

# Rhodes College Digital Archives - DLynx

Frank McRae, 2008

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*Lauren:* Mr. Mcrae, we'd like to thank you on behalf of Crossroads for taking time out of your busy schedule to come interview with us. Can you start by saying your name for us?

*Frank:* My name is Frank Lewis Mcrae.

*Lauren:* And your current occupation?

*Frank:* I'm a retired United Methodist minister.

*Lauren:* And where were you born and raised?

*Frank:* I discovered America in Memphis, Tennessee on October 14<sup>th</sup> 1930 at the Methodist Hospital, and there's no plaque down there to commemorate that. It's just an occurrence. My mother was ready. *[Laugh]*

*Lauren:* Could you start by describing your home life for us?

*Frank:* Yeah. I was one of four sons born to Kenneth and Bessie Mcrae. My father was the treasurer of the Newburger Cotton Company and we lived in the Glenview community. We were a middle class family who lived in a wonderful period of history in the life of this city. I was third of four sons born to Kenneth and Bessie Mcrae. Home life was middle class, neighbors knew each other, we got along well. We were all pretty much the same. We looked alike, smelled alike, same color. It was a middle class community, good mix of people. It was a great time to be alive.

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*Lauren:* Where'd you go to school?

*Frank:* Well I went to Roselle Elementary School and then I went to Belleview Junior High School, and then I graduated from Central High School in 1948, which is where two of my older brothers and my mother and father had also graduated many moons before that. Then I went to the University of Memphis only it was called something else back then and got a baccalaureate degree, and then I went to Emory University and got a theological degree, and then I came back to the University of Memphis and got a Master of Arts degree.

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I have an un-earned degree from Rhodes College as a DD from this school, which I appreciate. I think the reason I got it was the chairman of the committee was a member of St. John's Methodist Church where I was a pastor 'cause I can't think of any other reason why I deserved an honorary degree from Rhodes College. That's the answer to the question as best I can do.

*Lauren:* You mentioned growing up in your neighborhood everyone was the same. So in terms of race relations how was going to school?

*Frank:* It was the only way we knew in those days. A profound influence on my life, and I'm gonna say it now, was a woman who worked in our home named Anna Jackson. Anna Jackson was born in Jonah, Arkansas. She had a profound influence on all four of the brothers but my next older brother, Al, the retired attorney and myself, we loved Anna. Anna took care of us when Mother was gone to do church work or whatever, but Anna was truly – she helped rear us.

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Early on what I witnessed as a child that had a dynamic influence on me later on, for example Anna would drive a street bus sometimes to go home in the evening and sometimes we would ride with her. We knew that she had to elbow her way to the back of the bus, which angered me 'cause this was a woman we loved, I maybe more than the other brothers. I saw this was wrong. Why should she, tired having worked all day, fooling with all these kids, and yet she had to go to the back of the bus and it was wrong.

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So my brother Albert and I, whenever we rode the street bus we always went to the back of the bus and sat as protest early on. This is a love story of a woman who had character and who reared us and who protected us as children. Downtown in the old Cress's five and dime store they had two drinking fountains, you know the story, one was white and one was colored. We always drank out of the colored fountain. It was a protest. We thought it was colored water at first, but then we learned the stark truths of how wrong that was. Why could Anna Jackson not sit in the front of the bus? Why could Anna Jackson not drink out of the same drinking fountain I did? My Lord, she cooked our food, she took care of us, she took us to the bathroom, she was everything to us.

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Those were the early seeds that were planted in my mind in terms of injustice and they later produced some flowers or whatever, people who agreed and disagreed. A lot disagreed. That's the home I grew up in. My father was a Sunday school teacher; my mother was a counselor with the young people. We were not overly religious in the sense of we loved Jesus but we didn't love Jesus as much as some other folks loved Jesus kind of home life, but it was religious in the sense that we went to church twice on Sunday and Wednesday night to the prayer meeting. That was the influence. We prayed every morning at breakfast and whatever else. It was that kind of a good, nurturing home, and Anna Jackson was a huge part of our growing up. She still is. When she died I had her funeral, which was pretty hard to do.

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Which said to me, I'm preaching now but that's what preachers do, it said to me it didn't matter what color of skin she was. It had nothing to do with it with us. That was Anna. She was one of us. She had no children of her own. We'd go to her house and visit and the pictures she had around were pictures of us. Our kids growing up in Rozelle School, take those little pictures every year. We became her children. Walter was her husband and Walter wasn't much \_\_\_\_\_. So when Walter would come we were sort of fearful what Walter might try to do to Anna.

So I had a little pocketknife and whenever Walter would appear at the back door of our house, little ol' kid, I'd grab and open up my pocketknife and stand next to Anna. She was a lot taller than I am. I was gonna protect her in case Walter tried to do anything to hurt Anna, which of course he did not. Probably wanted money, I don't know. That tells you something about that relationship.

[0:07:16]

*Lauren:* How did you parents explain issues of race and race relations to you?

*Frank:* My daddy came from Iuka, Mississippi. My mother's people came from Mobile, Alabama. The other members of the family came from Richmond, Virginia. My grandfather was alive during the Civil War. That put something in perspective. Our people were all very Southern but my parents were very fair to everybody. We understood what was happening. We knew it was wrong, they knew it was wrong, but at that tender age there was not a lot I could do about it.

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My family taught tolerance of all people regardless of who they were and what their religion or their skin color or whatever else. We didn't do much with sexual orientation in those days. That was one of the things we swept under the rug at the time but we've since matured into that. It was tolerant of all people and of all conditions of people, and there wasn't that anger, that whole racism that was – we just weren't born with that. I'm glad we weren't.

*Lauren:* Can you talk a little bit about your experiences at University of Memphis?

*Frank:* Relative to what?

*Lauren:* Just elaborate on your experience there.

[0:09:00]

*Frank:* My daddy died when I was 18 years old and I was a fresh person at the University of Memphis at the time. I always questioned would I quit school or would I have to take care of my mother. My grandmother lived with us and my mother also had a four-year-old child at the same time, which was a heavy load. She had no job. She'd been a schoolteacher many moons earlier but of course she's not current in terms of her training. But I stayed in school at her encouragement and did.

At that time I was training to be a YMCA secretary. I worked in the YMCA and coached ball and I was a P.E. major, kind of interesting. I was very sensitive to race again because of Anna Jackson, and I would attend regional meetings, state meetings in Nashville that were racial kind of meetings and was very comfortable in that environment.

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Later in 1950 I decided to go into ministry, which was not that awkward a move from where I had begun at any rate, and so I changed my major to English. There were no religion majors at University of Memphis at that time. So I moved in that direction and finished my four years there and then went on to – I had to work. I worked at YMCA, I worked at Tri-State Cleaners in South Memphis. I delivered dry cleaning to people of all colors and

persuasions or whatever else, and that was really not an issue. I'm not trying to make it Pollyanna when it was not but that was not an issue.

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So my life, again everything was segregated at the University of Memphis. So whatever relationships I had with any other race or culture had to be outside of school life, had to be outside of church life. Those developed, all the relationships, at regional meetings or state meetings of students who were trying to be progressive in terms of all of that.

*Lauren:* What kind of activities were you involved in?

