

Rhodes College Digital Archives - DLynx

Henry Turley interview in 2007

Item Type	Moving Image
Publisher	Memphis, Tenn. : Rhodes College
Download date	2026-04-21 11:04:41
Link to Item	http://hdl.handle.net/10267/33486

Interview of Henry Turley. Interviewed by Francesca Davis and Crystal Windless, of The Crossroads to Freedom Project, Rhodes College.

Mr. Turley is Real Estate developer in Memphis, TN. Mr. Turley has watched the growth and development of the city of Memphis since his childhood. In this interview he discusses his childhood, and his participation in the development of Memphis, as well as his memories of the Civil Rights protests that took place in Memphis.

This interview was conducted in 2007 to be included in the Rhodes College Crossroads to Freedom Digital Archive Project.

The transcripts represent what was said in the interview to the best of our ability. It is possible that some words, particularly names, have been misspelled. We have made no attempt to correct mistakes in grammar.

Beginning of Clip 1 – 00:00.0

Francesca Davis: Crossroads to Freedom Project at Rhodes College. We would like to extend our gratitude to you for coming in to participate, because we really would like to hear your story, so thank you for coming in.

Henry Turley: Well, thanks so much for having me. I appreciate and admire what you all are doing.

Francesca Davis: Thank you. Thank you. And we're just gonna begin. Could you tell us what your name is and where you were born and raised?

Henry Turley: I'm Henry Turley, and I'm a Memphian and have been here my 65 years now.

Francesca Davis: Okay, and what is your current occupation?

Henry Turley: I'm in the real estate business. I develop real estate, primarily in Memphis.

Francesca Davis: ~~Primarily in Memphis.~~ Okay, and could you tell us a little about your parents, who they were and what were their occupations?

Henry Turley: My mother and father were both Memphians. I was born near ~~Bellevue Belleview and in~~ Lamar in what's now called the ~~Annesdale Amsdale~~ Snowden neighborhood.

00:01:00 My dad was in the cotton business. When I was born, he worked for a big cotton brokerage company called Anderson Clayton and Company, and my mother stayed home, took care of my brother, me, and our extended family. We all lived together at 1268 Sledge.

Francesca Davis: Okay, and could you tell me a little bit more about their personalities, like what you liked about your mom or what you liked about your father or what you learned from them growing up?

Henry Turley: Well, I don't know that I can be specific about that. I would say they induced me in a very subtle way to lead the life I've led, which is to some extent about Memphis and playing a small role in its building.

00:02:02

Francesca Davis: Okay, so your parents played a major influence on your love of Memphis and why you decided to invest in it?

Henry Turley: I think so.

Francesca Davis: Okay. That's good. And could you describe any brothers or sisters that you have?

Henry Turley: I have a younger brother, Calvin Jones Turley, who has distinguished himself recently by creating the Memphis Cotton Museum, and you must go see it. It's at the corner of Front and Union, and 2006 was its inaugural year.

Francesca Davis: Great. You mentioned that you grew up around [Bellevue](#) ~~Bellevue~~ and Lamar. Could you tell us a little bit more about the neighborhood you grew up in?

Henry Turley: Well, it's sort of an interesting neighborhood of contrasts.

00:2:54

Henry Turley: On the one side of me maybe a half a block away was one of the most elegant and sumptuous houses in the city, Amsdale itself, that great house on a hill at Lamar, well, actually, on Lamar at Snowden Circle, and perhaps an equal distance to the west was a public housing project known as Lamar Terrace, only recently torn down. So it's sort of a neighborhood of contrast.

Francesca Davis: Okay. Could you share with us maybe two or three of your most memories or best memories from your childhood, if anything comes to mind, anything with your brothers or your parents?

Henry Turley: No, nothing comes to mind that I particularly one to tell at the moment.

Francesca Davis: Okay.

Henry Turley: I mean, you know, I can't think of anything that just jumps out at me.

Francesca Davis: Okay. Could you tell us a little bit more about your home life and what was it like having maybe your grandmother or –

00:04:05

Henry Turley: I'm still thinking about that last question.

Francesca Davis: Oh, okay. Okay.

Henry Turley: (Laughter)

Francesca Davis: Okay.

