

Mr. WARREN: This is Tape #2 of the interview with Reverend Wyatt T. Walker - proceed. We were talking about Faulkner and homogeneity, and if this meant some vision of reconciliation after the present conflict, then some special relationship based on a common history, how would you respond to that notion?

WW: I have said this at different times, and I think I have heard the others <sup>who have</sup> ~~known~~/worked with us in the revolution - in our revolution say so - that we believe that the South is going to be a better place to live in for Negroes and whites than perhaps the North. Even though we are passing through a period which is very tenuous and in a sense very costly emotionally to both whites and Negroes, because of the sharp social changes being demanded and forced, but when, after a period of reconciliation, that because of the - and maybe this is - if I'm following your guess at what Faulkner meant - if his projection was that Negroes and whites would live together in a warmer relationship than they would anywhere else because of their common bond, I think this is generally true. This is what I think. I think so because - well, a kind of sentimentality of the South and the ease with which relationships are - have been built, the fact that white children were reared by Negro wet mothers, that perhaps both of us were refined in the cauldrons of the Civil War and Reconstruction and then the non-violent revolution - that maybe because of that, out of our common geographical history - and this is what I was saying poorly before -

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I just misinterpreted it, as I recall, what Faulner said about this idea of homogeneity - I was going the other way and trying to interpret your guess at it - I could agree very strongly that I think there will be a unique relationship - the Negroes and the whites in the South will enjoy after the reconciliation of the revolution than is presently or can be hoped for to be enjoyed by Negroes and whites in the North. I think the level of interpersonal relationships is closer than it could ever be in the North.

RPW: You referred to reconstruction - do you remember Muirdahl's sketch of what would have been his recommendation for policy -

WW: You mean the swift change?

RPW: No, after the Civil War. He gave a five or six point policy that he thought would have saved us the last hundred years of race troubles. The policy runs like this - first, for compensation to Southern slaveholders for emancipating slaves. Two, expropriation of plantations as needed, but payment for the land taken. Three, the sale of land to landless freedman and landless whites - sale, not gift - over a long period of time, with education and some supervision during this period - transition - and other details too. Do you feel any emotional reaction to the fact that a payment was proposed to the slaveholders for the emancipated slaves?

WW: No, I wouldn't have any at all, because I guess I'm enough businessman and practical headed enough as a student of history to know that the Negro slave represented dollars and cents to an economy which was being crippled by the dissolution of slavery.



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Now, I suppose it would be federally subsidized -

RPW: Yes, that's what - U.S. government tax money.

WW: But I would have no emotional response whatsoever, and I don't know just why other than what I said.

RPW: Now, many people - many Negroes do have a violent response to that - people you know - some people you know.

WW: It wouldn't bother me at all.

RPW: They just say no, this is compounding a sin. And actually have a violent emotional response immediately.

WW: How do they say it's compounding a sin?

RPW: By paying the man who -

WW: As small as the investment might have been - maybe he didn't pay anything for the slaves - but at least he had a sense of housing, as poorly as it was, and fed them, and his whole economic venture depended upon the exploitation of free labor. I mean, there were some dollar and cents involved, whether it was right or wrong, and as I say at this point I'm a pragmatist.

RPW: Well, you answered my question.

WW: Yes, and further than that, if I may push the point, though this may - I don't know whether this would have been the panacea, but I think this would have been far better than what they did do.

RPW: Well, now, we can't - I don't think it would have been possible. You couldn't have expected the Northern taxpayer to say we're going to put two billion dollars in compensating Southern slaveholders we were fighting last week. That's not probable - not likely. But we have to take the big if it could have been done

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and it would have had some ---

WW: I think it would have probably wrangled a hundred years to get that answered in some form.

