ing, a radiating personality, and genuine honesty. With these qualities I am sure that you will make a real success of your work in an orphan home.

You have my prayers and best wishes for a future filled with success.

Very sincerely yours,
M. L. King, Jr.,
President
MLK:mlb
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The Martin Luther King, Jr. Papers Project

“We Are Still Walking”

December 1956
New York, N.Y.

Liberation, a new radical pacifist magazine, had published an article by King in its second issue.1 Celebrating the boycott’s first anniversary with a “Salute to Montgomery” by seven prominent political and religious leaders,2 its December special issue included a firsthand account of “How It All Started” by MIA activist E. D. Nixon as well as King’s report on the final stage of the protest. In this statement King contends that, despite its apparent legal and moral victory, the movement had entered its “most difficult” period. He asks everyone to return to the buses “not as a right but as a duty. If we go back as a right, there is a danger that we will be blind to the rights of others.”

When the Supreme Court ruled on November 13th that segregated buses are illegal, it must have appeared to many people that our struggle in Montgomery was over. Actually, the most difficult stage of crisis had just begun.

For one thing the immediate response of some influential white people was to scoff at the court decision and to announce that it would never be put into effect. One pro-segregationist said: “We are prepared for a century of litigation.” The leader of the Montgomery Citizens Council stated: “Any attempt to enforce this decision will inevitably lead to riot and bloodshed.” 3 It is clear that all our tact and all our love are called for in order to meet the situation creatively.

Even more important, our own experience and growth during these eleven and a half months of united nonviolent protest has been such that we cannot be satisfied with a court “victory” over our white brothers. We must respond to the

2. The “salutes” were written by Eleanor Roosevelt, Roy Wilkins, Ralph Bunche, A. Philip Randolph, Harry Emerson Fosdick, John Haynes Holmes, and Z. K. Matthews, a leader of the African National Congress in South Africa.
3. Luther Ingalls, quoted in “White Spokesmen Warn of Possible Violence,” Montgomery Advertiser, 14 November 1956.
decision with an understanding of those who have opposed us and with an appreciation of the difficult adjustments that the court order poses for them. We must be able to face up honestly to our own shortcomings. We must act in such a way as to make possible a coming together of white people and colored people on the basis of a real harmony of interests and understanding. We seek an integration based on mutual respect. We have worked and suffered for non-segregated buses, but we want this to be a step towards equality, not a step away from it.

Perhaps if I tell you of our first mass meeting the night after the Supreme Court's decision, it will indicate what was going on in our minds.

After our opening hymn, the Scripture was read by Rev. Robert Graetz, a young Lutheran minister who has been a constant reminder to us in these trying months that white people as well as colored people are trying to expand their horizons and work out the day-to-day applications of Christianity. He read from Paul's famous letter to the Corinthians: "... though I have all faith, so that I could move mountains, and have not love, I am nothing. ... Love suffereth long and is kind. ..."

When he got to the words: "When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child, but when I became a man I put away childish things," the congregation burst into applause. Soon there was shouting, cheering, and waving of handkerchiefs. To me this was an exciting, spontaneous expression by the Negro congregation of what had happened to it these months. The people knew that they had come of age, that they had won new dignity. They would never again be the old subservient, fearful appeasers. But neither would they be resentful fighters for justice who could overlook the rights and feelings of their opponents. When Mr. Graetz concluded the reading with the words: "And now abideth faith, hope and love, but the greatest of these is love," there was another spontaneous outburst. Only a people who had struggled with all the problems involved in trying to be loving in the midst of bitter conflict could have reacted in this way. I knew then that nonviolence, for all its difficulties, had won its way into our hearts.

Peculiar People

Later, when Rev. Abernathy spoke, he told how a white newspaper man had reproached him for this outburst on the part of the congregation. "Isn't it a little peculiar," he said, "for people to interrupt the Scripture that way?" "Yes it is," said Abernathy, "just as it is peculiar for people to walk in the snow and rain when there are empty buses available; just as it is peculiar for people to pray for those who persecute them; just as it is peculiar for the Southern Negro to stand up and look a white man in the face as an equal." Pandemonium broke loose.

