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James Reynolds, U.S. Secretary of Labor, 1972

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David Yellin: This is 1120 Connecticut Avenue, and it's February 4, 1972.

Carol Lynn Yellin: In Washington, D.C., not Memphis, Tennessee.

David Yellin: Well, almost tell us the story of your life in Memphis.

James Reynolds: Is it Dr. Yellin? Mr. and Mrs. Yellin, then. You've asked me to tell you about my involvement in the events, which were associated with the assassination of Dr. King, but more particularly the difficulty that had arisen between the union representing the garbage, sanitation workers of Memphis and the city. I will tell you what my involvement was. In the first place, in April of 1968, I was the undersecretary of labor serving under President Johnson. And on the night of Thursday, the 5th of April, Dr. Martin Luther King, we all know, was assassinated in Memphis. And the very next morning, which was a Friday, about 11:00 I had a call in my office from the president. And the president asked me why I wasn't down in Memphis attempting to settle the garbage strike. Well, why did he call me? He called me because, as part of my responsibilities at the Department of Labor, I had become, through the years, involved in a great many disputes involving the national welfare, the national interests, such matters as maritime and railroads, and airlines and steel, etc. and so I had taken on the role of sort of a special mediator when cases got to be real difficult and had frustrated the efforts of the usual mediation channels, such as the Federal Mediation Service, and the National Mediation Board under the Railway Labor Act. So, the president then naturally and understandably called me and wanted to know why I wasn't down there.

David Yellin: Excuse me, does it bother you to be interrupted?

James Reynolds: Not at all.

David Yellin: Well, first of all, we will change it, but it was April 4.

James Reynolds: Oh was it?

David Yellin: And 5th was Friday.

James Reynolds: I see, well I beg your pardon.

David Yellin: That's all right.

James Reynolds: It was Thursday night the 4th, because I recall vividly it was a Friday when the president called me, and that was the 5th.

David Yellin: He called you directly?

James Reynolds: Yes, he called you directly.

David Yellin: He just got on, I mean I'm curious. I think it's interesting. Does the secretary say, "The president is calling."

James Reynolds: Yes, my secretary said, "The president's on the phone." He called me, not often, but he called the secretary of course because he's a member of the cabinet on many, many occasions on business and government, but he did call me occasionally and directly, and this was one of those occasions. And, the conversation went pretty much like this: "Jim, why aren't you down there settling that garbage strike in Memphis? This is a terribly difficult situation, and unless it's settled, cities are going to burn." And he said, "The death of Dr. King is a tragedy that's going to ignite difficulty all over this country, and basically the problem is that garbage strike, and that has to be settled." I said, "Well, Mr. President, the reason I'm not down there is because you must understand the federal government does not involve itself in labor disputes, which concern municipalities and their employees, or the counties or states, and we never get involved unless we are specifically asked to do so." He said, "I don't care whether you're asked to do it." He said, "I am telling you I want you to get down there, and you may say that you're down there at my direction to do everything possible to bring that strike to an end." And he said, "When you get down there," he said, "call Governor Buford Ellington to tell him you're in the state so that he will know. Then the rest is up to you." Well, I looked up the first plane for Memphis, and it was leaving that afternoon, and I went direct from the office to the airport and got on the plane for Memphis. And, as the plane took off, I'll never forget, I looked out the window over Washington and smoke was rising from the areas of 14th Street, and the passengers saw this and everyone looked out the window and we could see that the city was indeed burning. I got down to Memphis in the evening, somewhere around 7:30 I would think, 7:00 or 7:30, and I went direct to the hotel there, the name of which I...

David Yellin: The Sheraton-Peabody.

James Reynolds: The Sheraton-Peabody, yes.

David Yellin: Known with the ducks?

James Reynolds: Yes, that's correct, with the ducks in the lobby. And I called Governor Ellington immediately as I had been instructed to do by the president, and the governor told me that he had a representative in Memphis, and he asked me to call him.

David Yellin: Do you remember who that was?

James Reynolds: I don't remember his name unfortunately, no. But it is not of any particular (muffled) because the man was not a tall, equipped, nor informed as to the fundamental problem. He was there, I think, basically to represent the governor because the National Guard had been called out, and the city, as you may recall was crowded with half-tracks and soldiers.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Yes, the National Guard had been in there for a week since the week before when Martin Luther King...

James Reynolds: Before?

Carol Lynn Yellin: His march -- the march that had broken up and the city had been under curfew for (muffled).

James Reynolds: Of course when there had been some violence and (muffled). So there they were and the city was under curfew as you say. So, I merely did this, called the governor as a matter of courtesy from the president that he would know I was there, and then I called the mayor, Mayor Loeb.

David Yellin: This is all Friday night?

James Reynolds: This is still Friday night, and I told the mayor that I had been sent there by the president to do everything I could to assist in resolving the difficulty, and that I would like very much to see him immediately.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Did you call him at his office at city hall?

James Reynolds: I tried to, but then I got through to him at his home.

Carol Lynn Yellin: At his home?

James Reynolds: Yes.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Simply by, excuse me, did you get his home phone number from the office, or did you just look it up in the telephone (muffled)?

James Reynolds: No I called the office, and I spoke to someone and explained who I was and why I was there and I was representing the president, so they put me through to his home. And, the mayor pleaded that he had been up all the previous night because of the tragic events, and Dr. King's death and that he hadn't been to bed, and because of the terribly tense situation in the city, and would I mind waiting until early the following morning, Saturday morning and I said yes, I'd like to meet you then about 7:30 a.m. in your office. And, he said all right, and he said I'll see that a pass is sent to you so that you can travel the street because the curfew was a problems, and although in the morning as I recall it I left the hotel very early, there weren't many people on the streets, but there were some soldiers about down the main street, but I believe there was freedom of passage in the morning. But I walked down the main street to the mayor's office. I will go into that further in a moment, but I must backtrack to the night before. Immediately after talking to the mayor and arranging an appointment for early Saturday morning, I then inquired whether Mr. Wurf, whom I did not know. I knew of him, and had, knew his position and so forth, and had been very much involved strangely enough in an indirect way with the fact that he was president of the State/County Municipal

Workers, because among my other responsibilities in the Department of Labor was administering the Landrum-Griffin Act. There had been events leading up to Mr. Wurf's election, which called for the attention of the labor board, because there had been efforts to defeat Mr. Wurf by illegal means. So I was aware of this and the bitterness within the union leading up to his becoming the president. I think he followed a man named Zander I think the previous president was. But, be that as it may, I inquired and I found that Mr. Wurf was in the hotel. I asked him to come to my room, which he did. And he had with him this young fellow, is young assistant a black man...Champ?

David Yellin: Lucy?

James Reynolds: Lucy.

David Yellin: William Lucy?

James Reynolds: Yes, and they sat down and I told them why I was there, that the president was deeply concerned that this labor dispute was continuing and was going to be a constant source of bitterness, and I wanted them to know just exactly what the situation was as he viewed it. And he told me, and he explained to me that what had begun really as a characteristic effort of a bunch of workers coming to get recognition had turned into a matter of the dignity of these black men, and they felt that they had been affronted and they had been ignored, and that what had been a basic labor dispute within a municipality had turned into a militant battle with respect to rights of black people, and that the churches had become involved. The Reverend, the local minister there.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Lawson?

