

"HUBERT HUMPHREY: A CONVERSATION"

February 26, 1968

KYW-TV

PARTICIPANTS

THE HON. HUBERT H. HUMPHREY, Vice-President of the  
United States

SID DAVIS

CARL ROWAN

ROD MACLEISH

- - - -

MR. ROD MACLEISH: This is  
Rod MacLeish in Philadelphia.

One senses that the United States  
stands at a precipitous moment in its history with  
the cities in conflict and national tensions at  
home and conflict abroad.

Tonight my colleagues and I will  
be discussing these world and national problems  
with the Vice-President of the United States.

Mr. Humphrey has agreed to come  
before us, and we will have a completely free  
and unscripted discussion on many things that

seem to be troubling, preoccupying, and disturbing Americans, both at home and abroad. There are no pre-planned questions; no agenda has been worked out for this, our conversation with the Vice-President.

My colleagues engaged with me in this endeavor will be Carl Rowan, Group W commentator, nationally-syndicated columnist, and former Ambassador to Finland, and Sid Davis, the Group W Whitehouse correspondent.

Carl, I believe we will begin with you.

MR. ROWAN: Mr. Vice-President, you have been in your office now for three years serving under President Lyndon Johnson. Have you ever wished that you had never moved from the Senate?

THE VICE-PRESIDENT: I suppose every man has a few questions every once in a while that he does not always convey the answers to even to his most intimate friends.

I don't believe I have really

regreted making the decision to leave the Senate.

I can tell you that when it appeared that there might be a possibility that I would be on the ticket with President Johnson in the 1964 convention, just prior to that convention, when there was some talk about my being on the ticket, I gave very serious thought as to whether this was a decision I wanted to make. I had been Majority Whip in the Senate, which is a very, very interesting and somewhat responsible and important position in the Senate structure. I had just finished handling our legislation in the Civil Rights Act of 1964. I had been in the thick of all the Congressional debate, and I liked it. I think that you know, as an old acquaintance and friend of mine, that I liked it very much.

But then I thought of what would be the possibility of public service as a Vice-President, and I thought those possibilities were big enough and sufficiently attractive for me to want to be Vice-President.

MR. ROWAN: Have you found the opportunity to advance during your three years

of what you consider your privilege of rendering service to be bigger than the burden the job puts on you?

THE VICE-PRESIDENT: Yes. This, of course, has to do with what I was saying about becoming Vice-President and what it has meant.

This is a very different office. I said one time to you before, Carl, that it's an awkward office.

Its description in the Constitution is so minimal that I hesitate even to mention it. That is the responsibility I have of presiding over the Senate and the authority of casting a vote in case of a tie in the Senate. You are, of course, Vice-President, there in case any tragedy befalls the President of the United States. But that is the scope of the authority and the scope of the position of the Vice-President.

But I have found, for example, that it gives you a wonderful opportunity to know what different proceedings are all about -- the budget process, the decision-making process, which is so vital. I have tried to learn that just in

case I was needed.

The Vice-Presidency does not lend itself to headline-making. You are not the front man; you are number two. You must remember that there is only one president at a time. Yet you are a member of the Presidential Cabinet, and you have a chance to speak out in the councils of the government, to know the working of the inside of the government.

I believe that I have said to you before, Carl, that I would rather have five minutes with the President in his office than to have two hours out or in front of the Whitehouse all week walking up and down trying to get in. I am part of the official family.

MR. MACLEISH: What about the problem of submerging your own political views to those of the President? This is one thing that has caused some question in your own capacity, being recognized as one of the greater modern liberals. It was considered by some that you were more liberal and the present President more

conservative. What about this problem?

THE VICE-PRESIDENT: When we were in the Senate, there is not any doubt that the President, during his term in the Senate, had different views on matters than the Senator from Minnesota, Hubert Humphrey.

But we are both now in national offices. And I say to my liberal friends that if any liberal has ever served in the presidency with a more liberal and progressive record than Lyndon Johnson, then you have a knowledge of history that is surely not mine. All of the things that I had fought for as a senator have come into being, not merely as promises but as achievements, and those things have occurred under the Administration of Lyndon Johnson.

I have had no difficulty with respect to my political views and those of the President. The President has taken a stand in the field of civil rights where I have long been an advocate, a stand that is as strong as or even stronger than any that I have ever taken.

MR. MACLEISH: Would there be

anything that you could do about it if you differed with the President, you as Vice-President?

THE VICE-PRESIDENT: Yes. If you disagree on a moral issue, on the basis of a moral issue or on the basis of a principle, your course of conduct is "hush your tongue," so to speak, and not try loudly to advocate the course of the Administration. I can tell you that my sense of political integrity would compel me to do so.

I have not supported the Johnson Administration because I thought it was the right thing to do politically. I have supported the President and his Administration because I thought he was doing the right thing. That is why I have been able to throw myself into it the way I have. I think it is generally conceded that I have really worked at it. Whether effectively or not is always open to debate. But when I did so, I was trying to do so because that was what I wanted to do.

