

PORTRAIT OF
AMERICA

SIXTH EDITION

VOLUME II
*From Reconstruction
to the Present*

STEPHEN B. OATES

UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS, AMHERST

HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY

BOSTON TORONTO GENEVA, ILLINOIS

PALO ALTO PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY

CONTENTS

PREFACE

xiii

Again, for Greg and Stephanie with my love

Sponsoring editor Sean W. Wakely
Senior associate editor Jeffrey Greene
Senior project editor Rosemary Winfield
Production/design coordinator Jennifer Waddell
Senior manufacturing coordinator Priscilla Bailey
Marketing manager Rebecca Dudley

Cover image: Ralph Stackpole (1885–1973), “Industries of California,” 1934, Fresco PWAP/FAP, Coit Tower, San Francisco, Photograph by Don Beatty © 1981.

Cover design: Edda V. Sigurdardottir.

Copyright © 1995 by Houghton Mifflin Company. All rights reserved. No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying and recording, or by any information storage or retrieval system without the prior written permission of the copyright owner unless such copying is expressly permitted by federal copyright law. With the exception of nonprofit transcription in Braille, Houghton Mifflin is not authorized to grant permission for further uses of copyrighted selections reprinted in this text without the permission of their owners. Permission must be obtained from the individual copyright owners as identified herein. Address requests for permission to make copies of Houghton Mifflin material to College Permissions, Houghton Mifflin Company, 222 Berkeley Street, Boston, MA 02116-3764.

Printed in the U.S.A.
Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 94-76537
ISBN: 0-395-70888-5
123456789-DH-97 96 95 94

I A TROUBLED PEACE 1

1. Eric Foner, *From Slavery to Freedom: The Birth of the Modern Black Community* 2

An award-winning Reconstruction scholar disposes of the canard that blacks were passive and undeserving recipients of freedom after the Civil War. In the critical first year of Reconstruction, Foner shows, black Americans set about expanding and strengthening their traditional institutions, thereby establishing the modern black community.

2. James MacGregor Burns, *Reconstruction: The Revolution that Failed* 17

Burns views congressional Reconstruction as a failed revolutionary experiment. He argues that the Republican Congress went too far in trying to centralize power in the legislative branch. While the Republicans did try to bring southern blacks into the American mainstream, Burns says, they failed to provide the former slaves with the economic freedom necessary to be truly free in America.

II CONQUEST OF THE WEST 31

3. Robert M. Utley, *Sitting Bull and the Sioux Resistance* 32

A knowledgeable and insightful portrait of the great holy man and warrior of the buffalo-hunting Lakota. Sitting Bull's life serves as a window to what happened to the Plains Indians when they collided with a rapacious, acquisitive invader with superior military power.

4. Miriam Horn, *How the West Was Really Won* 46

An excellent summary of the modern revisionist interpretation of the conquest of the American West, this selection challenges the frontier myths and stresses the ecological destruction, racism, and greed that characterized much of U.S. westward expansion.

III THE NEW INDUSTRIAL ORDER 59

5. Robert L. Heilbroner, *The Master of Steel: Andrew Carnegie* 60

Heilbroner offers a splendid portrait of the man who embodied the spirit of the Gilded Age perhaps more than any other tycoon of the period. Carnegie not only created but advocated and celebrated industrial power. He even argued that evolution produced

Trumpet of Conscience: Martin Luther King, Jr.

STEPHEN B. OATES

For most African Americans, the Depression had been an unmitigated calamity. An impoverished group to begin with, African Americans, especially southern sharecroppers, suffered worse than any other minority. World War II, however, offered African Americans relief, and they made considerable progress during the conflict. The war accelerated their exodus to the North, as southern blacks sought employment in war-related industry there. At first, white employers refused to hire African American workers, and the Roosevelt administration did little to stop such discrimination until A. Philip Randolph—the celebrated African American labor leader—threatened to lead a massive protest march. Roosevelt responded with an executive order that prohibited racial discrimination in defense plants and government agencies alike. By the close of 1944, 2 million African American men and women were working in shipyards, aircraft factories, steel mills, and other defense plants. At the same time, almost 1 million African Americans served in the United States armed forces—half of them overseas in segregated outfits. By war's end, however, some of the army bases at home were partly integrated, and African American sailors were serving on ships with whites.

Alas, African American soldiers and sailors who fought in a war against Nazi racists returned home to confront massive racial discrimination against them, especially in segregated Dixie. Many of those veterans joined the NAACP, which now had chapters across the South, and became civil rights activists. In the postwar years, President Harry Truman proved to be sympathetic to the plight of African Americans and did much to help them:

he established a special committee on civil rights, which worked out an agenda for attacking segregation that continued for two decades. Truman also issued an executive order that ended segregation in the armed forces. Ironically, the military would become the most integrated institution in the United States.

