Interview of Robert H. Tucker Jr. by Jack Davis and Justin Nystrom
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Abstract: This interview places special emphasis on Tucker's role in the Landrieu Administration during the 1970s, including his recollections of the standoff with the Black Panthers in the Desire Housing Project, the Mark Essex shooting, and the efforts by himself and others to diversify and modernize the city from within the political sphere.

Bio: Robert Tucker Jr. was a pioneer in business, a veteran, a political icon, a civil rights activist, and a dedicated New Orleanian. He accomplished a great many things over the course of his life, from participating in the first lunch counter sit-in in Atlanta in 1960, to becoming the first African American to serve as an executive mayoral assistant in 1970, to becoming a chairman in a number of important New Orleans industries.While his hiring by Mayor Moon Landrieu introduced Tucker to the political limelight, his involvement in city government and infrastructure only grew in the following half decade. He continued to serve as the Executive Assistant to the Mayor for 8 consecutive years (1970-1978), afterwards dedicated himself to constructing his own firm, being a political consultant to a number of New Orleans-based political campaigns, and serving administrations including (but certainly not limited to) the Oschner Medical Foundation, the Metropolitan Young Men's Christian Association, the Port of New Orleans, the New Orleans Super Dome Commission, the Accrediting Commission of Education for Health Services Administration, the Health Education Authority of Louisiana, and the United Negro College Fund. He also served as a lecturer and Chairman of the visiting committee of Loyola University New Orleans's College of Business. Tucker passed away on Wednesday, March 1st, 2023.

Index

[00:00:00.00] Jack Davis: Start that over again

[00:00:00.19] Bob Tucker: Okay, yeah, yeah, I--yeah, thought about that when I heard the noise–

[00:00:01.16] Jack Davis: Okay, okay, and...because then we wanna give these...the...the future listeners of this an orientation of where we are and…

[00:00:08.14] Bob Tucker: Right okay let's do it, yeah

[00:00:10.11] Jack Davis: ...We're in...the...energy center on Poydras Street in New Orleans...we are in the offices of...Robert Tucker's daughter's engineering firm

[00:00:22.16] Bob Tucker: You got all that right.

[00:00:24.10] Jack Davis: And...where Bob plays an important role. And I'm Jack Davis…investigator on this Loyola oral history project, focusing on the 1970s and I'm with Justin Nystrom, Professor of History at Loyola who will also be asking questions or commenting. And we're here with Mr. Robert H. Tucker, Jr. Bob, explain what you're doing now.

[00:00:52.20] Bob Tucker: ...let me just first of all say that...this is really a very, very unique project, typically when one wants to find information about New Orleans, particularly in a scholarly environment or context, they would wind up going to one of the university's libraries or to the...morgue over at the Tulane library, for example. Or to the Times-Picayune, going into the archival...process to try and retrieve information, but this is an exciting project, not only because of the technological mode that it's being done in where it's available to scholars and to people generally will be...now, interviews that will be recorded in this mode. Which will be helpful I think because it gives a, a lot more personality to the process. I happen to be working here for my daughter. She is taking over a civil engineering firm that we started almost eighteen years or so ago. So it's quite an interesting experience working for one's daughter, but it's also a fun process for us too. I spent back in 1970, after I returned from the military, a year in the United States, a year in Europe, and a year in Southeast Asia, became a part of the Landrieu Administration. In between my return, which happened several years earlier

[00:02:26.21] Jack Davis: In the late ‘60s

[00:02:27.23] Bob Tucker: In the late ‘60s. ...I got a chance to come back to my hometown that I left when I was eighteen to go away to college up to Clark.

[00:02:40.15] Jack Davis: And where did you, where did you grow up in New Orleans?

[00:02:42.09] Bob Tucker: I grew up in central city, on Loyola between 1st and 2nd. ...went to Walter L. Cohen Senior High School...was active in sports, played football and participated in the debate team, then left New Orleans on a scholarship and went to Clark. Atlanta.

[00:03:03.13] Jack Davis: Right.

[00:03:04.08] Bob Tucker: ...in those days it was Clark Atlanta College, now it's Clark University....

[00:03:10.07] Jack Davis: And your father was a minister?

[00:03:12.09] Bob Tucker: My father was an African-African Methodist Episcopal Minister. And also a funeral director. While at Clark, the Ides of March of 1960, I was arrested along with a hundred and eighteen other students for eating in the wrong place. In those days, the city had not quite gotten around to desegregating. And so we were participating in the march in the effort to help Atlanta get it right in that regard.

[00:03:45.22] Jack Davis: And what mark did that leave on you...?

[00:03:49.08] Bob Tucker: Well it was an interesting experience. Dr. King's brother, A.D. King led the march. We hit eleven different places all at the same time in Atlanta. The place that I went into along with eleven other students from the Atlanta University system was [Streyberry's Federal Cafeteria]. It was an intriguing experience because we walked in, we were all well-dressed, we had been brought down there by the local funeral directors using their vehicles because it was really a highly coordinated activity. It was well-planned. We were indoctrinated in a positive sense into the, into nonviolence. We had to come with the understanding that if we could not sign on for nonviolence, that you were of no benefit to this movement, so we received training, we went through the immersion, if you will, from Jesus Christ forward to Mahatma Gandhi all the way up, understanding that this was the movement that focused on nonviolence. And so once we got that part of it understood, we moved into those particu--those specific locales in Atlanta and simply went in and requested that we be served. The Federal Cafeteria that I went had food, cafeteria style, and as the line moved around. There was a murmur in this place at noon, actually at 11:30, when people realized what was happening. The manager came out, I guess the only...one of the tense moments, and said, "I wish I had my gun." Which had no impact on us because the eleven of us there was simply there trying to get some food and then we had to return to class. He instructed the help, which happened to be African American, to begin taking up the food. So as they were taking it up, we were putting it on our trays so everybody would have something to eat or drink and passing it back. As the line moved around it became clear that everyone in the restaurant what was happening. We had been instructed on how to talk to those in authority, and in this instance the manager who had made the gun remark, and informed him

that we simply wanted to be able to eat; most of us had afternoon classes, under our arms we had Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and Aristotle-- Because we were gonna have to leave to go back to class once we finished our lunch here and we would certainly be out of his way. At a point, don't know how long it was, it may have been twenty minutes but it seemed like an hour, the police arrived, we were taken outside, put up against the wall and patted down, and I recalled very clearly the Lieutenant being questioned by the Captain with the Atlanta Police Department as to what had happened with the-with the paddy wagon, as we call it down here, that was to take us to jail and he said, he responded to him, Lieutenant said, "They've hit all over town. We don't have anymore paddy wagons." So they wound up taking us down in a school bus and we went in and we had a jail versus bail situation. Ultimately we were bailed out and we went on from there, but that experience, in answer to your question, Jack, as to what impact. It...it...raised the question which I guess is the ultimate question in these sorts of movements, particularly so-called revolutionary movements, which is what that was at that time, in 1960. ...the ultimate question is, "Are you willing to die for this particular cause?" and we as young, to some extent idealistic, students answered affirmatively. So having done that and then about a year and a half later going after I graduated from Clark into the US military, where I was instructed twelve different ways how to kill someone, it's quite a contrast, but it helped to set, I guess, my path forward in terms of commitment to struggle and it developed a kind of positive quality of fearlessness. About these matters.

[00:08:26.22] Jack Davis: Was it--was there an, an interest in participating in that further that brought you back you back to New Orleans in 19-1967?

[00:08:34.02] Bob Tucker: Didn't know, yeah, I was actually, I was just coming back home after I'd spent three years syndicated in the military, my last year in Southeast Asia. And when I got back here and began to kinda look at the, the landscape if you will, we were always having meetings, that is those of us who had these concerns which was most of the people in New Orleans because of the activism that has been always characterized in New Orleans, particularly in these matters. But the death of Dr. King and the anniversary of that event triggered our questioning. What should we do to commemorate Dr. King's death? And so we convened a meeting with a very interesting diverse group.

[00:09:26.11] Jack Davis: And this would've been in the spring of 1969?

[00:09:29.01] Bob Tucker: Yeah. A little bit earlier, I think it may have been ‘68 I'm not sure of the dates.

[00:09:33.20] Jack Davis: Okay.

[00:09:34.13] Bob Tucker: A few decades ago now. But that meeting that occurred consisted of African American ministers, members of the Republic of New Africa, which was a highly activist group, Catholic nuns…other activists that were in this town at that time, ministers and people who just had a concern. So we spent the first few hours having vigorous and active discussion on whose method should be employed in order to bring about what needed to be done in the city that was totally segregated at that time. The discussion culminated, began to level off if you will, from my vantage point when we began to argue about the Mule that was gonna pull the case on carrying the replica of Dr. King's casket. And I said, "Now we're getting somewhere, we finally found a topic that is constructed to make sense to everyone." And so the, the conversation focused over to the mule, one person, "Man, there's a mule over here, and you know, he's kinda hard-headed but he would probably do it" and so at that point we began the planning and the ne–

[00:10:56.15] Jack Davis: Well whose mule did you use?

[00:10:58.03] Bob Tucker: It was a mule from a guy that had a vegetable wagon I believe, and…

[00:11:02.11] Jack Davis: One of the vendors?

[00:11:03.07] Bob Tucker: Yeah, yeah, in those days, you remember the vegetable wagon just drove through New Orleans–

[00:11:07.08] Jack Davis: You remember which, which one it was?

[00:11:08.06] Bob Tucker: the Rag Man...don't know, don't know. ...he nor the mule I don't think is still with us, but they certainly, they certainly provided the services needed at that time. The march went from the Old French Hospital, which is where we had our meeting. At that time it was the offices of the National Urban League, I'm sorry the local, New Orleans branch of the Urban League. And prior to that it had been the old French Hospital. We did our planning there and then ultimately the march actually began and we went all the way up and then back down Canal Street and then across to City Hall.

[00:11:48.05] Jack Davis: Across on Loyola to City Hall?

[00:11:49.08] Bob Tucker: Right, right. We had confected ten non-negotiable demands, as I like to say it, any nine of which we would've readily negotiated with anyone that was ready to listen to us. As we got to City Hall, nobody even though we had sent registered letters to all of the elected officials of the time, including the Mayor Schiro at that time. And the members of the council, nobody was home when we got there. And so we all "Edict of Worms", we posted those

to the door. As we were departing I noticed over in the breezeway between Civil District Court and City Hall an individual who simply stood and observed, that fella was Moon Landrieu.

[00:12:38.22] Jack Davis: Did you know him at the time?

