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Rev. John W. Aldridge, Civil Rights Era Minister, 1968

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David Yellin-This is tape 2 of the interview with Reverend Aldridge on May 26th 1968. (Tape Break)

David Yellin-Do you have a question?

Carolyn Yellin- Well perhaps this is out of your immediate province but what was the situation of the 2nd Presbyterian church at this time, you mentioned something about the difficulty of suburban ministers, people in east Memphis being aware of what was going on, do you think this was more of a problem for 2nd Presbyterian and for Idlewild.

William Aldridge- This doesn't answer your question directly but I think it will be an interesting answer. Before this situation I was very much involved in strategy in the church the strategy of mission and the effective programs from that strategy and the execution of that strategy. I have been teaching social ethics out at the seminary and I think I have some interesting thing sot present in this manner. But here in this crisis situation I learned tactics, that is what you do on the battlefield. There I was I am told on good authority a lot circulating around to try and censure Zeke Bell, Dick Moon and myself. Now I didn't know I was on this line but I let the word out in certain places that if Zeke Bell got censured that the general assembly would never meet at the 2nd Presbyterian church in 1970. The brief history of that is I believe in the year 1965 the general assembly had been asked to come to 2nd Presbyterian church because the 2nd Presbyterian church was having some integration problem. The moderator at that time by executive order changed the meeting of the general assembly to Montreat. Finally the general 2nd Presbyterian church has requested the general assembly to meet here in 1970 and it seems this is going to be accepted and between my and perhaps others getting this information out at the lower level and interestingly enough someone from high level sort of sent down the word, the high circles of the church that the general assembly would certainly look with disfavor upon any presbytery that attempted to censure a negro ministers for being involved in civil rights activity and so we saved Zeke Bell in this way and as far as I know that is behind us now. I think at one time there was a real mood to censure Zeke Bell and Dick Moon, and I also got on it because of this Christian relations committee.

Carolyn Yellin- What is Dick Moon's situation now as regards to Presbytery?

William Aldridge- As far as I know he, Fred Neil at Southwestern is chairman of his board and he has about 7 tremendous persons on the board who have total support of him. I think there are about 4 or 5 that have some questions and maybe 1 or 2 who are really pretty perturbed about the situation but I don't believe that those one or two are going to be able to have the power that they need to do anything.

Carolyn Yellin- Now just on this same subject of other churches I would also get onto other denominations and almost as a matter of information ask, do you know of other ministers whose congregations have reacted similarly or with as much vehemence as in your case?

William Aldridge- Well it is only pertinent, it might be some personal, the Presbyterian, the national churches have a way of supporting their ministers and even though there might be a many individuals within my congregation is they can only really get to me by official action of the Presbytery which protects the Presbyterian ministers. Alright, if you will notice when the captain of human relations council sent out their letter, Monsignor Leppert got into some people didn't like what he did but Bishop Durrick and I am not sure the planning of this held a dinner in his honor and bestowed upon him some award or something. In other words this was Bishop Durrick's way of supporting Monsignor Leppert without actually supporting the specific letter to the mayor from the Catholic Human relations council. Dean Demmick when he walked down to the mayor's office that following Sunday bishop Vandross got up and said in church no priest in this denomination in my diocese does anything without my approval. That stopped all the file they couldn't do anything. Well people could talk but if you have your church authority behind you they can't act. They can talk and they can raise a lot of fuss but that is all. Now the Baptists on the other hand on their congregational formal government and this is the reason that congregationalism will not be effective in our time and churches have to realize that the Baptists cannot operate today. There is just no possible way for them to be really operative in crisis situations. Brooks Ramsey is one of the greatest men in history. Walk downtown and had a lot of trouble out at his church and see his church can fire hi (muffled). He was pretty funny about it. I saw him and he said one little old lady came up to me and she said, preacher you know you got this congregation split right down the middle. And he say why thank you, I didn't know my odds were that good. But he has been in South America on official something official for the church but I don't know his exact situation.

