

SS246.mp3

David Yellin- This is side 2 on September 23rd 1969 of reverend James Lawson. We left you at the council of world churches and reverend Lawson is walking around his study looking at books.

James Lawson- You want me to start now again?

David Yellin- Yes.

James Lawson- Well we, I was saying I have been involved in the world council, formerly since 61 and...(muffled) and a member of the committee on church and society and actually of course I have been invited to many more meetings than what I can go to, because one can get into that (muffled).

David Yellin- Excuse me this may be out of chronological order in a way but I think let's take it to subject order since the assassination and so on I am sure you are speaking engagements haven't lessened if anything they have increased. What do you hear, or what questions are you asked about Memphis and so on, about the situation here? I mean are they any different than they were before?

James Lawson- Before the assassination? Well I guess the key question I am asked is to what extent I feel, (muffled) we already know who killed Martin Luther King. And I had the question....

David Yellin- Who asked that what kind of....

James Lawson- All kinds of people sure black and white all kinds of people.

Joan Beifuss- What do you answer them?

James Lawson- I say we don't know. Most black people are not satisfied at all.

David Yellin- Your not suggesting, they are not satisfied the Ray thing.

James Lawson- No they are not satisfied and they tend to feel that there is much that hasn't been said. They tend to feel that he is the patsy and that if he may not have been the trigger man but if he was he was a part of a team that (muffled) tend to feel very differently that definitely he couldn't have pulled it off by himself and they tend to feel he was paid to do it and they tend to feel there could be people implicated in front of us.

David Yellin- Are they satisfied with your answer that you don't know?

James Lawson- Well, I don't know if they are or not but that is my honest answer.

David Yellin- I guess it is almost an unfair question because there, I don't mean dissatisfied with your answer but that you are not covering up.

James Lawson- Yeah oh I see. Well I don't have anything to cover up so of course.

David Yellin- No I mean that I didn't mean that, that you are covering up. Then in other words it looks certainly as if there is never, well unless somebody confesses in history digs it out.

James Lawson- I don't think that history is going to judge that piece very well.

David Yellin- Why is that?

James Lawson- Well because of a simple thing there are too many unanswered questions that did not come out in any trial. That people cannot give satisfactory answers to.

David Yellin- Well oddly enough our own searching this is not to find out, well if we could it would be great, but why this climate exists here, why it is possible to have unanswered questions and so on.

James Lawson- Well the thing, I think one reason is simply because there wasn't a good trial that committed a full airing. A trial where the state had to put fully its case up before where they could have had that case severely questioned by lawyers, by defense attorneys.

David Yellin- Now was it because the state had its evidence and that is all it wanted to do enough to convict him? They didn't do any more than..

James Lawson- They didn't do any more than they had to. But I know for example because a couple of FBI men visited me about it, some months before, or weeks before the trial about certain statements I had been quoted as making around the country, various questions of me and I told them what I knew. Of course there response was well all that is going to come out in the trial. Of course there was no trial.

David Yellin- Yeah but we were prevented from interviewing several people because...

James Lawson- Some didn't come out.

David Yellin- Yeah.

James Lawson- Well I think those people ought to be interviewed now. And I think that stuff needs to be (muffled).

David Yellin- Now the FBI has supposedly at least they indicate they have or somebody has all these statements the 300, there were some 300 people on the list.

James Lawson- Is that right? Well a number of those incidents I don't think are in satisfactory in explaining them.

David Yellin- Well again this is just asking a question, the job of the attorney general here was to see that justice was done to the one who committed the crime. It was

not necessarily making a statement almost in the form of a question. Was it his job to go beyond what happened and the implications and so on.

James Lawson- Yes because justice wasn't done, because when you put a man in jail but leave approximately 20 million black people very uncertain then you have not done justice. Particularly when those people have historically learned to feel that the courts tend not to be fair, if blacks are involved. So what I am saying is that it is not enough for the prosecution to have done this order of judgment, they want to speak about (muffled) But this seems to me that it was very very short sighted. For the prosecution not to have rejected the guilty plea and insisted that we be informed particularly in the viable climate that was here. After all they were dreadfully afraid that there was going to be riots and demonstrations and everything else at that time. Black people had good sense enough not to do anything like that. I would have thought you know that sensing and knowing the tension from the unanswered questions for black people there would have been a large effort some how to have gotten enough it into the public view to at least delay some of those things. I, as one who wants to be a responsible person cannot go to black people in the city of Memphis and say, the case is settled. I don't know of any black leader who can, who feels (muffled).

David Yellin- (Muffled)

James Lawson- No I would not have said so I don't think opening up the subject it does harm you see, particularly when you are trying to deal with a large public matter and a matter which is so important to so many people.

David Yellin- So there was the short arm of justice instead of the long arm. As I said I guess we are jumping ahead chronologically, and you still excuse me get questions about..

James Lawson- Oh yes about Memphis too, about what is going on in Memphis, that is the second most prominent asked question, what is going on today? Did the strike get satisfied, settled satisfactory, what has happened since. Do you see any signs of hope, you know (muffled).

David Yellin- Well let's hope when we get to it, just by the way do you still have your little notebook, or your notebook?

James Lawson- Oh yes somewhere.

David Yellin- Yeah but...

Joan Beifuss- We are not going to get it.

David Yellin- (Muffled).

Joan Beifuss- (muffled) 67.

David Yellin- 66. Did you go past 66 because that was the Meredith March?

Joan Beifuss- We passed that already.

David Yellin- And also was that the summer when that was the first injunction also. Against the first strike. That was an injunction that later caused an awful lot of trouble.

James Lawson- (Muffled) T.O. Jones got fired.

Joan Beifuss- Did you know T.O. Jones early on?

James Lawson- Yeah, he and various unions had talked to us about what was going on.

David Yellin- Now on that was there anything that you can recall in relation to eventually what happened about the first injunction.

It was going to be a strike. As we gather there was word spread there was going to be a strike and the injunction was gotten over the weekend. There was no strike. (muffled)

James Lawson- Well the only thing I recall, I don't recall the specifics on how the injunction was taken up the only thing I recall is the fact that T.O. Jones came to public view in the black community and he had gone to various meetings NAACP and what not. And to participate in these and he began to tell any number of us about the problems he was facing about getting fired and his men being fired from the job for trying to get organized in order to do something about the problems. So I remember (muffled).

Joan Beifuss- Did anybody take any action at that time at the NAACP? Make any inquiries?

James Lawson- I have forgotten it seems to me that some inquiries were made but just what these were and how extensive I don't know. Well, along this line somewhere in here too 65 or 66 that we tried to get the city commission to pass a minimum wage of \$1.25 an hour.

David Yellin- (Muffled) was a federal minimum then?

James Lawson- Locally.

David Yellin- But federally it was \$1.25?

James Lawson- Yeah it was \$1.25 then but we had at that time people on the school board and people in the hospitals who were making \$.48 and \$.50 an hour. And the NAACP made an issue with a number of (muffled) came to the state commission and they tried to lift at least the minimum wage without very much success until about 2 years later, this was the 67 campaign.

David Yellin- Yes, did it become a dollar?

