**Gentle Warrior: A. Philip Randolph (1889 - 1979)**

* He was called the most dangerous black in America.
* He led 250,000 people in the historic 1963 March on Washington.
* He spoke for all the dispossessed: Blacks, poor Whites, Puerto Ricans, Indians and Mexican Americans.
* He attained for Black workers their rightful at in the house of Labor.
* He won the fight to ban discrimination in the armed forces.
* He organized the 1957-prayer pilgrimage for the civil rights bill.
* He was President of the Institute, bearing his name, and President Emeritus of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, the union he built.

The words and deeds of A. Philip Randolph show us the unyielding strength of his life-long struggle for full human rights for the Blacks and all the disinherited of the nation. In his cry for freedom and justice, Mr. Randolph is echoing the fury of all the enslaved. They are fighting for their freedom, with the kind of desperate strength that only deep wounds can call forth. With none of his words, however, does Mr. Randolph turn aside the help of others. But these comrades-in-arms must share the vision that has led Mr. Randolph through his long years of search for equal human rights. From the day of his arrival in Harlem in 1911, Mr. Randolph had been in the thick of the struggle for freedom for Black Americans.

The civil rights revolution, which began in the 1950’s, was a result of his efforts and the work of men like himself. Even when he had become an ''elder statesmen" his passion for justice remained as youthful and vigorous as ever. He still planned and organized such activities as the 1957 prayer pilgrimage for the civil rights bill, the 1958 and 1959 marches for school integration and the 1963 March on Washington. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and the Civil Rights Act of 1968 are all the fruits of the seed he and his co-workers sowed many years before A. Philip Randolph has always called for jobs and money as being the passports to human rights. At the same time, he did not let himself be led astray by the impractical economic promises of a man like Marcus Garvey, who called for a "return to Africa" back in the 1920’s. As a man living in the bread-and-butter world, Mr. Randolph knew that a good weekly paycheck had to be won first. Then, after the children were fed, a better fight could be waged for dignity and self-pride.

With this always in mind, Mr. Randolph traveled throughout the nation just before World War II, in 1940 and 1941. His mission was to unite Blacks against the discrimination, which shut them out of well-paying jobs in the factories. Although many Whites, and even Blacks knocked his efforts in the beginning his message caught fire. All over the United States committees of Blacks were forming to "March on Washington" in protest. Influential people tried to turn Mr. Randolph away from his goal, but he remained strong and steadfast. Finally, recognizing that Mr. Randolph could not be swayed, President Franklin D Roosevelt signed an order, six months before Pearl Harbor, in June 1941, which called for an end to discrimination in defense plant jobs. Here was the beginning of "fair employment practices " This, the first "March on Washington," never had to be held. The most powerful leader in the world, the President of the United States, had yielded to the head of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. From this start have come all of the many laws trying to guarantee a fair and equal chance to all Blacks looking for jobs About seven years later, in July of 1948, Mr. Randolph again moved to fight discrimination. This time, it was against segregation and Jim Crow in the Army, Navy and Air Force.

Once more, the power of his persuasion and the justice of his complaints swayed another President of the United States, Harry S. Truman. President Truman signed an order commanding that there would be an end to this kind of discrimination not only in the armed forces, but also in federal civil service jobs. In 1963, another high point in Mr. Randolph's struggle for equality for oppressed people was reached when he headed the famous "March on Washington,'' in which more than 250.000 Americans joined together under the slogan of "Jobs and Freedom." Still relentlessly pressing for full economic freedom, Mr. Randolph then presented, in 1966, the Freedom Budget to the nation. This called for the spending of $185 billion over ten years by the U.S. government to fight against poverty, "The labor movement traditionally has been the only haven for the dispossessed, the despised, the neglected, the downtrodden and the poor." So spoke A. Philip Randolph from the convention floor of the AFL-CIO. And so believed A. Philip Randolph all his life long. It was this belief that sustained his spirit through the long, long, bitter years when he was the voice crying in the wilderness. It was this belief that enabled him to go on with the uphill fight for racial equality and opportunity for all Americans.

The story of Randolph the labor leader is the story of many beginnings, a tale of many defeats and many victories. Even in defeat he sowed the seed that afterwards blossomed and bore fruit-for Black workers and White workers alike. By the early 1920's, Mr. Randolph could look back upon ''a career of glorious failures," as one writer put it. He had run for Assembly twice and Comptroller once and lost each time. As far as organizing Blacks went, he had been at it from his first days in Harlem, but had little to show for his efforts. He began to come into his own when a group of Pullman porters came to him for help. The porters wanted the right to bargain for better wages and improvements in working conditions. They wanted a chance to run their own affairs. After a number of secret meetings, the organization of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters was announced at Elks Hall on August 25.1925. But it was going to be a long and tough fight to get the powerful Pullman Company to sit down and bargain with the workers. It took all of 12 years. The odds against the newly born union were huge. The company used all of its strength in attacking Mr. Randolph, calling him a Bolshevik and accusing him of being a hustler out for a fast buck. Pullman fired union members. It tried to put fear into the men by threatening them with tougher assignments, fewer assignments, or no work at all. The law also failed the Brotherhood. Mediation failed, so did arbitration. And when the men prepared for a strike as a last resort, the company recruited strikebreakers and private police. At the last moment, the strike was called off.

The leadership of the union decided that the Brotherhood was simply not strong enough to win at that time. Now began the struggle to keep the organization together without funds, without much support from the outside, and in the midst of a depression. Mr. Randolph would travel to Chicago on Brotherhood business and have only a one-way train ticket in his pocket. But somehow he survived and his message with him Wherever he went, Mr. Randolph had one important sermon for the porters. They were Black men who were being called upon to prove that "Black men are able to measure up." And the men never forgot that message and in the end it won for them. By 1935, not only had the Brotherhood survived, but also it had won an election supervised, by the National Mediation Board. The same year, the American Federation of Labor reversed its previous position and voted to grant an international charter to the Brotherhood It took two more years of negotiations but finally the Pullman Company signed a contract. This was more than a victory for better wages and working conditions. As one scholar wrote "A small band of brothers—Black— had stood together and won against a corporation that had said it would never sit down and negotiate with porters."

In 1936, A. Philip Randolph was drafted presidency of a new organization called the National Negro Congress. The NNC was made up of a number of groups, which planned to build a Black mass movement, by working with and through trade unions. Although the NNC was successful in a number of organization drives led by the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), when Mr. Randolph realized he had come under Communist control, he quit. He was attacked by the Communists as a traitor because he refused to support a stand against aid to the enemies of Hitler at the time of the Nazi-Soviet Russia pact. But when the Germans turned around and invaded Russia, he was again attacked by the Communist, this time for refusing to help the Soviet Union. Throughout the hard years of struggle to obtain dignity and decent treatment for porters, Mr. Randolph forgot that there were other workers that also needed help. As one observer wrote ''He became a familiar and lonely figure on the floor of AFL-ClO conventions" to his role as champion of the underdog. He was conscience of organized labor in seeking to get the trade union to set its own house in order and to remove the last remnants of racial discrimination from ranks of the AFL-CIO. He spoke for all other dispossessed , Mexicans Americans, Indians, Puerto Ricans, and poor Whites alike. He helped to draft ''the strongest statement of labor's position on our rights ever to come before a convention of the AFL-CIO. This resolution put organized labor in "a front line role in the civil rights revolution."

A. Philip Randolph's chosen home is the labor movement—which he believes is the real home of all working men. In 1955 he became a vice-president of the AFL-CIO's Executive Council. and in 1959 he helped to found the Negro American Labor Council. The NALC's job is to present Black workers' demands to the labor movement and to do what Mr. Randolph has always tried to do— keep the Black people and organized labor together and working for common goals. A. Philip Randolph, the labor leader, is also a dreamer of dreams He has tried to put flesh and bones on his dreams by working for a labor movement that would be free of all prejudice and which would play a key role in changing society for the better. It is that dream that has made A. Philip Randolph one of the giants of the American labor movement. At the heart of A. Philip Randolph's vision as a socialist is his belief that a decent and well-paying job is the first step towards social and political freedom. Therefore, while he supported the needs of Blacks as Blacks, Mr. Randolph also maintained that those who are poor, or earn little money whether they are Black or White have basic interests in common, and that they should join together. As a socialist, Mr. Randolph believes that workers and their labor unions are the key forces in any political effort to redistribute society's wealth more justly. Mr. Randolph has continuously advised Black people to develop political alliances with other groups labor, liberal and civil rights groups—to fight for common aims.

Mr. Randolph has never abandoned those principles that have given his outlook qualities of depth and honor. He is a firm believer in both integration and non-violence. As an integrationist he opposed the "Back-to-Africa" movement of Marcus Garvey in the 1920's, as he has opposed the separatist beliefs of the "Black Power" advocates of today. At the same time, Mr. Randolph has rejected violence as a tactic of struggle, on both moral and practical grounds. A. Philip Randolph has not seen the problem of Black people in America as the problem of one isolated group. He views the condition of American Blacks as the symptom of a larger social illness, an illness which is caused by an unfair distribution of power, wealth, and resources. For the socialist ideals on which his political wisdom is built, Mr. Randolph looked to the giants of American socialism—Eugene V. Debs and Norman Thomas. The agent for spreading Mr. Randolph's socialism was a magazine called the MESSENGER, founded in 1917, "the only magazine of scientific radicalism in the world published by Negroes." He co-edited the magazine with Chandler Owen, a fellow socialist who came to be Mr. Randolph's closest friend. Though both men were well aware that many unions and many socialists discriminated, they continued in their conviction that only through the organization of the workers into unions could society be changed. Mr. Randolph and Mr. Owen outlined the purpose of their socialist publication in an early editorial, saying: "The history of the labor movement in America proves that the employing classes recognize no race lines, They will exploit a White man as readily as a Black man . . . they will exploit any race or class in order to make profits. "The combination of Black and White workers will be a powerful lesson to the capitalists of the solidarity of labor. It will show that labor, Black and White, is conscious of its interests and power. This will prove that unions are not based upon race lines, but upon class lines. This will serve to convert a class of workers, which has been used by the capitalist class to defeat organized labor, into an ardent, class conscious, intelligent, militant group."

Though Mr. Randolph was an integrationist, he believed that organizations which had come into existence to wage the Black and working class struggle, ought to be headed by the leaders from those groups. He disagreed with National Association for the Advancement of Colored People leader W.E.B. DuBois' claim that a "talented tenth" of the race would pave the way for its entry into society. The gap between Mr. Randolph and Mr. DuBois widened when, during World War 1, Mr. DuBois called on Blacks to "close ranks," put aside their grievances, and support the war. Mr. Randolph was definitely opposed to the war. He believed that the American idea of ''making the world safe for democracy'' was outright falsity, and "a tremendous offense to the intelligence of the Blacks because at that time the Blacks were being lynched and denied the right to vote, in the South especially, and were the victims of segregation and discrimination all over the nation." The MESSENGER repeatedly stressed the anti-war stand of its editor’s and, as a result, the U.S. Justice Department kept a close watch on Mr. Randolph and Mr. Owen. Finally, they were jailed in Cleveland on charges of treason. They managed to get out under the custody of Seymour Stedman, a socialist lawyer, and they promptly continued their public protest against the war. World War I ended just one day before Mr. Randolph was scheduled to leave for war himself as a new draftee.

As a socialist associated with radical, leftwing causes. Mr. Randolph was subject to pressures from other radical groups, including the Communists. When a split struck the Socialist Party in 1919, over the question of whether or not to support the Bolsheviks in their leadership of the Russian Revolution, Mr. Randolph and Mr. Owen stayed with the non-Communist faction of the party. When the Communists began to concern themselves with the issue of Blacks in the labor movement, Mr. Randolph had already begun his organization of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. The Communists were so jealous of Mr. Randolph's effort, they took pains to prevent mentioning him in their publications. A. Philip Randolph's position, whether an attitude toward labor unions, an anti-war stand, or a political position with an aim of economic change, has consistently reflected his socialist ideas. He has always believed in a movement based on the workers as the main force, and has always been committed to the idea that a democratic redistribution of wealth is the first step toward greater freedom for all people, Black as well as White.

**A. Philip Randolph**

**Born April 15, 1889**

**Crescent City,** [**Florida**](http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Florida.aspx)

**Died May 16, 1979**

[**New York**](http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/New_York.aspx)**, New York**

**Labor and civil rights leader**

During [World War II](http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/World_War_II.aspx) (1939–45), A. Philip Randolph fought racial discrimination in war industries and the armed services. His efforts built a foundation for the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s. A. Philip Randolph was one of the most influential black American leaders of the twentieth century.

**Early life**

A. Philip Randolph was born on April 15, 1889, the second of two sons born to a poor family in Crescent City, Florida. His father, an itinerant minister who traveled about the area to various small rural churches, also worked as a tailor to provide for his family. The Randolph family emphasized religion and education. In 1903 Randolph attended Cookman Institute, an all-black male Methodist school, where he excelled. In addition to being a good athlete, he showed particular skill at drama, public speaking, singing, and literature. Randolph graduated in 1907 at the top of his class. Following graduation, Randolph worked at odd jobs in Jacksonville, Florida, while giving public readings, singing, and acting in plays. In search of better job opportunities and less racial discrimination in the North, in April 1911 Randolph joined the great migration of Southern blacks moving to the North. Randolph headed to Harlem in New York City, where he held various jobs including waiter, porter, and elevator operator. He also joined a theater club where he tackled Shakespearean plays. Through these parts, Randolph developed public speaking skills that would benefit him through much of his life. Randolph married a fellow theater club member in November 1914. They would have no children.

Seeking to establish a more stable career, Randolph abandoned acting and enrolled in City College of New York. The college offered a free education for those with strong academic skills. At college, Randolph became interested in politics and organized his own political group, the Independent Political Council.

**Political activism**

In New York, Randolph met Chandler Owen (1889–1967), a student at Columbia Law School. They were attracted to the growing labor union activity in the [United States](http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/United_States.aspx) that was seeking improved working conditions, such as a forty-hour workweek. Union activity was considered a radical movement in the 1910s. They also joined the Socialist Party in late 1916. The party promoted the rights of individual citizens over dominance of big business. Randolph and Owen often stood on street corners in Harlem promoting the ideas of socialism and calling for blacks to join unions. Yet to most blacks, socialism and unions represented a white man's world with little relevance to them.

In 1917 Randolph organized a union of elevator operators. He and Owen were also hired to publish *Hotel Messenger,* a newsletter for the Headwaiters and Sidewaiters Society of Greater New York. However, their positions on labor issues were too radical for the organization, and after only eight months, Randolph and Owen were fired. They created their own magazine simply called the *Messenger,* in November 1917. Published until 1928, the *Messenger* became a highly respected black journal attracting some twenty-six thousand readers. In the *Messenger* Randolph and Owen expressed many controversial views, even leading to their brief arrest for expressing antiwar views in 1918 during World War I (1914–18). Their activity continued to expand. They organized the first black socialist organization in Harlem, the Friends of Negro Freedom, and unsuccessfully ran for local public offices.

**Union leader**

During the economic boom years of the 1920s, Randolph's radical political efforts lost their following. His attempts to organize black workers had limited success. However, in 1925 a group of porters invited Randolph to speak about trade unions. The Pullman Company employed the porters to provide services to railroad passengers. The porters asked Randolph to organize a union for them. On August 25, 1925, Randolph introduced The Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters at a mass meeting.

The Brotherhood soon rose in power as Randolph proved a very effective leader. In 1928 it was accepted into the American Federation of Labor (AFL), a national federation of labor unions representing various types of skilled craft workers. The arrival of the [Great Depression](http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Great_Depression.aspx) (1929–41) in late 1929, however, set back the unions' effectiveness until 1933 when newly elected president Franklin D. Roosevelt (1882–1945; served 1933–45; see entry) signed into law legislation formally recognizing organized labor unions. In 1935 the Brotherhood became the first black union to gain formal recognition by industry. By 1937 it reached an agreement with Pullman over working conditions. The agreement brought an additional two million dollars in wages to the porters and greatly increased Randolph's national prestige.

In addition to his union activity, Randolph continued to press for social change, including racial equality for black Americans through economic progress. In 1935 Randolph became the first president of the newly created National Negro Congress (NNC). The NNC was a national organization designed to coordinate all existing black political groups in an effort to improve the economic condition of black America.

**Wartime opportunities**

In 1940 almost thirteen million black Americans lived in the United States. The mobilization of industry for war production beginning that year presented a new opportunity for economic improvement of black Americans. In addition, the [Democratic Party](http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Democratic_party.aspx) pledged during the 1940 presidential campaign to work for civil rights in order to maintain the large black vote President Roosevelt received in 1936. However, disappointment soon returned. As industry began increasing its workers, the actual percentage of black workers in industry declined. Many industries sought only white workers.