*Frank:* Not many on campus per se. I had to work. As I said my grandmother lived with us. She had no income, and my mother had a small child that was five years old I guess who later became a PhD and now living in Turkey but that's another story.

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That didn't provide me many opportunities. I was participant in the Wesley Foundation, the Methodist student thing at the University of Memphis but I couldn't do much 'cause I was working wherever I could find money, anything I could do, ride my bicycle. When I worked over at Highland Heights YMCA I'd ride my bicycle down to Highland to Summer Avenue in order to – I had to work. It's not a sad story about poor me. I had a wonderful father. He didn't leave money but he left us some good things and I wouldn't trade the money for what I got. Others think I probably should've taken the money but it wasn't mine to take.

So I wasn't active on campus and doing those things. I did at the time participate, because I was an athlete, did play amateur basketball with Veterans of Foreign War, VFW Post 684. I was a kid and these were war veterans who after the ballgame went out and got drunk. That wasn't my crowd but it was a lot of fun because that was my opportunity to participate in sports and did.

[0:13:28]

*Lauren:* Could you talk a little bit about when and why you decided to go to Emory to study theology?

*Frank:* Well I decided to go into the ministry and Emory had a seminar. It was a Methodist school. That was part of it. I decided to go into ministry because it just seemed the right thing to do. My older brother who now is a retired attorney, Al, had also decided to go into the ministry. He went to school here. He also changed his mind later and went into law. My younger brother, Bill, who again has a list of degrees as long as your arm also wanted to go into the ministry but he opted out for whatever reason later.

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Emory was a natural choice for me. I had not lived away from home. I couldn't. I had to stay home and take care of my mom. So Emory offered me a scholarship and I took it and had three wonderful years, and that was in 1952 and Atlanta was just beginning to feel its own muscle and growth, and it was an exciting time to be in Emory, exciting time to be in Atlanta. \_\_\_\_\_ was mayor, things were beginning to happen, and for this little old peckerwood here coming out of Memphis and never, ever left home it was a whole new ballgame and it was wonderful for me. I grew up a lot.

*Lauren:* Can you talk a little bit more about the differences between Memphis and Atlanta in race relations? You talked about Atlanta starting to be progressive and things like that.

[0:15:08]

*Frank:* Yeah. Atlanta had the benefit of having some great predominantly African American schools, more house and \_\_\_\_\_ of course. Outside of Rhodes are two outstanding schools in the south. Atlanta had the benefit of businesses that were moving in there, which brought a different culture to that community. That whole Atlantic seaboard people began to migrate toward Atlanta, which meant they were different people from different cultures and different understandings and were really more sophisticated. So Memphis may have been larger in terms of population but Atlanta sort of emerged at that time because of this business influx 'cause of its location.

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Hartsfield Airport of course began to mushroom at that time and it had Emory University, which is now one of the ten leading universities in America and now I think it's past Vanderbilt, which pleased me a great deal in terms of whoever does all those things.

Atlanta was a different city and for me it opened my eyes to a lot of things. It had the Undenominational Theological Center, ITC, which was a conglomerate of seminaries that were black and white in terms of historically. CME Church owned a seminary in that conglomerate, the Methodist seminary and Presbyterians. So that gave me exposure.

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One of the interesting experiences, I worked as a student worker at Peachtree Road Methodist Church. Peachtree Road was in Buck Head, well-heeled, a lot of rich folks, and they hired me to be the student worker for the senior high school group, which was fine. Well there was an occasion where we wanted to do a Sunday evening thing with the young people 'cause we did Sunday evening activities so there was a retired professional football player who also was a professor at the Undenominational Theological Center. So here he was retired professional football player, faculty member, ordained minister.

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So I thought, this is wonderful. We'll invite him to come and speak to our young people on Sunday night. Great idea, Frank. One problem: he was black as ink, and here was this white congregation. The architecture of the sanctuary was all southern colonial. The plantation shutters, I mean everything you could see was white, the pew was white, everything was white. Well after he spoke to the group on Sunday night I invited him to stay for the Sunday evening worship service. Uh-oh. Here was this all white sanctuary Sunday evening, fairly full, and here was this one man who was black as ink sitting next to me and the congregation exploded.

The next day they called the pastor. They wanted me fired of course, and they wanted all of the student workers fired. I mean they didn't do anything, but it was my decision, but the pastor of the church who went to bed with a 104 fever at that time, 'cause this was a big – they owed a lot of money. It was a big church, but the contrast between black and white was so obvious.

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This man was wonderful. Spoke out of his heart. I'm not steering that one way or the other. It just never occurred to me that he would not be well-received. Well, they wanted my head on a

platter. The pastor stood with me and said, “No, we can’t do that.” So I kept my job, and I quit. I said, “I quit, but this is what I believe and I’m gonna stand on it. I’m not gonna back off and I’m not gonna apologize to anybody.” My mama named me Frank. Gets ya in a lot of trouble.

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So it blew over but they never did care much for me after that. They liked the other student workers. I was sort of one they sort of watched to be careful I didn’t create troubles. Good story but that’s sort of the way it was. You see it builds from Anna Jackson and on the back of the bus, colored and white drinking fountain. All of that built and it took another leap when this occurred in Atlanta in I guess it was ’52, ’53, but there are other stories that follow. That was my experience in Atlanta. It was good for me to grow up and be away from home. I had to work. Didn’t have any money, didn’t have anything, but again I got a little scholarship and that helped.

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I got a job, and I worked also with the YMCA at the Jay Allen Couch School, which was down below Georgia Tech. It was the Mill District in Atlanta. These were the poorest kids you can imagine where 7 kids would sleep in one room. They were all white. They were very poor kids and I loved ‘em, and they had little or nothing. I went out and had games, recreation, ball games, taught ‘em what I knew, and when I left each kid, there were 50 kids in that group, and each kid came and brought a dime to give to me as a gift, which was something but it wasn’t that big a deal. Each kid gave me a dime and I had 50 dimes and I kept ‘em in a little box until I was pastor in White Haven years later and I thought, I wouldn’t spend it on me.

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We had an opportunity to help sponsor that church with a missionary in Africa. The congregation gave money and I gave my 50 dimes for that cause. The story builds. Doesn’t just “pow” for me, didn’t just happen, and that was one more piece of it. The black thing was injustice more than it was poverty. Those poor kids in that district left an impression on me. At the same time I was doing that the YMCA had a group of Y teens who lived in Ansley Park, which was a well heeled – the governor’s mansion

was in Ansley Park. I worked with those – these were high school girls, Y Teen Club.

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The contrast to go to Peachtree Road on Sunday morning and work at Ansley Park with these all white wealthy kids and then in the Mill District during the week the YMCA, all of that is part of the mix, part of the formula that caused me to turn out as poorly as I have. That's my Atlanta piece.

*Lauren:* You talked about small forms of protest like sitting on the back of the bus.

*Frank:* Yeah.

*Lauren:* Did you ever get involved in any formal protests in college?

*Frank:* Later. Remember I was a product of the 50's, the placid 50's. the war was over, money was plentiful because they were pumping money into housing and veterans were getting benefits and whatever else and I was not in the second war. My oldest brother was. There were not a lot of protests. There was nothing to protest. It did not surface until the 60's. In the 60's and the 70's the culture erupted and there were protests. I'll tell you about it when we get there.

