

“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.¹ 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.

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Significant variations are noted below between the notes taken by a person attending the Washington speech and the text that King prepared for his Holt Street remarks.²

I. INTRODUCTORY OBSERVATIONS

Presiding officer, members of the Montgomery Improvement Association, visiting friends, ladies and gentlemen.

One year ago we assembled in this church and voted unanimously to cease riding the buses of Montgomery until injustice had been eliminated in three definite areas of bus transportation. The deliberations of that brisk and cold night in December will long be stencilled on the mental sheets of succeeding generations. Little did we know on that night that we were starting a movement that would rise to international proportions; a movement whose lofty echos would ring in the ears of people of every nation; a movement that would stagger and astound the imagination of the oppressor, while leaving a glittering star of hope etched in the midnight skies of the oppressed. Little did we know that night that we were starting a movement that would gain the admiration of men of goodwill all over the world. But God still has a mysterious way to perform his wonders. It seems that God decided to use Montgomery as the proving ground for the struggle and triumph of freedom and justice in America. It is one of the ironies of our day that Montgomery, the Cradle of the Confederacy, is being transformed into Montgomery, the cradle of freedom and justice.

We have learned many things as a results of our struggle together. Our non-violent protest has demonstrated to the Negro, North and South, that many stereotypes he has held about himself and other Negroes are not valid. Montgomery has broken the spell and is ushering in concrete manifestations of the thinking and action of the new Negro.

Some of the basic things that we have learned are as follows: (1) We have discovered that we can stick together for a common cause; (2) Our leaders do not have to sell out; (3) Threats and violence do not necessarily intimidate those who are sufficiently aroused and non-violent; (4) Our church is becoming militant, stressing a social gospel as well as a gospel of personal salvation; (5) We have gained a new sense of dignity and destiny; (6) We have discovered a new and powerful weapon—non-violent resistance.

One of the amazing things about the protest that will long be remembered is the orderly way it has been conducted. On every hand you have evinced wise restraint and calm dignity. You have carefully avoided animosity, making sure that your methods were rooted in the deep soils of the Christian faith. Because of this, violence has almost been a non-existent factor in our struggle. For such “discipline, generations yet unborn will commend you.

If we are to be fair and honest we must also commend the white community at this point. If there had not been some discipline and moral sensitivity in the white

2. King, “Birth of a New Age,” August 1956, pp. 339–346 in this volume; and Julian O. Grayson, notes on “Facing the Challenge of a New Age,” 6 December 1956.

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community, we would have had much more violence in Montgomery. All of this renews my faith in the vast possibilities of this community. I am aware of the fact that the vast majority of white persons of Montgomery and the state of Alabama sincerely believe that segregation is both morally and sociologically justifiable. But nobody has been able to convince me that the vast majority of white people in this community, or in the whole state of Alabama, are willing to use violence to maintain segregation. It is only the fringe element, the hoodlum element, which constitutes a numerical minority, that would resort to the use of violence.³ I still have faith in man, and I still believe that there are great resources of goodwill in the southern white man that we must somehow tap. We must continue to believe that the most ardent segregationist can be transformed into the most constructive integrationist.

I cannot close these introductory expressions without giving a personal word of appreciation. I realize that words can never adequately express appreciation. Real appreciation must flow from the deep seas of the heart. But in my little way and with my stumbling words, I would like to express my deepest appreciation to each of you for following my leadership. The wonders that have come about in Montgomery this year were not due so much to my leadership, but to the greatness of your followship. The Executive Board has worked as a unit and has distinguished itself for peace and harmony. The Negro ministers of the city deserve the highest praise. They have worked indefatigably and assiduously for the overall cause of freedom. They have been willing to forget denominations, and realize a deep unity of purpose. Above all, those of you who have walked and picked up rides here and there, must have a special place in freedom's hall of fame. There is nothing more majestic and sublime than the quiet testimony of a people willing to sacrifice and suffer for the cause of freedom. I am sure that God smiles upon each of you with an exuberant joy.

II. FACING THE CHALLENGE OF A NEW AGE

Those of us who live in the Twentieth Century are privileged to live in one of the most momentous periods of human history. It is an exciting age filled with hope. It is an age in which a new social order is being born. We stand today between two worlds—the dying old and the emerging new.