David Yellin: Reverend Lawson.

James Reynolds: Reverend Lawson, yes, had become deeply involved (muffled).

David Yellin: Had you ever heard of Reverend Lawson?

James Reynolds: I hadn't heard of him to that time at all, no. But Jerry gave me a picture that I felt was a fair appraisal of the situation from his point of view. And I told him that's all I wanted at that time, but I wanted him to be available if I called him. He explained to me that such negotiations that had taken place in recent days had taken place before television cameras, and that this was at the insistence of the mayor, and he told me that the mayor had made some commitments in the election the previous November that this union would never be recognized. It even back then I gather had been a smoldering, unsettled dispute, and that the mayor had, in Mr. (muffled) opinion, positioned himself in such a very clearly defined manner that for him to retreat from that was going to be extremely difficult for him. So, I thanked Mr. Wurf, and then the next morning -- getting back to the walking up through the streets very early in the morning; a beautiful Saturday morning I do recall, and looking around. It was the first time I'd ever been to

Memphis, and the Main Street looked prosperous and so forth, and it didn't seem possible to me that there could be such deep bitterness and racial difference of this sort in that city. But I went to the city hall, and as you know it's a very impressive new building, and as I walked up there were guards, armed guards outside the city hall with rifles and pistols, and I came up and identified myself, and word had been given that I was to be permitted in. So the armed guards let me in, and there at the foot of the stairs were two more armed guards.

David Yellin: Are these national guards or city police?

James Reynolds: City police, or deputies because some of them were in civilian clothes, but with pistols. Two had rifles I recall, but the point was that there was an atmosphere of great tension, but I was directed up to the mayor's office, and there sitting outside his door were two more armed guards. And I was ushered in, and the mayor -- the mayor's office as you may recall is a rather impressive, elaborate office. And he sat at one end of the (muffled) and again, within the office two armed guards, two police sergeants, but they were in civilian clothes; they were sitting there in the office, and the mayor introduced me to them, and he asked me to sit down, which obviously I did. I said do you mind if I take my coat off too. I'm telling you the little details.

David Yellin: Wonderful.

Carol Lynn Yellin: This is exactly what we want.

David Yellin: Just beautiful.

James Reynolds: Because I did, and I rolled up my sleeves as he had his rolled up, and I said, "Look let me get something very straight, Mr. Mayor." I said, "I've been sent here by the president, but having said that, let me tell you that I'm not going to tell you how to run your city. There is no intention of anybody from the federal government coming down here to try to dictate and direct the terms of a settlement. You're the man who has to run the city, and you're the man who's going to have to live with it, and your people are, and I'm not going to come here and be an intruder thinking I know all the answers, but I'm here to try to help you, and try to help the city to terminate this thing as quick and as peaceful and as logical and honorable a way as we can." You know he said, "I think I like you." And he said, "How about a Coke?" And I said, "Yeah, that would be nice, let's have a Coke." So, he said to one of the sergeants he said, "Go and get a couple of Cokes." And the guy jumped up and he said, "Okay, mayor baby, okay. Okay, mayor baby." And I thought for a moment I was in the midst of a Tennessee Williams play. I just couldn't believe the rapport and the informality that was evident by that remark. But in any event the Cokes came and I asked the mayor to then to please tell me what the problem was. And he said, "The problem is this." He said that, "We are not ever going to recognize this union." He said, "I committed myself in the election that this city would never recognize this union." And he said, "We're not going to do it." And furthermore he said, "I've got a budget and there's no money in it for any wage increase, it's a tight budget." He said, "I inherited a big debt here when I came in." He said,

“Look at this city hall.” He said, “All the money that went into building this. All the debt that’s involved in it and so forth.” And he said, “I’ve inherited a very difficult situation, and there’s no room for movement to recognize any union, or pay any money to these fellows.” Well, that was a pretty difficult point to start from. I said, “Well, the first thing we’re going to do is we’re going to cut off the television cameras, and we’re going to stop any public statements and posturing on the news media. That goes for both you I trust, and for the union. And any statements about the progress of negotiations I would appreciate if both of you’d agree they’d come from me. And that I’m going to ask you to resume negotiations very promptly.” He told me that he had a committee of advisors who were doing the negotiation, which was partly made up of members of the government, and in part outside citizens, which I am sure you are familiar with. I said that was fine with me, I don’t care who it is, but I want to talk to them, and then I’ll get the (muffled) together, and when I feel that the time is right, we will bring them together, all together and then when I need you I’ll call you. So, I started a series of meetings. Now the details of those meetings and when they were held, and so forth, is of no particular moment. Dr. King’s death of course meant that there was going to be a memorial for him there in Memphis, which I think took place the following...

David Yellin: Monday.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Monday the 8th.

James Reynolds: Monday. And any prospects of negotiating while that was going on, to me, appeared to be very unwise (muffled). The union officials were all going to be involved in the demonstration for Dr. King, the march with Mrs. King, and Abernathy, and all the others, and there was a certain tenseness that it was better to let dissipate for that day at least. And, therefore, I did not attempt to hold meetings until that was out of the way.

Carol Lynn Yellin: You didn’t hold your first meeting until afterward?

James Reynolds: No, that isn’t so. I must say that I did. I did meet with the groups -- the mayor’s group. I had a long talk with them and met them all to develop some sort of...communication with them.

David Yellin: Where did you do that? Do you remember?

James Reynolds: Yes, in that building right across from the city hall.

David Yellin: The hotel?

James Reynolds: There’s a hotel there, yes.

David Yellin: The Claridge.

James Reynolds: The Claridge, yes, and that’s where we met. That got to be home for

us (muffled) negotiations.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Who was included? Do you recall the city attorneys? Was it Myron Halle, or Frank Gianotti, or?

James Reynolds: Frank Gianotti did not come in right at the outside, he came in later on.

Carol Lynn Yellin: James Manire?

James Reynolds: Mr. Manire was there, yes. And...

Carol Lynn Yellin: Weintraub?

James Reynolds: Mr. Weintraub I believe yes. There was one person and I so regret I don't remember their names, a lawyer, a local, he was a very close friend of the mayor's who was extremely helpful and I am deeply regretful that I don't recall his name. Possibly you can help me?

David Yellin: Halle?

James Reynolds: Was it Mr. Manire? Was he a local attorney.

David Yellin: He was a city attorney.

Carol Lynn Yellin: It wasn't Lucius Burch?

David Yellin: No, not a friend of the mayor's.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Tom Prewitt?

James Reynolds: Prewitt, Prewitt. Tom Prewitt.

David Yellin: Prewitt, yeah.

James Reynolds: Tom Prewitt.

Carol Lynn Yellin: He was very much behind the scenes.

