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David Yellin- This is June 27th 1968, we are at our offices and this is David Yellin and I will be joined later by Carolyn Yellin and we are talking to Charles Holmes, public information officer at Memphis state university who as we will hear had other assignments. (Tape Break)

Carolyn Yellin- I am going to leave this door open I am going to be in and out Gerry won't be in until 10 or 11 unless Judy....

David Yellin- Ok we will start ok Charlie first I would like to ask you about the relationship of Memphis state to the situation after the riot on that March 28th pr was there anything in any way was Memphis state or Memphis state students involved with any of the situation, the strike and the riot and any action there after?

Charles Holmes- Alright Dave, the university has of course been concerned with the situation in that some students ranged up to 100 or more at times took part in demonstrations usually once a week for a period of several weeks in support of the strike. The bulk of these students were negro students who had become associated with the social aspects as well as the economic aspects of this situation and issue.

David Yellin- Do you recall the dates? Do you have any information of the dates of marches that were held on campus, is that?

Charles Holmes- They were on campus yes and they usually took place at mid day and often on Wednesday or Friday during roughly the two months previous to the assassination of Dr. King. This was on April 4th I believe.

David Yellin- Yes so during late February and into March?

Charles Holmes- Right, the issue was presented in the newspapers and the media and the urgency grew and the stalemate and the standoff between the union officials and the city government became more apparent. That is when the demonstrations took place.

David Yellin- Did the university ever offer an official stand or did they ever issue an official point of view about the relationship with the university administration and/or students and what was happening in the city?

Charles Holmes- No there was never a definite statement issued, but there was a position taken of course was when the student demonstrations were allowed it was allowed well it was decided at that time that they were within the process of the role of the university for self expression of the students.

David Yellin- Were there any restrictions ever on the kind of, on the demonstrations.

Charles Holmes- Well to the best of my knowledge they were not, they were kept under scrutiny of the university dean of students staff and security office just as a

safe guard in case there might have been some conflict to arise and the confrontation between the two factions.

David Yellin- Were they pretty well kept, were the demonstrations pretty well orderly?

Charles Holmes- They were orderly, they consisted primarily generally of originating in the student center, forming out on the patio for a march and marching around various portions of campus, generally around the administration building back through the cafeteria through the student center and back onto the patio usually for a short speaking rally. This usually took place during the noon hour when a lot of students schedule a free hour for lunch.

Carolyn Yellin- Were any faculty members involved in the demonstrations or in this general area of activity?

Charles Holmes- I personally saw some faculty members marching with the marchers. Oh it ranged at the various different times that I saw these faculty members from 3 or 4 to at least as many as 10.

Carolyn Yellin- Did they participate in the speaking at any time that you remember or was it mostly student led or originating.

Charles Holmes- It was mostly student. It was a student organization and a student march the primary speakers were always students as best I recall. I do remember on at least one occasion a faculty member speaking.

David Yellin- Charlie in your experience in the university which goes back other than being a student, several years...

Charles Holmes- It goes back 1953.

David Yellin- Right, do you recall any other situation in which there were student rallies or marches or protests of this kind or of this nature, or of this magnitude?

Charles Holmes- Well you can't compare I don't think with this. The one that comes to mind was the demonstrations of the small group of students usually 5 or 6 that evolved from the distribution of an off campus publication known as Logos. And these students did not have an organized demonstration and they did not provide a march they merely distributed copies of this mimeographed publication in the student center and on the patio. It was organized to a point that they generally tried to publicize far enough in advance what time they were going to distribute these publications but they didn't have an organized goal they were after on each appearance.

David Yellin- In other words to get the historical perspective on this, this in the history of Memphis State in reality was the first sort of student demonstration would you say?

Charles Holmes- On campus., we also had, it was 3 years ago now we had a series of picketing movements of one restaurant in the neighborhood, it was not on campus it was two blocks away on high land, the Norma T. Room, which refused to serve negroes at that time. An integrated group of students integrated both racially and from campuses. They were students from Southwest and Lemoyne, various other schools in the city that took part in this picketing. They picketed the Tea Room and their staging area was the Newman Club catholic youth center just off campus. So this was a student demonstration but it was off campus.

