considerations can become a wild and fanatical emotion that can only lead to psychological disintegration.

PD. Ebony, December 1957, p. 120.

The Martin Luther King, Jr. Papers Project

"Some Things We Must Do,"
Address Delivered at the Second Annual Institute on Nonviolence and Social Change at Holt Street Baptist Church

5 December 1957
Montgomery, Ala.

In a November letter King invited local pastors and their congregations to the December institute marking the second anniversary of the MIA. King described the four-day event as "the school in which our people will be prepared to lead the freedom movement in the spirit of love and non-violence." Attorney Harris Wofford and Illinois legislator Paul Simon led seminars related to the conference theme, "Freedom and Dignity Through Civic Responsibility." Archibald Carey, pastor of Quinn Chapel AME Church in Chicago, closed the gathering with a sermon on 8 December.

King delivered this address on the institute's opening night at Holt Street Baptist Church, the birthplace of the MIA. He declares that he will resist the temptation to reminisce about the boycott and forgo his usual reflections on the state of race relations. Instead, he asserts that if the struggle for full equality is to succeed, black people must improve their "personal standards." King lashes out at black teachers who "can't even speak the English language," spendthrift doctors who "haven't opened a book or been back to an institute since they left med school," and preachers who spend all of their time "trying to learn how to whoop and holler." He declares that Montgomery's black community must "plunge deeper into the whole philosophy of nonviolence" and, paraphrasing a passage from missionary E. Stanley Jones, King explains: "Our victory will be a double victory. We will win our freedom, and we will win the individuals who have been the perpetrators of the evil system that existed so long." King concludes: "This is the thing that we must say; this is the thing that we must do." The following transcript is taken from an audio recording.

After listening to such an eloquent introduction, I hardly have anything to say. [laughter] I'm certainly grateful to Dr. Jones for these very gracious and kind expressions.


[2] King closely follows his notes for this address, adding only a sixth point, that African Americans should remain committed to the philosophy of nonviolence (see Notes, "Some Things We Can Do," 5 December 1957). Several portions of the address, including King's discussions of black leadership and the need for African Americans to become more competitive, are similar to sections of his address at the First Annual Institute on Nonviolence (see "Facing the Challenge of a New Age," 3 December 1956, in Papers 3:451–463).

[3] Moses W. Jones was a Montgomery physician and second vice president of the MIA.
This is a great moment, because as we assemble here we cannot help but think of the fact that two years ago on this date, we assembled in this church and said to Montgomery and to the world that we were tired. [Audience:] (Yeah) Many days have passed since that brisk day, or brisk evening, in December 1955. But little did we know on that evening that we were starting a movement whose lofty echoes would be heard all around the world. Little did we realize that we were starting a movement that would stagger and astound the imagination of the oppressor, while leaving a glittering star of hope etched in the midnight skies of the oppressed.

And I can remember very well that night that you gave us the go-ahead to go to the city commission and to the bus officials and let them know that you had three complaints, and there were three things that you wanted. And we went there. We went without fear. We did not go there jittery; we went there and said to the city officials and to the bus officials that we were representing fifty thousand tired souls. (Yes sir) And we let them know that we were buttressed by the hopes and supported by the aspirations of people who had walked so long amid the dark and desolate midnight of oppression. (I hear you) We told them at that time that although across the centuries our souls have been tired, we were now going to substitute some tired feet (Yeah) for those tired souls and that we were going to walk the streets of Montgomery (Amen, Yes) until the sagging walls of bus segregation were finally crushed by the battering rams of the forces of justice. And we did it (Okay, Yeah); we did it. [applause] We did it for three hundred and eighty-one days (Yes), three hundred and eighty-one days. (Yeah) One of the most amazing things that has ever happened in the history of our nation.

Now I could stop here a long time and think about those days, reminisce, but in passing I would like to just express a personal word of appreciation to you for your cooperative spirits and for your loyalty across our long, the days of our long struggle together. I go in my house from time to time and look at the walls. And I think back over the fact that in the last year, a little more than a year, I have gone over the country and received some sixty awards. Those awards were presented to me, but I made one thing clear every time I received the award. And that was that the award really should be duplicated in about fifty thousand awards. Montgomery is not a drama with one actor, but it is a drama with fifty thousand actors, each playing their parts amazingly well. (Yes) And the world will long remember you; you are what Jesus called the salt of the earth. (Yes)

I’m grateful to these ministers of the gospel. I look about here and I see them. They are not Baptists; they are not Methodists; they are not Presbyterians; they are not Episcopalians; they are not Lutherans—they are Christians (Amen) first, and Baptists, Lutherans, Presbyterians and all of that second. They realize that we are all one in this struggle for freedom, and we have been able to come together (Yes sir) and forget about our denominations. (Yes sir) You see, these things can so easily divide us. And the thing I like about the God that we worship is that He isn’t a Baptist (Yes sir); I like that about Him. (Yes) I would be confused if God was a Baptist. (Yes) I’m happy that God isn’t a Methodist. (Yes, Lord) He would be arguing over whether you should be sprinkled or immersed. [laughter] I’m glad of that. And we have come to see in our own struggle here, that there is a unity, there is a oneness.

