

A Redbook
Dialogue:
**ANTHONY
QUINN AND
HARRY
BELAFONTE**

Two men
who grew up
surrounded by
poverty and hatred
talk about
self-respect,
independence
and love



(Actor Anthony Quinn strode into the apartment of singer Harry Belafonte, extended his hand in greeting and, observing an unusual musical instrument, commented on it immediately.)

QUINN: Do you play that thing over there, Harry? That mandolin thing?

BELAFONTE: Oh, yes. It's a Turkish instrument.

QUINN: It's beautiful. I must tell you what happened when I was in Morocco. I went to a little, little, tiny town way up in the mountains, and there was this wonderful marketplace, and an old man was playing a very strange instrument. It's a one-string instrument, a leather thong, and he played it like a fiddle, producing the most amazing, haunting sounds. The market place was crowded, and somebody in the crowd turned and asked: "What do you want?" I fell in love with the instrument, and I said, "I'm looking for something to buy, and the only thing I've found interesting is that instrument."

So they went up to the man and said, "This crazy American wants to buy your instrument." And the man says, "But I've had this all my life. I don't want to sell it. It's my living." You know, he goes around playing and they give him coins.

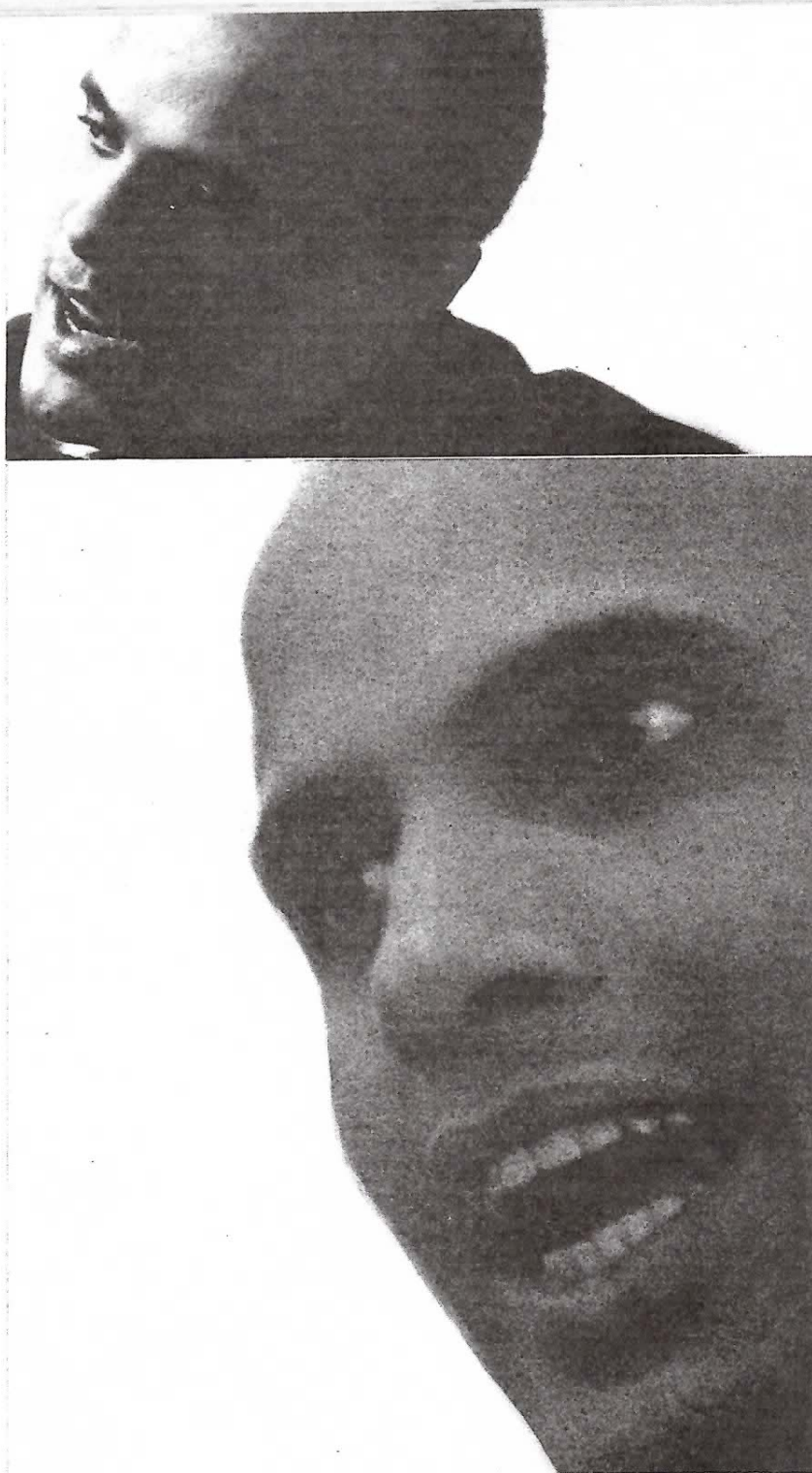
Then the whole crowd starts badgering him. "He's a rich American," they said. "He'll give you anything you want for it. Ask him for—" I don't know what they said, twenty-two thousand *dinars*, or whatever they call it, and it came to about thirty-five dollars.

