

ROBERT PENN WARREN    AARON HENRY    BOX 5    2/10/64  
(Tape 2)

Warren:    It should be all right, we're home free for another hour.    Well, you were saying that the split that Duboise refers to - you were explaining your attitude toward that notion.

Henry:    Yes, you asked questions - yes, to some degree and in paraphrasing was the situation where there is a desire of Negroes to retain Negroid-ness and the question of the assimilation into American culture was inevitably destroy that image. My position is, I don't really care which develops.    I would like to be considered on par with any other man in America, to have been in America, I think, to bear some rights that are mine because I was born in my father's house.    There are perhaps some rights that others who come over as aliens and become citizens in that fashion - there probably should be and are some requirements that they should have to meet, but as an American, as a human being, born in America, I think that we should be free to associate with whomever we please.    If we want to live in a community, and it's our desire that, if it's a Negro's desire, that he perpetuate as best he can the culture of the African, or of the Negro, well and good.    On the other hand, the American that wants to be a part of the mainstream of American life - and accept his friends because he likes them, rather than because of their race, who perhaps develops in time to come, a situation where Americans become tea-colored, I don't think that it would

cause me to have strong feelings either way.

Warren: A situation that is similar to that - a parallel, and there are many solutions to the other question too - the Jews I know talk about this division of impulse, either in themselves personally, or in this general Jewish situation. Is there a difference between the Negro situation in this respect and the Jews, do you think?

Henry: No, I think that when we are talking about Jews, maybe we sort of lose the fact that many of the present-day Jews of my generation are not nearly as great adherents to the Jewish traditions as others. I recall an experience - a year ago - met a Jewish lad at a convention, and he and I got to be pretty conversant. At lunch time the hostess brought around ham salad and chicken salad. Well, I just knew that this kid, being a Jew, would in all probability take chicken salad, so I ordered chicken salad and he ordered ham salad. So I looked at him. I said, "Boy, you can't eat ham salad. You're a Jew." He said, "Well, I'm just about as good a Jew as you are a Christian." So - and I have found this kind of light banter in many of the Jews, of which I find it possible to be conversant with, and I find them just as loosely connected to the orthodoxy of Judaism as many Americans are religiously I say connected to the preparation of races. In some Negro communities you will find there will be the women who will not groom their hair -

straighten it, but will let it grow in its natural form. Well, it's all right if you do, and it's all right, if you don't. And, I think, that this kind of reaction, and this kind of doing or not doing ought to be put down simply as a cultural trait of a particular individual, and does not connote, not denote anything superior or inferior, but it's just as simple as some people like to wear red ties and others like them black.

Warren: Where do you think the image of the "new Negro" arose?

Henry: Well, I think that perhaps Langston Hughes is the author, I think, of a little ditty that gave rise to this stereotyped new Negro, just after the Supreme Court decision of 1954, when he paraphrased an old song about Stephen Foster, "Old Black Joe", and he said, "I'm coming, yes, I'm coming, but my head is bending low. I hear their gentle voices calling, Old Black Joe".

Langston Hughes did it this way. He said, "I'm coming, yes, I'm coming, but my head isn't bending low. I'm walking loud, and I'm talking proud; I'm America's new Black Joe." And that sort of caught on, because it's easy to say - it's easy to remember and it gives you a sense of buoyancy. And with the '54 Supreme Court decision, I think, that the somebody-ness that the Negro has sort of acquired of himself -

Warren: They've had a long preparation for that, hadn't they? I mean legally and otherwise.

Henry: Yes, sir. The decision came some seven or eight years,

you know, after the legal work had begun, so it was - although it came about in '54, the decision - this gave, shall we say, authenticity or legality to the dream and the hope that the Negro was not biologically, and not in any other manner, inferior to the white people.

Warren: A psychologist told me this some months ago. New Haven is having a community planning program, rebuilding certain sections, re-zoning, new housing projects. And, in connection with it, they are investigating attitudes of various minority groups in the city. That's what they want, what image they have of themselves, that such thing. And they have test called a Rumor test, which runs as follows. A picture is shown with four, five persons in it. One here, standing in the foreground, being a white man and a Negro there and somebody else there, somebody else there. But a white man is holding a knife in the foreground. Or sometimes a razor. Now, this test is given to a group of whites, or a group of Negroes. The first person looks at the picture and then the picture is put away. He's supposed to tell Number 2 what's in the picture. Then tell Number 3 - Number 2 tells 3, through ten or fifteen people. Invariably,-  
Henry: Get it all wrong.

