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## J. O. Patterson Jr., Memphis City Council, 1968

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Joan Beifuss- This is September 11, we are in the office of J.O. Patterson at 224 S. Danny Thomas Blvd. Interviewers are David Yellin and Joan Beifuss.

David Yellin- Well Mr. Patterson, since we have given you a lot of introduction in our sales pitch now we are ready kind of for you to tell your story which is what the important thing is. First of all your story of your self because, and please feel free to answer the phone if you care to. Can you tell us a little bit of your background, where you were born and when.

J.O. Patterson- Well I was born here in Memphis 1935, attended the public school system, Booker Washington for high school. Attended Fisk University undergraduate study then to DePaul University.

David Yellin- Excuse me what did you study in graduate school?

J.O. Patterson- Business Administration for undergraduate and law for graduate study at DePaul.

Joan Beifuss- At DePaul in Chicago?

J.O. Patterson- Yes.

David Yellin- You are talking to a Chicago girl.

J.O. Patterson- Oh really. Very good. Well after the graduation from law school a little bit of practice and then I got into politics.

David Yellin- Before you do that your family.

J.O. Patterson- Well I am a divorcee, have two kids presently 9 and 4 years of age. I come from a family havening 2 kids myself and a sister who about 19 years of age. My father is a minister and my mother is a house wife.

Joan Beifuss- Ok now what I have never gotten straight is, now Bishop J.O. Patterson, that is your father?

J.O. Patterson- Yes.

Joan Beifuss- That is not Gilbert Patterson.

J.O. Patterson- No. That is Gill Patterson's uncle.

David Yellin- Well all the Patterson's here for years have been involved in the ministry haven't they.

J.O. Patterson- Yes, well one way or another.

Joan Beifuss- How long has your family been in Memphis?

J.O. Patterson- I don't know exactly. I suspect my mother came to Memphis maybe 10 years before I was born.

David Yellin- From Mississippi?

J.O. Patterson- I think they moved from Mississippi. Perhaps in the early 20's and we have been here ever since.

David Yellin- Did you always want to get into law.

J.O. Patterson- No, it was the last thing I wanted to get into.

David Yellin- No?

J.O. Patterson- A very good friend of mine who attorney Ladding's son and I were room mates at Fisk and at that time he was headed in the direction of law and law was the last thing under the sun I would consider getting into.

David Yellin- Well how did you trip into it or who pushed you or...do you recall?

J.O. Patterson- I don't know it seems after finishing Fisk I realized I needed something more than a bachelor's degree. I started thinking in terms of profession and law happened to went out.

Joan Beifuss- Did the ministry ever enter into the picture?

J.O. Patterson- Yeah it entered into the picture also. I gave a very serious consideration but I just decoded I was not cut out to live the life of a minister at that time, rather than go into it and be very hypocritical about it I decided to leave it alone.

David Yellin- I hope you don't mind what these questions are?

J.O. Patterson- No.

David Yellin- Was it is because your relationship to religion or your opinion of religion or just he very fact of the existence of a minster?

J.O. Patterson- Well I think the relationship to religion, because I have always been very close to it ever since I was born there have been ministers or very religious people around me. There was a strong feeling inside of myself unless I could be all I thought a minister ought to be then I would not care to take any part in it.

David Yellin- So whenever you go into something you like to...

J.O. Patterson- Well I don't necessarily whenever I go into something I go into it all the way, but it just happens to be that particular field I feel very strongly about.

Joan Beifuss- Where did you live when you were up in DePaul?

J.O. Patterson- In Lake Meders.

Joan Beifuss- Did you?

J.O. Patterson- (muffled) apartment 902.

Joan Beifuss- Wish I would have known at the time. Was that the first time you had lived in a really northern city?

J.O. Patterson- For any extended period of time yes previously it had just been for visits.

Joan Beifuss- Did you make comparisons...

J.O. Patterson- Well no let me take that back, I did spend one year in Washington.

Joan Beifuss- Did you make comparisons between Chicago and Memphis.

David Yellin- Then not now.

J.O. Patterson- Well, The only great comparisons that can be made at the time certainly the various facilities there, the public facilities there, the accommodations for negroes were law in that part of the country and you had the opportunity of going, I think the attitudes of the people is basically the same. I don't think there is any difference between negroes there and negroes here and whites there and whites here. There was perhaps more toleration but the basic problems we encounter were present at all times.

Joan Beifuss- Could you say that about the ghetto neighborhoods here and the ghetto neighborhoods in Chicago?

J.O. Patterson- A ghetto is about a ghetto anywhere and it really doesn't matter.

Joan Beifuss- Has more sunshine and dirt here, dirt yards.

J.O. Patterson- I will say this about Chicago, it was much dirtier. When you used the word it brought it back up, the physical being of it.

Joan Beifuss- Chicago is real pretty if you are out on the lake looking at it.

J.O. Patterson- I don't know I thought Chicago had horrible beaches.

Joan Beifuss- Did you?

J.O. Patterson- Yeah they were dirty, now I noticed the beaches farther North a city just north of...

Joan Beifuss- (muffled)

J.O. Patterson- Yeah up along there is it northwest of...

Joan Beifuss- Yeah.

J.O. Patterson- On a few occasions I had to be up that way and they had some very beautiful beaches up there but the public beaches in the heart of Chicago were horrible. Very dirty sand.

David Yellin- It is a decaying beach town you might say.

J.O. Patterson- Well I guess I would have to agree with you.

David Yellin- Then when you got out of law school you were intending to always come back her.

J.O. Patterson- Oh yeah, very definitely.

David Yellin- Indeed you did and set up law?

J.O. Patterson- Established a practice right here.

David Yellin- Did you go in yourself or did you go into a law office?

J.O. Patterson- No I was a brave one, went out on my own.

David Yellin- Right from the beginning?

J.O. Patterson- Well we face a little bit different problem here in Memphis, us negro lawyers here. There are only about 10 practicing negro attorneys in the city and we have no firms per say. And usually the situation is a young lawyer coming back into the city is start practicing on his own and usually a relationship is established between a young attorney and a n older established one. Aid and assistances are acquired that way.

David Yellin- When did politics rear it's whatever?

