Interview with **William Simmons**
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Note: These transcripts contain material that did not appear in the final program. Only text appearing in ***bold italics*** was used in the final version of *Eyes on the Prize.*

00:00:04:00

[camera roll 331]

[sound roll 1316]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: OK AND YOU CAN MARK.

[sync tone]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: MARK.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: GREAT.

INTERVIEWER: OK. GIVE ME A SENSE OF THE TIMES, WE'RE TALKING ABOUT THE DEEP SOUTH AS A WHOLE NOW, AS A NICE PLACE TO LIVE IN THE EARLY '60s.

Simmons: Well, the Deep South has always been a nice place to live and the early '60s was certainly no exception. With all of the turbulence that went on and all of the big headlines that appeared occasionally it still was home and life went on for the most part very much as usual.

00:00:38:00

INTERVIEWER: WHAT WAS THE, WHAT WAS THAT LIKE THE STATE AS A WHOLE IN TERMS OF RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN PEOPLE AND THE

ATMOSPHERE?

Simmons: Well, the atmosphere was, as far as I know, was unchanged from time as long as I remember. We have always had in the South a civility and a courtesy between all people and those times certainly were no exception to that general rule.

00:01:08:00

INTERVIEWER: OK. NOW GOING ON TO THE LATE ‘50s AND EARLY ‘60s. MANY MISSISSIPPIANS HAVE SAID THAT, ALTHOUGH THERE WAS A RIGID COL—CODE OF SOCIAL SEGREGATION AND RACIAL SEGREGATION, THAT DESPITE THIS FACT BLACKS AND WHITES IN THE SOUTH AND IN MISSISSIPPI HAD A, A CLOSER RELATIONSHIP HERE THAN ANYWHERE ELSE. CAN YOU COMMENT ON THAT?

Simmons: I think that’s generally correct. I have—

INTERVIEWER: TELL ME, TELL ME WHAT WAS GENERALLY CORRECT.

Simmons: I have heard it—well it’s, it’s general correct that there’s a close relationship between blacks and whites in the South although that terminology is recent. It used, the polite term was colored people in the ‘60s, and that, that is true. That had always existed. It, it may be because of this unusual fact that in the South while we had social segregation, we did not generally have residential segregation. There was a close physical association between black and white, that is, is historically just a fact of life and it has, it has been summarized generally in this, perhaps inaccurate phrase, that in the South, the blacks are highly regarded as people and not highly regarded as a race whereas in the North they are highly regarded as a race and not at all highly regarded as individual people.

INTERVIEWER: THAT’S GOOD. THANKS. OK CUT. CUT FOR A SECOND—

[cut]

00:02:49:00

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: MARK.

[sync tone]

INTERVIEWER: OK WE’RE TALKING ABOUT THE RELATIONSHIP IN THE LATE ‘50s, EARLY ‘60s OF—DESCRIBE THE, THE CODE OF SEGREGATION, SPECIFICALLY, FOR SOMEONE WHO’S NEVER BEEN DOWN HERE AND WE’RE IN, WE’RE IN THE LATE ‘50s, EARLY ‘60s. WHAT COULD AND COULDN’T ONE DO?

Simmons: The practice of segregation that prevailed throughout the South really operated

primarily in social spheres. That had to do with social events and social type institutions. That was true. It extends to—or did extend and still does to churches, to education, to all facets of life that involved a social type exchange. There were actually state laws on the books regarding segregation in schools and in public transportation. These had been on the books in all of the Southern states since about the, the 1890s when the restoration of home rule occurred after Reconstruction. It, it might be mentioned that segregation itself was an outgrowth of the Reconstruction period following the Civil War. When all of the South was under black political domination and it was that historical experience with the excesses of the Reconstruction legislatures maintained by Yankee bayonets that led to this result. And it might be added that the whole legal concept of segregation was based on a U.S. Supreme Court decision in 1896 called Plessy vs Ferguson.

00:04:44:00

INTERVIEWER: OK. NOW, HOW DID THESE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN COLORED PEOPLE, AS THEY WERE CALLED, AND, AND WHITES BEGIN TO CHANGE AFTER THE BROWN VS. THE BOARD OF EDUCATION DECISION ‘54?

Simmons: The relationship between black and white changed after the Supreme Court decision in 1954 hardly noticeably at all. As far as the general daily life in the South there was no change. The reaction of, of most white people and, I think, it’s fair to say, make that generalization, was at two opposite poles: people either said oh, it'll never happen. That is, the schools will never be integrated or, on the other hand, the Supreme Court has spoken, there's nothing you can do about it.

00:05:43:00

INTERVIEWER: WELL, IT SEEMS TO ME, I’LL, I’LL JUST KEEP GOING ON THIS TRAIN OF THOUGHT. IN ‘54 WITH THAT DECISION, NOW THAT SEGREGATED SCHOOLS WERE ILLEGAL, IN EFFECT, CAN YOU JUST GIVE ME AN IDEA ABOUT THE KIND OF SHOCK THAT THAT DECISION REGISTERED TO SOUTHERNERS?

