Address at the Fourth Annual Institute on Nonviolence and Social Change at Bethel Baptist Church

3 December 1959
Montgomery, Ala.

In this typescript of his final address as president of the MIA, King summarizes the past year’s accomplishments, highlighting attempts to desegregate the city’s public schools and parks: “I think this is enough to say to the cynics, skeptics, and destructive critics that the MIA is still in business, and that while it does not have the drama of a bus boycott, it is doing a day to day job that is a persistent threat to the power structure of Montgomery.” He outlines the MIA’s “threefold task”: challenging segregation, suffering and sacrificing for freedom, and making full and constructive use of existing freedoms. King discusses “the painful experience” of leaving Montgomery and admits that he had “not accomplished for you all that I desired, but I have tried to do my best.” King pledges to remain “actively associated” with the MIA and reminds the members that “the freedom struggle in Montgomery was not started by one man, and it will not end when one man leaves.”

I. Introduction

Presiding officer, members of the Montgomery Improvement Association, visiting friends, ladies and gentlemen.

Four years ago we assembled in the Holt Street Baptist Church and expressed in strong and courageous terms our determination to be free.¹ When we came together on that brisk and cold night in December our minds were filled with the dark memories of past oppression. We knew that the shadow of injustice was still athwart our path, and the dust of discrimination had not been removed from our longing souls. The result of our determination to organize against these evils, particularly as they expressed themselves in bus segregation, was the Montgomery Improvement Association. Little did we know when we brought this organization into being that we were starting a movement whose influence would be felt in large cities and small villages of America, in the sunny climes of Africa, and the rich soils of Asia, indeed throughout the whole civilized world. Little did we know on that night that we were starting a movement that would change the face of Montgomery forever and leave for unborn generations an imperishable legacy of creative nonviolent struggle.

The achievements of the bus boycott are so well known that we need not pause to mention them in great detail at this time. Suffice it to say that our year long united struggle gave Negroes everywhere a new sense of dignity and destiny and provided a powerful and creative approach to the crisis in race relations. I firmly believe that one day all of America—including those who have opposed us—will be proud of our achievements.

¹. See King, MIA Mass Meeting at Holt Street Baptist Church, 5 December 1955, in Papers 3:71–79.
II. The MIA Today

But we have not been content to live merely on past accomplishments. He who lives only in the past has a doubtful present and an unattainable future. No greater tragedy can befall a people than to rest complacently on some past achievement. Noble yesterdays must always be challenges to more creative tomorrows. So the Montgomery Improvement Association is still attempting to make this community a better place in which to live. It has served as a continuing influence for good in Montgomery. In spite of negative cries of “What are you doing now?”, the MIA is still active and deeply committed to its task. We are still courageously challenging the system of segregation. We are making it clear through our words and actions that segregation in any area of Montgomery life is an undue luxury that the community can ill afford.

We have used our financial resources to generously aid community projects. At the end of the boycott we had several thousands of dollars left in our treasury as a result of the generous gifts that people sent to us from every section of this country. And may I say in passing that every penny that came to Montgomery to assist in the bus struggle was used wisely and honestly. As president of the MIA I can truthfully say that I do not know of a single instance of mishandling or misappropriation of funds. Our books have been audited every year by competent certified public accountants, and I am sure that if funds had been mishandled they would have notified us by now. But back to the main point. We have used the money remaining in our treasury to do many worthwhile things. The YMCA, which is presently under construction, would be an unfulfilled dream and a blasted hope if the MIA hadn’t come to its rescue by making the sizable contribution of twenty thousand dollars ($20,000.00). This money could have very easily been placed in reserve to finance many of the court suits that await us in the future. But we were willing to overlook this to meet the pressing need of the YMCA.

Along with our concern for the YMCA, we have taken great interest in Farm and City Enterprise, the cooperative grocery store in Mobile Heights. We came to the rescue of this institution to the tune of eleven thousand dollars ($11,000.00). This was done because of our interest in seeing Farm and City survive and stand as a symbol of what the Negro could do by pooling his economic resources.