Henry Turley: I hate to – I hate to get totally skunked. Oh, shoot. Well, you asked about my grandmother. You know, of course I thought, at least at the time, I thought it was the natural order of things to live in an extended household where several generations lived together, and that was pretty commonplace on our block. Most families lived in that extended relationship, and if that wasn't the case, quite frequently the house was given over to either a rooming house or a rooming and boarding house, and by board you were furnished meals as well as a room.

00:05:01

Henry Turley: So the economy was quite different then from what it is today. The South was a much less affluent place. Probably has significance in our – as we develop the racial relationships, I think people expected to be – for the economy to be small, and we didn't participate in a grandly expanding pie that we now have.

Beginning of Clip 2 – 5:38.15

Francesca Davis: Okay. Could you tell us about the activities you were involved in growing up, either in school or –

Henry Turley: Oh, I think I was just an average kid. I went to public schools and did pretty well with what public school kids do.

00:05:56

Henry Turley: When I was in ninth grade, my mother, I believe it was, came and announced that I would do better in private school and that they were gonna make some economic sacrifices and send me to Memphis University School, which had opened that year.

Francesca Davis: Okay.

Henry Turley: So I then became a private school boy.

Francesca Davis: Okay. And did you see a difference between public schools and going to private schools in terms of the students or just the atmosphere?

Henry Turley: I enjoyed school always, sort of got a kick out of learning, was reasonably good at it, and thought I benefited from good teachers and good associates throughout my educational career. I started at Idlewild then went to ~~Bellevue~~ Belleview Junior High and then on to MUS.

00:07:05

Henry Turley: At MUS, I was at that formative stage where you get intellectually curious, I mean, more so than you had been to date, perhaps, and we were blessed with those sort of inspirational teachers who stimulated your thoughts and got you interested in books and education and learning. I was particularly interested in history, but, you know, I liked physics, too.

Francesca Davis: Okay, and were some of those teachers, would you consider them some of your role models, perhaps?

Henry Turley: I don't know that I would call them role models, rather, just people who inspired me to learn more and from whom I learned the value of education and the perspective that that gives you.

00:08:07

Francesca Davis: Okay. Who were your role models growing up?

Henry Turley: I can't say for sure that I know.

Crystal Windless: Okay. Moving forward to our target period, the fifties through the seventies, the Civil Rights Era, can you give us two or three of your most meaningful memories of that time period?

Henry Turley: Well, I think in retrospect, the thing I most – that most frequently occurs to me about the civil rights ~~y~~ears was that for a long, long time it went straight over my head. I didn't get it, and even though when I was at MUS, one of the kids who joined our class was from the then closed Little Rock Central, you know, because it had been closed following the integration of, I believe, '57.

00:09:14

Henry Turley: He was forced to move here, so it must have put it – it should have put it foremost in our minds and foremost with the possible exception of rock-and-roll, which was being created here at the same time. I missed that one too, but we should have been, and I'll fault MUS here, we should have been talking about it and its significance for us, for this young man who came from Little Rock, whose name was T.L. Stebbins, moved to Memphis, boarded with a, I forgot, I think a friend of his family's, and went to MUS so that he could complete his education and go on to Harvard, no less.

00:10:00

Henry Turley: But we just didn't talk about it. It was interesting in itself.

Beginning of Clip 3 – 10:07.10

Francesca Davis: That's very interesting.

Henry Turley: So my first thought is, again, in retrospect, "Dadgum." Rock-and-roll happened here, and I only vaguely was aware of it and really, you know, had just a very slight understanding of its significance and how it was changing or creating, if you will, the youth culture and changing the way America worked, and the Civil Rights Movement, which was also substantially being created here, and made obvious changes in the way the world and particularly the South and particularly Memphis worked, just went on over my head.

00:10:59

Henry Turley: Took me – I was well in college before I thought, "Hmm, guess I'm involved in this, too." Isn't that something to be that dumb? And I think back. "Now, okay, I was that dumb then. I wonder what I'm missing now?" you know, things that are really important, fundamental changes that are occurring now. So that's my first recollection or my first thought about the Civil Rights Movement.

