

C.T. VIVIAN INTERVIEW
Director of Affiliates, SCLC
Interviewed by Taylor Branch
April 12, 2017
Total Running Time: 2 hours 11 minutes

00:00:00:00 CREW:
Doctor Vivian interview take one, marker soft sticks.

00:00:04:00 TAYLOR BRANCH:
Glad to be here. So Reverend Vivian, can you tell us, I believe it was the Fisk that you first met Doctor King. Can you tell us about the first time you met him and what you remember of that encounter?

00:00:17:00 C.T. VIVIAN:
Yes, I remember Fisk, the Fisk meeting very well. Martin, I had not met Martin King and he had been invited to Fisk in order to be honored by the school because of what he'd already achieved. It was right after he had won the high award for the nation. And as a result of that- and I was an editor at the Sunday School Publishing Board at the National Baptist Convention. And both my wife and I knew already, already knew nonviolence and- she in Michigan and I in Illinois. And so, we really wanted to build him up and to be able to use this as a means of making nonviolence the means that we will all use to fight racism, in particular, but, you know, you hope for more than that, but that's enough to hope for, really.

00:01:44:00 And so, I was in the park right across the street from Fisk and wanting to make certain that I got to talk to him. And so, after the meeting, he came over, and he'd given a speech at Fisk that- every speech he gave was terribly important. And as a result of it, we were concerned that we could go beyond that, and that we would- so we were preparing, the wife and I, were preparing to do a twenty-page piece on Martin, 'cause no major piece had been done on him. And of course, we weren't going to do a major piece, but we were going to do a larger piece than had be done. We wanted to take material to the Sunday School Publishing Board and have it come out of there as a total piece, and then we wanted to take that to the Baptist Publishing Board, but to the National Baptist Convention's annual meeting. And so, and here was my first chance to talk to him. And in fact, I hadn't seen him before this, right? And then here was this man, that- he didn't talk much. Martin didn't talk much. He listened to you, though. He didn't miss what anybody was saying at any time. It was just he and I, but Martin wanted to know what you thought as much as- or was thinking.

00:04:09:00 And so, and this was right after he had received the award, and he had come over to the park. And as a result of that, we got into a major, major conversation, and also got to talk about nonviolence in a way that very seldom did anybody talk about nonviolence to him. And yet he was to us the delivery system for nonviolence in

Black America, right, and hopefully in the nation. This was what we really wanted, and because we figured that that was the future. And that was a chance to test out what was possible for nonviolence in the nation, particularly in Black America, but if we could sell Black America, we could sell the nation. And that was the first time I had met him, and we ended up with- doing a twenty-page piece on Martin, and he did not know that. And we were fortunate that a photographer, a black photographer, had already done a lot of pictures on Martin, but hadn't used them, right, but he let us use them. And so, this is exactly what we wanted. And we had all the material that we really wanted, right, and we knew that the future would be there. However, we created it and took it to the convention, spent more money trying to do it than we should have. We were just two young people working at the publishing outlets, right, but it did work. But people had known enough about him to clamor for material on him, right, but we wanted to get as much across as we could, and we did. And later on, the material was more important than it was at that time.

00:07:01:00 TAYLOR BRANCH:

So, I want to try to get the context on that, I'm pretty sure this meeting, your introduction to Doctor King would've been before the sit-ins, but after the bus boycott, or even during the boycott. He went to Nashville to speak- this is pretty early, right? This is in the fifties.

C.T. VIVIAN:

Yeah, but this was- happened at the very time that he, being in the action, had won a case.

TAYLOR BRANCH:

Oh, probably ending the bus boycott.

C.T. VIVIAN:

In fact, oh, it was. It was.

TAYLOR BRANCH:

Right after the victory. I just wanted to get the context.

C.T. VIVIAN:

Oh, yeah, good.

TAYLOR BRANCH:

And so my question is, so your first meeting with him shortly after the bus boycott in Nashville, your very first conversation with him is about nonviolence.

00:07:58:00 C.T. VIVIAN:

That's exactly right. This was my, this was my real concern and my wife's real concern. Octavia had been- had come in from her city and we had now set up for Nashville, and we were so happy that we had been able to find this man that was going to, as far as we were concerned, going to make our future.

TAYLOR BRANCH:

So, what did he say about nonviolent? What are your impressions that first meeting? You came away from it thinking that he was interested in nonviolence, that he-

00:08:46:00 C.T. VIVIAN:

Oh, yes, and in fact Martin was basically seeing that as the future too, but he didn't talk much. I wanted him to talk a lot more than he did, all right, but he didn't talk as much, but he was listening to you. That's what he was doing. He was- I don't think I said anything that he didn't hear and respond to in a meaningful way.

TAYLOR BRANCH:

So how was he different from other preachers that you met in the movement including Daddy King and a whole host of them that you associated with?

00:09:34:00 C.T. VIVIAN:

In fact, we're fortunate that Martin even became a minister. He did not like the way that the average Baptist minister, in particular, responded to- the public responded to the possibilities of being a minister in Black America. He and his wife both were deeply concerned. Coretta was- his wife Coretta was deeply concerned about how they were going to set an example of what ministry could be in a city in the Deep South. And this was the time to do it, had just gotten the prize for it, would just build on that. And he saw that, but you would never know at the time that he really was excited about it. He didn't seem excited about any of it, right, but you knew he was because of how he responded for the little that he did tell you, right? Martin was- he was very young. The average minister that had a church was not young. And he was highly educated and the average Baptist minister was not so. He just about- in fact, he almost did not become a minister. He was not for certain that he wanted to be. It was only at seemingly at the last minute that he had decided that he was truly going to become a minister and it was at the- very year the students at Morehouse would go to a farm in Kentucky, and that's how they made their money for the rest of the year. And it was very hard work. It was tobacco farm, very hard work. But, and that year, the group decided that he was going to be their minister, and so he was. He then changed and he wanted to become a minister- quite different than what it had been the year before, right?

TAYLOR BRANCH:

Did he tell you this story?

00:13:02:00 C.T. VIVIAN:

He told me- no, I knew this from- everybody knew this, in fact, all right? He didn't tell me how he had changed. He wasn't all that talkative really. He could be, but he was better at giving speeches than he was as doing conversation. He always had deeper things to talk about than just conversation.

00:13:39:00 TAYLOR BRANCH:

I'd like to go back. You said we were lucky that he became a preacher and he didn't like the way a lot of preachers were. Could you talk a little more about that? What I take it that means is that a lot of the preachers then were kind of selfish or full of themselves or- and in a way, his relationship with Daddy King, who was like a fundamentalist preacher, embarrassed him. On the other hand, he loved Daddy King, so the relationship between Daddy King - Daddy King, could you talk about that? I mean, in a way, Daddy King was a lot of thing he didn't like about ministers and yet he became a different kind and still loved his father.

00:14:22:00 C.T. VIVIAN:

Oh, yeah, in fact, Martin was the kind of person who understood people that they dealt with and he really understood his father, but he understood also the difference between he and his father. He also understood what it meant to be a successful minister in the South and how difficult it was to be a true preacher in the South, right? There was a great difference between he and his father's preaching, all right? But everybody loved Martin as soon as they heard him. There was a desire for people to be a part of an educated south, an educated ministry. Daddy King was also better educated than the average. He was also a part of the daily life of Black America, and he understood what it took to be "successful," quote, unquote, in preaching in the South in particular.