Simmons: It, it, it had a profound shock. It was met almost—

INTERVIEWER: START AGAIN—

Simmons: —the Supreme Court decision of 1954 caused a profound shock. Almost one of disbelief except to those who had been following prior decisions and who saw the way the wind was blowing. It was not too big a surprise there. What did come as a surprise was the second part of the decision. It really came in two parts. The first one said segregation was no longer legal. It outlawed segregation. The second part required integration and there is a distinction between those two a very great distinction. And, I think, it was the second part when it really began to soak in that disturbed people very much because that involved the, the fact of compulsion, of compulsory mixing of people who had two completely separate ways of life.

00:07:12:00

INTERVIEWER: WHY WAS THIS DECISION THOUGHT TO BE A DANGEROUS DECISION CONTINUING ON THIS—

Simmons: The decision was thought to be a dangerous decision because it involved what to many people, at the time, was, was kind of unthinkable. And it raised the question why? Why use the power of government to compel people to mix socially for the sole reason that they were of different races? There's nothing—there's no historical precedent that anyone has brought to, to my mind that explains this. There's no prior experience of mankind. There's plenty of the opposite of separation, but none of this compulsion to integrate. And the effects in education were thought to be detrimental as, indeed, they turned out to be. It was foreseen that there would be chaos, in fact, that has not actually happened to a large extent. But it was resented very deeply and regarded as a, a, a, a gross usurpation of power by the United States Supreme Court and it destroyed the confidence of the public in that Court's integrity.

INTERVIEWER: OK, THANKS. STOP THERE FOR A SECOND.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: YEAH.

[cut]

00:08:49:00

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: AND MARK.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: MARK.

[sync tone]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: YOU CAN REPHRASE THAT QUESTION IF YOU WANT.

INTERVIEWER: OK. YOU WERE SAYING THAT AFTER THE '54 DECISION, FIRST OF ALL, THE DECISION ITSELF WAS UNTHINKABLE BECAUSE OF THE REPERCUSSIONS IT WOULD BRING. GIVE US SOME SPECIFICS ABOUT WHAT, WHAT PEOPLE WERE AFRAID OF AND YOU, PARTICULARLY.

Simmons: Well, I make exception of myself as being afraid of any consequences of it because I was a mature person and able to take care of myself. The main concern was for children for the younger people growing up. There was concern about interracial dating to be perfectly frank. There was concern about parental control. The fact that in, in schools the difficulty of maintaining discipline would be exacerbated by this de—by this decision. It enhanced the power of civil rights lawyers where they were able to call the tune in the classrooms more so than teachers and school officials themselves. It just changed the whole basis. It took, it took the control of schools away from local school boards. Placed the control

of schools in the hands of Federal Courts and the, the difficulties that arose out of this transfer of power from local to federal level was, was what people were, were concerned about most with all of the details that would flow from that.

00:10:24:00

INTERVIEWER: WAS THERE ANYTHING BESIDES THE EFFECT IT WOULD HAVE ON THE SCHOOL CHILDREN? WHAT WERE SOME OF THE OTHER ISSUES YOU WERE AFRAID OF? ONE WERE SCHOOLS WHAT WAS THE NEXT?

Simmons: Well, this is not directly related to the—to this decision although it's related to a similar decision, the U.S. Supreme Court that is the outlawing of restrictive covenants on property.

00:10:46:00

[cut]

[wild audio]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: JUST, JUST RAN OUT OF FILM. I'M SORRY.

INTERVIEWER: WE'LL HAVE TO BREAK.

Simmons: All right.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: END OF FILM ROLL.

INTERVIEWER: WHEN WAS THAT? WHEN WERE THESE LAWS?

Simmons: Jones v., Jones v. Mayer.

00:10:59:00

[cut]

[slate]

[change to camera roll 332]

INTERVIEWER: I MAY GO BACK TO THAT QUESTION—

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: SPEED.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: AND MARK.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: MARK.

[sync tone]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: THANK YOU SIR. GIVE ME ONE SECOND. DONALD [?] YOU'RE NOT HEARING ANY CAMERA NOISE ARE YOU?

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: NO. NONE I'VE NOTICED.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: OK.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: ABSOLUTE—ABSOLUTELY QUIET CAMERA.

INTERVIEWER: OK, JUST A COUPLE SENTENCES, VERY BRIEFLY, WHAT'S—DEFINE THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN DESEGREGATION AND INTEGRATION IF YOU THINK IT'S SIGNIFICANT.

Simmons: There's a significance difference between desegregation and integration. These two terms, I think, have been used interchangeably and quite erroneously. Desegregation simply means the absence of legal segregation, that is, the absence of laws requiring separation of the races. That is a negative. Integration is a positive that requires the actual mixing of races and—for racial reasons. And it's a, it's a new type of racism that is very disturbing. It's—it has led to affirmative action, to busing of children to achieve so-called racial balance, whatever that is.

INTERVIEWER: STAY ON MY SHOW.

Simmons: And also it has led to the gerrymandering of school attendant—attendance zones in order to get what some social engineer thinks is a proper racial mix. So there's a world of difference between desegregation and integration.

