

WILLIAM STRINGFELLOW - N.Y.C. - MARCH 13th.

Where were we? Let me go back to the matter of apathy; you say you think that the apathy among the negroes at least in New York is definitely waning.

Yes, the school boycott is the first one, this is a good example of that -- I mean -- There it was, four hundred thousand kids were out, well that means that the parents of four hundred thousand kids had to make some decision, so I don't think it is -- the revolution is no longer confined to the organized Civit Rights movements or to the students or to the -- some of the Clergy, and what not, but really does involve the and final person.

It is taking on the quality of a mass movement now, you think?

Yes, but without -- then the next thing is -- but without a unified or recognized leadership.

Has it ever been true that in this state there was ever a recognized, unified leadership?

Well, I don't know, there is a theory around that revolutions are the work of elite, but --

When did they emerge? Is the leadership of phase 1 ever the leadership of phase 2 or the leadership of phase 2, the leadership of phase 3?

I guess not, I mean that like night now in New York, I think the same is true in Chicago, there is an acute leadership crisis, because it becomes clear that the revolution has matured enough so that it is obvious that there is some real power at stake, both within the revolutionary movement, so to speak, and what is to be gained in the revolution, and that means there is a lot of in-fighting and back-fighting, and in fact if there ever needed to be real

proof which there does not, but if there ever needed to be real proof of the profound humanity of the negroes, it would be to witness them fighting among themselves for little scraps of power.

How do you see that split now, in terms of national or in terms of New York, or both?

Well, I know most about New York, of course, I would say the main line Civil Rights groups which here are core NAACP which have been in the field for so many years, and who have provided both the leadership and the financial resources and so on for what has been our receding in importance and in influence and our thought as to gradualist as having too many contacts with white society and of receding into the background. I mean there have only been two things so far in which there has been a real unification of the Civil Rights organizations of various kinds and that has been the March on Washington which was the preeminent example and then the first school boycott here was a united front, but as you know, that unity has already fragmented into --

What blew that up?

I think -- I don't know Golansen personally but I think from seeing him perform, that other negro leaders were fearful that he was too personally aggressive.

Grabbing?

Yes, I don't know, that is just my intuition.

This personal aggressiveness for power or a matter of over-reaching as a matter of tactics, may ---

I am inclined to think more of the first, that there is personal competitiveness and jealousy and also some feeling that if there was

focused  
to be some kind of united ~~XXXXXXXX~~ leadership, that he was not the  
one upon whom that mantle should be bestowed and --

How much do you know of his history and is there much ground  
for that belief in his past history or is this just an assumption,  
if it , -- don't like it.

I don't know much about his ---

What do you know about Ruskin,?

Oh, quite a good deal. I first had contact with him, oh, twenty  
years ago, when he was involved with the ~~XXXXX~~ Pacifist  
Movement at the time. I think he is a genius, organizationally especially and he  
was the real person who engineered the March on Washington on a  
practical level.

I have heard the contrary, I don't know anything about this,  
but I have heard the other theory that he was not a good -- was given  
this reputation because he was under fire and was a cover-up  
appraising him.

Well, I don't know and I certainly don't know the whole in-  
terior thing; it was true that he was under fire and it was something  
of an achievement that that did not discredit the March on Washington.

His previous pacifist ---

Yes, and he was convicted of them all, in a sense ---

That is right, I forgot ---

--- And that was not generally known or publicised or used by  
some, by Congressmen and what not, with any great effect.

It was in the papers.

It was in the papers but as far as I can detect, it never caught  
hold enough or was publicized enough to be ---

I forgot this. I know this -- Dr. Hedgeman takes a view that and I have heard elsewhere that he is not a good , he was covered up for by the who couldn't afford to let go. Randolph had to cover him (Inaudible)

Well, just from what I have seen, not only the present time, but when he was especially working among college students and what not on the pacifist business, I have a great respect for his ability and his -- and almost professionalism, I would say, in non-violent agitation.

Is he optimistic on this matter of non-violence, non-violent demonstrations, do you know?

I haven't talked to him recently. The last time I did, he was not optimistic. Of course, my theory is -- hypothesis is that the violence that is most likely, won't come from the extremeists groups or from Malcolm X who wants negroes to arm and resist and so on, but will be of the character of the -- like the Cleveland riot and be an explosion but may be provoked by an unrelated -- or apparently unrelated incident, but the kind of temperature of the ordinary negro is so high that there will be spontaneous violence, without anybody ever sitting down and plotting it or planning it, and that is the most dangerous and destructive kind of violence.

