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Wilson Veyer- This is reel 3 in the interview with reverend Ezekiel Bell being conducted at the home of Wilson Veyer 269 Marianne Dr. Memphis. Present are Wilson and Jerry Veyer, date May 28<sup>th</sup> 1968. Reverend Bell I believe that you had mentioned at the end of the last tape that there was this strange car stayed parked outside your house the night of Dr. King's assassination if you would like to take it up fro there.

Ezekiel Bell- Well after I came home there was a, I received one or two phone calls from people around town and then I tell them..(Tape break)

Ezekiel Bell- After I got home that night, I received one or two phone calls form people around town. I think one was from my brother who was (muffled) and then a strange car parked in front of our home. Then a little while after that I asked my wife to call the police and to at least tell them the car 3was out there and of course the phone was dead at the time and she never got the police. So we had the children put in the back room where they ordinarily sleep. We cut off all the lights and we stayed there art the windows and watched until I guess it was 2 or 3:00 in the morning when they left. Now it could have been private detectives or it could have been some folks writing nasty letters to us or this might have been somebody parked out there I don't know.

Wilson Veyer- And you say you did see someone in the car?

Ezekiel Bell- Yes there were at least 2 people in the car I could make this out. Now I don't know what heir reason for being there was, no one to my knowledge had parked like this before in front of our home.

Wilson Veyer- Were they directly in front of your home parked on your side of the street?

Ezekiel Bell- Yes.

Jerry Veyer- And you had no contact with anyone at all that night?

Ezekiel Bell- In fact it was about 10:00 the next day before we got our telephone back into operation.

Wilson Veyer- Do you remember when did the car leave?

Ezekiel Bell- It was about 2 or 3:00 that morning and they (muffled) until after they left.

Jerry Veyer- Did you tell the police about this the next day?

Ezekiel Bell- No, I didn't. I had received threatening calls about every day from somebody who would call about 3 or 4:00 in the morning so I didn't feel constrained to tell the police about this at all in fact it might have been the police there for

protection or some other reason. So I didn't have no carrying of these (muffled) or any of the phone calls that we received at all.

Jerry Veyer- How did you feel after Dr. King's death that night, how did you feel about the whole thing what were your feelings?

Ezekiel Bell- Well, I felt rather angry I think, not violent but angry that we could make so much to do about a little matter, a simple matter of a small raise and union recognition for a handful of sanitation workers. I really felt that our country and particularly our city was just in a mess that we would be so stubborn about something like this and let matters go this far. When we could have settled it just a few days after the strike without having to go so far. So I really felt disappointed, angry, let down, saying that we would go so far as to permit this to happen. I think we were responsible for it.

Wilson Veyer- Did you know Dr. King personally?

Ezekiel Bell- I knew him as personally as you would know a person of his caliber, he was a very down to earth person. I indicated earlier that I believe that on one of the tapes that Dr. King had spent the night in our home in Huntsville Alabama.

Wilson Veyer- Oh no I didn't hear that.

Ezekiel Bell- Yes. And it was some what of a coincidence. He would not have spent he night with us but with some of the other neighbors but everybody was afraid to let Dr. King stay in their home, it was the 19062 I believe just before the man's march, 62, we were having demonstrations there and he would come up to speak in a rally, he and Dr. Abernathy both spent the night with us. And so it really was a joy to have them in our home and I got to know him very well. In fact, I had been offered two jobs with the SCLC. And I could never make up my mind to go up and work for them as a full time worker, but it always has been a matter of him and also of his the work of the organization.

Jerry Veyer- So the next day after the assassination what took place?

Ezekiel Bell- Well you know that was some amount of looting that night and the next night there were a number of fire calls and alarms I understand. And we got an...we started to meet immediately after that, we would meet down in hotels and all of us on the strategy committee were given passes to be out since curfew was invoked and we went right ahead with our meetings and started to make plans for the funeral after we found out when it was going to be. And those of us who were going down chartered a plane and busses to go down and make arrangements to go to the funeral. And we also laid plans for the mayor's march which took place here, Monday prior to the funeral. In the meantime we had to go about here with things that had to be done by paying utility bills for the men and buying groceries for the men and receiving a great number of checks that have begun to come in as a result of this. I would also point out that at the time that Dr. King was shot the union certainly had said they had depleted most of their funds that they had set aside for

that and the community was only raising something less than a \$1,000 a week. And the men were using more than that in a day for food alone. So we really were at rock bottom and this was the reason why I had been over pleading again with the presbyter and Dr. Bottoms to come across with some funds because we were just really hurting and it was really just a question of how long we would be able to encourage the men to stay up with because they didn't have money to do just the basic things like buy groceries you see. These people were really having to go without the basic necessities and of course it will be even a long time now before many of these men will catch up, if ever.