James Reynolds: Yes, but he was extremely helpful. Mr. Manire, I found not to be particularly helpful. He was taking a rather institutional position, and I felt reflected a deep resentment to the organization, and the fact that they would attempt to be organized (muffled). And he was there defending the mayor constantly. In fact, they were all very close to the mayor, and...

Carol Lynn Yellin: But many of these men were members of what was known in Memphis as (muffled), as the mayor's kitchen cabinet.

James Reynolds: Yes, that was...

Carol Lynn Yellin: They met for breakfast regularly.

James Reynolds: That is correct, yes, yes, yes. And in any event then, we did have meetings that weekend with the parties separately, but then we deferred any further meeting during that Monday.

David Yellin: Mr. Reynolds, very interesting to me, what you're describing is -- you know we always think that the mechanism of government and this kind of thing needs papers and subpoenas and letters, and so on. In other words, you as a federal mediator are not called in unless the parties request you, but this did not happen. You just announced that the president was anxious to do it, and the mayor said fine. Do you remember his first reaction, though?

James Reynolds: Oh his first reaction was obviously when I went in the room was one of resentment that this is my problem, I'll work it out. But he soon (muffled) himself to that. I think that quite frankly that he realized that I was not the kind of a person who was going to come in with any preconceived ideas of how this had to be done, to sort of push something down his throat. I was very conscious of his position.

David Yellin: Did you know about him before in any way?

Carol Lynn Yellin: From talking with Mr. Wurf.

David Yellin: Except what Wurf told you.

Carol Lynn Yellin: You were able to gather that this...

James Reynolds: Well, I got Mr. Wurf's side of it, but I didn't necessarily accept that as being the gospel (muffled), that Mr. Wurf was quite bitter in his comments about the mayor of course, because he too was reflecting the opinion that the local leaders, the black leaders of this group had a deep bitterness toward the mayor, regarded him as a very serious, violent racist. There was no question about that.

Carol Lynn Yellin: They regarded him as Pharaoh (muffled).

James Reynolds: Yes, and I didn't accept that. I wanted to appraise the man with my own, (muffled) by my own yardsticks.

David Yellin: Did you have any reason to believe that the president and Governor Ellington called Mayor Loeb directly also at any time, or before you came, or during the time you were there those first days?

James Reynolds: I am not aware of any conversation the president had with the mayor

at all. I don't believe he did. To the best of my knowledge he didn't. But I am quite certain that the governor did have conversations with him, and it became very apparent that there was far from a cordial relationship between the mayor and the governor, and as soon as I appraised that, I realized there was no particular point, nor did I intend to utilize any of the power of the governor in this situation, because the mayor was quite clearly disdainful of Buford Ellington and had very little regard for him. Why? I don't know. That wasn't my business, but... So that the governor's involvement in this was nil as far as I'm concerned. My only conversation with him was that one as a matter of courtesy to tell him I was there, as I was directed to do by the president. But beyond that it was strictly the mayor and his advisors and the union and myself.

David Yellin: But now we're ready for your meetings.

James Reynolds: Yes, and then I was told -- I asked whether anybody had been attempting to mediate for the dispute, and I was told that a man named Frank Miles, a local citizen and employee of this company had been attempting to be of assistance. So, I contacted him, and from that time on until the thing was resolved, Mr. Miles worked very closely with me, and he was a great assistant. He knew the people. He was respected. I had a feeling that the union people respected him, as well as the management people, so that he was a great help.

Carol Lynn Yellin: He was the rare person who did seem to have an overall view rather than (muffled) one-sided.

David Yellin: (muffled)

James Reynolds: So he was a great help to me, and I don't minimize his assistance in this at all. I think it would be fair to say that I was the guy that was doing the mediating and the talking to the parties, but Frank was always there when we went out to have a talk together, to evaluate with the way the thing was developing.

David Yellin: Can I ask you an unfair question?

James Reynolds: Yes.

David Yellin: In a few sentences, can you tell us what a mediator is?

James Reynolds: Surely. I'll tell you what a mediator is, and what he has to be. A mediator is a person who has an impeccable policy of integrity and objectivity. He has to have also an impeccable standard of trust that he will not violate confidences when they are given to him, and he has to have an understanding of the issues that underlie the dispute, and he has to know all the nuances of that dispute. Why? How much would a penny increase cost right to the detail to the city? How much would an additional vacation day? He has to know the issues and the expense of the issues better than the parties, you know, really. So that he has to be in a position where he has negotiated contracts or mediated disputes so that he can draw on his experience and his background

to throw suggestions out, to provoke new lines of thought, to provoke new channels of inquiry of the parties, and always trying to develop a situation where they themselves, without them knowing where it came from practically start to come together, you see.

David Yellin: Rather than you arbitrarily saying this is so.

James Reynolds: That is right, although this situation was so unique that it wasn't the conventional dispute over substantive terms of employment like a steel strike, or a railroad strike, or something of that sort. It had this very deep sort of spiritual quality to it, philosophical quality, and should a city like Memphis recognize a union, particularly a union of, of all people of garbage workers and black men, you know. And, particularly after it had been a political issue, and where an administration had taken an absolutely irrevocable stand on it. Well, to make a long story short as best I can, the details of the meeting after meeting after meeting, I will only make these comments about it, those meetings -- that here was a group of well-bred, educated, southern gentlemen on the one hand, and here was a tough little Jewish irascible northerner in their opinion, Jerry Wurf, backed up by a little group of ignorant black men, with the exception of Lucy, who was an assistant to Jerry. The local leaders were sanitation workers, and they were humble black men, and here they were at the table with these fellows from, you know, from Duke, and Harvard, and Yale, and so forth, and it was obvious that at the beginning of these discussions there was a certain condescension on the part of the spokesmen for the city that they would even sit there and talk to these people because I asked them to do it and so forth. And so we had a long way to go, and the one problem that Mr. Wurf had constantly was to keep his little group from blowing up really, keeping restraint on them, and to me this was one of the great contributions he made in this whole thing. Because here that Dr. King, a great leader, had been killed; there had been these terribly violent incidents on the street; and here were these men sitting down attempting to discuss the contract and getting rebuffed at every turn. So, it had all the ingredients of a disaster, you know everybody walk out and that be the end of it.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Let me ask you, was there any discussion of Dr. King himself? Was his name ever invoked during the (muffled)?

James Reynolds: His name came up a number of times, but it was only in terms of, for instance I recall the mayor expressing his deep regret that this had occurred, and this sullen, deep hurt and apologies, followed on the other side of the table, you know, almost afraid to answer any expressions of sympathy from Mayor Loeb, because they distrusted him, they disliked him. It was very apparent to me. And, the mayor was in a very difficult position. And, I must say as a footnote at this moment, that there was never once throughout the series of meetings and discussions when he was not impeccably courteous to me, cooperative to me, to the extent that he could within the limits of the world that he had built around him, you see, by these commitments. But I would not express any complaints about the mayor. He met when I asked him. If he was home, and I told him I wanted him down, he would come down. And he -- to that extent, he was extremely cooperative. And I have no complaints about that.