Not only have we given to collective community enterprises, but we have given economic aid to individuals who have faced reprisals as a result of their participation in our movement. When the needs have been made known, we have always responded with immediate help.

We have made a determined effort to get our members to patronize Negro busi-
ness. As a result of this continual plea in mass meetings and other channels we have made it possible for Negro business and professional people to know more prosperity than they have ever known before. Almost any Negro business and professional person who is honest will have to admit that his business has taken a decisive turn upward since the boycott. I submit to you that the MIA is largely responsible for this.

Since the NAACP is not operating in Alabama at this time many of the court cases that would ordinarily fall under her domain are taken up by our association. We contributed more than one thousand dollars ($1,000.00) to the Jeremiah Reeves case. We threw the full resource of our office and legal counsel behind the Jimmie Wilson case and contributed in some little way to the saving of his life. We have already put more than fifteen hundred ($1,500.00) in the Aaron case.6

Above all the MIA has provided the Negro community with an agency to which individuals can come to air their grivances and complaints when they have been mistreated. To know that we have an organization in our community that is daily concerned with the injustices that we continually confront is a source of great hope and deep consolation. The MIA is that institution in our community which stands as an eternal reminder of the fact that as we walk through the dark night of oppression we do not walk alone, but a host of others are walking with us. Every Negro in Montgomery now knows that he has an organization, with its doors opened everyday in the week, that will fight for his rights.

I think this is enough to say to the cynics, skeptics, and destructive critics that the MIA is still in business, and that while it does not have the drama of a bus boycott, it is doing a day to day job that is a persistent threat to the power structure of Montgomery. If you have any final doubts about our aliveness, talk with the candidates who ran for reelection in the city last spring and they will have to admit that they are out of business because the MIA is very much in business.7

III. A Word About the Park Situation

It goes without saying that the Negroes of Montgomery have been the victims of the most glaring forms of injustice in park and recreational facilities. All the Negro Parks in Montgomery put together could hardly meet the specifications

6. Alabama officials succeeded in banning the NAACP from the state in 1956 on the grounds that it had failed to register properly with the secretary of state. Reeves was executed on 28 March 1958 following his conviction for attacking several white Montgomery women (see King, "Statement Delivered at the Prayer Pilgrimage Protesting the Electrocution of Jeremiah Reeves," 6 April 1958, in Papers 4:396–398). In September 1958 Wilson was sentenced to die for stealing $1.95 from an eighty-two-year-old white woman in Marion, Alabama; his sentence was commuted to life imprisonment. For King’s earlier reference to the Wilson case, see note 5 to Statement to Eugene Loe, 5 September 1958, in Papers 4:488. Drewey Aaron was given the death penalty after he was convicted of raping a white Montgomery woman. In 1973, his sentence was commuted to life in prison (Aaron v. State, 49 Ala. App. 402).

7. In its 30 April newsletter, the MIA asserted that a relatively strong black turnout in the March elections helped defeat two ardent segregationists who had led the opposition to the Montgomery bus boycott, mayor W. A. Gayle and city commissioner Clyde Sellers (MIA, "The City Election," Newsletter, 30 April 1959).
for one good park. It is indeed shameful that there is not a single public swimming pool or tennis court for Negroes in the city of Montgomery.

For many years Negroes protested these blatant expressions of discrimination. Committee after committee called these oppressive conditions to the attention of the city commissioner. But all of this was to no avail. Finally, after serious and prayerful discussion, we decided to take this issue into the federal courts. Being mindful of the Supreme Court’s affirmation of the inherent inequality of separate facilities, we naturally decided to challenge the constitutionality of segregated parks. The result was a favorable decision from the federal district court declaring segregation unconstitutional in the public parks of Montgomery. This was a significant victory, and one that left every person of goodwill throbbing with inner joy. This decision means in simple terms that public parks never can be operated in Montgomery on a segregated basis.

