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V O I C E S O F C I V I L R I G H T S :  
T H E O R A L H I S T O R Y

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INTERVIEW OF HERBERT COULTON

conducted by

HERMANZE FAUNTLEROY

March 2, 2007

Petersburg, Virginia

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(Interview of Mr. Coulton  
conducted by Hermanze Fauntleroy.)

BY MR. FAUNTLEROY:

Q Today is March the 2nd, 2007. I am Hermanze Fauntleroy and I will be interviewing Mr. Herbert Coulton today related to the civil rights struggle, the civil rights period primarily as far as the City of Petersburg is concerned, but as we go into this I think you will find that Mr. Coulton was quite involved even outside of Petersburg and worked considerably with Dr. Martin Luther King and the Reverend Wyatt Tee Walker.

Mr. Coulton, would you give us some information in reference to the positions that you held as you worked within the SCLC structure.

A Surely. I first was -- received a call from Wyatt Walker, who had left Petersburg in 1960, he called me in 1962, and said that SCLC was expanding and wanted to know whether or not I would be interested in working with the SCLC. He told me that he had recommended me to Martin Luther King and wanted me to come to Atlanta and be interviewed for a job as field secretary.

So I went to Atlanta and was

1 interviewed by Martin Luther King, Jr. and he hired  
2 me on the spot as a field secretary for SCLC working  
3 in Virginia, North Carolina and Tennessee. From  
4 there I was promoted in 1964 to the Director of  
5 Affiliates, which we had 432 affiliates in 37  
6 states, and my job was to service these affiliates.  
7 However, I had to live and work out of the national  
8 office, which was in Atlanta, Georgia.

9 I then left there in 1967 and came  
10 back to Virginia, and the reason for that is, I had  
11 a young son whom I did not know, and I told Dr. King  
12 that I would have to go back because -- in my  
13 talking with him that weekend, I asked him who I  
14 was. The only thing he could tell me, rather than  
15 his father, I was man, and that was just too much  
16 for me. And I told him I would continue to work  
17 with SCLC, but I would have to do it out of Virginia  
18 since my wife was still stationed in Petersburg.

19 Q Did you at that time move to what we  
20 considered as the Petersburg SCLC office?

21 A Yes. At 244 Halifax Street, came back to  
22 that office. Nobody replaced me when I left going  
23 to Atlanta to accept the job as Director of  
24 Affiliates, so it was easy to come back into that  
25 same seat, into that same office. That's what I

1 did.

2 Q So, obviously, you started with  
3 considerable activity in terms of being a part of  
4 the SCLC structure and working with Martin Luther  
5 King directly. What would you say is your first  
6 recollection of a violation of civil rights as far  
7 as your life is concerned?

8 A I would think 1957, really. I was drafted  
9 into the military, taken my basic training at Fort  
10 Jackson, South Carolina, and when I was finished my  
11 basic I had orders to go to Schofield Barracks in  
12 Hawaii. For some unknown reason I was given the  
13 meal tickets by a sergeant, and our first stop was  
14 Atlanta to eat. Atlanta's airport was nowhere near  
15 what it is today. It was sort of delapidated, but  
16 it did have a restaurant, so we stopped and we were  
17 to eat lunch in Atlanta, going from Atlanta to Forth  
18 Worth, Dallas, Texas to pick up some more troops and  
19 from there to California where we would get on the  
20 ship and go to Hawaii.

21 At that point, when we got to Atlanta  
22 I showed the captain of the restaurant my meal  
23 tickets, and he said, okay, you white fellows come  
24 on with me, and you-all can eat right in the dining  
25 room with everybody else. You colored fellows, wait

1 right here until I can get somebody to help me with  
2 a blackboard, and we'll put a blackboard in the  
3 restaurant and you-all will eat behind the  
4 blackboard.

5                   And I said, no, we're not going to do  
6 that.

7                   And he said, well, that's the law.

8                   I said, well, we're just breaking  
9 that law because we're not going to eat behind a  
10 blackboard.

11                   And he said, well, that's the law. I  
12 don't see how you-all can eat.

13                   I said, well, you tell those white  
14 fellows that you just told to go into the dining  
15 room that if they eat, they will have to pay for it  
16 out of their own money. I was not going to use  
17 these meal tickets to feed anybody if they were  
18 going to discriminate against the black soldiers.

