

From Roy Wilkins

14 January 1958  
New York, N.Y.

*This letter, in which Wilkins reminds King of his pledge to work in "close cooperation" with the NAACP on the issue of voter registration, arrived amidst charges of a "serious rift within Negro ranks." An 8 January article in the Atlanta Constitution carried allegations from Georgia attorney general Eugene Cook that "NAACP leaders are opposed to King's independent operation and want all integration and voter activity funneled through their organization."<sup>1</sup> The day after the article appeared, King criticized it as being "so erroneous I shouldn't even comment on it."<sup>2</sup>*

Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr.  
Montgomery Improvement Association  
530C South Union Street  
Montgomery, Alabama

Dear Martin:

You were present in Atlanta November 15-16 when we held a meeting of representatives of the NAACP from ten Southern states together with representatives of several other groups who are working on the task of increasing registration and voting among the Negro citizens in the South. The delegates to Atlanta remember

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1. William M. Bates, "Negroes Split Over King, Cook Says," *Atlanta Constitution*, 8 January 1958. After Benjamin Mays wrote an article disputing Cook's charges, Wilkins wrote him suggesting that Cook was motivated by a desire "to cause as much dissension as possible and to create the idea that Negro citizens are not united in their campaign for first-class citizenship." Wilkins assured Mays that he and King "have been working together in a friendly and cooperative manner" (Wilkins to Mays, 31 January 1958; Mays, "It Must Not Be So," *Pittsburgh Courier*, 1 February 1958).

2. "Negro Leader Denies Split with NAACP," *Rochester Democrat*, 9 January 1958. On 10 January King purchased lifetime memberships in the NAACP for both himself and the MIA. Thanking him on 14 January, Wilkins told King that "we will be pleased and proud to add these names to the others on the bronze plaque on the wall of our reception room."

your inspiring remarks and your joining with others in the theme of close cooperation in carrying forward the campaign.<sup>3</sup>

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The implementation committee named in Atlanta held its first meeting January 7, under the chairmanship of Kelly M. Alexander of Charlotte, North Carolina, president of the NAACP state organization there, and a member of our national board. All members of the committee were present, and discussion extended over a full day. We had as consultants Mr. [John M.] Brooks of Richmond, Virginia, who has been working on registration in that state, and Mr. W. W. Law, president of the NAACP state organization in Georgia. We also had several of our national staff members present, including Clarence M. Mitchell, director of our Washington bureau.

It was decided not to try to cover the entire South, rural and urban, but to concentrate activity in selected cities in about six states. However, the remaining states would by no means be ignored and, even though activity would be largely in urban centers where the return for the effort and money would be greater, rural areas would not be overlooked completely.

It was also decided that NAACP field secretaries who are presently assigned to certain Southern states would have this project as their number one activity for 1958. Where the situation warranted it, these men would be given supplemental assistance. The whole project would be in charge of a south-wide director who was to be named before February 1.

The campaign will have the supervisory attention not only of the south-wide director, but of our southeast regional secretary, Mrs. Ruby Hurley, whose office is in Atlanta, and of Mr. Mitchell in Washington.

It was further decided at the January 7 meeting to work out and maintain friendly cooperative action with other groups working on this problem. It was emphasized that this is a project requiring much detailed attention in the areas of activity with the instruction and education of the prospective registrants as a "must." For these reasons it was felt that all groups interested in the problem should work in cooperation wherever possible.

I believe this sums up the January 7 meeting. We expect to move out promptly on the project through our branches and state organizations. I will be glad to hear from you.

Very sincerely yours,

[signed] Roy

Roy Wilkins,

Executive Secretary

RW:jl

TLS. MLKP-MBU: Box 32A.

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3. Wilkins refers to the "NAACP Atlanta Conference on Registration and Voting," to which he invited King two days after SCLC unveiled plans for its Crusade for Citizenship registration drive (Wilkins to King, 7 November 1957). At the meeting King described SCLC's plans to aid the NAACP's voter registration campaigns, especially in areas where the national group had been outlawed (George M. Coleman, "Leaders Map Plans for Increased Voters," *Atlanta Daily World*, 17 November 1957).