

Martin Luther King, Jr.

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ATLANTA, GA.

April, 1968

Dear Friend:

Our national government is playing Russian roulette with riots; it gambles with another summer of disaster. Not a single basic social cause of riots has been corrected. Though ample resources are available they are squandered substantially on war. However, the inhumanity and irresponsibility of Congress and the Administration are not a reflection of popular attitudes -- legislation to abolish slums and end all unemployment has been endorsed by a wide majority of the American people in reputable polls. Yet, these positive proposals, like the recommendations of the President's Commission will be filed away to gather dust if the people do not generate relentless pressure on Congress.

It was obdurate government callousness to misery that first stoked the flames of rage and frustration. With unemployment a scourge in Negro ghettos, the government still tinkers with trivial half-hearted measures -- refuses still to become an "employer of last resort". It asks the business community to solve the problem as though its past failures qualified it for future success. In the halls of Congress Negro lives are too cheap to justify resolute measures; it is easier to speculate in blood and do nothing.

SCLC cannot wait; it cannot watch as the only systematic response to riots are feverish military preparations for repression. It cannot sit in appalled silence and then deplore the holocaust when tragedy strikes.

We cannot condone either violence or the equivalent evil of passivity.

We intend, before the summer comes, to initiate a "last chance" project to arouse the American conscience toward constructive democratic change.

We intend to channelize the smoldering rage of the Negro and white poor in an effective militant movement in Washington and elsewhere. A pilgrimage of the poor will gather in Washington from the slums and the rural starvation regions of the nation. We will go there, we will demand to be heard, and we will stay until America responds. If this means forcible repression of our movement, we will confront it, for we have done this before. If this means scorn or ridicule, we will embrace it, for that is what America's poor now receive. If it means jail, we accept it willingly, for the millions of poor already are imprisoned by exploitation and discrimination. We will in this way fashion a confrontation unique in drama but firm in discipline to wrest from government fundamental measures to end the long agony of the hard core poor. A prosperous society can afford it; a moral society cannot afford to do without it.

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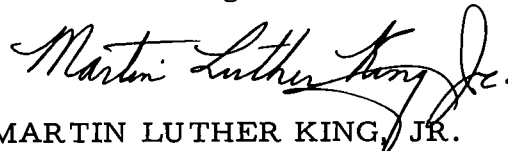
We are taking action after sober reflection. We have learned from bitter experience that our government does not correct a race problem until it is confronted directly and dramatically.

SCLC had to precipitate a Birmingham to open public accommodations; it had to march against brutality in Selma before the constitutional right to vote was buttressed by federal statutes. There was a thunderous chorus that sought to discourage us when we initiated direct action in Birmingham and Selma. Yet, today our accomplishments in these cities, and reforms that radiated from them are hailed with pride in all circles.

The nation has been warned by the President's Commission that our society faces catastrophic division in an approaching doomsday if the country does not act. We have, through this non-violent action, an opportunity to avoid a national disaster and to create a new spirit of harmony.

Please send the maximum contribution in this crisis year that your circumstances permit. While we are engaged in our Washington project we will also be continuing our far-flung work in voter registration, citizenship education and other activities. We can, together, write another luminous moral chapter in American history. All of us are on trial in this troubled hour, but time still permits us to meet the future with a clear conscience. Please mail your check today to fill tomorrow with optimism and hope.

With warmest good wishes,



MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

Tax deductible contributions may be made to fund the educational and voter registration projects of SCLC. If tax deductibility is important to you, or will enable you to increase your contribution, you may make your check payable to SCL Foundation.

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