

Transcript of Taped
Conversation with
MISS LUCY THORNTON, MISS JEAN WHEELER, MR. IZELL BLAIR,
MR. VINCENT and MISS SCHNEIDER
and ROBERT PENN WARREN
(Tape #2)

MR. WARREN: This is a conversation with Miss Lucy Thornton, Miss Jean Wheeler, Mr. Izell Blair, and now for this tape: Mr. Vincent and Miss Schneider. Miss Wheeler, you read the quotation again from ^{and} Otto Rose, on the matter of the Negro history movement and the possibility of delusion.

MISS WHEELER: Now two things are important. One is that I don't think there is a significant Negro history movement in the sense of a propagandist movement. I think that this I think that Frazier, John O. Franklin are good examples of good Negro historians, and I don't think that that's what Mr. Rose is referring to. As far as this kind of thing that you find in the, say, Negro periodicals, this is what we used to be. I don't think that-- that the information hits the people hard. Maybe one of the reasons being that it is not of sufficient scope to hit hard. One article once a month can't make a lot of difference. Now especially in the South I don't think there's been any kind of Negro history movement of-- the people I've met in Albany and in Greenwood were starved to know what happened before 1950; you know at least they knew we were in slavery and so on, but to name Negro writers, I don't think you could have gotten many people to name a couple of Negro writers to name-- to tell you and so on. So I would say that the mass criticism is a good guidepost for

people who are going to bring the history to these people, because it is a necessary part of developing a spirited movement among people, that is we can avoid the problem he suggests. But I don't think that they exist, because I don't think there is a large-scale propagandist in the Negro history movement.

MR. WARREN: Mr. Blair, do you want to talk on that for a moment?

MR. BLAIR: So far as Negroes having delusions--

MR. WARREN: That's not exactly what Mr. Rose said; that's the other-- you know that passage that was only quoted. This danger of history as propaganda ^{leading to delusion} breeding delusion .

MR. BLAIR: Well, I think to a certain extent. Now Negroes ever since the Reconstruction period, most of the history books dealing with the Reconstruction period of America have been somewhat onesided, that of the-- most of the white historians and they haven't given too much credit to the Negroes. In my state, North Carolina, I always hear of the dark days of the Black Reconstruction. But in John O. Franklin's book of the Slaves of Freedom, he seems to have given a different point of view. In my school, in college it's mandatory for all students who are in education or social sciences or literature, to take Negro history. This is the book we studied, John O. Franklin. I don't think it's propaganda. I think it's-- maybe if it is propaganda it's a good thing that Negroes get this, because it's not the-- I don't think Franklin is the type of historian who

would delude anybody as to the facts concerning the part of Negroes.

MR. WARREN: His reputation is very solid, of course.

MR. BLAIR: It's very solid, and I think this is what we need as a group to sort of what-do-you-say, build pride within ourselves as to the contribution that we've made to America. I think that a certain amount of propaganda is needed, after all, with 300 years almost of injustice I think it's about time that we begin to see those of us who have played a part in America's society, played a role.

MR. WARREN: Mr. Blair, have you read DuBois's "The Black Reconstruction"?

MR. BLAIR: No, I have not read it.

MR. WARREN: Have you read Van ~~Wiggin's~~ Woodward's work on Reconstruction?

MR. BLAIR: No, I haven't.

MR. WARREN: Or have you read the (this isn't an examination but I was rather curious to know--)

MR. BLAIR: Yes, I know.

MISS THORNTON: That one I know.

MR. WARREN: Did you know Van ~~Wiggin's~~ Woodward's "The Strange Career of Jim Crow," that book?

MISS THORNTON: Yes.

MR. WARREN: I gathered from something that you said earlier that you'd read that. I assumed that from something you said earlier. The whole reevaluation of The Reconstruction is

is one of the strange developments of history.

MISS THORNTON: DuBois?

MR. WARREN: Well, I mean DuBois did not-- was almost alone, but not a general evaluation. It didn't have an immediate effect. Now it's only in the last few years that this has become a matter of-- he was a voice alone, you see, for years and years and years.

MISS THORNTON:

MR. WARREN: That's what I said, I mean. And a reevaluation of the general sort, as a general matter now, it's fairly recent, I should say it's in the last twenty years. He was alone; he was almost alone in it.

MISS THORNTON that I could make of Reconstruction and the people I respect could make with that-- I mean the significant

MR. WARREN: You mean it looked like DuBois.

MISS THORNTON: Yes, the information is there. Now you would have to read around Marx's reinterpretation, but if you could read around that then you've got more meat there than you're likely to find in most history books, and therefore the book should be worth while. That's my understanding of how it goes, and I can't make a generalization about the Reconstructing or Reconstruction, but I would say that that was a very valuable contribution, even with that reinterpretation that you have to deal with.

MR. WARREN: I think DuBois's book is a great book, a

great, monumental work, I mean in my opinion of the book, but I personally think it's ~~xxxx~~ a great rhetorical thing too, a great piece of writing.