David Yellin: (muffled)

James Reynolds: I did see, I must say, that there were occasions when I would finally get him alone with Jerry Wurf, with myself, just the two of them. The situation was deteriorating and I said to the mayor, I want you and I want Jerry and myself and no one. And I had one of them on one side of the table and the other one on the other, and so here and I said now we're going to have a very frank review of where we are and why we're here. And I think that -- and I have told Jerry Wurf this, that I feel that, you know, whatever his shortcomings may be, that he conducted himself in that meeting and in subsequent meetings under what I would regard as very serious, strained provocation, with great dignity.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Jerry Wurf did.

James Reynolds: Jerry. Jerry was going to blow a couple of times and I just told him to keep his seatbelt on.

(audio pause)

David Yellin: The two of them together, yes.

James Reynolds: But there were a few times there where Mr. Wurf would look at me when the mayor would constantly repeat, "I won't recognize the union."

Carol Lynn Yellin: May I ask this, and if you can't answer, then please don't, but the mayor is known in Memphis for his salty language. Was this kind of language when you got him alone with Jerry Wurf?

James Reynolds: No, I wouldn't say so.

Carol Lynn Yellin: So, it wasn't that kind of provocation. I just wanted to clarify.

James Reynolds: No, no, no. I don't recall the mayor ever using profanity or vulgarity or any of that sort. But his deep opposition to any recognition, to any offers, to anything is, you know, it was a matter of such frustration for these fellows, and there was nothing that Mr. Wurf could go back to the Reverend Lawson and these people who were meeting in the churches every night, and so, and say, well the mayor has agreed to this or that. There was nothing. There was nothing, you see? And two or three times Wurf said to me, he said, "Jim, there's no point in going on with this. Why don't you stop it?" I said, "We're not going to stop. We're going to keep at it day and night if necessary, and we're going to settle this." And he said, "Well, I've got to go, I've got leave here." He had a bad tooth or something. I said you can go and get your tooth fixed, but you'll be right back here again, you know. And I just kept him on, just as I did the mayor. And I confess I was a rather hard taskmaster, but I regarded this as a terribly serious development. And I was constantly reporting back to Washington.

David Yellin: Oh, you were?

James Reynolds: I was. I was reporting.

David Yellin: To who?

James Reynolds: Not to the president, but to Secretary Wirtz, who in turn would tell the president what, you know, where the situation was and what was going on. Well, the key problems seemed beyond resolution unless I could think of some rather unique, obviously some unique way around it. And that unique way came into the discussion when I would meet with Frank Miles to explore different ways. And I said we've got to get some recognition for these people. It's a basic matter of dignity for them, and I said furthermore, I said -- and this is where I departed a little bit from my basic sense of complete objectivity. I had walked along the Main Street when they were picketing. They were picketing. They were attempting to get a consumer boycott going, and these sanitation workers in a very peaceful manner are maybe 30 feet apart, would quietly march up and down in the streets, the Main Street, seeking to get the public to cease buying products to try to bring the economy to a halt I guess. And I walked along two or three times, because I wanted to -- I never told Jerry this, and I never told the mayor this -- but I walked along and I'd pick up a conversation with a different picket, I'd picked old men and young men and I'd just chat with them. And I would ask them how long they'd been a sanitation worker, and how much were they earning. And I was quite convinced they were telling me the truth, and made notes of all of these matters, particularly their careers, some of them had been working for 20 and 25 years, and they were getting the absolute minimum wage that one could get. I asked them about promotions, supervisors (muffled). And they told me that only the white men got the supervisors jobs, and so forth. Well, I asked my staff to get statistics on what garbage men were being paid in Chattanooga, Birmingham, New Orleans, and other southern communities, and so I had some basis to conclude that these men were being rather unfairly treated in the economics of the situation. But to them, the more important thing was what they would regard as the dignity of being recognized.

Carol Lynn Yellin: I am a man.

James Reynolds: Yes, and this was a terribly important thing. It wasn't an imaginary illusion or anything, it was a real thing, and they wanted to be recognized. Well, that was the first problem. And then I had this idea of getting the city council to recognize them, even if the mayor wouldn't, and I spoke to Frank Miles about that. And we discussed this with some members of the council, and that's the way we did that, as you may know.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Do you remember which...did you speak with Mr. Lewis Donelson? A small man, gray-headed?

James Reynolds: It would be unfair to say yes or no, because I don't recall. It's very unfortunate that I don't. It's almost 4 years later.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Did you speak with any of the Negro, the black councilmen?
(muffled)

James Reynolds: No, no. No, I talked to the white councilmen.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Did you speak with the woman on the council, Mrs. Awsumb?

James Reynolds: Yes, I did. I talked to a woman. But, as you know, finally by a majority vote they...

Carol Lynn Yellin: As I recall Mrs. Awsumb's vote was kind of the swing vote to...

James Reynolds: They agreed to recognize, to give the union recognition. And so the mayor said, well fine, you know, if they want to do it, that's fine, but make it clear it wasn't the mayor it was the council. I said I don't care who it is, as long as it gives these men a feeling that they have some kind of stand in it. And then I talked to the mayor at length about the inability of the city to give these people any increase, and he showed me the budget, he showed me the figures of the condition in the which the city was.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Excuse me, there's an important point here that I wanted to ask you. Did he show the budget for the upcoming year, and that an increase was planned for July?

James Reynolds: He told me that, yes, and he said...

Carol Lynn Yellin: Did he tell you this had been in the works?

James Reynolds: For the next year, yes. He said for the next year he said, "We'll have something then, but I can't possibly give them anything now." Well, it was awfully difficult for these men, for Wurf really to put a termination to the strike without any increase at all at this time. And then there was one other -- put that issue aside for the moment, then the other issue was the men wanted, the union wanted some sort of mechanism so they could check off the union dues, so they would have some reasonable assurance that the union would continue. I think the local leadership, and Mr. Wurf recognized that they didn't have that, and they had to go around every payday to collect dues that the union wasn't going to stay alive for very long. So, any idea of the city engaging in a check off was out of the question. So then I thought of the federal credit union, and I called Washington, and I got the director of the federal credit union, and he agreed to send a man down immediately by plane, which he did, to see whether the federal credit union could be utilized for this purpose. If the men put money in the federal credit union, which could be checked off from their salaries, in the credit union, then the credit union could in turn, outside of the city, check off the man's dues if he signed an authorization card that they do so. So, by this rather circuitous way we were able to get the check off for them. And then of course the final and difficult issue of getting some wage increase for them immediately came up, and it was there that Frank

Miles made the contacts with Mr. Clark. I said, Frank, I read in the paper here just before I arrived -- I had gotten the previous two or three days paper to read that it said that a Mr. Plough here had made a statement that he would pay the union security, or some ridiculous statement, which reflected a lack of knowledge of what he was talking about, but basically and more importantly reflected a desire as a (muffled) citizen to help these people, to help the resolution of the dispute. So I said why don't you talk to Mr. Plough and see if there's any way we can get him to assist us. Well then you know what he did. And we were able -- I asked the mayor if we got a check and put that in the treasury of the city, would the city pay the increase. I said nobody has to know where it came from. The mayor, you know, thought this was astounding, but he was willing to do it. And so that's what happened. And Mr. Plough wrote out a check, which was given to the city, and subsequently we had estimated, Frank and I, what it would cost for this increase until such time as the city could pick it up, and we had estimated at particular (muffled), which is what the check was drawn for, but then subsequently reordered it. It turned out to be more, and I understand Mr. Plough didn't resent that at all, he just wrote another check. Now I regard that as remarkable.

