April is …

Black Women’s History Month

The black orchid, one symbol of Black Women’s History Month, with its imposing color and mysterious beauty, signifies great power and absolute authority.

We are pleased to have the opportunity to celebrate the intelligence, strength, compassion, and tenacity of African American women and all women of color in this month’s newsletter.

Our only regret is that we don’t have enough pages in this newsletter to feature all the women who should be included.

The late activist and wife of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., often referred to as the First Lady of the Civil Rights Movement, would have been 90 on April 27.

April 27, 1927 – January 30, 2006

Our Part of the Story: Ms. Helen Ice and The PPSCLC Education Committee

PIKES PEAK SOUTHERN CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE

603 S. El Paso St., Suite B, COLORADO SPRINGS, CO 80903

MISSION: In the spirit of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) is renewing its commitment to bring about the promise of “one nation, under God, indivisible” together with the commitment to activate the “strength to love” within the community of humankind.
The Pikes Peak Southern Christian Leadership Conference recognizes April as the anniversary of the slaying of our founder, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Fifty-one years ago, on April 4, 1968, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was fatally shot at the Lorraine Motel in Memphis, Tennessee at the age of 39. He dies at 7:05 that evening at St. Joseph’s Hospital.

The beginning of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) can be traced back to the Montgomery Bus Boycott that began on December 5, 1955 after Rosa Park was arrested for refusing to give up her seat to a white man on the bus.

The boycott was carried out by the newly established Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA) which was later established on February 14, 1957 as the Southern Leadership Conference on Transportation and Nonviolent Integration, of which Dr. King was the President.

At its first convention in Montgomery in August 1957, the organization adopted the current name, Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and Dr. King remained the organization president.

At this convention, nonviolent mass action was adopted as the cornerstone of the SCLC strategy, and began to affiliate with local community organizations across the South. It was also determined to make the SCLC movement open to all, regardless of race, religion, or background. The SCLC is now a nationwide organization made of chapters and affiliates with programs that affect the lives of all Americans: north, south, east and west.

Pikes Peak Southern Christian Leadership Conference (PPSCLC) was established February 11, 2015. With approximately fifty persons in attendance, the PPSCLC had the necessary number to constitute a chapter and apply for a charter from the national organization. Henry D. Allen, Jr. was elected as President and continues to serve in that capacity. In July 2015, President Allen travelled to Atlanta for the national convention and received the PPSCLC’s official charter. Current membership of the PPSCLC has grown to over four hundred.

The PPSCLC is comprised of community activists who are dedicated to pursuing civil rights based on Christian principles. This team of dedicated volunteers have investigated and assisted with complaints of injustice in the area of housing, employment, education, criminal justice, politics, transportation, and the legal arena.

We are always recruiting motivated, like-minded individuals who believe all persons in the community are deserving of their constitutional rights.

Sincerely,

Henry D. Allen, Jr
President
Pikes Peak Southern Christian Leadership Conference
Patrisse Khan-Cullors, Alicia Garza, and Opal Tometi
Founders of Black Lives Matter (BLM)


Co-founder Alicia Garza is an Oakland-based organizer, writer, public speaker and freedom dreamer who is currently the Special Projects Director for the National Domestic Workers Alliance, the nation’s leading voice for dignity and fairness for the millions of domestic workers in the United States. Garza, along with Opal Tometi and Patrisse Cullors, also co-founded the Black Lives Matter network, a globally recognized organizing project that focuses on combatting anti-Black state-sanctioned violence and the oppression of all Black people. Her work has received numerous recognitions including being named on The Root’s 2016 list of 100 African American achievers and influencers, the 2016 Glamour Women of the Year Award, the 2016 Marie Claire New Guard Award, and as a Community Change Agent at the 2016 BET’s Black Girls Rock Awards.

Most important, as a queer Black woman, Garza’s leadership and work challenge the misconception that only cisgender Black men encounter police and state violence. While the tragic deaths of Trayvon Martin and Mike Brown were catalysts for the emergence of the BLM movement, Garza is clear: In order to truly understand how devastating and widespread this type of violence is in Black America, we must view this epidemic through of a lens of race, gender, sexual orientation and gender identity.

Co-founder Opal Tometi is a New York based Nigerian-American writer, strategist and community organizer. The historic political project was launched in the wake of the murder of Trayvon Martin to explicitly combat implicit bias and anti-Black racism and to protect and affirm the beauty and dignity of all Black lives. Opal is credited with creating the online platforms and initiating the social media strategy during the project’s early days. The campaign has grown into a national network of approximately 40 chapters. In 2016, in recognition of their contribution human rights, Opal Tometi and the #BlackLivesMatter co-founders received an honorary doctorate degree, BET’s Black Girls Rock Community Change Agent Award, recognition among the world’s fifty greatest leaders by Fortune and POLITICO magazines, and the first ever Social Movement of The Year Award from the Webbys.

Opal is currently at the helm of the country’s leading Black organization for immigrant rights, the Black Alliance for Just Immigration (BAJI) founded in 2006, is a national organization that educates and advocates to further immigrant rights and racial justice together with African-American, Afro-Latino, African and Caribbean immigrant communities. As the Executive Director at BAJI, Opal collaborates with staff and communities in Los Angeles, Phoenix, New York, Oakland, Washington, DC and communities throughout the Southern states. The organization’s most recent campaign helped win family reunification visas for Haitians displaced by the 2010 earthquake. BAJI is an award winning institution with recognition by leading intuitions across the country.

A transnational feminist, Opal supports and helps shape the strategic work of Pan African Network in Defense of Migrant Rights, and the Black Immigration Network (BIN) international and national formations respectively, dedicated to people of African descent. She has presented at the United Nations and participated with the UN’s Global Forum on Migration and Commission on the Status of Women. Opal has been active in social movements for over a decade. She is a student of liberation theology and her practice is in the tradition of Ella Baker, informed by Stuart Hall, bell hooks and Black Feminist thinkers. She has been published in the Oxford Dictionary of African Biographies, was #10 on the 2015 Root 100 list and she was named a “New Civil Rights Leader” by the Los Angeles Times in 2015 and ESSENCE magazine in 2014, for her cutting edge movement building work which bridges immigrant and human rights work to the ever-growing Black liberation movement. She was a lead architect of the Black-Brown Coalition of Arizona and was involved in grassroots organizing against SB 1070 with the Alto Arizona campaign. Opal is a former Case Manager for survivors of domestic violence and still provides community education on the issue.

Opal holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in History and a Masters of Arts degree in Communication and Advocacy. The daughter of Nigerian immigrants, she grew up in Phoenix, Arizona. She currently resides in the Republic of Brooklyn, New York where she loves riding her single speed bike and collecting African art.
In celebration of Black Women’s History Month, we chose four artists, each of whom had their own particular “firsts” in their genre.

Hattie McDaniel
June 10, 1895 – October 26, 1952

Hattie McDaniel was a professional singer, actress, songwriter and comedian. She became the first African American to win an Academy Award when she won an Oscar for her portrayal of Mammy in *Gone with the Wind* (1939). She appeared in over 300 films and was the first African American woman to sing on the radio in the United States.

Ms. McDaniel has two stars on the Hollywood Walk of Fame and was the first Black Oscar winner to be placed on a U.S. postage stamp.

She was involved in several community service projects, including providing entertainment for World War II soldiers stationed at military bases, and raising funds for the Red Cross.

