

Interview with William Simmons, Director, Citizens Council, Jackson,
Mississippi, March 29, 1974, conducted by Jack Bass and Walter de Vries,
transcribed by Linda Killen.

Walter de Vries: We've spent the last five days in Mississippi
interviewing people.

William Simmons: Well, I'm sure you're replete with knowledge.

Jack Bass: What do you see as the major change in Mississippi
politics in the last 25 years.

Simmons: I've been so close to it, I haven't thought about it.
There've been a great many changes, of course. One of the most signi-
ficant changes has been the increased black registration of voters and
I think that's brought about a consequent change in attitude of some of
the state leaders.

J.B.: The Citizens Council in Mississippi is very active in the
private schools movement as I understand. And am I correct, they spon-
sor schools?

Simmons: Well, pretty close to it. The relationship actually is
this. The Citizens Council advocated private schools as a means of deal-
ing with the results of the integration of public schools that occurred
ten years after the Brown decision, really, following on the passage of
the Civil Rights Act. Of course, everyone knew that it was impossible
to operate private schools. It was just common knowledge that it couldn't
be done. That is, except for old line, expensive schools with tuition
in the neighborhood of say \$2,000 a year up. The Citizens Council here

in Jackson organized an experimental school to try to determine if it was economically feasible to operate a school on different economic principles than that followed by an exclusive school. Really, from that I think, along with Prince Edward Academy in _____ Virginia, which was the first large private school established of this nature, some encouragement was offered to the private school movement. A lot of operating experience was gained and shared with other interested groups. As the need for private schools increased, many of the local citizens councils in towns in the deep South then turned their principal activities toward the organization of private schools. Along with that, here in Jackson we organized the council school foundation. It's closely related to the Jackson Citizens Council. And the Council School Foundation itself operates some ten schools in this area and Vicksburg and Natchez.

J.B.: How about the other private schools in the state? Is there a relationship between them and the council?

Simmons: There's not a direct relationship, no. I'd say the principal role of the citizens council was several years ago in offering operating information and primarily sharing some of the things that it had learned from its experimental schools. It differed in many ways from the type of public school operation people had been accustomed to. And, as I mentioned, many of the schools that now exist were organized by local citizens council members. But there is not any direct, official connection.

J.B.: Is there any sort of working relationship, formal or in-

formal, between the private schools that have developed in Mississippi and those in other states?

Simmons: Yes, there is.

J.B.: Roughly how many schools South-wide would you say are involved in this more or less informal network? Is this an informal relationship?

Simmons: Well, it has some elements of both formal and informal. The formal structure in the Southern Independent School Association that is comprised of private school associations in six states. There are no schools themselves that have direct membership. It's an association of associations. They cooperate primarily on matters of general interest on private schools. There is some informal give and take in that committees have been set up, for example, on the writing of text books. Committees have been set up on standards, teachers standards. We are engaged in a law suit right now. That's one of the things that delayed me from seeing you gentlemen, because we're set for oral argument Tuesday in Richmond. There's been a certain amount of inter-state, inter-scholastic competition, football games, and that sort of thing.

J.B.: The six states are?

Simmons: Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana.

J.B.: Do you think that will expand to any of the other states?

Simmons: Two other states are included--or rather, schools in two other states are included. Arkansas and Tennessee. But they are included by virtue of their membership in the Mississippi Private Schools

Association. Frankly, I don't think it will spread beyond these states. I don't see any indication at this point that it will.

W.D.V.: What has been the pattern of private school growth in this state since the first one was formed?

Simmons: Well, the pattern was extremely rapid. About four years ago. And it has leveled off. As far as I know, there has been no sudden spurt comparable to that that followed, for example, the court order in schools here in Jackson. Probably Jackson and Memphis are the two largest towns with real extensive private school systems. I myself am not personally knowledgeable about Memphis because I haven't been there since the expansion. But my impression is that there are about 10,000 children in private schools in Memphis. And all of that is the result of the last year, year and a half. Here it has leveled off.

W.D.V.: Do you anticipate it's going to stay the same or is it doing to drop?

