

**Oral History Interview of
Thomas James Patterson**

**Interviewed by: Daniel Sanchez
June 16, 1999
Lubbock, Texas**

**Part of the:
*African American Interview Series***

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Interview Series Background:

The African-American Oral History Collection documents the diverse perspectives of the African-American people of Lubbock and the South Plains. These interviews and accompanying manuscript materials cover a myriad of topics including; early Lubbock, segregation, discrimination, politics, education, music, art, cultural celebrations, the May 11th 1970 tornado, commerce, and sport.

Transcript Overview:

This interview features Thomas James Patterson as he reflects on his time spent in the city council, and the involvement of minority communities in Lubbock and in politics. In this interview, Thomas describes his views on why people aren't as involved in politics, and things that shaped politics in Lubbock.

Length of Interview: 01:06:15

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Keywords

Lubbock, Texas, Politics, City Council

Thomas James Patterson (TJP):

To 9 percent and then Asian, 5-7 percent. You follow me?

Daniel Sanchez (DS):

Um-hm.

TJP:

But he says what's astounding about those numbers is this—that the workforce—the workforce will be less educated. Now, that may not affect me. I'm sixty—I'll be sixty-two in two weeks, on the twenty-ninth of this month. That may not affect me, but it's going to affect the young people coming along. You follow me?

DS:

Um-hm.

TJP:

So something is wrong when your workforce is less educated. With all the sophistication we have these days and we don't have that knowledge to exist. Something wrong, my friend. Something is out of place. You see? We, in my opinion, we need to find a way back to the basics. Back to the basics from which we come from. We have thrown that out the window and you cannot build a house, my friend, without a foundation. So, pardon me?

DS:

Let me ask you about that, going back to the basics. Do you think that with this TAAS [Texas Assessment of Academic Skills] test and the way they're trying to make it even more stricter. You think that's [crosstalk] [0:01:23]?

TJP:

No, no, no. When I said "basics," I'm talking about going back to family.

DS:

Okay.

TJP:

You know, I care less about TAAS test. Although, the system use—they commercialize those things. I'm looking at the basics from a kid, from the house, what a kid is reared.

DS:

Okay.

TJP:

What the kid is taught at home. If the kid is properly taught at home, a TAAS test is a popsicle. You understand what I'm talking about?

DS:

Um-hm.

TJP:

I don't—if something missing in the home when the kid leaves home and goes to school. Something missing there, my friend. I don't know what it is. My aunt had a private school here. It was called Mary and Mac Private School and I watched her and she had some of the toughest little fellows that come there, but she had discipline and those kids learned ABC's. They learned basics. You understand what I'm talking about?

DS:

Um-hm.

TJP:

It wasn't on no computer. It wasn't no—it wasn't on no high tech system. But they didn't memorize them. They recall what they saw. They knew them front and back. They could say them front and back because in their mind, as young as they were, this—that box up here, that medulla oblongata that they had that brain capacity was able to absorb that knowledge, but the kid don't—does not get that encouragement from home, man. When they don't have the encouragement at home and they go to school, everything is garboil. I drive by Project Intercept. Are you familiar with that?

DS:

Yes.

TJP:

These are kids who were allegedly in trouble. I don't like the program. It gets rid of a prison. To me, it gets rid of a prison. That's the family's responsibility, in my opinion. When I watch parents pick up those kids and I was amazed when those kids come to the automobile to go home, parents give them cigarettes, encouraging them. What the hell they've been in? Am I making sense to you?

DS:

Yes, you are.

TJP:

I mean, about family, brother. Discipline at home. If you've got discipline at home, you ain't got to worry about where they go. But the discipline is not at home, my friend. It ain't got anything to do with being poor, rich, black, white, or brown. That's at home. When that is missing. You see, Colin Powell has America's promise. You heard of it? And he has five ingredients that makes a lot of sense. He says that every boy and girl in America, every boy and girl in America, should have a family. If the family's not there, there should be some kind of a mentoring system to look after and guide that child. You know what I'm talking about? And that child next—that child needs to have a safe place to go learn something. When they go to school, they need to feel safe. Man, they're not safe nowhere in America going to school. You know what I'm saying?

DS:

Right.

TJP:

You can't legislate right and wrong, brother. It goes back to the family. Every child in America ought to learn something, something marketable, so when they've left the academic setting, they're able to go out and do something for him or herself. And number four, he said, "Every boy and girl in America should be able to keep this temple that God has given us clean." You know, with no drugs and that kind of mess. That should be clean. And number five, he said that, "Every boy and girl should learn how to give something back to what they have received. Should be able to come back and give it back so that the other boys and girls can follow them." Am I making sense to you?

DS:

Um-hm.

TJP:

So you said "TAAS test." TAAS test is a game, man. It's a game. If you learn the basic stuff here, you don't have to worry about TAAS test. I know educated man would come angry with me. I don't care. I'm looking at what I'm seeing out there. This prison up here in Lamesa, Texas, when it was first developed—when it was first constructed, I think there are about six hundred inmates up there and of that number, forty, forty-five Hispanic and Black. Young punks. Okay. I go back to Lamesa several months ago and that population has risen to thirteen hundred. As of June one, the prediction was to race another six hundred and fifty. Something wrong, Daniel. Something wrong, man. It's back here in the family, man. I don't want to hear that stuff about, "I'm Chicano," "I'm Black." I don't want to hear that mess. We've got children, brother. They get off at what I am. Of course you love your heritage, but when you come to the marketplace, you're like everybody else. Am I making sense to you?

DS:

Yes, you are.

TJP:

And the point, we've let them kids believe that they're better than the other folk. Man, that's wrong. That's wrong. Anyway, I just—it tears me up, man. That's why kids are going to hell in a handbasket because we sitting back here allowing all this because family folk don't say nothing. Folk in the church look the other way when they see wrong, man. You tell a kid what to do, my friend, not always asking them what they want to do. You know? They got certain freedoms.

DS:

Right.

TJP:

They don't own nothing. I tell gang members, "What do y'all own?", "Nothing.", "It's not your turf, brother." We had a march yesterday in the neighborhood. Telling them folk, "No, we sick of wrong, man." But you got to be vertical. You got to stand up.

