

To James F. Estes

Dec  
1960

[December 1960]  
[Atlanta, Ga.]

*In this draft letter to the lawyer for the Fayette County Civic and Welfare League, King commends the organization's "unfaltering perseverance" in its grassroots voting rights campaign in western Tennessee.<sup>1</sup> Ella Baker had previously corresponded with Estes regarding assistance SCLC might provide in Fayette and Haywood counties, and on 22 December SCLC sent \$800 to support their struggle.<sup>2</sup>*

Jas. S. Estes, Esq.  
777 Hamilton Street  
Memphis

In our move toward the threshold of equality the time has come to re-double our efforts to stem the tide of segregationists retaliation and persecution in Fayette and Heywood Counties. The Southern Christian Leadership Conference has been able to raise \$800 to serve this end. It will be mailed at once. We have gained new courage and determination from your unfaltering perseverance in the face of overwhelming odds. May you continue in the faith that unearned suffering is redemptive. At this festive season celebrating the birth of our Saviour, let us rededicate our faith in Him and our allegiance to the cause of freedom. Merry Christmas and may God bless all of you.

MLKjr

THL. MLKP-MBU: Box 24.

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1. The Fayette County League and a similar organization in Haywood County were founded and began a voter registration drive in mid-1959 after an all-white jury convicted Burton Dodson, a seventy-year-old black man, of murder (Wayne Phillips, "Court Again Bars Negro Evictions," *New York Times*, 6 January 1961). Economic retaliation against black activists in the region had escalated in September 1960 when white landowners evicted several hundred sharecroppers from their homes and many businesses refused to buy, sell, or trade with blacks; this led to the establishment of a tent city composed of hundreds of families (James Talley, "Fayette Invokes Economic Force," *Nashville Tennessean*, 8 May 1960, and *Tent City . . . : "Home of the Brave"* [Washington, D.C.: AFL-CIO Industrial Union Department, 1961]). On 13 September 1960, the Justice Department charged twenty-seven individuals and two banks in Haywood County with using economic pressure to keep blacks from voting in violation of the Civil Rights Act of 1957, the first such suit to be filed against private individuals under this legislation (Anthony Lewis, "U.S. Suit Charges an Economic Bar to Negro Voting," *New York Times*, 14 September 1960).

2. King's assistant James Wood mailed the check to John McFerren, chairman of the Fayette County Civic and Welfare League (see also Baker to Estes, 12 February 1960 and 21 July 1960). James F. Estes was born near Madison County, Tennessee. He earned his undergraduate degree from Lane College and an L.L.B. degree (1948) at Marquette University. Estes was an Army officer during World War II and in 1955 formed the Veterans Benefit of America to help African American veterans obtain their benefits. When he served as Burton Dodson's attorney in 1959, Estes became the first black lawyer to try a case in Tennessee since Reconstruction.