

INTRODUCTION

One of the frustrations of any young man is to approach the heights at such an early age. The average man reaches this point maybe in his late forties or early fifties. But when you reach it so young, your life becomes a kind of decrescendo. You feel yourself fading from the screen at a time you should just be starting to work toward your goal. And no one knows better than I that no crowds will be waiting outside churches to greet me two years from now when some one invited me to speak.

Martin Luther King, Jr.
New York Post, 14 April 1957

By the end of 1956, Martin Luther King, Jr. was already widely known for his leadership of the Montgomery bus boycott and was fast becoming a national symbol for the civil rights movement. Increasingly sought after as a spokesperson for civil rights reform, social gospel Christianity, and Gandhian nonviolent resistance, King struggled to accommodate the many speaking invitations and other appeals that flooded his office, and he pondered numerous requests to publish his account of the Montgomery campaign. As early as December 1956, he had made clear his readiness to build upon the success of the boycott, depicting Montgomery as a “proving ground” for the use of Gandhian methods to achieve social justice.¹ Broadening his contacts with other activists, King represented the Montgomery protest at several gatherings designed to promote the use of nonviolent tactics in an expanded, South-wide movement. King’s decision to assume a leadership position in the southern struggle resulted not only from his own sense of calling, but also from the initiative of northern supporters, who saw the potential for a sustained protest movement with King at the fore. Yet even as he began discussions regarding the creation of an organization that would bring together black activist ministers in the South, King was ambivalent about taking on wider responsibilities. Faced with the new demands that accompanied his rise to promi-

1. King, “Facing the Challenge of a New Age,” 3 December 1956, in *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. 3: *Birth of a New Age, December 1955–December 1956*, ed. Clayborne Carson, Stewart Burns, Susan Carson, Peter Holloran, Dana L. H. Powell (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997), pp. 451–463.

Introduction nence, he found it difficult to fulfill his obligations as pastor of Dexter Avenue Baptist Church and president of the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA). Moreover, the bus boycott had exhilarated but also exhausted him, and the wave of segregationist violence in Alabama near the end of 1956 warned him of the dangers associated with civil rights activism. Nearing his twenty-eighth birthday and entering his third year at Dexter, King began the new year struggling to balance family, church, and MIA responsibilities with those of his national public ministry.

During an NAACP rally in Atlanta on 1 January 1957, King reaffirmed the basic ideas that he had developed in many of the previous year's speeches: a renunciation of retaliatory violence, an acceptance of *agape*—redemptive goodwill toward all peoples—as the guiding ideal for the black struggle, an abiding faith in divinely ordained justice, and a recognition that resistance to segregation would involve sacrifice and even death. While refining these themes, King also introduced several broader concerns that would characterize his subsequent speeches, particularly his growing interest in national and international politics. Encouraging his audience in Atlanta to see itself in the context of the worldwide struggles of oppressed, nonwhite people, he proclaimed that “the old order of colonialism is passing away, and the new order of freedom and equality is coming into being.” Declaring that ultimate victory is inevitable because “God is struggling with us,” King urged African Americans to “speed up the coming” of the new order: “We must somehow stand up and courageously oppose segregation wherever we find it. We must passively resist it.” Even as he championed the tactics used in Montgomery, King advocated a multifaceted strategy to achieve civil rights reform utilizing black political and economic power as well as protest and NAACP-style litigation.²

The Atlanta address marked the beginning of a period in which King's activities shifted focus from local injustices to regional and national civil rights concerns. During the closing weeks of 1956 he had discussed with black pacifist Bayard Rustin the possibility of using Montgomery as a model for an extended protest movement. Rustin, who had advised King since the early days of the boycott, proposed the creation of a group that would unite black protest leaders from across the South, informing King that he was “in a very strong position now to set up an organization” in which he would be “the key.”³ Rustin spent the early days of 1957 finishing a set of “working papers” that outlined the purpose and structure of his proposed “congress of organizations. . . . capable of reacting promptly and effectively to situations and possessing ties to masses of people so that their action projects are backed by broad participation of people who gain experience and knowledge in the course of the struggles.”⁴ Rustin prepared the

2. King, “Facing the Challenge of a New Age,” 1 January 1957, pp. 73–89 in this volume.

3. Rustin also advised King to exclude representatives of the Urban League and the NAACP because “if you bring all those organizations together, you will have to compromise to their needs” (*The Reminiscences of Bayard Rustin* [New York: Columbia University, 1988], p. 151).

4. Rustin to King, 23 December 1956, in *Papers* 3:493; Southern Leaders Conference, Working Papers 1–7, 11 January 1957.

papers to guide discussions at the planned Southern Negro Leaders Conference on Transportation and Nonviolent Integration. This meeting, scheduled for 10 January at Atlanta's Ebenezer Baptist Church, would lay the foundation for the regional organization that eventually became the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC).

Although King maintained ties to many of the activists who had assisted him during the bus protest, by 1957 Rustin had emerged as his most trusted advisor on ideological and strategic affairs. Rustin enhanced King's influence outside Montgomery, drafting several public statements for King and introducing him to activists—notably labor leader A. Philip Randolph—outside the network of black Baptist churches that had supported the MIA. Rustin also channeled funds to King and the MIA through the New York-based civil rights support group In Friendship and facilitated King's ties to two of the founders of this group, leftist lawyer Stanley Levison and former NAACP organizer Ella Baker. King met Levison a few weeks before the January gathering and thereafter benefited from his advice, legal counsel, and contacts. Baker, a veteran activist with extensive southern organizing experience, came to Atlanta to assist Rustin in handling local arrangements for the black leaders' meeting; she would return the following year to manage SCLC's office.

On 7 January King and ministers C. K. Steele of Tallahassee and Fred Shuttlesworth of Birmingham jointly issued the call for the Southern Negro Leaders Conference, inviting black leaders "from troubled areas all over the South . . . to share thinking, to discuss common problems, to devise a unified strategy and to plan mutual economic assistance."⁵ Although King and other participants agreed on the importance of forming a new regional group, their discussions about the future conflicted with their need to respond to the wave of segregationist violence targeting southern civil rights supporters. On 10 January, just hours before the meeting was to begin, King learned that bombs had exploded at four black churches in Montgomery and at the parsonages of MIA leaders Ralph Abernathy and Robert Graetz.⁶ King and Abernathy, already in Atlanta, rushed home to Montgomery and missed the opening session, leaving Coretta King and Shuttlesworth to serve as moderators.⁷ In Montgomery King inspected the damaged buildings and contacted local FBI agents to demand an investigation.⁸ When he

5. MIA, Press release, 7 January 1957, pp. 94–95 in this volume.

6. See King to Robert Johnson, 10 January 1957, p. 97 in this volume. Several of the black leaders at the conference had been recent victims of racist violence, including King and Shuttlesworth, whose homes had been bombed (see King to Dwight D. Eisenhower, 11 January 1957, pp. 99–101 in this volume; see also King to Shuttlesworth, 26 December 1956, in *Papers* 3: 495–496).

7. King, Abernathy, and several other activist ministers were already in Atlanta participating in a gathering organized by Glenn E. Smiley of the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR). Smiley, who had also served as an advisor to King during the boycott, later accused Rustin of attempting to boost attendance at the Southern Negro Leaders Conference gathering by scheduling it immediately after the FOR meeting (Smiley, Draft of autobiography, 1986; for more on Smiley's rivalry with Rustin, see William Robert Miller to King, 25 February 1957, pp. 141–143 in this volume).

8. See Fred Hallford to J. Edgar Hoover, 10 January 1957; see also Maxwell Rabb to King, 11 January 1957, p. 98 in this volume.

Segregation Hasn't Been Licked

In spite of timely Supreme Court decisions ruling out racial separation, jim crow is still unbeaten. But real strides have been made in the last year to drastically reduce the web of segregation — still the ugly weave of this system shows too much.

We

Can't

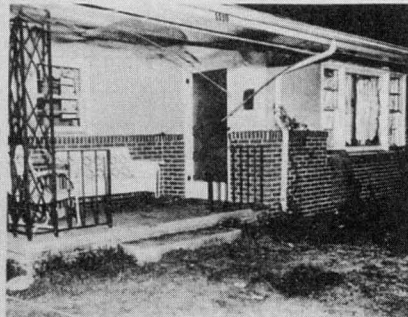
Relax



Hutchinson Street Baptist

This church suffered damage to the amount of \$2,444.15. The insurance covered three-fourths of this loss. Dr. H. H. Johnson, the Pastor and members of his loyal congregation face the added expense of repairs caused by vandalism.

days old on the morning the rectory was struck and not aware of the danger he was in—slept through all of the excitement. In spite of being Caucasian, Pastor Graetz has served the Negro Congregation since his coming from Los Angeles, California in June 1955. Including the auto damage—housed in the attached garage—the total loss amounted to \$683.00.



Trinity Lutheran Parsonage

The mass bombing of January 10 past marked the second time that this home was hit in less than six months. The young Rev. Robert Graetz and his family were sleeping when the attack occurred which not only damaged the house, but ruined some household furnishings. Baby Graetz was nine



First Baptist Parsonage

While a bomb was wrecking this dwelling place a young mother and her two year old daughter were unprotected occupants because the husband and father was in a conference in Atlanta. The home is still unlivable, causing serious inconveniences to the Rev. and Mrs. Ralph Abernathy and daughter. Approximately \$4,000 will be needed to make the parsonage habitable.



First Baptist Church

From the appearance of the above picture, everything looks orderly. Yet it suffered much loss from a bomb that was tossed into the church. The Sanctuary and basement level must undergo extensive repairs to restore the beauty of this historic building. Insurance adjusters appraised damage near \$17,000.

Montgomery Improvement Association flyer, "Segregation Hasn't Been Licked" (March 1957)

returned to Atlanta the following day for the final session of the conference, King accepted the post of chairman of the assembly. In addition to releasing "A Statement to the South and the Nation" affirming their commitment to a nonviolent "struggle for freedom," the black leaders concluded the conference by sending telegrams to the president, vice president, and attorney general, demanding federal action on civil rights. Yet beyond agreeing to create a "continuing body," the leaders did not define the group's structure.⁹

During the weeks following the meeting, King experienced difficulty transforming his success in the Montgomery campaign into a broader civil rights reform movement. His entreaties to the Eisenhower administration prompted only responses from lower-level officials, and the president continued to duck black leaders' requests to deliver a pro-civil rights speech in the South.¹⁰ Rather than gaining confidence from his new role as head of the Southern Negro Leaders Conference, King began displaying signs of stress, stemming largely from the violence that persisted after the end of the boycott. Shortly after the Atlanta conference, Coretta King confided to a northern supporter: "The pressures are not any less and it seems that they will continue for a long, long while. You see, Martin has become the 'leader' and authority on non-violent integration in the south. His responsibilities continue to grow. What he has to do is the job of not less than four men. . . . He can't continue indefinitely under the pressure of the situation."¹¹

On 13 January King traveled to Nashville for a speaking engagement, an event marred by the discovery of a fake bomb on the sidewalk outside the church where he appeared. The following evening King used an MIA mass meeting to reflect on the meaning of the recent violent incidents. He proposed that the hardships endured by black residents of Montgomery reflected a divine purpose: "It may be that we are called upon to be God's suffering servants through whom he is working his redemptive plan." Rejecting bitterness, he advised, "let us continue to love."¹² The meeting reached a crescendo as King invited his audience to join in a prayer for guidance. "Lord, I hope no one will have to die as a result of our struggle for freedom in Montgomery," he cried. "Certainly I don't want to die. But if anyone has to die, let it be me." Members of the crowd protested and their shouts filled the church as King apparently faltered and fell silent, prompting re-

9. "A Statement to the South and the Nation," 10 January–11 January 1957, pp. 103–106 in this volume; Jack Nelson, "Negro Leaders Here Ask Brownell Meeting," *Atlanta Constitution*, 12 January 1957. The black leaders requested that Eisenhower deliver a speech in the South asking southerners to abide by the Supreme Court's 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision (King to Eisenhower, 11 January 1957, pp. 99–101 in this volume; see also King to Richard M. Nixon, pp. 101–103 in this volume; and King to Herbert Brownell, both dated 11 January 1957).

10. Sherman Adams to King, 18 January 1957; see also Warren Olney to King, 30 January 1957; "I can't do it'—Ike Plays Golf, But He Can't Deliver Speech in South," *Baltimore Afro-American*, 9 February 1957.

11. Coretta Scott King to Lynn Rohrbough, 16 January 1957.

12. King, Outline, Address to the MIA Mass Meeting at Bethel Baptist Church, 14 January 1957, pp. 109–110 in this volume.

Introduction ports that he collapsed at the pulpit.¹³ One MIA member later remembered the event: "It was obvious that he was at the point of exhaustion. I think they could feel it, that he was going to probably just pass out if he kept on going."¹⁴ King insisted that the intense audience reaction prevented him from continuing the prayer and strongly denied reports that he had collapsed. However, he later admitted suffering a breakdown in response to the previous weeks' bombings, which had caused him "to feel a personal sense of guilt for everything that was happening," and explained that the "episode brought me great relief. Many people came up to me after the meeting and many called the following day to assure me that we were all together until the end."¹⁵

King's resolve continued to be tested as resistance to desegregation remained strong in Montgomery. In mid-January, white officials seeking to undermine the bus boycott victory announced plans to establish a private, segregated bus line. Early on the morning of 27 January, police spotted and disengaged twelve sticks of dynamite smoldering on the porch of King's Dexter parsonage. The family was not home, but King soon learned that the office of the city's black taxi service had been bombed, sending three drivers to the hospital. Another bomb damaged the home of a sixty-year-old black hospital worker. As he had done almost exactly one year before, King calmed an angry crowd that assembled at his home by counseling nonviolence: "I know this is difficult advice to follow, especially since we have been the victims of no less than ten bombings, but this is the way of Christ; it is the way of the cross. We must somehow believe that unearned suffering is redemptive."¹⁶ Speaking to his Dexter congregation later in the morning, King recalled a spiritual reawakening that he had experienced during an especially dark moment of the bus boycott. He reported that he had drawn strength

13. *Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1958), pp. 177–178; see also Nelson Cole, "King Collapses in Prayer During Negro Mass Meeting," *Montgomery Advertiser*, 15 January 1957. During his sermon the previous morning, King bemoaned the antiblack brutalities that had struck Montgomery and elsewhere in the South, and asked: "Where is God while hundreds and thousands of his children suffer merely because they are desirous of having freedom and human dignity? Where is God while churches and homes of ministers are being plunged across the abyss of torturous barbarity?" (*The Ways of God in the Midst of Glaring Evil*, 13 January 1957, pp. 107–109 in this volume).

