[Interviewer 3:] Just one other question. What has been your greatest moment of fear? I think it would be unfair to ask you if you've ever been afraid.

[King:] Oh [laughter] sure. I don't know what I would say has been my greatest moment of fear.

[Interviewer 3:] Or would it have been a continuing process?

[King:] I would say that during the early, in the month of January 1956, when the threats had risen to almost astronomical proportions—that is, thirty and forty threats a day.

[Interviewer 3:] Fan mail.

[King:] Well not only the mail, but telephone calls, and I came to a point in that period that I actually got afraid. After that I believe there were very few moments that I actually got afraid because I had girded myself for the things ahead which I hadn't done at that time. I had the illusion in the beginning that, number one, Montgomery is a pretty good size town and it had not been known as a violent community. So I just didn't think that there would be any violence. I said that from the beginning, that we would have no violence in Montgomery. I didn't think we'd get many threats. So I started out with an illusion and that's why I think I was a little more fearful in the beginning than I was later. Because I had gone through the process of adjusting to the inevitable later and I had certain religious experiences that gave me something within to confront all of these threats that later came.

[Interviewer 4:] Are you a native of Alabama?

[King:] No, I'm a native of Atlanta, Atlanta, Georgia. [Crowd:] (I see, I'm with you Doctor) Yes. Very glad. (And I'll be with you tonight) Good, good. (Thank you so much)

At. BCC-NcGB.

Address Delivered at a Meeting Launching the SCLC Crusade for Citizenship at Greater Bethel AME Church

12 February 1958
Miami, Fla.

On the anniversary of Abraham Lincoln's birth, SCLC held simultaneous mass meetings in twenty-one southern cities, launching its campaign to double the number of black registered voters in the South. Following an introduction by Pastor S. A. Cousin, King delivers this address to an "overflow audience" at Miami's Greater Bethel AME Church.¹

¹ Bayard Rustin worked on at least two drafts of this address; several portions, including paragraphs three, seven, eight, eleven, seventeen, nineteen, and twenty, appear largely as Rustin handwrote them (see King, Drafts, "Address at the Meeting Launching the Crusade for Citizenship," 12 February 1958; see also Greater Bethel AME Church, Program, Crusade for Citizenship, 12 Feb-
King compares the Crusade for Citizenship to the efforts of women and poor whites to obtain the franchise. He also calls on the federal government to use its powers to convince southern public officials to adhere to the Constitution by holding free elections: "We have the duty to remove from political domination a small minority that cripples the economic and social institutions of our nation and thereby degrades and [impoveryishes] everyone."2 The extant portion of King's address is published below.

The history of our nation is the history of a long and tireless effort to broaden and to increase the franchise of American citizens. At the very birth of our nation, a great struggle had to be made to secure the ballot for people who did not own property. Even among the founding fathers there were men who felt that only those who owned property should have the right to vote. Over this issue a mighty struggle took place. When, after many long years, this fight was successfully won, a great effort was made by women seeking to obtain the franchise. Again after weary decades of agitation, the glorious fight for women's suffrage succeeded and the 19th Amendment to the Constitution opened a new chapter in the lives of women and in the life of our nation.

Thus, we see that from 1789 to 1920 disenfranchised Americans fought and won their basic right to vote. However, for the Negroes of the South, there was still no ballot. Whether they owned property or were penniless, whether male or female, these American victories in the extension of Democracy did not affect them.

But this history does provide a profound lesson for the voteless Negroes. It teaches us how a struggle is won. We see that the poor men of 1776 did not accept disenfranchisement without protest. In a legal manner, these pioneers fought as hard for the vote as they had fought as minute men at Lexington and Concord. They fought; they did not get weary; and they finally won citizenship status for themselves and for their children.

Later when women decided the time had come for them to vote, they were far from submissive or silent. They cried out in the halls of government. They agitated in their homes. They protested in the streets. And they were jailed. But they pressed on. Their voices were vigorous, even strident, but they were always effective. Through their courage, their steadfastness, their unity and their willingness to sacrifice, they won the right to vote.

From these women we have learned a great lesson of how social change takes place through struggle. In this same tradition of determination, of confidence in the justice of a cause, Negroes must now demand the right to vote. And these qualities of courage, perserverence, unity, sacrifice, plus a nonviolence of spirit are the weapons we must depend upon if we are to vote with freedom.

