

**Interview of Lolis Edward Elie by Jack Davis and Justin Nystrom
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Abstract: This interview focuses on Lolis Elie's involvement in the political landscape of New Orleans during the 1960s and the 1970s and addresses the effects of African-Americans joining the political landscape during the Civil Rights Movement. Elie discusses his motives and his process behind becoming a lawyer following *Brown v Board of Education*, his involvement with the Canal Street sit-in demonstrations and picketing at Dryades Street (now Oretha Castle Haley Boulevard), and his involvement with the Morial and Landrieu Administrations along with how both periods affected the process of desegregating New Orleans. Elie details how the process of navigating and reorienting race relations during this timeframe led to the integration of Black culture into the identity of New Orleans, allowing for the emergence of the Jazz and Heritage Festival and the staple of Creole cooking to become synonymous with the city itself. He then delves into how the municipal decisions regarding the bisecting of Tremé and the fencing of Armstrong Park hurt the surrounding community, and led to the relocation of the African American population to New Orleans East. The interview concludes with a discussion of how the cookbook *The Creole Feast* was created, Elie's involvement with its creation, and how its connections to the restaurant *Dooky Chase's*.

Bio: Lolis Elie was born in New Orleans on January 9th, 1930. He was drafted into the Army in 1951, and went on to attend Howard University in Washington D.C. through the GI Bill. He then transferred, graduating from Dillard University and obtaining his law degree from Loyola University of New Orleans in 1959. He started his career as an attorney immediately thereafter, starting out by representing individuals who had been charged with minor felonies before becoming an advocate for civil rights organizations and those who had become associated with them, working alongside figures such as John "Jack" Nelson, Robert "Bob" F. Collins, Ernest "Dutch" Morial, and Moon Landrieu. Some of the more noted cases in his four-decade long career include *Lombard v Louisiana*, which went all the way to the Supreme Court, and the defense of an upstart Black Panther chapter in New Orleans in 1971. He passed away on April 4, 2017, and is survived by his son Lolis Eric Elie (columnist of *The Times-Picayune of New Orleans*; story editor of HBO's "Treme"), daughter Dr. Migel Elizabeth Elie, three grandchildren, and three great-grandchildren.

Pasted from inqscribe 19 January 2023 - Draft given to Jack Davis for review.

[00:00:00.00] Lolis Elie: —Sandwich Shop, and when I ... when I was in college on a Saturday night, that's where I'd take my girlfriend. You could get, you could get a stuffed crab at *Dooky's* for like 90 cents, a dollar ninety ... and then when I was in college at Dillard, we used to go to *Dooky Chase* for lunch all the time on the campus at, at, on Dillard's campus. You could have a hot dog and a Pepsi-Cola for a dollar and a quarter, but for two dollars you could go to *Dooky's* and get red beans and rice and hot sauce. So ... I went to *Dooky Chase* for lunch with my friends frequently and for supper. And when I graduated from law school, my Mother and Father and my brother and sisters, we all went there to celebrate my graduation.

[00:00:54.03] Justin Nystrom: Can I turn off that television in the other room?

[00:00:55.18] Lolis Elie: Sure, sure.

[00:00:57.00] Jack Davis: Do you want a glass of water or anything? ... In case we ... you're—

[00:00:58.08] Lolis Elie: No, no, I'm ...

[00:01:01.03] Jack Davis: Should we start?

[00:01:02.05] Justin Nystrom: I'm recording.

[00:01:02.27] Jack Davis: Okay, we're here in ... at ... 1402 Henriette Delille Street

[00:01:09.06] Lolis Elie: 1304.

[00:01:10.17] Jack Davis: ... 1304, let me start over again!

[00:01:11.12] Lolis Elie: [laughs] 70116.

[00:01:14.26] Jack Davis: 1304 Henriette Delille Street in Tremé at the home of Lolis Elie with Justin Nystrom of Loyola and Jack Davis talking here.

[00:01:29.12] Lolis Elie: Clear my throat, listen, you know the only street in ... in Tremé named after an African American is that lady—

[00:01:38.06] Jack Davis: Is the one we're on?

[00:01:39.02] Lolis Elie: Right.

[00:01:39.28] Jack Davis: And it hasn't been named after her for very long.

[00:01:42.08] Lolis Elie: Oh, less than two years.

[00:01:44.05] Jack Davis: Less than two years ... well, Lolis, we're, as, as I've explained to you before, I'm interested in, in ... what happened in New Orleans in the 1970s and I'm trying to test the proposition that this was a decade that made ... in which momentous changes took place, some of which are still affecting life in New Orleans ... and the Loyola Documentary and Oral History Studio is interested in ... collecting materials from the participants, observers, and players from that time, the 1970s.

[00:02:22.14] Lolis Elie: It makes sense.

[00:02:24.06] Jack Davis: So ... so here we are ... But let me just directly ask you from the onset ... what do you think was different at the end of that decade than had existed in New Orleans at the beginning?

[00:02:38.13] Lolis Elie: Oh, we're talking ... We're starting out in the sixties?

[00:02:41.16] Jack Davis: Well we can define the, we can define the decade loosely—

[00:02:45.17] Lolis Elie: Good, I—

[00:02:47.03] Jack Davis: ... sense because you gotta go back into the sixties to find the roots.

[00:02:51.02] Lolis Elie: Right, now I get confused at some celebrating ... separating the sixties from the seventies at points. Oh, I think there had been momentous changes. Oh ... but I always refer to them when I say this in other settings like this one. But there was a miseducation among African Americans. We were trained, not educated, trained to believe that this is the way, this is the, this is

the way things are and there ain't a damn thing you can do about it. And New Orleans, you, you always had, I always thought that there were some people, some, some people who were enlightened, and some people who were willing ... to, to, to struggle for something better, but not to really disturb the white folk, and of course the way the structure was in years is that the, the politicians were the ones that were there to, they were not ... the white politicians were not, their relationship to, to the ruling classes was not too much different from mine as a boot black. I mean they just hired help. They wanted it all.

[00:04:14.16] Jack Davis: And you were literally a boot black?

[00:04:16.19] Lolis Elie: I, I ...

[00:04:18.19] Jack Davis: When you were—

[00:04:20.00] Lolis Elie: I was shining shoes for a nickel at Broadway and St. Charles. There was a Katz and Besthoff Drugstore at the time. And I had the shoeshine box, and I did a nickel for a shine. Some people would give you a dime. But then, doing World War II ... you know that big cannon on Freret Street, by Tulane?

[00:04:43.12] Jack Davis: Mhmm.

[00:04:44.06] Lolis Elie: Well they were in ... the every Saturday, the Na- Naval ROTCs would meet there and have an inspection. And that was the perfect time because they could get fifteen cents for a shine, and most of those ... young men would give you a quarter ... So—

[00:05:08.21] Jack Davis: But then by the time we got into the 1960s you had also been trained as a lawyer at Loyola?

[00:05:15.00] Lolis Elie: I, I graduated from Loyola's law school in 1959, but I again, as I said earlier before we started recording, I earned my ... second year, my tuition for the second year of law school at Loyola, you know, shining shoes and waiting on tables and the rest of that.

[00:05:37.28] Jack Davis: And then the training, what did the, the law training do for you as you— were you better trained as a lawyer than for these other activities when you got into the 1960s and, and were playing a role in the civil rights movement?

[00:05:52.29] Lolis Elie: Well ... I, first of all, I ... I never dreamed of being some civil rights person, that wasn't ... but I went to law school because I didn't want to spend my life shining shoes. Oh, now, fortunately for me, my first year, two things: my first year in college was at Howard University, and this was in 1953, I was in the army from '51 to '53. This was in 1953, and ... Howard University, I mean that was the hotbed of black intellectuals and for black militancy, and ... the, the, the Thurgood Marshall and that crowd, they would, they would practice the ... Brown v. Education arguments that took— I did not attend that session, but I knew at least one lawyer who did. Oh ... so what I had when I came back to New Orleans, that was because I spent all my money I had saved on the army [laughing] And ... but going from Howard to Dillard was like going from college back to high school. [clears throat] I had six years for me between the time I finished high school and the time I started college, and going to college made no sense to me initially because the best teacher I had in high school, which was at Gilbert Academy, which is where De la Salle is now—

[00:07:32.20] Jack Davis: Right, on St. Charles.

