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JESSE JACKSON INTERVIEW
KING IN THE WILDERNESS
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JESSE JACKSON
Director, SCLC Operation Breadbasket
Interviewed by Trey Ellis
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Total Running Time: 1 hour 29 minutes

00:00:04:00 TREY ELLIS:

Again, thank you for having us- this is really exciting for me. Can we start with just telling us, how did you first meet Doctor King and what were your first impressions?

00:00:14:00 JESSE JACKSON:

You know, the first meeting was really indirect. I grew up in Greenville, South Carolina and most of our people had adjusted to the situation. Ministers reinforced the adjustment. Be good people-, but don't fight for change, don't fight for power because it met with such stiff resistance. So, to see Doctor King and Reverend Abernathy and Reverend Shuttlesworth emerge as redefining the role of ministers was itself a source of relief. We met them there, we began to follow them in that vain. I was arrested June- July nineteen sixty with several classmates trying to use a public library. Little did I know he was aware of that. And then in sixty-three in Greensboro, North Carolina, at North Carolina A and T we were involved in a major sit-in movement there. So, when I first met him physically I was coming to Atlanta, to speak at Morehouse, as a member of the Omega Psi Phi fraternity. And he was coming to the airport with his group over to get his Nobel Prize. It was just a thrill to see him. He saw me- he called my name, "Jesse." It flipped me off. "Hi, Sam," he was talking about Doctor Sam Proctor, who he knew at Boston University and they were good friends, he's being, "How are things going in Greensboro, how are things at the A and T, how are things at Bennett?"

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00:01:41:00 So, the fact that he was- 'cause we had been on television quite a bit during that time during the Greensboro struggle. So, I met him in that sense. To me it depicted how sensitive he was, how aware he was of our struggle. I remember Ernest Green talking about when they graduated from Little Rock Central, he was at the graduation. Not as a speaker, he was just there at the graduation. He was deeply immersed in the Southern struggle to end apartheid in the South. I remember the first time I was real close, we were in Selma. And Reverend C.T. Vivian and I went by Miss Boynton's house where he was staying. And he was lying in bed, he had by him a little a "Love, Power and Justice" by Paul Tillich, "The Courage to Be" by Paul Tillich, "The Nature and Destiny of Man" by Niebuhr, and the bible. I asked him about the books, 'cause I was in the seminary at the time. He said, "Well, I read one fiction, one nonfiction book a week." He was deeply scholarly.

00:02:42:00 As I often say to young people who catch on to the "I have a dream" dimension of his life- Doctor King finished high school at fifteen, he finished Morehouse at nineteen, he finished seminary at twenty-two, his PhD at twenty-six. Deeply committed to scholarship. He knew that strong minds break strong chains. I always hear young people say, "Now, when did he become radical?" To be in Montgomery, Alabama, a block from the Confederate capital, and from the Confederate White House, and to call the boycott to dislocate that city in the South was a very radical move. When Rosa Parks was arrested, the bus driver was legally right. Ms. Parks was morally right. There was a sign above the drives head that read "Coloreds seat from the rear. Whites in the front, those who violate, by law, will be- will be punished." And so, to defy that law, was radical.

00:03:50:00 And there are some who said, now that she has- the bus company wants to apologize. She said, "No, until the sign comes down, until the wall comes down, nothing has happened." He saw beyond private pain to the issue of social justice. And it was as significant as Ms. Parks when they- see how connected things are. I said, "Ms. Parks, why didn't you go to the back of the bus? Given the fact that, you know, everybody did. If you stay up there you could be arrested or you could be run over by the bus or something, beat by hostile forces." She said, "I thought about going back, but I

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thought about Emmett Till, I couldn't go back." August twentieth, nineteen fifty-five, Emmett Till was lynched. All that stuff was happening at the same time. In the midst of lynching, very barbaric activity and hostile laws, he emerged out of that cauldron, calling for an unusual thing for the South, an end to Confederate rule, a demand for social justice, a demand for one set of rules. So even- we must not underestimate just how militant the Montgomery Bus Boycott was as an action, a collective action that lasted for a year. And not only did the action survive, but the law. Ms. Parks and the Reverend Doctor Turner Fred Gray were testing the law of fifty-four to see if it were valid- the fifty-four Supreme Court decision. So, she didn't just happen to sit down, she meant to sit down. She was willing to go to jail. There was a plan to bail her out. But those are very militant actions. And so, every action he made for change had a certain edge of not adjustment, not resentment, but resistance and change.

00:05:37:00 TREY ELLIS:

As you got to know him personally, what surprised you about him as a person?

00:05:44:00 JESSE JACKSON:

Well just... his energy level, and his reading habits, and his willingness to open up to other people, to staff members, and to let ideas flow. Whether you agree with him or disagree, sometimes he would just point blank, "What do you see?" His willingness to a kind of participatory democracy. He had a point of view, he had a conclusion, but that feature of him, and his preparation. Tuesday was kind of his off day. He'd spend Tuesday studying, reflecting up on what happened the past week and projecting. But he was quite sociable. I mean, he laughed a lot, you know, with friends, what we called "preacher jokes." So, he was at once a very personable guy. Many activists don't have much analysis. I mean, and analysts don't have much action. He had the combination of action and analysis and preparation. He would say, "You must not have the paralysis of analysis." You can't just keep on talking, you have to act. But you act without analysis, you don't know where you're going. And if you have- you

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see it, but don't act, you can't get there. So, he saw the combination that led to power, and that power led to change.

00:07:11:00 There is a new South today, and there's in many ways a new America because Doctor King led the movement to pull down those walls. You could not have the Carolina Panthers and the Atlanta Falcons, they couldn't have existed behind the Cotton Curtain because it would have been illegal for them to play together, stay together, sit in the fans together- in the stands together. You couldn't have had the Olympics in Atlanta behind the Cotton Curtain. South Carolina would not be the number one producer of tires in America today behind the Cotton Curtain. You wouldn't have Honda and Nissan and Toyota in the South behind the Cotton Curtain today. You couldn't have had Clemson playing Alabama, black quarterbacks in the South behind the Cotton Curtain. So, in many ways, the whole South must attribute its growth and its removal of certain barriers not to any southern governor or any southern senator. All that was on Doctor King's watch.

00:08:16:00 It's important to note that we not take for granted those changes. But the South has been not always as it is today. And not only did it free black people, it freed so many white people. Jimmy Carter couldn't have come from Plains, Georgia and gone to the White House behind the Cotton Curtain. George Bush couldn't have come from Odessa, Texas to the White House behind the Cotton Curtain. Bill Clinton from Hope, Arkansas, because so long as the curtain was there and the South was in the shadows, it was assumed that any southerner was too "racist," quote, unquote, to lead the country, so southern whites were at sometimes regionalized and limited, as well. When the curtain came down, the wall- and the bridge went up, it shed light on everybody. It was like the right to vote, you know, blacks had been denied the protected right to vote from states' rights since eighteen-eighty. But white women couldn't serve on juries since 1967. We couldn't- eighteen-year-olds couldn't vote before serving in Vietnam. You couldn't vote on campuses. You couldn't vote bilingually. You couldn't get proportionality in delegate selection for conventions. All that stuff happens in the wake of the flood of Doctor King's sense of social justice and redemption.

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00:09:40:00 TREY ELLIS:

Absolutely. You had mentioned briefly about these preacher jokes. Can you- do you remember any or can you give us a feel for what it was like and the competitive nature of preachers to- when they get together?

00:09:51:00 JESSE JACKSON:

I never sensed the competition, but guys just have fun as they express- some ministers are- could be comedians, 'cause they're public speakers and they develop punchlines to tell their stories. I don't remember anything frankly specifically about him, but he was easy to laugh and go along with- friends in favor.

00:10:20:00 TREY ELLIS:

He refers to his staff as a "team of wild horses," there are a lot of strong personalities there. Can you talk about that and how his management style? How did he corral all you wild horses?