As you recall, when we first decided to take this issue into the federal courts the city commission responded by closing all of the parks. Up to now the parks are still closed, and the new commissioners have not made it known whether or not they will open them. Naturally, we want to see the parks opened, for recreation is a vital part of the total welfare of the individual and the community. But we cannot in all good conscience make an agreement to accept a new form of segregation in order to entice the city commission to open the parks. While compromise is an absolute necessity in any moment of social transition, it must be the creative, honest compromise of a policy, not the negative and cowardly compromise of a principle.

IV. The Question of School Integration

On May 17, 1954, the Supreme Court of our nation rendered a momentous decision declaring segregation unconstitutional in the public schools. The decision stated in substance that separate facilities are inherently unequal, and that to segregate a child on the basis of his race is to deny that child equal protection of the law. A year after the Supreme Court rendered this decision, it handed down a decree outlining the details by which integration should proceed “with all deliberate speed.” While the court did not set a definite deadline for the termination of this process, it did set a time for the beginning. It was clear that the court had chosen this reasonable approach with the expectation that the forces of goodwill would immediately get to work and prepare the communities for a smooth and peaceful transition.

Five years have elapsed and no discernable move has been made toward integrating the schools of Montgomery, Alabama. Realizing that this was not only contrary to the Constitution of our nation, but to the best interest of our children, we in the MIA decided to request that the school board announce its plan of in-

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8. On 9 September 1959, a federal district court ruled on behalf of eight black residents who had sued the previous December to desegregate the city's parks. City authorities, who had responded to the initial suit by closing the parks, successfully thwarted the district court's ruling by keeping the parks closed for several years. The case was not ultimately decided until 1974 by the U.S. Supreme Court (Gilmour v. City of Montgomery, 417 U.S. 556 [1974]).

integration to the community. In making this request we made it clear that we were issuing neither a threat nor an ultimatum. We were simply urging them to begin some reasonable compliance with the "law of the land," and to cease the maintenance of a system which was injurious to both Negro children and white.

Three months have passed since we made this request to the board of education, and it has not even given us the courtesy of an answer. It seems now that we have no alternative but to carry this issue into the federal courts. We have said all along that we would make the courts a last resort, and this we sincerely meant. But when the school board absolutely refuses to acknowledge your letter and act on your request the last resort stage has already emerged.

The governor of our state has promised to close the school if we continue our moves toward integration. Such a big threat, however, will not in the least deter us from our righteous efforts.

Our governor has also predicted violence if schools are integrated. Of course the continuous prediction of violence is a conscious or unconscious invitation to it. But even so, it should now be clear to the reactionaries of the white South that we fear neither bodily injury nor physical death, because we know that we are engaged in a cause that is right. We will not allow threats or vitriolic words to frighten us into a position of retreat.

In spite of the threats and loud noises we know that the idea of closing the public schools is a fanatical proposal which is both rationally absurd and practically inexpedient. The absurdity of this approach was clearly seen in the breakdown of massive resistance in Virginia and Arkansas. Interestingly enough, this massive resistance has crumbled as a result of the massive insistence of white southerners to keep the public schools open. What we now see in both Little Rock and Virginia is something very revealing. Two powerful institutions have collided in the South—the institution of segregation and the institution of public schools. And the people, on the whole have made it palpably clear that when the final moment of choice comes, they will choose public schools rather than segregation. People are gradually coming to see the futility of attempting to close the public schools. The price to be paid by school closing is much too high. Business suffers. Children receive an inferior education. Many responsible persons move away. The cultural life of the community lags.

So if our governor is driven to the extreme of closing the public schools, as he has so earnestly promised to do, he will do more to promote integration in Alabama in a few hours than the most powerful integrationist could do in ten years.

V. Our Threefold Task

1. We must continue courageously to challenge the system of segregation. It must be our firm conviction that segregation is an evil that we cannot passively

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10. See King to the Montgomery County Board of Education, 28 August 1959, pp. 270–272 in this volume.

