

SS0077.mp3

Tom Beckner- This is Tom Beckner along with Bill Thomas we are in the office reverend Malcolm Blackburn at the AME minimum salary building today is August the 2<sup>nd</sup> 1968. I think we are ready to go.

Bill Thomas- Alrighty reverend Blackburn if you could give us a little bit of personal biography, how you came here and you happen to be who you are.

Malcolm Blackburn- I think I did this once before, it should be on that other tape.

Bill Thomas- Well if we got into the personal background. You sit in with the reverend..

Malcolm Blackburn- I sat in with reverend Jackson yes.

Bill Thomas- And so we haven't had a chance to listen to that tape. How far did you get, let me ask you that.

Malcolm Blackburn- We got down to the day of the disrupted march and we were kind of in the middle of that as I recall.

Bill Thomas- Which march, now is this the macing.

Malcolm Blackburn- No, no, the march 28<sup>th</sup>.

Bill Thomas- With Dr. King left.

Malcolm Blackburn- When he came back, or when he came for the march . We had been snowed out the previous Friday and he came back for Thursday.

Bill Thomas- And so how far did you get?

Malcolm Blackburn- I don't recall at this point.

Tom Beckner- I remember you were talking about the police cordoning off the area right at the corner of Chestscott or the parking lot there.

Malcolm Blackburn- Yeah they had broken the group up really as I recall and sent some of us back down Beal St. towards the church down the original route of the march and others were coming further down Main St. and we got just to the corner of what was at that time that parking lot Chestscott parking lot and that was in the process of being torn down and sort of leveled and the fence was half down and at this point it was possible to get over it not too conveniently but well enough. When I got to that point reverend Bill Smith from Collins Chapel was there and by this time he had a loudspeaker or a kind of bullhorn kind of thing and was trying to stay out in the middle of the street. The police were beginning to direct people not on down Main to the corner but they were making us go over this fence and through the torn up parking lot area and Bill was doing his best to talk to the people and so I stopped

at where the fence was and I was helping people over that, there was some Roman Catholic sisters.

Bill Thomas- I reckon that is incidentally where Mulberry St. comes into Beale, would have been now is that right?

Malcolm Blackburn- No, no, no this is on Main St. approaching Linden.

Bill Thomas- It's on Mian St.

Malcolm Blackburn- Yes, this is we were forced off Mian St., rather than coming on down Main to Linden now.

Bill Thomas- I see.

Malcolm Blackburn- Some people had been turned off Main to Beale. Others of us were coming down Linden and normally would have come as far as Linden or perhaps up to Pontotoc, but at the point where this parking lot began and you know it continued to the corner there was a Belmont Café in the corner one time Lillie Gridiron below that.

Bill Thomas- Doesn't Mulberry street run along behind the Chestscott?

Malcolm Blackburn- Yeah that's right but we were far on Main St. at this point and instead of coming down to Linden they were directing us off the Main St. and over this corrugated steel mesh fence and through the parking lot which there was some area, I think the Belmont Café had been torn up by this time and there was only one or two ways you could get through the lot.

Bill Thomas- Out of curiosity how did they identify you as a member of the march.

Malcolm Blackburn- I believe I had a marshal's band on for one thing yeah I am sure I did.

Bill Thomas- There was no doubt by what they did identify you?

Malcolm Blackburn- Yeah well anyone that wasn't a policemen had to be part of the march at that stage you know as far as they were concerned I am sure they weren't discriminating they were just getting everybody off the street.

Bill Thomas- Did you have your clergy collar on.

Malcolm Blackburn- Yeah and after I stayed there awhile and the fence was gradually getting more and more flattened till it became reasonably passable and I helped these sisters and their habits over the thing, since so many people had not even left the church it appeared and others were on their way back I better get back there and see what is going on. So I went as quickly as I could back to the church.

Bill Thomas- Back to Clayborne Temple?

Malcolm Blackburn- Back to Clayborne. When I got here the church was full of people and the street and I checked inside and there were number of preachers inside, there were ministers inside the church speaking to the people and trying to keep some degree of calmness.

Bill Thomas- Was there any one ministers that seemed to be in charge at that point in the church?

Malcolm Blackburn- No, we were just trying to fill in the time, at least have 1 or 2 ministers up in the pulpit and any other leader of the movement until we could really find out what was going on. I remember reverend B.R. Booker was there from Mt. Zion AME Church and he was speaking to the people and trying to keep some semblance of calm.

Bill Thomas- Was there a great number of people in the church?

Malcolm Blackburn- Oh the church was full.

Bill Thomas- What is the capacity there?

Malcolm Blackburn- Well including the gallery it is about 1500 and I suppose there was over a thousand people on the floor of the church and I don't recall how many in the gallery I don't recall too many.

Bill Thomas- But here would probably be more than 1,000 people?

Malcolm Blackburn- Oh I am sure there were because the seats were full and people standing in the aisles and around the back and it was pretty much confusion. Ss I left then, left Booker there and came over here to see what was going on and then shuttled back and forth between the church and here for the next I guess couple of hours.\

Tom Beckner- What were the people like in the church? Were they frightened?

Malcolm Blackburn- Confused and wondering what was going to happen and you get this strange attitude or feeling of not really appreciating the significance of the moment. As we look back on it we probably should have been more frightened than we were but you know you are in familiar surroundings and some of the things that were to happen had not happened, macing and gassing around the church and so forth. This came later once the people got back here and the streets were filled with people as well pretty much and the area we assume was pretty much cordoned off. So there was a kind of waiting period of finding out when it would be safe for people to leave and gradually this began to happen. I told people too that they should begin to leave and go quietly and directly and go home.

Bill Thomas- Were there a great number of people who had lost contact with their children and this sort of thing?

Malcolm Blackburn- No, not really I mean there was no great item of the afternoon. There were cases like this but you know the children were around and everybody knew where everybody else was headed for at least and that was here.

Bill Thomas- Did you see anything that the police shot a canister of tear gas into the building?

(Tape Break)

Malcolm Blackburn- IF you won't forget that question we will go back I recall one case Jerry Fanion's daughter had lost her brother and/or sister I think and was very upset but they turned up within half an hour or so. So that whenever there was a case of people not being able to find someone else you had some genuine fear especially as the afternoon developed. As far as the gas was concerned there was tear gas in this building, shot into this building.

Bill Thomas- Was this before you arrived?

Malcolm Blackburn- No this was afterwards, by the time that happened I think most of the people, no some of the people had left the church the church still had a lot of people in it and this building was full of people on most of the floors. Down Dotty was down on the first floor and our floor was just jammed with people and even though they were flowing down into the kitchen area down there.

Bill Thomas- And you felt like the people had sought refuge here, this is why they were here I guess.

Malcolm Blackburn- Yeah. And also it had come to be the headquarters in a way of activities. You know on special days we had the short wave and citizen band radios here with units in different cars. When the march had started my car was equipped with one of these transceivers, citizen band things and it was to lead the march it was to go ahead of the marches so we would have radio contact at the head of the march. By the time we got down and turned onto Main St. and the march was stopped I managed to get to my car and the man who was driving it and there was somebody else in it with him running the radio. And just told him I said get off the street any way you can and come back to the minimum salary building. Well it was 6:00 before I was able to find out what had happened to my car, and other people who had units in their cars and trucks were having difficulty from then on getting back here. In some cases we told them to clear out of the area and when people tried to get back they couldn't and so forth.

Bill Thomas- Were you in radio contact with your car?

Malcolm Blackburn- From time to time I had been but then we lost contact with them, we couldn't raise it.

Bill Thomas- Did they ever report from the front from their position that something had happened? I may be going over and stepping on your toes.

Malcolm Blackburn- Well by the time something happened of course, I was up at the front of the march anyways and the car was just there a few feet ahead of the march. So whether they reported back to the base I don't know.

Bill Thomas- Did you reverend Blackburn see what happened to Dr. King?

Malcolm Blackburn- No. I was marshalling and as the march started it was a little bit disorderly I mean unruly, not the way the march later. We did follow a line of marshals behind Dr. King but they weren't directly behind him there was perhaps 15 or 20 people including some of the march leaders and a number of young people that were right in close behind him and we had not been able to get a line of marshals directly behind him so we settled with what we could get.

