

# Rhodes College Digital Archives - DLynx

## Rev. Richard Moon, Chaplain at Memphis State University, 1968

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Caroline Yellin- We were, at the end of the last tape were talking about who was leading the group which organized COME and we were saying Lawson, Epps and one other person and I don't remember who that other person is now. I wish I did.

Caroline Yellin- Joan asked you if it were a long meeting.

Reverend Richard Moon- Yes it was about 2 and a half to 3 hours. Basically about strategy, basically about giving some of the men with stature in the black community an opportunity to speak to it. There was some sermonizing going on, whenever you get black ministers together you have to sermonize. I don't know why I said black minister, any kind of minister.

Caroline Yellin- Right.

Reverend Richard Moon- Anyway, this went on for quite some time, anyway the unity took place right there in that meeting and once you get what you call the black princes together, the black ministers, the black princes together in one room sold on an idea you have the black community united. I don't care if you want to talk about the 10% or 15% of the black community who didn't go along with this thing. But when you get these guys together sold on it and they go tell their people what to do the people respond and do what the minister tells them to do.

Caroline Yellin- Well were there representatives from almost every denomination there?

Reverend Richard Moon- CME's, AME's, church of god in Christ, the two Baptists groups within the black community. Just about all of them.

Caroline Yellin- Was the catholic priest at that, Father what...Father Greensburn.

Reverend Richard Moon- Father Greensburn didn't come into town until March 1<sup>st</sup>.

Caroline Yellin- Oh and this was before March 1<sup>st</sup>.

Reverend Richard Moon- This is before March 1<sup>st</sup>. Now as far as the main line denomination I remember seeing father Adkins from the Episcopal church, he is there one black minister.

Caroline Yellin- And he was there shaking hands.

Reverend Richard Moon- Zeke Bell, the one black Presbyterian, U.S. Presbyterian minister was there. Jim Lawson of the Methodist church.

Caroline Yellin- Ok so then out of the...just the ministers alone was not COME was it?

Reverend Richard Moon- No but this was the beginning of it you had all the ministers together, but you see Epps was in on it. This brought the union in and then

the strategy committee was set up and that included such people as the NAACP and the Shelby county democratic club and all these other organizations.

Joan Beifuss- Now did you know who asked Epps to come to that first meeting? Did Lawson ask him?

Reverend Richard Moon- I have no idea who asked him but since he was with Jim and was speaking for the sanitation workers at that meeting, I would venture to guess that Jim Lawson did ask.

Caroline Yellin- Dick, were the unity league people in (muffled ) from the beginning?

Reverend Richard Moon- Not at that meeting...

Caroline Yellin- No I don't mean to say, I mean when they..

Reverend Richard Moon- Yes, yes, yes, because you know you just can't play politics with a black man without getting all of these leaders together. You can't call two of them one night and then two of them the next week. You have to call them all together at the same time and say we are having a meeting. So that week then, after that Sunday, they had their first big strategy meeting. There was a strategy meeting before the ministers came. This was a very small and select group and I don't know who was in that group, but this was the group that said we have got to have the ball rolling, this was the group that said we have got to have a meeting of all the ministers, and they had that meeting on Saturday and there were many many meetings from that time on, late hour meetings, long long meetings.

Caroline Yellin- So then the boycott was announced the next morning in the black churches.

Reverend Richard Moon- Yes and that started Monday and that also started the marches. That next Monday was also the first march downtown.

Caroline Yellin- Did you march in the first march downtown?

Reverend Richard Moon- I don't remember if I did or not. I didn't march too many times, I only marched 5 or 6 times during the whole thing.

Caroline Yellin- Oh did you? Was that first march said that first meeting on Saturday, the organizing meeting...

Reverend Richard Moon- It was said that we would start marching.

Caroline Yellin- No from reading the papers I assumed you marched in every march, from beginning to end.

Reverend Richard Moon- Far from it. First of all I was involved in, I had a job. The second thing was I was coordinating a Presbyterian institute of industrial relations all through this too and this institute comes out of Chicago and I was there contact person and I had all kinds of things to do for that so I was dividing my time up

between three things, my job, the Presbyterian institute, and COME. So anyway, I don't remember really what the events were that took place along the way chronologically. We have got that from the newspapers I am sure. But I remember the next big thing I remember was that next Tuesday when the city council met we all marched down to the city council and I remember I was in that march.

Caroline Yellin- Were you afraid of being maced again?

Reverend Richard Moon- Yes. Very definitely. And we walked in the council chambers and there were police everywhere, all along the walls, there was police, there is this open space up above that you can look down on the crowd from. There was police up there, there was police all through the corridor there out front in front of city hall. Really we expected to be maced.

Caroline Yellin- But you went anyway?

