Address Delivered at the Montgomery Improvement Association's "Testimonial of Love and Loyalty"

[1 February 1960]
Montgomery, Ala.

Shortly before King's departure to Atlanta, the MIA honored him and his family at Ralph Abernathy's First Baptist Church. The Kings were treated to music from at least ten local church choirs, expressions of support and appreciation from area clubs and businesses, and testimonials from several SCLC and MIA associates. Preceding her husband's address, Coretta King thanked the audience for inspiring her by their example: "For when I see you stand up with courage and face the things that you have had to face, it has given me courage to do my little bit." Looking forward to continuing the struggle in Atlanta, she surmises that "perhaps we will have some more bombing, but I don't mind that because I know that you will be behind us."

In his remarks below, King thanks the crowd for the generous financial gift presented to his family but insists there is "no greater gift to be purchased than the gift of freedom." He immediately turns the money over to the treasurers of SCLC and the MIA and encourages them to "protest till all of your sons and daughters can walk the streets with dignity and honor knowing that they are children of almighty God."

As the crowd's cheers build, King promises to return to Montgomery "if you want to boycott a little more," and he turns the presidency over to Abernathy. King urges the MIA to recognize that Abernathy won't have the same advantages he had enjoyed: "Martin Luther King didn't bring about the hour. Martin Luther King happened to be on the scene when the hour came." These remarks are drawn from an audio recording of the evening's proceedings.

Dr. Hubbard and my associates in the ministry and in the struggle for freedom, members and friends of the Montgomery Improvement Association. And first, I want to thank you for this generous contribution that you have so graciously given tonight. And I say generous not because I know the amount, but I saw the box, and I noticed that the box was filled, and I noticed that in the envelopes dollars were present rather than coins. So I say that I thank you for the generous contribution. I know you want us to use this money to purchase some cherished gift that will be meaningful to us for years and years to come. And I know no greater gift to be purchased than the gift of freedom. [Audience:] (Freedom) Sometimes freedom has to be purchased through suffering. But I am convinced that freedom is not free, and if we are to achieve freedom in this nation, in general and this community in particular, we will have to give. I see sitting before me the financial sec-

1. Among those honoring King were Fred Shuttlesworth, C. K. Steele, and C. O. Simpkins representing SCLC, Solomon S. Seay and Ralph Abernathy from the MIA's executive board, and Robert D. Nesbitt of Dexter Avenue Baptist Church (MIA, Program, "A Testimonial of Love and Loyalty," 1 February 1960).

2. H. H. Hubbard, MIA treasurer and pastor of Bethel Baptist Church, presided over part of the evening's program and presented the financial gift to the Kings.
retary and treasurer of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference \textit{(Amen)}, an organization representing thousands and millions of people in eleven southern states. That person is the Reverend Ralph David Abernathy. \textit{(Amen)} [applause] I see behind me \textit{[applause]}, I see behind me the treasurer of the organization that, to a large extent, gave impetus to the southern struggle and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, namely the Montgomery Improvement Association. That is the Reverend Dr. H. H. Hubbard. \textit{(Amen)} [applause] And so when the members of the finance committee come up tonight, I would like to ask them to turn that box over to Reverend Abernathy and to Reverend Hubbard, and every penny of this money will be divided between the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and the Montgomery Improvement Association. \textit{[applause]} I understand that Reverend Hubbard has the money in his hands already, so we are very happy. \textit{(He's got it)} [laughter] And I say that very seriously, I mean every penny of it \textit{(Yes)} will go to the work of these organizations that are so close to my heart.

