To James P. Coleman

[24 April 1956]
Montgomery, Ala.

HON J P COLEMAN
GOVERNOR OF MISSISSIPPI
JACKSON MISS

YOUR TELEGRAM WAS RECEIVED, AND CONTENTS HAVE BEEN NOTICED VERY SCRUTINIZINGLY. FIRST, I MUST SAY THAT I AM NOT SCHEDULED TO SPEAK IN JACKSON MISSISSIPPI. WHEN THE INVITATION WAS EXTENDED SOME MONTHS AGO I MADE IT CLEAR THAT I COULD NOT ACCEPT THE INVITATION BECAUSE OF A PREVIOUS COMMITMENT.1 HOWEVER, IF I HAD ACCEPTED THE INVITATION I WOULD FEEL IT MY MORAL RESPONSIBILITY TO COME TO MISSISSIPPI IN SPITE OF YOUR MOST CAUTIOUS WARNING. YOU STATED THAT IN VIEW OF MY RECORD MY COMING TO MISSISSIPPI WOULD BE A GREAT INJUSTICE TO THE NEGRO PEOPLE. I THINK IF YOU WOULD OBSERVE MY RECORD VERY CAREFULLY YOU WOULD DISCOVER THAT [IT.] IS MORE THE RECORD OF A PEACE MAKER THAN A PEACE BREAKER. THE MOST GLARING THING APPEARING IN MY RECORD IS THAT I AM CONCERNED ABOUT ACHIEVING JUSTICE FAIR PLAY AND EQUALITY FOR ALL PEOPLE THROUGH LEGAL AND NON VIOLENT METHODS. THE PHILOSOPHY UNDERGIRDING MY STAND IS DEEPLY ROUTED IN THE CHRISTIAN FAITH. I HAVE STATED MORE THAN ONCE THAT IN OUR STRUGGLE FOR JUSTICE THAT OUR WEAPON MUST BE THE WEAPON OF LOVE. CERTAINLY I THINK THE STATE OF MISSISSIPPI COULD WELL PROFIT FROM A GOSPEL OF LOVE. THAT IS THE PIVOTAL POINT AROUND WHICH MY WHOLE PHILOSOPHY REVOLVES AND IF I WERE COMING TO MISSISSIPPI I WOULD BE PREACHING SUCH A GOSPEL. I AM QUITE GRATIFIED TO LEARN, ACCORDING TO YOUR TELEGRAM, THAT RACIAL CONDITIONS ARE MORE PEACEFUL IN MISSISSIPPI THAN EVER BEFORE. I WOULD ASK YOU TO CONSIDER, HOWEVER, THAT PEACE IS NOT NEARLY THE ABSENCE OF SOME NEGATIVE FORCE—TENSION, CONFUSION, THE MURDERING OF EMMETT TILL, AND THE REVEREND GEORGE LEE—BUT THE PRESENCE OF SOME POSITIVE FORCE—LOVE, JUSTICE, AND GOODWILL.2

SINCERELY
MARTIN LUTHER KING JR

THWc. MLK-MBU: Box 15.

1. See J. F. Redmon to King, 14 March 1956; and King to Redmon, 27 March 1956.

2. Emmett Till, a fourteen-year-old Chicagoan visiting his uncle, was murdered on 28 August 1955, purportedly for acting disrespectfully toward a white woman. George Lee, an African-American minister and voting rights activist in Mississippi, was shot and killed on 7 May 1955.