Maya Angelou
April 4, 1928 – May 28, 2014

Maya Angelou was a poet, author, and Civil Rights activist. She authored the first nonfiction best-seller by an African American woman, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, as well as a number of poems, novels, and autobiographies spanning over fifty years.

Ms. Angelou contributed to the Civil Rights Movement as a fundraiser and organizer, working with both Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcom X.

She was the first black woman to write a screenplay of a major film and the first female poet of any race to recite a poem at a U.S. Presidential inauguration.

Maya Angelou received many honors over the years, including the 2010 Presidential Medal of Freedom.

“Success is liking yourself, liking what you do, and liking how you do it.”

Maya Angelou
Toni Morrison
February 18, 1931 – Present

Toni Morrison is an award-winning professor, editor, and novelist.

Ms. Morrison is the first African American woman to receive the Nobel Prize in Literature. She is the recipient of many awards including The Pulitzer Prize, the NAACP Image Award, and the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

She wrote many novels with strong, African-American women striving to survive in a white/male-dominated world as the focal points.

Ms. Morrison penned the award-winning novel, Beloved, based on the life of a runaway slave who killed her daughter rather than have her return to slavery. Her novel ranks 26th on the American Library Association’s list of most banned/challenged books because of its thought-provoking content.

“*You are your best thing.*”

Toni Morrison

Misty Copeland
September 10, 1982 – Present

Misty Copeland is an American ballet dancer, stage performer, author, and celebrity spokesperson.

Ms. Copeland is the first African American to be promoted to principal ballerina by the American Ballet Theater (ABT) in its 75-year history. Unlike most ballerinas, Ms. Copeland did not start ballet training early; she began dancing at the age of 13.

Ms. Copeland rose above a difficult childhood to excel as a student and a ballerina.

She is the recipient of many awards, including the Los Angeles Music Center Spotlight Award for best dancer in Southern California, the 2013 National Youth of the Year Ambassador by the Boys & Girls Clubs of America, and one of Glamour’s Women of the Year for 2015.

Ms. Copeland has authored books that empower children of color, including her 2015 book, Firebird.
In this section of our newsletter, we will showcase the different committees of Pikes Peak SCLC, the chairs of those committees, their volunteers, and their story.

Pikes Peak Southern Christian Leadership Conference

EDUCATION COMMITTEE
An Interview with Ms. Helen Ice by Jim “Hawk” Hawkins

Committee Chair:
Ms. Helen Ice

The Mission of the Education Committee: To advocate for improvement in the quality of education for all, but with a specific focus on African-American youth.

Ms. Helen Ice joined Pikes Peak Southern Christian Leadership Conference in November 2018 and jumped right in to chair our Education Committee.

Ms. Ice takes interviews with parents and students regarding various issues that arise in the local schools, from getting homework sent to the student when they are out sick, to tutoring needs and resolving discipline issues.

Discipline issues include excessive punishments, unequal treatment of African-American youth, and punishments that do not fit the crime. Ms. Ice declares her priority is to have all interested parties collected in a room (which very frequently resolves the issues) as key personnel are sometimes unaware of the all the facts of the issue.

Communication is a critical problem in these matters, and having a discussion also leads to an acceptable solution to the issue. Often, the Principal is called into these discussions and s/he plays an important role in the resolution of the issue.

Ms. Ice strives to ensure that fair treatment of the student is considered in every situation. Her focus is always on the student first.

One of her responsibilities is to educate the parents of the student in the proper steps of the complaint process with the school and encourages them not to circumvent the process by ignoring the established procedures set by the school.

“Coordinating the student’s recommendations from their doctor and the school (primarily, the teacher) seems to come up often,” she says, “especially when an absence from school occurs due to the student’s medical condition.” Ms. Ice spends quite a bit of time trying to resolve these issues. More needs to be done to create cooperation between the student’s doctor and his/her teacher so that the student isn’t unfairly penalized for having a medical condition.

Additionally, Ms. Ice will accompany a student and their parents to court hearings, usually involving a disciplinary action for fighting, etc. She makes every effort to obtain a diversion program for the student rather than punishment, such as anger-management classes and/or community service.

The Education Committee is a vital service offered to our community by Pikes Peak SCLC through the impressive work by Ms. Ice. We are so grateful for her dedication and persistence in serving our children and their parents, and, as a matter of course, assisting the parents, students and school personnel in creating a more cooperative and communicative relationship between all parties involved.

We say, “We are so fortunate for your service and want to say, ‘Thank you,’ Ms. Ice!”

Contact Ms. Ice at education@PikesPeakSCLC.org and lend a hand.
Discover an area on the Education Committee that could use your talents and skills.
This is a call to all who may be interested in being involved with a workshop event featuring the film, Cracking the Codes.

About the film:

From Shakti Butler, the director of “The Way Home: Women Talk About Race in America” and “Mirrors of Privilege: Making Whiteness Visible”, comes a new film that asks America to talk about the causes and consequences of systemic inequity. Cracking the Codes: The System of Racial Inequity features moving stories from racial justice leaders including Amer Ahmed, Michael Benitez, Barbie-Danielle DeCarlo, Joy DeGruy, Ericka Huggins, Humaira Jackson, Yuko Kodama, Peggy McIntosh, Rinku Sen, Tilman Smith and Tim Wise.

Film segments are braided with facilitated dialogue. In this learning event, hundreds of people can engage in talking about the system of racial inequity prompted by the stories in the film. People leave asking new questions and are inspired to engage in change.

What is the first step? I am proposing that everyone interested in learning more about this event and the film send me an email. Together we will choose a date that will work for everyone to join a Zoom meeting on their computer to preview the film, decide if this is for us, and have a discussion with the others on the computer about next steps. This will be about a two-hour commitment.

Email: communication@pikespeaksclc.org or call me at (719) 373-2839.

Jim “Hawk” Hawkins


“Racism is on its deathbed; the question is, how costly will racists make the funeral.”

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Racism is a harsh, destructive reality. The irony is, race is a fiction. There is no genetic or biological basis for the concept. The notion of race is artificial and an absurd lie. Furthermore, race is a social, cultural and political construct based on superficial appearances, historical conditions and tradition. The invention of ‘race’ enabled the peoples of Europe, when developing a global reach, to establish slavery, and the system of colonialism that followed.

We are all human, with the same ancestors. Our history is relatively short (less than a quarter of a million years long). The physical diversity we observe in ourselves is a function of geographical accidents of climate.

Arbitrary and superficial distinctions are made every day relating to skin color. The truth is, there are no ‘white’, ‘black’, or ‘yellow’ people. There are people with many shades and types of skin, making no difference to any other aspect of their humanity except for what the malice of others can construct.

To advance beyond racism one has to advance beyond race. Racism will end when individuals see others only in individual terms and we all recognize and undo the systems and structures that support racial hierarchies.

(I am so grateful and indebted to Dr. A.C. Grayling for these insights. He has become my mentor and one of the most influential voices in my life. Hawk)

Anthony Grayling MA, DPhil
Meditations for the Humanist
Oxford University Press, 2002

1 an idea or theory containing various conceptual elements, typically one considered to be subjective and not based on empirical evidence.
No one person exemplifies the personality of the Emmanuel Missionary Baptist Church better than its Senior Pastor, Cleveland A. Thompson. His high-energy, down-to-earth manner of elucidating the word of God has come to define the Emmanuel experience and his Liberty, Mississippi roots are evident in the southern drawl and vernacular he often slips into when preaching.

