

Interview with **Hodding Carter III**

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Washington, D.C.

Interviewer: Orlando Bagwell

Production Team: B

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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*.

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[camera roll 301]

[sound roll 1301]

[sync tone]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: SELECT ONE.

INTERVIEWER: OK, IN THE LATE '50s AND '60s SAY LATE '50s EARLY '60s, MANY MISSISSIPPIANS WOULD SAY THAT ALTHOUGH THERE WAS A VERY RIGID CODE OF RACIAL SEGREGATION THAT BLACKS AND WHITES IN THE SOUTH AND MISSISSIPPI LIVED CLOSER TOGETHER ACTUALLY AND HAD A LOT MORE CONTACT THAN THEY DID IN A LOT OF OTHER PLACES. HOW DID YOU REACT TO THAT OLD NOTION?

Carter: There was a great deal of contact between black and white in Mississippi and in the Deep South. The contact was that of master and slave of subordinate to superior of serf to master. It was a contact in which the illusion of familiarity on the white part bred contempt and had to breed on the black part fear. It was a togetherness under very rigid rules. It was a joke.

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INTERVIEWER: NOW, HOW DID THOSE RELATIONSHIPS CHANGE FROM SAY '54 WITH THE BROWN DECISION ON THROUGH THE '50s UP INTO THE EARLY '60s?

Carter: There was a general assumption at the beginning by a good part of the white leadership that in fact black Mississippians, black Southerners didn't really want the changes. That these were things that were being engineered and forced on the south by left-wing agitators, outside forces, Communist, Jewish intellectuals, whatever. There was a great sense of shock and some dismay in certain of those quarters when it turned out that blacks in fact thought that the 1954 decision ought to be implemented that there ought to be changes that the system didn't work. That it stunk. Initially in any case, there were enough whites who were disturbed by the decision that not to take any chances they organized in the Citizens' Councils, first in Mississippi and elsewhere, almost immediately after the decision to make sure that whatever blacks thought the system wouldn't change. What blacks thought however in Mississippi in the 1950s was almost totally irrelevant because there was no outside power to which they could sort of turn for assistance and there had not yet boiled up that absolute determination to seize the moment for themselves that you suddenly saw coming out of the kids starting in the early 1960s. In the '50s it was all one way. It was the white southern legislatures the Mississippi political apparatus mobilizing legally to make sure nothing changed in reaction to the two Supreme Court decisions of '54 and '55.

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INTERVIEWER: WHAT WERE SOME OF THOSE LAWS THAT CHANGED JUST SOME EXAMPLES OF HOW THINGS CHANGED?

Carter: It sort of went across, it went across the board. To begin with, nothing changed. The laws were committed to insuring that nothing would change. You still had schools which were rigidly segregated black and white and laws were passed to make sure that if the courts or other outside forces required that they be integrated they would be closed. Laws were passed to see to it that state monies might be used for private education; all white. Laws were passed to try to guarantee that voting, which was a function reserved almost exclusively for whites in Mississippi, so exclusively that, perhaps twelve thousand blacks voted in the general election of 1955, was going to be reserved still for whites. That is voting would be a function so exclusively maintained by the white voting registrars that no new black regis-, regis-, registrants could get on. Well, what kind of laws? Laws such as a requirement for a good moral character to be decided by each individual registrar of the eighty-two counties. Requirements that you had to interpret a section of the state constitution to the satisfaction, subjectively, of a registrar in each of the eighty-two counties.

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INTERVIEWER: HOW WERE THE REGISTRARS SELECTED?

Carter: The registrars were elected by the general populace, voting populace, which means they were elected by whites in the eighty-two counties and they had sole control of the registration and voting procedures in those counties. The state legislature of course set the

laws under which they operated. The, the—really the range of what was called massive resistance legislation left virtually nothing untouched in aspects of public life and in private life, that is to say, in an associational life. They were simply going to see to it that no one deviated from total conformity to what was called our way of life and that—and they had the almost total support of the white population.

00:05:37:00

INTERVIEWER: EVEN THOUGH SOME OF THAT WHITE POPULATION SUFFERED AS A RESULT OF THE RESTRICTIONS?