In my talk, I tried to discuss the basic philosophy of our movement. It is

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4. 1 Corinthians 13. King refers to the mass meetings held on 14 November 1956 at Hutchinson Street and Holt Street Baptist churches. See King's description of that evening in Stride Toward Freedom, pp. 161-162; and his address to the Holt Street mass meeting on pp. 424-433 in this volume.
summed up in the idea that we must go back on the buses not as a right but as a duty. If we go back as a right, there is a danger that we will be blind to the rights of others. We Negroes have been in a humiliating position because others have been chiefly concerned with insisting on their own rights. This is too narrow a basis for human brotherhood, and certainly will not overcome existing tensions and misunderstandings.

Secondly, if we insist on our "rights," we will return to the buses with the psychology of victors. We will think and say—by our manner if not our words—that we are the victors. This would be unworthy of us and a barrier to the growth we hope for in others.

In the past, we have sat in the back of the buses, and this has indicated a basic lack of self-respect. It shows that we thought of ourselves as less than men. On the other hand, the white people have sat in the front and have thought of themselves as superior. They have tried to play God. Both approaches are wrong. Our duty in going back on the buses is to destroy this superior-inferior relationship, from whichever side it is felt. Instead of accepting the division of mankind, it is our duty to act in the manner best designed to establish man's oneness. If we go back in this spirit, our mental attitude will be one that must in the long run bring about reconciliation.

There is a victory in this situation. But it is a victory for truth and justice, a victory for the unity of mankind.

These eleven months have not been at all easy. Our feet have often been tired. We have struggled against tremendous odds to maintain alternative transportation, but we have kept going with the faith that in our struggle we had cosmic companionship, and that, at bottom, the universe is on the side of justice. We must keep that perspective in the days that are immediately ahead.

Klan Stages Parade

The night the Supreme Court decision was handed down, the Ku Klux Klan tried to intimidate us. The radio announced that the Klan would demonstrate throughout the Negro community. There were threats of bombing and other violence. We decided that we would not react as we had done too often in the past. We would not go into our houses, close the doors, pull the shades, or turn off the lights. Instead we would greet them as any other parade.

When the Klan arrived—according to the newspapers "about forty carloads of robed and hooded members"—porch lights were on and doors open. The Negro people had gathered courage. As the Klan drove by, people behaved much as if they were watching the advance contingent for the Ringling Brothers Circus or a Philadelphia Mummers Parade. Many walked about as usual; some simply watched; others relaxed on their stoops; a few waved as the cars passed by. This required a tremendous effort, but the Klan was so nonplussed that after a few short blocks it turned off into a side-street and disappeared into the night.

Not all our problems are resolved that easily. A few hours after the Supreme Court decided in favor of non-segregated buses, the U.S. Circuit Court issued an injunction prohibiting us from continuing the car pool. This was a system whereby about 100 vehicles had picked up protesters at the Negro churches and had taken them to central locations. The court order deprived us of our chief method for transporting many Negroes to work or shopping centers from outlying districts.

Formal objections to the car pool included the charges that the cars were improperly insured and the drivers were “morally unsuitable.” It is true that for a time some cars were without insurance—since the White Citizens Council brought pressure on the insurance companies to cancel the policies on cars being used in the pool. But this was remedied long before the court case, when Lloyds of London insured each car to the amount of $11,000. As evidence of the moral unfitness of the drivers, the city listed the numerous traffic tickets with which it had harassed us from the beginning. Despite this strange justice, we decided to comply with the court order.

Unlike the Supreme Court decision, which does not go into effect until the formal order is handed to the Montgomery officials, the injunction against the car pool was immediately operative. This means that at the present time—and for about a month—we have no car pool, and cannot, in good faith, ride the buses. As evidence of solidarity among Negroes, the leaders have decided either to put their cars in the garages, while the people must walk or to place their cars at the disposal of others. If people must walk, the leaders will walk with them.

