

SS100.mp3

David Yellin- This is tape 2 in the interview with Jesse Turner on May 29<sup>th</sup>. 1968.

Anne Trotter- We are talking about why did the negro community accept.

Jesse Turner- Yeah well I think as I said primarily I think that the at that particular time that the community felt that Memphis was moving. But the problem that we are faced with and that we have faced with as we have gone along is that the more freedom, and this is logical I suppose that the more freedom that a person gets than the more, the then recognizes what poor shape he already was in and this I think has happened here, the primary reason I think they accepted that then is the fact that if Memphis was generally ahead from the standpoint of movement at that particular period of time.

David Yellin- Yeah what we are trying to do here Mr. Turner is to find out the reason that Memphis was unique in that there was no violence as such and there was at least some form of token communication and you were right so much involved and I don't know this is my own term and I shouldn't editorialize but there was communication at least and somebody has described that the thing about Memphis that made it such an ideal city for good race relationship, not that it was good, but that it should have been or could be still was that the power structure was at least tangible, it was definable it was confinable it was available, we know who they are. Would you agree with this.

Jesse Turner- Yeah but now I will say this. I think that was the, that idea I think was the, is the real cause of the problem that we are in today in that Memphis did escape violence. The image of Memphis was changing and I think that the power structure and a lot of the people that we have perhaps worked in (muffled) and have gone around the country and have generally said and as they have discussed this as in indicating that the negro is worse satisfied and the fact so to speak they knew how to get along with negroes when in essence as we have tried to talk with some of those people and talk to them and try to explain that the (muffled) had to take a more active role so to speak as we have talked about the matter of job discrimination, the matter of discrimination in education. As we have talked about this, I am talking about we here and the NAACP and negroes in that area. The power structure generally felt that in essence that everything was alright and as I said they were lured into taking a nap when in essence they should have been out there trying to stay ahead of the situation they had lost the lead they had. I think that is a classic example of that is the matter of the sanitation strike. When it started, when the sanitation strike started the, well of course the NAACP got into it on the, not we didn't just get into the work but the sanitation workers when they saw us but we have been dealing with the sanitation workers and the sanitation problem for about 7 or 8 years./ But when it started, immediately the actions that were suggested by the NAACP and the white community could not understand, they couldn't understand it because they did not really feel the depth that negroes thought was the sanitation situation was in this community. For instance they talked about tying up

the telephones. Well the whites say what is going on here today and then we talked about bringing garbage and putting on city hall. Well they just couldn't understand this, they are saying what is going wrong, what is happening to the NAACP. The point I am saying is instead of their taking these threats and considering them as how grave this problem is in the negro community, they took the position that something must have happened to the leadership of the NAACP or what has happened to him. If they had taken these threats as we consider them as we knew what the feeling was in the negro community, I think perhaps the history of Memphis would have been part different than it is.

David Yellin- You were trying to tell them something, and they didn't want to hear what you were telling them, now why?

Jesse Turner- That's right they didn't want to hear.

Anne Trotter- They were after symptoms rather than causes isn't that what you say.

Jesse Turner- Yes, I think that is true and I think also the situation is, I think the reason they didn't want to hear is I think they recognized, and rightfully so perhaps, they were afraid of the domino theory. I supposed in a matter of what is going to happen if we give in to these folks what is going to happen to the other negros that are working and here there I think they were true there.

David Yellin- Now can we act as devil's advocate.

Jesse Turner- Yes.

David Yellin- Your telling us that through the years you talked to these people you went to Orgill and his group and said now look something where we are trying to do here, and they try to do it in one way or another not all the time doing all the things you want but doing something and so on. And then suddenly you come to them and say now look this is very serious, you got to go the whole way. Is that a breakdown on your communication?

Jesse Turner- No I think that here in connection with the sanitation strike you have got another element there you have got to deal with here and that is with mayor Lobe being in office who negros hated and who negros had no confidence in. So he immediately raises the issue of the white community, so when he champions the cause of the other side of this issue you get a confrontation here that h in the past that we have not had. In other words they did not commit a confrontation previously, we never, ion other words when Lobe was mayor before making the same statements he had before, he was a weak mayor I the sense that the commission could over rule him.

David Yellin- So you didn't pay much attention to him?

Jesse Turner- So that meant you did not get the cutting off, that means you did not get the confrontation and no we didn't pay attention because we didn't have to

because of the fact that the, let's take the sanitation situation we wouldn't have all been under his particular control in other words he would not be speaking specifically. As the results of the election last year when the race issue again. We got back into a racial situation again as far as elections are concerned, when the race issue becomes the paramount issue and this is what it became in the last election between Lobe and Ingram. When you find a situation where 98 1/2% of negroes vote for one candidate and 75% of the whites vote for another candidate, you see we are on trouble in that situation with such a large negro minority. Now as a result of that when Lobe comes into office then he and he starts taking his stand of which is popular with the white community since he got 75% so naturally I his administration generally would be popular with the white community and then we bring up these issues so called the domino theory which they certainly would have to confront. I think these issues that if you had issues such that the committee could not act, in other words, and I am not even saying the MCCR itself, I don't think that they, I don't think our committee was sold on the fact, in other words I would put it another way, I think they generally agree with the mayor. It is my idea that they themselves generally agree with the mayor and for instance of course this was very ineffective and had no effect at all.

