

INTRODUCTION

If my life, with the accompanying trials, tribulations, and difficulties that I have faced for my people have not proven my courage, then there is no way that I can convince anyone. I have lived amid threats, intimidation, physical violence, and even death, and yet I have never run from the situation. I have urged my people at all times to stand up against segregation, and even disobey the segregation laws in order to arouse and awaken the conscience of our nation. I will continue to do this, but I will do it in the right spirit. I will never allow any man to drag me so low as to make me hate him; and above all I will never become bitter.

Martin Luther King, Jr.
15 June 1959

When Martin Luther King, Jr. reviewed his activities in his 1958 annual report to Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, he referred with understatement to his “rather difficult year,” during which he had endured police brutality, a groundless arrest, and a “near fatal stab wound by a mentally deranged woman.” Nevertheless, he reported that the future was “filled with vast possibilities” and he urged his congregation to “move on into this uncertain but promising future with the faith that the dawn of a new day is just around the horizon.”¹ It had been three years since King’s leadership of the Montgomery bus boycott had propelled him into the national spotlight. His decision to remain a part of the young freedom struggle, with which he was becoming synonymous, had provided him a national pulpit from which to denounce racial injustice, afforded him access to the president, and garnered him considerable fame. At the same time, King and the organizations he led, the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA) and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), had failed to build upon the success of the bus protest, and the Eisenhower administration remained impervious to their pleas for reform.² Moreover, his growing notoriety had endangered his safety and that of his family. The 20 September 1958 stabbing had forced King to reduce his relentless pace of activities and, following the advice of physicians,

1. King, Annual Report, Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, Presented on 18 November 1958, in *The Papers of Martin Luther King*, vol. 4: *Symbol of the Movement, January 1957–December 1958*, ed. Clayborne Carson, Susan Carson, Adrienne Clay, Virginia Shadron, Kieran Taylor (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000), pp. 538–539.

2. For a discussion of the MIA’s and SCLC’s stalled programs, see Introduction, *Papers 4*:21–26 and 36–37.

he cancelled or postponed nearly three months of speaking engagements, allowing his wife to deliver his prepared remarks at the national Youth March for Integrated Schools in late October.³ By December King had returned to public life and political engagement, addressing the third annual MIA Institute on Nonviolence and Social Change and a rally in Atlanta.⁴ With his closest associates, including New York attorney Stanley Levison and pacifist Bayard Rustin, King also continued discussions regarding the direction of SCLC and plans for a long-deferred trip to India that had been postponed several times since the conclusion of the bus boycott.

Traveling to India offered the hope of a break from the hectic pace King had maintained since his rise to prominence, but it would also serve as a transition to a still more demanding period when his efforts were confronted by new challenges. White intransigence would show no signs of abating over the coming months, and public officials in the South continued to tolerate and sometimes actively support acts of segregationist violence. The harassment from Georgia and Alabama officials would put King's commitment to nonviolent direct action to the test, and though the upcoming presidential elections promised the possibility of change, the major political parties appeared most concerned with accommodating their southern and conservative constituents. King's earlier clashes with NAACP general secretary Roy Wilkins and National Baptist Convention president J. H. Jackson continued, but for the first time he would face challenges from African American leaders who advocated alternative strategies for achieving equality.⁵ SCLC colleagues Ella J. Baker, James Lawson, and Fred Shuttlesworth had long served as friendly foils, attempting to persuade King of the importance of developing local movement leadership and engaging in head-on confrontations with segregation. But they would soon be joined by challengers, such as Robert F. Williams, a North Carolina NAACP official who publicly advocated retaliatory violence, as well as other black community leaders who were growing impatient with the federal government's failure to protect civil rights. Amidst these challenges and against a backdrop of public indifference, a student-led movement unexpectedly infused the southern civil rights struggle with new energy and pushed King toward greater militancy.



As he completed his convalescence in Montgomery during the fall of 1958, King decided that the time had finally come to undertake a tour of India to deepen his understanding of Gandhian principles and to assess the movement's legacy

3. King was stabbed by Izola Ware Curry, a woman who was later determined to be mentally disturbed. For more on the stabbing and the Youth March, see Introduction and King, Address at Youth March for Integrated Schools in Washington, D.C., Delivered by Coretta Scott King, in *Papers* 4:34–35 and 514–515, respectively.

4. MIA, "Program, third Annual Institute on Nonviolence and Social Change," 1 December–7 December 1958; see also "Conference Condemns Alabama Officials," *New York Amsterdam News*, 20 December 1958.

5. For more on tension between King and other black leaders, see Introduction, *Papers* 4:17–18 and 26.

through conversations with Gandhi's associates and exposure to their social projects.⁶ Two years earlier Indian prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru had indicated to a group of American pacifists that he would welcome such a visit.⁷ King's associates Rustin and Lawson had traveled to India, and he also knew and admired a number of African American leaders who had met with Gandhi—notably Howard Thurman in 1935, Benjamin Mays the following year, and Howard University dean William Stuart Nelson in 1946. Securing funds from the Christopher Reynolds Foundation, the MIA, SCLC, and his own Dexter congregation, King invited Alabama State College professor Lawrence D. Reddick, author of the recently completed King biography *Crusader Without Violence*, to accompany him and Coretta and to assist in drafting public addresses and press releases while in India.⁸

While King made travel plans from Montgomery, representatives of the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) and the Gandhi Smarak Nidhi (Gandhi Memorial Fund), the co-sponsors of the visit, began arranging for King to meet with Indian officials and Gandhian activists during the five-week tour.⁹ The Nidhi offered the services of a guide, Swami Vishwananda, and helped secure a letter of welcome from Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru.¹⁰ Vishwananda's AFSC counterpart, James E. Bristol, director of the Quaker Centre in New Delhi, arranged the itinerary in consultation with Friends in Philadelphia and Bayard Rustin, who served as King's representative. After a visit with American embassy officials who "were most emphatic that under no circumstances" was he to leave King's company, Bristol warned his AFSC colleagues in the United States that the visit was attracting considerable interest in India from "all sorts of forces and movements." He noted that the significance of King's tour was heightened by the possibility that it would coincide with the visit of controversial African American entertainer

6. From the early days of the Montgomery bus boycott, King had pointed to the Indian independence struggle as a model for his own efforts in the South (see King, "The Montgomery Story," Address Delivered at the Forty-seventh Annual NAACP Convention, 27 June 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: University of California Press, 1997], p. 307).

