ROBERT PENN WARREN

TWO FOR SNCC*

NUMBER 1017 Lynch Street, in Jackson, Mississippi, the headquarters of SNCC, is a clean, white, rather new store-front, a big glass window, as for display, on each side, a door in the middle. Inside there is an empty space, then a third of the way down, an office has been boxed off, leaving a wide passage to the right. Toward the back is a much larger space, with another office boxed off at the rear. It is February 12, 1964, and I have come to keep a 9 A.M. appointment with Robert Moses, the pioneer SNCC field worker in Mississippi. He is not here.

Notebook:

Cement floor, big battered picnic table with empty coke bottles and piles of papers, desk across from it, totally cluttered—floor with cigarette butts and trash, and brisk young woman (white, lanky, spinsterish) sweeping floor (charwoman-secretary), young colored man, student type, who walks about, muttering histrionically (for my benefit?), "Oh, America, land of the free," then sighs—now and then an appreciative sound from the lanky girl.

He: "I'd help out if things weren't so chaotic. I don't know what to do." Does begin to help, collecting her sweepings in big cardboard box.

Girl turns to me: "Mr. Moses used to be on time, but not since he got married." I sit on a folding metal chair that has been mashed forward by violence or a too heavy load, and it slowly spills me forward if I don't brace my feet as I write. A large dog, rather like an Irish setter, comes out of rear office, retires. Sound of crunching bone in office. Negro boy goes into rear office, softly picks guitar in that privacy.

Along the wall are stacks of cartons of books (usually half burst open), contributions to library for Negro children (not permitted to use Public Library). On walls two large tacked-up maps, one USA, other Miss., posters for registration, one a picture of two children sitting forlornly on steps of shack, and words: GIVE THEM A FUTURE IN MISSISSIPPI; other poster full of upward-stretched arms, and the big word: NOW.

Girl on phone, calls out to boy: "You know where Doug is?"

Boy from office: "He's off sleeping in my sleeping bag." Picks at guitar back there.

Telephone rings in office. Boy picks up phone: "Listen, we need a $500 peace bond—two situations—can put up property for one, but need peace bond—yes, you sent a $1,600 bond, but that's not enough."

Now 9:20. Two very young boys—sixteen?—come in, wander about, as on a stage—one pats the dog that is now out of back office, they go out.

One of the young boys re-enters blankly, picks up a book, reads. I see another copy, pick up, *Living In Our Democracy*, by Deveroux and Aker, about sixth- or seventh-grade level, a gift from California. Boy pores over it, sucking cigarette.

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Moses comes, a well set-up young man of medium size, light brown in color, preoccupied, unsmiling behind his big glasses: blue denim trousers, white shirt, open collar, dark denim jacket; greets me, offers aimless abstract handshake.

Moses decides the office is too confused for an interview, and we go up the street to Number 1072, where the NAACP headquarters are, back into an empty auditorium. We set up the tape recorder on a small table in the rear.

WARREN: Where were you born, Mr. Moses?

MOSES: In Harlem, raised in upper Harlem, went to school in Harlem until high school, and then I went to Stuyvesant High School, downtown. We took an exam, a city-wide exam to get in.

WARREN: What was the ratio of Negroes?

MOSES: Out of a graduating class of a few thousand, not more than a handful were Negroes.

WARREN: Did Negroes try for it?

MOSES: Over a city-wide basis my impression would be that there was usually no effort, really,

ROBERT PENN WARREN, the eminent novelist, poet, and critic last appeared in COMMENTARY with an essay on Edmund Wilson's *Patriotic Gore* (August 1962). The present piece will form a section of Mr. Warren's new book, *Who Speaks for the Negro?*, which is to be published later this spring by Random House.

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in the Negro junior high schools to prepare people for the tests and encourage them to take it.

WARREN: Was there apathy among the students—the kids?

MOSES: They'd have the feeling it was something out of their range.

WARREN: I hear it said that part of the problem of voter registration is the fear of not passing.

MOSES: The fear of being embarrassed.

WARREN: Let's cut back to your career.

MOSES: I graduated from Stuyvesant in '52, then I went to Hamilton College. I graduated in '56, and went to graduate school, at Harvard, in philosophy, and stayed a year and a half. I picked up an M.A. at the end of my first year, then we had family trouble—my mother died the next year, my father was hospitalized, and I dropped out. Then I got a job teaching at Horace Mann*—that was '58—and stayed there three years. Then came down here.

WARREN: Were you ambitious for an academic career when you went to Harvard?

MOSES: Well, I wanted to get the doctorate. I liked philosophy, I wanted to study. I wasn't sure I would teach—but there wasn't anything else at the time I wanted to do.

WARREN: How did you make the shift to active participation in the civil rights movement?

MOSES: It was really a big break. I wasn't active at all until 1960, when the sit-ins broke out. It seemed to me something different, something new—and if—I had a feeling for a long time—

WARREN: Before this you had a feeling?

MOSES: Yes. There was a continual build-up and frustration—back, I guess, as early as high school. And then in the teaching—confronting at every point the fact that as a Negro—I mean, first that you had to be treated as a Negro and you couldn't really be accepted as an individual yet—even at any level of the society you happened to penetrate.

WARREN: You wouldn't have felt it, you think, if you had taken your doctorate, then gone to a good college to teach?

MOSES: I don't know. But the fact was I gradually got the feeling that no matter what I did it would always be there, even though things were better and different than, say, in my father's time.

WARREN: Had your father had ambitions like your own?

