

[Gilbert Moses]

and universality of things will probably be shown, et cetera. And linking, and having the Negro audience understand them on those terms.

Warren: That's a fascinating prospect. I'd like to see some of your plays.

Moses: So would I.

Warren: Yes, I can imagine.

.....

[Aaron Henry]

Warren: As a starter I wonder if you could tell me how you first got interested in the N. A. A. C. P., in Civil Rights - Civil Rights Movement.

Henry: Well, Dr. Warren, I believe that it goes back to a point before I could even remember myself. One of the earliest experiences that I remember was the traumatic experience of being separated from a lad that I had known since birth, when it came time to go to school. And we were living in Derule. I was born in this county, and his parents and my parents were the best of friends and, of course, Randolph and I became inseparable. And, to have to go to one school and he to another at the age of six or seven was one of the early crises of my life, and I just never forgot about it.

Warren: This is a white boy, you mean?

Henry: Yes, Randolph was a white boy and I understand from my

mother and from his mother that as children, as babies, they would leave him with my mother at times, and me with his mother at times, and we both nursed each other's mothers' breasts as children. And when it came time to go to school we all looked forward to it, and here the great experience that we anticipated was so negated by the question of racial prejudice and racial bias that separated two kids who loved each other dearly. And, since that time, and I can't remember a time that I was not concerned about the <sup>race</sup> question and determined to do what I could about it.

Warren: Of course, many people are aware of it. I suppose every Negro has to be aware - it's just part of the times - but in doing is another thing - I mean actual moving into an organization like N. A. A. C. P. or a similar organization, and you have been with it a long time, I understand.

Henry: Yes, I became a member of the N. A. A. C. P. as a high school student, when the senior class of '41 in Kohoma County were encouraged to take out membership in the N. A. A. C. P., and of course, after high school, going into the service, there was an immediate need for N. A. A. C. P. philosophy with regard to the many instances of racial bigotry and racial prejudice we ran into in the service; and coming out of the service and into college - on the campus of Xavier University, I was - there was a strong Civil Rights movement, participating in the National

Students' Association as a student, gave additional opportunity of participation with organizations that were concerned about the rights of mankind.

Warren: This is after the war?

Henry: This is after the war, yes sir. And upon coming home from college in '50, we did not have an organized N. A. A. C. P. in the community, and in '52 we organized the N. A. A. C. P. here and I became its president and have remained president of the local branch ever since.

Warren: I know you have been very prominent in it, in fact, so prominent that it occurred that the bullet that Medger Evers got, might have gotten you by a toss-up.

Henry: Well, I've heard that too, and we get it from what we consider usually reliable sources within the news media, but I'm not anxious to die, but I'm not afraid of it. I think one thing that the death of Medger accomplished for me, it freed me from any fear of it. I know that I can never give any more to the cause than Medger Evers gave - and he was the best friend I had. And I'm willing to give as much.

Warren: This was a deep, personal friendship then?

Henry: Yes, sir. It goes back to about '50. We both got out of school about the same time.

Warren: Were you in school together?

Henry: No, we were in different institutions, but we came out and began working in the Freedom Movement together.

Warren: Yes. Was he a native Mississippian same as you?

Henry: Yes, sir. He was from Newton County, Mississippi.

Warren: That's what I thought. He was not from here.

Henry: No, he was from Newton County. Not from Go -

Warren: Yes, I remember now. There has been threatening, and there has been small acts of violence against you, hasn't there, here?

Henry: Well, yes. Our house was bombed and set afire, shot into, the store's been bombed.

Warren: The store's been-- the windows knocked out too, hasn't it?

Henry: Yes, sir. The windows were knocked out pretty frequently.

Warren: Pretty frequently. So I hear. Was it one case of shooting into the house, or more?

Henry: Two.

Warren: Two?

Henry: Yes, sir.

Warren: I've read about one. I think I've heard about one more - one other, but I didn't know how much - that there might have been some that I hadn't heard about.

Henry: Well, you see what happens - these things happen usually late at night, and some wild, careening cars come through and they

shoot at random. Perhaps not aiming, but just shooting. A Bullet could cause serious difficulty.

Warren: Well, bombing isn't quite that casual though.

Henry: No, the time that they bombed the house, we were all asleep. And, we woke - the concussion awoke us and, of course, the incendiary set the house afire and we were able to get the fire out, however, before any serious damage was done to any of the people - any members of the family, or any of the visitors who happened to be in here at that time.

