Mark Gonnerman: Good evening, and welcome to the Aurora Forum. Tonight our program is “What Would Martin Say? An Evening with Clarence B. Jones.” Mr. Jones and I will first engage in a conversation together here on stage and eventually we’ll open up to audience questions and comments.

I’d like to remind you at the start that the Aurora Forum is a program that comes out of Stanford’s Office of Public Affairs and Stanford Continuing Studies. These free and open programs are created to serve the larger community. You can go on to our Web site, auroraforum.org, to see transcripts, audio recordings, video recordings of programs in our archive, and also get further information about the conversation we’re about to have tonight.

Mr. Clarence B. Jones worked closely with the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. as an attorney, draft speechwriter, comrade, and confidant from 1960 to 1968. Clarence Jones was a key member of Dr. King’s inner circle of strategic advisers who helped not only with legal matters but also with fundraising, press relations, and tactical planning of all kinds. Dr. King held Clarence Jones in high regard, writing of him in 1962, after they had been working together for a couple of years, that he is “a man of sound judgment, deep insight, and great dedication.” Dr. King went on to add that he is also “a man of great integrity.” The historical record indicates that Dr. King and Clarence Jones deeply trusted each other, as together they worked to support a largely successful but tragically aborted human liberation movement that attempted to close the gap between America’s professed ideals and the actual day-to-day life situation that millions of Americans – particularly Americans of African descent – have had to endure on this continent for hundreds of years. Their tireless efforts, along with the collaborative, collective, multifaceted efforts of countless others, contributed to psychic healing, awakened a sense of self-worth and human dignity, and led to the passage of the Civil Rights Acts of 1964 and 1965. All this inspired a heightened concern for social and economic justice that we hope we’re on the verge of recovering today.
Clarence Jones is now a scholar-in-residence at Stanford at the Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute, where he has just completed a book, *What Would Martin Say?* that will be out from HarperCollins this coming April, and where he remains while working on his memoir. Clarence is just back from Atlanta, where his footprints were added to the International Civil Rights Walk of Fame that is part of the Martin Luther King National Historic Site and the King Center right there in the vicinity of Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta. So once again, please join me in welcoming Clarence Jones to the Aurora Forum stage. [Applause]

Clarence Jones: Thank you very much

Gonnerman: Clarence, there’s so much for us to talk about tonight; the time will go by very quickly. I’d like to begin with the story of how Dr. King recruited you in the first place. So let’s go back to 1960. You’re the holder of a bachelor’s degree from Columbia University, where you majored in political science. You got your law degree from the Boston University Law School, and you joined an entertainment law firm in Beverly Hills while living in a beautiful house in a Pasadena suburb with your wife. You have a baby daughter and another child on the way. You’re twenty-nine years old and things are looking good. And then you get a phone call from a mentor. What happened?

Jones: Well, I got a phone call from Judge Hubert Delaney. But just before I continue this, let me just pause for a moment and say that I’m very pleased to be here. Certainly, my efforts in connection with my memoirs and the book would not have been possible – that is, it would have been possible, but it wouldn’t have been as substantive and I believe as good – had I not had the access and the support of the incredible staff and resources and database at the King Institute. And because we’re at the Aurora Forum at Stanford University, and you know I come from back East and I spent a lot of time as an investment banker, I want to make it very clear that in any remarks that I make about Stanford University, I am speaking for myself only. I’m not representing the views of the Institute, but I am representing the views that Stanford should hear when I get to that point.

Gonnerman: We look forward to getting to that point. [Laughter]

Jones: In direct response to your question, as you know, we’re almost forty years to the date of Dr. King’s assassination. Forty-eight years ago, I was twenty-nine years old. But let me give you a little more of a start at a context. On June 25, 1950, the Korean War broke out. I was in college, and to avoid being drafted, you had to be able to keep a certain level of grades to keep a student deferment. I graduated in 1953, and because I had not clearly decided what I wanted to do to apply to a graduate school, my draft board snatched me and I was drafted into the military in August 1953. And when I went into the military, because I had opposed, on ideological grounds, the Korean War and because I had been very much influenced by some near mentors and some distant ideological mentors like Paul Robeson and other people, when I went into the army and I was confronted with signing a whole group of papers, including a loyalty oath (the attorney general listed some 400 organizations which you had to say that you had never been a part of – organizations that were either supposed to be or were determined to be Communist organizations or so-called Communist front organizations), and since I had been president of the Young Progressives of America at Columbia University, which was
a student organization following the Wallace movement, and I saw that that was on the organization list, I didn’t sign it. And so I was put in an interesting status in the military when I went in. I took a test and because of my testing ability, they put me in counter-intelligence (G2), and then they found out that I had not signed the loyalty oath, and then they put me in hold-over status.

Gonnerman: You were a security risk.

Jones: After twenty-one consecutive months of honorable service, good conduct medal, soldier of the month, and so forth, I was discharged from the military as a security risk, and I was discharged and got an undesirable discharge. I had to engage the American Civil Liberties Union in order to sue the army to enable me to eventually get an honorable discharge. That enabled me to go to law school on the Korean GI Bill. So I felt I had paid my dues a little bit, so when I got a call from Judge Hubert Delaney, who was my mentor, telling me that I had to help out because Martin King had been indicted by the state of Alabama for tax evasion, I said, “I can’t help.” But I want to give you a flavor of that just a little bit by reading certain excerpts from the book.

This is one of the chapters. It says:

Martin Luther King, Jr. was coming to meet me at my home. It would be social, but not a social visit. Like Uncle Sam in those recruiting posters, Dr. King wanted to enlist me in his war, but I had already become a conscientious objector. It was a long time and yet never long enough. It was a time when not the few, but the many, believed, as surely as they believed that gravity makes things fall, in the racial superiority of the white race. This was a time when more than a few agreed that because man is made in God’s image, and God isn’t black, that the Negro is therefore not a man. It was a time when far more than many insisted that the law needed to separate blacks from whites, not only today, but tomorrow and forever. It also was a time when I was happily living in a scenic white suburb of Los Angeles in a pleasant ranch-style contemporary with an attractive wife – white wife – and less than a year out of law school working as an entertainment lawyer at a small Beverly Hills firm where I hoped someday to make partner and enjoy all the rights and privileges pertaining thereto: a lavish salary and everything it could buy, including the freedom never again to worry about how much I had left in my pocket….

The phone had rung several days before: Hubert Delaney calling from New York. I had gotten to know Hubert, a prominent Negro lawyer and former judge, during my college days. He had generously written a letter of recommendation to Boston University Law School. He said that Dr. King had been indicted and they needed somebody to be a law clerk, and I said, “I’d like to help, but really, Judge, I’m here in Los Angeles and I can’t do it.” With disappointment in his voice, Hubert thanked me, and that was that, or so I thought until the next day, when Dr. King’s personal secretary from the Southern Christian Leadership Conference called to say that the man was going to be in Los Angeles over the weekend delivering the keynote address at the World Affairs Council dinner Saturday night, and would it be possible for him to stop by the house for a brief chat on Friday night after the dinner just to say hello. I laughed, marveling that the judge hadn’t given up. What was I supposed to say: No?
No, I couldn’t say no, and so came the knock on the door. There stood a man of medium stature wearing a dark suit, white shirt, skinny tie, and fedora. “How do you do?” he said. “I’m Martin.” Next to him was a man similarly dressed, The Reverend Bernard Lee, King’s aide-de-camp. We shook hands and I invited them in. King first noticed how the house had been built around an existing tree that would have dominated the living room if not for the hundreds of potted plants, courtesy of my wife’s green thumb. Then he glanced up at the place where a portion of the roof had been retracted for the night – a nice architectural touch that paid off whenever the stars were aligned in the sky as they were then, and not in a way that said I’d done well for myself. “Pretty nice house you have here, Mr. Jones,” he said. I introduced him to Anne, who had grown up in New York City, the daughter of a prominent family, so she had met her share of important people. But in front of Martin Luther King, she seemed awestruck. It’s funny; before he had arrived, I had actually wondered whether he’d be shocked to see me married to a white woman – something that was still illegal in most southern states, and whether this miscegenation would put him off. He was, after all, a southerner himself, but he sure didn’t seem put off. He acted gracious and appeared charmed by her.

