

SS196.mp3

David Yellin- We are in the minimum salary building this is Friday May 24<sup>th</sup> 1968 and we are here to interview Reverend Ralph Jackson and seated around the table with reverend Jackson and myself are Anne Trotter Joe Lowe and Bill Thomas. (Tape Break).

David Yellin- You have to test your voice.

Ralph Jackson- I guess not. Well I was contacted by Mr. Pickett.

Anne Trotter- Who is he?

Ralph Jackson- O.W. Pickett.

David Yellin- O.W. Pickett yes.

Ralph Jackson- Mr. O.W. Pickett who stated that they were forming a committee to raise funds for food to help the sanitation workers while they were on strike and he wanted to know if he could use my name.

Bill Thomas- Reverend Jackson do you know about what date this was?

Ralph Jackson- No.

David Yellin- After the strike started?

Ralph Jackson- Oh yes.

David Yellin- Was it a week or a month or a couple of days after.

Ralph Jackson- As a matter of fact I don't know the date, this was about 3 days before we were maced.

Anne Trotter- Oh but that would be February 23<sup>rd</sup>, so be about he 20<sup>th</sup>.

Ralph Jackson- Somewhere around, between the 18<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> would be the time because when he asked me if he could use my name that I would do more. That he could use my name but I would like to actively help to do so, but I was going out of town for about 3 days or 4, is that loud enough?

David Yellin- Yes sir.

Ralph Jackson- And when I returned I would contact him. Well when I got back and called I found that they were supposed to go to the chamber of commerce, I mean down to the city council, down to that council building that afternoon and that they had already had a hearing and that they were too, this committee was to report to the council and the council would take action on this report. And so I decided to go down too the council meeting. Well when we got there we found out the council

meeting was being transferred to the auditorium because of the large crowd and that they would only meet in the chamber and then they would try to (muffled). So we stayed for them to meet in the chamber and then transfer to the auditorium. Well when we got there the council came in and made a statement that they had already made and instead of hearing the report from the committee they had heard the report and was coming up with a statement. Of course this statement has been a matter of public record. After reading their statement they voted to approve it with the black councilmen voting no and one of the white councilmen voted no but for a different reason which he stated. As it closes this motion was made to adjourn and all efforts to be heard were denied. They adjourned and walked out and all of the microphones were taken down. This was the first thing that annoyed me and disturbed me and I did not feel this was due process and neither did I feel this was the proper type of treatment that we were entitled too.

David Yellin- Excuse me, you were not then at the day before when Fred Davis and his committee met?

Ralph Jackson- No I was out of town that day.

David Yellin- Yes so this is now Friday?

Ralph Jackson- This is my first encounter with them. And so while I didn't like that and moved down to the front among others, about it I still was not bothered more than the fact that wasn't a decent way or a democratic way, to treat them. It was decided that the group would march back to Mason Temple and so I said to someone there that not having a top coat I would march back as far as my office and I would talk with them later. So we started down Main St. and we were told that we could walk in the street if we walked on the right side of the center line, this is the white line. And of course we were doing this and talking in more or less a picnic fashion. Well a police car continued to pull in on the white side of the line, merging the people who were walking.

Bill Thomas- On the right side of the line?

Ralph Jackson- Yeah, see the lie was down here and he was pulling, see we were walking on the right side of the line and the car kept pulling on the right side of the line.

Bill Thomas- Was that only the one car?

Ralph Jackson- Well this is the particular car that caused the disturbance, I don't know who this policemen was but he continued to drive on that right side of the line.

David Yellin- Was this at the head of the line or somewhere behind it?

Ralph Jackson- A little bit behind the head, not exactly at the head of them but a little behind the head of the line and of course this car continued to pull in there and

some where along the road, conflicting statements as to what happened because I was in the front in front of the car, but I do know that someone ran up and told all of the policemen in front of us that something was going on and indiscriminately from the front of the line without knowing what was going on I back because we had not had time to find out the police began to spray mace and for the first time in my life I was gassed or maced and that was when I got mad.

Bill Thomas- Could you describe that do you remember exactly how you yourself got maced?

Ralph Jackson- Well as I said, see walking in front of the group was a large number I would say 15 or 20 policemen who were just going in front of the group and some were pushing the cars there was a portion of us to the other side and I said we are more or less in a picnic fashion you see. And when this little disturbance started behind us and we came back, we stopped at least I did and reverend Lawson and several others who were dressed as clergy men we all stopped. I was trying to see even before I could try to walk back, because I didn't even get a chance to walk back tot here the car was. The police just took out and we moved toe h curb and they began to mace us and even came up on the curb where we were standing and was saying move on and get out and indiscriminately I guess this is the first time they had that little toy, so they came and they maced us.

David Yellin- Now those policemen had the mace, is it with a gun or?

Ralph Jackson- No it is something nearly what I could see about it, it is something like a shaving kit or something like that., little bomb or little thing like that and they took it and they sprayed me with this stuff and others.

