Britt Jenkins: Your very busy schedule to come and talk with us today.

Fred Davis: Okay, thank you.

Britt Jenkins: Could you please state your name and occupation?

Fred Davis: My name is Fred L. Davis. I'm an insurance broker, financial advisor.

Britt Jenkins: Okay. And where were you born and raised?

Fred Davis: I was born in Memphis, Tennessee and bred in Memphis, Tennessee.

Britt Jenkins: Great. And who were your parents?

Fred Davis: Frank Davis and Charity Davis.

Britt Jenkins: And what did they do for a living?

Fred Davis: My father was a barber and my mother was a domestic.

Britt Jenkins: Can you describe what they were like or what it was like growing up in Memphis?

Fred Davis: There's so many facets to that.
[01:00] It's kind of hard to explain. I was born in 1934 which is in the heart of the Depression. In Memphis, it was a very difficult time for everybody, including, not the least of African-Americans, in a very, very segregated society. I was born in a split family, in the sense that even though my mother and father were married, I never lived in a two parent home.

[02:11] I guess the location where I was born was a precursor of some things. Because in 1934, I was born in a two-story frame apartment building. Well, multi-family building, two floors, about eight units in the apartment, in the rear of the house that the person who owned the apartments lived.

[03:03] Now, when you're Black in 1934 and you're born in the rear of colored folks, that's pretty far back. My mother, there were seven of us all together. My father was my mother's third husband. The other two were dead. There were, I had four sisters.
04:04] And I had three brothers.

During that time, we moved a few times. As a matter of fact, I lived on the same street in different houses, three different houses on the same street at different times. One house was, I remember distinctly. I was, and you may have problems understanding how distinctly I remember at three years old.

[05:03] But, I do remember the house that we were living in when I was three years old which was in 1937, which was probably the best one we lived in.

My mother was a religious woman and at a young age, I was taught recitals and speeches and things of that sort. Pretty lengthy that I recited before groups that astonished the groups that a person at my age and could remember all of those speeches and essays of that length.

[06:18] I started to Florida School at the regular age, but I had been home schooled to the point that I really could have gone to the second grade. And some of the students who were at my level of learning were moved up, advanced to another level. But, I wasn't.

[07:00] Those early years were pretty tough. When, I guess I started working my way through school in around the fourth grade. My mother would take us, my little brother and me over to Arkansas to live with a man by the name of Mr. Henderson who was a sharecropper.

[08:06] And we picked cotton in the fall of the year up until the end of November, somewhere around in there. And my money was kept separate from the work. And when I got back home, the money that I earned was probably used to buy my clothes, so I could go back to school. And I was expected to catch up. And I did.

[08:59] But my father visited us from time-to-time, and I guess provided some money from time-to-time, you know I was too little to know about those kinds of things. And also during that period as we were growing up, oh, fourth, fifth grade they had these cotton trucks that went from Memphis over to down in Mississippi and Arkansas and Missouri.

[09:57] And many times my mother would go and take me with her. You can imagine a kid of nine, ten years old getting up at 4:00 in the morning to catch a truck to go to Arkansas or wherever to pick cotton. I guess it stopped me from being a morning person. But, that was not easy, but it had an element of discipline in it.

[10:55] And there was one period during that time when my mother and my aunt, my father's sister worked in Oak Ridge, Tennessee during the war at the plant up there, after the war. And we were left with some friends. A lady who had, an old lady who was Miss

Hawkins, was sort of my second mother for me and my brother. We lived in all those houses where we lived on that street, were three-room shotgun houses with no inside plumbing.

[12:04] And money would be sent to take care of us and of course, something, but we didn't, we lived, our house was two doors down and none of them had inside plumbing, you know.

But early on, I was taught to wash and iron and cook when I was just a little feller. And I was stirring cornbread when I had to stand up in the chair to stir it.

