

Draft -  
Transcript of  
Taped conversation with  
STOKELEY CARMICHAEL, IZELL BLAIR, LUCY THORNTON and JEAN WHEELER  
and MR. ROBERT PENN WARREN  
at Howard University - March 4, 1964

MR. WARREN: Mr. Blair, you were one of the first sit-ins in Greensboro, weren't you?

MR. BLAIR: Yes, I was.

MR. WARREN: Well, I can tell us something about the origin of those sit-ins, how they were arranged beforehand, planned, how they came about?

MR. BLAIR: Well, the sit-ins originated, the idea originated with my roommate, Joseph McNeil. We were all freshmen at \_\_\_\_\_ College, and one day Joe--

MR. WARREN: You said-- again, the idea was your roommate's-- whose name ~~wa~~ is what?

MR. BLAIR: Well, his name is Joseph McNeil.

MR. WARREN: Joseph McNeil.

MR. BLAIR: Yes. Right now he's a Second Lieutenant in the Air Force in Texas, but the idea came about one day when Joe came into the room and he had a disturbed look on his face and I asked him what was wrong with him, and he told me he had just come from, I think, the Greyhound bus station in Greensboro, and he asked to get served there at the lunch counter and he was refused. So I told him, I said, "Why you know how things are; you know how segregation is; it's just been here all the time. There's nothing you can do about it."

MR. WARREN: Was he from the South, or was he from the North?

MR. BLAIR: He was also from the South. He was from Wilmington,

North Carolina, and he graduated from-- he went to high school; he graduated from Wilmington High School. And I asked him, well, what can we do? And he said, "Well, we ought to have something like a boycott," and I said, "A boycott?" And he said, yes, that we should go in and sit down at the lunch counter (and he named Woolworth) and he said, ask for service, and if they refuse us then we can continue to sit there. And if we're thrown in-- we'll go to jail and then we'll ask the people not to buy in the place. . . . . you should meet him.

MR. WARREN: And then what happened?

MR. BLAIR: Well, we told our friends David richman, who's from Greensboro, and Franklin McCain, who's from Washington but he went to high school with us at Delta High School where we went to school, David and I, and they liked the idea; so in the ensuing week which followed the day I talked with Joe, we talked about plans, things like the rights of man and how we felt, you-know, about being Negro and what rights we felt should be ours. And finally on January 31st, 1960, the night before we went down, Joe came to the room and he asked us were we ready to go. And well, we were-- at first I thought he was kidding, so did the rest of us, so Frank was the largest guy in the group and he said, "Are you guys chicken, or not?" And we said, no, we're not chicken. And he said, "Well, we're going tomorrow down to Woolworth's and sit in," and I said, "O.k., we're going," like that. And we told a local merchant there, . . . . . John . . . . . in NAACP, he's always acted as a go-behind

mainly ideas, maybe revolutionary ideas, but most of us who served in the NAACP at the time didn't like him because they said he was too much of a radical. So when we told him what we were going to do he decided he would help us. We went back ~~me~~ and we talked to him about the idea and he said he would give us money to buy articles downtown in Woolworth's, and after we sat in he said he ~~we~~ would contact the reporters and Police Department and everything like that. So the scene was set, and around four-fifteen there were . . . . . we went downtown, we purchased articles at the merchandise counter at Woolworth's and then we proceeded toward the lunch counter and we sat down and we asked for service. So that's how the idea started.

MR. WARREN: Did this have any relation to the old March on Washington movement, its theorizing?

MR. BLAIR: Well, -no-

MR. WARREN: Had you all read about that?

MR. BLAIR: Well, no, we hadn't read anything about any of the previous movement.

MR. WARREN: That was a long time ago. That was back in '41.

MR. BLAIR: Yes. I asked Joe where he'd got the idea from, and he told me he got the idea from a boycott which took place in Wilmington and I think in 1959, when he was a senior, when he was senior at the high school there. He said they had a townfolk show at the school in Wilmington, not at the school-- and it was sposed by a local soda pop firm (I think it was

Pepsi Cola or Coca Cola) and, well, they felt that the Negroes-- the prizes were given to all the whites and the Negroes didn't receive many prizes at all, so they felt there was some-- started discrimination there, and they protested it by not buying the sodas from the soda pop firm, and the soda pop firm reviewed its policies and they decided they'd-- to give a townfolk show over again, and they gave out prizes to Negroes after that. So this is where Joe said he got the idea from. I didn't know anything about a previous movement. Of course the only one we knew about was the . . . . . movement in, you know, in Birmingham-- I mean in Montromgery, but otherwise than that was the only movement we knew about.

MR. WARREN: Have you read about the March on Washington movement since then, the old one? Twenty years ago?

MR. BLAIR: Well, I read about it. I read about it . . . . . and this was . . . . . I think through the Nashville paper or it was through a Nashville weekly magazine.

MR. WARREN: Now CORE was the organization that came in to back you up, wasn't it?

