

(beginning of second tape)

RPW: Let me cut back to the question we were talking about before we were - before we got back on the tape. You were talking about the word "responsibility" in quotes as it has been used in various ways in relation to leadership of the movement. Do you mind saying that again or elaborating it?

BR: Well, I feel that the word "responsible" is a bad word because it has moral overtones, and I think we have to make it clear that we disagree with people tactically and otherwise but not morally necessarily, that we are impugning their morals. SO I'd like to use the word "responsible", that is to say, not responsible but relevant. Is it really workable, is it getting us somewhere? Because a great number of people who have quite as much moral commitment and dedication as I have, but I just don't think what they're doing is relevant and meaningful in the situation.

RPW: Well, suppose hypothetically we take a person who is a pure opportunist, though. How would you treat him?

BR: I think he has to be called an opportunist.

RPW: And not irresponsible?

BR: No. This is just opportunism, and we have such people.

RPW: Though he may be relevant?

BR: Right. And if he's relevant he has to be called an opportunist.

RPW: A relevant opportunist.

BR: That's right.

RPW: All right - we have some - all right.

BR: Oh, sure.

RPW: No question about it. Let me touch something quite different, American history. How would you assess these persons or their symbolic significance, say Thomas Jefferson?

BR: Well, I feel that Thomas Jefferson must be judged in his century and not in ours, and although Thomas Jefferson as I understand it in fact held slaves at the time when he was writing the Declaration of Independence, I understand that before his death he came to see that slavery was quite wrong and to free his slaves, or even if he didn't free them -

RPW: He didn't free them; he was against slavery.

BR: Against slavery - right. Now, this to me in the time that Thomas Jefferson lived was a very advanced and forward position. A great number of people who tried to judge men in past centuries by today's standards - this is to me extremely stupid because you and I, whether we like it or not, are subject to and do react not only by what we necessarily ourselves feel but what is socially acceptable, and I think I look upon Jefferson as a very great person.

RPW: Is it merely a matter of social acceptance, or is it just a matter of the possible range of vision one generation may or may not have?

BR: I agree with this - exactly - exactly.

RPW: How about Lincoln?

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BR: Lincoln freed the slaves - a difficult decision. It took a man of some vision to do it, and I do not take the view that many Negroes take, that because Lincoln said, to save the Union I will free some, all or none, that this detracts from him. He had the mission of saving the Union. In the process he came to see that slavery was wrong, and he had said this even earlier, and I look upon him as a very remarkable man.

RPW: There's another question around him, and I suppose around Jefferson too, that though Lincoln freed the slaves, almost certainly he was a racist by modern day standards.

BR: Here again, I don't know how anybody could have come out of Lincoln's background and have been much farther advanced on this question than he was. We have to remember at the same time there were Negroes freed who were holding slaves, and I'm not going to completely damn them and read them out of the human race. But the objective thing is important. He freed the slaves, and this was a great act and an act which took some courage. Furthermore, let me say, sir, I think it's a very difficult thing to tear the innards of people apart. I am perfectly willing to judge men finally by what they do. I know that there are a great number of white people in this country who may have been very confused about Negroes. Society has taught them to be confused. But over and above that they find the courage to treat Negroes with dignity. Now, there's a sense in which that kind of confused person, who can yet overcome

deserves a great deal of credit. I don't ask every white person to like me. I ask him to treat me decently, and I assume Lincoln - because he freed the slaves - and I assume that Jefferson - because for his time he was an advanced political thinker, and because he came to see that slavery was wrong. My grandmother used to say to me, Bayard, never judge people by where they are but by the direction in which they are taking - because that is the way you will want to be judged. I am not in favor of killing heroes - I just am against it. We all need them.

RPW: What about Kennedy? How do you accept his political and social role?

BR: I think Mr. Kennedy did a number of things that I was very happy to see. I remember when I took the first Youth March and the second Youth March to Washington, and prominent Negroes went to the gates of the White House to see the President of the United States and Ike would not receive us even though we had forty thousand people in Washington. Mr. Kennedy, one of his first acts was to restore dignity to the Negro people by receiving repeatedly their leaders and hearing their problems. That was good. I think that by and large Mr. Kennedy's behavior in times of crisis in this country, such as Mississippi and others, is not all that I would like to have seen. But he did move vigorously. I think that Mr. Kennedy's greatness is in part the greatness of the Negro youngsters who were in the street, because he had no intention of sending a civil rights bill to Congress, but because of Birmingham and other things which were happening

in the street, even he, in presenting that bill to Congress, said, I do this to get the people off the street. We must have legislation now. And therefore I think he got a great assistance from the Negro people. But again I judge him - he sent the civil rights bill, it got through, and this will make a place for him in history.

