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*A New Yorker, Communist, and Admirer of C.L.R. James:
Walter Goldwater's Candid Recollections in 1976*

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Oral Interview with Walter Goldwater, conducted by Joan V. Feeney,
July 29, 1976, New York City, New York.

Introduction

The oral history transcribed below belongs to a collection held in CSUF's Lawrence de Graaf Center for Oral and Public History (COPH), titled "African American History." The interview with Walter Goldwater was conducted by Joan V. Feeney on July 29, 1979, in New York City, New York. It is 39 minutes and 7 seconds long, and it is archived as a digital recording/audio file at COPH. The verbatim transcript edited here was prepared in the fall of 2025 by Siennah Cervantes, Lauren Eissing, Jennifer Sanely Galarza, Christian M. Hernandez, and Lyann Martinez.

In this interview, the American bookseller, publisher, and political activist Walter Goldwater (born July 29, 1907, in Harlem, New York; died June 24, 1985 in New York City, New York) details his involvement in the Trotskyite movement, his personal experiences with Trinidadian writer and Marxist activist Cyril Lionel Robert James, better known as C.L.R. James (1901–1989), and divulges details about James's contributions to the movement, his battle against deportation, his difficult family life, and his return to the United States as a sought-after academic. Goldwater affirms James's positive impact as an activist but lampoons much of his personal behavior, specifically his tendency toward pettiness and his irresponsibility with regard to familial obligations. He sheds light on James's drawn-out deportation by the U.S. authorities and the United Kingdom's lackluster response to his appeal for aid. Anecdotal information in this interview includes an interesting logistical connection between members of the Trotskyite movement and Lee Harvey Oswald, the assassin of U.S. President John F. Kennedy; James's respective relationships with a number of prominent activists, such as James Boggs, Ernest Rice McKinney, George Padmore, and Richard Wright; and James's literary forays into the sport of cricket and the themes of Herman Melville's writings as societal metaphors.

This interview is relevant to those who wish to learn more about the early 1930s Trotskyite movement in New York City, the expansion of workers' rights during the sharecropper movement, and C.L.R. James in particular. As such, it should be of interest to scholars of American social and intellectual history, interpersonal networks, and cultural memory.

Only identifiable individuals, locations, and technical terms have been referenced in the footnotes, usually when they first appear.

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Verbatim Transcript (O.H. 1688)

LAWRENCE DE GRAAF CENTER FOR ORAL AND PUBLIC HISTORY
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, FULLERTON

NARRATOR: Walter Goldwater [WG]

INTERVIEWER: Joan V. Feeney [JF]

DATE: July 29, 1976

LOCATION: New York City, New York

PROJECT: African American History

TRANSCRIBERS: Siennah Cervantes, Lauren Eissing, Jennifer Sanely Galarza,
Christian M. Hernandez, and Lyann Martinez

JF: This is an interview with Walter Goldwater¹ in New York City² on July 29, 1976. Mr. Goldwater, will you please tell us a little bit about your background?

WG: This could be a little bit too long, I'm afraid. Uh, I, uh, I, I am a New Yorker, born and bred, and I was in the communist movement, although not in the Communist Party,³ when I left college⁴ in Ann Arbor⁵ in 1927. In 1930, I went to, uh, Europe and then to Russia to work there for the Communist International.⁶ Uh, later on, I became disaffected with the official Communist Party and, uh, little by little, uh, drifted towards the Trotskyite⁷ and Socialist movement.⁸ Uh, I met C.L.R. James⁹ first in London,¹⁰ in 1936, uh, at a meeting of the, uh, fraction of the, uh, Labour Party,¹¹ which was composed of Trotskyites there. Uh, I remember C.L.R. as a very imposing, uh, tall, beautiful Black man with a wonderful presence and a wonderful diction, and, uh, he always, uh, uh, had a, a kind of, um, charisma, we didn't know the word at that time, but that's what he had and, uh, uh, declaimed whenever he talked, and I remember quite well, the first time I met him, he told us that the king¹² was going to abdicate,¹³ because Mr. Baldwin¹⁴ was going to force him to do so. Uh, as you probably know, in

¹ (1907–1985), American bookseller, publisher, and political activist.

² Metropolitan city in the southeastern part of the U.S. state of New York.

³ Communist Party of the United States of America (1919–present).

⁴ Goldwater graduated from the University of Michigan.

⁵ City in the southeastern part of the U.S. states of Michigan.

⁶ Political organization (1919–1943, a.k.a. Comintern and Third International).

⁷ Followers of Leon Trotsky (1879–1940), Russian revolutionary and intellectual.

⁸ Political and economic movement, originated in the late eighteenth century.

⁹ Cyril Lionel Robert James (1901–1989), Trinidadian writer and activist.

¹⁰ Capital city of the United Kingdom (UK) in the southeastern part of England.

¹¹ UK political party (1900–present).

¹² King Edward VIII of the United Kingdom (1894–1972; r. 1936).

¹³ Resign.

¹⁴ Stanley Baldwin (1867–1947), UK prime minister (1923–1924, 1924–1929, 1935–1937).

the radical movement—in the political movement generally—everybody likes to make predictions, and, uh, even Trotsky¹⁵ used to like—make, make predictions, about one third of which came true. Uh, in the case of C.L.R. this was the only prediction that he had made, and it did come true, so I remembered that for the forty years since, because within the next couple of weeks the king did indeed abdicate due to, uh, (static from microphone) Mr. Baldwin's pressure. Is there an off thing?