David Yellin-Because Rabbi Wax is in the same position.

William Aldridge- No Rabbi Wax according to my understanding in talking to him does not have a problem, he I think he has a lifetime contract there. there were a lot of people who were angry with him and he received all type of criticism from throughout the city but in his congregation there was no, I don't think that he has had individual problems no doubt.

David Yellin-But they have to act as a congregation they are responsible to no central organization.

William Aldridge- I think he is alright in time.

Carolyn Yellin- Just before we finish this I have a couple of other questions. Do you know of any other ministers other than Rabbi Wax and I know Jim Lawson who have as you say in the case that Rabbi Wax received criticism city wide. Did you receive any criticism that...

William Aldridge- I wasn't taking the papers during all of this and I know there were a lot of letters when I went in on the minister's action.

Carolyn Yellin- Did you receive hate mail or hate calls?

William Aldridge- I received a one night, somebody rang all night and when I got ready to get to bed, they wouldn't answer, every time I would pick up the phone they would hang up. So I unplugged my bedroom phone and put my overcoats over my downstairs phone and went to sleep and forgot all about it. I received several letters but not anything...

David Yellin-No threatening letters?

William Aldridge- No no threatening letters.

David Yellin-You have any other questions relating to this I would like to get back and get...

William Aldridge- Let me just mention one thing about Brooks Ramsey, this man you have to admire a great deal more than myself or a Presbyterian and Episcopal and catholic men that are walking downtown, because Brooks has nothing to back him up, there is no basis for which he...

David Yellin-Just the will of his congregation.

Carolyn Yellin- And one other question the Methodist denomination and I ask this because you think normally as the Methodists as being extremely involved were they?

William Aldridge- Yes Frank McRay and Roy Williams and several others. There really is a distinct difference in the Methodist church the downtown district and I ma not sure because Frank McRay (muffled). Generally very much aware of the situation, the outlying district on the flat who is now receiving an appointment to Lambert college, they weren't in it, they didn't understand it. Generally..

Carolyn Yellin- Well I was asking this just because as a personal observation it seemed to me that the Methodists were relatively quiet in this situation.

William Aldridge- Well there were really only 2 Methodists that stand out in my mind, McRay and Roy Williams.

Carolyn Yellin- I think that finishes off.

David Yellin-Ok well of course I would like to go ahead because I would like to get your personal involvement and the what he result of what al of this meant to you personally and would like to save some time for it but I do want to get along with your chronological order and I think we can do it.

William Aldridge- Let me because of the time go to the day of April the 3rd.

David Yellin-Alright you want to skip the March 28th riot and so on?

William Aldridge- I had a long standing appointment to speak to the conferences on social welfare in Nashville.

David Yellin-And you went?

William Aldridge- And I went. I had been up on Friday the 22nd to march in the King march. And I had, and we sold out. The comment, I hope someone get this in there but I heard the WDIA announcer say the march has been called off, white power has won over black power this morning. (muffled) Actually and also on the 28th as I said I was out of town and was not here.

David Yellin-Were you here when Martin Luther king came to speak before the...

William Aldridge- Yes I heard that first..

Carolyn Yellin- Were you at the meeting.

William Aldridge- Yes.

David Yellin-Mason Temple?

William Aldridge- Right.

Carolyn Yellin- Did you meet him at that time?

William Aldridge- No I didn't there was a large crowd and I didn't feel I should push.

David Yellin-And that was the time he announced that there was going to be a march or he would lead a march and so on. Do you happen or do you think Taylor Blair would have a tape of that speech?

William Aldridge- I don't have any idea.

David Yellin-We can't find any copy of it? Now you wanted to get, if there was nothing that happened...

Carolyn Yellin- Well before we leave this too, had you met Martin Luther King before?

William Aldridge- No.

Carolyn Yellin- You had never met him personally and you did not meet him that night though you heard him speak. Had you heard him speak before?

