To Bernard Shanley  
16 May 1957  

[Montgomery, Ala.]

On the eve of the Prayer Pilgrimage to Washington, D.C., King writes Shanley, Eisenhower's appointment secretary, to request a meeting with the president. White House aides deliberated the matter and Chief of Staff Sherman Adams concluded that "the President should see [King], probably after Congress adjourns." Presidential assistant Maxwell Rabb called King in New York to explain that his visit "would be disastrous for the Civil Rights Bill" and "would give just cause for complaint by the Governors and the Attorneys General of the Southern States who had previously asked for permission to visit with the President and discuss segregation issues." Rabb told King he should "bide his time and we would set an appointment in about a month or so." In a White House memorandum he reported that King "was agreeable and said he would not urge publicly for the appointment."4

Three weeks later, A. Philip Randolph renewed his request for a presidential audience with sixteen black leaders.5 A 20 June memorandum from Rabb noted the support of other Eisenhower aides for this larger meeting, stating that "the only question is one of the President's personal preference as to timing for him as to whether he wants to do it."4 Eisenhower met with King, Wilkins, Randolph, and Lester Granger of the Urban League on 23 June 1957.

Mr. Bernard Shanley  
The White House  
Washington, D.C.

Dear Mr. Shanley:

For quite some time now I have felt the need of talking with President Eisenhower concerning some of the problems which we confront in the South during this period of transition. As President of The Montgomery Improvement Association (Montgomery, Alabama) and Chairman of the Southern Negro Leadership Conference I have had firsthand contact with the major problems of the South. My close associates all over the South and influential persons over the country have urged me to seek a conference with the President as early as possible. I am certain that many vital and helpful things could arise out of such a conference. If

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1. Bernard Michael Shanley III (1903–1992), born in Newark, New Jersey, received his B.A. (1925) from Columbia University and LL.B. (1928) from Fordham University. After campaigning for Eisenhower in 1952, he was appointed White House special counsel; he became the president's appointment secretary in 1955.
2. Rabb, Memo for the Files, and Rabb to Shanley, both dated 23 May 1957.
3. Randolph to Eisenhower, 10 June 1957.
4. Presidential aide E. Frederic Morrow, responding to a request from Adams for a memorandum on the issue, wrote on 4 June: "I feel the time is ripe for the President to see two or three outstanding Negro leaders... [Black citizens'] present feeling is that their acknowledged leadership is being ignored, snubbed, and belittled by the President and his staff."
16 May 1957

it does nothing else, it would at least give persons of goodwill in general and Negro Americans in particular a feeling that the White House is willing to listen sympathetically to the problems which we confront.

In the light of the above I would like to request an appointment with the President at his earliest convenience. It is true that I have been invited to Washington to confer with Vice President Nixon, and this I plan to do; but it seems to me that my conversation with Vice President Nixon can in no way substitute for the necessity of my talking directly with the head of our great government. I hope that an appointment with the President can be worked out at the same time that I come to Washington to see Vice President Nixon. I have suggested the following alternative dates to Mr. Nixon: May 24, June 7, June 13 or 14. I realize that the President's schedule is always extremely crowded, but conditions in the South make it imperative for me to make such a request. I do hope it will be possible for me to see the President on one of the above mentioned dates. Please give this every possible consideration.

Very sincerely yours,
Martin Luther King, Jr.,
Minister

MLKmlb

TLC. MLKP-MBU: Box 71.

To M. C. Williams

16 May 1957
[Montgomery, Ala.]

In April, Williams, executive secretary of Tallahassee's Inter-Civic Council (ICC), which was formed in May 1956 to manage a boycott of city buses, invited King to address that organization's first anniversary observance. On 7 May, Williams requested a loan from the MIA to underwrite the cost of the event. King denies the request because the MIA's "financial position is too precarious at this time." On 29 May, King addressed the institute in Tallahassee.

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2. According to the MIA financial report of 31 May 1957, the organization had $98,219 in assets, of which over three-quarters was considered earmarked.