Now I am aware of the fact that there are those who would contend that we live in the most ghastly period of human history. They would argue that the rhythmic beat of the deep rumblings of discontent from Asia, the uprisings in Africa, the nationalistic longings of Egypt, the roaring cannons from Hungary, and the racial tensions of America are all indicative of the deep and tragic midnight which encompasses our civilization. They would argue that we are retrogressing instead

3. King apparently omitted these two sentences in his speech but later explained to a reporter that it was due to "a lack of time," adding that the passage "certainly still expresses my sentiments" ("King Labels 'Hoodlums' Bar to Racial Harmony," *Montgomery Advertiser*, 4 December 1956).

3 Dec of progressing. But far from representing retrogression and tragic meaninglessness, the present tensions represent the necessary pains that accompany the birth of anything new. Long ago the Greek philosopher Heraclitus⁴ argued that justice emerges from the strife of opposites, and Hegel, in modern philosophy, preached a doctrine of growth through struggle. It is both historically and biologically true that there can be no birth and growth without birth and growing pains. Whenever there is the emergence of the new we confront the recalcitrance of the old. So the tensions which we witness in the world today are indicative of the fact that a new world order is being born and an old order is passing away.

We are all familiar with the old order that is passing away. We have lived with it for many years. We have seen it in its international aspect, in the form of Colonialism and Imperialism. There are approximately two billion four hundred million (2,400,000,000) people in this world, and the vast majority of these people are colored—about one billion six hundred million (1,600,000,000) of the people of the world are colored. Fifty years ago, or even twenty-five years ago, most of these one billion six hundred million people lived under the yoke of some foreign power. We could turn our eyes to China and see there six hundred million men and women under the pressing yoke of British, Dutch, and French rule. We could turn our eyes to Indonesia and see a hundred million men and women under the domination of the Dutch. We could turn to India and Pakistan and notice four hundred million brown men and women under the pressing yoke of the British. We could turn our eyes to Africa and notice there two hundred million black men and women under the pressing yoke of the British, the Dutch and the French. For years all of these people were dominated politically, exploited economically, segregated and humiliated.

But there comes a time when people get tired. There comes a time when people get tired of being trampled over by the iron feet of oppression. There comes a time when people get tired of being plunged across the abyss of exploitation where they experience the bleakness of nagging despair. There comes a time when people get tired of being pushed out of the glittering sunlight of life's July and left standing in the piercing chill of an Alpine November. So in the midst of their tiredness these people decided to rise up and protest against injustice. As a results of their protest more than one billion three hundred million (1,300,000,000) of the colored peoples of the world are free today. They have their own governments, their own economic system, and their own educational system. They have broken loose from the Egypt of Colonialism and Imperialism, and they are now moving through the wilderness of adjustment toward the promised land of cultural integration. As they look back they see the old order of Colonialism and Imperialism passing away and the new order of freedom and justice coming into being.

We have also seen the old order in our own nation, in the form of segregation and discrimination. We know something of the long history of this old order in America. It had its beginning in the year 1619 when the first Negro slaves landed on the shores of this nation. They were brought here from the soils of Africa. And

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unlike the Pilgrim Fathers who landed at Plymouth a year later, they were brought here against their wills. Throughout slavery the Negro was treated in a very inhuman fashion. He was a thing to be used not a person to be respected. He was merely a depersonalized cog in a vast plantation machine. The famous Dred Scott Decision of 1857 well illustrates the status of the Negro during slavery. In this decision the Supreme Court of the United States said, in substance, that the Negro is not a citizen of the United States; he is merely property subject to the dictates of his owner. Then came 1896. It was in this year that the Supreme Court of this nation, through the *Plessy v. Ferguson* Decision, established the doctrine of separate-but-equal as the law of the land. Through this decision segregation gained legal and moral sanction. The end results of the Plessy Doctrine was that it led to a strict enforcement of the "separate," with hardly the slightest attempt to abide by the "equal." So the Plessy Doctrine ended up making for tragic inequalities and ungodly exploitation.

