

SS156.mp3

Tom Beckner- Today is June the 20<sup>th</sup> 1968. David Yellin and Tom Beckner are interviewing John T. Fisher and Oscar Carr at the John T. Fisher motor company on Union Ave. (Tape Break)

David Yellin- We are from the Memphis search for meaning committee and our whole purpose is to get down as much as we possibly can of anything connected with the events of Memphis. Directly, indirectly, in the several months beginning February, and going through April 4<sup>th</sup>. And we would like to talk with you because you are certainly representative of the business community and I don't want to limit you.

John T. Fisher- Yeah right.

David Yellin- And you have, you were active in several events that took place during that time.

John T. Fisher- Well let me get this exactly clear, now to what use will this tape be, I think of this in terms of competences between people especially as to their names. And sometimes it is I the conversation. I am not really speaking to some that would be of an extremely confidential in nature and one of which I have some open firm commitment not to reveal a name or something. But many of those are ones that you reveal names on a very responsible basis. In other words I would think that I would be both happy to have a record made up but that I would really not expect to read in print in a publication.

David Yellin- Well this, excuse me.

John T. Fisher- What I don't know is to what extent?

David Yellin- Right...

John T. Fisher- Are we doing this, I don't want the thing to haunt me and yet at the same time I know if you go bury it in a vault someplace it is not of any valuable to anybody.

David Yellin- Well you have caught on to this whole thing and the most honorable answer we can give you is that you will never know, in a sense we can go around and no matter what we say here things (muffled). All we can say is our purpose of course is to do exactly what you said. Where it may in a sense not embarrass but it would not, it would be a breach of confidence then we would honor...

John T. Fisher- Well many of these things are the type of thing that if I can elaborate to some extent on it, it will make it clearer as to its intent. This sort of thing and perhaps it might better enable you to write down the circumstances of the times knowing the background and yet not writing down the intimate details of the background but keeping them on record for down the road but I wouldn't want

them played at this time. So I am assuming you are going to do that. I can use names and dates.

David Yellin- You can use all the names and at any time now and I will explain this that you can think of it as you do and sometimes you forget so we have a valve for you, you say well I would prefer you don't mention this name but, after you have done it say please don't mention my name in relation to it and so on. And then at the end of this we will tell you that there are a form you sign and if you want any conditions I will say possibly you will get a transcript but when you will get a transcript...or you could before we would use anything that would be in anyway confidential my hope is that we will check with you.

John T. Fisher- That will be fine.

David Yellin- Ok good. Then in order to get started why don't you just fill us in on biographical material.

John T. Fisher- Well my name is John T. Fisher I am 34 years old, born on February the 10<sup>th</sup> 1934, in Memphis Tennessee. My grandfather came here from Chesterville Ohio about 1900 and began the automobile business when he was 45 years old or thereabouts.

David Yellin- When?

John T. Fisher- In Memphis about 1905.

David Yellin- With what car?

John T. Fisher- Mackel and Rio are two that I know of. The John T. Fisher motor company was chartered in 1922 on April the 1<sup>st</sup> in (muffled) hotel. And has come along until this day. He was Mackels in 1922 and in 1924 they signed a Chrysler Franchise. To this date why we are one of the remaining original Chrysler dealers in the nation.

David Yellin- 34 years then I gather.

John T. Fisher- Right, well longer than that 44.

David Yellin- Oh I see.

John T. Fisher- I was born in 34 when the company associated with Chrysler predates me 10 years. And my grandpa had two children a daughter and my aunt who lives here in town and my father William Fisher who died at age 41 in 1949 and my grandfather's business partner continued to own the business until I came here in 1958. So I attendee what is now called the Campus School at Memphis state. I went to trade school for grades 1 through 8 and I left there in the fall of, and I left campus school or training school as I always called it in June 1948.

David Yellin- When I came to Memphis we had offices in your building.

John T. Fisher- Did you really.

David Yellin- Of course your building is no longer there.

John T. Fisher- It is gone right, I took my children through it the month before it was torn down as a matter of fact. I went in the fall and September of 1948 I went to Woodberry Forrest School and that is spelled w-o-o-d-b-e-r-r-y, everybody changes it back to bury.

David Yellin- Where is that?

John T. Fisher- In Orange Virginia. Near Orange, it is at (muffled) in Woodberry Forest Virginia but it is near Orange, 4 miles away, 35 miles north of Charlottesville, university of Virginia. About 100 miles south of Washington D.C. 70 miles from Richmond. I went there from 1948 and graduated in June of 52. I went to the university of Virginia June of 52. Graduated in 1956 with a bachelor of science degree in commerce. Was commissioned to second lieutenant in the U.S. Marine corps and went to Quantico, to basic school for 6 months and left basic school after my 6 month tour and I spent a little over a year in the far east in Japan, in Okonowa are a and came back home in January of 1958 and was discharged. I left school after 3 and half years. I went into the marine corps early March of 1956 and I graduated from college June the 6<sup>th</sup> I believe. I was the first time at Quantico that he had ever let somebody off for the day to go graduate from college because graduating from college was a requirement for getting my degree, my commission. But university of Virginia confers degrees only once a year, in June they do not confer degrees mid year.

David Yellin- How come 3 and half years I mean you were able to...

John T. Fisher- Well I just stacked up the hours and it turned out that I got through, I took an extra heavy load. I really didn't intend to and it wasn't until Christmas I decided to leave that year just a month before I left. But the main reason I did that was because I knew I would go to Quantico and I knew that the schedule there would release me on Friday afternoon of every weekend and I could be back in Charlottesville and most of my class never even knew I left. I kept my room in the fraternity house with all my clothes and everything., And I would leave Quantico at 4:30 and be in Charlottesville at 5:30 or so and spend all weekend and leave late Sunday night and go back to Quantico. SO most of the people I would see out of my small close knit group thought I was still in school because I was there on weekends and during the week you studied anyway so not a lot of social activity during the week. And that is really the reason I left I could sort of have the best of both worlds. I could get started on my military training and not lose the social life at school and I thought I could talk my way into coming back for graduation well it turned out to be true.