00:10:34:00 JESSE JACKSON:

Hosea was strong. Hosea would go into a fire with gasoline clothes on. He was that kind of defiant figure, and sometimes boisterous. And we didn't know what Doctor King knew, and I remember, sometimes he would drink, but he was such a good guy we all gravitated to him. When Hosea was fifteen, he put his age to go up to the war. His mother and father were blind. They'd never seen each other and they'd never seen their children. And while in the war, he was in a foxhole, I think 7 or 8 people were killed, he survived. It affected how he- his sense of survival, his sense of justice, so he had that strong kind of something about him. Bevel was just creative, I mean, he would take any kind of risks. Bevel could just like see things unfolding before him. He was just like- he could go to the point. Andy was always so smart, administrative type, a great balancing wheel. Reverend Abernathy was the, the rock that we all

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leaned on when things got rough. Dorothy Cotton was about political education, *[unclear]* education department, it's called. All these different- Reverend C.T. Vivian, the kind of theologian in the house. Bernard Lafayette, the nonviolent artist, really, theoretician and activist. And so, we, we would have the right to argue and take positions. And he would say two things, one, that we were a team of wild horses and it was his job to take the energy and direct it. And sometime when the stuff would get hot on the inside of the staff and he would say, "Well, we reflect in here what's out there. We cannot corral ourselves, we cannot corral the community." And so, he saw that as neccess- he saw that in some perspective.

00:12:31:00 The other thing he would say, that he was the pilot of the plane, but we were the ground crew. Without the ground crew the plane could not go from port to port, from arrival to departure. It cannot- have the mechanical dimensions, so he had an appreciation of the field crew. 'Cause after all the Saturd- the Sunday of the big march in Selma, Alabama, he was in his church preaching that morning. But James Orange along with Bevel and along with John Lewis and Hosea Williams, Cotton, *[unclear]*, the field crew was on the ground. 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 the 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.

00:13:44:00 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.

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00:14:26:00 TREY ELLIS:

I'd like to move to talk about coming up to Chicago- so after Selma this move to Chicago and the sort of, and the housing, you know, the move to end slums, and him moving up to Chicago- can you talk about that and how the- how the movement- how did the movement change when it moved up here to Chicago and your role in that?

00:14:49:00 JESSE JACKSON:

Well, when he came to Chicago- first of all, there was a big debate, should we leave the South? Hosea thought we never should have left the South, there was so much unfinished business in the South, that was his point of view. Andy thought perhaps we should go to New York, 'cause there was a certain infrastructure, relationships in New York, to prove we could go urban. And Bevel came to Chicago, and Reverend C.T. Vivian came to Chicago, the Urban Training Center, Bernard Lafayette came to Chicago. But- Chicago had an organization called the Triple-CO, Chicago Coordinating Council Community Organizations. He felt that infrastructure would give us a right platform. It was always a challenge- can nonviolence work in the South, could nonviolence work in the North? Violence is subtle in the North, and it's very overt in the South. All these dynamics were pressuring us to come north, so we came to Chicago.

00:15:39:00 He came with the focus on schools, overcrowded schools. And, and the lack of resources for those schools, they called them "Willis Wagons," or overcrowded black schools, and segregated schools, I might add, children were going to classes in the trailers. So, while that was going on, he said to the ministers, "I want you guys to work on something called 'Breadbasket.'" Look at these companies that sell us milk and bread and product, but don't hire us to drive trucks, because the stores- there were no black working in the meat departments or produce managers or checkout clerks, not putting money in banks, so the *[unclear]* to make money. It was just strong economic occupations. So, ministers became fascinated with the Breadbasket part of things. I'd begun to organize ministers and he'd named me National Director of

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Operation Breadbasket. Well, while we were working on Breadbasket and he was going to deal with the schools' thing on the West Side, Bevel and Bernard Lafayette were getting children who, you know, put urine in bottles and take them downtown and find lead in, lead in the urine. And so, you had the whole slums where absentee landlords had the product- had the- owned the house but had moved on to Florida. They're just sucking money out, not reinvesting. So, you had these competing forces, one the Breadbasket movement, the ministers, you had the education movement, you had the end the slum movement, union to end the slum, so you organize a whole block, don't pay rent until something happens.

00:17:24:00 And then sometime- I'm really convinced it was Bevel who said, here we are twenty-five percent locked on ten percent of the land, we've got to move out of these slums. We've got to demand all the territories. So, we started marching down seventy-first street. Little did we realize, which was Doctor King's real passion, was a mass movement for mass change. And we began to move west of Halsted. The whites [*unclear*] their ignorance and their fear of our motives, of what they had been taught. And then the whole neighborhoods began to resist us. And they were throwing the rocks and all of that. So, the mass marches took over, but that's not why we came. But Doctor King was right in his [*unclear*], a mass action, mass reaction, mass change, global view.

00:18:16:00 So, you had the school movement, end the slums, Breadbasket and open housing- kind of four things are happening at the same time. And in the end, while some skeptics say you lost Chicago, the fact of the matter is, two things happened in Chicago, one thing happened was that the Fair Housing Act of sixty-eight came out of the Chicago open housing movement. That is as concrete as, as public accommodations or the right to vote, fair housing. The second was, Rainbow Push, which Doctor King workshopped. We never stopped. Doctor King had said, this would not be a three-month, six-month movement like a kind of one horse small southern town. This was a big complex Chicago. Out of Chicago has come four black congressmen, three U.S. senators, state- black- African American senators. I ran for president, Barack won for president, all that stuff- 'cause we helped to lead the

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breakup of the mentally incarcerated blacks in this city and unleashed their power. So that the dynamic- no other city has had the political leadership emerge since the sixties in Chicago. You think about Caramel Debraun [*phonetic*] and, and Barack Obama and Roland Burris as senators. My run in eighty-four and eight-eight. Leading the, leading the drive to unseat delegation in Florida in nineteen seventy-two. Bobby Rush, ex-Panther, as congressman, and Danny Davis in the Congress, and Jesse Jr. in the Congress.

00:20:01:00 And, and, and so you see this whole political dyn- the independent movement finally prevailed. And I think it's a kind of a dark spot in the mind of historians who, who see Chicago as a failure. That's a mistake. No other city has had the change of inclusion of black people. And then Emil Jones led the drive to get reapportionment, that's why you have a Latino- Gutierrez, so the black-brown coalition is alive in Chicago. Harold Washington ran for mayor against the most tremendous odds and he won. But, but you cannot connect Harold's winning in, in, in eighty-three from what happened in sixty-six, because the financing of his movement came from the Breadbasket beneficiaries. Many of the guys who, who were the beneficiaries of our economic movement became the officers of Harold Washington's campaign. Errol Johnson, worked for Harold for a dollar a year. Doctor [*unclear*] was his treasurer. Al Johnson and Joy Johnson and John Johnson, and all that Chicago. And I associate that very much with Doctor King's work- the kind of radical urban reconstruction movement came from his movement.

00:21:21:00 TREY ELLIS:
Going back to in Chicago- King talks about how surprised he was at the ferocity of the, of the whites. Can you sort of paint a picture of many a day or- what that-

00:21:34:00 JESSE JACKSON:
Chicago is a city of ethnic enclaves, seventy-something cities within the city. And people fiercely guard their neighborhood turf. And various ethnic groups, European ethnic groups have certain territories. There's Latinos and blacks and Russians and

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Germans and all that. So, we started marching west of Halsted. They saw us invading their territory. And they had seen blacks in the most stereotypical terms. When we come, pain comes, community disintegration comes. And there was a reaction to us as a people of stereotypes. And so, we began to march for the right of open housing. And we would have a black and white go to rent a house, they would tell the black no rooms available, the white come right back and get the room available. So, we had to break down house by house. And then they had the real estate guys doing what they call blockbusting. Once a black moved in on the block, tell all the whites, "They're coming," and they'd jack the price. So really it was not just the crowd throwing the rocks, which is the obvious. The real estate brokers were behind that deal, and the bankers. The bankers would only lend you money to buy a house or for business in certain areas, so the bankers had a role in this. Their hands were hid. The real estate broker was leading the blockbusting, so they had a role to play in this. So, the kids throwing rocks, they were may have been the third or fourth layer of resistance. So, you had the, the basic Catholic church leadership, where most of them were Catholic. And that's why at the end of the day, the Archbishop had to come to the table, to preach the immorality of segregation, and limiting people upon race and gender or religion.

