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58 x 9 – Near East and Slavery

Date: 3/03/58

Guest: Elmore D. Graves

Morphew: Madison county farmer, charter member of CC, helped organize a number of chapters around the state, young leadership...tell us about your recent trip, concentrated on the Near East?

Graves: Yes it was, Dick, confined to the countries of Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Egypt, particularly Jordan.

Morphew: Observations about the Middle East?

Graves: Well, Dick, it is always difficult for one who has stayed in a country such a short time to make any general observations, but, and I would like to use as background in reference to anything I have to say by referring those people who are interested to several general works by contemporary scientists which will bear out more or less what I have to say on the race question. Those scientists are P. A. Sarokin (?) of Harvard University, the second is Arthur Keith who is dean of the British School of Anthropology, and the third is R. Ruggles Gates, all three of whom have written extensively on the race question.

Morphew: The area has been called the cradle of civilization, does the middle east impress the tourist with any importance of race?

Graves: Yes, to me it is everywhere evident, Dick. The Middle East, to my mind, is one of the great stages where the drama of race has been played over and over again. The area is covered with colossal ruins of former civilizations where many of the great civilizations of former time stood, are now replaced only by miserable mud villages and

where civilization once flourished over a good part of that area there's very little to be found now. So, even to the most casual observer, the importance of race is everywhere to be seen in the whole Middle East area.

Morphew: Nations are considered to be old and at various times been dominated by other nations, evidence left of the Crusaders, the people of northern and western Europe?

Graves: The Crusade period in the Middle East, Dick, was a very remarkable thing and extraordinary in many ways. The crusaders who were largely French, German, English and other European soldiers and knights occupied a stretch of the Middle East for almost a century. They were driven out and then they came back for a much shorter time. But there are 2 remarkable traces, or rather 3 of the Crusade period: one of course is the great string of castles that occupy the deserts of Jordan and all along the Dead Sea Basin, the second is that most of the great Christian churches and temples in the holy places were built by the crusaders, and the third, probably that most impresses the traveler, is that the Christians in the Holy Land, and I have this on the authority of a great many people, and a great many priests and Catholic nuns who live in the Holy Land, the majority of the Christians in the Middle East are direct descendants from the Crusaders and since that time there has been a very poor effect in converting the Moslems. So, most of the Christians there today are descendants of the original Christian crusaders.

Morphew: They all have European blood in them.

Graves: Yes, it's very noticeable.

Morphew: Slave kings in Egypt?

Graves: Yes, that's quite true and I think there are some interesting aspects of slavery in the Middle East that I think have a direct bearing on the race question in the United States because I know that almost anyone who has paid any attention to the matter, has studied the negra question, knows that a constant reproach or a constant excuse given for the fact of negra backwardness is that they were so long held in slavery. The Middle East is an example where slavery was once in effect in a much more harsh manner than anything that ever prevailed in the southern states.

Morphew: People were made slaves when they lost a war.

Graves: They were enslaved. One of the most remarkable groups of rulers in Egypt in modern times were the Mamlouks (?). It was a Turkish custom from the earliest times to enslave the boys of their conquered provinces and to train them up as royal bodyguards, and so they enlisted a great many white slaves and the Arab word for slaves is Mamlouk. These slaves later revolted against the slaves and set up a great dynasty in Egypt lasting 300 years when they were again conquered by the Turks but which had the practical effect of leaving the rulership of Egypt and most of the Middle East area in the hands of these former slaves. And Egypt at that time, under the slave rulers, had a very prosperous history and a very great history. Another interesting incident of slaves in Egypt coming

into power and into rulership was the incident of Muhammed Ali, who was an Albanian slave and who ruled Egypt with great thoroughness and under whom Egypt made remarkable progress. So it completely points out the untruth of the fact that slavery in itself is a deterrent to intellectual development. It depends altogether on who is enslaved it seems.

Morphew: What observations about Nassar, the current ruler of Egypt?

Graves: Well, only that everybody has a very violent opinion on him, one way or another. It's interesting his racial background, his mother is supposed to be a Sudanese mulatta and his father an Egyptian, which would mean that he is predominantly white. But Egypt is a very interesting country, there the contrast of racial difference is the greatest seen.

Morphew: Leaders here know as much about that area as they should?

Graves: No, I do not think so, Dick. And it occurs to me, even though this is an impractical suggestion, still, if politicians, in order to qualify for office in the United States or in other western countries could spend some time studying the Middle East, which as I said earlier has been a great stage for race, if they could study the Middle East, see how civilizations have come and gone there, see how great civilizations have been destroyed by other races and have never risen again, I think it would be a great lesson to them. And if they would take politics more seriously and weigh more thoroughly the consequences of some of the things they do, I wish particularly that President Eisenhower and his group of politicians could know more about the race idea before they launch upon the actions, the outrageous actions, that they have launched upon.

Morphew: What is the basic reaction in ME to Americans and American tourists?

Graves: Well, the Arab hospitality is very famous. They are very generous people, and the Americans are not too well liked at this time. One thing that I was interested to learn was that when it was learned that I was a Mississippian there was almost an immediate reaction. I had two interesting conversations. One person thought that they way the South, the attitude of the South on the Negro question was something that was outrageous. Another person who was a graduate of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology thought just the opposite. But Mississippi is an international name, it seems, and...

Morphew: Thanks, no doubt to the Russian propaganda...

Graves: Thanks to a very large part to that.

Morphew: What impressed you the most in your travels?

Graves: The thing that impressed me most in that short stay there was arriving in Athens, Greece. The thing that impressed me most was to leave Egypt and to go into an all white

country like Greece where the contrast was immediate, obvious and almost overwhelming.