David Yellin- How far away did they come up to you and spray you?

Ralph Jackson- Oh they came up, I guess two feet away form us, up on the curb too not out in the street, up on the curb.

David Yellin- They came after you?

Ralph Jackson- They came after us, yes and sprayed us with the rest of this stuff. Alright then we went on to the Mason Temple.

Anne Trotter- Wait a second, what happened to the men that ran down the alleys, were they beaten up by police?

Ralph Jackson- I don't know because see I didn't go down there.

Anne Trotter- Did you hear anything about that?

Ralph Jackson- Oh yes I have heard all type of reports but and my statement more or less I will tell you things I saw and I know.

David Yellin- Now in other wards you were...

Ralph Jackson- If it was something that I tell you I heard I will tell you it was reported, otherwise I will stick more or less to things I actually saw and I actually know.

David Yellin- in other words then the disturbance behind you was not a prolonged time that you could have heard about it or...

Ralph Jackson- This disturbance was behind and provoked by the policemen, this was provoked you see, I have my reason for why it was necessary to break up this, the march or the back to the place. Because as I told you we were marching the way we were going was more or less is a picnic kind of atmosphere and we were laughing because I told them I said to them at the rate we are going by the time we get to Crump and Beale, I mean to Danny Thomas and Beale and start across to Crump to get to Mason Temple, traffic will be backed up into West Memphis.

David Yellin- Did you tell them, them being the police?

Ralph Jackson- Oh we talked with the police all, reverend Lawson continued to tell the police that and don't let these folk involve you all in this, this is no fight with the police, you are underpaid yourself and if we can get more for the sanitation workers we will be out there to get more for you. And we had nice dialogue going on with the police in the front. But you see these neither were a part of this policemen and this is the thing that I have continued to say to Commissioner Holloman. That if you want to be fair with the black community find the driver of that car that broke your rule that you said we could walk on the right side of the line. Any policemen that drove his car on the right side of that line was in violating your instructions and that we can never be satisfied in the black community until you find the man who created and started the whole thing. Our next position was that the police would not have maced ministers of the white community of the status of the ministers of the black community that they maced, knowing that they were ministers. So this is where we felt this was done because we were black.

David Yellin- Now just so I am crystal clear the policemen that you were joking with and exchanging pleasantries with on this march were the very same ones who then maced you.

Ralph Jackson- That's right.

David Yellin- They knew who you were.

Ralph Jackson- Of course they knew, they might not have known me by name, but they knew that we were ministers, reverend Lawson was dressed in a black front clergy collar and several others were dressed that way. I very seldom wear clergy collar anymore but my point is that if Dr. Pollack or any of those groups would have been out there in a situation as this, that they would not have indiscriminately begun to mace people. My next point is that if what they say, if 4 or 5 men pushed against the car or was trying to push it over as many policemen as they had there

they could have arrested any 4 or 5 men without indiscriminately macing men women and children.

David Yellin- Did you hear anybody give an order to mace?

Ralph Jackson- No.

Bill Thomas- Any explanation how before you had the dialogue going and suddenly things changed.

Ralph Jackson- Yeah you see as I say when somebody ran from the back, somebody I can't identify this person but some person ran from back of us up to the front where these policemen were and told them they tried to turn a car over or they are doing something back there...

David Yellin- Is that a policemen that did that?

Ralph Jackson- I don't remember, but it occurs to me that it was somebody in pedestrian clothes, a short fellow, full face white fellow as near as I could remember. He might be relaying the message I don't know where he came from. But I know he came up there and I know by that time when we turned around and saw the (muffled) I would say 100 feet behind us and they were already drawing club and macing at that time and this group up here just joined in with them you know. And they just ran in.

David Yellin- Reverend now could you now that you have gotten the details and it is clear and very expert we will make you a reporter if you ever lose your job, could you recall when you say you were angry.

Ralph Jackson- Oh yeah I will come back to that, I will come back to that.

David Yellin- Ok.

Ralph Jackson- That is one of my favorite expressions concerning this. So we were discussing the time element and what this thing was going to do. It already had traffic all downtown, busses all out of line and we were almost down to Goldsmith's and peoples were still spreading out all the way back up the street all the way up that way. And so they sprayed this stuff on us and I have stated this and I think you will find a quote that I made the first night that I spoke on this that I was reared in Birmingham Alabama, born and reared in Birmingham Alabama. All of my ministry and work has been in the south, so I have 30 years of discipline as a Christian, as a Christian minister, more than 30 years as a Christian, but 30 years discipline as a Christian minister. I have the natural discipline that comes to a black that has been born in the south and has made any type of attainment and stayed in the south. This is a natural discipline that we have. I have been an administrator for the church in the hierocracy of the church for nearly 20 years which represent another type of discipline and I have said all of this discipline of 30 years was lost in that moment. That moment when I was maced. Now this happened because I have always prided

myself coming from Birmingham and living in the midst of racism and all, the only encounter I have ever had with a policeman were a ticket and those tickets were either from an accident or from irregular parking. I doubt very seriously as I have ever received as many as 5 tickets in my life for speeding. And so I consider this type of discipline that I had come up and kept me fairly well, a disciplined person. All of it lost because I saw this for what it was. This was done to me for one reason and that is because I was black, no other reason. Just 6 weeks before it happened when we built this building the mayor came to dedication of this building and stated that the city of Memphis was proud of the type of leadership that I was giving to Memphis and leading our people in this type of work and building this type of building what a contribution it would make. The housing development that we are putting out on Allison Rd. all this kind of stuff.

