

MOVEMENT BUILDING

INTERVIEW THREAD FOUR: FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

CLIFFORD ALEXANDER

"Every black organization of prominence in civil rights is short of money. We do not have a major group of white and black people who have that big-pocketed opportunity to help us not have to spend our time kissing ass to raise some money for the next meal. So, they were not very -- not themselves very certainly filled with money, so he had to do a lot of things. He had to go beg money for them. He had to express thoughts that if you had eight or 10 people who were on staff could use some of those, had to do some of that as well. I don't have any idea how many speeches and things that he gave during a year, but they were enormous numbers. So, he covered a full range of things that obviously I didn't see all his speeches and begging for money. And he was a scholar, he -- the highly educated man, a curious man, and that took some of his time as well."

JESSE JACKSON

"So, he had a great appreciation of the many roles that many people play. And he saw himself as kind of guiding those forces. And he was more like -- more interested in building a kind of... a tugboat as opposed to an ocean liner. He didn't want a big organization, per se. He didn't want a membership organization, he'd say you get bogged down in raising members. It was not the big ocean liner, he wanted to have a strike force. It was going to give him time to raise the issues, expose the contradictions and have the courage to fight.

"And so, I remember him saying one time that he did not want to build a big building, leave it as a monument, didn't want to have a lot of money left. He felt if any money was left, it would be a reflection on his leadership, that it was not about money. He believed that you should be materialistically minded enough to take care of basic essentials, but not mindless and materialistic and out for your stuff. He had that sense of-- that's why they gave him -- he won the Nobel Peace Prize, he gave the money away to all the organizations. He kept just a portion for SCLC. 'cause he had -- those were kind of his, kind of his values."

CLARENCE JONES

"I was not part of the SCLC organization. SCLC didn't pay me. There was a period of time when my work with him overlapped when I was also an investment banker in Wall Street. I think it's fair to say that as a lawyer, from practicing law and other things, I know as a matter of fact that in one year I made more money than all the combined salaries of everybody on the staff of Southern Christian Leadership Conference. They didn't pay me a damn thing. Everything I did, didn't even pick up my, occasionally, they'd pick up a hotel, but most of my travel was picked up on my then American Express card and reimbursed by Southern- So- And that, in a strange way, I think it affected how Doctor King looked at me and another person I was very, very close to, Stanley David Levison. Neither of us were in any way financially dependent, nor ever took, or wanted, a penny from him or the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

"In fact, as the history will record, and it's uncomfortable for some people, but the fact of the matter is there are persons like Harry Belafonte, Stanley David Levison¹, and at sometimes a white lawyer by the name of Harry Wachtel, and myself, collectively; we were the collective financial reservoir that kept Doctor King and his family afloat. And chief among them was Harry Belafonte. And so, I get really personally offended when I hear or read one of the more adult King children say, one, they didn't know about it, or two, they express this anger at Harry over one thing or another. And I say, 'Well, hold on. He's the man that paid for their schooling, that let them go to school. He's the man that paid for the domestic household servants.' And when there was a critical time when he [Doctor King] didn't have any money, it was Danny Levison, Harry Wachtel, Harry Belafonte and Clarence Jones that sent the King family money. So, I don't want to hear a damn ill word about any one of those persons who spoke, particularly Harry who is 90 years old."

¹Stanley David Levison was a businessman and lawyer and activist in progressive causes.