

# Rhodes College Digital Archives - DLynx

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

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Caroline Yellin- It is Wednesday May 29<sup>th</sup> 1968 and the members of the group here are me and

Tom Beckner- (muffled)

Joan Beifuss- Joan Beifuss,

Reverend Richard Moon- and Dick Moon.

Caroline Yellin- Ok well dick we are going at the (muffled) it is the end of the year and Joan, and I think that the first thing we would like to know in conjunction with our project is how long have you been in Memphis first of all.

Reverend Richard Moon- Since June of 1954. 4 years.

Caroline Yellin- And where did you come from before that.

Reverend Richard Moon- Directly from Louisville Presbyterian Seminary, I graduated in June of 1954.

Caroline Yellin- And you are with the Presbyterian student center at Memphis state?

Reverend Richard Moon- I am a Presbyterian student pastor and we have a student center there but I work for the senate of Tennessee Presbyterian campus Christian life board.

Joan Beifuss- Dick will you explain the difference between the Presbyterian church South and the Presbyterian church USA or whatever that distinction is that there is between Presbyterian churches.

Reverend Richard Moon- The only difference is that historical difference that at the time of the civil war practically all of the churches broke up into two different camps the northern camp and the southern camp and this happened in the Presbyterian church also. There are a few small differences now but essentially they are both the same doctrinally and also in the form of church government.

Joan Beifuss- Well are you originally a southerner?

Reverend Richard Moon- No I am originally a mid-westerner. I was born in Sioux City Iowa and lived in Iowa, South Dakota, Nebraska and graduated from high school finally in Shreveport Louisiana. So I became a southerner late in my high school years.

Caroline Yellin- What did you go to Bird High?

Reverend Richard Moon- Bird High School in Shreveport.

Tom Beckner- No kidding I am having long, long connections with Bird High through speech, because Bird has a very big speech program.

Joan Beifuss- Where did you go to college at?

Reverend Richard Moon- After Bird high school I went to University of Missouri for a year and then I joined the united states air force and I was with the air force for 4 years. Cam back and returned to the university of Missouri. Graduated from there with a bachelor of arts degree in 1960. Then went on to seminary.

Caroline Yellin- Were you and Glenda married?

Reverend Richard Moon- We were married after both of us graduate college, summer of 60'.

Caroline Yellin- Had you decided let's say you were in seminary or had you decided that you wanted to go into the campus aspect of the Presbyterian ministry, that is you wanted to work with college students as oppose to having a pastorate and a church. Or had you not made up your mind or what?

Reverend Richard Moon- While I was in college I was thinking of two areas, that is inner city work and campus ministry. While I was in seminary I decided to go into inner city work and I trained for that kind of work. And graduated from seminary and came to Memphis to my first inner city church. After working there for two years by myself in some sort of a bind because of my own attitudes and because of the some of the programs we had started there and I was invited to become the temporary campus minister for a year and decided to try it since I had that in mind previously to see whether I would fit in good or not. This developed then into a permanent relationship.

Caroline Yellin- Well no by inner city what do you mean by inner city?

Reverend Richard Moon- Inner city, central city, working with the core poverty areas of the city.

Caroline Yellin- And where were you before, during your inner city ministry?

Reverend Richard Moon- I was at Emmanuel Presbyterian church at Lamar and Bellevue.

Caroline Yellin- Was that an integrated church?

Reverend Richard Moon- It was a purely white church and while I was there we started sponsoring some tutoring programs and got some of the negro children of the neighborhood into the church, for tutoring out of Bellevue Junior High School.

Caroline Yellin- Did you meet with opposition in the church on that kind of program?

Reverend Richard Moon- Yes, this is what got the sparks kind of flying. And it had a number of people who called in and said they had to cancel their pledges because they were not going to pay for the lights gas and water of nigger children.

Caroline Yellin- And most of your parishioners and congregation are from around that neighborhood Lamar and Bellevue?

Reverend Richard Moon- From that neighborhood and from the outlying areas such as Whitehaven and parkway village because these are people who had lived in the area and when negro enforcement began they moved out into the white subdivision but continued to have that relationship with that church at Lamar and Bellevue.

Joan Beifuss- Did you leave that church voluntarily or was there pressure for you yourself to leave the church.

Reverend Richard Moon- There was a certain amount of pressure but they did not ask me to resign I took care of that for them and stepped down when this other opportunity opened.

Joan Beifuss- Now when you changed that was the summer of 66' and you came to Memphis state and that particular job opened up because the other person moved out, the man before you?

Reverend Richard Moon- Yes. My predecessor had decided to take a grant. A foundation grant to do some graduate study in pastoral counsel. I accepted the job knowing that one year later he would be returning. While before he left, before that he decided to turn down the grant and accepted a position with our church in work with universities in Taiwan, and so then he started a 3 year assignment and this meant of course he had to make a permanent break with the work (Muffled).

Caroline Yellin- Dick let me look back a little bit further to in seminary. You may have been involved in civil rights activities in seminary.

