

Transcript of Taped Conversation
with DR. WILLIAM STUART NELSON of
HOWARD UNIVERSITY
March 3, 1964 - Tape #1

MR. WARREN: This is a conversation with Dr. William Stuart Nelson of Howard University, March 3rd, Tape 1

DR. NELSON: You might be interested to know the genesis of this trip to Africa.

MR. WARREN: I should be interested, yes.

DR. NELSON: In April of 1963, The American Society of African Culture (AMSAC) held a three day conference at Howard University under the title "Southern Africa in Transition." Its aim was to focus wide attention on the very complex and difficult problems faced by the people struggling for freedom in this area. It hoped to promote an understanding of the desires and plans for a southern Africa in which all the people might share equally in the responsibilities and the privileges of self-government.

At this conference I met Ndabaningi Sithole, National Chairman of the Zimbabwe African Peoples National Union, who had come to the conference from Dar es Salaam, Tanganyika, where he was in exile from Southern Rhodesia. You have doubtless noticed that Mr. Sithole is in the current news occasioned by the coming to power in Southern Rhodesia recently of the racist Ian Douglas Smith. Mr. Sithole's view of non-violence, publicly expressed in Washington, was that it is useful only against one who has a conscience. Otherwise, one is warranted in using violence. Following a discussion between us, in which basic differences of views on non-violence were apparent, Mr. Sithole suggested that I come to Dar es Salaam for a discussion with him and his colleagues there.

I did go to Dar es Salaam in August of last year to find that Mr. Sithole had returned to Southern Rhodesia only to be placed under arrest.

Strangely enough, however, upon my arrival in Southern Rhodesia I met Mr. Sithole in Salisbury at the home of Dr. Paul Geren, the American Consul General to the Federation of Northern Rhodesia, Southern Rhodesia, and Nyasaland. That evening Dr. Geren's guests engaged in a long after-dinner discussion of the pros and cons of non-violence.

Upon leaving Salisbury, I noticed in the press the report of a plea by Mr. Sithole that Africans array themselves on the side of non-violence. Since returning home, I have heard that a friend of mine of many years, who lingered in Salisbury after I left, has described Mr. Sithole as promoting vigorously the principles of non-violence in the Federation of Northern Rhodesia, Southern Rhodesia, and Nyasaland.

My trip to Africa had as its purpose, not simply to meet Mr. Sithole and his friends but to explore generally the temper among Africans as to the possibilities of using non-violence to overcome their disabilities at the hands of the rulers of South Africa, the Portuguese possessions, and Southern Rhodesia. In my visits to eleven countries I was able to talk with such leaders as Mr. Nyerere, Mr. Kaunda and Mr. Nkruma, all heads or prospective heads of states, and a large number of African cabinet members, educators, and others concerning their attitudes and that of their followers toward the best way to meet the threats from the enemies of the freedom of Africans. From these talks I concluded that there is not much sentiment in favor of non-violence in Africa under the present circumstances. This I can understand from what I saw in Johannesburg and heard in Southern Rhodesia. On all this I hope to have more to say in time.

MR. WARREN: On the question of non-violence, may I read you a little passage from Dr. Kenneth Clark on the subject of Dr. King, one that you may have encountered already: "On the surface, King's philosophy appears to reflect health and stability, while black nationalists portray pathology and instability. A deep

analysis, however, might reveal that there is also an unrealistic, if not pathological, basis in King's doctrine -- the natural reactions to injustice, oppression, humiliation, bitterness and resentment. The form which such bitterness takes need not be overtly violent, but the corrosion of the spirit seems inevitable. It would seem, therefore, that any demand that the victims of oppression be required to love those who oppress them places an additional, an intolerable burden upon them." That passage I've found of interest. How do you respond to it?