00:12:29:00

INTERVIEWER: HOW WOULD YOU DEFINE THE PHRASE, I READ THIS IN THE CITIZENS' COUNCIL PAMPHLETS, OF RACIAL INTEGRITY AND IN, IN THE EARLY '60s? NOW, WHAT WAS—IF I READ THIS AND SAID, SO WHAT, WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS OF RACIAL INTEGRITY?

Simmons: The, the implications of racial integrity are simply what the word integrity means. That is to, to maintain the standard of racial integrity to refrain from mixing to oppose the compulsory integration of races. It's the—could be said to be the opposite of integration.

00:13:07:00

INTERVIEWER: NOW CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE GROWTH OF THE CITIZENS' COUNCILS IN THE LATE '50s AND, AS A RESULT AND IN RESPONSE TO THESE

DECISIONS, BROWN AND THE OTHER?

Simmons: The Citizens' Councils were formed in the summer of 1954 following the Brown vs. Board of Education decision on May 17, '54 for the reason that it dealt directly with education and parents were very concerned about their children, about the effects it would have on them. They didn't know exactly what to do, but they felt that they should organize. They looked around them. They saw that the decision itself had been the result of organization, of organized pressure over a period of many years. And they felt that it could only be fought with counter-pressure. That was through organization. Hence the Citizens' Councils were formed. The name Citizens' Council was selected because it was descriptive. A council of citizens. It was thought that the best course to follow would be to try to get respected capable people who were aware of community sentiment to form themselves together for purposes of communication and, and study and try to determine what best course of action could be taken.

00:14:47:00

INTERVIEWER: SO, TO SUMMARIZE THE PURPOSE OF THE CITIZENS' COUNCIL, WHAT, WHAT ARE THE, THE GOALS? YOU COULDN'T REVERSE THE SUPREME COURT'S DECISION.

Simmons: The, the goal of the Citizens Council was to not necessarily to reverse the Court's decision because that was regarded, although desirable, as realistically impossible. It was to figure out how to deal with it. And it was dealt with quite successfully for ten years until the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, because no integration occurred in the South from 1954 until 1964, a period of ten years.

INTERVIEWER: WHEN YOU SAY IT WAS SUCCESS, YOU WERE SUCCESSFUL BY WHAT, STALLING TACTICS OR COURT OR—

Simmons: Stalling, stalling tactics. By mobilizing public sentiment against the U.S. Supreme Court decision.

INTERVIEWER: I'M SORRY CAN WE START AT THE BEGINNING? JUST, JUST IN A COMPLETE SENTENCE, YOU, YOU KNOW, WHAT YOU WERE TRYING TO DO—

Simmons: Yeah, I forgot, I got too responsive.

INTERVIEWER: OK. WE WERE TALKING ABOUT STALLING TACTICS. OK, HOW DID, HOW DID YOU ALL PROCEED IN THAT, IN THAT TEN YEAR PERIOD? BY DOING WHAT?

Simmons: The strategy of the Citizens Council during the years following the U.S. Supreme Court decision was to delay, to delay, to delay, because nothing was to be gained by not delaying hence that seemed to be the sensible thing to do. And it did work for ten years until

the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and that, in itself, led only to what was called token integration which was very slight and really of not any concern at all.

00:16:32:00

INTERVIEWER: COULD YOU DEFINE FOR ME HOW THE CITIZENS' COUNCIL WORK SAY IN A SMALL TOWN RATHER THAN A—IN ALL OF THE SOUTH? LET'S SAY AS AN EXAMPLE, IN ONE AREA. WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

Simmons: In a small, in a small town the Citizens' Council would have meetings. They would, in effect, mobilize public sentiment. They would get means of communication: newspapers, radio, and television stations to express their views. Also, and this is to be remembered, it's difficult to remember in the light of subsequent events, but, at that time, there was no mandate to integrate. For integration to take place a suit had to be brought and no individual suits were brought, hence there was no integration. And in, in this sense the mobilization of public sentiment and opposition to the U.S. Supreme Court decision was quite effective for this ten year period.

INTERVIEWER: OK, CUT. CUT.

[cut]

00:17:41:00

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: AND MARK.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: MARKER.

[sync tone]

INTERVIEWER: OK. CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE GROWTH OF THE CITIZENS' COUNCILS IN THE LATE '50s AND—I'M SORRY, LET'S START AGAIN. SINCE THERE WERE SO MANY PEOPLE WHO JOINED THE COUNCIL, CAN YOU GIVE US NUMBERS OR PERCENTAGES OF, OF MEN WHO JOINED OR WAS IT ONLY MEN?

Simmons: The Citizens' Councils in the late '5Os grew quite rapidly as word of the organization spread. It actually got its biggest boost from a speech made by a lady member of the state legislature. The speech was well publicized and organizations began to spring up all over the state. The Citizens' Council was not and never was an overall organization. It was a group of local councils who cooperated with each other. There was no centralized record keeping and no one ever really knew how many members there were, but it—in this state and in neighboring states it numbered, certainly, into many thousands. The leadership, typically, in a local—on a local level, would be town leaders. Lawyers, doctors, businessmen, professional men by and large. And, of course, planters in the Delta, farmers in the hills and, generally, that, that type of person. Ladies were very active in it as well.