Warren: Yes. Do you think that was just a bomb to frighten you, to intimidate you, or do you think it was meant to destroy the house? Destroy -

Henry: I think it was meant to destroy us.

Warren: Um, hum.. Strong enough for that?

Henry: Yes, sir.

Warren: What about the criticism of N. A. A. C. P. by some of the other organizations. Or people - put it this way - not organizations as organizations. I have encountered it here and there. You know they - the line taken by various people, even -

Warren: Well, I take this position, that it's important, really, that we keep our eyes on the target, which is freedom, and I guess, also, on the enemy, who would be considered those who are in

opposition to all Americans, or all citizens obtaining citizenship in America. Now, I take this position also - that in partisan conversation, there is bound to be at times a praising of a particular organization, and many times some people feel that the only raise to praise their own is to down the other. In the main, however, I think that those of us who are genuinely concerned with Civil Rights - in speaking sometimes derogatorily about the N. A. A. C. P. are not really serious in their criticisms. I think to some degree it's kind of jealousy, that some might hold because of the prominence that the N. A. A. C. P. has in the Civil Rights field. It might be that sometimes in caution - to try to be sure that the step we take is the right step to take. That sometimes we are criticized for moving slower than others would have us move. But, when we look at the fact that regardless to who else gets in jail, because of whatever activity they have become involved in, it's always the grand old, good N. A. A. C. P. that number one: puts up the bond money to get him out of jail, and number two: furnishes the legal talents to get him out of the difficulty with which they are involved. So, although there might be criticism leveled against the N. A. A. C. P. at times by some - I think that these criticisms are in the main, expressions that do not come from the heart, but come from the lips in somewhat passion and are not really aimed at casting a derogatory picture, of the N. A. A. C. P., but are more to cast a pleasant picture

about an organization for which a man might have a persuasion for, other than the N. A. A. C. P.

Warren: Waiving the question of one organization against another, there is an argument, that one encounters, to the effect that dependence on legal action, the insistence on the legality of the process has inhibited the achievement of Civil rights, because it carries no threat with it.

Henry: Oh, no, no. I can't agree with that at all. I think that the mere fact that the N. A. A. C. P. has been involved in legal action, it has served as an apparatus to determine actually what the law is - what the law says, and a determination and an interpretation of the law that is on the books, without which there would be no precedent - without which there would be no direct action, knowing previously what the final legal outcome is going to be. Now, I don't mind violating many of the Mississippi statutes, but those that I violate I know are in contrast with what is the law on the Federal level. And speaking from a scriptorial point of view, I would not want to become involved in violations of the laws of this State that would be upheld by the Constitution of the United States. And, I think that the legalistic approach that the N. A. A. C. P. has taken, has clarified this course. Therefore, we can, without hesitation, become involved in direct action, because we know

the first amendment to the Constitution gives us the right to protest, but the good old N. A. A. G. P. has established this right in our own minds, and consequently, when we violate this law we are not violating what we consider an actual law, but a practice that's within Mississippi that we want to get rid of.

Warren: I've heard it argued too with the legalistic approach keeps the image of the law-abiding society as something to cut out of the protest.

Henry: Well, now, I think that's important. I think that we do want to become - we do want to be that - the law-abiding citizens. And I also think that the legal image of this nation, that has been identified by the work of N. A. A. G. P. lawyers and others, really gives the - brings into the possibility of creation of the ~~direction~~ movement. Now, were it not for the fact that the Constitution of the United States stands for the equality of mankind, so defined that this country itself was built on acts of protest - the Boston Tea Party, and various other activities that were responsible for the birth of this nation. Were it not for the fact that we know that these are democratically section principles <sup>of</sup> protests, the image of this nation from the eyes of the Negroes, it is very necessary that we understand that this is the position - this is the official position of our country. Were it that the official position of our country was to deny the right to Negroes to be full and free citizens of this country,



I doubt very seriously if the protest that we are waging, on a non-violent nature, would be continued to be waged in this restrained, dignified manner, because without the hope, without the knowing that the United States sanctions what we are doing - then we would be in open rebellion against the country. Therefore, the restraint that we are able to impose upon those who participate, it would not be possible if the victory that we seek were not so sure.

