

SS353.mp3

This is August 14, 1973. This is David Yellin, and I am speaking to Frank Holloman in the offices of Future Memphis Incorporated, 100 North Main. This is the second tape.

David Yellin: Well, as I said before, we were talking when in our last tape about the March 18 appearance of Dr. King, and the fact that you wanted information for his protection, and it was not forthcoming. Could you discuss that, please?

Frank Holloman: From the very beginning when Dr. King came to Memphis, we felt that there was a security problem connected with his visits to Memphis, in view of the atmosphere of the times, and we attempted to establish a liaison with Dr. King and his representatives in order to provide that personal protection that we felt was necessary. However, these efforts were not successful, and as a matter of fact we were told very plainly that our presence and our services in this connection were not welcome. As a matter of fact, they were definitely rejected. I think that, in my opinion, from information available at that time, Dr. King's representatives felt that we were insincere, and instead of trying to provide personal security for Dr. King, we were interested in learning of information regarding what he was doing, what was happening, that we might use it for ulterior purposes, which is positively untrue. That type of information that we could have obtained from such an association was available to us from other sources, and we did not require it in the activities that we were engaged in at that time, because actually our activities at that time were not in any way other than legitimate in providing security for all the various forces that were at work at that time. Our main thrust was not taking a position of anti-labor or anti-sanitation, or pro, but rather it was attempting as best we could to provide security and protection for all of the citizens, regardless of what position they were taking in regard to the controversies that existed at the time. So, our entire purpose was merely to provide security that we felt was necessary for Dr. King on his visits to Memphis.

David Yellin: Two things on that -- when you said they didn't cooperate, do you mean by "they" Dr. King's people in the SCLC or the local people here in Memphis?

Frank Holloman: Dr. King's representatives in the SCLC, as well as the local people in Memphis.

David Yellin: Both?

Frank Holloman: Right, and as a matter of fact, we were told directly and very sharply. I remember (muffled). On one occasion I remember that I sent a particular representative of the police department to the airport when Dr. King arrived in order to make personal contact with him and his representatives, and to offer personal security to him while he was in Memphis. We were told by his representatives that we were not welcome, that the police protection was not desired, and that we were unwelcome at the airport or at any other place or time while he was in Memphis.

David Yellin: And for the reason that you mentioned, that they thought that, to put it in plain words that you would be spying on them for other reasons.

Frank Holloman: Right, and I think that was in their mind, which was not in our minds at all, because as I say, it was not necessary. We were not interested in Dr. King's movements or such, or what he was doing. As a matter of fact, Dr. King, everything that he did generally speaking was public knowledge. We could learn from the newspapers or from attending the meetings, everything was advertised whenever he made a speech or whenever he had a public appearance it was well advertised. So, it was not necessary for us to have that type of motive, because we could get it from other sources very easily, but we were told very positively, and it was not a cordial relationship let's say when we were told that we were not welcome, and as a result we had to back off. We did not abandon our efforts, but we had to operate from the perimeters you might say, rather than directly with him.

David Yellin: Perhaps some of this is hindsight, but do you believe that was really the reason, or do you think they had other, say tactical motives, such as they didn't want to appear to be cooperating with the police, or vice versa? I don't know, I'm just trying to bring up some reason that...

Frank Holloman: I doubt it really in assessing it at this time, because I'm a little uncertain as to the time element that we -- the time period in which we are referring to at this time and whether to not, but it's my recollection that in the month of March we had established a fairly good rapport, as far as the marches were concerned, and that was our concern. Our concern, I think can be wrapped up very positively and definitely in one thing, and that was providing security for the individuals who were engaged in these various activities, but I would say that our main thrust and our main concern was the marches, and we were having two marches a day as I recall at that time, one in the morning, and one in the afternoon, and it was to provide security for the individuals engaged in the march from antagonistic individuals on the street, and also to provide property protection for the merchants along the light of the route. So, we had established a fairly good liaison because, which I had tried to do from the very beginning, in order to learn for instance when would the marches start, what route would they take, how long they would last, and so forth. So, we had established, I think, that, and also you will recall that our representatives actually marched with them. We were, we had a very, very definite policy that, and as I say the period of time here is, I cannot be too specific, but generally speaking we had established a policy where representatives of the police department actually marched with the leaders of the march. They were actually at the head of the march with the leaders, and were in direct contact with them, and we were working together, because I think that these responsible leaders at that time, they didn't want any violence either, and I think it was a working arrangement that was to their advantage not to have violence at that time.