7. See Homer Alexander Jack to King, 27 December 1956, in *Papers* 3:496, 498; Dorothy M. Steere to King, 5 January 1957, and King to Steere, 31 January 1957, in *Papers* 4:115–116.

8. See King, "My Trip to the Land of Gandhi," July 1959, pp. 231–238 in this volume, and "The Kings Leave Country," *Dexter Echo*, 11 February 1959. James E. Bristol of the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) later indicated that the Reynolds grant resulted from "Libby Holman Reynold's friendship with the Kings" (Bristol to Corinne B. Johnson, 10 March 1959, p. 139 in this volume). Reddick's *Crusader Without Violence: A Biography of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York: Harper & Brothers) appeared later in 1959. King initially considered extending his trip by meeting with Christian leaders in the Soviet Union but changed his mind shortly before leaving the United States, citing "the state of his health and the urgency of the racial conflict in the South" ("Dr. King Calls Off Russian Part of Trip," *Los Angeles Tribune*, 6 February 1959). In a later letter to the general secretary of the American Baptist Convention, King mentioned that his decision came after failing to gain "assurance that the Russian Baptists were participating in my coming. Without this assurance, the visit to Russia would have taken on too many political connotations" (King to Reuben E. Nelson, 23 March 1959, p. 158 in this volume).

9. James E. Bristol to Corinne B. Johnson, 30 December 1958.

10. See G. Ramachandran to King, 27 December 1958, in *Papers* 4:552–553, and Nehru to King, 14 January 1959, pp. 107–108 in this volume.

Paul Robeson, who had been feted in the Soviet Union and other countries after the United States Supreme Court overturned a government decision denying him a passport due to his alleged Communist ties. Bristol explained that Robeson and King were “THE two most important American Negroes in Indian eyes.”¹¹

On the morning of 29 January, King departed Montgomery for several engagements, including a visit with AFSC officials in Philadelphia on 2 February to work out last-minute details of the trip. That evening in New York he addressed the annual dinner of the War Resisters League (WRL), during which he praised the league’s work and linked the domestic struggle for racial justice with the campaign for global disarmament: “What will be the ultimate value of having established social justice in a context where all people, Negro and White, are merely free to face destruction by strontium 90 or atomic war?”¹² Late the following evening, King and his traveling companions boarded their overseas flight at New York’s Idlewild Airport. Reddick recalled that they “chatted for an hour or so” before Coretta King noticed her husband dozing and cradled his head as he reclined over several seats on the uncrowded plane—“There she was: the serene Madonna, strong and protective.”¹³

After a brief stopover in London, the King party continued on a 6 February flight to Paris where Reddick had arranged a meeting with Richard Wright, the expatriate African American novelist he had known during his years in New York. Reddick recalled a far-reaching discussion about race and politics at Wright’s apartment: “Coretta and I threw in a point now and then but we were content to observe the giants in intellectual action. Both were short and brown-skinned but Dick was intense, always reaching for a thought or phrase while Martin was relaxed and un-spirited.” As the group grew more comfortable, there was much “giggling and cutting up, imitating first one, then another personal friend or public figure.”¹⁴ Reddick recounted that Wright’s response to King “was never more enthusiastic about any person that the two of us had known.” Wright told Reddick that King lacked “that preacher fakery that I always look for in those sermon-on-the-mount boys,” and King later indicated his own enthusiasm for Wright: “Now, I really understand his writings. He can tell a story as vividly as he writes it.” King asked Reddick to arrange a visit to Montgomery, but Wright died the following year.¹⁵

From Paris the group traveled to Zurich, where they missed a connecting flight to New Delhi when fog prevented the plane from landing. While hundreds of Indians waited in vain for King’s arrival in India’s capital, a later flight took them to Bombay on 9 February. The three travelers were shocked by their initial encounter

11. Robeson cancelled his trip to India after becoming ill in Moscow; however, Bristol was still concerned about the repercussions of King’s visit to a nation that was resolutely nonaligned in the Cold War and had mulled the possibility of using United States Information Service personnel to help prepare press releases (Bristol to Johnson, 16 January 1959).

12. King, Address at the Thirty-sixth Annual Dinner of the War Resisters League, 2 February 1959, p. 122 in this volume; see also “Martin Luther King Addresses War Resisters League Dinner,” *WRL News*, March–April 1959.