Warren: Get it wrong; the person that's holding the knife is one of the Negroes. This has a - it's a very strange fact that a - this psychologist who knows it - the giving of these tests in

New Haven assured me that it is true. What does that mean?

Henry: I think that the stereotype here is perhaps answered in jest, by Dick Gregory, and of course, I think that Dick has brought quite a bit of the humor and to some degree the solution to the problem in his banter and humor. Dick said in regard to the fact that Negroes usually were depicted as carrying a knife, is largely because the white people won't sell us no guns. And, it's a sort of get-even weapon, because you can buy a butcher knife at any store to carry home to use in the kitchen. But, I don't know how this image of the Negro has preceded over other nationalities. I see about as many white fellows with knives as Negroes. I think that in our own community, a Negro would come nearer being arrested for bearing a knife, than would a white man.

Warren: Certainly that's true.

Henry: Yes, and therefore, we get more publicity about having knives than the whites do. Many of the things that Negroes get arrested for, the white man is either chastised and sent home, or nothing at all is said to him about it.

Warren: Well, in any case, here in New Haven, far away, a significant number of Negroes accepted this white man's stereotype of the Negro, and put the knife into the Negro's hand.

Henry: Well, yes, I think this is important too. Mississippi is not a mutation in America. The bigotry that exists in Mississippi

is perhaps more overt than exists in New Haven, but this question of racial prejudice, the question of white supremacy, when the question of white supremacy is present, throughout the Western world and American and European culture - wherever Western culture is involved, you have a system of white supremacy. Show me a Negro in the legislature of England, France, Italy. Wherever you have Western culture, why I don't know, but there is always in accompaniment with it an existence of white supremacy.

Warren: I gather that is true. Of course, there are no Negroes in England - no significant number, nor Italy.

Henry: Well, they say that there are some in Russia, too, and of course I have no feeling of kindness toward Communism at all, and I haven't seen Pravda espousing the Negro cause to the point that you see Negroes in the Presidium either.

Warren: No, no.

Henry: See? So this image of white supremacy is not at all confined to Mississippi. It's nation-wide and to some extent world-wide.

Warren: Do you feel that this thing is true, as James Baldwin said, and has been said by others as well, that the Southern mob - you see on the streets in Jackson, or Little Rock, or New Orleans, Birmingham - does not represent the will of the Southern majority.

Henry: Yes, I think that's true - and I think that the - many

of the people of the South, are not permitted because of real or imagined fears to espouse the goodness that they really feel in their hearts. Political opportunism causes the expressions of racial bigotry to the point that many people feel that they can't win any active position unless they espouse the cause of racial hatred. And, when you study the history of Eastland and Bodiman and Bilbo, you will find that in many instances these men sired Negro sons, or Negro children, by Negro women, which gives you to understand that they really didn't hate the Negro. He would have found himself far away from it. But, the question of the fact that Negroes are not registered to vote in any appreciable number gives rise to the political necessity of espousing a cause of racial hatred if the politician intends to win at the ballot box. Now, once the Negro acquires the right to vote, you are going to have a whole lot of whitepeople talking about how good we were to Negroes, even back then, and how we felt about Negroes even then, but were afraid to say it. Now, I think though, that we go back to our feelings of Christianity here, and this sort of is unbelievable by the white majority too, that the Negro really holds no vengeance about what happened yesterday, if they will really begin right now, they'd be surprised how fast and how quickly we forgive. But, the white man is afraid his deeds are going to follow him, and he feels that once the Negro gets in power, the Negro is going to remember all

of the dirty deeds that he has gotten from the white community, and therefore he continues to prolong the day, as long as he possibly can, that he will have to suffer for his crimes. In other words, this old eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth, and a man reapeth what he sows. But, if we - when we do get suffrage - get the right to vote - it is our determination to really show America how democracy can really work, and how the freedom that we seek for ourselves will be definitely shared by everybody else - because we realize that freedom is a peculiar kind of a commodity. You can only keep it by giving it away. The only way that a man can be free is to express and give freedom to all and other people that he comes in contact with. And this is <sup>a</sup> general feeling among the leadership of the Negro community, with whom I am in contact with. None of us have the vengeance and the hatred to carry.