Crystal Windless: And were there any other meaningful experience during that timeframe of those decades that you'd like to share?

Henry Turley: Well, I will tell you one story. If there were a question in, say, a Memphis trivia contest, and that question was, "What old real estate guy was landlord to both T.O. Jones, local head of the ASMEAFSCME Union, in support of whose activities Martin Luther King came to Memphis?"

00:12:17

Henry Turley: “Who was T.O. Jones’ landlord and also James Earl Ray, who, of course, killed Dr. King? Who was landlord to both of those fellows?” The answer would be Henry Turley, so that is sort of an interesting circumstance, and I got to know T.O. Jones, the head of the union. I met T.O., because he was regularly and chronically behind on his rent.

00:12:57

Henry Turley: This was before the garbage strike and before dues check-off, and I suspect being head of the sanitation union in Memphis was a hard thing, but I say I was his landlord. I didn’t own the property, but I worked for a company that served as landlord. It was a property management company for various people, and so, you know, in fact or in effect I was his landlord, and it fell to me to collect T.O.’s rent. And as I recall, the ~~ASME~~AFSCME union was upstairs over the old ~~Rabilio’s~~ store, currently where MIFA is located, store long gone, building long gone, but the location is there at Vance and wherever in the world MIFA is.

Formatted: Font color: Auto

00:14:05

Henry Turley: But in any case, I would trudge up those stairs and tell T.O. that his rent was a bit overdue, and I suspect he ought to pay a little something if he wanted to stay up there rather than down on the street in Vance, and we’d make a deal, and we got to be – we were acquaintances if not friends.

Beginning of Clip 4 – 14:32.06

And later in the – as the garbage strike occurred and all the things surrounding the garbage, you know, strike began to develop, it was perhaps through my knowing T.O. that I realized something significant was going on.

00:14:58

Henry Turley: You know, I said earlier that I sort of missed the Civil Rights Movement as a young man, but by this time I was – gosh, I was 27, and I hope a little more aware of things, but as the strike occurred, I began to watch it closely, and although I was not in the Civil Rights Movement, I tend to sympathize with the garbage workers. It was not at all clear to me, but my sympathies lay there. You know, on a scale of left to right, I was a little bit to their side of the middle, and so I watched it with great curiosity, and I knew Jones,

so I sort of knew where they were going, and I had someone to watch.

00:16:00

Henry Turley: It turned out I was at the first, so far as I know, the first mass rally that occurred downtown. It followed a ~~c~~City ~~C~~ouncil meeting where the union and their various representatives had gone to one of those very early ~~c~~ouncil meetings in '68, and you remember the ~~c~~ouncil had just been reconstructed in the new form of government where there's a strong mayor and a ~~c~~ouncil. We – I went and watched the union members, the leaders of the garbage strike, harangue the ~~c~~ouncil and then go north to old Ellis Auditorium and harangue each other.

00:16:58

Henry Turley: This one and that one spoke, and each one told about how they would like to see the garbage strike develop, how they would like to see whatever was necessary done, violent or otherwise, to create justice and to overthrow the unjust system that they saw. And we participated in a lot of yelling and screaming, and it got pretty contested, and we decided, or it was decided at the end of that meeting to march down Main Street. So when I think back, I assume this was all predetermined, because as we exited the building to march south on Main Street from north of City Hall towards Beale Street, a great battalion of police came out of police headquarters.

00:18:03

Henry Turley: And while we lined up about, oh, five abreast, at the end of each rank of people a policeman would line up, and so we were escorted down towards Beale Street by the police in what proved to be a very quiet and orderly march for a time. And I guess I had walked down to about the old Goldsmith's store when I realized, "Gosh, so what? I mean, this is kind of fun to start. It's kind of interesting to see the police file out like that and get organized, and it's interesting to see the two sides, if you will, come together like that.

00:19:00

Henry Turley: "That just seems to be working out pretty well and uneventfully." However, when we got right in front of the old Goldsmith's store, I recall my friend T.O. Jones walking, departing from where he was in the march and walking to his left, oh, two or three paces to a squad car that had been following us, as well, or escorting us down

the street, and he grabbed it just above the tire and began to rock the car. Oh, my goodness. Well, all hell broke loose. I mean, when he presumed to take the police car, you know, and began to rock it, the police attacked the marchers.