00:16:08:00 TAYLOR BRANCH:

Could you give just some examples briefly? Daddy King was like this as a preacher. This is the way he preached from the pulpit and Martin King was like this and compare and contrast them and how Doctor King reconciled that to be like his father but different from his father.

00:16:26:00 C.T. VIVIAN:

In fact, there was a great difference between how Martin went to the pulpit and how he started things than his father. His father didn't have the background that he had to be the kind of man that could bring you so much material quickly, but the people loved it. They loved it when he was able to talk like he was really educated, and he was, and do it so fully and so easily. And Martin did and how he made his points was always at a different level and in a different way than most other preachers did- most others, not all, but most others. And the reason for that was is because he had this unusual education. You know, Martin King was writing materials for the Atlanta newspaper before he was- before he was even out of his college. And he was unusual, well, most people knew that. They didn't know how to respond to it, but when he preached they knew how to respond to it. And they responded in a way that said that, "This is what we're waiting for, this- that we hope we have more ministers like Martin King."

00:18:37:00 And as soon as Martin started to lead the people, right, they- I remember people talking about the night they picked the leader for the movement. And he- and they stood up and they said, "We want him," you know, and they pointed to him, 'cause he wasn't trying to become the anything, the people made him the thing. That's a very important point. I mean, he didn't have to try hard, right, is that he preached. He

became pastor of that church because his father made him pastor of that church in Montgomery, right, is that- because he had friends and all of that, right? How would a young man like that become the pastor of a major church? Those were important kind of questions and that made success, and Martin was there for it. He was there because had he not had a father like that, he probably wouldn't have been at that church. But-

00:20:35:00 TAYLOR BRANCH:

Can you talk about his development? I know as a Christian minister he started with nonviolence. Jesus was nonviolent, "Resist not evil," but he developed nonviolence as an outlook and a way of life. That was something important to you. How did he learn the discipline of nonviolence? Nonviolence in America was different than nonviolence in India. Eye contact, the things- how did that come about?

00:21:05:00 C.T. VIVIAN:

Is that we really didn't know the difference between Martin teaching us nonviolence and India teaching us nonviolence. Now Martin, from the very beginning, he had about six or eight books by Martin and the others that were involved in nonviolence in India, right, so- because he knew that they had won against the same problems that we had to win. That was what Martin wanted to have happen, right? Remember, his house had just been bombed. He was- there were a number of things that was happening at that time that was going to decide. And in fact, my wife and Coretta were very good friends. And she talked about how they were concerned for what to do, how to deal with the ministers, right? And Coretta was herself already concerned about nonviolence before they came to the church and that sort of thing. She was concerned about winning the victories that would be necessary to be a leader in Black America, that she and people like her, my wife, were concerned. And it was quite wonderful to have come to a city that wanted that kind of ministry. In fact, the- that church was particularly concerned about, it was the church of those that were better educated than most, right?

00:23:57:00 TAYLOR BRANCH:

So how did he, when he came back from India in nineteen fifty-nine, he said that Black Americans needed to develop a different nonviolence than Gandhi had. That they were- and in a way he was disillusioned because the Indians were building a nuclear bomb and they were divided among one another and he said, "We need our own version of nonviolence. How did that come about? So could you talk about the development of nonviolence in Doctor King and in the movement?"

00:24:26:00 C.T. VIVIAN:

In fact, we weren't- none of us were too well educated in terms of nonviolence. Very few towns and cities and places had any knowledge of nonviolence. And there wasn't any idea that everybody would know about Martin or Martin or know about Gandhi or know about any of that, right? That had to come later, and it came as a result of Martin having a method, but had he not had a chance to prove it, there's a doubt whether many people would have caught on, alright? But remember, they proved it

there and they won and- so that the bus boycott changed buses and how everybody had to ride in Montgomery. The- that was the proof of the method winning, right, and that was so, so, so important. Not a matter of talking, a matter of doing, alright? Not a matter of talking about India, a matter of succeeding here. The- that matter of winning and then winning the NAACP awards, et cetera. Everything was leading to victory.

00:26:46:00 TAYLOR BRANCH:

Was there- could you summarize what you learned about the difference between nonviolence in India and nonviolence in the United States, of segregated America?

00:26:55:00 C.T. VIVIAN:

No, I'm not able to. Truthfully, I wish I could except as far as I was concerned, they were about the same except that because India had been so long at it, it was quite different. I have some material that shows how different the two were, alright, because- but nevertheless is- the victory had to come. It wouldn't have made any difference if he hadn't had a victory, if the people had not seen something change, then there wouldn't have been, Martin wouldn't have been nearly as important and we would not been able to have taken SCLC and made a victory out of it. But those people, those- the people were already desiring something that would change things, but it had to happen in their midst. It wasn't just a matter of preaching. It wasn't just a matter of having some sort of good idea. It was a matter of winning, and they did. And they changed, changed- in fact, they practically put the bus company out of business.

00:28:55:00 TAYLOR BRANCH:

Was there a moment when you were around Doctor King and you said that you knew he didn't just want to talk and preach about nonviolence, but that he was a practitioner, that he was committed to-

00:29:09:00 C.T. VIVIAN:

Well, no. He never said that, but it was just always true. And- but Martin- how Martin responded to the people's desire to win was the best thing and he did. He- and as he won, they responded to him even greater. But their- the people's response was what made the difference. We knew we were going to win.

00:29:48:00 TAYLOR BRANCH:

I want to jump ahead just a little bit. After he won the Nobel Prize in nineteen sixty-four- this is even after the St. Augustine movement, which we may talk about later. In his Nobel lecture, he said that he thought that the movement was spreading liberation because it discovered nonviolence as a method that was applicable to all the evils, not just racism, but also poverty and war.

00:30:16:00 C.T. VIVIAN:

You can see where Martin is. He is thinking about victory in every way possible. He was thinking, had already been thinking far beyond just victory for black people. But

he figured by way of black people, everybody who could begin to understand how life might be, would use it well. And they began to use it well- not at the level I would liked to have it had it to happen, but that's secondary, right? It just takes time. We all had the desire to change things as quickly as possible. Things don't change that fast?

00:31:10:00 TAYLOR BRANCH:
How early did you have a sense that he and the movement saw possibilities for nonviolence beyond segregation and race, war and poverty and that sort of thing? That's very ambitious.

C.T. VIVIAN:
We always saw it, but we had to win it in order to be able to make it happen.

TAYLOR BRANCH:
How did you see in him these larger ambitions for nonviolence beyond just dealing with segregation?

00:31:44:00 C.T. VIVIAN:
Is that- in fact, it was very, it was... Martin understood that as the people would win, that every- things would open up, little by little. He did not think that things were going to change all at once. And remember, as soon as he won in Montgomery, he left Montgomery and came to our city because he knew that victories had to keep coming or the people would be satisfied with what they had. And he was thinking far beyond it, both he and Coretta. And we certainly were. Is that- the victory, the actual victory was that he didn't have to stay in Montgomery in order to keep the movement moving.

00:33:11:00 TAYLOR BRANCH:
Could you describe how you went from the first meeting in there in Nashville and seeing that he was interested in the possibilities of nonviolence to actually going on the staff? How did that transition occur?