14. Robert Graetz, Interview by David J. Garrow, 23 February 1984.

15. *Stride Toward Freedom*, p. 178; see also King to Fannie Scott, 28 January 1957, p. 113 in this volume.

16. *Stride Toward Freedom*, p. 179. Montgomery police arrested seven men in connection with the January church bombings. Seeking to convince the all-white jury that black civil rights proponents were responsible for the violence, defense attorneys called King as a witness. "For more than an hour I was questioned on things which had no relevance to the bombing case," King recalled. "The lawyers lifted statements of mine out of context to give the impression that I was a perpetrator of hate and violence. At many points they invented derogatory statements concerning white people, and attributed them to me." King was discouraged when the jury ignored the considerable evidence against the first two defendants facing trial and returned a verdict of not guilty (*Stride Toward Freedom*, p. 180; see also Rex Thomas, "Rev. King Denies Blasts Were Set to Raise Money," *Montgomery Advertiser*, 30 May 1957, and "'Tragic' Declares Negro Leader," *Birmingham Post-Herald*, 31 May 1957).

and comfort from an early morning visit of a divine presence, which assured him of the righteousness of the boycott. King defiantly proclaimed: "I'm not afraid of anybody this morning. Tell Montgomery they can keep shooting and I'm going to stand up to them; tell Montgomery they can keep bombing and I'm going to stand up to them." Revealing an increasing awareness of mortality that would become a recurring theme in his oratory, King continued: "If I had to die tomorrow morning I would die happy because I've been to the mountain top and I've seen the promised land and it's going to be here in Montgomery."¹⁷

In the weeks after the Southern Negro Leaders Conference meeting in Atlanta, King fulfilled a demanding speaking and meeting schedule that brought him to St. Paul, New Orleans, New York, Hot Springs, and Oberlin. In a 10 February television interview in New York City, he confessed that the continuing resistance to bus desegregation in Montgomery had left him with no opportunity "to sit down and think about next moves."¹⁸ As a result, when he and other black ministers gathered on 14 February in New Orleans for the second meeting of the Southern Negro Leaders Conference, they repeated the pattern set at the Atlanta gathering, reporting on the slow progress of their local movements and sending telegrams to Eisenhower and other government leaders requesting federal intervention in the South. Although little had been accomplished since its initial meeting, the group affirmed its determination to establish itself as a permanent organization, shortening its name to the Southern Leaders Conference and electing King president.¹⁹ Using telegram drafts prepared by Levison and Rustin, the conferees expressed their concerns to government officials with notably more force than in the previous month, warning Eisenhower that they would lead a pilgrimage of prayer to Washington "if you, our president cannot come south to relieve our harassed people."²⁰



In the days following the New Orleans meeting, King prepared to attend the independence ceremonies for the Gold Coast, soon to become the new West African nation of Ghana. After receiving his invitation from Prime Minister Kwame Nkrumah, King accepted donations from the MIA and the Dexter congregation to finance his trip.²¹ Confirming his emergence as a national black leader, King and his wife traveled with a delegation that included A. Philip Ran-

17. "King Says Vision Told Him to Lead Integration Forces," *Montgomery Advertiser*, 28 January 1957, pp. 114-115 in this volume; "'Dud' Spares King's Home; Another Hit," *Montgomery Advertiser*, 28 January 1957.

18. King, Interview by Richard D. Heffner on "The Open Mind," 10 February 1957, pp. 126-131 in this volume.

19. Russell Lasley, Minutes, Southern Leaders Conference, 14 February 1957.

20. King to Eisenhower, pp. 132-134 in this volume; King to Nixon, pp. 134-135 in this volume; King to Herbert Brownell; and King to Thomas C. Hennings and Emanuel Celler, all dated 14 February 1957.

21. Kwame Nkrumah to King, 22 January 1957, pp. 112-113 in this volume; James E. Nesbitt to King, 14 February 1957, pp. 137-138 in this volume.

Introduction dolph, Congressman Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., and United Nations official Ralph Bunche.

Soon after arriving in Accra on 4 March, King attended a reception where he met Vice President Nixon. Encountering a high federal official for the first time, King used the opportunity to press Nixon to respond to the Southern Leaders Conference requests. "Mr. Vice President, I'm very glad to meet you here," King reportedly told Nixon, "but I want you to come visit us down in Alabama where we are seeking the same kind of freedom the Gold Coast is celebrating."²² Though he had previously ignored King's telegrams, Nixon invited him to Washington to discuss the southern segregation crisis.²³

At a midnight independence ceremony on 6 March, King's emotions overflowed as he watched the lowering of the Union Jack and the hoisting of the Black Star over Accra's polo grounds. Following a minute of silent prayer, a crowd of fifty thousand people erupted in joyous shouts and cheers. The subsequent celebration, which King recounted on several occasions, made a vivid imprint on his memory: "We could hear little children six years old and old people eighty and ninety years old walking the streets of Accra crying: 'Freedom! Freedom!' They couldn't say it in the sense that we'd say it, many of them don't speak English too well, but they had their accents and it could ring out 'free-doom!' They were crying it in a sense that they had never heard it before." For King the events in Ghana presaged the passing of the "old order of colonialism, of segregation, of discrimination" while reaffirming his belief in a just God: "That night when I saw that old flag coming down and the new flag coming up, I saw something else. That wasn't just an ephemeral, evanescent event appearing on the stage of history. But it was an event with eternal meaning. . . . Somehow the forces of justice stand on the side of the universe, so that you can't ultimately trample over God's children and profit by it."²⁴

During Ghana's first day of independence, King attended the seating of the new parliament in the morning and a formal reception at Christiansborg Castle that evening. The Kings later had a private lunch with Prime Minister Nkrumah at his official residence. King enjoyed being treated as an international dignitary, which bolstered his reputation at home, but Coretta King would later remember her husband as deeply troubled by the poverty he encountered in Accra. The couple felt especially uneasy being served breakfast each morning by low-paid attendants. "Seeing how that system had demoralized them bothered us and marred our trip," she recalled. "Martin was extremely upset by the servile attitude to which their suffering had brought them. They had been trained to bow, almost to cringe; their stature was decreased."²⁵

Before leaving Ghana, King fell ill and was forced to remain in bed for several days of recuperation. Despite his poor health, he welcomed a visit from English

22. "M. L. King Meets Nixon in Ghana," *Pittsburgh Courier*, 16 March 1957.

23. Thaddeus T. Stokes, "Dr. King Says He May Meet With Nixon," *Atlanta Daily World*, 29 March 1957.

24. King, "The Birth of a New Nation," 7 April 1957, pp. 155-167 in this volume.

25. Coretta Scott King, *My Life with Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969), pp. 154-155.

clergyman and anticolonial activist Michael Scott, during which the two men compared the freedom struggles in Africa and the United States. King reportedly expressed admiration for the bus boycott then taking place in Johannesburg, South Africa, and remarked that there was “no basic difference between colonialism and racial segregation. . . . at bottom both segregation in America and colonialism in Africa were based on the same thing—white supremacy and contempt for life.”²⁶

The Kings left Ghana on 12 March, spending two weeks as tourists in Kano, Rome, Geneva, Paris, and London, where on 24 March they had lunch with Trinidadian writer and political activist C. L. R. James. Although King left no record of his response to James’s eclectic Marxism, a subsequent letter that James sent to his political associates in the United States suggests that he was deeply impressed by King’s report on the Montgomery struggle. James warned that Marxist organizations would be “making a fundamental mistake” by not recognizing the nonviolent movements in Ghana and Montgomery “for what they are, a technique of revolutionary struggle characteristic of our age.”²⁷

Returning to Montgomery, King shared his travel stories and insights with the community at several public events, allowing him to depict the local bus struggle within the context of a global drive for racial and economic justice. At Dexter, King preached “The Birth of a New Nation,” an account of his trip combining theological reflection and political analysis. He proposed that at the heart of the Ghanaian struggle for independence was the certainty that “freedom only comes through persistent revolt, through persistent agitation, through persistently rising up against the system of evil.” The integration of the bus system was just the beginning, he told the congregation: “Don’t sit down and do nothing now because the buses are integrated, because if you stop now, we will be in the dungeons of segregation and discrimination for another hundred years. And our children and our children’s children will suffer all of the bondage that we have lived under for years.”²⁸

For the next two Sundays at Dexter, King continued to blend social commentary and personal reflections into his sermons. Preaching on Palm Sunday, King spoke of Jesus’ initial reluctance to embrace the cross as he prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane. After dwelling on the difficulties of life’s “Good Fridays,” King concluded that surrendering to God’s will, though often painful and incomprehensible, is the only way to freedom: “I will follow Him to the garden. I will follow Him to the cross if He wants me to go there. I will follow Him to the dark valleys

26. Homer Alexander Jack, “Conversation in Ghana,” *Christian Century* 74 (10 April 1957): 446–448.

27. C. L. R. James to Martin and Jesse Glaberman, 25 March 1957; see also James to King, 5 April 1957, pp. 149–150 in this volume, and King to James, 30 April 1957, p. 194 in this volume.

28. King, “The Birth of a New Nation,” 7 April 1957, pp. 155–167 in this volume. Commenting on King’s preaching style to a reporter after the sermon, one congregation member asserted that despite Dexter’s reputation for being a “sophisticated” church, “the Rev. Mr. King has ruined more faces with crying than anybody else I know. . . . I almost broke out crying myself yesterday when he preached on his recent trip to the birth of Ghana” (Ted Poston, “Where Does He Go From Here?” *New York Post*, 14 April 1957).

Introduction of death if He wants me to go there! Not my will, but Thy will be done.”²⁹ Delivering his Easter sermon a week later, King suggested that the Resurrection symbolizes the belief that God is on the side of righteousness: “If we can just stand with it, if we can just live with Good Friday, things will be all right. For I know that Easter’s coming and I can see it coming now. As I look over the world, as I look at America I can see Easter coming in race relations. I can see it coming on every hand. I see it coming in Montgomery.”³⁰



The notice King received as a result of his trip to Ghana confirmed that he had become a symbol of liberation for an international constituency, adding to the demands on his attention. During the spring of 1957, he received adulatory letters from dozens of African students requesting his assistance in their efforts to study or work in the United States. “I will like to come and lead my life in United States of America, in order that I might learn some trade for you, myself and our people in this New Nation of Ghana,” wrote Alex F. Quao. The Ghanaian student requested that the civil rights leader arrange a job for him in the United States: “As a states man and head of all the Negroes in America . . . it is easier for you to do something about my passage and take care of me.”³¹ From Morocco, journalist Ernest L. Zaugg relayed a message from Algerian rebels who believed that fighting for independence from the French “is a part of the same struggle” as the fight against southern segregation: “The rebels send greetings and told me to tell you they are 100% behind you.”³²

King’s visibility already had increased earlier in the year as a result of a television interview on the National Broadcasting Company’s “The Open Mind,” followed soon after by a laudatory cover story in *Time* magazine and a favorable profile in the *New York Times*. The national media stressed King’s Georgia roots and northern graduate-school education in depicting him as a symbol of the South’s “New Negro.” The *New York Times* Sunday magazine piece portrayed King as the preacher/philosopher who “introduced intellectual dynamism to the Montgomery Negroes.” He was, according to the article, “an aspiring Negro who reached the scholastic heights up North,” and traded “Biblical bombast” for sermons fusing “Christianity, Hegelianism and Gandhism.” *Time* described King as a “scholarly, 28-year-old Negro Baptist Minister . . . who in little more than a year has risen from nowhere to become one of the nation’s remarkable leaders of men.”³³ Although aware of the media’s tendency to neglect the contributions of other southern black activists, King viewed his increasing fame as a positive de-

29. King, “Garden of Gethsemane,” 14 April 1957.

30. King, “Questions that Easter Answers,” 21 April 1957.

31. Quao to King, 18 March 1957; see also Charles Akuamoa to King, 25 July 1957, pp. 239–240 in this volume, and Herbert Vilakazi to King, 25 October 1958, pp. 515–516 in this volume.

