Address to MIA Mass Meeting at Day Street Baptist Church

[26 April 1956]
[Montgomery, Ala.]

At an MIA mass meeting at Day Street Baptist Church King reads the executive board’s recommendation to continue the bus protest after city and state officials contested the National City Lines’ decision to end segregated seating. Despite bus company officials’ unwillingness to meet with MIA leaders during recent negotiations with the city, King expresses appreciation for their stand, explaining, “Our action now is not aimed at putting the bus company out of business, but only at putting justice in business.” The crowd of three thousand greeted the resolutions with a “thunderous ovation,” unanimously approving the decision to continue the boycott.1 CBS News recorded this excerpt.

[King:] Thank you very much my friends. That certainly is very kind of you. We never assemble with a feeling of a sense of bitterness. We always assemble with deep tones of love in our hearts. [Audience:] (Yeah) And we always assemble with great hope and with a feeling of the ultimate triumph of righteousness and justice. (Yeah) [applause] It is certainly gratifying to—(Can you turn the mike up? Turn on the mike) I don’t know if the mike . . . [recording interrupted] that to see you in such large numbers. We are very happy to see you. And I know you are here because of your interests in this movement and because of your determination to stand in the same sense of dignity that you’ve always stood in. (Yeah) Whereas it is unanimously agreed . . . [recording interrupted] the adjustment involved in the emergence of any new order. (Yeah, That’s right) And we must be willing to confront the onslaught of the recalcitrance of the old order. (Yeah, That’s right) And we must stand with the deep spirit of Christian love (That’s right) as we have always done. (That’s right, All right) We started out with. . . . [recording interrupted]

Several things have happened since we met together on last Monday evening. (Oh yeah) We had a very fine meeting at the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church and we discussed in that meeting the decision which had been handed down that day,

the Supreme Court's decision. But since that time several things have happened, things that are vitally important for our whole movement. And I'm sure that you've been reading about them in the papers, you have been hearing about them on television, and you've been talking about them. We've been thinking about these things, and at every moment and every second, we have this movement on our hearts and in our hearts. (Oh yeah, Yes) We are always seeking to do the right thing. (Yeah, That's right). We feel that we cannot afford to make mistakes, so we are trying at every point to be wise in our decisions. We are not depending only on our judicious capacities. We are not depending only on our power to speculate. We are not depending only on our knowledge and our supposed wisdom, we are also depending on the guidance of the Almighty God. (Amen, Amen, All right) [applause] So that everything that we will say today comes not only from what we have thought about, although it comes from that, but also from what we have prayed over. (Yeah, That's right) We have thought over it, and we have prayed over it.

I have a resolution that I would like to read to you and I want you to listen to this at every point and notice everything in it. Be very scrutinizing in analyzing it. I want everybody to listen carefully. [recording interrupted]

Resolution:

Whereas, a majority of the Negro citizens of Montgomery, Alabama, have refrained from riding city buses since December fifth, 1955, because of mistreatments and because of the unconstitutional seating arrangement. And

Whereas, it was reported that on Monday, April twenty-third, 1956, the United States Supreme Court held that city ordinances and state statutes requiring segregation on public conveyances for hire intra-state are unconstitutional. And

Whereas, National City Lines, Incorporated, parent of the Montgomery City Lines, Incorporated, has issued a statement and instructed its drivers to cease and desist from enforcing city and state laws requiring segregation on city buses. And

Whereas, it has been reported through reliable sources that several southern cities, including Richmond, Virginia; Little Rock, Arkansas; Dallas, Texas; and others, have ended segregation on city buses and white and Negro passengers rode together on front seats without incidents, mishaps, or disturbances. And

Whereas, the public officials of the city of Montgomery and the state of Alabama have indicated both orally and in writing that they intend to and will use all means available, including the arrest of the bus drivers and passengers who refuse to abide by and obey the segregation laws of the city of Montgomery and the state of Alabama requiring segregation of the races on city and state buses [recording interrupted]

[B. D. Lambert:] With the Supreme Court of the United States in our favor.

[King:] Let's, let's hear it.

[Lambert:] I said, with the Supreme Court of the United States in our favor and the [federal?] government on our side, the people of Montgomery will never go back to Jim Crow buses! [thundering applause] [words inaudible]

[King:] Let's hear the motion. Let's hear the motion. Let's hear the motion.

[Lambert:] [words inaudible] I make a motion that the resolution and the recommendation made by the president be received and adopted! (I second that) [applause]
29 Apr 1956

[King:] It has been moved and seconded that the resolution that was read will be received and adopted. Are you ready for the question? (Yeah) All those in favor let it be known by standing on your feet. [thundering applause] Opposed. [recording interrupted]

Be it therefore resolved that we, the Negro citizens of Montgomery, Alabama, do now and will continue to carry on our mass protest until such time as the matters stated above are clarified and we hereby authorize and direct the officers and board of directors of the Montgomery Improvement Association to do any and all acts that it deems necessary to perfect our desires. (That’s right) [applause]

Now my... [recording interrupted]

We are grateful to them and we feel that they acted in all good faith (That’s right), and they decided to comply with the Supreme Court’s decision. And in continuing this protest, we are not attempting to punish the National City Lines. (That’s right) As I have said to you before, in our movement we are not bogged down in a negative... [recording interrupted]

(That’s right, That’s right, That’s all right) [applause] And we intend to stand up until justice comes our way. (Yeah) Now let me urge you to continue in the same spirit that we have carried on for these twenty weeks or more. Let me urge you to be sane and rational. Eventually, segregation in public transportation will pass away (Yeah), eventually. And I think we should start now preparing for the inevitable. (Yeah) And let us, when that moment comes, go into the situations that we confront with a great deal of dignity, sanity, and reasonableness. (Yeah) We never intend to get on the buses kicking people over and trying to show that we had won a victory. (No) For when segregation dies it will not be merely a victory for fifty thousand Negroes of Montgomery (No), it will not be a victory for sixteen million Negroes of America, but it will be a victory for democracy. (Yeah) It will be a victory for justice. (Yeah) It will be a victory for the forces of light. (Yeah) Not just a victory for one segment but for the whole of the nation. (All right) And let us not abuse our new rights and privileges (That’s right) by overdoing them. (That’s right) [recording interrupted]

Vt. CBSNA-CBSN.

From J. Martin England

29 April 1956
Somerville, N.J.

England, a fellow Baptist minister and graduate of Crozer, praises King’s Gandhian approach and advises him to use nonviolence not “to conquer the opponent” but to redeem him.¹ Noting that “it is always good to hear from a Crozer alumnus,” King thanked England on 5 June for his “helpful suggestions.”

¹ J. Martin England (1901–1989), born in Seneca, South Carolina, received degrees from Furman University in Greenville, South Carolina, and from Crozer Theological Seminary. From 1933 until 1939