[0:24:23]

*Lauren:* What was it like coming back to Memphis after being in Atlanta?

*Frank:* Well I was in love. My wife was in school in Texas and she hurried through so we got married in '54. That part of it was pretty good. I asked the bishop for – they wanted to put me as an associate at Christ Methodist Church, which was not my crowd theologically, and I asked for what the Methodists then called a circuit church, which meant you had several churches and I had two. You find out if you're fresh out of seminary and you ask the bishop for a circuit church you'll get one every single time 'cause nobody wants to go.

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I wanted to learn how to be a pastor from the ground up. I didn't wanna be anybody's associate and let somebody tell me what I was supposed to do. I wanted to make my own mistakes, and did. So

the bishop told me there were two little churches out at Shelby Forest, one on Benges Town Road called Mt. Vernon and one out on Cuba Road called Enberry named after Philip Enberry, a Methodist, early pioneer. I served those two churches for two years. Now what happened at Mt. Vernon Church? The story continues.

John Hodges was a retired Naval officer who lived in the community, came to the Methodist church. We were good friends. He'd come by every morning. This was three or four months before I got married so I lived alone out there. John would come by and we would have coffee together and we were just good buddies or whatever.

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John was a classic racist. John one day found a piece of Methodist literature that had a picture of a black child on the front cover of the Sunday school material and John came to me in a rage, "The Methodist church is nothing but a bunch of nigger lovers" and all this that went with it. John was so enraged he said, "If you ever come to my house again you come to the back door like the niggers and the dogs do." Here I was starry-eyed, fresh out of seminary, and this is what met me. The congregation got pretty upset about what they thought the Methodist church was doing.

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There was a group known as pro-Southerners at the time, which was a right-wing political group that met out in Raleigh and they brought some wrath upon me as well and labeled me all of the bad things that you could say about a person who was open and sensitive to race. It's hard to believe this today. So I stood my ground and I said, "If this is what you want then you can find another preacher" and they did not. Whether it was my charm I don't know or my courage or my stupidity or bull headedness I don't know, but I stayed. I left that church and went to serve a church in White Haven, Andrew's Memorial on Neely Rd., 4028 Neely Rd.

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It happened again, story builds. This was a time when blacks were not admitted to Sunday worship without protest. Now this was in the late 50's, '56. Civil rights didn't just happen at one time. It was all building along. The congregation had a meeting. They

were fearful that black people might show up to worship and what would happen? So they had a meeting and they said, “Well we vote that if a black person comes to worship here we will tell them they cannot worship here” and I said – I was married and had two children. How old was I? 26 years old, somewhere in that range.

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I said, “Before you vote I wanna explain one thing to you. If you vote this, this time tomorrow you’ll have a new pastor. I won’t serve a church that will not allow everybody in.” They said, “We wanna think about it.” I said, “You think all you want to but I will not serve a church like that.” I said, “I don’t know where my wife and two children will go but we won’t be here. You’ll have a new pastor in the morning.” They began to think about that. So they tabled the motion and then the committee met, ‘cause every year the Methodists play musical chairs. We’re subject to appointment every 12 months every June. So June came and the committee met as to whether or not I should leave and they voted 3:2 for me to leave on the basis of that.

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I said, “That’ll be just fine. I’ll leave.” I said, “But I’ll take with me the stories.” I was young but I said, “I’ll take the stories with me about this church and about your unwilling.” Now they weren’t the only ones. I mean there were plenty of others. Second Presbyterian was in the highlight at that particular time. So anyway, I stayed another year. It was the fifth year that I stayed there. It was not the best year I had there because again Frank was over in the corner. Story continues. I left there after five years and moved to **Cayeville**. Well – I hadn’t thought about all of this.

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It was a good experience, small town, people were very welcoming, very fine, whatever else. Well at this time voter registration was taking place. Core and Snick and other groups were here registering black voters. They were in **Fayed** County. Now the Cayeville city limits on the east is the Fayed County line. Well the organization, I believe it was Core, came to Cayeville and they were gonna march and they were going to demand – they wanted I think black police officers. So on the day they were to march, Cayeville has a little square. In that day they just had shops around the square but the Methodist church happened to be on the square. So they knew when the march was coming.

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They all closed their stores and went home. So here is this mass of black people coming from Fayed County and God knows where to march on the square. On the square that day there may have been a couple hundred black faces but there was one white face. Guess who that one white face was? I welcomed them to come in if they needed to use the restroom at church or water out of the drinking fountain. Well that didn't go over too well with the congregation as you could guess, and I said, "You want a new preacher, call the bishop. This is who I am and these people have a right to march and I'm in sympathy with their voter registration purposes. So you wanna get rid of me go ahead."

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I stayed. I stayed six years. Now that was the background. Then in 1967 the bishop calls and says – things were in an uproar in most every urban area. There were protests and everything. The world got turned upside-down in the 60's as you surely know, and everything was under attack. Churches were under attack, government was under attack, higher education was under attack. Everything was under attack.

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Our bishops began restructuring urban areas. So they asked me at age 37 to be the district superintendent for the Methodist district. I then became the superintendent for pastors who had been my pastors who were twice as old as I was. That was in 1967. The dates are beginning to come together now. So I became the superintendent for the Methodist district. I was the youngest district superintendent in the world and they said, "How did that happen?" I said, "I was so young they took advantage of my youth. I didn't know what I was getting into."

Story goes on. As the district superintendent I was required to go to each congregation in the district and hold a conference every year. It was a business section where you elected officials of the church and you decided on how much money – you agreed to spend money on whatever the connection \_\_\_\_\_ on whatever the general church was.

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Well I had some great experiences because during this time I was marching in favor of the sanitation workers. I'll get to that chapter in a minute. So I went to one church, which – the people there were not happy with me because I had been marching and I had been mentioned in the newspaper a great deal about my positions on the whole issue of race so in this first meeting – there are two of these stories I'll tell. The first one a man spoke up who I believe was a chiropractor or osteopath. I'm not sure. I forgot his name. He moved that Jim Lawson, who was very active at the time and I was Jim's superintendent, which made it even more interesting but also good friends with Henry Lobe, and that story will come in a minute.

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So this doctor whoever he was stood up and moved that the church withhold funds from my salary for one thing, and that they not allow Jim Lawson to come into that particular congregation anymore to have any meeting or anything. I said, "Okay. Now let me get this straight because I wanna be sure that the minute" – and I was presiding – "I wanna be sure that the minutes have this correct about what you want because when the commercial appeal calls me tonight when they hear about this they're gonna wanna be sure they know your name and where you live." I wasn't a kid but I was a kid. *[Laugh]*

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"And when *Time* magazine calls me tomorrow that you are wanting to keep a Methodist preacher from being present in a Methodist church building" I said, "I wanna be sure I got your name spelled right because you're making the most" – then I said, "This week when marchers come and march around your place of business and protest your business", I believe he was a chiropractor over in Linden Circle. I said, "We wanna be sure that we got the right place because they will come to protest what you're proposing tonight." Well everything got real quiet and the man sat down. There was no second to the motion. Now night after night this is what I went through.

