INTRODUCTION

One of the frustrations of any young man is to approach the heights at such an early age. The average man reaches this point maybe in his late forties or early fifties. But when you reach it so young, your life becomes a kind of decrescendo. You feel yourself fading from the screen at a time you should just be starting to work toward your goal. And no one knows better than I that no crowds will be waiting outside churches to greet me two years from now when some one invited me to speak.

Martin Luther King, Jr.
New York Post, 14 April 1957

By the end of 1956, Martin Luther King, Jr. was already widely known for his leadership of the Montgomery bus boycott and was fast becoming a national symbol for the civil rights movement. Increasingly sought after as a spokesperson for civil rights reform, social gospel Christianity, and Gandhian nonviolent resistance, King struggled to accommodate the many speaking invitations and other appeals that flooded his office, and he pondered numerous requests to publish his account of the Montgomery campaign. As early as December 1956, he had made clear his readiness to build upon the success of the boycott, depicting Montgomery as a "proving ground" for the use of Gandhian methods to achieve social justice.[1] Broadening his contacts with other activists, King represented the Montgomery protest at several gatherings designed to promote the use of nonviolent tactics in an expanded, South-wide movement. King's decision to assume a leadership position in the southern struggle resulted not only from his own sense of calling, but also from the initiative of northern supporters, who saw the potential for a sustained protest movement with King at the fore. Yet even as he began discussions regarding the creation of an organization that would bring together black activist ministers in the South, King was ambivalent about taking on wider responsibilities. Faced with the new demands that accompanied his rise to promi-

1. King, "Facing the Challenge of a New Age," 3 December 1956, in *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. 3: *Birth of a New Age, December 1955–December 1956,* ed. Clayborne Carson, Stewart Burns, Susan Carson, Peter Holloran, Dana L. H. Powell (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997), pp. 451–463.

nence, he found it difficult to fulfill his obligations as pastor of Dexter Avenue Baptist Church and president of the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA). Moreover, the bus boycott had exhilarated but also exhausted him, and the wave of segregationist violence in Alabama near the end of 1956 warned him of the dangers associated with civil rights activism. Nearing his twenty-eighth birthday and entering his third year at Dexter, King began the new year struggling to balance family, church, and MIA responsibilities with those of his national public ministry.

During an NAACP rally in Atlanta on 1 January 1957, King reaffirmed the basic ideas that he had developed in many of the previous year's speeches: a renunciation of retaliatory violence, an acceptance of *agape*—redemptive goodwill toward all peoples—as the guiding ideal for the black struggle, an abiding faith in divinely ordained justice, and a recognition that resistance to segregation would involve sacrifice and even death. While refining these themes, King also introduced several broader concerns that would characterize his subsequent speeches, particularly his growing interest in national and international politics. Encouraging his audience in Atlanta to see itself in the context of the worldwide struggles of oppressed, nonwhite people, he proclaimed that "the old order of colonialism is passing away, and the new order of freedom and equality is coming into being." Declaring that ultimate victory is inevitable because "God is struggling with us," King urged African Americans to "speed up the coming" of the new order: "We must somehow stand up and courageously oppose segregation wherever we find it. We must passively resist it." Even as he championed the tactics used in Montgomery, King advocated a multifaceted strategy to achieve civil rights reform utilizing black political and economic power as well as protest and NAACP-style litigation.[2]

The Atlanta address marked the beginning of a period in which King's activities shifted focus from local injustices to regional and national civil rights concerns. During the closing weeks of 1956 he had discussed with black pacifist Bayard Rustin the possibility of using Montgomery as a model for an extended protest movement. Rustin, who had advised King since the early days of the boycott, proposed the creation of a group that would unite black protest leaders from across the South, informing King that he was "in a very strong position now to set up an organization" in which he would be "the key."[3] Rustin spent the early days of 1957 finishing a set of "working papers" that outlined the purpose and structure of his proposed "congress of organizations. . . . capable of reacting promptly and effectively to situations and possessing ties to masses of people so that their action projects are backed by broad participation of people who gain experience and knowledge in the course of the struggles."[4] Rustin prepared the

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2. King, "Facing the Challenge of a New Age," 1 January 1957, pp. 73–89 in this volume.

3. Rustin also advised King to exclude representatives of the Urban League and the NAACP because "if you bring all those organizations together, you will have to compromise to their needs" (*The Reminiscences of Bayard Rustin* [New York: Columbia University, 1988], p. 151).

4. Rustin to King, 23 December 1956, in *Papers* 3:493; Southern Leaders Conference, Working Papers 1–7, 11 January 1957.

papers to guide discussions at the planned Southern Negro Leaders Conference on Transportation and Nonviolent Integration. This meeting, scheduled for 10 January at Atlanta's Ebenezer Baptist Church, would lay the foundation for the regional organization that eventually became the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC).

Although King maintained ties to many of the activists who had assisted him during the bus protest, by 1957 Rustin had emerged as his most trusted advisor on ideological and strategic affairs. Rustin enhanced King's influence outside Montgomery, drafting several public statements for King and introducing him to activists—notably labor leader A. Philip Randolph—outside the network of black Baptist churches that had supported the MIA. Rustin also channeled funds to King and the MIA through the New York-based civil rights support group In Friendship and facilitated King's ties to two of the founders of this group, leftist lawyer Stanley Levison and former NAACP organizer Ella Baker. King met Levison a few weeks before the January gathering and thereafter benefited from his advice, legal counsel, and contacts. Baker, a veteran activist with extensive southern organizing experience, came to Atlanta to assist Rustin in handling local arrangements for the black leaders' meeting; she would return the following year to manage SCLC's office.