00:20:10

Beginning of Clip 5 – 20:10.27

Henry Turley: And people were – I mean, it got wild, and people were flown through the plate glass window of Goldsmith's. I always – later I always had an idea that lady at the cosmetics counter, you know, which was right there at the entrance, was, "Oh, my gosh."
(Laughter)

Francesca Davis: (Laughter)

Henry Turley: You know, here comes a garbage man through the window. And so, back to T.O. He said, I read somewhere years later, that he actually was – went over and tried to pick up the side of the police car, because it ran over the foot of a female marcher, and he proposed to get it off the foot, her foot.

00:21:08

Henry Turley: Now that story I always thought was a stretch, and I always regretted not asking, not going to him and saying, "T.O.," and he – by that time, he, of course, retired from the union, but I always regretted not going to him and say, "T.O., I'm always giving you credit for realizing we were almost at the end of the march, and nothing had happened, and we were kind of bored, and it would have served your purpose, as well, to incite the police to rock, if you will, and so I have personally always given you credit for that. Is that the truth? Did you do it deliberately?" I never called on him and have always regretted that, but I saw it, and that's the way I recall it.

00:22:00

Crystal Windless: Okay. Thank you for that.

Henry Turley: I could have told that story in about half the time.

Crystal Windless: But you told it beautifully.

Francesca Davis: You did.

Crystal Windless: Thank you. You mentioned –

Henry Turley: Well, what do you think? Do you think he did it on purpose?

Crystal Windless: Well, seeing as you said he was a man who was late with his rent –

Henry Turley: *(Laughter)* Well, he – but I always that was smart. I mean, and see, we were down at all the way to Goldsmith²s and then, you know, it's just not far past Goldsmith²s that you get to be where presumably the march would end.

Francesca Davis: Was there media around the march, this first march?

Henry Turley: I'm sure there was, but it wasn't extensive, and this was – as I remember, it was local. I mean, this was before King, and oh, so many people who came to join in support of the sanitation workers.

00:23:03

Henry Turley: It was before that, and it would seem that it wasn't spontaneous. I mean, surely the police just – you know, we didn't come out and line up, and they come out and escort us on a totally spontaneous basis. I mean, there must have been communications between the two factions. "We're gonna do this, and we're gonna react this way," that sort of thing, but I was certainly ignorant of it, and it was all evolving there right in front of my eyes, and I found it just overwhelmingly interesting.

Francesca Davis: Uh-hmm. During this time, were you ever afraid for your safety or the safety of the people that you knew?

Henry Turley: Well, of course, I was afraid when the police came into the marchers. Now I wasn't marching. I was just – I mean, I wasn't participating in the march. I was just walking along the sidewalk as a curious onlooker.

00:24:03

Henry Turley: As I've said, I was in no way an active participant in the Civil Rights Movement. I was just an interested observer, and I think somehow I knew finally that something important was going on.

Crystal Windless: Did you notice other observers besides yourself watching?

Henry Turley: No. I think I was somewhat unique and probably benefited by having that relationship, such that it was, with Jones.

Beginning of Clip 6 – 24:33.01

Crystal Windless: You mentioned sympathy, having a certain amount of sympathy for the sanitation workers. Do you feel that during that time that was a common feeling for the City of Memphis? Do you think most of Memphis sympathized with the garbage workers and what was going on?

Henry Turley: I think feelings broke down substantially along racial lines, and there was a reality for black people and a reality for white people.

00:25:00

Henry Turley: I remember that it was not as clear what was the right thing to do and the right outcome. It was not nearly so clear as it seems now in retrospect. You know, at the time, white Southerners talked about outside agitators, which indeed we have a proper order of things that we've established here in the South, and this is the – although it may not be perfect, this is the way things should be, and it would continue that way if it were not for outside agitators. It was one of the sort of catch phrases we used. We sometimes stretched it a bit and called them communists or union organizers or radicals.