Warren: Do you - first, let me read you two passage - criticizing Martin Luther King's philosophy. May I read you this? It's by the - the passage is by Kenneth Clark, the psychologist at C. C. N. Y. Here is a quotation, "On the surface King's philosophy appears to reflect health and stability, while the Black naturalists" - he'd been talking about the Black Muslims, "Betray pathology and instability. A deeper analysis, however, might reveal that there is also an unrealistic, if not pathological bias, in King's doctrine. The natural reaction to injustice and oppression is bitterness and resentment. The form which such bitterness takes need not be overtly violent, but the effect of the human experience remains the same. It would seem, therefore, that any demand that the victims of oppression be required to love those who oppress them, places an additional and probably intolerable burden upon these victims. In other words, the notion that it is psychologically unhealthy to

forgive. Now, in the light of your own experience, which is vast in this matter, and your observations and readings about the effect of Dr. King's program, what would you say about this? Please comment.

Henry: Well, Dr. King's philosophy is built on an understanding of Christianity - the Christian ethic. I certainly agree that the adoption of the following through on an ethic of Christianity is not, shall we say, common sense. It's not a kind of reaction that one would normally be expected to understand.

Warren: It's not common human nature either.

Henry: No, it isn't. Christianity is not common human nature.

Warren: It's redeemed human nature, is that it?

Henry: Yes, redeemed. And, only in this context, that I think that Dr. King's philosophy and which is the philosophy of many of the others of us, that Jesus Christ so forgave His oppressors and if we are to be true followers of Christianity, then we too must be able to forgive those who oppress us. But, I also think that King is very careful in identifying what he calls love. He refers to the Greek language in an identification of this love, and the three words that the Greeks use - number one is philial, which is a reciprocal kind of love. One who is loved because he is loved, and it is certainly not philial level that King espouses, that we love our oppressors.

The other - another word that the Greeks use is called eros, which in Greek, understanding is the yearning of the flesh for the rim of the God - an esthetic, synecopating kind of sexual attraction, man for woman, and it is not in this context that King is talking about either. But the third word that the Greeks use is the word called philia - and when we arise to love - the third word that they use is a word called agape, excuse me, and when we rise to love on the agape level, we love men not because we like them, not because they like us - not because there is something physically attractive about them, but we love them because God loves them - because the Redeemer of this world that we know about, caused them to be created and we know that He loves everything that He created. Therefore, it is up to us to imitate the leader of the Christian faith - hard as it may be, difficult as it might be. We know that freedom is not easy and without some suffering there will be no freedom. And, I'll go along with King all the way in this redemptive kind of love that espouses a love of mankind, because God Himself made him and He loves him.

Warren: I've heard it said by admirers of Dr. King, say that only by this is there basis for a future society. You can win every law suit, every - and by force seize every right - if necessary by force, and then have no society when you get through, without this human recognition across the lines of race.

Henry: Well, that might - that's probably true on the American scene. I think this - I think that there has to be this contrast of activity, with the emergence to freedom for Negroes in America. I don't think that we can win our freedom by using the same apparatuses that are used - that have been used in Asia and Africa. In Ghana and Nigeria, now, in other countries of Africa, when the Negro has emerged to freedom, he has driven out the white oppressor. The land has been left to the blacks. But here in America, when we gain the freedom that we know that we're going to get, our white brother and our black brother are going to be still right here. Neither is going to drive the other out. Therefore, it has to be this symbiotic kind of response and respect, one for the other.

Warren: That is, this is not a nationalistic revolution, except in the Black Muslims' dream. It is a matter of a social adjustment within the same nation, with the same -

Henry: I'd say we've got to learn to adjust socially, to all and other people in this country, and not accept differences as any connotation of superiority or of inferiority, merely a cultural difference.

Warren: That brings up another question which I - in my coat here - I encountered first in reading DuBoise many years ago - many years ago. He speaks of a split, or the division in the Negro psyche, or the - he says on one hand there is the yearning

that at least some, perhaps many of the Negroes feel, and he was one of them, for identification with a black soul, with even with the spirit of Africa, Mother Africa - or some pull toward the exclusive experience of being Negro, what is now Negritude, or Mystique - those phrases. On the other hand, there is the pull, as he puts it, towards the Western cultural traditions - Europe and America. And the impulse to enter that position - to integrate with that tradition and perhaps, in the end, to lose the Negro identity entirely in entering the bloodstream and the cultural stream of the Western world. For some people this is apparently a problem - a real division of loyalties. Do you think about that, or does it seem to be ~~significant to~~ you? I know to some people it is not significant at all.

Henry: Well, it's not significant from the standpoint of what will the outcome be. I take the position that as an American -

Warren: I'm sorry sir - I've got to recall the tape here -