

Interview of Gene Bourg by Jack Davis and Justin Nystrom
Recorded May 13, 2014
New Orleans, LA

Making Modern New Orleans
Digital Humanities Studio
Loyola University New Orleans, Department of History

Abstract: This interview focuses on Gene Bourg's relationship with the politics and food scene of New Orleans through his positions as a columnist, editor, and food critic at both major papers in the city at the time, the *States-Item* and *Times-Picayune*. This includes a discussion of the 1969-70 election in New Orleans and Moon Landrieu's election as Mayor of New Orleans. He details different details of the Landrieu administration and discusses Landrieu's popularity. Being an avid restaurant-goer in the 1970s, he then discusses the restaurant scene in New Orleans during this period, prior to his becoming the food critic for the *Times-Picayune* in 1985. This includes a discussion of Ella Brennan, Paul Prudhomme, Emeril Lagasse, Mr. B's, Restaurant Jonathan, and Al Copeland's Popeye's Fried Chicken. He discusses the impact that chefs like Lagasse and Prudhomme had on the cuisine of the city, moving it forward and evolving the city's cuisine. He also discusses the downfall of the restaurant scene in the Westbank of New Orleans following the oil industry collapse. He also discusses the creation of two now infamous New Orleans dishes, blackened redfish by Paul Prudhomme and Monalbano's creation of the muffuletta.

Bio: Gene Bourg was born in the Westbank of New Orleans in 1938 and attended De La Salle High School, and received his bachelor's degree from Tulane University. He left the Westbank at the age of thirteen to attend De La Salle High School and began spending more time in New Orleans, getting an apartment in Uptown at nineteen. His first job was at the *Times-Picayune*, where he became an assistant financial editor. Bourg was then drafted into the Army, where he was stationed near Bordeaux and then in Paris, a formative time in his understanding of the larger culinary world. Returning from his time in the Army, he returned to the *Times-Picayune* and became a reporter. He had a column called the "City Hall Report" before he was tasked to cover the 1969-70 New Orleans Mayoral Election, which saw Moon Landrieu become the Mayor of New Orleans. He then continued to cover City Hall and report on what was happening in City Hall with the Landrieu administration. In the 1970s, Bourg was an avid restaurant-goer which then transitioned into his new position in 1985 as the food critic at the *Times-Picayune*. Throughout his career at the *Times-Picayune*, he became well acquainted with many chefs in the city as well as many restaurant owners, including Ella Brennan.

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[00:00:17.07] Jack Davis: 27, we're later than usual, so, sorry. We're later than I promised, but we'll just go ahead. The- So, we're ready to start, Justin.

[00:00:25.06] Justin Nystrom: We're rolling.

[00:00:25.26] Jack Davis: We're in the Marrero Apartment of Gene Bourg, who was one of the most visible and constructive journalists in New Orleans in recent decades, first as a reporter and columnist, largely in politics, at the States-Item and other papers, later as an editor at the States-Item and the Times-Picayune. I can testify to that since he edited some of my stuff, made it better. And then became probably the most influential of the New Orleans food critics in the last several decades as the food columnist for The Times-Picayune. I'm Jack Davis. This is another of our interviews for The Oral History Project at Loyola: "Making Modern New Orleans." We're talking about the 1970s, and Gene- I'm here with Justin Nystrom, Assistant Professor of History at Loyola, and it's May 13th, 2014, and so, we're talking about the 1970s, and Gene, you, after some years of doing other journalistic jobs in the summer of 1969, when things were just about to start happening politically, and in other ways, you were- you joined the staff of the States-Item. What was going on then?

[00:02:01.14] Gene Bourg: Well, it was the year of the 1969-70 mayoral race, and I was assigned, fairly early, I was assigned to cover, exclusively, the mayor's race. I didn't have any other assignments from the time of the first Democratic Primary on through the General Election, which posed the Democratic versus the Republican candidate. That was in March or April of 1970, and it was one of the most exciting and satisfying experiences of my journalism career because I got to know politics inside out. I did a series of articles on the emergence of the Black political organizations, like SOUL and COUP, Southern Organization for Unified Leadership, and The Community Organization for Urban Politics, and there were several others.

[00:03:06.28] Jack Davis: And did you do that series before the election?

[00:03:09.19] Gene Bourg: Yes. One thing, while I have it in mind, that impressed me was, with the series on Black politics, we ran a map- a precinct map of Orleans Parish, and it showed by race- by racial population- or by voter registration, I'm sorry, the precinct figures. And the map showed a checkerboard, which showed that New Orleans, unlike other American cities, had really had no "ghetto." Everybody lived- every White person lived not too far - except for the Lake Front, I mean the Lake Front was all White - but in the central part of the city, Black and White neighborhoods were not really separated that much. You could walk three blocks from an upper-middleclass White

house, and come into a- what- you know- a really lower-middleclass Black neighborhood.

[00:04:26.21] Jack Davis: And the impact-

[00:04:27.14] Gene Bourg: So, I think this is why there was never the kind of violence or unrest that appeared in places like Watts and- I mean, Harlem was in Manhattan, I mean- Harlem was- it wasn't a ghetto- I mean, it's a pretty, you know, I would think, a pretty, fairly prosperous neighborhood. But, anyway, that- I think that played a part in a Mayoral election, and the fact that-

[00:05:02.13] Jack Davis: How did it play a part in the Mayor election? As this was the first-

[00:05:05.00] Gene Bourg: Well, this was the first time SOUL and COUP and a few other- BOLD was another one: Black Organization for something le-

[00:05:16.19] Jack Davis: Leadership Development.

[00:05:18.23] Gene Bourg: Leadership Development. Precisely.

[00:05:20.21] Jack Davis: Right. Jim Singleton.

[00:05:22.01] Gene Bourg: Those were the first organizations that really had an effect. They- most, if not all, were based in the Seventh Ward, which was the Creole- the Black Creole Ward, in the city, as you know, and, anyway, that was part of the background of the 1969 election.

[00:05:47.29] Jack Davis: And why did you decide, I mean, this was a- this was a portion of the electorate- the Black electorate in New Orleans had not been particularly decisive in previous elections for Mayor, or anything else-

[00:06:02.23] Gene Bourg: Well-

[00:06:02.17] Jack Davis: Why did you all at the States-Item decide to write about that then?

[00:06:06.15] Gene Bourg: Well, because of the emergence of the powerful Black political organizations, but-

[00:06:10.06] Jack Davis: You could see it coming?

[00:06:12.22] Gene Bourg: Yeah.

[00:06:13.14] Jack Davis: Or was it already- had they already ex- influenced anything, yet?

[00:06:17.19] Gene Bourg: Yeah, they had influ- well, everybody told me when I started covering the mayor's race, everybody told me that in past elections, mayoral elections and I would assume other municipal elections, the Black population was bought out by the White candidates, and the 1969 election may be the first one where it didn't work. Jimmy- from what I was told- Jimmy Fitzmorris paid off all the neighborhood ward leaders and neighborhood leaders, or whatever...

[00:07:02.23] Jack Davis: Jimmy Fitzmorris, who was a leading candidate in this election.

[00:07:04.25] Gene Bourg: I- well- Sorry?

[00:07:06.24] Jack Davis: Jimmy Fitzmorris, who was a leading candidate in this-

[00:07:09.22] Gene Bourg: Oh, he was number two, yeah. And, in the 1969 primaries, the Blacks took all the money from Jimmy Fitzmorris and voted for Moon Landrieu. This is what I was told and which I thought was fairly obvious because in some of the precincts that went for Landrieu.

[00:07:35.16] Jack Davis: And did you write the series- I have to go back and look this up, but was- did the series come out before the first primary, or did they come-

[00:07:43.29] Gene Bourg: I don't remember, Jack. It was- it's a fairly simple thing. The first article in the series was on the front page, I remember that. I'm sure you'll find them in the clippings librar- do you have access to the clippings library?

[00:08:02.25] Jack Davis: Yeah.

[00:08:04.06] Gene Bourg: You'll find them in the clippings library. But, I forget exactly when it was.

[00:08:17.19] Jack Davis: But you entered, I mean, in the summer of 1969-

[00:08:20.23] Gene Bourg: Yep.

[00:08:21.03] Jack Davis: -the States-Item was given its editorial independence.

[00:08:25.03] Gene Bourg: Yes.

[00:08:25.21] Jack Davis: From the Times-Picayune.

[00:08:27.03] Gene Bourg: Yes.

[00:08:27.13] Jack Davis: And it was free to go out and cover things as the editors, Walter Cowan and Charlie Ferguson saw fit.

[00:08:33.05] Gene Bourg: Right.

[00:08:34.08] Jack Davis: They drafted you for this critical position of covering politics and the mayor's race.

[00:08:41.28] Gene Bourg: Yeah.

[00:08:42.29] Jack Davis: Why did they- what is it about your background that made them think that you would be good for that?

[00:08:50.15] Gene Bourg: I honestly don't know. I had been working at Tulane for a couple of years in the Development Office, and I had left the Times-Picayune city desk for complicated reasons, and then I got a phone call from, somebody, who told me, "You should try to call Walter Cowan, the editor of the States-Item, because George Healy is no longer in control of the States-Item." And, I think Charlie Ferguson was editor of the editorial p- Yes, he was editor of the editorial page at that time. So, I had done pretty well as a general assignment reporter at the Picayune, and so they knew my experience. I have to assume that's why they assigned me to the mayor's race.

[00:09:47.29] Jack Davis: Well, so this was the pre- it was the most visible beat on-

[00:09:52.06] Gene Bourg: Yeah.

[00:09:52.16] Jack Davis: -a newspaper that was newly in the spotlight for being on its own. When did you start thinking that Moon Landrieu was a contender in this election?

[00:10:05.04] Gene Bourg: Well I didn't know Moon Landrieu from Adam, except that he was a councilmen at large, and my first encounter with Moon Landrieu was for another

series that I wrote- I don't- several months or whatever, before the first primary, a series called "The Candidates Themselves," and I interviewed all- I think there were six or eight- including several fascinating crackpots- and, when I researched Moon, I discovered that he had been the lone voice during- when he was in the legislature- he had been the lone voice to vote against some of the segregation laws that were being passed, and I'll never forget the lead that I used on my story on Landrieu as a candidate. It said, in effect, that after Moon Landrieu voted for these- voted against these laws, he was staring into his political grave because I think- you know- everybody thinking that he'd never get re-elected, but he did get re-elected.