You know another thing we’ve come to see? That there can be no class distinctions and divisions. I look out and I see some professors in here, and some Ph.D.’s, and some M.D.’s, and some LL.D.’s. But the great thing about Montgomery is

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this: that the Ph.D.'s and the "no D's" came together (Yeah, Yes sir) and forgot about D's (Yeah), and that's great. [applause] That's the greatness of it. And I just want to say to you that you have the blessings of God in your sense of dignity and the way you have conducted yourselves in the midst of a very difficult struggle. A very difficult struggle.

I say this final thing in my introductory remarks: I still have faith in the South. I still have faith in Montgomery, Alabama. I do not speak as any superficial optimist at this point; I'm not sitting back in some ivory tower with a rosy-eyed vision. I speak as one who has stood in the thick of this struggle (All right); I speak as one who has subjected his family to dangerous living (All right); I speak of one who has to live every day under the threat of death. (Yes) But in the midst of that, I come to you not with a message of despair, but a message of hope. (Yeah) I believe in the future and I believe in the South, and I have faith in it. (Well)

I believe in the future because I believe in God. (Yes) And I believe that there is a personal power in this universe that works to bring the disconnected aspects of reality into a harmonious whole. (Well, All right) I believe that there is a force, a creative force, that works at every moment to bring low prodigious hilltops of evil and to bring down gigantic mountains of injustice. (Yeah, All right) And He's still working (Yes); He's working now, at this hour. And because He's working, I know He's working to establish His kingdom. (Yes) I believe in it, in Him, and I believe in the future of this whole struggle.

The Negroes, many years ago, discovered something great and they were great psychologists. They didn't know the English language too well, but they knew God, and they could say things that had a great deal of meaning, and with a profound psychological vision, they could say: "I'm so glad that trouble don't last always."4 (That's right, All right) And that's the glory of life: when you believe in God you're glad about it, because you know it doesn't last always.

Thank you for everything. I want to thank the Montgomery Improvement Association, all of the members, the board members, for giving me words of consolation in the midst of the long struggle, and saying go ahead. (Yes, Yes) And there's a little lady here this evening that I'd like to thank. You might not know her; you might not know her, she's in the background all the time. But I know just as well as I'm standing here, that I couldn't have made it in this struggle if Coretta King hadn't been behind me. [applause] (I hear you) I can remember those moments when days were dark, I mean dark, and there was always that voice saying, "I'm with you (Yes sir): no matter what happens, no matter what the moments may bring, I'm with you." (Yes, All right) That was that little lady. (All right)

And then you heard some people sing a few minutes ago, some more are around. They are the members of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church. (Yeah, Yes) They haven't had much of a pastor in the last two years, haven't had much of a pastor. The pastor has neglected his responsibilities and his duties, and yet I haven't heard any complaints. (Well, All right) If I had had a church [applause], if I had had a church where the members would have argued all the time: "What are you going for? You're supposed to be here" (Yes), I never would have been able to

4. King quotes from the traditional gospel song "Trouble Don't Last Always."
make it. But they had the vision to see that this struggle is bigger than Mont-
gomery. (Yeah, That’s right) And they have been willing to share me with this na-
tion and with the world. (Yeah) And I’m grateful to them, so much, for that.

I don’t want to talk too long tonight, but I want to talk to you about something
very practical, nothing profound. I want to use as a subject: “Some Things We Must
Do.” “Some Things We Must Do.” Don’t look at your watch there, Brother Binion;
we’re just getting started.5 [laughter] He’s looking at his, he’s looking at his watch.
I’m just getting started. [laughter] Give me, give me a little break. [laughter]

So much for that bit of humor. We all recognize the fact that we stand today on
the threshold of the most amazing period of our nation’s history. We look around
and we see the walls of segregation gradually crumbling. (That’s right, That’s right)
And let nobody fool you. All of the loud noises that you hear today in terms of
nullification and interposition are merely the death groans of a dying system. (Yes,
Amen, All right) As Dean Gomillion said so eloquently: “An old order is passing
away (Yeah), and the new order is coming into being.”6

Now as I get around, and as I get over the country and talk to various groups
and speak to people, I talk a great deal about the role of certain agencies in bring-
ing the ideals and principles of this new order, this new world, into full realiza-
tion. And occasionally I talk about the role of the federal government. And I will
go on to say that the federal government has the responsibility to use all of its con-
stitutional powers to lift the noble precepts of our democracy from the dusty files
of unimplemented court decisions. (Yes) The federal government has a great role
in this period of transition.