JF: (inaudible)

WG: Uh, as I say, I met him, uh, with, with a group of Trotskyites, uh, whom I'd been in—introduced to, uh, a, uh, I think on my way back from Russia in 1932, and I kept in tru—tac, in touch with ever since, in fact, I have kept in touch with them until this very day, the ones that are still alive. Uh, a—uh, at that time, C.L.R. seemed to indicate that, although he was a very big fish in the small British puddle, he wanted to expand his horizons and suggested that he come to America. I don't think I had any part in this, uh, i—in any, in any way. I was only a very modest member of the movement that time and indeed remained so. But, uh, of course, I thought it would be interesting, actually, in—in our movement in America, we did very badly need Negroes.¹⁶ We had only really one s—uh, important Negro in our group and that's Rice McKinney,¹⁷ and a very few others who drifted in and drifted out, so, um, I knew quite well that C.L.R. would make his mark as soon as he came. Uh, I don't remember exactly when he did arrive, but I think it was next year, probably 1937,¹⁸ that can be verified, and, uh, he—whe, when he came, uh, he immediately, uh, had differences of opinion with, uh, Ernest Rice McKinney, who at that time was called David Coolidge,¹⁹ and the two of them never got along, during the wh—wh, never got along well during the whole period of, uh, C.L.R.'s being in the movement here. Uh, I was not in the upper echelons²⁰ of the movement enough to know what the politics of it were, but I do know that shortly after that, C.L.R. was sent by the movement out to Missouri²¹ with the idea of organizing certain very, uh, poorly paid workers there—

JF: Was the sharecropper movement,²² right?—

WG: —and at that time. I'm not sure it was the sharecropper movement. Uh, however you have to find the pamphlet which is called "Down with Starve"—which we always called—

JF: —"Down with Starvation Wages." (both talking at same time)—

WG: —"Down with Starvation Wages in South-East Missouri."²³—

JF: —(laughs)—

WG: —(both talking at same time) We always loved that—we always loved that title.

¹⁵ Leon Trotsky (1879–1940), Russian revolutionary and intellectual.

¹⁶ Now considered unacceptable, this term was still widely used in 1976.

¹⁷ Ernest Rice McKinney (1886–1984), American labor activist.

¹⁸ It appears that he arrived in the United States in 1938.

¹⁹ McKinney's pseudonym.

²⁰ Ranks.

²¹ U.S. state in the Midwest.

²² Activities by the Southern Tenant Farmers Union (1934–1960) and its supporters.

²³ 1941/1942 pamphlet supporting the local sharecroppers' strike, [online](#).

JF: Yes.

WG: Uh-huh, uh, and he stayed there for a comparatively short time, and then, uh, he never really was one for, um, uh, uh, agitation, uh, in the masses, at least, uh, in my opinion, uh, that there are more than one opinion about that, I'm sure. But, uh, he did come back because it was quite obvious that C.L.R. was going to be a captain or a general and not a private. Uh, most of us, as a matter of fact within the movement at that time, there were more captains and generals than there were privates, I happened to be one of very few, very few privates at that time, and I have written something about, uh, my, uh, adventures in the, uh, movement at that time because, uh, I was one of the people who was deceived by the generals when the, uh, movement, uh, decided that they would go into the Socialist Party,²⁴ and, uh, uh, this was one of my differences with, with the, uh, higher ups in the movement, although I always kept on good terms with them, because, uh, uh, those of us in the lower echelons were never told, uh, the ins and outs of the, uh, uh, complicated political maneuvering, which the other people had and, uh, C.L.R. was, of course, one of the people in the upper echelons at that time. He had simply made himself so as soon as he arrived. Um, the, uh, uh, the question of the Trotskyite movement and the Workers Party²⁵ and the, and the entrance into the Socialist Party and the exit from the Socialist Party are a different story, which I cannot now go into. As far as C.L.R. was concerned, however, uh, he generally was his own man and did not hesitate to, uh, have differences with Shachtman²⁶ and Cannon,²⁷ who were the leaders of the movement, or even with the "old man," as it was called, who was Trotsky, who has left the Soviet Union²⁸ and had left, uh, after leaving Alma-Ata,²⁹ had gone down to Turkey,³⁰ from Turkey to Denmark and eventually to, uh, Mexico City.³¹ Uh, uh, there is extant a considerable correspondence between Trotsky in his various, uh, pseudonyms.³² During that period the main pseudonym that he used was Crux, C-R-U-X, although he had a great many others. Uh, and C.L.R. who had named himself J. R. Johnson³³ and various other, other, names, also for the purposes of the correspondence.

JF: And he had actually given himself these names.

WG: As far as I know he had,—

JF: Uh-huh.

²⁴ Socialist Party of America (1901–1972).

²⁵ Workers Party of the United States (1934–1936).

²⁶ Max Shachtman (1904–1972), American Marxist theorist.

²⁷ James P. Cannon (1890–1974), American Trotskyist.

²⁸ Post-Russian Revolution communist country in Eurasia (1922–1991).

²⁹ Now Almaty, city in southeastern Kazakhstan.

³⁰ Now Türkiye.

³¹ Capital city of Mexico in the south-central part of the country.

³² Fictitious name (a.k.a. alias).

³³ One of James's pseudonym.

