

From Cecil A. Thomas

28 August 1956  
Berkeley, Calif.

*Thomas was one of Coretta Scott King's teachers in Marion, Alabama. As an administrator of the Stiles Hall University YMCA in Berkeley, he arranged King's appearance there on 15 May. Thomas reports on his efforts to build support for the bus*

*boycott and suggests that his wife, Fran, might assist King in writing a book.<sup>1</sup> King responded to Thomas's letter on 2 October.<sup>2</sup>*

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Dr. & Mrs. M. L. King  
309 South Jackson St.  
Montgomery, Alabama

Dear Martin and Coretta:

Our thoughts and prayers are very much with you these days as we read almost daily, of the things that are happening in Alabama. I have on my bulletin board the clipping of the A.P. release, yesterday, in the local paper which says "a Negro man was tossed into the air 'like a baby' and another was injured at a K.K.K. rally in Tuscaloosa."

We have followed with great interest the comments on the voting today on the "the freedom of choice plan."

The general reaction among our friends here is that it helped a great deal to have your speech in the August 3rd U.S. News and World Report and the article by Grover Hall attacking much of it.<sup>3</sup> We are glad that you encouraged Fran to type a copy of it, since some of the most interesting parts have been left out of the magazine article, as you probably noticed. So many people wanted to get your speech, so I got about 250 copies wholesale of the U.S. News and World Report and are letting people have them at the various meetings where we speak.

In two of the large White papers and two Negro newspapers, they used pictures of our group similar to the one I am enclosing from the Chronicle which has a very large circulation, especially on Sunday, when this article appeared. And as a result of these articles we have had more requests than we can even fill to come and show our colored slides and discuss what is happening in Montgomery. We have met with such groups as an open meeting in Rev. Bennett's church, a large noon meeting of the Fellowship of Reconciliation in San Francisco, a large

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1. Cecil Thomas (1917–1969), born in Frankfort, Ohio, received his B.A. (1939) from Cedarville College in Ohio and his Ph.D. (1949) from Ohio State University. He and his wife, Fran Thomas, first became acquainted with Coretta Scott while teaching at Lincoln School in Marion, Alabama, between 1941 and 1943. Fran worked closely with Coretta and her older sister as their music instructor. They continued their relationship with Coretta Scott while she pursued music studies at Antioch College. Cecil Thomas was associate peace education secretary of the American Friends Service Committee from 1959 until 1966, when he became executive director of the National Committee on United States–China Relations.

2. See pp. 385–386 in this volume.

3. Thomas refers to the publication of King's prepared remarks to San Francisco's NAACP and a response to it by Grover C. Hall, editor of the *Montgomery Advertiser* (see King and Grover C. Hall, Jr., "Alabama's Bus Boycott: What It's All About," *U.S. News and World Report*, 3 August 1956, pp. 82–89).

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NAACP membership meeting, four or five White churches and the Race Relations Committee of the Council of Churches through its Speakers Bureau are encouraging all the churches in Berkeley have one member of the group come to tell the story.<sup>4</sup> One church said they were sending \$50 to you and when we read in the paper of the arrest of some of the car pool drivers in Tallahassee, we sent a \$20 offering from a meeting a couple of days ago to Rev. Steele.<sup>5</sup>

I hope that the short message from the 300 Quakers at our four day conference, showed some of the enthusiasm and real sense of support the group felt after we discussed,—at great length with the entire group,—the spirit of the approach which you are using. I am sure you will be hearing from some of these Quakers from all up and down the west coast.

In fact, it was the kind of enthusiasm and interest evidenced there which should make ~~the~~ {it} possible for us to bring Coretta to the west coast for some concerts if she and Fran decide to try and work it out. Fran is still in Ohio and I am not sure of what she is thinking about in regard to this but she will be back this weekend.

I am also more certain than I was that if Martin and Fran decide that they should experiment with Fran coming down to try to be of some help on the book that we can get some real financial support to carry this idea along {from Quakers.} The head of the American Friends Service Committee in southern California works closely with Mr. Hallock Hoffman, of the Fund for the Republic, and he is interested in talking with him about financial support for the book and for a documentary film, if you feel that now is the time to move ahead on either one.<sup>6</sup>

Martin and Coretta, I want it very clearly understood that in no way am I urging you to do any of these things if your spirit tells you that now is not the time. I realize how busy you are and that you must make daily judgments as to what must be done and what must be left undone. In no way have I made any commitments but have tried to indicate that this is the situation with you. So if life is just too busy or complicated to even think about these things now, please let me know so that I will drop these matters. However, if this is the case we will stand by to help at any time we can.

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4. A group of white Bay Area activists accompanied the Thomas family and L. Roy Bennett, pastor of San Francisco's First AME Zion Church and former MIA vice president, during a visit to Montgomery in late July. A photograph of their entourage appeared in the *San Francisco Chronicle* on 19 August 1956.

5. Thomas refers to Rev. C. K. Steele who headed a Tallahassee, Florida, bus boycott. On 26 May, two Florida A&M female students refused to give up their seats and were arrested. On 28 May students decided not to ride the buses and convinced local black residents to join the boycott. On 30 May African-American church leaders organized the Inter-Civic Council (ICC) to continue the nonviolent protest and elected Steele as president. See Steele to King, 23 October 1956, p. 404 in this volume.

6. In this letter to King Thomas enclosed a letter he had written to Hallock Hoffman on 27 August in which he reported that King was "very interested" in writing a "short interpretative book about the Montgomery movement, . . . but is handicapped because of time and limited resources for secretarial help." Hoffman (1919—) served on the staff of the American Friends Service Committee from 1952 to 1954. He then joined the Fund for the Republic as a staff member and later became its secretary and treasurer.

There is one important business matter which I would appreciate a reaction to in order that I can advise the executive secretary of the Council of Churches. He received a communication from a Harold Clements giving a Hope Street address asking for a list of churches in Berkeley and in California. He did not mention any connection with you or the M.I.A. or the Ministerial Association.<sup>7</sup> If this is a bona fide request in which you are interested, please let us know, so that we can cooperate with it, but I could not remember meeting Harold Clements while in Montgomery.

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Almost every meeting where we talked about our Montgomery experience, we tell people of the meaningful experience we had in your home the morning, when you discussed the protest with us and lead us in prayer.

Probably you do not remember what you said but your prayer in which you asked for God's help as we worked on problems "gigantic in scope and chaotic in detail" made a lasting impression on us. Each one of us felt a little closer to God because of our close fellowship those few days with you, Martin and Coretta. I personally feel deeply in debt to you for challenging me to try to live more nearly in that spirit of reconciling love which Jesus exemplified. I shall always be grateful to you for this.

Sincerely yours,  
[*signed*] Cecil  
Cecil A. Thomas  
Associate Secretary  
CAT:jl

Enclosures

{P.S. Do you have the insurance worked out satisfactorily on the station wagons? Would appreciate pictures from you and Abernathys when they are available.}

TALS. MLKP-MBU: Box 67.

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7. In his reply King reported that H. L. Clements was pastor of Mt. Zion AME Zion Church, L. Roy Bennett's former church, and an MIA executive board member (see King to Thomas, 2 October 1956, pp. 385-386 in this volume).