David Yellin- Of course you are a good ad for colleges, you go to colleges on the weekend instead of going away.

John T. Fisher- Right, so I would spend two nights a week down there. And I came after living in Japan for almost a year I came back in January of 58 and started the automobile business, and somewhere between the period of 58 and 61 several changes took place and I acquired the interest of my family in the car business and I took over the reigns of running the operation and so forth.

David Yellin- Are you the only son?

John T. Fisher- No we had 5 children, I have an older sister who is (muffled) wife and two younger brothers who are at the Hamilton cigar company, and a younger sister who is married to an attorney so five of us. And my mother is still living here in town. So, after this took place about 61, Chrysler is self had some changes about 61 and began the upswing and so our increases have been mutually supportive, we have worked hard and Chrysler has to and without their changes why we could have never done ht growth that we had here. In 1962 or 61, we sold the (muffled) property and leased it back for a period of 5 years and worked out a purchase to purchase this and we purchased this in April of 63 with a year's delay because it was a girl's school, Hutchinson school.

David Yellin- Yes I remember I came before and I remember...

John T. Fisher- Yeah we moved in here, we got the property on June the 8<sup>th</sup> 1964 after their graduation and began working, moved into the building the day after thanksgiving 1964. So we have been here about 3 and half years almost 4 years this fall, we will be 4 years this fall. And having joined a nice (muffled) and I am married, I married Jean Carter from Atlanta Georgia in 1959 on January the 3<sup>rd</sup>. We have 3 children. Kelly who is now age 8 a little girl and Susanna age 6 and John T. the 3<sup>rd</sup> age 4.

David Yellin- We have a John T. now, and how did you meet your wife?

John T. Fisher- We met during the Memphis (muffled) she was the maid of cotton in 1958. And I was one of 6 or 7 Memphians who escorted the (muffled) for the night one of the nights when she was here and that is how we met.

David Yellin- Right, well this is certainly biographical.

John T. Fisher- I mean greater detail then you wanted.

David Yellin- No this is fine. And what we are going to do if you don't mind is kind of almost start at the end and at the end of our concerned period of time and ask you if you can tell us where you were on the time of the assassination and how you remember it any of your recollections?

John T. Fisher- Well I think my recollections might be more helpful as I can and just weave you through a little pattern chronologically from whatever made me become interested in the project anyway. And it pre dates that a little bit. my civic background is membership on the boys club board, boys club of America which has

two chapters here one on Whopper St. and one on Barkesdale which is our next door neighbor. The Barkesdale clinic has been integrated for some time and this was no particular problem. The Whopper club is almost totally segregated though not by design it is just the neighborhood itself is totally black and it is supported in good measure from the funds from the WDIA good will fund. And it has been a very jovial experience and a very well run organization. I serve on the church chapter which is the same as the Vestry of the Episcopal church at St. Mary's cathedral.

David Yellin- You are an Episcopalian?

John T. Fisher- Yes, and I have served over there for 3 years and so my relations with Bishop Vandross how that is his church and Dean Demmick who is the rector of the church they call him the Dean of the cathedral. I have gotten to know them well. And so I had that particular area of contact through my work on the church (muffled) with the Episcopal church. I also work as a trustee and am in fact the chairman of the board elect July the 1<sup>st</sup> 1968 of the St. Mary's Episcopal school for girls, located on the corner of Walnut Grove Rd. and Perkins. And I have been a trustee out there for about 3 or 4 years, I don't know exactly when it started. Some of my background there to get close to his question would be a fund raising drive at St. Mary's school undertook two years ago and the building is almost finished now it will be finished this fall. And the idea of funds came up and discussion about accepting funds with strings on it either to implement integration of the school or to perpetrate segregated all white school. And we decided that no one could even bring a request in on that basis, in other words a worker would turn one in that way whoever got it would send it back. That would never even consider one because you really incur your problems if you begin to consider an offer like that.

David Yellin- When was this?

John T. Fisher- Either way this conversation took place about 2 years ago right now. About two years ago last April, so about 26 months ago we were talking in those terms and so at the end of that summer, through that summer two years ago we had tried to run the fund drive ourselves and we couldn't. We got some professional counseling on January the 1<sup>st</sup> two years ago. We started I earned on our formal fund drive, a formal fundraising effort which continued through last year and all last spring and we broke ground in December. We wrapped up and got the building committee moving and broke ground in December and integration never became much of an issue except on one occasion that I know of it was referred to and it was inquired about and our basic answer was the fact that St. Mary's school had in fact been all white to my knowledge anyway (muffled). I don't know when the last negro child was there if there ever was one but certainly not in the last 25 years. The questions would come up from time to time in informal groups and the answer was that St. Mary's school does not have a policy of exclusion and that it does operate in conformity with the church, Episcopal church. Now the school is a general welfare cooperation in the state of Tennessee and it is not responsible in a legalistic way to the church. It is in fact involved in the life of a parish church by being a tenant in its

building and building its own building so it is all intermixed. So there is a distinct obligation to operate in the name of the church, Episcopal is the name of the school and we are not trying to compromise that point we are not trying to get rid of that. So when we went to the church, the state church the diocese of Tennessee of (muffled) Episcopal church this question was asked in more detail than that. This was a year ago April about 15 months ago.

Tom Beckner- Question about the fund?

