

INTRODUCTION

And those people who are working to bring into being the dream of democracy are not the agitators. They are not the dangerous people in America. They are not the un-American people. They are people who are doing more for America than anybody that we can point to. And I submit to you that it may well be that the Negro is God's instrument to save the soul of America.

Martin Luther King, Jr.
2 January 1961

When forty-three-year-old John F. Kennedy took office on 20 January 1961 as the youngest elected American president, Martin Luther King Jr. had just turned thirty-two but had already risen to national prominence as a result of his leadership role in the Montgomery bus boycott that ended four years earlier. Early in 1957 he had become founding president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and subsequently was in great demand as a speaker throughout the nation. His understanding of Gandhian principles had deepened as a result of his 1959 trip to India, but, during the following year, college student sit-in protesters, rather than King, became the vanguard of a sustained civil disobedience campaign. Having already weathered a near-fatal stabbing and six arrests, King was uncertain about how best to support the new militancy. Moving to Atlanta to be near SCLC headquarters and to serve as co-pastor with his father at Ebenezer Baptist Church, he had assumed a wide range of responsibilities. He relied on his wife, Coretta Scott, to take the lead role of raising their two small children with a third due any day. Cautious about initiating major protests, King sought to enhance SCLC's ability to aid local protest movements that he hoped would prod the federal government to support southern civil rights reform. Aware that Kennedy had voted against a key provision of the 1957 civil rights bill while serving in the Senate, King was nonetheless optimistic that the new president would reward the crucial support he received from black voters by backing the civil rights cause.¹

1. The jury amendment would have allowed the attorney general to bypass a jury and issue contempt citations for violations of constitutional rights. When King met in June 1960 with then-senator Kennedy to discuss his civil rights stance, King recalled that the candidate regretted voting against the amendment even after sit-in protests revealed the "injustices and the indignities that Negroes were facing all over the South." King was convinced that Kennedy had an "intellectual" rather than "emotional commitment" to civil rights. King argued that while Kennedy knew that segregation was morally wrong, "he had never really had the personal experience of knowing the deep groans and passionate yearnings

"The new Administration," King wrote in *The Nation* during the initial weeks of Kennedy's presidency, "has the opportunity to be the first in one hundred years of American history to adopt a radically new approach to the question of civil rights." King insisted that the "intolerably slow pace of civil rights is due at least as much to the limits which the federal government has imposed on its own actions as it is to the actions of the segregationist opposition." By eliminating federal support and sponsorship of discrimination, the president would be setting "a clear example for Americans everywhere." King cited historic precedents for the use of federal action in times of crisis and called on Kennedy to redefine federal leadership during his presidency. "It is no exaggeration to say that the President could give segregation its death blow through a stroke of the pen." In King's estimation, executive power had never been fully "exploited"; instead "its use in recent years has been microscopic in scope and timid in conception."²

Ignoring King's calls for immediate presidential action, Kennedy decided against proposing new civil rights legislation. After signing Executive Order 10925, establishing the President's Committee on Equal Employment Opportunity, Kennedy acknowledged the usefulness of legislation but argued that his administration had not yet exhausted all means of enforcing laws previously passed by Congress. At a press conference, he asserted that no new laws would be proposed until he felt "that there is a necessity for a congressional action, with a chance of getting that congressional action."³ Soon afterward, King expressed impatience with the administration during a question-and-answer session at Temple Emanuel in Worcester, Massachusetts. He said that he was "willing to wait a few more days; not many more; but a few more days to see what he's gonna do." King surmised that Kennedy was hesitant to push for civil rights legislation for fear of jeopardizing other legislative proposals before Congress.⁴ On 16 March King sent the president "belated congratu-

of the Negroes for freedom because he just didn't know Negroes generally" (King, Interview by Berl Bernhard, 9 March 1964).

2. King, "Equality Now: The President Has the Power," 4 February 1961, pp. 139, 140, 144, 145 in this volume. During a presidential debate with Richard Nixon, Kennedy said that discrimination in federally funded housing could be eliminated by a "stroke of the President's hand" ("Transcript of the Second Nixon-Kennedy Debate on Nation-Wide Television," *New York Times*, 8 October 1960). Kennedy also promised that he would end discrimination in government contracts and ensure compliance of the Supreme Court's mandate to desegregate schools. He asserted that the country had "lost valuable years" because President Dwight D. Eisenhower failed to implement a civil rights plan and thereby show presidential and moral leadership (Kennedy, Remarks at National Conference on Constitutional Rights and American Freedom, 12 October 1960). After the election, King began urging Kennedy to enact the civil rights planks adopted at the 1960 Democratic convention. He told an audience in Chattanooga: "Now we must remind Mr. Kennedy that we helped him to get in the White House. We must remind Mr. Kennedy that we are expecting him to use the whole weight of his office to remove the ugly weight of segregation from the shoulders of our nation." King argued that in the past the federal government had exclusively relied on the judicial branch to deal with the civil rights issue, while the legislative and executive branches have been "hypocritical, apathetic, and silent." King added, "we must remind Mr. Kennedy that when he gets the pen in his hand, we expect him to write a little bit and give some orders" (King, "The Negro and the American Dream," Address delivered at Memorial Auditorium, 30 December 1960).

3. *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: John F. Kennedy, 1961* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1962), pp. 156–157.

4. King, Question and answer period at Temple Emanuel, 12 March 1961; see also King, *The Question*

lations” and offered him “support and prayers” as he led the nation “through the difficult yet challenging days ahead.” Acknowledging Kennedy’s busy schedule, King requested a White House meeting, explaining that “a brief discussion on the present status of the civil rights struggle may prove to be mutually beneficial.”⁵

While King waited for a response from Kennedy, the administration partially fulfilled a campaign promise by asking a federal court to add the U.S. Department of Justice as a plaintiff in the Prince Edward County, Virginia, school desegregation case.⁶ King sent Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy a telegram applauding the Justice Department’s “forthrightness and courage in a sincere attempt to solve many of the crises that face our Southland” and promised to support the attorney general’s efforts “to bring our country closer to the fulfillment of its ideals of equal opportunities for all.”⁷ Soon after receiving King’s praise, Kennedy gave his first formal address as attorney general at the University of Georgia Law School and called for compliance with federal court orders regarding civil rights. “We know that if one man’s rights are denied, the rights of all are endangered. In our country the courts have a most important role in safeguarding these rights.” He insisted that court decisions “must be followed and respected” and “if we disagree with a court decision and, thereafter, irresponsibly assail the court and defy its rulings, we challenge the foundations of our society.”⁸

As King pressed the Kennedy administration to support civil rights reform, he also recognized that his 1960 tax evasion trial had been a major distraction from his effort to increase SCLC’s effectiveness.⁹ During the winter and spring of 1961, his speaking invitations brought in contributions for the group’s depleted coffers. A celebrity gala in January at New York’s Carnegie Hall netted over \$20,000, and a direct mail appeal brought in \$30,000 more by May.¹⁰ Even as SCLC built its national

of Progress in the Area of Race Relations, Address delivered at Temple Emanuel, 12 March 1961. King later recalled the president seemed “committed” to civil rights but was “not quite sure that he had a mandate from the people” because of his “very small margin of victory in the election” (King, Interview by Bernhard, 9 March 1964).