00:33:25:00 C.T. VIVIAN:
I did not see how important the success was going to be. And nor did I see how important moving out of Montgomery would be, and- but Martin did. Martin always could see ahead of us and he did. And he understood the power of nonviolence before most of us did, right, even those who wanted it and desired it. And he saw it in a way that allowed him to think about moving from it. It wasn't because the house was ... It was not because ... He did not move because it was a fear that they would not move fast enough and hard enough in Montgomery. It was that he understood that ... I feel he understood that you had to have victories everywhere.

00:35:06:00 TAYLOR BRANCH:
And you were part of victories in the sit-in movement in Nashville and in that same place and the Freedom Rides in the early movement yourself, which expanded the

movement from the bus boycott and gained national attention. How did you come to work at SCLC?

00:35:28:00 C.T. VIVIAN:

I came to SCLC's staff because I was already in Nashville. I was already where that we could do something quite different, and Jim Lawson came there as well. Well, Jim really knew nonviolence and turned out to be the kind of teacher that we needed, but from the people's standpoint, all the ministers in Nashville, they came behind Martin. They wanted to be a part of a movement. They desired a person as strong as Martin. And as- and all preachers like to hear great preachers and as a result Martin made the difference between their winning in Nashville and their sending their people as well as the students to the meetings where Martin- where basically, not Martin, but basically where we were teaching each other.

TAYLOR BRANCH:

Did he ask you to become Director of Affiliates? How did that come about?

C.T. VIVIAN:

Yeah, in fact ...

TAYLOR BRANCH:

What's the nature of the position, because most people don't know? What was your job for Doctor King and how did he persuade you to take it?

00:37:19:00 C.T. VIVIAN:

In fact, we had a national meeting, all right? And Abernathy called me from the group and says, when we come back from the evening meal, he said, "I'd like for you to preach for us, nonviolence." And I was really- I wasn't going to let the idea go. I certainly was going to preach it, but I didn't expect it, nor did I expect anything at the level that Abernathy and Martin then, 'cause they never said anything that they didn't agree on together, right? I knew then that they wanted me to do more than sit around. And as a result of that, when I told everything to my wife, she understood it as well. We understood that here was a chance to do what we had been thinking of a long time ago and we had been.

And as a result, the people ate up the ideas because they desired it. Everybody wanted a means and a method whereby that we could beat racism at a higher level and without- and keep the faith, because that was terribly important. The only thing that we had was Christianity. The only thing that White America allowed us to have was our churches. That's the only thing Black America had, was the churches. And we used it any way we desired, I mean, we- and we did not mind telling each other how wrong White America's racism was, right? But how do you ... And we won. In fact, we almost ... We put the ... We had the meetings in Nashville that put the bus company out of business. They had to give way to us, not we to them.

TAYLOR BRANCH:

So, who asked you to go on and become the Director of Affiliates?

00:40:56:00 C.T. VIVIAN:
Oh, well, the way things would happen in Nashville- in SCLC is that Abernathy talked to you, and then- but Abernathy and Martin had already been talking to each other. And in fact, I didn't even know there was going to be an affiliate program, you see.

TAYLOR BRANCH:

So, what was that job like? You were like to recruit affiliate members, right, across the South? You did that for several years. Can you describe that work and-?

00:41:34:00 C.T. VIVIAN:
The thing is that how did we openly teach nonviolence to people in church settings, see? That was how it was going to go. How did we talk to ministers in a way that they could see that nonviolence was going to be the new thing? How did we- we knew that the people liked it, but how would we transfer it, right? And since Martin and Abernathy in particular liked my teaching of it and my talking about it, right, 'cause first you were talking about it, you were not teaching nonviolence. I missed that point again, didn't I? And as a result of that, I went all over the South. Remember, Martin had already set things up. He had talked to about fifty ministers across the country. And we were just following in behind this man. If I could do it, they could do it, right.

00:43:10:00 TAYLOR BRANCH:
Skipping ahead to Selma, like the peak movement, the Voting Rights Act of sixty-five, after- this is only ten years after the Brown decision, the segregation and Civil Rights law of sixty-four and then Selma, the movement immediately went into debate about going north, taking the movement north. Were you part of that debate?

00:43:33:00 C.T. VIVIAN:
Well, we all were, but we weren't sure how fast that should be. All we knew is we were not going to make the decision. Martin made the decision, all right? And so, when Martin said that's what he wanted, that's what we wanted, right? And we couldn't 'cause we had made certain that we were pretty solid in most all the cities of the South that had already invited us there, right, and given that, we were ready for whatever else Martin wanted to do or how he wanted to do it. It was just like the next great movement after that was after that one was finished, was to- it was California, all right. But we went to California not to take nonviolence as much as to organize it so that they would send us the funding we needed, right, and they were happy to do it. And they did not feel that they needed the actual practice at the same level that we had throughout the whole South.

00:43:10:00 TAYLOR BRANCH:
Now he experimented in several cities in the North. He went to Boston. He went to Rochester. He went to Philadelphia. He went to Cleveland. Ultimately, he settled on

Chicago. That was the first major movement city. Were you involved in that decision?

C.T. VIVIAN:

Not very much. Not very much. I was continuously involved in the money-raising ones up from California. That was basic-

TAYLOR BRANCH:

But when the movement got to Chicago in nineteen sixty-six, you were there. How did that come about?

00:45:47:00 C.T. VIVIAN:

Well, a number of things. See, it wasn't just taking nonviolence... Pardon me. The next great steps were taking the North with us, and that was much more difficult... then the- it was much more difficult than it was to go on with the South.

TAYLOR BRANCH:

Were there people who wanted to stay in the South and not go North?

00:46:40:00 C.T. VIVIAN:

Oh, well, well, I'll tell you what had happened. By that time, we had come, we had- Selma was past, right? We had won Selma, right, and how it happened is Jim Morton- Jim Morton called me on the phone one day. And I had just had a dream that... I was going to.... That we- everything was over for SCLC as we had known it in my mind, right, and that- so that I was beginning to think what we need to do is to go North, period. And that's what I was going to do, right, and of course I did. North meant for me is that, "Let's sweep the entire North just like we swept the entire South," right?

00:48:08:00

And Jim Morton called me- but I didn't know how it was going to happen. And Jim Morton called me. And I didn't know Jim Morton, and we were going to have a new movement in the North. And I didn't see that at all, right? I wanted it to happen, I was going to make it happen, but I didn't see where the money and the people and any part of it was going to come from. And then Jim Morton calls and says, "I would like to have you come to our staff." And I didn't know who he was and I didn't know what kind of staff it was. And he said... and it was... but... so I told him I'd contact him later. And then I had to make a sweep of speeches across the central United States, right? Then I got to thinking, what he's talking about is precisely what I was looking for, this dream idea. I was seeing it starting clear in the East Coast, but here I was being given exactly what I wanted, right? And so. I was making the speeches and I was in Indiana somewhere when- and at that time, we had telephones all over everywhere, right? And so I told the driver, I said, "Stop at the next filling station," 'cause there was about three telephones there. And as a result of that, I called Jim and said, "I'm coming." And knew very little about the program, but I knew the program was going to allow me to do exactly what I'd been dreaming about, right?