David Yellin: Was the total 6...

James Reynolds: Something like \$60,000.

Carol Lynn Yellin: You had never encountered anything like that?

James Reynolds: I had never heard of such a thing. I think it was one of the most remarkable, and noble gestures I have ever heard of.

David Yellin: And he gave it anonymously.

James Reynolds: And he insisted that. You know, gradually in the years the word has come out, but I know I have never mentioned his name. And Frank has said that Mr. Plough just doesn't want his name brought into this at all.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Did you yourself talk with Mr. Plough?

James Reynolds: No, I didn't. He was living in the hotel there, up on the top floor, and I had no particular desire to, you know.

Carol Lynn Yellin: It was handled through Frank?

James Reynolds: It was handled through Frank, and that was a great contribution that Frank made to this thing.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Let me ask about -- the question of raising taxes. Did that come up as a way of handling the increase? Increasing the city's budget, or the establishment of any kind of garbage collection fee?

James Reynolds: Both of those matters came up. Yes a fee for collection of garbage came up, as well as the tax thing, both of which the mayor was very strongly and adamantly against as I recall. But subsequently I think they did do something about this, put a service fee.

Carol Lynn Yellin: A service fee.

James Reynolds: A service fee, sort of pass it on to the individual, so that any resentment seems to me they're able to direct it. The citizens to the mayor, the citizens would direct it at the garbage men themselves because they're having to pay for it.

Carol Lynn Yellin: This was how it was interpreted by the garbage workers.

James Reynolds: I would assume so, and I would assume that they're absolutely right.

Carol Lynn Yellin: There was attempt even after the settlement to create further, continuing resentment (muffled).

James Reynolds: Right, right. But the one (muffled) was that we did get a resolution out of it, and we got a resolution of it, out of which came, at least temporarily a sort of a climate of good will between this committee and the union. Mr. Manire, is that his name?

David Yellin: Manire, yes.

James Reynolds: He always, I could see, he was an exception. He was bitter. He didn't like this business at all. That, you know, this was going in the direction it was, and the hell with them. Let them stay out forever -- that kind of an attitude. But, by in large I thought that it ended up with a spirit of reasonable good will at the time, and a sense of great joy and happiness on the part of these black men that they could get back and at least can say that we were recognized, and we have a little increase, and so forth.

David Yellin: Do you remember when the climactic moment, at which conference you were able to say now here we have broken through? Can you remember that at all?

James Reynolds: Gee, I don't, you know, frankly I was so exhausted by the time we got settled I don't think I remember.

David Yellin: And usually they happen cumulatively anyway.

James Reynolds: (muffled) went on hour, after hour, after hour, you know. And I'd go -- have one group in one room, and one in another, because there was no point of them sitting across the table because the more you did that, the more, you know, bitterness was growing up, building up, building up, until you really had something to say and something to agree upon. So there was a question of keeping one group in one place and one in another and going back and forth, back and forth, and then occasionally, as I said,

bring the mayor and Jerry together, which were really dramatic confrontations, because here just the three of us in a room there, you know, and all of the bitterness within the mayor, you know, this is the guy that represents your union has come in from up north, and leading these men down this path and so forth. So, it was a pretty bitter thing, and Wurf took a great deal of what I would regard as abuse. I don't mean profanity and that sort of thing, but abuse, intellectual abuse, and scornful abuse in the attitude of the mayor with regard to Wurf. And Jerry showed great restraint I thought. But I, you know, repeat, emphasize, that as far as I'm concerned, none of that was directed at me, and the mayor couldn't have been more cooperative to the extent that he'd meet and he'd talk with me day or night.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Did you have any relationship with the news media? I mean you had no further problem, but about just you making the announcements.

James Reynolds: That's correct, that's correct, and I would make a brief statement to the news media each day, or after each meeting, and that gradually took out of the picture this posturing and so forth.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Did the mayor object to the absence of the television?

James Reynolds: At first he did, yes.

David Yellin: Do you remember why?

James Reynolds: Well, he felt that this was the city's business, and they should be able to see and hear anything that's going on, I suppose. I said, well it just isn't going to be that way.

David Yellin: How do you feel the news media handled your announcements?

James Reynolds: I thought fairly, yes. I had no reason for feeling otherwise.

David Yellin: Do you feel that the negotiation after you came in lasted a longer time, or had you any reason to believe it should have been earlier? I mean this is a silly question, that it should have been.

James Reynolds: Sure. I don't quite understand.

David Yellin: Well, was it unusually long?

Carol Lynn Yellin: You arrived in town on the 5th.

James Reynolds: The 5th, and when did we settle?

Carol Lynn Yellin: You settled on the 16th.

David Yellin: So you started on the 9th or so, really. Well, you did have sort of negotiations.

James Reynolds: Well we had, I had the individual meetings, yes. Well, it took 11 days, but of course this thing had been going on for months and months already, festering.

Carol Lynn Yellin: 53 days, was it not?

James Reynolds: 53 days was it?

David Yellin: No.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Right until the assassination.

David Yellin: 65 days in all.

Carol Lynn Yellin: It was 53 days until the assassination, and 65 days.

James Reynolds: And of course, you know, during those early days of the negotiations we were having terrible problems around the country. These were all in the press.

Carol Lynn Yellin: 104 cities did burn.

James Reynolds: Incredible, incredible, incredible. And I recall, you know, saying to the mayor and his associates, and they would keep saying, no, no, no to me. I said, no look, this thing has long since to be a local dispute where you have to maintain a position for political reasons or because you believe it's right in terms of the city. I said what's happened here is like a pebble wrapped in a pond. The ripples are going all over this country. And until that is corrected, it's going to go, I mean those ripples are going to keep going because this is the center of it. And it isn't just Memphis, and I don't mean because it is just Memphis that you should throw in, capitulate on everything that's going to create a deeply difficult situation. That isn't it at all, but there is a way here. It isn't that unique. There are other municipalities and further efforts to organize and to have people to speak to their employees so that please think of this within the welfare of Memphis, but recognize that what you're doing has an impact all over this country. At least I tried to convey that, and I don't know whether this impressed Loeb in any way at all. I think that Loeb felt that, look I'm the mayor of this city. I got the job to do here, and this is my (muffled), and that's it.

David Yellin: He built a wall, around the city.

James Reynolds: Yes, yes, yes. But I just keep wanting to stress that I don't want to be critical of him or anyone else. I had the feeling that Mayor Loeb, who was educated at Brown University you know, was a captive of attitude, and captive of generations of attitudes, which were awfully difficult to remove from one's thinking. When you're

sitting down being asked to negotiate with a union of black men, and the most menial kind of black men, you know, sanitation workers, you know it wasn't even teachers, or it wasn't people even close to an intellectual level, and these weren't the kind of people you did that with, and the mayor, his family had this laundry business I guess. And they knew how to deal with black men.

