

Interview of Benjamin C. Toledano by Jack Davis and Justin Nystrom
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Abstract: This interview focuses on Benjamin C. Toledano's relationship with politics in New Orleans during the 1970s. This includes a detailed examination of the main platforms and thoughts surrounding the 1970 New Orleans Mayoral Election. Toledano recalls his mayoral campaign and his accomplishments. This discussion of the election includes his view on his opponent, Mayor Moon Landrieu's time in office, and his achievements. Toledano also discusses his involvement and candidacy in the 1972 election for Louisiana's freshly open Senate seat. Toledano also details Dutch Morial's time as Mayor of New Orleans and provides a look at what New Orleans has done wrong in his eyes and how New Orleans could have remained the economic powerhouse that it once was.

Bio: Benjamin C. Toledano was born into Uptown New Orleans society in 1932. Born to a father who was a Toledano, a family that had been in New Orleans since 1718, and a mother with a wealthy father, Toledano was bound to be involved in the traditionally Uptown elite. In 1957, Toledano became licensed to practice law. In 1967 he was a partner in a law firm practicing insurance defense. Toledano became bored with insurance law and the day-to-day life that his occupation had entered, so he decided to run for Mayor of New Orleans in the 1970 election as a Republican in the general election against the Democrat Moon Landrieu. The main issue during the election was the integration of New Orleans. With Black New Orleanians voting in unprecedented numbers in 1970, Landrieu easily defeated Toledano. In 1972 Toledano also ran for an open United States Senate seat as a Republican. Although he also lost this election, he never expected to win. In 1982, Ronald Reagan considered him for nomination to the United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit. Toledano was removed from consideration once his past relation to the Louisiana States' Rights Party was brought to Reagan's attention. After being in New Orleans his whole life and raising his children there, he left for Charlottesville after his removal from consideration for the Court of Appeals. He moved to Mississippi in 1991, where he lived the rest of his life. Toledano passed away at the age of 89 in 2021.

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[00:00:17.09] Justin Nystrom: Recording...B. Okay.

[00:00:23.09] Jack Davis: We are here in the library of the Columbus, Mississippi, home of Ben C. Toledano and Margaret Toledano. We're talking to...Ben C. Toledano, who's...the image you can see. Once again, it's part of the Loyola Oral History Project focusing primarily on New Orleans in the 1970s. I'm Jack Davis, asking some questions, and Justin Nystrom, professor at the...Loyola history professor, Loyola History Department, behind the cameras and asking probably some other questions. So Ben C., thanks for having us...up here. Glad to be with you...you are a New Orleanian whose family and roots go back centuries...you're a lifelong New Orleanian and in the 1970s you are as deeply involved as anybody I can think of in New Orleans affairs in being a partner in a law firm, raising four kids, starting businesses, owning an Italian restaurant, saving historic buildings, active in reform and politics, running for mayor, running for the United States Senate...what drove that breadth and depth of commitment to New Orleans on your part?

[00:02:00.11] Ben C. Toledano: Well I, Jack, I really can't say that it was due to this deep feeling of commitment to New Orleans. You, you often have to wonder how much is personal, how much of the motivation is...activated by personal considerations other than wanting to do something for your community. It's simple enough to talk about caring about your community, but the more I think about it, the more I wonder why certain things were done, why I got involved in certain things, and...I can't really say that...I can't be altruistic about it and say that I did these things because it was for my city. That, that had to be an element of it, but I...can't...

[00:03:01.15] Jack Davis: Well, you don't have to say that, you just, why did you, why for instance did you run for mayor in 1970?

[00:03:09.22] Ben C. Toledano: Well, I think there were a lot of factors. One was...that I think I was bored with what I was doing for a living.

[00:03:18.24] Jack Davis: Which was...

[00:03:19.24] Ben C. Toledano: ...defending insurance companies and (?) actions, trying cases almost every day...and it wasn't very...intellectually stimulating...it was a nice way to try to support my family, but somehow or other I wanted to...I guess like a lot of people...I wanted to feel that my existence mattered. That's such a subjective thing that it's, it's hard to really explain...but I don't think it's unusual for people to want to be recognized and...it's neither a good nor a bad thing, just the way it is...

[00:04:14.27] Jack Davis: New Orleans in 1969, when the mayor's race started, and 1970, when it finished with the...general election, had been...this followed...a decade or more of

really...important, major changes in, in the city's economic and political landscape. And there were a...there was a huge crowd of people running for mayor in 1970...Were you, how did you distinguish yourself from those...dozen or so other candidates?

[00:04:54.20] Ben C. Toledano: Well, I guess if I had to give one example, it would be...a presentation of that Catholic girls school on...what is it? Claiborne and State Street, the auditorium there, the...League of Women Voters and the Junior League I think were cosponsoring a meeting of all candidates, and it must've been eight Democrats, I would imagine. And I was included, being the only Republican, and the Republican nominee in the general election. And one of the questions was, "What do you think of the manner in which Jim Garrison has...prosecuted or persecuted both...Clay Shaw, in trying to involve Clay in the death of President Kennedy?" And to a man, the Democrats who certainly cared about Jim Garrison's political clout, gave the usual, "Oh Jim is a very bright, capable guy. He's a little irascible, he's difficult to deal with sometimes, but nobody would really take the gloves off, and when it got to me I said, "I think what Garrison's done is a disgrace. I think he should be replaced in public office...I don't think there's any excuse for what he's done." And was very strong about it. That's the only standing ovation I got from that...so-called liberal group primarily, I mean the crowd there.

[00:06:56.29] Jack Davis: And how much then media notice did that get?

[00:07:00.14] Ben C. Toledano: Oh, I think zero, usual amount. The other, the other major story I guess—

[00:07:08.01] Jack Davis: If I could ask you though, this was...in 1969 after, after Garrison had failed to convict Clay Shaw. Am I right on that?

[00:07:17.25] Ben C. Toledano: Probably so, Jack. You're better on dates than I am

[00:07:21.24] Jack Davis: So, Ben, and Garrison would still be in office until 1973.

[00:07:26.21] Ben C. Toledano: But he was, yeah

[00:07:27.11] Jack Davis: So he was still, so these, the other candidates were still...

[00:07:30.27] Ben C. Toledano: Wanted his support.

[00:07:32.09] Jack Davis: Right.

[00:07:33.07] Ben C. Toledano: Which was strong. Didn't want to offend him, in other words.

[00:07:39.08] Jack Davis: So even after that fiasco of a trial, he still had what they feared as political—

[00:07:45.17] Ben C. Toledano: That's the way I saw it. I can't imagine any other way. Because I'm sure they couldn't have felt that way and never...you know, deep down.

[00:07:55.23] Jack Davis: Right. You mentioned that the second...

[00:07:58.13] Ben C. Toledano: Well, yeah...speaking of the press, one day I was...speaking to the Sertoma Club across the street from the Supreme Court Building, they have a side street. And the, both newspapers were there and three television stations were there. It was well-covered, and...I had used that occasion to call upon the community, the leaders, and social leaders, to show us...they believed what they were saying and to resign from all clubs and organizations to which they belong, which systematically excluded people because of nationality or race or so forth. Because the big issue in the campaign was the Public Accommodations Ordinance, which was to...racially integrate the neighborhood bars and restaurants in New Orleans.

[00:09:08.14] Jack Davis: And this...that ordinance had been passed...just before the election...one of the leaders of it was Moon Landrieu, against whom you were running in the general election one-on-one. And was this during the general election that you talked to the Sertoma Club? I forget.

[00:09:29.06] Ben C. Toledano: I think, I think it was.

[00:09:31.08] Jack Davis: Uh huh. And the Public Accommodations Act was a major act in that campaign.

[00:09:35.12] Ben C. Toledano: I think so.

[00:09:37.11] Jack Davis: So what, what response did you get to that?

[00:09:41.03] Ben C. Toledano: Well, I called on these people by name, I said that [Harry Kelleher] and [Owen Fenner] and [Dick Freeman] and all of the social bigwigs should lead the way that they wanted the, the poor working-class people to show their good faith by supporting the Public Accommodations Ordinance, and that the neighborhood bars and restaurants were the clubs of the working men, where they went to drink beer after work and be with their buddies and do whatever they did together. Talk, play pool, whatever. And I thought that these outstanding citizens should...lead the way and...set examples for the less fortunate people. Well, after I said it, I thought, well I've really done it today. This is the end of me, but I'm glad I did it

because I felt so strongly about it. So I, when I took the bus home that day, I thought about it and wondered what the ramifications were gonna be, and...when it came time to listen to the news I did and there was no mention of it. Then when I read the papers the next day there was no mention of it. And in my judgment without knowing that I would say that the boys in charge of things just killed it. I, they just decided we don't want this and it was as if it didn't happen. It was a most extraordinary experience. That this, I mean this was a big thing. I remember there was a Jewish lawyer named Herbert Garon, G-A-R-O-N, who was there at the meeting and...he, he looked on me as a...segregationist, as a right winger or whatever, and...he came up to me with tears in his eyes afterwards and said, "I never thought I'd live long enough to hear someone say this. And thank you." So that made an impression on me, but...

[00:12:08.09] Jack Davis: The Public Accommodations Ordinance did, did make a race of it in the general election in the spring of 1970. A lot of the way it gets spun is it's a...pro-integration ordinance that Moon Landrieu and members of the city council passed, and the way the opposition is spun is as opposed to that degree of...integration. And what you're saying you did here was turn that around and challenge the people who were seeking...public, more widespread public accommodations by making them accommodate everyone in their own organizations and clubs.

[00:12:52.09] Ben C. Toledano: Well that, that was the idea. Of course I knew they wouldn't. The...the thing about it was nobody really wanted to integrate either the Black or the White neighborhood bars and restaurants because that was the social life of the poorer working-class people. It's where they went to be with their friends, and...they didn't have the clubs to go to. Those were their clubs, and...of course Father Screen, Pat...Pat Screen's brother, I guess, I don't know...sort of led the fight for Moon and [laughs] one side accused Moon publicly of hiding under Father Screen's skirt. [laughs] And Moon thought that was...going a little too far [laughs]. So we've seen the way he dresses, but...it was so typical of the mentality in New Orleans. I mean...the leaders were trying to sell it on the basis of, "Well, if we're gonna attract major athletic events and...bring tourists to the city, we're gonna have to be an open city." However, the important thing was that the civil rights act of '64, I guess it was, the one that LBJ, one of the ones that he brought about, specifically excluded neighborhood bars because they knew that that was not a good place to try to do social experimentation. So the feds had excluded it, but in New Orleans our cherished leaders were going to impose this to make New Orleans look like the open city we don't discriminate and so forth. And, and I...to this day, I resent anybody taking a position that they would not apply to themselves and their own families, you know here were these guys going to clubs ordering people like Alden McDonald's father, to get them drinks.

[00:15:41.11] Jack Davis: Alden McDonald being the, the first president of the first Black bank, Liberty Bank

[00:15:46.20] Ben C. Toledano: Liberty Bank or whatever it was. Yes.

[00:15:49.18] Jack Davis: And you're talking about his father.

[00:15:50.16] Ben C. Toledano: His father, who worked at the Boston Club...they would fetch drinks for the, the bigwigs, but the poor man deserved no consideration. So I was very sincere about that, and I think that...I think that Moon could probably see the merit of it because he was never an elitist as far as I was concerned. I think he cared more for the average working man than he did for the big shots, but the die was cast, we were going into a transitional period that could not be avoided, I mean it was...the '70s were the period of transition.

[00:16:40.18] Jack Davis: Transition from...what to what?

[00:16:43.07] Ben C. Toledano: Well...the Public Accommoda--I mean, the whole concept of public accommodations, which, which I agree with generally, in other words I don't think that anyone can make a, a reasonable or proper argument for excluding Black people from any public services or activities or benefits. And...yet people, because of the education question, the, became...something different than what it was. In other words, the first thing we had to do was make all public opportunities available to everyone equally. That was the big thing, But then the education situation, which I think was, was a different question, became the, the ultimate question, the only thing. And people lost sight of, you know...well who cared whether Black people at lunch at Woolworth's or that sort of thing, that was a symbolic involvement initially, and it was effective, but once...the ball got rolling, there again, the, the poor working class people had no spokesman that they needed. And emotions got the best of everybody. Confused also by the Supreme Court, 1954, that was one of the most poorly handled decisions ever, I think, because--

[00:18:46.13] Jack Davis: The Brown v. Board of Education decision?

[00:18:47.12] Ben C. Toledano: Yes...all deliberate speed in other words, they, they gave up their responsibility and said with all deliberate speed without saying what that was and...are we to integrate the seniors in high school immediately even though it may not be in anyone's interest to do so? And then for, well, several decades, we had endless litigation over that.