MR. BLAIR: Well, we had offers. I think it was on the second day of our demonstration, we called in for the NAACP, but CORE came down first. Dr. Simpkins, who was president of the NAACP at the time called and--

MR. WARREN: The local press *sent*

MR. BLAIR: The local press *sent* of NAACP, at the time in Greensboro, called in CORE, Gordon Carey, and Mr. Carey came down and he

offered his assistance to our Students Executive Committee for Justice . . . . . This was the student group which spear-headed the movement. And at the time we told him that we didn't want any outside organizations come in because of what the townfolk might say, that the movement was taken over by outside people. So we thanked him very much for his aid but we declined to take it. And the next day, Herbert Wright, who was then the  $\phi$  youth secretary of NAACP came down, but he couldn't offer too much in assistance; he only gave us more support like "good luck, we're with you," and so forth, but Gordon Carey, as we understood, had experience in-- and CORE had experience with sit-ins and so forth, so we passed up both.

MR. WARREN: Now that-- some of the reports on that, you know, are a little different from this account. Some of them said that CORE came in immediately, you see, and was accepted. Some accounts of it in print say that, you see.

MR. BLAIR: Well, from being there at the meeting the night that Mr. Carey came down to-- this was--

MR. WARREN: You'd know because you were there.

MR. BLAIR: I was there, and our Students Executive Committee for Justice went on record for -- as having declined his offer, but we thanked him very much. We told him we wanted to remain, as one student said, "we appreciate your aid but we would like for it to remain a student movement at the time, and if we need your help we will call on you," and he thanked us and he went on to Durham, I think, the next day.

*By [unclear]  
[unclear]*

MR. WARREN: Now this is a rather important point, in one way, in a major way, but some of the printed accounts say this, unless my memory tricks me, that the appeal was made-- appeal, mind you, by your group, to Mr. Simpkins. Is that right?

MR. BLAIR: That's true.

MR. WARREN: Your group. To Mr. Simpkins.

MR. BLAIR: Dr. Simpkins.

*Simp*  
MR. WARREN: Dr. Simpkins. Instead of going to NAACP as might have been expected, he called in CORE because he assumed, at least, that he would be too legalistic and not militant enough. That's the interpretation that's given in print sometimes.

MR. CLAIR: Well, this is-- to a certain extent this is true. I think the Greensboro chapter of NAACP was sort of written <sup>Nashville</sup> ~~NEW~~ on the blacklist by the National office, after Dr. Simpkins did this, and I remember in 1960 a convention that I went to, Greensboro was the last city to be recognized before the sit-in. Oklahoma City, I understand, I think a young lady . . . . . was given recognition to start a sit-in. We didn't do anything about this in Oklahoma because, well, we didn't have to, I think . . . . . we didn't have to, so we were told . . . . . '58. Well, we found out later after we started the movement that Oklahoma had a similar demonstration and we got a CORE Information Book we found out then that these demonstrations, even though they were NAACP groups, were organized by CORE, you see.

MR. WARREN: The earlier one, you mean.

MR. BLAIR: Yes, in Oklahoma, yes, but we didn't know

anything about this at the time, and so the NAA-- NAACP, as we called it, tried to write in its minutes at this-- its convention that the demonstrations were spontaneous and they were started back in 1958. The organization at that time didn't want to give credit to the Greensboro movement.

MR. WARREN: Which organization, now, NAACP?

MR. BLAIR: Yes, this was NAACP didn't want to give credit.

MR. WARREN: The national organization.

MR. BLAIR: Yes, to the national organization, and I think one reason was that of CORE-- of Dr. Simpkins' actions and our actions, because when we left the Woolworth store on February 1, 1960, we were asked by a reporter from the Greensboro Record were we sent there by NAACP, and we told the reporter no. Although some of us had been proud members of the NAACP when we were in high school, at the time none of us were members of NAACP.

MR. WARREN: But you had repudiated both organizations, as far as their help was concerned.

MR. BLAIR: That's true. That's true.

MR. WARREN: You refused both, with thanks.

MR. BLAIR: We wanted to sort of destroy the old idea that Negroes had to be told everything we do, by the NAACP or CORE. It wasn't that we had any disrespect for the group because we respected it very much. It was just that the idea that college students coming downtown sitting in, asked for service, couldn't do these things unless they were told to do them by somebody else.

MR. WARREN: This was not motivated, the sit-in itself, was not motivated by a notion, a criticism of the NAACP's previous role, was that right?

MR. BLAIR: Well, partially yes and partially no. One reason--

(BREAK)

MR. WARREN: You said partially yes and partially no, about the -- accepting help from NAACP.

MR. BLAIR: Yes, from this standpoint: When we talked about . . . . in Greensboro, we mentioned the fact that the present method, you-know, the legal method which had been used by groups like NAACP, while it was a good method and a lasting method to be put on the books and so forth as law was concerned, it was not a good method when it came to immediate removal of discrimination, and we wanted something-- we wanted to have a personal involvement in removing discrimination, which we thought NAACP wouldn't go along with, and if they did, the national office-- it would be about two or three months before it gave its approval and by that time the idea would be lost, as many ideas of this nature have been probably lost beforehand.