We sat on the sofa in front of the table of snacks she had set out. He said, “I’m thankful to Judge Delaney that he could set this up. Hubert had some very nice things to say about you,” he said. “Very nice, very complimentary.” And the small talk went on for some time about how Dr. King had earned his Ph.D. from Boston University School of Theology in 1955, the year before I had entered law school; about how he had formed the Southern Christian Leadership Conference about the time I was a first-year law student; about the Montgomery bus boycott and the thrilling Supreme Court ruling; about the success on Broadway of my friend Lorraine Hansberry’s A Raisin in the Sun; about the coming presidential election and the possible nomination of Senator John F. Kennedy as the Democratic candidate; and about my background as the only child of a maid and gardener-chauﬀeur living with two foster families before ending up at a Catholic boarding school where I took four years of religious Latin.

This clearly interested him. “As you know,” he said, “I was just indicted in Alabama for perjury, lying on my tax return. They say I was evading taxes. I don’t think I have to tell you that I did no such thing, but I’ll tell you anyway: I did no such thing.” And I said, “You have an excellent legal team, the cream of the crop. I’m sure you’ll beat it.”

Now he appeared to shift gears, telling me about his trip the previous year to India for meetings with the adherents of Mohandas Gandhi, who had famously been in great part responsible for the British departure from the subcontinent through his policy of religiously devoted nonviolence. Gandhi’s tactics and strategies, King said, were directly applicable to the American civil rights movement. He used the word “movement.” What struck me was how much eye contact Dr. King made with Anne while he spoke, as though the way to me was through her. If that were so, I would have been on the next plane to Montgomery judging by how entranced she was by everything he said. “The movement,” he said, “is fortunate to have generous support of many northern white liberals, including lawyers.” He paused, possibly to consider
telling me about one of his closest advisers, Stanley Levison, a successful white businessman who had gone back to school to earn a law degree in order to improve his effectiveness as a liberal activist. It was Stanley Levison who prepared Dr. King’s tax returns, and it was he who acted as an agent for the book King wrote about the Montgomery boycott. Stanley, it should be pointed out, refused every dime of compensation ever offered to him by the SCLC and Martin Luther King, and it’s safe to say that if Stanley had ever been convinced that complete civil rights for Negroes could have been accomplished somehow by his own impoverishment and debt, Stanley would have considered it a bargain. Stanley Levison was one of Martin’s closest and most trusted advisers, someone who deserves a statue for his devotion to Martin and work with civil rights. But Dr. King didn’t mention him then.

He continued, “One of my concerns, however, is our dire need of committed Negro professionals – doctors, accountants, insurance agents, particularly lawyers. The movement doesn’t have enough of the people like you. We’d like to see them get more involved with the movement to help our southern brothers and sisters.” “I understand,” I said, that he believed there was going to be a concerted effort by the white power structure to intimidate the civil rights movement, etcetera. And he said, “Well, what they can’t do to us with clubs and dogs and fire hoses and bullets, they’ll do with law suits and criminal cases. They’ll try to bleed us dry. This indictment is just a first cut of that.” Now was the time for me, he said, to offer whatever assistance I could in the way of legal research. I said I would do that, but I couldn’t go to Montgomery. I said, “I’m happy to help you, but I simply can’t leave my family.”

After he left, I faced the wrath – actually, the frustration – of Anne Aston Warder Norton Jones, daughter of the late William Warder Norton, better known as W. W. Norton, cofounder of the eminent publishing house. “What are you doing that’s so goddamned important that you can’t go off for a few weeks to help him?” she said. “The man came all the way here to meet you to ask you personally.” “Come on,” I said. “Just because some Negro preacher got his hand caught in the cookie jar, that’s not my problem.” Needless to say, this was not my finest moment. [Laughter] Anne was furious. “You mean you think he really did it? Shame on you!” It was a long night between my wife and me, but not a long, dark night of the soul. I felt comfortable with my decision. Truly God himself could not have dissuaded me, and he didn’t. Saturday morning, I got another call from Dr. King’s secretary in Alabama, this time inviting Anne and me to attend Sunday church services. I told Anne about it and she looked at me and she said, “You may not be going to Montgomery, but you are going to church this Sunday if Dr. King is inviting you.” So I went alone, however. About a half hour away on the freeway, I went to Baldwin Hills. [I’m reading and also summarizing to get through it.]

Dr. King was in the church as a guest preacher. He was introduced and then he said, “Brothers and sisters, the text of my sermon today concerns the role and responsibility of the Negro professionals to the masses of our brothers and sisters who are struggling for civil rights in the South.” [Laughter] With a natural storyteller’s ease, he related how the Montgomery bus boycott’s Supreme Court decision had galvanized tens of thousands of ordinary southern Negroes to begin to think of
themselves as human beings, and how, if you visited the South now, you could just sense that a new day was coming. I leaned forward in my seat, eager to hear whatever came out of this man’s mouth. With just these few words, witnessed in person instead of heard over the radio or quoted in the newspaper, I realized I had never heard anyone so thoroughly capable of transfixing the listener. It was magic. What Frank Sinatra was renowned for doing with his singing voice the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. did with his speaking voice. The phrasing was immaculate, his inflection giving you half the story by itself. The hair on the back of my neck stood up, and I was glad that Anne hadn’t come. She would have been elbowing me in the ribs as she figured out long before I got the point of what the sermon was. To me, King had chosen the right venue for such a sermon. It occurred to me that there might not have been another black Baptist church anywhere else in America where his message could have reached so many targeted ears. Damn, I thought, this guy King is really smart. I get it; at least I see what he wants to do. I get what the big deal is. Actually, I just didn’t know what I hadn’t gotten. He spoke of those Negroes who had been fortunate to become doctors and lawyers and accountants and performing artists, and what they morally owed those black adults, especially in the Jim Crowe South, who had never had the chance to do what they did, and those black children who would never by themselves rise above poverty and indignity. It was powerful stuff, made poignant when he noted the literally hundreds of offers from white northern professionals, particularly lawyers. What a shame it was, he said, that the kindness, generosity, and good will of those whites, while dearly appreciated, was not dwarfed by the kindness, generosity, and good will of those Negroes most in a position to offer them to their own people. Then came a brief pause. For example, he continued, there’s a young man with us in this church today who my respected friends and colleagues in New York tell me is a highly gifted lawyer. They tell me that this young man’s brain has been touched by God. They tell me this young man is so excellent he can walk into any law library in the country and in minutes find cases and citations that an ordinary lawyer wouldn’t find even after a full day of looking. They tell me that, then, when this young man writes it down in support of a legal argument, his words are so compelling and persuasive that they all but just jump off the page.