5. King to Kennedy, 16 March 1961, p. 175 in this volume. Although King was invited to Kennedy’s inauguration, he did not attend. For a facsimile of the invitation, see p. 129 in this volume. Kennedy was slow to respond to King’s request for a meeting, which did not take place until October 1961 (see King, Press Conference after Meeting with John F. Kennedy, 16 October 1961, pp. 308–311 in this volume).

6. In June 1961 the Justice Department’s petition was denied (*Eva Allen et al. v. County School Board of Prince Edward County, Va., etc., et al.*, 28 F.R.D. 358 [1961]). The Prince Edward County school desegregation case was one of five cases consolidated into the Supreme Court’s 1954 *Brown* decision, which outlawed segregation in public schools (*Brown et al. v. Board of Education of Topeka et al.*, 347 U.S. 483). Five years after the *Brown* decision, Prince Edward County school board officials closed the county’s public schools rather than obey a federal court order to desegregate.

7. King and Wyatt Tee Walker to Kennedy, 28 April 1961.

8. “Text of Attorney General Kennedy’s Civil Rights Speech at University of Georgia,” *New York Times*, 7 May 1961. SCLC’s executive board expressed its “sincere appreciation for the Attorney General Robert Kennedy and his forthright leadership he is giving the enforcement arm of the Federal Government” (SCLC, Press release, “King and SCLC meet in Montgomery,” 12 May 1961).

9. For more on King’s tax evasion case, see Introduction, in *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. 5: *Threshold of a New Decade*, ed. Clayborne Carson, Tenisha Armstrong, Susan Carson, Adrienne Clay, Kieran Taylor (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), pp. 24–26, 30–31.

10. King to Sammy Davis, Jr., 28 March 1961, pp. 188–189 in this volume; Ralph Abernathy, “Report of the treasurer,” 1 November 1960–30 April 1961.

donor network, however, King's concern with fundraising limited his ability to build his group's local programs.

The challenge King faced from the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) and college students affiliated with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) would become increasingly evident during 1961 and 1962. Protesters eager to practice civil disobedience not only prodded the Kennedy administration to speed the pace of civil rights reform but also put pressure on King to overcome his reluctance to engage in militant direct action. On 31 January, the eve of the first anniversary of the lunch counter sit-in in Greensboro, North Carolina, a small group of protesters affiliated with CORE launched a "jail-in" campaign in Rock Hill, South Carolina.¹¹ When CORE requested assistance from other civil rights groups, SNCC sent four students to Rock Hill to be arrested and join those in jail. In a letter to the students, King praised them for their willingness to remain jailed rather than accept bail, but he did not become involved.¹²

While the Rock Hill protesters were in jail, the Atlanta students resumed the demonstrations they had started a year earlier. King had been jailed for participating in the previous fall's student-led sit-ins in Atlanta, but this time he played only a supportive role.¹³

He also appeared in a Fulton County courtroom on 15 February for the arraignment of a group of protesting ministers, including his former Morehouse and Crozer classmate Walter McCall, who had been arrested for joining the sit-in demonstrations.¹⁴ At a rally that evening, King praised the efforts of the students and ministers to defy unjust laws and called upon African Americans to reject token integration. Soon afterward he left Atlanta for a two-week vacation in the Bahamas.¹⁵

Upon his return to Atlanta, King mediated conflicts between increasingly impatient student activists and older black leaders. When black attorney A. T. Walden, acting on behalf of the Student-Adult Liaison Committee, negotiated an agreement with downtown Atlanta merchants to end the protests in return for desegregation of downtown stores and a promise to desegregate public schools the following fall, some students objected. White leaders praised the agreement, and several prominent African American leaders, including King's father, signed it.¹⁶

11. Thomas Walter Gaither, "Jailed-In," April 1961.

12. King to Diane Nash and Charles Sherrod, 17 February 1961, pp. 167–168 in this volume.

13. After his October arrest at Rich's department store, King was convicted of violating the conditions of his probation stemming from a May 1960 traffic violation and sentenced to four months in Georgia's state prison at Reidsville (see Introduction in *Papers* 5:36–40). Student sit-in leaders later suspended demonstrations for thirty days while Atlanta officials promised to try and secure the release of jailed protesters. After negotiations collapsed, however, the students resumed the boycott of downtown stores ("Atlanta Negroes Suspend Sit-Ins," *New York Times*, 23 October 1960; John Britton, "Demonstrations Are Resumed Here after Truce of 30 Days," *Atlanta Daily World*, 26 November 1960).

14. Keeler McCartney, "8 Ministers Seized in Sit-In, Vow to Remain in Fulton Jail," *Atlanta Constitution*, 16 February 1961.

15. Charles Moore, "Negroes Here Plan Huge Rally at Jail," *Atlanta Constitution*, 16 February 1961. Lonnie C. King and Mary Ann Smith, two members of the Atlanta Committee on Appeal for Human Rights, wrote King on 25 February thanking him for his "eloquent" address: "You have been an inspiration to all of us" (p. 169 in this volume).

16. The merchants also agreed to rehire black employees who had been laid off (Bruce Galphin, "Negroes Agree to End Sit-Ins," *Atlanta Constitution*, 8 March 1961; SCLC, *Newsletter* no. 1, 1, May 1961).

