Mr. J. Charles Whitfield
The State of Texas
House of Representatives
Austin, Texas

Dear Mr. Whitfield:

On returning to the office I found your letter of August 5, on my desk. I deeply regret that absence from the city for several days has delayed my reply.

I am happy to know of your concern over the question of school integration in Houston, Texas. I have always felt that if people of good will really take the leadership in this area, the transition from the segregated to an integrated society would be much smoother and peaceful. I do not know if I can give any specific suggestions concerning the Houston situation since I am not too familiar with the pulse of the community. There are certain unique situations within every community which cannot fit into a general pattern. However, there are one or two things that I would like to suggest which might make for a transition devoid of extreme tension. The first one is the necessity of preparing the community to accept the inevitable. This means that the religious and civic leaders of the community should seek to work through their congregations and organizations to mitigate the fears that many white persons have concerning integration. So many half truths and false ideas have been disseminated concerning integration that many white people sincerely feel that it is a design of the devil [so?] to speak. It is at this point that I think respected and influential community leaders can be of tremendous service. This has happened in other communities and in almost every case the situation worked out very well.

I would also suggest that the community leaders urge the political leaders of the city to take a definite stand in urging the people to accept law and order. This means that they must not predict that violence will emerge as a result of integration. Actually, the constant prediction of violence is a conscious or unconscious invitation to it. But it has been proven that where governors, mayors and other officials have made it clear that they would not stand for violence to break out dur-

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1. Joseph Charles Whitfield (1921–1997) was born in Beaumont, Texas, and received a B.B.A. (1943) from the University of Texas School of Business Administration. After serving in the U.S. Navy during World War II, Whitfield received a J.D. (1957) from the South Texas College of Law and practiced law until he was elected to the Texas House of Representatives in 1958. A liberal Democrat concerned with civil rights, Whitfield represented Harris County until 1966. He ran for the State senate in 1965 and U.S. Congress in 1976, losing to his opponent on both occasions.
ing the integration process there has been no violence. The police force must also be alerted so that they will be determined to keep down any real incidents. It has been proven that mobs only take over when they feel that they are aided andabetted by the police force. Once they discover that they do not have the support of the police force they fade away. This was vividly revealed at Central High School a few days ago when integration took place again. After the mob discovered that they did not have the support of the police force we have heard no more from them.

I do not want to give the impression that there is nothing that the Negro must do himself. Certainly, Negro leaders must stress the importance of nonviolence and love during this period of transition. They must urge the children who are entering integrated schools to go with a spirit of humility and also of forgiveness in case some incident develops. In the final analysis, this whole problem is a moral problem and it will depend on the commitment that individuals have toward the moral ideals of religion and the great creed of our democracy.

I don't know if these suggestions are at all pertinent, but I hope they will be helpful. I would also suggest that you read the last chapter of a book that I wrote a few months ago entitled, Stride Toward Freedom. There I have elaborated my philosophy, and also attempted to give some direction to the question of school integration. You may secure this book from Harper and Brothers at 49 East 33rd Street, New York 16, New York.

Thank you for writing me, and whenever I can be of any assistance please feel free to call on me.

Very sincerely yours,
Martin L. King, Jr.

MLK:mlb

TLC. MLKP-MBU: Box 73.

2. On 12 August five black students attended previously all-white high schools in Little Rock.