For a moment, but only a moment, I wondered whether this young lawyer he was talking about was me. But no, it couldn’t have been. The lawyer Martin described obviously had skills far beyond mine. I decided I definitely wanted to meet this young man before leaving church. [Laughter] Then came the diamond bullet of recognition right between my eyes. This gentlemen, Dr. King continued, lives in a suburb of Los Angeles in a fine, fine home—a home with a tree in the middle of the living room [Laughter] and a ceiling that opens up to the sky. Oh, no, dear Lord, I said. I recently had a chance to meet this man, Dr. King said, as I slumped down in my seat trying to hide. He has a convertible automobile parked in his driveway, and a lovely fountain. Martin Luther King never looked directly at me, though he ended up making eye contact with everyone else there, so it seemed as they wrapped into his words the way only black folk know how to do in church, with “Oohs” and “Aahs” and “Amens” and “Hallelujahs” and other assorted verbal punctuations. But, he continued after a dramatic pause, I’m afraid this gifted young man has forgotten from
whence he came. Now you could hundreds of people’s “sss” and “hmm” in a way
that means “for shame.” [Laughter] I tried to sink farther in my seat, feeling like Dr.
King was the only one there not looking at me. Of course, it wasn’t true. No one else
could have known who he was referring to, but the shame and recognition felt like a
theatrical spotlight and a knife in my belly – one that I held myself. He said, “And
he told me that his parents were domestic servants – his mother a maid and a cook
and his father a chauffeur and a gardener. So here was this Negro woman working in
a white woman’s house who had to send her boy away to live with others, telling him
‘Life ain’t easy, son, but you can’t give up. I’m doing this for you.’”

Hearing my mother quoted in the exact words I remembered, my mind began running
a movie of my mom’s life – her hard life, her heartbreaking life, her life that ended at
52 years of age of cancer with pitifully few days of pleasure, days that didn’t even
include her ultimate dream of seeing her only son’s college graduation. Any parent
knows that having to send a child away is an incessant and nearly unendurable pain,
one that I was too immature to understand. At the time, I believed the pain of
separation to be mine only. Not until later, and too late to say thank you, did I realize
that I had been the lucky one.

Now a second movie began, this one starring every other Negro mother, generations
of them, who did as well as possible under the circumstances – all sorts of
circumstances, few of them good. Their words of advice weren’t always heeded, but
they insisted that their children get an education – the education they hadn’t had
access to. Those children who didn’t heed them and those who did soon learned the
hard way why education was so important, because a Negro had to be twice as good
to be considered as good as a white. You couldn’t argue with these hard and fast
rules the way you couldn’t argue with the laws of physics, and mom said, “Life ain’t
easy, son, but you can’t give up.”

This all would have been painful and persuasive enough if Dr. King had ended just
there, but he didn’t. In closing, he recited the Langston Hughes poem titled “Mother
to Son.” I had long ago memorized the words and lip-synched them as he spoke:

Well, son, I'll tell you:
Life for me ain't been no crystal stair.
It's had tacks in it,
And splinters,
And boards torn up,
And places with no carpet on the floor --
Bare.
But all the time
I've been a-climbin' on,
And reachin' landin's,
And turnin' corners,
And sometimes goin' in the dark
Where there ain't been no light.
So boy, don't you turn back.
Don't you set down on the steps
'Cause you finds it's kinder hard.  
Don't you fall now --  
For I'se still goin', honey,  
I'se still climbin',  
And life for me ain't been no crystal stair.  

Tears rolled down off my cheeks, which might have given me away as the culprit if the feeling hadn’t come on so many others, too. Only a few in the church were dry-eyed. Cries of “Hallelujah” and “Amen” mercifully ended the service. People flowed out of the pews and the line up the aisle moved slowly, with dozens stopping at the back to thank Martin Luther King and get his autograph. No question: he was black Elvis. At last came my turn. He saw me coming and smiled like a man holding a winning Irish sweepstakes ticket or a Cheshire cat who had just cornered a juicy mouse. I smiled, too, but not quite so ingenuously. My smile was, well, sheepish. “I hope,” he said, “that you didn’t mind me using you to make a point in my sermon. We Baptist preachers have to do that sometimes. There were a lot of people here in the church I needed to reach today, and I always use whatever I think is going to be most effective. No offense, Mr. Jones.” I walked over to Dr. King and I said, “The only thing I need to know is when you and Judge Delaney want me to meet.”  

[Applause]

Gonnerman: So you had a life-changing experience.  

Jones: Yes.  

Gonnerman: First, you finished the tax evasion case. You won that.  

Jones: Well I didn’t win it; the lawyers won it. By the way, just for a fact, he was indicted in February of 1960 and he was acquitted in April of 1960. The team that he had was made up of three lawyers out of Chicago, Bob Ming, Layton, and Chauncey Eskridge, and two of the lawyers had also been former IRS agents. And Hubert Delaney was a magnificent trial lawyer, and Phil Gray, a local lawyer. It was a criminal case for perjury. They literally destroyed the government’s case. It was amazing, when you think about it, that in April 1960, an all-white jury acquitted this controversial minister, because to have convicted him would have been a testimony to sheer idiocy. The government’s case was so destroyed that even if the jury didn’t like Martin Luther King, there was nothing they could convict him for because Bob Ming, who had been an IRS agent, they would just go through each count of the indictment and each of the government’s evidence and they would totally destroy it. So he was acquitted by an all-white jury.  

Gonnerman: This was just the first of many government cases trying to get in the way of this nascent movement.  

Jones: Oh, sure. There’s no question about it. I suppose the high point…. There was always litigation, mostly by states or federal authorities against the movement, the leadership of the movement, because Dr. King, Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and other people – SNCC, the NAACP corps – were challenging the system. I suppose the most threatening challenge to me was when the state of Alabama
got slick and very ingenious and when they sued the *New York Times* and Dr. King and the top leadership of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference based on a full-page ad that was placed in the *New York Times* on March 29, 1960, and that full-page ad contained some minor factual errors – what the law would say were not necessarily material. An example: The ad said, “The students sang ‘My ‘tis of thee.’” “The students sang, ‘The Star Spangled Banner.'” Errors of that magnitude. In any event, they sued the *New York Times* and Dr. King and the Reverend Shuttlesworth, Lowery, Steel, Seay for millions of dollars, and it was clear to us that this was an effort to politically and to financially decapitate the movement. The reason I say that is because when Stanley Levison and I, at Martin’s request, went in to meet with the lawyers for the *New York Times* (they were represented by Lord, Day, and Lord, a very distinguished law firm at the time, something out of the *Great Gatsby* – I mean, every time I see the *Great Gatsby* movie, I think that’s the way the lawyers for the *New York Times* looked with their spats and their glasses and their vests, and so forth), their inclination was to settle. Their inclination was to try to offer a retraction in an effort to mitigate damages. And they said to us, Well, in effect, you know, you guys have nothing to lose, but we are a corporation, and so forth. And I remember saying to them (they were young, inexperienced, but very smart lawyers), and I said, “If you do this, if you give in to this, they are going to hold your feet to the fire and you’re not going to be able to send your reporters in.” Now, their number one reporter at the time was a fellow by the name of Claude Sitton, and if you don’t fight this (and it was really difficult), the FBI files will reveal, and the record is a matter of public record, that I was never a party; I never knew what the *New York Times*’s lawyers were saying to the *Times*’s ownership. I do know, however, that after the case was won, that Arthur Sulzberger – “Punch” Sulzberger – the publisher of the *Times*, the father of the current publisher of the *Times* … I was at a private party with him, and he said that he really thanked us. He said that we were really the conscience standing firm.