During a 10 March mass meeting at Warren Memorial Methodist Church, some students charged that the adult leaders had sold them out.¹⁷ King watched as students shouted down his father's attempt to defend the agreement and then pleaded for calm and unity between both groups. "No greater tragedy could befall the Negro in Atlanta now than to be infected with the cancerous disease of disunity," King argued.¹⁸ Addressing those who believed that the adult leadership had sold out by accepting the agreement, King said:

If I had been on that committee that met Monday afternoon, I wouldn't mind anybody saying, Martin Luther King, Jr., you made a mistake. I wouldn't mind anybody saying, Martin Luther King, Jr., you should have thought it over a little longer. I wouldn't have minded anybody saying to me, Martin Luther King, Jr., maybe we made a tactical blunder. But I would have been terribly hurt if anybody said to me, Martin Luther King, Jr., you sold us out! . . . I would have been hurt by that.¹⁹

King's pleas did not repair the rupture between impatient youthful activists and older leaders favoring a more gradualist approach to desegregation.

As he dealt with this growing youth-led militancy, King also struggled to respond to the request of white SCLC supporter Anne Braden that he initiate a clemency petition on behalf of her husband.²⁰ Carl Braden had recently lost his appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court of his one-year prison sentence for refusing to answer the House Un-American Activities Committee's (HUAC) questions about his alleged communist ties.²¹ Although the Bradens had been longtime associates of King, he knew that involvement in this controversial issue would make him vulnerable to red-baiting, especially from segregationists who demonized any civil rights advocacy

17. Lionel Newsom and William Gorden, "A Stormy Rally in Atlanta," *Today's Speech* 11, no. 2 (April 1963): 18–21; Trezzvant W. Anderson, "Repudiate Boycott 'Settlement': 'You Sold Us Out,' Cry Angry Atlanta 'Sit-Ins,'" *Pittsburgh Courier*, 18 March 1961. In a later interview, Lonnie C. King, chairman of the Atlanta Committee on Appeal for Human Rights, said that although he had wanted immediate desegregation of downtown businesses he was "browbeat" by the adult leadership into signing the agreement (Lonnie C. King, Interview by John H. Britton, 29 August 1967).

18. "King Pleads to Students: Atlanta Accord Followed by Dispute," *New York Amsterdam News*, 25 March 1961. Before King, Jr. addressed the meeting, Daddy King explained his position: "By your saying I've sold out bothers me very little. I keep my record up and my business is to keep any of that from being true. . . . If you want the little place I have you can have it. I'm tired, as tired as I can be. . . . Now God bless you, and let's keep working together for the good of all of us" (Newsom and Gorden, "A Stormy Rally in Atlanta").

19. Newsom and Gorden, "A Stormy Rally in Atlanta." According to Lonnie C. King, King, Jr. "made the greatest speech" he had ever made with "tears were in his eyes" after seeing "his daddy being castigated by those people" (King, Interview by Britton, 29 August 1967).

20. Braden went to Atlanta to ask King personally to initiate a petition on behalf of her husband (Anne Braden, *The Wall Between* [Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1999], pp. 325–326; see also Braden to King, 5 March 1961).

21. *Braden v. United States*, 365 U.S. 431 (1961); "Witness Balked in Inquiry on Reds," *New York Times*, 31 July 1958; "A Year for Contempt," *New York Times*, 3 February 1959. Created in 1938, the House Un-American Activities Committee investigated the threat of subversive activities by organizations, private citizens, and public employees suspected of having communist sympathies.

as communistic.²² Anne Braden sought to convince King to act by citing Supreme Court justice Hugo Black's warning in his dissenting opinion that "the power to interrogate everyone who is called a Communist" would allow all legislative committees "to subpoena all persons anywhere who take a public stand for or against segregation."²³ After King failed to respond to her request, Braden reluctantly decided to move ahead without him. King finally phoned her to indicate that he would support the petition, but only if other black leaders also agreed to sign it. "Anne," he said, "I've been praying about this thing all night. I want you to put my name on that petition."²⁴

Anne Braden made revisions to the petition in consultation with King and then secured sponsorship from sixteen others, including Fred Shuttlesworth, Ralph Abernathy, and C.K. Steele.²⁵ A day after Braden surrendered to U.S. marshals in Atlanta, King told a reporter with the *Atlanta Journal* that the case against Carl revealed the resurgence of McCarthyism, insisting that Carl was being punished for his "integration activities." King also made clear that the clemency petition circulating for Carl was not a defense of communism, but a response to the anti-communist crusade intended to silence those calling for civil rights: "We see the rise of McCarthyism in the South again because all other weapons of the segregationists have failed."²⁶ This same sentiment was echoed in an SCLC press release that announced the "unanimous agreement" of the organization's executive board to support Carl Braden.²⁷

22. Anne Braden had met King at Highlander's 1957 anniversary celebration on 2 September 1957 (see Braden to King, 14 October 1958, in *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, 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. 510–511). Following his address at Highlander, King was denounced in billboards in the South for being at a "Communist Training School." The billboards featured a photograph of King sitting near a reporter for a Communist Party newspaper (see King, "A Look to the Future," Address Delivered at Highlander Folk School's Twenty-fifth Anniversary Meeting, 2 September 1957, in *Papers* 4:269–276).

23. Braden to King, 5 March 1961. Black, an Alabama native, also wrote in his dissent that the decision against Braden "may well strip the Negro of the aid of many of the white people who have been willing to speak on his behalf" (*Braden v. United States*, 365 U.S. 431).

24. Braden, *The Wall Between*, pp. 325–326; see also Braden to James A. Dombrowski, 20 April 1961. In her autobiography, Braden wrote: "There was absolutely no personal advantage for him in his unwavering support of us; it could only bring him trouble and criticism—which it did" (Braden, *The Wall Between*, p. 326). After receiving word that King would sign the petition, Braden sent him a letter: "I know that we have agreed that it is not so much a personal thing for Carl as a weapon to keep the witch hunters from damaging the integration movement, but since I'm personally involved I can't help having a certain sense of appreciation. But more important than that, I admire your courage" (Braden to King, 14 March 1961).

25. Braden to Wood, 27 March 1961. The petition was circulated on 22 April 1961. Additional signees included both black and white Southerners: William B. Abbot, Sarah-Patton Boyle, Carl P. Brannin, James McBride Dabbs, W.W. Finlator, Clarence Jordan, James M. Lawson, Edgar A. Love, Dorcas Ruthenburg, Charles Eubank Tucker, Wyatt Tee Walker, Aubrey W. Williams, and Marion A. Wright (Petition for clemency for Carl Braden, 22 April 1961).

26. Douglas Kiker, "King Sees 'McCarthyism' in 2 U.S. Contempt Sentences," *Atlanta Journal*, 2 May 1961. A day before Braden's surrender on 1 May, King and his wife, Coretta, attended a reception in Atlanta to honor Carl Braden and Frank Wilkinson, who also refused to answer questions before HUAC and was sentenced to a year in jail. For a photograph taken at the reception, see p. 97 in this volume.