DS:

Let's talk about those marches that you started as a councilman. In fact, you're still city councilman. What kind of effect—have they—have you noticed any positive impact?

TJP:

We've reached some young children, but what happens is it's we still got that core all over Lubbock. We don't go outside of my district unless we are invited to a district. We think they are effective. I notice in the Cherry Point area addition when we were marching and kids were able to come out and play more. You understand?

DS:

Um-hm.

TJP:

And we not God. We not police. We don't intimidate. We believe in prayer. We believe in prayer changes things, my friend. That's why we in the streets. A lot of folk, "Oh, that don't do any good." Oh, yes. God's prayer always works, my friend. Always works. We were praying last year for rain. Remember? Everybody had all these praying programs going, but God let it rain when he want it to rain. Now, we're saying, "Quit it." Hear what I'm saying now?

DS:

Yeah.

TJP:

So in other words, he's still in control, but some children don't even understand that, man. They don't get the teaching at home. You understand?

DS:

Yeah.

TJP:

We eating chips at home. Not at the table like I came up. Nobody would eat anything until we ate together. Now, "Save mine. I'll get mine later." That's not the way it's meant to be, man.

DS:

Did you notice when the switch was beginning from your time to the way it is now?

TJP:

I'd say a little about [0:09:16] the sixties. I looked at my baby sister. I looked ____ [?] [0:09:23] to her. I didn't know my baby sister because I'm adopted. The oldest kid. And I left home when I was sixteen so I didn't know then. My brother died on crack, man, in California. People—for example, my newspaper, this week's paper, we run drug dealers. When you sell drugs and get busted, we let folks see who you look like. We think you got to do those kind of things, Daniel Sanchez. We think you must do those kind of things. Folks say it's wrong. We invading they're privacy. No, we not. You killing our kids. We say, "You alleged." You should've got busted. We didn't arrest you. It's an equal opportunity—display of photos. You notice that. Don't you?

DS:

So these are just those that have been arrested?

TJP:

Arrested recently.

DS:

Recently. Okay, yeah.

TJP:

You understand? To give an example, last Friday, my partner, Eddy Richardson, was—you can have it if you want it.

DS:

Oh, okay. Thanks.

TJP:

He was coming back to the place and Anglo fellow was in front of the newspaper and Eddy said the fellow looked pretty upset and when Eddy got in the car, it was after five o'clock, Eddy said, "I know what he's going to do to me. I don't have no weapon. Let me see what he wants." So he said, "This the place where y'all run those notorious pictures of people who do drugs?" Eddy said, "Yes." "I'd like to see one of them." So Eddy—they go unlock the door. He go inside the business and he takes out one. He said, "Give me two." And what happened was, he looked, said, "That's my brother there. He was Anglo." He began to cuss. He said, "I told my mother a long time ago what he was doing. We knew he was taking this stuff and now he's selling it." You understand what I'm talking about?

DS:

Um-hm.

TJP:

He never would've known that hadn't we shown that. You understand what I'm talking about?

DS:

Right.

TJP:

We never—the mothers of kids, whose kids play little league ball never would've known the coach was selling drugs if we hadn't of had his picture in the paper.

DS:

Wow.

TJP:

Am I making sense to you?

DS:

Um-hm.

TJP:

So it does some good when you pull the cover off people, my friend, it always does good. When you expose wrong, you do well. You do good, man. You might be by yourself. I was with Jesse Jackson last September in Atlanta. I said, "Jesse." I said, "Look here, brother, we march in Lubbock. Hell, I get tired." He said, "TJ, you got to keep marching. If it's just one of you, two of you, you can't stop." You don't worry about how many. You keep marching, Daniel. You keep moving, brother. And if you keep moving and you believe in the Almighty, something going to

happen, brother. But see, folks want instant, McDonald, success. Their lives, excuse my grammar, elect that. It doesn't come like that. It takes it over and over again, what the old folk would say. You understand what I'm talking about?

DS:

Um-hm.

TJP:

Those basic things. Basic things, man. So that's my life in a nutshell, my friend.

DS:

Okay. Let's talk a little bit about your experience with politics. When did you know that you would eventually be doing that as a career? Or did you know that?

TJP:

I didn't know that. I had a preacher, the late Reverend A.W. Wilson, pastor of the Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church here in Lubbock and he ran for city counselor in the sixties when everything was at large and he ran a good race and I didn't know what politics were about. I didn't know. I was as naïve as anybody else could be and I would go to his meetings I just liked what I saw and I had no idea I would run because it was far away from me. It was a long way across the pasture to see where he was. And then when the suit was filed in Lubbock, it took twenty-five years for it to be settled and my partner, Eddy Richardson said, "Why don't you go run for it?" I said, "Let me pray over it." Strange thing about that. I prayed that night and I couldn't even sleep. I said, "Lord, give me a sign and let me know." It was like a calm came over me and I went to sleep. I woke up. I said, "I'm going to sign up," and I went and I signed up. It was different. When you put your name on a dotted line, you want to seek public office. That's when you open up Pandora's Box in your life, man. None of us are perfect, but everything comes at you, you know? Like, I was accused a couple years ago of misappropriating funds. remember that? In the newspaper, about two years ago. Someone lied on me and I knew I was innocent, but sometimes, people lie on you and what you have to do is, like the brother told me, "When you in a storm, you can't come out throwing. You have to stand tall in a storm and you come out and you prove your worth."

DS:

In fact, along those lines, do you know Frank Guterrez?

TJP:

I know Frank, yeah.

DS:

Because he and I were talking and he said that when you come to the point when you can take whatever garbage they dig up and throw at you, that's when you're at the point that you should be running.

TJP:

That's right, brother. That's right. People going to find things about you. No, we not perfect. They going to find—people will lie for lying on you, man. You know, you will help someone and that person will do an about face on you. You know, yesterday's home run, Daniel, will not win today's ball game. Not win it. Give a good example, I was out at Chapel Hill. That's a predominantly white area and they meet at some college for their little house, their little meeting house. So I go out there several years ago and I said, "Man, y'all need a building out here. Let's see what we can do." So we worked like hell and got them a little neighborhood building that they run themselves and I went to a meeting. [DS moves recorder] I messing up?

DS:

You're going fine.