19                   So they came back real angry with me  
20 and said to me, Herb, we just might beat you and  
21 take these tickets.

22                   And I said, you can beat me, but on  
23 the way down I'm tearing these tickets up. You will  
24 not eat in that dining room.

25                   And when I got to Atlanta -- I got to

1 Hawaii, of course. I was called in by the C.O., and  
2 the C.O. said we are prepared to court marshal you.  
3 And he said, you violated orders in not allowing  
4 these soldiers to eat in Atlanta. Do you have  
5 anything to say for yourself?

6 I said, yes, sir. I said, if the  
7 same thing would happen again today, I would do the  
8 same thing.

9 And he told me then to report back to  
10 your outfit, your unit, and we will process the  
11 papers to have you court marshalled.

12 I'm still waiting fifty years later.  
13 Nothing really happened. But I just could not take  
14 the idea that here we're going to be in the military  
15 together, but we couldn't even eat together. Now,  
16 Truman passed Executive Order 1448 in 1948 that the  
17 armed services will be integrated, and here we were  
18 in '57, nine years later, and we still were being  
19 discriminated. And I just took offense to that.  
20 There's no way I could handle that.

21 Q As an individual under those  
22 circumstances, what would you say was the reaction  
23 of all of that upon you?

24 A It was kind of rough in as much as if you  
25 can recall the Rosa Parks situation in Montgomery,

1 Alabama was just two years away. It happened two  
2 years before this incident happened, and we were  
3 reading about it, and many of the people were very  
4 upset about that. And I just said at least I could  
5 play a part into that by not allowing this to happen  
6 to us, so that's the reason why I did that.

7 Q After you returned home and received I  
8 suppose a discharge from the military at that point  
9 in time, about when was it that you had your first  
10 contact with the Southern Christian Leadership  
11 Conference as it relates to becoming a part of that  
12 organization?

13 A Well, you know, prior to that I was --  
14 well, I got out of the military in 1959. I got a  
15 job at Central State in 1959, latter part of 1959.  
16 And when I got this job they had a cafeteria that  
17 was discriminated against. And they built a new  
18 cafeteria and that was segregated. So the whole  
19 situation was just segregation. This was years  
20 after supposedly things had changed.

21 And I was interested in voter  
22 registration and voter education, was doing some  
23 things at Blanford, at the Blanford Chapel. We  
24 would have meetings once a week, and we would get  
25 names of those who were not registered to vote, and

1 then we would have to encourage them that they would  
2 have to pay their poll tax. And so we just started  
3 a whole thing there. It was really -- Wyatt Walker  
4 had heard from a member who lived in Blanford who  
5 was a member of Gillfield Church of what we were  
6 doing, and he said, well, just keep on. We're going  
7 to get something started. Later -- that was before  
8 King had come for him, but he had in mind that we're  
9 going to have to do something.

10 He had approached the NAACP actually  
11 concerning his venture at the Petersburg Public  
12 Library, and they had a waiting plan, and said you  
13 are going to have to wait, and he did not wish to  
14 wait, and told me to continue to do what I was doing  
15 over there. He will get some students and some  
16 other people to go to the library. That's where it  
17 all started, at that Petersburg Public Library.

18 Q So what you were doing, then, if I am  
19 correct, as far as the Blanford area is concerned in  
20 Petersburg really was taking place prior to the time  
21 that the effort was made to integrate the Petersburg  
22 Public Library?

23 A Correct. Yes.

24 Q What type of reaction were you getting  
25 from the citizens in that area as you made an effort

1 to assist them, if you will, in terms of becoming  
2 registered voters and recognizing the problems that  
3 were existing at that time?

4 A Well, some were hesitant primarily because  
5 it was just generally known that when you went  
6 upstairs on the third floor to the registrar's  
7 office, Gilliam I think his name was, was not going  
8 to let you pass that test because you had to derive  
9 from that paragraph answers, ten answers, in order,  
10 what order that he deemed fit, and you more than  
11 likely would fail that test. So we were trying to  
12 get them to understand the test, what you are going  
13 to have to do. Those were the kinds of things we  
14 were about.