RPW: We've had a hundred years anyway, though. On the matter of history, let me ask you, Mr. Walker, what your estimate of and feeling about Lincoln -

WW: To me, Lincoln was - I guess I could say, from where I stand, the greatest president we had. And I am aware of some of his earlier statements on the slave question, but I am convinced as I read different works and different historians' assessment of him, and within the context of what doing away with the slave system meant to the nation - you know, it could have been that this nation might have gone down the drain, and I think Abraham Lincoln took a dangerous risk solely - almost solely on a moral principle. Now, I - a lot of people don't agree with me on this. They say he was forced to do it - I don't think he was forced.

RPW: He was a racist, apparently. You have, even after -

WW: He was a racist in a day when it was perfectly acceptable and Christian to be a racist.

RPW: That's the point I'm getting at. Now, you are taking the view of a reader of history who realizes that things change and the context changes. There are many people who think these things are absolute, and reject Lincoln because of these elements in his career.

WW: I think you would have to say he was a racist in terms that perhaps he accommodated slavery intellectually, but not a racist -



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RPW: He segregation - he said so.

WW: At one stage of his career, he did.

RPW: After emancipation he said this - straight segregationist statements.

WW: But not a racist within the context or the connotation of what racist means today, I don't think.

RPW: A hundred years make a difference in general climate anyway. That is, you think there has been - and I gather from what you say, a fundamental change in the whole attitude toward race from the time of Lincoln to our time? A man like Lincoln who has racist attitudes -

WW: I don't know - I'd have to think about that a little bit as to whether I - you're asking whether I think the concept of race has changed in the hundred years since Lincoln?

RPW: Yes - whether the notion of inferior races and superior races has been modified.

WW: Oh, yes - yes - I would say that very readily.

RPW: What has modified that notion?

WW: I think to a great degree anthropological studies. I don't think we have erased all of the emotional loyalty to the concept of race - and you see, prejudice in a sense is a religion of its own, of its own kind, and man's nature is such that the last things he gives up - I think the last two bastions of change to which he will submit, is that of his religion and that of his personal prejudices.

And religion is last. And of course our Angle-Saxon Protestant concept of race was infused with racism, see. Well, even until recent days, here in the South, you know. There have been so many apologists - still some exist. Billy James Harkness is one, who have a rationale worked out for race within the context of the Christian church. There are some Southern white Baptists who feel logically - sincerely believe that when Jesus, within the frame of reference of our Protestant theology, spoke of redemption and salvation, that he never really had the Negro in mind, you know. The Negro was not an entity then, and so Jesus wasn't talking about us, you know - or them, as he would describe it. And so he has a kind of a mental bloc - almost a psychic trauma, when he sings the hymns of the Christian church and reads the text of the New Testament - he has a bloc when he has to be confronted with the fact that this may mean black folks too, you see.

RPW: You were saying the clinging to religion and the clinging to prejudice - these things can be symptoms of a clinging to identity, can't they? Clinging to religion, clinging to prejudice, is a clinging sometimes to identity, isn't it? closest

WW: That's right. It's a subjective vehicle by which we enlarge our identity, we enlarge it through our religious posture -

RPW: Or even know our identities.

WW: Yes - yes.

RPW: Now I'm getting something like this - which is a matter of speculation - and I want to see how you feel about it - the Southern



white man is a man in one way in a situation parallel to that of the American Negro. He is a man - he's been having identity trouble. That is, he is on one hand a Southerner with a special history - a nationalism and with a special body of beliefs and prejudices and sentiments around this fact. On the other hand, he is pulled into the American orbit in many strong ways. Now, to be himself - i.e., to be Southern - the naive Southerner feels he must cling to a certain number of prejudices and attitudes which have symbolic value for him.

WW: Yes - and to his history.

RFW: And to his history - segregation, for one. Segregation becomes the symbol of identity, to be, i.e., Southern. Now, this I should say is a mistake - is abandoning of history - there are many Southerners who did not - segregation is a very late idea, anyway. If he once sees history in a different light, he sees that to defend segregation does not mean to - necessarily to be Southern - you can be Southern without being a segregationist. But the point I am getting at in asking your view of, do you see a parallel of the sort of - I have mentioned. The Southerner is defending an identity - a cultural identity, which is threatened, and the Negro is seeking an identity which has been weakened. So the Southerner is defending - he's having a weakened identity too - he's trying to defend his weakened identity.

