

To Lawrence M. Byrd

25 April 1957
[Montgomery, Ala.]

Byrd, the membership campaign director for the Washington, D.C., branch of the NAACP, met King at a mass meeting in that city in December 1956. In an 8 March letter, he asked King to "identify the particular books and their authors which have strongly influenced" him. Byrd also asked whether King believed the NAACP's "working philosophy" was consistent with the "method of non-violence."

Mr. Lawrence M. Byrd
1114 21st Street, N.E.
Washington 2, D.C.

Dear Mr. Byrd:

On returning to the country I received your very kind letter of March 8. It was a real pleasure hearing from you, and to know of your interest in my work and philosophy.

You make inquiry concerning the books which have influenced my thinking very strongly. I would list the following:

A Biography of Gandhi by Louis Fisher
Essay on Civil Disobedience by Henry David Thoreau
The Power of Non-Violence by Richard Gregg
Christianity and the Social Crisis by Walter Rauschenbusch
Autobiography—Mahatma Gandhi¹

1. Louis Fischer, *The Life of Mahatma Gandhi* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1950); Henry David Thoreau's essay "Civil Disobedience" was first published in 1849 as "Resistance to Civil Government"; Richard Bartlett Gregg, *The Power of Nonviolence* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1934 [King wrote

1957 There are many, many more books that have been profoundly interesting to me. But I would say that these are the basic books.

I do not at all feel that the working philosophy of the NAACP [*is?*] in conflict with the method of non-violence. It seems to me that the two work together very well. As you know the NAACP is an organization dealing mainly with legal strategy. The philosophy of non-violence is concerned mainly with spiritual strategy. Both can work together very well. One supplements the other rather being a substitute.

Again let me say how deeply grateful I am to you for your interest. I do hope that we can talk this matter over personally in the not too distant future.

Very sincerely yours,

M. L. King, Jr.,

President

MLK:mlb

(Dictated by Rev. King, but signed in his absence.)

TlC. MLKP-MBU: Box 14A.

the foreword to the revised edition, published in 1959]); Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis* (New York: Macmillan, 1907); Mahatma Gandhi, *An Autobiography, or, The Story of My Experiments with Truth* (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1927).

In response to an earlier inquiry regarding the impact of Gandhi upon his thinking, King acknowledged "a definite influence" and claimed to have read most of Gandhi's major works and Thoreau's "Civil Disobedience" prior to coming to Montgomery: "Both of these strains of thought had profound influence on my thinking. I firmly believe that the Gand[h]ian philosophy of non-violen[t] resistance is the only logical and moral approach to the solution of the race problem in the United States" (King to George Hendrick, 5 February 1957).