

To C. Kenzie Steele

19 March 1960
[Atlanta, Ga.]

On 20 February eleven Tallahassee demonstrators were arrested and charged with disturbing the peace for protesting at a local chain store. After Judge John Rudd ordered the protesters to either pay a \$300 fine or serve a sixty-day jail sentence, eight of the eleven elected jail.¹ Two days after the verdict, King sends encouragement to the eight students via SCLC vice president C. K. Steele, whose sixteen-year-old son Henry was among those jailed.²

REV. C. K. STEELE
(FOR 8 JAILED STUDENTS)
TALLAHASSEE, FLORIDA

I HAVE JUST LEARNED OF YOUR COURAGEOUS WILLINGNESS TO GO TO JAIL INSTEAD OF PAYING FINES FOR YOUR RIGHTEOUS PROTEST AGAINST SEGREGATED EATING FACILITIES. THROUGH THIS DECISION YOU HAVE AGAIN PROVEN THAT THERE IS NOTHING MORE MAJESTIC AND SUBLIME THAN THE DETERMINED COURAGE OF INDIVIDUALS WILLING TO SUFFER AND SACRIFICE FOR THE CAUSE OF FREEDOM. YOU HAVE DISCOVERED ANEW THE MEANING OF THE CROSS, AND AS CHRIST DIED TO MAKE MEN HOLY, YOU ARE SUFFERING TO MAKE MEN FREE. AS YOU SUFFER THE INCONVENIENCE OF REMAINING IN JAIL, PLEASE REMEMBER THAT UNEARNED SUFFERING IS REDEMPTIVE. GOING TO JAIL FOR A RIGHTEOUS CAUSE IS A BADGE OF HONOR AND A SYMBOL OF DIGNITY. I ASSURE YOU THAT YOUR VALIANT WITNESS IS ONE OF THE GLOWING EPICS OF OUR TIME AND YOU ARE BRINGING ALL OF AMERICA NEARER THE THRESHHOLD OF THE WORLD'S BRIGHT TOMORROWS.

1. At a 17 March hearing Rudd gave the demonstrators a thirty-day suspended sentence and placed those attending Florida A&M University on probation for one year or until graduation ("Tallahassee Sitdown Sentences Are Suspended," *Miami Herald*, 18 March 1960).

2. The other students who chose jail with Henry Steele were Priscilla G. Stephens, William H. Larkins, Clement C. Carney, Angelina Nance, Barbara Joan Broxton, John A. Broxton, and Patricia G. Stephens, who later remarked: "We strongly believe that Martin Luther King was right when he said: 'We've got to fill the jails in order to win our equal rights'" (Stephens, "Letter from a Jailed Student," *CORE-lator*, April 1960; see also "8 Florida Negro Demonstrators Choose 60 Days in Jail over Fines," *Washington Post*, 19 March 1960).

The Martin Luther King, Jr. Papers Project

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MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR., PRESIDENT
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