00:50:51:00 TAYLOR BRANCH:

But you had to go tell Doctor King that you were going to be leaving the staff to go. Were you nervous about telling him that you were going to go move to Chicago?

00:50:58:00 C.T. VIVIAN:

Yes, I was, really. I- when I had to really tell Martin I was leaving SCLC, it was- I wasn't for certain how, but I knew I was going to, right? And so, when I walked in to tell him that, and I sat there and I was rather nervous and was wondering what he was going to say, and... because I really didn't know what it would be like to leave SCLC. I know that I was never, never tied to an organization for the sake of the organization, right, and here was this new thing coming. And so, I told Martin. I said that, what I had to do, and he said, he told me, he said, "Always remember that you are a part of SCLC." And I told him that I would, and I would always belong to it. And...

TAYLOR BRANCH:

That sounds like an emotional scene.

00:52:23:00 C.T. VIVIAN:

Yeah, and it was. You could feel it in both of us, right? And the... but then, you know, I knew that was it, and he knew that, but we'd both been thinking about all sorts of things, I'm certain, 'cause sooner or later, it was going to have to happen, right?

00:52:55:00 TAYLOR BRANCH:

It's great irony, of course, that you go to Chicago and then not very long after that, he's in Chicago.

C.T. VIVIAN:

That's exactly-

TAYLOR BRANCH:

We'll get to that in a second. As opposed to virtually all the other people in SCLC, you had been born and raised in the North.

C.T. VIVIAN:

Yeah.

TAYLOR BRANCH:

Were you con- how was it different for you to be a Northerner among Southerners, and how was race different, the approach to race in the North and in the South?

00:53:24:00 C.T. VIVIAN:

You know, the thing about it was that in my town, I always had a leading role in whatever I was doing. So, I was- it was too good, shall we say? But it was just what I needed and I felt very good about being there. I started the first grade there, was about six weeks early and ended up making straight A's. My grandmother, that's

who I'm looking at. Oh, she was very happy. And... but it was all very good. I loved Macomb. If I had been white, I would have stayed in Macomb, but... I wasn't.

TAYLOR BRANCH:

Well, Doctor King- you and Doctor King both took the movement, you moved to Chicago and then he brought the movement there in nineteen sixty-six.

C.T. VIVIAN:

That's right.

TAYLOR BRANCH:

There was considerable debate about doing that in SCLC.

C.T. VIVIAN:

Yeah.

00:54:43:00 TAYLOR BRANCH:

One thing Doctor King said was, "You'd be surprised how many white people think there isn't any race issue in the North, that it's only about Southern segregation, and we need to show that the race issue is not just a Southern issue." It turned out to be hard to do that. Chicago was a tough environment...

C.T. VIVIAN:

That's right.

TAYLOR BRANCH:

...for him. Did you see that it affected his mood? He often said he saw as much hatred in Chicago as anywhere else.

00:55:26:00 C.T. VIVIAN:

That's exactly right. But Martin... Martin knew that he had to be a part of the North sooner or later. In fact, remember, every move- major move we made was made because of Martin and Abernathy. And I say that because I'm concerned that we haven't heard enough Abernathy. Abernathy was basic to SCLC as... Martin was the man beyond any doubt, right, but he needed Abernathy, and Abernathy stayed with him. Abernathy had intended to go to the same college that Martin had gone to. He was so affected by Martin, but he was thinking about it as being a minister. None of us, I don't think, was really thinking about it at the- as going to a city to start something, other than as SCLC.

TAYLOR BRANCH:

When SCLC came to Chicago, you were already there, right?

C.T. VIVIAN:

Yeah, yeah, but there was very little time between us. No, I'm not for certain truthfully whether Martin was there before I was, or I was there before Martin, but almost had to be there before Martin came to Chicago.

00:57:41:00 TAYLOR BRANCH:
Did you ever go visit him in his slum house?

C.T. VIVIAN:
House? No, I came close to it one time, but I really didn't. One member, one member of my staff did, and just... still living- Samson, Al Samson.

TAYLOR BRANCH:
Xernona Clayton talked to us about what it was like to her to watch a group of SCLC preachers getting together, usually at night, and tell stories. Is that part of preacher culture? What do you remember about that?

00:58:23:00 C.T. VIVIAN:
It's part of preacher culture. But it's all the same, I mean, but it's not my kind of thing, so I spent little time at it. It just- didn't spend a lot of time.

TAYLOR BRANCH:
So, who did?

C.T. VIVIAN:
Well, all the ministers in town. You see what I mean? Is that- all of the fellows in town.

TAYLOR BRANCH:
She said they told stories and tried to one-up each other.

C.T. VIVIAN:
They did, all the time-

TAYLOR BRANCH:
Preaching each other's funerals, telling jokes, and that Doctor King was right in the middle of it, and he was a mimic.

00:59:05:00 C.T. VIVIAN:
In fact, that that first part about preaching the funeral, that was Martin. Martin just made us realize that we didn't have to be there, and that we had too short a life not to use it as best we can. It was just one of the things that was the most important to Martin, because Martin realized the power of the staff, and he realized that he wasn't doing all of this by himself, but at various times, one or the other of us was... was import- I only got on picture with Martin. And then I created Upward Bound and Martin didn't even know I was creating it. We were just- we were allowed to be free-moving, free-thinking, free-sharing, right, all the time. Martin didn't try to stop

anybody, and he didn't try to demand that you do this or that, right? And we all thought together. And one of the great things about Martin is that he didn't have to lead every meeting. Whoever, whoever-

TAYLOR BRANCH:
Who else would lead meetings?

01:01:20:00 C.T. VIVIAN:
Oh, well, Ab. Just about all of us at one time or the other led meetings, but that wasn't our real concern. Our real concern was to get over an idea, like Bevel, for instance. We were without doubt going to get over ideas, right? The problem with that is that sometimes... somebody would go behind somebody else's back to say, you know, they didn't win in the meeting, so they were going to win afterwards, by going through somebody else, right? But most of the two or three guys at the top understood what was happening.

TAYLOR BRANCH:
There were a lot of clashes over strategy, right?

C.T. VIVIAN:
Yeah.

TAYLOR BRANCH:
I mean, between Bevel and Hosea. Doctor King had an awful lot of strong people around him.

01:02:27:00 C.T. VIVIAN:
In fact, that's, that's the problem with people who are strong and young, is that you think you've got it down, right? But Ab and Martin was the ones that really were deciding, finally, what was going to happen one way or the other.

TAYLOR BRANCH:
Jim Lawson told me that he felt out of his element around the Baptist preachers when they were joking like musicians at night, because he was a Methodist.

C.T. VIVIAN:
That's right, and that's true. Well, but it's more than which denomination you're going to. It's that he was always at a higher level. And-

TAYLOR BRANCH:
He was always more cerebral.

C.T. VIVIAN:
Yeah, that's exactly right.

01:03:22:00 TAYLOR BRANCH:

Well, see, Doctor King, that's what I like ... Doctor King is at a higher level too, but he was also comfortable joking and making fun of people, and playing practical jokes, and that sort of thing. So, he was a jokester, but also a cerebral person, whereas...