Simmons: It all depends on outside influences. There will probably be an expansion of private school enrollment here depending on a couple of events that are in the future. One would be the expansion of the city limits to take in, as I recall, about nine county schools that are virtually totally segregated. Jackson is under a court order and Hines county schools are not. It's pending. It hasn't been pushed. I think it's been stalled for two or three years. If and when the city limits are expanded, then I think that it will mean a radical and massive integration of about nine schools. Six of them black, three white. I don't think there's any integration in them. That will, I think, undoubtedly cause an increasing enrollment. Another is if the Hines county

case ever gets heard and decided, and the public schools in Clinton get effected. Then I think that will cause an increase in enrollment. Aside from that, the enrollment in our schools--the only ones with which I'm intimately familiar--is pretty stable. It's leveled off to about 5,000 children. And about the only changes we have are from people moving from Jackson or coming in. Our largest source of new students now, aside from occasional students who are involved, say in unpleasant physical incidents in public schools, are newcomers.

J.B.: What's the tuition?

Simmons: In our schools there's a great range of tuition depending on grade and number of children in the family. But the average overall at this point is slightly under \$50 a month per child.

J.B.: Are any of your schools integrated?

Simmons: No.

J.B.: Do they have the tax exempt status?

Simmons: Ours do not.

J.B.: What was your reaction to that IRS order?

Simmons: I thought it was atrocious.

J.B.: Were you disappointed?

Simmons: It's not a matter of being disappointed or not disappointed. I was not altogether surprised. My personal impression is that the decision came right out of the White House, like some other things that have come out of the White House. But I'm satisfied that the decision was made there, to change the position of the Justice Department which originally had defended the suit. I don't know how

familiar you are with the situation, but all of the schools involved--to my knowledge--including the Council School Foundation had been granted tax exemption. Or not been granted, because it's something you're entitled to by law. But the IRS had ruled that we had tax exemption. As I recall it was in December of 1964. And the tax exemption was rescinded in September 1970. When the Green case was filed. And filed, not of course against the schools but against the Director of Internal Revenue. The Justice Department defended the case, which was its obligation to do. After the case was half way through trial court, I gave, myself, a rather extensive deposition. The Justice Department reversed its position and instead of defending the case then agreed with the plaintiffs on some kind of settlement which amounted to their rescinding the tax exemption for the schools involved. The case, as I recall, eventually dismissed on the ground that the relief sought for had been granted.

J.B.: Am I correct that at one time the Citizens Council got direct subsidy from the state?

Simmons: No, that's not correct. The Citizens Council at one time had a separate organization entitled Citizens Council Forum. The project was to produce television and radio programs. And that received grants from the state sovereignty commission for the production of tv and radio programs. That was the use to which it was put. They operated for a period of several years as I recall, beginning about '57 or '58 and extending--I forget what year we stopped, but my recollection is it lasted five or six years.

W.D.V.: Today the basic purpose and function of the council is

to encourage the growth of these private schools and to keep them--

Simmons: That's one, yes.

W.D.V.: When you think back to when the council was formed, has the function changed materially? How?

Simmons: Yes they have. It's changed primarily in this respect. I wouldn't say the objectives have changed but the methods and tactics have changed due to changing circumstances. For about the first ten years of its existence, the primary mission of the citizens council was to protect, as far as possible, the public schools and to try and encourage the state governments to bring their power to bear in counter-acting what we thought was a disastrous decision of the court in this Brown case, which opened up a whole pandora's box. This, I think, was fairly successful in organizing public sentiment against massive integration. Then the passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1964, I think, changed that. Changed the whole situation.

W.D.V.: So from 1954 to 1964 that was the principal objective or strategy. And then in '64 it changed?

Simmons: Right. In '64 it changed and went primarily to preoccupation with private schools. And also, on the local level, among local citizens councils, encouraging white voter registration drives as a political counteraction to the black registration drives.

W.D.V.: And that's been the principal concern since then?

Simmons: Right. And that would be true particularly in counties with heavy black majorities.

W.D.V.: Were you in this position in the latter 'sixties? In

the citizens council did you hold this position?

Simmons: I've been active in it almost since it started, yes.

W.D.V.: Thinking back in those years, say between 1964 and 1970, and *the* possibility of massive integration, did you anticipate that that integration would be accomplished as fairly peaceably as it was? In other words, did you expect a different kind of reaction?

Simmons: I'm not sure exactly what I expected.