[00:07:34.21] Lolis Elie: —which is one of the crimes that the Catholic Church committed against black people was taking that fucking school.

[00:07:39.27] Jack Davis: Took Gilbert Academy—

[00:07:40.27] Lolis Elie: It took Gilbert and put in De la Salle. And the Jews wouldn't do us that. They were right next door. They'd have never took it in any event, and at the same time that they were

doing that, St. Aug was being constructed on an unpaved street down London Avenue. But in any event ... in order for my grip on the sixties started in the army. When I went into the army, I never dreamed ... I never had dreamed that, that I would become a lawyer. If I had two dollars in my pocket, and you offered me a half million, bet me that I'd become a lawyer, I would've kept my two dollars. But the, being in the army was very important to me. That's where I met Frank D'amico. Frank was the is and was of ... being a very, still a very close friend. Frank is a Loyola law school grad, and Frank and I would go..Italians weren't too ... with that, with those white boys from ... East Texas. So Frank and I used to have coffee together at the PX. And it was Frank who first suggested to me that I become a lawyer. He was always telling me that I was very smart and I should become a lawyer. So I went home one of those nights and wrote my mother a letter and said, "If I get out of this army alive, I'm gonna become a lawyer." [laughs]

[00:09:21.24] Jack Davis: And she said?

[00:09:22.23] Lolis Elie: I'm not, I wrote her a letter, so it wasn't a 'she said'. And ... that was in ... 1951, between '51 and '53 but by '59 I was a full-fledged lawyer.

[00:09:38.03] Jack Davis: Then how did, so ... you were in the thick of most of the activities connected to the civil rights movement in New Orleans in the 1960s.

[00:09:49.20] Lolis Elie: Okay, that's true.

[00:09:51.05] Jack Davis: And then in that, we should talk about that as setting the stage for entering New Orleans in the 1970s.

[00:09:59.00] Lolis Elie: Well—

[00:09:59.13] Jack Davis: Where did the biggest changes take place in that ... from the time you got out of law school into the beginning of the 70s, what were the biggest changes?

[00:10:07.08] Lolis Elie: Well ... I mentioned this man up here, Jack Nelson, and Jack, if you want to find an unsung hero from the white community, it would be Jack Nelson. Jack was, Jack was extremely Catholic and my friends considered him, after we got to know him, a real saint. My mentor was Jack Nelson.

[00:10:35.12] Jack Davis: A lawyer.

[00:10:36.14] Lolis Elie: A lawyer. Very much a lawyer. Jack ... Jack did something that very few white people did of his generation. Jack identified with the civil rights movement. He didn't just, he didn't just represent people. He was identified with the movement, with the movement. And at the beginning of the sit-in demonstrations ... I ended up with my part, by then I was a, I was in the partnership with Bob Collins, who had been one of the first African Americans to finish at Loyola, and Neals Douglas, who was a— Neals and I were the only two African Americans in my class of '59 at Loyola's Law School.

[00:11:26.24] Jack Davis: And Bob Collins was at LSU?

[00:11:29.13] Jack Davis: Bob, Bob Collins was the second African American to finish at LSU. It's a funny story here. He and Dutch Morial started together. Dutch was eager to become the first. Dutch went to summer school ... that's why he became the first black—

[00:11:50.26] Jack Davis: Well he became 'The First' a lot of things.

[00:11:53.19] Lolis Elie: That's very true. I was his lawyer at one of the most crucial times in his life. As a matter of fact, it was this case that put me on the map.

[00:12:03.03] Jack Davis: That was the ... McGrury?

[00:12:05.06] Lolis Elie: Dearly, no. This was ... when Dutch ran, Dutch first ran for the Louisiana State Legislature. Dutch lived in Pontchartrain Park, but this district barely was, had been occupied by

white people all the time. Dearly was his opposition, a white man. When Dutch won in the first primary, Dearly sued him, saying he was not in the district. Well, by then the white folk had decided they were gonna let an African American in the legislature, I mean if you're gonna get one, you know, Dutch certainly had no reputation for militancy at the time now that ...

[00:12:55.10] Jack Davis: What, you remember what year this was exactly?

[00:12:57.14] Lolis Elie: ... shouldn't be hard to come up with that if I think a minute ... This is in the '60s. That's all I can say, early 60s, mid 60s I would guess.

[00:13:10.29] Jack Davis: And how did you win ... the case?

[00:13:15.01] Lolis Elie: Well ... first of all, the, the judge was Judge Oliver Provost Carriere ... and he was, he's a real confederate, but his son Oliver Jr. used to study with me. We used to study together, and that was very beneficial to me, but I will, I always felt that Judge Carriere was a part of a group of people who had decided that it made sense to just let one back in our legislature because there was no ... there was no way ... it had to be a stretch for him to believe my witnesses ... and to believe that Dutch lived in that little funky room up there on ... on Magazine Street, rather than in Pontchartrain Park. So this is how ... so I got a hold ... when I say I, almost every black, half the black lawyers in New Orleans, there are only about ten of us now, were sitting at the conference, including Mr. Tureaud, were sitting at the ta— at the conference table at the, at the bench when, during the middle of argument. So I didn't do this by myself, but I was the league consul.

[00:14:35.08] Jack Davis: So then ... before we get into the 1970s ... were there, what was the major ground setting activity in the 1960s, was it the, was it the civil rights movement and the civil rights act?

[00:14:53.00] Lolis Elie: Okay [clears throat] My, when I first got to be a lawyer, my ... I offered, I opened my own law office immediately and that was because there were no jobs. And I was teaching GIs at the YMCA on Dryades Street. My offices were directly across ... later after I finished law school, directly across the street. The initial boycott selected by the Campaign in New Orleans occurred on Dryades Street, which is now Oretha Castle Haley Boulevard. A group of men, including Reverend Davis and other, other ministers and some other civic leaders, they were meeting across the street at the Y, and this was the 60s. Someone there must've said, "Well, there's a lawyer across the street. Maybe we should get him in here." So I went in there, and that was really my, my beginnings in the civil rights movement because the boycott on Dryades Street was a very important event ... and a lot of things made it ... important. First of all, ninety percent of the business on Dryades Street was coming from African Americans, but they would not hire any African American clerks, and it was precedent for that going back, going up to Harlem in New York. The same thing had happened in New York. So we, we knew that we could, we could beat that, and it turned out that the students from Xavier, Rudy Lombard included, among others, and the ... who's at Xavier, there was a Oretha that saw them and a couple of white people, boys, girls came out there to join in this picketing on Dryades Street.

[00:17:00.22] Jack Davis: And which store do you remember?

[00:17:02.17] Lolis Elie: Coff— [pause] There were two, there were two stores that we're talking about. Coffman was the largest one ... I'll come up with the second. And it was HL Green, they're on McCrory's, that was a national trend, that was the only person, the only white many in the room who spoke with any sense. [laughs] He was the one who was early on sense once we should give them jobs. So that's— and I became the lawyer for that group. That's, that's why I had my first come-uppans.

[00:17:40.21] Jack Davis: And, well then, it was not long after that that you got the McCrory's sit-in case that went to the United States Supreme Court.

[00:17:48.07] Lolis Elie: Correct. Now ... the person —

[00:17:50.14] Jack Davis: Was that a direct linkage from one to the other?

[00:17:54.00] Lolis Elie: Yes, definitely. Because we learned as we went along ... we knew we hadn't learned of the, of the importance of tourism in New Orleans. That is not something we knew at the time, so when we started, that was Oretha, Rudy, Cecil Carter, Leonard Goldfinch, white boy was a part of this ... it's a good story. In any event, they started the sit-in demonstrations on Canal Street and ... and of course they got arrested, and this is where— and I ... by the way I'm out of practice ... I didn't, never imagined I'd be doing this kind of work, but one of my clients who made it to Loyola was Tommy Nelson, who had been in the army, and he got out, he got out of the army in time to register for the second semester ... of '56, of fi- sixty— '56 or '57. And he was Jack Nelson's brother. We were studying ... he started studying with me. We were studying, and Tommy said that, he said he had a brother who had been a dis- assistant district attorney. So we ended up going to Jack's house. He was going to help us, which he did.