MR. WARREN. I see.

MR. BLAIR: And no, we didn't take a <sup>dis-</sup>respectful attitude towards NAACP; we realized that it had been the forerunner of the civil rights movement for a long time, and we respect the organization very much for what it has done, but we felt that it was time for new action to be taken in the South. You see to us, it appeared that it was something like the hierarchy, maybe something like the Catholic church -- and



no offense to the Catholics in that -- you know in Italy giving all of the orders, you know, and none of its affiliates in other countries will make a move until maybe the ideas or suggestions . . . . . were approved by the head office in Italy, and that in the Vatican City, and so we thought the NAA was organized on the same basis, and we felt that many times Negroes felt discouraged in the South because it took too long for NAA or NAACP to make up its mind what to do.

MR. WARREN: Here's a remark attributed to Mr. Wilkins.

They-- they being SNICK, CORE, furnish the noise but the NAACP pays the bills, that is bail, legal costs and so forth, while CORE, WNCC, SCLC, here today and gone tomorrow, that there is-- be only one organization that can handle a long, sustained fight.

MR. BLAIR: Well, does that mean NAAC--

MR. WARREN: It's attributed to NAACP.

MR. BLAIR: Well, I think at the time Mr. Wilkins made his speech, it was partly due to the reason that the NAACP was probably seeking a new membership fund. Now I really don't think Mr. Wilkins is sincere about what he says because I think as a result of groups like SNICK, FPLC, CORE and other groups working in the south, NAACP is giving many of its fund to fight the legal battles. I-- not taking anything away from NAACP, I think it's doing a good job, a very good job, and will continued to do so, but the movement since 1960 can switch from a legal courtroom battle to where you deal with

conformity of men on the basis of law to a battle between men when it comes to personal consciousness in regard to segregation. Now I think this is the basis of the present movement now.

MR. WARREN: Now not to deny you this question, but you don't mean to imply, do you, that a matter of direct action, of nonviolent direct action, should supplant the continued effort to set up a legal framework and a legal philosophy to underlie even the direct action?

MR. BLAIR: Well, no, I'm not implying that direct non-violence action to supplant the legal method and the legal means of eradicating segregation. I think while it is good to establish laws on the books, one of the main problems that we have been having now, that we have many laws on the books in regard to segregation and discrimination, in the schools and so forth, is that we have a problem of getting the people to accept these laws. And this is where I think direct nonviolent action comes into play, where the people, where we, as the oppressed, actually begin to practice what these laws say: no discrimination, so we're seeking equal equality--

MR. WARREN: There's use-- there's direct action there, a way of implementing of a law, is that <sup>what--</sup> we--

MR. BLAIR: Yes.

MR. WARREN: A way of . . . . method. Not a way of supplanting . . . . a method of achieving a desired end.

MR. BLAIR: Yes, I think you're right, that direct nonviolent

~~action~~

action as a means, of, I think, of implementing the law--

MR. WARREN: This is not always what is said, of course. Sometimes it's said you know differently; we've had enough of the law, now this.

MR. BLAIR: I think you can't separate the two; you need both, but I am in disagreement with those who feel that the legal method is the only answer, and I'm in agreeing with those who feel that nonviolence method is the only answer.

MR. CARMICHAEL:

*N* I think you can still use the two, but where the conflict comes in is where one group feels that the other group is of no use to a movement any further.

MR. WARREN: There is this quotation from Mr. Wilkins, you say, Mr. Carmichael, is with the Times magazine story of--

MR. CARMICHAEL ~~MR. BLAIR~~: *W* Yes.

MR. WARREN: Tell that story.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Yes, New York Times . . . . I think that was an unfair statement.

MR. WARREN: That they are to him or unfair ~~to~~ on his part?

MR. CARMICHAEL: Unfair on his part. I don't think that he should have made a statement like that at all. While I agree with Mr. Wilkins that the NAACP organization has been there since 1908, or 1911, as the case may be, and has been fighting, has been doing, I don't think that he's completely correct where he says that the other groups that come by here come by night. I think that he felt that the NAA was attacked by a lot of other groups for being conservative, and he felt

that the way to fight the attack was to make this statement, putting the other groups on the defense. My personal feeling was that it backfired.

MR. WARREN: Let's change the subject a bit. Mr. Blair, how would you describe for us this so-called "new Negro," how do you distinguish this character from previous characters, or do you believe that this definition, that this ~~phrase~~ phrase covers anything?