11. Governor John Patterson warned the state's African Americans that pushing for school integration would "lead to chaos and disorder and violence and the destruction of our public school system" ("Governor Makes Plea to Negroes," Montgomery Advertiser, 6 September 1959).
Segregation is evil because it seeks to repudiate the principle that all men are created equal. Segregation is wrong because it relegates men to the status of things and makes them objects to be used, rather than persons to be respected. Segregation is wrong because it gives the segregated a false sense of inferiority, while leaving the segregator confirmed in a false sense of superiority. Segregation is wrong because it assumes that God made a mistake and stamped upon certain men an eternal stigma of shame because of the color of their skin.  

Therefore, we must not rest until segregation is removed from every area of our nation’s life. Segregation is a cancer in the body politic, which must be removed before our democratic health can be realized. And may I say to you that we must not be deluded into complacent acceptance of an outmoded doctrine of separate-but-equal because of the present erection of beautiful school buildings in many southern communities. The fact remains that separate facilities are inherently unequal, and so long as segregated schools exist the South can never reach its full economic, political and moral maturity.

2. We must be willing to suffer and sacrifice in order to achieve our freedom. It is trite, but true that freedom is never handed out on a silver platter, and the road to progress is never a smooth and easy road. The road from the Egypt of slavery to the Cannah of freedom is an often lonely and meandering road surrounded by prodigious hilltops of opposition and gigantic mountains of evil. The triumphant beat of Easter’s drum is never allowed to sound until the bleak and desolate moments of life’s Good Friday have plucked the radiant star of hope from the sky of human experience. Yes, even dawn must temporarily hide itself behind some distant horizon until the deep darkness of the midnight has had its opportunity to reign supreme. This is the story of life. There is rarely ever any social gain without some individual pain. I am afraid that too many of us want the fruits of integration but are not willing to courageously challenge the roots of segregation. But let me assure you that it does not come this way. Freedom is not free. It is always purchased with the high price of sacrifice and suffering.

We must gird our courage and stand firm for a better world for our boys and girls. We must tell our white brothers that the few Uncle Toms who will sell their souls for a mess of economic pottage do not speak for the Negro. We must let them know that we are determined to be free, and that we are willing to pay the price.

And so our most urgent message to this nation must be summarized in these simple words: “We just want to be free.” We are not seeking to dominate the nation politically or hamper its social growth; we just want to be free. Our motives are not impure and our intentions are not malicious: we simply want to be free. We are not seeking to be professional agitators or dangerous rabblerousers: we just want to be free. America, in calling for our freedom we are not unmindful of the fact that we have been loyal to you. We have loved you even in the moments of your greatest denial of our freedom. And now we are simply saying we want to be free. We have stood with you in every major crisis. Since Crispus Attucks gave

12. The preceding two sentences are similar to several lines from Benjamin E. Mays’s 1955 speech, “The Moral Aspects of Segregation” (see note 11 to King, “Address at Public Meeting of the Southern Christian Ministers Conference of Mississippi,” 25 September 1959, p. 288 in this volume).
his life on Boston's Commons black men and women have been mingling their blood with other Americans in defense of this republic.\textsuperscript{13} For the protection of our honored flag which still floats unmarred in the breeze, Negro men and women have died on the far flung battlefields of the world. And so America we think we have a right to insist on our freedom. For your security, America, our sons sailed the bloody seas of two world wars. For you, America, our sons died in the trenches of France, in the foxholes of Germany, on the beachheads of Italy, and on the islands of Japan. And now, America, we are simply asking you to guarantee our freedom.