[00:12:41.13] Bob Tucker: Not intimately, I knew who he was, as a councilman. Few weeks later I got a call from–

[00:12:49.16] Jack Davis: But you said the mere fact that he was there…

[00:12:52.05] Bob Tucker: Just watching, just observing.

[00:12:53.04] Jack Davis: Distinguished him from the other...public officials?

[00:12:55.03] Bob Tucker: Yeah. He was-- one, he showed up. I think it was Woody Allen that said that eighty percent is just showing up. He showed up, didn't say anything, didn't do anything, but observed.

[00:13:06.08] Jack Davis: And you observed him.

[00:13:08.06] Bob Tucker: Exactly. And so a few weeks later, my daddy asked me if I would meet with this fellow by the name of Moon Landrieu who's a councilman who knew my father, having been a minister in the area and having served in the lower ninth ward. In those days Bethel AME Church and so I said, "Sure!" So–

[00:13:27.11] Jack Davis: Did, did, had Moon Landrieu hear you speaking at this demonstration at City Hall? How did he, how did he know about you?

[00:13:36.16] Bob Tucker: ...Not sure. I'm not sure. You'd probably have to ask–

[00:13:40.09] Jack Davis: You-you were working in town at this point

[00:13:42.23] Bob Tucker: I was working at the National Urban--at the Local Urban League as an economic development person helping to try and find jobs for unemployed...unemployed and underemployed African Americans. But he must've, you know, I guess he assumed that I had a leadership role, which I did, in putting this piece together. So I went to visit with him. He told me that he planned to run for mayor of New Orleans. Talked to me about what his plans and aspirations were and asked me if I would help him. And I checked with my dad. My dad said, "He's a fair guy, I've been knowing him for a while." And my dad checked off on him and in a couple of my own personal visit with Moon, I came on board, I did some community organizing

for him, some writing and we know what the history of that was, that there was a final debate and the, the question was asked–

[00:14:42.05] Jack Davis: A final debate between the two candidates in the run-off election in 1969? In the, in the Democratic primary.

[00:14:44.13] Bob Tucker: He and...that is, that is correct. That is correct. And so the question was asked of the two run-off candidates which would be willing to hire Blacks as they referred to in those days and his opponent said that he would hire qualified people, and Moon said, didn't draw a breath, unequivocal, "Yes." Race was held, the African American vote went to Moon, coupled with the White vote that he had already been able to accumulate. And as a result he ran and won.

[00:15:19.18] Jack Davis: In that, in that debate it was, was, wasn't the question about would you hire, would you put Blacks as department heads? Wasn't it more, it was executive–

[00:15:31.08] Bob Tucker: Yeah, maybe it was. I remembered the larger context of the question, which was, "Are you willing to involve Blacks in the fabric of city government?"

[00:15:41.09] Jack Davis: And your, and the language about the qualified persons, you, you were reading that as code?

[00:15:48.17] Bob Tucker: We-yeah, in the African American community we saw it as code for qualified meant non-Black. Because the wit was, the going understanding was that Blacks certainly as we viewed City Hall in those days, that Blacks were only qualified to do the the mop, the broom and mop jobs. There was nobody with exception of one individual that was called out as an aide to the mayor, Philip Baptiste, but other than that, there were no African Americans in the fabric, in the upper, shall we say the upper management of City Hall, or in any other, even middle-management positions.

[00:16:29.15] Jack Davis: Back to the campaign before we get into the administration, what did Moon Landrieu want you to do for him?

[00:16:37.07] Bob Tucker: Wanted me to help him to put together a campaign that was inclusive. And what that meant was having African Americans not simply putting signs in the ground or simply, you know, sticking leaflets in doors. But involved in the planning and the intricacies of that campaign and also being willing to become, if you will, political witnesses for him and what he wanted to do and what his vision for the city was and as I said, after my daddy gave an unequivocal endorsement of him and after I had my own visit with him, I sensed that he was what the city needed at that time based on what the problems were. Not only was segregation

rampant in the city, but there was police brutality was really out of control, there was a joblessness situation that ran unabaited, there were just cultural issues, you know, everything and everywhere that you looked, you felt that we were in fact in reality truly second-class citizens. You had to sit behind the bar in the streetcars, you had to go to, women couldn't try on hats in stores, restaurants were totally segregated, we had to go to our own restaurants like Dooky Chase's of the world and Willy Mae's and all those restaurants that we knew that we would feel welcome at. But not only that, we legally couldn't go to the other restaurants, and in time the Public Accommodations Act fixed all that, but Moon had a vision of what and how these matters should be handled. And also I don't recall if my daddy specifically told me about Moon's record when he was in the legislature, but either Moon did it or I had some sort of a piece of memory of that that he and one or two others, I think it was...Sal...one of the other members of legislature–

[00:18:51.23] Jack Davis: Sal Anselmo.

[00:18:53.01] Bob Tucker: Sal Anselmo are the only ones who opposed the governor's program to just continue this infestation of segregation and racist policies.

[00:19:06.08] Jack Davis: And in the campaign, did you find it hard or relatively easy to recruit support for Moon Landrieu?

[00:19:15.09] Bob Tucker: The fact that he was a new face and the fact that people knew something of him and the fact that he made an outright, not a under the cover or “trust me I'll...I'll do some good things for you,” he said, "Here's where I'm going with it. That I wanna bring in and make Black department heads. I wanna open the doors to City Hall to all the people who happen to make up," at that time, I think we were African Americans were about forty, forty-seven percent of the population of the city of New Oreans. So based on those representations and the belief that he not only was promising to do that but that he had the capacity and I guess the guts to take it on, he was not a tough sell.

[00:20:05.12] Jack Davis: And then there was a general election in which the winner of the Democratic primary, Moon Landrieu, faced the Republican–

[00:20:11.17] Bob Tucker: Right.

[00:20:12.08] Jack Davis: Ben C. Toledano

[00:20:13.17] Bob Tucker: Right.

[00:20:14.10] Jack Davis: Was that a, was that something that you all were worried about as a, as a major hurdle?

[00:20:19.20] Bob Tucker: Not, not really because...the Republican lines, the Republican party was pretty well known for what they were. This is a really super true blue state in those days. All of the elected public officials in those days for the most part with the exception of people like Ben in fact, Republicans were sort of a political anomaly. [laughs] in those days. So we didn't have any fear other than the traditional approach to politics, which is you always wanna run in a vigorous, all-out, you know, metal to the...to the...pedal to the metal approach to win, but we found it rather interesting that a Republican would challenge him and in fact to some extent it was not a racial appeal per say, I think that Ben Toledano was a decent human being and a decent person. I think, however, he carried the flag for people who said, "Maybe if we can get Ben in then we don't have to worry about what this Landrieu fellow may or may not do in disturbing the way things had been down here at that time for the last, at that time, you know, three hundred plus years."

[00:21:32.17] Jack Davis: Did you find it was as easy to motivate people to participate in the general election as in the primary?

[00:21:38.22] Bob Tucker: Yeah, yeah. Because it was a much cleaner and clearer break. The Republicans brought all of their racial baggage with them as opposed to the, the primary, the initial Re-Democratic primary, where there wasn't too much known about Moon or his opponent per say except those issues that I described relative to what Moon's commitment was on the racial front. But with Toledano he had all of the Republican and the states' rights stuff that preceeded him in the, in the Strom Thurmonds and all of those people who had, over the country, made clear what the intent was as related to matters of race.

[00:22:22.19] Jack Davis: Would you, was the general election strategy any different from the primary election strategy?

[00:22:30.08] Bob Tucker: No, we just did the same thing, we went to the streets, we educated a lot of people, we took strong positions, we told everybody what was on the line, and we, we achieved the result that we had been hoping and praying for.

[00:22:45.04] Jack Davis: And then when you achieved that result, mayor elect Landrieu recruited you into his administration.

[00:22:52.05] Bob Tucker: He did.

[00:22:53.06] Jack Davis: Or tried to, how hard did he have to try?

[00:22:55.07] Bob Tucker: Well, we had to have the discussion, and I met with him and I was not in doubt that he was going to do what he said he was going to do, bringing me and others into the administration and opening it up.

[00:23:12.18] Jack Davis: Yeah.

[00:23:13.09] Bob Tucker: But we had not had THE conversation, so now specifically, what are we talking about? That conversation began with Moon suggesting that one of the departments that he wanted to bring in an African American to, heretofore no department heads African American, female, hispanic, any other ethnic, from an ethnic background, and he suggested that the department of sanitation was suffering and he felt he could do and, and I just explained to him that I had no intent of going in to become the town garbage man in the city. I knew that it was a role that had to be filled, but I didn't think that, and it was not–

[00:24:02.10] Jack Davis: Did you think that was symbolic…

[00:24:04.18] Bob Tucker: I think that what Moon was looking at was what would be the least painful route to take in moving this ball forward on having a Black and African American department head. And…

[00:24:21.16] Jack Davis: You mean sanitation would be more, would be easier to put across?

[00:24:25.03] Bob Tucker: It might be, yeah, and I'm not sure what was going through his head, but you know, that versus let's say the head of the department of finance, where people say, "Aw man, he, now, now he's really going off the deep end." So it may have been a starter position but it wasn't the starter position for me, not for me personally so much as I just didn't think it was represented at the time of the African-Ameri-what the African American community merited in terms of going into CIty Hall for the first time. So I said, "Well, what else you got?"

[00:24:58.03] Jack Davis: And, and he end-ended up on sanitation, he ended up keeping–

[00:25:00.21] Bob Tucker: He kept, pe, yeah. It was Pete Gagliano, which was really quite rare because in those days unlike this environment now where you can't just walk in and do a clean sweep, in those days you could, you could say by the end of this afternoon, end of this day, not later than five o'clock, have your desk cleaned out, you're gone. And interesting enough, this is a quick aside, Pete Gagliano, in those days knew he was gone. I'm sorry, Pete Gagliano was in property management.

[00:25:34.20] Jack Davis: Pete was in....right, with Pete Sanchez, right?

[00:25:37.06] Bob Tucker: Yeah, Pete Sanchez became his re--over time, they made a great salt-and-pepper team if you will, I forget who the head of sanitation was…

[00:25:46.21] Jack Davis: John Cassarino?

[00:25:47.14] Bob Tucker: John Cassarino! It was John Cassarino.

[00:25:50.05] Jack Davis: And he was an incumbent, I mean, he was...from the pre–

[00:25:51.21] Bob Tucker: He was with the CC--CCDA

[00:25:54.14] Jack Davis: Yeah.

[00:25:55.05] Bob Tucker: An old-line political organization.