[00:19:19.12] Jack Davis: And, in the, in the decade of the 1960s in particular in New Orleans was when battles were fought over integration and resisting integration and the legislature on the local level...were you still able to...and by the time 1970 came around, the White flight had started going pretty speedily and the schools were becoming...not integrated at all...in, in the reverse of what the Supreme Court had in mind. Was that an issue in the mayor's race?

[00:19:56.10] Ben C. Toledano: Well...remember, the...the people who were leaving were not the Uptown crowd, not the big shots, not the socialites. They weren't leaving at all. Because during the '60s, as best I recall it, when things were going on all over the country, we were, we felt immune...we would read about someone in St. Bernard, you know, being irate over integration, or that sort of thing. But we didn't think of it as a problem for us because most all of our kids went to private schools, and it, it just didn't touch us the same way. Plus the fact that New Orleans always took an extra decade or so to do what anyone, any other place did. And...so I would, I would say...I'm trying to think if and when the integration issue ever became a problem for the Uptown socialites and frankly it's hard for me to, to think of when that may have happened. I mean, not that the people didn't have opinions. You know, not that if you were with [Darwin Fenner¹] privately, he wouldn't express himself or that kind of thing. But...we never really felt that it touched us so that most people didn't feel they had anything at stake, any reason to take a, and then they would be delighted when Judge Perez would be excommunicated and Jack Ricau² would be excommunicated and...over things like that.

[00:22:00.14] Jack Davis: When, when you refer to 'us,' you're, you're including yourself in this group of Uptown...residents or people from an Uptown culture. Can you explain how, how you, how you got there? How did you, how did you get to be part of that group and how did you differentiate yourself?

[00:22:22.20] Ben C. Toledano: Well, my father...came from a, a distinguished old family that went back before the founding really, New Orleans in 1718 and so he was well-recognized although it had been a long time since anybody had done anything in the family other than, you know, take pride in the name. And then my mother, who came from an entirely different background, her mother was a non-practicing Jew from Clinton, Louisiana...whose family came over in 1848 when all of the revolutions were going on in Europe and the...her family came from Paris and Alsace-Lorraine. Then my grandfather, Mr. [Cassanus], who founded Merchant's Coffee Company, we don't really know anything about him except that he was a lovely, wonderful gentleman and everyone adored him. So as a result of that, my mother was made Queen of the Mardi Gras in 1929 I think it was.

[00:23:46.25] Jack Davis: That's, that's a pretty Uptown thing.

[00:23:49.25] Ben C. Toledano: I would say that's...they liked to make it look like a Comus is the big thing, but Queen of Mardi Gras is the big thing. I mean that's...the best one that really carries the...so I was the child of an aristocratic fallen on bad times father, and...a mother of...you know, very new circumstances, who just happened to have...the most wonderful father in the world,

¹ Darwin Schriever Fenner (1908-1979)

² Jackson G. Ricau (1918-2001) the Executive Director of the South Louisiana Citizen's Councils, was one of three Catholic segregationists excommunicated in 1962 at the urging of Archbishop Rummell for their efforts at opposing the integration of the diocese's parochial schools.

and...I would imagine that he didn't join the clubs and so forth because he didn't want to embarrass my...grandmother. Because Jews were not included, and I don't think he would have ever put her in embarrassment. But the captain of the Rex selected his daughter to be Queen of Mardi Gras. So because of those two things, my name and my mother's prominence...we, we lived up there. My grandfather had made a good bit of money.

[00:25:10.07] Jack Davis: Where did you live when you were growing up?

[00:25:13.05] Ben C. Toledano: ...1321 Pine Street. And that was really great because it was half a block from Lusher School. And Lusher School was where the children of the professors at Tulane and Newcomb went to school, and of course it was all White in those days. We had wonderful teachers. So we could just walk three or four houses and be at one of the best public schools in New Orleans. It was terrific. And...that's where we, and my grandparents lived at 630 Burdette Street, one house off of St. Charles Avenue. They built a house there, and I don't know when, but—

[00:25:57.13] Jack Davis: When, when did you start feeling that looking around you something wasn't right? That, that there was inequality, there was exclusion perhaps, when did you start noticing or experiencing that?

[00:26:13.17] Ben C. Toledano: Well you know it's hard to, to put a date on it. I would say by nature I'm now content. And...even when I was in high school I was very...critical internally of the guys that drank a lot and gambled and...you know, seemed to feel that the rules didn't apply to them. I never did like that, and that's why, except that over a period of time you learn to live with yourself and with others...that...once I got accustomed to being called a racist, it didn't matter at all. I didn't care because here I am on one hand, caring about the less fortunate regardless of color, and on the other hand, you see labels were the order of the day.

[00:27:27.11] Jack Davis: Why, yeah. Why would you be called a racist, is it because you were from a racist...society? A racist city, or a racist culture?

[00:27:34.26] Ben C. Toledano: No, I would say that I was...I was definitely opposed to the immediate integration of public schools on every level in every grade. I and some others felt that it should be like kindergarten the first year, then add a, a grade each year so the children could develop together. And...so I would say that, in that sense, I was a segregationist, and...the thing we feared has come about. In other words, in my judgment only, we have destroyed the public education system in the deep south. And I mean, look what happened to New Orleans, my God. Look what the Jeffersons did to the public school system.

[00:28:28.08] Jack Davis: Yeah. Describe, well describe that.

[00:28:31.11] Ben C. Toledano: Well, they saw...I have to watch my language as to how they saw things, but...it was a...an opportunity to clean house, to steal...to, to make contracts with relatives and friends. To not care at all about the children...to not demand proper teaching...qualifications. To put cronies in as superintendents and whatever, it was...they didn't mind destroying education to further their own nests. And I look back on it now at when Mrs. Charles Keller got...me and...the boy whose...what...head of the law school at LSU...real nice guy.

[00:29:42.28] Jack Davis: Jack Weiss?

[00:29:44.17] Ben C. Toledano: Jack Weiss. Jack Weiss and I were the...White campaign leaders for Bill Jefferson when he first ran for mayor. Mrs. Keller called and said there was this wonderful young man that she...you know, and she was such a dear person and, and she thought the world of him and he'd been to Harvard Law School, and with Jack and I helping, so we started having regular meetings at Jack's house to assist him in running for mayor. I haven't talked to Jack since then to tell you the truth, but that was...it was a funny situation. But it's a fact—

[00:30:29.17] Jack Davis: That was in...early 1990s? Late 1980s? ...I'm foggy on when Bill—

[00:30:34.12] Ben C. Toledano: No, because I left in '83. So it was the first time he ran. It was against Dutch.

[00:30:43.13] Jack Davis: Against Dutch Morial, okay.

[00:30:44.25] Ben C. Toledano: Yeah, yeah.

[00:30:46.21] Jack Davis: In Dutch Morial's second election.

[00:30:48.22] Ben C. Toledano: Yeah, I guess so, and...

[00:30:52.13] Jack Davis: So, but, well the 1960s in New Orleans...was often experienced by people in...the kind of exclusion that people were focusing on mostly in New Orleans in the 1960s had to do with, with race.

[00:31:08.23] Ben C. Toledano: With what?

[00:31:10.01] Jack Davis: Exclusion. Had to do with race and exclusion of Blacks from government and economics and...organizations. But you were starting to focus on different kinds

of exclusion of everybody by the, the...Uptown...there was an Uptown exclusivity that was keeping out...not only Blacks, but Jews and Italians, and, and women, and...

[00:31:40.26] Ben C. Toledano: Hispanics.

[00:31:41.26] Jack Davis: And Hispanics and...and Texans.

[00:31:44.28] Ben C. Toledano: Right.

[00:31:46.10] Jack Davis: So...and people who were coming here to help grow the economy. How did you...as...was that a...was that a view that you had difficulty getting across as everybody else was focusing on race?

[00:32:00.27] Ben C. Toledano: ...Yeah, I don't think I got it across at all, as a matter of fact. I...I think it to the credit of my...acquaintances or friends, if you will, that they tolerated my, my attitudes because they, they were so different. I never ever thought that Blacks should be excluded from...public office or business or anything of that nature...education...I must say that I make an exception in that instance, but...and I'm very sad that I think that the events have proven me correct in that regard. I look at what's happened locally to the school system, you know, and then the White kids go to the White Christian academies and the same old, same old...so you have segregation again, except worse than it was because you don't have the qualified teachers and superintendents that you used to have. That's, that's what's so sad. And...no, I don't think I was ever able to...I never really tried, I remember once I gave a speech up at Tulane Law School during the general election for mayor. And I didn't realize they had been prone to...support me. And Edmund McIlhenny Jr. was in the class...and after he heard my pitch about the leaders of the community—

[00:34:01.22] Jack Davis: Explain who he was, is, was

[00:34:03.17] Ben C. Toledano: Well they were probably the most prominent family in Louisiana, they owned Avery Island and they made Tabasco and they...that island was a Spanish land grant that the family had gotten and, and they had a lot of oil and gas, they were rich people and very prominent socially. And when I gave my pitch about the way New Orleans worked, he got up and he was irate. He said, "I was gonna vote for you, but I'm not gonna do it now because I didn't realize you weren't on our side," or something to that effect. And...you know, I...I didn't know him. I mean, he introduced himself, but...so I...would say I got exactly nowhere—

[00:34:57.02] Jack Davis: Do you think he voted for Moon—

[00:34:59.04] Ben C. Toledano: I, I did get Walker Percy to resign from the Boston Club. That is one of my, one of my accomplishments.

[00:35:05.01] Jack Davis: And when was that? When did he resign?

[00:35:08.09] Ben C. Toledano: I'd have to check to see when Walker resigned, but we were having lunch and I said, "You know, you're a phony bastard." I said, "You're always talking about...meritocracy and equal opportunity and all of that," and I said, "Here you and all your family belong to the Boston Club and exclude Blacks and Italians and...Jews." [laughs] And in a typical Walker fashion, he didn't say anything, and...then later some friend of mine said, he said, "I saw that your friend Walker Percy resigned from the Boston Club." And I said, "No!" And he said, "Yeah!" We never discussed it, I never said a word to him, I never told him that I knew about it or anything, I just, but I...figured that was my single accomplishment.

[00:36:06.16] Jack Davis: Now did that have any, did that have any legs? Did it influence anybody else...

[00:36:11.24] Ben C. Toledano: I'm sure not.

[00:36:13.05] Jack Davis: Yeah, I mean Walker...the 1970s for Walker Percy was a big time. He had, I think he published four novels from 1971 to 1980 as he was becoming increasingly visible. Would that have...

[00:36:28.06] Ben C. Toledano: Oh, they didn't know who he was. I mean, come on. Now, I mean. I'm sure that on those few occasions when he's have lunch with Dick Faust and Rivers Lelong and a few others...someone would say, "Who was that guy?" "I think he writes books, I don't know." They wouldn't have known who Walker was.

[00:36:56.08] Jack Davis: So they didn't read these novels about Louisiana and New Orleans and the culture, *The Last Gentleman*, or *Lancelot*—

[00:37:05.04] Ben C. Toledano: Well I think Dick Faust did. I'm sure Rhoda got him to do it...but...

[00:37:11.24] Jack Davis: His daughter Rhoda Faust who—

[00:37:13.17] Ben C. Toledano: Yeah.

[00:37:13.26] Jack Davis: --founded the Maple Street Bookstore.

[00:37:16.25] Ben C. Toledano: And...no...Walker didn't have any, he didn't carry any weight at all.

[00:37:25.12] Jack Davis: Does that say something about the culture then that...here's a nationally prominent novelist who's writing novels set in New Orleans and it's largely unknown?

[00:37:36.18] Ben C. Toledano: I would say that...the group of people about whom we're speaking are so or have been historically so self-satisfied with their lot in life, with their position, and one thing that very few people ever seem to understand who have never been a part of it, is the Mardi Gras. And I'm constantly amazed by people on the outside who tell me, "It's just a good time, and it's a time to celebrate, drink, to dance, to, you know, it's nothing other than a good time." Well, it's a lot more than a good time. And if they only knew the extent to which, and plus the fact that men control the social life in New Orleans, now you ask yourself, "What other communities do the men...decide on costumes and"... we used to have to wear these damn dresses and wigs, I mean, we were like transvestites.

[00:38:56.25] Jack Davis: Where did you wear those?

[00:38:57.23] Ben C. Toledano: At the balls.

[00:38:59.16] Jack Davis: And you went to the balls.

[00:39:02.09] Ben C. Toledano: Well—

[00:39:02.08] Jack Davis: As a kid, as a—

[00:39:03.03] Ben C. Toledano: No, I did...for a while because of my father because he was active in those things, but finally I just gave it up. I couldn't do it anymore. I just—

[00:39:16.04] Jack Davis: And yeah, in this, this is a period of time in the 1970s, when Mardi Gras was growing in terms of the...size of the spectacle of the existing parades and the number of beads and the number of new organizations that were parading and the attention that was paid to it in the national media and the local media. I mean, how do you reconcile that, that growth with the effect you're seeing?

[00:39:45.26] Ben C. Toledano: Right, well I think—

[00:39:45.29] Jack Davis: Or not reconcile.