James Lawson- Yeah, (muffled) because of our effort. But it was that time that I became acutely aware of city employment and what this represented in terms of poverty, also it is around this time that people like O.Z. Evers and James Sneek tried to get some people in the hospitals together to make a county union.

David Yellin- James Smith?

James Lawson- Yeah reverend Smith he is (muffled). They tried to take a number of issues to the hospital board and the hospital and city administration but to no avail. And the interesting thing is of course is that at that time Ingram was the mayor, but still didn't get anywhere at all. (muffled) I had another (muffled) with the city commission over the question of the city employees because sometime I think approximately my first year in Memphis 62, 63. Commissioner Armor presented a resolution to prohibit the organizing of city employees of any kind. Now this apparently at that time being quite specifically as police department because I guess apparently there was rumors that the police were trying to organize and the Memphis labor council, Bill Ross, this is my first contact with Bill Ross, apparently Matt Flint, Flinch rather, from Nashville, had sent him word that I had been assigned to Memphis as a pastor and of course came from Nashville and had told him that I would probably be supportive of bonefied labor efforts. So he contact me to go down and be one of the people that testified before the city commission and that is the first time I went to city commission for any purpose.

David Yellin- Now that was 6-....

James Lawson- That was 62 or 63 somewhere in there.

David Yellin- Oh back then.

James Lawson- Yeah. This ordinance in issue was in its second hearing when the labor council put together clergymen and labor people and others.

David Yellin- So it is some sort of a tradition that the clergy were involved I mean black clergy.

James Lawson- Sure, that's right. So that I, that was the first (muffled) commission against, against such a resolution which I of course said was fundamentally wrong and that really it was contrary to the best interests of the city was the line that I took.

Well then this, what you just said spoils my next question, but I'll ask it anyway because you made a statement awhile back that was around this time that you began to be interested in (muffled) and so on. Up until this time, (muffled).

James Lawson- Because I have been in an interesting role, because on the one hand I have been , most of my own student adult days, fairly critical of the unions, because one they have not done a fair job at the point of giving the black man a fair shake, and that is particularly true of course as you walk over the craft unions and

(Muffled) one of the (muffled) persistent in his life, and he has been, though very active and very critical of the labor movement at the point of shortchanging the black working man. And so I usually I follow with....Secondly I have been very critical of the labor movement because I felt that the labor movement has tended to forget the basis on which it is founded and therefore did not work (muffled) it needed to be working to be a dynamic force for meaningful creative social change. This is particularly true, this was particularly true in terms of international affairs the way you main stream the movement in the United States. This tended to simply parrot whatever Washington said about foreign policy is their policy. And this was at a time when American foreign policy has just been, justifiable, so I have been fairly critical for that reason. And up until after 68 I never really made a link between the idea of unionizing and poverty. (Muffled) really until during the sanitation strike. Of 68. Even though I had been in favor of unions, organizing particularly in the south. And all that, I never really made a connection of this as being one of the ways of trying to deal with this question involving...

David Yellin- (Muffled)

James Lawson- The employed poverty people.

Joan Beifuss- Was this not talked about though for instance in SCLC at the time?

James Lawson- Yes we talked about it, and we all left it to organized service workers and hospital workers in New York. I mean Chicago to (muffled) campaign there was a great deal of talk about organizing and so on but what I am saying it did not really take as an overall, as a kind of (muffled)_ strategy of trying to deal with one side of the poverty issue. Oh yes we talked about it as a factor and in 67 I was going to Chicago for workshops, doing workshops for SCLC and I remember conversations in which a group of us from SCLC including Martin King talked about this whole business and also the links between the connections between, violence racism and poverty for instance.

David Yellin- Are you saying then that what happened in Memphis kind of brought these together?

James Lawson- Yeah in a new way for me, in 68 though this really became much more gelled, it became much more realization and since I have seen it in much more terms of potential meaningful black people.

David Yellin- Could you, are you, explain how it doesn't interfere?

James Lawson- Well essentially this. I mean we as you know I have been, I was one of the early people to get involved in the war against poverty in Memphis and I have long been concerned about the poverty of the employed. And there essential way in which it come sot my own mind is an awareness that we talk about power and eliminating poverty today in the United States, what better strategy is there than to essentially organize the poor workers of the nation and to help them develop the

kind of unity and strength by which they themselves can then deal with the question of indecent wages and (muffled).

David Yellin- So in other words, the poor workers would not be organized within their crafts or unions themselves but as poor people.

James Lawson- Yeah organize them as poor workers.

David Yellin- As poor workers?

James Lawson- But essentially of course in their own units of course.

Joan Beifuss- You are not talking about a big overall thing of union of poor people?

James Lawson- No, No.

Joan Beifuss- No, you are talking about like the sanitation workers and the hospital workers.

James Lawson- Yeah.

David Yellin- So but they would be active within their own (muffled). So this is not to be confused with what Dr. King's poor people's march or is it, is there some connection there? Would that stimulate them to go back to their own unions or? Union then becomes a vehicle.

James Lawson- Yeah, unionizing then becomes a vehicle, just as unionization in industrial workers or the factory workers of the united States tended to eliminate 14 hour work days, bad wages, lack of safety, exploitation, lack of fringe benefits...

David Yellin- They certainly couldn't do it through the national association of manufacturers.

James Lawson- Right.

David Yellin- Yes.

James Lawson- That tended to make essentially our factory workers in the united states middle class people to wage, to lift their wages anywhere from 5 or 6 thousand to 10 12, 13 thousand dollars a year and to essentially permit them to buy homes, put their kids in college and put aside stuff for pension and social security and these other kinds. I mean that came about because of the union movement. And my criticism of the union movement as I said earlier is that it failed, it did this but it failed then to try to include the poor workers or the country and particularly to include the black workers. Not only did it fail to include them, but in many instances it sought to exclude them (muffled). In fact that is what Chicago and Pittsburgh is all about.

Joan Beifuss- Do you, AFMSCE has been the one union to kind of make a breakthrough in this area?

James Lawson- Well, the place in which ASCME is important is it is the chief national union of governmental workers and workers of nonprofit institutions and consequently it is the fastest growing union in the country. In large measure that is because governmental workers are left outside the labor laws in the United States like the agricultural worker and the migrant worker. These three large categories of workers in the country are not included in any of the present labor legislation. As an illustration if at Centenary United Methodist Church, no Centenary is a bad example. But a better illustration would be that any business or factory of a certain size I think it is 25 employees or more. Where the workers request an election for union the company has to permit it. And the national labor relations board then comes in and partially conducts that union. Now that is true of any (Muffled) of a certain size. But that excludes municipal workers. That includes workers of non-profit institutions. Now the federal government Kennedy sort of bypassed that by an executive order, by an executive order, as part of the workers to organize, the federal organizers that is if they wanted to.

David Yellin- Is part of that because the municipalities such as in Memphis they don't recognize?

James Lawson- Well municipalities have your, you know various state and local governments that have effectively sought to keep the unions out, But I should say though even though that is true, most across the country you will find that state and city employees are pretty well organized now even without falling, but that has been a kind of a wilderness, they have had to fight for it, they have had to do what went on in Memphis to get it, to get the cities and the state governments to recognize.