And vote we must. For the inability of Negroes to vote is not only unjust, it is a very real embarassment to our nation which we love and must protect. For a number of years I have been reading with great interest of the tireless and in-

1. Portions of the speech were published as "Who Speaks for the South?" Liberation 3 (March 1958): 13-14.
2. Portions of the speech were published as "Who Speaks for the South?" Liberation 3 (March 1958): 13-14.

Sylvester Alvin Cousin was pastor of Greater Bethel AME Church from 1957 to 1968.
defatigable effort of our Secretary of State, Mr. Dulles, to obtain free election in
Germany. Free elections in Europe are the sine qua non, a most important part,
of our foreign policy. And I sincerely hope that people the world over shall live
under governments where elections can be free.

However, I feel, and I know you feel, that the American government must be-
gen the struggle for democracy at home. Therefore, on behalf of the millions of
disenfranchised American citizens, I earnestly invite and call upon the United
States Government to use the constitutional power it has to convince the gover-
nors and legislators of Georgia, South Carolina, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana
and other Southern states to adhere to the United States constitution. They
should convince these governors and legislators to hold free elections.

The advocacy of free elections in Europe by American officials is hypocrisy
when free elections are not held in great sections of America. To Negro Ameri-
cans it is ironic to be governed, to be taxed, to be given orders, but to have no
representation in a nation that would defend the right to vote abroad. We have a
duty to deliver our nation from this snare and this delusion.

Let us make our intentions crystal clear. We must and we will be free. We want
freedom now. We want the right to vote now. We do not want freedom fed to us
in teaspoons over another 150 years. Under God we were born free. Misguided
men robbed us of our freedom. We want it back, we would keep it forever. This is
not idle chatter, for we know that sacrifice is involved, that brutality will be faced,
that savage conduct will need to be endured, that slick trickery will need to be
overcome, but we are resolutely prepared for all of this. We are prepared to meet
whatever comes with love, with firmness and with unyielding nonviolence. We are
prepared to press on unceasingly and prestoently, to obtain our birthright and
to hand it down to our children and to their children's children.

Already this struggle has had its sacred martyrs: The Reverend George Wash-
ington Lee shot and killed in Mississippi; Mr. and Mrs. Harry Moore, bombed
and murdered here in Florida; Emmett Till, a mere boy, unqualified to vote, but seeming-
ly used as a victim to terrorize Negro citizens and keep them from the poles. While the blame for the grisly mutilation of Till has been placed upon two cruel
men, the ultimate responsibility for this and other tragic events must rest with the
American people themselves. It rests with all of us, black and white, who call our-
selves civilized men. For democracy demands responsibility, courage, and the
will-to-freedom from all men.

To long have we, all of us, with shameless indifference permitted the denial of
the right to vote. White Southerners of goodwill have turned their heads from in-
timidation and closed their eyes on physical violence. On the other hand, Negroes,
all too often, have been disorganized and apathetic in areas where the polls are
open to all. In the past, apathy, by Negro or white, was a moral failure. Today, ap-

3. As secretary of state (1953–1959), John Foster Dulles was a major architect of United States for-
eign policy during the Eisenhower administration.
4. Lee, a NAACP organizer, was killed in 1955 while working for black voter registration in Bel-
zoni, Mississippi. Harry Tyson Moore was a Florida NAACP activist; he and his wife, Harriet, were
killed when a bomb shattered their house on Christmas Day, 1951.
athy is a form of moral and political suicide. For American denial of freedom affects the struggle for the loyalty of men's minds and hearts throughout the world.

If a tragic global crisis is to be avoided, if America is to meet the challenge of our atomic age—then millions of our people, Negro and white, must be given the right freely to participate in the political life of our nation. If democracy is to win its rightful place throughout the world, millions of people, Negro and white, must stand before the world as examples of democracy in action, not as voteless victims of the denial and corruption of our heritage.

There is blood on the hands of those who halt the progress of our nation and frustrate the advancement of its people by coercion and violence. But despite this, it is our duty to pray for those who mistreat us. We must pray for a change of attitude in all those who violate human dignity and who rob men, women and little children of human decency. We must pray for ourselves that we shall have the strength to move forward each day, knowing that our every act can emancipate us and can add compassion to the heart of our nation. We must pray for the power that comes from loving our neighbor as we love ourselves.