(BREAK)

MR. WARREN: Lost to posterity.

MISS THORNTON: It probably will be. No, I was thinking in terms of some of the latest historical writings which I've in fact come across, the writings of people who are new in the ~~the~~ field of history or who have just gotten their doctorate or who have gotten their masters ~~and~~ who would dare to delve into such a subject which probably have never been covered before, or have been covered and left on the shelves of their university, unnoticed. They've gone into details as to what might have appeared to be just an ordinary American historical occurrence, and now they go into anything-- yes, there was a Negro involved here, and here's how. I have the facts and figures to prove it. While George Washington -- I'm just using this as an example of course; I have no proof of it -- while George Washington said one of his aides was a darkey. I know about that man. And the historian has in some way of checking it down, and historians are Negroes and are able, I guess, using whatever fragmentary documents are available, whatever can be now recreated they have ~~of~~ rewritten, I guess what has been left out of history all along, so it might be fairly to a person looking at ~~the~~ that, because it would

of course, put some pride in a youth when he reads the books, say, like called The Black Man or that after all there were all these Negroes involved in the American Revolution, and he finds out that after all, there were all of these Negroes involved in the Revolution, and I thought that Christopher was just an isolated incident. So that ~~he~~ does give the impression that even at that day Negroes were involved and that historians now are bringing this to the forefront.

MR. WARREN: Let's turn to another topic for a moment. I used a quotation again, to start us on this. This is a quotation: "Negroes of wealth and education whose only barrier to unrestricted participation in the complete life of the community is the fact that they are Negroes, probably constitute the largest single class of social neurotics; that is, life is fantasy for them as regards reality." Does that make any sense? Do you want me to read it again? Do you think that makes some sense, Miss Wheeler?

MISS WHEELER: I think there's a lot in it. I agree. I think that Cadillacs in the society that are but I think that if I had to make it into a percentage I would say it was 60 per cent of this kind of people, but there are 40 per cent of Negroes with money, have had a hard time getting it and know that that which they don't have to do now they would have to do but for their-- if the money is gone, and are conscious of it to keep a pretty close hold

on reality. I think the 50 per cent dominates. I think you see them in the newspapers, and so on. But I can't help but remember a friend now that I knew-- the older people in this place I was from, Detroit, and this friend, an old Negro American man, and he had a sense of understanding of what the people are, of how far they can go, and they can be pushed, of what was important, I think, even though he was participating in this culture, within the Negro culture, and I think that there is a good number of them, and 40 per cent. And I think out of this 40 per cent comes a few who stand up and say, well, I've made it and I'm going to help the other people. And I think that Booker To Washington is an example. I think he had money and his concern And so I agree with the writer's general statement, but I think it doesn't have enough flavor of the people who even though they have the money, may be laughing inside themselves at the antics everybody's going through. Izell wants to say something.

MR. WARREN: Yes, Mr. Blair.

MR. BLAIR: Well, I certainly agree with I would agree with her wholeheartedly. I think Negroes are going through a sort of a fantasy inasmuch as that they have a problem in trying to be-- it's an obstacle being a Negro to be able to, you-know, as she said, in education and so forth, and being to a Negro, and then you still have to fall back to the same whites seem

to look at Negroes all alike: If you're once a Negro, you're always a Negro; you never change, even if you have all the education you want. This is the type of people in the community that I live in now. Most of them are teachers or they may be doctors or lawyers, and so forth, but they still can't, they still can't reach the point where they contribute anything to fit in completely with the community. They can't be accepted as being lawyers or doctors, except for being Negro lawyers or doctors, and seems to bother them. And many of them have expressed to me the feeling that they just don't know where they fit in. They have all the education that they can get, they are professional people, but at the same time ~~they still constitute~~ they're still considered Negro, and while they want to get patients regardless of whether they're Negroes or white, they're still confused. They don't know where they fit in, so they have to fall back into the position of just taking on Negro ^{patients} physicians or teaching in Negro schools, and where many ~~of~~ of them are qualified at teaching or working in positions which have not been heretofore what you might call Negro positions. They're eligible to teach anybody how to work in jobs which have not been traditionally Negro jobs.

MISS THORNTON: I'd like to just--

MR. WARREN: Yes, Miss Thornton.

MISS THORNTON: I'd like to look for a minute at the source of this neurosis, really. In many instances it's because,

as the author has very rightly said, the Negroes are not accepted into the larger community, but it's also because of the attitude in which, as Izell has pointed out, most of society has towards Negroes in general and because of this attitude much of it has, I suppose gone over to the men whom he has termed are the most ^{my} erotic group in America, mainly because all of society is saying within this group you've got so much that's no good, so much that's unacceptable and that that statement.

WHEELER?