00:19:19:00

INTERVIEWER: AND SO, SPECIFICALLY, IN ‘62, WHAT WOULD YOU SAY THE—WHAT WOULD BE THE INFLUENCE OF THE CITIZENS’ COUNCIL?

Simmons: I probably would not be well qualified to describe the influence of the Citizens’ Council, because it would be like the tree saying how far does the forest reach? Someone with a more objective point of view could do better, but I felt that it, it was representative of the mainstream of thought of the white community, at the time.

INTERVIEWER: DID YOU HAVE A LOT OF POLITICIANS WHO AGREED WITH YOUR ORGANIZATION?

Simmons: Many politicians agreed with the aims of the Citizens’ Councils and, in fact, a, a blue book of state organization of those years, I think, would reflect that a majority of members of the state legislature listed membership in the Citizens' Council as one of their asides.

00:20:17:00

INTERVIEWER: OK. NOW, WHAT WAS THE CI—THE POSITION OF THE CITIZENS’ COUNCIL ON STATES’ VERSUS FEDERAL RIGHTS AS THEY RELATED TO THE QUESTION OF RACIAL INTEGRITY?

Simmons: The position of the Citizen's Councils on states’ rights vs the Federal Government in the field of racial integrity as well as in all fields was very much in favor of states’ rights. Historically, we are inheritors of a states' rights tradition and that is very strong in our, in our part of the country. It was reflected in the presidential election of 1948. It has been reflected in subsequent presidential election and the selection of free electors. There's been that spirit of independence and a, a real concern with the overweening power of the Federal Government.

00:21:19:00

INTERVIEWER: OK, LET ME TAKE YOU BACK TO OLE MISS AND THAT—THE CRISIS THAT OCCURRED IN 1962. WHAT STANDS OUT IN YOUR MIND ABOUT THAT NIGHT OF SEPTEMBER 30TH OR OCTOBER 1ST IN ‘62 WHEN JAMES MEREDITH IS ON THE CAMPUS AND THESE DISTURBANCES BREAK OUT? YOU KNOW, WERE YOU THERE? WERE YOU WATCHING ON TV? WHERE WERE YOU AND WHAT WAS YOUR REACTION?

Simmons: When, when the disturbances broke out at Ole Miss, when Meredith was brought in by the U.S. Marshals and the riots broke out I was in the Citizens'—

00:21:56:00

[cut]

[wild audio]

Simmons: —Council office in Jackson.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: I'M SORRY. WE JUST RAN OUT.

INTERVIEWER: OK. WE'RE PICKING UP RIGHT THERE.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: WE GOT THROUGH THAT FAR.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: END OF SOUND ROLL THREE THIRTY TWO.

00:22:06:00

[cut]

[slate]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: YOU CAN ROLL IT AND MARK.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: SPEED.

[sync tone]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: MARK.

INTERVIEWER: AND WE'RE READY.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: OK, PRU IT'S ALL YOURS.

INTERVIEWER: OK. SO YOU'RE IN THE CITIZENS' COUNCIL—WHY DON'T WE START FROM THERE.

Simmons: I was in the Citizens' Council office in Jackson during the night of the, of the Ole Miss riot when Meredith was brought to the campus forcibly by United States Marshals and we were kept aware of what was going on over, over the radio reports. There was a lot of excitement in Jackson, at the time, because rumors were flying that Governor Barnett would be arrested by United States Marshals. Many people, in fact it probably numbered several thousand, surrounded the Governor's mansion in downtown Jackson and more or less stood there. They were very orderly, not too excitable, but stood there as a sort of human barrier to protect the Governor and to stand with him. That was one of the main objectives and thoughts as expressed to me was simply to show solidarity with him in support for his position in trying to protect the integrity of the state, state University.

00:23:36:00

INTERVIEWER: WHAT DID YOU ALL THINK OF THE MARSHALS COMING IN OR THE MISSISSIPPI—

Simmons: We thought, we, we thought the use of marshals was, was, was, was pretty bad. We viewed this, the whole episode, as an attack on the author—authority of the state. It was politically, apparently, politically mandatory for President John F. Kennedy and Attorney General Robert E. Kennedy to put Meredith, to put a black in Ole Miss. They had been suffering from a bad defeat when the Freedom Riders had tried to invade the state in—a couple of years earlier. So it appeared politically necessary for them to show some results. Mississippi was a good whipping boy and also the symbol of resistance to the Supreme Court's decision. So why not humiliate the state and show the fist? And that's exactly what happened.

00:24:42:00

INTERVIEWER: DID, DID GOVERNOR BARNETT EVER TALK TO YOU ABOUT HOW HE FELT WHEN HE STOOD ON THE STEPS AND INTERPOSED HIMSELF TO PREVENT MEREDITH'S ADMISSION?

Simmons: He did it four times.

INTERVIEWER: OK, I'M SORRY. START FROM THE—

Simmons: This is when I'd say he was, he's incredible. If you want to I'll recount one of 'em.