This is a noble struggle in which every person confronts a personal challenge, in which every person has concrete deeds to perform. And we must approach the right to vote in full knowledge that when we have accomplished it we shall have established democracy in a wasteland of tyranny just as our founding fathers created the concept of a free nation and electrified a dark and tyranny-ridden world in 1776. Because all men are one, the revolution for American freedom affected the entire world. In the same manner, freedom for the American Negro will affect the lives of all the people in the South for the better, just as the absence of Negro freedom has affected the lives of all Americans for the worse. This can be seen from the tragic consequences, the insecurities, that have emerged from the disenfranchisement of Negroes in the South.

The ghastly results have not been borne alone by the Negro. Poor white men, women and children, bearing the scars of ignorance, deprivation, and poverty, are evidence of the fact that harm to one is injury to all. They, too, are victims of the one-party system that has developed in the South, a system that denies free political choice and real political expression to millions of white voters. With a limited electorate capable of being manipulated, reactionary men gained access to the highest legislative bodies of government. Today, because the Negro cannot vote, Congress is dominated by Southern Senators and representatives who are not elected in a fair nor in a legal manner. The strategic position of these men, as chairmen of the most important committees in House and Senate, enable them to filibuster and to bottle up legislation urgently needed for the economic and social welfare of all Americans, Negro and white. Hence, it may clearly be seen that it is not the Negro alone who suffers but the nation as a whole.

Come what may, we must hold fast to hope. Hope, love and non-violent resistance must become the cornerstone of our movement, for the struggle ahead may be long and tedious. But the rewards are worth whatever we must endure. And we must struggle on, knowing that when the Southern Negro has won the right to vote, the enforcement of law and the spirit of our communities will not rest the racists and with angry mobs, but with the Southern people of good will.

Governor Griffin, who recently called for a poll tax to reduce the Negro vote in Georgia, Senator Eastland, and men who hold their views do not, I am thoroughly
confident, speak for the South. They speak only for a willful but vocal minority. This group is not the South. I believe that voices like those of Miss Lillian E. Smith of Georgia, Mr. Harry Ashmore of Arkansas, and the ever growing list of white Christian ministers such as the group that recently issued a statement in Atlanta, Georgia—these voices represent the true and basic sentiments of Millions of Southerners, whose voices are yet unheard, whose course is yet unclear and whose courageous acts are yet unseen.

In the name of God, in the interest of human dignity and for the cause of democracy, I appeal to these millions to gird their courage, to speak out and to act on their basic convictions. In their hearts the white Southerners know the loyalty, the courage and the democratic responsibility of the Negro people. Beyond this, they know that we are dedicated to non-violence. Just as I have urged Negroes to face the calculated risk involved in resisting injustice non-violently, I implore the white Southerner of goodwill to face the calculated risk that working openly for justice and freedom demand.

We Southerners, Negro and white, must no longer permit our nation and our heritage to be dishonored before the world. And the South should know that the effort of Negroes to vote is not merely a matter of exercising rights guaranteed by the United States constitution. The question is beyond rights. We have a duty to perform. We have a moral obligation to carry out. We have the duty to remove from political domination a small minority that cripples the economic and social institutions of our nation and thereby degrades and impovishes everyone.

But beyond this, it is our duty to struggle by non-violence for justice, because we are opposed to all injustices, wherever it exists, first of all, in ourselves.

TD. MLKP-MBU: Box 2.

5. Samuel Marvin Griffin was elected governor of Georgia in 1954. Just prior to the launching of the Crusade, Griffin released a letter claiming that SCLC’s plans to register black voters would place the state “under complete domination of the NAACP and those fuzzy-headed liberals who are out to completely destroy the Georgia way of life.” Griffin proposed the introduction of a poll tax and recommended that voter registration records be purged every two years “to keep from adding thousands of ineligible Negroes each year” (“Does This Man Speak for the South?” Liberation 3 [March 1958]: 14).

6. Georgia author Lillian Smith was active in the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) and the Southern Conference for Human Welfare. Harry S. Ashmore was editor of the Arkansas Gazette and won a Pulitzer Prize for his editorials on the Little Rock desegregation crisis. In November 1957 eighty white Protestant ministers from Atlanta issued what became known as the “Ministers’ Manifesto,” a statement on race relations that called for obedience to the law and the extension of “full privileges of first class citizenship” to black people (“Text of Ministers’ Racial Statement,” Atlanta Journal Constitution, 3 November 1957).

To Eleanor Roosevelt

19 February 1958

[Montgomery, Ala.]