- WG: —yes, I believe that to be the case. I don't know, I—and I wouldn't know, but I assume that what happens in those cases is that people get together and, and say what's, what's a good name or something like that—
- JF: —Well, that was certainly a real common one (unintelligible)—
- WG: —(both talking at same time) and J. R. Johnson is, is exactly the kind of name—
- JF: —(both talking at same time)—common, yeah—
- WG: —that, that one would h—uh, would use in such a thing. Uh, in the, in the case of one of the pamphlets or, or perhaps two, he called himself Native Son.³⁴ Uh, uh, uh this—
- JF: —Then he called himself Jane Myer,³⁵ and other times (unintelligible)—
- WG: —(both talking at same time)—Yes, well, he had, he had very, as I say, he took various names, we have—you have to check up on those, them, I think, uh, uh, a young man in California³⁶ has now found seven names at least that he had.
- JF: (laughs)
- WG: And, uh, over twenty that, that Trotsky had.
- JF: Uh-huh.
- WG: So that, uh, I can't promise about any of these. I ne—I never, I never really knew then. I just—we just had to figure out from the tone of the thing who, who was writing them in most cases.
- JF: Um-hm.
- WG: Also, having that many names al—al—also made it appear the—to any bo—to any outsider, who might be interested, that we had more members to the party than we did. It was always actually very small.
- JF: Mm-hmm.
- WG: Uh, of course. Now, uh, early in this period he began to attract certain satellites or disciples to himself and, um, uh, he, uh, was for a time very close to, to one of my closest friends, Prescott Daniel, uh, who—and, and used to come to his house and, uh, fondle his child and so on. Uh, uh, Daniel's wife was my first cousin, didn't care for C.L.R. terribly well, but it wasn't on a personal basis so much as that she was afraid that her husband was being weaned away from family and, uh, and friends, and, and into the movement. Uh, so, uh, I became quite, quite well acquainted with, with C.L.R. during this period, uh, but he, as I say, he always, uh, uh, was his own man and went his own way. Uh, but, uh, he demanded loyalty of his disciples and, uh, and he got it from a great many of them. Uh, uh, he married, or whatever it was, this—the very beautiful Connie Webb,³⁷ who was a, a, a, uh, a model, and, uh, really a, a very beautiful, blonde girl, at that time, uh, and had a child, uh, whom he named Robert,³⁸ uh, his third name is Robert, as you know, uh, and, uh, who was going to be the apple of his eye. Actually, as, as it turned out, why—the apple didn't turn out to be so whole

³⁴ One of James's pseudonym.

³⁵ One of James's pseudonym.

³⁶ U.S. state on the Pacific Coast.

³⁷ Constance "Connie" Webb (1918–2005), James's second wife (1946–1953).

³⁸ Cyril Lionel Robert "Nobbie" James Jr. (b. 1949).

throughout and, uh, this, uh, represents a, a, a sadness in Connie's life, a good deal more than it does in C.L.R.'s because actually, uh, C.L.R., uh, uh remained his own man even when it was a question of family. He never uh, uh, ugh—this is one of the points that's, that's involved about, uh—

[00:10:05]

JF: (unintelligible)

WG: —whether we should have it down, actually as to, as to C.L.R.'s, uh, responsibility, he was very irresponsible towards, towards all his family obligations, and uh, uh—

JF: Walter, now this child Robert, the way you put it,—

WG: Um-hm.

JF: —uh, was he retarded?

WG: No, quite the contrary, he was very bright, but, uh, he went in—he therefore went into drugs, he went into, uh,—

JF: Yeah, yeah.

WG: —he went into Ayn Rand,³⁹ he went into, um, uh, that, that kind of thing about y—your mind, uh, a—that phony thing with a, uh, ph—parapsych—not parapsychology,⁴⁰ but, uh, scien—Scientology⁴¹—

JF: —Oh yes, yes, yeah. (both talking at same time) Yeah, that whole thing—

WG: —(both talking at same time) He, he went on a tri—he went on, he went on a boat with, uh, with, with the Scientologists, uh, as, as the—of, of course, the Ayn Rand thing was particularly de—depressing to, to Connie because it's really a semi-fascist—

JF: Um-hm.

WG: —kind of thing, so this was, this was a terrible thing—

JF: Yeah, yeah.

WG: —and then he became, of c—for a while, of course, he was, was ultra, ultra Negro-radical and all that sort of thing, much more his—and—than his father had been, but it was only a game really, he, he—it wasn't, uh, you know, it was the thing to do.

JF: Mm-hmm.

WG: Uh, he was a very charming boy if, uh, or, or could have been a very charming boy and very intelligent, but what has happened to him now, I don't know actually, uh, he's probably, he's certainly over twenty-five, he's probably something between twenty-five and thirty now and probably still finding himself for all we know. Uh, we have that—

JF: —Well, it takes a lot of, uh, youngsters a long time to grow up and reach maturity, (both talking at same time) so—

WG: —Yeah, and some of them don't. (laughs)—

JF: —(both talking at same time) Right.—

³⁹ Alice "Ayn Rand" O'Connor (1905–1982), Russian-born American writer, developed the philosophical system of "Objectivism."

⁴⁰ Study of alleged psychic phenomena.

⁴¹ Religion created by American author L. Ron Hubbard (1911–1986) in 1953.