15 And we tried later on to do some of  
16 those same kinds of things in different areas, and  
17 let them know that this is not just a Blanford  
18 thing, but this was a situation where we're going to  
19 have to get folks registered to vote to get some  
20 things changed.

21 Q What was your reaction at the time that  
22 Wyatt Tee Walker followed through on his position to  
23 make an effort to integrate the library as it  
24 related to your activities in the City of  
25 Petersburg?

1           A     I was just happy. I'll tell you. I  
2 never forget. I walked over to Zion  
3 Baptist Church that night in reasonably clear  
4 weather and only to discover that when I got  
5 there -- when I came out there, there was 8 or  
6 9 inches of snow on the ground. Didn't make no  
7 difference at all. Just happy to be a part of that.  
8 I don't know that Zion Baptist has ever had that  
9 many people in it since then.

10                     I can remember a lawyer, whom I lost  
11 contact with, Len Holt was there, and Len Holt was  
12 telling us that we got to continue on. Wyatt Walker  
13 remained in jail over night, but he did this for us,  
14 and we've got to take up the banner and continue on  
15 with not just voter registration, not with  
16 demonstration to the library, but we got to go down  
17 to the five and dime stores and other areas of the  
18 city because all of it was segregated.

19           Q     As I recall, I think that was the first  
20 time that Petersburg had seen such a mass meeting as  
21 you are describing here, particularly with the  
22 weather as it was that night.

23           A     Yes.

24           Q     What was your reaction to what took place  
25 in that mass meeting that night and the end result

1 of that?

2 A You know, that mass meeting was very, very  
3 long. It lasted up until up around midnight. It  
4 really didn't make any difference how long it  
5 lasted. It was just interesting. It was just good  
6 to be there.

7 And the next day, I can't remember  
8 when we got 244 Halifax Street, but I know that  
9 Reverend Walker knew Dr. Crowder and was able to get  
10 the upstairs of that building because they had their  
11 doctor's office downstairs really in the old Golden  
12 Horseshoe Building. But we began to get signs ready  
13 because we are going to do a whole onslaught on the  
14 whole city. We were going to go to the library,  
15 back to the library. We were going to go to the  
16 dime stores, the bus stations, everything.

17 So John Long was one of the first  
18 ones, and he and Cecil Clark were painting the signs  
19 that we used to begin our long, drawn-out  
20 demonstrations. They lasted from March until the  
21 summertime came, we continued to do it, and some  
22 doors were opened during that period.

23 Q As a result of that particular activity,  
24 the mass meeting, the activity that took place in  
25 terms of organizing as it relates to picketing and

1 sit-ins and all that went along with that,  
2 what would you say was the reaction  
3 from the community when all of that started?

4 A I think -- well, for the most part they  
5 were with us. I know that some people were sort of  
6 reluctant, but for the most part they were really  
7 with us, and we were having mass meetings at that  
8 time almost every week. We were having mass  
9 meetings, we were arranging money for jail bonds, we  
10 were raising money so that the kids would be able to  
11 have sodas or something once they had gone on the  
12 picket line or were coming off the picket line.  
13 We had students from Peabody High  
14 School at that time and Virginia State students. We  
15 had them both. And we had  
16 a Director of Food Service at  
17 Virginia State who was with us, David Gunther was  
18 with us, very much a part of the movement who would  
19 be responsible for getting many of the students from  
20 Virginia State over to the office where they would be organized  
21 to demonstrate -- starting off there, and then going  
22 downtown to the dime stores, and later on to the bus  
23 stations.

24

25 Q You mentioned the involvement of

1 students, particularly Virginia State College, at  
2 that time, and Peabody High School  
3 students, which I guess indicates that the number of  
4 people involved really was at the student level at  
5 that point in time. What was the involvement of the  
6 adults in the city as you recall?

7 A Not bad, when I consider the persons that  
8 were -- well, as example, Cassie Walker closed her  
9 beauty shop that day and went with Wyatt Walker to  
10 the library and got arrested. And there were others  
11 who were with us.