27. SCLC, Press release, "King and SCLC meet in Montgomery."

As King came to the defense of Carl Braden, he realized that SCLC's effectiveness was also being threatened by legal attacks against four executive board members who had been sued for libel after signing a 1960 *New York Times* advertisement published by the Committee to Defend Martin Luther King and the Struggle for Freedom in the South.²⁸ A court had ordered Ralph Abernathy, S.S. Seay, Joseph Lowery, and Fred Shuttlesworth to pay two Alabama officials \$500,000 each in damages, and by early 1961 the plaintiffs were seeking to force payment of the judgments.²⁹ On 8 May King met in New York with the newly formed Lawyers Advisory Committee, a group of eighteen lawyers seeking to raise funds in response to the legal judgments against the four SCLC leaders. King warned that "if these judgments are not reversed, victims of injustice dare not express opposition to their oppressors." He also contended that this kind of "misuse" of the legal system is a "new and potent weapon in the arsenal of the segregationists" that "not only deprives the victim of his economic security, but it undermines his confidence in law."³⁰



Following a two-day SCLC board meeting in Montgomery, King and Wyatt Tee Walker returned to Atlanta to meet with participants of the Freedom Rides campaign, organized by CORE to test compliance with the 1960 U.S. Supreme Court ruling outlawing segregation in waiting rooms, restaurants, and restrooms in transportation terminals.³¹ The interracial group of thirteen volunteers left Washington, D.C., on 4 May intending to arrive in New Orleans on 17 May, the seventh anniversary of the *Brown* decision.³² Their first week on the road was mostly uneventful, except for a skirmish in Rock Hill, South Carolina.³³ By the time the group arrived in Atlanta on 13 May to meet with King, the campaign had drawn little national

28. According to an SCLC treasurer's report, the Emergency Defense fund balance by the end of April 1961 was \$775.42 (Abernathy, "Report of the treasurer"). For more on the libel suits and a facsimile of the advertisement, see Introduction in *Papers* 5:25–26, 382.

29. In two of the five libel cases, the plaintiffs were awarded a combined total of \$1 million in damages. Although the ministers appealed the verdicts, the plaintiffs immediately began taking possession of the defendants' personal and real property. Some of the defendants' wages were garnished and their land and cars auctioned ("Background, The Alabama Libel Suits," 8 May 1961; "Car Is Impounded as Libel Payment," *New York Times*, 4 February 1961). In a 9 April 1961 letter to Stanley Levison, King's advisor, Seay pleaded for a loan of \$500: "As a result of these suits my credit has been completely nullified here in the community. I am the pastor of a small church, but my main income is from a farm that I operate." In June 1961 federal district court judge Frank M. Johnson ruled that the ministers had been wrongly named as codefendants with the *New York Times* since they had no knowledge that their names were being used in the ad. Johnson's ruling absolved the ministers in two of the three remaining cases ("U.S. Court Keeps Times Libel Suits," *New York Times*, 27 June 1961).

30. King, Statement at Lawyers Advisory Committee Meeting, 8 May 1961, pp. 219, 220 in this volume. The Committee was founded by Theodore W. Kheel, former president of the National Urban League and an arbitrator in labor disputes.

31. SCLC, Press release, "King and SCLC Meet in Montgomery"; *Boynton v. Virginia*, 364 U.S. 454 (1960).

32. Elsie Carper, "Pilgrimage Off on Racial Test," *Washington Post*, 5 May 1961. The group planned to make stops in Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana.

33. SNCC, *The Student Voice* 2, nos. 4 & 5, April–May 1961.

publicity. At Paschal's, a popular black-owned restaurant, King listened as the riders recounted their experiences integrating bus terminals in the Deep South, and later he expressed pride in being a member of CORE's national advisory committee. According to CORE national director James Farmer, the freedom riders were "heartened" by their interaction with King, "the man who had become, without question, the symbol of the civil rights movement in America."³⁴ Although King supported the freedom riders' objectives, he nonetheless harbored doubts about whether they would accomplish their mission, telling *Jet* reporter Simeon Booker, who was one of two journalists riding the buses, that he had "gotten word you won't reach Birmingham. They're going to waylay you."³⁵

On 14 May, both groups of freedom riders left Atlanta for Birmingham, while King preached a Mother's Day sermon at Ebenezer Baptist Church.³⁶ Later that afternoon, the freedom riders in the first bus encountered trouble when a mob awaited them upon their arrival at the Greyhound bus terminal in Anniston, Alabama. With no police in sight, segregationists slashed the tires and smashed windows on the bus. When police finally arrived, no arrests were immediately made, and the group was allowed to continue on to Birmingham with local Klansmen following closely behind. Six miles outside of Anniston when the bus was forced to pull over because of a flat tire, a member of the pursuing mob hurled a firebomb through one of the bus windows, filling the bus with dense smoke and forcing riders off the bus. Despite the threat of mob violence, the freedom riders got off the bus shortly before it burst into flames. Some of the riders were taken to the hospital, while others were driven to Birmingham in cars dispatched by the Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth, president of the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights.³⁷

The second contingent of riders met a similar fate upon their arrival at the Trailways bus terminal in Birmingham. With Birmingham police conspicuously absent upon the riders' arrival, segregationists assaulted several freedom riders including James Peck, who was left lying unconscious on the ground outside the terminal. Others were beaten as they tried to enter the segregated waiting room.³⁸

34. James Farmer, *Lay Bare the Heart: An Autobiography of the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Plume, 1985), p. 200. CORE field director Gordon R. Carey asked King to attend a rally in support of the freedom riders at Atlanta's Warren Memorial Methodist Church on 13 May and to arrange for a private dinner with them that evening. The rally was later canceled (Carey to King, 8 May 1961, pp. 217–218 in this volume). Farmer recalled that he expected King to pick up the dinner check at the "not inexpensive" restaurant. "I finally reached slowly for it, certain King would beat me to the punch," but King "made no move, so to my surprise I found myself picking up the tab" (Farmer, *Lay Bare the Heart*, p. 200).

35. Simeon Booker and Carol McCabe Booker, *Shocking the Conscience: A Reporter's Account of the Civil Rights Movement* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2013), p. 189.

36. King's sermon at Ebenezer was "Crisis in the Modern Family" (Ebenezer Baptist Church, Press release, "'Crisis in the Modern Family,' Dr. King Jr.'s topic at Ebenezer," 13 May 1961).

