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Joan Beifuss- This is Joan Beifuss and Modine Thompson, we are having an interview with Gilbert Patterson, the Holy Temple Church of God in Christ, 1254 Wilson Avenue, the date is June 4<sup>th</sup>. Ok first of all elder Patterson I wonder if you would just give us a little bit of history about the founding of the church of god in Christ?

Gilbert Patterson- Well the church of god in Christ is possibly the oldest organized Pentecostal church in the united states. Our founder Bishop Mason, Bishop C.H. Mason was in Los Angeles California in the great Isuseus Street revival conducted by W.J. Seymour. He was already a Baptist minister and later on he became a sanctified preacher but they did not know of the gift of the holy ghost speaking in other tongues. So after he received the baptism of the spirit in that Isuseus Street revival in 1906 I believe, he came back to Memphis and called all of the ministers together that really believed in the Pentecostal experience of the second chapter of Acts and from this the church of god in Christ has grown to possibly 4,400 churches from early 1900's up until now.

Joan Beifuss- Now is Mason temple named after..

Gilbert Patterson- Yes Mason Temple is our national headquarters and it is named after our late founder Bishop C.H. Mason.

Joan Beifuss- How many churches of this denomination are there in Memphis?

Gilbert Patterson- In Memphis I am not certain, it is in the vicinity of about 40 or 50 churches in Memphis. This particular church Holy Temple, my father Bishop W.A. Patterson, he has pastured here for possibly 38, 39 years and I have only been here for 6 years. My father is actively pasturing now in Detroit Michigan. The New Jerusalem Church of God in Christ. I am presently at this location.

Joan Beifuss- Well now who is the bishop Patterson that is here?

Gilbert Patterson- Bishop J.O. Patterson at Pentecostal Temple. He is my father's younger brother and he is the presiding bishop of the church of god in Christ. The second jurisdiction of Tennessee, and also he is the general secretary of the international body.

Joan Beifuss- Ok now councilmen Patterson is...

Gilbert Patterson- J.O. Patterson Jr. My first cousin.

Joan Beifuss- Your first cousin, just a little confused on the Patterson's here. Ok could you tell us a little bit about did you grow up in Memphis were you born here?

Gilbert Patterson- Yes well I was born in Humboldt Tennessee, in well I was born in Humboldt Tennessee for almost a year but that is not important. My family moved to Memphis when I was 2 months old, so I didn't know anything about Humboldt

and I grew up here until 1952. In 1952 our family moved to Detroit Michigan and the very first of 1962 I decided to come back to Memphis. So I packed up and came back down here not really intending to stay.

Joan Beifuss- Well now is there seminary training for church of god in Christ? Do they have a seminary?

Gilbert Patterson- The church of god in Christ does not have a seminary., We do have a school from the 1<sup>st</sup> grade through junior college in Lexington Mississippi. As a national body we do not have a seminary. I attended the Detroit bible college in Detroit Michigan. And also after coming back to Memphis I went to Lemoyne College for a few semesters. But we don't have as a church body a seminary.

Joan Beifuss- Why did you come back to Memphis?

Gilbert Patterson- I really don't know. I was just bored. I got bored with Detroit and just thought I wanted to come back to Memphis.

Joan Beifuss- And you are not bored with Memphis?

Gilbert Patterson- I have been trying to get away the whole time I have been here I don't know how it so happens that I am yet here.

Joan Beifuss- You want to answer that? Well now perhaps, first let me ask you do you have a family here, are you married with?

Gilbert Patterson- Well yes I am married, a year and a week. Yesterday.

Joan Beifuss- Very, very good. Now what we really wanted to get into is the involvement of the black clergy during the garbage strike, the formation of COME, that whole period in through there. Now I wonder if you could tell me during the political campaign last fall when Mr. Willis was running were the ministers involved in that campaign?

Gilbert Patterson- No the ministers were not involved, there might have been an isolated few but as a whole the ministers were not involved, because although the so called black movement had swept the country, Memphis we were under false illusion in this city and we didn't really feel there was any necessity of consolidation of the black community to this extent.

Joan Beifuss- Why were you under a false illusion do you think?

Gilbert Patterson- I think that we really wanted to believe that Memphis was a city of good abode. And that the race relations were possibly tops for any city in the south.

Joan Beifuss- And did you believe that yourself?

Gilbert Patterson- I could not say that I believed it altogether but I had not idea that things were as bad as I later found out they were. The sanitation strike was just an eye opener.

Joan Beifuss- Now when did you first hear about the sanitation strike?

Gilbert Patterson- Well when I first heard about the sanitation strike it was near the end of the first week. My wife and I were vacationing in Atlanta and we were staying at the Regency. And then a television report I heard that the Memphis garbage workers were on strike. I immediately told my wife let's pack up and go home because I happened to have a member here Brother Nelson Jones who is one of the stewards, one of the shop stewards, and he has been telling me more than, well two years time about the bad conditions that existed in the sanitation department. Knowing that he and possibly two or three other members were involved I wanted to come home and see what was really going on.

