Interview with **Dillard Munford**
Date: May 15, 1998
Interviewer: Jacqueline Shearer
Camera Rolls: 4086-4087
Sound Rolls: 436
Team: D

Interview gathered as part of ***Eyes on the Prize II: America at the Racial Crossroads, 1965-mid 1980s***. Produced by Blackside, Inc. Housed at the Washington University Film and Media Archive, Henry Hampton Collection.

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Note: These transcripts contain material that did not appear in the final program. Only text appearing in ***bold italics*** was used in the final version of *Eyes on the Prize II*.

[camera roll #4086]
[sound roll #436]

00:00:12:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

You got speed, right?

Camera Crew Member #2:

Speed.

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it. This way.

[slate]

00:00:22:00

Interviewer:

OK, Mr. Munford. When Maynard Jackson ran for mayor in 1973, did you support his campaign?

Dillard Munford:

Oh, no. Oh, no.

Interviewer:

Could you give me that in a sentence? “When Jackson ran for mayor—”

00:00:37:00

Dillard Munford:

Well, when Maynard ran for mayor then, I knew practically nothing about him except that he was a bright, young lawyer. I'd had no political contacts with him, and he had not been a political figure in Atlanta at all. ***I supported a White candidate, and—as most White people did***—and May—May—Maynard had the Black support, financial and otherwise.

00:01:11:00

Interviewer:

OK, cut.

Camera Crew Member #1:

That's a cut.

[cut]

[slate]

00:01:22:00

Interviewer:

Was the White business community scared at the prospect of a Black mayor in Atlanta?

00:01:26:00

Dillard Munford:

Oh, yes. Yeah, we, ***we were very frightened, because we had nothing to go on—no, there'd been no experience there—and we had no idea what was gonna happen.*** First, we, we had no idea that he was gonna get elected, first, because the Blacks had never turned out in enough volume to swing an election. But they did in this one. The churches put their buses to work, and they moved a lot of people to the polls, and Maynard was elected.

00:02:03:00

Interviewer:

And were you scared at the prospect of a Black mayor?

00:02:07:00

Dillard Munford:

Well, “scared” is not necessarily the word, but undecided as to what, what was gonna happen, because we knew of, of no department heads, because we had heard that he was gonna replace all of White ones with Black department heads. They had no experience in, in what they were doing, so we expected chaos if he was elected, and we got it.

00:02:36:00

Interviewer:

Now, Atlanta had just tipped from being White majority to Black majority.

Dillard Munford:

Yes.

Interviewer:

Could you speak to what the expectations were or what the feelings were among the White business community about what that would mean politically?

00:02:53:00

Dillard Munford:

Well, we never knew that, that the change was gonna come so fast. The Black population had been growing very fast, and we were having an exit from the city of the White population. The White population was going down, the Black was coming up. But we’d had no idea that they were gonna be that politically attuned to the situation then, in 1973. They surprised the Black—the White community—I’ll tell you that.

00:03:26:00

Interviewer:

What was your, what was Maynard’s agenda as mayor, in your opinion?

00:03:33:00

Dillard Munford:

Well, he was charged, as I understand, by the, the, the Black power structure, to get elected and to, to run as a, as a young thirty-two-year-old, and if he was defeated, he had his future ahead of him. He was a lawyer, and a good lawyer. And if he, if he won, he would be the top man, and his charge was to convert the city from a White majority in government to a Black majority in government. And he did that. He did. He brought in people who were absolutely inexperienced, and there was no place they could get experience. This was—we ran a massive, on-the, on-the-job training for public officials in 1974, and Maynard was right in the middle, and he had no staff of, of experienced people. He told me later, when I was fussing at him about not returning my phone calls, he said at one time, he was 700 phone calls behind. So, he had no—he was not a business person himself, and he didn't know about delegating authority or responsibility, so he just had this turmoil around him of good folks that—supporters and politically hanger-on-ers, but nobody knew how to run an organization or how to run an office, particularly in the office of mayor, which was the number one office in the city.

00:05:08:00

Interviewer:

What was Jackson's relationship to the downtown White business community?