MISS THORNTON: But in thinking in terms of the sources of neurosis, I was thinking the whole of society has a way of looking at a Negro and where the Negro has gotten into a position where he has, in quotes, arrived, unquote, and he finds that he has arrived but arrived where, who's going to accept him? So I can see where this neurosis would set in, and not just because now that he has arrived, as a Negro is still a Negro, he's above what I guess most society thinks is Negro or what most society thinks is the black man of the country, but yet he knows that the major part of society will not accept him still as a man, so you've got a neurotic on your hands.

MR. WARREN: Within his dream of achievement, without the denying the fact that he's not accepted outside, I gather that's a topic, is the point that has been made here.

MISS THORNTON: Yes, I could understand it very clearly.

MISS WHEELER: F find it a little silly achievement.

MISS THORNTON: I can understand a Negro very clearly making this statement because many is the time that I've come across Negroes who have bent over backwards to quote arrived, and when they've arrived, where are they? Arrived to what? you-know, especially if they're willing to immediately arrival, forget the fact that, try to forget the fact that they are Negro or black.

MR. WARREN: On the question of the class structure of the Negro society-- we find another quote here: "The entire Negro middle-upper class is caught in a dilemma. On the one hand they find that a caste wall blocks their entrance into general white society. On the other hand they have sometimes a vested interest in a social segregation that it gives them the only opportunity they have." Now that is to paraphrase that this is another-- this is ~~Marsahl~~, by the way.

MISS THORNTON: Yes, I can understand if he's looking at southern society, I guess this is true.

MR. WARREN: Not the southerner.

MISS THORNTON: You're a northerner, so you would know also what vested interest the Negro leader in the North would have in keeping things as they are, but looking at it from the southern point of view, I said southern first, even more so than northern, because the vested interest ~~with~~ which the Negro has in segregation there is that you've got the dualism which goes through all phases of life from the cradle

to the grave, so that you've got a Negro businessman who has a chance to arrive. When in the white society it's not as clearly defined and whites-- Negroes cannot, after all, go some places in town, so that the Negro businessman or the Negro business might be extremely limited. Now they might have as much of an interest in a segregated society or in the whole system of segregation as the southern, because after all, as I've said, you've got southern Negro teachers, and when you stop to look at this class of to the same degree you won't find it in the North, you won't find it in segregation except in the so I guess, though, I would think that on one side where these same people yearn for more segregation too, in fact, will say they on the other hand realize that moneywise which, after all is some standard in the country, this might also mean their ruination to a certain extent.

MR. WARREN: This has divided minds in certain Negro groups about segregation.

MISS WHEELOCK: This is a manifestation of the situation that the Negro find themselves in is that when people go into a town to ~~going through town~~ organize, you start with people who are, who are ~~gai~~ against a certain civic mindedness, and so on, but you don't spend your time trying to convince the whole business community or the whole minister community or even a part of it, that they ought to be on your side, because you

know from past experience that ministers; there are going to be two or three ministers and two or three of the who are going to step up and there are going to be a few businessmen. But other than that are going to have to come in when the thing is big enough so that they can't afford not to come in, and it's really whether it's-- I would say it might not be so consciously

MISS: You know the great man in the community and self-sacrificing, self-sacrificing . . . change them.

MR. WARREN: Do you think there's less of this split between, say, Negro business leaders and civil rights movement than there was a few years ago, and what is the basis for your opinion there? The split between-- of certain groups of successful, in quotes, Negroes. You see that we're talking about-- of the upper class-- upper-middle class, who do not want to be identified with a civil rights group because they segregation. Is there less of that now than there was?

MISS Yes, very definitely. I think they can afford to voice it. Right! It's popular now.

MR. BLAIR: It's popular now to be in a movement. Like in Greensboro, North Carolina, for instance, there once was a time when Negro leaders would oppose integration because Negroes themselves, as a whole, were not in favor of it. But now, since the idea of integration-- or rather desegre-

gation has come about through the masses of the Negro community, many of them are jumping on their bandwagon, they've gone along with it, and so now you see maybe this outstanding attorney ~~of~~ in New Orleans or this Negro businessman supporting desegregation within the community, or integration or desegregation of the lunch counters, or jobs and so forth; they've come in on it.

MISS WHEELER: But the thing is that I think they recognize, too, that desegregation is not a real threat to them. I don't think Negroes are going to go outside the Negro community, as long as we live together, I think, and socialize together, I think we're going to pray together, and so on. And I think that probably having seen a few integrated situations and having found the Negroes still come back to the cafe, and so on, because they-- I don't know why, I'd sooner go back to the cafe, I think they have seen the realization of the integration and realize that their interests are not so much endangered as they thought. And I think a further point is that-- I had a

MISS THORNTON: Along those same lines, too, I think this same group would realize that what they might in fact lose as a result of war for segregation probably is lessened to a great ~~extent~~ extent not only in the particular Jean has just said, that is that what

they have to offer might, after all, still have a certain validity, Negroes might still want to come to the cafe, but also because of the society which they've lived in, they've been forced to, in many instances, to prepare themselves to greater degrees than people in the other-- say the white society, so that the teacher who once was threatened with possibly losing her job, she's got a master's Columbia or N. Y. U. I mean I would feel less threatened by becoming involved in segregation in that she knows that now that we've got the system itself coming in, we'll be looking at things in terms of who's prepared -- and not who's white or who's black. So that I think less and less there's been a more comfortable feeling on this level in that let it come, I think we'll get adjusted. And I think that the popularity of the movement that is the outcry against segregation, has probably lessened a good deal.

