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Russell and Gina Sugarmon, Tennessee State Senator, 1969

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David Yellin- This is the second side…what did you say about the negro as a racist going through an odyssey?

Russell Sugarmon- Yeah.

David Yellin- Could you repeat that again?

Russell Sugarmon- Well I would say the nigger was a racist going through this sort of an odyssey with whatever his roots are, his identity and his being. Which is inevitable, I don't think you can go from being an American shaped by all of the predecessors or whatever (muffled) is affected to being a human being without going through a stage of identity, of acceptance of identity, and acceptance of the identity of others.

David Yellin- Is this identity limited or only of your self or is it the people around you, your parents your family, I mean is this clear?

Russell Sugarmon- Yeah are you saying have they gone on the same odyssey?

David Yellin- No when you find yourself do you find your self in relation to your parents?

Russell Sugarmon- Yeah, well for years after the incident about the bicycle, my reaction was that my father had failed me.

David Yellin- Because I think almost that comes first in a lot of ways or that comes strongest.

Russell Sugarmon- Yeah and I used to feel badly about it, I felt certain that when I was finally able to realize what had happened to the two of us. What I had done to him, I felt badly about it but then later on I mellowed on out even. That was a part of this whole thing too. And probably; I still wished it hadn't taken so long. I would think that we probably began to relate to each other as father and son after I finished law school. He was proud of that but we still had this distance, we didn't communicate we stopped after I was 12. And I had talked about it with a history teacher at Moorehouse who had been over here a year and he had all kinds of color slides he would take the rose one that shocked you (muffled) and things like that. Then this English professor at Rutgers (muffled). Thos are the three professors that really have a (Muffled) on my values and my growth. This guy at Moorehouse said your father is a product of a Mississippi high school. You at this point have passed him. You are already first in college and it seems to me of the two of you the one who should most logically make the first step is you. So I didn't buy it until I finished law school.

Carolyn Yellin- It is fascinating to me that what you are describing Russell it seems to me is something I have heard described by 2nd generation immigrant Americans.

Russell Sugarmon- Yeah probably so.

David Yellin- And yet here you are with roots in this country that go back so far and yet you are really just now immigrating into this country.

Russell Sugarmon- Well we have been subjected to a retarded process of assimilation.

Carolyn Yellin- But it is this generation this great leap is taking place that and it does lead to alienation.

David Yellin- I think so much of the unrest and (muffled)

Russell Sugarmon- I think probably this generation is a larger percent of this generation is making the leap than ever and maybe this is an accelerating process. But in my generation a lot of my friends never made that leap.

Joan Beifuss- So that must have been kind of lonely.

Russell Sugarmon- Well it wasn't, it was unique, I wouldn't say lonely because I didn't miss them. I mean in terms of you miss people with whom you share something.

David Yellin- Yeah I mean there is no reason you should be associated with him just by accident, neighborhood and….well look I feel incumbent at this point if we can switch gears.

Russell Sugarmon- And get back.

David Yellin- I know that our political; analyst here.

Russell Sugarmon- Well after the 59 election I guess….

Joan Beifuss- Was Lobe elected mayor I 59?

David Yellin- Yeah.

Russell Sugarmon- Yeah.

Joan Beifuss- Was there any Lobe stick in your mind at all in relation to 1959?

Russell Sugarmon- No.

David Yellin- now who did you run against you ran against Farris?

Russell Sugarmon- Farris and 6 others.

Carolyn Yellin- This is for the city?

Russell Sugarmon- John Ford Canale, yeah public works, William Farris, some labor man, I have forgotten his name.

David Yellin- Well we have that book.

Russell Sugarmon- The city engineer then, whatever his name was. They named some part of the road system around here for him didn't they?

Carolyn Yellin- William….

Russell Sugarmon- Fowler.

Carolyn Yellin- Fowler Expressway.

Russell Sugarmon- Fowler. I think that was his remorse for getting out of the race I can't prove that.

David Yellin- Hit the road buddy.

Carolyn Yellin- So every time you drive over William B. Fowler expressway you feel you had a small part in naming that road?

Russell Sugarmon- And giving him immortality as long as concrete lasts.

David Yellin- They ought to name it at least they ought to name a bypass over for you.

Carolyn Yellin- The Russell B. Sugarmon Bypass.

Russell Sugarmon- Anyway after that election we came out of it with oh, I would say between 700 and 1,000 people who had been exposed to a sense of having some influence on their destinies because everybody in town believed that the nigger vote was going to be a viable factor and it was I think, it created a reaction a tremendous reaction. And even in losing the fact that you had been able to challenge a structure like this, I think a lot of these people.

David Yellin- Now was there any kind of a follow up to that.

Russell Sugarmon- Well this is what I am saying we came out of that with that many people who had volunteered to do various things in the campaign and we had a meeting maybe I guess a month and a half later but I got together, a new constitution for the democratic club creating precinct units and this is the structure that the last decade, and what we had was a precinct club which was formed by people in the neighborhood electing somebody to be their chairmen. We had two or three meetings explaining what we were trying to do. We got the constitution adopted by the democratic club with the structure and then we took everybody's names and addresses and we put them down by precincts and we asked them to have meeting in their precincts and to have people from their community in their precincts to come in. And we made these meetings and we explained the structure and what it was about. It was about power. At that point Stokely added black to it but we were talking about it the same thing.

David Yellin- Did you really mention the phrase power?

Russell Sugarmon- Power, yeah the whole thing was power. And I think what is the labor man, Dan Powell.

David Yellin- Dan Powell.

Russell Sugarmon- He thinks, I don't know what he thinks now because of what has happened later but then he thought we were power mad because that was all we talked about and he told people that.

Joan Beifuss- Now who besides A.W. is Ben Hooks in on this thing?

