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*Tayshawn Jones:* Good morning. On behalf of the South Memphis Shalom Zone, Knowledge Quest and the Crossroads of Freedom at Rhodes College, I would like to thank you for taking the time to share your story. Today is July 1, 2015. My name's Tayshawn Jones. I attend Booker T. Washington.

*Maya Sheldon:* And I'm Maya Sheldon and I attend Central High School.

*Tayshawn Jones:* Let's start out with some basic questions about you and your life, and then we will ask more specific questions about the neighborhood. What is your name?

*Edward Parker, Jr.:* My name is Edward Parker, Jr.

*Tayshawn Jones:* What year was you born?

*Edward Parker, Jr.:* I was born April the 12th, 1938.

*Tayshawn Jones:* Where were you born and raised?

*Edward Parker, Jr.:* I was born here in Memphis, raised in Memphis. I was born at Jane Terrell Hospital. That was an African American hospital and it was on Williams Street here in South Memphis, off of Mississippi Boulevard.

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It no longer exists, but it was a thriving hospital back in the day.

*Tayshawn Jones:* What is your occupation?

*Edward Parker, Jr.:* My occupation is minister. I pastor Berean Missionary Baptist Church in White Haven, at 1666 E. Raines Road.

*Tayshawn Jones:* Did you marry?

*Edward Parker, Jr.:* Say again.

*Tayshawn Jones:* Did you marry?

*Edward Parker, Jr.:* Am I married? Yes.

*Tayshawn Jones:* What is your spouse name and occupation?

Edward Parker, Jr.: What is?

Tayshawn Jones: Your wife's name and occupation.

Edward Parker, Jr.: Oh, okay. Thank you. Her name is Linda Rutherford Parker. She works with Federal Express in their philanthropic department –

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where she manages and works with various agencies throughout this area, and in terms of getting them funds to carry out their activities.

Tayshawn Jones: Did you have children, and what were their names?

Edward Parker, Jr.: Oh, yeah. Yes, I have three children, Andre Delano is my oldest. Edward III is my middle child. And Edie Lynn is my baby girl. She's the baby. And I have grandchildren, and I'm excited about being a grandparent.

Tayshawn Jones: Could you tell me their occupations?

Edward Parker, Jr.: My son is a professional truck driver. He's a graduate of Le Moyne-Owen College in accounting.

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My daughter works in the Guard services, and my oldest son is in Michigan. He works in management with rental agencies.

Tayshawn Jones: Could you tell me about the neighborhood you grew up in?

Edward Parker, Jr.: Yeah. I grew up in the South Memphis at 344 Lucy Street. That's between Latham and Wellington, what we refer to as the McLemore Corridor. I lived there until I was 13 years of age. And then we moved further south off of Kansas Street onto Blair Hunt Drive. Professor Blair Hunt was the principal of Booker T. Washington High School at the time I was attending. And so the street that we lived on, which was a new street, new homes, were named after him.

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And, of course, but in my early years on Lucy Street is in the McLemore Quarter in this area here, I grew up going to the Ace Theater which was on Mississippi and Walker there, which we

would walk up from Lucy Street over there. The neighborhood back in the '40s and the '50s, were more integrated in terms of proximity. What I mean by that is that you would have half of the street that was European-American or white, and then you'd have half of the street was African American or black, maybe divided by an alleyway. And, of course, we walked to school. I went to LaRose School, and that was an old LaRose in the '40s. It was on – you know where Greater White Stone is?

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Well, old Larose was on Wellington, right across from Greater White Stone. It was a two-story framed building with the bathroom facilities on the outside. They had a separate building with the water fountains on the front of it, and, of course, the bathroom facilities on the inside of the building. And the two-story framed building, we had first and second grade. And I went there for two years. Then, of course, LaRose that now sits on Crump Boulevard and Wellington, which goes into Danny Thomas. Back in the day, it was Crump was known as Iowa, and it was later changed in the '50s to commemorate one of the mayors of our city. And so I went to LaRose from the first to the seventh grade. And then, of course, when we moved and when I was 13, I went to Florida Street School, which was on Florida there in South Memphis during the eighth grade.