That is the reason why -- I come back again -- I like my work. It isn't as if I were doing something contrary to my nature or well-being. I find that I can do what I want to do;

I am able to work in matters behind the scenes, or I can work in the programs or deliver our messages to the American people, that is, my input of ideas and convictions. I am not always in the front line; I am not always making headlines; but I have a warm, friendly relationship with the President. I do not bother him unless he wishes I should come to visit, but we have an exchange of views, and I always know that I can talk to him.

MR. DAVIS: On the subject of your personal relationship with the President, are you able to see him whenever you want to see him? Do you feel that you can be deeply involved in everything going on?

THE VICE-PRESIDENT: Anytime I wish to see the President, I have no problem whatsoever.

As a matter of fact, he made it clear at the first Cabinet meeting that any time the Vice-President wanted to see the President, that was the way it was. Not only that, but any time the Vice-President wished to see a member of the Cabinet, the Cabinet member was supposed to be available to the Vice-President. Our relationship not only on an

official level but on a personal basis is warm. We are warm friends and have been for a long time. Besides this, our family relationships are very, very good.

MR. MACLEISH: Back to the matter of the interpretation of any of the disagreements of your point of view with the Johnson Administration, incidentally, that causes us to come to the question of Viet Nam. A great many of your former liberal colleagues are not supporters of the President's program or political views, as was demonstrated by the Americans for Democratic Action, of which you were a founding member, which has just split itself in two over the question of the support of President Johnson. What about Viet Nam? Do you think that those liberal views of yours are sometimes squashed a bit when you view the puzzling predicament going on in Southeast Asia?

THE VICE-PRESIDENT: I have been able to work and most of my life -- all of my adult life -- has been dedicated to the pursuit of peace. My political reputation, if I may speak of it in that respect, has been one of working for the

Nuclear Disarmament Treaty, one of the authors of the Food for Peace Act, sponsor of the United States Disarmament Agency, a person who has been deeply involved in the work of the United Nations, and I am a former delegate to the United Nations. I am a peace man.

But I don't believe that peace is attained by blinking our eyes at aggression, subversion, and intimidation. I don't think that that is the work of peace. Of course, I am a product of the post-World War II period and the pre-war. I believe that those levels of activity are still valid even though conditions are, of course, very different. This is a different world than the world of 1939, a very different world from the world of 1945 or 1950, but there are certain verities, I believe, that will stand the test of time. Aggression does not lend itself to a solution or easement by just feeding the aggressor, letting him have a little more and a little more. The aggressor knows no limitation to his appetite nor to his aggression.

I also believe in the necessity of

international involvement on the part of our country. We are a world leader. This came about somewhat unwittingly. We did not plan on being a world leader. There is not any doubt about it. The greater one is, the more responsibility he must accept, which is true of nations and individuals. With responsibilities sometimes come burdens, pain, and agony, which takes us back to your inquiry about Southeast Asia.

We organized the Americans for Democratic Action to involve the American liberal Democratic community in international affairs. Involvement was vital; it was necessary that they participate in international affairs if our international responsibility was to be met.

I must say I am a little bit concerned about what ADA did because I think it turned its back from what I consider is responsibility in international leadership.

MR. ROWAN: You have been preaching to us about this for three years. Do you think that you are really selling the American people?

Some people think that as the months go by the Administration loses a few more liberals, a few more so-called moderates, in this case. Do you think you are in for deeper trouble before the fall elections?

THE VICE-PRESIDENT: I don't think that that is a real problem or question.

I think the question I have to face is: Is what we are doing, as an Administration, is what I am doing, as an individual, what I believe to be really the right thing to do?

I believe that when people elect a President and a Vice-President, they expect them to follow the dictates of their own consciences, they expect them to be knowledgeable, and they expect them to be as concerned with the life of this nation and its responsibilities and hopes and aspirations as any person who has ever lived. In other words, they expect us to make decisions.

For instance, if you are going to try to be popular, you are really in the wrong business if you are in a position of political

relationship. If you expect people always to agree with you and not to have to take the furor at times of the public, you are in the wrong business.

Harry Truman once said, "If you can't take the heat, get out of the kitchen."

I like to be in the kitchen.

MR. MACLEISH: In that context, there are many people, at least some people, who think of Lyndon Johnson as being quite a political animal, putting politics first, you might say.

In the case of Viet Nam, are you saying that you think that he would rather be right than President?

THE VICE-PRESIDENT: Yes. I do. I think that President Johnson is a man very deeply committed on matters of international and domestic policy. As a matter of fact, if the President has problems today -- and he has a few, as he would be the first to admit -- it is because of his courage in taking a stand on two of the great issues of our time: First, the right of equal opportunity for every person, regardless of creed or color. No

President has ever taken as firm a stand on the matter of participation in American life of all people of all classes and categories, and not only has he taken that stand, but he has implemented it. He has fulfilled the responsibilities of his leadership by programmed policy and administrative decision. He has lost friends with it. There is no question about it.

As to the second great question, on the international front, he faced the tough decision as to whether we were going to live up to our commitments, to live with our treaties when the sun is shining being one thing, but whether we were to live with them when the storm clouds gathered. This President has realized that, as a result of our great power, the people of the world depend, in large measure, upon the integrity of the American contract and the American commitment.