John T. Fisher- Yes about what you are going to do and the fact that we were asking them for \$50,000, they gave us \$25,000 which is the second largest gift that we got. There was one family gift of \$50,000, the next largest gift was two or three \$25,000 of which the state diocese (muffled). And there were some misgivings about that by some of the people and what with all the bishop and councilmen from the state diocese and governing board., They didn't feel that we were speaking at this point enough that we were running this school was perhaps a socially acceptable exclusive school which was not the school's intent. And yet to go on and implementation program for integration it is a very difficult process for an institution to undertake and maintain its viable life, its living structure and getting support from people. It is not an easy thing to just jump out of the (muffled) easily. But we weren't trying to beat around the bush either. But anyway, it was acceptable enough. So that year there was no application or anything, but this past summer there was some talk about application. Then back around January or so or February an application just plops in. And as best I can determine it is just an honest situation, I am positive that school had nothing to do with that and I had perfect knowledge of that and I can't find anyway that anybody in the community put them up to it or something. The app was from Macio Walker for his daughter. Macio Walker is a man that I don't really know but I understand that he has some children who have attended private schools up east. I think one is in a private school now, so he has this background including that. The child was tested by the school and she was very well qualified and frankly if she was tested it would be clear cut. And Mr. Walker's personal life has been such that perhaps he would endure more criticism from the negro community for not doing enough then he would from the white community for being too militant or too demanding or something. So any rate he had been a stable citizen in the community. Certainly economically able to send his child wherever he wants to. So there was no basis on which to even vote on it and I told some people that we didn't even vote and they seemed surprised. We did discuss it and I don't want to play that down, we, it was discussed hours and hours and hours before it was changed. I don't want to belittle that but in all this discussion suppose we were really trying to form a question that we really could vote on. But there was really no way to form a question to which we could honestly vote. So we didn't vote. The man applies on an honest basis and to my knowledge there never has been anything done to shape that up. (muffled). The child was tested and offered admission and her parents registered her and sent in the money and that was that.

David Yellin- There was no procedural basis in otherwards as you had to..

John T. Fisher- No special handling no, the application was handled the same.

David Yellin- What were some of the objections?

John T. Fisher- No, just the routine, there was nothing special about the objections of the case at all. Except that the school board that is made up of some fine people, really one of the finest groups I have ever worked with anywhere, perhaps would have liked to abduct it frankly somehow if they could have found a way but were not willing just to duck at any price. So that is when we ended up not doing anything, you understand what I am saying.

David Yellin- How did this come out that they would like to duck it, I am not really...

John T. Fisher- Just conversationally it is going to cause a problem collecting building pledges, we will lose our student body and we won't even be able to pay all the teachers.

David Yellin- Nobody there said they would pull out but they were..

John T. Fisher- No none of the trustees would.

David Yellin- But they were indicating that that some others might and they were afraid of the reaction.

John T. Fisher- Right, so this was going on right now the early stages of the sanitation strike right?

David Yellin- Yes.

John T. Fisher- So it is a lead in the awareness of a personal problem that is sort of mixed in the same thing. One at least occupying much of my thoughts and some of my time and discussion with other people interested in life in a similar school.

David Yellin- Do you remember a moment?

John T. Fisher- Yes there was a particular moment that led me into the sanitation thing. A friend of mine a boy named Fred Beason and this is the kind of thing that I think you have knowledge of and in some areas can be discussed but I wouldn't want to read it in a magazine or a newspaper.

David Yellin- Alright.

John T. Fisher- Fred Beason came in and see me here, I could look up the day it was back in March. If I can get a calendar I can reconstruct even the specific date, it was about 4:00 in the afternoon and he felt from some of the people that he knew in the community that Memphis was headed to a violent type of crisis of some sort. And this view was shared as I later found out by many people in the community in the early march, sanitation strike was 4 or 5 weeks old. And many people thought we were headed for some thing serious here.

David Yellin- Now many people, business people social friends or...

John T. Fisher- Not so much like that I think probably some church people, some church leaders some other individuals who had been doing a little work. (muffled) who had been doing some work like church oriented mix in some social areas are working in different areas felt like there really might be some trouble here. Some of it began to show up in the newspaper and all of that, little gang groups and all. The police department was working overtime at that point. The general feeling in the community that we had some problems going on, the police are following the garbage trucks through my neighborhood and this kind of thing. I had to explain to my little boy why the police car behind the garbage truck at 4 years old.

David Yellin- What did you say?

John T. Fisher- I don't remember exactly I mostly didn't want that to make too strongly more an impression on him because he was only 4 years old. It made an impression on me more than it did on him and I, what I told him wasn't really important, I was trying to keep it from being important to him but then it did make a distinct impression on me that he would ask that question, that it was that our society was in such a situation that he would become aware of this.

David Yellin- You understand our questions are not prompted to (muffled).

John T. Fisher- No I understand this.

David Yellin- This is kind of interesting as you yourself can see what your thrust at your son was that he would understand the position of the police or understand the position of the sanitation worker?

John T. Fisher- Well he had never, I don't know what his impression of police and garbage trucks are. But there was no connection between the two particularly. The policeman's job was this and the sanitation worker's job was this and it caused a conflict in his mind of some sort that the police car was going to have to be there to help the garbage workers, what was he going to do does he need policemen to help carry the garbage cans? Why are they there, I don't understand why they are there. Mostly I wanted to keep him from trying to, well I couldn't explain to a 4 year old why they were there exactly and I didn't really try I just tried to keep it from forming a strong impression on him at the time and went on to something else. But it did on me that we would be living that differently. Fred Beason asked me to talk to some people about trying to get something done,. Nothing specific in mind I don't think. As a result two or three days later I ended up in (muffled) with some people he had and I talked with the mayor and Ned Cook who is a friend of mine. The mayor said bring him up to my office and so we went up there, Charles Crump, Fred Beason John Salmon and myself. They kind of had a request they were going to ask him about although it wasn't real specific but just to get this thing settled.

David Yellin- They were all at the luncheon?



John T. Fisher- \_Yes.

David Yellin- Where there others?

John T. Fisher- No that there was all there was I though there would be more than that.

David Yellin- Who called this? You did?

John T. Fisher- I think John Salmon and Fred Beason called it, they put it together.