Yes, you are right. There are people who yearn for that, though -- say they do --

Isn't it like -- it has some kind of , -- I don't know, I guess we will never know the truth about the assassination of the nice President, but as far as I can figure out, there is no direct connection between the assassination and Civil Rights as such.

Apparently not.

Yet, the assassination came at a time when -- after the bombing and so on in Birmingham, when there was acute frustration and I think apprehension about violence with the negroes, and then the assassination happened and more or less everybody identified with it had a good cry and a lot of tensions unrelated were relieved, and -- although I think also that that has pretty much dissipated itself but it did forstall -- perhaps -- violence for a couple of months.

What do you think is the -- underneath the ritual grief etc.-- is the negro toward Kennedy now, -- a way to talk -- saying such a thing as the negro attitude now, but you see what I am driving at.

I think there are two attitudes. One is some self-conscious attempt perhaps to make him a symbol and martyr for Civil Rights-- you know -- the easy comparisons with Lincoln and that kind of thing, but I think also that it is factually unjustified and that a lot of negroes realize that, but there may be some kind of utility in remembering Kennedy in that way, on the grounds that his assassination -- how do you put it -- his assassination is an arguement against any form of extremism in the racial crisis and other matters, and this tends to perhaps mute extremeism of -- but that he is as an authentic martyr for Civil Rights is ridiculous -- he was a practical, hard-headed, fairly liberal politician who acted on Civil Rights when he was under pressure and he was forced to do so, politically speaking. I think that is the record and I don't think that it is unfair, and I support it.

That is true of Lincoln, too, though isn't it?

Yes, I think very much so.

Is any other type possible as an effective thinking?

I don't know that it is, under our system.

Under what system might it be?

Well, I don't know -- see --

It is a question of manipulating power and who can manipulate power. (Inaudible)

I don't know that there is, at least in America.

Well this thought is sometimes very shocking to the negroes (inaudible) they don't come to terms too easily.

Well, that is my point, that there may be ~~akt~~ a kind of at least temporary immediate tactful advantage in not being realistic about Kennedy's role, because of the shock of the assassination itself and martyrizing him about it, even if the facts don't justify it.

This then, understanding you are right, you were saying that the martyrizing of Kennedy serves a way to contain non-violence --

And stifle the opposition to integration to some extent and to keep -----

Both. and to establish opposition to-white opposition to integration, and this can even be thought of as a conscious -- as conscious on the part of negro leaders ---

What do they decide to do when they have the Memorial Service at the end of the Morning period? Well, they decided to go to the Lincoln Memorial and -- you know -- repeatedly comparisons have been

made -- well, as they obviously would be -- between the two assassinations and -- you know -- it is by some coincidence, the hundredth anniversary of the Emancipation of Proclamation and all this contributes to it.

And the Vice-President contributes to the parallelism, too, the name. What do you think of Johnson, by the way?

Well, I sort of like him. I -- overlooking a kind of corniness in his speeches and what not, I think it is likely that he will get more results and in a shorter time. I think that has already been indocumented, to some extent, the tax business and the education bill.

Throw me out when you are ready. How much stereotyping of Johnson is the blank resistance to end the cause because he is a southerner?

I don't think too much -- like -- Dick Gregory has a gag on this -- that after the assassination -- it was something like after the assassination, twenty million negroes held their breath until Johnson's first address in which he put Civil Rights at the top of the agenda and then Gregory says "I'm packed" -- and I think also on the record, he has a pretty good record in Congress on Civil Rights. I don't detect any very critical ---

Where else could he go? I don't know, I am just asking.

I don't think there is any alternative.

I should hope not, politics are politics.

Of course, surely the Southern Senators have recognized that, too, and the debate and so on about the bill and the filibuster if there is one is some kind of ceremony --

Speaking of someone who is trapped, is he maybe trapped by a moment --

What about the negro leadership (Inaudible)

negro slogans, gets them away from the real issues ---

I think in New York, that has been the history -- you know -- they predominantly have voted Democratic in response to the letter of the Democratic politicians, locally and national, and --

What about ?

To add a power to, for example.

? freedom now, you know ---

Yes, but that is fine for a while and it has been fine for six years, but I think now there have to be some results, and they have to be results that affect everyday life of the negro, in his in his school, in his job or chance for a job, in very practical situations like that, so for example, if the Civil Rights Bill passed tomorrow, that is not the end of the story and I don't think it will even have much of an impact in the negro community, because it will be so long before the Bill will have any practical consequences, ~~they~~ there may be years of litigation about some of its provisions and the difficulties of enforcement and the possibilities of evasion are just tremendous in such a bill. We know that because we have such legislation in some of the northern states and what not, and there are very little practical consequences.

Not to underrate the importance of Civil Rights, but is the question fundamentally a Civil Rights question at all -- how would you argue that point?

