

SS016.mp3

Jerry Veyer- - Alright you recording then?

Jerry Veyer- It's recording. Recording now, say something. We still got it a little too loud I can't tell.

Ezekiel Bell- I went to the city council meeting today and I got there at 2:30 and left at 6:00 and the meeting was still in progress. There were oh I guess there were ten people there from our group. (Tape Break)

Wilson Veyer- Side 1 interview with reverend Ezekiel Bell. Conducted at the home of Wilson Veyer May 28 1968. Present Jerry Veyer- . Reverend Bell in order to let us get the show on the road perhaps it might be a good idea for you to go into your own family background, where you were born, when. Environmental conditions and what have you.

Ezekiel Bell- Alright I will be happy to do that Wilson. I was born in Clarksdale Mississippi. In 1935, and I lived there from 1935 until 1943 and then my parents moved to Memphis Tennessee after we had been driven off the plantation there. As I understand my father said we made some something 40 or 50 bales of cotton that year and he had gone to the boss man the man who owned the plantation and the gentlemen told him that if he had another year similar to the year we had the year before and that year in 1943 that there was a good chance of us coming out of debt. So daddy talked to him a little bit about what he meant by this but he didn't clear the money and so he told him that he didn't clear any money, that if he had a couple more good years chances are he would be out of debt. So we left that night after dad had a little discussion with the man that he couldn't be raising questions like this. And so we left that same night and we left all of our hogs and our chickens and our cows and everything we just left.

Wilson Veyer- Was your dad a renter or sharecropper?

Ezekiel Bell- He was a sharecropper.

Wilson Veyer- Sharecropper.

Jerry Veyer- - Do you mind telling us the man, the name of plantation owner?

Ezekiel Bell- Well I really don't know I believe it was Mr. Wolfe. I is the only name I could every remember dad saying just outside of Clarksdale. I went to school two years in Mississippi, my first grade and my second grade. And then of course we moved to Memphis in 43 I went to Douglas Elementary School and Douglas became a high school before I, became a high school during the time I was enrolled there and I finished Douglas high school in 1973 and went from there to college and later on to seminary and (muffled) teaching scholar. I suppose my upbringing was just about like any other negro youngster. My parents were hard working people my mother did maid work and my father after we came to Memphis worked for a little while

with Rock Allen railroad and then that job ran out and he worked for a little while with hardware manufacturing company, Lee's Hardware. Manufacturing company, was an ax handle factory. And then he worked for about 6 months with the sanitation department and finally he went into business for himself by buying a couple of ice trucks and he carried ice until he passed in 1959. Ice and coal and wood and stuff like that.

Wilson Veyer- So your father was a garbage man at one time.

Ezekiel Bell- Yes he work for the city about 6 months. Everybody in my family worked so that and this was the rule in the community that was where I grew up all of the youngsters worked at least I worked and all of my friends worked. I started to carry papers when I was size of your little boy here 8 years of age and carried papers I worked straight on through elementary school and secondary school and through college actually and worked some in seminary so that we were taught to work and our parents while they did not insist on us working it was just the thing you did in my family.

Wilson Veyer- Well was it necessary in order for the family to carry on? Was this the primary reason or?

Ezekiel Bell- Well my father and mother could have provided some of the things that we wanted and all the things we needed. We had a home and while we all had separate bedrooms we were comfortable I think there. But if you wanted extra things like jackets at school and letters and so forth on those jackets I found it necessary to work and many of the other youngsters did too. My parents just provided them with what I suppose some people would call luxuries. But for example I bought my first bicycle, Santa Claus didn't bring to me I bought it myself. I was 10. I simply saved up my money from carrying papers and daddy bought it for me. Saved it up and bought it myself. He probably would have bought it but I felt a sense of real accomplishment in having done this myself. I am not sure I would want my own kid to do that but I would like them to have a sense of responsibility early in life.

Wilson Veyer- How many in your family?

Ezekiel Bell- There are 8nin our family 5 boys and 3 girls. Now my oldest sister and my oldest brother of course were not able to go to school they went for two or three years in Mississippi and that was all. For you only went for about 3 months during the year and then of course you have to stay out to pick cotton or chop cotton or help around the house and do other things you see. So us coming to Memphis, my family moving to Memphis was a real I guess you could say blessing for me because I got a chance to go to school and so did my brother just ahead of me and my sister under me. The others were a little large and therefore went to school for just a short while and they were too big to be in school with the other children. Very much behind and we just don't feel right going to school with children who are a lot smaller than you are. So they all got married and took jobs doing other things.

Wilson Veyer- Did any of the rest of them besides you complete college?

Ezekiel Bell- No I am the only one that finished college. Now my oldest brother had come to Memphis long before we did because my grandmother lived here and he was reared by my grandmother, since my mother came ill right after he was born. So he went to Manassas high school here and graduated and did two years at Lemoyne got married and went into the army. He came out and moved to Chicago. And was living there when we moved here.

Wilson Veyer- You say your dad went into business on his own selling ice?

Ezekiel Bell- Yes.

Wilson Veyer- Did he have any financial backing?