Reverend Richard Moon- Oh yes, yes. We can't keep our fingers out of (muffled)

Caroline Yellin- I think I remember Glenda saying about me going to Louisville to march or...

Reverend Richard Moon- We had quite a civil rights movement that developed in Louisville, KY. The largest...

Caroline Yellin- That was while you went to seminary?

Reverend Richard Moon- While we were in seminary right. The biggest thing that we tried to accomplish in Kentucky was to get the state legislature to pass a civil rights bill. And if I remember correctly that was 62'. We had the while city organized and a number of people came into the city to help us organize the communities, including the now president of southern Christian leadership conference. And we had our own people there of course, (muffled). We also

established a federation of groups there that all went together under one banner and we marched on Frankfurt. We had a large automobile caravan that went from Louisville and most parts of the state to the state legislature. We marched up to the capital building and had anumber of speeches there and left a contingency of us there to stay with the state legislature until they passed a civil rights bill. The form that this took was a hunger fast. Approximately 40 people sat up in the balcony of the state legislature and stayed there day and night in the capital building itself for a number of days I think it was something like 18 days before the state legislature finally passed the civil rights bill. An abbreviated form of what we wanted but it was at least a form of a civil rights bill.

Caroline Yellin- So you know a little bit about hunger strikes. (Laughs)

Joan Beifuss- Was this your first experience with any kind of fasting?

Reverend Richard Moon- Well I didn't make myself clear, I wasn't part of the contingency that stayed.

Joan Beifuss- You weren't part.

Reverend Richard Moon- No I had a number of friends who did stay, as well as college students. I did attend some of the briefing sessions that they had with physicians telling them what they should expect and the kinds of things they should do in order to keep their health. I knew what it was to do this kind of thing.

Caroline Yellin- In other words then while you were in seminary you were already pretty familiar with the techniques of marching, nonviolent demonstration, hunger strike.

Reverend Richard Moon- Oh yes, of course Louisville Kentucky 1962 was still very much of a nonviolent movement.

Caroline Yellin- If we could get back to Memphis and once you took up your job on the Memphis state campus, did you continue to work closely with those negroes and those people, maybe just poor people in general whom you had tried to incorporate into the congregation through programs you had going in your inner city church?

Reverend Richard Moon- Well not the people themselves but one of the first things I did when I came to Memphis was to contact all the leaders of the negro community as well as various city and county officials having to do with welfare, familiarize myself with all the services that were available and what the situation was in Memphis. I also went over to Memphis state university that year in 64' to pick up Dr. Stewart's study of the urban poor in Memphis. I used these kinds of things and through this kind of thing I met many of the leaders, not all of them because each year you have other leaders who develop or some leave town and you have to keep these kinds of contacts going. I was very familiar with such organizations as NAACP and Shelby county democratic, (Muffled) and all these different organizations within the community. I was (muffled) part regard to such joint church because they were

a neighboring church, very short distance from Emmanuel Presbyterian Church where I served, knew the congregation very well and one summer served as their interim pastor in between pastors, but I was there pastor for probably 4 months before Zeke Bell came.

Caroline Yellin- For clarification of the tape the parkway garden (muffled) is an integrated congregation with a negro minister at this time. Is there an associate minister?

Reverend Richard Moon- There is no associate minister, and of course when we talk about integrated, this is tokenism again, we are talking about the congregation not a make up of the membership. Very few whites you were actually members of the church, but I guess out of such a guilt over the recent history of Memphis a lot have plopped down to the church because this is one place in the Presbyterian church where we had contact with blacks and we felt that we might be welcome.

Caroline Yellin- DO you feel that you have a good dialogue with the negroes at parkway gardens in terms of better than talking to negroes in general whom you may have contact with? An honest dialogue.

Reverend Richard Moon- Yes I think so, I think they know where I stand and they trust me and I trust them and we are willing to get down to the nitty gritty of things and we talk about them and see where we end up. As I think so I think I have that relationship with black student on Memphis state campus.

Caroline Yellin- Are you closely connected with black students association?

Reverend Richard Moon- Well it all depends on what you mean by closely connected. I knew about the development of the organization before it became an organization, I knew the people who were trying to get it started and what kinds of things they wanted to try and get accomplished on the Memphis state campus. But that was because I made it a point to be in contact with all of the college students who would be considered the radical left on campus, both black and white.

Caroline Yellin- How many of those students would you say there are at Memphis state?

Reverend Richard Moon- Real radical real left people, 5 or 10.

Joan Beifuss- How would you classify the others?

Reverend Richard Moon- Followers, seekers, people that don't know exactly where they stand but this sounds exciting and this sounds interesting and it sounds as if they are dealing with some more worthwhile and pressing problems of our times and so they are in it.

Caroline Yellin- Now who would you classify some of the new left in terms of these 5 or 10 students.

Reverend Richard Moon- Do you mean by name?

Caroline Yellin- Yeah do you know any by name?