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At another church – I sort of enjoy telling these stories. You can tell the story the way to make yourself a hero, which I love to do. I went to another church and this man stood up. Every night it was the same battle 'cause there were all these churches and we had

them all at the same season of the year. He said that he moved that they withhold my salary and that they talk to the bishop and they thought I should be replaced in my position because I had marched with sanitation workers and my position on race.

I said, "I have a question. This man said we have too many outsiders who are coming in trying to tell us how to run our city." I knew I had him and I said, "Excuse me, Sir, but where were you born?" "I was born in Texas and we didn't have to deal with these things in Texas."

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I said, "I was born down the street here on Union Avenue at the Methodist Church. You know, part of the trouble in this community is we got too many outsiders coming in trying to tell us how to run our city." And the man sat down. Now the story builds. Anna Jackson, back of the bus, drinking fountain. Now it goes on and on and on, and I lived that way.

Years later I would go preach in those churches. During when we had curfew at '68, curfew at night, I got a lot of threatening letters I still have. I have a file called "Poison pen letters." People who just hated me and, "How can you call yourself a minister?"

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I would go back a couple of years later and preach in those congregations. I'd look in the faces of those people who'd written me those letters and I said, "You know some of you here wrote me some letters a few years ago." You could feel the blood draining from their faces. *[Laugh]* I said, "And I still have those letters" and they thought, "Oh my Lord, he's not gonna read those letters in the pulpit is he?" which I did not.

See, what I learned in the midst of all of that, I had to show love for the people. If I didn't then I would've been contrary to everything I had advocated. I had to love those people who hated me, otherwise I would've been phony and I would've been nothing and my message would've been lost 'cause you're supposed to love everybody. Okay. Well that's what I learned. I still have the letters. Not gonna do anything with 'em.

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The public library is now collecting my papers and archival stuff and whatever but I haven't given them the letters. I had a meeting with the archivist two weeks ago but I'm not gonna do anything, because why? See, King was consistent. King loved the people. He was threatened. He was scared. They hated him but he knew that when he showed hate in response to their hate he put himself on their level, and as a young fellow I wasn't gonna do that. I learned a lot. Now that was part of what went on. I came to St. John's church out in Peabody and Belvedere. It was 19 years. Methodist preachers don't stay long. Most of 'em just stay about three or four years but I stayed 19 years.

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People say, "How did you stay 19 years?" and I said, "Every year the congregation went to the bishop and said, 'bishop, we don't want a preacher at all' and the bishop said, 'Frank is as close to nothing as we have to offer you so you'll just have to' – "Well okay, send him back." St. John's was a congregation of young and the old, rich and the poor, the black and the white, the gay and the straight, the learned and the illiterate, but we all were part of one congregation and it didn't matter. Didn't matter what your sexual orientation was, didn't matter what the color of skin was, where you came from, whatever else.

Now why did that happen? Partly because of Anna Jackson. That pulpit became noisy and conspicuous by design. The Rhodes College singers sang up there one time and we had on the bulletin board out front something about what's hell all about, and under it says, "Rhodes College singers." Again we made *People* magazine, we made whatever.

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It wasn't about me. It was about that congregation. What emerged from that was a spirit and an attitude about what our faith was all about. I got other poison pen letters, which I still have. I've been a member of ACLU for a long time and I've been a member of the NAACP longer than anybody. Maxine out-ranks me a little and I love Maxine. The ACLU wanted to have a meeting at St. John's and I said, "Fine." Commercial Appeal covered the story. I later sort of wondered whether I should've invited them or not but they came and they made headlines and a picture.

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They had a woman who spoke that day on freedom or whatever else and she was a black former *Playboy* bunny who was a lesbian. I mean she pretty well covered all the categories. Man, thunder letters went to the bishop. “How can Mcrae call himself to be a Christian and he allowed this to go on in his congregation? Doesn’t he know the Methodist Church are against homosexuality?”

My poor bishops. They suffered so much under me. *[Laugh]* It’s like they had a form letter, “Dear occupant, this is my response to your criticism of Mcrae.” I still have the bishop’s letters. I’m keeping the bishop’s letters in case they came after me, but those were 19 wonderful years. It was a great church and we were a variety of folks.

[0:45:01]

There’s a group in town called Friends For Life. It’s a gay/lesbian conglomerate but they were dealing primarily with HIV and AIDS people. So they came to me and they said, “We’d like to have a dinner once a month in the basement of the church and invite everybody who is HIV and AIDS to come be a part of the dinner.” Okay.

First of all we gave ‘em meeting space in the church ‘cause they couldn’t afford anywhere else and we gave ‘em room, didn’t charge ‘em of course, and they stayed there. Then they wanted to have the dinner. Well all hell broke loose again. some people in the congregation, “Don’t you know what you’re doing, endangering the lives of people? This is what’s gonna happen.”

[0:46:00]

Scott Morris at the church health center, which we also started, and you guys have been wonderful with, came to rescue. You get AIDS through semen and blood. You can’t get it through saliva but there was some Italian at the time that came out with a new – a medical person who suggested you might get it through saliva. Well they could see all these folks eating in our church, using our church dishes.

Well you know, caught hell for a while after that, but the dinner still goes on even to this day and it’s wonderful and I’m proud of those folks who have become almost legitimate and accepted, Friends For Life. It’s wonderful. But you see, the story goes on.

It's race. It's poor people who gave me 50 dimes when I left Emory University. It now is HIV. It's the gay/lesbian community.

[0:47:03]

These are God's children I'm preaching now. These are God's children. They belong there. So it was not a large leap from where I was early on with Anna Jackson to others who came in that whole succession. Those were my 19 years at St. John's, which were wonderful. Church health center came at that time. We can do the story of that. Mike Maclane was on the faculty here. Mike Maclane called and said, "I have a guy I want you to meet. He wants to do a healthcare clinic in the name of the church. He happens to be Methodist. He's ordained." So after church on Sunday Mike Maclane and Scott Morris showed up.

[0:48:00]

Scott Morris is a legend. I mean he's the child I never had. Scott came and we of course arranged for a building for him and the church health center is now history. You don't need any word from me on that but the point was he was caring for the working poor and that's what he does today and he does it better than anybody else. I love him like my own child but he is for real. His wife at the time was on the faculty here.

She came here and that's why he came to Memphis. He was born in San Diego but he grew up in Atlanta. He's one of the guys captain of the football team, president of the student body, A team kind of guy. Makes the rest of us look bad. That was part of the St. John's thing. We got ready to have soup kitchen at St. John's.

[0:49:02]

A bunch from Rhodes College came over, "Yeah, we wanna do the soup kitchen." They weren't starry eyed but they were a little. So was I. It's okay to be starry eyed. Be a dreamer. They came and they said, "We wanted a soup kitchen. We'll do it on Saturday night" and I said, "No, because you'll leave in June and you'll go home and all summer long these people will not be fed but they will expect to be fed here" and they said, "Oh, I guess that's right." I said, "No, we won't allow it."

They went back two weeks later they come back to the church and they said, "We worked it out. We got the refractory people to agree to provide food that they had" not necessarily left over, not

scraping plates but left over, and they said, “We have enough people who are here in the summertime who will either be at school or who are resting and we will maintain that soup kitchen 12 months out of the year.” And you know, it’s still going on at the corner of Peabody and Belleview.