My friends, I have been deeply moved tonight, and I could stand here for a long, long time and thank you for these meaning-packed statements that have left me with unutterable gratitude. \textit{(Yes, Lord)} But I'm not going to be here but just a few minutes, and I want to stand here and thank you not only for your words and your contributions tonight but for the inspiration that you have given me and my family over the years that we have struggled together. I will never forget Montgomery, for how can one forget a group of people who took their passionate yearnings and deep aspirations and filtered them into their own souls and fashioned them into a creative protest, which gave meaning to people and gave inspiration to individuals all over the nation and all over the world. I will forever forget the bright luminous witness of nonviolent resistance that you left shining not only in this community but for the whole nation to see. \textit{(That's right)} Not only have I read about nonviolence, but I have been able to live it with you. \textit{(Amen, Amen, Amen)} And I will take it wherever I go \textit{(Amen)}, for I'm still convinced that although we must work passionately and unrelentingly for first-class citizenship that we must never use second-class methods to gain it. \textit{(That's right)} And I still go down the road of life believing, even though violence is often inflicted upon us and even though we are the recipients of abuses and persecution, that love is the only absolute and that it is the most durable power in all the world. \textit{(Amen)} And I still believe that the most ardent segregationist can be transformed into a genuine integrationist. I believe that because I believe in the new birth \textit{(Amen)} and because I believe in this way of love and nonviolence. \textit{(Amen)} And so I would urge you, on the one hand, to continue protesting. Protest until the walls of segregation \textit{(Yes)} have been finally crushed by the battering rams of surging justice. Protest \textit{(Amen, All right, That's right)} until all of the segregation in parks, all of the segregation in the public schools of Montgomery will have passed away.\textit{3} \textit{(Yeah)} Protest

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3. One month after King's departure, Abernathy and MIA secretary Robert DuBose led a march from Dexter Church to the state capitol protesting the expulsion of several black student protesters at Alabama State. The 750 marchers were forced to retreat back to Dexter when more than four hundred police, some on horseback, and an estimated five thousand white demonstrators blocked streets around the church ("Police Thwart Negro Services at Capitol," \textit{Montgomery Advertiser}, 7 March 1960). For more on these events in Montgomery, see King to Eisenhower, 9 March 1960, pp. 385–387 in this volume.
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(Protest) till all of your sons and daughters can walk the streets with dignity and honor (Well), knowing that they are children of almighty God, knowing that they are made in His image (Yeah), knowing that every man from a bass black to a treble white is significant on God’s keyboard. [applause] (Go ahead)

But there is another side to this coin and that is reconciliation. (Yeah, That’s right) And so not only must we protest, but I urge you to continue to follow the path of reconciliation as you protest (Yeah), for our aim must never be to defeat or to humiliate the white man. No matter what he says about us, no matter if he misunderstands us, no matter if he bombs us, no matter what he does to us, our aim must never be to defeat him or to humiliate him, but to win his friendship and understanding. (Yeah) And this is the end which we seek. [applause] We might have to boycott in Montgomery some more. (Yeah) And if you want to boycott a little more, I will certainly be willing to come down and help you. [applause] And may I say to you that as we boycott (Yeah), let us remember that a boycott is not an end within itself. A boycott is merely a means through which we seek to awaken a sense of shame in the opponent (Yeah) and to lift him to a new level of his own humanity. But the end which we seek is reconciliation. The end which we seek is the creation of the beloved community. The end which we seek to create is a society in which all men will be able to live together as brothers and respect the dignity and worth of all human personality. And finally I say to you that you will not be able to protest or to follow the path of reconciliation unless you get behind the leadership of the community and follow that leadership. (That’s right) Let nobody fool you. Without this unity between leaders and followers, we will not be able to do the job. (Well)

