

ROBERT PENN WARREN    CARL ROWAN    TAPE #4

RPW: This is Tape #4 - last tape - of a conversation with Carl Rowan. I suppose we both assume there's no social change without power - power is the key of social change.

CR: That's correct.

RPW: What kinds of power does the Negro now wield?

CR: Well, he wields a good deal of political power. He's got a great deal more power in terms of the international situation. This whole question of race is so deeply involved in what goes on in the <sup>that</sup> world/in terms of this nation's leadership posture in the world the Negro is a very important factor. The Negro has got a great deal more economic power than ever before was the case. Indeed, I have pointed out to audiences abroad that this revolution and this new militancy on the part of the Negro is in itself an indication of progress, because without greater education on the part of the masses, without a great deal more money than the Negro's ever been able to muster, he could never pay all these bonds and bails and court costs, that without political power the fact that there's more support in the White House and in the Congress and in the courts than ever before was the case - this kind of movement never would have gotten off the ground.

RPW: In other words, you see this movement as the culmination of a long process, and not something that burst full-blown.

CR: Oh, absolutely not. The movement never could have gotten off the ground but for a great many things that have happened over the last several years.

Carl Rowan - Tape #4 - p. 2

RPW: And several generations.

CR: That's right.

RPW: But as you no doubt well know, many Negroes of education and experience hate to take that view.

CR: Well, I'm not saying it had to take that long, but the fact is that all that has gone on in the past made this movement possible. Without the NAACP's legal actions over the last many years, there would have been no basis for many of the things that are taking place today. Without - well, let's take for example the - even the inadequate education that the Negro has gotten in the last hundred years in this country, that was crucial. I believe that if you want to keep a man a slave you've got to keep him ignorant. But once you start educating him, you're asking for trouble in terms of keeping your slave, you see. And there were some states, for example, where members of the legislature wanted an official policy adopted that the Negro should not be schooled, that he should not be educated. Well, these people were right in the sense that if they wanted to keep him a slave they'd better not let him go to even a bad school. But he did go to those schools and we're seeing some of the results of it today.

RPW: That is, Frederick Douglas was right - once you teach him the alphabet you're through.

CR: Yes, that's precisely right.

RPW: To what objectives is this threat of power directed? Let me put it differently. Every revolution has - is fared by hope and by hate. We have the hope - we know where that's directed. Where is the hate directed?

Carl Rowan - Tape #4 - p. 3

CR: Well, I would think that such hate as exists is directed at those public officials particularly, and those members of this vague thing that we would call the power structure, who have really abused their power and used it to block the Negro from getting any semblance of first class citizenship.

RPW: You find in most revolutions in the past the aim to liquidate a class or liquidate a regime. Now, there's no class to be liquidated here that you could isolate - no regime to be liquidated, except, say, in Mississippi. But where is this object?

CR: Well, there is a regime in a vague sense, you see -

RPW: Let's define it.

CR: There is a regime in the eyes of the Negro, there is a regime presided over by a tyrant named Jim Crow, whose basic doctrine is the inferiority of the Negro. Now, this is the regime that the Negro seeks to destroy. Now, one of the problems today is that there seems to be a little bit of growing confusion as to what the purpose of all this is.

RPW: Let's deal with that - good. Let's deal with that.

CR: The NAACP has known where it was going all the time. The Urban League has known where it was going. And the goal has been - the first class status of the Negro within an American interracial context. But we've got some youngsters in the street today who I do not believe are at all conscious of where it is they're going. They know what they're against, they know what they want in terms of having this particular restaurant open its doors to Negroes, but in terms of

Carl Rowan - Tape #4 - p. 4

a larger goal that has some relationship to American society and the Negro's position as a whole, I just don't think they've ever gotten around even to thinking about it, let alone making any decisions as to what it is they want.

RPW: Do you gather that a man like the Reverend Gulammuson knows what he wants? I pulled him out of the air - he's just one -

CR: I don't know this man, and so I wouldn't have the remotest idea. But I would have to have some doubts about the depth to which he has thought about these problems in view of some of the things he's said and done.

RPW: He has said some rather strange things, like the story that the public school is necessary -

CR: Yes, well, you see - you get a lot of foolish things said in any kind of program like this, and I think the remarkable thing is that the Negro has heard so many foolish things said about him over the last century, the remarkable thing is that more Negroes haven't replied with more foolishness in the past. But we're seeing some of it today.

RPW: We have the problem, say, of bussing in New York City. Some people say we will integrate at any cost - by bussing if necessary. The most extreme point - three hours a day - three hours a day of bussing. To get racial balance. This extreme view is mentioned over and over again. I know one person - a responsible person I think - who said to me in Washington, if necessary to balance schools in Washington, D.C., get the white children from Virginia.

Carl Rowan - Tape #4 - p. 5

CR: Well, I - I don't go that far. I mean, that's a position that I can't carry myself to -

RPW: That is, integration is to be treated in a context - well, other values too, is that it? Equality is one thing; integration is another.

CR: That's right.

RPW: It has to be distinguished to make things work.

CR: The point is that you can't make the physical presence in the same classroom of Negroes and whites the be-all and end-all of your objective. Now, I can say let's have this community make a special effort to get some racial balance in the schools, not only because it's good for Negroes, but also because it's good for white people, because no white youngster growing up deliberately aloof from the colored people in this country is going to be able to cope with the kind of world we live in, et cetera, et cetera. But there is a limit to which I am willing to disrupt other factors that are important to the Negro and the white person and the country in order to achieve this racial presence in the same classroom. For example, I don't want to bus Negro youngsters three miles across town just to put them in a white classroom if nothing else is being done to change the reasons why this segregated set-up existed in the first place - the Negro's isolation in Jim Crow housing, the low economic status of those youngsters, the conditions that exist in the home because perhaps the father doesn't have the right kind of job or the right kind of education. I say let's do something about those things too in our efforts to achieve school desegregation.

Carl Rowan - Tape #4 - p. 6

RPW: And sometimes there's a corollary that some values have to give in the face of other values. Even the values to integration in a special case might have to give before other values.

CR: Yes, answering that in the intellectual context, that's certainly true.

RPW: That is, integration can become a chevalier which actually works against as a matter of equality.

CR: Well, that's precisely my point - yes.

RPW: I was just saying it back so I'd be sure I got your -

CR: Yes - that's precisely my point. Well, I'm going to have to - break it off.

RPW: All right - sure. This is the end of the last tape with Carl Rowan. End, end, end, end, end.

(end of tape)