00:26:00

Henry Turley: So they were – and we said that they were behaving illegally. You know, there was the great argument that public service workers could not strike, and I think there was a pretty good legal case that said that. So there were lots of questions that weren't just entirely clear other than is the position of whites and blacks in Memphis appropriate, fair, productive, et cetera. It wasn't – if it got down to that level, maybe we would have said, "No, it could have been better," but it was always encumbered by, "But we have to have society functioning. We have to have a functioning economy. We have to work by rules. We have to work things out ourselves and let them evolve."

00:27:00

Henry Turley: And certainly most white people opposed, if not change, radical, wrenching, violent change.

Francesca Davis: Do you think in terms of the history of Memphis the sanitation strike and the assassination of Martin Luther King, did it – I don't want to say helped but kind of bring to light the polarization of black and white people in our city? Do you think situations like that can have –

Henry Turley: Yeah, sure. Sure. I mean, I think there were many things like that occurring all over the South, and for us that was the seminal event. That was the event where things before would always be one way, and things after would always be different, and that experience would change our lives, and it did mine. It made things more clear to me.

00:28:00

Henry Turley: You ask if I were afraid. I don't know that I was afraid, but I was certainly uncomfortable when, after King's death, I decided to participate in the march that commemorated his death a couple of days afterwards, and I talked a friend of mine into going with me to the march. And as we departed from the center of downtown and walked towards ~~Clayburn~~ Temple into an area that was more black than white, we were uncomfortable in that we were white guys being received with, at that point, some degree of hostility by black people along the street. When we got to the march – so we were uncomfortable on the way.

00:28:55

Henry Turley: When we got to the march, though, I remember being very well received by the garbage workers themselves, who were organizing the march and telling, you know, "You line up here. You line up there." They handled themselves exceedingly well and made us feel welcome and comfortable. Then on the way back, as we progressed back into the heart of downtown into the white Memphis, we were uncomfortable yet again, because people, our bosses, as it were, saw us and generally thought, "Hey, what are those young guys doing participating in this? We disagree." In fact, both of us, my friend and I, were threatened with losing our jobs over that. In my case, it was in no way serious.

00:30:00

Henry Turley: But, you know, there was talk about it, so there were definitely two views of things, and I'm gonna say both views have to be – had to be taken seriously at the time. Heroes, to me, were ~~c~~City ~~c~~Councilmen who had to – two, in particular, Fred Davis, black, Jerrod Blanchard, white, who found themselves, in order to seek a common ground, having to go against their core constituency. I still think of them as heroes, having – you know, it's easy just to go right with your core, and that's who you represent. That's with whom you agree on everything. Those guys had to step outside of their normal pattern of doing things.

00:31:04

Beginning of Clip 7 –31:05.19

Crystal Windless: In speaking about the march after the assassination of Dr. King, can you tell us what do you think prompted you to actually participate in the march versus only observing as you did for –

Henry Turley: Well, I think – well, that’s such a good question. I think it had just become so clear then. It was clear that something very important happened, and we would be better served dealing with it together being across racial lines than dealing with it separately, and so it probably wasn’t a common. It was less uncommon that people began to join together.

Francesca Davis: And did you see the people around you participating, like your friends or your family?

00:~~32~~34:00

Henry Turley: Well, I had talked my one friend into joining us at that march, and we’re walking down the street, and I see yet another friend, and he’s there on the curb just like I was for the first march, saying, “Come on,” and, you know, he got right in there. I’ll tell you an interesting thing about sort of my ambivalent attitude towards the march. When we lined up down there at Claven Temple, the garbage men were charged with giving you a proper sign to have, you know, a stick with a placard on the top, and mine said, “Union Justice Now.” Well, I was unsure about this union thing, because I had, you know, I had heard it was illegal and that sort of thing. Participation in a union by a municipal employee was illegal. At least I wasn’t clear on that, so I said, “I want a ‘I’m a man.’”

00:33:02

Henry Turley: “Do you have an ‘I’m a Man’ thing or a ‘Union Justice Now?’” He said, “No, you’ve got to get a ‘Union Justice Now,’ and that fellow next to you got a ‘I’m a Man.’” “I’m gonna be marching. I’m gonna have to have an ‘I’m a Man.’” You know, it sounds better anyway.