Joan Beifuss- Jim was there contact (muffled) Caesar Chavez and SCLC and Caesar Chavez's movement? (Muffled) in 65 when he took his people out.

James Lawson- Well this chief contact was through the national council of churches.

David Yellin- Who the...

James Lawson- Chavez.

David Yellin- The Chavez conflict was through the national council of churches?

James Lawson- Of course I mean, (muffled) with SCLC I don't think any formal.

Joan Beifuss- That summer in Chicago 67 were you there for the marches and all (muffled).

James Lawson- No, (muffled).

David Yellin- Now one thing we must not neglect in that period because you have mentioned it again tonight and that is your work in holding not seminars but...

James Lawson- Workshops.

David Yellin- Workshops, in Chicago?

James Lawson- Yes.

David Yellin- About this time?

James Lawson- Yes.

David Yellin- Now since I have missed a few of the tapes, have you covered what your relationship with SCLC was specifically?

Joan Beifuss- Yeah we did that in the last.

David Yellin- Well now...

James Lawson- We did do that?

Joan Beifuss- Yeah I think so.

James Lawson- Ok.

Joan Beifuss- It was still how long, when was the last workshop you held for SCLC?

James Lawson- 67.

Joan Beifuss- That summer the Chicago summer?

James Lawson- The spring.

David Yellin- But you were involved with them up until then, including the workshops?

James Lawson- Yes. I may have been at the staff retreat of 67 too in September I don't remember (muffled).

Joan Beifuss- I think we have that.

David Yellin- Have you covered the workshops?

Joan Beifuss- Yeah. Something I was just going to ask.

James Lawson- We are sticking around quite a bit that's for sure.

Joan Beifuss- Are you still on the board of SCLC?

James Lawson- I have never been on the board.,

David Yellin- That is what I am trying to get your real relationship.

James Lawson- I have never been on the board.

David Yellin- Because I think it is a very interesting relationship.

James Lawson- Well...

Joan Beifuss- I think...

David Yellin- It is almost by proxy, your...

James Lawson- This is correct.

David Yellin- And that is what I wanted to try and set up because it is not official.

James Lawson- No I have never been, I have never been on the board, I have been well, when I first met Martin King, formally, I had dinner with him in Obal in 1957. At that time I told him of my long time interest in (muffled). And how I was thinking strongly of coming south and doing it, and he encouraged me to go ahead and do it,. So I definitely committed myself in 57 to coming south. And I came south and for the first couple of years I worked for the southern, for the fellowship of reconciliation as the sit in secretary. And the first main series of things I did that winter, 57-58, was to conduct a series of workshops across north Carolina, south Carolina, Alabama, some parts of Tennessee. In which we did this in conjunction with SCLC which was founded in the fall of 57 and Ralph Abernathy and Martin King would be the keynote speaker at each of these workshops. And then Gwynn Smiley and I would do the basic teaching of the workshops. So what it was this led therefore, I got immediately involved with SCLC, so that I conducted a work shop at that February or March meeting of SCLC that was held in Virginia or South Carolina or something. And then I continued to cooperate with them through all that period and went on. At different times than during the period they called me a consultant and one period what was that 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, I was director of nonviolent education.

David Yellin- For the SCLC?

James Lawson- Yes. And went through all that period even though I was part time pastor in Shelbyville in Collierville and I was pastor here.

David Yellin- Were you involved in the 63 march to Washington?

James Lawson- I didn't go but I was an advance man in Birmingham but I did not go to the Washington march (muffled).

David Yellin- You worked with Birmingham people?

James Lawson- Right I did a number of the workshops and back in and why we can't wait there is a list of ten rules for each person to do and I did that.

David Yellin- Thos were your?

James Lawson- Those were rules I set for the Birmingham campaign. And...

David Yellin- Who came out of the workshops, do you remember some of your graduates?

James Lawson- Well, we sure I can even (muffled) most people that come out of our workshops, people like Jim Bevel, Bernard Lafayette, Julius Lester, the growingly well known writer on black subjects. Diane Nash, I have had Stokely Carmichael in workshops, John Lewis, Maryanne Berry for Memphis director of PRIDE in Washington. A number of these workshops, Charles Sherrard is one of the fine workers in Southwest Georgia and they take it as their job there. (Muffled).

David Yellin- (Muffled).

James Lawson- (muffled) During all that period I was doing not only works shops for SCLC but I was also going into situations as a member of the staff to help to plan and strategize and work. I was also helping to plan at that time staff retreats on nonviolence. Bayard Ruston had a falling out with King in 60. I moved with Martin's consent and all to bring Bayard Ruston back in. In a relationship with SCLC?

David Yellin- How do you do that?

James Lawson- You know I simply, insisted he was one of the best minds in the country as far as nonviolence and strategizing and organizing as far as staff retreats and workshops we understand he is a resource for us.

David Yellin- I mean what did you do exactly talk to the SCLC?

James Lawson- Talked primarily to Martin and asked him why he was executive director and said that I think I should invite him in and bring him in and they agreed. So I thought, I saw that Bayard Ruston come back in.

David Yellin- I think we had a, I know we had a session on those workshops and the work.

Joan Beifuss- Jim on the SCLC staff retreats was there constantly a need within the organizational staff to keep reiterating the nonviolence thing?

James Lawson- Well you have to recognize this was a whole new approach and SCLC was doing a fair amount of expanding at the time if anything taking in a lot of people, field workers. And the important effort always is to orient these people. Well many were verbally committed to nonviolence while they were engaged perhaps in some campaign in their own community, tried to do a kind of an orientation on a large great number of levels, of which nonviolence was one of the levels. So the effort we had a sort of two-fold thing going on all the time, one was to try to help each person to think out the meaning of nonviolence and there was some knowledge of the strategy and tactics and the ideologies and theologies behind it, to give it some biblical background and basis and the other thing was to help people to grow so they can analyze their situation and walk around them and look at them and study them so they wouldn't be stagnant in their understandings and so that was the other side. This was done every year at least once or twice a year when all staff people were brought in for this kind of thing.

David Yellin- During this time well this time being 67 and working our way up to 68. Did Martin Luther King and I guess it has to be synonymous with SCLC his prestige and so on, was going down I guess we could say.

James Lawson- When?

David Yellin- Around 67 or so.

James Lawson- I wouldn't say that.

David Yellin- You wouldn't?

James Lawson- No.

David Yellin- Well.

James Lawson- That is where I disagree with essentially a press report. I mean you say yeah....

David Yellin- I mean that is what I want to explore was it...

James Lawson- Of course not, I mean, (muffled) January 68, January 69 issue of playboy where they published what was probably the last (muffled) with Martin King and they had a couple articles on Robert Kennedy too in that issue. They titled the testament of hope his article, they title it the testament of hope. But they had a little introduction to it and they say something in that introduction that he had to rush back to Memphis to rescue a vanishing nonviolent movement. Some such nonsense as that.

David Yellin- Well there have been several...

James Lawson- Yeah well this is just logic. Ok, 67 you had Chicago.

David Yellin- That is Martin Luther King in Chicago.

James Lawson- Yeah I mean people said it was impossible and yet it became very clear that in Chicago those marches those housing marches galvanized the black people. And brought the whole city to evil.