13. Reddick, “With King through India: A personal memoir,” 1968.

14. Reddick, “With King through India.”

15. Reddick, “With King through India.”

with Indian poverty on the drive to Bombay's Taj Mahal Hotel. "The sight of emaciated human beings wearing only a dirty loincloth, picking through garbage cans both angered and depressed my husband," Coretta King wrote in her memoir. "Never, even in Africa, had we seen such abject, despairing poverty."¹⁶ Although told that the Indian government discouraged begging, King himself remembered finding it difficult to resist pleas of desperation: "What can you do when an old haggard woman or a little crippled urchin comes up and motions to you that she is hungry?"¹⁷ As would often be the case in his comments about India, King combined his observations with implicit criticisms of his own country: "They are poor, jammed together and half starved but they do not take it out on each other," he generalized. "They do not abuse each other—verbally or physically—as readily as we do."¹⁸

By the time the King party arrived at New Delhi's Palam Airport on 10 February, there was a smaller crowd of well-wishers and curious onlookers than had been waiting two days earlier, but the "press, news photographers, and news-reel cameramen were there in full force."¹⁹ G. Ramachandran and Sucheta Kripalani of the Gandhi Smarak Nidhi greeted the party with garlands as they disembarked from their plane. After being escorted to the Janpath Hotel, King conducted his first press conference. "To other countries I may go as a tourist," he announced, "but to India I come as a pilgrim."²⁰ King commented on the impact of Gandhi's ideas on the Montgomery bus boycott and other southern protests. "We have found them to be effective and sustaining—they work!" he was quoted as saying. Although King conceded that not all African Americans shared his views on nonviolence, he affirmed that he had "come to look at non-violence as a philosophy of life."²¹

That evening the Kings and Reddick drove through guarded iron gates past flowered lawns to Nehru's residence, Teen Murti Bhavan, a classic sandstone structure built by the British. Nehru had accommodated his delayed guests by inviting them to join a previously scheduled dinner with Lady Mountbatten, wife of the last viceroy of India, as well as her daughter and Nehru's daughter, Indira Gandhi.²² Holding loosely to an agenda they had worked out beforehand, the Kings and Reddick spoke to Nehru about the potential for nonviolent resistance in the area of international politics.²³ Reddick recalled that the prime minister "re-

16. Coretta Scott King, *My Life with Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969), p. 173.

17. King, Draft, "My trip to India," April 1959. According to Coretta King, "Martin soon disobeyed these instructions and gave all the money he could to the forlorn humans who beseeched us" (*My Life with Martin Luther King, Jr.*, p. 174).

18. King, "My Trip to the Land of Gandhi," July 1959, p. 235 in this volume.

19. Bristol, "Notes from My Tour-Diary," in *With the Kings in India: A Souvenir of Dr. Martin Luther King's Visit to India, February–March 1959* (New Delhi: Gandhi National Memorial Fund, 1959), p. 8.

20. Reddick, Account of Press Conference in New Delhi on 10 February 1959, p. 126 in this volume; see also "Martin Luther King, Negro Leader, Pays Tribute to Gandhi," *American Reporter*, 13 February 1959.

21. "Dr. King Will Make Study of Gandhism," *The Hindustan Times*, 11 February 1959.

22. See King, Palm Sunday Sermon on Mohandas K. Gandhi Delivered at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, 22 March 1959, p. 151 in this volume.

23. See "Notes for Conversation between King and Nehru," 10 February 1959, p. 130 in this volume.

sponded by saying that as an individual and follower of Gandhi he favored non-violent resistance in every phase of life—between persons, groups and nations; but as a head of state, in a world that had not accepted the non-violent principle, it would be folly for one country to go very far down that road alone.”²⁴ Nevertheless, Nehru declared, India “should never give up trying to persuade other countries to adopt the non-violent approach to international affairs.”²⁵

Nehru also informed his guests about India’s efforts to eliminate discrimination based on caste and defended the policy of giving preference to untouchables in competition for university admission. King recalled that when Reddick asked whether this constituted discrimination, Nehru admitted, “It may be,” but argued it was India’s “way of atoning for the centuries of injustices we have inflicted upon these people.”²⁶ King later remarked that he was “surprised and delighted” that Indian leaders had “placed their moral power” behind antidiscrimination laws protecting untouchables while “in the United States some of our highest officials decline to render a moral judgment on segregation and some from the South publicly boast of their determination to maintain segregation.”²⁷ Following this discussion, Nehru considered the King party’s suggestion of offering scholarships for black students to attend Indian universities but admitted he had not yet considered the notion of “poor” India offering scholarships to “rich” America.²⁸

King came away from the discussion impressed by Nehru as “an intellectual and a man charged with the practical responsibility of heading the government” and someone seeking to “steer a middle course” between Gandhi’s emphasis on local economic self-sufficiency and western-style modernization. Nehru, he explained, “felt that some industrialization was absolutely necessary” and believed that “pitfalls” could be avoided “if the state keeps a watchful eye on the developments.”²⁹ Reddick remembered the four hours of conversation as “a wonderful evening” and contrasted the warm reception with the fact that “Martin had never been to dinner in the White House.”³⁰

Continuing on their busy schedule, the Kings visited Rajghat the following day to lay a wreath on the site of Gandhi’s cremation. Bristol recalled that they were “obviously deeply moved” and that Martin “knelt in prayer” following the

24. Reddick, “With King through India.” For more on the differences between Gandhi’s belief in nonviolence and Nehru’s, see King, “The Negro Is Part of That Huge Community Who Seek New Freedom in Every Area of Life,” 1 February 1959, and King, Interview on “Front Page Challenge,” 28 April 1959, pp. 119 and 193–194 in this volume, respectively.

25. Reddick, “With King through India”; see also “Notes for Conversation between King and Nehru,” 10 February 1959, p. 130 in this volume.