Occasionally I will talk about the white South and what the moderates in the
white South should be doing, because I believe firmly there are many more white
people of goodwill in the South than we are able to see on the surface. (That’s right)
There are many of them right here in Montgomery; you don’t hear from them.
You don’t hear from them because they are afraid; they are afraid of social, polit-
ical, and economic reprisals. And I go on to say that they must rise up without
fear. (Yes sir) And sometimes I will even go so far to say that it may be that the great
tragedy in this great period of social transition is not the glaring noisiness of the
bad people, but the appalling silence of the good people. (Amen, That’s good) It
may be that our generation will have to repent, not only for the diabolical acts
and vitriolic words of the children of darkness, but also from the tragic apathy
and crippling fears of the children of light. (Amen, All right) It seems to be one of
the great tragedies of life that the children of darkness are wiser in their genera-
tion, more zealous, more conscientious, more determined, than the children of
light.7 (Yeah, Yes)

Then occasionally, I will say that white persons all over the nation have a great
responsibility to come forth with a real liberalism. For many of our northern
white friends have a sort of liberalism that is bent on seeing all sides, and it is so

5. R. B. Binion served on the MIA finance committee.
6. Charles G. Gomillion, president of the Tuskegee Civic Association, delivered an address imme-
idately preceding King’s at the mass meeting.
7. Cf. Thessalonians 5:5.
determined to see all sides that it fails to get committed to either side. (Yes) It is a sort of quasi-liberalism that is so objectively analytical that it never gets subjectively committed. (All right, All right) It is a liberalism that is neither hot nor cold, but lukewarm. (Yes sir, That's right) And so occasionally I say to our friends in the North that you have a responsibility to stand forth with a real, positive, ethical Christian liberalism. (Yes sir)

And then occasionally, I talk to Christians. Just last night I spoke to more than five thousand Christians in the Kiel Auditorium of St. Louis. They had assembled there from all over the nation, representing the most powerful religious body in this nation—more than forty million Christians, more than forty denominations—the National Council of Churches, an organization with a budget of twenty million dollars this year. But even there I had to say that so often we as Christians have a high blood pressure of creeds and an anemia of deeds. (Amen, All right) So that there is a responsibility, there is a responsibility for the church. For so many years we had to face the tragic fact that eleven o'clock on Sunday morning, when we stood to sing, "In Christ There is No East or West," we stood in the most segregated hour of Christian America. (Yes, Yes) Thank God we're beginning now to shake the lethargy from our eyes and from our feet, and we are joining in the rhythmic beat of the march of justice. (Yes) That's great; the church does have a role. (Yes)

This evening, I'm not going to say anything about the role of the church; I'm not going to discuss the role of the federal government; I'm not going to discuss the role of white liberals, North and South. I just want to talk with you about some things that we must do (Yes, Amen), as Negroes. (Yes) We must realize that there is something that we can do to bring this new order into being. I think that was something of the greatness of Mahatma Gandhi, that he looked in the eyes of ordinary people, and he said to them that they had something. He looked at them and said: "You may be poor; you may be illiterate. You have something within your very being that can determine the very course of human events." And through that he was able to galvanize the forces of Indian people, and they were able to break a loose from the political domination and economic exploitation inflicted upon them by Britain. (Yes) And I come to you this evening and say you have something. What are the things that we can do? I just want to state them briefly, and go into them briefly, and I'm going to leave them with you.

Number one, we can maintain a continuing sense of dignity and self-respect. (Yes) This is important. And we will not achieve our freedom until we feel that we belong and that we have a sense of significance. Let no force, let no power, let no individuals, let no social system cause you to feel that you are inferior. (Yeah) You know, one of the great tragedies of this hour is that you have some Negroes who don't want to be free. (Yes, Amen) Did you know that? (Yes) There are Negroes in

8. Speaking before the General Assembly of the National Council of Churches on 4 December, King praised liberal church bodies for adopting declarations on racial equality but warned that "sublime statements...move all too slowly to the local churches." King also spoke to the conference the previous afternoon ("The Christian Way of Life in Human Relations," 4 December 1957; "The Oneness of Man in American Intergroup Relations," 3 December 1957).
this Southland who have become so conditioned to the system of segregation that they prefer the fleshpots of Egypt (Well) to the challenges of the Promised Land. They lack a sense of dignity and self-respect.

Now that is why segregation is evil. I think, more than anything else; that is the basic reason. Segregation not only makes for physical inconveniences, but it does something spiritually to an individual. It distorts the personality and injures the soul. Segregation gives the segregator a false sense of superiority, and it gives the segregated a false sense of inferiority. But in the midst of this, we must maintain a sense of dignity and self-respect.

The other day I was going through the Atlanta airport, I think it was Monday. And I had a layover there for a while, and I went to the restroom. I looked up and saw a sign, “Colored Men,” but I conveniently failed to see it. And I looked over and saw another sign which said “Men.” “Colored Men” and “Men.” So I thought I was a man. [laughter] I thought I was a man. And I still thought I am, so I decided to go into the “Men’s” room, not the “Colored Men’s” room, but the “Men’s” room. I got in there and everything was fine. But as soon as I walked up, there was a colored man in there; he was working in there. He provided the towels and the other things that the men needed in the restroom. And he looked over at me and said: “The, the, the colored room is over there.” I didn’t say anything; I just stood there. But he came up and touched me, and said: “You belong over there; that’s where the colored room is.” I said: “Are you speaking to me?” “Yes, sir, yes, sir. You see, the colored room is over there.” I said: “Well, I’m going to stay here, right here.” Now the interesting thing was that the white men in there weren’t complaining at all; they hadn’t said anything; I hadn’t heard one word from the white people. [laughter] They hadn’t said one word.

