

Warren: This is Tape 4 of an interview with Mr. Roy Wilkins. Proceed.

Wilkins: Well, I was talking about, I think, Mr. Lomax's assertion that the N. A. A. C. P., so-called top leadership was in control and dominated the organization and that the ideas for - such ideas as came out that were progressive and militant and all the other things that Mr. Lomax thinks are necessary, they came from the people, in spite of the crushing control from New York and the suppression. Well, of course, we got a big laugh out of that here. The truth of the matter is that our chapters have been beseeched by us to become active in various ways. I recall that in 1960, at the time of the mistreatment of three hundred and ninety-three N. A. A. C. P. young people in Orangeburg, South Carolina, where the police turned water hoses on them in thirty degree weather, before they had ever demonstrated, or carried a sign, or ^{done} anything, that we felt so indignant about it here that we called upon our chapters to hold demonstrations against variety stores in the North to protest the way in which the variety stores in the South were calling upon the police, or using the Federal - the State governments and City police to mistreat our young people. And, we had to discipline a number of our chapters throughout the country who felt that this idea, coming from New York, from the headquarters that Mr. Lomax calls conservative - were so radical

that they would disregard our instructions and requests. We had to take disciplinary action against a number of chapters. We got response from the overwhelming majority of them, but this seems to us to disprove the Lomas theory. Of course, as I say, I can't afford to spend too much time on Lomas. I think he is a sort of a parasite on the Civil Rights movement, as it has developed, and when the thing is over, he will probably be the only one with a fat bank account.

Warren: Well, not the only one perhaps.

Wilkins: Well, no, not the only one, but the only one who consciously accumulated it during this period. This is not really, really a condemnation, I suppose; he is a writer and lecturer and who can blame him for utilizing current events for the purposes of making money.

Warren: Don't blame me either.

Wilkins: Well, it's when Louis takes on the pontifical air that he becomes sort of a - I think the other Civil Rights organizations have found him similarly at fault, if I recall correctly. I have talked to some of them, and they have expressed more or less the same feeling.

Warren: Yes. Do you remember any detail of Faulkner's Sound and Fury?

Wilkins: No, I don't.

Warren: Well, then, the question is based on a character in that

book, and some remarks about it by James Baldwin, and his mother -
.....pursue that then. There's one question that I do want
to ask you. We all know, more or less, what the white stereo-
types of the Negro are - even their contradictory ones sometimes -
frequent contradictory. What about the Negro's stereotypes of
the white man? How would you describe them? Aside from the
white devil, which is what I -

Wilkins: Well, the white devil is a Muslim thing.

Warren: It's a Muslim one, yes. I mean in general - take any
shades and types of stereotypes.

Wilkins: Yes - I hadn't ever thought about it precisely in that
way. Negroes, of course, profess to know about white people
because of their association with them in various ways -

Warren: They're in a strategic position to see them.

Wilkins: Yes, but they - it seems to me they suffer from the
same weakness that white people suffer from in making their judgments.
A white man who makes his judgments about the Negro race from his
cook - or his chauffeur, or his yardman, or the porter in his store
is just as badly advised as the Negro who judges white people by
her mistress, if she's a domestic servant, or by any other - his
straw boss, if he's a laborer. You do know them - or if he's a
waiter in a club or a hotel, he judges white people by the way they
act at table, or how they react to the payment of their bills, or

by the size of the tip they use - by the amount of liquor they drink, or by how they act, and so on and so forth. I don't know that either the white man or the Negro knows the other one from such contacts, but I would say that I think Negroes do regard some white people as pretty clearly defined - exploiters, friends, luke-warm friends, real helpers, real friends, and they have come to differentiate even, believe it or not, between Southern white people. There was a time when they lumped them all together. They don't any more. They have their suspicions of Southern white people, but they are not inclined to damn everybody, as they once were. I don't know that they have a stereotype, and I don't know about white people and their stereotypes. As you said, correctly, they are contradictory.