MOSES: Probably yes. But he was caught in the Depression, with two families to support. He had finished high school but he hadn't gone to college—there was no money. Then he got a job in the armory and decided to keep that. I don't know, we had long talks about it, talks which I can now see were really about the question of opportunity, about whether he was satisfied or not—you know, his whole purpose in life. Anyway, he had decided to put his energies into his personal family. There were three of us and he wanted to see us all through school and college.

WARREN: It sounds as though you were very close to him.

MOSES: Yes.

WARREN: How do you respond to Martin Luther King's philosophy?

MOSES: We don't agree with it, in a sense. The majority of the students are not sympathetic to the idea that they have to love the white people that they are struggling against. But there are a few who have a very religious orientation. And there's a constant dialogue at meetings about non-violence and the meaning of non-violence.

WARREN: Non-violence for SNCC is tactical, is that it?

MOSES: For most of the members it is tactical, it's a question of being able to have a method of attack rather than to be always on the defensive.

WARREN: What about the effect King had at moments of crisis in Birmingham?

MOSES: There's no question that he had a great deal of influence with the masses. But I don't think it's in the direction of love. It's in a practical direction—that is, whatever you believe, you simply can't afford to have a general breakdown of law and order. And in the end everybody has to live together. Negroes understand this very well, but they put it in terms of "When they're all gone we'll still be here, and we have to live with the people here."

WARREN: "They all" being the workers who come in and then go away next week?

MOSES: Yes—but we try to send workers to communities where they can stay and live.

WARREN: The objection of the local Negro might have either of two meanings—a positive one, a vision of a society of men living together under law, and a negative one, a fear of reprisal after the outside workers have left.

MOSES: Exactly. They mean it largely in the negative sense. But in the end there can be an appeal they understand—that is, in the end the Negroes and the whites are going to have to share the land, and the less overlay of bitterness, the more possible to work out a reconciliation.

WARREN: Some Negroes say that such a reconciliation may come more easily in the South, because of a common background and a shared history, than in the great anonymous Northern cities.

MOSES: Well—I really don't know. The country has such tremendous problems—I mean, every

* A private school in New York.

time you try and get a breakthrough in, say, the Negro problem, you run into a deeper, tremendous problem that the whole country has to face. Jobs, the question of education—these things are tied so deeply into problems that run deep into the major institutions of the country. And then there is the whole question of automation, and armament.

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We talk a little about more specific issues. I ask him about busing to balance schools racially in great cities like New York and Washington. He has been far removed from the issue, he says, down here in Mississippi—and if you go to a little town like Glendora or Liberty or Greenwood, it is another world. But he thinks that the whole school system, everywhere, aside from the question of race, is failing to meet the needs of the times, that the level of education is the immediate key, not integration as such. But both education and integration are tied together with housing and employment in a vicious circle, with only some 10 or 15 per cent—the rising Negro middle class—able to break out and with the lag in the Negroes' earnings, on the national percentage, becoming more and more marked. But the poor white man, the unskilled man, is caught, too, in the same process: "They're the people who don't have a real voice in Congress"—who are outside the umbrella of organized labor, with the Negro.

WARREN: Do you see any possibility in the South for cooperation between the poor white and the Negro?

MOSES: I don't know. White men move to town and get jobs in industry, but they would want to hold onto them. And if you tell him there's this big industry that will move in if he will drop this race thing—but I don't see that kind of breakthrough.

WARREN: Have you suffered violence?

MOSES: Once I was attacked on the way to the courthouse—two Negro farmers and myself. Going to register, and walking down the main street, three young fellows came up and began to pick an argument—they singled me out and began to beat on me. I had about eight stitches on the top of my head.

WARREN: With their fists?

MOSES: Well, apparently—but it turned out after, he* had a knife, which was closed. We went to trial, and a couple of days later he was acquitted. We came back to town—this little town, Liberty, a town of maybe a thousand people. It has a long and vicious history. Just last week one of the farmers down there was killed and—

WARREN: He had consented to be a witness in a murder trial, hadn't he?

MOSES: He told the truth to the FBI, but the local authorities, he had told them what they wanted to hear.

WARREN: Then told the FBI the truth and was willing to testify if given protection?

MOSES: Yes, and we believe that the FBI leaked this to the local authorities, and the Sheriff and the Deputy Sheriff came out, you know, and told him—the farmer—what they had learned.† And they had been picking on him ever since—that was in September '61. At one point a deputy sheriff broke his jaw—and then they killed him. With a shotgun.

WARREN: Have there been any arrests on that?

MOSES: I doubt that there will be.

WARREN: Do you believe that the leak was intentional?

MOSES: I believe that, and we said as much to the Justice Department.

WARREN: Back to you, you've had other attacks?

MOSES: Last year in Greenwood we were driving along. Some white people had been circling the town—about three or four carloads. One followed us out of town—there were three of us in the car—and they opened up about seven miles out of town. Bullets rained all through the car—the driver had a bullet in his neck, and he was slumped over in my lap, and he went off the road. We had to grab the wheel and stop the car. He had a .45 slug lodged about an inch from his spine. None of the rest of us was hit—just shattered with glass. This is all interesting because Beckwith—the fellow who was tried for killing Medgar [Evers]—well, the people who shot us that the police arrested—there were some arrests on that—they answered to the same general

* The assailant was Billy Jack Caston, a cousin of the local Sheriff and son-in-law of a State Representative, E. H. Hurst. See Howard Zinn, *SNCC—The New Abolitionists*, p. 68.

