

February 20, 1961

Rev. Martin Luther King
208 Auburn Avenue
Atlanta 3, Ga.

Dear Dr. King:

I would welcome an expression from you in connection with the following:

For many years I have been interested in the study of early American popular music and have a very large collection of such music, dating from the 18th century on. Articles about it, and many sheet music covers from my collection, have appeared in Life Magazine, American Heritage and numerous others.

American Heritage, as you probably know, is a magazine which confines itself to stories and aspects of American history.

In popular music, the one type which is indigenous to this country is the minstrel song. You are aware, I am sure, that American minstrelsy started out with the individual entertainer in the 1820's and 1830's, who corked his face; and that in the 1840's the minstrel troupe developed as the great form of American entertainment.

I have discussed with the editor of American Heritage the possibility of working up an article, with illustrations, on songs of the early minstrels and he agrees that it might make a very enjoyable story. However, I am wondering whether, in your opinion, there could be anything offensive in such an article to any group of readers who might see it. I would value that opinion, because if you felt that the article could be informative without being disturbing, I would like to try to put it in shape for the magazine.

If, on the other hand, you felt that it might cause offense to any group, I would not want to work on it. I would appreciate very much your thoughts on this matter and remain,

Sincerely yours,

LSL:ew

Lester S. Levy

Martin Luther King, Jr.

Ebenezer Baptist Church

407 Auburn Avenue, N. E.

Atlanta, Georgia

██████████
Jackson 2-4395

March 7, 1961

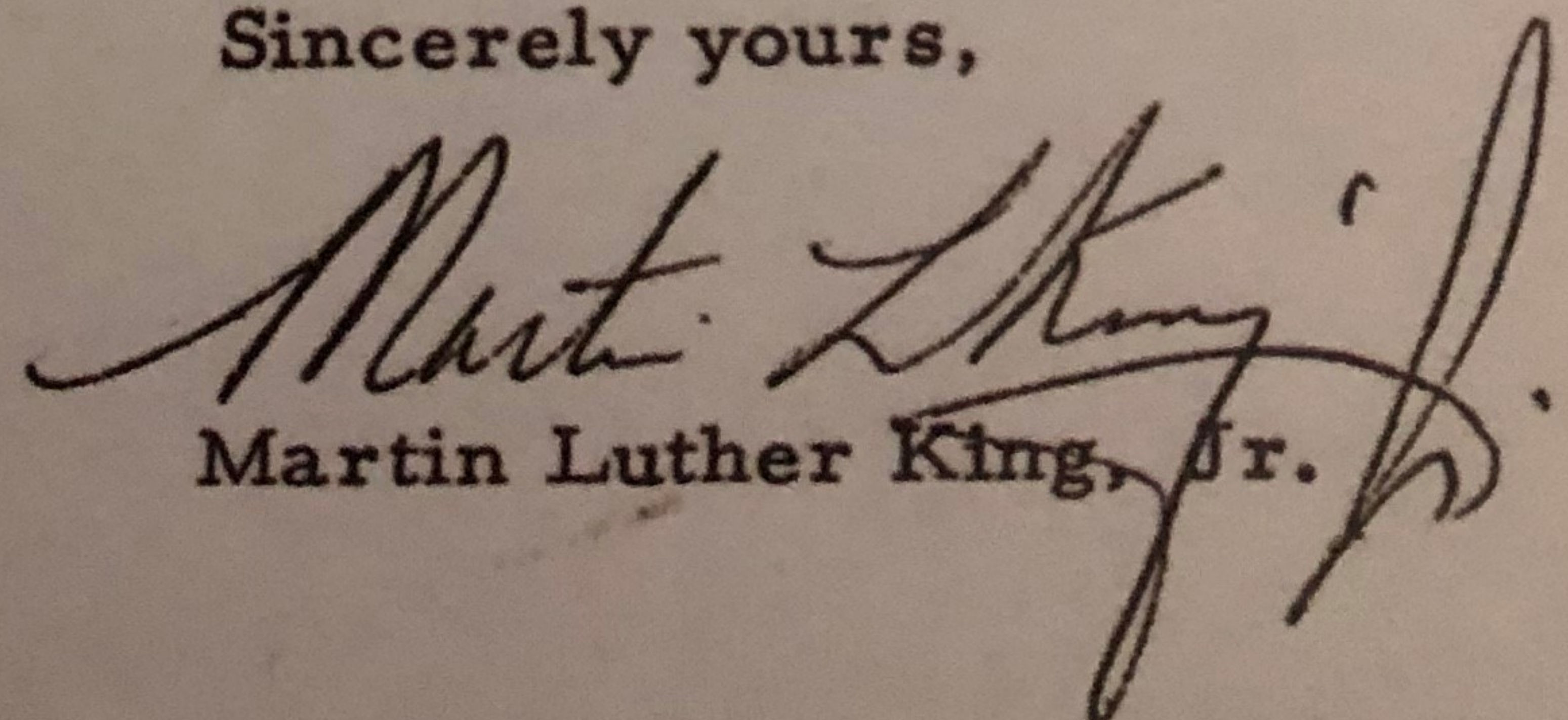
Mr. Lester S. Levy

Dear Mr. Levy:

This is to acknowledge receipt of your letter of recent date relative to the article you are writing for American Heritage.

It is my opinion that if the article on the early minstrels is written as a purely informative piece, such a study may serve a good purpose. However, it will depend in the final analysis on how the article is written. If it is written in such a way as to perpetuate certain stereotypes concerning Negroes, then it would probably be offensive, but if it is written to present the historical development of entertainment with a clear expression of the fact that this does not represent the best of Negro entertainment, then it may have some value.

Sincerely yours,


Martin Luther King, Jr.

Km