David Yellin- So the ones we are talking about now in relation to the strike, you would say, if you would say that they were the first or how would you classify them or typify them?

Charles Holmes- I think possibly I would classify them as the first major organized demonstrations on campus to support a cause in a continuing manner.

David Yellin- Right, very good.,

Carolyn Yellin- I wanted to ask one other thing you brought up the Logos thing and I not really having been as involved at that time I don't recall all the details. But as I recall there was a good deal of student reaction to the group publishing the Logos newspaper. Would it be fair to say that was sort of like an underground newspaper in the currency of the day.

Charles Holmes- It would in broad terms. I think the primary conflict came in that the views and the students that the views that were presented in Logos were generally very liberal and allegedly leftist in some areas. They primarily in each issue (muffled) in the general areas of anti administration, anti authority, anti Vietnam war and pro black power.

Carolyn Yellin- Was that I didn't..

Charles Holmes- It was..

Carolyn Yellin- My next question was going to be was there any racial issue involved in this.

Charles Holmes- And of course they didn't follow any cause but they wrote in these areas. Now the Memphis state campus has been traditionally a conservative campus. The primary point of conflict that arose between the publishers and the distributors of this publication and the student body in mass that Memphis state seemed to be on the point of the opposition to the Vietnam War. Might point out that the war had not received the amount of criticism and exposure that it has now. I don't know if the same situation or the same point would cause the conflict today.

David Yellin- That is interesting.

Charles Holmes- That is my opinion of course.

Carolyn Yellin- I wanted to follow through on this that the student reaction to these larger demonstrations which obviously involved a larger number of students, the logos was just a small group of students but quite a reaction, how would you compare the reaction to these demonstrations. Was it as strong as it was the reaction to the Logos demonstration, or the logos newspapers.

Charles Holmes- Logos, the boys, they were boys that published it their appearance at that time contributed a great deal to the animosities I believe for they had the beards the sandals the tattered clothing with what is generally associated now with the hippie movement but the hippie movement was only a fledgling at that time.

Carolyn Yellin- They were Beatniks I think, they were calling them then.

Charles Holmes- In appearance they would be classified as Beatniks. One had a striking features the leader had very striking features, heavy black beard heavy black hair, and he was the spokesman for the group. This seemed to contribute to the conflict and the amount of animosity, I did not personally perceive any mass animosity towards the students who demonstrated this spring in support of the striking sanitation workers. There was some individual cases some calling back and forth to the speakers and so forth but you will have this with any type of student talk whereas with the logos group there seemed to be a crowd reaction to these which resulted in probably our most serious student unrest problem which we ever had here. Was on one of the final issues of logos when several hundred students possibly as many as 800 gathered around the well publicized distribution point of logos on the patio and wound up in such a hostile mood that the campus police had to escort had to surround the distributors of logos and escort them off of campus and there was on Patterson some scattered fist fights as the distributors of logos ran for sanctuary of the Newman Club.

David Yellin- I think how would you account for the shall we say the receptivity of the demonstration in this past spring in the strike among the students at Memphis state?

Charles Holmes- How it was received here?

David Yellin- Yes.

Charles Holmes- Well let me back up I want to make one point too that on the Logos situation it should be pointed out that it was fairly surprising to me that the leaders of the campus organizations, I sat in on a meeting of these there was 50 or 60 leaders of various organizations fraternities clubs, professional organizations. At which this distribution came up and was discussed and the majority of these people disagreed with the information that was distributed in logos but they defended the rights of the students to distribute it. Now will you rephrase that question again please.

David Yellin- This spring as you said they were received they went around and there was not much certainly no physical opposition and just we might call collegiate,

local not even opposition. How do you account for this, in a way change even though there is not a parallel about the intensity and the involvement of....

Carolyn Yellin- Or even the issues, I wonder if the difference in issues.