MISS WHEELER: Well, the point that I want to make is that the emphasis itself along with desegregation of public utilities, is getting people registered and getting people voting. Now I don't know why people keep talking about desegregation as opposed to the movement. I think that's surely a part of it, that they at least, of the other, at least they're proud of that, is evidence . . . at least to strengthen itself, and the people, the business people, know that when it comes time to find a leader, they're going to be the one; it's only because the things that they represent are things

that Negroes in general want to have. Everybody respects a man of education; everybody, especially if you're American. So these business people, I think, can see now many gains where they couldn't see before for themselves, because when it comes time to redistrict the town or when it comes time to send somebody to the stage Congress, there's-- it's going to be one of them.

MR. BLAIR: I'm inclined to agree with you, Jean, because most of the people in the Negro community realize that even though this is a movement of the mass of people, when it gets down to it it's going to be those people who've had education and training, and this is something that the Negro community looks up to.

MISS Invariably.

MR. BLAIR: Invariably. They look up to the man who has training, but they are skeptical of the man who has had training and who does not use it to the advantage of the freedom movement at present; they're skeptical of the Uncle Tom. I think what is involved in the movement is the realization of Negro leaders who have training and who have experience in the political and business life of a community, who are making a sacrifice and who stand for equal rights and desegregation and the protest movement as against those who have training and who have knowledge of a business and so forth and of the economic worth of the community who have heretofore taken a backward stand and who have sided with the majority of the white community and are keeping the Negro community disfranchised from this right. I think,

for instance, in North Carolina and other states, we can expect to see more Negroes state and national . . . and run for public offices, and we can see the Negro mass who will vote for them. It's the same people, the educated people are still taking over leadership in the movement, but ~~if~~ there seems to be a new image on the part of educated negroes, to realize that they're fighting for the masses of the people, and that they're representing the people. Now if they're representing only a limited number of middle class people

MR. WARREN: ~~Well~~ Let's try this vested interests. This is a paraphrase and a quotation, I won't distinguish, as given by James Baldwin of the African Congress in Policy seven years ago well, you know what happened there. The greatest problem facing us, that is the African Negroes, was that we, all Negroes, what ^{did} ~~do~~ we do among ourselves, when there was no longer any colonial horse to ride that he pointed out that this was the horse of which a great many Negroes who were in what he calls the skin trade, hope to ride to power and prestige, power which would be in no way distinguishable from the power they sought to overthrow. To paraphrase that, the career of anti-colonialist in Africa, was a power was a power gained, not to be distinguished from colonial power in the end. Now this, can we transfer this to possible danger in the civil rights group? careerists who were exploited and then when it's over, what career did they have? If they could maintain it, the-- were interested to maintain it, that means you're keeping it going

Is that a real danger?

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Typescripts of interviews:

Stokely Carmichael, Izell Blair, Lucy Thornton
and Jean Wheeler

/ 1964

MISS it's not peculiar illus-
 tration I think it especially applies, if applied
 generally, I would say it becomes people who will
 consciously be involved in-- to always scrutinize them-
 selves and their reasoning and to the Martin Luther
 King is scrutinized, I mean is scrutinized very closely,
 and I hope with power of suggestion, but I tell you
 at least once a week a bunch of us radicals sit around and
 make some statements about him and leaders and so on. I think
 that kind of scrutinizing goes on at least among those who
 regard themselves as leaders or potential leaders, there's
 always going to be-- I think there's always going to be some
 guard of people who are consciously involved, maybe because
 they're young idealists or something who will at least be
 criticizing

MR. WARREN: This danger, then, is simply a human danger
 in all movements?

MISS I think so.

MR. WARREN It's part of history, is that right?

MISS THORNTON: Our history, definitely, as a matter of fact;
 as you read that I kept thinking about a little analysis that
 we set up in our history courses "The Anatomy of a
 Revolution,"

MR. WARREN: Milliam Brenner.

MISS THORNTON: Yes. When you analyze any great movement,
 it's just the kind of danger which ~~is~~ is inherent in it, really,

and the kind of successes and failures, it seems to be at least something that you could fit into a pattern, and I would think that levelheaded people aware of the history of this kind of thing can, in fact, at least to a certain degree, maneuver it that in a given situation that happens to a lesser degree; but I do think it's a danger, yes.

MISS WHEELER: I'd like to ask a question; I don't know if it fits into the pattern. I'd like to know what you, too, Mr. Warren, think, would you call this a revolution reform, or keeping people busy, or what? I'd really like to know your opinion.

