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RFW: That's true. This raises a question - in 1935 would such a leadership have been available among Negroes?

WW: Well, I personally doubt it. It's difficult to second-guess history. I do not think it was possible in 1935, because a lot of what has been produced has come about out of the response to what World War II produced. You had a new temper developing on Negro boys during World War II - got to see the world in a sense. And they had made an investment in making the world safe for democracy - et cetera - all of the slogans we had. And they came back with certain questioning in their minds. They had been overseas and had freedoms that they never even conjectured in Mississippi and Alabama and Georgia and Louisiana, and then in their own minds say what if I fought and ran the risk of dying for all of America then I ought to have some share of it here. This shift in the South had a lot to do with it, from an agrarian economy to an urban industrial economy has had a lot to do with the groundswell of discontent of the Negro community. The Negro was leaving the deep South in droves, going to other large industrial cities in the North during the war. This is another ancillary force I think.

RFW: What about the notion that we are encountering sometimes that the Negro is just discovering his identity - that this is part of this whole movement?

WW: Well, I think it's a very critical part, because I've seen in my own lifetime - I'm not an old man, as you know - I have been as a child - I can remember being aware of an internal color discrimina-

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tion in the Negro community, and being a Mulatto I guess I was sensitized to it because I had brothers and sisters who - I don't know why - gave to being light skinned some special value.

RPW: You mean some of your ~~xxxxxx~~ brothers and sisters did feel this way?

WW: Oh, yes, they felt - I know two sisters particularly, and one brother in particular, who felt that being a light skinned Negro assigned to them some special values. I think fortunately for me I rebelled against this - maybe this was my inquiring mind, but I wasn't aware of it at an early age and I rebelled against it, and I thought ~~xxxx~~ people were people on the basis of their intrinsic worth - the fact that they were humans. And I think this could have been one of the things that made me get the issue of humanity square in my own mind. I had seen that change sharply in the last fifteen or twenty years. I have known dark skinned people in whose presence I would be afraid to say the word "black" - seriously or humorously.

RPW: You mean now or in the past?

WW: No - in the past - fifteen years ago. Now I feel no reluctance whatsoever. In fact, it's a part of the built-in humor of the movement that we kid each other about it - calling each other half-white Negroes and black Negroes. In affectionate terms, you know.

RPW: Some weeks ago I was having an interview with a quite distinguished lawyer who is a Negro, and he was saying to me that

it's a real problem for him, living in a world of white symbolisms - the symbolism of white and black, dark and light, as values symbols, through English poetry or French poetry or American fiction and God knows what, and in casual conversation. He said bitterly - I find myself schooling myself to invert these symbolisms that are hidden in all literature and in common speech.

WW: I think this is symptomatic in the Muslim movement, you know.

R FW: This man is not a Muslim.

WW : No - I know - he may not be, but I - this is the other extreme, that within this movement they are exalting black, which is the reverse of exalting white. And I can certainly sympathize with this lawyer because I know when I am watching television I - and reading stories, and in some of our expressions, I - maybe my antenna is out, you know, to pick up these little value assignments on the basis of color, you know - we talk about a little white lie, but a terrible lie is a black lie. I saw a television story about a good horse and a bad horse, and the good horse was white and the black horse was bad, you know. And it's so skillfully woven into the whole fabric of our value judgments that I think sometimes it almost happens to us unconsciously.

RPW: Now let's think of this - in this connection - these oppositions, light and dark, run through all sorts of things in our society - in our literature. Well, it also is found in Africa. This makes a change. Now, you have African tribal dances which pre-date -

WW: I would qualify what I have said earlier by saying that you

must understand, I'm sure - perhaps you do - that this is the normal emotional response for the American Negro because of the frame of reference in which he has been forced to move. Though it may not be when you trace it to its historical origin one - something that grows out of race or color prejudice, but because of the box in which the Negro has been moved and this is his immediate interpretation of it.

RPW: He interprets it that way, though the symbolism was made, as some anthropologists say, antedate any contact with white European culture. In the Chinese theater literally a face is darkened to denote a villain and whitened for a hero.

WW: Yes - well, I think this goes back even to Platonic dualism. It's reflected in the New Testament writings of Paul - he talks about the children of light and the children of darkness -

RPW: There we are -

WW: and we can even go back to the business of day and night - and with the primitive mind, not really quite grasping what makes night and what makes day, and of course the night was unknown to him and of course beasts of prey and all of the dangers of jungle life, I guess - this - it seems to me that this would probably be the origins of this.