The NAACP, meanwhile, continued to battle segregation in case-by-case litigation in the federal courts and marked hard-earned victories against southern white primaries and segregated law schools in the border states. In May 1954, the NAACP Legal Defense Fund won its most spectacular triumph before the United States Supreme Court. In *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, the High Court outlawed segregation in public schools, thus reversing the doctrine of "separate but equal" that had prevailed since *Plessy v. Ferguson* fifty-eight years earlier. Said the Court: "Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal" and created "a feeling of inferiority" in African American students "that may affect their hearts and minds in a way unlikely ever to be undone." In one historic blow, the Supreme Court smashed the whole legal superstructure for the idea of racial separateness, knocking down a century and a half of devious rationalizations in defense of the doctrine that African Americans must be kept apart because they were inferior.

But the white South obstructed the school decision at every turn. The Alabama legislature "nullified" the Court decision, vowing to preserve white supremacy come what may. Fiery crosses burned against Texas and Florida skies, and random Klan terrorism broke out against African Americans in many parts of Dixie. Faced with stiffening white resistance, the Supreme Court did not order immediate compliance with the *Brown* decision and called instead for desegregation of public schools "with all deliberate speed." But the Court offered no guidelines and set no timetable. In 1956, more than one hundred southern members of Congress signed a "manifesto" that damned the Court decision and summoned the white South to defy it to the bitter end. Mustering its own legal forces, white officialdom promised to tie up the *Brown* decision in "a century of litigation."

For African Americans, the road to freedom's land was elusive indeed. Most African Americans in the South languished in searing poverty and a rigid racial caste system that relegated them to the gutters of southern society and kept them away from the polls and out of politics.

How did African Americans feel about segregation? What did they say alone among themselves? "Laud, man!" an elevator operator once told an African American writer. "Ef it wuzn't fer them polices n' them ol' lynch-mobs, there wouldn't be nothin' but uproar down here."

In 1955, African Americans in the South created an uproar despite the police and the lynchings. That was the year of the Montgomery bus boycott, an event that launched the nonviolent civil rights protest movement of the 1950s and 1960s. Many people rose to prominence in the movement, but Martin Luther King, Jr., became its most popular and most eloquent spokesman. In this selection, you will walk with King from his birth in

Atlanta and his intellectual odyssey in college to the great and impassioned days of the civil rights movement in the 1960s. As you ponder King's life and significance, consider what writer-historian Garry Wills said of King in The Kennedy Imprisonment (1982), "While Washington's 'best and brightest' worked us into Vietnam," Wills wrote, "an obscure army of virtue arose in the South and took the longer spiritual trip inside a public bathroom or toward the front of a bus. King rallied the strength of broken [men and women], transmuting an imposed squalor into the beauty of chosen suffering. No one did it for his followers. They did it for themselves. Yet, in helping them, he exercised real power, achieved changes that dwarf the moon shot as an American achievement. The 'Kennedy era' was really the age of Dr. King."

GLOSSARY

BLACK POWER In 1966, angry, disaffected young militants in the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) turned away from nonviolence and racial integration; inspired by the earlier teachings of Malcolm X (see selection 26), they started advocating Black Power — the need for African Americans to organize themselves and consolidate their economic and political resources — as well as black separatism and even violent resistance.

CIVIL RIGHTS ACT OF 1964 Outlawed segregated public accommodations — the goal of King's civil rights campaign in Birmingham.

CONGRESS OF RACIAL EQUALITY (CORE) Founded in 1942, it staged sit-ins and applied Gandhian direct-action techniques to the American scene; in 1961, under the leadership of James Farmer, CORE sponsored the freedom rides to call attention to segregated busing facilities in the South, and the federal government responded by desegregating interstate bus stations.

CONNOR, EUGENE "BULL" City police commissioner who gained worldwide notoriety when he turned firehoses and police dogs on King's followers during the Birmingham demonstrations.

GANDHI, MOHANDAS The father of modern India whose teachings on nonviolent resistance and *Satyagraha* — love force — profoundly influenced King.

MONTGOMERY BUS BOYCOTT (1955–1956) King rose to prominence as leader of this protest demonstration against segregated seating on Montgomery city buses; the Supreme Court finally nullified the Alabama laws that enforced the practice.

RAY, JAMES EARL King's assassin and a petty crook; subsequent evidence linked Ray to two white men in the St. Louis area who had offered "hit" money for King's life.

SOUTHERN CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE (SCLC) King's civil rights organization, which worked through African American churches to effect social and political change.

STUDENT NONVIOLENT COORDINATING COMMITTEE (SNCC) Established with King's help in 1960, SNCC organized sit-ins and voter-registration drives in segregated Dixie; many of its leaders were jealous of King, calling him "De Lawd."

VOTING RIGHTS ACT OF 1965 Passed in response to the Selma campaign, the measure

outlawed barriers to voting by African Americans and authorized the attorney general to supervise federal elections in seven southern states where African Americans were kept off the voting rolls.

He was M.L. to his parents, Martin to his wife and friends, Doc to his aides, Reverend to his male parishioners, Little Lord Jesus to adoring churchwomen, De Lawd to his young critics in the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, and Martin Luther King, Jr., to the world. At his pulpit or a public rostrum, he seemed too small for his incomparable oratory and international fame as a civil rights leader and spokesman for world peace. He stood only five feet seven, and had round cheeks, a trim mustache, and sad, glistening eyes — eyes that revealed both his inner strength and his vulnerability.