Living under these conditions, many Negroes came to the point of losing faith in themselves. They came to feel that perhaps they were less than human. The great tragedy of physical slavery was that it led to the paralysis of mental slavery. So long as the Negro maintained this subservient attitude and accepted this "place" assigned to him, a sort of racial peace existed. But it was an uneasy peace in which the Negro was forced patiently to accept insult, injustice and exploitation. It was a negative peace. True peace is not merely the absence of some negative force—tension, confusion, or war; it is the presence of some positive force—justice, goodwill and brotherhood. And so the peace which presently existed between the races was a negative peace devoid of any positive and lasting quality.⁵

Then something happened to the Negro. Circumstances made it necessary for him to travel more. His rural plantation background was gradually being supplanted by migration to urban and industrial communities. His economic life was gradually rising to decisive proportions. His cultural life was gradually rising through the steady decline of crippling illiteracy. All of these factors conjoined to cause the Negro to take a new look at himself. Negro masses began to reevaluate themselves. The Negro came to feel that he was somebody. His religion revealed to him that God loves all of his children, and that every man, from a bass black to a treble white, is significant on God's keyboard. So he could now cry out with the eloquent poet:

Fleecy locks and black complexion
Cannot forfeit nature's claim
Skin may differ, but affection
Dwells in black and white the same
And were I so tall as to reach the pole
Or to grasp the ocean at a span,
I must be measured by my soul,
The mind is the standard of the man.⁶

5. These five sentences do not appear in Grayson's notes.

6. These lines are a composite of poems by William Cowper, "The Negro's Complaint" (1788), and Isaac Watts, "False Greatness" (1706). See note 5 to "The 'New Negro' of the South: Behind the Montgomery Story," June 1956, p. 283 in this volume.

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With this new self respect and new sense of dignity on the part of the Negro, the South's negative peace was rapidly undermined. And so the tension which we are witnessing in race relations today can be explained, in part, by the revolutionary change in the Negro's evaluation of himself, and his determination to struggle and sacrifice until the walls of segregation have finally been crushed by the battering rams of surging justice.

Along with the emergence of a "new Negro," with a new sense of dignity and destiny, came that memorable decision of May 17, 1954. In this decision the Supreme Court of this nation unanimously affirmed that the old Plessy Doctrine must go. This decision came as a legal and sociological death blow to an evil that had occupied the throne of American life for several decades. It affirmed in no uncertain terms that separate facilities are inherently unequal and that to segregate a child because of his race is to deny him of equal protection of the law. With the coming of this great decision we could gradually see the old order of segregation and discrimination passing away, and the new order of freedom and justice coming into being. Let nobody fool you, all of the loud noises that you hear today from the legislative halls of the South in terms of "interposition" and "nullification," and of outlawing the NAACP, are merely the death groans from a dying system. The old order is passing away, and the new order is coming into being. We are witnessing in our day the birth of a new age, with a new structure of freedom and justice.

Now as we face the fact of this new emerging world, we must face the responsibilities that come along with it. A new age brings with it new challenges. Let us consider some of the challenges of this new age.

First we are challenged to rise above the narrow confines of our individualistic concerns to the broader concerns of all humanity. The new world is a world of geographical togetherness. This means that no individual or nation can live alone. We must all learn to live together, or we will be forced to die together. This new world of geographical togetherness has been brought about, to a great extent, by man's scientific and technological genius. Man through his scientific genius has been able to dwarf distance and place time in chains; he has been able to carve highways through the stratosphere. And so it is possible today to eat breakfast in New York City and dinner in Paris, France. Bob Hope has described this new jet age in which we live. It is an age in which we will be able to get a non-stop flight from Los Angeles, California to New York City, and if by chance we develop hiccups on taking off, we will "hic" in Los Angeles and "cup" in New York City. It is an age in which one will be able to leave Tokyo on Sunday morning and, because of time difference, arrive in Seattle, Washington on the preceding Saturday night. When your friends meet you at the airport in Seattle inquiring when you left Tokyo, You will have to say, "I left tomorrow." This, in a very humorous sense, says to us that our world is geographically one. Now we are faced with the challenge of making it spiritually one. Through our scientific genius we have made of the world a neighborhood; now through our moral and spiritual genius we must make of it a brotherhood. We are all involved in the single process. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly. We are all links in the great chain of humanity. This is what John Doane meant when he said years ago:

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"No man is an island, entire of it selfe; every man
is a peece of the Continent, a part of the maine;

if a clod bee washed away by the Sea, Europe is the lesse,
 as well as if a Promontorie were, as well as if a Mannor
 of thy friends or of thine owne were; any mans death
 diminishes me, because I am involved in Mankinde;
 And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls;
 it tolls for thee.”⁷

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A second challenge that the new age brings to each of us is that of achieving excellency in our various fields of endeavor. In the new age many doors will be opening to us that were not opened in the past, and the great challenge which we confront is to be prepared to enter these doors as they open. Ralph Waldo Emerson said in an essay back in 1871, “If a man can write a better book, or preach a better sermon, or make a better mouse trap than his neighbor, even if he builds his house in the woods the world will make a beaten path to his door.” In the years to come this will be increasingly true.

