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Citizen's Council Radio Forums  
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58 x 16 – Organization of Pike County Citizens' Council

Date: 4/20/58

Guests: officers of Pike County CC, Gordon Burt and Warren Ratliff

Morphew: Up from McComb, Gordon Burt, Jr. a plumber and butane business and Warren Ratliff, owner of hardware store in McComb...to Burt...when was the Pike County CC organized and how?

Burt: Dick, we organized the Citizens' Council in the early part of 1956. We had the good assistance of Bill Simmons, the program director here, and Judge Tom Brady. We spent a couple of meetings and maneuvering and shaping up and getting ready, examining exactly what the Citizens' Council stood for and then in sometime in April, we had our charter or organizational meeting.

Morphew: How many members did you start off with?

Burt: I would say possibly 40, just the charter members only, that is the original charter meeting, of course, the membership soon spread after that.

Morphew: I was going to ask if you experienced any rapid growth then

Burt: Oh yes. Quite a rapid growth from the beginning, found a quick response among the people to the things that we were fighting for.

Morphew: To Ratliff...how is it governed, what officers do you have?

Ratliff: Dick, we have a chairman who is Mr. Gordon Burt, Jr., we have a vice-chairman Mr. Mount (sp?) McDougal from Magnolia, we have 14 directors that are selected from

each voting precinct of the county and we have a secretary and treasurer of which I am the secretary and treasurer.

Morphew: How often do the directors get together?

Ratliff: We meet once every month, the second Thursday in the month at a dutch lunch at one of the cafes and discuss our problems.

Morphew: To Burt...you have had several successful mass meetings in McComb and one coming up?

Burt: Yes, Dick, we do have a meeting coming up soon. You know, one of the things we have to keep our cause before the people and to keep the interest up is the meetings because that's one way the people, the bulk of the membership can participate. We have coming this Tuesday night, Dr. Emmett Lee Erwin, who is the chairman of the Citizens' Council of New Orleans and also vice president of the Association of Citizens' Councils of Louisiana. And we feel sure that we'll have a very good crowd for this meeting. We have a very good program planned. We'll have a, a quartet is going to sing, the Gospel Four in McComb, from 7:30 to 8, and even while the crowd is gathering we have an orchestra that will provide music. Now in addition to Dr. Erwin, of course, we have had Dr. Caskey (?), we have had Judge Tom Brady, Bob Patterson, and John Bell Williams.

Morphew: I know you're anticipating a big turnout.

Burt: Yes, we have extended a special invitation to Lincoln County and Amite County through their Citizens' Council offices and of course in addition to that we're giving quite a bit of publicity to this meeting.

Morphew: To Burt...what does the CC do?

Burt: That, Dick, is a question that we get asked quite frequently, in fact, some of our members ask us what we do. Certainly, there's no reason to do something when, that is as far as any kind of objective that we have in this field we work in unless there is a problem to deal with. We spend the greater portion of our time actually trying to encourage membership, the reason for that being is because we feel like that we have many people who would like to become members, some of them don't thoroughly understand the Councils, some of them just need to be asked and for that reason, we are continually from the beginning of the year to the end, trying to add to our memberships. And of course the reason for the memberships is to get the money.

Morphew: "Well, in other words, the Citizens' Councils are to the field of race relations pretty much as a volunteer fire department is to a community in terms of fire prevention. The more people that you have in the organization, mobilized and trained and knowing what their job is, the less likelihood that they're going to have to be called upon.

Burt: That's exactly right. We feel like that the people of Mississippi and the South will someday be very grateful to the work that the Citizens' Council have done.

Morphew: To Ratliff...key people in Pike County...you have most of the business and political leadership in your county on your Council.

Ratliff: We have been very fortunate, Dick, in the membership from a great number of people from every walk of life, more especially from the business people and our officers in the city and the county and we feel right proud to be able to say that we do have a very good membership in the county right now.

Morphew: To Burt...in Pike County, the Council is very active in the media field...you have a radio program going on down there, don't you?

Burt: Yes, each Saturday morning from 8 to 8:15 we give a 15 minute program of news and information and the vital topics of interest that are current at the time. It has been unfortunate, really, that for about the last 2 months or more that I have had the task of presenting this program.

Morphew: I have heard a lot favorable reports on your work and want to say, keep up the good work. What is another project? Public opinion poll in McComb?

Burt: Yes. We are in the process now, Dick, of making a poll of the people of our area. This poll that we have devised is, I think, has been very well originated. It develops the question in such a way that we might determine the attitude of the people that are being questioned concerning the Citizen's Council. So far, we have only been able to contact most of the business people. That's the one we started on, and we have been highly pleased with the response and the results of this poll.

Morphew: Eventually you will be contacting all of the people in the area.

Burt: We believe so.

Morphew: You have been talking to us about the Councils' opposition in one field or another, and expressed that the opponents have been disappointed, what is the cause of that?

Burt: Well, Dick, I think that most of us realized that when the Councils were first organized we immediately had some intelligentsia I might say that said that Citizens' Council would be a bunch of rabble rousing lunatics that would probably thrive on incidents and things like that, and of course, the fact that the councils haven't done this has been a source or a little bit of trouble to these people. So, in order to offset this disadvantage, they have attempted through flattery and by buttering it up, you might say, and say, oh these dear council people they wouldn't want to do this and so forth. It hasn't been too successful.

Morphew: In other words, they have been disappointed that their predictions have not come about.

Burt: I would say so.

Morphew: What is the most undeserved criticism you've gotten among these opponents?

Burt: Well, even among our members, Dick, we find sometimes they say, well, what does the Citizens' Council do, they don't do anything. Well, of course, it's impossible, for instance, to let the people know sometimes just what we are doing because you wouldn't want to show your hand on things that you are studying and things that you are preparing for, but I can tell you one thing, that we are not sitting idle. We are doing our best to anticipate whatever problems might be there, and you know that the idea is to be there first.

Morphew: To Ratliff...are you getting the financial support from the community that you anticipated?

Ratliff: Dick, we are agreeably surprised with our finances. We are never satisfied, we are always continuing to secure new members so we will have money to operate on, but we have been very fortunate in that we have been able to contribute to quite a few worthy causes whenever they've come to us, and we've been fortunate to have the money to take care of it. We're in good financial shape in a small way.

Morphew: And your books receive a great deal of scrutiny to make sure it stays that way.

Ratliff: Yes, they do, Dick.

Morphew: To Burt...the biggest task is education in the south and north...what do you think can be done in this field?

Burt: Well, Dick, I think in our state offices we're doing a tremendous job in trying to reach the people in other areas of the country, and after all, that is what we're going to have to do. I have always felt that eventually this fight will be won in the realm of public opinion. You can pass all the laws you want to, and I expressed this sentiment on my radio program a short time ago, and these laws can only prove to be stopgaps to the problem. But you cannot outlaw public opinion and as long as people are convinced that they are right in what they are doing, well, you certainly can't make them do something they don't want to do.

Morphew: Next week we hope to present a special report that will be of interest...