Reverend Richard Moon- We went anyway. So we filled up city council chamber and we waited and we waited. Well the city took care of the most important business, you know what that was. All these zoning things and whether we are going to let Lobe put in another BBQ on the corner of such and such. They went through all of this and finally our time came and they allowed people to speak and at that point I was not up at the front. I was about halfway back on the left hand side if you look towards the city council seats, desks. Jim Lawson spoke and a number of others spoke and we left peacefully and we left without getting anything done.

Caroline Yellin- Jim Lawson spoke to the council?

Reverend Richard Moon- To the council. And they all listened very quietly. I remember seeing Gwynn Awsumb sitting there knitting through the whole thing. There is nothing that can make me more angry than seeing a woman whose says she wants to be a responsible citizen and even run for public office and sit in a public meeting of the city council talking about the biggest crisis Memphis has ever faced and she is sitting there knitting. Days and days and days after that she came up to me and said Dick Moon I just don't understand you. I didn't answer her but I had some choice words ready in case I got up there, it wasn't nerves it was just...I was already in enough trouble, I didn't want to get in any more.

Joan Beifuss- Actually knitting doesn't contract from thinking.

Reverend Richard Moon- I am sure it doesn't but it is a symbol, it's a symbol.

Joan Beifuss- it is like Wee rolling his bearing balls in his hand, it is a nervous thing.

Caroline Yellin- So what was the next thing you remember?

Reverend Richard Moon- But you know I could see all these black people sitting there thinking what is she doing. Don't read into this, into anything she says this sort of thing.

Caroline Yellin- Madam Defarge knitting maimed the ministers there. (Laughs)

Reverend Richard Moon- I remember, I know it doesn't mean a whole lot historically but my impression of the city council Gwynn Awsumb was quite pleasant through the whole thing, Todd was just bristle, except that he was keeping his mouth shut.

Caroline Yellin- Surprised.

Reverend Richard Moon- Bob James was sitting there like Bob James always sits there. The people who were really listening were the black representatives on city council and the chairman of the council was listening very intently and the fact and point was actually nodding in agreement. Jerry Blanchard was leaning forward and listening to every word.

Caroline Yellin- Now at that point had Blanchard begun to show that he recognized the problem that the sanitation workers were having?

Reverend Richard Moon- Not publicly. Not publicly. But he was always down front after the council meetings, talking with a group of negroes. He and Prior and of course Fred Davis and J.O. Patterson and Neders. But these were the people who were always talking with. The next week we marched again, down to the city council. This time, we had said that we are going to stay. That was the strategy we were going to stay. The reason we were going to stay was we wanted to get people in the jail. We wanted martyrs, not dead ones but live ones. In jail, we wanted some of the COME leaders and a lot of the other people to be in jail and we decided the day before what leaders of COME would be in jail and what leaders would not be in jail. We didn't want to put ourselves in the position of not having leadership left out there in the community while all of us were in jail.

Caroline Yellin- Then who did you decide would go to jail?

Reverend Richard Moon- It is kind of...We left it up to each individual, I remember that it was definitely decided that H. Ralph Jackson would not go to jail. Billy Kyles would not go to jail and I don't remember what other ones were not going to jail and of course the labor leaders weren't about to go to jail because they were already, that was the day they had gone to court right at the strategic moment when they were supposed to speak to the city council.

Caroline Yellin- Oh yeah.

Reverend Richard Moon- Oh wait a minute, or am I mixed up was that the Tuesday before? I think that was the Tuesday before they had to go to court, but anyway. I remember Jim Lawson was there and Zeke Bell was there.

Caroline Yellin- You mean once it was..

Reverend Richard Moon- Who were going to...

Caroline Yellin- Jail the others did not attend the meeting is that correct?

Reverend Richard Moon- They attended but left.

Caroline Yellin- Left instead of staying.

Reverend Richard Moon- Many of them attended, but not all of them attended. Many of them attended and left before the congregation took place.

Joan Beifuss- How did you go about deciding who would go to jail and who wouldn't?

Reverend Richard Moon- Like I said it was left up to each individual pretty much and there were no hard feelings if a guy said well I am not going to go to jail. That was it. What really upset us, is when we got down to the very point of are we going to jail or not, when the confrontation took place within the city chambers, there was one little negro minister there who started making all kinds of excuses. (muffled) alright let him go, but he should have made that decision before we got right there in the conference chamber, because it looked as if there was a division within the ranks, this kind of thing.

Caroline Yellin- Well can you name that person?

Reverend Richard Moon- I sure can't.

Caroline Yellin- He was someone whom you were not familiar with?

Reverend Richard Moon- I wasn't familiar with, no.

Caroline Yellin- Well what happened when he said he wouldn't, or he started making excuses and started to leave. Was anyone else outside of your group aware that he was suddenly breaking ranks so to speak?

Reverend Richard Moon- Well we hoped they didn't, I don't know if anyone was aware of it or not. Jim and I were standing there together and Jim said to him alright go go go get out of here and quit falling all over yourself and trying to make excuses.

