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XERNONA CLAYTON INTERVIEW
KING IN THE WILDERNESS
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XERNONA CLAYTON

Friend and Organizer, SCLC

Interviewed by Trey Ellis

March 28, 2017

Total Running Time: 2 hours 16 minutes

partner

00:00:03:00 TREY ELLIS:

Xernona, first thank you so much for coming, this is really, it's really an honor for me. Can you tell us about the first time you met Doctor King?

00:00:12:00 XERNONA CLAYTON:

I met Doctor King in- I don't remember the years, but, you know, early on in his career he was a Baptist minister who attended the Baptist conventions, as did many ministers. I was very active in the church and went to the conventions and one year I met him. But at that time, he really had not achieved fame necessarily. He was a young minister and I remember how vibrant he was, but it wasn't really that memorable. It was later on that I kind of put all of this together. But I do remember real fondly and clearly the first time I had a real personal contact with him and what I remember about him is that his sincerity was apparent, his love was obvious and his dedication was very, very, very apparent. He talked so passionately about the work he wanted to do. And that was the memory that carries me all the time, how impressive he was when you got a chance to have an engaged conversation with him.

00:01:34:00 TREY ELLIS:

And what brought you to the SCLC and working so closely with him?

00:01:38:00 XERNONA CLAYTON:

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He did. Doctor King, we- well, he was looking for a public relations person who would help write speeches, help do public relations for SCLC. And he knew and felt the growth of the organization. They did need an expansion, someone who would do those kinds of things, make the organization more relevant to the public, so he was on the search for a good, strong PR person. At that time, I was married to Ed Clayton, who was the editor of *Jet Magazine* and known very well, in the journalistic circles as a man with great ability. He was creative, he was smart, he was quick, he was fast. And everybody respected Ed Clayton even when they didn't like him because he was kind of controversial, because he was a kind of go get it kind of guy, a real driver. And so, you either liked Ed or you didn't. And people would say that about him, said, "But he's smart." So as Martin would run into people, he would ask 'em, "You know a good journalist?" He said, "Yes." Some people would say, "But I'm not sure you could get 'em. He's kind of pricey. He's worked at *Jet*."

00:03:00:00 And, and one of the things I'd like to say about Mr. Johnson who was the publisher of *Jet* and *Ebony* magazines, he didn't believe in paying black writers meager sums because they were black. He wanted them to be good and proficient and earning capacity as they would have at *New York Times* or some other white publication. So, he paid good salaries and people knew that, that was his reputation. So, Ed was making a decent salary and as the executive editor at *Jet*, he made a very good salary. So, people would tell Doctor King, he's good but he's pretty pricey. And every place he went that's what he'd hear about Ed. He was good, but pretty pricey.

00:03:49:00 And finally, he said, Doctor King said to himself, "I think I'm gonna go after this guy and see if we can get him." And sure enough, he calls Ed, we were living at that time in Los Angeles. Johnson Publishing Company had sent Ed to Los Angeles to set up the West Coast office of Johnson Publishing Company, so we were living there. And Doctor King called him and told him that he had a pretty good reputation out in the market place and he'd like to meet him and see if he could entice him to come to Atlanta and he said, "Well, what does the job pay?" And when he told him, "He said, oh no, I don't think I can come for no money." That's what it amounted to. After much persuasion, Ed agreed to at least come to Atlanta and visit the environment and

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see what it was like. Ed came to Atlanta and saw the dedicated workers, people there who weren't making hardly any money, but who were just committed to the cause of justice and equality and went about it so seriously.

00:05:03:00 And when he saw Doctor King was very much involved in his mission and he was determined to meet his goals, Ed was softening. And finally, he said to Doctor King after much discussion, and he came home and discussed it with me, that he'd like to come and stay for about a couple months, just to maybe get him started and maybe then somebody else could come in who could afford to work for that little amount of money. Ed came to Atlanta with a two to three-month agreement. And in a very short time, Doctor King said, "I knew the first day he came, he was the man we wanted." As I said, Ed was so creative. He right away gave them ideas and suggestions as to what he thought he could do to get the message out about the work of SCLC.

00:06:06:00 While here in Atlanta working on his mission, he- 'course he met Mrs. King and she being a trained concert singer, because she went to New England Conservatory of Music and felt like she had a talent that she could market that would help raise funds for the organization. She expressed that to Ed and Ed said, "Oh, well, listen, I can help you get there together and I could help shape it for you and get PR surrounding it and making it a real package and even my wife who's back in Los Angeles, she could help you because she's very organized," and he told them all these nice things about me. And sold her on the idea that she would work- Ed would work with her to get her a concert format together. And it was Ed's theory that she could start with no effort at all, that she could start with Doctor King's base, churches in the west coast who were so committed to the mission or the work that he said, "We'll just start going through the churches. And so, she was very fascinated with Ed's ability to think right away how you could put this together, and he in fact put it together. And then they called me, asked me to work with her, to travel with her and help implement the plan. And I did.

00:07:40:00 So, the first concert was an eleven day stay. We went from Pasadena, California all the way up the coast. And everywhere we went it was a hit. She was Mrs. Martin Luther King. And it was a way of the public to touch the hem of Doctor King's

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garment through his wife, and it was just a great success. She was very happy and now she's become happy with me. Of course, I had no intentions of moving and making this a permanent situation, but she went back home and told her husband how pleased she was with me. And he said, "Well, I'm very pleased with Ed," and they ask him to stay three more months, so now that one agreement went to six months. And after that time, the two of them kind of put the pressure on us to- there's something for us to do here in Atlanta working with the two of them and we acquiesced.

00:08:57:00 TREY ELLIS:

So, the main focus of this documentary is really later King from after the- after Selma and the Voting Rights Act towards the end. We're calling it sort of, "King in the Wilderness," the hard work that's a little bit out of the spotlight. You describe really beautifully a lot of the struggles he had. If you could talk a little bit about that plane ride you took with him when he- he encountered someone who didn't like his work.

00:09:25:00 XERNONA CLAYTON:

Doctor King demonstrated, as I said, immediately the seriousness to which he was going to fight the cause of justice. When you're around him all the time, he expressed what his goals were and we got a chance to hear the rationale for his commitment. He had met Gandhi and he said, "Mr. Gandhi had the right approach to nonviolence and peace and love," and through his meeting and his readings and his teachings, he was convinced without a doubt that this is the only way to go. You must be nonviolent, you must be peaceful, you must be loving, and you must be committed. And Doctor King demonstrated that. He meant it sincerely and deeply that we must fight these evils in our society, poverty, injustice, maltreatment, and he said we can do it with a plan, a plan of love.

00:10:56:00 And I couldn't believe really, even though I'd seen a little of this, I couldn't believe the man was so committed to nonviolence. I had been in his presence when a man

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spat on him, just spat all over his face, and that would just make anybody mad. It conjured up in me anger and I kind of wanted to fight myself. Doctor King, who never ever showed any signs of retaliation, would just do the same thing all the time. Just take his handkerchief, wipe the sputum, and said, “Well, this convinces us we got a lot of work to do,” and just keep on moving, keep on moving. Once you saw that over and over and over again, you became thoroughly convinced that here was a man who practiced what he preached. And it’s a lesson I learned about him all the way through the balance of his life, that he meant to solve the problem of inequity. He meant to have the government pay some of its commitment to African American community. He was convinced that we can’t stop until we win some victories. And he did it, a lot of it, not everything, but so much of it.

00:12:39:00 TREY ELLIS:

Do you ever think about that man that spat on King, how if he’s still alive, what-what do you think he’s thinking?

00:12:47:00 XERNONA CLAYTON:

I’ve been asked many times after Mr. Obama won the presidency and it was so unbelievable, shocking and wonderful and all that put together, but I’ve asked many- I’ve been asked by many news people, what would he say if he came back now and saw Mr. Obama sitting in the President’s chair. I said he would say, “I told you so.” And of course, I was asked to explain it. And I said, “Doctor King said all the time that white men of goodwill must join this fight, join hands with blacks and together our results would be unimaginable they’d be so successful.” And then he even outlined what really happened almost, that when women, men, boys, and girls, blacks and whites unite, that’s when we could see those unimaginable results. And when I look at the President’s numbers of victory, that fits what he said. And I remember so well, how stories came out that well, to do working white women would take leaves from their jobs so they’d go on the campaign trail. I remember when men who had money were giving it in great amounts. I remember when

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children were taking their penny banks and contributing. We had what Doctor King said would be the picture, blacks and whites, rich and poor, young and old, uniting for something, and in this case, it was the victory of Mr. Obama. And so, he would say if he were here, "I told you so," because that's what he said and we saw the evidence of that.

00:15:09:00 TREY ELLIS:

From, from your point of view, what was the hardest part about being Martin Luther King? The, the weight of, of- did you see that weight on him?

00:15:21:00 XERNONA CLAYTON:

Oh, I think the hardest part was- I know what I could describe as his darkest moment. I'm not sure I would classify it as his hardest point, but maybe I could. The darkest moment for him was when he made the speech about his position on Vietnam at Riverside Church. His world changed because the people around him changed. They stopped giving, they stopped calling, they stopped caring, and he was devastated. And he would say to those of us who were close to him, "I cannot understand this. I don't understand why and how people who knew me didn't quite understand that I can't condone killing in any form." And he said he was sitting in front of a television set one day and saw children being bombed. He said, "Now I- now I gotta act." He never liked it, but he didn't say anything quite like that in such prominence. But he said when he saw the children, he said, "I've got to speak. I've got to speak out."

00:16:51:00 Now he knew it'd be a controversial position, but you know he didn't run away from controversy, but he did not know how deadly it was gonna be because the world just clammed up. And he couldn't understand it and he always said, "I can't understand it." He said, "You expect your enemies to disagree with you. You expect them to go against and in opposition of what you're doing. What I didn't understand was how our friends would leave me." And it just really killed him. I'm gonna stop because I think we hear noise.