Pastor Thompson has a heart for God’s people and his caring, compassionate leadership has caused Emmanuel to grow, spiritually and physically, and to reach far beyond the walls of the buildings.

"When our days become dreary with low-hovering clouds of despair, and when our nights become darker than a thousand midnights, let us remember that there is a creative force in this universe, working to pull down the gigantic mountains of evil, a power that is able to make a way out of no way and transform dark yesterdays into bright tomorrows."

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
These are the scores given to Southeast Colorado Springs (primarily the 80910 and 80916 zip codes) according to the organization, AreaVibes. [We vetted this organization as best as we could and found their data to be reliable.]

**Cost of Living**
On a scale of 100, the entire city of Colorado Springs has the same cost of living index as the U.S. (100). Southeast Colorado Springs has an index of 89 (11% less than the U.S. average).

**Crime**
Total S.E. Colorado Springs crime is 262% higher than the state of Colorado and 305% higher than the U.S. average (people have a 1 in 9 chance of being a victim).

**Employment**
Household income is 36% lower than Colorado state’s median income.
The median income is $39,845 which is 28% lower than the U.S. average.
The unemployment rate is 6% which is 34% higher than the U.S. average.

**Housing**
Home values in S.E. Colorado Springs are 48% lower than the state of Colorado.
The median rent price is $821 which is 13% lower than the U.S. average.
Home ownership is 41% of the population, which is 36% lower than the U.S. average.

**Schools**
High school graduation rate is at 81%, which is 2% lower than the U.S. average.
School test scores are 38% lower than U.S. average.

Source: [www.areavibes.com/coloradosprings/liveability](http://www.areavibes.com/coloradosprings/liveability)
* The Liveability Score is based on a scale of 1 (worst) to 100 (the U.S. base score)

So, here is the question: **Do the committees of Pikes Peak Southern Christian Leadership Conference have a specific opportunity (and responsibility?) to engage with the people of Southeast Colorado Springs, and do what we can to make a difference?**
WHILE confined here in the Birmingham city jail, I came across your recent statement calling our present activities "unwise and untimely." Seldom, if ever, do I pause to answer criticism of my work and ideas. If I sought to answer all of the criticisms that cross my desk, my secretaries would be engaged in little else in the course of the day, and I would have no time for constructive work. But since I feel that you are men of genuine good will and your criticisms are sincerely set forth, I would like to answer your statement in what I hope will be patient and reasonable terms.

I think I should give the reason for my being in Birmingham, since you have been influenced by the argument of "outsiders coming in." I have the honor of serving as president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, an organization operating in every Southern state, with headquarters in Atlanta, Georgia. We have some eighty-five affiliate organizations all across the South, one being the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights. Whenever necessary and possible, we share staff, educational and financial resources with our affiliates. Several months ago our local affiliate here in Birmingham invited us to be on call to engage in a nonviolent direct-action program if such were deemed necessary. We readily consented, and when the hour came we lived up to our promises. So I am here, along with several members of my staff, because we were invited here. I am here because I have basic organizational ties here.

Beyond this, I am in Birmingham because injustice is here. Just as the eighth-century prophets left their little villages and carried their "thus saith the Lord" far beyond the boundaries of their hometowns; and just as the Apostle Paul left his little village of Tarsus and carried the gospel of Jesus Christ to practically every hamlet and city of the Greco-Roman world, I too am compelled to carry the gospel of freedom beyond my particular hometown. Like Paul, I must constantly respond to the Macedonian call for aid.

Moreover, I am cognizant of the interrelatedness of all communities and states. I cannot sit idly by in Atlanta and not be concerned about what happens in Birmingham. Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly. Never again can we afford to live with the narrow, provincial "outside agitator" idea. Anyone who lives inside the United States can never be considered an outsider.

You deplore the demonstrations that are presently taking place in Birmingham. But I am sorry that your statement did not express a similar concern for the conditions that brought the demonstrations into being. I am sure that each of you would want to go beyond the superficial social analyst who looks merely at effects and does not grapple with underlying causes. I would not hesitate to say that it is unfortunate that so-called demonstrations are taking place in Birmingham at this time, but I would say in more emphatic terms that it is even more unfortunate that the white power structure of this city left the Negro community with no other alternative.

In any nonviolent campaign there are four basic steps: collection of the facts to determine whether injustices are alive, negotiation, self-purification, and direct action. We have gone through all of these steps in Birmingham. There can be no gainsaying of the fact that racial injustice engulfs this community. Birmingham is probably the most thoroughly segregated city in the United States. Its ugly record of police brutality is known in every section of this country. Its unjust treatment of Negroes in the courts is a notorious reality. There have been more unsolved bombings of Negro homes and churches in Birmingham than in any other city in this nation. These are the hard, brutal, and unbelievable facts. On the basis of them, Negro leaders sought to negotiate with the city fathers. But the political leaders consistently refused to engage in good-faith negotiation.
Then came the opportunity last September to talk with some of the leaders of the economic community. In these negotiating sessions certain promises were made by the merchants, such as the promise to remove the humiliating racial signs from the stores. On the basis of these promises, Reverend Shuttlesworth and the leaders of the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights agreed to call a moratorium on any type of demonstration. As the weeks and months unfolded, we realized that we were the victims of a broken promise. The signs remained. As in so many experiences of the past, we were confronted with blasted hopes, and the dark shadow of a deep disappointment settled upon us. So we had no alternative except that of preparing for direct action, whereby we would present our very bodies as a means of laying our case before the conscience of the local and national community. We were not unmindful of the difficulties involved. So we decided to go through a process of self-purification.

We started having workshops on nonviolence and repeatedly asked ourselves the questions, "Are you able to accept blows without retaliating?" and "Are you able to endure the ordeals of jail?" We decided to set our direct-action program around the Easter season, realizing that, with exception of Christmas, this was the largest shopping period of the year. Knowing that a strong economic withdrawal program would be the by-product of direct action, we felt that this was the best time to bring pressure on the merchants for the needed changes. Then it occurred to us that the March election was ahead, and so we speedily decided to postpone action until after election day. When we discovered that Mr. Conner was in the runoff, we decided again to postpone action so that the demonstration could not be used to cloud the issues. At this time we agreed to begin our nonviolent witness the day after the runoff.

This reveals that we did not move irresponsibly into direct action. We, too, wanted to see Mr. Conner defeated, so we went through postponement after postponement to aid in this community need. After this we felt that direct action could be delayed no longer. You may well ask, "Why direct action, why sit-ins, marches, and so forth? Isn't negotiation a better path?" You are exactly right in your call for negotiation. Indeed, this is the purpose of direct action. Nonviolent direct action seeks to create such a crisis and establish such creative tension that a community that has consistently refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issue. It seeks so to dramatize the issue that it can no longer be ignored. I just referred to the creation of tension as a part of the work of the nonviolent resister. This may sound rather shocking. But I must confess that I am not afraid of the word "tension." I have earnestly worked and preached against violent tension, but there is a type of constructive nonviolent tension that is necessary for growth. Just as Socrates felt that it was necessary to create a tension in the mind so that individuals could rise from the bondage of myths and half-truths to the unfettered realm of creative analysis and objective appraisal, we must see the need of having nonviolent gadflies to create the kind of tension in society that will help men to rise from the dark depths of prejudice and racism to the majestic heights of understanding and brotherhood. So, the purpose of direct action is to create a situation so crisis-packed that it will inevitably open the door to negotiation. We therefore concur with you in your call for negotiation. Too long has our beloved Southland been bogged down in the tragic attempt to live in monologue rather than dialogue.