[00:39:47.21] Ben C. Toledano: I think the reconciliation you have to come about with is this: I think in many ways it's stronger now than it used to be when Momus and Comus and...would ride because I think by becoming less public, it has become more private, and I think that Mardi Gras is alive and well now. I see the young men who are running it and...I know how they feel about it. They don't have to share it now. In the old days, you know, the noblesse oblige concept, we do this for the peasants. We throw them doubloons or beads...trinkets or whatever it is, and...but now they're not troubled with that and no one falls off the float drunk and hits their head like several of our friends did. And so I think anyone that thinks that Mardi Gras is fading out is kidding themselves.

[00:40:56.27] Jack Davis: It certainly was getting bigger in, in the 1970s. Yeah.

[00:41:01.27] Ben C. Toledano: Well yeah, but remember that...what's his name...the float builder.

[00:41:07.29] Jack Davis: Blaine Kern?

[00:41:09.17] Ben C. Toledano: Blaine Kern. The commercial aspect became so great with Bacchus and the others that it was a tremend--the old krewes used to take the...you know, the old floats and redo them. And then Kern made it into a multi-million-dollar business and...but...but it was horrible I thought. I mean, God, you'd go and have these colored men, you know, like, butlers dressed you and put on your gold and dress.

[00:41:48.23] Jack Davis: You mean when you were going into the krewes then?

[00:41:50.12] Ben C. Toledano: Yeah, blond, blond wig.

[00:41:52.15] Jack Davis: You were going into the krewes then to be dressed, to parade, you would have butlers?

[00:41:57.06] Ben C. Toledano: Yeah.

[00:41:58.26] Jack Davis: And it was strictly race, a matter of racial segregation?

[00:42:03.15] Ben C. Toledano: Well I don't think that even a--

[00:42:04.23] Jack Davis: Separation?

[00:42:05.08] Ben C. Toledano: I don't think that even came up. I mean, you don't think about things that are not supposed to be unless they are. And so they weren't. [laughs]

[00:42:16.20] Jack Davis: There were complaints in the 1970s that the, the...made the traditional Mardi Gras organizations and...the social clubs that were behind them excluded newcomers to the city who were, many of whom were coming in because of the oil business or possibly the port business which hadn't declined at that stage. The oil industry was growing. Was that a factor, do you think?

[00:42:44.08] Ben C. Toledano: Well I think that by and large the, the outsiders, even if they had a lot of money...look down on buying. At least a handful. It doesn't take a lot of people to ball a guy from a club.

[00:43:02.09] Jack Davis: To black ball?

[00:43:03.03] Ben C. Toledano: Yeah, to blackball a guy. And there were always a few of the unsuccessful socialites who wanted to keep out newcomers...you know, the nouveau riche, they're not like we are, and there was a little nucleus that could always make that happen. On one hand you had the lawyers who did their legal work, hustling and scrambling to get them in because it's got to where the Boston Club is lawyers and country doctors. Virtually any country doctor can join because you pay the dues and you never use the facilities. So it's a good, good deal—

[00:43:53.12] Jack Davis: Depending on your background. You have to have the right background.

[00:43:57.00] Ben C. Toledano: Well not necessarily because you marry a debutante. You just, you come from, you know, deep river Mississippi and you marry a queen of one of the balls, and you're automatically included, you're a son-in-law. And so it doesn't matter. The, every Thursday they have four guys, doctors, that have lunch together at the Boston Club. And...

[00:44:25.03] Jack Davis: Still do.

[00:44:27.03] Ben C. Toledano: And let's see, yeah, still do. And...trying to...not one of the four is from New Orleans. They all married New Orleans debutantes. And they all got in because they were sons-in-law. And one of them...is divorced from his daughter, but once you get in you're in. And so that's the thing to do is marry a debutante, get in the clubs, and then get divorced. And so it's a nice system.

[00:45:03.28] Jack Davis: So if you're coming in from outside New Orleans to head up an exploration office for a major oil company or to start a new bank...that would rival the Whitney Bank...do you have trouble getting into these clubs in the 1970s?

[00:45:20.07] Ben C. Toledano: I would think so. I'm sure that—

[00:45:23.12] Jack Davis: And the impact of that on the New Orleans economy, is there, is it measurable or is it—

[00:45:29.13] Ben C. Toledano: I think there's a definite impact in the sense that it discourages businesses from moving into the community. And, and the thing is, New Orleans had an opportunity to be the oil and gas capital. And Houston took it by default because Mr. Berry³ and people at the Whitney and the old timers, they didn't want any of those questionable loans, you know, where you lend the money to drill a new field and so that's what created the multi-billion dollar banks in Texas. In Houston it was the fact that they couldn't get the money in New Orleans, so then gradually Houston became the oil and gas capital, and New Orleans was just satellite offices...more and more so. And...but if they don't feel welcome, you know, if you don't open your arms and say, "Hey look," but if you say, "I found out that guy and his wife lived in a trailer in Oklahoma when they were laying a pipeline for his oil company. Living in a trailer. And now they come here and put him in a suit and want him to be like we are." You know, and so...

[00:47:00.07] Jack Davis: Did anybody...worry about the impact this would have? I mean it seemed that during the 1970s you have this Poydras Street corridor which is...raising new skyscrapers for oil companies...Shell and Amoco and...Texaco, I think...was there any concern that...New Orleans...exclusive, exclusivity, exclusionary practices could slow that down?

[00:47:33.09] Ben C. Toledano: Well...I'm sure there always is with the lawyers because wherever there's representation involved I mean, they'll do everything but kill, they'll break every commandment but that...to get business. And so they want the business, but I would say...and I guess insurance. And certain businesses wanted that, but the...social elite didn't want that. They, they would always talk about, we don't wanna be another Atlanta or another Houston, to hell with them, we're gonna stay what we are and be proud of our heritage. And...they, they would cite those cities as examples of bad, of what can happen if you're not careful. And in the process they lost, you know all of this, after World War II New Orleans was Queen City of the South, and it could've gone anywhere they wanted. I mean, it could really have been something.

[00:48:47.20] Jack Davis: What were the notable assets then after World War II? We had a port and an airport. We had relations with Latin America.

³ Keehn M. Berry (1894-1981) Became President of Whitney Bank in 1938, serving until 1969 when he became Chairman of the Whitney Bank Board of Directors.

[00:48:57.25] Ben C. Toledano: Well, it could, think what it could've been. In other words, it's the last port of call before you go into the gulf. So that all of your grain for export had to come through New Orleans, and...all of your produce from Central America would come up to New Orleans...I can remember. Every politician that wasn't talking about race was talking about the gateway to the Americas. I mean, even when Chep Morrison was flying around Central America with Zsa Zsa Gabor it was always Gateway to the Americas, boy we're...gonna open up the whole thing, and, and Houston has the (?) Port, and they're beating the devil out of New Orleans, and the bananas go to Gulfport now...they had left...they left New Orleans...

[00:50:09.28] Jack Davis: What happened to the port? I mean we talked about, we haven't really gotten deep into the oil industry, but what happened to the port, why did that—

[00:50:17.24] Ben C. Toledano: I would, I would think the same thing that happened to everything else in New Orleans. Wonderful management, great leadership, all of the things that make for good...they probably had more luncheons to give, you know, little awards, or little silo or something or soybeans someone who was employee of the week. While the other people were working there.

[00:50:50.12] Jack Davis: I'm not sure the transcriber of this...recording will recognize that you were being...sarcastic when you were talking about the great management.

[00:51:00.06] Ben C. Toledano: Well I think that if they can't analyze the leadership and management...business management of the city, I wouldn't say political because I think by and large, I think Moon did a remarkable job considering what he had to work with and I, he had, Mitch is doing a good job, but tourism is the only thing now and so you can concentrate on one thing and...

[00:51:36.22] Jack Davis: ...let me take us back to where we started on the election—

[00:51:42.10] Justin Nystrom: We're running on an hour, do you want to take a break?

[00:51:45.14] Jack Davis: Do you wanna stop and take a break now, or keep rolling?

[00:51:47.27] Ben C. Toledano: He wants to, he says

[00:51:48.25] Justin Nystrom: No, I'm good, I just wanted to know if, we've gone fifty minutes and I just didn't know if you needed a break or anything like that.

[00:51:53.22] Ben C. Toledano: Okay, well, I'll see if my legs are working.

[00:51:58.04] Jack Davis: You wanna take a little walk around?

[00:51:59.20] Ben C. Toledano: No, I'll just stand up. If I walk, my legs...go to sleep

[00:52:08.05] Jack Davis: Back to...we started talking about 1972 and, 1970, rather, the mayor's election...who voted for Moon Landrieu in that two-person race and who voted for you? In that...

[00:52:24.25] Ben C. Toledano: Well, let's see...Moon got 99% of the Black vote. I think there was 1% mistakes, you know, made, and I got 65% of the White vote.

[00:52:37.29] Jack Davis: And...what would that say, what...happened to Edmund McIlhenny Jr., is he in that, the ones that didn't vote for you, or is he in the ones—

[00:52:47.12] Ben C. Toledano: I don't know what he did. I don't know what he did.

[00:52:51.16] Jack Davis: And...Moon Landrieu had defeated in a Democratic primary—

[00:52:58.07] Ben C. Toledano: Jimmy Fitzmorris

[00:52:59.04] Jack Davis: --Jimmy Fitzmorris, who later became lieutenant governor...was the split similar in the terms of the demographics of New Orleans? Did you get the Fitzmorris vote?

[00:53:13.12] Ben C. Toledano: I got an awful lot of it, yeah. Fitzmorris had gotten...I think, more White votes than Moon had, but Fitzmorris and typical Fitzmorris, in his way, he said afterwards, he said, "I don't understand these votes," he said, "The Black man has never had a better friend than Jimmy Fitzmorris." Now, whatever that meant, I don't know, because number one, he was not telling the truth, let's put it that way, and they had had better friends. And...Jimmy had done everything he could to organize the white vote.

[00:53:58.08] Jack Davis: Who were the better friends that they had, what, in the 1960s than Jimmy Fitzmorris?

[00:54:04.09] Ben C. Toledano: Well, Moon, for sure, and I would say...almost anybody, I never thought of Jimmy as a friend of...he was everyone's friend. I mean, maybe if that makes you a friend, he'd shake your hand, "How you doing, partner? Glad to see you. You're looking good, I like your tie." I mean, if that's friendship, okay, he was good at that, but—

[00:54:33.26] Jack Davis: Was this, the...the decade leading up to the mayor's race in...1970, was this when New Orleans was beginning to calculate the vote in terms of racial breakdowns? I

mean, was this, it just didn't happen before, were there people who got it quicker than others, or am I, am I just projecting backwards in an incorrect way?

[00:54:59.18] Ben C. Toledano: Well, of course...

[00:55:03.18] Jack Davis: Did you...figure on a Black vote in that election that was gonna—

[00:55:11.10] Ben C. Toledano: I figured I wouldn't get any.

[00:55:12.26] Jack Davis: And did you think it was gonna be as decisive as it was? Because in previous mayoral elections, it hadn't been as decisive.

[00:55:23.29] Ben C. Toledano: No, even Vic Schiro got some Black votes...but...and, and Vic shouldn't have probably, but...I don't know...when, of course...I would think without knowing that more Blacks voted in Moon's race for mayor than had ever voted before. Because they had never had a Black candidate, but they had never had a friend, as good a friend as Moon running. And so I would think, I mean they got him out.

[00:56:13.02] Jack Davis: And registration was more possible, and the civil rights, Voting Rights Act—

[00:56:15.01] Ben C. Toledano: Yeah...It was, it was then the largest vote...you told me, I believe, ever recorded in a mayor's race.

[00:56:26.12] Jack Davis: I read recently that the general, general election was the biggest general election that New Orleans had, although I'm not certain that's in voter percentage or numbers.

[00:56:37.10] Ben C. Toledano: Well a lot of people, a lot of White people felt that it was a last chance to...for the Whites to be in charge and control, and I was a beneficiary of that, because they were upset that Jimmy Fitzmorris had lost, and...

[00:56:56.02] Jack Davis: Were you comfortable with that? With—

[00:56:58.25] Ben C. Toledano: Sure. Damn right. ...You got wherever the votes are, I didn't have...to compromise myself when I would go into some of those neighborhood bars, they'd strike up singing, "Bye Bye Blackbird." I wasn't gonna say, "Hey guys, I find that song offensive. Don't sing it please." That's ridiculous. No! Moon was doing all he could to get the Black vote, I was doing what I could to get the White vote. It was just that simple. But I remember Nils

Douglas and Bobby Collins and Lolis Elie and some of that crowd invited me over to Nils Douglas's office, this was during the campaign for the general election

[00:57:48.13] Jack Davis: And these were new Black leaders who were supporting Moon?