Caroline Yellin- Now was this council members had already left and it had been announced that you were going to stay...

Reverend Richard Moon- The council members had already left except for Fred Davis, Patterson, Neders, and Jerry Blanchard. Those 4 stayed talking with us. I don't know how many minutes it was after the council had left, with these four men staying that it was announced to us that if we did not leave that we would be arrested. They gave us 30 minutes after that announcement to leave. Some of the people that were there did leave. Just one of the ministers and some of the other people who had to feed their families and so on and so forth. Felt they couldn't do this, this time. You see the only people who knew we were going to stay were the leaders. And the announcement was made in the city council chamber and the people who were with us made a decision then whether they were going to go or not.

Caroline Yellin- So about how many people stayed?

Reverend Richard Moon- 117. 117. I was the 113<sup>th</sup> person. Well we all sat there and we sang songs and the policemen were around and we thought again well this is a time for a macing. It didn't happen.

Caroline Yellin- What did you sing?

Reverend Richard Moon- Oh freedom song, one right after another. We didn't sing them very happily, I remember we were singing them wondering what was going to happen. Looking around, but Jim and I decided we would march out together. We were both very much concerned that since I was the only white person arrested, that I might get split off. So we decided ok, I will go with Jim, Jim Lawson. Wherever he goes I go, if they want to split me off from the rest they are going to have to split Jim Lawson off with me. So we lined up and all the folks went out ahead and all of the leaders came out at last. By that time it was dark, I remember, and we came out of the city hall and there was a huge group of young people there and they were very emotional, to the point of tears. I remember when we walked down the steps to cross Main St. to go over to the police department they were all gathered around the steps and I saw at least 10 or 15 boys and girls who were cheering and crying at the same time. So we went across and we kept in a long line I pairs all the way through the corridor of the police department on back down again retracing our steps.

Caroline Yellin- Now were the police at any time rough or discourteous?

Reverend Richard Moon- No not at any time. There is no, yes there was with Reverend Starks. See they had an arresting officer behind each pair and the arresting officer stepped in behind us as we came out of the conference chamber. Reverend Starks is behind me and I heard this patrolmen keep saying get along boy, move it boy, go on boy. And I remember Reverend Starks turned to him and said I am not a boy I am the Reverend Henry Starks and if you call me boy one more time you are going to arrest me for assault and he turned around and the policemen remained quiet for the rest of the time. Now while we were in line there the police me that was with Jim and me was very friendly, we talked along....

Caroline Yellin- You told him everything you were doing you were doing for him.

Reverend Richard Moon- We did. We definitely did and we had a very friendly conversation, I think we won him over. We won him over.

Caroline Yellin- Really.

Reverend Richard Moon- And he was talking like something had to be done we just can't keep going on like this. So we, when we double back we got back to the door where we had entered into the police department and they had a man that was taking a picture of each pair with the arresting officer. They took us on up to the jail and we all stayed just inside the doors of the jail and we were in the hall waiting to be processed. It was a long wait, I remember it was one room up there off the hall

which must be maximum security when a man is in process. All they have in there is a light and a fan, a light and a fan. So they just stuffed people in there, way too many people in that room. The rest of us were out in the hall. Well we stood and we sat and we knelt, whatever we could do, there was quite a long time there. I guess that was somewhere around 7:00 in the evening. They would call off names and that's whose name would be called off they would be taken upstairs. This went on for about 30 or 45 minutes and then we all received word that we were all going to be released on our own recognizance. This came from the court.

Caroline Yellin- Now who was the judge that made that decision?

Reverend Richard Moon- What's his name?

Caroline Yellin- Churchill?

Reverend Richard Moon- Churchill. Judge Ray Churchill. They were talking about our own recognizance well that didn't make any difference we had been arrested so we had to be booked. Being booked also included being photographed with a number profile and front and fingerprinted. So we had to go through this process even though we were release on our own recognizance. This took a long time they would take about 8 of us at a time and take us down stairs and we would be....I got out of there by 10:30 and there were still quite a few people waiting. So I am sure some of those people didn't get out until 2 or 3:00 in the morning.

Caroline Yellin- Was that the first time you had been arrested?

Reverend Richard Moon- Yes.

Joan Beifuss- Something let me ask you. The negro ministers when there is a group of people like that waiting to be processed, do the negro ministers put any sort of religious overtone into a situation like this?

Reverend Richard Moon- No I think they do that just by being there. No sermonizing or anything like that.

Caroline Yellin- No speeches.

Reverend Richard Moon- No, no speeches. This is a process you go through.

Caroline Yellin- Again were you wearing your collar?

Reverend Richard Moon- Malcolm was arrested, I wasn't the only white person arrested Malcolm was arrested then. Yes I was wearing my collar.

