“Kick Up Dust,”
Letter to the Editor, Atlanta Constitution

6 August 1946
Atlanta, Ga.

During the summer after his sophomore year at Morehouse, King wrote this letter to the editor of Atlanta's largest newspaper. Although King does not make clear his reasons for writing, the letter was probably written in response to the racially motivated murders of two black couples in Walton County, Georgia, and of Macio Snipes, a black World War II veteran. In the letter, King is critical of those who attempt to “obscure the real question of rights and opportunities.” Years later, King, Sr., observed that he and his wife had “no intimation of [King, Jr.’s] developing greatness... until as a teenager he wrote a letter to the editor of a local paper which received widespread and favorable comment.”

Editor Constitution:

I often find when decent treatment for the Negro is urged, a certain class of people hurry to raise the scarecrow of social mingling and intermarriage. These questions have nothing to do with the case. And most people who kick up this kind of dust know that it is simple dust to obscure the real question of rights and opportunities. It is fair to remember that almost the total of race mixture in America has come, not at Negro initiative, but by the acts of those very white men who talk loudest of race purity. We aren't eager to marry white girls, and we would like to have our own girls left alone by both white toughs and white aristocrats.

We want and are entitled to the basic rights and opportunities of American citizens: The right to earn a living at work for which we are fitted by training and ability; equal opportunities in education, health, recreation, and similar public services; the right to vote; equality before the law; some of the same courtesy and good manners that we ourselves bring to all human relations.

M. L. KING, JR.
Morehouse College.

PD. Atlanta Constitution, 6 August 1946.

1. On 26 July 1946, the Atlanta Constitution reported the killing of Macio Snipes, the only black person to vote in his district in Taylor County, Georgia. On the day after he voted, four white men shot Snipes to death. On 27 July, the newspaper reported that twenty white men stopped and shot two black couples who were driving near Monroe, Georgia. The Constitution expressed “a heartfelt sense of shame and embarrassment” over these incidents, but repeated its opposition to “legislation that would make instances of mob violence a matter for Federal authorities” (Atlanta Constitution, 26, 27, and 29 July 1946).