



Remembering Dr. Clarence B. Jones

1931-2026



Message from the Director

It is with deep sadness that the King Institute reflects on the passing of **Dr. Clarence B. Jones**, our esteemed former MLK Scholar-in-Residence, a cherished friend, and a true American hero.

Just a few short months ago, I had the distinct and humbling honor of moderating a conversation between two titans of the civil rights movement: Dr. Jones and Ambassador Andrew Young. Watching these two men who helped shape the twentieth century share stories and reflect on a lifetime of civil rights struggle was a profound gift. Today, we feel the immense weight of that gift and the deep sorrow of its loss.

Clarence's presence at the King Institute was not a fleeting one. From 2006 to 2018, he was our MLK Scholar-in-Residence, a foundational part of our community's intellectual and moral life. It was here, within our walls, that he undertook the difficult but necessary work of researching and writing his memoirs, *Behind the Dream* and the aptly titled *Last of the Lions*. But his contributions went far beyond the page. Dr. Jones generously shared his firsthand experiences, profound wisdom, and infectious passion with our students, staff, and community. He brought history to life, challenging us to recognize our own roles in the ongoing struggle for a more just world. Clarence reminded us all that the work of justice is never truly finished.

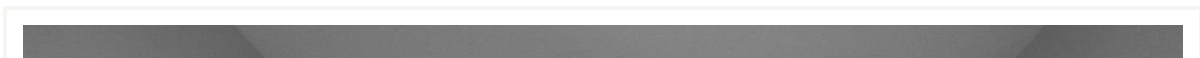
In 2024, we celebrated Clarence's 93rd birthday with him here at Stanford. He was as sharp and fiery as ever. He issued a charge to our students: "Put down the goddamn cell phone—read, read, read." And, with tears in his eyes, he gave the ultimate tribute to his friend: "Never ever, ever have I seen or will there be another Martin Luther King. Never, ever. The baddest dude on the Earth."

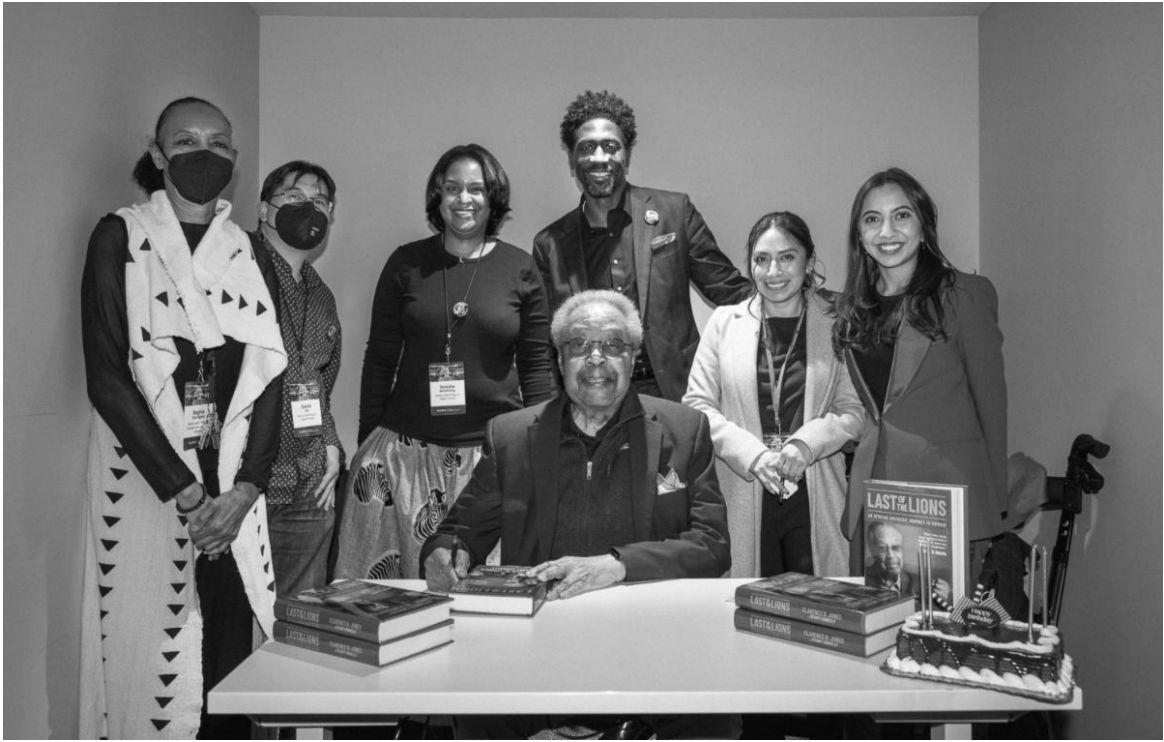
Clarence's loss is a solemn reminder that the living direct witnesses to Dr. King and the movement he led are becoming fewer. This places a greater, more urgent responsibility on us as scholars, as students, as citizens. The work of interpreting, preserving, and advancing this legacy now falls more heavily upon our shoulders.

We extend our deepest condolences to Clarence's family and to all who were touched by his extraordinary life. We have lost a mentor, a colleague, and a dear friend. The echoes of his voice and the lessons of his courage will forever resonate in our halls and in our work. We look forward to continuing his legacy with the Clarence B. Jones Research Fellowship Fund.

Rest in peace. Rest in power.

Dr. Lerone Martin







Assistant Editor David Lai Remembers Dr. Jones

When I returned to the King Institute in 2015, I already held a deep respect for Dr. Clarence Jones for his years spent advising Martin Luther King Jr. during the height of the civil rights movement, his successes in finance and law, and his appointment as the King Institute's Scholar-in-Residence. The next years would provide me with the immense privilege of knowing him as a friend, one who had a deep heart for people.

