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Anne Trotter- We are interviewing the reverend Blackburn, we are still down in the minimum salary building May the 24<sup>th</sup> 1968 interviewers David Yellin, Anne Trotter. Would you begin by telling us something about yourself where you from, how long you have been here how you happened to come.

Malcolm Blackburn- Well I was born and brought up in Canada principally Columbia. Took all my school and training in Western Canada. I went to Knox Theological college in Toronto and graduated from there. Then went back to the West Coast as a pastor for several years from 1951 through 57' and in 57' I was offered the position of assistant to the stewardship secretary in the Presbyterian church in Canada. Moved to Toronto and served there three years and at that time in 1960 the national council of churches stewardship department had a vacancy and asked me if I would take the position of associate director of the stewardship department, which I did and served there until 1964. In about 1962 my immediate superior Tommy Thompson was on an extended sabbatical in Europe and so I was left kind of in charge of my department and about this time reverend Ezra Johnson who is Dr. Jackson's assistant contacted me and said the AME church was interested in having stewardship seminar and did we have any materials we could provide. So I wrote back and said we have some material we would be glad to supply and also staff if that was helpful because this was part of our function. So we held a week long stewardship seminar in St. Louis which was attended by AME ministers from across the country. Out of that came a decision that this experience of stewardship needed to be repeated at smaller geographical levels, at Episcopal district levels. The big problem was one of providing staff, and I prevailed on the stewardship executives of the various dominations and about 35 of them gave two to three days of time in 1963, gave their time freely. There were assigned to different of these Episcopal district seminars. Now this involved a lot of you know meetings and discussions and consultations getting ready for these things so I was down here a number of times and Dr. Jackson and Dr. Johnson were in New York, planning and writing materials and as I say I was relatively free to do this because as I say my boss had been on sabbatical and I could make more decisions without reference to him. But somewhere in the course of these meetings and preparation someone said jokedly Blackburn has been around so much he might as well join the AME church, this was in 63'. Well from then until the general conference of 1964 we worked very closely together and somewhere along the line the joke became serious and Dr. Jackson and I agreed that following the general conference if he was re-elected he would offer me a position in his department, which he did and which I accepted. So I came down here in August of 64' as stewardship field secretary for the church. IN October 1965 bishop Jordan who was then Episcopal of the 13<sup>th</sup> Episcopal district Kentucky and Tennessee suggested that I ought to be a little bit more deeply involved in the fabric of the churches life then just working out of a departmental office. This church next door,

Anne Trotter- Clayborne Temple.

Malcolm Blackburn- Clayborne Temple. The pastor there was re-appointed to Mt. Zion AME church here in the city, reverend Booker. Bishop Jordan at the time of the conference when the appointments were read did not name the pastor to this church, he left it in the hands of the presiding elder, and bishop Jordan was going to be in Africa for 6 weeks and suggested that the presiding elder Reverend James might care to us me as supply and then bishop would make his appointment on his return. Which he did and he handed me my appointment upon his return. SO I have been pasturing Clayborne Temple since October of 1965, it is 2 and ½ years.

Anne Trotter- Do you feel that you have problems in Memphis because you are white and a minister at a negro church?

Malcolm Blackburn- No I think initially the congregation accepted me because our church (muffled) the pastor is the one who the bishop appoints there fore I was the pastor because the bishop had appointed me.

Anne Trotter- What I meant really was do you have trouble with the whites in Memphis? Do you find that it is trouble for example in having friends?

Malcolm Blackburn- Well until the sanitation strike I didn't have any contact with the white community apart from business contact, supplying materials to our operation here.

David Yellin- Your congregation is completely colored?

Malcolm Blackburn- Yes completely black.

Anne Trotter- Where do you live?

Malcolm Blackburn- I live in a place called Longview heights suburb in the south side of Memphis here, it is the last white family in that immediate family moved out about two weeks after I moved in last July.

David Yellin- Do you have a family?

Malcolm Blackburn- I am separated, I have a wife and two daughters in New Jersey.

David Yellin- Did they come with you before?

Malcolm Blackburn- No,no,no they have never been here.

Malcolm Blackburn- They didn't come.

Malcolm Blackburn- I have had my two daughters down t hey visited last summer and spent about two weeks here. So really I mean I haven't really had any contact with the white community until the strike started and I became known.

Malcolm Blackburn- Now what we are trying to do of course, it must be admitted in the context of time here and the setting that you have an unusual position, it is

unique certainly in this community as it would in many others particularly throughout the south.

Malcolm Blackburn- Yes and relatively unknown in terms of the larger white community.

Anne Trotter- Yeah that was my next question once you became known as a result of this and the brush with police and other things did you begin to have problems like letters, phone calls?

Malcolm Blackburn- No I haven't had any, I have had one letter that I think was an off balanced person.

David Yellin- Do you have a copy of it?

Malcolm Blackburn- I don't know whether I have it, it was a long 12 or 14 page very finely written I read half a page a day kind of thing. It wasn't a terribly hate filled letter and I have never had any phone calls of course my phone number was never in the telephone directory, I mean I got my phone after the directory came out, not that it was an unlisted number and I am not there as much.

David Yellin- Do you find that for instance the negroes when you are in the conferences do you think in any way do you inhibit them?

Malcolm Blackburn- Inhibit? No I don't think so.

David Yellin- In relationship to white people would they say any more?

Malcolm Blackburn- It depends, say a group my own annual conference or a group in my own congregation the answer is no, there is a degree of acceptance albeit the fact that I am white. The only antipathy that I have really expressed has been on the street during the marchers and by the police.

David Yellin- During the march or before or after?

Malcolm Blackburn- During the period of the march, during the period of the march yes several things were reported. For instance one man who was arrested was told that if any trouble broke out in Memphis, this man is John Ferguson who is in jail now. He was arrested by the police on one occasion and they told him that if any trouble broke out in Memphis they were going to get him and Willy James Kemp who was arrested with me at the trucks and I would be shot on sight. Later on in the movement John was arrested again and the police took him down on President's Island and beat him a little bit and told him that the next time they arrested him he might well end up in the river along with that nigger loving preacher Blackburn. These were the open kind of thing that came.