Randolph and other black leaders decided it was time to take action, including public protests and mass demonstrations. In January 1941 Randolph called for a national march on Washington. In May plans were set for at least ten thousand black Americans to march on July 1. At the time, Roosevelt was trying to build national unity for the upcoming war effort. His predecessor, President [Herbert Hoover](http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Herbert_Clark_Hoover.aspx) (1874–1964; served 1929–33), experienced a public relations disaster in 1932 when thousands of World War I veterans marched on Washington wanting advanced payment of pay bonuses. The last thing Roosevelt wanted was another embarrassing march on Washington.

Yet Roosevelt on June 18 nominated Southern U.S. senator James F. Byrnes (1879–1972; see entry) to the Supreme Court despite strong protests from Randolph and others. The nomination further strained relations between the president and black leaders. Six days later Roosevelt met with Randolph and other black leaders, including Walter White of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), to resolve their grievances so that the march could be called off. In the meeting were several governmental leaders besides Roosevelt, including secretary of war Henry L. Stimson (1867–1950; see entry). Roosevelt knew Randolph had the ability to stage the largest demonstration by black Americans in the nation's history. Randolph demanded an executive order from Roosevelt banning racial discrimination in hiring by war industries and integrating the armed forces. Roosevelt agreed to ban discrimination in war industries, but, with advice from Stimson, not to integrate the military. On the

**Fair Employment Practices Committee**

The Fair Employment Practices Committee (FEPC) was formed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt (1882–1945; served 1933–45) under pressure from black American leader A. Philip Randolph to ensure that the U.S. war industries did not discriminate in hiring workers. The FEPC bounced from agency to agency for its first two years. It began in 1941 in the Office of Production Management (OPM), then to the War Production Board (WPB), and on to the War Manpower Commission (WMC). Finally, in March 1943, Roosevelt placed the FEPC within the White House as part of the Office of Emergency Planning. U.S. senator James F. Byrnes (1879–1972), who was no friend of racial integration, assumed control over it. However, Byrnes directed most business related to the FEPC to another White House assistant, Jonathan Daniels (1902–1981). Daniels was Roosevelt's assistant on racial matters.

The FEPC held a series of public hearings in [Los Angeles](http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Los_Angeles.aspx), [California](http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/California.aspx); [Chicago](http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Chicago.aspx), [Illinois](http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Illinois.aspx); Birmingham, [Alabama](http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Alabama.aspx); and New York City documenting instances of discrimination against blacks, [Jews](http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Jews.aspx), and Mexican Americans in war industry hiring. Southerners accused the FEPC of spreading racial strife. As controversy increased, the administration called a halt to the hearings. By mid-1943 the FEPC was one of the most controversial agencies in wartime Washington. Southern Democrats in the U.S. House of Representatives opened hearings in 1944 to investigate certain agencies, with the FEPC being the first. It even became a major domestic campaign issue for the 1944 presidential elections.

Despite its limited powers, the FEPC served as a forum where black Americans could be heard and bring their work-related issues forward. The FEPC was abolished by Congress following the war, when military contracts to industry wound down.

following day, June 25, Roosevelt issued Executive Order 8802 requiring that all government contracts contain conditions prohibiting racial discrimination in the workplace. To carry out the plan, the order also created the Fair Employment Practice Committee (FEPC) with members appointed by the president. Randolph called off the march. It was a major victory for him. The executive order was the first major action by a U.S. president regarding equal rights since the 1870s, just after the [American Civil War](http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Civil_War.aspx) (1861–65). The executive order was also an affirmative action plan that preceded the 1960s affirmative action programs.

**Controversy builds**

The FEPC became one of the hottest controversies on the U.S. home front during the war. During the summer of 1943 a series of race riots occurred around the country. One of the earliest outbreaks resulted from an FEPC order directing the Alabama Dry Dock and Shipbuilding Company to promote some black Americans to skilled welding positions. White workers protested, leading to fights between segregated white and black work crews. Some eighty workers were injured before the Alabama National Guard restored order. Riots also occurred in Beaumont, [Texas](http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Texas.aspx); Los Angeles, California; Philadelphia, [Pennsylvania](http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Pennsylvania.aspx); and Harlem. The worst riot occurred on Sunday, June 20, in [Detroit](http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Detroit.aspx), [Michigan](http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Michigan.aspx). The FEPC claimed the main cause for the racial unrest was poor housing, recreation facilities, and public transportation available for minorities. However, others blamed the FEPC and its rulings for stirring up trouble. With progress in relieving racial discrimination largely nonexistent in 1943, Randolph again began threatening another march. He wanted Congress to make the FEPC a permanent agency with more stable funding and greater authority to enforce actions.

With the 1944 presidential election campaign approaching, Roosevelt had not yet given the FEPC his personal support. Southern Democrats were angry that he had gone too far. Black Americans, including Randolph, believed Roosevelt was far less supportive than he should be as the nation's leader. To resolve the matter, on November 4, 1943, Roosevelt voiced strong support for the FEPC, claiming its decisions were mandatory.

Nonetheless, Randolph, along with White and others, persisted with pressure. They signed a large newspaper advertisement calling for legislation creating a permanent FEPC. The black leaders were able to block James F. Byrnes from becoming Roosevelt's vice presidential running mate. Roosevelt won the unprecedented reelection to a fourth term partly owing to the black American vote he once again received.

**A lasting influence**

Following the war, Randolph pressed again to end segregation in the armed forces. He formed the League for Nonviolent Civil Disobedience Against Military Segregation.

Needing the black vote in the 1948 presidential election, President Harry S. Truman (1884–1972; served 1945–53) signed a presidential order ending racial segregation in the military in July 1948. It marked yet another major victory for Randolph.

In 1955 the AFL combined with the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), a national union organization composed of semiskilled factory workers. Randolph was one of two blacks on the new AFL-CIO Executive Committee.

By the 1960s Randolph was widely recognized as an elder statesman of black America. Through World War II Randolph paved the way for the later civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s led by [Martin Luther King Jr](http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Martin_Luther_King_Jr.aspx). (1929–1968). One of Randolph's biggest moments came on August 28, 1963, at seventy-four years of age. He was national director of the march on Washington, D.C., in which over two hundred thousand black and white Americans participated, seeking an end to racial discrimination. On the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, Randolph delivered his last major public speech. He was followed at the podium by King, who delivered his epic "I Have a Dream" civil rights speech. As in 1941, the president—this time President John F. Kennedy (1917–1963; served 1961–63)—had tried to convince Randolph to call off the event. Although Randolph's wife died only three months before the march, Randolph decided the march must go on.

Much progress was realized after the historic march on Washington. The AFL-CIO adopted a strong national position in favor of the civil rights movement and lobbied for legislation prohibiting racial discrimination in the workplace. In 1964 Congress passed the landmark Civil Rights Act banning racial discrimination in public places. Also in 1964 Randolph established the A. Philip Randolph Institute to solve black labor issues and maintain ties between labor organizations and civil rights groups.

In 1968 Randolph was robbed and beaten outside his Harlem apartment building. Afterwards his health declined, leading him to resign as president of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters and from other labor positions. In 1971 Harvard University awarded Randolph an honorary degree. He died at the age of ninety in New York City on May 16, 1979. Randolph is remembered as a man of great integrity by both blacks and whites. In 1989 the U.S. Postal Service issued a Black Heritage Month stamp sporting his likeness.

Martin Luther King Jr

During the less than 13 years of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s leadership of the modern American Civil Rights Movement, from December, 1955 until April 4, 1968, African Americans achieved more genuine progress toward racial equality in America than the previous 350 years had produced. Dr. King is widely regarded as America’s pre-eminent advocate of nonviolence and one of the greatest nonviolent leaders in world history.

Drawing inspiration from both his Christian faith and the peaceful teachings of Mahatma Gandhi, Dr. King led a nonviolent movement in the late 1950’s and ‘60s to achieve legal equality for African-Americans in the United States. While others were advocating for freedom by “any means necessary,” including violence, Martin Luther King, Jr. used the power of words and acts of nonviolent resistance, such as protests, grassroots organizing, and civil disobedience to achieve seemingly-impossible goals. He went on to lead similar campaigns against poverty and international conflict, always maintaining fidelity to his principles that men and women everywhere, regardless of color or creed, are equal members of the human family.

Dr. King’s [“I Have a Dream” speech](http://www.thekingcenter.org/archive/document/draft-i-have-dream), [Nobel Peace Prize lecture](http://www.thekingcenter.org/archive/document/draft-nobel-prize-acceptance-speech) and [“Letter from a Birmingham Jail”](http://www.thekingcenter.org/archive/document/letter-birmingham-city-jail-0) are among the most revered orations and writings in the English language. His accomplishments are now taught to American children of all races, and his teachings are studied by scholars and students worldwide. He is the only non-president to have a national holiday dedicated in his honor, and is the only non-president memorialized on the Great Mall in the nation’s capitol. He is memorialized in hundreds of statues, parks, streets, squares, churches and other public facilities around the world as a leader whose teachings are increasingly-relevant to the progress of humankind.

Some of Dr. King’s most important achievements include:

* In 1955, he was recruited to serve as spokesman for the Montgomery Bus Boycott, which was a campaign by the African-American population of Montgomery, Alabama to force integration of the city’s bus lines. After 381 days of nearly universal participation by citizens of the black community, many of whom had to walk miles to work each day as a result, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that racial segregation in transportation was unconstitutional.
* In 1957, Dr. King was elected president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), an organization designed to provide new leadership for the now burgeoning civil rights movement. He would serve as head of the SCLC until his assassination in 1968, a period during which he would emerge as the most important social leader of the modern American civil rights movement.
* In 1963, he led a coalition of numerous civil rights groups in a nonviolent campaign aimed at Birmingham, Alabama, which at the time was described as the “most segregated city in America.” The subsequent brutality of the city’s police, illustrated most vividly by television images of young blacks being assaulted by dogs and water hoses, led to a national outrage resulting in a push for unprecedented civil rights legislation. It was during this campaign that Dr. King drafted the “Letter from a Birmingham Jail,” the manifesto of Dr. King’s philosophy and tactics, which is today required-reading in universities worldwide.
* Later in 1963, Dr. King was one of the driving forces behind the March for Jobs and Freedom, more commonly known as the “March on Washington,” which drew over a quarter-million people to the national mall. It was at this march that Dr. King delivered his famous “I Have a Dream” speech, which cemented his status as a social change leader and helped inspire the nation to act on civil rights. Dr. King was later named Time magazine’s “Man of the Year.”
* In 1964, at 35 years old, Martin Luther King, Jr. became the youngest person to win the Nobel Peace Prize. His acceptance speech in Oslo is thought by many to be among the most powerful remarks ever delivered at the event, climaxing at one point with the oft-quoted phrase “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.”
* Also in 1964, partly due to the March on Washington, Congress passed the landmark Civil Rights Act, essentially eliminating legalized racial segregation in the United States. The legislation made it illegal to discriminate against blacks or other minorities in hiring, public accommodations, education or transportation, areas which at the time were still very segregated in many places.
* The next year, 1965, Congress went on to pass the Voting Rights Act, which was an equally-important set of laws that eliminated the remaining barriers to voting for African-Americans, who in some locales had been almost completely disenfranchised. This legislation resulted directly from the Selma to Montgomery, AL March for Voting Rights lead by Dr. King.
* Between 1965 and 1968, Dr. King shifted his focus toward economic justice – which he highlighted by leading several campaigns in Chicago, Illinois – and international peace – which he championed by speaking out strongly against the Vietnam War. His work in these years culminated in the “Poor Peoples Campaign,” which was a broad effort to assemble a multiracial coalition of impoverished Americans who would advocate for economic change.
* Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s less than thirteen years of nonviolent leadership ended abruptly and tragically on April 4th, 1968, when he was assassinated at the Lorraine Motel in Memphis, Tennessee. Dr. King’s body was returned to his hometown of Atlanta, Georgia, where his funeral ceremony was attended by high-level leaders of all races and political stripes.
* For more information regarding the assassination trial of Dr. King. [Click here.](http://www.thekingcenter.org/assassination-conspiracy-trial)
* For more information regarding the Transcription of the King Family Press Conference on the MLK Assassination Trial Verdict December 9, 1999 Atlanta, GA. [Click Here](http://www.thekingcenter.org/sites/default/files/Assassination%20Trial%20-%20Family%20Press%20Conference.pdf)
* For more information regarding the Civil Case: King family versus Jowers. [Click here](http://www.thekingcenter.org/civil-case-king-family-versus-jowers).
* Later in 1968, Dr. King’s wife, Mrs. Coretta Scott King, officially founded the Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change, which she dedicated to being a “living memorial” aimed at continuing Dr. King’s work on important social ills around the world.
* Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. is considered the formative figure in the modern fight for civil rights, and his legacy looms large in the work of all those who follow him in his cause. Dr. King's involvement with the NAACP dates back to his position on the executive committee of the NAACP Montgomery Branch in the 1950's, through his leadership in the various boycotts, marches and rallies of the 1960's, and up until his assassination in 1968. In 1957 the NAACP awarded him the Spingarn Medal, its most prestigious honor. In 1964, he received a Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts. Dr. King pushed America to fulfill its promise of equal rights for all. We honor his life and his legacy by recommitting ourselves to keeping his dream alive.
* **“I have come to see more and more that one of the most decisive steps that the Negro can take is that little walk to the voting booth. That is an important step. We've got to gain the ballot, and through that gain, political power.”**
* **- NAACP Emancipation Day Rally, January 1, 1957**
* Dr. King was born in Atlanta, Georgia in 1929. As a child he never failed to ask discerning questions about the world around him. Though his father was a reverend, King initially had many doubts about the Christian religion, and it was only after years of schooling that he became convinced that religion could be both “intellectually and emotionally satisfying.” (Source: http://www.tikkun.org/article.php/nov\_dec\_09\_scofield) King graduated at the top of his class from Morehouse College and moved on to Boston University where he earned his Ph.D. in systematic theology.
* In June 1953 King married Coretta Scott, a student at the New England Conservatory of Music in Boston. The following year King, now finished with his religious education, followed in his father's footsteps by becoming a pastor for the Drexel Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama.
* **“We have no alternative but to protest. For many years we have shown an amazing patience... But we come here tonight to be saved from that patience that makes us patient with anything less than freedom and justice.”**
* **- Montgomery, Alabama, December 5, 1955**
* When King arrived in Montgomery he saw a city that was highly segregated. One of the “Jim Crow” laws required the first four rows on public buses to be reserved for white people, while “colored” riders had to sit in the back of the bus. On December 1, 1955, barely a year after King's arrival, the secretary of the Montgomery chapter of the NAACP refused to move from her seat in the front of the bus. Rosa Parks was arrested and sent to jail, but her act of defiance inspired the burgeoning civil rights movement in Montgomery. The Montgomery Improvement Association was formed with the NAACP Executive Committee and officers of the Montgomery NAACP, which had at that point been banned in the state. The Association led a boycott of the bus system, and King, already a member of the NAACP's executive committee, was chosen as its leader.
* The boycott lasted for over a year, during which time King was threatened, arrested and even had his house bombed. However, by December 1956 the MIA had won a clear victory – the United States District Court ruled in Browder v. Gayle that racial segregation on buses was unconstitutional.
* **“The end of violence or the aftermath of violence is bitterness. The aftermath of nonviolence is reconciliation and the creation of a beloved community. A boycott is never an end within itself. It is merely a means to awaken a sense of shame within the oppressor but the end is reconciliation, the end is redemption.”**
* **- The Power of Nonviolence, 1957**
* Emboldened by his success in Montgomery and a rise to national prominence, in 1957 King joined other civil rights activists to found the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. King was elected president. Inspired by the ideals of nonviolence espoused by Mahatma Gandhi, he promoted civil disobedience as the best method to fight for civil rights. The SCLC led sit-ins and marches for various local causes, all with the aim to end segregation and disenfranchisement of black voters. Though the protesters did their best to remain peaceful, they were occasionally met with violence from authorities, and King was arrested multiple times. Throughout this, King's profile continued to grow.
* **“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."**
* **- Letter from Birmingham Jail, 1963**
* King was arrested during a rally in Birmingham that sought to end segregation at lunch counters. While in jail he wrote “Letter from Birmingham Jail”, which defended his views on racial justice and nonviolence. It was considered the “manifesto” of the civil rights movement (Source: http://nobelprize.org/nobel\_prizes/peace/laureates/1964/king-bio.html) and further inspired black Americans to join the cause. At this point King was one of the national leaders of a movement that was rapidly growing across the nation, and in 1963 King joined with other leaders to capitalize on the moment with an enormous rally for civil rights.
* **"In a sense we've come to our nation's capital to cash a check. When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir. This note was a promise that all men - yes, black men as well as white men - would be guaranteed the unalienable rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness... America has given the Negro people a bad check, a check which has come back marked 'insufficient funds.'"**
* **- “I Have a Dream”, August 28, 1963**
* The historic March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom was a collaborative effort by the major civil rights groups and icons of the day, including A. Phillip Randolph, the renowned labor leader who originally conceived of such a march, and Roy Wilkins, Executive Secretary of the NAACP. Feeding off of a rapidly growing tide of grassroots support and outrage over the nation's racial inequities, the rally drew over 260,000 people from across the nation. King's celebrated speech, “I Have a Dream”, was carried live by television stations across the country. “I Have a Dream” is remembered as one of the greatest, if not the greatest, speech of the 20th century.
* **“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." I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at a table of brotherhood.”**
* **- “I Have a Dream”, August 28, 1963**
* It didn't take long for King's dream to come to fruition. After a decade of continued lobbying of Congress and the President led by the NAACP, plus other peaceful protests for civil rights, President Lyndon Johnson signed into law the Civil Rights Act of 1964. One year later, he signed the National Voting Rights Act of 1965. Together, these laws outlawed discrimination against blacks and women, effectively ending segregation, and sought to end disenfranchisement by making discriminatory voting practices illegal. Ten years after King joined the civil rights fight, the campaign to secure the enactment of the 1964 Civil Rights Act had achieved its goal - to ensure that black citizens would have the power to represent themselves in government.
* **"They told us we wouldn't get here. And there were those who said that we would get here only over their dead bodies. But all the world today knows that we are here and we are standing before the forces of power in the state of Alabama saying, 'We ain't goin' let nobody turn us around.'"**
* **- “Our God is Marching On!”, March 25, 1965**
* Of course, the fight was not over. Over the next few years King continued to lead marches and rallies across the country. In 1965 King helped organize three marches to the Alabama state capitol to protest continued voting rights violations. The first march ended in violence, as police used tear gas and billy clubs against the peaceful protestors. Undeterred by “Bloody Sunday”, the activists marched twice more and finally reached the capitol in an emotional validation of their rights on March 25.
* **“I've seen the promised land. 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. And I'm happy, tonight. I'm not worried about anything. I'm not fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord.”**
* **- “I've Been to the Mountaintop”, April 3, 1968**
* During this period King was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize and the American Liberties Medallion by the American Jewish Committee. He broadened his focus and began to speak out against the Vietnam War and the economic injustice that plagued the nation. King was concerned that the United States government was spending money on a wasteful war while it should have been directed toward programs to help the nation's poorest citizens.
* In early April, 1968, King visited Memphis, Tennessee to support the local black sanitary public works union. On April 4, King was shot to death by James Earl Ray in his hotel in Memphis. President Johnson called a national day of mourning on April 7. In 1983 Congress cemented King's legacy as an American icon by declaring the third Monday of every January Martin Luther King, Jr. Day.
* **"If you give your life to a cause in which you believe, and if it is right and just, and if your life comes to an end as a result of this, then your life could not have been spent in a more redemptive way. I think that is what my husband has done."**
* **- Coretta Scott King, April 9, 1968**
* Dr. King's legacy has inspired civil rights activists for the past forty years, and will continue to do so as long as there is injustice in the world. Organizations like the NAACP have carried on his work on behalf of all people of color, and have endeavored to keep his dream alive for future generations. We can always look to Dr. King's actions – and, especially, his words – to remind us of what we are fighting for and why we must continue to fight. If we ever get sidetracked or discouraged, we can remember Dr. King's closing remarks at the NAACP Emancipation Day Rally in 1957:
* “I close by saying there is nothing greater in all the world than freedom. It's worth going to jail for. It's worth losing a job for. It's worth dying for. My friends, go out this evening determined to achieve this freedom which God wants for all of His children.”