David Yellin: Now, just to be clear, when you said you cannot recall that period of time, you mean that five years later you can't put everything in its context?

Frank Holloman: Right, I can't; five years later, March 18, I cannot pinpoint exactly what happened on March 15 or 18 or 20.

David Yellin: Yes. Well, now just a couple of things there, just to make sure we kind of clear it up and that is you indicated you had a good liaison, I would assume you mean with the local people involved in the daily marches?

Frank Holloman: Right, yes. That's true.

David Yellin: Do you remember who they were, he was?

Frank Holloman: Dr. Jackson -- we were in communication with him. We were in communication with...

David Yellin: Jim Lawson perhaps, or not?

Frank Holloman: To some extent, but Dr. Lawson was not -- as I recall he was not in the same position as Dr. Jackson. Dr. Jackson, as my recollection is, generally speaking and I'm not speaking specific, but generally speaking Dr. Jackson was at the forefront in the organization of the marches and so forth. And we were in contact with him. We were in contact with the representatives of the labor union.

David Yellin: Jesse Epps, or Lucy?

Frank Holloman: Jesse Epps, Mr. Lucy -- we were in contact with them. I was on the telephone with them several times myself. But we had representatives who were designated for the purpose of staying in contact with them, and that contact and that liaison was accepted by them.

David Yellin: So that when Dr. King came, in a sense, it was another group.

Frank Holloman: It was another group, and I also have the impression that they let it be known that Dr. King had his own security force also.

David Yellin: I see, yes.

Frank Holloman: That he had his own representatives. He had his own security force, and that it was sufficient, and that they did not desire police personal security for him.

David Yellin: Now one other thing, Frank, that this again may be hindsight in that we do know that this occurred -- do you suppose at this time or to your knowledge at this particular time, was the fact that the FBI later did divulge that they did follow Dr. King, does this enter into it at all? I mean...

Frank Holloman: As far as our activities are concerned?

David Yellin: Well, as far as their response to your activities. Do you think...

Frank Holloman: Oh, no, no, no. I don't think that...I think they -- this is an opinion, but my opinion from the facts that I recollect at this time is that their attitude and relationship with the FBI was exactly the same as with the Memphis Police Department.

David Yellin: But do you think they knew that the FBI had been following, or tapping Dr. King as was later disclosed?

Frank Holloman: I don't think that entered into our -- I can't comment as to whether or not they thought that or not. I do not think it had any direct bearing on it, and to my knowledge the FBI was not "following" Dr. King as closely as your statement may indicate. In other words, at the airport and at these places, the FBI was not present.

David Yellin: Yes. Well, as I say, this is much more hindsight.

Frank Holloman: And I think they would have known. I think that if the FBI was either in direct contact with them, as far as "following" Dr. King is concerned and so forth, I think they would have known it or would have suspected it, but I had no indication that they, that this entered into the matter at all.

David Yellin: Well, now one other thing that you mentioned, that you indicated that there were forces on the 18th that you knew about that might be dangerous to Dr. King. Did you know it the 18th? Did you have any indication that there were people who were possibly out to get him, or at least?

Frank Holloman: No, not in that sense, no. I would say that our actions and our motivations were based mostly generally speaking on the atmosphere at the time, and also the fact that you had certain elements in the community who were as militant anti-sanitation strike as there were those pro, and we had received information that there were... Well, for instance to illustrate the point, I remember that on one particular march that was scheduled, we received direct information that another group was going to march the same day in an opposite direction.