David Yellin- Just to talk over generally what was happening in this thing.

John T. Fisher- Trying to see what we could do, I was very fearful of being meddlesome because it was that sort of thing. No one appointed me to go out and solve the sanitation strike, But as the thing progressed on and on you became less concerned with being meddlesome and more concerned (muffled) intolerable, you can't tolerate what is happening.

David Yellin- It was your business..

John T. Fisher- It was becoming my business, right because I was so uncomfortable from what is going on. So then we went to eh mayor's office and the mayor was in a very much of a inflexible position which is kind of common knowledge. And in talk with him about it why he was not inclined to change his position about it or the statement was made pretty strongly that he would not negotiate a dues check off at any level. He was very adamant about it and the impression was made on me here in view of this that if he had made the comments the way he did to me and went straight to conviction that he had behind himself and doing it to some one of a more militant like opposition mind why I would think this would intensify and increase their opposition to him. Would solidify the ranks and make them more intense, and that was more my impression there. If folks like this kind of Lawson and others had heard this like I heard it, there motivation to move is probably very much substantial as it appeared to me on television and such. A week later this same group asked me if I would go with them down to reverend Lawson's church just to visit just to hear another side of the story and I agreed to do so. With a great deal of intellectual curiosity and it was on Saturday afternoon following the mayor's meeting on Monday, on Saturday afternoon we went to Centenary Methodist Church and spent well from about 1:00 until 4:00 or about 4:15. This was about 3 hours and 15 minutes. And this was a very quiet easy going conversation attended by reverend Jim Lawson and Audry Parker the director of Map South. Later joined by Dr. Ralph Jackson. Dr. Jackson came in and reverend Ralph Jackson not a doctor he is reverend Ralph Jackson. He came in very much upset because this was the afternoon and this is why you go back to the calendar now, this was the afternoon that the, I guess with Mr. Miles got his group together and just as they were getting ready to talk somebody asked the question can those people discuss with us, because they are under injunction by the court and so they had to recess right there until Monday to get that question answered. Well it was that Saturday afternoon because reverend

Jackson came from that meeting to Jim Lawson's office to talk to us and he was fit to be (muffled) when he got there.

David Yellin- Then we have the date. That followed the snow didn't it do you recall if that's the one? The first march..

John T. Fisher- No this was before any march.

David Yellin- Well they were supposed to have a march, well it goes way back you mean...

John T. Fisher- This would be in early march when Frank Miles first come on the scene.

David Yellin- Well he didn't come in until the 23<sup>rd</sup> or 24<sup>th</sup>.

Tom Beckner- He was named on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of March he was named to be the mediator.

John T. Fisher- What day was that a Monday?

David Yellin- That's the Friday, I suppose this was the 23<sup>rd</sup> of March.

Tom Beckner- This is Saturday..

David Yellin- The first march was the 28<sup>th</sup> you see.

John T. Fisher- That would be about right.

David Yellin- And so the snow cancelled the first march on the 22<sup>nd</sup>.

Tom Beckner- The march followed it a week later.

John T. Fisher- I would have thought we were in Jim Lawson's church before that snow.

David Yellin- Frank Miles was not in it officially but he probably would have been called before. Would you have anywhere where later on we can check with you.

John T. Fisher- Well I will try to.

David Yellin- You may as we come along here, Ok fine.

John T. Fisher- I have some notes some place I kept all my sanitation....

David Yellin- And incidentally can we make a request about any of the papers to turn over to the archives and if you want them back we can make copies or however you want to do that please.

John T. Fisher- Yes.

David Yellin- Thank you.

John T. Fisher- So this visit there was no particularly productive in the sense of program forming or something like that but was productive in just conversation and seeing whether we could get any agreement about anything or not. And just to learn about reverend Lawson was of interest to me. And this process was repeated several times and this is why I think (muffled) but it was repeated several times.

David Yellin- Would it stop your narrative if it asked you some of your impressions of reverend Lawson since you gave us some of your impressions of mayor Lobe?

John T. Fisher- No, well alright. The impressions for me of that point of reverend Lawson were based on just our conversation in which he took the group for about 45 minutes and gave us a background going back to his coming to Memphis. Now we didn't challenge what he told us and I gave never gone out to check it in any way But I presume that it is true I don't see any real reason to throw it off. But it was going back to some early efforts to bring about some change and that this union process or union tie was much older than just the last few months it goes back to several years ago and he brought us up to date step by step about what had happened and why they walked off and gave us some of the fill in facts that really we had not read in the newspaper any rate about some of the incidents around town, democrat road gate and things in of themselves not particularly consequential but of interest to one who would live in the community and read the newspaper and this was kind of background behind the headlines. And then we discussed some areas that needed work and as I remember those they were transportation and education and job opportunity. Very (muffled) things that would be accepted by anybody. We discussed some of Map South work and Dr. Jackson told us what the minimum salary was and their role in it. And this really took up the afternoon and I think we met again some days later, and Bill Kephart was there, he is an Episcopal priest in Whitehaven. He was there, he was instrumental in setting the group up. Bill Kephart was the contact man into Jim Lawson as a matter of fact. I said John Salmon and Fred Beason did they are good friends of Bill Kephart and they are the ones that got me to go but Bill Kephart was the one who arranged the meeting with Jim Lawson.

Tom Beckner- The same group was in attendance?

John T. Fisher- Bill Kephart was in attendance OI left him out I didn't mean too. He was the man that put the meeting together in the first place and he was he man who wrote the little thing on the black board of what we are going to talk about.

David Yellin- What do you mean he wrote it on the black board?

John T. Fisher- Well he had a little statement written out that we are her to discuss he may still have if you, I don't know he could probably tell you what it was, He has got the Episcopal church in Whitehaven and I don't remember what it was exactly but it was fairly simple and mostly it concerned that we were there to talk about and see the problems in our town and see if we could outline anyways to go to them.