[00:11:31.15] Jack Davis: And so, ten years after that- or nine years- he's running for Mayor. Did you- who did you- did you think he had the capability of winning that? Or-

[00:11:44.24] Gene Bourg: Well, the more I got into covering the race- yeah. I think it was obvious from the beginning that he and Jimmy Fitzmorris were the two most prominent candidates that they were Landrieu, Fitzmorris, William Guste, whose father was attorney for the New Orleans Public Housing Authority, and who, I think, took over for his father, it was Lloyd Rittiner, who was president of the school board, and- do you have all these people?

[00:12:18.09] Jack Davis: Yeah, we have all them, thank you.

[00:12:18.25] Gene Bourg: Ok. All right.

[00:12:19.04] Jack Davis: Who were the 'crackpots,' you were thinking of?

[00:12:21.09] Gene Bourg: I'm sorry?

[00:12:21.18] Jack Davis: Who were the 'crackpots' you were thinking of?

[00:12:23.10] Gene Bourg: One was Cecilia Pizzo, who was really- she had a mental problem- her father had been a- she was a very lovely lady. Her father had been a shoemaker, and it was her theory that your brainpower was controlled by the titeness of your shoes. Then there was Dan Dial, who rode his bike all around the French Quarter, and said that he knew what the city's problems were because he had contact with these people. Another one was Rodney Fertel, you know, his son wrote it- a book- about him, whose promise- his only promise was that he would bring a gorilla to the New Orleans Zoo. He was obsessed with gorillas. And then there was a taxi driver, whose name I forget, who was an ordinate segregationist, and who claimed that he had created a

substance that, if it was added to milk, would never curdle the milk or make it solid, even in the sunlight. Those were-

[00:13:49.17] Jack Davis: And you wrote profiles of all of them.

[00:13:51.24] Gene Bourg: I wrote profiles on all of them.

[00:13:53.06] Jack Davis: I'll go back and re-read-

[00:13:55.06] Gene Bourg: It was really one of the most interesting series I've ever done. I mean, it was really something.

[00:14:00.15] Jack Davis: But Landrieu prevailed. In- he got into the second primary. He and Jimmy Fitzmorris-

[00:14:08.09] Gene Bourg: Right. Right.

[00:14:10.10] Jack Davis: -were the two top vote getters in the first primary, and they ran the run-off election between them for Democrats. Were you there in the election-night scene with-

[00:14:24.25] Gene Bourg: The night of the second primary?

[00:14:26.03] Jack Davis: Yeah.

[00:14:27.01] Gene Bourg: Landrieu had his election night headquarters in the old Jung Hotel on Canal Street. And, I'm sorry- it wasn't on Canal Street, it was somewhere else- well- maybe it was.

[00:14:44.28] Jack Davis: No! I- you're- I think- I believe you're right, but it's not there now.

[00:14:49.05] Gene Bourg: And I was- Landrieu asked me to go up to his room to watch the election returns, which I did. And so when the- when he was announced the winner, all of us got into elevators and went down to the grand ball room where the big party was being held, and I'll never forget this because it was one of the most emotional scenes I've ever seen- that I ever saw in covering politics. We approached the doors to the ballroom and the doors opened, and I was standing right- well not right next but- next to Landrieu, and when the doors opened and he appeared, this huge roar went up from the crowd of the ballroom, and Landrieu was just- it's like a wind had hit him, I mean, he just pulled

back and- there were hundreds of Black hands reaching up and cheering. It was really something! In a nutshell, I mean, depicted what he had done. It was, to say, very emotional.

[00:16:13.02] Jack Davis: And then we had a rare run-off. I mean- a rare general election contest.

[00:16:20.27] Gene Bourg: Right. In Janu- in- I think-

[00:16:22.12] Jack Davis: In the spring of '70.

[00:16:24.05] Gene Bourg: Right. March or April of...1970, against Ben C. Toledano, who was the Republican candidate, and Toledano got 40% in the general election and was bragging about it because he was the first Republican who had ever gotten a significant vote in Louisiana- anywhere- up to that time. Toledano, if my memory serves me right, Toledano did not conduct what I would call an intense campaign because there were just not that many Republicans in New Orleans, and I'll never forget one thing: Ben C. was something of an aristocrat and he once told me, "We can't have Moon Landrieu as Mayor of New Orleans. Verna Landrieu would be First Lady!" And he was- he really looked down on the wife- on Moon Landrieu's wife, for some reason. I don't know. But-

[00:17:40.04] Jack Davis: What was the reason?

[00:17:41.20] Gene Bourg: I have no idea. I didn't ask him. I just assumed it was because he thought she wasn't proper enough to be the First Lady of New Orleans.

[00:17:52.26] Jack Davis: Did it have anything to do with her Italian background? Did he-

[00:17:58.03] Gene Bourg: I would assume so-

[00:18:01.25] Jack Davis: Would she-

[00:18:02.14] Gene Bourg: She came from a successful family. She was not just part of the New Orleans estab- social establishment. You know- she was a very bright, charming lady, I think, but, I can't recall very much about Ben C.'s campaign, because there wasn't that much going on. You know, there were-

[00:18:23.00] Jack Davis: Did the fact that they had to run the general election have any- did it slow down the Landrieu administration from getting started, instead of preparing the transition after the run-off- the democratic run-off, he had to-

[00:18:40.10] Gene Bourg: That's a good question. I'm not sure I know the answer. Things- one other thing I remember about the fir- the second primary, was the morning after, I called Moon Landrieu and asked him if I could go to City Hall and interview him and also to shoot a picture of his family. So, I went to his house, and we shot a picture of his family and then he said, "Why don't you ride up pic- to City Hall with me?" and I said, "Ok, fine." So we went to City Hall, and we walked into the lobby, and here was Jimmy Comiskey, who was in his '60s, let's- I think more like his 70's- who had been the power in the center of New Or- the political power in the center of New Orleans, and who had violently opposed Landrieu and had worked for Jimmy Fitzmorris. So here are these two dominating figures in the city's political factions, and Mr. Comis- Jim Comiskey said, "Congratulations Mr. Mayor," and Landrieu went up and they talked for a couple of minutes, and it was something remarkable to see. The change in personal terms, to see the change of- that had happened- the seat change- it was a seat change.

[00:20:25.02] Jack Davis: So do you think Landrieu won, in spite of the traditional White political powers, the regular Democratic organization, and he didn't re-establish his own organization, the way his predecessors had?

[00:20:40.26] Gene Bourg: No, no. This was the first election where public relations, consultants were involved. Landrieu got a man from Washington- Dan . . .

[00:21:04.28] Jack Davis: McCollum.

[00:21:05.13] Gene Bourg: McCollum, who really put it together for him. And Jimmy Fitzmorris's- consultant he hired was Henry- he was a long-time political consultant, who was extremely capable, but, I think- who could say whether McCollum was better than- I can't think of his name, but it had a lot to do with Landrieu's election, I think. I mean- you know, it- the colors they chose, the advertising they used, it was revolutionary for New Orleans.

[00:22:06.07] Jack Davis: And you covered- did you start covering City Hall then as a beat?

[00:22:11.24] Gene Bourg: Yes. Yes.

[00:22:12.00] Jack Davis: The Landrieu administration?

[00:22:13.09] Gene Bourg: I had a column called "City Hall Report," which I had for three or four years.

[00:22:22.04] Jack Davis: And, what did you- what was it like then, in City Hall, and right after the election of Moon Landrieu?

[00:22:29.28] Gene Bourg: It was the most- it was even more exciting than the campaign, I guess.

[00:22:35.16] Jack Davis: In what way?

[00:22:36.19] Gene Bourg: Well, Nixon was President, and he had gotten past Congress the Model Cities Program, which, as you know, was a very large program to help improve the urban character of the country. And Landrieu used the Model Cities Program to bring into City Hall people like Sherman Copelin- the names don't all come to mind right away, but the Model Cities Program was the generator of a great deal more of political Black power. Also, Landrieu was introducing legislation that had been the kind of legislation that had been unheard of before. I think he dragged New Orleans, kicking and screaming, into the 20th Century- was the way that I see it. That may be a bit exaggerated, but I think-

[00:23:55.20] Jack Davis: Was that mostly- how much of that was organized around integration of the city's politics and businesses?

[00:24:04.18] Jack Davis: Well, that was a major part of it, but one example that sticks in my mind was this: he wanted to develop the tourism industry. Tourism was not a big deal until the 1970s, and I think Landrieu could see it coming. And one of the things he wanted to do was to- on a- to coming down to a very small instance- was to increase the amount that vendors paid the city to operate in the French Market- to get their licenses or permits or whatever they were. And they were pittance when Landrieu got into office. So, the people at Café Du Monde agreed to pay more. The people at Morning Call moved to Metairie. Morning Call has lost tens of millions of dollars, because they would not pay a nominal- I think it was like a couple of hundred thousand dollars a year- where they were paying maybe a thousand dollars a month before or something. I don't know what the figures are. But that was the kind of thing- a microcosm- that he was trying to do. And he got a lot of resistance from it.

[00:25:38.18] Jack Davis: But this-

[00:25:40.09] Gene Bourg: He was- you know- he wanted the Superdome, and all the projects aren't coming to mind- well, he wanted to develop Armstrong Park which didn't turn out well- and I forget all the- you would actually know more about these details than I do, but anyway.

[00:26:07.07] Jack Davis: In, well- I got there a couple years after you were already writing all this stuff.

[00:26:15.14] Gene Bourg: Yeah.

[00:26:15.24] Jack Davis: But- in- let's talk about just integration for one minute. In the Model Cities Program, gave him the opportunity to hire more people-

[00:26:25.00] Gene Bourg: Right.

[00:26:25.23] Jack Davis: -using these federal funds, and he was able to- what aside from the fact that this- you know- he was able to find talent, whether it was Afric- he was able to find talent whether it was Black or White or whatever...

[00:26:40.03] Gene Bourg: Yes, yes.