David Yellin- But another thing here I think ought to be at least looked at, what I am getting at the severity of your change if you follow me came as a shock to certain people. And what I am trying to get at is why did it come as a shock?

Jesse Turner- Well first as you were saying the severity of the change we do not consider the change severe. In other words I don't, what you are saying what you are just asking that the point that they considered the change severe we did not consider the change severe...

David Yellin- I told you I was being the devil's advocate.

Jesse Turner- Yeah, I understand yes but you see because of the fact that and I think that perhaps to an extent we may ask this the question is that this sanitation situation had been with us for some time and the question certainly may be asked well why at this particular time which would make it look like a superior change and as I said you have to look at that in light of the fact that you have got a mayor who has been elected whom the negroes had no confidence in. This is the, you have this man elected as mayor and he is the man that you have to deal with. So when you deal with the sanitation situation you are not only dealing with support for the sanitation but you are also dealing with a fight against Henry Lobe. So you get then a combination of situation which, I suspect if Ingram had been elected mayor, I doubt you would have had any sanitation strike and I don't think you would have had any sanitation strike because of the fact that although in my opinion he was no better than Lobe but the negro generally felt that he was better that he might have looked after their interests and I doubt if he would have had the sanitation strike, in fact when he was mayor he got an injunction against it see.

David Yellin- Now do you think there is any, and this is my own thinking, that what you did to Henry Lobe was to cast him in a certain position, albeit he was in that position and he probably, it was his true position. But you said you were against him, and therefore he is going to take this stand there is no doubt about it and then boom you socked into the city or the white community and said now look this is very severe you better change and they were surprised. Here they had been lulled by your own explanation it has been so peaceable they believed their own publicity that you were happy.

Jesse Turner- I wouldn't say, I would say as far as Lobe is concerned and putting him in this position you have not go back a bit and remember this that the reason Lobe was in this position as far as the negro community is concerned is because when Lobe came into public office he was pushed into public office by negro votes.

David Yellin- The first time?

Jesse Turner- The first time when he ran for city commission, Lobe came into the negro community promising what he was going to do on their behalf. Not only promising but indicating to the fact and indicating that he was a Jew a minority race himself and certainly they could expect sympathy and support from him. When he then got into the office he then took this opposite view and the negroes, not only the opposite view from being passive but an active opposite view and the negro shaver never forgotten him for that. And of course so when he comes back into office this time and this is what they are faced with and of course certainly you may say, or you could argue that his intentions may have changed which they could have. And I certainly would not argue on that situation but it is difficult it seems to me for a man who schools the negroes once for them to take him into their arms this time and hope he was going to be a changed man. So it is possible, entirely possible that because of the fear of Lobe that the negroes did go into a position here in which they were not, which may not have been called. However I think you also have to realize that I think from the standpoint that the strike is concerned that mayor Lobe has one way he acts which is terrible from the standpoint of negotiations. In other words what I see is that when this started he immediately became involved in the strike himself and said specifically what he was not going to do. Well I just think when you are dealing in the situation of a public official that you find that certainly my limited experience that you find that very seldom would you take a stand saying what you are not going to do. You will figure out I am not certain what is the best thing and you will leave yourself some room to maneuver in and of course he left himself no room to maneuver in and as the results of that I think that has been the negroes figure. That says there is no way, no room to maneuver and they are asking for everything and they are saying they aren't going to do it. So I think that you have gotten yourself into....

David Yellin- So in other words the hardening processes is what I think we are getting at. You feel he hardened immediately instead of the charge that because you people hardened he hardened this kind of thing.

Jesse Turner- Well you see that is true because initially not, initially the, this sanitation strike although the majority of the negroes supported him, or had sympathy with him I will put it that way. But the majority of the negro community was not actively supporting him, I am just talking about from an active standpoint. In other words although they were in sympathy with him and but it only developed into an active situation as the situation developed.

David Yellin- Can we go now into this strike and what happened I think is what you are saying would probably tell it much better. When did you first become acquainted with the strike or the eminence of a strike, were you consulted before?

Jesse Turner- No we were not consulted before, in other words I came to knowledge of it the morning...well actually I had some knowledge of it on Sunday, I had some knowledge of what was going on that Sunday.

David Yellin- That is the 11<sup>th</sup>.

Jesse Turner- That is the 11<sup>th</sup>. That is right.

David Yellin- What knowledge is that?

Jesse Turner- Well all of my knowledge was is that they were meeting trying to better their working conditions. If you remember this happened during the time of the New York strike the new York sanitation workers and I knew that they were meeting then trying to get something resolved as far as their own conditions were concerned.