† The charge that in the South the FBI is packed with Southern-born agents and is racist is not uncommonly made by Negroes. It is alleged, for example, that Dr. King advised civil rights workers not to report acts of violence to the FBI in Albany, Georgia, because the agents were Southern. To this, Hoover replied that King is "the most notorious liar in the country," and asserted that four out of the five agents in Albany were Northern and "that 70 per cent of the agents in the South were born in the North" (The New York *Times*, November 19, 1964).

Since that time Dr. King and Mr. Hoover have met for an "amicable discussion" of their differences. "I sincerely hope," King said, "we can forget the confusions of the past and get on with the job . . . of providing freedom and justice for all citizens of this nation." The issue, of course, is not really the percentage of Southern-born agents of the FBI working in the South, the question that provoked the outburst of rancor between Dr. King and Mr. Hoover. Negroes have not been alone in protesting against what the American Civil Liberties Union has called "the absence of a psychology of commitment [in the FBI] to enforcing laws which guarantee Negroes equal rights." The ACLU has suggested a separate unit in the FBI to investigate civil rights violations (see the New York *Times* December 2, 1964).

description as Beckwith—middle-aged, middle-class people. They've never been brought to trial.

WARREN: The same type as Beckwith?

MOSES: I think there was a conspiracy up there—and we wrote letters and sent telegrams to the Civil Rights Commission asking for an investigation. Of course, they say there're no grounds justifying—no grounds.

WARREN: You are just married, aren't you?

MOSES: Yes.

WARREN: What view does your wife take of your hazardous occupation?

MOSES: Well—that's hard to say because she doesn't—I mean you don't really confront her. I mean, you just go on living.

WARREN: You take it day by day?

MOSES: Otherwise, there's no real way to confront that except to—within yourself, try to—you have to overcome the fear. And that took me quite a while, you know—quite a while.

WARREN: Can you put your philosophy to work on that?

MOSES: Not the Harvard seminar. It goes back to when I was in college and I had a French professor who did a lot of work in 20th-century literature, and I read a lot of Camus. And I've picked it up again. When I was in jail this last time I read through *The Rebel* and *The Plague* again. The main essence of what he says is what I feel real close to—closest to.

WARREN: Will you state that?

MOSES: It's the importance to struggle, importance to recognize in the struggle certain humanitarian values, and to recognize that you have to struggle for people, in that sense, and at the same time if it's possible, you try to eke out some corner of love or some glimpse of happiness within. And that's what I think more than anything else conquers the bitterness, let's say. But there's something else.

WARREN: What?

MOSES: Camus talks a lot about the Russian terrorists—around 1905. What he finds in them is that they accepted that if they took a life they offered their own in exchange. He moves from there into the whole question of violence and non-violence and comes out with something which I think is relevant in this struggle. It's not a question that you just subjugate yourself to the conditions that are and don't try to change them. The problem is to go on from there, into something which is active, and yet the dichotomy is whether you can cease to be a victim any more and also not be what he calls an executioner. The ideal lies between these two extremes—victim and executioner. For when people rise up and change their status, usually somewhere along the line they become executioners and they get involved in subjugating, you know, other people. Of course, this doesn't apply for us Negroes on any grand scale in the sense that we're going to have a political overthrow in which we are going to become political executioners.

WARREN: But it does apply in terms of inside attitudes?

MOSES: It applies very much, I think. We're going through a big thing right now even in terms of attitudes of the Negro staff toward the white staff, and it's very hard for some of the students who have been brought up in Mississippi and are the victims of this kind of race hatred not to begin to let all of that out on the white staff. And we just had a tirade—one staff person a few days ago just, you know, for about fifteen minutes, just letting out what really was a whole series of really racial statements of hatred. And we sort of all just sat there. The white students were, in this case, now made the victims. You know it's a process mainly of cleansing, but the problem is whether you can move from one to the other—that is, whether you can move Negro people from the place where they are now the victims of this kind of hatred, to a place where they don't in turn perpetuate this hatred.

WARREN: What are the actual criticisms—I don't mean necessarily valid criticisms—of the white participants in this movement?

MOSES: Well, first the white people come down and have better skills and have better training. The tendency always is for them to gravitate to command posts. But Negro students, you know, actually feel this is their own movement. This is the strongest feeling among the Negro students—that this is the one thing that belongs to them in the whole country; and I think this causes the emotional reaction toward the white people coming in and participating.

WARREN: What about the resentment against young white persons who come into such an environment as this, and then try to enter romantically into Negro taste in music, Negro tastes in this, that and the other—who want to enter, to join, to become more Negro than Negroes?

MOSES: Well, it depends. The distinction that the students themselves use is where a person is white—that is, they make the distinction between white people who somehow carry their whiteness with them, and some white people who somehow don't.

WARREN: But this difference remains?

MOSES: Yes, well, the Negroes say that they're not really *white* white people. Some people transcend that distinction and move on a plane where people are human beings.

WARREN: I was referring to the sense of amusement, and perhaps even resentment, at the white man who tries to be Negro—

MOSES: The white person who carries his whiteness and who, in addition, may be trying to move into this area—that person becomes an object of amusement.

WARREN: Speaking of splits in identity, what of that split DuBois speaks of—the tension between the impulse to Negro-ness, the *mystique-noire*, and the impulse to be absorbed into the white West European-American culture—and perhaps bloodstream?

MOSES: For myself I don't think the problem has been this kind of identity. It's not a problem of identifying with "Negro-ness." But neither do you want to integrate into the middle-class white culture, since that seems to be at this point in vital need of some kind of renewal. But in the struggle you find a broader identification, identification with individuals who are going through the same kind of struggle, so that the struggle doesn't remain just a question of race. Then you get a picture of yourself as a person, caught up historically in these circumstances, and that whole problem of identifying yourself in Negro culture—or of integrating into the white society—that disappears.

