

We do not publish in August. The manuscript deadline for the September issue is July 15, so you have almost two months in which to “put your best literary foot forward.” Knowing how heavy your commitments must be, I am sure that the amount of leeway this gives you will be welcome.

18 May
1956

May I close with a personal note? My wife and I live in rather humble quarters, which were cozy a few months ago and have, since our daughter was born on February 20, become quite cramped. With this warning in advance, I want you to know that we would be very pleased to have you visit us informally any time you happen to come to New York.* We are not important people in any sense, but we would, I am sure, derive great satisfaction from getting to know you and your wife personally. My wife, who is descended from West Indian Negroes, never had much regard for Negroes from the American South until the Montgomery bus protest began. You have radically altered her views in the direction of respect bordering on high enthusiasm.

I shall be looking forward to seeing a draft of your scholarly article when you get to it. Until then, as Dean Pike says, May the Lord bless you and keep you.

In fellowship,

[*signed*]

William Robert Miller

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“Mother’s Day in Montgomery,”
by Almena Lomax

18 May 1956
Los Angeles, Calif.

On Sunday, 13 May, Almena Lomax, editor of the weekly black newspaper the Los Angeles Tribune, attended Dexter’s Mother’s Day service and took notes on King’s sermon.¹ In this excerpt from Lomax’s account, King exhorts mothers to prepare their children for life in an integrated society by instilling “a sense of dignity, of self-respect” and an “awareness that they must acquire excellence in everything they do. . . . The Negro must work a little harder than the white man, for he who gets behind must run a little harder or forever remain behind.” M. K. Curry, president of Bishop College in

1. Almena Lomax was born in Galveston, Texas, and grew up in Chicago and California. She studied at Los Angeles City College but left in 1941 before graduating to work for the *California Eagle*. In 1943 Lomax and her husband, Lucius, purchased a small black religious weekly and renamed it the *Los Angeles Tribune*. She expanded its coverage to include nonreligious news and served as editor and co-publisher until the paper folded in 1960. Lomax later recalled that many of her readers, eager to receive firsthand information on the boycott, helped finance her fact-finding trip to Montgomery and offered to babysit her six children (interview with King Papers Project staff, 20 February 1995). King thanked Lomax for her articles on the boycott in a 5 July 1956 letter, p. 313 in this volume.

18 May
1956

Marshall, Texas, was a pulpit guest. After the sermon two collections were taken up, the second being for the MIA; King thanked his congregation for its loyalty to "the movement," but noted that "we don't take time out in the worship services to go into it." He advised them to "come out to the twice a week mass meetings" for more information on the bus protest.²

The Rev. Dr. King preached Sunday morning from the subject, "The Role of the Negro Mother in Preparing Youth for Integration."

He told his hearers that he doesn't "give much of a Mother's Day sermon," noting the "tendency of ministers to exploit certain emotions.

"I assure you," he said, "that I will not play on that theme."

IS LEADER AS WELL AS PHILOSOPHER, STUDENT

He also expressed the "hope that you will not feel I am being racial or provincial," but with the strong sense of the immediate, which mingled with the philosopher and student that he is, undoubtedly account for his effectiveness as a leader in these troubled and indeterminate times, he pointed out that the Negro mother has certain "practical problems" in rearing her children, and he proceeded to give her the benefit of his thoughts on the subject.

"The word, integration, is probably one of the best known words in our language now," he said. "It is on the lips of statesmen of all races; it is a big word in our society.

"If I may make a prediction, integration is as inevitable in America as the rising of the sun . . . not only because of 9 justices of the Supreme Court . . . not only because the Negro has a new sense of dignity and destiny, and a determination to press on to achieve integration. . . . not only because whites, North and South, have a moral faith in its coming. . . .

"But because the God of the universe is on the side of integration."

He quoted a religious philosopher to the effect that "God is a process of integration," and said he differed only in that, to him, "God is a person of power."³ However, he thought this philosopher "getting at something quite vital and true since part of the activity of God is a movement toward integration.

