

74- Date: July 31, 1992

Subject: The Race Riots in Beaumont, Texas 1943

Interviewee: Jaytee Mattox 74 **Interviewer:** Donald W. George

Interviewer: you told me earlier that you were about to run for city council in Beaumont?

Mattox: Well, when I came here

Interviewer: Oh in Houston?

Mattox: Yeah, well see, when I came here, there wasn't no blacks on city council, this town was just, was in a bad [inaudible word] you know, but, you had a little [more freedom time?] But, there was no blacks in city hall, no blacks in government, no blacks in nothing. It wasn't nothing there for us but a [inaudible few words.] You worked from [inaudible few words.] You work from whatever time they want you to come into work until it's black, dark [inaudible few words.]

Interviewer: Were there any black leaders back then, were people looked to for guidance and leadership and...

Mattox: if there was, they was a [inaudible few words.]

1:03-1:18 inaudible

Mattox: When Martin Luther King came along and [regrouped?] and led us to freedom and that's where we are now.

Interviewer: You made a comment about catching a bus and going to Houston during the race riot, what did people in Houston think about Beaumont during the riot because they were only less than 80 miles away so...

Mattox: They thought it was the [terriblest?] thing in the world.

Interviewer: was there-

Mattox: they was thinking that, maybe what's next? We might be next.

Interviewer: Did Houston make any in office to help Beaumont or send in aid for those that lost their homes?

M: No, they wouldn't allow it. Blacks weren't allowed to send nothing to Beaumont. If you was in Beaumont, and you were [inaudible word,] you was in there. There's a lot of blacks wanted to come and see about the riot because some of them had relatives. Like me, myself, I had a father come from a little town in Silsbee and was turned around, he couldn't come [no further?] Regardless of what was happening to me, he couldn't come in there. So I had to, sixteen years old, I had to weave my way and get out the best way I could and survive.

Int: Did blacks try to sneak into Beaumont and get the people out or was there like a big barricade

M: They weren't allowed. The officers of the law stopped them from going in there. If you had somebody in Beaumont, you could not hear from them, they wouldn't give you no information or what's going on, nothing. So, you just had to stay out and wish for the better.

Int: okay, the people that are left in Beaumont, do they also share the [same?] about Beaumont? That they would never go back or-

M: Beaumont has been marked as a racial town, and it always will be. You know, I don't know what's gonna change it. It always will be a racial town. I don't know what can change that town but, like I told you, it's a lot of black people in the penitentiary that ain't supposed to be there.

It's a lot of black people being charged, and they didn't do it. See, it used to be a time where a black man would go do something and put a [inaudible few words] and look like a [white?] person. And then when he'd do it, he'd come out, [pull?] it off, and go about his business. As a poor black man that's working and struggling all his days, has kids to feed, and he'll be caught, [beat halfway?] to death and be locked up or [he'll be told to?] leave town. They'd have to get up and [get their clothes?] and leave their family behind. That's why a lot of children are raised up today like they are. Because all of their lives they've been abused by white society. Know what I'm saying?

Int: Yes. You made a comment earlier about a truck of white people driven by a Mexican guy looking for Blacks. Do you feel that the Mexican people had a hand in the race riot, or were they spectators or what?

M: Yes

Int: Which one?

M: Well this guy here was driving around, showing where black people stay. I assume if he didn't have anything to do with it, he wouldn't have been driving around showing them where blacks stay.

Int: Do you think it's just this one Black person or- I mean this one Hispanic person or was it a group of Spanish people that were doing this?

M: Well, I'll put it like this, Spanish people, most of them ones be white, although they're not. A white person can come to them when they want dirty work did and put it in their head that they are more better than a black, and they'll do almost anything for the white person. Right now they are over here un-legal, they work for less wages, or they don't ask how much they're gonna get

paid when they start. You know, the white man will pay them what they want. And that's bad for the black people, cause we are supposed to be citizens. We were brought here, we were brought here, not of choice, we were brought here as slaves. We have built this country. Why are we supposed to be second class citizens now, when we have built this country? Our [inaudible word] built this country.

Int: Before the race riots, how did you feel about Spanish people, before the riots?

M: Well, I'll tell you, I never was around Spanish people for any length of time, but I can tell you one thing, in late years I had a chance to be around and work with them. They're the sneakiest, undercover people that you ever want to deal with. They will come up to you and talk about a [white superior?] and cut your throat [for your friend?] They are dangerous people to be around. And the words are speaking out of their mouth. They are the most [inaudible word] undercover people that you could ever be around.

