

Journeying Toward the Promised Land

A chronology of the life of Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Civil Rights Movement

January 15, 1929

Martin Luther King, Jr., is born in Atlanta, Georgia. In his late teens, King works a factory job alongside both Whites and Blacks.

1944-1948

King attends Morehouse College in Atlanta. His professors encourage a critical exploration of racial issues. King reads Thoreau's *Essay on Civil Disobedience* numerous times.

February 1948

At age nineteen, King is ordained and becomes assistant pastor at Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta.

1948 – 1951

At Crozier Theological Seminary, King engages in "a serious intellectual quest for a method to eliminate social evil," digesting various philosophies on social transformation, including Rauschenbusch, Marx, Nietzsche, Reinhold Niebuhr, and A.J. Muste. He discovers the teachings of Gandhi, from which he develops a strong belief in nonviolent resistance.

1951

King begins graduate studies in systematic theology at Boston University where he is exposed to the philosophy of personalism, “the theory that the clue to the meaning of ultimate reality is found in personality.” He receives his doctorate in 1955.

June 18, 1953

King marries Coretta Scott.

September 1954

King begins a pastoral position with Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama.

December 1, 1955

In Montgomery, Alabama, Rosa Parks refuses to vacate her bus seat for a White man and is arrested. Parks had attended training sessions in labor and civil-rights organizing.

December 5, 1955

A bus boycott begins on the same day as Parks’s trial. Several thousand gather that evening, and the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA) is formed with King as president.

January 30, 1956

King's home is bombed. Addressing a crowd outside his home, King demands nonviolence.

November 13, 1956

After a year-long boycott, the U.S. Supreme court declares Montgomery and Alabama bus segregation laws unconstitutional.

January 10, 1957

The Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) is formed, with King as president. Montgomery is rocked by a series of bombings that night.

March 1957

The Kings travel to West Africa to celebrate Ghana's independence from British colonial rule.

May 17, 1957

King delivers his first national address, "Give Us the Ballot," in Washington, D.C.

September 20, 1958

At a book signing in Harlem, King is stabbed by a mentally ill woman.

February 1959

King travels to India for one month where he meets with many of Gandhi's followers.

April 18, 1959

King meets with Kenyan leader Tom Mboya

January 1960

The King family moves to Atlanta where King becomes co-pastor of the Ebenezer Baptist Church with his father, Martin Luther King, Sr.

February 1, 1960

Four students in Greensboro, North Carolina, refuse to leave their seats at a lunch counter when they are denied service, sparking a sit-in movement throughout the South. On February 16, King addresses the student protestors in Durham, North Carolina, imploring them to follow the moral imperative of "jail, not bail," and encouraging them to consider economic boycott.

April 17, 1960

Through the organizing efforts of Ella Baker, the longtime assistant director of SCLC, the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) is established to unite the sit-in protestors.

October 19, 1960

Student protestors recruit King for a sit-in demonstration in Atlanta, where he and thirty-five others are arrested.

April 10, 1961

Under a compromise reached by business owners and the Black clergy, schools and businesses in Atlanta begin to desegregate.

May 21, 1961

After suffering a series of violent attacks in Alabama, Freedom Riders on a campaign to desegregate interstate travel are addressed by King in a Montgomery church. With the church besieged by a White mob, King calls Attorney General Robert Kennedy for assistance. King begins pressuring the Kennedy's for federal civil-rights legislation.

September 22, 1961

The Interstate Commerce Commission mandates that all interstate transportation be desegregated.

October 16, 1961

King meets with President Kennedy and asks him to deliver a second Emancipation Proclamation.

December 1961

King begins a lengthy campaign in Albany, Georgia, to challenge the city's refusal to comply with the integration order. The campaign is ultimately unsuccessful.

April 1963

While in jail during a campaign to integrate Birmingham, Alabama, King writes "A Letter from Birmingham Jail" chastising liberal White clergy for their passive stance against segregation. For several months, the campaign in Birmingham includes massive civil disobedience and severe measures by city police against protestors, including high-pressure fire hoses, clubs, and dogs. Several bombings occur, including at the hotel where King had been staying.

August 28, 1963

The March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom uses the momentum of Birmingham to move the power of mass resistance to the national stage. King delivers his "I Have a Dream" speech.

September 15, 1963

Four young girls are killed in the bombing of Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham.

January 17, 1964

President Lyndon Johnson meets with King to seek support for his "War on Poverty" initiative.

May – July 1964

King leads an effort to integrate St. Augustine, Florida. One day before Johnson signs the Civil Rights Act of 1964, St. Augustine business leaders hammer out an agreement to comply with the new law.

July 1964

With widespread integration compliance in Alabama, King begins a tour of Mississippi where the Civil Rights Act is widely ignored.

December 10, 1964

King receives the Nobel Peace Prize.

January 2, 1965

At a mass meeting in Selma, Alabama, King introduces SCLC's plans for a voter drive. On March 3, while attempting to march from Selma to Montgomery, civil rights advocates are beaten at the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma.

August 1965

President Johnson signs the Voting Rights Act. California's Proposition 13, seeking to block the fair housing component of the Civil Rights Act, creates a feeling of despair and injustice among the urban Black population. Rioting breaks out in the Watts neighborhood of Los Angeles, leaving dozens dead and hundreds injured. King travels to Watts where he questions the effectiveness of violence.

January 1966

King moves to Chicago's South Side where he develops Operation Breadbasket to address urban economic injustice. The campaign increases black employment, business opportunities, and housing rehabilitation while strengthening black financial institutions.

June 6, 1966

In a show of unity, King, Floyd McKissick of the Congress of Racial Equality, and Stokely Carmichael of SNCC resume James Meredith's "March Against Fear" from Memphis, Tennessee, to Jackson, Mississippi, after Meredith is shot and wounded.

April 4, 1967

At Riverside Church in New York City, King denounces U.S. military action in Vietnam. Subsequently, he is harshly criticized in the media and by colleagues in the civil rights movement.

November 1967

King envisions a Poor People's Campaign—poor people camping out en masse in Washington to dramatize the need for a redirection of national priorities and resources.

April 4, 1968

King is assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee, where he is helping to organize striking sanitation workers.

1998

The King family, after unsuccessfully petitioning President Clinton to establish a Truth and Reconciliation Commission to explore the facts behind King's killing, files a wrongful-death suit. In December 1999, a twelve-person, mixed-race circuit court jury finds that Martin Luther King, Jr., was "murdered by an intricate plot that included government agencies."

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