[00:19:27.05] Jack Davis: With your studies.

[00:19:28.12] Lolis Elie: With our studies. But right after we got, he got to helping us the first time, he said, "Well, let's go and get a cup of coffee," and I said, "There's no place in New Orleans that we could go get a cup of coffee together." And that's how rigid New Orleans was. So ... but in any event, when Rudy Lombard and Oretha Castle Haley and one other person whose name escapes me came to see me about representing them, and by then I was partners with Bob— Bob Collins and Neals Douglas. But I didn't have the slightest idea about what it meant to represent these crazy people because everybody I had, I had had some criminal experience by then, minor stuff ... but everybody I had represented, they wanted a lawyer to get them out of jail as fast as possible.

[00:20:33.24] Jack Davis: Well they hadn't been arrested for a sit-in at McCrory's, or they were planning?

[00:20:34.27] Lolis Elie: They, they were planning it. Shortly after some of those days they sat in they got arrested [laughs] ... I didn't know, had the vaguest idea about how to represent these kids. I had never represented anybody who didn't want to come out of jail. But then of course some of these kids, their parents wanted them out of jail, these were all college kids. So that's, that really was my entrance into ... the militant civil rights movement, I mean that's the, the selective boycott on Dryades Street was one thing, but when you start talking about going to sit in, and this in that little funky place at [inaudible] and McCrory's, you know, the only thing that made them important was that black people couldn't sit, sit, sit in with them ... that's all poor white people had, damn sure it weren't for the Boston Club. So in any event ... that was the ... that's how ... when we, when we, that night, we were trying to figure our what we're gonna do with Bob Col— with the, the sit-in demonstrators. I recalled that I had met Jack Nelson, so I call Jack, and ask ... after Bob and Neals are not talking, and I told him and he shook his head and said, "Well I don't know." He went and spoke with Father Twomey.

[00:22:06.11] Jack Davis: At Loyola?

[00:22:07.12] Lolis Elie: At Loyola, who persuaded him to be a good thing, and of course Jack became my mentor and my lifelong friend.

[00:22:17.10] Jack Davis: So then by ... I don't wanna rush through the 1960s, but —

[00:22:23.02] Lolis Elie: I will do whatever you say.

[00:22:24.11] Jack Davis: But what ... what, what had ... improved, or what had changed, or what still needed to be fixed by, at the advent of the 1970s in New Orleans? In terms of race relations and civil rights?

[00:22:37.04] Lolis Elie: ... The only place, going back to going get a cup of coffee, the only place that a white person and a black person could've gone together at that time was the Union Passenger terminal ... and that went on, I mean, everything you could think of was, was closed! I mean, there were black and whites fountains in, in, in the federal court! There were black and white toilets in the civil district court. Blacks— in the criminal court, rather. Blacks had to sit on the last two rows, and blacks went up there to that Catholic Church, Holy Name of Jesus, they had to sit in, I never did it, but they had to sit in the last two rows. Down the street at St. Augustine, when they were, now I didn't witness this. I was—

[00:23:28.25] Jack Davis: St. Augustine Church?

[00:23:30.05] Lolis Elie: St. Augustine Church when, when you had Easter Sunday and the church got crowded, blacks had to stand up in the back and let the white folk in, have the seats. And this is what New Orleans was.

[00:23:41.27] Jack Davis: Up through?

[00:23:43.24] Lolis Elie: I, I, I—

[00:23:45.15] Jack Davis: When did that, when did all those things start changing?

[00:23:47.14] Lolis Elie: All of this, they started to change in the 60s.

[00:23:51.17] Jack Davis: In ... now in terms of if you took it as measurement of, if you took a measurement of how many blacks were involved in government or government jobs in the 1960s—

[00:24:04.02] Lolis Elie: There was nothing about the— there, there was a postman, a postal clerk, but nothing else. There was no, there wasn't a single black person working in city hall without a mop and a broom.

[00:24:16.08] Jack Davis: And would you say things that, that the situation changed more rapidly in the 1970s than it had in the 60s?

[00:24:24.25] Lolis Elie: Well, actually, the big changes came in the 60s, started in the 60s, and then the big cha— the big changes in New Orleans. Now bear in mind, we were part of a national movement ... we talked about Dryades Street, which became Oretha Castle Haley, by then we, we had the Congress of Racial Equality, which was a national organization, and we had people from another organization, a few secretaries, working with us. And also then ... we had these militant, really militant young blacks from around the country ... because this goes, this goes right into the Freedom Riders ... and that, that, that was ... I mean, that was really, really the ... I don't, I wanna say the beginning ... and when the sit-ins started it with the, the Freedom Riders, that, that ... was a major, major event.

[00:25:29.16] Jack Davis: By the time we got to the end of the sixties ... what were the main things that you ... if, if you were taking stock in 1969, say, when the mayor's race was taking place ... what needed most urgently to be done ... to fix New Orleans?

[00:25:48.15] Lolis Elie: ... Well ... first of all, most, the most important thing was, was that we had been miseducated to believe that the, this is a system of segregation and there ain't a damn thing you can do about it. The white people had a white citizens council. Any, any elected official had to damn near join the white city council to have any hope of being elected.

[00:26:22.21] Jack Davis: And what caused that to, to change because it did change.

[00:26:26.26] Lolis Elie: Well ...

[00:26:28.07] Jack Davis: Eventually.

[00:26:29.26] Lolis Elie: My impression that the real change can, you had, you know, you had some de— some minor desegregation by then, but ... the African American people were changing. And they were, they were, there were some ... enlightened white people who, who recognized the fact that we're gonna have to, have to give something up or we're gonna have some real problems. That was especially true on Canal Street because of the effect in tourism. And people, those picket signs we had out on Dry— on Canal Street ... the people would not, white people wouldn't go in because they feared there'd be trouble out there. So it wasn't so much that they supported what we were doing; it's just that they just feared trouble.

[00:27:23.28] Jack Davis: Was the ... election for mayor in 1969-1970, was that a watershed?

[00:27:31.04] Lolis Elie: This is Moon Landrieu?

[00:27:32.22] Jack Davis: That was when Moon Landrieu was elected.

[00:27:34.15] Lolis Elie: Oh, that was a, that was a, that was a watershed ... to the nth degree. Parts of the time that Moon ran ... the, the black political organizations, they— Hyde was the sheriff. They were, they were bargaining for was to get two deputy sheriffs, okay? [laughing]

[00:28:02.29] Jack Davis: That was their intention.

[00:28:04.18] Lolis Elie: That's the best, they were just hoping to get some power. This is, was considered power at the time. And by then ... you know, they, you had a couple of blacks in the police department, but they couldn't arrest white people ... so he, you know, the spark has been lit ... but now when Moon comes along, I mean, every, Chep Morrison was considered in light, and I mean, his biggest reputation was that he had never said, "nigger," in his life. That was a word he had never used.

[00:28:40.27] Jack Davis: I guess that was something at one time.

[00:28:43.06] Lolis Elie: Well, in any event ... well—

[00:28:46.16] Jack Davis: What kept Chep Morrison from, from ... pushing racial equality?

[00:28:52.15] Lolis Elie: Oh, that, that wasn't even a word in Chep Morrison's vocabulary, racial equality. [pause] He was the, bear in mind, Chep defeated Maestri, the, the whole Reg List, the old Long organization ... and, for whatever reason, I get Chep again, he didn't talk about the Niggers, unlike his predecessors ... So he was considered to be enlightened. Now when Moon comes— along, I mean, Schiro was the ... it's sad to say, but, well I'll come back to him later, but [laughs] Now when Moon Landrieu comes on the scene, Moon has ... agreed that he's gonna put two black people at the head of the department in city hall, which he did ... And Moon, Moon delivered a lot more than he had promised.