In order to defend this case, we didn’t have any money, so part of my job was to, in effect, be the coordinating chief of legal staff to raise money and to assemble a committee to defend us against the suit. And we were fortunate enough to persuade William P. Rogers, former secretary of state and attorney general, a Republican, who was the head of the firm at the time called Rogers & Wells, to take the case pro bono. And they took the case all the way up to the Supreme Court, resulting in the landmark decision of *Sullivan v. The New York Times*, which today is the seminal case on the law of libel. That was one of the major responsibilities I had, among others.

**Gonnerman:** Let’s talk a little bit about the nuts and bolts of having a movement of this magnitude. You just mentioned fundraising. How do you pull together and manage the funds? Let’s go behind the scenes.

**Jones:** Well, the person who really was the quarterback of fundraising was Stanley Levison. I guess I was the left halfback or maybe the wide receiver. Martin had a coterie of people around him. Sometimes that coterie operated in a quasi-, semi-formal organizational form such as a research-advisory committee. It consisted of people like Bayard Rustin and Vincent Harding and Professor Lawrence Reddick and Cleveland Robinson and Ralph Halsteen and myself and Andy Young, etcetera. Then he had strategically based people like Harry Belafonte and Arthur and Marian Logan in New York and John and Dede Drew in Birmingham … a number of people. The money was
very important. The best example I can give to you is that, you know, in late 1965-early 1966, I was invited to be a partner at a Wall Street investment banking firm, and by accepting that invitation, I became the first African-American partner in a Wall Street investment banking firm and the first allied member of the New York Stock Exchange. But when I told Martin about this – that I had been invited by Sandy Weill, who created Citigroup, and Arthur Levin, Jr., two-term chairman of the Securities and Exchange Commission, and Roger Berland – his first reaction was that he didn’t want me to do it. His first reaction was that it would cause problems for him because of how closely we were associated. He said, “How is it going to look?” People were already suggesting that he had a Swiss bank account. How would it look if his personal lawyer were somebody on Wall Street? What turned him around was that I said, “Well, yeah, I understand that. Bottom line,” I said, “If you don’t want me to do it, it’s going to be hard [because the SCLC wasn’t paying me], but if you really feel that strongly about it, then I’ll have to reconsider.” Then Stanley was the one who said, “Hold on, Martin. You know,” he said, “the one thing is that this could possibly be very beneficial because if Clarence goes and does this, he’s going to have access to capital and access to more people with money than we currently have.” When Martin heard that, he said, “I agree.” [Laughter] And, as a matter of fact, I occasionally see my partners. Sandy Weill retired, and I see him. You know, the firm couldn’t make any direct contributions to the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, but the rules were a little more flexible than they are now, so I think of 1966-67, when I’d be out of the office so much. I’d put in an expense report, and most of my expenses really would be related to my work with Martin. They’d look at my expense report and say, “Yeah, OK, Clarence, we know.” That was their indirect way of helping me. However, I still had to keep my production up. Tony Brown out there knows what that means. It means that you can very well be committed, but at the end of the day, it’s how much money you bring into the bottom line, and I was successful bringing a significant amount to the bottom line.

Be that as it may, money was critical, and we were fortunate. Harry Belafonte was critical to this effort. I can remember Harry performing in Canada, being on stage, and he’d get my message. I’d say, “It’s urgent.” And he’d call me or his secretary would call me, and Harry would say, “Could you make it fast? I’m calling you during a break.” And I’d say, “But I need time to talk.” So I could hear him talking to Phil Stein, his manager: “Tell ‘em we need 10 to 15 more minutes. We’re not going to go back on.” And when I see Harry now, I say, “Boy, you were something else,” because he was there. People forget that he was there at the time and he was at the top of his game. He was one of the most celebrated entertainers in America, and there was never a time…. The best way I can describe Harry is always with the question of when and how much. That’s the only thing he needed to know. And, quite frankly, that was my attitude. I would say to Stanley, “I don’t know how I’m going to do it, but….,” He would say, “You know, we’ve got to do it, Clarence; we need $50,000.”

**Gonnerman:** And you had the contacts.

**Jones:** First of all, the record should be clear. There was as big a financial support network around Martin that, in addition to individuals, I want the record to reflect so that those labor unions that stood with us … I want everybody to know that they were incredible. And they were 1199; they were the United Packing House Workers out of
Chicago, they were the District 65 Retail Wholesale Workers’ Union. To a lesser extent, but important, the Auto Workers. But it was 1199, District 65, Ralph Halsteen and the United Packing House Workers, and the United Electrical Workers. It was the same thing: I’d call up Cleveland Robinson, and the first question I’d get in the phone call: “Clarence, how much?” And it was interesting, the way they raised money. They would go to their union membership and they would say, “We just got a call from Dr. King,” or “We just got a call from Clarence Jones, Dr. King’s lawyer,” and they need so and so and so and so and so. And they would take up a collection. It’s not as if they just automatically went in and wrote a check. They did it with the consent of their members. Those were very special times. You can’t run a movement without money. You can’t run a presidential campaign without money.

**Gonnerman:** And you were also often raising bail. Let’s turn here to, let’s say, Birmingham in ’63. What was that about? Why Birmingham?

**Jones:** Why Birmingham? Birmingham followed Albany, Georgia. The movement in Albany, Georgia, had been somewhat fractured. The objective of desegregating interstate bus facilities and public accommodations in Albany, Georgia, had not been successfully achieved. After having not succeeded (and there’s a difference between not succeeding and failure; you may not think there’s a difference, but there is a difference), as a result of not succeeding to achieve the objectives that we wanted to achieve, not necessarily it being a failure completely, we calculatedly, with premeditated thought, we (Martin Luther King, Fred Shuttlesworth) decided we wanted to embark and initiate a movement in a place where we felt we had the best strategic chance of succeeding. Now, why was there a strategic chance? Because we would be going into a community that would be perhaps less fractured and less divisive than Albany was. One of the leaders of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, Fred Shuttlesworth, had developed a very strong local following, notwithstanding the fact that there was what I call a class difference. There was the middle-class leadership in Birmingham that wanted to pursue a much less confrontational strategy than the local people in the Alabama human rights and Christian movements. Birmingham was so important that Martin called a retreat in January 1963 to go to Dorchester, at which we discussed this back and forth twenty-four hours a day. And then we came back to New York and we held a planning meeting in Harry Belafonte’s apartment. And that planning meeting really revealed the fissures and differences within the movement. I never will forget Shuttlesworth saying over and over (not in any way deprecating me or those of us who were in the North), “Now, you know, my northern friends, you visit down here and then you go back home. Now, Birmingham is no joke. This is the citadel of racist segregation.”

And I began to study Birmingham. I said, “Well, we’re going to think about Birmingham.” We didn’t have Google and all that stuff, but I began to really study it and learn as much about Birmingham as I could. And one of the things I learned was that this was one of the southern cities that had a major industrial base – Bessemer Steel, coal, iron – and also, in the forging of steel and in the mining of coal and all the things that were done in Birmingham, one of the things that they used on a day-to-day basis, essentially, was dynamite. So Birmingham had the most knowledgeable, the most expert, people in the use of dynamite of any domestic city in the United States. So it was no accident that all of the bombings in Birmingham were dynamite-ignited bombs. In fact,
Shuttlesworth said, “You know, we call it ‘Bombingham’ because there are so many unsolved bombings.” And I remember one of the back-and-forth decisions was whether we would have the resources to do it, and then they would turn to people like Harry and myself and Stanley and somebody would say, “What do you think it’s going to cost to sustain this operation?” I never used these words with them, but in my own mind, as I listened to it (and when you’re looking at doing a project in investment banking, the first thing you think of is what is called a “burn rate,” or how much money you’re going to use up on a monthly basis), so I said, “Well, how much money do you think it’s going to cost us to sustain this operation?” Nobody knew. So I said, “Well, we have to know.” I remember being told, “Just go out and raise as much money as you can.”