- WG: So, uh, anyway, that's, that's that, but, as for C.L.R., he never, uh, tried to support or help support the boy, or even when he was put in jail, uh, for, uh, uh, a combi—as far as I know, a combination of, of drugs plus, uh, uh, plus deser—plus either desertion or refusing to, uh, to go to Vietnam,⁴² I'm not sure which. Uh, it was mostly Connie who had to do all this.
- JF: Um-hm.
- WG: Uh, she never really seemed to bear a grudge, actually; she s—sort of took it for granted, and that was the point about C.L.R., which I always found most difficult. Uh, he's so very self-centered, that he—and has, has always been, that he always felt that he—that the world owed him a living—
- JF: Um-hm.
- WG: —and did not recognize his great virtues and great, uh, and great talents. Now, that is of course perfectly true. Nobody—people, people don't recognize great virtues and great talents but, uh, most of us grow up, think—see—in the case of C.L.R. at, at his present age, he doesn't have to grow up any longer. (both laugh)
- WG: (laughs) Obviously, he, he has grown up, and he has been successful mostly in this because, he himse—he's really very talented, his, his, um, uh, his cricket material⁴³ is very good, very intelligent.
- JF: Um-hm.
- WG: But he would get these kind of goals, like in the case of Melville⁴⁴ or, or, or cricket, uh, where s—cricket would be life or Melville would be life or (both talking at same time) something, something else, something else would be—
- JF: —(both talking at same time) Yeah, I don't quite understand this Melville thing. Cricket, I don't understand at all, but the Melville (unintelligible)—
- WG: —well, that's the thing; that's one of the reasons I think—I'm gonna turn it off, but that's one of the reasons, I think—(recorder stops and starts) Uh, he and George Padmore,⁴⁵ who both came from Trinidad⁴⁶ and were both almost exactly the same age and both had gone through pretty much the same kind of political feelings. Uh, George had stayed with the Communist Party a little bit longer than, than C.L.R. had, but, uh, eventually they came to the same f—pretty much to the same thing, uh, had always been, uh, uh, very strong, uh, not opponents but, uh, competitors, uh, uh, Ge—uh, C.L.R. did think very highly of Padmore, uh, uh, I remember quite well his telling me that he was going to write this life of Padmore because Padmore was the second greatest West Indian.⁴⁷ And I said, "Who is the greatest West Indian?" And he said, "Marcus Garvey."⁴⁸ But actually, in the back of his mind, I always felt that he

⁴² Reference to the Vietnam War (1955–1975).

⁴³ C.L.R. James, *Beyond a Boundary* (Hutchinson, 1963), a memoir on cricket.

⁴⁴ C.L.R. James, *Mariners, Renegades and Castaways: The Story of Herman Melville and the World We Live In* (by the author, 1953), a study on Melville's novel *Moby Dick* (1851).

⁴⁵ (1903–1959), Trinidadian journalist.

⁴⁶ Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, archipelagic country in the Caribbean.

⁴⁷ Inhabitant of the West Indies or Caribbean islands.

⁴⁸ (1887–1940), Jamaican political activist.

- wanted me to say—or anybody else to say, “Actually, you are the greatest West Indian,”—
- JF: (laughs)
- WG: —or at least, “You are the second greatest West Indian,” and I think that he aimed—
- JF: —remove Padmore down a notch. (both talking at same time) Yeah.—
- WG: —And I think that, that, that, that, that, that, that he tended to do that. Uh, I remember very well, uh, a, a, a very pleasant evening I spent, uh, with my wife,⁴⁹ and, uh, uh, Padmore and Dorothy Padmore⁵⁰ and C.L.R. in a club in London.⁵¹ The word “club” was a special, was a special word at that time because it wa—didn’t mean anything fancy but it was a place where you could go and be in an evening and have a good, uh, and sort of be around and, and talking without people complaining about it because, uh, there were blue laws⁵² in England, so much at that time that they had to get, get around them this way and, uh, we sat at this long table in the basement and, uh, C.L.R. wanted to be the, the, uh, the, the object of all our attention, which he was whenever he talked because, as I say, he always declaimed.
- JF: Um-hm.
- WG: But every once in a while, George would want a word, too, and so George would start to either tell a story or, or say something, uh, political or otherwise, at which C.L.R. would turn away from the table and stare off into space, uh, without looking at George at all.
- JF: Oh my goodness.
- WG: Uh, and, uh, then when George finished talking then he would turn back to the table and, uh, uh, I remember telling a joke at that time, which, which they both laughed at, and uh, but, uh, but George laughed heartily, and C.L.R. laughed because he was supposed to laugh. Uh, and, uh, later Dorothy Padmore didn’t care for, for C.L.R. terribly much. Uh, and, uh, I remember quite well that, uh, th—this was after C.L.R. had been deported in 1953⁵³ or whatever it was, and uh, she said to me, “You know that when they were holding those hearings for deportation, C.L.R. kept on saying how really American he had become and how he loved America, and he loved everything they did, and, and he said he even loved their comic strips.” Now he didn’t have to say that. (both laugh)
- JF: No, I, I recall reading that, in the, in the book, you know, *Mariners, Renegades*⁵⁴—
- WG: —(both talking at same time) was in that I, I—
- JF: —(both talking at same time) (unintelligible)—Yes, oh yes, he said he loved the comic strips.—

⁴⁹ Ethel, Goldwater’s first wife.

⁵⁰ Dorothy Pizer (1906–1964), Padmore’s domestic partner (not wife).

⁵¹ Perhaps a reference to Charles Lahr’s bookshop (Camden Town); see [online](#).

⁵² Statutes restricting or banning specified activities on Sundays.

⁵³ In 1953, James was deported from the United States to the UK.

⁵⁴ C.L.R. James, *Mariners, Renegades and Castaways: The Story of Herman Melville and the World We Live In* (by the author, 1953), a study on Melville’s novel *Moby Dick* (1851).

WG: —(laughs) Yeah, so, uh, she, she kind of felt that he didn't really, that he didn't really mean that (laughs) and that, uh, and that, that he was just saying that to be able to stay. Uh, the, the story about the deportation, I think, might as well be told here because we wanna,—