[12:55] And I was washing ~~my washing~~ my clothes on a washboard and starching them and ironing them with smoothing iron, those big irons that we put on charcoal buckets at that time.
That was the only thing available. And I was wearing short pants, you know little shaver and I could wash those pants, those clothes, and iron them. I could scoot around under the house all day. The creases in them would be so stiff, until when you put them in the dirty clothes basket, the creases was still sharp.

[14:04] For a couple of years, she put us in the school, a 78 business school, very small school because Bible was taught there. And eventually my father came and got us. And because of the difference in the curriculum when I came back to public school, I lost a grade. And we lived with him until I finished high school because my mother came back home.

[14:56] And we had this sort of conflicted kind of thing because sometimes I would stay with her and sometimes I would stay with him and my brother, well, then there were three of us, by that time. In grade school, I worked. Sometimes catch a truck, go pick cotton, sometime in the summer, chopping cotton. I got my first public job at a café called "The Brass Rail" downtown just in back of Court Square when I was 13, washing pots.

[15:59] And then later on I got a job washing dishes at the Peabody, which was just down the street there. And in the grill later on, I got a job as a busboy and waiter at the main dining room in the Skyway.

It was always necessary for me to earn my keep in order to go to school. That training did me well. I used that training and the expertise and called it that to help pay my way through college.

[17:08] I was on, I had a job at , oh by the--, ~~————~~, when I first went to college at Tennessee State. I really hadn't been assigned a room. I had a few hundred dollars, which was a whole lot of money then. Room, board, and tuition at Tennessee State was $90.00 a quarter. You have to recognize that was more than 50 years ago.

[17:57] The first couple of years I worked at the cafeteria putting the food on the line and when I got jobs, outside jobs, working in the hotels and things of that sort. I'd pay somebody to do my work in the cafeteria and do other, and then work outside at clubs and hotels. I majored in accounting. And one time, unbeknownst to me, some people from Paducah, Kentucky, the Atomic Energy Commission came to interview people in accounting, engineering, and chemistry.

[19:19] For some reason, I didn't go to class that day, so I wasn't available to be interviewed. But the professor, they wanted to take three accounting students. Professor told them to take two. And he had another person he was going to send. I didn't know anything about it. That other person was me. And we went up there and we were all interviewed. And they chose me and I interned with them for two years.

[19:59] Of course, I have to tell you that some years earlier in freshman and sophomore years, I had lived in Chicago with my sisters and I had worked at the stockyards in Chicago, which is there are many young people who are old enough to remember when there was stockyards inside the city of Chicago. But I did. And used the money to come back and pay my way through school. One of the things I was mentioning to a friend of mine not to long ago, is that I have never had the privilege of going to school without working, from grade school through high school through college.

[21:07] I've always wondered what it would be like not to have to work and go to school.

I met my wife in college. She was also an accounting student, much better student than me. And she had the same experiences. I must say that after my military duty, I'm just splicing her in, I'll go back to the scenario. And I was elected to the council, which we'll talk about later on.

[22:04] I had enrolled in the University of Memphis to get an MBA. And while in that course of study, I was elected to the City Council and I didn't complete it.

She got a Ford Fellowship for a full ride, room and board and tuition, a stipend, I'm sorry. And we had three children at the time and went on out there and got an MBA. We had three children at the time. She was the first African-American person to get an MBA at the University of Memphis, which she considered a very, both of us considered a very nice achievement.

[23:00] But getting back on the trail, that sort of explains some of my years in college, that there's a lot of other stuff that's ancillary, but not may not be that important. I went to the military, volunteered for the draft because they kept on agitating me and trying to take me out of school. And I did not, if you volunteered you had to do three years. If you volunteered through the draft, you only had to do two years.

They tried to send me to Officers' School. I wouldn't do it because I didn't want to do three years.

[23:58] I ended up in France working in the office where the finance was done~~run~~. I was responsible for the accounting for the post. Then later on I worked in the Post's Engineers Office. While there, I became fluent enough in French to be the third in command, third in line as the commander's interpreter.