It is not easy to take such a stand. I know of no man who wants peace any more than President Johnson.

MR. ROWAN: It has also been charged that this action has led to the neglect of his concern for civil rights and so forth, that he is

spending all of the country's money in Southeast Asia instead of on our domestic problems.

THE VICE-PRESIDENT: I must say, first, that my initial reaction is that that is not true, and it is not true. The record speaks for itself. There has been no period in the history of this country in which there has been as much done in such a short period of time concerning the welfare of the public as under the present Administration. There has been, for example, more Federal aid to education in the last few years than in the preceding two hundred. There has been more building of houses for senior citizens in the last four years than since the beginning of this country. Look at the programs for the elderly, for instance, the medical care, the Medicare, care for the elderly. Look at what has been happening throughout the country in terms of our youth and children -- Head Start, child nutrition, child health. These things are substantial, believe us.

My wife and I are very interested in the field of mental retardation. For the first time this Government has come to grips with this

problem under the Administrations of President Kennedy and President Johnson.

This Administration has been orientated towards the need of people. When I think along these lines of the large, urban centers, I am reminded of my good friend, the present mayor of Minneapolis, who was my secretary when I was mayor. I think of Mayor ~~Naphtali~~<sup>Huber</sup> as one of the good, talented mayors of that City. As is true of all good friends, we do not always agree.

But recently we were talking, and I said, "Art, when I was mayor of Minneapolis and you were my secretary, we never heard from the Federal Government, and yet we had poor people, and yet we had urban blight, and yet we had all of these problems. It wasn't easy. We never heard of the Model Cities Program; we never heard of the Urban Program."

Now, when you ask me in these terms, "Are we doing enough?" I must answer, "No."

But if you say, "More than anybody else ever did?" then the answer is, "Yes."

MR. ROWAN: Aren't you afraid that we are going to have to cut back?

THE VICE-PRESIDENT: No. This country is a very rich and powerful country. The people in America have no lack of means, but they need only to will it to be.

MR. MACLEISH: I want to go back to the Viet Nam crisis. Now, for months this Administration has been telling us that there is light at the end of the tunnel, but in the past few weeks we have sustained drastic attacks, and certainly Viet Nam is now braced for a second series of offenses at Kanian, as we all know. What is your deepest, inner feeling about Ho Chi Minh? Do you think that he wants to negotiate before the November elections, or do you think that we are going to have a much longer war than we had anticipated?

THE VICE-PRESIDENT: I don't think you can tell. I do not try to be a prophet but an interpreter of events as I see them. I really do not think anybody knows.

I believe that the fact that so many have tried to predict these events is part of the problem of confusion in America. After all, no one knew when the Berlin Air Lift was started when it

would end. Nobody had the slightest idea. It just went one day.

Now, it is my view that while we are going through a very difficult period now in Viet Nam, the odds are on the side of the Allies if we stay with it. What the Communists seek to do and what North Viet Nam seeks to do more than anything else is to strike a psychological blow, not in Viet Nam, but in America. Remember, Ho Chi Minh said repeatedly that this war will be won in America, just as the <sup>is called</sup> ~~World~~ War was won in Paris. He believes it. We must understand that he believes it.

I believe that the recent wave of discontent and uncertainty in America is the only victory Ho Chi Minh has had since America became fully involved in the struggle.

MR. MACLEISH: You view this as a psychological victory?

THE VICE-PRESIDENT: I am saying that it could be a psychological victory for Ho Chi Minh to have such effect in America.

We must reverse it. This is a great country. We ought not to stand in fear and trepidation of what appear to be temporary setbacks. Remember the Battle of the Bulge, although that is not necessarily comparable. But Mr. Hitler put on a tremendous offensive in the winter of 1944, I believe it was, and it looked like they were passing us, but it was not so. Japan did the same thing; North Korea did exactly the same thing in 1952 in Korea.

I don't think one can predict exactly when the end will come in this terrible struggle, on the one hand. But I know this: It will come a little sooner if we buckle down to the task and understand that this is an important development for the security of the United States and the free world.

MR. DAVIS: Are you going to supply -- the figure is estimated at an additional two hundred and fifty thousand -- General Westmoreland the additional troops he says are needed?

THE VICE-PRESIDENT: This is a

question that the Vice-President of the United States cannot answer. I have not had a chance to visit with the President on this matter in recent days. I can only point out to you that there is no desire on the part of the President or on the part of the Vice-President to send a single man who is not needed in Viet Nam there for any purpose.

I do want to say that there has been a lot of conjecture and a lot of talk about how many we are going to send and how many are needed and so on, but that sort of talk does not particularly appear to help the situation. I want every American to know that no man I have ever known or you will ever know has a greater stake in this matter than the President of the United States. If peace came in Viet Nam in the next few months, his political future would be assured beyond any doubt. If peace would come, his place in history would be assured. The President is vitally interested in peace, but he is also interested in the protection of the men who are

there. I think that the American people will have to understand this, though: Even it takes a few more to protect what we have there, these are the lives of the people of America, American people, but no one is willing to sacrifice the lives of American people, more American soldiers, more forces in Viet Nam, than are needed for the single purpose of seeing that aggression is stopped.