WW: Well, I think the difference is that the Negro has in a sense

had no identity. It is not a matter of change for him as it is to crystallize an identity.

RPW: Yes, the difference is there. But they are both concerned with identity problems. Does that make sense to you?

WW: Yes, but I think they come out of different roots. And that is where I would see the significant differences. And where the Negro I think would have a lesser problem of adjustment, psychologically and emotionally, than the Southern white.

RPW: All right. The Negro is moving toward - successfully toward identity. The white man in the South is fighting a somewhat losing battle to maintain that identity. A falsely conceived identity.

WW: A falsely conceived identity, and he's also in a sense being dragged forward by what a - what I would call a new identity with the concept of a total United States or total America - see, which he's got to keep up with because of automation, industrial advances, the space age and all this. If he's going to get in the mainstream then he's got to give up some of this so-called Southern identity.

RPW: He's got to do it.

WW: And this is the thing that is giving him such a tremendous problem, where you have such sharp variance in response to the whole integration question. So you don't have a solid Southern posture any more, you've got degrees of differences ranging from white all the way to black, with a lot of different - a thousand different grades in between. There are many, many Southerners who say, yes, I think the schools ought to be desegregated, but I don't think



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they ought to come to our church. Or they say I think they ought to be able to sit anywhere they want on the bus, but I don't want them living in my block. Or I think they ought to have the right to have good schools, but I don't think they ought to participate in sports together - you see - there are so many contradictions at this point.

RPW: Speaking of schools - let me give you a quotation from Reverend Glamerson - a TV interview not long back. I would rather see it - the public school system - destroyed than not conform to a time table for integration - his time table. And he added, maybe it has run its course already - the public school system. I'm just taking a few - a couple of sentences out of a - debate, but now, forgetting whether this represents his considered views or not, how do these views strike you?

WW: Well, first of all I would say that as a practical man I think both of us <sup>must</sup> understand every prophet exaggerates his point of view. It would be difficult for me to believe that Glaerson means literally to destroy the public school system. What he means, I think, - and maybe I'm hazarding the wrong guess here - is that the board of education in New York, as I'm familiar with it, says that it would cost too much and would disrupt the normal routine smooth running of our school system to do all you say do right now. Glamerson says, so what if it does cost all of that and you lose a month or a few days, the ills that it's creating in the community and its deeper entrenchment is so severe that I think you ought to go to that

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awkwardness and inconvenience that it may cost. I don't - I can't see him meaning literal destruction. If he means that, then I can't go that far with him, because I think there are some things about the public school system that are good, and -

RPW: The idea is good anyway.

WW: Yes, and as entrenched as some of the ills are, I, even as a militant, would understand out of practical purposes that it must be transitional, that you cannot say tonight it's one way and tomorrow morning it's another way. You just have people and administrative problems and geography - all of these things enter into it. And particularly in a city like New York City, where it has problems that are unique to itself by the very nature of its being New York City - there's no other city like it anywhere in the world.

RPW: Do you regard a bussing program as a tactic to dramatize a need, or do you regard it as a device that has positive, long-range advantages?

WW: I think it has positive, long-range value and I endorse it heartily.

RPW: What would you do about Washington, D.C., where there - are assumed to have almost entirely Negro population in the public schools? Where would you get the white children to bus in?

WW: Well, you see, each city's program has to be geared to that city's particular problems, and if Washington, D.C., in fact does become a Negro city, it's a different problem altogether from a



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situation where the Negro would be in the minority.

RPW: Well, would the Negro be in the minority in the New York City public schools - not now?

WW: Yes, he still remains - the non-white - you have to add in the Porto Rican factor there -

RPW: Yes, that's what I say - the non-white.