Jerry Veyer- Friday morning after did you (muffled).

Ezekiel Bell- No, no, I went down for I just couldn't go down with him, I just felt that I couldn't in good faith participator in the memorial service with him nor could I go down to city hall and raise cain with the mayor. I just didn't feel constrained to do it and I felt that it was after the fact that we could have gone, the Wednesday before we could have gone....I just felt it was a hypocritical act, that it was something now popular to do and it was looked upon that if you didn't, if you went you would be criticized for going after the fact, if you didn't get you would, anyway before this I felt it was a hypocritical action as far as (muffled) really even though they had planned to do this before the assassination. I think that they might have been way off to use their influence if they had any such influence prior to his assassination. See I don't know that it had any effect after the assassination on what was going to be done. I think his assassination brought the strike to break not what the ministers did. So they might have gone along with that what they had been doing prior to.

Wilson Veyer- And what would (muffled) if you did go down to the meeting of ministers (muffled).

Ezekiel Bell- I went down on the Wednesday when they had another meeting and I also went down that day. I went down that day that they was marching. They were having prayers and all that I decided I would go back home.

Wilson Veyer- Were you there when the period of discussion?

Ezekiel Bell- I don't know that they had a discussion as such, I think most of it had been planned they had a memorial service, worship was in progress when I got there and I left and went on by the hotel and talked to (muffled) Peabody Hotel. Yes that is right and then he got reservations to go back that afternoon and I had to see the call (muffled) I called from the hotel to speak with Mr. Taylor Blair, he told me that we could come on over now and make arrangements to pick up the money and I told him we didn't need the money any more. And he said well I think we ought to make a contribution and I told him that as far as I was concerned he could keep his money and (muffled) that we would be getting money from everywhere across the country and the world. And we didn't need presbytery assistance anymore since they had not found a way to do it before this had, before it had gone this far I didn't see the necessity of trying to persuade the Presbytery to do any more than it had

already done and that was nothing. But we did go on and meet, I went ahead, because I was obligated to take Mr. Bottoms over there and I simply sat through that meeting and pointed out to them again that I didn't think they should be breaking their laws to try to get somebody to request the money when this committee, the committee on (muffled) and relations (muffled) had written a letter to the mayor indicating that they felt he should hear in the affirmative the request of the men. They were under fire for this and I didn't want to see them come under any more fire for requesting funds for the sanitation workers since the crisis in a sense was over in terms of money we knew then that we would be able to take care of the men for as long as the strike went on. So I didn't see the necessity of breaking the laws to get these men (muffled). To get them to request any money before the national ministers but this was done in fact \$5,000 donation was made to the (muffled) for the purpose of assisting the sanitation workers (muffled). Almost given back to them but the (muffled) said they would go ahead and have money given to the men.

Wilson Veyer- Well then I guess the next thing I believe is the memorial march itself. Can you think of any significant thing that happened before that time, or the next thing would be the memorial march?

Ezekiel Bell- Well that was the (muffled) I think that had probably (muffled) I think that many of the churches in town. And national memorial service was announced the next day. (muffled). A plan was made for the service that would take place. (Muffled) Everyone else wanted to be on the program so I naturally gave them an opportunity to do that. I wanted to make sure that the march went out right because that is what Dr. King had come back to prove and I felt that I should be out there trying to make sure nobody took advantage of this situation to do anything that would disrupt the march. And that is what I did. I served as a marshal and brought up the rear to make sure that everybody got back to where they started from.

Wilson Veyer- Why was Ruston brought back in to organize the memorial march as oppose to the SCLC (muffled).

Ezekiel Bell- Thing is they had to go and make arrangements for what was going to take place in Atlanta. They had to get all of their staff, they had to have a staff meeting and reorganize and re-staff and they had a number of things to do with people there in getting all of the men off (muffled) and deciding what their next move is going to be and electing Dr. Abernathy. Hold up, Dr. Abernathy automatically became president because of the constitution of SCLC I understand I don't know anything about that constitution but they had a lot of work to do there and of course the man on the spot here was Barrett Ruston and he certainly wanted to make sure that he was the most qualified man to put his march together for us and he did together with all the ones that wanted to make sure it was done right.