David Yellin- Now this was Lobe that was here?

Ralph Jackson- Oh yes Lobe was here I have his picture speaking here.

David Yellin- Do you have the tape?

Ralph Jackson- I don't have the tape but I have a picture of him speaking, I can write down what he said. But this is just the (muffled) type because the 7 members of the council were here, 9 of the bishops of the church were here, 300 high churchmen from all over the nation was here to dedicate this building...

David Yellin- And just off the record can you tell what this building is?

Ralph Jackson- Yeah, this is the home office of the department of minimum salary for the (muffled) church. The department of minimum salary has the responsibility of subsidizing the salaries of underpaid preachers. When their congregation cannot pay that preacher a minimum of \$3,000 a year then this department brings him a check which brings him up so that no minister of our church who qualifies makes less than \$3,000 a year.

David Yellin- And you are executive director?

Ralph Jackson- I am the executive director of that department. We also have the responsibility in stewardship education, tied in with the fact that along with subsidizing the salary of this minister also this congregation must be trained to come into self help. So that it would no longer need this subsidy and so the two tie in together and this was the purpose...now so this happened.

Bill Thomas- One thing, how many ministers would this involve just overall this whole organization.

Ralph Jackson- You mean here?

Bill Thomas- Yeah.

Ralph Jackson- With the minimum salary department? Over 6,000. We have over 6,000 ministers and I subsidize a little over a thousand ministers from this office.

David Yellin- You mean over a thousand ministers don't make the minimum salary?

Ralph Jackson- o not make the minimum salary. Now so this is the problem, alright then the next thing is before we could hardly get tot eh Mason Temple, after they maced us and we all broke up then everybody, I decided then to go on to Mason Temple. The radio, the television began to carry the news item, which they said that the police had to break it up because they were stoned, that they were stoned. Well everybody know that Memphis is not the cleanest city in the world, but it doesn't have stones in the middle of Main St. See. The second statement that came was that we began breaking out windows all up and down Main St. But this provoked us to no turn. And so then we saw again, that here again you have the bias reporting that exists in Memphis. You have the newspapers carrying the story and the type of thing here which creates for racism. So it was at that meeting we decided that we would not take this lying down, we would call the black community, make the black community aware of it and we would give support to the sanitation workers.

David Yellin- now we being the black ministers?

Ralph Jackson- This is the people that were there, the black ministers and everybody else who was there at that time because when this thing began to hear doctors, lawyers several of them made their way to Mason Temple to find out what was happening.

Bill Thomas- Did they come individually, for instance did you come back alone or did you make your way back here alone?

Ralph Jackson- Oh yes I came on from, yes, I cam on down from Beale and came on here. Champa who was thrown down and maced all down the street also was passing out here and I invited him to come in and wash his face and took him in my car to Mason Temple, so I walked this far and I drove from here to Mason Temple. Well then all the ministers went to their pulpits, first we sent out telegrams calling the ministers to meet Saturday and that is when it was decided that we would band ourselves together and we would have a general mass meeting here at he Clayborne Temple her on Monday night. So this is the beginning of, now let's cut that for a minute and let me relax (Tape break)

Anne Trotter- Would they have any pictures of the paper of any broken windows?

Ralph Jackson- There was no pictures because there were no broken windows, this is the beginning of the boycott, this is why we had the boycott on the papers because you could not rally the community if they were going to read the lies being printed in the paper and the type of editorials and things that was being carried and so this is why it will continue to be necessary from time to time when we start campaign unless we can get fair reporting in the newspaper then this is the only way, you can't

rally people that are reading lies, unless you can point out to these people these lies involved.

Anne Trotter- Did you ever go down to talk to anybody down at the Commercial Appeal, has this ever been tried?

Ralph Jackson- Oh this has been done several times.

David Yellin- By whom can you recall?

Ralph Jackson- No I wouldn't attempt to name the group but this, we did not have time for that then because we had a campaign and so we didn't....when you have this type of racism as has been carried forth in the newspapers even for the last two years. The way Dr. King has been presented and any other method.

Bill Thomas- May I work in a question here. You said that you had gone down and you agreed to lend your name and then you went down and the walk back was in a picnic type atmosphere which indicates that up to that point you had kind of considered this maybe a labor issue, but then after the meeting the ministers decided...