Joan Beifuss- And what did you find when you came home?

Gilbert Patterson- Well when I came home I found that these men, I think I got home on that Friday night and that Saturday I went to the Firestone union hall and I saw the building just jam packed with the sanitation workers and I saw a spirit of unity such as I have never seen before. My first interest was that if these men were on strike that certainly we should do all that we could to see to it that they had basic necessities and that next day that Sunday I went on my broadcast appealing to the public for donations to be turned over to the union. To help aid these men, food and necessities and sustain them through this period, at first this was my only interest.

Joan Beifuss- And then that was the first week and then the second week of the strike?

Gilbert Patterson- When we went to city hall that Tuesday, and that was the day that all of the bread and food was brought in fact I was here at the church I was going in and out and someone had called and said that, informed me of what was going on at city hall and asked if I would come down. So I did go down because I wanted to know just how the city was going to handle the situation. Upon arriving there was a committee, a sub-committee of the city council Fred Davis, Louis Donelson, and I can't remember who the 3<sup>rd</sup> one was, but there was 3 of them on the sub-committee. They had drawn up a proposal that they would recommend to the entire city council, a form of dues deduction so that this seemed to be the major problem. The mayor said he would recognize the union but his recognition was of such nature that he wouldn't put it on paper. No signed contract, no letter of intent, he would recognize it, but he would recognize it like he had been recognizing it.

Joan Beifuss- Gentlemen's agreement.

Modine Thompson- Did you look at this as a purely labor strike in contrast to having racial overtones?

Gilbert Patterson- Well..

Modine Thompson- At that point?

Gilbert Patterson- At that point I think I thought it was more labor that racial because I felt that maybe the mayor was trying to keep down organized labor from any departments in the city. This was at that point. However, as time went on and the way the city council even dealt with it, it helped to really just create a breach between the negro community and the white community because what the council did, they said they would have this special meeting downtown in the south hall of Ellis Auditorium, the music hall. And in this meeting the sub-committee's recommendation wasn't even read, they made no reference to it what so ever. They re-affirmed that, or re-confirmed that this came under the jurisdiction of the mayor and that the city council had no authority what so ever in the matter. They called roll and one of the councilmen voted. The white councilmen voted to accept this resolution and the negro councilmen voted against it and there was one white councilmen who voted against it. That was Thomas Todd, and the reason he voted was not that he was sympathetic too the negros point of view but because it did not support the mayor strong enough. At this point they got up and with an army of policemen marched out and went back to city hall. The microphones were cut off so that the labor leaders and the ministers, no one was able to really speak to the audience, without lifting voices. And this left for everybody quite disturbed.

Joan Beifuss- You were there that day?

Gilbert Patterson- Oh I was there yes.

Joan Beifuss- Now what was the reaction of the sanitation workers?

Gilbert Patterson- The sanitation workers were..

Joan Beifuss- The whole crowd...

Gilbert Patterson- Some were angered others were hurt. Some of us were disgusted some of us were surprised because we didn't think this would happen in Memphis. At least we thought they would have had the courtesy of staying a few moments listening to some questions from the floor because when the council meeting was open and the sergeant at arms called the meeting to attention, he did say the honorable city council is in session all having business with this council draw near and ye shall be heard. But no one was heard. So after they refused to hear any questions the mics were cut off so we could not even have an orderly meeting among ourselves, it just depended who was able to talk the loudest as to who was heard. It was decided that we would march from city hall rather from the city auditorium to Mason Temple where we could have a mass rally. Permission was given and the entire westbound lane of Main St. was given for the marchers. Later on they say the instruction was they should march 4 or 5 abreast, but this was not the instruction given. If it was, we never knew it. No announcement to the fact was made. The people just went out into the streets and the entire west side of main

street, the southbound lane was used and the policemen were over on the other side. But as the march went on and I was not walking at this time. I had gone to move my car to another point and in trying to join the march a few blocks later this is when all the commotion started.

Modine Thompson- Where did you join the march next on foot?

Gilbert Patterson- It was about, it was only about 3 blocks from I don't know...

Modine Thompson- From the auditorium.

Gilbert Patterson- From the auditorium and at this point the police it was already an army of policemen and it kept getting larger and larger. You could see the police cars had already moved over into what they had made a pedestrian zone, across on the side of the line where they had given permission for the marchers. Of course you know from the newspaper reports and from the TV and the radio that it was said that violence erupted and the police brought it under control and glass was broken on Main St. and this day there was no glass broken on Main St. What so ever it was just a false report it was rumored because no glass was broken that day. The policeman definitely did not break up violence they started it.