Ezekiel Bell- No his brother who still lives here in Memphis had a truck and had worked with him for awhile. And later he got a truck of his own. They had some kind of a plan where you could, you got a percentage for selling so many thousands of pounds of ice, and this more than paid for the note on the truck you see and once you got through paying for it of course these percentages come back to you. When I was in the 10th grade my father got an additional truck and of course I drove it 10th grade 11th grade and 12th grade and I also carried the commercial appeal which means I had two jobs while I was still in high school and did both of these and went to school, in fact I didn't miss a day of high school, in fact I wasn't tardy a day in high school for grades 9 through 12.

Jerry Veyer- - did you do this through college and seminary?

Ezekiel Bell- I did this through college and seminary you know you take your cuts and all like everybody else. I don't remember having an over cut in college. In seminary I didn't because in Chicago where I attended you could go to the classes you wanted to and if you choose to not go to class, if you felt you could pass examinations without going to college, I mean without going to class you were sort of on your own.

Wilson Veyer- Did you have any sort of scholarships to either college or seminary?

Ezekiel Bell- Yes, when I graduated from Douglas I graduated top of the class and I was awarded a tuition scholarship to Tennessee state and also a \$500 scholarship to Howell University but I had already chosen to go to Tennessee state at Nashville before the scholarship from Howell University came through so I went to Tennessee State, well registration there really was no tuition as such but registration was all taken care of and we just had to pay a small amount on that. At the end of my freshmen year I won the interstudy club award and second year took a job licking up laundry and dry cleaning so with all of the registration fees being taken care of, what I was able to make picking up dry cleaning I was able to send home rather than having to ask for money.

Wilson Veyer- Were you married at the time?

Ezekiel Bell- No I didn't marry until after I got to seminary, I finished college in 1956 and upon graduating from college I received the Rockefeller fellowship to study at the university of my choice in this country. So I chose to study at the university of Chicago and to study there from 1953 to 56 and took a degree in theology. And for 2 semesters I studied at Chicago teaching college for some courses that I wanted to take.

Wilson Veyer- It sounds like you had a very outstanding academic record and all would, were you active in any campus activities either in college or seminary or both.

Ezekiel Bell- Well in seminary there wasn't too much to get involved in except studying and field work. They didn't have internships then for young men to go out and work along side seasoned men but there were some experiences provided for those of us that did want to get involved in church work and I did. I worked with one year with Dr. Faulkner at Parkman Congregationalist Church working with the senior high students there and then I worked one year at the Shadow Baptist church where I preached two or three times during the year and worked with a couples group, met with a couples group in the afternoon at the seminary. But now in college I was very active serving on the student council and I was president of the summer graduating class of 56 and I was on the ROTC drill team the AFROTC drill team the tiger jets. I was a member of the international relations club, I was president of the men's dormitory club. And participated in many of the activities around the campus there, was vice president of my fraternity Phi Beta Sigma. And was a treasurer I believe of the student Christian association and went off to Kansas to represent the student Christian association I believe it was in 1955 out at the university of Kansas. I was pretty active in college and the fact that I went to my first Presbyterian church in college and also went to my first integrated meeting with students from Vanderbilt at a Presbyterian camp (muffled) which is a part of our churches camp and (muffled) ground here in Tennessee. (muffled)

Wilson Veyer- You say you in college then in the early to middle 50's along about the time of the 54 decision.

Ezekiel Bell- Yes I was in college at the time.

Wilson Veyer- When did you, when was your first involvement in any civil rights activities?

Ezekiel Bell- Strangely enough after I got out of seminary and became minister of the church in Huntsville where I served, Fellowship Presbyterian church in Huntsville, sit-in demonstrations were going on all over the country and once they got started in Birmingham it wasn't long before they were going on in Huntsville where I was serving and naturally the adults had to come to the assistance of the youngsters. In fact it ended up with the adults having to take over and sending the youngsters back to school and I was new in town and so many people called upon

me to head up a little organization called the community service committee. Since the NAACP and all of the other civil rights groups in Alabama at that time were outlawed, had been outlawed. And I served as the chairman of a little local group there in Huntsville and we were instrumental in desegregating public schools, public accommodations hotels and things of this sort, all of the public accommodations for the most part. This was my first real encounter and then another encounter came when we tried to get our community into the city limits in 1961 in Huntsville and I was asked by the neighbors in the community there to serve as a chairman of a steering committee to get the area into the city limits and it took us some 4 years going through all the red tape and all of the procedures laid down to us by the city council in order to get our area into the city limits and this left quite a number of hostile people into the community, hostile feelings. Among the residents of the community but out here after 4 years it was brought into the city limit.

Wilson Veyer- Predominantly negro area I presume?

Ezekiel Bell- _Yes it was just under the, just at the foot of these campus of Alabama AM college. There was about 250 homes there and city limits had just gone around our community and there we were without street lights, without garbage pick up without any playgrounds for our children, without any care of our streets, just out in a dark community and for 4 years we struggle trying to get it see fit that the council would take that in and it was adjacent to the city limits they just simply bypassed it. And made us go through red tape and taking all kinds of surveys and employing lawyers and we went through all of this just to get our area into the city limits.

Wilson Veyer- Did you come from Huntsville, the church there in Huntsville directly to Memphis?

Ezekiel Bell- Yes when I left seminary in 1959, I was called to serve in the Presbyterian church and chose to serve in Huntsville Alabama, that were several churches available at the time, and we went to Huntsville Alabama at the time, we didn't have any children at the time and here was a new community that was looking for a minister so we decided we would go into this area where there was nothing but the homes and these 250 homes in the area there and we at the end of the year organized a church and I was called to serve as the minister and served until 1966 and at the end of 1966 we had accepted a call to come back here and work at he church where we presently serve, (muffled).