Carter: Well, you couldn't prove to most white southerners, at that time, or to white Mississippians particularly that they were suffering because of segregation. It was a system which made the least of us superior to the best of non-white and so why would a white in Mississippi in 1950 have wanted that to be changed from pure self-interest any more than a white South African wants to see change today. The fact that it was immoral, unconstitutional, undemocratic and directly contrary to what you thought you learned in church, notwithstanding, that was not something that had a great popular following, the idea of change.

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INTERVIEWER: OK. CAN YOU GO INTO THE FORMATIONS OF THE CITIZENS' COUNCIL A LITTLE BIT MORE? A, IN TERMS OF THE—

Carter: Sure.

INTERVIEWER: —ORGANIZATION ITSELF—

Carter: Sure.

INTERVIEWER: —AND HOW THAT CAME ABOUT.

Carter: The decision came down in May 1954 saying that segregation was, on its face, unconstitutional. Tut Patterson who was then a farmer in Sunflower County went out and had a talk with God one day and God told him that he had to do something about this unnatural mixing of the races which was getting ready to happen. And so Tut decided that what was needed was an organization of responsible, in quotation marks, and respectable, in quotation marks, establishment figures in every community and county in the state to see to it that agitators and wrong thinking whites and blacks, who got out of line, would be instructed in the error of their ways either by economic pressure, by the maintenance of the laws which kept them in place, or, if necessary, by other means though that was always minimized in the official rhetoric. His intent was helped a great deal ideologically by a little pamphlet written by, God help us, a Yale law graduate, whose name, a Yale graduate, whose name was Judge Tom Brady. Who wrote a book called *_Black Monday_* which in effect was the, [laughs] I started to say refined although that'd be a joke, it was the clear statement of segregationist

belief and a call to arms against this decision which would imperil the blue-eyed blond haired young girl who represented the finest of white society and set loose the animal which represented the basis of black society as the judge saw it. And *Black Monday* became, for the Citizens' Councils, the Bible and the judge became their favorite speaker for some time. In any case, in, Indianola, Mississippi, in 1954, that summer, a group of men, lawyers, bankers, farmers got together and organized the first Citizens' Council under Tut Patterson's prodding. The idea spread in that general state society because the people who formed that original one belonged to what is that extended fraternity of leadership in a rather small state which has contacts in—all over the state. So pretty soon there were Citizens' Councils in perhaps a half the st—counties in the state, not all. There were places that saw it as a Delta, sort of Bourbons Plot. There were places that weren't ready to be stampeded, but soon enough there were councils.

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INTERVIEWER: HOW DID THEY EXTEND THEIR INFLUENCE ON—TOWARD PEOPLE WHO MAY NOT INITIALLY HAVE WANTED TO JOIN THEM, HOW DID THEY—

Carter: One way, one way was simply to make it be seen as another necessary club for inclusion in the white family. That if you were going to be considered a responsible leader in your community you had to join it. Another was by suggesting that those who were outside it, if you weren't with us were against us, that a moderate was someone, who would only let a little sewage under the door, as they said. That those who weren't ready to stand up and be organized were ready to lie down and let the integrationist take over. There were a handful of people who resisted them almost from the beginning and my father was one of that handful. And the response to that [coughs] for that handful of whites there was, for us, a, a boycott launched by the Citizens' Council which lasted from I would say 1955 until 1968—

INTERVIEWER: ON THE PAPER?

Carter: —on the newspaper, on its circulation. Attempts on its advertising, which wasn't very successful, but the circulation certainly was in the outlying counties around us and areas. The—for that handful of extraordinarily brave blacks who tried immediately passing—for that handful of extraordinary brave blacks who tried following '54 to do something the Citizens' Council provided the mechanism for quick suppression. Names that found themselves for instance on petitions for the integration of local schools were names that soon found themselves without jobs. A person who was identified in Belzoni, Mississippi as a leading member of the NAACP soon found himself dead.

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[cut]

[wild audio]

Carter: People who were considered to be major, a guy named Gus Courts, you know.
[coughs]

[cut]

00:11:34:00

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: MARKER.

[sync tone]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: JUST ONE SECOND PLEASE. ALL RIGHT.

Carter: *Within four years the Citizens' Council was powerful enough that, in the election of 1959, it threw its support openly and actively behind the candidacy of a damage suit lawyer named Ross Barnett, not one of the world's most successful politicians up to then, and saw him elected over a supposed moderate, who was himself a segregationist but with a quieter voice than Ross Barnett. And, from 1959 until 1963, in the Barnett administration, the Citizens' Council was the state; and the state effectively, on all matters racial, was the Citizens' Council.*

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INTERVIEWER: AND THE SOVEREIGNTY COMMISSION WAS WHAT? HOW WOULD YOU DEFINE THAT?