He was born in Atlanta on January 15, 1929, and grew up in the relative comfort of the black middle class. Thus he never suffered the want and privation that plagued the majority of American blacks of his time. His father, a gruff, self-made man, was pastor of Ebenezer Baptist Church and an outspoken member of Atlanta's black leadership. M.L. joined his father's church when he was five and came to regard it as his second home. The church defined his world, gave it order and balance, taught him how to "get along with people." Here M.L. knew who he was — "Reverend King's boy," somebody special.

At home, his parents and maternal grandmother reinforced his self-esteem, praising him for his precocious ways, telling him repeatedly that he was *somebody*. By age five, he spoke like an adult and had such a prodigious memory that he could recite whole Biblical passages and entire hymns without a mistake. He was acutely sensitive, too, so much so that he worried about all the blacks he saw in Atlanta's breadlines during the Depression, fearful that their children did not have enough to eat. When his maternal grandmother died, twelve-year-old M.L. thought it was his fault. Without telling anyone, he had slipped away from

From "Trumpet of Conscience," by Stephen B. Oates. In *American History Illustrated* (April 1988), 18–27, 52. Reprinted through courtesy of Cowles Magazines, publisher of *American History Illustrated*.

home to watch a parade, only to find out when he returned that she had died. He was terrified that God had taken her away as punishment for his "sin." Guilt-stricken, he tried to kill himself by leaping out of his second-story window.

He had a great deal of anger in him. Growing up a black in segregated Atlanta, he felt the full range of southern racial discrimination. He discovered that he had to attend separate, inferior schools, which he sailed through with a modicum of effort, skipping grades as he went. He found out that he — a preacher's boy — could not sit at lunch counters in Atlanta's downtown stores. He had to drink from a "colored" water fountain, relieve himself in a rancid "colored" restroom, and ride a rickety "colored" elevator. If he rode a city bus, he had to sit in the back as though he were contaminated. If he wanted to see a movie in a downtown theater, he had to enter through a side door and sit in the "colored" section in the balcony. He discovered that whites referred to blacks as "boys" and "girls" regardless of age. He saw "WHITES ONLY" signs staring back at him in the windows of barber shops and all the good restaurants and hotels, at the YMCA, the city parks, golf courses, swimming pools, and in the waiting rooms of the train and bus stations. He learned that there were even white and black sections of the city and that he resided in "nigger town."

Segregation caused a tension in the boy, a tension between his parents' injunction ("Remember, you are *somebody*") and a system that constantly demeaned and insulted him. He struggled with the pain and rage he felt when a white woman in a downtown store slapped him and called him "a little nigger" . . . when a bus driver called him "a black son-of-a-bitch" and made him surrender his seat to a white . . . when he stood on the very spot in Atlanta where whites had lynched a black man . . . when he witnessed nightriding Klansmen beating blacks in the streets. How, he asked defiantly, could he heed the Christian injunction and love a race of people who hated him? In retaliation, he determined "to hate every white person."

Yes, he was angry. In sandlot games, he competed so fiercely that friends could not tell whether he was playing or fighting. He had his share of playground combat, too, and could outwrestle any of his peers. He even rebelled against his father, vowing never to become a preacher like him. Yet he liked the way Daddy King stood up to whites: he told them never to call him a boy and vowed to fight this system until he died.

Still, there was another side to M.L., a calmer, sensuous side. He played the violin, enjoyed opera, and relished soul food — fried chicken, cornbread, and collard greens with ham hocks and bacon drippings. By his mid-teens, his voice was the most memorable thing about him. It had changed into a rich and resonant baritone that commanded attention whenever he held forth. A natty dresser, nicknamed "Tweed" because of his fondness for tweed suits, he became a connoisseur of lovely young women. His little brother A.D. remembered how Martin "kept flitting from chick to chick" and was "just about the best jitterbug in town."

At age fifteen, he entered Morehouse College in Atlanta, wanting somehow to help his people. He thought about becoming a lawyer and even practiced giving trial speeches before a mirror in his room. But thanks largely to Morehouse President Benjamin Mays, who showed him that the ministry could be a respectable forum for ideas, even for social protest, King decided to become a Baptist preacher after all. By the time he was ordained in 1947, his resentment toward whites had softened some, thanks to positive contact with white students on an intercollegiate council. But he hated his segregated world more than ever.

Once he had his bachelor's degree, he went north to study at Crozer Seminary near Philadelphia. In this mostly white school, with its polished corridors and quiet solemnity, King continued to ponder the plight of blacks in America. How, by what method and means, were blacks to improve their lot in a white-

dominated country? His study of history, especially of Nat Turner's slave insurrection, convinced him that it was suicidal for a minority to strike back against a heavily armed majority. For him, voluntary segregation was equally unacceptable, as was accommodation to the status quo. King shuddered at such negative approaches to the race problem. How indeed were blacks to combat discrimination in a country ruled by the white majority?

