

June 13, 1963
The White House
Washington

From Myrlie Evers-Williams and Manning Marable, eds., *The Autobiography of Medgar Evers: A Hero's Life and Legacy Revealed Through His Writings, Letters, and Speeches* (New York: Basic Books, 2005).

Mrs. Medgar Evers
2332 Gynes Street
Jackson 3, Mississippi

Dear Ms. Evers:

I extend to you and your children my sincerest condolences on the tragic death of your husband. Although comforting thoughts are difficult at a time like this, surely there can be some solace in the realization of the justice of the cause for which your husband gave his life. Achievement of the goals he did so much to promote will enable his children and the generations to follow to share fully and equally in the benefits and advantages our nation has to offer.

Sincerely,

[signed by President Kennedy]

Mrs. Kennedy joins me in extending her deepest sympathy.
[handwritten by the president at the bottom of the letter]

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83 Bill Peters, "A Talk with Medgar Evers"
New York Post

Transcript of an interview of Medgar by CBS reporter Bill Peters, given in the summer of 1962, but aired in full in the days immediately following his assassination on June 12, 1963, and June 16, 1963.

In a TV interview filmed last summer, the NAACP leader told of the violence that was to take his life.

Medgar W. Evers, the NAACP official who was murdered this week in Jackson, Miss., had been interviewed last summer by CBS-TV reporter Bill Peters on the voter-registration drive in Mississippi. The following is a condensation of that interview, a portion of which was rebroadcast earlier this week.

Peters: I'm speaking with Mr. Medgar W. Evers, Mississippi Field Secretary for the National Assn. for the Advancement of Colored People. Mr. Evers, can you tell me how long you've had this job?

Evers: I've been Field Secretary for the National Assn. for the Advancement of Colored People going into my eighth year.

Peters: And during these eight years, has there been an NAACP effort towards getting Negroes to vote and register?

Evers: Yes, there has been all over the state—an effort to get Negroes registered to vote in most of the counties where we're organized, and even in a number of counties where we're not organized. We think now in terms of back in 1954 and '55, when up in Belzoni, Miss., which is in Humphrey's County, we had a very active chapter getting Negroes registered to vote.

The president of our branch there was Rev. G. W. Lee, and of course, Rev. Lee was putting out a little handbill urging Negroes to go down to the registrar's office and he got a message from some unidentified person telling him to cease his activities, and of course he refused to cease these activities, and as a result of his refusal not let people intimidate him, one Saturday afternoon as he was driving home from the cleaners from downtown—a car drove up beside him with two men in it and shotgunned him to death. A little later on Rev. Courts, who was active in getting people registered to vote—was told to cease his activities in this same town of Belzoni and he was shot down as he made change in his store.

Peters: Looking back over the eight years that you've been engaged in this work, would you say that it has become more or less difficult for Negroes to register in Mississippi?

Evers: Well, I would say that it has become in some instances more difficult for them to register, and in other instances possibly less difficult. I think in terms of some of the counties that I've mentioned—since 1954 they passed a literacy bill which requires all persons to fill out a form consisting of some 21 questions and they make it most difficult for Negroes to register. For example, if you fail to cross your T or dot an I, in a number of instances, Negroes are refused the right to register. In other instances we find Negroes not even given the application form to fill out.

Just recently, down in Forest County, it was mentioned that one fellow was asked how many bubbles in a bar of soap, which was most difficult for anybody to answer. These are some of the questions that are asked Negroes when they go in, and some of the obstacles—some of the problems that we face in trying to register to vote here in Mississippi.

Peters: Would you say that there is less violence now in connection with it?

Evers: Well, we have not had violence in connection with voting that we had in 1955, not recently that is, and I'd say that we are thankful for the role the federal government is playing in this regard. The federal government has gone in and filed a number of suits to make it possible for Negroes to register and vote in Mississippi. And this, of course, we are very proud of and we're most cooperative with the federal government in making affidavits available to them from Negroes who have been denied the right to register and vote.

Peters: In your work, Mr. Evers, in the state of Mississippi, have you personally been subjected to any difficulties or problems?

Evers: Yes, I have. I've suffered some personal difficulties. Number one, I'm a native of the state, lived here all my life, but in 1958, as I came from a regional meeting in North Carolina, I boarded the bus in Meridian, Miss., on the front seat where I sat and was told to move by the police. I, of course, refused. I refused to move to the back of

the bus after being ordered to do so by the driver. And after I refused, of course—of course he got off the bus and went and called the police in Meridian and they conferred. And after having conferred with one another, two came on the bus and asked to see my identification. I showed them my identification. And after having done that, they asked me to get off the bus and come over to the police station with them—which was across the street. I went over there with them and they asked me what I was trying to do—stir up trouble? I told them, no, I was merely going home to my wife and children. Of course I had two children at the time. And they said, well, you know how things are done here. I said, yes, I was born 30 miles from here, which was Decatur, Miss. And after some 15 or 20 minutes of interrogation they permitted me to go back to the bus.