One of the basic points in your statement is that our acts are untimely. Some have asked, "Why didn't you give the new administration time to act?" The only answer that I can give to this inquiry is that the new administration must be prodded about as much as the outgoing one before it acts. We will be badly mistaken if we feel that the election of Mr. Boutwell will bring the millennium to Birmingham. While Mr. Boutwell is much more articulate and gentle than Mr. Conner, they are both segregationists, dedicated to the task of maintaining the status quo. The hope I see in Mr. Boutwell is that he will be reasonable enough to see the futility of massive resistance to desegregation. But he will not see this without pressure from the devotees of civil rights. My friends, I must say to you that we have not made a single gain in civil rights because of negotiation. Indeed, this is the right in your call for negotiation. Indeed, this is the product of direct action, we felt that this was the best time to bring pressure on the merchants for the needed changes. Then it occurred to us that the March election was ahead, and so we speedily decided to postpone action until after election day. When we discovered that Mr. Conner was in the runoff, we decided again to postpone action so that the demonstration could not be used to cloud the issues. At this time we agreed to begin our nonviolent witness the day after the runoff.

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We know through painful experience that freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed. Frankly, I have never yet engaged in a direct-action movement that was "well timed" according to the timetable of those who have not suffered unduly from the disease of segregation. For years now I have heard the word "wait." It rings in the ear of every Negro with a piercing familiarity. This "wait" has almost always meant "never." It has been a tranquilizing thalidomide, relieving the emotional stress for a moment, only to give birth to an ill-formed infant of frustration. We must come to see with the distinguished jurist of yesterday that "justice too long delayed is justice denied." We have waited for more than three hundred and forty years for our God-given and constitutional rights. The nations of Asia and Africa are moving with jetlike speed toward the goal of political independence, and we still creep at horse-and-buggy pace toward the gaining of a cup of coffee at a lunch counter. I guess it is easy for those who have never felt the stinging darts of segregation to say "wait." But when you have seen vicious mobs lynch your mothers and fathers at will and drown your sisters and brothers at whim; when you have seen hate-filled policemen curse, kick, brutalize, and even kill your black brothers and sisters with impunity; when you see the vast majority of your twenty million Negro brothers smothering in an airtight cage of poverty in the midst of an affluent society; when you suddenly find your tongue twisted and your speech stammering as you seek to explain to your six brothers smothering in an airtight cage of poverty in the m...
that you are a Negro, living constantly at tiptoe stance, never knowing what to expect next, and plagued with inner fears and outer resentments; when you are forever fighting a degenerating sense of "nobodyness" -- then you will understand why we find it difficult to wait. There comes a time when the cup of endurance runs over and men are no longer willing to be plunged into an abyss of injustice where they experience the bleakness of corroding despair. I hope, sirs, you can understand our legitimate and unavoidable impatience.

You express a great deal of anxiety over our willingness to break laws. This is certainly a legitimate concern. Since we so diligently urge people to obey the Supreme Court's decision of 1954 outlawing segregation in the public schools, it is rather strange and paradoxical to find us consciously breaking laws. One may well ask, "How can you advocate breaking some laws and obeying others?" The answer is found in the fact that there are two types of laws: there are just laws, and there are unjust laws. I would agree with St. Augustine that "An unjust law is no law at all."

Now, what is the difference between the two? How does one determine when a law is just or unjust? A just law is a man-made code that squares with the moral law, or the law of God. An unjust law is a code that is out of harmony with the moral law. To put it in the terms of St. Thomas Aquinas, an unjust law is a human law that is not rooted in eternal and natural law. Any law that uplifts human personality is just. Any law that degrades human personality is unjust. All segregation statutes are unjust because segregation distorts the soul and damages the personality. It gives the segregator a false sense of superiority and the segregated a false sense of inferiority. To use the words of Martin Buber, the great Jewish philosopher, segregation substitutes an "I - it" relationship for the "I - thou" relationship and ends up relegating persons to the status of things. So segregation is not only politically, economically, and sociologically unsound, but it is morally wrong and sinful. Paul Tillich has said that sin is separation. Isn't segregation an existential expression of man's tragic separation, an expression of his awful estrangement, his terrible sinfulness? So I can urge men to obey the 1954 decision of the Supreme Court because it is morally right, and I can urge them to disobey segregation ordinances because they are morally wrong.

Let us turn to a more concrete example of just and unjust laws. An unjust law is a code that a majority inflicts on a minority that is not binding on itself. This is difference made legal. On the other hand, a just law is a code that a majority compels a minority to follow, and that it is willing to follow itself. This is sameness made legal.

Let me give another explanation. An unjust law is a code inflicted upon a minority which that minority had no part in enacting or creating because it did not have the unhampered right to vote. Who can say that the legislature of Alabama which set up the segregation laws was democratically elected? Throughout the state of Alabama all types of conniving methods are used to prevent Negroes from becoming registered voters, and there are some counties without a single Negro registered to vote, despite the fact that the Negroes constitute a majority of the population. Can any law set up in such a state be considered democratically structured?

These are just a few examples of unjust and just laws. There are some instances when a law is just on its face and unjust in its application. For instance, I was arrested Friday on a charge of parading without a permit. Now, there is nothing wrong with an ordinance which requires a permit for a parade, but when the ordinance is used to preserve segregation and to deny citizens the First Amendment privilege of peaceful assembly and peaceful protest, then it becomes unjust.

Of course, there is nothing new about this kind of civil disobedience. It was seen sublimely in the refusal of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to obey the laws of Nebuchadnezzar because a higher moral law was involved. It was practiced superbly by the early Christians, who were willing to face hungry lions and the excruciating pain of chopping blocks before submitting to certain unjust laws of the Roman Empire. To a degree, academic freedom is a reality today because Socrates practiced civil disobedience.

We can never forget that everything Hitler did in Germany was "legal" and everything the Hungarian freedom fighters did in Hungary was "illegal." It was "illegal" to aid and comfort a Jew in Hitler's Germany. But I am sure that if I had lived in Germany during that time, I would have aided and comforted my Jewish brothers even though it was illegal. If I lived in a Communist country today where certain principles dear to the Christian faith are suppressed, I believe I would openly advocate disobeying these anti-religious laws.

I must make two honest confessions to you, my Christian and Jewish brothers. First, I must confess that over the last few years I have been gravely disappointed with the white moderate. I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the Negro's great stumbling block in the stride toward freedom is not the White Citizens Councilor or the Ku Klux Klanner but the white moderate who is more devoted to order than to justice; who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice; who constantly says, "I agree with you in the goal you seek, but I can't agree with your methods of direct action"; who paternalistically feels that he can set the timetable for another man's freedom; who lives by the myth of time; and who constantly advises the Negro to wait until a "more convenient season." Shallow understanding from people of good will is more frustrating than absolute misunderstanding from people of ill will. Lukewarm acceptance is much more bewildering than outright rejection.
In your statement you asserted that our actions, even though peaceful, must be condemned because they precipitate violence. But can this assertion be logically made? Isn't this like condemning the robbed man because his possession of money precipitated the evil act of robbery? Isn't this like condemning Socrates because his unswerving commitment to truth and his philosophical delvings precipitated the misguided popular mind to make him drink the hemlock? Isn't this like condemning Jesus because His unique God-consciousness and never-ceasing devotion to His will precipitated the evil act of crucifixion? We must come to see, as federal courts have consistently affirmed, that it is immoral to urge an individual to withdraw his efforts to gain his basic constitutional rights because the quest precipitates violence. Society must protect the robbed and punish the robber.