David Yellin: Did he ever articulate this?

James Reynolds: Oh, yes. Yes, he spoke about that, and how fair his company was and how many good friends some of those people, some of my dearest friends.

David Yellin: And he was a garbage worker?

James Reynolds: No.

David Yellin: He was a garbage man? He had been in charge of sanitation.

James Reynolds: Oh, yes, he did mention that at one time. Yes, he did.

Carol Lynn Yellin: And oddly enough, the record does show that when he came in as commissioner some of the really, really subhuman conditions he improved.

James Reynolds: That improved.

David Yellin: He got raincoats and so on.

James Reynolds: Yes, that's right. He mentioned that to me.

Carol Lynn Yellin: I think he did feel that there was great -- that these men must still be grateful to him for this.

James Reynolds: That they must still be grateful. That is correct, that he did tell me this, that he had, you know, 'I had been the best friend they every had,' that sort of thing. And I think he really meant it. That's what I mean that I think that that Loeb was a captive of this.

David Yellin: I think you're right.

Carol Lynn Yellin: You're very perceptive.

David Yellin: Right. I can see why you're good at your job. One other thing in relation to that, and I think it helps beautifully in the picture. Did you feel that the men around Loeb, Prewitt, Tom Prewitt and those others were really not concentrating on their own feeling about it, or were they mostly concerned with how everything would affect the mayor?

Carol Lynn Yellin: How it would look to Henry?

James Reynolds: I think that most of them did feel that way. They were very protective of him. I think they were fond of him, genuinely fond of him, you know. And were rather protective of him.

David Yellin: Or do you think they shared may of his (muffled).

James Reynolds: I think some of them shared very much.

David Yellin: They were blood brothers really.

James Reynolds: Certainly Mr. Manire.

David Yellin: Yeah, Manire.

James Reynolds: And (muffled) in a very coyful way.

David Yellin: Oh, yes, yes.

James Reynolds: You know, but you could get the feeling that look this isn't your fault or your grandfather's, it was probably your great-grandfather's fault, you know, that you're unable to see this in any other light than of a negative light.

David Yellin: And of course it's so interesting in that this is what it was, and the other guys on the other side, the black people knew that's what it was.

Carol Lynn Yellin: But I want to change the focus here just a minute (muffled). What you're describing is the racial climate, but as an experienced labor observer, did you feel that it is a fact that there is very little, until recently there has been very little union organization just in general in the private sector in the south, and in Memphis. Did you feel that there was any anti-union feeling just as such?

James Reynolds: Oh, yes; oh, yes, I did.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Did you feel that that was -- which was more important, the racial climate or the labor climate in making this seeming insoluble?

James Reynolds: I think they were so deeply intertwined I just don't feel you can separate one from the other. The racial thing was undoubtedly very much in it, because the mayor would constantly disclaim this. You know, (muffled) protest too much constantly.

Carol Lynn Yellin: He would say, 'it's a union situation.'

James Reynolds: That's right, that's right, and, 'we don't need any union coming here

to tell us how to run our affairs. We're just not going to have it.'

David Yellin: As a matter of fact, it could be almost as you've just said it, but the union objection was expressed, overt, conscious. The other was almost unexpressed, or at least covered up.

James Reynolds: And you know, one must keep in mind that the local union leadership was so frightfully inept. They were extremely limited in their ability, even to negotiate the basic terms of the contract. And I'm sure that any discussion that had gone on in the months prior to the terrible events of the 4th of April were in a climate where these local fellows were so inept and so intellectually inferior to the men they were talking to, that the thing never would have been resolved. And it took the fact that the president of the state, county municipal workers moved in, and from there is where...

David Yellin: But then when he moved in he came in with all of the prejudice against outsiders. So that that compounded...

James Reynolds: That's correct. That's just what I was going to say because he came in with the knowledge of unions and union contracts and so forth, but also brought in a climate, which added to the, or exacerbated the resentment.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Mr. Wurf spoke of something when we talked with him yesterday that I felt was very interesting. He thought that there were some missed signals that the very fact that a union would (muffled) at such an early stage in the negotiations and he was there 6 days after the strike started on February 18, but they would bring in their international president, that the city should have picked up the signal that they considered this an important thing and wanted to get it settled quickly.

James Reynolds: Uh huh, and that this was going to really be a test because it became another march to Montgomery and so forth.

Carol Lynn Yellin: We've had -- I was interested in that because in some of the city council people and people of this sort that we've talked with, but they articulated very strongly their feeling that Memphis was a test case, and that if they had their finger in the dike and if they gave way that the employees, government employees union was going to mushroom and it would be all over the country.

David Yellin: In fact that was Mr. Manire's chief objection to this.

Carol Lynn Yellin: And so I wondered if you had encountered any articulation of...

James Reynolds: No, I didn't, and I don't recall that. Too bad we couldn't have talked a couple of years ago. My memory was clearer back then.

David Yellin: Yes, yes.

James Reynolds: So many things have happened since. It's hard to believe, and I didn't keep a diary. I would report back here, as I said, to Mr. Wirtz every evening. But, it was an intriguing situation in many ways that you get involved with the federal credit union, you know, you involve the council to get recognition, and you involve a wealthy old man who was willing to move in to help resolve this. An incredible series of ingredients that were brought to play here, and to this day you must remember, you know the mayor never changed his attitude. He didn't capitulate one bit. He could still say, well I told you last November I was going to do this, and I stood by my guns.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Many people in Memphis to this day, people still say the mayor had the strike beaten until Martin Luther King was killed. I think this is strongly believed.

David Yellin: Of course, another thing that I think this indicates, to me it's sort of fascinating, if you want to get something done, you get it done, and you don't really have to go -- I guess we'd have to say you don't have to follow the rules. Something had to be done here.

James Reynolds: Oh, yeah. One thing that about having to be done, is that I have a sense of accomplishments and a certain personal pride in the fact that what I did, if I use a little imagination and tenacity to get people together, was done in a manner which retained the respect of the mayor and his colleagues as far as I know, and of the union people, and that nobody had a basis for saying this was federal government coming in and imposing conditions, and demanding we do (muffled).

Carol Lynn Yellin: Which in a southern city is a really hard (muffled).

David Yellin: The form is so important.

James Reynolds: It called for a good deal of tact and understanding, because I understood thoroughly how the mayor felt about this. I had no sympathy for that, but that didn't change my attitude one bit. I had to understand that, and why he felt as deeply as he did.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Let me ask you. I want to take you back just for a moment about your own feelings. You were in Memphis the day that Mrs. King did come in and lead the march. This was the day before the funeral.

James Reynolds: Yes.

Carol Lynn Yellin: I wondered if you would say just a little bit about what you did on that day of the march?

James Reynolds: I was asked to, as a matter of fact, if I wouldn't be in the march.

David Yellin: By who.