Russell Sugarmon- No he was a republican you see, we were in the same law office but didn't b other us because we thought at times that the negro voters had republican leadership, democratic leadership.

David Yellin- Whose law office was this?

Russell Sugarmon- Well we were each in private practice separately but we were in the same building.

Joan Beifuss- who were the other leaders besides you and Willis?

Russell Sugarmon- Jesse Turner.

Joan Beifuss- Was Jesse the head of the..

Russell Sugarmon- Dr. Walker he was killed later…

Joan Beifuss- Oh he was the one that was killed at the insurance office?

David Yellin- You mean somebody shot him?

Russell Sugarmon- Shot him yeah.

Joan Beifuss- Who else can you remember and who else is still around?

Russell Sugarmon- Jimmy Walker, well Jimmy is dead, the I would say almost nobody is still around from that group. Turner is, the Smiths, Maxine and Vasco. I mean I am not around in that sense I am in a different role.

Joan Beifuss- Well you are still around.

Russell Sugarmon- Well I was reading you as meaning who was around…

David Yellin- Yeah who is active around.

Joan Beifuss- Active around is what I meant.

David Yellin- At that time did you because of the structure of the negro community call on the ministers?

Russell Sugarmon- Yeah for the campaign, we did not call on them after the campaign.

Joan Beifuss- Could you count on the ministers…

Russell Sugarmon- In 59 we could, it was black white. There was no conscientable alternative for the white leader. They couldn't back us, same thing for the black leaders if you open your mouth you support the race ticket. And that was a deliberate thing. We felt that we could create an environment in which people were either forced into it all the way or out of it all the way.

Joan Beifuss- And it worked?

Russell Sugarmon- Yeah it worked. Because we were looking at 3 or 4 objectives and one of them was maybe we would elect somebody but the important objective is maybe we would radicalize in that context I am not talking about in the 66 or 69 context..

David Yellin- That is a hell of a word now.

Russell Sugarmon- We evolved in a quest for power, enough negros to have an impact and I will come out of it with an organization that had some specific objectives.

Joan Beifuss- And you did?

David Yellin- So now, so what was your most difficult or what was your greatest problem influencing the run of the mill, I don't know what word I mean, negro people, grassroots people, but they were allowed to vote for a negro and a negro was allowed to win or was it?

Russell Sugarmon- No because this was discussed before we even announced any candidates what was the pitch. And we had two choices because of the mathematics of the thing and before we even decided which races it was already apparent that the public works race was one where there was a real chance of winning, 7 candidates white and we are going to run one candidate black.,

David Yellin- Of course very quickly I think…

Russell Sugarmon- And we had a meeting, you know what do you did when you are in this situation, when you announce. What kind of platform are you going to have, are you going to have a platform that maybe won't stampeded the white voters. And maybe you lose generating some real grassroots awareness and win. Whether you come up with a campaign where you talk about what these people want to hear in 1959.

David Yellin- Your big issue was just to win in a sense?

Russell Sugarmon- No this was the discussion whether we go to win or whether we go to come out of it win or lose with a candidate. And this is what we decided to do with the candidate.

David Yellin- First time I met you….

Russell Sugarmon- This is the way our platform was…

David Yellin- I heard you give what I thought was kind of a extemporaneous speech at the young democratic club.

Russell Sugarmon- I always…the only prepared speech I gave in my life was to the UT law students over in Knoxville maybe 4 years ago.

David Yellin- It didn't turn out too good did it?

Russell Sugarmon- It is a law review article. I think I should have did it oral.

David Yellin- No but I was quite impressed and your whole point I think was related to that how when they broke up the gerrymandering, they have to (muffled) how it would play right into the hands of the negro vote so it controls the power and each one had 37% or so and so.

Russell Sugarmon- Well this is what we did. We really looked at the figures and looked at the possibilities but anyway the whole philosophy of that campaign, it was not a campaign in which we reacted it was a campaign in which wee laid the ground rules of the thing. But figured out what would be the reaction of the papers to a certain type of a platform.

Joan Beifuss- So it was almost like playing war games wasn't it?

Russell Sugarmon- Yeah, yeah, yeah. Now we had a meeting down on Vance with Hooks and Willis and Turner, and Robert Ratcliff. He was the PR man for the campaign. He is a Lemoyne.

David Yellin- Just again to kept he record straight was the democratic club all negro?

Russell Sugarmon- Yeah.

David Yellin- But then the young democratic club is mixed isn't it?

Russell Sugarmon- The young democrats is a regular party organization.

Joan Beifuss- This wasn't a party organization.

Russell Sugarmon- Democratic club is the black power wing of the democratic club.

David Yellin- Alright. So I couldn't join…

Joan Beifuss- Well I ….

(Muffled)

Russell Sugarmon- We have some white members now, we have a couple ion Whitehaven and one white member in Lemoyne Gardens.

David Yellin- Who?

Russell Sugarmon- Margaret Valium.

David Yellin- Yes of course I wanted to get her name in there.

Carolyn Yellin- (muffled) Where you working, was the NAACP….

Russell Sugarmon- Well the leadership is fungible and we are all in NAACP and we are all in Shelby Democratic club.

Joan Beifuss- Yeah but were you actually working were the NAACP instituting suits here and this sort of thing you were involved in legally?

Russell Sugarmon- Oh yeah, yeah well Everest suit against the transit authority was an NAACP cosponsored case. Willis and Hooks and I were all lawyers on the case.

David Yellin- Can we, can you, would you, I am sure you can…

Russell Sugarmon- What's that?

Joan Beifuss- I don't know.

David Yellin- Could you tell, and I don't mean us, could you tell whomever posterity, history, something. About this power structure of the power structure of the negro community? Who was important who was the leader and why?