[00:30:00.25] Jack Davis: As measured by what?

[00:30:03.04] Lolis Elie: Well, he— he ...

[00:30:06.16] Jack Davis: With jobs, or—?

[00:30:07.18] Lolis Elie: Not just jobs, but turns to when became the chief administrative office under Moon, and when Moon became chairman of HUD, he took turns on as his deputy.

[00:30:21.11] Jack Davis: Why did Moon do it and ... Morrison and Schiro didn't?

[00:30:27.16] Lolis Elie: [pause]

[00:30:28.06] Jack Davis: What made it possible, was it the person or was it the circumstance?

[00:30:31.12] Lolis Elie: I think both. I think both. I mean, Moon did not come up ... now Moon will tell you today that he was a recovering racist, there's no, the damn few people who aren't crazy who were not racist in New Orleans. But Moon did not come up and erase his household and Moon came up ...

in the community where blacks and whites live next door to each other, and ... when Moon came up at least as poor as I was ... and, and Moon's religion played a role in this. In the fact that he was Catholic, he saw, he saw things that he considered to be not fair.

[00:31:14.12] Jack Davis: And ... was he, did he want to undo the fairness, unfairness?

[00:31:20.02] Lolis Elie: I remember the day I met Moon, long before this. The two people I met, the two white boys I met were both at Dillard. Moon was in the legislature, Jimmy Davis was the governor, this was before Moon ran for the— for mayor.

[00:31:36.25] Jack Davis: This was the early 1960s?

[00:31:38.21] Lolis Elie: Right. Moon and, and Michael [Keefe?] I became Mike's lawyer at the ... [laughing] Moon and Michael came to Dillard to talk, and ... McCart— the, you know, the, the ... anti-communism was the biggest thing then. And Moon took the soft side. Moon said, "Look. If you have to discuss communism or whatever, do it, but I can't protect you" and that was unlike what, what Mike was suggesting, doing the thing you want and I would be on your side, which was bullshit. But in any event, that was my first, that's the first time I had interacted with Moon and what, what I was impressed with was that he, he's on the legislature and a straight talker. And the race has had, they owned Baton Rouge and ... I mean, this was the days of Jimmy Davis. That was my first introduction to Moon, which was long before ... I was still a student at Dillard at that point. That was like my second or third year in college.

[00:32:45.29] Jack Davis: In the, in the mayor's race in 1969 ... I believe, you told me earlier that you were friends with ... Billy Guste, who was running for, for mayor.

[00:32:57.09] Lolis Elie: I—

[00:32:58.24] Jack Davis: But you ended up supporting ... Moon.

[00:33:00.08] Lolis Elie: Moon. And I, I remember to this day the way that came about. Billy Guste was not considered a racist. Billy Guste, so I had pretty much signed on with Billy Guste and it, we were going to a meeting at the labor union hall, and Billy Guste told me ... something that, having to do with, had to be something like, "Well, Lolis, I want you to know I'm running for office. I'm not running for civil rights, et cetera." And my reaction to myself was, I know the difference. When I walked out of that me— at the end of that meeting, I was in Moon Landrieu's camp. Oh, Moon Landrieu ... did something very smug. Moon came and got me and he took me [laughs] to the neighborhood he, on Adams Street, it was red, and red and the way he was living ...

[00:33:55.18] Jack Davis: That neighborhood where he grew up, on Adams Street?

[00:33:57.06] Lolis Elie: Right, on Adams Street. And Moon said that, and then he took me to Rosa Parks, which was where Billy Guste was from and Moon said, "Now which one of these white men do you think [laughs] would be the most beneficial?" And that's, that's the way Moon and I started our relationship.

[00:34:16.04] Jack Davis: And did you start supporting at that—?

[00:34:18.00] Lolis Elie: A hundred percent. Oh, I was, I was ... I was very, very much into supporting Moon.

[00:34:26.19] Jack Davis: So we had eight years of ... Moon Landrieu as mayor?

[00:34:30.06] Lolis Elie: Right.

[00:34:30.27] Jack Davis: What in terms of the things we've been talking about ... social justice and race relations, what, what did, what was accomplished in that eight-year period?

[00:34:41.05] Lolis Elie: Well at— at many levels, relationships among blacks, well you got the voting rights act, and this, this tampered down on a whole lot of racism, and when these white politicians

knew they had to get black votes ... so the, now I still believe that the most important right we gained during the Civil Rights Movement was the Voter Rights Act and that's why it disturbs me to no end that these fucking people are going back, dealing with that, and it ain't coming from the south. I mean it started out in Pennsylvania. Bonus oppression, and that, that's a serious stretch.

[00:35:29.26] Jack Davis: And ... as more African Americans got registered to vote, the traditional organizations in New Orleans like the VRBO and the CCDA lost their clout to— to other organizations or to—

[00:35:46.04] Lolis Elie: No, they, they [pause] They, well, they didn't, they didn't lose their clout— clout completely ... that man I mentioned earlier, Ernest Wright. Ernest Wright was never with Chep Morrison; he was with ... Earl Long. We're going back probably to Huey Long. So Ernest Wright— Ernest Wright identified with the ordeal as opposed to Chep Morrison CCDA. And of course the difference was ... that the, the racist language that, that was being used was never part of Chep Morrison. He was racist as any of the rest of them, but Earl Long was, you know, his attitude was, you know, he was ... he was willing to give you Lincoln Beach, but he wasn't gonna support anything that gave me the right to go to Pontchartrain Beach.

[00:36:46.25] Jack Davis: Now, do you think in, in, by the time Moon Landrieu was running for mayor in 1969-1970 that—

[00:36:53.22] Lolis Elie: Jimmy Fitzmorris was, was in that race.

[00:36:56.21] Jack Davis: Yes, yes. And ... was he, was, was the motivation for him to be more inclusive and open to, to African Americans, was that because of, he thought it was the right thing to do or just because he realized that there was going to be an increasing number of African American voters?

[00:37:18.07] Lolis Elie: I think some of both. I think he was very comfortable and very happy with the fact that things were getting to be looser and people were becoming more enlightened. But he was, you know, he's a politician, he, he didn't know of the fact that if he played the game differently, he could get elected and up to and including all of those Landrieu's in— are really indebted to him for what he did then.

[00:37:46.09] Jack Davis: What you th— [pause] in terms of ... the city's ... healthy growth in the 1970s, what, what were the accomplishments of the Landrieu administration?

[00:38:00.28] Lolis Elie: Oh, just ... you could ... breathe fresh air, I guess ... but by now, we've talked about, I had talked earlier about blacks having to stand up when [pause] only went to Holy Name of Jesus Church and places like that and all of the, some of the most worst parts of it ... A lot of these "colored only" signs were coming down ... so Moon is coming in at a time that blacks are becoming more and more militant and more and more blacks are getting registered to vote. And more and more blacks are, you know, willing to fight for some power. That was Moon, those two things came at the same time.

[00:38:53.00] Jack Davis: If it had been Jimmy Fitzmorris in 1970 as mayor, what do you think would've happened?

[00:39:00.04] Lolis Elie: Well, that's a good question and there's a good answer to it. Jimmy Fitzmorris ran against Vic Ski- Schiro, doing Schiro's— Schiro— Schiro's running for the second time ... because Chep Mo— Chep Morrison had become the American am— ambassador to the organization ...

[00:39:17.22] Jack Davis: In 1965 the organization of American states?

[00:39:30.02] Lolis Elie: Right. And that's, and the city council had appointed Schiro. Moon was not in that fight. Fitzmorris was running against Schiro. And we were all, all of our people were in favor of Schiro, including me and many of us were for Schiro ... were with Jimmy Fitzmorris. We all opposed Schiro because he was as old regular as old regular could be.

[00:40:02.02] Jack Davis: You, you were all for, for-?

[00:40:04.25] Lolis Elie: We were all for Fitzmorris against Schiro.

[00:40:06.22] Jack Davis: Yeah. Right. Then this is the 1965 election?