MR. WARREN: I think it's a matter, I hesitate, because it's a matter of how you're going to use a word.

MISS WHEELER: Well, would you call it a movement toward a broad-scale change in the nature of

MR. WARREN: Society. No, I wouldn't call it that, no. As I see it now, and I may change my mind tomorrow, I should say that it's a matter of not changing the essential order of American society, but absorbing a peripheral element into the American society by their own efforts, not by solely, as an act of society, but by their own efforts, into an identity.

MISS WHEELER: What do you think about the argument that is general, that we still, number one, you can't solve the Negroes' problem, and the employer can't solve, without solving the problems of how the money is how the economy is run income, how the money is distributed

when it's going into defense, into maintaining the cold war front.

MR. WARREN: You can't solve any single social problem separately action on these matters.

MISS THORNTON: But that still doesn't give it a greater significance.

MR. WARREN: No, it means you can tie them together How are you going to solve the school problem in Harlem without solving a lot of things like housing and jobs, you know. These things all-- but that doesn't mean you should be excused on the whole, in the meanwhile.

MISS WHEELER: No, but it does give a greater impact to the school's efforts. Now what I'm wondering-- I'm not arguing on either side, because I'm/wondering ^{obviously} without thinking, can you say that the momentum given to a particular issue by its relevance to the other issues makes it important-- can you say that this problem is so deep and its relationship to other problems is so tight that nothing's going to be done until they all get done, and that that would constitute a big change of structure in society. ~~time~~

MR. WARREN: Well, I think we have to go back to the actual definitions of what we mean by, say, revolutions opposed to a fundamental ~~form~~ reform. Would we call, in the 1930s a revolution in American society, or not?

MISS THORNTON: I think the most revolutionary thing about the whole movement when you think of the minority group being accepted and assimilated into American society, that

maybe this is a novel idea. In other words, America has always been known as the melting pot, and minorities who have such a hard time eventually make it into the American mainstream. I think the most novel and probably revolutionary, is that now you have the black man achieving a kind of self-realization, who has been not only moving into American society but also standing and saying, yes, I'm willing to come into the American society, I've always wanted to be there; in fact I've always considered myself as being a part of society even though you sort of put me over to the side. On the other hand, I'm standing tall and saying I'm a black man and

MR. WARREN: In other words, and this is what I was about to say a moment ago, that it's partly-- it's not a revolution for a total society. It may be revolution merely in terms of the Negro society as separated to distinguish it logically and otherwise from American society. This represents a real shift of attitude, a revolutionary shift in Negro society, a negro movement, but its effect on the whole of society will be a matter of, we might say a fundamental matter of reform but will not change the order of society. Is that what you're saying together, or not? Particularly is that what you're saying.

MISS THORNTON: It might be. I had one other thing that hit my mind and when I thought also in terms of the black man standing, you know, a self-realization of the black man,

I also thought in terms of world order, because over the centuries now, when you look at how things have stacked up the power structures, more and more of this self-realization, I guess, has been in ferment throughout surely, we would say in Europe first and then it spread throughout the world, so you've got now the black man in Africa not only realizing or achieving his own goal, standing as the man who will in fact control and rule his homeland but also you have throughout the world now, and especially in the United States, in which the majority of the people are in fact white, you have a black man who's there in that land saying, yes, but I'm a part of the society, and these two things can harmoniously be a part of each ~~on~~ other. And the black man can in fact be a part of the whole; he does not have to be something that-- he's a problem here and he's set off to one side instead. It's revolutionary for America to be, because after all I think he's taking-- the whole of society or American society is taking another look at the black man. He's not just something that's humorous, who's--

MR. WARREN: That's true, that's true.

MISS THORNTON: We accept him or we don't or we may not accept him and he's just here and he's a thorn in our side, and if we didn't have those I think one, more and more American~~s~~ itself is taking a look at the black man, and sometimes he appears to them to be violent; sometimes he appears anxious and restless, but over all I think they're

getting a picture of us and they're getting a picture-- at least they know no matter what picture they get, that the American Negro intends to be here and he's fighting to fit into the over-all scheme of America, ^{to find his place.} And it's revolutionary, probably, that the black man is doing it in terms of stand up and saying yes, I'm a black man, but as a black man I do in fact have something to offer; I don't have to. In fact this is something that's always puzzled me-- Jean, you might be able to probably work it out; I used to argue this bit with some of my friends. . . . always-- sometimes say, I can go sometimes just so far over way to the left, in saying-- talking about the black man with great pride and what he's achieved and how he's done it and what we want him to identify with other people on the other side have people who I suppose they think, white friends who, for example, will say, Well, I would think in 25 Years you won't have this problem because by then everybody will look pretty much alike because by then we'll have sufficiently integrated marriages and you won't be able to speak any more in terms of the American black man. In other words you'll just have the American Negro or ^{simply} ~~something~~ fighting to be a part of that America, and what we'll do eventually is to view of himself instead of seems to me lopsided, it somehow doesn't sound quite like willing to accept--

MR. BLAIR: The Negro in the Congo will lose his identity in a hundred years' time new Negroes won't

be Negroes anymore. Instead of being dark they'll be what we call mulattoes; it will be difficult to tell who's Negro and who's not Negro. I think that

MISS We think so.