# Martin Luther King, Jr.

From New World Encyclopedia





Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King addressing the press in 1964. "An eye for an eye makes the whole world blind".

The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (January 15, 1929–April 4, 1968) was America's foremost civil rights leader and is deemed by many as the greatest American leader of the twentieth century. His leadership was fundamental to ending legal segregation in the [United States](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/United_States) and empowering the African-American community. A moral leader foremost, he espoused non-violence as the means to bring about political change, emphasizing that spiritual principles guided by love can triumph over politics driven by hate and fear. He was a superb orator, best known for his "I Have a Dream" speech given at the March on Washington on August 28, 1963. King became the youngest person to win the [Nobel Peace Prize](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Nobel_Peace_Prize) in 1964.

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At age 39, he was killed by an assassin's bullet in 1968. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s impact and legacy was not limited to the U.S., but was worldwide, including influencing the struggle against [apartheid](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Apartheid) in [South Africa](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/South_Africa). He is only one of three Americans to have a national holiday, and the only African-American.

## Introduction

From the halls of the highest scholasticism to the valleys of the deepest and most pragmatic activism, Dr. King combined the qualities that propelled him to world-figure-hero status during the course of his life. No other scholar-activist, except possibly [Mahatma Gandhi](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Mahatma_Gandhi), did as fine a job of descending from the lofty level of the ivory tower and walking among the masses, meeting them at their level, giving voice to their yearnings, and exemplifying the common touch. Comfortable in his own skin and confident in the righteousness of his cause, King still grappled daily with the doubts, struggles, and temptations that inevitably burden all leaders. Stephen B. Oates tells us that:

Like everybody, King had imperfections: he had hurts and insecurities, conflicts and contradictions, guilts and frailties, a good deal of anger, and he made mistakes. …his achievements… were astounding for a man who was cut down at the age of only 39 and who labored against staggering odds—not only the bastion of segregation that was the American South of his day, but the monstrously complex racial barriers of the urban North, a hateful FBI crusade against him, a lot of jealousy on the part of rival civil-rights leaders and organizations, and finally the Vietnam War and a vengeful [Lyndon Johnson](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Lyndon_B._Johnson). King was all things to the American Negro movement—advocate, orator, field general, historian, fund raiser, and symbol. Though he longed to be a teacher and scholar on the university level, he became instead a master of direct-action protest, using it in imaginative and unprecedented ways to stimulate powerful federal legislation that radically altered Southern race relations.[[1]](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Martin_Luther_King%2C_Jr.#cite_note-0)

Despite his flaws, King maintained an attitude of public-minded, self-sacrificial service, which was the hallmark of both his impressively enlightened Christian faith and his lifestyle of [prayer](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Prayer), perseverance, and contemplation.

*Did you know?*

*Martin Luther King, Jr. received the* [*Nobel Peace Prize*](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Nobel_Peace_Prize) *in 1964 for his work to end racial segregation through nonviolent means; at the time he was the award's youngest recipient*

Before the end of his life, he had (1) become the third black and the youngest person to ever receive the [Nobel Peace Prize](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Nobel_Peace_Prize); (2) established himself as the chief architect and premiere spokesperson for the [Civil Rights Movement of 1955-1968](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/African-American_Civil_Rights_Movement_%281955-1968%29)—an authentically religious revival, the socio-political impact of which was unprecedented in human history; (3) been jailed for a total of twenty-nine times, in the name of freedom and justice; (4) witnessed, first hand, the death of the wickedly racist [Jim-Crow](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Jim_Crow_Laws) system of legal segregation in the South; and (5) led the Civil Rights struggle on its march toward inspiring the [United States](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/United_States) of America to earnestly practice the truths found in the Bible, which stands as the cornerstone of its republican form of government. He was posthumously awarded the [Presidential Medal of Freedom](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Presidential_Medal_of_Freedom) by [Jimmy Carter](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Jimmy_Carter), in 1977, and the [Congressional Gold Medal](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Congressional_Gold_Medal) in 2004. In 1986, during the administration of President [Ronald Reagan](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Ronald_Reagan), Martin Luther King Day was established in his honor. King's most influential and well-known public address is his world-renowned "I Have A Dream" speech, delivered at the Lincoln Memorial, on August 28, 1963.

Through intense study and masterfully systematic thought, King successfully merged his intimate knowledge of the [Declaration of Independence](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Declaration_of_Independence_%28United_States%29), the [U.S. Constitution](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/United_States_Constitution), the Mayflower Compact, and other documents, with his strikingly insightful, biblical worldview. As a result, he ultimately forged within himself an undying love for America and a passion for its destiny. That passion fueled his vision and instilled his being with a flaming religious commitment. It was this committed life that made it possible for him to become both a sterling example of sacrificial leadership and a providential instrument of the most noble Judeo-Christian ideals. And it was that model of leadership that fueled the Civil Rights Movement in its nearly successful effort at inciting a Christian Revolution within the borders of the United States.

## Biography

### Birth, early life, and education

**Martin Luther King, Jr.** was born on January 15, 1929, in Atlanta, Georgia, the second child and first son of the Rev. Martin Luther King, Sr., and Mrs. Alberta Williams King. Reverend King—the boy's father—was pastor of black Atlanta's historical, influential, and prestigious Ebenezer Baptist Church. As such, the Rev. King was likewise a pillar in Atlanta's black middle class. He ruled his household with a fierceness not unlike that of an Old Testament patriarch, and he provided a lifestyle in which his children were disciplined, protected, and very well provided for. By the Reverend King's decree, his son (Martin Luther King, Jr.), during the course of his youth, went by the name "M.L." A strong and healthy newborn, M.L. had been preceded in birth by his sister, Willie Christine, and was followed by his brother, Alfred Daniel, or A.D. Within the context of his rearing, and because he was his father's son, the church was M.L.'s second home. It functioned as the hub around which the wheel of King family life rotated. And the sanctuary was located only three blocks away from the big house on Auburn Avenue. Having been slipped, by his parents, into grade school a year early, and having been bright and gifted enough to skip a number of grades along the way, M.L. entered Booker T. Washington High School in 1942, at the age of 13. Two years later, as an exceptional high school junior, he passed Morehouse College's entrance exam, graduated from Booker T. Washington after the eleventh grade, and, at the age of 15, enrolled in Morehouse. There, he was mentored by the school's president, civil rights veteran Dr. Benjamin Mays. King graduated from Morehouse in 1948, with a Bachelor of Arts degree in [Sociology](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Sociology). He subsequently enrolled at Crozer Theological Seminary in Chester, Pennsylvania, where he was elected student-body president, and from where he later graduated as class valedictorian, with a Bachelor of Divinity degree, in 1951.[[2]](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Martin_Luther_King%2C_Jr.#cite_note-1)

In 1955, he received a Doctor of Philosophy in Systematic Theology from Boston University. Thus, from the age of 15 until 26, King embarked upon a pilgrimage of intellectual discovery. Through it, he systematized a religious and social worldview, characterized by unusually striking insights and by an unshakable adherence to the power of nonviolence and redemption through unearned [suffering](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Suffering).

### Marriage and family life

Following a whirlwind, 16-month courtship, Martin Luther King, Jr., married [Coretta Scott](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Coretta_Scott_King), on June 18, 1953. King's father performed the wedding ceremony at the residence of Scott's parents in Marion, Alabama.

Martin and Coretta Scott King were the parents of four children:

* Yolanda Denise (b. November 17, 1955, Montgomery, Alabama; d. May 15, 2007)
* Martin Luther III (b. October 23, 1957, Montgomery, Alabama)
* Dexter Scott (b. January 30, 1961, Atlanta, Georgia)
* Bernice Albertine (b. March 28, 1963, Atlanta, Georgia)

All four children followed in their father's footsteps as civil rights activists, although their opinions differ on a number of controversial issues. Coretta Scott King passed away on January 30, 2006.

## Career and civil rights activism

The best way to understand the impact of King's 13-year crusade for freedom and justice is to divide his career into two periods—before the Selma, Alabama campaign and after it. The first period ignited with the Montgomery Bus Boycott of December 1955 and closed with the successful voting-rights march from Selma to Montgomery, on March 25, 1965. The second period commenced with the January 1966 Chicago campaign for jobs and slum elimination and ended with the assassination of Dr. King on April 4, 1968, in Memphis. During the first period, King's belief in divine justice and his vision of a new Christian social order fueled his sublime oratory and his equally sublime courage. This resulted in a shared commitment to the concept of "**noncooperation with evil**," that swept the ranks of Civil Rights Movement devotees. Through nonviolent, passive resistance, they protested the social evils and injustices of segregation and refused to obey and/or comply with unjust and immoral [Jim Crow laws](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Jim_Crow_laws). The subsequent beatings, jailings, abuses, and violence that were heaped upon these protesters ultimately became the price they paid for unprecedented victories.

Martin Luther King Jr., after his arrest in February of 1956, at the age of 27. He had been arrested during the Montgomery Bus Boycott. The mug shot was found in July, 2004, during the cleaning out of a storage room at the Montgomery County Sheriff's Department. Someone had written "DEAD" twice on the picture, as well as 4-4-68, the date King was killed, though it is not known who wrote it.

### The Montgomery Bus Boycott

This campaign lasted from December 2, 1955 until December 21, 1956, and it culminated with the [Supreme Court](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Supreme_Court_of_the_United_States)'s declaration that Alabama's system of bus segregation was unconstitutional. On the heels of the courageous stand by Mrs. [Rosa Parks](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Rosa_Parks) and against the subsequent backlash of white hatred and violence, King's leadership had wrought a stunning triumph, as Montgomery blacks displayed bravery, conviction, solidarity, and noble adherence to Christian principles, and ultimately achieved their goal of desegregating the city's buses. And through this victory, King and his ecclesiastical colleagues elevated to new heights the historic role of the black clergyman as the leader in the quest for civil rights.

### Birth of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC)

In the aftermath of the victorious Montgomery effort, King recognized the need for a mass movement that would capitalize on the success. The Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) was organized on August 7-8, 1959, and King was unanimously elected as president. This was an organization that brought a significantly different focus to the already established mix of the major civil-rights groups. According to Oates:

SCLC's main goal was to bring the Negro masses into the freedom struggle by expanding the "Montgomery way" across the South....SCLC's initial project was a South-wide voter registration drive called the "Crusade for Citizenship," to commence on Lincoln's birthday, 1958, and to demonstrate once again that "a new Negro," determined to be free, had emerged in America.[[3]](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Martin_Luther_King%2C_Jr.#cite_note-2)

### Extending the Stride Toward Freedom

Along with his best friend, the Rev. Ralph D. Abernathy, Dr. King met with Vice President [Richard M. Nixon](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Richard_M._Nixon) on June 13, 1957. A year later, on June 23, 1958, King, A. Philip Randolph, Roy Wilkins, and Lester Granger met with President [Dwight D. Eisenhower](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Dwight_D._Eisenhower). The SCLC leader was ultimately repulsed by both Nixon and Eisenhower, and King finally gave up on the idea of working with either of them. From 1957-1959, King struggled to (1) keep the ranks of the Civil Rights Movement unified; (2) raise desperately needed funds; (3) systematize and disseminate the theory and practice of nonviolence; and (4) establish himself as an incisively competent author. Among other black leaders, there was jealousy of King and his popularity. But this was an issue in which the press did not take much interest. When King's first book, *Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story,* hit bookstores, the SCLC leader's prestige skyrocketed as he proclaimed to the world: "To become the instrument of a great idea is a privilege that history gives only occasionally. Arnold Toynbee says in *A Study of History,* that it may be the Negro who will give the new spiritual dynamic to Western civilization that it so desperately needs to survive." (1982:129).

Dr. King was extolled by *Christian Century* as the leader who had guided his people to unlock "the revolutionary resources of the gospel of Christ." (1982: 133).

Following the September 20, 1958 stabbing attempt on his life by the demented Mrs. Izola Curry, King endeared himself, nationwide, to millions of both black and white Americans, when he forgave the woman and refused to press charges against her. Resigning from the pastorate of Dexter Avenue Baptist Church on November 29, 1959, the SCLC leader spent the next three years watching historic events unfolding in city after city throughout the South. In 1960, he returned to his native city of Atlanta and became co-pastor, with his father, at Ebenezer Baptist Church. From this platform, he sought to advance his SCLC and Civil Rights Movement agendas, while striving to ensure cooperation and harmony among the SCLC, the [NAACP](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/National_Association_for_the_Advancement_of_Colored_People), and the National Urban League. In the meantime, scores of protesters increasingly joined in uttering the battle cry of "Remember the teachings of [Jesus](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Jesus_of_Nazareth), [Gandhi](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Mahatma_Gandhi), and Martin Luther King."

Throughout the year of 1960, King was encouraged by the startlingly pleasant development of student sit-in demonstrations across the South. With black students on numerous campuses now joining in the struggle, the SCLC president was delighted. And as the sit-ins spread, King boldly and unequivocally declared his full-fledged endorsement of their strategic courage in the quest to desegregate eating facilities in Southern cities. When the sit-ins broke out in Atlanta, King lent his voice to the local students' determination, as he penned for the nation at large a defense and an interpretation of the student activism: "A generation of young people has come out of decades of shadows to face naked state power; it has lost its fears, and experienced the majestic dignity of a directed struggle for its own liberation. These young people have connected up with their own history—the slave revolts, the incomplete revolution of the Civil War, the brotherhood of colonial colored men in Africa and Asia. They are an integral part of the history which is reshaping the world, replacing a dying order with a modern democracy."[[4]](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Martin_Luther_King%2C_Jr.#cite_note-3)

On Wednesday, October 19, 1960, King was arrested along with 33 young people who were protesting segregation at the lunch counter of Rich's Snack Bar in an Atlanta department store. Although charges were dropped and the jailed students were all set free, the SCLC leader remained imprisoned. Through trumped-up charges and judicial chicanery, King was convicted of violating his probation regarding a minor traffic offense committed several months earlier, and he was sentenced to four months hard labor in Reidsville State Penitentiary, three hundred miles from Atlanta. The volatile combination of widespread concern for King's safety; public outrage over Georgia's flouting of legal procedure; and the failure of President Dwight Eisenhower to intervene, catapulted the case to national proportions. It was only after the intercession by Democratic presidential candidate [John F. Kennedy](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/John_F._Kennedy) that the SCLC leader was released, on October 28. Throughout the black community across the nation, Kennedy's action was so widely publicized that historians generally agree this episode garnered crucial black votes for him and contributed substantially to his slender election victory some eight days later.