Russell Sugarmon- Well I think the power structure up until after 59 it probably took a couple of elections to become creditable. Prior to the democratic club, I think now there is a different environment and the club is, has fallen on lean years and probably will be so for a while. I would say the 60's the democratic club was a black power structure in this town. Prior to the 60's I would say the power structure of the negro community was middle class. It was, the people who had money..

David Yellin- Now you say middle class. And in the negro community the middle class had money.

Russell Sugarmon- I mean the black.

Joan Beifuss- The black bourgeois.

Russell Sugarmon- By virtue of having a decent home and a decent suit and this sort of thing.

Carolyn Yellin- Can we push you any further?

Russell Sugarmon- Not by virtue of any commitment of values.

Joan Beifuss- Are we talking about for instance the president of Lemoyne?

Russell Sugarmon- Dr. Price? Yeah he had to be by virtue his role as an educator.

Joan Beifuss- What about the ministers and…

Russell Sugarmon- Well I think they always have been and they probably will be for a long time.

Joan Beifuss- What about the…

Russell Sugarmon- Not consciously, but I mean not with a specific goal in mind just because they talk to 100 people everyday.

Joan Beifuss- (muffled) every Sunday.

David Yellin- One thing though excuse me another criteria is or where does this come in the relationship of the negro leaders with the white community. Was that a..?

Russell Sugarmon- Then?

Joan Beifuss- Yes.

David Yellin- Was that a consideration?

Russell Sugarmon- No.

David Yellin- So did a leader…

Russell Sugarmon- No let me backtrack, it was not a consideration for my generation….

Joan Beifuss- but before?

Russell Sugarmon- Before the leadership of the democratic club had a very close and I may not be being fair, probably paternalistic relationship with the white liberal community.

Joan Beifuss- In other words it existed by virtue of the white liberal ok on it?

David Yellin- But not only the white liberal because I am trying to say you say black power but what were they powerful about. You know.

Russell Sugarmon- Well black leadership, who were the opinion expressers in the black community whether it resulted in power or change.

David Yellin- Or resulted in any tangible…

Russell Sugarmon- Well I would say that the principles and the negro middle class and the preachers.

Joan Beifuss- Can, Mason Walker would he have been a power before 1959?

Russell Sugarmon- Oh yeah.

Joan Beifuss- How about bishop G.O. Patterson's father?

Russell Sugarmon- Yeah.

David Yellin- So that was all part of the hierarchy of….when they expressed power you people met and you talked in the back of the room?

Russell Sugarmon- I think with that generation with bishop Patterson and with Mason Walker, they probably had the potential for some movement even in Memphis because they had, if I can use a in some immaculate they had in spays what the average negro opinion expresser had. Like Mason had money and Dr. Bishop Patterson had people.

David Yellin- Yes with anything you had to do you needed money and you eventually had to come to them or..

Russell Sugarmon- Well now initially. Most of the initial group sort of slide off one way or another.

Joan Beifuss- Well people like Mason Walker, Bishop Patterson prior in the early 50's were they doing anything in the negro community here?

Russell Sugarmon- Yeah I think they were doing things.

Joan Beifuss- Like what.

Russell Sugarmon- But they weren't, well I think Mason is of a generation that felt that you are making a contribution just by proving that the negro could be a success in whatever he was doing in business or what not. I think this had significance in that period, because maybe it was true I don't know. No I think that Bishop Patterson could probably get some things done, which didn't really challenge any important values in the white power structure.

David Yellin- I mean some things like favors or getting somebody out of jail or settling of rent and this kind of think almost like the ward politician.

Russell Sugarmon- Well yeah but I think that it was probably a function of the time, his problem with (muffled) was building that church and the other is peripheral.

Joan Beifuss- What about some one like…

Russell Sugarmon- Like I think Mesa's main drive as building universal.

Joan Beifuss- About someone I guess Owens or was the…

Russell Sugarmon- I think Dr. Owens roles was that of a patriarch, he was old then.

David Yellin- He has a big congregation.

Russell Sugarmon- He has a big congregation, he has a real strong church and he is a very highly respected man and his years there is not so much you can expect from him with his blessing and that was what he gave us.

Joan Beifuss- Now so that prior to, I am trying to still get an overall picture prior to 1959, then you had functioning NAACP functioning strictly on a legal level is that correct?

Russell Sugarmon- Ah yeah legal and that was….

Joan Beifuss- Was the urban league functioning at all in that?

Russell Sugarmon- It was functioning about like it was functioning 20 years prior, it was there.

Joan Beifuss- So there was nothing really viable except the upcoming Shelby County Democratic Club.

Russell Sugarmon- Well it wasn't viable then the NAACP I think was probably the one effective activist group.

David Yellin- Well I don't know….since you are talking about politics, who helped Lobe if anybody helped Lobe, who helped Farris, who helped before Lobe and later Ingram. I mean talking about power and so on who was involved in this kind of liaison.

Russell Sugarmon- Well Lobe the first time he ran which was not for mayor but public works commission.

Joan Beifuss- Right.

Russell Sugarmon- Was helped by the negro organizations, which was why he had such a hard time because it was not a matter of Lobe being a conservative it was a matter of Lobe being a liar, a double crosser. He campaigned on Beale Street with a pitch that I am Jewish I know what it means to be in the minority.

Joan Beifuss- Is this 59?

Russell Sugarmon- no this was before when he was public works commission.

David Yellin- Yeah when he first ran. And so the negro leadership feel for it.

Russell Sugarmon- Then they backed him. The negro masses feel for it, they backed him. Then he got an office and became a candidate for mayor.

Joan Beifuss- Right and did they back him again.

Russell Sugarmon- No, no, that was the last time they backed him. The first time.

Joan Beifuss- Public works was the only time he was backed?

Russell Sugarmon- Yeah.

Carolyn Yellin- In what way did he double cross them?

Russell Sugarmon- He became a conservative, he became a segregationist after he…

Carolyn Yellin- His true colors came out?

