

From John Henrik Clarke

20 December 1957
New York, N.Y.

In the following letter Clarke, a journalist at the Pittsburgh Courier, thanks King for his hospitality during a recent visit and describes as unfair a series of articles his paper published on Montgomery's black community in the aftermath of the bus boycott.¹ On 9 November the Courier began running reporter Trezzvant Anderson's seven-part series, portraying the MIA as directionless and suggesting that local African Americans were embittered by the media's concentration on King: "There are scars which will never be healed in our lifetime, all growing out of that unfortunate imbalance which disregards . . . the sacrifices and toils of all and focuses on one individual while others work equally as hard, if not harder."²

1. John Henrik Clarke (1915–1998), born in Union Springs, Alabama, attended New York University (1948–1952) and the New School for Social Research (1956–1958). While developing the African Study Center at the New School, Clarke wrote the weekly series "Famous African Chiefs" for the *Pittsburgh Courier*. He also wrote and edited for the *Ghana Evening News*, *African Heritage*, and *Freedomways* before he began teaching in 1970 at Hunter College of the City University of New York as a professor of Black and Puerto Rican studies.

2. Anderson also suggested that MIA leaders mismanaged funds and had failed to support Rosa Parks after she lost her job. Before the end of the series, the *Courier* had printed one retraction and a rebuttal from MIA historian L. D. Reddick (see Trezzvant W. Anderson "How Has Dramatic Bus Boycott Affected Montgomery Negroes?" *Pittsburgh Courier*, 9 November through 28 December 1957; "Anderson Criticized For 'Boycott' Article," *Pittsburgh Courier*, 7 December 1957; "MIA Did Help Rosa Parks," *Pittsburgh Courier*, 14 December 1957).

Dr. Martin Luther King
Montgomery Improvement Assn.,
530 South Union Street
Montgomery, Alabama

23 Dec
1957

Dear Dr. King:

This is a belated "thank you note" for the pleasure of meeting you and the kindness that was so graciously shown to me during my short visit to your home in the presence of my good friend and fellow writer, John O. Killens.³ I was much inspired by the people I met in Montgomery, especially those associated with the M.I.A.

Like you, I was disturbed by the content and tone of the articles about the Montgomery Bus Boycott still appearing in the Pittsburgh Courier. These articles take a negative approach at a time when there are so many positive things to be said. I expressed this opinion to the Courier Editor, P. L. Prattis, before the articles appeared, belatedly, he agreed with me.

My articles on Famous African Chiefs are still appearing weekly in the Pittsburgh Courier. One day, I hope very soon, some editor will assign me to do a series of articles on the Montgomery Improvement Association. I promise you I will write the kind of articles about this great organization that you and your loyal supporters will take pride in reading.

Sincerely yours,
[signed] John H. Clarke
John Henrik Clarke

TLS. DABCC.

3. Killens, a Georgia-born author, was likely in Montgomery to discuss plans for a proposed film on the bus boycott, for which he had been selected to write the screenplay. In June 1956 Killens sent King an inscribed copy of his 1954 novel *Youngblood* (see King to Killens, 5 July 1956, in *Papers* 3:314).