Wilson Veyer- In 1966?

Ezekiel Bell- Yeah October of 66.

Jerry Veyer- - What did you think of Memphis after having come from Huntsville?

Ezekiel Bell- Well I found Memphis to be rather complacent as I fell most of the places are in the country. So people say Memphis is a little different in other towns in the south but I feel that by and large Memphis is no more complacent than

Birmingham Alabama or Montgomery Alabama where Dr.. King labeled so tirelessly and Jackson Mississippi and other large places.

Jerry Veyer- - Did you find that Memphis had made more progress than some or less?

Ezekiel Bell- Well I don't feel that Memphis had made any more progress necessarily than any of the other places. I think that you could have a strong branch of the NAACP here and a group of people that went out and pressed for the gains which had been made but I don't feel that any progress has been made I feel that many negroes have just decided that they weren't going to tolerate certain conditions and have gone out to push down these barriers and when the whites had seen it was to their advantage, to let these barriers come down then they have simply stepped aside. I would like to document this, I am speaking in terms of the zoo. I believe the negroes went to the zoo on Monday or Tuesday except when those days came on the 4th of July. We only went to the fairgrounds in early October and I believe we only had 4 or 5 days then and everybody looked forward to this in the black community, it was sort of a high point and people came from everywhere and schools let out. We had to fight for this and the NAACP took the lead, played the lead in this. Negroes had to ride the back of the bus or negroes rode in separate taxi cabs, negroes went to separate schools, negroes drank out of separate water fountains. Negroes ate at separate eating facilities, negroes went to separate parks, negroes lived in separate communities. Now all of these things came all of these changes came as a direct result of court suits or direct action on the part of negroes. I can remember when my parents first went down to register to vote that I signed for my daddy. He could write a little but I remember having signed for him and my mother of course signed for herself. I don't remember exactly (muffled) now but I remember it was about the time, it might have been before the poll tax was off, because it hadn't been too long since the poll tax was off, but it was just when the poll tax was still on when my father first became registered to vote. I was on my way to Huntsville in 59 when Shipman was running for commissioner of public works and made 2 or 3 speeches on his behalf and I think at that time many negroes were beginning to understand the significance of the ballot and were beginning to exercise this right.

Jerry Veyer- - (muffled) you think there was no balance in connection with the working out of these court decisions?

Ezekiel Bell- Well I don't know if there was or not I was not here at the time when schools were desegregated and all but I would feel because of leadership you had here in the community I think by and large the entire black community is geared for the most part or certainly was at that time was more sympathetic to the idea of nonviolence as a technique even if not committed to it as a philosophy or way of life and certainly the people who led in the movement knew they could accomplish more in terms of trying to do this according to the law and getting outside the bounds of the law. And I feel that until you have got the organization of this southern leadership conference, all of the gains won by negroes came as a result of court decisions. It was only when Dr. King started SCLC that we got the idea that you

could not compromise or you could not really, you really had no right to feel you had to obey and unjust law. So that students started to disregard all of these laws which were wrong in the first place and started going to jail for this. They didn't ever try to escape the consequences of breaking the law they certainly just started to disregard these laws and you had some of that here, massive civil disobedience. But I would think that the reason you didn't have any (muffled) is because there was a respect in the community at large that the old leaders could control and could bring about the kind of ends they were seeking and so you really, I don't think you had any reasons for violence when you could deliver without people becoming so upset.

Jerry Veyer- - Zeke were you involved in any civil rights activities here before the garbage strike?

Ezekiel Bell- I had only participated in the NAACP and we had gone down on 2 or 3 occasions to call to the attention to the old city council the former city council, the need for a police review board, a civilian review board,. I had addressed the council on 2 or 3 occasions and this was about the only contact I had with them. I had been very active however in support of the NAACP's program and I presently serve as the co-chairman of the church work committee of that organization.

Wilson Veyer- Well do you remember when you first heard about the strike or perhaps maybe you heard about it or was involved before the actual strike, maybe the rainy day walk out. Can you relate back and tell us when you first heard about it what happened, your involvement and what happened?

Ezekiel Bell- Well I first heard about it on February 12th and I think that is....

Wilson Veyer- The day of the strike.

Ezekiel Bell- T.O. Jones and I grew up in the same community in Douglas. He was much, I don't know if he was much older than I but I know he was a grade ahead of me in school. He called me that night and asked me if I would meet him at the union hall together with is men that next day which would have been Tuesday the 13th and asked me would I come over and give the men inspirational talk. I told him I would be very happy too. And at that time I was (muffled) that night the grievances which the men had, telling me about the fact leading up to the strike, leading up to the walk out. Before I went and told him, he told me that the meeting would be held that day at 12, but before I went to that meeting after he outlined for me the grievances, many of which were in the evening paper, or morning paper. I went, it just happened that Tuesday the Presbyterian ministers were meeting at Parkview Manor. I went by there and carried a resolution asking if they would stand with the men in their grievances. And of course, this resolution which I carried would have involved the Presbyterian ministers to the extent of saying that we were supporting the men in all that they were asking for. This was not, this resolution was voted down and a very simple statement was made to the extent that, by the ministers, that we hold in time , a very short time constructive measures would be taken to bring the strike to an end. Both on behalf of the city and also on behalf of the men. I

can remember some of the discussion which took place when I presented the resolution. One gentlemen said that he just certainly felt this was illegal and was started by somebody else.

