In March 1957 the National Newspaper Publishers Association (NNPA) awarded King the Russwurm Award for his "wise and unflinching leadership in the fight against racial segregation and for his contribution of a third force, non-violence, to the arsenal of democracy." NNPA board member and Louisville Defender editor Frank L. Stanley wrote King on 17 December requesting that he record a statement about the importance of the black press for a radio broadcast during Negro Newspaper Week in March: "We are not out to blow our own horn. We would much prefer for you to point up briefly the task before every force in this all-out fight—the church—the press—the government." King's secretary Maude Ballou sent Stanley a tape recording of this message on 18 February. Radio stations serving African-American communities played King's statement during the week of 16 March.

When future historians characterize the twentieth century they will, I believe, describe it as the era when the common people the world over revolted for social, economic and political freedom. Long after the Soviet-American power struggle is solved, long after man has adjusted to the atomic age and even after the problems of automation have been dealt with, our age will be remembered as the period when ordinary men demanded to live with dignity and freedom.

All Asia has won freedom or is in turmoil. From Algeria to the Cape of Good Hope Africa is aflame with the cry, "Freedom." In Eastern Europe and in the middle east the last vestiges of fudalism and totalitarianism are being undermined by popular uprisings. There is no area of the globe where men accept an unjust status quo.

The struggle of the American Negro for first class citizenship is part of this world wide struggle. First, because the Negro is a part of the American heritage of justice and freedom but also because he has been caught up in the world revolt against tyranny.

When one pauses to examine the internal forces that have developed the Negro's conscienceness and dignity, when one thinks of the forces that have cemented the Negro community, one immediately thinks of the Negro Press. Perhaps, more than any other single force it has devoted itself to the achievements, ambitions, hopes and even the failures of the Negro people. It has interpreted the Negro to the American people and to the world. It has brought the American people and the world to Negroes in cities, towns, plantations and cotton fields.

It has become angry for people who dare not express anger themselves. It has


2. King's schedule delayed his recording the message until mid-February (see Stanley to King, 25 January 1958, and King to Stanley, 29 January 1958).
cried for Negroes when the hurt was so great that tears could not be shed. It has asked the Negro to analyze himself, organize himself, and realize his ambitions. It has been a crusading press and that crusade has, from its beginning in 1827, been the cry "Freedom". Gunnar Myrdal, the great sociologist, in his study, The American Dilemma stated that the Negro press is perhaps the most powerful single factor in shaping the ideas and actions of Negro America.5

But perhaps the greatest contribution of the Negro press is this: it is one major voice of the conscience of our nation. The 205 journals of Negro opinions say every day to the American people "the struggle for democracy is not yet done. America is not yet America." And this is of vital importance for there are millions of Americans who know American Negroes only through their press.

To the degree that the Negro Press can continue to play this role, its greatest contribution is not to the Negro really, but rather to America which cannot be at peace with itself until all men are free.

Today the American Negro is determined to win freedom. Not only because it is his right but because he has a duty to the nation to relieve it of the embarrassment democracy faces in the great struggle for the minds and hearts of men all over the world. Since the Negro press has played so important a role in this unfinished business of democracy, I am sure that all men of good will, Negro and white, join me in urging the Negro Press to continue its uncompromising efforts to make our beloved nation a place in which all men can live in the security that they will be judged as individuals, governed under just law and free to develop their personalities in keeping with their capabilities.

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3. Myrdal wrote that the black press "has rightly been characterized as 'the greatest single power in the Negro race'" (An American Dilemma [New York: Harper & Brothers, 1944], p. 924).

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Interview at Bennett College

[11 February 1958]
Greensboro, N.C.

On 11 February King delivered "A Realistic Look at Race Relations" to an over-packed audience at Bennett College's Annie Merner Pfeiffer Chapel.1 In his address King stressed the importance of the ballot, while noting the limitations of the two major political parties. "I'm not here to tell you how to vote," he said. "That isn't my concern. I'm not a politician. I have no political ambitions. I don't think the Republican party

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1. King's address was sponsored by the Greensboro branch of the NAACP, which struggled to find a location for his appearance until Willa Player, president of Bennett College, invited King to speak at the school (Willa Player, Interview by William H. Chafe, 1979; for further discussion of King's address see Introduction, p. 38).