[00:26:41.13] Jack Davis: He- didn't he- my impression, I mean, I walked into City Hall for the first time in 1972, and I was impressed with- this was a group of bright people in the mayor's office.

[00:26:53.23] Gene Bourg: Oh yes, oh yes.

[00:26:54.08] Jack Davis: But- I mean- but you saw- was that the same as before, or did he change it to get there?

[00:26:59.21] Gene Bourg: Oh, he changed it drastically. I mean his- he hired people like Mary Zervigon and, I can't think of all the names, like, right now- Gagliano, and there was this think tank of young, intellectually aggressive people- young people- who were just there to come up with ideas, and make recommendations to him. They produced all kinds, I mean, just all sorts of new ideas for him. And, one thing, before I forget, when Landrieu was a councilman at large, he was the only one who, outside his office door in City Hall, had a line of Black people coming in to see him for help. These were the only- he was the only man who ever, ever helped Black people in City Hall.

[00:28:05.21] Jack Davis: In his role as-

[00:28:06.24] Gene Bourg: In his role as councilman at large.

[00:28:06.26] Jack Davis: -councilman at large.

[00:28:10.09] Gene Bourg: And I think it's something that came both from within, as well as from his political instincts. But anyway, no, he had this think tank, and they would come up with ideas. He appointed a bright young person as Chairman of the- Director of the Vieux Carré Commission, which regulated all the architectural changes in the Vieux Carré...

[00:28:36.25] Jack Davis: That was Wayne Collier?

[00:28:38.17] Gene Bourg: Yes, it was Wayne Collier.

[00:28:41.23] Jack Davis: And then Linda Friedman?

[00:28:43.12] Gene Bourg: Linda Friedman. Now, Linda was one of the City Hall's think tank people, along with the guy with the curly hair, whose name I can't remember right now.

[00:28:53.23] Jack Davis: Larry?

[00:28:54.09] Gene Bourg: Larry.

[00:28:55.04] Jack Davis: Coleman?

[00:28:55.22] Gene Bourg: Larry Coleman...Coleman. And there was another one, whose name I forget, but- you know, what- City- the Mayor's Office, City Hall, was throbbing with energy. I mean, it was like a revolution had occurred. Vic Schiro-

[00:29:18.18] Jack Davis: The previous Mayor.

[00:29:20.14] Gene Bourg: -had been a charlatan. You know, he was a Comiskey creation more or less and there was a TV reporter named Bob Kreiger, who wrote an article for New Orleans Magazine called, "The Sayings of Chairman Vic," with all of these quote like during- right in the aftermath of a hurricane, he got on TV and said, "Do not believe in any false rumors unless they come from City Hall," and at a banquet with John McGiffin there, he said, "Look at that lovely Mrs. McGiffin: every wrinkle in her face is glowing." And these just went on and on, I mean, but they were a window into his personality.

[00:30:09.12] Jack Davis: And so he-

[00:30:10.26] Gene Bourg: And his intellect.

[00:30:11.27] Jack Davis: And Mayor Schiro hadn't recruited the same kind of talent that-

[00:30:15.24] Gene Bourg: I'm sorry?

[00:30:16.19] Jack Davis: Mayor Schiro didn't attract the same talented workforce?

[00:30:20.12] Gene Bourg: Oh, of course not. No, I once walked in on Schiro- this was when I was a general assignment reporter for the Picayune- I walked in to Schiro's office, and there was a TV reporter there, I forget who, and the TV reporter was harassing the mayor and insulting him and everything else, and Schiro just sort of stood there. It was extraordinary.

[00:30:55.01] Jack Davis: Well, what was it about Moon Landrieu that attracted these bright people to City Hall? Did it- or was it the promise that New Orleans was showing at the time?

[00:31:05.19] Gene Bourg: Oh, it was definitely that. I mean, they recognized him from the very beginning when they got with him, I'm sure it was clear to them that they were going to have a serious responsibility in that they were going to have to produce. There was a communication there that was, well, perfect.

[00:31:30.05] Jack Davis: And- were- as reporter, did you have access to those people at all the levels?

[00:31:34.06] Gene Bourg: Yes. Oh, definitely. Oh yes.

[00:31:35.26] Jack Davis: They were open?

[00:31:36.14] Gene Bourg: I got to know them well, yeah. Regularly counted on them for reports or what was going on at City Hall because I couldn't be in the Mayor's Office every day. I mean, I used to spend every day at City Hall. There was a pressroom there, and I just wrote there, I did all- of course all my interviews there, made phone calls, whatever.

[00:32:10.10] Jack Davis: And what were they- what do you remember them being most energized about? Was it the- having the chance to re-make the city physically, or to re-make the politics that had suppressed Black influence for so long, or-

[00:32:29.20] Gene Bourg: You mean in City Hall, or jus-

[00:32:30.07] Jack Davis: Yeah. It was- what was their main thrust that you recall from those days?

[00:32:35.27] Gene Bourg: They were going in so many directions, it was really- I remember sitting in Dan McCollums's o- Dan McCollum became an assistant- he went from just consulting work to being one of Moon Landrieu's executive assistants, and I would go into Dan's office every morning and check with him what was going on, and one morning, I was interviewing him, and there was this Black- young Black person- man- sitting in a chair off to the side, and he was being groomed and Dan said, "I want to introduce you to Sidney Barthelemy." Well Sidney Barthelemy was out of the Health Department or something at that- or- he was working in one of the city departments, I forget which- but that was a common sight where you would go in, and, you know, there'd be a Black person in charge. Which was-

[00:33:48.28] Jack Davis: Pete- Pete Sanchez was the-

[00:33:51.01] Gene Bourg: Pardon?

[00:33:51.05] Jack Davis: Pete Sanchez was made a depar- I think the first head of a major department.

[00:33:57.01] Gene Bourg: I think you're right.

[00:33:59.29] Jack Davis: Wou-

[00:34:01.22] Gene Bourg: San- yeah. Sanitation department. You're right, yes. I remember.

[00:34:04.29] Jack Davis: And then, Barthelemy, well was the- within another few mayor terms- was to become mayor himself.

[00:34:14.14] Gene Bourg: Yeah.

[00:34:15.11] Jack Davis: Do you think that was his- a main learning experience for him?

[00:34:19.07] Gene Bourg: Oh, without question. Yeah. I don't think he became a very good mayor, but, yeah. He, of course, he eventually became a councilman, and then ran for mayor.

[00:34:35.07] Jack Davis: How much time were they spending on the Superdome? Was that a City Hall- was it commanding attention in City Hall, or was that the independent Superdome Commission and the state?

[00:34:49.11] Gene Bourg: I think the S- the Superdome doesn't stick in my mind, for some reason. I think it may have been- when- what was the year the Superdome was done? 1974 or '75?

[00:35:02.02] Jack Davis: I think it opened in 1975. It was-

[00:35:04.00] Gene Bourg: Well, if it opened in 1975, then it was definitely going on there, but I think the Superdome was a whole different part of coverage. Once it became a fait accompli, City Hall was not really that active in discussing it, because it was there.

[00:35:32.25] Jack Davis: Moon Landrieu had played a part in getting the Superdome built and then located downtown, did- were they- did they spend much time taking advantage of the Superdome's location to develop the downtown? I mean all of the Poydras Street developments that took place in the 1970s, did that-

[00:35:55.10] Gene Bourg: Well, one thing-

[00:35:55.18] Jack Davis: -show up on City Hall agendas?

[00:35:57.21] Gene Bourg: The only thing I remember about that, at least right away, is that Landrieu had proposed an increase in the property tax millage for downtown businesses, and he called a press conference to announce it. And with businessmen there- it wasn't so much a press conference as it was a meeting with the business men, it was CBD. And- but it was a lot of people there. And when Landrieu explained his proposal, he got an enthusiastic applause from all the businessmen. Well, Lolis Elie was there, and I saw Lolis, and I said, "What do you think Lolis? Isn't this exciting?" He said, "Man, this is BS. They're all applauding, and then they're not gonna come across with the money." And sure enough, he was right.

[00:37:02.10] Jack Davis: And, how did they avoid coming up with the money? I mean-

[00:37:05.27] Gene Bourg: Pardon?

[00:37:06.07] Jack Davis: How did they avoid coming up with the money, after that enthusiastic response?

[00:37:11.05] Gene Bourg: I don't remember the details, but I propo- I assume it was proposed, and it was voted down because of their opposition.

[00:37:20.03] Jack Davis: Were they- was it evident in the beginning of the Landrieu administration that the New Orleans economy in- was looking pretty bright? I mean, the 1970s, as it turned out, was a boom time in- especially in oil, to a certain extent, import, and as you said, the start of a more active tourist industry. Did they see this coming, and did that raise the spirits in City Hall?

[00:37:52.16] Gene Bourg: I would think so. I think they had to get a sense of satisfaction from some of the things that they were accomplishing, plus with these outside influences that improved the economy- it was the best of both worlds, I mean. So, it was all very positive around that time, yeah.

[00:38:28.24] Jack Davis: So the energy level was good. How long did you cover City Hall? You said three or four years?

[00:38:42.10] Gene Bourg: Four years. And I became- then I became an editorial writer; I'm trying to remember what was going on that last year. One thing I remembered while I was covering City Hall was this: Moon Landrieu appointed Clay Shaw, head of the French Market Cooperation. This was after Garrison's trial charging him with the- a plot to assassinate John Kennedy. For, I'll never forget, seeing Clay Shaw at this press conference that was called to announce his appointment. I mean- he was a new man. And, it was a- he died a couple of- three years later, I think- but, he was kind of a symbol of what Landrieu knew that here was a man who was head of the International Trade Mart, one of the most- it was one of the most influential businessmen in New Orleans. And he had been treated like dirt.

[00:39:59.13] Jack Davis: In the prosecution by Garrison.

[00:40:02.05] Gene Bourg: Right. So, you know, it was just one of the- a mosaic of things that Landrieu did that added up to a tremendous- it- sense of accomplishment and progress in the city.

[00:40:18.26] Jack Davis: Was- how did New Orleans politicians deal with the Clay Shaw prosecution and Jim Garrison's, as it turns out, crazy case? How did that show up in the mayor's race in 1970?

[00:40:35.17] Gene Bourg: No, no.