MR. BLAIR: Well, to a certain extent I don't think there is anything . . . . I think what it is, is that more people now in mass are adopting the ideas of direct action and more members of the Negro race as well as many whites, are now seeking, or now want to know more about the history of the Negro and the part he's had to play in America, and this new idea of militancy, as I said, is being adopted by more people in mass numbers. There have been many people before, such as . . . . . and Walter White and Roy Wilkins, James Weldon Johnson, . . . . . and so forth, who have been what they called radical Negroes, are new Negroes, so to speak, but they were only in small number. But now, since 1960, and since King's movement in Montgomery, they are people in massed numbers who are accepting these ideas imbued that we must take a-- that we must do something personally to remove segregation. And so I think while the idea of the new Negro is still with us in many respects the idea is not a new one; it's something that existed all the time.

MR. WARREN: The very phrase "new Negro" dates back to the '20s, that whole group in the '20s, a group that Langston Hughes was associated with, where it applies, the phrase is applied to that group. That's a long time ago now, forty years ago. This has raised another question, though. You say mass movement. Has SNICK or CORE or NAACP or any other organization actually worked in mass terms? Hasn't it been a matter of rather specialized leaderships, another of the spontaneous movement from the Negro masses, a movement in leadership groups, of special leadership groups, say, college students, would you say?

MR. BLAIR: Well, to a certain extent, SNICK-- a student of our coordinating committee, I can't speak very much for that. Maybe Stokely can give you information about it, but from my observations it has been primarily composed of college students and high school students who want to do something about eradicating segregation. CORE is made up-- basically the majority of CORE members are college students and high school students. The NAACP organization is made up mostly of professional people and ~~also~~ the Urban League also is made up of professional people, but I feel that the movement now since 1960, has become one of mass numbers, since 1960, is mostly college students. But since then and especially since 1963, the movement has become one which we have adults involved, people who are old enough to register to vote, people who have jobs, people who are seeking all these

things that we've been talking about, a better job employment, a release of police brutality, and so forth.

MR. WARREN: Two things like the registration drives and the boycotts, including the bus boycott, moved toward a mass base, is that it?

MR. BLAIR: Yes, that's right.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Well, I'm not sure.

MR. WARREN: Yes, Mr. Carmichael.

MR. CARMICHAEL: I would assume up between-- following the Montgomery movement, that started a mass movement and then everybody started it, but that was a passive action, they just didn't take the bus, it wasn't the same thing that's been going on in the street, I think that it was the first mass movement that . . . . since 1960, which started ~~ix~~ ~~mix~~ ~~that~~ ~~was~~ ~~a~~ ~~passive~~ ~~action~~ in Albany, Georgia. We have 700 people arrested from the town. There were some demonstrations against segregation, open facilities, it was in that case also the part of all . . . . of that town walking up and down the streets. Since then we've had Cambridge, we've had Danville, we've had Birmingham, we've had Greenwood and Jackson, Mississippi, and it has become since then a mass movement . . . . Now there are a few professional agitators, I don't have qualms about using ~~of~~ the word "agitators," who do agitate, but once a movement gets going, in most cases now it's aimed at a mass movement. If we go back to '61, the Freedom Riders, for example, wasn't even -- when we were arrested, we just went into jail, we

wanted to get students into jail, a number of SNCC people came out and decided to start agitation in Jacksonville, to get Jackson people to go to ~~jami~~ jail, and they got fifty people from Jackson, Mississippi, to go to jail and that was a big step up, and from then it started the whole thing about mass movements to jail.

MR. WARREN: This is from DuBois: "The Negro group has long been internally divided by the mothers as to wheter its striving should be aimed at strengthening the inner culture and root bonds for intrinsic progress, for offensive power, or whether it should seek Escape wherever possible in the surrounding culture. The decision in this matter has been largely determined by outer compulsions rather than in a plan to this point." In other words, over and over again DuBois writes, and in the writings of other people we find this notion of a fundamental split in intention, actually divided desires to be associated with the negro tradition, even with the African mystique on the one hand to preserve the racial integrity; on the other hand to move into an integrated situation and adopt the Western-European-American cultural values with perhaps a loss of even racial identity in the end. Now for some people this is clearly, and for DuBois a problem; to others not at all. How would you we react to that? Miss Thornton, do you want to say anything on that point?

MISS THORNTON: Yes, my first reaction, of course, would be, thinking of Socrates: Know thyself. I think that the

problem, the dilemma of which DuBois speaks of, is one which is very common to Negro Americans today because we do face the problem of amalgamation into the whole of American ideal, into the whole of American life, being Americans first, say, or being what I would like to term Negro Americans or Black Americans, I guess is even a better way of putting it, and I think that we as black men have an obligation to, as I've said before, know ourselves; to know ourselves as black men and be proud of what we are, and contribute to America what we could actually offer to this culture. I think that there is something unique which the black man offers to this melting pot, this melting pot that insofar as there is still a melting pot. I know that more and more today Americans are tending towards thinking of themselves as some, let's see, some entity which is now, I guess, some figure like the Joneses or some <sup>ideal</sup> idea set up as to what an American man or an American woman is, and I think that because this has been a tendency in America, it does not exclude what other racial minorities or ethnic groups could in time add to our culture to make it what America has always been in fact known to the world.

