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Pardon case cited in Senate campaign meeting

Strom Thurmond

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I want to give you another example of the type people my opponent turned out of the penitentiary when the pardon racket flourished in his office while he was Governor.

At the October 1936 term of the Court of General Sessions for Berkeley County, a man we will call J. D. was convicted of the crime of murder and was sentenced to serve a life term.

Just before he went out of the Governor's office in 1939 Governor Johnston freed him by a parole. This was a little over two years after his life sentence was pronounced.

On January 14, 1939, the father of the young man who had been killed by this criminal wrote my opponent a letter of protest against his action.

The father said that reputable witnesses testified that this man seized a gun, stepped on the running board of the automobile in which his son was sitting, and shot his son through the head as he sat in the front seat of the automobile, defenseless and unarmed.

The deceased was a young man of the age of 19 years, who had enlisted some months before in the United States Army.
and was stationed at Fort Moultrie where he had an excellent record
as a soldier. He had never had any trouble with the criminal and
and did not even know him.

This bereaved father wrote my opponent as follows:

"I am satisfied that the slightest inquiry or investi-
gation by you into the facts of this case would have shown you
that this was one case in which you could not conscientiously
exercise executive clemency at this time, and that it was a case
in which your campaign pledge to the people to uphold the verdicts
of juries and the decisions of the courts should have been kept.

"Instead of keeping this pledge, you have chosen to
substitute your action for that of the duly constituted authorities
whom you promised to back up. You have backed up instead the
conduct of one who maliciously took the life of another human
being under such circumstances that a jury of his own county
found him guilty of murder. You have struck a blow at the safety
of the children of every father and mother in South Carolina, and
you have brought distress and sorrow to all of us who loved my son.

"It is a horrible tragedy when a father and mother have
raised a child to manhood and he is shot down, unarmed and
defenseless. It is small recompense that the law has functioned and the man who took his life forced to pay the penalty provided by the laws of the state, but it is some satisfaction that the lives of other people's children have been made safer. When this small satisfaction has been taken away without proper investigation and without any consideration either for the feelings of the family of the dead boy or the safety of other people's children, I would feel derelict in my duty to the memory of my dead son if I did not do all in my power to bring the truth to light and attempt to undo what has been done."

Not satisfied with paroling this criminal when he went out of office in January 1939, my opponent gave him a full pardon when he became Governor again, just as he was about to leave to go to the United States Senate.

The records show that since he was freed, this man has been convicted of running a whiskey still and also of threatening the life of an officer of the law with a rifle, and he is now serving a five year term for that.