On 7 January King and ministers C. K. Steele of Tallahassee and Fred Shuttlesworth of Birmingham jointly issued the call for the Southern Negro Leaders Conference, inviting black leaders "from troubled areas all over the South . . . to share thinking, to discuss common problems, to devise a unified strategy and to plan mutual economic assistance."[5] Although King and other participants agreed on the importance of forming a new regional group, their discussions about the future conflicted with their need to respond to the wave of segregationist violence targeting southern civil rights supporters. On 10 January, just hours before the meeting was to begin, King learned that bombs had exploded at four black churches in Montgomery and at the parsonages of MIA leaders Ralph Abernathy and Robert Graetz.[6] King and Abernathy, already in Atlanta, rushed home to Montgomery and missed the opening session, leaving Coretta King and Shuttlesworth to serve as moderators.[7] In Montgomery King inspected the damaged buildings and contacted local FBI agents to demand an investigation.[8] When he

5. MIA, Press release, 7 January 1957, pp. 94–95 in this volume.

6. See King to Robert Johnson, 10 January 1957, p. 97 in this volume. Several of the black leaders at the conference had been recent victims of racist violence, including King and Shuttlesworth, whose homes had been bombed (see King to Dwight D. Eisenhower, 11 January 1957, pp. 99–101 in this volume; see also King to Shuttlesworth, 26 December 1956, in *Papers* 3: 495–496).

7. King, Abernathy, and several other activist ministers were already in Atlanta participating in a gathering organized by Glenn E. Smiley of the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR). Smiley, who had also served as an advisor to King during the boycott, later accused Rustin of attempting to boost attendance at the Southern Negro Leaders Conference gathering by scheduling it immediately after the FOR meeting (Smiley, Draft of autobiography, 1986; for more on Smiley's rivalry with Rustin, see William Robert Miller to King, 25 February 1957, pp. 141–143 in this volume).

8. See Fred Hallford to J. Edgar Hoover, 10 January 1957; see also Maxwell Rabb to King, 11 January 1957, p. 98 in this volume.

Segregation Hasn't Been Licked

In spite of timely Supreme Court decisions ruling out racial separation, jim crow is still unbeaten. But real strides have been made in the last year to drastically reduce the web of segregation — still the ugly weave of this system shows too much.

We Can't Relax

Hutchinson Street Baptist

This church suffered damage to the amount of $2,444.15. The insurance covered three-fourths of this loss. Dr. H. H. Johnson, the Pastor and members of his loyal congregation face the added expense of repairs caused by vandalism.

Trinity Lutheran Parsonage

The mass bombing of January 10 past marked the second time that this home was hit in less than six months. The young Rev. Robert Graetz and his family were sleeping when the attack occurred which not only damaged the house, but ruined some household furnishings. Baby Graetz was nine days old on the morning the rectory was struck and not aware of the danger he was in—slept through all of the excitement. In spite of being Caucasian, Pastor Graetz has served the Negro Congregation since his coming from Los Angeles, California in June 1955. Including the auto damage—housed in the attached garage—the total loss amounted to $683.00.

First Baptist Parsonage

While a bomb was wrecking this dwelling place a young mother and her two year old daughter were unprotected occupants because the husband and father was in a conference in Atlanta. The home is still unlivable, causing serious inconveniences to the Rev. and Mrs. Ralph Abernathy and daughter. Approximately $4,000 will be needed to make the parsonage habitable.

First Baptist Church

From the appearance of the above picture, everything looks orderly. Yet it suffered much loss from a bomb that was tossed into the church. The Sanctuary and basement level must undergo extensive repairs to restore the beauty of this historic building. Insurance adjusters appraised damage near $17,000.

Montgomery Improvement Association flyer, "Segregation Hasn't Been Licked" (March 1957)

returned to Atlanta the following day for the final session of the conference, King accepted the post of chairman of the assembly. In addition to releasing "A Statement to the South and the Nation" affirming their commitment to a nonviolent "struggle for freedom," the black leaders concluded the conference by sending telegrams to the president, vice president, and attorney general, demanding federal action on civil rights. Yet beyond agreeing to create a "continuing body," the leaders did not define the group's structure.[9]

During the weeks following the meeting, King experienced difficulty transforming his success in the Montgomery campaign into a broader civil rights reform movement. His entreaties to the Eisenhower administration prompted only responses from lower-level officials, and the president continued to duck black leaders' requests to deliver a pro–civil rights speech in the South.[10] Rather than gaining confidence from his new role as head of the Southern Negro Leaders Conference, King began displaying signs of stress, stemming largely from the violence that persisted after the end of the boycott. Shortly after the Atlanta conference, Coretta King confided to a northern supporter: "The pressures are not any less and it seems that they will continue for a long, long while. You see, Martin has become the 'leader' and authority on non-violent integration in the south. His responsibilities continue to grow. What he has to do is the job of not less than four men. . . . He can't continue indefinitely under the pressure of the situation."[11]