WW: And that's why I say, each city, you know - there's no one rule of thumb for each city. So I don't know that I have altogether worked out a -

RPW: How far would you be willing to bus children? All children ride buses some -

WW: I would say, just as a rule of thumb - and this is right off the top of my head - anything more than a half hour bus ride for a child - I'd say a half hour or forty-five minutes - seems to me beyond the normal duress of what would be needed.

RPW: Anything beyond that is -

WW: I think would be unusually burdensome, yes. As I say, that's right off the top of my head. I can't imagine a child having to ride an hour in the morning to school, and an hour in the morning(?) back from school.

RPW: That is, you would see the bussing system, then, as a device to gain certain ends but not a solution to the problem?

WW: No. I would only be an interim program by which it would get certain results and at the same moment dramatize - I think it's a both/and situation rather than an either/or.

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RPW: But the dramatization would be ultimately - I'm asking you this - I'm putting it as a statement - the dramatization would be of the need for decent schools, decent -

WW: Yes - quality education for all children, regardless of neighborhood. And I think it would also dramatize the existence of residential segregation, which - about which -

RPW: Ah, that's something else, now - that's something else. In other words, it dramatizes a deeper ill than the mere fact of unintegrated schools.

WW: Exactly so. The last battleground is the residential segregation that is perhaps the most difficult to get at, because the money-lending institutions and the city planners and the people who decide what the neighborhood is going to look like even twenty years from now are all, for the most part, white people, who have their own Anglo-Saxon, if I may say, Protestant heritage, to protect.

RPW: Yes, they do, by their own definition. You're a Protestant?

WW: Yes.

RPW: And by your statement, part Anglo-Saxon, I presume.

WW: Yes, I suppose I am. But I do not interpret what my - my heritage is not what they interpret it - the same - different - because I have an old friend that - preacher friend, who says, a lot of people criticize me for not having religion, and when I see what they think it is I'm glad I ain't got it.



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RPW: What is a Negro in America?

WW: That's a question which is antiphrastic. I really don't know. From a Negro's point of view it is a person who moves within the Negro community, societally speaking. For the white man, it is any person who has a drop of Negro blood.

RPW: By the law of Virginia - I once looked this up - it's changed over the years - the percentage - getting smaller and smaller percentage each time - each new law defines - Negro blood - defines Negro.

WW: It's down to one-thirty-second now, I think.

RPW: Something like that.

WW: And of course I don't know how they measure that, you know.

RPW: What happens if a Negro man, say, marries a white woman and she lives then, societally, as a Negro?

WW: She becomes accepted. A white person is - becomes assimilated into the Negro community in such a way that no white and no Negro could ever become assimilated into a white society. We haven't gone that far yet.

RPW: Aren't there some Negroes who have, by losing their identity?

WW: Oh, yes, that's what we would call passing. Of course, that's not assimilation, that's in a sense disappearing. That Negro - he becomes the invisible Negro of Ralph Ellison.

RPW: Yes. What is your view of a person who passes - a Negro who - a so-called Negro, shall we say, who passes?

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WW: This may surprise you. If that's what he wants to do, more power to him. And I say -

RPW: No, it doesn't necessarily surprise me or otherwise, I just -

WW: Irrevocably - if I - you know, there's always the irrevocable question - if you could come back, would you come back as a white man or a Negro? - I'd come back as a white man every time.

RPW: I heard the other day a professor of law in a distinguished law school saying, it must be great to be a Negro now.

WW: Well, this is a great hour for him.

RPW: This man is a white man, you see. He says, it must be great to be a Negro now - you must have a sense of significant action that you couldn't have as a white man.

WW: I think the white man may feel - I don't know - I never thought about it really - he may feel that he's in a sense at the mercy of history, whereas the Negro in a sense is guiding or directing -

RPW: Making history - is that it? Well, this has some - I'm sure has some at least truth in it for a large number of people. It's an interesting formulation.