Warren: This is the general feeling, you say?

Henry: Yes, sir.

Warren: You don't think it's confined to persons approaching middle age, or older? It's part of the young too?

Henry: I think it applies very much to the young. I think that the question of being sure that all people enjoy the rights and privileges of an American citizen is perhaps more embued in the minds and hearts of the young than in the old.

Warren: Even when they have not - are Christians?

Henry: Sure. Even when they are not Christians. I don't think that it takes a Christian to feel this kind of responsibility. It takes a person to some degree, that has experienced difficulty to know what it's all about. Now, I think that the greatest ally that the Negro gained during his whole crisis was the white enlisted man that served in World War II and the Korean War. This white man went to the Army never having experienced any kind of segregation or discrimination from his community. And here he goes into the Army. He finds that the PX system is so arranged that what comes there is placed into the Officer's PX. They get what they want. And then it's sent down to him, and the quarters on the base, where the officers live is so much better than the quarters where he lives, and he got to see what segregation and discrimination means. He realized that when it was doled out to him, he didn't like it, and he began to have a greater appreciation for the fight that the Negro is making, trying to get rid of these same oppressions. And, look at the broad spectrum of white support that the Negro has in his cause for freedom; you will find that a great majority of it comes from veterans of the World War II.

Warren: Many of whom I've been told had their first chance to know a Negro personally in the Army.

Henry: That's true. In the service. They only knew him as

a servant in some servile occupation.

Warren: Who had never seen a Negro.

Henry: I mean they had never seen him for himself and they only knew them about what they had read about them, or what they had heard about them, and usually this was in derogatory terms.

Warren: You're a business man. What do you find in Mississippi, or in other places you know, of Negro anti-Semitism?

Henry: If this is anti-Semitism, I'd like it to be defined as such. In the fight for human dignity we have never underestimated our position, but we have over-estimated our hope. We felt that naturally we would have the Jewish people on our side. We thought that naturally we would have labor on our side, because the enemies of all three are usually found in the same group. Here we don't have the Jews supporting us.

Warren: In Mississippi?

Henry: No.

Warren: But you do elsewhere?

Henry: Yes, elsewhere. Frankly, the president of the N. A. A. C. P. is Jewish.

Warren: Yes?

Henry: And T.V. Kaplan, one of the most ardent workers in the N. A. A. C. P. is Jewish, and it was this image of Jews as we knew them on the national level that caused us to feel that we

could count on the Jews.

Warren: In Mississippi?

Henry: In Mississippi. And here in our home town, we have absolutely no support from the Jewish community. Frankly, some of our oppressors are found in the Jewish community, which saddens me, which is a statement that I am sorry to have to make, and if that anti-Semitism, then we have learned it reluctantly; we would hope that that would be a fact that we would not learn.

Warren: But you don't generalize when they ask you if this situation has local roots - that's the assumption that you are making about it.

Henry: Yes, locally, and frankly, when we are exposed to a Jewish person there is this feeling that he is a friendly person and we accept him as our friend until and if he conducts himself in a manner that says that he is not. Frankly, it will never be the Negro community that will be responsible for not being able to get along with the Jewish community.

Warren: Do you think that the Mississippi Jews, for instance, because slightly more vulnerable than Gentiles as social pressure, that's why that they react this way.

Henry: I would think so; I would think that they know that once the white man clubs or clobbers the Negro into submission, that he probably is next. And, it's to his advantage not to have become involved in the problems of other oppressed people, but

it would be hard for me not to become involved in the problems of person who was being oppressed, without regard to what his race might happen to be.

Warren:    But of course we know in general the Jews have been very great supporters for the Civil Rights movement and for the Negro in particular.

Henry:    Yes, and that's why I say it was a question of over-estimating our support, here in Mississippi because we assumed, without asking, that certainly we can count on the Jews.    But, that has not been the case, morally, financially, any other way.

Warren:    Do you notice any difference in attitudes of white people in general, say, under thirty and over thirty?    Is the younger generation changing its attitude on the race question?