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CREW:
We're fine.

XERNONA CLAYTON:
Okay, thanks.

TREY ELLIS:
Yeah if you'd like to continue that would be wonderful.

00:17:35:00 XERNONA CLAYTON:
When I say that the nation dried up, that meant that money did not come. And I remember without, you know, reciting people's names necessarily, he had some- a coterie of good friends who would always kind of find a reason to do some fundraising for him, people who would donate themselves and get others to donate with them, to just send money without even a request. I mean, they would just know that Doctor King's organization needed money and the fight needed to be continued, and so without, you know, requesting, they would just send money. He noticed that they stopped. It hurt him deeply and so he just brooded over that. He just could not rise above the depths of his disappointment.

00:18:39:00 And on his birthday, which ended up being his last birthday, we the members of the organization, his close friends, would always kinda give him a gift of a suit 'cause he'd just wear a suit out, wearing suits all the time. And his staff, meaning people who had gathered in Atlanta in April to- I mean, in January to plan some of the activities for the future, his birthday was coming and they said, you know, we were all concerned, we haven't seen him laugh in a long time. And we had Reverend Jessie Jackson, Bernard Lafayette, Andrew Young, and the close connection of people who were at a meeting at the Ebenezer Church planning strategy for a future activity. And this was April- I mean January fifteenth, which was his birthday. And they said you know, "We can't give him another suit. We want to give him something

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that'll make him smile, we haven't seen that smile in a long time." He just walked around aimlessly it looked, but I know for certain 'cause he talked to me that it had bothered him deeply that the nation had turned against him. As a matter of fact, I can say now that he never got over it because this was January that we were talking and he was assassinated a couple months after that, and I always tell people he died of a broken heart.

00:20:32:00 But on this birthday, January fifteenth nineteen sixty-eight, when the men who were working at the church at this meeting had gotten together and said, "Let's call Xernona and ask us- ask her to come over when we take a break and see if she can get him to laugh. We got to see him to laugh, he hasn't laughed in a long time." So, they called me and told me their feelings like, "Please come over and think of something to do to make him laugh." Well, I said, "I can't be funny at the spur of the moment, so I need more time to plan some humor," but they said, "No, we need you to come, it doesn't matter, just come on over." Well, I went reluctantly because I couldn't think of what I needed to do to make him laugh. But as I, you know, just wanted to follow through on the need to do it, as I was going out of my house to get into car, I went through the kitchen and I saw some items that I had gotten out of a gift basket. One of them was a little can of shoestring potatoes and another one was, you know, funny stuff that I figured I could make some humor out of.

00:21:50:00 I went onto the church and at a propitious moment and they broke, Doctor King came out of the meeting room and headed towards the men's room. They called him back. Now, I must also add that present was a film crew from Italy who was here doing a documentary on Doctor King, so they were present, because normally there would not be a need for television cameras, but they were on the premises because they had been following him during the week. Well, they filmed him coming out of the meeting, going to the men's room, or headed in that direction, and they said, "Hey Doc, come back." Then he turned around and said, "We got some- a surprise for you." And he came back. And now I'm standing there and I said, "Now, you just have a seat because this is your birthday, so we're gonna treat you to something special."

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00:22:58:00 Well, one of the things I picked up was a little gold can, very similar to what used to be a beggar's cup, and- but it was all gold and kind of fancy, but nevertheless a little cup. And I said, "Doctor King," as I reached into my bag, and I said, "I brought you a cup because you're always talking about helping President Johnson fight the War on Poverty, so now you can take the cup and go out on the corner and collect money and send it to President Johnson, which is your way of helping." Well, he laughed, and it wasn't a smile, it was laughter. And then I said- I reached into the bag and brought up this can of shoestring potatoes, and I said, "You're always going to jail, so take this can of potato chips- I mean, of string of potatoes and when you go to jail again you'll have something to eat." And he just really falls out with laughter. And I did this enough times to bring out some things and he's falling over the desk with laughter and then I said, "Well, and now I have a cake and this is your birthday, so happy birthday." Well, when the evening ended, the meeting resumed, but everybody now is so relieved because now we've gotten the laughter back and oh, he just stayed up, up, up throughout the rest of the evening. He was jolly and he was fun loving and everybody loved him.

00:24:47:00 What was interesting about that further on is by having the film crew here, we never knew how important that was until April when now we have in the can his last birthday, which ends up being a lot of laughter captured. And when the major movie was done on him, they looked through the tapes and they couldn't find hardly any footage where he was laughing. He was full of tension or he was marching on some mission that would not bring laughter. And so the movie producer said, "We don't have much levity here, we need something that gives us some balance here." And they went across this film and it became very valuable because it was one of the few times they could ever find any footage of him laughing. And I felt very good about it because I was a part of the rationale and the reason that he ends up now laughing, because we were all concerned about the depths of his despair and disappointment over the reaction to the Vietnam issue.

00:26:20:00 TREY ELLIS:

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Going back, so when you first met him in sixty-three, and sixty-four, he was more funny and was- in th- in those early successes, was he lighter, was there a different- was th- did he seem like a different Martin before the Poor People's Campaign and Vietnam than after?

00:26:41:00 XERNONA CLAYTON:

One of the things that those of us who were privileged to be in his environs found out he was the funniest man alive. Now that was surprising to me because every time I had met- seen him, prior to being a part of the inner circle, you know, he didn't laugh much. He was like the film director said, they couldn't even find him laughing, because when we would see him, he's taking care of serious business, so he wasn't laughing. But once you became a part of the inner circle, this man was the exact opposite of what we knew, the public part of him. He loved fun time and he was the best fun- funny man because when he joked or tell a story, he had inflections like, he would say, "And this Italian said this," and he would give you the Italian dialect, or, "the Frenchman said this." And he'll giv- you know, he was so learned and he would give you- he set the story up for you that you felt like you were a part of the story. He made you come alive with his story and you ended up on the floor with laughter.

00:28:01:00 And we had a chance to meet every week or so, ministers would get together what they call their "private moments," and they would tell stories. And ministers are very competitive, like, when one tells a story and everybody falls out laughing, "Well, wait till you hear this story." And so, it's kind of like, "Can you top this? I can top this," kind of evening. The most fun that you could ever have is to be in the presence of Martin Luther King and his close associates and ministers who were his friends. Fun time was the best part of Martin Luther King because he would unwind and he took on another mantra of personality and I remember them so fondly now.

00:28:51:00 TREY ELLIS:

Besides the, the fun times, which is- which is a surprise, anything else about Martin the man that was a real surprise to you that you'd like the world to know about, how

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he was as a person that's very different and more personal than, than how we was portrayed?

00:29:07:00 XERNONA CLAYTON:

Well, I want to tell a funnier story about him. When I- first time I came to Atlanta- now I had seen him in Chicago, in New York, in California, and his treatment was, you know, everybody loved and respected him, so he was always in a nice, comfortable setting like a great suite in a hotel surrounded by security people and driven around in a limo, like you treat the rock stars, I would call it. And somehow, I had that picture of him living large and when I came to Atlanta, I remember the first day I met him here in his setting, it was gonna be on a S- I mean, it was a Sunday. And I flew in on a Saturday and he said I wouldn't see him until Sunday, but after church, he was preaching- he always preached two Sundays of the month as the co-pastor of Ebenezer.

00:30:19:00 So, on his Sundays he would preach and this was a Sunday that he was in the pulpit. And he said, "Following the service, I'll go into the office and do some cleaning up, and then we're gonna go to dinner." Well, we stayed outside the church, it was a beautiful sunshiny day, and so Mrs. King, my husband and I were standing outside chatting with members and waiting for Doctor King to come. Now, there were cars on the sidewalk, but I didn't pay any attention necessarily to them. But when he came out of the pulpit- I mean, out of his office and now comes to the sidewalk and says, "Okay, I'm ready to go now." they opened the door of this small car, similar to a Nash Rambler, is what I called it, and that surprised me because I was expecting a limo. And then the other surprise was he got in on the driver's side. I never in my wildest dream would think that Doctor King even knew how to drive.

00:31:35:00 My husband and I got in the backseat and he and Mrs. King were in the front seat. Now, as I said it's a sunshiny day. We were parked near the end of the street on the end. So, he got in, turned the ignition and the windshield wipers started going. Well, I thought he had just hit it accidentally. But now he puts the car in reverse, we back around the corner still with the windshield wipers going, this sunshiny day and

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nothing is unusual about it except for me- “What is this?” So, we back and we’re goin’ and finally I just had to say, “Listen, I got to ask, what in the world- what are we doing?” *[Laughs]* Sun’s shining, windshield wipers, we’re going in reverse, he said, “Oh, this car has to go at least a block, then it’s warmed up.” We went the length of the block, he stopped, then put it in forward, and we went. Well, I just fell out and he laughed with me, so we had a laughing good time going to the restaurant. I said, “Oh, wait till the nation sees what you really look like.” And he laughed because that was diabolically different from what I’d seen him. But he laughed so heartily that I called attention to this because he thought it just a common occurrence, that’s what he did every Sunday- every day.

00:33:10:00 But, you know, he accepted his little meager lifestyle to just what it was. The other was treatment that other people gave him. But I understood from people here in Atlanta early on that the people who loved him didn’t want him to be common, ordinary, low living. They would offer him homes with big splendor or cars with bigness ‘cause that’s what they wanted him to be, and he said “No, this is what I can afford. I’d rather live like I can afford it.” I loved that about him.

00:33:58:00 TREY ELLIS:
Did he understand- did he understand in way differently than Coretta, for example, his place in history? I heard it was Coretta is the one that said record all these sermons, record all these speeches for the future. Was he aware while things were happening that he was making history or was that more people around him?