RPW: The nature of pressure to a social movement in times of pressure, Birmingham was a violent situation. If it hadn't been violent no civil rights bill, given the context. What do you say about the use of violence?

BR: Oh. Who used the violence, is the question. By and large Negroes did not resort to violence in Birmingham. Violence was directed toward them. Dr. Martin Luther King's insistence and the people by and large, with a few little scattered incidents that didn't amount to much, remained non-violent, and it was not only that violence was used against the Negro, it was that the Negro by and large absorbed that violence. But even after three children - or four - were murdered, they did not take to the streets and raise hell. They said we're still going to be non-violent. This deeply touched the hearts of the American people. I would say that wherever social change is involved, some violence is inevitable, usually on the part of those who have rather than those who have not. To the degree that the have-nots can remain non-violent, they therefore reduce the inevitable violence to its irreducible minimum. To the degree that they retaliate with violence, to that degree do they bring

more violence into the situation and thus multiply it. But Gandhi used to say, go to - be courageous and accept in a great movement death as you would accept your pillow at night, but do not resort to violence yourself. And I think that this is true. There will be injury. The purpose of our movement is to reduce that injury to the least possible.

RPW: Yes, but some people would maintain that the non-violence succeeds only because there's a threat of violence at the same time, that the non-violence succeeds because of the threat of a Harlem riot or the threat of a riot in Jackson, Mississippi. It didn't come off but the threat was there. This is a built-in paradox. Does that make any sense to you?

BR: Yes, it does. But I'd like to state it another way. It seems to me that people who speak in this manner see what I call the open violence but do not see the covert violence. For example, I think the violence of our society of which I am a part, of keeping people in ghettos, is a much more extreme form of violence because it touches the entire personality and warps it, than Negroes throwing stones and Molotov cocktails during a so-called Harlem riot. Now, if one knows that in injustice there is itself violence hidden and unseen, what one does in a non-violent project is to not create violence but to bring it to the surface so that, like a sore, it can get light and air and be cured. This is, as you say, a part of the - what was the word you used? -

RPW: A built-in paradox.

BR: This is a built-in paradox, that - it's there, and somehow or other what you have to do is get it up to the surface where it can be dealt with. I'll give you one illustration of a simple thing, but it impressed me deeply. Some years ago I was at a university in the mid-west. A girl was supposed to have lunch with me and introduce me - she was from the deep South - and she - the woman said this dear girl is - she can't do it. She says, she's sick, and to have to sit with you at lunch is going to make her terribly sick. I said, I think you ought to encourage her to come. The girl came, and in the midst of the meal she threw up all over the place and ran out crying. Now, I was accused by some people of creating a violent situation. I feel that nothing is better than if she faced this, and this was a kind of psychological violence I was encouraging. But I am good friends with that girl now, and she's working for the national YWCA. The paradox is there. There is a certain threat - I am sure a man who owns a store who feels that he is being boycotted - feels that people are behaving violently toward him - but it is the fact that until his pocketbook sometimes has been touched he is not made to face the reality of the situation and to become a human being himself, and it's a tedious process. And love is not all soft. Love has a very hard side, and that is making people face themselves, and one is obligated to use whatever is necessary that isn't - where the purpose is to redeem him as it is to hurt him. I think purpose - if I went into a boycott because I wanted to put the man out of business, then I know I was not behaving

non-violently. And if a man were put out of business and really changed his mind, I would be the first one to go to the Negro community and say let's take up a collection and put him back in business.

RPW: On this point, I had a question - you talk about here your own motive as a criterion, you see. Now, let's go back to your responsibility, some vision of yourself, of objective values. That is not relevance - the criterion relevance - you're opposing there - do you see what I mean? You're proposing a moral criterion. Now, how do we - I'm not trying to create a logical trap - I just wonder how you put these things, these two criteria together.

BR: Yes. I put them together very simply. Where you are concerned I cannot really see in your heart, therefore if you do an objective act and it's good, my assumption must be, unless there's a political evidence to the contrary, that you're doing it for that reason. However, I can see into my own heart and my own motives, and therefore I have the right really to examine my own - not yours - and to make certain that what I am doing is right and not destructive. Now, this is not to say I don't make some judgments on other people in these regards. But when I do it I know that I am on dangerous ground. But I'll be compelled to make ethical judgments all the time about other people - I say we are, but we'd better do it with a whole lot of humility.

