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“20/20”

Segment: “Civil Rights”

Producer: Harry Phillips

INTERVIEW OF
CHARLES MARCUS EDWARDS
WITH
ABC NEWS

Tuesday, August 10, 1999

[TRANSCRIPT PREPARED FROM A TAPE RECORDING]

I N T E R V I E W

ABC NEWS: Let's start with how would you describe race relations back in the 1960s?

MR. EDWARDS: I don't think it was as bad as the media portrayed them, you know. I don't believe that. You'd have to live here to understand what I'm talking about because we worked in these fields, you know, on this river together with the blacks, and all of us were poor. We didn't - - there wasn't any rich people here. My grandfather raised 13 kids in this house here behind us, and you can imagine, you know.

And we had a lot of black friends, you know, in this country. We all worked together. And there wasn't anybody- - I mean, we didn't have anything, you know, but just what we raised and ate and stuff like that. There wasn't - - but segregation was here then, you know, but we lived together and probably closer than anybody else in this country because we worked in the fields together, and fished together, and hunted together and everything else, you know.

ABC NEWS: How did you feel about blacks in those days?

MR. EDWARDS: Well, I had a lot of black friends, still do. You know, I - - but you'd have to understand, you know, that segregation was a way of life here then, and it wasn't a hate thing. I mean, I didn't hate any of them, you know, but we just didn't- - socially we just didn't intermingle with the blacks.

But we worked with them, and it's basically that way now. You know, I mean, besides our kids going to school, you don't - - people here - - not to say that- - or race relationship is a whole better now than it was back then, I think, but basically right now we are still separated, you know, socially in the rural areas, you know where-

ABC NEWS: Still separated socially.

MR. EDWARDS: Socially, you know.

ABC NEWS: The blacks keep to the blacks and the whites keep to the whites.

MR. EDWARDS: And the blacks keep to the blacks. They live, if you came down this road here, you saw the black neighborhood up there. Well, in this area here, there's not any blacks live in this area. They own their own land, their homes and everything else, you know.

ABC NEWS: Tell me, Mr. Edwards, did you know Henry Dee and Charles Moore?

MR. EDWARDS: I knew Henry Dee. I didn't - - I never seen the Moore kid. I didn't know him.

ABC NEWS: Was Henry Dee someone that - - there was some talk, there was some talk back then that people were kind of concerned about blacks looking in on them.

MR. EDWARDS: I don't know anything about that. I had a lot of friends that lived in that neighborhood where I lived down there then. As far as I know, the only time that I ever seen Henry Dee was he walked

that road probably in front of my house there. Maybe once or twice I carried him to town, you know.

ABC NEWS: You gave him a ride?

MR. EDWARDS: Yeah, I gave him a ride. But personally, you know I didn't really know him that well, you know.

ABC NEWS: Was he just a kid in the neighborhood?

MR. EDWARDS: Well, I think he was grown, you know. I think he was more than a kid, you know. He was grown probably, and probably working. I don't know. I really don't know that much about his personal life, you know - - just seeing him on the road there.

ABC NEWS: What happened on the morning that you were arrested in connection with the murders of Henry Dee and Charles Moore?

MR. EDWARDS: Well, it was - - I don't know. I can't even remember the year or anything now. But my wife and five kids - - I had five kids then, and we were all at home. I was just fixing to get up and go squirrel hunting that morning when they knocked on the door. And they came in and had a warrant for my arrest, and I didn't - -

ABC NEWS: A warrant for your arrest?

MR. EDWARDS: Yeah. They didn't - - they didn't give me time to put my shoes or anything on. My wife put my shoes on. And I did look like a hoodlum that morning because I hadn't shaved or anything, you know. But they carted me off to Jackson and kept me up there all day, you know. And the next day they let us go.

ABC NEWS: When you got to - - were you at the Sheriff's Department or the Police Department? Where were you?

MR. EDWARDS: They took us to Jackson. I don't know, I don't know what you'd call the building they took us to.

ABC NEWS: Were you fingerprinted and handcuffed?