[00:25:57.22] Jack Davis: Among the few people who... Moon didn't have old-line political organization support

[00:26:03.10] Bob Tucker: Right. The RDO and all of the old-line organizations went straight White, I mean that's the only way I can characterize it. But I asked him, I said, "So what else do you have, Mr. Mayor?" He said, "Well, I plan to bring in three special, at that time, special assistants." I said, "I'll take one of them." and so he said, "Okay."

[00:26:26.06] Jack Davis: And...and which, which special assistant assignment did you get?

[00:26:29.20] Bob Tucker: There were three of us...there was...Richard Kernion, who was Moon's brother-in-law, there was Dan McClung, who had worked with us during the campaign, is a great political consultant who really lives between here and Houston, who's done campaigns all over the nation now. And myself, and we became the three special assistants.

[00:26:51.23] Jack Davis: And how did you divide up those duties that the three of you, how did you…Richard Kernion was the chief administrative officer from the start?

[00:26:59.01] Bob Tucker: He, oh, later he became chief administrative officer.

[00:27:00.05] Jack Davis: Okay.

[00:27:01.18] Bob Tucker: He handled a lot of the, the staffing out the administrative responsibilities. I wound up handling some of the housing responsibilities. But we worked, we didn't have specialists, if you will. We all worked as a team and we, we helped each other, we

were a cro-sorry, cross...cross-trained, if you will. Not per say, but cross-trained in...there was so much that needed to be done in this town that nobody had to look at, doing only their job. Everybody did everybody's job and did everything that the city need to, to continue to, to come through this period. I may also parenthetically insert that this decision politically that the people of the City of New Orleans made was, was a critical decision because New Orleans, at that point in its history, was at a fisher-cut-bar---fisher-cut-bait point...either we were to join the twentieth century and move up and out or we could continue to be this sort of, you know, just a big, fun city, the Big Easy, but not moving up to the next level, and you know, historically, there were, there were periods when New Orleans sort of topped out and there were periods when it went down to the abyss. But this was one of those specific crossroads in time where this decision had to be made. And the citizens made a decision, not even realizing the impact of what that decision was because that decision resulted in the leadership at the top, the team along with the City Council and other elected officials now beginning to realize that we can move into the NFL, if you will, of municipalities, and come to the big league, and, and that was, that was the pivotal moment in time that triggered that decision.

[00:29:11.12] Jack Davis: Can you, have you ever reflected what would New Orleans have been like in the 1970s had Jimmy Fitzmorris been elected mayor?

[00:29:19.04] Bob Tucker: I think that, that Jimmy given his skills, and given his familiarity with New Orleans and people's familiarity with him, would've been able to keep things moving at a level that would've not allowed the city to deteriorate. But in terms of achieving fast-paced, high-end and almost pounding type of, you know, changes, I think it would've been difficult for Jimmy, particularly if the Black vote that was with Moon had gone against him completely. And I don't think that was the case because Jimmy had some Black friends out there too, but there may have been high levels of resistance and there may have been other problems, and it's hard to imagine what those would've been because the path that Moon chose, which was to vigorously bring in blacks and women and, and people who were, gays, and people who were outside of the City Hall fence literally...That decision came with its own...pressure points, and it came with its own, you know, challenges. So it's a tough call to say which would've been the, the easier path. Which would've been the less contentious path? Jimmy's administration may have been less contentious but the, the sort of punch that New Orleans needed, he may not have been able to get the support for it across the board, and he may not have been able to assemble the people and move the process along with the needed parties to do that.

[00:31:07.10] Jack Davis: Did the election of Landrieu bring in...I think...I think I hear you saying this, bring into city government the forces that another mayor would've had to fight with?

[00:31:18.14] Bob Tucker: I, I think that that would've been a lot of that, if not a lot of it, I think that there would've been been some contentious moments. I think that Jimmy, who had been

really serving in state government, who understood it, been serving on the City Council just like Moon. But it was a difficult sell given the support that Jimmy had. This, I'm separating Jimmy the person from his support base, that they would've been pushing on him. "Mayor, we need to go slow, we need more of a gradualism approach to all of this stuff." I suspect that in time, had Jimmy, for example, been elected mayor, that the Public Accommodations Act would've been put in place. I suspect that some of the other changes that were undertaken would've come, but as I said that could've been with its own set of challenges because of the, the big cleavages in the city–

[00:32:18.11] Jack Davis: Yeah.

[00:32:19.01] Bob Tucker: --Moon was able to enjoy the support of the African American community in huge numbers, and also keep his White base intact, and those were a lot of the people, you know, Uptown and some Lakefront folks who felt that the city needed a guy of the calibur of a Landrieu to move us forward, so...But each brought with it. Each candidate would've brought with them their own set of challenges and concerns and difficulties.

[00:32:50.16] Jack Davis: Moon Landrieu brought in, besides you and Richard Kernion and then Dan McClung, brought in a lot of new people and as you said, inclusive...in-inclusively staffed it. What, you often hear this described as just an extremely competent administration in terms of personnel. People worked hard, they...they worked together as a team, sometimes people use the world "Camelot" to describe it.

[00:33:18.16] Bob Tucker: [laughs]

[00:33:19.05] Jack Davis: What was, was that true? Was it, was it a good team, and how did, how did the Landrieu administration recruit these people and get them to work?

[00:33:29.18] Bob Tucker: I think one, the strength of Moon and his personality and his vision and where he wanted to take the city was a sort of emotional and professional magnet for the, sometimes we've been referred to as the whiz kids that he brought in, what characterized us was that we were all young at the time. Secondly, we shared a sense of commitment to making things right and better and thirdly because of, I guess, our youth and youthfulness, we were pretty much fearless folks. And there was nothing that we didn't feel that we would be willing to undertake as a team and that is what we were, we were a team. There's sometimes inside of these types of operations, whether it's the White House, the UN, or the state, or the municipal at the municipal level there can be rivalries between and among staff folks, and that can be healthy, but it becomes exacerbated to the point where, you know, everybody's working it, trying, you know, have the man's ear, the woman's ear, whoever the person in charge is, it can be counter-productive. But in this instance, we were a team and we were all on board, we had fun,

we loved each other, we worked together, and in fact, I-as I think back over it, Jack, I'm not so certain that we may not have literally almost spread ourselves out the first five years, the first four years and then, going into the second two years, six years of our administration. Under Moon's leadership, we just looked for and undertook challenges. You know, building that Dome stadium back there, that building was fraught with speed bumps from start to finish. Thirteen lawsuits by senator at that time, John Schwegmann attempting to derail this process, moving it along and tearing down all those warehouses and demolishing what was there, undertaking the pedestrian mall in the French Quarter, you know, an area unto itself, and the merchants initially wanted to run Landrieu and his whole group out of town on a rail.

[00:35:58.05] Jack Davis: This is the pedestrian mall around Jackson Square?

[00:36:00.16] Bob Tucker: Yeah. The curb where we curtailed vehicular traffic and said, "We're gonna convert this in certain hours of the day" into pedestrian traffic. And then they began to love it because it enhanced it dramatically, increased the pedestrian traffic that moved into their establishments and, and consequently, their revenues, moving throughout city departments to ensure that there was representation of all those groups that had been outside the fence, if you will, of City Hall, that there was representation on all the city boards and commissions.

[00:36:37.23] Jack Davis: Representation that's diverse.

[00:36:39.14] Bob Tucker: Exactly. Exactly. And all of the other capital projects, going into the neighborhoods, and putting in facilities and multi-purpose centers and improving playgrounds and putting into place infrastructure and street programs and building the city and rebuilding the infrastructure of the city, all of this was undertaken during that period, and it was you know, it was a 24/7 operation, not to mention the insertion of unintended problems of the sort, you know, Black Panthers, the Mark Essex event, [?] fire that, you know, is now forty years ago happened. All of those, all of that was on the plate, and everybody just hung in and did their thing and we figured out ways to fix problems.

[00:37:29.12] Jack Davis: Did you feel...that is-at that time there was a favorable economy, there was support out of Washington for investing in cities, which New Orleans certainly took advantage of and the, the lo-the local economy, like other economies around the country, was, was...on the upsurge, and you're, behind you are all these buildings of...the, the...far end of Poydras Street around the Superdome, which is behind you and City Hall's off over your left shoulder. All of this landscape didn't exist when the ‘70s began, but was in, largely in place by the end of the decade. How much of it was this favorable economic and political climate from Washington?

[00:38:17.18] Bob Tucker: I believe that it was a combination of factors that contributed to the platform from which the rebuilding process began. The Dome Stadium was really catalytic. Once that building was put in place after all the, well, what all it took to make it happen, it became the sort of anchor tenant, if you will, for converting Poydras Avenue into the Fifth Avenue of New Orleans. It helps to spur the economic development. The assistance from Washington, the favorable economic climate, the fact that the petrol-chemical industry was rocking and rolling, the oil patch was hot, race relations were starting to improve, some of the outside interest in to some extent invested dollars looked to see if there was some stabliity in terms of race relations, and if the city was moving in the direction that, of other progressive cities, and so that–

[00:39:18.13] Jack Davis: And you think they saw that?

[00:39:20.17] Bob Tucker: Yeah, they saw it. They saw it, and I think it was, it helped to create the environment for other people to look at New Orleans, and at the same time also for the tourism, the tourism piece of the equation to begin to reshape itself. We've never been a manufacturing, not in modern times, a manufacturing center. We've never been able, with the exception of what happened out in Michoud, where we fabricated booster rockets for space shots, had a major economic magnet if you will that would, you know, provide hundreds, if not a few thousand jobs at its, at its height, Michoud did that, probably five-six-seven thousand jobs, but that was sort of a, an economic anomaly, in a good way for the city of New Orleans, but our...the...the, the, the centerpiece if you will of New Orleans has always been its tourism and those events shaped around it. You know, Mardi Gras and, and now the tons of festivals and the tons of all the other touristic pieces that have been added to the equation helped now make New Orleans removed. I guess in those days I'm not quite sure where we were I think in San Francisco was at the top of the tourist attraction cities in the United States. We were certainly in the top four or five after we kinda had leveled off.

[00:40:46.02] Jack Davis: When-when you and your team in, in City Hall were putting together all these programs, tackling all of these projects, were you aware of the sort of the resurgance of New Orleans culture with sort of greater consciousness about food and about music? I mean, did, did you all have time to go to Jazz Fest and say, "Hey, this is...this, this city...is really attracting attention?" Did you have time to go to those–

[00:41:14.21] Bob Tucker: We–

[00:41:15.19] Jack Davis: --new restaurants that were being discovered by the Richard Collin, the Underground Gourmet?

