

From Harris Wofford

5 September 1958
Alexandria, Va.

Wofford comments on Stride Toward Freedom. On the same day Wofford wrote to Levison suggesting several people who should receive complimentary copies of the book, including each member of the Civil Rights Commission, several southern elected officials, and President Eisenhower, about whom Wofford added: "Very occasionally he reads."

Rev. Martin Luther King
530 South Union
Montgomery, Alabama

Dear Martin,

Yesterday I received your book and finished it just in time to read the morning paper's account of your arrest. But your book stands a good chance to become a best-seller without this cooperation from the Montgomery Police Department. It is a fine book, fast-moving, and deeply moving, cleanly written, and eloquent. It will do much good. Not only is the story well-told, but the case for non-violent action is made in full dimensions and persuasively. The kind reference to me was unnecessary but is appreciated.¹

I am going to try to reach you by telephone tonight, but in case I miss I want to make sure you hear the above. Also I want to urge you to let me know when you are coming through this way again, even for a stopover at the airport. For I would like to talk about several things with you.

Events are moving rapidly. I trust you received the confidential memorandum which I sent about a week ago, concerning the possible and necessary Executive

1. In the preface to *Stride*, King thanked Wofford for "significant suggestions and real encouragement."

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action.² I am particularly interested in your reaction to my third proposal, for a mediatory roundtable conference convened by the President to consist of you and the other Negro leaders who saw the President with you (and perhaps an additional Southern Negro such as Dr. [*Benjamin*] Mays) and a group of leading Southern whites including Governors Collins and Hodges (perhaps with Clement and McKeldin who were on the committee that saw the President before).³ The more I think about it, the more it seems to me that Chairman Hannah of this Commission, or the Commission as a whole, might be the mediating factor.⁴ That is, that the President would ~~not~~ suggest this procedure and convene the first session. But then it should be clear that serious, private and recurring talk was intended. Perhaps a two-day session, with an adjournment for a month and then more talks; perhaps an agreement to meet once a month to continue the talks. I would think the focus should be the school crisis but the minimum aim would be no more than the promotion of better understanding: the opening of an important top-level channel of communication. The President might invite these people to meet for the purpose of understanding each other and the problem better, in the hope of finding some common ground for progress on the problem.

If such a roundtable conference could be brought about, you would play a very key role. For your wider approach might make possible some basis for progress with men like Collins, and if we could find a way to go ahead with states like Florida and North Carolina, we have motion again. But any such agreement would not come overnight and would have to be awaited as the fruit of long talk.

Still I think this is an important thing to push for at this point. Am I wrong? If ~~not~~ this is worth doing, then it seems to me that you ought to plan to come to Washington in the next week or two, to see your friend Nixon and to talk with [*Rocco*] Siciliano. These two could do a lot to bring this off, and you might be able to persuade them to do so. Other methods of achieving this are in the works, which I would discuss with you if you are coming to town.

Again, it is a book that delighted me, and on occasion brought tears of awe and joy, and a book that brings tears and light and joy is good.

I trust you are bruised but of good cheer. The ~~clipping~~ item about your treatment by the police, while I was reading your book, was a fitting climax to the phase of your story ~~of~~ I was reading; it shows that your story goes on, and as you say it is a story that involves many more than you, for there must have been many friends of yours, those you know and ~~to~~ those you do not know, who felt as I did/, when they read this story. They felt the stigmata and also the agape which you radiate.

2. Wofford refers to his 20 August memorandum, "On the role of the executive in school integration," which was enclosed in a 24 August letter to King.

3. Governors Leroy Collins (Florida, 1955-1961), Luther Hartwell Hodges (North Carolina, 1954-1960), and Frank Goad Clement (Tennessee, 1953-1959) were moderate in their opposition to the *Brown* decision. Theodore Roosevelt McKeldin (Maryland, 1951-1959) was an outspoken critic of segregation.

4. John Alfred Hannah (1902-1991). From 1941 to 1969, Hannah served as president of Michigan State University, during which time he integrated dormitories and refused to allow athletic teams to play where black team members would not receive equal treatment. He served as chairman of the U.S. Civil Rights Commission from 1957 until 1969.

The Martin Luther King, Jr. Papers Project

9 Sept 1958 With some philia and eros, too, (a section of your case I liked especially), and regards to Cloretta,

As ever,

[*signed*] Harris

Harris Wofford

cc Stanley Levison

TLS. MLKP-MBU: Box 73A.