David Yellin- Now is John Ferguson a member of your church or just...?

Malcolm Blackburn- No he is just one of the young people who very early came into the movement.

David Yellin- How did you find that the young people accepted you?

Malcolm Blackburn- I think very well, I was on the youth committee which gave me an exposure to them that I wouldn't have had otherwise and worked closely with them and many of the young people and I got along very well.

Anne Trotter- When you all were marching and you had the trouble with the police, did the city ever use negro police or was it always a white policeman as a symbol of white authority?

Malcolm Blackburn- You mean during the regular marches?

Anne Trotter- During regular marching and during the march which ended in trouble.

Malcolm Blackburn- There were often black policemen around if you, many of the black members of the police department were plainclothes people and where in our mass meetings this kind of thing. There were several occasion where they word got around in the mass meeting where there was a policemen in the crowd. One night here, somebody while the young people's meeting was going on this was after their march 5:30-6:00. Somebody said so and so is a policemen and we had little difficulty getting to him and keeping the young people from crowding in on him and then we had to dismiss the young people and we had to hold this man until well after dark in the front vestibule of the church until al the young people had gone and then brought t hem over here in this building and kept them over here for an hour. Until we were sure it was safe for him to go outside. He denied he was a policemen all the way through.

David Yellin- Oh he denied it, I was going to ask if you spoke with him, but obviously if he denied it there was no conversation.

Malcolm Blackburn- Well on another occasion in a mass meeting at Mt. Olive Cathedral one night, one policemen who was a plain clothes men and everybody knew he was not accepted but nobody paid too much attention.

David Yellin- Do you know his name?

Malcolm Blackburn- Reddick. He was at this meeting at Mt. Olive Cathedral and worked got around that there was another plainclothesmen in there and we asked Reddick to go in and get him out to save trouble which Reddick did and some of the young people were trying to crowd around and intimidate him a little bit.

David Yellin- Was officer Reddick every involved in any other kind of I don't know what you would call it, plainclothes intelligence work?

Malcolm Blackburn- I first met him during the movement.

Anne Trotter- Did you all ever talk to Holloman about this? Why should there be plainclothesmen at a meeting?

Malcolm Blackburn- We talked about it I think in city hall in council chamber it seems to me on a couple of occasions. Objected strenuously to the fact so many policemen period. Not only in our mass meetings but shepherding us on the marches this kind of thing. About this time there was a mass meeting at Mt. Pisgah church, yeah Park Ave. This was the night Jerry Fanion and the tri state photographer, one of those two from continental were arrested, here he is. (Tape break) The two arrested are report had gotten around in the church that the police were putting parking tickets on the cars for illegal parking and Jerry Fanion went out along with the tri-state defender photographer.

David Yellin- Did we cover the date on this?

Malcolm Blackburn- No. I can't give you I don't recall the date.

David Yellin- Well we will look it up in the paper.

Malcolm Blackburn- When they went outside the police arrested them.

Anne Trotter- For what?

Malcolm Blackburn- For jaywalking and carried them to not to the armor station but someplace else as it was and they were fined I recall \$11. By the time they had got to the station and been fined and paid their fine we had gotten to chief Holloman, and he corrected the situation and made an apology and I think suspended the officers I think for whatever period I wasn't too concerned about that end of it. But it was this kind of thing they were protesting this over reaction and over repression by the police and there was some drawing back. Now whether it was because we were protesting it or whether it was because they began to see that the marches were peaceful down town. I don't know but at least there was a little pulling back on this issue.

David Yellin- Now can you kind of trace your own involvement, did you first get involved with the youth group?

Malcolm Blackburn- No I got involved the day the sanitation workers wanted to have a meeting with the council on February the 22<sup>nd</sup> and on that afternoon we got word that there was to be this meeting. Dr. Jackson said to me come on Malcolm let's go down to city hall and see what's going on.

David Yellin- There was no connection before that?

Malcolm Blackburn- No connection before, I knew there was some problem as we all did but I didn't know too much about it. So I drove him down in my car and we parked on Front St. and started to go into city hall and we are told the meeting was over in the auditorium so we went over to the auditorium and we were there for that meeting and I guess you had some reporting on this.

David Yellin- Well then that is the 23<sup>rd</sup>, you didn't go to the meeting were councilmen Davis chaired his committee meeting the day before.

Anne Trotter- 23<sup>rd</sup>.

Malcolm Blackburn- Then the word began to get out as the meeting was over, the council meeting was over and some of us went up on the stage and some of us were trying to talk to the crowd and others of us were just standing around discussing the situation. The suggestion was made, I forget how it happened but we should try to find somebody, and I went down into the audience and tried to find somebody and then the word got around that we were going to march to Mason Temple and at this point I had decided, I had lost Dr. Jackson in the crowd, and I would go and get my car.

David Yellin- What do you wear? Do you wear civilian clothes or?

Malcolm Blackburn- I was wearing civilian clothes that day. I decided I would go and get my car and come back, drive it back here and then meet up with the group or find Dr. Jackson he might want to be driven over to Mason Temple. So I came back here and was here when I began to get worried that something would happen downtown, so I thought well I better stay here until I hear from Dr. Jackson and where he was. At that point Jackson came across the street with P.J. Champa and two or three of the sanitation workers and they were crying their eyes red with mace this kind of thing. This is when I began to get some idea of what had happened and at that point there were maybe 10 or a dozen sanitation workers had arrived here, had stumbled this far, I gather the police had broken the march up into smaller groups and they just had to find their way wherever they were going. So we decided to go over to Mason Temple and I drive Dr. Jackson drove his car and I drove my car with a load of men, and we got out here and found the large group marching to Mason Temple, so we got out..

David Yellin- What was the reaction of the men in your car? Essentially before this they were depicted as calm and peaceful and gentle men?