MR. WARREN: Mr. Carmichael, how do you feel about this? Do you recognize the problem here or do you just feel that the problem does not exist for you? As many people say? What about yourself?

MR. CARMICHAEL: Well, it sort of exists, but I don't go



to the extreme that Lucy-- Professor Hershkowitz, in his book, "The Myth of the Negro's Past," tried to show that Negroes in America have some connection with the African ritual ritualist and African culture. Frazier and Professor Parks at the university of Chicago, as far as I'm concerned, clearly answered him and showed him that he was just all wrong on that issue.

MR. WARREN: That the culture-- the Negro is totally of the American culture.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Totally of the American culture, and that makes the Negro a unique specimen in America because he is the only one who is totally American, and I forgot the name of the psychologist out at the University of Chicago who contends he was a, he's Jewish and he was in one of these camps in Germany and he wrote a book-- I forget the name of it, also, which shows that people who are oppressed usually take on all the superficial and all the mannerisms of the oppressors. This, for instance, would be a classic example of ~~Bob~~ Frazier's "Black Bourgeoisie," and that when the oppressed people take on all of the characteristics of the oppressed, they exaggerate. My feeling is that as far as the movement has developed, this far, it's not a revolution; it's not even a reform, all it has been is that the Negro has been trying to get into the established system as it is now. Let us get into your jobs, let us get into your restaurants, let us get into the housing neighborhoods,

let us get into your schools. We just want to get into it.

That's the way it's been so far, that's a fact.

MR. WARREN: Now there are some people, James Baldwin among them, who will say, in part, at least, that the Negro is prepared to offer a fundamental criticism of middle-class American values.

MR. VARMICHAEL: Baldwin is right and he's not right. The Negro whom he speaks about is not the Negro whom the white press allows to speak or the white man's communication allows to speak. The Negro who speaks as Baldwin says: Yes, I'm wearing a tie, a suit, I'm clean, I've been to a college in the South and I'm a college professor in the South; or I'm a Negro lawyer or a negro doctor and my accent is clear and my English is superb and I have a Cadillac in my garage, and what else can you expect of me. That is not the Negro that Baldwin is talking about. The Negro that Baldwin's talking about is the one that is down at the bottom ~~of~~ who has nothing to offer. In that sense, then, you really have integration, when you talk about integration you talk about bringing two things together, you-know: "I have my chitlin's, I have my wine on Friday night, I'll come in your house, you have some of my friend chicken and I'll eat some of your a la carte whatever it is. But as far as the scene now, it's just the Negro~~s~~ just fighting to get into something. It's like you're giving up your jazz, you're giving up your soul music, your brainchild or whatever we say, your

nitty-gritty, to get into this.

MR. WARREN: Now we spoke earlier today you, and I, of . . . . . called The Black Nationalist. He makes the point, if I remember the book correctly, that even the Separatists and the Black Nationalists, like the black Muslims, are actually seeing a new way, perhaps unconsciously moving toward a full acceptance of American middle-class values. This provides a conflict, a backstairs ladder, to the achievement of the middle class values, even though they're not specified by the . . . . .

MR. CARMICHAEL: I ~~do~~ agree with that.

MR. WARREN: You think that's a fair diagnosis?

MR. CARMICHAEL: A fair diagnosis, because Negroes in America are not presented with any other alternative, like the-- let's say the Italians don't have any trouble because the Italians have some old former culture to fall back on; we have no old culture to fall back on, none at all.

MR. WARREN: Now of course some Negroes will not agree with you.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Of course they would not, but I would ask them for an answer for the home culture: What have we got? We have a subculture within a main culture. And the main culture so suppresses us that, and I bet you if you went South and asked a Negro girl or a Negro boy to draw a picture of a man on the board they would inevitably draw a picture of a white man or a white woman, with features

of a white man or a white woman.

MR. WARREN: The test that I know of at least that has been run at Negro schools in the South is to associate qualities with color.

MR. CARMICHAEL: The doll test?

MR. WARREN: . . . . . a long time ago by Dr. Johnson, in one of his books he gave the results of it. I haven't seen it-- this is back in the 50s. It bore this out, what you're saying, it bore this out.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Recently, for instance, they did a test, some psychologist-- I think it was the Klockhorns, where they had Negro dolls and white dolls and they had Negro girls come and pick which doll was prettiest, and inevitably they picked the white dolls.

JEAN BLAIR: Well, of course you know why. This Jean Blair, this is not Jean Wheeler.

MR. WARREN: What about that topic for you? Does that emerge as a real question to you, or a false question.

MR. BLAIR: Well, it poses as a real question, because many of us in the movement are going through the experience, we're going through the experiences, you know, whether we should adopt the full values of a white middle class society or whether we should develop within ourselves through this thing we call is the movement, an idea or an image of what we like to think of as being ourselves and being accepted as Negroes, and not as whites. I know many times I have confronted this problem of whether I should adopt the

values of a middle-class American society or whether I could be myself as a Negro. I don't think all values, all of the white man's values, are good for Negroes at this point.