00:34:17:00 XERNONA CLAYTON:
I think she was aware because she told me, the many hours we talked, I was asking about their early romance. She didn’t especially like him for the boyfriend ‘cause she had a man she was dating and she kind of liked him because he had a little dash. Martin seemed slow and studious. Now, the boyfriend she had was also smart, but Martin seemed a little slow, and so she- he was really not her immediately chosen-choice, I should say. But she said, one of the things – but he- he didn’t stop, he knew

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she didn't get bowled over and- but I used to tell him all the time, I said, "You know, you're kind of conceited!" You know, he had an exalted opinion of himself, he thought he was okay, which was I guess good to have, but Coretta didn't think so. But he couldn't understand how Coretta didn't see in him that, "I'm the one, I got it all." You know, and he, he had a swagger about him, and, you know, he thought he was the cat's meow and Coretta wasn't so easily turned on. But she said in spite of that, what made her turn the corner on seeing him differently was that he just seemed that he was committed to a cause, and the times they did spend together, he said, you know he was going back home to the south because of so much work to do. And he was always talking seriously on a date.

00:36:01:00 And through those moments of dating, she saw that this man is really gonna do something because his commitment just seems so real. And she had said to him that, "When I leave school, I'm not staying here either. I'm goin' back home," because her parents were mistreated. She lived in, was born in Marion, Alabama right in the heart of communities that burned and looted and mistreated, even her father, who was a grocer's man, owned a little store there. She saw firsthand the difference in which black people were treated and so she was gonna come home also to do her life's work when she graduated from school.

00:37:01:00 So in talking on their dates, they learned that they really had similar goals and that's what made her love him enough to finally say, you know, "I think I could marry this man," and that's how the romance grew and blossomed, and matured to the level it did because she was impressed with a man who could talk so well, who had a goal, and a lot of students didn't have goals, they had ambitions, but not necessarily stated and committed goals, and she saw that he did and that's what really kind of turned her more strongly toward him and ultimately they married. And that's why she was in agreement because he could not have married a woman who would resist coming back to the heart of the problems- well, the problem was everywhere, but I mean, in the heart of our nation where you could see the difference and see the need and work harder to make a change.

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00:38:18:00 TREY ELLIS:

Well, in talking about their marriage, when you go to the- he writes sometimes that he had almost married nonviolence, and he had married the cause as well. Did Coretta ever talk to you about the price the family had to pay for living so publicly and having, you know, sort of sharing their father with the world?

00:38:39:00 XERNONA CLAYTON:

When I look at their early lives through what they told me and what I've read, there were women in Martin's life 'cause he was seen as a smart man. And he came from good stock, I mean, his parents were considered well-to-do and he was kind of what people would call a "good catch." But when I look at them and especially when I examine him and the prospective girls, the girls who could be prospective wives, I can tell you now that Martin Luther King chose the best person possible as a wife. Coretta- 'cause when I met her, you know, they were already married with a family, but I learned her- from that point I could see all of her background that I didn't know, I saw it coming together, that Coretta didn't fight his cause, she joined his cause. And the only time she was angry and kind of disjointed is when she couldn't join him, either through- because of pregnancy or some other situation where she couldn't be on the march, she was unsettled. She believed in his cause so much that she was willing to pay the price. Now, when- and early on they had just had Yolanda, their first child, and the house- there was a bomb thrown in the house and naturally there was fear, but they were able to protect the child from harm, but she kind of felt like, "Boy, this is our future. Looks like this may come again." And I think she braced herself and she was a prayerful person herself. She believed in the strength of the good Lord, the strength that the good Lord gave her and them and wore it well, because she believed in it so deeply and she felt that the cause was just.

00:41:14:00 And when he was called on an- I guess I'm probably mixing some of this story with later on in their lives when he got busier and busier, she was left at home with four children to care for and I remember the difference between- and I, and I made the contrast between when she was home every day and he was still living, nobody

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noticed her as the woman who was taking care of home. It wasn't until he died and she then was the only caretaker and she did it so well, they're saying, "She really has turned out to be a good, caring person." Well, she had lots of practice, but I was traveling with her and could see how she had those children's schedules and the care of them right in her head and in her heart every moment.

00:42:11:00 Now, I'll give an example. We're on the road, she had call her housekeeping staff and said, "Now, don't forget, Dexter has an appointment with the dentist this afternoon at two o'clock. And don't forget that- make sure that Yolanda gets to her dance class at six." And I mean, she's got the schedule down and she's calling back home to be sure that they have it, "And don't forget to have the driver take some soup over to Mrs. So-and-So's house 'cause she's got a cold. And don't forget that I told Mr. So-and-So I will see that he gets picked up to go to prayer service." This was Coretta's calling back home. With all these duties assigned to somebody and she's got 'em in her head, she wasn't reading from a chart. She had this day carved out in her head and she's rattling off responsibilities and dates and appointments. And this is while he's still living because he's somewhere else, he's not in the house.

00:43:26:00 And also, when he was home, she insisted, with not a whole lot of luck, I must add, that he have dinner with the children. And so, he would- she would ask him, "Martin, what time can you come home today and will five o'clock work?" And he would right away say, "Oh, yes." And so, she'd tell the children, "Okay, we're having dinner with your dad present at five o'clock." Well, Doctor King's someplace else. He's involved in something else, he gets involved at the office, he's got somebody's problem, and he's forgotten all about home. She would call, and of course those were the days before cell phones, and she'd track him down, and they said, "Well, he's in a meeting with somebody." "Well, will you tell him we're waiting for him for dinner." And the children are getting cross and hungry and grumbling and she said, "Yeah, but I want your father to have dinner," "Oh," and they're crying, and then he may or may not come on time. And when he'd come in, of course she'd fuss at him and he's apologized and then he'd kiss her and make up and didn't do it the next time, so it never really got better. But she seemed to understood- she tried hard to have him

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spend as much time with the children as he could because he wasn't home that much. And she tried hard.

00:44:57:00 Now, when it worked best was immediately after church. He was here every first Sunday and then another Sunday during the month, it may be second or third or whate- but every first Sunday he was here. And so, she'd plan a very family dinner on the first Sunday 'cause she knew she had him and the family could eat together. But she was an organized woman, she didn't give him grief about his schedule and most women would just get bent out of sorts. Now, she was disappointed of course 'cause she wanted him to be there with him 'cause she wanted him to be there with them 'cause she wanted them to share him. But she didn't beat him up. She understood and although she'd fuss some, she didn't fight about it, she just said, "Oh, I'm disappointed you couldn't make it." Most women would be scrappin' 'til, you know, kingdom come about, "You didn't do what you said," and this, that and the other. And that would just add pressure to him. She knew that if she fussed at him too hard, it was just gonna add pressure. She knew he was out doing something that had value to his work, and so she understood. Most women would not.

00:46:15:00 So, when I look at their lives together, she was such a good partner and I can tell you this, the world owes her the debt of our hearing his words today because she was relentless in seeing to it that a microphone and a tape recorder were present every time he spoke. And she would get agitated and she would say to me, "Where is that boy with that microphone?" She would insist on having it. And had she not been that type, we wouldn't have his words today. She kept every piece of paper. That's why we have his papers. Now, of course, at his office his secretary was a well-organized, but the stuff he had at home, Coretta was responsible for that. And so, we would not have his words to hear and live by and capture were it not for Coretta, the best partner he could have ever chosen.

00:47:23:00 TREY ELLIS:
The- for the kids, were- they WERE young. How woul- they must've- it must've been harder for them to understand that their father was missing so often?

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00:47:33:00 XERNONA CLAYTON:

Well, it's interesting that they saw him going to the airport all the time. And one time, Dexter, who was the younger boy, they would say, "Well, where's your dad?" Said, "He's at home, at the airport." They used to call it "home" because he seemed like he was going to the airport all the time. But he was coming and going, he'd kiss 'em goodbye and tell them when he was coming back and it was okay. But see, Coretta was there and so half the house was in order- well, the house was in order 'cause Coretta saw to it that all their needs were taken care of. They gonna have to go to school, do their homework, go take their baths, get up, go here, go there. So, their lives had a routine and a habit to it. So, it was a comfort to them. They didn't care that their dad's not there. He's coming back and so it was no problem.

00:48:27:00 Except now, let me fast forward when that changed. And I'm jumping this story, but we can put it in context for all to understand that that contrasted with the end. The end came when he was getting ready to go to Memphis. Now, nobody knew this was going to be the end, of course, but things changed. I had spent Sunday at their home. Coretta was convalescing from recent surgery and was home bound. But this day Doctor King was here and his mother was there and we all had dinner together and had a wonderful, wonderful afternoon playing the piano, singing church songs, telling jokes, and well, they say, "a good time was had by all." Now, I was to drive him the next morning to Memphis. I don't, I don't mean drive him to Memphis, drive him to the airport to go to Memphis. After the evening was over, I went home and Mama King went home and we tucked Coretta in. His mother called me about eleven-thirty at night and said, "I know you're taking M.L. to the airport tomorrow, but while you have his hear, will you tell them that although I'm his mother and I understand that he's busy and don't really fret over it, but boy today was such a grand occasion when we were just sitting around the house, playing the piano and singing and having a grand time. I wish we could have more family moments like that, so tell him to plan it in his schedule and why don't you help him get us on the schedule sometimes after he comes back." Well, on the way to the airport I told him,

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he just laughed and I said, you know, “She’s feeling the joy we had today or yesterday and you gotta have more of it and I promised I was gonna help, so come on now, you gonna have to help me.” We laughed about it.