[00:41:20.12] Bob Tucker: We, we were in the heat of battle, and we knew that good things were happening but we didn't have the perspective of third party observers if you will. Of what the

magnitude of it was or what the implications would be, we just knew that we would take up one challenge, we'd fix that, and then we'd go jump on something else. And we'd bang away at that, and we'd make that happen, and then we just kept rocking and rolling through transforming the city, not fully realizing until, I guess, at the end of the battle day, we were in the zone, if you will, when we were doing all this stuff. It was fun, it was hard work, it was tough, there were difficult days and nights for all of us, and we just, we just figured out a way to make things happen and so at the end of our, I guess it was 1978 when we all came out of that pressure cooker over there called City Hall, we were able to look back with some sense of perspective and say, "Hey, you know, that was an exciting eight years, we did some good things for this town."

[00:42:28.09] Jack Davis: And would you say you enjoyed it in the process?

[00:42:31.23] Bob Tucker: Yeah, we had fun, we were, as I said, we were all personally involved with each other. There was a there was a comradery and in those days, the issues of race and class and castes were more clearly defined, but on the other hand there was a constituency that was certainly much larger, but not only the discussion, but for the resolution of some of those type issues. Now we have a completely different environment, but because I think the, the setting of the historic stage, coming off of, in the ‘60s, the deaths of Dr. King, Kennedy, and Kennedy, created a feeling among people at the national level that we needed, there were some things as a country that we needed to get right. And I think there was a flow-through and a flow-down to New Oreans of that same emotional logic, but not in its totality now. We were not a barrier-free city in terms of oppression and resistance to change on the part of a lot of elements of destruction. A lot of folks just wanted to see things the way that they were, just as there are people today who want to take it back to the way that it was. And so we encountered that resistance, but we also had a strong, strong set of committed individuals and constituencies that stayed with us, not because they were driven by anything other than love and wanting to get it right and do it right.

[00:44:21.04] Jack Davis: One-one thing that cropped up early in the Landrieu administration was an incident that could have changed things if it had gone the other way. I mean the Black Panther stand-off in the Desire community ended up not producing violence, but it was a, it was a close call, wasn't it?

[00:44:47.16] Bob Tucker: Yeah, it was.

[00:44:48.19] Jack Davis: What if that had gone, what if that had ended differently and that there had, you were there, you had been in Desire doing…

[00:44:59.22] Bob Tucker: Couple of weeks before it happened–

[00:45:00.22] Jack Davis: Reconnaissance to trying---trying–

[00:45:02.09] Bob Tucker: Yeah. Actually I went down and, and lived down there with a guy by the name of Hengy Fagan. When we came in 1970 as we surveyed, Jack, the multiple needs that and areas of concern in the city, clearly Desire stood out in a very, very prominent way. One, because of the extreme number of young people that existed in, in that apartment complex, it was a housing authority property. It was very poorly constructed from day one that was a whole another topic in terms of how inferior materials were used and how a result of that created a part of the turbulence, if you will, that occurred. You know, raw sewage because the sewer lines were not properly laid, inferior materials, as I indicated, being used, and so when Desire was finally completed it looked great from the outside visually, but ultimately as people moved in they began to see the emergence of these actual physical problems that existed. But they bore up under that, but the second set of issues had to do with the, with the quality of life in Desire, or the lack thereof. When it rained, for example because of the lack of drainage water was elbow-deep, polio was a major medical challenge in those days, kids were out in that polio-infested water, there were rats the size of cats that lived with the people in those apartments there were problems of crime, police brutality,and all of the ma--malice

[00:47:01.02] Jack Davis: Who-who-who asked you, who asked you to go there to live with Mr. Fagan and what, what prompted that?

[00:47:08.11] Bob Tucker: I made, I made the determination that that was an area of need and I went to the mayor with it and the, the agreement was that we needed to take a closer look. I figured there was no way, better way to take a closer look than to go out and live for a while. So I stayed with Fagan, who had fourteen kids...the...the apartments, in Desire were intentionally made with larger bedrooms because of the population density, but Fagan was just a tremendous individual. He passed a few or so years ago, for some people he was the mayor of Desire. He was a very articulate, home-grown guy who had a love for people and who was just a wonderful, wonderful person, who was all heart but also strong and tough because in coming in Desi-coming up in Desire you had to be.

[00:48:01.16] Jack Davis: When you went there were was there also, was there already concern that the, the Panthers situation might produce a confrontation?

[00:48:11.08] Bob Tucker: No, to the contrary. The people saw the Panthers as a group that served them–

[00:48:19.01] Jack Davis: Right.

[00:48:19.21] Bob Tucker: --when the city was not serving them. What happened was that the Panthers came in, they had been Uptown. They moved into New Orleans as they did in a number of cities, and what they did was to survey what the problems were and they began to attack the problems. They provided a breakfast program for the kids for mothers who had to go get their food stamps and then go to the stores, they provided protection. They kept the drug dealers from going after the kids. So they were performing the duties almost as an arm of city government without portfolio, if you will. So they were seen as a positive force. The confrontation was not envisioned until it happened.

[00:49:02.06] Jack Davis: And there's an account of this that has been written in book form only in the last several years...so, so thirty-five or so years after it happened we're, we've got, we finally got a complete account. Did you...you-you've-you're familiar with Orissa Arend's book–

[00:49:20.10] Bob Tucker: Yeah, Orissa Arend's, yeah. Showdown in Desire.

[00:49:22.06] Jack Davis: Is that, is that a is that a...tell the story?

[00:49:25.14] Bob Tucker: Yeah, she captures it in just fantastic fashion. She went, she did over forty interviews and she went from person to person, she went back and she went into the traditional sources for archival materials and she has told the story that, as I characterize it, was a missing page from the history of New Orleans because if you went out into the street today and, and you asked the average person are you aware of what happened in Desire forty years ago? They wouldn't know what you were talking about. Because we didn't make the headlines the hard way–

[00:50:02.10] Jack Davis: Right, right

[00:50:03.11] Bob Tucker: In those days. Had it gone down and gone bad and gone the other direction and resulted in a bloody ending with men, women, and kids being shot and maimed, the police persons who were down there being hurt and killed, then it would've gone down as one of the, the, the really bloody situations for this country.

[00:50:23.06] Jack Davis: What would that have done to the Landrieu administration's opportunity to make progress?

[00:50:28.22] Bob Tucker: I think it would've severely eroded, what we were trying to do. It would have called for some period of, if you will, municipal rescue and recovery. It would have had a chilling effect on others looking to come into this town, be they retailers, developers, or whoever, you know, proprietors and owners of hotels, flagships. I don't say that it would have necessarily prevented them from coming, but I think that the stigma and the stain of the blood

that would've been on the streets would have certainly had an eroding effect on the future development of the city.

[00:51:10.04] Jack Davis: And it wasn't all luck that it didn't...didn't happen violently, it was...when-you-you-you-you saw it coming right up to the brink, you were there, but it was a matter of convincing the mayor, convincing the police department to behave smartly? What-what-what caused it, just in brief summary, what caused it not to go bad?

[00:51:33.05] Bob Tucker: We met in City Hall I think it was a 3AM staff meeting. Once the occupation had taken--what happened was that the Panthers occupied an apartment in the De-Desire housing complex. And the housing authority...asked the police department to serve an eviction notice. And those sound like routine matters except that this was anything but routine, so as opposed to having a constable and a handful of you know, officers that they what they needed it wound up with two hundred and fifty police people, a war wagon as it was called, which is and armored vehicle brought down from Baton Rouge, and a few thousand people that were residents of Desire, all moving into a collision course that fortunately came out okay, but in any rate at the meeting in City Hall I don't know who, but somebody volunteered me to go with the mayor to police headquarters to help direct the operation. And I explained to the mayor that while I'd been in the military I was not hired as the military advisor or military tactician, and it was not my intent to be involved in undertaking or assisting an operation whose intent could have had deadly effects for everybody. And so the mayor disagreed with that point of view and I suggested to him that maybe he and I step over into a side office and, and visit that matter, and, and we did.

[00:53:20.13] Jack Davis: And what did he say?

[00:53:21.20] Bob Tucker: He thought that because when the segregation in a situation was at its highest point in, in Plaquemines Parish, for example, the example he used, Leander Perez who was, you know, chief racist in those days he had some competitors in other parts of the country but certainly he was the state's chief racist here, talked about and said what he was going to do, gonna create a snakepit for Blacks that were cleaned down here from outside, and all of them, things that he did, what Moon contended was that there were some Whites that stood up and said, "That's wrong, and that guy is bad, and we condemn him." So he felt that now that the Panthers that were considered to be outside an extremist that there should be some African Americans who were similarly stand up and say, "Those guys are bad." And I–

[00:54:21.02] Jack Davis: What-what did you say?

[00:54:22.07] Bob Tucker: And I told the mayor that...that just wasn't gonna work, that the job and I said this in terms that were a little bit more graphic, but I told–

[00:54:35.18] Jack Davis: You-you-you can be graphic.

[00:54:37.00] Bob Tucker: Yeah [laughs]. I told him he could take the job and shove it up his ass because that was not what I was gonna be involved in. My intent was to go into the neighborhood and to do what I could to prevent the loss of life from either side, from either the residents who had begun to assemble themselves in support of the Panthers, or from the police department, who felt obliged to go down and to root them out, and as I walked out of the office I told him that one other thought that I needed to say and to, to make clear to him was that Black folks in 1970 could not be pro-police and the corollary to an anti-Panther argument was the pro-police argument, and the history books would not let Black folks in this town at this time be pro-police so I left, and I went down to Desire and I brought and recruited a couple of soldiers that I knew had the understanding of the streets, the commitment, and the heart, and the toughness to make the trip, Cecil Carter who was, at the time, Director of Human Relations with Don Hubbard, who had been serving in that area, running a program, Charlie Elloie, who was also a person that had worked with us. And so we went into Desire, I went into Fagan's apartment and that became sort of the operating headquarters. Chief Giarrusso was there also, was the police department, who was the, at that time, chief of police, directing operations. So Fagan's apartment became the headquarters of operations–

[00:56:29.20] Jack Davis: And–

[00:56:31.01] Bob Tucker: And the police were starting to...to come into the area in large numbers at that time.

[00:56:35.18] Jack Davis: Within, within the administration in the police department, was there concern that this could go badly and that would be bad, really bad for the city?

[00:56:48.03] Bob Tucker: I don't think that there was an understanding because they were removed–

[00:56:51.22] Jack Davis: Yeah.

