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Guest (s): Rep. George Grant (D-AL)

Title: Civil Rights Demonstrations

Note: Questions were paraphrased and/or shortened by the transcriber. For the exact question, please consult the audiotapes.

Morphew: Introduction...recent incidents in the south in the field of race relations, got their start in your district in Montgomery, Alabama, several years ago, is that right?

Grant: That's true, several years ago when they had the bus boycott.

Morphew: And since that time, this doctrine of so-called 'passive resistance' or 'non-violent resistance' has spread to the wave of lunch counter sit-ins throughout the entire south.

Grant: That's true.

Morphew: Actually, this doctrine of nonviolence, is it really advocating disobedience to the law?

Grant: Well, I think it's disobedience of law, particularly local customs and you recall what President Truman said about it.

Morphew: I believe he said that if anybody came into his place of business, he'd throw them out.

Grant: Yes (laughing), that's right.

Morphew: In spite of these demonstrations, the people of the south have maintained segregation peacefully.

Grant: I think so.

Morphew: Recent votes taken in Houston and New Orleans, how did the people in Houston vote?

Grant: Well, I think it's overwhelmingly against integrating the schools, that is, if they had the choice.

Morphew: And the vote in New Orleans went the same way. The white parents voted overwhelmingly in favor of closing the schools rather than integrating them. The federal government is continuing its efforts to integrate the south.

Grant: Yes.

Morphew: And the current field seems to be through the mass registration of Negroes and mass bloc Negro voting.

Grant: Well, that seems to be the custom. Just recently Judge Wallaby Jones of Montgomery denied the federal government, that is representatives of the Attorney General's department, permission to go on a fishing expedition into the records of Montgomery County. As a matter of fact there are many Negroes who vote in Montgomery County, Alabama, but this thing of just going in and fishing and looking for something, it looks like they want to you to furnish the evidence with which they can give you trouble.

Morphew: The historic practice of Anglo-Saxon jurisprudence in this country has been that you're innocent until proven guilty, but in these civil rights proceedings, these voting investigations, it seems like they are presuming that the South is guilty of something and then asking that the South provide the evidence with which to get the conviction.

Grant: That seems to be. Well, we are not surprised at the departure after what the Supreme Court's doing.

Morphew: When the judge issued that decision, he applied it to the whole state.

Grant: Yes, all 67 counties.

Morphew: And the federal government was trying to subpoena voting records to find a pattern, isn't that the case?

Grant: Yes.

Morphew: And it would show them that Negroes were being so-called discriminated against.

Grant: Well, (laughs) if they were carrying the pattern out, of course.

Morphew: If that's what they were trying to show. In the face of these efforts, there hasn't been any evidence in any of the southern states that anyone has been denied the right to vote from any race, has there?

Grant: No, I don't believe so.

Morphew: We had the Darby case in Mississippi where the NAACP filed suit in federal court and the trial was so ridiculous that the 3-judge court practically laughed it out of court and denied the petition and the NAACP dropped it without appealing.

Grant: Well, the tragic thing about the whole business is that you have in practically all the southern states, I'd say in all the southern states, I know they're somewhere along the pattern of my own state of Alabama, we have valid and good laws concerning the denial of the ballot and I think the best evidence that a nigger can secure justice in Alabama courts is, recent case of Dr., so-called Dr. King, who was turned a loose by an Alabama jury on income tax evasion and there were people in New York, a good many of them, who had big advertisements in the papers, spent a good deal of money before the trial was ever held saying that he wouldn't get justice. I don't know what they have to say now.

Morphew: This is the same Martin Luther King who started the bus boycotts in Montgomery.

Grant: That's true.

Morphew: And he's since moved to Atlanta, was brought back to Alabama on an income tax charge and acquitted...

Grant: That's true.

Morphew: And yet they say that a Negro cannot get justice in the South.

Grant: Yes.

Morphew: That seems to be stretching the point a little bit. Do you believe that the people of the south are still firm in their desire to maintain segregation?

Grant: I'd say that individually they are firm but they are not organized.

Morphew: And you believe that organization is necessary if we are going to win this?

Grant: Absolutely.

Morphew: Do you think that migration to the northern cities is going to eventually create a change in northern opinion in favor of the South?

Grant: I think it will in time.

Morphew: Are you familiar with the charge by an Illinois legislator that certain counties in Alabama and Mississippi were buying one-way tickets to Chicago for any colored citizens that desired to move.

Grant: (laughs) No, I recall the instant after the war when some of the members of Illinois delegation were very anxious to get the nigger people out of a state and back to Alabama.

Morphew: (laughing) This was just a few weeks ago. They were complaining at the rising welfare costs in Chicago and said it was because we were exporting our welfare cases up there. Of course, you and I know that isn't the case, but it shows there is a reaction setting in up north.

Grant: Yes.

Morphew: What else can the southern people do to show their determination to the rest of the country?

Grant: Well, right off, I'm not able to say except to attempt to show the people of other sections of the country that what is happening in the way of federal interference into the purely domestic and local affairs of the southern states can happen just as easily in New York or Illinois or California or wherever it might be. This thing of federal interference has just wiped away all states rights and looks like it's beginning, unless something is done, it's the beginning of the end of local government as we have known it in America.

Morphew: And where in the south federal interference may be in the field of race relations, in other parts of the country it can be in another field.

Grant: Oh, yes. It's a matter of states rights, pure and simple.

Morphew: And once the federal government gets its foot in the door, states rights are gone.

Grant: That's quite true.

Morphew: Voting question, most people don't think about the fact that qualifications for voting in states in the south are higher than in other states which creates a better informed people so that decisions are more intelligent than that made by a great mass vote. We don't hear any arguments in favor of upgrading the quality of the electorate. Do you feel this is because some of the minority blocs are being used by politicians in the north?

Grant: Well, I'm afraid so. Of course, the qualifications for voting in my state and all the southern states as far as I know have certain requirements which have to be met by white and Negro alike.

Morphew: Reasonable requirements.

Grant: Oh, yes, yes.

Morphew: It certainly isn't unreasonable to expect a person to be able to read and write before you give him a ballot to mark.

Grant: That's quite true.

Morphew: In connection...Alabama has been the target of more investigations than any other southern state. Reaction to this by your people? Do they resent being picked on?

Grant: Uh, yes. I think you are correct in that. Alabama was the first of the deep, so-called Deep South states where this started. Of course, there has been in Arkansas and other states which are nearer what we might call border states but it looks like they have been descending upon the state of Alabama.

Morphew: And your people are well aware of that fact?

Grant: Oh, I think so, yes.

Morphew: Do you think that the northern news coverage by the national news media is going to improve? I know you've had some recent incidents with a New York newspaper in Alabama.

Grant: Well, I hope so. Of course, a man in the newspaper business, a reporter, he can go to any state in the Union, to almost any given community in any state, and he can stay there long enough, he can get something sensational that he can write about. You could do it in Chicago, New York, Los Angeles or anywhere else.

Morphew: That's right.

Grant: You could get a good story.

Morphew: But it seems that the facts about the south have been distorted somewhat.

Grant: Oh, certainly so, and they usually find what they're looking for. If they're looking for a story to give the absolute facts they can find that and when they're not looking for that, they're not going to give it.