As some other blacks had done, he found his answer in the teachings of Mohandas Gandhi — for young King, the discovery had the force of a conversion experience. Nonviolent resistance, Gandhi taught, meant noncooperation with evil, an idea he got from Henry David Thoreau's essay "On Civil Disobedience." In India, Gandhi gave Thoreau's theory practical application in the form of strikes, boycotts, and protest marches, all conducted nonviolently and all predicated on love for the oppressor and a belief in divine justice. In gaining Indian independence, Gandhi sought not to defeat the British, but to redeem them through love, so as to avoid a legacy of bitterness. Gandhi's term for this — *Satyagraha* — reconciled love and force in a single, powerful concept.

As King discovered from his studies, Gandhi had embraced nonviolence in part to subdue his own violent nature. This was a profound revelation for King, who had felt much hatred in his life, especially toward whites. Now Gandhi showed him a means of harnessing his anger and channeling it into a positive and creative force for social change.

At this juncture, King found mostly theoretical satisfaction in Gandhian nonviolence; he had no plans to become a reformer in the segregated South. Indeed, he seemed destined to a life of the mind, not of social protest. In 1951, he graduated from Crozer and went on to earn a Ph.D. in theology from Boston University, where his adviser pronounced him "a scholar's scholar" of great intellectual potential. By 1955, a year after the school desegregation decision, King had

married comely Coretta Scott and assumed the pastorate of Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama. Immensely happy in the world of ideas, he hoped eventually to teach theology at a major university or seminary.

But, as King liked to say, the *Zeitgeist*, or spirit of the age, had other plans for him. In December 1955, Montgomery blacks launched a boycott of the city's segregated buses and chose the articulate twenty-six-year-old minister as their spokesman. As it turned out, he was unusually well prepared to assume the kind of leadership thrust on him. Drawing on Gandhi's teachings and example, plus the tenets of his own Christian faith, King directed a nonviolent boycott designed



A pensive King stands beside a portrait of Mohandas Gandhi, the Indian spiritual and political leader. "As King discovered from his studies, Gandhi had embraced nonviolence in part to subdue his own violent nature. This was a profound revelation for King, who had felt much hatred in his life, especially toward whites. Now Gandhi showed him a means of harnessing his anger and channeling it into a positive and creative force for social change." (Bob Fitch/Black Star)

both to end an injustice and redeem his white adversaries through love. When he exhorted blacks to love their enemies, King did not mean to love them as friends or intimates. No, he said, he meant a disinterested love in all humankind, a love that saw the neighbor in everyone it met, a love that sought to restore the beloved community. Such love not only avoided the internal violence of the spirit, but severed the external chain of hatred that only produced more hatred in an endless spiral. If American blacks could break the chain of hatred, King said, true brotherhood could begin. Then posterity would have to say that there had lived a race of people, of black people, who "injected a new meaning into the veins of history and civilization."

During the boycott King imparted his philosophy at twice-weekly mass meetings in the black churches, where overflow crowds clapped and cried as his mellifluous voice swept over them. In these mass meetings King discovered his extraordinary power as an orator. His rich religious imagery reached deep into the black psyche, for religion had been the black people's main source of strength and survival since slavery days. His delivery was "like a narrative poem," said a woman journalist who heard him. His voice had such depths of sincerity and empathy that it could "charm your heart right out of your body." Because he appealed to the best in his people, articulating their deepest hurts and aspirations, black folk began to idolize him; he was their Gandhi.

Under his leadership, they stood up to white Montgomery in a remarkable display of solidarity. Pitted against an obdurate city government that blamed the boycott on Communist agitators and resorted to psychological and legal warfare to break it, the blacks stayed off the buses month after month, and walked or rode in a black-operated carpool. When an elderly woman refused the offer of a ride, King asked her, "But don't your feet hurt?" "Yes," she replied, "my feet is tired but my soul is rested." For King, her irrepressible spirit was proof that "a new Negro" was

emerging in the South, a Negro with "a new sense of dignity and destiny."

That "new Negro" menaced white supremacists, especially the Ku Klux Klan, and they persecuted King with a vengeance. They made obscene phone calls to his home, sent him abusive, sickening letters, and once even dynamited the front of his house. Nobody was hurt, but King, fearing a race war, had to dissuade angry blacks from violent retaliation. Finally, on November 13, 1956, the U.S. Supreme Court nullified the Alabama laws that enforced segregated buses, and handed King and his boycotters a resounding moral victory. Their protest had captured the imagination of progressive people all over the world and marked the beginning of a southern black movement that would shake the segregated South to its foundations. At the forefront of that movement was a new organization, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), which King and other black ministers formed in 1957, with King serving as its president and guiding spirit. Operating through the southern black church, SCLC sought to enlist the black masses in the freedom struggle by expanding "the Montgomery way" across the South.

The "Miracle of Montgomery" changed King's life, catapulting him into international prominence as an inspiring new moral voice for civil rights. Across the country, blacks and whites alike wrote him letters of encouragement; *Time* magazine pictured him on its cover; the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and scores of church and civic organizations vied for his services as a speaker. "I am really disturbed how fast all this has happened to me," King told his wife. "People will expect me to perform miracles for the rest of my life."