David Yellin- The sanitation workers were meeting with whom?

Jesse Turner- With some of the city officials I didn't know particularly and also I knew that there was some grievance, I knew there was some specific grievance about those persons who had been working out there one day, the question that they were, in other words the men went out to work one day and they paid the whites and didn't pay the negro. Now I had known of that situation leading up to it but as far as the immediate strike was concerned it was that Sunday.

David Yellin- Now the NAACP didn't take any action as a result if the sewer workers getting only two hours...

Jesse Turner- No.

David Yellin- You were not asked to and you didn't, but you were just aware of it as you are aware of other things.

Jesse Turner- That's right.

David Yellin- and you didn't attach too much deep significance to it.

Jesse Turner- No because of the fact that we have had from the standpoint of the sanitation workers some of their complaints were far deeper than that in other

words, such as the matter of lack of promotion, such as the matter of men working, some man who may have worked for a number of years and somebody who has come in later getting more pay. Such as the promotion which they give whites and not [put negroes in those positions, certainly those things were deeper and such as the fact that we knew also about the men who had been killed and had no insurance, in other words we had been through this whole area and such as the lack of job security. I mean all of these things in or opinion were far deeper than that particular situation so this was just a part of an overall fight that we had on it.

David Yellin- So when this happened it fit into a fuller picture that you knew of. At any time however of the other involvements of no promotion and the death of the two workers, you took no official action as an organization?

Jesse Turner- Wait a minute yes, we took, well we took official action, we did not take nay official action as far as the death of the two men were concerned but as far as the other aspects were concerned yes. Our first complaint was that filed on behalf of the sanitation workers was filed during the time that Henry Lobe was in office the first time when he was in office the first time he was elected which I believe, I am not certain but I believe that he was elected in 1959 if I am not mistaken.

David Yellin- That is (muffled) as commissioner.

Jesse Turner- No I believe he was elected....let's see wait just a minute let me see if I have gotten my times straightened out, let me see.

David Yellin- Because Ingram came in 64, or 63.

Jesse Turner- Well if Ingram came in, I think Ingram came in 64 that meant that Lobe came in as mayor in 60 and that men's he was elected to the again in 1960 and then 1956. We started out the first action we took was during the time he was serving as public works commissioner which was from 1960 to 63.

David Yellin- Right.

Jesse Turner- That was the first time that we NAACP started. Now since the beginning in 19, wait a minute he came in, I mean between the period of 1956 to 1959, this is the period I am talking about because he was the public works commission then. But we filed several complaints during that period but after that period during the time he was mayor we were up there a number of time filing complaints to Bill Ferris about the conditions for the sanitation worker and they followed through the term of mayor Ingram. So we were filing numerous complaints in regards to these other things but not the one that is for the two employees that were killed.

David Yellin- So we are establishing the fact that this was a long time. This is something that you knew.

Jesse Turner- Yes.

David Yellin- Do you feel it was something the general public knew?

Jesse Turner- I am not certain how well the white public knew it. But I know this is one reason, that question is often asked, well why should the negroes be so concerned about the conditions of the sanitation workers, this was an old negro community in general. I think this is one of the reasons, is because we have filed so many complaints on them. In other words this is a matter of common (muffled) whenever we got to a meeting we talk about it and talk about it the poor conditions under which negroes work we start out with the sanitation workers and this is a common situation that has been brought up meeting after meeting and it has been building up through the years and we have been dealing with those conditions, poor conditions under which they work.

David Yellin- Yes and this knowledge was spread around the negro community because three members were member of this church, 4 people belonged to this church or this organization and so on.

Jesse Turner- And you can always get support when you go and you talk about the conditions as always somebody that knows about the poor conditions under which they...

David Yellin- They knew a neighbor or a friend or a relative.

Jesse Turner- That's right.

David Yellin- This is very important I think to get the picture that it didn't just come up February 12<sup>th</sup> or two weeks before because of the sewer workers and so on.

Jesse Turner- No it is a situation and if we, let's say we would have NAACP meeting and we started talking about conditions and somebody would bring up some condition in the matter of the , let's say the matter of the restroom facilities see. I am just talking about this is a problem in the matter of eating lunch this is a problem. And we have had all of these we have gone through that whole situation, it is something that we have dealt with down through the years and we were complaining from one person to another and then it was during Ferris' administration I believe they fired some other person so we haven't been able to get anything done. Look we have elected people and the strange thing about this is that almost everybody you see sent Lobe, Lobe was elected by only negro vote and he was in charge of that department and Ferris was elected and I believe as we see, when he was elected he as not, because Sugarman was running against him and the negroes did not support Ferris, Sugarman was running against him but Ferris got into that particular position and yet nothing was done and of course he turned out supposedly a friend of the negro, even though the negroes didn't support him but the point is that yet nothing was done about that situation.

David Yellin- And then Pete Sisson was in charge.