12 There were some -- I can remember Dr.  
13 William Meyers, the late Dr. William Meyers who  
14 called the office one day and spoke to me and said,  
15 Herb, I just want you to know I'm with you, but I  
16 can't take the non-violence. What I'll do, I will  
17 see that a box of sandwiches will come every day for  
18 those students, and every day he sent a box of  
19 sandwiches so the students rather than having to go  
20 home, right from school they would go on a picket  
21 line and they would be able to eat right there  
22 at the office. So there were contributions that many  
23 of those adults made.  
24 They were with us.

25 Q Who do you recall during that particular

1 period of time would you say were the leaders of the  
2 movement?

3 A I think Reverend Wyatt Walker, of course,  
4 Reverend R. G. Williams, who was the Pastor of Zion  
5 Baptist Church and Reverend Milton Reid, Pastor of First Baptist  
6 Church. We had Hermanze Fauntleroy, his  
7 wife, Germaine Fauntleroy, were very instrumental in  
8 the movement. And we had David Gunther, who was  
9 very much a part of that movement. And of course  
10 there were others, but those were the key people, I  
11 think, who were doing what they could to continue  
12 the movement.

13 Q Do you recall any other of the local  
14 organizations that became involved in the struggle?

15 A Yeah. The night that we were at the -- at  
16 Zion Baptist Church for that mass meeting, an  
17 organization was organized and called themselves the  
18 Petersburg Improvement Association, which later  
19 became an affiliate of SCLC, but they had a very  
20 integral part in the movement at that time. I can't  
21 recall now, I don't know whether R. G. Williams or  
22 David Gunther who was the president of that  
23 organization, and it lasted for quite some time.

24 There is an article in the Life  
25 Magazine of 19 -- September of 1960, and it stated  
then that Petersburg was perhaps the only city in

1 the nation that was using high school students.  
2 Most of the people in the movement were college  
3 students up until that time. We started using high  
4 school students, Peabody, and they were very, very  
5 productive in their coming down each day, even  
6 sometimes we even demonstrated on Sunday. They were  
7 right there.

8                   And we had some preachers who were  
9 with us. I had mentioned Reverend Walker, Reverend  
10 Williams, Reverend Reid from First Baptist Church,  
11 and there were probably some others that were -- but  
12 those were the three ones that were really  
13 interested in what we were doing.

14           Q     Thinking about churches, and if we look at  
15 what is happening today, there doesn't appear to be  
16 the involvement of churches, if you will, as may  
17 have existed in some of those years that you  
18 described. What do you recall in terms of the  
19 involvement of particularly the black churches in  
20 Petersburg during the height of the struggle, if you  
21 will?

22           A     Unfortunately, we just didn't have what we  
23 thought we should have had in terms of productivity  
24 from many of the black churches. The ones primarily  
25 that we really had were First Baptist, Zion,

1 Gillfield, and sometimes Tabernacle and sometimes  
2 Mt. Olivet. That was really about it. I might have  
3 left out a church or two, but for the most part  
4 these were the ones that we could call on for -- to  
5 see whether or not if we wanted a mass meeting, we  
6 could have it at that church. Those were the  
7 churches that would send students. Those were the  
8 churches that would raise monies for the movement.  
9 I hope I haven't left out many, but that's for the  
10 most part was the churches that had total  
11 involvement.

12 Q Obviously, there were businesses, of  
13 course, that -- where the picketing and the sit-ins  
14 took place. Do you recall basically by name any of  
15 the businesses, white-owned, operated businesses  
16 within the City of Petersburg at that point that  
17 really were segregated and took or made every  
18 effort, if you will, to deny African Americans an  
19 opportunity to either come in or be a part of the  
20 regular clientele?

21 A By all means. You had Spiro's who was  
22 definitely anti what we were about; close the  
23 department store before they would allow a nigger to  
24 come in, they would close their stores. However,  
25 blacks were still buying from Globe, because Globe

1 had a truck that he would -- Mr. Charles Wynn would  
2 carry things and he would tell us who was buying.  
3 They would call up, they had -- they knew -- they  
4 knew their sizes. They would tell me, send me an  
5 overcoat, a suit or whatever, and then later he  
6 would tell us, say, well, so and so was in the store  
7 today. I took him a suit or whatever. We knew  
8 that.

9 Spiro just had such a bad attitude  
10 about the whole thing, that even if you -- if we had  
11 a meeting with them to talk with them, they were  
12 always very, very adamant about -- doesn't matter  
13 about -- but I do remember Spiro's and I remember  
14 Globe Department Store.