David Yellin: Are you talking about the 28th March?

Frank Holloman: I don't recall which one it was at that time.

David Yellin: Not the daily marches, one of the big ones.

Frank Holloman: One of the big marches, yes, in which Dr. King would have participated as I recall.

David Yellin: Would that be something like the White Citizens Council, or some such, or would that be another black group?

Frank Holloman: No, it was a white group. I don't recall specifically the name of the group, but it was necessary for us to get in touch with the leadership of that group, and I don't recall now exactly who it was, to advise them that they would not be permitted under any circumstances to march at that time and along that route, that if they wanted to have a protest march of their own, they could have it scheduled and we would give them the same protection that we gave anyone else.

David Yellin: So in doing that, your motivation for that was predicated on keeping the peace.

Frank Holloman: Absolutely. That was entirely -- that was the theme regardless of what anyone may think, that was entirely my concern throughout the entire matter. As a matter of fact, as I think as I in one of the earlier conversations with you, it was definitely a policy that I adopted on the first day of the strike, that I would not have, nor would any member of the police department have any part whatsoever in the sanitation strike. We would not sit in on conferences. We would not be in policy decisions, and as a matter of fact the city administration was advised that the Memphis Police Department would take a completely objective non-interest you might say in the subject matter of the strike, but would be only concerned with public safety.

David Yellin: I want to get to that in a little bit, but before, I want to continue the last thing about Dr. King's first coming to Memphis. If you would care to, and this is for all I know, and I just have to ask this. You may have secret information and so on, but did you know of any kind of threats on Dr. King? Can you be specific, or do you know that you have that information that you may turn over to us at some future time?

Frank Holloman: I do not recall at this point the specific information. Now, I testified later in the federal court, and I did testify at that time and I testified on actual facts that had been furnished to us that the march was of great concern to us because there had been threats against Dr. King's safety. Now it was not a specific type that would be connected in any way with his later assassination, but it was one of these general types of emotional, inflammatory threats that were prevalent at the time. In other words, they were not isolated. There were a lot of threats. And I might also say that there were certain elements in the black community who were disagreeing with Dr. King and his peaceful tactics and were, I would say, that we were quite, as concerned that there was as much danger from certain individuals or groups in the black community against Dr. King's safety as there were from the white community.

David Yellin: As a matter of fact, either Dr. King, and certainly some of his lieutenants or both said it, one time or another, that they felt that were he to be killed it would be by a brother.

Frank Holloman: Right, I recall that, and I also as a matter of public knowledge that after the march, which was disrupted in violence on Beale Street, I recall the exact date of that.

David Yellin: March 28.

Frank Holloman: That the next day there were leaflets put out and distributed in the community referring to Dr. King's movement not as black power, but as yellow power. Those were distributed in Memphis, and were public knowledge.

David Yellin: Do you have any?

Frank Holloman: I did have. They are probably in the police department files. I do not have any personally.

David Yellin: I was trying to remember, I don't know whether we do or not.

Frank Holloman: And there was publicity at the time, I believe, if I'm not mistaken I believe that the newspapers carried some references to it at the time.

David Yellin: Now, again I'd like to ask you, during the strike and again for your determination to keep the peace, you did use informers. I guess that's part of the police work.

Frank Holloman: We had sources of information, yes, definitely.

David Yellin: You're saying this with a smile. I have to record this.

Frank Holloman: Yes, and I would say that we had very reliable sources of information. I will say at this point in describing whether they're reliable or not, that in hindsight the information that we received always proved correct. And, very, very frankly it was information that I would, that was not something that was bad, it was information that we would have gotten if we had had direct personal contact with Dr. King and his representatives.

David Yellin: Could you tell us a little bit about that, again for the record now, you know. I don't want to spy on you, or even on the police, and some of it is written down and people have written books, and so on, but could you tell us a little bit, say about how you did this?

