ROBERT PENN WARREN BOX 9 CHARLES EVERS TAPE #1

Mr. WARREN: You say the Citizens Council was calling you all day yesterday on the phone?

Mr. EVERS: They call all day every day and they hang up the phone and they - it's a form of intimidation - harassment - that they go through, so we decided we would give them a taste of their own medicine by calling them - have a committee call them all day - so their phone is tied up and our phone is tied up too.

RPW: Yes. Let's cut back to personal matters for a moment, if we may. How did you get involved in the movement? I know you were in physical education work before you came here, weren't you? Is that right?

CE: Well, actually I have been involved in the movement since I was a boy. Now, what happened - Medgar and I had worked as a team together from boyhood. We organized chapters over in Newton County and over in Lauder County and Shauver County and Western County - and then up in the Delta section when we went out with teams in our early twenties. And then - I was in the funeral business -

RPW: Where?

CE: Over in Shauver County - Philadelphia, Mississippi. And I had - I was president of the Negroes' Voters League, and I was trying to get Negroes registered to vote - and I had many hardships - many economic pressures were applied to me in my business, and they forced me out of business in 1957. At the same time I was

president of our local branch there, and also president of the Negro Voters League of Mississippi. And therefore I had to - they broke me. They sued me - I had a couple of lawsuits, and I was thrown into - I was fined, and I was sued for personal damages - a white lady was - I was parked at an intersection, and a white lady was in the parking lot, and she got in the car and ran down - ran into me and tore my car - and they sued me for $5,000 claim and they said I had injured her back, and - that was confirmed by the courts. Then they also -

RPW: Was that appealed?

CE: No one would represent me. I couldn't get an attorney to represent me. Then I went to St. Louis to a meeting, to the National Funeral Directors' meeting, and while I was there my wife had - was attending a funeral that we had - a person had died and she was carrying a woman to the cemetery with the funeral procession, and a white man ran through the funeral procession and tore my with the body in it - and they sued me again for that and fined me a tremendous sum. So then they began to - I was the first Negro disc jockey in Mississippi. They got me fired from the radio station in Philadelphia, Mississippi.

RPW: That's your picture there on the wall, isn't it? The picture to the right of this letter from President Johnson and your brother.

CE: Yes. And President Kennedy too. That's President Kennedy -

RPW: And on the left there is President - I mean, on the left is

President Kennedy and you - and is it your family?

CE: No, that's my brother's family.

RPW: Your brother's family.

CE: That's when we were attending the funeral of my brother in Washington.

R PW: The funeral of your brother.

CE: Yes. We were guests of the President at the time.

RPW: Yes - I read that.

CE: So, as I was going on to say, about the wreck that happened during my wife's funeral procession - they sued me for that and then they began to apply pressure all over. They got me fired from the radio station - then they got me fired from - I had a restaurant downtown in Philadelphia and they closed it up - revoked my license. And then they began to not let me have - asked the casket companies who were selling me caskets and embalming fluid, not to sell me caskets and not let me have fluid. And they applied so much pressure to me and they - until I had no choice. I had to give up my business and seek employment - which I had never had a job before. I had worked for my father and my uncle in the funeral business and I had been in my own business for years. Then I began to look for employment. I couldn't find it anywhere in the state, so I told Medgar - I said, look, Medgar, I'm going to go away and get a job, and I'll send money, but you stay here and keep carrying the fight on, and I'll go and send money back and try to buy some property and get enough income, and they

would then fire you and I'll come back and we'll have enough money so that we can continue the fight and get our people free - and free ourselves. But I said, any time you need me I'll be back, whether it's day or night. And so we agreed, and then I told him, I said, Now remember the pact that we made when we were boys - that whatever happened to one of us - the other one will carry on until the same thing happens to him until he could not - until physically he was prevented or until something else that we couldn't help.

RPW: This was your agreement as boys?

CE: Yes. We must have been about - oh, I must have been about fifteen, I guess, and Medgar must have been around twelve. Why we said this - there was one day we were sitting at the Bilbo - at that time the late Senator Bilbo was campaigning for re-election, and he came to - he would come to our home every year - every time there was an election - he would stomp and and he would lambaste the Negroes and tell everybody he was going to send them back to Africa, and -

RPW: Which town is this, now?

