

To Jackie Robinson

19 June 1960
[Atlanta, Ga.]

King responds to Robinson's accusations that SCLC supporters had engaged in divisive fund-raising efforts and made derogatory comments about the NAACP. King states that he would rather "retire from the civil rights struggle" than "become a symbol of division."¹ He reaffirms his support for the NAACP but notes that he has remained

1. See also Robinson to King, 5 May 1960, pp. 454-455 in this volume.

19 June
1960

silent in the face of "efforts on the part of NAACP officials to sabotage our humble efforts." Robinson thanked King for this "reassuring letter" on 29 June.

Mr. Jackie Robinson
425 Lexington Avenue
New York 17, New York

My dear Friend Jackie:

This is to acknowledge receipt of your letter of May 5. First, I must apologize for being so tardy in my reply. Actually, the southern student movement, the court case in Montgomery, Alabama, and other pressing responsibilities have kept me out of my office almost consistently for the last two months. Therefore, I have been thrown almost hopelessly behind in my correspondence. Even when I am in a desperate attempt to play a game of catch up, something else emerges to hold me back. I am sure that you can understand this with all of your busy responsibilities.

I am deeply grateful to you for calling my attention to some maladjustments and unfortunate situations that have developed around fund raising for my defense. Frankly, I did not know about these things, and I would want to investigate them immediately. I would certainly not be a party to anything that would damage fund raising for all organizations in the future.

The only organization raising money for my defense is the Defense Committee which was formed in the home of Harry Belafonte the week after I was indicted in Alabama. As you know, this committee was set up to raise funds for a three-fold purpose, namely, my defense, the student movement, and the voter registration drive of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. Therefore, the committee had the joint name of "Committee to Defend Martin Luther King and the Struggle for Freedom in the South." The committee took on this three-fold responsibility because of a strong appeal that I made the night of the forming of the committee. I tried to make it palpably clear that it was not enough to defend me because in the long run of history it does not matter whether Martin Luther King spends ten years in jail, but it does matter whether the student movement continues, and it does matter whether the Negro is able to get the ballot in the South. I made it clear that I would not be so selfish as to be concerned merely about my defense and not be concerned about the great creative causes that were taking place in the South. And so I said to them that it would not be enough to defend me and then let the organization die which is a projection of me and my personality. I also made the suggestion because I knew that I would be out of circulation for a while, and that I could not raise as much money for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference as I would ordinarily raise. Therefore, to keep things moving, I felt that it was absolutely imperative that funds be raised for this purpose. Fortunately, the persons present agreed with me. They set up the committee and went out to raise money for these three causes. As you know the committee has made appeals through ads in newspapers, direct mail order appeals, mass meetings, and benefit concerts. As far as I have been able to discern, this committee has operated on the highest level of honest and integrity. There will be a public accounting of all the money that has been raised and spent in the next few days, and I am sure that the public will agree that it has handled

19 June
1960

the money [*properly?*].² As you know, there are always those later problems of organizational differences and the fear on the part of some that something new is offering competition. But I hope no one will get this impression. I have said both publicly and privately that before I become a symbol of division in the Negro community I would retire from the civil rights struggle because I think the cause is too great and too important for a few individuals to halt things by engaging in minor ego battles.

Now to say just a word concerning the second question that you raised with reference to SCLC leaders making derogatory statements concerning the NAACP. I have always stressed the need for great cooperation between SCLC and the NAACP. I have made it clear in all of our board meetings and conference meetings that the NAACP is our chief civil rights organization, and that it has done more to achieve the civil rights of Negroes than any other organization. It, therefore, justifiably deserves our support and respect, and I have constantly said that any Negro who fails to give the NAACP this backing is nothing less than an ingrate. I have always felt that the SCLC could serve as a real supplement for the work of the NAACP, and not a substitute. In areas where the NAACP cannot operate the SCLC can. Also, with the number of ministerial leaders involved in SCLC it has an opportunity to get to the masses in order to mobilize mass action, and assist the NAACP in implementing its great program. So I have never seen any conflict between the two organizations. I only see the possibility of the greatest harmony. If there are those individuals who move under the name of SCLC and say derogatory things about the NAACP I can assure you that they do not speak for me or the organization. They are expressing individual positions which I cannot control. I absolutely agree with you that we cannot afford any division at this time and we cannot afford any conflict. And I can assure you that as long as I am President of SCLC it will not be a party to any development of disunity.

The days ahead are challenging indeed. The future has vast possibilities and I am convinced that if we will gird our courage and move on in a sense of togetherness and goodwill we will be able to crush the sagging walls of segregation by the battering rams of the forces of justice. In my little way I am trying to help solve this problem. I have no Messiah complex, and I know that we need many leaders to do the job. And I am convinced that with the leadership of integrity, humility, and dedication to the ideals of freedom and justice we will be able to bring into full realization the principles of our American Democracy. Please be assured that you can count on me to give my ultimate allegiance to the cause. Even if it means pushing myself into the background. I have been so concerned about unity and the ultimate victory that I have refused to fight back or even answer some of the unkind statements that I have been informed that NAACP officials said about me and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. Frankly, I hear these statements every day,

2. According to a 31 July financial report, of the over \$85,000 raised by the committee, more than \$51,000 went toward costs incurred during King's perjury trial and other expenses of the southern struggle (Committee to Defend Martin Luther King and the Struggle for Freedom in the South, "Statement of income and expenditure for the period ending 7/31/60," and A. Philip Randolph and Gardner C. Taylor, Press release, both dated 7 October 1960).

The Martin Luther King, Jr. Papers Project

24 June
1960

and I have seen efforts on the part of NAACP officials to sabotage our humble efforts. But I have never said anything about it publicly or to the press. I am sure that if criticisms were weighed it would turn out that persons associated with the NAACP have made much more damaging statements about SCLC than persons associated with SCLC have made concerning the NAACP. But I will not allow this to become an issue. The job ahead is too great, and the days are too bright to be bickering in the darkness of jealousy, deadening competition, and internal ego struggles.

I hope that I have in some way answered your very important questions. I am deeply grateful to you for your concern and interest, and always know that I, along with millions of Americans, are deeply indebted to you for your unswerving devotion to the cause of freedom and justice and your willingness at all times to champion the cause of the underdog.

With warm personal regards, I am

Sincerely yours,
Martin L. King, Jr.

MLK:mlb

Dictated, but not signed by Rev. King.

TLc. MLKP-MBU: Box 68.