32. Zaugg to King, 20 October 1957.

33. *Time* further characterized King as “an expert organizer,” who had “out-generated” Montgomery’s white leadership during the bus boycott (“Attack on the Conscience,” *Time*, 18 February 1957; George Barrett, “Jim Crow, He’s Real Tired,” *New York Times*, 3 March 1957; Interview by Richard D. Heffner on “The Open Mind,” 10 February 1957, pp. 126–131 in this volume).

velopment leading toward “a lessening of the tensions and feelings against me and the movement itself.”³⁴

With the assistance of Rustin and Levison, King built upon the positive media coverage by drafting articles and speeches directed at potential civil rights sympathizers outside the South. King’s message particularly drew the interest of northern religious liberals, who looked to him for moral guidance on issues of race relations. In early February the religious journal *Christian Century* published King’s “Nonviolence and Racial Justice,” a summary of his views on the southern situation and nonviolent protest. On Sunday, 10 February, congregations across the country heard their ministers read a statement King wrote for the National Council of Churches’ annual “Race Relations Sunday.”³⁵ King quickly became a popular guest speaker at gatherings of religious liberals and white civil rights proponents. In these addresses he often urged white moderates and the church to confront racial inequality, contending that segregation undermined the nation’s prestige in the eyes of developing countries.³⁶ Upon receiving the Social Justice Award of the Religion and Labor Foundation in New York City on 24 April, King expressed his optimism that “white moderates of the South” would “rise up courageously, without fear, and take leadership of the South.” King further reported that his foreign travels had convinced him that government officials in the United States needed to recognize that civil rights reform was not a “domestic issue” to be “kicked about by hypocritical and reactionary politicians; it is rather an eternal moral issue which may well determine the destiny of our nation in the ideological struggle with Communism.”³⁷ The following day King delivered “The Role of the Church in Facing the Nation’s Chief Moral Dilemma” at a Nashville conference organized to encourage southern white clergy to support the desegregation struggle. Reaffirming the basic tenets of social gospel Christianity that he inherited from his father and grandfather, King insisted that “every minister of the gospel has a mandate to stand up courageously for righteousness, to proclaim the eternal verities of the gospel, and to lead men from the desolate midnight of falsehood to the bright daybreak of truth.” He complained that the Christian church often set a poor example with respect to integration and in-

34. Ted Poston, “Where Does He Go From Here?” *New York Post*, 14 April 1957.

35. King, “Nonviolence and Racial Justice,” 6 February 1957, pp. 118–122 in this volume; King, “For All . . . A Non-segregated Society,” 10 February 1957, pp. 123–125 in this volume. The following year, King agreed to serve as an editor-at-large at *Christian Century* (King to Harold E. Fey, 16 September 1958).

36. With Levison’s encouragement, King also began forging ties to a number of progressive Jewish organizations. On 13 January 1958 he spoke on the “Desirability of Being Maladjusted” at Beth Emet The Free Synagogue in Evanston, Illinois, and two days later he delivered “The Montgomery, Alabama Story” before the Jewish Community Center Forum in Cincinnati. During an address to the American Jewish Congress in Miami, King spoke of the common struggle of Jews and African Americans: “Every Negro leader is keenly aware . . . that the segregationists and racists make no fine distinctions between the Negro and the Jew. . . . [Their] aim is to maintain, through crude segregation, groups whose uses as scapegoats can facilitate their political and social rule over all people. Our common fight is against these deadly enemies of democracy” (King, Address Delivered at the National Biennial Convention of the American Jewish Congress, 14 May 1958, pp. 406–410 in this volume).

37. King, “This is a Great Time to Be Alive,” 24 April 1957.

Introduction

sisted that the church was obliged to “take an active stand against the injustices that Negroes confront in city and county courts of many southern towns.”³⁸ Later in the year, when King addressed the annual meeting of the National Council of Churches, he contrasted “real liberalism” with the “quasi-liberalism” of many Christians that “became so involved in seeing all sides [that it] failed to become committed to either side,” adding: “What we need now is a strong ethical Christian liberalism, which will take a definite stand in the name of Jesus Christ.”³⁹

During the spring and summer of 1957, King made more than fifty public appearances outside of Montgomery, including four college commencements, several well-attended addresses during a June fund raising trip to California, and an 18 July appearance at Billy Graham’s Evangelistic Crusade at New York’s Madison Square Garden.⁴⁰ But the pressures of constant travel took a toll on him. “I haven’t read a book—really sat down and read a book—for a year,” he later confessed to friends. “Sometimes I accept an engagement just to get the people off my back because I know if I say ‘No’ they will be inviting me again a month later.”⁴¹ Although consistently optimistic when speaking with journalists and delivering public addresses away from Montgomery, King grew increasingly introspective and unguarded in his public statements at home. In an August 1957 sermon at Dexter, King reflected on the rigors of travel and the price of his newfound fame:

I can hardly go into any city or any town in this nation where I’m not lavished with hospitality by peoples of all races and of all creeds. I can hardly go anywhere to speak in this nation where hundreds and thousands of people are not turned away because of lack of space. And then after speaking, I often have to be rushed out to get away from the crowd rushing for autographs. I can hardly walk the street in any city of this nation where I’m not confronted with people running up the street, “Isn’t this Reverend King of Alabama?”

He confessed to his congregation that he prayed God would help him to see himself in “true perspective” as “just a symbol of the movement,” adding: “Help me to see that I’m the victim of what the Germans call a *Zeitgeist* and that something was getting ready to happen in history. . . . And that a boycott would have taken place in Montgomery, Alabama, if I had never come to Alabama. . . . Because if I don’t see that, I will become the biggest fool in America.”⁴²

King’s numerous speeches and guest sermons during the spring of 1957 received enthusiastic responses, broadening his appeal among white religious lib-

38. King, “The Role of the Church in Facing the Nation’s Chief Moral Dilemma,” 25 April 1957, pp. 184–191 in this volume.

39. King, “The Oneness of Man in American Intergroup Relations,” 3 December 1957. During 1957 and 1958 King addressed several other gatherings organized by mainline white Protestant groups, including the January 1957 Minnesota State Pastor’s Conference in St. Paul, the June 1957 and June 1958 American Baptist Conventions in Philadelphia and Cincinnati, and the August 1958 National Conference on Christian Education at Purdue University. King was also on hand at the founding conference of the United Presbyterian Church, U.S.A., in Pittsburgh in June 1958.

40. King, Invocation Delivered at Billy Graham Evangelistic Association Crusade, 18 July 1957, p. 238 in this volume; see also King, “Techniques of Persuasion in the Montgomery Bus Boycott,” 24 June 1957.

41. Harris Wofford, “Birthday Party For a Bus Boycott,” 25 January 1958.

42. King, “Conquering Self-Centeredness,” 11 August 1957, pp. 248–259 in this volume.

erals and consolidating his stature in African-American communities. His increasingly polished presentations varied according to the occasion and the predominant race of the audience, but they all included exhortations against passivity and conformity and calls to sustain the nonviolent movement toward social justice. He effectively used themes and sometimes passages borrowed from orators he admired, including Harry Emerson Fosdick of New York's Riverside Church and Benjamin Mays of Morehouse College.⁴³ King's speeches often culminated with flourishes quoted from abolitionist sources, including William Cowper's affirmation of racial equality—"Fleecy locks and black complexion/cannot forfeit nature's claim"—which had been used by Frederick Douglass and probably by subsequent black orators.⁴⁴

King did not restrict himself to his written texts, altering his repertoire of set speeches to incorporate extemporaneous commentaries on matters of immediate or local interest. Thus, his address at a 10 April Freedom Rally in St. Louis included a brief digression in which he commended the city for desegregating its schools in a "quiet and dignified manner," noting that "cities in the Deep South have a great deal to learn from a city like St. Louis. It proves that integration can be brought into being without a lot of trouble, that it can be done smoothly and peacefully." King also used the St. Louis address to modify a peroration that was quickly becoming a staple of his speeches from the period. Adding a final line to a closing passage he had likely borrowed from his friend, Chicago preacher Archibald Carey, King commanded:

From every mountain side, let freedom ring. Yes, let us go out and be determined that freedom will ring from every mole hill in Mississippi. Let it ring from Stone Mountain of Georgia. Let it ring from Lookout Mountain of Tennessee. Let it ring from every mountain and hill of Alabama. From every mountain side, let freedom ring. And when that happens we will be able to go out and sing a new song: "Free at last, free at last, great God almighty I'm free at last."⁴⁵



The May 1957 Prayer Pilgrimage for Freedom, though cosponsored with Randolph and NAACP executive secretary Roy Wilkins, was largely an outgrowth of

43. In composing his 1957 summer sermon series on "Problems of Personality Integration," for example, King adopted themes, illustrations, and key phrases from a collection of essays by Fosdick. King wrote extensive marginal notes in his copy of the book (for textual similarities see King, "Overcoming an Inferiority Complex," 14 July 1957, and Fosdick, *On Being a Real Person* [New York: Harper & Brothers, 1943], pp. 52–78; see also King, "Conquering Self-Centeredness," 11 August 1957, pp. 248–259 in this volume). In his oratory King also frequently paraphrased several sentences from a 1955 Mays speech discussing the negative effects of segregation (see note 7, "Facing the Challenge of a New Age," 1 January 1957, p. 76 in this volume).

44. For Douglass's use of Cowper, see Douglass, "Slavery, the Free Church, and British Agitation Against Bondage," 3 August 1849, in *The Frederick Douglass Papers: Series One, Speeches, Debates, and Interviews*, Vol. 1, 1841–46, ed. John W. Blassingame (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), p. 324, and Douglass, "Too Much Religion, Too Little Humanity," 9 May 1849, in *The Frederick Douglass Papers: Series One, Speeches, Debates, and Interviews*, Vol. 2, 1847–54, ed. Blassingame (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), p. 193.

45. King, "A Realistic Look at the Question of Progress in the Area of Race Relations," 10 April 1957, pp. 167–179 in this volume.

Introduction

King's failed attempts to prod the Eisenhower administration toward more forthright support of black civil rights. The Pilgrimage was scheduled for 17 May, the third anniversary of the Supreme Court's *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, and organizers hoped to attract fifty thousand participants to the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C. Randolph's initial conception of the event recalled his 1941 effort to use the threat of mass protest as a means of securing federal civil rights reform, but when seventy-seven church, labor, and civil rights supporters gathered in Washington on 5 April to complete plans for the Pilgrimage, moderates at the meeting succeeded in their efforts to ensure that the event would not embarrass the Eisenhower administration.⁴⁶

King's statements after the planning meeting suggest that he was not overly disturbed by this effort to temper the tone of the Pilgrimage. He emphasized that the event should involve "persuasion rather than political coercion," and that its major purpose should be "to appeal to the nation and Congress to back and support the Civil Rights bill which will be blocked and filibustered by a small group."⁴⁷ King's own advisors already had counseled that the event should not focus on convincing Eisenhower or Nixon to deliver a pro-civil rights speech in the South, thereby publicly challenging a popular president and threatening passage of the administration's pending civil rights legislation. Rustin, Levison, and Baker recommended instead that the Pilgrimage demonstrate the unity within the civil rights movement and serve as an outlet for the frustrations of southern black people, "thus minimizing the possibility of harmful outbursts of violence which might at this time have a catastrophic effect both on Congress and the reservoir of good will built up by the non-violent nature of the southern struggle."⁴⁸

The Prayer Pilgrimage attracted a crowd about half the size of the organizers' expected fifty thousand demonstrators. Randolph presided, Mahalia Jackson sang, and Powell, Shuttlesworth, Wilkins, and other speakers addressed a range of black concerns. Nevertheless, it was King's closing remarks, featuring the refrain "Give us the ballot," that captured public attention. Rejecting Rustin's advice to reveal the Southern Leaders Conference's next steps, King opted instead for a speech that blended a conventional political strategy with rhetorical urgency.⁴⁹

46. In the days before the 5 April meeting, Congressman Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. told White House aide Maxwell Rabb that he did not approve of the event and indicated that he would work with NAACP leaders to prevent the Pilgrimage from becoming a protest against Eisenhower's tepid support for civil rights (see Rabb to Adams, 2 April 1957). Afterwards, Rabb reported that Powell, Clarence Mitchell of the NAACP, and the Reverend W. H. Jernigan of the National Fraternal Council of Churches "changed the entire character" of the meeting by convincing participants to support "an observance of the anniversary of the school decision through prayer." Rabb assured other administration officials that Eisenhower would "not be adversely affected" by the Pilgrimage and that he was "in constant communication with the leaders to ensure keeping it in hand" (see Rabb to Adams, 17 April 1957; see also James Booker, "Randolph Compares '57 Pilgrimage to '41 March," *New York Amsterdam News*, 4 May 1957).

47. "King Hopes to 'Stimulate' Ike," *New York Amsterdam News*, 18 May 1957; King, "Plans for Prayer Pilgrimage to Washington, D.C.," 24 April 1957. In an earlier interview King said that the event was "aimed at enlightening and informing all America on the feelings of the Negro people" ("March on Washington Plans Revealed," *New York Amsterdam News*, 13 April 1957).

48. See Baker, Rustin, and Levison, Memo regarding Prayer Pilgrimage, February 1957.

49. Rustin to King, 10 May 1957, pp. 199–201 in this volume.

Give us the ballot and we will no longer plead to the federal government for passage of an anti-lynching law; we will by the power of our vote write the law on the statute books of the South and bring an end to the dastardly acts of the hooded perpetrators of violence. . . . Give us the ballot and we will place judges on the benches of the South who will do justly and love mercy, and we will place at the head of the southern states governors . . . who have felt not only the tang of the human, but the glow of the Divine. Give us the ballot and we will quietly and nonviolently, without rancor or bitterness, implement the Supreme Court's Decision of May seventeenth, 1954.⁵⁰

Many people hearing King speak for the first time were awestruck. The *New York Amsterdam News* reported that King emerged from the Pilgrimage as "the number one leader of sixteen million Negroes in the United States," and much of the other news coverage concentrated heavily on King's role in the march.⁵¹ Soon after attending the Pilgrimage, a member of the American Friends Service Committee dashed off a breathless letter to his associates describing King's address: "I had not expected to hear, in my time, such words spoken in my country's capital to a throng of twenty-five or thirty thousand whose waving hands and quiet murmurs of assent were signs, not only of approval, but of dedication. I felt a great surge of hope: this could be the beginning, I said within myself."⁵² Two days after the Pilgrimage, a reporter recorded the scene at Philadelphia's Zion Baptist Church where King had come to preach: "A crowd estimated at more than 1,800 persons crammed into the church, and hundreds of others who failed to gain admittance stood outside to get a glimpse of the nation's most talked-about leader."⁵³



On the eve of the Pilgrimage, King had reminded Richard Nixon of their conversation in Ghana and the vice president's invitation to meet in Washington. A week later Nixon indicated that he was available for such a meeting in the capital on 13 June.⁵⁴ Rustin and Levison prepared King for the meeting, urging him to prod Nixon into making a pro-civil rights speech in the South and to push for the passage of civil rights legislation. They cautioned him that "every word expressed to Nixon and the press, every concept, requires careful weighing," considering that many black leaders believed that the meeting might undermine the year-long effort of Randolph and other major civil rights leaders to meet with Eisenhower. Most important, his advisors warned that "nothing could be more

50. King also lambasted both political parties for betraying "the cause of justice" with their unwillingness to support civil rights reform: "The Democrats have betrayed it by capitulating to the prejudices and undemocratic practices of the southern Dixiecrats. The Republicans have betrayed it by capitulating to the blatant hypocrisy of right wing, reactionary northerners." As he frequently did in his addresses, King took pains to applaud the work of the NAACP, asserting that it had "done more to achieve civil rights for Negroes than any other organization we can point to" (King, "Give Us the Ballot," 17 May 1957, pp. 208–215 in this volume).