^John T. I think it is very significant what Lawson told you and in this day it was very unusual. Wasn't this the day he told you that you were the first white business man who has come over to listen to our side of the story wasn't that that day?

John T. Fisher- Right that is true when we were leaving we talked about that and we asked him here again, all of us appeared to be meddlesome. It is none of my business to go in there and settle this thing, man (muffled) the city has all this functioning. They don't need us to go and settle it. We went and we asked him about this. I said how many groups such as ours are you talking with and he said none. I said well hard to believe, and he said, oh no he didn't say none. He said we have had one group come down here and talk to guys and listen to the things that we had to say and act as if they could be concerned and interested and we will try to bring about some change if it were, were there needed to be change and there they are and pointed to us in there. Really I thought that was right incredible that (muffled).

David Yellin- Of course now you are still talking about all of this and its impact on you as a person?

John T. Fisher- Right, so this leads to a personal relationship with reverend Lawson at that point and we visited back 2 or 3 more times. I didn't keep a, I think I have some notes some place on a dirty about that that I kept.

David Yellin- As you can imagine in the original for the archives again.

John T. Fisher- I may not have it, (muffled).

David Yellin- Just again....

John T. Fisher- Those dates can be rebuilt I know.

David Yellin- Yeah now was it, you know martin Luther King came here the 18<sup>th</sup> and made a speech would that make any?

John T. Fisher- No when he came here going to march ion Mississippi right? He came through going down to some place. (muffled).

David Yellin- Well no he made...

Oscar Carr- Clarkesdale too.

David Yellin- He made a speech at Mason Temple the first speech he made here in which he said that there will be a march that was the Monday the 18<sup>th</sup>. Ws that the Monday the first...

John T. Fisher- I haven't gotten those tied together quite yet.

David Yellin- Ok.

Oscar Carr- Then he left the next day and made it through Mississippi to recruit people for the poor people's march.

John T. Fisher- Was that the time he made the speech about shutting Memphis down? We are going to come back and shut them down? Pull them out of schools.

Tom Beckner- He was referring to the following Friday when it snowed and the march was cancelled.

Oscar Carr- It was fundamentally said that the law was stepping and not let them march.

John T. Fisher- Now we had in fact gone out before that, our group had been doing it before that. Because at some point becoming aware of this I discovered, somebody told me, I forgot who told me. Oh Charlie (muffled) he said listen to WDIA if you want to find out what is going on I listen to WDIA 5 minutes before the hour. Well that was a very revealing thing for him to tell me because listening to WDIA 5 minutes before the hour during times of racial crisis is very enlightening. They do have things on their radio station that you really don't pick up in that context anywhere else and that is not a reflection on other stations but they give it to from some other guy's point of view. It does, it made an impression on me at any rate. And I heard Martin Luther King's speech on that station.

David Yellin- Now was this before you saw reverend Lawson?

John T. Fisher- No it was after, I had some personal knowledge and contact at this point. That is why the speech, I have to say in all candor that I don't think, I think that is the first time I had ever heard Martin Luther King speak and really heard what he said. Most of the time I had observed what he said and not really what he heard.

David Yellin- What was your impression?

John T. Fisher- Well my impression was that I came here and I own this dealership 80% and tow people the man that runs the whole sales owns 10% and the man who runs the whole service department owns 10%. And I thought the emotions were so high that he had a good chance of keeping them out of schools and keeping them off the jobs and getting them into that march at this point. Solidarity is growing and growing and growing. I thought that was a very real possibility and I didn't want to get caught flatfooted here.

David Yellin- Ah you mean in your business.

John T. Fisher- In my business. So I asked these two people we had some coffee in the morning and I asked them did you all hear that speech and they had not. Well I said this is what he said and I told them and I said what are we going to do if these people don't show up. Well we knocked it around for a minute about responsibility and (muffled) and so we talked some more and I said I am primarily worried about our shop quarters and our showroom janitor and people just not coming what would we do. And so we decided that this was an exceptional situation. One that we could best respond to by not getting into an inflexible position because we assessed

that the mayor's position was in trouble because of its flexibility. I think his legalistic point was a pretty good one really and it wasn't well defended. Could have been defended with much more offensive action. But the defense part of it just didn't work out it caused problems. We wanted to avoid those if we could. So to that end we decided we weren't going to do anything, if they wanted to go march, then fine. We just wouldn't say anything and several days later when things calmed down we were depending on the circumstances we would call the group together and tell them that this was a breach of our normal operating procedure and policy but that we try to understand but at the same time for them to understand not to make a habit pattern of irresponsible route. We want to do that in an area in a non-tension atmosphere so after it is over 2 or 3 days.

David Yellin- Did you anticipate that any one of your negro employees would come and say I will not be here Friday?

John T. Fisher- Well we thought it both ways we thought that if they did go into the march they would come tell us that or ask off even. If they asked to be off what were we going to say. And obviously if they weren't here they weren't going to be on the time clock so they wouldn't be getting paid for the time.

David Yellin- What would have said if they would have asked?

John T. Fisher- We would have said yes. We would have said well we really don't like it but ok that is acceptable deal and alright we will make an exception. But nobody did ask matter of fact and course it snowed. But the strange thing was that the same morning some of our other people here had heard the speech and two of the white mechanics back in the shop, (Muffled) sneaking grin on their face did you hear the thing. Well yeah I know about it. Well what are you going to do when they don't come to work? You going to fire them? He was taunting me, you don't put up with that argument. So he sat him down and said let me get this straight we are going to run this thing ourselves, if this is that strong of an emotional issue and they go they are going to be allowed to go. I said now if...

David Yellin- You said?

John T. Fisher- No our service manager handled this himself. Because he came back in the next morning and had coffee and said I will tell you one thing boy I am glad you brought that up yesterday, let me tell you what happened. He said, without that background he would have been caught in the same trap you see. They came to it you see. I will fire them, and boy then the fats in the fire. But by getting to the problem early while in this case it was one of those providential type things, it really did avert.