Naturally, we were disappointed at the issuance of the injunction. There will be many sore feet in Montgomery—and many tasks unfilled because of lack of transportation. But as in the case of several previous persecutions it may work in the end to our benefit. Having destroyed the car pool, the defenders of segregation will be in no position to go to the courts and request delays in execution of the desegregation order. This was the method for getting around the Supreme Court order on integration of schools. It has succeeded to the extent that there is not a single integrated public school in the State of Alabama. But in the case of the buses it is hard to plead for “going slow yet a little longer” when Negroes must walk everywhere they go. To me this is further proof that human beings inevitably work against themselves when they work for selfish ends. Several weeks ago an editorial in the Montgomery Advertiser raised questions about the wisdom of the white segregationists pressing for the abolition of the car pool. The writer said he was not sure that this was the right thing to do. The answer is simple: you cannot do the right thing in the wrong context.

Growth on Both Sides

I do not mean to imply that all the white people are working for merely selfish ends. We have all inherited a situation that is extremely difficult. We are therefore gratified when we find members of the white population making a serious effort to change. There are many evidences of growth on the part of both white and Negro people in Montgomery.
A year ago the intolerable behavior of a prominent member of the white group was largely responsible for prolonging the protest. In fact, considerable tension arose from his initial intransigence. At the beginning we felt that this gentleman treated us rather rudely. But now he talks with us in a dignified and courteous manner and says that he understands us better. He told me that he respects persons who have deep convictions and are willing to stand up for them at the cost of personal suffering.

There are encouraging indications that hundreds of other white persons have come to feel similarly. They are under tremendous pressure to conform to the views of the more reactionary elements, or at least to remain discreetly aloof. But we are trying to encourage them to act firmly in line with their deeper convictions. That is why we are publicly asking all persons of good will to comply with the Supreme Court order.

One anonymous phone caller, whose voice I have come to recognize, has been calling me for months to insult and threaten me and then slam down the receiver. Recently he stayed on the phone for half an hour, giving me the opportunity to discuss the whole underlying problem with him. At the end of the call he said: "Reverend King, I have enjoyed talking with you, and I am beginning to think that you may be right." This willingness to change deeply ingrained attitudes buoys us up and challenges us to be open to growth, also.

Appeal to the Churches

We are appealing especially to church people to examine their lives in the light of the life and teachings of the great religious leaders. They teach that all men, whatever their race or color, are children of one Father and therefore brothers, one of another. He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen can not love God whom he hath not seen.6

Churches, by disseminating these teachings, have had much to do with the increasing sensitiveness on the issue of race relations and the undoubted advances which have been made in recent years. However, the churches have fallen woefully short of practicing what they preach. They have contributed to the confusion, the hesitation, the bitterness and violence.

We are convinced that great gains can be made if religious men will seek to practice true love toward their brothers and sisters. This conviction underlies our own attempts to be fearlessly non-violent in the present situation. It is the basis on which we are appealing to our white brothers to see beyond the narrow concepts of the past.

Can Not Be Solved by Politics

Discussion has tended to concentrate on such aspects as Supreme Court decisions and the maintenance of law and order against mob rule. We do not wish to

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minimize these issues. They have an important bearing on the peace of our land. But the racial problem, North and South, cannot be solved on a purely political level. It must be approached morally and spiritually. We must ask ourselves as individuals: What is the right thing to do, regardless of the personal sacrifices involved?

Within the Negro churches, one of the lessons we have learned is that the church is not living up to its full responsibilities if it merely preaches an other-worldly gospel devoid of practical social connotations. It must concern itself, as Jesus did, with the economic and social problems of this world, as well as with its other-worldly gospel. As our church has played a leading role in the present social struggle, it has won new respect within the Negro population.