Wilson Veyer- A Strike was illegal?

=Yes.

Wilson Veyer- And this was on the night of February 12th?

Ezekiel Bell- No this was on the day of February 13th when I was on my way over to the union hall to address the men, I stopped by the luncheon meeting with Presbyterian ministers, we meet once a month, I had hoped that they would back up this workers even at that early stage of the game but they did not of the strike.

Jerry Veyer- - Were there any in that meeting who did want to?

Ezekiel Bell- I think there were some that wanted to but there was no committee appointed to find out what the real issues were, they did not take my work for it and frankly that was the last I heard of it.

Wilson Veyer- Do you recall particular pastor who made the statement that the strike was illegal?

Ezekiel Bell- It was Mr. Darnell. Darnell is the associate minister of the Evergreen Presbyterian Church. And in gist Dr. Russell said it would be real helpful to him if we went out to pick up the garbage. He was sitting next to me in the meeting. And Mr. Ed Stock at the bonding church said that he just didn't know what the issues were and felt that we probably, that he certainly had to have more information about this. And so my resolution was not even, no one, my resolution was seconded, I think Mr. (muffled) seconded it for the sake of getting it on the floor. And then it was voted down and then another resolution was passed by the ministers stating what had stated earlier.

Wilson Veyer- Was Dr. Jones there?

Ezekiel Bell- He was not present at this meeting but later I did have a conference with him and of course that he took the position that the strike was illegal and therefore he could not support it. Of course very few white ministers did support the strike in terms of in a concrete way. Very few of them to my knowledge supported the strike, I mean in terms of really helping the people who were on strike, or in terms of making statements to that effect.. Now some few did. Make their mild statements and some came out very boldly, some few did. But by and large these were very insignificant.

Wilson Veyer- You, I presume went from that meeting on to the Mason Temple?

Ezekiel Bell- No they were meeting at the union hall where all of the meetings for the most part were being held.

Wilson Veyer- Firestone?

Ezekiel Bell- To the Firestone hall. I spoke to the men that day And I can remember after I finished speaking to the men , one of the union officials said, you shouldn't have said what you said because this is a union matter it is not a racial matter and I insisted from the first day that it was a racial issue that if it seemed to me that all of the persons on strike were black and I even feel that the grievances which I discussed with T.O. Jones would have in fact been grievances if these men had not been black men and further I had learned that the men had tried once before to form a union and walked out but had not stayed out over 2 or 3 days and they went on back to work. And I think that many people assume that the men were going to do this time. And of course with some of the tricks that were pulled by the mayor and other people in the power structure I do feel that the men were encouraged to go back to work but they may have denied they weren't going back and those of us who were supporting them were just pointing out why they couldn't go back. But I thought from the very beginning in fact I knew from the very beginning that it was a racial issuer and I didn't think we could hide behind the fact that we would just be in a labor dispute it was more than a labor dispute as it came to the attention of all of us who were involved in it later on even more clearly.

Jerry Veyer- - What labor man said he thought it was labor dispute do you remember?

Ezekiel Bell- Well all of the labor men, I remember Mr. Lucie was there he had just come, Mr. Epps hadn't come yet. But he made it clear to me that he didn't want to get the racial in, we didn't want to tie in race. And you remember on one4 of their first circular they were pointing out this was a labor dispute not a racial dispute and of course many people maintained this to the end. This was certainly the mayor's cry and I think most of the people on the city council continued to say that it was a labor dispute. Some of the commentators now I am sure would still maintain it was a labor dispute.

Jerry Veyer- - Did Mr. Lucie and Mr. Epps changed their minds later?

Ezekiel Bell- Oh yes in fact the whole union changed it s mind. Mr. Worth and Mr. Champa and Champa certainly indicated to me that you are not to bring any of this business of race because we got enough on our hands just battling these things.,

Jerry Veyer- - Why do you think they changed their minds.

Ezekiel Bell- I think they saw the power structure was not going to deal with them and that really it was boiling down to a question of race. If it hadn't boiled down to that it was already that I just think they had started to admit that. Because they said they dealt in a number of places with persons (muffled) power structure before but they never seen anything like this before.

Wilson Veyer- Now are you saying then that the union came in and took the position that this was not a racial matter it was strictly a labor matter and the powers that be

in the union reversed their position or changed their minds primarily for the purpose of.....

Ezekiel Bell- No I think the labor officials knew that it was a racial dispute that certainly race was apparent from the outset but I felt that they felt they had a strong position of solving it and getting their problems over because they had so much support on behalf of the men and things were going so well with them in the early days of the strike you know 5 or 6 8 trucks picking up trash and they knew then they would have a crisis but I think they started to realize what we were saying after negotiations started to break down and it did become crystal clear to all of us to all the persons that had not admitted that it was a black white situation.

Wilson Veyer- Do you remember what you told the sanitation workers that day, February the 13th?