James Reynolds: I think Walter Reuther. I ran into Walter there and some of his associates and they asked me, you know, as a member of the administration they wanted me to do this. And then I was also called from Washington to ask wouldn't I go over to Dr. King's funeral. And I declined both. I said, no. my posture here is not going to be in any way impaired by my apparent sympathy or feeling of national regrettedness. It's going to be absolutely divorced from that.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Neutral.

James Reynolds: So I just stayed in the hotel room that day.

David Yellin: You had to because it passed right by you didn't it.

(muffled)

James Reynolds: That's about all I saw.

David Yellin: You snuck through the curtain. You're going to make a public confession right here.

James Reynolds: (muffled) and I didn't do anything else. I just stayed in my room and kept away from it.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Watched it on television.

James Reynolds: Television, that's right. And the same is true of the funeral in Atlanta the day or some two days later. (muffled) representatives of the government, and the church and so fort, but the answer was no. It would have been a grave mistake, because that would have been interpreted by the mayor and his colleagues as sort of a reflection of likely of objectivity, I'd say, that here I really was down there as a sympathizer of the civil rights people who were being unfairly treated.

(Audio issues)

David Yellin: I think you could give us a good interpretation. (muffled) the terms that you finally arrived at were not very far from the, any distance from what the original proposals were.

James Reynolds: The original demands.

David Yellin: Demands and so on, and in fact there are so many examples of what we do have, so many proposals that are almost precisely what it was. So that actually what your job was, was just to find the way that everybody could arrive at what they knew they had to.

James Reynolds: That's right, and the only contribution I made in it was possibly

contributing to the rather unique way that this could be accomplished by the use of the credit union, as I say, and getting the city council to do what they did, and then by the great help that Frank Miles gave to me with Mr. Plough and the interest.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Did you have commendations when you came back to Washington with your mission accomplished? Do you remember special commendations, recognition of how difficult it had been?

James Reynolds: The president called, and.

David Yellin: Yeah, I was going to say, did the president call?

James Reynolds: Yes, yes he did.

David Yellin: Again, with your novelist approach, could you tell us how that happened?

James Reynolds: No, again, it was just the course of your secretary buzzing you and saying the president's on the phone, and he said, "Jim, I know how difficult it was, and what a good job you did down there. And, I've got nothing but favorable comments about it, and I just want to thank you." And that was all.

Carol Lynn Yellin: I think the only other thing that I can (muffled) is if Mr. Reynolds could just -- we usually do this at the beginning of the tape, but if you could just tell us a little bit about how you became a labor mediator, just so that we have on the record. How does one become a labor...?

David Yellin: The way we say it, is how does a nice guy like you...

James Reynolds: Well let me tell you because it sounds like a rather quixotic story, and it isn't quite so quixotic as first impression. When I graduated from college I went to work on Wall Street.

David Yellin: Which college?

James Reynolds: I graduated from Columbia University, and I went to work on Wall Street, and I became a member of the New York Stock Exchange. I worked my way up as a messenger boy, and all that sort of thing. The firm brought me a seat. But, after 5 years of it, I knew that I didn't want to spend my life in this business, but I wanted to get out, and I felt that the time to do it was then, while I was young enough and a bachelor so I could move, and I did. And I felt the only way to get into industry, to where I felt I could accomplish things, where you weren't in a sense in a financial community just gathering the crumbs that others had created from the bread they were baking, and I wanted to get into industry. So I felt that I had to start all over again. And what I did was inquired two or three companies in New York to see if I could get a job out in one of their plants somewhere, and just start in as a laborer. And at one poor company I went to they said, 'here, we need men down in our Alabama plant, Bessemer, Alabama.' So I

went down there and I started at \$0.525 as a (muffled) helper. So I had some...

David Yellin: In a steel mill?

James Reynolds: It was a foundry in Bessemer, south of Birmingham, and I worked there as a molder's helper and then a foreman, and assistant to the management. So I knew something about the South. I knew something about the southern workers, and I knew something about the black man to some extent, (muffled) with whom I worked, I knew well and so forth. This was back in 1939.

David Yellin: Was it an integrated factory?

James Reynolds: Well the blacks had all the menial jobs and the whites had the better jobs. And mine was a better one and I got \$0.525. But in any event, the point is I got to know laboring people by that experience, and I later became vice president of that company, and having worked with labor the way I did, I was directed into the field of industrial relations, and I negotiated the contracts with the unions later on for the company, and then I had subordinates who did it reporting to me, and then in the Navy during the war. I was in the Navy. I was directed into labor relations because that's what I knew and I never fired a shot in anger, but I ended up as assistant secretary of Firestone in labor matters. The Navy was the biggest employer of labor the world ever had because of the shipyards and so, so I was labor advisor there, and then immediately after that, President Truman, whom I did not know, called over there. He had heard of me and asked me would I serve on the National Labor Relations Board. The Wagner Act was the law then, and rather than go back to my industry, I did it. So I served as a member of the National Labor Relations Board, and so I got to know an awful lot about labor. I had negotiated contracts, I had made my friends were labor leaders, and representatives of management, spokesmen for management, so that I then when President Kennedy asked me to come down to Washington to become assistant secretary of labor, I did it, and I left industry again, and as assistant secretary of labor, and then undersecretary -- I gradually got into the business of mediating disputes that had failed everyone else's efforts. I got the basket cases so to speak. But the background of having negotiated contracts, having worked in a plant, having known laboring people, was a wonderful background, and having known the law, having been one of the three members of the old National Labor Relations Board, and then the five-man board (muffled). So I had, I guess, a rather unique background, and the peculiarity in a sense that here I had been a financier, member of the stock exchange, and then had gone to be a common laborer, so (muffled) points of the spectrum, I guess. So I suppose it was rather unique, and then I suppose fundamentally that to be a good mediator you've got to have some intuitive knowledge of people, and you've got to have an ability to get them to trust you. And they've got to have a basis for knowing that trust is never going to be falsely given to you. And when you get out of a dispute, mediating a dispute, I for one, this may not apply to Memphis because that was a unique situation, have always felt I was much more concerned to get the people to think and provoke their thinking along lines of making a contract with which they could live in peace, and a contract just for the sake of stopping a strike -- that has been one of the terrible things that I (muffled) labor relations

in this country that frequently efforts have been made, and bad efforts have been made to get a settlement of any cost, regardless of what it's going to mean later to the welfare of the people or the welfare of the business, but just to get a settlement. And my thoughts have always been to try to get a settlement directed in terms that are going to be fair and (muffled) to the parties. So, and I suppose that arises from having been a businessman, having been an official of a corporation, that I know what's important that the corporation remain profitable so it can pay good wages to the people, and yet knowing the other fellow's point of view from having worked, from having sit in the dirt of a foundry and sweated with them and lived with them, and hunted with them, and did everything with them.

David Yellin: Do you ever get ruffled?

James Reynolds: Not often. Not often, Mr. Yellin. You can't -- a good mediator can never indulge in the luxury of becoming affronted or exasperated, and you never use exasperation, except as a weapon, and you have to be a pretty good actor sometimes, and you have to be outraged, but you're not at all. Sometimes that's necessary. It doesn't happen that (muffled).

