

Mr. WARREN: This is Tape #2 of interview with Dr. King - continue. What about the meaning of Freedom Now - the slogan Freedom Now. We know in terms of process it's never now and it's never absolute. What about the relations between the historical process and the slogan?

Dr. King: Well, I think the slogan is a good one, and I think it really means that the Negro has reached the point of feeling that he should have freedom now. I don't think there's any illusion in the mind of anybody about the fact that you've got to observe historical process, you've got to think about the fact that this structural change cannot come over night. But we must work at it, and we must try to deal with it with such an urgency that we do have - we are challenged by the need for it now. And I think this is more of a challenge to work and realize the urgency of the moment than it is a belief that you can really get freedom within such a short period.

RPW: I sat in a group of students some months ago and asked this - that is, the question of social process. And a very bright boy, a senior in a good college, said, I understand about social process - it is within time - but he said I can't bear to bring myself to say it.

MLK: Well, I find - it is a problem, and we have lived so long with this idea, of people saying it takes time, and wait on time, that I find it very difficult to adjust to this. I mean, I get annoyed almost when I hear it, although I know it takes time. But

the people that use this argument have been people so often who really didn't want the change to come, and the gradualism for them meant a do-nothingism, you know, and a stand-stillism. So that it has been a revolt I think against the idea of a feeling on the part of some that you can just sit around and wait on time when actually time is neutral. It can be used either constructively or destructively.

RW: But some words have become symbolically charged with feelings of they can't even be used. Does it mean the same thing as other words?

MLK: Yes - yes - ~~not~~ exactly.

RPW: The word "gradual" has become emotionally charged - symbolically charged, so the word can't be used.

MLK: That's right - exactly.

RPW: Would you say historical process - the word's been cleaned up but it means the same thing.

MLK: It means the same identical thing. But all of the emotions, you know, surrounding gradual - gradualism, that - and this whole thing of waiting on time - it brings about an initial resentment from the Negro and is their lives in the white community.

RPW: Now, speaking of symbolisms like that - symbolic charges into things - I was talking a few weeks ago with a very able Negro attorney. And he suddenly said, we live in a society - he's a very violent, bitter man - very able - we live in a society where all the symbolism of the poetry I read, the Bible I read,

is charged with the white man's values - God's white robes, you know - the White Light of Hope - you know - all these - which are an affront to me, he said. I find myself schooling myself now to resist all the symbolism and invert it to myself.

MLK: Yes - well, I think this is - many Negroes go through this, and I think now probably more than ever before. My only hope is that this kind of reaction will not take us right back where we, you know, into the same thing we're trying to get out. There's always a danger that in a pressed group will seek to rise from a position of disadvantage to one of advantage, you see, thereby subverting justice, so that you end up substituting one tyranny for another. Now, I think our danger is that we can get so bitter that we revolt against everything white, and this becomes a very dangerous thing because it can lead to the kind of philosophy that you get in the Black Nationalist movements and the kind of philosophy that ends up preaching black supremacy as a way of counteracting white supremacy, and I just think this is - this would be bad for our total society. But I can well understand the kind of impatience and the psychological conditions that lead to this kind of reaction.

RFW: There's a special thing about this revolution that makes it unlike, as far as I can tell, any other. All previous revolutions have aimed at the liquidation of class or regime. This one does not aim at liquidation of a class or regime. It aims at something else. How would you define that aim, then?

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MLK: Well, I would say that this is a revolution to get in. It's very interesting - I think you're quite right that most revolutions - almost all revolutions have been centered on destroying something, you see, and that's been the center. Whereas in this revolution, the whole quest is for the Negro to get into the main stream of American life. He's - ~~is~~ it's a revolution calling upon the nation to live up to what is already there in an idealistic sense - I mean, in all of its creeds and all of its basic affirmations, but it's never lived up to it. So I think this is the difference. It is a revolution of rising expectations, and it is a revolution, not to liquidate the structure of America, but a revolution to get into the main stream of American life.

RPW: A revolution liquidating an idea - is that it?

MLK: That's right - to liquidate an idea which is out of harmony with the basic ~~idea~~ idea of the nation.

RPW: A new kind of revolution?

MLK: Yes, it's a revolution - it is a new kind of revolution.

RPW: Now, let me say it and you can say it correctly, or revise it - correct or revise this or - the problem may be - is this your problem - and people like yourself - to define this revolution in the new terms, to retain the element of hate and liquidation and exploit the element of hope - in other words, based on hope and hate together -
they're the dynamics - revolutionary change. Strange, then, you want to drive one horse and not two - unless you want to kill one of the horses.

MLK: And you're saying that -

RPW: Hate great dynamic in a revolution.

MLK: But what you're saying is that in this revolution you don't have this?

RPW: You have it psychologically, sure - it's human - the hate element is there. But it's a question of containing that or converting it to something else, because there's no legitimate object for it. can't liquidation.

MLK: Yes - well, I think you're quite right, and I think that this is a part of the job of the leadership in this revolution, you know, to keep that hope alive and yet keep this kind of - I guess the word hate here - the best way I would call it is - the best way to put it is to keep the kind of righteous indignation alive or the kind of healthy discontent alive that would keep the revolution moving on.

RPW: Without the personal focus?

MLK: Without the personal - yes - that's right.

RPW: Let me ask you one more question. How did you interpret the assaults on you in Harlem?

MLK: You mean the two - the stabbing and the -

RPW: Yes, and the throwing of things. These two experiences must have been a ghastly shock, of course, to anybody. But it's a special extra shock in your case.