37. "One Vehicle Is Set Afire at Anniston," *Birmingham Post-Herald*, 15 May 1961; James Peck, *Freedom Ride* (New York: Grove Press, 1962), pp. 96–97.

38. Jerry McCloy, "Attackers Here Use Lead Pipes against Victims," *Birmingham Post-Herald*, 15 May 1961; Peck, *Freedom Ride*, pp. 97–98; "Ambushers Burn Bus, Riot Hits Birmingham," *Montgomery Advertiser*, 15 May 1961. Peck was an original participant in CORE's 1947 Journey of Reconciliation. Prior to their arrival in Birmingham, riders on the Trailways bus also made a brief stop at the Greyhound bus station in Anniston, where, unbeknownst to them, their fellow riders had been attacked an hour earlier.

8 Local thugs boarded the bus and beat several of the riders, forcing them to sit at the rear of the bus.

The next day, Greyhound bus drivers refused to continue the trip.³⁹ In order to remain on schedule, the group decided to fly from Birmingham to New Orleans, where local CORE members feted the group's heroic efforts.⁴⁰ Although the decision to fly to New Orleans effectively marked the end of the initial Freedom Ride, members of the Nashville Christian Leadership Council and SNCC vowed to continue the campaign.⁴¹

Incensed by the violence in Anniston and Birmingham, King, Fred Shuttlesworth, and Wyatt Tee Walker sent a telegram to Alabama governor John Patterson protesting the brutal treatment of the freedom riders: "Once again Alabama has shamed our nation. The disgraceful and unprovoked violence at Anniston and Birmingham inflicted upon interstate passengers and the failure of law enforcement officials to give adequate protection reeks of Hitlerism."⁴² SCLC sent an equally blunt telegram to the attorney general: "It is inconceivable that American citizens peacefully travelling under interstate law cannot be protected from segregationist terrorism and mob violence." The telegram complained that the violence in Alabama mocked the Fourteenth Amendment's guarantee of "equal protection under law" and urged "immediate steps be taken to end the tyranny in Alabama and other states to fully safeguard American citizens from racist brutality."⁴³

Spurred by Nashville student activist Diane Nash a new group of ten volunteers left Nashville for Birmingham on 17 May, hoping to resume the Freedom Rides. Upon their arrival in Birmingham, Public Safety commissioner Eugene "Bull" Connor arrested them, holding the group in "protective custody" overnight before driving

Throughout the two-hour ride to Birmingham, segregationists occupied the front part of the bus (Peck, *Freedom Ride*, pp. 97–98).

39. "Freedom Riders' Fly to N.O. after Bomb Reports Delay Trip before Takeoff," *Birmingham Post-Herald*, 16 May 1961. On 15 May 1961, Robert Kennedy placed a call to George E. Cruik, superintendent of Birmingham's Greyhound bus station, asking if anything could be done to "get this bus down to Montgomery." Cruik insisted that no regular drivers were willing to take the assignment for fear of their safety. Kennedy suggested getting a "driver of one of the colored buses" or even "some Negro school bus driver" to take them to Montgomery. Cruik steadfastly insisted that "amateurs can't handle" \$45,000 buses. Frustrated by Cruik's insistence that no driver could be found, Kennedy warned that he was "going to be very much upset if this group does not get to continue their trip" since "they are entitled to transportation provided by Greyhound and we are looking for you to get them on their way." Despite his pleas, no driver was found to take the riders to Montgomery (Transcript, Phone conversation between Robert F. Kennedy and George E. Cruik, 15 May 1961; "Bi-Racial Group Cancels Bus Trip," *New York Times*, 16 May 1961).

40. Peck, *Freedom Ride*, p. 101. Just before the freedom riders were scheduled to fly from Birmingham, a telephoned bomb threat prompted all passengers to get off the plane, and the freedom riders waited several hours at the airport before departing for New Orleans ("Bi-Racial Group Cancels Bus Trip," 16 May 1961).

41. Howard Zinn, *SNCC: The New Abolitionists* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), pp. 44–45.

42. The telegram, which was reproduced in an SCLC press release, also called upon the governor to uphold the Constitution and "to begin giving responsible moral leadership to your state before America completely loses her prestige in the world community" (SCLC, Press release, "Freedom riders attacked in Alabama," 15 May 1961).

43. SCLC, Press release, "Freedom riders attacked in Alabama." In a statement released by CORE, James Farmer said that if mobs can "terrorize American citizens who are peacefully and legally traveling interstate, then existing Federal Laws are not adequate and additional civil rights legislation must be given top priority" (CORE, "Statement by CORE National Director, James Farmer," 16 May 1961).

several of them to the Alabama-Tennessee border and ordering them out of the car.⁴⁴ The Nashville contingent was able to catch a ride back to Birmingham's Greyhound bus station, but, once again, bus drivers refused to take them on to Montgomery.⁴⁵

Behind the scenes Justice Department and White House officials sought an agreement that would allow for continued protests without further violence. Robert Kennedy sent his assistant, John Seigenthaler, to Alabama to secure a pledge from Governor John M. Patterson to protect the riders.⁴⁶ When a recalcitrant Patterson repeatedly refused, Floyd Mann, Alabama's director of public safety, assured Seigenthaler that the riders would arrive in Montgomery unharmed. Patterson finally capitulated, asserting that he had "the will, the force, the men, and the equipment to give full protection to everyone in Alabama."⁴⁷ On 20 May, the riders boarded a Greyhound bus and were escorted to the city limits by Birmingham police, who turned the bus over to the Alabama Highway Patrol for the remainder of the ride to the state capital.⁴⁸ The riders expected that Montgomery police would assume responsibility for their safety once they arrived at the Montgomery bus station, but no one was there to shield them from a mob wielding clubs, sticks, and metal pipes. SNCC activists John Lewis, Jim Zwerg, and William Barbee were badly beaten, as was Seigenthaler, who was knocked unconscious trying to come to the aid of a white female rider.⁴⁹

Several attempts by Robert Kennedy to reach Patterson for an explanation went unanswered. Irritated by Patterson's flagrant snub, the attorney general, on orders from the president, deployed federal marshals to Alabama and obtained a federal injunction preventing the Ku Klux Klan and other white supremacists from harassing the riders and interfering with interstate travel.⁵⁰ Responding to the violence in Montgomery, the president issued a statement pleading with state and local officials

44. "Police Jail 10 'Mixed' Riders for 'Protection' in Bus Delay," *Birmingham Post-Herald*, 18 May 1961. A newspaper quoted Connor as saying he drove the students back to Tennessee for their own protection. When Connor dropped the students off, he reportedly said: "There is the Tennessee line. Cross it and save this state and yourself a lot of trouble." One student replied: "We'll see you back in Birmingham about noon" ("Crowd at Bus Station," *New York Times*, 20 May 1961).