Bill Thomas- But that had been tried, was that the plan to have a line of marshals behind Dr. King or?

Malcolm Blackburn- I don't recall it had ever been planned that way but it just seemed like a good thing to do to keep as much as the crowd from pressing too closely in on the front line, so that we did have a line of marshals and I was working with that group, I think at one stage we even had two deep across the street and keeping the regular line of march more or less slowed down but not over running, and there was a little open space in front of them too the group with Dr. King. by the time we turned the corner this line of marshals had begun to I am sure disintegrate. I don't recall it being a good line after that point. By this time a lot of windows are being broken of course up and down either side of Beale and they began to be broken on Main St. so that by the time the march was stopped I was perhaps half a block behind the front of it.

Bill Thomas- I hadn't thought of that aspect before was there any usually Dr. King had marched in a kind of open box thing where he had marshals in a square.

Malcolm Blackburn- A kind of U almost kind of.

Bill Thomas- Yeah. Was there anything, any planning as to, as to how he would march or anything?

Malcolm Blackburn- We had planned you know as you say 4 marshals to be there marshals on either side of the street and so forth and we had marshals readily available and we called for this line behind them you know we were able to get a line of marshals at arms length tot his kind of thing but no plan had been drawn up ahead of time.

Bill Thomas- You didn't have any trouble getting back to the church?

Malcolm Blackburn- No there was no trouble getting back to the church, all the trouble began after that. Some people had trouble coming back, 2 or 3 people had been beaten on the way back.

Bill Thomas- Were there any victims, any people who had been injured here or in the church.

Malcolm Blackburn- Yes there was one man and I never did find out the details of it whether he was the man that had been beaten by 7 or 8 policemen downtown on Beal St., but my car, I am sorry, but my car did get back here and this man had been found somewhere, only semi-conscious if conscious at all, and when I saw him they had driven my car down into the alleyway and it was down in the alleyway at the back of this secondary parking lot and he was lying on the trunk of the car, seemed to be unconscious. When I saw the car I had a chance to run down briefly, then we started trying to call for ambulances, of course we were having difficulty getting ambulances to come in. And then we had another, one of the other young men in the young people's group had hurt himself. He had fallen off a car or something I never did get the full story on that and he was over in the missionary work room and they were afraid his back had been broken and so we were trying to get an ambulance for him. I am trying to think, there was a woman who had been hurt and she was in this building and they managed to get her out on an old door.

Bill Thomas- On an old door they carried her out?

Malcolm Blackburn- I think so, they carried her out of the printing shop, the delivery exit or entrance down there, and managed to get her into a car, I can't remember if it was my car or somebody else's and carried her to the hospital. Then later on another girl had to go to the hospital she suffers from asthmatic condition and the tear gas in the building she about suffocated from it. Those are the only specific instances I recall, specific instances.

Bill Thomas- Do you remember was there someone out I front I the street, truck with a bull horn or some type of exterior sound equipment trying to?

Malcolm Blackburn- We had one piece of equipment, I think it was, no couldn't of. The vice president of NWA that finally got arrested with Dr. Smith the day before yesterday. As I recall he had a loud speaker set up on his truck. I do recall some car or truck out there that was telling people to be calm and go home and this kind of thing?

Bill Thomas- And you think perhaps that was Crittenden?

Malcolm Blackburn- I am sure Crittenden's, I am sure his truck had a loud speaker mounted on it yes.

Bill Thomas- So how late did you stay?

Malcolm Blackburn- Well we stayed through the macing, through the gassing here in the church, and you have had Dr. Jackson talk about that and others. About 4:00 as I recall we had been in telephone contact with Dr. King and some of his lieutenants and had discovered by this time that he was back over at the Rivermont and that there was to be a meeting with him. We knew that we were going to have to issue

some press statement for the sake of the people and we knew that we couldn't do this until we talked with him and had a kind of general confer on it.

Bill Thomas- Excuse me at this point you say we, if you could tell us really briefly what your duties were in the organization?

Malcolm Blackburn- I was a member of the organization the community on the move for equality and a member of the strategy committee and had been almost from the beginning of it.

Bill Thomas- And did you have a specific area of work?

Malcolm Blackburn- No, no, we just did whatever needed to be done and as it turned out I had kind of taken on to myself responsibility that was involved in terms of this building or the printing part of our operation we have an internal printing department for the minimum salary department and getting out of handbills, which would usually be done at 1:00 in the morning after a strategy meeting for the next day kind of thing.

Bill Thomas- This is where most of the handbills were printed?

Malcolm Blackburn- Almost everything that was produced was printed here with the exception of the placards.

Bill Thomas- The I am a man sign?

Malcolm Blackburn- Yes. And all of the other signs that had been in use before that were made down here, we made all of those down here.

Bill Thomas- We have great numbers I think of the handbills and this sort of thing but do you still have a representative copy of them all?

Malcolm Blackburn- No we don't I am sure we don't have representative copies of them all. At the time you got a handbill out you get it out of the way kind of thing.

Bill Thomas- Do you have any idea how many might have been put out in all?

Malcolm Blackburn- Mrs. Fleming the receptionist here in the office who keeps the books on this, probably has a record, some kind of company has a record of how many handbills are put out and so forth. But there was a whole lot to slip by just was never caught.

Tom Beckner- While we are talking printing do you happen to know where the original I have a dream stickers came from, you know the long ones?

Malcolm Blackburn- The first one that came out that I heard about was done by Mr. Johnson down at Johnson Printery in the next block. And almost immediately after that there was one that was in an SCLC sticker, but the first one I saw was right here, he printed it up down here.

Bill Thomas- Mr. Johnson is a negro print shop?

Malcolm Blackburn- Yeah.

Bill Thomas- Well while we are on that subject do you know who might have authored the phrase I am a man?

Malcolm Blackburn- It was a committee meeting up here that did it, I think I was as close to authoring it as anybody, but I remember we discussed it but it sticks in my mind that I kind of originated it but there was 5 or 6 of us sitting around and settled on that thing.

Bill Thomas- The closest we get is a beautiful thought there, how did this come about in the thinking?

Malcolm Blackburn- Oh I know. Yeah I do, there is some documentation on it. There was a poem written and in the material I gave you the other day I gave you a little thing and the lady with you asked was this such and such and I said no and it has a man's name at the bottom. Now he is the same man, he wrote a poem entitled this I am a man or some thing close tot hat. I am sure there is a copy of that around here somewhere if you don't have it.

Bill Thomas- Gee that would be great because...

Malcolm Blackburn- I think that is where I got the phrase from for the signs yeah.

Tom Beckner- What are some other plunders that were mentioned do you recall any others that came up and were rejected?

Malcolm Blackburn- Well now Dick Moon at Memphis state if you talk to him, those people out there you know made us up I forget how many thousand signs at one time and they had a lot of good slogans I never saw a whole lot of them but they brought them all down here and they were over in the church for a day or so. We were just sit down here in the afternoon getting ready for a march and try to dream up stuff you know and most of the stuff we dreamed up was used at one time or another. We had slogans or you have probably seen a lot of them the trouble with Memphis is not garbage it is Lobe. Memphis doesn't have a garbage problem yet. This kind of thing. We had one sign one day that said, that we carried downtown the street that just said business as usual? Another one that said business poor, happy Easter, and then we turned around and said would you believe Christmas? There was signs that were on he garbage cans that we got for the young people, I think I quoted some of those. The trouble with Memphis is not garbage...

Bill Thomas- Yes.

Malcolm Blackburn- And of course Lawson's sign, only god is king Henry. There was a lot of this went on, garbage stinks so does Lobe. Lobe you are S.O.L. Well we didn't pick young people once it got started began producing this kind of stuff and as far as possible we weeded that kind of stuff but you had to continually try to draw a line,



with the young people that would keep them involved effectively. Or on the other hand you are going to lose them. This is really when we began to run into problems with the police, which we knew we would have. The young people had been marching everyday after school, getting down here at 4:30 about as early as we could get a march off and by 5:00 of course the stores were closed. And so the young people felt number one at that time of the day except at late opening day they weren't being terribly effective or useful and they were just doing the same thing the grown ups were doing.

Bill Thomas- They didn't have a thing of their own?