Francesca Davis: (Laughter)

Henry Turley: So we just said, “Look.” We had to settle that deal there. He said, “You can’t have that ‘I’m a Man.’” I said, “Well, I ain’t gonna take a ‘Union Justice Now’ either.” So I just walked down with no sign. (Laughter) That’s crazy, isn’t it?

Crystal Windless: Thinking about segregation, do you feel it ever had an effect on you personally or people around you?

00:34:00

Henry Turley: Sure. It affected everything you did, you know, your whole life, and I remember getting on that bus. I thought, "How far back can I sit?" you know, and to anticipate where the black people are gonna be. How many are there gonna be? How many whites, how many blacks, that sort of thing, you know, just a little uncomfortable in every single thing you did. You know, that old water fountain, you had to worry about that and when you could go to the zoo and all that sort of things that seem so patently absurd. Let me try to repeat a civil rights story that I wasn't primary in. May I do that?

Francesca Davis: Sure.

~~*Francesca Davis*~~*Crystal Windless:* Sure. Go ahead.

Henry Turley: I'll repeat it, because it came to me from my old friend A.W. Willis, II, A.W. Willis, Jr., who was so active in the Civil Rights Movement, and told me, by the way, that more civil rights legislation was made here than anywhere else in the South.

00:35:03

Beginning of Clip 8 – 35:03.04

Henry Turley: But he told me that about – he was a young black lawyer, and he said it was more or less accepted among black lawyers at the time that you'd do a certain amount of pro bono work for the movement and specifically for the NAACP through their Legal Defense Fund. It's directed by Thurgood Marshall, and he and Ben Jones, who was sort of reluctant to do – another young black attorney who was sort of reluctant to do pro bono but rather wanted to work for fees, were assigned the improbable case of seeing that black children could go to the public library.

00:36:04

Henry Turley: I mean, you know, you look back and think, "Couldn't go to the library?" I mean, how goofy is that? But indeed you couldn't, and so A.W. and Jones set out to – Ben Jones – set out to rectify this, and it was such a simple case that I'm sure that they went right through the courts, and the court said, "If it's a public library, it will be open to black children as well as white," and so there was a victory. The day after that ruling was made, A. said he called Ben and said, "Ben, we better go and see. You know, you can't trust

these whites. We better go down there and see that this thing's working as it should be." So they go to the library. Sure enough, black kids in the library, you know, reading books and just acting like proper young people in a library.

00:37:00

Henry Turley: And they're relieved that it has worked, and Ben's in a hurry to leave, because he has a divorce case that is pending, and he's gonna get, as A. – I think A. said he was gonna get \$100.00 cash when the divorce was granted, so he's anxious to go. They head out the library door, but on the way Ben decides he'll drop by the men's room, pushes on the men's room door only to find that they're locked. Well, you know, segregation at its core had to do with bathrooms and that sort of thing. So they looked at each other and said, "Can you believe this?" So we had integrated the library, but we didn't know what the hell to do with the bathroom. So A. said Ben took immediate action and summoned those black children who had been sitting in the library to join him, and they all marched into the offices of the library.

00:38:08

Henry Turley: And Ben said, "The bathrooms are locked," and they kind of looked guilty, and "Yes, they are." He said, "Well, surely even you crackers have by now heard of a sit-in. If you don't go open those toilets right now, you're gonna see the nation's first shit-in." And that, it seemed to me, since both A. and Ben are deceased, is a story that properly should be told even by the second party.

Crystal Windless: Well.

Henry Turley: They opened the doors, and the libraries have been well integrated since.

00:38:58

Crystal Windless: And thank you for that, especially the statement on segregation affecting you, because I believe there is a misconception about segregation only affecting African-Americans, but it was something that really touched many people on the other side.

Henry Turley: Yeah, well, you know, King talked about that a great deal, you know, that everyone is bound in this system, and it took me a little while to see, indeed, and the limits I impose on someone else are, indeed, limits on myself. ~~In the end, it's~~ And limits on what we together can achieve.

Crystal Windless: Do you feel that equally with segregation that desegregation or integration efforts had an effect on you personally, your family?

Henry Turley: Yeah, I mean, I got pretty interested in it. Still am. I mean, I'll tell you an interesting little story.