00:23:35:00 TREY ELLIS:

And what about King when he moved in with his family to the projects- were you around?

00:23:40:00 JESSE JACKSON:

Yeah, on the, on the West Side. He moved, he moved into a sl- just to prove- when he moved into that apartment, it was to put the focus on the fact that you had- people had to pay rent, didn't have heat, had to pay rent, maybe didn't have running water, had to pay rent, lead paint on the walls, I mean, and so by moving in the middle of the community, it put a global focus. In other words, he had the strategic sense, to put light in dark places, and heat in cold places. And he knew that but his going there it

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illuminated the situation, you could say, “Oh, man.” The people only- and one place we moved into it was kind of painful for us. Moving into one house with a slum landlord who was draining money from there, but putting nothing back- he died, which was not associated with our effort nor our intent, but that was just- old people would live in those neighborhoods, so as the blocks were busted, they would rent to blacks, but not reinvest. That’s what made a slum, ‘cause the only difference between a condo and a project is that in the condos people will wipe the windows and they take care of the elevators, and in the so-called projects, you don’t have the accompanying facility developer protecting of the property.

TREY ELLIS:

Personally, was it hard on King or on his family to, to be living up-

00:25:09:00 JESSE JACKSON:

I don’t think so, because there was excitement. The, the people were responding in such great numbers. There was the joy of- he would say the most difficult part of the movement, when you, when you leave the excitement of a march in Selma, where there’s even violent reaction- that’s not the difficult part. The difficult part is that when all that’s over, you got to get people to register and vote. The slow- they call it the slow non-romantic dimension, when the lights are not there, the hardcore organizing, convincing people to change their minds, to change their situation. ‘Cause at the end of the day, change comes when people change their minds. Most people who were on the occupation, whose backs are against the wall, have three options, and that’s why it’s so difficult to organize is our understanding this. Most people adjust- they have found their place, they have found their space- where they live, where they can live, where they grocery shop, where they go to school, where they go to church, where they get married. They live in this circle and they have adjusted to- they blank the outside world away. So, if you’re in, in the ghetto and you’re paying pension funds, and the pension funds are building the other side of town, they’re building the big tall, buildings, but you just forget that. You’re living in conditions

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where, you live there, but you don't control the economic resources, but you've adjusted. And some people- beyond- they resent- they know better, but they don't feel empowered enough to change anything. So, they have a- often become very bitter. They, they've not adjusted, they resent.

00:27:00:00 And then there's the third dimension called resistance. That's where the action comes in. Where you're not only- you become maladjusted, as Doctor King would say, and you resent, but you also begin to resist. Resisting means some kind of boycott, some kind of action. The weapons we use- one, the effective use of one's vote, one's dollar, coalition, action, and to be morally right. Those are the weapons that you use, because at the end of the day, our biggest weapon is to be mostly morally right. Ms. Parks was mostly right. Those who marched in Birmingham were mostly right. Those who marched for the right to vote were mostly morally right. We couldn't impose wrong on anybody. We had, in fact, to assert the rightness of our cause and the righteousness of our cause and be willing to suffer and sacrifice at the end. And nonviolence was both a strategy and a way of life. If we had been fighting with arms, we couldn't have battled in arms. But then Doctor King said, "If you shoot and you get shot, then there are no winners, but if you can change without shooting, getting shot, then both can survive for another day."

00:28:25:00 And so now when I go to a game in the South where the Dallas Cowboys play the Houston, Texas or Atlanta and you see people choosing uniform color over skin color, direction over complexion, that's part of the transformation. And after all, we were enslaved longer than we have been free. We've been enslaved for two hundred forty-six years, we've not been free two hundred forty-six years. And whites learned to live as slave masters for that long. And right after slavery it was more violent than slavery, after all eighteen eighty to nineteen forty, five thousand blacks were lynched, five thousand without an indictment. Lynching took place after church on Sunday. They really believed that blacks were inferior and it was god-ordained inferiority, and god-ordained superiority. So that the layers of racial supremacy and racial degradation were much deeper than people realized, but people learned to believe in their DNA that they had the right to impose on one another's- but we had an obligation to resist.

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So, the resistance movement- ultimately, our resistance, our distance there, a will to occupy. And on our worst days, we see the backlash, which always comes after the forward move. But also, in addition, you also see these lights of progress. I mean, when I ran in eighty-four- we got the right to vote in sixty-five, we were all- we were happy with- we were- it was a big deal. We didn't realize that with the right to vote, the burden was on us.

00:30:15:00 We didn't know anything about gerrymandering, how to draw lines, annexation, at large, role [*unclear*] and ticket splitting. We learned that in the next twenty-five years, that's how deep that thing was. I ran in eighty-four, we got three and a half million votes and less than four hundred delegates. Delegates did not correspond to the votes. So, we figured out something called "winner take all." If I get forty-nine and somebody else gets fifty-point-one, they'd take a hundred percent. And so, that meant the forty-nine who worked for me get zero, the other people get the forty-nine percent they didn't earn, which itself undercut, development. So, we got some kind of proportionality, if I get forty-nine percent of the vote, I get that many delegates. On that theory- and I ran in eighty-eight- we got twelve hundred delegates. We were learning how to- the science of politics. On the eighty-four rules, Hillary won California, Ohio, Pennsylvania, barely, but she won them. On the eighty-four rules, she would have been the winner in oh-eight. But on the eighty-eight rules, President Barack Obama got his- even though she won California, Ohio and Pennsylvania and New Jersey, and Texas, he still got his share of delegates, and he won, because we democratized democracy. We kept changing- the movement never continued until we finally even the playing field.

00:31:43:00 And as I look at these- what are we doing- why we've become so dominant in athletics. And to me it's the very best analogy. On the, on the field no one argues about split homes and the social condition you came from. What makes us so dominant on the football field, the basketball court? 'Cause whenever the playing field is even, and the rules are public, and the goals are clear, and the referees are fair, and the score is transparent, we can make it. There's any doubt, there's a replay, 'cause there's a determination for a game to have a just process and a just outcome.

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Those rules that make athletics work don't apply beyond the athletic field. And so, fighting for a just society, equal protection under the law, equal opportunity, those are very radical ideas. One of the most- one of the most radical ideas in the whole bible is "do unto others as you would have them do unto you". The one-to-one ratio does not sit well with aristocrats. A one-to-one ratio does not sit well with those who have supremacy notions of themselves and inferior notions of other people. So, his fighting for a just and balanced society- I mean, in football- if blacks had to run twelve yards for a first down because they came from a broken home and whites had to run eight yards because they inherited some yards, we couldn't get along there. But so long as ten yards for all first downs, six points for all touchdowns, we've learned- And so when I see- I look at the games and I see black and white referees and the black and white players, and all that- I just see the joy of- and people of all political arrangements. They want a fair game. No one wants to win because somebody- because of a violation- because of a bad call by a referee. But those same rules must apply to access to med school and law school and politics as well.

00:33:47:00 TREY ELLIS:
Could we talk about Cicero being- your marching on Cicero after the- it was your idea, wasn't it? That-

00:33:57:00 JESSE JACKSON:
Well, Cicero was considered the kind of the Birmingham of the Chicago community. It was- there had been some killings there and the reputation was very violent. And, and so it was the supreme test, would we confront Cicero. And we met downtown with the mayor and the Archbishop Cody and all of that- Cardinal Cody. And we finally decided to not go into Cicero. We had made our point about open housing versus closed housing, but the temperature was so hot, the people marched in Cicero anyhow in defiance, which is a part of the whole uprising over open housing. Because what was happening- while we were in Chicago, people were marching all around the country for housing. People were locked in these ghettos and locked into limitations

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in every place. After all, when, when we got the right to vote on open housing, we got the mayor, fifty years ago this year- with Mayor Richard Hatcher in Gary and Carl Stokes in Cleveland. All that comes out the same struggle, that's not Chicago, that's Gary, that's Cleveland, that's Detroit- [*unclear*], that's L.A., Bradley. So, the impact of these movements- the movement became like the, the earthquake, the aftershocks, the reverberations affected everybody everywhere from Seattle to Miami.