Reverend Richard Moon- Oh yes sure. Eddie Jenkins, Edwina Harold, Ronald Ivy, these are all black students from the black student's association. These three are some of the major leaguers, there are others too. But these are the three that come to my mind when I think of the black student's association. We have some other students out on the Memphis state campus, whites, that you might consider to be the new left. But they are closest to the new left as you can get at Memphis state. They are not the Berkeley students and the Columbia University students. We may have this kind of student in the future but right now I can't classify them in that category.

Caroline Yellin- Do you have an opportunity to talk very much to the negro students or the white or to whatever student may be on the left? In terms of what they plan to do or in terms of what they want to work for, or in terms of what they are working towards?

Reverend Richard Moon- I have a lot of opportunities and this is why I call them opportunities because they are willing to talk about these things with me. And when I see that their ideas or programs are somewhat naïve at least I can force some information into them that helps them to think through a little bit more clearly. So often we like to think in terms of black and white and I don't mean the color of people's skin, here is the black here is the white, we want to be on the white side. We want to be pure and we want to work for justice and peace and dignity and all these kinds of things. We don't understand a lot of times the inner workings within an institution like a university and the things that have happened that we perhaps don't know about because perhaps a lack of communication between administration and school and faculty and so on. And then to I think the fact that today in order to be radical you must disrupt without even thinking about any other kind of approach you could take., You don't realize that you have to do a little research to find out what the situation really is. You take it for granted that you know and the only way to communicate with the administration of the university today or the faculty of a university today is to disrupt the procedure by sitting in at the president's office or having some kind of demonstration on the lawn. This is...

Caroline Yellin- Well not all professor's are that bad.

Reverend Richard Moon- No, goodness no. In fact, we have some people on the faculty that I would put in the category of running with the best.

Caroline Yellin- Well in other words then you are serving as the chaplain of the Presbyterian and also of the left?

Reverend Richard Moon- You know that is funny because I have never considered myself to be the chaplain of the Presbyterians? Because there is no way anymore to talk to students as Presbyterians, students don't identify themselves as

Presbyterians, catholic's, Jews, Episcopalians, or Baptists. Well perhaps a few more student denote themselves as Baptists far more than the other denominations, they don't want to think in these terms, they want to think in terms of what they have been learning in their philosophy courses and so on and what does it mean to be a man in the 20<sup>th</sup> century today and how do I live my life and it is a consensus of the person rather than saying I am a Presbyterian. I would like to take the name Presbyterian off the board out front and write university pastor available.

Joan Beifuss- And when some of the students begin to talk about forming the black student's association did they ask you for any advice as how best to mobilize this opinion, these black students and get them into an organization. Did Ron Ivy come and talk to you or Eddie Jenkins?

Reverend Richard Moon- Eddie and Ron didn't at the very beginning, the first contact I had was with Edwina Harold who was a transfer student from Moorehouse in Atlanta. I came in contact with her because she became quite interested in another organization that students wanted to start called the student alliance. There were about 150 people who wanted to form this organization and get chartered by the university. There were about oh 7 or 8 professors who were very much excited about this idea of the new organization. And there were black students in this and we talked to them about black students being in student alliance in order to forma cadre, a strong cadre that could then form a student black association. We didn't think at that time that it was possible for them to split off, to really have it. Well as it worked out student government association was ready and willing to take care of the student alliance idea and did not charter them in and charged them with having their list of membership (muffled), until this process died which took over a full year.

Caroline Yellin- Now when did this start? When they first started talking to you and trying to get the organization together?

Reverend Richard Moon- That was in September of 67;, September of 67'.

Caroline Yellin- And by September of 68' it was kind of dying because....

Reverend Richard Moon- Wait a minute, now what I am talking about is this past year. This past year....

Caroline Yellin- Ok.

Reverend Richard Moon- And by March, February and March we knew it was dead. There was no chance for student alliance and of course the black students realized it much earlier than the white students did. They knew what the score was. The white students were a bit more naïve about what they could accomplish in getting organized on the campus, especially when you are identified right away as a kind of left political activist group. So many of the people then moved into the liberal club

and acted through that club that already had a charter. It was very easy then to move right into the liberal club, to actually take it over. This was the confrontation with the white students and the black students went off on their own. In about November I really got serious about this black student association and wrote a number of PC's, black pieces number 1 number 2. A number of these things were passed out to students.

Caroline Yellin- The Martin Luther idea.

Reverend Richard Moon- What do you mean?

Caroline Yellin- Of his theses, his 9 (muffled) theses.

Reverend Richard Moon- My goodness you got so tricky on me there ...

Caroline Yellin- Sorry about that. Well do you know right off hand about how many black students are in the black student association?

Reverend Richard Moon- Well have asked that question of the leaders and they say every black student on the Memphis state campus and in a ways this is true. I think they all identify to a certain extent. But when you get down to the nitty gritty and talk about actual people they can call out for some kind of action I think probably 50 to 75 students at the most. But this is a large group on the Memphis state campus. Anytime you can get a group this large the administration begins to shake a bit.

Caroline Yellin- You know how many black students there are on the campus?

Reverend Richard Moon- Oh I did but it has slipped my mind now.