Dillard Munford:

Zero. Zero. No, no contacts at all. The thing that—

Interviewer:

I'm sorry. Could you give me a full sentence that says what, with "zero" in it, that says Maynard's—

00:05:24:00

Dillard Munford:

Yeah. Yeah. There was little or no contact with the White business community and the mayor's office when Maynard was elected. He made no overtures to the White community, and they tried to make them to him, as they normally do when they change, change city governments. But he wouldn't return phone calls. But he had the bankers and top people just standing on their ear trying to get in touch with him. And, and he didn't call. And, and that resentment is, you know, was, was pretty bad at that time, because the city government is a

vital part of the business community, and you have to have some contacts with the city before you can do a lot of things. But we had none.

00:06:22:00

Interviewer:

Now, if you think about a transition from White control to Black control, isn't some amount of conflict inevitable?

Dillard Munford:

In the conflict—?

Interviewer:

Isn't conflict inevitable?

00:06:34:00

Dillard Munford:

Oh, sure. Oh, sure. Mainly because there was no way to get to the mayor, and when you—communications were just absolutely zero. No communication, so it was a situation which I don't know how it could've been avoided, because it, it looked like Maynard was surprised to have gotten elected, and he had no backup team. He had no experienced people, because it—no place he could get 'em. They hadn't had experience in, in government—city government or any kind of government. So, he was there with 700 phone calls and a lot of good people whirling and running around him, but nobody taking care of the day-to-day business.

00:07:23:00

Interviewer:

Now, if you had been mayor, how would you have handled it?

00:07:27:00

Dillard Munford:

I'd've done exactly the same thing. There was no way to change this city from, from White to Black with no help, except do what he did. Having a business background, I believe I could have delegated some responsibility and gotten some of the top business leaders telephone—at least told them I was thinking about 'em. But he ignored that, and—but I think he had a job to do. It was to change the business climate, or the governmental climate, from

White to Black. And I don’t know how else he could’ve done it with no help. I think he meant well, and, but he, he just didn’t get the job done as far as communications are concerned, and left a lot of people unhappy. Because, you know, your businesspeople are accustomed to, when they make a phone call, they usually get a response, particularly if you were bank president or head of a utility or something of that nature. But they got no answer, no response, and this left them, Well, where do I go from here? There was no place to go, because that was the top job in the city, and they could get no response. So, things were just kind of at a, at a stand-still for a good while, and the longer they waited and didn’t hear from Maynard, the madder they got. So, how to answer your question, though? I don’t know how he could’ve done it. There was no way to slip in the side door of the, of the mayor’s office. He could’ve asked for some White help. He asked for no White help. He could have gotten some top White businesspeople who didn't want a job, head of banks or utilities, something like that, to come and advise him. But being young and brash, he evidently wanted to do it all himself, and he didn’t get the job done. He made a lot of people unhappy. And of course, it affected his whole tenure as mayor that, that people were very unhappy that he just ignored 'em. They were not accustomed to be ignored. I mean, people which have thousands and thousands of stockholders and, and thousands and thousands employees. They not accustomed to anybody just ignoring them, and this built up a resentment which was very, very severe.

00:10:04:00

Interviewer:

OK, cut. Are while we roll—

[cut]

[camera roll #4087]

00:10:08:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it.

[slate]

Camera Crew Member #1:

Any time, Jackie.

00:10:16:00

Interviewer:

Back then, Mayor Jackson was called by many a “reverse racist”. What was your position on that then?

Dillard Munford:

Well, I had no question but he was, that—

Camera Crew Member #1:

Was what?

Interviewer:

I’m sorry. Could you give me a full sentence with—?

Dillard Munford:

Yeah.

Interviewer:

OK.

00:10:31:00

Dillard Munford:

There was no question about he was a full-fledged racist against White people, and this was what his charge was, was to see that it was turned over to Blacks, and you had to, to be a racist to do that. Colorblindness was not part of his repertoire, so no, he was a, he was a full-fledged racist as far as the White community was concerned.

00:11:02:00

Interviewer:

Now, what about Jackson’s affirmative action program? What was your assessment of it back then?