This must be our message to America. Freedom is that vital, intrinsic value which determines one's selfhood. It is worth suffering for: it is worth losing a job for: it is worth going to jail for. I would rather be a poor free man than a rich slave. I would rather live in a humble dwelling by the side of the road with my freedom and a sense of dignity than to live on some palatial hillside a mental slave. Once more every Negro must be able to cry out with his forefathers: "Before I'll be a slave, I'll be buried in my grave and go home to my Father and be saved."\textsuperscript{14}

3. We must make full and constructive use of the freedom we already possess. We must not allow our oppression and lack of full freedom to drive us into a state of contentment with the mediocre and satisfaction with the non-productive. History has proven that inner determination can often break through the outer shackles of circumstance. Take the Jews for example. For years they have been forced to walk through the dark night of oppression. They have been carried through the fires of affliction, and put to the cruel sword of persecution. But this did not keep them from rising up with creative genius to plunge against cloud-filled nights of affliction, new and blazing stars of inspiration. Being a Jew did not keep Handel from lifting his vision to high heaven and emerging with the inspiration to leave for unfolding generations the glad thunders and gentle sighings of the great Messiah.\textsuperscript{15} Being a Jew did not keep \textit{[Albert]} Einstein from using his profound and genius-packed mind to challenge an axiom and add to the lofty insights of science a theory of relativity. Being Jews did not prevent Amos and Hosea, Isaiah and Jeremiah from standing up amid forces of religious idolatry and unjust power structures and declaring with prophetic urgency the eternal word of God, and the never ceasing necessity of being obedient to his will.

So we too can make creative contributions, even though the door of freedom is not fully opened. We need not wait until oppression ceases before we seek to make creative contributions to our nation's life. Already we have a host of Negroes whose inspiring achievements have proven that human nature cannot be catalogued, and that we need not postpone the moment of our creativity until the day of full emancipation. From an old slave cabin in Virginia's Hills, Booker T. Washington rose to the stature of one of America's greatest leaders; he lit a torch in the state of Alabama and darkness fled. From the red hills of Gordon County, Georgia, Roland Hayes rose up to be one of the world's great singers, and carried his

\textsuperscript{13} Attucks was killed by British troops in 1770 during the Boston Massacre.
\textsuperscript{14} This verse is from the spiritual "Oh Freedom."
\textsuperscript{15} King refers to George Frideric Handel, composer of "Messiah" (1741).
melodious voice to the palace of King George the fifth and the mansion of Queen
Mother of Spain. From a poverty stricken section of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania,
Marian Anderson rose up to be the world’s greatest contralto, so that Toscanini
could say, “A voice like this comes only once in a century,” and Sabelius of Finland
could cry out, “My roof is too low for such a voice.” From oppressive and crippling
surroundings, George Washington Carver lifted his searching, creative mind to
the ordinary peanut, and found therein extraordinary possibilities for goods and
products unthinkable by minds of the past, and left for succeeding generations
an inspiring example of how an individual could rise above the paralyzing con-
ditions of circumstance. There was a star in the sky of female leadership, and Mary
McCloud Bethune grabbed it and allowed it to shine in her life with scintillating
beauty. There was a star in the diplomatic sky, and Ralph Bunche, the grandson
of a slave preacher, reached up and brought its radiant outpour into the center
of his life. There was a star in the athletic sky; then came Joe Louis with his edu-
cated fists; Jessie Owens with his fleet and dashing feet, and Jackie Robinson with
his calm spirit and powerful bat. These are but few of the Negroes whose epic mak-
ing contributions have justified the conviction of the poet:

Fleecy locks and black complexion
cannot forfeit nature’s claim
Skin may differ, but affection
dwells in black and white the same
And were I so tall as to reach
the pole or to grasp the ocean at a span,
I must be measured by my soul,
the mind is the standard of the man.16

VI. A Plea to the White Community

There is great need for positive leadership from the moderates of the white
South in this tense period of transition. Unfortunately today, the leadership of the
white South is by and large in the hands of close-minded extremists. These persons
gain prominence and power by the dissemination of false ideas, and by appealing
to the deepest fears and hates within the human mind. But they do not speak for
the South; of that I am convinced.