WARREN: What relation, if any, do you see between your student movement and the Beats?

MOSES: One thing, the Beats were left without a people—without anybody they might identify with.

WARREN: Anti-social?

MOSES: Yes. Reacting against everything, they closed in on themselves—for their own values and things like that. What happens with students in our movement is that they are identifying with these people—people who come off the land, who are unsophisticated, and simply voice, time and time again, the simple truths you can't ignore because they speak from their own lives. It's this the students are rooted in, and this is what keeps them from going off at some tangent. It's this that is put into opposition to what life is now. We had this meeting last Sunday—

WARREN Yes, I was there.

MOSES: There are some in leadership who are against this kind of meeting.

WARREN: Why?

MOSES: They're for the kind of meeting where you get well-dressed, cleaned-up Negroes. They don't want the other people. They're embarrassed. Those people don't speak English well. They grope for words.

WARREN: "Red-ish" for "register."

MOSES: Right—they can't say that word. But it's that embarrassment the students are really battling against. For society needs to hear them, and as long as the students are tied in with these, their revolt is well-based. Not like the Beatnik revolt.

WARREN: Has there been a change in the climate of opinion—the white attitude toward the Negro, or toward the Negro problem?

MOSES: When I was at Hamilton the white attitude was: "Well, we have to do our part—the society has the over-all problem, and our part as an educational institution is to try and open a door for two or three Negroes, and let's see what happens." The difference from the period before is simply that earlier they weren't interested in even opening a door. Well, while I was there I was glad to have the opportunity, but still I was deeply bitter about some of the realities of the campus and of the white attitude. You're getting another change now.

WARREN: Has the white man's picture of the Negro changed here?

MOSES: I'm sure it has. The Sheriff in Canton told some of our fellows, he told them, "Well, you all are fighting for what you believe is right, and we're fighting for what we believe is right." Now that seems to me to be a tremendous change.

WARREN: It surprises me, to tell the truth.

MOSES: That is the recognition of an equal status—that is, you're a person. Now these guys at Canton, they're not well educated or anything like that. Just from the South—Negroes born right here—but here the Sheriff is saying to them, "You have something you believe in. So we both have sides—two sides of the same fence." That's a tremendous change.

WARREN: How do you give flesh in history to the concept Freedom Now?

MOSES: I don't know that that's a concept. It's an emotional expression, an attempt to communicate—We have a poster in our office and all it says is "*Now*!"

WARREN: I saw it.

MOSES: That's to say how we feel. This is the urgency.

WARREN: It's a poetic statement?

MOSES: Right.

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I COME OUT of number 1072 Lynch Street and go toward town. I have an engagement for lunch, miles away at Tougaloo College. I swing left off Lynch, opposite the white store-front of 1017, which houses SNCC. There, facing 1017, is a vacant lot, and on the lot is a very big billboard with the picture of the Statue of Liberty, lifting high the torch. The bold letters read:

Think *Speak* *Register* *Vote*
PROTECT YOUR FREEDOM
Contact your Civilian Club

It does not say Contact SNCC.

II

I HAD FIRST met Stokely Carmichael in November 1963, at Howard University, in Washington, where he spoke at a Conference on non-violence. In the winter I wrote him to ask for a conversation. We met in his apartment, in a district not far from Howard, where he was a senior, in a basement room, disheveled and not too clean, with scaling walls calsomined a bilious green. The air was hot and sticky from the bare steam pipes in the ceiling.

Carmichael, then twenty-two, is of fine athletic build, quite dark, with well-modeled features. His manner is calm, with occasional streaks of ironic humor, often at his own expense. That afternoon he sat on the edge of a couch, or cot, and leaned forward with his hands hanging off his knees, at first speaking slowly and diffidently, then becoming more fluent and positive as he seemed to withdraw from the immediate scene into his recollections.

Since that time, he has graduated from Howard, with a major in philosophy. He received the offer of a full scholarship at one of the best colleges, for supervised reading and study in whatever field might interest him, but he has continued, and will continue for at least a year, as an activist in SNCC, for he feels that he is needed. In 1964 he was prominent in the Summer Project in Mississippi, and was newsworthy at the Democratic Convention in Atlantic City, with the Freedom Democratic Party group that held vigil outside the hall. Most recently he has been at Selma.

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STOKELY CARMICHAEL was brought by his family from Trinidad to Harlem in 1952, when he was eleven years old. In Trinidad, some 96 per cent of the population had been Negro; all immediate authority—police, teachers, ministers, civil servants—and the storekeepers and entrepreneurs in general were Negro. The 4 per cent of whites lived in "mansions," but then many Negroes lived in "mansions" too, and the question of exploitation of the black by the white had not occurred to the boy. In America all was different. Immediate authority was white, and the storekeeper was white. His parents, who had no friends among the Negro Americans and saw only West Indians, said that in America Negroes were "unambitious" and pointed to the number of West Indians in Harlem and Brooklyn who owned their own homes, while American Negroes "do not own anything except a Cadillac."

They had a profound distrust of all white people, too. But, in the complexity of things, the father aspired to escape from the ghetto into "a good neighborhood"—which meant white. They finally succeeded in moving to the East Bronx, "an old Italian neighborhood balanced by a Jewish neighborhood and an Irish neighborhood." Here they were the only Negroes. The first week the boy had a fight: "Everybody had heard Negroes were tough and they wanted to see how tough I was."