DR. NELSON: Surely the demand that we love our enemy does place a heavy burden upon the best of men. The fact is that most great moral and religious insights place unwelcome demands upon us. But this is the price of getting rid of the brute in us and of exorcising it in others. It is important, of course, to know what we mean by love in the religious sense. In the simplest terms it means, at least for me, making the welfare of another person as important to one as his own welfare. If this is difficult it is also the loftiest insight of our heritage. Furthermore, it is testimony to the belief that even in the brutish man there is, deep down in him, something better. The secret of making the world better is to evoke that something. If love is the means, as I believe it is, surely to call its use unrealistic, if not pathological, is to condemn the race to an endless round of tit for tat, of violence in answer to violence. On the other hand, the doctrine which Martin Luther King preaches is that of the most persuasive and enduring of prophets and seers -- of the spokesmen in the Hindu Vedas and Upanishads; of Buddha, Jesus, Tolstoy, Gandhi.

MR. WARREN: In other words (may I interrupt a second), by Dr. Clarke's rendering, you are dealing with this other part where the aggression and resentment is short-circuited and you get effects on the personality to bear. But you are saying, just to be sure I understand you, I'll say it back: Another aspect of man's

nature which can be actually developed by this discipline. Is that it?

DR. NELSON: I am saying that inherent in man is the possibility of rising above the beast which is surely in him. We are all both human and animal. You and I could engage here and now in a brawl and a fight if we permitted ourselves to, if our personal histories had been different from what they are. At the same time, however deeply one may have offended the other, we ~~can~~^{could} embrace each other, sacrifice for each other, give our lives for each other. This means, then, that at least one of us must have appealed to what he believed was good in the other in the hope that the other would somehow respond, and that the offense would never be repeated. I am saying that there is this possibility in us as well as the manifestations of the brute.

MR. WARREN: Then you don't believe that a man without a potential conscience exists, except in the case of pathological cases, is that it?

DR. NELSON: I believe we are warranted in acting as if that explanation were undeniably true.

MR. WARREN: In Mississippi I encountered every stripe of opinion, of course, on this matter. Here's a place of crisis and where physical violence is always a possibility, every day it's a possibility. At the riot in Jackson -- at Jackson College a few weeks ago, in the street there, there was a great chance of a real blow-up which was headed off, partially at least through the efforts of Mr. Evers who went among the students and got them back, tried to quiet them and get them off the street. (I didn't see this; this was all reported to me.) Now, some of the younger people I've talked to deplored this effort to break the -- to get the crowd off the street. They said that all right, we can have a crisis, we need one, in violence, and maybe the guard -- the nationalized guard, and then we have a showdown. This will be awfully unpleasant but it's a Machiavellian tactics but the only thing that will break the deadlock. From that extreme

position on up to the position you have outlined, all sorts of scalings down, this line when up against a point of real physical violence. The assumption there is no conscience in the Jackson College, you know. But here's something that puzzled me a great deal. Mr. Evers, in his conversation, had said: "Bloodshed solves nothing. Birmingham, with its disastrous phase, and things of that sort, do you see, that aligned with non-violence. Five days later, on the 17th of February in Nashville, he made a speech advocating non-selective reprisals. He said, "Reporter, write this down: 'If a church is bombed with children, we shall bomb a church with children. If a Negro is shot, we will shoot a white man -- not selectively, just a white man, children either way is easiest.'" This is very puzzling, to see this man change his whole view in five days, and I've written and asked him if he could somehow clarify what happened in his mind during that period. I haven't yet heard from him. But it's a very strange fact, this sudden shift, some deep emotional shift during that five days.

DR. NELSON: Mr. Warren, that isn't at all strange to me. Men are plunged into this struggle not on the basis of long thinking and profound conviction. They are gathered up in a movement which up to this point has succeeded pretty well. They sense that there is something good in it. Immediately, however, when it fails to work, when the one against whom it is directed responds brutally, they lose faith in its workability and turn to what society on the whole has always turned to: reprisal. I am not surprised at all. The wonder is that more do not so act in the beginning, considering the history of the racial struggle.

MR. WARREN: That's the wonder.

DR. NELSON: That is the wonder; that is the miracle.

MR. WARREN: Mrs. Richardson had a comment on this episode (by the way, I wanted to report that I had real admiration, you see, for Mr. Evers. This is not, you know -- I'm trying to define --

DR. NELSON: Oh, I understand perfectly.