INTERVIEWER: SURE, GO AHEAD. TALK ABOUT GOVERNOR BARNETT AND YOUR POSIITON.

Simmons: You ready?

INTERVIEWER: MM-HMM

INTERVIEWER: Governor Barnett in a speech, I forget the date but it was about a week prior to Meredith's being brought to the campus, had made a speech broadcast statewide on television in which he interposed the authority of the state between the College Board, who had responsibility for determining registrations, and the authority of the Federal—the power of the Federal Government. There's a long history to this which, I don't know if we need to go in here, but as, as one of these—in, in one of the acts or one of the confrontations of a more amusing nature that took place in the Woolfolk building, it's a state office building in downtown Jackson. Two federal representatives, a chief marshal and a fe—federal attorney, accompanied Mer—Meredith to the College Board office to see that he was registered. They had a summons from a federal judge enjoining Governor Barnett from interfering with the registration. Governor Barnett was standing there in place of the College Board. As a matter

of fact, if I recall correctly, he had been named de facto registrar for the moment. When the federal official whose name, as I remember, was John Doar spoke to Barnett and asked him if he would accept Meredith as a student. Barnett peered over his glasses and he said, which one of you gentlemen is James Meredith? This, [laughs] this caused some laughter. During this, it should be added, that during this episode the corridor was filled with members of the legislature. Then Doar said, Governor I have this summons for you. And Barnett said, well, I thank you for offering it to me, but I, I don't think I want it. And Doar said, then you refuse? And Barnett said, I refuse, but I do so politely. Whereupon Doar said, in which case we'll leave politely. And Barnett's final words were, come see us at the mansion. [laughs]

INTERVIEWER: CUT.

Simmons: And that's the God's truth—

00:27:59:00

[cut]

[wild audio]

INTERVIEWER: OH GOSH. DID YOU—IS THIS A STORY TOLD AROUND OR DID YOU HAPPEN TO BE THERE OR WHERE DID, WHERE DID THIS ALL COME OUT?

Simmons: Much of it appeared in print in the paper. I was not there, but, but it, it came out.

INTERVIEWER: SOUNDS LIKE A BARNETT STORY.

Simmons: And I wrote a—I had written an unfinished, unedited manuscript about this whole thing and I had, I had a lot of sources, at the time, and so I got it pretty straight.

INTERVIEWER: THAT'S GREAT.

Simmons: But that is, that is so in character for Barnett. It sounds unbelievable but when you know him—

INTERVIEWER: IT FITS.

Simmons: It fits.

INTERVIEWER: LET'S SEE—

Simmons: When he said, which one of you is Meredith, I thought John Doar was gonna collapse.

INTERVIEWER: [laughs] I WONDER.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: WE'RE STILL ROLLING.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: OH I'M SORRY.

INTERVIEWER: SORRY.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: SPEED.

00:29:00:00

[cut]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: CAMERA SPEED AND MARK.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: MARK.

[sync tone]

INTERVIEWER: OK. GOING BACK, GOING BACK TO THE POSITIONS OF THE CITIZENS' COUNCIL MANY PEOPLE HAVE THE, THE FALSE IMPRESSION THAT THE—

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: HANG ON ONE SECOND. NOW WE'RE OK.

INTERVIEWER: OK. THAT THE KLAN IS—THE KU KLUX KLAN IS BASICALLY RUNNING THINGS IN THE STATE OR IN THE SOUTH, AT THIS PERIOD, THE DEEP SOUTH. NOW, WHAT, I WANT TO CLARIFY THIS, WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE, THE CITIZENS' COUNCIL VERSUS THE KLAN? WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENCES? AND WHAT WAS THE POSITION OF THE CITIZENS' COUNCIL ON THE KU KLUX KLAN.

Simmons: There's absolutely no relationship between the Citizens' Council and the Ku Klux Klan.

INTERVIEWER: WELL, WHAT, WHAT DID YOU ALL—HOW DID YOU VIEW THE ACTIVITIES AS ONE HEARD ABOUT THE KLAN IN THAT PERIOD?

Simmons: The activities of the Ku Klux Klan, generally, were, were viewed by members of the Citizens' Councils as very detrimental to our cause.

INTERVIEWER: BECAUSE OF THE VIOLENCE—

Simmons: Because of the violence, because of irresponsible actions.

INTERVIEWER: OK.

Simmons: And because the, the Klan by and large played into the stereotype of the, of the Southerner that was portrayed in the North to create anti-southern sentiment.

00:30:19:00

INTERVIEWER: WHY DON'T YOU TELL ME ABOUT THAT STEREOTYPE JUST BRIEFLY?

Simmons: The stereotype of the Southerner is, is—when, when you've been characterized, yourself, as a stereotype it's hard to, it's, it's hard to know exactly what to say. How do you say I'm not a stereotype? It's like being asked when did you stop beating your wife. You, you, you never started. I've been asked the question many times, why do you hate blacks? I don't hate blacks. Why should I? It's, it's that type of—it's—I don't know exactly how to describe it, but it, it is a, a strong—it's a very difficult thing to deal with. I have seen Southerners that I could recognize as stereotypes. Perhaps it's in the eye of the beholder, but I think it's been overdone tremendously. And it completely ignores the complexity and the variety that exists here as it does everywhere in this world.