[0:50:09]

Wonderful things. When you love the people and you care about ‘em, that’s just part of the fun. We had Rhodes College – I’m moving off the subject but we had David Ramsey, and if you didn’t know David Ramsey you missed so much, who was organist at St. John’s while I was there the whole time. I spoke at his funeral. This institution, Rhodes College, has contributed so much to the life of the things that go on on the corner of Peabody and Belleview. Faculty members, spirit of student body. It’s like we all have sort of merged at that corner.

That’s still going on. Johnny Jeffridge is there and does a super job and does all of these things but students, students who care, sort of the same way I was when I was at Memphis State years ago and went to all those interracial meetings and look what happened. So the story goes on and on and on. Here we are. Have any other questions? That was a pretty long answer to one question, wasn’t it? *[Laugh]*

[0:51:25]

*Eric:* Going back to the sanitation strike, you had said that you were friends with Henry **Lobe**. How did you reconcile your advocacy for the sanitation strike with your friendship?

*Frank:* Yeah. Like I said many times Henry and I were great friends. Henry’s wife was married, Greg and I were classmates at the University of Memphis. Henry was – first time I met Henry I loved him and I say it – Henry will go down in history as a villain and it hurts me that he is because Henry was really a wonderful kind of guy.

[0:52:06]

Recently I was interviewed by Bob Edwards in Sirius Radio. Somebody called and asked me if I would be willing to be interviewed on Sirius Radio. I thought it was “Serious” Radio. But I agreed so Bob Edwards and one of his friends came down from DC I guess and interviewed me out of my home about the

whole Lobe thing and they raised the very question of “how can you reconcile this?” and I said to him, and they ran it on PBS, people from all over the country began to call me. Most of ‘em were nice. I said that Lobe, whom I knew as a caring – I wanna make that point. I really wanna make that point for the record. I’ve made it other places.

[0:53:00]

Lobe was a loving, caring people who loved the little people who was compassionate. He was dead wrong on this issue. I helped swear him into office in ’68. I also swore Willy Harrington in the first time he became mayor and I swore him in in January of this year again, and I reminded the people down at the Convention Center this year, and I said, “16 years ago I stood before this same assemblage and prayed into office a young former school superintendent who had been a friend of mine a long time, Willy Harrington.”

I said, “40 years ago on this very day I swore into office Henry Lobe in the back room of his house out on Colonial Road” and I said, “These two men were my good friends, were very much alike, both tall men, both handsome men, both bullheaded, wouldn’t listen to anybody. Willy is almost as bad as Henry” but I said, “Their road to the mayor’s office was quite different.”

[0:54:10]

Lobe was born with name recognition, wealth. Willy was born down there at Crump and 3<sup>rd</sup> Street at a little old tunnel house. Totally different. I try and make the point Lobe was good hearted but everybody who hears this, and this is why the people on the Bob Edwards show called me from all over where and says, “How can you say he was a great man? He was dead wrong.” I said, “He was wrong on this issue but do you expect perfection from everybody? I’ve been wrong on a lot of things in my life ‘cause a lot of folks out there would love to tell you where I was wrong.” That was the Henry Lobe that I knew and loved. Now how do I reconcile it?

[0:55:00]

I first knew Henry Lobe when he was director of public service and I was serving in that little church down in Whitehaven where they tried to run me off, and we were about Forest \_\_\_\_\_ to University Street out there. Well a little closer than that but I

\_\_\_\_\_ where my car is parked out here. We didn't have public sewer because White Haven was in the county. We lacked that much gap in the public schools. I went down and said, "Henry, could you help us? We've got this church going. We need to connect to the public sewer. Can you help us?"

So he said yeah he would. So he extended the sewer line out of this little church. So it was done and I said, "Hey, why don't you and Mary come down one Sunday and worship with us and try out our new facilities so the restrooms would work?" which I thought was kind of funny, and he's told that story over and over. We became good friends. He came here one time and then he came here a second time. You may know altogether a different situation. We were very close.

[0:56:00]

Now when this happened, when I got involved with the sanitation dispute, I went to Henry and I'd sit in his office. We'd eat lunch in his office over and over again. Henry was so cheap he'd always buy hamburgers. He wouldn't buy anything decent to eat. I'd sit there and say, "Henry, you're wrong on this. This city is gonna blow up. I've been with the sanitation workers. I know who they are." The Methodist Church was sending in supplies for food and I was catching hell from the Methodists from the national church doing that, but I said, "It's wrong, Henry. These people deserve this. They don't have any rights. Send 'em home on rainy days."

Henry wouldn't listen. He would not listen. The night that Martin King was killed Henry invited me to ride with him to speak at the law school at Old Miss and I turned him down at the last minute because I was having dinner with the mayor at Cairo, which was kind of interesting, but I'm always thankful that I was not with Henry that night. That was a pretty terrifying night.

[0:57:05]

I remember 'cause I tried to come back into the city having been out of Cairo and the city was sealed. They wouldn't let anybody in or out but the deputy sheriff who was guarding the city over there beyond Germantown happened to be a guy I'd married years before. He'd been a member of the church so he let me come in. Lobe would not listen. Now I believe this and not many people agree with this but the Lobe family was always anti-union. Lobe hated unions. They were management people. I understand that

dispute. It's gone on as long as we've had labor unions, and that I think was Henry's primary complaint.

Henry fervently believed that it was a violation of the law for people to strike against a municipality. Well I think it was against the law but it wasn't tested, and that was part of it, but was it racist in part? Yeah, it was racist. Everybody was white. I didn't know what racist was. I could look at the Dictionary if I wanted. I guess I'd been one and didn't know it.

[0:58:08]

That was the culture, and if you're gonna sit in judgment on a previous period of history you gotta know a lot about it and that's why you're doing this whole series. I argued with Henry and I could never convince him. During the strike the Memphis Minister Association met on a Monday at St. Mary's cathedral and I said to – I just ate lunch with Henry – “Why don't we just take a stroll down to the mayor's office?” He didn't wanna say “march” 'cause march was an inflammatory word, and these preachers were all scared and they didn't know what to do.

I said, “Let's just take a stroll down to the mayor's office and tell him how we feel about this.” Well they were ready to go except some older preachers were more sensible of course and they said, “Well we need to think about this because the mayor is the highest elected office in the city and we don't need to just barge in there.”

[0:59:06]

I said, “We won't barge. I'll get you an appointment. You'll see.” They backed down. They were looking for a way out is what it was and they found it. I've often wondered if the course of history would've changed if we had gone to Henry that day and Henry had listened to us and changed his mind. I don't know. Nobody knows. Lobe and I had a falling out. We didn't speak, see each other for a year. We finally got back together. You may recall Henry had a stroke. Henry Lobe was a tall, handsome man, very outgoing, never met a stranger, but for Henry Lobe to have a stroke and couldn't speak, that's just almost impossible to believe. Well he did.