RPW: That's something that we are compelled I should judge to make and to act in terms of our ethical judgments of other people -

ourselves.

BR: Right - exactly. But I think we have to be very, very humble when we do it. We have to be certain that we are opposed ourselves not to injustice to Negroes or this or that, but we are opposed to injustice anywhere it exists, first of all in ourselves. And that's my primary responsibility, not to try to analyze Farmer's heart or Roy Wilkins' heart. I have finally to say -

RPW: Or Senator Eastland's heart.

BR: Or Senator Eastland's heart. I finally have to say I agree with his behavior or I don't. Now, on Barry Goldwater's for example, I do not take the view that many people do that he is a racist. I won't get into that because I can't answer that. That's in his heart. I say he is dangerous because he is building his political power on people who are racists and who approve of it.

RPW: You mean you take their past records as a basis of this?

BR: Right. Two Ku Klux Klan people have made him peer - they are racists, you see. Now, to accept their support is to me dangerous. There are certain people in other groups that he defends who are to my objective knowledge racists. And to build political power on these people makes him not necessarily a racist but one who accepts support - political support of the racists, because I think it may be true that he has contributed to civil rights groups.

RPW: Johnson is going to have some voted that are racist.

BR: Yes, he certainly is.

RPW: If he doesn't he's going to be licked.

BR: That's right, and I of course - this is a reason that in the process of supporting Johnson I am trying to get people out to vote for him, not on Johnson's program but on my program and in trying to get what I believe into Johnson's program and to getting huge consensus for that.

RPW: I see your thinking all right. Sure, you're using the tools that God gave you.

BR: Yes, exactly.

RPW: Let me go back to the time of the demonstration again just for a moment. Back in Nashville several - two or three years now there have been objectives with - I mean, demonstrations with pretty clear-cut targets. Last spring - and they've been fairly successful. Last spring there were demonstrations that seemed to have no formidable targets, no formidable objectives. One of the spokesmen, a clergyman, said, these demonstrations are not against anything except against being a Negro in America. That seemed to me to indicate something of a distinction. I don't know all the morals of this distinction - distinction - demonstrations which have some target that you can, you know, define in the pattern of larger targets, then the demonstration has no target is an expression. Now, what do you make of that distinction?

BR: I think this is an excellent distinction and one that I constantly try to make. A demonstration should have an immediately achievable target, or it should have - it should throw up a position

which if those in power or those who own the thing or whatever it is, can at least in part come through with some demand that you are making. Now, when a demonstration is just against being a black man in America, this is not a demonstration to me, it is a gimmick. This is not real, it is unreal, and sooner or later even one's own group will not tolerate this, because they have to have victories in order to keep in the movement, and those victories must be clearly interpreted to them, so that they know truly what they have won. There is nothing you can win by going out on a demonstration because you're black.

RPW: I suppose the only asset that can be credited to something like that, if it's possible, is the threat element.

BR: Well, to the degree that there is just a threat element, then I say you're in trouble, that one has - the objective to make clear to people here is not threatening, but that he wants them back in the human community. They cannot be happy until they are back in the human community, and the demonstration is holding a mirror up to them so that they can see themselves as they truly are and not as they think they are. And that is one of the reasons I have been in favor of pray-ins. It's one thing for a white person to say I will not take Communion with Negroes. It is another thing to refuse to take Communion when a Negro is there, because now he has to feed himself with human beings, but the Negro's objective in being there is not to embarrass or to disturb the service. This is quite wrong, but to win them, and by his own attitude of simplicity and gentleness to

get people to see that he is a human being like they are.

RPW: You know the line that Dr. Kenneth Clark takes about the whole non-violent movement.

BR: No, I'm not sure I do.

RPW: Well, I haven't the quotes handy. He says in a certain kind of simple society like the South, it may work. In the North, and for many more sophisticated people in the North because he has no racist background, that to ask the oppressor - to ask the Negro to love his oppressor is to impose an intolerable psychological burden.

