

## To William P. Rogers

[19 November 1959]

[Montgomery, Ala.]

*King lauds Attorney General Rogers for advocating the integration of a Huntsville, Alabama, elementary school that excluded the children of black military personnel.<sup>1</sup> Acting Assistant Attorney General Joseph M. F. Ryan thanked King on Rogers's behalf.<sup>2</sup> The Huntsville schools remained segregated until 1963.*

ATTORNEY GENERAL WILLIAM P. ROGERS  
THE JUSTICE DEPARTMENT  
WASHINGTON, D.C.

MAY I COMMEND YOU FOR YOUR FORTHRIGHT STAND FOR INTEGRATED  
SCHOOLING AT THE ARMY'S REDSTONE MISSILE CENTER IN ALABAMA. IT IS CER-

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1. At a news conference, Rogers claimed that because the school was built with federal funds the "Negro youngsters on the base should be permitted to go to that school" ("Rogers Says Steps Planned to Lift Redstone Race Bars," *Montgomery Advertiser*, 19 November 1959). Objecting to Rogers's statements, Governor John Patterson told the press that he found it "inconceivable that the federal government would go so far as to jeopardize its missile program at such a time of national peril" ("Governor Blasts Plan to Mix Huntsville School," *Birmingham News*, 10 November 1959). William Pierce Rogers (1913–2001), born in Norfolk, New York, received an A.B. (1934) from Colgate University and an LL.B. (1937) from Cornell University. Rogers became deputy attorney general in 1953 and was named attorney general after Herbert Brownell resigned in October 1957. While in private practice, Rogers successfully represented King before the U.S. Supreme Court in *New York Times v. Sullivan* (376 U.S. 254 [1964]). Rogers later served as U.S. secretary of state from 1969 until 1973.

2. Ryan to King, 24 November 1959.

# The Martin Luther King, Jr. Papers Project

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TAINLY UNJUSTIFIABLE FOR MILITARY PERSONNEL TO BE ORDERED AROUND VARIOUS STATIONS AND THEN CONFRONT A DENIAL OF EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR THEIR CHILDREN ON THE BASES. I STRONGLY IMPORE YOU AND THE MILITARY AUTHORITIES TO FOLLOW THROUGH WITH THE INTEGRATION OF SCHOOLS AT REDSTONE CENTER. A RETREAT AT THIS POINT WOULD ONLY CONFIRM STATE OFFICIALS IN THEIR UNDEMOCRATIC DEFIANCE OF THE LAW AND MAKE THEM MORE DETERMINED IN THEIR RESISTANCE. IT WILL ALSO MAKE IT MORE DIFFICULT FOR THOSE MODERATE WHITES IN THE SOUTH WHO ARE WILLING TO JOIN WITH NEGRO LEADERS IN WORKING TOWARD PEACEFUL COMPLIANCE WITH THE SUPREME COURT'S DECISION OUTLAWINGS SEGREGATION IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR., PRESIDENT  
SOUTHERN CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE

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