MR. WARREN: About rapport I felt, at least. Anyway, Mrs. Richardson said, "No, this is a mistake to get them back on the campus and leave them." She said, "You have to go in," she said, "Go in, talk with them, get the violence out of the kids who are about ready to go wild. Pray, sing, and say now we're going right back on a non-violent basis, so that the people would not think they were afraid and also they would not be bottled or feel frustrated. So go back, and this time we're going in an hour later or two hours later, and we'll march out again, and this time with non-violence as a program. She said if you let it cool off for weeks and days, something happens inside. It festers. This is her analysis of that situation.

DR. NELSON: Yes, I think something like that is right. A person has to be brought along by stages. Even so, when the particular episode is over, he may still take the road of reprisal. On the other hand, in the process there are going to be some converts or at least a modification of the views of these participants toward life, as to how best to get wrongs removed. They will have seen some minor miracles, you know, if they have got deeply involved in the movement.

MR. WARREN: Dr. Clark goes on (I may have the quotation here, in another -- it's not here) that many white people admire Dr. King because he lulls them into the fond hope that the Negro will not resent that this is a way of perpetuating the notion of the Uncle Tom equally Negro, among whites, and this accounts, in part, at least, for the admiration that many white people feel for Dr. King. How much sense does that make to you?

DR. NELSON: I would not be surprised if many white people choose him over some leader who is on the edge of force and whose temper and language are generally violent. On the contrary I would say that a far greater number -- and comparisons are always dangerous where the facts are not available -- I would say that many

people, most, perhaps, have responded to Dr. King because they sense something deep and good and workable in what he has done. After all, a majority of the people profess to be religious or at least have some religious background. It is difficult to get completely away from such a background. They respond instinctively in respect, even perhaps in admiration, to acts of restraint and sacrifice coupled with evident courage. They see something in this behavior and faith which transcends their own capabilities. They get a view of the best in man. They see in King what their religion has taught them is right but what they have been unable to express in their own lives, and what they rarely see in the behavior of most men, even most leaders.

MR. WARREN: Dr. Clark says or strongly implies, that this movement which has worked in the South, you see, he admits, to some extent, would not work in the North. I presume because the religious background of the Negro in the North is less immediate than is the south, that the religious basis in the South is not in the North, and an appeal to non-violence on his terms would be therefore weaker in the North.

DR. NELSON: I believe myself that the non-violent movement as practiced in the South would face greater difficulties in the North. I can think of no better way to describe the difference between the religious background of the Negro in the South as against that in the North than that it is, as you suggest, more "immediate." It needs to be remembered that genuine non-violence is religious in essence. There is no question but that in the great urban centers of the North religion faces greater competition than in the South. There is, of course, no necessary conflict between urban sophistication and religion. On the contrary, urban sophistication profits by religion provided the religion is also sophisticated. It takes, however, a lot of this kind of religion to go around in the big cities. For many years Northern ministers have complained that newcomers from the South "stray away from God."

But quite apart from religion, Northern Negroes generally differ from Southern Negroes. Their taste for freedom has been sharpened. Fear no longer haunts them as in the South. Court decisions against them are not so consistently made in advance. They can better afford the risks of direct action. Non-violence, under these circumstances, faces greater difficulties. I hasten to say, however, that this should certainly not discourage efforts to develop strong non-violent movements in the North. To permit this to happen is to admit the defeat of the movement's success in America.

MR. WARREN: There are so many things you have started there, I hesitate to take just one, but I'm going to take one that's implied in how we started this topic a moment ago. In relation to this comparison of North and South, how do you account for the fact that suddenly, in a matter of just a few years, the leadership of the Negro movement's been largely southern?