[00:56:52.16] Bob Tucker: --from ground zero, where we were. They were sitting in offices and kind of listening in, there were no television cameras ability to, to convey anything that is, might exist today. So we had to, me, Chief Giarrusso, my, my compatriots in this process had to convey to him that this situation was nothing nice that was going on down there and it was not going it was it was gonna have a bad ending if there was not the intervention that we suggested and the solution that we suggested was that the police needed to withdraw and the reason for that was that the people's position was that when they wanted the cops when there were incidents that

occurred down there, they needed the police, they couldn't get them, and now that these eight Panthers had made the case for being there and helping and, and doing the things that the system had not done for them, the things that I described, helping the people and, and improving the quality of life. Then now they had cops coming out the "gazoo". And so the mayor took the position that, well, you know, let me talk to the chief, so we was-we were-we were exchanging the, the phone between us. And the chief's position, Clarence Giarrusso, who was just a superb police chief and just a superb human being, but his position officially was that they had broken the law and they had to be evicted. And so my position to the mayor was that this is a serious situation and that if you don't wanna wind up on the front page of the New York Times as the person presiding over a blood bath, which is what it's going to be here, then you need to ask them, give him a direct order to withdraw now. While all this is going on Don, Cecil, Charlie are moving around and we come to find out and then when I went back on the ground we all came to the conclusion that was scary, and that there were individuals in that crowd, and the crowd had now begun to really accumulate large numbers. Men, men, men, women, and children, residents of Desire, that there were, in that crowd, individuals that had fragmentation hand grenades. And so–

[00:59:34.15] Jack Davis: That-those are military-grade–

[00:59:36.21] Bob Tucker: Yeah

[00:59:37.09] Jack Davis: Is that where they came from?

[00:59:38.01] Bob Tucker: A frag, yeah, is a...it's a, it, it's a, it's an explosive device. If you pull the pin on one, it's not just a regular grenade, it has a lot of lethal qualities associated with it then a, than a typical grenade. And so that only exacerbated an already bad situation with all those people who had come out into the streets. And so Moon did his credit, gave the police chief a direct order. He said, "Let's bring the cops outta there." And they, Chief Giarrusso asked that I would go with him to de-deploy, if you will, the cops who had taken up positions in the apartment buildings and in the streets and wherever and I simply asked the chief to take off his coat and to take his weapon off, because it there was gonna be shooting [laughs] I said, tongue-in-cheek, "Chief, I don't want my brothers shooting at him to hit me." And we, we, we remained good friends and he was just a fantastic individual. I guess it was just a moment of levity, but he and I–

[01:00:45.07] Jack Davis: Was that, that was still a pretty intense moment?

[01:00:47.01] Bob Tucker: Yeah, it was. It was. And so the cops came out and they were quite, quite angry at having to leave, the wall wagon which was on a vehicle and brought down, and they have photographs of that people will see from the newspaper accounts of our guys walking,

and the police on one side, and the, the people of Desire stood between the police and those Panthers, they put their bodies out. That's how committed they were, in effect they're saying that you're gonna have to kill us first before you go in and get those eight Panthers. Now that's that's a telling indictment of what and how situations like that and the impact they can have when it comes to neighborhood life, quality of life, and we were very lucky. The city of New Orleans was quite, quite lucky and fortunate that that situation did not result in a bloody showdown in Desire. So it was a showdown as Orissa has pointed out so beautifully in her book. It was a showdown, but it did not happen for the reasons that we talked about.

[01:02:12.01] Jack Davis: And what did the, was the administration able to do in the next eight years to help change the conditions in Desire?

[01:02:21.10] Bob Tucker: We, we began to see as a result of model cities the inflow of federal funds, we began to see changes occurring, Press Park Homes got built, which was one of the most effectively done residential developments in the United States. Strong tenant association, people kept up their, their units, their homes, they ensured that garbage was properly collected and what have you. Now we later learned that it was built on a, on a waste disposal site. That had all sorts of other implications that we did not know at the time, but the development started to occur not only in the Desire and in the Ninth Ward but in, in other areas of the city as a result of this new administration coming in.

[01:03:18.11] Jack Davis: Justin a-a–

[01:03:21.19] Bob Tucker: Can we take a--yeah.

[01:03:22.17] Jack Davis: I just wanna see if maybe we could take a...a, a little, unless Justin you had any a quick question, well let's come back to it.

[01:03:28.21] Justin Nystrom: Yeah, we'll come back to it.

[01:03:29.20] Bob Tucker: Yeah, I wanna keep rolling, yeah, I wanna just take a quick bathroom break…

[01:03:36.13] Justin Nystrom: I'll have a seat here, just wanted to have a few follow-up questions.

[01:03:40.03] Bob Tucker: Sure.

[01:03:40.18] Justin Nystrom: And, you're talking about how segregated New Orleans was.

[01:03:47.10] Bob Tucker: Mhm.

[01:03:48.06] Justin Nystrom: Can you tell me the first time you ate in a restaurant in New Orleans with a white person without trouble?

[01:03:55.02] Bob Tucker: I don't have a distinct recollection, but what I do recall is that we were pretty much of a novelty and it may have been three or four of us, it may have been some of the Landrieu folks that we were a novelty in that restaurant. I don't even remember what it was, I just remember the stares, and kinda what we got, took a while for the city to adjust after all those years, to adjust to suddenly an integrated…book-ends to the city when we had had all of that. Everything was, as, as I indicated, segregated in those days. There were, there were some people getting together in their homes, but it was almost sort of like an underground culture, if you will, and so there was none of the, the even flow of discourse or relations or commerce in the town.

[01:04:58.11] Justin Nystrom: When-when-when Mayor Moon first approached you where did you meet?

[01:05:04.09] Bob Tucker: We met in a little office...oh! He had a headqua-he-had had a campaign headquarters during the campaign, campaign headquarters over here off of Canal Street, and we talked in a campaign office. When we had the interview about the job, it was a little transition office a block from where the Orpheum Theater is. I think it's a Subway now. We were on the second floor, I passed it last night, and I thought about it. I looked up and I said, "That's where Moon and I met, had our in-initial meeting...about the job."

[01:05:37.23] Justin Nystrom: Yeah. Did...did you know Billy Guste?

[01:05:41.20] Bob Tucker: Sure did, sure did.

[01:05:44.05] Justin Nystrom: Tell me a little bit about Billy Guste.

[01:05:45.15] Bob Tucker: He was the attorney general at the time that we were in office, he owned, I guess it was Antoine's at the time restaurant. Billy Guste was one of the candidates that ran against Moon in the 1969-70 mayor cycle. In fact it was probably one of the richest fields of candidates that the city had seen, but obviously as we discussed the run-off was between Moon and Jimmy Fitz. But Billy was always a decent individual, and, and as I said the system and the inhabitants of New Orleans as a unit had always been living, all of us, under the seg-segregated system. But there were people like Billy, and others, in fact, who were outparcels, if you will, from that sort of thinking.

[01:06:46.23] Justin Nystrom: Who were some of the other what you would call the sorta Uptown White establishment who started seeing that the city needed to change?

[01:06:55.10] Bob Tucker: In those days I guess the real test for change, and people outwardly manifesting the desire to change as the political wheel rolled forward, were those people who stood with Dutch and who publicly came out for him. But during our administration calling [Dink Lowe], Brooke Duncan, Leon Irwin, Uptown people Leon, I think was the formerly, deceased now, King of Rex, these were folks and, and certainly Brooke was big in Rex organization. So, some of these invididuals, and there were others, but those come off the top of my head who broke with the establishment, if you will, to hang with Moon and, and support. Remember now this is the outyears as we got into 1978 and I the ending of our second four years, second term. By that time Moon had been coming on as Moon the Coon, which was obviously the derogatory term applied by Whites who felt that he had gone too far in this prob--in this situation of dealing with the segregation problem and he had gone overboard in doing too much for the African American community, but how do you say, how much is enough when you look at three hundred years of oppression and segregation. So all Moon was doing was just trying to do the right thing to create the landscape that should've been there, had we not encountered these problems of race and class and gender in this town.

[01:08:35.07] Justin Nystrom: I just always panic when I, when I'm not actually looking that camera to make sure it's running.It's-it's-it's okay, it's-it's definitely running, we-you first came in contact with Moon in, in 1969 when he approached you, but when did you really feel like you knew Moon as a person? Was there a moment?

[01:08:59.19] Bob Tucker: I knew him as a person coming off of that day in Desire, because what Moon did, in those days, the hangout for Landrieu administration was a place on Decatur Street called In a Pig's Eye, yeah. And our team, our guys that we--been down there we talked to the Panthers, you know, first and as they were setting up the perimeter, they had green on their faces and they knew that they were gonna send the dogs in first and then often when we wound up talking the Chief Giarrusso, the mayor in this sort of shell diplomacy, if you will and it was a day-long event, and we realized that it was really kind of a crazy situation that we had inserted ourselves into as imbeds in that because of the fire power of the police department, the possibility of pins getting pulled on frags on the other side, and everything that was going on that entire day. So we said, "Man, all we wanna do is go get us a nice drink and chill out." ..."chill out" wasn't around in those days, but we just wanted to get out of that and Moon, to his credit, had the police to find us, and he came up and in front of everyone there, he said, "I wanna publicly apologize to you because now I understand what you were doing and what you were saying that had you not shown that you had credibility as a Black person and as a Black public official working in this administration, then you would've been no benefit to me because you would've been just like a Black guy who was there with a White face." So I said, "Moon, that's

all that we're trying to show." So that's when I knew Moon Landrieu to be a guy that had a tremendous amount of integrity, strength, toughness, and compassion and who knew what it took to bring all these pieces together. Because this is a learning experience for everybody. There was no template for what went on down there. There was no template for the eight years of what happened in this town under his leadership. On some days, we were making it up as we went along, but that required a tremendous amount of confidence and strength and fearlessness to do that. And so the result is that it was a, it was a dynamite eight-year run, the city was all the better for it. The piece that you and Jack have laid out that those eight, that the ‘70s, we haven't found a better term yet. They may not have been the golden years, but certainly they were formulative years in this process of building the New Orleans that we know today. That that was a great run and a great period for us.

[01:12:01.07] Justin Nystrom: What...what was the biggest issue you butted heads with Moon Landrieu about?