Ralph Jackson- This is what I am trying to point out we were not that particularly interested in helping the labor union, my interest was to provide food for these workers the union would fight out their own battle until this happened and then when this happened and we met this is when we began to get the story behind the union you see and how this is the type of treatment that blacks is going to receive they are receiving this type of treatment because they are black even the sanitation workers. When the city fathers had promised to give us a government of progress can walk in and say this is in the hands of the mayor and virtually go to the devil behind this. We are not going to hear you, we are not going to leave the microphones up and now you all get up and get the hell out of the auditorium. You see this is the problem, this is the thing that provokes and bring on the real picture of racism. Which is involved in the (muffled). So after we had this meeting then we got prepared for the mass meeting on Monday night and the ministers would meet the next day I believe this is in sequence that next Tuesday. And at this meeting it was decided that before we went any further that maybe we should talk to the mayor.

David Yellin- This meeting being Saturday?

Ralph Jackson- No this is probably Tuesday. After the first mass meeting. And then that next Tuesday I believe I might be a little off on these days in the sequence but I think this was Tuesday. So they sent for the mayor, first they sent for the commissioner, and he came down and we came down.

David Yellin- which commissioner?

Ralph Jackson- Commissioner Holloman the police commissioner and we were discussing what happened and the car pushing over to the side and we talked with commissioner Holloman and I told him about being maced and what happened and what we saw. And he seemed at that time very much interested and trying to see that such things did not happen. But our contention here is that the only way we can be satisfied is to put this thing where it belong. And my statement to him was that I could not be satisfied with anything in this office until the policemen that provoked this thing who was driving that car, who provoked the incident was brought up before his department and the community and the blame has been rightfully placed in the community, not that we were irresponsible and lawbreaking windows and throwing rocks which were lies but this thing was provoked by some slap happy policemen. This has never been done and I will never accept anything from them for I am concerned until you can't get that type of a response from your police department we have very little right to have confidence in the type of response you can get from them. So then we sent for the mayor and we decided that building the church was too open. So they were then moved to the dining area of my building here which is a smaller building. We had anywhere from a hundred to a hundred and twenty five ministers. We talked with the mayor for an hour and a half and we pleaded with him to grant a dues check off either through the union, through any type of way. He said that it was against this principle. Our position was that as high or as low as his principles could be that the city could not be run by his principles. But by the issues that matter that came before the place here. We pointed out to him that he had to, we realized that as mayor his face should be saved and he should not be put in the position, I pointed out that another part of this discipline that I said was that I am a Methodist. I am accustomed to realizing that the bishop must come out in a good light.

Bill Thomas- I am a Methodist too I get you right down the line.

Ralph Jackson- Yeah, that he should come out in a good light and we asked him to put it upon the preachers, the black preachers. Say Mr. Mayor that I don't believe this is best for them, I feel that they shouldn't have a union but if you preachers, you are their spiritual leaders, and if you feel that this will do, I will do this because of you but I want you to know now this is not what I want I am doing it because you preachers have got me here and you all are asking me for it and we want the community to move together and for this reason I will go on and grant this thing. So he said to us, well there are too many of us here, suppose 7 of you meet me at my office tonight. So we really deep in our heart really thought we were going to get somewhere. So the group decided that 7 of us would go to his office that night.

David Yellin- Can you tell the 7?

Ralph Jackson- I don't remember, I don't remember them all, I probably can get the names later.

David Yellin- Please.

Ralph Jackson- But if I attempted to name some and left out somebody it might be bad.

David Yellin- We can come back to you.

Ralph Jackson- Yes you can come back and I will give you names if you make a notation as this is one of the things I am supposed to do for you. We went, several of us in the first place when we got there he had a reporter. And we objected to a reporter being in the room. He proceeded to give us a lecture on the reporter and the news, which I resented. I told him he was talking down to us and he was attempted to set us up as being opposed to the press and by the time we got out of the meeting the press would have a story on the fact that the mayor had nothing to hide and this type of stuff and if this is what they wanted then we would leave. And of course he reluctantly he asked the reporter to leave and then he began to talk to us about budget figures. We will try, again we told him we are not interested in budget figures, that the city paid people to sit down and deal with the figures, and budget and we were not interested in that. The only thing we were interested in was that these men had a right to be recognized and that we pointed out to him that these men spoke of a union and when we spoke of a union we were not talking of Champa, Worth, or the officials. These men talked about, and when we talked about union was there indispensable right to organize for what they felt would do and serve to the best interest of their family. When they spoke of dues check off it was not a matter to us of putting money into the (muffled) or the treasury of the union but that personally I have an arrangement with my bank where every month they automatically pay a certain amount of the money that I deposit for a retirement fund, for myself and a guaranteed insurance for my wife and children including educational policy and including mortgage, I went through all of this. I said now this is what I feel that I am done with the money I want earned because this contribute to the safeguard and building of my family. These men who are on the lower end of the economic scales do not have bank accounts but if they feel that they want a certain portion of their earnings put into the union because this will help provide these things for their family they had as much right to have it as I have to have the bank to do this. This was their right and this is what we stood upon. This was known that he was elected mayor not to serve as a great white father for 1,300 black men, it was not his place to decide whether this was good for them or whether this was the best thing for them, if it was not good for them but as men they had a right to decide this and when you take that away from them you take away from them their fundamental manhood and this was the principle upon which we argued for the dues check off and we argued for the recognition of the union because with those men when you say recognition that means we are begin recognized. This is why they wore the sign I am a man. When we were told that mayor Lobe has a good heart and mayor lobe will give you the shirt off of his back the answer come back quick we don't want the shirt off his back we want a job and money where we can buy our own shirt and this is the fundamental thing that tied and wrapped the community. And this is where the moral issue came in on this whole thing.