Warren: Sometimes they are contradictory, and sometimes held of the same person - the contradiction sometimes held of the same person.

Wilkins: What are you going to do - how do you explain, for example, the white man who has a Negro family that - where the boy or the girl has gone away to school and made a very good record, and so on and so forth, and the white man is as proud of that as he can be - knowing that particular family. Yet, he will make sweeping generalizations about Negroes, in general, being no good, lazy, unable to learn. We don't want them in school with my -

he'll-he applauds the fact that this girl or boy who went to the University of Chicago, or the University of Illinois, or Harvard or Yale, where he went to school with white boys and girls, and so forth and so on, - "I don't want Negroes to go to school with my children".

Warren: A contradiction.

Wilkins: Absolutely a contradiction. What are you going to do with white people in Laurel, Mississippi, who cheer Leontine Price at the Metropolitan Opera, and say she is a Laurel girl, she's a mississippi girl, "We knew our girls can do it. Our girl" - and so forth and so on, but who turn right around, and in Laurel, and deny the opportunity to somebody who doesn't have a sponsor like Leontine Price had. These are - Negroes recognize these contradictions too, and they'd rather roll with the punches you might say. There is, I'm sorry to say, an increasing expression among some Negroes in this period of tension, general statements like, you know, "White people are all alike" - or "You know, you can't trust white people" - or "You know how white people are" - or "I'm not sure we can trust the white man" - or "Do you believe you can trust him?" - which is - the way - even the way of framing the question means that I don't believe so. This skepticism is growing out of their continued frustration over say, the Civil Rights bill, desegregation bill, the unemployment problem, the

discrimination in employment. Now, they get impatient when you, if you bring up the statistic that there aren't enough jobs to go around, even for the white people, that you have a shortage. If you, you have in this town, let's say, four hundred brick layers, but you only have work for two hundred brick layers, and yet Negroes want to either get into the brick layers' union, or are already in the union and want to get some of the work. So you say to them, "Well the real problem is to increase the economy and create more jobs." And they say, "Yes, but meanwhile, I starve."

Warren: And he does.

Wilkins: He does starve, he's right - he's very, absolutely correct on this.

Warren: What is the answer to that?

Wilkins: I don't know what the answer is. I only know that we must, if we're going to starve, then all Negroes shouldn't starve, and all white people eat. If we're going to starve, let us starve in proportion.

Warren: Ratio starve.

Wilkins: Ratio starve - whatever comfort you can get from that, you know. But I - what the Negro is saying is that he doesn't want to be discriminated against in this - he's beating his head against this business of automation, reduction of opportunities

for employment and he knows that. But, he also knows that he isn't getting the training in new skills that he should get, and he isn't getting a crack at the new jobs. For example, in the South, where the Negro and the white have both been displaced from the land by industry and by diversified farming, and they have both gone to the cities, or gone to the towns where new industries have been established. The white boys and girls, or men and women either have been able to get jobs in the new industry without training, or they have got on-the-job training, or they have been able to get training, and then get a job. But, the Negro has had the door slammed in his face, and he has had to go all the way up to Ohio and Pennsylvania and Illinois and Indiana and Michigan to try and hunt for a job, without any skills. He's right off the land. He lands there. He becomes a welfare case, or he's crowded into an already overcrowded apartment, or overcrowded house. He becomes a health menace. He becomes all of these things, and he causes frowns and apprehension in city councils of Northern cities and the mayors and the departments of welfare, and then the Southerners don't help the situation any by pointing a finger and saying, "See, we told you what he was. Now he's on your doorstep and you see." But, what they don't say to themselves is, "I made him like that", and I think this, Mr. Warren, is coming home - there are two things that are coming home to the Northern white people and that are working

against the Southerners, although the results may not be seen tomorrow morning. One of them is that the Negroes coming North in their great unprepared, untrained, uneducated state, with their lack of a sense of participation in twentieth century political, civic and urban community life, because of deprivations - they have driven home to the Northerner what a terrible, terrible job the Southerner has done with the Negro for a hundred years, in giving him advantages and giving him access to the training that - even rudimentary training - he should have had.