William Aldridge- Only on television or radio.

Carolyn Yellin- So this was your first encountering of him in person.

William Aldridge- Yes.

David Yellin-Just as a can you give a quick comment on him as a speaker?

William Aldridge- Oh tremendously impressed I remember and I wish I could remember the first work of this but anyway he said he used this quote form chaos and community on power. Power as the ability to achieve purpose I have forgotten how he said it. But anyway he said power is what makes Pharoah say yes when he wants to say no, and then he kept on going, he said power is that which will make mayor Lobe say yes when he wants to say no. he said we are going to have to escalate.,

David Yellin-Alright you weren't here the 28th, you came back that same night.

William Aldridge- Alright now the problem is that also at this time my mother died on the 28th. And this, I preached here on the 31st but between all of this I didn't get over on Wednesday night the 3rd to hear Dr. King's beautiful speech. That is one of the greatest speeches I have ever heard in my life, I have seen it on television saw it several times you know. I didn't get to see it, yes the next night. Not when it was done but the next night. And so we met on the 4th, the ministers association met on the 4th with the interdenominational minister's alliance.

David Yellin-In the morning?

William Aldridge- No, after lunch and the meeting ran all afternoon and I had another scheduled meeting with Dean Demmick and the downtown minster's association steering committee and that had to be called off anyway that is when the ministers talked themselves into leading a march until Friday. Now on the morning of the 4th the...

Carolyn Yellin- Wait excuse me you said that you met on the 3rd?

William Aldridge- Alright...

Carolyn Yellin- You met on the 4th but when you met on the 3rd is when it went on all day?

William Aldridge- Yes well all afternoon. On the afternoon of the 3rd the long awaited and the long postponed as far as I am concerned joint meeting between the Memphis minister's association and the interdenominational minister's alliance met.

David Yellin-Now the Memphis minister's association is all white?

William Aldridge- Well, no. Jim Lawson is the vice president or was the vice president this year, this past year and we do have a number of negros but it is predominantly white. And the interdenominational minister's association was all black, I have, we now have white members on that too, some. Someday let us hope that these two will merge and I wouldn't, I would like to see this take place but things may have to calm down just a little bit.

David Yellin-Excuse us please go on.

William Aldridge- Now they met as I mentioned before on the afternoon of the 3rd at which time the motion was made and seconded and finally passed to walk downtown to the mayor's office. But it had to be postponed until Friday, the Friday after King's murder.

David Yellin-Do you remember why?

William Aldridge- Because of the way they talked themselves out of going that afternoon. 5:00 and the mayor had gone home when we finally broke up.

David Yellin-Why didn't they meet the next day?

William Aldridge- They did, but they met the interdenominational minister's alliance was holding their regular meeting that day.

Carolyn Yellin- The 4th?

William Aldridge- The 4th and the Memphis minister's association met with them I missed this meeting due to a funeral. But the situation happens I had this funeral and I was back in my study at 3:30 Thursday afternoon. At approximately 3:30 Dr. Rabbi Wax called me and he said due to very certain situations and this is very interesting, I cannot march tomorrow. Will you take over and write another statement in the march. I said yes I will. He said this morning Henry Starks appointed a committee to write a theological statement in conjunction with a committee with the Memphis minister's association to be read to mayor Lobe tomorrow morning. He said can you do that, I said of course. He said why not get Frank McRay because he had made the most and he said Frank doesn't want to do it because of his personal relationship with mayor Lobe, though they disagree on many items they are very close friends. They had grown up together in this city.

David Yellin-Was he the one that was the room mate of the mayor Lobe?

William Aldridge- I am sorry I cannot say but perhaps because he called him Henry all the time, I just don't know and they had lunch together Frank McRay and Henry Lobe had lunch together on the 3rd.

David Yellin-Is it MC or MAC?

William Aldridge- McRae. District superintendent, in a city I am not really sure the exact name of it, Methodist.