[00:57:51.10] Ben C. Toledano: Yeah. Yeah. And very effective people. And...Sherman Copelin and...so I went over there and, and Nils had this wonderful bar that he opened up, it looked like a piece of furniture, and the next thing you knew it was open with every expensive call brand you could imagine in there. So, Feldman was with me and—

[00:58:19.15] Jack Davis: This is Marty Feldman, our federal judge?

[00:58:22.03] Ben C. Toledano: Yeah, Marty Feldman, the comedian. And so they...they said, "Look. We, we wanted you over here to tell you that we got nothing against you. You're not gonna get any of our votes, but it's nothing personal. It's business, you know, that sort of thing." Sounded like the Black, Black mafia. We had drinks and they said, "Someday, we may be able, we may be so powerful that we'll have to split up so that there'll be some Republican Blacks as well as the majority Democrats, but that day hasn't come yet and so we've still got to vote as one, and...just wanted to make sure you understood." And I said, "Sure I do, of course I understand." And...I said, "I've got no hard feelings. You guys have made your deals with Moon, you know what to expect, and he'll do what he told you he was gonna do." And that's all there is to it. So they just, they were very nice about it, and I knew I was gonna get no Black votes. Now the day before the election, as I recall, Moon's people came out with a poll and showed that I was gonna get 17% of the vote. And I got just beneath 42% of the vote, which was unheard of. Which I mean, unbelievable. Unbelievable.

[01:00:05.05] Jack Davis: What's the explanation for that discrepancy?

[01:00:07.10] Ben C. Toledano: I don't think there was ever a discrepancy.

[01:00:10.26] Jack Davis: What...the discrepancy between their numbers and the...

[01:00:13.27] Ben C. Toledano: To discourage, to discourage people from going to the polls. Say, "What the hell. Why take the time when you could be drinking or playing tennis or something like that, I mean the guy's gonna get 17% of the vote."

[01:00:29.12] Jack Davis: Back to Nils Douglas's office...what happened to all that call-brand liquor?

[01:00:36.27] Ben C. Toledano: Well we drank some of it.

[01:00:38.18] Jack Davis: To seal the understanding?

[01:00:40.16] Ben C. Toledano: Oh we stayed there and, and shot the breeze and..and talked about things...

[01:00:47.01] Jack Davis: And did you, and did you have...continue to have good relations with those gentlemen..through—

[01:00:52.08] Ben C. Toledano: Yeah, I did. I always thought Bobby Collins was sort of a crook, but I like Nils, and I knew Sherman Copelin was a crook. And Don Hubbard was another one that was there. I thought Lolis Elie was a nice guy. I didn't know him very well, but I always liked him. And there were a bunch of people there I don't know.

[01:01:20.14] Jack Davis: And you, you had known Moon Landrieu growing up...boyhood—

[01:01:24.01] Ben C. Toledano: Yeah, we lived in the same neighborhood.

[01:01:25.22] Jack Davis: You lived not, not far from his although his, his material...context was a lot different from yours. I mean, he lived in a...lower middle-class White neighborhood...not far from bigger houses.

[01:01:45.08] Ben C. Toledano: Yeah, well, I mean, our house wasn't that big and, and it's a mistake to think that in those days people lived in a grand style because they didn't because in those days nice people didn't let on if they were comfortable. They went out of their way not to...because it was considered bad taste, bad form, poor manners, things that...don't exist anymore. And...so none of us had anything. I mean, hell, we hitched, hitchhiked to and from school. We had one, one boy in our class had a car, Rupert Richards. And that was it.

[01:02:35.26] Jack Davis: This was a class in what school?

[01:02:38.01] Ben C. Toledano: At...NOA. New Orleans Academy. And, and those were, those were the non-Jewish Uptown boys because it was sort of like the, the McGhees was for girls, NOA was for boys. That was the way it was. And...everybody else went to Jesuit that you could, unless you went to (?)

[01:03:06.18] Jack Davis: How well did you know, know Moon in, in that neighborhood? Did you know who he was, did you—

[01:03:11.10] Ben C. Toledano: Well...well no, well, in the sense, you gotta understand you go out in the street or on the ground at the school and there would be a baseball game and you have your glove and you play, I mean...we didn't exchange monogrammed cards or anything like that, I mean...at an opening in the outfield you went play. It was neighborhood stuff.

[01:03:43.11] Jack Davis: And after the election between you and Moon...you, you remained on friendly terms?

[01:03:50.26] Ben C. Toledano: Well he wouldn't speak to me for two years because they had tried to get me not to run, and they had made some offers to me of appointments to different boards or committees...of my people if I didn't run. Because Moon was tired and he didn't want another damn race, he really didn't. And I understood that, I figured that was a plus for me. So he was angry that I had done so well. And he was, and so one day I saw him a couple of years later, and I said, "Hey by the way I forgot to tell you, but you won the election and I lost." He said, "What do you mean?" I said, "Well, you, you've been snubbing me and been angry with me and you won." And at that time there were four Republican congressmen coming on some subcommittee to New Orleans to conduct a hearing or something, really to have a good time. Except for Peter Frelinghuysen, who was a lovely gentleman. Wonderful, wonderful man. And...so I asked Moon if he would be a co-host for a luncheon at Antoine's for these people, and he said he would, and so we had an engraved invitation that said, "Mayor Moon Landrieu and Ben C. Toledano invite you to attend a--" And he invited half of his friends, I invited half of my friends, and the four congressmen, and that was it. And I think, you know I told him, I said, "Let's just get on with it, you know, and, I mean...it's so--"

[01:05:56.00] Jack Davis: ...What was your impact, what was your...sense of what was happening in the Landrieu administration, the thrust...first of all, talk about the thrust towards integrating New Orleans politics and to a certain extent New Orleans society and boards and commissions and organizations. I mean, he was pushing pretty hard on that. Was that...was that working?

[01:06:21.19] Ben C. Toledano: Well, and I think, I think, I think he should've, in a sense that I think he's a man of his word, and I think that's what he told them he would do and that's what I think he was committed to doing. The thing that I didn't understand exactly was why Moon would've...put himself in the awkward position he did in letting Leon Irwin take him to those balls. When they went backstage at that Momus ball, that was a very bad thing.

[01:06:54.18] Jack Davis: Explain that, I mean...there's a famous painting...that George Schmidt did of Moon at Momus that depicts--

[01:06:58.17] Ben C. Toledano: George Schmidt. Well I mean it was just, it was just a bad thing and Leon should not have done it, and he should have known that people would be drunk and that a lot of people didn't like Moon and that the people there didn't vote for him. And he brings Moon backstage to meet the king and have a drink with the king—

[01:07:25.14] Jack Davis: And this is, this is the...the Momus Rex—

[01:07:30.15] Ben C. Toledano: No, it's Momus Louisiana Club

[01:07:32.24] Jack Davis: Okay. And it's...everybody is in formal attire

[01:07:37.06] Ben C. Toledano: Not backstage, they weren't.

[01:07:38.26] Jack Davis: Oh. Well they were in a dressing room. And Leon was, was Moon's social advisor.

[01:07:45.07] Ben C. Toledano: Taking him around, yeah, taking him around, introducing him, and Moon was not comfortable, at home in a situation like that. And, and I would never have subjected him to that...if, if he had subjected himself I would have said, "I wish you'd think about this because these guys, when they get to drinking and all, they...they're not very gentlemanly and I just don't want to see you exposed to that kind of thing." And...

[01:08:18.13] Jack Davis: And what happened?

[01:08:20.06] Ben C. Toledano: Where there was a spat, I wasn't there. I wasn't there. Someone called him a, you know, a name...or something like that.

[01:08:32.23] Jack Davis: Yeah. So was he taking the city in the right direction on those issues?

[01:08:38.13] Ben C. Toledano: I think he was taking the city in the only direction it could be taken in. I think, I, I don't believe, unless you're Julius Caesar or, or Napoleon, that you take people where they don't wanna go. I think that the smart politician is the one that takes the people either where they wanna go or where they're going no matter what. And in Moon's case I think it was no matter what, I think he knew the writing on the wall, and I think he was committed to getting it done, and...that's all there was to it. You know...

[01:09:24.12] Jack Davis: And we're talking about increased minority employment at City Hall getting African Americans on boards and commissions...securing invitations to Mardi Gras balls somewhere down the road, that sort of thing?

[01:09:40.22] Ben C. Toledano: Well I don't think Moon did that. Now, you know, tokenism is another question that I have some real reservations about. I know that...that...I'm terrible about names now. A good friend, president of Xavier—

[01:10:02.10] Jack Davis: Norman Francis

[01:10:03.06] Ben C. Toledano: Norman Francis, he would be a token Black invited to certain balls and so forth. With me, I don't want to go where I'm not really wanted in order to make a point, and I hate the thought of using Norman that way, but...he and them maybe Revius Ortique would do the same thing, I don't know, but....I think that Moon was the perfect transitional mayor. I think that...he...I can't think of anyone else that could've handled the transition. And you know they used to refer to him as our first Black mayor, that sort of thing, but...even if I disagreed with him, I thought he was doing...maybe the, maybe the wrong thing for the right reason. But it may have been the right thing for the right reason, I, I don't know. I can't fault him for it.

[01:11:23.28] Jack Davis: The other political campaign you were involved in directly in the early 1970s was running for United States Senate in 1972. ...Why were you doing that, I mean...is, what impact, first of all what impact on you and on, on the city had you noticed in the mayor's race? What, what did that accomplish for you and then why did you get into another very visible race?

[01:11:54.11] Ben C. Toledano: Well, I got into another race because Allen Ellender dropped dead suddenly. ...I mean, no one had counted on that. And...

[01:12:06.05] Jack Davis: He, he was going to be on ballot in November of '72 and he died in the summer of '72.

[01:12:12.27] Ben C. Toledano: And the only one that had qualified against him was Bennett Johnston. Bennett had just lost a close race to Edwin Edwards and...no one else would jump in. And then Ellender died and...the...I was still unhappy with my work, with what I was doing. I was bored, and it, and I think I would've made a damn good senator too....but I didn't ever think I would get elected. And then John McKeithen jumped in...he, he, he got in as an independent. And then Hall Lyons, Mr. Charlton Lyons's son, got in as a whatever the right wing party was called at the time. And...so I had like six weeks to run. And the Republicans tried to keep me out. Dave Treen tried to keep me out because the Republican party belonged to Dave Treen. And what support there was was support for Dave, and Dave was running for Congress, and he didn't want any competitive races by the Republicans, and...so I had a hard time even getting the Republicans to let me run. And in six weeks you can't go to 64 parishes. And...the...it, it was a lark and...nothing more. You know, with four people in the race, and...Bennett...

[01:14:13.02] Jack Davis: So what did you learn from that experience? You didn't run for public office again.

[01:14:19.13] Ben C. Toledano: I learned that everything is political. Everything.

[01:14:25.26] Jack Davis: Then what did you do next in New Orleans? The Landrieu administration is charging along...

[01:14:32.16] Ben C. Toledano: You know I wonder what I did do, I guess...I collected books and read books and...I will say this, Jack, I had a...a pretty good following in New Orleans of just regular folks, and I did derive a certain joy or pleasure from recognition and if I'd get in a cab, the cab driver would say, "Where do you wanna go, Mr. Toledano?" I, I have to admit that my ego, whatever the heck it is, would, was comforted by that. But I liked it, because...I guess that was the element of the family making a return to some degree, to prominence. I think that's where that element came in among the many elements involved...in a way I was saying, "Well we, we're coming back, but..."

[01:15:48.11] Jack Davis: Well you were, as I recall from then, you were also very active as a preservationist.

[01:15:53.02] Ben C. Toledano: I was that.

[01:15:54.18] Jack Davis: You were restoring buildings and neighborhoods that other people hadn't even ventured into yet.

[01:15:58.17] Ben C. Toledano: And I don't even remember when Charlie had me, Charlie Ferguson had me write that weekly book review column for the State's Item, but that, I did that for 50 weeks or so, that was fun, really liked that. And...

[01:16:19.21] Jack Davis: And you, you started or at least owned an Italian restaurant on Magazine Street.

[01:16:26.27] Ben C. Toledano: Well, I had an interest in it. Dick Collin got Joe Bernstein to...try to save Turci's

[01:16:38.20] Jack Davis: Yeah, Richard Collin being the restaurant—

[01:16:39.28] Ben C. Toledano: The Underground Gourmet

[01:16:41.11] Jack Davis: And the restaurant critic for the State's Item

[01:16:43.27] Ben C. Toledano: Right. And he told Joe he'd give him so many stars if he saved the restaurant.

[01:16:52.15] Jack Davis: I didn't know that he, he traded that way.

[01:16:54.22] Ben C. Toledano: And then he became a consultant for the restaurant. And then Joe, I believe...terminated his consultation and the restaurant lost a lot of stars....[laughs]...in the process. But I mean that, that was a beautiful building though. I mean, we did a good job with that building.

