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57 x 2 – Northern Concept of Mississippi Race Relations

Date: 11/10/57

Guest: Tom Q. Ellis, Clerk of Mississippi Supreme Court

Dixie Intro...

Morphew: Welcome, new time, 2:45 Sunday afternoon in order to reach a different segment of the viewing audience than before, welcomes new viewers, to Ellis: you have spoken a number of northern audiences as a Mason?

Ellis: Yes, Dick, this is the largest Masonic organization in the world under one head. I occupied that position 3 years, ending the second day of October, last month. And I did visit, practically, every state in the Union.

Morphew: I was going to ask you how much traveling you did...

Ellis: Well, I traveled, I kept an account, an estimate of the miles I traveled in addition to my meat and bread job as clerk. I traveled about 140,000 miles outside of the state of Mississippi throughout America, and Mexico, I made Mexico a couple of times.

Morphew: Any idea how many speeches you made?

Ellis: I have an idea, I kept an estimate also of the audiences, the live audiences. Sometimes my talks were radioed and sometimes on TV in the places I have been. But the live audiences an estimate was about 150,000 people with whom I talked who were representative citizens of their various states, practically every state in the Union.

Morphew: I know that when people found out you were from the south they had lots of questions.

Ellis: Well, they don't fail to do that at the beginning and end, nor do I look with disfavor on those questions. I'm glad to talk to them.

Morphew: Examples of what they are most interested in and what you told them?

Ellis: Well, in the first place, they have a misconception of our relationship down here with the races. And of course, I'm just one of many who are trying to carry the gospel and I never fail to do my part of it. And I found so many of them astounded at the wonderful relations that do exist between us and the good colored people of Mississippi. And I never failed to assure them that a tremendous majority of our good colored people in Mississippi are good citizens also. And I surprised a many of them. This was the thing that surprised me: by publicly announcing that among those was, are some of the best friends I have in the world, and I found them to be rather surprised. Because their attitude and approach to this thing as a general proposition, I mean, is much different than our's.

Morphew: Their attitude, how would you describe it?

Ellis: Well, so many of them, I found, have a prejudice when you get right down to where they live and sometimes the hatred that we don't know and can't understand, (when I got off a train in Philadelphia one morning and caught a cab), and of course as soon as I say Good Morning, they know where I'm from, you understand, they almost know I'm from Mississippi, this cabdriver began to talk to me about this very thing. And his first expression was some vile profanity that I wouldn't even repeat in your office, let alone on the TV, in connection with the colored race in general. I took exception to it because I told him, you're condemning a large body of good citizens in my state that don't deserve that sort of thing. I said, maybe you've got some of them up here but the kind, we have very few of the kind described as blank da blank da blanks, you understand, and I said, we don't have any of that kind down in my state and I said I'm going to tell you something else, that the biggest trouble we have had are the trouble we are threatened with, is by the people in your state and states like yours that have a misconception of the problems of our situation, trying to tell us and trying to tell the colored folks how to solve problems we've been wrestling with, and I think successfully, for some hundred years.

Morphew: Have the northerners any concept of real conditions or have they been brainwashed?

Ellis: Very little. He has no idea whatever and it's almost ridiculous the questions they ask me sometimes. Very surprised, for instance, to find that I lived, next door neighbors, most of my childhood days, with colored people that some of my favorite playmates were colored (laughs) I remember one of their names were Hogie ??? ....But the majority of them, this kind of people, that they want to know the truth and I have been literally

astounded at the heaps of letters I have received from every section of these United States.

Morphew: What can the average southerner, who stays at home, do to better the understanding of the South?

Ellis: Well, the best thing I know he can do, Dick, is join the Citizens' Council to start with and then he can make contact with people up there, with his friends or relatives. And I know a good many southerners who will call on me for literature to send, scores of it. Little things, for instance, I wrote last year some little article, I don't know whether you saw it or not about the delta, a little old nigger friend of mine up in the Delta. Well, that thing, I have been called on for a total of about 15,000 copies of that up north and east, and I sent it. My mailing list was 1450 to start with and I slipped a couple of that in each one of my bulletins. So, in that way and in various ways, we can do and I think that we're getting somewhere with it.

Morphew: In your travels, have you seen the influence that CC are having in the north?

Ellis: Yes, I have, and I have heard, I'll say, nothing but favorable comment. It may be, of course, some people said that because they knew, of course, my attitude and I was their guest. That might have had something to do with it. And yet some of them would have leaked out if they had much animosity toward it. And I've found that in a good many of those states there are Citizens' Councils...I learned something.

Morphew: Hasn't the CC revealed that this issue goes beyond race relations, more basic things?

Ellis: Oh, absolutely. I think that that has gotten almost to be a minor question. I think it's a question of the survival of our constitution, the survival of the American way of life, and when I say that I don't mean the southern way of life, I'm talking about the American way of life, the freedom that we've enjoyed. We are tending now, I'm afraid, in the direction which if not stopped, is going just the way of all other civilizations that history tells us about, and so I think that that's just one of the facets of this thing.

Morphew: So race is just one example of this tendency toward the centralization of government?

Ellis: That's right, that's right.

Morphew: What is the south's biggest problem on this front?

Ellis: Well, of course, living in Mississippi where the relations have continued to be so good...you mean with reference to overcoming this?

Morphew: Yes.

Ellis: Well, complacency, I'd say that even among our own citizens. Now you take just a, I'll give you a little idea, Congressman Dies, one of the greatest Americans that ever lived. He gave lots of his life, I'll say, and almost sacrificed his health in ??? out communist activities, which by the way, I wish we had time to go into but our people are pretty well cleansed of those things. That auditorium had a nice number of people there the other night when he spoke. In fact, it was a pretty big crowd for a little peanut like myself, but the streets outside, all around, should have been crowded with people who were unable to get in there because one of the most forceful American speeches, not smacking toward anything toward the controversial, so far as hatred or anything like that is concerned, it was purely an American speech. And I think people, that that's one of our troubles around here is complacency...some peanut politicians that we have, even in the South that would...sacrifice a principle for expediency.

Morphew: You feel that some of these politicians have caused these problems?

Ellis: Well, I do. I definitely do. I'm sure that's true. That's where it began, I think. We have 2 political parties now and there are no shades of difference in their philosophy. They are playing for a minority vote and they will sacrifice, it looks to me like America adjust for what it might get in some particularly concentrated districts as far as votes are concerned and I think they are doing that and I think some of that gets down our way.

Morphew: Announces that Sen. Eastland will speak to the New Orleans CC next Thursday and Sen. Stennis will speak to the Oktibbeha County CC on 25th