Int: So, do you think that Spanish people are more dangerous than whites or are they even?

M: Well, I'll put it like this, they're dangerous with their mouths, they're not to be trusted, anything that you want to say about your white [superiors?] you have to keep to yourself, you can't tell them. They want to be white so, the white man can get them and tell them he's gonna give them a meal or [tortilla?] or whatever, and they'll do it, give them a better job. They'll do it. And then after he gets him to do what he want him to do, he's through with him.

Int: So are you saying that Mexicans are pawns of white people?

M: Yeah

Int: And how do you feel about white people now, years after the incident?

M: Well, I could never feel- I couldn't tell you that I really like them, but I don't hate them. You know, I can't hate nobody for who they are. I've been taught that but I haven't learned to live with society, you know? It's just like being- laying with a rattlesnake. You know the rattlesnake will bite you, but you have to be aware, or he will bite you. Or lie on you, [inaudible word] will lie on you, he's not [tame?] he's gonna attack. So that's what you have to do, you have to keep your guards up. You trust, [inaudible few words] but, what got me confused, that only time [they?] were scared that you're treated different, and this is supposed to be a [inaudible word] of freedom, and no black person have freedom [inaudible few words] right now.

Int: So do you feel that white people do what they do because it's their nature?

M: That's what they've been taught.

Int: That's what they've been taught?

M: Yeah.

Int: And why do Mexicans do the things they do?

M: They're ignorant to the fact they're ignorant.

Int: Because they're ignorant is why they do these things?

M: I think if they knew better, they would. They need to get educated on what's good for them.

Int: Okay

M: See, let me tell you something, the Mexicans once owned Texas. This belonged to them. The white men came in a group and whooped them and ran them away [from Texas?]

Int: Okay

M: They come from another place, I don't know where, if you read history. And they grouped up and runned them Mexicans away- they whooped them. They won the war and so, somehow or another they allowed them back in here. And the reason why they allowed them back in, because some of them are uneducated, some of them come back because of jobs, and they take the lower paying jobs that you and I wouldn't have, because we can't survive. The only thing a Black man wants is equal opportunities. And equal opportunities [inaudible few words] if you [fear?] the white man, 10 dollars an hour. Pay me 10 dollars an hour. If I do the same work the white man do, and I'm qualified, give me the same opportunities. White men think the Black man wants his white woman. That's not the point. The Black man wants the same thing the White men got. White men riding around in a Cadillac, he wants it too. If the white man got a airplane, he wants it too. Not so much that he wants his woman, you see what I'm saying?

Int: Uh huh

M: This is all about equal opportunities. [inaudible word] if I worked, and do the same job the white man do, give me the same pay. Allow me the privilege to have the same kind of vacation he has. If I work on a job and it calls for two weeks of vacation, give it to me. A white man works there, and it calls for two, give it to him. But don't have him in another bracket, getting the rights of the job, leaves when he wants, take a sick leave, and just because I'm Black, the [inaudible few words] from me. Supposed to be out there with everybody else. Same opportunities. If you work 40 hours, get paid for 40 hours. They'll have you going to work, working every day, [inaudible few words] some of them are doing it right now. Some of them got you going and [inaudible word] pay you overtime, they'll come and work you seven days a week for the same pay, they won't pay you overtime.

Int: Okay. Mr. Mattox, do you know what racism is?

M: Yes

Int: And what is racism?

M: Racism is being taught to keep the Black man down.

Int: Okay. Would you call yourself a racist? Not the hate of the Blacks, but the hate of whites and Mexicans.

M: I don't hate nobody. I pray that one day that the black and white- the white man will see the black- not for the color of his skin. He will see him as a human being, a citizen, and he will treat him like a human being. The time has come for all people to group together and be a happy world, not to hate one another. You cannot hate nobody and go to heaven. You can't do it. You don't like a person, but you can't hate him. And that's dividing up the White society and the Black society.

Int: Okay. So, Mr. Mattox, have your feelings changed about Beaumont since the riots?