But fame had its evil side, too. When King visited New York in 1958, a deranged black woman stabbed him in the chest with a letter opener. The weapon was lodged so close to King's aorta, the main artery from the heart, that he would have died had he sneezed. To extract the blade, an interracial surgical

team had to remove a rib and part of his breastbone; in a burst of inspiration, the lead surgeon made the incision over King's heart in the shape of a cross.

That he had not died convinced King that God was preparing him for some larger work in the segregated South. To gain perspective on what was happening there, he made a pilgrimage to India to visit Gandhi's shrine and the sites of his "War for Independence." He returned home with an even deeper commitment to nonviolence and a vow to be more humble and ascetic like Gandhi. Yet he was a man of manifold contradictions, this American Gandhi. While renouncing material things and giving nearly all of his extensive honorariums to SCLC, he liked posh hotels and zesty meals with wine, and he was always immaculately dressed in a gray or black suit, white shirt, and tie. While caring passionately for the poor, the down-trodden, and the disinherited, he had a fascination with men of affluence and enjoyed the company of wealthy SCLC benefactors. While trumpeting the glories of nonviolence and redemptive love, he could feel the most terrible anger when whites murdered a black or bombed a black church; he could contemplate giving up, turning America over to the haters of both races, only to dedicate himself anew to his non-violent faith and his determination to redeem his country.

In 1960, he moved his family to Atlanta so that he could devote himself fulltime to SCLC, which was trying to register black voters for the upcoming federal elections. That same year, southern black students launched the sit-in movement against segregated lunch counters, and King not only helped them form the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) but raised money on their behalf. In October he even joined a sit-in protest at an Atlanta department store and went to jail with several students on a trespassing charge. Like Thoreau, King considered jail "a badge of honor." To redeem the nation and arouse the conscience of the opponent, King explained, you

go to jail and stay there. "You have broken a law which is out of line with the moral law and you are willing to suffer the consequences by serving the time."

He did not reckon, however, on the tyranny of racist officials, who clamped him in a malevolent state penitentiary, in a cell for hardened criminals. But state authorities released him when Democratic presidential nominee John F. Kennedy and his brother Robert interceded on King's behalf. According to many analysts, the episode won critical black votes for Kennedy and gave him the election in November. For King, the election demonstrated what he had long said: that one of the most significant steps a black could take was the short walk to the voting booth.

The trouble was that most blacks in Dixie, especially in the Deep South, could not vote even if they so desired. For decades, state and local authorities had kept the mass of black folk off the voting rolls by a welter of devious obstacles and outright intimidation. Through 1961 and 1962, King exhorted President Kennedy to sponsor tough new civil rights legislation that would enfranchise southern blacks and end segregated public accommodations as well. When Kennedy shied away from a strong civil rights commitment, King and his lieutenants took matters into their own hands, orchestrating a series of southern demonstrations to show the world the brutality of segregation. At the same time, King stumped the country, drawing on all his powers of oratory to enlist the black masses and win white opinion to his cause.

Everywhere he went his message was the same. *The civil rights issue, he said, is an eternal moral issue that will determine the destiny of our nation and our world. As we seek our full rights, we hope to redeem the soul of our country. For it is our country, too, and we will win our freedom because the sacred heritage of America and the eternal will of God are embodied in our echoing demands. We do not intend to humiliate the white man, but to win him over through the strength of our love. Ultimately, we are trying to free all of us in America — Negroes from the bonds of seg-*

regation and shame, whites from the bonds of bigotry and fear.

We stand today between two worlds — the dying old order and the emerging new. With men of ill-will greeting this change with cries of violence, of interposition and nullification, some of us may get beaten. Some of us may even get killed. But if you are cut down in a movement designed to save the soul of a nation, no other death could be more redemptive. We must realize that change does not roll in “on the wheels of inevitability,” but comes through struggle. So “let us be those creative dissenters who will call our beloved nation to a higher destiny, to a new plateau of compassion, to a more noble expression of humaneness.”

That message worked like magic among America's long-suffering blacks. Across the South, across America, they rose in unprecedented numbers to march and demonstrate with Martin Luther King. His singular achievement was that he brought the black masses into the freedom struggle for the first time. He rallied the strength of broken men and women, helping them overcome a lifetime of fear and feelings of inferiority. After segregation had taught them all their lives that they were *nobody*, King taught them that they were *somebody*. Because he made them believe in themselves and in “the beauty of chosen suffering,” he taught them how to straighten their backs (“a man can't ride you unless your back is bent”) and confront those who oppressed them. Through the technique of nonviolent resistance, he furnished them something no previous black leader had been able to provide. He showed them a way of controlling their pent-up anger, as he had controlled his own, and using it to bring about constructive change.

The mass demonstrations King and SCLC choreographed in the South produced the strongest civil rights legislation in American history. This was the goal of King's major southern campaigns from 1963 to 1965. He would single out some notoriously segregated city with white officials prone to violence, mobilize the local blacks with songs, scripture readings, and rousing oratory in black churches, and then lead

them on protest marches conspicuous for their grace and moral purpose. Then he and his aides would escalate the marches, increase their demands, even fill up the jails, until they brought about a moment of “creative tension,” when whites would either agree to negotiate or resort to violence. If they did the latter, King would thus expose the brutality inherent in segregation and . . . stab the national conscience so [much] that the federal government would be forced to intervene with corrective measures.

