

24 Jan  
1958

From Stanley D. Levison

24 January 1958  
New York, N.Y.

*In the following letter Levison discusses King's decision to work on his book in Montgomery with Alabama State professor Lawrence Reddick, against the advice of his agent, who had wanted him to work in New York City with a professional writer.<sup>1</sup>*

Dear Martin:

I reached Marie Rodell after our discussion and fully described the considerations which resulted in your decision. She found many of the points persuasive and was able to understand your position. Naturally, in certain areas she places emphasis more strongly than we do, just as in other areas we have special attitudes which she does not easily grasp. Her concern is to wind up with a professional, as well as warm human document, so that a sale to a magazine may be accomplished. She is also anxious that the time schedule be met with certainty. In any case, she is sincere and cooperative and will convey to Harpers in the best light the conclusions which have been reached.<sup>2</sup>

To satisfy herself that Reddick will do justice to the book, she went over to the library to read something he has written. Because it was in the evening, she was only able to find two articles but they gave her a rather comfortable feeling about his competence. She wanted this to arm herself for the discussions with Harpers. It is part of her responsibility as agent to keep the publishers enthusiastic to guarantee maximum cooperation on their part.

If you are making a formal agreement with Reddick about compensation, let me know if you want her or me to prepare a letter agreement covering it. It is desirable to have something in writing, both for clear understanding and for tax records. It is not mandatory but it is usually better than to rely on oral agreements or vague generalities since money questions are well to keep precise even where a wholesome personal relationship exists. It never corrodes a good relationship, but its absence sometimes creates misunderstanding and embarrassment later.

I see many advantages to working with Reddick, though I do not know of his writing ability. Bayard did express himself as having respect for him and only

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1. After encouraging King in December to consider obtaining editorial help with his manuscript, Marie Rodell arranged for him to meet with two prospective assistants at her New York office on 9 January. It was agreed that King would work on the book in New York beginning in February, and Rodell began looking for an apartment where King could stay while in the city (Rodell to King, 20 January 1958).

2. Concerned that working in Montgomery would cause interruptions in King's work on the book, Rodell suggested in a 27 January letter to King that she or Joan Daves might come down to Montgomery if he decided that "an outside editorial eye could help." In February the publishers provided an "editorial associate" to further assist King (see Eugene Exman to King, 26 February 1958; and Hermine Popper to King, 21 March 1958, pp. 386-388 in this volume).

doubted that he would be available. As you could gather from the character of the cross-examining I did with [*Stephen*] Becker and the other candidates, I give significant value to your assistant's knowledge of the deeper meaning of the struggle, participation in it, and familiarity with relationships in the movement. I have always felt that for your freedom to unearth and express your ideas, a sense of identity with a co-worker is important. Such rapport necessarily rests upon the feeling that he is able to empathize fully because he is a committed person himself. Marie, like Becker, did not fully grasp my feeling that a Negro more readily feels things that a white person comprehends with greater difficulty. This is the old story that too many white liberals consider themselves free of stereotypes, rarely recognizing that the roots of prejudice are deep and are tenaciously driven into the soil of their whole life. I know I did not resolve this for myself by reading a few articles and pronouncing myself a person of good will. The acid test. I have always used is deeds involving significant sacrifice based on the acceptance of the painful truth that we share responsibility for the crimes and gain release from complicity only by fighting to end them. On this score the two men we met fell short.

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Please keep in ~~my~~ mind the time schedule which is rigid by necessity. Warmest regards to you and Coretta.

As always,  
[*signed*] Stanley