Ralph Abernathy and I were going somewhere a few days ago on the train, and we got on, we went in the waiting room down at the station. You see, they have a waiting room, not a, it’s just a waiting room. And I always go through the waiting room, the general waiting room. But we got on the train and somebody came running. We went on up—we were going to Birmingham—and we went on up to the, we took a seat in one of the coaches, an integrated coach. And we got in there and we saw somebody running behind us and calling us back. And we thought sure it was a conductor or somebody, and it was a Negro [laughter] telling us that; the conductor wasn’t saying anything. It was the Negro porter there telling us to come on back to the colored coach. Well, the same thing happened in the airport the other day. And I said to the man, I said: “You mean to tell me every time you have to go to the rest room, you go out of here and go all over there?” “Well, yes, sir, yes, sir. That’s where I belong. [laughter] That’s where I belong. [laughter] Yes, sir.”

Well, I not only thought of the physical inconvenience that it caused him, but I almost got mad; I almost got angry with that man; I almost got angry. But then I went out and took a seat. I was waiting for my father and mother; they came out to pick me up that afternoon. And I took a seat out there, and I started thinking

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about that thing, and when I thought about it I didn't get angry. I said to myself, this man has come up under the system, you see. He has lived under this system all of his life, and he really doesn't feel that he deserves any more. He feels that he has a place (All right, That's right); he feels that colored people ought to be in one place, and that place is lower than where white persons are (Yeah); he believes that. (That's right) Here is a man who has become conditioned by the system. I guess this is what John Watson, who is a psychologist, was a psychologist, behavioristic psychologist, meant when he talked about conditioned response, that you can do a thing so long that you just get conditioned to it, and you respond in a particular way. This is what happened to that man, that he was a victim of a conditioning process, and he felt that he didn't deserve more.

But my friends, if we are to be prepared for this new order and this new world which is emerging, we must believe that we belong. Every Negro must feel that he is somebody. (All right, Yeah) He must come to see that he is a child of God and that all men are made in God's image. (Yes) He must come to see that the basic thing about a man is not his specificity, but his fundamentum (Yeah), not the texture of his hair or the color of his skin, but the texture and quality of his soul. (Yeah) He must come to the point that he will believe with the eloquent poet:

Fleecy locks and black complexion,
Cannot forfeit nature's claim.
Skin may differ, but affection,
Dwells in black and white the same. (All right, Yeah)
Were I so tall as to reach the poles,
Or to grasp the ocean at a span,
I must be measured by my soul. (Yeah)
The mind is the standard of the man. (All right)

Tell your children that. (Yes) Say it to them at every hour, so they will be able to live in this age (Yes) with a sense of dignity (Yeah), and a sense of self-respect. (Yeah) This is something that we can do. (Yeah)

And the second thing: we must make ourselves worthy of the respect of others by improving our own personal standards. (All right, Amen, That's right) Now we must admit that we have some weaknesses (Yes) and some shortcomings (Yeah), and we must seek to gain the respect of others by improving on our shortcomings. (Yes) Now I realize, and I want to say this quickly, because I see a reporter here and I don't want to be misquoted. I want to say quickly that I realize that these standards in which we lag behind, whether they are cultural, whether they are moral, criminal, or what not, they are like they are because of segregation; I know that. (That's right, Yeah) They are here because of segregation (Yes); segregation is the causal factor. And it is a sort of torturous logic to argue for the tragic inequalities as a basis, as a result of inequality, as a basis for the continuation of in-

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11. The first four lines are quoted from the "The Negro's Complaint" (1788) by William Cowper, and the remaining lines are quoted from *Horae Lyricae*, "False Greatness" (1706), by Isaac Watts.
equality. (Yeah) See these things have been caused by segregation, and the thing to do is to remove the causal factor. (All right)

A man was telling me the other day, an editor of a southern newspaper, a very intelligent man, he said: “Now, Reverend King, I don’t have anything against integration a hundred years from now.” He said: “But your people are not ready. They aren’t ready culturally, and what will happen: they will pull the white race back a generation.” That was his argument.

And it’s a very interesting thing to see that our, many of our white brothers have moved away now from the argument that the Negro is inferior by nature because of Noah’s curse upon the children of Ham. You know they used to justify it on the basis of the Bible. And, I’ve always wondered about that passage, why they use that one. Even if they are Biblical literate, literalists, they would interpret that a little better, because it tells us that before Noah pronounced the curse, he was drunk, and when he did pronounce it he had a hangover. [laughter] And I don’t think, and although God can work in divers ways and divers manners, I don’t think He will entrust anything that important to a man with a hangover. [laughter] I don’t think He will. And it states very clearly that Noah pronounced the curse, not God (Yeah), you see.