There are in the white South millions of people of goodwill whose voices are
yet unheard, whose course is yet unclear, and whose courageous acts are yet un-
seen. Such persons are in Montgomery today. These persons are often silent to-
day because of fear of social, political, and economic reprisals. In the name of God,
in the interest of human dignity, and for the cause of democracy, I appeal to these
white brothers to gird their courage, to speak out, to offer the leadership that is
needed. Here in Montgomery we are seeking to improve the whole community,
and we call upon the whites to help us. Our little message to the white commu-

16. The first four lines are quoted from “The Negroes Complaint” (1788) by William Cowper, and
the remaining lines are quoted from Horae Lyricae, “False Greatness” (1706) by Isaac Watts; see note
nity is simply this: We who call upon you are not so-called outside agitators. We are your Negro brothers whose sweat and blood have also built Dixie. We yearn for brotherhood and respect and want to join hands with you to build a freer, happier land for all. If you fail to act now, history will have to record that the greatest tragedy of this period of social transition was not the strident clamor of the bad people, but the appalling silence of the good people.

VII. A Parting Word

I cannot close without expressing my sincere gratitude to you for giving me the privilege to serve as your president for the past four years. You have been indeed kind to trust me with so great a responsibility, and to honor me with so lofty a task. I have not accomplished for you all that I desired, but I have tried to do my best.

Thanks to the members of the executive board of the MIA who have done all within their power to help carry the burden of this responsibility. Some have answered every call and responded to every demand of duty. Thanks to the faithful members of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church who have been generous in allowing me the time to carry on the work of the MIA and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. They have encouraged me with the warmth of their fellowship and have sustained me by their earnest prayers.

And now I have the painful experience of having to say to you that after four years as your president and five years as a citizen of this community, I will leave Montgomery for Atlanta. The pain is somewhat relieved when I realize that Atlanta is such a short distance from here, and that I will have the privilege of remaining actively associated with the MIA.

For the past year the Southern Christian Leadership Conference has been pleading with me to give it the maximum of my time, since the time was ripe for expanded militant action across the South. After giving the request serious and prayerful consideration, I came to the conclusion that I had a moral obligation to give more of my time and energy to the whole South. This was only possible by moving closer to the headquarters where transportation was more flexible and time hitherto consumed in longer travel could be saved and utilized for planning, directing and supervising.

It was not easy for me to decide to leave a community where bravery, resourcefulness and determination had shattered the girders of the old order and weakened confidence of the rulers, despite their centuries of unchallenged rule. It was not easy to decide to leave a city whose Negroes resisted injustice magnificently and followed a method of nonviolent struggle that became one of the glowing epics of the twentieth century.

17. In a later interview, King detailed some of his personal reasons for the move: "For almost four years now, I have been faced with the responsibility of trying to do as one man what five or six people ought to be doing. . . . What I have been doing is giving, giving, giving and not stopping to retreat and meditate like I should—to come back. If the situation is not changed, I will be a physical and psychological wreck. I have to reorganize my personality and re-orient my life" ("Why Rev. M. L. King Is Leaving Montgomery: "Leader Says Time Is Ripe to Extend Work in Dixie," Jet, 17 December 1959, pp. 14–15).
Now let me assure you that my leaving Montgomery should in no way slow up or end the struggle for first-class citizenship. Things will proceed just as they have been going. The freedom struggle in Montgomery was not started by one man, and it will not end when one man leaves. The Montgomery story was never a drama with only one actor. More precisely it was always a drama with many actors, each playing his part exceedingly well.

As I said earlier I will still remain associated with the MIA and will often come into the community to lend my assistance wherever it is needed. But the important thing is that you get behind the person who is elected president, and be as loyal to him as you have been to me. Indeed he will need more of your loyalty than I needed, because I started out with certain advantages that he will not have. When I became your president I did not have to create unity; you had already been brought together by the forces of history. And there was always the drama of the boycott which caused us to submerge our individual egos in the greatness of the cause. But the new president will have neither this preexistent unity nor the powerful aid of a dramatic boycott. Therefore, he will need your backing and support at every point.  