00:50:57:00 That was Sunday. Now it’s Monday. But when I came over the next morning, Monday morning, to pick him up, the boys grabbed his attaché case, one grabbed the case, the other one blocked the door and said, “Daddy, don’t leave.” And he said, “Oh, I’ll be right back. I’m just going down to Memphis, I’ll be back.” And e was trying to get his bag and they’re tussling over his bag. He finally was able to get it and I helped him get the door open and he came out the door. Then they ran ahead of him and blocked the stairwell, and said, “Daddy, don’t leave us. Daddy, please don’t go.” And he said, “Listen, I’m coming right back. I’m just gonna go down there for a march. You know I explained why I’m going, these people have been mistreated in Memphis and I’m going to do something about it, that’s my work and you know that. So, I’m coming back.” And now he makes another step down the steps. The boys then blocked again the end of the stairs, said, “Daddy, please don’t go, please don’t go, please.” And the pleading unlike you’ve ever heard before. We finally got that cleared and he walked to my car. They ran over to my car and blocked- the two of them blocked the door so he couldn’t get it open. And he said, “Come on, guys, I’m coming back. I’ll be right back. I’m just going for a march and I’ll be back.” Then he finally pushed them out of the way, nonviolently of course, and got in the car and then they jumped on the hood of the car pleading again through the window. “Daddy, please don’t go, daddy, please don’t leave us, daddy, please!” Such pleading, so atypical, so heart wrenching.

00:53:25:00 So, we finally, you know, were able to get out, ‘cause I said to them, “Listen Martin,” I had a new car, and I said, “Now they not gonna mess up my new car.” I said, “You all get out of here!” *[Makes sound]* We got out and backed out of the driveway and got on the way, and he said, “What in the world happened to these kids?” Then he said, “Have you ever seen them act like that before?” I said, “Well, no they’ve never acted like that before. These kids see you go all the time, coming and going, coming and going.” We’ll never know. Now, what I have said after the fact is, I analyzed it

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because it was so piercing and so atypical, the whole behavior, and I said, “Martin, I think that,” -No, he said, “They must really tryin- be trying to tell me that they’re missing me more. And when I come back, I’m gonna do something about this, I’m not gonna- I’ve gotta change my habits, I can’t go through this.” And I now say in their- not defense, but I say- especially Martin who was older, maybe they’re having a feeling and a sense, maybe God is talking to them, that he’s not coming back, maybe God- some force, external force has given has given them the truth like this is gonna be the last time you see him. Or maybe they had a premonition, or maybe they were just prejudging that he’s not coming back. And maybe they had an inner warning because these things, you never- how do really say that?

00:55:17:00 But he didn’t and it’ll be a scene that I won’t forge. And Martin talked about it all the way to the airport, about how disturbing that was. Now, I back up to the real world in which they were all living. They didn’t care that he was going to the airport, ‘cause he’ll be back. And so, they’ll just kiss him goodbye. Now, they’re out there playing ball, they’re just, “Okay, dad, see you,” like any kid would do and it was like any occurrence. “Okay, see you later,” as if it were no problem. So, I think during those times, it was no problem because they knew he’d be back. But I don’t know how to describe this scene I just gave you.

00:56:13:00 TREY ELLIS:
You’re saying he was really punctual, he was never late?

XERNONA CLAYTON:
I’m sorry?

TREY ELLIS:
You were saying he was never late?

XERNONA CLAYTON:
No always late.

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TREY ELLIS:
I'm kidding.

XERNONA CLAYTON:
Always late.

TREY ELLIS:
So, tell us about that.

00:56:24:00 XERNONA CLAYTON:
As wonderful as Martin Luther King was, one of the things that annoyed me and everybody around him was that he was always late. Never on time. Now, he would keep press people waiting, like, he had a press conference ten o'clock, didn't mean a hill of beans, he's gonna be late. But what was interesting about that tardiness is that they would wait because they probably figured that when he gets here, he's gonna give us something, so he was kind of like worth waiting for. But I said to him one time, "Why are you late all the time?" And, and it bothered me 'cause I'm such a timely person. I mean, I can't ever be late. And trying to do something with him was so annoying because he was just, just- I think he planned, "I'm gonna be late." So, one time he said, "You know, everybody always has nice things to say about you, but I just believe that something's you just can't do. Everybody thinks you can do everything," he said, "but I bet there's something you cannot do." And I said, "What is it?" He said, "I bet you can't cook?" And I said, "Well, I wouldn't go down in the record books as being a great cook, but I can prepare a meal." He said, "You mean one that you could cook?" I said, "I will cook, I can find something I can cook." And he said, "Well, okay set up a dinner party. We gonna have a dinner party." I said, "Okay." I said, "But under one condition, that you're not going to ruin my meal by being late."

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00:58:07:00 Well, sure enough- so we planned it all up. So, the day he was to come to my house for dinner, and I did find- but I had to get help, because I really didn't know how to cook, but I found me something I could put together. And he liked pork chops, that was one of his favorites. So, one of my church members showed me how you fix pork chops. And I did the work and so I really could honestly say I did it, but I had help with how to prepare pork chops. So, he came, and I think- I don't remember the time, but I'll just pick a time like dinner was gonna be at six. Martin surprised me by coming, like, four thirty. And I said, "Oh, my gosh I did put the fear in you, you are here early. And so- which means you're gonna be at the table on time." But guess what, he was late because he went in the backroom, got on the telephone and talked to a hundred people on the telephone. And at six o'clock, which was dinner time, I had to threaten him with his life not to make another phone call, that he's already late for dinner. He- it- came in and he was late. I said, "Well, Martin, you messed this up." And he said, "Well, I know you didn't cook it anyway, so it'll be okay." So, he was late for the dinner he said he wouldn't be late for, and it impressed me beyond any reason that he was not gonna be on time, but coming early just blew my mind, but he still was late.

00:59:39:00 And I think he enjoyed throwing people off. He was a real lighthearted man so many times, and we'd play games with the children that just infuriated Mrs. King. He'd come in the house and the fun was this. They had one of those tall refrigerators and the fun came when one child- he had a kiss spot for every kid. One was on the right, with four children, he had four spots. And it was their individual spots, which they coveted, you know. So, when he'd come home, first thing he would do was play with the kids. And man, they'd get ready to all go to the kitchen and take turns. Like, one would go up on the refrigerator and leap down. He's on the floor and he's gonna catch them and give them a kiss. Now, Mrs. King would just absolutely die every time he planned to play that fun time with them 'cause she figured they're gonna break their necks falling off the thing. But they'd come down and fall into his arms and he'd grab 'em and on purpose pick the wrong spot. And then, "No, daddy that's my spot!" Oh, then they'd have a fight over it. He'd kiss and he'd have to wipe it off.

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“Okay, then this is your spot.” And the kid would kiss the right spot. Then he’d take the next kid and so forth. This played it out ‘til all four kids were down now and they got the right spots and, man, then they’d have a big hug. That was the greatest fun for them and for him, ‘cause he now- the kid in him gets a chance to come out. But it’s fun for them and he was so full of wanting to give them a little of himself when he did come and that was the beauty of his fatherhood, that he had work to do, but he found time. And then he would take the boys swimming, and he loved to play basketball and now the boys are learning how, so they went to a friend’s house who had an indoor swimming pool and a thing you played basketball. So, he would play with the kids.

01:02:03:00 Now, but he told me the hardest job that he ever had to do was to tell his daughter she couldn’t go to Fun Town. Fun Town in Atlanta was a little spot that you see on the way to the airport where kids would go and they had merry go-rounds and they had cotton candy and it was like a carnival all the time, but it was a permanent place where kids went to play all the time. White kids, but black kids couldn’t go. But on the way to the airport sometimes the kids would ride with him to the airport just to have a little more time with him. They would see it and they’d say, “Daddy, when are you gonna take me to Fun Town?” And he said, “Well, when I come back.” And then he’d come back and they’d say, “Well, when are we going to Fun Town?” Then he’d make up another story. “Well, I’ve got some things to do, but as soon as I get them off my plate, then we’re gonna go.” He kept misleading the child thinking he was saying next time, next time. Well, he was avoiding telling her that she couldn’t really go because she was black. He finally got tired of telling her the untruths and putting it off, he didn’t want her to think he’s just not taking the time to take her. He finally had to say it, “I’ve gotta give her the truth” And he told her.

01:03:38:00 And he said what bothered him was that, “I’m teaching my children to love everybody. I’m teaching them that some men are good and some are bad, there’s a difference in our society, trying to paint the real picture of our world, but you gotta love everybody.” The bible speaks of that and he’s giving them a biblical lesson all the time on being kind to folk and treat your neighbor- all the good stuff, and now I

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have to tell her that she can't go because she's "colored," as they said in those days. Colored people couldn't go. The color of the skin made the difference. And he said, of all the things ever happened to him in life, that would go down as his darkest moment because he had to tell her the truth, he couldn't put it off any more. That was rather sad to me, that now the truth has to come out and he's gotta be the one to help do that.

01:04:45:00 TREY ELLIS:

The- in terms of his- again talking about the children, they never felt any kind of- the threats, any of the- besides they were too young for the bombing, I would think, in Birmingham, but, like, were there other times when they felt the threat? Because he didn't allow bodyguards or any of that so I wonder did- how did they- how were they protected from that feeling?

01:05:07:00 XERNONA CLAYTON:

Well, you know, they were- the King family was able to get the older children- yeah, the older children into a school that was a white school. They used the influence- it wasn't easy, but they managed to get them into one of the better schools in the city, which means there were white kids and I think they were the only black kids, but since they'd been taught that, you know, all men are equal, so to speak, they didn't see that there was a real difference. And I think the times I talked to them, they couldn't measure that there was a fight to get them in and they weren't in the position to say, "We're the only colored kids here," or whatever. They knew that they had to study because this was, was a good school and studying was order of the day and getting homework was a requirement.