But they’ve used that. They’ve even used arguments that reminds one of Aristotle’s logic. They would say: “Now, all men are made in the image of God.” That’s the major premise. Then comes the minor premise: “God, as everybody knows, is not a Negro.” Then comes the conclusion: “Therefore, the Negro is not a man.” [laughter] Now these arguments have been used. But they’re getting away from this now. They’re getting away, and they’re arguing for segregation on cultural and sociological grounds: “The Negro isn’t ready. He isn’t prepared culturally, intellectually, morally, physically. He isn’t ready, so that he will pull the white race back a generation.” That’s their argument. And my answer is that it is tragic to use the unfortunate results of segregation as an argument for the continuation of it; that’s the reason you ought to remove it. [applause]

But in spite of this, we must admit that because segregation does exist and has existed for so many years, we must work on two fronts. And it presents a dual problem to the Negro. On the one hand, we must work to remove this system, which is the causal basis for our ills. We cannot let up; we cannot stop working to do away with segregation; we cannot retreat at that point. We must not rest until segregation and discrimination are banished from every area of our nation’s life. (Yes) We’ve got to work. [applause] But we have another job. And that is to work to improve these standards that have been pushed back because of the system of segregation. We’ve got to work on two ends; we have both an internal problem and an external. One is to try to remove the system. The other is to work with these conditions that have come into being as a result of the system. We must work with them, and we’ve got to face this fact, my friends.

Let us be honest with ourselves, and say that we, our standards have lagged behind at many points. Negroes constitute ten percent of the population of New York City, and yet they commit thirty-five percent of the crime. St. Louis, Missouri:

the Negroes constitute twenty-six percent of the population, and yet seventy-six
percent of the persons on the list for aid to dependent children are Negroes. We
have eight times more illegitimacy than white persons. We’ve got to face all of
these things. We must work to improve these standards. We must sit down quietly
by the wayside, and ask ourselves: “Where can we improve?” What are the things
that white people are saying about us? They say that we want integration because
we want to marry white people. Well, we know that is a falsehood. (That’s right)
We know that. We don’t have to worry about that. (All right) Then on the other
hand, they say some other things about us, and maybe there is some truth in
them. Maybe we could be more sanitary; maybe we could be a little more clean.
You may not have enough money to take a weekend trip to Paris, France, and buy
all of the fascinating and enticing perfumes. You may not be able to do that, but
you are not so poor that you cannot buy a five cents bar of soap (Yeah) so that you
can wash before [word inaudible]. [applause]

And another thing my friends, we kill each other too much. (All right, Yes) We cut
up each other too much. (Yes, Yes sir) There is something that we can do. We’ve
got to go down in the quiet hour and think about this thing. We’ve got to lift our
moral standards at every hand, at every point. You may not have a Ph.D. degree;
you may not have an M.A. degree; you may not have an A.B. degree. But the great
thing about life is that any man can be good, and honest, and ethical, and moral,
and can have character. (Well, Yes) [applause]

We must walk the street every day, and let people know that as we walk the street,
we aren’t thinking about sex every time we turn around. (No, That’s right) We are
not animals (No) to be degraded at every moment. (Yeah) We know that we’re
made for the stars, created for eternity, born for the everlasting (Yes), and we stand
by it. [applause] (All right, All right)

There are some things that we can do. (Yes) We must improve our standards
(Yeah); improve our conduct; we must improve our sanitary conditions; we must
even improve our cultural standards. There are many things that we can do. Op
portunities are open now that were not open in the past, adult education and all
of these things—we must take advantage of them. (Yeah) There are things that we
can do to make ourselves respected by others. Let me rush on.

There’s a third thing we must do, that we can do. We must achieve excellency
in our various fields of activity and our various fields of endeavor. This is a new
day, and that simply means that doors are opening now that were not open in the
past. Opportunities stand before us now that did not stand before us in the past.
And the great challenge before the Negro at this hour is to be ready to enter these
doors as they open. (Yes, All right) Ralph Waldo Emerson said in an essay back in
1871 that if a man can write a better book or preach a better sermon or make a
better mousetrap than his neighbor, even if he builds his house in the woods, the
world will make a beaten path to his door.13 (Yes) We must get ready and do the
job, the opportunities will stand there for us.

13. The source of this quotation, generally attributed to Emerson, is uncertain; see note 6 to
"Mother’s Day in Montgomery,” 18 May 1956, in Papers 3:266.
Now let me rush on to say that in this day we are going to compete with people, not Negro people. So don't set out to do a good Negro job. Do you see what I mean here? [laughter] That we are not out to be good Negro anything, especially at this hour. Set out to do a good job. I was in a fraternity meeting not long ago, and you know when you're pledging a fraternity, they ask you what you plan to do, or what are some of your ideals, and what is your life's work? What do you plan to do for life? And I remember very vividly, a fellow looked up and said, "Well, my aim is to be a good Negro high school principal." And I looked at him and said, "Brother, you aren't ready for this new order which is emerging. [laughter] You see, we are trying to get in an order where you won't have Negro high schools, and what do you mean, you're going to be a good Negro high school principal?" [laughter]

We've got to get ready to do a good job, a good job. Let us build up our standards of excellence in all of these areas. Businessmen, professional men—and when I say men, I'm speaking in a generic sense, I mean women also who are in these areas—set up your businesses and your professions on such a level that they will stand up anywhere. (Yeah, All right) Don't just set them up so that you go out begging people to come to trade with you because you're a Negro, but because you have a good business (Yeah), not because you're a Negro. Keep your business up and run it on a business basis, and keep it clean and well-developed so that people will come to your business (Yeah) because you have a good business, and not because you're a Negro (That's right) out here in need of a little help. You must do a good job. And I've said, you know, everywhere along the way, I preach about this thing, that we must patronize Negro business. And that's not forming a new type of isolationism, but it simply means that we make jobs for other Negroes because we can't get jobs in these other places, in white businesses, so often, so we must make jobs for ourselves. [source tape damaged] [. . .] for all of us; that's for all of us. Let's get ready to achieve excellence in all of these fields of activity.