"God seeks to bring the disintegration of the universe together," he said. "He is seeking to bring that which is disunited into unity."

"God, himself," is the "final fact of the universe on the side of integration.

2. In a letter to a fellow minister a few days later, King reiterated his position that he was "very reluctant to make a speech on the bus situation at a regular Sunday morning worship hour" (King to Fred E. Stephens, 23 May 1956).

3. King probably refers to Henry Nelson Wieman, one of the subjects of his dissertation. See King, "A Comparison of the Conceptions of God in the Thinking of Paul Tillich and Henry Nelson Wieman," 15 April 1955, in *Papers* 2:339-544.

“PREPARE NOT ONLY
FOR WORST, BUT THE BEST”

18 May
1956

“The individual must be prepared to accept and live with integration,” he warned; and he “must inevitably think about being prepared.

“The great question is, are Negroes prepared? . . . For if there was any foolishness on the part of the foolish virgins, it was complacency, and the wisdom of the wise virgins was preparation.⁴

“We have a great responsibility to be prepared not only for the worst, but for the best.

“Every mother has the responsibility to prepare for this great moment of history,” he said; and then he proceeded to list three lessons which he said are necessary that mothers teach.

“1. A sense of dignity, of self respect;

“Start teaching your child early that he is somebody. There is a danger of succumbing to a sense of feeling that we are not.”

He said all the mechanics first of slavery and then of segregation had been directed at convincing the Negro that he was not fit to be “elevated to . . . the human race.”

In the “background of segregation is a theory that there is something inferior about the group segregated,” he stated.

He advised that “although you may have to live with segregation a while longer, you must never feel inferior. You are just as significant to God as anybody else.” He urged upon them the necessity of “living with a mind that is free . . . reaching out every moment for freedom.

“I must be measured by my soul—the mind is the standard of the man,” he said.⁵

DAY OF “GOOD
NEGRO-ANYTHING” PAST

Next he urged parents to instill in their children “awareness that they must acquire excellence in everything they do.

“It is not enough to be prepared to be a good Negro-anything . . . Never let the circumstance of race cause you to be something good only within the framework of race. . . . The need for excellence is a pressing need.

“The great challenge of the Negro is to be prepared. Emerson’s lines, ‘Make a better mousetrap and the world will beat a path to your door,’ hasn’t always been

4. King refers to the parable of the ten virgins from Matthew 25:1–13.

5. This line is from the eighteenth-century poem “False Greatness” in *Horae Lyricae* (1706) by British poet Isaac Watts. In later speeches King combined passages from Watts’s poem and William Cowper’s “The Negro’s Complaint” (1788). See note 5 to “The ‘New Negro’ of the South: Behind the Montgomery Story,” June 1956, p. 283 in this volume.

18 May true for us; but it will be true.⁶ Get the child ready for these opportunities. Stop
1956 just getting prepared to get by.

“Everyone is not able to do the so-called great things of life. . . . But if you sweep streets, sweep streets like Michelangelo painted pictures, like Beethoven wrote music . . . so that people will say of you, ‘here lives a great street sweeper.’ It’s not so much what you’re doing as how you’re doing it.”

Perhaps, he conceded, “the Negro must work a little harder than the white man, for he who gets behind must run a little harder or forever remain behind.

“There is a temptation,” he said, “as we move toward integration, to be better, to seek to retaliate. . . . That isn’t the way. . . .

“LOVE THE SOLUTION”

“Love is the only solution to the problems of man. There is something about hate that can never solve a problem. Hate destroys the unity of a personality. Hate, like an erosive acid, eats up the best part of our lives.”

Cautioning his audience to self-discipline, a theme he returns to frequently in his addresses, he said, “Let’s not . . . run wild, boasting that we have done better than the whites. Integration is not a victory for the Negro, but a victory for God and justice . . . Forgiveness means reconciliation, totally blotting out the past.”

He quoted Arnold Toynbee, the great British historian, to the effect that the ability of civilizations to survive is measured in terms of “challenge and response” . . . civilizations have died because when the great challenge came, they had not the power to give the proper response.”