Joan Beifuss- Were you close enough to see that car rocking incident that supposedly touched it off.

Gilbert Patterson- I did not see the car rocking, I did not see it. I saw the car over the line, but I didn't...

Modine Thompson- You were too far back to see it.

Gilbert Patterson- Right. But I did not see it rocking. Well as I was saying and it was really the incidents that day, and if I am not mistaken this was on Friday and this was what brought about the consolidation of the black community. After getting to Mason Temple, we just, it was a strategy committee that just emerged, see COME was not planned it was born of necessity and from the people that happened to have been in this conference room at Mason Temple, NAACP representatives, labor representatives, ministers, just various people at this point we just started formulating plans. It was totally unorganized and because Mr. Jesse Epps of the union had been working closely with the sanitation workers and had an insight of what the sanitation department happened to have been and reverend James Lawson who is a veteran civil rights worker himself. The two of them more or less spearheaded it and we decided that day that letters would be sent to all of the ministers of the city and various leaders and they were sent special delivery, airmail, not air mail but special delivery. That we would meet that next day in Mason Temple and this was when we had a meeting of more than 100 of the outstanding clergy of the city.

Modine Thompson- Was Mason Temple, why was Mason Temple chosen for these meetings?

Gilbert Patterson- Mason Temple I think was chosen because it is somewhat of a gathering place, many of the large musicals and it is centrally located and everyone knows where it is and we knew that the movement would grow and it was the only building large enough to house a large representation.

Joan Beifuss- Could you give us some of the names of some of the ministers that were present the Friday meeting, with the labor people and the NAACP people....

Gilbert Patterson- It is kind of difficult to remember. Reverend Middlebrooke, reverend Ralph Jackson, reverend Starks, and of course I was present and I mentioned reverend Lawson and there were others but right now I just cannot remember because our eyes were burning.

Joan Beifuss- I was going to ask you did you yourself get maced?

Gilbert Patterson- I was close enough for it to get near me but it didn't get directly on me. Just the...

Joan Beifuss- Just the fumes are bad enough.

Gilbert Patterson- Right, just the fumes, so that the people who had this mace in their hair and on their clothes, to get in the room all of us were, after we got into this room, we could hardly have the meeting for tears running from the fumes of the mace.

Joan Beifuss- How angry were he people at that meeting?

Gilbert Patterson- Very angry, oh and I must add reverend Ezekiel Bell was there.

Modine Thompson- Knew that would come out.

Gilbert Patterson- Very angry. We could not help but be angry to see policemen just really brutally beating people with night sticks with no reason, no reason at all. Because that day there were quite a few bruised heads. This was the same day that one of the union representatives P.J. Champa, he was on the ground and they were spraying him with mace while he was on the ground and such brutality. It was though they had been standing back waiting for an opportunity and you could see it, you could see it in the eyes of the policemen, they were like kids with a new toy.

Joan Beifuss- Do you thin they had been standing back just waiting for an opportunity?

Gilbert Patterson- Yes, I do. I believe they staged the whole thing. I think they purposely, they purposely had this thing staged with the mace and the nightsticks, because there had been riots in most of the major cities, Memphis had been threatening for a few years and I think policemen in Memphis wanted to prove that we can keep our black folk under control we can handle them. I firmly believe that because I have always tried to be one that respected the law and I do respect the law but I think Memphis had very poor officers to enforce the law. In fact I don't doubt

that it is greatly infiltrated with the ku klux klan, I believe this. And actions prove it by the day.

Joan Beifuss- So then on Saturday the letter was sent out inviting the ministers, just the ministers.

Gilbert Patterson- It was sent that night for them to be there on Saturday.

Joan Beifuss- Where was that, was that at Mason Temple?

Gilbert Patterson- Right and we met in another conference room there.

Joan Beifuss- And you say there were about a hundred more than a hundred?

Gilbert Patterson- More than a hundred. I don't know the exact number but it was more than a hundred.

Joan Beifuss- Do you have any idea how many negro ministers there are in the city?

Gilbert Patterson- I really don't?

Modine Thompson- That is a hard figure to come by.

Gilbert Patterson- but these represented some of the larger congregations because some of these ministers represented 1,000 and sometimes 2,000 people.

Joan Beifuss- Now some of the ministers that were at that first meeting were you surprised to see them there were they ministers who you would have not expected to see involved in a situation like this.

Gilbert Patterson- Well they were ministers that ordinarily would not be involved, now I wasn't surprised to see them there because nay situation that gets me there, I have never been identified with any civil rights struggle prior to this time.

Modine Thompson- Did you know Ezekiel Bell before this ?

Gilbert Patterson- I had only heard of him but I did not know him personally.

Joan Beifuss- Ok now the letter that went out for that Saturday meeting was that sent out by reverend Lawson?