CE: Decatur, Mississippi. The county seat of Newton County. And - so this particular - but we'd always go and listen to him, you know. We were about the only Negroes who would go up and listen, and we'd always go and sit right in front of him. My dad had always told us that we were as good as anybody, and that regardless of the man's color, it had nothing to do with him as an individual

or - and God loved us all - that we were all God's children, and we had the rights of anyone else. So we felt that way. It was brought up in us. And we would go up and listen to him speak. We were sitting down in front of him this particular day and he said - and I remember it very clearly - he said, You see these two Negroes down here - if you don't keep them in their place, some day they'll be in Washington trying to represent you - taking my place and the rest of the good white people's place. And I sort of looked up at him and smiled at him, and he said, He's even got the nerve to grin at me. And then - that day, Medgar and I said, well some day he may be telling the truth. And Medgar said, You're right, Charlie - some day we may be in Washington representing all the people of Mississippi. And from that day on we decided that that was something we could do. And then a few days later - a few months later - a friend of my dad's was lynched. He was accused of insulting a white woman. They came and got him and dragged him out of his home, hooked him behind a wagon and dragged him down the streets into a pasture down - not too far from our home, and hung him to a tree, and stood off and shot him in two with shotguns, until his body fell - part of his body fell to the ground. And his clothes laid there in the pasture for weeks and weeks, and we used to go by and see them.

RPW: What year was this - approximately?

CE: Oh, I don't know - it's hard to say. It must have been

193 maybe 7 - 38 maybe.

RPW: Do you remember his name?

CE: Yes - Mr. Tingle.

RPW: Tingle?

CE: Tingle - his last name was Tingle.

RPW: T*I*N*G*L*E?

CE: Yes. So we - it hurt my dad and it hurt us. We asked dad, ~~my~~ Dad, why did they do it? Why did they do it? And he said, Son, just because he was a Negro. And I said, well, isn't there something we can do - something that Negroes can do - something that the law would do to stop people from doing this? And dad replied to it, he said, The law themselves encourage that type of thing in Mississippi. He said, And we're going to have to straighten it out ourselves. And that's one of the most important things I think that made Medgar and I more determined to become fighters for equality of all men, not just Negroes, but all men.

RPW: Was your father in the funeral business too?

CE: My uncle was in the funeral business. My dad was a lumber contractor, and he owned shares in the funeral business, but he never actually was an undertaker. I lived with my father and uncle and worked with my uncle in the funeral business.

RPW: I see, with your uncle.

CE: Yes. And I - that was actually the beginning of us determine - of our determination that we would really do something and something we could do. We began then to go around and ask

our people not to buy newspapers from the white boys who would come around through a neighborhood and sell newspapers. And there was a furniture company - we tried to get our people not to buy furniture, because the white people would come in and sit on on the side of our parents' bed and they would come in - open the door and call our friends and our mothers by their first name, and we asked them, Why do we have to say yes, sir, and no, sir, to the whites - they don't say it to us. And my dad, said, Well, that's just an old custom, son, it always has been the Negroes have to respect the white people. I said, Well, dad, why can't they respect us? He said, Well, white people don't feel that we are supposed to be respected. They feel that we're just a piece of property or a tool or something to be used, and that they are our superiors and that they have no right, or no reason to respect us. And I said then, I said, Well, I don't feel - I feel that you have always told us, dad, that we're as good as anybody else. He said, That's right. I said, Then why should I say yes, sir, and no, sir, to them - they don't say yes, sir, or no, sir, to me. Or they don't say yes, sir, or no, sir, to you. He said, Well, I don't know - it's something that we just can't help. You see, my father was not an educated man. He never finished the sixth grade. But he had a lot of common sense and he had the nerve of a lion - you couldn't frighten him, and - what gave Medgar and I so much courage too, was that he never would let white people frighten him. I remember once we were

at a commissary - a commissary is a little store where Negroes go and buy their commodities on Saturdays, and - we used to have a running account that we would pay every Saturday. This particular Saturday we went in to pay the account, and the store owner, who was named Jimmy Bulware at that time - I'll never forget it - had a great reputation of beating Negroes - kicking Negroes, and - if they didn't pay the bill that he said they owed. So this Saturday he gave my dad his statement, and dad said, Mr. Bulware, this is wrong. He said, I don't owe you this money. So he cursed him and told him he did. He said, don't curse me - he said, I don't owe you this money. And then he - Medgar and I were standing beside dad, and the commissary was jam-packed with people, and - with Negroes mostly - and a few white - so Bulware broke for the - for his cash register drawer, I guess - for the little drawer underneath the counter - and my dad jumped between he and the cash register and told him, he said, Look -/if you ~~xxxx~~ open ~~xx~~/that cash - and he grabbed a bottle - he said, if you open that cash register I'm going to bust your brains out. At that time Medgar and I received the - picked up a bottle - each - and stood at the door. And my dad said, Son, don't turn your back on them - he said, just stand there. And dad talked to him. He said, if you dare hit one of us, he said, we're all going down - and this white man stood there and trembled - he just shook like a leaf on a tree. And that - let me know them that - my dad only had a bottle - he had a gun lying there, right inside but he was afraid

