

## To Dwight D. Eisenhower

29 May 1958  
Cleveland, Miss.

*SCLC held its first full meeting of 1958 at Haven Methodist Church in Clarksdale, Mississippi, on 29 May. Described as a "working conference to provide information and know-how on registration and voting," it attracted delegates from ten southern states, including 130 from Mississippi alone.<sup>1</sup> Meeting the night before the conference, the executive board named John Tilley to the post of executive director and Ella Baker to that of associate director.<sup>2</sup> Conference attendees unanimously voted to send the following telegram.*

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1. Also reported was a "very definite increase in the number of lay leaders and women at this session" (Ella Baker, "A Brief Digest of the Meeting of the SCLC," 29 May 1958; "Leadership Confab To Be Held In Clarksdale," *Tri-State Defender*, 17 May 1958). Not all reaction to the meeting was positive. Roy Wilkins had arranged an invitation to the conference for NAACP registration director John M. Brooks, who reported on the conference in a 1 June memorandum to NAACP officials: "75% of this time was spent by ministers praising themselves, the Conference and Rev. King, Jr. 95% of the reports made on voting and civil rights activities were projects of the NAACP. . . . Rev. Shuttlesworth, Rev. Steele, Rev. Abernathy and Rev. King Sr., through a skill play of words, invoked the thought that the South-ern Christian Leadership Conference was the only salvation for the Negroes in the south." Brooks concluded that SCLC "has a small hard core of leaders that would like to take over the NAACP's leadership in the south."

2. Following a morning session on the 29th, which included a brief statement by King and a keynote address by Tilley on "Why the Church Should Be Interested in Registration and Voting," the delegates broke up into four workshops, the themes for which had been suggested by Baker earlier in the month. It was also decided that SCLC would meet as a body twice a year (Baker to King, 19 May 1958; see also Baker, "A Brief Digest," 29 May 1958).

THE PRESIDENT  
THE WHITE HOUSE

29 May  
1958

AMID CONTINUED VIOLENCE IN THE SOUTH AND THE DREADFUL PROSPECT THAT SOME AREAS MAY CLOSE SCHOOLS RATHER THAN OBEY FEDERAL COURT ORDERS TO DESEGREGATE IN SEPTEMBER WE URGENTLY RENEW OUR REQUEST THAT YOU GRANT AN IMMEDIATE CONFERENCE TO NEGRO LEADERS IN AN EFFORT TO RESOLVE THESE PROBLEMS. IN THE LIGHT OF YOUR RECENT PLEA FOR CONTINUED PATIENCE BEFORE THE SUMMIT CONFERENCE OF NEGRO LEADERS IN WASHINGTON DC WE ARE CONVIN{ced} THAT A FACE TO FACE, HEART TO HEART TALK IS NEEDED TO PLACE BEFORE YOU THE REAL AND SERIOUS PLIGHT OF DEMOCRACY IN OUR SOUTHLAND TODAY.<sup>3</sup> SINCE QUITE SOMETIME AGO YOU PROMISED TO MEET WITH LEADERS AND BECAUSE THE PRESENT CLIMATE OF LAWLESS DEFIANCE THREATENS TO PRODUCE INCIDENTS THAT WILL SHAME AMERICA AT HOME AND ABROAD WHEN SCHOOL OPENS IN SEPTEMBER WE RESPECTFULLY REQUEST IMMEDIATE AUDIENCE. THIS MIGHT WELL BE AVOIDED BY COURAGEOUS AND FORTHRIGHT ACTION NOW. THE SOUTHERN CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE MEETING IN CLARKSDALE MISS TONIGHT MAY 29TH 1958 UNANIMOUSLY AND URGENTLY URGE THAT YOU IMMEDIATELY CONFER WITH REPRESENTATIVES FROM THE AREAS WHERE THE SITUATION IS GRAVE.

REV MARTIN LUTHER KING JR PRESIDENT  
SOUTHERN CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE  
208 AUBURN AVENUE NE ATLANTA GA.

PWSr. WSAPP-KAbE: Box 42.

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3. Eisenhower spoke on the opening day of the "Summit Meeting of National Negro Leaders," on 12 May in Washington, D.C. He called for "patience and forbearance" and questioned reliance on legal remedies: "I do not decry laws, for they are necessary. But I say that laws themselves will never solve problems that have their roots in the human heart and in the human emotions. It is because of this very reason that I am more hopeful that we will, as the years go past, speak to each other only as Americans without any adjectives to describe us as special types of Americans" (*Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Dwight D. Eisenhower* [Washington: General Services Administration, 1959], pp. 391-394).