00:40:00

Henry Turley: I've been in the real estate business for a long time, and in the sixties, of course, all housing was segregated. I mean, you know, you looked in the want ads. There was apartments for rent, and as I recall, apartments for rent, colored, or colored apartments for rent, and somewhere along the way we learned that that wasn't entirely appropriate, and I told people who worked for me, the people who actually rented the apartments, the managers on the sites, that we won't be doing that anymore. We won't be keeping our apartments segregated. And I went on at some length about our integrating apartments. I mean, that sounds so damn dumb and so preposterous from, you know, this point of view.

00:41:00

Henry Turley: But I bet by now it's the seventies that I'm talking about, certainly late sixties or early seventies, and I go on at some length with the people who work with me about that and follow up. "Well, how are you doing with the rentals, and how are people reacting to integrated housing?" "Well, we're not doing so very well." Well, I find out that after these people depart my little lecture on our intent to integrate our housing, they caucus together and say, "Well, you know, he has to say that. Under the new law, he has to say that. He doesn't really mean it. He couldn't. So let's just accept it as something he said and we heard, but let's go on with our behavior the way it was." So it took – I mean, it just, you know, these things were so deep and so ingrained that they took a while to change.

00:42:05

Beginning of Clip 9 – 42:06.12

Crystal Windless: Pertaining to your occupation, you're known as a man with a promise to revitalize downtown, and downtown is such a crucial area to civil rights history. You mentioned Main Street, Beale Street. We have the museum, the marches. So a lot of the work that you've done has actually benefited a location that's crucial to civil rights history. How do you feel about that?

Henry Turley: I always thought that we were – always – when I – as I develop my philosophy of how cities should be built or my ideas around building cities, I thought we, society as a whole, would be best served if we weren't separated or segregated in a de facto way.

00:43:04

Henry Turley: We had been – I mean, by the time I began thinking seriously about this, the Civil Rights Movement had made very significant progress. The rules, the law said you would be integrated, but, indeed, segregation persisted. You know, a lot of that was economic, but it was also racial and based on racist attitudes. I always thought downtown should act as a common ground and a place where people act on things together and a place where people shared a history, where they had a commonality in time or history, and they should also have a shared – they shared the history there. They should also share that place physically.

00:44:10

Henry Turley: So it was a geographical and historical place of where we should be together, so I sort of deliberately worked on downtown in some measure because I thought it was a place where people could come together, work together, and work out common ideas on the basis of common experience or at least shared experience. And I also thought that it was a place that we must first rebuild and rebuild on that basis if we were to ultimately successfully rebuild the inner city and build neighborhoods on a more effectively functioning, diverse and collective, in that way.

00:45:11

Henry Turley: And I think that's a good goal for the city, and so I'm still working on it now.

Crystal Windless: In wrapping up, with your long time history in the City of Memphis, what do you feel has changed today from how it was during the Civil Rights Era?

Henry Turley: I was – I have an interesting little experience there. One time I was on the dais at a dinner at the Peabody. I can't remember exactly what the occasion, but I was sharing the dais with, among others, A. W. Willis and Ben Hooks, and I think we were participating with others in a panel discussion.

00:46:08

Henry Turley: And after it was over, two young black men came up and said to Ben and A. W., or Benny, as he was called then, “You know, nothing’s really changed,” and I thought, “That’s not true, and how impudent of those kids to have said that to these guys,” you know, who had done so much, and I think things have changed. Kind of funny to find that emotional.

Crystal Windless: It is. So much has been done. So much work has been put in.

00:47:00

Crystal Windless: Even something as small as our project today, that’s evidence of change –

Henry Turley: That’s true.

Crystal Windless: – and our project like this, trying to teach others, so it’s very true. Much has changed. Well, we once again want to thank you for taking time out of your schedule to be here.

Henry Turley: Well, y’all do a great interview. Thanks so much.

Francesca Davis: Thank you.

Crystal Windless: Thanks so much.

Henry Turley: You make it very easy for an old man to reminisce.

Crystal Windless: And we couldn’t do anything without your story, so thank you.

Henry Turley: Thanks.

End of Clip 9 – 47:31.20

[End of Audio]