RPW: Then we have a very strange situation, don't we, of a social - the conditioned attitude toward natural symbols.

WW: I think one has been superimposed on the other. We have taken the natural symbols and then, as the structure of race and color

concepts developed, we superimposed this on nature symbols that were already available.

RPW: There we are. Now, what reaction is appropriate, then, for say a cultivated Negro or a not cultivated Negro facing these symbolisms? What's reasonable and logical?

WW: Well, I would hope that I could be considered cultivated, but I don't think any Negro, no matter how much he's cultivated, ever really becomes emancipated, no matter how much my mind has been opened, no matter how much academically I recognize the fallacy of race, so much has been done to my emotional pattern by what we call the system - the segregation and discrimination - that I never really am free of it, and so you get sometimes in fleeting moments the reverse response, you know - discrimination the other way.

For instance, I think Negroes like myself have developed almost a mental catalog of the tone of voices of how a white face speaks to them which in another circumstance when a Negro speaks it would get no response whatsoever. But everything that a white person says is interpreted by the nuance of the tone of voice, or maybe the hang of the head, or the depth of tone or the sharpness of the tongue, you know - things that in the ordinary, normal ethnic frame of reference would have no meaning, takes on tremendous and deep and sharp meaning.

RPW: In other words, you are documenting the remark made by more than one Negro, that to be a Negro is to have a touch of the paranoid.

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WW: Oh, yes, I think we have almost a total ambivalence, even in this moment of history for the Negro, when he really accepts his identity more than he ever has before, there is still a retention of this ambivalence, which has many roads by which it has come. Some of it came out of survival, some of it came out of hatred for the white man - just the pure joy of saying one thing that you know he wanted to hear and really meaning something else, you know -

RPW: Even the folklore - even Uncle Remus.

WW: Yes - poking fun of the master without the master ever really understanding what he was saying. This runs through the idiomatic expression of the Negro and the Negro spirituals - and the Negro religion, even.

RPW: What about this question, then, of the relation of white men to the Negro movement? We have very violent statements here and there. Baldwin says the white liberal is an affliction, or others have said, we will have no more connection with the white sympathizer, the white liberal - he has no place - he's a curse. This is carrying - this is a logical extension of that attitude, isn't it?

WW: Ah, yes - it is.

RPW: What is the role - what role can, say, the white man take toward -

WW: Well of course I understand in the American non-violent tradition, as it is symbolized in the model understandably  
so - I do agree with Adam Powell, one person whom I know has said this again and again, that the day has come when the white person

has no role to play in the policy decisions of the Negro movement. But I do not go all the way with him to say that we do not need white allies. So maybe I am a middle of the roader on this point of view. I say that there are some decisions that the Negro will have to make ~~him~~ tactically and strategy-wise, as far as the direction that his movement is going to take, and there are certain kinds of decisions in which I don't think a white man's attitude can have any impact whatsoever, and they ought to be left alone to the Negro community. But if he wants to help with our revolution, he must come and join with us. I think we have passed the - we have come through the stage of the Southern white liberal of fifteen years ago. I have an expression I use about the - we are afflicted with outworn white liberals - or worn out white liberals - who fifteen years ago what they were saying could have cost them their life, but they're saying the same things now that they were saying fifteen years ago, and as James Russell Lowell has said, Time makes ancient good uncouth. We are at a different moment in history.

RPW: Is it possible that the Negro movement could have success without a white consensus, though, in its favor?

WW: Yes, I do think so.

RPW: Without the white consensus?

WW: Yes.

RPW: How would you explain that?

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WW: Well, I know this is a minority opinion, but I sincerely believe it, that the Negro has just enough pivotal position in the economy of our nation - the free enterprise system - and just enough visible identity, that generally in a united effort, we could produce so creative a crisis that the consensus in a sense might be forced - not a consensus of consent, but a consensus of - prodded by practicality.

RPW: In other words, a rising political and economic force?

WW: Yes. Strategically used and applied. Now, this, coupled with I would say the guilt burden that the white community must bear - that they do bear - particularly within the frame of reference of, shall we say, white Christianity or white religious life.

RPW: You mean you're coupling the question of guilt burden - which is another way of saying potentiality of consensus -

WW: Yes, I suppose so.

RPW: Turning it upside down - so in other words -

WW: But you may not emotionally want to be ready to accept it, but you recognize intellectually that this is the proper thing.