Throughout 1961, King witnessed and lauded the development of the method known as Freedom Rides, a technique launched across the South to confront and topple the practice of racially segregated interstate bus facilities. The practice of Freedom Riding proved to be a nightmarishly dangerous and deadly mission that elicited great sacrifice and bloodshed. Yet this was the reason that it was ultimately a spectacular success. "As it turned out, the Freedom Rides dealt a death blow to Jim Crow bus facilities. At (Attorney General) [Robert Kennedy](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Robert_Kennedy)'s request, the Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC), that September, issued regulations ending segregated facilities in interstate bus stations; their regulations were to take effect on November 1, 1961" (1982: 173). The victories achieved from the blood, sweat, and tears offered on the altars of sit-ins and Freedom Rides emboldened King to issue his clarion call for all Americans to join these black, white, brown, Jewish, Protestant, and Catholic students in a campaign to forever rid the nation of Jim Crow. Thus, the momentum of the years from 1961-1965 lifted King's influence to its zenith.

Through the Bible-based tactics of applied nonviolence (protest marches, sit-ins, and Freedom Rides), committed allegiance was educed from scores of blacks and sincere whites across the country. Support likewise came from the administrations of Presidents Kennedy and [Lyndon B. Johnson](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Lyndon_B._Johnson). Advancement took place, despite constant suffering, setbacks, and even notable failures such as at Albany, Georgia (1961-1962), where the movement was utterly and resoundingly defeated in its campaign to desegregate public parks, pools, lunch counters, and other facilities. Taking stock of their failure, King and his lieutenants concluded that the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) had sided with the Albany segregationists. Despite blacks' repeated complaints regarding the violation of their civil rights, FBI agents had shown absolutely no interest whatsoever. In his statement to the press, the SCLC leader declared: "One of the greatest problems we face with the FBI in the South is that the agents are white Southerners who have been influenced by the mores of their community. To maintain their status, they have to be friendly with the local police and people who are promoting segregation. Every time I saw FBI men in Albany, they were with the local police force."[[5]](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Martin_Luther_King%2C_Jr.#cite_note-4) Incensed by these remarks, FBI officials—Director [J. Edgar Hoover](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/J._Edgar_Hoover) in particular—angrily determined to make King pay the full price for his "sinister audacity" to criticize them, the accuracy of King's assessment notwithstanding.

Albany highlighted for King the rigidity and defensiveness of the white South, with regard to the race issue. The SCLC president grew so distressed that he seriously entertained thoughts of quitting the [Civil Rights Movement](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Civil_Rights_Movement). A tempting proposal came to him from Sol Hurok's agency, offering him the position of its chief, around-the-world lecturer, with a guaranteed salary of $100,000/year. King grappled with the idea, finally told them no, and, with reawakened resolution, committed himself irrescissibly to the Movement.[[6]](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Martin_Luther_King%2C_Jr.#cite_note-5)

From a procession of speeches and published articles during the late fall and early winter of 1962, King forged a new determination. From his conversations with Alabama's Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth—the head of SCLC's Birmingham auxiliary, the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights (ACMHR)—the SCLC leader conceived a strategy whereby a victorious direct-action campaign in Birmingham would make up for the debacle in Albany and would break the back of legal segregation in Birmingham once and for all.

### Letter From Birmingham Jail

The four-month span from February through May 1963 found King, Shuttlesworth, Abernathy, and others drawing nationwide attention to Birmingham, with their campaign to deracinate the city's stringent segregation policies and expose to the world the viciousness and violence of this community's segregationists. Racism at lunch counters and in hiring practices was ugly enough. Now, added to the humiliation, was the brutality displayed by Police Commissioner Eugene "Bull" Connor, whose officers unleashed dogs and firehoses upon the peaceful demonstrators. And King was resolved that, in the streets of Birmingham, he and his people would awaken the moral conscience of America. In his own words:

We must say to our white brothers all over the South who try to keep us down: we will match your capacity to inflict suffering with our capacity to endure suffering. We will match your physical force with soul force. We will not hate you. And yet we cannot, in all good conscience, obey your evil laws. Do to us what you will. Threaten our children and we will still love you…. Say that we're too low, that we're too degraded, yet we will still love you. Bomb our homes and go to our churches early in the morning and bomb them, if you please, and we will still love you. We will wear you down by our capacity to suffer. In winning the victory, we will not only win our freedom. We will so appeal to your heart and your conscience that we will win you in the process.[[7]](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Martin_Luther_King%2C_Jr.#cite_note-6)

Along with vast numbers of his supporters, including hundreds of schoolchildren, the SCLC leader was arrested and jailed. Notably, among King's supporters, the black clergy of Birmingham were nowhere to be found. And the white clergy had issued a strong statement entreating blacks to not support the demonstrations, and to, instead, press their case in the courts. That statement had been signed by eight white Christian and Jewish clergymen of Alabama. From his Birmingham jail cell, King penned a highly eloquent response that articulated his philosophy of civil disobedience:

You may well ask, 'Why direct action? Why sit-ins, marches, etc.? Isn't negotiation a better path?' You are exactly right in your call for negotiation. Indeed, this is the very purpose of direct action. Nonviolent direct action seeks to create such a crisis and establish such creative tension that a community that has constantly refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issue. It seeks to so dramatize the issue that it can no longer be ignored…. History is the long and tragic story of the fact that privileged groups seldom give up their privileges voluntarily…. We know through painful experience that freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed.[[8]](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Martin_Luther_King%2C_Jr.#cite_note-7)

By mid-May, after three days of around-the-clock negotiations, the demonstrators and the white power structure came to agreements. All of the movement's demands were met. In front of a packed press conference, King and Shuttlesworth stated: "The city of Birmingham has reached an accord with its conscience. Birmingham may well offer for Twentieth Century America an example of progressive racial relations; and for all mankind a dawn of a new day."[[9]](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Martin_Luther_King%2C_Jr.#cite_note-8)

### Walk To Freedom With Martin Luther King, Jr.

Sixty-six days before the famed March on Washington, King was in [Detroit, Michigan](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Detroit%2C_Michigan), at the request of his ecclesiastical colleague, the Rev. C.L. Franklin. Franklin was part of an alliance that included the influential, local black millionaire, James Del Rio, and other members of the Detroit Council for Human Rights. These activists were determined to engineer a huge Kingian breakthrough in the North, and subsequently open up a new Northern front, by orchestrating a massive demonstration of support. As a thriving labor town for blacks, Detroit possessed a solid black middle class that had blossomed from the workforce of its automobile factories. Organized by the esteemed local newspaper journalist, Tony Brown, Detroit's "Walk to Freedom With Martin Luther King, Jr." ensued on June 23, 1963, along the city's Woodward Avenue. Marching in step with the SCLC president, a throng of some 250,000 - 500,000 people moved as one united wave of humanity. The march ended at Covall Hall Auditorium, where King took the stage, and, surrounded by a packed house of listeners, launched into the "I Have A Dream" address that he would also deliver sixty-six days later at the [Lincoln Memorial](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Lincoln_Memorial). The June 29, 1963 edition of *Business Week* magazine praised the event as extraordinary. King was lauded as the incarnate messenger of nonviolence. And at the time of the Detroit march, he was ascending daily in his credibility, following the success of the Birmingham campaign. Media coverage of the Detroit march was lavish, once again reiterating the lesson King had learned from the Freedom Rides of the South: attaining authentic success in civil rights efforts mandated doing something dramatic enough to elicit national media attention. Of all the black leaders of his generation, none learned that lesson as well as the SCLC president had.





King is perhaps most famous for his "I Have a Dream" speech, given in front of the [Lincoln Memorial](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Lincoln_Memorial) during the August 28, 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom.

### Behold The Dreamer, Who Can No Longer Wait

Arriving in [Washington, D.C.](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Washington%2C_D.C.) on August 27, the day before the great march, King and Coretta entered their suite at the Willard Hotel, and the SCLC president began working on his speech. With support from Walter Fauntroy, Andrew Young, Wyatt T. Walker, and [Ralph Abernathy](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Ralph_Abernathy), King toiled throughout the night. According to King biographer, Stephen B. Oates: "Two months ago, in Detroit, he had talked about his dream of a free and just America. But he doubted he could elucidate on that theme in only a few minutes. He elected instead to talk about how America had given the Negro a bad check, and what that meant in light of the [Emancipation Proclamation](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Emancipation_Proclamation)."[[10]](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Martin_Luther_King%2C_Jr.#cite_note-9) On August 28, 1963, before a throng of at least 250,000 people, the emotional power and prophetic ring of King's oratory uplifted the crowds, as the rally crescendoed to its conclusion. And he made the point that blacks could wait no longer—that the time of patiently waiting for America to do right by the black man was over:

We have also come to this hallowed spot to remind America of the fierce urgency of *now*….*Now* is the time to make real the promises of Democracy. *Now* is the time to rise from the dark and desolate valley of segregation to the sunlit path of racial justice. *Now* is the time to lift our nation from the quicksands of racial injustice to the solid rock of brotherhood. *Now* is the time to make justice a reality for all God's children."[[11]](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Martin_Luther_King%2C_Jr.#cite_note-10)

The biblical phraseology did its work. Later, when asked about her recollection of the address, Coretta Scott King remarked, "At that moment, it seemed as if the Kingdom of God appeared. But it only lasted for a moment."[[12]](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Martin_Luther_King%2C_Jr.#cite_note-11)

King's fame and celebrity were now at their peak. To the public, he was the symbol of a coalition of conscience on the [civil rights](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Civil_rights) issue. But the white racial hostility was not gone, and on Sunday morning, September 15, Birmingham's Sixteenth Street Baptist Church was rocked by a dynamite bomb, that killed four young girls. At a joint funeral service for three of them, King gave the eulogy. Not one single member of Birmingham's white, city officialdom attended the service. The only whites present were a few courageous ministers. Sixty-eight days after the church bombing, on Friday, November 22, President [John F. Kennedy](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/John_F._Kennedy) was dead at Dallas' Parkland Hospital, the victim of a sniper's bullet. King joined the rest of the nation in a period of mournful soul searching, stating to Coretta and to Bernard Lee, "This is what is going to happen to me also. I keep telling you, this is a sick nation. And I don't think I can survive either."[[13]](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Martin_Luther_King%2C_Jr.#cite_note-12)

As the year of 1963 came to an end, the SCLC leader was riding the wave of unprecedented fame. He was now the first [American black](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/African_American) to ever win the honor of *TIME* magazine's "Man of the Year" award. He had displayed exemplary physical courage in the face of danger, and he had been borne to glory on the wings of his "I Have A Dream" speech. Now he was at the center of a rising tide of [civil rights](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Civil_rights) progress that was strongly impacting national and international opinion. The result was the passage of the [Civil Rights Act of 1964](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Civil_Rights_Act_of_1964), a legislative hammer that empowered the national government to outlaw discrimination in publicly-owned facilities and to enforce the desegregation of public accommodations. As the eventful year of 1964 came to a close, King placed the exclamation point at the end of it by becoming the youngest recipient ever of the [Nobel Peace Prize](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Nobel_Peace_Prize), on December 10, in Oslo, Norway.

### Campaigns In Selma and Chicago

The plans for "Project Alabama" were on the table by Christmas time 1964. The goal was the dramatization of the need for a federal voting-rights law that would put legal muscle behind the enfranchisement of blacks in the South. From January until March 1965, the protest marches and demonstrations let Selma know that the SCLC leader and his followers were serious and were playing for keeps. During King's pilotage of the Selma Movement, the city received a visit from [Malcolm X](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Malcolm_X), who had flown in, addressed a gathering at Brown Chapel, given Coretta a message for King, and had then departed. Two weeks later, Malcolm X would be assassinated by blacks in New York City.

King's imprisonment in Selma, on February 1, 1965, had attracted the national media as well as the attention of the Johnson White House, as blacks struggled to make the right to vote a reality for themselves and all Americans.

On March 7, a procession from Selma to the State Capitol building in Montgomery commenced. King did not lead it himself, as he was in Atlanta. The marchers encountered state troopers who were armed with tear gas, billy clubs, bullwhips, and rubber tubing wrapped in barbed wire. Using these weapons, the troopers attacked the defenseless, nonviolent demonstrators with such viciousness and wrath that by the end of the ordeal, 70 blacks had been hospitalized and an additional 70 treated for injuries. That night, the country was shaken by the news of this brutality in a way that it had never been shaken before, as a film clip of Selma's "Bloody Sunday" interrupted the broadcast of ABC Television's Sunday-night movie, *Judgment at Nuremburg*. The national outcry was deafening, and public opinion sided with the battered protesters. With a surge of public sympathy now shoring up his Selma Movement, King led a second march on March 9. The procession of 1,500 black and white protesters walked across the Pettus Bridge until it was stopped by a wall of highway patrol officers. The protesters were ordered to abort their march. King objected, but to no avail. The SCLC leader decided at that point to not move forward and force a confrontation. Instead, he led his followers in kneeling to pray and then, surprisingly, turning back. Angered by this decision were many of the young Black Power radicals who already viewed King as being too cautious and overly conservative. These radicals withdrew their moral support. Nevertheless, the nation was now aroused, as events in Selma sparked wide-scale outrage and resulted in the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. On March 25, King and some 25,000 of his followers concluded a four-day, victorious, Selma-to-Montgomery march, escorted by 800 federal troops. Among blacks, the SCLC president now enjoyed the status of a "new [Moses](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Moses)," anointed to lead America on a modern-day Exodus to a new Canaan.

His moral authority, vision, clout, and credibility notwithstanding, King was unable to allay the impatience blacks now felt at the lack of greater substantive economic and social progress. Such frustration was the root of growing black militancy and the rising popularity of the Black Power Movement. With his Bible-based philosophy of nonviolence under ever-increasing attack, the SCLC leader searched for a way to meet the challenges of the ghetto and its concomitant despair. At the beginning of 1966, King and his forces embarked upon a drive against racial discrimination in Chicago, Illinois. Their chief target was to be segregation in housing. Tremendous media interest was generated by King's entry into Chicago. After a spring and a summer of protest and civil disobedience, the protesters and the city signed an agreement—a document which ultimately turned out to be essentially worthless. The impression remained that King's Chicago campaign ended up null and void, due to the opposition from the city's powerful mayor, Richard J. Daley, as well as due to the poorly understood complexities that characterized Northern racism.

### Additional challenges and the FBI's war against King

In the North as well as in the South, Black Power enthusiasts were challenging and deriding King's thought and his methods. He therefore sought to broaden his appeal by including controversial issues beyond the realm of racial politics that were no less detrimental to black people's progress. These included his irrevocable opposition to the United States' involvement in the [Vietnam War](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Vietnam_War) and his vision of a poor people's coalition that would embrace all races and would target economic problems such as [poverty](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Poverty) and [unemployment](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Unemployment). The SCLC president was hitting one ideological dead end after another, and he was now in search of theories and analyses that would be relevant to the deeper problems he was currently running up against. As he stated to journalist David Halberstam:

For years, …I labored with the idea of reforming the existing institutions of the South, a little change here, a little change there. Now I feel quite differently. I think you've got to have a reconstruction of the entire society—a revolution of values.[[14]](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Martin_Luther_King%2C_Jr.#cite_note-13)

This challenge to remain relevant and at the cutting edges of the issues kept King under the relentless bombardment of pressure. The Anti-War Movement and the [riots](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Riot) of 1967 only added to the philosophical and spiritual struggles. The SCLC leader sensed, excruciatingly, that "something else had to be found within the arsenal of nonviolence—a new approach that would salvage nonviolence as a tactic, as well as dramatize the need for jobs and economic advancement of the poor."[[15]](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Martin_Luther_King%2C_Jr.#cite_note-14)

Excoriated by critics on the left and the right for his anti-war stance, King strove to keep his sights on the plight of the poor. He was increasingly faced with the limitations of his own worldview, and yet he was committed to elevate and enhance his service to humanity.