01:06:17:00

And I remember in conjunction with that story, when Coretta had to go in to tell the children that their father was not coming back, it was her hardest assignment. She asked me to go in with them and the- these two stories will link as you hear it unfold. She asked me to go in the room and she had ordered her house keeping staff, "I don't want anybody talking to my children 'til I get a chance, I must tell them." Now, the

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house is now filling up with people the night of his death. Everybody had come from everywhere, so they knew there was a lot going on, but she made them go to their bedrooms. And at a propitious moment she decided that she would now go in and tell them. She asked me to go with her and she had a death grip on my arm as we went into the bedroom. The boys shared a room, but different sides. One had a bed over here, the other had a bed over there. So, we went to Dexter's bedside first and she said, "You know, your dad's not coming home now anymore because-" No, she didn't say he's not coming anymore. Said, "Your dad's been hurt, now, we don't know when he's coming home." And Dexter said, "Well, if he's been hurt, then why are you still here?" So, she said, "Well, I wanted to see how badly he's hurt and then I'll decide what to do." And then she said- he said, "Well, was he hurt real badly?" So, she said, "Well, the reports are that, yes, he was hurt real badly." And so, he kept pressing, "Well, when you gonna- you all do everything together, so why are you back home and he's hurt there?" And so, then she said, "Well, I am going," that she did, you know, plan to go to Memphis, you know, to bring him back. She didn't tell him all that, she said "Well, I do plan to go to Memphis." Which was the truth. Well, he finally settled down when she told him that.

01:08:35:00 When we get over to Martin's bed, she told him that he'd been hurt. She couldn't even say "shot," she couldn't say- and definitely couldn't say "killed," she just couldn't muster it. She said, "Well, he's been hurt and we don't know what we're gonna do next, but it looks pretty bad." So, Martin said, "Well, what will I tell my friends at school tomorrow?" So, she said, "Well, you really aren't gonna go to school tomorrow." He said, "Oh," and he jumped up out of his bed and said, "I've got to go to school." And she said, "No, you don't have to, we'll explain it." "Oh, my teacher doesn't understand if you miss!" We laughed later because we said, that teacher must've said to these kids you're not, you know, walking out of these classes, you're coming to school every day and that was part of the problem with the school system. These kids would go to school and then they'd run away at some of these schools, but Martin's teacher said, "I want you in here every day." And so he said that and he said, "No, mom she doesn't understand if you miss school." And after

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everything, the dust settled and all, we laughed about that teacher and Martin who convinced those kids you come in here every day, you know, to get this lesson.

01:10:03:00 TREY ELLIS:

If you'd go back, as long as we're on this story, were you- so you last saw him, at- can you take us through- you last took him to the airport, that's the last time you saw him, then how did you hear about the assassination and were you with Coretta had it- when- when you heard?

01:10:17:00 XERNONA CLAYTON:

I had dinner that evening with Calvin Craig, the Grand Dragon of the Ku Klux Klan, with whom I had made headlines because the story was that he got out of the organization and credited a black woman with changing his whole mode of living and I was that woman and that's- the story came later, but Martin knew that he and I were having meetings together and I was trying to change his ways. Martin never knew what ultimately happened, but anyway, I was there having dinner at a restaurant. The maître d' at the restaurant knew my relationship to the Kings, everybody did. And so, she came and brought me a note that said, you know, "did you hear what happened to Doctor King?" And I just kind of folded the note up and kept talking and ignored her. She came back, she said, "Oh, I hate to interrupt, but according to what my reports are, it looks like something bad has happened." Well, I wasn't really focused in on something- nothing real bad because I talked to him that afternoon from Memphis and he was in good shape and everything was going well. They were preparing for the march and everything was great. And I had been in his presence three times- well, two times where the word went out that he had been killed, and we're sitting in a hotel room laughing about, you know, "There's your death on TV." And so, I just figured that there's just another false report.

01:12:25:00 But after she came back and said, "You might want to check it out," I decide to go to the telephone and I went to the phone and called their private numbers and all of them were busy and that was unusual. And I said, well, maybe something did

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happen, but I couldn't get through. So, Mr. Craig drove me to the house and as I drove up to the house, she was in the police car with the mayor and they were backing out of the driveway. She said, "Oh, I've been trying to reach you. I've gotta go to Memphis and I hope you'll just kind of look in on the children for me." Now, she had a house keeping staff, but she knew I had a very close relationship with the children and she didn't know how long she was gonna stay, so she said, you know, "Check on 'em, and take care of 'em, and all of that," and left. Well, as you know what happened is, she got to the airport and while she was there, she got the call that he had in fact died. And she turned around and came home.

01:13:37:00 So, I was still there when she got there. And she just told me she had gotten the message and, "Would you just stay with me?" That's what she said to me. And she said, "No, before this, go over to Mama King and Daddy King's home and see if they're okay 'cause I can't go." They sent me over there and to see if they're okay and Mama King through their tears, she said to me, "I want you to know that when the tension of the moment, you know, tapers a little bit, I can tell you fully how much I appreciate what you did." And I said, "What'd I do?" She said, "Well, you told Martin what I said, that I wanted him to spend more time with me and I want to have more home sessions like we had." And I said, "Oh, he telephoned you?" And so, she said, "Yeah." Well, that was the first time he'd done that. You know, he didn't make a habit- you know how mothers are, you know they love you, in spite of anything else, a mother is there and that's where his mother was. So, she said, "He called me and we looked at the difference in time," because Memphis was an hour behind us. And so, she thinks that according to the time of the clock, that she was one of the last persons he talked to and so she said, "I know I'm gonna feel good about that one of these days and I want to thank you."

01:15:26:00 And Daddy King was just walking around just praying and I said, "I'm here as a result of Coretta. This is Coretta's visit to you. She told me to check up on you, to see if you're okay." They said, "Tell her not to worry about us, we're worried about her and we know everything will be okay." And then they drove me back to her house. Then she said, "Listen, I'm concerned," because the phones are just ringing

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with incoming calls now, the nation is now getting the word and it's all over, people are calling. She said, "But my parents don't even know." So, she said, "Can you go home to your house and call," and gave me a list of people to call, to notify them that, you know, what has happened. So, I went to my house and the minute I walked in, Coretta was calling, said, "They know now so come on back." And so, I came back and I stayed with her almost the rest of the time.

01:16:34:00 But I saw Coretta's strength, I'd seen it before, but I saw it glorified at this moment. She didn't shed a tear, except her daughter Yolanda, who was the oldest of the children, had been out to a friend's home and got the message and of course came home and the two of them embraced on the bed and rocking and crying, "We're not gonna cry because we're big girls." This is what Yolanda's saying to her mother. "We're not gonna cry, he wouldn't want us to cry. Daddy would be disappointed if we cried. He wants us to be big girls." And they're rocking and crocodile tears are coming out of both of their eyes. "We can get through this, we gotta help others get through this and we're not going to cry." Very, very painful moment for me, but one that I'll remember. And I never saw another tear until... she was so busy. I mean, calls now were coming from everywhere, everywhere. The President called, well, just everybody called. And the people up front of the house were sending messages to me who's on the phone and she would determine whether we take it or not. But you know, most calls were of people like the President and the Vice-President and people like that who are now expressing their sorrow.

01:18:31:00 But one call came in that was different from all others. Now, everybody said the same thing that I think we're all say, "I'm so sorry to hear the news, if there's anything I can do, please let me know." It's a common kind of comforting word to a friend, "If you need me, call me." The one call that was different was Bobby Kennedy. He said, "It's obvious that we know some of your needs. The one that's really obvious that we've been trying to get you ever since the word broke," now this is about ten o'clock at night, he said, "We've been trying to get you since about five-ish," 'cause that's when we got the news, around five Atlanta time. He said, "We've

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been trying for this long period of time to get through to you and we were unable to do it so obviously you need telephone lines.

01:19:38:00 And so, we have a man who's been dispatched to Atlanta, he's en route there now, will be there before midnight to set up eight telephone lines for you. And also, we heard that on the news that you want to go to Memphis to bring your husband's body back to Atlanta, so we've dispatched a plane. It's there now sitting at the Atlanta airport at hanger number one-two-three-four, his name is John Jones, telephone number is, you know, three-eight-seven-one-two-six-four. You don't even have to call, go to the airport. He's there waiting, whatever time you get there, whenever you come, the plane is there waiting for you. Also, tell them who your point person is 'cause I want to talk to them," and so she told them I was, so he put me on the phone and says, "Xernona, call every hotel manager in the city and tell them lockdown every room in the city and that only you would be the point person to release rooms because we got people coming, heads of state will be here for this funeral and we need space and we will be there, me and my team will come in tomorrow morning and we've got an office that we're setting up at, you know, one-two-three Maple Street," or whatever, "and we'll be on the ground to handle and dispatch all the things that need to be done. I'm a Kennedy so I've got experience in this kind of decision making."

01:21:44:00 We hung up on the phone and looked at this. Everybody said, "Call me if you need me if there's anything I can do." This man said, "Here's what's gonna happen to you. We know you need telephones, we know you need transportation, we know you need this, here it is." He planned everything and I got on the phone and called hotel managers and told them what he said, and able to protect the rooms as people did plan to come to the funeral. That was a busy night, people came and I don't know how they got the mes- well, I do know how the message- you know, Martin, Martin Luther King being killed, it doesn't take long to get that message through. Celebrities flew in from Hollywood on the next thing they could get out and got in planes and flew in here. So that night was a long night, but Mrs. King handled it like a champ.

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She didn't cry, she was calm, composed and acted like she was in charge and she was.

01:23:08:00 Now a lot of decisions had to be made, just so many decisions. One of the things she asked me to do is, one of her housekeepers was gonna take care of the children's clothes, like be sure that they're dressed properly for whatever we do and I want you to take care of me and then she talked about her headdress. She said, "I don't want to look like Jackie Kennedy, but I want to be covered. So, whatever you come up with, you do it and see what I think of it." I then- it's still night and so when morning came, I had two thoughts in mind for what I was to do personally for her. One is, she asked me to do the headdress, but I knew that she was also from listening to her talk she was thinking about going to Memphis and she was thinking about whether she wanted to finish the march or not and some people were calling, said, "No, don't do it." And so, these were the two things that were on her mind at the time should she lead the march. She was gonna go to Memphis, but should she plan to continue the march and all that. And she knew that I was taking care of what she wanted so she didn't have to worry about that. But in listening to her talk, I knew that she was planning something, she was gonna go someplace.