to pick it up - so I knew then that white men - from a boy - are cowards, and they are easy to become excited if you show any type of nerve or any courage at all they will quick turn and run - they'll tuck their tails.

RFW: Would you generalize that - you'd say a white man - would you generalize that - all white men are cowards?

CE: No - I wouldn't say all white men are cowards. I would say the type who live violently are cowards - those who depend on violent means to secure their ends are cowards. I noticed as we grew up, we'd watch the cowboy pictures, and we'd notice how all the bad white men would always take a - try to sneak and hide and shoot the other brave men in the back, or they would try to stay in the bushes and shoot them as they passed. So those are the type of things that built up - we noticed that - that helped us understand that Negroes and white, to a certain extent, are the same, that a coward is a coward, regardless of who he is, and most cowards react the same, and that has been one of the reasons why we felt that we should not be afraid of the whites - stand up to them - respect ourselves and respect them too - and demand respect from them. So we did this for - clean through our boyhood days, and as we began to - came into manhood we went into the army and served in the army - World War II -

RFW: Both of you?

CE: Both of us, yes. Then we came back home in 1946 and we felt that - at that time, you know, you didn't have to pay a poll tax.

RPW: Let me interrupt a second - what branch of the service were you in, and what branch was he in?

CE: Well, we were in many different branches - you know, during World War II the army was segregated, so they put Negroes wherever they thought they could be served most. When I first went in, I went into the Engineers, and I was transferred from the Engineers to the Infantry, from the Infantry to the Tank Battalion, from the Tank Battalion - I got hurt in 1942 in Louisiana on maneuvers - the Red - and I believe the Blue - the Red and White or Red and Blue Maneuvers, I believe it was - I got hurt on maneuvers, and I was put into a limited service unit in Fort Sill, Oklahoma, and I stayed there for I guess two years. My job there was to transfer recruits to replacement centers, and then after I got back and recuperated, then they sent me - assigned me back to an engineer battalion, and I went overseas with the Thirteenth Engineers, and went to the Pacific[illegible] - we served in the Pacific Theatre for three years, and Medgar was with the Military Police Department in France - he was in the Normandy Invasion. And he served there for two and a half years. And then when we both came back in 1946, we decided we'd - we'd always wanted to register but we were too young before - so we were old enough now to register, and we wanted to register to vote . We began to work in our community to try to talk to the people of our community to get interested in voting.

RPW: Now, this was Decatur again?

CE: Decatur, yes. In Newton County. So then we had many hardships - the whites began to threaten our parents, and they began to threaten us, and Bilbo came back again and said, the way to stop these Negroes from voting is to visit them the night before the election. And sure enough, they came the night before the election of 1946 - I think it was -

RPW: But you were registered then?

CE: No - I hadn't registered -

RPW: You hadn't

CE: - and told my father that if he don't stop these - your sons from trying to register, something bad is going to happen to them. In the meantime, Medgar and I were in school down in and we were coming home for weekends and pushing - and working with the voter registration and organizing NAACP chapters. So then when we came home my dad told us what he had said, and so I said, well, dad, I was involved in New Guinea and I fought in the Philippines, and I wanted to fight here in Mississippi to have the thing that we fought for there. I said, this is our country, and I don't care what no white man says, I'm going to stay right here in Mississippi and enjoy it. And if I can fight there for it, I can stay here and fight for it. And Medgar felt the same way, and Medgar said, we're going to register. We don't care what they say. So that morning we went up to register, and when we got to the register - we got up to the place to register, Mr. Brand who at that time was circuit clerk - he had know us all our lives -

he came up and he said, Come here, Charles, you and Medgar - he carried us into a room and he talked to us, he said, now, look, son, now I don't have no right to tell you not to register and not to vote, he said, but -

RPW: This was the registrar?