In the new age we will be forced to compete with people of all races and nationalities. Therefore, we cannot aim merely to be good Negro teachers, good Negro doctors, good Negro ministers, good Negro skilled laborers. We must set out to do a good job, irrespective of race, and do it so well that nobody could do it better.

Whatever your life’s work is, do it well. Even if it does not fall in the category of one of the so-called big professions, do it well. As one college president said, “A man should do his job so well that the living, the dead, and the unborn could do it no better.”⁸ If it falls your lot to be a street sweeper, sweep streets like Michelangelo painted pictures, like Shakespeare wrote poetry, like Beethoven composed music; sweep streets so well that all the host of Heaven and earth will have to pause and say, “Here lived a great street sweeper, who swept his job well.” As Douglas Mallock says:

If you can’t be a pine on the top of the hill
 Be a scrub in the valley—but be
 The best little scrub by the side of the hill,
 Be a bush if you can’t be a tree.

If you can’t be a highway just be a trail
 If you can’t be the sun be a star;
 It isn’t by size that you win or fail—
 Be the best of whatever you are⁹

A third challenge that stands before us is that of entering the new age with understanding goodwill. This simply means that the Christian virtues of love, mercy and forgiveness should stand at the center of our lives.¹⁰ There is the danger that those of us who have lived so long under the yoke of oppression, those of us who have been exploited and trampled over, those of us who have had to stand amid the tragic midnight of injustice and indignities will enter the new age

7. John Donne, “Devotions upon Emergent Occasions” (1624).

8. King later identified his source as Morehouse president Benjamin Mays (see King, “Facing the Challenge of a New Age,” 1 January 1957, Paul H. Brown Collection, in private hands).

9. Douglas Malloch, “Be the Best of Whatever You Are” (1926).

10. In his Washington speech King said he considered the third challenge “the most important.”

3 Dec 1956 with hate and bitterness. But if we retaliate with hate and bitterness, the new age will be nothing but a duplication of the old age. We must blot out the hate and injustice of the old age with the love and justice of the new. This is why I believe so firmly in non-violence. Violence never solves problems. It only creates new and more complicated ones. If we succumb to the temptation of using violence in our struggle for justice, unborn generations will be the recipients of a long and desolate night of bitterness, and our chief legacy to the future will be an endless reign of meaningless chaos.¹¹

We have before us the glorious opportunity to inject a new dimension of love into the veins of our civilization. There is still a voice crying out in terms that echo across the generations, saying: "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, pray for them that despitefully use you, that you may be the children of your Father which is in Heaven."¹² This love might well be the salvation of our civilization. This is why I am so impressed with our motto for the week, "Freedom and Justice through Love." Not through violence; not through hate; no not even through boycotts; but through love. It is true that as we struggle for freedom in America we will have to boycott at times. But we must remember as we boycott that a boycott is not an end within itself; it is merely a means to awaken a sense of shame within the oppressor and challenge his false sense of superiority. But the end is reconciliation; the end is redemption; the end is the creation of the beloved community. It is this type of spirit and this type of love that can transform opposers into friends. It is this type of understanding goodwill that will transform the deep gloom of the old age into the exuberant gladness of the new age. It is this love which will bring about miracles in the hearts of men.