Now in the nice neighborhood, he had to do "all the bad things" to prove his point:

> By the time I was in the eighth grade I knew all about marijuana—pot—had heard from my cousin but never touched the stuff, but now some friends from school wanted to show me how to do it. Before I knew it, I was putting on a demonstration for about thirty people in the bathroom—how to blow up.

The white friends of the new neighborhood had long since taught him "the tricks, how to break into stores, how to steal cars," but his parents still touchingly held to the belief that they were, at last, in a "good neighborhood," and the son did not disillusion them.

In the good neighborhood they owned their own house—"a shack," but the father spent long hours after work remodeling it. He was a man of prodigious energy and honesty, a carpenter who was "always being screwed by the union" because he didn't believe in giving a bribe to the union representative to get assigned to work. He was ambitious and after regular hours was moonlighting as a taxi driver or at other jobs. In the winter when carpentry was slack he was a seaman. He apparently aspired, in some devious way, to white middle-class standards. At the same time he kept the old distrust of whites, and when the son brought white friends home, the parents would ask: "What's your social life going to be, they don't really accept you." In the old tension of values, the father wanted the son "to be respectable, speak, do all the things the white kids were doing." But the son, who was keeping ties in Harlem as well as with the local white kids, had his own tensions; as for doing what the white kids did, and talking like them: "I wasn't sure I wanted to do all that." For one thing, at this stage anyway, the boy never dated but two white girls: "It seemed that there were too many barriers and too much conflict to be bothered with."

By 1956 he was in the elite Bronx High School of Science. Here he found out that "people do more than fight each other, they didn't swear, and were respectable, and read a lot, good books, and discussed these things at the lunch table." It was hard, he says, for him to adjust; but even though he still went out to do a little gang fighting, he worked hard, because his mother kept saying: "Remember one thing, those guys are white, they'll all make it, and you won't unless you're on the top rung." So he read—"to get her off my back"—and she "didn't care what I read as long as my grades were good."

At the same time, he was discovering how inadequate his "intellectual background was." He didn't know who Marx was or about dialectical

materialism, and his fellow students told him about relativity and Einstein, who, he thought, was only an old nut who went out in the sun with an umbrella:

> My parents never finished school, we had no intellectual background. All these students' fathers had been Harvard, Yale, doctors, dentists, PHDs. They had what I didn't have, but I tried to develop my own—just beginning to read as quickly as I could, anything that anybody mentioned. It was naïve at the time, but it was sincere.

He was repairing the deficiencies in his background, and one way was to associate with a "lot of people on the Left, young Socialists." He began reading "on the Left," too, studying social problems. His parents had always wanted him to be a doctor, but he had no inclination for that, and "just let them assume." He was being told at school that he would be "a brilliant Negro leader," and he says: "I thought I was going to be brilliant, I was going to solve the race problem."

At Bronx Science there were only some 50 Negroes out of 2,000 pupils. But, he says, everybody was his "best friend," and he was always invited to parties; they leaned over backward because he was a Negro. As for one party . . .

> on Park Avenue with a friend of mine, I think he's in Yale now, he invited me, he kept asking me. So I went to the party, and was very impressed with the place, doorman at the door, and the elevator went up and opened on the living room, sunken living room, open fire, stereo all over the place, rugs about that thick. Never seen this before, only in the movies.

When the friend's mother came in, he insisted that everybody meet her, especially Carmichael.

> I didn't particularly care to meet his mother, I was so fascinated with the place. He was living on about the fifteenth floor, and I was looking out the window, just enjoying myself just being there. But he insisted and I thought I would appease him. Well, his mother had a group of ladies there, and it was like I hit it off right away—she said: "Oh, I've heard so much about you, you've got such a sense of humor, Jimmy is always talking about you, you're such a good-looking boy, what features you have," and on and on. Finally when I was leaving, the door was just about closed, his mother turned to the other ladies and said, "Oh, yes, we let Jimmy hang around with Negroes." I didn't like that.

Nor did he like a lot of other things:

> It was a continual thing, everybody would ask me, "Whose party are you going to? We'll be there." And "Oh, you dance so well"—when I can't dance. All the stereotoypes were carried over leaning backward. Everyone telling me how well I could sing—when I can't carry a tune. All the stereotypes, and what a good sense of humor.

But he is inclined to think that there was some sincerity mixed, maybe they really wanted to be his friend, and not merely the friend of "the Negro." But he resented being taken as a type and not a person.

Meanwhile he had his own way of exploiting the white condescension. For instance, whenever there was a racial conference, he was "always consulted as the spokesman"—the "brilliant Negro leader," as he ironically describes himself:

> I went out to the NSA conference. I took the floor and said just any ridiculous thing, you know, about Negroes, about the race conference. Here were students from all over the country, and they would never have attacked me no matter what I said, because I was a Negro. The whole thing is shifted so much, if you're a Negro and among a white group, you're good, you're great, you're—but I am sure you know Negroes are bastards too. But you know, I was good no matter what I did.

But a crisis had come as early as the summer after freshman year at Bronx Science. That year he had been trying to cut himself off from his old associations, both those of the tough white neighborhood and those of Harlem, but in the summer he slipped back into the old pattern:

> I stayed in New York City and hung around with all the fellows, the gang, stole cars, gang fighting, and all that nonsense. By about the middle of the summer, I kept thinking, I'm going to get into real trouble if I keep this up. So I started alienating myself from them. And I started calling up people from Science, started to hang around with them more, and go swimming, play tennis. Of course, all my old friends would call me fag. By about the middle of the sophomore year I had completely broken all the old ties.