BR: Well, you see I do not use the word "love" very often, although I am as a Quaker profoundly impressed with what I think it means. Let me put it this way - to love Senator Eastland is essentially to take from him that which makes love for him impossible - privileged power. Sometimes people have to give it up or have it taken from them in a situation which they consider to be extremely unpleasant for them before they can be stripped enough to be real. This is - Jesus was not talking to the whole world when he said to a particular young man, your problem is money, and until you give it away you will find no peace. Take all thou hast, give it to the poor, and find your humanity again. He was telling him, get rid of power as you have exercised it because it stands in the way of your being a human being. Now therefore to create a political situation where Mr. Eastland's power is limited, is to love him, because you are making it possible again for him to see himself as a human being. Now

any Negro or any white, no matter what his condition, who is not prepared to do those things which help to make other people human beings is himself not a human being. And in this sense love is the concrete, the cement, whatever it is, which holds the bricks of society together. Another loves her child when she calls him in and scolds him for stealing. She's saving him. He doesn't like it, he feels he'd rather be anywhere than being in the kitchen scolded by her. But she loves him, and she can't let him stay in that condition. Now, in this broad sense I feel that we have simply got to hold up. Furthermore, what weapons does a minority group like the Negroes have for winning over other people. Are we going to force nine-tenths of the population to accept us? We have the economic power to make them accept us? We can create enough violence to frighten them to death? No. We have to win them.

RPW: Now, some people would say that there is enough power - not power at gun point, but a combination of powers, to actually make the power stick.

BR: I don't believe it. In order - Negroes - one-tenth of the population have either no social, economic nor political power to force anybody to do anything.

RPW: Now, Wyatt Walker - Mr. Walker would say that he - the Negro does have that power. He's quite explicit on that point.

BR: Well, Wyatt and I are very dear friends and I completely disagree with him.

RPW: He's a very attractive fellow, too.

BR: Yes, he is. What the Negro has is the power to behave in such a way that he will out of his dynamism and his non-violence cause the Church to move for the civil rights bill, cause the Negro movement to begin to move on economic questions. He will create an alliance of true power, made up of many segments of this society, who will then begin to look at the society.

RPW: Do you mean then, you'd be a catalyst, to use a previous word of yours, which will organize real practical power in a new constellation, is that it?

BR: Exactly.

RPW: That practical power is what will count in the end?

BR: Yes. Negro protests would never have gotten us the civil rights bill. What got us the civil rights bill is labor and the churches going into the Middle West and certain parts of the upper South, and particularly in the Middle West where we didn't have Negroes to do it, and putting extreme pressure on these Congressmen to do the right thing, to stand up and to break that alliance between Southern Democrats and Northern Republicans which made cloture possible. We never had the power to do it alone. You cannot get the Negro power to put Negroes back to work. You've got to get all kinds of segments of this society to come out for full employment.

RPW: This leads to another - I think I know where it will go but I want to ask the question anyway, and see how you think about it - in many parts of the country, Negroes look over the head of local government to appeal - and local society - to appeal directly to

Washington - this is built in to the society for a hundred years - to look into - to look to Washington. There is a - at the same time the same Negro who said let us look to Washington for redress will also say, to hell with the white liberal or the moderate, you see, forgetting that that man he reads out of consideration - quotes - white liberal - moderate - or what you call him - marginal - is the very source of the power in Washington he is appealing to.

BR: Right - right.

RPW: There's a line there, but still Washington is not an agency. Washington, taken by itself, is an agency of the electorate. If you offer an appeal it's often the marginal man, it seems to me - does that make sense?

BR: Right. I agree with this thoroughly, and I think that this is another one of the sicknesses which - this springs from the intense frustration. But I want to put this in a broader context. When, ten years ago, 1954, the Supreme Court decision came, Negroes interpreted this, rightly or wrongly, as the beginning of a new era. Many people were writing at the time that this was going to mean - this was an across-the-board decision in principle and that things were going to jump. Now, ten years after that there are actually - and discrimination is not the whole reason for it - but there are literally more Negro children going to segregated classrooms now than before that. There are more Negroes out of work. There are more Negroes in slums, largely because - and here again not only because of discrimination, but these are the objective facts. Now,

many young Negroes then say three things. If things are this bad in '64, there's something wrong with the major leadership, they've taken us down the wrong road. There's something wrong with non-violence, and therefore let's start really asking how we can get something going there in violence. And third, there's something wrong with these whites who pretend to be our friends. They haven't made things better in the last ten years. We depended on them. They're not - so it isn't just that it's a white liberal. Now, this is the result of, again, this kind of frustration where people, instead of being analytical, tend to react emotionally to a series of circumstances, and they are frightfully inconsistent and it is like building a consensus amongst great numbers of white people that there has got to be social change that we have any chance at all, and therefore by discarding any elements is wrong. The other aspect of this is, that many young Negroes today, and Negroes who are writing, are not humble in this respect. They say, I've been to jail, other Negroes have been to jail, and the question is that you become valuable in terms of how many times you have been to jail or how many times you've prepared to bare your chest. A young white student at Howard University who is one of the best - brightest - to come out of the civil rights movement recently - was told by some of the students, what the hell are you writing a book about this for? They said, we don't need you to write a book. Come on, come to Mississippi and get arrested. Now, I said to him, don't be taken in by this. Your contribution is to write well about

it. Everybody is not needed on the firing - on the barricades, you know. And what I'm trying to say is, not only in the white community but Negroes also are judged wrongly. Have you been to jail? How many times have you been on the picket line? As if that's all. And therefore this attack on the white liberal is in part an attack on - ought to be directed toward the objective situation which is a difficult one for everybody.