15 For those persons who were really --  
16 businesses who were really with us in terms of the  
17 blackness, I have to -- I would be remiss if I left  
18 out William N. Bland. William N. Bland Funeral Home  
19 was the one who bonded everybody out who was  
20 arrested. They didn't initially go to William N.  
21 Bland. They went to another funeral home who  
22 refused to do so, and Bland said, I'll take them  
23 all. So he did take them all.

24 We had help from Bland. We had help  
25 from Williams and Moody Drug Store. We had help

1 from, really, O. P. Hare. O. P. Hare couldn't do --  
2 could do no less because 90 percent of their  
3 business, maybe 95 percent of their business, though  
4 he was white, the businesses were black. So that's  
5 basically what we had working with us.

6 Q At the time that we're talking about at  
7 this point, of course, most of the businesses that  
8 were affected as far as picketing, and sit-ins,  
9 boycotting were concerned were retail type  
10 businesses. What do you recall in reference to  
11 Petersburg General Hospital as it relates to the  
12 situation at that time?

13 A That was a rough act to follow.  
14 Petersburg General, we only had -- I think it was  
15 the second floor where blacks could go. We couldn't  
16 go to any other areas there of Petersburg Hospital.  
17 I remember what happened one night at First Baptist  
18 Church, we were having I think some type of service,  
19 and we had a member of our church who was having a  
20 heart attack.

21 Reverend Reid left the church, had  
22 called the ambulance to go pick this lady up at  
23 church, and call her doctor, who was black. And  
24 this was a good time to try to get this woman in the  
25 hospital with a heart attack. And we had begged the

1 doctor, please don't send this woman to Richmond,  
2 whereas en route to Richmond she could have died.  
3 But he insisted on sending her to Richmond because  
4 he didn't want to tackle what was facing him at the  
5 hospital. So she, too, had to go to the -- but  
6 then, too, when we would interview and go into the  
7 hospital and look around, they would always -- for  
8 some reason the federal government would always let  
9 them know when we were coming so when we came  
10 everything looked bright, they had changed the  
11 draperies, and had nice sheets and all. And workers  
12 told us when we left, they took all that down and  
13 business was as usual.

14                   So we also did a -- we performed some  
15 civil disobedience there, not as much as we should  
16 have, whereby we would get down and block the  
17 entrances of the hospital. That was a tough act.  
18 They weren't about -- I think the administrator at  
19 that time was Bowkinski I think his name was, and he  
20 was very adamant and wanted to keep the status quo.

21                   We also had another one which was  
22 just as bad with the Holiday Inn. They would not  
23 allow blacks to go in to eat in there or to get  
24 rooms in there. It was a time that there were those  
25 from Virginia State, and I hate to mention this, but

1 there were those at Virginia State who felt that  
2 they could go in there, they were sort of a little  
3 above us, and later they were dismissed. But they  
4 had gone in and were eating. But that was stopped  
5 until later that they begin to open up because with  
6 the pickets that we did there, the home office of  
7 Holiday Inn was -- pressure was put on them from  
8 other areas, and we were not the only ones who  
9 wanted to go in. So as a result, they had an order  
10 to integrate, so they integrated the whole system of  
11 Holiday Inns, and that was it. But that was not  
12 without a fight.

13 Q Within the City of Petersburg, and I'm  
14 well aware of the fact that you are a native  
15 Petersburger, if you will, what's your opinion of  
16 what the status, and the atmosphere and the  
17 environment of our police department was at that  
18 time?

19 A That was very tough, because we had no  
20 blacks on the police force. We didn't even know  
21 when young men -- I don't think young women tried  
22 at the time, but young men went down to apply, we  
23 didn't know whether or not they passed the test or  
24 not because the administrator -- and  
25 administration was all white, and I guess they would

1 allow those who wanted to apply to apply, but they  
2 were -- or probably informed that we did not pass.