[01:17:24.07] Jack Davis: So you restored the building, moved the restaurant--

[01:17:27.14] Ben C. Toledano: Had original...posters from the 1890s and French posters all over the walls, it was really great.

[01:17:36.11] Jack Davis: And it was on a stretch of Magazine Street that hadn't yet become--

[01:17:39.08] Ben C. Toledano: Right.

[01:17:39.27] Jack Davis: --popular and expensive.

[01:17:41.04] Ben C. Toledano: Right.

[01:17:43.03] Jack Davis: ...So--

[01:17:44.29] Ben C. Toledano: And we ended up buying the whole block and then Joe opened Spaghetti Eddie's to go in competition to Turci's and it was right around the corner, you could walk in the backyard of Spaghetti Eddie's and get to Turci's. And...Bill Carpenter at the Whitney Bank said, "What is with Joe?" He said, "He's competing with his own restaurant" [laughs] I said, "Yeah, Bill...I'm not sure I can explain it to you, but..." and I couldn't.

[01:18:25.08] Jack Davis: Well now, the restaurant phenomenon in New Orleans and Richard Collin were...I mean, if, if you were talking about the, the cultural themes of the 1970s-- okay, let's take a little break.

[01:18:41.06] Ben C. Toledano: Sorry.

[01:18:42.03] Jack Davis: We're having a leg stretch.

[01:18:44.07] Ben C. Toledano: I can stand up. It's, it's good—

[01:18:48.18] Jack Davis: So talking about Turci's and Rose Turci and you and Joe Bernstein in partnership to bring Turci's to Magazine Street from Poydras with the support of Richard Collin, you, so you were in the middle of, you found, you got yourself in the middle of what a lot of people think of as one of the main themes of New Orleans cultural rebirth in the 1970s. The...the rediscovery of food that had been there all along or the recombination of food that hadn't been there, like the blackened redfish. But Richard Collin, writing for the State's Item was a, was a factor. Was this, was this important in New Orleans life? This new fascination with food?

[01:19:37.28] Ben C. Toledano: Well I, I wasn't fascinated with it. Number one, I didn't put up any money except to buy the building. And number two, all I did was decorate it, redo the building inside, design it and decorate it and so I wasn't really...Joe brought Toni Morrison in on the deal, should've gave Toni a, a part of it.

[01:20:08.08] Jack Davis: Toni the—

[01:20:09.15] Ben C. Toledano: We never made a dollar, not one dollar out of the whole thing. So I mean, it was...it was an unusual situation.

[01:20:20.04] Jack Davis: Toni being the former, the, the son of former mayor...Chep Morrison.

[01:20:23.09] Ben C. Toledano: deLesseps S. Morrison. The junior of whatever the heck he was, poor guy.

[01:20:29.25] Jack Davis: Well what was it about the restaurant scene in New Orleans that made Joe Bernstein think that it was a viable investment?

[01:20:39.03] Ben C. Toledano: I don't know, probably because Dick Collin talked to him about it. Said, "Only you, only you can do it," to him. [laughs]

[01:20:49.26] Jack Davis: How, how influential was Dick Collin and we hadn't had a restaurant critic before approximately 1970, 1971, and he started...doing his underground gourmet thing in the State's Item every week. Was, was that a factor—

[01:21:07.27] Ben C. Toledano: It wasn't to me. It wasn't to me. I was, Joe and I had bought the building because it was my favorite building in that Magazine Street area, just a beautiful building. We didn't know what we were gonna do with it. We bought it for practically nothing

and...then he decided that he was gonna put a restaurant in there and he borrowed all the money from the Whitney Bank and so what the heck, you know. That was that. But...

[01:21:45.00] Jack Davis: Well was food...I'm gonna try this another way, was food a factor in this...New Orleans...resurgence as a place that other people were paying attention to?

[01:21:58.28] Ben C. Toledano: Well it wasn't a factor to me, I was, I was never—

[01:22:05.01] Jack Davis: You already knew where to eat.

[01:22:06.20] Ben C. Toledano: Yeah, I was never a gourmet type person, but obviously the future of New Orleans would become more and more dependent on tourist attractions, restaurants, bars...pageants, extravaganzas and so forth. And I think we were just early, we were just very early...I mean, nothing else had really begun on Magazine when we did our thing that I'm aware of, but...

[01:22:45.24] Jack Davis: And, and yet, I'm also, on a parallel track was music and the re, the rediscovery—

[01:22:53.07] Ben C. Toledano: Yeah, music...

[01:22:56.00] Jack Davis: But there was a, there was a rediscovery of old New Orleans food and introducing new New Orleans food into that, there was also a rediscovery of old New Orleans music and combining it with other forms, and the, so the—

[01:23:10.20] Ben C. Toledano: You feel more...about that than I do because—

[01:23:14.24] Jack Davis: The Jazz Fest started 1970.

[01:23:18.11] Ben C. Toledano: Yeah, and I was on the original board.

[01:23:20.26] Jack Davis: You were?

[01:23:22.10] Ben C. Toledano: Yeah. Trying to remember the name of the guy that set it up and put me on the board. It wasn't [George] Wein, it was another fellow who had been with radio for Europe or something, I don't know. And I didn't even go to the darn thing, I mean, I hate that sort of stuff. I hate crowds, anything over eight people and I'm miserable...But I was on the board.

[01:23:55.07] Jack Davis: How long did you stay on that board?

[01:23:57.08] Ben C. Toledano: I don't know, two years maybe?

[01:24:00.01] Jack Davis: And what, what direction did they set, do you recall?

[01:24:03.04] Ben C. Toledano: No. No, and I didn't care. I hate that sort of stuff, but...

[01:24:09.26] Jack Davis: But the new attention to music was along with the new attention to food, was that driving this cultural thrust that you're talking—

[01:24:18.19] Ben C. Toledano: I don't know, you call it music, I don't know what you're talking about exactly. I mean, if it's...the only thing I would call music would be Dixieland. The rest of the stuff, I don't know...I was never a pop person.

[01:24:37.20] Jack Davis: Well there were people at that time who thought that the rediscovery of New Orleans rock n roll and rhythm and blues and Cajun music and the new Zydeco music and all of these things were...cultural treasures that needed to be showcased, and the Jazz Fest tried to do that.

[01:24:57.28] Ben C. Toledano: Well I think that anything that had a financial, that was a financial opportunity, it was looked on that way. And I think music was...I, I don't know anything about that kind of music. I don't pretend to, and I think a lot of people took a lot of interest in it. It wasn't something that interested me.

[01:25:28.13] Jack Davis: And...as we're experiencing the real estate boom on Poydras Street we're, we're seeing some people paying attention to music and food in New Orleans, was...were those two things, was, was the cultural fascination masking the economic weakness of the city? In other words, you said earlier that the oil industry wasn't really as firmly rooted here as it needed to be. The port was not as well run as it needed to be. And you've, you've, you've alluded to the tourism economy. Is this, is this where we made the transition to the tourism economy?

[01:26:14.08] Ben C. Toledano: Well, I can't go any further than to say that I think that Moon recognized that tourism was ultimately gonna become a primary industry, that New Orleans had always been a good time town since before the Civil War, long before planters had come to New Orleans to kick up their heels and see the girls and drink and gamble and so forth and that was its image and that, it was going to have to rely more and more on that. So I think that he very actively...supported the city in that direction. From what I know, what little I know, I have no personal knowledge about it. I, it's, it's surprising sometimes how insular many of us were...I'm probably the only person I know who's been to all 64 parishes. And I would say that most New Orleanians have never been north of Covington or maybe Baton Rouge if they had to go to Baton Rouge.

[01:27:42.07] Jack Davis: In Louisiana.

[01:27:43.20] Ben C. Toledano: In Louisiana. They'll go to Alaska, but they don't know where...Bunkie is. And maybe it's okay but we were very insular and I don't think that's ever been adequately captured, the insularity of...of Uptown New Orleans. Now people are celebrating the fact that real estate is so sought after and so high in Uptown New Orleans, but the fact is that the community itself is getting smaller, and more compact, more isolated, I mean you can draw out the lines as to where it, where it actually fits in. You found out when you were trying to save all those houses and...from the, from the hospital or whatever it was

[01:28:42.28] Jack Davis: After Katrina. Yeah.

[01:28:43.24] Ben C. Toledano: Yeah. But...they're satisfied. And when people...are satisfied, or think they are, they won't leave things alone...this, it's never been a place where there was a great effort made to improve or change things, it just hasn't. It hasn't been its record, it's character.

[01:29:23.09] Jack Davis: Let's talk about the, the Superdome. The...and this was an idea that germinated in the mid-1960s...Governor McKeithen made the money available and Dave Dixon did a sales job...Moon Landrieu was probably working as the main driver to actually implement it and design it and build it. And there was a lot of controversy about the Superdome, whether it should be built, where it should be built...what's, what, what did it look like to you from that mid-1970s vantage point, a good idea or, or not?

[01:30:10.26] Ben C. Toledano: Well I wasn't involved in it and—

[01:30:14.01] Jack Davis: In your capacity as observer.

[01:30:17.14] Ben C. Toledano: Well...I didn't think that they could legally do it. With public money. I didn't think they could legally do it with public money. That was my lawyer's position on the matter because the state could not pledge full faith and credit...to finance the building of the, of the dome. And the boys came up with an idea. And that's the way it turned out.

[01:30:56.29] Jack Davis: They got it done. Now what about its urban design implications? It's Downtown. Is that good or bad, did it help over the long haul?

[01:31:03.08] Ben C. Toledano: ...I think it probably helped. And I was very fond of Buster Curtis, who, who did the design...you remember the firm of Devious and Courteous...Yeah.

[01:31:25.17] Jack Davis: Previously known as Curtis and Davis. Well Buster Curtis was the architect. Is that, did it strike you at the time as being acceptable in the New Orleans skyline?

[01:31:39.01] Ben C. Toledano: Well it ruined the view of the church, it ruined our, our train station I guess, and our bus station, which were pretty much eliminated. That neighborhood generally was pretty run down up to Jackson Avenue...I, I must say I don't, I don't remember much that was torn down that was noteworthy in order to buy it. It was not something in which I was interested, frankly. I thought the Tulane stadium was one of the best football stadiums I ever saw. So that's why the boys had to get rid of it.

[01:32:25.14] Jack Davis: And make Tulane play in the Superdome

[01:32:28.15] Ben C. Toledano: Well yeah and the...Freemans owned part of the land and the hotel and...

[01:32:35.25] Jack Davis: In front of the Superdome?

[01:32:37.24] Ben C. Toledano: Yeah.

[01:32:38.15] Jack Davis: And you, a couple people you mentioned earlier, Don Hubbard and Sherman Copelin...were...contractors for the Superdome, they had a company called Superdome Services.

[01:32:51.07] Ben C. Toledano: Right.

[01:32:52.21] Jack Davis: And they were handling all the setup and the janitorial work

[01:32:55.19] Ben C. Toledano: Janitorial work, yeah, yeah.

[01:32:58.15] Jack Davis: Now, was that something that had to be done?

[01:33:02.05] Ben C. Toledano: Not by them. It could've been done by people who had experience and...you know, they got it for political reasons. Anything that those two touched, you could bet your life it was...a boondoggle, let's put it that way.

[01:33:21.26] Jack Davis: And yet they had been key people in the BOLD political organization and as you said earlier they were solidly behind Moon Landrieu

[01:33:31.12] Ben C. Toledano: Oh, absolutely. And, and, I don't think Moon would deny that he treated his friends generously with any opportunity that he felt was proper. I mean, I don't think

you could deny that. I hate to think of him having to deal with the Hubbards and the Copelins...but...

[01:33:59.28] Jack Davis: You hate to think because—

[01:34:01.18] Ben C. Toledano: Of Moon having to deal with people like that, but he did.

[01:34:04.15] Jack Davis: You mean you sympathize with him on that.

[01:34:06.19] Ben C. Toledano: Oh, absolutely. It was just part of what makes that job so nasty and so difficult, particularly for him in the sense that he was the transitional figure, and things were going to change very radically during the eight years that Moon was mayor. And....they could not have been more difficult years than they were for him.

[01:34:41.04] Jack Davis: But he did have a...strong economy in those, in most of those years. It started tapering off after he—

[01:34:49.28] Ben C. Toledano: He may have, I...don't know. I never did pay attention to...that sort of stuff.

[01:34:57.07] Jack Davis: And he put together a staff that some people called a Camelot. He had smart, smart people working for him. Did you interact with any of them?

[01:35:08.06] Ben C. Toledano: Well, I, I, no, I knew Blake Arata and I think highly of him. And...I don't know who the others were really. Ben Levy, I guess he was an, an able fellow. But I didn't really have much contact with them.

[01:35:26.27] Jack Davis: And under the, in his staff and the mayor and set up the Historic District Landmarks Commission apparatus that's still in place in New Orleans, did that—

[01:35:39.10] Ben C. Toledano: It's a wonderful thing.