TJP:

And I went to a meeting two years ago and I was in the meeting, drinking coffee, and a tall, white brother stood up. Oh, he lambasted me. He lambasted me. When I first heard it, it hurt because I'm in their house. You see, when you invite someone to come to your house, there's a way to treat anyone. You understand?

DS:

Right. Well in that sense, you were a guest.

TJP:

Right. So when the gentleman finished, I said, "Sir, I'm not going to even attempt to debate you. Number one, I don't go around saying, telling folk what I've done. I don't believe in that. History will reflect what I've done. Not from me." I said, "But since that's your position and everybody apparently agrees with you, I'm going to walk out that door right now. Goodnight." What am I saying? You cannot win in the enemy's territory, brother. You understand what I'm talking about?

DS:

Um-hm.

TJP:

When you by yourself.

DS:
Right.

TJP:
Your best thing is get your behind out of that business and go home because you're not going to win. You know what I'm talking about? You'll not win. You'll not win because they came to destroy. You understand? And life, to me, is worth more than that, Daniel Sanchez. If I die in this chair right now, God forbid, if I die right now, you're going to say, "Oh, he's," you'd have some remorse. You'd feel. You'd say, "I hate to see that," perhaps, and you'd go call city hall and city hall would call my wife and say, "Your husband is apparently deceased on the campus at Tech. Apparently, a heart attack. He got excited. He lost his cool." Well, she's going to feel sorry. She's going to have a mortician to come pick up my body. Something—someone is going to see that my body is picked up from the _____ [?] [0:18:29]. The justice of the people come out and pronounce me D.O., dead, or whatever. Right?

DS:
Right.

TJP:
And they going to take me somewhere to some funeral home. They go embalm me. Right? And my family's going to be notified and they all going be unhappy. Some folks probably going to be happy. You understand?

DS:
Um-hm.

TJP:
I mean, they going—my wife is going to set a time for a funeral or services for me for the last words over me and they going to have it out at the church. No doubt, a lot of folks will be at the church. Some concerned. Some could care less. Some glad. And the preacher going to preach a sermon and they're going to sing songs and they're going to roll myself out in some box. Put me in the back of that herse and take me to the City of Lubbock Cemetery and they going to put me in a hole, six foot deep, after they said words over me and the last thing said by the preacher, "Oh man, we're going to leave." They might talk about me that day and the next day, but in two weeks, brother, I'm forgotten about, my friend." You understand what I'm saying?

DS:
Um-hm.

TJP:

So that's why it's so important, Daniel Sanchez, for me to be a tiny instrument. I get in the heads of some kids. You know what I'm talking about? See, I have a selfish goal, brother, that when I get where I can't walk no more. Can't march no more. Can't hardly see. You understand? But I can still come on the porch and somebody will sit me in a chair on my porch and I can sit out there for some cool air. Then when kids come by, they can say, "There's old man Patterson there. He can't do what he once did. Why don't we buy him a Coke and go talk to him?" That's my goal, my brother. When the kids come by. When they come marching by. And they just talk, you see? Now, I've flushed—maybe that's not being wealthy or rich, which is not important to me now. You know what I'm talking about?

DS:

Um-hm.

TJP:

Things that used to be important to me no longer exist, my friend. Things I've thought were important, Daniel, are no longer important. You understand what I'm talking about?

DS:

Right.

TJP:

So you grow to a point in life where you understand that. Once you understand that, then you able to live with yourself, man. You got to live with yourself. Like in those marches we have. We pass by folks' houses, the pointing the finger at us and they downing us. That's not important to me no more. I don't want to never leave my head down no more against a brother. I want to lay down with peace. You understand what I'm talking about? Because I know this side of the world is okay, but to me, there's a better side, Daniel Sanchez. For me, I know that.

DS:

Are you able to—because I know they had the Patterson Branch Library over there.

TJP:

Yes sir.

DS:

Has that helped you get your message across any?

TJP:

Well it's helped the kids. They come to read. They're reading. There's over three hundred people getting their degrees—GED degrees through that program.

DS:

That's a high amount.

TJP:

You'd be surprised. Go out and look at it. Go by and see who's enrolled in that program. And folks said that wouldn't work. You'd be surprised. Man. That makes you jump up and shout. That makes you shout, brother. You know, and I wasn't thinking about nobody would name a library after my name. It's after me. I didn't ever thought about nothing like that. You know what I'm talking about?

DS:

Um-hm.

TJP:

That's the poor brother around town. You understand?

DS:

Yeah. Uh-huh. In fact, one of your contemporaries, Maggie Trejo, when they named the Maggie Trejo supercenter, she said she couldn't go by there for a year because it had her name on it.

TJP:

That's right. [Laughter] That's my sister, brother. That's my sister, brother. We like brother and sister. I love that sister. I love her, man. She's alright. She's quite a person. She's quite a person.

DS:

She talked about when y'all first came aboard on the city council.

TJP:

Oh yeah.

DS:

As the—after that, first single member of the [crosstalk][0:22:35].

TJP:

That's right. Yeah.

DS:

Would you like to talk about that and tell us what that was like? What that council was like?

TJP:

That was different because we—I did, and I'm sure Maggie would say the same, we had no idea what to expect. You understand?

DS:

Um-hm.

TJP:

You know, I'll tell you something funny. It's funny now. It wasn't. You know, I thought I was serious in those days, but the first council meeting, I didn't know anything about agendas, about the law, that when you have a proceeding, or proceedings, it has to be made in public view forty-eight hours before you have the meeting. You know what I'm talking about? The agenda. So I'm sitting next to Maggie. District one. I'm district two, and George Carpenter tried to use us, I believe. Anyway, I'm sitting here and we finish the agenda items and the Lord works mysteriously. And I said, "No, I want to talk about something else." I was out of line. I was trying to bring something else for the agenda, but I didn't know, Daniel. But Mr. Carpenter would call Maggie and I over to his office before the council, because this councilmen wanted to program us. I told Maggie, I said, "What's wrong with this brother? We just like him. He can't be programming us." But we didn't know.

DS:

So he was trying to do a little mini meeting before the real meeting.

TJP:

What I'm saying was, if he had Maggie and I with him, when you go to the meeting, you got three votes.

DS:

You already got three wrapped up. Yeah.

TJP:

You see what I'm saying?

DS:

Did he need one more?