On 13 January King traveled to Nashville for a speaking engagement, an event marred by the discovery of a fake bomb on the sidewalk outside the church where he appeared. The following evening King used an MIA mass meeting to reflect on the meaning of the recent violent incidents. He proposed that the hardships endured by black residents of Montgomery reflected a divine purpose: "It may be that we are called upon to be God's suffering servants through whom he is working his redemptive plan." Rejecting bitterness, he advised, "let us continue to love."[12] The meeting reached a crescendo as King invited his audience to join in a prayer for guidance. "Lord, I hope no one will have to die as a result of our struggle for freedom in Montgomery," he cried. "Certainly I don't want to die. But if anyone has to die, let it be me." Members of the crowd protested and their shouts filled the church as King apparently faltered and fell silent, prompting re-

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9. "A Statement to the South and the Nation," 10 January–11 January 1957, pp. 103–106 in this volume; Jack Nelson, "Negro Leaders Here Ask Brownell Meeting," *Atlanta Constitution*, 12 January 1957. The black leaders requested that Eisenhower deliver a speech in the South asking southerners to abide by the Supreme Court's 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision (King to Eisenhower, 11 January 1957, pp. 99–101 in this volume; see also King to Richard M. Nixon, pp. 101–103 in this volume; and King to Herbert Brownell, both dated 11 January 1957).

10. Sherman Adams to King, 18 January 1957; see also Warren Olney to King, 30 January 1957; "'I can't do it'—Ike Plays Golf, But He Can't Deliver Speech in South," Baltimore *Afro-American*, 9 February 1957.

11. Coretta Scott King to Lynn Rohrbough, 16 January 1957.

12. King, Outline, Address to the MIA Mass Meeting at Bethel Baptist Church, 14 January 1957, pp. 109–110 in this volume.

ports that he collapsed at the pulpit.[13] One MIA member later remembered the event: "It was obvious that he was at the point of exhaustion. I think they could feel it, that he was going to probably just pass out if he kept on going."[14] King insisted that the intense audience reaction prevented him from continuing the prayer and strongly denied reports that he had collapsed. However, he later admitted suffering a breakdown in response to the previous weeks' bombings, which had caused him "to feel a personal sense of guilt for everything that was happening," and explained that the "episode brought me great relief. Many people came up to me after the meeting and many called the following day to assure me that we were all together until the end."[15]

King's resolve continued to be tested as resistance to desegregation remained strong in Montgomery. In mid-January, white officials seeking to undermine the bus boycott victory announced plans to establish a private, segregated bus line. Early on the morning of 27 January, police spotted and disengaged twelve sticks of dynamite smoldering on the porch of King's Dexter parsonage. The family was not home, but King soon learned that the office of the city's black taxi service had been bombed, sending three drivers to the hospital. Another bomb damaged the home of a sixty-year-old black hospital worker. As he had done almost exactly one year before, King calmed an angry crowd that assembled at his home by counseling nonviolence: "I know this is difficult advice to follow, especially since we have been the victims of no less than ten bombings, but this is the way of Christ; it is the way of the cross. We must somehow believe that unearned suffering is redemptive."[16] Speaking to his Dexter congregation later in the morning, King recalled a spiritual reawakening that he had experienced during an especially dark moment of the bus boycott. He reported that he had drawn strength

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13. *Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1958), pp. 177–178; see also Nelson Cole, "King Collapses in Prayer During Negro Mass Meeting," *Montgomery Advertiser*, 15 January 1957. During his sermon the previous morning, King bemoaned the antiblack brutalities that had struck Montgomery and elsewhere in the South, and asked: "Where is God while hundreds and thousands of his children suffer merely because they are desirous of having freedom and human dignity? Where is God while churches and homes of ministers are being plunged across the abyss of torturous barbarity?" (The Ways of God in the Midst of Glaring Evil, 13 January 1957, pp.107–109 in this volume).

14. Robert Graetz, Interview by David J. Garrow, 23 February 1984.

15. *Stride Toward Freedom*, p. 178; see also King to Fannie Scott, 28 January 1957, p. 113 in this volume.

16. *Stride Toward Freedom*, p. 179. Montgomery police arrested seven men in connection with the January church bombings. Seeking to convince the all-white jury that black civil rights proponents were responsible for the violence, defense attorneys called King as a witness. "For more than an hour I was questioned on things which had no relevance to the bombing case," King recalled. "The lawyers lifted statements of mine out of context to give the impression that I was a perpetrator of hate and violence. At many points they invented derogatory statements concerning white people, and attributed them to me." King was discouraged when the jury ignored the considerable evidence against the first two defendants facing trial and returned a verdict of not guilty (*Stride Toward Freedom*, p. 180; see also Rex Thomas, "Rev. King Denies Blasts Were Set to Raise Money," *Montgomery Advertiser*, 30 May 1957, and "'Tragic' Declares Negro Leader," *Birmingham Post-Herald*, 31 May 1957).

and comfort from an early morning visit of a divine presence, which assured him of the righteousness of the boycott. King defiantly proclaimed: "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." Revealing an increasing awareness of mortality that would become a recurring theme in his oratory, King continued: "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 Montgomery."[17]