Warren: Let's say that's true. It certainly is true. But, the same thing has happened in the South to a large number of white people. Now the ratio question again is there, the lack of ratio, but given the economy of, say, Mississippi, just the economy - let's leave the will out of it - and good will out of it. You have the vast number of white people in Mississippi with exactly the same situation, or Alabama, or Louisiana.

Wilkins: Yes, yes, or Florida.

Warren: Or Florida or Georgia.

Wilkins: That's true, that's true, and this is a problem -

Warren: An endemic ignorance.

Wilkins: Yes. Well, we - this is a problem we contend is a problem which must be met by the combined wisdom and resources of the county, state and the nation. This is problem of displaced persons in a changing economy, and if they are white they

are going to be, have to look after them. All we're saying is that the white Mississippian or Alabamian or Georgian, as the case might be, or Tennessean, can - some proportion of them can go to the new industries and get a job.

Warren: A large proportion can, yes.

Wilkins: That's right. And some of them can get work on the new farms that are now dairy farms, instead of cotton farms, and - but the Negro gets none of that work, except his traditional work of the menial clean-up man.

Warren: Well, I was not saying that we have an Elysian in Mississippi. That's not the point. This is - I was just saying merely one thing, or implying it - that the situation for the Negro is related to a general situation.

Wilkins: Oh, precisely, and we realize that. And, I think most Negroes understand, those who understand economic changes, they know this - but what is happening is that the Northern white man is being converted to the Negroes' contention - hitherto made mostly by Negroes that I've been mistreated in the South. The Northerners either look the other way, or have listened to the more rosy accounts of how well the Negroes are getting along and how well they are satisfied. And has always regarded the problem as being a thousand or more miles away. Now, it's on his doorstep.

Warren: It's on his doorstep up the Island here too.

Wilkins: That's right, that's right. And on his doorstep in Cape Cod. Now, that is going to have a reaction which sooner or later, you know, what Winston Churchill - what Roosevelt is supposed to have said to Winston Churchill at one time about - they were on a trip together in Africa, and went over or through a British protectorate, or a British colony. And, F. D. R. is supposed to have said to Winston, "Winston, when the hell are you going to give these people the chance to be themselves and stop treating them like colonies?" And Winston is supposed to have replied, "F. D. R., when are you going to free the Mississippi Negroes?" Well, the idea is that the Northern white politicians and industrialists and responsible people are going to pretty soon say to the Southerners over their gin and tonic, and this, that, and the other - "You didn't do so well by the Negroes, because we've got a lot of them up there, that came up from your State, and they this, that, and the other". We contend that's all to our side. We contend further, that the other thing that is going to have a backlash is the Northerners who are coming South, into the Civil Rights movement and are being met with oppression and mistreatment - and ministers, the rabbis, the students, hardly a place I go. Now, two days ago I spoke at a university in New Jersey, and three students were introduced to

me there as alumni of the jails, one from Georgia and two from somewhere else. A year ago I spoke in Coe College, deep in the heart of Iowa.

Warren: I've been there. I know where it is.

Wilkins: And they had three alumni from jail in Mississippi. These kids come back - they spread the story to their families, their churches, their sororities, their campuses, and it's no longer Wilkins of the N. A. A. C. P., or Martin Luther King, spinning a tale of horror and oppression. It's these kids coming back and saying, "This is what a policeman did to me. This is what the judge said. This is what my fine was. This is what my crime was supposed to be." And this is the kind of indictment that I don't believe the South ought to let stand. I believe that the cooler heads there, the ones who understand what it's all about ought to take charge from the ones who are perpetuating these sort of things.