Carolyn Yellin- They had lunch together on the 3rd where they did talk about this?

William Aldridge- Yes.

Carolyn Yellin- It was arranged by Frank McRae to talk to him..

William Aldridge- (Muffled) Now so Rabbi Wax has called me. I call Carl Walters who I consider to be one of the best professors of Bible at Southwestern and I consider to be one of the best brains in the city and a close personal friend because

we are trying to write a theological statement I got him. I started calling Frank McRae because I felt like we needed a broad base to have it approved. I couldn't get him but I finally got Roy Williams. Roy said I can't do that and I said well give me another Methodist and he said I will give you flat because I will do with out a Methodist before I get flat. Because he wasn't in it he was anything but. Alright I called up Monsignor Leppert and never got him, you see the phones went dead during all of this during the murder of Dr. King so you couldn't get the calls through.

Carolyn Yellin- So this is after the murder?

William Aldridge- It is happening all through this time. I called up Dean Demmick, he gave Bob Watson who is sharp. He is as sharp as you can get..

David Yellin-&And he is an Episcopalian.

William Aldridge- Right. Called up Dick Wells from Memphis theological seminary. I found out that Henry Starks already had called him Bayard and Memphis theological seminary on his committee. Finally got in touch with Henry Starks at 5:30 or perhaps a quarter to 6. I said to him when can we meet and where can we meet. He said Dr. King is speaking at Mason Temple, this is a quarter to 6 between 5:30 and a quarter to 6:00 meet us there at 7:30 and I will get my men together and you get your men together and we will write out the statement. During the mass meeting, and you know these meetings take about 3 hours so I figured we could have enough time. Alright the phones go dead at 6. I finally get through to Carl Walters and Bob Watson gets through also. We couldn't get anyone else, I just was unable to get anyone else. So we decided we had to go to Mason Temple if we didn't do anything else. Curfew was already on and everything else by the time. So we ran he curfew at 8:00 at the night of Dr. King's murder to get to Mason Temple to see Henry Starks. Thank goodness he was still there. Now that night it was sticky for white men in Mason Temple because some of my friends that I had known all through this movement in fact having white people there was sort of therapeutic for them because they said why in the world could your people do this, how could you do this and everything. Anyway it was pretty sticky there for a little while, Henry Starks this is the only time he lost his composure during this entire thing, He was worried for us and he made us get out of there. We saw Malcolm Blackburn and Henry Starks and saw them long enough to make arrangements to go home and write the statement and to get back in touch with him and everything. So we left Mason Temple and went to Carl Walters house and drew up a theological statement., The statement was written predominantly by Carl Walters and some of the key phrases such as swift dispatch were Bob Watson's and a little bit about me. Alright well we decided we had to march, there were about 3 of us and we were going to march the next morning. I finally got in touch with Dean Demmick after they had talked to Bishops and the phone rang and all that, we didn't finish until about 1:30 in between and watching Dr. King speeches on television and everything. Dean Demmick decided he said we were going to have a memorial service at St. Mary's. You see we were to go to the parking lot of St. Mary's cathedral on Friday morning at 10:00 and walk, or proceed to the mayor's office. He said we are going to have a memorial

service there . I called up Henry Starks and I said we are going to march I said, but we are going to have it on the news as a memorial service. I called up Jim Kilpatrick at the Commercial and he got it on the front page, a memorial service at St. Mary's cathedral at 10 am, Friday the 5th. Called up Dean (muffled) of WMC and got it on news there and I called up Henry Stotters. We went home at 1:30, 6:30 to 7 the next morning and I was calling all the major denomination men such as Frank McRae, everybody in every denomination to tell them what we were trying to do to get their men out there to have a memorial service which was very well attended by both black and white. Alright, I ran over to the church and got the statement mimeographed and had it available to give copies to Henry Starks and other key persons in the memorial service.