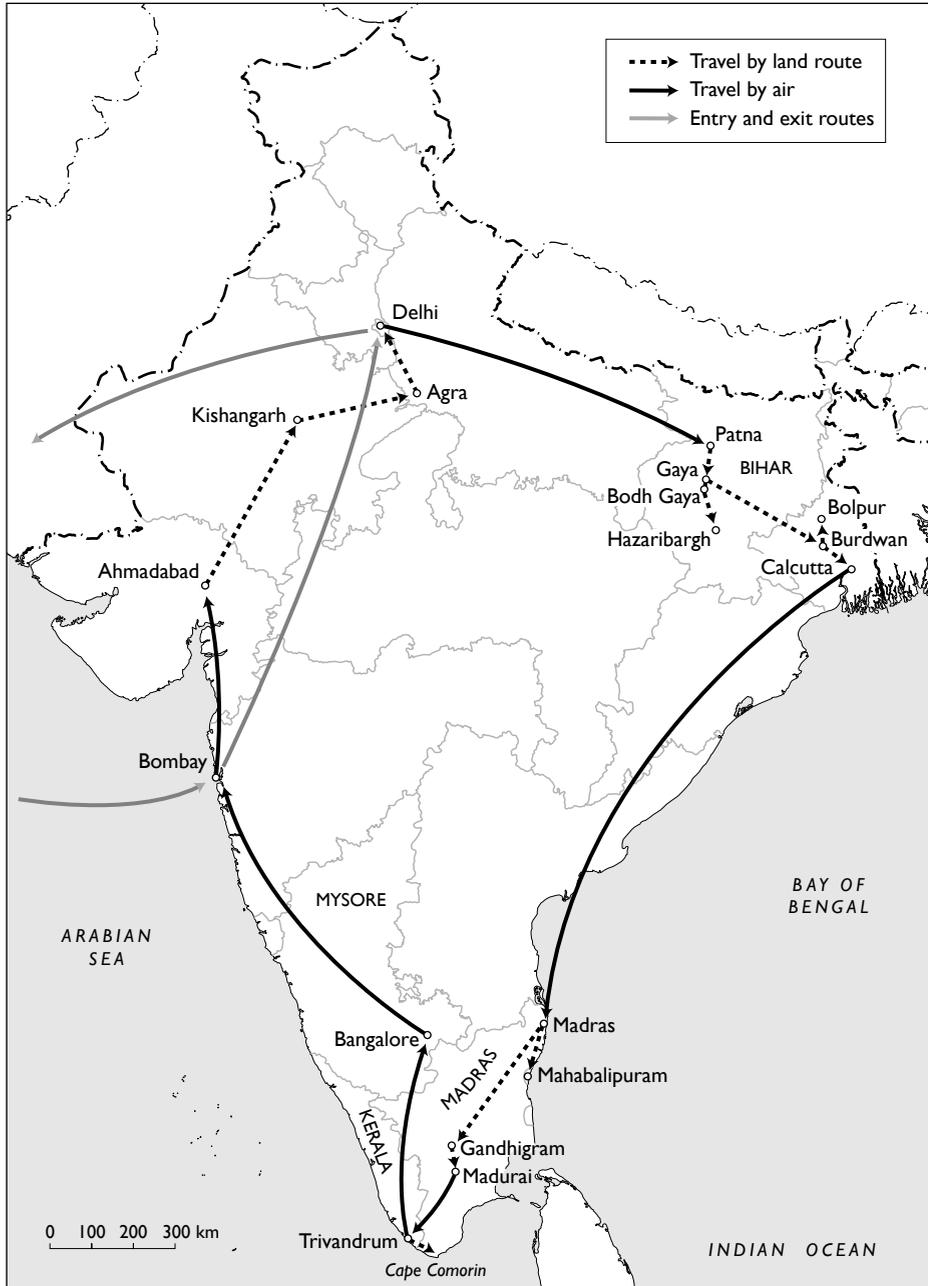
26. King, *Why We Can’t Wait* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), p. 135.

27. King, “My Trip to the Land of Gandhi,” July 1959, p. 236 in this volume. For more on King’s admiration for Indian policies toward its untouchables, see note 4 to Address at the Religious Leaders Conference, 11 May 1959, and King, Palm Sunday Sermon on Mohandas K. Gandhi, 22 March 1959, pp. 197 and 145–157 in this volume, respectively.

28. Reddick, “With King through India”; see also “Notes for Conversation between King and Nehru,” 10 February 1959, p. 130 in this volume.

29. King, “My Trip to the Land of Gandhi,” July 1959, p. 236 in this volume.

30. Reddick, “With King through India.”



Map of India listing the stops King made during his 9 February to 10 March 1959 tour

ceremony.³¹ In Delhi the King party also met with India's president, Rajendra Prasad, and its vice president, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan.³² Particularly impressed by the latter talk with the "philosopher-politician," Coretta King noted that her husband compared the sessions with India's leaders to "meeting George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and James Madison in a single day."³³

On 13 February the Kings left Delhi for Patna, and over the next week they visited a number of cities including Gaya, Calcutta, and Madras. Bristol recounted that during a train ride from Patna to Gaya, in the state of Bihar, King visited with socialist activist Jayaprakash Narayan, who outlined his ideas on decentralism.³⁴ Bristol also reported on the visits to two Gramdan (cooperatively owned) villages where the party experienced rural life, eating seated "on the ground from banana leaves," and a student meeting in Madras that was "among the best in the entire trip."³⁵ Vishwananda would later describe Martin King as "impressed" and Coretta "moved" by their visit to Gandhigram, an institute for rural development, where "five-hundred-strong *Shantisena* [Peace Army] in spotless white *khadi* received Dr. King and gave him the salute."³⁶

The enthusiastic reception King received in Trivandrum on 22 February had special importance given its status as the capital of Kerala, the only Indian state with a Communist government and the only state not governed by Nehru's Congress Party. Bristol noted the contrast between the warm reception accorded King and that given to New York governor Averell Harriman's arrival two days later: "Then there was only the one government representative on hand; nobody else; no garlands, no bouquets, no photographers. King's tour was popular and triumphal as Harriman's was not."³⁷ Unplanned incidents made indelible impressions on King. Years later he recalled that when a principal of a school attended largely by children of former untouchables introduced him as "a fellow untouchable," he was at first "a bit shocked and peeved," but he then reflected on the "airtight cage of poverty" that afflicted African Americans "in rat-infested, unendurable slums in the big cities of our nation, still attended inadequate schools faced with improper recreational facilities. And I said to myself, 'Yes, I am an untouchable, and every Negro in the United States of America is an untouchable.'³⁸

31. Bristol, "Notes from My Tour-Diary." Reddick recalled of the wreath laying: "A picture of that went around the world and we were told that the 'Today,' morning TV show, had a five minutes clip about it" ("With King through India").