I had also hoped that the white moderate would reject the myth of time. I received a letter this morning from a white brother in Texas which said, "All Christians know that the colored people will receive equal rights eventually, but is it possible that you are in too great of a religious hurry? It has taken Christianity almost 2000 years to accomplish what it has. The teachings of Christ take time to come to earth." All that is said here grows out of a tragic misconception of time. It is the strangely irrational notion that there is something in the very flow of time that will inevitably cure all ills. Actually, time is neutral. It can be used either destructively or constructively. I am coming to feel that the people of ill will have used time much more effectively than the people of good will. We will have to repent in this generation not merely for the vitriolic words and actions of the bad people but for the appalling silence of the good people. We must come to see that human progress never rolls in on wheels of inevitability. It comes through the tireless efforts and persistent work of men willing to be coworkers with God, and without this hard work time itself becomes an ally of the forces of social stagnation.

You spoke of our activity in Birmingham as extreme. At first I was rather disappointed that fellow clergymen would see my nonviolent efforts as those of an extremist. I started thinking about the fact that I stand in the middle of two opposing forces in the Negro community. One is a force of complacency made up of Negroes who, as a result of long years of oppression, have been so completely drained of self-respect and a sense of "somebodyness" that they have adjusted to segregation, and, on the other hand, of a few Negroes in the middle class who, because of a degree of academic and economic security and because at points they profit by segregation, have unconsciously become insensitive to the problems of the masses. The other force is one of bitterness and hatred and comes perilously close to advocating violence. It is expressed in the various black nationalist groups that are springing up over the nation, the largest and best known being Elijah Muhammad's Muslim movement. This movement is nourished by the contemporary frustration over the continued existence of racial discrimination. It is made up of people who have lost faith in America, who have absolutely repudiated Christianity, and who have concluded that the white man is an incurable devil. I have tried to stand between these two forces, saying that we need not follow the do-nothingism of the complacent or the hatred and despair of the black nationalist. There is a more excellent way, of love and nonviolent protest. I'm grateful to God that, through the Negro church, the dimension of nonviolence entered our struggle. If this philosophy had not emerged, I am convinced that by now many streets of the South would be flowing with floods of blood. And I am further convinced that if our white brothers dismiss as "rabble-rousers" and "outside agitators" those of us who are working through the channels of nonviolent direct action and refuse to support our nonviolent efforts, millions of Negroes, out of frustration and despair, will seek solace and security in black nationalist ideologies, a development that will lead inevitably to a frightening racial nightmare.

Oppressed people cannot remain oppressed forever. The urge for freedom will eventually come. This is what has happened to the American Negro. Something within has reminded him of his birthright of freedom; something without has reminded him that he can gain it. Consciously and unconsciously, he has been swept in by what the Germans call the Zeitgeist, and with his black brothers of Africa and his brown and yellow brothers of Asia, South America, and the Caribbean, he is moving with a sense of cosmic urgency toward the promised land of racial justice. Recognizing this vital urge that has engulfed the Negro community, one should readily understand public demonstrations. The Negro has many pent-up resentments and latent frustrations. He has to get them out. So let him march sometime; let him have his prayer pilgrimages to the city hall; understand why he must have sit-ins and freedom rides. If his repressed emotions do not come out in these nonviolent ways, they will come out in ominous expressions of violence. This is not a threat; it is a fact of history. So I have not said to my people, "Get rid of your discontent." But I have tried to say that this normal and healthy discontent can be channeled through the creative outlet of nonviolent direct action. Now this approach is being dismissed as extremist. I must admit that I was initially disappointed in being so categorized.

But as I continued to think about the matter, I gradually gained a bit of satisfaction from being considered an extremist. Was not Jesus an extremist in love? -- "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, pray for them that despitefully use you." Was not Amos an extremist for justice? -- "Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream." Was not Paul an extremist for the gospel of Jesus Christ? -- "I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus." Was not Martin Luther an extremist? -- "Here I stand; I can do no other so help me God." Was not John Bunyan an extremist? -- "I will stay in jail to the end of my days before I make a mockery of my conscience." Was not Abraham Lincoln an extremist? -- "This nation cannot survive half slave and half free." Was not Thomas Jefferson an extremist? -- "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal." So the question is not whether we will be extremist, but what kind of extremists we will be. Will we be extremists for hate, or will we be extremists for love? Will we be extremists for the preservation of injustice, or will we be extremists for the cause of justice?
I had hoped that the white moderate would see this. Maybe I was too optimistic. Maybe I expected too much. I guess I should have realized that a few members of a race that has oppressed another race can understand or appreciate the deep groans and passionate yearnings of those that have been oppressed, and still fewer have the vision to see that injustice must be rooted out by strong, persistent, and determined action. I am thankful, however, that some of our white brothers have grasped the meaning of this social revolution and committed themselves to it. They are still all too small in quantity, but they are big in quality. Some, like Ralph McGill, Lillian Smith, Harry Golden, and James Dabbs, have written about our struggle in eloquent, prophetic, and understanding terms. Others have marched with us down nameless streets of the South. They sat in with us at lunch counters and rode in with us on the freedom rides. They have languished in filthy roach-infested jails, suffering the abuse and brutality of angry policemen who see them as "dirty nigger lovers." They, unlike many of their moderate brothers, have recognized the urgency of the moment and sensed the need for powerful "action" antidotes to combat the disease of segregation.

Let me rush on to mention my other disappointment. I have been disappointed with the white church and its leadership. Of course, there are some notable exceptions. I am not unmindful of the fact that each of you has taken some significant stands on this issue. I commend you, Reverend Stallings, for your Christian stand this past Sunday in welcoming Negroes to your Baptist Church worship service on a nonsegregated basis. I commend the Catholic leaders of this state for integrating Springhill College several years ago.

But despite these notable exceptions, I must honestly reiterate that I have been disappointed with the church. I do not say that as one of those negative critics who can always find something wrong with the church. I say it as a minister of the gospel who loves the church, who was nurtured in its bosom, who has been sustained by its Spiritual blessings, and who will remain true to it as long as the cord of life shall lengthen.

I had the strange feeling when I was suddenly catapulted into the leadership of the bus protest in Montgomery several years ago that we would have the support of the white church. I felt that the white ministers, priests, and rabbis of the South would be some of our strongest allies. Instead, some few have been outright opponents, refusing to understand the freedom movement and misrepresenting its leaders; all too many others have been more cautious than courageous and have remained silent behind the anesthetizing security of stained-glass windows.

In spite of my shattered dreams of the past, I came to Birmingham with the hope that the white religious leadership of this community would see the justice of our cause and with deep moral concern serve as the channel through which our just grievances could get to the power structure. I had hoped that each of you would understand. But again I have been disappointed.

I have heard numerous religious leaders of the South call upon their worshipers to comply with a desegregation decision because it is the law, but I have longed to hear white ministers say, follow this decree because integration is morally right and the Negro is your brother. In the midst of blatant injustices inflicted upon the Negro, I have watched white churches stand on the sidelines and merely mouth pious irrelevancies and sanctimonious trivialities. In the midst of a mighty struggle to rid our nation of racial and economic injustice, I have heard so many ministers say, "Those are social issues which the gospel has nothing to do with," and I have watched so many churches commit themselves to a completely otherworldly religion which made a strange distinction between bodies and souls, the sacred and the secular.