All in all, there was a deep conflict of loyalties, one that was, in various forms, to continue. Here is a passage on "integrity," "identity," the "psychic split":

CARMICHAEL: I used to hang out down in the Village, because that's where everything is happening. I used to see a complete reverse of the usual—white kids jumping into Negro neighborhoods, becoming Negro-fied. "Yeah, man—yeah, baby," you know, everything out of context, just dropping words that come from Negro neighborhoods. I always thought, "This isn't right," and I wondered if I went into the white world, wouldn't I do the same thing? That bothered me quite a bit, because I didn't want to do that.

WARREN: You thought you would lose integrity, is that it?

CARMICHAEL: I wasn't sure if it was a loss of integrity, it was a loss of being yourself.

WARREN: Your identity being betrayed?

CARMICHAEL: Yes—like Negroes and whites, teenagers dance entirely differently. Now I've danced

both ways, and I find myself, at a party, for instance, beginning to Lindy—now the Lindy, I don't know if it's still around, is probably a white dance. Negroes slop. And when everybody would start looking at me, they'd say, "You dance just like a white boy." And then I'd stop, and catch myself, and I'd say, "Yeah, I do." And they'd say, "You hang around with them white kids there?" And I said, "Yeah, I hang around with white kids." And they said, "Man, you ought to be square, don't know what's happening." Then I'd go to a white dance, and do a slop, and, "Oh, man, that's cool! That's real cool, show me how to dance!" You know, leaning over backward. Then I wondered whether or not, in Harlem, they were being completely fair when they said I was square when I was hanging around with white kids. That was an internal conflict. I resolved the problem with myself just going wherever I wanted to go. If I felt like going to Harlem, if I felt like going down to the Village, I'd do what I wanted to do. But there certainly was a cutting off of culture.

WARREN: Several Negroes have told me that white students coming into Mississippi to work in voter registration sometimes try to assume vocabulary and stances that are Negro, and that this is resented, or if not resented, it becomes a matter of satire. Have you encountered this?

CARMICHAEL: Quite a bit. There are a few white people in the Movement who are what we call completely Negrotized. But there's still a difference; you can tell people who come into the Movement and try and say there is no difference. Also, the other conflict, you get Northern whites, all committed to equality, on a humanitarian and intellectual level, but they themselves don't know a Negro, they don't even have Negroes in their own neighborhoods, have never known a Negro. They don't know a Negro is really different. When they come South and find out that it's different, they jump right in, to accept it.

WARREN: To assume the culture without understanding the experience behind it?

CARMICHAEL: Right. Then they say things without realizing what they're saying. You know—"Yeah, man, I really dig that," and *dig* can be used in two ways, sarcastically a lot of times. They use words out of context. They want to be accepted right away, without being accepted for their work.

WARREN: Social climbing?

CARMICHAEL: That is it. They want to be accepted as a Negro, not as an individual. "Look, I'm not like the other whites you know, I dig you." Snap their fingers out of tune: "I dig Ray Charles." Once a white fellow came in and started playing Ray Charles. "Ray Charles," he said, "he's swell, man, too much!" And after he walked out, one of the Negroes, out loud, said, "You know that white boy don't even understand, 'cause Ray Charles play like white boy don't even think." And everybody laughed. The white boy putting on a show was resented. As much as it would be resented if I put on a show to show how white I was. How much I had absorbed the culture.

WARREN: How commonly do you think the Negro may accept some derogatory stereotype of himself?

CARMICHAEL: At one point, I was about a sophomore in high school, I realized that I was really ashamed of being a Negro. I was really ashamed of it, and would stop saying things that I would say in the Negro neighborhood, and I was afraid of Gospel music, which I had always liked. I remember thinking about that for two weeks, and then I decided to go back to my Gospel music.

WARREN: How common do you think this is?

CARMICHAEL: It's very common, because whether Negroes admit it or not, they are 150 per cent American. They think, they act, they accept American without even questioning it.

WARREN: Including the white man's version of himself—the Negro?

CARMICHAEL: Including that, I'm afraid. Because you're not sure how much truth there is in it, if you really want to be honest. You have to admit if you walk through Harlem, it is about the dirtiest place, there're always drunks on the street, people are always cutting each other, there are prostitutes on every corner, bars on every corner, and you want to be careful that you're not just rationalizing. You start off with the basic premise that Negroes aren't really inferior, and you wonder, have the conditions really been thrust upon them, or are they—the Negroes—really lazy? This bothered me for a time too. But you do accept it unconsciously.

WARREN: What is the psychological solution?

CARMICHAEL: For me it was to read as much as I could to show—maybe I do it even now, I think I still do it—as soon as I meet a white student I want to prove to him that he isn't any smarter than I am. This is what Baldwin talks about in the black-boy-meets-white-boy, play a game of cat-and-mouse, let's see how much you know, because I know you think that because I'm a Negro I don't know very much, and I'm going to prove to you that's not true. You see, I even caught myself playing this last September. I met a white boy from Yale, and kept playing the game. Then I caught myself: "What do I have to prove to him? Why am I doing it?"

WARREN: In other words, you were acting like the Yale boy who goes to Mississippi?

CARMICHAEL: Yah, yah—in the reverse.

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Carmichael's original involvement with the Movement was not immediate. It did not come

out of the ineffable force that later put him in the Freedom Ride.

In 1960, he happened to pick up the paper and read about "Izell Blair's Four Companions."* His first reaction was that the sit-in was the wrong way. He threw the paper down.

WARREN: Why this reaction?

CARMICHAEL: Actually what I said was, "Niggers always looking to get themselves in the paper, no matter how they do it." My opinion was that they didn't know what they were doing, and I'm convinced now that they didn't know what they were doing.