Joan Beifuss- About 1,700 isn't it?

Reverend Richard Moon- It's close to that, it is a little over 10Tom Beckner- I think.

Joan Beifuss- Dick are you familiar with the problem the black students are having with their coordinating committee and names going on the letter which accuses these people of conspiring to assassinate the mayor? Are you familiar with this letter which went out to business men and was signed anonymous.

Reverend Richard Moon- No I am not familiar with this letter when did this one come out?

Caroline Yellin- Well, the reason that I mentioned it because one of my students was on the coordinating committee and his name was on the letter and he got in trouble over it and I thought possibly Ron or Edwina or someone had talked to you about it. Ron was called in at Hamilton high school when he was student teaching because some of the people had gotten hold of the letter and asked him if this were true and you know what does this mean?

Reverend Richard Moon- Some anonymous mimeographed letter of some kind?

Caroline Yellin- I don't know if it was mimeographed. I know it was sent out anonymously, and I know it was sent to businessmen in town and I know at least one boy was turned down a job because of the letter, and Ron was interviewed at his high school because he applied for a teaching job and several other people have been called in at various points because of it and finally they went to Dean Robinson with the letter. In the meantime, one of the boys, my student was beat up by the police at Hamilton high school when he went to pick up his brother, because his name is on a list that the police have or had as a result of that letter.

Joan Beifuss- What did the letter say?

Caroline Yellin- The letter essentially said that these students members of the coordinating committee were planning to assassinate the mayor and the letter was sent anonymously to downtown businessmen and of course you don't really have to sign your name if you are receptive to this kind of message.

Joan Beifuss- They were probably getting ahead of the story here.

Caroline Yellin- Yeah and also some of these people on the coordinating committee had gone downtown to apply for jobs for the summer or apply for part time jobs while they were going to school, and they, most of them were not confronted with the letter they were simply turned down. But one fellow was finally confronted with the letter.

Reverend Richard Moon- No I didn't know about this, I did know however that some of the lesser people that attended university of Tennessee medical school are very much concerned about Edwina Harold applying to medical school. They are already talking about this left-wing anarchist, communist who is going to be in our midst and what are we going to do. They are terribly afraid of anything that is different than what they usually see and Edwina is totally black woman. She is growing the African hair doo and to tell you the truth she looks beautiful.

Caroline Yellin- Is she the one that was opening letters?

Joan Beifuss- Yeah I think she is.

Reverend Richard Moon- So it is just the fact that hear again communication has broken down. People are so willing to accept something without finding out ever who this person really is and what he or she is saying and what he or she is doing. We just want to accept the worst that we hear about people. Especially when we are all so grugged.

Caroline Yellin- Well should we go back to..

Joan Beifuss- Yeah why don't we...

Caroline Yellin- Before we get to the beginning of the sanitation strike, during the political campaign last fall, where you active in that?

Reverend Richard Moon- Yes I was active in supporting the N.W. Willis for mayor. I didn't do a whole lot=, I just did a couple things I thought I was capable of doing. One was to introduce and interview the mayor. Yeah I wanted him to be the mayor so badly that I already am calling him the mayor. I introduced and interviewed N.W. Willis on various radio stations and they taped shows and had to be 15 to 30 minute programs interviewing various candidates for mayor and so we did this as well as some of the volunteer work down at the office. I talked with some of the students at Memphis state who were interested in working on his campaign and worked closely with one of his campaign managers, Harold Dauty.

Caroline Yellin- I think the interesting thing about Willis in that campaign is that Willis really has the only overall program for the city. He was the only one....

Reverend Richard Moon- Well he was the only one who was speaking to any of the issues of the city, the real issues of the city. I think he made so much sense that people were scared to death., People didn't want to face any of the problems the city had. And of course the other thing is that the black community didn't want to listen A.W. Willis' common sense because of kind of duping Bill Ingram was able to accomplish at the very beginning when he was a judge here in the city and fought the police all along the way. Anyone who fights the police is a the friend of a black man. He pulled some pretty bad things on the negroes when he was mayor but he was able to do it with such finesse they didn't realize what he was doing to them. The same, this is getting a little bit ahead of the story but the same kind of thing that Ingram used to do, happened when a number of us were arrested and brought into court for sitting in city hall and it didn't accomplish anything. The judge actually played the game so that every black person within that court room thought that he was their hero but he put them in one of the biggest binds he could have put them in. He controls them by putting them on a 60 day probationary period. Where if they got in any kind of trouble at all they would be in jail for sure. So he had this bludgeon that he used to calm them, and at the same time they were loving it all along the way. They thought he was wonderful the way he stood up to the city attorneys.

Caroline Yellin- When A.W. lost out then in the primary, did your political activity then cease when the conflict then was between Ingram and Lobe.

