

From St. Clair Drake

21 Mar
195621 March 1956
Chicago, Ill.

Drake, professor of sociology and anthropology at Roosevelt University, was a pioneer in the study of African-American life.¹ He applauds King as "among that small group of prophetic figures who have tried to teach the world how to fight for justice with weapons of the spirit."²

Dr. Martin Luther King
Dexter Ave. Baptist Church
Montgomery, Alabama

My dear Dr. King:

I am enclosing a page from one of our Chicago dailies. I thought, perhaps, you would like to have it for your archives. Whatever the outcome of the boycott and the attendant trials, you and your colleagues—and the Negro people of Montgomery—now belong to history. And you, particularly, will find your place among that small group of prophetic figures who have tried to teach the world how to fight for justice with weapons of the spirit. Toynbee, in A Study of History predicted that the Negro in America would eventually open up new dimensions of spiritual insight. Destiny has called you to participate in that process. How fortunate our people are that a man with your insight and training was "raised up" in the fullness of time.

In 1932, as a young man fresh out of Hampton, I attended a Quaker school in Pennsylvania, Pendle Hill. We spent a great deal of time studying Gandhi's philosophy. We used to dream of the day when someone would arise in our country to lead us in a similar fashion. Then Reinhold Niebuhr, in Moral Man and Immoral Society, threw out a few ideas as to the possibilities of non-violent direct action among Negro Americans. But the time was not ripe. The day has now come. When you held your great prayer meeting, I wired both the American Friends Service Committee and Reinhold Niebuhr, pointing out that what they had talked of in the Thirties had now come into being—quite independently of them, and that they should wire their support. I was very happy to receive communications from both sources indicating that they had acted. I shall send on

1. John Gibbs St. Clair Drake (1911–1990), born in Suffolk, Virginia, received his B.S. (1931) from Hampton Institute and his Ph.D. (1954) from the University of Chicago. In 1945 Drake co-authored a landmark study of African Americans in Chicago, *Black Metropolis*. While teaching at Roosevelt University in Chicago from 1946 to 1969, Drake also served as a Peace Corps consultant and an advisor to a number of postcolonial governments in Africa. In 1969 Drake became the first director of Stanford University's African and Afro-American studies program.

2. Drake enclosed a published poem he had written, "Freedom Fighters," dedicated to Charles Houston, Carter Woodson, and Charles Drew, with this notation typed above it: "I wrote this bit of verse many years ago, and held it, waiting for an event which I felt was worthy of dedicating it to. Time passed. When the three men named died during a single year, I sent it on to PHYLON where it was published. Now, I should like to rededicate it—to you and your colleagues, and the Negro people of Montgomery." The poem's last three lines are: "We focus Freedom's rays into a beam, / Illuminate the destined hour, / And justify the dreamer's dream" (*Phylon* 11, no. 3 [1950]: 222).

21 Mar 1956 their letters for your files. I burned up the phone wires and telegraph wires the day before your meeting, trying, in my limited way, to mobilize financial and moral support. As one who had dreamed for twenty years of that day, I was stirred to the very core of my being. Having grown up in a Baptist parsonage, I took special pride in the fact that it was the Negro ministers who were in the vanguard.

Please accept these expressions of gratitude for your courage in fighting the battle for us all—as Negroes, as Christians, as Americans, as human beings. You fight not for us alone, but for all mankind. “Walk together children, Don’t get weary, There’s a great camp meeting in the promised land.”³

Sincerely,

[*signed*]

St. Clair Drake,

Professor of Sociology and Anthropology;

co-author of Black Metropolis; Ford

Foundation Traveling Fellow in West

Africa, 1954–55.

TALS. MLKP-MBU: Box 91.

3. This line is from the spiritual “There Is a Great Meeting in the Promised Land.”