WARREN: You mean they stumbled on it?

CARMICHAEL: Yeah. About three weeks later, the New York *Times* documented that the sit-ins had spread all over the South. My reaction was: "Niggers are just like monkeys—one do, all do." Threw the paper down again. About a month later TV interviews began to appear. I'd heard students from A and T, students from Greensboro, and I was distressed about this—you know, you don't want a revolution, you want to be intelligent. At the same time you can't just talk about how badly you've been treated; I get tired of seeing that stuff all the time. By mid-April I thought there were possibilities.

In May, 1960 I met a number of people who were involved in the sit-ins.

WARREN: You were still in high school then?

CARMICHAEL: Right. I went on a sit-in in Virginia. Very impressed with the kids, their courage. I had always been oriented to the Left, from an economic point of view—not an economic determinist but certainly a great proclivity for that sort of thing. And now I realized that a lot of the kids weren't talking about what I thought they would be talking about. They said—"We have the right to human dignity."

WARREN: This, as opposed to an economic approach?

CARMICHAEL: Right.

WARREN: You mean a human approach, a moral approach?

CARMICHAEL: It seemed to me this was euphemistic—I think men always cover up their actions with moral issues. So I began to think seriously whether this was an economic problem or whether these students were right, whether non-violence and love was the thing. I never took the approach we've got to teach them to love us. I thought that was nonsense, from the start. But I was impressed by the way they conducted themselves, the way they sat there and took the punishment.

WARREN: You mean not just by their fortitude, but by self-discipline and personal power, inner power?

CARMICHAEL: Right. I was really impressed, because when I lived up in Harlem, I learned, you know, that you don't get tapped on the shoulder without turning around.

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Carmichael had already begun, in any case, to drift from the Left. He had begun to feel that the Communists who expected the Negroes to start a civil rights revolution which could be developed into "The Revolution" weren't really sincere about Negroes, "were just trying to use Negroes." And he made no sense out of any Communist attempt to outline a program. The first dip into the sit-ins had shaken his economic theories; and now he elected Howard University, even though he didn't want to go to a Negro university and "wasn't sure that Howard could give me a good education," because there he could keep working in the Movement.

In December 1960, he went, in fact, to Fayette County, Tennessee (where James Forman† was also working), and there received further confirmation of the courage and moral force of the people involved.

> I was cold, hungry, and freezing, the ground was hard, when it wasn't hard it was muddy, ankle-deep. And the kids would go out and chop firewood, then come back and sit around and sing songs in the evening—a very, very moving thing.

Then came the Freedom Ride. He knew that this was serious. He had seen violence, had seen "what people can do to people." In his old neighborhood in New York, "five guys could jump on someone and beat him up, and I was sometimes the victim of that." So he knew that the Ride was serious: "Do I really want to put myself in a position where I can die?" He got rid of that by saying: "Well, somebody will die, but it won't be me, it will be the guy next to me."

So he went. He saw a mob. He was arrested. He heard a Chief of Police tell him: "You're not going to change anything, we'll keep throwing you in jail, we'll beat you, and furthermore, those people will kill you." He was released, made it to Jackson, and confronted the mob there:

> One old lady in particular, she was about 70 years old, shaking a cane viciously, just trembling all over, and I just kept looking at her, not because I wanted to antagonize her, but because I really couldn't believe this.

People in the mob yelled, "I'll kill you, I'll kill you!" Carmichael had been threatened before, but for once he really believed it. "I wondered

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* On February 1, 1960, Izell Blair, with three other freshmen at the Agricultural and Technical College, at Greensboro, North Carolina, initiated the wave of sit-ins that spread from that city over the South.

† Since 1961, Executive Secretary of SNCC.

whether I really thought these people meant it or whether I was scared because I was in the South." He stared at the faces, holding his hands up to keep from getting cigarette butts in his own face:

> And I kept thinking, why, why, why. A naïve question, but it's something that still comes back, because you can't find the answer to questions that bother you—really a problem.

He, with his group, was in the City Jail of Jackson. There the other Negro prisoners thought the Riders were "great, you know—heroes." On the night before they were to be removed to Parchman, the penitentiary, the jailer came and held the bars, to talk:

WARREN: What kind of a man was he?

CARMICHAEL: An old man, early fifties, believed in the Southern way of life, whatever connotation that brought him, but he was an honest man, and he thought at first that we were just a bunch of troublemakers, we were Communists, and so forth, and he was going to rule with a ruthless hand. We'd still keep singing, when he'd say *not* to sing. And after a while, it became a little petty game, you know. He'd do certain tricks to try to keep us in line, and there'd be soup for a meal one day, and let's say there were about thirty of us in there. He would pass thirty hot bowls of soup, with about three spoons, you know. So if you were at the end of the line, you'd just have cold soup. All these simple little things.

But he found out that we wouldn't break. Then he got so that he'd even joke a little, and laugh, and he'd say, "You gonna be here for a long time." And then we'd say, "Yeah, but you gotta be here with us, don't forget that."

But I think we got to respect each other. Anyway, I got to respect him. After a while, the respect grew. And we got to respect each other very well, sort of. It grew because I respected him as a man, you know, forgot that he was a white Southerner, that he was my jailer.

Well, it came that we could really talk—you know, about issues—and then he'd tell us about what we didn't understand about the Southern way of life. Of course, he'd say the same stereotypes, of Negroes being treated well, and so forth. We finally came to some understanding, I guess a sort of unspoken understanding. I found out a lot from him, about Mississippi and the way of life, you know, how he used to go fishing with Negroes, and so forth. He thought it was on an equal footing. I didn't think it was an equal footing. I don't know, it might have been, it's something that bothered me.