David Yellin- Now these are the words that you said to him?

Ralph Jackson- Oh yes. This is near as I can recall. And this was the plead we made with him, that the dues check off was a indispensable right of these men. Alright he started out on the fact that this was a illegal strike. Which I question and which the city has never proven. You have no statute, you have an injunction, an injunction which certain mean were assigned in contempt of court. Which has never followed the due process of appeal and until it is appealed to the supreme court we have as much right to say that it is not against the law as he has to say that it is against the law as long as you are following due process of appeal. He knows this, and this was our position on the thing so we got nowhere with the mayor.

David Yellin- How long did you spend with him?

Ralph Jackson- I would easily say, if I can remember now a little over an hour.

Bill Thomas- One thing you mentioned he objected to the dues check off thing on some thing he called principle, did he clarify what he meant by that did you ever understand what the, I am unclear on what in the world the principle...

Ralph Jackson- I have never been able to clarify what he said it was just a matter of principle with him. I think he went back to probably he could tell you if you go on and interview him but as near as I can remember he went on to say something or another about the right of the public employees.

David Yellin- Yes the legality of the strike that was the thing.

Ralph Jackson- Maybe that is what it was,.

David Yellin- As far as we can tell, but we will put that question to him.

Ralph Jackson- Yeah because I, but this is what he kept on saying about his principle and what had not been done for 50 years in Memphis. 50 years of course....

David Yellin- It was to his principle of talking to what he considered illegal people and what he considered referencing an illegal situation.

Ralph Jackson- That may be it but I am not sure what it was, but whatever our position was that the, I think yes probably type of recognition because these people were out on strike and our contention is that we will not ask them to back off strike until we had some kind of promise, put it in writing. Now a letter or some kind of promise because to ask these people to go back or to go off of the strike and then not be bale to sustain them with any better things, well they had in these things, we would not do that. We and our next position was all through the strike, after the organization of he community on the move for equality. My position as a member of the negotiating team and my position as raising nearly \$200,000 for the support of these sanitation workers. My position all the way through was that we had no decision at all to make. These men made their own decision. The only thing we could do is to say we support your decision or withdraw our support whenever we felt we

could no longer support their position. These men had made a decision that they wanted a union this was, this was not open for discussion.

David Yellin- Reverend did the mayor ever asked you in this conversation to ask the men to go back to work?

Ralph Jackson- Oh yes, that was his, he was stating that if the men went back to work.

David Yellin- He made that a condition.

Ralph Jackson- All the time that this was illegal that if the men went back to work something this that and the other but nothing ever definite, not in proposition the men go back to work and we will give you thus, thus, thus, thus. Never any type of proposition like that but the proposition at this time and the time we are talking down here you see at the beginning. I have not been involved more than 4 days yet. And so this time when we were talking with him, oh by the way I can see why you said you will glad to be here two hours.

David Yellin- I made a mistake.

Ralph Jackson- Yes because we could be here 4 days but I am going to come up...well anyway we didn't get anywhere with that.

Bill Thomas- You (muffled).

David Yellin- The reverend and I were discussing he couldn't see when I insisted that it might be two hours, he didn't figure that...

Ralph Jackson- I didn't know nothing that we would be talking about for two hours.

Bill Thomas- He is only 4 days into it.

David Yellin- Yes and he is only 4 days into it.

Ralph Jackson- Alright so the cut again. (tape break)

Ralph Jackson- I don't remember what I was talking about.

Anne Trotter- The meeting at Lobe's.

Ralph Jackson- Oh yeah, alright then we called the boycott on all of the downtown merchants. The purpose behind the boycott was very simple, Lobe would not listen to us but he would listen to eh merchants. We ah dint he community, in the black community we had two things one of two things we can do. We can go out on a destruction of violence program or it can attempt to use its economic power together. We chose the one, the economic boycott, against the merchants downtown and other stores and against the newspapers because of their biased ways of writing and reporting what was happening . We had our nightly meetings with the

sanitation workers and the community. Now we called a boycott against all Lobe enterprises and we were told that these enterprises were owned by Lobe's brother and they did not get along well, so that they did not change the fact that they got along well, they would get along worse at that time.

Anne Trotter- That was the nicest stroke of all.

Ralph Jackson- And that he too along with the pressure would do so.