MR. BLAIR: I might be a hundred years old, but I think-- one thing I was in favor of the integrated but you know everybody will look like one person, but the older I get and time passes, I'm beginning to realize that there are certain like I say racial pride identity. You have the feeling that you are what you are. Even though you are in the culture, you have certain characteristics. Like the Jewish people, for instance, they are in the American culture, but that they have preserved this identity that they have had over thousands of years. Now that is something that the Negro in the culture should be, and I realize that an interracial marriage-- not interracial marriage, but what you might call a concubine there are a million Negroes, for instance, who are of different complexions and eventually these traits may bring about a person who's probably Negro but who is so fair-complexioned that it would be difficult to tell Negro from white. This is how eventually it will come about. But until that time Negroes can feel proud of themselves.

MR. WARREN: What is a Negro?

MISS WHEELER: I was trying to--

MISS THORNTON: We might become a lost race or something, well, as Negroes. That's something too, this of terms, what is a Negro. I have friends, people who would

prefer not to be called Negroes, "I'm not a Negro; mainly, I'm a black man." Some others: "I'm not colored, don't call me colored," you know, and very good-humoredly, you know. Negro is simply something vague attached to-- I won't have it, you know. I'm just another man. You know you get these reactions over and over again to-- True, some of them I must admit come from the feeling that the name Negro attaches a stigma

MISS WHEELER: Or worse than that: that's a nice little name.

MISS THORNTON: Yes, that is a nice little-- although they're colored, but in fact Negro has such a stigma to it until--

MR. WARREN: It simply means black, doesn't it? Its accumulative from other meanings, perhaps.

MISS Yes, yes, but the accumulation of it is

MISS THORNTON: And that's probably where the reaction comes in too, in fact.

MR. BLAIR: you are born and it may be where segregation a white neighborhood, or black is a symbol of evil, people die and are buried in a coffin that's white; everything that is white is white; if he is he is white, if you go to heaven it's in a white gown, that type of thing. Even if you're an angel, the angel's white and is dressed in a white robe, and you're going to be drinking milk and honey, and you're walking down the street all purple and gold and everything. This is the image Negroes constantly have to face and this is the image that I faced in growing up

W
 in an American society. You know a black cat is said to be evil; everything white is pure. So you begin to wonder. You say, well, what am I? You feel you're rubbed out and you you feel like you're an invisible man, see/nobody even seems to see you, as if you never existed.

MISS WHEELER: Do you think it's a true definition, a true statement -- I didn't know but what it might be misquoting somebody, but there's an old saying: "Nobody knows my name, don't" -- you know, "they call me that but I know really, I'm"

MR. BLAIR: Nobody knows me and

MISS WHEELER: I think that a Negro in the United States is anybody who is of a tint or color who is less than white-looking, and I think, I think isn't apparent you come to the conclusion who is less than white-looking and who cannot prove that he's of-- not race. Like any time I see a--

MISS THORNTON: Indian. Indian or Puerto Rican-- put those in-- Indian or Puerto Rican. They're not people

MISS WHEELER: Yes. I know that, but whenever I see a Negro in New York-- whenever I see a Puerto Rican in New York, until I find out that he has an accent I think he's a Negro, that's what I'm trying to say. Until-- if he can show that he's something less than-- it's all right, but as long as he's anything less than white then he's a Negro.

MISS THORNTON: Well, I think caught in this terrible blinding doubt British Guiana and other

countries, right away, sometimes that's going on it's so funny, when you're taught this kind of thinking. You go down the street and say that's a Negro -- oh no, he's not, that's a white man. In other words, somehow Negroes think they can tell other Negroes and then my ~~friend~~ friends I don't know how he can speak that way because in my country now ~~this that's a~~ ^{this} person may be black, typical-- I mean you'd never call him an American anything, but a Negro, but to the natives from this country they would prefer not to attach a name Negro or anything else part Danish part Spanish or part anything, so how could that be Negro when Negro in the Unites States will mean something quite different?

MISS WHEELER: But until he suddenly comes out with that accent he's a Negro.

MR. WARREN: Actually, the legal definition of Negro has changed ~~to~~ from time to time in this country. In Virginia gone less and less quotes Negro blood is required to make a person legally a Negro by the statutes, and gradually they decreased the amount of Negro blood that makes a person legally Negro. Now it's come to the point where I notice where any demonstrable portion, it started out as three-quarters, or something like that. legally

MISS THORNTON: I think go as far as even if he's got one-eighth of a drop of Negro blood, I think that

something about the drops of blood might still mean
 the language, because I remember once I was going into court
 and the charge was that we sat in some place which was supposed
 by law to be segregated, Negroes and whites, and we took the
 position that-- our attorney got up and said "I want you to
 prove that my clients are Negroes, in court, because we looked
 like we were United States and some who were
 clearly, you know, not ~~be~~ obviously Negroes, and he read
 off a statute that--

MR. WARREN: grandfather's white . . .