CE: The registrar. He said, but it's going to cause trouble. He said, now if I were you I'd just go on back and wait. The time will come when you can register. And I told him then, I said, Mr. Brand, we've waited too long already. I said, I want to register now. Not tomorrow, but now. So he said, well, he said, you're going to cause trouble. I said, well, I don't care what the trouble is, I want to register. So he carried me and we registered.

RPW: Both of you -

CE: Both of us. We registered. Then we went back. And the election was coming up I believe about two months later - three months later - we could vote. And then we came back and we got five others to register. We came back to vote - that's when the trouble really came. Then this time they - a friend of my dad's and my parents - all this time they're going to come and we're going to kill them - we're going to do this and we're going to do that. So when we got back to Decatur to register to vote for the election that fall - it was in November - that fall - then they must have had over 200 I guess - these white - I won't say hoodlums - with shotguns and overall pants on and rifles, and the next morning Medgar and three other of our friends went down to vote. They blocked

- they put the polls inside of a room - like inside this room here - and then they blocked the door with these whites. And Medgar and I pushed the door - where the poll was - where the booth was. First we were going to get our ballots - they stopped us - they tried to stop us from getting the ballots. Mr. Brand just said, step aside and let them get the ballots. So when we went in to get them - he gave us our ballots - we came out - they blocked the booth where the - they blocked the door where the polling place was, and they - as I walked up they rammed a shotgun in my side and said I'll blow you half in two, and they wanted to put a rifle in Medgar's side, and they said, You damned Evers niggers, you're nothing but trouble noway. And I said to him, I said, now you don't have the guts to pull the trigger. I said, in the first place, you're a coward. I said, now if you're going to kill me for wanting to register, you keep me right here in the court house; and Medgar says, They aren't going to do anything, Charlie - don't worry about it. And by that time another white man who we had worked for - helped - we had raked his yard and we had played with his sons and we had - my mother, I remember, once had nursed his wife when she was sick - walked up and said that - you niggers are going to get in trouble if you don't go on back home. He says, now you go on back home, with Jim and Jeff, and stop raising all this trouble. But he had been here all these years, and they - looked upon as the leading Negroes of our time - no point in you creating all this trouble for them. And I said, We aren't

creating any trouble for them, Mr. X, I said, the point of it is we just decided we want to have the same thing you have - that is, our freedom and right to register and vote. I said, we looking for trouble. And he said - by that time he said, Well, if you don't get away from here, you're going to wind up getting shot. And I said, Well, you don't want to shoot me as long as I'm looking at you, but we turn our backs you possibly will. And by that time another white lady who we thought quite a bit of had heard what was going on. She came over, and she said, Charles and Medgar, please, she said, they'll kill you. She said,
And so we said, O.K., then. And I told her, I said, look, you've beaten us but you haven't defeated us. We'll be back. And I told Medgar, I said, don't turn around, Medgar, just back out the door. Well, these other three - two - fellows who were at the door waiting for us, and we backed out of the doorway -

RFW: Your friends?

CE: Yes, our friends. And then they said, You damned Evers niggers are going to get all the niggers in Decatur killed if you don't stay at home and tend to your own business. So we didn't say anything. We all got outside on the court house square, and I told Medgar, I said, look, you and the other two fellows go down one way, and the others will go with me down in a different direction. So as we were going down the street, here comes about three or four carloads of these whites - they ran down beside and jumped on the cars - and by that time I had a - as I always did, usually -

we'd always be well armed, and so I said, Listen, if you touch one of us, we're going to leave you right in the street. Now, we're not going to bother you, don't you bother us. But nobody is going to take a whipping from any of you white people - do you understand that? We're going to kill you niggers ~~xx~~ - you ain't going to do nothing to me, I said, - there's one thing about it, if you're going to kill I'm going to get one of you first - now you just believe/ that - hear? So they stood there and they cursed and we kept on walking and they cursed us - they drove alongside and cursed us all the way down the street.

RPW: Were they armed?

CE: Yes, they were armed. They had shotguns in the car. And they said - because they felt that we were going to fight back. So I said, And don't follow me home. Now, you follow me down ~~xx~~ to the store but you'd better not follow me on my property. So they followed us - not far - I'd say about a hundred yards they followed us, and then they turned around and went on back. ~~xxx~~ You'd better not be in town when night comes. So Medgar and I decided we were going back to school - which was Alcorn -

RPW: Where was that?