David Yellin- Well I think the difference of issues are important and maybe that accounts for it.

Charles Holmes- I don't think we can say that these were similar issues and I believe that the reception of the demonstrations this spring reflected the changing social attitudes that had been wrought during three years.

David Yellin- And that is therefore we have to spell it out and say that the, that this was essentially a racial issue.

Charles Holmes- It was presented on campus as such, as a social racial issue.

David Yellin- And so the climate of Memphis state this past Spring then was a little bit more receptive to the social racial issue and recognized it as such and allowed it to express itself without too much opposition.

Charles Holmes- I think that it was much more receptive this spring than it would have been 3 years previously, although I can't say that the Logos issue can be compared to this issue. But I think that is a very valid and true point.

David Yellin- In other words then if this had happened 3 years ago there might not have been this kind of acceptance among white students at Memphis state.

Carolyn Yellin- I even have one other question because I do think this is quite interesting about student attitude. I wonder even three years ago had the Logos thing not involved the Vietnam war had it involved only something whether true or not was considered by all the students as a racial issue do you think had it been a black student publication even three years ago do you think there would have been less opposition to that or the Vietnam involvement, these are hard questions and we realize we are asking opinion not official statements.

Charles Holmes- Conducted as it was I think that if Logos had reported or commented simply on race, whether it be integration or whatever worth while portion, the issue. It would have received a similar treatment. I think it was the presentation,. I think it was the deliberate, well I interpreted it as a deliberate action by the students who presented Logos to provoke reaction from the masses of students and I think whatever issue they would have harmed the cause that they tried to...

Carolyn Yellin- In some ways it perhaps is analogous to the presentation of the union issues at a city level we have encountered a considerable opinion that it was the way in which Mr. Champa in particular presented his issues that made it, that contributed to the insolubility of some of these issues.

Charles Holmes- That is right I think it is a changing culture here of course in the south as everywhere here in the united states but still there is enough of what used to be known as the southern way of life, for a person to be polite in his opposition a matter of gallantry, which of course was absent I the televised appearance in (muffled).

Carolyn Yellin- This whole thing you hear about today's style, the style of presentation is almost as important as the form, I mean the form is almost as important as the content.

David Yellin- Well now in relation to this your job Charlie is one of kind of, is it interpretation? How do you classify what you have to do I mean something like the logos thing or some thing like this you have to write it, you have to present a press release.

Charles Holmes- Well that is part of it of course Dave. One of the things that I was concerned with of course in the logos situation was to keep up with what the people were doing with what they were planning and try to interpret this for myself as well as offer any opinions I had on this to whatever university officials were involved in dealing with the situation. Then at the same time any news releases and I don't believe we actually prepared a single release but we may have and I have forgotten, but I don't think we prepared a single release on logos because they always well publicized themselves in advance by notifying newspapers and television that there were going to appear at such and such a time. So any information that I gave out was over the telephone, That was generally the skeleton because the university action was minimal in this situation.

David Yellin- I appreciate we told you about this present interview and indicated we were going to talk more about your position with the city officially representing it but I think this is so important as a background and to present your own experience.

Carolyn Yellin- Your baptism in fire on campus in some of these things.

Charles Holmes- We had, very shortly after I came here in July of 1962 because in that fall you will recall the riots at the university of Mississippi Oxford. At the time Dr. Humphreys issued a statement saying that any student from Memphis state who was found to be on the campus of university of Mississippi during the riot situation would be expelled from Memphis state. Whether or not he was bluffing it worked not a single Memphis state student was arrested or reported.

David Yellin- I think the interesting thing in all this however is that Memphis state students up until now have not been particularly known for their addiction to demonstrations, violence and so on wouldn't you say that?

Charles Holmes- That's true.

David Yellin- As a non professional characterization of the, non-publicized, your own personal.