Ezekiel Bell- I don't remember precisely but I pointed out to them that what they were doing certainly was right that they had worked hard and long and they certainly deserved a just wage and while I didn't know anything about unions, I knew that all unions were not perfect for I had read many of the complaints against unions in the NAACP office. But if they felt they could help themselves by getting into a union that if they felt this time this was the lesser of the evils to be in a union rather than out of a union I felt it was not a question for me to try to determine what they wanted to do. They had to do themselves and because they had walked off their jobs they had made up their mind they wanted a union and because they wanted this I felt my obligation to stand with the, for 3 reasons. For many reasons but 3 which I can think of. In first place I felt as a minister, was a Presbyterian minister I had as an Christian ministers, Presbyterian sect, that I had a responsibility to stand with people who were trying to accomplish that which they felt was in their best interest. Secondly I felt I had a responsibility to be there because I had a number of friends who were out there and I think you ought to be on the side of your friends when something like this come sup. I had many friends that....and then in the third place my own father had once worked for the sanitation department and I know something I don't remember precisely exactly what he was making but I do know he was not making enough for the long hours he was putting in. His paycheck ended up being small. For those reasons I pointed out that I would stand with them as long as they stood and not only would I stands with them but I would try to do the best I could for nay underprivileged people in the area.

Wilson Veyer- Well then exactly what capacity were you there at that meeting?

Ezekiel Bell- I was simply there as an interested person. As a minister who had been invited by one of the labor officials to come and say something to the men and I simply said what came to my mind. I had no prepared speech and simply told the man that what I have said to you. They had a right to stand for that which they were striking for.

Wilson Veyer- Who else spoke that day?

Ezekiel Bell- Mrs. Crenshaw got there about the same time and she spoke and Mr. Pickett was there and he indicated that he had already begun to take up food for the men.

Wilson Veyer- Now Mr. Pickett and Mrs. Crenshaw who are they?

Ezekiel Bell- Mrs. Crenshaw is one of the ladies who had been working for some time with the Memphis housing authority and is a lady well known in the community here as a civic and political leader. I assumed that someone had invited her over as one of the community leaders to be there and speak, and she spoke to the men. And Mr. Pickett was there who also addressed the men.

Wilson Veyer- You were the only ministers there?

Ezekiel Bell- I was the only pastor there as far as I can remember there were some other preachers there but they also might have worked part time they might have been working at the sanitation department I don't remember any other ministers there who later you know pastors of churches I am saying, full time pastors.

Wilson Veyer- Then what are the meeting that day and then your talk with the union then what next as far as your involvement what was the next step?

Ezekiel Bell- Well I was invited to come back the next day and I did. In fact I believe that same evening we went down, that was on a Tuesday, I believe we walked from the Firestone hall down to city council. Yes we did because we met with the mayor that evening, the men met with the mayor in the auditorium and Mr. Lucie and the mayor had quite a discussion. The man was indicating to them how they could not do this, that this was certainly illegal and the men ought to go back to work in fact he ordered them back to work. It was a very lively discussion and I addressed the men after the mayor left and told them again that they ought to stand their ground. That if it were illegal then the mayor had a right to put them in jail or to do whatever you do with people who are doing illegal things. This encouraged them again to not give into his threats. And he did threaten them, he ordered them back to work. And Mr. Lucie and the mayor had quite an exchange before he left and then of course the men left and went on home after this meeting. That was same that same Tuesday the first day that I went there. Then the Wednesday I went back in fact I went back everyday. Almost everyday I can remember, I can remember days I was not there and I think the main climax, the first part of the movement, the first part of the strike came to an end when the city council, when we went to the city council's chamber. And there the men, and Mr. Davis, Mr. Fred Davis called for a hearing and asked that the men come down and present their own grievances, you know come down and speak for them selves, and when this meeting, I don't remember exactly the date of this but it must have been around the 20 something of February, about the 22nd I guess. Only a few of the men were there at the beginning of the meeting and Mr. Davis insisted as the chairman of the committee that day and who was presiding that more men had to be present. That he didn't want to hear preachers and labor people he wanted to hear the sanitation workers themselves. And he insisted 3 or 4

times that the men should be there. Well the men finally came and when they came there was about 700 of them. Well the city council only seats 407. But all of the men came in. After they filled up the chamber they were standing in the aisles.

Jerry Veyer- - Did somebody go back and tell the men that they wanted them.

Ezekiel Bell- That's right someone called over to the union hall and told all the men that they wanted them there.

Jerry Veyer- - And it was the city council themselves that insisted...

Ezekiel Bell- No it was a committee it was a public recs committee headed by Mr. Davis, it is over sanitation and housing. Sanitation and housing division of the city council and Mr. Davis is the chairmen, incidentally he is from my district also. Now I voted for him he is a good friend of mine he and I were in school together. Well the men came and there were more than enough to fill up the chamber, and so Mr. Davis insisted that all the men standing around the aisle had to leave otherwise he would have to call the meeting off. And he would have to close the meeting and the men started to leave. I told them that they should not leave, that they had been invited down in fact Mr. Davis had insisted that they come down and it was only fair that he hear the,. If we wanted to go to a larger room, there were larger rooms, and we could have gone over to the city auditorium or somewhere else, but Mr. Davis insisted that the men leave and I insisted as a friend of the men that they had no right to level that they had been invited. So Mr. Davis indicated that if they did not leave then he would have to leave and so he did leave and we decided we would staying the chamber until we were heard. And while we were there lunch time came and some of the ladies, some of the men went out and got sandwiches and bread and we just had dinner in the council chambers. And naturally you had to bless the food and things of this sort so we had prayer and other men gave speeches to the people and many of the wives had come to this meeting and many of the ladies supporting the men were there and we had lunch and we simply sat and waited for the council or a committee of the council to come back and we found that they did come back.