DR. NELSON: First, the race problem is more acute in the South. Second, Martin Luther King happened to be in the South. Why Mrs. Rosa Parks, who refused to give up her bus seat, and Dr. King happened to live in the same city is one of the mysteries which men cannot explain. Dr. King makes an extraordinary picture -- of religious parentage, born and brought to early manhood in the South ---

MR. WARREN: His winters at Atlanta ---

DR. NELSON: Yes, at Morehouse College, where he first read Thoreau. It was in the North, however, that he read deeply in philosophy and religion, that he was stirred to broaden his knowledge of Gandhi by reading everything that he could find out about him. He returned to the South; his house was bombed; a crowd threatening violence gathered outside. He brought to bear on that situation the religious insight and power born of this total experience. This, in my judgment, was an extraordinary linking of events.

MR. WARREN: But he is one among many of these leaders. I mean there are dozens and dozens in Survey, and he autographed an article on this subject, this question

arises: Did they start calling you names, this massive percentage of the new leadership which is from the South? There are varying --there are various interpretations of this.

DR. NELSON: I do not find great difficulty in understanding the springing up so swiftly of many Negro leaders of the non-violent movement in the South. First, the problem of racial injustice is massive there. It is everywhere and in the most irritating forms. Negro ministers, increasingly well trained, have a large following. Some twenty-four hours after Mrs. Rosa Parks was arrested in Montgomery for failing to give up her seat to a white passenger, Negro leaders assembled in a church to plan their protests and most of them were ministers. When the Montgomery Improvement Association was formed, four of the six officers were ministers. The church was the center of a weekly assembly which proved a crucial factor in the sustaining of morale. Many such people in the North who would respond have their religious roots in the South. Life in the Northern cities is different, more sophisticated on the whole, more "worldly," as one says. Thus, in Montgomery, it could be expected that the kind of message Dr. King brought would find a greater response. The pattern of events, then, is logical. The extraordinary and fortunate combination was the presence in this Southern city of a Southern-born man, deeply religious, highly trained in philosophy and theology, who could translate this knowledge into fervent terms that people would understand and feel deeply. Right beside him and close behind him there appeared numerous other leaders who had similar orientation, if not always quite so deep. That is the miracle, if we choose to use that word loosely.

MR. WARREN: I was talking with Ralph Ellison about this point and Ralph is a -- born in Oklahoma but educated in the South, in Alabama, Tuskegee, and knows the South very well. His line of thought ran something like this: It's parallel to the notion that you hear sometimes of the benefit the marginal psychological benefit of segregation in annealing a character, in toughening character, which

in some of the surveys has been a frequent response made by leaders, southern leaders or southern-born leaders. And it's said by Mr. Farmer. among others, you know what he said is segregation toughened me. He said it not only made me doubt . . . but it gave me the will to use them. And Ralph takes the view that part of this, one element in the development of southern leadership was what you were saying, I guess, and I wanted to tell it in different terms, was the pressure of immediate segregation itself, it toughened a body of leaders, gave them the will to resist, to deal with. Where the more vague humiliations and more vague repressions in the North tended to beat off. The issue is not joined clearly. And that actually that segregation had proved a kind of breeding ground in the last generation, for leadership.

DR. NELSON: That, I think, is true. At the same time the almost totally repressive aspect of segregation in the South has also robbed certain Negroes of the power to resist, either overtly or subjectively. I was born in Kentucky ---

MR. WARREN: Yes, I know you were.

DR. NELSON: But I spent nine adult years in other parts of the South, including the deep South. One great disappointment was to discover the extent to which many Negroes were not deeply troubled by what they had to suffer.

MR. WARREN: Do you think, that one of the problems has been the fact that the Negro accepted the white evaluation of the Negro in some deep way?

DR. NELSON: Often.

MR. WARREN: Often.

DR. NELSON: But, remember, we are dealing with centuries of repression and denigration. My second observation is that for many Negroes from slave times onward, repression has bred the deepest resentment, to which the slave insurrections and the enormous number of slave runaways testify. The numbers in these classes have grown. Beneath outward, deferential deportment there is often boiling resentment.

MR. WARREN: I don't know how I could generalize about this, but in my conversations I begin to see a pattern something of this sort: A mother or a father, so far most often a father in the background, who, though the father may have been, say, poor and illiterate or semi-literate, would say to the son: "Look, don't believe what they say about you." Some image of the father would give the boy, that would toughen him to self-respect and refuse the white man's stereotype of the Negro. I don't know how far to push this, but this is certainly the tale told by more than one person I've talked to, which is that there's a man in the background, sometimes a mother, but usually it's a father who says this.