In the weeks after the Southern Negro Leaders Conference meeting in Atlanta, King fulfilled a demanding speaking and meeting schedule that brought him to St. Paul, New Orleans, New York, Hot Springs, and Oberlin. In a 10 February television interview in New York City, he confessed that the continuing resistance to bus desegregation in Montgomery had left him with no opportunity "to sit down and think about next moves."[18] As a result, when he and other black ministers gathered on 14 February in New Orleans for the second meeting of the Southern Negro Leaders Conference, they repeated the pattern set at the Atlanta gathering, reporting on the slow progress of their local movements and sending telegrams to Eisenhower and other government leaders requesting federal intervention in the South. Although little had been accomplished since its initial meeting, the group affirmed its determination to establish itself as a permanent organization, shortening its name to the Southern Leaders Conference and electing King president.[19] Using telegram drafts prepared by Levison and Rustin, the conferees expressed their concerns to government officials with notably more force than in the previous month, warning Eisenhower that they would lead a pilgrimage of prayer to Washington "if you, our president cannot come south to relieve our harassed people."[20]

In the days following the New Orleans meeting, King prepared to attend the independence ceremonies for the Gold Coast, soon to become the new West African nation of Ghana. After receiving his invitation from Prime Minister Kwame Nkrumah, King accepted donations from the MIA and the Dexter congregation to finance his trip.[21] Confirming his emergence as a national black leader, King and his wife traveled with a delegation that included A. Philip Ran-

17. "King Says Vision Told Him to Lead Integration Forces," *Montgomery Advertiser*, 28 January 1957, pp. 114–115 in this volume; "'Dud' Spares King's Home; Another Hit," *Montgomery Advertiser*, 28 January 1957.

18. King, Interview by Richard D. Heffner on "The Open Mind," 10 February 1957, pp. 126–131 in this volume.

19. Russell Lasley, Minutes, Southern Leaders Conference, 14 February 1957.

20. King to Eisenhower, pp. 132–134 in this volume; King to Nixon, pp. 134–135 in this volume; King to Herbert Brownell; and King to Thomas C. Hennings and Emanuel Celler, all dated 14 February 1957.

21. Kwame Nkrumah to King, 22 January 1957, pp. 112–113 in this volume; James E. Nesbitt to King, 14 February 1957, pp. 137–138 in this volume.

dolph, Congressman Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., and United Nations official Ralph Bunche.

Soon after arriving in Accra on 4 March, King attended a reception where he met Vice President Nixon. Encountering a high federal official for the first time, King used the opportunity to press Nixon to respond to the Southern Leaders Conference requests. "Mr. Vice President, I'm very glad to meet you here," King reportedly told Nixon, "but I want you to come visit us down in Alabama where we are seeking the same kind of freedom the Gold Coast is celebrating."[22] Though he had previously ignored King's telegrams, Nixon invited him to Washington to discuss the southern segregation crisis.[23]

At a midnight independence ceremony on 6 March, King's emotions overflowed as he watched the lowering of the Union Jack and the hoisting of the Black Star over Accra's polo grounds. Following a minute of silent prayer, a crowd of fifty thousand people erupted in joyous shouts and cheers. The subsequent celebration, which King recounted on several occasions, made a vivid imprint on his memory: "We could hear little children six years old and old people eighty and ninety years old walking the streets of Accra crying: 'Freedom! Freedom!' They couldn't say it in the sense that we'd say it, many of them don't speak English too well, but they had their accents and it could ring out 'free-doom!' They were crying it in a sense that they had never heard it before." For King the events in Ghana presaged the passing of the "old order of colonialism, of segregation, of discrimination" while reaffirming his belief in a just God: "That night when I saw that old flag coming down and the new flag coming up, I saw something else. That wasn't just an ephemeral, evanescent event appearing on the stage of history. But it was an event with eternal meaning. . . . Somehow the forces of justice stand on the side of the universe, so that you can't ultimately trample over God's children and profit by it."[24]

During Ghana's first day of independence, King attended the seating of the new parliament in the morning and a formal reception at Christiansborg Castle that evening. The Kings later had a private lunch with Prime Minister Nkrumah at his official residence. King enjoyed being treated as an international dignitary, which bolstered his reputation at home, but Coretta King would later remember her husband as deeply troubled by the poverty he encountered in Accra. The couple felt especially uneasy being served breakfast each morning by low-paid attendants. "Seeing how that system had demoralized them bothered us and marred our trip," she recalled. "Martin was extremely upset by the servile attitude to which their suffering had brought them. They had been trained to bow, almost to cringe; their stature was decreased."[25]

Before leaving Ghana, King fell ill and was forced to remain in bed for several days of recuperation. Despite his poor health, he welcomed a visit from English

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22. "M. L. King Meets Nixon in Ghana," *Pittsburgh Courier,* 16 March 1957.