David Yellin- Or we might say by discussing it, by bringing it out in the open you were able to handle it.

John T. Fisher- Right so he was able to handle it my service manager was who is not any personnel expert or anyone else. He is an automobile service manager and I

think a very confident one. But when these two guys jumped him they were taunting him almost you know the atmosphere I am talking about.

Tom Beckner- Did he happen to mention to you their reaction to what he said.

John T. Fisher- What he told them was to sit down first I am going to really tell you. Now if you guys don't have anything better to do than to come and holler about something like that, you guys got to do your job right. Now I will run his job up here, when you stop getting people bringing their cars back to fix that thing again and you get to work on time everyday and you keep your place clean back there like it is supposed to and all then you can come in here and tell me what someone else can do. But I think you got plenty of things that you need to work on right this minute myself to do this. And if this is what some one else wants to do and it is that important to him then we are going to try and work with it on what's important with him because we do that with you. When you want somebody to do that, if you wanted to do it you would expect us to do that. Well you are right and so the tension was sort of gone. As it turned out it snowed and of course I don't know what the official thoughts of the community are more educated thoughts than mine would be but there seemed to me to be a great deal of momentum and impotence to that march. Which was lost when the snow fell and never recovered at all, I don't think but a small percentage of that impotence followed through in that march. If he did participate...

David Yellin- 28<sup>th</sup> yes.

John T. Fisher- So a lot was lost at that point, in my mind it was.

David Yellin- Do you have anything specifically?

John T. Fisher- No, on the second march, on the first march I think many of these people would have gone and I think one employee did tell us he would be going. But as it was when it snowed every negro probably was here and some of the white employees didn't make it because of the snow but all the negros did make it in probably out of a sense of being here so they could make sure....because obviously they couldn't march. So they all did come in. And then the next time none of them ever asked to be off and none of them did take off. And they knew what we would have said because by this time it was common knowledge, it had been discussed some. And they knew that management wasn't going to take any close minded position about it and they knew that management would like people to tell them they were going to be off in the sense that anybody is going to be away tomorrow well we would like to know, you should tell us. So nobody told us and we thought that maybe some of them will go but none of them did, there wasn't a single negro employee absent the day of the second march all here. I don't know why they were here, but I am sure they lost a lot of this momentum and a lot of emphasis because they didn't feel the need to go that second time that they did the first time.

David Yellin- Ok now where are you in all of this?

John T. Fisher- So let's see about that time we had Charles Crump and myself and some of these others had decided it would be helpful to increase our little visitation awareness of talking to somebody and we had several meetings around town with reverend Lawson and I think reverend Billy Kyles and I think a few others, just different spots here and there. Trying to get some people to go, other people to go, other business people to go. And we were fairly successful at that although we didn't have any planned program, it was very informal.

David Yellin- Do you remember your approach to other business people, on what basis did you ask them to go and to find out about this?

John T. Fisher- Oh asked them to go on the basis of awareness, you don't like him but you ought to listen to what he has to say, he is interesting to listen to him. He might learn something, not to go to sold at all just for intellectual curiosity and that was the only approach at all what so ever. Increase one's personal knowledge of things that are happening was the approach that was made.

David Yellin- Was it any realization on any one's part or was it indeed too that it was also a good business, the approach to the shall we say in the best sense of the term the chamber of commerce approach, that Memphis is going to be in trouble it is going to hurt business...

John T. Fisher- No we didn't use any of that, no.(muffled) it was a just come down yourself and learn for yourself.

David Yellin- I see that is kind of interesting.

John T. Fisher- We never got much into national image picture.

David Yellin- So in order to clarify this your approach to business people because that is who you...

John T. Fisher- These are all personal approaches there was no wide spread they were very personal in there nature.

David Yellin- Yeah because your friends are business people not because they, and you didn't approach it on the business person's point of view.

John T. Fisher- No I didn't call 5 car dealers per say I called 5 men that I knew and invited them to go with me and I had been two times IU think at t his point and we ar4e going to go again Tuesday morning at 10:00 and I would like very much for you to go with me because I think you would find it interesting I think you would find it enlightening to you about some of the things h e has to say. I think it would be a real opportunity for you to go ad I think our response was about 50/50. I had one man that was really adamant.

David Yellin- What did he say?



John T. Fisher- Oh he told me that I was out of my mind that Lawson was a communist and played the record you know.

David Yellin- Yeah and what did you say?

John T. Fisher- I said well I can't tell you whether he is or not and I think it is presumptuous at this moment to try and speak for Mr. Lawson. He is a very complex fellow, extremely intelligent. I certainly don't think he is a communist but I am not out trying to convince Memphis that he is not a communist because I am not qualified to convince Memphis that anybody is not a communist. I don't really know what a communist is frankly.

Oscar Carr- (Muffled)

John T. Fisher- Anybody is a communist that does things you don't like.

David Yellin- I see.

Tom Beckner- Right.

John T. Fisher- But I do know one thing I have to go, I can get, I don't get my personal confidence, my personal confidence comes from just knowing Jim Lawson, I don't think he his going to eat me alive. But in talking with some others, the ones I would speak to the most often is that not knowing much about communism I do know some of its basic precepts and one of them is that you are not a Christian. You cannot be a true blue communist and be a Christian. It is not any way to be a true blue both of them.

David Yellin- That is an exceedingly effective answer.

John T. Fisher- If Lawson is a minister in the Methodist church, that is a fact. And I have confidence in the Methodist church, prophets in the Methodist church in the united states. I am not ready to challenge them as a totally worthless organization or a subversive organization. This is intolerable to me. So one leads directly to the other and I would think that the Methodist church has enough people of awareness and strength in character to bring any truly subversive element in their midst to the surface and deal with him in whatever fashion would be appropriate under the circumstances and I am not aware of any I probably wouldn't be, being Episcopalian but I am not even aware of any action contemplated or anything in this regard by the Methodist church with reference to the reverend Lawson.