David Yellin-Now just a few clarifications, the statement that you 3 wrote the night before there was to be an additional statement by Henry Starks and his group and then both together.

William Aldridge- It was all planned to do it all together but you see the curfew broke down, you see the negros that is the whole thing the discrimination in the city was that the negros couldn't get together and we could and we did. But I couldn't get all of my men because of the communication problem.

David Yellin-You mean they couldn't get together with you?

William Aldridge- Right. And so I got the statement to Henry Starks very early and he read it and said it was alright, I got together with certain person and things were happening so fast that I do not know or remember the person, but I made sure that someone, I was to read the statement that was already predetermined. After the memorial service we were to go to the parish house of St. Mary's cathedral, I was to read he statement. I had someone to make a motion to adopt the statement and someone to second that. I had someone to make a motion that we proceed to the mayor's office and someone to second that. Now here is the beauty of the situation, the memorial service is one of the most moving things I had ever been to. As James Lawson came in he really was broken down. Now remember that he and Ben Hooks really saved the city the night before by being on television Anyway he broke down but they had him reads the scripture at tat service and he opened to the 53rd chapter of Isaiah and didn't say a word he just read it and he closed that book and it was the most moving thing that could have ever happened in my life. You know it is suffering circumstances.

David Yellin-Well I must confess I don't.

William Aldridge- Well anyway just really beautiful. Then the memorial service was over and we moved to the parish house. Rabbi Wax got up and this is really some thing, Rabbi Wax got up and he said gentlemen we have a statement to be read and I read the statement., He said Mr. Starks what have you to say, and Henry Starks got up and say I my group accept this statement and so forth and so on so Rabbi Wax said alright gentlemen you have a statement before you what will you do with it.

Somebody moved and seconded it downtown. Then a few people wanted to say, ask questions in other words delaying tactics were about to start. And this was just really something and so a couple of people kept asking questions and this sort of thing and Rabbi Wax says gentlemen you have a statement before you what will you do with it. And somebody said...they didn't even say that I believe. This was all so fast that you could hardly...and so he says how many are there in favor of the statement and the I's just shouted this thing out. And there were quiet a few no's around I understanding the back but the no's were so afraid to speak that it carried as unanimous. I understand I got that from a few people in the back that there were a few no's but....then we didn't even have to make a motion to proceed tot eh sidewalk. Rabbi Wax said gentlemen we will proceed to the sidewalk and the Reverend Henry Starks and James Lawson will line us up and we will go to the mayor's office. In the meantime Dean Demmick ran in and got that processional cross and this was just great the way everything worked out. Henry McRae wouldn't call the mayor to tell him we were coming down there and we got down to the corner of Thomas and Poplar and boy 12 squad cars came up and all that battle gear and everything.

David Yellin-Oh they came and met you and escort you?

William Aldridge- Yeah that was the only time I saw them I don't know why they ran up there at so many of them. Not 12 excuse me for the record I think I saw 3 but they looked like 12 with all those people piled up.

David Yellin-Did they come to protect you?

William Aldridge- Yes, I don't know why we had to have so many?

David Yellin-Now when you called around and told about the meeting did you indicate too that there would be a movement to the mayor's office or you didn't this was just to come to a meeting?

William Aldridge- Perhaps this is bad, I could have told a certain person I could have told Jim Kilpatrick for instance this but I didn't want it in the paper and I felt like it would be disadvantage of him to have information and not be able to print it.

David Yellin-But did you tell the ministers that you had spoke with?

William Aldridge- Henry Starks, yes I told the ones, particularly the ones I called the next morning.

David Yellin-So the plan was still to march but you didn't...

William Aldridge- Well half and half people were coming and going on this all the time. For instance Rabbi Wax who would not march on 3:30 on Thursday not only led the march but said his piece.

Carolyn Yellin- Did he ever communicate to you that he had changed his mind he was going to or he just did?

William Aldridge- Well things were happening mighty fast at that moment of course everybody was in a terrible..