David Yellin: I mean you have that quality, I think we sensed it.

James Reynolds: I think you have to have it. You're born with it or not. And when you have it you can be awfully helpful to the parties. Sometimes, you know the best of the labor leaders and management people just don't know where to turn. And we've got to have someone who will help them think in little different directions than they've been thinking.

David Yellin: Now all of this does not mean that you don't have your own opinions about what happened, even as this goes.

James Reynolds: What happened? Oh, of course.

David Yellin: Even as it's going on, you can like, dislike, (muffled) and so on.

James Reynolds: That's right, but you don't indulge in the luxury of really giving voice to those at all, or letting them change your attitude to what you do. You just can't. I know I have mediated -- I can think of one dispute without naming the people, in which thought the leader of the union was one of the most despicable human beings I have ever met. That didn't detract for one moment my efforts to get a settlement and to help his people get a fair settlement. You just can't.

Carol Lynn Yellin: You can (muffled) the union as a personality, or the city, or the industry as a (muffled).

James Reynolds: That's right. And you just constantly try to create a climate, which is conducive to light rather than heat, which is conducive to an understanding (muffled)

between people who have every reason to be bitter toward one another. And that's the trek of being a good mediator, but fundamentally knowing the issues, and knowing the (muffled) -- knowing them better than the parties.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Of course this is what interests me, well having been living in Memphis during this period this dispute was building up. If I had been asked to outline the qualifications for someone who might possibly be able to settle it, why what you've just described (muffled).

James Reynolds: Well you can imagine someone coming down there and saying, 'look the president sent me down here, and now here's what you're going to do.' You know that would be incredibly rude. And naturally Mayor Loeb has a responsibility for running that city, and he had a right to be given as much latitude as possible within the broad framework of the national welfare, the national interest, and that was the trick to get that compromise.

Carol Lynn Yellin: I have in my mind only two more questions. We've taken so much time.

James Reynolds: That's perfectly all right.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Had you heard of the Memphis strike before this, during (muffled), and secondly if you could just say a few words about when you yourself heard of the death of Martin Luther King, before the president's call (muffled).

James Reynolds: As to the first point, the only knowledge I had of it, of course, was the press coverage, and as you recalled it did get press coverage, and nationwide press coverage. You'd find it in the second page or the third page, and there was always the Memphis strike, again and again. And then there'd be civic disorders that, you know, were associated with it. So, obviously one knew about it.

David Yellin: Did it ever occur to you that you might be involved in it?

James Reynolds: No, never, because again it was a municipal dispute, and the federal government just doesn't get into those things, you know, except when you ask them, parenthetically, and I'll come back to the other question, when Mayor Lindsay was elected mayor the first time, you know within hours he had a crisis of the subway strike. And at that time, here he had just been inaugurated, he called the president and asked the president if he could send me up there to help him. And the president again called on that occasion and said to go up, but to have absolutely no visibility. I was to not be there officially as a federal official. And I went up there and I lived incognito and was with the mayor constantly advising him and guiding him, and with the union people (muffled), always in the background so that that was a case of a municipal dispute we did get involved in, but only because the mayor had asked, and then only with, in the most circumspect way, you know. And when there was a settlement and everybody's shaking hands and whoop-de-doo, I was on my way out of the city. Nobody even knew I was

there.

David Yellin: Are you from New York?

James Reynolds: (muffled) Brooklyn, but then of course I lived in Alabama for quite some time, and then back up to New York state, yeah.

David Yellin: Okay, now...

James Reynolds: Now the other question was how I heard of Dr. King's death. I (muffled) only heard about that also through the press on the television, announcements.

Carol Lynn Yellin: You don't have any special memories of where you were?

James Reynolds: No, I don't. I really don't.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Because the more memorable things happened, started the next day.

James Reynolds: Yeah, well from my point of view because I was (muffled).

David Yellin: If you don't mind, if you could comment on the significance of the Memphis situation and the settlement that you were a part of. Did that have any, as far as you could tell, any significance as far as labor or race relations?

James Reynolds: No, I think it had no great impact on organizing campaigns in the South, to my knowledge. I don't think that it established a precedent whereby the State County Municipal Workers went from city to city organizing people. If that happened I'm not aware of it.

Carol Lynn Yellin: Or making alliances with civil rights groups or?

James Reynolds: I don't believe so. Not to my knowledge. I think this was just a rather unique situation that was sui generis as the lawyers say, and all the ingredients and the timing melded together to make this, you know, a dramatically different kind of a situation.

David Yellin: Right, so I know, and this is what I was getting at -- you have used the word several times, unique. And you have pointed out that all of these things just came together and formed a unique situation. One other thing you mentioned -- do you have any letters or notes relating to your activity there that you would like to turn over to history?

James Reynolds: No, I regret to say I don't believe I have. I think I received some letters from people later thanking me for being down there and that sort of thing, and I don't even know what happened to them.

David Yellin: (muffled) scratch pads. You're not a (muffled) saver then?

James Reynolds: No, I wasn't a saver. I threw it all away I guess and went on to the next thing, Mr. Yellin. I sometimes regret that I didn't do this through my years in the government, because some of the situations were really fascinating and involving major disputes. But none with the civil rights undertones here, and the deep-seated feelings of a loss of dignity, and literally they, you know, 'I AM A MAN.' That was meaningful. It wasn't just a shout for people to hear, they meant it. They wanted to, for the first time, even though they were the men who picked up garbage and threw it in trucks, that they wanted somebody to say, 'you are a man.'

David Yellin: You got that from your own experience of talking to the pickets and just seeing it?

James Reynolds: Yes, I did. I did. Nothing dramatic, nothing -- very humbly and very gently, you know. Enough already, I am a man.

(audio issues)

David Yellin: Had you ever seen a group of the sanitation workers together at a meeting?

James Reynolds: No, I didn't go to any of the meetings. I stayed away from them. They were being held quite frequently throughout the negotiations. They'd go back and report to them, as you know. And of course when we weren't getting anywhere there was building up more bitterness and more tension.

David Yellin: Now, and you did say, and I do recall, that you held separate meetings. So, it kind of negates the other question, but even before you did that, other than Mr. Wurf, were anybody locally involved? Any of the Memphis people?

James Reynolds: No, not a soul. No, it was just Frank Miles and myself, and you know there were people calling to offer their assistance to this and that, and I don't even recall who they were. I know that through Frank we found the press very cooperative. You asked that before, and I felt that they were restrained from the handling of the thing and contributed to, you know, to a climate with all of the bad elements, was reasonably conducive to at least get on with the job they were doing. In other words, they weren't inflammatory, and making rash statements about he said this or he said that. I think one contribution I made was to stop that, and stop all that television nonsense. You know that had to be stopped. And, just declined any more of that business, and that if there were going to be any television announcements I made them.

David Yellin: Now, we're going to -- we have a form that we're forced to... would you. We're going to have to let you have it and sign release of this tape.

James Reynolds: Oh sure, surely.