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And then from there to BTW High School. BTW was a feeder school where several what we referred to then as grammar schools that went from one to the eighth grade. And we all ended up at BTW out of South Memphis. BTW was a great school. We had a motto that, "We're tops. We lead and others follow." Do you know that one?

Tayshawn Jones: Yes, sir.

Edward Parker, Jr.: All right. Professor Blair Hunt was the principal, and he inspired us to believe that we could accomplish whatever we wanted to. I think one of the wonderful things about the educational process at BTW particularly was that not only were you prepped to go to college if that was your ambition or your desire, but they also –

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had in conjunction with that curriculum was what we referred to as

the shops. There were auto mechanic, brick laying, plastering, woodwork, radio repair, shoe repair. There were any number of shop sources that could equip and educate a person to be prepared to go into the job market immediately outta high school. I think that is something that sorta defeated the educational process you don't really have a lot of that now attached to our educational process. But that was what was going back n the day. And growing up in South Memphis was an excitable time for me because it was great anticipation and things of recognizing that life was ahead of you, and there was hope and aspiration.

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We believed especially those of us who had gone to BTW, that we were gonna be successful in whatever our endeavors may have been.

*Tayshawn Jones:* What was your home life like?

*Edward Parker, Jr.:* I had a happy and loving home life. My mother and father were hardworking people. My mother read to me. Even as a child growing up I was nurtured in being a storyteller, and I guess ended up that that's what I am now today. I tell these stories. But my dad was a very outgoing personality.

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He would write speeches for me. Church was the center of our activity back in the day. On Sundays you went to church morning, noon, and evening. And even back at night there was evening services for what we called Baptist training union. This is where you learned the doctrine of the church. And so it was a way of life. And there were activities in the church where you would have your speeches and your activities where you would be presented to be into public speaking, et cetera. So my dad was very much into that, and, again, that's nurturing me to sorta fall along the lines where I am. I wanted to please my dad very much. I was very fond of my dad, and he had a great lot of influence in my life. So my home life was very good. I didn't realize I was poor until I started going to school.

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And I didn't know you were supposed to have two meats and a vegetable. We had one vegetable with the meat in it. But, hey, I was excited about the neighborhood, the kids I played with. And

when the street lights came on, it was time to be in the house. So home life was good all the way. My parents lived till I was an older person. Matter of fact I was drawing a Social Security check along with my parents before they passed. Y'all supposed to laugh at that.

[Laughter]

Tayshawn Jones: Who were your parents?

Edward Parker, Jr.: Say again.

Tayshawn Jones: Who were your parents?

Edward Parker, Jr.: Edwin and Amanda Parker, Sr.

Tayshawn Jones: What were their occupations?

Edward Parker, Jr.: My dad worked at a company called Orgill Brothers.

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It was a local company, hardware, farming implements and those kinda things, housewares. They were on the Calhoun and Desoto back in the day, and they later moved out to Latham and Mallory with a larger plant. So my dad worked the for over 38 years and retired. My mother was basically a housewife. Worked intermittently in various kinds of jobs, but basically she was home when we got home from school.

Maya Sheldon: What church do you attend? What is your church life?

Edward Parker, Jr.: Say, again.

Maya Sheldon: What church do you attend? What is your church life?

Edward Parker, Jr.: Oh, well, I pastor Berean Baptist Church, and we are a large congregation.

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We believe in the Father, Son, and the Holy Ghost. We're very lively from time to time. We have a tremendous youth and young adult ministry. And we have all around ministries at our church. But I invite you to come by and visit with us sometime. And

Reverend Dr. Gina Stewart considers me as her mentor, so you can tell her that you met her Paul. *[Laughs]*

*Maya Sheldon:* What was school like for you?

*Edward Parker, Jr.:* What was school?

*Maya Sheldon:* -like for you?