And it was funny because in my office three languages was spoken in the finance office.

[25:13] There was a Frenchman who was in charge of all the French and employees on Post. And he had a Spanish secretary who took shorthand, if you spoke English, French, or Spanish. And there was a Black Lieutenant in the office who had a secretary who was German. And she spoke German, French, and English. And then there were the GIs who just spoke English.

[26:01] So, the French became the gossip language. So, anytime they wanted to talk about the GIs in the office, everybody switched to French.

And I never shall forget, I was studying French because of my aversion to the kind of Army discipline required. I had sent home and got my wife and brought her over there. And I had a house in town. And I only had one child at the time. And so I could go home from Post and have a sort of a domestic life.

[27:07] But, almost the whole time I was there, at home from Post I was studying French. And it would make my wife so furious because all day, all she heard was French and she didn't understand it. And then I come home all night studying it. And we weren't doing a lot of talking. And her revenge was to go back, go the library, and get a stack of books about that tall. And she' read her books, while I was on the _____.

But, this is sort of anecdotal to what we were talking about. But, we had a janitor in our building, _____ in French.

[28:08] Who was appreciative of the fact that I was trying to learn his language. And he took me on and he taught me. And sometimes,

it would be from me to the dictionary and back to him until the conversation became more fluent. He'd take me to his house and meeting his friends and his neighborhood and etc. And found in a comparatively short period of time I became very fluent in the language, both speaking and writing it.

[29:03] And we'd at the end of my tour of duty over there, I had a very good experience because I could communicate with the people. My other soldier friends said that they want to talk to me, let them learn Eng –

[End of Audio – Side p1]

[Start of Audio – Side p2]

Fred Davis: We at the end of our tour of duty over there, I had a very good experience because I could communicate with the people. My other soldier friends said that they want to talk to me, let them learn English. An attitude is it's not our country. It's theirs. And if we need to talk to them, we need to learn French, but the attitude.

Daniel Jacobs: I just wanted to ask, what was it like going from living in Memphis to living in France? Was there, I mean, especially in terms of attitudes towards *(crosstalk)* --

Fred Davis: Well, there were two different kinds of attitudes.

[01:02] On Post, you didn't have to look very hard to find southern racism, almost everywhere you looked. You didn't have to look. It would impose itself on you. And that was very difficult for me. And that's one of the reasons I didn't want to stay in the Army any longer than I had. But I felt an obligation to do my service. But I wanted to get it on and over with as quick as possible. But~~O~~out on the economy, and that's what we called it, off the Post, out in it.

The whole attitude towards African-Americans, were different.

[01:58] And it was interesting to see that dichotomy and that is the reason why over the years, there were a lot of Expatriate African-Americans in Europe, they called us, because of the difference. And in my later years, I traveled extensively. Year before last I just came back from tour of the Greek Isles.

[02:57] And I was in Belgium and England at various times, South America, all over the place.

You don't have the, I never encountered the kind of automatic racial attitudes, even two or three years ago. I'm not traveling this year, but as I said last year, we went in the Greek Isles.

[03:49] I did not encounter, have not encountered the kind of blatant racism in other parts of the world that I encounter in this country, albeit on a more subtle basis. If you've grown up in that atmosphere, you know it. You detect it very quickly. Your radar is very sensitive to that kind of thing. But I think one of the things you want to talk about is the Civil Rights Movement, the Sanitation strike, that kind of thing.

I was elected to the Council in 1967 to take office in January 1968.

[05:08] It was a new charter. It was a new government before there had been a commissioner form of government. The commissioners were both legislative and administrative body. It was a commissioner of fire and police, commissioner of health, commissioner of public works, commissioner of finance, personnel. I can't recall each one of them distinctly now.