00:35:24:00 I think that- I think another point I would like- Is the ups and downs of the struggle are very distressing mentally, and emotionally. I remember we were- his last birthday, we didn't realize it was his last birthday- January fifteenth, nineteen sixty-eight, we all met at the- about fifty of us met down in his basement of his church. And that day there was a lot of excitement in the air, it was a warm Georgia- Atlanta, Georgia day. Around eight o'clock he had breakfast with his family, he came to church around ten with his blue jeans on and a sport jacket and a sport shirt. And he had some whites from Appalachia with whom he had not worked before, but we were aware of their situation; some Latinos, some of Chavez' group from southwest Texas and Colorado, California, some Native Americans, some African Americans from the deep south, South Carolina, Alabama, Mississippi and Georgia, some Jewish allies, Al Lowenstein out of New York, some labor- about fifty of us met, planning a Poor People's Campaign. His argument was we've got public accommodations, we have the right to vote, but we're democratizing poverty. There's abounding poverty- he's arguing- Doctor King said, there must be a floor beneath which no person should fall. We should always should have a base of access to education, and healthcare, and a decent house. Wage, and education for the mind, and art for the spirits and culture. He, he kept that vision focused.

00:37:14:00 And so that day, we had that kind of meeting and around eight o'clock, he left home and came to church around ten, we met. Around twelve o'clock Xernona Clayton came in and Bernard Lafayette came in and she held a cake, said, "Doctor King, you forgot it was your birthday." And we laughed and it was January fifteenth and we cut the cake and we drank the punch, and it really- and had about twelve-to-one maybe, and then in then in the afternoon, Al Lowenstein led the workshop on how they

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entered the war in Vietnam. So, he- so he- as I argue with people who celebrate his birthday, let that week be a week of door to door voter registration. let that be a season to fight for automatic voter registration, let that be a season for activism, not just *[unclear]*, but activism, because he spent his own birthday, home, church, work clothes, end poverty, end the war, 'cause he believed that the war in Vietnam- resources were designed for the war on poverty, but you thought there'd be a morally virtuous movement, went to the war in Vietnam. And the resources needed to heal at home was going to kill abroad. Three million Vietnamese were killed. He thought that to be a moral disgrace. And so, he wanted to shift, he said, "Let's go to Washington. We're going to Washington, if necessary go to jail, civil disobedience, and convince this Congress to shift from the war in Vietnam to war on poverty, 'cause bombs dropped in Vietnam, resources spent there, will explode in our cities," and of course, ultimately, that did happen.

00:38:54:00 But he spent- and this kind of happened, he was kind of in a good mood that day, that was January fifteenth. We had our meeting of ministers January twentieth in Florida at the *[unclear]*, trying to organize a plan to get this going in twenty-five cities simultaneously, but in April, the last week of March, I remember on Friday night-, we were preparing to have a meeting the next day, Reverend Abernathy called, said, first of all Doctor King called, said, "I need to see you guys tomorrow morning at ten o'clock in my office." We said, "Doc, we'll try to get there but it's- it's late." He didn't spend much time arguing the case. Reverend Abernathy said, "Martin wants to see you guys." Bevel and I were in Chicago, and I think *[unclear]* maybe was in Cincinnati and other people in different places. So, reluctantly, Bevel and I, we got to the airport at seven o'clock, said, "Doctor Abernathy, we missed the plane, we can't make it." He said, "I know you were going to miss it, you're on the seven thirty-five Eastern." So, we got the seven fifty-five plane.

00:40:00:00 And I should never forget that meeting because he came in in a kind of a somber mood. And he said, "For four days I've had a migraine headache. I've thought, I've sat with my wife Coretta and, and Andy and Jean and Ralph and Juanita, and I pondered, maybe I should quit now. Maybe I should stop- maybe I've done much as I

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could do. We won the bus boycott. Broke down barriers of public transportation. We have public accommodations. The barbarism is behind us. We have the right to vote. Many of my friends are turning on me, many of my Morehouse friends, my classmates, preachers have said I can't come in their pulpits because we shouldn't be engaged in the war. I can't bifurcate my sense of justice. The war is morally wrong. I live in the world- I'm a Nobel Peace Prize winner, I live in the world, not just on one side of the town." He kind of talked, "Maybe I should quit." I remember Andy saying, "Doctor King, please don't talk that way." He's saying to be quiet. Don't say peace, peace when there is no peace, kind of like Jeremiah. And when he said that, in the way, we got real quiet. He said, "But then I thought maybe if I would fast to the point of death- Stokely is my friend and Rapp, Floyd McKissick, we all friends, we disagree on strategy and tactics, but we were all friends, so maybe if I were near death, it could come around my bedside and we could regroup our struggle."

00:41:40:00 And then as if something hit him, he said, "But we'll can go to Washington as we did in South Georgia." Than we go on to- it's like he preached himself out of a depression and he had been depressed. And I was taking notes because it struck me that the same three moves of Jesus, let this cup pass from me, and then some disciples slept, and then- as- as he pondered some disciples slept. And then let my will to thine be done. So, Jesus goes from let this cup pass, thinking maybe I should quit, to as he prayed, disciples slept, to not my will. Doctor King went from, maybe I should quit, to maybe I should fast upon my death and not my will but theine be done. I watched those three moves and we left on that note. But we vigorously debated that morning what we should do tactically. Doctor King was- he said, "But I feel so alone." That made us feel so bad. I was arguing and Bevel was arguing. If we get though- if we get to Washington and the government shuts down, what do we do? We have no sympathetic ears anymore in Washington. So, we finally said, well, and we got through arguing, that if we got to Washington and we look at the top fifty- GM was the big company at that time- maybe if we would target a big industry like that, not buy their cars- get big industry at the table to deal with our concerns, They say well, let's think it through, we left on that note, it was a very anxiety driven meeting. Painful for me, frankly.

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- 00:43:24:00 Then we met in Memphis that Tuesday, I suppose. And he came and said that the plane had been held up because they thought that he was on it and it might be a terror attack. And he sat in the room- we met with some ministers that morning, about the role they should play on the garbage workers' strike. And Doctor King- he made us stay in the room most of the day, and said, "Well, I have a headache, I don't feel like going." And we'd been laughing and playing and he and Andy had a pillow fight- it was very fun day. He said, "You know, my dad," said, "My dad's a slick old man." He said, "Dad came out of," I think, "Cornelia, Georgia," some real small Georgia town. "So, he came to town, that had never been to college or anything, and my grandfather, A. D. Williams, in front of the church, sitting down and he befriended the pastor." He said, "But it was 'cause the pastor had a daughter, who was my mother." We laughed about that. "And ultimately they became husband and wife." He said, "And I looked back through my family's history," kind of walked through, walk through history.
- 00:44:49:00 So later around five o'clock he said, "I'm not going to the rally tonight, I don't feel like it, but Jesse, will you go?" I didn't have a thought. Ralph said, "No, Jesse you ought to go." And so, I think he must have asked Andy, so finally Reverend Abernathy and I went together. Said, let's- "We'll go together." So, we went over there. It was raining that night. And we walked in the door, the church was about three-quarters full, and the people cheered, so Ralph said, "Jesse, don't think they're cheering for us, they think Martin's behind us." And so, you could sense they were expecting him. So, we went down the side of the church, at Mason Maple Church to the- to the back where Bishop Mason- Bishop Mason of Church of God and Christ found- where his body lay- and Doctor Abernathy called him on the pay telephone, the pay telephone, if you will. Said, "Martin come just for a few minutes, you don't have to stay long," said, "they're so ready for you."
- 00:45:54:00 And so, Doctor King came and Ralph gave a rather long introduction, 'cause he was trying to let him get himself adjusted. And he got up and gave the speech, "If I can live any other time in history." He had walked through history that day on a very personal level, and" I've been to the mountaintop, I've seen the promised land," that was in the context of- And then we had no idea what he may have felt about the forces

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closing in on him. “I’m not fearing any man.” It’s a big statement, we reflect fifty years- “I’m not fearing...” like, “I know they’re trying to kill me, like I know they out for me, ‘cause I took on the Vietnam war, I was taking on our government in a war time, I was taking on angry people and misguided people in wartime.”