Frank Holloman: Well, no. I'm not willing to because I think that we're now talking about a police procedure, which will be used again in the future. But I will say this, that in view of the present climate in America, I can assure that there, that we are not talking about telephone taps or microphone taps or things of that kind. We are talking about individuals who would furnish us information, who were in position to have the information. In other words there was no (muffled) technical means of securing this information, it was strictly through persons, people.

David Yellin: Right, yeah. And again for the record, you are referring to the climate of the times, which we now term Watergate.

Frank Holloman: True.

David Yellin: Which unfortunately will go down in history, and people will remember it. Well, since you won't tell us, I will have to get my other informers to give us information. Now I want to get back to something you did say, and again I have to ask this question. You did say that, and you said it on our first tape that your whole attitude and thrust was to keep out of the philosophical concern of the strike itself.

Frank Holloman: That's right.

David Yellin: But, however, as it went on and as we approached the 27th, 28th, and perhaps particularly after the 28th when people who were not otherwise very much concerned or who were definitely on the side of the mayor to continue the strike, there was a sentiment in the community saying we ought to get it over with. Were you ever approached by anyone to use whatever influence, contact you had with the mayor?

Frank Holloman: No. No, I was never asked to use any influence with the mayor. I, on occasions I met with certain individuals in an attempt to let's have, it's difficult to describe it, except for the fact that I met with certain...

David Yellin: Can you identify these individuals?

Frank Holloman: No. No, I would not because they were off the record meetings. They were meetings that actually people never knew that took place. They were with members of the black community, as well as with the members of the white community who were legitimately and very sincerely attempting to find a solution, and I think that my involvement in it was strictly a police involvement as to my advice to them, or my input as to what could be the final solution because I think that the police were playing a prominent part in it because they were involved in providing the security for the marches and the demonstrations and so forth. So, I think that my part was not from an administration representative. As a matter of fact, some of the meetings that I participated in the mayor never even knew that I participated.

David Yellin: Well, now how -- I don't completely understand how could the police concept of it be involved in the solution of this strike?

Frank Holloman: Because I had information from the activities that had been going on, I think that I had probably in my position rather objective information as to what was happening in the community, who was doing what in the community, what the atmosphere in the community was, which would give these leaders a better insight as to conditions with which they were faced at the time.

David Yellin: In other words, you knew where who was acceptable or receptive in both sides, and perhaps on what areas they might be receptive.

Frank Holloman: Right, and who was doing what, who was taking the leadership in the various factions that were involved at that time, and I think that the information, which I furnished was valuable input as far as background you might say for their activities in trying to find a solution to the situation.

David Yellin: Well, again Frank, you know we're doing this for history, and my only reason for probing is that we do have a lot of people who have talked to us about these meetings, which were at that time called secret, and I assume you're talking about community leaders. Sometimes that would include some elected officials, such as city council and others, but not necessarily.

Frank Holloman: That's true, that's true, and these meetings that I'm referring to were very reliable people involved in them. In other words they were the leadership of both the black community and the white community and trying to find a solution, not any other type of groups.

David Yellin: Now all of this of course is, puts people in a favorable light. What was the thrust of these meetings? Where were they going? What were they trying to do with your advice, and why didn't they do it, or why couldn't it be effective?

Frank Holloman: I think they finally were effective.

David Yellin: Now you're talking after the assassination probably.

Frank Holloman: Yes, yes. Eventually, but I think it was a long process. I think there were a lot of feelings. There were a lot of emotions involved, that it was something that could not be resolved over night. But I think that these efforts that were made early finally paid off, but I think it took time and I think it took -- it was a very, very sensitive situation, and I think they were productive in the long run.

David Yellin: So, what you're saying, and of course we do know this again from hindsight that what was called the strike in the situation, became hard to solve because it was more than merely a situation between labor or whatever it was. Emotions became involved.