Joan Beifuss- The way it is anonymous, if King is holding at a level what he had synonymous with it was the violence that was coming up all the time.

James Lawson- Not in Chicago in 67 he didn't

. He had white violence. The police had to get in to stop the stone throwing and the marshals in the march had to (muffled).

Joan Beifuss- There was a riot in Chicago (muffled).

James Lawson- Had a riot in Watts in 67.

Joan Beifuss- Sure yeah, but I think that this is where people say that nonviolent was going down and violence was coming up.

James Lawson- This was assuming, this was assuming too much, this was assuming, excuse me, that the riots represented a planned strategy , which they did not.

Joan Beifuss- No.

James Lawson- They were what Kenneth Clark and any number of us warned about, mainly that you had urban dynamite. And these warnings were being silent when these things started in May of 64 Kenneth Park had a long article in Jet Magazine, New York Times that Harlem was getting ready to explode, no one took that seriously and Harlem exploded in July.

Joan Beifuss- But I think what white people expected was because there was a Martin Luther King there would not be a ghetto explosion.

James Lawson- You see that again, this was mythology.

Joan Beifuss- Yeah but I think this is the rationale...

James Lawson- Yeah, and see among other things Martin and I and a number of others, Ruston. Any number of us were predicting violence from black s I would have been terribly surprised and I will be terribly surprised if it doesn't move past the present level. Of course you heard me say that (muffled). I mean but that is kind of a mythology. Then again, you see that was 67 and in 68 here was a Memphis campaign, thing called the Memphis campaign when we campaigned, silent witness. We start looking for things, the positive things that black people organized to do, you certainly have to say Chicago was the biggest in 67 and more significant. At that time in 67, in the spring of 67 I think it was, the Newsweek magazine indicated that Martin King was looked to by black people from some 85% of the black people as a major spokesmen.

David Yellin- Well alright now what you are saying is that the white press, the white interpretation was that because of these violent outbreaks Martin Luther King was losing his hope.

James Lawson- Yeah.

David Yellin- And also because of certain elements in the black community, the militant elements who were saying he is gone and his way is no good. They were giving more space to them?

James Lawson- Sure.

David Yellin- But the very fact that these things were happening only indicated what he had started and all of you who went with him were generating some action.

James Lawson- Sure.

David Yellin- And subsequently some results.

James Lawson- Sure, if you have to say who is the father of black awareness, the awakening of black people, you have got to say King is. There is no any other way, you couldn't say Malcolm X is.

David Yellin- Because almost well, you are not saying this but it would seem to me that say Watts and so on is almost gee, you know how I am saying this. Came because of Martin Lither King right, not because of him but (muffled).

James Lawson- I don't think that Martin Luther King or anyone else could have avoided or stopped some of the urban explosions that have gone on, just as I don't think, I don't think there is anyone around who could have stopped the riots in St. Louis after World War 2, the 1934 one in Detroit, the history of riots in the American cities, catholic Irish, Irish catholic and what not.

Joan Beifuss- Would you then, this thing about rising expectation leading to the riot, would you say that is not true?

James Lawson- No I would say that a riot is more of a cry of despair and anguish, than it is a cry of expecting something else.

David Yellin- It seems to me it is not so much a cry as an action of despair.

James Lawson- Yeah sure.

David Yellin- You have stopped crying you are doing something, you are using...

James Lawson- But it is doing something, it really isn't very rational or revolutionary. At a time you had some of these young black cats going around saying this was rebellion but you know lot of that talk has stopped. A lot of that stopped because they perceived you know as Elbert Clay the black messiah says you know a guy who riots has given up.

David Yellin- Yeah it is an act of frustration.

James Lawson- Sure. He has given up, (muffled). He has no longer in the revolution he has copped out is the way Clay says. When a lot of others of these guys who back, let's see the Newark was when 67?

David Yellin- Yes.

James Lawson- Newark was 67, but at the time of Newark in particularly you had an explosion of that kind of rhetoric. Cats would challenge me and say, you know, we want a rebellion. Rebellion assumes that you had deliberate plans, you were going to overthrow something and taker it over, but none of this was in the plan in the ways in which those things got started. It got started almost in variably. Some spontaneous incident, confrontation between police and blacks.

David Yellin- Destruction.

James Lawson- Yeah it went off in there and zoom. I mean and, so I am saying this is a kind of a press analysis of this rather than, analysis of the realities of the social scene.

David Yellin- SO that the press, what you are saying is that the oppress and others who are overwhelmed by the smoke screen, the fact that these other things were happening, they interpreted because they wanted to that Martin Luther King was losing hold on his people?

James Lawson- Yeah, sure , also there is another kind of an assumption behind it and that is the assumption that, that Martin Luther King, let me say that over, it is the assumption is that black people have accepted the Martin Luther King way of doing things. Now there are some blacks who perpetrate this, this is nonsense, this is sheer adulterated nonsense. Because I can talk of this from a great variety of angles but I can just, I just point you back to the books and in the United States as a whole only a small minority of black people adopted personally non, a King's non violent approach as a way of life, or as an approach to social change. A handful only. And in any movement you tended to get a few people, a few leaders who talked about nonviolence, who studied it and read it and tried to inculcate it. Large numbers of people in those movements did not accept it but accepted it only because the leadership said this is the way we need to operate.

David Yellin- In other words there are even more Muslims than there were people who supported Martin Luther King just as a way of illustration?

James Lawson- Well, I don't like using the term Muslims. No but I am saying there are more Americans, more Americans who through black said if a man hits me I hit him back see. And who did not, who equated that with nonviolence, what King was talking about. And therefore, everybody took it seriously. Now in terms of negro leadership and students and others who say we tried nonviolence and that is a lot of bologna. You did not have across this nation great numbers of blacks rising up in massive marches and demonstrations of a nonviolent character. Not in 55, not in 60, not in 63, not in 65, not in 67, not in 68. The only places this had gone on to a large extent was in the southern cities, I mean for blacks. Now you had a few rent strikes and a few picketings and what not of places like Los Angeles and Harlem and Chicago and a few other places. During the 40's when you had CORE doing nonviolent action for racial change in places like St. Louis, Cleveland, Chicago, Washington, Los Angeles, (muffled), these groups were largely white operated groups with a handful of blacks in them. Black civil rights leadership, urban league leadership, church leadership for the most part ignored those experimentations. Now I am telling you what is, not theory. Because I follow this whole process from my earliest student days so I know. They ignored CORE. I wondered about this as a student. They ignored Gandhi, they ignored Nekuma who even then was organizing nonviolent efforts in Ghana. They ignored chief Elbert Luothouli and some of the nonviolent campaigns in South Africa. During World War 2 they ignored the underground movements that were nonviolent, Norwegian opposition to the Nazi's, Danish, these are well known stories, well documented. But you did not have black

intellectuals or civic leaders in this country taking any of that seriously and trying to relate it to the American scene.

David Yellin- Now that is who you mean by they?

James Lawson- Yeah.

David Yellin- Black people (muffled) who helped..