Malcolm Blackburn- They were still calm and peaceful and gentle and terribly upset and I think confused and but with a determination. Now whether they had the same determination I don't know, but a resentment.

David Yellin- Could you recall, you know what did they resent what were they determined about?

Malcolm Blackburn- In the midst of, it was I am sure they were confused the thing that happened so unexpectedly, and it was almost as though they were saying you know is this thing really happening this way and you don't really grasp a situation at that moment.

David Yellin- They were talking about the macing?

Malcolm Blackburn- The macing, it had a dream like quality at that point in that instant like that. The same thing the day the march was disrupted here and when all of this was happening when shots were being fired and stones being thrown and gas coming in the building it has a dream like quality about it when it is happening you don't, it isn't until reflection that you think my god they maced my church.

David Yellin- Yeah.

Malcolm Blackburn- Police put tear gas in my church. But at the time you know it, you are just seeing it happen and you are not feeling it in a way.

David Yellin- We are so interested even more interested in trying to re-create if it is at all possible the setting and the time rather than the interpretation from this distance. Also part of the feeling of the mace is to kind of calm you in away.

Malcolm Blackburn- Perhaps this was part of it.

David Yellin- That could have been part of the reason.

Malcolm Blackburn- So this was really how I first got involved in it. We went to Mason Temple and we had that first meeting there.

David Yellin- Can we stop here now?

(Tape break)

Malcolm Blackburn- So that then I think it was the next day the ministers met at Mason Temple and really formed the organization.

David Yellin- Yes that is a Saturday and the organization being COME?

Malcolm Blackburn- Yes and I was at that meeting and that was really when I began to get involved.

David Yellin- Can you give us a little bit on the make up of the organization? Who was elected chairman who was contending chairman?

Malcolm Blackburn- There really wasn't much organization struggle even, Jim Lawson convened that meeting and reverend Henry Starks as I think his title of president of the interdenominational ministerial alliance, one of our AME preachers became kind of overall chairman of the movement and reverend Lawson was chairman of the strategy committee. At that first meeting one the Saturday he presented the basic points I think that became the focus of the movement. The downtown boycott, the nightly mass meetings, the boycott of the newspapers, and the boycott of anything with Lobe's name on it.

David Yellin- So the thrust of this meeting was for the ministers to get involved in the strike but for the strike or for a larger?

Malcolm Blackburn- Well the thrust of that meeting was you had 150 I guess ministers who were there because they were involved and the attitude of that meeting was alright what are we going to do about it and the intent behind that question was we are going to do something and we are going to do it now and together.

David Yellin- And these were all negro ministers except yourself.

Anne Trotter- Dick Moon was not in it then?

Malcolm Blackburn- I don't think Dick was in that meeting but I think he was in that first march, yeah he as in that first march where he was gassed. I don't recall him being at this session.

David Yellin- Yes, he was in that. Oh now no we are talking about another march I know he was in the 28<sup>th</sup> march but he wasn't, I don't know about this one.

Anne Trotter- Why was the decision made later to boycott Coca Cola and Sealtest, both are national products how would that hurt.

Malcolm Blackburn- This came out of the movement after the involvement of the SCLC people. Reverend Jesse Jackson would be a key person in this because we began to talk about not only the strike and the settlement of the strike but the movement for black justice really and he began talking about the establishment of an operation breadbasket here in the city and it was in this context that we decided as a form of escalation partly that a boycott would be held on Coca Cola, Hart's bread, Wonder Bread, and Sealtest. In so far as these organizations were local it was a form of direct economic pressure to get more support for the settlement of the strike. In so far as say Sealtest maybe sold in Nashville, Knoxville, and Chattanooga we could put a call out for people to support the Memphis sanitation strike by boycotting these products in their town.

David Yellin- It gave you an extension.

Malcolm Blackburn- Yeah. And Coca Cola as a national thing, now it never really got of the ground, we never really went ahead with the thing. Except that it affected Hart's Bread and Wonder Bread, I think there were some pretty serious affects there they were hurting very badly. My evidence for that is they began coming around they began giving away bread and cakes and honey buns and coming to our mass meetings.

David Yellin- Now we have pin pointed the ministers involvement in this, what did you say, or what would you now say, or more important what did you say then to well it is none of the minster's business why are you involved in this.

Malcolm Blackburn- You mean to the comment that this is not the minister's business? Well you know ministers get this all the time no matter what they preach



or do so it is not a new question to be fielded. And it is usually asked by somebody who isn't going to listen to your answer anyway.

David Yellin- So you didn't really feel that was any?

Malcolm Blackburn- No we didn't feel that at all and also it was so obvious why the ministers were involved because these were our people.

David Yellin- Well what would you then say to the accusation? What would you then say tot eh accusation?

(Tape Break)

David Yellin- We have got the thing started an underway and now you are involved in it, the ministers are involved.

Anne Trotter- When do the white ministers become involved?

Malcolm Blackburn- Well the white ministers never did become involved. There were, I mean Dick Moon was the principal white minister that became involved and sat in on numerous strategy sessions and was active in support of the movement.

David Yellin- Was he a member of the strategy committee?

Malcolm Blackburn- He sat in for a certain period of time on the strategy committee.

David Yellin- Were you a member of the strategy committee?

Malcolm Blackburn- Yes.

David Yellin- Was reverend Jackson?

Malcolm Blackburn- Yes and he was chairman of he finance committee and a key figure in the strategy committee, he and James Lawson were really the two charismatic people in the movement.

Anne Trotter- How do you explain the lack of involvement of the white ministers?

Malcolm Blackburn- That is a dirty question. Because they are white. You had a lot of ministers in town who were black and involved one way or another, but the ministers that were not involved they were white, this is the answer. They weren't involved because t heir churches weren't involved.