Warren: There's been no leadership in the South in this whole matter, as far as I can make out. There's no leadership for anything, except the - well, the hard-core segregationist.

Wilkins: Some has emerged, Mr. Warren. Some has emerged. We have noted that business men in a number of areas have said, "Now this we don't want. We can't afford to have this upheaval. It's bad for business." The Tuscaloosa business man, for example, told

Governor Wallace, they pleaded with him. The Birmingham business men pleaded with Wallace - ease up on his University of Alabama stand. The Norfolk business men in Virginia years ago took charge - it seems funny now to say years ago, but it is some years, took charge of school desegregation in Norfolk.

Warren: In Durham, too.

Wilkins: In Durham they did the same thing. In Dallas - the top business men got together - this was a kind of a controlled thing, but nevertheless it illustrates that when top business, or just business gets together, they can have an effect on the politicians, and the politicians, I maintain still, the politicians are the big obstacle to understanding the progress along racial lines in the South.

Warren: Let's say that that's true and I believe that it's true. I think this is the biggest single factor and some of the Southern editors think so too. They don't put it in their papers very often, but this is the over-reaching technique. You find men running for nomination in the Democratic Party, for governor in Mississippi. Each one says, "I hate niggers worse than you do". Any struggle for power over-reaching, the bigger the promise has - has to - has a role. Let's take that same principle and put it back in terms of the Negro movement, you see. Any movement invites over-reaching. Now, how dangerous - we know

how dangerous it is in Mississippi. Now, how does the same principle in its operation in Negro leadership in the movement -

Wilkins: You mean Negroes over-reaching themselves?

Warren: Yes, each - each - each other pulling toward this. The escalator of demonstration - the escalator of promises - the escalator of illusion and delusions. How much of this is operating now in the, well, loosely used, the Negro movement? You see?

Wilkins: Out-promising - yes. Yes, I don't know - we're -

Warren: You've observed some of it?

Wilkins: Some it yes. But we are meeting now, some of us, oh, every month or six weeks, Martin Luther King, James Farmer, of C. O. R. E., Whitney Young of the Urban League, Jack Greenberg of the N. A. A. J. P. legal defense and educational fund and myself - S. N. I. C. We all meet - we meet every month or six weeks, regular, and we have been doing it since last February, and exchange views, and we generally - we don't agree on any co-ordinated program. Each man is still pursuing his own organization, but nevertheless, there is a general understanding of what we are about and a general respect for our -

Warren: Well, now I shouldn't assume just offhand and out side that among the men you name and the organizations you name, the question of over-reaching would be one of real significance, but

that doesn't exhaust the great power of it, go on in the world.

Wilkins: No, that's true. It doesn't - but nevertheless -

Warren: Those are all highly organized, highly responsible things.

Wilkins: They are, they are. But, and what you're saying is that the Negroes, whether they are highly organized in big groups, or whether they are on a local bandwagon people, tend to over-reach in trying to match the white over-reach, or to try to -

Warren: Yes, in various ways.

Wilkins: To erect - to prove that I'm more resistant to the white domination than -

Warren: Yes, or I can offer more, or get more done by my method. I'm more - the Black Muslim is the most extreme case, of course, and the new line of Malcolm X is clearly a first-rate example, but we have other examples that seem to me to be floating around.

Wilkins: Yes, well, this I think is true. And I think that the Negro - we have eighteen million people here. You're going to have all - the whole spectrum here.

Warren: It's going to be human.

Wilkins: That's right.

Warren: But this is - this is always a human factor in any gen-

eral movement - it's always a question of who controls whatever motive, and over-reaching is a natural technique. But how dangerous is this, we all know it's human - it's always bound to happen. Now how dangerous it is - how - what symptoms are there of it's being out of control -

Wilkins: I think any - I think it's almost self-controlling. I think any irresponsible leader or core of movement, which genuinely over-reaches itself to the point that it demonstrably inflicts damage upon people or the cause, quickly loses its influence. Now, the Negro is very sensitive, even in spite of his realization that he can't retreat, just because he meets white criticism, because he knows - he's lost that fear. You can't say - you can't say "We mustn't do this because the white folks won't like it." He's lost that a long time ago. But, he is very quick to sense genuine, genuine obstacle, a genuine hurt to the movement and he won't follow a method that produced a genuine hurt, or a lasting hurt.