MR. MACLEISH: Going back, for the moment, to talking about the need nationally of getting the American people behind the policy of the administration and not meeting with a psychological defeat, perhaps there is a great deal of discontent in this country for one reason: the American people think that they are being excluded from the realities of the situation. As Sid Davis said, there have been numerous people debating these things particularly in the last four weeks, while the Whitehouse informs us that there has been a series of victories for our side, blows are being struck against us, as revealed by our own figures, such as six hundred and seventy thousand new refugees, thirty-nine thousand homes destroyed, thousands of civilian casualties.

Does the Administration sometimes think that the American people cannot take a clear, direct talk about Viet Nam, the real truth about the situation, rather than giving out these fond euphemisms and statements?

VICE-PRESIDENT HUMPHREY: Let me mention for a moment that this is the first war in history in which there has been no censorship. When you say that the American people do not have the facts, it is my point of view that they have so many facts that they don't know what to do with them. There is a glut of facts or opinions or observations.

This is the first war in history ever shown on television, not even in the movies, but right where the blood comes into the living room in color. You see every little action. As to the interpretation of the facts, I think the correspondents have tried to do a good job, but each one sees things a little differently.

The other evening my wife and I went to a symphony with five people. We came home and discussed what we had heard. No one heard the same music.

43

You know that if ten people go to the art gallery and look at the same paintings, why, all ten have seen something different in the art pieces. When you think of the hundreds of representatives of the press in Viet Nam, you must remember that they all have their eyes and minds focused on particular developments and see things differently, and yet it is recorded every hour on the hour three hundred and sixty-five days a year.

Think back to World War II and just imagine how much confusion would have been caused in this country if every mistake had been reported, if every time an American airplane bombed a civilian population had been reported, and imagine what America would have looked like if we had known that the city of Dresden, an open city, had been leveled to the ground by American airplanes, if we had known that on Italian beaches we cut off supplies from our own people, that the command orders were mistaken and never got through. Wars are not exact, efficient, business-like operations. They

represent the most severe, the worst of man's violence, fraught with frequent terrible mistakes. It has been always thus.

As a matter of fact, this is the first war ever in open display to the American public. I want to say that I think that if everybody in the world could see what we see, if this tube, the television, could have an universal acceptance free and clear throughout the world, that would be the end of the war.

But this is not so in the Communist system. Imagine what Goebels could have done with television.

Imagine what it means today for the President of the United States not only to have to face up to the realities of the struggle but to have to face every bit of cross-current of opinion that comes from here and there.

No. I really don't think this is such a big problem.

MR. ROWAN: But, Mr. Vice-President,

while you are wanting people to buckle down, you do not seem to be able to get the Congress to buckle down. As has been seen in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, most or many of the members say that they were misled right from Tonkin Gulf right on up to the present day. How can the American people buckle down when even the men who are supposed to be closest to the President, talking to him, say that even they suffer from the credibility gap?

THE VICE-PRESIDENT: Carl, the "credibility gap" is a handy catch phrase, but the main thing about the credibility gap is that it lacks credibility. It does not really relate to the problem. There are always different views under various circumstances. What can I predict about what will happen at the end of the week in Minneapolis, Philadelphia, or Washington? I don't have the powers of prophesy. What I have to do, I think, is obvious, namely, predict, to be sure, but obviously I may be far wrong. For instance, we frequently see the Government making

predictions on crops, only they don't always work out that way. We make predictions on the gross national product, but they do not ~~always~~ work out that way. The great corporations of America predict sales, but they do not always work out that way. But you don't say that that is due to a credibility gap but to extenuating circumstances.

Now, let me make it clear that I didn't say that the American people are unwilling to buckle down. The problem, after all, isn't as much in the buckling down of those who have suffered, those in this world who have done more than any person should be called upon to do, regardless. It has not been with this group that there has been dissatisfaction.

MR. ROWAN: All right.

THE VICE-PRESIDENT: But it has been my observation that the vast majority of the American people have not suffered at all. The dissatisfaction has not come from the people who

have suffered and made sacrifices, the some five hundred thousand men out there and their loved ones back here, who suffer great agonies. The protests, generally from people subjected to little in the way of suffering, people not subject to the draft, people getting special exemptions, people who frequently have had the best education. They are the people who are doing most of the protesting.

MR. MACLEISH: Why do you think they do it?

THE VICE-PRESIDENT: I think I need to ask you, Rod, why you think they do it.

One cannot help puzzling: Why is it that the family that gives its son, has had the lives of its sons lost, do not complain, but somebody who has given nothing, in fact, has had two tax decreases in the last four or five years, will say, "It's just too much for me"?

I am not ignoring compassion; I know people have sensibilities, and so do I. But I

get letters from the heartsick, the pained, and the anguished, and I get letters, such as one from a mother who saw her boy wounded in Viet Nam as she watched on her television in the front room -- and I have had that happen to me -- and I have gotten a letter from a mother who has seen her boy draped over a tank as she watched on television -- and I will say to you that that person has suffered real suffering, real anguish.

