Shortly after the September 1958 publication of Stride Toward Freedom, King inscribed a copy for theologian Reinhold Niebuhr: “In appreciation for your genuine good-will, your great prophetic vision, your creative contribution to the world of ideas, and your unswerving devotion to the ideals of freedom and justice.”¹ In Stride King wrote that Niebuhr’s work had greatly influenced his own theology, though he disagreed with Niebuhr’s critique of pacifism.²

The Rev. Martin Luther King
Dexter Avenue Baptist Church
Montgomery, Alabama.

My dear friend Martin Luther King,

During the summer when I was absent in Princeton, New Jersey, you were good enough to send me your splendid book “Stride toward Freedom” with a very generous inscription.³ I did not see this book until I returned because no books were forwarded to me and my secretary could not acknowledge it because she did not know your address. Indeed I do not know it either but I am taking the chance of sending it to your church. I want to say how grateful I am for the book and for the inscription and for the splendid example which you have given both to your people and to the Christian people of the nation. Incidentally I read your book with great enthusiasm before you sent me the inscribed copy, but I am just as well pleased to have an inscribed copy and to give the other copy to my son.⁴

¹. King, Inscription to Reinhold Niebuhr, November 1958.
³. Niebuhr, a professor at Union Theological Seminary in New York, was a visiting scholar at the Institute for Advanced Study in 1958.
⁴. Niebuhr refers to his son Christopher.
With cordial personal regards and best wishes for the new year.

Sincerely yours,
[signed]
Reinhold Niebuhr.

TLS. MLKP-MBU: Box 84.

From Stanley D. Levison

8 January 1959
New York, N.Y.

In December 1956 King met New York attorney Stanley Levison, who would become one of his primary legal, financial, and tactical advisors. In a 15 December 1958 letter, King invited Levison to submit a bill “for all of the things that you are doing to lessen my load and also to save me money.” In this reply Levison explains that his participation in the struggle for civil rights “is payment enough,” and adds: “I am indebted to you, not you to me.” King replied on 12 January.

Dear Martin:

Between holidays, colds, and Youth Marching for 1959, I’ve been delayed in writing you about several matters, apart from those Bayard reports on to you.2

First, in your last letter you suggested that you should pay me for handling your taxes, the book, etc. It does you credit to make such a thoughtful offer but it is out of the question. I could wax philosophical on this subject at length but instead I’ll put it simply. My skills to which you refer were acquired not only in a cloistered academic environment, but also in the commercial jungle where more violence in varied forms occurs daily than is found on many a battlefront. Although our culture approves, and even honors, these practices, to me they were always abhorrent. Hence, I looked forward to the time when I could use these skills not for myself but for socially constructive ends. The liberation struggle is the most positive and rewarding area of work anyone could experience. So the skills learned in basically destructive activity are employed here in constructive effort. That is payment enough for me and very seriously I am indebted to you, not you to me.

The national director of programs for the American Jewish Congress, Jules

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1. See Papers 4:545.
2. With Levison’s assistance, pacifist Bayard Rustin organized the 1958 Youth March for Integrated Schools, an effort to pressure the Eisenhower administration to enforce the Supreme Court’s 1954 school desegregation ruling in Brown et al. v. Board of Education of Topeka et al. (347 U.S. 483). They also helped coordinate the 1959 march (for King’s remarks, see Address at the Youth March for Integrated Schools on 18 April 1959, pp. 186–188 in this volume).