From Jawaharlal Nehru

14 January 1959
New Delhi, India

In December 1956, while meeting with a group of Quakers in New York City, Indian prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru "responded with enthusiasm" to the possibility of meeting King. Though King had hoped to travel to India in 1957, continuing southern racist violence and his obligations as president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) forced him to postpone the trip until February 1959. Intermediaries attempted to secure an official invitation from the Indian government but settled for this letter of welcome from the prime minister. Nehru met with King in Delhi on 10 February.

Dr. Martin Luther King,
309 South Jackson,
Montgomery,
Alabama
(U.S.A.)

Dear Dr. King,

I have today received your book "Stride Towards Freedom" which you have kindly sent me. I am grateful to you for this.

1. Dorothy M. Steere to King, 5 January 1957; see also Homer Alexander Jack to King, 27 December 1956, in Papers 3:496, 498. Jawaharlal Nehru (1889–1964), born in Allahabad, India, received a B.A. (1910) from Trinity College, Cambridge, and was accepted into the bar two years later before returning to India. Around 1918 Nehru joined the Indian National Congress and was soon recognized as a leader in the struggle for independence. Nehru spent more than thirteen years in prison for his protest activities. After serving as the chief negotiator during the transfer of power, Nehru was elected the first prime minister of independent India in 1947, a position he held until his death. Though he was a close associate of Gandhi’s, the two leaders sometimes disagreed over strategies for bringing about independence and economic development. Upon Nehru’s death, King remembered the prime minister as “a towering world force skillfully inserting the peace will of India between the raging antagonisms of the great powers of East and West” (K. Natwar-Singh, The Legacy of Nehru: A Memorial Tribute [New York: The John Day Company, 1965], p. 65).


3. Rajkumari Amrit Kaur to Stewart Meacham, 18 December 1958, and Corinne B. Johnson to Rustin, 31 December 1958. King received an invitation from the Gandhi Smarak Nidhi (Gandhi National Memorial Fund), which served as the official host of the visit (see G. Ramachandran to King, 27 December 1958, in Papers 4:552–553). The Nidhi was founded after Gandhi’s 1948 assassination to promote charitable activities influenced by his ideals.

4. See “Notes for Conversation between King and Nehru,” 10 February 1959, p. 130 in this volume.

5. In his inscription to Nehru, King thanked the Indian leader for providing inspiration to black Americans fighting segregation: “We hope that as the march to the sea ushered in mass action leading to India’s independence, so our efforts here may become a part of the great liberation movement changing the face of the world” (King, Inscription to Jawaharlal Nehru, November 1958).
16 January 1959

I have long been interested in the work that you have been doing and, more especially, in the manner of doing it. This book will give me a greater insight into this and so I welcome it.

I understand that there is a chance of your coming to India. I shall look forward to meeting you.

Yours sincerely,

[signed] Jawaharlal Nehru

TLS. MLKP-MBU: Box 32.

From Wyatt Tee Walker

16 January 1959
Petersburg, Va.

Walker, the pastor of Gillfield Baptist Church in Petersburg, reports on a 1 January Prayer Pilgrimage to protest the efforts of Virginia officials to block public school integration. He thanks King for providing prerecorded remarks that were played at the culmination of the demonstration outside the capitol in Richmond. King replied on 28 January, congratulating Walker on the success of the Pilgrimage: "Virginia and the nation will remain in debt to you for many years to come."2

Dr. Martin L. King, Jr.
Dexter Avenue Baptist Church
454 Dexter Avenue
Montgomery, Alabama

Dear Mike,

Upon my return to Petersburg immediately following the Pilgrimage my first impulse was to call you and tell you the good news of how tremendously successful our protest was. After three calls or so, it dawned on me that you could not possibly have returned from Mobile.3 Carey and I both tried the next day, but to no avail; thus we assumed that you were spending the holidays with your relatives in Atlanta.4

Friday and Saturday following the Pilgrimage we worked all day getting out our

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1. For King’s endorsement of the Prayer Pilgrimage, see To Brother in Christ, 3 December 1958, in Papers 4:542–543.
2. King later offered Walker the position of executive director of SCLC (see King to Walker, 5 March 1960, pp. 384–385 in this volume).
3. On New Year’s Day King attended an Emancipation Day program in Mobile, Alabama.
4. Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) field secretary Gordon Carey helped Walker coordinate the Pilgrimage. In a 15 January 1959 letter, Carey also thanked King for his contribution to the march and praised Walker’s efforts in Petersburg.