We certainly appreciate your interest in our movement. Your suggestions are certainly helpful. Please feel free to write us any time.

With every good wish, I am

Sincerely yours,
M. L. King, Jr.,
President

May 1956
MLKb

"Walk for Freedom"

May 1956
New York, N.Y.

King's statement for Fellowship, the journal of the Fellowship of Reconciliation, is based on a half-hour interview recorded by Glenn Smiley on 28 February. In the article King recounts the bombing of his home on 30 January and his speech to the throng outside. Fearing that "violence was a possibility," he urged the crowd to "manifest love" and to "carry on the struggle with the same dignity and with the same discipline that we had started out with." A photograph of King speaking to the crowd that night graced the cover of the magazine.

The present protest here in Montgomery on the part of the Negro citizens, grows out of many experiences—experiences that have often been humiliating and have led to deep resentment. The Negro citizens of Montgomery compose about 75% of the bus riders. In riding buses, they have confronted conditions which have made for a great deal of embarrassment, such as having to stand over empty seats, having to pay fares at the front door and going out to the back to get on, and then the very humiliating experience of being arrested for refusing to get up and give a seat to a person of another race.

These conditions and those experiences have now reached the point that the Negro citizens are tired, and this tiredness was expressed on December 5, when more than 99 percent of the Negro bus riders decided not to ride the buses, in a protest against these unjust conditions. This protest has lasted now for many, many weeks and it is still in process.1

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1. The editors omitted King's discussion of the city's response to their demands: "It is still continuing because we have failed to get any consideration from the city officials on our proposals. They were very moderate, they certainly fitted within the framework of the present law, and we insisted, and we still insist, that the city commission could do these things without a lot of trouble, without changing the foundation of the community. We felt however, that if we could be granted these proposals, this would at least be a temporary alleviation of the problem, knowing that the ultimate solution would be in the total eradication of segregation itself. However, we have not received any consideration on these proposals, and we are still involved in the protest" (King, interview by Smiley, 28 February 1956).
From the beginning, we have insisted on nonviolence. This is a protest—a nonviolent protest against injustice. We are depending on moral and spiritual forces. To put it another way, this is a movement of passive resistance, and the great instrument is the instrument of love. We feel that this is our chief weapon, and that no matter how long we are involved in the protest, no matter how tragic the experiences are, no matter what sacrifices we have to make, we will not let anybody drag us so low as to hate them.

Love must be at the forefront of our movement if it is to be a successful movement. And when we speak of love, we speak of understanding, good will toward all men. We speak of a creative, a redemptive sort of love, so that as we look at the problem, we see that the real tension is not between the Negro citizens and the white citizens of Montgomery, but it is a conflict between justice and injustice, between the forces of light and the forces of darkness, and if there is a victory—and there will be a victory—the victory will not be merely for the Negro citizens and a defeat for the white citizens, but it will be a victory for justice and a defeat of injustice. It will be a victory for goodness in its long struggle with the forces of evil.

Violence Is Immoral

This is a spiritual movement, and we intend to keep these things in the forefront. We know that violence will defeat our purpose. We know that in our struggle in America and in our specific struggle here in Montgomery, violence will not only be impractical but immoral. We are outnumbered; we do not have access to the instruments of violence. Even more than that, not only is violence impractical, but it is immoral; for it is my firm conviction that to seek to retaliate with violence does nothing but intensify the existence of evil and hate in the universe.

Along the way of life, someone must have sense enough and morality enough to cut off the chain of hate and evil. The greatest way to do that is through love. I believe firmly that love is a transforming power that can lift a whole community to new horizons of fair play, good will and justice.

Love vs. Bombs

Love is our great instrument and our great weapon, and that alone. On January 30 my home was bombed.2 My wife and baby were there; I was attending a meeting. I first heard of the bombing at the meeting, when someone came to me and mentioned it, and I tried to accept it in a very calm manner. I first inquired about

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2. Smiley prompted King’s discussion of the bombing: “I understand that on January 30th, your home was bombed. Could you tell us something about this instance, and how it was met by nonviolence?” (King, interview by Smiley).
my wife and daughter; then after I found out that they were all right, I stopped in the midst of the meeting and spoke to the group, and urged them not to be panicky and not to do anything about it because that was not the way.