[00:40:36.14] Jack Davis: Were people embarrassed by the Shaw prosecution?

[00:40:41.22] Gene Bourg: It wasn't an issue in the mayor's race, no. As- at least I can't remember that it was. If it was, it was a minor issue, I would think.

[00:40:51.04] Jack Davis: And what was Moon Landrieu's motivation in appointing Clay Shaw to the French Market Cooperation head?

[00:41:00.06] Gene Bourg: He never told me, but I would assume it was because of his experience as Director, you know, Director of the International Trade Mart and maybe only peripherally because of the Garrison prosecution-

[00:41:21.29] Jack Davis: Was it a chance for redemption, I mean, a chance for Clay Shaw to come back into the spotlight?

[00:41:27.07] Gene Bourg: Oh definitely. Oh yes. Oh yes. That was the whole thrust of the column I wrote after that press conference. That here was the reemergence of a major New Orleans figure after a ludicrous criminal prosecution.

[00:41:48.18] Jack Davis: I think you once told me about an incident involving Clay Shaw and Jim Garrison in one of Ella Brennan's restaurants?

[00:41:57.19] Gene Bourg: Yes. And Ella Brennan-

[00:41:58.06] Jack Davis: Is that- can you remind me about that?

[00:42:01.23] Gene Bourg: Ella Brennan- this was at Brennan's restaurant on Royal Street in- some time in the 1960s, I guess. She was in a dining room at Brennan's restaurant, and Jim Garrison was having lunch with his wife, and Clay Shaw was also in the dining room- whether he was with Ella Brennan or not, I don't know- but, Jim Garrison began berating his wife audibly in the dining room, and it was causing, you know, some disturbance. And supposedly, Clay Shaw went - I say "supposedly," if Ella Brennan says it's true, it's true. Clay Shaw got up and went over to Garrison's table and said something to the effect that, you know, why don't behave yourself, you're causing a disturbance here or something. And the result of that though was that there was some speculation that this sparked the idea in Garrison's mind to prosecute Shaw on ridiculous evidence.

[00:43:29.20] Jack Davis: And this incident, you know, didn't happen- it happened after the assassination of Kennedy-

[00:43:35.12] Gene Bourg: Right.

[00:43:36.04] Jack Davis: And di- and Garrison was DA then.

[00:43:38.01] Gene Bourg: Right.

[00:43:39.07] Jack Davis: Interesting.

[00:43:41.14] Gene Bourg: He was a very strange figure, I mean in a lot of ways.

[00:43:50.00] Jack Davis: The- after you came back as an editorial writer, what were you writing? What were the main things the States-Item was supporting at that time?

[00:44:02.19] Gene Bourg: Well, first of all, they were anti-, well I guess you could say "we"- were anti-Vietnam, anti-Nixon- it was a liberal newspaper. And it was my understanding that the Newhouse family, which owned both the States-Item and the Picayune, gave the States-Item license to express editorial opinions completely different from the Picayune's. I've never heard of that done before in an American newspaper. And Charles Ferguson, who very capably ran that editorial department, was always open to discussion among the editorial writers as to what the policy would be on any particular issue. But everybody seemed to be in agreement, in most cases. I was not present in the year that the States-Item endorsed McGovern against Nixon, but it was my - Ferguson can either affirm or deny this - it was my understanding that the strong belief by the other editorial writers that the States-Item should not put its name on Richard Nixon's candidacy was the ultimate reason the Picayune- I mean- the States-Item endorsed Nixon. In the meantime- well, also during this period, during the Nixon- or later, during the Nixon impeachment, the States-Item was running these editorials damning Nixon for all this, and the Times-Picayune was running front-page editorials by the publisher defending Nixon, even at the time that the Congressional Committee- Impeachment Committee members were abandoning him- the Republicans on the committee were abandoning Nixon and the Times-Picayune was still fighting for him! Which is an indication of how far apart the States-Item and the Picayune were editorially.

[00:46:36.05] Jack Davis: Did you have the same chasm on local issues? City Hall issues?

[00:46:40.01] Gene Bourg: Yes. Oh definitely.

[00:46:41.21] Jack Davis: What was the States-Item pushing at that time?

[00:46:44.22] Jack Davis: Editorially.

[00:46:47.16] Gene Bourg: Armstrong Park, for one thing- but I don't know if the Picayune was for or against it. It's hard to come up with specific issues, after all these years, but-

[00:46:59.13] Jack Davis: Well let me ask you- let me ask you about- at the end of the Landrieu years, Judge Morial-

[00:47:04.22] Gene Bourg: Yes.

[00:47:05.23] Jack Davis: -becomes mayor.

[00:47:06.14] Gene Bourg: Yes.

[00:47:06.29] Jack Davis: How did things change? In terms of city government and what you were covering?

[00:47:15.12] Gene Bourg: I don't think things changed radically. I don't remember Morial as a blazing force for change. He was not a fan of Moon Landrieu's politically, but a brilliant man. I remember, as a general assignment reporter, night side, when Dutch Morial was President of the New Orleans chapter of the NAACP, and I went to a meeting on [Gerard??] Street - this was at night of membership - and Dutch walked in, and here were all the- I call him Dutch- Morial walked in, and here were all these really nice Black people, sort of dressed in shirts, and just- shirts and trousers or whatever- and here walks in Dutch Morial, in his Ivy-League suit and his Ivy-League tie and all this, and it was quite a contrast! And, I got the impression that he was uncomfortable among all of these people, because he was as White as he was Black, for one thing. But, a very, very intelligent and honest person, I think.

[00:48:48.03] Jack Davis: Did he- was he able to continue- if there was a trajectory in New Orleans government for opening up the restrictions of segregation, and opening up a government to continuing the economic boom, was Dutch able to continue that in those things?

[00:49:08.16] Gene Bourg: I wasn't covering City Hall there, so my observations wouldn't be really valid, but I thought he did a good job as Mayor. His personality left him something to be desired because he had lived a hard life. He was the first Black

student at LSU because he passed as White. I mean this was during segregation. And he fought for what he got. Nobody ever gave Dutch Morial anything. I was a friend- I mean- I was able to- after I left the paper and everything- I got to be a friend of Dutch and Sybil.

[00:49:56.21] Jack Davis: When you- during the Morial first term in City Hall, the States-Item merged with the Times-Picayune, and you and other editors of the States-Item took over the Times-Picayune. You- what were you doing in that merger? What was your responsibility?

[00:50:21.14] Gene Bourg: What was I doing on the States-Item? I was your assistant city editor.

[00:50:24.10] Jack Davis: Like I said, right, you've been my editor. Not fair. But what we- what I'm trying to recall, and the newsroom- when we merged these two papers what changed?

[00:50:38.08] Gene Bourg: I had- you see- I had left- I was headed to- at Figaro for about nine months.

[00:50:43.21] Jack Davis: Ah. That's coming back to me.

[00:50:46.21] Gene Bourg: Yes. You, having been one of the founders of Figaro should have remembered that. But anyway- I had been an editor. I had left the paper and Charlie Ferguson, in one of the kindest things that's ever been done for me, took me back on the States-Item. And I became assis- you know- assistant city editor, and then, when the papers were combined, I became your as- one of your assistant editorial editors.

[00:51:19.19] Jack Davis: And what did we accomplish? I mean- I guess I should ask it that way- what did we accomplish-

[00:51:25.23] Gene Bourg: Well I remember-

[00:51:26.25] Jack Davis: -with the merger of the two papers as-

[00:51:30.29] Gene Bourg: Well one thing: it set the Picayune straight. I mean- the editor of the Picayune had been a clown. I hate to say it that way, but I mean- every holiday, he would come dressed up for the holiday like Saint Patrick for Saint Patrick's Day, or Santa Claus for Christmas, and on Valentine's Day- I forget what he did, I mean, he was unbelievable. Anyway, Ferguson took over this- The Time's Picayune and the States-Item and turned New Orleans journalism around.

[00:52:05.29] Jack Davis: I see that- so- if- this happening at the end of the 1970s and 1980's, was one of the legacies of the 1970s going forward-

[00:52:17.25] Gene Bourg: I mean- Ferguson opened the Picayune up in a way that Moon Landrieu opened City Hall up, you know, to bring in all of these young, accomplished people, I mean, we could go down the list. And you, Dean Baquet, who's now head of the- well- no- Baquet came on the States-Item, who's now managing editor of the New York Times, Walter Isaacson, all these people!

[00:52:51.13] Jack Davis: W- and don't forget Laurie Hays who's executive editor of the Bloomberg.

[00:52:54.17] Gene Bourg: Laurie Hays. An- and Fen Montaigne and-

[00:52:58.01] Jack Davis: Countless others.

[00:52:59.20] Gene Bourg: Pardon?

[00:53:00.16] Jack Davis: And countless others.

[00:53:01.22] Gene Bourg: Yes.

[00:53:02.22] Jack Davis: But projecting- this put the Times-Picayune in position, in the '80s and '90s, to do good work.

[00:53:12.22] Gene Bourg: Yes. Oh, definitely. Well, I mean, the Picayune, it took a few years for it to sink in, you know, in the rest of the journalism community around the country, but I think the fruit was born by the fact that Picayune has won three Pulitzer Prizes, eventually, under Jim Amoss, he was, you know, a very competent editor.

[00:53:40.10] Jack Davis: He was Charlie's- Ferguson's- successor.

[00:53:41.13] Gene Bourg: And Charlie laid the groundwork for that. We were stimulated. We were excited about getting things done.

[00:53:54.15] Jack Davis: Well, this gives me an opportunity to transition into food.

[00:54:00.21] Gene Bourg: Okay.

[00:54:00.23] Jack Davis: Because one of the things that the Times-Picayune did so well was continue the earlier States-Item tradition of restaurant coverage.

[00:54:10.22] Gene Bourg: Yes.

[00:54:10.29] Jack Davis: And, even though you had been covering politics and writing editorials and editing Figaro, when you became the food critic of the Times-Picayune in, I think, 1985-

[00:54:22.15] Gene Bourg: Yes.

[00:54:23.09] Jack Davis: -but you'd been looking- you've been experienced food - excuse me - experiencing food in New Orleans, obviously, in the 1970s and built that into your coverage.

[00:54:35.11] Gene Bourg: Right.