JF: —Yes I wish you would (both talking at same time) bring that up.—

WG: —(both talking at same time) we wanna, we wanna make sure that it—that this particular part of the story be on record permanently, and as it is why it's only on record with everybody I've told about it. It's really quite, quite a lovely story, and if we don't have any other story this should be told. (takes deep breath) Uh, they had tried to deport him years and years before, actually before the war.⁵⁵ But when the war came, they, they were busy with other things, and they were interested in, in doing something to Japanese or to, or to Germans, or whatever it was, but C.L.R. was no longer a person in whom they were interested. So, the matter dragged out and dragged out and dragged out throughout the whole war, and in the meantime, as I say, he had married this typical American girl, and, uh, and there was no particular rush about it. After the war, the immigration department⁵⁶ began to get around to this again, and, uh, and, uh, C.L.R. was here and there and everywhere, and, uh, they would make an appointment, and maybe he would show up and maybe he wouldn't, and, uh, and then he had friends, uh, who would, uh, sort of help him to, to put off the thing and, uh, and who would learn—and would, uh, teach him how to, to use the proper legal thing, to say he was sick this day, and he wouldn't be able to come for three months, or he actually had a special appointment, which he had to keep, or whatever it was, until the thing dragged out and dragged out for years. And, uh, however, the time eventually came. Come in. (door creaks as someone enters the room) (unintelligible) (recorder stops and starts) However, little by little, the inexorable grasp of the immigration department closed in, and, finally, I don't remember the dates anymore, I used to remember them quite well but, let's assume that it was early in the 1950s, because it dragged out for that many years. Uh.

JF: Yeah so, it's 1951, he's actually on Ellis Island.⁵⁷

WG: Yeah,—

JF: Uh-huh.

WG: —a—and, so that, that's, alright, that's, that's correct, anyway, and, uh, they finally said, "Now, look here, (laughs) why don't you just go (both laugh) and not, and not, keep bothering us anymore."

JF: (laughs)

WG: And he said, gee, he didn't want to go, he really loved it here, and he really felt American and so on. And finally, he was reduced to his last resort. He was a great friend of Fenner Brockway.⁵⁸

JF: Um-hm.

⁵⁵ World War II (1939–1945).

⁵⁶ U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (1933–2003).

⁵⁷ U.S. immigration processing station (1892–1954) in the Upper New York Harbor.

⁵⁸ (1888–1988), UK politician.

[00:20:00]

WG: And, uh, and Fenner, uh, by this time uh, had become an, an elder statesman⁵⁹ over there, he had been actually in the government, uh, in the Labour government⁶⁰ of Attlee,⁶¹ and, uh, as you know, in England they don't have the same enmity for each other as they do here. So, uh, uh, C.L.R. appealed to Fenner to see what he could do about, about this matter. And his claim—and, and what he said to Fenner was that, uh, he is being persecuted by the American government.

JF: Um-hm.

WG: And so Fenner went to Eden,⁶² who was then the prime minister,⁶³ and so—and to see what he could do about it. And a certain correspondence took place, which I used to know all of, but now I only remember the very high spot of it. And that was this. It was a letter from Sir Anthony⁶⁴ to His Majesty's⁶⁵ subject⁶⁶ C.L.R. James in New York. "My dear Mr. James, uh, certain representations have been made to His Majesty's government from the ambassador⁶⁷ to the Court of St. James.⁶⁸ The tenor of this conversation is that you, one of His Majesty's subjects, is being per—are being persecuted by the government of the United States. Inquiries into this matter elicit the fact that the alleged persecution consists of the government of the United States wishing to de—deport you to the United Kingdom. His Majesty's government can in no sense consider this persecution (both laugh) and therefore cannot act any further in the matter." (both laugh) Uh, uh, we will telescope the question of the deportation right now, simply this, to, to, uh, point this out, that he went back to, uh, Great Britain and stayed there reluctantly, uh, writing and, uh, uh, keeping in touch with his disciples here in Detroit⁶⁹ and, uh, in Los Angeles,⁷⁰ one or two other places, for several years.

JF: What, how were their names called at that time? The group that—

WG: —Uh, Bill,⁷¹ my friend Bill knows that, but I don't remember, it was, uh, the, uh, there were too many names, uh.

JF: I know one of the later names was the Friends of Facing Reality.⁷²

⁵⁹ Fenner was a Member of Parliament (1929–1931, 1950–1964).

⁶⁰ UK government led by the Labour Party. Fenner never served in government.

⁶¹ Clement Attlee (1883–1967), UK prime minister (1945–1951), Labour leader (1935–1955).

⁶² Anthony Eden (1897–1977), UK prime minister (1955–1957).

⁶³ Eden was, in fact, deputy prime minister at the time (1951–1955).

⁶⁴ Eden was, in fact, not knighted ("Sir") until 1954.

⁶⁵ King George VI of the United Kingdom (1895–1952; r. 1936–1952).

⁶⁶ Trinidad and Tobago was, at the time, still under British rule.

⁶⁷ Sir Oliver Franks (1905–1992), UK ambassador to the United States (1948–1952).

⁶⁸ Official royal court for the UK's Sovereign.

⁶⁹ City in the southeastern part of the U.S. state of Michigan.

⁷⁰ City in the southwestern part of the U.S. state of California.

⁷¹ Likely William "Bill" French (1943–1997), Goldwater's friend and employee, who took over Goldwater's "University Place Bookshop" in New York City after his death.

⁷² Publishing arm of James's "Facing Reality" leftist group (1962–1970).