Caroline Yellin- So here is this picture in your record of being booked you with your number and your collar....

Reverend Richard Moon- Yup, same with Jim Lawson. We are all in our collars.

Caroline Yellin- So when was the next time you participated in any kind of activity that COME had planned?

Reverend Richard Moon- Well I remember being one of the strategy meetings, two of us kind of took turns going to strategy meetings as representatives of save our city. Darell Valdy and I. Darell went most of the time I only went to about 2 or 3 strategy meetings.

Caroline Yellin- Save our city was already formed?

Reverend Richard Moon- Yes.

Caroline Yellin- By when?

Reverend Richard Moon- I think it was formed a week after we were arrested. Yes it was, a week after we were arrested save our city was formed. They way that happened, I think we ought to plug in on that at this point. Malcolm Blackburn called me and he said. What can we do to get more whites involved. And what he meant by involved was involvement with COME. And I said well I don't know for sure, why don't we just call a meeting with some of our friends. He says, well you give me the time and I will be glad to be there and he said he would make some calls. So I contacted 2, I made 4 phone calls, that is all I made 4 phone calls to key people that I knew who other people and said we are going to have a meeting we are going to talk about the sanitation strike and we are going to talk about what whites can do.

Caroline Yellin- Now who were the 4 people that you talked to? Darell Downing was one.

Reverend Richard Moon- Yeah I called Darrell. I called, if I remember correctly I called John Gay Johnson campus minister down at U.T. Medical present journey campus minister, I called some of my other campus ministers right there at Memphis state. Someone down at first Presbyterian church I don't remember who it was. But that was enough because that Sunday evening we had 37 people for a meeting, There was no plan for this meeting what so ever, there was no idea of an organization. There was nothing really except we wanted to get t hose people that we knew that were concerned about the strike together, primarily whites and there weren't any negros at that first meeting I don't believe. Jerry were you at that first meeting?

Joan Beifuss- We knew of the meeting and wanted to be there and had a babysitting problem that night. But I felt like we were in it from the beginning.

Caroline Yellin- Was Darell Downing already working with COME prior to this?

Reverend Richard Moon- Darrell was working with come through such people as Zeke Bell, Basco Smith and the contacts he had with Shelby democratic club, you see he is a member of Shelby county democratic club and a member of NAACP. So we

have these contacts and there were late hour meetings, informal meetings. So we had this meeting and I really don't remember what happened at that meeting except we talked about the things we could do, and before we knew it we had the four points of CMUE up there. Whites can do this, whites can call and say I don't want the newspaper, what an impression this would make on the city newspaper if a lot of whites called in and said we don't want your paper anymore, you're racist. Or to call up your friendly Goldsmith store or Loeinstein's whatever it might be and say we are canceling our accounts or we are not going to purchase anything anymore until the strike is settled so on. SO we moved in that direction and somebody started talking about organization, what should we call ourselves. I think I asked the question, well if you want an organization what is a suggestion for names? One of the first names we came up with was save our city and everybody liked it so we chose it.

Caroline Yellin- Well it comes out SOC, SOC it to them.

Reverend Richard Moon- I don't know why it came out like that but it did. Then we chose 4 officers a native Memphian, a lady, Pat Gillian.

Caroline Yellin- Pat Gillian?

Reverend Richard Moon- And her husband is a professor at southwestern in physics I believe. Chemistry...

Caroline Yellin- Chemistry.

Reverend Richard Moon- Darell Dowdy was the co-chairmen and the treasurer, and that was me. The only reason it was me I guess was because we were meeting at the Westminster house and I had some collection plates, you know, religious organizations always have collection plates. We collected \$130 that night for COME. And \$30 or \$40 for save our city, that was the start. We had another meeting the next Sunday then and we had something like 50 or 60 people there, it just about doubled. Then we had another collection, we were always good about collecting, and then that was the beginning of it. We immediately began to send out calls to action telling people exactly what to do and one of the things we decided to immediately do was to put an ad in the paper telling what save our city was and what we planned to do and if you were interested in joining the organization just fill out the form and send it in. We got one response from that, it cost us like some 60 odd dollars, and we got one response and the one response was the only way to save our city is for people like you to keep your nose out of other people's business. So we learned the hard way that \$67 for an ad in the commercial appeal of all things we wanted to put it in the East Memphis Shopper's news but we couldn't meet their deadline and they said they didn't have space for it also. We had to go to the east Memphis shopping section of the Commercial Appeal. The Precimeter, the Precimeter the evening paper. So that was the very beginning of it, and we said from the very beginning that we would be a non organization in that we would not have a membership, we would have a mailing list and we would send out information. Our

primary goals were to disseminate information that you couldn't get in your commercial appeal and Precimeter. To suggest action that whites could take and there is a third one and I forgot what it is. Anyway, this is the beginning, it keeps going I think probably within the next couple weeks some basic decisions are going to need to be made as to what direction it is going to go now and in midst of the confusion we have in Memphis at the present time.

