Once again, for all you have done, and I’m sure will continue to do to help extend the fruits of Democracy to our southern brothers, please accept my deep and lasting gratitude.

With thoughts of the very best warmest personal regards.

Very truly yours,

[signed] Martin Luther King Jr.

Martin Luther King, Jr.

TLSr. ERC-NHyF.

The Martin Luther King, Jr. Papers Project

"Message from the President"

11 October–13 October 1960

Shreveport, La.

The typed program for SCLC’s annual conference featured these comments. Held in Shreveport, the conference was hosted by the United Christian Movement, under the theme “The Southern Struggle and the American Dilemma.” Before the proceedings began, King told a reporter that support among Shreveport African Americans symbolized “their determination to move on to the better way of life that offers human dignity for all.” During the opening session, Gardner Taylor addressed the conference and Guy Carawan of the Highlander Folk School led a “freedom sing.” King spoke at a freedom rally on the second night.

I am convinced beyond the shadow of a doubt that the philosophy of nonviolence will redeem the soul of America. There is a great temptation to accept nonviolence solely as a strategy, a device; this we must guard against. This is one of the chief aims of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference: To broadly disseminate through intensive training the heart of nonviolence, that our commitment to nonviolence will not only be as a technique, but shall become for us a way of life with love and redemption as its center.

The other chief aim of SCLC is in the area of voter-registration. Here again, it must be recognized that the right and proper use of the ballot is vital in our struggle for first-class citizenship. The SCLC stands ready to serve in developing and

1. At Evergreen Baptist Church, on the first afternoon of the conference, King told SCLC’s executive board that the organization “must do something creative this year” (Dorothy Cotton, “Minutes of annual board meeting,” 11 October 1960). SCLC’s new executive director Wyatt Tee Walker reported that the organization has successfully implemented “some of the basic organizational structure that SCLC has so sorely needed” (Walker, “Report of the director to the executive board,” 11 October 1960).


3. After the conference closed, SCLC field secretary and conference organizer Harry Blake was shot at from a passing vehicle (“Assassin’s Bullet Misses SCLC Secretary,” Pittsburgh Courier, 22 October 1960).
organizing grassroots voter registration programs. One of the most significant steps that the Negro can take at this hour is that short walk to the voting booth.

[signed] M. L. King Jr

TDS. PFC-WHi.

From Stanley D. Levison

13 October 1960
New York, N.Y.

In this letter concerning SCLC's fund-raising efforts, Levison stresses the importance of King maintaining a nonpartisan position in the 1960 election. Levison also warns him to beware of "heavy pressure" from some of Kennedy's Hollywood supporters who perceive King "as a personality of glamour not as a leader whose responsibilities will continue over decades and through changes of great magnitude."

Dr. Martin L. King
The Ebenezer Baptist Church
407 Auburn Avenue, N.E.
Atlanta, Georgia

Dear Martin,

I hope the conference went well.1 I have a few items which need your attention so that we can move on with some of the projects we've been discussing.

First: I am enclosing a draft of the appeal letter which we will get out shortly. My thought in developing it in this fashion takes advantage of the limited action you staged, in the "Stand-Ins", while not relying on it for the whole emotional appeal.2 The recipient with this approach can feel he is part of the movement because he is in it from the experimental stage to the developmental period. This sense of participation from the beginning is the substitute for the drama we lack at this moment.

Second: I am enclosing a draft of a letter to go to Atty. Clarence Jones.3 He

1. Levison refers to SCLC's annual conference, held 11–13 October in Shreveport, Louisiana.
2. On 3 October SCLC staged "stand-ins" at the Fulton County registrar's office, which King described as a "pilot project" to determine the "feasibility of a national program of voter registration protest" ("'Stand-Ins' Aim Is Told by Dr. King," Atlanta Daily World, 6 October 1960).
3. In a 13 October letter, Levison thanked Jones and his colleagues for their offer to raise funds for SCLC, describing the "electrifying actions" of student protesters as inspiration for a new initiative to protest for voting rights through "mass non-violent 'stand-ins' at the polling places in the south."