W.D.V.: In terms of the operation of the council, it would seem to me that if you expected massive resistance to it it would have increased the enrollment in the private schools steadily rather than just a spurt and then a leveling off.

Simmons: Well, the spurt occurs when massive integration in the public schools occurs. You must bear in mind that the integration in the public schools here in Jackson, even, which is under court order, is by no means level. It's very heavy in some schools and less in others, depending on neighborhood. Although the school districts have been gerrymandered in order to try to achieve certain racial quotas against the law. Nevertheless, that has been done. We have seen some change in the city as the racial composition of certain public schools changes. For example, a couple of years ago there was an attempted re-segregation of Callaway School in north Jackson. They gained a certain amount of white students who have since kind of drifted away. There has been substantial resegregation in certain elementary schools of southwest Jackson. That's had some effect.

W.D.V.: I didn't make my point too clear. About 7 percent of the

students are now in private schools. Is that correct? In the state?

Simmons: I presume that's correct. I thought it was a little higher. I thought it was about 10.

W.D.V.: Okay. My question was: looking back to the 'sixties, did you see when this movement first started that it would increase to a much higher level or much higher percentage than it is now? That as the integration was accomplished, there would be kind of a one to one relationship between that and the enrollment in the private schools?

Simmons: Well, I think there has been, allowing for differences in percentages. For example, there are a good many counties in the state where the percentage of blacks is low. There, there has been very little movement toward private schools. But I think that if you'd look at a map and see the private schools plotted, they would be heaviest in the counties with the heaviest black population. But answering your question in more general terms, yes I was a little surprised. People and parents have accepted some of the conditions that their children are exposed to. I've been quite surprised.

W.D.V.: How do you explain that?

Simmons: It's difficult to explain. I have voiced some explanations to colleagues that might sound a little irreverent and perhaps should not be repeated here. I can speculate a little bit, but that's all it would be. I've noticed a difference in class reaction that's puzzled me a little bit. For example, people in this state whom you would ordinarily think of as tending to be liberal or moderate--

W.D.V.: Are you talking about social class?

Simmons: Right. And, to a certain extent, of political ideology,

if you can call such pale thought processes ideology, will go to private schools much more quickly than the so-called redneck. Which is right interesting.

J.B.: Is that a reflection upon economics?

Simmons: I don't think so.

W.D.V.: But it's a reversal of what you thought was going to happen.

Simmons: It's a reversal of what one would logically think would happen. The first experience I had with this was when we expanded so rapidly here in Jackson. Our schools jumped from--in the winter of '69-70, we had an enrollment, total enrollment of about 500. And then in two weeks time we jumped to 3,000. Then the next fall jumped to 5,000. Well, among the most vociferous and articulate of those who wanted a place for their children were many people I knew who, in '64 and '65, when the Civil Rights Act was passed and brought about a certain change in the general atmosphere, would not be particularly cordial socially. They suddenly became old buddies, old school mates. Please, for God sake, make a place for my child. I'll give you anything to get at the head of the list. Make a contribution, whatever. Many who, frankly, surprised me. Now, at the same time, here in this city in particular we've had an enrollment of all economic classes in the schools. Patrons who, probably as a group, pay the most promptly are those who would be near the lower end of the economic scale. But in areas that have not responded to private schools in the way you mentioned would be some rural, like someone from Charlotte might call redneck counties. Or in Georgia you call them wool hat counties. And I

explain it to myself in this manner. I don't know whether I'm correct or not. There may be some truth in it. The more upper class whites, if you can call them that, physically are a little bit intimidated by blacks, by close contact with them. The rural white is not. You know, this is something--you're both southerners, aren't you?

J.B.: I am.

W.D.V.: I'm not. Well, I am now. I was in Michigan, where I went through the private school systems.

Simmons: Yeah. Well, I'm sure you're familiar with the fact that in the South--and this is something that's always puzzled people who are not acquainted with the South--there is a lot more give and take between black and white than there is in the North. More personal conversation and dealing back and forth. And whites here, by and large, are not afraid of blacks. In the North, they're terrified of them. And probably with very good reason. But I think this may have something to do with it. That the whites here are not all that--you know, it's not all that unusual to be around them and talk with them and not afraid of them. So I think that that may be some explanation.

W.D.V.: So it's a function of their class. And you also said earlier, of people moving in. In other words, people who move in from say the North are more apt to send their children to private schools.