David Yellin-Do you remember who did second the motion or who did second the motion?

William Aldridge- I don't ever know that it was anything I don't know that either one of those motions were made or seconded....

David Yellin-They were done so quickly?

William Aldridge- They were put through in other words Rabbi Wax had decided we are going to do this thing and he just did it.

David Yellin-He had watched television earlier and watched Alvin Barkley do it in some of the conventions and other people came after Martin and all those. Well now when you got to the mayor's office who was supposed to read the statement to the mayor?

William Aldridge- I read the statement to the mayor. David Yellin-When did you do that?

William Aldridge- Before Rabbi Wax spoke.

David Yellin-Oh you did it before he spoke.

William Aldridge- And I don't think that Rabbi Wax would spoken or Jackson would have spoken had not and this is my personal opinion and you remember this is an emotional day for all of us so I could be wrong in my observation. It is my opinion that Henry Lobe did not give us a satisfactory answer. He said gentlemen I have called Frank Miles and have told him to get the negotiations, to get the parties together to negotiate in order that we can get and these are his words, this thing behind us. Now if he had said now gentlemen I have told my men to go back to the negotiating table and not to come out until this thing is settled then I think that would have been different . But as far as what I read and I think Rabbi Wax read it to, we are going to talk some more. Well that was what we went up there for we were tired of talking. And when I read the statement and he responded like that is when Rabbi Wax said sir we are angry and these beautiful statements. And then that didn't do anything and so that was when Jackson came in with his plea.

David Yellin-But you are and I just repeat this because as I recall...

William Aldridge- Incidentally William Sloan Coffin came down from Yale and was here for that march.

Carolyn Yellin- Was he in that march?

William Aldridge- Yes.

Carolyn Yellin- I didn't ever realize that.

David Yellin-Nobody ever said a word about that.

Carolyn Yellin- Was he unidentified throughout, he was never mentioned in the paper.

William Aldridge- Yeah.

David Yellin-Where was he?

William Aldridge- I met him right outside when we were lining up to march I was in the front of the march and IO don't know where he marched but when Dick Moon decided to sit in..

David Yellin-The mayor's office?

William Aldridge- Henry Sloan Coffin said that's it you will all join him that's where you get results join him stay here. And then I lost him again I don't know where he went I don't know a think about who, where, what, he just, he was here at that time.

David Yellin-Now just again so that we are specifically clear you did read the prepared statement to the mayor and then before Rabbi Wax and reverend Jackson.

William Aldridge- I have a copy but that statement is also in the Saturday New York Times a very good excerpt on it Saturday the 6th New York Times.

David Yellin-Alright we have the New York Times, an excerpt of it or the full statement?

William Aldridge- Most of the statement is in there but not the full statement , but....

David Yellin-Do you have the original one that you worked on in sessions?

William Aldridge- Carl Walters has his own copy of the original and Bob Watson has his on copy of the original and then Carl Walters has the one that we put together. I wanted those saved and in fact I gave them back.

David Yellin-Well we certainly would love those for the files, the archives at Memphis state.

William Aldridge- Carl Walters and Bob Watson.

Judy Schultz- Then after Reverend Jackson made his speech what happened next?

William Aldridge- Every decided it was time to leave and we started out and that was when Dick Moon made his statement.

David Yellin-And Dick Moon said what generally?

William Aldridge- I would like brother Dick to tell you, my recollection is I am going to stay here and fast until we are finished. Now I am tired, this is the same old thing you have been telling us all along that is what Dick said.

Carolyn Yellin- And none of the other ministers did join Dick Moon at that time.

William Aldridge- It was my understanding and it is a lot of confusion because there were so many people in the mayor's office, that Lawson started to say and they jerked Lawson out of there because he had to leave. Now that is my understanding.

Judy Schultz- How did the other ministers feel about Rabi Wax, what he had done and reverend Jackson and Dick Moon.