[00:54:35.28] Jack Davis: Wh- Take us- what was going on in the- in food in New Orleans in the 1970s? Did pe-

[00:54:44.22] Gene Bourg: Well, I was- in the 1970s, I was simply a restaurant-goer. I mean, I don't know about the frequency of it or anything, but I always paid attention to what I ate because I had spent two years in France when I was in the Army- in fact, I wrote an article for Gourmet Magazine about my years as a 24-25 year old first in the south-west of France, near Bordeaux, and then in Paris for a year, and I learned to eat. Especially since everything was so cheap. You know, I lived in Paris as a civilian, and, while waiting for an apartment, I was living in a hotel for two dollars a night in 1963. But anyway, I- my mother was a wonderful cook, and I always liked food, and I think I learned- when I was in France I learned how to eat- how to really eat. But in the 1970s, Mr. B's opened which- and Paul Prudhomme- I don't know if he was the first chef, but he was a chef there. And of course, Prudhomme was- ju- this was before he became the number one in terms of his recognition of the top chef in the c- in New Orleans, and around the country.

[00:56:19.04] Jack Davis: What did- what- let me. Mr. B's, what did Mr. B's do that was different from what had been done?

[00:56:25.17] Gene Bourg: Well, they did Paul Prudhomme's dishes, which were quite different from what he would later do at K-Paul's Louisiana Kitchen. I think I mentioned to you once- he had one of the- which may be the best shrimp dish I've ever had in New

Orleans, which he never did after he left Mr. B's, it was called "Shrimp Chippewa," and it was simply this incredible shrimp broth with a big piece of toasted New Orleans French bread in the middle of it with these wonderfully cooked shrimp- I forget exactly how he cooked them. But Mr. B's was to become the first restaurant to feature grilled fish. The fish were the big deal at Mr. B's, eventually and it had some terrific chefs.

[00:57:24.01] Jack Davis: Who- and who hired Paul Prudhomme for Mr. B's?

[00:57:30.07] Gene Bourg: Probably Ella Brennan, from Commander's, because Prudhomme was working at Commander's Palace around the same time.

[00:57:41.01] Jack Davis: And what did she see in him that she couldn't get in other chefs?

[00:57:46.05] Gene Bourg: You'd have to ask her that, but she tells me- and I think I've recounted this story to you before- when Paul Prudhomme was at Commander's Palace, before he opened his own place, there was a German-born chef there- this sort of classic continental chef and there was Prudhomme and Ella Brennan- the way the story goes- as she told me, was talking in her office to the two of them, and she just said, "Suppose we're out on a river bank- or on the bank of a lake, rather- and we catch a fish. How would you cook it?" And I don't know what the German guy said, but Paul Prudhomme said he would put it in a black, cast-iron skillet, get it red-hot, cover it with spices, and char one of the sides and char it on the other side! Became blackened redfish. And I remember, when I was covering restaurants, I got Nation's Restaurant News - which is a weekly newspaper covering the industry - and I remember, a headline on a story inside Nation's Restaurant News says: "'We'll Blacken Anything!' Says Restaurateur." I mean it was the biggest thing in the- going on in the country in those days! It was amazing! Of course it was all terrible, but people were going for it.

[00:59:36.19] Jack Davis: Yep. So the blackened redfish took place some time in the 1970s?

[00:59:41.13] Gene Bourg: In the- yeah.

[00:59:42.15] Jack Davis: But-

[00:59:43.07] Gene Bourg: But I don't think- well- when did Prudhomme open Louisiana Kitchen- I think 1979.

[00:59:50.02] Jack Davis: After he'd left Ella Brennan.

[00:59:51.15] Gene Bourg: After he left Commander's, yeah.

[00:59:53.19] Jack Davis: But he'd had a major influence on Comman- if-

[00:59:55.22] Gene Bourg: Oh definitely. Oh yeah. I mean- he was doing a- eventually he was doing all the menus. I remember I first saw on a menu at Commander's the word 'debris,' which means scrapings- meat scrapings and so-forth- and he was- he really jazzed up that Commander's menu- no. He- Ella Brennan gave him his start, but he ran with that all something incredible.

[01:00:22.07] Jack Davis: Wh- so you as in the 1970s as more a consumer of food than a discriminating eater. What else was going on? The- Richard Collin- I looked in my copy of "Richard Collin's Underground Gourmet" and its copyright date is 1970. Collin was the first- am I correct in this- the first restaurant critic in New Orleans?

[01:00:49.10] Gene Bourg: Yes. Without question.

[01:00:52.04] Jack Davis: And can you describe the impact of that? Were people paying attention?

[01:00:57.04] Gene Bourg: Oh. It was the hottest thing in the city. It never had, I mean, here's- per-capita- the greatest restaurant interest in the country, and there was no restaurant reviewer. Of course, restaurant reviewing was something completely new- Craig Claiborne started it at the New York Times. But, when Collin's paperback restaurant guide, before he came to the States-Item, when that restaurant guide was published, it was the hottest thing going in the city. And well- it's, you know, Ferguson- Charles Ferguson- the editor admitted- you know- he hired him because of the popularity of his book. Or, well, he credits-

[01:01:51.20] Jack Davis: "The Underground Gourmet."

[01:01:52.24] Gene Bourg: -his wife, Jane, for having suggested it. "The Underground Gourmet" was published by Simon and Schuster, a series of books that were published around the country and Collin wrote the one about New Orleans. But Collin was a big circulation booster for the States-Item. He, especially for the Lagniappe section, which is the entertainment section- tabloid section- that was inserted in the paper. No, he was a big deal.

[01:02:35.11] Jack Davis: And what impact did he have on the kind of restaurants New Orleans had?

[01:02:42.14] Gene Bourg: He probably stimulated a lot of popular interest in restaurant going that might not have been there before. I mean, it had to have tremendous impact because of the interest that was in the column.

[01:03:09.10] Jack Davis: Did we get a greater diversity of cuisines as- partly as a result of that? Was he having a wider variety of things to cover?

[01:03:19.24] Gene Bourg: I would think that it had some affect, although, the expansion of the types of restaurant cuisine came after Collin. I mean, ethnic restaurants were very few aside from Mexican and Italian and maybe one or two others when Collin was reviewing. The new exotic culinary traditions didn't come through until, I would say, the early- to mid-'80s. They started popping up more around 1985 when I started reviewing restaurants.

[01:04:09.20] Jack Davis: But one of the people- one of the things you sent me was about the arrival of Tom Callemin in 1977-

[01:04:19.10] Gene Bourg: Yes.

[01:04:20.01] Jack Davis: -to Jonathan's to Marti's-

[01:04:23.21] Gene Bourg: Restaurant Jonathan, yeah. On Upperline, Jonathan and Upperline. Oh, oh, I'm sorry, Jonathan and Marti's, yes.

[01:04:30.20] Jack Davis: And then Upperline. Did he- what impact and were there other people like him coming to town?

[01:04:37.20] Gene Bourg: Well, Jonathan was the chicest place in town. It was an art deco restaurant owned by an architect and his partner, and the architect designed the whole restaurant which was spectacular, I mean, it was- the decor was extraordinary in terms of ar- it was the most beautiful art deco restaurant I've ever- I mean, I've seen pictures, nothing compared with Jonathan. Anyway, they were open for about six months when they needed a new chef and Tom Callemin, who was originally from Columbus, Ohio but he had restaurants in Manhattan and Long Island- or he cooked in restaurants in Manhattan and Long Island, and a friend of his in New Orleans convinced him to come and take the job at Jonathan. Well, in among the in-the-know crowd, Jonathan was flying high something incredible, and this was in 1978-79, so forth. Callemin's repertoire was internationally- he had spent- he was a self-taught cook, but he had spent a year in France, he had made frequent trips to Mexico and the Caribbean, and he had an eclectic menu, everything from Barbados rum-and-trifle to duckling with orange sauce and then

he got into the New Orleans repertoire and produced some incredible variations on traditional New Orleans dishes. But at Jonathan, his first dishes were, you know, really more Northeastern than Southern. And, if you wanted to be seen with the in-crowd, you went to Jonathan. That's the way it was.

[01:06:52.20] Jack Davis: By the time he got to Upperline with the owner JoAnn Clevenger, he had adopted a lot of local-

[01:07:01.15] Gene Bourg: Oh yes.

[01:07:01.28] Jack Davis: -stuff.

[01:07:02.20] Gene Bourg: Yes, I mean, he did remoulades, he did- they don't all come to mind right now, but, I was no longer reviewing restaurants at that time, and, oh, and this was before-

[01:07:16.17] Jack Davis: Yeah.

[01:07:16.17] Gene Bourg: -I should say before I was reviewing restaurants. Tom and I had mutual friends in New Orleans and he got to be one of my very best friends, and I can't be completely objective about Tom. But-

[01:07:30.00] Jack Davis: Right, no. Well in this period of the 70s, New Orleans people got more aware of what New Orleans food had been all along, and weren't they, I mean, in addition to the outside influences introduced by people like Tom Callemin, the Collin's, Richard-

[01:07:50.00] Gene Bourg: Yep.

[01:07:50.00] Jack Davis: -and Rima Collin did a cookbook, called "The New Orleans Cookbook," in which they told- taught people how to- what the traditions were.

[01:07:58.15] Gene Bourg: Well, and, it was Rima's cookbook, really, I mean, Tom was the taster. His obituary-

[01:08:03.15] Jack Davis: Richard was, yeah, Dick was the taster.

[01:08:08.05] Gene Bourg: Oh yeah. There is, I think, common agreement that the New Orleans Creole Cookbook is the best in, you know, the last 25- 50- whatever.

[01:08:24.00] Jack Davis: You're talking about the Collin's cookbook, Rima Collin's, yeah

[01:08:26.10] Gene Bourg: Yeah, yeah, but-

[01:08:29.03] Jack Davis: Which I think was just called "The New Orleans Cookbook"-

[01:08:31.05] Gene Bourg: Pardon me?

[01:08:31.24] Jack Davis: I think it was just called "The New Orleans Cookbook," yeah-

[01:08:33.04] Gene Bourg: "The New Orleans Cookbook"? I'm sorry, yeah.

