

# Rhodes College Digital Archives - DLynx

**Rev. Gilbert Patterson, COME, 1968**

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Download date	2026-03-07 18:27:05
Link to Item	<a href="http://hdl.handle.net/10267/33911">http://hdl.handle.net/10267/33911</a>

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Carolyn Yellin- Ok, what was your, can you tell us at all your personal reaction to Dr. King?

Reverend Gilbert Patterson- Well my personal reaction I guess was the same as all of the negro people and some of the whites. The same reaction as if someone in my family had died, this was the only way I could describe it. Even the night before he died that Wednesday night when I went home after hearing his speech. I was just remember lying flat on my back in bed for maybe 2 or 3 hours, I didn't sleep that night. The Wednesday night and when he as killed that Thursday evening I still just couldn't sleep, I was just greatly disturbed, and really not caring too much, I really didn't want to see any more innocent people hurt but it really didn't make me too much difference if Stokely and Ratt Brown and the whole crew had come in here because Memphis, which I had already started feeling that this place was possibly one of the worst in the united states, but after that I don't know. I just went to a new low. Just really went to a new low. I didn't feel any feeling of hatred, not real hatred but yet I felt that the mayor, the council, the police department of Memphis ought to be blamed. And I knew that was an awakening in our community then as to the rottenness of our city. Because as I have said all along I don't believe it was just a lone assassin. I think it was set up by people here, completely engineered and carried out, He was protected, The whole thing revolved around individuals here. I even think the resignation of certain high ranking police officers is an admission. There is more involved than we will ever know.

Carolyn Yellin- Had you have had any feeling of hope during all of this long when we had settled in the community had settled in to support the sanitation strikers. Did you ever have any real feeling of hope for the community for Memphis? From anything that might have happened.

Unknown Female Interviewer- Once I felt that there was a little hope.

Carolyn Yellin- Just once.

Reverend Gilbert Patterson- Once I felt there was a little hope. I thought there was a time when the cit council might have reflected and decided to be men and as the legislative law making body of the city I thought they were have created an ordinance whereby the sanitation struggle, you know could be resolved without it coming to what it eventually did. After those Tuesdays meetings and seeing their attitude I lost that hope and I felt then that the only hope would be that the black community remain consolidated and keep its economic pressure on downtown...

Unknown Female Interviewer- When you had a chance to reflect after Dr. King's death, possibly maybe the next morning because you said you didn't sleep. And you probably didn't really reflect you were probably just there. But when you finally did sort of say ok what is going to happen. What did you really think was going to happen to Memphis in its white and black communities to all of us what did you really think possibly was going to happen where were we going, if anywhere?

Reverend Gilbert Patterson- I wanted to hope that something would happen to where we could reach some kind of a mutual understanding but I won't deny the fact that I feared, I feared a real race riot here. Not a riot of negroes, I mean a race riot. Actual warfare between the two sides. The threat of it isn't completely gone.

Unknown Female Interviewer- If that had happened or if it should happen, then what do you think is going to happen to Memphis as a city?

Reverend Gilbert Patterson- I feel that if it would happen in Memphis it is going to set a new trend in the nation.

Unknown Female Interviewer- What ultimately, what I am trying to, what ultimately..

Reverend Gilbert Patterson- I will tell you exactly what I felt. I felt that the slaying of Dr. King and the rioting and all of that developed afterwards, I felt that it would be worse than it was and really I still feel this, that the irresponsibility of our law makers and people in authority is making a civil strife between the races in the united states that is really throwing open the front door, back door, and all of the windows to communism. I am really afraid that not only in Memphis alone but all over our nation we are going to keep on bickering at home, civil strife, that before we know it the very thing we are supposed to be fighting so hard to contain in Vietnam is going to be right here and I don't think it is to far away. I believe with all of my heart that America is the best country in the world, you know I believe this. But the second class citizenship that has been given to negroes here is going to be the downfall of our nation and I yet fear that. I think that the killing of Dr, Martin Luther King was one of the greatest steps on down that road.

Unknown Female Interviewer- Have you noticed any emergence of more persons possibly, have you heard of concerned white people who really are, that you can really believe that are making some effort to that end?

Reverend Gilbert Patterson- No, very few. Memphis Cares, Memphis does care, it cares about its national image and that's all. I think that is the only thing that the people in the white community who are really expressing so much concern about now, I think that the only thing they are concerned about is the image of the city. I don't really think they are so interested in helping,. I think they want good relations, I think they want it so that there is no danger of negroes burning, looting, and shooting, they don't want this, definitely not. But I don't think that they are really concerned about raising the level of educationally, financially, I don't think they are really concerned about that. I think that all of this talk and all of these various things that are going on in Memphis supposedly to improve race relations, I think that all of this is just face saving. So I am a pessimist.

Carolyn Yellin- Well then what would you suggest white people do? Not the white power structure just plain old white people. What can they do?

Unknown Female Interviewer- Who are concerned.