Then one other critical question was: If we decided to do it, who was going to be at the center of leadership? We left that to Shuttlesworth to work out with the local people. Then I never will forget this: one of the principal strategic questions was when – the timing. If you know anything about the Baptist church, it is that there is no other more important or sacred time on the Baptist church calendar than Easter. So as they were planning this possible demonstration, it looked like they were going to have to do it on Easter. I remember them saying, “No, no, no, no.” That’s when I learned. In fact, a Baptist preacher can be forgiven for being away from his church many times, but he cannot be away on Easter, because that is the central part of Baptist theology: the crucifixion, the resurrection. And if you’re not in church in Easter, well, you might as well not go to church. In fact, some people consider, if they’re church-goers, that they still are good church-goers if they at least go on Easter. If you don’t go on Easter, then you’re not in good standing. So that was all-important for the question of when they could do it.

What was Birmingham? We had to plan. For example, it was not accidental as to when Martin would get arrested. We had to strategically decide when would be the best time for him to get arrested. So he gets arrested.

Gonnerman: On Good Friday – April 12.

Jones: Good Friday – April 12. That’s correct.

Gonnerman: So he was in prison over the Easter weekend in Birmingham.

Jones: That’s correct. And we had to use that symbolism, by the way: Martin in prison on Good Friday. So there’s Holy Thursday, Good Friday…. We had to use that symbolism.

Gonnerman: So, it’s known that you helped, then, to get the letter from Birmingham Jail.

Jones: Well, hold on. The facts are: what had happened (and I didn’t know about it) was that the white clergy of Birmingham had taken out a full-page ad in the Birmingham newspapers. And in that ad, in effect, the point that they were making was that Martin was an outside agitator; that they could work out their problems if they were just left alone; that they were making progress; that he was pushing too fast; that they could solve their own problems. Martin had read this. So when I went in to see him, he was very agitated. I went in to see him, and he was writing all over pages of newspaper. He was
writing on anything he could get. I said, “What’s all this about?” He said, “Have you seen this?” I said, “No, I haven’t seen it.” I looked at it and I said, “What else is new? They’re just telling you you shouldn’t come here.” He said, “Oh, no, Clarence, you’ve got to understand. This is almost blasphemous. These white clergy, they don’t understand … they don’t understand what our struggle is about.” So he said, “I’ve got to get some paper. You’ve got to bring me some paper.” So I just took out the scraps of paper that he had written on and he told me, “This goes here and this goes there.” I put it together and I took it to Dora McDonald. That was in the morning, actually. So when I came in to see him in the afternoon, the second time, I then brought in some yellow sheets of paper, which I put under my shirt to go and see him. I gave him the yellow legal pad, and he worked all that Friday and Saturday. I think he probably worked all through the night, and I really didn’t pay much attention to it. It’s not like when he gave it to me I’d read it. I figured I would give it to Dora McDonald. I had too many other things to do. I just took it and gave it to Dora McDonald. But then, when I saw the typed pages and I started to read it, the first thing that came to my mind…. You know, when you’re so close to someone, as I became to Martin…. Now, Martin had a Ph.D. in theology. He was a very erudite and learned person, not just in scripture, but in philosophy. And that letter from the Birmingham Jail – the references and any quotations he made – he didn’t have anything to refer to. It was not like he was sitting in his study and he could pull out a book out and say, Well, I want to get this quotation. It was all he had internalized, and it was one of the most powerful religious, quasi-political polemics, arguments…. I mean, he took them on. And it was written with a passion. I think that the letter from the Birmingham Jail is probably the most substantive piece of independent, separate, stand-alone writing as an article that he wrote. Now, he wrote *Why We Can’t Wait*, and other books, sure. But some of those books were written thoughtfully, where he would sit in his study or where Stanley and I would work with him, and so forth, but this was written right from the soul. It was just magnificent. I think it’s probably one of the finest pieces of writing you have from him, and I virtually (not virtually; I do know) every major speech that he has written or given, and I think this is one of the best. I know the “I Have a Dream” speech, the Vietnam speech, the “Yes, I’ve Been to the Mountaintop” speech, which was extemporaneous, but this was a powerful, powerful piece of writing.

**Gonnerman:** For the young people in the audience, take note that Martin King’s book, *Why We Can’t Wait*, is really a great way to get into the thought of Dr. King and the movement in that amazing year of 1963, one hundred years after the Emancipation Proclamation. Then, in August, you have the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. You’re involved in that.

I want to talk a little bit about the process of the “I Have a Dream” speech and coming up with that, and talk also, then, a little more about Dr. King and his qualities as a leader.

**Jones:** Well, first of all, in direct response to your last question about “I Have a Dream.” As those of my colleagues at the King Institute know so well, the use of that phrase, “I have a dream,” on August 28, 1963, was not the first time that Martin had used it. He had used it in speeches in Detroit and Houston.
The evening of August 27: we’re at the Willard Hotel. Two weeks earlier, he and his family had stayed at my home in Riverdale for about three weeks, and during that period of time my wife and family moved out and let them stay in our home. And during that period of time, it was a kind of working vacation, but we had begun to periodically say, Do you have any ideas about…? Andy was offering him certain ideas; Wyatt Walker was offering him certain ideas. And then, when it became the night before the March on Washington, first of all, I had to deal that day with some of what I call certain ego-logistics of who was going to speak, in what order. It was one of the few times in which Martin said that I embarrassed him sometimes by saying things that he wouldn’t say but I felt had to be said. So I’m sitting in a room with all these people on the March on Washington, and I said, “Well, now, we don’t have to have a lot of discussion because he’s speaking last.” “Well…” “Oh, no, no, he’s speaking last, and he’s not going to be limited. He’s not going to take a lot of time, but he’s going to speak last.” “Well, we only can give him five minutes.” “No, he’s speaking last and he’s going to take at least fifteen minutes.” I said it in such a way that it didn’t offend A. Philip Randolph, but it offended Whitney Young and some of the other leaders because my sense was that while A. Philip Randolph was indeed the godfather of the movement and was coordinating together, I had read that these people were coming – that they were responding to the leadership of Martin Luther King – and he wasn’t going to be relegated to secondary status.

Be that as it may…he was sitting around, as was his style, Walter Fontroy is there, Ralph is there, I’m there, Walter Wyatt is running in and out, going back and forth, and he’s saying, “I’d like to have your ideas.” So we opened up ideas as to what he should say, and I was relegated to something like the note taker. “Clarence, you taking notes?” “Yeah, I’m taking notes.” And everybody was offering: “Well, you know, Martin, I think you say this,” and so forth, “And by the way, I’ve been thinking about this and I wrote it out for you today.” So this goes on for about two or two and a half hours in the lobby – a little secluded lobby – and then he says, “Well, Clarence, why don’t you go upstairs and see whether you can pull some of this together.” And when I went upstairs to pull it together, my sole purpose, since I knew I was again dealing in ego-logistics, was that I wanted to try to be sure to include as accurately as I could – I was like a recording secretary – I wanted to try to be sure I included everybody’s point of view so that when I came back they felt that I had incorporated them. So that’s what I did. I didn’t have any laptop, I didn’t have all that stuff. I was writing as fast as I could. And I came back and they were all sitting around. I said, “OK, these are the points that we covered.” I got maybe a minute into reading it and somebody – I don’t know who it was – started interrupting me: “Yeah, but you didn’t say this.” And Martin said, “Let him finish.” So I read and I summarize, and everybody is throwing in their ideas. Then he looked up and around and he said, “Well, gentlemen, thank you very much. I’m going upstairs and I’m going to counsel with the Lord. And I’ll see you in the morning. And Clarence, Dora will be in touch with you.”