Simmons: Yes. We have had many people come here, primarily with industries moving in or with utilities, who will come in and said "My god, I never saw anything like this before" when they'd go to one of the public schools. We never had anything like this in Indianapolis or Chicago or Louisville or wherever they came from. Where do I sign?

That's the typical reaction.

J.B.: What are they meaning when they say they've never seen anything like this before?

Simmons: The number of blacks in the school. That's what they mean. You can see it across the street.

J.B.: Looking ahead ten years, do you see Mississippi becoming pretty much a racially integrated society or not?

Simmons: Well, it's a multi-racial or b~~i~~racial society in effect now. It's changed somewhat. I think the change has been probably more superficial than it has otherwise. I think what's very likely to happen--again, bearing in mind the caution one feels when talking about ten years from now. Because things always happen that we don't foresee that can change events. But I think that the attitude of the South, white South, has changed in this respect. I think there is more integration and more hostility. There is more racial hostility than there has been in the past. I think the young southerners are becoming more like young northerners in that they know the Negro less. They regard him as more alien. And I think in some segments of society in particular--what you might call the hippie class--well, they probably would become more thoroughly integrated. It could bring about a splitting off of more of a class among whites in the South. I think this could happen.

J.B.: Do you think this hostility is greater among students in private schools, who go to segregated school, or students in public schools?

Simmons: Quite the contrary. I can give you an example. We--the

Jackson Citizens Council--last year sponsored a contest. Really not a contest so much as a program among our schools. To give a prize to the student who best exemplified the ideals of the Citizens Council. Which was states rights and racial integrity. It was left up to the faculties, or faculty committee, in each of our five twelve grade schools here in Jackson, to select student candidates whom they thought exemplified those qualities. Just from their observation. Five students chosen were then interviewed by a committee of three. I was not on the committee. And they were all asked the same questions to try to give some kind of consistency and fairness to the interview. This was an interesting result. They were all seniors. Two of them had been in council schools since they began in 1964. Practically all of their conscious school career had been in council schools. Three had been recently transferred from public schools. So that one I think had had two years with us and the others had had one year. The students who had spent their entire school career with the council schools had a vague idea of what it was about. They understood in general terms but they couldn't really articulate it. The others were blunt and pointed. The ones from public schools. And demonstrated an attitude that was far more hardened than the ones who had been in council schools. When you reflect on that, it's easy to understand why.

J.B.: How about the students who remain in the private schools? I mean those students who remain in the public schools, and remain in daily contact with blacks.

Simmons: Well, some, I think accept it and I think some resent it.

J.B.: You mentioned earlier you thought students were becoming more like the North because of isolation from and lack of contact with blacks. That's why I asked the question.

Simmons: I mean lack of contact in the way that we used to know that term. There's not the friendliness or the courtesy or code of behavior that used to exist between black and white. We see in children, whose parents bring them in here to enroll them in our schools--some of them are almost in a psychotic state. Who have been robbed, blackmailed periodically, had their lunch money stolen, physically intimidated. That sort of exposure, regardless of how much physical presence you have, leads, I think, to a psychological withdrawal.

J.B.: How do you recruit your faculties?

Simmons: We select from those who apply. We have a great many more applicants than we have positions. They are primarily people who have taught in public schools, although we have a fair sprinkling of new teachers who come to the private schools for their first teaching experience. But naturally the majority of faculty are experienced, middle aged teachers, who've been in public schools practically all their careers. Interestingly enough, the teachers leave ahead of the students when massive integration occurs in the public schools.

J.B.: Are your salaries equivalent to those in the public schools?

Simmons: No. Less.

J.B.: How about retirement?

Simmons: A couple of years ago we instituted a retirement program, or tried to. Got it all worked up along with a group insurance

program. Our teachers, by and large, were not too enthusiastic about it. They wanted the group insurance, most of them, but they didn't want the retirement. They wanted their salary increased. We frankly were a little surprised at this reaction. But when we delved into it we began to understand it a little more fully. Classroom teachers, by and large, are not heads of families and they're not as much interested in retirement as a family head. Most of the teachers nowadays--typical teachers are youngish, married woman whose job is a second family job. It's not the primary source of family income. So her husband would be the one more interested in retirement than she. For that reason we didn't pursue it. But we were prepared to institute one if there had been sufficient interest.