But every day except Tuesday, they were administrative. On Tuesday, they met as commissioners to make the law, to pass the ordinance.

[06:06] And what they were in effect doing, were passing the rules that they themselves would administer. And that was not uncommon in this country for cities the size of Memphis. That has changed substantially over the years. There was a charter commission created to make the change. And some friends of mine, I'm sure some you may have, well one of whom you may have interviewed, Judge Sugarman, Russell Sugarman.

[07:02] We, going back to Russ, before the Charter Commission was born and the change of government was to take place, there was a club, political organization in Memphis called the "Shelby County Democratic Club." It was headed up primarily led by Russell Sugarman. A. W. Willis who was the first African-American State Representative after Reconstruction.

[08:02] Jesse Turner, Sr. who was at that time, president of Tri-State Bank, and head of the local NAACP. These are the people who were primary leaders in Shelby County Democratic Club. We organized this community. At one time, I was the treasurer of the Club. We organized this community, almost completely in the Black community, on the street-by-street, block-by-block basis.

[08:52] And organizational efforts started by running candidates for offices like the Board of Education and *(phone)*, ~~better call me back,~~ by putting together organizations and people to completely organize

this city. And we had organized on almost a street-by-street, block-by-block basis. I probably had the tightest organization under my auspices.

[10:01] And that's Orange Mound, which is a very, very old African-American neighborhood that's recognized all over the country. I could make five phone calls and touch almost every house in the area. It was so organized that I think either the Rockefeller Foundation or the Ford Foundation gave people fellowships to come and study how we did it. We were part of a catalyst for the change and the charter, lobbying because African-Americans were not represented in government.

[11:07] The charter change was the bitter fight. It passed by a fairly narrow margin. The charter change required 13-member council and a mayor that would be seven districts and six at-large. Everybody would get a chance to vote for six at-large councilmen and one district councilman which gave everybody an opportunity to vote for the majority of the city council.

[12:02] In the charter meetings it became the necessity to draw the district lines. I was not a part of the charter meetings, but my friends, Russel and AW came back. They gave them the assignment and they came back and gave the assignment to me to draw them some lines that would be representative. Now, they weren't the only ones that were, there were several other people on the commission who were asked to draw lines.

So, I took the challenge. And my wife and I laid out the city by precinct and on the map.

[12:57] And I judged the political nature of the community and she was drawing the lines, adding up the figures. And we submitted our~~t~~ map. And to our astonishment, to Russ and AW, our map was the one that was chosen. The way I drew the lines there would be three very predominantly Black districts, one district with a slight White majority, probably about 10% White majority. At the time I was drawing the line, I had no idea of running for public office.

[14:05] But on the way back home from my job in the county, one day I had an epiphany and I decided I wanted to do that. My organization you know it scared the hell out of them because they didn't think any black person could win in any district that had a White majority, I don't care how small it was. And my own organization supported a White candidate against me because they thought I was going to divide the vote and a more conservative White~~-~~candidate were going to win.

In the end I almost got 50% of the votes in the primary.
[15:02] But because I did not get more than 50%, I had to have a runoff against the person who was the head of the College of Optometry, who had been a Naval Commander. I beat him soundly and that was the first time a Black person had won in a predominantly White district in the city of Memphis. As a matter of fact, it hadn't been done since. Now, got questions --

Daniel Jacobs: Well, yeah. I was going to ask, I mean, how do you think you were able to do that? What kinds of things did you do?

[16:00]

Fred Davis: Couple of things. I had much of the community that I live in highly organized. But the second thing is he made a mistake that he didn't know he was making. In those days, we had cars with sound systems on the top of them to go through neighborhoods and campaign. And in his campaigning, he went through some predominantly White neighborhoods and said, "Elect me or you'll have a Nigger for a Councilman." And some people heard it.