Caroline Yellin- I was just going to say that we could tie a sock back in the seal (muffled).

Reverend Richard Moon- Yeah well we got representation then on the (muffled) committee and it was only terms of saying we have a mailing list of people, and what we want to do is plug in and know what you are doing so we can help our people to know what to do. It wasn't in any sense of any person on the mailing list being represented by the (tragic?) committee.

Caroline Yellin- And you sat in on one or two of the strategy meetings?

Reverend Richard Moon- Mmm hmm. One of the strategy meetings I opened my mouth and that is a bad thing to do because there were only two whites there at the strategy meeting, Malcolm Blackburn and myself. We were talking about what direction are we going to go in, how can we again place the city in a moment of crisis to bring the thing to a head. And all kinds of ideas were coming out. So after awhile I opened my mouth and said it seems to me what we need to do is get the leader in here, and I said I don't mean by that Stokely Carmichael, I mean Martin Luther King. Let's get Martin Luther King in here to speak at a mass meeting and then let's let him lead us in a march downtown.

Caroline Yellin- Had anyone ventured this suggestion before that?

Reverend Richard Moon- Not that I know of, but it might have been suggested earlier in another strategy meeting. I suggested this and they decided to move in this direction. They immediately got on the telephone that night and began making telephone calls and seeing if there was any possibility of King coming in and no there wasn't. Do you remember there was a press release that there was a possibility that King might be coming into town?

Caroline Yellin- Yeah.

Reverend Richard Moon- That was shortly after that strategy meeting that night.

Caroline Yellin- Press released it that he had been invited.

Reverend Richard Moon- Oh yes that was the press release he had been invited and we didn't know whether he was going to be able to come or not.

Caroline Yellin- Had you contacted Ben Hooks to see if he could help to get King in to Memphis?

Reverend Richard Moon- I don't know, I don't know if that contact was made. Then of course we had the other leaders come in from NAACP, what's his name.

Caroline Yellin- Trevor?

Reverend Richard Moon- No, no national from New York.

Caroline Yellin- Oh Roy Wilkins and Barrett Ruston.

Reverend Richard Moon- Roy Wilkins and Barrett Ruston came in and then the next week King came.

Caroline Yellin- Before we get to King coming let me check back on something. Were you getting harassment at home during this period?

Reverend Richard Moon- Oh goodness yes. Immediately after my name first showed up in the newspaper and I don't know when that was. Oh I do to, Saturday after the march downtown when everybody got maced we had this big meeting at the Mason Temple and before the ministers met upstairs there was some preliminary things going on, there was a mass meeting going on in Mason Temple. And there were two white preachers there Malcolm Blackburn and Dick Moon. The press was there and they saw us and they found out who we were and...Oh before that meeting I had been down at the rubble workers hall and talked with the sanitation workers and the press was there and they saw me in front of who I was. That day they got a hold of my name, the second day I was involved in this I got my name in the paper. And from that time on then we were harassed by all kinds of phone calls. We got three different kinds of phone calls. We got phone calls where people would say you are a nigger lover. We figured these are the ku klux klan types. Then we got those who were actually willing to debate the issue with us on the telephone and make some sense in their debating. We figured these must be the white citizens kinds of people. Then the others were the ones that would go on and on and on about you are involved in the communist conspiracy, these are the John Birch type. Three different types of phone calls but you can pretty well categorize every one of them.

Caroline Yellin- Did you get very many people who complimented or said they were glad you were doing what you were doing?

Reverend Richard Moon- I got 4 notes in the mail from some members of Presbyterian churches saying thank god you are there and the rest of it was hate. It didn't bother me as much because I was away from home so much, it was my wife who got all these things and she got some horrible, horrible calls. I feel kind of strange with three women, I don't know how to express what it was these people would say to her. Both men and women would express themselves in very vivid terms about how my wife had sexual intercourse with black also, and there were probably certain parts of her anatomy that were black. And they could put these in (muffled) terms and she took these things very well, she is a real trooper. These kind of phone calls went on until the Saturday before the strike was ended. All of a sudden that Saturday all of the phone calls quit and no one has called since.

Caroline Yellin- Is that right.

Reverend Richard Moon- That day was the end of the (muffled). It is the strangest thing as if it is organized and they had a list of people they were calling and all of a sudden it is called off and they move in some other direction.

Joan Beifuss- Um Dick let me ask you one thing, what did you do about the children with the phone calls? Did the children ever answer the phone really?

Reverend Richard Moon- Both of our children are too young to really answer the phone we have two girls, 2 and a half and 4 and a half. We do have a Japanese girl who was living with us and was living with us throughout this crisis and she would answer the phone but usually they would ask for reverend moon or Mrs. Moon. She would get a couple of these calls where she would say hello and they would say nigger lover and then hang up. This kind of thing.