James Lawson- Who now, like Leroy Jones, talking about you know, we have given that up, well Leroy Jones never practiced it so what has he given up? John Killin saying it novelist, writer, he never had it. I mean he made have had gone to some token march somewhere sometimes but he wasn't actually engaged from 55 on trying to approach what King was doing in Montgomery or St. Augustine or Albany or Birmingham. In 1960 when we had the sit-in movement, most of the students outside of the south who were backing us in the south were white. I mean I went to any number of campuses to talk about things (muffled). And I know who was at the meetings, I went to places like University of Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania State, University of Kansas, Cambridge Harvard Boston. And who were the people who came to the meetings and who were picketing and what not then? The whites.

David Yellin- The whites. Now what is that? There aren't enough negros there?

James Lawson- There were the nigger towns in most of those states. Memphis is a nigger town.

David Yellin- (Muffled).

James Lawson- Oh sure, lots of black students in those campuses.

David Yellin- (Muffled) why didn't they come, or where they afraid of their precious assention? They didn't want to lose this advantage they got?

James Lawson- Well I maintain that they essentially they rejected the idea of confrontation, they rejected the idea of engaging the social scene in direct action that would resist the evil, this is what I am saying, I am saying that resisting...

David Yellin- (Muffled) maybe some of them thought of nonviolence as non participation?

James Lawson- Well obviously they couldn't say that about King, because here is King leading 50,000 folks in resisting a thing, economic boycotts. You have hardly had, outside of the south you have hardly had a single (muffled) boycott of the downtown area by (muffled). Now you name me the places where they have had boycotts, Nashville, Somerville, Memphis, Atlanta, Orangeburg.

David Yellin- Alright now why in the south?

James Lawson- You can't name them?

David Yellin- Why in the south?

James Lawson- Because in the south there was a fair group of black people, who when King began to move said this is the way.

Joan Beifuss- Why?

James Lawson- Why you say this?

Joan Beifuss- Why was there a fair amount in the south, why the south?

James Lawson- Well I suspect it might have something to do with the fact that in the south the issue was more closely drawn. The south was built around at that time laws of segregation that built the system. Whereas in the north why you had the problems it was more fuzzy and Nebulus and black leadership, intellectuals too tended to kind of beseech themselves and say you know, if you know, we are persuading them to die....

David Yellin- (muffled).

James Lawson- They tended to kind of deceive themselves about progress.

Joan Beifuss- Ok so in the south you had...

James Lawson- IN the south you couldn't deceive yourself about the progress quite so easily.

David Yellin- If it wasn't in the books it was in the local...

James Lawson- That's right, in the looks it was in the signs, it was everywhere and so people saw it everyday and so black leadership was much more frustrated by it and so when King started to move I don't know how many hundreds of people I have met across the south that have said to me the reason I got involved here is because when that happened in Montgomery Alabama, I said to myself if I could ever do something like that please let me.

Joan Beifuss- What about the southern religious, (muffled) religious thing in the south?

James Lawson- Well I am not so sure that....certainly, it certainly historically the fact that you have so much church leadership and church people indicates you know, has some meaning religiously I would assume. But it might also have a more sociological meaning in that the black, it was a major black institution that had connections somewhere and that had a certain degree of freedom because at least the preacher was not being supported by anyone in the power structure. The preacher is being supported primarily by black folk.

David Yellin- In many cases the only place where a black person felt at home.

James Lawson- Right, this was his place where he could go to meetings, it was his buildings generally.

David Yellin- What also was the fact that Martin Luther King being a southerner spoke the southern language or the southern rhetoric.

James Lawson- Well I am not so sure that has so much relations hip because black people tend to be much less provincial at that point.

David Yellin- Are you talking about the white people?

James Lawson- Yes that has been my experience, black people, I have never heard black people talk about he is an outsider.

David Yellin- No I meant Martin Luther King spoke to the southerner, the white southerner understood him. I think that is what I heard and people have said this, the white southerner in that sense hated him or because he did understand what he was after. Where as the white person in the north did not understand him really.

Joan Beifuss- Oh because he wasn't familiar with the situation?

David Yellin- No, I don't know, I would say...

James Lawson- I wouldn't say that.

David Yellin- You didn't I did.

James Lawson- No what I think I am really trying to say to you is that the problem of the rejection of Martin Luther King, 55, 60, 65, 68, 69, 70, is the problem of the rejection of the one who most diametrically was calling for a whole reorganization of the values as well as the institutions of the American scene.

David Yellin- Alright maybe this is what you are saying.

James Lawson- In other words I am saying, what I am saying is that this man is much more prophetic for all Americans black or white.

David Yellin- Maybe what I am saying Jim is this, that Martin Luther King in really and I as I understand the nonviolent movement depends on the basic theory that people who believe in nonviolence believe that people are good....

James Lawson- That is hellacious.

David Yellin- It is?

James Lawson- Sure.

David Yellin- Well wasn't he shaming the southerner?

James Lawson- I don't think so.

David Yellin- What was he doing, what was his power then?

James Lawson- It is a kind of complex thing. It is not simply a question of shaming the southerner at all, I mean for one thing as an illustration. One thing that happened again and again you know was that the federal government moved to intervene.

David Yellin- Yeah but I think New Orleans for instance I am thinking my own case, and I don't really...

James Lawson- Martin King didn't really organize.

David Yellin- No but he didn't but I am just saying...

James Lawson- School desegregation and it was sort of spotty.

David Yellin- But the woman swinging the bag at that little kid. Or in Birmingham or whatever where the hoses and the dogs and all of those when we saw people acting like that...

James Lawson- Sure that is one of the responses, but you have multiple response and in fact some one pointed out in some publication which I have tried to get a copy of again, and back in 50, 50 or in 60. Talk about new negro leadership in which they compared a number of us and talked about those and they talked about Martin speaking in theological terms and they said that I talked, when I talked about nonviolence primarily in terms of power. And power structures. And I disliked that in part because it wasn't quite true, but it was at least partially true. Because I maintain that the, that there is such a thing as the power of nonviolence and it is a far more complex thing than the analysis of some people have historically made. For example there are those persons who have looked at the India independence movement in Gandhi and they said it is a good thing that Gandhi was operating in a country where the British were in control. Because the British had the basic background in gentleness, and morality. But you see on the other hand you have to say that in the south you had a kind of pathology among the whites. And nonviolence has been proven to be very effective in a situation where you had pathological prejudice and hatreds. So I tended to say that the power of nonviolence is that in part the confrontation helps to get a variety of counter forces operative., That help to create the possibilities of change. And these counter forces bombarding against each other and with each other and also against the resisting element gets sufficient forces operative to create change. Now this isn't to minimize the personal effect of nonviolence on various kinds of people but you also had to be honest about this kind of thing and say that you had a variety of kind of personal affects. Some people are driven to more hysteria and their pathology comes up into brutality. If they can do it, if they are in a position to create brutality they will do it. Others, others get conscious stricken and they move, some, the personal affect it has a wide range of personal affects upon people. You know I don't think that any of these are persay bad. Because I think that even the hysteria tends to serve a purpose because at least it brings the problem to the surface rather than.

David Yellin- For the hysterical one?

James Lawson- Yeah sure even the hysterical person you see, even the brutality against, in the Birmingham campaign which took so much or Selma even that brings the problem out to the open where everyone look at it whether he likes it or not and in a sense I have to say as a pastor that is a healthier stage than this level where we kept it buried both socially and psychologically.