J.O. Patterson- Oh I guess 7 or 8 months after I started practicing.

David Yellin- Did it occur to you as a furtherance for your career or was it in itself and end.

J.O. Patterson- Initially I saw it as a means of advancing myself within the profession. I think that what was caused my initial entry into it.

David Yellin- What was the first time you ever got into politics?

J.O. Patterson- 65' when I ran for legislature.

David Yellin- And that is when you, and you won. That was the first time you ran that was the state legislature.

J.O. Patterson- That's right house representative.

David Yellin- Then you ran again in 67' for the senate.

J.O. Patterson- No I ran in 67' for the city council.

David Yellin- For the city council, and you went there too.

J.O. Patterson- And this year for the state senate.

Joan Beifuss- Where do you live in Memphis?

J.O. Patterson- Right now at the Holiday Towers.

Joan Beifuss- What was your kind of neighborhood in Memphis? South Memphis. North Memphis?

J.O. Patterson- Previously?

Joan Beifuss- Yeah.

J.O. Patterson- Well let's see when I was born we were living in south Memphis at Mississippi and Edith, and oh I guess we lived there until I was about 6 or 7 years old. We moved to North Memphis where my dad's business was located at Springdale and Chelsea, I guess we stayed there for another 12 years.

David Yellin- For the record can you tell the business?

J.O. Patterson- Yes, Patterson Funeral Home. Then we moved back to south Memphis back to the starting place on Mississippi, it was sort of a family home. Lived there a few years 3 or 4 years I guess and then we moved out on Parkway, 1774. I stayed there for awhile, and then from there I acquired my own place on S. Willington St. And then after I got involved in the idea of running for the city council of course I then had to move and establish residence within my district and not live in Holiday Towers.

Joan Beifuss- What are the boundaries of the district.

J.O. Patterson- Roughly Crump Blvd. over to South Wells St. on North river on the west. And in some places it goes over to Willett on the east but that is the most easterly boundary. I would say the longest east of the boundary is Cleveland.

David Yellin- I would say that's good background maybe now we kind of want to skip and anything you feel that is relevant to whatever comes up please kind of loose, don't hesitate to include it. However we are concerned with the strike and the events that led to it, just to start you off or you can start where you want to if you are prepared to. When did you first hear about the strike?

J.O. Patterson- I first heard about it the first day it occurred.

David Yellin- You knew nothing about it? Any plans before?

J.O. Patterson- As far as I know there were very few people who knew the strike was actually coming up. This was my impression has always been that it was somewhat of a spur of the moment decision on the part of Mr. Jones, president of this local.

David Yellin- Have you ever spoken to him or someone in relation to confirm your suspicion?

J.O. Patterson- Well this is something that I assumed through hearing discussion on it, some of the statements were by members of the union, no not members of the union but officials of the union. Though I never asked them point blank was it a planned affair my impressions from what they related it wasn't.

David Yellin- Can you tell us your association with the strike? Or should we help you out?

J.O. Patterson- Suppose you help me out?

Joan Beifuss- The legislature was meeting in Nashville all throughout this period?

J.O. Patterson- That's right.

Joan Beifuss- How many days a week then does the legislature?

J.O. Patterson- We usually meet 4 days per week.

Joan Beifuss- Is that full legislature?

J.O. Patterson- Yeah.

Joan Beifuss- it is, yeah.

J.O. Patterson- We meet Monday evenings usually at 7. Then Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday during the day.

Joan Beifuss- And that is not just committees that is full?

J.O. Patterson- That is full, we have committee meetings and full meetings with both the house and senate during this time.

David Yellin- A full day on Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday usually?

J.O. Patterson- Not really no, it seems it is sort of par of the course for the legislature to meet for an hour or two, three at the most during the early part of the procession and maybe the last couple weeks we go into extended time and it might then run all afternoon or something.

David Yellin- While you are on that, the city council meets how often, and are they regular meetings of the city council?

J.O. Patterson- Regular meetings of the city council are scheduled for 2:30 on Tuesday afternoon.

David Yellin- Each week, that is all you need.

J.O. Patterson- That is all that the charter calls for. Now during that period of the strike because we had some special sessions that were called.

David Yellin- So that on February 12<sup>th</sup> which was a Monday, you were most likely in Nashville.

J.O. Patterson- No I didn't leave for Nashville until Monday evening, I think I got a 5:00 or flight out around 5:00.

David Yellin- So you had time to (muffled) you were here when the strike started.

J.O. Patterson- Yes.

David Yellin- Do you recall what your first impression to what it was? Was it merely a strike?

J.O. Patterson- Well it was not as I recall now, it didn't bloom into a full fledge strike on the first day as I recall it was more like a walk in and walk out.

David Yellin- All of the 1300 didn't report for work.

J.O. Patterson- As I recall, on the first day only about half or something stayed out and I think within a day or 2 after most of the workers had joined in. Now this is what I am trying to recall and I never had any occasion to keep that fact in mind for any reason rather to keep it in mind.

Joan Beifuss- Actually there were more out on the first day it is kind of incredible that so many men went out the first day.

David Yellin- In fact a lot of them came to work reported to their stations and when they saw that a lot of others were going out they stayed out. So it was a pretty good percentage the first day that they did stay out. But then again just if you can recall, did you have any special concern about it, did you feel you would get involved or it would be something that...

J.O. Patterson- Well no, right at the beginning I had no idea that the strike would ever grow to the proportions it did or take on the meaning and interest that it eventually acquired and I readily admit probably like everybody else, it was of no major concern the first day they walked out I felt that it was there method of demonstrating and calling attention to whatever grievances they had at the time and it probably would be settled within a day or two.

David Yellin- Well when did this change or what happened there after any things that stand out in your mind?



J.O. Patterson- Well, I would think that of course passage of time naturally, you realize that the men had a big gripe and they were very determined to see that they got something better than the situation they were in. When it appeared to me that the mayor was not inclined to settle the issue.

David Yellin- How did that appear to you?

J.O. Patterson- Well if I remember correctly he of course took the position very shortly after the strike began that he would not even discuss the issue with the men unless until they went back to work. They were equally as determined they were not going back to work until they did get some consideration, at least discussion from the city fathers and I think it was at that point that I became greatly concerned about it. I think that Henry was being a little too hard-nosed at that point. I think he could have worked the thing out, without all the hardship involved in this city, he could have done it a bit earlier. Had he taken a little more humanitarian approach to the workers I think.