David Yellin- Now excuse me you say we, what organization.

Ralph Jackson- Well whenever I say we I am talking about my relationship with the community on the move for equality.

David Yellin- Now when was that officially organized?

Ralph Jackson- Probably before we held our first mass meeting, I think we held a strategy meeting here, this is the Monday after we met on Saturday to plan for that Monday night mass meeting.

Bill Thomas- The weekend following the macing.

Ralph Jackson- That is right, we met that Monday and decided this would be the name we would call it COME, the community on the move for equality taken from the scripture in Isaiah where it says come now and let us reason together. And We this is how the idea came. And this is where it was also decided that I would be the principle speaker at this meeting.

David Yellin- The Monday night meeting.

Ralph Jackson- I would be the principle speaker in the Monday night meeting, but this was in Monday in the daytime that this was decided. So most of the time when I said we I was talking about the group.

David Yellin- Do you have a copy of your speech that night?

Ralph Jackson- No it was (muffled) I don't have a copy of any speech. Because everything, this was at that time that we called on the community to back us in this effort and at the time we made it clear that we would go to jail, whatever was necessary but that we wouldn't be intimidated and not treated by the macing. We also pointed out that we were not organizing just to support the sanitation workers we were organizing for justice and jobs our first effort would be justice for the sanitation workers, but after then the community would continue to work to erase all types of racism within this community and continue move for full justice in all that relates to blacks in all status or places and for a fair percentage of the jobs in the community which represent 40

Bill Thomas- of a community.

David Yellin- Can you indicate what the reaction among you people were, were any against this, did any feel that the boycott was too strong?

Ralph Jackson- No.

David Yellin- Was it unanimous?

Ralph Jackson- Nobody guessed it we had no descending voices and I was in attendance and even when the opposition of the power structure tried to move in among the black community to get somebody else out and come and lead they couldn't get nobody>Every where they went they were constantly told we had people constantly coming to us telling us that how they had been in contact with other preachers and things like that and they told them that they were supporters. This was a near a complete movement as a black community and behind a group as you have been able to find anywhere because we did not have any descendents at least coming through us. If there were any they were out there somewhere else and never came to our meeting.

David Yellin- You say that some of the black people were approached by other people who were the other people the whiter establishment?

Ralph Jackson- Yes. Some of the, even some of the councilmen. I think of one reverend (muffled) I don't remember his name but he came. Any number of people who had ordinarily have been what you might call the real conservative leaders in the black community were actively supporting this. You name them and they were here, because this thing wrapped up everybody here because really of the racist tone that was given to it and so we went from place to place with our meeting and we formed our marches everyday. This was not a sanitation march, this was he minister's march. The sanitation workers were on the court injunction as a union to march but as individuals hey could follow the ministers in the march. And so to make sure we kept them some ministers were at the head of the march everyday because this was the minister's march in support of the sanitation workers and we kept this and we marched and we tried to obey all the laws and we went continuously before the council. Now back before the council this is unfortunate that the council so soon advocated (muffled) for respect of this community. Either form black or white who want to be fair, that this kind of suggestion did not measure up to his responsibility. Our plea to them went on deaf ears. Their main interest was that the blacks must not beat the mayor the mayor must be upheld and all this kind of turn a rot. And any effort to talk with them even those who attempted to try to move to what might be a fair or equitable upon behalf of dealing with the council was blocked by others by a majority vote that was there. So much time was wasted but every week we would go into the council in an effort to try to get the council to dissolve this matter which they refused to do. The newspaper had such a blackout on news on this situation that when you would go to places as close as Nashville, what was going on in Memphis in the strike s on the back page of the paper and most of the time it represented a 3 inch story in a single column. As I traveled in other places like Washington and places like that they didn't even know that a strike

was going on down here, that it was just a completely shutdown the news. So the strategy committee decided that if we were going to do anything we had to bring some pressure. We were not inclined to say to these sanitation workers that they should turn to violence to beat these men of the trucks. In other places except in Memphis almost, some other place in the south where you will have a group of people as disciplined as this group was where the ministers were meeting with them daily as the labor called and was continually saying to them that they must not turn to violence. The mayor was continually bringing in scabs and putting them on the truck anywhere except in a place where the ministers, a religious atmosphere dominated the whole black community and this affair here certainly would have turned to this type of thing. But so, avoiding that type of an encounter we decided that we had to do some thing to get somebody in here that would get some national attention and would point of Memphis for what it really is and would point out mayor Lobe for the type of racist that he exists. Now I will call your further attention to our, when I came to Memphis and this was part of one of my speeches. When I came to Memphis I believe it was some time around, in maybe it was 56 I believe when I first came back here. We were getting ready for a city election somewhere around that time the year may be, may not be exactly 56 but somewhere around that time and the slogan for the team of commissioners was keep Memphis down in Dixie. Lobe came back after that time, the one time running on the slogan keep Memphis down and Dixie, he resigned at the time when the civil rights schools was having to open and business, eh was out all of that time and then after running one time on a slogan of keep Memphis down and Dixie, he comes back again and says I don't want none of the black votes and run on a slogan be proud again. So we put this two slogans together. Be proud again and I will carry you back down to Dixie and we will be damned if we will go and just that clear all along. This is what we said to the black community and this is what we are saying today, we will not go and Lobe cannot carry Memphis back there. Wallis cannot carry the nation back there and if Lobe has any such intention of swinging Memphis into that type of a camp he is going to wake up either from a strong vote enforced against him or he is going to work up by the sirens of the fire hydrants and everything else. You cannot carry these black folks back there. And we cannot hold them. We cannot stop the situation that is going on today over at Carver and this is just he beginning and unless Memphis wakes up and of course I am all for you stories now, but this is what you face. And this is what this community must become aware of and that they must face with Lobe.

