The Kelseys and the Kings must yet get together for a relaxed movement. Perhaps, there will soon be a chance when you and the madam can spend a night here rather than in a New York hotel. This is a commuter town, you know.

With best wishes and kindest personal regards, I am

Most sincerely yours,

[signed] George
George D. Kelsey
GDK/Ik

TLS. MLKP-MBU: Box 87A.

Telephone Conversation with Rex Thomas

[4 April 1958]
[Montgomery, Ala.]

Upon returning to Montgomery on 4 April, King learned that a leaflet had been circulating throughout the city calling for a demonstration to protest the recent execution of a young black man at Montgomery’s Kilby State Prison.1 During the following conversation with Associated Press Alabama correspondent Rex Thomas, King denies rumors of the MIA’s involvement, though he later endorsed the Easter Sunday protest and urged other ministers to attend to give “guidance to it and see that it doesn’t get out of hand.”2 The author of this transcript is unknown.

Thomas: Dr. King I want to tell you right away that I have your unlisted telephone number at home. I don’t have it written down, I have it in my head and I think I got it from the New York boys. I have not given it out to anyone and won’t; I am being discreet about it. Rev. Abernathy said the demonstration was NOT being sponsored by the M.I.A.

King: O, yes . . . well, that’s all right

1. Announcement of meeting protesting electrocution of Jeremiah Reeves, 3 April 1958. When twenty-two-year-old Reeves died in the electric chair on 28 March, it ended a legal battle that began in 1952 when Alabama officials charged him with rape, assault, and robbery in connection with several attacks on white Montgomery women. Reeves’s defenders maintained that the confession he gave and later retracted was coerced. After a two-day trial, the jury deliberated thirty-four minutes before finding Reeves guilty on one count of rape and sentencing him to death. NAACP attorneys appealed the verdict and in 1954 the U.S. Supreme Court set aside the conviction and ordered a new trial which, like the first, lasted two days and resulted in a sentence of death. A second appeal to the Supreme Court failed (Reeves v. State of Alabama, 348 U.S. 891 [1954]; Reeves v. State of Alabama, 355 U.S. 368 [1958]).

2. “Officials Plan No Action To Halt Rally By Negroes,” Montgomery Advertiser, 5 April 1958. Shortly after his arrival in Montgomery in 1954, King learned of Reeves through his involvement with the local NAACP, which had made the case its major focus (see Rosa Parks, Minutes, NAACP Montgomery branch meeting, 9 January 1955). Rex Newton Thomas (1914–1991), born in St. Joseph, Missouri, was a longtime reporter who covered such events as the Montgomery bus boycott, the Selma-to-Montgomery voting rights marches, and the presidential campaigns of George Wallace.
Thomas: Some people are trying to stop the meeting that is to be held Sunday and there are those who think that stopping it at this particular time would not be wise.

King: I just got into town this morning . . . I have not had a chance to talk with the people about it so that I can't make a statement at this time. . . . I'll just have to look into it a little more . . . it is impossible for me to do it right at this point, but I plan to go into it later on today. However, I plan to look into it later on today. . . . Rev. Abernathy was right in saying it was not sponsored by the M.I.A.

Thomas: The feeling is that some people are going to try to stop it. I would not care to say who they are. . . .

King: Who are these people whom you say do not want it. . . want to stop it?

Thomas: As I said, I wouldn't care to mention their names. But they say they do not know who is sponsoring the meeting and they are suspicious of it. They know they M.I.A. is not doing it so they are suspicious.

King: Who are they?

Thomas: In all fairness, I do not want to mention their names. They mention police brutality and that might be a sore spot . . . they feel that this might not be the right approach. . . . since you are the sort of recognized spokesman, if you go into the thing, I would appreciate it if you will let me know what you find out.

King: I will go into the thing later today.

Thomas: You can contact me at home. . . . I could tell that the thing was not yours . . . I read it and I know the thing was not put out by you.

King: I will look into it and give you a ring.

Thomas: Thank you

King: All right

“Statement Delivered at the Prayer Pilgrimage Protesting the Electrocution of Jeremiah Reeves”

6 April 1958
Montgomery, Ala.

Shortly after 2 p.m. on Easter Sunday, King led fifteen black ministers on a one-block procession from Dexter Church to the state capitol, where he addressed a crowd of two thousand people.¹

¹ This document, which appears in all capital letters in its original form, has been standardized for readability. Before King’s address, audience members read in unison from a leaflet that “extolled