Jesse Turner- Then Pete Sisson then came in and of course he did nothing. And so this made this situation in general it made a small bit of improvement but very little. And see the strange thing about that is that all the, well all the negroes were, in other words that people could be fired no civil service and everything that the other city employees were in was leave people were not and so this happened that this is where most of your negroes are. So this is where, everywhere you look at it you have to face the fact that these people were in this position because they were negroes, these people do not get the same benefits from the city that they would get because they are negroes and this is why everywhere you run, you run smack into that particular problem and get the racial angle involved.

David Yellin- Now how come you never brought this up to Ed Orgill's group that human relations, community relations council.

Jesse Turner- Let's see I am not certain that we did not, I did not say that it was not brought up because we did, in connection with the, I am fairly certain although I don't have a minute that I am fairly certain we have discussed, well I have no doubt we have discussed it because when they were talking about firing, when they got the injunction this was a problem. When Ferris fired them these were all big problems that particular day, I am fairly certain that this has come to that committee's attention but the problem is that some of these areas and many of these areas of course these committees never did do anything about it. But I cannot say you know I am fairly certain it was but I cannot say specifically any specific instance to say that we did bring it up and at that meeting such and such was decided, I can't think of any instance.

David Yellin- Ok right. Now we come to the strike February 12<sup>th</sup>. You read about it in the paper or you heard about it and then very soon your organization NAACP took a stand.

Jesse Turner- Yeah well the strike was on the 12<sup>th</sup> when it started and of course I think the, let's see the Wednesday, the 14<sup>th</sup> because I went to the meeting. That was the first day I went out and went to the meeting out at Firestone Union Hall and of course our branch then immediately took a position on it supporting the strike. It then started calling special meetings and we started drawing up procedures by which we could get support from the public for the strike. Since because first we didn't know or not, since primarily this was a the union was involved, we didn't know whether we were a part of negotiations. But we wanted to make certain that if they were going to get involved and they were going to continue the strike that we ought to get all these issues settled and get the fact that this is racial situation involved. Unfortunately or fortunate however you want to look at it. Initially the union folks did not, well I don't say they didn't want our help but they wanted to make certain that this was not a racial situation.

David Yellin- Now were there any confrontations?



Jesse Turner- Well the only confrontation that came on that well there was several confrontations. One of them was of course they put out their pamphlet which says this is not a racial matter, this is number 1 which meant that this to an extent was an attack on our position. Number 2 is that Dr. Smith went out to speak and they did not want him to, they wanted to introduce him they did not want to introduce him as vice president of the NAACP. (muffled we had a meeting and a resolution passed a resolution supporting them and they would not permit our person to read the resolution.

David Yellin- At their meeting.

Jesse Turner- Supporting them at their meeting. The excuse of course given there was that their committee was supposed to check anything that anybody read before the meeting and they could not permit us to read that unless it had gone before their committee. Well of course that was an excuse because knowing that we were the NAACP they knew what our position was that we are usually...

David Yellin- Was this the 14<sup>th</sup> meeting?

Jesse Turner- This, no this was not the 14<sup>th</sup> meeting this was a day or two after the 14<sup>th</sup>. The 14<sup>th</sup> they introduced me and of course it is hard for them to, I was there, it would have been hard for them to get there without introducing me because of the fact a lot of the men you see at that time were looking, you see this is why they needed tremendous support because the men hardly knew which to go whether or not they were going to get the public support for whether or not these were I say crucial periods, because at that time with no public support they didn't know which way to go.

David Yellin- You mean the sanitation workers themselves.

Jesse Turner- The sanitation workers yeah and so they were looking for whatever kind of support they could and of course they were glad to see the NAACP coming out and joining their support in this situation. And but I let them no in no uncertain terms I told them that the association was behind them, that this is a racial matter and that we were going to tackle it as such. Now the Dr. Smith had been out and that was the first (muffled) but they did not confront me with that situation but subsequently they did put out a handbill saying this was not a racial matter.

David Yellin- Now did you ever have, or was this Mr. Champa's doing or T.O. Jones?

Jesse Turner- I don't know who did it but I would rather think, I don't know but my opinion is that you know initially they were, well I don't know which one did it but I think that the general assumption was at that time they were going to get a lot of support from the white labor folks and that with the NAACP coming in here this might scare away some of them, this would be my idea of what was perhaps behind that.

David Yellin- I see they really wanted to keep it a labor thing,.

Jesse Turner- And they perhaps thought they were going to get the support from the whites that would be necessary to for them to win on that basis.

David Yellin- So did you ever later talk about this?

Jesse Turner- No we didn't no, because we felt that we had a responsibility to the men, number 1, we had a responsibility to the sanitation worker period. Regardless of that took, union, regardless of what they thought and we just took the position that we were going our course whether or not they agreed with our course or not. And so we then called, we then immediately wrote letters to all of the churches and clubs and notifying them that the men were on strike and they were going to need some help and that they should raise money and try to help them that we did not want that money to come through us, we wanted, that it ought to be sent out there to them but that all the churches and this letter went out, urging them to do that.