MR. EDWARDS: Oh, I was handcuffed that morning. I told them there wasn't any need in that because I wasn't going to go anywhere or try to get away or anything like that. I didn't have anything to hide from them. But they - -

ABC NEWS: Do you know why you were arrested?

MR. EDWARDS: Well, they had a - - they told me that - -

ABC NEWS: We just lost a light.

[Technical interruption.]

ABC NEWS: Mr. Edwards, do you know why you were arrested?

MR. EDWARDS: Yeah. They had a warrant. It was on the warrant that I was accused of murder, you know.

ABC NEWS: Accused of murder.

MR. EDWARDS: Yeah. I was accused of murder, yeah.

ABC NEWS: Murdering whom?

MR. EDWARDS: The Dee kid and the Moore kid, I guess.

ABC NEWS: Henry Dee and Charles Moore.

MR. EDWARDS: Moore, yeah.

ABC NEWS: Do you remember talking to investigators for two hours?

MR. EDWARDS: Well, I talked to them longer than that in Jackson that day. I'm - - well, I didn't talk. They did the talking. I listened. I didn't say a word to them. I didn't have anything to say to them. They done all of the accusing and everything, and I listened. A lot of the things that they said and put out was false accusations, too.

I didn't say a word to those people about anything that I didn't know anything about, you know. I didn't have anything to hide from them, but I - - they wanted me to testify against my neighbor and offered me a witness protection program and all of that. But I didn't know anything to tell them. I couldn't tell them anything.

And finally they told me, they said, "Well, if you don't cooperate with us, then we'll have a bunch of people kill you."

And I said, "Well, so be it, if that's the way it is. But I couldn't tell you anything because I don't know anything."

ABC NEWS: Did you pick up Henry Dee and Charles Moore and take them to the forest?

MR. EDWARDS: No, I did not, did not. I don't know anything about that. In fact, I'm telling you that I didn't even know Charles Moore. I had never seen that kid in my life to know him, you know. If I did, if I had ever seen him before, I didn't recognize him. I didn't know him, you know.

ABC NEWS: Well, the investigators said that you told them you picked up Charles Moore and - -

MR. EDWARDS: That was part - -

ABC NEWS: - - Henry Dee.

MR. EDWARDS: That was part of the plot to get the other people on my case, too. And that's exactly what they told me in Jackson that they would do, that they'd put out a false accusation. And they would have them tend to me. That's exactly what they told me in Jackson.

ABC NEWS: Well, the - -

MR. EDWARDS: And I'll tell you now, me and my family we suffered a lot of hardships over this. And I hope this, this is the last interview that I'll ever do on this. I'll promise you that. Because we went, and I'm hoping, I hope to God that it won't stir this up again, and I'll start getting these threatening calls again. Because I've had hundreds of threats on my life telling me that I wouldn't live to daylight in the morning and things like that. But, you know, I took that with a grain of salt. But it was really hard on my wife and kids, my first wife. But I just, you know, things like that, you know, is really hard on your family.

ABC NEWS: Now, the investigators - - well, why don't we go through just what the investigators said. The investigators said that you told them that you and a couple of other guys picked up Henry Dee and Charles Moore - -

MR. EDWARDS: They told you a lie.

ABC NEWS: - - and took them to the forest.

MR. EDWARDS: They told you a lie, too, cuz I hadn't said that.

ABC NEWS: No, this is what, this is what the record shows.

MR. EDWARDS: That's what the record shows, but there's no signed statement on that, is there.

ABC NEWS: Well - -

MR. EDWARDS: I didn't sign anything, and I didn't say that either. I'm telling you what the truth is.

ABC NEWS: Did you - - you did not pick up Henry Dee and Charles Moore - -

MR. EDWARDS: I did not pick up - -

ABC NEWS: - - and take them to the forest.

MR. EDWARDS: I did not pick up Henry Dee and Charles Moore. In fact, I've never seen Charles Moore in my life.

ABC NEWS: The investigators - - I'll just carry on with their, you know, their version.

MR. EDWARDS: Okay.