Dr. Jones was often in the office. While working on his memoirs, he would occasionally come to my office to ask about obtaining specific documents. Oftentimes, those visits would also turn to him checking in on me. If I was discouraged from working on a particularly challenging research task, he would listen and offer his insight. Those conversations would, without fail, leave me reinvigorated.

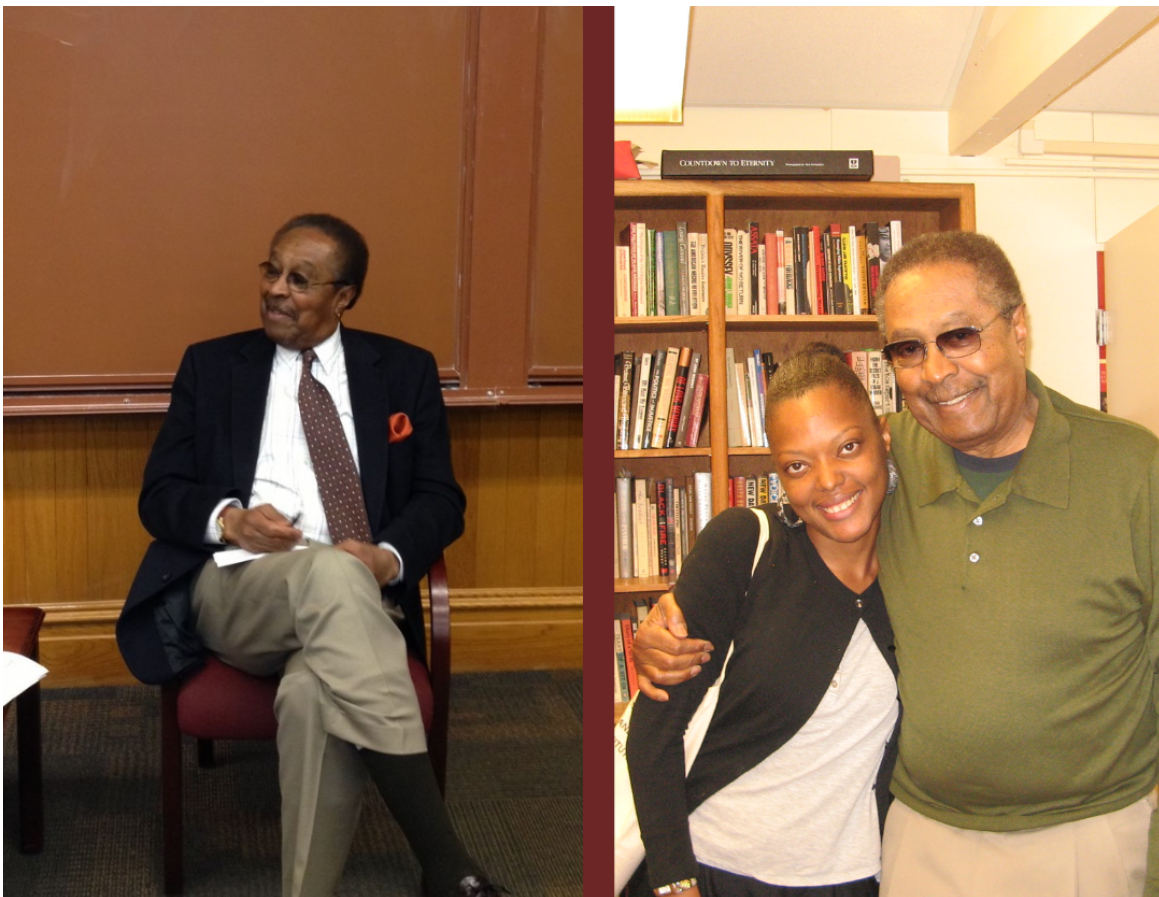
Prior to the pandemic, Dr. Jones always saved time to headline our Stanford Admit Weekend outreach. He did this despite his many commitments elsewhere. In 2019, we were assigned an early morning slot in the History Corner, and the audience was 10–20 prospective students and their parents. In that intimate classroom setting, Dr. Jones told them that a Stanford education would unlock a plethora of opportunities, including through proximity to the movers and shakers of Silicon Valley. He related that to his own life story, noting how he achieved significant personal success as an entertainment lawyer. He then told them how he initially dismissed the opportunity to meet King as a distraction and how King had to shame him into providing legal services and support.

With that life story, he then insisted that regardless of what they majored in, the most valuable thing they could do at Stanford would be to learn about King's public ministry and the broader civil rights movement, which he called the single most important moment of American history with the possible exception of the Civil War. To do that, he urged them to get engaged with the King Institute, where they could dive into that history in a unique fashion.

These talks proved successful: several interns noted that they remembered his Admit Weekend talks, and one intern even noted in her application that the opportunity to hear Dr. Jones speak was what pushed her to choose Stanford. Following the 2019 Admit Weekend, I sent a thank-you email to Dr. Jones, letting him know we were grateful he continued to take the time to address these small classrooms when he could easily headline large, ticketed venues elsewhere. His reply is below:

*"David,
Martin would have been VERY proud of you.
This morning was what he would have wanted me to do.
Hope students took your and my words away with them to remember.
Dr. Jones"*

I share that because I learned in those hallway conversations, classroom sessions, and later public talks that Dr. Jones took the duty of representing Martin Luther King Jr. very seriously. As one of the last living members of King's inner circle, he sought to defend King's legacy and the hard-won achievements of the 1960s and also inspired others to continue the fight.







We are forever grateful for the time Dr. Jones shared with us. Let's honor his incredible legacy by continuing the work he dedicated his life to.

**Clarence B. Jones Institute for
Social Advocacy**