this, for after all, what you are doing for me requires a great deal of time and technical knowledge. 

Yours very truly,
Martin

Enclosures

TLC. MLKP-MBU: Box 2.

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4. In an 8 January 1959 reply, Levison declined King's offer of pay: "The liberation struggle is the most positive and rewarding area of work anyone could experience... that is payment enough for me and very seriously I am indebted to you, not you to me."

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The Martin Luther King, Jr. Papers Project

To Royce Kershaw

17 December 1958
[Montgomery, Ala.]

In response to the MIA's donation of $20,000 toward the building of a new Negro branch of the YMCA, Kershaw, the Montgomery YMCA president, wrote King on 13 December asking that he sign a document acknowledging that the organization "is and will remain a segregated institution." King sent copies of the letter and the reply printed below to YMCA officials in Atlanta and New York asking for their "thinking on this matter." On 19 December Kershaw accepted the MIA contribution, noting that "after digesting" King's reply he believed the donation was made "with full realization by you and your organization of the policies and aims of the Montgomery YMCA."

Dear Mr. Kershaw:

We confess that your letter of December 13, was shocking to us. It was almost unbelievable that you would ask a contributor to sign a statement endorsing the policy of racial segregation before accepting his gift.

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1. Royce Kershaw (1898–1971) was born in Renfroe, Alabama. After attending the University of Virginia (1910–21) and working two years as superintendent in his father's Birmingham company, Kershaw became president of the Kershaw Manufacturing Co. in Montgomery.

2. King, Form letter to YMCA directors, 18 December 1958. In a 22 December reply, Charles L. Wharton, a southern YMCA official, acknowledged that King "might construe the last paragraph to mean that they were asking you to endorse the principle of segregation." But, he explained, Kershaw only intended "to make certain that you and the responsible officers... are under no false impressions about the plans" for the new facility. Wharton wrote King again on 29 December complaining that King had contacted national YMCA officials.

3. Responding to King's 18 December letter, New York YMCA official Herbert P. Lansdale asserted that Kershaw's 19 December letter "would appear to put the acceptance of the gift... in a new and quite different light." He expressed his hope that the MIA's donation "soon will be at the service of your Montgomery youth by helping provide improved YM.C.A. facilities for them" (Lansdale to King, 2 January 1959).
Please know that we made our offering of twenty thousand dollars (20,000.00) at a great sacrifice out of our limited financial resources. We did this only because of our genuine concern for the welfare of the community. We made this gift sincerely and without any strings attached.

It goes without saying that we are aware of the policies of the local YMCA, as well as the national organization. Likewise, we assume that the policies and purposes of our organization are also public information. It is unfortunate indeed that the Board of the YMCA injected the segregation issue into this situation. This question never needed to enter the equation. The request for me to sign a statement endorsing segregation is both unnecessary and unreasonable.

Completely apart from this contribution, perhaps I should make clear my own position on the issue of segregation. I have made it clear on many occasions that the festering sore of segregation debilitates the white man as well as the Negro, and that we will never come to our full economic, political and moral maturity until this system is removed. However, I have asked God to keep me from becoming bitter in seeking to change this system. I have attempted to love and understand my white brothers who sincerely believe in the constitutional, sociological and moral validity of segregation, realizing that they were taught this from their birth and that mores do not change overnight. This is my sincere conviction. Now you request that I, on behalf of the Montgomery Improvement Association, sign a statement endorsing segregation. I cannot in all good conscience do this.

All along, we had thought that the main purpose of your fund raising campaign was to help meet the needs of our boys and girls which otherwise might not be met. Accordingly, we trust that you will not raise false issues that would stand as obstacles in the way of a better and more wholesome life for these children and young people of our city.

The Executive Board of the Montgomery Improvement Association joins me in the prayer that you will receive this letter in the Christian spirit in which it is sent. Please let us hear from you at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely yours,
Martin Luther King, Jr., President
The Montgomery Improvement Association, Inc.
MLK:mlb

To Richard Bartlett Gregg

18 December 1958
[Montgomery, Ala.]