There was a time when the church was very powerful. It was during that period that the early Christians rejoiced when they were deemed worthy to suffer for what they believed. In those days the church was not merely a thermometer that recorded the ideas and principles of popular opinion; it was the thermostat that transformed the mores of society. Wherever the early Christians entered a town the power structure got disturbed and immediately sought to convict them for being "disturbers of the peace" and "outside agitators." But they went on with the conviction that they were "a colony of heaven" and had to obey God rather than man. They were small in number but big in commitment. They were too God-intoxicated to be "astronomically intimidated." They brought an end to such ancient evils as infanticide and gladiatorial contest.

Things are different now. The contemporary church is so often a weak, ineffectual voice with an uncertain sound. It is so often the arch supporter of the status quo. Far from being disturbed by the presence of the church, the power structure of the average community is consoled by the church's often vocal sanction of things as they are.

But the judgment of God is upon the church as never before. If the church of today does not recapture the sacrificial spirit of the early church, it will lose its authentic ring, forfeit the loyalty of millions, and be dismissed as an irrelevant social club with no meaning for the twentieth century. I meet young people every day whose disappointment with the church has risen to outright disgust.

I hope the church as a whole will meet the challenge of this decisive hour. But even if the church does not come to the aid of justice, I have no despair about the future. I have no fear about the outcome of our struggle in Birmingham, even if our motives are presently misunderstood. We will reach the goal of freedom in Birmingham and all over the nation, because the goal of America is freedom. Abused and scorned though we may be, our destiny is tied up with the destiny of America. Before the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth, we were here. Before the pen of Jefferson scratched across the pages of history the majestic word of the Declaration of Independence, we were here. For more than two centuries our foreparents labored here without wages; they made cotton king; and they built the homes of their masters in the midst of brutal injustice and shameful humiliation -- and yet out of a bottomless vitality our people continue to thrive and develop. If the inexpressible cruelties of slavery could not stop us, the opposition we now face will surely fail. We will win our freedom because the sacred heritage of our nation and the eternal will of God are embodied in our echoing demands.
I must close now. But before closing I am impelled to mention one other point in your statement that troubled me profoundly. You warmly commended the Birmingham police force for keeping "order" and "preventing violence." I don't believe you would have so warmly commended the police force if you had seen its angry violent dogs literally biting six unarmed, nonviolent Negroes. I don't believe you would so quickly commend the policemen if you would observe their ugly and inhuman treatment of Negroes here in the city jail; if you would watch them push and curse old Negro women and young Negro girls; if you would see them slap and kick old Negro men and young boys, if you would observe them, as they did on two occasions, refusing to give us food because we wanted to sing our grace together. I'm sorry that I can't join you in your praise for the police department.

It is true that they have been rather disciplined in their public handling of the demonstrators. In this sense they have been publicly "nonviolent." But for what purpose? To preserve the evil system of segregation. Over the last few years I have consistently preached that nonviolence demands that the means we use must be as pure as the ends we seek. So I have tried to make it clear that it is wrong to use immoral means to attain moral ends. But now I must affirm that it is just as wrong, or even more, to use moral means to preserve immoral ends.

I wish you had commended the Negro demonstrators of Birmingham for their sublime courage, their willingness to suffer, and their amazing discipline in the midst of the most inhuman provocation. One day the South will recognize its real heroes. They will be the James Merediths, courageously and with a majestic sense of purpose facing jeering and hostile mobs and the agonizing loneliness that characterizes the life of the pioneer. They will be old, oppressed, battered Negro women, symbolized in a seventy-two-year-old woman of Montgomery, Alabama, who rose up with a sense of dignity and with her people decided not to ride the segregated buses, and responded to one who inquired about her tiredness with ungrammatical profundity, "My feet is tired, but my soul is rested." They will be young high school and college students, young ministers of the gospel and a host of their elders courageously and nonviolently sitting in at lunch counters and willingly going to jail for conscience's sake. One day the South will know that when these dispossessed children of God sat down at lunch counters they were in reality standing up for the best in the American dream and the most sacred values in our Judeo-Christian heritage.

Never before have I written a letter this long -- or should I say a book? I'm afraid that it is much too long to take your precious time. I can assure you that it would have been much shorter if I had been writing from a comfortable desk, but what else is there to do when you are alone for days in the dull monotony of a narrow jail cell other than write long letters, think strange thoughts, and pray long prayers?

If I have said anything in this letter that is an understatement of the truth and is indicative of an unreasonable impatience, I beg you to forgive me. If I have said anything in this letter that is an overstatement of the truth and is indicative of my having a patience that makes me patient with anything less than brotherhood, I beg God to forgive me.

Yours for the cause of Peace and Brotherhood,

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

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**Martin Luther King Jr.’s Original New York Times Obituary**

_The obituary, which was published on April 5, 1968, celebrated the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. as a prophet of a crusade for racial equality and a voice of anguish for millions of people. In celebration of a man who accomplished so much for his people and his country in just a short period of time, here is the obituary in its entirety._

To many millions of American Negroes, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was the prophet of their crusade for racial equality. He was their voice of anguish, their eloquence in humiliation, their battle cry for human dignity. He forged for them the weapons of nonviolence that withstood and blunted the ferocity of segregation.

And to many millions of American whites, he was one of a group of Negroes who preserved the bridge of communication between races when racial warfare threatened the United States in the nineteen-sixties, as Negroes sought the full emancipation pledged to them a century before by Abraham Lincoln._

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**In Memoriam**

*Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.*

_April 4, 1968_
To the world Dr. King had the stature that accrued to a winner of the Nobel Peace Prize, a man with access to the White House and the Vatican; a veritable hero in the African states that were just emerging from colonialism.

Between Extremes

In his dedication to non-violence, Dr. King was caught between white and Negro extremists as racial tensions erupted into arson, gunfire and looting in many of the nation’s cities during the summer of 1967.

Militant Negroes, with the cry of, “burn, baby burn,” argued that only by violence and segregation could the Negro attain self-respect, dignity and real equality in the United States.

Floyd B. McKissick, when director of the Congress of Racial Equality, declared in August of that year that it was a “foolish assumption to try to sell nonviolence to the ghettos.”

And white extremists, not bothering to make distinctions between degrees of Negro militancy, looked upon Dr. King as one of their chief enemies.

At times in recent months, efforts by Dr. King to utilize nonviolent methods exploded into violence.

Violence in Memphis

Last week, when he led a protest march through downtown Memphis, Tenn., in support of the city’s striking sanitation workers, a group of Negro youths suddenly began breaking store windows and looting, and one Negro was shot to death.

Two days later, however, Dr. King said he would stage another demonstration and attributed the violence to his own “miscalculation.”

At the time he was assassinated in Memphis, Dr. King was involved in one of his greatest plans to dramatize the plight of the poor and stir Congress to help Negroes.

He called this venture the “Poor People’s Campaign.” It was to be a huge “camp-in” either in Washington or in Chicago during the Democratic National Convention.

In one of his last public announcements before the shooting, Dr. King told an audience in a Harlem church on March 26:

“We need an alternative to riots and to timid supplication. Nonviolence is our most potent weapon.”

His strong beliefs in civil rights and nonviolence made him one of the leading opponents of American participation in the war in Vietnam. To him the war was unjust, diverting vast sums away from programs to alleviate the condition of the Negro poor in this country. He called the conflict “one of history’s most cruel and senseless wars.”