ABC NEWS: The investigator said that you - - the investigator said that you said that you beat them up, but you left them still alive.

MR. EDWARDS: That's what they said. That's what they said. But I didn't say that, thought. I'm telling you. And I didn't say two words. The only thing that I asked them people, the only thing that I said to those people from the time I left my home and went to Jackson and

back that day, the only thing I that I said to that investigator, he asked me was I a veteran, and I told him, yeah, I was a Korean War veteran, and I was proud of it.

And he called me a happy-go-lucky SOB, and that clamped my mouth up. I didn't say another word to those people. And anything that they brought up or anything that they've said or accusations that they've made that I said about other people and what I done and things, that's a bald-faced lie. I had said anything.

And it burns me to the gill when people like this Mitchell guy that's on the Clarion Ledger up there can print that stuff and put it in the paper, too, without knowing what he's talking about. They never contacted me about that to see what I had to say about it.

ABC NEWS: Well, that's why we wanted to contact you, and we appreciate your sitting down with us and you're telling us what the truth is.

MR. EDWARDS: Yeah.

ABC NEWS: Because at this time, in 1999, it's time to tell the truth.

MR. EDWARDS: It's time to tell the truth.

ABC NEWS: And what is the truth?

MR. EDWARDS: The truth is that I've never murdered nobody. I did, I reckon, help kill a lot of people over in Korea, but I've never murdered anybody here in Mississippi.

ABC NEWS: When you were a soldier in Korea?

MR. EDWARDS: Yeah, I did. Sure, I did.

ABC NEWS: Did you, as the story goes, you and a couple of other guys, including James Seals, beat these two men up, Henry Dee and Charles Moore, and dismembered their bodies and threw them in the Mississippi River, weighted them down with Ernest Parker's engine of a Willys Jeep.

MR. EDWARDS: I don't know. I couldn't tell you what Ernest Parker and James Seals did. I don't know what they did. But I can tell you that I had never been on that Mississippi River in my life, not in that area.

ABC NEWS: Never?

MR. EDWARDS: Never. Never the first time in my life have I been up there.

ABC NEWS: What were you doing on the day and the night that the investigators said this occurred?

MR. EDWARDS: I couldn't tell you.

ABC NEWS: Were you able to tell the investigators what you were doing?

MR. EDWARDS: I wasn't able - - no, I wasn't able to tell them because I've worked at that mill out there 40-some. I could have been at work that day. I don't know because I work shift work, you know. I could have been at work on the day that this took place. But I - - that's

been years, and I can't remember back that far. It's something I wasn't involved in.

ABC NEWS: Were you with James Seals, and were you around Ernest Parker or anywhere near them - -

MR. EDWARDS: Hardly - -

ABC NEWS: - - that day and night?

MR. EDWARDS: I hardly knew Ernest Parker. I wouldn't have knew Ernest Parker if he had drove up in this driveway here. Now, James Seals was raised in this neighborhood. Yeah, I knew him. But I wasn't with him that - - any of the, I don't guess. I don't know what day that was supposed to have been anyway. But I had never been with James Seals and Ernest Parker together, no.

ABC NEWS: Did you know the Seals brothers?

MR. EDWARDS: Sure, I know them. We were all raised here in this neighborhood together. I knew James, Don and Gene, all of - - knew their father.

ABC NEWS: You know, did you hear about - - did you hear about those bodies being discovered?

MR. EDWARDS: Sure, I heard about it when they picked me up and took me to Jackson because they had photos of a lot of it, you know. They showed it to me. But other than that, I didn't hear anything about it, you know.

ABC NEWS: How did the people around here feel about the fact that these two men were found, their bodies dismembered and floating in the river or were pulled out of the river?

MR. EDWARDS: I really don't - - [cleared throat] - - excuse me. I really don't think that, you know, that they really appreciated it, those people here, you know.

ABC NEWS: What's - -

MR. EDWARDS: Race relationships has always been pretty good in this county here. They hadn't been that bad, you know.