The technique succeeded brilliantly in Birmingham, Alabama, in 1963. Here Police Commissioner Eugene “Bull” Connor, in full view of reporters and television cameras, turned firehoses and police dogs on the marching protesters. Revolted by such ghastly scenes, stricken by King's own searching eloquence and the bravery of his unarmed followers, Washington eventually produced the 1964 Civil Rights Act, which desegregated public facilities — the thing King had demanded all along from Birmingham. Across the South, the “WHITES ONLY” signs that had hurt and enraged him since boyhood now came down.

Although SNCC and others complained that King had a Messiah complex and was trying to monopolize the civil rights movement, his technique worked with equal success in Selma, Alabama, in 1965. Building on a local movement there, King and his staff launched a drive to gain southern blacks the unobstructed right to vote. The violence he exposed in Selma — the beating of black marchers by state troopers and deputized possemen, the killing of a young black deacon and a white Unitarian minister — horrified the country. When King called for support, thousands of ministers, rabbis, priests, nuns, students, lay leaders, and ordinary people — black and white alike — rushed to Selma from all over the country and stood with King in the name of human liberty. Never in the history of the movement had so many people of all faiths and classes come to the southern battleground. The Selma campaign culminated in a dramatic march over the Jefferson Davis Highway to the state capital of Montgomery. Along the way, impoverished local

blacks stared incredulously at the marching, singing, flag waving spectacle moving by. When the column reached one dusty crossroads, an elderly black woman ran out from a group of old folk, kissed King breathlessly, and ran back crying, “I done kissed him! The Martin Luther King! I done kissed the Martin Luther King!”

In Montgomery, first capital and much-heralded “cradle” of the Confederacy, King led an interracial throng of 25,000 — the largest civil rights demonstration the South had ever witnessed — up Dexter Avenue with banners waving overhead. The pageant was as ironic as it was extraordinary, for it was up Dexter Avenue that Jefferson Davis's first inaugural parade had marched, and [it was] in the portico of the capitol [that] Davis had taken his oath of office as president of the slave-based Confederacy. Now, in the spring of 1965, Alabama blacks — most of them descendants of slaves — stood massed at the same statehouse, singing a new rendition of “We Shall Overcome,” the anthem of the civil rights movement. They sang, “Deep in my heart, I do believe, We have overcome — today.”

Then, watched by a cordon of state troopers and the statue of Jefferson Davis himself, King mounted a trailer. His vast audience listened, transfixed, as his words rolled and thundered over the loudspeaker: “My people, my people listen. The battle is in our hands. . . . We must come to see that the end we seek is a society at peace with itself, a society that can live with its conscience. That day will be a day not of the white man, not of the black man. That will be the day of man as man.” And that day was not long in coming, King said, whereupon he launched into the immortal refrains of “The Battle Hymn of the Republic,” crying out, “Our God is marching on! Glory, glory hallelujah!”

Aroused by the events in Alabama, Washington produced the 1965 Voting Rights Act, which outlawed impediments to black voting and empowered the attorney general to supervise federal elections in seven southern states where blacks were kept off the

rolls. At the time, political analysts almost unanimously attributed the act to King's Selma campaign. Once federal examiners were supervising voter registration in all troublesome southern areas, blacks were able to get on the rolls and vote by the hundreds of thousands, permanently altering the pattern of southern and national politics.

In the end, the powerful civil rights legislation generated by King and his tramping legions wiped out statutory racism in America and realized at least the social and political promise of emancipation a century before. But King was under no illusion that legislation alone could bring on the brave new America he so ardently championed. Yes, he said, laws and their vigorous enforcement were necessary to regulate destructive habits and actions, and to protect blacks and their rights. But laws could not eliminate the “fears, prejudice, pride, and irrationality” that were barriers to a truly integrated society, to peaceful intergroup and interpersonal living. Such a society could be achieved only when people accepted that inner, invisible law that etched on their hearts the conviction “that all men are brothers and that love is mankind's most potent weapon for personal and social transformation. True integration will be achieved by true neighbors who are willingly obedient to unenforceable obligations.”

Even so, the Selma campaign was the movement's finest hour, and the Voting Rights Act the high point of a broad civil rights coalition that included the federal government, various white groups, and all the other civil rights organizations in addition to SCLC. King himself had best expressed the spirit and aspirations of that coalition when, on August 28, 1963, standing before the Lincoln Memorial, he electrified an interracial crowd of 250,000 with perhaps his greatest speech, “I Have a Dream,” in which he described in rhythmic, hypnotic cadences his vision of an integrated America. Because of his achievements and moral vision, he won the 1964 Nobel Peace Prize, at thirty-four the youngest recipient in Nobel history.

Still, King paid a high price for his fame and his cause. He suffered from stomachaches and insomnia, and even felt guilty about all the tributes he received, all the popularity he enjoyed. Born in relative material comfort and given a superior education, he did not think he had earned the right to lead the impoverished black masses. He complained, too, that he no longer had a personal self and that sometimes he did not recognize the Martin Luther King people talked about. Lonely, away from home for protracted periods, beset with temptation, he slept with other women, for some of whom he had real feeling. His sexual transgressions only added to his guilt, for he knew he was imperiling his cause and hurting himself and those he loved.