Reverend Gilbert Patterson- I will tell you what they can do they can see to it that they get the racists out of the office.

Carolyn Yellin- Yeah but see that is a long term process, what can they do now.

Reverend Gilbert Patterson- It is a long term process.

Carolyn Yellin- It can't be done this summer.

Unknown Female Interviewer- If you were..

Reverend Gilbert Patterson- According to this petition if they get this thing done they will be able to have a recall in November mayor and councilmen.

Unknown Female Interviewer- But if was this weeks radio program and you were for your own interests, wondering if there were any of them out there, what would you say to them say if your there.

Reverend Gilbert Patterson- To join, well what they can do right now is they can join with us before we take these people out, they ca join with us in putting pressures on them while they are in office, like I would like to hear some of the white people from east Memphis go down to the council this evening and let the councilmen know that we are not in favor of a garbage collection fee.

Unknown Female Interviewer- Is that today?

Reverend Gilbert Patterson- Well they meet every Tuesday.

Unknown Female Interviewer- No I mean about the garbage.

Reverend Gilbert Patterson- Well they passed it last week but as you know all ordinances have to go through 3 readings so this would be the second one. I think if they could see there are white people concerned and I think that the concerned ones who have a negro maids and all and know something of the struggles of the negro people and the kind of wages they are making, they know that this garbage collection fee is going to create a problem.

Carolyn Yellin- Now let me tell you the bind I think I am in because I know what you are saying with the garbage collection fee. We heard Jared Blanchard talk and he said of course this isn't really a garbage collection fee that is the money from it is not going for garbage, this money collected will be used for other projects, it is just a city money raising project is what it is. Now the city has got to have money, the city has got to have more money to do anything.

Reverend Gilbert Patterson- But why would they take advantage of the garbage situation, because this is a slap in the negros face.

Carolyn Yellin- This I agree with.

Reverend Gilbert Patterson- Definitely. I would rather have see the taxes go up a little higher than the garbage collection fee.

Reverend Gilbert Patterson- Or use some other method, or anything but to tamper with the garbage situation because this seems to be Mr. Lobe and his racist on the council saying alright you won so we are going to kick you in the teeth with it and make you pay for it.

Carolyn Yellin- Going to take all your raise back and garbage collection.

Reverend Gilbert Patterson- So I think anything other than these, this type of an approach and I think that if more of the white people could kind of see how these things affect the negro community and help to find another way, you know, just help to find another way. I don't blame all of the white people because I know that a lot of them they jut can't understand what the life of a negro is like because they never had to live on that level and the man who stands up on the mountain peak with his head lifted up to the sun he doesn't know what is going on in the valley and this is the situation. A lot of them just don't understand our problems and don't try. But they are going to have to, that's all. Now I am not saying that all of it has to be done by the whites. At the same time you have to look at this the one that has the advantage is the one who has to sometime do the bending to find the way. Because by being the majority race controlling the money, controlling the guns, the power structure, controlling everything then I think leniency on their part or understanding on their part will bring about understanding on our part. Of course I have gotten all off what you all wanted to talk about, but I just keep thinking I have more to say about it.

Carolyn Yellin- No that is alright, then do you think that Dr. King's nonviolent philosophy, is still possible?

Reverend Gilbert Patterson- I think it is the only workable one. I do feel that unless the philosophy and tactics of nonviolence are adhered to, our nation is doomed, I do believe that. If rioting persists then brutal police methods will persist and when the police are brutal and this is a day when the negro just isn't afraid to die then they will keep killing negros and negros will keep killing policemen. Before you know it, it will get on a larger scale and then the national guard won't be able to contain it and then the soldiers who are trying to keep peace in other parts will have to come home. And I said this on that broadcast too that they will have to bring home our black boys as well as the white ones from Vietnam to keep peace and there is a great danger if congress doesn't act, if negro demands in many respects re not met, the people who don't believe in the nonviolent philosophy will just keep resorting to violence and violence brings on violence and when we become involved in a civil war then you have nothing to protect yourself from the dangers from without. And it is a very I don't know, I am wondering what Dr. King saw, I wonder what he saw when he said he saw the promised land. I am wondering what he saw because I am afraid, I am a pessimist. I am afraid that the way things are going that there is no

peace for us for a long time to come. I even expect governor Wallis to make a good showing for president.

Carolyn Yellin- I don't know that things are that bad.

Reverend Gilbert Patterson- Well if Henry Lobe can get back in the mayor's seat of Memphis...I don't see why Wallis can't get to president. If the reaction of white people in Memphis is at all an indication of the reaction of the white people in the nation, if they could put Henry Lobe in the mayor's seat in Memphis and a Lester Maddox in the governor's chair in Georgia, they are going to do their best to put George Wallis in the presidential seat.

Carolyn Yellin- Here in Memphis now the, is the COME organization functioning.

Reverend Gilbert Patterson- Yes COME is going through a transition now as I said it was, a group that arose out of necessity. But now we are in the process of drawing up a constitution that will create guidelines under which it will operate. Offices, offices to be held and offices to fill the offices. So we are really in the process of organizing COME on a more effective basis.