[01:12:08.05] Bob Tucker: Probably Desire. I mean that was where we had, we had to literally agree to disagree at that moment in time when I said that I was not gonna go to police headquarters and help direct the operation. Other than that, we, we pretty much worked through everything else. There were some times, there were issues related to, you know, some of the day-to-day municipal things, but those were issues that everybody went back and forth on. We had the ability as a team to speak forthrightly with each other. We didn't tell each other what we wanted, you know, what somebody wanted to hear. We talked very forthrightedly about what we all needed to know, and we created a…a platform, a predicate from which we could go in and it created, not only did it create...capacity for us as professionals, but it allowed the public to see the-the term transparency wasn't even around in those days, but it gave us standing with the public to say, "You know, we may not agree with them all the time, " talking about the Landrieu administration, "but boy, they sure are making things happen in this town." And some of the, as I indicated, using the example of the pedestrian mall in the French Quarter, for some of the preliminary feelings of our changes that were occurring were-were out right negative. People came around, they came around on some of the other pieces, on some of the racial stuff. Some folks came around and said, "Well, you know, we do need to do right, we do need to have people at that level, we noo-do need to support small businesses, which is with Moon, also another theme that he worked. We need to, all of the, all of the pieces of this town that it takes, this is one of the most difficult towns to govern in the United States. My sense of it is, you know, the White House is comparatively easy compared to this town because mayors are on the frontline 24/7. They're always accessible. They don't get a break when they're always on duty. Desire was tough, the Mark Essex matter was not so much a decision, but sorting it out and figuring it out and working through it, we were all in that building, we--it occurred we were at Saint Benedict's Abbey--Abbey...on retreat, a weekend retreat with our staff guys. And we were playing touch football and the word came to us that the city was on fire, it was a cold day and we all jumped in

our cars and rushed back, came straight to City Hall and we could see the smoke from the Causeway. It did appear that the city may have been on fire. But it was a Howard Johnson building and so for the next twenty-four, forty-eight hours we were there trying to sort out, you know, how to figure this stuff out and how, how to get it right.

[01:15:08.12] Justin Nystrom: Yeah, I was gonna ask you about that incident. Yeah...tough time.

[01:15:11.23] Bob Tucker: Mhm.

[01:15:13.02] Justin Nystrom: Mm. What stands out most in your mind about those forty-eight hours?

[01:15:17.04] Bob Tucker: There were several solutions that were being proposed one as I recall it, was to, the Dome was under construction at that time, and one solution was to move one of those cranes over and to use that large concrete ball to knock the block house down where, where Mark Essex was. The police were at the 1010 Common Building and they were deployed in that building and other buildings. But they cannot inflict any fire because that, that blockhouse was like a, a fortress in of itself. So I think that that got rejected because it was just a precarious, you know, construction undertaking or deconstruction undertaking, another solution had to do with trying to send the dogs in there and you know, that didn't work, Another had to do with dropping I think bags of fammable material and trying to create a fire situation and that was rejected and ultimately and in between all that was going on, you had, you know, police in and out and the guy that was the shot knocked into, the impact of the bullet knocked him into the pool, Howard Johnson's pool and he lived because of that because the round that penetrated, he was sort of a rotif indivi-individual, the cold water kept him from bleeding to death, one of the members of the press set up across the street, and it was kind of a sensational event for the press, particularly at the point that the, that the police were getting ready to get going through the inside. One of the real tragedies of that event was the loss of Louis Sirgo. Louis Sirgo was really a people person who happened to be an assistant chief in the New Orleans police department. He had the respect of all of the neighborhood activists and the people who knew him because he was just a straight-up guy and he died leading his men into that building, going down one of the hallways and got popped from behind. But the process of trying to extract Mark Essex from that building was certainly an intricate one and, and ultimately what happened was that they brought in a Huey chopper with police officers and I, I think other law enforcement people inside the chopper. And he actually came out from the blockhouse and literally attempted to attack the chopper. And then they were able to inflict fire and took him out, about fifty rounds or something. The sequel to that story was that a few days later they found an apartment uptown where he lived and so Chief Giarrusso asked if I would go with him to go examine it and it was a small appartment behind another appartment building. When we got in, even if he had been discovered, unless you took the house apart, you would not have known the weapon that he used was behind a hollowed-out

panel in the floor in the, in the side of the building, the small appartment unit. In the bathroom, he had taken usher's gloves and he had sprayed it with black paint because you could see the imprint. And then on the mirror it said, I think, "Death comes at the end of a gun barrel," as I recall it. So the point is that even if he had been discovered, unless you were able to sort through all that, nobody knew what his mission was. Intriguing thing about the fellow was that he was on a mission, it appeared, a one-person mission. He had been in the Navy when you drilled down on his background, middle-class family in the midwest, came up not in a poverty environment but in the military. I think it was in the Navy, began to experience a different world and it helped to shape him when he got out. He tried to join the Muslims, which were active in this town at that time, in fact, there was an arrest warrant that went out for a member of the local chapter of the Black Muslims. I had worked with the Muslims, knew them, George Forex was the Muslim minister, and so they called me and asked if I would give safe passage to this individual. He wanted to surrender himself to ensure and to tell his story that he had nothing to do with the Howard Johnson's matter or with Mark Essex. So I did, I, I called my good friend Chief Giarrusso and said, "I'm gonna bring him in. I want safe passage for him and for me." And because there was a really tinderbox of emotions in that town, particularly with the, with the policemen that had been killed and there were vigilantes had came in from all parts of towns, armed to the teeth, that wanted to, I guess, share in this, this action. At any rate, we drove directly into police headquarters at an appointed time, we went up to the chief's office to ask all their questions of him and cleared him. He had had no involvement. The other interesting pieces that, when the autopsy was done on Mark Essex, no drugs, no alcohol, he was just on this very deadly mission. He was tactically trained, he took phone booths--phone books, put them in these curtains, sign of--you know, lit them and sort of appeared that there were certainly multiple people and maybe multiple shooters, but he was caught on his mission and it was, it was one of those situations that was regrettable certainly for the loss of those police lives and certainly for a young man who maybe, given another choice, could've done something with his life but who decided that he was going to spend that out, but it became a piece, another page in the history book of New Orleans that, you know, just spoke to New Orleans kind of being in the middle of things, you know. Lee Harvey Oswald handing out free plate of Cuba pamphlets on the corner right over here, Girod and Camp Street and New Orleans is always sort of in this mix, that's the sort of shadowed side and then they always all the, the great sides, the culture and the architecture and all the things, which makes it, I guess, this interesting city that it is.

[01:22:47.04] Justin Nystrom: Tell me about...did you see changes in Carnival?

[01:22:51.11] Bob Tucker: No, I did not.

[01:22:52.18] Justin Nystrom: Okay. So not during the ‘70s that wasn't something that–

[01:22:55.07] Bob Tucker: Oh, yeah, I'm, I thought it was the movie like no, I know what you're talking about [laughs]

[01:22:57.20] Justin Nystrom: Oh yeah, no, no, [laughs]. Yeah.

[01:23:01.10] Bob Tucker: I did, yeah, what happened was that...we...Carnival had been a fairly tame to the extent that Mardi Gras can never be tame but it was certainly not the even that it has become today when the movie Easy Rider came out what we saw happening was that young people began to flow into New Orleans, following that movie, they saw it as sort of a Woodstock south setting, if you will. And the first year the city administration, we tried to accomodate the inflow of young people, in those days, Tulane's stadium was uptown and we tried to house them in the athletic dorms there were inside of the, the back part of the stadium, but the numbers on them began to increase, I think it was the second year following the movie that we had brought in the National Guard, Jackson Square had been opened, but all kind of wild things were going on there with this influx of students. I say "students," young people from around the country who had seen the movie and so Judge Eddie St. Pierre and a lot, and a couple of other municipal judges had court and tried to adjudicate the more glaring cases of, you know, civil disobedience or people breaking the law and there was more of a attitude of trying to tolerate and to work through the situation than taking oppressive measures that would've put a different face on Mardi Gras, but, but that was the beginning of the change in Mardi Gras and so it began to receive publicity, you know, in a worldwide context, not just because of that but as the, as the celebration grew and as it went through this metamorphisis of becoming...a celebration, not just attended and participated in by locals, which is what it had been for so many years, local people masked and they brought their kids out, then it sort of went, evolved into this other Mardi Gras that we see today.

[01:25:21.07] Justin Nystrom: There was a committee set up to deal with the young people, right? Coming in from, for Mardi Gras. Were you part of that, or...?

[01:25:27.18] Bob Tucker: Tangentially, the administration looked on everything that was going on to see if there was any intervention. I was not, I think it may have been Tony Gagliano or other folks that were more intimately involved in it, but it was an effort to try and achieve some sort of meaningful detente and coexistence between the forces of between the participants in Mardi Gras, the Canival krewes, the local folks, and the tourists, and sometimes all those forces had difficulty in coming to some, some sort of agreement on what, how all of these pieces worked together, but that, that committee did help in large part to achieve some resolutions. And now we have a Mardi Gras that is what it is, you know. It's a different celebration than what we knew it to be when we were growing up here.

[01:26:22.01] Justin Nystrom: Great...Jack I wanna turn it back over to you I think at this point.

[01:26:26.00] Jack Davis: Good.

[01:26:26.05] Justin Nystrom: Great. Gonna...stop this and…

[01:26:31.05] Jack Davis: Continuing on the subject of Mardi Gras, the administration made a point of integrating for the first time.

[01:26:39.18] Bob Tucker: Mhm.

[01:26:40.11] Jack Davis: Something as simple as the reviewing stands in front of Gallier Hall.

[01:26:45.11] Bob Tucker: Mhm.

[01:26:46.04] Jack Davis: ...were...am I correct in recollecting this, that–

[01:26:50.05] Bob Tucker: Right, yeah.

[01:26:50.16] Jack Davis: What, what changed from an all-White or almost all-White audience to...a, a, a carefully integrated...crowd of people watching the parades in front of City Hall?

[01:26:59.07] Bob Tucker: Yeah. And the effort was led in large part by one of Moon's top supporters in the White community that was Lon Erwin.

[01:27:09.02] Jack Davis: Right.

[01:27:09.17] Bob Tucker: One of the major events that happened was that Lon was able to get the officials of Rex to agree to invite a selected group of African Americans to the ball, which had never happened before. So it was, I recall Moon asked, we had a discussion about it, and he called me in, he said, "Man, Lon has worked to get this thing done, you know, where some of y'all are gonna be invited." So I grew up in New Orleans and, and, and Mardi Gras was an event that I enjoyed but I didn't, I wasn't really a big Mardi Gras person per se. You know, did all the usual stuff. Took my daughter out when she was a kid to the parades and went out when I was a teenager to the parades, and those type of things, but going to Mardi Gras ball was not at the top of my list of things and certainly going to a Rex ball was not at the top of my list of things to get done.

[01:28:12.13] Jack Davis: Would you, did you fell obligated to do so to make the point?