[01:35:40.23] Jack Davis: Did that...meet with your approval then? Support?

[01:35:44.24] Ben C. Toledano: ...No, because I didn't know about it. I mean—

[01:35:50.19] Jack Davis: Well you were the preservationist.

[01:35:52.10] Ben C. Toledano: I know, but, but Camille would've known about it, Camille Strachan, but I wouldn't have. Because I never knew about things like that.

[01:36:01.04] Jack Davis: But, but this met with your approval of the—

[01:36:04.14] Ben C. Toledano: I'm sure it would have if I'd known about it.

[01:36:10.14] Jack Davis: Tell me about, and the other thing they had to wrestle with was this influx of federal money that increased dramatically from the late '60s into the early '70s, model cities and others. ...Did that work the way it was supposed to in New Orleans?

[01:36:30.23] Ben C. Toledano: Well I think it did for Sherman and Hubbard and, and the boys, I think it worked beautifully for them. I don't know—

[01:36:39.24] Jack Davis: In the sense that what, that—

[01:36:42.21] Ben C. Toledano: They, I think they got rich out of it. I think they shared in the pie. I've never talked to Moon about how much control he actually... You know, I...when I wrote my article for commentary, I assumed that Moon had really been forced to give up certain control, complete control, he's a control guy and he's a very decisive guy, and I don't know what he had to do with, with these guys. I don't know what he, what agreements they had to make. I just know that they were doing very well.

[01:37:32.02] Jack Davis: But to, to use that money you had to set up a brand new apparatus...in city governments around the country. ...Do you think the money got at least in large part where it was supposed to go?

[01:37:44.21] Ben C. Toledano: I have no idea.

[01:37:46.12] Jack Davis: Was it a problem...at the time?

[01:37:48.29] Ben C. Toledano: I don't know. I don't know.

[01:37:53.01] Jack Davis: The...another thing that was going on with this sort of expanding city was New Orleans East and the, the city had been—

[01:38:01.23] Ben C. Toledano: Now that should not have happened. That should never have happened.

[01:38:06.08] Jack Davis: Why? New Orleans East—

[01:38:07.13] Ben C. Toledano: Because it was too damn low, for one thing. It was, it was marshland and it was, it should have been preserved for what it was, it should have been left alone, but we went through a period there where everybody I knew was building those damn paper apartment houses out there along the interstate and turning them and...it was, it was dreadful, and I mean, I hated to think of people living in those, those places. And they were ugly and...it just ruined that part to me of New Orleans. And remember how that shopping center was so fabulous out there, everybody loved it for—

[01:38:57.00] Jack Davis: Lake Forest Plaza

[01:38:58.20] Ben C. Toledano: Whatever it was, it was big and it was pretty plush initially when it was opened. Now it's a dead zone. And I don't mean just because of Katrina. I mean it was dead before Katrina.

[01:39:13.11] Jack Davis: This was a response to White flight to Jefferson Parish, wasn't it? We have...a place where we can build a suburb within our city boundaries. And we can have a shopping center to collect tax revenue.

[01:39:29.03] Ben C. Toledano: I don't think Whites moved there...I don't know the numbers, but I would be very surprised if many White families moved there. Many Black families did, but the White families that moved moved into Jefferson Parish and converted that into sort of a Plaquemines, St. Bernard...but, but New Orleans East was just dreadful to me...

[01:40:02.15] Jack Davis: How did it, but how did it, could it have been prevented? We had a city that was in 1960, 600,000 people and very compact on the high ground. And by the time we got 20 years further down the road, we had a much smaller population and it was spread out into places like New Orleans East.

[01:40:25.25] Ben C. Toledano: Yeah, it could've been completely prevented.

[01:40:27.14] Jack Davis: So how?

[01:40:28.03] Ben C. Toledano: Zoning. Zoning...I mean, all they had to be was zone it marshland, it was...unfit, they had to dig in those canals, cut those canals just to try to keep the land dry...it was simply not meant to be a residential housing area. Of course it could've been prevented. But there were too many boys that were building them and turning them and making money and...as—

[01:41:06.15] Jack Davis: And...who was driving that, was it just real estate interest or was it political interest?

[01:41:13.18] Ben C. Toledano: A lot of bankers were doing it...I don't know who else, but the ones I knew were bankers. They'd get Banker A to lend to Banker B and build and then move it and it, it was like a checker game, it was very bad, I thought.

[01:41:36.05] Jack Davis: And if we hadn't, if New Orleans hadn't created New Orleans East and...where would that, where would that thrust go, would it have gone to other parishes or would it have stayed in New Orleans...

[01:41:52.09] Ben C. Toledano: I think it would've been in the, what do you all call it? The Treme now and that area...I mean, the...Gentilly, when you come in at Gentilly, let's say to Walker's movie house

[01:42:08.04] Jack Davis: When you come in from, come in from the east?

[01:42:10.13] Ben C. Toledano: Yeah. That whole area down to the Quarter could've been...done over into a nice residential area. Right on top of St. Bernard.

[01:42:25.16] Jack Davis: And that would've been for—

[01:42:28.00] Ben C. Toledano: Ninth Ward.

[01:42:29.00] Jack Davis: And, and a lot of the people who, as you said, moved to New Orleans east were, were Black residents of New Orleans.

[01:42:36.07] Ben C. Toledano: First homeowners

[01:42:37.13] Jack Davis: And this could have been for them, this Gentilly Ninth Ward, Seventh Ward area?

[01:42:42.17] Ben C. Toledano: It could've been, but it could've been a nice integrated area too of homeowners. I think that, I don't know that I've ever seen it, but I think that if you had an area where the buildings were done over, restored and made neat and plain and nice that there would be a good chance that home ownership by both Blacks and Whites could work, not rental property, but because the rental property racket, the people at their homes just...rotted away and get those rents...just incredible...I remember...an acquaintance of mine used to collect his own rents every Saturday. He was a lawyer in New Orleans. Leonard Rosenson. And...he one Saturday this fellow pulled a gun on him and told him to get under the house and throw his trousers out and, and his sack with his rental money. And so Leonard didn't stop collecting the

rent after that, but he hired an off-duty policeman to go with him to collect the rent every Saturday, armed.

[01:44:14.17] Jack Davis: What neighborhood?

[01:44:16.07] Ben C. Toledano: Down that same area, Treme I guess.

[01:44:19.11] Jack Davis: One of the...beliefs in New Orleans is that the...move of a lot of Black residents to New Orleans East was because their own traditional neighborhoods, at least some of them, were...hurt by the construction of Interstate 10 along Claiborne Avenue and through the Seventh Ward and Treme...in the late 1960s did you have any apprehensions about the construction of Interstate 10 in that neighborhood?

[01:44:56.19] Ben C. Toledano: Jack, I swear I don't remember the...only thing I remember getting at all involved in was the Riverfront Expressway

[01:45:07.29] Jack Davis: Which was about the same time in a slightly different location. Were you involved in the Riverfront Expressway?

[01:45:15.04] Ben C. Toledano: Not really except that friends of mine were. Mrs. Robinson and Bill Borah in particular, Dick Bombach and...that's where I got my information, I didn't know anything beyond that. But I don't think that, I don't think that New Orleans East was a proper place to develop, and I don't think it was the only place that Black families could've, could've gone to build a strong neighborhood. When you come in on the interstate into New Orleans—

[01:45:51.25] Jack Davis: from the east

[01:45:53.17] Ben C. Toledano: From the east and you look both ways and you see the wonderful churches and buildings and that whole area around the Circle Market and...over. That can be a vibrant neighborhood, but there again, you need the leadership and the...New Orleans has always been short on that.

[01:46:22.04] Jack Davis: It's really interesting, the...it's, when people are asked, people in leadership positions are asked about Interstate 10 over Claiborne Avenue...not very many if any will say that they thought it was a mistake. But...almost universally they will say it would have been a terrible mistake to build the Riverfront Expressway in front of the French Quarter...and I, both, both projects...were parallel at the time and one happened and one didn't.

[01:46:58.10] Ben C. Toledano: I think they were both bad and I think that the reason they were able to get away with the Claiborne situation is because poor people were there and a lot of

Blacks did...and that was a wonderful boulevard there, I thought. I mean, as a child, we used to drive on that and go to restaurants or to show people little St. Roch's chapel and...all of that sort of stuff, but...there again, it was, we're not gonna be able to get any organized opposition, so therefore let's put it here and ruin it and just, you know...just that's the kind of neglect of, of people for racial reasons that I resent bitterly. I mean, I, I think too much of, of most Black people to, to want them to have to join the Boston Club. But at the same time I would like...to protect something like Claiborne Avenue from that horrendous overpass that's on it there. And that, that market there was one of the most wonderful places. I remember as a little boy going there and it was so nice. I hear they're gonna fix it up.

[01:48:33.16] Jack Davis: They are, construction is...underway right now on that. But...in the kind of Black political power that was growing in the '60s that was reflected in the results of the 1970 mayor's race, was probably necessarily, do you agree with this? Probably necessarily concerned with things like voting rights and, and political...and the right to vote, and so if this plan for a river...expressway going through your neighborhood comes in 1965 or so, you're concentrating more on your political rights than on your neighborhood quality of life...

[01:49:19.20] Ben C. Toledano: I'm not sure I agree with that. I...I don't think that...they were near so interested in...the voting rights and serving in public office and, as they were in money. I think it's the same old game, money. And I don't think they cared because they didn't live any longer off of Claiborne Avenue. They lived in fancier houses in other areas, and it didn't affect them. And they didn't furnish the leadership. That's the question that, the minute a White person asks a question like that, he gets called a racist. He says, "Where, so much has, where are the people who are leading the charge for, for good public education? For...proper...attire, for proper behavior, for so many other things, for decent neighborhoods, clean neighborhoods" Well...you're a racist. You say, "Well, wait a minute. On one hand, I'm told it's none of my business because I'm White and it's up to the Blacks to take care of their own lives and fortunes. But at the same time if they do nothing about it then the, the poor Blacks are the ones that suffer." And everyone's just taking the easy way out now. They say, "Why fight the system?" I mean, whoever thought you'd have...political correctness? Whoever thought that freedom of speech would be second to political correctness? And this is what we're going through. I don't know how we're gonna pull ourselves out of this one...so often a movement will...sort of like the reformation I guess. It'll go further than it was supposed to go, you know. And...and it can't be stopped. You don't know what to do about it. Say, "Wait, we didn't want to go this far." Say, "Man, it's out of my hands." This thing is ruined.

[01:51:51.29] Jack Davis: And this far is where?

[01:51:54.25] Ben C. Toledano: Mmm?

[01:51:55.22] Jack Davis: What do you mean by this far?

[01:51:57.18] Ben C. Toledano: Well, I mean that I don't think it was ever intended that the conditions for Blacks in many respects should get worse than they were before, like the quality of public education, which to me is the most important thing. But when the Jeffersons come in and the other crooks and they see the money to be made, they will destroy...an education system in order to benefit from it. And when you want to...and healthcare, same thing. Remember they...there was that hospital thing that Sherman Copeland was involved in...he had a traveling trailer or something with x-ray machines or whatever, but...

[01:52:56.13] Jack Davis: Was that the Family Health Foundation?

[01:52:59.05] Ben C. Toledano: I guess so, and remember he spilled the beans on Joe Beasley. And poor Joe went to jail—

[01:53:06.21] Jack Davis: Joe Beasley being the doctor who ran it.

[01:53:08.15] Ben C. Toledano: And Gerry Gallinghouse told me—

[01:53:11.21] Jack Davis: The United States attorney

[01:53:13.03] Ben C. Toledano: Yes, that he was out of town and when he got back Jimmy Carriere, who was an assistant US attorney, told him I made a deal with Sherman Copelin and granted him immunity if he would spill the beans on Joe Beasley. And Gerry blew up, he was furious about it. Furious about it. That Jimmy would do that without consulting Gerry. And that's the way it ended up.

[01:53:49.12] Jack Davis: I guess the deal stuck, yeah. Now Family Health was something that was providing services to...poor people.

[01:53:59.15] Ben C. Toledano: Maybe.

[01:54:00.28] Jack Davis: Some. Back to the...New Orleans politics in the 1970s. If Moon Landrieu was the, in effect the first Black mayor, the first actual Black mayor in his description was Dutch Morial. What...changed when Mayor Morial took over in 1978 from when Moon had been doing it the previous eight years?

[01:54:27.28] Ben C. Toledano: Well I'd say an awful lot changed...one, basically the White community had no real contact with City Hall after that. There were a few lowlifes like the guy in the steel business, whatever his name was. I can't remember that fellow, Glazer?

[01:54:55.05] Jack Davis: Glazer.