45. Peck, *Freedom Ride*, p. 106.

46. Robert F. Kennedy and Burke Marshall, Interview by Anthony Lewis, 4 December 1964.

47. Burke Marshall, Interview by Louis F. Oberdorfer, 29 May 1964; "'Protection Assured': Patterson, JFK Aide Talk Here," *Montgomery Advertiser*, 20 May 1961.

48. Marshall, Interview by Oberdorfer.

49. Marshall, Interview by Oberdorfer; "Freedom Riders Attacked by Whites in Montgomery," *New York Times*, 21 May 1961; Don Martin, "U.S. Official Is Knocked Unconscious," *Washington Post*, 21 May 1961.

50. "Text of Telegram from Robert Kennedy," *Montgomery Advertiser*, 21 May 1961. In a telegram to Patterson that was released to the public, Robert Kennedy blamed the violence against Seigenthaler and the demonstrators on the governor's failure to enforce the law. Kennedy also argued that while he "strongly" believed that law enforcement should be left to local authorities, his futile attempts to discuss with Patterson how he planned to protect the demonstrations going forward left him no alternative but to call in federal marshals ("Text of Telegram from Robert Kennedy," 21 May 1961). Kennedy acknowledged that his decision to send marshals to Alabama was done "with great reluctance" (Robert F. Kennedy, Summary of telephone conversation with John Malcolm Patterson, 20 May 1961). Following his conversation with Kennedy, Patterson announced that the federal government had no "legal or constitutional right" to send federal marshals into Alabama and that the Kennedy administration had encouraged "busloads of incident-hunting 'students' to violate our state laws." He also postulated that the federal government's failure to stop "outside agitators" from "invading Alabama" made his efforts

to “exercise their lawful authority to prevent any further outbreaks of violence,” while also requesting that the protesters refrain from actions that would provoke further violence.⁵¹

Canceling a scheduled appearance at Dartmouth College, King flew to Montgomery on 21 May to lead a mass meeting in support of the freedom riders at Abernathy’s First Baptist Church.⁵² Black residents began filling the pews several hours before the rally began at First Baptist Church, and more than a thousand residents eventually gathered inside. As the meeting got underway, a crowd of angry whites brandishing weapons and yelling racial epithets was growing outside. With only the federal marshals to restrain them, some members of the mob began vandalizing and burning automobiles.⁵³

When King stepped to the pulpit, he expressed concern about the “ugly mob outside,” but cautioned black residents against becoming “panicky.”⁵⁴ In King’s draft of the remarks he planned to deliver, he charged that “responsibility for the hideous action in Alabama last week must be placed at the doorsteps of the Governor of this State.” Governor Patterson’s “consistent preaching of defiance of the law, his vitriolic public pronouncements, and his irresponsible actions,” King said, “created the atmosphere in which violence could thrive.”⁵⁵ King also maintained that the federal government’s refusal to act amounted to condoning such behavior: “Unless the Federal Government acts forthrightly in the South to assure every citizen his constitutional rights, we will be plunged into a dark abyss of chaos. The federal government must not stand idly by while blood thirsty mobs beat non-violent students with impunity.”⁵⁶

Throughout the evening King remained in communication with Robert Kennedy, calling the attorney general several times by phone to inquire about the federal government’s plans to resolve the situation.⁵⁷ As the mob surrounding the church overwhelmed the outnumbered federal marshals, the attorney general tried to assure King that national guardsmen reinforcements were on the way, but the civil rights leader pressed Kennedy for a more forceful response.⁵⁸ After a harrowing eight

to enforce the law more difficult (“Riot Incidents May Cloud Patterson, JFK Relations,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, 22 May 1961).

51. *Public Papers of the Presidents: John F. Kennedy, 1961*, p. 391.

52. “Dr. King Cancels Visits at College, Returns to South for Race Crisis; Tension Increases in Montgomery,” *The Dartmouth*, 22 May 1961; “Graham Asks Negro Group Stay Overnight in Church,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, 22 May 1961.

53. “Angry Mob Quits Church before Cloud of Tear Gas,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, 22 May 1961.

54. “Graham Asks Negro Group Stay Overnight in Church,” 22 May 1961; King, Statement Delivered at Freedom Riders Rally at First Baptist Church, 21 May 1961, p. 232 in this volume.

55. King, Address at Freedom Riders Rally at First Baptist Church, 21 May 1961, p. 229 in this volume. Several days after the rioting, Patterson contended that the federal government was responsible for the mayhem: “They caused that rioting by bringing King to Montgomery. There were about sixty marshals on hand. They escorted him to the church. It looked like the President of the United States” (Claude Sitton, “Bi-Racial Riders Decide to Go On,” *New York Times*, 24 May 1961).

56. King, Address at Freedom Riders Rally, 21 May 1961, p. 229 in this volume.

57. “Negroes Leave Church after Long Stay,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, 23 May 1961.

58. “Angry Mob Quits Church before Cloud of Tear Gas,” 22 May 1961. Attempting to regain his power from federal authorities, Patterson declared Montgomery under martial law, sending in guardsmen to do whatever necessary to restore peace (“Montgomery under Martial Law; Troops Called after New Riot; Marshals and Police Fight Mob,” *New York Times*, 22 May 1961).

hours for those trapped inside the church, federal marshals used tear gas to disperse the mob and Alabama national guardsmen evacuated the church and escorted those inside to their homes.⁵⁹

Over the course of the next two days, King, Farmer, and other SCLC officials met with student protesters, who urged King to join their planned Freedom Rides into Mississippi. Fearing that any new arrests would be a violation of the probation he received after his arrest in Atlanta the previous year, King declined.⁶⁰ King's decision disappointed and angered some students, who mocked King's comparison of himself to Christ and noted that they were also on probation. But King did not budge, insisting, "I think I should pick the time and place of my Golgotha." The students walked out of the meeting in protest.⁶¹

