

ROBERT PENN WARREN BOX 6 TAPE #3 *Qarm* SARM HENRY FEBRUARY 10

... you know - the white community. I don't enjoy going down the street and hearing "There goes that son-of-a-bitch" - you know - I don't enjoy that. But I believe that trying to be free - if that's the part of the process, then - if there's to be trouble in my day, let it happen, so that after this is through then maybe things will be better.

RPW: I asked you before, but the tape wasn't on, how your wife has stood up under this. Will you answer it again for me on the tape?

SH: Well, Henry has stood this turmoil and difficulty remarkably well, and frankly, without her encouragement and support and understanding, it would be impossible for me to carry on, because I'm away from home really too much - more than any married man likes to be away from home. The telephone calls are - come almost on the hour every day - about - some kind of violence or vulgarities and obscenities, which no man would really want his wife to have to undergo and put up with, but the fact that she's able to ask questions, like - certainly you must be Christian or you wouldn't do that. When Rebecca, our daughter, answers the phone and a man says, "I just shot your daddy" - she just looks at the phone and says, "Aw, fellow, are you kidding". These kinds of expressions on the part of our family are really sustaining to me, and I'm grateful for it and I don't know whether I would be able to continue in this activity were it not for the fact that I have the complete support, ~~an~~ understanding and love of my family.

RPW: You have friends who come in to keep watch on the house at night, don't you?

SH: Yes - we started this after Medgar was killed, and there has been this encouragement from all over the nation that we do take some precaution, and because of the - because the psychological well-being and psychological satisfaction of my family is important to me in trying to continue in the field of civil rights, we have permitted our friends to come in every night, and there's some one in the house or around the house every night since the death of Medgar.

RPW: Are they armed?

SH: They are armed, yes, sir.

RPW: But since that time there have been no further trouble with - at your house?

SH: No, and I suppose to some degree it's due to the fact that, after Medgar was killed I went to the chief of police and revealed to him the source of information that I had about the threats that had been made against my life.

RPW: Yes.

SH: And of course he told me that he had heard several threats too, and that - he asked me if I wouldn't let him take out an insurance policy also. You see, he and I have been involved in a libel difficulty. At one time I was arrested on a morals charge.

RPW: Here in Clarksdale?

SH: No - in an adjoining county, which the chief of police of my

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city and the county prosecuting attorney of my county were the only interrogators, and I felt that they had had a part in concocting this fabrication, and I told them so. And they reacted by filing a libel suit against me, and the reason that Pearson - that Collins, the chief of police was asking for this life insurance policy was in the event that he won the suit he wanted to be able to collect his money, and of course I parried it as if I thought he was kidding, and then the next couple of days he sent an insurance agent over to the store to try to persuade me to let him take out this policy, and if I had submitted to it I know that I would probably have been dead the next day, because here there would have been no reason for somebody not wanting to be offered the chief of police to collect whatever policy he had been able to write.

RPW: That's asking for it.

SH: Well, yes. So I discussed with him - I asked him about the city police department supplying the protection, and he told me he didn't have the men to spare and he couldn't do it, so we hired a guard, and the next couple of nights he came down to the house, and then arrested my guard and took my guard, and -

RPW: The chief of police - of Clarksdale?

SH: Of Clarksdale, yes. But that only set off a furor in the community, and many people ~~informed~~ donated us now more guns than we had before, and of course there have been no more confiscations

of the weapons that we use, but every person that serves - goes into the house now is armed, and he can come and take the gun whenever he gets ready and there will be plenty more that will be available to us.

RPW: There's no legal basis for seizing these weapons?

SH: Well, he used the question of an unauthorized weapon. Now, I understand that - from our lawyers that the state does provide that a weapon in your possession must be registered with the authorities. Of course, hardly anybody complies with that.

RPW: Does that apply to shotguns and sporting rifles too?

SH: Well, it does not differentiate. It does not say. It simply says that firearms must be registered, and the gun that he took was not so registered, therefore, we did not become involved in litigation about it.

RPW: What hour of the night does the guard come on?

SH: He comes on around 11, somewhere in that area, and he's here all night long. Sometimes - it all depends on who's coming. Many of them come much earlier, and spend the evening looking at TV or - some of them come before I get here in the evening and go to bed and take a nap.

RPW: Then get up when you come in?

SH: Get up when I'm ready to go to bed, yes, sir.

RPW: It's a body of friends who simply take on this duty, then?

SH: Yes, sir.

RPW: Is that generally known in the community around the countryside?