Henry:    I'm sorry - I can't - this is a thing that I would like to believe, but when I observed the riots at the University of Mississippi last year, and observed boys who had fuzz on their chins, never had begun to shave - and girls who still wore too much lipstick, not knowing really how to be well-groomed, - in other words, kids between fourteen-eighteen years old.    And, realizing that these kids from the day that they were born, many of them, had heard only that the Supreme court decision of 1954 was not the law of the land - it need not be obeyed - and this had been drummed into the minds and the hearts of these kids from their formative years.    And, the average kid that is in college

now, was between fifteen and seventeen, when the Supreme Court decision of '54 was passed, and all they have learned since then was they didn't have to obey it. And, here they are faced on their own college campus with the presence of the Negro, which goes against all they have been taught, and there they begin to throw the bottles and the bricks and the racial epithets and the curses, which said to a lot of people that the sociological and the psychological utterance that we had taken too long to be a truism, that the younger generation will straighten the thing out, if only given a chance, did not follow the lines of the writer.

Warren: Depressing thought.

Henry: Yes, it is a depressing thought, but I think we have to - I have to express it as I have seen it.

Warren: Sure, sure.

Henry: As much as I would like to say that certainly we can count on the younger ones to be much more tolerant than the older ones - but when you realize that the greater amount of the violence - the bricks that were thrown, the people who were knocked off stools in sit-ins, the kids who bombed our house, which were nineteen and twenty-two.

Warren: You identified them - did you?

Henry: Well, I didn't identify them. They were captured the same night, and we understand that each one has between five

hundred - had about five hundred dollars in his pocket.

Warren: Paid to do it?

Henry: We think so - when they were captured.

Warren: Otherwise, where would they have got it?

Henry: Yes, for a kid that young. But still, that is that image of youth expressing an action in a method of racial intolerance says to me that we're not home safe even with the youth.

Warren: I have heard it said that it will take - that the riots set development back here ten years - that these people who - the whole generation in college that now run Mississippi, with this in their ears.

Henry: The riot?

Warren: The riot and the attitudes that made the riot.

Henry: They say it set it back?

Warren: Yes.

Henry: I don't think that at all. I think it was the riot that has really hurled us into what can become a new era. I said that because prior to the riot, our contact with the campus, University of Mississippi, was next to nothing. Since the riots almost weekly, sometimes daily, there are students and faculty persons, come by just to exchange ideas and views on particular issues. These students and faculty members would not have dared be seen in the company of the president of the N. A. A. C. P. prior to the riots.

Practically, the riots actually freed them.

Warren: Well, that would seem to prove that there's something to be said for the younger generation then.

Henry: Well, I - except that many of the people who take this opportunity are not necessarily young people.

Warren: Oh, I see.

Henry: Many of - it's a mixture of old and young.

Warren: I see - but some young.

Henry: Some young and some old, yes.

Warren: How much contact, in terms of Civil Rights movement, do you find between the more prosperous middle class, as it were, upper class Negroes and the masses of the Negroes. Is there more communication now, in recent years, than there was, or less.

Henry: There's more. And I think that the reason that there is more is because of the involvement of the younger Negroes, the teen-agers, who are the sons and daughters of this older, middle-class, ~~black~~ bourgeois, Negro. And, once momma's red-haired boy is in jail and has been slapped around by the police, regardless of what he is there for, she becomes enraged and becomes more amenable to the Civil Rights struggle than before. And one thing that the white policemen have not been able to do - they have not been able to differentiate between the child of the Negro lady that has set the image of stereotype in a community, and the Negro that is now striving, making a strive for freedom. And, because

of that non-distinction, the Negro now takes a position, from another cliché, that if we hadn't been in a bed together, we wouldn't be in this jam today. Which says, that we are all Negroes - we are all involved in the same strawberry patch and we're in the same jar of jam, and therefore, we might as well act like it and start to work together to get out of it.

Warren: Yes, it's unified the Negro group. Made a group identify possible that was not there before.

Henry: Yes, sir. It has. The overt activities of the white community has done more to unite the Negro community than any other thing.

Warren: That leads me to another notion. There's - where does leadership come from - what social bracket?

Henry: It's not indigenous to any strata. It's not - you'll find the leadership personnel will range from persons who can't read or write to persons - people with PH.D.'s - and the person who can't read or write will have just as much persuasion over the group that he is involved with -

Warren: Because of natural force and natural intelligence.

Henry: Yes, sir.

Warren: But there's no real danger, then, of a break between leadership and the masses?

Henry: No, sir. I don't think so, at all. I think that the -

Warren: The fear is sometimes expressed, of course. This is

said to be a problem, if not a danger.