01:03:44:00 C.T. VIVIAN:

Yes. There wasn't anybody in our group, in the major part of our- of SCLC, that wasn't cerebral, as you might say. That's what made them good follow-through. They knew where they were going. They knew what had to happen. And as a result, nobody in SCLC was slow. The... the way- in fact, when they argued like mad with each other, it wasn't as emotional as it was cerebral.

01:04:37:00 TAYLOR BRANCH:

Around the time Doctor King was in Chicago and you were in Chicago is when Black Power arose on the March Against Fear in Mississippi. Do you remember Doctor King's discussions with, you know, Stokely? There was a drift away from nonviolence and his attitude about that, and how it changed the mood in the country?

01:05:02:00 C.T. VIVIAN:

Well, no, I don't, truthfully, because I wasn't concerned about Stokely. These guys used to worry me because- what I found is that they didn't have any victories. Is that Martin and SCLC did, and that they would like to come alongside and walk beside Martin, and particularly Stokely, right? And Stokely was the first one to lead the country. He wasn't there for the long haul. See, we were all there for the long haul. All the main ones of SCLC were there for the long haul. We weren't there for liking ourselves, or- and you had to always have the feeling with Stokely that he knew what it was all about. Stokely moved outside of SCLC and had to come back to walk beside Martin in order to have any presence. But even as I say that, though, I don't think I paid enough to Martin or to any other leader to give it much thought, because none of them were deeply committed to nonviolence. I was, that's what Martin was. That's what it was all about. We had defined a means and a method in order to free Black America, period, right? And if we didn't do that, we would not be worth our time, effort, or concern. And this was the most important thing that there is, nonviolence. Only there were guys that left Harlem just almost like it was, right? North and ... but major victories was from nonviolence.

01:07:55:00 TAYLOR BRANCH:

The media, the national media, the network television and the newspapers pretty much fell head over heels for Black Power and said nonviolence was passé and over. Did that hurt Doctor King? How did you look on that?

01:08:14:00 C.T. VIVIAN:

No, I tell you how I look at it. I just- that it had no meaning to me because they didn't change anything. Is that in the final analysis, I was only concerned, and Martin was only concerned is that, how do we create victories, all right? Not how do we go to jail? How do we have victories, right? Not whether you, you know, you had a new

shout or something. In fact, I'm still that way, I mean, is that- What was great about Martin was nonviolent, direct action, right? That was, that was the important thing. Nonviolent, direct action. Martin was perfect for it, was it, that's what made Martin different, right? Martin may have gone to Harlem and been just like the rest and strutted down the street for a while. But Martin was about really winning and freeing Black America.

01:09:56:00 TAYLOR BRANCH:
People said he didn't understand nonviolence- I mean, Black Power. He debated Black Power with Stokely all the way down the highway through Mississippi. He said it was a leadership- that nonviolence was a leadership doctrine, and Stokely said America only admired nonviolence in black people, but otherwise America admired, you know, John Wayne and soldiers. Do you think Doctor King did understand Black Power? It sounds like what you're saying-

C.T. VIVIAN:
Oh, sure, he understood Black Power, but he understood- "How do you make it work?" See? That's all ask yourself. You know, is-

01:10:40:00 TAYLOR BRANCH:
That leads to my next question in a way that when he was talking about violence and nonviolence working, it wasn't just faith, it was also rational. Where are your guns? How many are you? Can you actually hope to win a victory with violence, and nonviolence makes more sense, logically, not just as a matter of spirit?

01:11:03:00 C.T. VIVIAN:
See, you have not one- nobody has won any victories in Black America with guns. Name 'em. See, they don't have any victories. This is- what bothers me is that the power of nonviolence is far beyond the guys that are talking that small talk and bragging about what they're doing, right, 'cause they didn't end up doing much. Where it's Martin King that the nation opens up to. Martin understood what he was about, and what we needed, and what we were doing, and what kind of victories we could have. The victories were the things that count. How many black people are you going to help? Not whether you can beat your chest or not.

01:12:26:00 TAYLOR BRANCH:
But there was a backlash. It made it harder for Doctor King to do nonviolence when Black Power and the Black Panthers and all that are getting all the media attention.

01:12:38:00 C.T. VIVIAN:
But it was- but the people that were, but there were- and that was true, but the people that were about that wanted the victories without the, without the trouble, see? Take California. Man, but they had good ideas of feeding kids and all of that. We were about winning whole states, whole country of understanding, right? Our victories were about far more than their victories, right? Think about it. It's that one has to realize that what you're about is real victory for all the people, not to be able to say,

"Oh, boy, we look good and we're just going to feed each other," right? That's not far- that's not important enough.

01:13:54:00 TAYLOR BRANCH:
I want to ask you to jump ahead. Do you see that the backlash and the hatred in the nineteen sixties as similar to what we're going through today with a lot of overt hatred and division and racial animosity today?

01:14:15:00 C.T. VIVIAN:
Well, I see it as a time where we don't have victory, that's what I see, is that where we haven't changed, where we're not changing much, right? But you can get a lot of applause, but can you get a lot of victory? How many people did you free up, right? See, this is it. How many jobs did you deliver, right? I created Upward Bound, right? We're talking about education at a whole 'nother level, right? Is that- and how long will some of that other stuff last? But the education will last, see? And the more of it you have, the better off you are. But most- but you also- Now, I'm not very certain of what I'm going to say right now, right, but the guys that ... Remember, those that made up SCLC in the beginning were religious people. Just about everybody that made up SCLC from the beginning were ministerial. They were spiritual. They were more- and who followed who, right? And how much did they do? This is the thing that bothers me. We could have used any number of guys that were not with us, but we never put them down or put them out, right? And we almost made it too easy for them.

01:16:39:00 TAYLOR BRANCH:
Before we get to Vietnam, I want to ask just three personal questions.

C.T. VIVIAN:
Okay.

TAYLOR BRANCH:
Then we'll take a break and come back to Vietnam.

C.T. VIVIAN
Good. In fact, I hope this part of the conversation brings forth more things than what you came with, you know?

01:16:55:00 TAYLOR BRANCH
You're talking about people around Doctor King. Could you talk about that they were mostly religious out of the clergy? Two exceptions to that, they were religious people, but not clergy, they were also the two women in the center of ... Could you say a word about how Dorothy Cotton and Septima Clark fit in to SCLC that you saw?

01:17:21:00 C.T. VIVIAN

In fact, when you see both of them, they're perfect for SCLC. They were about teaching nonviolence. They were dealing with the long-term. They were preparing each other. Right now, we have a fellow that is not ministerial. In fact, they were not ministerial. But I'll tell you what, when you read what's-her-name's book not... ..

TAYLOR BRANCH
Septima or Dorothy?

C.T. VIVIAN
Septima. When you read Septima's book, you realize that she was- and had started doing nonviolence years before we were there. But she- it wasn't nonviolence as we know it. She was a teacher. She fought for other teachers a long time before we even knew there was one. You see what I mean? And had it not been for Martin, we would have never known Dorothy. Not Dorothy, we would have never known Septima. And yet, Septima was deeply spiritual, deeply educational, and deeply concerned about what happens to God's people, right?

TAYLOR BRANCH
Could you say a word about Dorothy Cotton?

