

Mississippi State University Libraries  
Special Collections Department, Manuscripts Division

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

Audiotape ID number: 597-58 x 14

Date: 1958

Guest (s): W. J. Simmons

Title: Federal Civil Rights Commission

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

Guest: W. J. Simmons

Morphew: (1<sup>st</sup> Anniversary of the Forum) One year of the forum...Simmons, administrator of JCC and editor of CC newspaper...welcome...what have we accomplished during this past year?

Simmons: Dick, I think the value of this program is shown most conclusively in the fact that as we have gone around at various meetings over the state, we find that there is a different atmosphere completely within the radius of WLBT where this program is seen and where it is not seen. There's just a difference, really, in night and day, in the attitude of the people.

Morphew: And now the program is on radio in addition to television and I imagine you will be getting a reaction from that also.

Simmons: Yes, it's now, as I recall, on 8 stations in Mississippi and Alabama and we have had a number of reactions already.

Morphew: The primary purpose of the CC is 'to inform and educate the people of the South as to some of the problems facing them' and you would be glad to from anyone who has any ideas for program features...

Simmons: We certainly would, Dick. As you say, the primary function of the Citizens' Councils is informative. It's educational, and if any of our viewers have things that they would like to see discussed on this program, please let us hear from you.

Morphew: We have a lot of material that comes in...your office is a sort of clearinghouse for mail from all over the country...

Simmons: Yes, it is, Dick. We have a huge backlog of material. In fact, our mail has seldom dropped below 300 pieces a week in the 3 years we've been in operation.

Morphew: Today we can look at some of these tidbits of information that have come in...things that didn't make the news...one thing that people are interested in is the Federal Civil Rights Commission...you have some info that might not be too generally known

Simmons: Yes, we do have a bit. I think the general impression some may have gotten from the papers is that it is a temporary undertaking. Certainly, the news reports don't bear that out. For example, while they only have 16 months left to operate under the law, the way they're setting up as a permanent government bureau doesn't bear that out. They appear to be putting down their roots to stay.

Morphew: They look like they're planning on staying for awhile

Simmons: Yes, indeed, they certainly do.

Morphew: What has left you with this opinion?

Simmons: Well, for one thing, the way they're organizing. They're set up in 5 divisions and 2 sections, just like any bureau. One is the secretariat and liaison office, which is to stay in contact with state organizations, citizens committees, individuals and so on, issue press releases. Another one, this is very interesting, is the research and planning division. This one, according to reports, practically covers the waterfront. Just as an example, it will have 7 employees who are to be paid a total of more than \$49,000 a year. This will give our viewers some idea of the size of what we have to cope with.

Morphew: And that's just in one division of the CRC

Simmons: Yes, just one of the 5 divisions. That function is one which is somewhat related to what our office does here in Jackson, Dick. Although, of course, we don't have anything like the resources to cope with it the way they have. I believe that's some of your tax money, my friend, and possibly some of mine is winding up in this \$49,000.

Morphew: Last week we had examples of how the people of NYC were having their tax money spent for them.

Simmons: Yes, this is how some of ours is being spent.

Morphew: Right...

Simmons: Now, some of the other divisions, just to give our listeners an idea: the survey division which will investigate, verify so it's called, certain allegations that are being made; they have a legal division that's authorized to pay out salaries in excess of \$100,000 a year.

Morphew: Wait...they have a legal division and the same law that set up this commission also gave an assistant AG in the DOJ to deal with CR, isn't this a duplication?

Simmons: It would seem so. Actually, a congressman has pointed out that this is a duplication. He's not a southerner, he happens to be Congressman Coudair (?), a Republican of New York City, I beg your pardon, of New York state.

Morphew: But the CRC and DOJ are both in the legal business as far as federal civil rights law is concerned...

Simmons: Very much so. Also, and a point of a interest, the commission will itself have its complaints checked by its own staff. This also is a point of duplication.

Morphew: So instead of using the governments other investigative agencies, they're going to do them themselves...

Simmons: That's right, and might be of interest particularly where this program reaches on TV and radio to know that the commission plans to send teams into the field to collect facts and report back and then they will analyze these reports and have a hearing. So, we might see some, if we see some strange little men running around, they might not be from Mars, they might be from the Civil Rights Commission.

Morphew: One thing that surprised me was their claim that they were going to make sure that everyone's vote counted...how are they going to do that from Washington?

Simmons: That's a pretty good question, unless they plan to have a periscope reaching into every ballot box.

Morphew: They're going to either have to forget about that or send somebody into practically every precinct in America to make sure that they elections are honest

Simmons: Yeah, I'd say this would certainly indicate some kibbutzing on a grand scale, Dick.

Morphew: (laughs) That would be a rather momentous undertaking...what is their budget for this next year...how much tax money are they asking to be able to spend

Simmons: I understand it's approximately three-quarters of a million dollars

Morphew: And much of that is for salaries

Simmons: Yes, apparently most of it will go for salaries.

Morphew: Anything in the south that has a comparable budget to counteract this budget?

Simmons: If there's anything comparable, I haven't heard of it, Dick.

Morphew: And some of the states are talking about working together against this...

Simmons: Yes, various proposals have been made to establish a fund for the South or something of that nature, but so far as I know, nothing has come of it.

Morphew: Let's look at other things we may not know hear in the South about the feelings in the North...I have right here from Minnesota a report that for the second time in a year the NAACP got a setback in passing state and city laws prohibiting so-called discrimination in housing...the legislature tabled that move and the city attorney in Minneapolis ruled that a city ordinance forbidding the landlord to choose his tenant would be unconstitutional and the city shouldn't pass it.

Simmons: Yes, I understand that's right. That indicates the extent to which these groups will go.

Morphew: One thing this paper reports is that real estate board up there was put under so much pressure that they were afraid to do anything and it was the builders and homeowners who had to get together to defeat this thing

Simmons: Yes. That's fairly typical of the sort of thing that our northern friends are having to cope with.

Morphew: Both of these laws would have 'imprisoned' homeowners who refused to sell their property to Negroes...the NAACP came within only a narrow margin of getting those laws passed.

Simmons: It's almost incredible to realize that in this year 1958, such things as that can be on the actual verge of happening.

Morphew: And it did happen in NYC where anyone owning a building has no say so in who his tenant is

Simmons: Yes, I think that is going to be a real Pandora's box in New York.

Morphew: Another item regarding our friends in the psychiatric profession

Simmons: Yes, it's very interesting. A couple of psychiatrists reported in an article to the effect that whites are going to be put on the psychiatric couch, so you might be getting ready, Dick, and some of our friends who are listening. They say that most opposition to racial desegregation involves a deep-rooted prejudice that's based on fear and fuzzy thinking. It makes you wonder who's fuzzy in something like this. Actually, the fear that I've found in the racial question exists mostly in the North. There's an element of physical fear in some of those cities that is absolutely unknown in the South. Just a few minutes ago, for example at lunch, I was talking with two friends from Minneapolis and

we mentioned that very point. I know I ran into it in Chicago last fall when I was up there several days to make a few talks to civic clubs.

Morphew: But according to psychiatrists, we're all crazy (laughs)

Simmons: Oh yes, they just dismiss with a wave of the hand the wisdom of generations of experience of white and colored in the South.

Morphew: Any subject you want to discuss, send them to the JCC...