DR. NELSON: To this I would say that there is always in the Negro the possibility of deepest self-respect provided there is the evocator. If, however, there is none -- there is no mother, father, teacher, or minister who can make him believe in himself -- he can easily yield to the old temptation of the accepting the conventional low estimate. It is different when there comes along a friend or a prophet and says: "Move out of this. Be a man."

MR. WARREN: Who gives the person a new sense of identity, a new sense of his role, is that the * * *

DR. NELSON: It is the one who enables him to identify himself with something other than that with which he has been habitually identified.

MR. WARREN: The white man's view of him.

DR. NELSON: Precisely. He is a laborer and a full adult and he is habitually called "boy." He has never been called by his last name by a white man in his life. It requires a major operation to alter a person's view of himself once he has been subjected all of his years to this kind of degrading view of himself. Now when a Martin Luther King or a Shuttlesworth or a James Farmer comes along and says: "God made you a man; Jesus Christ died for you; you are a free American; you fought for your country; get out of this," or something like that -- it makes

a difference. He feels like the two women in the South whose home was shot into because they attended an education meeting on voter registration. One of them you recall said: "Yes, I'm gonna vote. I ain't affeared any mo "; and the other: "Yes, bless Jesus, I'm gonna vote."

MR. WARREN: And to resist the resentment may lead the way to random violence or criminality or psychic disorder, the resentment gets short-circuited and is not constructive, in that case, is that it?

DR. NELSON: There is in every individual something of the brute. I'm saying the brute in . . .

MR. WARREN: I understand.

DR. NELSON: I mean the kind of brute that is in all of us when we "get mad" and swear or slap or shout. If there is no appeal to the other side of us, this side will take over because it's deep and strong in us and is there every minute and hour of the day. If there is nothing to evoke the finer side of us, which is also always there, this uglier side will prevail.

MR. WARREN: I have just a slight acquaintance with, who's a Negro, made a remark to me that the new movement is a shift from a matriarchal society among Negroes, to a patriarchal society among Negroes, that "the father has returned," as he put it. I don't know how he would argue this, there's some probability of specificity to it, anyway, I should think.

DR. NELSON: I believe myself that the imbalance represented by the past matriarchal influence upon Negro life is being arrested. When the home was the greatest positive center of influence upon the new generation, the mother was the natural center of power, especially when the man was gone or when there had never been one -- in the home. Now, the family is more stable; the man is more often there. More important, however, is the fact that the Negro man is gaining in education, position, power, and thus in respect. His image in the child's mind

is increasingly more powerful and positive than in the past. At the same time, the mother remains a potent factor, for the Negro elite is still comparatively small. Among the masses, family life is still too unstable, a fact which places the burden of child raising upon the mother (and, incidentally, upon the grandmother) and thus increases the maternal influence. The mother still plays an important role in holding the Negro society together even if it is not as great relatively as in the past.

MR. WARREN: And this goes back into the slave situation where the father might be sold off or the mother sold off, with child, so that the continuity was necessarily with the mother.

DR. NELSON: Often the child knew no father.

MR. WARREN: Often knew no --

DR. NELSON: Often knew no father. Frederick Douglass and Booker T. Washington are classic instances of this. But the mother was there.

MR. WARREN: I'm certain you have read Faulkner's "The Sound and the Fury." Do you remember the figure of -- Dilsey in there? That figure of this Negro woman who is the repository of both toughness and human charity for black and white all around her, is now sometimes being attacked as simply the white man's fantasy. Faulkner wants to feel what a nice mammy Dilsey was, rather than seeing her as a figure of moral force and this moral center of the whole book. This swing is now taking place. Some Negroes attack Dilsey, so this is just Aunt Jemima sort of figure, that kind of tone about it. Do you have a reaction to that situation in Faulkner's book, or have you read it recently enough to -- impression?