Russell Sugarmon- Well I don't know whether it is his true colors now. We don't need to worry about that I know segregationists I can have some repoire with because I think they are honest about it.

Carolyn Yellin- Well what I am trying to get at is what made the masses…

Russell Sugarmon- Because they felt that Lobe had lied to them./

Carolyn Yellin- What acts made this visible to them? What I am saying is that it must have been something pretty amazing because for that many people to become universally aware and totally..

Russell Sugarmon- Well Lobe campaigns he has a lot of animal energy ad he runs a hard campaign. He projected himself as a liberal before a lot of negros when he was running of public works. And he became mayor..,..

Carolyn Yellin- He exposed himself.

Russell Sugarmon- He had, I can't give you any one specific, there were so many statements that he made that you know nit is like your favorite son comes home…..well. You know with some girl he is going to have to marry.

David Yellin- What have you two been up too?

Russell Sugarmon- You know a great disillusionment this is what happened with Lobe.

Joan Beifuss- Now negros were aware of this in 59?

Russell Sugarmon- They were aware of it I guess maybe in the first 8 months after Lobe became public.

Carolyn Yellin- And was it….

David Yellin- Sort of 56 or 55.

Russell Sugarmon- And the sort of resentment which he reinforced consistently to becoming mayor.

Joan Beifuss- Ok when he ran for mayor was there a universal opposition to him in the negro community?

Russell Sugarmon- Yeah what happened was we started out to back Orgill and something happened with Orgill's health and he dropped out of the race which left Par T. Fleming.

Joan Beifuss- Oh is that who it was.

Russell Sugarmon- Yeah Par. T. Fleming was Lobe versus Par. T. Fleming.

Joan Beifuss- That was a good choice.

Russell Sugarmon- Lobe got 87 or 88 thousand votes and Par. T. Fleming got all the black votes.

David Yellin- Even then, even then.

Russell Sugarmon- Yeah and it was not a matter, we thought he would win, but it was a matter of putting those votes somewhere other than Lobe so it was clear.

David Yellin- Now just of a second or however long permitted. Was this attitude or action against Lobe which what it was in 59. Was this something that the leadership organized or you almost didn't have to?

Russell Sugarmon- I think it was something the leadership probably developed not in the sense of creating. It was something the leadership just,…..

David Yellin- Just catalyzed.

Russell Sugarmon- Yeah it was there no real leadership problem. I think the first thing that the leadership organized was following the 59 election the 60 county elections, the county commission races of 1960.

David Yellin- Is that when Turner became?

Russell Sugarmon- No this was when Harsey Jones had the big headline about negro leadership makes basement deal for support it was Harsey Jones.

Joan Beifuss- What was that?

David Yellin- We weren't in the basement.

Russell Sugarmon- We were on the top floor we weren't in the basement….it was the grand jury room but they were two of the old county organization people, Crump people, and they had been conservatives, they were conservatives. The sheriff was

Mel Hinds and I think Jordan Ramsey and Jordan were running against him on the reformed ticket.

Joan Beifuss- Who is Jordan?

Russell Sugarmon- Bruce Jordan, he won he was later what do you call it impeached whatever it is. They put him out of office because he got some hams from the penal farm.

David Yellin- (Muffled)

Russell Sugarmon- All of the other commissioners had done except they were all their commissioners and not (muffled) commissioner. Anyway in 60 everything was segregated in 60 the libraries and everything. They had signs, white and colored on the restroom doors and public buildings and what not. Somehow well the anti-Crump force, Birch and Orgill and Niemer had been after every vestige in the Crump organization. I think Harsey Jones really felt that they needed some help and so they asked us if we needed support them in earnest of their willingness to work with us what would we expect of them if we backed them. And so we told them we would back them provided it took all the signs off of the buildings they control, provided they had some black deputies, provided there was, probably about ten things before the election and that is what they did. And we backed them, except we planned to come out with this thing by a letter through the ministers on the Sunday before the election. Which they were all going to read, I think maybe we had 7 or 8 hundred letters out tot be read the Sunday before that election to their congregations.

David Yellin- Did you check with the ministers on this?

Russell Sugarmon- Oh yeah we were still traveling under the momentum of the previous summer, the 59 election and no I think it would have been beautiful except Dr. Price started having some second thoughts about…well let me back track a little bit. After the 59 election we were called over to Lemoyne and Dr. Price, Edmund Orgill, Lucius Birch, Edwin Niemann, Dan Pile, I think, and Lucius Birch's daughter, Edith Caywood. I think she was in high school then but she was interested in everything so he brought her but I remember her because we had a talk, after the meeting she and her father and I because I think I upset the men, (muffled) Price, maybe Dr. Walker I don't think he had been killed. It was either one of the Walkers I am not sure which one it was. Jimmy Walker, a couple of other people and the purpose of the meeting was we needed to avoid a repetition of the 59 campaign when it was black white and the way to do it was the white community was organizing the citizen's association, Dr. Bucklin was there. And they felt that the black community organized a counterpart.

Joan Beifuss- This was the Anti-Crump?

Russell Sugarmon- Yes this was the reform group. And it is sometime in the future, of course we understood why now it couldn't be integrated but sometime in the future they would drop the white only label and we would join. And before anybody

else talked I said well if this is the way you all feel why don't you go do whatever you want to do and leave the white only label on your organization just put it for whites only and leave us alone. You know when you conscious bothers you enough where you are going to have an integrated organization you have a membership drive and if we think we want to join we will join. But don't ask us now to organize a segregated counterpart which you think is……and that broke the meeting up. Anyway this is the background of 60, so this is the thing that left a bitter taste.

Joan Beifuss- So you threw your support to the Crump?