00:11:08:00

Dillard Munford:

I didn’t accept it at all, because it was unfair to the White people, to White contractors. But they rammed this through the city council and actually went beyond the government bounds and made a lot of unqualified Black contractors very wealthy. So it was, it was not a fair

program at all, and they didn't have time—they were unfamiliar with affirmative action, and they saw it as a way to—somebody in his, his campaign did, or his office—to let a lot of their Black supporters in on a good thing, which they did. And it was very abusive to White contractors who saw jobs going at higher prices than they were bidding, because they were Black.

00:12:06:00

Interviewer:

Now, what about the joint venture program? You remember the joint venture, and it came up with the airport?

00:12:14:00

Dillard Munford:

Yeah, well, this was a payoff to the Paschal brothers. They were the largest. See, Maynard didn't get any money from the White community. Everything he raised in his campaign came from the Black community, and the Paschal brothers—who are wealthy people and run hotels and restaurants and stuff—they were the main contributor. So it looked like the payoff to the Paschals was the airport contract, which was very disadvantageous to the city and very advantageous to the Paschals. But this was, this and affirmative action were the two things that, I think, abused the c—taxpayer more than anything else. I know of no side-deals, or underhanded, or crooked, anything like that. And these were all, all legitimate, all the government-sponsored programs, but they went beyond that. And the Paschals came out very well. And two or three contractors did, too—one of them, particularly, was a good contractor anyhow, and he became very wealthy. He had seven contracts at the airport, and he came up smelling like a rose.

00:13:43:00

Interviewer:

Has the business community of Atlanta been integrated as a result of this program, or do you think that Black businesspeople would've been let in anyway?

00:13:53:00

Dillard Munford:

Well, there were Black contractors. As I said, there was one very successful Black contractor before all this came out. And, but there was, it was some integration of the contractors, but not very much—mostly subcontractors, smaller operators. And that's the way this successful contractor came, he was a plastering contractor and he grew into a general contractor. Well,

that was the way that I'd hoped to see the Blacks integrated into, into our society. But that was too slow. They wanted to take a running jump, and that's what they did.

00:14:40:00

Interviewer:

OK, cut.

[cut]

[wild sound]

Camera Crew Member #1:

You know, something that would start with: "I remember sitting around the table of the Commerce Club one day—

Dillard Munford:

Yeah. Yeah.

Camera Crew Member #1:

OK, roll sound, and tell me you have speed.

Camera Crew Member #2:

Speed.

[picture resumes]

Camera Crew Member #1:

OK. Roll the slate please.

Camera Crew Member #2:

Oh, Sorry.

00:15:00:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mark it, please.

[slate]

Camera Crew Member #1:

OK.

00:15:05:00

Interviewer:

Can you remember any specific stories of discussions with other businessmen about the Maynard Jackson problem?

00:15:14:00

Dillard Munford:

Well, every time you got at least two or three businesspeople together, that was the subject, because we were paying a lot of money in taxes and had no idea what was happening to the money or who was administering, if they were competent people, if they were honest people, and it was just a big question of, of, really, what's going on? There's no way to find out when you can't talk to the mayor or to somebody in his office who speaks with, with his authority. We were at a loss, and when you put millions of dollars into taxes in a, in a, in a city, you have to th—wonder about it a bit. So yes, we talked every time we got together about it, and they weren't very pleasant things we said about Maynard Jackson.

00:16:05:00

Interviewer:

Now, I have a really funny image of all of these very powerful, strong businessmen feeling like orphans with your noses pressed against the glass. I mean, how, how did you all feel—the White business community?

00:16:17:00

Dillard Munford:

We felt that we were at bay. We were out there, barking, and nothing was happening. And that went on for a long time, a couple or three years, so it was a very unpleasant and unhappy situation for the businesspeople and, I think, a disastrous situation for the city, because we just marked ground for two or three years. Because in the past, we'd have such a wonderful working relationship between the business community and the city. We built a stadium. We built the Commerce Club. We built a lot of things in joint venture with the city and the businesspeople. When we lost one, you, you lost the, lost the deal, the momentum—and we lost the momentum, no question.

00:17:09:00

Interviewer:

OK. Cut, cut. OK, I think we—

[cut]

[end of interview]

00:17:14:00