[1:00:00]

He lived in Arkansas. When he left \_\_\_\_\_ Mary and his family owned the property over at Forest City and he moved over there

and opened up a dealership within a \_\_\_\_\_ harvest. Well his son Tommy called one day and said, “Dad would like you to come over and have lunch” so I got in the car and drove to Forest City. Henry could not speak. He had a little handheld thing like a Blackberry that he could punch out words on. We went out to the country club to eat lunch. So I went out and said, “This is nice. Is this where you all have the David Duke rallies?” Oh, Henry was enraged trying to punch out words. He was so angry. I was having fun. We went in the dining room and I said, “Maxine and Vasco wanted to come with me today, Henry, but they couldn’t make it” and people around knew who Maxine and Vasco were and they were just dying laughing.

Henry pulled out that little – he was so funny but he couldn’t speak, which was sad. We got in the car and we drove out to his – we got in his truck ‘cause he could drive – out to his farm, and he showed me where he had buried dogs who had died. Then he took me by to see a little old lady who’s husband – who worked in the city government there – who’s husband had just died and she wanted me to go and have prayer with her.

[1:01:15]

This was Henry Lobe. He was dead wrong on the sanitation thing, dead wrong, but he will go down in history as a villain and he doesn’t deserve that. Am I the apologist for Henry Lobe? I don’t wanna be that but I’m saying Henry Lobe was a good man who made a big mistake and his mistake was in not recognizing the unions. Of course as we know Mr. Plow paid it out and that was the end of that. Sad story. When I went to Henry’s funeral I talked to his children and I said, “Your daddy was a good man. Whatever historians may say about your daddy, you had a good daddy”, but he was wrong on this issue.

[1:02:02]

Did I reconcile it with Henry? No, never did. We later became good friends again but no. I had to take a position and I took a position against my good friend. He’d come out to church when I was pastor in Cayeville and we had a lot of fun together but that was my position and I wasn’t gonna budge. See, Henry was bullheaded. Was Frank bullheaded? *[Laugh]* Somebody else can decide.

*Eric:*

Throughout the Civil Rights movement what part did you see the white church around you play?

*Frank:* In the sanitation dispute?

*Eric:* Yes. Well I mean in Memphis in the late 60's.

*Frank:* The role the church played in what?

[1:03:03]

*Eric:* In protests, in sit-ins.

*Frank:* Okay. A lot of good things came out of '68. MIFA, the Metropolitan Inter-faith Association, began in '68 getting ready to observe another 10-year celebration thing. There were 7 of us who signed the charter for MIFA. Cities were disrupted. We didn't know what to do here. Bill Jones, who graduated at this school, later became the Episcopal bishop in St. Louis, new organization. He was gifted and he helped us come together because most of the liberals, my people, were in the Memphis Ministers Association, which was a more progressive group. There were not many Southern Baptists in the Memphis Ministers Association. That's their choice. To each his own.

[1:04:10]

But out of that group there came this very thing you're addressing, this need to do something to address issues. What are the issues? Transportation, public education was not as big an issue then as it was now, crime, welfare issues. I mean you could pick – there were just plenty of issues. You didn't have any trouble finding a war to fight because wars were everywhere. So we formed MIFA, which was early on we were criticized and they called it the Mafia and made fun of us but it was all right. We knew we were doing what was right, just the way Lobe thought he was doing what was right.

[1:05:00]

We began to address those issues. I was concerned that MIFA be an advocacy group and that's where I left MIFA, and in the archives they tell the story of how I quit and walked out of a meeting because they wouldn't – and it got better after I left. I wanted to do advocacy on those issues, which I just named, plus others. Race was a whole big thing, a piece of that whole component, but they didn't wanna do it because they couldn't get it funded.

National money came in to help fund MIFA and we got judicatory money came in to fund MIFA but you couldn't get local money 'cause people didn't want it. They didn't want it stirring up trouble. So Gid Smith who I was superintendent and appointed Gid to that job at MIFA who did a super job, but Gid and a fellow named Bob preached, really began getting grant money and they began doing delivery of services, which meant food programs, transportation programs.

[1:06:19]

Those were good things, but MIFA really never emerged as an advocacy group. These groups like MIFA were started all over the country. MIFA is one of the few that has survived all of these 40 years now but I wanted to be involved in advocacy and not in delivery of services. MIFA does a super job in delivery of services. They're doing housing now as you know. Margaret Craddick has been doing the transportation thing a lot time but they're doing it on government grants primarily. That was a good thing that came about but a group of us who were clergy, to address you question, stayed together, and there were a lot of good things that happened.

[1:07:04]

The Memphis House was a drug rehabilitation house that started here. The church health center was a product of that a little later period of time, but because we came together in an ecumenical way and this school provided leadership for that and people who were visionary and progressive from Rhodes participated in that and gave leadership to that. So the white community was not blind nor ignorant or silent but it was a small voice because if you live at the buckle of the Bible Belt you just have a different theological perspective, and it's more concerned with evangelism and what they would call spiritual matters as opposed to social gospel items.

[1:08:03]

Thank God for this school and leadership that it has provided not only in students at the time but later in graduates here. So the white church was not absent. It was present but it was limited in what it could do and people wouldn't listen to us 'cause we were a bunch of crazy liberal radicals or whatever we were.

*Eric:* You had mentioned that in Cayeville you were the one white face. Did you meet any adversity from African Americans who felt like you shouldn't be part of their movement in a way?

*Frank:* No, never. The mayor of Cayeville at the time was my best friend, Herman Cox. I'm always on the other side from the power brokers. No, I participated in other marches in other cities, San Francisco. I happened to be there at another meeting and a march was organized, and spoke on this subject because when you get spotlighted, the national media came in, cameras running and all this stuff, and that made network stuff.

[1:09:25]

ABC ran several pieces. At the River I Stand is the classic piece that's done here as you may know on this subject. So naturally people in other cities called and asked, "Would you come over and Greatness and How I Achieved it or I'm gonna write Great Men Who've Met Me" and stuff like that. There was none of that but people wanted to know 'cause we were modeling a lot, what model did you follow in Memphis that brought about whatever change came about here.

[1:10:03]

The interesting thing, there have been three cities of Memphis. I wanna say this 'cause I want it to be on the record if you've got enough tape left. The first city of Memphis when you go back in its history, the first city of Memphis was the Native Americans. They were here. The French came. That's why the name \_\_\_\_\_ is part of Memphis. The Spanish came. Hernando DeSota came in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The English came. Later the Confederate States of America, CSA. Memphis has lived under a lot of flags. The first Memphis was a very cosmopolitan city when it began to develop. The Germans, the Italian, the Irish were all a part of this city and the westward movement of America. A lot of Germans here. There were German Catholic churches. St. Mary's is a good example of that.

[1:11:04]

The Italians were here. St. Patrick's church is a good example of the Irish who came. St. Genevieve on North 3<sup>rd</sup> Street I guess it was. That was the first Memphis. That city died in the 1870's when the yellow fever epidemic struck this city and thousands of people died and people went to Granada, Mississippi, the Italians

and the Germans went back to St. Louis. Memphis was devastated. Lost a city charter, became a taxing district in the state of Tennessee.

Memphis was dead and gone because of the yellow fever epidemic. That city died in the 1870's. I remember it well. I was a small child at the time. The second city of Memphis was Mr. Crump's town. Crump came here right after the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, redheaded fellow from \_\_\_\_\_, Mississippi. People know the story. That was the city I grew up in.