Russell Sugarmon- So then Harsey Jones said what can we do. We said in earnest they did these things and we backed them, except that Dr. Price got some, I think he had some pangs of conscious whether this was the right thing to do and he told Edmund Orgill I think somebody, Niemann or Orgill. Anyway the papers came out prior to our release, jobs (muffled) deal, basically exposed.

Russell Sugarmon- So we had a meeting with Harsey Jones and I have a high regard for him even now because, not because I still think they are conservatives wherever they are, Jones is here, Harsey is in Florida.

Joan Beifuss- Who is Jones?

Russell Sugarmon- Rudolph Jones, he is the water expert here. He comes up with these programs developing flood control, dams, and he was pushing the Wolf river Lake, he has good ideas as a hydraulics engineer which is what he was, but they said well, they both said well we shook hands on an agreement and in politics if you want to have a long life the one thing you have to have is a reputation for keeping your word. We don't know how it is going to come out, we may get destroyed because of the revelation but we have made a commitment and we are going to keep it. Sot hey kept theirs and we kept ours. And we backed them and they both won. They had everything against them, they had bother papers….the only endorsement they had was the Shelby county democratic club.

David Yellin- Now when you say we you mean the leadership of the Shelby county democratic club and the people you mentioned, Willis….were Lee and Hooks involved in this arrangement?

Russell Sugarmon- Yeah.

Joan Beifuss- Did you have opposition from the papers all the way along?

Russell Sugarmon- Oh yeah, yeah.

David Yellin- So they won in 1960 Harsh and….

Russell Sugarmon- They wont in 60.

Joan Beifuss- Ok then what? So then we have them in and Logan as mayor.

David Yellin- Now first did they keep their word, did they do it?

Russell Sugarmon- Well they did it before the election. You see when we met the first time to explore whether they could get out support. They were honest about you know we both have been brought up as segregationists but we are both are politicians and we both believe we can do things and we both know we need to have power in these things and maybe that is more important to us than being segregationists and we need your support. Now what can we do to convince you.

Joan Beifuss- So they met your conditions before the election?

Russell Sugarmon- Yeah it was before the election.

Joan Beifuss- Well I will think that…

Russell Sugarmon- It was after the newspaper expose, I mean which is what I am saying I think they both had a lot of moral courage even though you may not agree with the overall political philosophies.

Joan Beifuss- Well I think that would have turned off people like Lucius Birch then.

Russell Sugarmon- Hm?

Joan Beifuss- I said I would think that would have turned off…

Russell Sugarmon- It did, we had tremendous traumatic confrontations after that. We found out about all of this etiology we (muffled).

David Yellin- What counts.

Russell Sugarmon- Well what happened, I think and I talked about you reminding me of phrases I used to use but we call this the time that the umbilical was cut between the black community and the liberal community.

Carolyn Yellin- Because suddenly you were after substance.

Russell Sugarmon- Well suddenly we weren't relying on having our handing the great white father's hand making our decisions. We may be wrong but it is going to be our mistake it is not going to be your mistake.

David Yellin- now see you were a forerunner of the militant blacks of today.

Carolyn Yellin- That is what he has been saying all the time.

Joan Beifuss- Forerunner of Sweet Willy. Now when did the sit-ins occur here trying to break the library and the fairgrounds.

Russell Sugarmon- Right after the…60.

Carolyn Yellin- In the midst of Lobe's term?

Russell Sugarmon- Yeah and we had more, he was repeating history in a little bit different direction. I think Lobe, and you have lived through this but I think Lobe has done more to organize the town than I think anybody could have done. I don't think he could have done a better job of bringing unions in.

David Yellin- With an organizer like him we don't need a disorganizer.

Russell Sugarmon- Yeah he did more for desegregation by being a bull headed ass all the way through nit. Even the legitimate honest segregationist with integrity could not really identify with this man.

Joan Beifuss- Let me jump away and ask you something…

Carolyn Yellin- Well wait I just want to go through and finish up this Lobe thing because I think it is so fascinating. Did he..

Russell Sugarmon- He is doing the same thing again with a little different group.

David Yellin- We are sup[posed to be neutral.

Carolyn Yellin- Did the negro and this segregationist black white congregation have anything to do with who we are putting as mayor? What were the reasons he quit as mayor?

Russell Sugarmon- Well I can only speculate, I don't really know, I think…

Joan Beifuss- It was not at t he end of his term.

David Yellin- Almost a year.

Russell Sugarmon- He had 8 pr 9 months.

Joan Beifuss- Yeah he had already announced for re-election I believe.

Russell Sugarmon- Yeah I think that he had a combination of things. He had family pressures, he had business pressures, he had a very difficult political plan.

Carolyn Yellin- In what way?

Joan Beifuss- Why?

Russell Sugarmon- Well there was still a monolithic black vote which he would write off.

Carolyn Yellin- Did he know this?

Russell Sugarmon- Yeah I am sure he knew it.

David Yellin- He said why should I do things for you when you didn't vote for me.

Joan Beifuss- That was this time.

Russell Sugarmon- And you know when you are talking about starting trying to get out of 2/3rds of the community when you know you don't have 1/3rd when you know you don't have all of that 2/3rds, it is a pretty….and I don't think he was assured of both papers a the time, he may not have even been assured of one.

Joan Beifuss- you mean you think one of the reasons he pulled out was because he didn't think he could get re-elected?

Russell Sugarmon- I think that he probably figured that the combination of circumstances where such that he figured he would have a hard time, he could get out and come back.

Carolyn Yellin- And yet he learned nothing.

Russell Sugarmon- No I think he is capable.

Joan Beifuss- That was objective Carolyn.

Carolyn Yellin- Well…

David Yellin- Interviewers in this conversation we are supposed to be objective.

Carolyn Yellin- Well I am saying…

Joan Beifuss- Let me ask you something…

David Yellin- Some people think…

Joan Beifuss- Some people think….