Now I realize that in talking so much about love it is very easy to become sentimental. There is the danger that our talk about love will merely be empty words devoid of any practical and true meaning. But when I say love those who oppose you I am not speaking of love in a sentimental or affectionate sense. It would be nonsense to urge men to love their oppressors in an affectionate sense. When I refer to love at this point I mean understanding goodwill. The Greek language comes to our aid at this point. The Greek language has three words for love. First it speaks of love in terms of Eros. Plato used this word quite frequently in his dialogues. Eros is a type of esthetic love. Now it has come to mean a sort of romantic love. I guess Shakespeare was thinking in terms of Eros when he said "Love is not love which alters when it alteration finds, or bends with the remover to remove." It is an ever fixed mark that looks on tempest and is never shaken. It is a star to every wandering bark . . .¹³ This is Eros. And then the Greek talks about philia. Philia is a sort of intimate affectionateness between personal

11. King altered these six sentences in his Washington address: "Love, justice, righteousness must be our companions as we enter the new age. We must continue in a spirit of passive resistance and non-violence. Violence would lead us into a night of bitterness. Ours must be a new demonstration of love. . . . We must seek to gain our freedom and equality through love; that is the essence of the victory for the 50,000 Negroes in Montgomery, Alabama. We are not out to defeat and humiliate the white man. We are trying to help him as well as ourselves establish justice in the world in a oneness under Christ Jesus."

12. Matthew 5:44-45.

13. William Shakespeare, "Sonnet CXVI" (1609).

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friends. It is a sort of reciprocal love. On this level a person loves because he is loved, then the Greek language comes out with another word which is the highest level of love. It speaks of it in terms of agape. Agape means nothing sentimental or basically affectionate. It means understanding redeeming goodwill for all men.¹⁴ It is an overflowing love which seeks nothing in return. It is the love of God working in the lives of men. When we rise to love on the agape level we love men not because we like them, not because their attitudes and ways appeal to us, but because God loves you. Here we rise to the position of loving the person who does the evil deed while hating the deed that the person does. With this type of love and understanding goodwill we will be able to stand amid the radiant glow of the new age with dignity and discipline. Yes, the new age is coming. It is coming mighty fast.¹⁵

Now the fact that this new age is emerging reveals something basic about the universe. It tells us something about the core and heartbeat of the cosmos. It reminds us that the universe is on the side of justice. It says to those who struggle for justice, "You do not struggle alone, but God struggles with you." This belief that God is on the side of truth and justice comes down to us from the long tradition of our Christian faith.¹⁶ There is something at the very center of our faith which reminds us that Good Friday may occupy the throne for a day, but ultimately it must give way to the triumphant beat of the drums of Easter. Evil may so shape events that Caesar will occupy a palace and Christ a cross, but one day that same Christ will rise up and split history into AD and BC, so that even the life of Caesar must be dated by His name. There is something in this universe that justifies Carlyle in saying, "No lie can live forever." There is something in this universe which justifies William Cullen Bryant in saying, "Truth crushed to earth will rise again." There is something in this universe that justifies James Russell Lowell in saying:

Truth forever on the scaffold
Wrong forever on the throne
Yet that scaffold sways the future
And behind the dim unknown stands God
Within the shadows keeping watch above his own.

14. Cf. Harry Emerson Fosdick, "On Being Fit to Live With," in *On Being Fit to Live With*, pp. 6-7: "Love in the New Testament is not a sentimental and affectionate emotion as we so commonly interpret it. There are three words in Greek for love, three words that we have to translate by our one word, love. *Eros*—'erotic' comes from it—that is one. . . . *Philia*—that is another Greek word. It meant intimate personal affectionateness and friendship. . . . But the great Christian word for love is something else: *agape*. . . . *Agape* means nothing sentimental or primarily emotional at all; it means understanding, redeeming, creative good will."

15. King elaborated on *agape* slightly differently in his Washington speech: "The other word for love of which I am speaking tonight is the word *agape* meaning the sacrificial, productive brotherly love as exemplified by Christ on the cross. I do not like Senator Eastland's attitude on the race question; I do not like the things he has said about us; I do not like the way he would treat us but I do love Senator Eastland with the love of God as a child of God. *Agape* should enter the new age with us with this true love of God in our hearts. Religion and spiritual love is the salvation of our new age. Toynebee in his massive work *A Study of History* thinks that it may be the Negro will inject love and understanding in our disintegrating society and save the world for a new age."

16. King added in Washington that "justice will be a reality here on earth."

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And so here in Montgomery, after more than eleven long months, we can walk and never get weary, because we know there is a great camp meeting in the promised land of freedom and justice.¹⁷

I am about to close now. But before closing I must correct what might be a false impression. I am afraid that if I close at this point many will go away misinterpreting my whole message.¹⁸ I have talked about the new age which is fastly coming into being. I have talked about the fact that God is working in history to bring about this new age. There is the danger, therefore, that after hearing all of this you will go away with the impression that we can go home, sit down, and do nothing, waiting for the coming of the inevitable. You will somehow feel that this new age will roll in on the wheels of inevitability, so there is nothing to do but wait on it. If you get that impression you are the victims of a dangerous optimism. If you go away with that interpretation you are the victims of an illusion wrapped in superficiality. We must speed up the coming of the inevitable.

