Dear Mr. King:

I am writing you as representative of the members of a small, informally organized Quaker Meeting in our Vermont village. Like all Quakers—like thoughtful and conscientious Americans everywhere—we have a deep and anxious concern about the troubles in the South over the question of obeying the Supreme Court decision against racial segregation.

We hear so much about the possibility of doing more harm than good by well-intentioned efforts, from outside the South, to help find an equitable, democratic solution to this difficulty, that we hardly know which is the wise manner to help those in the South who are, we feel, following the best American principles by their actions. We have written to Miss Lillian Smith, [whose name is well-known to us as an ardent supporter of equality before the law of all American citizens] for advice and she has given us your name and address suggesting that the legal expenses of your group are high and that a contribution to those expenses may be a good way for us to help an effort to obey the decision of the Supreme Court in regard to segregation based on color. We are few in number, and without large financial resources, but the checks I enclose represents our sympathy for your efforts and our great admiration for the fully Christian and peaceable manner in which your group is carrying on your resistance to illegal (against the Supreme Court) practice of the bus company of your city.

(P.S. The radio news-bulletin has just brought in the news—news in which the whole nation is interested—that the Montgomery bus lines are giving up segregation, following on a decision of the Supreme Court on this precise question An enormous relief to all of us, (outside the South!) But we know that this is only one step forward. You have plenty of difficulties ahead of you. You can't imagine how we trust in your fine, non-violent, Christian spirit to carry you through. And when you surmount obstacles, you raise the moral plane for all of us who follow the doings of your group with such sympathy.

I have just been shown by a Quaker friend, the enclosed clipping from The

1. Fisher refers to the Montgomery City Lines' decision to honor the Supreme Court's decision in the case Sara Mae Flemming v. South Carolina Electric & Gas Company.
Times. Clarence Pickett is one of our Quaker heroes, and I rejoice that you are to see him.²

With friendly and [word illegible] admiring greetings
[signed] Dorothy Canfield Fisher

TAHLS. MLKP-MBU: Box 17.

2. An 8 April 1956 article in the New York Times, “Quakers Will Send Mission to Alabama,” reported that Clarence Evan Pickett (1884–1965), executive secretary emeritus of the American Friends Service Committee, would visit Montgomery. Pickett and his two Quaker colleagues, Dorothy M. Steere and George C. Hardin, spent three days meeting with representatives of both sides in an effort to “express Friends’ concern that the controversy should be nonviolent and that those belonging to each side should be led to a deeper search for their responsibility in the light of their religious faith” (quoted in Friends Journal, 5 May 1956).

From James P. Coleman

[23 April 1956]
Jackson, Miss.

After newspapers announced that King would be a featured speaker, along with Congressman Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., at the fifth annual meeting of the Mississippi Regional Council of Negro Leadership in Jackson on 27 April, Mississippi governor James P. Coleman announced that “it would be a tragedy to have professional agitators like Powell and King come to our state and fan the fires anew.”¹ The meeting was expected to draw an audience of thousands, which prompted Coleman to urge King (and Powell) to “reconsider and indefinitely postpone your visit.”

REVEREND MARTIN LUTHER KING
MONTGOMERY ALA

THE PRESS REPORTS THAT YOU ARE SCHEDULED TO ADDRESS A PUBLIC MEETING IN JACKSON MISSISSIPPI ON FRIDAY OF THIS WEEK STOP MISSISSIPPI HAS NO INTENTION NOW OR HEREAFTER OF INTERFERING WITH THE CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHTS OF FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY AND FREEDOM OF SPEECH YET I FEEL IT MY DUTY AS GOVERNOR OF MISSISSIPPI TO INFORM YOU THAT CONDITIONS IN OUR STATE ARE NOW MORE TRANQUIL THAN AT ANY TIME IN RECENT MONTHS AND IN VIEW OF YOUR RECORD YOUR APPEARANCE HERE WILL BE A GREAT

¹. “NAACP Maps Court Battle in Mississippi,” Montgomery Advertiser, 24 April 1956. James Plemon Coleman (1914–1991), born in Ackerman, Mississippi, graduated from the University of Mississippi in 1935. He served as the state’s attorney general from 1950 to 1956 and was governor from 1956 to 1960. President Johnson later appointed him to the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals.