King was elected president of the Southern Leaders Conference on 14 February during the organization's second meeting at New Zion Baptist Church in New Orleans. The one hundred delegates from thirty-five communities in ten states heard addresses by King, his father, and Nashville minister Kelly Miller Smith. At a press conference after the meeting King released the text of the following telegram to Eisenhower, asking the president to call a White House conference on law and order in the South and to reconsider his decision not to speak out against segregation. King and the other delegates promised to lead a prayer pilgrimage to Washington, D.C., if Eisenhower remained unresponsive. Sherman Adams responded for Eisenhower on 13 March.

THE PRESIDENT
THE WHITE HOUSE

DEAR MR. PRESIDENT:

PERMIT US TO ACKNOWLEDGE RECEIPT OF THE WHITE HOUSE COMMUNICATION OF JANUARY 18, 1957, STATING YOUR INABILITY TO SCHEDULE AN ADDRESS IN THE SOUTH TO ENCOURAGE THE MAINTENANCE OF LAW AND ORDER AS REQUESTED BY THE SOUTHERN NEGRO LEADERS CONFERENCE ON JANUARY 11, 1957.

WE POINTED OUT IN OUR LETTER TO YOU THAT LAWLESSNESS WAS BECOMING A DEEPLY DISTURBING FEATURE OF THE DAILY LIFE OF OUR COMMUNITIES. VIOLENCE HAS CONTINUED TO ERUPT BY NIGHT AND BY DAY. IT HAS GROWN TO ALARMING PROPORTIONS. SOME OF THE ACTS OF VIOLENCE WOULD BE UNBELIEVABLE WERE THE GRIM RUINS NOT MUTE TESTIMONY. UNDER THE COVER OF DARKNESS, DYNAMITE BOMBS HAVE BEEN EXPLODED IN OUR CHURCHES AND THE HOMES OF OUR MINISTERS AND CITIZENS. WE HAVE BEEN COMPELLED TO POST UNARMED GUARDS NIGHTLY TO PROTECT OUR CHURCH PROPERTY. WE ARE NO LONGER FACED WITH SPORATIC VIOLENCE, BUT WITH WHAT APPEARS TO BE AN ORGANIZED CAMPAIGN OF VIOLENCE AND TERROR.

AGAINST THIS SHOCKING BACKGROUND, WE HAVE MET IN NEW ORLEANS TO CONSIDER YOUR RESPONSE TO OUR REQUEST.

1. The Conference members also decided to drop the word "Negro" from the organization's name, becoming the Southern Leaders Conference.
2. In his address King predicted that segregationists would soon accept integration: "The opposition will soon absorb the shock and will see that the only way is to sit and talk things out with those who have freedom in their hearts" ("Speak, Negroes Again Urge Ike," New Orleans Times-Picayune, 15 February 1957; "A Brief Digest of the Activities of In Friendship," 6 March 1957).
3. Before the meeting, Bayard Rustin and Stanley Levison drafted telegrams to be sent to several government officials, including this one to Eisenhower, which King and other conference members edited before sending (Levison to King, 11 February 1957).
WHILE WE ARE SENSITIVE TO THE BURDEN OF YOUR RESPONSIBLE OFFICE, WE ARE AWARE THAT HUMAN LIFE AND ORDERLY, DECENT CONDUCT OF OUR COMMUNITIES ARE AT STAKE. THESE IMPERATIVE CONSIDERATIONS MAKE IT DIFFICULT FOR US TO ACCEPT AS FINAL YOUR MESSAGE THAT YOU CANNOT MAKE A SPEECH IN THE SOUTH AT THIS TIME. IT IS OUR SINCERE BELIEF THAT ACTION ON YOUR PART AT THIS MOMENT CAN AVERT TRAGIC SITUATIONS BY COOLING PASSIONS FOSTERING REASONABLENESS, AND ENCOURAGING RESPECT FOR LAW. IN SAYING THIS, WE ARE NOT UNMINDFUL OF THE IMMENSE RESPONSIBILITY OF YOUR OFFICE IN THE CONDUCT OF OUR NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS. HOWEVER, MORALITY LIKE CHARITY, BEGINS AT HOME. HERE AT HOME, AS WE WRITE, WE ARE CONFRONTED WITH A BREAKDOWN OF LAW, ORDER, AND MORALITY. THIS CONDITION IS A SINISTER CHALLENGE AND A THREAT TO GOVERNMENT BY LAW. IT CALLS FOR DRASTIC AND REMEDIAL ACTION.

THE FLOUTING OF THE SUPREME COURT DECISIONS SERVES NOT ONLY TO DEPRIVE A PART OF OUR CITIZENRY OF ITS RIGHTFUL PRIVILEGES BUT EVEN MORE, IT WEAKENS THE FABRIC OF OUR DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY FOR ALL CITIZENS, NEGRO AND WHITE. THE UNLEASHING OF VIOLENCE AGAINST INDIVIDUALS WHO PEACEFULLY PURSUE JUSTICE, AGAINST CHRISTIAN CLERGYMAN, AND AGAINST THE HOUSE OF GOD ARE UNSPEAKABLE CRIMES. THEY AROUSE THE CONSCIENCE OF ALL HONORABLE AMERICANS TO COMPEL AN END TO THOSE OUTRAGES AS PROOF OF THEIR DEVOTION TO DEMOCRATIC AND SPIRITUAL IDEALS.

TO THIS END,

1. WE IMPORE YOU TO RE-EXAMINE YOUR DECISION NOT TO SPEAK OUT TO THE SOUTH ON THE QUESTION OF LAW AND ORDER.5
2. WE FURTHER URGE YOU TO CALL A WHITE HOUSE CONFERENCE ON THE MAINTENANCE OF LAW AND ORDER SIMILAR TO THOSE HELD EARLIER ON EDUCATION AND JUVENILE DELINQUENCY. WE BELIEVE SUCH A CONFERENCE CAN HELP DEVELOP IN THE SOUTH AND IN THE NATION AN ORDERLY GROWTH TOWARD CIVIL RIGHTS.

WE ASK YOU TO DO THESE THINGS BECAUSE OUR PEOPLE, THOUGH RESOLUTE AND COURAGEOUS, CANNOT BE EXPECTED FOREVER TO BE TARGETS FOR RIFLES, SHOTGUNS, AND FOR BOMBS, PARTICULARLY WHEN OUR WOMEN AND CHILDREN ARE BROUGHT WITHIN RANGE OF THOSE DEADLY WEAPONS. WE KNOW THAT IF A HALT IS PUT TO THESE TERRORISTIC PRACTICES, OUR APPEALS FOR NON-VIOLENT CHRISTIAN BEHAVIOR WILL COME INTO SERIOUS QUESTION BY THOSE WHOSE FRUSTRATION IT HAS ALREADY BEEN DIFFICULT TO CONTAIN.

WE BELIEVE YOUR INABILITY TO COME SOUTH IS A PROFOUND DISAPPOINTMENT TO THE MILLIONS OF AMERICANS OF GOODWILL, NORTH AND SOUTH, WHO EAR-
14 Feb 1957

NESTLY ARE LOOKING TO YOU FOR LEADERSHIP AND GUIDANCE IN THIS PERIOD OF
INEVITABLE SOCIAL CHANGE.

MR. PRESIDENT, WE URGE YOU TO GIVE DEMOCRATIC LEADERSHIP TO THE CON-
FUSED CITIZENS OF THE SOUTH AND THE NATION IN THIS CRITICAL HOUR. WE IM-
PLORE YOU TO ENUNCIATE WHETHER IN THE NORTH OR SOUTH AN EISENHOWER
DOCTRINE FOR DEMOCRACY AT HOME.

IN THE ABSENCE OF SOME EARLY AND EFFECTIVE REMEDIAL ACTION, WE SHALL
HAVE NO MORAL CHOICE, BUT TO LEAD A PILGRIMAGE OF PRAYER TO WASHINGTON.
IF YOU, OUR PRESIDENT CANNOT COME SOUTH TO RELIEVE OUR HARRASSED PEOPLE,
WE SHALL HAVE TO LEAD OUR PEOPLE TO YOU IN THE CAPITOL IN ORDER TO CALL
THE NATIONS ATTENTION TO THE VIOLENCE AND ORGANIZED TERROR DIRECTED
TOWARD MAN WOMEN AND CHILDREN WHO MERELY SEEK FREEDOM AND FIRST
CLASS CITIZENSHIP OF GOODWILL FROM ACROSS THE NATION WILL UNDOUBTEDLY
JOIN IN SUCH A PILGRIMAGE FOR FREEDOM AND HUMAN DIGNITY.

MR. PRESIDENT, WE PRAYERFULLY URGE YOU TO GIVE EARLY AND SERIOUS CON-
SIDERATION TO THE TWO REQUESTS WE HAVE MADE IN THIS LETTER, FOR THE VIO-
LENCE OUR PEOPLE FACE BY DAY AND IN THE DARK OF EACH NIGHT, MAKES IT IM-
PERATIVE THAT WE HEAR FROM YOU AT YOUR EARLIEST CONVENIENCE. PLEASE REPLY
THE REV MARTIN LUTHER KING 530-C SOUTH UNION MONTGOMERY ALA.

RESPECTFULLY YOURS
REV MARTIN L. KING, MONTGOMERY, ALA.
REV F L SHUTTLESWORTH BIRMINGHAM, ALA.,
REV C. K. STEELE, TALLAHASSEE, FLA.,
REV T. J. JEMISON, BATON ROUGE, LA.,
REV A. L. DAVIS JR, NEW ORLEANS LA.,
FOR: THE SOUTHERN NEGRO LEADERS CONFERENCE.

PWSr. WCFO-KAbE: GF 124-A.

6. A typescript of this telegram shows the sentence ending after "first class citizenship"; another
sentence then begins with "People of goodwill. . . ." The word "people" and the period preceding it
may have been lost in transmission.

To Richard M. Nixon

14 February 1957
New Orleans, La.

At the conclusion of their meeting, the Southern Leaders Conference sent this telegram
urging the vice president to visit the South and report to the president on racist