51. James Hicks, "King Emerges as Number One Leader," *New York Amsterdam News*, 1 June 1957.

52. Norman J. Whitney to Friends, 19 May 1957.

53. Art Peters, "Rev. Martin Luther King Says Moral Laws Ignored," *Philadelphia Tribune*, 21 May 1957.

54. King to Nixon, 15 May 1957, p. 204 in this volume; Nixon to King, 23 May 1957.

Introduction disastrous" than for King to be maneuvered into endorsing either political party: "The entire movement for freedom could become diverted into a cul-de-sac if it becomes a political football kicked back and forth by two parties. One of the frustrating problems of our time is that race relations is a football used as an instrument to secure support by the two parties rather than as a problem to be solved."⁵⁵

On 13 June 1957 King and Abernathy met with Nixon and Secretary of Labor James P. Mitchell at the Capitol. Nixon's handwritten notes from the meeting reveal that King opened by describing the situation in Montgomery, where more than thirty thousand eligible black voters were prevented from registering through violence and intimidation. He explained that although most white southerners opposed integration, they would be willing to accept change if it were encouraged by the president. After Mitchell suggested that strong federal action might jeopardize the progress that had been made, Abernathy countered that the nonviolent approach of black southerners could not be guaranteed for much longer. King then disclosed that the next phase of the struggle would involve a massive campaign to register black voters in the South. He argued that, if allowed to vote, black southerners would elect better representatives to Congress, thus negating the need for drastic federal intervention.⁵⁶ At the meeting's conclusion, Nixon rejected King's request that he speak on behalf of civil rights in the South, but suggested that the President's Committee on Government Contracts could hold their next meeting in a southern city.⁵⁷

As King and Abernathy emerged from Nixon's office they released a printed statement to the press before Rustin hurried them into a waiting car, miffing some reporters who had waited two hours to discuss the meeting.⁵⁸ Black press accounts of the meeting offered a mixed verdict on King's effectiveness as a racial spokesperson. *Jet* depicted him as a "national power," but also reported "rumblings among the old-guard" black leadership who questioned King for holding the meeting without Randolph or Wilkins. The *Afro-American* accused King of not taking full advantage of the opportunity, perhaps because of his political inexperience.⁵⁹ Though King failed to secure tangible concessions from the vice president, it is possible that Nixon's positive impressions paved the way for a later meeting with Eisenhower. As White House aide Maxwell Rabb reported after the meeting, the vice president was "very much impressed with" King and believed that Eisenhower "would enjoy talking" to the Montgomery leader: "He is not, [Nixon] says, a man who believes in violent and retaliatory pro-Negro actions, but sponsors an evolutionary but progressive march forward."⁶⁰

55. Rustin and Levison to King, 13 June 1957; Rustin to King and Abernathy, 13 June 1957.

56. Nixon, Notes, Meeting with Martin Luther King, Jr., 13 June 1957.

57. Rabb to Adams, 24 June 1957. The committee, which monitored employment discrimination, held its next meeting in Washington, D.C., on 15 January 1958. King attended at Nixon's invitation and delivered an invocation at the luncheon (Nixon to King, 23 December 1957).

58. King, Statement on Meeting with Richard M. Nixon, 13 June 1957, pp. 222-223 in this volume.

59. "King's Meeting With Nixon Makes Him A National Power," *Jet*, June 1957; Louis Lautier, "Was King Ready?" *Baltimore Afro-American*, 22 June 1957.

60. Rabb to Adams, 24 June 1957.

King was pleased with the meeting, but during subsequent months he remained skeptical about the degree of Eisenhower's commitment to civil rights reform. He criticized the executive branch for being "too silent and apathetic" on civil rights issues, unfavorably comparing the federal government's lack of civil rights action to its concern with the uprising against communist rule in Hungary: "It is time they discovered that Birmingham is as significant as Budapest."⁶¹ The administration did back the Civil Rights Act of 1957, the first civil rights legislation to be enacted since the Reconstruction Era, but it was also willing to compromise with southern senators in order to gain its passage. Despite this compromise, King decided to support a bill that he admitted "was almost emasculated," arguing that it was "better than no bill at all." He hoped that the legislation would provide a foundation for future gains: "It doesn't mean that we won't continue to struggle for a stronger bill but we take what we have and try to use that. It is a step, it is some legislation. No matter how ineffective it is, it is some legislation in the area of civil rights and that is something we haven't had in 87 years."⁶² Other leaders, including Randolph, Ralph Bunche, and Jackie Robinson, decided that the administration's bill was too weak, and the *Chicago Defender* condemned King, Wilkins, and other black supporters of the legislation for making "the gravest tactical blunder that has ever been made by Negro leadership through the whole course of our turbulent history in America."⁶³

In addition to occasional knocks from the black press, King faced opposition from some black leaders who resented his sudden ascent. Following the Prayer Pilgrimage, *New York Amsterdam News* writer James L. Hicks alleged that Wilkins, Randolph, and National Baptist Convention leader J. H. Jackson had not fully supported the march because of their jealousy of King.⁶⁴ Although Pilgrimage organizers quickly denied Hicks's report of a rift among the leaders, noting that much of the funding for the event came from the NAACP and Randolph's Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, Hicks had clearly struck a nerve.⁶⁵ In a 9 August 1957 letter, Wilkins pointedly reminded King that the NAACP had covered many of the expenses of the Pilgrimage, "in hope that later on the Association would be reimbursed," but he now concluded that "there does not appear to be any chance for that." Wilkins suggested to King that several outstanding bills be split between the "Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, the NAACP and your group."⁶⁶

King's popularity also threatened J. H. Jackson, the four-term president of the National Baptist Convention, who was accused by some ministers of flouting of

61. "Long, Long Way to Go, Negroes Told," *Milwaukee Journal*, 15 August 1957.

62. "Rev. King approves Rights Bill," *Michigan Chronicle*, 24 August 1957; see also King to Nixon, 30 August 1957, pp. 262–264 in this volume.

63. "Denounce Wilkins, King On Rights Stand," *Chicago Defender*, 31 August 1957.

64. James L. Hicks, "King Emerges As Top Negro Leader," *New York Amsterdam News*, 1 June 1957.

65. See Wilkins to C. B. Powell, 4 June 1957: "The facts prove that Mr. Hicks was not telling the truth when he wrote that the NAACP did not throw the full weight of its office and organization behind the Pilgrimage. . . . the request for the use of the Lincoln Memorial was made March 21 on NAACP stationery. . . . the official Call was written by Roy Wilkins. . . . after the April 5 meeting the NAACP national office contributed \$2,500 to the Prayer Pilgrimage treasury"; see also Rustin, Thomas Kilgore, and Baker to Hicks, 4 June 1957.

66. For King's reply, see King to Wilkins, 23 August 1957, p. 260 in this volume.

Introduction the Convention's constitutional tenure limits.⁶⁷ Facing reelection at the group's September 1957 convention in Louisville, Jackson feared that King would use his influence to elect an opposing candidate or capture the presidency himself. As the election neared, King, Sr. wrote Jackson to defuse his suspicions of King, Jr.: "These fellows are lying about M. L. Jr., saying that he is against you and he is going to vote against you. You can take it from me, M. L. is not going to have one thing to do with it one way or another."⁶⁸ At least publicly, King remained neutral as he watched the Jackson forces reelect their candidate during a chaotic and contentious convention that featured several fights and four arrests. Talking to a reporter during the proceedings, King prudently condemned the "regrettable" acts of violence that had occurred, while declining to criticize Jackson: "I don't think these violent actions represent the intentions, hopes and noble purposes of the convention. And I have friends on both sides."⁶⁹

While maintaining a cordial public relationship with Jackson, King and a group of younger ministers who formed the core of his supporters began organizing within the National Baptist Convention to shift its organizational priorities toward civil rights. Before the September 1958 convention, King was elected vice president of the Baptist Training Union Congress, the educational arm of the Convention. King also sought to place his supporters within the Convention's hierarchy, requesting that Jackson appoint Ralph Abernathy social action chairman. Jackson rejected the recommendation even after King orchestrated a lobbying effort on Abernathy's behalf.⁷⁰

For the most part, friction between King and other black leaders remained private. The NAACP's decision to award King the Spingarn Medal indicated that these tensions did not prevent that organization's leaders from acknowledging the importance of his achievements. Indeed, King was the overwhelming choice to receive the NAACP's highest honor.⁷¹ In accepting the award in Detroit on 28 June, King went to great lengths to praise the work of the NAACP. He challenged the audience to double their financial contributions to the Association and suggested that, given the efforts to outlaw the organization in the South, "it would not only be passing negligence, but tragic ingratitude if we failed to give our utmost loyalty to the NAACP at this time." While commending the NAACP's legal approach, he did not shy away from calling for continued nonviolent resistance: "We must have the moral courage to stand up and protest against injustice wherever we find it. Wherever we find segregation we must have the fortitude to passively resist it."⁷²

67. There were also rumblings among ministers who believed that the leader of the nation's largest black Baptist group had been slow to support the burgeoning civil rights movement (see Gil B. Lloyd to King, 28 November 1956, in *Papers* 3:443–444; see also L. K. Jackson to J. H. Jackson, 1957, and William A. Booker to King, 31 July 1957).

68. King, Sr. to Jackson, 29 July 1957.

69. Alan Levy, "Bus-Boycott Leader Surprisingly Young," *Louisville Courier-Journal*, 7 September 1957; see also Barbour to King, 3 October 1957, pp. 281–283 in this volume.

70. King to Jackson, 7 August 1958, pp. 462–463 in this volume; see also Jackson to King, 22 August 1958.

71. See NAACP, Press release, 29 May 1957; King to Wilkins, 3 June 1957, pp. 218–219 in this volume.

18 72. King, "Remarks in Acceptance of the Forty-second Spingarn Medal at the Forty-eighth Annual NAACP Convention," 28 June 1957, pp. 228–233 in this volume.

Even as King worked to quell the resentments of established civil rights leaders, he nonetheless emerged as a popular and dynamic alternative to their leadership. Many leftist activists welcomed him as a symbol of hope in a period with few signs of dissent or protest. King's speeches combined critiques of segregation, colonialism, and capitalism with calls for black self-improvement and voter registration. He also identified himself with a wide range of social change groups, including some that had become targets for anticommunist zealots. At a time when most civil rights leaders exercised considerable care to avoid being associated with left-wing groups, King expanded his contacts with union leaders, socialists, and peace activists, including some who criticized the nation's foreign policies. In 1957 King became a member of the American Committee on Africa and agreed to serve as vice-chairman of a daylong anti-apartheid protest held in December of that year.⁷³ King's relations with Quaker pacifists were also close, and he addressed the Friends General Conference in June 1958.⁷⁴ In addition to making these commitments, he allowed his name to be used on behalf of the Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy (SANE).⁷⁵

In a September 1957 address at Highlander Folk School, a training center for labor and civil rights organizers that had been condemned as subversive by Tennessee authorities, King challenged Cold War orthodoxy, urging his audience to engage in active dissent rather than accept injustice. He beseeched listeners not to adjust "to the tragic inequalities of an economic system which takes necessities from the masses to give luxuries to the classes," and declared: "I never intend to become adjusted to the madness of militarism and the self-defeating method of physical violence."⁷⁶

King's speech at Highlander reflected his goals of connecting civil rights advocacy with economic justice issues and forging strong ties with labor unions with social reform agendas. Randolph's Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters supported the Montgomery movement from its early months, and other progressive unions subsequently backed King's efforts to build upon his success in Montgomery, notably the United Packinghouse Workers of America (UPWA). A left-wing union with a substantial black membership, the UPWA supplied much of SCLC's initial budget. When he addressed the union's annual convention in October 1957, King noted that "organized labor can be one of the most powerful instruments to do away with this evil that confronts our nation that we refer to as segregation and discrimination."⁷⁷



As he deepened his involvement in the national civil rights movement, King began to question whether he should remain at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church given the new demands being placed on him and his continued interest in an aca-

73. King to Chester Bowles, 8 November 1957, pp. 311–314 in this volume.

74. King, "Nonviolence and Racial Justice," 27 June 1958.

75. King to Clarence Pickett, 17 March 1958.

76. King, "A Look to the Future," 2 September 1957, pp. 269–276 in this volume. King delivered similar addresses for the National Council of Negro Women on 9 November 1957 and the Guardians Association of the Police Department of New York City on 9 January 1958.