M: Beaumont is getting there. I've seen a lot of things have happened since I've been away from there. I seen a youngster that- the college that you are attending now, Blacks couldn't even look over there, now you can go there. You had a world fair that would come to Beaumont once a year and they had one day for Blacks. You could go there one day, and all the other time, it was closed to Blacks. But Whites could go- could have a fair and stay the whole week. Whites could go there every day. You had one day Blacks could come from East Texas, Beaumont, all the way around- I mean Houston, all the way around the country, you had one day to come into that fair ground and enjoy themselves, then they had to vacate. And after the celebration, the blacks won't come. One day, the fair come in there, and they had [inaudible word] stuff for the blacks, that's where they make the money. They've been making money off Blacks, and the Blacks didn't

show up. So, they got a lesson, they had all that stuff brought out for the Blacks, they didn't come. They boycotted, they didn't come. So now, right now, yourself, every year, when the fair comes to Beaumont, you go any day you want, for the whole week, right?

Int: Right.

M: Well it used to not be like that. You had one day, every [pig?] and his brother, from all around East Texas and around, had that one day to go to that fair. And that was- they made more money than they did that whole week of the fair.

Int: Mr. Mattox, you had made a comment that you had two sisters that moved to Beaumont after the riot. How did you feel about them moving to Beaumont after the riots?

M: If I could have got with them I'd have told them it was the wrong time. I got a cousin there now, he's doing good, he's a [inaudible word] just a working man. He called [the preacher?] I understand that he's doing good. So [inaudible few words] maybe the whites, young whites- I hope that they [inaudible few words] try to get along and I hope that all the old whites has gone on wherever they gonna go. And the young peoples is trying to get together, and they're gonna be the peoples that's gonna run the world. And I hope one day I can see them all, as Martin Luther King said, "we'll all get together and walk together, hold hands and enjoy ourselves."

Int: How do you feel about young Whites and young Mexicans and young Blacks now?

M: Well, they got a [lot, they got it hard for them?] They've got the drugs in there, the drugs killing not only blacks, the whites, Spanish people, are on drugs or some of them got to sell drugs to try to make [inaudible word] but it's unsafe in any town, any country town. It's unsafe to be there because you don't know what's gonna happen, people [inaudible few words.] I think what needs to be happening for the whole America is to get new jobs, training jobs, for all

people, not Black, all people. Have something for them to do. When a person has a [hollow mind?] they [inaudible few words] If they have a job for them to work, then they won't have a- they'll have something to go to, and then that job's paying them- worthwhile. Then you'll see more homes go up and people [inaudible word] things that they want. it'll be a more happy marriage, and everybody'll forget about their color, and we'll all group together and be as one, [and that's what we're gonna be?]

Int: So you think that there's a bright future for young blacks, whites and Mexicans-

M: Yeah, yeah, young blacks is- they don't think about- they don't think about [inaudible word] young blacks, whites getting together and doing what they want to do. Old heads are probably turning over in their graves, kicking. You see what I'm saying? But, that's in the past. You got a lot of older people saying [inaudible few words] what happened in those days. [our old parents?] had to work for nothing and be talked to like nothing and be treated like nothing. And the way this happened is those people been taught back all their days against the black man.

Int: So, would you say that race relations are better, worse, or the same?

M: It's getting better, getting there. But. Jobwise, it's not. Jobwise, if a black man goes to a job right now, and they can meet him, and they'll tell you to fill out an application, I saw it happen, and after he leaves, they'll look at the application and get tickled. They'll ball it up and throw it in the trash can. Then a white man comes along, and he's got a story, they'll hire him right in the spot. [inaudible sentence.] and he's making twice as much money as you, and you've been there a long time. But he comes in there, [the new man?] cause he's white making more than you, twice as much more. And that's what [inaudible word] a white man is carrying [home his

salary?]) and he can live comfortable. Black man, most of them don't have enough money to buy groceries or to even pay mortgage or whatever.

Int: So what you're saying is that race relations are better, but there's room for improvement, right?

M: Yeah, there's room for improvement. This is America, everybody's supposed to be free.

Int: Okay, now I need a little background information from you. Your full name?

M: My full name is Jaytee Mattox. Jaytee is [tall?] and M is Mattox. [inaudible word]

Int: M-

M: M- T is [tall?] and M is a Mattox.

Int: Okay. And your marital status?

M: Yes.

Int: Yes? You're married, okay.

M: I was married, I'm a widow now

Int: Okay, you're a widow. And your number of kids?

M: Nine.

Int: And you reside in Houston now?

M: I'm in Houston.

Int: And do you have any intention of the possibility of being able to move back to Beaumont, or you have no intention of-

M: No way, I wouldn't move to Beaumont if they would give me a place there. I don't have no-
just the way I was treated when I was there, you know

Int: Mr. Mattox, I appreciate the interview, and I hope I get a good grade for this. Thank you for
your views and your personal experience as to what went on back then, at that time. I thank you
very much.