David Yellin- Also saying that fewer, well some people participate but some people are spectators of what happens.

James Lawson- Well I think that is always true.

David Yellin- Yeah, so that where the good can come is among the spectators.

James Lawson- Yeah, often this, often spectators become some of the counter forces. I mean in the Memphis scene certainly you have to say that any number of businessmen became quite concerned and began to try and focus pressure on Lobe and the city council (muffled).

Joan Beifuss- But are you saying then when you talk about unleashing forces when you throw your nonviolent force against another force and you release a bunch of force. The forces you release though all come through actions of the individual, who this...

James Lawson- Well no not necessarily.

Joan Beifuss- Well what are your other forces then?

James Lawson- Well for example as this past summer the concerned women of Memphis got organized.

Joan Beifuss- Yeah but the concerned women of Memphis got organized because a couple of individual women got...

James Lawson- Sure that is alright, that doesn't matter, you always got to have some initiator and that wouldn't have gotten organized if there hadn't been some demonstrations going on Saturdays....

David Yellin- You know those guys in (muffled) started this whole thing you know.

Joan Beifuss- Yeah but what I am saying though is that forces began to move against each other, but what you are talking about is people began to move against each other.

James Lawson- Well not just people though, people organizing. I mean the concerned women shook up the politicians fairly badly in this community.

David Yellin- And their husbands.

James Lawson- And their husbands you see and that started in turn to produce a fair amount of business concern on the city council, who then proceeded to move to insist that Lobe had to negotiate in good faith.

Joan Beifuss- Right the only thing you, the way you stated it before it sounded like it had some mystical group of forces, it isn't...

James Lawson- NO I think (muffled) sociological terms.

David Yellin- Though sometimes they are mystical and they counterforces come from no where.

James Lawson- It is important to me to say it seems to me about this is that it is not simply share, you cannot understand meaningful history of social change purely from the disciplines of politics or business or political science or economics.

David Yellin- I mean there are all kinds of forces in our society.

James Lawson- Right, there are, and I often call these, I often talk about the human element. I mean this is true it is kept out of it so frequently when we analyze and we talk. And what nonviolence, one of the great strengths of nonviolence it makes it vastly superior to violence in my own judgment is the fact that nonviolence tends to try and exploit the way in which the mystical of a human element can help to shape decisions in human life.

David Yellin- So nonviolence unabashedly sometimes causes violence to somebody else.

James Lawson- Yeah I mean, right, nonviolence, of course I shrink away, I mean it is the accusation, I shrink away from saying it that way personally. I tend to say that the violence is already there, the cruelty is already there. The only thing that happens is that everyone goes along pretending it is not there. And then the confrontation in which a group of people ask for meaningful change or for whatever their objectives are limited or general, that tends then quite often to bring that latent racism to the surface. Now I say it this way because this is one of the reasons why I reject the term white backlash. That is nonsense. Because on the contrary I think the sociologists point out again and again that certain attitudes in America have increasingly changed in the last 34 years in this whole area of race. But what has happened with the negro beginning to organize and get moving has been simply that those white people who had the latent prejudice and were not able at this particular moment to change are increasingly having the courage to express it.

David Yellin- Yeah.

James Lawson- Which in many respects is, actually an inevitable feature and is a feature of health. Because as long as they pretend that it is not there and were afraid to express it and were afraid to talk about it and afraid to organize around it, then we were in real trouble. But getting it out into the open, the society has a chance to

see it and our institutions have a chance to begin to respond to it. Now they may respond to it in the most fascious way, that is the whole real threat you are taking.

David Yellin- It is a chance you take.

James Lawson- Yeah but this is the chance we have to take,.

David Yellin- Is there any other way there to bring it out?

James Lawson- I don't see any.

David Yellin- There never has been?

James Lawson- No, I don't see of any other way. There is no possible way of doing it unless you leave things the way they are. And you let poverty and racial injustice go along but that in itself will not, probably because I would say that would then reach proportions of massive explosions in this country. So in very real ways those of us who actively engage in trying to speed up the processes of change are doing the nation a tremendous service because the alternatives to this can only mean the destruction of our whole nation if not our whole world.

Joan Beifuss- Well Jim then why do you yourself spend so much time talking at interracial groups and all this other stuff if you don't really think that is going to make some change.

James Lawson- Well it is the basic reason that I am a preacher I think you have to constantly be explaining all these things.

Joan Beifuss- (muffled).

James Lawson- I wouldn't be doing it, I say very frankly though that I would not be doing it if I were not an activist.

David Yellin- I mean there are simultaneous actions here.

Joan Beifuss- So that you can do both things at the same time.

James Lawson- I mean I take this very seriously from the prophetic, from the prophetic tradition. The word doesn't precede the demonstration, the word follows the demonstration.

David Yellin- Well or sometimes the word can take the place of a demonstration somewhere along the line.

James Lawson- Yeah I think it does.

David Yellin- I mean in other words you don't have to be two demonstrations there can be one demonstration and one word.

James Lawson- Yeah you can say that the word is a demonstration of the demonstration.

David Yellin- Yeah.

James Lawson- It is an extension of the demonstration.

David Yellin- A word alone...

James Lawson- I mean this has been many, part of the whole problem with the kinds of interracial discussions and interracial cooperation with (Muffled) both north and south prior to 1955. Too much of it went on in a vacuum. I can explain this in another way in which I explained this personally, as I followed the whole ecumenical discussion on the Lord's Supper. Certain churches still will not permit what is called intercommunion in theology. Certain Lutheran groups, certain Protestant groups and Roman Catholic. And the Orthodox groups. Now it is my contention that, that discussion will go on and goes on essentially at a kind of academic level and a kind of a vacuum. My contention, the real way to make some inroads upon it is if various people in these communions would quite deliberately go to receive the mass. If I walked up for example to Bill Greenspun at St. Patrick's I mean what would Bill do if I walked up there to receive the bread?

David Yellin- Yeah.

Joan Beifuss- He would hand it to you?

James Lawson- Yes (Muffled) As long as no one, as long as we are operating on an academic level probably that discussion isn't for another decade or so.

David Yellin- Now these priests are(muffled).

Joan Beifuss- Let me ask you something else in the thing that sister Avens group did this summer the nuns, they picked up an awful lot of fear of you and Jesse Epps out of the white community, people really though you were the devil incarnate.

Is that, now this is a result of confrontation, confrontation with the city.

Is this better, is this a healthy thing that these people should be afraid of you, that they should kind of ignore you? Are we advancing? Because they are afraid? (muffled) regard you as harmless leaders? Do you know what I mean?

James Lawson- Yeah, the thing I would say is that probably the fear is their initial reaction in a way without really either knowing me or knowing what I represent. In that sense I would tend to say is a sign that health is possible for them.

Joan Beifuss- Not if they never find out what you represent?

James Lawson- Well there is a good chance that they may move past it, there is still that chance.

David Yellin- The fact that they recognized it.

James Lawson- Oh sure. The fact that they re organized it is very important.

David Yellin- And had said it to somebody else is the beginning.