TJP:

There you go. See, but we didn't know what he—we thought he was being courteous. People will take advantage of you, man. You know what I'm talking about? You know? And I've been to a lot of meetings. I've had over four hundred and fifty city council meetings. I've been—I've missed—they said I've missed twenty times. And that was TML [0:24:40] business of the navy had me one time and my church. I do church work. ____ [0:24:46] leading the church. That's a lot of meetings, man. I think my attendance is about 96 percent, they say. That's not bad is it? About 96 percent.

DS:

No.

TJP:

Never been sick. Thank God for that.

DS:

Well that's good. Also, I mean, the length of time you've been there. Since '84, right?

TJP:

Since 1984.

DS:

That's fifteen years.

TJP:

April the seventh, 1984.

DS:

So you've seen a lot of changes, as far as personnel.

TJP:

I've seen how many mayors? I've seen Alan Henry, B.C. [0:25:14] Minn, David Langston, and now, Mayor Sitton. And I've been through about four mayors.

DS:

Wow.

TJP:

So it's—and once you look at it, the same problems that exist in 1984 still exist today. You understand? You're not going to change all those problems. But you know what hurts me,

Daniel? I'm serious when I say this. Hear what I'm going to say. And I can't talk about the Hampton case because of litigations, whether it be right or wrong, but when I hear the word racism in the community, that hurts me. Daniel, my granddaddy was Anglo. You understand? Who married that black slave woman who had eighteen boys and girls and my mother was the baby. I was her first born. So I really can't say all Anglos are racist.

DS:
Right.

TJP:
You understand what I'm talking about?

DS:
Yeah. Nobody can really say that. Nobody can believe that.

TJP:
It hurts me when children grew up like that. I don't know how to deal with that because we're all human beings and I look at that and sometimes I say, "Lord, why? Why does this exist?" Really, if those of us who have not gain our position in the economic arena, we can overcome a lot of those problems. You see what I'm talking about?

DS:
Um-hm.

TJP:
And until we do that, we'll always be saying, we'll be using the term "racism."

DS:
Right.

TJP:
You know what I mean? Now, if the man made his money, he going to try to hold onto his money and if you made your bucks, you'd do the same. My point is how can you come in with a program yourself? How can you develop some things yourself? You know what I'm talking about?

DS:
Right.

TJP:

And why can't we create jobs for all people? Am I making sense to you? Then you get respect.

DS:

Well there's been—you've had some recent economic development in East Lubbock, in your precinct.

TJP:

Do you see it?

DS:

Can you talk about that?

TJP:

Yeah, it's a lot of work with that too. I'm happy. The new homes that we're getting there. People said that would never happen. There were three hundred vacant lots in the Chapman Hill area. Man. We're down to about seventy, I guess. About seventy. Less than a hundred, I believe. But people are coming back in. They're coming back in. United Supermarket, the Family Dollar, the Estacado Apartments across from Estacado High School. The refurbishing of properties. I was speaking with some gentleman the other day about a possibility of a national chain in the area. There's several things on the table, but it takes time, but folks—you know, I wish MLK Boulevard was filled with economic development. I wish it was. It took twenty years to change that name. You know that?

DS:

I was going to ask you about that.

TJP:

It took us about twenty-five years to change that so the process is long, enduring. You have to persist. You can't get mad and quit because when the man is in control, he wants to maintain the control, but you have to have a position where you can there and make things happen yourself. That's difficult. Man. It's difficult. But through it all, it's going to work out one day. Through it all, it's going to work. One day, it will work. Daniel, it will work one day. I won't be around, perhaps, but it will work one day. Yeah.

DS:

And you talked about MLK. What kind of impact has the I-27 quarter had? Has it had a positive impact?

TJP:

Really, we don't pay much attention to it. I don't.

DS:

Okay.

TJP:

You have to have routes to bring in goods and services that will take people around your political subdivision. It so happens, when it first appeared, it appeared as though I-27 was dividing the community. That can be an advantage and of course, a disadvantage. I see it as an advantage to have a distinct different area. In other words, you can do some things differently than other parts of the city is doing. You following what I'm talking about?

DS:

Um-hm.

TJP:

So I see nothing negative with it. It has not kept us away from the market. It only lets us know we need to start developing some new markets ourselves? You see? During segregation time, Daniel, we had everything we wanted in the neighborhood.

DS:

Yeah. It was a self-contained community.

TJP:

We had it. Why did we lose that finesse? Why did we lose that? Maybe I-27 is a blessing to take us back to those basic concepts. But all the old settlers are dead. They're gone and their children could care less. So I don't think it has hindered us. That closed down Dunbar high school, not I-27, but with the young people moving back into Chapman Hill, I'm seeing kids riding little tricycles and bicycles. Unless we know that they going to have to reopen that school one day. Have you driven near it lately?

DS:

No, I haven't.

TJP:

You ought to drive and look at the kids out there playing. I live on Globe. Habitat has developed. I think thirteen houses behind me. Nice.

DS:

Yeah. Habitat has done a lot of work there.

TJP:

They do a lot of work. A lot of good work, man. A lot of good work. And we're building new homes over there. Man. I'm tickled to death because folks—look here. In the Black community, in the African American—and also the Latino Hispanic community, it's unusual when they come in and refurbish it and rebuild houses around those old churches. You know what I'm saying?

DS:

Um-hm.

TJP:

Now, Chapman Hill is an area of Black churches. You understand? And my neighborhood, many of them are Hispanic, brother. They like what they see. Those my neighbors. Those kids, my neighbors. That's great. That's what God wants it to be. He wants to see his people together. Man.

DS:

Have you had—because I know Victor Hernandez is a councilman also. Have y'all had any chance to talk about the possible impact that the interstate's going to have on Arnett Benson, which is a major portion of his area?

TJP:

You're talking about the east-west freeway probably?

DS:

Yeah, the east-west.