[17:02] Two young Jewish fellows who had been lifelong friends. One was a graduate of Yale Law School and the other one was a sports editor for the "Press Scimitar~~enator~~." And they showed up at my driveway one day and told me what they heard. And said we're going to help you to win. And we teamed up and we put on one hell of a campaign.
[17:57] And we beat him.

But we had, I had my organization that I had put together years earlier was very forceful, very tight. And we did what, that's my personal organization, not the Democratic Club. And we did that, what my recognized political organization didn't think, could be done. And I was elected.

Now after the election, we elected among ourselves a person who was head of a very large car dealership down in Pryor, it was Pryor Oldsmobile at the time, as our first chairman.
[19:13] And he was making up the committees, passing out the committee assignments. And for some reason I was out of the room doing some of the _assignments_____. When I came back in the room, one of my fellow council members told me, Fred, said Fred you got Public Works.

So, I had some concern because I knew the problems that had been brewing with the Sanitation Workers.

[19:56] But I thought it was an opportunity for me to help to move them to another level. Now, a strange thing that happened, something else had happened which was historic in the Memphis government. The outgoing mayor had left the city in a deficit. And by law, Memphis can't run a deficit. When you start running out of money, you have to cut back on services to meet the money.

It was not long before, after we were elected that the Sanitation Workers and their representatives start making demands on the new council.

[20:55] And one morning I turned my radio on and heard that they were on strike. I guess it was in February or something. So, went to City Hall had meetings and trying to determine how we were going to deal with this, what most of the negotiations were with the mayor Henry Loeb~~in _____~~, who refused to negotiate with them, why they were on strike.

In the meantime, AFSCME~~MET~~, American Federation of Workers were contacted to come into Memphis tonight.

[22:03] AFSCME~~MET~~ was on its last leg because it had tried to organize in a number of other places and had not succeeded. They were upset with the Sanitation Workers because they felt that the workers had done something stupid, strategically. In~~And~~ that they had called a sanitation strike in the wintertime. And you don't do sanitation strikes in the wintertime. You do sanitation strikes when it's hot and the garbage stinks and the flies go.

[23:02] So, they presented that as a strategic error, but they came and they started the organization effort. Some of the people that they sent down here from, union officials were very hardball, old time labor types who didn't understand a city like this. And the first thing they did was offended Henry. And they got in a cussing contest.

[23:58] And things went from bad to worse.

As Chairman of Public Works Committee, I had started trying to mediate these things and trying to educate the council on the realities of the life of sanitation workers, which was hard. Those men were required to go in the backyard, empty the garbage in the tub. Put the tub on their shoulders and take it out to the mother truck waiting.

Many times that garbage was infested with maggots and the water that comes from that kind of thing all on their clothes and their bodies.

[25:05] They were not provided with shower facilities. The White drivers who never got out of the truck were provided with shower

facilities. Some of them, the pay was so low that they were working and still on welfare. It was a horrific situation that needed addressing. And I had hoped I could be the champion of them to help address those issues. But, running parallel to that was the financial situation that the city was in. And also, find it running parallel to that was the fact that mayor was doing the negotiating.

[26:10] After a while, the strike started getting national attention. And there were reporters here from all over the world. In an effort to try to bring some sense, order to it, I held a hearing with the full Council and invited the workers to come and speak to the Council. They came except for the fact every time I invited a worker up to speak, the union person would pull them down and he would try to speak and I wouldn't listen to him.

[27:09] Telling him I did not represent the union. I represented the workers, who were~~the~~ citizens of Memphis.

And we bantered that back and forth for a while and the union leader said that if it's workers you want, workers you'll get. At the time, the workers were having a meeting, a rally at Firestone Tire & Rubber Company over there and they had a labor hall there. They send buses out there and got those people and packed 1,300 people in a space that was designed for 600.

[28:02] And the fun began.

In the meantime, we have a lot of preachers and civil rights leaders who were getting in on the act because of the situation that the sanitation workers were in. So, I found myself presiding over the protests and the suspicions of the ~~———~~both the union leaders, civil rights leaders who were, thought that I should not be a mediator, but I should be aggressively advocating.