Gilbert Patterson- I don't remember exactly who sent the letter , there was a committee. I think Mrs. Cornelius Crenshaw, Mrs. Thomas Matthews, Mr. Epps, reverend Lawson and someone else, anyways it was a committee that drafted...

Modine Thompson- Do you know how Mrs. Crenshaw got involved with this had she been with the sanitation workers strikers from the beginning?

Gilbert Patterson- Yes she was, she was with us from the beginning.

Joan Beifuss- Then who was chair manning that meeting on Saturday for the ministers?

Gilbert Patterson- Reverend Lawson, assisted by Jesse Epps.

Joan Beifuss- Now what was done at that meeting?

Gilbert Patterson- At that meeting, well first of all I have to backtrack before that meeting another committee was set up that formed the strategy committee. The strategy committee listed some of the problems and what we felt would be the way to cope with the problems. And at the meeting when all of the ministers came in, we brought up the strategy committee brought up the proposals to be adopted or to be turned down whichever they saw fit to do. This is where the idea for the boycott, the boycott of the newspaper the businesses of the councilmen and all downtown. This is when this was adopted and it was requested that all of the ministers would go to that pulpits that Sunday morning to get the word to the public that we were boycotting all of downtown. And the branches of downtown stores and all of the businesses owned by councilmen and every business that had the name Lobe on it. And it was also that next morning that same Sunday, before coming to church I have a broadcast at 10:30 and that broad cast is done live from the church I either cut a tape or go down in person. This was the meeting where I wanted to give the negro community the truth for what they had read in the newspapers and heard on the radio and seen on TV was not the truth, it was a distortion of the true news. That morning I read a passage from the book of St. John, you shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free. That was what I purported to do was to tell the truth about what had happened for the past few days.

Joan Beifuss- That was that great sermon.

Gilbert Patterson- Well it was the truth I am not altogether proud of the tone it was delivered in because never before have I ever been so angry. I have never been that angered before and this had happened on Friday and I waited until late Saturday night to cut the tape because I had to tone myself down and then I wasn't toned down as much as I needed to be,

Joan Beifuss- That was, can you recall any of that sermon at al, can you recall any passages from it?

Gilbert Patterson- Yes I can and the one you want me to recall I won't.

Joan Beifuss- but any of the others.

Gilbert Patterson- As I said it was more or less a rehearsal of what the newspaper and what the TV had said the days before, but what the actual fact was I mentioned the promise from the sub-committee of the council that this recommendation would be recommended to the entire council but in spite of that the council disregarded it. I informed the people who we as tax paying citizens were treated in our auditorium that the mics were shutoff so that we could not even have a meeting, and how that



the police men had provoked an incident on the street. How the news media had said that glass was broken and there was no glass broken and just the various things, the cruel beating and macing for no other apparent reason other than to prove that the Memphis police department could do what no other city had done which was to contain the onward march of the negro. They wanted to prove that although national guardsmen had been used in other cities, the Memphis police department was highly capable of handling it's own problems. Of course I referred to the mayor trying to be a king and his councilmen being nothing but a bunch of puppets, on his string not realizing they were elected by the same people who elected the mayor, and they had as much authority in their respective offices as the mayor. I also said that, I mentioned that prior to this time the ministers we had done our best to keep down riots and tell the people don't do it and I told them in that Sunday morning that we are not going to promote it, we are not going to incite a riot, but I doubt that we will discourage it either when we see there is no justice that can be found in this city at the northern tip of Mississippi.

Joan Beifuss- I remember you, I think I remember you making another statement to about not buying new clothes for Easter Sunday.

Gilbert Patterson- Right, right we said that we ewer going...I told them about the boycotting and we were not going to buy any new clothes, we didn't know if it would last until Easter or not but we had made up our minds that since there was so much downtown, the stores had bought waiting for us waiting for us to buy it back for Easter, that we just wouldn't buy new clothes for Easter and I think that on a large scale our people didn't go down there. In fact, now downtown hasn't gotten back to normal. Not from the negros and personally myself I put a permanent boycott on some places, I don't go into anything that is named Lobe. Nor would I go into Mr. Peril's business because as I think back with my mother and myself, my uncle, his wife and other members of the Patterson family in the past 10 years times he has possibly done 35 or \$40,000 worth of business in our family alone. But when he looked out the door that day and saw them marching he thought all of them ought to be put I jail, at least this is what the commercial appeal quoted him as saying. In a place like that I would never go back in and I would discourage anybody who I thought was going there. So we said no new clothes for Easter and some of us who already bought new clothes refused to wear them. If we bought them before the boycott we just still starting to wear the,

Modine Thompson- Were you hear when the other boycott was on for the newspapers?

Gilbert Patterson- No I wasn't, I was in Detroit. That was before 62' wasn't it?