We were walking to the airport one day in O’Hare in Chicago, I remember four sailors, two white and two black came, “Hey, Doctor King how you doing?” And one guy said, “Doctor King, why are you against us?” And he stopped. It was almost as if he teared up, said- told Bernard, “We’ll catch the next plane, I’m not against you. I think you should be in college, not in Vietnam killing somebody. So, I’m for you. I want you to live, not kill and be killed.” He stopped and talked with them. He sensed that kind of- moving in on him.

00:47:12:00 And so, I do not know what he felt that we didn’t know, except, “I’m not fearing any man, I have seen the glory of the coming of the lord. And I’ve been to the mountaintop.” And then he turned, we embraced, ‘cause I was sitting right behind him and Doctor Abernathy. That was that night. You know? And the next day, we met some more, figured out what we were going to do, ‘cause we had a good night the night before, finally. And I remember Reverend Billy Kyles and Andy and Hosea and I were in the room with him. And some local gang groups who had interfered with the march the week before, they came by the room- when- he raised them some money in New York, he said, “I can’t get you a grant unless you have a plan- I- I’m not- I don’t have any money”. And then they got boisterous, and Hosea and I said, “You guys, it’s time for you guys to go,” you know, we had that kind of understanding with them and they had to go. So, we sat up-Doctor- Reverend Billy Kyles and his wife Gwen to have dinner at their home that night. I remember I had brother *[unclear]* Chicago, Ben Branch, Wayne Bennett and the group, David McCullough, we all were in the carousel singing. We were going singing at the rally. The week before, Doctor King had been to Chicago at the Breadbasket meeting. And he’d heard Ben Branch play “Precious Lord” on the saxophone. He had never heard that before, it was a beautiful rendition.

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- 00:48:40:00 So, I was coming across the courtyard and Doctor King- he's about an hour late, as he was typically. He said, "Jesse, you ready to go?" I said- he said, "You don't even have on a tie." So, I said, "Doctor King, a prerequisite for eating another tie is an appetite." He said, 'You're crazy.' We laughed. And he said to Ben, "Ben, how you doing?" And Ben said- Doctor King, "Play my favorite song tonight, 'Precious Lord,' 'cause he'd heard him play it two weeks before," and... dat! [*noise*]- And then he raised up, the bullet hit him right here. It severed his tie. I heard someone, I think Bevel was saying, "Get low," because whoever was shooting, if they sprayed bullets, they could have shot several of us. And I just hit running toward the steps. And there's a picture of Andy Young and I pointing, and the pointing is that he was knocked against the wall, and the police were coming from that way with their guns. We said, "The shooter came from that way, not this way," that's what that picture was all about. And I remember getting down and by the time Reverend Abernathy came out the room, he said, "Martin," but he was non-responsive.
- 00:49:50:00 So, I got up and went up and called Mrs. King, 'cause I was living next door to them. And I called- by his bedside I had their phone. She said, "Hello, Jesse, how you doing?" I said, "Mrs. King," I said - it was a long ten steps, to take from where he was to that phone, "Doctor King has been shot- I think he's been shot in the shoulder, but I think you should come." I really couldn't say what I saw, it was, like, too much to say. Like, couldn't say that. Couldn't say that. And she said, "I'll come," and maybe, well, maybe a few minutes later, AP called, said he was dead. And that's when a new dimension of our struggle took off.
- 00:50:33:00 We determined at that time, really led by Reverend Abernathy, [*unclear*] or leadership took on another dimension. We would not let one bullet kill a movement. We had to turn the pain in to power. And a lot of stuff happened post his assassination. There was burning the streets. Those were the burning desired of people to do something, people who had never come next door to hear him speak, who had never been to a King rally. The burning in the hearts was hotter than the burning in the streets, frankly, and out of that came the Gary convention, out of that came elections all over the country, out of that came a whole other dimension of politics in our country. In

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many ways, from the balcony in Memphis, balcony of the White House, forty years in the wilderness, it's non-stop movement, lots of stuff happened, that I call it "forty years in the wilderness" because it's so analogous to what happened with Moses in forty years in the wilderness. We have forty years- the leader killed, Breadbasket and marching and changing rules for the Democratic Convention in seventy-two, running for offices we've never run for before and winning, a higher degree of consciousness from calling it the negro to Black Power, to African American. We were- our minds were getting freed up and, and the success of the 84/88 campaigns with the broad base of coalition building, and Andy Young had become mayor and Walter Fauntroy had become a congressman in South- in Washington. One could just see us kind of swelling up.

00:52:31:00 And so, by oh-eight, I remember standing in Grant Park, across from Johnson Publishing, where Mr. John Johnson used to raise money for Doctor King, to give Doctor King support, where in, in sixty-eight there had been the riots and tear gas in that same park- Barack Obama is announced president. Boy. Tears came from everywhere to my eyes because it was the moment and the memories. The moment was that we had won the big one. We had won the big one. We won the big one. And I knew Barack would represent us well, 'cause he's so smart and so able and one can see evidence of that. But what also made me- I wish Doctor King or Medgar Evers, or Mrs. Parks, really, certainly Fannie Lou Hamer, could have been there for a moment, to just see the fruit of their labors, certainly Fannie Lou Hamer, Medgar Evers, 'cause it was their night, really. And then the people who couldn't get there, some of them were injured, or dead, a guy names [*unclear*], James Orange, and others who had been injured along the way who maybe are unable to come to Chicago, couldn't get the big standing spots, couldn't get the- the common people made that right to vote possible.

00:54:08:00 And the right to vote was a crown jewel of our struggle. And that's why it's always on the attack because the right to vote is the crown jewel of democracy. And there's the attempts to minimize or undercut it even today. To protect the right to vote in sixty-eight has been undermined tremendously by this administration. And one of the, one

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of the most anti-forces was led by Sessions, who said the right to vote was an imposition on the South, it was intrusion. And he could not wait, he and the *[unclear]* to remove the protections from the South. But all that stuff came and, and post King, here we are today, we're in a different place, but it's the roots of all this is Martin Luther King, Jr.

00:54:52:00 TREY ELLIS:
You've already talked about the assassination. You went home to Chicago right afterwards. And talk about the rioting and—

00:55:01:00 JESSE JACKSON:
We had the substantial movement of Operation Breadbasket in Chicago, aftermath of the sixty-six movement. Here for the first time, blacks built a chain store, construction guys, companies, begin to build churches for the first time, build a stronger black middle class. We begin to leverage corporations to invest in black communities. We had stores on the weekends who put their monies into black banks 'cause over the weekend monies accrues. And so, we had a strong movement here. And he had been here two weeks before. And my family was here. So, when the shock took place, when he came back from the funeral home, the Atlanta group went home, they lived in Atlanta, I lived in Chicago. I came home to be with my family and our organization. And so, I woke up the next morning. Chuck *[unclear]* was standing over me, sent *[unclear]* to come by the house. I was still laying there in my clothes, so I went down to city hall. I was so angry because the same voices that were so hostile toward him, some of the ministers and political leaders, the Daley forces that said he should get out of town, he had no place in Chicago, they were having the drapes- the purple and black drapes. And I was mad as hell. Said, "You guys sit here as hypocrites." I could not- I was trying to control my anguish with discipline, it was hard to do. And I left that afternoon and went on back to Atlanta, but I came home first.