MISS: Wheeler: Well, I won't tell you about my

MISS THORNTON: My brother used to take some kind of a I don't
 know whether it was pride or anything, but he used to try
 to stir up you know, one of my relatives on
 my grandfather's side, not too far down the line, a few
 generations back that used to kill 'em right away
 ~~I know~~ I know he always says talking
 that way. I'm sure everybody in Virginia would be shocked
 if they heard him say that, you-know

MR. WARREN: May I change the subject a little bit? James
 Baldwin says this: "The most trenchant observers of the
 scene in the south, those who are embattled there, you-all,
 feel that the southern mobs are not an expression of the
 southern majority will. Their impression is that these mobs
 fill, as it were, a moral vacuum.

MISS WHEELER: I don't believe that. I have sat and thought

in jail and later just a feeling and what is happening, all these people hate me that much, and I mean I was afraid, I'd never seen a mob like it, so that everywhere I went down South I had a feeling at me before I went down here.

MR. WARREN: Here being Washington, D. C.?

MISS WHEELER: And Detroit.

MR. WARREN: And Detroit.

MISS WHEELER: I was treated very nicely in Detroit. Everywhere I went I just had a continual, unless I was or just surrounded, I had a continual feeling that there was a white person around the corner waiting for me to step the wrong way, to hit me, and I didn't know, I didn't feel like that policeman was an exception; I thought that he was the generalization of being to cross over Fourth Street or downtown across on the other side of downtown, and I might not speak for-- I'm really speaking for me, but I never had a feeling when I talked to people who lived on -- put out a canvas, say, trying to get people to register to vote, an easy subject--

MR. WARREN: Where was this?

MISS WHEELER: In Albany, Georgia, and Greenwood, Mississippi, an easy subject of conversation: Gee, those white folks sure hate us, and we could talk about that for hours. I don't think it was just the mobs, I really don't. I think it was probably every one of them that ever lived.

MISS THORNTON: I think it was kind of-- then too, on the other side, it seems the fashion to think, too, even if you had any kind of feeling, any good feelings about Negroes or any feelings at all about demonstrations, I suppose it was the most fashionable people, was to keep barge in, pray that something will change one day. I suppose I'm really just imposing, ^{emphasizing} ~~emphasizing~~ with a white southerner, I'm trying so hard-- On the other side, thinking that if they had these feelings there might be some majority but the manifestations of this feeling; I mean a feeling that's different from the mob, are so slight and so few and far between that the person within himself saying: God forgive me. Or saying: If I have wounded any southerner I know full well you help everybody step on top of every Negro you saw in sight, doesn't help me, and so the more you do this kind of thing, the more guilt you get thinking about yourself and the less of a chance there is for a white individual to come across on the other side And of course these people probably come up within the white person ~~for~~ from his birth on up, I guess; even from within the society he has learned a certain way, and most people are such social beings, they want the adjusted to their society if you want to rebel against so that if the mob is not representative, in fact, of what the majority of the people are, the fact that the majority sits back and silently okays it or looks on and every once in a

while is ashamed that only when the most blatant things happen, says to himself, this has to change; and then on the other side of his mouth says, oh yes, it has to change, but who they are-- far too radical; and on one side he's hoping for the safety and security of what he knows to be white society, even if that seems okaying the mob and-- or sitting back silently and watching what happens. So that if you've got this feeling over all, it will take the manifestations of this mob aren't very, very encouraging, I would say you've got wouldn't dare speak out against it, and as usually they are ousted by the society and the rest of the society realizes this, so that the other souls who again would speak, know of the examples, so you know has not been accepted, and so that it's just fashionable, if this is any kind of a joint feeling, not that it is manifested but even if they don't manifest it. You really don't have it I know people who, as you say, Of course in some cases it's a kind of thing that-- an attitude or a kind of feeling which has grown up without any basis at all. For example, I remember once talking with a group of southern white college kids at Tulane. I mean the kinds of things which happened in meetings-- white southerners and Negroes talk to black southerners, you know you suddenly realize that human being everything I learned in white society, I used to stand on the corner too and "there goes a nigger," you know, and get in

Suddenly I realized that this was and the kinds of feelings that which well up into a person, but there's still in many instances victims of their society, they know they practice a myth and they know what it's going to mean if they dare to say don't do it, then they might be mobbed along with the Negroes. Other people talk about self-preservation, and this is where self-preservation really stands out.