MR. MACLEISH: Do you think that we will undergo a somewhat changing role in Viet Nam?

THE VICE-PRESIDENT: No. I think America must keep up the responsibilities of world power and world leadership. I think that we have to stand committed. I think that the real danger would be in America's withdrawing from the responsible role of fulfilling its duties in a troubled world.

MR. MACLEISH: What is our role in the world, as you see it, Mr. Vice-President?

THE VICE-PRESIDENT: I think our role is to try to promote conditions leading to a

just and enduring peace. The highest standard of statesmanship today is the pursuit of peace.

I am reminded of what the late President Jack Kennedy said, I believe at American University in 1962, when he reminded the people that their lives would not be passive but active, when he reminded us that one's sacrifice for peace may be the ultimate sacrifice, when he said to us that the price of freedom does not come cheaply and that this generation will live in trouble and danger and peril for all its lifetime. This is what we are really up against. I think that we, as a people, are going through a very, very dedicated sometimes painful process, providing more and more assistance for other peoples, Food for Peace, foreign aid -- and some people talk most about peace and want to cut out the heart of the foreign aid program -- and I think that the peaceful promotion of foreign trade, which I believe lead to mutual alliances such as NATO, and I also think that these are the times when the American people must stand up against those who would commit acts of criminal aggression around the world, just as they do in the

cities' streets throughout the country.

What kind of a world do you think it would be today if Mr. Truman had backed away from Iran, if Mr. Truman had not had the courage to stand up to the Communist penetration of Greece and Turkey? What kind of a world do you think it would be today without NATO and all of the measures that have been taken, without facing up to the Cuban missile crisis, the war in Korea, all of these steps toward peace? The world is a better place because these actions were taken when they were needed.

MR. DAVIS: What do you have to say about the problem of peace in the big cities this summer? That is a very serious problem we have facing us now.

THE VICE-PRESIDENT: This is a question of ferment. This is the first thing you have to understand.

I think it was D'Tocqueville, the great French sociologist of the early nineteenth century, who said to us that ~~persons~~ <sup>conditions</sup> that seem

inevitable are tolerable, but once they seem to be subject to correction, then they become intolerable. In other words, thus it is with the civil rights exponents today, and most of our cities today have hundreds of thousands of people who have for years and years been deprived, disadvantaged, and now for them for the first time there is a ray of hope. It is difficult, and it is terrible, and there lie the sources of violence.

In some societies you could justify violence, societies where there are no democratic processes for the redress of grievances, but in the American society there is redress of grievances through the political process and other processes in a democratic manner. That is why I believe that we have to have law and order in our cities as we pursue the development of our cities.

MR. DAVIS: What do you have to say about the forthcoming prospects as to civil rights and the fair housing subject?

THE VICE-PRESIDENT: I will predict --

I had better think again, for I have said that I am not going to be a prophet -- but I will go this far: I believe in the leadership in the Senate from Mansfield and now from Senator Dirksen, working with my ~~the~~ colleagues on both sides of the aisle, that they will be able to bring forth a good civil rights program, with improved protection for civil rights workers, improvements in our jury system, strengthening of the civil rights code, development of a program of guaranteed open housing. It may not go all the way, but it will make a breakthrough and a very substantial one.

MR. ROWAN: Do you think Senator Dirksen will go a substantial part of the way on this program?

THE VICE-PRESIDENT: Well, Carl, you know this Senate, you and I. Senator Dirksen is an astute parliamentarian and a very able legislator. We have our disagreements politically. I guess everybody knows that. I am of the opinion that the Senator realizes the great importance of this legislation. Freedom of movement is a part of

democracy, the right of people to live where they wish within their means being a basic right within this country. To the extent that this is not true, this is an intolerable inequity. I think that the Senator realizes that this very definitely has to be developed. With respect to the Civil Rights Act of 1964, he was one of the major forces in making possible this legislation in 1964. I think that he has been very helpful in this particular development, which I think is a very vital piece of civil rights legislation.

MR. ROWAN: There are people in the country who equate your support of civil rights legislation with support of rioting in the streets. Does that bother you?

THE VICE-PRESIDENT: They are wrong. Of course, when anybody falsely accuses you, it bothers you.

But rioting is not limited to any one ethnic group. I would hope that all Americans would take a good look at their history. We had

rioting conditions in America long before anybody ever heard about civil rights legislation. As I understand, the most apt to be hurt, of course, are the Negro families living among these existing dangers. We know that.

But I have just read a survey, incidentally, in the Fortune Magazine on what the Negro and the Negro family wants. I will tell you what they want: They want the same thing that the rest of the American people want -- they want the law enforced; they want the opportunity for ample education; they want adequate medical care; they want a clean community; they want a wholesome environment. They want every single thing Hubert Humphrey wants; they want everything Carl Rowan wants; they want everything Rod MacLeish wants; they want everything Sid Davis wants. We are all alike in this consideration basically. Unfortunately, these disadvantaged people all too often live in the neighborhoods that bear the brunt of these civil disturbances. They are not wrong in advocating civil rights legislation as a right, not

a privilege. They have every right to want to be first-class citizens with all American people.