Russell Sugarmon- I don't because I think he did the same thing not with black people but with labor, black labor I will put it that way this time.

Joan Beifuss- We have had people tell us and this is jumping way ahead and I don't want to get into a big discussion over it….

Russell Sugarmon- He almost did it the first time we had a meeting when the sit-ins started and the town was pretty tight, tense. Near a flashpoint and all of the negro lawyers in town at that point probably ten, we set up one weekend all night long and we drew up a list of things that we felt that if done could diffuse the tension by the city.

Joan Beifuss- Like what?

Russell Sugarmon- I have got a copy somewhere I have forgotten what they all where. But there were things like desegregating the library, open the zoo.

David Yellin- Fairgrounds.

Russell Sugarmon- Yeah this sort of thing. And we asked for a meeting with the commissioners and they agreed, I don't know who brought that about. Anyways, Buddy Dwire, Henry Lobe, (muffled), Farris was there and one other.

Carolyn Yellin- Let me just stop here to say Buddy Dwire being Robert T. Dwire who now is the…

David Yellin- No.

Russell Sugarmon- No, that is his brother.

Carolyn Yellin- The Dwire who was picketing the (muffled) trial…

Russell Sugarmon- Is Buddy Dwire's Brother…

Carolyn Yellin- Is Buddy Dwire's brother.

Russell Sugarmon- Buzzy Dwire.

Carolyn Yellin- Buzzy Dwire.

David Yellin- He was on the Crump show.

Russell Sugarmon- And we had this meeting and we prefaced it by explaining what we thought we were trying to do, diffuse the thing, make some progress, make the context as I recall was that you have a choice of a certain, you have got certain options with this city at this point and we think that it is important that the black leadership in this community get some credentials that the masses believe in, And the black leadership at this point has believe inviting and going to court and this type of thing in holding negotiation and unless these things produce results you are going to get a different type of black leadership. And we think it is important that these techniques produce something now and we read this list of things and we felt they needed to do. We got through and Lobe said no. And (muffled) said I don't think we need to be that hasty. We were going out the door and he stopped us and he said I think we can talk about this.

David Yellin- Who he?

Russell Sugarmon- Armor.

David Yellin- Armor, oh his I don't think we should be hasty was to Lobe saying no, not to you.

Russell Sugarmon- Yeah he was talking to Lobe. So wee came back and we sat down and over I guess maybe a period of 6 months following we were in court on all of these things and I think most of them were done prior to the court orders being entered.

Carolyn Yellin- But are the sit-ins continuing during this 6 month period?

Russell Sugarmon- Oh yeah sit-ins, boycotts, the boycotts continued for 18 months, because…downtown, the boycotts, the sit-ins were directed not only against, they stopped against the busses and they stopped against the library you know these things were accomplished but they were also directed against businesses.

Carolyn Yellin- How were these organized these boycotts, who cooperated, did the ministers?

Russell Sugarmon- Everybody, we had a lot of things going for us then, the momentum, we had the repoire with the ministers, we had the precinct organizations.

David Yellin- Russell you are saying it seems to me that the power structure in Memphis was a political one. Or are you?

Russell Sugarmon- I think so.

David Yellin- Because we have heard since we came that the power structure the establishment was not necessarily political.

Russell Sugarmon- Well I think the financial power, the political power structure was sort of the surrogate of the financial power. And the financial power has only recently felt threatened where it needed to get directly involved.

Joan Beifuss- Russell what about what was called the Memphis human relations commission or some thing, Birch and Niemann and Orgill the big thing that was held up.

Russell Sugarmon- I think orgill was well meaning, relatively ineffectual on this issue I don't know about other issues. I am talking about the black white, paternalistic really. I think between having Orgill's support, I mean Niemann's support and Auburn's support the two editor's I would rather have Auburn's support on a particular issue.

Joan Beifuss- Why?

Russell Sugarmon- Even though I think Niemann was probably more of a reformer.

Joan Beifuss- Why?

Russell Sugarmon- I think Orgill was a more powerful character. Auburn.

David Yellin- Was he more powerful because of the paper or because of his own personal?

Russell Sugarmon- I thin he was a harder man, yeah personality I think he was a gut fighter.

Carolyn Yellin- Did his paper reach more white people/…

Russell Sugarmon- His paper was more in contact with the community.

David Yellin- Now are you saying then that you didn't have Auburn's report?

Russell Sugarmon- You had the ties, off and on depending on the particular issue. We were always arguing with him and always working with him.

David Yellin- You found him approachable in any case?

Russell Sugarmon- Yeah.

Joan Beifuss- Was he any kind of a power on the administration?

Russell Sugarmon- Well both papers I think the politicians they were worried about, We never did have their support, never counted on it and never wanted it.

Joan Beifuss- Ok is this the period which Lobe closed the swimming pools?

Russell Sugarmon- Yeah right at the end after the court order came then. He closed them.

David Yellin- Wasn't that closed in 65, 64, 65?

Carolyn Yellin- No they were closed…

David Yellin- Were they closed earlier too?

Russell Sugarmon- Lobe closed them and Ingram did not re-open them. Armor re-opened them, Ingram was mayor but Armor re-opened them.

Joan Beifuss- Ok so if you characterize the first couple of years of the 60's you have got changes coming because you have sit-ins…

Russell Sugarmon- You have a black cannon ball rolling on a ship that is pitching.

Joan Beifuss- Let me ask you one other thing..

David Yellin- (muffled) figure of speech.

Russell Sugarmon- From the white politicians point of view I am sure this is what they saw.

Joan Beifuss- Were there any other southern cities that were had set up a comparable black political organization.

Russell Sugarmon- I don't think so, I don't think any now and I am not sure we have it now.

Joan Beifuss- Ok why, it doesn't really or has never appeared that there was terribly much mass action civil rights wise in Memphis…

Russell Sugarmon- Oh yeah the 18 month boycott in 1960.