SH: Well, it's pretty well known in this community. Now, particularly since Mr. Collins came out and arrested one of them one day. That got the word around.

RPW: Yes - that was a hired guard you said - the first one - is that right?

SH: Well, - he wasn't hired - he was volunteer.

RPW: Oh, a volunteer. I thought you said the first guard was hired. I hear varying interpretations of the Board of Registration matter. Some people say there's real apathy, real fatalism. Some say there's a certain amount of fear, and the other interpretations. What is the real - in your mind, then? - the problem?

SH: Well, the greatest cause of Negroes not registering I think can be analyzed by the Mississippi Civil Rights Committee's report of two years ago, when it gave as the greatest cause that Negroes don't go down to register is because of fear of failure of the examination that is to be taken.

RPW: That fear - not fear of reprisal?

SH: That's the first cause. The second cause was fear of reprisals. But the greatest cause was that they were afraid that they couldn't pass it, and the other causes were direct intimidation and the refusal of the clerks to permit them to take the test. If the failure and fear of failure of this examination is the greatest deterrent to Negroes or any people trying to register, it ought to

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be removed, whether the fear is real or imaginary. That should be no existence of fear to that extent in this country that remains without something being done to - by the state authorities or the federal government to insure the people that this fear need not exist.

RPW: Changing the subject again, I have a quote here which I will paraphrase without reading the whole thing to you from a Negro sociologist-historian, Dr. Hancock. He says, in brief, that the problem of color, the problem of race, is a social problem, and therefore is subject to the same considerations of adjustment and maladjustment that all problems of social change involve. In social change, he goes on to say, there is never an immediate solution, and never an absolute solution. Now -

SH: I think that there are imperfections in democracy, and I doubt if we will ever gain true perfection in democracy, but it can be improved a hell of a lot from what it is now.

RPW: All right - let's agree with that. He - my question, then - the next thing would be this - if this is a process that is never immediate - there's no immediate solution - there's always a question of adjustments in time - whether a long time or a short time, but in time - therefore, put against that the notion of freedom now which says out of time - immediately - on the same stroke - absolutism now - Caesar said that - what does it really say? How do you interpret it?

SH: Well, I interpret it this way - the freedoms that Negroes have

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been seeking go back to the year of 1865 - 1863 - and we have been patient, we have tried to take into consideration that this will not be an overnight accomplishment, but we think that after a hundred years of trying it's time for freedom now. We don't think that this is any abrupt request.

RPW: Well, now, assuming that it is overdue, assuming that it is time, the time has come and past - past due - the social process still remains, so it was not - suppose every legal bar were removed tomorrow morning automatically - the big Civil Rights Bill were passed with teeth - all the legal restrictions removed - the process would not be complete. What becomes of freedom now in this situation.

SH: Well, you see, the law will not make you love me, but it will stop you from lynching me, and that's what we've got to be concerned with about the law. The law itself is one of the greatest forces in social change that we can possibly have, and I think that my white brother owes me a deep debt of gratitude when I permit him to give me my rights piecemeal. They 're mine now - he's lucky that I don't grab them all right now. When I work for you for ten dollars a week, when Saturday comes I want my ten dollars - don't come talking about I'll get two-ninety later - and I think that's what the struggle and the cry for freedom now is all about. We have been in labor merely four hundred years, and we want our pay-day.

RPW: Now, let me say something to you that someone said to me the

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other day, that so long as there is substantial movement toward freedom, the now is in the concept of freedom as due - the process is in the implementation of this idea, hitting it out in time, but in a time that is - no - they - what is actually - what it promises - it is positive and continuous and accelerated.

SH: I can buy that. I can buy that - we're going to continue to apply whatever pressures we know how to apply, as long as there is the need to continue to apply them. The NAACP and other civil rights organizations would like to have gone out of business yesterday, but we will be in business as long as it takes and as long as is necessary. We aren't going to come to the point where we're going to become violent, we're going to try to overthrow the government, we're going to try to gain the freedoms that we know are ours and thrust the country - the image of the country in the eyes of the world into a state of degradation from which perhaps it will never - you know - come from. But when it comes to the question of slow down when you're going too fast - let's try this and not this. The day will never come again when there will be any quietus put on the freedom of -

RPW: In other words, the freedom now means - now as interpreted literally, as a constant, elevating effort -

SH: Right - right -

RPW: - and no naive belief that a stroke of a pen or a stroke of a law brings a mystic change tomorrow morning.

SH: That's true.



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RPW: In terms of the continuing, accelerated effort -

SH; Yes, sir.

(end of interview)