David Yellin- Now this is not merely hindsight?

J.O. Patterson- Not and this was the thing I was saying during the strike. I first took the position that it was a, initially an executive problem and that the executive part of government ought to deal with it. It was only after oh maybe a week or 10 days or so that it seemed that my mind changed and I then took the position that the executive branch of government was not going to deal, either was not going to deal with it or was incapable of dealing with it, and then at that point the strike had gone on long enough and somebody ought to step in and I think the charter provided the authority for the council to do it.

David Yellin- Oh only on the basis that the executive didn't act then the council could?

J.O. Patterson- Well we were really bothered by the interpretation of the charter. And some members of the council were not really certain as to whether the council had the authority or not. I think several of us went in and re read the charter and tried to reach an interpretation on it. It seemed to me at that point that certain issues that were involved in the strike, not jus the strike itself but one of the issues that could have settled the strike early became within the area of the council's consideration and it was on that particular point that I thought we had the authority to get in.

David Yellin- And what particular issue is that.

J.O. Patterson- Oh this was the matter of the dues check off, I felt and in fact most members of the council, I would say the great majority of them at one point believed that the matter of dues check off was a policy decision that the council ought to establish for the city.

Joan Beifuss- Do you recall if this was the feeling before the macing incident?

J.O. Patterson- Yeah. This if you remember some of my statements back during the strike. No not during the strike, well some of them are during the strike too. But after Dr. King's death and the council ratified the agreement with the union, I think I mentioned then that the council had agreed previously to almost the identical terms that the city and the union eventually ended up with. We met out at councilman Davis' house about 2 weeks after the strike started. There were 12 of us present, 11 of us agreed to, well yeah agreed and this was on Sunday. We agreed to all of the terms that were eventually included in the settlement agreement and this was about 2 weeks after the strike started. After that meeting, well at the meeting Tom Todd was the only one that disagreed. From the very beginning he took the position that it was the mayor's problem and that he was going to support he mayor 100%. It didn't matter what the mayor decided to do, that was what he was going to do. He didn't care what happened, just as long as he supported the mayor.

David Yellin- That was his issue as far as he was concerned?

J.O. Patterson- Yeah. This was the only thing, if the mayor said to do this, I am going to do this. Do you remember the day we met with the union in the auditorium. He voted against a particular resolution and his only reason for doing so was that it did not support the mayor 100%.

David Yellin- Yes.

J.O. Patterson- And it seemed like a very stupid position to take but anyway. That was approximately 2 weeks after the strike started. We had agreed to this course of action which at that point I had assurances from the union that it was acceptable to them. In fact, if I remember correctly these assurances came from Jesse Epps. Jerry Worth, and Mr. Champa, the three of them stated that those items at that point were acceptable to the union and the strike would have ended the next day.

David Yellin- So what happened as far as you can tell?

J.O. Patterson- Best to my knowledge after that meeting the mayor was informed of what we intended, Downing Pryor was (muffled). I am positive of those two, I don't know who else may have been corralled by the mayor I don't know. But when Tuesday morning rolls around they had changed their opinion. Well not necessarily changed their opinion but had decided not to act.

David Yellin- Because they had been in touch with the mayor who said he wouldn't go through with this or he didn't want them too.

J.O. Patterson- He didn't like it, he didn't approve of it, he would veto the ordinance if it passed.

David Yellin- Now was that the ordinance that you had drawn up?

J.O. Patterson- No I didn't draw no ordinance up until after this.

David Yellin- Right. Then so Tuesday's meeting came and nothing happened. Did you bring it up or did anybody bring it up?

J.O. Patterson- Oh yeah it was brought up and discussed. If I remember correctly representatives from the union and interested citizen's showed up at that particular council meeting once they brought it up, we had already discussed it previously anyway>

David Yellin- Were you at Fred Davis' committee meeting on the 22<sup>nd</sup>?

J.O. Patterson- I came in late that day.

David Yellin- It was a Wednesday the 22<sup>nd</sup>.

J.O. Patterson- Was it a Wednesday or a Thursday?

David Yellin- Well Wednesday the 22<sup>nd</sup>.

Joan Beifuss- It is Thursday.

J.O. Patterson- That's what I thought because legislature had finished for the week and I came back in late that...

David Yellin- Yes.

J.O. Patterson- I didn't get there until about 4:30 or 5:00 and of course by then the house was in an uproar. The picnic table was out and everybody was howling and it was a general uproar at the time I walked in and all of the hot words had already been exchanged.

David Yellin- Did anybody brief you on what had happened or how did you catch up to what was going on?

J.O. Patterson- Yeah there was members of the council that informed as to what had occurred earlier and one or two members of the police department I think I talked with and some of the officials of the union and some of the ministers, I guess I maybe talked to 10 or 15 people.

David Yellin- And the whole point then was that all hell was breaking loose or was about to break loose or already had.

J.O. Patterson- Well at that point it was oh I guess you could almost say that it had broken loose within the council chamber.

Joan Beifuss- So what did you do then when you found out what was happening.

J.O. Patterson- I think it was about that time that, I didn't really say too much that day because I remember there was a (muffled) committee meeting and I had not particular desire to interject my personality into his hearing, so I don't think I said anything of importance then, was to try to urge the members of council to step in

and settle the whole thing before the community got out of hand, because it looked to me at that point it was headed that direction.

David Yellin- Can we kind of do something now that I think needs to be done. Can you would you care to discuss your relationship with other members of the council, with or without names because obviously there was a relationship you were one of the three negro members of the council and you were kind of a loner. How did you get along?

J.O. Patterson- Well at that point, I was not necessarily a loner, only a loner in the sense of my very vocally being opposed to the mayor's position and my insistence that it was within the province of the council to deal with the problem and we ought to deal with it. I would say my relationship with the other councilmen at that point was very good.

Joan Beifuss- Did it deteriorate over the period of the strike or was it always good personally even when you were on opposite sides?

J.O. Patterson- Deteriorated with one or two of the councilmen, Mr. Todd being the prime example.