32. Bristol to Johnson, 20 March 1959.

33. Coretta Scott King, *My Life with Martin Luther King, Jr.*, p. 176.

34. For more on King's visit with Narayan, see King to Jayaprakash Narayan, 19 May 1959, pp. 209–211 in this volume.

35. Bristol to Johnson, 20 March 1959.

36. Vishwananda, "I Go Round with the Kings," in *With the Kings in India: A Souvenir of Dr. Martin Luther King's Visit to India, February–March 1959* (New Delhi: Gandhi National Memorial Fund, 1959), pp. 5–6; see also Bristol to Johnson, 20 March 1959.

37. Bristol to Johnson, 20 March 1959. Harriman, who had visited King in the hospital while he recuperated from his 1958 stabbing, was studying the Soviet Union's impact on India. He had met with the Kings in Delhi soon after their arrival. For coverage of the public meeting on 23 February, see "Emancipation of Negroes: 'Non-violence the Only Way,'" *The Hindu* (Madras), 25 February 1959; see also K. Krishnan Nair to King, 5 October 1959.

38. King, "The American Dream," Sermon delivered at Ebenezer Baptist Church, 4 July 1965.

King also had lasting memories of his brief journey to nearby Cape Comorin at India's southern tip late one afternoon: "It is one of the most beautiful points in all the world," he later told his Dexter congregation. At the convergence of the Bay of Bengal, the Indian Ocean, and the Arabian Sea, he remembered sitting on a rock, watching the sun set "like it was sinking in the very ocean itself." After the sky darkened, he noticed a full moon rising in the east: "This is one of the few points in all the world that you can see the setting of the sun and the emergence of the moon simultaneously." King drew spiritual significance from the serene surroundings: "For when it was dark and tragedy around, seemed that the light of day had gone out, darkness all around and sunlight passing away, I got enough strength in my being to turn around and only to discover that God had another light. This would be a tragic universe if God had only one light."³⁹

By the time they flew to Bangalore on 24 February, Bristol recognized that their schedule had been too ambitious, resulting in cancelled or delayed meetings and some frustration on the part of Indians who were eager to meet King. In reports that evening and the following day that were forwarded to AFSC headquarters, he indicated that they had trimmed the itinerary into "the sort of schedule King had in mind." Bristol observed that "both the Kings (especially King himself) are JUST PLAIN EXHAUSTED and very understandably have been so for months before coming to India."⁴⁰ Bristol's account of the three days in Bombay suggests that the reduced schedule suited King. Moving from the luxurious accommodations they had in Calcutta and Madras, the party chose Mani Bhavan, Gandhi's Bombay residence, where they "enjoyed simple accommodations in an authentically Gandhian atmosphere." King left his impressions in the Mani Bhavan guest book: "To have the opportunity of sleeping in the house where Gandhiji slept is an experience that I will never forget."⁴¹ A public meeting on 27 February attracted "about 400 really top-calibre people," including former U.S. ambassador G. L. Mehta, to King's "inspired" presentation.⁴² The following day King met with African students studying in Bombay who challenged him regarding the effectiveness of nonviolence. "They felt that non-violent resistance could only work in a situation where the resisters had a potential ally in the conscience of the opponent," King later reflected in *Ebony* magazine. "We soon discovered that they, like many others, tended to confuse passive resistance with non-resistance."⁴³ Traveling north to Ahmadabad on 1 March, the King party went to the Sabarmati ashram, which had been founded by Gandhi and was where he began his 1930 Salt March to the sea to protest British taxation of salt. Vishwananda recalled that "the Kings had a great experience going round the hallowed place and meeting in prayer the six hundred" residents, many of whom were untouchables.⁴⁴

On 3 March, King rose early for a drive toward Kishangarh, where the party was scheduled to meet with Acharya Vinoba Bhave, the leader of the Bhoodan

39. King, *A Walk Through the Holy Land*, Easter Sunday Sermon Delivered at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, 29 March 1959, pp. 173–174 in this volume.

40. Bristol to Dorothy Bristol, 24 February–25 February 1959.

41. For a facsimile of King's 29 February guest book entry, see p. 134 in this volume.

42. Bristol to Johnson, 20 March 1959.

43. King "My Trip to the Land of Gandhi," July 1959, p. 234 in this volume.

44. Vishwananda, "I Go Round with the Kings," p. 7.

(land distribution) movement and Gandhi's spiritual successor. Just outside of town they met up with the peripatetic Vinoba and a group of his followers who traveled India on foot, persuading landlords to provide land to the poor. Reddick recalled that Vinoba embraced King, and the two men walked together, Vinoba shortening "his long strides in order that Martin could keep up."⁴⁵ After the marchers entered Kishangarh, Vinoba addressed local residents and then retired to his room in a school building, where King presented questions to him. During this structured exchange, which was later reported in the weekly *Bhoodan*, Vinoba replied to King's query about his "hopes for the future" by insisting that "either there will be 'Kingdom of Kindness' or there will be no society."⁴⁶ Vinoba declined King's request for a message "for the United States in terms of racial justice and world peace," stating that he would not "be so presumptuous as to send a message to a Christian nation." But Vinoba did advise Americans to "simply follow Jesus Christ" rather than "listen to flocks of sermons."⁴⁷