The next thing I know, at five o’clock in the morning, the phone rings. It’s Dora McDonald. “I’ve been up working all night, and I’ve reproduced copies of the speech, and I’ve given it to the press tent, and they in turn have made copies of the speech.” And I said, “Oh?” So I go over to the press tent (like I say, it’s five or six o’clock in the
morning) and they’re working feverishly because they’re so glad to get a copy of the speech. And I see that they have put the mimeographed copy of his speech in about seventy-five press envelopes. Now, I’m thinking, one of the reasons I went to Los Angeles to start being in entertainment law was that I had developed a specialty in copyright law. Indeed, I had written a paper as a senior in law school called “The Judicial Criteria Used to Determine Musical Copyright Infringement.” And that paper was submitted among a group of papers from all the law schools in the country. They divided the country into four quadrants, and my paper was the winning paper for the northeast quadrant. So I knew a little bit about copyright law. [Laughter] So I thought to myself, There are so many turkeys … so many people who are trying to always trying to pimp on you, always trying to…. I said, I bet you…. Something, something, something bothered me. So I said to the people at the press tent, “What are you going to do?” “Oh, no, no, no. Hold on a moment.” So I go and I look at the printed speech, and I see it’s just like a mimeograph, but it doesn’t contain a copyright notice, or, specifically, it doesn’t contain a circle with a “c” inside [©]. So I, then, get three or four women to pull out the speech, and I take a pen and I show them. And I take each page, every page of that speech, and I pull them out and I have those women go and put a circle on each page. Well, one of the people at the press tent said, “Well, who is this guy who is making such a fuss?” Now, I don’t know, to tell you the truth. I don’t know. I guess I was tired. I hadn’t had much sleep and I had a lot of pressures on me, and I just know that that was something I thought had to be done. My knowledge of copyright law had nothing to do with the March on Washington, nothing to do with the movement. It was something he didn’t ask me to do, something I did on my own because I just felt I had to do it.

Now, little did I know that after he gave the speech, about a week after, I’m listening to the radio or someplace I hear the speech being played. And then I go into a record store and I see that Twentieth Century Fox had already put out a record, and I said, Hold on; they can’t do this. To make a long story short, I went to federal court and brought an injunction against Twentieth Century Fox to prohibit the sale of this speech. I won the case, but in winning the case, the federal court in the Seventh District of New York established the legitimacy and the validity of the copyright protection.

Fast forward. That was common law copyright protection. We then later filed with the copyright office and got statutory copyright protection. That copyright protection is what enables today…I said, If I never did anything else for the movement, I assured the copyright ownership of the “I Have a Dream” speech to the King estate, which probably is one of the most valuable pieces of intellectual property… [Applause] …and one of the things I hold dearest. I haven’t framed it yet, but I actually have the duplicate copy of the copyright certificate. I have it; it was sent to me.

Gonnerman: So, the right man in the right place at the right time.

Jones: Yes, I think that was a very constructive thing I did. But let me just say … let me just go to the speech. I think it’s important that you should know this. He gives the speech. Now, he had incorporated into the speech some of the things which I had written in the draft, and some of the things which I had written in the draft incorporated what other people said, but I crafted it, which really consisted of the first seven paragraphs. The first seven paragraphs of the “I Have a Dream” speech are virtually verbatim what I
wrote and he gave. Now, it’s interesting that when he gave the speech…. [Jones puts the
speech on the podium.] And so I’ll put it on the stand up here. He’s at the podium here, and I’m over there. And he starts to speak in his sonorous way, and so forth, and then when he gets to the part, We’ve come here to redeem a promissory note – a bad check that’s been returned for insufficient funds, “but we refuse to believe that the bank of
justice is bankrupt. We refuse to believe that there are insufficient funds in the great
vaults of opportunity of this nation,” and so forth. He reads the first seven paragraphs.
And then he pauses. He has the text, and then he pauses and he takes the text at the
podium and he turns it upside down over there. He looks out … and I say to the person
next to me (of course, I’m standing over there). . . he pauses and he looks up and I just
instinctively say to the person who was standing next to me, “These people” (meaning
some 250,000 people there), “they don’t know it, but they’re about ready to go to
church.” [Laughter]

And that’s when he started the transition and started talking about “I have a dream.”
That’s when he started. That was totally extemporaneous. I was a professional musician
when I was sixteen years old, clarinet, flute, and so forth, classically trained, but I always
liked…. To me, that speech was like watching John Coltrane. It was like watching a
great instrumentalist, you know? It was incredible.

I’m frequently asked, “Who today of anyone is most like Martin King?” And that’s an
easy question because I say, “There’s a Latin word, sui generis (one of a kind).” I answer
the question by asking a question rhetorically. I say, “Who today is most like
Michelangelo? Who is most like Mozart? Who is most like Copernicus? Do you
understand what I’m saying? Who is most like Galileo?” There’s nobody like Martin
King, no one. He was unique.

Now, here we are forty years since his death. Now, my friends at the Institute have heard
this song and sermon before. They know that I think that in the twelve years and four
months from 1956 to 1968, that Martin King may have done more to achieve political,
social, and economic justice than any other person in the previous 400 years, perhaps
aside from the Emancipation Proclamation. They know that’s my position. So I travel
around the country. I go and I talk to JPMorgan Chase and I talk to General Electric, and
so forth and so forth. So now I’m out here at Stanford, right? And I’m saying to myself,
It’s very difficult academically to get into Stanford. People here are smart, right? And
presumably that goes to the level of professors and the board of trustees. The board of
trustees must be as good and as smart as the students who come here, right? So there
must be some very smart people running this university, OK? Well, hold on. I don’t get
it, OK? Here is the most important person in the last half of the twentieth century, and
have you been over to the Institute? I invite the board of trustees of Stanford University
to come and finally come into the real world of conscience. Forty years after the death of
Martin King, they need to give the King Institute the stature that is befitting of the
contribution that this man has made to the world. [Applause]

Now, I want to make it clear; I want to make it plain. This is Clarence Jones talking. I
am delighted to be here. I am delighted to be at the Institute, and I want to stay here, but
I want to see some sanity, some conscience. [Applause]
Now, lest you think I’ve lost my mind, why do I say that? The point I want to make is that I’m not so sure that the general public understands how close this country, America, came to coming apart. I’m not so sure that they fully understand what was going on around 1967-68, when you had the rise of the Wallace movement, when you had a disenchantment of a large segment of the population with the Vietnam War. As Eldridge Cleaver said, “It’s soul on ice” when you had large numbers of white youth being alienated from their parents, and he used the expression, “While we’re trying to integrate into the house, the white youth are leaving because they’ve already seen what we want to integrate into and it ain’t what they want.” This is the time of Charles Reich’s *The Greening of America*. This is the time of SDS, this is the time of great turmoil – Kent State, and all that stuff.

Let me back up for a moment. I had a relationship with Malcolm X, and Martin knew I had a relationship with Malcolm X and they used to communicate through me with each other. So Malcolm X once said to me, “Now Clarence, you go back and tell Reverend King….” I never will forget this. He said, “You go back and tell him that he should just publicly say … and I’m not going to be offended … he should publicly say to the white man that if you don’t deal with me, you’re going to have to deal with Malcolm. I would love for you to say that.” So I went and told Martin that. Martin would smile and so forth. But there were so many confluent things going on in the country that I really believe that it was the singular power of Martin’s leadership and commitment to nonviolence that, to a large extent, kept this country from coming apart.