Wilson Veyer- Who decided to bring him in was he in contact.....

Ezekiel Bell- Now I didn't contact him I was afraid Jim Lawson was or simply he might have volunteered this or SCLC staff might have invited him in for see I

indicated to you earlier he was the one who had worked out the details for the grand march on Washington. Some few years ago. He was the most qualified person to do that this and therefore he is the logical one to come back and to (muffled) this one march and it would be a perfect ending march.

Wilson Veyer- And then you were also marshal in the memorial march. Do you remember your reaction to (muffled) the memorial march. Could you give us your impression the (muffled).

Ezekiel Bell- Well here again I felt during the whole march and as I did so many days thereafter a feeling of emptiness, of what is the use, That the whole country is going down the drain and all of us are going to hell. Because we are just so sinful this was my feeling from then a feeling of emptiness. A feeling of despair. I felt sorry as I always do for folks who come after the fact and pity that here were folk coming from all around the world to be in the memorial march you know preachers and rabbis and nuns and all these ambitious folks (muffled). High ranking church officials and all of these folks were here to be in the memorial march because they respect him, but I felt that in a sense it was hypocritical that after this was over many of us would go back to doing the same thing that we had always done with your lip service and just go back to the regular ways again. And from what took place in city council today it certainly tells us what has taken place in Memphis. I would hope that this is not going to be taken place in other parts of the country, but from that which has taken place right now in Washington I think the country is (muffled). So I felt that what a pity that people of goodwill such as these could not have arisen to the occasion of occasions when the man was alive. When he begged them, and tried with all that he had to get them to do the right thing, the Christian thing, that there were so many people at the podium you see. I think the newspapers that talked about him and how they had drawn cartoons of him and ridiculed his work. Here they were now putting up a reward, a great reward for catching him and the city council they talked about he outsiders, and the fact that it was not a racial strike, not have no racial implications were putting (muffled) and all of those people many of them were there marching you know. So I am (muffled) we like people when they are dead, but then they are alive you can't do anything for them. This was sort of a feeling I got a feeling of emptiness (muffled). The next day or so (muffled) I think that it takes (muffled) maybe it takes place a week after, I just couldn't (muffled). I just felt if people cared they would be out doing what Dr. King had been doing before. (muffled) of pity and sympathy for folks who were just so bland. (Muffled).

(Tape break

Jerry Veyer- Zeke what events took place between the memorial march and the end of the strike that stand out most vividly in your mind?

Ezekiel Bell- I am not sure if anything one thing stand out to me. I had gone to the funeral, absent of all your march, some 24 or 25 of us chartered a plane and went

down to the funeral and others came on by bus and by other private airlines, commercial airlines. The funeral was a mass, you know you saw it on television. It was something I guess that people look for now. But where again I got the same feeling, what are people really going to do, we studying all this crisis material and I really wondered if this was going to cause folk to do more than just give lip service and I think this yet remains to be seen. I know that much is going to take place but in terms of any outstanding event I don't really know of anything that occurred except that I had heard that before long the strike would be settled. I mean the strike would be settled and most of us knew that this wouldn't be too far off. So we kind of looked forward to this and got ready to brace ourselves for it going on longer in case it had gone on. We certainly were in a very good position financially. Much money had come in and we were able then to start giving the men a check each week for \$40 or so, so they could start buying their own food and nobody was giving it to them like children and to take care of some of the more pressing bills that they had and a man was standing in line 4 and 5 hours to pick up this and to take it for basic necessities. So we had to go on with these kinds of things and then of course we were a greatly alarmed and disturbed at least I was, over the fact that very little seemed to have been done. I say very little seemed to have been done, from where I was standing on the part of the police on the part of the police to try and apprehend the killer, or killers. This just perturbed me to the end and you start just thinking all kinds of things which I would just not like to share. This bother me and of course when we went to a meeting on the day the strike was settled that day at 12, at 10:00 we were told that the strike had unofficially ended. And that they had agreed to terms and they read those too us before it was really announced to the union men and they had told us that they would make a recommendation that the men would accept it and they thought it was fair and was a good contract. Maybe this was about the end of it. So frankly it wasn't too much time of rejoicing for me because I was glad the men were going back to work anybody would be happy that somebody is going back to work but I guess the fact that Dr. King had been assassinated and that whoever did it had not been caught, just didn't seem like whatever they got was enough to atone, was going to suffice that which had occurred in our community and this same feeling of why many of us want to go back and work for reconciliation and all, many folk don't feel that we have ever been separated. They felt that if he hadn't come in worries of some people have said, I heard some indicated that the strike would not even have been settled unless the man had been assassinated. I was just glad that the men were going back to work and we could just move on to make our city the best place possible.