Although Vinoba abruptly ended the morning interview by announcing, "I have finished your questions," King was granted a less formal audience in the evening. During this later meeting, King talked about Montgomery and pressed Vinoba about the limitations of nonviolence. Given that totalitarian regimes "are composed of human beings" rather than people of "a different species," Vinoba maintained that "non-violence and its effective appeal to others requires faith. Mere argument and persuasion is not enough."⁴⁸ King was greatly affected by the hours he spent with Vinoba, whom he later called "sainted." While conceding that his ideas "sound strange and archaic to Western ears," he was impressed that "millions of acres of land have been given up by rich landlords and additional millions of acres have been given up to cooperative management by small farmers." He also observed that "the Bhoodanists shrink from giving their movement the organization and drive that we in America would venture to guess that it must have in order to keep pace with the magnitude of the problems that everybody is trying to solve."⁴⁹

As the visit entered its final week, Bristol had hoped that the Kings and Reddick would spend two more days with Vinoba, but the group went back to Delhi ahead of schedule. Disappointed that other events did not go as expected during the remaining four days of the tour, Bristol complained vehemently to Friends in Philadelphia that the trip had been "ARRANGED AT TOO SHORT NOTICE" and had suffered from "insufficient communication (worse than that, practically no communication) between [the] Kings and AFSC." Bristol observed that the Kings possessed a "fanatical interest in snapshots" and "newspaper publicity" and concluded that "one of the motives clearly appeared to be to build up King as a world figure, and to have this build-up recorded in the US." Both Bristol and his AFSC

45. Reddick, "With King through India."

46. Vinoba Bhave, "Dr. Martin Luther King with Vinoba," *Bhoodan* 3 (18 March 1959): 369-370.

47. Bristol to Johnson, 17 April 1959.

48. Bristol to Johnson, 17 April 1959; see also Bristol to Johnson, 16 April 1959.

49. King, "My Trip to the Land of Gandhi," July 1959, p. 237 in this volume. At his farewell press reception the following week, King called Vinoba "a great spiritual man, moving in a humble way to keep the spirit of Gandhiji's philosophy alive" ("Mahatma's Spirit Lives in India," *Hindustan Times*, 9 March 1959).

colleagues suspected Rustin's heavy hand in seeking to use the trip to enhance King's profile and increase his political capital.⁵⁰ Despite Bristol's criticisms of some aspects of the trip, he reported that "the net effect of the King trip seems to have been very, very good!"⁵¹

On 9 March, his last full day in India, King delivered a farewell address to reporters gathered at the Gandhi Smarak Nidhi and then recorded similar remarks for broadcast on All India Radio. Thanking those who had made his "short stay both pleasant and instructive," he remarked that he and his traveling companions would not be "rash enough to presume that we know India." Nonetheless, he suggested "that the spirit of Gandhi is much stronger today than some people believe." He then offered his most controversial public pronouncement of the India tour by repeating Vinoba Bhave's suggestion that India disarm unilaterally: "It may be that just as India had to take the lead and show the world that national independence could be achieved nonviolently, so India may have to take the lead and call for universal disarmament."⁵²

Reflecting on his trip a few months later, King reiterated his call for aid to India: "It is in the interest of the United States and the West to help supply these needs and *not attach strings to the gifts*."⁵³ Touched by India's reception of him "with open arms," King related that Gandhians had "praised our experiment with the non-violent resistance technique at Montgomery." The tour party had been looked "upon as brothers with the color of our skins as something of an asset," but "the strongest bond of fraternity was the common cause of minority and colonial peoples in America, Africa and Asia struggling to throw off racialism and imperialism."⁵⁴ Buttressing his calls for nonviolence in the United States, King elaborated on his discussions with skeptical African students in India: "While I understand the reasons why oppressed people often turn to violence in their struggle for freedom, it is my firm belief that the crusade for independence and human

50. Bristol to Johnson, 10 March 1959, pp. 137–142 in this volume; see also Bristol to Johnson, 22 April 1959, and Johnson to Bristol, 26 March 1959. A subsequent AFSC report on the trip attributed some of the problems to the "last minute" changes and to the difficulty of scheduling because "communication had to be almost exclusively through a third person, Bayard Rustin" (AFSC, Report on Martin Luther King's trip to India," 4 May 1959).

51. Bristol to Johnson, 27 March 1959.

52. King, Farewell Statement for All India Radio, 9 March 1959, pp. 135–136 in this volume.

53. King, "My Trip to the Land of Gandhi," July 1959, p. 237 in this volume.

54. King, "My Trip to the Land of Gandhi," July 1959, pp. 233–234 in this volume; see also King, Draft, "My trip to India," April 1959. Bristol also remarked later that Indians had not regarded King as an American, but "as the champion of the oppressed peoples of the world—in America, Asia and Africa" (Bristol to Johnson, 11 March 1959). Reddick similarly returned convinced that King was "better understood in India than in America" and that King's experiences in India had caused him to "realize some of the changes that will be necessary if his movement in the South is to wipe out racial segregation without violence and bloodshed" (Press release, "Reddick returns from India; now understands King," 18 March–28 March 1959). In his 1968 memoir, "With King through India," Reddick concluded that India was "a turning point" in King's development. Previously King "had something of a reputation—especially with black folk and white liberals." But "he had reason to wonder how he would be received in Gandhi's homeland where the people really knew the meaning of non-violence." Rather than an "impostor," Reddick concluded that King "was accepted as the real thing" and had become "the leading, living exponent of the Mahatma's theory and practice."

dignity that is now reaching a climax in Africa will have a more positive effect on the world, if it is waged along the lines that were first demonstrated in that continent by Gandhi himself.” King also gave implicit support to India’s effort to find a middle road between capitalism and communism, predicting that India could “be a boon to democracy” by proving “that it is possible to provide a good living for everyone without surrendering to a dictatorship of either the ‘right’ or ‘left.’” King depicted India as “a tremendous force for peace and non-violence . . . where the idealist and the intellectual are yet respected. We should want to help India preserve her soul and thus help to save our own.”⁵⁵