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00:56:43:00 But there were explosions all over the country. But we were trying to turn, you know, you turn garbage into energy, energy if you can discipline it. So, our point was, don't just burn up where you live, there's a- some of *[unclear]* that were burned down are still burned down these many years later. Turn your anger into votes, turn your anger into boycotts, turn your anger into opening school doors that are closed. Cause if you spend more than you have, you get in debt, and you vote less than you have, that's a formula for suicide. If you, if you spend less than you have and vote all you can, that's a form of power. So, let's- how do we discipline our power and make something happen that's big here? And we began to finance our own campaigns. I mean, the basic money for Harold Washington's campaign- came from the black business community in Chicago. The first monies of Barack Obama came from that same, that same- the King group of sixty-six to seventy-two, the Al Johnson, Bute *[phonetic]*, John Rodgers' parents, the King group put the first money even for President Barack Obama. So, there's a continuity between open housing marches and, and Chicago sixty-six and the White House in oh-eight, there's an unbroken line of- and I think much of, much of that has been left in the dark because many writers only put a footnote to his work in Chicago. My neighborhood, for the record, there's a book written by Doctor Deppe if you've not read, you should read the book, by Martin Deppe, I'll get you a copy today because for some reason or other, they want to say, well, Montgomery was a success, and Birmingham was a success, and Selma was a success. Chicago- they got had by Daly. It's not true.

00:58:47:00 In Chicago, we laid the groundwork to redefine the urban struggle, 'cause Chicago's so big, you can have a stadium for the people at Soldier Field, White Sox and Cubs Park, *[unclear]* you don't miss anybody you know. This is Chicago- this is not Selma or Birmingham or, or Atlanta, this is Chicago. And so, we had to figure our way out, how to navigate through this urban situation and build coalitions. That's why I say the weapons are- you have to be- you have to have the right to vote, you have to- right use of your dollars, your coalitions, act and be mostly morally right. All that stuff has to come together to make something happen. So, Doctor King's- the Barack victory is a King victory. The- Doctor King's side of history. And we who were in that struggle,

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would rightly be called the Joshua of our generation because Joshua came into Moses' army. He was the Moses of our time. And so out of that comes Andy Young, comes to Congress and goes to the UN. Out of that Walter Fauntroy comes out to organize Washington. Out of that- out of the aftermath the Rainbow Coalition comes with Barack Obama. So, King is the Moses of our situation, there's King- there's Joshua and there's- here we are today, facing a stiff resistance, a reaction to our progress. unfortunately, one built upon fear, not built upon hope.

01:00:29:00 But he- Doctor King warned us of this, he said, you'll have these forward movements forward, and then fear will set in and the reaction will set in. You plant two seeds in the ground of equal strength and you water them both, but you put a wall between them, one will grow tall with multiples of fruit, and one will be short and stunted. That does not mean the smaller is less than, the other is more than, it's something called photosynthesis. The one that had the light could flourish. Now, whites often have the light and they flourish, not 'cause they better, because they have photosynthesis. Or to put it another way, you have a wall between you, and on the other side of the wall there's ignorance, fear, hatred and violence. So, you pull the walls up, we can see each other, we become teammates. And on the football field, we become teammates, in the army, we become teammates, and pulling for healthcare, and jobs and justice. That's all I do- that's why we choose bridges over walls.

00:00:00:00 TREY ELLIS:
So coming up to Chicago, how was Mayor Daly a different kind of opponent for King compared to the Bull Connors and how was that tactic different?

01:01:38:00 JESSE JACKSON:
A Bull Connor had a solid white, you know, *[unclear]* base. It was a white/black society. Mayor Daley had many more African Americans on his plantation. He had ministers who were intimidated-. If they spoke out against him on Sunday morning, because some policy, there was some precinct captain in the audience who would report them to the building commission, they'd challenge the churches on Monday

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morning. The church runs on intimidation. He controlled a political structure which had black leadership and there's committeeman and aldermen, but all of them- if you wanted to become a judge, you had to go through Mayor Daley, or police officer promotions had to go through Mayor Daley, so he could- he had a very controlled situation. So, it was the first time we ran into stiff black resistance, where a group of blacks, ministers had a press conference, said, "We don't need Doctor King to be here." Another guy had the press on the West Side, said Doctor King should go to hell, made all the- all the nightly news. He had a group of political leaders who were at one of the churches, big press conference on why Doctor King was not needed in Chicago. We, we had never met that in, you know, Montgomery or Birmingham or Selma before, that was different.

01:03:03:00 So, we had to distinguish between who was trapped in that machinery, so we had to free those in that machine, to get them free too. I still don't forget, one Saturday afternoon- since we were kind of divided, who was in the machine, who was free, who's like [*unclear*] over here, and some of us over there. And Harold Washington sent for me. He was still on the- [*unclear*] which is now King Drive. We spent most of that Saturday afternoon explaining why he was in the machine, but his father was a- was a protester. Harold Washington's father. He learned how it worked, how he resented the machinery. And in his own way he was fighting, Harold became someone who understood it, in it, didn't like it. Harold was a different kind of creature, he knew enough of it, kind of like Moses. Moses understood the system in Egypt 'cause he grew up in it and he didn't like it. Harold was kind of that guy with that relative consciousness. And so, at some point in time, out of it emerges Harold Washington who knows what makes a machine click and how to stop it from clicking. One Sunday morning- one Friday, should I say, Dorothy... may have been Doris- yeah- Dorothy Tillman and Marion Stamps, and Lou Palmer were in the- over the- in the fair- over in the open housing meeting, and they were arrested, beaten and arrested. We went down to get them freed. And then we still kind of become exhausted like what to do next.

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01:04:49:00 This is such a big complex situation in Chicago, New York, L.A. And I was on the radio program that Sunday morning on BMX, someone called and said, "Why don't you guys just boycott Chicago [*unclear*] that's the Jane Burn's coronation, you've done a lot to get her elected and she's, she's defying us, turned her back on us." I wanted to say to him, "It's easy to say 'call the boycott.' It's hard to do. You gonna have free hot dogs and beer and cokes, Stevie Wonder's coming for free 'cause the city is [*unclear*] the concert." So, my mind said no, but my movement consciousness said, but if you the faith it can happen. So, it's really faith versus mind. And so, I couldn't put the person down saying, "You don't understand," said, "I'd get back to you next week." So that Sunday I asked Reverend Evans and he said, "Go for it." And Joe Gardner and the various groups and Leon Finney. And somebody- Wednesday we had a meeting at this building and said enough is enough. We're just going to the West Side, South Side and North Side. And we started boycott and so everybody had a different assignment- my assignment was to get the artists with whom I worked with, and [*unclear*] not to cross that picket line.

01:06:03:00 We crossed- Stevie wouldn't cross the picket line. So, they sued him- Stevie took the hit of the suit. He- he wouldn't cross the picket line. Every day a different artist wouldn't cross the picket line. So, after ten days, this thing had momentum. Harold came at one- Harold said- "This is a success, but I'm on my way back to Washington. I'm not going to run for Mayor because I have a good job and I like my job in Washington, I'm not going to run." Said, "Harold, you have to, you know, you- you're the one with the right set of credentials." So, Harold said- we went and had the meeting. Harold said, "Well, two or three things, one if I were to run, you'd have to put on fifty-thousand new voters, raise at least a quarter of a million dollars, not promised, put on the table. I have to build a coalition, this is not just a black city, I have to build a coalition." Said, "Let me take you up on that." In the wake of ten days of a successful boycott of Chicago, very successful, a lot press covered every day, media coverage all day, the Daley boycott was successful, the Daley boycott is successful, boycott successful. So, we had a meeting and they- they put on four hundred thousand new voters and raised a half million dollars led by Mr.- Mr. Ed

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Gardener and people of that ilk. And so, Harold kind of was trapped in his own rhetoric, so to speak. But it was really part of his consciousness, frankly, for a long time. And out of that, Harold won. But that- that too comes out the same Chicago conscious, 'cause had we'd not had the expo, and had we'd not known Stevie and the artists, that couldn't have happened. It would not have had the presence of mind, it couldn't have happened. So, all that stuff- the end of- the wilderness years, the stuff like that happened.