Modine Thompson- Yes it was around 60 because yes...

Gilbert Patterson- No I wasn't here then.

Joan Beifuss- I can vaguely recall again from that sermon, did you say some thing about surely god will raise someone up in the white community to help us.

Gilbert Patterson- You know I don't remember verbatim what I said...

Joan Beifuss- I took notes on it.

Gilbert Patterson- I don't remember verbatim what I said, I said something to the effect that this was not. I said that I am not indicting all white people and I do remember saying there are some good white people. But they are as scarce as hen's teeth.

Joan Beifuss- you mean some of my best friend's are white...yeah.

Gilbert Patterson- That was what I said.

Joan Beifuss- Yes that was as a matter of fact. Ok then so that was the Sunday. The following wee, was the following week the sit-in at city hall?

Gilbert Patterson- Yes. Well let me see, was it the following week? Yes I believe it was.

Joan Beifuss- Or just go ahead and tell us then about your participation in the weeks that followed that Sunday after the formation of COME.

Gilbert Patterson- Well actually my greatest role in participating was in going to the union hall. I felt that one of the great essentials was that the morale of the men be kept at a peak. I along with reverend Ezekiel Bell, Dr. Ralph Jackson, Mrs. Crenshaw, Mrs. Matthews, Reverend Starks, and others we tried to make it a point to be there at the union hall every day. I participated in some of the sidewalk marches I did not participate in them all. Reverend Starks and reverend Ralph Jackson were in possibly most of them just about all of the marches. I didn't do too much, very much marching. I mostly tried to lend my influence through radio. Because when the sanitation strike first started I was on everyday except Saturday. I am on three times now on Sunday. At that time I was on 4 times on Sunday and every morning. But the station I was on everyday the manager he requested of me that I stick to the religious texts and not to become involved in this and from his talking his referring to the union as some blank Yankees, I feel that you and all the ministers are sincere but I think if you just urged those men to go back to work and like the mayor said have a cooling off period that the mayor would be willing to negotiate with some of the ministers and help to bring about what the men want and then he continued to defame the union.

Joan Beifuss- Is this a white radio station owner?

Gilbert Patterson- yes.

Joan Beifuss- What radio station?

Gilbert Patterson- KWM. And of course after talking to him I even wrote him a letter that same evening to make it official and I told him that I knew it was not FCC regulations.

Modine Thompson- Could you have used the station to give his point of view?

Gilbert Patterson- Oh definitely because another one of my brethren he did not choose to be with us so he continued to preach about the evils of riots and all this and he even ended up on TV a couple times. I had tried to buy TV time back during the Christmas and couldn't buy it. But I have found that when you are expounding a view that is in alliance with the power structure you can get anything., It is only when you are attempting to go against it that you are told you are in danger of FCC regulation and all. I realize now that I am trying even now to get enough people interested, I don't even know how to go about it but I want to touch somebody who does know so that we can get a radio station in our area that will truly be the voice of the negro people, because we don't have a voice. Even the stations that report to be they are trying to tie their regulations tighter and tighter also. And that is why the sanitation struggle brought all of this to light as long as we weren't doing anything but just sitting back and not trying to go forward then Memphis is the city of good abode you can go in anywhere. Certainly you don't have the money to spend you can go in anywhere., But when we really wake up to the fact that we are a group of poverty stricken people in a land of plenty, and start moving forward trying to share in the wealth of the city and the wealth of the nation, then this is what happens, you get policemen, state patrolmen national guardsmen and everybody to keep you crushed. They would rather spend \$2 million for law enforcement rather than to spend \$200,000 to try and raise the standard of the black community. All these things we were brought to light, just so many things we see we need and personally I myself my whole ministry I think has changed since the sanitation struggle. I always try to avoid the civil rights movement but I am sold out to it now.

Joan Beifuss- Why did you try to avoid it before?

Gilbert Patterson- Because I was like so many of the rest of my brothers and sisters that it was not my fight., I knew it was for the good of all of our people but I said well god has somebody for everything and he just not intend for me to be a Martin Luther King, but now I think he wants all of us to be Martin Luther Kings.

Joan Beifuss- Ok can you, let's backtrack, still don't talk loud enough. Let's backtrack. Back again to the early weeks of the strike, so you were going to the union hall.

=Yes I was going to the union hall.

Joan Beifuss- Marching occasionally, now what is the next thing during the strike that sticks out in your memory.

Gilbert Patterson- It became pretty routine for a while, the sidewalk marches everyday, the mass meetings every night. Mass meetings every night walk every day, meeting with the men every day, raising an offering every Sunday trying to help to sustain them and occasionally the press conferences, but the next thing that really stood out in my mind as I look back over it now I can't see anything but the assassination of Dr. King, this is the thing that stands so large that I almost tend to

forget things that led up to this point. I could just remember that in our strategy meetings we wondered what to do next. There was a big debate of whether we should get Dr. King or Stokely Carmichael.