3 I did not have, and I think most of  
4 the people who were leaders did not feel that we had  
5 a very good police department. I remember so well  
6 when the -- when the young lady, I think her name  
7 was Walton, was found in that well. But prior to  
8 her being found, the -- instead of looking for them  
9 themselves, the police, the James Day Street Club,  
10 which was a club, men's club of First Baptist  
11 Church, we had the very first search, and I can  
12 remember the police department calling my house and  
13 saying, when are you all going to have a search?  
14 And if so, can we tag along with you? And this is  
15 something for a police department to say when a  
16 child has been missing that they didn't initiate the  
17 first search, we did, and they wanted to go along  
18 with us. But the police force was not one of those  
19 organizations that we cherished.

20 Q Based on conversation that we are having  
21 here at this point in time, what is your opinion in  
22 reference to the status, if you will, and  
23 conditions, and environment within the City of  
24 Petersburg as it was compared, if you will, to what  
25 was transpiring during the period that we just

1 discussed today? What would you say it is today  
2 versus that period?

3 A There is an old saying that says  
4 everything is changed, hyphen, and nothing has  
5 changed. If we don't watch it, things will go back  
6 to -- revert back to what they was -- what they  
7 were. And I think here that we have to be very  
8 careful that this does not happen. I can remember  
9 when we didn't have very much to be proud of, when  
10 everything was white. George Washington, it was  
11 said, to come back to Petersburg he could recognize  
12 everything here because nothing had changed. Things  
13 have changed now but if we don't watch it, they  
14 might revert back to how they were.

15 We do have some positions that we  
16 have not had before, but I'm not sure that these  
17 positions will be ones that will hold up and stand  
18 the test if certain things happen.

19 Q We have not talked about our school  
20 system, and I'm talking about it from the  
21 perspective of a segregated versus integrated school  
22 system. What do you recall in terms of the  
23 differences as related to schools that -- our school  
24 system in the City of Petersburg during the period  
25 that we described here as it relates to black

1 students being able to benefit from an education  
2 that we would say was on par with what may have been  
3 taking place at schools such as Petersburg High  
4 School?

5 A I've had some real problems with the  
6 school system. I still believe, and if we go back a  
7 little ways I've had some problems really with how  
8 certain positions were being filled. I can remember  
9 we had a -- we had a superintendent for years who  
10 was named the dean of superintendents, John Meade,  
11 was the dean of superintendents. He stayed here for  
12 nearly I guess close to 40 years as superintendent  
13 of schools here.

14 And when he died we had a black man  
15 coming in whom I thought could have made a good  
16 superintendent, however, I remember the words he  
17 said, that he didn't feel worthy to sit where he  
18 sat, and that's almost like talking about Jesus, and  
19 John Meade was a long ways from being a Jesus. But  
20 that's the way he seemed to have felt about him.

21 Also, along with the fact that we've  
22 had some superintendents who seem to be working for  
23 a salary rather than working to help the children,  
24 and this includes the last one that we had. I just  
25 have some problems with that kind of administration

1 and that kind of structure, whereby we didn't seem  
2 to be that concerned about doing some good, positive  
3 things for our children. I've had problems with  
4 that.

5                   I want to go back a little ways and  
6 say something here that you may or may not agree  
7 with, but I can remember years ago when Hermanze  
8 Fauntleroy asked John Meade, who was the  
9 superintendent of schools, would it be all right if  
10 teachers would run for positions in the city such as  
11 city council. And I think at that time John Meade  
12 said yes. One of them ran and won, and I think the  
13 day afterwards was told that the rules have changed,  
14 that you -- it's a conflict of interest. We could  
15 not have a teacher who is on the city council. You  
16 have to make your choice of whether or not you are  
17 going to accept city council job or your teaching  
18 position.

19                   And Fauntleroy, it didn't take him  
20 long to say, if people thought enough of me to elect  
21 me, I'm going to take the councilman's position, and  
22 he did. Of course, he lost his teaching job. Don't  
23 think he ever taught anymore, ever, but the citizens  
24 of Petersburg at least for two or three months was  
25 able to pay his salary whatever he was making as a

1 teacher, because he surely was not going to be  
2 making that much as a councilperson.

3                   And I thought that was a heroic act  
4 that I've always felt had been sort of played down.  
5 Maybe Fauntleroy didn't want to tell that story, or  
6 make mention of that, but I think that's a fact and  
7 I think that's part of history, and that's a part  
8 that needs really to have been told.