*Edward Parker, Jr.:* School was always an interesting aspect for me. I liked school. I liked learning because that was part of my household growing up. My parents insisted on my reading and studying and being the best that I could be, so I rather enjoyed school.

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I excelled at school. I was a fairly good student. Matter of fact, I was a good student. I really came alive in the sixth grade. I had a teacher by the name of Miss Marr that was just a tremendous person. And she saw in me some things that probably had been looked over, and her prompting me to even read and do more, and I became the president of my class in the sixth grade, and just sorta went from there. Graduated from high school in the top third of my class, then went onto college. So school was great for me. I liked school. What about you?

*Maya Sheldon:* It's OK.

*Edward Parker, Jr.:* *[Laughs]* Okay. All right.

*[0:14:01]*

*Maya Sheldon:* What does South Memphis mean to you?

*Edward Parker, Jr.:* What does South Memphis mean to me? South Memphis, I think it has tremendous potential. A lotta changes has taken place in South Memphis from the time that I grew up. Well, this area here was referred to as Le Moyne Garden, one of the I think second or third housing projects. And back in the day, Le Moyne Garden was the place to live. It was designed first of all, as an aiding place for families to be able to bring their resources together and then move from this setting into their own homes.

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Whole families lived in Le Moyne Garden, a husband, wife, and

children. It was back in the '40s when there were many houses in the South Memphis area who had the bathroom facilities or toilet facilities on the outside. Le Moyne Garden had hot and cold water on the inside and the bathrooms, so that was upscale. And so it later changed over in the '60s, but in the early years, well-kept lawns. There was a well-kept area. It was the place to live. And so South Memphis – well, you asked his area. Mississippi and Walker were referred to as Sugar Hill.

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More your prominent African Americans lived in this area on the Eden Street, Saxon, Orleans. Your professional African American lived in this area, even on McDowell here 'cause they changed the name to Hollis Price now. But it was very nice homes. They was along Walker on back to –

*[Cell phone rings, background talk]*

So to be in this area was, in a plush area, it was sorta considered sort of a mecca, I suppose. A lotta black businesses were along Mississippi Avenue, ice cream parlors, candy –

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shop where they made their own candies on McLemore, and it was a live and well-kept community. And so growing up in South Memphis I guess for me was a very plush situation. As I said earlier on, the area was more mixed in terms of proximity. As I went to LaRose School on Wellington at Walker and Lauderdale was a white school, and so we would coming down Wellington Street from Lucy, and we'd be walking together. And when we'd get to Walker, we would split off and the whites would go down to Lauderdale and go to their school and I would go on down to LaRose.

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And then in the evening we'd meet back up and we'd play together, fight together, the whole nine yards. That was what it was like growing up. All of McLemore was white from say Third Street west. Coming all the way back to Mississippi Boulevard was white Americans. And so but when you cross Mississippi, right there between McLemore and Neptune were African American, were blacks, and there were nice homes along the street there. And, of course, coming down Mississippi Boulevard coming back

this way were all African American, and there were nice homes intermittent along the way there.

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Now, on McLemore – are familiar with Pilgrim Rest Baptist Church there on McLemore? Any of you? Well, that was McLemore Christian Church in the day. That was a white American church. And they didn't move outta there till the late '50s as the neighborhood began to move all black. If you're familiar with Wellington there and Greater Mt. Moriah – are any of you familiar with Greater Mt. Moriah Church, big church just sit there on Wellington. That was LaBelle Baptist Church, which was a white church. And in that immediate area, there was only two African American church, which was on Fourth State and New Salem on Fourth Street –

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which was there just across Walker on Fourth Street, and Greater White Stone, which it's called McEwen now where Greater White Stone is. But it was Long Street back in the day. And, of course, you have any idea who McEwen was? It was Bishop McEwen with the Church of God Christ. And so that street was named after him. I got some history. *[Laughs]* No. And so all of these changes and what have you took place in my lifetime, but Greater White Stone was always an upbeat kinda church. Had a middle-class influence in it and its membership. And, of course, here, Metropolitan Baptist Church up the street here, was always one of the prominent churches in the community.