Last January he said:

“We need to make clear in this political year, to Congressmen on both sides of the aisle and to the President of the United States that we will no longer vote for men who continue to see the killing of Vietnamese and Americans as the best way of advancing the goals of freedom and self-determination in Southeast Asia.”

Object of Many Attacks

Inevitably, as a symbol of integration, he became the object of unrelenting attacks and vilification. His home was bombed. He was spat upon and mocked. He was struck and kicked. He was stabbed, almost fatally, by a deranged Negro woman. He was frequently thrown into jail. Threats became so commonplace that his wife could ignore burning crosses on the lawn and ominous phone calls. Through it all he adhered to the creed of passive disobedience that infuriated segregationists.

The adulation that was heaped upon him eventually irritated some Negroes in the civil rights movement who worked hard, but in relative obscurity. They pointed out — and Dr. King admitted — that he was a poor administrator. Sometimes, with sarcasm, they referred to him, privately, as “De Lawd.” They noted that Dr. King’s successes were built on the labors of may who had gone before him, the noncoms and privates of the civil rights army who fought without benefit of headlines and television cameras.

The Negro extremists he criticized were contemptuous of Dr. King. They dismissed his passion for nonviolence as another form of servility to white people. They called him an “Uncle Tom,” and charged that he was hindering the Negro struggle for equality.

Dr. King’s belief in nonviolence was subjected to intense pressure in 1966, when some Negro groups adopted the slogan “black power” in the aftermath of civil rights marches into Mississippi and race riots in Northern cities. He rejected the idea, saying:

“The Negro needs the white man to free him from his fears. The white man needs the Negro to free him from his guilt. A doctrine of black supremacy is as evil as a doctrine of white supremacy.”

The doctrine of “black power” threatened to split the Negro civil rights movement and antagonize white liberals who had been supporting Negro causes, and Dr. King suggested “militant nonviolence” as a formula for progress with peace.

At the root of his civil rights convictions was an even more profound faith in the basic goodness of man and the great potential of American democracy. These beliefs gave to his speeches a fervor that could not be stilled by criticism.

Scores of millions of Americans — white as well as Negro — who sat before television sets in the summer of 1963 to watch the awesome march of some 200,000 Negroes on Washington were deeply stirred when Dr. King, in the shadow of the Lincoln Memorial, said:
“Even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream. I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: ‘We hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal.’”

And all over the world, men were moved as they read his words of Dec. 10, 1964, when he became the third member of his race to receive the Nobel Peace Prize.

**Insistent on Man’s Destiny**

“I refuse to accept the idea that man is mere flotsam and jetsam in the river of life which surrounds him,” he said. “I refuse to accept the view that mankind is so tragically bound to the starless midnight of racism and war that the bright daybreak of peace and brotherhood can never become a reality.

“I refuse to accept the cynical notion that nation after nation must spiral down a militaristic stairway into the hell of thermonuclear destruction. I believe that unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the final word in reality. This is why right, temporarily defeated, is stronger than evil triumphant.”

For the poor and unlettered of his own race, Dr. King spoke differently. He embraced the rhythm and passion of the revivalist and evangelist. Some observers of Dr. King’s technique said that others in the movement were more effective in this respect. But Dr. King had the touch, as he illustrated in a church in Albany, Ga., in 1962:

“So listen to me, children: Put on your marching shoes; don’tcha get weary; though the path ahead may be dark and dreary; we’re walking for freedom, children.”

Or there was the meeting in Gadsen, Ala., late in 1963, when he displayed another side of his ability before an audience of poor Negroes. It went as follows:

**King:** “I hear they are beating you.”

**Audience:** “Yes, yes.”

**King:** “I hear they are cursing you.”

**Audience:** “Yes, yes.”

**King:** “I hear they are going into your homes and doing nasty things and beating you.”

**Audience:** “Yes, yes.”

**King:** “Some of you have knives, and I ask you to put them up. Some of you have arms, and I ask you to put them up. Get the weapon of non-violence, the breastplate of righteousness, the armor of truth, and just keep marching.”

It was said that so devoted was his vast following that even among illiterates he could, by calm discussion of Platonic dogma, evoke deep cries of “Amen.”

Dr. King also had a way of reducing complex issues to terms that anyone could understand. Thus, in the summer of 1965, when there was widespread discontent among Negroes about their struggle for equality of employment, he declared:

“What good does it do to be able to eat at a lunch counter if you can’t buy a hamburger.”

The enormous impact of Dr. King’s words was one of the reasons he was in the President’s Room in the Capitol on Aug. 6, 1965, when President Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act that struck down literacy tests, provided Federal registrars to assure the ballot to unregistered Negroes and marked the growth of the Negro as a political force in the South.

**Backed by Organization**

Dr. King’s effectiveness was enhanced and given continuity by the fact that he had an organization behind him. Formed in 1960, with headquarters in Atlanta, it was called the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, familiarly known as SLICK. Allied with it was another organization formed under Dr. King’s sponsorship the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, often referred to as SNICK.

These two organizations reached the country, though their basic strength was in the South. They brought together Negro clergymen, businessmen, professional men and students. They raised the money and planned the sit-ins, the campaigns for Negro vote registration, the demonstrations by which Negroes hacked away at segregationist resistance, lowering the barriers against Negroes in the political, economic and social life of the nation.

This minister, who became the most famous spokesman for Negro rights since Booker T. Washington, was not particularly impressive in appearance. About 5 feet 8 inches tall, he had an oval face with almond-shaped eyes that looked almost dreamy when he was off the platform. His neck and shoulders where heavily muscled, but his hands were almost delicate.

**Speaker of Few Gestures**

There was little of the rabblerouser in his oratory. He was not prone to extravagant gestures or loud peroration. His baritone voice, though vibrant, was not that of a spellbinder. Occasionally, after a particular telling sentence, he would tilt his head a bit and fall silent as though waiting for the echoes of his thought to spread through the hall, church or street.

In private gatherings, Dr. King lacked that laughing gregariousness that often makes for popularity. Some thought he was without a sense of humor. He was not a gifted raconteur. He did not have the flamboyance of a Representative Adam Clayton Powell Jr. or the cool strategic brilliance of Roy Wilkins, head of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.
What Dr. King did have was an instinct for the right moment to make his moves. Some critics looked upon this as pure opportunism. Nevertheless, it was this sense of timing that raised him in 1955, from a newly arrived minister in Montgomery, Ala., with his first church, to a figure of national prominence.

**Bus Boycott in Progress**

Negroes in that city had begun a boycott of buses to win the right to sit where they pleased instead of being forced to move to the rear of buses, in Southern tradition or to surrender seats to white people when a bus was crowded.

The 381-day boycott by Negroes was already under way when the young pastor was placed in charge of the campaign. It has been said that one of the reasons he got the job was because he was so new in the area he had not antagonized any of the Negro factions. Even while the boycott was under way, a board of directors handled the bulk of administrative work.

However, it was Dr. King who dramatized the boycott with his decision to make it the testing ground, before the eyes of the nation, of his belief in the civil disobedience teachings of Thoreau and Gandhi. When he was arrested during the Montgomery boycott, he said:

“If we are arrested every day, if we are exploited every day, if we are trampled over every day, don’t ever let anyone pull you so low as to hate them. We must use the weapon of love. We must have compassion and understanding for those who hate us. We must realize so many people are taught to hate us that they are not totally responsible for their hate. But we stand in life at midnight; we are always on the threshold of a new dawn.”