Long Range Program

From this perspective, it is obvious that our interest in brotherhood extends far beyond the desegregation of the buses. We are striving for the removal of all barriers that divide and alienate mankind, whether racial, economic or psychological. Though we are deeply involved in the bus protest, we have also worked out a long-range constructive program. Recently we agreed on six continuing goals:

1. To establish the first bank in Montgomery to be owned and operated by Negroes. We have found that in the present situation many Negroes who are active in the protest have been unable to secure loans from the existing banks.

2. To organize a credit union. As a result of the protest, there is a strong desire among the Negroes to pool their money for great cooperative economic programs. We are anxious to demonstrate that cooperation rather than competition is the way to meet problems.

3. To expand the voting clinics, with which we have been trying not only to teach Negroes the techniques of registration and voting but also to provide impartial discussion of the underlying issues.

4. The establishment of training institutes in the methods and discipline of non-violent action. We have begun to see the tremendous possibilities of this method of tackling human problems.

5. Until the NAACP, which has been outlawed in Alabama, is able to function again in the State, we hope to be able to take on some aspects of the excellent work it has carried on.

6. To give aid to those who have sacrificed in our cause. Many of them are marked men and women who will be unable to get work in Montgomery for a long time. We cannot build a movement if we do not stand by those who are victims in the struggle. Spiritual solidarity is meaningless if it does not extend into economic brotherhood.

Unanticipated Results of Non-Violence

Everyone must realize that in the early days of the protest there were many who questioned the effectiveness, and even the manliness, of non-violence. But as the
protest has continued there has been a growing commitment on the part of the entire Negro population. Those who were willing to get their guns in the beginning are coming to see the futility of such an approach.

The struggle has produced a definite character development among Negroes. The Negro is more willing now to tell the truth about his attitude to segregation. In the past, he often used deception as a technique for appeasing and soothing the white man. Now he is willing to stand up and speak more honestly.

Crime has noticeably diminished. One nurse, who owns a Negro hospital in Montgomery, said to me recently that since the protest started she has been able to go to church Sunday mornings, something she had not been able to do for years. This means that Saturday nights are not so vicious as they used to be.

There is an amazing lack of bitterness, a contagious spirit of warmth and friendliness. The children seem to display a new sense of belonging. The older children are aware of the conflict and the resulting tension, but they act as if they expect the future to include a better world to live in.

We did not anticipate these developments. But they have strengthened our faith in non-violence. Believing that a movement is finally judged by its effect on the human beings associated with it, we are not discouraged by the problems that lie ahead.

PD. Liberation 1 (December 1956): 6–9.

“Facing the Challenge of a New Age,”
Address Delivered at the First Annual Institute on Nonviolence and Social Change

3 December 1956
Montgomery, Ala.

The MIA's weeklong Institute on Nonviolence and Social Change, which became an annual event, featured seminars on nonviolent tactics, voter registration, and education. Delivering the opening speech to an overflowing crowd at Holt Street Baptist Church, King declares that the success of the Montgomery movement has shattered many stereotypes. “We have gained a new sense of dignity and destiny,” King asserts, as well as “a new and powerful weapon—nonviolent resistance.” King sees the rise of the “new Negro” as heralding a “new world order” to replace the “old order” of colonialism, exploitation, and segregation. King's speech is similar to his August address to the Alpha Phi Alpha convention and his speech on 6 December to an NAACP gathering at Vermont Avenue Baptist Church in Washington, D.C.

1. Among the session leaders were T. M. Alexander, Glenn Smiley, T. J. Jemison, C. K. Steele, F. L. Shuttlesworth, B. D. Lambert, Carl Rowan, H. V. Richardson, Nannie Helen Burroughs, James B. Cobb, William Holmes Borders, Homer A. Jack, and John B. Culbertson. A mass religious service, with J. H. Jackson, president of the National Baptist Convention, as the main speaker, concluded the conference on Sunday, 9 December.