Jerry Veyer- - How long before they came back?

Ezekiel Bell- It was 2 hours and half it was in the afternoon.

Jerry Veyer- - And no one was in there with you, no one in official capacity?

Ezekiel Bell- Well the press was there but nobody in official capacity no. Finally, 7 or 8 of the councilmen came back and met with a few of the labor people and some of us ministers and stated to us that they would resent the next day which was a Friday, that if we left the council chamber rather than stay all night as some of us had planned to do by that time that they would present a resolution on tomorrow calling for the dues check off and all of the other grievances which the men were seeking. All the other things they were seeking they would present this in a formal resolution.

Wilson Veyer- Now who proposed, who on the council...

Ezekiel Bell- Agreed to that?

Wilson Veyer- Yeah.

Ezekiel Bell- Now I can remember the ones who were there, Mr. Chandlerman, Mr. Davis and Mr. Neders and I think Mr. Patterson came in later. I am not sure Mr. Pryor was there and maybe Mr. Blanchard I am not sure. But there were 5 that came back there with us. I am not sure Mr. Hindman, but I can remember those I didn't know all of the councilmen then. But there were 5 of them there at that particular time but more had been there when the hearing was going on. Because Mr. Pryor had been there but he had gone, The mayor had also come and had gone from the meeting. Well it was agreed, not by a majority because I didn't feel we should have left, I felt they should have called a special meeting of the council and passed the resolution then and plus I wasn't one of the negotiators anyway. Now I was just speaking as a friend for the men., I told them that I didn't think the councilmen were in good faith that this was simply a trick to get us out of the chamber because we were well fortified and they couldn't have put all 7 or 8 hundred of us in jail. They could have but I doubt if they would have. But it was agreed that they would present the resolution on tomorrow and they felt they had enough strength to pass it and in compromise to that we would leave the auditorium and meet back tomorrow in the city auditorium, leave the council chambers, and that we would meet back on tomorrow at the city auditorium because the council chambers would not be large enough for all the peoples who were coming, that was agreed upon and I mentioned to you that I thought it was an un wise decision. And so since I had been speaking to the people practically all evening and just talking about things you know like we pick much of the cotton and the symbol bearer gave me a theme to talk on. The steam boat and I talked about how the steam boat had brought our fore parents down the river and that this was our town and we had been here for a long time and we weren't going to let anybody run us away from it. And that the cotton was symbolic of us having picked all of it and yet all of us were still stricken and we had a responsibility for trying to save our town and also a responsibility for insuring that this would be a place of justice for everybody and what we was doing was really the right thing to do, I wanted to point out to them that many of their sons at that time were in the army. There was one man who had been wounded and who (muffled) the sanitation department in world war 2. I pointed out things like this to let them know that hey really had helped to make America what it was not only by picking cotton but by laboring even as they were now with the sanitation department. And by fact that they got (muffled) and their sons were now fighting that they had as much a right to claim this building or any other building as anyone else did that it was theirs. So if we chose to stay all night we could stay all night. But we left after the compromised was reached and everybody went home to come back on tomorrow.

Jerry Veyer- - Before we leave this meeting is this the meeting at which you made the controversial statements that were in the press?

Ezekiel Bell- Yeah.

Jerry Veyer- - Would you comment on those and if you were you quoted accurately?

Ezekiel Bell- I really don't know what the press said, we hadn't stopped at that time to check. I hadn't stopped checking the paper but I indicated that the building could be redecorated a lot better than it was. That frankly I didn't like the red carpet and I didn't like the cotton symbol because it reminded me of things that I didn't particularly care to remember and that maybe it should be redecorated.

Jerry Veyer- - Did you say this in jest?

Ezekiel Bell- Well it drew a lot of compliment, it drew a lot of applause from the people, people like to hear things like this I think but I don't think anyone ever felt in that group there that we would have done anything to deface the building in any kind of way. I saw we would not have and no one there would have done this. Not at my leading so I would not have lead him to do that.

Wilson Veyer- U think the statement in the paper was to the effect that you in a fiery outburst pointed to the seal and commented that is the seal of Memphis it is not worth or something to that effect or it should be torn down.

Ezekiel Bell- I certainly indicated that I thought the building could stand a redecoration and nobody had consulted us when someone put up that.

Jerry Veyer- - Did you make a comment about public restrooms?

Ezekiel Bell- Oh yes, I indicated that there were not enough restrooms there for all the people and thought maybe this would encourage the council to go ahead and do something. I didn't know what the folk were getting ready to do when they got ready to go to the restroom.

Jerry Veyer- - Did you say this in anger when you said these things, or in jest, was anybody taking you very seriously?

Ezekiel Bell- I don't feel that anyone would have used the rest room in the chambers because there were restrooms on the outside, at least there were restrooms on the outside. I certainly would not have done this and I don't think anyone present would have. I think we were really trying to let the council know that they had a responsibility to listen to us to try and hear us. But the council did not hear us anymore than they heard two weeks later. And I still don't think many white people hear what is being said in the black community.

Jerry Veyer- - Did you read the paper after this meeting that quoted you?

Ezekiel Bell- I think...

Jerry Veyer- - Do you remember if it quoted you fairly or what you thought?