The old man said, "He is not crazy enough to pay that for it." All this was being translated, you know. So I said, "Sure, I'll give him thirty-five dollars for it." And I took out the money and said, "You want to sell it? Here's the money."

But by that time I felt embarrassed because I didn't want to buy the man's instrument—it was his livelihood, and I could see how much he loved it. And I was hoping he'd say no, that he'd be strong enough to say no. But the crowd kept badgering him, telling

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PHOTOGRAPHS BY JERRY SCHATZBERG



Anthony Quinn

and

Harry Belafonte

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him he'd be an idiot if he didn't take it, and he could make another one. So he had to give me the instrument, and I gave him the money. And it was very funny, but you know what? At that moment we both lost respect for each other.

After that I went chasing him. I said, "The hell with it, here's the instrument." And he says, "But I don't want to give the money back!"

Belafonte (laughing): Did he keep the instrument?

Quinn (with a grin): No, I kept it.

Belafonte: You're not a New York kid, are you, Tony?

Quinn: No, I was raised in a very tough district of Los Angeles. But I had a kind of peculiar youth because I was a religious kid. I don't know where it came from, but when I was fourteen I was preaching on the streets for a woman named Aimee Semple McPherson. But in my neighborhood—in my group—if you didn't have a jail record, you were considered queer or something. And it was really tough, because everybody grew the weed (marijuana) in the back yard and you lifted everything: a bicycle, car, tires, whatever there was.

Belafonte (lightly): The Hope diamond.

Quinn: But I used to cheat. I'd come in with cartons of cigarettes, grocery stuff, you know, so I could be in the club. But I was really charging it at the grocery store.

My old man, he would get those crazy bills—and the guys in my group thought I was a hell of a thief.

Belafonte: Thanks to your old man.

Quinn: My old man—as a matter of fact, once . . . Well, all the kids used to sit around and make grape juice and ferment it. We didn't know what we were doing. We used to get drunk on this stuff.

Belafonte (dryly): And you didn't know what you were doing!

Quinn: So I came home one day—I was maybe eleven years old—I came home a little high, and my old man was wonderful about it. He said, "I didn't know you liked to drink, Tony. You like to drink, so let's have a drink together." So he brought out a bottle and he said, "Come on, kid, let's get drunk."

He made me drink a belt and he drank one. He says, "You know, this is great. I've always wanted to have a drinking partner." I was eleven years old and here I am swigging the bottle down, and finally I said, "Pop, I can't—"

"Oh, no, you don't!" he said. "We're going to drink the whole lousy bottle!" And we did. As a matter of fact, to this day, you know, I don't really drink. It was a wonderful kind of cure-all.

Now, my daughter—I caught her with a cigarette once when she was twelve, I guess, and I said, "Chris, you want to smoke—all right, let's smoke." I got her to inhale, which made her violently ill,

Belafonte: You ever smoke rope? When I was a kid in the West Indies, I had an insatiable need to be a jockey. And in the mornings I used to get up at five, hop out the window, run out, because right near the place we lived there was this track called East Race Course. That's where they used to train the horses. The beach wasn't far away, and we'd take the horses down to the salt water and run them, strengthen their legs.

But I saw myself growing and growing, and I went through a whole period of doing everything that was supposedly guaranteed to stunt the growth, including smoking rope. We used to get big hunks of rope off the ships and literally try to smoke that. But it didn't work. I'm six feet two—and I've given up horses. But [with a grin] I love rope!