William Aldridge- Well it is my opinion the ministers who went up there, we went up there to get results. And everyone was very pleased with Rabbi Wax. We felt like a lot of people stood tall that day and this is from the white side and I know a lot of the turmoil and problems that many of these ministers went through to make that march and so I have a great admiration for many of them. From the black standpoint, many of them came up a little bit late but still they were there. Now, H. Ralph Jackson said in a meeting on Monday afternoon the 8th of April, he said I understand Rabbi Wax is in trouble, he says.....now wait a minute Monday afternoon the 15th I guess.

David Yellin-We follow you the memorial march.

William Aldridge- Right, because anyway, I understand that Rabbi Wax and some of these other ministers are in trouble who helped us. Don't anybody help us unless we help them, you tell me these people who are giving him trouble and we will put them out of business. We will close down. Don't nobody help us unless we help them.

David Yellin-Now you did ask your time has come, excuse me, can I just ask you one question and it is an awful question and if you don't care to answer it then don't feel, please don't, just sort of a topper to this. How do you feel that what you did has been a significance to what has happened and I mean not only you specifically but the other men with you, your point of view. Would you have done other wise, I mean how do you evaluate here?

William Aldridge- No I wouldn't have done otherwise the actual tactics that we took and might have changed up somewhat because we had no idea of the situation. I am not talking about the march downtown I was thinking about the letter to the mayor. Actually did accomplish less, I think he got even more support in a certain way.

Carolyn Yellin- Reaction against your letter.

William Aldridge- Right. But I got into this thing again the polarization and I just felt like we cannot have. And I said to the minister's association on that March the 4th that if you want to see the Kerner Commission Report, the commission on civil

disorder report, it is vividly portrayed for you just look at Memphis Tennessee, this is what they are talking about and that was my whole situation right there.

David Yellin-Do you feel that Memphis has changed any or will change any as a result of all that has happened to it?

William Aldridge- As a larger awareness on the part of many white ministers I think there is really going to be more attempt to really do something in this city. But I had a real concern that as long as this large white, well you just have to call them racists, electorate is out here we are in trouble. But there will be things done, you know right after King's death there was just frenzied meeting everywhere all the time, now if we can get some kind of coordination out of this and something big taken place then I think then in certain areas we can have a tremendous impact on the city. But the situation is not going to be solved until such time when a large majority (muffled) is some how changed.

Carolyn Yellin- This morning on the religion and news program did you by any chance here that?

William Aldridge- No.

Carolyn Yellin- They had a Presbyterian ministers in Chicago, I believe the 1st Presbyterian church there, united Presbyterian and he spoke on riot-watching as having become a national sport. And he actually said I very strong terms that there, this satisfies the lust for violence that he thinks is part of American Life.

David Yellin-You allude to this earlier that they wanted some thing to happen, or needed something.

William Aldridge- Well I didn't mean it as exactly as far as that. Even though I did allude to it. Let me just say this. The terrible tragedy in Memphis Tennessee is that it could have all been averted. The final agreement was that agreement that had been already for all practical purposes consummated many weeks previously but the newspaper came out with the thing that Lobe compromised it and there was just no reason, plus if the white community hadn't been so anti-organized labor and the newspapers hadn't been so bias then they might have been able to reach some solution.

David Yellin-Well wouldn't it have come out in another way because if you say that the large segment of the white community is racist they would have been racist even if this had been settled and it might have come out of it another way. So that the problem is there regardless.

William Aldridge- The problem is there, and my standpoint is that I didn't create any of this problem from ways I accused of creating it. It was there I just...

David Yellin-One thing we didn't cover and it is absolutely we are being very rude for keeping you and we will send you a note.

William Aldridge- I can stay just a couple more minutes.

David Yellin-And that is we never talked about your leaving, how come?

Carolyn Yellin- To go to Princeton theological seminary is that on the tape?