David Yellin- Excuse me go ahead.

Jesse Turner- And then we set up a for that Monday night the following Monday night we then set up a meeting for having an all night vigil at city hall in support of the sanitation worker. So this when our demonstration starter drawing support, contacting clubs and reminding them that individually reminding them of the fight and that it was necessary for them to come on out and show some support.

David Yellin- That 21<sup>st</sup> then would be that all night vigil. Did it take place or what happened do you recall?

Jesse Turner- Yes it took place but I am not certain, I think it was the...

Anne Trotter- 17<sup>th</sup> or 18<sup>th</sup>?

Jesse Turner- I think it was the 19<sup>th</sup>. I think it was yes, oh yes it took place and we had quite a group out. We had some group of about 70 or 80 beginning at 6 that night over until 6 that morning.

David Yellin- Now to get back to the letter you sent, you sent the letter to the individual churches and the ministers, not tot eh revere Starks group?

Jesse Turner- That's right....well his group was not involved in the thing at the time. There was no, at that time, the first minister that I know was involved in the situation of course Jones can give you that more clearly than I, there was a bishop A.F. Turner I don't know where, bishop J.F. Turner I don't know his address but the first(muffled) he was there and reverend Bell, reverend Ezekiel Bell, perhaps those two were probably the first two ministers who got involved in the situation.

David Yellin- Did they go at all through you?

Jesse Turner- No, not they didn't, not I think bishop Turner had been meeting with the folks just in general I think he has. Reverend Bell I suppose he got involved because he said that some of his relatives were members but he did not get involved directly through us. I don't think the ministers in general got involved almost two weeks or so after that they got involved.

David Yellin- COME started.

Jesse Turner- And only reason the reason the way they got involved was that after we wrote to the, should have kept these dates but after we wrote to the church4es some of the churches started sending money and I started sending, I am not certain that the group that was (muffled) two or three groups that were working around the situation and then it was perhaps, why after we started the question came up of raising money and the, and I remember being at a meeting where the ministers indicated if you expected ministers to raise any money for these folk then the ministers going to have to be in charge. Now I don't know that if you expect them to raise any large amount of money form the churches and this is the way the ministers got in charge from that standpoint.

David Yellin- So right about there COME idea was started?

Jesse Turner- Yes it was started somewhere along that time because at that time they had no particular meaning and they didn't get a name, the COME idea was started and they didn't get a name, let me see you know they had this march, had the meeting with city hall after that (Muffled).

David Yellin- 22<sup>nd</sup> the first one and the 23<sup>rd</sup> when the macing took place.

Jesse Turner- 22<sup>nd</sup>, 23<sup>rd</sup>, Well anyway so the then it seems to that, I am trying to get my time, oh yeah. We had the all night vigil on the 19<sup>th</sup> and it looked like we didn't had this meting. Then the ministers got somewhat involved just after that because just before after that because we then went on down to Mason Temple and after that I believe that Saturday, I believe COME's idea well they got started on that Saturday, which was the Saturday after the 19<sup>th</sup> or whatever it was.

David Yellin- Yes, the 24<sup>th</sup>.

Jesse Turner- Meeting at Mason temple. All of this perhaps if they had not had the macing whatever that day was that Thursday I believe it was. This is the thing that propelled the thing at a much faster pace than it would have been if they had not had that particular confrontation.

David Yellin- Now when you were down at city hall were you there that day that Fred Davis and his committee met.

Jesse Turner- No I was not at city hall at that particular time.

David Yellin- When were you involved in the city hall situation?

Jesse Turner- I was at, let me see now. I was at city hall, I am trying to get my days straight here now. I believe we had somebody in city hall on the 20<sup>th</sup> if I am not mistaken, I believe on the 20<sup>th</sup> we had somebody if I am not mistaken and Fred Davis meeting I believe was the...

David Yellin- 22<sup>nd</sup>.

Jesse Turner- Was the 22<sup>nd</sup>, or 21<sup>st</sup>?

Anne Trotter- 22<sup>nd</sup>.

David Yellin- 22<sup>nd</sup>

Jesse Turner- 22<sup>nd</sup>, alright., Then where was the macing the 23<sup>rd</sup>?

David Yellin- 23<sup>rd</sup>.

Jesse Turner- Alright well...alright then I think we were down at the city hall and we didn't much on the 20<sup>th</sup>, this is many first time there and I was not at the Fred Davis' hearing but we were at the one they had on the 20<sup>th</sup> down at the city at the auditorium.

David Yellin- Yes and this is the situation when you were quoted as saying about bringing the garbage.

Jesse Turner- Oh well that came out before then because of the fact that we had made that charge, we had made that before. You see when we had our meeting prior to when we had our meeting prior to our vigil, we came up with a number of different ideas as to what would be needed to bring this thing to an end. And it was our position which we were fearful that the men would not be bale to stay out too much longer. I was even a short way to bring this thing to head. In that we brought up the suggestion of carving up the telephone lines this happened to be one of them and of course quite a bit was said about that and there was a number of suggestions that we made in that particular meeting.