77. King, "The Future of Integration," 2 October 1957.

Introduction

demetic career. In July 1957 he rejected Howard University president Mordecai Johnson's offer of the deanship of the School of Religion, explaining: "My work in the South is not quite complete, or at least I have not been able to do several of the things that I would like to see done before leaving. The vast possibilities of a nonviolent, non-cooperative approach to the solution of the race problem are still challenging indeed. I would like to remain a part of the unfolding development of this approach for a few more years." King admitted that during a prior discussion with Johnson he had been overly optimistic in estimating that his obligations "could be fulfilled by June of 1958," conceding: "Now I have the feeling that it will take longer."⁷⁸ Declining a later offer to serve on the faculty of Garrett Biblical Institute in Evanston, Illinois, King asserted that his "deep sense of responsibility" to the effort to alleviate racial tensions compelled him to remain in the South "for the next few years at least."⁷⁹

Despite his willingness to remain at Dexter, King's congregation was forced to adjust to his growing commitment to a national ministry that included, by the fall of 1957, writing a monthly advice column in *Ebony*.⁸⁰ During his presentation of the church's annual report on 23 October, King reflected uncomfortably that he had "lagged behind in his church responsibilities" and confessed to not spending enough time with his parishioners: "I must again express my appreciation to you for your willingness to share me with the nation. Through the force of circumstance, I was catapulted into the leadership of a movement which has succeeded in capturing the imagination of people all over this nation and the world." King admitted feeling frustrated "that in the midst of so many things to do I am not doing anything well."⁸¹ Before finishing his report, King was interrupted with the news that his wife had just given birth to their second child, Martin Luther King III. As he continued his report, several church members voiced their concern that St. Jude's hospital would close before the end of the meeting, preventing King from seeing his wife and newborn son. After some discussion as to whether the report might be shortened, a parishioner phoned the hospital and made

78. King to Mordecai W. Johnson, 5 July 1957, pp. 233–234 in this volume. The following year King rejected an offer to serve as a guest lecturer at Howard (King to Daniel G. Hill, 23 June 1958, p. 430 in this volume). For correspondence related to an earlier job offer, see King to L. Harold DeWolf, 4 January 1957, pp. 89–90 in this volume. In the spring of 1957, King refused to confirm reports that he had rejected an offer of the presidency of Fisk University: "If I were to say I turned down an offer at this time it might hurt the person who accepted the job" (James Booker, "Uptown Low-down," *New York Amsterdam News*, 4 May 1957).

79. King to Dwight E. Loder, 5 August 1958, pp. 461–462 in this volume.

80. The column, "Advice for Living," featured King's replies to readers' questions about marital infidelity, sexuality, and family problems, as well as social issues, such as capital punishment, atomic weapons testing, and race relations.

81. King, Annual Report, Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, 1 November 1956–31 October 1957, pp. 287–290 in this volume. Two months later King again confided to church members about his mounting frustration. According to the minutes of a special board meeting held to discuss lightening the pastor's workload, King noted gravely that "he can't continue to carry on under the present load" and felt "the need of withdrawing some." Acknowledging that he needed "to do something and get a sense of direction," King assured the congregation that he intended to stay in Montgomery even though he was "aware of the fact that he does not give the time to the Church that he should" (Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, Minutes, Board meeting, 6 January 1958).

arrangements for King to be admitted after normal visiting hours, explaining that the pastor “is engaged in an important meeting at the church and is being detained.”⁸²

King’s ever-expanding responsibilities outside Montgomery also checked his ability to provide effective leadership to the MIA. Though the successful boycott had fueled expectations that the organization would expand its program beyond the goal of desegregating buses, no single issue unified the city’s black community.⁸³ Moreover, King’s absences exacerbated existing tensions among Montgomery’s black leaders. The MIA proved more successful at organizational mechanics—electing officers, holding mass meetings, raising money, drafting newsletters—than in achieving victories after the boycott. In March a planning committee that included Abernathy and boycott leader Jo Ann Robinson drafted an ambitious economic development and political education agenda that listed “civic education and participation on a non-partisan basis” as its first priority.⁸⁴ On 6 May the voter registration committee, led by Rufus Lewis, mobilized more than three hundred African Americans to march on two local boards of registrars, but this protest and other MIA registration efforts in the following months did little to boost the number of new black voters.⁸⁵ Throughout the spring of 1957, King and other MIA leaders effectively tapped both local and national sources for funds to rebuild the four churches damaged by the January bombings, but this initiative also proved to be problematic, aggravating deep-seated jealousies among the leaders who bickered over the distribution of the donations.⁸⁶

Internal MIA matters and personnel issues increasingly occupied King’s time, further diverting his attention from advancing the Montgomery struggle and exercising national leadership. Mose Pleasure, an executive secretary hired in June to relieve King of some of his administrative responsibilities, was fired a few months later at a contentious reorganization meeting.⁸⁷ Later in the summer King responded to criticisms that the MIA had failed to assist Rosa Parks after she and her husband were fired from their jobs in retaliation for Mrs. Parks’s role in the boycott. Shortly before Parks and her family relocated to Detroit in August, King organized a tribute for her at which she was presented with nearly eight hundred dollars from the MIA.⁸⁸ King found it more difficult to address the festering grievances of E. D. Nixon, a veteran activist and the MIA’s treasurer since the organization’s founding. Nixon’s growing alienation from the MIA resulted from his belief that his own long-standing contributions to the local movement

82. Zelia S. Evans with J. T. Alexander, *The Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, 1877–1977* (Montgomery: Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, 1978), p. 124.

83. In February 1957, following several months of discussion, the MIA applied for a credit union charter to provide low-interest loans to members of the black community and to encourage saving; the Bureau of Federal Credit Unions rejected the application (see Harold B. Wright to King, 28 March 1957, and King to James T. Coats, 13 February 1957).

84. Abernathy, Ten point program of the future planning committee, 18 April 1957.

85. “2 Registrar Boards Swamped by Negroes,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, 7 May 1957.

86. Committee to Study and Plan Aid to Bombed Churches and Homes, “Now is the Time to Rebuild,” 1 March–31 March 1957; H. H. Johnson to King, 29 October 1957; A. W. Wilson to Uriah J. Fields, 17 April 1958.

87. Graetz, Minutes, MIA executive board, 20 January 1958.

88. Parks to King, 23 August 1957, p. 261 in this volume.

Introduction had been obscured by the acclaim given to King and that more attention was paid to violence directed against King's home than to the February 1956 bombing of Nixon's. He also believed that MIA leaders took advantage of the group's poor record keeping by diverting contributions to personal uses. He expressed his deep bitterness in his 3 June 1957 resignation letter: "Since I have only been treasurer in name and not in reality, it will not be hard to find someone to do what I have been doing, even a school boy. I resent being treated as a newcomer to the MIA. It is my dream, hope and hard work since 1932 and I do not expect to be treated as a child."⁸⁹ King and Abernathy temporarily dissuaded him from leaving the MIA, but tensions persisted through 1957, and in November Nixon again offered his resignation in order to launch his own voter registration effort.⁹⁰



In his address to the MIA's Second Annual Institute on Nonviolence and Social Change on 5 December 1957, King called for continued activism "until segregation and discrimination are banished from every area of our nation's life," but he could point to few tangible gains from his efforts during the previous year to exert influence at the national level.⁹¹ During a roundtable discussion at the conference, King conceded that perhaps the movement "just takes time to work" and that civil rights supporters "shouldn't expect miracles overnight."⁹² Although King realized that so much remained to be done in 1958, at least one chapter of his life closed just a few days before the Institute. On 26 November he reached a settlement with Montgomery officials in a case stemming from the bus boycott. King agreed to pay a \$500 fine for violating the state's anti-boycott law, in exchange for the dismissal of charges against his eighty-nine codefendants. Despite complaints from the black press that he should have served jail time rather than pay the penalty, King defended his choice to end the matter: "It would have been a needless waste of time and money to continue the case. We decided the best thing to do was to pay the fine and move on to another phase of the battle. . . . We're free now to continue on registering people to vote. This is our main and most urgent task now."⁹³

Through the Crusade for Citizenship, a massive southern voter registration effort, King attempted to give substance to his pronouncement at the Prayer Pil-

89. See pp. 217–218 in this volume.

90. Nixon to King, 4 November 1957; see also King to Nixon, 6 March 1958, pp. 376–377 in this volume. After leaving his post, Nixon continued to express his resentments in letters to associates: "It was I who found Rev. King, but the people all over the world have made it appear that it was Rev. King and only him that could do anything in the South . . . I don't care to be hurt any more and if the people do not care for me or the service I can render then [why] should I cry, no thank you I do not care to be push in the back any more by the NAACP [or] any other group, I just want to be let alone now" (Nixon to G. L. Weissman, 20 December 1958; see also Nixon to Conrad Lynn, 16 December 1958).

91. King, "Some Things We Must Do," 5 December 1957, pp. 328–343 in this volume.

92. Harris Wofford, "Birthday Party for a Bus Boycott," 25 January 1958.

93. "Rev. King Tells Why He Paid Fine," *Baltimore Afro-American*, 7 December 1957. As part of the agreement with city officials, charges were also dropped against five white defendants who were to stand trial for the January church bombings ("Charges Dropped Over Bus Boycott," *New York Times*, 27 November 1957).

grimage that black voting rights were the most effective means of eliminating barriers to racial advancement. Yet despite their evident desire to push forward on voter registration, King and his fellow ministers failed to translate ambitious goals into effective programs. Following his June 1957 meeting with Vice President Nixon, King announced that he hoped to register three million southern black voters to participate in the 1958 election and laid out plans for voting clinics “to help Negroes overcome the contrived and artificial obstacles to their registering and voting.”⁹⁴ Two months later, however, during a meeting in Montgomery held to plan the Crusade for Citizenship, the Southern Leaders Conference managed only to rename their organization the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and approve the opening of a permanent headquarters in Atlanta.⁹⁵ The passage of federal civil rights legislation in September 1957 provided new impetus for the Crusade by empowering the U.S. attorney general to sue individuals and localities that interfered with voting rights. Bolstered by the new law, SCLC used its October and November meetings to develop plans for the voting rights campaign as well as to work on the related task of addressing structural weaknesses that had been present since the organization’s fitful start in January 1957.⁹⁶

Most immediately, King and other ministers realized that the lack of an effective administrator had hindered their ability to expand the civil rights struggle. Fred Shuttlesworth’s impatience led him to confide to King that, although worried that their enemies might attempt to divide them, he was even more concerned that SCLC would be “found fearing to begin” an assault on segregation. He urged King “to attack it rather than waiting to defend ourselves; it is the problem of others to defend it if they can.”⁹⁷ Similarly alarmed by the lack of activity, Rustin and Levison persuaded King to hire veteran organizer Ella Baker to help launch the Crusade for Citizenship and to open SCLC’s headquarters. Learning of the decision only after her future had been arranged by the three men, Baker was annoyed, but nevertheless agreed to relocate from New York to Atlanta.⁹⁸

Arriving in Atlanta on 9 January 1958, Baker was disappointed to find that no provisions had been made for her. She initially worked from her room in the Savoy Hotel on Auburn Avenue and was allowed after-hours use of the mimeograph machine and telephone at Ebenezer Baptist Church. Within two weeks Baker, with assistance from Morehouse College professor and SCLC board member Samuel Williams, located a suitable office at 208 Auburn Avenue and began organizing for the opening of the Crusade, which was to begin within a few weeks

94. King, Statement on Meeting with Richard M. Nixon, 13 June 1957, pp. 222–223 in this volume.

95. SCLC, Press release, 9 August 1957.

96. Shuttlesworth, Minutes, SCLC executive board, 18 October 1957; Press release Announcement of the Crusade for Citizenship, 5 November 1957, pp. 307–308 in this volume.

97. Shuttlesworth to King, 27 July 1957, pp. 240–241 in this volume.

98. Baker, who had been an activist since the late 1920s and had served the NAACP in a variety of leadership roles in the 1940s, later recalled learning of the decision from Levison and Rustin: “This, of course, irritated me because I don’t like anyone to commit me. But, my sense of values carries with it something to this effect: that the welfare of the whole, of the people or a group of people, is much more important than the ego satisfaction of the individual” (Baker, Interview by John Britton, 19 June 1968).

Introduction with simultaneous protest meetings in twenty-one southern cities. Baker designed promotional materials, arranged speakers for the kickoff events, and drafted memoranda on King's behalf to the organizers of the local rallies. Reflecting Baker and Rustin's desire to reinvigorate the southern struggle, these memoranda emphasized the importance of establishing a broad-based mass movement built upon local direct action: "The Crusade is not a talking campaign. It is an action campaign. It aims to include every man and woman of voting age—at the grass roots. We intend to set up voting clinics and work shops in local communities. There is a concrete job for you to do—giving out leaflets, or going with a friend to register, or visiting your neighbors or helping people in your block learn how to fill out registration forms."⁹⁹

Inaugurating the Crusade in a 12 February address at Miami's Greater Bethel AME Church, King located the registration drive within the context of a tradition of American voting-rights movements, including those of propertyless men and the suffragettes: "From these women we have learned a great lesson of how social change takes place through struggle. In this same tradition of determination, of confidence in the justice of a cause, Negroes must now demand the right to vote." Urging increased federal intervention to protect black voting rights, he argued that white people were victims of voting discrimination as well: "Poor white men, women and children, bearing the scars of ignorance, deprivation, and poverty are evidence of the fact that harm to one is injury to all. They, too, are victims of the one-party system that has developed in the South, a system that denies free political choice and real political expression to millions of white voters." With a reduced electorate and few real options for southern voters, King explained, "reactionary men gained access to the highest legislative bodies of government."¹⁰⁰

As King appeared in Miami, Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. addressed a Crusade gathering in Houston, and Nashville minister Kelly Miller Smith spoke to a crowd at Montgomery's Holt Street Baptist Church; similar meetings took place in more than a dozen southern cities. The meetings generated some local publicity, but in the following months SCLC could claim credit for few new registered voters. Some ministers and activists appeared unready or unwilling to cooperate in the region-wide campaign. Following the kickoff R. Julian Smith, who sponsored the Atlanta gathering, complained to King that Samuel Williams, Baker, and Rustin generated "unnecessary printing bills that served to no advantage other than causing a lot of trash on the street." Smith griped that the SCLC representatives were "apparently naïve of the fact that I could pack Mt. Moriah [Institutional Baptist Church] single handed," and their assistance "proved more confusing than helpful."¹⁰¹ Despite Baker's efforts to provide follow-up support to the affili-

99. See King, *To the Southern Christian Leadership Conference*, 4 February 1958, pp. 358–360 in this volume.

100. King, *Address Delivered at a Meeting Launching the SCLC Crusade for Citizenship*, 12 February 1958, pp. 367–371 in this volume.