I immediately came home and, on entering the front of the house, I noticed there were some 500–1000 persons. I came in the house and looked it over and went back to see my wife and to see if the baby was all right, but as I stood in the back of the house, hundreds and hundreds of people were still gathering, and I saw there that violence was a possibility.

It was at that time that I went to the porch [see cover photo] and tried to say to the people that we could not allow ourselves to be panicky. We could not allow ourselves to retaliate with any type of violence, but that we were still to confront the problem with love.

One statement that I made—and I believe it very firmly—was: “He who lives by the sword will perish by the sword.” 3 I urged the people to continue to manifest love, and to continue to carry on the struggle with the same dignity and with the same discipline that we had started out with. I think at that time the people did decide to go home, things did get quiet, and it ended up with a great deal of calmness and a great deal of discipline, which I think our community should be proud of and which I was very proud to see because our people were determined not to retaliate with violence.

“Stand Up to the Finish”

Some twenty-six of the ministers and almost one hundred of the citizens of the city were indicted in this boycott. But we realized in the beginning that we would confront experiences that make for great sacrifices, experiences that are not altogether pleasant. We decided among ourselves that we would stand up to the finish, and that is what we are determined to do. In the midst of the indictments, we still hold to this nonviolent attitude, and this primacy of love.

Pray For Justice

Even though convicted, we will not retaliate with hate, but will still stand with love in our hearts, and stand resisting injustice, with the same determination with which we started out. We need a great deal of encouragement in this movement. Of course one thing that we are depending on, from not only other communities but from our own community, is prayer. We ask people everywhere to pray that God will guide us, pray that justice will be done and that righteousness will stand. And I think through these prayers we will be strengthened; it will make us feel

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the unity of the nation and the presence of Almighty God. For as we said all along, this is a spiritual movement.4


4. Miller promised King that the article would end with an appeal for funds, but it was omitted in the final copy. King concluded his interview with Smiley with a discussion of the financial situation of the MIA: "Along with [prayers from other communities] there is always a pressing need for funds. This is a very expensive movement, our local operations like the car pool, running of an office, are now running into about $3000.00–$3500.00 a week, and of course we have court cases before us, and we are involved in a great deal of litigation which will be very expensive. We can see now that that will cost with the present indictments and the other suit in the federal court, both will cost some $16,000.00–$18,000.00. So that you can see that our expenses are high and that we need financial assistance at every point. So that through your prayers and your financial assistance, we will be greatly benefited" (King, interview by Smiley). See also Miller to King, 10 April 1956.

“The ‘New Negro’ of the South: Behind the Montgomery Story”

June 1956

New York, N.Y.

This article, printed in the Socialist Party–sponsored journal, the Socialist Call, was drawn from an address King delivered on 17 May at the annual dinner of the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund, commemorating the second anniversary of the Supreme Court’s school desegregation decision. Expounding on three basic attitudes regarding progress in race relations, King dismisses both “extreme optimism” and “extreme pessimism,” arguing instead for a “realistic” approach that acknowledges substantial progress but recognizes that “we have a long long way to go.” He then discusses the emergence of the “new Negro” in the South, “with a new sense of dignity and destiny,” particularly in Montgomery, and urges an interrelated strategy of education, legal reform, and nonviolent resistance to move African Americans toward “the promised land.” Significant variations between the article and a typed draft of the speech, containing marginal handwritten comments by King, are noted.1

There are three basic attitudes that one can take toward the question of progress in the area of race relations. The first is the attitude of extreme optimism. The optimist would contend that we have come a long way in race relations. He would point proudly to the marvelous strides that have been made in the area of civil rights over the last few decades. From this he would conclude that the problem is just about solved, and that we can sit comfortably by the wayside and wait for the coming of the inevitable.