David Yellin- You made it to the council?

Jesse Turner- No, these are suggestions that we made and then he press came out and got those suggestions and of course immediately we had to oh I guess a line of complaint from them talking about it, what you are going to do with carving up them lines of the telephone and all that situation the fire department and the police department. Anyway we had a number of suggestions that came out of that but out of that the first one was for us to have an all night vigil this was the first one. We were to put the others on the top. So after the all night vigil, then we had another meeting the next day to try to see what was the next thing to do to implement that. At that time we decided that maybe it would be a good idea also to implement it, the next step would be to get this thing reformed was that since we ought to not use the telephone situation as the first report that we could come up with another one and

this is the suggestion that we had that maybe we ought to consider, then everybody come down and bring some garbage on city hall. This is...

David Yellin- Was this a serious suggestion?

Jesse Turner- Well it was serious to the extent well we discussed it and we said well, we had some other ideas that were to serious the situation that we would see what would be necessary. Yes this was a serious suggestion and we started to, we tried to (muffled) we had this was would have been one of our projects we started to consider this as one of our other projects but we side stepped for some particular reason and I have forgotten what it was but the anyways the initial idea was not to have any (muffled) was to have a symbolic, was a few people just to bring some garbage down there and put it on there as a symbolic gesture in this regard. And of course then everybody got, the newspapers got on that. Now at that meeting at city hall this was just another suggestion that I had given but at that particular time, which this would have been serious but at the time when they left there and got into the mace situation then the whole thing changed then. You see you did not need then the type of a thing that would be necessary to...

David Yellin- Dramatize.

Jesse Turner- To dramatize as you would (muffled) SO for that reason there was no particular other mention made of that.

Jesse Turner- Well I think we are getting that picture now but did you find it difficult to get involved with your organization, did you find all of these lines coming in confusing or was this inspiring to you?

Jesse Turner- What lines do you have reference to?

David Yellin- I mean here in the ministers are coming in the unions are going in one direction you are coming in, maybe somebody else is coming in?

Jesse Turner- Well, no, we took the position that certainly it presented some problems, but we took the position that it was the most important thing we had at that time was to go ahead and win this fight. That if we lost this fight, that anything else you did then would have been lost anyway. This was a fight that you could not lose and as the results of that even though there was problems that you have because of these various groups and conflicting interests and all that but we said that would have to be minor in comparison to winning this strike.

David Yellin- So you were prepared to do whatever you could.

Jesse Turner- That's right.

David Yellin- Now you felt your thrust was I would like you to say it generally was not to take care of the union business. Your thrust as I gather it was to support the men.

Jesse Turner- Yes I was just, well let me put it this way our thrust was to support the men but what happened as you recognize that when the, and this as you realize, when the, and this may be (muffled). But you know the city council went ahead and agreed to by 7 of these 9 things they were asking for. So when they left there were only two big issues they were actually arguing about and they turned around that one of them was the union recognition and the other one was the dues check off. So it meant that what had happened is in the fight for this, that they then made these the two big issues and when they made these two the big issues then of course our position is that if you did not win on these two that as far as the public is concerned you have lost even if you have won on all the others. So the point is that then we had to get out there and fight with these two because they were symbolic of everything you were fighting for you had this particular stage. And when the mayor particularly made his position so clear and he was so adamant that this is what it is going to be and this is it period. Any course that meant then for you to win or get consideration you were going to get on the others you had to win on these two issues here. So that then meant that the position of the union and the position of civil rights was a group in the same.

David Yellin- So that your position taken that this fight then became a symbol for a the fight for the entire negro population.

Jesse Turner- That's right.

David Yellin- So your idea too that the other side, the white community those representatives of the white community in any case, thought of it as a domino theory. You too thought of it as an anti-domino theory.

Jesse Turner- Well yes, let me put it, I thought of it as a domino theory too and of course this was alright. We have got other negroes over there in the same category. But I think also you have got some thing else to realize to at this particular stage the other groups quit talking about this not being a racial situation. Now at that time it was nothing but racial situation. They had discarded this idea of saying it was not a racial situation. The union officials and everybody was saying this was a racial situation and it was. Because at that stage you see along the way you had lost, you see initially you had (muffled) and his group that were (muffled) of course as the thing went along you lost them along the way and they picked back on somewhere along the way and they were just there primarily but when they were there they was letting us know this is a racial situation.

David Yellin- And so you felt that and it began really to graphically describe it, it was a head on collision.

Jesse Turner- That's true.

David Yellin- At this point. And in a sense you were ready for it because you had been living with it.

Jesse Turner- Yes that is true, our position is that we have been living with it and this is what it was initially and nobody can argue that this was not a racial situation, no one in the world the mayor would have taken the position he did take if these had been 1,300 white folks, no way in the world he would have taken that position. In fact if they had been white they wouldn't have been in the position in the first place, because under the conditions under which they worked it wouldn't have gone this long with the complaints they had.