Quinn (laughing): I grew up in the height of the depression in a section of Los Angeles called Boyle Heights, and there wasn't anything kids didn't smoke or drink. It was a fascinating neighborhood. Where Glass Street crossed Brooklyn, that was the center. One corner was a Negro section, the other corner was a Mexican section, the other corner over here was the Jewish section and the other corner was the Irish section. It was actually that divided. So was I; I had a Mexican mother and an Irish father. We used to have our gang wars—what they call rumbles now—down at the Los Angeles River. We used to line up on one side of the river with the enemy gang on the other. Either the Mexicans were fighting the Negroes or the Negroes were fighting the Jews or whoever was fighting. And you had to take sides.

Once the Mexicans were going to fight the Irish, and I remember that two boys named Chandler and Kelly came to our house, saying, "Tony, there's a big war on tomorrow against the Mexicans, and of course you're going to fight on our side—your name is Quinn, and we expect you." And then the Mexicans came over and said: "Who are you going to fight tomorrow?"

That day I had to make up my mind whether I was going to be Mexican or Irish. I chose to be Mexican; I made the choice. And it was interesting why I made the choice . . . because the Mexicans were the minority and they were outnumbered.

That's a peculiar decision to make, you know what I mean? When you're two nationalities like that, half and half, to make the decision *what* I'm going to be? But I think that some of my values came from realizing that there really is no difference, no division, that one day you can belong to one group and next day another, and you're still the same person.

Now when I look back on it, I think I had a great youth. I wish that the last twenty years were as interesting as my first twenty years. Because what is all this malarkey about being a success—which, you know, one never feels? I did a lot when I was a kid. I was a preacher. I was a fighter. I was even a dancer! I used to enter dance contests—those were the days when they had marathons.

Belafonte: You go back that far?

Quinn: Oh, daddy—1933 and '34. . .

Belafonte: My background isn't too far

Quinn: So was mine.

Belafonte: My mother was a domestic worker and my father was a seaman, and my father was very, very rarely at home. He was away for things like four months at a time because he used to take these trips around the world. My mother was an obstinate, aggressive woman, extremely religious. She would never fit into the nonviolent movement of today because she responded to everything very dramatically and violently.

The early part of my childhood was spent in Harlem. Then I went down to the West Indies, living under colonialism. Then we came back to New York, and I spent the rest of my early adulthood in Harlem. At sixteen and a half I had to quit school. I never went any further than first-term high school and I had to enlist in the Navy because all the guys who were my contemporaries—well, two of them, for example, were given life sentences in prison, and they were very young, and I knew that I had to get out of the ghetto in which I lived because otherwise my life wouldn't have been worth two cents.

Often I have wondered where did I get my own sense of right and wrong, and I would say my mother gave me a great deal of it. And I don't have a mother complex; my mother just did it. With all the grief that I had in my childhood, either in my personal relationships with my mother or the decisions she made, I never lost respect for her ability to get through the drama of the day. Her strength endowed in me a feeling that I could never compromise my own life.

And then having moved in a vast melting pot of racial and religious groups, my values were set very early, set by individuals who rose up either on the scene of sports or on the political scene. La Guardia was mayor of New York. He was an Italian with a deep, compassionate feeling for the people living in the ghetto in Harlem, for instance. Roosevelt, you know—Protestant, American—was President. Joe Louis was the big champ and the idol of all young Negro kids. And with all these symbols around me, I would look to them and listen to them and see what they were putting down, which was a sort of guide in helping me build a life based on the fantasy of the kind of human being I would like to be.

Being in analysis now, there's been such a deep probe going on that I'm not sure where my values come from, except that I know they have been formulated minute to minute, day to day, place to place, condition to condition. Things that in my youth I thought I could never accept, I have found out as an adult I can't quite understand why I wasn't able to accept them in my youth. The things that I had accepted in my youth, I find that as an adult I really have no care for any more.

Plus I think the marvelous thing about the profession we're in—it is impossible to be exposed to the world of theater, to the world of art, to creative people, and not be continually challenged, which also sets up your values.