J.B.: We've been told by some people that ten years ago the Citizens Council exerted far more political influence in Mississippi than it does today. Would you agree with that?

Simmons: Possibly.

J.B.: What is the level of political influence of the council?

Simmons: I frankly don't know. We have not been too active. We opposed some legislation and we have consistently. One's a compulsory school attendance law. We've opposed that.

J.B.: Why?

Simmons: Two reasons. Among others. One is that we're against it as a violation of individual right. We think it's undue interference with the rights of individuals. Another is that--a little more technical reason--we think it poses a certain legal threat to the existence of private schools in that it tends to bring state action into the theory

of education. think private schools are safer from federal management, let's say, than if there were compulsory school attendance laws. For example, there's a law suit in Florida filed in, I believe it was Tampa. [Interruption.] In this law suit that I mentioned, the existence of a compulsory school attendance law in Florida was cited as one of the grounds for bringing suit. In fact the law provided that attendance at a licensed, regulated private school was compliance with the law, and this gives a little thread to hang on. It may be thin, but we'd rather avoid such threads if possible. That's our primary reason. Although actually, if one would take a short sighted, more self-centered look, the enactment and enforcement of a compulsory school attendance law would help the private schools. . . . the public schools hoards of unmanagable blacks who would run more whites out, is what would happen.

J.B.: In view of the fact that the other 49 states I think have compulsory attendance laws, what do you think is the individual right that would be infringed?

Simmons: I think it's involuntary servitude. Incidentally, there has been a consistant view growing in educational circles that it's a failure. Compulsory attendance laws, by and large, are not strictly enforced. Although occasionally you hear of parents being put in jail. You know, there was a case of the Amish in Pennsylvania. Wanted to educate their own children. Some parents were put in jail.

W.D.V.: You say the goal of the council is racial integrity. When you translate that into practical terms, it means that the school system is all white, right?

Simmons: As far as we're concerned, yes.

W.D.V.: Why? What is the theory behind racial integrity?

Simmons: There are a couple of aspects of it. One is, and I think the most important, I think each racial group or religious group has a right to exercise its own preference. If it wants to associate with its own kind, I think that's sufficient reason enough. And that concept, incidentally, is very deeply ingrained in the whole formation of our country. Pragmatically, there are very sound educational reasons for this. Jackson, this city, and Washington, D.C., another example, had two of the best separate school systems in the nation, judged by educational results, prior to integration. Now they've got two of the worst. The black school system here. The achievement level of the blacks here was almost two years above the national norm for blacks. There was extensive testing done. The thought was that something was wrong with the tests. But closer investigation proved that the black principals and teachers had adopted educational methods that were suited to their students and they were getting excellent results. Their achievement level has dropped and so has the whites since integration. They perform differently, they learn differently, they relate to their teachers differently if they are of different race. To me, integration's been such a crashing failure and the other was so successful that there hardly seems room really for much argument about it, which works better.

W.D.V.: That suggests there ought to be a governmental policy then to maintain the separation of the two?

Simmons: Well, I don't think it's necessary to do that. I think that the force of nature would bring it about if the element of govern-

mental cohercion were left out of it. I am absolutely convinced--I become more convinced every day--that if the gerrymandering of school districts and the busing of children were abandoned, that you would see a natural resegregation of schools in this country. I know it would happen here.

W.D.V.: But that's based on social class, isn't it, not a function of

Simmons: I think it's based on preference. Whatever other description you give it, it would be preference.

W.D.V.: Don't you generally find that as you move up the socioeconomic class, that the behavior problems are less, that motivation is higher for learning and so on. That if you were to raise economic levels and so on--

Simmons: I don't know, Mr. de Vries. There seems to be a point at which deterioration sets in, because most of the drunk problems in the schools here are upper class, not lower class.

J.B.: If the end of busing and gerrymandering were to happen and a resegregation of the schools at least so that there would be basically segregated. You're not talking about total segregation.

Simmons: No, I'm not talking about legal segregation. But I think that there would be substantial.

J.B.: If that were to happen, would that result in the collapse of the private school movement?

Simmons: I don't know if it would result in the collapse. I think it would tend to eliminate the need for it. I think it would lessen the demand. I don't think there's any question.

