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Guest (s): Rep. William M. Tuck (D-VA) and Carlton Putnam

Title: Supreme Court's Decision in the Brown Case/Forcing School Integration in the South

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

Morphew: Introduction...Tuck introduces Putnam who wrote the Letter to the President...this letter to the president, why did you write and what did you say?

Putnam: Well, my reason for writing it, I would call my indignation at the Supreme Court's decision in the Brown case, the forcing of school desegregation on the South and the letter deals exclusively with that subject.

Morphew: Your background is in Massachusetts and New York, you were educated at Princeton, Harvard and Columbia, you are a northerner speaking out on integration.

Putnam: I would say that that was my status, yes.

Morphew: What kind of distribution did this letter achieve?

Putnam: Well, thanks to the work of the Birmingham Committee, which published it in the North, it has had a circulation of about 10 million and as a result of that, of course, there has been a very great volume of correspondence. It goes without saying that a thing of that kind stirred up some controversy. The letter, I understand, had a 95% favorable response. There was about a 5% questioning, critical, controversial response and it was in dealing with that that I came to do this job of trying to answer the questions. Five percent is a, seems like a small percentage but there were tens of thousands of letters and there were hundreds of critical letters. What I tried to do was to distill out the main points and answers those points as best I could. I have tried to produce in my answers what I call an arsenal of rebuttal which would serve as a handbook for those who are on the firing line and don't have the time to meditate on some of these things as I've had to do as a result of all this correspondence.

Morphew: These questions and answers are soon due to be published in book form, are they not?

Putnam: That's what we have done, yes.

Morphew: What are some of the main points you cover in answer to some of the questions that have been raised?

Putnam: Well, the first problem that I've found, and it was interesting to see the quality of the response because it gave me some understanding of what was going on in the minds of the North. The first confusion seemed to be on the subject of anthropology. There was a complete misunderstanding of the facts, I found, on that score, and that led me to write my letter to the attorney general. That also is included in this book, the two letters and then the total questions and answers to both letters. In dealing with the subject as a whole, first there was the letter to the attorney general and then in the questions and answers I tried to emphasize, I might say perhaps, 3 points. The first is that if you consider all of history, you will find no place at which, no time at which an all-black and an all-white civilization living together in any numbers, have done so without segregation and failed to intermarry. In other words, there has always followed from a lack of segregation an intermarriage situation. This intermarriage has naturally produced a new type of culture. This new culture, a hybrid culture, a hybrid civilization, has never failed in all history, from the standpoint, now, of the white civilization, to represent a deterioration. I don't say that from the standpoint of God it's a deterioration. I don't say from a standpoint of some judge on a different planet it's a deterioration. I'm not criticizing any individuals or groups in this matter, but I say it from a standpoint of white civilization it represents a deterioration. I thirdly emphasize that there is no human right greater than the right of a civilization to defend itself against that deterioration. In other words, there is no right greater than the right of a race to protect itself against suicide. You can't mention any point in history where you find a stable republic that was predominantly or even substantially Negro. Now, the human right in this case has to be, in my judgment, regarded as perhaps as a little different from suicide because in the case of the South, you're not simply committing suicide if you give into this, you are being, you are forcing, the North is forcing someone else to commit suicide, namely the South, and that goes by another name of suicide. You might go so far as to call it murder. And I certainly think the South has a right to protect itself against that. I don't want to dwell too long on this subject but if there has been one thing which I think the South has not understood, in which I think I now see clearly as a result of these letters, it has been that you have this false conception in the North of what the South has done. It's like, I sometimes suggest this analogy: if you see someone standing on the street corner and you think he's committing a crime and you protest and he comes back to you and says, oh, I'm within my constitutional rights, my states rights permit me to do this, if you think that that's a serious crime he's committing, it doesn't persuade you to be sympathetic to him, but if he comes back to you and says, this, I'm a victim of a homicidal attack here, now that begins to make an impression. Now, until the South is willing to put the case that clearly, I don't think you're going to make an impression upon the rank and file of northerners who have been subject to this, what you might call brainwashing on the subject of the anthropology of the racial question generally.

Morphew: Governor Tuck, what would be your observation?

Tuck: Well, I quite agree with everything that Mr. Putnam has had to say. I do think, however, that the constitutional principles involved should not be neglected entirely but at the same time I recognize the validity of what he has to say in respect to the real argument that would strike home both in the North and in the South.

Morphew: But we have failed to make ourselves clear on this one point.

Tuck: Yes. So many people seem to think it's impolite to discuss the true issues, that are going off on tangents, and thus we may have been handicapped in the fight that we're making to preserve our society and to preserve our way of life.

Morphew: And actually in a frank discussion of integration, the vital issue is intermarriage

Tuck: That's right.