"In a 'Christian Sermon on Peace,' aired over the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation on Christmas Eve 1967 and delivered in person at Ebenezer Baptist Church, King called for a total reconstruction of society for the benefit of white and colored peoples the world over. Human life, he warned, could not survive unless human beings went beyond class, tribe, race, and nation, and developed a world perspective."[[16]](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Martin_Luther_King%2C_Jr.#cite_note-15)

Meanwhile, the FBI stepped up its persecution of King. There were contracts on his life, with assassination threats from the [Ku Klux Klan](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Ku_Klux_Klan) and other hate groups that had him pinpointed for violence. However, King found the strength to persevere, and he stayed his course. He envisioned a massive Washington, D.C. campaign that would flood the nation's capital with an army of its poor and unemployed. "White America must recognize that justice for black people cannot be changed without radical changes in the structure of our society—changes that would redistribute economic and political power and that would end poverty, racism, and war."[[17]](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Martin_Luther_King%2C_Jr.#cite_note-16)

### King's assassination and its aftermath

King's plans for the Poor People's March were interrupted in the spring of 1968 by a trip that he made to Memphis, Tennessee to show support for a strike by that city's sanitation workers. The SCLC leader's arrival in Memphis on April 3 created a local sensation and attracted a bevy of news reporters and cameramen. That night, two thousand supporters and a large press and television corps turned out at Mason Temple to hear an address by the 20th century's most peaceful warrior. King had been extremely reluctant to make an appearance, but he finally decided that he would do so for the sake of the people who so dearly loved him. The address that encapsulated and reaffirmed his life that night was destined to become known as his "I've Been To The Mountaintop" speech. By this time, to those who knew him, King had given the impression that his life may be near its end. The next day, April 4, 1968, at 6:01P.M., as the SCLC leader stood on the second-floor balcony of the Lorraine Motel where he was lodging, the loud crack of a high-powered rifle was heard, and a bullet decimated the right side of King's face with such impact that it ferociously knocked him backward.



Martin Luther King's tomb, located on the grounds of the Martin Luther King, Jr. National Historic Site (King Center)

At 7:05P.M., lying on an operating table at Saint Joseph's Hospital, Martin Luther King, Jr. was pronounced dead. News of the assassination sparked a nationwide wave of riots in more than 110 cities, with the worst damage being wreaked in Washington, D.C. In total, 39 people were killed during the mayhem, and section after section of one blazing city after another looked like a war zone. Ironically, the most egregious outburst of looting, [theft](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Theft), [arson](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Arson), and [murder](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Murder) had been incited by the death of the man who had incessantly taken his stand for nonviolence and peace.[[18]](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Martin_Luther_King%2C_Jr.#cite_note-17) In honor of the fallen visionary, [President Johnson](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Lyndon_Baines_Johnson) declared Sunday, April 7, a national day of mourning. Across the country, flags flew at half mast, and hordes of black and white Americans, together and in unison, marched, prayed, and sang freedom songs in tribute to King. After lying in state at the chapel of Spelman College, King's [funeral](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Funeral) was held on April 9 at Ebenezer Baptist Church, with Rev. Abernathy officiating. Finally, with 120 million Americans viewing by television, the special hearse bore the SCLC leader's body to South View Cemetery, where he was buried next to his grandparents.

Meanwhile, King's [assassination](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Assassination) had sparked one of the biggest manhunts in U.S. history. Two months after the SCLC leader's murder, escaped convict James Earl Ray was apprehended at London's Heathrow Airport, while attempting to leave the [United Kingdom](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/United_Kingdom), using a false [Canadian](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Canada) passport, under the name of "Ramon George Sneyd." Ray was quickly extradited to Tennessee and charged with King's assassination, to which he confessed on March 10, 1969. Three days later, he recanted this confession. Subsequently, Ray was sentenced to a 99-year prison term. Since then, there has been seemingly endless investigation, re-investigation, hearing, re-hearing, and speculation regarding Ray's guilt or innocence, the murder weapon and the culpability or non-culpability of the U.S. Government in relation to King's death. Key players have died, confessions have been recanted and altered, and vast conspiracy has been alleged but never proven. Long believed by many in the [African-American](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/African-American) community is the assertion that King's murder was the outcome of an FBI-led conspiracy.

In the eyes of many others, by the late 1990s, James Earl Ray had been exonerated, and former Memphis bar owner, Lloyd Jowers, emerged as the obvious culprit. At the time of Ray's death, in April 1998, Dr. King's son, Dexter Scott King, had come to believe that Ray was not involved in the assassination plot. In 1999, [Coretta Scott King](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Coretta_Scott_King), along with the rest of King's family, won a wrongful death civil trial against Lloyd Jowers and "other unknown co-conspirators." Jowers claimed to have received $100,000 to arrange King's assassination. The jury of six whites and six blacks found Jowers guilty and also found that "governmental agencies were parties" to the assassination plot. William Pepper represented the King family in the trial.[[19]](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Martin_Luther_King%2C_Jr.#cite_note-18)[[20]](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Martin_Luther_King%2C_Jr.#cite_note-19) [[21]](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Martin_Luther_King%2C_Jr.#cite_note-20)

In 2000, the Department of Justice completed its investigation into Jowers' claims, but did not find evidence to support the allegations about [conspiracy](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Conspiracy). The investigation report recommends no further investigation unless some new reliable facts are presented.[[22]](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Martin_Luther_King%2C_Jr.#cite_note-21) Later, in April 2002, Rev. Ronald Denton Wilson of Keystone Heights, Florida, told *The New York Times* that his father, Henry Clay Wilson, and not James Earl Ray, was the assassin of Martin Luther King, Jr. Rev. Wilson contended that his father was the leader of a small group of conspirators; that racism had nothing to do with the murder; Henry Clay Wilson shot King because of the former's belief that the latter was connected with the [Communist](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Communist) movement; and that James Earl Ray was set up to take the fall for the assassination.

## Legacy, Awards, and Achievements

### Academic and Intellectual Excellence

As one of the most widely revered figures in American history, Martin Luther King, Jr. is lauded the world over for his intellectual prowess and for his accomplishments in the moral and socio-political arenas of human affairs. During his lifetime, he was essentially unmatched in his ability to articulate the crucial issues and concerns of humanity from a genuinely prophetic vantage point, using scriptural phraseology and imagery with an adeptness that other clergymen envied. The comprehensiveness of King's Judeo-Christian worldview was astounding, and his trenchant theological and philosophical analysis of the world and its problems customarily left his opponents speechless and at a loss to offer any counterproposal to his assessments. A highly competent intellectual as well as a bona fide revolutionary, he could artfully turn phrases and eloquently paint word pictures that inspired hope, confidence, and courageous commitment within the hearts and minds of his listeners. In this regard, he was a stellar example of what [W.E.B. Du Bois](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/W.E.B._Du_Bois) referred to as the black race's Talented Tenth. King's ability to methodically think through and systematize his vast amount of learning and then call upon it to fuel the hearts and minds of millions is worthy of humanity's admiration.

### Lifestyle of Nonviolence

To this day, historians, politicians, sociologists, and religionists are fascinated by the fact that King's words and example actually inspired a generation to adopt the lifestyle of being viciously struck first, only to subsequently rise to victory over those who struck them, while praying for the forgiveness of their attackers. King succeeded in persuading his followers to embrace the idea that **unearned suffering is redemptive**—that one can recover one's lost position and/or overtake one's opposition through [suffering](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Suffering) that is unjustly inflicted but is accepted, digested, and overcome. By embracing this tradition, King and his followers were consciously imitating the pattern established by [Jesus](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Jesus), and the civil-rights victories that were subsequently won loomed as proof that the Living [God](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/God) was with these protagonists of racial integration

# Malcolm X

From New World Encyclopedia



**Malcolm X**

**Malcolm X** (May 19, 1925 – February 21, 1965) (Born **Malcolm Little**; Arabic name **El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz**) was a [Muslim](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Muslim) minister and a national spokesman for the Nation of Islam. He was also founder of the Muslim Mosque and of the Organization of Afro-American Unity. A self-educated, scholastically-inclined activist who arose from the depths of the black underclass' criminal element, he evolved into a hero-spokesman for those African-Americans who had long held that they and their suffering were invisible to the American mainstream.

As a fiery, socio-political critic of American Christianity's shortcomings and hypocrisies, he made the majority understand that maintaining the pretense of a just American society would be tolerated no longer. His ministry was a courageously scathing critique which held that the conventional systems of Western thought and traditional worldviews were not meeting the "race issue" challenges of the twentieth century, and people should face the fact there was an urgent need to look elsewhere for authentic solutions. In the final year of his short life, after a pilgrimage to [Mecca](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Mecca) and experience of new enlightenment, Malcolm X came to abandon his virulently anti-white, anti-Christian polemics and emerged more universal in perspective, beholding all men and women as his brothers and sisters under one God.

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## Introduction

As the [United States](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/United_States) entered 1920, the raging debate over whether the races should be separated or integrated became more and more sharply focused within the public consciousness. The debate was hottest within the black community. The preceding decade had seen at least 527 (reported) lynchings of American blacks, including the 1918 lynching of the pregnant Mary Turner in Valdosta, [Georgia](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Georgia). During the preceding decade, the [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/National_Association_for_the_Advancement_of_Colored_People) (NAACP) had been incorporated in [New York City](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/New_York_City), the administration of Democratic President [Woodrow Wilson](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Woodrow_Wilson) had made it clear that the guarantee of "fair and just treatment for all," meant "whites only." The nation had experienced no fewer than 33 major race riots and the [Ku Klux Klan](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Ku_Klux_Klan) had received a charter from the Superior Court of Fulton County, Georgia. Finally, the voice of [Booker T. Washington](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Booker_T._Washington) had passed away in 1915 from overwork and fatigue.

America's race crisis had reached a boiling point, and the world was witness to American Christianity's failure to deeply penetrate the culture and make real the tenets of [Jesus](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Jesus_of_Nazareth)'s teachings on the "fatherhood of [God](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/God)" and the "brotherhood of humanity." Fifty-seven years had passed since the [Emancipation Proclamation](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Emancipation_Proclamation),[[1]](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Malcolm_X%22%20%5Cl%20%22cite_note-0) and despite the climate of racial hatred, blacks—now 9.9 percent of the total population—were making substantial economic gains. By 1920, there were at least 74,400 blacks in business and/or business-related vocations. [African-Americans](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/African-American) in America had accumulated more than $1 billion in wealth, and the *self-help* drive was being led strongly by [Marcus Garvey](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Marcus_Garvey) and the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA).

In the midst of the blazing segregation-versus-integration debate, the black masses struggled daily for the cause of economic independence, coupled with solidarity and group uplift. Into this mix of interior activism and nationalist sentiment was born Malcolm X, whose voice would later ring articulately on behalf of the voiceless, on behalf of those blacks of the side streets, back streets, and ghettos, who were most alienated from the ideals of cultural assimilation and social integration. His message would position itself as the categorical antipode to the doctrine of nonviolent protest and belief in an integrated America that characterized the ministry of Rev. Dr. [Martin Luther King, Jr.](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Martin_Luther_King%2C_Jr.)

## Biography

### Birth, early life, and imprisonment

Malcolm Little was born May 19, 1925 in Omaha, [Nebraska](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Nebraska), to the Reverend Earl and Louise Norton Little. Malcolm's father was an outspoken [Baptist](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Baptist) lay preacher and a supporter of Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA). Garvey had begun serving his prison sentence for mail fraud just two months prior to Malcolm's birth. Malcolm described his father as a big black man who had lost one eye. Three of Earl Little's brothers had died violently at the hands of white men. One of the three had been lynched. Earl Little fathered three children by a previous marriage before he wedded Malcolm's mother. From this second marriage, he had eight children, of whom Malcolm was the fourth.

Louise Norton Little was born in [Grenada](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Grenada) and, according to Malcolm, her features were like those of a white woman. Her father was a white man, of whom very little is known except that his mother's conception was not consensual. Malcolm's light complexion and reddish-brown hair were inherited from his mother. For a period of his earlier life, Malcolm thought it a status symbol to be light-skinned. Later on, he professed to have "learned to hate every drop of that white rapist's blood that is in me." As a result of being the lightest child in the family, Malcolm received his father's favoritism. His mother, however, "gave me more hell for the same reason. She was very light herself, but she favored the ones who were darker."[[2]](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Malcolm_X#cite_note-1)

During Malcolm's first four years of life, the family was forced to relocate twice. A white supremacist organization known as the Black Legion issued death threats against the Rev. Earl Little, due to his fervent crusading and active campaigning with the teachings of Marcus Garvey. Even two months prior to Malcolm's birth, while the family was still living in Omaha, they had been harassed by the Ku Klux Klan.[[3]](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Malcolm_X#cite_note-timeline-2) By organizing UNIA meetings and preaching Garvey's message in the churches, Rev. Little drew the hostility of these racists. In 1929, the Little's Lansing, [Michigan](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Michigan) home was torched and burned to the ground. This sacrificial lifestyle of crusading and of incurring wrath caused tension within the household and sparked heated arguments between Malcolm's parents. In 1931, the mutilated body of Rev. Little was found lying across the town's streetcar tracks. Although the police ruled the death an accident,[[4]](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Malcolm_X%22%20%5Cl%20%22cite_note-3) Malcolm and his family were certain that their father had been murdered by members of the Black Legion.[[5]](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Malcolm_X#cite_note-4) Malcolm questioned how his father could have bashed himself in the head, and then lain down across streetcar tracks to get run over and virtually severed in two.[[6]](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Malcolm_X#cite_note-5)

Malcolm's mother made diligent effort to collect on the two insurance policies that her husband had always carried. The smaller one paid off, but the larger one paid nothing because the company claimed Earl Little had committed [suicide](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Suicide).[[7]](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Malcolm_X#cite_note-6) This response meant that the desperately needed money would not be forthcoming.

Over the next several years, the family's fortunes continued to dwindle. Destitution, social welfare, hunger, and shame became some of Malcolm's closest acquaintances. The hardships took their toll, and by 1937, Louise Little suffered an emotional breakdown, and was committed to the state mental hospital. The 12-year-old Malcolm and his siblings were subsequently separated and placed in different orphanages and foster homes. Twenty-six years would pass before Little's adult children were able to remove her from that institution.

Malcolm was elected president of his seventh-grade class, and he graduated from junior high school with top honors. Yet, his favorite teacher, upon hearing Malcolm state that he would like to one day become a lawyer, told the young student that the profession of law was "no realistic goal for a nigger."[[8]](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Malcolm_X#cite_note-7) This experience drastically changed Malcolm internally, and he lost interest in further academic achievement.

The pain from his favorite teacher's words had a transformational impact on Malcolm's attitude and view of life. After dropping out of school, he lived and worked for some time in [Boston](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Boston), [Massachusetts](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Massachusetts), and then made his way to Harlem, [New York](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/New_York_City). His schooling in con games, dope peddling, and other petty crimes soon began. By the time he was 18, Malcolm Little was hustling, pimping, and pulling armed robberies. In the underworld, he went by his nickname, "Detroit Red" (for the reddish color of his hair). A cocaine-abusing, [atheistic](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Atheism), uncouth heathen, he was at moral rock bottom, and was totally unconcerned about the consequences of a life of crime. Having ethically descended "to the point where I was walking on my own coffin,"[[9]](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Malcolm_X#cite_note-8) Malcolm and his best friend and [robbery](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Robbery) cohort, Malcolm "Shorty" Jarvis, were arrested and convicted on 14 counts of [burglary](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Burglary), in February 1946. Malcolm was not quite 21 years of age.

### The Nation of Islam ministry and the prosecution of America

Malcolm was the product of a disintegrated [nuclear family](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Nuclear_family) and an incarcerated felon. He had spent the preceding seven years on a descent into hell, going from job to job, and from hustle to hustle, reaching out for something that would assuage the childhood pain and make sense of the disappointments and contradictions of life. The next seven years would be spent behind bars, on a path of ascension, self-education, and intellectual renewal, as he found a way to channel the venomous rage that hallmarked his personality.

Malcolm knew the reality of life at the bottom of American society. He conversed in the backstreet vernacular, slang, profanity, and colloquialisms of the black underclass—an underclass desperately crying out for meaning, answers, direction, and leadership. Christianity—black America's overwhelmingly preferred choice of faith—had brought Malcolm none of these. And he despised both the Bible and the "blond, blue-eyed God"[[10]](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Malcolm_X#cite_note-9) it supposedly revealed. In his prison cell, "I would pace for hours, like a caged leopard, viciously cursing aloud to myself. And my favorite targets were the Bible and God…. Eventually, the men in the cell block had a name for me: 'Satan.' Because of my anti-religious attitude."[[11]](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Malcolm_X%22%20%5Cl%20%22cite_note-10) Malcolm critically analyzed himself and society, and he concluded that Christianity is an absurd religion and that God does not exist. To him, the hypocrisy of Christianity was evident in the failure of its white and black adherents to live out its tenets and to solve real societal problems such as racism and poverty.

