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Guest (s): Senator Richard B. Russell (D-GA)

Title: Civil Rights Bills

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

Morphew: Introduction...these new bills, is there any real difference between these bills and those in the past?

Russell: I do not think there's any great deal of difference. Perhaps the bill that Senator Douglas is sponsoring does have one or two provisions that haven't been with us heretofore, that is a proposal of the federal government to finance schools in areas where they are closed by the state when threatened by integration, but by and large it's nearly all a rehash of legislation we've had heretofore.

Morphew: Do you feel that people in the rest of the country are becoming more interested in integration because they're realizing it leads to big government?

Russell: Well, of course, you cannot take away the rights of a southern state without affecting adversely the rights of every other state. You cannot deny the rights of the white people of the South without impinging upon the rights of the people of the United States everywhere. I think that there is a gradual awakening to that, though I must say that it hasn't moved as rapidly as I would like to have had. But the vote that just passed, H.R. 3 in the House of Representatives, does indicate that there's a general awakening throughout the country to the necessity of maintaining our dual system of government of indestructible states.

Morphew: Do you think we're in danger of become a government of minority rule because of these pressure groups at work?

Russell: Well, I've made several speeches on that, the pressure of minorities who are vocal and who overstate their voting strength, exercises a much greater influence in legislation than is warranted by their real voting strength in our representative form of government. We've seen that in the case of any number of minority groups, I won't undertake to name them, but they are active, they apply pressure to the members of congress, they are busy giving out handouts to the press and to the radio to influence

public opinion whereas a great majority of the American people are so busy in this business of making a living that they don't take that part, and that is a very grave threat to the rights and liberties of our people.

Morphew: I know that you are the author of a bill concerning a voluntary relocation plan, could you explain that?

Russell: Well, this bill grew out of the conviction that has later been supported by every study that has been made that the matter of racial feeling was in almost direct proportion to the proportion of the races in any given area. I found that these people from states that had only 2 or 3 percentage of Negro citizens were always very happy indeed to tell me in Georgia, where we have more negroes in Georgia than in any other state, exactly how we should adjust our social relations and all of the other relations of life between the two races. And it occurred to me that if we would have national legislation that would influence and mold the society that we should have the same conditions everywhere, and I therefore proposed a plan whereby we would relocate people, both the white and Negro, so that there would be approximately ten percent negro population in each and all of the states, so that every state would have the same problem and that every member of the Congress would be dealing with the same actual condition rather than abstract theory of some psychologist or sociologist. I find that men's minds sometimes change when they are confronted with the fact instead of a theory.

Morphew: How would this work?

Russell: Well, the federal government would assist people to move to other areas if they desired to do so and they would not move anyone except on his request and with the assurance it would better his economic condition. It provides loan funds for industry that would employ these people at wages above that which they get now, it provides loans for them to improve housing and indeed to establish small businesses of their own, though I must say, when you get outside of the South you don't find any areas where negroes have businesses of their own, at least I'm not aware of it. Down in our part of the world they own their own banks and stores and taxi cab outfits and things of that nature, which you don't find much of that outside of the South.

Morphew: So if a negro citizen in Georgia or Mississippi was convinced that he would fare better in another part of the country...

Russell: That is correct, that the federal government would help finance him, if necessary, give him a grant for his moving expenses. You may be interested to know, when I first introduced this bill in nineteen hundred and forty-nine, I received a large number of letters from white people outside of the South who were very much interested in being assisted in moving to the South. I didn't get a great many letters from negro citizens in the South, though since then I have noticed that a few of them have come out in favor of a plan of this kind.

Morphew: Is some of the pressure on the south due to economic competition where the south is booming and other areas of the country are not?

Russell: Well, I think that there is a feeling, I must say, I don't know whether it's confined to any one thing, unfortunately, there is a certain feeling against the South in other areas of the country, whether that's a holdover from what Mark Twain called 'the late unpleasantness' of the sixties or whether it's generated by a desire to slow down the very almost fantastic economic progress of the South over the past twenty years, I do not know and I've always had trouble analyzing just the true source of this feeling against the white people of the South. Of course, a great deal of it is based on the misrepresentation of the South through these great media (sic) of communication throughout the nation, but I have thought sometimes it's the fact that the southerner even in hours of adversity has never been reduced to battling his pride, pride his community, his family, I hope this isn't considered completely out of line, even pride of race. And we hope our negra citizens have the same pride of race as our white people have. I've sometimes thought that just because they've never been able to break that pride even though they destroyed us in a horrible Civil War and essentially held us in some kind of economic bondage for several decades, had a great deal to do with it and of course, where a man was influenced by things of that kind we saw we were coming out of that bondage and assuming our proper place in the economy of the nation, it would, of course, generate some feeling.

Morphew: What can southerners do to get the rest of the country on our side?

Russell: Well, we must avail ourselves of every opportunity that we have to bring to the attention of the people of the rest of the nation the real facts. It's an amazing thing, but the people who feel most strongly on maintaining what we call the southern way of life, which is the separation of races is all it means so that there will be no social intermingling, would eliminate both races and give us a mongrel race, but the strongest feeling usually is shown by those who have lived in other sections and have moved into the South. I have know any number of people who have lived in my state for ten, fifteen years who came there from Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, other areas that told me that after they found the facts of life that they had changed their opinion completely and were convinced that the only salvation of our society and the only way to assure continuance of the great growth and expansion that we are having now is to preserve the separation of the races in anything that partakes of a social nature.

Morphew: Do the southern states need to unite?

Russell: Well, I wish that we could devise some system that would enable us to unite our efforts. Heretofore we've had a great deal of difficulty in doing that. As I said a few minutes ago, we do not control the great media, dissemination of information in this country, but there is a real need of course to unite our efforts as far as we can. I'm afraid I have no comprehensive program that would enable us to do that, we'll have to depend on people like you for that.

Morphew: With southern unity, do you think the south can eventually win the struggle?

Russell: If we are willing to make the sacrifices that all out resistance will entail, we can eventually win through. The way will be hard and be rough and we will not find it easy, but if we really mean what we say and are willing to make the sacrifices we can win this fight.