CE: Alcorn College. We were going back to school that afternoon. So they said, You'd ~~xxxxxxxxx~~ better not go. But then we stayed because we thought they might bother our parents. And we had a barn out back on our property, which was inside the city limits -

but it's - at that time there was no rule against having a barn and chickens and cows. So we - I planned - I asked Medgar, I said, you stay in the barn, and I'll get in the garage, and we'll stay in there - and our - other two friends stayed across the street in one of our rent houses in case they came, we'll have them in - we'll put them in a crossfire - by now we had learned to - in case people should attack you, the best way is to get them in a crossfire and you can't miss. We felt they were going to come in large numbers and we planned to get them in a crossfire. So that night we stayed all night - we sat up all night waiting for them to come, and they didn't come. As soon as day broke, then, we went home - went across the street to the house and laid down and had a few hours' rest. I had a '41 Ford at that time, and I got in my car - Medgar and I got in the car the next morning and drove back uptown and went into the court house and caught them unaware because they thought we were gone. We went to the court - no one was there - and we went into the court house and went into the Circuit Clerk's office and asked them why do they feel the way they do about us. He said, Well, Charles, I told you before that it's just not time yet. And I said, Well, when do you think the time will come? And he said, I don't know, it's going to take time. And then we walked - turned and said thank you - turned and walked on out.

RPW: What kind of a man is the Circuit Court Clerk?

CE: I must say he was a - I would say, a fairly decent man. He actually didn't ever show any resentment for us - he never showed where he was for us, either. He seems to have been the type of person who wanted to advise against any possible trouble or possible violence. He was not a violent man.

RPW: Do you think he had some sense of the injustice of the situation, some regret about it - or not?

CE: Yes, I do. I think he was a man who knew they were wrong, but the position he held he knew that he would be crucified had he spoken out.

RPW: What about the registrar? Mr. Brand?

CE: He's the same man.

RPW: Oh, the same man. I see.

CE: What happened - we had worked for Mr. Brand for a long time -

RPW: Is it Brand?

CE: Brand - yes. We had worked for him a long time and we knew him and he knew us. He knew my father and he knew my mother and he knew all of us. Well, you know, that's our home. And I feel that he was a fair man. There were many there who were fair. But these who were so bitter against us were, as I've said before and I've said many times, were the ignorant whites who had nothing to offer and their own way of proving that they were somebody was to try to keep the Negro depressed and deprived of his rights as a citizen and as an individual.

RPW: But there never was an attempt by the other white people in

the neighborhood to interfere with this - to stop this?

CE: No. You see, in Mississippi, the white man who differed with the extremists are in much more danger than the Negro, because reprisals will come to them are much severer than would come to us, and that's why so many good white people in Mississippi are afraid to speak out - and there are many.

RPW: James Baldwin says in print that he's convinced by the testimony of Southern Negroes that a Southern mob does not represent the will of the white majority but fills, as he says, a moral vacuum.

CE: Partly I agree. I won't say it's the majority, but I will say that I don't think that the mob represents all the whites of the city - I can't say that it doesn't represent the majority, because evidently it is the majority because they seem to be too solid on it. A person having lived in Mississippi, it would be hard for them to judge on whether or not that that's the case. I've lived here all my life, with the exception of the four or five years I was away trying to save money to come back to Mississippi. I can't say that Mr. Baldwin is altogether true - I would say that there are a large majority of whites who do not approve of this type of thing, but I can't say that they're the majority. I think I would be exaggerating to say that they're the majority of the whites in Mississippi feel that this thing that we are fighting for and dying for is right.

RPW: But majority or not, they are passive or withdrawn from it, anyway.

CE: Oh, yes.

RPW: I don't want to interrupt your narrative. Go ahead and tell me more of this straight ahead story, will you?

CE: Well, I think we left off when we tried to register and vote.

RPW: That's right. You came back the next morning to the court house.

CE: Yes, we came back from there. Then we went and got in our car and pursued back to the school, and when we got back to the school we had many calls, many letters from home, from our Negro friends, asking us please don't come back to Decatur because they're going to kill us if we had gone back. And Medgar and I felt and we - and Medgar felt until his assassination, that if we must go, then we must - Mississippi. We took a chance in France, we took a chance in New Guinea, we took a chance in Manila, we took a chance in going to Japan - had we had to invade Japan - we had already been alerted to go there - to fight for democracy, to fight for the things that we - this country was established for. I said, If I have got to come back to Mississippi - the two of us felt this way - and be denied these things, then my fighting and my sacrifices, all the years I sacrificed in the army have been in vain. I said, If I had the nerve and the courage to go and face people I've never seen before and never heard of and never even spoken to, well, the least we could do is stay here and face people who we grew up with and who we knew - we had served - who have served us - who we have worked beside -