W.D.V.: But the resegregation would be based on housing patterns, right? If you went back to the neighborhood, which is essentially an economic matter, an economic variable.

Simmons: That would certainly be a great influence.

W.D.V.: That's the way I was trying to tie economics to behavior and discipline and motivation. I think there's some kind of relationship there.

Simmons: I think that it's a definite relationship. But there again, it's a matter of choice. I think people choose to live where they like to live.

J.B.: Do the private schools operate a bus system for transportation?

Simmons: Some do. In the council schools, we have several buses that we use primarily for shuttle purposes. We use them for athletic trips. A certain amount of bus transportation is used by students in getting to school. We ourselves don't operate those, but a couple of private operators do.

J.B.: Do you have a fair number of students who actually travel farther to get to the private schools than they would if they went to the public schools?

Simmons: I'm quite sure of that.

J.B.: When opposition arises to busing, in your opinion is it a question of the distance traveled or a question of the destination of the bus?

Simmons: I think it's the destination of the bus. Busing has become one of these code words, like law and order. We don't necessarily confine ourselves to the use of code words. We like to think we're a

little more candid than that.

[End of side of tape.]

W.D.V.: Look at the basic differences between your system and the public school system. Obviously the first one is that they're segregated. One's all white and one is not. If you look at it in terms of curriculum, what are the differences qualitatively in the two systems? Is the only basic difference the fact of who is there?

Simmons: The curriculum is not greatly different.

W.D.V.: Is your view of the races as taught in the schools different or isn't there any conscious effort to teach--

Simmons: There's no conscious effort to teach it.

W.D.V.: And there's no religious difference in that sense?

Simmons: Yes, there's some religious differences because. . . . Mind you, what I'm telling you I'm speaking primarily of the council schools. Ours are nonsectarian. There are a great many other private schools, however, that are comparable, that are sectarian and have been established by churches. And naturally there is some difference on that account. But it is a general practice in the council schools for us to have nonsectarian religious as well as patriotic observances daily. In the Baptist schools or Presbyterian schools I'm sure they are much more sectarian than ours would be in that they present a particular religious point of view. In the public schools, of course, there's none.

J.B.: Are they sectarian in a denominational sense and yours only nonsectarian in that they are nondenominational?

Simmons: Yes.

J.B.: But you hold religious observances in the schools and exercises are basically Christian. Is that correct?

Simmons: Yes, basically. I don't know what other there are.

W.D.V.: Basically protestant.

Simmons: Oh, we have Catholics as well. We have Catholic children. And Jewish children.

W.D.V.: How do your students score on ACT and so on compared to the integrated public school? Is there a measurable level of--

Simmons: There's a great deal of difference. We introduced quite a bit of testimony to that effect in this law suit that I mentioned a moment ago. We gathered the ACT scores for a majority of the private schools in Mississippi who were members of the Mississippi Private School Association. And their average, as I recall, was close to 20, which is pretty good for high school seniors. The average in the public schools, as I recall, was about 15.

J.B.: You think that's a reflection primarily of the quality of the education? Do you think that's primarily a result of the fact that private schools tend to get students from more affluent families?

Simmons: I don't know they're generally more affluent. I think what we have and other schools have is a cross section. In some of the private schools they have all the white students. For example, place like Indianola. I don't think there are any in public school, any whites. Probably half a dozen counties where the enrollment is total. There may be a selective factor in that respect, in our case, although one of our teachers, doing some work on her master's degree, did some study by economic class in one of our schools. And she found some correlation between achievement tests and occupation of father. Like I think there is probably nationally.

W.D.V.: Expect, as you say, when you push that to the end, then you may find out that the achievement goes right down along with the behavior problem.

Simmons: Yeah. We think, though, that there are other factors that contribute to it. One is, we have almost a total absence of disciplinary problems and no class room tension. The burdens on our teachers are much less. They don't have to attend sensitivity sessions, for one thing. You know, where you gaze into someone's eyes and become soul brothers or something. Whatever they do. All they have to do is teach. We have a lot more freedom for innovative things. For example, we're in a process now of planning a seminar now with Samuel Blumenfield. That's his book over there. He's from Boston. On specially effective methods of teaching children how to read. Which is one of the big problems in school. Remember, why Johnny can't read several years back. So we have the freedom to try to use innovative methods that will improve instruction. And all we have to do is decide. And if we're satisfied that it's good, then go ahead and use it.