Reverend Richard Moon- Yeah it ceased as far as my doing anything directly is concerned. I do a lot of talking. What I tried to do was probably a wild thing, I know it was now. I think it makes sense still but I tried to talk to my black friends about voting for Lobe, instead of Ingram. And the reason I suggested it was the same reason that the freedom democratic party had for suggesting that they put Ross Barnett in as governor in the state of Mississippi in this crisis politician. You put the worst man in possible so that you have an enemy to fight against, so that there are some definite differences on both sides of the fence and you can see them clearly. With Ingram in as mayor we would have had 4 more years of the same kind of thing and I doubt very seriously we would have had this crisis if Ingram had been in office.

I think that the sanitation workers would have found an injunction placed upon them before they ever even talked about walking out. This was the kind of thing Ingram had done before and he would have done it again. At the same time he would have been out politicking in the black community. And he wouldn't have made the strange and stupid mistake of not having a grievance system put in. He had places where the pressure could be let off, the steam could be let off and Lobe came in and filled up all those holes and let the pressure build up and then it blew up on him. In a way I am glad it did because it just gave us the opportunity to make the city face up to some of its problems, even though many people in this city still think that we have now solved our problem since things are back to normal, I think we are a little bit further down the road even though it took the death of Dr. King in the process.

Caroline Yellin- Well did you ever have any feelings that Lobe might in any way try to understand the problems of the negro community or the problems of those people whose income was not adequate who worked for the city, or did you feel like it was totally oblivious to what was going on?

Reverend Richard Moon- No I didn't, I don't think that any man can be totally oblivious to this, I mean we have been living with this kind of thing now, I want to say since 1954. All of us have been aware that things aren't right in our city, things aren't right in our world area. I can't believe that Lobe has been living in this century and hasn't realized that we have a problem. I think he does, what I thought was that Lobe was doing what was politically expedient in the situation and that he knew the facts of life in Tennessee folk, and that is you don't raise taxes if you want to come back after 4 years and be mayor again, you just do not raising taxes. This started with the Crump machine and has been fact of life in Tennessee politics since what 1914 something like that. A long time, in order to face problems you have in your city you have to have funds and in order to have funds you have to have higher taxes. So, you don't raise the taxes, you don't face the problems, you get re-elected.

Caroline Yellin- When did you first have an indication that there was going to be trouble with the sanitation workers? That there would be a strike?

Reverend Richard Moon- Well I really didn't, I really wasn't that close to the situation at the very beginning and I didn't get involved until the strike was already under way. I got involved the day the city council was supposed to pass on the resolution from the sub-committee of the council headed by Fred Davis. They were supposed to come through on this report, at least all of the black community expected this sub-committee to come through with this report saying the council felt the mayor should recognize the union, that there should be a dues check off and that they should raise the salary and so on so forth. That was when I got involved and the only way I got involved I wanted to find out what the sub-committee was really going to report, I wanted to be in on the end of the strike, this had only been going for a few days and I felt this was a day of victory and I wanted to be a with some of my black friends in a time of victory. So I went down there and I went to the city hall

and walked up to the front door and there were about 12 or 13 policemen all blocking the doorway. So I just walked up as if I was going to walk through them, I just didn't feel like they had any right to block my way into city hall and before I reached them, they asked me if I was looking for the city council meeting, I said yes. They told me it was over at the auditorium. By the time I got there then, to my amazement the city council meeting was over. I walked in just as Jim Lawson was speaking to the city council saying will you please give us a microphone, will you please listen too us, will you please let us speak to you, and the council walked off stage. So that was the moment when I got involved.

Caroline Yellin- How many people were at the meeting other than the city council?

Reverend Richard Moon- I don't know what the capacity of that auditorium is but every seat was taken and many of us were standing in the back 3 and 4 deep all the way across the back.

Caroline Yellin- Now which auditorium?

Reverend Richard Moon- The city auditorium.

Caroline Yellin- The music hall auditorium, the small....

Joan Beifuss- This was a Friday meeting.

Reverend Richard Moon- Was it on a Friday, after so many weeks, I don't know if it was a Friday or Tuesday or what. Whatever meeting that was, it was in the auditorium.

Caroline Yellin- So as they walked off and Lawson was asking for them to listen, what did Lawson do and what did the other people within the audience do?

Reverend Richard Moon- There was a great amount of confusion at that point because I don't think anyone expected this. They expected the city council to listen to the their spokesman. A number of the leaders, union leaders as well as community leaders from the NAACP and Shelby county democratic club, some of the clergy, black clergy all got up on stage then and started speaking one after another to the group. I think they did this in order to keep the group from rioting right there. This was the kind of mood they were in and this was the kind of mood I was in, as a white person I was enraged. I was really angry. And if I was angry as a white man what were these sanitation workers and their wives thinking about and how were they feeling at that moment. I remember, you know it has been so long now I can't remember what different people said, but I remember T.O. Jones spoke and a number of others. I remember Basco Smith getting up and showing the editorial page of the Commercial Appeal and showing them the political cartoon that was in the paper that day. That enraged me before I ever got down to the meeting. That was the cartoon that showed a dirt filthy black man sitting up on top of a garbage can with trash all around it and the stench coming up from all of this pile whole heap of rubbish is what it was saying. The stench came up to the top and formed the

word anarchy. And I remember Basco Smith saying to the group, you see what Memphis thinks of you. This is what Memphis thinks of you. This made sense to me at this moment because the city council spoke for Memphis and the Memphis city council thought so much of these people who were there and wanted to talk to them that they walked right off the stage without hearing them.