[00:40:11.16] Lolis Elie: You pick it, that's ... it was ... it was Schiro running for the second time. They, Moon and ... Michael Keefe, among others, had a meeting at the Howard Jones on Loyola Avenue with blacks and white political people. Jimmy Fitzmorris took direct questions, what will he do different? What would he do in race relations? And his answer was that he thought we had wonderful race relationships in New Orleans and he would do exactly what had been done in the past. So then ... everyone lost their breath. So then, they called a little recess in the meeting and Jimmy Fitzmorris comes back in the room and the same question is put to him and it's the same answer [laughing]. And at that point many of us, including me, said, "Well, we'll be better off with Schiro for one more time than we would be with Jimmy Fitzmorris." So Jimmy Fitzmorris lost it all with black people at that point.

[00:41:27.04] Jack Davis: Do you think he would be— would he have been capable of governing ... a city that was largely African American if he'd been elected in 1970?

[00:41:36.06] Lolis Elie: Well Moon had a lot more education than Jimmy Fitzmorris. I mean, Jimmy Fitzmorris had nothing going for him other than he was a bullshit artist. He did— he wasn't as educated as Moon, he didn't have the heart that Moon had, he was not as intelligent as Moon by far.

[00:41:55.10] Jack Davis: Let me shift a little bit. One of the things that, besides the Landrieu administration, that took us to the 1970s, was the rediscovery that New Orleans had a culture that ... that other people were interested in, and we were people who lived here were interested in ... I'm talking about the food, the music, architecture, all of which are largely African American in influence and origin.

[00:42:20.27] Lolis Elie: Yeah.

[00:42:22.01] Jack Davis: Is that a way of fighting back against the, the ... segregation?

[00:42:26.26] Lolis Elie: You mean with the white people who recognize that?

[00:42:29.09] Jack Davis: Well, with the fact that people in New Orleans recognized it too, that we—

[00:42:31.19] Lolis Elie: Well, but the people in New Orleans ... we did not have or didn't not have, a really serious educated class of white people who were socially conscious or cultured. I mean, you just look out there in Mardi Gras and ... how do you find culture there? Putting on some bunch of fucking floats, but you could do that in New York. They had no regard for the music.

[00:42:58.03] Jack Davis: You didn't have too many people like Thomas Sancton taking his son to ... to listen to ... to jazz musicians—

[00:43:06.28] Lolis Elie: ... Who was that? [laughs]

[00:43:09.02] Jack Davis: Thomas Sancton was the, the, the ... a novelist ...

[00:43:12.18] Lolis Elie: Oh, I didn't know that. No, the biggest people, the people who came here to promote black culture and to save the French Quarter were mostly Jews, people like Larry Bernstein. And that, but, Preservation Hall and that stuff. And the, the whole idea of the Jazz and Heritage Festival did not come from local white people; it came from George Wein. So we had, I mean ... we

had the white people here, but the only culture they knew was Mardi Gras. [pause] They were not people who had any serious, who had any ... they didn't recognize what jazz music meant.

[00:43:55.00] Jack Davis: Would you agree with me that jazz music in the 1970s got a lot more attention than it had, whether it was from outside or locals?

[00:44:05.21] Lolis Elie: Oh, that's very true. And, you know, like ... n-n-New Orleans had not recognized the genius of Louis Armstrong, I mean, he was just a ... a clown up there. So they didn't, black people, white people did not, not know the black understanding of the cultural significance of the music. Oh and that, that has changed radically.

[00:44:30.23] Jack Davis: And what's, and so ... the bene— is there ... what were the benefits of discovering a different attitude about the music?

[00:44:40.09] Lolis Elie: Oh, people become more, people become more, become cultured and more enlightened and it was, you know, the ... New Orleans and the f— the food and the music. And white people have always danced to black music and if you went back on the plantations during slavery, whenever there was a need for enter— for entertainment, there was some black culture or something. That's what they had. That's, you had the— that's how they survived.

[00:45:11.15] Jack Davis: Was the rediscovery of the music [pause] if we, if I can put it that way, was that dependent on the civil rights movement opening people's eyes?

[00:45:21.27] Lolis Elie: Yeah, those two things were happening at the same time ... and you had here, with the music, there was a— on WWL there was a program called Moon Glow with Martin. And all of the progressive, much of the progressive music was being played on that station at night. On WWL, so that was the only, there was that.

[00:45:47.07] Jack Davis: Was that New Orleans music, or is that—

[00:45:49.17] Lolis Elie: Oh no, that was na— that was national, that was national, that was national ... the only thing you had here with New Orleans music on the radio was WBLK that had jazz at five, five, like the half an hour of serious jazz music.

[00:46:07.13] Jack Davis: So what, what caused the jazz festival to take off from its first appearance in 1970 to, to being as big as it got in the 1970s?

[00:46:18.16] Lolis Elie: ... The name there, it's gonna be George Wein, who I'm proud to say is a friend of mine. That, that's who that was, I mean, that local ... and I got this directly from George Wein, one of the major people who helped with the jazz fest was when the Times-Picayune endorsed it. That was major. And that, that was, that was, what George Wein took, and that was the biggest contribution, that the Times—

[00:46:46.06] Jack Davis: Boost, boosted the audience?

[00:46:47.18] Lolis Elie: Well, mostly dark and they legitimized that, you know ... just let people know, he, he, you know, he had done the Newport Jazz Festival before he came here. And he was, and he was a jazz musician, George Wein was. So you have, yeah, all of those things were coming together.

[00:47:08.29] Jack Davis: And, we, New Orleans discovered that it had all these different strings of music—

[00:47:15.09] Lolis Elie: And food.

[00:47:15.28] Jack Davis: And any of which ... justified a separate stage of the many stages at the Jazz Fest?

[00:47:21.27] Lolis Elie: Oh right, absolutely, I mean, the Jazz Fest, in terms of cultural events that bring money to New Orleans, the Jazz Fest does almost as well as Mardi Gras.

[00:47:31.28] Jack Davis: And, and simultaneous with that, New Orleans was ... becoming much more food-conscious than it had, it always had the food, but it had, it was now ... talking about it more overtly. Was that a function of ... the civil rights movement or was that a function of the same—

[00:47:53.24] Lolis Elie: I ... this is when I paid some attention to them. It should start with the, with the ... this cookbook, the Times-Picayune cookbook. What I said—

[00:48:07.12] Jack Davis: The, the classic, going back to the early twenties—

[00:48:10.01] Lolis Elie: We have, we have to learn ... these old black cook, people are dying out, we have to learn how to do this. You had no ... when my friend Rudy Lombard wrote his cookbook, it was all, there was no such thing as a white, they had a few white chefs in New Orleans. My other friend Billy Guste told me this. When ... they ... Antoine's Restaurant paid their cooks one dollar above minimum wage.

[00:48:41.09] Jack Davis: And they were called cooks?

[00:48:42.09] Lolis Elie: Cooks, oh yeah, the term chef came with the white folk. And Rudy's cookbook, when Rudy wrote his cookbook, they were— no one couldn't have them a half dozen white chefs in New Orleans.

[00:48:53.18] Jack Davis: And his cookbook was in ... *Creole Feast*—

[00:48:57.01] Lolis Elie: *Creole Feast*.

[00:48:57.26] Jack Davis: —was in the mid-1970s, I believe.

[00:49:01.01] Lolis Elie: I think you're right. I have it back there, I could get that.

[00:49:04.17] Jack Davis: But it was, they were, the food in New Orleans was being prepared by people who were following the traditional African American Creole rec— recipes for the most part—

[00:49:17.17] Lolis Elie: Absolutely.

[00:49:18.18] Jack Davis: And they, and, which had been codified in the Times-Picayune cookbook

[00:49:22.22] Lolis Elie: Well, that, that, that's an important book. I mean, there's more honesty in that book than you'll find in many aspects of New Orleans culture.

[00:49:32.15] Jack Davis: In giving credit to the sources, you mean?

[00:49:36.06] Lolis Elie: Right.