TJP:

Well that's going to be interesting because you know, although the properties on the north side of what's that? 4th Street. They'll be taken out and of course, it'll take that—it'll affect from 4th Street to 3rd Street, I believe it is. That area, I can't tell you about a plan that's on the drawing board. I don't want to talk about it. I think because of what I'm seeing is going to take place, I don't see nothing negative happening. I think it'll be something great. I can't talk about it, but I know something is about to hit the table that's really going to shock Arnett Benson. Not Arnett Benson, but South Overton and North Overton and that ripple effect will no doubt touch Arnett Benson. So I don't see nothing negative, but look here, Daniel. Abraham Lincoln was visited by the steamship people, you know, who brought goods and services down the mighty Mississippi when he was in office and they were mad. They were mad because the iron horse of the

locomotive was going west taking their—taking business from them. Lincoln told them one thing. He said, “In this sign of progress, somebody will be hurt.” You understand? So what I’m saying—I’m saying this here, Arnett Benson—and I don’t live in that area. Nor do I live in North and South Overton. But things—and only in my opinion, will change for the better. You understand what I’m talking about? For the better. And I think that maybe Victor probably will agree. He’s been working very hard in this area to see that things are changing in a very positive perspective. So I don’t know. I don’t live there. I see some good coming. You know? When you bring that thoroughfare—when you bring up the east-west freeway through there, it’s going to change the dynamics of the area. No question about that. It’s going to change. No question about it. But if you want your city to change, somethings you got to do, man.

DS:

You mentioned North and South Overton.

TJP:

Yeah.

DS:

I guess North Overton is the part that really needs—has a lot of needs there. Have you seen anything coming up that’s going to address some of the issues there?

TJP:

This program that I’m speaking about is going to address it dynamically.

DS:

Okay.

TJP:

I don’t want to speak about it because it’s a pretty—it’s a very confidential piece of matter, but it’s coming.

DS:

Okay. Well maybe when it comes about, you can come back and we can record that here.

TJP:

I’d be glad to. I’d be glad to. Oh yeah. I’d be glad to. It’s going to be—I think you’re going to appreciate it because one of our major, major players in town is putting his life in it. That’s all I can say. It’s going to be heavy.

DS:
Okay.

TJP:
A heavy piece of—I wish it was coming to my part of the city. That's the only thing I'm mad about. But that's all right. Do it there. ____ [0:35:14].

DS:
Okay.

TJP:
Yes, sir.

DS:
Well I understand you're having to keep your confidentiality there. And let's see. Let's talk a little bit about—we've talked about your political career. What kind of business career did you have? I know you taught at Tech for a while, or you were an assistant dean out here.

TJP:
Right. I was at the College of Business at Texas Tech University. I had fun doing that. Primarily, my function was freshman students and there were a lot of freshman in the College of Business in those days. I'd have to go to a course called BA 1290 it was, in those days. It was a pass fail two hour course. It was a course where we would try to define in the minds of children—not children—I mean, young people, what accounting is, marketing, finance. Those different disciplines of business. Information systems, so when they decide to choose a major, they would have a different opinion. They can understand better. For example, bookkeeping is not accounting, for example.

DS:
Right.

TJP:
And we brought in practitioners to—from the business world—to explain to them in their own way what those areas were about and now, they telling us a three hour letter course I guess, so that's good. We had fun doing that and seen a lot of kids out there. That fellow who shot Reagan was one of my students. Hinkley. Yeah, he was in my class. One of the freshman students. Denver, Colorado, where he came from. So I've seen so many. When I go around the state, I see so many of them doing well. Doing real well. Alan White was one of my students who runs Plains National Bank.

DS:

Really?

TJP:

Oh yeah. A lot of them came to me. I had a lot of fun with those young people. A lot of them doing well. A lot of them doing well. So the best thing about that effort was to be able to interact with those young children, those young people, in those days, the seventies, when times were different than they are in the nineties and it was fun. I had a good time. I had a darn good time. Dean Steel was a good dean to work for. He's no longer there. He's in USC, probably retired by now, but he was—he did—he was before his time in Lubbock, I thought.

DS:

Right. Well that's what it seemed like to me, I mean, because when I saw T.J. Patterson, an African American, was teaching at Tech at this time when—

TJP:

Oh man. That was unusual.

DS:

When even now, the African American population is not [crosstalk] [0:37:50].

TJP:

We had more involvement in the Black community when I was here than they have now. Am I right in saying that? We don't hear from—how many Blacks on campus here?

DS:

Right. That's what I was going to get at. The numbers seem to be way down.

TJP:

I don't—we don't even hear from them. There's no—there's not a bridge between the academics community and our area.

DS:

Has—well I don't know if you know Kathy Anderson with the chancellor's office.

TJP:

I know Kathy. I know Kathy.

DS:

Has her presence here helped or affected?

TJP:

Kathy's a good lady. She's got so many mountains to climb. Man. She's working pretty hard. She's working very hard. Very, very hard. But what I mean by—what I mean by there's no—we don't—no feeling. Because these professionals who work here don't interact in the neighborhood like they did when I was out here.

DS:

Okay.

TJP:

You see what I'm talking about?

DS:

Right.

TJP:

Because we had the George Scotts and those folks who would make sure, man, you got involved. They're not here anymore. You see what I'm saying? We don't—and the folk that you have here now are not homegrown. They come from other places. So they have—Latina—Hispanics were very rare when I was out here and that number began to increase. It grew rapidly. I remember, man. That was a heck of a concern out here back in the seventies.

DS:

Yeah. In fact, I don't know if you know Alice Chavez.

TJP:

I know, yeah.

DS:

She was talking about when they first got out here, she made a point of looking up every single Hispanic and there was like around a hundred.

TJP:

Yeah. It was easy to find. It was. But you were closer then.

DS:

That's what she said.

TJP:

You were closer then. Now, we think we have arrived. We haven't arrived, my brother. We

haven't arrived yet. We haven't arrived yet.

DS:

And I don't know what it's like in the Black community, but I know that in the Hispanic community, they had leaders that came up in the sixties and the early seventies that seemed to be the movers and shakers then and they're still the leaders. There's no new crop of leaders. And you have the same problem.

TJP:

There you go. Same problem. We've become too selfish. It's my life. But the folks in the sixties and the seventies made it possible for you to be here. My aunt was the first African American to enroll at Texas Tech University. Lucille Graves. She the first one. And of course, after her, people came here because folks were—see, they had a book out here, a catalog, that had this—it said this, “This shall be called the Texas Technological College established by 19—what? '29, or '25.” And it says, “Only the white students shall attend.” It's in the catalog. It was in the catalog. I kept that catalog and I lost it, but so if you look at that, it was very difficult to get folks of color to want to come here. You see? So anyway, they're here now. That's all that matters. We're here now. Hoping for the better. For the better. Not the worse, but the better. Yeah, we hope that.