Through their letters and visits, his siblings encouraged him to improve his penmanship and his command of the English language. This he did, via correspondence courses and exercises. He likewise broadened his vocabulary by a self-directed, privately-motivated journey through the entire dictionary, copying the words and reading them back to himself. Above all, there were the teachings of Elijah Muhammad, to which Malcolm was introduced by his brother, Reginald. Malcolm's sharp and widely-ranging intellectual curiosity was both satisfied and renewed by Muhammad's doctrines. Here at last, for Malcolm, was a worldview that made sense out of nonsense. The young convict was transformed and reborn. His commitment to dispelling his ignorance and obtaining "the true knowledge of the black man"[[12]](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Malcolm_X#cite_note-11) was steel-firm. His voracious appetite for studious, selective, and purposeful reading, he combined with his relish for the weekly debate sessions between inmate teams at the school building of the Norfolk, Massachusetts Prison Colony. Through these sessions, he honed his ability and his confidence to argue the truths of [Islam](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Islam) with anyone, anywhere, at anytime.

Upon his parole in August 1952, Malcolm re-entered society with a focus. He knew intimately the degradations of ghetto life, and, even better, the acquiescence of blacks in them. Self-hatred had once dragged him low, and he understood its crippling power. Now he was poised to wage a war of words that would unveil him as a force for the liberation of American blacks. The spiritually disciplined and purposeful lifestyle of a Muslim made his blood boil with expectation and a desire for action. His love for Allah and for Elijah Muhammad knew no bounds. Never again would he be an atheist. Malcolm later reflected on how well he had used his time in prison, to study, to transform himself, and to ready himself for the cause:

I don't think anybody ever got more out of going to prison than I did. In fact, prison enabled me to study far more intensively than I would have if my life had gone differently and I had attended some college. I imagine that one of the biggest troubles with colleges is there are too many distractions, too much panty-raiding, fraternities, and boola-boola and all of that. Where else but in prison could I have attacked my ignorance, by being able to study intensely, sometimes as much as fifteen hours a day?[[13]](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Malcolm_X#cite_note-12)

The world would soon learn that it was not due to a lack of intelligence that Malcolm Little had previously slid into a life of degradation, anger and crime. Over the next 12 years, he crusaded and evangelized to bring blacks out of the darkness and deception of Christianity and into the light and truth of Islam. He committed his blood, sweat, and tears to spread the message of Elijah Muhammad. This man, Malcolm worshiped, and he decided to quit his Ford Motor Company job "to spread his teachings, to establish more temples among the twenty-two million black brothers who were brainwashed and sleeping in the cities of North America."[[14]](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Malcolm_X#cite_note-13)

Having changed his surname from "Little" to "X," and having been ordained a Nation of Islam (NOI) minister, Malcolm launched into what would later appear to have been a nearly meteoric rise in recognition and celebrity. He organized and opened numerous new Muslim Temples (i.e., [mosques](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Mosque)), and made the NOI such a cultural phenomenon among the black masses that membership increased from four hundred in 1952 to 40,000 in 1964. His incendiary rhetoric and his bold, inflammatory denunciations of perceived injustices generated controversy and headlines. He became an electrifying media magnet. And the Minister Malcolm X was the human quintessence of accusation.

With one vehement aspersion after another, he excoriated the "corrupt, Judeo-Christian" cultural sphere, declaring it "bankrupt and hazardous to black people's health." His trenchant indictment was unleashed with fiery oration. In his worldview, hypocritical, irredeemable, Christian America was a guilty, criminal nation. The NOI was Allah's grand jury, indicting America for lynchings, oppression, racism, and a litany of other offenses. With these indictments, America was to be held without bail, and was to be immediately brought to trial. He, Malcolm X, was Allah's designated prosecutor, by the benevolence and the anointing of Elijah Muhammad. Even millions of black Christians, who would never have even dreamed of joining the NOI, still listened thoughtfully to him, feeling an empathetic tug of the heart:

You see my tears, brothers and sisters…. Tears haven't been in my eyes since I was a young boy. But I cannot help this when I feel the responsibility I have to help you comprehend for the first time what this white man's religion that we call 'Christianity' has *done* to us…. Brothers and sisters here for the first time, please don't let that shock you. I know you didn't expect this. Because none of us black people have thought that maybe we were making a mistake, not wondering if there wasn't a special religion somewhere for us—a special religion for the black man. Well, there *is* such a religion. It's called 'Islam.' …. But I'm going to tell you about Islam a little later. First, we need to understand some things about this 'Christianity' before we can understand why the answer for us is Islam."[[15]](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Malcolm_X#cite_note-14)

This was the prosecuting attorney, Malcolm X, pressing charges and making his case. As previously stated, he was the incarnation of indictment against Christian American culture. His Muslim faith indicted the "decadent Judeo-Christian" faith-tradition. And his black nationalism indicted the "deluded integration-ism" advocated by the [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/National_Association_for_the_Advancement_of_Colored_People) (NAACP) and other "so-called 'Negro-progress' organizations"[[16]](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Malcolm_X#cite_note-15) that constituted the civil rights leadership establishment.

In late 1959, [CBS](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/CBS)'s *Mike Wallace Show* aired a specially-filmed television documentary entitled *The Hate That Hate Produced*. This documentary had been created with the full cooperation and consent of the Nation of Islam (NOI). Its goal of shocking the American mainstream with the reality of the NOI's presence was met and exceeded. Almost simultaneously came the release of black scholar Dr. C. Eric Lincoln's book entitled *The Black Muslims in America.* Together, the documentary and the book propelled Elijah Muhammad and Malcolm X onto center stage of the racial segregation-integration controversy.

Over time, the fame and celebrity of Malcolm eventually surpassed that of Muhammad. His eclipse of his mentor was an outcome that Malcolm X never intended or even anticipated. On the contrary, the Minister displayed bold and courageous filial obedience and attendance, as he sought to always promote Elijah Muhammad over himself: "Anyone who has ever listened to me will have to agree that I believed in The Honorable Elijah Muhammad and represented him one hundred per cent. I never tried to take any credit for myself."[[17]](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Malcolm_X#cite_note-16) "Both white people and Negroes—even including Muslims—would make me uncomfortable, always giving me so much credit for the steady progress that the Nation of Islam was making. 'All praise is due to Allah,' I told everybody. 'Anything creditable that I do is due to Mr. Elijah Muhammad.'"[[18]](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Malcolm_X#cite_note-17)

As its recognition and notoriety continued to increase, the NOI enjoyed success at one mass rally after another across America. And both the press and the public mind locked on the *Black* in "Black Muslims." In vain, Malcolm X tried for two years to clarify that they were "*black* people in America" who were properly called 'Muslims' because "Our *religion* is Islam."[[19]](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Malcolm_X#cite_note-18)

Nevertheless, the name stuck, as did the "hate-teaching" image. From 1961-1964, the NOI flourished, as Malcolm X became more well known. The focus was not only on indicting white, Christian America, but the Minister also scolded blacks for their lack of entrepreneurial efforts at self-help. He felt frustrated that the teachings of Booker T. Washington and Marcus Garvey were being downplayed, and that the focus of the current civil-rights vision was upon litigation and legislatively forcing white people to give blacks a portion of what whites had achieved and built for themselves:

The American black man should be focusing his every effort toward building his own businesses and decent homes for himself. As other ethnic groups have done, let the black people, wherever possible, however possible, patronize their own kind, hire their own kind, and start in those ways to build up the black race's ability to do for itself. That's the only way the American black man is ever going to get respect. One thing the white man can never give the black man is self respect! The black man can never become independent and recognized as a human being who is truly equal with other human beings, until he has what they have, and until he is doing for himself what others are doing for themselves.[[20]](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Malcolm_X#cite_note-19)

With oratory such as this, the minister was leading the charge to rekindle the black nationalism of [Marcus Garvey](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Marcus_Garvey), and thereby to present a challenge to the left-wing, Marxian thrust that was already underfoot in black America, due to the influence of [W.E.B. Du Bois](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/W.E.B._Du_Bois) and his ideological disciples in the civil rights establishment. In addition, Malcolm's public lectures on the history and the evils of the African slave trade always succeeded in building rapport with his black listeners. By replaying the sins of the past, he was able to give voice to deeply buried grievances. In this way, he could articulate the collective pain and anger and, thereby, use wrath as a structuring leadership principle. At the same time, he told blacks that they could not continuously live in the past, and that they needed to embrace the future-oriented vision of black nationalism, which called for separation between the races, so that blacks could build for themselves the type of economic, cultural, and political system best suited for their long-term survival and progress. Such a vision indicated his faith-tradition's practical, here-and-now focus, as well as its deficit regarding an ethos of forgiveness and love for one's enemies.

Malcolm X's distrust of the civil rights establishment's integrationist drive became even more obvious when he disparagingly labeled the August 28, 1963 March on Washington as the "Farce on Washington." Consistently, the minister derided the middle- and upper-class blacks who constituted the civil rights leadership. Their clamoring for integration with the white majority vexed him to no end. As did Garvey before him, Malcolm concluded that American whites had no genuine desire whatsoever for either integration or its inevitable consequence, intermarriage.

Numerous others of the black nationalist persuasion agreed with Malcolm X, thus clearly demonstrating that Martin Luther King, Jr. did not enjoy universal support among American blacks. The call for integration rang hollow to those who believed that before blacks could learn to collectively love another people or group, they had to nurture sufficient love and respect for themselves and one another. Announced Malcolm: "Beautiful black woman! The Honorable Elijah Muhammad teaches us that the black man is going around saying he wants 'respect'; well, the black man never will get anybody's respect until he first learns to respect his own women! The black man needs *today* to stand up and throw off the weaknesses imposed upon him by the slave-master white man! The black man needs to start today to shelter and protect and *respect* his black woman!"[[21]](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Malcolm_X#cite_note-20)

Embarrassed and frustrated by Malcolm's constant berating them and by his blistering anti-Christian and anti-white utterances, many of the civil rights luminaries made it their policy to completely shun him. Although they professed [Jesus](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Jesus_of_Nazareth)'s mandate of reaching out to one's enemies, in the minister's case, the distance apparently seemed too far for them. Their ostracism would deeply wound Malcolm.

### Marriage and family

On January 14, 1958, Malcolm X was married to Sister Betty X (née Sanders) in Lansing, Michigan. She had joined Muslim Temple Seven in 1956. From their union were born six daughters, all of whom, along with their mother, carry the surname Shabazz. Their names: Attillah (November 1958); Qubilah (December 25, 1960); Ilyasah (July 1962); Amilah (1964); and twins, Malaak and Malikah, born after Malcolm's death in 1965. Sister Betty, who always extolled the memory of her husband after his death, herself died in 1997 as a result of [arson](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Arson) committed by her grandson.

### Elijah Muhammad, a rude awakening, and questions

During the early 1960s, Malcolm was increasingly confronted with rumors of Elijah Muhammad's extramarital affairs with his own young secretaries. Malcolm initially brushed these rumors aside. [Adultery](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Adultery) and [fornication](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Fornication) are strongly condemned in the teachings of the Nation of Islam, and Malcolm could never imagine that his mentor would violate the strict moral codes to which he demanded his own ministers' firm adherence.

Eventually, Malcolm spoke with the women. From their conversations he ascertained that the rumors were indeed facts. In 1963, Elijah Muhammad himself confirmed to Malcolm that the rumors were true. Muhammad then claimed that his philandering followed a pattern established and predicted by the biblical prophets, and was therefore approved by Allah. With this verbal acknowledgment and acceptance that his mentor was indeed a repeat adulterer, Malcolm experienced a period of painful reverberation, following the seismic shaking of his faith. Shaken to the core by these revelations of Muhammad's ethical betrayal, the minister would later comment: "I believed so strongly in Mr. Muhammad that I would have hurled myself between him and an assassin,"[[22]](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Malcolm_X#cite_note-21) "I can't describe the torments I went through."[[23]](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Malcolm_X#cite_note-22)

### Hajj, transformation, and the quest for new knowledge

Along with his discovery that Elijah Muhammad had traitorously turned his bevy of eligible young secretaries into a secret seraglio, Malcolm X also experienced, in 1963, a 90-day period of silence, imposed upon him as well, by Muhammad. Elijah explained that this decree was chastisement for the minister's inappropriate comments in response to a reporter's question regarding the assassination of President [John F. Kennedy](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/John_F._Kennedy). In answer to that question, Malcolm had replied that it was a case of "chickens coming home to roost"—that the violence which Kennedy had failed to stop (and at times refused to rein in) had come around to claim his life. Most explosively, Malcolm then added that, because of his country-boy origins, "Chickens coming home to roost never made me sad. It only made me glad."

This remark incited a widespread public outcry and led to the speaking ban. Malcolm, however, even though he complied with the censure, concluded that Muhammad had other reasons for the imposition. The minister suspected that jealousy and the fear of being further upstaged were Muhammad's real ground and motivation. The two men became more and more distant, as Malcolm's faith in Elijah's moral authority continued to erode. On March 12, 1964, Malcolm X officially terminated his relationship with the Nation of Islam, and he founded the Muslim Mosque, Inc. Later that same year, he took the [Hajj](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Hajj) (pilgrimage) in the Muslim holy land at [Mecca](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Mecca), [Saudi Arabia](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Saudi_Arabia).

The experience proved to be life-transforming. The minister met "blond-haired, blue-eyed men I could call my brothers," and he returned to the U.S. on May 12, 1964, with an altered view of the racial segregation-integration debate, as well as with a new name: **El Hajj Malik El-Shabazz**. Prior to the Hajj, Malcolm had already converted to orthodox Islam. Now, as a traditional [Sunni](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Sunni) Muslim minister, he was even more fully persuaded that the Islamic faith-tradition alone had the potential to erase humanity's racial problems.





Malcolm X shook hands with Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. at the U.S. Senate on March 28, 1964; they exchanged only a few words, and never met again

During the speech upon his return to the U.S. from Mecca, the minister's openness to intellectual growth and new enlightenment was obvious. He stated:

Human rights are something you were born with. Human rights are your God-given rights. Human rights are the rights that are recognized by all nations of this Earth.

In the past, yes, I have made sweeping indictments of all white people. I will never be guilty of that again, as I know now that some white people are truly sincere, that some truly are capable of being brotherly toward a black man. The true Islam has shown me that a blanket indictment of all white people is as wrong as when whites make blanket indictments against blacks.

Since I learned the truth in Mecca, my dearest friends have come to include all kinds—some Christians, Jews, Buddhists, Hindus, agnostics, and even atheists! I have friends who are called capitalists, socialists, and communists! Some of my friends are moderates, conservatives, extremists—some are even Uncle Toms! My friends today are black, brown, red, yellow, and white!"[[24]](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Malcolm_X#cite_note-23)

While in Mecca, for the first time in my life, I could call a man with blond hair and blue eyes my brother.

In New York, on June 28, 1964, along with A. Peter Bailey and others, Malcolm X founded the U.S. branch of the Organization of Afro-American Unity. His new vision entailed "a socioeconomic program of self-defense and self-assertion, in concert with the emerging nation of Africa. He also projected a vision of black control of black communities."[[25]](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Malcolm_X#cite_note-24) At this point, Malcolm was on the crest of a wave of resurgent black nationalism. Simultaneously, he was diligently seeking an intellectual framework—a paradigm by which he could determine where he was going and what he wanted to be. Now, far beyond the teachings of Elijah Muhammad, he was in search of an adequate ideological home.

### Final days, regrets, and assassination

During the course of his intellectual growth and seeking, he made journeys to Africa and to the United Kingdom. He had been certified in Cairo, [Egypt](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Egypt) as a Sunni Muslim Imam, and had placed himself beneath the spiritual tutelage of an African imam, whom Malcolm had brought back with him to America. He yearned for his own platform of recognition, not eclipsed by Martin Luther King, Jr. During Malcolm's last days, however, he was ostracized from the mainstream, establishment, black leadership and black middle class. He was thus unable, at that time, to realize his longing for leadership legitimacy in the American mainstream sense.

Malcolm never changed his views that black people in the U.S. were justified in defending themselves from their white aggressors. Increasingly, though, he did come to regret his involvement within the Nation of Islam and its tendency to promote racism as a blacks-versus-whites issue. In an interview with Gordon Parks in 1965, he revealed:

"I realized racism isn't just a black and white problem. It's brought bloodbaths to about every nation on earth at one time or another."

He stopped and remained silent for a few moments. He said finally to Parks:

Brother, remember the time that white college girl came into the restaurant—the one who wanted to help the Muslims and the whites get together—and I told her there wasn't a ghost of a chance and she went away crying? Well, I've lived to regret that incident. In many parts of the African continent, I saw white students helping black people. Something like this kills a lot of argument. I did many things as a Black Muslim that I'm sorry for now. I was a zombie then. Like all Black Muslims, I was hypnotized, pointed in a certain direction, and told to march. Well, I guess a man's entitled to make a fool of himself, if he's ready to pay the cost. It cost me twelve years. That was a bad scene, brother. The sickness and madness of those days—I'm glad to be free of them.[[26]](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Malcolm_X#cite_note-25)

Meanwhile, relations with the Nation of Islam had become volatile, following his renunciation of Elijah Muhammad. There were warnings that Malcolm had been marked for assassination. Repeated attempts were made on his life.

