

Martin Luther King, Jr.

...STON MIDDLE SCH...
...STON, OH 43117

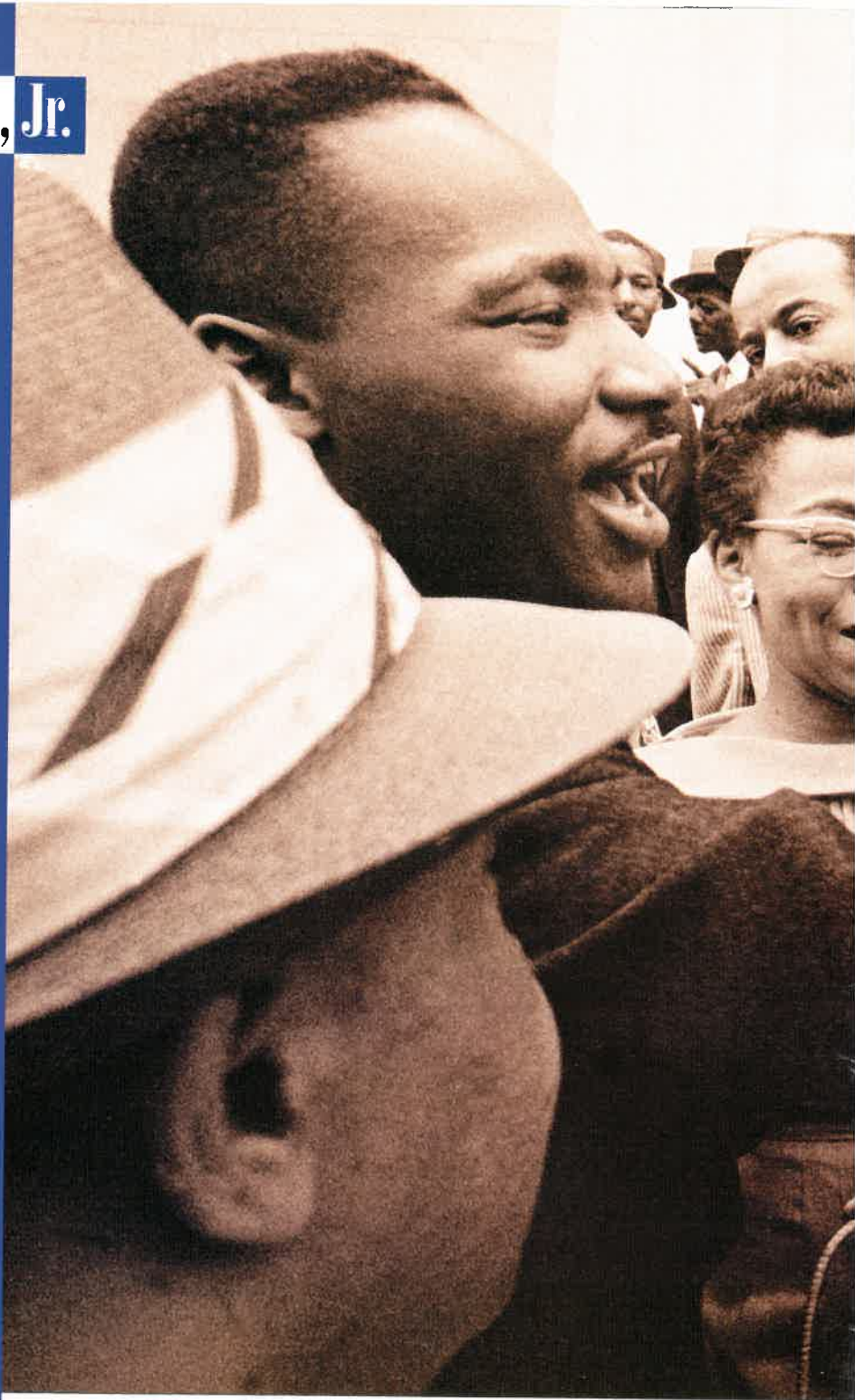


Martin Luther King, Jr.

Martin Luther King, Jr., devoted his life to fighting injustice on behalf of all Americans. However, he didn't believe in fighting with guns, tanks, or fists. Instead, he believed in using peaceful means. He thought that positive words and ideas and nonviolent action could change the world. In 1955, when he was twenty-six years old and had just begun pastoring a Baptist church in Montgomery, Alabama, King suddenly became the key leader in America's civil rights movement, a crusade to end discrimination in all forms against all groups. For the rest of his brief life, he inspired people to fight for their rights using nonviolent means.