[01:08:35.15] Jack Davis: And the Creole Cookbook was the decades, much older Times Picayune-type, was it, yeah-

[01:08:41.20] Gene Bourg: Oh yeah, that went back to 1901.

[01:08:44.21] Jack Davis: But the Collin's cookbook- I can't remember people using the Collin's cookbook in the 1970s religiously trying to teach themselves to appreciate New Orleans food.

[01:08:56.20] Gene Bourg: Oh yeah, I can understand that. No, "The Picayune Creole Cookbook," which was the title of that first-

[01:09:04.25] Jack Davis: Yeah.

[01:09:04.25] Gene Bourg: -cookbook, was, I mean, it's unusable today because of- in part because some ingredients and techniques, and, I mean, it's just- it's not a usable cookbook.

[01:09:22.05] Jack Davis: Right.

[01:09:22.15] Gene Bourg: Although the Picayune got Marcelle Bienvenu to re-do it, but I don't think that ever really took off. They had her re-do a lot of the recipes and everything and print it and write it in a comprehensible style for the 20th century- the late 20th century. But I don't think it ever took off.

[01:09:46.00] Jack Davis: So- the- we've been exploring the, in this and other interviews, the sort of revived, cultural awareness in New Orleans in this decade of the 1970s. Did

you see it happening in other areas in the first Jazz Fest, like the first “Underground Gourmet,” was 1970.

[01:10:13.20] Gene Bourg: I don't think so. I remember going to the, to a Jazz Fest performance by Carmen McRae in Municipal Auditorium in the 1960s.

[01:10:25.10] Jack Davis: Yep, there were-

[01:10:26.00] Gene Bourg: And there was also some of it on the [steam of President?].

[01:10:29.03] Jack Davis: True. I think the- what we know- what now has evolved is the Jazz and Heritage Festival, I think its first manifestations were in Congo Square, Armstrong Park now, in 1970 and 1971. I may be wrong about that. Before it moved to the Fairgrounds in 1972.

[01:10:53.25] Gene Bourg: Well, it may not have been called the New Orleans Jazz and Her- oh, that's right, I mean Heritage and so forth.

[01:10:59.00] Jack Davis: Yeah. But, and-

[01:11:00.00] Gene Bourg: No, but there was a Jazz Fest in New Orleans in the 1960s.

[01:11:04.10] Jack Davis: Right, and then, was that building the consciousness about New Orleans music at-

[01:11:11.10] Gene Bourg: Oh, without question. It has become a phenomenon. I mean, when Bruce Springsteen comes to New Orleans and plays for four hours, this doesn't happen anywhere else in the United States, I would think.

[01:11:31.10] Jack Davis: And sings a Dr. John song-

[01:11:33.25] Gene Bourg: Yeah.

[01:11:36.00] Jack Davis: Yeah. What- do you remember the world- the consciousness of music opening up in the 1970s? I'm testing this idea that, you know, with the politics-

[01:11:50.00] Gene Bourg: Well-

[01:11:50.00] Jack Davis: -and the food and the prosperity, we had people paying more attention to New Orleans music and architecture and other manifestations of the local culture. Do you think that's- I'm pushing it too hard?

[01:12:05.29] Gene Bourg: I think that had to happen, and the thing about me and New Orleans music is it goes- it starts when I was in high school, and high school students' parents would give house parties and Papa Celestin would play. And, you know, there was no- there was dance-

[01:12:36.15] Jack Davis: Right.

[01:12:36.15] Gene Bourg: -dance hall, and in fact, you and I remember well that dance hall, in the, what was it, in the Ninth Ward or?

[01:12:43.05] Jack Davis: Was that Luthjen's?

[01:12:45.01] Gene Bourg: Luthjen's, yes. But-

[01:12:51.10] Jack Davis: Well, when you-

[01:12:52.00] Gene Bourg: Well, I mean, New Orleans mu- like everything else in New Orleans, I mean New Orleans music progressed along with the consciousness of New Orleans music around the country, I mean, it progressed more and more.

[01:13:06.00] Jack Davis: Well, for you, I mean, where did you go to high school? And where did you live-

[01:13:10.00] Gene Bourg: De La Salle.

[01:13:11.05] Jack Davis: De La Salle.

[01:13:11.12] Gene Bourg: Catholic high school.

[01:13:12.05] Jack Davis: Uptown. And then- and you lived- where were your house parties? Were there-

[01:13:18.20] Gene Bourg: Uptown.

[01:13:19.05] Jack Davis: Yeah, and so, Papa Celestin and sort of traditional New Orleans jazz was already in your head.

[01:13:26.26] Gene Bourg: Yeah.

[01:13:27.17] Jack Davis: But there are all these new people who were, am I wrong in this? New people discovering it in the later years?

[01:13:36.10] Gene Bourg: Not so much in New Or- well, you mean New Orleanians?

[01:13:39.20] Jack Davis: Well, people outside New Orleans, too.

[01:13:42.07] Gene Bourg: Yeah, well no, when Preservation Hall opened, that- you know more than I do when that was.

[01:13:53.00] Jack Davis: Early 1960s.

[01:13:54.10] Gene Bourg: Yeah. When Preservation Hall opened, it became a major tourist attraction not long after, and needless to say that did a lot to-

[01:14:09.20] Jack Davis: Yeah.

[01:14:09.20] Gene Bourg: -promote the jazz culture here.

[01:14:13.00] Jack Davis: What- when you were growing up and going to high school, were- was there as much consciousness-

[01:14:20.10] Gene Bourg: I'm sor-

[01:14:20.10] Jack Davis: -about- was there as much consciousness about New Orleans having a distinct culture - food, music, architecture- as there developed later?

[01:14:34.29] Gene Bourg: I think it was more infused in everybody locally but it wasn't that well known around the country, I mean, Jackson Square was empty, you know, there weren't anybody there until the tourism boom started. As for the music, I will never forget this, when I was a junior at De La Salle in 1957- no wait a minute, I started, 1958- everybody was talking about this new rock-an- a rock-and-roll record called Hearts of Stone. And nobody ever talked about jazz, I mean, it was just not what you listened to. You listened to pop music. And I'll never forget that. That was the first rock-and-roll song I ever heard of. Hearts of Stone by, I can't remember who.

[01:15:40.00] Jack Davis: Was it a New Orleans record-

[01:15:41.14] Gene Bourg: No.

[01:15:41.28] Jack Davis: -it's the national culture.

[01:15:44.10] Gene Bourg: There was a lot of New Orleans rock-and-roll of course. The people who have the grocery store on St. Philip and Dumaine in the quarter-

[01:15:56.20] Jack Davis: Matassa.

[01:15:58.09] Gene Bourg: Cosimo Matassa was recording all this stuff here in New Orleans, all this rhythm and blues-

[01:16:06.28] Jack Davis: And-

[01:16:07.00] Gene Bourg: -which developed into rock-and-roll.

[01:16:09.00] Jack Davis: So you had the Ernie K-Doe records and Lee Dorsey and other groups. But they had kinda faded from consciousness by the time-

[01:16:22.20] Gene Bourg: Yeah.

[01:16:22.25] Jack Davis: -the 70s rolled around. And then they, as I recall, in the 70s, partly as a result of Jazz Fest, partly as a result of Quint Davis and Allison Miner bringing people like Professor Longhair back.

[01:16:39.20] Gene Bourg: Right.

[01:16:40.07] Jack Davis: It had a revival. Is that-

[01:16:42.20] Gene Bourg: I remember the first Jazz Fest I went to at the Fair Grounds, there was a Black singer piano player, a man, playing some terrific music, and there were like five people standing in front of him, listening to him. That was the first Jazz Fest at the Fair Grounds. It, I mean, it just-

[01:17:10.10] Jack Davis: Yeah.

[01:17:10.10] Gene Bourg: -it grew like a tornado, I mean, it was just-

[01:17:14.15] Jack Davis: Yeah.

[01:17:14.15] Gene Bourg: -unreal.

[01:17:15.10] Jack Davis: If-

[01:17:15.12] Gene Bourg: The one thing I wanted to mention also, when rock- when I started to hear a lot of rock-and-roll, it was not known as rock-and-roll. And I think the term "rock-and-roll" came from a song by a rhythm and blues artist who- whose name I don't remember, but he sang a song called the Sixty Minute Man. And the lyrics- some of the lyrics were: "If you're man don't treat you right, come up and see ol' Dan. He'll rock 'em, roll 'em, all night long, that's the sixty minute man."

[01:17:54.10] Jack Davis: And this-

[01:17:55.03] Gene Bourg: I've never forgotten that.

[01:17:56.00] Jack Davis: Now is this a New Orleans lyric?

[01:17:58.10] Gene Bourg: I don't know if he was New Orleans or not. But it was something else. Anyway, we're getting off track.

[01:18:04.20] Jack Davis: Well, no, but when you went to Jazz Fest in probably 1972 and there, you know, that could've been-

[01:18:10.00] Gene Bourg: Is that the first one at the Fair Grounds?

[01:18:11.20] Jack Davis: Yeah, yeah.

[01:18:12.00] Gene Bourg: That's when I went.

[01:18:13.05] Jack Davis: I mean it could've been James Booker, who in-

[01:18:15.10] Gene Bourg: Oh yeah, oh yeah, well I'm sure I can't remember all-

[01:18:16.28] Jack Davis: -in subsequent years would've had a crowd of tens of thousands.

[01:18:23.20] Gene Bourg: I can't remember all the orders that-

[01:18:28.00] Jack Davis: Right. Let me turn to Justin to see additional questions. Do you want to take a pause?

[01:18:31.00] Justin Nystrom: Yeah, yeah let me pause. Yeah, pause, please.

[01:18:35.20] Justin Nystrom: I see the red light. We're good. So, you grew up on the Westbank, correct?

[01:18:41.00] Gene Bourg: Yeah.

[01:18:41.24] Justin Nystrom: Okay. So you're pretty familiar with life out here.

[01:18:46.08] Gene Bourg: I moved into the city when I was 19.

[01:18:49.00] Justin Nystrom: Okay. But you-

[01:18:50.13] Gene Bourg: And I went to high school in the city.

[01:18:52.00] Justin Nystrom: But you've- would occasionally visit the Westbank over your time in New Orleans?