W.D.V.: It seems to me that the council has gone almost 180 degrees since the early 'sixties. At that time they were fighting to maintain the legal segregation, using the government to do so. Now it seems to me that you're at the other end of the thing saying keep the government out of all this and people will naturally select certain options and there will be a certain selectivity at work and, you know, the whites will go here and the blacks will go there. Wasn't that kind of a schizophrenic experience to go through? Arguing on one hand really

massive governmental interference and control and on the other hand, come all the way around saying--

Simmons: We're talking about different types of government.

W.D.V.: Yeah, but it's still government. Whether it's federal government or state government.

Simmons: The influence of the civil rights revolution became much greater in the federal government. And the role of state government was consequently enormously reduced.

W.D.V.: Which has been the case, though, in every area of life.

Simmons: And that has had an effect. So that it has become, as far as we're concerned, more a battle for survival. In this case, for example, we're arguing for the rights of our schools to exist. I mean that's how far it's come. We've gone through a lot of traumatic experiences.

W.D.V.: Yeah, but it is a real reversal on the way you see the role of government.

Simmons: It has been a reversal in that sense, and it's been caused by the exigencies of circumstance.

J.B.: Does your rule on racial acceptance of students apply to Oriental students?

Simmons: No.

J.B.: They are accepted or not accepted?

Simmons: Well, we don't have a policy on it. We have had some Oriental students. Not many, naturally.

W.D.V.: But no black, whatever his coloration, could get in.

Simmons: No black. That's been our policy.

J.B.: Why is that policy adopted, basically?

Simmons: That was the name of the game. First of all, we felt we had a right to have a school for white children.

J.B.: But you accept Oriental children who are not white.

Simmons: Well, their educational characteristics are primarily those of whites. I mean, you know, there's no problem. Whereas the educational characteristics of blacks are quite different.

J.B.: Do you think there's a genetic difference?

Simmons: Yes, I certainly do.

J.B.: Your opinion is that there is a genetic inferiority involved in so far as blacks are concerned.

Simmons: I think there's a genetic difference.

W.D.V.: It's not a class difference, it's genetic.

Simmons: I think it's genetic, yes.

W.D.V.: In other words, if you had an upper income black family educated, would you get a different kind of result in terms of the student who came out of that family?

Simmons: Well, I think you'd get a different result in that family from a poor black family and I think it would be different from a white family.

W.D.V.: But would one or two black students pose that much of a threat?

Simmons: Well, its a question of the principle of the thing and the right that I think is important. No one or two blacks would, but

that sounds like the replay of the type of rationalization we used to hear in the old days. You know, what difference would one or two black children make in this school across the street? The answer is none. What does make a difference is who controls it. Now control has shifted, from the local school board to the federal government. The federal government controls this school now. The local school board doesn't. And the enrollment is what? Eighty percent black. That's what I'm talking about to you. If we don't have the right to say who goes to our schools--and it revolves around this point--then the nature of this country, I think, has changed probably irrevocably. And that's very much at issue right here in this law suit, this law suit.

W.D.V.: If you have that right, then don't you have some other rights, too? Like the text books and any kind of governmental programs that are designed to improve the

Simmons: No, because that involves state action.

W.D.V.: Yeah, but if it's governmental policy to improve/approve the quality of say a science program because the students in this country are not getting the kind of training they need, then doesn't it apply to all students? And aren't your students being denied those fundamental rights?

Simmons: I'm not aware of any except the free lunch program that would apply to students below the college level.

W.D.V.: Well, I'm thinking of the principle, at the college level, extending it down. Because I used to argue this--

[Interruption on tape.]

Simmons: --proved that the government is interested in one thing and one thing alone and that's integration. It is not interested in education. It is not interested in the quality of education. It is not interested in the welfare of children. Hell, it's not even interested in national defense. It's not interested in the safety of the public. It's interested in integration. At least that's the way it is now.

W.D.V.: Then the conclusion is, you cannot accept any governmental benefits whether it related to school busing or

Simmons: Right. We do not accept any. We want to be free. Freedom now.

J.B.: We've been told that sometime back you had a press conference and that some of the tv stations sent black newsmen over and that you declined to have the press conference with them here. Is that correct? Why was that?