David Yellin- Of course you are implying there that it was at sometime in good shape.

J.O. Patterson- Right I would say it was cordial.

David Yellin- I don't know that I am misusing their confidence but I think this is one of my favorite stories, we usually don't do this discuss other tapes but Gwynn Awsumb said well the J.O. Patterson, the way she put it she said, with Fred Davis he as kind of a little fellow and a sort of fellow you call Fred right away, and she said J.O. Patterson, and Mr. Neders being a minister you kind of always call him reverend I think. But she said, J.O. Patterson we sort of had a formal relationship and I called him Mr. Patterson and he called me Mrs. Awsumb, until one day and now I can think about it, when she said J.O. and you said Gwynn. (laughs) I though it was kind of charming.

J.O. Patterson- It was, I don't know why...it has always been like that. Previously, it really was. Everyone else around the council called her Gwynn and she called them by their first name. And I called everybody else, I think at that point I still referred to Neders as reverend, I think I used that and Mrs. Awsumb I always called Mrs. Awsumb.

David Yellin- Yeah. I mean she made a point that she was quite aware of this whole thing.

J.O. Patterson- This went on maybe a couple months or something after we took office.

Joan Beifuss- What does J.O. stand for?

J.O. Patterson- James Oglethorpe Patterson Jr.

David Yellin- Just having come through Georgia, I know Oglethorpe.

Joan Beifuss- Well I met the day of the Fred Davis committee meeting, did Fred Davis do you think that if his committee came in with the recommendation that it would be adopted by council?

J.O. Patterson- No he didn't. It was known, we met in a little cubbie hole.

Joan Beifuss- Did you meet with this sub-committee?

J.O. Patterson- Yeah well at that time, by the time I got there practically all the councilmen were in the chamber and we had a meeting, I really recall it was in a cubbie hole there west of the council chamber and no one would really come up with a solution at that time and no one, very few people were interested in taking a stand right then so we just generally agreed that to get Fred off the hook or try to anyway. That the committee would come in with a recommendation that the strike be settled and I forgot what provisions they included in their committee report.

David Yellin- Now other people, other councilmen and women and these two meetings, that day Thursday and the next day, indicated that there was some fear of violence or something. Did you have any of that in those either on Thursday or the next day. Well let me say that I felt, I believe that some of the people they were in the council chamber that day. Let me say this, I was never fearful that anything was going to occur in the council chamber. This was not a consideration in my mind at all. In think there were those that were fearful that something might break out actually right there on the floor. But as far as I was concerned this was not the case, I do not believe anything any major disturbance would occur there. I did believe however that there was some possibility of disorder within the city itself. And realize that a lot of people get very very angry and that is when I really get concerned about this thing. That the council at that point showed forward and showed a little bit of leadership.

David Yellin- Now the reason for your concern was it just something you felt on your own or did you go out among your constituency or did you get letters or?

J.O. Patterson- Well I guess I am a little bit different than my other councilmen that I am among my constituents constantly at some point of practically every day I am out rubbing elbows with the crowd one way or another. So I get a chance to hear them talk and I think I have a way of keeping my fingers on the pulse of the community a lot better because of this, this tendency of mine to just go out and see people. With this in mind and hearing the talk I realized this thing was getting extremely hot.

David Yellin- Did people come to you about this or did you do it as you say in the...?

J.O. Patterson- Well, some people came to me, I knew personally a number of the civilian leaders and as you recall many of them were ministers, and my association over the years has been friendly with most of them.

David Yellin- Now this is what if we could if we can discuss this now the, when were you aware tangibly that the ministers were in it and were you in favor of that and what was this doing to the community.

J.O. Patterson- Well if I recall the ministers entered into this issue fairly early.

David Yellin- Just about the same time they were involved at the meeting.

J.O. Patterson- They were at city hall that day. If I recall they announced some of them announced their support maybe about a week or so after it started.

Joan Beifuss- Yes.

David Yellin- Well this is only 9 days, 10, 11 days after yea. So following the macing and if we can we will find out what.

J.O. Patterson- Well of course there is a meeting at city hall Fred's committee meeting preceded the macing.

Joan Beifuss- Yes.

J.O. Patterson- One day and then the 22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> is the macing and the 24<sup>th</sup> was when OCME officially got started.

Joan Beifuss- I want to ask you do you recall before in Memphis seeing the ministers come in so strongly into any kind of a social problem as they did in this?

J.O. Patterson- No I cannot remember any other incidents. As far as I know this was the first time.

Joan Beifuss- First time it had happened.

J.O. Patterson- Yeah. They always there have been some that have always been concerned and have worked with various problems that they felt were in the civil rights area. Reverend Lawson is of course is always been involved in these things and reverend Kyles and there have been a few others. But for widespread participation no, this was the first time.

Joan Beifuss- In February, in Memphis would the utilization of the ministers been one way to draw the entire community and..?

J.O. Patterson- I don't say it was the one way but I certainly think it was one of the best ways.

Joan Beifuss- Yes, is this still true now if you wanted to unify the community would it still come through the ministers?

J.O. Patterson- I think ministers would play an extremely important part in it yeah.

Joan Beifuss- Would they be as important now as you think they were last February? Or did we in Memphis...

J.O. Patterson- Well you have what a lot of people consider to be a great moral issue. And of course this is just perfect of leadership and support from the ministry. I don't know whether it would be quite as important now.

Joan Beifuss- The thing I was trying to get at I suppose is in the south the ministers role has played such an important part in the community that (muffled) .

J.O. Patterson- Well, the ministers that, if I recall the ones that really exerted influence during the strike the ones that were very active with COME, do not have churches in the lower south Memphis area. Now how much influence they could exert I am not certain of at all. Most I would say most of the larger negro churches are not located in that area. That is not saying because of course a lot of people in that area are coming to other areas of the city to attend church. That is an interesting question, I don't know.

Joan Beifuss- The only reason I bring it up is because it was in Chicago there was no kind of community relationship with the ministers at all or at least it was not apparent with the politics of the city whether it never existed there past that point or whether, what had happened exactly but I just wondered.

J.O. Patterson- Well I would think this now, that in most cities at one point or another the negro clergy has played some strong part in politics.