01:24:47:00 So, I call the store, one of our leading department stores in Atlanta, and asked to meet with the millinery department and told them the nature of my call, that I was coming to get Mrs. King something to wear and I had something in mind, but maybe they could help me implement it and would they do it. The manager said, "We'll do anything you want and do you know what time you're coming?" I said, "No." He said, "Well, it doesn't matter, the store closes at five o'clock, whatever, but we'll leave the back door open and you can come at any time you get ready. We're gonna wait til you get here." And they said, "You think you can find the back door?" And I laughed, and for the first time, "Oh, yes, I'm black, I can find a back door." We went in and I sketched out something and I said, "Now, this is temporary because- so don't stitch anything, just follow my design and put it on loosely and we'll take it on to see if she likes it and then we can stitch it." Also, prior to coming to this store, near there was a nice women's clothing store and I went in and picked out several outfits for

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her to wear. So, wherever she went, I had something for her to look nice in 'cause now I knew she was gonna be photographed and she was gonna be busy. And I said to them, "I know I'm getting a lot of clothes, but I have no money. I didn't want to bother her for a credit card and I don't have enough money to pay for all of this, so will you trust me to take the things and then I'll come back tomorrow, whatever she keeps we'll pay for and she rejects I'll bring back?" And he said, "Yes."

01:26:49:00 When I got home to her house in the foyer were Harry Belafonte and Stan Levinson, who were friends and supporters and just good guys who would want to do anything. They asked me what else I'm doing, I had a guy helping me bring in all these clothes. And I said, "I've gone down to the store to buy all these clothes for Mrs. King, but I didn't pay him." And I said, "But I want her to look nice wherever she's going." And they said, "You know what, Xernona, we do too." So they both reached in their pockets and gave me credit cards, and said, "Take these cards and buy whatever you want, it doesn't matter. We want her to look nice as you would want so you make the decisions, here's to pay for it." The next morning, I went down to take-settle the account and- 'cause I didn't want 'em to think I was just taking advantage of 'em, so I wanted to do that early. I went down and I said, "I've come to pay my debt." He said, "Well, you've got a zero balance." I said, "What do you mean?" I said, "All the clothes, I took, she liked them all, so she kept them all, and I'm here to pay for them." He said, "Listen, I'm white living in America. I must take some of the guilt and take some of the responsibility of creating an environment that caused all of this happening. The least I can do is cover the clothes cost, they're yours. Zero balance." I thought that was quite a story.

01:28:43:00 But then I went over at some point to the store because they told me to come down and look at- the lady stayed up all night she said trying to fix what I wanted or what I thought I wanted and gave me a dressing that I could carry home to Mrs. King. It looked really nice and kind of looked like what I had in mind. And, and I wasn't sure, I've gotta meet her requirements because you know you're- she's trying to tell me what she thought she wants, but she said, "I don't really know what I want, but I don't wanna look like Jackie Kennedy, but I wanna be covered." And I think I got it.

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I went home and after we cleared out the visitors, 'cause she wouldn't let but so many come in her back area, which was her private bedroom. She tried it on, it was the only time I saw her cry except when Yolanda cried, and I think the unspoken word was, "I'm dressing to go to my husband's funeral." And then she broke. She knew I wasn't gonna say anything. People were marveling over her strength because every time the public saw her, she was composed and in order. And that's the look she wanted, but in reality, that's the way she was.

01:30:24:00 She was grieving over his death, but she also knew that a lot of decisions to be made, just so many decisions, so she didn't have time to cry. But then she also didn't want to weaken to the tears 'cause they do break you down. And even after she cried after trying on the garment, this headdress, we went into the bathroom and she washed her face and then I told her- said something funny, we laughed and gave her a little relief. But the woman's strength was unparalleled and I saw her at her finest hour and she never- and when I talk about her sense of organization, it was woven throughout her life. And even to this dramatic moment when she wanted to know are the children okay? Like sometimes people came and took the children out, or somebody was feeding them or somebody was taking care of them. All she wanted, "Are the children okay? Whose got the children?" She wanted to know where they were now, she wanted that, but it's always with somebody or the dressing is taking place.

01:31:52:00 TREY ELLIS:

We're gonna jump ahead to, unless we're going to the funeral, to talking about the Memphis and did she- about going to Memphis and then the body laying in state and if you could walk us through that. Like, did you go with them to Memphis to lead- to the march?

01:32:15:00 XERNONA CLAYTON:

I went with them to- when the- no, I didn't go to Memphis. I stayed here 'cause she'd given me a laundry list of things to do, but I don't know if you know that I was there when- the first time I had contact with the body and that was the day of the

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public viewing, so I can tell you about that, that's about all I know, I don't know what happened in Memphis to tell you-

TREY ELLIS:

No that would be great- right- if you could bring us back to that point and how you felt and about, you know...

01:32:55:00 XERNONA CLAYTON:

Okay. But as I proceeded to do several things... let me see how I start this. Okay, I think I can start. Mrs. King did decide with a lot of conversation with people who mattered- you know, Andrew Young, people she trusted, were giving her opinions and facts and advice on whether she should or should not go and she was a kind of person who made up her own mind, she was very decisive. So, she listened to everybody, but she decided she wanted to go. And so, as she was planning to be away from home, she gave me a lot of things that she wanted me to do here at home in her absence, see to it that the children's clothes for the funeral and for whatever else was gonna happen, that, you know, was in place and be sure that the program was in the printer's hands and just a lot of things, she was just so organized that she left me duties at home while she left.

01:34:31:00 One of the many things that she gave me that are really memorable are- I mean, does include the day of the viewing, the public viewing, all the decisions had been made like who's on program and that took- all this took a lot of time, planning who will speak, who's coming, who was participating. And we'd just gotten a lot of messages conflicting and a lot of instances that Mrs. Kennedy was coming, now not coming. She said she didn't think she could handle the visit and then she said, "No, I must go," and that was going back and forth, back and forth. But the day came when she really was coming and I was there to witness that meeting. Very, very, very poignant moment. Mrs. King's house is- there's a long hallway from the front door to the back of the house and at the end of the back of it is where Mrs. King's bedroom was and that's where she spent her private times. So, we'd gotten the message now that Mrs.

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Kennedy is enroute and is definitely coming, so she sent me up to greet her at the front door, to escort her back. When those two women met, it was a scene I won't forget. They didn't even say, "Hello," I don't think. They embraced and they rocked, it seemed like hours, of course it wasn't. But it seemed like they were communicating, not saying any verbal words, but just locked. And my take on that, they were saying, "We understand, we know your pain, we know the suffering, we know the impact," that is what I said they were saying. They didn't say anything.

01:36:57:00 But the day before the funeral was the day of the viewing, the public viewing. The plan was to have the public- well, the body was to lie in state at Spelman College on the campus of Morehouse and all the black institutions. And so, there was to be a lineup of viewers and then the viewing. Well, Mrs. King was called over to Ebenezer Church where they were typing up the program because she wanted to get a last-minute look at the flow of the program and make some changes. While we were there, we're spending time now with program changes while the people are gathering over on the campus to come to the viewing. And so, a security officer called Mrs. King and said, "We want to know what we should do," because now it's supposed to have been, I think, eleven o'clock and they were expected, the crowd was, you know, to start in. And the reporter- I mean the officer said to Mrs. King, "There must be thousands here who are lined up and it has begun to rain. What must we do?" And it's past the time, "What must we do?" And she was such a compassionate person. She said, "Oh gee, they're standing in the rain. Why don't you let them- open the door and let them in?" Then I said, "Mrs. King, don't do that. I'm recommending you see him first. The public will wait, but you need to see him first." And I convinced her to do it.

01:39:00:00 So, we then kind of wrapped up the meeting here at the church and dashed over to the campus. Harry Belafonte and I were the only- oh, and Doctor King's secretary were the only non-family members, so this was just the family hour now. Mrs. King led, everybody came in, marched around the bier, and she looked like she was about to collapse. I didn't see the body till I got up close. I nearly died. He looked awful, awful meaning, he had a big blob on his face as if it were a big piece or handful or

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something of clay and somebody just plopped him upside his head, awful looking. Well, I was just so disgusted because I had taken many calls during the week from morticians around the country who called to volunteer their services because they all said the same thing, "We want him to look good, look natural, and we are willing to come and provide services free of charge. We want to put our craftsmanship to this and make it good." Well, the family turned it down because Daddy King was a loyalist. And I hate to talk about the man, the, the embalmer, but it was not a good job. Well, I had had a similar experience, not quite like this, the experience I had was similar. My husband died a few months prior to this and I didn't like him the way he looked. He was a fair skinned person and he didn't look natural and I think it's a natural occurrence that people want their loved ones to look like they looked when they lived. And so, I said to the mortician, "You know, I'm really not pleased. You know, he's darker than his normal complexion was in life." He said, "Oh no, problem, we'll take you home and we'll bring you back when we've made the corrections." And they did. When they brought me back, he looked natural, as if he were lying there sleeping and I was very pleased. Now I remember that was craftsmanship. I don't remember what they did but some craftsman's work made a difference in the way my husband looked. So now I'm applying that same theory that craftsmanship can solve this problem.