Just think what occurred. You had a peaceful revolution take place nonviolently to make the most fundamental change in the legal structure of America since the Civil War. I was in Atlanta over the weekend, and Jesse Jackson was a guest preacher at Ebenezer Baptist Church. Now, I can give him credit for what he said. He described Martin as “a minority dreamer with a majority vision” … “a minority dreamer with a majority vision.” Now, I say that there’s a line that goes from Montgomery, Alabama, to 399 Park Avenue, the headquarters of Citigroup. There’s a line that goes from Montgomery, Alabama, to the headquarters of JPMorgan Chase. There’s a line that goes from many of the Fortune 500 companies to Sumner Street in Connecticut, where the GE headquarters are. Corporate America now has the benefit of the peaceful enjoyment of their wealth. They may not see a connection, but I believe I could go in and spend an hour and I could show them that the opportunity they have to enjoy the benefits of their wealth today is because of someone who was born 79 years ago: Martin Luther King, Jr. [Applause]

**Gonnerman:** We’re fortunate to have you here. Let’s open up the microphones.

**Question from the Audience:** I have a double question. That speech that Martin Luther King gave one year to the day before he was assassinated…

**Jones:** You mean the one at Riverside Church?

**Question from the Audience (continued):** Yes, the one at Riverside Church. It seemed prophetic and it seemed that he had some kind of vision of quite a few things coming together beyond civil rights and the international order and all. It seemed he had some kind of epiphany about how everything was tied together. That is Part A: Did he have
that epiphany? And, B, what would he say about what we have today, forty years on, after that moment at Riverside Church?

Jones: Well, with respect to the first part of your question, it became very clear to him and those of us who were around him and his advisers … very clear to him that notwithstanding all the great things that Lyndon Johnson was seeking to do, that the war in Vietnam, aside from creating a climate and having a byproduct of a climate of violence, and so forth, just the sheer drain it took from the Treasury and the resources. Now, does that sound familiar to you? Does this sound familiar? [Applause] I mean, $12 billion a month. Think about it: $12 billion a month for Iraq and Afghanistan. That’s what it’s costing. So isn’t there something obscene about spending $12 billion a month and then somebody telling me, Well, we don’t have the money to insure 47 million people. Isn’t there something obscene about that? It just doesn’t compute. [Applause]

If you go to the King Institute and you spend some time and really look at the material they have on this issue, you will see that there are three emerging things that seem to define Martin King: poverty, racism, and militarism. That was the tripod. I’m sorry he is not here, but Vincent Harding was here about a month ago, and he was part of the research group that had a greater influence with Martin on the Vietnam speech than I did because we both had competing drafts, and I was a little more equivocal in what I often suggested he say. And Vincent was right on the money and really reflected what Martin…. Bombs of inaction would be exploding in the cities of our country similar to the bombs that were exploding over in Vietnam. It was the impossible. We could not carry forward an agenda of effective social justice, giving access to economic equality, unless we ended the war. There was no money to do it, aside from the moral question of whether we should be killing people indiscriminately.

Question from the Audience: Mr. Jones, I was wondering how you feel about the current situation of black culture and black society today, or maybe even how Dr. King would feel about it.

Jones: I think today that he would see one, if not the principal, challenge of the twenty-first century as the pursuit of excellence. Our struggle for freedom was a necessary prerequisite in order to deal with equality. He’d deal with the issue of equality. So clearly, the next threshold was economic parity – economic equality. Now, with respect to culture and so forth, I think that at least some segments of the African-American community and urban centers have been going through what I call in my book “the black killing fields.” Do you know what I’m saying? Wanton violence – violence: killing somebody over a pair of sneakers; killing somebody over a jacket. I don’t have the time to go into a discussion about the impact of this cultural phenomenon called rap and hip-hop, and so forth. I think I’m fairly knowledgeable about it, generally, but my concern about some of the culture of rap, particularly that which sometimes borders on gangsta rap, is that it is really the 2007 and 2008 version of the minstrels. We, as black people, are having people going out and performing minstrels about our culture. It’s the “minstrelization” of the essence of black culture that’s occurring sometimes. Minstrels were many times performed by white people in black face, and now we have minstrels being performed by black people in black face for the entertainment of white people, who
comprise 70 percent of the audience for this crap. I guess you know where I stand on that. [Laughter]

**Question from the Audience:** There’s a lot that’s been said about Dr. King in many different ways, some of which were really against what he actually stood for. What would you say is the biggest misconception that you’ve seen of Dr. King’s life?

**Jones:** The biggest misconception? Well, at one point I would have said that it’s this garbage that he was inspired by Communists, and so forth. There was a calculated, systemic vendetta against him. I would say one misconception is, I think, underestimating him. Martin King was afraid, but he was fearless. The difference is, if you walked down a street with him and a car would backfire, he would flinch. But he never, ever asked anybody to initiate a demonstration where he would not be the first person standing in line himself. He never asked anybody to subject themselves to danger in a demonstration that he himself wouldn’t lead. I think they underestimated him.

**Question from the Audience:** Clarence, what do you think Martin would think about the controversy circling around Hillary and her statement concerning the significance or maybe even more significance of LBJ and the civil rights legislation as opposed to….

**Jones:** Well, I think, first of all, for those of you who may not know, I wrote an article on this in the *Huffington Post*, posted January 15. Essentially, what I tried to do was to correct the record. First of all, I acknowledged the great contribution that Senator Clinton and President Clinton have made. I made the point in the article that John Edwards and Senator Clinton are part of that generation of white southern politicians who have risen above their upbringing of segregation and committed their lives to racial justice. What disturbed me most…. Some people said that maybe I overreacted. OK, maybe I did. There’s no question that Lyndon Johnson played an important role. But I was very analytical. I dealt with the cause and effect. And speaking for myself, interpreting what I knew of the King movement, I said that Lyndon Johnson signing the Civil Rights Bill of 1964 was not an act of a president who can take an act and get it done. There’s no question Lyndon Johnson exerted his extraordinary legislative leadership, but that passage of the Civil Rights Bill was made possible on the streets of America. That’s what passed the Civil Rights Bill – not a president who got it done. [Applause]

**Question from the Audience:** I wonder if you could give us your thoughts from an international perspective. I come from Africa – Zimbabwe, in particular – a country where the rights groups are trying to use Gandhi and King’s methods of nonviolence, and it’s not working because of the regime – because of what’s happening in Zimbabwe and Robert Mugabe’s role. And I wanted to find out how do you keep up with the agenda of social and moral justice in countries like Zimbabwe and Kenya where you would want proper nonviolent strategies but you keep on hitting a brick wall?

**Jones:** Well, I don’t know that I have the answer, but I can say this. There was a whole generation of African leaders who held Martin King in great admiration, and, conversely, a generation of African leaders going back to Nkrumah and Mboya, in Kenya, and so forth. But in direct response to your question, let’s take Mugabe in Zimbabwe.
I know Mugabe. I haven’t seen him in a long time. It is an unfortunate circumstance where a heroic liberation leader like Mugabe has somehow alienated himself from a large mass of the people he seeks to serve. Now, from a sheer political standpoint, and I’ve said this to my friends in Africa, the theme that people are objecting to – what Mugabe’s doing in terms of the reallocation of land – he should have done that years ago, not now. That’s where he made his mistake. He should have done it years ago when he could have built a constituency of support for doing it.