David Yellin- So now you are in it. And you are involved in it and certainly you gave all you could to do what you could. Did you work together with the other negro groups or how did you function?

Jesse Turner- Well we were functioning on our own the NAACP had member son almost all of the committees and the head of a number of committees if you are looking for work as the group is concerned. When they went down to get arrested I was there with the secretary, Mrs. Smith was one of the ones that was arrested in the group. When it came to picketing we were always in on the picketing and the marching and the meetings and all of that situation the association was there. Now there was, whether or not there was believe it or not but there was as the thing developed I think and had it developed when the ministers came in you did have a, you did not have as much of a projection of the NAACP as a in my opinion as it should have been but I didn't argue about that but this is perhaps is understandable because of the fact that usually and this is perhaps normal in this type of situation where you have these organizations coming together and most of the community the NAACP is the predominant organization in the first place and of course you have got to almost anyway you go you run into the NAACP./ As far as these actions (muffled) this is no different here and of course somewhere along the way you run into some conflict of interest as far as that is concerned. By far and large I did not find anything unusual as far as this situation was concerned because we stayed in and we worked with it and we said we were going to stay with it until at such time that they did get the thing settled. In fact our national office sent them down \$1,000 (muffled). And also when it was faltering too they needed a national, they wanted to get the national image in the situation and they wanted Roy Wilkins to speak, I called Roy and he said he could make it because he had just finished with the president's commission on disorder and so we met one Sunday night and we found that we just had to have some national speaker. So I went to New York and got him one Sunday night and got him to come that Thursday to speak.

David Yellin- You had tried before that?

Jesse Turner- Yeah we tried before that.

David Yellin- You called him or...

Jesse Turner- Yeah.

David Yellin- And he couldn't make it.

Jesse Turner- No he couldn't make it.

David Yellin- But then...

Jesse Turner- So I went up to New York and I told him...

David Yellin- You went specifically for this purpose?

Jesse Turner- Yes, well you know I am on the board of the NAACP and it just so happened I am on the executive committee of the national office and they were having an executive committee meeting so I had not intended to attend that meeting but since they wanted to have him I said well I better go over there and meet him. When I went to the meeting I just put the cards on the table and told him we just had to have him or somebody, we had to get this thing it was on the national situation because this is a fight we could not lose and so he had the sanctity to look and find that he could squeeze one day in and we took that day right away because we didn't have much time to prepare for him, and so this is how we got him in.

David Yellin- And did Barrett Ruston come by the same way?

Jesse Turner- I don't know if Barrett Ruston at the same time that I was checking on Wilkin somebody else had contacted from the labor situation was to check there and somebody else who had contact with Martin Luther King was to be checking on that angle and we were to get this done as soon as possible. And unfortunately or fortunately it so happened that we got Ruston and Wilkins on the same day.

David Yellin- double anything, again if we could just for the record who contacted you the first time and or the second time about getting Roy Wilkins?

Jesse Turner- Well I don't know, well we..

David Yellin- You don't remember?

Jesse Turner- Well in the first time it was we had there was a meeting but I don't know who made the recommendation but in the second time I do know that in the meeting reverend Lawson was there and Champa was there and Mr. Epps was there. I know those 3 and I am trying to see, I know those three were there because we were the ones who talked about it (muffled) together and I don't know who else happened to be at this meeting.

David Yellin- This was a small sort of strategy meeting.

Jesse Turner- Small sort of strategy meeting that is right.

David Yellin- And the name came up and you (muffled).

Jesse Turner- Well it came up, well no, the way it came up I think the suggestion probably came from well you see we had tried to get Roy before and I did get him so



I had just discarded that idea. I think Champa or Epps suggested that you have got to look, why can't we get Roy Wilkins and it must have come from them again because I had discarded the idea.

David Yellin- What was the major factor in getting Roy Wilkins to inspire the people here, to get national publicity, to get local publicity?

Jesse Turner- Well primarily was to inspire the people you had to get national publicity. This is what to inspire the people, to get national publicity and also to impress upon the local folks that this was not something that was going to die away, there was going to be other efforts that are going to be made behind it. In fact some of these, let's see I am trying to see, I am certain where it was made but I came in contact, I am not certain where but there was some effort by some here to try to sell Roy on the fact that the demands of the union were not legitimate. I don't know if that was tried before this or as a result of his supposing to come here. (muffled) Or somebody wanted to see him, I am not certain how that came up, somebody here wanted to see him once they knew he was going to come. I suppose to try to sell him on the fact that the demands of the union were not just.

David Yellin- Oh really?

Jesse Turner- But as I said that is the reason why it gets Roy in here.

David Yellin- Going to make a quick shift here. Did you ever meet Dr. King?

Jesse Turner- Yeah I met Dr. King some several years ago.

David Yellin- Did you have any connection with any of his appearances here?