who we have played beside - I said, If I don't have the nerve to stand up to them and tell them what I want, then we must be a phoney all the way, and we don't believe that we are phonies and we didn't believe it then. So we felt that we must let Mississippi know - and I still feel - and Medgar felt that this is our state. And we went and fought for this country - it wasn't anybody else - and all we want out of it is an equal opportunity - no more and no less. Therefore, when we went back to Alcorn we began to continue to work, and we came back home the next weekend and nothing happened to us, and we went back home until we finished school. And then when I came home - when we came out of school, I went in and took over the funeral parlor which we had in Philadelphia, Mississippi, and Medgar then went into Mound Bayou and headed up an insurance company. At that time the president was Dr. T.R.M. Howard, whom we looked on more or less as a father and as a - well, he was everything - a counsel to us. Because he was the - one of the few men who seemed to have understood what Medgar and I wanted. And he was one of the few Negroes in Mississippi at that time who were willing to stand by us and push us and urge us on.

RPW: Most Negroes were willing to stand aside - is that it - at that period?

CE: Well, they weren't willing - they were afraid.

RPW: Well - afraid.

CE: They were afraid. I wouldn't dare say that no Negro -

including the Uncle Toms, as we called them - don't want the same thing or didn't want the same thing that Medgar and I wanted. But many of them didn't have the courage and the guts to be willing to stand up for it.

RPW: All this hopelessness, too.

CE: Yes. And they always felt that it was a hopeless and a useless fate, that the white man was in charge, he always remained in charge. That this was his country and he would control it. Well, we were trying to get our people to see what I'm still trying to get them to see - what Medgar died trying to get them to see - is that this is not any one person's country - this is a country of all the people, and it's only you people exert every effort that you have to let the world know that you are willing to pay the supreme sacrifice, as all other great Americans did, to make it a better place to live. And one of the greatest ways to do that is ~~through~~ through political participation - register and vote - education, self-denial, self-respect, respect for others, and demand respect from them.

RPW: How much progress do you think has been made in that way in the last fifteen years?

CE: A tremendous amount. More than we had ever dreamed would come. I think - there are many instances where it brought about - the war, the two wars that we had. You see, the Negro in Mississippi has always been denied communication, association with other people - with people who have learned and who have been exposed. You see, a person's intelligence is no greater than his exposure. We in

Mississippi have been - most of us have been brought up on farms, and we've worked for the - in these kitchens and in these back yards and on these plantations for nothing - and that's all we ever got. My father, I don't think he ever - he left Mississippi one time - he lived 68 years and he left Mississippi once - he went to Chicago to visit my sister on her dying bed. So therefore he knew nothing but Mississippi. And there are millions - I mean thousands, should I say, of Negroes who have never been out of Mississippi, who have never been fifty miles from where they were born. So therefore, until World War II came, we thought that the whole world was just like Mississippi. We had no ambitions, we had no outlook on the world or life. And then by going in - the war coming and they threw all of us into the army with men from all over the world and all over the country, and listened to them talk and see how free they were. And when I went into the army and found a boy I had finished high school and here was a boy who hadn't even finished eighth grade - was much more abreast, much more learned than I was - he could discuss things that I hadn't even heard of - and I knew then that there must be a better place ~~than~~ - that Mississippi had deprived us of all of the things that others are getting throughout this country.

RFW: The same thing is true, to a substantial degree, of the white boy growing up, too, isn't it?

CE: Right. As the whites of Mississippi are in the same predica-

ment we are. And our basic trouble is ignorance -

RPW: On both sides.

CE: - white and Negro. We just haven't been exposed to anything. And the only thing that the poor whites know, and the poor Negroes know, is what these politicians get up and holler ~~xxx~~ on the radio and newspapers and ~~xxxxxxxxx~~ television. Therefore, he feels that there's not a line of communication between the Negroes and whites, and they don't know what the Negro wants other than this politician who is in there for his own personal gain - just saying that all Negroes want to do is to come down and marry your daughter and destroy your homes. He never says that Negroes want - all the Negroes want is an equal education, to learn to be a first-class citizen. He never says that Negroes want to be able to participate in political affairs. He never says that the Negro wants to equip himself in education to where he would be able to serve in any educational capacity where he's needed. He never says that Negroes want to be lawyers and doctors, and where he can nurse and where he can doctor on any person - any patient who needs medical care. He never says that Negroes want to be ~~xxxxx~~ dignitaries - to go out and represent our state or our country. But all he's sure of is that the Negroes want to become intimate with your daughter. And no man approves of anyone who wants to come into his life through his daughter. They know that's a good weapon they can use, and they hammer away at that. All they want to do is intermarry - intermarry - intermarriage - and they never say