Now you see, I think this applies to all of us in various professions and occupations. I was talking the other day, and I'll talk—many of you, I'm sure, have done the same thing—we talk frequently with school teachers. And we have some mighty fine school teachers, no doubt about it. But I have met more school teachers recently who can't even speak the English language. (Yeah) Wouldn't know a verb if it was big as that table. (All right) Now some people [source tape damaged] [. . .] subject and the verb, the noun and the verb. They haven't had the opportunity; they haven't been to school. But for a college graduate to be standing up talking about "you is," there is no excuse for it. (Yes) And some of these people are teaching our children (Yeah), and crippling our children. (Yeah) Now if we going to get ready for this day, we must achieve excellency. (Yes)

And I know we have some mighty fine doctors in Montgomery [source tape damaged] [. . .] but our doctors, in order to be ready for this day, ought not spend all of their time merely getting big cars and building big houses. (That's right) But you've got to spend some of that time reading books and journals, and going to institutes (Well), and knowing what's happening in the medical profession. (All right) [applause] Too many of our Negro doctors—now, I know that some of these things are going to hurt us, you're going to be mad with me when we leave (That's right), but I'm going to say them and then get them over and I think you will agree with me in the final analysis—too many of our Negro doctors haven't opened a
book or been back to an institute since they left med school. How can they know what's happening in the medical profession?

Preachers? We going to get ready for integration, we can't spend all of our time trying to learn how to whoop and holler. (Yes, Lord) We've got to study some. [applause] (All right, Yes) We're talking about integrated churches. I listened to Dean Liston Pope last night, and we talked a great deal on this problem; how churches are gradually, slowly, all too slowly, but they're integrating. And we've got to have ministers who can stand up and preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. (Yes, All right) Not a Negro gospel (No man); not a gospel merely to get people to shout and kick over benches, but a gospel that will make people think and live right and face the challenges of the Christian religion. (All right, Yeah) There are things we can do. [applause] (Yeah, All right) There are things that we can do.

Now I'm going to holler a little tonight, because I want to get it over to you. (Yes) [laughter] I'm going to be a Negro tonight. [laughter] Now, we must rush on, the hour is getting late. [source tape damaged] [ . . . ] must head out to do our jobs so well that nobody could do them better. No matter what this job is, you must decide to do it well. Do it so well that the living, the dead, or the unborn (Yes) can't do it better. (Yeah) If it falls your lot to be a street sweeper, sweep streets like Raphael painted pictures; sweep streets like Michelangelo carved marble; sweep streets like Beethoven composed music; sweep streets like Shakespeare wrote poetry; sweep streets so well that all the host of heaven and earth will have to pause and say: "Here lived a great street sweeper (All right), who swept his job well."15 (Oh yes)

If you can't be a pine on the top of the hill,
Be a shrub in the valley (Well)—but be
The best shrub on the side of the hill.16

[recording interrupted] [ . . . ] we must do. We must use our growing economic security for worthy and meaningful ends. (That's right) We are making a little money now. We aren't making what we should make; standards are still low. Forty-three percent of the Negro families of America still make less than two thousand dollars a year, while just seventeen percent of the white families of America make less than two thousand dollars a year. Twenty-one percent of the Negro families of America still make less than one thousand dollars a year, while just seven percent of the white families of America make less than one thousand dollars a year.

15. In his 1 January 1957 speech "Facing the Challenge of a New Age," King credited Benjamin Mays for these phrases.
16. Douglas Malloch, "Be the Best of Whatever You Are" (1926).
Eighty-eight percent of the Negro families of America still make less than five thousand dollars a year, while just sixty percent of the white families of America make less than five thousand dollars a year. So there is still a gap, and we have a long, long way to go to achieve economic justice. But in spite of that, we've come a long, long way. (Yeah) The average Negro wage earner today makes four times more than the average Negro wage earner of 1940. The annual income of the Negro is now at about seventeen billion dollars a year, more than the annual income of Canada, and more than all of the exports of the United States. We've come a long, long way.

Now, what are we going to do with this? That's the question. What are we going to spend this money for? Are we going to pool it in cooperative enterprises that will make for economic security for the race? Or are we going to waste it with meaningless things? That's the question. Are we going to live above our standards? Now I can understand it. Are we going to live above our means? I can understand why we often do it. We often do it because we've been pushed around so much; we've been kicked about so much, until we get these big things that we often buy and can't afford in order to feed our repressed egos. So a Negro buys a Cadillac because it's as big as the white man's Cadillac and it can pass his on the highway, and when he sits up there, they're there together. I understand that. In many instances, he can't buy a home where he wants to buy it, and so he puts it in this other type of thing. I understand all of that.