Alas for King, FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover found out about the black leader's infidelities. The director already abhorred King, certain that Communist spies influenced him and masterminded his demonstrations. Hoover did not think blacks capable of organizing such things, so Communists had to be behind them and King as well. As it turned out, a lawyer in King's inner circle and a man in SCLC's New York office did have Communist backgrounds, a fact that only reinforced Hoover's suspicions about King. Under Hoover's orders, FBI agents conducted a ruthless crusade to destroy King's reputation and drive him broken and humiliated from public life. Hoover's men rapped King's phones and bugged his hotel rooms; they compiled a prurient monograph about his private life and showed it to various editors, public officials, and religious and civic leaders; they spread the word, Hoover's word, that King was not only a reprobate but a dangerous subversive with Communist associations.

King was scandalized and frightened by the FBI's revelations of his extramarital affairs. Luckily for him, no editor, not even a racist one in the South, would touch the FBI's salacious materials. Public officials such as Robert Kennedy were shocked, but argued that King's personal life did not affect his probity as a civil rights leader. Many blacks, too, declared that

what he did in private was his own business. Even so, King vowed to refrain from further affairs — only to succumb again to his own human frailties.

As for the Communist charge, King retorted that he did not need any Russians to tell him when someone was standing on his neck; he could figure that out by himself. To mollify his political friends, however, King did banish from SCLC the two men with Communist backgrounds (later he resumed his ties with the lawyer, a loyal friend, and let Hoover be damned). He also denounced Communism in no uncertain terms. It was, he believed, profoundly and fundamentally evil, an atheistic doctrine no true Christian could ever embrace. He hated the dictatorial Soviet state, too, whose "crippling totalitarianism" subordinated everything — religion, art, music, science, and the individual — to its terrible yoke. 'Truc, Communism started with men like Karl Marx who were "afire with a passion for social justice." Yet King faulted Marx for rejecting God and the spiritual in human life. "The great weakness in Karl Marx is right here," King once told his staff, and he went on to describe his ideal Christian commonwealth in Hegelian terms: "Capitalism fails to realize that life is social. Marxism fails to realize that life is individual. Truth is found neither in the rugged individualism of capitalism nor in the impersonal collectivism of Communism. The kingdom of God is found in a synthesis that combines the truths of these two opposites. Now there is where I leave brother Marx and move on toward the kingdom."

But how to move on after Selma was a perplexing question King never successfully answered. After the devastating Watts riot in August 1965, he took his movement into the racially troubled urban North, seeking to help the suffering black poor in the ghettos. In 1966, over the fierce opposition of some of his own staff, he launched a campaign to end the black slums in Chicago and forestall rioting there. But the campaign foundered because King seemed unable to devise a coherent anti-slum strategy, because Mayor

Richard Daley and his black acolytes opposed him bitterly, and because white America did not seem to care. King did lead open-housing marches into segregated neighborhoods in Chicago, only to encounter furious mobs who waved Nazi banners, threw bottles and bricks, and screamed, "We hate niggers!" "Kill the niggers!" "We want Martin Luther Coon!" King was shocked. "I've been in many demonstrations all across the South," he told reporters, "but I can say that I have never seen — even in Mississippi and Alabama — mobs as hostile and as hate-filled as I've seen in Chicago." Although King prevented a major riot there and wrung important concessions from City Hall, the slums remained, as wretched and seemingly unsolvable as ever.

That same year, angry young militants in SNCC and the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) renounced King's teachings — they were sick and tired of "De Lawd" telling them to love white people and work for integration. Now they advocated "Black Power," black separatism, even violent resistance to liberate blacks in America. SNCC even banished whites from its ranks and went on to drop "nonviolent" from its name and to lobby against civil rights legislation.

Black Power repelled the older, more conservative black organizations such as the NAACP and the Urban League, and fragmented the civil rights movement beyond repair. King, too, argued that black separatism was chimerical, even suicidal, and that nonviolence remained the only workable way for black people. "Darkness cannot drive out darkness," he reasoned: "only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate: only love can do that." If every other black in America turned to violence, King warned, then he would still remain the lone voice preaching that it was wrong. Nor was SCLC going to reject whites as SNCC had done. "There have been too many hymns of hope," King said, "too many anthems of expectation, too many deaths, too many dark days of standing over graves of those who fought for integration for us

to turn back now. We must still sing 'Black and White Together, We Shall Overcome.'"

In 1967, King himself broke with the older black organizations over the ever-widening war in Vietnam. He had first objected to American escalation in the summer of 1965, arguing that the Nobel Peace Prize and his role as a Christian minister compelled him to speak out for peace. Two years later, with almost a half-million Americans — a disproportionate number of them poor blacks — fighting in Vietnam, King devoted whole speeches to America's "immoral" war against a tiny country on the other side of the globe. His stance provoked a fusillade of criticism from all directions — from the NAACP, the Urban League, white and black political leaders, *Newsweek*, *Life*, *Time*, and the *New York Times*, all telling him to stick to civil rights. Such criticism hurt him deeply. When he read the *Times's* editorial against him, he broke down and cried. But he did not back down. "I've fought too long and too hard now against segregated accommodations to end up segregating my moral concerns," he told his critics. "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."

