

Mississippi State University Libraries
Special Collections Department, Manuscripts Division

Citizen's Council Radio Forums
Acc. No. 597
Stephanie Rolph Transcripts Addition

Audiotape ID number:

Date:

Guest (s):

Title:

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

6514 – Selma-Montgomery March

Guest: Rep. William L. Dickinson (R-AL)

Morphew: Introduction...Chairman of the Republican Congressional Delegation from Alabama...you have made quite splash on the national scene because of speech you made on the floor of the House on March 30 concerning the Selma to Montgomery march or civil rights demonstration...could you give me a vest pocket summary of this speech?

Dickinson: Yes, Dick. I'm very pleased to do this. As you say, it created quite a ripple, I think. I've gotten tremendous response from all over the country, most of it favorable, some small amount unfavorable but I have found that in most of the instances where the response was unfavorable it was from people who hadn't read my speech. They picked up parts in newspaper accounts and assumed that I meant something other than what I said. Now in substance what I said was that there were four different and distinct elements involved in this march on Montgomery from Selma and one was the Alabama Negro who had an interest in it and was doing what he conscientiously thought was in his interest. The second group were the do gooders from outside of the state such as the preachers, the nuns, the professional people, the teachers, who out of a real sense of wanting to help, and I feel they were misguided, but they are down there out of compassion for their fellow man and were sincere. The third group though was a bunch of rabble and beatniks who were down there just for self gratification and maybe self glory. They were just out for kicks and they were the ones that caused all the trouble and they just had one drunken debauchery from before they left Selma til after they got to Montgomery and it's really difficult for the people to believe what went on. And the fourth group, and this was the insidious part of it, was the Communist influence there because it is the Communists who are behind all of our recent racial troubles there, people that sort of gotten to the point now where if you cry wolf if you say Communists, they say, well, it's just the same old line, but they were there and we can prove it. And they were the purpose and the under girding structure for the whole thing. But really, as

far as the people were concerned, the people of my community, Montgomery, Selma, the obscenities that were witnessed there by newsmen, by policemen, by others, is really shocking, and the newspaper accounts haven't always made it clear that I was not talking about the clergy and the do gooders, I call them, they lumped them altogether and inferred that I meant everyone was in on this, and that's not so.

Morphew: Didn't some of the northern ministers who were involved in this thing become so disgusted with some of the goings on that they packed up and left?

Dickinson: Yes, that's very true. Of course, we have no way of knowing how many came and left because everyone came on their own. They didn't sign in, they didn't have to stay in any particular place. But there were many that came, saw what was going on, became disgusted and did in fact leave. The newspapers did mention some of those and some were rather prominent people.

Morphew: Did you witness any of these activities yourself, were you in Alabama at the time the march was going on?

Dickinson: Yes. I was there, Dick. Now, you have to remember that this was a ragtag group for the most part. The hardcore beatniks with the long hair, the filthy clothes, tennis shoes, these were people just out for kicks. They left every campsite and they camped, I believe, 4 times, littered with debris of whiskey bottles, beer bottles, they really had them a swinging party every night. They took over the church, one of the Negro churches in Montgomery and it took the minister and the deacons of this church 48 hours to get these beatniks, white and black alike, out of the church that they were having such a party in. They slept in it, they couldn't get them out and they didn't want to have to call the police because of the notoriety involved, after all, these were supposed to be marches to help the Negroes there. And they just had an orgy in the church. And I'm getting affidavits to substantiate this.

Morphew: The colored deacons of the church had to have all of the utilities cut off in order to get them out...

Dickinson: Don't forget telephones. They were running up quite a long distance bill and they had the telephone disconnected at the church, too.

Morphew: During your speech you put into the record a circular that was being passed around among the demonstrators, headed "Welcome Freedom Marchers to Hollywood Burlesque" and then in big type, "Girls, Girls, Girls, Girls, Girls"...was this a traveling carnival?

Dickinson: Now, I said on the floor in my speech, I do not know who printed this. I do not know where it came from, but I do know that it was circulated on the route of the march on the first day. On the second day they very frantically went back to the old campsite and tried to collect all evidence of this having been passed out because it was more than just suggested. Now it said, come to tent 9, that tent 9 would be set up nightly

in advance of the marches, and to come down and join in the revelry of person to person good times or something like that. There was no tent 9 erected. I've been able to ascertain that. Now whether the pressure kept them from being put up or whether the whole thing is a spoof, I have no way of knowing, but I do know that this circular was given out on the march by those in the marches to some degree. I have one in my possession and I do know that they stayed in tents and the newsmen were excluded and kept away from the area where the marchers met and had their little revelry every evening.

Morphew: I'd like to read just two excerpts from this circular before we move on...it said in part, "note to ministers: please prevail upon the holdbacks to let the show go on in all of its unrestricted glory, fun, frolic, and warmth." And then, "note to southern girls: come join in the fun if you can cast off the old fashioned ideas whether of racial bigotry or medieval moronic morality"

Dickinson: Now, here is an actual circular that was given out on the march. As I say, I don't know who had them printed. I don't know anything about them except that they were in circulation on the march, advertising girls and the Hollywood burlesque and wanting everyone to shed their moronic medieval morality.

Morphew: You said in your speech that the beatnik element had been recruited to be fulltime paid demonstrators

Dickinson: Or so they said. They've told many officers, told Wilson Baker, who is the public safety director in Selma, they made no bones about it. one boy in particular, I remember, asked him where he was from and he said Philadelphia. He had long hair and a beard. They asked him what he was doing down there in Selma if he lived in Philadelphia. He said, well, why not? They gave him \$10 a day, free room and board, and all of the free lovin' that he wanted and so he was coming down and having a ball, and laughed about it. And this is not uncommon. This was common knowledge among the officers there.

Morphew: You said in your speech that only by the ultimate sex act with one of another color can these demonstrators demonstrate that they have no prejudice...in other words this is sort of a prerequisite as being part of the group.

Dickinson: Well, I understand, now, this is the type of thing that you cannot prove. This is just things that are told by those who are in the group but nobody is going to give you an affidavit, but I understand that that is the criteria by which they judge whether or not a white girl, for instance, has in fact, prejudice against the other race or a boy either for that matter. I understand that's sort of the rule of thumb among the beatnik group that were going through all of these things in the parade there, in the march.

Morphew: These instance of sexual misconduct, drunken debauchery, what proof does exist?

Dickinson: There are innumerable eyewitnesses. I have in my possession affidavits of no less than 10 people who were eyewitnesses to these events, there were photographs in varying degrees. Of course, most of this took place at night and taking photographs at night without flashbulbs is a little difficult but we do have photographs of some of the things I have alluded to. We have the testimony of those who cleaned up some of the campsites as to the facts I have alleged and when the day comes for the presentation of proof I will have the proof, cause I have it now.

Morphew: Could it be said that these affidavits would be from people who would tend to be biased against the demonstrators?

Dickinson: No. One is from AP, the one that I have talked to, and he has an account I've seen in the newspaper of sex acts going on during what was billed as an all night prayer. He was an AP news writer. There are newspaper reporters, law enforcement officers, national guard that was called out. I don't believe all of these people would be necessarily considered biased.