Caroline Yellin- Did not one of them stay and try and talk to the sanitation workers?

Reverend Richard Moon- Well I am not sure if there were any that came back to talk with any of them or not, I don't remember, I couldn't say.

Caroline Yellin- Were there many white people at that meeting?

Reverend Richard Moon- Maybe 15 or 20 something like that. I was used to this. This is the style of life in Memphis. I remember the summer before when the Orange Mound area became quite upset when the city commission decided to sell off part of their postage stamp park. If you remember that the city commission decided to sell this portion of their park to a refrigerated warehouse. The fantastic thing about it is that park property was purchase by the people of orange mound many years ago and given to the city as a park. And then they went years after and built their own wading pool, paid for it lock stock and barrel. On city property and all this, then the city turns around in 1967 and sells off half of it including the wading pool.

Caroline Yellin- And it was never in the paper that the people of orange mound had purchased that property.

Reverend Richard Moon- None of this was in the paper. At the same time the city commission was talking about purchasing the fox meadows country club. Well millions of dollars, this makes no sense what so ever. I called Fred Davis, this is before he was city councilmen. I said Fred this is reporral, what can we do. He said, come join us and get all the white friends you can to come with us. We are going to go down to the city commission and we are going to talk to him and we have chartered some busses, we are going down as a community. So I talked with white people and I couldn't find anyone who was interested. I couldn't find anyone who could half understand what the problem was or what the situation was and I had even conjectured that this was going to be the beginning of a race riot in Memphis. Last summer we were going to have a blow up and that orange mound was going to go wild. I thought this was going to take place, I just didn't know orange mound that well. I would have realized what kind of area orange mound is I wouldn't have predicted that kind of thing. Now I think anything is possible in Memphis. That last summer wasn't the time. So I went down with these people and I was the only white person in the group and I felt kind of foolish but I felt that I needed to be there at least one white face in the group. So we had three busses that went down. We filled up the city commission chamber and plead with him. What we wanted him to do was to purchase the property at Park Ave. and, oh what's the street that cuts across right there? Pendleton. Park Ave. and Pendleton, there is a large area there right next to a drive in theatre that could be developed into a beautiful park. What we

didn't know at that time the city commission had already made a deal with a very fond Presbyterian elder and some of his business cohorts, had already made a deal with them to sell this property to them. Or not sell it to them but to rezone it for business so a nice new shopping center could go in there. So white businesses could develop in the orange mound area and whites could make more money off of blacks in Memphis. So this is what stopped us from getting this thing changed, the zoning changed and getting the city to purchase it. There were too many vested interests involved.

Caroline Yellin- After being down at the auditorium and listening to the leaders talking to the sanitation workers and their families and friends and people who were interested, then what did you do because you said you were irate at what the city council had done.

Reverend Richard Moon- I did the same thing the rest of them did. I followed the leadership of the black leaders. They did a very wise thing. They decided to let these men march their anger out.

Caroline Yellin- Now who is they?

Reverend Richard Moon- You mean the leaders?

Caroline Yellin- Yeah.

Reverend Richard Moon- Such people as Jim Lawson and Basco Smith and there were so many there at that point. The union leaders themselves.

Caroline Yellin- Was Lucie there?

Reverend Richard Moon- Lucie was not there.

Caroline Yellin- Was Champa?

Reverend Richard Moon- Champa was there. I remember T.O. Jones was there, perhaps Lucie was there but I don't remember his being there on that stage that day. So we were told by the black leaders that permission had been given to march down Main St. to Crump Blvd. West and east on Crump Blvd. to the Mason Temple. Church of god in Christ headquarters on Mason. To march down Crump to Mason and south on Mason. This was approximately 4:00 in the afternoon or something like that. We were told this by the black leaders and there were policemen up on the stage with their walkie talkies, everything had been cleared, police communications had been used to clear this thing, this march. The policemen were supposed to be ready outside and we came out to help us in an orderly march.

Caroline Yellin- How long had this been since the city council had walked off stage?

Reverend Richard Moon- I would say probably about 30 minutes at the most. We all filed out then and I ended up in the front of the line with some of my acquaintances. The first thing we saw was an emergency squad car. I don't remember if it was 4

patrolmen, or 6 patrolmen but it was somewhere in there, but it was somewhere in there. Jumped out of that emergency squad car and put on their gas masks and if you have ever seen a policemen with a gas mask on it scares the hell out of you. That was my first reaction, I was scared.

Caroline Yellin- This was as soon as you got out?

Reverend Richard Moon- As soon as we got out. We walked across the street and formed right there at the corner on the street and the emergency squad car was on the street in front of us.

Caroline Yellin- Do you have any estimate on how many people were forming into the line?