01:19:18:00 C.T. VIVIAN:
Oh, Dorothy is, Dorothy, Dorothy- listen, Dorothy is a marvelous human being. We've been in midnight in Saint Augustine together where they ... Walking through people that were willing to kill us. In fact, threw rocks- not just rocks, threw major pieces of rock across the top of those fences, right, on us. Sent forty some of us to the hospital one night, right? In fact, actually we were saved by policemen and didn't know it. They knew that it was too much to let guys do everything they wanted to do. After one night that we were out-

TAYLOR BRANCH:
This is you and Dorothy?

C.T. VIVIAN:
Yeah.

TAYLOR BRANCH:
Can you say Dorothy's...

01:20:42:00 C.T. VIVIAN:
One night, Dorothy and I were in a situation where that we had the police let... the- I can't think of his name now, the guy that was head of... Oh, what is his name?

TAYLOR BRANCH:
Hoss Manucy?

C.T. VIVIAN:

Yeah. Thank you. Is that- if it hadn't been for the police who realized what they were going to do, right, they would have probably killed us.

01:21:36:00 TAYLOR BRANCH

Doctor King, notably a lot of people don't know this, had an awful lot of friendships, ecumenical friendships with leaders from different denominations, and even different faiths, like Abraham Heschel and Thich Nhat Hanh, the Buddhist monk, and that sort of thing

C.T. VIVIAN:
The best.

TAYLOR BRANCH:

How unusual was this for a Baptist preacher to have the range of acquaintance that he did?

01:22:01:00 C.T. VIVIAN:

Oh, it was just understood that good people were good people. And most of the South was just not good. I mean, their understanding of religion was not ... I don't know how to say it really right, but the South is racist. Racism is automatically non-Christian, right? And one has to face that and do in conversations with them, right? And when I do workshops, I make it very clear that they can't be, they can't be Christian and racist at the same time.

01:23:12:00 TAYLOR BRANCH:

So, what you're saying is that in matters of race relations, an unorthodox Jew like Heschel, and a Buddhist like Thich Nhat Hanh were more Christian than the Christians in the South?

01:23:28:00 C.T. VIVIAN:

That's exactly right. And there's no doubt. In fact, actually, you really have to ask yourself how many Christians are in the South, see? I mean, and how does a man preach to people like that, and they still remain racist? You're just not preaching. And- but as one of the young guys told me, I'd just given a speech to this group of Baptist seminarians, right, and he told me, "We know you're right." That kind of thing, right? He says, "We know you're right, but if we preach like you are, we wouldn't be in the ministry." In the Baptist ministry. And that's all they had. And the South is so deeply Baptist because they can be racist. Whether it's accepted or not, they're wrong, and you just got to tell them they're wrong.

TAYLOR BRANCH:

One last personal question and we'll take a break. Did you ever see Doctor King in a pool hall?

01:25:03:00 C.T. VIVIAN:

Oh yeah, in fact, and played a pretty good game, better than me. One of our best-known guys used to- that's why he came to the SCLC is because Martin played pool with the guys in the pool hall, right? And furthermore, than that, he used to pick up his change each evening. That kept him going by winning money from all the guys. He saw Martin as a regular fellow. He went home every night and changed clothes so he would look right.

TAYLOR BRANCH:

Where did you - do you remember seeing him?

01:26:07:00 C.T. VIVIAN:

Oh, sure. Martin understood that if you ran with folk you could organize folk. If they were left thinking that you were, you were high heading them or even yourself that they wouldn't- you couldn't organization them. But playing pool in the town before the next day we would be on the street, they would understand you as a decent person, as a person concerned about all people. This is what the average black persons ... Remember, we've spent all of our lives being hated in one form or the other, right? And- but when we see somebody who really cares for people, people period, right, automatically we're willing to know that that person is worth knowing, being with, and something good can come out of.

01:27:42:00 TAYLOR BRANCH:

I wanted to ask you about a conversation that you had with Doctor King in Chicago during the Chicago movement when you were riding around in a car. I believe you told me this, but maybe Bayard Rustin told me.

C.T. VIVIAN:

I did.

TAYLOR BRANCH:

-That you were driving, and this is in the Chicago movement, but the Vietnam war, or course, was taking over the mood of the country and that Doctor King turned to you and said, "You don't think I know what I'm talking- I'm doing when I talk about Vietnam, do you?" Could you tell us that story about how that came about and what you said?

01:28:18:00 C.T. VIVIAN:

Yeah, in fact, I and Dorothy and somebody else was in the car. And Martin was just feeling good. He'd given a speech out to one of the suburbs of Chicago and people came like m- lots and lots of people came, right, and- 'cause they wanted to hear Martin. And he was willing to even to answer questions if they wanted to, right? And that was the issue. The issue was the war. But he said to me, he said, "Vivian," we were on our way back to the city, and he said, " Vivian, you don't think I know what I'm talking about do you?" Because his attitudes toward the war and he was just saying it as a way to just to slow me up, right? And so, I said, "No, Doc," and then I didn't say nothing, right? And so, it gave him a chance to start talking and he talked

to us about how he felt about the war and realized that that was as important to him as any other subject could be, and that he wanted for us to find a way to win that war and still do it with our spirit. And I was deeply concerned. I didn't say much; all the rest were going into the city.

01:30:46:00 TAYLOR BRANCH:

What did you feel about him coming out against it? Most of his staff and most of, like, Daddy King and- they didn't want him to touch the Vietnam war.

01:30:55:00 C.T. VIVIAN:

But you see, they weren't on the ground. They weren't crazy about nonviolence in the first place, right? There was no way that I could want anything more than to have what we had, the people learning to be deeply concerned about nonviolence and think about winning the future nonviolently. That's... and so, I was very quiet and he went on talking about it. He had all his stats to give and all of it... And it was Martin and you knew the all that ways that Martin was always ahead of whatever we were doing.

TAYLOR BRANCH:

This was only a few months before his Riverside speech, and most of his staff, including Stanley Levison, they were all against it saying he was going to get the wrath of the country coming down on him, were against that. Do you think he was too far ahead?

01:32:25:00 C.T. VIVIAN:

No, in fact and neither do they now, all right? Martin knows how to handle ... Remember when would when it came to Montgomery, right, he was nonviolently ahead of his time, right? He was always ahead of his time. Vince Harding, who was my other favorite person, right, I always talked about Martin being the person to listen to, as that he wasn't as hard about it as many of the rest of us, but he definitely did, and he used to bring me out to his place out in the Midwest.

01:33:33:00 TAYLOR BRANCH:

Vincent wrote a lot of that Riverside speech. Helped Doctor King with the draft. But many people who were around him said that as even-keeled as Doctor King was, he was disappointed and hurt by the level of venom that came- the *New York Times*, people that were against the war still said, "You don't have any business talking about the war. You don't know what you're talking about," and that that hurt him.

01:34:00:00 C.T. VIVIAN:

Yeah, and it did, but it didn't change him, see. That's the beautiful part about Martin. He made up his mind about things. He would be willing to go against the world about it. And after all, here is a man whose life is built around nonviolence, and that's what we can't forget. He wanted his life to be remembered by making the nation realize that nonviolence is what we must in the end have. Right? Now, I say that. Many other people that were with him would not necessarily say that, but I think

most of them would. They knew that Martin King was hoping for a nonviolent world for all of us. All of us, all of us, but that he didn't think we could have it without nonviolence.