Departing from Delhi on 10 March, the Kings flew to Karachi, Pakistan, and continued to Beirut, Lebanon, where they spent the night before traveling through Damascus to Jerusalem. His brief tour of the Middle East gave King an opportunity to increase his awareness of the ongoing conflict between Israel and the surrounding Arab states. In a sermon preached a few weeks after the trip, King avoided taking a stand on the Arab-Israeli conflict, but he noted its consequences in the partitioned city: “And so this was a strange feeling to go to the ancient city of God and see the tragedies of man’s hate and his evil, which causes him to fight and live in conflict.”⁵⁶

King’s pilgrimage to Jerusalem’s holy sites was typical of the “Stations of the Cross” guided tours taken by Christian visitors, although his theological and biblical studies deepened the meaning of his observations and strengthened his identification with the travails of Jesus. King visited the Garden of Gethsemane, the reputed site of Jesus’s betrayal by his disciple Judas Iscariot, and later reflected on tragic aspects of the garden of life when “even those people that we have confidence in and that we believe in and we call our friends fail to understand us. And in the most difficult moments of life they leave us going the road alone.” The story of Simon of Cyrene helping Jesus carry the cross became a metaphor for the freedom struggles of the world’s colored people: “And in all of our struggles for peace and security, freedom and human dignity, one day God will remember that it was a black man who aided his only begotten son in the darkest hour of his life.” At the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, according to tradition the site of Jesus’s crucifixion, King recalled an epiphany: “There was something that overwhelmed me, and before I knew it I was on my knees praying . . . I was weeping. This was a great world-shaking, transfiguring experience.”⁵⁷



Upon returning home from his travels on 21 March, King confronted SCLC’s continued ineffectiveness. Fund-raising efforts had attracted only slightly more than two thousand dollars in contributions during the period from December 1958

55. King, “My Trip to the Land of Gandhi,” July 1959, pp. 231–238 in this volume.

56. King, *A Walk Through the Holy Land*, 29 March 1959, p. 165 in this volume. In a letter to Bristol, he reported talking “with many people concerning the Arab Israeli problem,” which he described as “still one of the most difficult problems of the world” (King to Bristol, 30 March 1959, p. 176 in this volume).

57. King, *A Walk Through the Holy Land*, 29 March 1959, pp. 164–175 in this volume.

through the end of March 1959, and the group's depleted financial resources were insufficient to cover the salaries of associate director Ella Baker and executive director John Tilley.⁵⁸ Much of the blame for SCLC failings fell on Tilley, who found it difficult to balance his organizational responsibilities in Atlanta with the needs of his congregation at Baltimore's New Metropolitan Baptist Church. When Jesse Hill, the chair of Atlanta's All-Citizens Registration Committee, reported to King early in 1959 on SCLC's local efforts, he pointedly called attention to Tilley's periods of absence from the city and noted that "registration efforts require experienced direction from day to day."⁵⁹ King defended Tilley, but the issue of his future was a prime topic for discussion when SCLC's administrative committee met on 2 April.⁶⁰ Lawrence Reddick's notes of the meeting suggest that King and other SCLC leaders had already decided that Tilley should be dismissed. The committee also recognized that SCLC's poor financial situation necessitated severe personnel cutbacks and decided that only Baker should be retained "at a reduced salary."⁶¹

The administrative committee also discussed the more general question of how to reinvigorate SCLC and the southern civil rights movement. Reddick's notes reveal that King's suggestion that Rustin join SCLC's staff prompted *Birmingham World* editor Emory O. Jackson to label Rustin a communist. Reddick recalled that he "pointed out the dangers of the 'enemy' using" Rustin's brief membership in the Communist Party and his homosexuality "to smear SCLC" and recommended using him exclusively in unofficial capacities.⁶² Given their inability to find a minister to replace Tilley immediately, Baker again assumed the executive leadership of the organization, a capacity in which she had served before his hiring the previous year.

The following day SCLC leaders discussed King's own commitment to the organization. According to Reddick, Baker "really came to lay him out and abuse him" for not spending enough time on SCLC. King defended himself against the charge that he was spending too much time delivering speeches by insisting "that an artist . . . not be denied his means of expression," but Reddick noted that Baker's complaints resonated with his own suggestions to King—made while they were traveling in India—that he would have to choose between devoting himself "full time to Crusading" or retaining his salary as Dexter's pastor. Reddick predicted that King would never give up being a clergyman and thus would remain "a crusader in a gray flannel suit" rather than becoming "a Vinoba Bhave."⁶³

After the meetings King quickly informed Tilley of the committee's decision and explained that it resulted from "the financial crisis confronting the organi-

58. Ralph Abernathy, Financial report, 2 April 1959.

59. Jesse Hill, Jr. to King, 19 January 1959.

60. See King to Hill, 28 January 1959, pp. 114–115 in this volume.

61. Reddick, Notes on SCLC Administrative Committee Meetings on 2 April and 3 April 1959, p. 177 in this volume.

62. Reddick, Notes, p. 177 in this volume. Rustin had briefly been a member of the Young Communist League in the 1930s and was convicted of engaging in a homosexual act in the 1950s.