Caroline Yellin- Did you ever actually receive any threatening calls?

Reverend Richard Moon- My wife got a threatening call, one that said leave town and be sure to take your children with you. There was these kinds, couple of calls like this.

Caroline Yellin- Was that, very soon preceding the time when your house was bombed or was that early?

Reverend Richard Moon- This was two days after I went on a hunger strike.

Caroline Yellin- Dr. King came in for the first time.

Reverend Richard Moon- He spoke at the mass meeting, thousands of people there. All of the Mason Temple was filled and there were people outside the building at the window listening. There had been a very quick meeting before King spoke with Jim and some of the other people on the strategy committee and King. And I think the meeting took place in an automobile on the way to the mass meeting from the airport. After he spoke, a lot of people got up and started to leave and Ralph Abernathy got up and spoke for awhile, and then Ralph said something about I think we ought to march on city hall. When he said that King got up and walked back up to the podium and said I think Ralph Abernathy has a good idea. I will tell you what we are going to do, we will be back next week and next week when we are back we are going to lead you on a march on city hall. When he said that Jim Lawson turned around and looked at me and had a look on his face like a little boy with a new toy, like this you know. I looked back at him and I was like yeah, yeah, yeah, because this was the thing we talked about in the strategy meeting. We wanted King to come and to march and all we knew, all I knew was that night when King came to speak was that he was coming to speak that was it, it was going to be like Bayer Ruston and Roy Wilkins. I don't know if that decision took place in the automobile on the way to that mass meeting or if it took place right there on that stage. The thing is he came up after Abernathy had started to speak and announced this, why if it had been

planned why didn't he say this for the end of his speech before everyone got up to leave. So I have a feeling that King might have made a decision right there on the spot that night.

Caroline Yellin- Well after he finished speaking the first time, and Abernathy started to speak did King ever leave the auditorium?

Reverend Richard Moon- No, King was right there sitting in a chair right behind Abernathy all through it.

Caroline Yellin- So then it was decided, were you in on any of the planning in that week planning for the first march?

Reverend Richard Moon- No, not in the strategy.

Caroline Yellin- Did you participate in that first march which was sometimes called the mini riot.

Reverend Richard Moon- Yes I was at the front with the other ministers, behind King in front of the sanitation workers. And before the march actually took place, I was kind of going up and down talking with a number of people. And I started talking with Jesse Turner of the NAACP, and I am sorry it is getting late and now I can't remember names. The now Memphis coordinator for Tennessee...

Caroline Yellin- Gerald...

Reverend Richard Moon- Gerald Baines and Jesse Turner and I were talking and Gerald said to me that it had just gotten over the radio that there was a disturbance at Hamilton High School. So Jesse Turner and Gerald Baines and I come in an automobile along with the national council of churches man, who had flown in that morning from New Orleans. Four of us went up to Hamilton High School to see what was going on. We interviewed one girl who had been hit over the head and was on her way to the hospital to be checked out for a concussion. We asked her what happened, we asked the principal what happened, and some of the teachers and so on and tried to get the story. I went back to the march.

Joan Beifuss- What was your assessment Dick on what had happened?

Caroline Yellin- I think her name is Jo Anne Talbot or Talbert.

Reverend Richard Moon- Oh if I had my book with me I have it written down.

Joan Beifuss- At that time what was your assessment of what had happened at Hamilton?

Reverend Richard Moon- MY assessment was that the police over reacted, that the some of the representatives of COME had come to Hamilton High School and had talked with the boys and girls outside the building about coming to march. Not to go to school that day but to come to march. There were some that were going to march

or at least not stay in school and then there were others who were going to go to school anyway. Those who were not going to go to school formed a line, formed a line out front and did not allow the other kids to go into the school building, so it was kind of a carnival atmosphere out in front of the school. We understand that there was a white laundry truck that drove by and some of the kids picked up rocks and threw rocks at the laundry truck. Some how the back door opened up on the truck and some of the clothes fell out. The driver got out of the truck and picked up that laundry and threw it back in. He was taking his life in his own hands at that point. When this happened as I understand rocks were thrown not only on the laundry truck but at the policemen who had arrived who were across the street. The policemen were standing there with mace in one hand and billy clubs in the other and all they were asking for were rocks. When policemen stand there ready to react you react right, the usual way you pick up rocks and start throwing things. Then when they did the policemen charged across the street onto the school grounds and clubbed at children, not any particular ones just ones they could reach. I don't know how it was broken up or how it happened that the police left by the time we got on the grounds of the school, no police were anywhere.

Caroline Yellin- Do you know why they are handling(Muffled).

Reverend Richard Moon- I don't know, I don't have nay idea what schools they went to. The fact that they went to Hamilton means they were (muffled) I don't know what ones.