23. Thaddeus T. Stokes, "Dr. King Says He May Meet With Nixon," *Atlanta Daily World,* 29 March 1957.

24. King, "The Birth of a New Nation," 7 April 1957, pp. 155–167 in this volume.

25. Coretta Scott King, *My Life with Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969), pp. 154–155.

clergyman and anticolonial activist Michael Scott, during which the two men compared the freedom struggles in Africa and the United States. King reportedly expressed admiration for the bus boycott then taking place in Johannesburg, South Africa, and remarked that there was "no basic difference between colonialism and racial segregation. . . . at bottom both segregation in America and colonialism in Africa were based on the same thing—white supremacy and contempt for life."[26]

The Kings left Ghana on 12 March, spending two weeks as tourists in Kano, Rome, Geneva, Paris, and London, where on 24 March they had lunch with Trinidadian writer and political activist C. L. R. James. Although King left no record of his response to James's eclectic Marxism, a subsequent letter that James sent to his political associates in the United States suggests that he was deeply impressed by King's report on the Montgomery struggle. James warned that Marxist organizations would be "making a fundamental mistake" by not recognizing the nonviolent movements in Ghana and Montgomery "for what they are, a technique of revolutionary struggle characteristic of our age."[27]

Returning to Montgomery, King shared his travel stories and insights with the community at several public events, allowing him to depict the local bus struggle within the context of a global drive for racial and economic justice. At Dexter, King preached "The Birth of a New Nation," an account of his trip combining theological reflection and political analysis. He proposed that at the heart of the Ghanaian struggle for independence was the certainty that "freedom only comes through persistent revolt, through persistent agitation, through persistently rising up against the system of evil." The integration of the bus system was just the beginning, he told the congregation: "Don't sit down and do nothing now because the buses are integrated, because if you stop now, we will be in the dungeons of segregation and discrimination for another hundred years. And our children and our children's children will suffer all of the bondage that we have lived under for years."[28]

For the next two Sundays at Dexter, King continued to blend social commentary and personal reflections into his sermons. Preaching on Palm Sunday, King spoke of Jesus' initial reluctance to embrace the cross as he prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane. After dwelling on the difficulties of life's "Good Fridays," King concluded that surrendering to God's will, though often painful and incomprehensible, is the only way to freedom: "I will follow Him to the garden. I will follow Him to the cross if He wants me to go there. I will follow Him to the dark valleys

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26. Homer Alexander Jack, "Conversation in Ghana," *Christian Century* 74 (10 April 1957): 446–448.

27. C. L. R. James to Martin and Jesse Glaberman, 25 March 1957; see also James to King, 5 April 1957, pp. 149–150 in this volume, and King to James, 30 April 1957, p. 194 in this volume.

28. King, "The Birth of a New Nation," 7 April 1957, pp. 155–167 in this volume. Commenting on King's preaching style to a reporter after the sermon, one congregation member asserted that despite Dexter's reputation for being a "sophisticated" church, "the Rev. Mr. King has ruined more faces with crying than anybody else I know. . . . I almost broke out crying myself yesterday when he preached on his recent trip to the birth of Ghana" (Ted Poston, "Where Does He Go From Here?" *New York Post*, 14 April 1957).

of death if He wants me to go there! Not my will, but Thy will be done."[29] Delivering his Easter sermon a week later, King suggested that the Resurrection symbolizes the belief that God is on the side of righteousness: "If we can just stand with it, if we can just live with Good Friday, things will be all right. For I know that Easter's coming and I can see it coming now. As I look over the world, as I look at America I can see Easter coming in race relations. I can see it coming on every hand. I see it coming in Montgomery."[30]

The notice King received as a result of his trip to Ghana confirmed that he had become a symbol of liberation for an international constituency, adding to the demands on his attention. During the spring of 1957, he received adulatory letters from dozens of African students requesting his assistance in their efforts to study or work in the United States. "I will like to come and lead my life in United States of America, in order that I might learn some trade for you, myself and our people in this New Nation of Ghana," wrote Alex F. Quao. The Ghanaian student requested that the civil rights leader arrange a job for him in the United States: "As a states man and head of all the Negroes in America . . . it is easier for you to do something about my passage and take care of me."[31] From Morocco, journalist Ernest L. Zaugg relayed a message from Algerian rebels who believed that fighting for independence from the French "is a part of the same struggle" as the fight against southern segregation: "The rebels send greetings and told me to tell you they are 100% behind you."[32]

King's visibility already had increased earlier in the year as a result of a television interview on the National Broadcasting Company's "The Open Mind," followed soon after by a laudatory cover story in *Time* magazine and a favorable profile in the *New York Times*. The national media stressed King's Georgia roots and northern graduate-school education in depicting him as a symbol of the South's "New Negro." The *New York Times* Sunday magazine piece portrayed King as the preacher/philosopher who "introduced intellectual dynamism to the Montgomery Negroes." He was, according to the article, "an aspiring Negro who reached the scholastic heights up North," and traded "Biblical bombast" for sermons fusing "Christianity, Hegelianism and Gandhism." *Time* described King as a "scholarly, 28-year-old Negro Baptist Minister . . . who in little more than a year has risen from nowhere to become one of the nation's remarkable leaders of men."[33] Although aware of the media's tendency to neglect the contributions of other southern black activists, King viewed his increasing fame as a positive de-

29. King, "Garden of Gethsemane," 14 April 1957.

30. King, "Questions that Easter Answers," 21 April 1957.

31. Quao to King, 18 March 1957; see also Charles Akuamoa to King, 25 July 1957, pp. 239–240 in this volume, and Herbert Vilakazi to King, 25 October 1958, pp. 515–516 in this volume.