On 23 May King joined James Farmer, Ralph Abernathy, and John Lewis at a press conference in Abernathy's home that sought to clarify the overall mission of the Freedom Rides while also affirming that the rides would continue from Montgomery to Jackson, Mississippi. "The students have made it crystal clear that the ride will take place with or without federal protection," King asserted.⁶² Asked about the possibility that someone could be severely injured or killed during the campaign, he responded: "We would not like to see anyone die. . . . but the philosophy of the non-violence involves the spirit of willingness to die for a cause. We are willing to face anything—even if it is death."⁶³ King's appearance at the press conference prompted some leaders and activists to praise him. Labor leader A. Philip Randolph pledged his "unstinting aid," while educator Septima Clark commended King for not merely making a statement, but going "into the thickest fight as a real symbol of courage to the grass roots people." Clark told King that she "could not sit on this mountain top and not let you know how much taller you have grown in my estimation."⁶⁴

As the students readied themselves for the next leg of the Freedom Ride on 24 May, King stood outside the Montgomery bus terminal, shaking hands with some of the riders and wishing them a safe journey to Mississippi. Under protection by police and the National Guard, the first group of freedom riders was en route to Mississippi when the attorney general issued a press release reiterating that federal

59. "Angry Mob Quits Church before Cloud of Tear Gas," 22 May 1961; "Negroes Leave Church after Long Stay," 23 May 1961.

60. Samuel Hoskins, "Fear New Ala. Riot Outbreak," *Chicago Daily Defender*, 24 May 1961; John Lewis and Michael D'Orso, *Walking with the Wind: A Memoir of the Movement* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1998), p. 163. In May 1960 King received a traffic violation for driving with an invalid license. Later that year, he pled guilty and was fined \$25 in addition to receiving a year of probation (see note 187, Introduction in *Papers* 5:37).

61. James Farmer, Interview by Taylor Branch, 18 November 1983; see also "A Disappointing King" in *The Crusader* 2, no. 31 (5 June 1961). According to John Lewis's autobiography, after that meeting the students jeeringly began referring to King as "De Lawd" (Lewis and D'Orso, *Walking with the Wind*, p. 164).

62. King, Press Conference Announcing the Continuation of the Freedom Rides, 23 May 1961, p. 235 in this volume.

63. "Freedom Riders' Sight Miss. As Next Target," *Los Angeles Times*, 24 May 1961.

64. A. Philip Randolph to King, 23 May 1961; Clark to King, 23 May 1961, p. 233 in this volume. King also received telegrams of support from couples Ruby Dee and Ossie Davis and Sidney and Juanita Poitier (Dee and Davis to King, 25 May 1961, pp. 237–238 in this volume; Sidney and Juanita Poitier to King and Freedom Riders, 25 May 1961).

marshals would not be on hand to protect them and that Alabama and Mississippi officials intended to maintain law and order.⁶⁵ The attorney general explained that the administration's obligation was "to protect interstate travelers and maintain law and order only when local authorities are unable or unwilling to do so." Kennedy also voiced his concern that the domestic turmoil associated with the rides would undermine the nation during the president's June 1961 meeting in Vienna with Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev: "Whatever we do in the United States at this time, which brings or causes discredit on our Country, can be harmful to his mission."⁶⁶

Unlike their previous bus rides, the trip to Mississippi was peaceful and uneventful, but once the riders arrived in Jackson, local police promptly arrested them.⁶⁷ Robert Kennedy had received assurance from Mississippi governor Ross Barnett that the mayhem and rioting in Alabama would not happen in his state.⁶⁸ Kennedy also called for a halt to the Freedom Rides, suggesting in a phone call to King that freedom riders jailed in Mississippi could be released in exchange for a "cooling-off period" that would allow for the "present state of confusion and danger" to pass and an "atmosphere of reason and normalcy" to be restored.⁶⁹ When King insisted that the freedom riders would remain in jail as a "matter of conscience and morality," Kennedy responded: "That is not going to have the slightest effect on what the government is going to do in this field or any other. The fact that they stay in jail is not going to have the slightest effect on me." King warned: "Perhaps it would help if students came down here by the hundreds—by the hundreds of thousands." Kennedy did not appreciate what he perceived to be a threat by King: "The country belongs to you as much as to me. You can determine what's best just as well as I can, but don't make statements that sound like a threat. That's not the way to deal with us." While King stood firm in his conviction that the riders must stay jailed, he tried to salvage the conversation by telling the attorney general: "It's difficult to understand the position of oppressed people. Ours is a way out—creative, moral and nonviolent. It

65. "‘Freedom Riders’ Exit Under Eyes of Guard, Police," *Montgomery Advertiser*, 25 May 1961.

66. U.S. Department of Justice, Statement, Robert F. Kennedy on protection of freedom riders, 24 May 1961. In a 19 July 1961 press conference, the president was asked to give his views on the Freedom Rides: "I think the Attorney General has made it clear that we believe that everyone who travels, for whatever reason they travel, should enjoy the full constitutional protection given to them by the law and by the Constitution. They should be able to move freely in interstate commerce. . . . In my judgment, there's no question of the legal rights of the freedom travelers—Freedom Riders, to move in interstate commerce. And those rights, whether we agree with those who travel, whether we agree with the purpose for which they travel, those rights stand, providing they are exercised in a peaceful way" (*Public Papers of the Presidents: John F. Kennedy, 1961*, p. 517).

67. "27 Arrested in Mississippi As Rides Continued," *Birmingham World*, 27 May 1961.

68. Transcript, Phone conversation between Robert F. Kennedy and Ross R. Barnett, 23 May 1961. In a later interview Kennedy said his "primary interest" was that the riders "weren't beaten up," and he conceded that he knew the riders were going to be arrested, but "I didn't have any control over it" (Kennedy and Marshall, Interview by Lewis, 4 December 1964).