9           Q     What else if -- at this point, if anything  
10 you might want to say about Petersburg in terms of  
11 where we are today? And you have already at least  
12 alluded to some of this, but what do we need to do  
13 to really, really cause the city to begin to fully  
14 recognize African Americans in this city as we refer  
15 to first-class citizens?

16           A     I think that so much needs to change. I  
17 think -- I don't know really what's happening in our  
18 churches. I don't know whether or not we're telling  
19 the story. I remember going to the High Street  
20 Methodist Church, and was turned down. It was all  
21 white. I know -- I can't remember everybody who  
22 went with me, but I know David Gunther and I went to  
23 that church. And David Gunther said to the usher,  
24 if Jesus would come here, could he come in?

25                   The usher went up to the pastor and

1 asked the pastor. And the pastor says, oh, let them  
2 come in. I ain't got no answer for that. Let them  
3 come in. So we went in. But just as that happened  
4 I'm certain that there are a lot of things that  
5 could happen even in the black church that is not  
6 happening.

7                               We had black history the whole month  
8 of February in our church. Every Sunday something  
9 was taking place constructively. I don't know how  
10 many other churches were doing that. I'm not saying  
11 that we, First Baptist are the only church that did  
12 that, but I think more of that needs to happen. I  
13 was in a session yesterday with Elva Hollins who has  
14 a tutorial program with a grant that's at First  
15 Baptist. She asked me to talk about black history,  
16 though it was March 1st, but we talked about it. It  
17 is amazing that we got to teach our children some  
18 things, that they got to lift their heads up. They  
19 got to feel good about their blackness. And I think  
20 that's one of the real problems, they don't feel  
21 good about any black -- a black cat was a bad guy.  
22 The black sheep was a bad guy. Everything is black.  
23 A black lie was a bad lie.

24                               I remember there's a song. Years ago  
25 when I was a little boy I heard that song, never did

1 forget it. The moon was all aglow, and heaven was  
2 in your eyes, the night that you told me those  
3 little, white lies. That was a white guy talking to  
4 his girl friend, who was white. She told a white  
5 lie. She didn't tell a black lie because a black  
6 lie is worse than that.

7                   Even in our bakeries we have  
8 problems. An angel cake was white. A devil cake  
9 was black. And our kids got this thing in their  
10 minds about that.

11                   You have never seen a woman walk down  
12 the aisle in a black gown, nor have you ever seen a  
13 baby wrapped in a black blanket. I have never seen  
14 a black blanket in my life. Even when we talk about  
15 Christ, it's a situation where the white artist  
16 depicted Christ as being a blonde hair, white,  
17 blue-eyed man, and that's what you see. Very few  
18 houses got a black Jesus in it.

19                   Santa Claus, big, white, rosy-cheeked  
20 white man. When a black man put on a Santa Claus  
21 suit, it's almost like Halloween. The kids are  
22 afraid of him. So I think we got to turn that  
23 around that kids can see and be proud of their  
24 blackness. I think that's one of the things that  
25 they are really going to have to do. And I think

1 here that we're going to have to come together on  
2 some real items when it comes to our city that we've  
3 got to turn away from what's happening downtown,  
4 what's happening -- I can't think of the name of the  
5 area now -- but Bollingbrook and Old Street).

6 There are some areas up here in Petersburg,  
7 there are some areas that we need to think of in  
8 terms of about the Avenue, and Halifax Street and  
9 the like. And that has not been so.

10 And I think that until we do that,  
11 until we can see where our blackness leads us, and  
12 be proud of that, and the positions that we now hold  
13 in the city will be something more than just a  
14 salary, but actually trying to help some people and  
15 try to make Petersburg what Petersburg really ought  
16 to be.

17 Q Well, Mr. Coulton, if I may at this point,  
18 I'll just say Herbert because I know you rather  
19 well, I think that's a good point and a good place  
20 to end our discussion, if you will. And I think  
21 your statement was such that it had a lot of  
22 meaning. I really appreciate the fact that you have  
23 taken your time to come and share with us today.  
24 You have, of course, been quite involved and know  
25 much about what Petersburg was, and what it is or is

1 not today and I think you have spoken to that. So  
2 again, thanks, for being here, thanks for coming and  
3 thanks for sharing with us.

4 A You are quite welcome.

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