32. Zaugg to King, 20 October 1957.

33. *Time* further characterized King as "an expert organizer," who had "out-generaled" Montgomery's white leadership during the bus boycott ("Attack on the Conscience," *Time*, 18 February 1957; George Barrett, "Jim Crow, He's Real Tired," *New York Times*, 3 March 1957; Interview by Richard D. Heffner on "The Open Mind," 10 February 1957, pp. 126–131 in this volume).

velopment leading toward "a lessening of the tensions and feelings against me and the movement itself."[34]

With the assistance of Rustin and Levison, King built upon the positive media coverage by drafting articles and speeches directed at potential civil rights sympathizers outside the South. King's message particularly drew the interest of northern religious liberals, who looked to him for moral guidance on issues of race relations. In early February the religious journal *Christian Century* published King's "Nonviolence and Racial Justice," a summary of his views on the southern situation and nonviolent protest. On Sunday, 10 February, congregations across the country heard their ministers read a statement King wrote for the National Council of Churches' annual "Race Relations Sunday."[35] King quickly became a popular guest speaker at gatherings of religious liberals and white civil rights proponents. In these addresses he often urged white moderates and the church to confront racial inequality, contending that segregation undermined the nation's prestige in the eyes of developing countries.[36] Upon receiving the Social Justice Award of the Religion and Labor Foundation in New York City on 24 April, King expressed his optimism that "white moderates of the South" would "rise up courageously, without fear, and take leadership of the South." King further reported that his foreign travels had convinced him that government officials in the United States needed to recognize that civil rights reform was not a "domestic issue" to be "kicked about by hypocritical and reactionary politicians; it is rather an eternal moral issue which may well determine the destiny of our nation in the ideological struggle with Communism."[37] The following day King delivered "The Role of the Church in Facing the Nation's Chief Moral Dilemma" at a Nashville conference organized to encourage southern white clergy to support the desegregation struggle. Reaffirming the basic tenets of social gospel Christianity that he inherited from his father and grandfather, King insisted that "every minister of the gospel has a mandate to stand up courageously for righteousness, to proclaim the eternal verities of the gospel, and to lead men from the desolate midnight of falsehood to the bright daybreak of truth." He complained that the Christian church often set a poor example with respect to integration and in-

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34. Ted Poston, "Where Does He Go From Here?" *New York Post*, 14 April 1957.

35. King, "Nonviolence and Racial Justice," 6 February 1957, pp. 118–122 in this volume; King, "For All . . . A Non-segregated Society," 10 February 1957, pp. 123–125 in this volume. The following year, King agreed to serve as an editor-at-large at *Christian Century* (King to Harold E. Fey, 16 September 1958).

36. With Levison's encouragement, King also began forging ties to a number of progressive Jewish organizations. On 13 January 1958 he spoke on the "Desirability of Being Maladjusted" at Beth Emet The Free Synagogue in Evanston, Illinois, and two days later he delivered "The Montgomery, Alabama Story" before the Jewish Community Center Forum in Cincinnati. During an address to the American Jewish Congress in Miami, King spoke of the common struggle of Jews and African Americans: "Every Negro leader is keenly aware . . . that the segregationists and racists make no fine distinctions between the Negro and the Jew. . . . [Their] aim is to maintain, through crude segregation, groups whose uses as scapegoats can facilitate their political and social rule over all people. Our common fight is against these deadly enemies of democracy" (King, Address Delivered at the National Biennial Convention of the American Jewish Congress, 14 May 1958, pp. 406–410 in this volume).

37. King, "This is a Great Time to Be Alive," 24 April 1957.

sisted that the church was obliged to "take an active stand against the injustices that Negroes confront in city and county courts of many southern towns."[38] Later in the year, when King addressed the annual meeting of the National Council of Churches, he contrasted "real liberalism" with the "quasi-liberalism" of many Christians that "became so involved in seeing all sides [that it] failed to become committed to either side," adding: "What we need now is a strong ethical Christian liberalism, which will take a definite stand in the name of Jesus Christ."[39]

During the spring and summer of 1957, King made more than fifty public appearances outside of Montgomery, including four college commencements, several well-attended addresses during a June fund raising trip to California, and an 18 July appearance at Billy Graham's Evangelistic Crusade at New York's Madison Square Garden.[40] But the pressures of constant travel took a toll on him. "I haven't read a book—really sat down and read a book—for a year," he later confessed to friends. "Sometimes I accept an engagement just to get the people off my back because I know if I say 'No' they will be inviting me again a month later."[41] Although consistently optimistic when speaking with journalists and delivering public addresses away from Montgomery, King grew increasingly introspective and unguarded in his public statements at home. In an August 1957 sermon at Dexter, King reflected on the rigors of travel and the price of his newfound fame:

> I can hardly go into any city or any town in this nation where I'm not lavished with hospitality by peoples of all races and of all creeds. I can hardly go anywhere to speak in this nation where hundreds and thousands of people are not turned away because of lack of space. And then after speaking, I often have to be rushed out to get away from the crowd rushing for autographs. I can hardly walk the street in any city of this nation where I'm not confronted with people running up the street, "Isn't this Reverend King of Alabama?"

He confessed to his congregation that he prayed God would help him to see himself in "true perspective" as "just a symbol of the movement," adding: "Help me to see that I'm the victim of what the Germans call a *Zeitgeist* and that something was getting ready to happen in history. . . . And that a boycott would have taken place in Montgomery, Alabama, if I had never come to Alabama. . . . Because if I don't see that, I will become the biggest fool in America."[42]

King's numerous speeches and guest sermons during the spring of 1957 received enthusiastic responses, broadening his appeal among white religious lib-

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38. King, "The Role of the Church in Facing the Nation's Chief Moral Dilemma," 25 April 1957, pp. 184–191 in this volume.