ABC NEWS: Well, you know, that's not the way other people describe it. Other people say there was a lot of tension between the blacks and the whites and that there were Klan members who would be giving the blacks a lot of trouble and then some civil rights workers were right out there sort of verbally fighting back.

MR. EDWARDS: I think that's a picture that the media painted of the situation here in our county, you know, at the time. But I don't, I don't see it that way, never did see it that way.

I had a lot of black friends, you know, and still have.

ABC NEWS: Well tell me, at the time, in the 1960s, did you think that black kids should be able to go to school with white kids?

MR. EDWARDS: Well, as a way of life, you know, and the way that I've been raised in my life, no, I did not. I was for segregation. And it would be just like me telling you, you know, if I went to New York or

somewhere tomorrow, and they passed a law that they was going to segregate up there, you all would be all over that in a second, you know, because that's not a way of life up there. But that was a way of life and had been here since the Civil war. My great granddaddy got killed in the Civil war at Shiloh. We believed in segregation, segregation of the races, sure, cuz that's the way we had been taught, you know.

And I really, you know, me going to the Army, and being with them, and being in the Army with them, and serving with them and had some of the best friends, you know, were black soldiers were some of my best friends, and I saw some of those boys died that I realized there had to be a change made, you know. I knew there would have to be a change made. Because you can't ask a person to lay down his life for something and then, and then mistreat him, you know. That's - -

ABC NEWS: You mean deny him rights - -

MR. EDWARDS: Deny him the privileges - -

ABC NEWS: - - here in this country.

MR. EDWARDS: Deny him the privileges that everybody else has got.

ABC NEWS: Mr. Edwards, what did you think of the KKK back then?

MR. EDWARDS: Well, I really don't know about the KKK back then because I didn't belong.

ABC NEWS: You didn't belong to the Klan?

MR. EDWARDS: I didn't belong to the Klan, no.

ABC NEWS: Did you sympathize with the Klan?

MR. EDWARDS: Well, in some cases I might would have. It wasn't only, you know, I don't think of what the stories went, it wasn't only the blacks that they were after, but it was a lot of the white people that mistreated their wives and things like that they tried to straighten up, too. But I didn't go along with them, as far as bombing or anything like that, a black person's house. I believe –

(Technical interruption)

ABC NEWS: Mr. Edwards, did you ever join the Klan?

MR. EDWARDS: No, I didn't. I've never been in the Klan.

ABC NEWS: When you appeared before the House Un-American Activities Committee, do you remember that?

MR. EDWARDS: I remember that, yeah.

ABC NEWS: The committee hearings said – the committee said that it established that you were a member of the Klan.

MR. EDWARDS: How'd they establish that? I don't know either. I know one thing. They put my picture on the front page of The Washington Post, and it went all of the way to London, England, and places like that. And that's what I went though really all through this whole thing, and how I was so important or why they did that to me I don't know. I won't ever know. But I wasn't, I wasn't part of the Klan,

and I surely didn't take any part in any murders that took place in this part, you know.

ABC NEWS: I'll ask you point blank then once again. Did you murder Henry Dee and Charles Moore?

MR. EDWARDS: I did not. I did not murder those two kids.

ABC NEWS: Did you witness anyone else murdering Charles Moore and Henry Dee?

MR. EDWARDS: I did not.

ABC NEWS: Did you have any knowledge about the murders of Henry Dee and Charles Moore?

MR. EDWARDS: The only knowledge that I had was when they picked me up with a warrant, you know, and accused me of the crime. That's the only, the only knowledge that I had of it, you know.

ABC NEWS: Did you have any friends who talked about killing Henry Dee and Charles Moore?

MR. EDWARDS: Not to my knowledge, no.

ABC NEWS: When you went before the House Un-American Activities Committee, you didn't answer any of the questions.

MR. EDWARDS: I sure didn't.

ABC NEWS: Why Not?

MR. EDWARDS: Because I didn't want to. [Chuckling.] I didn't figure it was any of their business where I'd been or what I'd done because I didn't have anything to hide from them.