David Yellin- But the point I think here, where it differs was that it was a unified movement as much as possible, as humanly possible wouldn't you say?

J.O. Patterson- I think so.

David Yellin- That the community really was unified, we are talking about the black community of course.

J.O. Patterson- Very definitely, spontaneous thing.

David Yellin- Yes, how did, see if I can put this not necessarily gently but exactly in that how did you feel, where were you in on all of this as a member of kind of a dual leader and council and state legislature, that this please you displease you, involve you in anyway?

J.O. Patterson- You mean the ministers?

David Yellin- Yes the ministers in it, was it, now it was no longer only a union situation, it was greater, it was a great moral question. Part of the moral question I guess too is whether the council should indeed be in this or not. Whether they should take precedence or take action where the mayor wasn't.

Joan Beifuss- Is that moral?

David Yellin- In some ways it could be. Because I think you are representing people and morally bound to do what you can and if someone won't do it, in a lot of ways I almost remember somebody did say they were morally bound to do it even if the charter didn't spell it out that somebody had to do something.

J.O. Patterson- Sounds like that would have been one of Jared's statements.

David Yellin- And if the mayor didn't, somebody ought to do something. I mean so much of the climate at the time was based on this thrust to do something about it. Particularly since the mayor was in a lot of sense being supra-legal, that it was an illegal strike therefore he can't talk to anybody, sense it as an illegal strike.

Joan Beifuss- Was that a question?

J.O. Patterson- I was trying to remember now exactly where we started?

David Yellin- I am coming back to it after having made this speech and I thank you all for paying attention. The question, what I am trying to get at is where did you fit or where did you see yourself, what position, what role did you see yourself as having in this.

J.O. Patterson- One, I felt that I ought to eventually fulfill all of my duties and responsibilities as a councilmen. Try to see that the strike was settled amicably and fairly and that they city did not if possible experience any civil disorders.

Joan Beifuss- Amicably or fairly? If it wasn't possible both at the same time?

J.O. Patterson- Well I would have preferred to see it settled fairly. I guess you would have to have, if it is fairly then it is probably amicable and under the circumstances for it to be amicable, it would have to be fair also.

David Yellin- You two have fun. You make me think of a friendly divorce there is no such thing.

J.O. Patterson- On the other hand I certainly felt every duty to use the influence of the offices that are held in support of my people.

David Yellin- If I am interrupting you tell me.

J.O. Patterson- No go right ahead.

David Yellin- Support of your people. I mean how much did you think this was a race problem and how significant a race problem was it?

J.O. Patterson- Well from the very beginning many of the citizens that supported sanitation workers viewed their plight as a race problem. I did not reach that point of view, immediately, though I have certainly realized their position and a position of love of people seemingly situated goes back into the race area, but a new group of



people and a new form of government and a new set of councilmen and all that. I wasn't convinced at that point that the council was looking at it with any racial overtones. This began to creep out, a little later in the strike when such statements as that one made by my bosomed buddy Mr. Todd that the sanitation workers were already overpaid. So there were certainly some racial feelings involved on the part of some of the councilmen, but what was your original question?

David Yellin- Well it had to do with that how significant did you think that then if it did become a racial problem, was it a racial problem only in relation with sanitation worker's with Memphis or with them being recognized or did you feel it had deeper significance. This is a very difficult question because of course later on it had deeper significance, but at this time.

J.O. Patterson- Well let's see later in the strike now, or 3<sup>rd</sup> week or so. After some of the hot sessions at city hall, and the first macing incident. Some of the townsmen started feeling that they did not want to settle the problem as they had previously agreed because they felt it would be showing weakness on their part. That they, as Bob James put it, giving in to threats and rabble rouses and if we give in to them on this point they will be back attempting to use the same tactics in the future.

David Yellin- Was he saying that it would be an advocacy for white supremacy as well as an advocacy for the government against the union, was it a double thing or how did you interpret it?

J.O. Patterson- Well because her was saying an advocacy of the government but I think there were some feelings that some of this was stimulated out of his prejudice ideas.

David Yellin- I mean that was of course not lost on you?

J.O. Patterson- No.

David Yellin- You made that known to him that you felt that way?

J.O. Patterson- No I never, I don't think I ever went into that area. I saw nothing that I could gain by exploring that avenue. It appeared to me it was better to try to maintain friendly relationships as nearly as possible with as many of the councilmen as I possibly could. Things that I could avoid doing, I attempted to do so.

Joan Beifuss- I am going to go back chronologically, the day of the macing. When the council all left the stage after the decision was announced to the strikers, did you go, where did you go then down into the auditorium to talk with the men?

J.O. Patterson- I stayed on the stage and talked with a number of people who were on the stage, several labor officials and some of the ministers and other interested citizens. I think I sat around and talked to Clark (muffled), not Clark but Moe Adams for awhile.

Joan Beifuss- Were you there then when the decision was made to walk down Main St.? Or were you in the group that made the decision to walk down?

J.O. Patterson- I did not participate in any decision making at that point. I stayed to let the men know that I was for them and was supporting them the best I could. I was there to give whatever moral support my presence would give, and when they decided to march to Mason Temple, I was in the group that led them out of the auditorium and incidentally I went with them to city hall, and waved good bye gave them god's blessings and then I got in my car and went to Mason Temple to open the temple up for them. I met them at Mason Temple when they came in with gas one them.

David Yellin- What affect did that have on you? That day and that incident. I don't know if we would call it an incident but that event, of the macing.

J.O. Patterson- Well of course it brought back all of the anger and hatred that I and a lot of other and why most negros have for this police department and police departments everywhere really. I had gotten some reports of what happened and I was fairly sure that there was not sufficient provocation for it.

Unknown Male- Mr. Patterson, Mr. Carpenter.

David Yellin- Yes was she the one with the car running over her?

J.O. Patterson- As I understand that she was. The way I get it is that there was a police radio dispatch to keep the marchers to the west side of Main St. and that an over zealous officer attempted to move his car or motorcycle or whatever it was, car I presume. Closer to the crowd in an effort to force them over, I don't know if he was trying to gently push or urge them over or whether he was just being mischievous or mean but anyway this is the report I got. I understand that Mrs. Carpenter was bumped by the car.