James Lawson- It is very important. It is no longer buried they now have to deal with it. They now have to deal with it whether they like it or not and some of those people see me in other places in categories and they do deal with, and they deal with it positively. One of the things I get all the time from friends as well as from some of these persons is you know that same kind of thing and also the reaction that we never really knew you. Now a friend of mine was just telling me the other day, who was that? What's today? He was telling me some major layman out east in one of our churches out there who was really turned off by me about being hysterical and what not. And then he has been into a couple of Methodist meetings where he has seen face to face and it has created (muffled) and he is now saying just the opposite of that.

David Yellin- Well you ought to go to more dinners.

James Lawson- You see to it that I get the invitations and I will go.

David Yellin- (Muffled) Plus the fact that them's the chances you take if you are a public figure.

James Lawson- Sure.

David Yellin- The heat in the kitchen or in the dining room gets very hot what you going to do.

James Lawson- Because you see what I am saying to is that up to this time, many of those people have never given a dime for any black person. (muffled).

David Yellin- Now is your....

Joan Beifuss- (muffled) the thing I would question is did you see the news tonight about Judge Horton being put out of the top 100 (muffled). You went to lunch but top of the hundred somebody and what's his name came over and told him that Judge Horton would have to leave and they had allowed Ben Hooks to eat in the green room up there but they no longer allowed Ben Hooks to do that and Horton would have to leave. Then they had a statement on television by Horton saying that he was terribly depressed by the whole thing and if this is what happens to him then what happens to the general population of the city of Memphis. My question would be whether or not these scared women in East Memphis are not going to respond much more positively to Horton than to you or Jesse Epps?

James Lawson- They responded much more positively to us. Also here is another point. Now here is a criminal judge that everyone from Lobe on down is applauding the white mayor.

(Muffled)

James Lawson- Now what are you come on?

David Yellin- (muffled) Lobe refused to go from then on, that will get you some votes, and I bet you, I wouldn't put it past him.

James Lawson- I doubt it.

Joan Beifuss- I doubt it to.

David Yellin- Well fine.

James Lawson- If he is human enough to respond in that way, that would be a very human way of responding. My friend has been offended and he served me well and I am really an offended person. This is a personal front to the city of Memphis and the mayor's office it self. I think it is time that (muffled)

(Muffled)

Joan Beifuss- Too much danger.

David Yellin- I don't know.

James Lawson- I don't think we will have to worry about (muffled).

Joan Beifuss- Can we go back to the summer of 1967.

David Yellin- Alright I have a question related to that summer and I think, just what I see here and..

James Lawson- I wonder if when this tape is over we better quit because it is 11:30. Hey Robert.

Robert- Yeah.

Joan Beifuss- Would he like to sit in here?

David Yellin- I hope this won't, this will wrap it up here but I think it is a question that could get us into the strike. That is what we ought to do tomorrow.

James Lawson- _Well I would like to do that without the book.

David Yellin- No you can't.

James Lawson- (Muffled).

David Yellin- My question is this, oh.

James Lawson- You can go home.

Robert- (muffled)

James Lawson- We have to go by 12.

David Yellin- My question is, could you possibly (muffled) explain, attempt to set out the pattern of black leadership in Memphis before February 1968? This is a modest little thing. Also it is probably possible for you so involved by being objective, but I think it is so important to get a picture and I don't know that we do have any kind of real picture. If there is any, there very well may be it was so diffused and by the very nature of the setup here. But I think we must try to set it out and mentioning names if you can and organizations and so on. Sort of place them, some way we have to do this I think to get a picture.

Joan Beifuss- Is that, would that picture be different before Willis's defeat and after it?

James Lawson- Well the picture has changed obviously.

David Yellin- Yeah maybe I could ask some questions that might help you get started?

James Lawson- Well I wonder if we might come back to that sometime, let me ponder it a little bit and see the best way I can approach it. I think as a prelude to 68 it would be good to go back to these chief question in the summer of 67 and the whole Coby Smith.

David Yellin- Yeah that is...

James Lawson- Charles Cabbage, that is a prelude too, to 68.

David Yellin- Alright ok.

James Lawson- Well in the spring of 67 Charles Cabbage returned to Memphis, and Coby Smith came with him. Coby had apparently as I recall dropped out of school that spring semester and was wondering, was moving about in Atlanta with SNICK. Charles was finishing his work and finished his work at Moorehouse College. And so they both came, returned to Memphis together and they made a call to talk about what was going on in Memphis and what could be done to help.

Joan Beifuss- Was Cabbage attached to SNICK at the time he came back?

James Lawson- I don't really think so.

David Yellin- You knew them before?

James Lawson- I knew Coby before, I knew Coby since 63, the first time I met Charles.

Joan Beifuss- How come you have known Coby since 63?

James Lawson- Well because Coby was one of the first black students at southwestern, but Coby was, in 1963 we had demonstrations against the extended school day and Coby was president of the student body at Manassas and head of the ROTC and president of student government and president of senior class. All these things at once and I had extensive conversations with him on this matter because I would (muffled) boycott and all of the schools and the effort to protect them. So that is where I met him and had a relationship with him in that (muffled). But they were turn him up as an atheist and they came to visit to see what was going on and talk. And of course one of the ethical questions I would raise with them is what they were doing. They work and raise with them a question of whether or not they would like to become a neighborhood aide for Mapsouth and work on the evenings on some kind of part time basis to essentially try to organize particularly the young. They were both interested and (muffled) Now part if the reason for this was because one of the failures of Mapsouth in my own mind has been the fact that the whole neighborhood aide program was just grassroots effort, door to door effort, sort of changed from our original intention. Most of the neighborhood aides are women. Women of course can only work in the daytime, they can't work in the evenings and they can't work on the streets. And essentially they can't work with the young. Obviously in South Memphis one of the biggest areas and problems with poverty, poverty of the young, between 16 and 23. This group is as much unemployed percentage of unemployed ranks of close to 35% of these folks are unemployed and if you are going to deal with problems of poverty you have to somehow work with this group all map south ahs not done this. Quite a number of them have (muffled) council and try to get somebody jobs. All these youngsters have copped out. So knowing these two guys and feeling they could probably help us to learn some things at this point we quite readily put them on for evening work. Well nothing would have happened about this probably and we may have had a good chance to find out what they could really do in this kind of a program, but we had an incident which sort of blew it up. That incident was that 3 of their friends, including Charles Cabbage as I recall were in an automobile that stopped for gas at this was a first of July maybe. At 3rd St. and Parkway. Maybe around midnight, I don't know all these details, some of these details were in the newspaper. The car belonged to John Smith, who was also a classmate of Charles Cabbage.

David Yellin- Now relation to Coby?