[29:13] I considered that an improper position for me, as Chairman of the Public Works Committee. That it was my job to try to bring some order and some sense and some thought to the situation, so we could resolve it. If you ever see that on film, it was chaos. I don't know whether you've ever seen the film or not, but it was chaos. And after that, one day I invited the Council out to my house to discuss the wages, how much we would increase them for an hour.

[30:10] And we started at 30¢ an hour increase.

And debated it, nickel by nickel until we got back down to 15¢ an hour. And at that point, I dug my heels in and said you know I can't entertain anything lower than ~~—~~this~~———~~. So, after much debate we agreed 15¢ an hour. However, because of the financial dilemma we were having we couldn't do the whole 15¢ at one

time. We figured we could get away with a nickel immediately and do the other 10¢ when the budget changed.

[31:02] Well, we agreed that we would call the meeting over to what's now Cook Convention Center~~& Benchonson~~ and make our announcement. Well, I'm not~~'d been~~ in office six moths. I'm a political novice. And I'm not sophisticated in phraseology, political speak, so to speak. And after some preliminaries then I was called up to report on what the committee had concluded, the Council had concluded.

[31:59] After a few words, I said 5¢ immediately, and somebody in the balcony said the Niggers gonna sell us for a nickel. And the place exploded. And the tax squad had to escort us out the back door, back to City Hall. But later on they found out the whole deal was, but in the meantime, Frank Holland the Police Director intercepted a call to Chicago to get a hit man to come to Memphis to take me out.

[32:54] Now this was all after, the sanitation, after~~Dr.~~ King had died. They took me to the police range. They gave me a .38. And they took me to the police range and I had to qualify with a .38 and a shotgun. And then they gave me 24-hour protection for a couple of months. Ultimately, when the strike was settled and they were negotiating, it was settled at 15¢. And the reason it was settled at 15¢ because they didn't do, they said we know you agreed to that at Fred's house. And what I had been vilified for became the standard of the negotiations.

[34:05] There are lots of details, more that could be filled in, but at the time King made his speech, I was sitting on the stage, his last speech. And I was beside him. I got a picture hanging on my wall in the office. I was beside him when he made his last march. And there were several other interactions between him and me, all during the period, but not much, a photograph. I documented. But I think that ought to wrap it up.

Daniel Jacobs: _____ change the tape --

Fred Davis: Oh, okay.

Daniel Jacobs: We'd love to hear you tell you stories _____. After we change out the tape, if you'd like to take a quick break *(crosstalk)* --

Fred Davis: Well, you know, unless you --

[End of Audio – Side p2]

[Start of Audio – Side p3]

Daniel Jacobs: When we stopped, you were talking about your role with Dr. King. What was your, I mean, what did you think when you found out that he was coming to Memphis? Or what was your --

Fred Davis: Well, there was a preacher organization of people who had been with him in other civil rights context that had invited him to come to Memphis. I'm trying to think of one pastor in particular who's teaching now at Vanderbilt, and I'm not --

Britt Jenkins~~acobs~~: ~~Larson~~ Lawson --

Fred Davis: Yeah, Jim ~~Larson~~Lawson

[01:02] Jim ~~Larson's~~ Lawson's wife and I were in the same class at Tennessee State. And I know of Jim when he was studying at Vanderbilt. And he was one of the leaders who entreated King~~d~~ to come to Memphis. First, since there was such a heavy snow, snowstorm, you know he didn't get here and came back at another time. I was in the leadership of the march that exploded down on Beale~~l~~ Street and on Main Street.

[02:00] And was assaulted by our own policemen as a member of the city Council. And that whole area was sort of tragic.

And then, at the time King was killed there was some of us who were in a closed meeting over at the Claridge Hotel preparing for King's people to show up. And a federal mediator by the name of Tom Mounts to come and we were gong to negotiate the settlement of that strike at that time.