David Yellin- Ok I think we can come back to that on the chronological thing, again and we are not asking you to defend but perhaps in your explanation you can come up with really some phrases, attitudes, ideas, that would be really helpful in explaining and I mean by this, some people have said that it was not a racial issue right from the very beginning. And they never though of it as a racial issue, and some of them say to this day they never think of the strike as ever having been a

racial issue. These same people say indeed it was the entrance of the ministers that made it a racial issue. How do you respond to this?

Malcolm Blackburn- Well when you had an issue or a situation in which it involved a group of people 95% or more whom are black, it obviously is a racial overtone if it is not basically a racial issue. When it involves a group of people like such as the sanitation workers who are not only predominantly black but at the very bottom of the economic scale and black it strengthens the suggestion that it was racial to begin with. There is a racial issue involved at least in this thing. Now how an issue becomes a racial issue when the ministers enter is a little difficult to rationalize as far as I am concerned. The ministers came together because they had gone down and they were supporting their people and supporting people who were black and poor. This was becoming a subject to the black community at least. If it wasn't a racial issue it was involving people who were all one color and so the ministers were involved in this thing the day before the auditorium meeting, or I mean before the day of the auditorium meeting. Then when they came out of that auditorium meeting and many of the ministers were in that group helping to lead it helping to keep it in line and then when the police began to spray this mace indiscriminately up and down the line and spray ministers who were trying to control the group, it is hard to even suggest that the ministers somehow tried to come into it. They were put into it, they were placed in the middle of it.

David Yellin- Yeah maybe this has been covered but it certainly has occurred to me, the call to come down that Friday the 23<sup>rd</sup>, to the city hall was, that was as you say your first entry into it and Dr. Jackson said to you we are going down there why don't you come along. Who inspired that?

Malcolm Blackburn- I don't know, he might now or reverend Lawson might now.

David Yellin- Yeah as a matter of fact I think reverend Jackson spoke about that but somehow it has escaped me and this is something that the union, well you don't know so we will try and find that out.

Malcolm Blackburn- I don't know.

David Yellin- Ok now as far as to save you some breath and give you a chance, what we know about the sequence of events is that after the Saturday meeting which was the first meeting the next thing was to get ready for a Monday night meeting which was a mass meeting.

Malcolm Blackburn- The next thing was to get ready for the Monday march we marched on that first Monday I believe.

David Yellin- Oh yes, was that the first of the marches the afternoon marches the 2:00 or whatever they were. Were they 2:00?

Malcolm Blackburn- Yes, I think that one was that day and that was the first march downtown and then we had the mass meeting that night if I recall.

David Yellin- Yes and reverend Jackson spoke.

Malcolm Blackburn- Yeah and then Tuesday was the city council hearing and Tuesday evening was the first arrests.

David Yellin- Now the first arrests, were you involved in this?

Malcolm Blackburn- Yes, the march scheduled on a Tuesday was to go down to city hall and try to get a hearing and if we didn't get a hearing we might decide to stay until we were heard or they arrested us or did something.

David Yellin- This is now February 28<sup>th</sup>.

Malcolm Blackburn- I guess so.

David Yellin- Tuesday February 28<sup>th</sup>.

Malcolm Blackburn- We had the problem that the young people were to march after school so some of us in the youth committee stayed out of the march on Tuesday down to city hall but we did have telephone contact people calling us and letting us know what was going on from time to time and when the young people arrived we told them what was happening and they said they were going to go downtown also. By this time 5:00 or whatever it was we were beginning to get the idea that they were not going to be heard downtown satisfactorily and they had decided they were going to stay, so the young people were all down for going and joining in city council chamber, but then the word came to us before we left that the council chambers were closed and that city hall was closed and the young people would not be able to get in. So we marched down at any rate and the police were lined up on the open area in front of city hall, you know a long line across maybe 2 or 3 feet part, and we marched down and stayed on the steps and the young people were singing and shouting and wanting to know what was going on inside. So I told them to keep it fairly cool and went up to the line of policemen and finally got the attention of one of the lieutenants.

David Yellin- Again were you wearing civilian clothes?

Malcolm Blackburn- No I had my clerical collar on that day. And he got me through the line into city hall and I spoke too I think it was chief inspector Lutz and said that I wanted to get in and talk to Lawson and did and found out what was happening which was the council meeting was over and the people were deciding to stay there. The lobby of the city council hall chamber was filled with sanitation workers people who couldn't get into the place. So I came back out and reported to the young people and went back into the council chamber again and began to establish my own line of communication. I had to talk to the young people to keep them in control and would you let me out and I had to talk to Lawson about the young people to get me back in. This had to be done every time with the policemen in the line kind of objecting to this, with looks but when I got as high as a captain or lieutenant there was no trouble. They finally then began to call that city hall was closed and the people in the

lobby would have to leave and they opened the doors. The way they said it and without any guidance to the people inside the council chamber the leaders of the movement and so forth, most of these men outside were sanitation workers and the police were standing around and they had a whole lot of deputy sheriff's down in the basement we understood there was just police everywhere. They were saying with their bullhorn, I am asking you to leave city hall is closed and you are going to have to leave this rotunda area and they opened the doors and you know it is fairly easily psychologically all they have to do is go outside. They had come to prepare to go into the council chamber and be arrested but there wasn't room so in this way most of the people in the rotunda went out the door and stood outside thinking that when it comes time to be arrested we will be here, I am sure this is what was going through their minds. And finally leaving just a few who were beginning to catch the idea that this was just a subterfuge to get them out. Save difficulty and save trouble and some of them were willing to stay and I talked to a handful of the sanitation workers that were left in the lobby and I said perhaps you ought to go outside with the rest. Because if there is going to be any trouble they will probably try and start it with you who are left here rather than starting in the council chamber than where the leadership was. It was merely a personal opinion.

David Yellin- So there were three areas the council chamber the rotunda and outside.

Malcolm Blackburn- And the young people out in the street, well 4 because you have the sanitation people who went out the door and stayed there. So most of them finally all left the rotunda. Well they had given them 45 minutes or an hour inside to clear the council chamber or be arrested. I was going back and forth as I say between the council chamber and outside representing myself as the leader of the young people and making sure I could get back in because the young people were ready to charge the police or walk in or do anything. You know lie down, get out in the street.