Modine Thompson- Did you feel that there was a growing black advocacy?

Gilbert Patterson- Oh yes.

Modine Thompson- The black power movement was really going at this point?

Gilbert Patterson- Definitely. It was easy to feel because in our mass meetings the ministers it was hard for us to keep telling the people to love. We know this is the bible way and the righteous way but it is hard to keep saying love when everything that goes on, every move is made by the city officials was designed it looked like to make you hate and there was this growing resentment and plus these black power militants were in our meetings and they would pass out that, they would pass out there literature and you let one of the ministers start talking about love and they would get up and walk out and all of their group would walk out.

Joan Beifuss- When you talk about black power advocates there are you talking about the younger college.

Gilbert Patterson- Yeah I said the black power militants yes.

Joan Beifuss- The college age kids?

Gilbert Patterson- Right.

Joan Beifuss- They never met, were they ever a part of the strategy committee as such?

Gilbert Patterson- Yes they were on the strategy committee. But they were a minority.

Modine Thompson- How did you decide to let them come into the meetings, did they ask to be included or did somebody decide that perhaps they should be included.

Gilbert Patterson- We decided that they should be because COME the community on the move for equality was designed to be an umbrella organization that would include representatives from every facet of the community. That was NAACP and the various church groups, the black organizing projects, the LABA people and interested individuals, it was just an umbrella organization under which all who are sympathetic to the cause could work under. They were apart. But naturally in any group in any organization you have certain people that are going to more or less steer it, especially when these are the people who are always on the scene. Sometimes it was an urgency to make a decision a new development. Maybe it was a minor thing or maybe it was major so you had to always kind of move with what you

had to work with. And that was a nucleus of people that were always on the spot and a lot of times the militants were not on the spot.

Modine Thompson- Did they agree or disagree with the basic proposal COME was trying to work on you know with the things you worked out in the strategy committee.

Gilbert Patterson- I would say they were in agreement, see one thing the people of Memphis they are kind of under a false belief about the militants. They think when they see them with their jackets on and with their beards and natural hair doo that their philosophy is always burn baby burn. But this is not always true they presented a program that was quite constructive really, things we are wanting, like to have negro history taught. To send our time in trying to develop a racial pride in our people, it was not always get your matches. We have found that it is good that the white race thinks this because this threat of fear helped. This helped. But I don't think they really, from the beginning they were not really violent and I don't blame any of the violence that happened on them. See what has happened now, they watch a certain, the police watching them all the time, you are always hearing about the invaders being picked up. But when violence erupts in any city whether it is Memphis or whoever it is the breaking of glass and all of this, usually these are people that aren't a part of any organized thing, it's just when they get so full inside that they know no other way to express it. They can lock up all of the invaders and all of the professed black power militants but they will still have riots. They are on their way to one right now with the garbage collection fee. Definitely.

Modine Thompson- Do you think there will be riots this summer in Memphis?

Gilbert Patterson- Unless this garbage collection fee thing is changed. To empower light gas and water division to add this to the utility bill, and anyone sees that this is only a slap in the face. Alright they possibly raise taxes, to cover whatever losses the city has sustained from the garbage strike. And in addition to raising taxes they are going to have a garbage collection fee too. Some of these poor people they don't have enough to eat to really have garbage and then they are going to impose this garbage collection fee on them and shut off utilities if they don't pay it. This is nothing but leading up to a riot. We have made the fatal mistake of putting people into office that don't attempt to understand but one side of life and that is their side. Those people down there Louis Donelson, and Bob James, and even Downing Pryor himself and most certainly Phillip Parel, Hyman, all they know, is they know the comfortable life, they know the life of plenty. They don't know what \$2.50 garbage collection fee will do to some of these poor families.

Modine Thompson- They have garbage disposals too.

Gilbert Patterson- Right. So there we go we are right back on our way again and this is what happened during the sanitation strike. We saw that here there was a group of predominantly black men trying to support their families off of less take home pay then \$50 a week. With a check off out of their check for Sun, you know