WG: Yes, it was, it was Facing Reality and then, and then Friends of Facing Reality, and then prior to that there had been—it, it had been the Johnson (both talking at same time) the Johnson Forest Tend—The Johnson Forest Tendency.⁷³—

JF: —(both talking at same time) Yeah, there was another one, right, right.—

WG: —In my book,⁷⁴ I have something about, uh, about this stuff, uh, when, when it comes to the, uh, to the, uh, periodicals, in which I, in which I sort of indicate this, this kind of thing for the period up to 1950, not after. Uh, and uh, and he stayed there in Britain, once in a while going down to Africa, where he was very well received, uh, and he told, he told me with great enthusiasm about how he would, uh, go out in a car there, in an open car and stand up and, and, uh, say things in English, and nobody would understand what he was talking about, but they all cheered him because he waved his arm and, and they, they knew that, uh, it was a question of “uhuru,”⁷⁵ and so on. He had a, really a joyful time there, whenever he went down to—particularly to Ghana, Gold Coast.⁷⁶ A—and then of course, when Padmore became, uh, the, uh, like the grey eminence beside, uh, behind, uh, uh, Nkrumah,⁷⁷ then uh, uh, he wasn’t—he wasn’t invited, I believe that—I’m not sure about the timing of all that, thank you. In any case, at about that, why—(shouting in the distant background) time his close friend Er—Eric Williams⁷⁸ became prime mini—or, uh, uh, uh, b—was put in charge of Trinidad and later on became the prime minister and invited C.L.R. to come back and C.L.R. was then his right-hand man and, uh, wrote a column in every issue of the PNM⁷⁹ paper, PNM being, uh, Williams’s party, and, uh, and C.L.R. did just what, uh, uh, Eric Williams wanted, which was to have a picture of him in almost every column and to talk about him every day as the doctor and so on, so—under those circumstances they got along quite well.

JF: Um-hm.

WG: Many of us, however, felt that this could not last because C.L.R. did no—not want to be Williams’s man he wanted to be his own man.

JF: Right.

WG: And, uh, after a num—uh, it, it lasted, even as it was, it lasted longer than we thought it would, uh, but after a given period, I don’t remember whether it was two years or three years, but it wasn’t just a few months, it was, it was a, a, a couple of years. The column started to change a little bit and, uh, there would be very, very mild queries,

⁷³ Radical left faction in the United States (1945–1962), “Johnson” being one of James’s pseudonyms and “Forest” being one of the pseudonyms of Raya Dunayevskaya (1910–1987), Russian-born American writer.

⁷⁴ Walter Goldwater, *Radical Periodicals in America, 1890–1950: With a Genealogical Chart and a Concise Lexicon of the Parties and Groups which Issued Them: A Bibliography with Brief Notes* (Yale University Library, 1964; 2nd ed., 1966; 3rd ed., 1977).

⁷⁵ Swahili word, meaning “freedom,” and the name of a radical Black student group at Wayne State University, associated with James’s teachings.

⁷⁶ British Crown colony (1821–1957), subsequently known as Ghana.

⁷⁷ Kwame Nkrumah (1909–1972), prime minister of Gold Coast (1952–1957), prime minister (1957–1960) and president (1960–1966) of Ghana.

⁷⁸ (1911–1981), prime minister of Trinidad and Tobago (1962–1981).

⁷⁹ People’s National Movement, political party in Trinidad and Tobago (1956–present).

then finally, uh, complaints and then finally what were almost attacks, and when they became to almost attacks then we all knew that it was time that the break was going to come. Uh, uh, I don't wanna go into the whole thing of down there because—partly because it's much too complicated and much too long, and (both talking at same time) partly because—

JF: —(both talking at same time) Uh, it doesn't really pertain too much to the subject.—

WG: —Eventually, however, uh, C.L.R. was invited to leave, which he did, and he went back to England, not to America. However, I believe that he had made a couple of trips to Canada in the meantime. And, uh, then, the mid-1960s came with the great uh, uh, Black explosion in America,⁸⁰ both physically and spiritually, and, uh, in various places C.L.R. was known. Uh, there were after all not very many Negro leaders with charisma at that time, and C.L.R. was there, very intelligent, uh, with a s—a following, although it was a small one, uh, with several books behind him.⁸¹ Uh, the book on cricket, uh, had had a great vogue,⁸² particularly in England of course, but, uh, since it was about life, it also had a great vogue here, it had, had some vogue here, I should say. Uh, he had—he was continuing to write his books and his pamphlets and his, uh, calls-to-arms or non-arms. Uh, uh, actually, when I spoke to him at one time in Trinidad, he said, uh, "They claim that we want socialism. I have at no time said that we want socialism in Trinidad." I remember his saying that because it was a very pointed thing for him to say. Uh, uh, uh, and, uh, then with this great, uh, explosion of the Negro movement, Black movement here, uh, several people got the idea of getting C.L.R. to come and speak. Now, he was absolutely forbidden to cross the border but, at a certain point, somebody new somebody in Washington⁸³ and said, "What harm would it do if C.L.R. came across at Detroit and gave a talk and then went back across the border." And the answer eventually was given: "If he comes across on the morning of the given day and talks and goes back in the—at the end of that day, we don't have to know he was here." And so, he did that, once or more times. Well, that was the opening wedge. And at, and at, and about that time, the students at Northwestern,⁸⁴ who were particularly militant, said they wanted a course given in Black history or something of the sort,—

JF: Yeah.

WG: —and they wanted it to be given by C.L.R. James and the people in Northwestern said, "Who is C.L.R. James," and they soon told 'em who he was. And so various other inquiries were made and eventually, due entirely to pressure and threats of the Black community there, they were going to, uh, boycott the, the school, they were going to sit in, they were going to do other threatening things, which, uh, would be better left unsaid.—

JF: —It all got pretty drastic (both talking at same time) (unintelligible)—

⁸⁰ Black power movement, part of the civil rights movement in the United States.

⁸¹ For James's books, see [online](#).

⁸² C.L.R. James, *Beyond a Boundary* (Hutchinson, 1963), a memoir on cricket.

⁸³ Capital city of the United States in the District of Columbia.

⁸⁴ University in Evanston, Illinois, established in 1851.