King paid a great price for his vision. From 1956 until his death in 1968, he was arrested, stabbed, stoned, and finally assassinated. And although he loved his family, he was often away from home, traveling tirelessly, from town to town, state to state, and even to Europe, Africa, and Asia to share his dream of peace and love.

"I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character. I have a dream today!"



◀ **WHILE IN SCHOOL,** King learned about Mohandas Gandhi, who had used peaceful means to free India from British rule. Gandhi knew that he could not fight the British government with guns, so leading

thousands of others, he peacefully broke unjust laws. Gandhi allowed himself to be arrested. He went without food for weeks to draw attention to his ideals. He led thousands of people on

marches. He taught people to boycott British goods, schools, courts, and offices. King used many of Gandhi's techniques in his fight for civil rights.



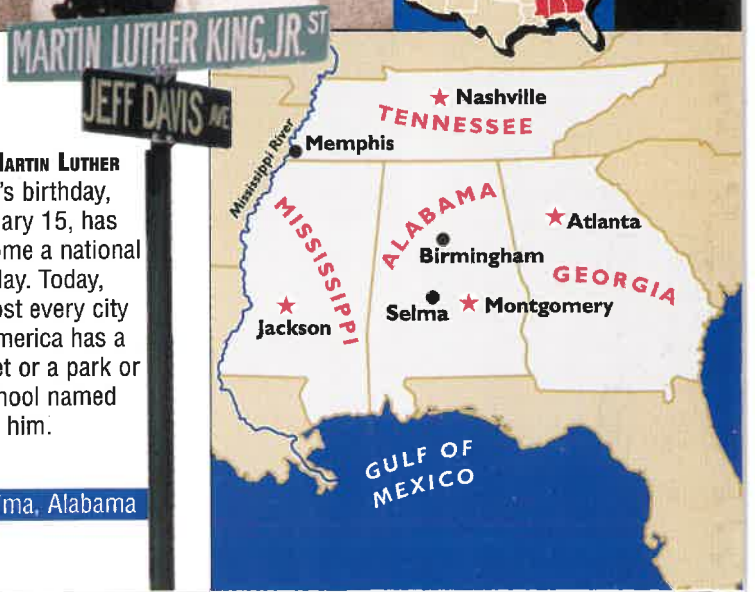
▼ **KING SPENT MOST** of his life in the Deep South. He lived in Atlanta, Georgia, and Montgomery, Alabama, and his major civil rights campaigns took place in Alabama—in Montgomery, Birmingham, and Selma. King was assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee.



◀ **KING WAS A** renowned orator (speaker). His style came from the long tradition in black preaching that uses biblical allusions, figurative language, emotional appeals, and impassioned call-and-response delivery to persuade and arouse.

▶ **MARTIN LUTHER** King's birthday, January 15, has become a national holiday. Today, almost every city in America has a street or a park or a school named after him.