01:35:20:00 TAYLOR BRANCH:

Many people say that he was subject to bouts of depression about whether nonviolence was going to work and about- did you see signs of that depression and how he coped with it? You said it didn't change him, but it certainly affected him.

01:35:34:00 C.T. VIVIAN:

Well, you see, the only thing I saw is that here's a guy struggling with, how do we get to the point, that all this time and energy was spent with nonviolence and having nonviolent struggles- and having nonviolent struggles, period. And he would want to be remembered more for his concern over nonviolence than for any subject. And now, that's what I don't know, is whether, whether the people, when he died, that they were really thinking about- or when he was murdered, really- that they really wanted to think about that here is the man of nonviolence, more so than any other future, that he wanted a future world that was known for desiring that the world changed because of our nonviolent struggles.

01:37:08:00 TAYLOR BRANCH:

Did you see him ... He was bearing a heavy load, though, and people said that at times it did depress him. Did you see him personally depressed, or see people around him try to manage this, saying, "Doctor King is carrying a heavy load." Were you aware of the psychological burden?

01:37:33 :00 C.T. VIVIAN:

You know, the closest I came to it is that last night, in Martin's life, when he... when he came up- you know, he came over from the hotel, came over to give the speech that rainy night. And when he stood up and started talking, and when he ended, he was ... he was... It didn't surprise me, and I don't know why, but it didn't surprise me that he died the next day. It was as though he knew it was coming. And that he- but he knew what he was going to do, and he knew who he was, and what he looked forward to doing and being, and wished that he was going to live longer. Now, that sounds strange, because he was concerned that he create or be a part of creating a nonviolent world, a nonviolent nation at least, or a nonviolent people, at least, right? But it was not to be.

TAYLOR BRANCH:

Did you ever see any signs of that burden before...?

01:39:40:00 C.T. VIVIAN:

I tell you, what is that thing where... we used to joke about death thing....and he... I think he was- he worried about dying before he had accomplished enough. And that's the only way I can say it and make any sense without sounding like, "what made you say that," right, kind of attitude. And I shouldn't have even said that.

TAYLOR BRANCH:

Did he ever say that he was going to preach your funeral?

01:40:33:00 C.T. VIVIAN:

That he was what? Oh, no. I was not one that he happened to have said that to, but- I do, it was for all of us, because he was always joking. He didn't say that with the same kind of seriousness that you would if you were doing a serious thing, right? But it was very clear that from the time ... The way I like to say it, but from the time that he... was ... was... I don't want to say it that way either.... But.... Martin joked about it because there wasn't any other way to be. He... It's as though, though, that he knew that he was not going to be here for the rest of the struggle, and that he wanted to be, not just for life itself, but to accomplish the major thing of his life.

01:42:24:00 TAYLOR BRANCH:

That's good. Shifting slightly, were you aware- did you have encounters with FBI agents yourself? Experience? Because I'm leading up to the question of how aware were you of the persecution that was in fact going on so deeply, the surveillance and that sort of thing. What was your experience with the FBI during the movement?

01:42:47:00 C.T. VIVIAN:

Only once did I really have, twice really, did I really have an experience with them. They came knocked on the door once and before I finished with them they were glad to leave, right? But then there was the other- however, that one of their guys came over to me one day in a park, I forget where it was, and said, "Are you who I think you are," you know, and that kind of stuff. He was going to make certain that I was who he thought I was, right. He said to me, "Are you going to be here for the rest of the day or so," you know, and I said, "Yeah." He said, "Look, I want to go, I want to go and be with my girlfriend and if you're not going to leave here." I mean, I've never had anybody to be - anybody like him to be that serious, right? And he said- and I told him, "No, I'm going to be here." And so he said... you know, he said that, you know, "I want to let you know that I'm going," but he didn't say all that, he just- but he said it that, "I'm going to go see my girlfriend and you're sure that you're going to be here," and I said, "Yes."

TAYLOR BRANCH:

So, your only experience with being surveilled is that you did him a favor?

C.T. VIVIAN:

Mm-hmm.

01:44:53:00 TAYLOR BRANCH:

But what about the general sense, I mean, certainly after J. Edgar Hoover in public called Doctor King the most notorious liar in America, people in the movement were aware that the FBI was hostile to Doctor Kin.

01:45:07:00 C.T. VIVIAN:
Knew it be anyway, knew it before that. We knew it before that, and I'm not saying I was the only one. I think most of us knew it beforehand that ... In fact, I don't think most of us really liked the man anyway. We didn't see him as one that was on the side of human beings anyway.

01:45:41:00 TAYLOR BRANCH:
Many people today and ever since have assumed from all the stories about FBI spying on Doctor King, that he had girlfriends. My question is what would you say to those today who try to use his personal flaws to discredit his mission, to discredit his ...

01:46:06:00 C.T. VIVIAN:
Oh, no, nobody paid any attention to that. Is that- none of us paid any attention to that because did not believe that in the first place, right? I know most of the guys I know didn't believe that he had girlfriends here and there and like... the FBI ... Like his enemies thought so. Now, that's me. I don't know who else did, but I knew that whatever it was, he was serious about it. I can't see him as taking it lightly.

01:47:12:00 TAYLOR BRANCH:
I guess what I'm saying is, what would you say today to somebody who objects to Doctor King on behalf of that, tries to tear down his accomplishments because of those rumors about him? Would us say, well in spite of that he was a great man, or would you say, he's a great man only because those things aren't true?

C.T. VIVIAN:
Neither really. I would say that didn't make him less... the great man he was.

TAYLOR BRANCH:
Is that something you run into? Do you ever run into people who would discuss with you, "I would love to admire Doctor King but he had feet of clay."

01:47:54:00 C.T. VIVIAN:
No. In fact, no. In fact, actually, I would think that if you're looking for a purer person anyway, you don't know where you're going because it just doesn't happen, right? And if you think somebody has to be pure in order to do good, you know, you're dreaming anyway. I wouldn't give it a thought. In fact, even hearing it said sounds a little nonsense to me.

TAYLOR BRANCH:
So, could you talk to us a little about the last time you saw Doctor King? What do you remember of that?

01:48:44:00 C.T. VIVIAN:
Yeah, I'll do that. In fact... I was... I left... I was then with Jim Lawson and the Institute and I ... It was going to rain and I left the office, which was completely on

the other side of town, and started toward the house, and we heard that Martin, all the way over to the house, we kept hearing Martin King was killed tonight or he's hurting, or ... And they'd bring it out slowly to you that he ... And... and I just wanted to be there, I wanted to get to the house and be out to the airport to go to Memphis. And when I got to the- and shortly after I got to the house, a friend of mine... Can't think of his name right now.

TAYLOR BRANCH:
Billups?