I think this open housing legislation will have some specific effect, but if anybody says that if we pass this open housing legislation, it will prevent riots, the answer to that is that that person is wrong. I can say only this: If we don't, it surely won't help conditions. Besides that, you ought to do it because it is the right thing to do.

I can't say that if we get every hard-core unemployed a good job at good pay there will be no more violence in our cities. As a matter of fact, Detroit had violence, and there were many good-paying jobs. But I do say this: that a man who wants to work and has the capacity to work ought to have a chance to work. We ought all to know, however, that the violence and riots will not necessarily all be gone with employment adequacy in our society, but if we do not have it I believe our work will be lost.

I don't condone violence; I don't think it helps anybody; it sets back the cause of

society, in my judgment. But, by the same token, as long as we have these inequities, as long as we do not make our education system more just, for instance, and as long as we have these inequities, we will continue to have problems.

MR. MACLEISH: Twenty years ago when I was a young reporter and you were an even younger politician, I remember when you were one of the young Democrats who ran through one of the great civil rights planks --

MR. ROWAN: Right in this city.

MR. MACLEISH: -- that's right -- at Convention Hall.

MR. ROWAN: Yes.

MR. MACLEISH: You were one of the white radicals in those days. Now we have black radicals. Do you think that we will be able to get the white and the black radicals back together, working for the same constructive things, so to speak, instead of the isolated radical black power in the cities?

THE VICE-PRESIDENT: The word "radical"

is always subject to interpretation. And just by way of history, in 1948, what happened then looks most conservative now. I look back at this and wonder how anybody got excited about it. When I read it over again, I say to myself, "My goodness, how could that precipitate any group walking out of the convention?"

And that leads me to comment again that I have never seen these walkouts as very helpful in dealing with problems. But Mr. Truman went on, after the Dixiecrats walked out, and won the election. The Democratic party took a stand on principle, and although it took sixteen years to accomplish most of the support of principle then advocated, yet we were on the right way.

Now there are groups who call themselves ~~militant~~. Now, there is nothing wrong with being militant as long as you are non-violent in being militant. You can be a strong militant; you can advocate democratic militant action; you can even be a militant advocate. Anybody has the right to exercise freedom of speech. I believe people ought to be able to speak and be heard.

I don't believe that they should always be taken seriously, but they ought to have the right to be heard. But I do not believe that you have a right to incite to violence. I do not think that you ought to incite acts of violence by your behavior, and I surely do not believe you promote the cause of society or justice by criminal acts.

MR. MACLEISH: These things obviously are of importance -- and I realize that the militant black element may be in the great minority -- but they have attracted the attention of many Americans. Isn't there some way to harness that voltage of that militant emerging power into some kind of democratic co-operative endeavor with equally militant white people wanting the same things for Negroes that the Negro militants want or if they do not want, should want? You have been adamant on the side of Negro rights, to bring this back to you.

THE VICE-PRESIDENT: Yes. I think that a number of our Negro citizens, the black people, feel that they need to win their own

self-respect, feel that they need to win their own dignity so that they can be regarded as equal partners in the struggle for full and complete American citizenship. I think that there is a certain amount of truth to that, that some have felt beaten down over a long period of time, that they need to win self-respect, self-esteem, and all of these are honorable attributes.

I am not particularly worried about that, militant advocacy of a good, positive program, a militant advocacy of cleaning out the slums, a militant advocacy for public hospitals and proper medical treatment, a militant advocacy for Negro partnerships in business, a militant advocacy for fair insurance rates, a militant advocacy for an equal place in trade and commerce. That kind of militancy this country desperately needs. It is receiving a very friendly reception. The business community in America is not what it once was. One of the great changes that has taken place in America, I think, has happened in the ranks of what we used to call the "captains of industry."

the business community, the great, urban ~~corporations~~ <sup>Coalition</sup> headed by Rockefeller, by Randolph, and others, the labor movement in the Negro community, the changes in the corporate structure in the white community, all represent the conscience of America. America today is much more receptive to what is right. As a matter of fact, people ought to know more about this change in the American business community, for instance, Mr. Miller of the Ford Motor Company, among others, advocating the negative income tax.

MR. MACLEISH: What about that? Do you think that we will go on and come to the guaranteed annual wage?

THE VICE-PRESIDENT: These are matters that are being discussed. I do not expect all of them to take place immediately.

Let me put it this way: All the subtitles and titles need to be discussed in terms of looking at their meaning, their impact, what kind of procedure would the impact take overall. I don't think we know right now. But this is the

American exchange of ideas, bringing out the social ferment, and ideas that necessarily have changed society from a rural to an industrial American society in which the second-class citizen is passing from the scene so that American will have only one kind of citizen.

You know, I have compared the situation we face today with an airplane ride. We all fly a great deal, much of the time. But each time that I get on an airplane, I talk to the pilot as to the weather. It is like Linas with his blanket. I always check and ask what the weather is going to be.