MLK: Yes - well, the first one - I don't know if we'll ever know what the cause of this was, because here you had a demented mind

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who really didn't know why she was doing it - I really don't - it may be that she had been around some of the meetings of these groups in Harlem, Black Nationalist groups, that have me all the time as a favorite object of scorn, and hearing this over and over again she may have responded to it when I came to Harlem. Or it may be that she was just so confused that she would have done this to anybody whose name was in the news. We will never know. But now, on the other one, where they threw eggs and - I think that was really a result of the Black Nationalist groups, and a feeling - you know, they've heard all of these things about my being soft and my talking about love and the white man all the time - and I think a real feeling that this kind of ~~an~~ approach is far from - it's a cowardly approach, and they transfer that bitterness toward the white man to me, because they began to see - I mean, they began to feel that I'm saying to love this person that they have such a bitter attitude toward. And I think it grows right out of that. In fact, Malcolm X had a meeting the day before and he had talked about me a great deal and said - told them that I would be there the next night, and said, you ought to go over there and let old King know what you think about him. And he had said a great deal about non-violence, criticizing non-violence, and saying that I approved of Negro men and women being bitten by dogs and the fire hoses and I say go on and not defend yourself. So I think this kind of response grew out of the build-up and the - all of the talk about my being a sort of polished Uncle Tom.

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I mean, this is the kind of thing they say in these groups. Now, my feeling has always been, again, that they have never understood what I was saying - I'm saying, because - they confuse - they don't see that there's a great deal of difference between non-resistance to evil and non-violent resistance. And certainly I'm not saying that you sit down and patiently accept injustice. I'm talking about a very strong force, where you stand up with all your might against an evil system, and you're not a coward, you are resisting but you come to see that tactically as well as morally it is better to be non-violent. I can't see ~~anything~~ anything that - even if one didn't want to deal with the moral question - it would just be impractical for the Negro to talk about making his struggle violent.

RPW: On that point, of the - this Brinkley survey - imposed survey in Harlem came up with the astonishing fact that a large percentage of the population of Harlem do not think of the Negro as being a minority.

MLK: Is that so?

RPW: They don't even know it. Even though it's ~~known~~ factually been done and others feel it - emotionally they don't feel it because they ~~don't see so few white people around.~~ see so few white people around.

MLK: They never go out of Harlem.

RPW: So the tactical appeal, this just doesn't apply to them. You see, we're the majority. That's a dangerous fact, isn't it?

MLK: That's right - that's a dangerous fact, yes. And you see,

many people in Harlem never go out of Harlem, I mean, they've never even been downtown. And you can see how this bitterness can accumulate - here you see people crowded and hovered up in ghettos and slums, with no hope, you see. They see no way out. If they could, you know, look down a long corridor and see an exit sign they would feel a little better, but they see no sense of hope, and it's very easy for them - one talking about violence and hatred for the white man, to appeal to them. And I have never thought of this, but I think that this is quite true, that even if you talk to them about non-violence from a tactical point of view, they can't quite see it because they don't even know they're out-numbered, you see.

RPW: That's right - emotionally -

MLK: That's right - they can't grasp it.

RPW: Let me ask one more question. When you were assaulted - it's very hard I know to reconstruct one's own feelings - what did you feel - what were your first actual reactions of the - well, say the egg and so forth - not the mad woman, but the - can you reconstruct that? Was it different for you in an emotional way what you went through in that moment?

MLK: Yes, I remember my feelings very well. I - at first, this was a very - I guess I had a very depressing response, because I realized that these were my own people - these were Negroes throwing eggs at me, and I guess you do go through these moments when you begin to think about what you are going through and the sacrifices

and suffering that you face as a result of the movement, that your own people don't have an understanding and a seeking - not even an appreciation, and seeking to destroy your image at every point. But then, it was very interesting, I went right into church and I spoke and I started thinking, not so much about myself but about the very people, the society that made people respond like this. It was so interesting ~~xxxxxxxxxx~~ how I was able very quickly to get my mind off of myself and feeling sorry for myself and feeling re-~~jected~~ jected, and I started including them into the orbit of my thinking, that it's not enough to condemn them for doing this - engaging in this act, but what about the society, and what about the conditions that are still alive which made people act like this. And I got up and spoke and mentioned this, and the people were almost - they didn't - I told them about the experience - many of them in the church didn't know about it - I got up and told them, and they were - they didn't quite know how to respond when I said that - I told them what happened, and I said, but you know the thing that concerned me - and not so much the - I mean I feel sorry for them - I'm concerned about the fact that maybe all of us have contributed to this by not working harder to get rid of the conditions, the poverty, the social isolation, and all of the conditions that cause individuals to respond like this.

RPW: I have attended some of your meetings - I went to Bridgeport two weeks ago -

MLK: Oh, you were?

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RPW: Yes - and I was struck by one fact - it was a total middle class audience, wasn't it?

MLK: Yes, I think it was, by and large, yes.

RPW: By and large, there. Now you have - I have never seen you - except in that context, I have never seen you in a situation dealing with a mass audience, you see, of the uneducated and the poorly educated and the poor. I should like to see that some time.
(both talking together)

MLK: - going some time when we are in the city, having a direct action program, I will go in the pool rooms and many of the taverns and just have a session there where I speak to groups.

RPW: I know that's true. A friend of mine has been with you and seen you do it. I know it happens. I should like to see that some time.

(end of interview)