Simmons: That's correct. A couple of reasons. One is what they symbolize. The blacks in the tv stations here are there because of the federal government has forced them there, because the stations are terrified that they will lose their licenses if they don't give preferential treatment to blacks. Therefore they get these blacks on who don't even know how to read or pronounce the English language correctly. That's one thing that I resent, is that they, what they symbolize, what their presence symbolizes to me. Is an inexcusable exercise of tyranny on the part of the federal government. The other is that our position is very strong on the question of race. We don't feel and

we've never felt, in the South, that it's really in very good taste to discuss racial differences with somebody of another race. So we don't do it.

J.B.: So you either don't have press conferences anymore or don't invite television?

Simmons: Correct.

J.B.: You mentioned the patriotic programs in your schools. What does this consist of? Do students recite the pledge of allegiance every day and stuff like this?

Simmons: Yeah, that's right.

J.B.: When you go through the pledge of allegiance and you get to the section dealing with liberty and justice for all, what does that mean to you? Some people would find a contradiction there between your policies of racial exclusion and that provision, that phrase.

Simmons: I'm afraid I'd be at a total loss to understand why they'd think there was a contradiction.

J.B.: What does the phrase mean to you? I should have let you answer that.

Simmons: I think it's a very idealistic expression of what this country was supposed to mean. When was the pledge of allegiance adopted? Do you remember? Nor do I. But I am quite certain that it was long ago and existed for years during the time when separation of the races socially was the accepted way of life in this country North and South. I'm sure not many people thought of a great contradiction there. What do we do that is so unjust? We feel we're the ones who are treated

unjustly.

W.D.V.: Do you see the council's role in the future essentially one in private education or do you see yourself becoming more politically active, or what?

Simmons: Well, indications now are that our main effort will continue to go into the private education. Because, obviously, when you operate a school with 5,000 children in it, it's a pretty good size business. Rather large operation and it takes a lot of time and effort.

W.D.V.: Do you spend most of your time on the operation of the school?

Simmons: My personal time? Yes. I'm primarily on the business end of it. I'm not an educator, though I hope I'm not a totally uneducated man. But I'm not a professional educator.

W.D.V.: Do you think it's going to get more and more difficult to finance them?

Simmons: We haven't found it so.

J.B.: Your financing. What extent comes from tuition and what extent comes from individual patrons who have more affluence and can afford to donate and believe in the purpose of the school?

Simmons: 100 percent tuition. That's not true with all schools, but we've tried to operate and have operated the council schools on that policy. And we've encouraged others to do the same because we think it's a much more reliable basis than contributions. People give when they're excited. And when they're not excited their pocketbooks become slimmer.

J.B.: When I quoted that phrase from the pledge of allegiance

what I should have said was the phrase one nation indivisible with liberty and justice for all. The seeming contradiction to some people would come in that phrase.

Simmons: Indivisible? Indivisible doesn't mean monolithic, does it? It doesn't mean lack of variety.

J.B.: Well, here you have a racial division, in fact.

Simmons: But we don't have a racial conflict. I really don't see the point of trying to draw a distinction there. You know, if we were really seriously trying to secede, then really we might talk about that. Like the separatist movement in Quebec. But that's not on the agenda at the moment or likely to be. We're not trying to divide the nation.

J.B.: A fair number of people felt, I think, when the private school movement got organized, that it would eventually last a while and then students would start coming back to the public schools, and begin losing financial support because of the cost. Some people have been surprised at the endurance of the private schools. Do you find this true in Mississippi of some people being surprised with the endurance of the private schools?

Simmons: Some have.

J.B.: And how do you account for that?

Simmons: I think there's only one way to account for it, and that is that the private schools fulfill a need that people want. We've found among a good many of our own patrons, when the big expansion took place, that. . . this is temporary. We'll go for a year or two and then when the public schools settle down we'll go back. But that

attitude has changed. There now is an acceptance of the council schools and other private schools as the accepted medium for their children to be educated in.

Mr. Bass, the older I get the more difficult I find it to explain people or predict what they will do.

J.B.: Is there anything else you wanted to add?

Simmons: [A latin phrase.] [Laughter.] Peace be with you. I'm sure glad to see you fellows smile. You all looked so grim and serious.

[End of interview.]