00:31:32:00

INTERVIEWER: OK, LET ME MOVE ON TO GOVERNOR PAUL JOHNSON. NOW HE'S RUNNING FOR OFFICE IN 1963. WAS, WAS PAUL JOHNSON SUPPORTED BY THE CITIZENS' COUNCIL IN HIS ELECTION CAMPAIGN?

Simmons: The Citizens' Councils never did support a candidate for public office directly. A majority of the Citizen's Council members, I am sure, did support Governor Paul, Lieutenant Governor Paul B. Johnson in his campaign for governor because of his strong stand at Ole Miss.

INTERVIEWER: THEN WHAT WAS THEIR REACTION TO HIS INAUGURAL SPEECH WHEN HE SEEMS TO AGREE?

Simmons: The reaction of most members to his inaugural speech in which he, in effect, made an one hundred eighty degree turn was one of great disappointment.

INTERVIEWER: DID THEY FEEL BETRAYED?

Simmons: Many of them, many members who had voted for him did feel betrayed by this sudden, sudden change in his policy.

INTERVIEWER: OK. YOU WANT US TO CUT?

[cut]

00:32:40:00

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: SPEED AND MARK.

[sync tone]

INTERVIEWER: IN MISSISSIPPI—WE'RE JUST GOING ANOTHER QUESTION IN. NOW YOU'RE, YOU'RE SOMEONE WHO'S FROM THE STATE. YOU'RE EDUCATED. YOU'RE NOT THE STEREOTYPE OF—THAT'S BEEN PROMOTED ABOUT THE SOUTH. A CONSERVATIVE PROFESSIONAL PERSON. WHEN YOU FIRST HEARD THAT PEOPLE WERE COMING INTO THE STATE EXPRESSLY TO CHANGE THINGS, SOCIALLY AND POLITICAL, WHAT WAS YOUR REACTION TO THESE CIVIL RIGHTS WORKERS? THIS IS IN THAT SUMMER WHEN THERE WAS THAT, YOU KNOW, THOUSANDS COMING IN.

Simmons: ***When the civil rights workers invaded the state in the summer of 1964, to change us, presumably into their own image, they were met with a feeling of some curiosity, but mostly resentment. They fanned out across the state. Made a great to do of, of breaking up our customs, of flaunting social practices that had been respected by people here over the years. That was the time of the hippies just coming in. Many had on hippie uniforms and conducted themselves in hippie ways. They were not exactly the types of models that most people that I knew wanted to emulate. Also the, the arrogance that they showed in wanting to reform a whole state in the way they thought it should be, created resentment.*** So, to say they were not warmly received and welcomed is, is, perhaps an understatement.

00:34:32:00

INTERVIEWER: GOOD. OK.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: THAT'S GREAT.

INTERVIEWER: WHEN YOU FIRST, PERSONALLY, RAN INTO THEM WHAT WAS YOUR REACTION AND, AND WHAT CONTEXT?

Simmons: When I personally ran into them my reaction was one of unbelief. It, it, it really was, it was difficult for me to think that people would flaunt something this way. It's perhaps not a polite thing to mention, but about the only close personal encounter I remember having had was coming out of a bank building one morning, to see these two young men in, in very short, shorts holding hands with their arms around each other and gazing into each others eyes with rapture. That sort of thing may have become common place since, but, at the time, it, it sort of did something.

00:35:29:00

INTERVIEWER: NOW, DID YOU FEEL THAT, THAT BLACK PEOPLE ALREADY HAD THE VOTING RIGHTS THAT WERE BEING DISCUSSED? THAT WERE, SUPPOSE—SUPPOSEDLY, THE REASON FOR THIS INVASION? WHAT WAS YOUR

FEELING ON THAT?

Simmons: Black people have had voting rights in this state all along. They had to meet certain qualifications. The objective of this student invasion was to eliminate all of the qualifications. To have mass voting and it was frankly to advance black political power. It was a very—had a very racist objection—objective. And as such it was opposed.

00:36:17:00

INTERVIEWER: GOING BACK TO WHAT YOU SAID JUST A MINUTE AGO, WHEN YOU SAID FLAUNT SOCIAL CUSTOMS, WHAT WERE SOME OTHER EXAMPLES OF THINGS THAT YOU FELT WAS VIOLATED? STARTED WITH THE—

Simmons: The type of social customs that were violated by the students would be students living in, in black neighborhoods, for example. Going to black churches. Flaunting themselves in a way that was unbecoming. This is not to say that this type thing hadn't been done. I had been in black churches, but under certain circumstances when it was acceptable and not to make a spectacle of myself. That really is the point of the whole thing. There was great publicity seeking. A high profile was raised for all to see. And that's the kind of conduct that was regarded as, as very distasteful.