Joan Beifuss- Did that involve marches?

Russell Sugarmon- It involved marches and it involved no black faces on Main St. Not one store but from Beale to Auction.

Joan Beifuss- Is this under the NAACP?

Russell Sugarmon- Yeah, and the democratic club, the precinct structure the mass contact structure was a political organization.

David Yellin- Why did it take that long to…

Russell Sugarmon- Well you have pretty tough, I don't think Lobe is a soft man he is a mayor.

David Yellin- But how about the business men. 18 months is a long time.

Russell Sugarmon- They spent a lot of time arguing with him. And they were afraid of the town, they were afraid of the white reaction.

Joan Beifuss- White reaction yes.

Russell Sugarmon- And they were afraid that Lobe would be a Bull Connor. If they did it he would go to the grassroots, the redneck reaction.

Joan Beifuss- Oh where they.

Russell Sugarmon- Yeah I mean I can understand their position I mean because we went one way and Birmingham went another and I thin Memphis could have done the same thing Birmingham did.

David Yellin- Yeah but wasn't the fact that Birmingham went one way…

Russell Sugarmon- Well that was after this stuff.

David Yellin- yeah that is true.

Joan Beifuss- How much affect do you think…

Russell Sugarmon- So nobody knew that point.

Joan Beifuss- How much affect did white leadership in this community did like the things that happened in Little Rock have on it where they determined that Memphis was not going to be a little rock?

Russell Sugarmon- Yeah I think that the probably gave them a little more resolve, Little Rock, they didn't want troops and bayonets.

David Yellin- Why didn't they capitulate to the boycott?

Russell Sugarmon- I think they thought they would get it from another point the white reaction if Lobe, if they got one demagogue two united.

Joan Beifuss- Was Memphis kind of isolated from the overall civil rights movement in the south?

Russell Sugarmon- I don't understand that question, isolated from the overall civil rights movement, in what sense isolated?

Joan Beifuss- Oh I don't know it has always seemed in reading about it and certainly from an outside point of view the thing sort of caught fire throughout the south and sort of attention moved from one city to another.

Russell Sugarmon- Well no, I don't think it was isolated, I think it was quieter here because the white power structure gained respect for the negro vote here.

David Yellin- And they gave them…

Russell Sugarmon- So you did not have a demagogue, no you didn't have the (muffled) in Birmingham the negro did not have the vote and there was always that sword hanging over. This sort of dampened the emotional reaction, which didn't trigger the thing, which would have produced the confrontations.

Carolyn Yellin- Russell I would love to ask you some what if questions since you are speculating. What if Claude Armor had still been police commissioner when the mace was used in the march, the first march on February 23rd which many people have referred to as a turning point in the sanitation worker's crisis. Do you think that particular situation might have been handled differently?

Russell Sugarmon- No I think it might have been handled worse.

David Yellin- Why?

Russell Sugarmon- Because Calude Armor is a professional cop and I respect his value as a cop but I don't thin he would have had the, what the insight.

David Yellin- You mean as, then are you then implying that you are not implying that Holloman is not a professional cop he is a different kind….

Russell Sugarmon- No he has a little more exposure than Armor. I think that Calude Armor his honest reaction and I don't mean as a…I think like Harsey Jones they were segregationists and they were politicians. If they were forced to make a choice they would be politicians before they would be segregationists and I think Armor was a segregationists and he was a cop and if he had to make a choice I think he would be a cop before a segregationist. But in the context of the social controls needed his instincts would have been a cop which is more force.

Carolyn Yellin- Well I have a couple more, what if Edmund and Edward Niemann still had been alive, do you think the paper would have been handled any differently, do you think he would have taken substantially he same…

Russell Sugarmon- I don't know, I think his role was chaotic through the whole thing. I don't really understand the different positions he took. I think he was a guy who opposed the things he should have opposed for reasons he shouldn't have had. He never, I think he thought there was no place for power, or he didn't recognize it. Everything happened by a great osmotic process of the people somehow getting their will implemented.

Carolyn Yellin- Well my 3rd…

Russell Sugarmon- And we felt that you had to have power to get things up and going. And this was something….(muffled)

David Yellin- Goodwill or…

Russell Sugarmon- Goodwill or whatever I don't know what it was, it was a mystic sort of thing.

Joan Beifuss- Would you call that…

(muffled)

Russell Sugarmon- I just don't believe that old liberals were that kind of out of it. That out of it, is unrealistic.

Carolyn Yellin- My 3rd quick what if, what if Willie Ingram had been elected in January and got into office January 1st rather than Henry Lobe?

Russell Sugarmon- Well I don't think you would have had the garbage strike prolonged as it was. I don't think you would have had the circumstances that would have brought Martin King here to get him killed.

Joan Beifuss- Why?

Russell Sugarmon- I think he would have settled it, I think he would have unionized the town and I think we would have had another Crump, another machine.

David Yellin- Who is this?

Russell Sugarmon- Ingram.

Carolyn Yellin- In other words you think Ingram understood the uses of power more than Lobe?

Russell Sugarmon- Oh yeah I am sure of that. I think he was following the same format Crump was following.

Joan Beifuss- Did you support him (muffled).

Russell Sugarmon- Not for mayor, we supported Ingram for city court judge. We did not support him when he ran for mayor, the democratic club I am talking about.

David Yellin- I thin this is keeping within your answer. Somebody told me the other day that and I don't know the source of this if it is reliable but you might clarify it. That Henry Lobe in a sense and this is in relation to your remark about Ingram, learned a lot from Crump.

Russell Sugarmon- I think Ingram learned a lot from Crump.

Joan Beifuss- Not Lobe.