Carolyn Yellin- Do you think that the negro community can remain unified if it isn't opposed to someone like mayor Lobe can it just be mobilized to move forward without opposing

Reverend Gilbert Patterson- Yes, the negro community can be mobilized to move forward but I will say this, the early boycotts in the city that you mentioned before I came here, they were effective and they resulted in the integration of lunch calendars and all of this and theatres and all. But it was done just through a persistent group of people who grew just enough, it wasn't a malgamation of the whole community, but it was enough to be effective. I don't think that the negro community in Memphis will remain as united as it had been in the mass unless there is somebody like Mr. Lobe and his council. But it will continue to move forward, maybe not at the same scale, the same pace, there may not be as many to mobilize and move forward. But it will continue to move. But as along as we have somebody like Mr. Lobe and that council that we have, we will have I would say 60% more than we would have ordinarily.

Carolyn Yellin- Why are you trying to get rid of Mr. Lobe?

Reverend Gilbert Patterson- Well personally I am a person that I like peace. I really like peace, I don't like to live in a tension everyday. Although, I know that as Dr. King said unless a man has something worth dying for then he is not fit to live. And I don't see a death as far as being killed, I am going to say what I have to say on the radio and I don't see a death. But yeah I don't like tension. I think that if we could have a quiet and peaceful city and yet go forward, this would be what I would love, it would be my ideal. Even if it is a little bit slower but if it is progress. So I think as long as we have someone like him the community will just stay tense and you will never know

what to expect next. And personally I think life is too short for it all to be tension.

Carolyn Yellin- Can you recall any of your sermon it would have been palm Sunday the Sunday after Dr. King was killed, I think there was a sermon about washing the blood from your hands.

Reverend Gilbert Patterson- Yes, in that particular sermon there was a reference made...There was a...let me see I was trying to think what was the palm Sunday message it was a palm Sunday message but it was just a bit different. I think that what we are mostly concerned with on Palm Sunday is the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem when they were crying hosanna blessed is the king of Israel that cometh in the name of the lord. We mostly on Palm Sunday talk about them pulling the branches down from the trees and all of this part. But after Jesus entered the city of Jerusalem on that Palm Sunday he saw the condition of the city and he wept over the city and this was the part that struck me and another point where he wept over the city and he said oh Jerusalem, Jerusalem thou that killeth the prophets and stoneth them that are sent to thee. So I spoke from the subject of the weeping Christ, and I thought about the things that make Christ weep. Compared his weeping over Jerusalem to our weeping over Memphis and even over our nation, because such is the heart of man that when true Christianity is presented, he rejects it. Dr. King was presented in my estimation the prophet of America. And Memphis just as Jerusalem killed Christ killed Dr. King. Memphis does not want to accept that responsibility, but Memphis did it. This was more or less the gist of it, Now it was the Sunday before Dr. King was killed the Sunday before Palm Sunday. When I brought a message concerning Pilate when Jesus was brought in before him and when Pilate wanted to let Jesus go because he said he found no fault in him. But yet he gave him over to the will of the Jews that he would be crucified and to keep himself from sharing any blame he washed his hands and said I am free from the blood of this man. But his washing his hands was symbolical but in essence his hands were guilty because he had the power even against the people he had the power to not put him to death. So I said that Pilate's hands were bloody and they could not be washed, so the violence that had erupted the previous week during the march that Dr. King was leading they had tried to blame the black power militants. Then there were those that tried to blame the ministers, saying that it was the ministers who had incited people to this point that they were ready to riot. So I said I wanted to put the blame where it properly belonged and first of all I mentioned the president's report on riots concerning white racism in America, I said this has to be blamed. I said secondly, our mayor who is nothing more than a man but he seems to think he is a god sitting on a throne, he has to be blamed. I think that I may have made a reference to the fact that he boasts and people who know him boasts about Henry being a stubborn man and this is supposed to be good, but I read in the scriptures that it is a fool that will not change, a wise man will. I think he has to be blamed. Secondly, I said that the irresponsible city council who have failed to take action must be blamed. Then I said the white ministers of our city who cannot see anything as being morally wrong except its liquor being sold in their neighborhood. They have to be blamed. And then

I said also are black ministers, those who have refused to join up with the cause have to be blamed and I did make a particular reference without calling a name to a specific minister who was on this KWAM blasting the preachers every day for being involved. We will see he was on a white station and most of his supporters were white. He had white people in his congregation, he is talking what they want to hear. I said now these kind of ministers have to be blamed. I said, and then those negro people who did not join with us in the boycotting for if we had 100% boycott then chances are the thing would have never gone that far. So that was it and I said all of these are people with bloody hands that cannot be washed. Don't throw the responsibility of the outbreak of violence on the ministers and on the black militants for the blame belongs somewhere else and that was what...

Carolyn Yellin- Can you think of anything else?

Unknown Female Interviewer- No..

(Tape End)