From Lillian Eugenia Smith

14 August 1958
Clayton, Ga.

Smith praises King’s book and indicates that she had just sent a review to the Saturday Review. On 23 January 1959 King thanked Smith: “Of all the reviews that I have read on Stride Toward Freedom, I still consider yours the best. I will keep it among my most cherished possessions.”

Dear Mr. King:

It was good to hear from you. I read your book long ago and was told by Harpers that they are using a blurb from me on the dust cover. I am also reviewing the book for Saturday Review and my review went off on Monday of this week.

Of course I like the book very much indeed. I gave it a very enthusiastic review in the Saturday Review and tried to make it sound so interesting that the intelligent reader would feel that he had to read it. The big thing to do in a review, is, from my point of view as an author, to take the results of these reviews, to make the reader want to read it. I praised your book highly; I also praised you highly; but I tried, also, to give the reader a feeling about the book, to excite his curiosity and his good impulses. I led off by saying, “This is the most interesting book that has come out of the current racial situation.” (etc.) I also told something of your intellectual interests. I did a 750 word review and I hope they won’t cut it or mangle it in any way. They asked me for from 600 to 800 words.

Under these circumstances, since I am doing the review for a national magazine, I do not think it would perhaps be the wise thing to ask the Los Angeles Times to let me do it. Also, I am working day and night on my novel trying to meet my October deadline and am very afraid that I cannot, at present, save by word of mouth, do more. If I can think of an important national editor who will listen to me instead of to the “moderates” (whom you were a bit too easy on, don’t you think?) I shall drop him a note and tell him your book is a very important one. For readers, it is important that the New York Times give it a good review and in an important place in the paper. But an author cannot urge a book editor to do this: it only irritates. But I can—as a reader who knows her way around in this racial complex. And if I can do it where it will help, I shall certainly drop a word in as tactful a way as possible. I think, from my notes exchanged with Harpers, that they are going to try to push your book quite a bit—more than they had at first expected to. I certainly hope they will.

1. In her review Smith wrote that Stride Toward Freedom would “become a classic story—as has Gandhi’s salt march—of man demanding justice and discovering that justice first begins in his own heart” (“And Suddenly Something Happened,” Saturday Review 41 [20 September 1958]: 21).
2. Smith’s novel One Hour was published in 1959.
I will drop your [promotion] editor a note and tell him that small ads ought to bring in fine results from such magazines as The Progressive, The Christian Century, The New Leader, The New Republic and the F.O.R. magazine. These small ads will bring the book to the attention of a group of readers who will want to read your book but who may not, otherwise, hear of it.

With every wish for your book’s success and for yours and your wife’s welfare and happiness—and do come to see me on the mountain, won’t you?

Sincerely yours,

[signed] Lillian Smith

TLS. MLKP-MBU: Box 84.

To L. H. Holmes

15 August 1958

[Montgomery, Ala.]

On 25 July, Clara Cochran and L. H. Holmes, leaders of a group of African-American homeowners known as the Albert Street Club, wrote to King requesting financial assistance to mount a legal challenge to the City of Eufaula’s plans to condemn and demolish black-owned homes in the Flake Hill community. The black residents charged that city officials planned to relocate them outside the school district boundaries to prevent the integration of a white high school: “We have lived in this area for over fifty years. Now the White people want to take our community, redevelop it with White homes, an extension of the White school and a White park.”

Rev. L. H. Holmes, President
The Albert Street Club
324 Albert Street
Eufaula, Alabama

Dear Rev. Holmes:

On returning to the office I found your letter of July 25, on my desk. I was very sorry to hear of the misfortunes that the Negroes of Eufaula, Alabama are confronting at the present time from the Eufaula Housing Authority. You certainly have a right to carry your complaints to the highest court of the land. I have been watching the developments in this case since I returned to the state and was sorry

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1. The Albert Street Club was the first of several block clubs in Flake Hill to organize against the city’s plans. Clara Cochran (1916–) was born in Eufaula, Alabama, and worked as a nurse at Barbour County Hospital at the time of the founding of the Albert Street Club. She served as the organization’s secretary. L. H. Holmes (1887–1973), born in Barbour County, served as a circuit preacher for several AME churches in southeast Alabama. He was president of the Albert Street Club.