RPW: Well, one question I wanted to ask you - have you read Stanley Elkins' book called "Slavery"?

BR: No, I have not, sir.

RPW: There's a question that revolves around that book sometimes I wanted to go into. And have you read Whitney Young's new book, "To Be Equal"? Have you read that yet?

BR: No.

RPW: It's just out now. Back to what I was saying - we were talking about before in a way - in various forms the notion of the Negro as a degenerate of society appears. Now, you were talking about that rather tangentially earlier - the catalyst of social change - this is - has earlier ramifications sometimes for other people. Would you say over again what you - or extend a little bit about what you said about the catalyst not to unless you said it on the other tape.

BR: I think he is a catalyst. That is to say that in the pursuit of freedom for himself, he was interested really in integration, which means getting his part of the cake, of becoming a part of the insti-

tutions as they exist. But in attempting to do that, he touched very basic things in this society. The Negro is not a revolutionary basically. He wasn't a part of the thing as it exists. But unconsciously he becomes a revolutionary, and a catalytic agent, because what he wants cannot be given him for that basic change, and it's in this context that - not because he's better or good or anything, but objectively. Now therefore I was saying that when he touches the rent strike, what happens is not merely that a few Negroes get their rent reduced and a few rats are cleaned up and roaches, and hot water is given, but we are finding that more is now being made around the rent strike which affects everybody, and law which says human rights must not any longer be subjected to property rights. Here again, you see, he becomes a catalyst because he's in the movement. The other aspect of it is that he, by challenging the hearts of people, he gets them to move. The churches in this country would not have moved unless the Negro was a movement. They have known for a hundred years what the Bible says, and the Negro began to move they were sucked into it. Another illustration would be that McCarthyism had gripped our colleges in 1960 - these people have been through a political experience - there were no political groups on the campuses, there was no groups for social and political actions. But when the Negro students moved in North Carolina and created the sit-in movement -

RPW: The race problem, you mean.

BR: Yes. They swept the remnants of McCarthyism or many of them

off the campus. Political groups emerged to support them. Social groups emerged to talk about the nature of the society. This was fundamentally because the Negro college students were moving.

RPW: I get your message. Now, one other question about the North-South situation. Some Negroes said to me - most of them of Southern origin or living in the South - Charles Evers, for one and various others - that they were more optimistic - optimistic about

either in the hard-core parts of Mississippi or Alabama. One girl went so far as to say more optimistic than she is of a settlement, say in the great Northern cities. And she goes on to say that here the two races have been together for hundreds of years in the same - on the land - in the same situation. There is a more personal relationship possible. All of the things that we said in the context of that relationship,

the human recognition would still have been possible in a way which she does not find, say, in a great Northern city. And she says

a crucial moment of this, she says, gives a base for settlement and a more workable settlement.

Does that make any sense to you?

BR: Well, that is an area - I mean, her reasoning - I don't know -

RPW: Now, she was raised in the South. She was raised in Virginia.

BR: I don't know enough to accept. I would like to project to them a more social and political circumstances. I believe that the distribution of the Negro in the South is conducive to a settlement there. He is not yet completely got so concentrated in cities where

problems are infinitely more difficult.

RPW: But the movement is going in that direction.

BR: Yes, that is. And therefore this is one of the reasons that I hope that we find some means of keeping a number of Negroes on the land if we can. I think also politically that the potential voting power of the Negro, disgraced as he is in the South, is conducive to a settlement. I think that if the government is to put people back to work, it is going to have to do infinitely more economically for the South, and I am convinced that that is more important than anything else, because what is generally called the racial attitude of the South, I believe is in large part an economic attitude, that when you have as many poor whites and poor Negroes side by side, that this is a part of the problem. In a situation where you-can-- economically they are both being uplifted, a great deal of this thing we call prejudice is going to disappear. And finally - and the only psychological thing I can say is that my experience is that when people in the South finally see the light, they are often infinitely more consistent than a number of people in the North, who never having been through the traumatic experience of change, change partially, where people who have had to go through a traumatic experience often come out with much more insight, and that is my hope for the South.

RPW: Well, I just don't know.

(end of tape)