"King Says Vision Told Him to Lead Integration Forces"

28 January 1957
Montgomery, Ala.

After another weekend of violence in Montgomery, including a failed attempt to bomb King’s home with twelve sticks of dynamite, King declares to his Dexter congregation on 27 January that their city is “dangerous to live in—it’s no longer safe.” For the first time he talks about experiencing a “divine” presence a year before, when God gave him the courage he needed to face escalating threats of violence. A Montgomery Advertiser article the next day included these quotations from King’s sermon.

After describing the vision to his almost-filled church a few hours after a dynamite bundle failed to explode on his porch when his family was not at home, King said in prayer:

“I realize that there were moments when I wanted to give up (leadership of the pro-integration movement) and I was afraid but You gave me a vision in the kitchen of my house and I am thankful for it.”

The 28-year-old Baptist minister said in his sermon that after Montgomery Negroes began a 381-day bus boycott on Dec. 5, 1955, “I went to bed many nights scared to death” by threats against himself and his family.

“Early on a sleepless morning in January, 1956,” King said, “rationality left me.” Then, “almost out of nowhere I heard a voice that morning saying to me:

“Preach the Gospel, stand up for the truth, stand up for righteousness.”

King went on, “Since that morning I can stand up without fear. So I’m not afraid of anybody this morning.

“Tell Montgomery they can keep shooting and I’m going to stand up to them; tell Montgomery they can keep bombing and I’m going to stand up to them.

“If I had to die tomorrow morning I would die happy, because I’ve been to the mountain top and I’ve seen the promised land and it’s going to be here in Mont-

3. A second Advertiser article dealing with the bombing attempt provided additional quotations from King’s sermon: “When men sink that low (bombing churches) they become dangerous . . . victims of mental illness. They wouldn’t hesitate to kill.” King told his congregation that Negroes must continue a policy of non-violence “because our oppressors control the police, the National Guard even, and if they send a federal government in here, that will be white folks, too.” King told the group “Let us not get our guns because that will not solve our problems. Through our suffering, we are going to transform the hearts of those who are cowardly enough to throw bombs and shoot pistols” (“’Dud’ Spares King’s Home; Another Hit,” Montgomery Advertiser, 28 January 1957).
The old Montgomery is passing away and segregation is dying," King declared.

*PD. Montgomery Advertiser, 28 January 1957.*

To Dorothy M. Steere

31 January 1957
Montgomery, Ala.

Steere, a prominent Quaker and member of the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), had met with King when she visited Montgomery in April 1956. She wrote King on 5 January to report on her meeting in New York with Indian prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru. Familiar with King and the Montgomery bus boycott, Nehru had expressed interest in meeting him and responded "with enthusiasm" to the suggestion that King visit India. While conceding that King was "very much needed" in the South, Steere urged him to travel to India at some point and offered her assistance.

Former U.S. ambassador to India Chester Bowles and others had also informed King of Nehru's interest.

Miss Dorothy M. Steere
Haverford College
Haverford, Pa.

Dear Miss Steere:

Thanks for your very kind letter of January 5. I must apologize for being somewhat tardy in my reply. Absence from the city and the accumulation of a flood of mail account for the delay. Please know that this slowness in responding was not due to sheer negligence, but to the inevitable pressures of an involved situation. It was a real pleasure hearing from you and getting your very encouraging words.

1. See Steere to King, 5 January 1957, and note 2 to Dorothy Canfield Fisher to King, 23 April 1956, in *Papers* 3:220. Dorothy McEachron Steere (1907-), born in Grand Haven, Michigan, received her B.A. (1928) from the University of Michigan. She was active in the AFSC, serving on several international missions during the late 1940s and 1950s, including visits to South Africa and India. Steere chaired AFSC's religious education committee from 1950 to 1953 and also served on the board of directors of the NAACP.

2. Writing from India on 28 January, Bowles reported that Nehru's interest in meeting King was shared by several other associates of Gandhi, including members of the late leader's family: "Nothing would spread more goodwill for America than a visit here by someone who has tried to apply Gandhi's principles in the United States. The stories I have told here of your peaceful boycott and the approach you have adopted in Montgomery have fortified people's faith in the democratic method." Unitarian minister Homer Alexander Jack had also reported on Steere's conference with Nehru in an earlier letter (see Jack to King, 27 December 1956, in *Papers* 3:496-498).