[00:49:36.18] Jack Davis: And capturing the culture that, that produced it. But why that then all the chefs that came up, it seemed, there were a lot of ... white writers and, and chefs in the 1970s who seemed to jump on the wave of New Orleans food and take full advantage of it.

[00:49:58.04] Lolis Elie: That's very true. That is, what you say it is absolutely true. I mean, you know, you had ... I mentioned Billy Guste earlier, his, his grandmother started Antoine's, she, she was cooking and bringing food out to the ... boats, to the ships ... so this, this was, you know, gradual. And New Orleans, you know, again, we, we have ... we have not had, for the most part, an enlightened ruling class.

[00:50:36.01] Jack Davis: Well how does that apply to food then?

[00:50:38.26] Lolis Elie: Why, on every level. I mean if, if I'm right that two of the biggest things in this city is the food and the music. So being enlightened on that, I mean, we gave up ... the port of New Orleans ... you know, he, he was too. I have an article I'll share, I'll share with you ...

[00:51:01.25] Jack Davis: So the port declined ...

[00:51:03.21] Lolis Elie: Right.

[00:51:04.26] Jack Davis: ... what we're left with, and the oil industry eventually went away in the 1980s. And, but we're still, we're still pretty strong on the food and music, you would say?

[00:51:14.16] Lolis Elie: Oh, we're strong, we're stronger now than ever before.

[00:51:17.03] Jack Davis: And it that be— is that be— you think the seventies started that ... I kind of surge that caused the food to be as, as, as visible and ... a central portion of our life as it is now, the same with the music?

[00:51:35.13] Lolis Elie: Oh, now I'm speculating, I would, I would say yes but at the same time, you found a lot of other people moving to New Orleans from other places, both white and black. And most of these white people coming here, I mean they recognize the value of the food and the culture much more than the natives.

[00:51:55.00] Jack Davis: And they adopted it.

[00:51:57.07] Lolis Elie: Right.

[00:51:58.06] Jack Davis: They, they ... took up the New Orleans cultural traditions and preserved them.

[00:52:02.25] Lolis Elie: Right ... Well, they promoted them and recognized the value of them, and saw the money that could be made from them.

[00:52:12.07] Jack Davis: Yeah. I remember Richard Collin writing about—

[00:52:15.06] Lolis Elie: Oh, I have his book over there.

[00:52:17.08] Jack Davis: —writing the, the Underground Gourmet—

[00:52:18.12] Lolis Elie: The underground gourmet, right.

[00:52:20.01] Jack Davis: And, and it was the ... the first ... really comprehensive journalism about restaurants and food, and that started in the early 1970s.

[00:52:30.25] Lolis Elie: Right, that was a very important book. By the way [laughing], it had, it destroyed an important black restaurant. It had like, Chez Helene— Austin Leslie is a wonderful human being, he's no longer with us, but—

[00:52:47.24] Jack Davis: But he was the cook—

[00:52:49.05] Lolis Elie: Well, he owned the restaurant, but he thought, rather than stick with the ... the New Orleans food that, that the black community need, thought he could do what Antoine's was doing, which ... so he's just ... he couldn't compete with the French Quarter restaurants by any stretch.

[00:53:09.14] Jack Davis: You certainly got a lot attention from those local and national food writers.

[00:53:14.19] Lolis Elie: Right, well, they got that, that was a— there was a, a television ... program that started and ran a long time [pause] what was it called?

[00:53:29.04] Jack Davis: Was that Mrs. Richard?

[00:53:31.13] Lolis Elie: No, Lena Richards, no, that's a, that's another important—

[00:53:35.04] Justin Nystrom: Frank's Place.

[00:53:35.19] Jack Davis: Oh, okay.

[00:53:36.20] Lolis Elie: That's Frank's Place. Right, right, right. Well that was based on Chez, Chez Helene.

[00:53:44.00] Jack Davis: The ... have we kept, if we hadn't started paying attention to the food and the music of the 1970s, would we be as far along with it as we are now?

[00:53:57.05] Lolis Elie: No, I don't think so. I mean, that, that's almost an impossible question to answer.

[00:54:01.19] Jack Davis: Yeah.

[00:54:02.28] Lolis Elie: But ... I know, I think ... I think once, I think now ... you can go, there's not many places in America where you can go hear music in as many venues any night of the week as you can in New Orleans. Now that's a very and— the restaurants here ... get, tend to get better and better.

Unfortunately, they, they're dropping some of the best kind of food they were making, but, but these restaurants in New Orleans—

[00:54:36.19] Jack Davis: The ... what about the consciousness of the urban landscape as something that's valuable in New Orleans? I mean, the ... the preservation movement, with the preservation of neighborhoods and architecture, kicked into high gear in the 1970s after preservation had touched only the French Quarter in, in terms of official regulations up until that point.

[00:55:05.28] Lolis Elie: Yeah, there's a, there's a book you'll enjoy if you haven't read it called Lost New Orleans. I mean you had, you had the houses in, in this, in Tremé. There was ... mansions and down St. Charles Avenue. New Orleans people here, even my, my friend Moon was perfectly prepared to run the I-10 through the French Quarter. So you know, we had, we had no, we were not, we never have had an enlightened ruling class. The Boston Club didn't give a shit about culture.

[00:55:41.24] Jack Davis: Tell me about interstate 10 as— interstate 10 comes down Claiborne Avenue and then ... changes a Boulevard, Oakline Boulevard, into an elevated expressway.

[00:55:55.11] Lolis Elie: Which is criminal. Which is—

[00:55:57.10] Jack Davis: How did, how did ... coul— would that have happened ten years later? This, this was the mid nine—

[00:56:03.17] Lolis Elie: Oh no, oh no, I don't think it would've happened. I mean, you had more, you had more oak trees and on, and on that curb here in New Orleans than any, than between here and Oakland, California. I mean, that was as ... no enlightened people would've done that. And of course nobody in the black community, which is where all the black businesses were, no one stood up against that.

[00:56:32.03] Jack Davis: All the black businesses on Claiborne Avenue mounted no protest?

[00:56:33.04] Lolis Elie: Right. No protest whatso—

[00:56:36.03] Jack Davis: In the late 1960s?

[00:56:36.29] Lolis Elie: Right, and Chep Morrison as the mayor.

[00:56:39.24] Jack Davis: And, and the trees came down under Victor Schiro.

[00:56:44.01] Lolis Elie: [pause] Right.

[00:56:45.28] Jack Davis: [pause]

[00:56:46.21] Lolis Elie: ... and I-10 came—

[00:56:48.10] Jack Davis: And it, and it severed Tremé from itself?

[00:56:51.17] Lolis Elie: Right.

[00:56:52.19] Jack Davis: We're actually only what, five blocks now from, from the elevated into Interstate 10—

[00:56:56.29] Lolis Elie: Right. Exactly.

[00:56:59.09] Jack Davis: So despite the harm ... did, is, is— was the ... consciousness of architectural and neighborhood value in the 1970s, did that help Tremé or was Tremé just going to get picked on by all these other sources? I mean, the building of Armstrong Park—

[00:57:18.16] Lolis Elie: Well ... well ... what, what you also had, and I'm looking at it from the ... black perspective ... black people were rushing out to New Orleans east, okay. I mean, the blacks had started making a little money, they were better than these, going to the east. [pause] Most of the people who live in Tremé now are white, and for damn sure the people who were buying up Tremé were white people. That's just, I mean [laughs], there are hardly, there are hardly two black people on this block, who live on this side and one on the other side. And this block here, the Bonhams, when I moved around here twenty-five years ago, those were slums, literally. And except for Bonham ... who

owns a lot of property around here, most of this, most of this, most of the people buying property in Tre— Tremé now are white people, and that's been true for a long time.

[00:58:26.02] Jack Davis: And ... the— in the 1970s was Tremé as ... well-regarded as it is now, as a place of his- history and ... texture?

[00:58:42.09] Lolis Elie: I don't think so. I'm trying not to, to, put—

[00:58:47.10] Jack Davis: We were just in the 1970s; New Orleans was discovering all kinds of neighborhoods, from Marigny downtown to the Lower Garden District and beyond Uptown. Did Tremé get left out of that?