Carter: The Sovereignty Commission was the official arm as far as I'm concerned of the Citizens' Council philosophy. The fact that it was occasionally run by people who were not fond of the Citizens' Council leadership did not—nonetheless change that fact. The Sovereignty Commission in most of its functions was a police state apparatus.

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INTERVIEWER: HOW WOULD YOU DEFINE, BRIEFLY, THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE CITIZENS' COUNCIL AND THE KLAN?

Carter: There was no Klan to have a relationship with in most of that period. The Klan in its last incarnation in Mississippi had vanished after World War II when it briefly flared and went away. The Citizens' Council in fact was often sold as a way to prevent the lower order of whites from taking the initiative in anti-integration movement. It was seen as a way for good people to stop bad people from doing things which would be embarrassing or perhaps even evil. A—the Klan did not begin to emerge again in Mississippi from its hibernation until the Freedom Summer and the publicity attending it in the 1964 period. It was the drumbeat of publicity about the Freedom Summer and the buildup to it that suddenly sparked, particularly in southwest Mississippi, the reemergence of the Klan, but that was

years later. The Klan simply was a nonexistent or negligible force in the '50s and early '60s and that's dead behind me.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: GREAT. THANK YOU. IT WAS GREAT. OK.

[cut]

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CAMERA CREW MEMBER: THREE. [coughs]

[sync tone]

INTERVIEWER: OK. HOW WOULD YOU DEFINE A MODERATE ON RACIAL MATTERS IN MISSISSIPPI IN THE LATE '50s EARLY '60s?

Carter: In the late '50s a moderate was a person who said while we cannot really see an end to the pattern of racial segregation when it comes to such questions which are basically social, as the schools, we think that qualified blacks ought to be allocated to vote, qualified blacks ought to be able to hold the jobs to which their entitled. No people should be mistreated physically. It was a careful attempt to say that you could have segregation with a human face. That it was possible to maintain that sort of all vital component which was there should be no blurring of lines in matters which could be considered essentially social and yet to say that it was possible to somehow blur the line when it came to matters economic and political.

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INTERVIEWER: WHAT WERE THE REPERCUSSIONS—

Carter: Well, for those who even went that far there was, which was essentially Dad's position, there was boycott. For those who went no further than that, there was sustained economic and physical harassment. I mean, Hazel Brennan Smith in Holmes County was something less than an integrationist. Oliver Emmerett down in McComb. Well in Hazel's case she in the mid '50s suggested that un-Christian and undemocratic forces were being used against a minister who ran a cooperative farm which included blacks and whites out in the country. And suggested the Citizens' Council, which were leading this, and the sheriff, who was the focal point of repression, were all simply outside the pale and for that Hazel was put outside the pale. A very prosperous set of weeklies became a beleaguered and dwindling weekly which opposition started an opposition paper. She was in many ways ostracized from the society. Lost virtually everything she had. Kept plugging away cause she wouldn't quit, because eventually some others outside that area helped her, but basically it's cause she just wouldn't quit. I think, if she hadn't been a woman, she would have been dead. Oliver Emmerett down in McComb who was less forceful in the sort of the personal forceful sense, than Dad or Hazel, none the less caught a lot of hell just for sort of talking in calm tones about what we ought to be doing in the state. It was not a great time. I mean for moderates.

There weren't any liberals that you could find in the late '50s. I mean, liberal in the sense of somebody who would be identified as a liberal on the East side of New York. They just didn't exist.

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INTERVIEWER: WHAT ABOUT THE SELF IMPOSED LIMITATIONS ON SOMEBODY WHO WAS A MODERATE? WERE THERE THINGS YOU JUST WOULDN'T—

Carter: Look, there was a joke that Dad told all the time about what he hoped he would be able to say when we'd passed through it and gotten to the other side and it's the old joke about the veteran of the Great War who, when asked by his grandson, what did you do in the war, Granddad, he said I survived. I mean there was a real strong sense that it would be wonderful to be that quick flash hero of coming right out and saying four square everything ought to change tomorrow. If of course you already had your ticket bought to take you on off to Boston where you'd be lionized because you could no longer exist economically in Mississippi or Alabama. The only ones who could were ones who were independent of the place in which they lived for their livelihood. Lillian Smith did and could because she was a brave and vibrant and ahead of her time woman, but also because she didn't live off the land in the sense of a person who had a business or was in a profession or had a newspaper. And those who went all the way editorially and they were few and far between, did not stay. One by one they were gone.