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It didn't always face where it's facing now 'cause you can tell if you walk by that the front of it used to be on McDowell, which is the new name, but and so we went to vacation Bible school at Metropolitan Baptist Church. And, of course, the congregation of the church has always been there, which is the founders of LeMoyne College. And, of course, in 1968, when Owen merged, which is the Baptist school, merged with the school it became LeMoyne-Owen College at that time. So you have two denominations that's in place in the school.

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But South Memphis has a rich heritage in terms of churches, in



terms of schools, in terms of African Americans and their development process. I would like to see the economic development come back into the area. I think that's where we're sort of at our weakest. But in the '40s and '50s, many of those black businesses afforded jobs for many persons in our community. And there was seemed to be a very flourishing community in that day and time. The Civil Rights Movement was one of the greatest movements in American history. And then but the down side I think was that we lost a lotta black businesses.

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The upside is that people were able to move into the total areas of America, in many areas that we weren't in. My generation was one of the first generations that began to integrate and move into the main economic structures of Memphis in the downtown area. Matter of fact I went to work for the State of Tennessee in 1969, the year after Martin Luther King had been killed. And there were many others who because of his death and because of his work that were able to move into mainstream America. It's been a great struggle and a great move and many changes have taken place. And I'd just like to throw in that most of America's progress and changes in America had been made in my lifetime. I'm 77 years old, so I saw the jet airplane get to be popular.

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My first airplane ride was only four-engine job, American Airlines – well, TWA. I was traveling with Tennessee St University as the mascot. I was the first tiger that they ever had. I wore the tiger suit. And I could shake a tail feather.

[Laughter]

But we were flying to Kansas City to the NAIA basketball tournament. And so I've since seen the four-engine job turn to jet propelled. All of the major advances in America has been made in my lifetime. But back to the community.

Tayshawn Jones: What was South Memphis like in the '60s and the '70s?

Edward Parker, Jr.: In the '60s, a transformation was taking place.

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It was started in the late '50s. Many of the whites who lived in this

area, the McLemore and Edith, west of Wellington and those areas began to move from the south and further east. And so African Americans began to move into these areas and take over the buildings. Greater Mt. Moriah moved into the building there where they are now. Pilgrim Rest moved off of Kennedy Street, which is off of Trigg in the Florida area moved into this area as the whites moved out. And as they moved further south, there was a school down off of the South Lauderdale area, they called South Side. Are you familiar where South Side School is?

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That was predominantly white back in the day. And so that took place in the late '50s and the '60s. In the middle '60s, we began to move further south as well, an area called Longview Heights. Stacks became very, very prominent in the '60s, there on the way it is now. And Isaac Hayes, which was also resident down in Longview Heights area, he had the choice of houses down there. I lived around the corner from him. It was a very budding area in the '60s. There was a great move afoot in terms of music, housing patterns.

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The Civil Rights movement was in its full impact. And so there was a great change in the air. Many of us were coming out of college. I came out in '61. We were under the impression that if we went to school, got our education, that we'd be prepared for the future and to be in the mainstream America. It wasn't that easy, but at least the movement was on. And so South Memphis in the '60s was a part of that air, a part of that excitement with the movement and changes that were taking place.

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In the '70s, I think there was even a greater move as people began to blossom out all over. South Memphis I think stayed \_\_\_\_\_ very positive influence. The District 6, which encompassed most of South Memphis, had a large population of African Americans, and the Voting Rights Act that took place in 1965, and the move of persons to be registered voters was on, so we began to get more black elected officials on the state level, and we began to look at even running in terms of city positions.

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Reverend Dr. Netters became on of the first city council in the late '60s or early '70s. And then, of course, the Fords came on after that, and that was a movement. But this area was very instrumental in all of that because it was the largest segment of African Americans along moving even further south into the Walker homes that had been annexed to the city. And so it was a great area for growth and productivity in this area.

*Tayshawn Jones:* What was going on in and around South Memphis in the '60s and '70s?