Street sign in Selma, Alabama

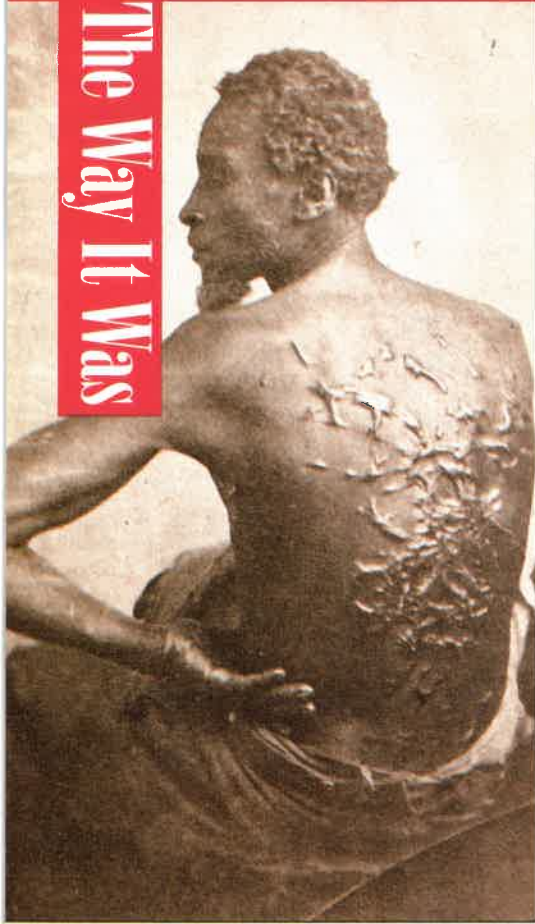




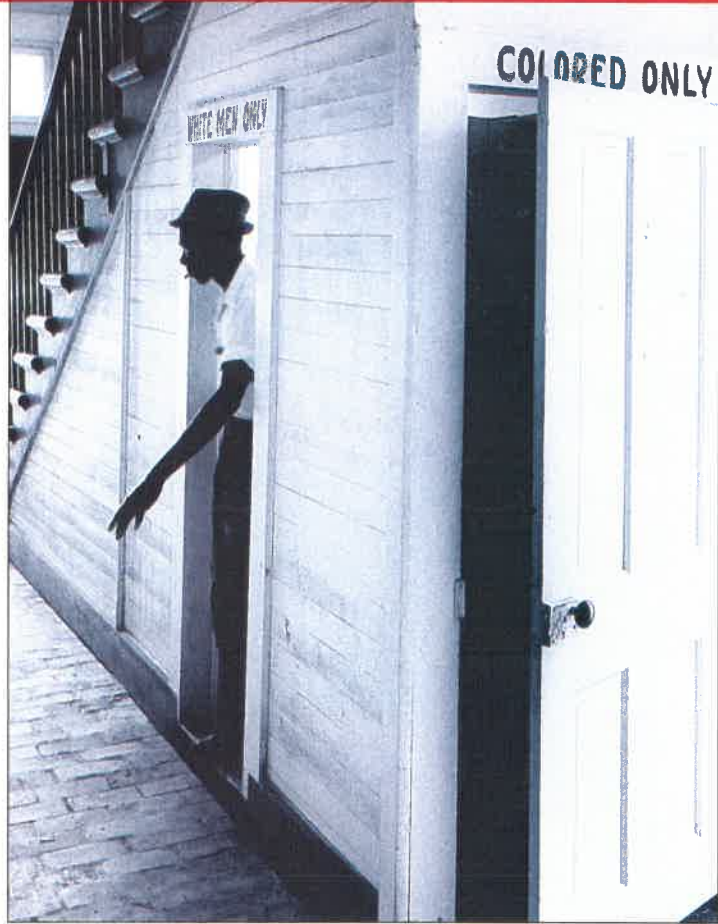
In 1861, a bitter conflict broke out in the United States, threatening to tear the Union apart. During the Civil War, which lasted until 1865, the nation

fought over the issue of slavery, among other things. At that time, slavery was illegal in the North, but legal in the South. The southern states refused to change their ideas and left the Union to

form their own alliance. On January 1, 1863, President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, giving more than three million slaves residing in Rebel territory their freedom. (The complete



◀ **THE RECONSTRUCTION Act of 1867** put under military control all states that had left the Union. This was done, in part, because after the war, most southern states had passed laws limiting the rights of blacks. The 14th Amendment (ratified in 1868) made all blacks in the U.S. citizens. The 15th Amendment (1870) made it legal for black men to vote. Even though the South was under military control, whites opposed these changes with violence. Many blacks were threatened, whipped, and even lynched.



► **WHEN RECONSTRUCTION** began, the Ku Klux Klan started its reign of terror. Klansmen were people who wanted to keep the South the way it had been before the Civil War. They dressed in white sheets. They rode about at night, attacking and intimidating blacks. They whipped them. They lynched them. Members of the Klan were



“ordinary” citizens—business people, doctors, and even ministers. The Ku Klux Klan still exists today.

▲ **IN 1896, THE** United States Supreme Court had ruled that it was constitutional to have “separate but equal” facilities for whites and blacks and other minorities, even religious groups. For many Americans—and not just blacks—this was a devastating decision. As Martin Luther King, Jr., said more than 50 years later, “I

could never adjust to the separate waiting rooms, separate eating places, separate rest rooms, partly because the separate was always unequal, and partly because the very idea of separation did something to my sense of dignity and self-respect.” During the civil rights movement, people challenged the separate but equal law.



▲ **AFTER THE CIVIL** War, Jim Crow laws kept blacks and whites apart at such places as lunch counters, schools, libraries, hospitals, mental hospitals, barber-shops, movie

abolition of slavery in the U.S. came with the 13th Amendment, ratified in 1865.) Though it was one of the most important acts in American history, unfortunately, what “freedom” means depends on the

world in which a person lives. After the war, many southern states passed laws limiting the rights of blacks. Why? In both the North and the South, racism—the belief that one race is

superior to another—was a part of life.