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INTERVIEWER: OK. MOVING TO OLE MISS IN '62. WHEN THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT INTERVENED WITH THE TROOPS IN MEREDITH FINALLY GOT ADMITTED. LIVES WERE LOST AND WHITE LIVES WERE LOST AND THERE WERE A LOT OF FEELINGS RUNNING HIGH IN THE STATE. WHAT WOULD YOU, HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE THE REACTION TO THAT WHOLE INCIDENT AMONG MISSISSIPPIANS?

Carter: I—

INTERVIEWER: OR OTHER SOUTHERNERS I GUESS.

Carter: Yeah. Well, I was running the paper as of that fall and writing the editorials as I had been since '59, but I was effectively running it as of that fall. Dad had gone off to Tulane as writer in residence. And I wrote a series of editorials leading up to that September 30th night. And at one point, when there had been the second back down by the U.S. Marshals and Meredith and their attempts to put Meredith into Ole Miss, when he had gone to the university once; he had gone down to Jackson once and both times had been repulsed. I called up John Doar, I said Johnny, don't you understand you're gonna have to put in troops. These people think it's a second civil war and this time they think they're gonna win, and that was the atmosphere. There was the sense that we are going to back 'em down. We've got

a governor who's not afraid to stand up to 'em. We're organized. They're wrong. And all we have to do is show resolve and we'll beat 'em. And that's the way the popular attitude was in the white community by a large number of people.

00:20:15:00

INTERVIEWER: BUT THEN WHEN BARNETT DIDN'T BRING OUT THE STATE TROOPS AND IN EFFECT FEDERAL LAW PREVAILED WAS IT SEEN AS A TREMENDOUS DEFEAT? AND—IN OTHER WORDS DID PEOPLE RALLY AFTER THAT? OR DID THEY—

Carter: They rallied after that. Anybody who wasn't associated with Barnett in the defiance was politically targeted and pretty well destroyed in the election of 1963. Paul Johnson got elected governor because of a motto which said, you know, stand tall with Paul. He stood tall for Mississippi and his campaign picture was him jaw to jaw with the marshal McShane who had been the chief marshal escorting Meredith to Ole Miss. That was the symbol. Defiance. J.P. Coleman, no integrationist, but considered something of a moderate because when he was governor he had let the then Senator John Kennedy sleep in the governor's mansion in the 1950s was crushed by Paul Johnson, a far lesser man in that gubernatorial campaign, precisely because of Ole Miss, but a lot of good legislators who had been among the few who resisted the Citizens' Council juggernaut of '59 to '63 were wiped out too. Guy in my home town, Joe Wroten, now a county judge, great man, gone. But plenty like him. No, the reaction in Mississippi was to further distance the state from reality in some ways to make it politically even more difficult to people to speak out for moderation and to see one black man at the University of Mississippi with Federal troops to make sure that he staged there safely. Parenthetically, don't talk about the governor's failure to use the troops. They were nationalized right out from under him. I mean so there were no troops for him to use. I mean, my old boss Cyrus Vance, was the one who gave the order as secretary of the army to nationalize the, the guard at the time.

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[cut]

[wild audio]

Carter: So there was no National Guard.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: ROLL OUT.

Carter: But even so, I mean—

INTERVIEWER: —MAYBE MORE PULLED OUT WHATEVER, YOU KNOW.

Carter: Well, he used, he used the state troopers to some degree, but there was nothing they could really do—

[cut]

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[sync tone]

INTERVIEWER: OK. WHAT OF THE IDEA OF BLACK PEOPLE GETTING THE RIGHT TO VOTE MEAN TO MOST MISSISSIPPIANS, AND WAS IT RESPONSE OF FEAR OR RESENTMENT OR—

Carter: Well, the idea of black people getting the vote meant to most whites was that they would see created a society in which blacks could do to them what they had been doing to blacks and so they were afraid of it. They resisted that as bitterly even as school integration, because they saw the vote meaning power and in the counties, particularly, in my part of the state, the Delta in which blacks were in the majority as they are now, they saw it as real power and the possible reversal of an entire society.