And I’ve listened to all of your kind and marvelous expressions tonight. But I want to say to you that the new president of the Montgomery Improvement Association will not have some of the advantages that I had, not because he doesn’t have the ability, for I know him and I know that he has great ability. But you must remember that I came to Montgomery when the hour was here (Yeah), and when the hour comes (Yeah), nothing can stop it (Amen) [applause] when the hour comes. [applause] (That’s right) And so although you’ve been kind enough to say nice things about me, Martin Luther King didn’t bring about the hour. (Amen) Martin Luther King happened to be on the scene (Amen) when the hour came. (All right, All right) And you see my friends [applause], when the hour comes (All right) you are just projected into a symbolic structure. (That’s right, That’s right) And even if Martin Luther King had not come to Montgomery, the hour was here. (Yeah) This was what the Old, the New Testament referred to as the kairos in the Greek language. (Yeah) It talked about it as the fullness of time. (Amen, All right) [laughter] And there are times in history (Well) that we face the fullness of time, when history is pregnant (Yes), ready to give birth to a great idea and a great movement. (Yeah) On December the fifth, nineteen-fifty-five we experienced the kairos (Yeah), the fullness of time. (Well) And Martin Luther King just happened to been here. (Yeah) And so there was a preexisting unity that Martin Luther King didn’t create. [laughter] It was created by the fullness of time. (Yeah) [laughter] There was a preexisting unity here (Yes) that caused you to substitute tired feet for tired souls (Yes, All right) and walk the streets of Montgomery (Yeah) until segregation (Well) had to fall before the great and courageous witness (Yeah) of a marvelous people. (Yes, Amen)
Therefore, I say to you that the new president will not have these advantages. And I say to you that you must get behind him (Oh yes) and give him that unity (Yes) and give him that support and that following which will make for a great movement. (Yes, Well) Montgomery is fortunate to have Ralph Abernathy. (Amen) [applause] (Amen) Ralph Abernathy [applause], Ralph Abernathy is a great soul. (Yes) And I can say that because I think I know him better than anybody in here but Juanita [Abernathy]. (Amen) He's a great soul. (Amen) And not only that, Ralph Abernathy is a man of great ability. (That's right) Ralph Abernathy has proved his administrative ability. I have worked very closely with him not only in the Montgomery Improvement Association but in the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. And since he's been executive, I mean secretary, financial secretary-treasurer of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, he has handled thousands and thousands of dollars. (Yes) And I have looked at the honesty and the accuracy which he's kept the records. (Yes) Not only, I say, is he a great soul, but he has great ability. (Yes) And I urge you to get behind him. Give him your backing, give him your support and so that he will be able to do this job (Yes) which is ahead.

It gives me great pleasure at this time, before presenting him to you, to present the other leaders, the other officers of the Montgomery Improvement Association. And in presenting them as they come forward, I say to you that although we are moving to Atlanta, Georgia, we are not moving from Montgomery. [applause] We are going [applause], we are going to a broader base to have more time and a better location to give to the total southern struggle, but I'm happy that the Montgomery Improvement Association saw fit to keep me a member of the executive board. [applause] And if I don't get to twelve board meetings a year, I will, at least, get to six of them. (Yeah) [applause] So that I'll be here. [applause] And I want you to know that we will be remembering you, and we will be thinking about you. (Yes) And, as my wife said, when you come through Atlanta, we will be looking for you. (Yes, Lord)

First, I want to present to you a man who has been with us since the beginning of our struggle. He is a man who's always on hand to give whatever he can give so that we can carry on. I have enjoyed working with him. I have enjoyed his companionship. He is the Reverend H. J. Palmer, who is the chaplain of the Montgomery Improvement Association. (All right) Give him a hand. [applause]

The next man is a man that we all love. He has given dignity to our movement, and he has worked assiduously to keep things going on so many levels. Since he is older than I am in age, on the one hand, I have considered him a father, but since he's such a gracious companion I also consider him a brother. And that is the treasurer of the Montgomery Improvement Association, Dr. H. H. Hubbard. [applause]

Sometimes you don’t hear about some of the people who are in our struggle as much as you hear about others because these are the people who work in the background, and they do a lot of the day-to-day work that must be done. And I’m thinking of a lady who was with us when we organized on December the fifth, and

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4. The evening's program listed King as a member of the MIA's executive board; he was reelected to a three-year term (Ralph Abernathy, Form letter to Friend, 30 December 1960).
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a lady who's been with us ever since, keeping the records, on hand in every meet-
ing. (Yes) And she's done it, not because there was any tremendous salary involved
in it because it's nothing, but she's done it because of her dedication to the work
of the Montgomery Improvement Association. And one of the things I like about
her is that, even if we differ on a point, she certainly isn't a fighter; when the ma-
jority rules, she follows the majority. (Amen) And she has been a wonderful per-
son to work with. I refer to you, I mention, I refer, rather, to Mrs. Erna Dungee,
the wife of a prominent physician in our community and the person who is the
financial secretary of this association and who has been reelected for this year.5
Erna's back in the back if we can all see her. [applause]

There is another person that I would like to introduce to you. He, too, has been
a very loyal supporter. He was not in Montgomery when we started; he was past-
toring in Tuskegee. But when he came to this community, he started working just
as he had been here all of the years. And he's gotten into our hearts, into the hearts
of the members of the executive board, and I have greatly appreciated his com-
mmitment and his stick-to-itness, his willingness to stick to a job until it is completed.
He is a person that we all love and admire, Father Robert E. DuBose [applause],
who is our new secretary. [applause] He is the new secretary of the Montgomery
Improvement Association.

