weapons of truth, noninjury, courage and soul force. Today we have the example of thousands of Negro students in the South who have courageously challenged the principalities of segregation. These young students have taken the deep groans and the passionate yearnings of the Negro people and filtered them in their own souls and fashioned them in a creative protest which is an epic known all over the nation. For the last few months they have moved in a uniquely meaningful orbit imparting light and heat to distant satellites. Through their nonviolent direct action they have been able to open hundreds of formerly segregated lunch counters in almost eighty cities. It is no overstatement to characterize these events as historic. Never before in the United States has so large a body of students spread a struggle over so great an area in pursuit of a goal of human dignity and freedom. I am convinced that future historians will have to record this student movement as one of the greatest epics of our heritage.

TAD. CSKC: Sermon file.

The Martin Luther King, Jr. Papers Project

To George W. Lee

27 September 1960

[Atlanta, Ga.]

In an 18 September telephone conversation with George W. Lee, an officer of the Benevolent and Protective Order of the Elks, King requested assistance for Atlanta student movement leader Lonnie King, whose participation in the city's sit-in protest had provoked reprisals from creditors. Lee sent King a check on 19 September. King wrote this letter in response to Lee's request for a written record.

1. King and Lee were among the speakers at a 31 July 1959 political rally in Memphis ("Dr. King Urges Memphians to Elect Candidates," Birmingham World, 5 August 1959). George Washington Lee (1894–1976), born in Indianola, Mississippi, was an author, politician, civic leader, and businessman. A World War I veteran, Lee was one of the few black officers in the American Expeditionary Forces, where he obtained the rank of lieutenant. As a member of the Republican Party, Lee served as national director of "Veterans For Hoover" during the 1928 presidential campaign. In the 1930s Lee became a member of Memphis's Benevolent Order of the Elks and later became the organization's Grand Commissioner of Education in 1951. In 1952, Lee was a delegate to the Republican National Convention, where he delivered the seconding speech for Senator Robert Taft. He was also the author of several books on Memphis, including Beale Street: Where the Blues Began (1934) and Beale Street Sundown (1942). Lonnie Cecil King, Jr. (1936–), born in Arlington, Georgia, earned a B.A. (1969) from Morehouse College and an M.A. (1968) from the University of Baltimore. In 1960, King and other Atlanta students founded the Committee on Appeal for Human Rights (COAHR) to coordinate the city's student sit-in demonstrations. King served as chairman of the organization until his departure from Atlanta in 1961. That same year, he enrolled at Howard University Law School and began organizing protests against the university's administrative policies. He left the university in 1962. From 1969 to 1973, he served both as president of the Georgia chapter of the NAACP and the principal organizer and chairman of the Community Coalition on Broadcasting.
My Dear Mr. Lee:

This is to acknowledge receipt of your letter of September 19 with the enclosed check of two hundred and fifty dollars for Lonnie King. This gesture of good will on your part will go a long, long way in helping Lonnie adjust to a difficult situation. As I said to you over the telephone, Lonnie is a very dedicated young man with a real sense of commitment to the civil right struggle. He has done a very significant job here in Atlanta, and the community now has a sense of involvement in the total struggle that it has lacked so long. Since circumstances have catapulted Lonnie into the leadership of the Atlanta Student Movement we feel a moral responsibility to protect him from all situations that may jeopardize his unenviable position. As you know he is a student at Morehouse College and his wife [Alice] is a student at Spelman. In an attempt to keep himself and wife in school and meet other family responsibilities that naturally face them as a result of having a child [Kimberly Jeanine], Lonnie got behind in several bills. Although he works at the Post Office, and makes a fairly good salary I am sure you can realize how easily one can over spend when he has so many responsibilities. After Lonnie started receiving publicity as being head of the Student Movement many of his creditors demanded immediate payment of certain outstanding bills. This was obviously an attempt to retaliate for the leadership he had rendered in the Movement. Realizing the extent to which some of our opponents will go and the embarrassment they will seek to cast upon our leadership, a few of us, after becoming aware of the problem, decided to sit down with Lonnie and seek to work out some plan whereby he could pay these various bills immediately. It was out of this situation that my request came to you. I am happy to say that we have been able to meet the problem and Lonnie is now free to continue his leadership without having financial worries.

Please know that we would not have called on you in this way if we had not felt that we were dealing with an emergency situation. We realized that this was somewhat irregular, but we felt that the situation justified our making this special request. I said to the Committee when the issue came up the following words, “Although this will be something of an unusual request to make to the Elks Department of Education my knowledge of George W. Lee’s sense of good will and commitment to the civil right struggle convinces me that he will give a sympathetic ear.” So you did just as I expected. Again let me thank you for your cooperation and great concern. You have my prayers and best wishes for your continued success in all of the significant work that you are doing.

Very sincerely yours,

Martin Luther King, Jr.

MLK1lmh