I think that it is a lot of things together. I think it is a question of Civil Rights in the sense -- so to speak -- what does it mean to be an American citizen? Well, that is a question that is as much for me as it is for the negro, and hopefully even the negro struggle to be recognized as a citizen is one that makes my own citizenship more secure, so it is not merely ~~xxx~~ racial in sense although it has this focus; but I think it is other things too, it is now in the terms we were talking of earlier, a matter of whether or not this society will survive in any kind of liable sense, and there are other things we can do -- like Germany had a problem before the war of How to deal with 10 or 12% of its population and they decided rather than -- so to speak -- integrate them, they would try to exterminate them, and it seems to me that ~~xx~~ our choices are roughly those, too, if there is not integration, as a practical matter of segregation cannot continue with the momentum of the protest against it and therefore the only other social policies that are imaginable are ~~xxx~~ of a very of confining or exterminating or exporting American negroes and I hope that the country isn't prepared to do anything like that, but my point -- in terms of the possible policies, the only one that has anything to commend it, is integration, and for the sake of the negro sure as such -- so to speak -- and also for my own sake and for yours and for all of us.

As a matter of Civil Rights, without underestimating it, can be thought of -- lack of Civil Rights -- as a symbol of something rather than as a disease itself (Inaudible) attacking the symptoms --

After attacking the symptoms, Civil Rights is important, yes, I am not denying -- nothing has been said -- this line of thought I find to some negroes is very chilling, they don't like to mention it -- some mystical values has been attached to Civil Rights as such -- this tends to be middle-aged negroes who respond this way, see what I mean?

I think two things. On one hand there is a ~~xxx~~ certain uniqueness to the negro cause -- I mean -- plenty of other people have suffered discrimination and so on in this country, but nobody ever -- nobody else has the inheritance of slavery, not the Jews, not the Italians, not the -- not any of the immigrant groups.

They also have a cultural background, a kind of cultural continuity.

Yes, but really the cultural background of the American negro is really America.

Most of the American negroes are more like the old Yankee, the old southern ?  
than he is like the vast of American population. Does that make sense to you?

Yes, yes it does. But the other thing is Baldwin's point of course, when he says that he doesn't want to be integrated into a burning house-- I agree with him. The negro revolution poses the much deeper issue of -- what kind of society this is and is to be, or perhaps should be.

Let me turn it around it a little bit. Is this psysically a middle class -- a middle class revolution -- aspirations are to get in on the American middle class values ?

Or is this a false question?

I don't think it is a false question and I think that -- I don't know -- this is just a guess -- my impression would be for most of the participants in a -- now that the rank and file people are involved -- it is the first, that is, an aspiration for simulation to the middle class.

-- A very important middle class --

Yes, but I think -- I mean, there are some voices exactly like Baldwins who are saying that -- and see the issue as a critique and condemnation even possible and at that point, I would join the second group.

Do you see what Baldwin ?

What kind of a vision he has for society to come -- Do you see that-- a governing vision?

I don't think he does. I mean -- I don't think he has seen it either yet -- I am very sympathetic toward all his -- or most of his indictment, I wait to hear from him some word in the terms of what we were talking earlier, about reconciliation, about how there can be some kind of integrity and unity in society that transcends race. I don't think --

(Inaudible)

I think there are damn few who do, white men or black men, don't I think the issue has even been addressed yet and ---

It is high time that some negro did.

I agree, in fact our friend Mrs. Hedgemen is able to be more articulate about this than any negro that I know of. I have just been thinking about that, as a matter of fact, some kind of a --

-- I mean -- the time has come to talk about How do you love your enemy and not How do you love your negro, white man or vice-versa or any more of the kind of a galatarian propositions because they, I think, are pretty empty anyway but a much tougher ---

You must know \_\_\_\_\_, this critique of \_\_\_\_\_ (Inaudible) God is talking to a natural man, not a redeemed man.

But I would say then, it is exactly in the actual event of bearing the hostility or the aggression of another, that a man's redemption is worked out.

Yes, but this is worked in that process by something that happened, some spiritual \_\_\_\_\_ has taken place so \_\_\_\_\_ can't conceive of that, he is a natural man according to \_\_\_\_\_

There is a precedent after all, I mean the ~~XXXXXX~~ crucifixion ~~XXXX~~ itself was the precedent and it is that and not particularly non-violence as a political or even revolutionary tactic \_\_\_\_\_, but a different character in which the love volunteers to accept and bear whatever one's enemy offers, and whatever one's enemy does for \_\_\_\_\_, is not destructive of the love, even though he may end up dead, if you love the world that way, if you love another that way.

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