

(Mount Clipping in Space Below)

# Two Who Were There Tell of King's Last Moments

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Two members of Dr. Martin Luther King's group were looking directly into his face when the shooting occurred and saw him smile for the last time.

"We were both standing down on the parking lot looking up at him as he stood on the balcony (of the second floor of the Lorraine Motel facing Mulberry)," said Chauncey Eskridge, long time confidant and attorney for King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference. The other man was a Memphian, Solomon Jones, 374 Vance, who had acted as King's chauffeur for the past two days.

King was about to go to

dinner as a guest at the home of the Rev. Samuel B. Kyles, pastor of Monumental Baptist Church, when he stepped out on the balcony shortly after 6 p.m., Eskridge said.

"Solomon, I am ready to go. Start the car."

King stood there as Jones started the engine and kept it running as he got out and looked up at King.

"You had better get your coat, Dr. King, because it has turned cool."

Dr. King looked up and rubbed his arms and then looked down at Jones, saying: "You are right."

He smiled and then Jones heard the shot.

"He had a kinda surprised look on his face and he fell very slowly," Jones said.

(Indicate page, name of newspaper, city and state.)

PAGE 13

MEMPHIS PRESS-SCIMITAR

MEMPHIS, TENN.

Date: 4-5-68

Edition:

Author:

Editor: CHASTAIN

Title: KING'S LAST MOMENTS

Character:

or

Classification:

Submitting Office:

Being Investigated

Memphis Press-Scimitar 4/5/68  
MFO 44-1987 Subc

King clutched at his neck as he fell.

Jones said he looked over his shoulder, and about 25 feet away he saw a man jump out of some bushes and run.

"He had something white on his face," Jones said.

Eskridge said he didn't see the man running, because he concentrated his energies on getting up the stairs to help King.

"His eyes were closed, and I thought he was dead then," Eskridge said.

His voice broke.

"He was so full of love, so full of life, and full of hope. How on earth could this have happened?" Eskridge asked.

Standing with King on the balcony several feet away was the Rev. Jesse Jackson,

an SCLC staff member and King's chief organizer of economic boycotts of white businesses.

"Jesse went and got a blanket and put it over him. If Dr. King ever said anything after he was shot he must have said it to Rev. Jackson. But I don't believe he did."

Eskridge said he was in Dr. King's suite at 5:30 p.m. and watched Walter Cronkite's telecast including his report about a compromise discussion in the judge's chamber in Memphis. Eskridge was present, but King was not. This prompted King to say:

"He (Cronkite) is telling me something I don't believe."

Eskridge said he then explained to King the fact that

Federal Judge Bailey Brown had taken the suggested plan under advisement.

Eskridge said he heard the shot, but at the time he thought it was a firecracker.

At 7:20 p.m., Paul Hess, assistant administrator of St. Joseph Hospital, called a press conference in the emergency room where a group of national, national and local newsmen waited a report on King's condition, believing he was still alive.

At 7 p.m. Dr. Martin Luther King expired in the emergency room of St. Joseph Hospital of a gunshot wound in the neck, he said.

A cordon of city police and sheriff deputies—armed with shotguns—formed a circle around the emergency room.

Dr. Andrew Young, executive vice president of the

SCLC remained in the operating room.

Several times Young would come out where the reporters were waiting and when he tried to answer questions, his voice would break and he would retreat into the room of the operating room. His eyes were red.

Jones, who asked what effect King's death would have on the Negro community in Memphis, said: "I can't think of a better comment on that."

That was what he had to say.

Eskridge replied to the question:

"I am not sure what he said or how he felt and whether he spoke to anyone. He certainly had as much as possible, you know."