DS:

Right. And how are y'all trying to meet the needs of retaining whatever leaders you can within the community?

TJP:

That's a good question. There's no specific program for that, Daniel. You see, it's a two-way thing. You have to want to do something. You have to give up something to be something.

DS:

Right.

TJP:

You can't go to Texas Tech University and say, “I want to become a leader.” It's not like that. You have to come out into the hedges and the highways and get involved. You can't get involved at home. You see? But these young brothers, they want to—those that come to Lubbock with all the ideas and things they bring here, we've already done. You see what I'm saying?

DS:

Um-hm.

TJP:

You cannot reinvent the will.

DS:

Right.

TJP:

And a lot of Blacks on this campus who work here don't even live in our neighborhood. You see what I'm talking about? So they have no idea what it looks like over there, unless they go to a function. Like tonight, we're having the reception for the Juneteenth celebration. You ought to come by there tonight.

DS:

If I get a chance, I'll—

TJP:

Just come by and observe. I think that's a part of history and also observe some of the events this week. The parade on Saturday. I think it's one of the largest groups of people who have come together for a parade in the city for the Juneteenth celebration, so you should take note of that. But see, you have to come see what's out there. You just can't stay here.

DS:

Right.

TJP:

That's what's happened. So I don't even know no professors there besides Kathy. I know Kathy. I don't know nobody else out there. I'm serious. I don't know anybody else out there. I don't. I can't recall anyone. I know Julio is still here. Julio is older than dirt out here. He good people though.

DS:

Yeah, he is.

TJP:

He's been here a long time.

DS:

In fact, he was one of the first people I interviewed.

TJP:

Yeah, he's been here a long time. Yeah, he's done a good piece of work out here. He really has. Yeah. I was here when Julio—I came before Julio, see? He came after me. So I don't know the people out here, my friend. Daniel, I don't know anybody out there. I do not know anyone out here from the African American community, aside from Kathy Allen, and some people in our office. I can't think of anybody else out here. You know any names of Blacks out here?

DS:

There was Patrick Day, but he moved on.

TJP:

When did he leave? This year?

DS:

He left early part of this year.

TJP:

Okay.

DS:

Yeah.

TJP:

Okay. He was in the admissions office.

DS:

He was working, at the time, with the student relations.

TJP:

I know Eric Strong. I know Eric Strong. Up at Banner. I know him. Yeah.

DS:

Right. In fact, Eric Strong, when we started this, he sat in on the meetings and came up with some of the brainstorming for how we need to—which communities we need to go after.

TJP:

Right. I know Eric. I think I know Eric, yeah.

DS:

So, it's—he's been—

TJP:

He came out this year.

DS:

He's very involved still. And in fact, I think he wrote an article for the *AJ* a couple of weeks ago.

TJP:

Yeah, I saw that. I saw that, yeah. Him, and Bidal Agüero.

DS:

Another guy that's still involved.

TJP:

Yeah, but he getting old. We all getting old

DS:

That's what I mean, it's like those community leaders like yourself and Bidal and Eric are still the ones that are doing it, with the exception of Ron Givens coming back and getting back into it also and I think he—because just by listening to him when I interviewed him and reading what was the paper, I think, that someday he'll be maybe picking up the torch when you're ready to set it down.

TJP:

Good. We going to need somebody. Somebody got to do it, man. Someone must do that.

DS:

So that's good.

TJP:

That's what it's about, man. you get tired after a while. You get tired.

DS:

Yeah. In fact, we're talking about that now. How long have—you've been on there fifteen years.

TJP:

Fifteen years.

DS:

How long do you see yourself continuing on?

TJP:

I don't know. I'm still praying over the next time around. I'm still praying to see what I'm going to do.

DS:

When will that be?

TJP:

It'll be by the end of the year. I'm TML President. I don't want to make a decision to have to out my TML presidency. I don't want to do that. I don't want—I don't want—I don't want that to have anything to do with my local council race.

DS:

Right. How is that TML running for you?

TJP:

It's fun. I'm going all over the state. I'm seeing people. I'm talking to people. I want to bring about twenty thousand kids to Dallas in November and it's looking pretty good. So I'll meet this week in Austin with my planning committee to see how we—look into how we can get those kids to Dallas on the twentieth of November.

DS:

What are y'all going to have?

TJP:

Well this is our annual conference and one of our initiatives I wanted to do was to bring young people together in Texas and we're taking the Saturday after we dismiss from the annual conference to bring children from the Valley, from the Panhandle, from El Paso, from Marshall, from all over Texas to Dallas and talk about the equals and bring in folk like Dion Sanders and Mel Renfro and Rockets and some other folk there to talk to our children. That's what I want to do. We'll know how it's going to come in a few days. We'll know about that and I'm all—we also got a program where all my board members will have—we want to spend one hour in some school in Dallas reading to our children at the third grade level. Got the Mayor Ron Kirk [?] [0:46:45] reading to a kid and one of the schools, Lee Brown, the Mayor of Houston reading and Mayor Ramirez, the senator from El Paso reading to a kid. The Mayor Head [0:46:57] of San Antonio. Those news reporters my board of directors of the Texas Municipal League. So we'll also have a board meeting in Lubbock next week, twenty-fourth and twenty-fifth. I'm bringing the board meeting here. Those folks who frequent our city. So it's fun. Man. it's getting out there in the hedges and highways, you see?

DS:

Um-hm. Has it—How much help has it given you as far as promoting our city?

TJP:

Lots. A lot. People said “Lubbock” around me, not “Lubbock.” So I find one thing as I travel around Texas is that Lubbock is in a better position than people think it is. Things I see in East Texas is antiquated, redundant, out of position, everything. Lubbock has a lot of good things going for it here. A lot of good things going.

DS:

Can you talk some about those good things that have come aboard since you’ve been on the council?

TJP:

I don’t like to talk about that.

DS:

I know you don’t, but just—this is, you know, it’s—you know, I’m not saying take the credit for it, but.