Ezekiel Bell- I don't, I think for example indicating that the symbol was something that I didn't like personally, I think it depends upon personally in the way which you, if you just read this you may get the impression that somebody, that I would have torn it down. Which I indicated that I would not have, but to have heard me say this and to have understood what I was saying I think one would have certainly gotten the point of what I was talking about.

Jerry Veyer- - But you feel that the paper, the newspaper reporter did not?

Ezekiel Bell- I don't remember having seen precisely what the paper said, so I don't know whether they quoted me correctly or not. But I certainly think that if they did not get the spirit of that which I was trying to get across then they didn't really hear me. They might have gotten worried that I might have viewed but they still didn't get the meaning I was trying to get across. For the whole intent of the confrontation in the first place was to get the attention of the council or the committee to hear what the men were actually saying and to do some thing about it and this we didn't communicate, to this extent we didn't communicate. So it stands to reason, whatever the newspaper picked up anything other than that of trying to get the attention of those present who could do some thing about it then they certainly misunderstood the whole thrust of what I was trying to say. Jerry Veyer- - I remember there was one particular quotation which you were quoted as saying about burning the city down and later there was an article in the paper that said that reverend Ezekiel Bell was misquoted that he said this city wasn't worth burning down do you remember this.

Ezekiel Bell- Yes I said that. I said I would probably burn it down myself if it were worth it but I don't think it was worth it. I said that, they didn't misquote me at that point. If this is what they said I had probably stopped taking notice at the time.

Jerry Veyer- - Was this in that same council meeting?

Ezekiel Bell- I would suspect so, I don't really know. I am trying to see how many times did we really confront the council. Maybe we came back the next week after that I think we did. Yes we did because we had a whole group of ministers who made testimony and speeches and I was one of the ministers called to speak at the meeting. And this is the time when I pointed out to them that I felt that these men were acting like rats and that I didn't like rats. I felt that the (muffled) I didn't call them rats, I said I didn't like rats. Said I called the men rats, well I didn't call them rats even though I might have. But I said that I didn't like rats white or black.

Wilson Veyer- Well on this February 20th or 22nd council meeting were there any other ministers at this meeting besides yourself there?

Ezekiel Bell- Yes there were many ministers there that day because many had come down feeling that we would get some kind of a...many had come down to testify at the hearing and many did speak that day I was not the only one to speak. Mr. Turner, no, Mr. Turner not the minister but he came down. And this was the day he

encouraged all his friends to come down and bring a bucket of garbage with you. And I was there on the platform when Mr. Turner addressed them.

Jerry Veyer- - Were there any white ministers there present at the time, or any white people who are supporting the strike at this point?

Ezekiel Bell- I don't think so, not in spoken if they were. I think Baxton Bryant was there. The Tennessee council of human relations, he is the executive director form Tennessee, I think he was there. He was at most of these but I don't think he spoke to the council not on that day.

Wilson Veyer- Well do you recall when ministers other than yourself began to become actively involved?

Ezekiel Bell- Yes I can remember this very well, you see that day we, now the same day we left the council chambers, with the understanding that we would come back tomorrow for them to present a resolution that would end the strike, all of the ministers, many ministers came that day for everybody was under the impression that we had really gotten the attention of the councils, that they were beginning to listen and that tomorrow they would vote something that the men could start to work with and maybe even move back to work and work out other grievances you see. But the council met that morning and in an executive session at 10:20 and then they came back to the city council chamber at 2:15 opened up the meeting there according to the rules and moved over to the auditorium and that is where we were all assembled. I had brought my sleeping kit because I didn't think the council was going to do anything, I didn't feel they were going to do, I just didn't feel they were going to do anything so I brought my sleeping bag. Because we said we were going to stay if the council didn't act right that day. Alright well the council met in the auditorium and called it into order, or recalled it into order after the recess from the main chamber. And hardly read the resolution which had already been voted on and not the one that they had voted that morning to turn down the resolution which they had promised us in closing and they brought back a resolution stating that they felt the mayor had the right to settle this dispute. And they voted 10-3, 10-4 one man felt that he even had no right to answer for them. This was the first, you know they were pointing out (muffled) service and so forth but in terms of all other things the mayor had the right to negotiate as the chief executive for the city.

Wilson Veyer- So the council then on the previous day had adopted a resolution which in your mind would have effectively either settled or opened the door for the settlement of the strike.

Ezekiel Bell- They hadn't voted but they had promised it.

Wilson Veyer- Had promised it.

Ezekiel Bell- Certain members of the council had promised it and had promised it on the basis of their feeling on the strength that they had enough votes on the council

that if we left they would be bale to get enough votes to give the men the things they were asking for.

Jerry Veyer- - Who were these councilmen that promised this.

Ezekiel Bell- Well Davis served as the chairman, Mr. Chandler was another member of his committee. And I don't know if Mr. Blanchard was one, but it must not have been Blanchard because he, well I don't know who the others were but I can remember Mr. Chandler, and Pryor had been there and I believe even, I don't know might have been (muffled). I am not really sure.

Wilson Veyer- They read this resolution to you on that day?

Ezekiel Bell- No, no, no. They told us they would give the thing to the men, the crucial thing, the dues check off, some form of dues check off which came out later to be by way of the credit union and an increase in salary. They didn't say how much but they felt these were the two crucial issues and a meaningful grievance procedure you see. These were the 3 crucial issues and then the other thing could be worked out in terms of (muffled).