Charles Holmes- Yes that is true we have a conservative and sometimes lethargic student body. I think if you have a student body that doesn't come out and support the athletic teams or take part in campus politics or take part in campus drives or that sort of thing, then you will have a student body that is not really too interested in taking part in demonstrations because the same involvement is implied here. And then again you have to recall that our university is primarily a commuter university with about 80% of our students driving to campus going to class and then going home without being involved in anything.

Carolyn Yellin- And it is rapidly growing too that is scarcely had time to gel.

Charles Holmes- Right we haven't had time to form any traditions, as a matter of fact I had query from a magazine the other day, amongst the things they asked was what traditions do you have? The only thing I could think of was a Christmas tree lighting ceremony.

David Yellin- Well the Ole Miss game I guess.

Charles Holmes- Well that was one of the things we put down but as far as traditions that are normally associated with colleges and universities we just don't have any.

David Yellin- This however is reflective of the community itself wouldn't you say, it is not to separate it from the city of Memphis.,

Charles Holmes- That's right, that's right. I suppose we should have concerned ourselves with traditions of Memphis because our students are more....

David Yellin- Because it is a commuter and all of the characterizations that you and about Memphis state would be applied to Memphis as a city?

Charles Holmes- That is true Memphis is emerging city that is still emerging.

David Yellin- Well now then with this as background can we get into your involvement with the city's situation as it is said in the law court, which this is not, can you tell it in your own words and we will rudely interrupt you when we feel necessary or politely excuse me.

Charles Holmes- Right yes Mr. Perry Mason. Just very quickly the situation evolved in Dr. King was shot about 6 pm on a Thursday night.

Carolyn Yellin- I would like to interrupt you even right there, where were you and what had you been doing that day?

Charles Holmes- Well I had worked that day at Memphis state and I was at home when having dinner when my daughter came in.

David Yellin- How old is she.

Charles Holmes- She was, she has had a birthday since she was 8 years old at the time and she was watching television in the back. She said Dr. King had been shot.

And she didn't know who Dr. King was I don't believe but maybe she picked it up from the newscast but I didn't expect her to know to much about the world going on around her. So I went back to the television and they had resumed the program. So I went back discounted her message and at least questioned it, and then she came back and said it is on the television again he has been killed. So then..

Carolyn Yellin- What program was she watching do you recall?

Charles Holmes- It was one of the evening programs.

Carolyn Yellin- Maverick, or not Maverick...

Charles Holmes- I am afraid I can't recall. So then I went back and I stood and watched until there was another interruption, a special news bulletin saying that Dr. King had been shot and was dead at the hospital. I continued to watch the news bulletins as they came in and I turned on the radio to have their news bulletins too. And a curfew was announced shortly after that by the police department I think it went into effect around 9:00. So I immediately checked with Dr. Humphreys, we still this was on a Thursday night, we still had the following week to go before our spring vacation began. So I talked to...

David Yellin- Did you call him?

Charles Holmes- Yes sir.

David Yellin- And he was at home?

Charles Holmes- Yes sir. I had to call several times because his line was busy so then I talked to Dr. Carrier who I knew would be involved in any major decisions affecting faculty and students.

David Yellin- And he is the provost?

Charles Holmes- The provost the university provost right. I learned from Dr. Carrier that some negotiations or some machinery was in motion to question certain people on the council and such about the feasibility of closing the school a week early. Dr. Humphreys immediately reacted to this I think in proper manner realizing there was going to be a great deal of serious trouble in the city as a result of this. I finally got to r. Humphreys in between his phone calls and he told me it had been approved that we were going to close school the next day as a day of mourning for Dr. King and the spring holidays would be moved up a week which meant that from that evening on the school would be closed until a week from the following Monday.

David Yellin- Until the 15th.

Charles Holmes- Right. So I immediately then started telephoning radios stations, television stations and newspapers to get the information out that Memphis state would be closed the next day. And the following week would be the spring holiday.

David Yellin- Now just to the best of your recollection and even post period can you recall how the idea to close the school came up. Originally it was Dr. Humphrey's but I don't know specifically.