[1:12:03]

If you were white, middle class, or above, it was a pretty good city. This was the cleanest, quietest, safest city in America. We got the trophy every year. If you blew your horn on your automobile it cost you \$3. It was a fine; you couldn't blow your horn. Cleanest, safest, quietest city. When I was in Roselle School we'd take home little pieces of a checklist to check off whether we'd cleaned the attic or the basement of the house or whatever. This was a great place to live if you were middle class and white. That city died in '68 with King's death.

We are now in the third city of Memphis. It is greatly different. Each one of those cities have been different than the preceding city. Third city will be different. Years ago when OJ was on trial I got a phone call from some woman with British Film Ways in Washington. She said, "I wanna come to Memphis to interview you" and I said, "I guess it's about the sanitation strike." She said, "No, it's about OJ."

[1:13:01]

She said, "We think if the jury comes in with a negative verdict on OJ that Memphis will blow and I said, "Lady, I can save you time and money. Memphis ain't gonna blow whatever happens in the OJ trial." I said, "Memphis now has black government and white power. Right now it's working. It's kind of a standoff but it's working right now." So she didn't come to Memphis. If she did she didn't interview me. That's the third city of Memphis.

I don't know what it'll be. Willy Harrington is my dear friend. People think Willy is loco and crazy but you've gotta know where Willy came from and I'm not his apologist but Willy came from Third Street and Crump Blvd. in a house that you wouldn't wanna

go in for fear of your life. He has emerged. He does some stupid things. I e-mailed him last week, “What is wrong with you?”

[1:14:00]

But we are now in the third city. I doubt we will ever have a white mayor again. Does that really matter? It matters to me but I do think Memphis has the potential in the third city and maybe even the fourth city, I’ll be buried out in Memorial Park by then but I think Memphis has potential because it is dealing – it’s not dealing very well – dealing with the issues of poverty, dealing with the issues of racism, dealing with the issues of first and second and third generation urban dwellers who don’t know how to live. What changed the city of Memphis?

You know what changed the city of Memphis? The cotton picker. In the national harvest had to plant \_\_\_\_\_. They made cotton pickers. When the cotton picker came to the delta cheap farm labor was no longer needed, and what happened? They kicked over tenant houses and burned them down. People had no place to go except to the cities. The stronger ones went to Chicago and Detroit and Cleveland and got good jobs. Some of ‘em came back; most of ‘em did not.

[1:15:06]

The women and the children were left over here in South Memphis to fend for themselves. They were first generation urban dwellers. They knew nothing about urban life and lived in the city. In the county you wanna borrow a cup of sugar you go next door and borrow a cup of sugar. In the city you have to have money. People don’t understand that. That and cotton allotments. They used to pay the American farmer not to plant cotton ‘cause we had a surplus and the price would go down if they had a surplus.

So between cotton allotments and the cotton picker farm labor all moved to the city. Some folks decided they didn’t like it up north and they’re coming back. Atlanta is a big community now for those who went north and decided maybe it’s better in the south than it is in the south side of Chicago.

[1:15:58]

That’s a piece of the picture of what Memphis is and why it got to be where it is today. See, I never answered the question you asked. You have a story to tell so you try to weave the story you wanna

tell into the question that was asked and Obama is good at it. I'll vote for him. Obama is pretty good at it. Y'all run out of questions?

*Lauren:* Let's go on back a little bit. How'd you feel about the conclusion of the \_\_\_\_\_?

*Frank:* The conclusion? Well there are great stories to be told. It was reasonably fair. Now what happened, it was fair for the time. You know what's happening today? Sanitation workers now are wanting benefits. They're entitled to it. I'll vote for it 'cause I don't live in Memphis. That wouldn't be the reason I would not vote for it.

[1:17:14]

I think all they got was a nickel or a dime on an hour increase, which again has to be put in perspective with the economy of the time. Sanitation workers have always been the lowest rung on the ladder but they live better today, and Taylor Rogers who marched with the sanitation workers is my good friend. To answer the question let's hear what the sanitation workers have to say in terms of their need. Let's hear what administration has to say in terms of what resources they have and negotiate and work it out, which I think they can do if they want to.

[1:18:04]

See, in those days you had a white mayor. It was a racial thing. Nobody accused Willy of being white. So you can't play the race card in terms of wages and benefits for current city employees in my judgment. It was a good weapon to use at the time. A lot of folks who have sat in sessions like this tried to play themselves to be heroes. The only heroes in all of this are the sanitation workers. Joan Beifuss wrote a book, *At The River I Stand*, which is the classic. Why? Because she interviewed all of us immediately afterwards and everybody remembered what happened but nobody wanted to make themselves out to be a hero because there were too many living witnesses who said that wasn't the way it was.

[1:19:08]

A lot of people today are written up and of course \_\_\_\_\_ with their obits and they talk about how active they were in the civil rights. They didn't show up at the meetings 'cause I was at the meetings. A lot of folks think they did things they didn't do. James Macklin,

I worked for – after I retired I went to work for Mid-America Apartment Communities for ten years, did their company charity and some community organization work. James Macklin is the vice president of Mid-America Apartment Communities based here in Memphis. Macklin played offensive tackle for the University of Memphis. He weighs 200-300 lbs. Best friend I had at Mid-America, James Macklin. He still is.

[1:19:57]

Macklin came to my office one day and he said, “Frank, I just wanna tell you something. I wanna thank you for marching with the sanitation workers” and I said, “Why, James?” He said, “My grandfather was a sanitation worker.” Now that made all the difference in the world to me because they were nameless, faceless people and I marched. I would never know them. Some I did know because later we had all these panels and whatever else, but that meant a lot to me because I loved James Macklin.

He is my brother. I don’t care what color skin mine is or his is. We’re bothers. But to know that back in ’68 that made a difference and it made a difference in his life, and he’s got an MBA, his vice president for companies, and married to a wonderful, wonderful woman, good family. That’s important to me and I want it on the record. If you edit it out I’ll come break your legs. *[Laugh]*

[1:21:05]

*Eric:* What issues do you feel are still left unresolved today in Memphis?

*Frank:* Well how long is that tape? *[Laugh]* The issues of poverty are with us why? Because for a long while Memphis was the second poorest metropolitan area in America. San Antonio beat us out a time or two but urban poverty has been the big issue here and continues to be. I know a little bit about public education. My wife just retired as a Memphis public school teacher for more than 25 years. She taught art at Craigmont High School and I didn’t work on Fridays so I would go out when I was working on Mid-America.

[1:22:07]

I’d go every Friday and sit in her classroom just to learn what I could from the students, and I learned a lot. Behavior problems, all that. I would ask these kids when they asked me, “Who are

you?” I said, “I am a designated observer” and they said, “Okay.” Nobody was a designated observer before but it seemed to work so I became a designated observer, but I wanted to learn from them and I learned a lot, good and bad. I loved some of those kids. I just got to see ‘em on Friday but they had so much potential and some of them were just hellions but you have to put it in perspective. What makes people the way they are? Why am I such a wonderful man kind of thing? Why are they in the situation they’re in?