True to my belief in Martin’s extraordinary ability, as difficult as the circumstance is, from my experience of working and observing him, he would say no matter how difficult the situation is, that building an effective movement with nonviolent mass protests, would still, in his judgment, be the best way of bringing about change. Under no circumstances could I conceive of him saying, Well, it’s not going to work nonviolently; we’re going to have to take up arms. There’s nothing in my relationship or knowledge of Martin King that would sustain that position. As difficult as it is, he would…. Let’s understand that the effectiveness of nonviolence also (aside from being a technique, a tactic, a strategy and tactic) assumes the largest base of mass support that you can get to do it. Look at Gandhi. Gandhi’s talent was that he could mobilize masses of Indian followers. I always said theoretically that to test out the power of nonviolence … it never occurred …. I said if Martin King had said one day that he was going to start a march from Atlanta, Georgia, to Washington – that he was going to march there peacefully – and he wanted all the people of good will in America to meet him in Washington, he would have had five million people in Washington. I believe that. That’s the power.

So what I’m saying is: as difficult as the circumstance is, and I knew Ben Bela from Algeria very well; I didn’t know Nkrumah well, but I knew Mboya. I used to be the investment banker for Zambia. I knew Nkrumah, and I arranged the financing for the fights in Zaire, so I knew Mbutu Sesi Seko of Zaire with the leopard hat, and so forth. I still believe, and I guess maybe when I pass there will be a different generation, but I was conditioned; I was trained as a nonviolent – not foot solider, but a strategist. And even though personally I had some problems with nonviolence, personally – how I would deal with it – but being close to Martin, I felt that I had to have the discipline. He knew my weaknesses, and that’s the reason he would never let me participate in a demonstration because he had no trust that I could act nonviolently. [Laughter]

Question from the Audience: With the upcoming 2008 presidential election, I was wondering how you feel about the possibility of having our first non-white president.

Jones: I think it’s exciting. I think it’s extraordinary. I think it’s a real possibility. Having said that, however, I’m a realist. When I say a realist, I know how political power is fought, and you have adversaries. You have adversaries in the Clinton campaign and perhaps even adversaries in the Obama campaign. But I know there are people in the Clinton campaign. They’re out of the Daley-Joe Kennedy school. They take no prisoners. So in order to win, Obama is going to have to develop such a mass base of support that all of that is going to be irrelevant. So I’m excited about the possibility. In my article in the Huffington Post, I have some difficulty with my dear friend Gloria Steinem because she seems to be advocating a female preferential
treatment, or female entitlement. Now, I love women, but I don’t feel that they’re more entitled to be president than I am, because I’m old-fashioned, you see. I’m still trying to grow to be a 2008 man. See, I think a black man should be president. That’s what I’m trying to tell you. [Laughter, Applause]

**Question from the Audience:** Tonight, you’ve blended a lot of elements of yourself. You’ve talked as a confidant of Dr. King’s, you’ve also talked as a confidant of important people on Wall Street, and you’ve also talked as someone who has seen nonviolence in forty years of black experience in America. In that forty years, we’ve seen disposable income for black America rise, and you talked about one percent of companies. I wonder what kind of thoughts you have about nonviolent use of black America’s internal economy, much like other people (I’m Jewish) when they came to this country and other immigrant peoples since have organized their own internal economies. What thoughts have you had in the last forty years about how best to have African-Americans use their economic power?

**Jones:** I have thought about that. I think that that is a very astute observation you make and a very appropriate question. I think that, during this period of time, that notwithstanding the buying power – the gross dollar buying power – of the African-American community, I think that there are still skill sets and strategies that have to be employed in order to be able to build up a base of capital. Now, we don’t have the time to go into it, but I also believe that there are different kinds of wealth. You can make a million dollars a year and after being taxed, you have a reasonably good income. But wealth is in assets. Real wealth is in things that you can take the money in which you create value. One of the limitations after slavery is that the descendants of slaves didn’t have much in assets that they could accumulate, and therefore a continuing bridge of the transfer of wealth from one generation to another. However, the Jewish community in the East, that I’m very familiar with … in business with, many close friends with … the Jewish community is a template, in my judgment, of a lot of things that could be learned and adapted by the black community, because there is no question, just on a sheer factual basis. There were many Jews who came to Ellis Island and they didn’t have anything but their name and a suitcase. They, too, did not have any assets. The difference is that they developed an education and the skills, and aside from maybe ethnic religious bigotry, they had a continuing privilege because most of them had white skin, even those who may have come from Spain – the Moors, and so forth. But in direct response, your point is well taken. The reason I say the challenge of the twenty-first century is the pursuit of excellence is that if you don’t have the education, if you don’t have the skills, you can’t deal with it. Now, one of the things I have noticed being out here in Silicon Valley, as opposed to the East, is that as I’m reading papers and the people I’ve come to know – and I say this to my young adult children – I quote my friend out here, Tony Brown (he uses about a trillion-dollar platform of wealth out here in Silicon Valley): while I may be critical of the governance of Stanford, I have to say that, in general, today the reason why the pursuit of excellence is so important is because 40- to 55-year-old senior managers in companies today will live in an information technology-based economy. They don’t care what color you are; they don’t care what gender you are. They don’t care what your sexual preference is; they don’t care whether you’re slim or fat. They only want to know: Can you do the job? That I know. Now, does that mean there is not
some individual person who says, “Well, I don’t care. I don’t want to hire this person because they’re black”? That is clearly a minority because you have some bad young brothers and sisters coming with engineering degrees, MBAs, and so forth – a new generation. So the pursuit of excellence is what’s required. As I say in my book, I believe there are a lot of differences I can point to, but I really believe that, for the African-Americans, the Jewish community is a template because I know so many Jewish colleagues of mine and they tell me their mother or father would say to them, “Get an education.” “My son, the doctor.” “My son, the lawyer.” “Get an education.” Education was par excellence – more important than a sports car, more important than all this bling-bling was an education. [Applause]

**Gonnerman:** Before concluding, I would be remiss if I didn’t ask Professor Clayborne Carson and Susan Carson and all of the staff of the King Institute that is here to stand up. [Applause]

**Jones:** I just want to say publicly that I’m not going to be offended if you want to disown me for some of the things I said. [Laughter] It’s OK. I’m not going to be hurt.

**Gonnerman:** Well, I’m going to make a phone call tomorrow, and you’ll be on the agenda of the next trustees’ meeting.

**Jones:** That’s fine. I look forward to it.

**Gonnerman:** Thank you for your attention. Good night. [Applause]

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**Clarence B. Jones** joined the team of lawyers defending King in the midst of King’s 1960 tax fraud trial; the case was resolved in King’s favor in May 1960. In 1962, he became general counsel for the Gandhi Society for Human Rights, the fundraising arm of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). Following King’s 12 April 1963 arrest in Birmingham for violating a related injunction against demonstrations, Jones secretly took King’s hand-written response from jail to eight Birmingham clergymen who had denounced the protests in the newspaper. It was typed and circulated among the Birmingham clergy and later printed and distributed nationally as “Letter from Birmingham Jail.” Jones continued to function as King’s lawyer and advisor through the remainder of his life, assisting him in drafting the “I Have a Dream” speech and preserving King’s copyright of the momentous address; serving as part of King’s inner circle of advisers, called the “research committee”; and contributing with Vincent Harding and Andrew Young to King’s “Beyond Vietnam” address at New York’s Riverside Church on 4 April 1967. After King’s death, Jones was editor and part owner of the New York Amsterdam News from 1971 to 1974. He was the first African American to become a partner in a Wall Street investment banking firm and now serves as a legal strategist and financial consultant for governments worldwide.
Comments?
We welcome your comments and suggestions via email to auroraforum@stanford.edu or via the feedback form on our website: auroraforum.org.

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