Messages Following the Stabbing

On 20 September 1958 Izola Curry, a mentally disturbed black woman, stabbed King with a letter opener as he signed copies of Stride Toward Freedom, at a Harlem department store. Following the assault, he received a deluge of mail and telegrams, including this correspondence recently acquired by the King Papers Project from United Nations under-secretary general Ralph J. Bunche and civil rights advocate Ruth H. Bunche, vice president Richard M. Nixon, author John Steinbeck, and entertainer Harry Belafonte. Steinbeck states, "You are very valuable to our whole perplexed and anxious species. Get well quickly. We need you, for you too are an accident—one of those fortunate accidents that have permitted us to survive our stupidities and our blundering."

From Ruth H. and Ralph J. Bunche

20 September 1958
Kew Gardens, NY

DR MARTIN LUTHER KING = HARLEM HOSPITAL PATIENT =

WE ARE CONFIDENT THAT YOUR GREAT SPIRITUAL AS WELL AS PHYSICAL STRENGTH, AND YOUR COURAGE, WILL LEAD YOU TO A SPEEDY RECOVERY STOP PLEASE ACCEPT OUR DEEP SYMPATHY AND WARMEST GOOD WISHES STOP =

RUTH AND RALPH BUNCHE³

PWSr CSKC

1 For more on King’s stabbing and recovery, see Introduction, in Papers 4:34–35
2 Upon his 24 October return to Montgomery, King acknowledged “the vast outpouring of sympathy and affection that came to me literally from everywhere—from Negro and white, from Catholic, Protestant and Jew, from the simple, the uneducated, the [celebrities] and the great” (King, Statement Upon Return to Montgomery, 24 October 1958, in Papers 4:513–514)
3 Ralph J. Bunche, the first African American Nobel Peace Prize winner, and his wife, Ruth, had been King’s supporters since the Montgomery bus boycott. Ralph Bunche contributed to a fund used to defray King’s expenses following his stabbing (see note 1, King to A. Philip Randolph, 8 November 1958, in Papers 4:527). Ruth Bunche served as a co-chair for the Youth March for Integrated Schools on 25 October 1958, held during King’s convalescence (see note 1 to King, Address at Youth March for Integrated Schools in Washington, D.C., Delivered by Coretta Scott King, in Papers 4:514)