[01:18:57.05] Gene Bourg: Yeah. The thing is, when I was 13, I started at De La Salle, and I more or less abandoned the Westbank at the age of 13-

[01:19:09.10] Justin Nystrom: Right.

[01:19:09.10] Gene Bourg: -because all my friends and everything were in the city. And then I went to Tulane.

[01:19:14.10] Justin Nystrom: Right.

[01:19:15.05] Gene Bourg: And at 19, I had my own apartment.

[01:19:17.10] Justin Nystrom: Right.

[01:19:17.10] Gene Bourg: I got my first job at the Picayune, in the library of all places. I was interviewed by the editor, George Healy, and he said, "How fast can you type?" And I said, "60 minutes a- 60 words a minute, Mr. Healy." And he said, "Well go down to personnel and talk to Mrs. Michelle. That's how I got in the newspaper business." And then I became assistant financial editor and then went in the Army, came back and became a reporter. Anyway, that's another story. So, you want to talk about the Westbank?

[01:19:55.20] Justin Nystrom: A little bit, and specifically in the context of restaurants. The "Underground Gourmet" always put LeRuth's restaurant-

[01:20:04.10] Gene Bourg: Oh yeah.

[01:20:04.10] Justin Nystrom: -as one the top restaurants-

[01:20:06.15] Gene Bourg: Oh, it was.

[01:20:06.15] Justin Nystrom: -in the city.

[01:20:06.20] Gene Bourg: Oh yeah, it was.

[01:20:08.10] Justin Nystrom: Well, what made it such a great restaurant?

[01:20:11.00] Gene Bourg: Warren LeRuth used to go to France, and he developed a lot of French techniques, and he sort of Creole-ized a few of them. I don't think his food was as good- I don't think it would have flown as high in France as it did in New Orleans, but he created some, especially seafood, dishes. And there were a lot of really good restaurants on the Westbank in those days because the oil industry was doing really well and you had a lot of business people going to lunch and dinner there and everything. And when the oil business collapsed, everything- You had steakhouses, you had a German restaurant, you had LeRuth's, you had, I mean, I don't know, I can't remember them all, but you had maybe eight or ten really top-rate restaurants. Oh, there was a real French place on the Westbank run by a native Frenchman whose- I can't remember his name or the name of the place, but that was the only period I know of that- where there were some decent restaurants on the Westbank. I'm talking maybe the '70s.

[01:21:57.00] Justin Nystrom: Yeah.

[01:21:57.25] Gene Bourg: 'Cause there was Willy Coln's Chalet, which I reviewed when it had been a long established restaurant, LeRuth's, which had been a long establi- when I was reviewing in the '80s, LeRuth's had been long-well established, Del Frisco's Steakhouse, which was, some people said better than Ruth's Chris, and they opened in Dallas and made a fortune, and you had- there were some Italian places- Bertucci's. B-E-R-T-U-C-C-I. Have you heard of the Bertucci's? They had a wonderful restaurant on Fourth Street in Harvey right next to- well, right near the bridge- the Harvey Canal Bridge. It was terrific. And they- there was a- there is a strong Sicilian population on the Westbank as you know I'm sure-

[01:22:58.00] Justin Nystrom: Right.

[01:22:59.28] Gene Bourg: And the Bertucci's had a wonderful restaurant. They established it in the early 19- I think the early- to mid-1920s.

[01:23:11.10] Justin Nystrom: When did things really start shrinking on the Westbank? When did the optimism fade from the oil boom?

[01:23:19.20] Gene Bourg: With the oil bust.

[01:23:21.15] Justin Nystrom: So, what- do you remember what year LeRuth's went out?

[01:23:25.00] Gene Bourg: I wish I could. It- I think it was in the 80s.

[01:23:31.20] Justin Nystrom: Yeah.

[01:23:36.20] Gene Bourg: I'm trying to think of who you could talk to more about this-

[01:23:40.10] Justin Nystrom: Well, I know Tom Fitzmorris had written quite a bit about-

[01:23:42.00] Gene Bourg: Oh, you know who you might want to talk to? Is Marcelle Bienvenu. Because she had a restaurant, which was thriving, and when the oil- I have her phone number and e-mail if you want. She had a restaurant called Chez Marcelle but in Cajun country, and she said. "I can tell you the day and hour that the oil bust occurred because my customers stopped coming in." You want her phone number-

[01:24:13.20] Justin Nystrom: We can do that after-

[01:24:15.05] Jack Davis: Yep, yep.

[01:24:15.23] Justin Nystrom: -post interview-

[01:24:15.25] Gene Bourg: Yep.

[01:24:15.25] Justin Nystrom: -I think, certainly.

[01:24:16.20] Jack Davis: We'll get-

[01:24:17.10] Justin Nystrom: We'll get that, yeah.

[01:24:17.15] Gene Bourg: I, well, yeah. But, my dad had a lumber business in Harvey not just a few hundred, maybe an eighth of a mile from the Harvey Canal, and there was a lot of activity around the canal then, but, I don't remember, you know, in the '80s, I never came to the Westbank. So I really didn't know what happened at that point, but there was some good restaurants here. There's nothing left, absolutely nothing.

[01:25:05.00] Justin Nystrom: Have you read Tom Fitzmorris' book, "That Hungry Town," book he had written

[01:25:11.00] Gene Bourg: I'm sorry, my ear-

[01:25:12.05] Justin Nystrom: Tom Fitzmorris' book, "That Hungry Town" book, that he came out with about two or three years ago, have you seen that?

[01:25:16.20] Gene Bourg: No.

[01:25:18.04] Justin Nystrom: Oh. One of the things he mentions in that book is how Mr. B's represented something different, and K-Paul's represented something different, and sort of a way of dining, not just- but they were casual restaurants. And of course this was going on other parts of the country. Do you see it that way?

[01:25:38.10] Gene Bourg: No. I have no respect for Tom Fitzmorris. I mean, I'll be perfectly frank with you. He lies. He lies even when he doesn't have to lie. I remember once- I haven't heard his show in years, but I was listening to this program and somebody called up and said, "Oh, I read somewhere about a French dessert- about a dessert call clafouti, C-L-A-F-O-U-T-I." He says, "Oh, clafouti, that was popular outside of London in England. Clafouti is a French dessert from the southwest of France, but he just makes this stuff up. I would never rely on that guy for a historical fact in a million years. Now I mean, I- maybe more recently, I mean, he's prolific. He rated restaurants that he never visited. The people who opened the Chicory Farm Café in Carrollton, and he had never mentioned the restaurant on the program and they bought some advertising, and so he put them in his letter and he gave them, I don't know, four stars or something, and the owners- this guys still hadn't stepped foot in this place. Where does he get the money he claims he pays for every single meal he gets? That's- that's fifteen- twenty-thousand- thirty-thousand dollars a year we're talking about. Anyway.

[01:27:33.00] Justin Nystrom: Yeah. No, I was wondering, what did the old established restaurants- did you ever hear any resistance to this sort of new Paul Prudhomme paradigm that emerged with blackened redfish?

[01:27:49.00] Gene Bourg: In a Cajun category?

[01:27:50.00] Justin Nystrom: Well, I'm thinking, you know, something like, I mean everybody kind of say like Antoine's as being- or Broussard's or La Louisiane. What was their reaction, did they, I mean, was there any resistance to this style of cooking other par-

[01:28:04.00] Gene Bourg: A lot of people- I remember, before K-Paul's became famous, I lived in the Quarter and used to go there, and it was, you know, you'd walk in and sit down and eat and it was cheap- cheap as dirt. I got some of the grittiest potatoes I've ever had in my life when I ate there once, but that's alright. Repeat the question, I'm sorry.

[01:28:33.15] Justin Nystrom: Well, did any of the sort of grand damme restaurants-

[01:28:37.00] Gene Bourg: Yeah.

[01:28:37.00] Justin Nystrom: -kind of resent this new style of cooking?

[01:28:40.04] Gene Bourg: I think they resented the fact that he was making a lot of money, I don't think- I mean there was nothing they could do about his popularity. A lot of- you know, there's a streak in New Orleans where people resent success. Smart asses who make a lot of money, you know, doing something. And I think there was a certain amount of that for Paul Prudhomme because he came from nowhere, and he's a Cajun, and, you know, all this kind of stuff. But, there's no question that he changed New Orleans cooking. I mean, Frank Wrightson is a variation on a Paul Prudhomme theme. He's one of the most brilliant chefs in the city. His Oysters Rockefeller Soup is a hell of a lot better than Oysters Rockefeller. So, there was definitely- there still is definitely a strong Prudhomme streak in certain ways in New Orleans- I think, in New Orleans food, yeah.

[01:30:04.29] Justin Nystrom: Do you think Paul Prudhomme has a sense of how influential he was?

[01:30:15.10] Gene Bourg: I talked to him maybe three or four times. He just impressed me as a Ca- a sort of unprepossessing Cajun boy, I mean, he never really pushed himself on people or anything that I know of. He was a very simple person.

[01:30:44.00] Justin Nystrom: Interesting. You-

[01:30:49.00] Gene Bourg: Not like Emeril.

[01:30:51.20] Justin Nystrom: Yeah, Bam.

[01:30:54.00] Jack Davis: Well, Emeril followed Prudhomme-

[01:30:58.00] Gene Bourg: Yeah.

[01:30:58.00] Jack Davis: -at Commander's-

[01:30:59.20] Gene Bourg: Right.

[01:31:01.20] Jack Davis: What was the difference in the effect?

[01:31:05.10] Gene Bourg: It was sensational. He was doing an unbelievable job. I'll never forget, I reviewed Commander's and it was my practice on a Tuesday or a Wednesday to phone somebody at the restaurant to fact check because I was addicted to fact checking. And, I called Ella Brennan, and I said, "I have a few questions for you." She said, "Why?" I said, "I'm reviewing the restaurant, the review's gonna appear Friday." She said, "Did you contact the restaurant?" I said, "Yeah." She said, "Who let you in?" But, no, there's no question that Prudhomme- and, as far as Emeril goes, his food was revolutionary, I mean, and Ella told me she had gotten an application from him or somebody had recommended him to her, and so she made- she started making phone calls to restaurants where people knew his work and she said, "They all told me, 'He can't cook.'" But she hired him anyway.