Reverend Richard Moon- I have no idea now. I remember that we had estimates at that time, there had been so many marches and so many gatherings I can't remember. It was a large group like I told you that auditorium was filled and everyone in that auditorium filed out top march. Except for a few of the whites who got out of it. So after I got over the fear, then I was angry again. What right do they have to turn on the crowd like this with their gas masks as if they are going to gas every one of us. Evidently the word got out and as I understand David Kaywood of the American civil liberties union was up in the mayor's office at the time of this formation of this march. He got the word of the mayor what was happening and the mayor sent the word down, get the gas masks off. The gas masks then came off of the patrolmen. Then we were all standing there all waiting to see what was going to happen and some leaders were on the side talking with Chief Lutz. They finally got permission to march in the street on the west side of the center line and the first he said 6 abreast, but then when you have a large crowd like this and you don't have any marshals you aren't going to get them 6 abreast. So we stayed on the west side of the street between the gutter and the middle of the street and start marching down Broadway, what is that, Main street. I am from Louisville Kentucky you know, I was thinking Broadway.

Caroline Yellin- Did they re-route the traffic coming onto Main?

Reverend Richard Moon- Yes. There was no traffic allowed on Main. No traffic was allowed.

Caroline Yellin- In rush hour.

Reverend Richard Moon- In rush hour. Well we had very jovial kind of march and everyone seemed to be in high spirits. Evidently the time that it had taken to talk to these people and to get them organized into a march and get everything worked out with the police and the mayor and everything, had given them some bit of a different perspective so that we were all on a holiday in a kind of a way. And everyone was very friendly and at first squad cars came up alongside on the east side of the street. Then the squad cars moved out of the way and foot patrolmen marched along with us, and we had conversations with the foot patrolmen. I remember Zeke Bell and I

were marching together that day and we were talking to one of the patrolmen and we were telling him...we started off the conversation by saying hi, how do you feel, in Memphis if you are a negro and I noticed some whites are saying this instead of saying how are you, you say how do you feel. So Zeke started the conversation by saying how do you feel and all this and we had a very friendly conversation and we started talking about what we were doing for him. We were telling him that we were marching for him.

Caroline Yellin- Now was this a white or a negro policemen.

Reverend Richard Moon- A white policemen. That we were marching for him. And that if the sanitation workers got their raise in salary the policemen were going to get a raise in salary too. Because you can't live the bottom and keep everything else the same way. I think we were beginning to make a little too much sense because he started thinking about it, you know this might not be a bad idea. So we were getting along fine. I think Zeke Bell and I by that time were about 30 to 40 feet behind the front of the line. One thing that was done at the very beginning of the march some leaders decided to put the women out front, which I thought was kind of a bad move but they decided they will not hurt the women so put the women out front. So that moved us back some and then Zeke and I weren't walking as fast as some of the others. We were talking too much to the policemen. I remember I took Zeke Bell's sleeping bag, Zeke had a sleeping bag with him because he and a number of others were going to sleep in city hall that day but they had come unprepared. But they never got into city hall you see because they changed the meeting to the auditorium. So I was carrying Zeke Bell's sleeping bag and we got down near Goldsmith's and all of a sudden I heard a commotion, I looked up and there were about 6 black men on the right side of this squad car and they were rocking it. It rocked about 4 times after I looked up, I don't know what happened before that. I do know that the squad car was on our side of the line however, I saw that. I don't know how it got there?

Caroline Yellin- Did you recognize any of the men who were rocking the car?

Reverend Richard Moon- No, no. Because it all happened so fast, I saw it rock about 4 times and I heard mace, mace, mace. Screamed three times, and I don't know where, who screamed it who said it or anything. All of sudden the patrolmen in that car jumped out of the car from the other side and squirted cans of mace over the squad car onto people who were rocking the automobile, the squad car. And it couldn't have been 3 seconds after the macing had started there at the front of the line, every policemen along the line for 3 blocks pulls out his mace can and starts macing everyone. I got maced right away.

Caroline Yellin- By your friendly policemen?

Reverend Richard Moon- I don't know at that point where he was, if he was the one or not, all I knew was I was going to get up on that sidewalk. I wasn't going to stay out on the street. I got up on the sidewalk and a number of people were going past me very fast and trying to get inside of Goldsmith's. I thought I don't want to get

inside Goldsmith's that is the last place I want to be in at this moment and maybe that would have been the best move for me but for some reason I just felt like I didn't want to be trapped inside a building. I don't know if that has anything to do with my psychological makeup or what but anyway. We just continued to get maced all that time we were up on the sidewalk and the police were doing nothing but macing and screaming move, move, move. And there were so many of us pushed off that street onto the sidewalk that it was just a mass of humanity and you couldn't move really. I followed the building, I got up against that building, I am sorry I did now, I wish I would have been up against someone else. It frightened me because all that pressure on me I thought I was going to go through one of the windows at Goldsmith. But I inched my way back up the street and then around the corner going up Gayoso I guess it is.

Caroline Yellin- Yeah.