Now it is true, if I may speak figuratively, that old man segregation is on his deathbed. But history has proven that social systems have a great last minute breathing power, and the guardians of a status-quo are always on hand with their oxygen tents to keep the old order alive. Segregation is still a fact in America. We still confront it in the South in its glaring and conspicuous forms. We still confront it in the North in its hidden and subtle forms. But if Democracy is to live, segregation must die. Segregation is a glaring evil. It is utterly unchristian. It relegates the segregated to the status of a thing rather than elevate him to the status of a person. Segregation is nothing but slavery covered up with certain niceties of complexity. Segregation is a blatant denial of the unity which we all have in Christ Jesus.

So we must continue the struggle against segregation in order to speed up the coming of the inevitable. We must continue to gain the ballot. This is one of the basic keys to the solution of our problem. Until we gain political power through possession of the ballot we will be convenient tools of unscrupulous politicians. We must face the appalling fact that we have been betrayed by both the Democratic and Republican parties. The Democrats have betrayed us by capitulating to the whims and caprices of the Southern Dixiecrats. The Republicans have betrayed us by capitulating to the blatant hypocrisy of right-wing reactionary northerners. This coalition of Southern Democrats and Northern right-wing Republicans defeats every proposed bill on civil rights. Until we gain the ballot and place proper public officials in office this condition will continue to exist. In communities where we confront difficulties in gaining the ballot, we must use all legal and moral means to remove these difficulties.

We must continue to struggle through legalism and legislation. There are those who contend that integration can come only through education, for no other reason than that morals cannot be legislated. I choose, however, to be dialectical at this point. It isn't either education or legislation; it is both legislation and education. I quite agree that it is impossible to change a man's internal feelings merely through law. But this really isn't the intention of the law. The law does not seek to change ones internal feelings; it seeks rather to control the external

17. This line comes from the spiritual "A Great Meeting in the Promised Land."

18. Grayson's notes on King's Washington speech end at this point.

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effects of those internal feelings. For instance, the law cannot make a man love me—religion and education must do that—but it can control his desire to lynch me. So in order to control the external effects of prejudiced internal feelings, we must continue to struggle through legislation.

Another thing that we must do in pressing on for integration is to invest our finances in the cause of freedom. Freedom has always been an expensive thing. History is a fit testimony to the fact that freedom is rarely gained without sacrifice and self-denial. So we must donate large sums of money to the cause of freedom. We can no longer complain that we don't have the money. Statistics reveal that the economic life of the Negro is rising to decisive proportions. The annual income of the American Negro is now more than sixteen billion dollars, almost equal to the national income of Canada. So we are gradually becoming economically independent. It would be a tragic indictment on both the self respect and practical wisdom of the Negro if history reveals that at the height of the Twentieth Century the Negro spent more for frivolities than for the cause of freedom. We must never let it be said that we spend more for the evanescent and ephemeral than for the eternal values of freedom and justice.

Another thing that we must do in speeding up the coming of the new age is to develop intelligent, courageous and dedicated leadership. This is one of the pressing needs of the hour. In this period of transition and growing social change, there is a dire need for leaders who are calm and yet positive; leaders who avoid the extremes of "hot-headness" and "Uncle Tomism." The urgency of the hour calls for leaders of wise judgement and sound integrity—leaders *not in love with money but in love with justice*; leaders *not in love with publicity, but in love with humanity*; leaders who can subject their particular egos to the greatness of the cause. To paraphrase Holland's words:

God give us leaders!
A time like this demands strong minds, great hearts,
true faith and ready hands;
Leaders whom the lust of office does not kill;
Leaders whom the spoils of life cannot buy;
Leaders who possess opinions and a will;
Leaders who have honor; leaders who will not lie;
Leaders who can stand before a demagogue and damn his
treacherous flatteries without winking!
Tall leaders, sun crowned, who live above the fog
in public duty and private thinking.¹⁹

Finally, if we are to speed up the coming of the new age we must have the moral courage to stand up and protest against injustice wherever we find it. Wherever we find segregation we must have the fortitude to passively resist it. I realize that

19. Josiah Gilbert Holland, "Wanted" (1872). King substitutes "leaders" where Holland used "men" and omits the last five lines, but otherwise King recites the original accurately. On the verso of the page on which this poem appears King wrote, "The ~~issue~~ civil rights issue is not some evanescent ephemeral domestic issue which politicians can; it is an eternal moral issue which may well determine the destiny of our nation in the ideological struggle with communism. The executive branch of the government is all too silent and apipthetic. The legislative branch is all too evasive and hypo-critical."