that Negroes are equal to anyone else - give them a chance. Therefore, Negroes are inferior because they have been beaten on their heads all their lives - that you're not as good as that white man. And it's going to take time for Negroes to realize that he is as good as anyone if he demands equal - if he prepared himself to become as equal to anyone else.

RPW: Do you think the non-violence technique has been the key of success so far?

CE: I do. The only way that we have is through non-violence - there's no other way. Violence will never accomplish anything in our fight. It will only destroy everything that we have gained to turn to violence.

RPW: You know, of course, that there are people - Negroes - who disagree with you - that the time for violence is probably coming - that the threat of violence is the only weapon that will finally break certain localities - it's been said to me by people I've talked with.

CE: Yes. Here's what I feel. I don't believe in violence, but I believe in this - I believe in self-preservation, and I believe in protecting yourself. Now you remember a few minutes ago I said that Medgar and I always tried to protect ourselves - now, that doesn't mean that we are violent - because if I don't let you come into my home and drag my son out and lynch him - I'll say this - I wouldn't ask any Negro any more to be driving along in his car and let a bunch of white hoodlums ride beside him and start beating him, or come into his home and drag his son or his

daughter out or his wife out and beat them. Now, we don't consider when we protect our people in that respect as violence. But when I speak of violence is to arm ourselves and go down and start shooting people on the streets, start going down - as they do us - beating them up as whites have done to us all these years - taking them by their hand and by their feet - dragging them and hanging them in a tree and shooting them in two like they did Mr. Tingle many years ago. Now, that's the type of violence we don't believe in. But now I don't want nobody to ever think that I don't believe in protecting myself or protecting my own or my family.

RPW: Now, for either on or off the record you choose, you see - we will put it down and you can cut it out of the transcript if you like - take a case like the Jackson student - Jackson College student situation, where there is immediate provocation and a flare-up, you see, of anger, and then you - the stoning of cars, as I understand it, started - indiscriminate stoning of cars - now, I've talked with several people here in Jackson - several Negroes - none of them quite agree as to what should be done about it, you see. Some have said that they thought that it should be encouraged, that an outburst would have blown the lid and meant federal interference. Some take the line you took, as I understand it. You tried to break it up and - put the crowd of students back into order - withdraw from the streets - is that right?

CE: Right.

RPW: That is, you went among them and tried to break it up. And even after the shooting, that your policy - if it's represented to me correctly - it may not be correctly represented - was to withdraw them from the streets -

CE: Right. That is true. I don't feel, as I said before, that violence will aid us at all. The thing that happened at Jackson College is understandable for any group.

RPW: It's humanly understandable, yes.

CE: But I don't think that we should resort to that because that's the same thing that the white man is using all the time - violence - and that's why he's being destroyed all over this land. And if we turn to violence we can only, as I said before, defeat our purpose and our aim and our objectives. We're gaining - we're winning - it's obvious - it's evident. And the reason why that our country today is slipping into third, fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth or ninth - even twelfth place - is because of the violent tactics that have been used and the reprisals that have been used against other people in other lands. So we started to figure - in Jackson College, I felt that the kids - I told them, the greatest accomplishment that can be made is through negotiation. Now, you have a right to protest, but I don't condone throwing bottles, cursing, being disrespectful towards anyone. Now, you're doing the same thing - as I told them - that these policemen have done and are doing. You're showing inferiority. Any time you have to resort to profanity, to rock throwing, and to gunplay, then you are inferior,

or you feel that you're not quite capable to stand up and compete against another man as man to man. And I wanted them not to go downtown and demonstrate - that wasn't the answer. But be firm and demand that something be done on the campus, and stay on the campus.

RPW: If nothing were done, though, should there be a demonstration? Of course you can't answer this because - generally, perhaps, because the situations change.

CE: I think, as you said - I think that's something that has to wait and then see if nothing is done. Now something has been done -

RPW: Yes, I know, I saw it -

CE: Through that - that was a good thing - the flare-up itself was a good thing - but I personally have been asking the City of Jackson to place a light or some type of protection there for the kids, and they have told me that it was being studied by the engineering department.