RPW: But guilt in the guts, though - if you have a feeling of guilt you already have an awareness of the moral issue and a desire for another attitude in yourself. Is guilt the feeling for desire for another attitude in yourself?

WW: Well, I had not defined it as closely as that. For instance,

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this is the feeling that I was trying to get at, or that I am referring to - when a white person says I know what the right thing is to do, but I just don't have the power to do it.

RPW: It's an old story - to any complexion.

WW: Yes, and I don't - that - to me that has not yet approached consensus.

R PW: Well when action means consensus, but the potentiality of consensus lies, say, in the recognition of a responsibility.

WW: Yes, I could buy that, as the expression goes. We started down one lane once that I'm trying to recall, and I know I hadn't quite exhausted my picking ideas about it.

RPW: Let's go back.

WW: I believe it had to do with - I think it began with a question as to whether this - whether Negro - oh, yes, it had to do with the Negro accepting his own identity, and I wanted - I remembered in my mind, I wanted to say a few more words about that, because I think this is half of the battle, for the Negro to accept himself as he is. Now, maybe my philosophy or attitude about this is a little structured because I've talked about it a good bit on the public platform, but this business of this internal colored discrimination, as I say, was very sharp fifteen or twenty years ago when I was a youngster, and I was very aware of it, and as I indicated, I have seen sharp disappearance, you know. You do not find Negroes today who are light skinned who assign to themselves

any special value, and you do not find its counterpart, the sharp sensitivity of Negroes who are dark skinned. In fact, it has gone a little - it depends on the - a little bit the other way. There's a little more pride taking - being taken now in a Negro being a visible Negro, you know - you know, if you're on the borderline, like some of us Mulattoes are - you feel a little bit embarrassed - kind of like we've been cheated, you know, in this movement of the rise of the nations in Africa and the respectability of being black and having kinky hair - you know. I think it's healthy even though the pendulum has gone the other way, because I think the natural response is going to be, it will even out. But I think more than anything else, this has given to the Negro - this is what the non-violent movement has given the Negro - a basic belief in his own personal worth, that no matter who he is, there is a means now by which he can make his witness for what he believes, without cursing and swearing and clubbing and shooting - you know, using any of the traditional violent means when one wants to react against oppression. He has found identity not alone for himself, but he has found identity with the group - the Negro has a new solidarity. This is true not only of one Negro with a hundred other Negroes, but it's also true of Negroes South and North. I think Birmingham meant this more than anything else. There were many Negroes in the North who kind of felt sorry for those poor Negroes down South, but then didn't really feel a bond. But the bond has been forged now as never before.

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RPW: In fact, there was by all reports of sociologists and other observers, a great withdrawal on the part of Northern Negroes from Southern Negroes as they came North.

WW: Yes - they wanted to cut off, not only from the stark circumstances that they had left, but they also wanted to cut themselves off from their historical of having been slaves. I think this is reflected in another way in the middle class Negro, who begins to develop enough economic security that he wants to cut himself off from the Negro community, he finds himself unacceptable to the white community, and so his frustration is lost in - as I think Dr. King describes it - conspicuous consumption - completely devoid of any spiritual or moral values, you know. And it has been a kind of entrapment that he has wandered into. I think it has been reflected in the early days - maybe even now in our present revolution - that a lot of the goals the movement has been directed toward have been in a sense middle class goals - they are middle class goals and not so much things that affect the simple and plain people of the land. But more and more the center of the movement, the focus of the movement, is shifting, particularly in economic terms, to matters of employment, those things which are going to be the day by day flesh and blood considerations of the people of the land.

RPW: Moving away from civil rights as such, toward the economic sub-structure - the psychological substructure - is that it?

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WW: Yes. From civil rights to human rights - the right to be free from the fear of want, and hunger, and free from the fear of not having shelter, free from the fear of ignorance.

RPW: Coming back a second to the matter of identity, we know along back - at least as far back as DuBoise - talk about the split in ~~the~~ the Negro soul, the division of impulses sometimes for some people, an almost irreconcilable division of impulse, one toward an extreme form - Africa, toward the mystique noire as we have it now, or Negritude, or the notion of the Negro culture as separate from and antithetic to and resisting of the white western European Judea-Christian culture - all this withdrawal was an extreme form that becomes a kind of black shovinizism of the Black Muslims, for instance. On the other hand, the impulse to enter into, to absorb and be absorbed by and integrate with this other western European cultural tradition, and perhaps lose the whole - even lose blood identity in this absorption. Does this split - is this for you a split of impulse?