01:50:18:00 C.T. VIVIAN:
Billups. Billups, thank you. Pardon me, that doesn't fit your camera right. But Billups ran in the house, because when I first came in the house my wife says ... It's a split-level house, right and so I just went up the staircase and my wife in the front said, "Are you going?" And I said, "Yes," and went on back and started to packing, right. And then about ten minutes later or so, Billups came and said, "Are you going?" and leaned over the bed and said, "Are you going?" 'cause that's where I was packing, and he said, "Are you going?" I said, "Yes," and he said, "Wait for me," and I just nodded my head, nothing to talk about, just nod your head, so I knew I was going, knew he was going. And he got back- he came back to the house before I had finished good. I didn't have to wait around, and we got in his car and started back to the ... I'm pretty certain we started in his car instead of mine. And we started toward the airport and we got there before the airplane had come. There was an airplane that also came straight out of the Chicago Airport into Memphis, and it was on its way. So, we got there and when the plane came, we started conversations with the members of our staff that had come in, and we just talked with them a little. And we went to get into the plane, right, now that's- and when we got to the airport... it was- when we got to the hotel, it was dark, dark, real dark. And we saw the guys getting in the car. Two or three guys were getting in there, that weren't- you could tell they were crowded in there, right? And we just got in the car and took off toward the undertaker parlor, and we were ... remember seeing him very well. And then... and we were going to let a couple of the older guys decide what to do. They had- and as a result, we stood around talking to each other, and then we drove back to... we drove back...And...

01:55:15:00 And the thing I really remember from that is, the next morning, we were waiting for an airplane to come to pick up Martin's body and- 'cause we left it up to Abernathy, really, and one of the other guys that was from one of the other organizations that had come. And then we drove on back to the hotel. And the next morning, the- and we had a car that we had rented at the airport, and we- and Coretta and the mayor of Atlanta were there to meet the plane. And the... and we... I remember, she was looking out one of the windows of the plane. I mean- don't mean that she was at the window, she had opened the window, and she was looking out and so did we, and so we were watching it as they brought the casket up to the side of the plane. And the thing that stood out for me was that, as the plane was going up, Martin was in the casket. She seemed to come out of the plane, right, hung out of the plane, and as he came up closer, she reached out further, not reached, but came out further, right? It

was as though they were going to meet each other. And I- every time I think about it, I know that this can't be real, that's why I'm trying to get right. Is that I really thought that she was going to reach out and kiss him because he was coming up closer to her, and she was reaching out further, right? And it didn't happen, but that's what I thought was going to happen, and then she went back into the plane, and the plane took off, and we went our various ways. But where I went, I had rented a car, and what I did was to drive around town, that whole area afterwards. There was a police station above where the hotel-

TAYLOR BRANCH:
-The Lorraine Motel.

01:59:44:00 C.T. VIVIAN:
Uh huh. And it was- so I drove the car through an alley up to that place because I had heard that they told the black guy, the one black guy there, that he could go home that afternoon, right, and so I wanted to see that police station. And I drove up and looked in the window but didn't get out of the car. And then I- and then- where he has been- where the gun that shot him, right, was over a ways, so I drove around until I found a way to get to the hotel across the way, right? And when I did, I wanted to go up to that hotel room. Well, the point is, it was easier than I really thought. The window was open, and I could open the door. So, I opened the door, and I went in the room. And so, I went down on my knees and acted as though I had a gun in my hand, to see how well you could see from that room, right? And the room was- and the door was, unlocked. In fact, the room itself was opened up. The window was up. And I didn't have to put it up and I could see the room across the way. And I got down on my knees to see if I could really, if I'd had a rifle, if I could've hit him that easily as he started down the steps, realized I could, and thought about it, still see it.

02:02:41:00 And there's only one other point there that you should know about. The- so- that this... this fellow was ... You wondered how he was able to get out of the room and down the steps and out the way to his car, but he could. And- but see, what happened, there had been ... Jim Orange, I believe, all right, had talked about his, the man from the window, 'cause they were all looking out from the balcony, right, and I wanted to know ... There's no way of really knowing, but I wanted to know if he could shoot from there. I found that out, but then was trying to find out where he might have gone.

02:04:16:00 TAYLOR BRANCH:
There was a- I believe you told a story that Reverend Billups who went with you was in such a blur that his suitcase had only neckties in it?

C.T. VIVIAN:
Yeah. Oh, that's exactly right.

TAYLOR BRANCH:
Can you tell that story?

02:04:29:00 C.T. VIVIAN:
Yeah, that's exactly right. Billups had thrown clothes in his suitcase and came on over. That's how he got to my house so quickly. And then he came over and when he got to the hotel, he didn't have anything but ties in it, because he was in such a hurry, and he was so absorbed in our- in the whole event that was happening around us that he just filled up the suitcase, but with ties, and had thrown them in his car and drove on over to my house. And when he got there, I was ready, and so we went right on out to the car.

TAYLOR BRANCH:
Did you go to the funeral?

02:05:46:00 C.T. VIVIAN:
Yeah, oh, tried to, was supposed to have a place to stand. There were so many people, and so many great people, or well-known people, that neither my wife or I got to stay in the seats we had, 'cause they'd ... We had been placed in good seats, right? And we left them, so ... The wife in particular, that still bothers me. I see my wife walking down the street. I didn't, I see her in my mind, right? I'd seen her in my mind, walking down the street, and she had to go across town, right? And... but then, I went on over to ... I walked all the way over to the Morehouse campus, right? And- I think it was the Morehouse campus, but it was one of the black college campuses. And I was- I wish I had one of these pictures, because I was one of the people that was holding on to the casket just to keep people off of it, not holding on to it carrying it or anything. But we all gave up our seats for the celebrities that came.

02:07:34:00 TAYLOR BRANCH:
Why do you think it was- it is so difficult to walk and stick to the nonviolent path? People are always jumping off of it and excusing violence.

02:07:43:00 C.T. VIVIAN:
I don't find it, I don't find it hard. And maybe, and I guess I just don't think about other people not doing it or ... I just don't- if you're in a nonviolent movement, you just live nonviolently. That's all there is to it as far as I'm concerned. And if anybody doesn't follow, so they don't.

TAYLOR BRANCH:
Do you think nonviolence can be a weapon against the cynicism and division that's so prevalent today in our society and? In other words, do you-

02:08:32:00 C.T. VIVIAN:
Yeah, I think it will if we had anybody to really move it. I think- here's what I really think, that nonviolent will become the only means that man will have to escape the horror of any other life, right, and that it's going to come little by little, and it will be final. I don't think there's any other way. I just believe that nonviolence is the only way to go and that you just go with it. And if it costs you your life that way, so what?

I mean, the point being is we know we're going to die anyway, right? You just- but if you got to go, let's go trying for the best way to live that we can and do it, right? And that's not just something I memorized. That's just the fact of life that you've... I don't think I'd ever- I don't even remember giving a speech saying precisely that, but I know that man can't live with violence, period. He thinks he can but he can't.

02:10:15:00 TAYLOR BRANCH:

If it's true, if you're right, and I'm on your side that that's true, that nonviolence is at the heart of our religious and our patriotic faith, and the only way out. How big a problem do you think it is with so much racial hostility today for America to accept that lesson from a black-led movement because that's where it came from?

02:10:42:00 C.T. VIVIAN:

That- precisely right, and the point is they have to come to the point- for them to have peace with themselves, they're going to have to come to the point that they help all other people have peace, all right? And we're all that way. We're going to have to help each other be the best we can, right? There's one of the countries that we don't hear about very much, small country, but they make certain that everybody has an education, all right? That's one of those great steps about ... that's- that is the way we're going to learn we have to live.

02:11:37:00 END OF INTERVIEW