[00:58:58.00] Lolis Elie: Yeah, well anything, any, yeah, Tremé was not ... you did not— even during Moon Landrieu's term, Tremé was just destined to become a slum community, like the— a more painful part of, on this subject would be the Seventh Ward, which was where the Creoles were. And not all, but many. And these were the carpenters who built those mansions on St. Charles Avenue. Take a look at what they were building for themselves. And again, you know, and some of this— we talked about slavery earlier, but well ... we were not that far away from slavery. And that is, and that continues to haunt us.

[00:59:48.04] Jack Davis: Can I ask you another urban landscape issue?

[00:59:51.15] Lolis Elie: You can ask me anything [laughing]

[00:59:52.11] Jack Davis: Armstrong Park affects Tremé.

[00:59:54.14] Lolis Elie: Right.

[00:59:55.03] Jack Davis: It was intended, it was ... intended I think by the Landrieu administration to make up for the damage that had been inflicted, inflicted by the demolitions that had occurred ... under the Schiro administration for the most part for the cultural center that never happened. But do you think that was a sensible plan, a good plan?

[01:00:16.04] Lolis Elie: It was not good and it wasn't sensible. And if you talk to Moon, not bad, now as much as I respect Moon and I respect him to the highest, but I mean, Moon, Moon was not culturally educated by a stretch [laughing], and Moon got two people. And Armstrong Park is a crime. That fucking fence in all around Armstrong Park, that's there to keep the little Louis Armstrongs out. But if you take a look at Lost New Orleans, you'd be amazed at the property that was destroyed there. I mean, I'm glad to have an—

[01:00:53.20] Jack Davis: But, but by the previous administrations ... would you're—

[01:00:58.10] Lolis Elie: What?

[01:00:58.26] Jack Davis: The demolitions took place before—

[01:01:00.21] Lolis Elie: ... Much of it came during Moon. I think Louis Armstrong, Armstrong Park came during, during Moon. And he had gotten, who was it? Who was, he was the editor of the Times-Picayune and Dutch Morial, he got to advise him.

[01:01:15.18] Jack Davis: Charlie Ferguson?

[01:01:16.11] Lolis Elie: Charlie Ferguson.

[01:01:17.05] Jack Davis: Then the state signed on?

[01:01:18.19] Lolis Elie: Right, well that, that's— So Moon together, Moon certainly wasn't ... knew nothing a, about jazz other than proper—

[01:01:29.02] Jack Davis: You think, but, it, you know, you said that ... that in the previous decade New Orleans ... ruling class treated Louis Armstrong like a clown, right?

[01:01:37.27] Lolis Elie: Right.

[01:01:38.23] Jack Davis: And here we, we're now, at least had the impulse to dedicate a memorial to him and it turned out to be a park.

[01:01:47.07] Lolis Elie: It's the same thing with, as with Mahalia Jackson. I mean, but this, but he had made a ... an international reputation by the time Armstrong Park came around. And now the music is being imitated all over the world. And you got these young people who ... the Marsalis's are the best. And the people who realize NOCCA, which is where both of my kids went, you'll get into any, had it Ben Franklin when I was, it was only a public school in New Orleans, we're talking about. New Orleans and, and, I mean, Ben Franklin and NOCCA—

[01:02:29.18] Jack Davis: The New Orleans Center for the Creative Arts.

[01:02:31.21] Lolis Elie: Oh yeah. and ... both of my kids went there. [laughing] And—

[01:02:36.21] Jack Davis: But on ... the question I'm not getting out very well about Armstrong Park is that, generally speaking ... Landrieu era was helpful to— to, to the quality of life in many New Orleans neighborhoods—

[01:02:54.21] Lolis Elie: Yeah, but—

[01:02:55.21] Jack Davis: —But Armstrong Park was not helpful to Tremé.

[01:02:58.04] Lolis Elie: Oh, Armstrong Park is, is not a part of Tremé. They put that fucking fence up there to keep the, the, the residents out of the park. I mean, you don't ... I used to, when I rode my bicycle, I'd ride my bicycle and be in Armstrong Park and some security person would tell me I couldn't ride my bicycle in there. I could ride it in Audubon Park.

[01:03:21.00] Jack Davis: Now, you mentioned Dutch Morial as being one of the people advising on Armstrong Park.

[01:03:26.16] Lolis Elie: Right, and that's history ... Dutch Morial then Charlie Ferguson.

[01:03:30.05] Jack Davis: Tell me, tell me ... we're gonna talk about Dutch Morial as mayor, but we, we couldn't leave the 1970s without talking about the beginning of the Morial administration ... Do you think it accomplished ... significant things on top of what had been built up in the sixties and seventies?

[01:03:50.20] Lolis Elie: No, I don't. And ... I think that ... I think that— I, I'm reminded in fact that at a point I was Dutch's lawyer.

[01:04:03.21] Jack Davis: Right.

[01:04:04.25] Lolis Elie: I think Dutch did very, did some, some decent things, but ... I don't think that Dutch was very much into culture. I don't think that Dutch recognizes ... I don't think anyone ever considered Dutch to be a, a jazz fan ... now Dutch did pay attention to food, I'll give him that.

[01:04:29.27] Jack Davis: Did he, what about continuing the ... inclusive moves that the Landrieu administration had been thinking about, including the African American community in political life and government?

[01:04:43.19] Lolis Elie: Oh yeah ... I mean much, much, Moon did, Moon did that, and once, once you get that and we had more and more people you know ... getting to be ... getting to be office-holders and winning the elections. [pause] That, that to me has been the way, what we've gotten out of our, generally out of our American poli— African American politicians here, it's a gross embarrassment to me, I don't find enlightened leadership there at all.

[01:05:18.02] Jack Davis: So you think Moon had the hard part: the breaking down the barriers?

[01:05:23.02] Lolis Elie: I think so. And I, I think that, I think that's a consequence of Moon, I think. I think white people were the white rulers— were expect— they were, they were expecting more militancy from the African American politicians. And that's a sad story. It's a very sad story.

[01:05:45.03] Jack Davis: So I, I keep on wanting to frame this as about the 1970s ... what, what, by the time we got to the end of it, what were the best things, or the best thing that had happened?

[01:05:58.09] Lolis Elie: Well ... it was a desegregated city in many parts, I mean, many of it is as desegregated now as it ever was ... but, but, what you, what you got in it, it was a more open city, much more open. And we were still in many parts very backwards, but— New Orleans is, is no longer the racist— as much of a racist city as it was.

[01:06:29.25] Jack Davis: And has that— have we been able to build on that after, over the last thirty years since the seventies ended ... or are we not making any advances?

[01:06:42.21] Lolis Elie: Well I think, I, I think the fact that we're making some advances ... I think is undeniable. On the other hand: we had such a ... a long, hard way to go given what we had. And we still, we still do not have an enlightened ruling class in this city.

[01:07:04.15] Jack Davis: And what were the worst things that happened in the 1970s? What were, what—

[01:07:09.08] Lolis Elie: The worst things were the police bru— then and now, police brutality. I mean that's, that's rampant. And nothing, an, an awful system of ... public education. I was for a brief while, I was an attorney for the school system, and [laughs] [pause] it's an extremely, extremely sad story. I mean, you had, you know, you go back from, from slavery you would have ... no desire to educate the, a majority of the population. And for many of us, including me, gained a lot as the consequences of the Civil Rights Movement, but for many, if not most African Americans, the Civil Rights Movement didn't touch them. Mainly they're as if you go to Galatoire's at four o'clock on a Friday, you're gonna see a bunch of black people in there. [shrugs]

[01:08:10.13] Jack Davis: And the, so, it, by the end of the seventies, we really hadn't made any gains in the, in the educational system or the police brutality system.

[01:08:21.25] Lolis Elie: We're saying nothing in police brutality, but ... you know, the gains, the gains for the few ... I, I think— I'm being a little moropic but my [laughs], you know, I look at some of it and think of my children, both of whom got a superior education in New Orleans, you know, but that is, that is not true for the most, most black people, and the public, the public schools here are still awful. I mean, there is a, I think it was Mitch Landrieu who said, you know, "Kids will have to be kids, kill the John McDonough ... [in Vietnam?]."