Wilson Veyer- You say they, who was the spokesmen, Davis?

Ezekiel Bell- Davis was the spokesmen but he certainly had the encouraged by those others who sat with him and who told him that they felt they had enough strength to get these votes if we would just leave the council chambers.

Wilson Veyer- So in other words Davis made this statement to you?

Ezekiel Bell- Yes he did.

Wilson Veyer- Now the others there which included Mr. Chandler. Did any of the others give any form of a cent to this position?

Ezekiel Bell- Yeah they felt the others there felt that we certainly would have a strong position and they would have a strong case tomorrow in council.

Wilson Veyer- They made this statement to you along with...

Ezekiel Bell- Yes they said that and they said this there in the room off from the right of the city council chamber and it was agreed that they would present it and they felt they had enough strength to get the votes to pass it.

Wilson Veyer- And Chandler was one and Chandler the next day was one of the ten who voted down the resolution.

Ezekiel Bell- That's right, all of the whites voted against it including the man who voted against it he voted because he thought it....even what they were saying was too much. So he voted I guess in order to say emphatically no that he was not in favor of even what (muffled). We had no right to do anything it was illegal and following the course of action laid down by the man.

Wilson Veyer- Well then what happened after the meeting in the auditorium that day. That was the first march wasn't it?

Ezekiel Bell- That's right. When the council hurriedly read the resolution that they had which was not anything like what they had promised us then there was no time allowed for nay questions from the floor, or discussion or anything. They voted, and closed the meeting and under the protection of policemen got out by way of the back door. All of them just left running you know the white ones did and they cut off the mic, the PA the public address system was cut off so that we couldn't even address our people and tell them what to do. And Dr. Vasco Smith shouted something to the audience and Dr. Ralph Jackson the first time I heard him speak and the first time I had seen him there made an oration and it was he who stated calling for the boycott and calling for the discontinuation of the newspaper and Jim Lawson was in the audience I saw him for the first time.

Wilson Veyer- In the strike?

Ezekiel Bell- And Jessie Epps one of the labor leaders made an oration and O.Z. Evers made an oration and it was finally decided that we would lead, even Willis, Willis was there first time I had seen him. A.W. Willis was there and he made a speech and it was finally agreed that we would, T.O. Jones instructed all present that we would leave and walk down Main St. and go from there to Mason Temple rather than Clayborne Temple. And so we started out of the building to go to mason Temple on Main St. and when we got out there of course we were confronted by the policemen right off, any number of them were there, hundreds of them, and they told us we couldn't go in the street but we all were (muffled) anywhere fro 1,000 to 1,300 people we must have been 1,300 people out here. It was finally agreed however that if we walked on the, and this information had come form the police department and we agreed that we would walk down Main St. on the right side going south and to the left of the line.

Wilson Veyer- Now who talked to the, were you involved in handling...

Ezekiel Bell- No I was not, I didn't talk with him it was agreed on by the labor officials at the front of the line. And T.O Jones they talked with who ever was the captain or chief of police whoever was in charge of the police, whoever was giving the orders for the policemen they talked to the people and then all of us got instructions of where we were going to walk. This took about 10 or 15 minutes of negotiating. Meanwhile all of us are just standing there in the street and many people had gone off to the side. And so we started walking after we got the permission and we marched on down and the lead car and all of the police men along there were acting very friendly. I know I was chatting with the one and I had my sleeping bag because I thought we were going to be in the chamber all night.

Wilson Veyer- Did you happen to know him?

Ezekiel Bell- No I didn't know him.

Wilson Veyer- You just struck up a conversation with him?

Ezekiel Bell- He was looking at me and I was looking at him so we just started talking.

Wilson Veyer- Did you introduce yourself or did you need to?

Ezekiel Bell- No I didn't introduce myself I just got to talking to him and talking about how warm it was and nice the weather was and he fact that we were really going to be tired when we got to where we had to go.

Wilson Veyer- Did you start the conversation?

Ezekiel Bell- I am not sure he was a friendly looking fellow and we sort of just started to talk, he might have started it. We got down to Gayoso right in front of (muffled) and I was on the 3rd or 4th line I heard some screaming by the ladies.

Wilson Veyer- 3rd or 4th line? You mean abreast?

Ezekiel Bell- 3rd or 4th row. People were rowed off about 8 or 10 across.

Wilson Veyer- You mean you were 3rd from the front of the....

Ezekiel Bell- Yes I didn't get on the front line some of the other people who were coming in to the movement for the first time wanted to get on the front so I didn't argue with them we were so glad they were there and we let them have the (muffled) I was just so glad to see them we were getting pretty tired. This thing had gone on for almost two weeks and when we got down in front of Goldsmith I heard the lady screaming and the police car by then was all the way over the line where we were supposed to be and they just started to put mace on everybody, all the way the man at the top I mean they were just putting stuff all over you, I didn't know what he was doing.

Wilson Veyer- He squirted you with mace?

Ezekiel Bell- Yes, he put that stuff all over me.

Wilson Veyer- Did he say anything before hand or just all of sudden he wheeled around and squirted you?

Ezekiel Bell- He just started putting the mace all over me and he put it on everybody and everybody was getting maced from one end of the line to another.

Wilson Veyer- Looking at it I can't tell how much more footage we have on this tape. Well did you run when you....(Tape End)