

28 May
1960

Statement on Perjury Acquittal

[28 May 1960]
[Montgomery, Ala.]

After deliberating for three hours and forty-three minutes, an all-white jury acquitted King of perjury for signing a false state income tax return. A news report indicated that King seemed "stunned" by the verdict, while his parents "collapsed in tears."¹ Outside the Montgomery courtroom, King delivers this statement to the press. This transcript was drawn from television news footage.

[King]: Just a moment, now do you want me to just make a statement and not interview? You don't want an interview?

[King]: There are two or three things that I can say at this point. First, as any person in such a situation I am very happy to know that the jury came back with a verdict of not guilty. I certainly want to commend the jury for what I consider a fair, honest, and just verdict. And I want to commend the judge for the way he handled the case, for the high and noble manner that he used in the whole proceeding.² And I certainly want to commend all of the lawyers, this brilliant array of lawyers who represented me in this case.³ And I'm sure that their brilliant and profound arguments and that factual evidence played a great part in the ultimate decision, which was one of not guilty. This represents to my mind great hope, and it reveals that said on so many occasions, that there are hundreds and thousands of people, white people of goodwill in the South, and even though they may not agree with one's views on the question of integration, they are honest people and people who will follow a just and righteous path. And so this rea [break in film]⁴

[question inaudible]

[King]: Well, I knew all along that the evidence was clear. I knew all along that the facts in the case were on my side in the sense that I had never filed a fraudulent return, but I didn't know what the outcome would be. I didn't know how the jury was taking this, so that I just didn't know. This was purely a speculative period, not knowing what the outcome would be.

F. NBCNA-NNNBC.

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1. John Coombes, "King Cleared of Falsifying Income Tax," *Montgomery Advertiser*, 29 May 1960. Returning to the Ebenezer pulpit on 29 May, King delivered an "Autobiography of Suffering," a sermon that highlighted his recent trial in Alabama ("King Sees 'Hope' in Verdict," *Montgomery Advertiser*, 30 May 1960). King reportedly told the congregation: "Something happened to that jury. It said no matter how much they must suppress me they must tell the truth" ("White Jury Obeyed Truth, King Asserts," *Atlanta Constitution*, 30 May 1960). Several years later, King reminisced on his acquittal, calling it "a turning point in my life as a participant in the Negro struggle in the South" (King, Foreword to *Deep in My Heart*, by William Kunstler [New York: William Morrow, 1966]).

2. Judge James Carter presided over King's trial.

3. King refers to Hubert Delany of New York, William R. Ming of Chicago, Arthur Shores of Birmingham, and Fred Gray and Solomon S. Seay, Jr., both of Montgomery.

4. In a transcript drawn from news footage of the statement, King continued: "And so this reaffirms my faith in the ultimate decency of man" (King, Statement on verdict by jury of Montgomery County, 28 May 1960).