David Yellin- Reverend during the time now, can you say that what you have just said was said then?

Ralph Jackson- Oh yes.

David Yellin- This into a new...

Ralph Jackson- Everything except the part about Carver School was part of my speech at that time and the part of the plea that we tried to make. So we brought in, we began to bring in some outside force. For the main purpose of getting news

coverage because we couldn't get any, we knew that when the president of the NAACP came this would bring us news coverage. When Bayard Ruston came this would bring us news coverage and we knew that when Martin Luther King came this would bring it, Now when Martin Luther King came to town the Precimeter or the Commercial Appeal I forgot which one it was, had their article on about what a shame it was that Martin Luther King was coming down here to Memphis. Here to see him was the internal affairs down into here you see. And the chamber of commerce also present made the statement about this type of statement and nowhere at no time did either the commercial appeal nor the president of the chamber of commerce open their mouths and said that these black people ought to be given justice. Dan Kirkendahl entered into the records a most damnable statement about Martin Luther King that can be issued. The newspapers played up all this type of thing to my way of thinking that the murder of Martin Luther King is as much of the responsibilities of racist newspapers that carried the type of stories about him and built up the hatred in the community as was built up in this community and as exists now in the city of Memphis between the certain forces in the white community and certain forces in the black community. This come from the responsibility of the white newspaper controlled by one folk under two a monopoly. On the news in this area and they are responsible. The same newspaper and the same folk that was calling me a responsible citizen in January when we built this building was calling me an irresponsible person because I supported the sanitation workers. This was the type of thing and the effort to (muffled) Lawson as a commoner and Ruston and all of this type of stuff when everything was not going the way they want even to the student uprising in Carver, some kind of way here in Memphis communists have been able to infiltrate Memphis in the last two or three weeks and get over the leadership in a few students over there that don't like the fact that they are having to run a split shift with high school children over at Carver school today. (muffled) student having to be on a split shift had been going on for three years and the board of education has done nothing about it and when the kids break out the windows and say we are really going to come to school someday and there isn't going to be any school left, they come up and talk about what a wonderful thing but they never have one time ever said to the white community then while your children are over here in the 24 and the 25 in a class, they got 45 over there in the black schools in a split shift and they don't even know it. They sit down and say what are they disturbed about that is a shame they ought to be just happy they got such a good place here in Memphis. And the papers are responsible for that.

Anne Trotter- Same thing is true in feeding the children.

Ralph Jackson- \_Oh yes.

David Yellin- Can I ask you some thing about the contacting of Martin Luther King. Do you recall how that came about was there a letter involved in that?

Ralph Jackson- Several telephone calls, all kinds of pressure was used because King was busy and everybody that knew him, and everybody that he owed any kind of a favor all of us called. We had called everybody that we could call, everybody I knew

that had any pressure, the King was suppose to have come before Ruston and the others and because King's schedule was so busy he could not come, we were doing these other things. But this was the purpose the plea and a tremendous sacrifice on King to leave his program and to come in at that time.

Bill Thomas- Do you recall reverend when the idea fist came up to invite Dr. King here and who came up with it?

Ralph Jackson- No I would not want to say who did it because at that time you see, at that time we were to the place where we had some of us had decided that if Lobe succeeded at this the black community would no longer be an entity of a part, and we were prepared to bring King, Stokely Carmichael, Ratt Brown, anybody, we were, this is how far we had gone. We had decided that this was a death struggle for the black people of Memphis and that we had to bring sufficient pressure and we had to bring pressure on the image of Memphis. To the extent that the chamber of commerce would realize that no new industry was coming into a place where you had a racial problem or a union problem. And this is the thing that we had to do and we had to bring the people in that would focus attention of Memphis of the world on Memphis and what we were undergoing. We had at this time no ministers would even talk with us, the white ministers sent a message to us, to the black ministers that if we would invite them they would come and discuss this matter. Not let us get together but if we would invite them so we invited them. The next they wanted to have an agenda set up and so before we could arrive at what the agenda would be they decided that they did not want to come and so the white ministers were afraid to even meet with us because of the pressure involved. Now there are some white ministers as an exception and I am sure you know their names and they can give you those names that began to meet.