There is another young man whom I consider a personal friend. I would like
to tell you a little secret. A few weeks ago I started thinking about this young man,
and he was in our home, in the parsonage. And I told him I wanted, that I wanted
to talk with him about something very seriously. I had mentioned this to the nom-
inating committee. I said I feel that you should be one of the vice presidents of
the Montgomery Improvement Association because I have seen something within
you. I have noticed your ability, not only as a physician, but your ability to work
with people. And not only that, I have followed your dedication, and in the midst
of your busy schedule you take time to come to our mass meetings, Monday after
Monday. And I said, "I believe you can give something to the MIA that it needs at
this hour along with the other dynamic leadership." And he said, "I can't do that."
He said, "I just can't do it. You need a person as vice president who can talk and
who can make a good speech and who can move the people." And when I heard
him speaking tonight I said to myself, he certainly didn't know what he was talk-
ing about. [laughter] And he was either telling an untruth. (That's right) Because
I can agree, I think you can agree with me (Yeah), that he made a sincere, a thought-
provoking (That's right), and a well-stated speech. I refer to Dr. Jefferson Under-
wood [sustained applause], who is the second vice president [applause], the second
vice president [applause] of the Montgomery Improvement Association.

There is another man. He has been with us from the beginning. I think I said
in Stride Toward Freedom that one of the things I like about him is that he is always
calm (That's right) and that he is a man of deep convictions and sober thoughts.
And whenever this man speaks, I pause to listen because he has something to say,
he knows how to say it (Amen), and he's always thinking (Yes) in terms of the total
situation. And I would like to present to you now the first vice president of the

5. King refers to Dungee's husband, Dr. A. C. Dungee.
Montgomery Improvement Association, the Reverend Dr. W. J. Powell, a minister of the Old Ship AME Zion Church.6 [applause]

And finally, I would like to ask my brother. Last night, my church gave a program I guess entitled “This is Your Life,” a beautiful program, as a testimonial for our family. And they really surprised me; they had my mother here, my sister, my brother. And they had been in town all day, and I didn’t know a thing about it. [laughter] But I say that only to say that my brother was here, Alfred Daniel King, whom I love. But the man that I’m about to present now is a man that I love as much as I love A. D. King, for he too has been a real brother. (Yeah) Not only has he been a brother in Christ, but he’s been a true brother in all of the situations and all of the struggles of life. And it gives me great pleasure to take this, which is a symbol of the leadership, which is a symbol of the authority, of the presidency (Amen) of the Montgomery Improvement Association, and I take great pleasure now in turning it over (Yes) to one who is able to do the job. (Amen) And as John the Baptist said [applause], and I hand it over by saying sincerely as John the Baptist said on the coming of Jesus, “I must decrease in order that he may increase.”7 (Amen) God bless you, Ralph. [applause]

At MLKEC: ET-53, ET-54.

6. In Stride Toward Freedom, King characterized Powell as having a “cool head and an even temper” (p. 73).
7. Cf. John 3:30. Accepting the MIA gavel from King, Abernathy declared: “Definitely, I am not Martin Luther King.” He promised that he would lead the MIA to the best of his ability. Identifying police brutality, school upkeep, and integration of public facilities as top priorities, the new MIA president promised ultimate victory (Ralph Abernathy, “Inaugural statement upon assumption of the presidency of the MIA,” 1 February 1960).

To Martin Luther King, Sr.

1 February 1960

[Montgomery, Ala.]

King writes his father in preparation for his first sermon as co-pastor at Ebenezer. On 7 February, a standing-room-only crowd filled the sanctuary and overflowed into the basement where loudspeakers had been set up for King’s return to the church in which he had grown up.1 Preaching “Three Dimensions of a Complete Life,” King reportedly explained that “many of today’s problems are because our white brothers

1. King’s father introduced him as “a grown man, whose decisions have been respected the world over” and remarked: “We can’t look on him as little M. L. now. To all of us he is now Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.” (Paul Delaney, “‘Follow Way of Love,’ Dr. King Asks People,” Atlanta Daily World, 9 February 1960).