RPW: Were you on the committee that went to the mayor?

CE: Yes - no - no - I wasn't there - he didn't want to see me - the mayor won't even talk to me.

RPW: Reverend Horton went, didn't he?

CE: I believe so. Reverend Horton, Reverend Smith - they went to -

RPW: Then the mayor later said that nobody had come to him - is that right?

CE: Well, the mayor has even said that no one at all had ever

been there, and even the Board of Education said they had asked - and they had been requested, and money had been set aside for an overpass. But the mayor said he didn't know anything about it at all.

RPW: Yet there had been a committee calling on him?

CE: Oh, yes. There had been a committee calling on him. Well, see, the mayor feels in Jackson that he is not obligated to Negroes because, as I tell them all the time, Negroes do not vote in Jackson, but if Negroes were voting in Jackson, the mayor would have a different tune. And that's why we are putting forth every effort that we possibly can to get Negroes registered, because we know that through registration and through selective bargaining are the two greatest weapons that the Negro has.

RPW: Let me ask about the trial of Beckwith - how did the verdict strike you. Now, I have run across the notion that it was rigged - I have run across the notion that it was an honest split of opinion, and I have heard many views of this. What do you think?

CE: Well, actually, - except this won't come out until after, I guess, the conviction of the -

RPW: It won't come out until mid-summer anyway.

CE: As you know, I have withheld any comment on -

RPW: I know you have.

CE: - but all I can say is that -

RPW: You can put a date on this if you want to -

CE: I wouldn't like it to come out until after the - other thing -

RPW: It won't.

CE: - the decision - I feel that - and I guess maybe I'm a little liberal in my thinking - that there was someone on this jury who wanted justice done. And I feel that the prosecutor did everything in his power, along with his aids, and the Jackson police department, to bring about justice - not because Medgar was Medgar Evers or he's my brother - but I feel that they did because they felt a crime had been committed, and I feel that somewhere that there's been a change of heart among men in Mississippi - some men. And I feel that they did the very best they could.

RPW: Some really - it was an honest job?

CE: I actually believe that. Maybe I'm wrong.

RPW: Well, of course, it's always possible

CE: Uh-huh, I could be wrong, but - as I said before, - you say it was rigged - well, if it was rigged, it was the first time in the history of Mississippi that they even thought enough of a Negro to even rig a trial and make it look like it.

RPW: Even to try and impress the outside world.

CE: Even to try and impress the outside world. So I feel that it won't bring Medgar back, and Medgar wouldn't want it any other way. He wouldn't want me to feel any different. I know Medgar - we - like I said, we was - I was indispensable. And he wouldn't want me to say anything else other than I feel that somebody wanted to see justice done.

RPW: That's an encouraging thought. Tell me this - where does his family live now?

CE: They're still at the same location - 2332 Gymes - yes. The same location - and, as I said, I think Mrs. Evers feels practically the same way I do - as I said, Medgar and I never believed in violence - we never believed in retaliation - we never believed in trying to belittle anyone because of our personal feelings. And we know that all of us didn't agree, but I truly believe that the - and I appreciate what the prosecuting attorney did - the district attorney -

RPW: You think it was a vigorous prosecution.

CE: I really do. And I also appreciate the jurors who were men enough to say that this was wrong and let the world know - who they were I don't know.

RPW: Do you think there will be a leak in reprisals against those jurors?

CE: I hope not. I don't see why there should be. I also think that the Jackson police department did a wonderful job in collecting evidence and getting witnesses. I appreciate that.

RPW: That's a strange division in the department, isn't it - they will go for this collection of evidence, yet other officers will testify contrary to the evidence - the officers who said that they had seen your brother - you know - gave him an alibi - I mean Beckwith - gave Beckwith an alibi at the time that he was presumably close to your brother's house.

CE: Well, as I said, that's an individual. I'd like to give credit to only those who were against us, as I said before, and they've

been against us all the time. But I feel that any officer who does his job - not because it was Medgar - not because he was a Negro - but because he was a human being and that he - a wrong - a crime had been committed. And it's their duty as a police officer to collect all the evidence that they possibly could. I believe they did.

RPW: That is, they had some sense of the ethics of their own job, then -/if nothing else.

CE: I believe from the moral standpoint if nothing else they did a good job.

RPW: I'm going to switch the tape now.