101. Smith to King, 25 February 1958. In Mississippi, NAACP field secretary Medgar Evers reported to his superiors that he had "immediately halted" the efforts of local activists to hold a 12 February "King meeting" in Jackson: "It will be our design through the NAACP and the Progressive Vot-

ates, no lasting movement emerged in any of the cities hosting Crusade kickoff meetings, and press reports pronounced the voting drive a flop.¹⁰² Reacting to such reports, Michigan congressman Charles Diggs indicated to King that he was “extremely disappointed to learn . . . that Negro voter registration continues to lag in the South despite Lincoln Day rallies last month.” Diggs suggested that “perhaps the leadership conference has not utilized the political techniques which characterize the success of registration campaigns in certain northern communities” and recommended that King contact Congressman William Dawson of Chicago for advice. “Rallies and speeches are fine for inspirational purposes but a successful registration campaign demands skillful follow-up in the field,” Diggs concluded.¹⁰³

After searching for an executive director through the spring of 1958, SCLC hired John L. Tilley, a minister who had helped organize a successful voter registration drive in Baltimore.¹⁰⁴ Tilley soon proved to be a poor administrator, unable to balance his new responsibilities with the demands of his Baltimore church, but he retained his title until 1959. Continuing to serve as SCLC’s de facto administrator, Baker focused her efforts during the summer and fall on the new Civil Rights Commission, which she hoped would serve as a tool to organize local communities while providing a national forum to demonstrate the pervasiveness of voting rights violations. When the first hearings of the Commission were scheduled for Montgomery in December 1958, Baker arranged for black witnesses from across Alabama to testify about being denied the right to vote.¹⁰⁵ In the course of the year, however, she grew increasingly frustrated by Tilley’s ineffectiveness and King’s failure to mobilize grassroots activity. “We are losing the initiative in the Civil Rights struggle in the South mainly because of the absence of a dynamic philosophy,” she complained to King during the summer of 1958.¹⁰⁶ She questioned the organization’s emphasis on “routine procedures for promot-

ers League, of which our leaders are in key positions, to control the present state of affairs” (Evers to Ruby Hurley, 24 January 1958).

102. Baker to Joseph E. Lowery, 28 March 1958; SCLC, Report on activities in local communities, 3 April 1958; “Negro Voters Lag In Registration,” *Tallahassee Democrat*, 12 March 1958.

103. Diggs to King, 13 March 1958; for King’s reply, see King to Diggs, 25 March 1958, p. 389 in this volume.

104. Though Baker had extended her stay with SCLC after the Crusade, she was not a candidate for the top staff position. Recognizing that board members were looking for a man and a minister, she did not press for the job and accepted a position as assistant director. King may have been more open to hiring a nonminister than were his colleagues on the board. When other ministers stressed that the appropriate director must be religiously motivated and “should possess physical strength for arduous tasks,” King emphasized that the candidate should have the “ability to coordinate and work well with people” and reminded the board that the executive director “does not necessarily have to be a Minister” (Shuttlesworth, Minutes, SCLC executive board meeting, 18 October 1957). Rustin may have been a possible choice for the role, but his homosexuality and early affiliation with the Communist Party were likely considered too much of a liability. According to a later interview with Baker, her selection to run the Crusade came only after Rustin was deemed inappropriate for the position: “I knew Bayard’s lifestyle did not fit Atlanta at that stage, because there was nowhere that he could function in his manner without exposure” (Baker, Interview by Sue Thrasher and Casey Hayden, 19 April 1977).

105. Baker to King, 14 November 1958.

106. Baker to King, 16 July 1958.

Introduction ing registration and voting” and deplored its failure “to develop and use our major weapon—mass resistance.”¹⁰⁷

While Baker criticized King for SCLC’s lack of militancy, Roy Wilkins worried that King was encroaching on the NAACP’s funding base by exploiting its vulnerability in Alabama where it had been outlawed, and in other states where it was under legal attack.¹⁰⁸ Wilkins and King had previously agreed to coordinate their respective voting drives, but in practice the organizations never worked out an effective relationship.¹⁰⁹ Several prominent civil rights supporters, including United Nations official Ralph Bunche, declined King’s invitation to serve on SCLC’s advisory board, citing their exclusive commitment to the NAACP.¹¹⁰ On 10 January 1958 King eased some of the tension by appearing at NAACP headquarters in New York with two five-hundred-dollar checks for lifetime memberships for himself and the MIA.

Having failed to spark a mass movement through the Crusade for Citizenship by the spring of 1958, King and SCLC looked once again to the federal government for assistance. At the 29 May SCLC meeting in Clarksdale, Mississippi, King sent a telegram to Eisenhower reiterating the call for a presidential conference with black leaders.¹¹¹ This time the administration’s response came with surprising speed; a few days later King received a call from presidential aide Rocco Siciliano, inviting him to the capital to discuss SCLC’s request. Seeking to boost the Republican Party’s standing among northern black voters for the 1958 congressional and 1960 presidential elections, Eisenhower officials concluded it was a favorable time to meet with civil rights leaders, who had hounded the president for almost two years for such a conference. Most recently, Congressman Powell had sent the president a stinging telegram warning of a “rapidly rising tide of criticism . . . mounting against” the administration for its “seeming indifference, if not procrastination” on civil rights. Powell noted Eisenhower’s failure to grant King and other leaders a presidential audience and suggested that the president had been ill-served by his advisors: “If you think that a conference is no longer nec-

107. Baker to Rustin and Levison, 16 July 1958. Later in the year Levison would echo Baker’s concerns, reminding King of the “relation between deeds and actions and fund raising results.” He warned King that “without activity, pursuant to a program, funds are significantly harder to obtain,” and recommended that SCLC focus its efforts on “concentration cities” that would dramatize the southern situation for the nation (Levison to King, 28 November 1958).

108. Responding to an NAACP branch official’s fund raising proposals, Wilkins complained that traditional Association supporters had “already sent untold thousands of dollars” to the MIA, which he described as “a strictly local outfit.” Though he acknowledged that King was not “misusing the money,” Wilkins noted that the funds were “tied down there at a time when the battle is raging clear across the South and in Congress in Washington” (Wilkins to Barbee William Durham, 14 February 1957).

109. Wilkins to King, 14 January 1958, pp. 350–351 in this volume.

110. Bunche explained that affiliation with both groups would pose “something of a problem” due to possible “misunderstanding in the public mind” and concluded that he must recognize his “primary obligation to give undivided support to the Association” (Bunche to King, 31 December 1957, p. 346 in this volume; see also Herbert H. Lehman to King, 20 December 1957). After consulting Wilkins, NAACP Mississippi field secretary Medgar Evers resigned as SCLC’s assistant secretary (see Evers to King, 20 August 1957, p. 259 in this volume).

111. King to Eisenhower, 29 May 1958, pp. 414–415 in this volume.

essary, then you are the recipient of some very bad briefing and advice by your aides.”¹¹²

King’s attitude toward the administration had grown more positive as a result of Eisenhower’s use of military force during the integration crisis at Little Rock’s Central High School in September 1957. After sending the president a telegram commending his actions, King defended the armed intervention in a televised interview: “I believe firmly in nonviolence. . . . But at the same time, I am not an anarchist. . . . I believe in the intelligent use of police force. And I think that is all we have in Little Rock. It’s not an army fighting against a nation, or a race of people. It is just police force, seeking to enforce the law of the land.”¹¹³ King nonetheless continued to believe that Eisenhower lacked a serious commitment to integration and was unwilling to protect black voting rights. Just three weeks before Siciliano phoned to invite him to Washington, King had assailed Eisenhower for the “potentially dangerous” remarks he had made before a black publishers’ group, urging African Americans to be patient with the slow pace of change. King complained that such comments were unfair to African Americans and would encourage white resistance to integration: “It is illogical to argue that because recalcitrant elements stubbornly resist the law, the degree and extent of their resistance should be the measure of our patience and forbearance. The logic of such a viewpoint is that the greater the resistance, the greater should be our patience and voluntary suspension of the law. If there is no time limit and no mutuality of responsibility toward the law, appeals for forbearance become suggestions for surrender and retreat. This course no Negro, no American can accept in dignity and honor.”¹¹⁴

On 9 June King met in Washington with Siciliano, Deputy Attorney General Lawrence E. Walsh, and Eisenhower aide E. Frederic Morrow to select the participants and the topics of discussion for a future presidential conference with black leaders. According to Siciliano’s notes from the meeting, Morrow proposed that a two-man delegation of King and Randolph would be sufficient, but King objected, noting that this would “place him in an impossible position and that Mr. Roy Wilkins . . . would have to be invited.” King agreed with the administration’s position that Powell not be included in the meeting because of his recent indictment for tax fraud. Siciliano also noted that “among Dr. King’s other observations was the significant one that the Negro community is beginning to feel that the President would not or could not see Negro leaders,” adding that such a meeting had been promised to black leaders since 1953.¹¹⁵ King and White

112. Powell to Eisenhower, 28 January 1958.

113. King, Interview by Martin Agronsky for “Look Here,” 27 October 1957, pp. 292–299 in this volume; King to Eisenhower, 25 September 1957, p. 278 in this volume.

114. American Jewish Congress, Press release, 14 May 1958.

115. Siciliano to Adams, 10 June 1958. Siciliano later recalled that “King felt strongly” that Powell should not be invited to the meeting: “I think that he felt that Powell spoke for a different element, had a different approach to the problems, and for other reasons. I don’t know, I can only guess. Maybe he felt that Powell would take the center of the stage which, of course, he was in a position to do because he was a long-time national figure and a Congressman of some prominence” (Siciliano, Interview by John E. Wickman, 2 April 1968).

Introduction House aides later agreed to invite Urban League executive director Lester Granger to the conference with the president.¹¹⁶

In the evening on 22 June, King huddled with Granger, Randolph, and Wilkins at the headquarters of the Washington NAACP to strategize for their meeting with Eisenhower the following day. They hammered out the language of a nine-point plan drafted by Randolph, which called upon the president to direct the Department of Justice to protect voting rights, extend the life of the temporary Civil Rights Commission, and convene a conference to discuss ways of peaceably integrating schools.¹¹⁷ The next morning, as the black leaders assembled in an outer office reception room of the White House, Siciliano and other presidential aides briefed Eisenhower. Siciliano later remembered Eisenhower's response to his warning against using the words "tolerance" and "patience" with the black leaders: "He looked at me and snapped . . . 'Well, Siciliano, you think I'm going to avoid good English words.'" ¹¹⁸

The president in fact said very little as he listened to the black leaders deliver their prepared remarks. Near the close of the meeting, Eisenhower responded favorably to the presentation and indicated his support of the request for guarantees of voting rights, but he evaded the efforts of Granger and Wilkins to pin him down to specifics, including the sponsorship of a national conference on race relations. "There may be some value to your idea of a conference," the president told the leaders. "But I don't think anything much would really come of one." ¹¹⁹

After the extended buildup, the modest consequences of the meeting with Eisenhower were a letdown for many civil rights supporters. Its greatest significance seemed to be symbolic—after five years in office, Eisenhower had finally met with black leaders. Although some members of the black press grumbled that the leaders had failed to extract concrete commitments from Eisenhower, the president's aides were buoyant.¹²⁰ In a memorandum to the president two days after the meeting, Siciliano reported that the black leaders were "more than enthusiastic" about their reception at the White House and that "after a number of conversations with knowledgeable people, I am convinced that this meeting was an unqualified success—even if success in this area is built on sand." ¹²¹

116. Siciliano, Memo for the files, 9 June 1958; Siciliano to Adams, 10 June 1958; Blanche Lavery, Memo for the files, 13 June 1958.

117. Randolph to King, Wilkins, and Granger, 23 June 1958.

118. Siciliano, Interview by Wickman, 2 April 1968.

119. Roy Wilkins with Tom Mathews, *Standing Fast: The Autobiography of Roy Wilkins* (New York: Viking Press, 1982), p. 258. According to one account, as the meeting broke up Eisenhower passed near King and said resignedly, "Reverend, there are so many problems . . . Lebanon, Algeria . . ." (Lawrence Dunbar Reddick, *Crusader Without Violence: A Biography of Martin Luther King, Jr.* [New York: Harper & Brothers, 1959], p. 223).

120. Louis Lautier, "Negro Leaders Leave Meeting With Ike Without Criticism," *Atlanta Daily World*, 1 July 1958: "The President apparently turned on the Eisenhower charm and pacified [the] four top colored leaders." Lautier noted especially the apparent "about face attitude" of Wilkins and King, who had criticized the president harshly for his remarks at a meeting of black newspaper publishers the previous month.