DR. NELSON: One who has read The Sound and the Fury can never forget Dilsey. Whoever has lived in the deep South would recognize Dilsey, the matriarch in her own family and potentially a dominant figure in any family, despite her servant status. This would be a family where weakness predominates as in the case of

Faulkner's Compson family. Of course, Dilsey knew her role as a Negro servant, what to say, when and how to say it in order to dominate and not to offend to dominate and still play the servant's role, the Negro's role. She was living testimony to the strength possible in the untutored Negro servant in the presence of the moral disintegration of Southern aristocracy. Dilsey not only revealed strength of character but the capacity as well for philosophic insight. The story reveals, also the humiliating role which a decaying society can force upon some who serve it.

MR. WARREN: Sure, it has to be, you can't prove these things in themselves, can we? Let me switch the topic a little bit. Let me read you a quotation. This is from Rose, you know. ^{Myrdal's?} Arnold Rose, Vidal's collaborator? It's Negro history, a teacher of Negro history and the Negro history movement: "The whole tendency of the Negro history of the Negro movement, not as history but as propaganda, is to encourage the average Negro to escape reality, the actual achievements and the actual failures of the present. Although the movement consciously tends to build race pride, it may also cause Negroes, unconsciously, to recognize that group pride is built partly on delusion and therefore in the end may result in devaluation of themselves or being forced to resort to some self-deception." Now we can't assess it, I'm sure, statistically. It is a question of whether there is a germ of truth in this apprehension.

DR. NELSON: The answer to this question must be mixed. Any human group which is placed unfairly on the defensive is driven to make the most of every fact in its favor and, at times, to explain weaknesses in terms of social situations from which there is no escape. This has happened in a measure in the Negro community, not that there is an absence also of a high degree of self-criticism within the group. When one considers the defensive position in which Negroes are placed, it is remarkable the measure of objectivity one finds in the historical and sociological studies of Negroes by such Negro writers as Woodson, Logan, Wesley, Franklin, Frazier, and others. These are men of the highest scholarly training and ability

and with a high sense of responsibility to their craft. We might be reminded, in passing, that most efforts to write group or national histories by members of these groups are subject to the criticism that the writers have presented an unduly favorable interpretation of their material. The tragedy of social injustice is that it arrays groups of men against one another and robs them of objectivity in assessing themselves and those opposing them. The great need is a sense of community, a wider brotherhood which permits and even encourages objectivity. The fact, of course, is that in America men are greatly mixed in matters of economic status, religion, and race. Certainly Negroes are greatly mixed. There is, then, all the more reason for a sense of community.

MR. WARREN: What is the figure? 75% at least of the Americans that are -- at least of the Americans in quotes, Negroes, only a small -- have something else, anyway.

DR. NELSON: Negroes, of course, do constitute what may be called a community drawn together in part by racial heritage but also by common suffering because of segregation, contempt, deprivation -- economic, political, social -- and also, fortunately, by unusual achievement in spite of handicaps.

MR. WARREN: And find the Negro history. There's so much of achievement, Negro achievement.

DR. NELSON: What Negroes want and should want without denying their racial heritage, is to escape the stereotype or, to be more positive, to be considered on their merits. This is made difficult, of course, by the need to unite against a part of the larger society which is united against us. This is the Negroes' dilemma - to want identification with the larger society but at the same time to be driven to unity along lines of race and common suffering.

MR. WARREN: I suppose one part of the significance of that is that the attacks by the hate literature, such as *The Thunderbolt* I saw yesterday, of the National (?) Nashville State Rights Party, devoted largely to attacking the notion that

the Negro had a history. The fact that this group feels it necessary to attack that fact or to attack who are Negro heroes are I read yesterday one article that I read yesterday say the irony.

Well, this -- the other side of the coin is to pressure, to affirm this. Now Rose's point, I suppose, ultimately directed at some sort of race chauvinism that may come out of this

DR. NELSON: Which is a danger. Any kind of chauvinism is bad, and a danger. That, of course, is the choice which every oppressed minority faces. This explains so much of the perpetuation of group hatreds in the history of the human race.