Caroline Yellin- So when you got back to the march and reported what you found out what happened then?

Reverend Richard Moon- Well then it was shortly after that King arrived and the march was on its way. We noticed many of the signs had been torn off the stakes they had. They had some stakes that were 2 and a half feet long these posters were nailed to. And I didn't know what was going to happen for sure, I was uneasy about it. The whole thing was a kind of uneasy thing, we didn't have enough marshals and that sort of thing but we moved on down. I was naïve enough to think that everything would be alright, that we would have our march and have speeches on the steps of city hall. We moved on down Pontotoc, is that Pontotoc? Not Pontotoc, it is between 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> the street that runs north south between 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup>? Hernando? We moved on down Hernando to Beale Street and made turn. First policemen we saw were 3 black policemen a the corner of 3<sup>rd</sup> and Beale. As we started up that block between main and the next street, things started happening. I remember seeing first of all glass windows broken out Pabst or Pabst clothing store. And when it happened everyone in the march just kind of moved away from that area and people were yelling no, no, no, no. And then all of a sudden another window broke on the other side of the street. Then everything seemed to calm down and we moved on up and made the turn onto Main St. and that is when everything started to break loose. I must say, people like Bill Smith, one of the ministers from COME and Jim Lawson did such a good job. I have never seen such a huge crowd like that turned around and marched in the opposite direction and they

did it with much calm, they just marched right through the middle of the crowd with their big megaphone saying turn around, go back to the church, go back to the church.

Caroline Yellin- So there are two of them? Bill Smith and Jim Lawson with the big bullhorns?

Reverend Richard Moon- Those were the two I heard.

Caroline Yellin- Were you, how close were you to Dr. King when the march turned onto Main?

Reverend Richard Moon- I guess I was half a block..

Caroline Yellin- You didn't see King leave the march.

Reverend Richard Moon- No I didn't see King leave the march, but I expected that to happen, I expected them to move him up very quickly. A lot of people said it showed what a coward he was, that this is the kind of thing you have to do as a figurehead like this. From what I understand from talking with some of the people on the strategy committee he didn't want to go but they forced him to go.

Caroline Yellin- Did you turn around then and start marching back towards...

Reverend Richard Moon- Yes, back and trying to stop people from running. But that is rather difficult to do, but anyway those of us who were on Main St. were told to continue on down Main St. We went past Beale St. south on Main, went a half a block and we were turned into a vacant lot where they were tearing down a building and we cut across that vacant lot down to the next street and over to the church. While the main body of the march went back down Beale St. and that is where you were.

Caroline Yellin- You were at Clayborne Temple when we got back?

Reverend Richard Moon- Did you go back to Clayborne Temple.

Caroline Yellin- Well we didn't stop...I went back to the temple first.

Reverend Richard Moon- Oh I doubt I would have been back at the temple then.

Caroline Yellin- That was the thing we were so frightened because you were up front and we didn't know where you were.

Reverend Richard Moon- Well we went back to the temple and what we did was to go back into the minimum salary building. We had an office on the first floor.

Caroline Yellin- This is COME office?

Reverend Richard Moon- No, this was the office that we had gotten from the AME church the various denominational and interdenominational that were trying to come into town. So first thing we did then we had this national (Muffled). We went

back to that office and immediately got on the telephone to report what was happening in Memphis to all the rest of the country. Now we had one telephone number that we called in New York and then the word went out from New York to all the other denominational offices across the country blow by blow. Because we were sitting in there on the floor behind the desks trying to protect ourselves because we had police out on the street with their shotguns and their rifles and everything else and all these things were aimed toward the minimum salary building and there was all kinds of scurrying going on. A group of blacks would try and move up the streets and try to hit the liquor store and then move back and the police would come running in. So we were just sitting there on the floor and telling New York what was happening blow by blow this whole thing.

Caroline Yellin- Who was there that day?

Reverend Richard Moon- Darell Dowdy, Zeke Bell, Sam Allen was the man from New Orleans, there were four of us in that office. At one point it got so wild out there that we moved into the entrance of that office and there was an extra wall between us and the outside that way.

Caroline Yellin- Where bullets and, or any kind of missiles coming in?

Reverend Richard Moon- Only rocks were being thrown in and tear gas was being shot off. No rifles or shotguns were fired but they were present. All through that we saw relative restraint. Because we saw county sheriff people and city police working together in large groups of 15 or more and it was relatively restrained at this point. Except when they threw the tear gas into the minimum salary building there were all kinds of people who had gone in the building and were trying to protect themselves by getting inside the building and getting in the hallway. And then when they threw the tear gas into the building there is a back door on that first floor it is a glass door. We heard the crash and the glass was broken because people were just forcing themselves out of the building out the back because of the tear gas was so strong.

Caroline Yellin- Why did they use the tear gas in the minimum salary building?