[01:32:23.10] Justin Nystrom: Were they trying to keep her from stealing him away?

[01:32:26.10] Gene Bourg: I guess so.

[01:32:29.20] Jack Davis: Gene, the- one of the articles you sent me recently was about- mentioned that Al Copeland launched the first Popeye's-

[01:32:39.10] Gene Bourg: Yes, oh no-

[01:32:40.00] Jack Davis: -in Arabi-

[01:32:41.00] Gene Bourg: Yeah.

[01:32:42.02] Jack Davis: -in 1972.

[01:32:43.05] Gene Bourg: Yeah.

[01:32:44.10] Jack Davis: What does that tell us-

[01:32:44.20] Gene Bourg: I'll tell you how, I still remember this, I was on a- I was writing edito- it was right when they brought in what we would call a 'cold type'. Now, I forget what year that was, but I used to make up the editorial page with co- because I was an editorial writer, and the guy who was pasting up the page, I don't know, we started talking about fried chicken. And he said, "Man, you gotta go to this place in Arabi called Popeye's if you want good fried chicken."

[01:33:20.00] Jack Davis: And that was the beginning of a big chain.

[01:33:20.10] Gene Bourg: And that's what- that was it.

[01:33:22.15] Jack Davis: What did that tell us- what did that success of Popeye's-

[01:33:25.14] Gene Bourg: Well, the word got out, apparently, you know. This guy was doing incredible fried chicken, everybody started going to Arabi to eat fried chicken.

[01:33:36.10] Jack Davis: And that's- that was an indigenous New Orleans thing.

[01:33:42.15] Gene Bourg: Indigenous fried chicken?

[01:33:44.15] Jack Davis: Yeah. It was sort of local food.

[01:33:48.00] Gene Bourg: Yeah. Well, it was spicy, you know-

[01:33:51.00] Jack Davis: But it wasn't Kentucky Fried Chicken.

[01:33:54.15] Gene Bourg: No. No, he had a spice mix that Popeye's still owns. He sold the spice mix to them when he went bankrupt.

[01:34:03.10] Jack Davis: But that was- that became immensely popular in New Orleans among New Orleanians, didn't it?

[01:34:09.02] Gene Bourg: I'll tell you how popular it was. Matilda Stream used to live a block away from me, and I would go to some of her parties. This is the richest woman in Louisiana, and she served Popeye's Fried Chicken at her cocktail parties. I'm not kidding. I mean, you- I used to catch the mini-bus to go to the Picayune- the French Quarter mini-bus, and every now and again you could tell someone had went to Popeye's because the whole bus smelled like Popeye's Fried Chicken.

[01:34:41.10] Justin Nystrom: I've boarded airplanes like that before, yeah.

[01:34:44.25] Gene Bourg: It's a disaster now. It's not any good at all.

[01:34:47.10] Jack Davis: No, no. What else, Justin?

[01:34:50.21] Justin Nystrom: Uh, I was just going to ask you, what ever happened to Nathaniel Burton and Henry Carr and the old chefs like that in the '70s- '70s and '80s, what happened to those guys?

[01:35:01.00] Gene Bourg: Henry Butron and-?

[01:35:02.00] Justin Nystrom: Nathaniel Burton, who was at Brussard's and the Caribbean Room before that.

[01:35:06.10] Gene Bourg: Oh, whatever happened to them? I honestly don't know because Nathaniel Burton- I didn't even know Nathaniel Burton cooked at Brussard's because the owner- oh god, I know his name as well as I know my own - the German guy who owned Brussard's was so ego- he was an ego maniac, you know, would never admit that somebody else was doing the cooking, so I don't know who cooked at Brussard's. The guy at the Caribbean Room was Black, which the Caribbean Room in- during the '60s and '70s was the number one- was one of the luxury restaurants in New Orleans, and- I know his name as well as I know my own but I can't think of it right now- and this Black guy was producing elegant, French influenced food. The best, in a lot of people- in a lot of people's opinion in the city. What the hell was his name? I think he's in- I sent you some material on Caribbean Room and I think he's mentioned in it-

[01:36:17.00] Jack Davis: Yeah, I'm sorry, I can't remember at the moment.

[01:36:19.05] Justin Nystrom: It's not Henry Carr. Not Henry Carr.

[01:36:23.08] Gene Bourg: No.

[01:36:23.23] Justin Nystrom: No.

[01:36:24.26] Jack Davis: When did- when did the people who'd been creating food in New Orleans start being called "chefs"-

[01:36:31.20] Justin Nystrom: Yeah.

[01:36:32.19] Jack Davis: -In- there- we've heard from a- more than one person that we've talked to that the ch- people that made the food were called "cooks" before-

[01:36:43.20] Gene Bourg: Yeah, and they still are at Antoine's. Yeah.

[01:36:46.20] Jack Davis: -and they got paid- they got paid on an hourly basis. When did- when did the chef become the "chef"?

[01:36:50.27] Gene Bourg: It's hard to tell because I guess it sort of gradually emerged, but I don't know.

[01:37:04.20] Jack Davis: Did Richard Collin focus on the-

[01:37:07.21] Gene Bourg: I don't think it had anything to do with Richard Collin. Like, Ella Brennan had a chef, you know, Paul Blangé was- Blangé was the chef at Brennan's originally- Brennan's Vieux Carré and then at Brennan's restaurant. He was the chef. And that was in the late '50s and '60s- no, I'd say, the early '50s to early '60s. So "chef" was- I don't think it was an unknown word. I would doubt that the word "chef" was not at all used, I mean, most cooks who worked at restaurants and who had a kitchen were called cooks, I'd agree, but I'm not talking of- we're not talking about the, you know, the really top ones, except for Antoine's.

[01:38:18.00] Jack Davis: What else?

[01:38:18.16] Justin Nystrom: I don't- I'm good.

[01:38:21.00] Jack Davis: Gene, this has been great.

[01:38:22.10] Justin Nystrom: Yeah.

[01:38:22.25] Jack Davis: Thank you for-

[01:38:23.00] Gene Bourg: Oh, I enjoyed it a lot.

[01:38:24.22] Jack Davis: Thanks for-

[01:38:24.22] Gene Bourg: I love to pontificate, I think it's terrific.

[01:38:27.16] Justin Nystrom: Great.

[01:38:29.10] Jack Davis: We'll have to do it again because there's a lot more to talk about.

[01:38:32.00] Gene Bourg: And furthermore.

[01:38:35.00] Jack Davis: Thank you very much.

[01:38:36.00] Gene Bourg: Well, thank y'all for including me in this project, I'm honored.

[01:38:40.03] Jack Davis: You've been a big help.

[01:38:41.00] Gene Bourg: I think it's going to be a great book based on-

[01:38:44.02] Gene Bourg: I can't remember right now.

[01:38:45.00] Justin Nystrom: He had a part-

[01:38:46.00] Gene Bourg: Pardon?

[01:38:47.02] Justin Nystrom: He had a partner, and the partner died.

[01:38:49.20] Gene Bourg: The partner may have been a relatives- been a relative of the Paroni's, but they were somehow- the two families were somehow connected.

[01:38:56.12] Justin Nystrom: I know that John Perrone's grandfather bought out the widow of his partner-

[01:39:00.05] Gene Bourg: Oh really?

[01:39:00.24] Justin Nystrom: -In the '20s sometime. But he said that- this was the point of the whole John- Paul Prudhomme story, is what they saw was that, when Paul Prudhomme really started taking off in restaurants starting and increasing in the '80s, that they saw the restaurant supplies side of the business just skyrocket and they were all of a sudden bringing in, when you could finally get containers into the port of New Orleans, they were bringing in containers of stuff. You know, mixture- not like a mixed container, not like an entire container of olive oil or cheese or something, but a mixed container, and it just didn't make any sense for them to focus in, being that it's a family business, he's still, like his sons are kinda running, he's semi- not really retired, but his sons are running it, and he's got grandsons now, he's very excited about this. And, one of the few Sicilian

families that seems to produce enough sons, not that daughters can't run these business, but at any rate, that their future is assured in this business.

[01:39:57.13] Gene Bourg: One thing that I have to mention to you, have you heard of Montalbano's?

[01:40:01.03] Justin Nystrom: Yes, oh yes.

[01:40:01.23] Gene Bourg: Oh, good, because a lot- when I lived in the Quarter, a lot of old timers there claim that-

[01:40:07.25] Justin Nystrom: They were the best.

[01:40:07.25] Gene Bourg: -Mr. Montalbano created the muffuletta, only he called it the Roma Sandwich.

[01:40:13.04] Justin Nystrom: Greco-Roman- Roma-Greco sandwiches was [Salagean?], he told me. [???

[01:40:20.11] Gene Bourg: He used to have a St. Joseph's altar, his place was in a former stable, a nineteenth-century stable that was on St. Phillip's Street. And his son was in prison and you had to put some money in a jar for his son-

[01:40:37.00] Justin Nystrom: See, I didn't know about the son being in prison, that explains- that explains why the son never went into the business. Now, the ones- like, there was a younger son.

[01:40:38.25] Jack Davis: I think he turned his back on . . .

[01:40:48.01] Gene Bourg: I didn't know about that.

[01:40:48.16] Justin Nystrom: I think it was Nick Montalbano, and he ended up working at Napoleon House. He actually brought the Montalbano olive salad recipe and the muffuletta recipe to Napoleon House when they started becoming a cafe in the early '70s. They were, I think they were kin of the Impastatos, maybe even, but, you know, all of those families right around St. Phillip, they're a lot of connections. And-

[01:40:55.10] Gene Bourg: Okay. Oh. Oh wow, that's great. Right. Right, right. Well, I'm so forward looking to your book.

[01:41:18.05] Justin Nystrom: Well, the other thing that Nick told me was that, on the eve of World War II, that Montalbano had a picture of Mussolini in the restaurant and that, when war started, it got replaced with a picture of the Pope.

[01:41:33.28] Gene Bourg: Well, from what I understand, the Montalbano's sold sandwiches by weight. He's the- yeah. Well.

[01:41:38.00] Justin Nystrom: Right.

[01:41:40.26] Jack Davis: Right, right. Great.

[01:41:44.10] Justin Nystrom: And the other one, Joe Segreto who-