- WG: —(both talking at same time) They, they finally—it was finally agreed, oh well, what's the use of sticking on to, to all the, uh, uh, all these formalistic conventional things. Okay, let him come back. And so, although I don't know how legal his stay is here—actually, it was understood that he was to be able to come back and teach there, and he did. And shortly after that, after a great deal of burnings and other things down in Washington, the people down in Washington said they wanted him to be there,—
- JF: Now this is Federal City College?⁸⁵
- WG: —professor down in Federal City College in Washington. And so, he became not only a full professor there, but the, uh, um, but almost the, the basis of, of, of, uh, Black Studies at, at Federal City College. And went down there, and of course we all thought it was a very amusing, uh, denouement of this thing because, uh, without C.L.R., there probably wouldn't even have been any Federal City College to, to get goin'. Uh, and so, uh, I visited him down there also and, of course, he was in his element, uh, in, in charge and all that kind of thing down there. (unintelligible) I'm gonna have to leave in a few minutes.
- JF: You want me to stop?

[00:30:19]

- WG: Turn it off. To go back a little to the connections of C.L.R. within the movement. Uh, many of these took place after I had left the movement and therefore, I'm not completely, uh, *au courant*⁸⁶ about them. However, one of his most firm disciples was a Chinese American girl called Grace Lee,⁸⁷ a very intelligent, bright girl who wrote a good deal of material and who stuck to him through thick and thin. Uh, uh, another, uh—she later on, as far as I know, married a Negro man called Boggs, James Boggs,⁸⁸ I believe, who has written a number of articles and, uh, pamphlets for whatever splinter of the Trotskyite or, or splinter of Trotskyite splinters they may be. Their cent—their center is in Detroit. Uh, uh, during the earlier period and even continuing on till much later, uh, a, uh, a real American type, uh, Lyman Paine,⁸⁹ the brother of Alfred Paine,⁹⁰ who was a, a book seller, and the, the scion of a, of a, a rather well known wealthy, uh, American family,⁹¹ uh, became one of C.L.R.'s disciples and, uh, he was an architect and presumably still is. He married a young Jewish girl from our movement who called herself Freddy Drake,⁹² I never knew what her real name was, uh, whom I know quite well and was very nice, and the two of them have been living

⁸⁵ Liberal Arts College in Washington, D.C. (1966–1977), then incorporated into the University of the District of Columbia.

⁸⁶ French term, meaning "aware of what is going on" or "current."

⁸⁷ (1915–2015), American author, philosopher, and feminist.

⁸⁸ (1919–1993), American Marxist activist, auto worker, and author.

⁸⁹ (1901–1978), American architect and activist.

⁹⁰ (1903–1944), died January 1, 1944, at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, while serving on a torpedo boat destroyer as 2nd lieutenant.

⁹¹ The Paine brothers' great-great-great-grandfather was Robert Treat Paine (1731–1814), a signatory of the Declaration of Independence.

⁹² Frances "Freddy" Drake Paine (1912–1999), second wife of Lyman Paine.

in California now for, uh, twenty or thirty years or more. Uh, it, uh, uh, the—there was an interesting connection there between, uh, the Paines and, uh, Oswald,⁹³ the assassin of, uh, President Kennedy,⁹⁴ because it was, presumably, uh, to the—to some relative of the Paines' house⁹⁵ that Oswald, uh, had—or in, in their house that Oswald had lived just prior to the time, uh, when he went to, uh, uh, to Dallas⁹⁶ and, uh, where indeed, uh, if I remember correctly, Marina⁹⁷ actually spent some time afterwards. Uh, the connection there was, was rather, was, was not so far-fetched as it may seem because the Trotskyites at that time, uh, were very much involved in the, uh, Fair Play for Cuba Committee,⁹⁸ and, uh, as is known, why, Oswald was also involved with that, and that is probably how the—where the connection, where the connection came. Uh, at the present time, why, Lyman is considered very old and feeble and presumably drunk almost all of the time. Uh, but, uh, when he's, uh, lucid, he's still as bright as he ever was and, uh, can perhaps give some, uh, uh, fill in some materials about C.L.R., and it's certain that Freddy Drake can do so, no question about that, whatever. Uh, you will, uh, presumably have to get hold of C.L.R. first in order to get in touch with these people and then, and then do that, I think, I think that would be wise. I'll have to be going, I got this—

JF: Um, can I ask you one last question (both talking at same time) that you might just briefly reply to?—

WG: —(both talking at same time) Yeah, yeah, yeah.—

JF: —I was interested in the fact that, uh, the Jameses and the Richard Wrights⁹⁹ were such close friends. (both talking at same time) Do you know this came about?—

WG: —(both talking at same time) Well, they, they weren't as close friends as you might think.

JF: Uh-uh.

WG: And that's one of the things that I'm a little bit dubious about putting on tape, but I will tell you anyway, and you can, you can have it for your purposes. One of the times when C.L.R. was in very bad shape, as you, as you may know he—a, he was reported dead at least twice.—

JF: —(both talking at same time) No, I'm n—not aware of that.—

WG: —(both talking at same time) Yes, yes. And in fact I, I, at one time, I spread the news that he was dead because I had been told that he was dead, and then, happily, we found out that it was not so. Uh, one time he was found in a gutter over here and

⁹³ Lee Harvey Oswald (1939–1963), U.S. Marine veteran, assassin of John F. Kennedy.

⁹⁴ John F. Kennedy (1917–1963) thirty-fifth U.S. president (in office 1961–1963).

⁹⁵ In fact, Ruth Paine, the wife of Lyman Paine's son Michael, let Oswald's wife Marina and children stay at her house (2515 W 5th St, Irving, Texas 75060) for several months prior to the Kennedy assassination, while Oswald himself was staying at a rooming house in Dallas (except for weekends, when he stayed with his wife and children).

⁹⁶ City in the northeastern part of the U.S. state of Texas.

⁹⁷ Marina Oswald, née Prusakova (b. 1941), Oswald's wife.

