“Faith in Man”

26 February 1956

[Montgomery, Ala]

In the following two handwritten outlines, King urges his listeners to remain aware of the evil potential of human nature while maintaining faith in the individual's ability to rise above the limitations of heredity, environment, and injustice. In the first outline, King cites two recent events as reasons for holding a pessimistic view of "the nature and destiny of man": the lynching in 1955 of Emmett Till and the recent rioting at the University of Alabama in response to the admission of the school's first African-American student, Autherine Lucy. He argues, however, that despite human shortcomings, Jesus "saw within this sea of humanity not a dead sea of impossibilities, but an ocean of [infinite] possibilities and potentialities." A newspaper report of the sermon quotes King as hopefully predicting that the bus boycott will end in a victory that will ripple out beyond Montgomery: "It will be a victory for justice, a victory for fair play and a victory for democracy."

"Faith in Man" I

I Intro —

(a) One of the things that we are witnessing in our age is a growing pessimism concerning the nature and destiny of man. Man has lost faith in himself. There are And so many would cry out with the writer who referred to man as "a cosmic accident." Other would affirm with the cynical writer that "man is the supreme clown of creation." Still others would affirm with Jonathan Swift than "man is the most pernicious little race of odious vermin."

(b) At many points it is quite understandable why it is difficult for us to have faith in man. Man has often made such a poor showing of himself. Within a generation we have fought two world wars. We have seen man's tragic inhumanity to man. We have looked to Mississippi and seen supposedly Christian and civilized men brutally murdering the precious life of a little child. We have looked to Alabama and seen a ruthless mob take the pre-


3 Jonathan Swift (1667-1745) was an author and Anglo-Irish satirist. King cites the words of King Brobdingnag to Gulliver in Swift's Gulliver's Travels (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1947), p. 140. "I cannot but conclude the bulk of your natives to be the most pernicious race of little odious vermin that nature ever suffered to crawl upon the surface of the earth."

4 King refers to the lynching of fourteen-year-old Emmett Till in Money, Mississippi.