David Yellin- Because we will be talking to Dr. Humphreys and he will of course talk to us about that.

Charles Holmes- The next morning, after I finished it was late, I went to bed having watched the latest news. The next morning before I went to work I called Frank Holloman's office. He was too tied up for me to talk to him because at this time there was riot situation going on in the city. There was shooting and fire bombs. And his secretary Mrs. Smith who I had known better when I worked at the commercial appeal. Took a message for me in which I asked Frank if there was anything that I could do to let me know. Within 15 minutes I had a call back from Mrs. Smith Frank Holloman says come right down we need you right away to work with the press. I then called Dr. Humphreys and told him what my situation was and we had a meeting that morning at Memphis state of some of the university officials to further discuss the ramifications of closing early. One of the things we had to do, that I had to do was to get out an announcement that was to be distributed to all administrative offices advising them of what the closing situation would be. I attended his meeting and Dr. Humphreys gave his complete cooperation and endorsement of my working with Mr. Holloman to deal with the press. I went to the police station at approximately 11:00 I think before I start talking about what I did there I think I might just give a little bit of my background that would explain my situation. Well first the reason I called was I wanted to do something, I think most people felt it he same situation.

David Yellin- Can you discuss that a little bit?

Charles Holmes- Why I wanted to do something yes, I can. Because a leader of a major movement in American history a man dedicated to peace and the recipient of the peace prize had been brutally murdered apparently assassinated in our city and I had seen other cities obtain national lasting reputations as a result of something like this that was actually probably no direct fault of their own. Dallas has a continuing reputation which they are still striving to rebuild because of Oswald's action there and (muffled) consequent action. Birmingham, in the middle of Alabama, Alabama has its own reputation. I remember when James Meredith was shot that afternoon one of the national broadcasters said that what was it Senatobia he was near? Or Hernando?

David Yellin- I think it was Hernando.

Charles Holmes- I think it was Hernando it is close enough to here anyway.

Charles Holmes- Hernando and he began his commentary by saying hernando Mississippi has joined the list of infamous American towns with Dallas and Birmingham and Meridian Mississippi etc. When the facts of this case were that Meredith was not in Hernando and the man who shot him was not from Hernando,

Hernando had nothing to do with it. But here was a man making this statement to the American people and the American people have a tendency to believe what is told them by news media. That sums up I don't, I wanted to help to make sure if I could that the news media who poured in here would present at least a fair picture of the situation in Memphis. I wanted them to know that Memphis is what it is an emerging city that is trying, At the same time...

Carolyn Yellin- That is an interesting word emerging, I think that sums up a good many of the things here and I wish you would even talk a little more about your use of that worked?

Charles Holmes- Well it is like, well it has not yet reached maturity I don't know if it ever will some cities in our country of course have grown old and decrepit.

David Yellin- Submerging.

Charles Holmes- Submerging exactly. Memphis has in the past been a great big old country town. I imagine most of the people that live in Memphis now were born in Arkansas, Mississippi or West Tennessee.

David Yellin- Where were you born Charlie?

Charles Holmes- I was born in West Tennessee, Hickory Valley. And the city is beginning to change from a rural oriented economy and social interest to one of a more cosmopolitan attitude. It is a slow thing but it is coming. We are beginning to get more interested in the arts and the finer things of life. We are beginning to respect outside attitudes that are brought in rather than resent them. We are beginning to use them and benefit by them. Industry is beginning to come in to bring more influence from other parts of the country and the world to our lives and of course then to help us financially and economically.

David Yellin- So the idea of Memphis state accepting outside students if they are going to accept outside students they must be willing also to accept their ideas.

Charles Holmes- Exactly and faculty members.

David Yellin- And faculty members.

Carolyn Yellin- And I wanted to because I think this is really most interesting you use emerging as one that was full of promise and so the danger is not only that they might misinterpret but there might, am I right in saying there might be a reaction against this I Memphis that would close off some of this promise if they felt they were unjustly criticized by the press.

Charles Holmes- Exactly criticized...(Tape End)