00:23:08:00

INTERVIEWER: IN JUNE '63 WHEN MEDGAR EVERS IS KILLED HOW WOULD YOU SAY HIS DEATH AFFECTED THE STATE?

Carter: Again, I think that the headline in the Jackson Clarion-Ledger following the murder of Medgar Evers, said as much as needed to be said about much of the white reaction. The headline was, "Californian Kills Civil Rights Leader" or "Californian Kills Evers" or "Californian Kills" something. As an accident of time and birth, his killer was at the time of his birth and his mother who was visiting in California. He was a several generation Mississippian who was very proud of being a Mississippian, but the headline carefully tried to separate him from, from the killing. In any case, what did it do? On the white side, the general reaction to that was what it was going to be later about the reaction to Kennedy's assassination in November of that year: he had it coming. If he didn't want to get killed he shouldn't have been messing around in the areas he was messing around in. That was the general white reaction. There were those, and the stirring, starting with '62 and Ole Miss were beginning. There were those who were saying we can't go on like this. We cannot have this kind of violence. We cannot be in such total opposition to the norms of this country, but they were still in the minority in the white community. On the black side, one of the great pictures is of John Doar, a very brave man, putting himself between a black memorial and protest march in honor of Evers, coming down a street in Jackson, putting himself between that marching group and a group of white police whose one intention was to mow 'em down. And somehow bringing down what would have been a massacre and diffusing it on the spot. I mean, it wasn't the only time John was brave but it was the most extraordinary piece of physical courage by a federal official of that time. It was another one of those energizing horrors for the black community. Now you understand that's against the context that the kids had already begun to show the way, pardon me, that was in the context in which kids had already begun to show the way in a good part of the South. That was in the context that the

freedom riders had come and gone to Mississippi. But that was in the context of Ole Miss. That was in the context of a national administration which had been wrenched finally into saying that civil rights legislation was going to be a necessity. The Kennedy administration did not exactly rush head first into supporting civil rights legislation, but by '63 it was clear, even to the most reluctant in that administration, that there was going to have to be legislation.

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INTERVIEWER: DID A LOT OF SOUTHERNERS SEE THAT PARALLELL BETWEEN EVERS AND KENNEDY?

Carter: No, as a matter of fact, very few southerners saw that much parallel between Evers and Kennedy. It was a season of assassinations after all. In Vietnam, our client was overthrown by people widely believed to be our client and our client was assassinated. Evers was assassinated. Kennedy was assassinated. It was pretty hard to say, you know, that we were looking at that connection. We were just seeing a lot of 'em.

00:27:02:00

INTERVIEWER: I WAS JUST GOING TO GO ON TO THE THREE SUMMER VOLUNTEERS MISSING AND, AND LATER FOUND DEAD—

Carter: Sure.

INTERVIEWER: —IN '64. WHAT WAS THE RESPONSE TO THOSE MURDERS IN THE STATE, ESPECIALLY THE RESPONSE TO THE MISSISSIPPI MODERATE?

Carter: All right, first response in the state was best articulated by the line, those boys are hiding out in Cuba. This is all a big plot to embarrass the state. Second one was, look they've just been spirited off, nothing's happened. Finally, the bodies are found and that begins to register, to make an impact. But you have to understand, it is a standard part of the old southern psyche, as indeed it is of the human psyche, that when you feel you're under siege, when you feel that you are beleaguered, you're willing to defend other things that otherwise might seem indefensible. And at that point, there was a strong feeling among whites in Mississippi that they were under siege. That there was a concerted effort being made to break down their society. And so, that colored some of the reaction to what should have been clear and immediate moral outrage. Others were just simply afraid to speak. But moderates in relation to that event were quite clear. It was unconscionable. The perpetrators had to be found. They had to be convicted. The honor of the state demanded it. Because that kind of event always made it possible for moderates to speak out very vigorously because you were then gonna speak to questions of basic law and basic order. There is irony in fact that getting the conservatives of Mississippi to issue simple statements in favor of law and order after the Ole Miss riots, after the Medgar Evers' assassination, after the death of the boys in Philadelphia was almost impossible. The great conservative motto of later years, law and order, was not possible for conservatives to utter in that period as indeed it ought to be

remembered that to wear the American flag in Mississippi on your lapel, in the late '50s and early '60s was to invite attack as a Commie, as an integrationist, as a liberal. Ah, how the symbols change.