Malcolm Blackburn- No, so we had to dream up things and we used to sit around here in the dining room, Harold Millbrook and I and Bill Smith and some of the young people's leadership and try to say what are we going to do this afternoon. It was always on a day to day, hour to hour basis anyway and this is where we first got the idea of sending them on a different route of march you know where they went once they got to Vance and 2<sup>nd</sup> street. Well first thing was we always went out that front door of the church and went this way. Now on this particular day, and we would always get people out on the street and the march would take 15 minutes to line up and get off. Well this particular day we got the young people lined up inside the church so that when they bust out the door they were moving and they went that way instead of his way and this fouled the police pattern up and they went up here as far as Vance and across to 2<sup>nd</sup> street and then proceeded up 2<sup>nd</sup> street on the sidewalk mind you but against the pattern of traffic.

Bill Thomas- On a one way street.

Malcolm Blackburn- On a one way street, which meant the police couldn't follow them. Some police on a motorcycle tried to and got fouled up with traffic and the young people just rode him unmercifully about this. And then came across Madison which is one way going West and then down 3<sup>rd</sup> street which is one way. I gathered that Holloman raised holy hell about this. And we had quite a time trying to convince him and anyone else that wanted to listen that we were not inciting the young people we were effectively trying to find ways to control them and at the same time we didn't particularly care to establish patterns that cooperated with the police. This was not our concern. The next day we had the coffin bit and then the garbage cans. The young people liked the garbage can idea because they just bust out of the church with these garbage cans and they had been talking for days about dumping garbage on city hall steps you know. So anything that we could do that upset the boys in blue that sat on the corner and they were there, I don't know if they were there 24 hours a day but almost 24 hours a day.

Bill Thomas- Oh were they?

Malcolm Blackburn- Yeah they sat right down here on the corner of Pontotoc facing out here onto Hernando.

Bill Thomas- In squad cars?

Malcolm Blackburn- Yeah. Usually an unmarked police car and often a marked squad car. And then when it came time for a march there would be more of them out there.

Bill Thomas- This was mainly a surveillance unit I guess?

Malcolm Blackburn- Yeah they kept pretty close track on who came and who went to the office as well.

Tom Beckner- Some of the younger people have some pretty radical ideas as to what they should do in the marches?

Malcolm Blackburn- No they wanted to sing and dance and bother the police and get arrested. The first day we went to Democrat Rd. to picket out there, the barn. We took, there was some young people that showed up at 6:30 in the morning and there was this surveillance car there and as it got close to time to leave two cars showed up I believe and they had one in front and one behind our caravan all the way out to the yard. We get out there and the first thing young people did was to get across the road with their signs on and sit down in the middle of the exit from the barns. We told them no this is not the time, they just finally began to lose interest in picketing out there because this just was not their thing. But it was this kind of thing now the first major arrests that were made were 9 young men that went downtown to relieve a picket I think at Lowenstein's and they were just marching downtown and they were making a kind of thing about it going down Beale street marching in cadence singing and making slogans you know. I think Evans himself, inspector Evans himself told them to be orderly or not to sing or not to talk and not to walk except in single file and they just (muffled) back at them and the first thing we knew they had been arrested on disorderly conduct.

Bill Thomas- Was this, when was this before?

Malcolm Blackburn- This was early in the regular marching I would suppose, maybe about the second week. It was, as far as I can recall, it was after the first right about the time of the first arrest at city hall. In that period of time, I think it was actually after that. But the interesting thing was from that moment on it appears that those 9 fellows were pre-marked and one of them was John Henry Ferguson, one of them was Tom Nelson who was not, I don't think Tom was arrested again, he may have been, but Tom is a little perhaps more stable. One was Peter Bell who was along with Eddie Leavery who was picked up and beaten I guess you got that story. Peter Bell, Eddie Leavery, Willy James Kemp who was arrested with me at Democrat Rd. when we stopped the trucks that morning, you know these just began to be singled out, and talked to as a group.

Bill Thomas- Can you tell us about that arrest incident?

Malcolm Blackburn- Eddie Leavery or mine?

Bill Thomas- Yours.

Malcolm Blackburn- Oh well we had been going out there picketing and I think for maybe a week and a half maybe two weeks and then there was a period of time in which I was just tied up, I couldn't get out to do that and other things. Then I started to go back again and when I went back to picketing out there I was picking up Willy James Kemp every morning, he lives not very far from me, we would instead of coming down to the church we would go right on out there, it was understood that anybody who was going to picket would be out there at 7:00 or 7:15 and usually there had been a group of people who had been making a regular practice of it then a few others would come and some of the numbers would diminish. I recall the night before when I was getting ready to go to bed, thinking to myself you know one of these days somebody has got to do something because the picketing was becoming increasingly ineffective, the scabs were paying less and less attention now that they knew they were safe, that nobody was going to hurt them. And it was just a regular morning thing, I mean Director Blackburn one morning when it was wet and rainy, I was complaining about the cold and he wanted to invite me over to the barn for a cup of coffee and you know a little bit too much fraternization going on you know.

Bill Thomas- Right.

Malcolm Blackburn- And I remember thinking to myself tomorrow morning I ought to, it ought to be the morning I stop in the middle of the road and I refuse to move. Then I get up that morning and I shave and I look myself in the mirror and think hell no I am crazy.

Tom Beckner- Did you have the bush at that time.

Malcolm Blackburn- Oh no I started this at resurrection city. So I picked Willy up that morning somehow or other whether we went to the church or not I forget. There was 3 or 4 of us in the car going out, yeah we had gone down to the church. I had picked Sonny up and we had gone down to the church and picked up a couple of other men one of whom left his car down there and we drove out. I remember on the way out we were kind of joking about it and we hadn't been doing this kind of thing. Well is this the morning we are going to stop the trucks, well I don't know the strategy committee hasn't decided. So we get out and we were picketing and I wasn't wearing a sign but I was just a walking back, the men had gathered on either side of the entrance roads, there was two, one went to a parking lot and the other one out of which the trucks would come and they were just standing there and it was kind of despondent I think, I had this feeling. Most of the men had not been out there before it was like a new group almost and I was the only preacher out there.

Bill Thomas- And excuse me did you have your collar on?

Malcolm Blackburn- Yeah I usually wore my collar out there as I did on all the marches and this kind of thing, so that I was walking back and forth between them and talking to them and somewhere along the lines it got close to the time the trucks were ready to leave and I was just walking back and forth across the road when the trucks were to come and when they started to call for them I was in the middle of

the road and I just kind o stopped and I think turned my back so that I could have been interpreted as standing in the middle of the road or meditating I don't know. And I forget who it was asked me I think it was Captain Moore.

Tom Beckner- Asked you if you were standing in the road?

Malcolm Blackburn- Well no asked me if I minded moving because the trucks were moving and I said to him to the best of my recollection something like well no I don't think I am going to move this morning. I forget exactly what happened next but somewhere in the next couple of minutes he said well now reverend you are going to have to move or you know what is going to happen and I said no what's going to happen. And he said, you know. And I said, yeah I know you are going to arrest me, or he said we will have to arrest you. I said well I guess you are going to have to arrest me because I don't think I am going to move. So a couple of men that were standing off to the side of the road where it meets the highway there came over to me and began talking to me and I told them I thought I was going to stay this morning.

Bill Thomas- Now these were members?