James Lawson- No no relation to Coby, Coby wasn't in the car, John, I think his brother had just come back from Vietnam and Charles Cabbage. When John maintains that he had lost a gas cap to this car once before, so that he from that time on kept this sort of eye on his gas cap. When the fellow finished putting the gas in the car he went to close it and the gas cap was then missing. John said that he thought he saw the out mine of the thing and he could tell it was in his pocket and he was white. He said you know my gas cap it was on there. The defendant denied it and they fussed about it and John went and called the police. The police came and John explained to the police what was wrong. The policemen said there is nothing I can do about it. I don't know if he has the gas cap and I can't search him. If you want

to make a complaint, you can make a formal complaint and we can then, we will then have to investigate it. Well as this was going on people began to collect. The police panicked and said they are crowding us and pother squad cars came in to disperse the crowd that had began to collect. And then because John was insistent that this was the second gas cap or something like this, they threw John into the police car to arrest him and Charles Cabbage got out of the car to go to his aide and find out what the charge was and they threw him in. Maybe they arrested the other two I am not sure. But in any case 2 or 3 of these fellow were immediately arrested that night. Then the judge was told the next morning they were trying to incite a riot. These were trouble makers and possibly SNICK people and they were trying to incite a riot that was all it was. The next day, that is when I saw it. Of course, they got a lawyer and he charges were dismissed, but when they went to the police station they were not polite to the police. They looked the police in the eyes and they told the police they were wrong, and they may have done some cussing I don't know this. But I do know they shook the police up and the police thereby marked them from that time on, John Smith, Charles Cabbage, Coby came down to help get Cabbage out, and he looked the police in the eyes and he talked straight tot hem so he was marked as well. SO then they became the SNICK people and the people who were trying to incite a riot. All this (muffled) Well then of course someone got wind that they were working as neighborhood, that Coby and Charles were working as neighborhood aides for Mapsouth. And when this happened then the chairmen of the war and poverty committee informed us to fire them.

David Yellin- Who was that then?

James Lawson- That was (Muffled). Several members from the policy committee went and talked with him at great length about this whole situation. He said I understands they are SNICK people, he said this is not true, he said they understood they were inciting a riot, and I pointed out the charges have been dismissed. He said that they had to go, I said they were on our payroll in good faith and we insisted then that this simply, this kind of a hatchet play could not be done. So then of course it got blown up and he insisted and he insisted upon a hearing. And then Mike Cody and Lucius Birch, we contacted them and we told them the whole story and they at length talked with Coby and Cabbage and we went to the record committee for the war on poverty (Muffled) and talked to, they had this hearing down there and that is where the whole thing got blown up. And of course (muffled) radical and supported the so called radicals. And of course it is in this period then, somewhere shortly after this thing, Cabbage began to talk about the invaders and in fact began to organize them.

David Yellin- Were you, was that when you ran for the school board that following fall?

James Lawson- Yes the Fall of 67 I ran for the school board that is correct. I don't know how I did all that?

David Yellin- YOU didn't do tapings and things of that kind that took up your time.

James Lawson- No. I ran for school board in that Fall of 67.

David Yellin- Now is this significant in what later happened, I mean your relationship with Cabbage and Smith and the invaders?

James Lawson- Yeah that helped to establish a relationship with Charles, Cabbage, who was with us later on in the game as chairmen for years you know. Charles was really the organizer.

David Yellin- It was organized subsequent to this event?

James Lawson- Yes, Essentially I think that is correct.

David Yellin- Were the invaders an outgrowth or did they proceed as neighborhood organizing or project or...

James Lawson- Oh yes, they proceeded.

David Yellin- So the OP came after the invaders?

James Lawson- Yeah the OP became a special suburb project in this suburb 1968.

David Yellin- But it had been thought of before then though hadn't it by...

James Lawson- Yes but all during that year, 67, 68, then the war on poverty committee staff did try to figure out some way by which we could help the students and these young persons, young adults work meaningfully to organize themselves and to get a constructive course. And they talked to them and they talked to me in fact extensively during that whole year and then out of it came the conception of (Muffled) which is a special summer project. It was as I say we tried to get them on a constructive course.

Joan Beifuss- Jim if they had been organized on a non constructive course in summer of 67.

James Lawson- Well they had been organized in a non constructive way.

Joan Beifuss- No I said if they were. Because one of the kids told us in one of the tapes we did that at the time that this Coby Cabbage thing with Mapsouth that you supported them publicly and fought with them within.

James Lawson- Within what?

Joan Beifuss- Within not within Mapsouth but....

James Lawson- We kept a vigorous dialogue in that period, let's say this. They were taking a line which I didn't particularly care for. So we did some vicious argumentation and all but that was one way of trying to who they were and what they were about. That I support them publicly not because I necessarily agreed with their philosophy, I supported them publicly because number one the war on poverty

committee had any reason to dismiss them without any kind of a hearing based upon irresponsible charges and secondly if you are not going to try and work with this element of people in the community then you know you are just playing games.

David Yellin- Yeah because what you said...(Muffled)

James Lawson- You have got to try to somehow, provide some vehicles for this group, this kind of person to organize and to work constructively, which I still support. I mean I am still maintaining that.

David Yellin- So was your, I don't know whether to call it disagreement or with this group one of method more than...

James Lawson- Partly it was ideological and partly method. I think for one thing they were placing themselves in the category of being militants, and they were claiming in part then that King and others of us who were functioning were very, counter revolutionary reactionaries and what not and really didn't know what was going on. Well it was with this kind of view I just basically disagreed and this has continued down even to the person staged because while Coby and I can sit in the same room and talk to each other he knows full well that if he moves off in a certain direction that I am going to move off with (muffled). Still that is just the reality of (muffled).

David Yellin- Why do they consider themselves militant? What is their militancy, or what was their militancy?

James Lawson- Rhetoric, that became very apparent, Rhetoric, because every time that we were able to put together any time of creative venture for work, or for confrontation they have not supported it. When, after this first gassing on February 23rd, and we met at Mason Temple and the strategy committee was forming and I was asked to be chairmen of the strategy committee and deal with the problems and organize it you know. One of the first things I did, I had to leave for some reason before the meeting was over so I didn't know I was chairmen until late that night when Vasco or someone called me and said we all were unanimous in saying that you should be asked to be chairmen and to get us going. And so I one of the first things I did over that weekend in fact, was to begin to add names to the strategy committee. One of the names I added was Charles Cabbage, asked him to come on in and to be in the committee and to help us organize and take care of the problem we were having to handle and from the very first he came in with hidden agendas of one kind or another. Of structionism and making ideological displays, rhetorical displays. Without, having you know let's do this one, or let' do that. Now, I had to finally reprimand some of the folk on the committee for taking this stuff and proceeded to engage in real battle with them. Because it was my thesis that when you had 1,300 men on strike, you got their families to care for, well you need to not concentrate on ideology but you concentrate on how do you bring their cause to effective conclusion, and eventually I simply invited both Coby and Charles, you know if you have got better scheme go ahead, no one is stopping you are free.

David Yellin- And I don't know (muffled).

James Lawson- Don't keep obstructing, we have to do something tomorrow we are doing the best we know, if you have got something superior you go ahead and do it, but don't come in and keep whatever it is you want to do not having your suggestion. So I saw a primary on the one hand as a money guy because they were always asking for money and I encouraged preachers originally to give them money just to help them get some things they were saying they wanted and they kept coming back for it and I finally stopped personally and said we are not going to do it any more. Then they had no recommendations on how we could systematically organize, affect the boycott, affect the marches, affect the kind of changes that we want for these men to deal with the problems of food and clothing and money. So, it was rhetorical that is what I call it.

David Yellin- Ok well this is a good place to stop, good place to leave.

Joan Beifuss- Right off.

David Yellin- Jim Lawson faces life....(Tape End)