Quinn: It probably will strike you as very strange but I am happy, I am very happy I experienced what I did, because I think

that if I had never experienced racial discrimination, I wouldn't be what I am or what I strive to be. Because what racial discrimination did for me—and I certainly experienced it, I want you to know. For the first twenty-two or twenty-three years of my life I experienced racial discrimination, and actively, I mean, *actively*. There were places in California where they would say: "No Mexicans allowed." Dance halls and so forth . . . Many times when I went to a dance or a marathon, I wouldn't be allowed to participate because I was Mexican and, you know, we had the name of zoot-suiters in those days.

But the peculiar thing is that I found—and I have since rationalized it in terms of our art—that you can only find freedom within a framework. Freedom per se does not exist. Because what is it? Freedom can only exist within a framework. A painter or any artist can only exist within the framework that he makes for himself. Do you understand what I mean? A painter must have the limits of a canvas; a novelist has the framework of a novel; a composer has certain bars that he has to say it all in.

And I think that the very restrictions of discrimination were wonderful for me because I found that this was the challenge and the framework. Now, I didn't set those limits, but there they were, and I had to operate within them, and it was all up to me. So all the conflicts served to make me say: "I'll show you!" I keep enlarging my framework—you can do that, you know—but still it's the framework, and you work within it to prove what you can do, to show other people what you can do.

The interesting thing that happens later in life is you realize that the people you want to show weren't worth the trouble. And—

Belafonte: They're not important.

Quinn: And a lot of them can't be shown any more because, unfortunately, in the meantime they've died. The other day I said to myself: Who the hell am I showing? It's time for me to get other values outside myself to aim for. In an interview in Europe recently, someone asked why I work so hard. I said: "I don't know what their names are, but I have imaginary giants that I fight." Now I've got to get other giants.

Belafonte: In a sense it's the same for me. I have begun to feel terribly redundant because a lot of the things that I am now doing, I did last year and I did the year before.

I am now really in search of my soul; I am really in search of my spirit; I'm in search of that thing which will permit all of the rebel in me to be expressed in the most challenging and the most creative way. That's why I find that, for instance, it means infinitely more to me to be associated with someone not because he happens to be a great personality but because he has certain values that fit with my sense of the rebel, with my need to express myself.

Quinn: What values?

Belafonte: I believe in change. I believe that my role is to challenge the status quo, to do anything I can to help precipitate that change. It might be terribly small, it might be no more than an ash or a grain of sand in the midst of the Sahara, but to accomplish that . . .

You know, I don't believe I am what I am just because I have certain proficiencies as an artist. I believe I am what I am because history was also on my side. Put me into an earlier time in history and I wouldn't have made it. But history today is making demands and how can I live up to those demands the best way possible? There was a time when no Negro had ever worked a Hilton hotel. I was the first to go in. No Negro had ever played before a desegregated audience in Atlanta, Georgia. I went down there under the auspices of Martin Luther King to work before them. I am caught up in the swirl of all these changes, and my great search is: How can I take my abilities and use them as fuel for the change that is taking place?

Here at thirty-five—I'll be thirty-six very shortly—I still have a lot of juice and a lot of life. I want to start out on something new, something vital. I don't mean that I'm going to give up singing, because whatever I do I must do in the framework of my art. But exactly what it is and how it will shape itself, I don't know.

Quinn (slowly): A small point of disagreement, Harry, is that I definitely feel we can make the changes ourselves. I say unabashedly that we, the artists, are the forerunners of taste, the forerunners of public ideas, and it's up to us to make history. I think that art is capable of making the world stop. All down the line, starting with Giotto, the painter, Rembrandt, Van Gogh, Rouault, Mr. Shakespeare—they've made time stop. They say: "Look, Time, stop and look at this!" And they kind of give you a picture of what's happening at the moment.

I believe that the artist makes history and history does not make the artist, and on this I have to go down swinging. Because if that's not so, then I'm being dictated to on what's good and bad by the public. My personal problem is that I cannot, dare not, take the chance to be as different as I would like to be. And I remember a great piece of advice given to me by my dear friend John Barrymore, who said: "You'll never be as great as you can be until you dare to be as bad as you can be."

I have a terrible fear of being bad. But you know, slowly, slowly, that may go.

I think you're minimizing yourself. Harry, when you say that you are not—you and I and all of us who think this way—are not responsible for changing the situation. We have changed the situation. But what the devil are we going to do with this change? Where do we go from here?

That is the big point, going on from here. Just recently I read an article about myself in one of the magazines, and it was talking about my poor youth and the fact that my mother had been a domestic, and I suddenly felt like a guy kind of mumbling: "Pity me, pity me!" And I made up my mind I'd never talk about that side of my youth that way again.