Malcolm Blackburn- Yes members of the sanitation department, and it was somewhere there in the next couple of minutes that Captain Moore said well now reverend, I don't think he said we don't want to do anything rash or but something to that effect and then he said if you won't leave you got 15 minutes to make up your mind and after that you will under arrest. So I said alright and stood there. now let me go back a bit. When I said I wouldn't move, he told me I would be under arrest and then the man in charge of the yard there the expeditor, young, younger man, I think called for the trucks to come out. The trucks would pull up three at a time you see this would enable their squad attendants to get in order and then the trucks would pull up and a squad car behind them and so forth. Well he called for these to move and they started forward and I was standing there and he saw that the truck had room to get by and so he called out and the truck did get by me there was about a foot clearance, and I felt awful foolish because I had been standing in the road and all those trucks could get by me. So after the first one I just moved over. So anyway he told me I had 15 minutes to make up my mind and at the end of the time I would be under arrest. So during 10 minutes of those 15 the men from the sanitation department were coming over, I was by myself for a few minutes and thinking. The only thing I had in my mind was Sonny Kemp had told me one time we were discussing, he said reverend if you ever get arrested and I am there I won't ever let you go alone. SO he came over and talked to me and I told him I guess I am going to stay. The other men almost all of them one by one came over and I think Captain Moore called me over to one side and said oh yes, he said I wish you would ask the men to leave or we will have to arrest them. I said well I can't tell them what to do I said but I will pass the message along. I went back to them and said Captain Moore has asked me to ask you to get off the road, and they said well what are you going to do, and I said well I think I am going to stay. Then one of the men said, no, I think it occurred to me that some of them might have individual problems with the police. I

said, now any body that wants to stay, stay make up his own mind don't stay because I am here, you make up your own minds but if there is anybody here on probation for anything else it might be better of you didn't stay, you might get into more trouble than this could cause. So it looked as though they were all looking for some kind of excuse to get off the road. I don't mean to say it that way, but several of them moved off. One of them said well I am on probation because you and I got arrested at city hall that night. I said I am too but I don't think that is any problem for an individual. But if anybody is under on probation for anything more serious or something like that you don't need to be out here, you don't need to take that kind of risk. Then I said to, I forget his name, Albert Somebody, who had come out with me, I said you take my, oh the policemen came along and the policemen said anybody who gets arrested here and their car is still here it is going to be impounded. So I told Albert he was going to stay with me, I said no you better take my and my keys and you take my car back downtown and get your car and you can just leave my car downtown if I get arrested. So several of them did leave, most of them at this point. Sonny stayed with me and then he went back and talked to the man and he came back and there were just two of us. Then Albert Pigram came over and Jake McWoods and Bill Telly, and one other man I wish I could remember his name for the record. And (muffled) until there was 6 of us. Well about this time we had been there about 6 minutes just kind of in a line or in a huddle facing away with our backs to the trucks and our faces to the road, and along comes the paddy wagon and pulled into the parking lot and along came inspector Evans with his pale green shades and his well-fed self and his sidearm and his stick and his handy talkie. And came up and stood in front us and said you have 5 minutes and at the end of 5 minutes if you don't move off the road you are going to be arrested.

Bill Thomas- He said it very briskly.

Malcolm Blackburn- Oh yeah and I didn't say anything. He said, do you understand what I said. I said yes, you are going to arrest us. That is right, so we stood there and I think he said this is your last chance maybe I am just...I think he said something before the 5 minutes was up and very abruptly he said alright you are all under arrest and he called some of the policemen over. By this time all of the police men were out of their cars pretty much and standing back where the trucks, now there were 2 trucks very close 2 or the 3 the first truck that had gotten by me was stopped down the road waiting. Most of the p-other policemen were back by the bulk of the trucks and by this time they had put a line of policemen behind us and the two trucks. He said some of you come over here. I didn't look around but I gather there must have been a mass movement of policemen towards us because he said not that many, not that many. As far as I know there was 75 or 80, I guess they all started coming. Let's all get a piece of this action, so they had 5 or 6 policemen came and they escorted us to the paddy wagon we had to get on the grass beside the road and go around it kind of a little grassy area and head over to where the paddy wagon was.

Bill Thomas- Did they take you by the arm or anything like that or they just made it rather clear?

Malcolm Blackburn- I think they...it strikes me that either then or after they had put us up against the paddy wagon they frisked us, I think we just walked over to the paddy wagon and then they frisked us and then they escorted us, I mean this when they grab you in the back by the shirt and everything else, just above the belt right there they get a whole handful of that you know and they can just maneuver good, pretty good technique. It works.

Bill Thomas- Did they inform you at that time of any charge or anything like that.

Malcolm Blackburn- No they just said we were under arrest.

Bill Thomas- But they didn't say why? Blocking the truck?

Malcolm Blackburn- I don't recall. I have recollection somewhere of asking, yes I think I asked Captain Moore what the charges are? I think he said disorderly conduct. Bill Thomas- That seemed to cover just about everything.

Malcolm Blackburn- Yeah, so they put us in the paddy wagon, something else I wanted to go back to I believe. Yeah when they put this line of policemen behind us, the thought crossed my mind what are these police doing there, were they stopping us from physically attacking the trucks or what I don't know. But prior to that time when the first truck had gotten out and then I moved over then he called the second truck on and captain Moore stopped the truck, I believe it was captain Moore who stopped the trucks, so technically I didn't stop the trucks he did. I was never in any danger of being run over.

Bill Thomas- This was a perimeter no matter which way they went?

Malcolm Blackburn- No when I moved over there wasn't but I don't think anybody, but I don't think the police were going to let the trucks run over me, captain Moore wasn't I'm sure because he stopped them and I am sure that the truck drivers weren't going to.

Bill Thomas- Were the drivers mostly white?

Malcolm Blackburn- I have a feeling that perhaps more of the drivers were white than black but I don't think it was significant one way or another.

Bill Thomas- Yes, I think I interrupted a thought there.

Malcolm Blackburn- Oh it was about him stopping the line of trucks and my curiosity about these line of policemen. And when I did turn around and look at them they were just standing there silent not arm and arm but 9 of them across the road, 8 or 9, and looking very officially straight ahead this kind of thing. You would think there was a war on or something, big deal. So they put us in the paddy wagon and we drove down and on the way down I had pencil and paper and I wrote down all the names of the men so that when we got down to the jail and if for some reason

I got to make a phone call and they didn't at least I could tell who was in there. So we got down to the jail and they drove us down the ramp inside and everybody was there waiting, curiosity coming in kind of thing. They took us inside whatever you call it where the grill is where the gate is it is just off the corridor and you know put us through that procedure and took us upstairs and I think I was one of the last ones to go upstairs and when I got up the other men were in cells, no I guess we all got up there together but they started putting us into cells one at a time and I was one of the last and I think 2 of the men were in one cell and 3 of the men were in another beside each other or across from each other in one block. But they put me in another block, I asked them if they could put me with the other men and they didn't.

Bill Thomas- Did they say why? Did you have an idea why?

Malcolm Blackburn- There was some reason that could be reasonable but it must be another cell around there somewhere but anyway so then they call us up a little later and carry us down for the final booking and photographing and I think they took all of our pictures together in a group photograph with the arresting officer. And in the booking room it was just business, ordinary business type of thing. Some of the men in the booking room I had me the first time I was arrested and they were very courteous and polite more so than the first time we were arrested. In the meantime during my initial booking in downstairs I had called Dr. Jackson and told him. I also called Albert what ever his name was when he got my car back to call Dr. Jenks. We were taken down and allowed to make a phone call before he got the call this other man. So I told him and I told him to call a lawyer which probably was a mistake. I kind of thought the first thing I would do was to let somebody know and get a lawyer on it. And what the lawyer did was go right ahead and get us an appearance right away. I kind of had it in my mind that I want a lawyer out there to know I was here but let it be my option whether I am going to stay for the day or whatever it is but the process went on through and we were bailed out. We were carried down sometime later that morning before Judge Wineman and brought in. He talked to us and so forth and asked the officer I think it was captain Moore or one of the others, questioned him about it and wanted to know whether we had resisted arrest or anything else. He said no, so that he said he was going to release us on \$250 or \$500 bond. And we had to so then we went back in, forget when it was we came out. (Tape break)

Bill Thomas- I think it occurred to Tom and myself about the bonds was there any set procedure for handling the bonds?

Malcolm Blackburn- Well enough people had been arrested that a kind of procedure developed. Whenever somebody got arrested we called the same firm usually, was it Rapner, Thompson, Sugarman, Lucas, and Willis, and Mr. Higgs or Mr. Bailey from that firm usually looked after it. On this occasion it was Marvin Rattner who came down and looked after the 6 of us.

Tom Beckner- Who paid for the bonds did the other people involved pay?

Malcolm Blackburn- Well they would usually go to a bail bond company, Howard Jackson at M and M Bail Bond had been doing a lot of this. And the lawyers assumed this responsibility usually. I think they built up quite a file of bail bonds.

Bill Thomas- I think Tom probably means did the committee pay for this?

Malcolm Blackburn- Oh yes in the end the community on the move for equality yes. Paid lawyers for their services.

Bill Thomas- It was some type of legal fund?