Frank Holloman: Oh definitely. I think if it was just a question of labor I don't think that, I think the history of it would be an entirely different complex. But I think it was a lot of other things involved in it that were very complex, and I don't think -- it was something that had been accumulating over the years, and I don't think that it could have been solved over night.

David Yellin: So the fact that it did get that deeply, I mean once it got so deep, it just became more and more difficult to extract the -- so that the point you mentioned that the emotions were involved.

Frank Holloman: True.

David Yellin: Well, could we now take a skip and the march of the 28th, which did break up and that was, it's been variously called the mini riot and so on, but it was certainly a pivotal point in all of this. Again to speed it up a little bit, Dr. King was coming in for the march. Again you tried to make contact about his plans, and I think you touched on this, too, last time, that again you were rebuffed.

Frank Holloman: Right.

David Yellin: Do you remember anything particular about this time? I think you mentioned something that eventually someone said to you, well the information that you had about the route that they were going to take was correct. If you remember I think it was you published it in the paper that this was where the march was going to be, and there'd be no traffic.

Frank Holloman: We had to do that.

David Yellin: You never got this directly, or do you recall that?

Frank Holloman: I don't recall that specific instance. I know that there were several times in which we ran into difficulties, in which the route was more or less agreed on, and then we received information that in order to bring the subject matter more to the attention of the people the route would not be followed and the police efforts would be made to confuse the police and that the route would not be followed. For the march of the 28th, as I recall, I don't remember whether that difficulty arose regarding that particular march or not. My recollection is just not that clear.

David Yellin: Do you recollect anything about the fact that Dr. King's plane was late?

Frank Holloman: I do know that he was late arriving, and that was one of the problems. Looking back on it at this point, I would say that the emotions in the community were probably higher and more intense on the 28th than it was at any other particular time. The schools had been advised, I mean the schoolchildren or the school students had been advised to participate in the march, and as early as 8:00 in the morning we found that there were groups leaving the schools and engaging in violence at various points in the city. So that by the time as I recall the march was supposed to have, and I may be mistaken, it seems like to me the march was supposed to start around 10:30 or 11:00. Dr. King was late getting in. He was late getting to his position at the head of the march. There was high emotions and tense emotions. There was already a feeling among the crowd that, unrest or whatever, however we want to describe it, but by the time that he took his position at the head of the march I would say that the organization of the march, the peaceful attitude of the march had been destroyed by that time, had broken down.

David Yellin: Yeah. So much of this is public record about what happened in the march. The...

Frank Holloman: Right, and I would say that recalling back on the public record there may, I can't recall any substantial divergence from what actually happened from that that was reported.

David Yellin: But what could be interesting, and where you're the greatest expert in the world, is what you were doing at the time and how you were feeling? Now, you know, if I could hypnotize you. Do you recall? Obviously you got up very early that morning.

Frank Holloman: Right.

David Yellin: Can you kind of go back, just your own actions in that day, when you got up, where you went and so on?

Frank Holloman: No, I was in my office. I was in the headquarters of the police department. Operation was in my office, and I know that I was there early because we began to get reports in as to these disorders, many disorders that were occurring throughout the city as the school students began to leave and approach the point where the march was to take place. These reports kept coming in, and I think there were several in which we had to have some police action in order to quell the disorders of a minor nature, comparatively minor nature and then it kept building up until the march stepped off, and by that time as, I think that even Dr. King and the leaders knew, or felt that it would be very difficult for the march to be carried out peacefully at that point.

David Yellin: Yeah. Could I ask you, again I'm trying to stick back to what you did because we would like so much to get a picture of -- because in a sense you were the commander in chief of, how shall we say, the defense forces or the peace forces let's say. Just to go back a little bit, could you tell us how you planned your strategy? Now you knew this march was coming up, you had some idea there might be trouble. Who was involved? Did you have meetings at night? Can you give us some insight into that, and while you think of it, can I change the tape, please?

END OF RECORDING