⁹⁸ Activist group in the United States and Canada (1960–1963).

⁹⁹ Richard "Dick" Nathaniel Wright (1908–1960), American author, and his second wife, Frieda "Ellen" Poplar Wright, née Poplowitz (1912–2004).

was taken to, to, uh, uh, to Bellevue,¹⁰⁰ and they thought he wasn't gonna recover. Another time was, uh, ef—in an automobile accident, that was the second time, and I had been told quite definitely by Felix Morrow,¹⁰¹ who was one of his friends in the movement, that he, that he had, that he had died, and, uh, later on it turned out, as I say, not to be so. Uh, well, uh, one of the times, uh, but he was very often broke, and sometimes, when he was broke, he got money from friends, and sometimes—in one case, he sold the, uh, some of his, uh, typed scripts—

JF: Um-hm.

WG: —and that th—thing which I later on sold to Northwestern, and, uh, other times, he would sort of, uh, uh, be helped by other people. Now one of those people that he was helped by was Richard Wright.

JF: Um-hm.

WG: And I remember quite well, this one anecdote is worth, as I say, telling anyway, although, uh, let's see, uh, C.L.R. was living in a top floor of a brownstone¹⁰² in Brooklyn,¹⁰³ and one of his disciples was acting as his bodyguard, although there was no particular reason for thinking that he needed—needed a bodyguard. And Richard Wright came to me and said, "I wanna get hold of C.L.R., I've got some money for him, at least I wanna see him and, and see if he needs some money."

JF: Um-hm.

WG: And so, I said, "Well, C.L.R. is under strict, uh, uh, care (laughs) or something, and I'm not sure he wants to see anybody, but I think I can find out where he is." And so, I, somehow or another, I don't remember how, found the address. He hadn't told me, I, I, I had to get it through—either through Freddy Drake or, or, or some other person, I don't know just how I got it. And, uh, Richard Wright took the trip on the subway to Brooklyn and came back later and reported to me and said, "I got out to this place, and I rang the bell, and there was no answer. So, I rang again, and I rang again, and there was still no answer. So, I hammered on the door, and I yelled, and finally somebody leaned out of the top floor and said, 'What the hell are ya making all this noise about,' and I said, 'I wanna see Nello,'¹⁰⁴ and he said, 'Who are you,' and he said, 'I'm Dick Wright,' and so, he went back in again, and he came out, and he said, 'Nello isn't seeing anybody. Goodbye,' and he closed the window. (both laugh) And, and here I am back again. (laughs) What's the matter with that guy anyway?" Now I said, "I can't tell you that." I, I said, "They, they're peculiar sometimes, that's all." (laughs) So, uh, I don't believe that they were close friends,—

JF: Ah.

¹⁰⁰ Hospital in New York City (1736–present), oldest public hospital in the United States.

¹⁰¹ (1906–1988), American author, editor, and political activist.

¹⁰² Type of nineteenth-century sandstone-built townhouse.

¹⁰³ One of the five boroughs of New York City.

¹⁰⁴ One of James's nicknames.

- WG: —uh, the family. Uh, I don't think that um, uh, that Ellen¹⁰⁵ cared for C.L.R., I'm, I'm sure she didn't care for him. And, uh, and Ellen certainly, uh, is very sore at, at, at Connie. Uh, because Connie wrote the biography of Wright,¹⁰⁶ you know?
- JF: Yes, I know.
- WG: And, uh, uh, I, uh, I'm fairly good friends with both of them, actually, and I don't, uh, try to badmouth either of them in the other, in the other's presence. They both have faults, obviously, and, uh, uh, I think that, uh—
- JF: Well, you would assume from that biography of Constance Webb's that, uh, Wright's widow¹⁰⁷ had really helped her out no end and that (both talking at same time) (unintelligible) very friendly.—
- WG: —(both talking at same time) She did help her out, and later, and later on she got sore and said that, uh, that, that, that Connie had betrayed her and had—
- JF: Uh-huh.
- WG: —put stuff in that she wasn't supposed to and that, that she had stolen stuff from her, and that she had done this and that. And, actually, later on, why, when, um, uh, uh, Fabre¹⁰⁸ wrote the life¹⁰⁹ of, of Wright (both talking at same time)—
- JF: Yes, his was, uh, excellent, and it stuck—
- WG: —then, then, then she felt this is, this is the thing, and let's, let's forget Connie's altogether,—
- JF: Uh-huh.
- WG: —she was very, very bitter against Connie's stu—stuff. I don't know how long that will last or whatever it is, they, they do have their ups and downs with these things.
- JF: Um-hm.
- WG: But, uh, each one of them has his axe to grind, you see, uh, uh, Connie wanted to feel that she was a close friend of, of Richard Wright and, uh, but, uh (both talking at same time)—
- JF: —(both talking at same time) That's certainly not that impersonal of a book.—
- WG: —But, but, uh, Ellen, but Ellen, uh, uh, feels that she has a proprietary right in, in Richard Wright.
- JF: Well, naturally.
- WG: And, uh, a—and that, uh, Connie has no business intruding in that kind of thing. Alright, I think we better cut it—(recorder stops)

[00:39:07]

END OF INTERVIEW

¹⁰⁵ Frieda "Ellen" Poplar Wright, née Poplowitz (1912–2004), Wright's second wife.

¹⁰⁶ Constance Webb, *Richard Wright: A Biography* (G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1968).

¹⁰⁷ Frieda "Ellen" Poplar Wright, née Poplowitz (1912–2004), Wright's second wife.

¹⁰⁸ Michel Fabre (1933–2007), French literary scholar.

¹⁰⁹ Michel Fabre, *The Unfinished Quest of Richard Wright* (William Morrow & Co., 1973).