The fact is that that part of my life is through—it's over now! What's the next step? What do I do now? I'm not a poor kid any more—I've got a few bucks in the bank. I've got a whole new responsibility as a man. Not as a Mexican, and you, not as a Negro. We're artists, period. That's all-encompassing. That has no nationality, no race!

If I go on talking about how tough the past was, I'm looking for a crutch. Now I find that I'm not using that as a crutch any more. But even the throat [*Quinn was hoarse, suffering from acute laryngitis*] is psychosomatic because I think that, strangely enough, I'm afraid to go on that stage and say, "I'm the best I'll ever be." No, I've got to go on with a crutch and say, "Well, I'm not as good as I could be because I've got a bad throat." Like going in to fight a guy for the championship and saying, "Well, I'd be better but I hurt my back the other day."

Nuts! I'm as great as I'll ever be. Whatever I am, I am right then and there. *No crutches!* I'm not part of a minority. I'm not this, I'm not that—I'm out here in the open and I'm going to talk for myself. The problems we have are always there, but they are only the springboards from which we spring—from which this anger, this rebellion springs. And there comes a time when you got to forget it, when you just got to forget it! That's the thing that released the spring, but now you're out in the open. It's like those satellites—they've got to forget the missile pad. They're out on their own now. That was just the mother that sent them up.

We can't go around with our mothers and fathers at our sides, holding us up. We've got to stand on our own.

Belafonte: Stop feeling sorry for ourselves.

Quinn: Yes. You know, I have a very peculiar attitude. I think that—take discrimination—I think the guy that's doing the discriminating is a poor, misguided idiot who is suffering from an inferiority complex. Because the only way he can feel he is my equal or superior to me is thanks to a racial thing he had nothing to do with. It was an accident that he was born white with blue eyes. That's a complete accident. But that's the only way he can feel superior, the poor idiot. He can't feel superior to me in deeds. Does he want to get in the ring with me? On the stage? In front of the cameras? His only superiority is in his background. So I have to feel sorry for him, rather than angry at him. I think this man needs therapeutic treatment.

In Paris once, I remember being in a French restaurant called *Fouquet's*, and these two Texans walked in and sat at a little table. They were both in military uniforms. They were both wearing these little white flowers in their lapels. You could tell they were from Texas. They sat down and ordered. They talked in this thick Texas drawl. I was in Texas once and, you know, experienced discrimination there.

But at any rate I was having a quiet lunch. It was about three o'clock in the afternoon. The place was kind of empty and the waiter went over and asked what they wanted to eat. And one of the Texans looked at the menu and he couldn't read French, obviously, and he said, "Well, I guess we'll have some spaghetti." Now, you know, spaghetti at *Fouquet's* . . .

And the waiter kind of looked at him, and then he said, "All right," and he brought them some soggy, horrible spaghetti. And these Texans looked at it and one man said, "Hey, garçon, how about bringing us a little chili sauce or something?" And the waiter looked at him and says, "What? What do you want?" So the Texan tries to explain, and finally

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some kitchen comes back and hands them some ketchup.

Strangely enough, a very funny thing happened to me. I felt sorry for those Texans. They were being discriminated against. I called the waiter over and I said, "What kind of miserable treatment is that? Those people want to eat—why do you treat them like dogs?"

Now, those Texans obviously felt like I felt in Texas. They were suddenly made to feel that way in Paris. And I made a terrible scene, and I went over to them and I said, "I'm very sorry. If I can help you order . . ." Well, they were so pathetically grateful, you know, because somebody ordered them something to eat. But that's what I mean, you see. Somewhere along the line you have to feel sorry for them and stop making apologies for yourself.

Belafonte: That means acting according to your principles and standing up under the attacks of other people, right? I am involved in an interracial marriage. My wife is Jewish. I was born a Catholic. My wife is—I say this as a kind of sociological definition—she is white. I am Negro. I didn't marry her because she was white. I didn't fall in love with her because I believe in integration. It was an affair of the heart, and she could have been anything. It just so happens that all, or almost all, of the important things I need as a human being, she is able to fulfill.