01:07:45:00 TREY ELLIS:

I want to go back to the media response to King in Chicago. When he- when the movement moved up north, it's like the first time that King was getting- from northern news outlets and "60 Minutes," and he was getting criticism. Can you talk about that and his- how did he feel about that-

01:08:04:00 JESSE JACKSON:

Well, the media is strongly cultural. And the media didn't believe that we had the capacity to take on the Daley machinery. They had fallen prey to that, and after all the Daley machinery, quote, unquote, delivered Kennedy in 1960. The fact is, under Congressman Dawson and that district in Chicago of blacks, that's what turned the key for Kennedy, but Daley had the overall arch and he was the guy. And it couldn't happen. And *[unclear]* see the instant struggles- these big cities, a lot of instant gratification. But in Montgomery is a single-issue bus boycott that cripples a city's transportation. Birmingham, it cripples the downtown area and you have tumultuous up bring and we win because he- the barbarism and the degradation of the dogs biting people and the whole world saw it. In Selma another war horse town, so to speak. But Chicago's a big complex situation. And since we finally got off the ground, with Breadbasket and the union to end slums and the school struggle and open housing. And then we met with Daley and then we met with Colonel Cody, and said well, you didn't win anything in Chicago. We knew it was a long distance run in Chicago. And the fact is, the reason why we are just looking now at a post-African American

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president, is because of nineteen sixty-six. You could not have had- oh-eight had you not had sixty-eight in Memphis and seventy-one in Gary. Had you not had all that stuff- it was a kind of non-stop struggle from one balcony to another balcony, the balcony in Memphis to the balcony of the White House.

01:09:52:00 TREY ELLIS:

I was just thinking, I'd read that the *Chicago Tribune* said that King- you and King threatening to march on Cicero was- they called it blackmail by martyrdom. You know- how did you- did you feel- that the media- not just Chicago, but the Northern media was being unfair?

01:10:10:00 JESSE JACKSON:

Well, you see- the sense that they knew if we marched, as we marched, and whites were erupting in ignorant, volatile violence, that we were winning, though we were getting hit, that nonviolence had the power to pull the worst fever out of them and show our moral strength. We were winning though losing. They had- they had the stick, we had the bible. They had the politics, we had the morality of our cause. It felt by going into Cicero, it would just be- whites would just go berserk. But we would win, though bloody. Well they- they saw that. And no, we did not- we didn't mind dying for life. We didn't mind going to jail for life. We put forth our courage and bodies on the line. Our bodies were like living sacrifices. And so, they said it was like- we weren't martyrs- we wanted open housing. And we finally got open housing, and fair housing because of that.

01:11:17:00 TREY ELLIS:

I want to talk a little bit about after the movement, after the Chicago marches, coming back, SCLC- Andrew Young talks about how the SCLC started to disintegrate a little bit and sort of internal strains on it. How was- what were those pressures like on SCLC?

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01:11:35:00 JESSE JACKSON:

Every time one of us would leave the core organization and go to another position, we called it “expanding our movement,” not disintegrating. So, Andy at one time, had the Doctor King Foundation, Human Relations Council in Atlanta, and SCLC de facto Executive Director, and ran for Congress and won, so SCLC was going to Congress. And Walter Fauntroy and Andy Young in the Congress. So, we were there arguing that case. I stayed in Chicago and every time we won a victory over some corporate lockout, that was- SCLC was there. And when Bernard Lafayette would go on his journeys into nonviolent teaching and C.T. Vivian. So, the core group expanded, you know, we didn’t leave, we expanded. And, and there were- children not of the immediate household, in other words, even Maxine Waters was de facto on the staff, but she was in California. You know, Reverend H.H. Brookins in California, Reverend Tom Kilgore in California. All the- the seeds sown grew great harvest around the country, indeed around the world. So not only did we harvest fruits in America, but we led the drive to get Mandela out of South Africa. Same spirit. We led the drive to get Aristide back to Haiti. So, the movement- when I went to Syria to get Lieutenant Robert Goodman, and Americans out of the rock in- rock in Cuba, I was- that was Doctor King. We still believe in that we had the moral authority- our struggle captured the imaginations of people around the world.

01:13:30:00 TREY ELLIS:

I was thinking about how also how when King came after- came out against the war, they talk about how a lot of the SCLC funding, outside funding sort of dried up and- was that- did that cause any pressures on you-

01:13:44:00 JESSE JACKSON:

Oh, tremendous pressures. That’s why our movement never accepted the regular salary competition for monies. We were making like thirty-seven fifty a week, you know, without insurance. Somebody asked me one time, said, “Jesse, how did you at age twenty-five, twenty-six get so close to Doctor King so quickly, and there was you

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and there was Bevel, and just a handful of you guys?” Said, “Well, if you want to work for fifty dollars a week or less with no insurance, on call to go to jail, you might get shot, there was no long line waiting to get in that line. It was a short line of people willing to pay the price. And Doctor King felt- it’s kind of like the coefficient of expansion, once you came out we swelled up, we could not go back, we would not go back. And so, it- it really was the blood of the martyrs that, that redeemed us. It was honor and suffering that was redemptive. It really was the nameless face- ‘cause I remind people the Sunday that the march took place in Selma, Alabama, there was John Lewis and Hosea, who were known from their civil rights work- Mrs. Boynton who really invited Doctor King to come to Selma, or the people who- the nameless, faceless masses begin to swell up and believe that no, no stick could stop them, that no dog biting could stop them, no [unclear] could hold their body down. We began, we began to believe that and by the power of that faith, we changed the course of the country.

01:15:17:00 TREY ELLIS:

I want to talk about the meeting and Airlie House. Taylor Branch talks about it being a retreat to sort of figure out what the next moves might be. And people talked about how you would just- in terms of arguing- fight for either Operation Breadbasket or Vietnam, hunger, what the next moves were.

01:15:35:00 JESSE JACKSON:

Well, the thing about those Airlie House-type strategy sessions, we would go to the Penn Center once a year in Frogmore, South Carolina and think through what’s next. We had, we had developed the audacity to believe we could change cities and change laws. We believed we had the power. The folks who got the right to vote didn’t have the right to vote. Folks who got open housing couldn’t live in open housing. We had values beyond our situation. The people who made open housing don’t live in Country Club Hills, you know. Those who got the right to vote, for the most part,

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didn't go to congress and the senate. They made it possible for others to- I- we were knocking down doors and creating space and building bridges. We were construction workers. We rebuilt the South.

01:16:29:00 TREY ELLIS:

And about Memphis, you talked about that meeting that you had when you all- when he called you back in to Memphis after the, the- can you go back a little bit to, like, how King and his staff reacted to the- to the violence of the first march.

01:16:49:00 JESSE JACKSON:

We felt the first march that the- that the gang group on the back of the march was a set up. That was a very successful march in terms of putting focus on the garbage workers. But two or three people in there disgusted in anger threw rocks in some windows and all the press covered the rocks and not the garbage workers. Doctor King said this is another case where violence does not work, because violence sucks the oxygen out of the tank. The focus on how accurate or inaccurate the rocks were, but not the focus on garbage workers and collective bargaining. And so- but we knew that was a plan to get attention by them. And it could have been even paid provocateurs, we were not sure. But we- we took that- and so, Doctor King- "King can't control his troops." That was not true. The ministers and the garbage workers were marching lock step with Doctor King. The rock throwers were coming from another angle. So, the whole thing about putting out "he can't control his troops." The fact is, our troops were growing, and our sense of focus was growing. And, and- we went back into Memphis again determined to have another march. And that's what the rally in Mason Temple was the night before. It was all about that.

01:18:12:00 TREY ELLIS:

You talk about how frustrated he was at that point in his life and there's that incident where he was- in his frustration he kind of cussed you out a little bit? He was a little, little short with you?