Henry: Well, what really happens is - the leadership finds out which way the mass wants to go, or what the mass wants to do, and then go get in front and lead it. But, the fellow who lives on the plantation, who digs the ditch, who makes a dollar a day, and sometimes nothing, is just as much concerned, and many times more concerned with becoming free, than the man who is maybe a little better off. And, the identity of all of us with this particular struggle, regard less to strata, I don't know just how it happens, except that - take a minister in a pulpit. He is no more a leader to the P.H.D. than he is to the little child in catechism. Each one follows him, you know, so I think too, that the position of the church in Negro life, where we have this democratic kind of society, has had and will have in the future, great bearing on the surging towards freedom of the Negro community.

~~Henry:~~ What church do you belong to?

Henry: I'm Methodist.

Warren: Methodist?

Henry: Yes. And we're moving too slow - we've got segregation within the Methodist church that we've got to get rid of. The - as you know, in the Methodist church the jurisdictional system prevails. All Negro churches, wherever they are in America, are certified to the central jurisdiction, while there are four other

geographical jurisdictions<sup>in</sup>/to which the white churches fall. And, we are working hard, within the Methodist church to rid it of the jurisdictional system and thus get away with segregation within the church.

Warren: Are you making headway?

Henry: Yes, we have come to the point where there is much discussion. This will be one of the main topics that will be discussed at the annual convention this year, and there have been some relaxing of the barriers, wherein if a church wants to leave a conference, and the conference to which it wants to go, will accept it - a majority vote by each will effect the move. But, it's going to have to be relaxed much more than that, especially going into geographical division, and that is what we are contending for.

Warren: Are you finding any significant support from white Southerners in this?

Henry: Yes, the white South - the white ministers - well, the white ministers with which I'm in contact, and that's largely those that are concerned with the division of Christian social concern within the Methodist church, of which I find myself fairly often in their presence - are quite concerned about ridding the church of the jurisdictional system; thus giving them a church doctrine, or a legality to preach the brotherhood of God - the brotherhood of man and the Fatherhood of God. Right now, as

long as we've got the jurisdictional system, this says to the white congregations in the South that the church condones this segregation, and once we rid the church of this tailor-made excuse, then we can begin to make progress without the law saying that this is the church's position.

Warren: Yes, I see the relevance of that jurisdictional re-arrangement. It's sometimes said, and I have a quotation here from a Negro sociologist and historian, to this effect. "The Negro's plight in the South will be lightened substantially, only when the plight of the poor white is lightened; when these two can no longer be pitted against each other in hatred and contempt."

Henry: I think that's pretty much a true statement. I think that the power structure of - and I can speak about Mississippi because I know it best - the power structure for too long has manipulated the Negro against the poor white and the poor white against the Negro. It is told - the Negro, every time there's a crime committed by a white man against a Negro, that it was a red-neck that did it. It wasn't us - up to - big white people - oh, no, we don't do that. It's the red-necks. And, they have told the white illiterate - poor man - that every crime, particularly a sex crime, is committed by a Negro - upon a white woman - that it was a Negro that did it. And, of course, they do this because sex is the thing that the most limited mind can comprehend, and that's the scarecrow that they use. You've got to keep these

Negroes in their place, or they're going to take all your women. Now, to me that's a serious indictment on the part of the white male towards his white woman - to feel that the only thing that is keeping her from embracing every Negro that she sees is because the white man keeps his foot on the Negro's neck. Frankly, if I were a white woman I would be completely insulted by this line of reasoning, and this thing about Negro men seeking insatiably the association of white women - now most Negro men that I know wish to God that our white brothers were satisfied with their own women, as we are with ours. You can hardly come into any Negro neighborhood at night without seeing some car with a white man circling, trying to find some Negro lady to have pleasure with. Well, now, I think that this position is - if she wants him and he wants her, that's two people's business.

Warren: A private affair.

Henry: A private affair. They ~~want~~<sup>to</sup> get married - that's their own private affair. I take quite a dim view on the legality of my State, that negates the possibility of holy matrimony between the races, but there is nothing about adultery and fornication and they use these types of expressions about the Negro to the white and about the white to the Negro, that keeps us apart. Now, I think that the best thing in the world that could happen to Mississippi would be somewhat a wedding of the Negro and the poor whites - a populous movement, that would break the strangle-

hold that the power structure of the white community now holds over both the Negro and the poor white, and there are only two divisions between the poor folks in our State - the poor white folks and poor colored folks, and I think the sooner we realize that, the better off each of us is going to be.