[1:23:10]

The more you understand them then the more you not excuse them but you really wanna help them find a way out of where they are. Public education is a huge issue today. Why is it? Well when I was pastor at St. John’s, Bruce School did not have enough classroom space. Marvin Harris, principal, asked if they could use St. John’s classrooms during the week. I said, “Sure.” So Marvin Harris and I became very good friends. Most of those kids came out of the projects across what was Lamarra Terrace, and Marvin said, “Frank, when these kids come to school they have to un-learn the things they have learned at home. We have to teach ‘em a whole different set of values and understanding about life.” So it was like they lived here in the school during the day but they go home to a different environment in a different world.

[1:24:10]

Obviously discipline is a huge factor in public education wherever you find it. I tried as best I could to believe that the black church, it’s not just an African American issue, but the black church is the best solution I think to some of the issues that are faced in Memphis public schools. Why? Because number one, they have a history. The black church has been the one institution that has advocated and has brought about unbelievable changes in culture. I believe in the black church. They have history, they have resources, they have people, they have facilities, they have money.

[1:24:59]

I went to Carol Johnson when she was superintendent of schools and talked to Carol about it. I went to three black pastors, pastors of three black major, big, black churches. That’s not said right. Pastors of large African American congregations. They all said the same thing, “Our congregations really wouldn’t go along with getting involved in discipline or helping kids in school because we

need bigger buildings and the people would leave. They won't pay. We're concerned with Dickles and Noses", which is classic Protestant church. "How can we get more people? How can we get more money?" They said, "We really don't wanna get involved in that."

I went to the police department and talked to the woman who was in charge of gang life and she said, "Well you know, we've tried that with the police department. Doesn't work." I don't believe it. I sincerely believe that what SCLC is trying to do and Dwight Montgomery, bless his heart, who's current head of SCLCU is doing the best he can but he has limited resources himself. If he could pull it off that would be one part of the answer to what's happening in public education.

[1:26:21]

The real issue of course is under-employment. If we had jobs for people, people don't turn out the way they do, bad, just on their own. That don't make sense. The economy is a huge issue here. The economy is big, school is an issue, all of that impacts upon the issue of crime obviously. I mean how basic can it be? Crime is what scares all of us. This story yesterday, three folks got shot. They go by and robe them. They come back three minutes later and shoot 'em. I don't understand that but I think I understand some of it.

[1:27:07]

But the point is if those people had jobs and had employment they wouldn't be out robbing other people. Is it just because certain people and a certain class of people are just inherently bad and wrong and evil? Sorry. You get no audience with me on that. So politicians will say, "Crime, yes, economics, jobs." School becomes again a manifestation of the underlying economic issue. They'll say, "Well you're a Democrat. You just think you throw money at everything." Well no, that's not what I'm saying, but I am saying that issue of the economics has not been reasonably addressed and it manifests itself in those ways, gang life or whatever else.

[1:28:00]

Is it gonna change? Anybody that doesn't understand what gang life is all about? The men got the women pregnant and they left! Then this stupid welfare program comes along and says the father

can't live in the home. If he's the father of the children he can't live in the home unless he's working. Well then he's gone. I throw up my hands and think, how do you unravel the issues of this city?

You don't attack the whole ball of wax. You take it one issue at a time, one piece of it at a time. I think Willy should've been a school superintendent. I think Willy would've been a really good superintendent again but it's not gonna happen for a while, although Ken \_\_\_\_\_ thinks he can pull it off. Maybe Ken can. I'm fond of Ken and was very fond of his father who died two years ago.

[1:29:05]

I think those are the issues that this city faces and most cities face some of that, but where you have this inequity in terms of economy, it's not a matter of color. It's really a matter of class this way or that way. What we're experiencing in Memphis today, this is so profound. You need to get this on tape. We have what I call a collision of the cultures. We have two cultures. In years past one culture was here and one culture was here. They didn't collide; they co-existed but they didn't collide. What's happened? Things have changed. You've got Willy and you've got AC, my good friend in the other office.

So now the cultures are coming together. There is some degree of equality. There are people from one culture who have risen to a different level who now collide. What will happen? What will be the fallout of that? That's the issue of the future and that will be the fourth city of Memphis when it happens. As I say, if you wanna see me you come out to Memorial Park. I already have a gravesite out there and come talk to my headstone. *[Laugh]*

[1:30:25]

*Eric:* A wrapping up question.

*Frank:* Wrapping up. That means, "Frank, don't talk so much." *[Laugh]* I've been here before. Go ahead.

*Eric:* How do you feel about – you talked about what still needs to be changed but what about the progress that's been made as an effect of the civil rights movement and since the civil rights movement?

[1:31:00]

*Frank:* Well the cultures are beginning to collide, to repeat myself. How do you determine progress in a community? Well you ask my generation, I'm soon to be 78 years old, my \_\_\_\_\_ "things are worse than they've ever before. I wish they were like they were when I was a kid growing up." Most of the people that have come to Memphis have come from north Mississippi and east Arkansas and west Tennessee who are basically rural people like my daddy who came out of Iuka, Mississippi, a rural people.

They have lived in an urban setting for a while but that's what the second Memphis was all about is all those people emerged here. Is it a better place in some ways? Well you ask Jack Bells and Henry Turley and I was Henry's pastor for 19 years, they'd say, "Mud Island looks pretty good and South Bluffs look pretty good and Peabody Place after it gets reconfigured now is gonna be a pretty good place."

[1:32:11]

Downtown has done pretty well. I mean I was on the Center City commission for a few years. Downtown has done fairly well. Is there progress there? Yeah. We have not yet learned to live in the kind of world we are now living with. Those who are younger adapt to it better because they didn't live in the old segregated world, and race is a piece of it but race is not all of it. University of Memphis has grown enormously. This school, man, I look at this building. I mean I knew Paul Jr. a long time ago.

[1:33:04]

This building, this campus, is that progress? Well yeah, I see it as progress. I regret the school system has changed but we probably knew it was gonna happen. If white folks had stayed in the school system we would probably have a little different attitude today about public education but what do you want? I mean I've studied urban cities for a long, long time. Urban cities; that's a redundancy isn't it? Urban areas. It's not so great to live in Dallas. I worked for a company that owned a lot of property in Dallas. It's not so great to live in Atlanta today. You look at the crimes. Crime in Atlanta is probably worse than it is in Memphis.

[1:34:02]

Don't go to St. Louis where my children went to school. They beat us out last month as being the worst city in America to live in.

Now we're number one in crime but New Orleans was before that. I don't know. Depends on who you ask. It's my home. I don't really wanna live anywhere else. Why? 'Cause it's all I know. My son lives in New York. My daughter practices law in DC. They didn't care for it I guess. They moved away, but it's my home. I own real estate out there at Memorial Park. I'll be there. My answer is better in some ways and different in other ways.

[1:35:00]

*Lauren:* We'd like to thank you again on behalf of Crossroads for coming out to see us today.

*Frank:* Thank you. You've done a super job as interview and camera person. You all have tolerated me and all my foolishness but you did a good job interviewing. Some folks I've been interviewed sometimes and the Lauren is so timid or didn't have good questions. You had good questions and the reason I like it is you just gave me a lot of time to vent and so I did. So thank you and thank everybody for being so nice.

*[End of Audio]*

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