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INTERVIEWER: [laughs] IF THERE'S ONE MOMENT THAT STANDS OUT IN YOUR OWN PERSONAL EXPERIENCE, AS A SOUTHERNER, IN RELATION TO THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT WHERE YOU FELT YOU ABSOLUTELY HAD TO TAKE A POSITION, THERE'S NO BACKING DOWN FROM IT, WHAT WOULD YOU THINK OF?

Carter: Well, you'd have to say two things, first for me, my life was a lot easier than most southern whites who consider themselves people of good will and trying to find a way out because I had my father who had already established a position which, while by northern standards may have seemed conservative, by Mississippi standards seemed radical. So that when I came along, I already had that platform from which to change and so I changed from '59 when I came back to the paper as an editorial writer in what I was saying publicly while I had already changed radically in what I felt privately. What I wrote increasingly came into correspondence with what I felt. And the line was finally crossed from which there wasn't any return with the murder of the boys in '64. And that...

00:30:40:00

INTERVIEWER: LET'S SEE. [pause] WAS THERE ANY—AT WHAT POINT WOULD YOU SAY IN THE STATE OR SAY IN THE SOUTH AS A WHOLE, THE STATE BEING THE LAST HOLD OUT, AT WHAT POINT DID THINGS FINALLY TURN THE TIDE IN TERMS OF COMING AROUND. WOULD YOU SAY IT WAS, IF IT WASN'T JACKSON, IT WAS OLE MISS? IF IT WASN'T OLE MISS—

Carter: No, what finally—No. The Freedom Summer was a great thing for mobilizing black Mississippians. It was a great thing for focusing the nation's attention on the reality of what segregation with a benign face really meant. It was a great thing finally forcing America to say this is not possible to tolerate anymore. But the Freedom Summer didn't change very much in Mississippi. At the end of it very few more people were registered which was the ostensible purpose of it than were registered before. At the end of it the schools which had to go to some form of desegregation had done so because of court order and not because of the Freedom Summer. There was no real change because of the Freedom Summer. What there was, was a total change in the atmosphere in which really many blacks were no longer going to be passive participants in a process that robbed them of their citizenship. No what changed Mississippi finally was the Civil Rights Act of '64 and the Voting Rights Act of '65. In which the combination of federal power and black activism combined to bring down the basic structures of the old order. And for Mississippi that was a revolution. It was radical change in the form, if not always, in the spirit of the society.

00:32:44:00

INTERVIEWER: CAN WE GET A SENTENCE ON THE CONNECTION BETWEEN MISSISSIPPI AND THE REST OF THE SOUTH. IT'S NOT AN OUTPOST IT'S—

Carter: Ah, well, you know, massive resistance which was adopted by most of the southern states following the 1954 desegregation decision. Massive resistance was pioneered here, in my home state now, of Virginia by the Byrd forces and those who followed them. The Virginia legislature led the way toward what became the legal code of what was called interposition. The resurrection from the moth balls of Civil War defeat, of the old idea of nullification by states of federal tyranny, that's all—

00:33:33:00

[cut]

[wild audio]

Carter: —in quotation marks, and the author of that little reversion in history. Yeah? OK.

00:33:39:00

[cut]

[sync tone]

Carter: Yeah, yeah. Sure, sure. Let me just say that over again anyway. OK, I got carried away. All right.

INTERVIEWER: ALL SET.

Carter: Massive resistance was not Mississippi's invention. Massive resistance was a pattern of life across the South. And in fact, massive resistance was probably invented and given its most virulent and sophisticated form in Virginia in the original coining of both the phrase and the fact. The South in its legislatures readopted the old notion that the states, when faced with federal tyranny, could interpose themselves between their people and that tyranny. We all thought that had been solved by the Civil War, but such great theorists as the then editorial page editor of the Richmond paper, J.J. Kilpatrick, just came up and said now is the time for us to play the game again, being a great southerner from Oklahoma, he spoke for the southern tradition with that notion. And that as much as anything else was responsible for the deaths that followed. It was certainly responsible for the massive, absolute, total effort by white south and the white southerner to stop any form of integration. So, Mississippi was in the end the most defiant of the defiant states, but it was not the only one. Alabama is after all George Wallace. Georgia outside of Atlanta was total resistance. South Carolina, resistance. Much of the northern parts of Florida, resistance. Arkansas had Orville Faubus, resistance. Louisiana, the pictures of the jeering white crowd and the little black children going into the schools ought to tell you what was going on there. Across the South it was the same. You

were going to by God stand up and this time not let the Feds win. Because what was at stake was white supremacy and that's all that was at stake and they were going to defend it.