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01:18:24:00 JESSE JACKSON:

I wouldn't say "cussed," it was- we were arguing in that meeting. Bevel kept saying and I kept saying, "Doctor King, we're going to Washington and the White House closed the doors. Where is the stick?" So, if we got to Washington and the White House says no and the Congress says no, where do we go? Do we go back home? He- there was no answer to that, really. Suppose we go to Washington and organize a massive walk- it came out of that conversation. And while Bevel and I were arguing back and forth on the same page, it was frustrating to him. He said, "Well, Jesse, that's all right. You're be leading one- you'll understand one day." He left. We were being insensitive to the state of his mind and pain at the time. He said, "Well, come on and-" So we- that was on Saturday until we were all in Memphis. It was no falling out, it was just an argument in the staff meeting about what do we do. And so, in the, in the speech at Mason Temple he referred to me in the speech. He says, "And we also have put money in the Tri-State Bank and, and we also have development and we also- What's that company, Jesse? Coca-Cola, Carnation? Wonder Bread." That was, in fact, one of that tactics that was being used. That, that came out of the Saturday morning meeting. So that put in perspective- it was not- he was frustrated, he was full of pain and... I understand that now. As he said, "I lived to see it". Sometimes you can be- your mind- you're in a staff meeting, your mind is in many other places and staff be arguing about stuff that's mundane compared to- our arguments were comparatively mundane. We were doing the best that we could do with what we had. We just didn't know any better.

01:20:27:00 TREY ELLIS:

Did you notice a big difference between King you met when you began in Selma and that King at the end?

01:20:33:00 JESSE JACKSON:

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Well, he had, he had more tax on his person, classmates, “I know Martin, Martin shouldn’t be doing this.” When he took the position against the Vietnam War, along with the war the machinery came with him, Pentagon-type, but civil rights leadership, “He didn’t know what he was doing.” They began to talk to the press- on and off the press. Many of the churches closed doors, “Don’t come in my church talking that war stuff.” I mean, going against the war was counter culture, right? Now, let me speak freely of wars, because with today’s technology, there are no more foreigners. You, you look at your gadget in real time, we’re looking at South Africa and Australia and New York in real time. That was- Doctor King never saw a cell phone. Today, if you and I catch a plane, one going to Senegal, one going to L.A., we get there about the same time. This is- our world was so different at that time, so much- I remember my parents talking about these foreigners who work with them, these foreigners, and they can carry- they can carry buckets on their heads and don’t drop them. They’re from Jamaica. *[Unclear]* But there are no more foreigners. And so, in that sense Doctor King was expanding our world. And so, we were beginning to think we had the right to fight to free Mandela, that was our world. I went down to Peoria, Illinois a few weeks ago trying to get a guy who’d been to jail forty-seven years, apparently innocent, and the press said, “Why you down here in Peoria?” I said, “If we could fight for Mandela in Pretoria, we can fight for Cleve Heidelberg in Peoria.” We- we’re world citizens. So finally, the world citizens are among people who’ve adjusted to their own little spot is quite audacious.

01:22:23:00 TREY ELLIS:

Can you- is there a memory of Doctor King that when you think about that makes you smile and, sort of personal, something personal, sort of, interactions, not political just sort of human things about him to-

01:22:40:00 JESSE JACKSON:

I remember staying at his house one night and he stayed in the community amongst the people. And the next morning we had to get up and Mrs. King fixed a quick

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breakfast. And it was early in the morning and we had to get to the airport in about fifteen minutes- that's before we had these security guards. And he's a NASCAR driver. I thought he would not make it to the airport. He could drive, he was a driver, you know, we laughed. And he gets to- pull the car in front of the airport and the, and the, and the skycaps come and get the car and we run in to the airport to catch the plane, I mean he was- that, you know. One Sunday morning, he'd asked me to preach in his congregation- before his congregation. That was before I had my- I was even licensed to preach. And I was teased by Xernona and the church was just packed to come hear him speak. And he said, "Now, this morning one of my sons in the ministry will speak to us this morning," and Xernona Clayton said, "Sh..." She has come all the way from California to hear him speak and I was getting up to speak that morning in Ebenezer.

01:23:55:00 So, he kept giving us opportunities to grow, and so, so much of my relationship with him, frankly, he gave me shoulders to grow on. And in my mi- my mind, I make certain moves now and he's a frame of reference. If I go to South Africa, or if I go to try to get some captives free, if I confront corporate America in a certain way, if I'm on TV arguing sometime, I will- I will sublimate my anger, my anguish with discipline because he would- he would have thought that way. So, he's in many ways in my heart, but he's also very much in my head. And I learned to read what he read. He read "Love, Power and Justice" by Paul Tillich. He was, he was- his PhD was in systematic theology. He read Reinhold Niebuhr, "Nature and Destiny of Man." And so, I stayed fairly close with the books he read, and now, of course, I wish this generation would read "Where Do We Go From Here." I wish they would read "The Courage to Be." I wish they would read and understand- Reinhold Niebuhr's "Nature and Destiny of Man." I wish they'd become more- aware with his book of sermons, I mean, he speaks to this generation clearly as if he's in yesterday's morning paper. He speaks to us clearly. His strategies, his philosophy, his world view remain real today.

01:25:31:00 TREY ELLIS:
And what would you say finally to the people that missed that- obviously most people

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are too young to have marched in Selma, to have marched in Chicago- the work we have to do today what's the work that we need to do today?

01:25:46:00 JESSE JACKSON:

Those who live today are the- those who watch the Sunday football game, they miss the process from Monday to Sunday., the practice, the preparation. I hear sometimes we're the Joshua generation, that's not accurate. Joshua came under Moses' army when Moses died- those who worked with him. And Joshua won the battle of Jericho. And he was the *[unclear]* to report the spies who asses- who spied out the land. And Joshua gained his strength under Moses and he took it. This generation is the post-Joshua, not post-King generation. But the- there is- they see the fruits of the labor; the right to vote, the right to play athletics on the big stage every Saturday and Sunday afternoon, the right to be flight attendants, the right to be pilots, even to be check-out clerks at the, at the airport. All that- all that is post sixty-six. It's post public accommodations, it's post the right to vote. I remember when Hatcher and Stokes became mayors of cities, they were national stars. It was such a new deal. When Bradley became Mayor of L.A., now you've got a U.S. Senator from California. You have the mayor of- the longest running state rep in California was Willie Brown.

01:27:21:00 So, things we now take for granted, in my lifetime it happened, and so much of it was attributed to Doctor King's vision. You- we speak of unity, but if you have ten thousand folks marching in unity, a one-eyed person is in charge, they're blind- and the blind say the one-eyed person's in charge. He had vision. Sometime the unity thing failed because of competing forces. But the vision of the power of nonviolence, the power of love, the power of redemption, the power of reconciliation, the power of preparation. Doctor King went to- finished high school at fifteen, finished college at nineteen, seminary at twenty-two, PhD at twenty-six, the power of preparation, and to be mostly morally right.

01:28:21:00 If you have no weapons and no money, just to be morally right is like a light in darkness. And he, in his movements for change, he always carved out the moral high ground. And that's what frustrated him- again, this is when they talked about "we

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want to be martyrs in Cicero,” they knew that in the rightness of our cause, even death became a platform for the resurrection. He survived the crucifixion. Now we live in the King resurrection. The crucifixion took place in Memphis. And one thing we perhaps we do too much, we focus- when we took him back to Atlanta, Atlanta was Bethlehem, it’s where he was born, but Calvary is the redemption. Jesus did- Jesus did not choose to be born in Bethlehem. He chose to go to Calvary. Doctor King did not choose to be born in Atlanta, he chose to go to Memphis. And what is Memphis except the Delta of Arkansas and Mississippi, the poorest Americans of Appalachia. His, his, his Calvary was in the pit of Appalachian whites in Arkansas, and, and Mississippi Delta blacks. And so just as we celebrate his birthplace in Atlanta, Memphis must take on new meaning. We’re- as Christians, we’re not saved by Bethlehem, we’re saved by Calvary. And the resurrection goes beyond Calvary. And some see this as Memphis, how do we handle the poor if Memphis, and Delta of Arkansas, and Appalachian whites. How do we handle- that *[unclear]* rightly determines the power of the resurrection? That’s the new American possibility.

01:29:57:00 END OF INTERVIEW