On March 20, 1964, *LIFE* magazine published a famous photograph of Malcolm X holding an M1 Carbine, and pulling back the curtains to peer through a window. The photo was taken in connection with the minister's declaration that he would defend himself from the daily death threats that he and his family were receiving. Undercover FBI informants warned officials that Malcolm X had been marked for assassination. One officer, while undercover with the NOI, is said to have reported that he had been ordered to help plant a bomb in Malcolm's car.

Tensions continued to rise. It was alleged that orders were given by leaders of the NOI to kill Malcolm. In *The Autobiography of Malcolm X,* he states that as early as 1963, a member of Temple Seven confessed to him that he had received orders from the NOI to murder Malcolm. The NOI won a suit to reclaim Malcolm's Queens, New York house, which NOI officials contended they had paid for. The minister appealed, angry at the thought that his family might soon have no place to live. Then, on the night of February 14, 1965, the East Elmhurst, New York residence of Malcolm, Betty, and their four daughters was firebombed. All family members escaped injury, and no one was charged with the crime.

Seven days later, during a speaking engagement at Manhattan's Audubon Ballroom, Malcolm X, while onstage delivering his address, was rushed by three gunmen who shot him 15 times at close range. Transported to New York's Columbia Presbyterian Hospital, the 39-year-old Malcolm was pronounced dead on arrival. The funeral, held on February 27, 1965, at Faith Temple Church of God in Christ, was attended by 1,600 people. Malcolm X is buried at the Ferncliff Cemetery in Hartsdale, New York.

Later that year, Betty Shabazz gave birth to their twin daughters.

A complete examination of the assassination and investigation is available from The Smoking Gun and contains a collection of primary sources relating to the assassination.[[27]](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Malcolm_X#cite_note-26)

## Legacy and Achievements

Malcolm X's speeches and writings became, for the black poor, a legacy of ideas, critiques, arguments, and sayings that would eventually codify as "Black Power Thought."

The minister's life and speeches helped to spark the drive toward a new black consciousness and black pride. They likewise played a major role in the thrust to extirpate the term "Negro" and to popularize the terms "black" and "Afro-American"—identity concepts with which members of the race could feel more affinity and authenticity. Malcolm stands today as a symbol of the culture, politics, militancy, and struggles of urban black America. His tremendous influence upon the social and political thinking of American blacks is legendary.

Thurgood Marshall was America's leading radical. He led a civil rights revolution in the 20th century that forever changed the landscape of American society. But he is the least well known of the three leading black figures of this century. Martin Luther King Jr., with his preachings of love and non-violent resistance, and Malcolm X, the fiery street preacher who advocated a bloody overthrow of the system, are both more closely associate in the popular mind and myth with the civil rights struggle. But it was Thurgood Marshall, working through the courts to eradicate the legacy of slavery and destroying the racist segregation system of Jim Crow, who had an even more profound and lasting effect on race relations than either of King or X.

[](http://www.thurgoodmarshall.com/gallery/tm15.htm)It was Marshall who ended legal segregation in the United States. He won Supreme Court victories breaking the color line in housing, transportation and voting, all of which overturned the 'Separate-but-Equal' apartheid of American life in the first half of the century. It was Marshall who won the most important legal case of the century, Brown v. Board of Education, ending the legal separation of black and white children in public schools. The success of the Brown case sparked the 1960s civil rights movement, led to the increased number of black high school and college graduates and the incredible rise of the black middle-class in both numbers and political power in the second half of the century.

[](http://www.thurgoodmarshall.com/gallery/tm17.htm)And it was Marshall, as the nation's first African-American Supreme Court justice, who promoted affirmative action -- preferences, set-asides and other race conscious policies -- as the remedy for the damage remaining from the nation's history of slavery and racial bias. Justice Marshall gave a clear signal that while legal discrimination had ended, there was more to be done to advance educational opportunity for people who had been locked out and to bridge the wide canyon of economic inequity between blacks and whites.

He worked on behalf of black Americans, but built a structure of individual rights that became the cornerstone of protections for all Americans.  He succeeded in creating new protections under law for women, children, prisoners, and the homeless. Their greater claim to full citizenship in the republic over the last century can be directly traced to Marshall. Even the American press had Marshall to thank for an expansion of its liberties during the century.

Marshall's lifework, then, literally defined the movement of race relations through the century. He rejected King's peaceful protest as rhetorical fluff that accomplished no permanent change in society. And he rejected Malcolm X's talk of violent revolution and a separate black nation as racist craziness in a multi-racial society.

The key to Marshall's work was his conviction that integration -- and only integration -- would allow equal rights under the law to take hold. Once individual rights were accepted, in Marshall's mind, then blacks and whites could rise or fall based on their own ability.

Marshall's deep faith in the power of racial integration came out of a middle class black perspective in turn of the century Baltimore. He was the child of an activist black community that had established its own schools and fought for equal rights from the time of the Civil War. His own family, of an interracial background, had been at the forefront of demands by Baltimore blacks for equal treatment. Out of that unique family and city was born Thurgood Marshall, the architect of American race relations in the twentieth century.

After Marshall died in 1993 there was still no authoritative, thorough account of his life and the impact his work had on the nation. The combination of his reclusiveness and his standing in popular culture as an elderly, establishment figure blinded much of the nation to the importance of Marshall's work. Young people were especially uninformed about the critical role Marshall had played in making history.

A new biography - **Thurgood Marshall: American Revolutionary** - is intended to fill some of that vacuum. In these pages the great storyteller tells his stories. And the history, of both his family and the civil rights movement, are in one place so that future generations can understand the dynamics that created and sustained Marshall's conception of successful race relations. Given that Marshall laid the foundation for today's racial landscape, his grand design of how race relations best work makes his life's story essential for anyone delving into the powder-keg of America's greatest problem. He was truly an American Revolutionary.

<http://www.thurgoodmarshall.com/home.htm>

hurgood Marshall was born in [Baltimore, Maryland](http://www.u-s-history.com/pages/h3856.html), on July 2, 1908. Marshall was the grandson of a slave. His father, William Marshall, made sure that his son gained an appreciation for the [Constitution (text)](http://www.u-s-history.com/pages/h976.html) from a young age.

Marshall completed high school in 1925 and graduated with honors from Lincoln University in Chester, [Pennsylvania](http://www.u-s-history.com/pages/h1923.html), in 1930. Just before his graduation, he married Vivian “Buster” Burey. After a 25-year marriage, she died from cancer in 1955. He remarried later.

Following his graduation in 1930, Thurgood Marshall applied to the University of Maryland Law School. He was not accepted because he was [black](http://www.u-s-history.com/pages/h3241.html), and that set in motion events of his future. That same year, Marshall was accepted to the [Howard University](http://www.u-s-history.com/pages/h3244.html) Law School. A dynamic new dean, Charles Hamilton Houston, made sure that all of the students had the desire to apply the tenets of the [Constitution (narrative)](http://www.u-s-history.com/pages/h3956.html) to all Americans.

In 1933, Marshall left Howard with a law degree and started a practice in Baltimore. The next year, he encountered the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People ([NAACP](http://www.u-s-history.com/pages/h1595.html)) and became an active member.

From 1934 to 1961, the NAACP tapped him to travel throughout the United States to represent numerous kinds of court cases. Most of the clients had disputes involving questions of racial justice, which ranged from common crimes to appellate advocacy, raising the most-intricate matters of constitutional law.

With the assistance of Charles Houston, Thurgood Marshall won his first major [civil rights](http://www.u-s-history.com/pages/h2873.html) case, *Murray v. Pearson*, at the Maryland Supreme Court in 1935. The next year he became the assistant special counsel for the NAACP in New York. He then served as the chief counsel for the NAACP from 1938 to 1961. He guided the litigation that dismantled the legal underpinnings of Jim Crow segregation.

Beginning in 1940, Marshall won 29 of 32 [U.S. Supreme Court](http://www.u-s-history.com/pages/h2574.html) cases. One of the first big cases was *Smith vs. Allwrite* in 1944, which overthrew the South's “White Primary." The White Primary was the practice of excluding African Americans from the [Democratic Party](http://www.u-s-history.com/pages/h701.html). It was most common in a state where that party controlled state government.

His next successful win was *Shelley v. Kraemer* in 1948. That case involved the Supreme Court striking down the legality of racially restrictive covenants and forced the state courts to end racially restrictive real estate covenants.

In 1950, Thurgood Marshall won two more cases, *Sweatt vs. Painter* and *McLaurin vs. Oklahoma State Regents*, which were graduate-school integration cases. The next year he went to South Korea and Japan to investigate charges of racism in the United States armed forces. He discovered that the military was committing “rigid segregation” as a part of daily life, in spite of the fact that President [Harry S. Truman](http://www.u-s-history.com/pages/h1670.html) had desegregated the armed forces in 1947.

Marshall went on to achieve a landmark victory with the case of [*Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka*](http://www.u-s-history.com/pages/h2776.html) (1954). That Supreme Court decision demolished the legal basis for segregation in America. It also made state-enforced racial segregation in public schools invalid.

In 1961, Thurgood Marshall was the first African American to be appointed to the United States Court of Appeals. He defended civil-rights demonstrators by winning a Circuit Court case, *Garner vs. Louisiana*.

Following numerous victories, Thurgood Marshall was nominated to the Second Court of Appeals by President [John F. Kennedy](http://www.u-s-history.com/pages/h2008.html) in 1961. In that capacity, he issued 112 rulings. All of the rulings set in place by Marshall were later upheld by the Supreme Court. In 1965, he was appointed to be the United States Solicitor General by President [Lyndon B. Johnson](http://www.u-s-history.com/pages/h2292.html). While in this position, in which he argued for the government, he won 14 of 19 cases between 1965 and 1967.

In 1967, Thurgood Thurgood Marshall became the first African American to be an associate justice on the United States Supreme Court. He was nominated by President Johnson, who declared that it was "the right thing to do, the right time to do it, the right man and the right place."

Marshall wanted to uphold positive gender and racial action policies in every case where they were challenged. During his 24 years, he became a vocal liberal on a court dominated by conservatives. He pressed for the government to assist with important benefits to people, including education, legal services, and access to courts.

He wanted those benefits to be available to everyone, regardless of their ability to afford them. He succeeded in fashioning new protections under the law for women, children, homeless persons, and prisoners.

Thurgood Marshall's steadfast progressive voting record included trenchant support for Constitutional protection of individual rights, in particular the rights of criminal suspects versus the government. Justice William Brennan was Marshall's most reliable confederate, who predictably voted with him against the death penalty.

Marshall's backing of [Affirmative Action](http://www.u-s-history.com/pages/h1970.html) prompted his stout dissent in *Regents of the* [*University of California*](http://www.u-s-history.com/pages/h3455.html) *vs. Bakke (1978)*, in which the University of California Davis medical school had, by setting a 16 percent minority quota, discriminated against a white applicant, Allan Bakke. As appointments by Presidents [Nixon](http://www.u-s-history.com/pages/h1948.html) and [Reagan](http://www.u-s-history.com/pages/h1958.html) altered the court's point of view, Marshall ended up more often in the voting minority.

Citing poor health, Thurgood Marshall stepped down from the court in 1991. In retirement, he was a vocal critic of the court. Marshall died on January 24, 1993, at age 84

<http://www.u-s-history.com/pages/h1668.html>

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| ***Jim Farmer******(January 12, 1920 - July 9, 1999)***  |