Warren: Do you see any prospect - immediate prospect for the economic competition between - competition for jobs between the Negro laborer and poor white laborer, or even on a higher level?

Henry: Yes, I -

Warren: ... for the struggle for economic advantage in a State which is poor, doesn't have enough jobs to go around.

Henry: I think this. I think the pay scale that is now used as a threat to everybody is a prostitution of the labors of the white people in that the white employer says to the white worker that: "If you don't agree to work for this \$1.25 an hour, I'm going to hire a nigger for seventy-five cents," and the attitude is not to get the best for the whites of our community by the power structure. The power structure is only content to be sure that what the white man gets is better than what the Negro gets; not that he is aiming at ultimacy for either group. I think that when employment is based on ability, without regard to race, creed or color, that this in itself will create a situation where industrial personnel will be willing to come into our area,

and with it will bring additional jobs and will, perhaps, create many more jobs than there are now.

Warren: Has the race situation - has prevented the industrialization and the bringing of new plants?

Henry: That's my feeling - that's my feeling, sir. And I think that when we break this thing, the hold on race, that there will be many more jobs, and perhaps enough jobs to go around.

Warren: Is it noticeable in Mississippi that some Negro business men and some others, who have more or less privileged positions, actually oppose the Civil Rights movement? This is true in some localities.

Henry: You know, I don't see how. If a Negro says he's opposed to the Civil Rights Bill, there are either two things present. He's either a liar, or he's a fool. He might say that he opposes the Civil Rights Bill because he is speaking the language that someone who can do him a favor would want to hear. And, he enhances himself possibly limitedly, in his estimation. But to be against the Civil Rights Bill is to be against yourself, and it's hardly conceivable that a rational, truthful man would take a position against the Civil Rights Bill.

Warren: Well, now, in a St. Louis paper, the president of the Negro business association wrote an article, saying that integration would set back Negro business in St. Louis about a generation.

Henry: Well, I presume what he was getting at was that the Negro business man in St. Louis does not run his business in competition with the American market. I think it's no good to be the best Negro business man. I think you've got to aim at being the best business man in the town in order to gain the clientele that is out there.

Warren: And the open competition, in the long run, would benefit the Negro.

Henry: Yes, sir. I do believe it.

Warren: And it's short sighted trying to protect -

Henry: Yes, of course, you know, Negroes also have vested interests in segregation, many.

Warren: That's what I'm talking about now.

Henry: But, I think that that is not best - that is not good for the development of the group. Now, you know back during the early days of labor, when there was this cry about the Negro being Communist. There was this cry about labor being Communist. There was one classical cliché, where you could hear expressed, when a person was looking for advantages and working with the labor movement to gain them. "Baby, this ain't for Moscow. This is for me." And, many of the Negro people who feel that they are not capable of competing on the open market will perhaps take this position, that this is for me. And, go at it from a subjective point of view - but objectivity ultimately is going to

prevail, and those of us who can't compete on the open market, are going to have to get out.

Warren: There are always casualties.

Henry: Yes, sir. In any sociological change, there are going to be casualties. In the American way the person who builds the best mouse-trap, is going to get the business, and I think that Negro people havee got to be prepared to take their chances on the open market and conduct their businesses as a business should be conducted, and not rely upon any advantage that race might give.

Warren: This is a problem, though, isn't it for many people?

Henry: It is a problem for some people, but I think that when race is removed though, it will not be a problem.

Warren: You mean it's a fear.

Henry: Yes, I think it's -

Warren: It's not justified.

Henry: I think it's an ain't. You know, some people - ain't - yes.

Warren: What did you think about the verdict in the Byron de la Beckwith trial?

Henry: I'm pretty much a skeptic, I guess, but I accept the verdict in the Byron de la Beckwith trial as the second act of a well-written drama, with the actors playing their parts superbly. I think that the decision of a hung jury was made before the trial started. I think that the third act of the drama will show

Beckwith a free man. First act was the preliminary - with the selection of the jury.

Warren: Do you mind explaining that?

Henry: The selection of the jury was a tedious, on the surface kind of reaction. Mr. Waller took a lot of time, so did Mr. Lott, Mr. Cunningham, in securing twelve members of the jury. I think that it could have been done in five minutes and been over with.