[01:54:56.04] Ben C. Toledano: ...But--

[01:54:57.14] Jack Davis: Who was an ally of, of Dutch Morial

[01:54:59.24] Ben C. Toledano: --of Dutch Morial, yeah, and, but...I think that's when the die was cast and people believed there would never be another White mayor. And there wouldn't have been if Nagan hadn't been Nagan. But it looked like there was, Moon had been the transitional figure. Dutch was a mean SOB. He was a...he was a get-even guy, I mean he would hurt you. If, if you had ever turned against him or said anything about him...like I know how he felt about me after he tried to convert to Republican, and I told that story of--

[01:55:54.13] Jack Davis: He tried to become a Republican...can you tell that story?

[01:55:57.27] Ben C. Toledano: He called me and he said, "Can we have breakfast at the Pavillon?" Mecom owned it at the time. And I said, "Sure." So he and I went there, I remember Joe DiRosa and...that fellow in the furniture business, Mintz, were sitting at another table, and Dutch said to me, he said, "I've been thinking about running"--he was a, an appellate court judge--he said, "I've been thinking of running for the...for mayor as a Republican, if you people can raise the money for me to run a real campaign. And I wanted to see what you thought of it." And I said, "Dutch," I said, "you know it would be great for the Republicans to be able to say, 'Well, look, we're not anti-Black. We're supporting Dutch Morial,'" I said, "But I think that it would be terrible for you because you're not a popular guy and...there are a lot of Black people who will vote for you as a Democrat who would not vote for you as a Republican because they'd have an excuse then. They wouldn't have to say, 'I don't like Dutch.' They could say, 'I don't vote Republican.'" And I said, "I just don't think it would work for you." And he said, "Well I wanted to talk to you and Jimmy Gulotta, Judge Gulotta, about it, see what you thought." And here I was, talking him out of it, trying to be fair, well--

[01:57:50.15] Jack Davis: Trying to save him from making a mistake?

[01:57:52.26] Ben C. Toledano: Yeah. Which I did, because then he ran as a Democrat and won and...I told that story on the radio once I think and...he vowed to get even with me someday and I know that when I was under consideration for that court of appeals judgeship...he went all out against me.

[01:58:20.04] Jack Davis: That was when you were, when President Reagan was considering nominating you for the fifth circuit court of appeal?

[01:58:24.13] Ben C. Toledano: Yeah, fifth circuit, yeah. And...Dutch—

[01:58:28.29] Jack Davis: And Dutch was still mayor then.

[01:58:29.04] Ben C. Toledano: Dutch and John Wisdom were the two that were the key to knocking me off, you know, the old racist business. But...and to show you how mean Dutch was, I told you this story, after Dr. King was killed, I wanted to do something that would help the community and I said to a couple of my friends, John Petterborne, Beau Redmond, a couple of others. I said, "Now is the time for us to try to do something constructive so that some good can come out of this tragedy." So I called Dr. Albert Dent, who was the president of Dillard University. And I said, "Dr. Dent, would it be possible for a couple of us to come out there and visit with you?" And he said, "Sure, Ben, come on out," and we went out there to his home on campus and...I told him, I said, "This is a terrible, terrible thing, but what I was hoping was that we could put together a group half Blacks, half Whites, it would meet regularly, talk about city problems, possible solutions, and get young people from both sides to work together." And Dr. Dent said, "This is a happy moment for me," he said, "I never thought that any good would come out of this...terrible loss, but perhaps it can." So he said, "Let me work on it from my end." He said, "I'm gonna get in touch with Ernest Morial and a couple of other guys and see if we can...set this thing up, and I'll get back to you." So a couple of weeks passed, and I didn't hear from Dr. Dent. So I called him and I said, "Dr. Dent, I know you're busy and I...I'm sorry to bother you, but I was just wondering if you had had any luck." And he said, "Ben," he said, "I've been too embarrassed to call you." He said, "Right after I met with you I met with Dutch Morial, and I told him of your idea." And Morial and I had never had any problems at that time. And he said, "And he told me, 'we're not gonna let those White bastards off the hook. They're not gonna be able to do anything that's gonna absolve them of responsibility for what happened. And we are gonna use that event to further our cause.'" And Dr. Dent said, "I'm just heartbroken that this thing didn't work out, and I'm very sorry. I hope you understand." And I said, "Yes, sir I will." So there was that, which...tells me about Dutch's resentment, you know, which he had so deeply because of the color thing. Because he was for this color and his, you know, his father didn't know him on the bus, when Dutch [laughs]

[02:01:57.02] Jack Davis: Explain that.

[02:01:58.08] Ben C. Toledano: Dutch's father was lighter than he was, much lighter and could pass for White. So Dutch used to get on the bus and sit on the back and he would, he was a good bit darker than his father. And he'd pass his father up, and his father wouldn't even recognize him. I mean, would, would not act like he knew him, he saw him, and...that always hurt Dutch's feelings [laughs]

[02:02:29.28] Jack Davis: Where did, where does that story come from?

[02:02:32.22] Ben C. Toledano: Dutch. But I don't know where all the stories appeared, but—

[02:02:39.29] Jack Davis: Is...so as mayor, did he...continue the, the, the progress New Orleans was making towards being less segregated?

[02:02:53.19] Ben C. Toledano: I don't think so, but I don't know. I mean...I'm not able to evaluate that. I had the feeling that Dutch wanted the confrontation, wanted the friction between the races because it, it strengthened his position. He could say, "I told you the way it was." I don't think that he was as good for the Black community as Moon was. I think Moon did a lot more. And Dutch...was a snob too. You know, he was of that very very light strain of...colored person, and he didn't think of himself as a brother to the really Black people. He sort of saw himself as the overseer rather than one of the boys, but...I think Moon was much better for the Black community.

[02:04:00.13] Jack Davis: Moon Landrieu wouldn't say anything...detrimental about...doesn't say anything detrimental about Dutch Morial, but...I heard from other people there was considerable friction at the transition between the Landrieu administration and the Morial administration and that there was not an effort to try to build on any accomplishments, or all of the accomplishments of the Landrieu administration.

[02:04:29.24] Ben C. Toledano: Well of course I wouldn't know anything about that. But, but I would expect that...that that's true and...I don't think Moon liked Dutch and vice versa. And...but Moon is, is rising above the, the fray, you know, he doesn't want to speak ill of people. He's a senior elder statesman, and...there's nothing in it, no advantage to him, to speak ill of these people, but I don't think there was a closeness there.

[02:05:20.15] Jack Davis: Could you think of what...accomplishment there was in the eight years of the Dutch Morial administration? I mean, it took us out of the 1970s and then by the time he left the office, New Orleans was pretty...clearly in decline...not, I'm not saying that was his responsibility but it was a different experience.

[02:05:44.25] Ben C. Toledano: Well I think it was his responsibility, Jack, in a sense. I think that it's the job of the mayor or the top guy, whoever he is, to bring people together to work for common cause. Dutch was the worst person you could've gotten to bring people together to...he couldn't even work with anybody himself. I mean...he, at a time when we desperately needed to work together. I, I really believe that he saw...his advantage in maintaining the tension between the races. I don't think Dutch ever set out to save New Orleans, so to speak...to call people in and

say, "Listen. You get to work on this and I want some results soon," or anything like that. I think that he worked in a different way...and...

[02:07:06.21] Jack Davis: Can you...describe that way again?

[02:07:10.04] Ben C. Toledano: Well he was very brusque and abrupt. And he would shake his finger at you, and when I'd be in his office, he, he had a clipping that Iris Kelso had written where I had been critical of him. And he'd open his drawer and he'd pull it out. He'd say, "You see this? You see this article? You said these things!" And I would say-- [laughing]

[02:07:38.04] Jack Davis: What did you say?

[02:07:39.25] Ben C. Toledano: Oh, I don't know, probably that he didn't get along with people or something--

[02:07:44.04] Jack Davis: And what, what, go ahead.

[02:07:46.08] Ben C. Toledano: And I'd just say, "Yeah, I said that. It's true." And...he didn't have much sense of humor, but he...

[02:07:56.22] Jack Davis: What were you doing in his office?

[02:07:59.06] Ben C. Toledano: Well I'd have to go there occasionally to talk about...something that was, I don't even know what it was. Yeah, I knew him fairly well.

[02:08:10.13] Justin Nystrom: Can you give me one minute? I need to replace the chip in this.

[02:08:13.04] Jack Davis: Okay. We'll take a, take a pause.

[02:08:16.03] Ben C. Toledano: Some serious questions.

[02:08:16.11] Jack Davis: Some real questions.

[02:08:18.06] Justin Nystrom: I don't know about how serious this will be, but you, you had...painted a picture of Uptown New Orleans society culture as a sort of endogamous, insulated world...that the only way you could get into it would be to marry a debutante...and I, I think people have commented to me that way, but when things started changing in the city, I mean there were also a lot of really smart people in that world. Inside that world, was there disagreement about the proper route to take for this city or was it as you said, it takes just a few

people to blackball a, a member, did it take a few people to derail what otherwise might've been people with good ideas?

[02:09:10.13] Ben C. Toledano: Well...a couple of things, Justin. One, I think that the makeup of the Uptown, so-called Uptown society has changed in recent years or decades in the sense that it's, it's not pure like it used, like they thought it was at one time. People come in now and...become a part of it by, say joining the Lawn Tennis Club, or, there are various and sundry ways in which you could, going hunting or fishing with this guy or that guy and that sort of thing, so I think that number one, that the numbers...has been attrition of the old-timers, and they need people to fill the slots, so that lawyers who were, you know, just first-generation white-collar...or country doctors can come in and be a part of this. So I think that's changed...the other part, let's see, how would you rephrase your other question, just—

[02:10:32.00] Justin Nystrom: Well, particularly in the 1960s, were, were there younger members who maybe...like yourself were in some ways born to this world that felt like things needed to change, they understood that things needed to change, but either the elders or some other cohort, was there disagreement in your generation in this world?

[02:10:56.17] Ben C. Toledano: Well, there were several of us that felt that way. But we really didn't have a voice. The way things worked, in other words, if Mr. Fenner or Mr. Freeman or Mr. Kelleher...wanted something done or Bud McCall, they would work behind the scenes, was what they called it, to get it done. We would've been considered very pushy if we had tried to tell them what to do because we were to look on them as our superiors and, and I don't, I didn't know a lot of these bright people that you refer to other than the Jewish community, which is practically nonexistent now in Uptown New Orleans, which was a major factor at one time, not only in commerce but in Uptown New Orleans, I mean...they were very prominent. And before World War I, they were not discriminated socially against in New Orleans.

[02:12:11.16] Jack Davis: So, and what happened to the Jewish community to have its numbers so diminished now?

[02:12:17.29] Ben C. Toledano: Well, I think that...

[02:12:20.06] Jack Davis: Numbers and influence.

[02:12:22.10] Ben C. Toledano: Oh, I think that they decided a long time ago that New Orleans was over. I think the smart ones...I tell you off the record what we always said, but...because I don't think we should record it, but they explained--what

[02:12:40.04] Jack Davis: You want—

[02:12:41.11] Justin Nystrom: I'll pause.

[02:12:41.28] Jack Davis: You wanna take a pause?

[02:12:43.09] Justin Nystrom: These cameras have—

[02:12:48.00] Ben C. Toledano: Look at the river, Baton Rouge north, you know Clinton and Natchez and Vicksburg, those were very very vibrant Jewish communities. Beautiful synagogues, now not a Jew to be found because they knew that the commerce wasn't going to be there anymore. They went where there would be business. A lot of them went to California or Montana or out West somewhere and uh, you know, you saw the Stern family pull up roots in New Orleans and leave and that's, they know when... Canal Street was the most wonderful street probably in America at one time, one great store after another, I mean it was unbelievable, Adler's next to , Gus Mayer] on and on and on, and all gone, all gone. That's not just shopping centers that's a lot of reasons and they're not here anymore and...

[2:14:13.00] Jack Davis: What's the, what's the succinct explanation for that?

[2:14:19.00] Ben C. Toledano: Because of the drying up of commerce, of, yeah I mean, who stayed? Goldring and Woldenberg, why? Because they sold booze, now what does that tell you? They didn't sell clothes they sold booze.

[2:14:38.00] Jack Davis: So the shrinkage of New Orleans as a market, retail market.

[2:14:44.00] Ben C. Toledano: Oh gone and it was top of the line, I'd say Terry and Juden was as fine a men's store for a small store as I ever went into, they made clothing there and everything. Look at Haspel, it's gone. I mean, Haspel was New Orleans, but all of them are gone there, their kids go away to college and they never come back, that's all there is to it. Look at my four kids, they go away to college, they live everywhere but in the South.

[2:15:23.00] Justin Nystrom: You actually answered the follow up question where did they go, where did the...

[2:15:29.00] Ben C. Toledano: Well I know where mine go, San Francisco, Connecticut, Brooklyn Hospital, Middleburg Virginia. You know, the horse vet's in Virginia.

[2:15:43.00] Jack Davis: And they went to New Orleans high schools?

[2:15:49.00] Ben C. Toledano: They went to Newman School which is quite different from just a New Orleans high school.