69. "Attorney General's Pleas," *New York Times*, 25 May 1961. In a 1964 interview, Kennedy recalled being criticized for calling for a "cooling-off" period: "I thought that people were going to get killed, and they had made their point. What was the purpose of continuing with it?" (Kennedy and Marshall, Interview by Lewis, 4 December 1964). In a 10 September 1961 article in the *New York Times Magazine*, King criticized those who advocated for "cooling-off" periods (see King, "The Time for Freedom Has Come," pp. 275, 276–277 in this volume).

is not tied to black supremacy or Communism, but to the plight of the oppressed. It can save the soul of America. You must understand that we've made no gains without pressure and I hope that pressure will always be moral, legal and peaceful." After Kennedy repeated his offer to have the protesters released, King firmly replied: "They'll stay."⁷⁰

From his Atlanta office the following day, King told *New York Times* reporter Claude Sitton that the arrests in Mississippi were a minor setback and that the rides would resume "in full force" in a few days. As he had said in his conversation with Robert Kennedy the previous evening, King defended the freedom riders and their tactics: "These are the pioneers who are making the way possible for people of all areas to ride buses unmolested by segregation as well as to use the facilities of the bus terminals without being segregated."⁷¹

With no clear end in sight for the Freedom Rides, CORE, SCLC, SNCC, and Nashville Christian Leadership Council formed the Freedom Ride Coordinating Committee, an independent organization.⁷² During a 26 May meeting, the new organization agreed that the rides would last until "interstate travel can be enjoyed throughout the nation by all citizens." The immediate objective was fourfold: coordinate the bus rides, intensify demonstrations to bring segregation in interstate travel to the forefront of the nation's conscience, convince the attorney general to order the Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC) to uphold the Supreme Court decisions in *Morgan* and *Boydton*, and fill the Montgomery and Jackson jails to "keep a sharp image of the issues before the public." To get the Freedom Ride Coordinating Committee up and running, SCLC and CORE each pledged \$1,000, and Wyatt Tee Walker was appointed to administer the funds.⁷³

Three days after the Committee's founding, Robert Kennedy petitioned the ICC to issue regulations banning segregation in interstate travel and the ICC complied

70. Edwin Guthman, *We Band of Brothers* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), pp. 154–155.

71. Also in the interview with Sitton, King argued that the continuation of the Freedom Rides was necessary: "I can conceive of no great social change or progress without some individuals who are willing to take the blows and who are temporarily misunderstood" (Sitton, "Dr. King Refuses to End Bus Test," *New York Times*, 26 May 1961).

72. In a 24 May press release, SCLC announced that King had authorized the launch of the Committee to organize the continuation of the Freedom Rides. King pledged SCLC's full cooperation and "entire resources" until interstate travel facilities were fully integrated: "It must be made clear to the nation, and the south in particular, that American citizens will not be restrained in the practice of their legal, moral and Constitutional privileges." And despite government officials who refuse to "recognize that racial segregation has no place in the fabric of our democracy," King insisted, they are "fighting a lost cause" (James R. Wood, Press release, Freedom Ride Coordinating Committee formed, 24 May 1961). The committee consisted of Gordon Carey of CORE, Ed King of SNCC, Diane Nash of the Nashville Christian Leadership Council, and Wyatt Tee Walker of SCLC. Although the founding documents indicated that the committee would not have a chairman, and each member would function equally in the organization, Walker was later quoted as saying that the students would handle most of the work: "They are the ones serving as the shock troops and we've got to go along" (James R. Wood, Report on meeting of the Freedom Ride Coordinating Committee, 26 May 1961; Claude Sitton, "Group Maps Plans on Freedom Rides," *New York Times*, 1 June 1961).

73. Wood, Report on meeting of the Freedom Ride Coordinating Committee; *Morgan v. Virginia*, 328 U.S. 373 (1946). Since October 1959 King had been lobbying the ICC to end discriminatory practices against black interstate travelers (King to Kenneth H. Tuggle, 19 October 1959, in *Papers* 5:309–310; see also King, Recommendations to the SCLC Executive Committee, 30 September 1959, in *Papers* 5:295–297).

a few months later.⁷⁴ Although King would rather have had a second Emancipation Proclamation ending all forms of segregation, he was pleased with the success of the Freedom Rides and the pressure that the attorney general placed on the ICC. King told an audience at Lincoln University in June:

We think of the Freedom Rides. Think of the fact that more than sixty-five people are now in jail in Jackson, Mississippi. What has this done, we say? These people have been beaten. They've suffered. Let us realize that it has brought to the attention of this nation the indignities and the injustices which Negro people still confront in interstate travel. So it has had an educational value. But not only that—signs have come down from bus stations in Montgomery, Alabama. They've never been down before. Not only that—the attorney general of this nation has called on ICC to come out with new regulations making it palpably clear that segregation in interstate travel is illegal and unconstitutional.⁷⁵

Although King never joined a freedom ride, many people thought of him as the leader of the campaign. King's reluctance to ride the buses irked some of his critics, especially Robert F. Williams, head of the Monroe, North Carolina branch of the NAACP, who sent the SCLC president a telegram: "No sincere leader asks his followers to make sacrifices that he himself will not endure. You are a phony." Williams insisted that if King lacked the courage to ride the buses, he should remove himself "from the vanguard," for "now is the time for true leaders to take to the field of battle."⁷⁶ Despite Williams's criticism, King insisted that although CORE had originated the Freedom Rides, the "central involvement since May 17th organizational wise has been SCLC oriented."⁷⁷ King's declining popularity among militant activists was gradually becoming evident to outside observers. A *Time* magazine article published in early 1962 suggested that students who had once idolized King were turning against him, charging that he was "status seeking" and "more interested in making speeches across the U.S. than in head-on action."⁷⁸

74. Kennedy, "Petition for rule making," 29 May 1961; ICC, Resolution MC-C-3358, "Discrimination in operations of interstate motor carriers of passengers," 22 September 1961. Harris Wofford, special assistant to the president, forwarded a copy of Kennedy's petition to King (Wofford to King, 6 June 1961). In a fundraising letter to an SCLC supporter, King called the ICC ruling a "remarkable victory which in no small way is attributable to the way in which the Freedom Rides dramatized the travel [*conditions?*] in our nation for persons of color." He also wrote of likely attempts to circumvent the ICC ruling, saying that money would be needed to sponsor activities to test the ICC ruling when it comes into effect on 1 November (King to Russell Buckner, 25 October 1961; see also King, *Christ Lives in the World*, Address delivered at the American Lutheran Church Luther League Convention, 16 August 1961; King to Evelyn Spraitzar, 29 December 1961, pp. 357–358 in this volume).

75. King, "The American Dream," Address delivered at Lincoln University Commencement, 6 June 1961.

76. Williams to King, 31 May 1961, pp. 241, 242 in this volume. Williams had clashed with King in 1959 over the role of nonviolence in the movement. For more on King's relationship with Williams, see Introduction in *Papers* 5:17–18.

77. King to J. Raymond Henderson, 6 June 1961, p. 248 in this volume.

78. "Confused Crusade," *Time*, 12 January 1962. While in London in October 1961, King appeared on John Freeman's "Face to Face," where he was asked to respond to criticism that he lacked "fire" and that he was "not really keen on challenging" segregation "except on the margins." King responded: "I don't know if I lack fire. I do feel that at times I am rather soft, and maybe a little gentle, but on the other hand,