“The destiny and survival of white civilization depends upon its responses.

“It may well be,” he said Toynbee has suggested, that “the Negro may give to white civilization that spiritual revitalization it needs to survive.”⁷

“This lack of bitterness; this faith of our fathers—this is a thing we can give at our country’s darkest hour. Something beautiful will happen in this universe because we were able to look out into darkness and see the pressing daybreak.”

The young preacher paused in his prophecy to look back and pay a tribute to mothers of the race; “There have always been mothers who could see the vision . . . who didn’t know the difference between ‘you does’ and ‘you don’t,’ but

6. This familiar quotation, often attributed to Emerson, may have originated as an entry in Emerson’s 1855 journal: “If a man has good corn, or wood, or boards, or pigs, to sell, or can make better chairs or knives, crucibles or church organs, than anybody else, you will find a broad hard-beaten road to his house, though it be in the woods” (quoted in *The Journals of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Robert N. Linscott [New York: Random House, 1960], p. 382).

7. See Arnold Toynbee, *A Study of History*, vol. 2 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1934), pp. 219–220: “With their childlike spiritual intuition and their genius for giving spontaneous aesthetic expression to emotional religious experience, they [American Negroes] may perhaps be capable of rekindling the cold grey ashes of Christianity which have been transmitted to them by us, until in their hearts the divine fire glows again. It is thus, perhaps, if at all, that Christianity may conceivably become the living faith of a dying civilization for the second time.” This quotation appeared in a section of the volume entitled “The Range of Challenge-and-Response.”

who wanted their offspring to 'get it all' . . . Mothers not only ought to be praised for their greatness, but for keeping on," he said with a particularly appealing perceptiveness; and he recited with a rhapsodic lilt to his voice, Langston Hughes' "Life for me ain't been no crystal stair"—closing with the prophecy that "The kingdoms of this world will be the kingdoms of God—Grant that we will catch the vision of the great city of integration which is the city that has foundations whose builder was God." ⁸

20 May
1956

PD. "Mother's Day in Montgomery: Boycott Leader Serves His Congregation Toynbee, Langston Hughes, Emerson and Jesus Christ, and Is Received in Complete Consanguinity," *Los Angeles Tribune*, 18 May 1956.

8. Langston Hughes's poem "Mother to Son" (1930) was first published in the NAACP's *The Crisis* in December 1922. For other instances where King uses this poem, see "The Montgomery Story," 27 June 1956, p. 310 in this volume; and "Address to MIA Mass Meeting at Holt Street Baptist Church," 14 November 1956, p. 432 in this volume. King weaves together quotations from Hebrews 11:10 and Revelations 11:15.

From Richard Bartlett Gregg

20 May 1956
Chester, N.Y.

Rev. M. L. King, Jr.
530-C South Union St.
Montgomery 8, Ala.

Dear Mr. King:

Your good letter of May 1st was forwarded from Jamaica, Vt. to me here where I will be for the rest of the summer. I am glad to learn that "The Power of Non-violence" is being useful to you.

If you do not mind I would like to pass on to you a few ideas I would like to incorporate in that book if I were to make a revised edition of it. Possibly some of these ideas might also be helpful.

Buddha once said something that is very profound and true and also so neatly and pithily stated. (Please pardon the way my typewriter stutters in the middle of each line.) He said that anger is like spitting against the wind;—it always comes back on the person who feels and expresses it. That is true, I think, of all the divisive emotions such as resentment, suspicion, mistrust, pride, [~~strikeout illegible~~] fear, etc. In your present situation at Montgomery it holds true of most of the white people, and would also apply to any negroes whose discipline might fail. The spiritual realm is a realm of unity, and whoever puts up a barrier to that unity inevitably suffers himself whether he causes suffering on others or not. If the members of your Association can come to realize that truth (of Buddha's) deeply and steadily, it will help them and the whole situation immensely, I think.

If in the course of the many private and public discussions of the validity of your non-violent actions, anyone asserts that it is undemocratic, you can answer

267