63. Reddick, Notes, pp. 178–179 in this volume.

zation” and Tilley’s failure “to achieve the public response expected.”⁶⁴ As Tilley made clear when he submitted his resignation, SCLC’s problems resulted from more than the deficiencies of one individual. Cautioning that the achievement of SCLC’s goals would “require time and patience,” Tilley offered a list of the daunting obstacles facing the group, including “the limited staff for the many varied demands, the non-spectacular nature of the educational process, and the lack of funds.”⁶⁵



Despite SCLC’s internal crisis and Baker’s criticisms, King resumed his busy speaking schedule as well as his pastoral obligations. On 18 April he was once again in the national spotlight as the concluding speaker at the second Youth March for Integrated Schools. Black labor leader A. Philip Randolph and Rustin had been sufficiently encouraged by the 1958 Youth March to plan a larger demonstration that would mobilize young people throughout the nation to circulate petitions urging the Eisenhower administration and Congress to implement the Supreme Court’s *Brown v. Board of Education* decision.⁶⁶ Although Roy Wilkins feared that the Youth March might compete with the NAACP’s efforts, Randolph assured him that the march was intended simply as “an ad hoc project” and would not result in a permanent organization.⁶⁷ With King’s help, Randolph and Rustin managed to secure widespread support for the event, including the backing of the National Student Association and other campus-based groups.⁶⁸ Indeed, as support for the march increased during the spring of 1959, march organizers became concerned about the involvement of the Socialist Workers Party, prompting them to issue a statement repudiating rumors that “anti-American” demonstrators might picket the White House and discouraging “the participation of these groups” and “individuals or other organizations holding similar views.”⁶⁹

On the morning of the protest, a four-student delegation marched to the gates

64. King to Tilley, 3 April 1959, p. 180 in this volume. Writing to an associate a few months later, King was more frank regarding Tilley’s departure: “The actual fact is that Rev. Tilley was forced to resign by the Board because he was not producing. We were kind enough not to let this out to the public, and we said to Rev. Tilley that we would protect his name and reputation at every point” (King to Theodore E. Brown, 19 October 1959, p. 311 in this volume).

65. Tilley to King, 13 April 1959, p. 000 in this volume.

66. Randolph and Rustin, “Interim report,” 30 December 1958; see also “Expect 100,000 Signatures Urging Integrated Schools,” *Chicago Defender*, 11 April 1959, and Youth March for Integrated Schools, “A call for a petition campaign and Youth March for Integrated Schools,” January 1959. SCLC became a sponsor of the Youth March but did not provide financial support until after the march, when it agreed to send \$200 to help cover the organizers’ remaining debt (see King, Recommendations to the SCLC Executive Committee, 30 September 1959, pp. 295–297 in this volume). In contrast, the NAACP contributed \$3,000 to the Youth March (Wilkins to Randolph, 14 April 1959).

67. Wilkins to Randolph, 26 May 1959, and Randolph to Wilkins, 5 June 1959.

68. Rustin to Friend, 19 February 1959, and Youth March for Integrated Schools, Press release, 16 March 1959.

69. The press release announced that the sponsors had “not invited Communists or communist organizations,” adding that members of the Ku Klux Klan and White Citizens’ Councils would also not be welcome at the march (Youth March for Integrated Schools, “Anti-American groups not invited to Youth March for Integrated Schools,” 17 April 1959).

of the White House where Gerald Morgan, Eisenhower's deputy assistant, informed them that the president was not there but, nonetheless, shared their concerns and would not "be satisfied until the last vestige of discrimination has disappeared."⁷⁰ After a fifteen-minute conversation with Morgan, the delegation joined more than twenty thousand other marchers, including King, who sang "We Shall Not Be Moved" as they walked toward the Sylvan Theater on the grounds of the Washington Monument. Opening the program, Randolph promised to return to Washington "again and again" until blacks were given equal education and civil rights laws were passed.⁷¹ After speeches by Wilkins, Kenyan labor leader Tom Mboya, and entertainer Harry Belafonte, King took the stage to give a brief address.⁷² Returning to the theme of voting rights that had marked his speech at the 1957 Prayer Pilgrimage in Washington, he stated that SCLC intended to increase the number of black registered voters in the South to three million. This, he asserted, would "change the composition of Congress," opening the way for school desegregation. King acknowledged the students' growing interest in racial equality and declared that "a hundred years from now the historians will be calling this not the 'beat' generation, but the generation of integration."⁷³

There is little evidence that the Youth March had much impact on Eisenhower or on Congress, which failed to pass proposed legislation that would have bolstered the 1957 Civil Rights Act. Nonetheless, the mobilization of protesters strengthened the organizational links between SCLC, the labor movement, and other social reform organizations. Furthermore, participation in the march provided thousands of young people with an outlet for their support of integration. Michael Harrington, Eleanor Norton, Jack O'Dell, Tom Kahn, Norman Hill, Robert Moses, and dozens of other young activists who would later become key figures in the civil rights movement gained important organizing experience working with Rustin and other organizers. King left Washington to deliver a series of sermons and speeches in the Chicago area and New York. Over the next several weeks he also appeared on the Canadian television program "Front Page Challenge" before returning to Washington to address the Conference of Religious Leaders sponsored by the President's Committee on Government Contracts.⁷⁴ Events in the South that spring, however, served as a reminder of racist intransigence while underscoring the need for SCLC to take bolder steps to force the federal government to protect black civil rights. On the evening of 24 April, a twenty-three-year-old rape suspect, Mack Charles Parker, was seized from a jail in Poplarville,

70. "Integration Rally Here Assured Ike Seeks End of Racial Bias," *Washington Post*, 19 April 1959; see also "Ike Won't See Belafonte with Youth Leaders," *Jet*, 23 April 1959, p. 3, and "Eisenhower Cites Integration Goal," *New York Times*, 19 April 1959.

71. Sara Slack, "30,000 in March: Belafonte, Mboya Stampede Crowd," *New York Amsterdam News*, 25 April 1959. Joining King at the front of the march were Randolph, Wilkins, Daisy Bates, Dorothy Height, Jean Noble, Joseph Overton, William Oliver, Gardner Taylor, and William Bowe.

72. Youth March for Integrated Schools, "Program at the Sylvan Theater," 18 April 1959, and Slack, "30,000 in March."

73. King, Address at the Youth March for Integrated Schools on 18 April 1959, p. 187 in this volume.

74. See King, Interview on "Front Page Challenge," 28 April 1959, and King, Address at the Religious Leaders Conference on 11 May 1959, pp. 191–194 and 197–202 in this volume, respectively.