Oscar Carr- I am a Methodist and some have suggested this along this line.

John T. Fisher- I know there are some personal comments and stuff like that but I am talking about the institutional church, there are many Methodists who dislike him intentionally.

Oscar Carr- Right I think that most of the moods that were made personally through the church were....

John T. Fisher- Rejected by the institution. From what I knew.

Oscar Carr- Yes that's true.

John T. Fisher- So it was mostly that was my answer on that regard and I said the thing is going to get no publicity nobody is trying to do anything to anybody but you might enjoy it. Just come for that reason and most of them that came did. Well one of those meetings was a complete fiasco because it was at 2:00 and at 3:00 I knew I would be late and I was late, there were two other in our group Charles Crump was there and he knew I was going to be late. But I got there at 5 minutes to 3 and nobody was there and at 3:00 they were all getting ready to leave and reverend Billy Kyles came in who Lawson had sent and he just I presume overloaded the circuits and couldn't make it and didn't call off course this has reinforced what they wanted to thin, so that one was really a fiasco, that set those people back, they were making the first move to go in but they got set back and that is the way it happens sometimes.

David Yellin- Now where did you meet when you met?

John T. Fisher- At Centenary church we met twice and I think this meeting I am referring to was in Collins church over at Orleans and Washington St. That was before the march I think, and then the march. No I guess that meeting was on Tuesday after the march.

David Yellin- After the 28<sup>th</sup>.

John T. Fisher- After the first march, after the aborted march.

David Yellin- Yeah that is the 28<sup>th</sup> of March.

John T. Fisher- No the snow march, was the snow march the 28<sup>th</sup>.

David Yellin- No sir.

Tom Beckner- That was the 22<sup>nd</sup>.

John T. Fisher- 18<sup>th</sup>? 22<sup>nd</sup>.

David Yellin- The one that didn't take place?

John T. Fisher- \_The snow day, the snow was on the 22<sup>nd</sup>, I think this was the Tuesday after that.

David Yellin- So that would make it he 26<sup>th</sup>.

John T. Fisher- Because there was another march coming up and I think they were out planning for the march to come up was why he was late.

David Yellin- Yes.

John T. Fisher- Let's see, then we had that march. Somebody came up with an idea of trying to settle the strike by Holiday Inn would donate the Rivermont completely staff and menu for the peace conference they were to prepare it.

David Yellin- No.

John T. Fisher- And so...

David Yellin- You don't know whose idea that was?

John T. Fisher- Dean Demmick expressed the, came to me with the idea and I really don't remember when he got it. He told me at the time but I don't remember the names of these individuals.

David Yellin- How far did this idea go?

John T. Fisher- Well it went to the, I discussed it with Ned Cook who is a good friend of mine and we thought it was wild and completely out of the question but it might offer the chance to talk about something else for a change. But the work part of it was that it just didn't really fit, Ned Cook is a good personal friend of vice president Hooker and if there was any way just to create a instrument of dialogue or something to talk about then it might could be worked out since (muffled) Washington.

David Yellin- You mean in other words get vice president Humphreys here?

John T. Fisher- Yes.

Oscar Carr- either that or send our people up there and just have their picture taken let the mayor send somebody and somebody else and trying to create a diversion from some of this other let somebody go and no real thought about it at all it was just a wild scheme, but it just didn't really fit the national interests and Ned didn't really think it did and I have to agree with him that it really didn't. Being one of the belligerents to come it would fit our purposes well but it certainly wouldn't fit in the foreign powers at all. This was after the assassination however though because it was offering to attempt to come to the site where the tragedy took place.

David Yellin- In other words somebody wanted to get in touch with vice president Humphrey to enter into this to settle the strike?

John T. Fisher- Well to see if he couldn't in his process of announcing the settlement of the strike pull the community with (muffled) make an offer to the world to host, this site of this terrible event be the site of this constructive peace conference.

David Yellin- Oh....I misunderstood the entire thing. You mean the peace conference that ended up in Paris.

Tom Beckner- Was during all the turmoil in Paris? Is that tied in?

John T. Fisher- This was right after the assassination and before the strike was settled because it was an offer that perhaps could be communicated with the settlement of the strike, in other words where is the settlement of the strike and all the sides are coming together and we are going to settle the strike and as a community with the aid of one of our business establishments, Memphis offers to host without charge.

David Yellin- Oh yeah I see.

John T. Fisher- But the offer was never made public, never went out and I am sure if it ever did go public Holiday Inn might be embarrassed about it so let's treat that that way. It's not....

John T. Fisher- Holiday, their name was just used they weren't asked...

John T. Fisher- It was cleared by Holiday Inn had backed the offer, understand it. I would (muffled) authorized to communicate the offer in and see whether the negro community reverend Lawson specifically would support this. In other words would he say that I too would like for Memphis to host this.

David Yellin- Did you ever get to him?

John T. Fisher- He had agreed to do this, he was agreeable, he thought it was a little bit wild too but he thought it was agreeable. And then I talked to Ned Cook and that is when we decided it really wasn't that agreeable and to my knowledge it was never specifically communicated to the mayor. I know the mayor never had any official knowledge of it although that I do think he had unofficial knowledge of it. But here again is a matter that no interest would be except human interest is served by revealing this. And the main part of it is not mine to reveal. If someone wants to reveal it than that is their prerogative but it is not mine, I don't have that prerogative. So let's see.

David Yellin- I mean to help you if you..

John T. Fisher- I was talking at that same time with Ned Cook to see if the mayor would talk to reverend Lawson and to see if together they couldn't do anything. And the next day Lawson made some charge and I don't remember what it was in reference too, he was making plenty of charges at that point, it wasn't police brutality but it was something else.

Tom Beckner- This too was after the assassination?