David Yellin- Is she available anywhere? Do you know where we might reach her?

J.O. Patterson- I know where she lives, she is in and out of here some of the time.

David Yellin- Is there any way we could get some, we could have a little talk with her because she is down to for history and will tell this event.

J.O. Patterson- Well if you close your ears I will holler, call my secretary. Eileen come here please. Is reverend here?

Eileen- Nobody.

J.O. Patterson- Has Gladys been in here today?

Eileen- No.

J.O. Patterson- What's her address around there do you know?

Eileen- I don't know I would have to go there.

David Yellin- Well can we make arrangements when we go out, because we are very anxious to detail this story as much as possible.

J.O. Patterson- Yeah. Yeah after we finish up. Show you were Mrs. Carpenter lives.

David Yellin- Fine thank you. Can we talk about your resolution?

Joan Beifuss- Hold on just a minute before we get there, when COME was organized then the next day after the macing when it finally got organized, were you at those organizational meetings?

J.O. Patterson- No I was not.

Joan Beifuss- Did you feel you could not because of your position as councilmen?

J.O. Patterson- I felt that my position as councilmen somewhat limited the extent to which I could participate. There certainly had been moral support and I did a few things in the background to aid the movement and the sanitation workers themselves, but as far as really open leadership and participation I was a little reluctant to do this because of my position as city council.

Joan Beifuss- Did you have your own, did you have a liaison person to come where you kept reprised of everything that was decided in COME strategy meetings?

J.O. Patterson- Yeah, I was usually in fairly close contact with Jesse Epps, Bo W. Pickett, occasionally reverend Lawson, Gerald Fanion, and Mrs. Carpenter has a unique way of getting her nose into everybody's business. She kept me well aware of everything that was going on. I usually got daily and sometimes hourly reports. Mostly what the decisions where.

David Yellin- Another thing occurred to me a little switch of locale. What did you hear up in Nashville all the time?

J.O. Patterson- Well if anything major importance broke my secretary would be on the phone immediately and let me know what had happened and besides that I made a habit or practice rather of calling back to Memphis at least twice everyday.

David Yellin- But what did the people in Nashville, import to you or did they question you about things happening here?

J.O. Patterson- Oh just normal curiosity and my fellow legislators knowing that I was on the council, periodically they would ask me to see if I had any information that they had not heard or read.

Joan Beifuss- Well what about over in Nashville when those bills came up that were aimed directly at the Memphis garbage strike?

J.O. Patterson- Well there was very little discussion, between myself and the other legislators about the bills, I think only one or two of them we made speeches from the floor of the house.

Joan Beifuss- What about the Shelby county delegation.

J.O. Patterson- Out if the Shelby delegation I remember Bill Bruce spoke against some of this. Charlie (muffled). But to a great extent the fight against the bills was carried on by somewhat of a white friends of the legislature who knew our feeling son them and had similar feelings themselves. And it was considered to be strategically best for arguments against the bills to come from white legislators rather than totally from negro members.

Joan Beifuss- How many negro legislators are there?

J.O. Patterson- There was 6 at the time 3 from Memphis and 2 from Davidson and 1 from Knoxville.

Joan Beifuss- Did it appear to you that the state legislature people in it had any idea of the racial tension that was building up in Memphis?

J.O. Patterson- Well they were aware..

Joan Beifuss- Outside of the Shelby (muffled).

J.O. Patterson- The bills because remember did not come up either after the macing or ...

David Yellin- yeah.

J.O. Patterson- Dr. King's first march I think after the first riot there.

Joan Beifuss- It was one I think the second march it would have made it a felony to come form the outside and lead people to strike.

J.O. Patterson- Wasn't this after the first march.

Joan Beifuss- It was not after the first march it was after the macing.

David Yellin- The state things came up rather early.

J.O. Patterson- You are right because many of them there were several that came at hat point and they were all defeated and then they were brought up again after the first march and just about all of them passed. If I remember correctly or two-thirds of them or something.

David Yellin- Let me just say this that somebody mentioned somebody I a position to know would say that there is quite a story attached to what happened in Nashville. What is the story. Are you aware of pressures and to get these things passed is what

I am referring to.

J.O. Patterson- I don't recall any degree of pressure being exerted around that. A lot of Joe Pipken trying to make political headway and that is the only thing I can think of.

Joan Beifuss- In case we find a story we will tell you.

J.O. Patterson- If you run up on it please tell me, something I missed.

Joan Beifuss- You mean you should really investigate this.

David Yellin- Well yeah that is what this is.

J.O. Patterson- Well no, Joe might have been, I am sure he was exerting any influence he could.

David Yellin- I mean the whole process of how it was brought about and maneuvered and we have a good old fashioned word for it, how it was connived and done so quickly, to get these bills because they were anticipating certain things happening and they did it very quickly and quite smoothly that was the fear that said all of that.

J.O. Patterson- Yeah well this is normal maneuvering for a bill that someone is particularly interested in. I place them in great importance.

David Yellin- Well I would like to get to your resolution, I would also like if we can discuss whatever your feelings and thoughts on the connection with having Dr. King come here.

J.O. Patterson- The resolution was about the first time I even think about it since, it was sent to the table if I remember correctly?

David Yellin- And then you came back with it again.

J.O. Patterson- Well it boiled down to this that basically the only big area of disagreement between the union and city hall was on the issue of dues deductions. Henry had in his mind, that he did not want a union with city employees, he was not going to have a union, he was going to do everything that he possibly could to see that a union does not survive and of course one of the greatest ways to kill off a union is to make sure that the union can't get his dues. And this he made his mind up he was not going to assist the union in collecting its dues and in fact was going to fight them on it. I had no grave desire to see the union with city employees either but the employees wanted a union that was their business and I didn't have a darn thing to do with it. They wanted it, they said they did. They needed it or not, that is debatable. Anyway they did say they wanted it, they said they wanted the union to

get dues. Since this was the only area of disagreement I just did not see where we ought to risk a riot here in Memphis just because Henry didn't like the idea of a union and did not want to help them collect their dues. They first asked for straight dues deduction. He said no we will not participate in that. Then to get around this, if I recall the union went to the officials of the credit union and made an arrangement with the credit union, for the credit union to act as the funnel for union dues. Henry found out about the meeting with the credit union officials and became very angry about that and threatened a few people here and there. Then he took the position that he was not going to permit the credit union to act as the agency to collect dues. And I thought at that point he was going just a little bit too damn far. My resolution was directed at this. Merely to establish policy that the credit union could exist and operate without any interference from the mayor.