Reverend Richard Moon- Well the main purpose of the police of course is to break up the large groups into smaller groups until finally you have everyone dispersed out of the area. So everything was fine except that Sam Allen in the meantime had gone up to the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor and then he came back down the elevator after the tear gas had been thrown in the building and the elevator door opened and it all came in on him. He ran across the hall and began to beat on the door and we opened the door for him and when he came in the tear gas came in and it was horrible. We opened the windows and laid on the floor to get some air. We were all laying on the floor crying.

Caroline Yellin- Are you still on the telephone with New York at this point?

Reverend Richard Moon- Not at that time, but about that time however the telephone rang and we picked it up and of all people it was director Holloman of the police department. He said, what's going on down there, who am I talking to? Darell picked up the phone. He said well this is Darell Dowdy and I am on the 1<sup>st</sup> floor of minimum salary building, you want to talk to COME? He says, I don't care who I talk to tell me what's going on down there. He didn't know what was going on at the...the communications had broken down the battalions evidently were working on their own initiative and Holloman had no idea what was going on in the city at that time.

Caroline Yellin- Now was did you go over into Clayborne Temple?

Reverend Richard Moon- No, no. We did have reports that some of the young blacks were going out of the back of the church were picking up rocks and taking them through the church and throwing rocks out the front doors.

Joan Beifuss- Well after that what kind of precautions did you see or hear of in preparation for the next march that King was going to lead?

Reverend Richard Moon- I didn't have a whole lot of hope for the next march. I was in fact telling people that I was divorcing myself from this whole thing I am not going to get into a fight between black militancy and the nonviolent movement. It seemed to me that what was developing was a showdown fight in Memphis between these two factions within the black community. King on one side and who knows who is going to come into town to lead the other side. And I knew what plans were being made in the strategy committee but I didn't think they were going to be able to pull them off. The next week on Wednesday, finally the COME strategy committee had worked out an agreement with the young black militants in the city, on Wednesday. On Thursday King was killed.

Caroline Yellin- Go back again Dick, when the sporadic rioting broke out after the first march you stayed down did you not?

Reverend Richard Moon- Oh yeah a group of us stayed at the Holiday Inn downtown because we were expecting more people coming in from various denominational offices. So we rented a number of rooms and we stayed there for 3 days. My wife and children stayed with some friends, while I was downtown and the main purpose of our holing up down there was to get all the people together that were going to come into town to talk about strategy, what were we going to do? Because we expected Memphis to respond as other cities responded. We saw Thursday as the first day of rioting, Friday as being about twice as bad and Saturday all hell would break loose. That we would have 3 days of anarchy in Memphis. So we got all our people together and we talked about what we could do. We decided one thing we definitely had to do was to get the white ministers together as many influential white ministers together as we can possibly get and talk to them about what happened in Detroit, what happened in Washington, what happened in Newark and so on. So they know what to expect in Memphis and what we want them to do is set

up emergency operations. We want them to open up their churches, we want them to tool up their churches ready to feed people to put members of families in touch with each other, to house them, whatever needed to be done we wanted the churches to be ready to do it over night. So at 2:00 in the morning, 1:30 in the morning I called Paul Cooter Jones the most influential minister I could think of in the city who could get the ear of other ministers, priests and rabbis and so on. Paul Cooter Jones could do it if anyone could.

Caroline Yellin- And who, where is he?

Reverend Richard Moon- At Idlewild Presbyterian church. He told me no, so I told him a few things.

Caroline Yellin- Why did he tell you no?

Reverend Richard Moon- Because he said he had to go out of town for a funeral. So I told him that he could come back and (Muffled). So then I turned around and called John K Johnson who was the associate minister at Idlewild church who had different contacts with various denominations because he was working with an inter-denominational group at university of Tennessee. He did the job for us and we had 40 or 50 ministers meeting at Westminster house I think Friday afternoon. We outlined what happened in the other cities, what could possibly happen in Memphis. Told them what we felt they needed to do and we walked out of there leaving them high and dry to go to another quick strategy meeting because we thought we were going to have to send half of our people up to Chicago but at that time we got the word that the Chicago stores were burning if you remember. There were 3 Chicago stores burning at the time, and we were sure that Chicago was going to go up so we moved out and left these ministers by themselves. There are a number of things that grew out of that meeting. The emergency operations did not grow out of it, but a statement from the 2 bishops, well there was 3 men involved in (Muffled). The subsequent meetings at Memphis (tape glitching) Gosh I don't know it was such an emotional moment, I will tell you what I have been talking so long...we hadn't lived in Memphis long but we were both Memphians and we realized the implications of what was going on and the possibilities of what could take place in Memphis. But we had accepted all this intellectually and we had then been working feverishly enough in so many different areas during those days that we had no time for an emotional experience. We would have time to (Tape Glitching)(Tape End)