In the midst of all of this, we must not let our psychological situation cause our values to be distorted. Let's live within our means. Save our money and invest it in meaningful ends. Did you ever stop to realize that according to the best economist, your automobile should not cost more than half of your annual income? Did you ever stop to realize that? That means if you make four thousand dollars a year, your car shouldn't cost much more than two thousand. Did you ever stop to realize that? Even your house, they tell us, shouldn't cost more than twice your annual income. So if you and your wife make six thousand dollars a year, your house shouldn't cost much more than twelve thousand. Did you ever stop to realize that? And yet we can find people making two thousand dollars a year riding around in a five thousand dollar car. There's something wrong with the sense of values there, isn't it? (Yes)

Now we must stop and see these things. And my friends, let us stop wasting money on frivolities. I look and see how much money we spend on liquor and on beer and on all of these alcoholic beverages. Right here in Alabama, we spend enough money on liquor to endow three or four colleges. (That's right) Right here in Alabama, in one state. (That's right) I said this, and I said it without any hesitation, to members of my fraternity. I remember three or four years ago, we met in Cleveland, Cleveland, Ohio for the convention, around the Christmas season. And that year, one of the sororities and another fraternity met with us there; we had a great meeting, a great session. At the end of the week, it was a bill that in one week, I want you to hear this, in one week a handful of Negroes spent five

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17. King refers to the 1952 Alpha Phi Alpha convention.
hundred thousand dollars for whiskey. (Oh) Now I thought about that. This was a tragedy that we spent more money in one week for whiskey than all of the sixteen million Negroes spent that whole year for the United Negro College Fund and the NAACP. (Yeah) Now that was a tragedy. (Yeah) That was a tragedy. (Yeah) Is this what we will do with our money? I know this is stinging, but this is something that we must do. This is something that we must do. (Yeah) Oh, it would be one of the tragedies of this century if it is revealed that the Negroes spent more money for frivolities than we spent for the cause of freedom and justice and for meaningful ends. (All right)

There is another point. In this period, we must develop intelligent, courageous and dedicated leadership. This is no day for the rabble rouser, whether he be Negro or white. We are grappling now with one of the most pressing and weighty social problems of the generation, and in the midst of such a weighty social problem, there is no place for misguided emotionalism. We must avoid the extremes of hotheadedness and Uncle Tomism (That’s right), and somewhere develop the type of leadership to see the issues and that will move on calmly in the midst of strife-torn situations. Leaders are needed all over this South, in every community, all over this nation: intelligent, courageous, dedicated leadership. Not leaders in love with money, but in love with justice. Not leaders in love with publicity, but in love with humanity. I know if you’re a leader, you’re going to have to have money to live like everybody else. If you’re a leader and you are in a situation that has the spotlight of the world, you will inevitably get some publicity. But these things must be incidental to the greater end. We must have in this hour leaders who are dedicated to the cause of freedom and justice, who have the love of humanity in their hearts.

God give us leaders.
A time like this demands great leaders.
Leaders whom the lust of office does not kill;
Leaders whom the spoils of life cannot buy;
Leaders who possess opinions and a will;
Leaders who will not lie;
Leaders who can stand before a demagogue and damn his treacherous flatteries without winking.
Tall leaders, sun-crowned, who live above the fog in public duty and in private thinking.18

And finally, we must plunge deeper into the whole philosophy of nonviolence as we continue to move on in our quest for freedom. As I look at our situation and the situation of oppressed peoples all over the world, it seems to me that there are three ways that oppressed people can deal with their oppression. One is to rise up in armed revolt, one is to rise up with violence, and many people have used that method. It seems that violence has become something of the inseparable twin of western materialism. It’s even become the hallmark of its grandeur. Violence nev-

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18. King paraphrases Josiah Gilbert Holland’s “Wanted” (1872).
ertheless solves no social problems. It only creates new and more complicated ones. Yes, violence often brings about temporary victory, but never permanent peace. This evening as I stand before you, it seems that I can hear the voice crying through the vista of time, still saying to men in this generation: “He who lives by the sword, will perish by the sword.”  

(All right) History is cluttered with the wreckage of nations and communities that failed to hear that command. Violence is not the way.

There is another method that oppressed people can use: they can acquiesce, they can resign themselves to the fate of oppression. That’s another method. Some people have done that. As I stated a few minutes ago, some people have lived with this thing so long, that they have adjusted to it and they accept it. But that’s also wrong, that’s also evil, for the minute you accept an evil you cooperate with it. (All right) The minute you accept segregation, you are a part of the perpetuation of segregation. (All right) Non-cooperation with evil is as much a moral obligation as is cooperation with good. (All right) So that isn’t the way, just to acquiesce and resign and sit down and do nothing.

It seems to me that there is a third way. There is a third way that is more powerful and enduring and lasting than the first two: that is the way of nonviolent resistance. It is just as strong as the first method because you do resist, but you do not sit down and resign yourself to the fate of oppression. You stand up and resist strongly, but without violence. And I believe to the bottom of my heart that this is the greatest method open to the Negro as he struggles for freedom and justice in this nation. It is the greatest method open to oppressed people all over the world. Whenever we use it, whenever masses of people organize themselves in nonviolent resistance, it is one of the most powerful methods that has ever existed in this universe. (Amen)

And I challenge you this evening to do that. We can do that and let us not hate; let us not become bitter. I know how it is. Those of us who have been kicked about so long (Yeah), those of us who have been trampled over by the iron feet of oppression, those of us who have been exploited and plunged into the abyss of injustice—there is a danger that we will react with bitterness. But we must not do that. We must somehow stand up before our white brothers in this Southland and see within them the image of God. No matter how bad they are as we think, no matter what they do to us, no matter what they said about us, we must still believe that in the most recalcitrant segregationist there is the image of God. (All right) If we keep on loving him, we must believe that he can be transformed. (Yes) This is the hope that we must live by.