TJP:

I’ve seen—

DS:

Yeah, I know it’s kind of difficult when—

TJP:

I hate to get into it.

DS:

Because they don’t—

TJP:

I got sheet of—[End of tape 1].

DS:

I’m Daniel Sanchez and this is tape two of my interview with TJ Patterson on the June the 16th, 1999. TJ, let’s pick up a little bit about—we’re going to talk about city council stuff you’ve done, but like you said, you’re going to just give me some material that covers those events. So

let's see. Let's talk about what do you think Lubbock's going, as far as politics? Do you ever see the day where there'll be more than two minorities on the council?

TJP:

Well that will happen. No question about that because of the growth of the Hispanic community in numbers. We'll see several Hispanic members on that body and hopefully, it's for the right reason, that to help the entire city and not just one area. But I'd love to see a Hispanic mayor in the near future because of the numbers in Lubbock. That's going—that will become a reality. When? I don't know, but it's coming. So, but the main thing, Daniel, is for people to vote. People don't vote in Lubbock, 8 percent vote and that's not—that's not a real picture of your community. Not only Lubbock, but all over the state of Texas, I'm finding eight, nine percent. Austin's last election, nine percent—eight percent voted in Austin. It's sickening. And so it will change because of demographics. It will change.

DS:

Right. In fact, you're talking about a difference between the population growing and numbers getting out there to vote. What's that like in the—I mean, you said, 8 percent overall, but what's it like in the African American community? I know that the Hispanic community is even lower than that. It's got to be.

TJP:

African American, I'd say about 25 percent of the African American community votes. I wish more would, but they won't. They don't take the time to do so and I don't know what it is. It's a—I don't know what it really is. People care. They care and they don't care. I don't know what it is. It's something missing out there. It's something tingling out there that I can't really put my hands on, but it's something different. It's something different out there.

DS:

Well I mentioned Frank earlier and he had mentioned about that it appears like the eighteen to thirty-two bracket is really the one that's not getting out there and doing the voting, at least in the Hispanic community.

TJP:

They don't care. They care and they don't because they don't really understand why they're not going to those polls. They just don't—I don't know what it is. They don't care. One day, it'll come back and affect them. You know? It's just one of those things. It's crazy, man. It's crazy. Can't make them vote.

DS:

Right.

TJP:

But I look at South Africa, people walk for two and three days to vote for Mandela and South America, the same way. People walk overnight. Camp out to vote. You see? We had it too easy, Daniel. We've had it very easy. Very easy. More people voted in the Black community when I came to Lubbock when we had to pay poll tax. It was a dollar and fifty cents, I think it was and people paid that proudly and they voted. Paid it and voted. Now, the poll taxes have been boom—gone away. We don't vote.

DS:

Is it part of the—what was—what I've heard is because when it was denied, everybody wanted to do it. Now, that anybody can, some people just, you know, it's almost got to get to that point where they're trying to keep you voting.

TJP:

It goes back to the family, man. Teaching good principles at home.

DS:

Okay.

TJP:

And implementing them. You can't bend a tree when it's grown, brother.

DS:

Right.

TJP:

You got to instill things back here. Back here. And the man in the Black community got to be in control of his family. You understand what I'm talking about?

DS:

Um-hm.

TJP:

God created man first. Then he created woman to become his half meat [0:52:38]. You see? But we don't start back here, get out here, folks don't care. It's as simple as that. It's as simple as that. Anyway, I don't know. That's what I think.

DS:

Okay.

TJP:

That's what I've seen. Folks don't have no interest.

DS:

Right.

TJP:

They don't think it affects them. You see? You see, from your birth to your death, you are affected by the political system. When you were born, before you become a new life, after the doctor has slapped your gluteus maximus and you cry, some doctor got to—somebody got to come along, appointed by some political person to sign your birth certificate to say you alive and when you die, before you can collect a dime worth of insurance, some politician got to sign some document that say you dead. If you don't, you don't collect a dime worth of insurance. So between birth and death, we are affected politically. We are affected by a season. You understand?

DS:

Um-hm.

TJP:

And young folk don't understand that. You are affected by that. Everything you do is politicized. I don't care what you got. You know?

DS:

Folk don't understand that.

TJP:

And yet, they do understand, but it doesn't turn them on. They're not turned on, my friend. They're not turned on by it. They're not turned on by it. I've quit worrying about that. I have.

DS:

Okay. Let's see. Are there any—let's see. Here's some issues that I wanted to talk about. Issues that happened in Lubbock that—like the May 11th tornado. We know that it damaged Guadalupe area, but it also had an impact on others city after the fact. I mean, other areas in the city. Can you go into some detail about that?

TJP:

What I can say about the May 11th, 1970 tornado is that it brought people together in this town. It was a means of folk coming together. Mi casa [0:54:50]. What was it? That was a local—that was facilitated in the eastern part of city when folks from all area of the city worked together. Mi

casa, I think. My house. And it was on Erskine. Erskine Avenue. Everybody worked there to—and what I'm saying—what I saw was people forgot about who you were and we came together. We came together because we had the same problem. The same problem. It's bad to say, but disasters always brings the people together. When people fearing God, things come together, man. So that's what I would say because—and of course, that was the motivating—that was the catalyst behind the Lubbock Memorial Civic Center in honor of those twenty-six people who died in that tornado so if I can say one thing about that bad tornado, it brought some good because it changed the face—the physical face. The physical face of this political subdivision. Not necessarily did it change the face of its people, but it changed the physical features. You see?

DS:

Right. In fact—

TJP:

Because Guadalupe didn't look the same after the tornado.

DS:

Oh no. No. And then a lot of displaced residents started moving into Northeast Lubbock.

TJP:

That's right. That's correct. That's correct. That's right. Nowhere else to go. Nowhere else to go, my friend.

DS:

Did the influx—I know, after that—because my dad worked in construction and there was a big boom in south Lubbock. There was a lot of building going on and that's been—

TJP:

But you see, Cherry Point was all white at one time.

DS:

Exactly. Yeah.

TJP:

Estacado High School was built for the white kids from the country club area, but God sent them mighty winds so that changed the whole picture, man. So the physical picture changed, but the minds of folk didn't change. You understand? That's what happened because the white flight left the Cherry Point area and moved, boom, south.

DS:

Right. Yeah. So I was going to ask what kind of effected that?