39. King, "The Oneness of Man in American Intergroup Relations," 3 December 1957. During 1957 and 1958 King addressed several other gatherings organized by mainline white Protestant groups, including the January 1957 Minnesota State Pastor's Conference in St. Paul, the June 1957 and June 1958 American Baptist Conventions in Philadelphia and Cincinnati, and the August 1958 National Conference on Christian Education at Purdue University. King was also on hand at the founding conference of the United Presbyterian Church, U.S.A., in Pittsburgh in June 1958.

40. King, Invocation Delivered at Billy Graham Evangelistic Association Crusade, 18 July 1957, p. 238 in this volume; see also King, "Techniques of Persuasion in the Montgomery Bus Boycott," 24 June 1957.

41. Harris Wofford, "Birthday Party For a Bus Boycott," 25 January 1958.

42. King, "Conquering Self-Centeredness," 11 August 1957, pp. 248–259 in this volume.

erals and consolidating his stature in African-American communities. His increasingly polished presentations varied according to the occasion and the predominant race of the audience, but they all included exhortations against passivity and conformity and calls to sustain the nonviolent movement toward social justice. He effectively used themes and sometimes passages borrowed from orators he admired, including Harry Emerson Fosdick of New York's Riverside Church and Benjamin Mays of Morehouse College.[43] King's speeches often culminated with flourishes quoted from abolitionist sources, including William Cowper's affirmation of racial equality—"Fleecy locks and black complexion/cannot forfeit nature's claim"—which had been used by Frederick Douglass and probably by subsequent black orators.[44]

King did not restrict himself to his written texts, altering his repertoire of set speeches to incorporate extemporaneous commentaries on matters of immediate or local interest. Thus, his address at a 10 April Freedom Rally in St. Louis included a brief digression in which he commended the city for desegregating its schools in a "quiet and dignified manner," noting that "cities in the Deep South have a great deal to learn from a city like St. Louis. It proves that integration can be brought into being without a lot of trouble, that it can be done smoothly and peacefully." King also used the St. Louis address to modify a peroration that was quickly becoming a staple of his speeches from the period. Adding a final line to a closing passage he had likely borrowed from his friend, Chicago preacher Archibald Carey, King commanded:

> From every mountain side, let freedom ring. Yes, let us go out and be determined that freedom will ring from every mole hill in Mississippi. Let it ring from Stone Mountain of Georgia. Let it ring from Lookout Mountain of Tennessee. Let it ring from every mountain and hill of Alabama. From every mountain side, let freedom ring. And when that happens we will be able to go out and sing a new song: "Free at last, free at last, great God almighty I'm free at last."[45]

The May 1957 Prayer Pilgrimage for Freedom, though cosponsored with Randolph and NAACP executive secretary Roy Wilkins, was largely an outgrowth of

43. In composing his 1957 summer sermon series on "Problems of Personality Integration," for example, King adopted themes, illustrations, and key phrases from a collection of essays by Fosdick. King wrote extensive marginal notes in his copy of the book (for textual similarities see King, "Overcoming an Inferiority Complex," 14 July 1957, and Fosdick, *On Being a Real Person* [New York: Harper & Brothers, 1943], pp. 52–78; see also King, "Conquering Self-Centeredness," 11 August 1957, pp. 248–259 in this volume). In his oratory King also frequently paraphrased several sentences from a 1955 Mays speech discussing the negative effects of segregation (see note 7, "Facing the Challenge of a New Age," 1 January 1957, p. 76 in this volume).

44. For Douglass's use of Cowper, see Douglass, "Slavery, the Free Church, and British Agitation Against Bondage," 3 August 1849, in *The Frederick Douglass Papers: Series One, Speeches, Debates, and Interviews*, Vol. 1, *1841–46*, ed. John W. Blassingame (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), p. 324, and Douglass, "Too Much Religion, Too Little Humanity," 9 May 1849, in *The Frederick Douglass Papers: Series One, Speeches, Debates, and Interviews*, Vol. 2, *1847–54*, ed. Blassingame (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), p. 193.

45. King, "A Realistic Look at the Question of Progress in the Area of Race Relations," 10 April 1957, pp. 167–179 in this volume.

King's failed attempts to prod the Eisenhower administration toward more forthright support of black civil rights. The Pilgrimage was scheduled for 17 May, the third anniversary of the Supreme Court's *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, and organizers hoped to attract fifty thousand participants to the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C. Randolph's initial conception of the event recalled his 1941 effort to use the threat of mass protest as a means of securing federal civil rights reform, but when seventy-seven church, labor, and civil rights supporters gathered in Washington on 5 April to complete plans for the Pilgrimage, moderates at the meeting succeeded in their efforts to ensure that the event would not embarrass the Eisenhower administration.[46]

King's statements after the planning meeting suggest that he was not overly disturbed by this effort to temper the tone of the Pilgrimage. He emphasized that the event should involve "persuasion rather than political coercion," and that its major purpose should be "to appeal to the nation and Congress to back and support the Civil Rights bill which will be blocked and filibustered by a small group."[47] King's own advisors already had counseled that the event should not focus on convincing Eisenhower or Nixon to deliver a pro–civil rights speech in the South, thereby publicly challenging a popular president and threatening passage of the administration's pending civil rights legislation. Rustin, Levison, and Baker recommended instead that the Pilgrimage demonstrate the unity within the civil rights movement and serve as an outlet for the frustrations of southern black people, "thus minimizing the possibility of harmful outbursts of violence which might at this time have a catastrophic effect both on Congress and the reservoir of good will built up by the non-violent nature of the southern struggle."[48]