William Aldridge- Right as had been asked to join the faculty at Preston Theological Seminary and during all of this situation well in the lasted few weeks of it I did not know before hand but Dr. McCord was in the process of getting my name before the faculty and having me up there and of course now I am and having me appointed to the faculty but this has been going on for several weeks. He mentioned my name at a faculty meeting in connection with what was going on in Memphis a couple months ago.

Carolyn Yellin- Is Dr. McCord who is..

William Aldridge- The president, James I. McCord.

Carolyn Yellin- Was he formerly at Vanderbilt?

William Aldridge- No this is (muffled).

Carolyn Yellin- Oh yes.

William Aldridge- I am going there, now the real story behind this is that for good or bad as a tactical move I resigned at Idlewild before this appointment came through, because from the standpoint of what I am saying here I just did not feel that Idlewild was ready to respond to the situation. It was Idlewild's decision generally speaking that if they take things slow and easy everything will sort of work its way out. I believe that our nation is in a crisis situation and therefore we must respond tot his situation rather than if you just don't say anything about it and hope it will go away that type.

David Yellin-Yes, we have come across this.

William Aldridge- I had no pressure on me to resign.

David Yellin-I see, this was on your own accord.

William Aldridge- Right.

David Yellin-Do you think there would have been pressure on you to resign?

William Aldridge- No. In fact, now that it is over everybody is going to miss me and so forth except for a few that were pretty angry about this situation.

David Yellin-Now that it is over or now that you are leaving?

William Aldridge- Now that I am leaving is what I meant to say that everybody is going to miss me. There are a few that are still angry though, but just generally speaking that is all.

David Yellin-Yeah do you think Memphis is any different to any other place in the country in regard to what you say that they are a great majority of white people that are still racists.

William Aldridge- It is hard for me to determine I have been so wrapped up in this concrete situation I wouldn't like to generalize. I do know that in the UPUSA church they have been able to make more positive responses, particularly to the, in light of the murder of Dr. King. But the northerners have always seen Dr. King as sort of a man who was going to tear up these southerners anyway. So it is hard to fight white southern prejudice, I mean they saw him as the hero against white southern prejudice. But what really got me at Idlewild is Idlewild was not ready to stand up being counted and would not mention Dr. King and try everything that came up was sort of eased out of and wasn't making a positive decision to move forward and which I did at this time and in this situation I just could not stay at a church that was not ready to stand up and be counted. In a certain sense I felt like I would be a hypocrite to do it./

David Yellin-Yeah how come Bill, you are Bill Aldridge, I mean why you and all those thousands of other people what do you owe your success to? Your enlightenment?

William Aldridge- That I can't say.

David Yellin-I wish you could say.

Carolyn Yellin- Another question that Willy Morris on PBO spoke I believe the night of the King assassination. Mississippi boy now editor of (muffled) and his assessment was that Martin Luther King was feared by southerners because they knew he was right.

William Aldridge- I think so and see the thing was he was so close to the church and that made him so (muffled).

Judy Schultz- Do you foresee ever coming back to Memphis?

William Aldridge- I think that because of this situation I am closer to many people than I ever have been in my life and I have tremendous admiration for many ministers both black and white and for a number of white people. Now percentage wise that is very small but there has been some tremendous persons involved in situations and I have a feeling of closeness and a tie to them but I don't know it would be difficult to experience with anyone else because it was done in such a concrete reality of such a tragedy.

David Yellin-You have been climbing up the mountaintop together.

Carolyn Yellin- Were there certain people who you feel made a vast changeover as the result of their involvement in this? Do you feel that some people that redemption was achieved out of this experience by some people?

William Aldridge- Right. In fact, I, Jim Lawson is the first I have heard and I have used this, Memphis has truly experienced crucifixion and I think there is a real possibility for resurrection and you see this in certain persons. And it is rather (muffled) it is different types, you can't say that this one and this one....

David Yellin- Well thank you very much.

William Aldridge- Well thank you.

(Tape End)