[2:15:54.00] Jack Davis: And they went, then they went to colleges where at Stanford and Harvard...

[2:16:00.00] Ben C. Toledano: and Chapel Hill

[2:16:00.00] Jack Davis: Chapel Hill, you know Wake Forest...

[2:16:07.00] Ben C. Toledano: Virginia Tech. I didn't know that I told you that Virginia Tech was the vet school for Maryland and Virginia. I didn't it...it covered the two states.

[2:16:21.00] Justin Nystrom: Yeah I used to take my dog, I taught at Virginia Tech for two years.

[2:16:21.00] Ben C. Toledano: Yeah, well my daughter after she finished at Chapel Hill, she went there to get her Doctor of Veterinary Medicine. She's a horse doctor in Middleburg Virginia now, but uh...

[2:16:40.00] Jack Davis: Well now in...people are saying that New Orleans post Katrina is affording young people more opportunities.

[2:16:47.00] Ben C. Toledano: I hear that.

[2:16:47.00] Jack Davis: Do you think if your smart kids had uh had this choice of where to live in a later decade like now, they'd find something to do in New Orleans?

[2:16:59.00] Ben C. Toledano: No.

[2:16:59.00] Jack Davis: And that is why?

[2:17:06.00] Ben C. Toledano: Because I don't think there are any opportunities there. What are you going to be a lawyer? I told my four children I wouldn't contribute a nickel to any one of them becoming a lawyer. That was one thing I wouldn't do because of my feelings about being a lawyer. But what are they going to do, I mean everyone doesn't own Leidenheimer Bakery like Sandy Wann. That's making, my son's best friend, if you have a family business or Reily's business you know Reily Coffee Company. I mean, they're not that many businesses, french bread, coffee, Zatarans, you know food preparation, seasonings, spices. Everything is pretty much directed toward food, tourism, that sort of thing.

[2:18:03.00] Jack Davis: Now what would they do...

[2:18:03.00] Justin Nystrom: What would you say, what were the biggest missed opportunities in the 1970s?

[2:18:16.00] Ben C. Toledano: Well I think, I think by then...the die may have been somewhat cast as for the opportunity was the oil and gas industry now it would trickle back and forth from time to time. I'm not qualified it would take an oil man to tell you when it was that the big companies had sizable offices in New Orleans, when they decided to consolidate in Houston and so forth. I don't know, but oil and gas, that's where the oil and gas was. I mean my goodness what better place than...than right near the mouth of the river, South Louisiana, and we couldn't even keep the industry here, I mean there. Whenever that was lost, I'm not good on dates because I don't, I just think in terms of happenings, but uh once we lost that. Now the port thing was different because containers and bulk cargos made a big difference. As...as general cargo decreased because of the containers, you didn't need the stevedores and the longshoremen. When I ran for mayor the two most powerful political organizations in New Orleans were the Black and the White longshoremen's unions, "Chink" Henry⁴ ran the Black union and Lindsey Williams ran the White union and they were powerful because I walked the whole riverfront and everywhere I was shaking hands with the people who work there and of course there was nothing you could do about the...the cargo other than what you could do with containers, I mean, but then bulk cargo you'd bring it down in barges, your beans and your corn you'd pump it out of the hold of the barge into a silo. A ship would come from Europe or wherever down South Louisiana, they just like a vacuum cleaner suck the beans out put them in the hold of the ship and that was it and it was not labor-intensive at all. There were no... there were no jobs there so that really hurt. The port was not something we could have done much about other than increasing trade, you know, with Central America but...

[2:21:08.00] Jack Davis: I guess we should um point out that you know something about the bulk grain trade since you spent some years as...involved in one of the big grain elevators on the...in Plaquemines Parish, the Mississippi River Grain Elevator.

[2:21:28.00] Ben C. Toledano: Yeah my client.

[2:21:28.00] Jack Davis: So you know how it works?

[2:21:35.00] Ben C. Toledano: I know a little bit about it, not much, but a little bit.

[2:21:35.00] Justin Nystrom: What was it like...what...what did the longshoremen say to you when you walked down the dock in 1970? I mean, were they supportive of you?

⁴ Widely-used nickname of Longshoreman Union president Clarence Henry.

[2:21:47.00] Ben C. Toledano: Yeah, especially the White ones were, I'd say almost to a man. Yeah they knew who I was and uh they were yeah. No they...they were very friendly and the Black guys were friendly too I mean I just don't know that I don't seem to have had much Black support if the numbers are correct.

[2:22:19.00] Jack Davis: By the early 1980s New Orleans was planning to have a World's Fair in 1984 and this was I think a...an initiative of the Morial administration or am I wrong about that? It was...it was supported by this...by City Hall, but at any point...any rate, by the time we got to 1984 we had a world economy that wasn't particularly interested and we had these drivers in New Orleans that you mentioned the port and the oil industries in significant enough decline and the real estate boom on Poydras Street had declined that there wasn't a whole lot of interest in the World's Fair, is that, was that the end of the 1970s?

[2:23:10.00] Ben C. Toledano: I don't know Jack, I was no longer in New Orleans in '84. I left I guess it was '83, early '83. I don't...I don't...I do remember this, so we had those beautiful streets with those granite cobblestones that had been there since the 18th century the [?] stones that had been used and they went in with Caterpillar equipment and just dug up all of these, and loaded them on trucks to throw away. Well I ran down a dump up near Bogalusa where they had dumped some of them, where this guy named Ronald Jefferson had dumped them. He had trucks that were picking them up and...and I arranged to buy a truckload of those to line my gardens with and they are so beautiful. I mean, the way they are carved it's incredible and they just plowed them up. These beautiful beautiful streets. I mean, that's the kind of thing that hurts me a lot but...I don't know...

[2:24:38.00] Jack Davis: You...I remember reading a transcript of us...of a talk you gave on the eve of the World's Fair in which you were apprehensive about the coming tourism economy...

[2:24:55.00] Ben C. Toledano: Right and saying that it would...and saying that I thought the Fair was going to be a flop, which it was, a dismal flop as you know. I mean, the New Orleans people barely went down there.

[2:25:11.00] Jack Davis: Why did you leave? You had mentioned Ronald Reagan's appointment of you to or...or considering...well I'm pointing you....

[2:25:19.00] Ben C. Toledano: Well I had been knocked off by then...

[2:25:19.00] Jack Davis: But that was in '82 or so?

[2:25:24.00] Ben C. Toledano: Yeah. A lot...I left for a lot of reasons many of which were not good reasons. I'm not particularly proud of my attitude but I was pretty bitter toward the city at the time and wasn't thinking clearly in the sense that I thought the only way to punish New Orleans was to leave. Now that shows you how disturbed I was to think that I could make any difference, but it was all I had...all I had was myself and so I said, "Well at least they won't have that." And that's basically why I left.

[2:26:23.00] Jack Davis: So this was about 1983, '82...

[2:26:23.00] Ben C. Toledano: Yeah, yeah...

[2:26:23.00] Jack Davis: and you moved first to Charlottesville...

[2:26:31.00] Ben C. Toledano: Charlottesville...

[2:26:31.00] Jack Davis: and by the mid '80s your family was in Charlottesville.

[2:26:37.00] Ben C. Toledano: Yeah

[2:26:37.00] Jack Davis: Would you...if you hadn't left...I mean do you think you should have stayed?

[2:26:43.00] Ben C. Toledano: No. No I think I had run my course.

[2:26:55.00] Jack Davis: And you live in Mississippi now both in Pass Christian and in Columbus.

[2:27:00.00] Ben C. Toledano: Yeah

[2:27:00.00] Jack Davis: with Margaret

[2:27:00.00] Ben C. Toledano: Right

[2:27:00.00] Jack Davis: And do you ever go back?

[2:27:00.00] Ben C. Toledano: No! No.

[2:27:07.00] Jack Davis: Why?

[2:27:07.00] Ben C. Toledano: I just don't miss it and there are a lot of people I wouldn't want to see and I'm afraid it's a tough town not to run into everybody on the street you know. And I don't...and a lot of people I wouldn't want to run into. I should have kept getting my Ph.D. at the LSU in history and should have been a teacher but I didn't do that.

[2:27:45.00] Jack Davis: When did you make that decision?

[2:27:45.00] Ben C. Toledano: When I ran out of money and got married. Then I went to McCallie School in Chattanooga and taught there for a year, prep school, and then I decided, hey I'm going back to New Orleans and I'm gonna do something there. That was in '61, something like that and...so I went back and didn't do anything. Well I was half right, I went back. [laughs]

[2:28:19.00] Jack Davis: I'd say based on some of the things we've been talking about you did a few things.

[2:28:30.00] Ben C. Toledano: I never did anything that...I never entered a race that I could win and I don't...I mean I don't mean just politics, I mean, just generally every cause I've espoused has "gone south" as they say, but...

[2:28:51.00] Jack Davis: You think you didn't have impact on these issues as you were talking about. Well we've...we run into people who dispute that appraisal.

[2:29:05.00] Ben C. Toledano: Well don't believe him. [laughs]

[2:29:11.00] Jack Davis: Justin, what else do we have to talk about?

[2:29:11.00] Justin Nystrom: I think this has been a strong interview.

[2:29:16.00] Jack Davis: Can I...can I introduce, that was a nice ending but I was...I was thinking of a topic we hadn't talked about. Do you have another five minutes?

[2:29:23.00] Ben C. Toledano: Sure!

[2:29:29.00] Jack Davis: Probably, maybe edit, insert this earlier in the interview so...the media in New Orleans in the 1970s, you mentioned Charlie Ferguson...

[2:29:37.00] Ben C. Toledano: Yeah...

[2:29:42.00] Jack Davis: How important was the States-Item that Charlie Ferguson edited..

[2:29:49.00] Ben C. Toledano: Very

[2:29:49.00] Jack Davis: in making...sort of creating an alternative voice? You wrote for it.

[2:29:55.00] Ben C. Toledano: Very important but Charlie had a lot to do with elected...Moon mayor...

[2:30:05.00] Jack Davis: In what way?

[2:30:05.00] Ben C. Toledano: He went all out for him, asked him if his cars didn't have Moon stickers on them and he...you know Charlie was a big Moon supporter, very strong Moon supporter, which is fine. I think maybe sometimes it affected the journalism a little bit, but he was, I would say that Charlie was as good a supporter as, as, Moon had.

[2:30:39.00] Jack Davis: And that was...now that was reflected on the editorial page and maybe a little in the news coverage but the State's Item news coverage was different from the Times-Picayune's, but there were also...we also had television stations that did some good reporting. You mentioned Iris Kelso...we had...

[2:30:58.00] Ben C. Toledano: Rosemary James

[2:30:58.00] Jack Davis: Rosemary James. We had alternative newspapers that were sort of...hadn't existed in previous decades. Did...was New Orleans benefiting from having media?

[2:31:21.00] Ben C. Toledano: Was it then?

[2:31:21.00] Jack Davis: Yeah

[2:31:21.00] Ben C. Toledano: Well, I think a follow-up question would be did it have any long-lasting effect. I think at the time, we were damn lucky to have Figaro and Vieux Carre Courier and the Picayune...I mean and the State's Item. I think Charlie did a grand job there, but ask yourself you know. It may have delayed the inevitable a little bit but didn't make any real difference other than informing a few people who probably had an inkling already and just learned a little bit more about what was going on what the problems were. That sort of thing, yeah.

[2:32:16.00] Jack Davis: And the States-Item, Charlie Ferguson as editor took over the Times-Picayune and was able to convert that into an improved newspaper.

[2:32:29.00] Ben C. Toledano: Absolutely.

[2:32:29.00] Jack Davis: Was it in time to make a difference?

[2:32:36.00] Ben C. Toledano: I don't think so. I don't think so. I think he did a wonderful job, but I don't think that the paper was going...number one, Ashton Phelps, I don't know this, but I would imagine that little Ashton and Charlie were never bosom buddies, and the Phelps's always exerted a tremendous influence there. And they were part of the, let things alone, let them go their own way, but no I don't think so I don't think so.

[2:33:24.00] Jack Davis: Justin, anything else we should be asking? Is there anything else, anything we should, we should have asked you?

[2:33:29.00] Ben C. Toledano: [laughs] I love that question, we used to ask witnesses that in court.

[2:33:36.00] Jack Davis: That's where you got some of your best results

[2:33:41.00] Ben C. Toledano: Adverse witnesses you'd say, "Is there anything else I should have asked you that I didn't ask you?" And the guy would look at you like you were crazy, and the opposing counsel would jump up and say, "Your honor, if he doesn't know what questions to ask, I don't want the witness to tell him." [laughs]

[2:33:59.00] Jack Davis: Okay, well then we'll call that the last question.

[2:34:06.00] Ben C. Toledano: Okay.

[2:34:06.00] Justin Nystom: Okay, thank you.

[2:34:06.00] Jack Davis: Thank you very much.

[2:34:06.00] Ben C. Toledano: Thank you.