01:41:55:00 I don't know what it is, but I walked over to the man and quietly- 'cause Mrs. King was standing at the foot of the bier just, just could hardly stand because when you look at it, it would make you collapse. And she was standing there in such pain and I could see her, she was so pain- Now I didn't want to do anything that would make her uncomfortable more, or to add to her grief, so I just quietly stepped over to him, tactfully and quietly asked the question, "Sir, is there anything you can do with the si- is there anything you can do from a craftsman point to the side of the face." And then he loudly and crassly said, "Miss, his jaw was blown off. This is the best I can do." And, oh, she nearly fainted. Well, we all did. So now I f- we can't have him look like this, so they set out and then my mind got to wandering, something can be done. So, I looked over at Mrs. King senior, who was Martin's mother who was dark

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skinned, then I looked at Julie Belafonte who was white, then I said, “Oh,” said, “You got some powder?” I asked each of them did they had loose powder and they both did. And I said, “Let me have your powders.”

01:43:32:00 And then I was looking for a way to make me a little combination- Belafonte took out his handkerchief and gave it to me and while I’m standing over the bier looking at my mixture, looking at Martin’s face, I finally think I got it. And I dabbed a little on his face, toning it down, and it-Coretta smiled. It was working. I didn’t know it, I’m just trying something that- I knew we had to do something, but it toned down this crash look of red clay up against his face, toned it down significantly until we could live with it and Coretta was pleased. So, I did it again at midnight and then we were- moved him over to Ebenezer, three A.M. I did it again and made the difference in that look. And she thanked me, you know, for that. But those were such difficult times. Mrs. King always had a composure, and we read stories later about her stamina gave the country and the world relief because everybody in the world, I think, were just crashing over this man’s untimely death, such a good man, a man who lived for, died for goodness and now ends up like this.

01:45:21:00 I got a couple funny stories I can tell you about Doctor King.

TREY ELLIS:

Yeah, please. We’d love to hear those stories.

XERNONA CLAYTON:

Ready?

TREY ELLIS:

Yeah, yeah. Please.

01:45:30:00 XERNONA CLAYTON:

Doctor King had such a- let’s see, how would I call this, a love for people and always wanted them to be comfortable and put ‘em at ease, ‘cause you know, everybody ran

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up to him all the time. We were walking down the street one day to a restaurant; he and I were going to lunch together. And this man approached him, he was so excited, I mean, you could just tell he was filled with glee that now he's personally seeing Doctor King walking down the street. Here's his chance to speak to him. And he walked up to him and he said, "Doctor King, you remember me?" Said, "I met you one, one, one September, we were down in Alabama and I was standing on those steps of the church and my momma said, 'Tell Aunt Susie to come out, that here's Martin Luther King and I want all of all of y'all to meet him,' and they said, "This is my nephew, and his name is Billy. You remember that Doctor King?" And Doctor King said, "Yeah." *[Laughing]*

01:46:30:00 And he didn't remember, they didn't- first they didn't have enough facts. I could remember all the people who related in this story and now we're meeting the grandson and the nephew and Doctor King said, "Hello," and he just filled him with joy, the guy just skipped away so happily that Doctor King remembered him. And so when he laughed, I just said, "You know what, you're an imposter." I said, "You know you don't remember that." He said, "No I don't remember, but let me ask you something. Now, don't you think it's important that I give that guy a moment of pleasure. If it's important to him to remind me that I have met him before and now he's bringing back the memory and he's gonna just jump up and down running down the street. He's got joy in his heart now. It didn't take anything away from me, but look at him, gave him all the joy. What's wrong with that picture?" And we laughed, but he always wanted to put people at ease and would just laugh.

01:47:36:00 He was filled with laughter all the time and all he was waiting for was a moment to let it out. And this last Sunday I was with them, as I told about the last Sunday together at their home, playing the piano, and the way it came about he- he said to me, he said, "You know what, I bet you don't really know that I can- I'm a good singer. Did you know that?" I said, "No but I heard that you used to sing." He said, "Well, I'm good." And he told me to sit down at the piano, he said, "I'm a prove it to you, so give me a b-flat." So, I gave him a b-flat and he starts singing and man, we got the rhythm of a gospel song and we just had such fun and he was into it then, I

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mean, he was giving the rhythm of the music and enjoying himself and clapping his hands and giving the ministers' "Hey, oh yeah, yeah," and just really enjoying himself. And it was one of those moments that we consider the rarities that you just, you know, pocket and put in your bank- your memory bank of how much joy he had in his heart and how many times he shared it with others.

01:48:55:00 TREY ELLIS:

I want to pick up a couple earlier things like a- when they went to Chicago as a family to, to live in the projects in Lawndale, were you- were you involved then, were you-?

XERNONA CLAYTON:

No, I didn't go to Chicago, but I said to him- no, the answer is no, no I didn't go.

TREY ELLIS:

I just wondered about if there were any kind of stress on the family then. It's a time when the family got together, but they're all living together but they're living in this sweltering projects.

01:49:26:00 XERNONA CLAYTON:

Yeah. He used to make a joke though about how many rats they had and he did make a joke of it, but I think in those instances, that Martin made light of the environment because it was a dirty environment. It's certainly atypical of what he's used to and I think he found things to laugh about because it kept some levity for him and some sanity for him because what he knew and what he said all the time, "This is, you know, I'm here kind of like a showpiece. I'm coming now, but I'm gonna leave. These people are gonna stay here because this is the way they live every day." And he never got that out of his mind, this is the way people live every day with rats and roaches and filth, every day. He's gonna have to endure it for a little while and then he's going home to an environment of cleanliness and so forth, just the antithesis of

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this. And so, it pierced his heart, but it motivated him to keep working harder. We've got to solve this problem of poverty. So, it was a constant reminder, as long as he was there it was a reminder all the time is, we've got to get people out of this kind of environment.

01:50:52:00 TREY ELLIS:

Can we talk a bit about the- you mention that the FBI had sort of- some FBI agents sort of came around to you- your office, pretending- well, people came around your office talking to you, but you realized later they were FBI snooping around?

01:51:10:00 XERNONA CLAYTON:

Well, when I first came to Atlanta, my office was in the front of the- I mean, my desk was in the front so I was kind of like the first person you'd see. And so, when the FBI came in, I had never encountered FBI people ever. I didn't know what they looked like, what they talked like, so I knew that when two- the first time these two white men came in, they come in- they all- all I ever met had the same order of the day, like, they come in with kindness, "Hello, how are you," and friendliness and, gee, with me being a woman, "Oh, that's a lovely outfit you have and boy, it just brightens you up," and oh, you know, and making you feel warm and receptive. And after a while it's, "Oh, gee, I like your hair." And they just pick out pieces they can say or complimentary. And so, I'm buying it, you know, like, oh, here's a friendly face. And then have an apple on the desk; "Oh, do you eat apples every day? Doctor King eat apples? You know, does he eat breakfast?" And they're piercing this friendliness with questions and I'm giving them the right answers, you know, "yes, no, maybe so." I don't realize I'm cooperating. And they laughed- they used me as a laughing pad many times 'cause I was just the one who said to them, "Yeah, and he'll be here in a few minutes 'cause he was out there the other day and he's getting ready to go up tomorrow night, he's gonna be here." I'm giving them information. Well, I learn quickly you don't do that.

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- 01:52:58:00 So, I learned that, you know, the behavior was the same, the approach is the same. They warm you up to have you give them information. So, it's their tactic, I think they're trained that way to get in, to first win you and then talk to you. But I was not real sharp at that period in my life 'cause this was such a new experience and, you know, I heard white people weren't friendly people but these were- here's some friendly people coming here, so they're wrong about white people, they're nice people here. But there was a black guy who worked in our finance department who was a different behavior than the norm. For instance, it's normal when girls would say, "Hey, let's go to lunch." Or the group, "It's so-and-so's birthday, let's all go out." Or "I'm going to lunch, anybody wanna go with me? Anybody want me to bring something back?" That's the way the office was, it was a small office. So, everybody coalesced and like, you know, "I'm going, you want anything, I'm going shopping, anybody need anything?" Always kind of sharing what you're getting ready to do. It was normal.
- 01:54:28:00 This man was atypical of all of this that I'm describing. Now, normal lunch hours almost universally are from eleven-thirty-ish to one-thirty-ish, on either side of that is what people normally have lunch. You don't see people normally, regularly going to lunch at three-thirty in the afternoon, and because that we were a family in the SCLC office, you hardly ever saw any- see- you hardly ever saw anybody going out by themselves, not for any other reason except you're just friendly, you know, "Come go to lunch with me." This man went by himself every day about the same time, three-thirty-ish. He said, I'm going to lunch. And I even asked, "You know, he's strange!" And I would ask- I mean I'd make the statement he had strange behavior, but, you know, "What's with him?" They said, "Oh, he just likes to go by himself." And it wasn't until later, later, later that we realized he was an informer. And I, I found it hard to believe because when Doctor King traveled, the people who went with him, you always had an assumed name, it was never Martin Luther King.
- 01:56:00:00 And I remember one time Coretta asked me, did I know- she was trying to reach Martin and she said, "Do you know what name he's in?" And I didn't know, so the name changed all the time, for obvious reasons, and that's why I had trouble figuring

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out how could the FBI really know to bug his room? They didn't know where he's going. He's going to New York, well, who knows it? He's gonna be on the twelfth floor, who knows that? He's gonna room be in twelve-forty-two, who knows that? So, I had the questions but I couldn't get the answers.

01:56:40:00 And so, when I start reading stories like, you know, the FBI has something on Martin when he was in New York at the Hilton. Well, how do you know he was going to the Hilton? Now this guy who I questioned worked in our business office, the finance office, and so he had to know because we often had to- you know, the office did, send him money or communicate with him or send a deposit to the room or do something dealing with his travel. So, he's the only one who really knew outside the people who would never tell. His wife wouldn't tell, his secretary wouldn't tell. So, you know that, I mean, they're really innocent, but this guy who's going to odd lunch times and going by himself and doing it every day became a suspect to me. But I didn't know until much later that he was the one who was, you know, giving information to the FBI. My sharing of information was harmless, I just said, you know, "Thank you, yeah, sometimes he likes an apple and the next day he likes this." So, my information was harmless and I learned quickly you don't talk, you know.