Malcolm Blackburn- Well it was just under general, yes, money available. This was actually paid after the strike was over and all of the money that had been collected for the sanitation workers had been turned over to the union for a strike fund so this was money that was surplus of that. Some where along the line in the process of appearing before Wineman or subsequent to that we were separated I remember they kept Willy James Kemp, I remember they pulled him off by himself. He was I think probably had broken probation from the time he had been arrested with the other young men down there on Beal St. or something like that. They kind of had it in for him.

Bill Thomas- He was a marked man by then.

Malcolm Blackburn- Yeah and...

Tom Beckner- Did they do this right away or they looked up his record or they were familiar with him.

Malcolm Blackburn- They somebody around there was familiar with him. Another man Jake McWoods had been arrested the day before on a charge that eventually was dismissed, a sanitation worker brought a charge against him of assault, so Jake was held without bond. The rest of us were, had to hang around and after we were released they asked us to hang around because they wanted it transferred into Judge Churchill's court for the hearing or the arraignment I forgot what it was.

Bill Thomas- Is that what they said?

Malcolm Blackburn- There was some reason that had to do with Judge Churchill. Oh I know, Judge Churchill I believe was the judge who heard the 117 people that were arrested the first time and before Wineman would release us he wanted to wait until Judge Churchill could hear, could deal with that aspect. See in effect we had broken probation from the first time. We were not on probation, he had said continue the case and if nobody is guilty or anything else in the next 60 days and well here we were in the next 60 days and they kept Jake McWoods and put him back in the cell and the rest of us were in the courtroom waiting to get into the other court. Then that seemed to get off track or something and as I recall we were brought back into Judge Wineman's court and arraigned and that was the first time we heard the charges, by this time the charges were state and local disorderly conduct and a state



conspiracy charge, I think there are 8 sections under the state conspiracy charge. And one of the two sections which we felt were probably being applied to us was obstructing trade and commerce and endangering the public health. These are the only 2 of the 7 or 8 that would possibly apply, and finally Winemann finally found, oh this was a probable cause hearing then, and Winemann listened to Captain Moore and Inspector Evans. Then bound us over to the state, he found probable cause, which meant we had to go back then into the cells and be carried downstairs and wait for transportation over to the county court.

Bill Thomas- To be arraigned on those charges.

Malcolm Blackburn- To be arraigned there. By this time the bails bondsmen of course was on it and we didn't even, we weren't even sent upstairs at the county jail we were just booked in and waited there because the bondsmen was arriving by this time and we waited maybe an hour at the most. But the probable cause hearing was interesting. Captain Moore testified, he is a very competent police officer, he is very polite. Never as any time that I saw him lost his temper, never did anything other than his job and always did it courteously to anybody and including me that I ever heard him spoke to but inspector Evans then gave his evidence.

Bill Thomas- Inspector is a little different type character.

Malcolm Blackburn- A little different and you could tell he was under some tension, his face was flushed and it appeared to me to be flushed and he seemed kind of testy and so forth and then they asked him, to recount what had happened, he said he told that when he got out there they asked him who did you speak to when you got out there? He said, I spoke to Mr. Blackburn and the prosecuting attorney, who would be, I forgot if it was Gianatti or Canale. It was Canale. Said now which Mr. Blackburn are you referring to because the director of public works is Charles Blackburn. He said, I am talking about that one over there. He goes you mean reverend Blackburn? And he goes yeah Preacher Blackburn.

Bill Thomas- Preacher Blackburn.

Malcolm Blackburn- Yeah, and the attorney said, reverend Blackburn, I said it preacher Blackburn at least twice he went through this thing and I could see the attorney wanted to make very sure that his stuff was in order so he had to push this and the first time Inspector Evans said preacher Blackburn I got a little dig in the ribs I think from Willy James Kemp behind me and I turned around and grinned. I think I almost caught Judge Wineman in what could have been a grin, and Captain Moore did grin. This didn't please Evans at all as far as I could see he just got a little more upset about it. So then they began then they asked him in the process of it well now do you recognize in the court any of the people you placed under arrest. He said well I know him, preacher Blackburn, Well do you know any others. He said well I know that second boy in line, Willy, he said you mean Willy James Kemp? Yeah the second boy in line there. So I turned to Willy and I said I guess that makes me 1<sup>st</sup> boy. This kind of thing. So they finally, I guess we were released from the county jail

it was probably close to noon by that time and walked on back to the here at the minimum salary building and just came in long enough for me to check in at the office and then we got in my car and I guess one of the other man's cars and drove over to the Firestone hall, river workers hall because there was a meeting going on there and of course they had gotten the word that we had been arrested that morning so it kind of made everybody feel good when we walked in we were the heroes of the moment and this stuff. That was about it.

Bill Thomas- One more thing, in a situation like that do you just automatically enter a plea of guilty? I mean not guilty? Or did they ask you to pleas?

Malcolm Blackburn- I don't recall, I think our attorney pleaded us not guilty. We weren't questioned in the probable cause hearing which kind of seemed strange to me that they would take the policemen's evidence and find probable cause on that basis. Especially when it is a conspiracy charge because how the testimony of Captain Moore and Inspector Evans could as to what happened out there could show probable cause that we had conspired to do this.

Bill Thomas- What was the final was there any more on this case?

Malcolm Blackburn- It went before the grand jury and they indicted us on the conspiracy charge. At that time the attorney said probably in the fall maybe September, October, before it would come to trial.

Bill Thomas- So that case is still pending then?

Malcolm Blackburn- Yeah but the lawyer said they were going to try to, I guess it is alright to talk about it on this isn't it.

Bill Thomas- Well if you would like to say...

Tom Beckner- You can put a restriction on it.

Malcolm Blackburn- Well just put a restriction on this at least until the case is settled. The lawyers said that what they planned to do is to attack it on the grounds of the constitutionality of the statutes and have it moved to federal court because attacking the statutes as being vague and so forth and then if that didn't work then the case will come to trial. I said Laura what happens if it comes to trial and you know they are talking about making a grand constitutional issue out of this and I had a feeling they were looking at that thing. I said well what happens if that doesn't work then we will go to trial on it. I said what will happen if you lose, he said it isn't that important it is only misdemeanor you can't get up to but a year in jail. (Laughs).

Bill Thomas- What's a year more or less. You could write a book in a year.

Malcolm Blackburn- That was it as far as that was concerned.

Bill Thomas- I think we interrupted you probably at a point where you had called and you had found out that Dr. King. I had asked we, who is we and you said that we understand now it is COME. Contact had been made and understood that Dr., King was in the Rivermont now did you go over?

Malcolm Blackburn- When I said we I was actually specifically referring to Dr. Jackson and myself and others that were around other members of the strategy committee. I at this stage it is a little vague as to who they were, I recall I think, Mrs. Maxine Smith, I think Jerry Fanion was here around that time, reverend S.B. Kyles, reverend Lawson and others were in and out some of them over at the church and...

Bill Thomas- Yes.

Malcolm Blackburn- At any rate around 4:00 Dr. Jackson and I got in the car and drove over to the Rivermont in his car and went up to Dr. King's suite. There were about 8 or 10 people in the sitting room and a number of other people, I didn't know how many at the time in Dr. King's bedroom with him. Engaged in discussion already and then all of us went into his bedroom which was a combination bed sitting room as well. And had a meeting right then and there as to what had happened and what we ought to do. One of our concerns of course was the idea that by 5:00 that evening we ought to have some kind of press conference and this is inevitably going to involve the question what is Dr. King going to do or what is the organization going to do and so forth, and the upshot of it was we agreed that we would hold a press conference downstairs. At that time Dr. King and some of the others mostly members of the strategy committee 2 or 3 of them would hold this press conference and announce that Dr. King number one was going to return to hold a peaceful march and then secondly we had decided that we would also march the next day which was Friday, if we were asked about that and this was the basic strategy we adopted as far as the oppress conference was concerned. And then subsequently to that we went downstairs. Someone asked me this question before whether it was Baxton Bryant or somebody I don't know, but I was the only white person in the group at that time.

Bill Thomas- I see.

Tom Beckner- I have heard that question somewhere too from somebody.

Malcolm Blackburn- It may have been Mr. Yellin, Joan Beifuss.

Bill Thomas- But you were the only white person there?