My friends, we must keep on believing that unearned suffering is redemptive. We must say to our white brothers all over the South who would try to keep us down: “We will match your capacity to inflict suffering with our capacity to endure suffering. We will meet your physical force with soul force. We will not hate you, and yet we cannot in all good conscience obey your evil laws. (Yes) Do to us what you will. Threaten our children, and we will still love you. (Yeah) Come into our homes at the midnight hours of life and take us out on some desolate highway

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and beat us and leave us there, and we will still love you. (Yeah) Run all around the country and send your literature, and say that we aren't worthy of integration, that we are too immoral, that we are too low, that we are too degraded, yet we will still love you. (Yeah) Bomb our homes and go by our churches early in the morning and bomb them if you please (Well), and we will still love you. (Yeah) But we will wear you down by our capacity to suffer. (All right) And in winning the victory, we will not only win our freedom, we will so appeal to your heart and your conscience, that we will win you in the process. (Oh yeah) And our victory will be a double victory. (Yeah) We will win our freedom, and we will win the individuals who have been the perpetrators of the evil system that existed so long.”¹⁹ (Yes sir) This is the thing that we must say; this is the thing that we must do. (Yes) If we do this, we will be able to bring into being, by the grace of God, this new world. (Yes)

I close by paraphrasing the words of John Oxenham: To every nation, there openeth a way and ways and a way. The high nation climbs the high way, and the low nation gropes the low, and in between, on the misty flats, the rest drift to and fro. But to every nation, there openeth a high and a low way. Every nation decideth which way its soul shall go.²⁰ (Yeah)

God grant that right here in America and all over this world, we will choose the high way: a way in which men will live together as brothers. (Yes sir) A way in which the nations of the world will beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks.²² A way in which every man will respect the dignity and worth of all human personality. A way in which every nation will allow justice to run down like waters, and righteousness like a mighty stream.²³ (Yes sir) A way in which men will do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God.²⁴ A way [recording interrupted] [ . . . ] men will be able to stand up, and in the midst of oppression, in the midst of darkness and agony, they will be able to stand there and love their enemies (Yeah), bless those persons that curse them (Yeah), pray for those individuals that despitefully use them.²⁵ (Yes) And this is the way (Yes) that will bring us once more into that society which we think of as the brotherhood of man. (Yes)

This will be that day when white people, colored people, whether they are brown or whether they are yellow or whether they are black (Yeah), will all join together and stretch out with their arms (Oh yeah) and be able to cry out: “Free at last! (Yeah)

20. King adopts this passage from the American missionary E. Stanley Jones’s *Mahatma Gandhi: An Interpretation* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1948), p. 88: “The weapons Gandhi chose were simple: We will match our capacity to suffer against your capacity to inflict the suffering, our soul-force against your physical force. We will not hate you, but we will not obey you. Do what you like, and we will wear you down by our capacity to suffer. And in the winning of the freedom we will so appeal to your heart and conscience that we will win you. So ours will be a double victory—we will win our freedom and our captors in the process.” King underlined the preceding quote in his copy of Jones’s book, and he made frequent use of it in his discussions of nonviolence.


To Archibald James Carey

20 December 1957
Montgomery, Ala.

King writes Carey, pastor of Chicago’s Quinn Chapel AME Church, thanking him for his 8 December sermon, which closed the MIA’s annual institute.

Dr. Archibald Carey, Jr.
188 West Randolph Street
Suite 1501
Chicago, Illinois

Dear Arch:

This is just a note to again express my deep appreciation to you for your willingness to take time out of your very busy schedule to come and speak for us on the occasion of our Second Annual Institute on Non-Violence and Social Change. Your dynamic and inspiring address will long be remembered. I trust that the manifest response of the people will provide a measure of compensation for the time and energy expended on our behalf. The people in the community are still talking about the magnificent job you did.

It was also a great pleasure to have you in our home.¹ The fellowship was rich indeed. I am only sorry that it could not have lasted longer. I hope things are going well with you and all of your many responsibilities. Coretta and Yoki are doing fine as well as Martin Luther, III. Corrie asked me to send her best regards and say to you that she is still trying to make me a dish washer. Give our best regards to Hazel and Carolyn.² I will probably give you a ring when I am in Chicago around the middle of January.³

¹. On 10 December Carey wrote to thank the Kings for their hospitality during his stay in Montgomery: “I am always made a member of the family when I am in your home and, of course, Yokie and young Martin Luther, III, make it a most enjoyable household.”
². King refers to Carey’s wife and daughter.
³. King addressed the Chicago Sunday Evening Club on 12 January; the following day he spoke at Beth Emet The Free Synagogue in Evanston, Illinois (see “What is Man?” 12 January 1958; “The Desirability of Being Maladjusted,” 13 January 1958).