121. Siciliano to Eisenhower, 25 June 1958. Reflecting upon the meeting many years later, Siciliano also recalled that the twenty-nine-year-old King eclipsed his older and more esteemed col-

The four black leaders offered decidedly more sober appraisals of the conference. Granger reported to Urban League officials that Eisenhower demonstrated “that he was not nearly as well informed on the day-to-day developments that were our concern as either of his two predecessors” and that “some of the points that we brought up seemed to have been made to him for the first time.”¹²² King concurred with Granger’s assessment, revealing to journalist Mike Wallace soon after the White House meeting that he remained dubious about the president’s commitment to black civil rights. “I think he believes it would be a fine thing to have an integrated society, but I think he probably feels that the more you push it, the more tension it will create so you just wait 50 or 100 years and it will work itself out,” he told Wallace. “I don’t think he feels like being a crusader for integration.”¹²³



The summer of 1958 also marked the culmination of King’s extended effort to write his memoir of the Montgomery struggle. Given the extensive demands on his time, it was hardly surprising that he experienced great difficulty in completing the manuscript for *Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story*. In some respects, the process of writing the book replicated the boycott movement in that King relied upon the assistance of many other people. As during the boycott, the ideas King expressed in the book reflected the influence of his advisors, most notably Levison, Rustin, and Gandhian civil rights attorney Harris Wofford. Professional editorial assistance also helped King narrate his experiences and express his views with greater coherence and precision than would otherwise have been the case.

Even while the boycott was in progress, King had begun considering offers to publish a book on the bus protest. In May 1957 William Robert Miller, who had arranged the publication of King’s first article on the boycott in *Liberation* magazine, encouraged him to write a book-length account: “You have a vital message for this country and the world, and not least for Negroes in the south.” King re-

leagues: “Though deference was paid to Randolph by all, it was obvious to me that the Rev. King was the intellectual soul of the group. . . . young as he was, he was the ideological linchpin who held the group together” (Siciliano, “Civil Rights and the Black Leaders Meeting With President Eisenhower of June 23, 1958,” October 1990).

122. Lester Granger, Memo to National Urban League, 26 June 1958.

123. King, Interview by Mike Wallace, 25 June 1958, pp. 431–441 in this volume. In a later recollection of the meeting King elaborated on the ambivalence he felt toward Eisenhower: “No one could discuss racial justice with President Eisenhower without coming away with mixed emotions. His personal sincerity on the issue was pronounced, and he had a magnificent capacity to communicate it to individuals. However, he had no ability to translate it to the public, or to define the problem as a supreme domestic issue. I have always felt that he failed because he knew that his colleagues and advisers did not share his views, and he had no disposition to fight even for cherished beliefs. Moreover, President Eisenhower could not be committed to anything which involved a structural change in the architecture of American society. His conservatism was fixed and rigid, and any evil defacing the nation had to be extracted bit by bit with a tweezer because the surgeon’s knife was an instrument too radical to touch this best of all possible societies” (King, *Why We Can’t Wait* [New York: Harper & Brothers, 1964], p. 143).

Preface

This book is a personal account of a few years that changed the life of a southern community. It does not purport to be a detailed survey of the historical and sociological aspects of the Montgomery movement. It is therefore automatically limited in scope and, inevitably, "first-person - singular - ish." In an objective survey of past events this would have been ineffectual, but a personal account can claim this indulgence.

While of necessity the personal nature

Handwritten draft of the preface to *Stride Toward Freedom* (May 1958)

plied that he had been thinking of such a project “for a long, long time” and even asserted that he had “already started it on a limited scale” and hoped to devote the summer to writing.¹²⁴

King was probably less advanced in this effort than he indicated, as he had still not made a commitment to a publisher. During the spring and summer of 1957, he considered proposals from several publishers before signing a contract with Harper & Brothers.¹²⁵ After committing to write the book, King tried to develop a workable plan to produce a manuscript by the following spring, but at the end of December he was forced to admit to his editor that “unexpected and unforeseeable circumstances” had prevented him from making much progress during the previous month.¹²⁶ Faced with the prospect that the book would not be done on schedule, he finally agreed that he needed editorial help, though he remained uncomfortable with the idea of working with a professional writer. With the support of Levison, King reached an agreement with his publisher to secure the services of Alabama State professor Lawrence Dunbar Reddick, who was already writing his own account of the boycott.¹²⁷

King had developed a foundation for his boycott narrative in earlier speeches (especially his address to the 1956 NAACP convention), which offered vivid and generally accurate accounts of the Montgomery movement.¹²⁸ Although he understandably focused on his own activities, he took pains to give credit to the contributions of others. His initial drafts reflected his struggle to provide an account that was both a personal memoir and a definitive history of the movement. Confronting a pressing deadline and distracted by his other responsibilities, King feared he would not complete the manuscript on schedule. “This has been the most difficult job that I have encountered,” he admitted to Levison. “It would not be so difficult if I did not have so many other responsibilities to take care of simultaneously.”¹²⁹ A few weeks later Harper & Brothers hired freelance editor Hermine Popper to assist with King’s drafts.¹³⁰

In composing *Stride Toward Freedom*, King sought in particular to prevent white readers from misunderstanding the motives behind the boycott or behind his own leadership of the protest. Also hoping to convince readers that his actions were grounded in sophisticated and broadly appealing notions, King relied heav-

124. Miller to King, 18 May 1957; King to Miller, 29 May 1957.

125. See for example, Henry Robbins (Alfred A. Knopf) to King, 20 February 1957; Ned Bradford (Little, Brown and Co.) to King, 20 May 1957; John Peck (Farrar, Strauss & Cudahy) to King, 23 May 1957; and Clement Alexandre (Doubleday) to King, 29 November 1957.

126. King to Marie Rodell, 23 December 1957, pp. 345–346 in this volume.

127. Levison to King, 24 January 1958, pp. 352–353 in this volume. Reddick particularly helped with King’s recounting of the boycott, the description of Montgomery in chapter two, and the beginning of the final chapter, “Where Do We Go From Here?” (See Reddick, Notes on chapter II, *Stride Toward Freedom*, May 1958, Memo on Martin Luther King, Jr. Manuscript, May 1958; see also Reddick to Rodell, 3 January 1958; Rodell to King, 27 January 1958.

128. King, “The Montgomery Story,” 27 June 1956, in *Papers* 3:299–310.

129. King to Levison, 7 March 1958.

130. Popper to King, 21 March 1958, pp. 386–388 in this volume.

Introduction ily on the words and ideas of his advisors and other authors. Though he recalled having intensively studied Thoreau and Gandhi as a graduate student, King's discussion of nonviolence and civil disobedience is drawn from an address by Harris Wofford that he may have obtained when they both spoke at a Howard University conference, "Non-violence and Social Change."¹³¹ In need of material exploring the relationship between black workers and the trade union movement, King turned to his friend, AFL-CIO official Theodore E. Brown, who responded with a four-page memorandum, several paragraphs of which King revised slightly before including in the final manuscript.¹³² Portions of a text drafted by Levison for King to use in his Prayer Pilgrimage address appear in *Stride* as reflections on the effects of segregation on black families.¹³³

In addition to soliciting material from associates, King also appropriated text and ideas from unacknowledged sources, a practice that he had used to compose many of his sermons and graduate school papers.¹³⁴ In the chapter tracing his "Pilgrimage to Nonviolence," King adopted phrases and illustrations from an essay by a prominent and well-respected minister to explain his own early attraction to and ultimate rejection of Marx.¹³⁵ Presenting himself as a Christian clergyman

131. Wofford, "Non-violence and the Law," 7 November 1957: "We will not obey unjust laws or submit to unjust practices. We will do this peacefully, openly, cheerfully, because our aim is to persuade. We adopt the means of non-violence because our end is a community at peace with itself. We will try to persuade with our words, but if our words fail we will try to persuade with our acts. We will always be ready to talk and to seek fair compromise, but we are also ready to suffer when necessary, to go to jail or risk our lives, to become witnesses to the truth as we see it." In *Stride* this paragraph appears as Wofford had written it, with King's slight revision of the final sentence: "We will always be willing to talk and seek fair compromise, but we are ready to suffer when necessary and even risk our lives to become witnesses to the truth as we see it" (*Stride*, p. 216). Wofford also delivered a version of the speech at an MIA gathering that King attended in December.

King sent Wofford a draft of the final chapter, "Where Do We Go From Here?" which included several additional passages from Wofford's speech (see *Stride*, pp. 220, 223–224). King also used a slightly modified passage from Wofford on p. 103 (see also King to Wofford, 22 March 1958, and Wofford to King 2 April 1958).

132. Compare *Stride* (pp. 202–204) with Brown, "The American Negro and the American Trade Union Movement," 31 March 1958 (see also Brown to King, 2 April 1958).

133. Less a few minor changes, page two of Levison's draft appears in *Stride*, pp. 203–205 (see Levison, "A Wind is Rising," April 1957). Phrases and ideas from a second memorandum, probably drafted by Levison, appear in *Stride*, p. 204 and pp. 214–215 ("What Are the Tasks Ahead?" April 1958).

134. See Introduction, *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. 1: *Called to Serve, January 1929–June 1951*, ed. Clayborne Carson, Ralph E. Luker, and Penny A. Russell (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), pp. 49–50, and Introduction, *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. 2: *Rediscovering Precious Values, July 1951–November 1955*, ed. Clayborne Carson, Ralph E. Luker, Penny A. Russell, and Peter Holloran (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), pp. 6–9, 25–26.

135. For a discussion of King's use of the work of Robert J. McCracken, see King, "My Pilgrimage to Nonviolence," 1 September 1958, pp. 473–481 in this volume. Among the other authors from whom King borrowed phrases and ideas to compose *Stride* were his former Morehouse professor George D. Kelsey, minister Harry Emerson Fosdick, and missionary E. Stanley Jones. At King's request, Kelsey, Levison, and Rustin provided additional material and suggestions for the discussion of the philosophy and practice of nonviolence (see King to Kelsey, 31 March 1958, pp. 391–392 in this volume, and Kelsey to King, 4 April 1958, pp. 394–395 in this volume; see also Levison to King, 1 April 1958).

who was well informed about the doctrinal justifications for the Montgomery movement, King emphasized the importance of his academic training at Crozer Theological Seminary and Boston University, but slighted his formative experiences in his father's church and in the larger African-American Baptist community.¹³⁶ While obscuring the sources of the ideas he had contributed to the movement, King did produce an engaging narrative that introduced him to a wider white audience while solidifying his base of black southerners.¹³⁷

After submitting the manuscript for *Stride*, King's relatively untroubled summer, which included a vacation in Mexico, was abruptly interrupted on 29 August when an irate man stormed into Ralph Abernathy's study at First Baptist Church and accused the pastor of carrying on a sexual affair with his wife. Brandishing a pistol and a hatchet, Edward Davis threatened to kill Abernathy, then chased him two blocks down Columbus Avenue until he was overtaken by two white policemen and arrested for attempted assault.¹³⁸ During a 3 September hearing in the Davis case, King was arrested outside the courtroom after exchanging words with a guard who refused to let him inside.¹³⁹ As photographer Charles Moore recorded the scene, officers twisted King's arm behind his back and hustled him to jail. Moore's photos appeared in newspapers across the nation, and white and black King supporters lodged protests with Montgomery officials and the Eisenhower administration, expressing their outrage at his manhandling by the police.¹⁴⁰ Released on bond, King began weighing his options. Charged with refusing to obey an officer, he would almost certainly be convicted. Dismissing the advice of Coretta King and other friends who wanted him to plead guilty to avoid jail, and remembering the criticism he received for paying the \$500 penalty for charges stemming from the bus boycott, King argued that he would never again pay a fine for a crime he did not commit:

You don't understand. You see, if anybody had told me a couple of years ago, when I accepted the presidency of the MIA, that I would be in this position, I would have avoided it with all my strength. This is not the life I expected to lead. But gradually

136. In an earlier account of his religious development, King did stress the centrality of his father, his family, and Ebenezer Baptist Church to his religious formation (King, "An Autobiography of Religious Development," 12 September–22 November 1950, in *Papers* 1:359–363).

137. With Levison's help, King used the distribution of *Stride* as both a fund raising mechanism and an organizing tool. MIA churches, SCLC activists, and other black community leaders purchased copies on consignment and sold them at civil rights meetings and at national and regional gatherings of black religious groups (see Levison to King, 11 December 1958 and 16 December 1958).

138. "Negro Jailed After Attack on Leader Of Bus Boycott," *Montgomery Advertiser*, 30 August 1958.

139. After King was denied entry to the courtroom, he reportedly asked the guard if he could speak with his lawyer, Fred Gray, who was already inside. The guard replied: "Boy, if you don't get the hell away from here, you will need a lawyer yourself." When King held his ground, two police officers descended upon him and began escorting him to jail. As Coretta King attempted to follow her husband, one of the officers taunted, "Gal, you want to go, too? Just nod your head." King urged, "Don't say anything, darling," and he was led off (Reddick, *Crusader Without Violence*, p. 226).

140. See for example, Benjamin J. Davis to King, 4 September 1958, pp. 485–486 in this volume.

Introduction

you take some responsibility, then a little more, until finally you are not in control anymore. You have to give yourself entirely. Then, once you make up your mind that you are giving yourself, then you are prepared to do anything that serves the Cause and advances the Movement. I have reached that point. I have no option anymore about what I will do. I have given myself fully.¹⁴¹

On the morning of his trial, 5 September, King gathered with his close friends at MIA attorney Fred Gray's law office. After a short meeting King led the group in prayer in front of a bag of bloody clothes belonging to a recent black victim of police brutality. Upon being convicted later that morning, King informed the judge that he would serve two weeks in jail rather than pay a small fine. He explained that he was accepting the sentence because of his "love for America and the sublime principles of liberty and equality upon which she is founded." King further suggested that "the time has come when perhaps only the willing and nonviolent acts of suffering by the innocent can arouse this nation to wipe out the scourge of brutality and violence inflicted upon Negroes who seek only to walk with dignity before God and man."¹⁴² After several minutes in jail, King was released when a local white official paid the fine in the hope of avoiding the bad publicity that would accompany King's imprisonment.