Jerry Veyer- Do you think there has been any change in Memphis?

Ezekiel Bell- Oh I think a few people have been aroused, I think a lot of people were actually happy, happy that he was assassinated. I think they are sorry that he was assassinated here but I think they are really glad that they did. I think there is this feeling by many people. I wouldn't say anything like a majority but many white people whom I know really kind of glad that this trouble maker is out of the way. This is usually the case of anybody that comes in and disturbs the peace. I think it

has been true of people like Jesus and Socrates and many others whom we knew. Many of the prophets people were glad when they were out of the way because then they felt that things would go back to normal and this is the attitude that many folks I feel have assumed and will continue to assume right here in Memphis rather than facing up to the racism, here is the sickness that really is (muffled) is really straining us and carrying us down as a nation.,

Jerry Veyer- Do you feel any hope that Memphis is on the way to change? Do you feel hopefully about the future as far as race relations go?

Ezekiel Bell- I feel hopeful,. I feel some hope through some of the programs that are taking place and that are really being planned I should say because I don't know of too many that are taking place presently. I know a lot of firms and a lot of firms are moving down to do that which was suggested to them 10 years ago by the NAACP like hiring people. I was impressed somewhat with the \$100,000 appropriated by the city council today to match an additional \$100,000 with the Dreifuss proposal to more youngsters to work and playgrounds this summer. These I think are healthy signs provided I think that they can be sustained and the fact that we are meeting this Sunday evening with the president of the school board may indicate that there are some break throughs it depends on what attitude he takes. But I think by and large the community is about the same as it was before, even though the two things that I have pointed out here are hopeful signs, I think that if the Dreifuss proposal and some of the meetings and perhaps the most (muffled) meetings. I can't say the most serious part because I have had meetings since 1959 with white groups who have wanted to know and who have been informed who have still gone back to business as usual. So I can't say that I am too excited about these meetings and all but maybe something good can come out of them they both really are interested in wanting to move forward.

Jerry Veyer- Do you think the black and the white communities in Memphis are more polarized or less polarized than they were before the strike?

Ezekiel Bell- I think that you had more of the polarization coming to the surface, they always been polarized because I indicated to you right at the first of this talk the black s and the whites really have very little or no dealings together and this is, this was true then if there were dealings they were all paternalistic in nature so that I don't really feel you have had any more polarization than you have had, I think you have had it brought to the surface, it has always been there. And perhaps will be there for some time to come until folks decide they are really going to change their way of doing things. Their attitude and to try new approaches to really bring about reconciliation.

Jerry Veyer- Now how do you think this can be done?

Ezekiel Bell- Well I would think from serious study groups of folks really wanting to find out what the basic problems really are. And once we have found these out which I feel again here is racism in America. Once we admit that we have certain

problems and can see this, see the way white racism and (muffled) so many aspects of our society in all areas of our society then I think we need to move rapidly to a doing something about this. Take for example discrimination in housing., Once we have seen this the nation has passed such a law and I think those of us who are concerned about it are going to have to take steps to correcting it and when real estate people are caught discriminating we are going to have to deal with these people the same way you would anybody else who is discriminating. And the school system where we see discrimination we are going to have to not only call a spade a spade but we are going to have to deal seriously with people who break the law along the lines of where the constitution is clear. Now I think this is going to mean that white people who are in the majority and who control most of the power in town, all of the power for most parts. Are the burden is going to be on the m to do this. And if, the big question is whether or no they are going to actually do that which they know they must do. If they really feel they must do anything more than what they have already done. And at this point frankly, I am not too optimistic that the whites are going to do more than they have already done, or always done. I think they are just going to bury their heads in the sand and hope that the problem will go away by and large. I think that negro community will continue to press with that which it has always pressed for and it will have to do this more militantly than ever before. And of course this is going to cause repression and repression is going to cause more demonstration and it is just going to be a cycle unless we can break out of it somewhere. The real test will be whether or not we can open our hearts and mind and deal with the real problems of white racism and how we have dominated people and controlled folk and manipulated people and slaughtered folks since this country got started. Now whether or not we are going to try another way remains to be seen. I think the real test is before Congress right now. How are they going to deal with the thing set out, said before them by the poor people.

Jerry Veyer- Thank you Zeke I believe this concludes the tape. Wilson you want to say anything?

(Tape End)