The years from 1865 to 1877 are known as Reconstruction, a time when Federal troops occupied the defeated South to protect blacks.



▲ **MANY SOUTHERN** blacks hoped to escape prejudice and violence by moving to the North, but things were often no better there. Whites in the North could be racist, too. In big northern cities, blacks were often crowded into slums. Wretched apartments were

expensive, and blacks could live only in certain parts of town. Blacks who did the same work as whites were paid less. Prices in the stores in black neighborhoods were higher than those where whites lived, and black schools were inferior.



◀ **CARICATURES** of blacks were common after the Civil War. White men painted their faces black and performed in traveling comedy shows, making fun of blacks. In an offensive song-and-dance act, the stereotypical black man was portrayed by a character called Jim Crow. Later on, the term “Jim Crow” came to mean racial discrimination.

THINK PIECE!



Can schools separate one group of people from another and still provide an equal education for all?



theaters, swimming pools, and on buses and railroads. There were separate water fountains, bathrooms, and telephone booths for blacks and whites, and even separate

hospital entrances (although some white-run hospitals did not admit blacks at all). In any way possible, blacks and whites were kept separate by these laws.

► **IN THE EARLY** 1950s in Topeka, Kansas, Linda Brown (shown sitting to the left of her sister) lived just two blocks from a white school but had to walk many blocks through dangerous railway yards to attend an all-black school. Her father, along with other parents, took the case to court. In 1954, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in

Brown v. Board of Education that “separate but equal” was unconstitutional and all public schools in the U.S. had to admit blacks and whites. Many parts of the South fought the ruling. The brave black children who walked past jeering mobs of angry white protesters heroically carried out the Supreme Court’s ruling.



Martin Luther King, Jr., was born on January 15, 1929, in Atlanta, Georgia, the “gateway to the South.” When he was grown, he wrote that he came from a family

Growing
Up

“where love was central and where lovely relationships were ever present.” He could never remember his parents fighting, and he was surrounded by

people with deep religious beliefs and a profound sense of human dignity. His father was pastor of Ebenezer Baptist Church and his mother had been a teacher. Her father had



▲ **THIS IS THE HOUSE** that Martin grew up in. When he was about six years old, he had his first taste of segregation. Martin often played with a white boy, who one day told Martin he could no longer be his friend. The boy's father had forbidden it because Martin was black. That night, Martin's parents told him of insults they had experienced. Years later, when Martin's daughter Yolanda was six, he found himself having the same conversation with her when she wanted to go to an amusement park that did not admit blacks. Things hadn't changed much in the South in 25 years.



▲ **IN THIS KING FAMILY** portrait, Martin is seated at the far right, next to Christine and A.D. Their parents and maternal grandmother are standing. When Martin was a boy, his mother warned him that people would tell him he was inferior to whites. She told him the truth: “You are as good as anyone.” King's father taught by example. He never shopped in stores that treated him poorly. He

told policemen not to call him “boy.” He led fights against segregation. Martin's most bitter experience with segregation took place at age fifteen. Riding home on a bus from a speech competition, Martin and his teacher had to give up their seats when white riders got on. For 90 minutes they stood. King later said, “It was the angriest I have ever been in my life.”

▲ **MARTIN WAS A** good student, skipping both the 9th and 12th grades. He graduated from high school at fifteen and entered Morehouse College in Atlanta. Like all the schools he had attended, Morehouse was all black. At Morehouse, he was a mediocre student with a C+ average. When he was a senior, though, he buckled down. He decided to

enter the ministry and began working with his father at Ebenezer Baptist Church. In 1948, he received a divinity degree at Crozer Theological Seminary in Pennsylvania. And in 1951, he entered Boston University's School of Theology to study for his Ph.D. degree. In the King family album above left, Martin is seen graduating from Morehouse College.



been pastor of Ebenezer before his death. Martin had an older sister, Christine, and a younger brother, A.D.

Martin grew up during the Depression, a time

when many were without jobs and had to struggle to make a living. His family wasn't wealthy, but they were comfortable and had enough to eat. When he was just five years old, he

asked his parents why he saw so many people standing in lines waiting to get food. Later, when he was an adult, he remembered what he had seen of poverty.



◀ **IN 1953, KING** married Coretta Scott, a music student. She wanted to stay in the North, but he felt he could do more good in the South. Instead of joining his father at Ebenezer in Atlanta, King struck out on his own, and in April of 1954, he accepted the ministry of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery. At left is King, Coretta, and their daughter Yolanda outside the church. In 1960, he moved his family to Atlanta, where he joined his father as co-pastor of Ebenezer.