Malcolm Blackburn- Yes.

Tom Beckner- What was Dr. King's mood? He was upset was he not about the march.

Malcolm Blackburn- I wouldn't describe him as upset he was concerned and he was seeking the best understanding he could get from the other members of the group in

terms of strategy and I think it was at this point that there was beginning to be the feeling, although his coming had been a kind of interruption of his plans for Washington which he had willingly agreed to do, that now the thing had changed. I am not saying we felt this at the time but looking back at the way the conversation seemed to go, that now the route had changed if he was going to Washington he had to go through Memphis.,

Bill Thomas- I see. Was awareness his reputation as a nonviolent leader had sort of been put on the line.

Malcolm Blackburn- Because of the false report that had already been put out over the radio and I guess televisions that he had run, that he had left the march, escaped, run away kind of thing. We had already heard this was being said and so part of the press conference obviously was to deal with this question somebody was to make the explanation of what had actually happened.

Bill Thomas- At the time you got there had the question regarding exactly what had happened in the element of the youths which had not been expected had that been explored at all?

Malcolm Blackburn- It was a part of the conversation and I think also the fact that our organization of the march had not been sufficiently adequate to prevent this kind of thing whether it could have been prevented or not. Being a secondary question but I think that all of us knew that we had inadequately prepared for a peaceful march like we had always been having, but we had not had a march of this size.

Bill Thomas- Was there any feeling that adequate preparation would ensure a peaceful march.

Malcolm Blackburn- Well as far as that goes we had adequate preparation for that size of march and even with the mood of some of the young people. If it had not been for the incidents that happened earlier in the day the Hamilton School incident you see for instance. We ended up with 5 or 600 young people down there from Hamilton who got down there who were ready to just bust loose. This was an unexpected factor that nobody had control over and nobody even knew was in existence really except when the other people arrived they were loud and noisy and they weren't about to settle for any more foolishness.

Bill Thomas- I wish I had a chance to listen to the other tape but let me ask you, had you known Dr. King prior to this?

Malcolm Blackburn- No, only very very briefly. The first time he came in which was the night before Jesse Epps and I drove to the airport to pick him up.

Bill Thomas- I am sorry the first time...

Malcolm Blackburn- Well that would be the night before, oh I am sorry...

Bill Thomas- That would be the second time he came in.

Malcolm Blackburn- That's right the night he came here to speak, remember he came here to speak and said he would return for the march which was snowed out.

Tom Beckner- You picked him up on the 17<sup>th</sup> of March, he spoke on the 18<sup>th</sup> is that right?

Malcolm Blackburn- If he spoke on the 18<sup>th</sup> we picked him and brought him from the airport directly to the Mason Temple.

Tom Beckner- So on the 18<sup>th</sup> when he spoke to those 17,000 people.

Malcolm Blackburn- Yeah we met him at the airport.

Bill Thomas- You met him at the airport and this is the first time he came into Memphis.

Malcolm Blackburn- During this issue.

Bill Thomas- Yes, and was he alone?

Malcolm Blackburn- No, one of his staff was with him. I am trying to think who it was.

Tom Beckner- Was it Jesse Jackson? I think I recall a picture of him. Probably would have been him or Bernard Lee.

Malcolm Blackburn- I think it was Bernard Lee.

Tom Beckner- Bernard Lee is his traveling secretary. Do you know where he came from?

Malcolm Blackburn- As far as I recall from Atlanta.

Tom Beckner- You and Jesse Epps went out alone to pick him up.

Malcolm Blackburn- Yes I think so. We were at Mason Temple, and I had stepped outside and Jesse had Mrs. Crenshaw's car, just pulling out of the lot and said come along with me and we drove out in his car. There may have been some one else there.

Tom Beckner- I am sorry was Ralph Abernathy there that night was he not. It seemed like Dr. King spoke and then Ralph Abernathy was that the night?

Malcolm Blackburn- Yes Ralph Abernathy was there. Yeah because he spoke after Dr. King and then Dr. King spoke again.

Tom Beckner- He came back and said he would return for a march.

Malcolm Blackburn- Yes. What I am saying now, in far as our car was concerned it seemed I was driving and Dr. King sat in the front seat beside me and Jesse Epps was in the back and Bernard Lee I think may have been the 5<sup>th</sup> person.

Bill Thomas- Did you talk about the movement in Memphis?

Malcolm Blackburn- Yeah we attempted to brief him on many of the things much of which he already knew and he did ask a few questions and Jesse and whoever it was trying to fill him in on some of the details. Really the movement in its context, I mean a strike in the middle of a larger issue this kind of thing. Just that general kind of conversation, then just general passing conversation. He and I talked about the fact that I was the pastor of Caywood Temple here and somebody had said I was pasturing a black church. There was one little interesting incident at the airport as we are waiting for the luggage to be put in the back of the car Dr. King was already in the front seat and I was in the driver's seat and a young man standing there in uniform came over and said hello to Dr. King. And Dr. King said something about are you are going overseas and he said yes, and he said don't you think you are doing the wrong thing or something like this or some reference to his position on the Vietnam issue.

Bill Thomas- What did that man say?

Malcolm Blackburn- Well he was a little taken aback I gather and not quite sure how to answer this question, he just came over to see Dr. King and Dr. King wasn't missing a chance you know.

Bill Thomas- Was this, this was a soldier, was he a negro or a white.

Malcolm Blackburn- He was black. And then I say we came down and there was this big crowd and we kind of formed a line to go ahead of him and some behind him to get him up to the platform.

Bill Thomas- Do you remember about what time he got in that evening?

Malcolm Blackburn- It must have been, we must have left for the airport around 8:00.

Bill Thomas- The meeting had already started?

Malcolm Blackburn- Yes the meeting was already in progress. I think we got back I think it must have been around 9:00 or a little after 9:00.

Bill Thomas- Did he at that time mention the poor people's campaign?

Malcolm Blackburn- During his talk that night?

Bill Thomas- No as you were coming in?

Malcolm Blackburn- I think I either Jesse or somebody asked him how things were progressing on it, just a general question.

Bill Thomas- Well at that point he, Dr. King was only kind of a one shot thing.

Malcolm Blackburn- Well we had Byron Ruston and Roy Wilkins and unfortunately from a tactical view they were both there on the same day, it might have been better if they didn't come on the same day and nothing had changed, we didn't seem to be getting any further and so we had talked about bringing in Dr. King even before that and we went ahead and decided to call and ask if he would come.

Bill Thomas- He was interested?

Malcolm Blackburn- Evidently because it was within the period of a day or so that we got the reply that he was going to come and we began settling on a date and began building for it.

Bill Thomas- Do you know of any arrangements made I know that night he stayed at the Lorraine.

Malcolm Blackburn- Yes I think so.

Bill Thomas- Did anyone tell him he had a room there?

Malcolm Blackburn- No probably somebody in the strategy committee just went ahead and called the Lorraine, called Bailey and made arrangements for it.

Bill Thomas- Did you see him anymore after the meeting?

Malcolm Blackburn- I think I saw him briefly that night at the Lorraine, you know we were driving people back down there after the meeting and I think just briefly in the room. I forget I think I had to get a handbill out or something and then I came on back.

Bill Thomas- The next day he went to Mississippi I think.

Malcolm Blackburn- I don't recall that.

Bill Thomas- So the next time you saw him would be when did you see him when he came back in?

Malcolm Blackburn- When he arrived here on Linden street for the day of the march that was broken up.

Bill Thomas- How about they had a press conference that night that afternoon press conference.

Malcolm Blackburn- 5:00 at the Rivermont.

Bill Thomas- Then I think there was one the next morning but did you see him the next day?

Malcolm Blackburn- I don't remember, I don't think I did because we were getting ready for the march the regular march and there was a lot of static coming down from commissioner Holloman. First he said he was not going to allow a march and we said we were going to march and then he said you can march but no young people. Then we fought this through so it was 18 and older could march. We were in the middle of all this kind of thing so I am sure I didn't see him.

Tom Beckner- Why did he have to change from the Lorraine to the Rivermont the next time he came in?

Malcolm Blackburn- I don't know, I don't know really?

Bill Thomas- Ok and did you see him again when he came in on April 3<sup>rd</sup>? The day before the shooting?