[03:04] And when King's people didn't show up and Tom didn't get there, we started, we got concerned and then we got a call from City Hall, turn the television on. And it was, and we learned that Dr. King had been killed. But on the very day he was killed, we were preparing to settle the strike.

Britt Jenkins~~acob~~s: Do you recall your initial like reaction or thoughts when you heard the news that King had been assassinated?

Fred Davis: It was a very emotional point for me. One of the reasons why I had been so _emotional~~_____~~, because at my urging we had come within a hair of settling the strike on a couple of different occasions.

[04:12] On one occasion we had a majority of the Council to agree for about three hours. And then one member of the Council concerned about what her constituents, what that member's constituents would think, that member changed the vote and we lost that one. We lost that one, the majority.

[04:54] But when I saw the tanks rolling down Main Street, I came loose and I couldn't contain it because I kept just kept telling them I told you. I told you. I told you and you wouldn't listen. And they, but to their chagrin they realized that I was right. I was leaving a monthly meeting, Kiwanis Club to where I had been a member for over 25 years and I was talking to somebody, who is in the same industry that I am in, but I consider hadn't gotten the message yet.

[06:06] And I was talking to him about the racism that exists still in this city. And he was, responded that he didn't see it, and he was talking about he had a very dry view of things as they are. And saying that's your problem. You got a bird's eye view and I got a ground level view. And the perspective is different.

[06:58] And that case members of City Council, who I guess as much concerned about that political position at that point, as they were about the necessity of settling the strike, that the position of the city.

And that kind of thing has not changed even 40 years later. Now you got different actors and majority of those actors are Black.

[07:59] But that whole scenario, that whole line of thinking had not changed very much.

Daniel Jacobs: It sound~~s~~ed like during the sanitation strike you were talking about some of these meetings. It sounded like you were coming under a lot of pressure from the Black community, but then at the same time you're constituency was majority White, and how did that affect you?

Fred Davis: I took the attitude that I was paying to be a member of City Council. The salary was $5,000.00 a year. It cost me a hell of a lot more than that to be on the Council.

[09:00] And I decided that since I was paying to do this job, I could do what the hell I wanted to do regardless of who the constituency was, okay. So, it never entered my mind about trying to satisfy a White constituency, okay. What troubled many Black people was that I wouldn't attach myself to the Black propaganda either. And now years later, the people who vilified me have held dinner in my honor.

[10:00] And I think it's a question of integrity. One of the things that I have discovered on my own that the crowd is usually wrong. Okay. Now, for a person to recognizes that that doesn't make good politics, okay. And when I decided I didn't want to do that anymore, I announced it a year in advance and people said you know I don't know anybody. I haven't seen anybody who quit. I said you watch me.

[11:02] And somebody asked me said why are you leaving? I said one thing 12 years is enough. I'm tired. But the other thing is that prophets have a habit of dying with their boots on. But, as a result of that kind of attitude, there was hardly a door in Memphis that I couldn't go in. There was hardly a bank executive or manufacturing executive or anybody who would not answer my phone call.

[11:55] Or during my tenure when Fred wanted to bring Federal Express to Memphis, I was Chairman of the City Council.

And I appointed the committee to work with him to find a place for him to land his four or five planes that he had at the time. And as a result of that he and I became very close. Sometimes when his folks was gone and my folks was gone, we'd spend a couple of hours on the phone talking about the affairs of Memphis and how you do it, and how you manage it.

And until this day, there's hardly, well I'm a member of the Society of Entrepreneurs.

[13:04] You know about the Society? And it's composed of highest level of business people in this city, including people like Fred Smith and Jack Bell owns the Peabody Hotel. And Louie Donaldson, Baker Donaldson, the largest law firm. Matter of fact, Louie and I was inducted the same year. I was the first African-American inducted in the Society. And they only accept five people a year, sometimes only four.