MR. WARREN: Or for white people.

MR. BLAIR: Or for white people. Now such things as many instances are given a monetary value for all things, I don't think that we should establish that value because, while this is a capitalist society we live in, Negroes who are in many instances on the bottom of the income bracket cannot accept the idea, I mean could not make it on a-- may be wearing a hundred dollars-- down the street every day, or driving a Cadillac; we just don't have the economic ability to do these things. Well, I think-- I don't think integration is the best thing for us or that desegregation is good. We already have interracial marriage -- if you look around and you see Negroes of many different complexions. I do feel that we, as a group of people, should try to adopt more unity among ourselves. And I feel this is one of the things that the movement is doing, that the civil rights movement is doing. Many young people now are beginning to feel proud of being black. There was a time-- there still is, I should say, to a great extent, of Negroes trying to imitate the whites; they used straightening combs, they process their hair, they used to imitate everything the American white society does. But

I hope to see that out of this movement a realization of the fact that the Negro-- to recognize the fact that once and for all they're Negroes, that we're black, and there isn't anything that we can do about changing that we are black, and that there are some values and many things that we can contribute to American society which is good, and that there are already many values in the contributions that we have made to American society. I hope that this is something that will be brought out.

MISS THORNTON: If you're not going on to the next question, I'd like to add something.

MR. WARREN: Please, Miss Thornton, go ahead.

MISS THORNTON: It's amusing, in many instances, in listening to you, Stokely, . . . . . I'm very much aware, of course, of the people who even within my own family, for example, who would very strongly say that we're so much American until European background or the English background which other men can claim when they say yes, we're white Anglo-Saxon Americans. So can so many Negroes, to a certain extent, stand in America and say the same thing. But of course they've had a problem which has stuck with them throughout, they were black men, after all, in spite of . . . . . yes, we have had imposed upon us the white man's society but we have continued throughout that blackness, even though there might have been a certain amount of mutation over into the other side and gotten a certain amount of . . . . . ,

acceptance, ~~if~~ we've got all of this, but the Negro or the black man in this country still has to know and accept and be proud of himself as a black man and have Americans who accept him as the same because this-- an example which I used to like to look at when I was in college. The black man can find himself lost in the white man's America. In other words, he can do everything under the sun which would make him an ordinary A-1 American man, and he thinks that he's been accepted not only by Negroes, but over . . . . . of society as just another American. He's reached the top of the ladder, he's become the peace leader for the world, he's listed . . . . . where he's a ~~great~~ great man in everybody's book. But it's going to come back to him over and over and as much as he wants to abandon the idea of "I'm a member of a minority, I'm just another black man, when he gets to the top of it all there's going to be somebody who's in that majority -- white, and probably not worth one-ninetieth of what he's worth, he's going to step on his toes and spit in his face and say: Look, you're still black, and that really, that really, I guess, really brings home the message to him that he is, yes, he's an American, very much an American, probably more American than the person who's just said to him: Let's keep in mind you're an American, yes, but a black American, and you have a place, you know.

MR. CARMICHAEL: You see I agree with you, Lucy, but I think the whole thing shows precisely what I ~~was~~ saying, that one,

the whole question that you're posing is whether white people want to accept black people. <sup>So,</sup> See, you know, I'm not sure, you know, the question isn't whether I mean they're going to accept me. I want to decide whether I want to accept them, and that's an important point. The whole development is that because we don't have the culture, you know, what do-- we can sit down and talk certain in-jokes, for instance we can say nitty-gritty and stuff like that, and amuse a few white ~~people~~ people-- it's getting nowadays we can't even amuse them when we talk, and we can eat chitlin~~gs~~s, and Mr. Penn Warren probably knows more about chitlin~~s~~d than we do. Where's our culture? Jazz, we can listen to Ray Charles, but where is it? It's all so bound up in the American system. All our aspirations are typically American. We <sup>more</sup> are/American than the American. And that's a fact whether we like it or not, whether we like it-- it is still a fact, you can't prove contrary to that.

MR. WARREN: Let me ask you another question raises this or say something, for what it's worth. I was talking a few weeks ago to a very able lawyer in a southern city. He's a northern-trained, from one of the better northern university law schools, practising in the south, a man of middle age. He said, "I have in late years had to school myself when reading English literature or simply listening to sermons, and many aspects of life, to refuse the metaphorical thinking which is implicit in that literature, and in that way of



life." He says, "I live in a world where the metaphors are insults to me: black versus white; values-- sin versus virtue; life the wisdom-- the intelligence darkest ignorance. This whole world of metaphors that I'm living in that I've got to school myself to invert them." Now interesting here is that he feels this so keenly, he's schooling himself to invert them. Every time he encounters in his reading of literature, or in any common speech or in a sermon-- he's speaking very honestly and fully about his views, you see, about the white society in which he is living. That <sup>expression</sup> reaction certainly is extreme?

