

Mr. WARREN: This is Tape #4 of conversation with Reverend W. T. Walker, March 18 - continue.

Mr. WALKER: I was about to -

RPW: The crowd following the demonstrators in Birmingham.

WW: Yes. I was referring particularly to the Saturday before the truce. On that Friday there had been some rock-throwing by spectators, and we felt -

RPW: White spectators?

WW: No - no, Negro spectators.

RPW: At whom?

WW: At the policemen.

RPW: At police.

WW: Yes. And this did not grow out of the demonstration per se, but at the policemen's insistence to make them move back, get up on the curb - just rough treatment generally - and they resented it. And I think a woman or so were struck, and so out of a crowd of a thousand people some rocks and bricks came. So in response to this we felt that in order not to have the non-violent thrust scarred by rock-throwing which, if the demonstration originated at the Sixteenth Street Church it would naturally draw the crowd. So what we did that morning, we began to distribute our demonstrators to other points in the city, to other churches, and they left the church in twos and threes. And that day, even though there were some three or four hundred arrested, not a single demonstration originated at the Sixteenth Street Church. Well, we couldn't let the spectators know

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what we were doing, nor did we want the police particularly to know, because what happened, our picketers were beginning to show up down there, they were down at the town hall, they were over at Sears & Roebuck - they were just coming from all quarters, coming from the train station. And the police couldn't figure out where they were coming from because they were not leaving the church in line as they had been. But the spectators waited from, say, 11 that morning - which was an off day - until about 4 that afternoon - you know, waiting to see some action, waiting to see the demonstrators. And none ever appeared. So they had gathered in the park, which is a shaded area, and the firemen had set up their hoses at two corners of the park, one on Fifth Street and one on Sixth Street. And the mood was like a Roman holiday - it was festive - there wasn't anybody among the spectators who were angry, and they had waited so long and it was beginning to get dark now - so somebody heaved a brick because they knew that - in fact they had been saying, Turn the water hose on - turn the water hose on - and Bo - then somebody threw a brick and he started turning them on - see. So they just danced and played in the hose spray - this famous picture of them holding hands - it was just a frillie of them trying to stand and some of them were getting knocked down by the hose - they'd get up and run back and it would slide them along the pavement. Then they began bringing the hose up from the other corner, and instead of Negroes they ran to the hose - it was a holiday for them. And this went on for a couple of hours.

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It was a joke, really. All in good humor and good spirit. Not any vitriolic response on the part of even the Negro spectators. Which to me, again, was an example of the changing spirit, you know. When Negroes once had been cowed in the presence of policemen and maybe water hoses - here they had complete disdain - they made a joke out of it.

RPW: What kind of people were in this crowd ?

WW: Mostly marginal and sub-marginal livers - people who came in from -

RPW: The very poor?

WW: Yes, the very poor.

RPW: Were they town people or country people?

WW: Both.

RPW: Both?

WW: Primarily I would say townspeople, who did - were not inclined to get into the movement per se, you know - to take the training and what not. With all of the more than thirty-four hundred people who went to jail there was hardly an instance of anybody going to jail who was not signed up, whose actual record was not made and who did not receive two hours of instruction.

RPW: Thirty-four hundred people?

WW: Yes. A tremendous administrative responsibility, but we saw it. Nobody will ever know, I guess, until I get my Birmingham diary finished of what really went into Birmingham. But it's an operation that I was proud to have a part in, which I take a great deal of

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pride in - this smoothness with which it operated.

RPW: Albany is - episode is coming in for criticism of one sort or another.

WW: Well, revolutions are not dissolved in a single battle. Albany had no apparent gains per se, but in that paper that I gave you, published by the New York University, I document the gradual - not gradual, but the perceptible change in the city fathers in ~~aluminum~~ their position that they took at the beginning, closing down of public facilities, the integration of public schools, the abridging of constitutional rights guaranteed under the First Amendment - at every point they approximated their former inflexible position whereas the Negro did not have any positive gains that were visible. Yet, the system of segregation has been successfully challenged, and I think the story of Albany is not over yet - in fact we have something going on there now. We still have a movement. The fact that the Albany movement exists in the life of the Negro at all is different.

RPW: You know Lomax's analysis of that, of course?

Louis Lomax?

WW: Yes - can I say something about ~~him~~ - one of the most informed chroniclers of the Negro movement alive. Mechanically, Lou Lomax is a good writer, but Lou lacks integrity, and I would say this as quickly to him as I do to you. It is difficult to believe, but I can document it, that ^{with} all of the pages that Lou Lomax wrote about Albany, Georgia - could you believe that he never set his foot in the town? With all of the pages that he wrote about

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Martin Luther King, Jr. - could you believe he never once interviewed him? And some people think that my criticism of Lou is because they felt he gave me a bad treatment, ^{in the book} I did not feel so. I felt he was absolutely accurate in his description of me - he had one or two facts off, but as to my demeanor and my attitude, he was as honest as any man could be. So it isn't anything personal. It's a matter of his - what I call maltreatment of an analysis of the movement about which he is generally uninformed. I've heard some response to his lectures around the country on Birmingham. Lou is not knowledgeable about Birmingham. He wasn't long enough there to know or to grasp or to understand all that was involved in Birmingham, and I think it's unfortunate that the general reading community, white and Negro, who are interested in the movement, look to Louis Lomax's articles on the movement.

RPW: They do - uncritically.

WW: Yes. But here again, this was another casualty of the revolution. Those of us who could do an interpretative job and who are intimate about the work, have no time to write it because we are it.

RPW: Only Caesar did that.

WW: Yes. And of course that was in a day when a revolution was slow-moving.

RPW: Slow-moving. Alas, I've got to go, and I'm sure you're ready for a little relief from this.

WW: Yes, I've got a few little things to do, too.

RPW: I know you have.

(end of interview)