ABC NEWS: Well, then, why didn't you answer their questions?

MR. EDWARDS: I didn't answer their questions.

ABC NEWS: If you didn't have anything to hide –

MR. EDWARDS: I didn't have anything to hide from them.

ABC NEWS: Then why not?

MR. EDWARDS: Because I just didn't want to answer them. I was – well, the lawyers advised us not to, you know. That's one reason.

ABC NEWS: You took the Fifth.

MR. EDWARDS: I took the Fifth, yeah.

ABC NEWS: Tell me, Mr. Edwards ---

[Technical interruption]

ABC NEWS: Mr. Edwards, back in the 1960s, do you think you would have called yourself a racist?

MR. EDWARDS: Well, I was prejudiced, yeah.

ABC NEWS: You were prejudiced.

MR. EDWARDS: Yeah, Sure, I was.

ABC NEWS: Would you call yourself a racist?

MR. EDWARDS: I don't think I was racist, no, because I have a lot of black friends.

ABC NEWS: But you were prejudiced against –

MR. EDWARDS: Against segregation.

ABC NEWS: You mean against integration.

MR. EDWARDS: Integration, I meant. Against integration. Or you could say I was prejudiced, I didn't want them to segregate, that's true. And you'd have to understand that's a way of life. That's the way we've been taught all our lives.

ABC NEWS: And how about today? Today, how do you feel about integration?

MR. EDWARDS: Well, I don't know whether it's really worked to the advantage of too many people, but it's, in a way it's helped, I guess. I'm not totally against, you know. I believe, you know, what I really believe that every human being that will get out and work, whether he's red, white, blue, yellow, or black or whatever, if he would have worked for a living and work hard, he deserves a home and a free way of life. I believe that. He deserves the best that this country can offer.

But these people that won't work, I haven't got too much for them. Because that's the way I was raised, you know. I worked 42 years at that paper mill to provide for my family.

ABC NEWS: Mr. Edwards, back in the 1960s, do you think a mixed jury could find a white man guilty of killing a black man?

MR. EDWARDS: If they had the evidence, I believe they would have. I believe they would have, yeah.

ABC NEWS: Do you think –

MR. EDWARDS: Now, we'll look at that right now, and we'll see an all black jury, if you had an all black jury, then probably trying ---I

need to just say that if they was going to try me and they had an all black, I wouldn't stand a chance now. And it goes form one extreme to the other, see? And we're talking about people being prejudiced, you know. There's not too many people in this world that's more prejudiced than the blacks are now. I mean, they're really prejudiced.

And what's really happened, I think, and I believe in our inner cities, you know, where we have all of this trouble, like in Jackson up there, that probably President Lyndon Johnson probably created this monster that we have now with the Great Society, you know, telling these people, "I'll take away from the haves and give it to the have not's," and it created a bunch of people that didn't want to work. And now we are reaping the benefits of that by crime, and murder, and everything else. There are more homicides in Jackson in two months than there's ever been in this county in 40 years.

ABC NEWS: Tell me, what has your life been like these last 35 years?

MR. EDWARDS: It's been good. I've raised --- I've had a good job all my life, and I raised five kids, had the American dream. I told you what the American dream was, 40 acres of this bottom land down here and a red tail mule, you know. That's what we call the American dream. But I had the American dream.

I love my country and my state, and I'd be willing to give my life for it, if I had to, you know. But - I've enjoyed, I've enjoyed life. I

have. I raised five kids and really enjoyed that. You know, I enjoyed my family.

ABC NEWS: There may be people out there who still believe that you did murder Henry Dee and Charles Moore.

MR. EDWARDS: They might. They might be, and there's many that believe that I think that you will find that a lot of them that doesn't believe it too.

ABC NEWS: They might be out there believing that you lived a full life, a free man, and shouldn't have.

MR. EDWARDS: Well, I don't know about that. I think I should have. I believe I've paid my price to this country and everything else, you know. And I didn't murder anybody, if that's what you are getting at. And whatever they think, it doesn't make any difference to me. For the last of all, I'm a Christian. My faith is in Jesus Christ, and I can't really be worried of what people – about what people think, you. I like to have a lot of friends, and I spend my time now trying to help people.