Now, I've spoken to Negroes who accuse me of betraying the race. And why do they consider the race has been betrayed? Because I have moved out of the ghetto, because I now live in a community that is not considered a Negro community, because I have married outside the tribe, because I have dared to embark upon certain courses of conduct that are not part of the cultural pattern of the Negro community.

When they say these things, I ask them: What is it in my life that you would deny me which is not, in fact, something you yourself believe should be your legitimate right? Do you say that you should just go into integrated schools but that human relationships should end there? Are you saying that I should never sit at tables with my white counterparts? Are you saying that I must now direct my children never to become emotionally involved with peoples of other races, never to fall in love with them? Are you saying that I should place restrictions on them as restrictions have been placed on us? And of course they have no argument for that.

Quinn: I think defiance is a problem for you and me, Harry. Defiance and anger and how to handle—

Belafonte: You're an angry man, Tony, too.

Quinn: Yes.

Belafonte: What makes your anger beautiful at the moment is that it is going along a course. It is no longer rampant. It is not anger for anger's sake. And all I am saying is that I don't want to lose my anger—I want to channel it.

Quinn: What one does with one's anger, whether one merely becomes defiant or . . . Look, Harry, I yearn to give up this lousy defiance and to supplant it with a bigger quality.

Belafonte: I'm saying exactly the same
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thing you're saying. I say I know all the things that I'm against and I would like to be able to take all of this 'against' energy and put it to being 'for'—what I am for, you know. I don't mean 'for' in terms of the flag-waving—

Quinn: Look, let me—

Belafonte: I mean what am I for in terms of the poetry of life.

Quinn: Let me tell you one incident. It's funny, the things that affect your life, you know. I used to hang around with Barrymore. I was twenty-three years old and he was sixty-five years old. But he loved me as a son. I don't know why, but that's how it was.

One night we went to a nightclub, to a place called Earl Carroll's. In those days it was a big, brash nightclub. We phoned down there around one thirty in the morning and said that Mr. Barrymore, Gene Fowler, John Dekker and I were coming by. Of course, Barrymore was the great actor at that time, and they said, "Oh, sure, come right down. We'll give you a table."

We went down and they gave us a table in the front row, and we had to order drinks fast because it was almost two o'clock in the morning, and we ordered twenty drinks and we had already had a few when the master of ceremonies came out and said, "Tonight in the audience is

the great lover of all times, and I want you to acknowledge his presence—Mr. John Barrymore!"

Spotlight on Mr. Barrymore, who got up and took a bow. And the master of ceremonies said, "Well, as long as Mr. Barrymore is here and as long as the audience is so receptive, we wonder if Mr. Barrymore would come up on the stage and dance with the most beautiful Earl Carroll girl?"

Now, Barrymore was suffering from gout at that time, and he had had a few drinks, and he said to us he'd be damned if he was going up there, but the other guys at the table said, "Look, you got to go."

There were about three or four thousand people in the place—it was huge—and the audience kept applauding, so finally Barrymore got up on the stage.

At a given signal the orchestra started, and out from the wings comes this most grotesque human being you've ever seen, a girl with buck teeth and frizzy hair, some kind of a clown. And people were in the aisles laughing—they thought it was the funniest thing they'd ever seen.

And Barrymore, with . . . I don't know what . . . with all the grace of a prince, walked up to her, took her hand, kissed it, and he said, "May I have this dance?" And so this girl, who was doing some weird contortions, suddenly—before your

eyes—straightened up and something happened to her and she seemed to be almost beautiful.

And he danced this waltz with her, and the audience didn't know what to do, whether to laugh or not. And finally while they were dancing, you felt their complete aloneness. Nobody was there. And the dance finished. He brought her up to the microphone very graciously and he said, "My dear lady, I've never enjoyed a dance so much. I thank you from the bottom of my heart." And he kissed her hand. And this girl, all flustered, turned and walked off the stage.

Then Barrymore turned back to the microphone and he said very quietly, "As for all the rest of you, go to hell!"

You see? He could have gotten mad, but here was the unforgettable thing. That was Barrymore. Creating there, alone, creating that sense of shame in the audience.

Belafonte: Yes.

Quinn: In terms of you and me, Harry, the only thing I'm saying is about the defiance. I'm slowly changing against the defiance. I'm beginning to feel that I must find something that I can love as much as the things I've hated. I think when I do, I'll be a much better person.

Belafonte: There's our closing statement, you know. Because that's what I agree with. . . . THE END

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