Shelby united neighbors hewn they should be the recipients of Shelby united neighbors. Not having money taken out of their check for it. But yet the mayor said ugh uh no dues deduction. This is illegal, this represents a change in policy. He is yet trying to live on the plantation policy. Alright, this is what consolidated the negro people. Here these men are working for less take home pay than \$50 a week, trying to support a family and under such bad conditions that even when it is time for lunch they have to pull off those dirty gloves with holes in them and the garbage is all over they hands and they aren't even in a place where they can wash their hands. They have to eat their lunch with hands that have handled everybody's garbage for about 5 hours. If they want to go to the restroom, there are no restroom facilities, because whatever part of the city they were in at the time for them to have lunch they just had to have lunch and if they were out in Frayser or Whitestation or something where these white people didn't want to be bothered with these dirt nasty negro garbage men, ok they couldn't even as much go somewhere and wash they hands. And these kind of conditions that we didn't really know as a whole existed these things are brought out and here is the mayor saying we don't have the money, we can't do this we can't do that. When they were paying a fortune just keeping the policemen out there. They would rather pay policemen to keep the peace to keep order than spend the money to help put order in someone's heart. But I think the sanitation workers should be commended because all the way through the strike, I think it was the influence of the minster's that helped when violence did erupt it was not from them, they remained calm throughout. And this is the biggest thing that I can really remember. It became very disgusting and heart breaking as it lagged on week after week after week. We were doing all that we could but as I said many of the ministers just as myself had never really been engaged in civil rights work and this was the reason why we felt we should get someone in here that was well-trained, and well-experienced. You possibly can remember that Roy Wilkins came and he spoke, Barrett Ruston came and he spoke. So we finally got Dr. King, he was so busy trying to organize for the poor people's campaign in Washington, but finally we were able to get him here and we felt that by having someone more experienced and someone who could really handle the job we would get it resolved. I must also say that was an uncomfortable feeling, where a lot of us were concerned because there were many of us that felt Dr. King wouldn't leave Memphis alive.

Joan Beifuss- Why?

Gilbert Patterson- I don't know. It is hard to explain it was like an atmosphere., I said it to a minister friend of mine that is the only thing I hate about him coming here is that I don't know what will happen it him in Memphis. And he told me now, come on now be reasonable. He said look at the places he has been, Mississippi and Alabama and all of these places and people just don't want. Memphis doesn't even want the notoriety of having that man in jail here. I told this minister, and it happened to be reverend Curry. I said reverend Curry you haven't been out here. You haven't been out here marching and looking at these policemen. See he had been busy just recently trying to get his church organized. Being a good civil rights worker and Browns hadn't really had a chance to get involved in this. I told him, you haven't

seen these policemen, you haven't looked at the expression on their face, they want an opportunity to get the negro community stirred up so they can shoot us down like dogs. He said, oh no I don't believe its that bad. And a lot of people didn't believe it was that bad. And even to this very day, even to this very day I believe that certain parts of our city was involved in his assassination. I think they tried to have us in our minds on a wild goose chase looking for this Ray or whoever it is. I think that the murderer of Dr. King can be found in Memphis I believe that.

Modine Thompson- Was this a general feeling?

Gilbert Patterson- Definitely. And there was a general feeling he was not shot from that window rather from the fire station. That is a general feeling and it is a general feeling that the police protected the murderers getaway that is why they appeared so suddenly and there is so much about it. I said that day in the memorial address that Memphis set him up, a man like Dr. Martin Luther King the news does not broadcast where he is. When he came, the day before he was killed and I was shocked I was lying down in bed and I sat up when I heard Russ Hodge on the 5:00 news say that Martin Luther King returned to Memphis approximately 10:20 and after brief conference at the airport proceeded to the Lorraine Motel where he check into room 306. This was just not customary procedure. Threats had been made, needless to say threats had already been made on his life. I am just saying Memphis made it easy, Memphis made it easy for him to be killed.

Joan Beifuss- Did you know Dr. King personally?

Gilbert Patterson- I did not know Dr. King personally before he came to Memphis. In fact many times I had heard him speak and being a busy man as he is and having so many ministers around I never made any point to just meet him personally until he came that the little violence occurred downtown. They said it was a riot but I don't call that a riot. But the day the violence did break out in the march he was leading and then later on a few hours after that he was at the Rivermont and we had a strategy session in his room. This was the first time that I had really met him and talked to him personally.

Modine Thompson- Why do you think he changed from the Rivermont to the Lorraine?

Gilbert Patterson- Well Dr. King was just a soul brother he preferred staying there, but in that day in the attitude and atmosphere the Rivermont offered more secrecy I believe and we did need to get together where everybody didn't know. Because if too many people had known where he was we could not even have a meeting in peace as to decide what to do next.

Joan Beifuss- What was Dr. King's feeling about that first march do you know?

Gilbert Patterson- What was his feeling? Well one thing I think that the records will show that no march ever organized by Dr. King ever erupted in violence. I personally believe that the only thing that really hurt me was the fact that the

people who staged this took the advantage of Dr. King to do it. Because he took it very nicely, he didn't have that much to say about it. He said, oh well, that is just one of those things.

Modine Thompson- Did he look very disappointed or more crushed than you have seen him before, did you notice anything in particular?

Gilbert Patterson- In his room before we went down for the press conference I think he did look a little, I don't know what word would adequately describe it, he is composed as usual but you could see he was a little disappointed.