00:35:45:00

INTERVIEWER: OK. COUPLE LAST QUESTIONS. WHAT IMPACT DID THE MISSISSIPPI FREEDOM DEMOCRATIC PARTY CHALLENGE HAVE ON POLITICS FOLLOWING THE CONVENTION IN '64?

Carter: Those who participated in the Mississippi Democratic Freedom Party challenge then and now have to take satisfaction in knowing that what they did was really the basis and the germ for the great political reforms in the Democratic Party, not just in Mississippi, which took some time yet to effect, but in the country as a whole. What they presented as a reality to a convention that—which couldn't turn its eyes away in 1964 was a reality that existed in other southern states. And the notion that it was not acceptable to be in the Democratic Party and discriminate against blacks and later against others who had been kept outside the standard process was really born there in that challenge. They failed by their own terms. They felt that they were sold out in 1964. I think they had a great success by any rational political standard. I think that what they did was to say, in effect, we have let you see what you didn't want to see and you can't ever act the same way again. In Mississippi, look, it took a long time after that. The MFDP was not a united front in itself and those of us who were outside the MFDP didn't buy everything that was in the MFDP and then those in the MFDP felt strongly that some of us, who came later, were coming to try to seize the glory after they had done the hard work, were coming in to try to grab off their fruits. So we had a long struggle after that.

INTERVIEWER: BUT WHAT WHEN THE—

Carter: But in that period, in that period of '64 they simply laid down what was to become the basis for the successful challenge and the absolute stripping of authority from the regular Democratic Party four years later. And in that sense, they fundamentally altered the nature of party politics in Mississippi. There's irony here of course. The more things changed in the Democratic Party in Mississippi because of the various pressures the more, of course, the Republican Party became a powerful influence. It became first the place to run to if you were an unreconstructed seg. Then it became a place to run to if you were looking for a more conservative mixture of people. It also became a place to be a respectable revolutionary because to be a republican in the Mississippi of one party politics was a nice way to say I'm different from the past not to put too much on it, but it is sort of the way a lot of young former Democrat yup types now say they're making their statement of independence when they say I'm a Reagan republican. Costs nothing, looks like real change and in fact holds true to what makes them most comfortable. That's what being a Republican was for a lot of whites in Mississippi.

00:39:11:00

INTERVIEWER: ANY FUNNY INCIDENTS COME TO MIND FROM, FROM THIS PERIOD?

Carter: [laughs] Well, there are a million funny incidents, I, a, not so funny, but I'll tell you a few. Well, I'll tell you some, no, I'll just, I'll try to get through one or two. In 1962 the last editorial I wrote on Oxford prior to that Sunday night the 30th was Sunday morning in our Sunday paper and the thesis of the editorial was the governor of Mississippi Ross Barnett had committed sedition against the United States and ought to be in a Federal penitentiary yesterday and if no sooner today and certainly tomorrow and we lost ten percent of our circulation that day after that editorial came out. We also caught hell, I mean, the threats came in from everywhere. That night my wife and I, two friends and an off duty deputy sheriff lay around the house with guns waiting for these guys to come and get us, who had threatened us all day. Dad called me from New Orleans and said is everything going OK, by now all hell was breaking loose at Oxford. And I said, sure everything's fine. And mother got on the line and said, tell me the truth, and I told her the truth. Dad actually hadn't put down the phone and said we're coming up to save you. And so he, my brother who was just married and my uncle and my mother drove fast as hell from New Orleans to Greenville 330 miles through the night arriving about five in the morning. They got their guns poking out of the cars. In the meantime, we who'd stayed up till four and nothing had happened had gone to bed exhausted. They arrive at the house, we all woke up, we talked, we wrote the follow up editorial. That night we went to bed around seven, exhausted. They burned the cross two hours later. We weren't around to see it. The next morning we woke up and there was the cross. It was a good thing because the people who burned it turned out to be kids and we would have killed them if they had come the night before because we were just that primed up. When my brother died, he shot himself to death in 1964, they dumped garbage in the a—nope can't. Kill that, can't do that one—in Dad's driveway, wonderful. Anyway.