[01:28:16.11] Bob Tucker: Well, Moon made me feel obligated to do so to make the point. [laughs] and I said, "Man," I said, "You know, I'm, I'm glad that it's gonna happen." And Moon said in effect, "You must go. You must go because Lon Erwin has gone to great efforts to get this done." So I think it was seven or eight people, James Gill really captures it in his book, the Lords of Misrule, Doctor Teemer and a couple of university presidents and Norman Francis and myself and, and what have you, and we went…

[01:28:51.04] Jack Davis: Did you have a good time?

[01:28:52.15] Bob Tucker: Yeah, it was okay, it was okay.

[01:28:55.03] Jack Davis: What was, do you remember any re--any reaction that people had?

[01:28:57.16] Bob Tucker: No, I, not other than, and as African Americans and you know people with ethnic backgrounds, we had this sort of sensitivity to when we walk into a setting if we're picking up, you know, vibrations or read the resistance or acceptance, so to speak. As I recall there were people who were, found us to be a little bit of a, of a, of a Mardi Gras anomaly, if that such a thing could, could be, certainly for the Rex ball. But we were, we were warmly greeted by others, and we attended the, it was in the Municipal Auditorium, I remember that part. And we sat through the tableau, the part, you know, where I kinda exited out was the, the ring kissing, you know, piece that I, I just didn't need to get a hand on that part. So I left and gave Moon a great report the next morning... [laughs]

[01:30:03.16] Jack Davis: And that was before, that was, that was before he pushed to get Rex to admit African Americans as members

[01:30:13.06] Bob Tucker: Yeah.

[01:30:14.01] Jack Davis: Not just ball attendees…

[01:30:15.01] Bob Tucker: Right, yeah. I, I think the ball was, was a test drive…

[01:30:17.09] Jack Davis: Uh huh.

[01:30:17.23] Bob Tucker: …of seeing how that part of it could work, it was the opener, you know, invite a hand--you know, some selected African Americans–

[01:30:27.19] Jack Davis: Mhm.

[01:30:28.18] Bob Tucker: --to the event, and then, take the next step and...you know, the, I guess the reason why I don't have a great sense of either gratitude or of, of it being a big deal is because the Aftican American community's Mardi Gras tradition, going back to the late 1800s, is just as rich–

[01:30:56.11] Jack Davis: Mhm

[01:30:57.02] Bob Tucker: --as the other traditions with the krewes. And the history and the, the all of the the, the, the tableau and all of the accoutrement of Mardi Gras that happened on the other side had been happening in the African American community.

[01:31:16.06] Jack Davis: Right. And, and do you think that, in the 19-in this period of opening up New Orleans in the 1970s in the, through the cultural new, the new cultural–

[01:31:26.04] Bob Tucker: Mhm.

[01:31:26.17] Jack Davis: --appreciation that the city and the world outside got to appreciate how much of Mardi Gras did come from African American heritage, I mean the....

[01:31:38.05] Bob Tucker: I…

[01:31:38.20] Jack Davis: Mardi Gras Indians and the Young Men Illinois–

[01:31:40.19] Bob Tucker: Yeah

[01:31:41.08] Jack Davis: And...and everything from the street to the, to the formal balls was–

[01:31:45.07] Bob Tucker: Yeah. I think it enlarged the photograph–

[01:31:48.13] Jack Davis: Mhm

[01:31:49.07] Bob Tucker: --of what the outside world saw. I think that to the extent that nobody had really drilled down on, for example, the Mardi Gras Indians and people were found it somewhat mysterious that Black folks would be dressing up as Native Americans...Well, what's that about? And so it caused them to probe it, and it opened the door for the explanation to emerge that during those days in which segregation was the rule the Native American population in this area. They were allies and friends and helped in various ways, and it also showed the richness of some of the Mardi Gras events and, and cued and, and balls and associations and the Zulus and what they did outside of, you know, what they do for Mardi Gras, what they do in the community to help kids–

[01:32:47.23] Jack Davis: Correct

[01:32:48.17] Bob Tucker: And institutions and that type of thing, so you're right. It helped to push out the envelope of what Mardi Gras is really all about as opposed to, you know, two weeks of parades and then the big day.

`[01:33:00.17] Jack Davis: Yeah. And then back to these traditional, you know, traditionally White, Uptown krewes

[01:33:06.07] Bob Tucker: Mhm.

[01:33:07.01] Jack Davis: Did, did Moon Landrieu ever tell you that he applied a little muscle to Rex that he, I un…, I understand that he let it be known to the organization very quietly that there wouldn't be anybody in the Gallier Hall official city reviewing stand when, when Rex came by Mardi Gras morning unless they made some concessions.

[01:33:34.13] Bob Tucker: I understand that he went into the muscle end of the business. [laughs]

[01:33:37.22] Jack Davis: So that, that story–

[01:33:38.00] Bob Tucker: On that particular matter

[01:33:39.21] Jack Davis: Did, you, can you, that story is true?

[01:33:41.14] Bob Tucker: I didn't yeah, I...I just inside of our circle

[01:33:44.09] Jack Davis: Yeah.

[01:33:44.23] Bob Tucker: It was kinda like some folklore that kinda got passed around. We never talked about it, but it would not be inconsistent with the Moon Landrieu that would be new, for example for those events that had previously been all-White events, like for example, the meeting of the chambers, the annual meeting. Moon made it clear that he expected to see some diversity and not just the usual situation and, and folks that the way it had been, he wanted to see some participation by women and by African Americans and by other folks that had been–

[01:34:23.04] Jack Davis: Mhm.

[01:34:23.14] Bob Tucker: --outside of the circle of participation.

[01:34:26.22] Jack Davis: And as I heard the story re-described, this was not a public statement. This was not an ultimatum made in the media to Rex to...change your ways or else we'll pull the plug. But it was, it was conveyed quietly and not even the many of the top people at Rex knew that it had happened.

[01:34:49.11] Bob Tucker: Yeah. I can see Moon's style fitting inside of that apprach–

[01:34:55.11] Jack Davis: Mhm.

[01:34:55.22] Bob Tucker: He was not trying to showboat, he was a unique, unique politician and the, the people that I've seen that operate in that same mode and that is on many days you really have to do the right thing for the right reasons. It's called integrity, and people, the three people I know that have in the historic, from the historic vantage point, Moon, Dutch Morial, Mark Morial, and I, I know that now with the current mayor that he comes from that same DNA that you have to do what's right on a lot of days, not what's politically expedient, and I think that Moon just wanted to achieve a result. He wasn't gonna bandstand--grandstand that and go to the Black communitiy and say, "Look what I did, you know, I made these people in Rex"...that wasn't his style.

[01:35:53.07] Jack Davis: Yeah, yeah. Well, I wanted to ask you a little bit about Dutch Morial.

[01:35:57.00] Bob Tucker: Mhm

[01:35:57.21] Jack Davis: The, the transition from the Landrieu administration to the newly elected first Black mayor of New Orleans, Dutch Morial this, how many of the whiz kids and the, the newfound activism, idealism, and competence that was within City Hall. How much of that carried over into the first years of the Morial administration?

[01:36:25.07] Bob Tucker: Not too much during Dutch's first term. He brought in with him pretty much his own crew, it was the first time that I'd held a job and lost a job. And I didn't understand how it worked that, you know, it had nothing to do with your performance, but that it's just the new guy comes in, he brings his own people in. So I understood it the hard way and I, you know, left and then in the second term when Dutch was confronted with the interesting political situation where Bill Jefferson was running on the one side and Ron Fortier was running on the other side. And the political intent is Dutch characterized it and as he perceived it was to make him run third. So I picked up the phone, called, said, "Look, Dutch, I see what the play is, whatever way I can help, I'm there." And immediately Dutch asked me to begin meeting with Rochon and the team at the old, the hotel over on Tulane Avenue, which was our headquarters,

and I became a member head of his team and life ever after with, with there with the Morial family.

[01:37:33.07] Jack Davis: Was the...wa-wa-the high standard of government performance that you described as in the Landrieu administration. Did, did, did that carry over to the Morial eight years?

[01:37:46.12] Bob Tucker: Yeah. He took it up a notch because typically the going wisdom was that if you were to find good talent, you needed to find it always at home because those were the people that voted. But Dutch was not shy, if needed be, if it, if there were situation or whatever the, the job or the task…

[01:38:09.10] Jack Davis: Mhm.

[01:38:10.03] Bob Tucker: …required of bringing in outside talent and so he uses a stand of having the people that could get the job done and get it done effectively that was, that was his, that was his way of getting and ensuring that the city was gonna continue at the level he--he knew how to work the legislature because he had been up there, and one thing about Dutch, the fact that he had this accumulated list of firsts, the first, you know, juvenile court judge, the first this, the first that, didn't get in his way. He never allowed the headlines to…

[01:38:49.01] Jack Davis: Right

[01:38:49.23] Bob Tucker: …get in his way of doing what he felt was needed to be in the city and even the people who we could've characterized as Dutch's enemies they respected him because he had a style and a way of doing things. He told you where he was, you knew where he was and he just got the business done.

[01:39:09.08] Jack Davis: What about the fact that because, well, did the fact that Moon Landrieu was the first mayor elected by Black voters.

[01:39:19.13] Bob Tucker: Mhm.

[01:39:20.11] Jack Davis: Did that cause Dutch, did that make it easier for Dutch by laying groundwork of inclusion and fairness or did it have any other effect?

[01:39:31.09] Bob Tucker: I think that it helped to create a sense of activism and particularly in the African American community of, the community paying more attention to the electoral process, it had been beaten into our heads that you gotta register to vote, you gotta participate, but at that time we were all on the short end of the numbers, even going into Dutch's election.

Better than what was in Moon's days but still not having a, shall we say, a strong majority. But the cause Dutch became a cause to lead in the African American community. And then for Whites who wanted to make a statement that we don't use race as a standard by which we determine performance, they came, they crossed over. Now, as you recall, Nat Kiefer missed that run-off by low single, triple digit numbers. Two or three hundred votes, where if he had been in a run-off with Dutch there may have been a different result, but he wound up in a run-off with Louis DiRosa. And there was, I don't know, there may have been, I don't know what all of the differences were between the two individuals that wound up in that round, but there was a feeling, and maybe it was at that point in history where some folks said, "Let's give the Black guy a shot. You know? Can't do any worse. He's got all these credentials, and from what we hear, he's a pretty straight guy." But whatever it was, it resulted in Dutch winning an election.

[01:41:09.02] Jack Davis: And then in terms of, of governing, Moon had if, if Dutch had had to follow Jimmy Fitzmorris–

[01:41:20.21] Bob Tucker: Mhm.