MR. WARREN: The Southern -- the Southerners have been faced with it; they have created -- they have lived in a history since 1865, which has been partly to fulfill the need for identity and for achievement. The myth of the Old South insofar as there is a myth, and it's a big myth, there's really a big myth there, all right, fulfills the same need for the Southerner, that in this way that Negro History Week forms for the Negro. Does that make sense?

DR. NELSON: It is a great pity that men often try to break their bonds by increasing them. The South cannot free itself by the perpetuation of a myth. As to Negro History Week -- I would say that it is not analagous to the Southerners' effort to defend the "myth" of their past. Negro History Week, as I have known and participated in it, has tried to emphasize the positive aspects of the Negro's life and, I believe, on the whole without exaggeration. A Negro History Week would not, of course, be necessary if Negroes were being fairly judged. They must take some step to correct the erroneous accounts daily given of their past and of their abilities.

MR. WARREN: The white Southerner

DR. NELSON: The white Southerner, yes. He has done himself a great disservice by identifying himself as a Southerner when he should have been trying to break that bond and become an American, a citizen of the world, and to become emancipated.

MR. WARREN: That -- let's pursue that a moment, this speculation. We say that the Negro has suffered from a loss of a sense of identity. He's had to accept the white man's version of himself, has not been able to affirm his identity as a man and as a Negro man, these two things in one package. So his liability has been the loss of a cultural continuity, the loss of identity. Take the ordinary white Southerner, now, confronted by the situation as of this moment, or earlier, is it possible that part of his resistance to change is based on a fear of a loss of cultural identity? Loss of his identity as quote Southerner, and in a mistaken way he has tied the segregation to this whole notion of identity, his identity in a symbolic way rather than in a literal way. He feels that he must defend segregation in order to be himself; in sum to defend his culture, to defend his identity in a culture, but if you could distinguish these elements for any rational man, he would say what was I thinking about there? There is a deep need for identity, a deep need for cultural continuity is somehow staked on segregation, for many Southerners.

DR. NELSON: Yes, and that is very sad.

MR. WARREN: Does this make sense to you?

DR. NELSON: Yes. I think it's true and I think it's one of the saddest facts in American history -- that a great and potentially a much greater part of our country, has lost its opportunity to break away from the weakness of its past and assert its strengths. What gadder commentary can be made on a people than that it has become united around the most uncomplimentary aspect of itself?

MR. WARREN: I suppose you are answering before I asked the question. I was going to read a passage from Dr. DuBois on the question of a split in the Negro's psyche on this very matter. I'm sure you know his arguments so I won't read the passages, but for the record here: "The division on this basis, the pull toward identity as Negro, the pull toward the African mystique, even the pull toward a cultural continuity to be elaborated and as Negro, this over against the pull to

enter Western European, American culture, to enter that society and perhaps be lost in that society with the personal heritage and the racial heritage, cultural and biological, lost and absorbed, gone." What sense this split -- or as he puts it, in the soul? That, I gather, doesn't make much, or isn't a question for you there against what you say, or am I misinterpreting what you said?

DR. NELSON: I want to defend everything of good that I can possibly find in my group or racial past. This, I think, every man has a right to do.

MR. WARREN: Yes, I know.

DR. NELSON: Not that he should try to inflate his ego . . .

MR. WARREN: I understand.

DR. NELSON: Yet he has the right, even the obligation, to look for the best in his past without, of course, ignoring or defending the indefensible should that exist also. He has the obligation also to make use of that past in the present insofar as it is relevant, and to encourage society as a whole to make use of it.

MR. WARREN: You mean it's part of the human story, then.

DR. NELSON: It becomes a part of mankind. No human group can pretend to have had past virtues in isolation. And, most certainly, such a group should want any distinctive virtues it possesses to become a part, an increasing part, of human history.

MR. WARREN: For some Negroes and for some whites, the problem is really acute, though with some southern whites it's acute, how they keep their identity and remain southerners without repudiating something of value, impiously repudiating something, how can they still act, then, freely, or be American or take other values in their local prejudices?

END OF TAPE #1