David Yellin- Go ahead.

Ralph Jackson- You also know of the meeting we held at the Episcopal church.

Anne Trotter- Yes, Dean Demmick.

Ralph Jackson- Yes, and call over there the effort on the part of some at that meeting to talk about long range programming because there was nothing before us but support of the sanitation workers and if they didn't come prepared to support that then we had nothing, we had no place for any dialogue. Don't even talk about what we are going to do in Memphis 5 years from now, when you got these sanitation workers strike. At that time someone suggested that we should leave at that moment. And go down to see the mayor, there were others that felt we should wait and come back that Saturday and go to see him or that Friday one. And of course I believe it was that Friday we were to come back and go to see him and King was killed that Saturday night. Now after King was killed we had a real large number to go. I am not in a position to say how many would have been there to go that Friday. Had King not been killed but the ministers to leave their church and to go in a body down to meet with the mayor had been planned before King was killed and I think

this should be understood. We had many who said they would not go. And we had many that said they would go, but we had a tremendous number to go.

David Yellin- They were going to go and relation to settlement of the strike.

Ralph Jackson- Yeah that is right and of course they went down and that time.

David Yellin- Can we just get back and see if you can any memory, what was Dr. King's reaction to the request to come here? Did he think it was a good idea, did he want to know more, can you recall that?

Ralph Jackson- No, I imagine, I would suggest that you talk with Jim Lawson and Kyles. I believe that I would be safe in saying that they probably did more communicating, actually talking with King than anyone else and they could probably give you that. We had reports but I would not attempt to say it was in the report because where you can get a more direct answer I think that is the better place.

Bill Thomas- Was it understood what king's mission here would be?

Ralph Jackson- Oh yes al of these fellows came to give support to he black community in their effort to support the sanitation workers.

Bill Thomas- But this would mainly be a one night appearance?

Ralph Jackson- Oh yes, he was coming one night. And of course you know there was a crowd that night.

Bill Thomas- Yes I was there in fact, I wondering....

Ralph Jackson- Did you all get tape of his address?

David Yellin- Well I believe we might.

Bill Thomas- One exists I understand.

Ralph Jackson- I don't, I am looking for one, for the use of one. WDIA we tried, I understood that WDIA does not have one, so you know who has one?

Bill Thomas- No I know that one exists because I was in Atlanta and I heard one down there, so I know one is in existence.

Ralph Jackson- Would that be with SCLC?

Bill Thomas- It could be and maybe that they had loaned that tape to the radio stations I don't know. Because I heard it on the radio station in Atlanta.

Ralph Jackson- Which one are you referring to? The last night he spoke in Memphis.

Joe Lowe- it is available and I think you can, (muffled) I know definitely NBC has it.

David Yellin- You mean April 3<sup>rd</sup> that Wednesday night?

Ralph Jackson- No.

Joe Lowe- April 3<sup>rd</sup>...

Ralph Jackson- No I am talking about the night that when he spoke when we decided we were going to have...

Bill Thomas- The first week.

(muffled) David Yellin- March 18<sup>th</sup>, yes I remember hearing that.

Ralph Jackson- You know this is the one where he says that if mayor Lobe and the city councilmen will not hear us we may have to escalate we may have to have a big march. This is the one.

Bill Thomas- And he suggested the one day work stoppage.

Ralph Jackson- That is right. This is the one that...

David Yellin- well we are in search for that and if we do find it we will sure get it to you.

Ralph Jackson- I would need that in the next week if I could get my hands on it.

Bill Thomas- Was his statement at that point the proposal of a work stoppage and that he would come back and lead a march, did that come as a surprise to you all?

Ralph Jackson- No it did not come as a surprise because you see we knew King and the thing we are doing here was nothing but the thing that was most on his heart and we have been a part of the movement and we understand what the heck to do with escalation and we knew King knew when he came that we had hope that when Mayor Lobe and the council find out that we were going to bring in outside forces that this would have called the community to say let us stop this thing. Because we have felt that we have asked that our demands were minor. The financial matter is almost a joke. And this thing could have been stopped, any number of good stopping places you see and we also knew that when if they did not come, once King came his prestige was also involved and so we, we had no idea however that first day that the march was going to break up...I certainly do not say in the rioting because the windows were breaking and what they did down there was nuts. The newspaper report and even the police report that they stopped the march, is a tale or a lie whatever you want to call it, we stopped it. We stopped it because there were not very many policemen along Beale St. at first but there were a lot on Main St. And when we were at the head of the march and it began to break glass near Main St. Just as we turned the corner and they came and broke glass beyond there we stopped before we got to Perl and Loewenstein's we stopped and it was decided then that we should turn around and that Dr. King should leave. And when we said turn around we will go back to the church, there were some folk that was coming in from the streets and they started hollering no., no no we are not going to turn around. Our position was that you go ahead on but the group that is following us go back. So we

left and began to turn the people back and I went down Main St. that would be going South on Main St. (Tape End)