The Prayer Pilgrimage attracted a crowd about half the size of the organizers' expected fifty thousand demonstrators. Randolph presided, Mahalia Jackson sang, and Powell, Shuttlesworth, Wilkins, and other speakers addressed a range of black concerns. Nevertheless, it was King's closing remarks, featuring the refrain "Give us the ballot," that captured public attention. Rejecting Rustin's advice to reveal the Southern Leaders Conference's next steps, King opted instead for a speech that blended a conventional political strategy with rhetorical urgency.[49]

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46. In the days before the 5 April meeting, Congressman Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. told White House aide Maxwell Rabb that he did not approve of the event and indicated that he would work with NAACP leaders to prevent the Pilgrimage from becoming a protest against Eisenhower's tepid support for civil rights (see Rabb to Adams, 2 April 1957). Afterwards, Rabb reported that Powell, Clarence Mitchell of the NAACP, and the Reverend W. H. Jernigan of the National Fraternal Council of Churches "changed the entire character" of the meeting by convincing participants to support "an observance of the anniversary of the school decision through prayer." Rabb assured other administration officials that Eisenhower would "not be adversely affected" by the Pilgrimage and that he was "in constant communication with the leaders to ensure keeping it in hand"(see Rabb to Adams, 17 April 1957; see also James Booker, "Randolph Compares '57 Pilgrimage to '41 March," *New York Amsterdam News*, 4 May 1957).

47. "King Hopes to 'Stimulate' Ike," *New York Amsterdam News*, 18 May 1957; King, "Plans for Prayer Pilgrimage to Washington, D.C.," 24 April 1957. In an earlier interview King said that the event was "aimed at enlightening and informing all America on the feelings of the Negro people" ("March on Washington Plans Revealed," *New York Amsterdam News*, 13 April 1957).

48. See Baker, Rustin, and Levison, Memo regarding Prayer Pilgrimage, February 1957.

49. Rustin to King, 10 May 1957, pp. 199–201 in this volume.

> Give us the ballot and we will no longer plead to the federal government for passage of an anti-lynching law; we will by the power of our vote write the law on the statute books of the South and bring an end to the dastardly acts of the hooded perpetrators of violence. . . . Give us the ballot and we will place judges on the benches of the South who will do justly and love mercy, and we will place at the head of the southern states governors . . . who have felt not only the tang of the human, but the glow of the Divine. Give us the ballot and we will quietly and nonviolently, without rancor or bitterness, implement the Supreme Court's Decision of May seventeenth, 1954.[50]

Many people hearing King speak for the first time were awestruck. The *New York Amsterdam News* reported that King emerged from the Pilgrimage as "the number one leader of sixteen million Negroes in the United States," and much of the other news coverage concentrated heavily on King's role in the march.[51] Soon after attending the Pilgrimage, a member of the American Friends Service Committee dashed off a breathless letter to his associates describing King's address: "I had not expected to hear, in my time, such words spoken in my country's capital to a throng of twenty-five or thirty thousand whose waving hands and quiet murmurs of assent were signs, not only of approval, but of dedication. I felt a great surge of hope: this could be the beginning, I said within myself."[52] Two days after the Pilgrimage, a reporter recorded the scene at Philadelphia's Zion Baptist Church where King had come to preach: "A crowd estimated at more than 1,800 persons crammed into the church, and hundreds of others who failed to gain admittance stood outside to get a glimpse of the nation's most talked-about leader."[53]

On the eve of the Pilgrimage, King had reminded Richard Nixon of their conversation in Ghana and the vice president's invitation to meet in Washington. A week later Nixon indicated that he was available for such a meeting in the capital on 13 June.[54] Rustin and Levison prepared King for the meeting, urging him to prod Nixon into making a pro–civil rights speech in the South and to push for the passage of civil rights legislation. They cautioned him that "every word expressed to Nixon and the press, every concept, requires careful weighing," considering that many black leaders believed that the meeting might undermine the year-long effort of Randolph and other major civil rights leaders to meet with Eisenhower. Most important, his advisors warned that "nothing could be more

50. King also lambasted both political parties for betraying "the cause of justice" with their unwillingness to support civil rights reform: "The Democrats have betrayed it by capitulating to the prejudices and undemocratic practices of the southern Dixiecrats. The Republicans have betrayed it by capitulating to the blatant hypocrisy of right wing, reactionary northerners." As he frequently did in his addresses, King took pains to applaud the work of the NAACP, asserting that it had "done more to achieve civil rights for Negroes than any other organization we can point to" (King, "Give Us the Ballot," 17 May 1957, pp. 208–215 in this volume).

51. James Hicks, "King Emerges as Number One Leader," *New York Amsterdam News*, 1 June 1957.

52. Norman J. Whitney to Friends, 19 May 1957.

53. Art Peters, "Rev. Martin Luther King Says Moral Laws Ignored," *Philadelphia Tribune*, 21 May 1957.

54. King to Nixon, 15 May 1957, p. 204 in this volume; Nixon to King, 23 May 1957.