Warren: You - do I understand this to imply that whether it is intellectually grasped, or whether it's just sensed, a - that a policy that does not lead to the possibility of a rapprochement - a reconciliation, is instinctively somewhere along the way rejected by ordinary, ordinary Negro - the Negro of say, you know, moderate education and moderate intelligence, all that.

Wilkins: He rejects it at the point where it becomes obvious that it never will produce the results that he desires.

Warren: His desiring is the reconciled society, is that the idea?

Wilkins: Well, that's his desire, unless you - when you leave out the Malcolm X's of course.

Warren: I - yes, I would leave those - we'll leave that out, yes.

Wilkins: Well you see, the Negro - I must draw a line here. He is not going to abandon any such leader just because he has an unpopular, or an unorthodox approach, or an approach that some white people say is dangerous, you see. He's not going to abandon on that account. He will abandon it only when it is demonstrated that such tactics will not get him nearer the goal. Now, he isn't bothered about whether it's unpopular at the moment, you see, because it may be that with persistence and with weakening resistance over there that it will become popular day after tomorrow, or next month.

Warren: I understand, yes, yes.

Wilkins: And will achieve what he wants. If it's demonstrated that it hurts him in such a way that it impairs his progress forward, so that he won't get to where he wants to go, then he's going to ditch him.

Warren: Follow to what - is what we get at there.

Wilkins: Yes.

Warren: The follow to what being, say, the reconciled society where -

Wilkins: Yes, what we were talking about in the very beginning. The society in which there are no restrictions and barriers on his movements and achievements as a citizen. Now, he doesn't expect, mind you, that this - this movement will establish him in the bosom of white people, within their love and affection. That is not his objective. He would be glad to have it - all human beings want to be regarded with some kind of a degree of affection. They don't want to be outside, but that's not his objective. His objective is not to be interfered with and restricted on the basis of color in the exercise of his ordinary human rights and citizenship rights. Now, if in the process he collects affection and regard and esteem, well and good, but if he does not, he will await the day when he does, because it's human - that sooner or later he will, in the degree that he warrants it, he will collect these things.

Warren: Yes, but there is a society of mixed ethnic origins, mixed bloods, and its a massive one of close to two hundred million people. So we have to live together - yhe recognizes that.

Wilkins: Yes, oh, yes. We must live together and what I hav

said in any number of my talks is that this so-called revolution, and I prefer to call it an upheaval, an upsurge, must be conducted resolutely and in a determined fashion, an uncompromising fashion, but it must be conducted also in a fashion that recognizes that when it's all over that we have got to live here together in mutual respect. And, if we conduct ourselves, or they conduct themselves so that we cannot have mutual respect hereafter, then all is lost. We aren't going anywhere. We aren't going to an island in the Carribean, or back to Africa. We're going to live right here, and they aren't going anywhere. So let's not look at each other day after tomorrow, or year after next, with smoldering hatred in our eyes, or contempt, but let's recognize as we do with a good football match - and it's far more serious than a football match, but it's only the aftermath I'm talking about - with that kind of respect and sportsmanship that recognizes we had a contest - you won, or you lost, or I lost some and you won some. And, we go forward from here. But, not that I kicked you in the teeth and called you a chimpanzee and things that you can't forget - that is, if you really meant them, not using them as a tactic, or as a device.

Warren: I'm watching that. It's starting to wind up. Well, this is the end of Tape 4 with Mr. Roy Wilkins. I'm going to be merciful and not bully you any more about this.

Wilkins: That's all right. Maybe we can come back again.