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***Civil Rights Leader*** \* \* \* \* \* \* James Farmer, a principal founder of the Congress of Racial Equality and the last survivor of the "Big Four" who shaped the civil-rights struggle in the United States in the mid-1950's and 60's, died Friday, July 9, 1999 at Mary Washington Hospital, in Fredericksburg, Va., where he lived. He was 79.  Farmer had been in failing health for years, losing his sight and both his legs to severe diabetes.  Farmer's main colleagues in the civil rights movement were the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, who was assassinated in 1968; Whitney Young of the Urban League, who died in 1971; and Roy Wilkins of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, who died in 1981.   Although attention in recent years has focused on Dr. King's activities, Farmer played a towering role in the movement as a direct-action leader of the organization popularly known as CORE. Claude Sitton, who covered the South for The New York Times during the civil rights struggle, observed: "CORE under Farmer often served as the razor's edge of the movement. It was to CORE that the four Greensboro, N.C., students turned after staging the first in the series of sit-ins that swept the South in 1960. It was CORE that forced the issue of desegregation in interstate transportation with the Freedom Rides of 1961. It was CORE's James Chaney, Andrew Goodman and Michael Schwerner -- a black and two whites -- who became the first fatalities of the Mississippi Freedom Summer of 1964." The three were murdered by a gang of Klansmen and buried beneath an earthen dam near the town of Philadelphia. The CORE workers were investigating a church burning and promoting black voter registration.   Farmer himself risked his life in several demonstrations. In 1963, Louisiana state troopers armed with guns, cattle prods and tear gas, hunted him door to door when he was trying to organize protests in the town of Plaquemine.   "I was meant to die that night," Farmer once said. "They were kicking open doors, beating up blacks in the streets, interrogating them with electric cattle prods." A funeral home director had Farmer "play dead" in the back of a hearse that carried him along back roads and out of town.   Farmer went to jail for "disturbing the peace" in Plaquemine, and was behind bars on Aug. 28, 1963, the day that Dr. King delivered his "I Have a Dream" speech as the climax of the March on Washington. Farmer sent his own speech to the March on Washington, which was read by Floyd McKissick, an aide in CORE. "We will not stop," Farmer wrote, "until the dogs stop biting us in the South and the rats stop biting us in the North."   At one point, a friendly F.B.I. agent told Farmer that an informant had infiltrated the Ku Klux Klan in Louisiana, and had reported that the Klan had voted to kill Farmer the next time he set foot in Bogalusa. "Tell me," Farmer said to the agent, "were there any dissenting votes?"   Farmer was a disciple of Mohandas Gandhi, and it was Gandhi's strategy of nonviolent direct action that was tohttp://www.core-online.org/historyphotos/f-4.JPG become Farmer's weapon against discrimination. A fierce integrationist, he enlisted both whites and blacks as CORE volunteers.  Some white liberals who generally approved of what Farmer was doing frequently advised him to be more patient with a recalcitrant society dominated by whites. They thought that the doctrine of nonviolence was radical in its use of picketing and sit-ins. Some thought it engendered bellicose responses from whites that did nothing to further amicable race relations.  On one tense occasion in the early 1960's, after a particularly vicious spate of violence, Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy suggested that Farmer's followers postpone some of their "freedom rides" -- designed to desegregate the interstate bus system in the South -- so that everyone could "cool off." Farmer refused, saying, "We have been cooling off for 350 years."   As the turbulent decade of the 1960's unfolded, some blacks who despaired that they would ever have an amicable relationship with the white majority and regarded nonviolence as more of a weakness than a  strength, on occasion would ask Farmer, "When are you going to fight back?" Farmer would always reply, "We are fighting back, we're only using new weapons."   "I lived in two worlds," Farmer said late in life, recalling his role in the movement. "One was the volatile and explosive one of the new black Jacobins and the other was the sophisticated and genteel one of the white and black liberal establishment. As a bridge, I was called on by each side for help in contacting the other."   http://www.core-online.org/historyphotos/Farmer_President2.gifJames Farmer, the son of a minister and the grandson of a slave, came to feel that his generation of leaders had been all but forgotten in  recent years, with the exception of Dr. King because of television's use of film clips replaying his "I Have a Dream Speech."   Farmer was appalled to learn that in one survey of blacks taken in the 1990's, somebody said he thought that Dr. King's claim to fame was that he had "worked for Al Sharpton" and that many young blacks had never heard of Roy Wilkins, Whitney Young and Farmer or had only the vaguest notion of what they had stood for. And so when President  Clinton awarded him a Presidential Medal of Freedom in January,1998, Farmer said he felt "vindication, an acknowledgment at long last."   Farmer was proud of his role in founding CORE and guiding it to becoming one of the most effective civil rights organizations of the 1960's. The motivation for CORE came on a bright spring afternoon in Chicago in 1942 when Farmer, then just a year out of theology school, was walking with a white friend, [***George Houser.***](http://www.core-online.org/History/george_houser.htm) The two decided to stop for coffee and doughnuts in Jack Spratt's Coffee Shop on the South Side.   The counterman made them wait even though there was almost nobody in the restaurant, then tried to charge them a dollar apiece for doughnuts that were going for a nickel. Finally he ordered them out and threw their money on the floor.  http://www.core-online.org/historyphotos/FarmerSt.gif"We felt he had a problem about race," Farmer said later, recalling the incident with typical understatement. Farmer, Houser and a few others staged a successful sit-in demonstration at Jack Spratt's. It was the first direct action of an organization they formed, called at the time the Committee on Racial Equality.   Within a year, CORE had a national membership, and within a few years a roster of more than 60,000 members in more than 70 chapters, coast to coast. In its heyday in the 1960's, it claimed a membership of 82,000 in 114 local groups.   Farmer was equally proud of the work he did in 1961, when he organized the Freedom Rides in the Deep South, a perilous effort in which any black and white supporters were attacked and injured by white segregationists.   James Leonard Farmer was born on Jan. 20, 1920, in Marshall, Tex. His father was James Leonard Farmer Sr., the son of a slave, a minister-scholar who became a college professor and who delighted in  teaching literature in Greek, Hebrew and Aramaic. He was believed to be the first black man from Texas ever to earn a doctorate, which he did at Boston University. Farmer's mother was the former Pearl Marion Houston, a teacher.  As a boy, Farmer was shielded from the worst aspects of racism. He used to say that as a "faculty brat" he spent most of his time on the campuses of black colleges in the South where racial incidents would not ordinarily happen. The houses he lived in were filled with books and the conversation frequently was about the ideas in those books, most of them about ancient cultures. They did not ordinarily speak of the bleak, segregated world that existed outside the campus.   Farmer told Gay Talese of The New York Times in 1961 that his first awareness of race came when he was 3 or 4 years old, living in Holly Springs, Miss., where his father was on the faculty of Rust College. One very hot day, young James went shopping with his mother and asked her to buy him a soft drink. His mother told him he would have to wait until they got home. He saw a white child go into a drug store, and it was not until he got home that his mother explained to him why he could not do the same thing.  http://www.core-online.org/historyphotos/f-1.JPG"Until then, I had not realized that I was colored," Farmer said. "I had lived a sheltered life on campus. My mother fell across the bed and cried." Farmer said it did not make him bitter, but, over the years, he became "determined to do something about it."   His determination was strengthened between 1934 and 1938, when he was an undergraduate at Wiley College in Marshall, Tex. He would go to movies in Marshall, and was made to sit in the "buzzard's roost," the balcony set aside for black people. During the same period, he got a job as a caddy, but found himself segregated even in the caddy yard.   Years later, when he looked back at his youth in the South, he sometimes remembered the times when black children and white children played peacefully together. The real separation between the races came at puberty, he recalled, when white parents reinforced in their children that they were white and that blacks were something else. He recalled that when he was in his teens, the friends he had known as a little boy "would only look away" when they saw him in the street.   Farmer considered both medicine and the ministry as vocations during his undergraduate days. He discovered that he could not stand the sight of blood and so in 1938, after he completed his baccalaureate work at Wiley, he enrolled in Howard University's School of Religion. It was at Howard that he was introduced to the philosophy of Gandhi.   With his commanding frame, booming bass-baritone voice and decisive way of speaking, everyone thought he would be a fine preacher. But to the dismay of his father, Farmer decided against becoming a Methodist minister because, in those days, the Methodist church in the South was segregated. "I didn't see how I could honestly preach the Gospel of Christ in a church that practiced discrimination," he said. He was quick to assure his father that his turning away from Methodism did not represent any lessening of his belief in Jesus.   After World War II started, Farmer, a conscientious objector, served as race relations secretary for the Fellowship of Reconciliation, a pacifist organization. He subsequently also worked as an organizer in the South for the Upholsterer's International Union and later for the State, County and Municipal Employees Union.   In the late 1940's, before giving CORE his full attention, he was also a program director for the N.A.A.C.P. and wrote radio and television scripts as well as magazine articles on race relations for Crisis, Fellowship, World Frontier and the Hadassah News.   During the 1950's, he worked assiduously to bring an end to segregation in Southern schools. He planned and organized CORE projects, including a Pilgrimage of Prayer in 1959 to protest the closing of public schools in Richmond, Va., to avoid complying with the 1954 Supreme Court decision outlawing segregation in the public schools.   Throughout the 1960's, CORE's black volunteers, under Farmer's personal direction, stood peacefully in lines all over the South, insisting on the right to enter theaters, coffee shops, swimming pools, bowling alleys and other segregated public places from which they had always been barred.   Farmer did not become the $11,500-a-year salaried national director of CORE until February 1961, just before he initiated his first Freedom Ride. His father, by then retired and living in Washington, died just as Farmer was getting this effort started.   CORE and another civil rights group, the Fellowship of Reconciliation, held a Freedom Ride in 1947. A year earlier, the United States Supreme Court had ruled that segregated seating of interstate bus passengers was unconstitutional, but the ruling was virtually ignored in the South. An integrated group was sent to call attention to that injustice.Some were arrested and served on a chain gang in North Carolina.   In 1961, CORE decided to try again. Its bus riders were assaulted when using restrooms and lunchrooms in terminals in Virginia and the Carolinas.   In Alabama, their bus was firebombed in the town of Anniston and the riders stoned. In Birmingham, a mob attacked the riders and one of them, William Barbee, was paralyzed for life. They were savagely beaten again in Montgomery.  Everyone expected more violence when a small band of young blacks and whites from CORE and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee boarded buses for the last leg of the Freedom Ride, from Montgomery to Jackson, Miss. Dr. King, on probation for his arrest during sit-ins in Atlanta, decided not to go and was criticized for his decision. When a follower asked Farmer if he was going, Farmer climbed aboard the bus though quaking with fear. But the journey was completed without further violence because of a deal worked out between Attorney General Kennedy and James O. Eastland, the segregationist Senator from Mississippi. But Farmer was arrested in Jackson for disturbing the peace and spent 40 days in Mississippi jails.   If the Freedom Rides stiffened opposition to desegregation in some quarters in the South, the courage of Farmer's CORE volunteers captured the imagination of blacks throughout the country, who decided to join the civil rights struggle. It also aroused the conscience of many whites both in America and abroad.    "In the end, it was a success," Farmer said of the Freedom Rides, "because Bobby Kennedy had the Interstate Commerce Commission issue an order, with teeth in it, that he could enforce, banning segregation in interstate travel. That was my proudest achievement."   http://www.core-online.org/historyphotos/farmer6.jpgSubsequently, Farmer turned his attention to the lack of employment opportunities for blacks. He sought no quotas because he said he was convinced that if blacks were giving an fair chance they would do just fine, but he made it clear that he wanted to see some black faces at construction sites, especially those financed with public money. He ordered sit-ins in the early 1960's at the New York offices of Mayor Robert F. Wagner and Gov. Nelson A. Rockefeller. He also organized picketing at White Castle hamburger stands in New York City, accusing the chain of refusing to hire black workers.  "We are not pressing toward the brink of violence, but for the peak of freedom," he said.   Farmer kept CORE focused on integration. When, in 1965, CORE officials called for a pullout of American troops from Vietnam, Farmer insisted that the organization reverse itself. He did not approve of the war, but thought that CORE should not express itself on American foreign policy.   He resigned his CORE director's job the same year to head what he hoped would be an intensive literacy project financed by the Administration of Lyndon B. Johnson. The project failed to materialize, and there was an open break between Farmer and R. Sargent Shriver, the director of the Federal antipoverty agency, the Office of Economic Opportunity.   Farmer did several things in the late 1960's. He taught at Lincoln University, a black institution in Oxford, Pa., about 45 miles southwest of Philadelphia, advised the State of New Jersey on problems of illiteracy, and, in 1968, ran for Congress. A Liberal candidate, backed by Republicans, in Brooklyn's 12th Congressional District, he lost to the Democrat, Shirley Chisholm. Also in 1968, he supported the re-election of Senator Jacob K. Javits, a liberal Republican, who was jeered at a campaign rally in Bedford-Stuyvesant. "Jake Javits may be white on the outside but he's black on the inside," Farmer said, calming the crowd. That same year he backed Vice President Hubert H. Humphrey in his run for the Presidency.   It had always been Farmer's position that blacks, no matter how they felt, should be a part of government, and so he readily accepted an invitation from President Richard M. Nixon in 1969 to become an Assistant Secretary in the Department of Health, Education and Welfare. Farmer was immediately attacked by some militant civil rights advocates, who wanted nothing to do with Nixon. But Roger Wilkins and Whitney Young refrained from criticizing Farmer because they agreed with him that blacks needed such involvement if they were ever to have anything to say about shaping national policy on race.   At first, Farmer defended Nixon's racial policies, but in 1970 he quit his post complaining that the Washington bureaucracy moved too slowly and saying that he felt he was more effective outside it. Somewhat later, he complained that Nixon had virtually no contact with blacks and instead relied on Leonard Garment, a white aide, to explain black problems to him.   In 1975, Farmer broke with CORE over what he regarded as CORE's excessively pro-leftist position that sided with the Marxist faction in the civil war in Angola. He resigned from the group he had founded the next year. In 1978, he lent his name to a lawsuit that attempted to unseat CORE's director, Roy Innis.   In the mid-1980's, Farmer worked hard on his memoir, "Lay Bare the Heart," which was published in 1985. Claude Sitton, reviewing the book approvingly for The New York Times, said that Farmer, "more than any other civil rights leader, fought against (racism) and attempted to hold the movement true to its purpose."   Among Farmer's other writings was "Freedom -- When?" a book published in 1966. Before his health failed he taught for several years at Mary Washington College in Fredericksburg.   Farmer's brief first marriage ended in divorce. He married Lula A. Peterson, whom he met in 1949 when she was a graduate student in economics at Northwestern University and a white member of the CORE chapter in Evanston, Ill. She died in 1977.  They had two daughters, Tami and Abbey.   In his last years, Farmer lived alone in a remote house near Fredericksburg, confined to a wheelchair and often in need of an oxygen tent. When visitors came, he would joke about the times he had come close to death. Asked by a friend if he had ever seen a tunnel. Farmer acknowledged that he had, but instead of seeing St. Peter at the end of it, he saw the Devil. "And he said, 'Oh, my God, don't let this nigger in! He'll organize a resistance movement and try to put out my fire.'  |

<http://www.core-online.org/History/james_farmer_bio.htm>

Orval Eugene Faubus (1910–1994)

Thirty-sixth Governor (1955–1967)

Orval Eugene Faubus served six consecutive terms as governor of Arkansas, holding the office longer than any other person. His record was in many ways progressive, but he is most widely remembered for his attempt to block the [desegregation of Little Rock’s Central High School](http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?entryID=718) in 1957. His stand against what he called “forced integration” resulted in President Dwight D. Eisenhower’s sending federal troops to [Little Rock (Pulaski County)](http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?entryID=970) to enforce the 1954 [desegregation](http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?entryID=3079) ruling of the Supreme Court.

Orval Faubus was born on January 7, 1910, in a rented log cabin on Greasy Creek in southern [Madison County](http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?entryID=788) in the [Ozark Mountains](http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?entryID=440). His parents were John Samuel and Addie Joslin Faubus. Sam Faubus, a self-educated farmer, became a fervent opponent of capitalism. He named his three sons for socialist heroes; Orval’s middle name was Eugene for Eugene V. Debs.

In his youth, at his father’s urging, Faubus spent three months at [Commonwealth College](http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?entryID=10) near [Mena (Polk County)](http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?entryID=959), a left-wing, self-help institution. Pragmatism and ambition drove him toward the [Democratic Party](http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?entryID=593) as Roosevelt’s New Deal took hold. In 1938, at the age of twenty-eight, tiring of the poverty of teaching in country schools in the winter and picking fruit in the summer, Faubus ran for and was elected circuit clerk and recorder of Madison County. He remained a politician for the rest of his life.

In 1931, he married Alta Haskins, a preacher’s daughter. She became a rural schoolteacher and, in later years, editor and publisher of the Madison County Record. They had one son.

Distinguished service in [World War II](http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?entryID=2402) gave Faubus’s political career a boost. He served as an Army intelligence officer in five major campaigns in Europe, including the Battle of the Bulge. He attained the rank of major.

Faubus returned to the Madison County seat of [Huntsville](http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?search=1&entryID=930) as postmaster. He and Alta bought the town’s weekly newspaper, the Madison County Record. Faubus’s editorials on education, healthcare, and [highways](http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?entryID=4209) caught the attention of [Sidney S. McMath](http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?entryID=51), himself a war hero and a leader of Arkansas’s [GI Revolt](http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?entryID=4157), a campaign that swept away many old-line politicians. Faubus campaigned for McMath for governor in 1948 and was rewarded with an appointment to the [state highway commission](http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?entryID=4149). That post, along with later service as an administrative assistant in the governor’s office, put him in touch with political activists all over Arkansas.

However, he was unknown among the general public. His challenge to Governor [Francis A. Cherry](http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?entryID=91), who had defeated McMath, was seen as an improbable undertaking in 1954. Nonetheless, he proved himself as a campaigner, attacking electric utility interests and Cherry’s political awkwardness. He stood up for old people on welfare, throwing Cherry’s unfortunate remarks about “welfare chiselers” and “deadheads” in his face. Faubus forced Cherry into a runoff in the Democratic primary.

Cherry panicked. When his advisors dug up Faubus’s old connection with Commonwealth College, he made it public in a way that suggested his opponent might be a communist. The tactic backfired; Faubus defeated Cherry by almost 7,000 votes. In the general election in November, he defeated Little Rock’s [Republican](http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?entryID=594) mayor, Pratt Remmel, in a landslide.

Arkansas steadily industrialized during Faubus’s years as governor. Seizing on the new prosperity, he oversaw numerous improvements in public education, including a large increase in teachers’ pay. He initiated an overhaul of the embarrassingly bad [State Hospital](http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?entryID=2238) for the mentally ill; built the state’s first institution for underdeveloped children, the [Arkansas Children’s Colony](http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?entryID=2575); expanded state parks; and forced the Army Corps of Engineers to abandon plans to dam the [Buffalo River](http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?entryID=7). Hundreds of miles of highways were paved during his tenure.

The defining moment of his political life was a constitutional crisis over school desegregation. The Little Rock School Board made cautious plans to place the first black pupils in all-white Central High School in September 1957, three years after the Supreme Court had ruled segregated schools unconstitutional. A federal district court endorsed the board’s plans. But growing resistance by segregationists caught the attention of Faubus. He was known as a racial moderate. He calculated, however, that a moderate would stand small chance of reelection in 1958 against a determined white supremacist.

On September 2, 1957, Faubus called out the [National Guard](http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?entryID=3192) to block the admission of nine black pupils to Central High School. His justification was that violence threatened and he had to preserve the peace. A federal judge ordered the guardsmen removed. The students, known as the [Little Rock Nine](http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?entryID=723), returned to the school but were met by a mob of enraged segregationists. The local police, unable to control the crowd, spirited the Nine out of the building. President Dwight D. Eisenhower federalized the National Guard and dispatched Army troops to restore order and enforce the court’s ruling. The troops stayed through the school year. Little Rock voted to [close its high schools](http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?entryID=737) the following year in a vain attempt to thwart further integration. Then, stung by bad publicity and facing economic decline, the city voted to reopen them with token integration.

Faubus lost the battle with Eisenhower, but his actions ensured his election as governor four more times. He left office undefeated in 1967 after knocking off one opponent after another, including former governor Sid McMath, the millionaire [Winthrop Rockefeller](http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?entryID=122), and Congressman [Dale Alford](http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?entryID=4604)—all one-time allies who had turned against him.

He accumulated unprecedented power over Arkansas politics. His followers remained loyal even after the race conflict subsided. He was opposed by a substantial coalition of [African Americans](http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?entryID=407) and white liberals and moderates, led by the [*Arkansas Gazette*](http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?entryID=2344), from 1957 until he left office. During his later years in office, he reached out to black voters and won substantial support there.

He habitually responded to his critics by sounding shocked and aggrieved. On the campaign trail in 1960, he demanded to know which accomplishments of “Faubusism” his opponents would end. Referring to one of his challengers, the Reverend H. E. Williams, Faubus would shout to the crowds, “Preacher Williams, do you want to close the Children’s Colony?”

Catering to the clamors of white supremacists seemed out of character for Faubus, a figure of pronounced country dignity and unusual public reserve. His personal convictions at the time were not virulently racist; indeed, his administration had favored the black minority in several instances. For example, he hired a number of black people in state government and saw to it that historically black colleges and other institutions received financial support. He joined a fight to abolish the discriminatory [poll tax](http://encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?entryID=5045) and replace it with a modern voter registration system. And the voters who repeatedly returned him to office were apparently driven by something more than the obvious motive of racism. They seemed in part to be applauding their governor for standing up to an all-powerful federal government.

He tried unsuccessfully three times—in 1970, 1974, and 1986—to recapture the governor’s office. However, a new generation of voters and leaders had moved into place.

Faubus’s personal fortunes declined after he left office. His only child, Farrell, committed suicide in 1976. Orval and Alta divorced in 1969, and he and Elizabeth Westmoreland were married soon thereafter. Elizabeth was murdered in 1983 in Houston, Texas, where she was waiting to divorce Faubus.

Faubus spent his last years writing essays and memoirs and commenting on public affairs. He became increasingly conservative and often encouraged Republican office-seekers, although he insisted that he never voted for one. A Republican governor, [Frank White](http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?entryID=125), gave him his last political job, state director of veterans’ affairs.

Faubus and Jan Hines Wittenberg, a teacher, married in 1986. He lived with her in [Conway (Faulkner County)](http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?entryID=879) until he died on December 14, 1994, of complications from prostate cancer. He is buried in Combs Cemetery on a hill above Greasy Creek in Madison County.

<http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?entryID=102>