Warren: It's never that way though.

Henry: Well, no, it's never that way, but I'm saying that the stage that has been set for the Byron de la Beckwith trial, that attempts to erase some of the mud from the name of Mississippi - at least we got a hung jury. To my mind, all the time they took selecting the jury was a part of the act, and I think that when the trial is finally over, perhaps some day like Mylan and Bryant, who wrote a - gave Look Magazine a close-up survey of what had happened -

Warren: In the Till case?

Henry: In the Till case. That maybe the Saturday Evening Post will print Byron de la Beckwith's confession. How there was this maneuvering back and forth.

Warren: Do you go as far as to believe, as some say, that even the taxi drivers who gave testimony that was damaging to de la Beckwith were giving fabricated testimony as to round out the

drama - to give interest to the drama?

Henry: Well, I - no. I think that the jurors - that's the question that - that's the position that I feel most strongly about - that they - the time that they took for the verdict - the hung jury question, and there never has been a white man in Mississippi given a penalty in a capital crime, for a crime against a Negro. And, there have been situations perhaps where the web of guilt was wound much tighter - and in the Till case there was positive identification - you are the man.

Warren: In the Melton case there was positive identification.

Henry: Yes - you are the man. Yes.

Warren: An eye witness.

Henry: Who pulled the trigger. In the service station. In the service station. That's right.

Warren: Eye witness in the case. Because I was in Van Doren just after that and I saw the widow and I was talking to people around town. Nobody in town wasn't certain - totally convinced of the guilt of what's his name? Who shot William Melton?

Henry: Well, Mylow was with the man who shot him. I don't recall just who pulled the trigger.

Warren: Oh, it's Kimball.

Henry: Kimball, yes, Kimball.

Warren: Kimball - K I M - Kimball shot him and was acquitted on the first ballot, I think. Now, the Clarksdale paper, if I

remember correctly - and please correct me if this is not - I seem to remember that the Clarksdale paper, after the acquittal of Kimball, published on the front page a little editorial, saying in the Till case there might have been some excuse for failure to convict. In this case there is none. We have flunked it.

Henry: That's right.

Warren: Now, was that a courageous<sup>act,</sup> for that editor of this local paper to come out and -

Henry: I think it was a courageous act. I think it reflects the thinking of a man that is no longer with the paper now - a boy by the name of Guy Clark, who actually served as the advertisement manager, but he was the liberal force in the Clarksdale Press Register. I don't think you will find an editorial of that nature today.

Warren: What became of him?

Henry: He died of a heart attack.

Warren: How old was he?

Henry: Well, Guy must have been about forty-five when he died. He was an heir of the founders of the City - almost a real liberal, a very good man.

Warren: A man, who because of his social position, felt free to express his views.

Henry: His views, sure. And he'd taken - he'd been expressing all along, so it was nothing unusual about it.

Warren: Do you find that kind of maverick very often? The man of privileged position, use his privilege to independence?

Henry: Not very often - not very often. The fear of social ostracism, and the fear of being called a nigger-lover, and mostly the fear of the children being tagged - "your daddy is a nigger-lover" -

Warren: That pressure.

Henry: That type of pressure keeps many people from being the kind of good men at heart they are.

Warren: This is cutting back into history, but I would like to ask you this one. Myrdal gives what he would consider a rational program for the reconstruction of the South in 1865.

Henry: Is this from The American Dilemma ?

Warren: Yes. You remember the passage from the - he says that there should have been compensation for slaves, to the now ex-owners - they should have given him expropriation of land for the resettlement - a division of land. This land should have been paid for at a reasonable rate to the owners from whom it was expropriated. That the Negroes who received the land should have been charged something for it over a long period of time, and receive supervision and control of the best selling of it for a certain number of years, until they had adapted themselves to the new system. Does this make sense? Because, as we're looking back on impossibilities.

Henry: Well, yes. I'd like to answer it my way.

Warren: Please do. Please do, and I just started this as a line of discussion.