MR. WARREN: Let me just break in her^sa moment, Miss Thornton, when I sat by you at lunch back in November, the first thing, if my memory doesn't trick me, that you said that you had some optimism for a settlement in the South, that you felt that if the white man and the Negro had been on the land together, if they had a common history, there would be some basis of a reasonable settlement, some human recognition in terms of this common history, despite the violence of the present situation, that this gave you some optimism for a settlement in the South that would be reasonable. You also said, if I remember correctly, and it was yoursaying, so you remembered it better than my memory, that you were frightened of the economic situations in say, Chicago, Detroit, New York cities you named. Is my memory playing me false on that?

MISS THORNTON: No, you're almost all correct. I was also thinking that in terms of the something which I guess many southerners have tried to-- or people who call themselves

southerners have tried to place their hands on some people who are segregated

MISS WHEELER: education for the poor, for anybody white in a town that is running a piano factory and in a town like that doesn't it make sense to start off ~~exi~~ excluding 40% of the population which is-- put yourself into situations.

MR. WARREN: Given that situation yes, but there's a great general argument that segregation has cost the country vast sums of money.

MISS WHEELER:

MR WARREN: All right, one little city in one little town, yes, but an over-all picture which would give an economic lobby for integration rather than an economic lobby for segregation, the statistics of it, long If a man is fighting for his job, you know at that particular moment But this over-all social lobby is, and I should hope that more and more people understand about it.

MISS WHEELER: And again I think there's more than recognition--

MISS THORNTON: We're talking about a local situation yes we're constantly seeing outside certainly not outside could conceptualize himself as a part of the United States, and realize that there are other countries in the world, that aren't necessarily bad; I think

it would be harder for most of them.

MR. WARREN: Let me tell you what Mr. Evers said to me on his recording session a few weeks ago. I asked him about Mississippi (I'll make this brief). He said, "I have some optimism here, that the one thing these segregationists, many of them, are raised on some respect for courage, that's in their tradition. He said that once that they recognized that the Negro is standing up and showing courage and facing them down, you have a kind of respect that is there as a working basis for a settlement, was this respect, that his just straight rare courage is in the local tradition. He said the other thing is once he crosses the line and sits down to talk to you and to make an agreement, he'll probably tell you the truth. He said apropos of dealing with him, and even the man and slaps you on the back and says, I'm really on your side." That's almost a direct quote.

MR. BLAIR: I agree with him. Inasmuch as when we started the sit-in movement in 1960, we met the mayor of Greensboro, we met representatives from I think from the Southern Regional Association associated with Woolworth's stores, and they told us these representatives and these representated the Woolworths told him the same thing. They were straightforward when they found out that we were, we weren't going to back down. They asked us, they told us that we were giving Greensboro a bad name, and so forth, so far as the sit-in was concerned, and that this would hurt

the city economically-wise, and we told them we weren't going to move and then this gentleman told us. He said, well, he respected-- he came across, he said, well, look, he said, we're not worried so much about you starting trouble. He said ~~the city~~ what we're worrying about is the poor whites starting trouble. He said the fighting and so forth, he said we know that you're not going to be violent." Now this was a great shock to me because this was the first time I'd ever come in contact with the middle class, upper white or the upper white of the community ~~is~~ admitting that the poor whites would cause trouble, and this is where I think he came through in telling the truth on the matter.

(SEVERAL VOICES TALKING SIMULTANEOUSLY)

MR. BLAIR: I know this was the basis of it, this was a plot to keep the Negroes and the poor whites apart from each other. This was a standard plot; I realize it--

MISS ^{didn't} Why ~~did~~ he tell you the truth, then?

MR. BLAIR: Negroes. This is the first time I ever heard a white man admit to his guilt, and he was admitting the truth for once and for all, he was admitting this to us, you know, that he-- going out on the white section, the poor white section, and tell the poor white people this, you see.

MISS WHEELER: And he was telling the poor white people about you niggers.

MR. BLAIR: I know, I know, I realize what he was doing He was telling on himself.

MISS WHEELER: It was an indirect telling on himself.

MR. BLAIR: An indirect telling on himself.

MISS WHEELER: That doesn't make it true.

MR. WARREN: I'm afraid that this was not what Mr. Evers was talking about

END OF
TAPE #2

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TAPE #3

This is a conversation with Miss Thornton, Miss Wheeler and Mr. Blair, continued.

MR. WARREN: You were saying, weren't you, Miss Thornton, that America at least offered some theoretical background for the improvement of society, is that right?

MISS THORNTON: Yes, that's quite true, and I was also saying that if the American or the black man does in fact achieve his goals, he is actually⁻⁻strengthens the theories of the nation's founded-- also it might strengthen what people, when they are talking in terms of a lost theology or lost ideals, lost goals, in fact it might even help to reiterate what we have always claimed to be true or what we've said is the nation's basis for existence. It might help, in fact, to bring America into the greatness which in our modern times, as far as world leadership is concerned, as far as the realization of-- as far as self-realization is concerned, on an international level.

MR. WARREN: You mean the civil rights movement has a possibility of provoking some moral regeneration in American