Malcolm Blackburn- He had a press conference at Centenary Church and that I believe was.

Bill Thomas- That was on the 3<sup>rd</sup>.

Malcolm Blackburn- On the 3<sup>rd</sup> was it.

Bill Thomas- A I understand he as picked up at the airport and taken to the church.

Malcolm Blackburn- We had a meeting with him, closed meeting with the ministers, and then he came out on the side porch there and had his press conference, that was the 3<sup>rd</sup>.

Bill Thomas- Do you remember anything about that meeting?

Malcolm Blackburn- Well there was a good deal of questioning about reporters about his stand on Vietnam, more on this than anything else. There was some questioning about the march but the general feeling at the time was that in itself was not what they wanted to talk about they talked to him about the poor people's campaign and his stand on Vietnam and these two issues stand in my mind as I recall to overshadow the march. It was as though he opened the press conference and he got the march out of the way in a kind of hurry. And then the conference broke up and then I assume we went back from there to the motel.

Bill Thomas- Do you remember how that press conference happened did he set up over there or was it set up, did they just follow him there.

Malcolm Blackburn- I think it was announced that he had this other meeting and it could be after that meeting and that was at Centenary and that was how it happened.

Bill Thomas- Who handled his public relations while he was here, I mean who announced or get the word out.



Malcolm Blackburn- Well I don't know sometimes this would have been done through Jim Lawson I am sure.

Bill Thomas- Do you remember how many black ministers were at that meeting?

Malcolm Blackburn- Well it wasn't limited to black ministers there were other people there who had been closely associated with the movement, well like Jerry Fanion. I think Baxton Bryant was there from Tennessee council and I was there. In all, there were probably I guess 100 people, maybe not quite that many.

Bill Thomas- Do you remember about what time Dr. King arrived?

Malcolm Blackburn- I was late getting there he was there and I think speaking when I got there.

Bill Thomas- To the?

Malcolm Blackburn- To the group of ministers. This was I guess around 1:30.

Bill Thomas- Oh that late.

Malcolm Blackburn- Maybe it was earlier than that I just don't recall the time. Others spoke I remember Jesse Jackson spoke about operation breadbasket, and we were planning at that time that would be one of the accelerating steps in the movement to come in with a program along that line. I guess there may have been one or two others who spoke as well.

Bill Thomas- I have been going over this particular part awfully close and so I am really concerned in this area of, do you remember that the attorneys arrived to tell him about the injunction there at the church ?

Malcolm Blackburn- I do recall something about that, yeah , either that the attorneys arrived to tell him or we knew about it, he knew about it, and there was a possibility that he might be served with an injunction. Now whether, I don't think it happened.

Bill Thomas- No he wasn't served until he got down to the Lorraine. Do you remember what he was saying when you arrived?

Malcolm Blackburn- No. I have a general recollection that he was talking about the significance of this movement in relation to the poor people's campaign and he was seeing it as an integral part of the whole thing. That the thing had moved out of the area of race and into the area of rich and poor and those are the kind of distinctions.

Bill Thomas- Do you remember anything about his mood that morning?

Malcolm Blackburn- Well it was quiet, generally. He was talking to, he was a preacher talking to preachers, it was very much an in group kind of thing, even though he was who he was and not personally acquainted but a great many of us. But it was a you know really as they call preserved, Jesse Jackson was much more flamboyant, stubberish and basket. Talk about the kingdom, people don't need to

pay taxes if they are going to come into this kingdom, he could do this thing pretty well. That was about all I can remember for that.

Bill Thomas- Ok then that night was the storm and the meeting at the Mason Temple and the mountain top speech, were you there?

Malcolm Blackburn- Yes I was there for all of that meeting we were building up at that time to Dr. Abernathy's speech of course, he was supposed to be the principal speaker and as we saw..

Bill Thomas- Excuse me if I interrupt I am sorry but was Dr. King announced as the speaker previously?

Malcolm Blackburn- No he wasn't to have spoken he was to have led the march the next day and then to have spoken that night the night of the march at Mason Temple.

Bill Thomas- So he was not to have spoke that night strangely enough.

Malcolm Blackburn- No. no. no, and with the storm I think we had about 3,000 people show up and when reverend Abernathy saw this and could see how these people had come out in the midst of the storm, and so forth and the rest of us talking about, we agreed, I wasn't involved in this conversation but there was an agreement that Dr. King ought to be called and told to come on out. Someone said to the effect that he was tired but even so he ought to come out and so in the interim before he came several of us spoke, I spoke that night. And just whoever was there to try and fill in the time.

Bill Thomas- Do you remember what you talked about just briefly?

Malcolm Blackburn- Yeah I kind of went over what I preached about the previous Sunday which was the battle of Jericho and there is some pretty good scriptural parallel between the battle of Jericho and the thing we were engaged in. Where the scripture tells that god told the people that first of all they should get the priests and the Levites to lead them, get a bunch of preachers out front and let them have rams horns and make a lot of noise which is what all the preachers have been doing all this time.

Bill Thomas- And then march.

Malcolm Blackburn- And then march to march around the city one time and to march around the city the next day but just one march a day. I said this is what we have been doing. And then I said that god decided this thing had to be accelerated, had to be escalated and so he told them that after they had been doing this marching one time with the preacher's out in front making a noise that they were going to get up this other morning and they were going to escalate they were going to march 7 times. But they were going to do it quietly and when god told them to shout they would shout and the walls will come down and it says every man will ascend, shall

ascend straight up into the city, no more back door. No more going into Mrs. Anne's kitchen everyone is going to go up in the city and I said the walls of Memphis are going to come down. I said the walls of prejudice, bigotry and hatred and Memphis is going to be a new city like Jericho. I had worked it out Sunday, while we were waiting for Dr. King whoever was in charge that night whether it was reverend Donelson or somebody else, motioned to me to come up and talk. You know when you are caught flatfooted you do the best you can.

Bill Thomas- Do you remember reverend Blackburn was it storming at that time, do you recall or did it start later?

Malcolm Blackburn- It had been storming prior to that time a great deal, but I think by this time it wasn't as severe. There was a couple times earlier in the meeting you know there was quite a clap of thunder and rain and the windows up at the top as I stood in the pulpit and look above the (muffled) the very high windows would rattle and shake.

Bill Thomas- When did the air raid warnings, the tornado warnings come on do you recall?

Tom Beckner- That was the night that the tornado hit Millington and.

Malcolm Blackburn- Well we had reports, somebody had a radio or something and this was in the very early part of the meeting.

Tom Beckner- I remember I was just trying to fix a time here, I remember one of the air raid warnings came on at 8:15 and I was trying to find out when did Dr. King arrive?

Malcolm Blackburn- Well he arrived, I am sure it was after that it was getting on it strikes me it was 9:00 or a little after 9:00.

Bill Thomas- Had you finished speaking?

Malcolm Blackburn- Oh yeah I had finished speaking and maybe someone else had spoken or I think we were involved in an offering.

Bill Thomas- Did you see him when he came in?

Malcolm Blackburn- Yeah I think so, I think I went down near the door when he arrived.

Bill Thomas- Can you just tell us about that and the speech your impressions of it?

Malcolm Blackburn- Well I guess we all talked about the speech together in the organization and with other people I, you come to a common opinion of the speech and I guess you probably talked to other people about that but the curious thing was the fact that so many of us and this was later on that night, now this was 24 hours before his death or almost 24 hours, talked about this incredibly long and

detailed introduction that Abernathy gave him which seemed strange and then also the kind of transition in his speaking. The first part of his speech was, it was very low key and there was almost a sadness, not an emotional sadness but I can't think of a word to describe it. About the way he talked and then when he got on this business about the sneezing. Somebody sitting near me said, I have never heard him talk about that before. Then he got into this long build up of how we are going back to the early part of the bible.

Tom Beckner- Good Samaritan.

Malcolm Blackburn- Yeah and how he had progressed through these things and how he is so glad he didn't stop there, he kept on going, kept on climbing up and up and came right on through the contemporary movement until he finally got to the fact of the Memphis situation, which was the build up for the thing. Now I have been to the mountaintop, this is the mountaintop kind of thing. And then the abrupt conclusion with the descriptive quotation that my eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the lord you know and then just paused, turned around and sat down. It was as though as I am sure he was tired to being with, and he had talked for a long time until this transition began, with the reference to the sneeze and then this long build up kind of thing. Again the 3,000 people instead of 15,000 there was a difference in their reaction. It was a smaller group but there was just a strangeness about it which could be attributable to many things but we did talk about it later.