Russell Sugarmon- I think Ingram, I mean Lobe learned the same thing that every run of the mill southern politician learned about being a demagogue and the white vote. (muffled) I don't think he had any insight into the dynamics of the negro community.

David Yellin- Very good.

Joan Beifuss- Do you think Ingram did?

Russell Sugarmon- Oh yeah, he beat us we opposed him as mayor, he got over 60% of the black vote.

Joan Beifuss- Who ran against him…

Russell Sugarmon- Ingram….or Farris.

David Yellin- Farris.

Russell Sugarmon- Farris was not the best candidate but he was our only choice.

Joan Beifuss- Question I forgot to ask before, we had a couple of people tell us on tape that they supported Lobe in the last election because they knew he was something against which the black community could catalyze almost. Every time somebody says it I think it is a terribly sophisticated political reasoning and I….

Russell Sugarmon- No we supported A.W. Willis because we felt between the choice of a black mayor Ingram…

Joan Beifuss- Yeah well after Willis was out of it.

Russell Sugarmon- Lobe would be better than having an enemy that you could articulate and then he was the man that sparked the black masses.

Joan Beifuss- The reason he is that sophisticated then that he would support an opposition.

Russell Sugarmon- Oh yeah we are not that stupid or that provincial. To get emotional on the thing, how you can spell out the target…

Joan Beifuss- No you are not but what about your grassroots?

Russell Sugarmon- We had an apparatus, we have had 7,000 members in the democratic club and 125 precinct organizations with board leaders who have been out on 8 or 10 campaigns and who know how to strip ballots from people the only thing they are going to the booth with is a our ballot.

David Yellin- How come then Willis didn't do as well as he might have?

Russell Sugarmon- Oh there were a lot of factors I think one thing is his personality. He doesn't communicate.

David Yellin- Then why did you nominate him, why weren't you nominated?

Russell Sugarmon- Well I wasn't even thinking about running for mayor I was having my own little personal….

Carolyn Yellin- Many people ask that question, they ask me that, but I remember I went to Willis' ward with his wife and in his own precinct you know it was pitiful.

Russell Sugarmon- He does not have the repoire. I think that in terms of organizational work he is a genius, political. Not….

David Yellin- So in a lot of ways it was a tactical error…

Russell Sugarmon- Yeah well I think we probably could have run two or three people that could have had more of an image.

Carolyn Yellin- He got a tremendous amount of national publicity.

Russell Sugarmon- I think whoever we ran was going to get that.

David Yellin- Yeah that had nothing to do with him that had everything to do with the situation.

Carolyn Yellin- I was going to say it seems to me this was a carry over form the very sophisticated sort of figuring what would be the reactions that you…

Russell Sugarmon- We felt that if he won the whole country would let him be a failure. Whoever won we could have run a black idiot and the democratic administration in Washington and the governor, they have more at stake to lose than we have to lose.

David Yellin- But why did A.W. Willis get nominated by your people then you knew all this before you say you weren't…

Russell Sugarmon- Well I think it was a relative thing of who was least unwilling. A.W. probably waned to be mayor more than the rest of us.

Carolyn Yellin- (muffled)

Russell Sugarmon- Well we had me, Turner, Lawson, Vasco Smith. We had several choices.

Joan Beifuss- Let me cut back again because I want to get this ting straight.

David Yellin- Would Hooks have been would he have been thought of?

Russell Sugarmon- Well the 3 of us argued about it for maybe 6 hours, not about who was going to run but whether it would be better to have a black candidate like Bill Morris or one of the other choices.

Joan Beifuss- Who is the 3 of us?

Russell Sugarmon- A.W. Willis, Hooks and myself.

David Yellin- and then you determined that it would be better to have a black candidate? Why Willis though?

Russell Sugarmon- Hooks and I weren't willing and it was a matter of running around a circle of 5 of 6 people to see who…

David Yellin- The 3 of you in a sense made that decision or at least implemented the decision?

Russell Sugarmon- Hooks and I acquiesced after we discussed the thing and decided maybe a black candidate we acquiesced and (muffled).

Joan Beifuss- Let me go back again I am still trying to get a historical thing here…

Russell Sugarmon- And I think it was at that point it was a little more acquiesced but A.W. was emotionally involved in the concept at that point.

Joan Beifuss- The concept of mayor?

Russell Sugarmon- Black mayor, being the black mayor.

Joan Beifuss- Is it under Ingram's administration thought that the democratic club then reached its sort of zenith?

Russell Sugarmon- No it wasn't, our power was in spite of Ingram if I recall.

Joan Beifuss- but that is when you elected Willis, wasn't that when Willis was elected firs tot the state legislation.

Russell Sugarmon- Was Ingram mayor then, I don't recall?

Joan Beifuss- What year was Willis elected?

Russell Sugarmon- I think Ingram has been more of a cancer.

Joan Beifuss- Then why did he have such widespread support in the black community.

Russell Sugarmon- Because he was a superb demagogue and they are (muffled).

David Yellin- Cancer gets great support cigarette smoker.

Russell Sugarmon- Let me take another drag.

Carolyn Yellin- Well thank you David.

Russell Sugarmon- Ingram was elected to the city court bench, that is when he started, two terms 8 years and you come across a lot of the grassroots.

Carolyn Yellin- Always fought the police, always have arguments with the police…

Russell Sugarmon- Yeah and we had a choice of backing Farris or Ingram, so we went to eh newspaper and we went to the morgue and we pulled out everything we could about William Ingram and we knew Farris so we didn't have to study him but Ingram was only a public figure as a city judge and we wound up with a single spaced type written sheet about 9 feet long on Ingram. And almost without exception it was Ingram against. He threatened to fire the carpenters that were working on the police station because they were hammering while he was having court. He threatened to put bails bondsmen in jail because they were setting outside his court room talking to clients. He threatened to fire his own bailiff. He released people who were obviously guilty. (Tape End)