[01:09:15.11] Jack Davis: Well, we, we said we'd confine this to ... an hour if we could, and there are plenty of things we could talk about, but ... I re, I wanna thank you for ... for doing, doing this and, and it's been— a really—

[01:09:28.24] Lolis Elie: Well, as you know I've always respected you and that's why I'm, when, so we're talking earlier. I enjoy reading history and things like that and I just feel that ... And so far as I can add to this and someone some years back take a look at this and tell them where we are.

[01:09:50.05] Jack Davis: Well I think this is really helpful in this ... will, will fit really nicely into the project. Justin, did you have anything else that you want, you wanted—

[01:09:56.20] Justin Nystrom: I, I, can, can, can I just ask—

[01:09:58.22] Jack Davis: Please!

[01:09:59.05] Justin Nystrom: —If I can sit I'll, I'll be able to hear, so I can ... not to pro- prolong the ... the— but, but ... I wanted to ask you ... did you and Rudy Lombard discuss when we decided to write that book *Creole Feast*?

[01:10:21.18] Lolis Elie: Did we discuss it?

[01:10:23.27] Justin Nystrom: Yeah.

[01:10:24.17] Lolis Elie: Oh yeah, my secretary in my office typed it. Yeah, Rudy and I— a hundred percent— it was all Rudy's idea, and Rudy had, went to Mr. Burton, who's ... generally believed to be the best chef we ever had. But Rudy, it was Rudy's idea. And the way it started ... every time Rudy, Rudy and I would go in all these fancy restaurants, and every time he would say the same thing. He would say, "Lolis, I bet there are black people in that kitchen." And that was always the case. And that's where Rudy developed his idea about the Creole, for the *Creole Feast*. And he got a whole lot of, I mean, and Rudy had, had ... and he did this for when we're out. He had a ... a *Creole feast* and he would invite all his chefs ... and that, that caught on for a while. And then Rudy moved to California.

[01:11:26.18] Justin Nystrom: Did, did you know most of these chefs, or—

[01:11:30.06] Lolis Elie: Oh, absolutely.

[01:11:31.22] Justin Nystrom: What can you tell me about Henry Carr?

[01:11:34.14] Lolis Elie: I'd have to get, he was at that place on Napoleon Avenue, what is that Italian restaurant on Napoleon Avenue?

[01:11:41.27] Justin Nystrom: Man— *Pascal's. Manale's.*

[01:11:42.27] Lolis Elie: Manale's. I think that's where Henry Carr was.

[01:11:45.14] Justin Nystrom: Probably so, yeah. I understand Nathaniel Burton was quite an individual.

[01:11:51.17] Lolis Elie: Never, I ... that man ... did more with food in terms of just sitting around having a meal than anyone else I've ever known. And he was, he was the "it" or "it" ... He was, he was, he was a super, super, super chef.

[01:12:12.16] Jack Davis: Can I ask you another question?

[01:12:14.05] Justin Nystrom: Yeah.

[01:12:15.14] Jack Davis: Why, then, didn't they get called chefs? How did they manage not to get that designation?

[01:12:19.23] Lolis Elie: Well [pause] I ... get paid a whole lot less to cook than [laughing] ... chef. I mean, that's what it was. I mean, they were not, the people in these restaurants have gone back to Billy Guste and one dollar up above minimum ... wage, wage at *Antoine's*. I mean you start, Southern chefs and they got those big hats on there, and demand, they ... begin to think more of themselves, and as a consequence of that they have to start making some demands.

[01:12:55.11] Jack Davis: Well why was it ... white chefs, a lot of them new to town, who sort of cornered the market in that title? Why couldn't any of the black cooks, who were just as good, leverage themselves into being chefs?

[01:13:09.15] Lolis Elie: ... Well that, that's, that's, that's a good question, but I don't know the answer to it. I mean, they ... had not been able, they had not thought that far. That was just, they hadn't thought that far. They're not that, that wasn't, that wasn't true just with the chef is a good example of it, but the truth is, I mean, you—

[01:13:35.12] Jack Davis: And that's still largely the case.

[01:13:37.11] Lolis Elie: Now you mean chefs, well most of the chefs in New Orleans are white now. And when Rudy wrote his cookbook, he needed a, he'd really go to something to ... and find a, a white chef in New Orleans.

[01:13:51.01] Justin Nystrom: I, I actually made my students read that cookbook, and—

[01:13:56.08] Lolis Elie: *The Creole Feast?*

[01:13:56.24] Justin Nystrom: *The Creole Feast*. And then I, I told them as a research assignment, tell me what happened to these people. And they, they worked very hard and they found little bits and pieces. And that book came out in 1978. What happened to these people?

[01:14:15.24] Lolis Elie: Well, Stanley Jackson ... well, those that are still alive, one guy was a major chef. He decided he wanted to be a policeman. Austin Leslie, Mr. Burton died a long time ago ... most of these people either, either died or left town. I can't think of, about the only person who's ... from those days who's still around is Leah Chase. I can't think of anybody else who's still around.

[01:14:48.20] Justin Nystrom: What were the, what were the, and we know Leah Chase and *Dooky Chase's* was really important during the Civil Rights Movement.

[01:14:55.10] Lolis Elie: True.

[01:14:56.09] Justin Nystrom: Do you remember the first time you walked in the doors there?

[01:14:59.26] Lolis Elie: Oh God, yeah, I was ... I used to go there every day for lunch ... when I was in college. I mean, I could go, I could go in and get lunch at *Dooky Chase*, say, for two dollars, and sit on the, on the campus for a dollar and a half. Hotdog and a Pepsi-Cola. So a group, me and my friends, we went to *Dooky's* on a regular basis. And on a Saturday night, when I was taking my girlfriend out to supper it was always *Dooky Chase*.

[01:15:29.26] Justin Nystrom: Did you ever find yourself in Oretha Castle Haley's mother's kitchen?

[01:15:35.14] Lolis Elie: Oh, absolutely. That was ... I was there, Oretha Castle Haley and I would have lunch ... two or three times every week. Breakfast once or twice a week. And her husband, Richard Haley, was a major mentor of mine. Richard came here to coordinate the Freedom March, which is where he and Oretha met. Yeah, but I was often at, over at this household. Oretha's sister was one of the best barbeque-ers in the town. And Richard cooked ... often. And by the way, Oretha was a hell of a cook. She didn't cook that often [laughing], but she was a hell of a cook.

[01:16:13.00] Justin Nystrom: And her mother worked at the restaurant?

[01:16:15.07] Lolis Elie: Oh, her mother worked at *Dooky Chase* ... till she died. She's a bar-maid at that *Dooky Chase*.

[01:16:23.18] Justin Nystrom: What did the inside of that kitchen look like?

[01:16:27.08] Lolis Elie: Very, too small. Much too small. It's a very, not a ... not enough room in that kitchen for three people.

[01:16:36.08] Justin Nystrom: Did you ever get thrown out because you had been there too late?

[01:16:39.10] Lolis Elie: Oh no, I, I never got thrown out. In fact, I was going there before Leah Chase was there. The old man *Dooky Chase* had been a lottery bender. He, we, we'd be in there till late and he'd say, "Well I'm not locking the doors because I don't want more people to come in. I'm locking it because I don't want you all to go out." That was old man Chase, yeah.

[01:17:03.18] Justin Nystrom: That's great. I, I, I could probably ask another five dozen questions of you, but I, I, I feel like, you know, I feel like I, I guess I'll stop myself right here. I'll make my analogy off the tape.

[01:17:17.14] Lolis Elie: [laughs] All right.

[01:17:18.14] Jack Davis: [laughs] Well, Lolis, thank you very much. It's been very, [very?] helpful.

[01:17:21.19] Justin Nystrom: Thank you very, very much.

[01:17:22.22] Lolis Elie: I hope it's been helpful.