

Statement upon Return from India

18 March 1959
New York, N.Y.

After six weeks abroad, King arrived in New York on the morning of 18 March and met with a small group of reporters at the Statler Hilton Hotel. Along with offering brief remarks to the press and answering their questions, King distributed copies of this statement in which he urges aid from the West to India to "help save one of the great nations of the World for democracy." He also praises India for "integrating its untouchables faster than the United States is integrating its Negro minority."¹

I say upon returning to America as I said upon leaving India, that I would not be so rash as to presume to know India after a one-month tour of that vast coun-

1. These remarks may have been prepared by Reddick, who had returned to New York several days before the Kings (Johnson to Bristol, 26 March 1959). During the press conference, King also told reporters that the Little Rock, Arkansas, school integration crisis of 1957 had harmed U.S. prestige abroad ("Non-Violence Move More Imperative Now," *New York Amsterdam News*, 28 March 1959).

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try. However, we are glad to say that while there we received a most enthusiastic reception and the most generous hospitality imaginable. Almost every door was open so that our party—Mrs. King, Dr. L. D. Reddick and myself—was able to see some of India's most important social experiments and talk with leaders in and out of Government, ranging from Prime Minister Nehru to village councilmen and Vinoba Bhave, the sainted leader of the land reform movement. We are most grateful to the Gandhi Smarak Nidhi which extended the official invitation and the American Friends Service Committee which helped to arrange the tour.²

Since we are often asked our impressions, we venture two generalization.

First, America and other nations of the West should extend generous economic and technical aid to India immediately. The Government and people of India are trying desperately to solve their grave problems of unemployment, food shortages, housing, etc., through democratic means. They need help but will not accept it if strings are attached to it. Our impression is that unless the problems of India can be solved through democratic means soon, the people there may turn to Communism or a Military dictatorship. America and the West should help India because she needs help; not as a part of an anti-communist campaign, even though the effect of this aid will help save one of the great nations of the World for democracy.

Secondly, we found the problem of the untouchables in India to be similar to the race problem in America. Even so India appears to be integrating its untouchables faster than the United States is integrating its Negro minority. Both countries have Federal Laws against discrimination but in India the leaders of Government, of religious, educational and other institutions have publicly endorsed the integration laws. This has not been done so largely in America. For example, today no leader in India would dare to make a public endorsement of untouchability. But in America, every day some leader endorses racial segregation.

India's faster progress is thus a challenge to us, for many Indians are convinced that unless America solves its race problem soon, America will lose prestige greatly in the eyes of the World.

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2. Corinne Johnson later complained that AFSC had not received a copy of this statement beforehand and suggested "that the Kings and Bayard might have felt that we would have wanted a stronger exposition" of the committee's sponsorship of the trip (Johnson to Bristol, 26 March 1959).