*Edward Parker, Jr.:* What was going on? Hmm. Well, along with, as I pointed out, the relocation and the movement –

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the Civil Rights issue, the political issues. There was a strong economic growth and development area moving into that.

*Tayshawn Jones:* How is South Memphis different now from then when you was coming up?

*Edward Parker, Jr.:* Well, I think what has happened with South Memphis in many areas is the – let me just preface that. I think that South Memphis is on the way back to – there's building in the area. People are building and redoing their homes in the area. It's people are moving back into the South Memphis area.

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In the '80s, as people moved out of South Memphis and then there became a turnover in the area, the economic level of South Memphis sorta dwindled. Anytime your economic resources begin to dwindle in a community, it sorta moves on a downscale. But as many of the churches began to rebuild, build new structures in the community, building new structures and what have you always tend to strengthen a community whenever your building activities has taken place. A lotta economic development processes are taking place. So the churches have been very instrumental. Greater Mt. Moriah, Pilgrim Rest, these churches built phenomenal buildings. Gina Stewart built a phenomenal building over there on South Parkway.

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As these churches bring the economic -- monumental where the

Billy Kyles was the former pastor, great Civil Rights icon, rebuilt in that area, and so that give confidence in others to invest and to come back into the area. Many houses in this area of being rebuilt are on Cummings Street, College. In those areas you begin to see where people are redoing their homes, revitalizing. Stacks have come in and redid that movement. So I see South Memphis having a very good strong hold. One of the things is, is very close to the downtown area. You can walk to the downtown in 30 minutes or so.

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So it has a magnificent location. And as long as you keep your main infrastructures moving, like Main and BTW, which is when your schools, your infrastructure, are strong and going strong in the area, it also helped to develop Le Moyne-Owen College as one of its strongest point. The former president who just retired, Johnnie B. and I were classmates at BTW. We come out at the same year. And we've been friends ever since the first grade. So Dr. Watson did a phenomenal job as president. And so the school it's just a tremendous growth and stronghold and with the high school there that many people are attending, all of these things that the former mayor who was instrumental in bringing these structures back into play.

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So South Memphis I think's got a great future. The Four Way Grill, which is a historical restaurant, one of my fraternity brothers who revitalized and brought that back into play, people coming from all over just to visit in the historical restaurant. If you visit in there, then go eat and et cetera, you can see pictures on the wall of the historical data. All of these things tend to have a positive impact in terms of the longevity of the South Memphis area. So I feel very strongly about the revitalization of where South Memphis is gonna go. And I fore-stated because of this location, because of what has it mean in the years, back in the day when I was a kid coming up, it had a strong Italian grocer influence that in a number of small grocery store chains called Weona's and Liberty Cash.

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And so these Italian grocers lived in the area along the McLemore Corridor, and there was the St. Thomas Catholic Church. But as they moved out then and so went the other structures. But I think we moved in and we've sorta let down our anchors where we are,

and at Booker T. Washington regional said, "Let down your buckets where you are." That is to know that you don't have to go anywhere to become successful as you are. We are learning now to revitalize our own areas, and I think that was the downfall in the last '70s and the '80s as we moved out and we didn't come back in to help to support or encourage the person. So I think that trend of that is changing.

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We're recognizing that we're all right where we are.

*Tayshawn Jones:* Were the people in South Memphis different than they are now?

*Edward Parker, Jr.:* Well, I don't think so. I think what it is it's a different time. The culture has been infiltrated with new concepts and a new way. The music changed, dress codes changed. But I think basically the basic fundamental desires and what of people remain the same. I think what happened is as we tend to forget that change is always inevitable. Change is gonna take place. And I think sometimes we may resist change because it reminds us of our extinction.

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One generation comes in, another one moves on, so we don't gravitate to change too readily. But I think we can learn to be positive in change in that change does not necessarily mean mortality rate. I recall when I go back to Tennessee State homecoming and I go back on campus and I've been out over 50 years. And so when I go back, my landmarks are gone, and I say, "Wow, I know I went here, but I don't see my landmarks anymore. But that's just the way it is in the city. You can stay out of an area for six months and you go back, there's a new building. You stay away a year, and that street don't go through anymore. You got another thing. So but you have to learn to appreciate change, and the change is gonna come. And then that is inevitable.