David Yellin- Did you feel at that time that you had control of the young people?

Malcolm Blackburn- Oh yeah there was no problem about it. They just wanted to do something and if we didn't have any information you know they would do something. Finally the word came down I guess I was in the council chamber when they said you are all under arrest. They started organizing how they were going to do this they had to get more policemen in and we were finally marched out with one policeman, two arrestees to one policeman.

David Yellin- This was all very friendly?

Malcolm Blackburn- It was all done very calmly.

David Yellin- Between whom?

Malcolm Blackburn- Chief inspector Lutz I think was in charge of it and Jim Lawson and reverend Starks and some of the rest of it. But they lined us up and I began to

realize that the young people were outside thinking or realizing that the arrests were going to be made and I could see the police escorting out in what to the young people would be a fairly emotional situation and we were going to have to walk out of the city hall straight to where the young people were and across the street into the police station. So I went back to Lutz and said I think I better go back and talk to the young people again. He said well somebody needs to talk to them because they are out there and their arms are linked and they won't open up, they were just lined up across the steps you see. So I said I will go out and talk to them and I am sure they will open up will you hold here until I get back. I was planning on coming back intending on being one of the people arrested. So he said alright. I went and told the young people that we are going to be under arrest and they are going to bring us out this way and we want you to stand on either side here and let the ministers and the sanitation workers come through and they are going to take us across to the jail.

David Yellin- What was their response did they want to get arrested to?

Malcolm Blackburn- I think they wanted to but they already understood that the people in the council chamber were being arrested.

David Yellin- I see for having been in the council.

Malcolm Blackburn- For having been in the council chamber, and I think some of them would have wanted to join this kind of thing but at any rate.

David Yellin- They had no thought of rescuing those people or?

Malcolm Blackburn- They did until I went and talked to them the last time.

David Yellin- What did you say.

Malcolm Blackburn- I don't know about then they said reverend Blackburn we are not going to let them arrest you. I said yes because the people in the council chamber are agreeing to be arrested. They are saying they are under arrest and this is their form of protest.

David Yellin- They young people's participation then would be in allowing you to be arrested.

Malcolm Blackburn- Yeah I don't know if they would have thought of it this way.

David Yellin- I am wondering how you were able to calm them down for not having being involved.

Malcolm Blackburn- Well we weren't calming them down but they were disciplined by it you see they was no question of disciplining them to calm down.

Anne Trotter- Lutz handled things very well didn't he?

Malcolm Blackburn- He was very immovable to reason and you didn't have to argue with him at great length I had to argue with several of those under him several times

to get into the council chamber doors, and two or three occasions had to make the same argument with the same policemen.

David Yellin- Ok so you got the young people to unlock arms and to make an aisle and then we went out and the police had formed an aisle from the council, from the city hall doors to the steps and then beyond that then the young people, by the time they marched us out I guess it was getting dark at this time or it was getting dark and there was a lot of floodlights I guess from the news media. But as we marched out and across we all of a sudden had a cheering section on either side, then people were very loud shouting and singing and some of them crying and as we went through the line and they carried us across and began to process us and whatever.

David Yellin- And how long did that take?

Malcolm Blackburn- Reverend Bill Smith and I were the first ones out of jail. And in the first 8 to be processed I think and we were perhaps from 6:00 or 6:45 until 8:00, so about an hour and a half. But the last ones didn't get out until about 1:30 in the morning.

David Yellin- Was this the time with the Maxine incident?

Malcolm Blackburn- Yes, the first 8 of us that were processed, they took us into city hall and around one of these round rotundas we were lined up and they came back and took our pictures and then took our preliminary information.

David Yellin- You mean they mugged you?

Malcolm Blackburn- Yeah it wasn't, this was not the regular mugshot. They were photographing us with the arresting officer in the corridor. With the press there as well and this is the picture that was in the picture the next day. Then they took us in and got some preliminary information and carried us through and put us, I guess then they carried us into the booking office yeah. And that is where they take all your stuff out of your pockets and they put it in the cooler right there. And there were about 20 men in the cooler standing there and it has a kind of open stall for shower and an open latrine an open urinal and they men were lining up to use this when the door opened and they brought Mr. Smith in.

David Yellin- You were there?

Malcolm Blackburn- Oh yeah. And she was in there, for when she came in and we knew this was just this one cell, this one cooler and we were all men in there and we were saying we are sure glad to have at least one lady join in. This kind of conversation and I had opened the door one time and said don't you have a separate place for the ladies you know and the man they were talking and not paying attention and he came back and kind of just closed the door. It wasn't locked or anything but just pushed it to. I think I opened it again and said you ought to let this lady ought to not be in here and I think someone else said the same thing I forget who it was and they took her out. But she was in there for several minutes 4 or 5 minutes, I really

cont recall how long. And then after that they began putting more people in, until we were pretty crowded in there maybe 40 people in this cooler and began calling us out in a group of 6 to 8. They took us upstairs and put us in the jail and called us back out for the regular booking and the mugshots and so forth. Then somehow I got separated I guess they were taking us back individually and when they went to put us in the cell the first time upstairs I could hear John Smith of the invaders and Reverend Bill Smith who had been arrested with me in my group. They were talking, arguing, loudly down in the cell. And when I came up they started to put me in a cell over here and I said well can't I go down there were my friends are? And they said we are putting all the ministers on this side. I said well I can here reverend Smith down there and he is a minister. So they kind of looked at each other and kind of said...

David Yellin- What were they arguing about?

Malcolm Blackburn- They were arguing about the as I recall whether this form of protest was useful at all, and John Smith and however else from the invaders group was saying this, getting in jail is nothing, this is playing the white man's game, this kind of conversation. There was....

David Yellin- Was there any under the breath remarks from the police to you, you were then the only white person.