MISS THORNTON: Well, I can say this about it: We do in fact live in times when black men can in fact be proud to be black, that is black Americans. I'm sure the times which Stokely spoke of when he spoke of our beginnings, when he spoke of what Negroes historically have been, in America, and why they are so terribly American, I guess that part of it being also that in white America we knew what standards represented, what is, in fact American, and usually they are contrary to what is in fact black, or what is in fact the black man, so that the black man had to usually think in terms of the white doll with all of the Caucasian features as in fact being beautiful, anything separate and apart from them, or anything that smacks of black or negro just happens, not to be too kosher, But today at least, the black man can stand with his head erect and say: You know I am a black man; and

I expect to be accepted for what I am. Black is not inferior. I mean we've had all the scientific theories, we've had, as you say, been set to rest that the Negro, like any other man, has the capacity, the ability and he in fact deserves to be accepted, he's not something that looks on from the back door at what happens in the big house and you-know, can say that's what I want to be one day, including I want to be white, in a sense. This is what some of the reactions, I mean can be in a society where being <sup>what</sup> ~~white~~ you is is not acceptable.

MR. BLAIR: Well, Carmichael, what is--

MR. WARREN Yes, Mr. Blair.

MR. BLAIR: May I comment on what you said, Lucy? I believe it too, to a certain extent, that while many people most of the newspapers criticise . . . . . the Black Muslims, I feel the Muslims are having some good points about their organization. Now I don't agree with them about the bit about separation, but I do like some of the things that they're doing. I can . . . . . having a Muslim state. I think what the Muslim is trying to do, is using religion as a means of binding the people together, and while the NAA and other groups are using their demonstrations and so forth, as a means of binding the people together, people in unity, they're using religion as a means of binding the people together. And so <sup>far</sup> ~~forth~~ as a criminal is concerned or a juvenile delinquents are concerned among the members of the

Muslims, it has been proven that most of their members, there is a great decline in delinquency among those people who are Muslims.

MR. WARREN: That they have actually redeemed a great many people.

MR. BLAIR: They have redeemed a great many people, so I thin it's not all bad, and as a part of this organization. I think if we look at it from an objective point of view, they have some good things which if American society will look at, it could be useful to sort of straighten out some of the ills that we're facing today.

MR. WARREN: You mean for whites as well as Negroes.

MR. BLAIR: Whites as well as Negroes.

MR. WARREN: It's a question of achieving a sense of self-acceptance and identity that would prevent the man in the gutter from his doom; save him from his doom.

MR. BLAIR: Yes. I think this is, see-- what I was taught in school, everything that I saw was of the middle class value, even in our school there were mostly predominantly Negro schools or segregated schools back in the South, is the Negro students are taught by middle-class people. Most of these students, the majority of them, come from low-income families, and therefore are tucked-- separated away from the middle-class, and many of these kids can't straighten up to this, and so in many respects I was told by some of my instructors; well, I have my idea that you have to get, and this is the attitude of many of the Negro students come out with. And so that many of them coming from

these homes, they can't help it if they're dirty when they come to school. And so what happens? They automatically reject the authority of the school because they say "I never can be able to stand it." And what I think that what we really need among ourselves, among Negroes, is a sense of racial pride; not so much of racism, but a sense of accepting who we are and what we are, and the roles that we have to play in our society, and not an inferior role.

MR. WARREN: Let me ask a question relating to that: Is it possible to argue that the southerner, whoever the southerner is, we'll say the segregationist, who's short of a fanatic in it--<sup>image--</sup>

MISS THORNTON: It's not a good definition of a southerner-- if I can interrupt, since I also call myself southern.

MR. WARREN: Yes, all right, all right, your . . . . . definition, you see. You know that.

MR. BLAIR: Your southern dialect!

MR. WARREN: Well, our southern segregationist who thinks he's defending, he says, the way of life, the way of life you see all of this when he's saying those things he's going to try to defend a cultural identity himself. He's got mixed up with his view of a whole package of things, including segregation. Now if he doesn't, if he could be led to see that his identity does not depend on segregation, his cultural identity, then the whole pattern might change for him. Does that make any sense? I'm not saying that it will; do you see what I mean? He feels defensive, the white southerner feels defensive. He

feels his culture's being attacked, his identity's being attacked, he's being robbed of his identity, his history, and he has as his notion the unlettered man or poorly lettered one, or unreflective one, sees part of his tradition and part of his identity . . . . . doesn't necessarily . . . . . identity.

MR. CARMICHAEL: This whole thing is very, very ironic. And if the white southerner knew anything about his history, number **one**, he would, now that after Reconstruction there was not official segregation, or state-law-backed segregation, that the Negroes and whites went to school together because the South at that time just received free schools.