Joan Beifuss- He wasn't angry?

Gilbert Patterson- No, he wasn't angry at all.

Modine Thompson- Did he look afraid to you?

Gilbert Patterson- No. HE didn't look afraid in fact we were all on his room and some were sitting on the bed and he had one of these rooms in the Rivermont with the king size bed and of course he was lying there under the cover, he just had on his shirt and tie, and he was under the cover, he was lying there talking and whatever anybody had to say, what they thought about it.

Joan Beifuss- Just normal conversation.

Gilbert Patterson- Just normal conversation and it was mostly formulating plans for his return because he had some commitments he couldn't break.

Modine Thompson- Were his aides with him at this time, did he have some with him then in this room at this time?

Gilbert Patterson- Yes, yes. But see at this point it wasn't until the trip when he got shot that he brought really just the full staff.

Modine Thompson- Right.

Gilbert Patterson- But he did have some of his aides.

Joan Beifuss- Was there any question of whether or not he would come back to Memphis a second at that point.

Gilbert Patterson- There didn't seem to be any question in his mind because he could not in his mind he could not afford to leave here with this kind of an image trying to get ready for a peaceful poor peoples campaign in Washington. So I don't think there was any question in his mind as to whether or not he could afford to come back.

Modine Thompson- How about in the minds of you and other Memphis people?



Gilbert Patterson- Well, I think that at this point even we agreed that he should. Some of the members of the staff I don't think they were into it.

Joan Beifuss- they weren't too impressed with Memphis were they?

Modine Thompson- Did they seem to you...

Gilbert Patterson- They seemed to have felt that all of his efforts should have been directed towards Washington instead of Memphis at this time. I think that this was the thing that the great hesitance on their part was that all the plans of the Southern Christian leadership conference the wheels were set in motion for Washington and Memphis was somewhat of an interruption. But I think that even now Dr. King he was truly a Christian man and he did a very good job of training his staff to think like him and to act like him and they all felt evidently that this was it, it was divine purpose, that did happen at this point. Personally I don't ever question divine purpose, but divine purpose has to have a Judas to carry it out.

Joan Beifuss- You are talking about they didn't question the point of the first march erupting or..

Gilbert Patterson- No they didn't question the assassination.

Joan Beifuss- They didn't question the assassination yeah.

Gilbert Patterson- Because they always knew that it could happen and he kept them prepared.

Joan Beifuss- Well now looking back into the hours after that first march turned into violence on Beal St. it appears to me that when reverend Lawson appears on televisions and then Dr. King appeared on television there seemed to be some conflict there about the position of the black power people in this....

Gilbert Patterson- What is was there is the newsmen were trying to get Dr. King or trying to get reverend Lawson or some of us to put the blame on black power militants. And you know they are very skillful in trying to entangle you. This is what it was they wanted to get the voice of Dr. King or reverend Lawson blaming the other, the other element. But this could not have been done because to blame them, would not have helped our cause any.

Joan Beifuss- Can you tell us where you were when you heard Dr, King had been shot?

Gilbert Patterson- I was at home to get dressed to go to the mass meeting at Mason Temple to hear him speak. And someone called me and asked me did I hear it on TV that he had been shot and in about 5 minutes time it did come back on. I proceeded to go on to the temple and I kept my radio in the car on and had my transistor with me and I was in Mason Temple with the radio on when they said it was official that he was dead.

Joan Beifuss- What happened at Mason Temple then?

Gilbert Patterson- Well really there wasn't that many people there just a group of young people about 25 of them and they ran out of there and they were very heated at that point. I don't know what they went out to do but as I had told the minister the night before when Dr. King said it didn't matter now, that he had been to the mountain. I said this to the minister next to me reverend Spite and also to Mrs. Crenshaw, I said that I don't think that these people know that to kill Dr. King would set off a riot in every major city. So it happened about 24 hours later.

Joan Beifuss- You were at Mason Temple when he gave that speech then about...

Gilbert Patterson- Yes I was there.

Joan Beifuss- At the time you heard the speech did it strike you as strange that he would say anything like that?

Gilbert Patterson- Well the whole thing was strange all the way through, Reverend Abernathy's introduction of him that took longer than usual. And Dr, King's going into detail even about being stabbed in New York and he didn't talk about these things and when he ended that speech even he himself was in tears. And reverend J.W. Williams the pastor of Lane Ave. Baptist church you could hear him crying all over the building just to the top of his voice. And it was just that atmosphere, we sensed it. Dr. King sensed it and it looked like everybody around did.

Joan Beifuss- Well then after you were at Mason Temple and you found out he had been , that he was dead did you go home then or what did you do?

Gilbert Patterson- Yes I went home because along with the announcement of his death was the announcement of the mayor's curfew, so we immediately went home.  
(Tape End)