00:41:39:00

INTERVIEWER: LET'S GO ON TO SOMETHING ELSE. I WANT TO GIVE YOU A LITTLE—

Carter: Hadn't thought about this. This is crazy, I haven't done this in a long time. We—one night, one night my wife was home alone and a man came, oh, starting over again. It was a really bad period right after Ole Miss and we all carried guns in that period. I, I carried one from about '59 until '64 actually. But one night I was away somewhere and my wife was at home alone and I'd told her, for Gods' sake never answer the door, but nevertheless the door knocked and we lived out in the country and she opened it. And a guy standing there with a gun in his hand and she said—and he said, Miss Carter I'm deputy sheriff so and so, the sheriff wanted me to bring you out this gun for your protection in case somebody showed up. That was the only time we had a political ally in the sheriff's office in that whole period. In '60, no it was years later, '68—one time I sent a reporter over to Indianola during the Freedom Summer of '64 to cover one of the church burnings of which there were a million and the reporter, a really tough and able guy, who later was a CBS bureau chief in Saigon was walking down the street with another reporter and a bunch of white thugs came up to them and said, you one of them civil rights workers? He said, oh no, he said, I'm a reporter

for the Democrat Times, and then they beat hell out of him. [laughs] And he came back and he says can I fight back? And I said yep, in this paper it's the only way you'll stay alive. Yeah.

00:43:28:00

INTERVIEWER: OK. JUST ONE FINAL THING. IF YOU WANT TO TAKE A MINUTE TO THINK ABOUT THIS, WE NEED A KIND OF A WRAP UP THING HERE IN THE LARGER PICTURE, OF U.S. HISTORY IN THE YEARS FOLLOWING THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT OF THE '60s. WHAT DO YOU THINK THE IMPACT WAS LEFT BY THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT? WHAT, HOW DID IT, HOW DID IT AFFECT THE SUBSEQUENT AMERICAN SCENE?

Carter: The civil rights movements was one of those rare movements which touched—starting over. The civil rights movement both tapped the American conscience and it piqued the American conscience. It appealed to it and it developed it. It came out of a consensus that you couldn't allow what was going on in the South to continue, but it also focused that consensus. It forced the nation to go from a bland statement of we don't really want to have racists involved in setting the laws of our country—

00:44:33:00

[cut]

[wild audio]

Carter: —to saying we can't allow racist laws anywhere in our country—

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: WE HAVE A ROLL OUT.

Carter: Hmm?

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: WE HAD A FILM ROLL OUT.

00:44:40:00

[cut]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: MARK IT.

[sync tone]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: SIX.

Carter: Ok? Sure. The civil rights movement gave focus to a very deep American sense that you could not have a society which was half free and half slave. It gave more than focus

though, it gave impetus, it gave impetus both the national legislation almost forcing the hand of a reluctant government. It gave impetus to a whole people to quit looking to good whites or to Washington or to somewhere else to do their speaking and their fighting and to speak up and to organize on their own behalf. But it went beyond that. It gave a tremendous thrust to a whole wave of similar movements affecting not just blacks or other racial minorities but women. Spilling over into the organizing efforts against the war into the environmental movement which I remember only too well because it took two of my reporters. It became, in a way, the model for what was the organizing principles of the 1960s and early 1970s. And it left behind more legacy than some of us who are sometimes nervous about the fact that we seem to have receded so far, left behind more than we sometimes are willing to admit. There are books, there are laws on the books now, which are never gonna come off because of that movement.

INTERVIEWER: LIKE?

Carter: There is the Voting Rights Act which, despite the best efforts of the reactionaries who set racial policy in this administration, is not going to be taken away. There is the basic question of public accommodations, which seems so primitively obvious in 1985, but in 1964 meant breaking down a structure and a code which had existed since the 1890's. It means, really, that that movement I think, was the most important single force that the country had seen perhaps in this century in ways that mattered because that movement said to America, if the Constitution means anything, if your own religious heritage means anything, if your protestations about what we're supposed to be doing in the world means anything then the country's got to change. And it did. We've still got a long way to go, but if it hadn't been for the movement of the late '50s and the '60s we wouldn't even be debating the length of place we had to go. We'd be in chaos right now.

INTERVIEWER: OK, LET'S CUT. GREAT.

[cut]

[end of interview]

00:47:25:00

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