David Yellin- What happened it was introduced?

J.O. Patterson- it was introduced and of course Tom led the opposition to that naturally this is against the mayor and anything that is against the mayor he is against. I of course was not particularly concerned about making an attack on Henry. We had gotten along fairly well, privately at the time. But I didn't think, I just felt he was going just a little bit too far, risking too much for the city to meet his own personal likes or dislikes or had not entered into the picture. It boiled down to a situation, most of the councilmen not wanting to embarrass another one of their white brothers and to pass the resolution would have been a total defeat of Henry on that particular issue. They just did not buy it for the most part. One day they were thinking about it and the next day they have had time to sleep on it and still did not want to embarrass Henry.

David Yellin- Did you have any behind the scenes discussion with this or?

J.O. Patterson- Oh yeah we had a number of discussions behind the scenes, when I was in Nashville half the time I was talking on the phone half the time talking with them, and when we were in Memphis we had a number of secret meetings.

David Yellin- Who did you feel you had to talk to or who did you try to talk to.

J.O. Patterson- Well, I felt our greatest chance of support was in the area of Gwynn, Jared, Billy Hyman, Downing Pryor. I knew I could rule out Tom, Bob James, and Wyatt.

David Yellin- McAdams?

J.O. Patterson- For the most part. Here and there he had thoughts that might make him a little sympathetic, easy going.

David Yellin- Here we heard a statement put by one of the councilmen that it was sort of even and Gwynn Awsumb was the phrase was she was really swinging. She held the key.

David Yellin- At one point, at one roll call she did and we spent a lot of time trying to convince Gwynn to vote for it. And she eventually agreed and then there was a little time lapse between that meeting and the next official one and I think Henry called Downing in on the carpet and by the time we met again Downing was back on the fence.

David Yellin- Because he was kind of a liaison with the mayor, and saw him and so on.

David Yellin- Were there any changes in your 2<sup>nd</sup> resolution when you brought it up again?

J.O. Patterson- Yeah I changed it and I don't remember what the subtle change was.,

David Yellin- I wish you remembered the subtle change, because it was not so subtly referred to once or twice and I would like for you to get an opportunity.

J.O. Patterson- Tell me who said it?

David Yellin- No and I must confess I don't recall the details except that there were some changes and I just wondered what the situation was?

J.O. Patterson- I don't off hand know I would have to go back and get the resolution then. But it was something subtle I think it was more geared towards less of an open attack on the mayor, tried to make it a little bit more palatable.

David Yellin- Did you ever feel at any time that you had any opportunity at anytime to change the mayor?

J.O. Patterson- Change the mayor? No, never, that is exactly why I became so vocal during that time because I was thoroughly convinced that Henry was going to do nothing to settle the strike that he had taken his stand, he was going to stay with it come hell or high water and as it turned out that is exactly what it took.

David Yellin- So from that point for you the issue was clear then, or that phase of it.

J.O. Patterson- In my mind it was.

David Yellin- Yeah, that he was never going to change.

J.O. Patterson- I think, I remember at one point trying to get something passed and we was just left yeah it was it was after King's death. Oh yeah it was the resolution calling for a cooling off period. Which was never officially brought up and I came into the meeting the next day, late was I going to the airport with Dr. King's body and we (muffled). I think they started meeting 8:00 or 9:00 in the morning. They wouldn't pass a resolution calling for a cooling off period of 6 months. I was in no particular mood really to listen to any of there little petty resolutions, none of them were doing what I thought ought to be done. Somebody called me, I believe Ned Cook and tried to get me to agree to the resolution that they were not going to

introduce it unless they got unanimous support for it. If they thought it was a good resolution go ahead, why worry about because I might decide to vote against it. Anyway this discussion about the mayor was a changed man and he was greatly concerned and affected by what had happened in the city, Dr. King's death and all. I would have to believe that, (muffled) I think my reply was I wasn't too far away from believing just that.

David Yellin- What was the cooling off period? Cooling off what?

J.O. Patterson- It was asked the men to go back to work.

David Yellin- Oh you mean not to settle the strike?

J.O. Patterson- No, go back to work period of 6 months and during which time the union representatives and the city government would negotiate an agreement.

David Yellin- Did the union as far as you know agree to this?

J.O. Patterson- No they didn't agree to it.

Joan Beifuss- It was the same old thing as before except it was after Dr. King's death?

J.O. Patterson- Well yeah basically the same thing only this was, saying if at the end of 6 months if no agreement had been reached of course they would be free to go back on strike.

David Yellin- It was never introduced you say?

J.O. Patterson- No it was never introduced, Neders and Davis asked that it not be introduced unless they had my approval along with it and they didn't want to be in a position where they are voting it and I am against it.

David Yellin- Did you know Dr. King?

J.O. Patterson- I had met him on his first trip to Memphis during the strike.

David Yellin- When he spoke?

J.O. Patterson- Yup.

Joan Beifuss- Did you have a chance to talk with him at all then?

J.O. Patterson- I talked with him a few minutes after that meeting, I went by the hotel and was introduced to him and talked to him for awhile.

Joan Beifuss- Did you think it was a good idea that he come into Memphis.

J.O. Patterson- Yes. I think that he at the time that he came the interest support was beginning to die and it was dropping and I think that this first visit to Memphis was



just the spark that was needed to raise the interest again, and it did, it had just that effect.

David Yellin- What is your version of what happened on the 28<sup>th</sup> of March the mini riot and the disruption.

J.O. Patterson- Well was this the first march he led?

David Yellin- Yes the one he led that broke up and whatever you want to call it the mini-riot the almost...?

J.O. Patterson- Well I was not here when it happened, I was on a plane on my way back and when I got to the office of course the main attack had been dispersed and there was the chasing everybody here and there and isolated incidents. I don't think I can go on is what was reported to me. Either it appears that there was a small group of persons who were bent on mischief that day and they really intended to stir something up. They used the march as a cover for their activities and of course they started smashing windows etc, and the police force moved in on the march and everybody in sight, who appeared to be associated with the march. I don't think they were necessarily directing their activity at persons breaking the law. Anybody that was down there at the time and got in their way.