Malcolm Blackburn- After that first picture when they took us in the room for the first information, there was a man beside me, see we were in twos up to this point and I don't know what his last name was but his first name was Tommy. But we stood at a corner of a desk like this and there was a booking officer here and one here. This man was taking my information and this man was taking the other man's information. When he got through he would ask a question like how old are you Mr. Blackburn, and just about that time that man said how old are you Tommy? So I let it go by until they started to heard us away and I said to this man I said just one question I would like to know why this man called me Mr. Blackburn but you called this man Tommy. And he said I will do my work any way I want you son of a bitch.

Anne Trotter- To the point.

Malcolm Blackburn- So I got down a little bit further and spoke to the patrolmen that had arrested me and said I want to file a charge against that man, I said you heard him. He said, oh I didn't hear what he said. I said well I want to get his name and by this time another man another man had come another plainclothesmen had come along and said what seems to be ht trouble, so I told him. Well after you have been bonded you can come back and file a charge and I said I want to know his name so I will know who to file a charge against. Let me get back there. He said well you can't go back that way now there are too many people coming through there.

David Yellin- Then you are now out of jail incidentally is your name in the records, you were booked but it still remains or did they clear all those?

Malcolm Blackburn- I don't know what the disposition was, the judges action the next day was to continue all of these cases 60 days. We were charged I recall on state and local disorderly conduct. He continued the cases until May the 4<sup>th</sup> I think it was to have been, but with the idea that if none of us were guilty of any similar charge in that period of time he would dismiss the charges. But I was arrested on similar charges so I don't know what happened.

Anne Trotter- Have you had to go back?

Malcolm Blackburn- Not on the first charge no.

David Yellin- What happened then, can you recall? One thing I think I would like to get clear on you said that now already the youth group had been formed. Did you form the youth group of COME immediately or was this another youth group of this church?

Malcolm Blackburn- No this was, I don't recall any formal organization of the young people but the fact that we had sent word to the school somewhere early and for the young people to come down and meet after school at Clayborne Temple.

David Yellin- That is the Monday then.

Malcolm Blackburn- I guess so.

David Yellin- Before the mass meeting that in any case immediately COME started you started on the young people as well.

Malcolm Blackburn- Yeah that's right.

David Yellin- Ok. Now perhaps maybe the next frame of reference can be your next arrest.

Malcolm Blackburn- Alright let me get a cigarette just a sec..

(Tape break)

Malcolm Blackburn- Right after the first arrest of course we got involved in a long strenuous round of activities. I mean it became a matter of marches and mass meetings and strategy meetings and you know.

David Yellin- This is with both groups now, the Sr. COME and Jr.

Malcolm Blackburn- Well really just one organization but a pattern of marches of the main march at 2:00 and then it became 3:00 and then the young people at 4:30 was our standard pattern followed by a mass meeting followed by a strategy meeting. You know until 1 or 2 or 3 in the morning and starting over the next day trying to get handbills printed and this became a kind of blur for awhile. Then I don't know the date but it is probably on record somewhere we decided we had to escalate somehow and one of these forms of escalation would be to picket the garbage trucks which were then only coming out of one yard.



David Yellin- Excuse me your escalation was prompted but the fact that you were getting no where with the white community partly, was it also prompted by seemingly a loss of interest in the black community?

Malcolm Blackburn- No, and I would have to say no to the first one too. We escalated not because we were not getting any reaction from the white community, that was not a word we used but because we weren't getting a settlement to the strike from what we were doing and it didn't appear we were moving towards that. We were getting a lot of reaction from the white community, and we were beginning to get evidence that the boycott downtown was proving effective. Normal Pearlstein of the Wall Street Journal got himself into hot water and a lot of criticism for the article he wrote which indicated that the boycott was 35% effective or more in many cases. And but we did feel that we then had to do more and we were beginning to be concerned by the fact that the garbage trucks were operating, there were some people who had never come out on strike and some people who had gone back and some scabs coming in, and the publicity it was being given was that there were more trucks being used everyday and this thing was just going on.

Anne Trotter- Did you ever have to deal with the charge of convict labor? How ample was that?

Malcolm Blackburn- It was noised around a good deal. We checked with commissioner Hydan, reverend Starks asked me to call Hydan he couldn't get him. I called him and told him what it was about and the commissioner indignantly denied that this was so. Reverend Starks accepted this, he said he felt that commissioner Hydan would not say anything other than the truth on this. I don't know of anybody who really investigated it. There were truckloads of sanitation workers being brought into the yard every morning under tarpolins. But they would be unloaded way up there and they could have easily have been from the penal farm but on the other hand if you are driving in a truck and the weather is cold put a tarpolin over it. But at any rate we started out over there to picket the sanitation trucks and I would say the first morning we went out a number of young people went. Some went out every morning for a period of time and some sanitation workers...

David Yellin- Did you have any literature concerning this, any handbills that you sent out for young people to join you or there is going to be a picketing tomorrow.

Malcolm Blackburn- For the picketing the trucks?

David Yellin- Yeah.

Malcolm Blackburn- No this was done I think an announcement mad at a mass meeting and from then on it was word of mouth I guess except what came out in the paper I guess.

David Yellin- You don't have any literature that you could, or we could turn over to the...

Malcolm Blackburn- Not just on that we have some items of literature that you might be interested in. Some of the slogans that came out, the lord's prayer.

David Yellin- Yes I have that but some of the other songs and that, do you have those?

Malcolm Blackburn- Some of them, and we can get the words of the rest I think.

David Yellin- Could you and then we can copy them or if you have copies to give us for the archives, for the files.

Malcolm Blackburn- Yeah I will try and stir together what I can on it. Well to make that part of the story a little bit shorter we started picketing and it gave the people who went out there a certain lift to be able to cuss them as they came in. I think at the end of the day some of them looked pretty scared and ashamed. The first few mornings as it went on it became another routine thing, pickets were going to be out there and we began to talk about stopping the trucks and every time would discuss it in a strategy meeting it would be mentioned and suddenly dropped from the agenda it just never got dealt with. Everybody agreed with it but nobody did anything about it kind of thing.