In the next two weeks King appeared in Detroit, Chicago, and New York City promoting the newly published *Stride Toward Freedom* and discussing his Montgomery arrest. On 19 September at an outdoor rally in Harlem, King said that because of his arrest he suspected that many in the audience of five thousand people hoped that he would deliver "a message of hate against the white man because of what happened," but he would offer "no such message." A few hecklers chided King as he declared that "black supremacy is just as bad as white supremacy" and commanded: "Don't let any man make you stoop so low that you have hate. Have love in your hearts to those who would do you wrong."¹⁴³

The following day King's convictions were put to the test. As he signed copies of his book at a Harlem department store, King was stabbed in the chest by a mentally disturbed black woman—who was later revealed to be one of the hecklers at the previous evening's meeting. While surgeons at Harlem Hospital labored to remove the blade, which lay perilously close to his heart, a parade of prominent visitors paced the hospital halls awaiting news of the surgery. Meanwhile, dozens of people lined up outside the hospital to donate blood, and Coretta King and Ralph Abernathy made their way from Montgomery to New York City.¹⁴⁴

Doctors soon announced that the surgery was successful, and Coretta King revealed to waiting reporters that her husband had whispered a message to the na-

141. Coretta Scott King, *My Life with Martin Luther King, Jr.*, p. 163.

142. King, Statement to Eugene Loe, 5 September 1958, pp. 487–490 in this volume; see also MIA, *Newsletter*, 27 September 1958.

143. James Booker, "Reveal King's Stabber Heckled Friday Rally," *New York Amsterdam News*, 27 September 1958.

144. Dexter Avenue Baptist Church to King, 21 September 1958, pp. 498–499 in this volume; see also "Dr. King, Negro leader, Stabbed By Woman in a Store in Harlem," *New York Times*, 21 September 1958.

tion: "God was with me just as He stays with all of us all of the time, even though we may feel He has completely forsaken us at times. I am prepared to die."¹⁴⁵

Ten days later, King felt well enough to greet reporters and issue a statement from his hospital room, announcing that he felt "no ill-will" toward his attacker and that the stabbing had made him "increasingly able to understand more deeply the hard blows and tragic suffering so many of my people and other members of minority groups experience—all too often, and without cause or reason."¹⁴⁶ On 3 October King was released and began a three-week convalescence at the Brooklyn home of Sandy F. Ray, a close friend of the King family.

Although he was forced to cancel nearly four months of speaking engagements, this period of recuperation reinforced King's status as the most visible symbol of the southern civil rights struggle. Newspapers across the nation carried a photograph of King sitting serenely with the seven-inch letter opener protruding from his chest. His public statements, reiterating his message of forgiveness and nonviolence, enhanced his image as a compassionate and virtuous leader: "Through this whole experience I can't remember one moment that I became excited or even upset nor did I have one iota of bitterness for . . . the lady who committed the act of violence upon me. And today I joyously accept the scars on my body as the marks of the Lord Jesus Christ and proudly sing, 'Where He Leads Me, I will Follow,' even if it is to a painful and agonizing cross."¹⁴⁷

Coretta King would remember the weeks following the stabbing as an exceptional period in her husband's life. Relieved from his pastoral responsibilities and the demands of public appearances, King took advantage of his recuperation to engage in long talks with his wife and friends and to reflect on the meaning of the past month's events.¹⁴⁸ Forbidden by his doctors from working or traveling, he was also increasingly forced to rely on his network of fellow clergy, movement associates, and personal aides. From Montgomery King's personal secretary Maude Ballou sent daily summaries of the office correspondence and phone messages, while A. Philip Randolph coordinated an effort to raise money for King's medical expenses.¹⁴⁹ Rustin and Baker concentrated their efforts on drafting public statements on King's behalf, planning SCLC's October conference in Norfolk, and managing arrangements for the upcoming Youth March for Integrated Schools in Washington, D.C.¹⁵⁰

145. "Rev. King Fights Back," *New Jersey Afro-American*, 4 October 1958.

146. Statement Issued from Harlem Hospital, 30 September 1958, p. 502 in this volume.

147. King to the MIA, 6 October 1958, pp. 505–506 in this volume. King's final "Advice for Living" column expressed a similar sentiment: "If I demonstrated unusual calm during the recent attempt on my life, it was certainly not due to any extraordinary powers that I possess. Rather, it was due to the power of God working through me" (King, "Advice for Living," December 1958, pp. 540–542 in this volume).

148. Coretta Scott King, *My Life with Martin Luther King, Jr.*, p. 171; see also Levison to King, 28 November 1958.

149. See King to Randolph, 8 November 1958, p. 527–528 in this volume.

150. See for instance, King's condemnations of the racist bombing of Atlanta's Hebrew Benevolent Congregation (King to William B. Hartsfield, 13 October 1958, pp. 507–508 in this volume, and King to Eisenhower, 13 October 1958, p. 509 in this volume). The Norfolk conference, which King was unable to attend, attracted four thousand people and featured a demonstration in front of a city

Introduction

Returning home on 24 October, King's attention was quickly drawn back to the struggle when Fred Shuttlesworth informed him by telephone of the recent arrest of a group of Birmingham ministers who had challenged an ordinance requiring segregated seating on city buses. King agreed to send three MIA representatives to Birmingham to investigate reports that the ministers were being held incommunicado. On 27 October the MIA emissaries were arrested in Shuttlesworth's home, prompting King to alert Eleanor Roosevelt and several other prominent liberals of the "virtual reign of terror" prevailing in Birmingham: "We urge you to send messages to United States Attorney General, Governor of Alabama, Mayor of Birmingham . . . protesting this national scandal. Your action can save lives." The public pressure led the U.S. Justice Department to launch an investigation of the arrests and triggered a short-lived bus boycott in Birmingham.¹⁵¹

Apart from speaking engagements in Atlanta and Indianapolis, King limited his activities to Montgomery during the closing weeks of 1958. He attended a 28 November MIA meeting to discuss the rehabilitation of an obsolete health clinic and coordinated efforts to establish a local black branch of the YMCA.¹⁵² King also participated in the planning of the MIA's Third Annual Institute on Nonviolence and Social Change and delivered his annual address to the group on 4 December. In his speech King recommended that the organization shift its focus to the issue of school desegregation, but the Institute emphasized testimonials to his leadership rather than programmatic discussions.¹⁵³ Upon receiving a last-minute cancellation from AME Zion bishop William J. Walls, who had been scheduled to deliver the closing address, King was made aware that the MIA had suffered from his absence and a lack of clear direction. Responding to Walls's complaints that he had received "no communications from the President of the MIA" confirming his invitation to speak and that publicity for the event had been poorly handled, King defended the preparatory work performed by his MIA colleagues, but lamented that he had been unable to participate more fully in the conference

high school that had been closed to prevent integration (King to Aaron Henry, 17 September 1958, pp. 495–496 in this volume). King was similarly unable to attend the Youth March though Coretta King delivered remarks on his behalf (King, Address at Youth March for Integrated Schools, Delivered by Coretta Scott King, 25 October 1958, pp. 514–515 in this volume).

151. King to Eleanor Roosevelt, 29 October 1958, pp. 519–520 in this volume; see also Shuttlesworth, Interview by James Mosby, September 1968.

152. MIA, Minutes of meeting, 28 November 1958; King to Royce Kershaw, 17 December 1958, pp. 546–547 in this volume. King and Abernathy also spent several days of vacation in Miami and Nassau during this period (see Ballou to King, 25 November 1958; King to Henry Arrington, 23 December 1958; King to Basil Sands, 23 December 1958).

153. "Bus Boycott Gain Seen By Negroes," *New York Times*, 7 December 1958; MIA, Program, Third Annual Institute on Non-violence and Social Change, 1–7 December 1958. Ella Baker later recalled confronting King about the inclusion of the "testimonial," which featured laudatory speeches from MIA members and supporters. Baker believed that such expressions slighted the importance of the mass movement and stunted the development of grassroots leadership by exaggerating King's role in the struggle: "Whatever literature that was circulated, didn't say practically anything about movement or what the movement stood for, what it had done, or anything, but was simply adulation of the leader, you know, Dr. King. I raised the question with him about this: 'Why permit it?' He said, 'Well, I don't want to. The people want to do this.' . . . Martin wasn't one to buck forces too much, at least at that stage" (Baker, Interview by John Britton, 19 June 1968).

planning: "At that particular time I was still convalescing from the very serious chest operation that I had to undergo the latter part of September. My physicians had requested that I give up all of my activities through the first of December."¹⁵⁴

King was aware, too, that he had been unable to meet the continual demands of his congregation. At Dexter Church's annual conference King apologized to the members for slighting his pastoral duties, not only during the three months of his recovery, but throughout "a rather difficult year." He acknowledged that he had delivered nearly twice as many sermons and speeches away from home as he had at Dexter in 1958, but he urged the congregation to "move on into this uncertain but promising future with the faith that the dawn of a new day is just around the horizon."¹⁵⁵

Troubled by his inability to fulfill all the obligations he had taken on since the end of the bus boycott, King mulled over the conflicting advice he received from friends and movement associates. Longtime advisor J. Pius Barbour counseled him to turn away from protest activities and concentrate on being a pastor: "Now buckle down and preach and let Reform alone for awhile."¹⁵⁶ Yet another friend, J. Raymond Henderson, advised against remaining in Montgomery, arguing that he was endangering his life and the lives of his wife and children. "How much does a leader owe his people," Henderson asked. "How much is he called on to suffer for them?" Having served Montgomery for four years, Henderson suggested that King would be more effective working with a national group such as the NAACP.¹⁵⁷

By the end of 1958, although most SCLC programs were not attracting as much attention as Baker and other activists had hoped, King had reason to expect that his life would take new directions in the future. After nearly three years of planning and postponement, arrangements were completed for his visit to India in early 1959. His appointment calendar, cleared for the weeks of his recuperation, began to fill as he rescheduled engagements and accepted new offers to speak to black church groups and college students. For the past year, during which he had weathered a brutal arrest and a brush with death while confronting the reality that his efforts to secure support from the Eisenhower administration had largely failed, King's public appearances consistently indicated that his message was reaching a receptive audience. Soon after observing the commitment of student participants in the October 1958 Youth March for Integrated Schools, Stanley Levison enthused to King: "Of greatest importance is the fact that it definitely triggered a student movement for civil rights on major campuses. This is a development of incalculable value." Levison predicted, "if the young people are aroused from their lethargy through this fight, it will affect broad circles throughout the country as well as vertically through the different economic stratifications."¹⁵⁸

154. Walls to King, W. J. Powell, and S. S. Seay, 4 December 1958; King to Walls, 31 December 1958.

155. King, Annual Report, Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, 1 November 1957–30 November 1958, pp. 537–539 in this volume.

156. Barbour to King, 19 November 1958, p. 539 in this volume.

157. See Henderson to King, 17 September 1958, pp. 496–498 in this volume.

158. Levison to King, 3 November 1958, pp. 524–525 in this volume.

Introduction

If King and SCLC were unable to turn rhetoric into results after Montgomery, some young people—particularly black youth charged by their encounters with King and his ideas—were taking some halting but momentous steps toward expanding the civil rights struggle. In the summer of 1958 John Lewis, a seminary student who had idolized King since hearing him preach on the radio prior to the bus boycott, traveled to Montgomery to request King's help in gaining admittance to the all-white Troy State University.¹⁵⁹ King agreed to help Lewis, but his parents balked at the idea. Lewis returned to seminary in Nashville, where his longing for deeper involvement in the southern struggle soon found a home among a group of like-minded idealists drawn together by James Lawson, another student similarly moved by King. During their first meeting at Oberlin College in early 1957, King urged Lawson, who had studied nonviolence in India, to put his Gandhian ideas into practice in the South. Within months Lawson moved to Nashville and began offering workshops on the philosophy and strategy of nonviolent protest.¹⁶⁰

For other young people King's impact may have been less immediate, but it was no less essential to the resilient freedom struggle in the years following the Montgomery bus boycott. On a winter's evening in Greensboro, North Carolina, in 1958, high school student Ezell Blair, Jr. sat captivated as King addressed an overflow audience at Bennett College. Blair heard King call for an escalation of nonviolent protests to end segregated accommodations and joke that as a boy in Atlanta he "never took a seat on the back of the buses. . . . I was only there physically but my mind was up on the front."¹⁶¹ King's speech deeply impressed Blair, and he would later recall that "his words were such that the vibrations that came over the microphone, over the loud speaker. . . . It was so strong, I could feel my heart palpitating, it brought tears to my eyes."¹⁶² Almost two years to the day of King's address, Blair would join three friends at a segregated lunch counter in Greensboro, sparking a wave of sit-in protests that spread quickly across the South and reinvigorated the freedom movement.

159. See Lewis to King, 4 September 1958, pp. 486–487.

160. Among Lawson's first students were members of the Oklahoma City NAACP Youth Council, whose adult advisor, Clara Luper, had guided them in a study of King and the Montgomery bus boycott for over a year before they initiated "sit-in" demonstrations in August 1958 at several segregated restaurants. The group's fifteen-year-old leader, Barbara Ann Posey, later wrote that after learning about King she "started reading everything I could find about passive resistance—about Gandhi as well as Mr. King" and "wondered why the leaders of the world did not use this nonviolent method of solving international problems" (Posey, "Why I Sit-In," *Social Progress* 51 [February 1961]: 8–9).

161. King, "A Realistic Look at Race Relations," 11 February 1958.

162. Jibreel Khazan (Ezell Blair, Jr.), interview by William H. Chafe, 27 November 1974.