Frequently the pilot will say, "We are going through a little period of turbulence, coming out of a low pressure system into a high."

Look at the television show morning, noon, and night, and see the maps. What does it mean? It says that when you come out of one weather system and go into another, there is a period in there in which you need a good pilot, in which you need a good structure, in which you need a good plane, in which you need some good luck.

and in which you need a little prayer or maybe a lot. I have gone through that experience in an airplane.

MR. DAVIS: Are you and President Johnson the pilot and copilot?

THE VICE-PRESIDENT: One moment. Let me finish with this.

Now, we are coming out a social system in which there was segregation, where there was idleness, where there was hopelessness and despair for hundreds of thousands, yes, millions of Americans. That was the low. We are going through a period of turbulence, making the change from a low-pressure system into the high, the clear, blue sky and unlimited visibility where every man can have a chance to be himself, and it is up to us to make it. I will tell you that you are making it, that you will make it, if you do not panic in the plane. The pilot will not panic; the copilot or the navigator or the ground crew -- I can tell you that -- will not panic; and if we can just keep the passengers from trying to sort of

jump out the windows, I think we will make it through.

MR. ROWAN: Talking about this political coalition to come out of the meeting of two societies, the American Democratic party has owed quite a lot of its power in the past years to the Negro vote in the big cities in America. But we hear more and more discontent among Negroes. Do you think that the Democratic party will continue to hold the Negro vote in urban areas of America in 1968?

THE VICE-PRESIDENT: Well, I think that I could get a lot more information from you than you could from me on this, Carl. I read what you write. I will say that you are a very persuasive journalist.

Would you like to take this one, untutored bit of comment?

MR. ROWAN: Yes. I want to know how you see it.

THE VICE-PRESIDENT: You know,

everything is a choice between alternatives, particularly when the day of decision comes. When you see the various opponents, you always hope that your favorite, ideal candidate will be, after all, a political candidate, this man who never lived and probably never will, but you would have it so.

MR. ROWAN: I thought that you were going to say Bobby Kennedy.

MR. DAVIS: I thought you were going to mention me.

THE VICE-PRESIDENT: But, anyway, we are going through a period like that now where all of the grievances one has -- and we all have some -- are more or less put up against the background of the person who we would like to see as a candidate in kind of a Utopia that one will never have, but we still hope to find the candidate someday, somehow to make our dreams come true.

Then, after the conventions -- the Republicans nominate in July and the Democrats, in

August -- we take a look at who the candidates are, and then we come down to the real-life candidates and have to make a choice between poor earthly mortals, none with our ideal qualities but men with limitations and abilities and capacities and inabilities and incapacities, and there are promises, and there are assurances, and at times there are lacks of assurances, but when they come down to it, I believe that most of the people, of whom we are speaking, not just in the Negro community, but the vast majority of the American people won't change.

MR. ROWAN: The liberals, too?

THE VICE-PRESIDENT: I believe that the liberals will come home, too. I believe that they will choose the man who has been willing to work along with them to help them. I believe that we have been constant about our liberal friends. I consider myself a Liberal. I have not resigned from the human race or the Liberals. I think they will be back, too.

I will tell you the reason why: because they will have to make some tough, agonizing decisions or suffer terribly.

MR. ROWAN: I think you have a hunch who will run against President Johnson.

THE VICE-PRESIDENT: I keep reading your column.

MR. DAVIS: Do you view the candidacy of Governor Wallace seriously as a threat to the country, viewed in the light of racial problems this summer?

THE VICE-PRESIDENT: I have great faith in the American people. The American people are certainly a steady, self-reliant, sensible people. They usually come up with a good choice.

Now, we had in 1948 Strom Thurmond and in 1948 we had Henry Wallace, who had a great following personally as an outstanding administrator of public service, and we had Thomas Dewey of New York, and we had Harry S. Truman of Missouri for the President of the United States. Not very

many people gave Mr. Truman much chance to be elected. In fact, Mr. Dewey, I think, thought he had it pretty much by himself.

MR. ROWAN: So did the Chicago Tribune.

THE VICE-PRESIDENT: I recall that some leading publications or at least one thought so also.

But the American people took that election in stride. And believe me, the Progressive Movement, if that is what you want to call it, wasn't very progressive, plus the fact that Mr. Wallace tried every way he could to confuse the American people on internal issues, to confuse the American people on domestic issues, and Governor Storm Thurmond surely led a very conservative force in America, and there were people who were very, very reactionary and conservative who supported him.

Governor Wallace, strange as it may seem to many people, has quite a Populist attitude on social and economic needs. I know some people are beginning to consider that fact. It is true that he

takes the segregationist attitude on racial issues, but when it comes to Social Security, welfare, housing, and education, he is associated with a number of other people who call themselves Liberals.

MR. MACLEISH: But he says that he wants to close down the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare.

THE VICE-PRESIDENT: But that does not mean that he wants to do away with those, but merely to return it to the state.

MR. DAVIS: You were speaking of this year as paralleled with 1948, but in 1948 the cities were not on fire, but this year they may well be, from everything we hear. Is this a very serious threat? I am not talking about you alone but all candidates. How will you be able to conduct a campaign this year with racial discontent being what it is? Is it not dangerous for candidates of both parties to take a stand on the issues?