David Yellin- Why do you think that is?

Malcolm Blackburn- Well Partly because there was so many other things, pressing things, we had to get ready for the next day's march, we had to have a handbill we had to get some worked to the schools about whether or not they should come out. This kind of thing, this was a large part of it, also I guess in a large part of it was the group wasn't prepared to escalate in this direction.

David Yellin- Did they feel that there were people there that they might know their neighbors?

Malcolm Blackburn- Oh no, no and some of the people, reverend Starks, reverend Bell, right from the beginning, the first day we went out I say, some of the young people and reverend Ezekiel Bell sat down on the road and reverend Starks came along and said now look I as ready to do this as anybody but this is not the time we, this is not what we had agreed on sort of thing and they were persuaded to get up you know. On the morning I was arrested, I recall going to be late that night and saying to myself, tomorrow morning I ought to stop in front of those trucks and refuse to move. And then I woke up in the morning and I was shaving and I remember what I thought, and say no this is a new day let's not think that way. Then on the way out to the car I picked up Willy James Kemp at the church and one or two others and we drove out there, no I jut picked him up at home because he lives near me on that morning and it was kind of a gray dreary morning as I recall it and when I got out there I was the only preacher there. All the rest were sanitation workers and there weren't any young people there that morning and most of the sanitation workers who were there that morning and I remember thinking about how disappointed they must feel at only finding a couple of dozen people out there and

very few who had been picketing before and none of the ministers up there. Just a coincidence really because we hadn't, we really didn't plan who was going when. They were picketing and that morning I hadn't done much picketing partly because the first days that we went out to picket some of the preachers knowing that I was a Canadian had said that you have got to be careful about what you get arrested for we don't know what the law is they could deport you, and this kind of thing. I was out there but most of the time I wouldn't carry a sign so I was just standing around. Then in the course of the mornings I got to striking up conversations with Charles Blackburn who is the director of public works.

David Yellin- Yes no kin.

Malcolm Blackburn- No kin and a captain Moore who was in charge of the detail out there. We had a kind of a healthy respect for each other. But on this morning I was just kind of walking back and forth and the men were not really picketing they were standing on either side of this driveway. I was walking back and forth and when it came time to call the trucks up they line the trucks up back here and then they call them up 3 or 4 at a time and then they are ready to go and they go. And when they call these trucks up I guess I had decided that I was going to stay or stand in front of them. I stopped and captain Moore came over and said reverend Blackburn the trucks are getting ready to leave you are going to have to move and I said something like I don't think I am going to. I don't know what the conversation was then and they started to call the trucks out and the embarrassing thing was that the first truck had more than enough room to get by me because I was wasn't standing in the middle of the road and that truck went right by me as nicely as you pleased and I had to move over two steps and that was when then captain Moore then captain Moore came out and asked me again to leave and I said I am not going to. He said well if you don't then we will have to arrest you. I said I understand that. Then Willy J. Kemp came over to me this young fellow who works in the public health department, and we had been closely together. He was one of the ten who were arrested that we told you about the first arrest of young people downtown, and one of the three that was to be shot on sight. He came over and said reverend what are they going to do. I said well I guess arrest me. And he said I am not going to let you go to jail by yourself and then most of the sanitation workers came over and we began talking about it in the middle of the road and they said should we stay and I said I don't know it is up to you. And they said well we are not going to let you go to jail by yourself, so then captain Moore called me back, called me out of the group and said reverend Blackburn, he said, we don't want to have any trouble and he says I wish you would ask the men to step off to the side of the road. I said alright I will do that. I went back and I said captain Moore has asked me to ask you to step off the side of the road, you do what you want to do. Some of them were quite apprehensive and worried about what would happened and then it suddenly hit me that some of these men could be running away from ADC charges and maybe some other thing against them. So I said if there is anybody here who is facing any other kind of charge, if you are on probation of anything, any reason why you shouldn't be arrested and have something else come up then you better not do this thing. So

some of them left and some others still stayed and one said well I am on probation. I said what for, and he said well I got arrested in city hall. I said well I don't think that makes that much difference because the I said the same thing happened to me. So in the end 5 of them, myself, Willy J. Kemp and 4 others stayed. At this point captain Moore said I am going to give you 15 minutes and if you are not off the road at this time you will be arrested. Well 10 of the 15 minutes went by and we just stood there and by this time they had lined up a row of policemen behind us but between us and the.

David Yellin- Were they policemen there or had they called the police.

Malcolm Blackburn- Well the police were there because all the garbage trucks were being accompanied.

David Yellin- Oh yes.

Malcolm Blackburn- They had their own private patrols, so these men, most of them were standing back by the next rank of trucks oh I guess 75 policemen, maybe not that many maybe they just looked like 75. They were between us and the trucks, I don't know who they were protecting of what from whom and just standing and looking stern. So about 10 minutes went by and then inspector Evans came by, good friend inspector Evans with his green tinted glasses and his three top buttons undone and his little handy talkie you know and stood in front of us and said now if you are still here in 5 minutes you are going to be under arrest. I just looked at him and he said do you understand me you are going to be arrested. I said I understand I know what you said. Alright you got 5 minutes. SO everything was quiet at the end of 5 minutes he said you are all under arrest some of you come here and help me with them. I kind of looked back over my shoulder and a whole lot of these policemen were coming towards us. He said I don't need that many and they took us off. A paddy wagon had arrived at this time and they took us over to the paddy wagon and began to put our hands up and search us for weapons or this kind of thing. By the time they had gotten through with that the trucks were starting to move that wanted to stay with us, oh yeah. The policemen had say had come up to me a lieutenant I think and said if there are any cars left here after this they are going to impounded. So I, another form of threat as far as I was concerned but I told one of the men that had decided to stay and had driven out in another car that he had ridden out with a friend, look you take my keys and take my car downtown and call reverend Jackson if I am arrested because I don't want my car picked up. SO they put us in the paddy wagon and drove us downtown and booked us. The police, at the police station at this time were very courteous and almost cordial, when they booked us in the preliminary booking downstairs and then putting us up in the jail cells. This time they put me in a separate cell I don't think the other 5 men were in the same cell, they were in two cells or three cells between the 5 of them but I was in a separate cell in another section and I tried to get myself in the same section.