**Home Bombed in Absence**

Even more dramatic, in some ways, was his reaction to the bombing of his home during the boycott. He was away at the time and rushed back fearful for his wife and children. They were not injured. But when he reached the modest house, more than a thousand Negroes had already gathered and were in an ugly mood, seeking revenge against the white people. The police were jittery. Quickly, Dr. King pacified the crowd and there was no trouble.

Dr. King was even more impressive during the “big push” in Birmingham, which began in April, 1963. With the minister at the limelight, Negroes there began a campaign of sit-ins at lunch counters, picketing and protest marches. Hundreds of children, used in the campaign, were jailed.

The entire world was stirred when the police turned dogs on the demonstrators. Dr. King was jailed for five days. While he was in prison he issued a 9,000-word letter that created considerable controversy among white people, alienating some sympathizers who thought Dr. King was being too aggressive.

**Moderates Called Obstacles**

In the letter he wrote:

“I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the Negro’s great stumbling block in the stride toward freedom is not the White Citizens Councilor or the Ku Klux Klanner, but the white moderate who is more devoted to order than to justice; who prefers a negative peace, which is the absence of tension, to a positive peace, which is the presence of justice.”

Some critics of Dr. King said that one reason for this letter was to answer Negro intellectuals, such as the writer James Baldwin, who were impatient with Dr. King’s belief in brotherhood. Whatever the reasons, the role of Dr. King in Birmingham added to his stature and showed that his enormous following was deeply devoted to him.

He demonstrated this in a threatening situation in Albany, Ga., after four Negro girls were killed in the bombing of a church. Dr. King said at the funeral:

“In spite of the darkness of this hour, we must not despair. We must not lose faith in our white brothers.”

As Dr. King’s words grew more potent and he was invited to the White House by Presidents Kennedy and Johnson, some critics—Negroes as well as white— noted that sometimes, despite all the publicity he attracted, he left campaigns unfinished or else failed to attain his goals.

Dr. King was aware of this. But he pointed out, in 1964, in St Augustine, Fla., one of the toughest civil rights battlegrounds, that there were important intangibles.

“Even if we do not get all we should,” he said, “movements such as this tend more and more to give a Negro the sense of self-respect that he needs. It tends to generate courage in Negroes outside the movement. It brings intangible results outside the community where it is carried out. There is a hardening of attitudes in situations like this. But other cities see and say: ‘We don’t want to be another Albany or Birmingham,’ and they make changes. Some communities, like this one, had to bear the cross.”

It was in this city that Negroes marched into the fists of the mob singing: “We love everybody.”

**Conscious of Leading Role**

There was no false modesty in Dr. King’s self-appraisal of his role in the civil rights movement.

“History,” he said, “has thrust me into this position. It would be both immoral and a sign of ingratitude if I did not face my moral responsibility to do what I can in this struggle.”

Another time he compared himself to Socrates as one of “the creative gadflies of society.”
At times he addressed himself deliberately to the white people of the nations. Once, he said:

“We will match your capacity to inflict suffering with our capacity to endure suffering. We will meet your physical force with soul force. We will not hate you, but we cannot in all good conscience obey your unjust laws … We will soon wear you down by our capacity to suffer. And in winning our freedom we will so appeal to your heart and conscience that we will win you in the process.”

The enormous influence of Dr. King’s voice in the turbulent racial conflict reached into New York in 1964. In the summer of that year racial rioting exploded in New York and in other Northern cities with large Negro populations. There was widespread fear that the disorders, particularly in Harlem, might set of unprecedented racial violence.

At this point Dr. King became one of the major intermediaries in restoring order. He conferred with Mayor Robert F. Wagner and with Negro leaders. A statement was issued, of which he was one of the signers, calling for “a broad curtailment if not total moratorium on mass demonstrations until after Presidential elections.”

The following year, Dr. King was once more in the headlines and on television — this time leading a drive for Negro voter registration in Selma, Ala. Negroes were arrested by the hundreds. Dr. King was punched and kicked by a white man when, during this period of protest, he became the first Negro to register at a century-old hotel in Selma.

Martin Luther King Jr. was born Jan. 15, 1929, in Atlanta on Auburn Avenue. As a child his name was Michael Luther King and so was his father’s. His father changed both their names legally to Martin Luther King in honor of the Protestant reformer.

Auburn Avenue is one of the nation’s most widely known Negro sections. Many successful Negro business or professional men have lived there. The Rev. Martin Luther King Sr. was pastor of the Ebenezer Baptist Church at Jackson Street and Auburn Avenue.

Young Martin went to Atlanta’s Morehouse College, a Negro institution whose students acquired what was sometimes called the “Morehouse swank.” The president of Morehouse, Dr. B. E. Mays, took a special interest in Martin, who had decided, in his junior year, to be a clergyman.

He was ordained a minister in his father’s church in 1947. It was in this church he was to say, some years later:

“Amercia, you’re strayed away. You’ve trampled over 19 million of your brethren. All men are created equal. Not some men. Not white men. All men. America, rise up and come home.”

Before Dr. King had his own church he pursued his studies in the integrated Crozier Theological Seminary, in Chester, Pa. He was one of six Negroes in a student body of about a hundred. He became the first Negro class president. He was named the outstanding student and won a fellowship to study for a doctorate at the school of his choice. The young man enrolled at Boston College in 1951.

For his doctoral thesis he sought to resolve the differences between the Harvard theologian Paul Tillich and the neo-naturalist philosopher Henry Nelson Wieman. During this period he took courses at Harvard, as well.

While he was working on his doctorate he met Coretta Scott, a graduate of Antioch College, who was doing graduate work in music. He married the singer in 1953. They had four children, Yolanda, Martin Luther King 3d, Dexter Scott and Bernice.

In 1954, Dr. King became pastor of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Ala. At that time few of Montgomery’s white residents saw any reason for a major dispute with the city’s 50,000 Negroes. They did not seem to realize how deeply the Negroes resented segregated seating on buses, for instance.

**Revolt Begun by Woman**

On Dec. 1, 1955, they learned, almost by accident. Mrs. Rosa Parks, a Negro seamstress, refused to comply with a bus driver’s order to give up her seat to a white passenger. She was tired, she said. Her feet hurt from a day of shopping.

Mrs. Parks had been a local secretary for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. She was arrested, convicted of refusing to obey the bus conductor and fined $10 and costs, a total of $14. Almost as spontaneous as Mrs. Parks’ act was the rallying of many Negro leaders in the city to help her.

From a protest begun over a Negro woman’s tired feet Dr. King began his public career.

In 1959, Dr. King and his family moved back to Atlanta, where he became a co-pastor, with his father, of the Ebenezer Baptist Church.

As his fame increased, public interest in his beliefs led him to write books. It was while he was autographing one of these books, “Stride Toward Freedom,” in a Harlem department store that he was stabbed by a Negro woman.

It was in these books that he summarized, in detail, his beliefs as well as his career. Thus, in “Why We Can’t Wait,” he wrote:

“‘The Negro knows he is right. He has not organized for conquest or to gain spoils or to enslave those who have injured him. His goal is not to capture that which belongs to someone else. He merely wants, and will have, what is honorably his.”

The possibility that he might someday be assassinated was considered by Dr. King on June 5, 1964, when he reported, in St. Augustine, Fla., that his life had been threatened. He said:

“‘Well, if physical death is the price that I must pay to free my white brothers and sisters from a permanent death of the spirit, then nothing can be more redemptive.”