3 Dec 1956 this will mean suffering and sacrifice. It might even mean going to jail. If such is the case we must be willing to fill up the jail houses of the South. It might even mean physical death. But if physical death is the price that some must pay to free their children from a permanent life of psychological death, then nothing could be more honorable.²⁰ Once more it might well turn out that the blood of the martyr will be the seed of the tabernacle of freedom.

Someone will ask, how will we face the acts of cruelty and violence that might come as results of our standing up for justice? What will be our defense? Certainly it must not be retaliatory violence. We must find our defense in the amazing power of unity and courage that we have demonstrated in Montgomery. Our defense is to meet every act of violence toward an individual Negro with the facts that there are thousands of others who will present themselves in his place as potential victims. Every time one school teacher is fired for standing up courageously for justice, it must be faced with the fact that there are four thousand more to be fired. If the oppressors bomb the home of one Negro for his courage, this must be met with the fact that they must be required to bomb the homes of fifty thousand more Negroes. This dynamic unity, this amazing self-respect, this willingness to suffer, and this refusal to hit back will soon cause the oppressor to become ashamed of his own methods. He will be forced to stand before the world and his God splattered with the blood and reeking with the stench of his Negro brother.

There is nothing in all the world greater than freedom. It is worth paying for; it is worth losing a job; it is worth going to jail for. I would rather be a free pauper than a rich slave. I would rather die in abject poverty with my convictions than live in inordinate riches with the lack of self respect. Once more every Negro must be able to cry out with his forefathers: "Before I'll be a slave, I'll be buried in my grave and go home to my Father and be saved."²¹

If we will join together in doing all of these things we will be able to speed up the coming of the new world—a new world in which men will live together as brothers; a world in which men will beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning-hooks;²² a world in which men will no longer take necessities from the masses to give luxuries to the classes; a world in which all men will respect the dignity and worth of all human personality. Then we will be able to sing from the great tradition of our nation:

"My country 'tis of thee, sweet land of liberty of thee I sing, Land where my fathers died, Land of the Pilgrims pride, From every mountain side, Let freedom ring."

This must become literally true. Freedom must ring from every mountain side. Yes, let it ring from the snow-capped Rockies of Colorado, from the prodigious hill tops of New Hampshire, from the mighty Alleghenies of Pennsylvania, from the curvaceous slopes of California. But not only that. Let Freedom ring from every mountain side—from every mole hill in Mississippi, from Stone Mountain

20. In a later speech King attributed this statement to Kenneth Clark (see "Desegregation and the Future," 15 December 1956, p. 478 in this volume).

21. King quotes a Negro spiritual, "Oh Freedom."

22. Isaiah 2:4.

of Georgia, from Lookout Mountain of Tennessee, yes, and from every hill and mountain of Alabama. From every mountain side let freedom ring.²³ When this day finally comes “The morning stars will sing together and the suns of God will shout for joy.”²⁴

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23. King may have adapted these seven sentences from Archibald J. Carey, Jr., who used a similar passage in his address to the 1952 Republican National Convention. Carey recited the song “My Country 'Tis of Thee” and then continued: “That’s exactly what we mean—from every mountain side, let freedom ring. Not only from the Green Mountains and the White Mountains of Vermont and New Hampshire; not only from the Catskills of New York; but from the Ozarks in Arkansas, from the Stone Mountain in Georgia, from the Great Smokies of Tennessee and from the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia—Not only for the minorities of the United States, but for the persecuted of Europe, for the rejected of Asia, for the disfranchised of South Africa and for the disinherited of all the earth—may the Republican Party, under God, from every mountain side, LET FREEDOM RING!” (Carey, “Address to the Republican National Convention,” 8 July 1952, AJC-ICHi).

24. Job 38:7.