David Yellin- Do you know any reason why and this is to go back, any reason that the police were fortified with mace on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of February, now we are going back 5 weeks.

J.O. Patterson- Yeah, well this was all part of the city's build up. Equipping the police department to handle any civil disorders.

David Yellin- It was all part of the police plan. Did you have any reason as being a member of the city council to know this?

J.O. Patterson- Yeah I knew that the police had the gas.

David Yellin- And part of an overall plan that stemmed from the almost incidents of last summer.

J.O. Patterson- Yes.

David Yellin- So again on the 28<sup>th</sup> when something happened the police were all ready.

J.O. Patterson- That is part of Henry's plan, his approach to a racial issue. Being very hard nosed about it.

David Yellin- Did you have any, did you think that the city had any right to expect anything different from Henry Lobe than Henry Lobe.

J.O. Patterson- No I think the city got everything that it should have expected when they received the dear man into the office.

Joan Beifuss- Did you ever have any private talks with Lobe?

J.O. Patterson- We, several of us met and talked with Henry before we took office and after we took office we had breakfast together several mornings and discussed things. He gives his usual speech here one day here two weeks later it is the same speech. Order of affairs, justice, no second class citizens. He says it very easily but apparently believes very little.

David Yellin- I mean this is probably an unfair question, but how much is Henry Lobe a representative of this area or a product of it or from your point of view, I mean you had kind of indicated your answer by saying the city got everything.

J.O. Patterson- I suspected Henry represents a good majority of the citizens of the city. Are they the same, practically the same people who elected Henry elected Kirkendall. Same attitude, existed then as existed when Henry was elected. This great conservative element. The same thing that might succeed in getting the Frayser project moved.

David Yellin- And then on into November.

Joan Beifuss- I am going to go back again to Dr. King. Had you been in town would have marched with Dr. King on that first march because he was Dr. King, would that have overcome your feeling as a councilmen that you should stay apart from them?

J.O. Patterson- I don't know that I would have had I been here. I am not positive of that. I don't know I can't answer that but I can tell you I did think of that. It was a matter of concern to me as to whether I was going to try to make an effort to try to get back here in time to march. As it turned out I couldn't leave Nashville in time to get back here, but had I been here would I have marched,. I don't know. I did march in the memorial march. But that particular one I don't know.

David Yellin- Where were you when the news of Dr. King's death came about do you recall?

J.O. Patterson- I, yeah I was in the airport parking lot and I was just getting in my car and I was just starting it up when the first newsflash came in.

David Yellin- You were coming in.

J.O. Patterson- Coming into Memphis yeah.

David Yellin- And did you go home?

J.O. Patterson- No, I went to the local pub across the street and I found all my buddies and cohorts.

David Yellin- Was there anything special?

J.O. Patterson- Well everybody was quite disturbed by it, the emotions were running very high at the time.

David Yellin- Did you have any reason to suspect that there might be trouble in Memphis as a result of it?

J.O. Patterson- Yup, in fact I think if I remember correctly when the first news came that Dr. King was in fact dead I knew very well to use my phrase at the time all hell was getting ready to break loose. I told some of the fellows in the place I think you all better get you some liquor and get on home because curfew will be in effect in the next few minutes and indeed it was.

David Yellin- If you would like to take our waning minutes, Joan do you have any, I do have a suggestion.

Joan Beifuss- No I just wondered why do you think all hell did not break loose?

J.O. Patterson- That is a little difficult for me to understand I never really came to a conclusion on it. I am certain now that the imposition of the curfew and the national guard played a major part in keeping down more disturbances that would have actually occurred. But even with the guard in town I had expected a lot more than actually occurred and why (muffled) I don't know. I pondered that question many times and I have not come up with an answer yet.

Joan Beifuss- Were you in contact with SCLC that night or any of Dr. King's people.

J.O. Patterson- Yeah in fact I was over at the motel most of the night.

David Yellin- Do you have any to recap any overall reactions to make.

Joan Beifuss- Well I want to ask him specifically. Now that the strike is settled or now that the council did sort of enter into the policy area. Does that set a precedent for the council will the council be freer to move now.

J.O. Patterson- The council did not move into the policy area.

Joan Beifuss- What was done with the mediation?

J.O. Patterson- Council only accepted the mediation after the mayor decided to accept it.

David Yellin- As a matter of fact they did set a precedent, that the council will not.

J.O. Patterson- Certainly they decided that they were not going to a type of legislative body.

David Yellin- At least as long as mayor Lobe is mayor.

J.O. Patterson- Certainly.

David Yellin- And he can point to it.

Joan Beifuss- Well then is the same thing going to keep on happening and happening?

J.O. Patterson- Probably. I see nothing to at this point (muffled).

Joan Beifuss- Can you enunciate at all what you think the death of Dr. King meant to negros in Memphis can you generalize on that at all, or what it meant to you personally. You know missing all the kind of flowery language and what not.

J.O. Patterson- Well, personally I was at a great loss almost like losing a very close member of your family even though I had only personally met Dr. King a few weeks before his death. But to me and I am sure to most other negros he just represented, he was a symbol of hope for a better tomorrow and certainly the one thing that stood the best chance of keeping the minority in a fairly nonviolent way. Most negros do not like the militant approaches but, and we I think have a tendency to respect them and Dr. King with his position of leadership in the community and with his passage a lot of us believed and still do that the next few years can be and might be very stormy and we definitely felt that Dr. King was about the only person who had the influence and respect among even the militants to try and keep from happening.

Joan Beifuss- Are you in contact with the younger more militant kids here at all. You have that liaison man to the black organizing project.

J.O. Patterson- Periodically they come in the office and talk to me. I know two or three people that are friendly with them. I happen to had some communication to them.

David Yellin- I noticed a discernable note of despair in your whole point of view in what is obviously the most significant problem.

J.O. Patterson- There is a certain amount of despair on one hand the community is impatience of the younger members and our more militant brothers and this as I said previously most of us are not in accord with... (Tape Break)