TJP:

That's what happened. They moved. The white flight left because I remember when the first Black man I knew had lived in that part of the city. Mr. Owens. He moved over there. He was happy. One by one, the Blacks moved in there. One by one. But you know, through all that, I look at the Hispanics and Blacks, they have not been close as they should be.

DS:

Right.

TJP:

And they should.

DS:

Yeah, in fact—

TJP:

_____ [0:57:35].

DS:

In fact—

TJP:

Mickey Leland. You know Mickey Leland, the congressman—what is Mickey—yeah. The congressman from Houston? The blue-eyed brother who was—died in a plane crash. Mickey Leland, who was born in Lubbock? You ever heard of Mickey Leland?

DS:

No sir. Sure haven't.

TJP:

You haven't? He made the comment that "We all the same when you come to Lubbock." I can't understand why we cannot get along. He was a friend of Froy Salinas. Why can't we get along here? Why we so divided? It still exists today.

DS:

Oh yeah.

TJP:

Why we so divided? Why is that? It goes back to the family, brother.

DS:

Yeah. In fact, along those lines, had a student that was working here one day and she was wanting to do a paper on the collaboration of the Hispanics and the Black communities of Lubbock and I go, "You're going to have a hard time with that because you would've thought that both sides would have gotten together a lot of issues, but really, they haven't."

TJP:

And you look at that, that's stupid, but that's what it is. It's stupid in hell. I look at—all it does is put you in a position of moving ____ [0:58:56] the same man, but control is still there. He throw you something one day and you something the next day. You understand? That's what's happening. That's what's happening. I see it all the time. And so it gets to the point now, it's "Lord help us."

DS:

Let me see if I can tie this in. You've been talking about the family and we know that Dunbar High, for a while, there was really a close knit community and when we had forced busing, what kind of changes did you see that creating within that community?

TJP:

That was a disadvantage for our children. Take a kid out of ____ take them to Preston [0:59:30] elementary school. That's night and day, man. Why penalize a child? Of course he seeing somethings, but then he got to come right back to that deathtrap he's been living in. Get the kids helicopters, I say. Why bus them? Give them a helicopter ride. That didn't work. You see it. Why should a kid have to walk past his school to go across town? And some kids live in a dump. Alderson junior high school area go out here to—what is it? Cavazos, not Cavzsos, but Ed Irons. What you going to Ed Irons for? You live over here. We got over three hundred kids who are going outside their district, going elsewhere, which takes away from the enrollment of your school district, which creates a problem on closing your schools.

DS:

Right. In fact--

TJP:

And then we get mad at the man—well hell, you got your kids going over here. Family. It goes right back to the family. Right back to the family, man. Well they can't get what they get over here. Well hell, go to the school and see why they can't get it over here. It goes back to the family, man.

DS:

In fact, you're talking about wanting to close schools. I think that's another big issue that the schoolboard has been talking about for a while now trying to shut down several campuses.

TJP:

If you don't increase those numbers, they going to do that, brother. They going to do it every time. But why? Why allow that to happen by moving your kids out?

DS:

See, I want to talk a little bit about—get your take on the recent change on the Buddy Holly Music Festival. Yeah.

TJP:

What do you mean? The—

DS:

The name change and do you think it's going to be better now that it's not going to be tied to just one individual?

TJP:

That's not even relevant to me. I could care less about that.

DS:

Okay.

TJP:

It doesn't even matter to me. As long as you have something that's positive for people, that's all I care about.

DS:

Okay. All right.

TJP:

You know, it's good that Buddy Holly has been seen in the public perspective, but I don't—I'm not into that. That's not—to me, that's irrelevant.

DS:

Okay.

TJP:

That's just my opinion. You always got change and you're going to always have change. Mrs. Holly, she's upset because of what's happened. That's a money thing. That's a money thing, man.

DS:

Exactly.

TJP:

That's what it is. So I don't even get into that so they'll work it out. I got no magic in that. God bless them. That's what I say to that.

DS:

Okay. Fair enough. Since we got you here and I know you don't like to talk about your history, but can you name off some individuals you've met in the Black community that have made an impact?

TJP:

Oh yeah.

DS:

Yeah, and talk a little bit about them.

TJP:

Reverend B. Wilson [?] [1:02:28], my pastor. He was a strong man, Dynamic man. He was honest. Had integrity. Kept his word. Believed in doing things. Dr. Jay Chapman, who had his own way of doing things, but he was a move and a shaker at the time I knew him. Earnest Butler, who was not educated, but had a knack of bringing people together. A civil fox, I call him. He's passed on now. My uncle, Caesar Graves, who built that school here. The Merrimack School. He was a business man. My aunt, Dr. Lucille Graves, who believed that an education is a mountain, that you must climb it. A disciplinarian, believe in kids saying, "Yes ma'am and no ma'am. Yes sir, no sir." Back to the family, the basics. My mother-in-law, who was blind. My wife's grandmother, Sarah Crawford, who was a deaconess in the church and she was blind, but she raised my wife and her sister when they were little and she never gave up. She'd cook, even sew. Kept her house spotless. Good lady. She believed in that. Couldn't see physically, but she could see. She could still see. I think about my mama. My mama stayed with me. She died in Lubbock. She moved here. She was mama. My buddy. I was her boy. When she called, I always appeared. So those folk kind of helped me along the way, my friend.

DS:

Okay. All right. Well I think we've covered quite a variety of topics and issues and I'll let you just wrap it up however you want to wrap it up.

TJP:

Okay. Number one, Daniel Sanchez, I appreciate this opportunity. I might not never have another opportunity like this to sit and just communicate with you in my own way. I don't know what history will reflect on this, on what we've said today, but I hope they take it with a grain of salt that it's from the heart. It's not political. It's not here to win nothing, but it's here to just share a footprint in my life that I've enjoyed every moment of it and I know that one day in my life, it's like the Good Book says, "You must descend so others may ascend," and I know that's one thing I have to look forward to after a while. So thank you for the opportunity to be able to reflect on Thomas James Patterson Senior.

DS:

Well I'm glad that you came in because, you know, we'd be remiss if we hadn't talked to you.

TJP:

Okay, thank you.

DS:

Well thank you.

TJP:

Thank you.

End of Recording

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