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And so I don't think there's a difference in people. I think our expectations are the same. We want life, liberty, and the pursue of happiness. It's just the way we probably approach it tend to make it feel like we're different.

*Tayshawn Jones:* What are some places in South Memphis that makes it a better place?

*Edward Parker, Jr.:* Like I said, Le Moyne College. Le Moyne-Owen College. The churches, Metropolitan, First Baptist Lauderdale, BTW. The building that looked the same when I was growing up, but it's still there, the pastor and I are good friends. I think you. You make it better. You bring new life here. You bring aspiration. You bring hope.

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And you're listening for those things that have passed that could probably be of an asset. We're standing on whoever's shoulder that came over for us. So we're not against each other. We're singing your praise. "Go on. Go on. Go on. Go on. Go on. Go on. Go on." And it take that from my mentor, the late Dr. Reuben Henry Green, that we encourage each generation to go to its fullest, to its max, giving the best that you got to give. And so I encourage all of you to become continuous readers. I know there are a lot of new things. You've got your iPhone, your iPad. You got tweeting and "sweeting" and everything else.

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But read. Read, read till you can read it well as Michael Jordan can dunk the ball. Read, and you'll do it as well as Magic Johnson could pass it. Read it makes an impression, enhances your mind to keep it moving. But God has given you tremendous talents and tremendous gifts. And if South Memphis is gonna be even greater, it's gonna be from the likes of you.

*Tayshawn Jones:* What is the best thing about South Memphis?

*Edward Parker, Jr.:* The best thing about South Memphis is that it got people and caring and loving people like Pastor Brown and at Greater White Stone.

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Gina Stewart at Christ Baptist, these persons give of themselves in tremendous ways. Reverend Payne at Greater Mt. Moriah. And they've got young students that are requesting to learn. Here you are gathered today here listening to an old man talk about his day in time and everybody's listening. You may dream for a moment, but you come back in. So these are tremendous gifts to the community. Just for the mere fact that you have been scheduled to be involved in this segment along with Rhodes College who's

gathering this information to look at the prosperity of today and tomorrow.

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As insignificant as we may think that may be, it will be in the archives or something for future reference. So it's a good thing.

*Tayshawn Jones:* What do you think will make South Memphis a better place?

*Edward Parker, Jr.:* Being aware of what –

*Tayshawn Jones:* What do you think –?

*Edward Parker, Jr.:* What? What do I think that would make South Memphis a better place? I gotta whole lot to say about that, but – well, I think that as people understand their power of their gifts and of their abilities to share in a common effort think, to be conscious and cognizant of the fact that each of us are responsible for what South Memphis looks like.

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So you're not to litter is an important aspect. I think when we become ecologically aware of our environment that all of us have a God-given responsibility in simple terms to clean up where we're are, to not be people who are not mindful of the fact that I need to be conscious of how I throw my trash away. Just being meticulous about your own area, that's basic. Number two. Is I think is to help out each other. People I think have to know that the greatest weapon or the greatest influence in the world is love.

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Martin Luther King changed this whole America by just loving folks. Didn't have a bullet. Didn't have a gun, but sang, "We shall overcome." Talked about the care and the respect of each person. And I think that become the basic fundamental of human existence is that we care about each other, that I care about you succeeding. You care about the next person succeeding. When we can care and generally move within those confines, I believe that South Memphis and America become the greatest place there can ever be. It shouldn't have to wait till a tragedy take place that we begin to recognize how important human lives are.

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And so to make South Memphis even better is our collective effort coming together to do that which it's best for the community politically, physically, the whole nine yards.

*Tayshawn Jones:* Thank you for participating in the Crossroads of Freedom Project.

*Edward Parker, Jr.:* Thank you for having me. I had some stuff to say, but I'm gonna come back next time.

[End of Audio]