Tom Beckner- Do you remember anyone making any comments about the weather that night. Somebody said it was unusual to hear him pause and when there would normally be applause for his speech and instead you hear thunder did this strike you at all?

Malcolm Blackburn- Well, no I can't say it struck me except the fact that it was a smaller crowd and in that big place 3,000 people were almost lost except they were down mostly in one area.

Bill Thomas- Towards the front?

Malcolm Blackburn- More towards the front but they stretched towards the back but not very much on the sides and I don't recall many people in the gallery and none behind.

Bill Thomas- Well as a from the word puppeteer, as a speaker yourself how did you feel about his speech.

Malcolm Blackburn- Well I was very moved especially when this kind of transition came about. I don't recall much of what he said at all in the early part of his speech the longer section of it I don't recall anything, If somebody reminded me he said such and such it probably would come back to me. It was only this last part that he began and this tremendous feeling that you know I still have that you lose when you see the last few sentences of his speech. When he was talking about the mountaintop he was talking about Memphis.

Bill Thomas- That was what I was hoping you would go into.

Malcolm Blackburn- He had I mean the mountaintop wasn't Washington it wasn't the fact of all he had done or experienced but he was talking to a group of garbage collectors and he was telling them that they were going to get somewhere that he wasn't going to get. And this was a little unnerving really, because it didn't seem to me as much as I was involved in the Memphis situation I almost had the feeling he was overstating it a little bit as a preacher might do. Then really whether it was the fact that there was only 3,00 or the night, or whatever it was the reaction was not the same. There wasn't the overwhelming applause that had accompanied his announcement to come lead a march for instance.

Bill Thomas- there was a sadness amongst the people?

Malcolm Blackburn- no, no that's not the word I am just saying this about the, I don't know, just the fact that having come all this way and being ready now to go to Washington by way of Memphis and all this ahead of him, the curiousness of him speaking of Memphis as the mountain top and the fact that he wouldn't get there but his people would kind of thing almost as though Washington was going to be anticlimax.

Bill Thomas- That did strike you at the time?

Malcolm Blackburn- Yeah there was a strangeness about this, about this thing. I am not sure at the time I thought it as explicitly as I do now.

Bill Thomas- Did he stay around after the speech at all or do you remember?

Malcolm Blackburn- I don't remember, I don't remember, I don't think he stayed around long but I think he was there and people were talking to him up on the platform some minutes afterwards. And I guess you know it probably was just a few minutes and then he probably left.

Bill Thomas- And then what did you do then, did you stay around or?

Malcolm Blackburn- I don't remember, I am sure that I came back here and we had a strategy committee meeting, because we always did.

Bill Thomas- I was wondering if there was any more discussion of the speech after you left or?

Malcolm Blackburn- No, no, no, no. I am sure I came back here yeah because we had young people here getting ready, getting signs ready, and that kind of thing for the march. We had a lot of signs that had to be tacked onto sticks and string put on them and so forth. We had people who I think stayed in the church all night that night, oh no I am sorry I am going back. Yeah but the same thing applied, I was confusing it with the disrupted march because we got most of the signs ready and then lost a lot of them but we still had a lot of signs to get ready and ones we had printed and so forth.

Bill Thomas- Ok getting sort of close to the end here, now can you sort of briefly tell us about Thursday April the 4<sup>th</sup> and what you were doing and how you heard about the assassination.

Malcolm Blackburn- Well, the day was just the day was over and he was to speak that night again. I knew if I didn't get somewhere and get something to eat I wasn't going to eat at all. So I had actually left the office early and normally don't leave here until 6 or after but I must have left here around 5:00. I went home and had just gotten inside and turned on the television and was getting ready to cook something and the announcement came over so I just shut the stove off and got on the phone and called here and Dr. Jackson was here. He also had heard and I said you are probably going to have to go by the motel the hospital or something, we didn't know how serious it was. I said I will come right back down and handle the base radio because someone will have to be on that. So I did I just came right down. I exceeded the limit I am sure and got here in 5 pr 6 minutes.

Bill Thomas- This would have been between 6:00 and 6:30?

Malcolm Blackburn- I think the announcement I saw was around 6:20, I forget, whatever that first announcement was and I was down here I'm sure by within 10 minutes and got on the base radio and by this time Dr. Jackson had gone and I think I managed to pick him up on the radio he was over at the Lorraine and one of the other cars with a radio in it was over near there or on it's way and was being prevented from getting in there at first and they had to stay outside or maybe half a block away. Then we had word he had been taken to the hospital and one of the cars went to the hospital, one of the cars with the radio so we had that contact and Dr. Jackson came back and I think he was here when we got word that Dr. King was dead. Very shortly after that we got word that Dr. Abernathy and Andy Young and so forth were going back to the motel and I think at that time James Orange was here.

Bill Thomas- Oh here in the building?

Malcolm Blackburn- Yeah here in the building so Dr. Jackson went back to the hotel and Orange and I drove over, I had my police pass from the curfew. So we drove over and the police stopped us and they let me through and we went inside and his staff was up in the room talking or part of his staff. So I was there just a few minutes and then I thought well I better get back over here and came over here and I think made arrangements with Orange that if he needed transportation to let me know so I believe after a bit I went and picked up Orange and brought him back here as I recall. Yeah then we went back over to the motel and we were there several hours I guess just waiting around standing around. And his staff was already in a meeting.

Bill Thomas- Where were they meeting do you remember?

Malcolm Blackburn- I think in his room. And then we went, I believe moved up into the room over the office, the office in the new part of the building and met there for awhile and the issue was how to deal with the issue that Dr. King came to deal with which was the sanitation strike. And that we couldn't allow anything, this was his

staff saying that we couldn't allow anything to even his death to lose sight of the primary goal which was the settlement of the sanitation issue.

Bill Thomas- So sometime at that point to have the memorial march?

Malcolm Blackburn- I am not sure it was decided that night it may have not been decided until the next day.

Tom Beckner- Let me interrupt here. (Tape Break)

Malcolm Blackburn- I have got to get...(Tape Break)

Bill Thomas- Is there anything about all of the whole experience reverend Blackburn that we might not have touched that impressed you or you think of, stands out in your mind.

Malcolm Blackburn- Well the only, I guess it is not an answer but the only thing I can think of is the incredible degree of racism in this country that I had no comprehension existed. Intellectually I knew there was a real problem and had known it because I had been here a couple years, but the incredible depth of white racism in this country and I don't see any genuine hope that is going to change which means trouble and black massacre. I don't drive in east Memphis unless I have to because they half joke me I am scared somebody might recognize me, and I don't drive in the black community anymore than I need to because somebody might not.

Bill Thomas- So you are kind of caught in the middle there.

Malcolm Blackburn- Yeah, yeah well it is an overstatement to put it that way. I see the looks on the faces of white people you know when they see me in black community or when they know who I am. It is just incredible to me that people can be so full of fear and hate so much that they get torn up inside themselves about somebody else's situation.

Bill Thomas- So the depth of prejudice in Memphis was a revelation to this degree.

Malcolm Blackburn- Yeah if somebody could have told me I would have said yeah that's right you know but to actually experience it and to see how deep it is.

Bill Thomas- Let me ask you one more thing, this is kind of a stupid question. Why do you think the garbage man struck?

Malcolm Blackburn- I think they got to the point where they said we have nothing else to lose, we have tried everything and nothing else works. If this is all we are going to get then we couldn't possibly, as many of them said we couldn't be any worse off.

Bill Thomas- I see and they just finally reached a point.

Malcolm Blackburn- Yeah, and then all they needed was a catalyst and that was these damn stupid policemen on Main St. that day.

Bill Thomas- You feel like reverend Jackson that was the turning point?

Malcolm Blackburn- Sure and it certainly was for somebody lie reverend Jackson you know.

Bill Thomas- You got anything else Tom?

Tom Beckner- Why did they take Dr. King to St. Joseph's hospital?

Malcolm Blackburn- I don't know, I have no idea.

(Tape End)