◀ **MR. AND MRS.** King had four children—two girls and two boys. When this picture was taken, Coretta was pregnant with their fourth child, and Reverend King had just learned that he had received the Nobel Peace Prize.



▲ **TO DRAW ATTENTION** to the terrible living conditions in Chicago's black ghettos, King and his family moved to a slum there in 1966. They joined

the Movement to End Slums, helping to repair buildings. King soon saw changes in his children. Living in a slum was demoralizing.

“Fortunately I have a most understanding wife who has tried to explain to the children why I have to be absent so much. I think in some way they understand, even though it's pretty hard on them.”

On Thursday, December 1, 1955, Rosa Parks (right) boarded a crowded bus in Montgomery, Alabama, to travel home after a hard day's work. As always, she sat in the back, which was set aside for blacks. After a few stops, all the seats were taken when a white passenger boarded. The bus driver told Mrs. Parks and the others in her row to stand and let the white man sit. Rosa Parks refused. She was taken to the police station and



Rosa Parks being arrested during the bus boycott

Taking a Stand in Montgomery

booked, then moved to the city jail. That evening, she was released on bond.

News of the arrest spread rapidly. The city's blacks decided to protest by staying off the buses. On Monday, almost all the city's black bus riders found another way to get to work. The boycotters' goal was simple: integration of the city's buses.

To keep the boycott going, Montgomery's black leaders founded the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA) and elected twenty-six-year-old Martin Luther King, Jr., president. The MIA started car pools to help people get to work, and they held meetings to encourage people to keep the boycott alive.



◀ **MRS. KING AND Yolanda** were at home on the evening of January 30, 1956, when a bomb exploded on their front porch. Luckily, they were not hurt. King rushed from church and quieted the crowd that had gathered in front of his home. He said, "I want you to go home and put down your weapons. We must meet violence with non-violence....We must meet hate with love."

► **DURING THE** boycott, police stopped black drivers for made-up or minor infractions. (Today such practice is called "racial profiling.") King was arrested for driving 30 miles an hour in a 25-mile-an-hour zone. About a hundred people were arrested for breaking an old, forgotten anti-boycott law.



"We came to see that, in the long run, it is more honorable to walk in dignity than to ride in humiliation."

◀ AFTER ROSA

Parks' arrest and the start of the bus boycott, many whites became enraged. People called King's house with threats. Sometimes, he received thirty calls a night from people telling him to get out of town. However, King had more to think about than himself. He and his wife had a new baby, a girl named Yolanda.



▼ **ON DECEMBER 21, 1956**, regular bus service started again after the U.S. Supreme Court declared that segregation on Alabama buses was unconstitutional. King proudly stepped onto the first bus that morning.

▲ **WHEN KING** was convicted of violating Montgomery's anti-boycott law, he said, "Ordinarily, a person leaving a courtroom with a conviction behind him would wear a somber face. But I left with a smile. I knew that I was

a convicted criminal, but I was proud of my crime." King would later write, "Any law that uplifts human personality is just." Further, he stated, "Any law that degrades human personality is unjust."

How People Got Around



- They walked.
- They rode in taxis.
- They joined car pools organized by the MIA.
- They rode mules.
- They hitch-hiked.
- Some white employers drove blacks to work.

Money Counts



The boycott hurt the bus company financially. Three-fourths of all those who rode the buses were black. Without these passengers, many buses had to be taken out of service. Some bus routes were discontinued,

and the fare went from 10 to 15 cents. To stay in business, the bus company needed the black riders. The boycotters used the power of their dollars to force the company to meet their demands.

King's Lifelong Friend



Ralph Abernathy, minister of the First Baptist Church, was twenty-nine years old when the bus boycott began. He became King's right-hand man in the quest for civil rights. They spent a lot of time in jail together as a result of peacefully protesting unjust laws.



I Have a Dream

On August 28, 1963, a quarter of a million people from all over the country rallied in Washington, D.C., during the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. Martin Luther King, Jr., spoke at the rally, and his words have echoed throughout the years as a moving and eloquent plea for equality. His now famous "I Have a Dream" speech ended with these words: "And when we allow freedom to ring, when we let it ring from every village and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children—black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics—will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual, 'Free at last! Free at last! Thank God almighty, we are free at last!'"

**"Free at last!
Free at last!
Thank God almighty,
we are free
at last!"**