WW: The assessment that I made about - it's a theoretical question, and theoretical - is that if a man - I say, a person selfishly wants to have an identity which would give him the greatest breadth of fulfillment at the stage America is now - for instance, I know people say to me, well, you've done pretty well, you know, why are you bothered with this - you know, you've developed some of the culture of our nation, you're highly educated,



you're not doing bad -

RPW: Summa cum laude.

WW: Yes - my response is, well, suppose I had not had the obstacles to face that I've had as a Negro. There's no telling what I might have been, you know. I might have been attorney general of the United States.

RPW: Let's reverse it. There are some Negroes who say that in special cases - not as a general principle - in special cases, segregation has meant a spur to achievement - to self fulfillment.

WW: Yes, I think that is true.

RPW: Mr. Farmer says that.

WW: Yes, I think that is true in special cases. But if the human spirit is what I think it is, I do not really believe that the coincidence or the accident of color really changes the nature of a man. And I think I would have had the same kind of ambition and the same kind of drive and the same kind of incentive in striving for perfection that I do - as I happen to be a Negro. I don't think a human personality is something that is genetically and biologically fixed.

RPW: You don't think the - you take that view - you don't take the view of the psychologists -

WW: I don't think environmental environment plays as much - is as much a factor in the personality as many modern thinkers would suppose.

RPW: Well, now the argument - the chief argument, I guess - the

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chief non-moral argument against segregation is that it does warp personalities and limit - it gives an environment which is bad.

WW: Well, I think that's true (talking together) I was trying to be precise and say I don't think it has as much influence as many might say - it does have an impact and does have influence, but I think the bent of a man's life - here again I'm falling back on the psychologists with whom I - some of whom I disagree - they say the bent of a person's life is usually set around four or five years old, when the concept of race is barely beginning to break through, you know - prejudice - white and Negro.

RPW: Speaking of psychologists - you are familiar no doubt with Dr. Kenneth Clark's attacks on the non-violence theory. He says for one thing that the practice of non-violence is to ask someone who has been oppressed to love his oppressor is putting on that person an intolerable burden.

WW: Well, I think the first problem Dr. Kenneth Clark has is that he has a semantic problem. He doesn't really know what we mean by love within the context of a non-violent revolution. Secondly, he is a man who - and I don't know him very well - so I have to qualify that - I would adjudge that he has only a naive religious orientation, and for one to understand what we are saying, he must be basically religiously oriented, and he must have some knowledge of what we mean by love. When we say love we're not talking about an emotional attachment that you like somebody - as I'm sure Dr.



King would say.

RPW: Yes, I've read his notes.

WW: But you have - you recognize this person's worthfulness as a fellow human being, despite what he may do - see. You may be a hard core racist, and our point of view is that as - you are misguided or misdirected or a product of your training and education and culture and whatever -

RPW: Environment?

WW: Yes, I say - it is a factor, but not the factor. And that this makes you do the things untoward that you do. Now, our point of view is that even at a practical level, the weapons with which I fight you of necessity must neither be physically violent or must not be a violence of the spirit, because neither will - can reconcile us. The only thing they can do is for one or the other or both of us to be annihilated.

RPW: You look toward the motive of reconciliation as the aim of the whole -

WW: In other words, what we're saying is this - that we have maybe a dangerous optimism about the resiliency of the human spirit, that if it can reflect in enough instances, and in repeated terms, a kind of heraldism or courage, that layer by layer we can peel back the hard core of what years and years have built up. Now, we may not convert in every instance, or at the moment. With some it may be short term, with others it may be long term - some it may be never - but, as Matt Dillon says, you can't win 'em all. But at least my personal moral position is stronger because at least I tried, you see. Somebody - I think Woodrow Wilson said it - it is better to

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lose - it is better - how does he have it? - it is better to have  
lost in the cause who will ultimately win than to win in a cause  
who will ultimately lose - something - let me - can I take a break  
here?

RPW: What do you say we do - end of Tape #2 of conversation with  
Reverend Walker - continue on Tape #3.

(end of tape)