I went and got back on the bus and, of course, I sat back on the front seat. And having refused to move again, the bus driver pulled off. I heard as we moved away—a number of people say that, “We should go on and pull him off.” Of course I sat there and some three blocks from the bus terminal a white man boarded the bus and struck me in the face. This was about 3 o’clock in the morning. I was alone. Of course I refused to move and I came all the way to Jackson without any further incidents.

That along with many others—I’ve had a number of threatening calls—people calling me saying they were going to kill me, saying they were going to blow my home up and saying that I only had a few hours to live. I remember distinctly one individual calling with a pistol on the other end, and he hit the cylinder and of course you could hear that it was a revolver. He said, “This is for you.” And I said, “Well, whenever my time comes, I’m ready.” And, well, we get such pranks pretty frequently. But that does not deter us from our goal of first-class citizenship and getting more people registered to vote and doing the things here that a democracy certainly is supposed to espouse and provide for its citizenry.

Peters: Why do you feel that it is important for Negroes to vote?

Evers: Well, I think it’s necessary for all people to vote, and Negroes especially, with the conditions as they are here. For example, in Mississippi, we have police brutality galore. We have bad roads. We have a number of things that we don’t get simply because Negroes do not vote. For example, here in Jackson there is not one single Negro policeman. There are some 60,000 Negroes who live in Jackson, Miss., with no Negroes represented on the police force. This, of course, is the result of the fact that Negroes are not voting. And once we become registered voters in the numbers that we should be, then, of course, we should get these Negro policemen and other individuals in good positions that will benefit all the people.

And I think another thing, too, and that’s the fact that we’re not interested in making Mississippi better or this country better for Negroes, we’re interested in making this country better for people, for all of us, and we feel that only through voting, like we should—everyone voting—are we going to be able to do this. We would hope that everybody would be able to register and vote and be able to elect those officials who are going to best serve the community. And then we would not have, for example, many politicians who get on the stands and—and of course, they appeal to prejudice and bigotry as a result of the fact that Negroes are not registered to vote. Once we are voting in the numbers that we should be voting, then we’re not going to have these politicians getting on the soapboxes, making his first speech on the Negro, using the Negro to climb into office, and that’s what we have here in Mississippi, and that’s what we have in many other Southern communities where Negroes are not voting. So these are some of the reasons why Negroes, as well as white people, should be permitted to register and vote.

Peters: Do you feel that in campaigns where the question of race is a paramount issue that perhaps some of the more important issues don’t get discussed?

Evers: Well, that’s quite true. Many a candidate who runs for office and gets into office on the Negro question fails to really bring out

to the constituency that he's supposed to represent what quality of man he really is. Because what he has done has been more or less to appeal to the emotions of the people rather than give them some concrete platform or some concrete plans that he intends to institute for the community or for the state that he represents. What he does—what he normally does is get into office on emotionalism and, of course, race emotionalism which is very paramount here in the state.

Peters: Are there places in Mississippi where the presence of a significant number of Negro voters had resulted in some progress?

Evers: Yes. There is one that I remember right off hand and that's Washington County, which is Greenville, Miss. In Greenville, Negroes comprise a large percentage of the total vote for the county. As a result of this large vote, you have Negro policemen. You have detectives and you have fairly good schools and you have a number of different things that we don't have, for example, here in Jackson. You have certainly no police brutality of any consequence in Washington County. I think now in terms of a coastal town. Gulfport—Negroes vote freely and they have a large number of voters there. They have Negro deputy sheriffs and they have Negro policemen. And, of course, you don't have the brutality that you have in areas where Negroes are not voting in large numbers. So, certainly, where they are voting, then, of course, you get better results all the way around.

Peters: In other words a Negro without a vote really has no appeal, no power to appeal for anything in his local government?

Evers: That's quite true. I think it's often said that a voteless people are a hopeless people. And I think that's true with us or true with anybody or any group of people. So it's necessary that we try to get our hands on the ballot and use it effectively. We're just not interested in voting so that conditions will be improved for Negroes. We want conditions improved for everybody. We feel that in this country

that all persons should have an opportunity to register and vote and do the things that the Constitution guarantees them. That's all we're interested in.

Peters: Thank you very much, Mr. Evers.

Evers: Thank you, sir.

84 "He Said He Wouldn't Mind Dying—If . . ."

Myrlie Evers
Life

JUNE 28, 1963

At Arlington National Cemetery, Medgar Evers, ordered Mississippi field secretary for the N.A.A.C.P., was buried with a dignity he had been denied in life. In the tribute below, Evers's widow pays her own respects to the man who was her husband.

We all knew the danger was increasing. Threats came daily, cruel and cold and constant, against us and the children. But we had lived with this hatred for years and we did not let it corrode us.

Medgar was a happy man with a rich smile and a warmth that touched many people. He was never too busy to listen or too tired to help. But beneath that gentle sympathy lay strength that could not be intimidated. Word knows, enough people tried. But it never worked and that, I suppose, is why they killed him.

I don't know what makes one man feel so passionately the needs of his people. It began for Medgar when he was a little boy in De-catur, Miss., where he was born. A family friend was lynched, and years later Medgar could still recall the shock with which he had returned to his father.