Henry: Yes, yes. I think - I take the position that if the white community had accorded my grandma and my grandpa, at the time they were freed from slavery, recognition for labor that they had given free, that they could have lived like millionaires forever, because of this exploitation. I do not feel that - and I'm sure that you recognize too, the Civil - the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation did not free the slaves. The slaves had been freed already by the - well, the - when Lincoln told - Lincoln said, "If you drive the Confederates back from Chiteegum Creek, I'll free the slaves". And, of course, they were driven back. The signing of the Emancipation led to the winning of the Civil War, it did not free the slaves. And, of course, that was somewhat an ambivalent position, because here the slaves are free after the War. There, the big thing that was wrong with the way the slaves were freed was none of us possessed the land; and I'd like to go back to perhaps, the Church would not agree with this maybe. But, in the leading of the children from Israel into what we called the Promised Land - to my way of thinking, was that Moses promised the children land, if you follow me. Of course, from the land comes all things that

are conducive to life. There was no place called the Promised Land as an area, but it was simply that they were promised land. And, the analogy that I'm drawing is that after the Civil War, Negro slaves were not even promised land. The Russians, when they freed their slaves, there was this land reform. England, when it freed its slaves, there was land reform activity, and the American Negro was the only group that were freed from slavery during, you know, during this particular era, several countries freed their slaves during this general area, and the American Negro was the only group that was freed from slavery with no possession whatsoever. And, because of this situation, the progress of the American Negro has been slower than the Negroes in other communities. I have seen the plantation system grow. We have studied the growth of some plantations, and we have seen that as Negroes began to buy - acquire land after the Civil War, that it was not too long before the man who owned the land in the first place had connived and somehow secured all of the land, generally, back, and the Negro reverted from a slave to a tenant farmer, or to a sharecropper. And his lot has not been that much better off. And, I <sup>aspire</sup> - as far as right now - 1964 - that in the South, we give serious thought to a land reform program. And if you look at the way these mass plantations have come into being - how it has been conniving between circuit and cliques, where Negroes probably have been taken for taxes. Where Negroes

have been charged smaller amounts for taxes, than should have been charged over the years - and they take the position that it's the owner of the land's responsibility to be sure that he is properly taxes, and after some fifty or sixty years, this great tax debt comes against the land and the Negro can't pay it. And, the land is confiscated.

Warren: Is this fairly common?

Henry: Fairly common in the growth of the large plantations in this area. In the South.

Warren: I see, yes, yes.

Henry: So although it appears to be in advocating land reform, taking from to give to others, but when we look at how come those that got, got, and those that do not have, have not got, it doesn't disturb my conscience, morality at all to advocate that we become seriously considerators of a land-reform program.

Warren: But - on a program with compensation, or without?

Henry: With compensation, with compensation, yes.

Warren: You would have been for compensation to the Southern land-holders in '65?

Henry: I don't really know.

Warren: That's Myrdal's big point, of course.

Henry: Yes, I don't really know. When I understand the amount of human labor for free that these plantation owners used, I don't

really know whether they were entitled to anything else. Maybe at that time they had received more than they really should have.

Warren: Myrdahl's point here is that there was a bankrupt economy and to leave it bankrupt as it was, in fact, was a contributing element to the present situation.

Henry: I think the big mistake we really made was <sup>re-</sup>moving the Northern troops too soon. I think that - I believe it was Rutherford Hayes, wasn't it, that made what we feel was a deal with the South - if you'll vote for me, I'll remove the Federal troops.

Warren: That's right. The big sellout of 1876.

Henry: Yes, and I think more than compensation for the land, the big error was to prematurely move the troops.

Warren: Eleven years after the War was over.

Henry: Yes.

Warren: I hear now and then, particularly in Mississippi, the notion that only by some sort of threat of violence will real progress take place toward social justice for the Negro.

Henry: Well, that all depends on what you mean by threat of violence. You see, any act that the Negro takes toward gaining his rights as a citizen, is considered a threat of violence by white communities. If it's going into church and espousing

the question of the right to vote in some communities, that provokes the white community to violence. If it's printing a handbill and passing it out in some communities - that's a threat to the tranquillity and peace and a threat to violence in some particular communities. So, this is - you would have to define, you know, exactly what is a threat to violence, and whether or not action guaranteed by the Constitution of the United States, the first amendment that gives us the right of freedom of assembly, and freedom of expression, can be construed as threats of violence.

Warren: Yes, I realize that. I was going a step farther - I'll have to change the tape first.

Henry: You mean we've been here a hour.

Warren: Yes, - I don't want to keep you up all night now. It's almost eleven o'clock.

Henry: OK.

Warren: Let's take a little piece of the next tape. All right? A little piece. This is going too well, I hate to stop it.