David Yellin- Is that because it is an integrated jail?

Malcolm Blackburn- I don't know, I suspect that it is not an integrated jail and has not been an integrated jail from the first arrest when they tried to separate me and then this second time when I didn't make an issue out of it. And they finally put us out on bond from the city jail. Actually they took us down into Wineman's court and he put us on bond and they took us back into the cell and we stayed there a while and then they carried us over to the county jail and they booked us over there on state charge. But the charges were state and local charges of disorderly conduct and inciting conspiracy charges, conspiracy charges. Under the conspiracy statute and the one I think they got us on was to obstruct trade and commerce and endanger the public health that sort of thing. Then they let us out, the bondsmen came and paid our bond and we were out.

David Yellin- Did you have a lawyer or anything?

Malcolm Blackburn- Higgs. Saulky, Saulky was our lawyer that day in Wineman's court. What was I going to say.

Anne Trotter- Who paid your bond you pr the strikers?

Malcolm Blackburn- No, I guess the strikers. It was two other things I wanted to say about it. One of them is the appearance in court before Judge Wineman, where inspector Moore, captain Moore gave his information and then inspector Evans and they said inspector Evans, who did you talk to when you made the arrest. He said, well I talked to Blackburn. Canale I guess was the prosecutor he said well which Blackburn did you talk to, reverend Blackburn or Mr. Charles Blackburn. He said well I talked to him, preacher Blackburn. Now there is a whole sociological struggle going on here and his face was red too. Canale said, do you mean reverend Blackburn, he said I said preacher Blackburn. And he used this several times, a black minister is a preacher and a white is a reverend. So then they said.

David Yellin- He is one for good form.

Malcolm Blackburn- So then the prosecutor asked him do you recognize any people that you arrested as being present in the court. He said, well preacher Blackburn and that second boy behind that second boy in line. Which made me 1<sup>st</sup> boy you see. Because he knew Kemp, he knew Willy James Kemp.

David Yellin- And Willy Kemp didn't miss that either?

Malcolm Blackburn- Oh no, I turned around and grinned at him and we almost caught Wineman grinning but he held it straight, but captain Moore grinned a bit I think. I had a great deal of respect for captain Moore and have all along, I think he is a good police officer.

David Yellin- Yeah he had a very critical position during the, when Martin Luther King was killed, he was up in the helicopter I believe and he was...

Malcolm Blackburn- Oh really.

David Yellin- Yes or he was in the riot or on the 28<sup>th</sup> disorder, he was in the helicopter and he was in charge of the operation.

Malcolm Blackburn- Oh I see. I didn't know that. The other thing was it went to eh grand jury and WINeman found probable cause for an indictment on the conspiracy charge and it went to the grand jury and I heard they did bring in a two bill of indictment.

David Yellin- So it is still around. (Tape Break)

David Yellin- Why don't you go ahead.

Malcolm Blackburn- Alright I picked Dr. King up at the airport along wit Mr. Jesse Epps of the union along with his first arrival in Memphis and I, one or two of his staff were with him and we drove from the airport directly to Mason Temple were he spoke.

David Yellin- Was his plane late that night?

Malcolm Blackburn- I don't believe it was late, no.

David Yellin- Was it...

Anne Trotter- Did he come in commercial or charter?

Malcolm Blackburn- I think he came in commercial that night, yes, commercial flight.

David Yellin- And it was approximately on time?

Malcolm Blackburn- As far as I know because the mass meeting had been called for 7:30 and we got him down to the temple around 8:00.

David Yellin- Did Dr. King have to be briefed on the strike, did he know what he was coming?

Malcolm Blackburn- I think he knew generally and we did brief him on the way in on some aspects of it.

David Yellin- What particular, can you recall what you told him about, what Mr. Epps told him and you say there was a 3<sup>rd</sup>?

Malcolm Blackburn- I think it was one of his staff member I forget who it was.

David Yellin- The lady I know her name.

Anne Trotter- Crenshaw.

David Yellin- Crenshaw.

Malcolm Blackburn- She was not in the car with us, it was her car as I recall that we drove to the airport in. It was just a general briefing some items and some facts and specifics but I don't recall.

David Yellin- And there was no indication about the seriousness of the strike, I mean any implication for his march?

Malcolm Blackburn- No, no, no, there was an implication of the seriousness of what we were engaged in that we were trying to further impress him with but the decision to come back and lead a march was made while he was speaking and after.

David Yellin- And he said it?

Malcolm Blackburn- NO he was speaking and some of us were down, some of these pictures you have seen show us down behind the speaker's roster speaking with his staff about whether they felt he should come back and lead a march. We were suggesting that this would be a form of escalation that it would extremely helpful to us and we reached an agreement and passed a note up to him and then he finished his speech and then while reverend Abernathy then spoke next we talked with Dr. King about this and he agreed to come back and then I think reverend Abernathy intimated it to the crowd as I recall in his speech and then Dr. King then spoke again and said he was coming back.

David Yellin- Oh that same night he spoke, yes.

Malcolm Blackburn- While he was I think speaking the second time I then took the word back tot eh young people who were seated behind the roster way up in the back part of the temple they had a section up there were most of the young people were. And by this time they were starting to leave and we went back and told them wait because we want you to hear something.

David Yellin- Right well that is what I hear don't he radio his second appearance in which he did announce that he was..

Malcolm Blackburn- The second time he spoke.

David Yellin- Yeah the second time he spoke in that one night which, the date of which we will look up and we don't at this point know. So it was decided as you say right at that meeting, that as you say is a kind of critical decision...(Tape End)