01:58:06:00 TREY ELLIS:
Right. Speaking of, so the FBI and what's come out after, the- in what you see in *Selma* the film, and in- and in *LBJ All the Way*, the sort of- talking about King and those recordings. How do you- what- how do you respond to the people that have been always denigrating King, even the ones who tried to stop the birthday celebration- national celebration by pointing to his- his- what- you know- the tapes- those tapes, what was happening, like how do- they try to- they try to- it seems like they try to eliminate all the good that this person has done for this- for being human.

01:58:47:00 XERNONA CLAYTON:
Well, it's hard to- now 'cause we're after the fact, you know, when you're going through those experiences, you don't have the ability to put the answers with the

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questions. President Johnson was a person Doctor King had such a good relationship with. One of my questions was, the FBI has to relay to the President, we're reading the paper, it's either the truth or not the truth. If it is the truth, why isn't somebody somewhere else in a higher place on top of this? If it's not the truth, why can't we get to it and find out how in the world he gets this information.

01:59:46:00 You know, those days were filled with so much mystery until you don't know the questions to ask and when you ask a question, you don't get the answers and so you're out there in left field, I, I don't know anything. I know what I feel, what I think and what I see, but I can't put it all together. Doctor King's movements were never understood by me. How they knew he was in Los Angeles and Chicago and New York. Sometimes he'd decide on the spur of the moment to go. How do they know quickly that he decided to go? And I remember he was on his way- well, to give an example, he was here, and he was really tired. He said, "I'm taking a trip. I'm going to Hawaii," 'cause he loved the water, and he said, "I'm going by myself," 'cause you know he had people traveled with him, "but I'm going by myself, I'm taking me a personal, private vacation and I'm telling everybody who knows me, don't call me for nothing. If my mother dies, tell her to hold on and give me the information later. I don't want a call at all."

02:01:06:00 Well, Julian Bond was denied his seat here in the legislature of Atlanta- of Georgia and that was a big story. And everybody was trying to figure out, "Well, who's gonna call Doctor King?" 'Cause we needed him for the movement. This was time now for a movement action and we ended up having to call him. We knew where he was, so it was easy to make the call. Well, after that we had a big laugh because he said, "Now, why is it the FBI knows where I am before I get there?" And, oh, we had trouble because he switched hotels and so it took us a moment to find him and he did that on purpose, "'Cause I'm on a hideout, I'm trying to have a vacation, I don't want nobody trying to call me." And he said, "Now, why is it you all had trouble?" We said, "We had trouble finding you, I thought you were going to this hotel and you ended up at another hotel." And he said, "Well, why are you all having trouble finding me, the FBI knows where I am before I get there." And all of that went

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through my mind, that's true, they do know before he gets there, but how do they know? And I couldn't make government fit my questions. I would just asking them to myself, I wasn't asking anybody. I was just smart enough to ask those questions and dumb enough to not get the answer, but it always bothered me of his movements, and everything he did was known before he did it. And I couldn't understand that, and especially when he had friends in high places.

02:02:54:00 The Kennedy's, now we heard by way of I don't know, unreliable sources that the Kennedy's were not as loyal to the friendship as Doctor King was. Everybody thought the Kennedy's loved Martin Luther King and then there were those who said no, no they didn't. And so even to this day, I still have questions of how could he get by those friendships and I just always remember President Johnson, who, of course later they had a collision course, but during the times he was friendly with Martin Luther King, he would always call him and invite him to the White House. Anything he did almost, he called him and invite him to be a part of some ceremony. But Doctor King called him a good guy. So, my long way of answering all these questions is I did- never got the answers to the questions I was asking. None of Doctor King's expose, as I would call it, fit my thinking. I didn't know why people didn't know it and those that did know it, why?

02:04:15:00 TREY ELLIS:
And so, you were the- do you remember the break with Johnson was over the war at the Riverside- after the- the war- did you notice the difference between their relationship?

02:04:25:00 XERNONA CLAYTON:
Yeah, but the difference that President Johnson displayed with Doctor King, he got disappointed- he got angry with Doctor King because when the riot broke out in California, the Watts Riot, he asked Doctor King to go and quell the storm and Doctor King didn't even know- he didn't know the people. He didn't know- he hadn't gotten the information on what started it, what prompted it, what propelled it,

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he didn't have any information. And so, he said to President Johnson, "I can't go in there blind. So, I don't know enough about it, don't know the people involved in it and so I'd probably would be no help. They may you know, put me in the mix also." And so, he couldn't convince President Johnson that he'd better stay out of Watts. So, he didn't go and it made President Johnson mad at black folk and especially King, that, "All I've done for you and now you can't do this to help me, calm this state we're in." So, I understand that was the beginning of the breaking point for them. Now, you have to remember too, that I'm on the outside of most stuff like that and I only got some of my information from being in the house and Coretta's side of the story and sometimes she didn't know some of the answers to the questions quelling, you know, around.

02:05:56:00 TREY ELLIS:

To close up, I was gonna ask you some questions about how do you think King is relevant today and the message of nonviolence especially in the post- in this post Trump world?

02:06:08:00 XERNONA CLAYTON:

I think if Doctor King were here today, one, somehow, I think- after- I'm asking myself why I think Doctor King's presence would be standing so strongly and vividly and loom so largely in the minds of President Trump that he probably would tone down a bit. I think he just didn't like the popularity of Mr. Obama, but their roles would have been different. President Johnson was in the seat of power, Doctor King was operating on religiosity and moral commitment and so the seats they occupied were different. Doctor King couldn't run the country, he was trying to change the country and I think the president- the current president's relationship would be different to Martin Luther King, differing from Mr. Obama's relationship.

02:07:32:00 And the reason I think I think this way is that I saw him warm to a meeting with ministers when he was campaigning. They made arrangement for him to meet some ministers in New York and he was almost differential to them and then after that I

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understand a follow up meeting took place and he asked to meet with some ministers. I think that- that said to me that he would have a different reaction to Martin Luther King who was a minister, as opposed to President Obama who sat in this seat and messed up the country as he said. So I think he would see them differently and maybe Martin Luther King's influence would've been more calming for him.

02:08:27:00 TREY ELLIS:

Thank you. Marian Wright Edelman called King a true prophet in the religious sense. Do you think of him that way?

02:08:38:00 XERNONA CLAYTON:

Doctor King, let's see, what would I call him? Well, I certainly have to give Marian Wright Edelman credit for a sensitivity to what she would say about him. I think Doctor King was a most unique- if I were to put him in category, I'd call him the most unique person who has lived. Unique in that he didn't have to get out on the firing line. Doctor King could've lived a comfortable life because he came from comfort and being a minister, they have a way of creating comfort. Doctor King created a disturbance because you have to shake it up to get it right and so he got out on the battlefield because he felt in his inner spirit, going back to Gandhi, that he had to do it. It was a compulsion. "I have to do this." Now that's unique because I think when people think feel like they can change a course, 'cause I don't have to take this, and I hear that a lot, "I don't have to put up with this, I don't have to do this, I don't have to enjoy this. I can go to my corner." Doctor King, I think, felt in his whole soul and body that he had to do what he did, and so I think he was the most unique person that ever walked. That's my answer.

TREY ELLIS:

Thank you so much.

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02:10:42:00 XERNONA CLAYTON:
You're finished?

TREY ELLIS:
Unless you have anything else you want to add.

02:10:48:00 XERNONA CLAYTON:
When I go and speak about Doctor King, they said, you never have a speech. You don't write out a speech. I said I'm not speaking, I'm not speechifying, I'm reporting what happened, I'm telling the story. So, I tell the story of Martin Luther King and Coretta King as I knew it, I lived it for several years and Doctor King took me in as a confidant, so he would come to my house and tell me things that I'm carrying today as secrets that I will die with. And so, I was not a part of his working committee, meaning, the soldiers on the battlefield, the people who lived with him as they fought this awful war we was waging. I don't tell that story because that's not my story. I'm back here listening to him when he comes and calls me and says, "Can I come over to your house, I've got a problem." And he'd come to my house and only the two of us are there and he's telling me something that's bothering him and said, "Don't tell anybody." I hear Mrs. King say to me, "I trust you, I want to share something with you." I'm carrying that story. I'm living it and keeping it, so some of the things I know are not to be told, but that which I can tell sometimes they're different stories from other people 'cause our experiences are different.

02:12:51:00 I told Andrew Young and Jessie Jackson and people that sometimes they gave me the hard assignments. They would tell me- something I remember, people were criticizing Mrs. King's hair, her hairstyle. She wore long hair and they would criticize her and people would say to me, "Why don't you tell her that the public wants her to put her hair up, she's too old to wear that long hair." And I would say, "Mrs. King has the privilege to wear her hair any way she wants it." But it come- it would come in droves. I would get calls from people, I go places and they tell me, "Please tell her to do this and tell her to do that." Well, I wasn't the messenger of the

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public. Now, we would talk privately and she'd get angry at people, and sometimes those were her so-called good friends. And then those were the times I'd perhaps break down and say, "Coretta, that's not your friend. She's talking about you in a negative way." And there's girlfriend talk, we'd have that, so my girlfriend relationship with Mrs. King was different from some other relationships, and my confidant moments with Doctor King were different from what they're talking about, you know, solving the problems of the world.

02:14:36:00 I value all of what they gave me now that I can remember and they're not- I'm not telling stories, I'm not making a speech, I'm telling you what happened in our relationships, what I did. And they both complimented me that I was his confidant on issues and I was his wife's confidant and the twins never met. There's some things I tell, some things I won't tell. I value to this day, and both of them are gone, they were my friends, to their end, and I'll wear their secrets to my end. I value highly that I had the pleasure and the honor of living with these wonderful people who made the difference not only in their world, but in the world. Their presence has made a difference in all of the world. And I shared a little bit of that through my relationship with them. I will value it to my end.

02:16:01:00 END OF INTERVIEW