MR. WARREN: In the Civil War generation, they thought segregation was preposterous.

MR. CARMICHAEL: They certainly did, and it didn't come until Mississippi started instituting the Black Codes, so that his whole tradition-- he talks about tradition, he talks about institution; you can change institutions but you can't change people. His whole feelings were molded by institutions.

MR. WARREN: A generation back.

MR. CARMICHAEL: A generation back, so that when he tells me now that institutions, you can change the laws but you can't change the people, he evidently doesn't know what he's talking about.

MISS THORNTON: I agree with that. If I could-- the non-

recognition of the existence of the black man in the South is quite an interesting thing for the Southerner, because, as Stokely has said, there has been a time when--

MR. WARREN: Can a white southerner come in here now?

MISS THORNTON: White southerner, although by the way few Negroes would say they're southerners. There are very few who would dare say they're southerners, and this nonrecognition of the black man, I would agree with Stokely, that there has been a time when in fact the white man has recognized the black man's existence and now all of a sudden he wants to erase from his mind something that he thinks he's forced by law to put up with or something to segregate out of his society, to keep out altogether. He thinks that it would be in the mind of the new southerner the person who is interested in bringing the South out of what in fact has gotten itself down into nonrecognition of a good part of its society and its nonrecognition bringing with it running away from the South-- not, I ~~do~~ don't mean running away, as such, but moving away from the South, of a good part of the population, that is the black man too, I think, when the new southerner with a new set of rules, will realize that the black man has a place there in the South and that the black man can, in fact, help to make the South a great South again. In other words they'll have to recognize that more than just the brawn and the labor of the black man, which made what they call the Old South great, they've got

to recognize that this black man can stand side by side by them, in education and everything else, and make the South what it ought to be today.

Mr. WARREN: Izell Blair?

MR. BLAIR: I'd like to comment on ~~what~~ Lucy and . . . . Stokely is saying. I agree with everything they say, especially the part of what Lucy said about many people being afraid to be called southerners. I think what has happened is that-- (BREAK)

MR. WARREN: ~~What~~ We were talking about the delusions that white southerners have about their history, the problem that delusions among Negroes, according to some writers, this being Arnold Rose . . . . . collaborator (I'm quoting from: "The whole tendency of the Negro history movement, not as history, but as used as propaganda, is to encourage the average Negro to escape reality, the actual achievements and the actual failures of the present. Although the movement consciously tends to build race pride, it also may cause Negroes unconsciously to recognize that group pride is built partly on delusion and therefore may result in devaluation themselves or being forced to resort to self-deception and certainly their own history." Does that make any sense to anybody here?

MISS THORNTON: I think it does, in a way. Sense probably not in the way that you mean does it make sense. I'm thinking now--

MR. WARREN: I'm not interpreting it. I'm saying does it make sense to you?

MISS THORNTON: Although much-- not-- I shouldn't even say much. Although some of the things which historians, Negro historians and other writers have said about the Negro's past, or his history, might be based upon some delusion. I think that looking at most of what is in fact bad about the Negro's past, as far as the glory of it is concerned, has-- contains very, very little delusion, and I think that the view which the Negro today gets of the past contains so little of what is in fact the--

MR. WARREN: (Excuse me; kill the last few sentences and resume here.)

Miss Thornton, will you speak again about the matter of delusion and Negro history, or the possibility of delusion in the Negro history movement?

MISS THORNTON: Yes, I think that the Negro has heard so little which in fact as-- so little from the Negro historian which is in fact padding or which is in fact delusion, as compared to what the white American has in fact heard of his heritage and his background and <sup>his</sup> history. For example, take any southern school in the United States and take the history books that we in fact read in the ~~public~~ public schools (I'm a Virginian myself)--

MR. WARREN: I know; you told me that some months ago.

MISS THORNTON: --and I know the history that we in fact



have in school. I know what our legislatures-- I know what the white southerner wants and feels that we should in fact know and believe about history. I also know that my brother, is now in teaching college history in the South, and I know also efforts on the part of people who are supposed to be scientists or something moving pretty close to it, that these people who are historians who want the truth and the facts to be told, people who have deliberately put themselves into positions across the country wherein they can . . . . . pages of history, see to it that the South gets a good shapeup and see to it that history is written so that we don't look so bad, or see to it that history's written with a sympathy for our cause; I mean this doesn't happen as far as the Negro history is concerned. By and large, the Negro hears mainly the black side of his history, and what he is getting today, if it contains any delusion, I would submit that there's very little by comparison with what we get as history. If you've been writing out of history the black man up to most recent times, you can now condemn what the Negro is getting by way of black history because it contains delusions or a bit of padding or gives him a false sense of pride, I think that's absolutely absurd when the whole system of history before then carried with it the idea of-- cutting out the idea that anything good--

MR. WARREN: It may indeed; it may indeed.

MISS THORNTON: --cutting can come out of black--

MISS WHEELER: I'd like to add this, though. I don't--