Jesse Turner- No, no, no, you mean in this recent?

David Yellin- In this recent.

Jesse Turner- No.

David Yellin- and you didn't meet him any one of the times he was here?

Jesse Turner- No.

David Yellin- Because we are trying to get at the activities of Dr. King too for the record just finding out. Now is there anything that you can particularly recall following Roy Wilkins and then Dr King and coming to speak and then the progression of events. That first march, the cancellation second march and anything that you can particularly recall. Because what you have done and done it beautifully is given us a wonderful background because then the events take over don't you think. And it is so important that we understand how the events came about and what they meant and so on. Just sort of as a summation for this part of it and Mr. Turner we would like your permission if going over some of our material that we want to clear up either a fact or two or maybe even ask you to comment on

something that either one of us or something body on our committee could have the liberty of calling you.

Jesse Turner- Yeah that is ok.

David Yellin- Fine. Because I am sure that we have missed something and you will want to say something else. How do you believe, what do you think is going to happen now what is the summer like?

Jesse Turner- Well, I don't know, my general idea is that probably the, well two things that seem to me has happened here. One, is that I am not certain that the very tragic events that happened here have softened the attitude of the white to a great extent. I gather the feeling that the attitude is perhaps hardened. This has been situation I get. I think that probably that you may have the (muffled) and the rioting (muffled) may have tended to lessen or to prevent that for the summer. I get the general impression that may be so for the reason, I think one of the reasons why, reasons that I indicated earlier why I figure that we were in great danger here in our community here form that situation is that the white community has been going across the country talking about how pleasant things were here and how they had, then people come here to see how were you able to solve your problems and keep negros satisfied when in essence negros were not satisfied. I think negros generally resented that type of situation and I think some of the folks would show them that negros are not happy here. I think with that image having been taken off and the white community realizing that we have got until now to get out and try to show that, trying to prove themselves so to speak. I think you might not have the type of thing that you probably would have had here this summer, this is as I am interested.

David Yellin- What about the young people in the negro community? How do you feel they are going to act, react, what has been your relationship with them, I mean generally the young people...

Jesse Turner- Well I don't know which ways to put it but I said one thing I think the biggest problem form the young folks standpoint that I see is that this matter of lack of jobs. I don't think you have, you see here you talk about, here you are talking about the negro militant groups and all that. Well you don't have the type of militant here you talk about in these other communities. It is not, it is just not here. Now I think that what you do have perhaps is that some people out there talking loud and negro youth recognize the fact about this job situation here is terrible and I think that you might have folks who may give some (muffled) and support to it because of that particular fact. But I think that they could find some different way to get to solving, I am talking about not only the permanency but the temporary fro some of the job situations which is certainly the most important thing that we are faced with at this particular time. I think that what we are going to have to do here I this community is to try to find some ways to get more people jobs so we can solve some of these problems.

David Yellin- Do you have any hope that anything will be possible if mayor Lobe continues in office?

Jesse Turner- Well I think that my personal idea is that Lobe is not going to, I doubt if he is going to take this same adamant stand in these situations. I think he is going, I think he has probably learned some thing out of it and you find that in situations such as this that he is just going to have to feel, that he can't just take an adamant stand on things he has got to do a lot of (muffled) and even if he believes something I would think that this is going to be his position and I doubt seriously whether or not he has going to fight as hard racially or a racial situation as he has done in the past, this is just my idea I haven't talked to him and I don't talk to him but this is my idea that out of this instead of what some people think that he will just take an adamant stand again and say since I know I can't get any negro support I am going to forget about it. Well my personal idea is he is going to take the opposite point of view, this is my personal idea.

David Yellin- Yeah in other words you are saying it may not be a change of principle but a change of tactics.

Jesse Turner- I think so.

David Yellin- it is all for the better right?

Jesse Turner- Strangely some of his friends think that his position in the past has not been his matter of principle. I don't know how they do it but I have talked to some of them they think that he, they say he is a man who is always fighting for the underdog, now how they see that I don't know. I am really surprised I talked to 2 or 3 of them who believe that. And they did not think, they do not think that his other ideas have been the real Henry Lobe but as I said I don't know how they figured that out but I certainly had that to come to me.

David Yellin- I think that as far as I am concerned in a sense that a final question, what do you think Dr. Martin Luther King's influence, position, is now, or even a little further if you could, was in this community and what do you think it will be now as a result of this assassination.

Jesse Turner- Well I think that his influence was very great before. I suspect that his influence (muffled) se I suspect it is greater than when he was here for instance I think he had far more folks let's say who marched in his memorial than had been at any march that he could have led himself. I am just trying to low-cut but I saw some folks who were in that march who were fighting the first march, you see. Some of these people I think that why they got a change I think the change is rather due to the fact that the community, due to the community we have an what had already occurred. I think that perhaps that he perhaps is more influential now than he would be before.

David Yellin- Ok.

Anne Trotter- Thank you.

David Yellin- Thank you very very much sir. (Tape End)