THE VICE-PRESIDENT: If it is, we

will have to take that stand anyway. Man wasn't put in the world to live forever. If you are looking for a purpose in life, look for a high purpose. That is my belief. I know there are risks in everything you do -- in personal relations, in public relations, in financial relations, in all kinds of relations. If you stand for the office of President or Vice-President, you ought to be able and willing to make a sacrifice for what you stand for. I really believe that. I don't necessarily think that that is going to happen to anyone, but you don't know what the price will be or how high. At times the price will be high in terms of anguish, fatigue, pain, and defeat. I have had some of that, and I know a little bit about that, but I have also had some victories, and I know about that.

Let me say a word about the cities. I don't think that predicting that the cities will be put on fire or that there will be violence is helpful. There may be. But there may be something else, too. As a matter of fact, what I think we

really need today in America is a positive program for the American people about how we can rectify the injustices in our society in a peaceful manner. I appeal to the American people to set an example for the world. We can make tomorrow very much more peaceful; we can have a social revolution, if need be, in an evolutionary, peaceful manner. Here we are the most educated people in the world blessed with the most freedom, the most blessed people on the face of the earth. If we can't do something about our problems peacefully, who can?

When I hear people saying they want peace in the world, I say, "The place to start is at home." The first place to get peace is right where you live. We can get it in the cities, the towns, and the countryside. I think we can.

MR. MACLEISH: Do you think that is still possible this year?

THE VICE-PRESIDENT: Yes. I think we must not only think positively, because that isn't the problem, but we must act that way. We must offer

hope to the American people, not just by allowing them or urging them to look to Washington. There is always that tendency, whenever the task may be complicated, not to look to yourselves but to see what Washington can do. Let me tell you this, gentlemen: Create a better America in your home town. The Federal Government ought not to have to do all of these things. The Government is big enough already. You need more local administration. You need more co-operation and better understanding between the local government and the private citizenry; you need more involvement of Americans with the communities in which they live, for instance, programs whereby the students and the faculty work in the metropolises, help the cities revise their charters, help enforce and create new laws required to make this a more equitable and better society, help to ease tensions by helping people clean up the slums. There is plenty of work that is there to be done. Sometimes I have thought that those who carry the biggest signs and shout the loudest are the hardest ones to find when there is work to be done with the disadvantaged,

teaching the little children, teaching the little boys and girls to learn to read, helping the man to get a job, training him for a job, cleaning up slums. The menial tasks are there to be done. What about helping people actually clean up their living quarters so that they are physically more attractive? Those are some of the little things that I can think of.

MR. MACLEISH: Mr. Vice-President, do you feel that you and President Johnson are going to win this year?

THE VICE-PRESIDENT: Yes. I think President Johnson will be reelected. I hope I can serve with him. I know one thing: If you have served by principles, if you have stood by your convictions, even when people don't agree with you, they have a tendency to respect you. I don't think a man in politics is often loved, but he is often respected.

MR. MACLEISH: Have you any doubt that you will be on the ticket with the President?

THE VICE-PRESIDENT: I don't have any knowledge of that. I think that's a decision for the Democratic Convention to make. I hope I will be worthy of their favorable consideration.

MR. MACLEISH: Do you think that Senator McCarthy will have much persuasion?

THE VICE-PRESIDENT: I don't think so. I will say that we have a twenty-year-old friendship, and I don't intend to see it go down the drain because of differences over some rather important issues.

MR. ROWAN: Do you think that you have lost some support in Minnesota since you have been Vice-President?

THE VICE-PRESIDENT: You cannot be Vice-President of the United States and have a war in Southeast Asia and take a stand on vital issues at home without losing a few constituents, but you gain some, too.

Carl, I will tell you what I think. I would not deviate from what I am doing because of the loss of a few people who said they were friends.

I have a great privilege. I am

Vice-President of this country. This is a wonderful thing to happen to the boy who was born above the drugstore in South Dakota. I hope to be worthy of this high office.

I think my job is not to try to be popular but to try to ease the burden of the President, to try to help promote the programs we have talked about -- the youth programs, the housing programs, the education programs -- to keep these things moving.

If I have yielded my life to help a single life, save the life of one person, I think that will have been a pretty happy, rich life for me.

I will put it to you this way: To help more people to a better life, what greater goal could there be?

MR. MACLEISH: On that note, I am afraid we must end this, our hour conference, and we thank you very much, Mr. Humphrey, for being with us this evening for the past hour's conversation with the Vice-President of the United States.

Thanking you, I am Rod MacLeish, on behalf of my colleagues, Carl Rowan and Sid Davis, for a very good evening.



# Minnesota Historical Society

Copyright in this digital version belongs to the Minnesota Historical Society and its content may not be copied without the copyright holder's express written permission. Users may print, download, link to, or email content, however, for individual use.

To request permission for commercial or educational use, please contact the Minnesota Historical Society.



[www.mnhs.org](http://www.mnhs.org)