00:37:16:00

INTERVIEWER: BUT MANY PEOPLE RAISED, AT THAT POINT, THAT THE REASON THE STUDENTS CAME IN WAS BECAUSE THEY WERE WANTED THERE BY, BY SOME OF THESE AND THESE BLACK FAMILIES THAT TOOK THEM IN. WHAT—HOW DO YOU RESPOND TO THAT?

Simmons: The question that some of these were taken in by black families that wanted them, I think, they were taken in because the black families were hospitable. I, I don't think that the whole influx of these, who knows how many, hundreds or perhaps even thousands of students were not invited. I, I cannot believe there was an organized hospitality committee that, that brought these in. The, the, the steam and the whole motivating force for the drive came from without. From within organizations: the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and CORE and others. That’s what did it. And I think the, the colored families who took them in could have been sympathetic, but could very well have been simple hospitality.

00:38:26:00

INTERVIEWER: BUT WHAT ABOUT LATER MOVEMENTS IN, FOR EXAMPLE, IN, IN JACKSON. THE WHOLE MOVEMENT IN THE, IN THE BLACK COMMUNITIES WHICH WAS, WAS A MOVEMENT WHICH CONSISTED AROUND THE VOTING RIGHTS QUESTION. WHAT WAS YOUR RESPONSE TO THAT WHEN, WHEN BLACKS WERE ACTIVELY PARTICIPATING IN A WAY THEY HAD NOT BEFORE?

Simmons: There was no opposition to blacks participating in, in registration and voting at all. The Citizens' Council has always taken a position that anyone who is qualified to vote should register and vote and be a good citizen. What is a little disturbing, though, about this whole question is the fact, is, is, is—really is this question of race. They were asked to vote not as American citizens, but to vote as blacks. Now there's been some history in the South of black block voting. And it has not been too pleasant. Most often it has been connected with political machines of, generally, of a corrupt nature. I—to mention two the Crump machine in Memphis, Tennessee, the Long machine in Louisiana. None of which—neither one of which covered themselves with, one might say glory. And part of their power base was a manipulable [sic] black block vote. One could see this coming about and, indeed, it has, it has lead to all kinds of gerrymandering maneuvering by federal judges, by civil rights lawyers to advance black political power per se.

INTERVIEWER: OK, CUT. LET'S CUT.

00:40:14:00

[cut]

[wild audio]

INTERVIEWER: WELL, I WAS GONNA SAY—

Simmons: Give him my, give him my, give him my regards.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: SPEED—

00:40:19:00

[cut]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: AND—

[sync tone]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1 AND 2: —MARK.

INTERVIEWER: OK. REMEMBER I ASKED YOU BEFORE WHETHER THERE'S ANY ONE INCIDENT WHEN YOU, PERSONALLY, FELT SO—WAS AN EMOTIONAL WATERLOO.

Simmons: The, the—perhaps the most, the, the thought I had in the aftermath of Ole Miss that I remember most vividly [coughs] is after it was all over. The next day. It was a beautiful fall day, bright sunshine, blue skies. I looked out the office window of our office overlooking the Governor's mansion, we were on the third floor, and my wife was standing there beside me. We looked at people walking down the street, normally, going about their every day

affairs and I turned to her and I said, these people have just been deprived of the power of self-government and they don't know it.

INTERVIEWER: DID THAT—

Simmons: That's the shock. The realization came to me. The enormous usurpation of power by the Federal Government had succeeded and from then on things would never be the same.

00:41:44:00

INTERVIEWER: DID YOU, THEN, PROPOSE TO RALLY AROUND THE CAUSE OF THE CITIZENS' COUNCIL WITH RENEWED VIGOR OR DID YOU ALL TAKE A DIFFERENT STRATEGY, DIFFERENT TACTIC AFTER THAT? AFTER ALL THIS?

Simmons: After, after Ole Miss there was a, a reaction. There was a state of shock and, yes, a change in, in tactics or a change in strategy was very necessary and indeed it did change.

INTERVIEWER: WELL WHAT—

Simmons: The change led to an emphasis on—we realized, for one thing, just how far the Federal Government would go. Many people thought they would not go that far that they simply didn't have the stomach for using an airborne division of thirty-two thousand troops to sub—subdue a state. But that was, that was the case and the—a, a change in strategy was very necessary to one of more, more subdued, less high profile activity and it—we began to understand then, what some of the consequences might be at the elementary and secondary levels. Bearing in mind that this event took place at the college level. We also got documents that indicated how—just how far the Federal Government did intend to go at Ole Miss. Not just to put Meredith in, but to take an actual bed check of the dormitories to see how many people of which race were in which room to be sure that there was no—

00:43:40:00

[cut]

[wild audio]

Simmons: —natural segregation in the dormitories.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: WE JUST RAN OUT.

INTERVIEWER: CUT. TO BE A QUESTION OF—

Simmons: Well, this is, this is later.

00:43:48:00

[cut]

[slate]

[change to camera roll 335]

Simmons: It was, it was—

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: SPEED. ROLL SOUND.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: MARK.