WW: No, I think this present movement that we have is going to lead toward a synthesis of the two. I don't -

RPW: Excuse me - Dr. King this morning was saying that he recognizes this as a ~~the~~/real problem - there are very sharp divisions of feeling on this question, you see, and many ways of discussing it. I do hope you will discuss it now.

WW: Yes. Now, I feel as Dr. King does, that it is a problem, and

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maybe I'm going out on a limb by giving my own personal conjectures.

RPW: Please do.

WW: I do not think that Negroes in the foreseeable future is going to lose his ethnic identity, if that's the proper way to describe it. I think for three to four to five and maybe six generations there is going to be a visible Negro community. But I think the temper of history in the world, particularly with the rise of the African and Asian nations, is such that the color factor is going to recede in its importance. Now, as I notice, as perhaps - I don't think it's an undue optimism. And so I see here as a synthesis between the two, that color will become an incidental means of identification, and the Negro will find his place in America in a very real sense as the Jew has, as the Irish, as the labor movement - that the tide of history of our times is going to demand so much for human rights that the Negro will in a sense integrate himself into this new stream of history in such a way that he will not be lost visibly but yet the stereotypes and the discrimination and the artificial obstacles that hampered him in his first one hundred years of emancipation will recede almost into insignificance.

RPW: That is, you envisage a pluralistic society in America rather than a unified society in that sense?

WW: I think what we're going to see in America is what the world is like in miniature in one place. It's going to be a kind of United

Nations, because even with the restrictions being imposed on new people coming from other countries - I think we're still going to have them come - some way is going to be found - the technological advances of this nation, the agricultural skills, our reputation and our bent as builders - we get more out of the land, we have the largest leisure class, you know - it's going to be a Mecca toward which people who have an opportunity are going to find their way. And I think you're going to have more of a melting pot in America. I envision something like maybe a larger Hawaii, or a larger Jamaica - something like that. And I think this is my hope for America, that it will become like Jamaica. I was in Jamaica last year, and you could clearly distinguish orientals and people of English stock or European stock I should say, some Americans, West Indians and Negroes - but everybody had the concept, not that they were Jewish or English or Chinese or oriental or that they were Negro, but that they were Jamaicans.

RPW: What about the notion that we encounter that the Negro, the American Negro is more like the old white American than like anybody else - the old white Southerner or the old white Yankee?

WW: Well, I don't think it's entirely true. I think we have to start with the basic premise that the Negro is an American. There is very little - I think that we have been able to retain from our so-called African or jungle heritage other than the blood lineage which we naturally have to trace. By and large, if you take the Negro, nine-tenths of him is a product of American culture. And

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then because we have existed as a sub-culture in American society, we have become imitators of what we have seen, and in many instances we are, as George Kelsey said, an exaggerated American.

RPW: That's the same idea, you see - one aspect of it.

WW: So in this wise you see in the Negro merely a mimicry or an imitation of what he has seen in the rest of Americans, who out of the circumstance of history have had privileged positions and our values and ideas reflect it, so in this wise I think it's true.

RPW: Have you read Faulkner's *Intruder in the Dust*?

WW: Yes.

RPW: Do you remember that very ambiguous section about the Southern Negro and the Southern white and the theory of homogeneity, that they would represent somehow against an outside world? What sort of sense does that make to you, or how do you interpret it?

WW: Well, I don't think it's - I think here you have a reflection of the provincialism of a geographical provincialism that still pervades to this day in the South. For instance, the South feels it stands against the rest of the nation politically and maybe in a real sense economically. I think this is to a large degree the same kind of thinking which causes us to have this Southern bloc in Congress. I don't think in practical terms it really works out like this. As I recall, vaguely, they were saying that the Utopia of the South would be that the Negroes would go along their slow course to whatever their goals were, and the white people would go

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along their course to whatever their goals were, and in one Southern homogeneous setting the two would exist separately but side by side.

RPW: That isn't apparently what Faulkner meant - a formal segregation. He meant something else, whatever -

WW: Except it was voluntary.

RPW: Not voluntary segregation - not segregation at all. In Faulkner's work segregation is not the point. Excuse me - I must change the tape. This is the end of Tape #1 of the conversation with Mr. Walker. See Tape #2.