Reverend Richard Moon- Going up Gayoso with all this mass of people and there was a 57 year old men right next to me and he was only about 5'3 or 5'4 at the most and all of a sudden I saw this club come down and hit him on the head, broke the skin right away and blood squirted every which way all over his coat and all over him. Everywhere.

Caroline Yellin- Was he doing anything other than trying to get out of the way?

Reverend Richard Moon- No, he was just with me we were trying to get up the street that was all we were trying to do. I remember there were some metal chairs and a Commercial Appeal dispensing machine along, right on the side of the building there. We got to those seats there, there was an elderly negro woman who had been trapped there and so about 5 of us just braced ourselves against the building like this so she could get up. She was down on our knees and we just kept holding it off so she could get on her feet and out of it. The we continued on up the street, and all along the street are policemen who are continuing to mace, I got it straight in the face directly 7 times from the time I was on Main St. tot eh time I was at Gayoso and Front St. When I got to, I had my collar on and I really looked white...

Caroline Yellin- And you were a minister with the collar.

Reverend Richard Moon- When we got to the next entrance into Goldsmith's there was a policemen standing there guarding the door and when he saw me he pulled the door open. He thought I had been trapped you see and he was giving me a chance to get out. I thought again you know.

Caroline Yellin- Weren't your eyes burning at this time?

Reverend Richard Moon- My eyes were watering my nose was running, everything. Of course all of us were saying to each other don't rub your eyes, all this kid of thing. We got up to Gayoso and then they split us off into different directions, I am sure that was taking place on Main St. too, splitting the groups up. Then we went north on Front St. for about half a block and policemen were along here and they had their

clubs out the big riot clubs, these big long heavy things and they were hitting negros on the back of the legs as they were walking, they didn't hit me, they didn't hit me but they hit others who were around me.

Caroline Yellin- Were you afraid?

Reverend Richard Moon- I was afraid I was going to get hit, yeah, but I didn't. We got about a half a block north on front street and then they split some of us off onto an alley. We ended back up on Main St. again and we went back up Main St. to the next corner and we were told to cross the street and we got on the east side of Main and then went north. All this time we are with this 57 year old man who had been hit and I was very much concerned that he get to a hospital and get taken care of. He was with friends and they had an auto mobile and they were going to take care of him. I figured everything would be alright on that score and he didn't seem to be in any kind of pain really and he was able to walk and was in fairly good spirits. I remember when I was walking up Front St. with him and with Zeke Bell, Zeke and I got split off in the process. All I could say to Zeke was, what were the words, I was repeating them over and over again because I was in a kind of state of shock at this point. It was something about helpfulness, over and over and over again. I just couldn't make much sense, I couldn't understand what had just happened, why it happened, why I was in this mess. All I could think of was I have to walk back to my car get in to my car and drive out to my wife's suburb smelling of mace. What was I going to tell my wife, because my wife didn't even know that I had gone down to that city council meeting and anyway I got home and I was still in some shock you know. I told my wife I got maced and I said here smell my coat.

Caroline Yellin- What does it smell like? Does it smell bad?

Reverend Richard Moon- No it doesn't smell bad, at this point I really couldn't tell you what it smells like.

Joan Beifuss- But it has a distinctive smell.

Reverend Richard Moon- Yeah it has a distinct smell to it, but it dissipates. In other words my over coat within 6 to 12 hours smells normal. Of course I knew that something was going to happen after that and that night I went out with my wife. We went to a production of Southwestern (muffled). We had these tickets for a long time. It was a crazy thing to do after what happened this afternoon but let's go, so I went and my eyes were still watering at that point, I was still blowing my nose. And I watched the production of the southwestern (muffled) old thing that had been put on for years. I guess it still has some message but anyway, I went home and I made a few phone calls to find out what was going to happen. Well what did happen was that they had a meeting that afternoon, that evening in fact, and it went on for about 3 or 4 hours I guess and this included union leaders and clergy and others. Including NAACP and Shelby county democratic club. I don't know how many people were at that meeting, but I was told there would be a meeting for clergy that next afternoon at Mason Temple, so I went.

Caroline Yellin- Now that would be on Saturday?

Reverend Richard Moon- On Saturday right on Saturday. And we met upstairs at Mason Temple in this big long room and long table in there and chairs all around the table and chairs all along the side all the way around the room. And there must have been over 100 ministers in that meeting in that room with Jim Lawson chairing the meeting. I was again the only white minister, the only white face in this sea of black faces. Oh here we go again, why can't...

Caroline Yellin- Here you are a minority of your own time.

Reverend Richard Moon- Why do I always have to get into these things where I am the only white person. Well you are the only white person (tape glitching) The program was, no new clothes for Easter. Boycott all downtown stores. To boycott the newspapers and have nightly mass meetings. They all voted for it except one. One black minister.

Caroline Yellin- Do you know who it was?

Reverend Richard Moon- No I do not. No I do not. I heard his name and you know I filed it away somewhere and he spoke against everything all the way through it and finally the rest of the ministers said we have had enough we don't want to hear from you anymore. That's the end of that. It was a unanimous decision, they all voted for it and then it was (tape glitching) (Tape End)