And another thing, I'd like to tell you... I came in from work one night, came down this road up here in this black neighborhood. A house was on fire, and there was four little black kids in there. I went there and kicked that door down and went in there and got those kids out. The some had done filled the rooms up.

Never was there anything on it. There was a thank you note from their grandmother in the paper up here. But never did any this hit the

national news, you see. There's not any, any policy – it seems that all everything that gets on the news is negative, you see, that makes big news. The good things that we do in life is never, you never see anything.

But I get accused of murder or something like that, then it's front-page news. I don't understand that. I don't understand, I don't understand our country a lot of times – you know, why it's like this.

ABC NEWS: Have you ever done –

[End of tape]

ABC NEWS: Mr. Edwards, uh, have you ever thought about Henry Dee and Charles Moore, I mean, do you...have you ever prayed for them?

MR. EDWARDS: Sure I have.

ABC NEWS: You've prayed for Henry Dee and Charles Moore

[OVERLAP]

MR. EDWARDS: Yep, prayed for you. [LAUGHS]

ABC NEWS: Really? [OVERLAP]

MR. EDWARDS: Yeah. Sure I would. Yeah, for all my people, yeah.

ABC NEWS: No, but um, you know, I hear of two...uh, one of them actually you had met, and I'm I know you you said that Henry Dee was someone that you had met, and hear you... [OVERLAP]

MR. EDWARDS: That's right.

ABC NEWS: ...you heard that he was, um, he was killed in a, a horrible way.

MR. EDWARDS: Well, sure, I felt, I felt sorry for him. I...and, un, really feel sorry for the family, you know, so that...I lost a son myself, and I mean, I understand what they're going through.

ABC NEWS: I mean, if you think about it, those two families never got any justice.

MR. EDWARDS: No, they haven't got any justice, but you can't take the justice out on an innocent person, either. That wouldn't be justice, right? And that's what they tried to do to me all my life. I...I mean, ever since this happened. And I'm not guilty. I'm telling you for the third time, I didn't kill those people, and I don't know who did kill them either.

ABC NEWS: You're telling the truth? [OVERLAP]

MR. EDWARDS: I, I...

ABC NEWS: Are you, are you telling the truth? [OVERLAP]

MR. EDWARDS: I'm telling you the truth, ..., I'm telling the truth from the bottom of my heart. [PAUSE]

ABC NEWS: Actually, if you think about it, Mr. Edwards, if you did do it, why would you tell me now that you did?

MR. EDWARDS: Why would I tell you?

ABC NEWS: Yes, if you did do it, why would you admit that you killed those two people now?

MR. EDWARDS: I don't think, probably, I would admit it, if I did it, you know. What I'm telling you is I didn't do it. [PAUSE]

ABC NEWS: Do you think that these cases should be brought up again, if there's any new evidence, and that people should be, un, that that that, do you think that charges should be filed against anyone, if new evidence emerged?

MR. EDWARDS: If there's new evidence, sure.

ABC NEWS: Are, are we... would we be dredging up old cases and dredging up hate?

MR. EDWARDS: They wouldn't do the race relations any good, I don't think, no...[OVERLAP]

ABC NEWS: To dredge up these cases?

MR. EDWARDS: To dredge up these...cases. No, but...if the evidence was there, try me or whoever, then it should be done. That's...you're talking about justice now, and that would be justice, you know.

ABC NEWS: [OFF CAMERA COMMENTS] Do you think, do you think that the deaths of Henry Dee and Charles Moore was a racially motivated murder?

MR. EDWARDS: I really don't know. I couldn't tell you because [CHUCKLES] it could have been blacks that killed them, I don't know. I really don't know. If I knew, if I knew who did it, I probably could tell

you whether it was racially motivated or not. But I could tell you, I couldn't tell you that.

ABC NEWS: [OFF CAMERA COMMENTS] [EDITING SHOTS]

[END TAPE]