That summer, with the ghettos ablaze with riots, King warned that American cities would explode if funds used for war purposes were not diverted to emergency antipoverty programs. By then, the Johnson administration, determined to gain a military victory in Vietnam, had written King off as an antiwar agitator, and was now cooperating with the FBI in its efforts to defame him.

The fall of 1967 was a terrible time for King, the lowest ebb in his civil rights career. Everybody seemed to be attacking him — young black militants for his stubborn adherence to nonviolence, moderate and conservative blacks, labor leaders, liberal white politicians, the White House, and the FBI for his stand on Vietnam. Two years had passed since King had produced a nonviolent victory, and contributions to SCLC had fallen off sharply. Black spokesman Adam Clayton Powell, who had once called King the

greatest Negro in America, now derided him as Martin Loser King. The incessant attacks began to irritate him, creating such anxiety and depression that his friends worried about his emotional health.

Worse still, the country seemed dangerously polarized. On one side, backlashing whites argued that the ghetto explosions had “cremated” nonviolence and that white people had better arm themselves against black rioters. On the other side, angry blacks urged their people to “kill the Honkies” and burn the cities down. All around King, the country was coming apart in a cacophony of hate and reaction. Had America lost the will and moral power to save itself? he wondered. There was such rage in the ghetto and such bigotry among whites that he feared a race war was about to break out. He felt he had to do something to pull America back from the brink. He and his staff had to mount a new campaign that would halt the drift to violence in the black world and combat stiffening white resistance, a nonviolent action that would “transmute the deep rage of the ghetto into a constructive and creative force.”

Out of his deliberations sprang a bold and daring project called the poor people’s campaign. The master plan, worked out by February 1968, called for SCLC to bring an interracial army of poor people to Washington, D.C., to dramatize poverty before the federal government. For King, just turned thirty-nine, the time had come to employ civil disobedience against the national government itself. Ultimately, he was projecting a genuine class movement that he hoped would bring about meaningful changes in American society — changes that would redistribute economic and political power and end poverty, racism, “the madness of militarism,” and war.

In the midst of his preparations, King went to Memphis, Tennessee, to help black sanitation workers there who were striking for the right to unionize. On the night of April 3, with a storm thundering outside, he told a black audience that he had been to the

mountaintop and had seen what lay ahead. “I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight that we as a people *will* get to the promised land.”

The next afternoon, when King stepped out on the balcony of the Lorraine Motel, an escaped white convict named James Earl Ray, stationed in a nearby building, took aim with a high-powered rifle and blasted King into eternity. Subsequent evidence linked Ray to white men in the St. Louis area who had offered “hit” money for King’s life.

For weeks after the shooting, King’s stricken country convulsed in grief, contrition, and rage. While there were those who cheered his death, the *New York Times* called it a disaster to the nation, the *London Times* an enormous loss to the world. In Tanzania, Reverend Trevor Huddleston, expelled from South Africa for standing against apartheid, declared King’s death the greatest single tragedy since the assassination of Gandhi in 1948, and said it challenged the complacency of the Christian Church all over the globe.

On April 9, with 120 million Americans watching on television, thousands of mourners — black and white alike — gathered in Atlanta for the funeral of a man who had never given up his dream of creating a symphony of brotherhood on these shores. As a black man born and raised in segregation, he had had every reason to hate America and to grow up preaching cynicism and retaliation. Instead, he had loved the country passionately and had sung of her promise and glory more eloquently than anyone of his generation.

They buried him in Atlanta’s South View Cemetery, then blooming with dogwood and fresh green boughs of spring. On his crypt, hewn into the marble, were the words of an old Negro spiritual he had often quoted: “Free at Last, Free at Last, Thank God Almighty I’m Free at Last.”

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Martin Luther King, Jr., was an angry young man who hated the segregated world of the American

South and the injustices he saw inflicted on African Americans all over the nation. In adulthood, he came to feel that anger offered no solution to the problems that he and other African Americans faced. What made him change his mind? What were the roots of the philosophy that he adopted and used to lead the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s? How did King give African Americans a sense of self-worth and the tools to achieve their aims?

2. What were SNCC and SCLC? How did these organizations differ from each other? In what ways were they alike? What changes took place in SNCC after the mid-1960s? How did Black Power differ from the civil rights movement under King?

3. What were the two major accomplishments of the civil rights movement in the mid-1960s? What

specific actions did King and his followers undertake to influence public opinion and effect legislative change, and at what cost?

4. Describe the internal and external difficulties that beset King and the civil rights movement in the late 1960s. How did King defuse charges that he was a Communist? How did he react to the FBI crusade against him? to white and black backlashes? to the attacks on his policies that seemed to come from all sides? What did his support of the anti-Vietnam War movement cost him?

5. Why do you think Americans were receptive to King’s pacifist message and nonviolent approach in the 1960s? Do you think similar tactics would be effective against oppression in a country such as the People’s Republic of China?