So, my credibility and my relationship with the people who make Memphis happen is still very collegial.

[14:12] And as a result, on many~~y~~ occasions I have been able to open doors for other people that they couldn't open for themselves because of my personal relationship with the people behind the door. Most of my antagonists have melted away. I'm still vibrant.

Britt Jenkins~~acobs~~: What do you think in looking back in Memphis you've grown up here and then going abroad to France and then coming back, how do you see, what has really changed from that time to now?

[15:00]

Fred Davis: Well, to give appropriate credit there's been a big change in opportunities for African-Americans and women, hell of a change. You know I told you my son is senior vice president of marketing for, vice president of marketing for Verizon. Before that, he had been one of the youngest brand managers for P&G.

[16:04] He was the brand manager at 27 which is unheard of at P&G.

I think the internal scars that I bear from those times, and not only I bear, but other people of my era bear made change in this country possible so that things of that sort could happen. Okay. He left there and became a senior vice president of marketing for Comcast. And when, you see the term "Comcastic" on TV, that's my son's voice.

[17:06] You know I think the change is more than evident. The fact that Barack Obama is in contention for the President of the United States is attributable to the sacrifices that took place to change the opinions of people in this country. And I have a daughter who's a lawyer who graduated from Yale and got a law degree from Vanderbilt which is, I couldn't have dreamed of, I didn't know anybody in my era who attended Harvard or Yale or wherever.

[18:10] You know never, not even a topic of discussion, okay. Now, it's common. My wife served on the ~~Advisory~~ advised the President at~~to the~~this school.

So, when you look at the kinds of changes that has taken place over time, the process was very painful. Okay.

[19:01] And when you look for change without pain~~ying~~, you're looking for roses without thorns. It just goes together. Okay. But, and that does not stop. Each generation has to bear its pains, to even sustain the positive progress that has been made. So, this country has made lots of progress. But in many ways, it has not.

[20:03] If you look around the world the level of educational competence in countries around the world, it's higher than many countries, in many countries than it is in the United States. The level of healthcare this provides citizens countries around the world is much better than many places than it is in this country. Per capita, the United States has one of the highest incarceration rates of any country in the world.

[20:59] So, even though our propaganda wheels work overtime, practically in many ways there are other nations who are outdoing us. So, that that's a challenge for the "now" generation. I was coming back from Brazil a few years ago. And I was on a plane with a lawyer

who was based in Washington, but who would work for an environmentalist organization and she was based in Brazil.

[22:05] And we got to talking about many things and we got around to politics. At the time, Bush had not been elected for the second time. And she told me from her contacts around the world that what the people were saying is they would forgive America for electing Bush the first time. But they wouldn't do it twice.

Now, I have no idea what your political persuasion is and that's not important. But, she was giving me a candid comment from what she observed in other places around the world.

[23:02] And we all are free to judge the fruits of his administration as we choose. I want to say that your generation has a serious challenge if we're going to make this country in fact, what we tell people around the world what it is. Does that answer your question?

Britt Jenkins~~acobs~~: Yes, sir.

Daniel Jacobs: I mean that was, yeah.

[24:00] I guess unless you have anything else to add, is there anything else you would like to say?

Fred Davis: No. It's my pleasure. And you know I would take time out to talk to young people because I think you need to be exposed to a variety of opinions based on experience of people who lived through various situations in this country, in this society, so that you will have a broader basis of pulling together your own conclusions.

[25:05] I've lived long enough to really understand that history really is his story. And it's a story of whoever is telling it, you know. We know about those things that are left out of the history books, those things that are not accounted for and those things that are in the history books, but are slanted.

[26:01] If you have an opportunity to hear and see for yourself then you can make better judgments.

Daniel Jacobs: Thank you for helping us. And thank you so much for your time. That was really great.

Fred Davis: Thank you. Thank you.

[End of Audio]