But anyway, the night we were leaving, he came to the bars, and he held on, very, very tightly, you know, and all of a sudden he started talking, about his life, and started talking about his maid. "Annie was good," he said, "she brought up and raised all my five kids, and we loved Annie dearly." A deep introspective thing, about how, "when Annie died, the whole family cried, how they went to Annie's funeral." Every year he places a wreath on Annie's grave. And he wanted us to understand that we were all wrong about race relations in the South. That they were really very good, and gonna be better, you know, and the Negroes really liked it that way.

But he was shaking, visibly shaking, and he said that we had our points of view as far as he was concerned, and he had his. He didn't want us to try and change them, he was gonna keep his way of life, he believed in God, and he believed in the way of the life of the South, he believed in human beings for what they were worth. He started crying. Tears dropped. And finally he said: "I want you to know that whatever happened to you, you know that you caused me a lot of trouble." He said, "I can't go along with the trouble you caused me, but you're still human beings, you have your beliefs, and I have mine." And he left. I thought about that for a long time. Everybody else felt that he was just putting on a show.

WARREN: I doubt it.

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On Black Nationalism

I knew Malcolm X and I told him: "You keep your talk, and you can say what you want, I don't even think you put me in a better bargaining position. You know, because you don't say anything."

On Goodbye to Liberals

Everybody is afraid to attack him [Malcolm X]. The funniest thing was an article by Loren Miller on the West Coast, Vice President of the NAACP. An article in the *Nation* called "A Farewell to White Liberals," which was a ridiculous article. He got hopped up with this Black Nationalism, and said goodbye to white liberals—"We don't need you—you don't do anything for us." The NAACP put out reprints, and passed them all over the country. Ridiculous. When they were attacked by Malcolm X, instead of standing their ground, they absolved him, and said, "We're friends." You know, people just jump on bandwagons.

On Being an Opportunist:

I don't think he [Reverend Milton Galamison] is a very intelligent leader. If you're really serious about it, it seems to me you've got to think about whether or not you're opportunistic. It bothers me a lot. If I see my name in the paper,

I'm not sorry it's there. When you write and say you want to interview me, I'm not sorry, I sort of feel good. That's one of the things you have to be worried about. The trouble is that you get an opportunist, and he becomes a rhetorician, he says things that are going to appease people, he's not going to really look for solutions.

On Busing into Harlem:

I've worked in Harlem, and I know the schools, how the schools are. We have the poorest teachers, the schools are run down, and so forth. I'd agree [with protesting] if you were to dramatize that [situation]. But now when you bring in the question of busing kids, it seems to me that you're being unfair, because I think—let's face it—Harlem is no picnic ground, you know. It's not a bad neighborhood just because white folks get beat up—because Negroes get beat up in the neighborhood, too. Negroes get beat up in Harlem all the time, so just because you're white and get beat up, it doesn't mean that all the Negroes are beating up white people. But it's a bad neighborhood—let's face it—whatever conditions produce it. And you can't really and truly ask anybody to send their kids in there.

On Non-violence and Conversion:

I think the issue of non-violence is very important in the question of solving certain things, but it's not true that it necessarily brings us closer together and makes us love each other. It does in certain cases, I'm not going to deny this.

Eddie Dickerson, from Cambridge, Maryland, a white fellow, two years ago, dragged me off a stool, and kicked me in the stomach about seven, eight, nine times. Really gave me a good roughing up, one of the roughest times I've ever spent was at the mercy of his hand. The same night he came back to church, apologized, said he was sorry, and started working in the Movement. Last summer, he was the fellow a white owner was smashing the eggs over his head, the white restaurant owner, and kicking—he was the same fellow. He joined. We sent him to New York to CORE, and CORE gave him some sort of non-violent training.

On Bob Moses and a Mississippi Episode

There were three cars, the men in the cars had guns hanging out of the windows. George started off driving. Bob asked why he was driving so fast. George said: "Goddammit, Moses, we're being chased." Bob looked back and could see the headlights. He said: "Well, they won't bother us." And Bob turned over and went to sleep. James and I were scared, and Bob went to sleep.

On the Debt to the Negro and Communal Guilt

It's a drip from the Muslims, you know—you owe us dues. I don't know that anybody owes me anything. I can't hold you guilty. And I don't want you to hold me guilty. For what my father did.

On Freedom Now:

It's a funny thing—if you just ask somebody what they mean by Freedom Now.

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Stokely Carmichael is now a veteran of many campaigns. He has spent the crucial summer of 1964 in Mississippi. But he remembers his first visit to Mississippi. He remembers Parchman, which was tougher than the Jackson jail, and remembers Sheriff Tyson, who made it tougher. He remembers, in fact, a number of things:

> I can go on Freedom Rides, with people around me, and I can say, "Oh, yes, nothing is going to happen to me, it will be the guy next to me." But when you get alone, and you're sitting on that stool by yourself, and somebody's behind you, and you hear the knife clicking, hot coffee being poured down your back, and you're alone, you really begin to feel, "Why am I here, when is it going to end?" But just before that first punch, just before you get hit, that little period there just before, when tensions are building and you can't control your stomach, and it's jumping, you start thinking over and over again, "You know, maybe that's the way it is, when you're really alone." When you really want to sit down and talk to people, when you really got to say, "Let's just sit down and talk this out, Sheriff Tyson, just me and you, and let's see, you know, where we go from here." And you say, "Why can't I sit down and talk with Sheriff Tyson?"