[01:41:21.21] Jack Davis: Not as, is it fair to say, not as much would have been accomplished in the, in the terms of racial balance and inclusion in New Orleans? Would, did, did Moon make it easier for Dutch to continue those things or did he take away the glory of it, of doing those things?

[01:41:40.02] Bob Tucker: No, I think it would have been, I think that result would've been the same. There would've been even more of a hunger possibly in the African American community for Dutch. You know a quick sequel to the Dutch-Moon piece is that because it was on some days the contentiousness between Dutch and Moon and that was particularly the case in Dutch's second term because Moon had three days before the election endorsed Ron Fortier. So it created a backlash in the African American community because Moon was the guy that got all this started from the standpoint of standing up for us and now the fact that he's endorsing Ron Fortier sent a message to Blacks that you know, everything's on the line right now. So I think that that election, it was the 1982 election was the high watermark for African American turnout–

[01:42:43.15] Jack Davis: Mhm.

[01:42:44.08] Bob Tucker: Blacks were leaving bars that night, the night before the election saying that I gotta go home so I can get up early to go vote for Dutch. That second four years created a little bit of a rub, maybe a big rub, between the two, but what happened over time was that Mark Morial, Dutch's son, and then Mary Landrieu, Moon's daughter, who ultimately got elected, was running for state treasurer, that the families, the sons and daughters

[01:43:23.18] Jack Davis: Mhm.

[01:43:24.13] Bob Tucker: Of the guys that had had gone through this adversaral episode came together, supported each other, and not only that, but it was Mark Morial and his organization that helped get Mary elected to the US Senate. So I guess sometimes they said that no good deed that goes unpunished, but..

[01:43:46.04] Jack Davis: Now were you, were you involved in those…

[01:43:48.08] Bob Tucker: Yeah, yeah.

[01:43:48.17] Jack Davis: In those campaigns? So and let, can I take you back to the early years again?

[01:43:56.11] Bob Tucker: Yeah, sure.

[01:43:57.08] Jack Davis: When you were this, one of these three top executive assistants to, to Mayor Landrieu and you were the, the only one who was African American…

[01:44:06.21] Bob Tucker: Mhm

[01:44:07.15] Jack Davis: What reaction did you get?

[01:44:09.13] Bob Tucker: It was, it was an interesting experience, Blacks, the Black community said we want to have Blacks in positions of responsibility and power and then we did that with the com-with the all of the department heads and boards of commissions. And then there were those occasions where there was matters of critical importance the Black community and Moon would say, "Bob, I want you to handle that." So I go to handle it, they say, "Well, Bob we like you, you're our guy, but we wanna see him." So it was that, it was that kind of some days the dichotomy on the part of the community, but it was not a dichotomy that could not breeched and we, we worked it out. We knew that what they were saying was that he's the guy that was elected. He's the guy that's got the power stick. We're happy that you're there, we're happy that all these other African Americans and people that we know are there that we can go to and get our problems and needs addressed, but ultimately it's his responsibility, so that all got worked out.

[01:45:17.18] Jack Davis: How did you react to the, the, this very high visibility you had, I mean, for ye-for decades, forever New Orleans has had...has not had a government where you had a high Black official dealing with people. So you come into these meetings or you're on TV or...and you and, and, and, and Pete Sanchez and later Terry Duvernay and, and, and, many others, but at the beginning, you were very visible, did that feel...burdensome or uncomfortable?

[01:45:26.18] Bob Tucker: [laughs] I've never been asked that before, let me think about that...It worked pretty good, it, it, sometimes with my family, they because I was in these, in and out of these various situations, you know taking some of the hits that the administration took when there were critics that didn't like what we were doing, I was included by either direct call-out or by reference but for me it came with the territory and the battle scars that I got were scars that were earned. I enjoyed the process, it was frustrating on some days, but asked to do it all over again, I'd be signing on. Where do I sign? I'm up, I'm on.

[01:46:44.06] Jack Davis: Were there people who didn't want, who felt uncomfortable dealing with you?

[01:46:48.19] Bob Tucker: Not uncomfortable, the, in, in, in certain instances I held Moon's proxy, for example, on the Dome Stadium commission and so certain meetings that he couldn't make in which there were a room full of Whites, I was there and there were moments I guess where people said, "Well, what is this guy doing here?" and it was quickly explained by the chairman that, "Well, he's, he's the mayor's proxy." And that's where I used--mostly doing it. That's why he's in this room. So it was like anything else, people got over it, got used to it, and got on with it.

[01:47:28.08] Jack Davis: It was, it was part of the educational experience for them.

[01:47:31.21] Jack Davis: Yeah, exactly. Exactly. I didn't take the issues personally. I've always tried to distinguish between what I have to do and, and keep me and, and put my ego in my back pocket and get the job done and, and keep heading on down the road.

[01:47:52.02] Jack Davis: Skipping to another issue–

[01:47:55.04] Bob Tucker: Mm.

[01:47:55.09] Jack Davis: --We've, we've talked a couple times about Poydras Street

[01:47:57.22] Bob Tucker: Mhm.

[01:47:58.19] Bob Tucker: ...And we're right here in a building on Poydras Street that, that, that with this real estate boom in the–

[01:48:05.19] Bob Tucker: Mhm.

[01:48:05.23] Jack Davis: in the 1970s that made, that erected the, all these major buildings on Poydras Street and that continued into the 1980s, how do you think Poydras seet--Street has, in retrospect has, has turned out in, in terms of the intentions that the administration had in the 1970s?

[01:48:27.11] Bob Tucker: It's the, it's the centerpiece I think of what we didn't set out to make Poydras the Fifth Avenue of New Orleans, but the net result, as a consequence of the Dome, as I indicated, becoming the, the critical spark for this development, it's worked out to the city's benefit and I think that it's helped to move New Orleans in, in, into the big league. Poydras Street now is completely different than what it was and that's one of the stars in the crown of the Landrieu administration, but there are also other streets in the other parts of the city and in neighborhoods that changes occurred, they were not as, as glamorous, if you will, as Poydras Street, but which, nonetheless, had the same sort of implication for change and for good things happening.

[01:49:30.21] Jack Davis: Mhm.

[01:49:31.02] Bob Tucker: And…

[01:49:32.10] Jack Davis: Are, are you including the in, in the neighborhood support, the historic district designations and the historic district commission and the new–

[01:49:41.23] Bob Tucker: All--yeah.

[01:49:42.18] Jack Davis: And the new awareness of preservation of–

[01:49:45.01] Bob Tucker: Right. All, all of the above. And I think at the cultural side of New Orleans, began to, to really, we alluded to it a little bit earlier, began to take off in, in a real way. I remember Etta James, for me, the, the di--the diva–

[01:50:09.01] Jack Davis: Mhm.

[01:50:09.10] Bob Tucker: Of, of blues singing. She said that no matter how pompous or schmaltzy a song she had to always put a gospel and blues hurting on it. And I think that New Orleans, in its culture, its food, its music, its ambience, puts a hurting on people that come here and spend any amount of time with locals or partaking in any one of those venues, whether it's food, music, recreation, architechture. And that's unique for cities. There are people that come here that do things that they wouldn't do anywhere else in the western hemisphere in, in the context of feeling a sense of, of freedom. I'm not talking about just, you know, drinking and running in the streets, but, but just feeling liberated, and that in part is response, in response to

people saying, "Man...walk up that town." Celebrities that take homes here are movie stars that come here to shoot a movie and people just kinda say, "Where you at?" You know, whoever it is, Denzel Washington or, or, "What's happening, Brad?" And they keep moving. You know, yeah there's some starstruckness that goes on, but there's a comfort level that our culture creates, and that's one of our major assets and it's one that has to continue to be nurtured, but the, but the infrastructure of culture, just like the infrastructure of this town, have to all be attended to and we have to preserve those parts that represent the big assets for us, and we have to sometimes jettison the things that, that don't work for us.

[01:52:05.05] Jack Davis: And that nurturing was to my recollection, happening, while you all were in City Hall. There was–

[01:52:11.22] Bob Tucker: Mhm.

[01:52:11.21] Jack Davis: You know, the, it made it, City Hall made it easier for the Jazz Festival to grow and become a national event and City Hall–

[01:52:20.09] Bob Tucker: Right.

[01:52:21.08] Jack Davis: ...crea--we haven't mentioned this, but the creation of the historic districts all around town–

[01:52:27.04] Bob Tucker: Right.

[01:52:28.01] Jack Davis: And historic district commission and new protections for neighborhoods and their quality of life. That was all material that was developed in the Landrieu administration–

[01:52:40.07] Bob Tucker: Yeah

[01:52:40.04] Jack Davis: --that's paying dividends...many people would say right now.

[01:52:43.14] Bob Tucker: Moon had to help distinguish for both individuals and institutional leaders and, and inside of the process. Because there's a difference between a slum and a historically significant piece of property, in that you can't lump all that together and in the name of progress just push it all away. And it can't be done only inside of the, the French Quarter that throughout this town and that's the districts that you have to preserve while you build and progress, but all of it goes into the envelope of creating a great city, and then when you look at what happens in the Charlestons of the world and in those other towns that have developed a keen appreciation of its historic properties that that also, there's an audience for that inside of its

tourist envelope that we talked about and that it also is important for the people of shotgun doubles and singles that people live in that we lost, you know, so many of during both Hurricane Betsy and, and Katrina. They were not only people's dwellings but they had historic significance, you know, Louis Armstrong's house, it was, you know, ultimately moved over to his residenture. It was moved over to, where he grew up at least, moved over to Armstrong Park, all of that contributes to this larger picture of what makes a town a great city, which is where we've come to.

[01:54:22.10] Jack Davis: Well thank you for sitting down with us today and talking about those things. We could go on, but the–

[01:54:27.17] Bob Tucker: Yeah.

[01:54:28.02] Jack Davis: --we probably should make it a wrap here. Justin, is there anything else we need to ask before we turn off the camera?

[01:54:35.13] Justin Nystrom: This...this has...this has been great.

[01:54:37.23] Bob Tucker: Well it's a great project, and I'm, I'm happy to–

[01:54:41.03] Jack Davis: Well thanks for ma–

[[01:54:41.14] Bob Tucker: --add my piece to it.

[01:54:42.18] Jack Davis: Thanks for this great contribution to it.

[01:54:44.17] Bob Tucker: Yeah.

[01:54:45.05] Jack Davis: Appreciate it.

[01:54:45.16] Bob Tucker: And, and, and as y'all go on if I can help in any other way I'll be happy to.

[01:54:48.11] Jack Davis: We'll be in touch.

[01:54:49.11] Bob Tucker: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

[01:54:50.08] Jack Davis: Thank you very much.

[01:54:51.04] Bob Tucker: Okay.