New divisive forces are at work in our community. In the mad quest to conquer us by dividing us they are working through some Negroes who will sell their race for a few dollars and cents. We must make it clear that we never intend to go back to the days when all of our efforts were paralyzed by the nagging virus of division. We never intend to go back to the days when the white community could pick our leaders for us and give them a few measly handouts to keep their mouths shut. We never intend to go back to the days when our children suffered discrimination because of our negligence, and our own lives were inflicted with a lack of self respect because of our complacency.

We have gone too far now to turn back. We owe it not only to this community, but to this nation and the world to keep the MIA a live and energetic organization. I urge you above all to continue the struggle on the highest level of dignity and discipline. You have given to the world a marvelous demonstration of the power of nonviolence. Turn not your backs on this creative method. We must keep it at the center of this movement. The days ahead will be difficult. As victories for civil rights mount in the federal courts, the angry passions and deep prejudices of the diehards will be further aroused. These persons will do all within their power to provoke us and make us angry. But we must not retaliate with external physical violence or internal violence of spirit. We must not allow ourselves to become bitter. As we continue the struggle for our freedom we will be persecuted, abused and called bad names. But we must go on with the faith that unearned suffering is redemptive, and love is the most durable power in all the world. I am convinced that Jesus was right when he uttered in words lifted to cosmic proportions: "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, pray for them that despitefully use you."  

18. On 31 January 1960, King formally announced Ralph Abernathy as the new president of the MIA (see King, Address Delivered during "A Salute to Dr. and Mrs. Martin Luther King" at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, p. 354 in this volume).

This is a great hour for the Negro. To become the instruments of a great idea is a privilege that history gives only occasionally.\textsuperscript{20} As I tried to say in \textit{Stride Toward Freedom}: "It may even be possible for the Negro, through adherence to nonviolence, so to challenge the nations of the world that they will seriously seek an alternative to war and destruction. In a day when Sputniks and Explorers dash through outer space and guided ballistic missiles are carving highways of death through the stratosphere, nobody can win a war. Today the choice is no longer between violence and nonviolence. It is either nonviolence or nonexistence. The Negro may be God's appeal to this age—an age drifting rapidly to its doom. The eternal appeal takes the form of a warning: "All who take the sword will perish by the sword."\textsuperscript{21}

And now let us go out looking to a future filled with vast possibilities. I know you are asking, when will that future fulfill itself? When will our suffering in this righteous struggle come to an end? When will the desolate valleys of oppression be transformed into sun lit paths of justice? When will the radiant star of hope be plunged against the nocturnal bosom of this lonely night, and plucked from weary souls the chains of fear and the manacles of death? I must confess that I cannot give you the exact date. But I have no doubt that the midnight of injustice will give way to the daybreak of freedom. My faith in the future does not grow out of a weak and uncertain thought. My faith grows out of a deep and patient trust in God who leaves us not alone in the struggle for righteousness, and whose matchless power is a fit contrast to the sordid weakness of man. I am certain of the future because:

\begin{verbatim}
Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord;
He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored;
He hath loosed the fateful lightening of His terrible swift sword:
His truth is marching on.
I have seen Him in the watch-fires of a hundred circling camps;
They have builded Him an altar in the evening dews and damps;
I can read His righteous sentence by the dim and flaring lamps;
His day is marching on.
He has sounded forth the trumpet that shall never call retreat;
He is sifting out the hearts of men before His judgment seat:
O be swift, my soul, to answer Him! Be jubilant, my feet!
Our God is marching on.
\end{verbatim}

Refrain:
Glory! Glory, Hallelujah! Glory! Glory, Hallelujah!
Glory! Glory, Hallelujah! His truth is marching on.\textsuperscript{22}

TAD. MLKP-MBU: Box 3.

\textsuperscript{20} In a 7 November 1957 address titled "Nonviolence and the Law," Harris Wofford used a similar phrase: "It is a privilege that history gives only occasionally for men to become the instruments of a great idea." King owned a typewritten copy of Wofford's address.

\textsuperscript{21} Cf. Matthew 26:52.

\textsuperscript{22} Julia Ward Howe, "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" (1862).