John T. Fisher- Yes, and I had visited with the mayor for awhile that day right in that little period of time. One afternoon about a Monday or a Tuesday before the strike was settled, well when was the strike settled?

David Yellin- The strike was settled approximately the 15<sup>th</sup>.

John T. Fisher- What day was that?

David Yellin- Finally it was on a Saturday.

John T. Fisher- on a Saturday well this was about the Monday before that. Ned Cook was going to go up there and see him and he had to go out of town and he called me and told me to go up there. SO I went and what? Well the first time we went there were 3 body guards there and we didn't know what they were. It was a great huge office.

David Yellin- Was that the first time you had been to the mayor's office?

John T. Fisher- First time I had been inside that office yes. IO was amazed at the size of it and it was furnished and all. It really is a huge barrier to human relations hips.

David Yellin- I mean this is exceedingly interesting, can you tell about even that first meeting?

John T. Fisher- Well at that first meeting ewe set there, and now this has got to be very personal because I wouldn't do anything to knowingly undermine the mayor's responsibility, authority, prestige, of the community.

David Yellin- And we are all certain of this. You see we are searching for meaning here and the big desk..

John T. Fisher- Share some thoughts with you but her again I would think that I would be less than honest to Henry Lobe in some of the things that I have agreed to do if I were to go out and say this because it would be misunderstood. But we went in there and there he was with his shirt sleeves rolled up. And after we left we were convinced that probably not by conscious conspiracy design but by somebody's design all the chairs where one sits are the easy chair type. You get down and you find yourself to trying to get up and talk and the sofa is right off of the desk and the 3 guys are on the sofa are just wore up and down, which was Charlie Crump, Fred Beason and John Salmon and I sat on the side. I swore that the sofa was place in that position so that they could be behind that huge desk and Henry's chair he was a big man, but anyway it was kind of screwed up some and he sitting up high and it is just a powerful thing downhill anyway.

David Yellin- That is wonderful did you see the great dictator Charlie Chaplain's.

John T. Fisher- No.

David Yellin- He has a barber's chair and he gets higher and higher and higher...

John T. Fisher- That is what was going on and the mayor finally came up out of his chair and said we are going to just get one thing straight there is not going to be any conversation any discussion or anything about this check off business and hit the desk. That was when I decided that somebody better go do some talking to somebody because man there is not any talking going on around here.

David Yellin- So what was your approach then to the mayor was it..

John T. Fisher- So I then went back to the mayor, well at that time we left and we decided we hadn't done anything. That was that early March.

David Yellin- Yeah but what had been your approach to him to make a settlement?

John T. Fisher- Oh yeah, well Charlie Crump had a deal worked out with voting machines and several different things, I really didn't say anything at that meeting I was an observer. (muffled) getting them into the mayor's office and then I didn't do anything in this early March meeting or mid-March meeting, the 15<sup>th</sup> of March or thereabouts. In I was back in there 3 or 4 weeks later which was after, certainly it was after the assassination, no it wasn't either it was before the assassination. Before the assassination...

David Yellin- The 31<sup>st</sup> if it was a Monday then...

John T. Fisher- Before the assassination I guess on that Monday, and I am talking about meeting with Jim Lawson on a private basis just so that they could hear each other out. And he was curious as to whether Lawson was willing or not and here again this is something that I can't be quoted on because this is not super confidential but it would serve no purpose that the mayor agreed to see him and the next morning Lawson released some statement and the mayor called me on the telephone and said have you seen this statement? I said Henry read it, get your paper out and just don't tell me about it I know what he said and I think I understand your reaction to it and this is a real right riot, a real sinful sinful.

David Yellin- In otherwards in April first if that were the date on that Monday that you met with the mayor he indicated a certain willingness at least to talk to Lawson.

John T. Fisher- Right. On a private basis, private informal basis.

David Yellin- Now Lawson's statement in relation probably to the Larry Payne thing or some thing because the funeral was the next day.

John T. Fisher- I guess it was, because I remember the story was on the front page second section right in the middle of the page somewhere.

David Yellin- Well we have our papers....

John T. Fisher- But there was some specific reference to that which he made (muffled). And so I said alright...as a matter of fact I think the Holiday Inn thing was mentioned that day as an instrument as which to do that and also conveys that time Ned Cook's opinion and really mine that it wasn't worth while and since it was on the table I thought he should be aware of it, that he should not be officially aware of it and so we agreed at that point to drop that. So the mayor did have unofficial notice of it, he did know it existed although he had no constructive knowledge of what to do about it. So I went back and gave it back to Dean Demmick who gave it to me. With the understanding that he could go and do anything else he wanted to do with it. But there was nothing prejudice about it none of the people that I talked with

would ever say anything about it. Say any knowledge of it or anything if he wanted to go and offer it directly or the church offer it or the bishop offer it or some thing that was perfectly acceptable whatever he wanted to do. Nobody would ever tell anybody else who knew about it. So I don't know whatever came of it. He could tell you. I do know what he did he called the governor and some other people just to make them aware of the fact that it was an offer.

David Yellin- This...

John T. Fisher- He could tell you that more than I could.

David Yellin- Right, we are going to talk to Dean Demmick, the point was that it was before the assassination, I mean that is what I could not understand that it was offered after the assassination.

John T. Fisher- Wait the offer was based on the assassination I thought?

Oscar Carr- (muffled)

John T. Fisher- Yeah but after the assassination this was not after Memphis Cares. I am certain it was not. I don't think I talked to the mayor after Memphis Cares personally.

John T. Fisher- Asked Hanoi to come here after the assassination I think you know what I mean I am not making any judgment but when you re-think about it would have been kind of.....but before it would have been excellent because here was a kind of a peace even between, it was a racial issue by then.

John T. Fisher- No because it was keyed directly in that thing, that thing was keyed directly in announcing the settlement of the strike.

David Yellin- Well.....

John T. Fisher- Which is after the assassination.

David Yellin- Well we sure will check...(Tape End)