[sync tone]

Simmons: It was significant in that it showed the effect of the transfer of power, that's—

INTERVIEWER: RIGHT AND THAT'S—OK. AND NOW, AGAIN ON OLE MISS, WHAT WAS—A LOT OF PEOPLE FROM MISSISSIPPI USE, I NOTICE REUSE CIVIL WAR TERMINOL—TERMONILOGY ALMOST. WHAT WAS THE FEELING IN, IN TERMS OF THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT COMING IN, EMOTIONALLY?

Simmons: The feeling in terms of the Federal Government coming in emotionally were, were very bitter. It's perhaps expressed very well by a, a cartoon that was drawn with two soldiers with bayonets in a little girl's back marching her to class. This type of thing. It was, it was resented very deeply.

00:44:39:00

INTERVIEWER: WOULD YOU, WOULD YOU SAY THAT THE SUMMER PROJECT IN '64 WAS ANOTHER TURNING POINT IN TERMS OF A HIGH POINT OF EMOTION?

Simmons: I would say the summer project of '64 was less of a high point in, in emotions than the Ole Miss events, because it was so less, so far—so much less dramatic and did not represent the use of government force. It was just simply, it was more of an annoyance than anything else.

00:45:09:00

INTERVIEWER: OK. NOW HOW MUCH DID EVENTS HAPPENING OUTSIDE OF THE STATE, FOR EXAMPLE THE, THE WHAT HAPPENED IN BIRMINGHAM IN '63 AND THE MARCH ON WASHINGTON, AS A NATIONAL, AS NATIONAL SENTIMENT SEEMS TO BE CHANGING HERE IN THIS PERIOD, HOW DID THAT AFFECT YOU ALL IN, IN MISSISSIPPI?

Simmons: I'm, I'm not sure I know what you mean by the March on Washington—

INTERVIEWER: WELL, THE FACT THAT SO MANY PEOPLE ARE GATHERED TOGETHER SEEMINGLY IN SUPPORT OF THIS CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT. HOW—WHAT WAS THE RESPONSE OF PEOPLE IN THE STATE WHO WERE AGAINST THAT MOVEMENT?

Simmons: Demonstrations in, in support of civil rights movement had very little effect here because most people felt that they were organized demonstrations. They were not spontaneous outpourings. And then later as, as, the long hot summers began with the rioting in, in Watts, Chicago, Cleveland, Rochester, New York City, wherever, that the, the feeling began to, to be well, why, why, why are these people coming to Mississippi to try to change things when their own back yard is blowing up?

INTERVIEWER: GOOD ANSWER. CUT.

[cut]

00:46:32:00

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: SPEED.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: AND MARKER.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: MARKER.

[sync tone]

INTERVIEWER: WHAT WAS YOUR RESPONSE NOW, ’63, ’64, WE’RE STILL IN THAT PERIOD, TO THE GROWING FORMATION OF WHAT WAS CALLED THE FREEDOM DEMOCRATIC PARTY? WHAT DID YOU MAKE OF THIS AS A POLITICAL PHENOMENA?

Simmons: The, the Freedom Democratic Party was regarded kind of as the activist extreme of the extreme—the activist wing of the Democratic Party. And it was just regarded as a political expression of the, the far left views of, of the organizers. Certainly a legitimate way to express it. We were opposed to it, but what's more to be said?

INTERVIEWER: WELL, WHAT DID YOU THINK SPECIFICALLY OF WHAT HAPPENED AT ATLANTIC CITY? THE CONVENTION WHERE THEY’RE COUNTERPOSED TO THE TRADITIONAL DELEGATES?

Simmons: Oh I see. Well, you're, you’re really getting into fuzzy, where I'm fuzzy now. Because we had, we had no direct ties with that.

INTERVIEWER: I’M LOOKING FOR OPINIONS MORE REACTIONS OF, OF PEOPLE.

Simmons: Oh. Well the, the, the general reaction to that was, was, was pretty bad. It was a reflection on the Credentials Committee of the Democratic Party that they recognized these people and, of course, one significant result of it was it helped push the state toward, toward the Republican column.

INTERVIEWER: OK, CUT.

[cut]

00:48:02:00

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: MARK

[sync tone]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: AND MARK. IF YOU CAN TELL US THIS AND YOU CAN ACTUALLY GIVE YOUR ANSWER TO PRUDENCE AND, I, I THINK, IN THE STRONGEST POSSIBLE TERMS ALSO. PRU, IT'S ALL YOURS.

Simmons: In the, in the years of—from 1964, I beg your pardon, 1954 through the middle 1960s—

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: I THINK WE'D BETTER HAVE YOU START THAT FROM THE BEGINNING.

Simmons: All right.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: YEAH.

Simmons: During the period of 1954-1965 Mississippi was generally regarded as being in the forefront of resistance to forced integration. It was the home of the organized Citizens' Councils. It had generally led the way in resistance to integration. It had led the way in the adoption of resolutions of interposition by various state legislatures. It had generally put up the stoutest resistance and was in the forefront of the fight to preserve racial integrity.

INTERVIEWER: OK.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: EXCELLENT.

INTERVIEWER: YOU GET IT? OK, CUT. THANK YOU.

[cut]

[end of interview]

00:49:12:00