

I HAVE A DREAM

Martin Luther King, Jr., was born on January 15, 1929, at 501 Auburn Avenue in Atlanta, Georgia. His father was a Baptist minister, and his mother was a musician. His childhood was not especially eventful. He grew up as the second of three children in a black neighborhood, attending all-black schools. At 19 he graduated in 1948 from Morehouse College in Atlanta. Before he turned 27 he had earned two other degrees, a BD from Crozer Theological Seminary and a PhD in systematic theology from Boston University.

From the time that he and his bride, the former Coretta Scott, moved to Montgomery, Alabama, to accept the pastorate of Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in 1954, King was destined to play an important role in the history of the United States. The year after he arrived in Montgomery, Rosa Parks was arrested for refusing to move to the back of the bus, and the support group that was organized to defend her and to boycott the bus company, the Montgomery Improvement Association, chose King as its leader. Soon his eloquent voice on behalf of the disadvantaged was heard not only in Montgomery but in many parts of the United States and, ultimately, around the world.

Perhaps King was always committed to non-violence. But his visit to India in 1957

and his personal encounter with Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and with Indian teachings of non-violence strengthened his resolve to use them in his quest for racial justice. This resolve is set forth in his first book, *Stride Toward Freedom*, an account of the successful Montgomery bus boycott.

It was evident by 1958 that King's activities in the movement to secure equal rights interfered with his pastoral duties. He was traveling constantly and his association with such other leaders as A. Philip Randolph, Whitney Young, and Roy Wilkins required regular meetings. Consequently, in 1960, King resigned his pastorate in Montgomery, moved to Atlanta, and became president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), a new but rapidly growing civil rights organization committed to non-violence. He also served as co-pastor with his father at Ebenezer Baptist Church and worked with the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC).

Increasingly, King advocated and practiced civil disobedience to what he termed "immoral laws." In 1960 he was sentenced to four months in Reidsville State Prison in Georgia for allegedly trespassing at a department store in Atlanta and for violating probation for a traffic violation several months earlier. Because of widespread fears for his safety in Reidsville, his jail-

ing became an issue in the presidential election when Democratic candidate John F. Kennedy expressed his concern to Mrs. King while Republican candidate Richard M. Nixon did not.

In the next few years King intensified his drive for equal rights, staging boycotts in Albany, Georgia, in 1961-62 and in Birmingham, Alabama, in the spring of 1963. There were violent responses from parts of the public as well as from the police, as homes and churches were bombed and civil rights workers were murdered. Meanwhile, King urged his followers to practice non-violence as they committed acts of civil disobedience. King himself was arrested and jailed. When eight prominent white Birmingham clergymen, in a statement called "An Appeal for Law and Order and Common Sense," criticized blacks for disobeying the law, King felt obliged to respond. "An individual who breaks the law that conscience tells him is unjust and who willingly accepts the penalty of imprisonment in order to arouse the conscience of the community over its injustice," said King in his "Letter from Birmingham Jail," "is in reality expressing the highest respect for the law."

The early summer of 1963 was filled with planning for the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, sponsored by the Urban League, the NAACP, the American

Negro Labor Council, the National Council of Churches, the National Catholic Conference, the American Jewish Council, SNCC, SCLC, and other groups. On August 28, more than 250,000 people of every race and creed marched on Washington. The leaders met with President Kennedy and then several spoke to the assembled crowds. King electrified the audience with his now-famous "I Have a Dream" speech.

"I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia, sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood . . . 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. This is our hope. This is the faith that I go back to the South with. With this faith we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope."

It was a momentous year for King. In December *Time* magazine chose him as its man of the year. The following year, at the insistence of King and his followers and with the prodding of President Lyndon B. Johnson, Congress passed the first civil rights bill since 1875. In autumn 1964 he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace. It was, perhaps, the events of the preceding year as well as his hopes for the future

that moved King to write in 1964 his second book, *Why We Can't Wait*. Even as he explained why blacks could not wait, roadblocks were clearly visible. The march from Selma to Montgomery in March 1965 to press for a voting rights bill was almost stalled as the opposition gained strength. By this time, moreover, some segments of the civil rights movement began to lose confidence in non-violence as a means of achieving equality. Although the Voting Rights Act became law in 1965, King's efforts the following year to fight discrimination in Chicago were less than successful. The old tactics of boycotting, picketing, and demonstrating were unfruitful. White backlash and more subtle forms of discrimination immeasurably complicated the task.

In 1967 King surprised many observers by speaking out against the Vietnam War. He was aware that his position might undercut his role as spokesman for civil rights, but he was convinced that his position in the movement would be compromised if he did not oppose the war. Thus the Vietnam War was more than a distraction; it became an occasion for King to look at himself, his own people, his government, and the way in which economic privation, political disadvantage, and the relations of nations were interconnected. It was a time of re-evaluation and earnest searching for permanent solutions. His quest was expressed

in his book *Where Do We Go From Here?*, published in 1967.

Even as he sought a resolution of his dilemmas, King continued the task of supporting those who attempted to better their condition. In early spring of 1968 he went to Memphis to assist the sanitation workers who were on strike. It was there that he was fatally shot on a motel balcony on April 4, 1968. News of the assassination set off several days of rioting in some cities as millions in this nation and around the world mourned his death.

King was not only the most eloquent spokesman for racial justice of this time; he was also the most successful. He raised the discussion of human rights to a new level, and he developed techniques and approaches that made activism in civil rights a viable policy by which stated goals could be achieved. He discovered, however, that it was far easier to secure basic civil and voting rights—as difficult as that was—than to remove from a society the racial prejudices and discriminatory practices by which it had lived for centuries. But by his teachings and example, he infused his own and succeeding generations with a commitment to racial equality and a zeal to work diligently for it. That legacy was second in importance only to the goals that he achieved in his own time.

—John Hope Franklin

Dr. King receives the Nobel Peace Prize, 1964



UPI/Bettmann Archive



March from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama, 1965 James Karales

Sweet Auburn

Growing Up in Black Atlanta

"Auburn Avenue was like a grand lady," recalled one journalist. "In her prime she was the talk of the town—young, vivacious, and beautiful. Everyone loved her, respected her, and wooed her."

Atlanta in the early 20th century was a mosaic of communities shaped by the people within the city's bounds. Auburn Avenue was the main artery through one neighborhood that came to symbolize prosperity for African Americans.

After the Civil War, ex-slaves bought property east of the city's central business district in the low-lying area of Wheat Street and Butler Street (now Jesse Hill Jr. Drive). By 1881, Butler Street was the center of an area known as

Darktown, sandwiched between Courtland and Jackson streets. Business owners and factory workers alike took pride in their surroundings, putting up houses, office buildings, and places of worship in late-Victorian architectural styles.

By 1893 white residents, concerned that "Wheat Street" was viewed as a black neighborhood, petitioned the city council to change the name to Auburn Avenue. The area grew to be a mixture of old and young, prominent and plain, and black and white—until the race riot of 1906 revived segregation.

In 1909 the Reverend A.D. Williams and his wife purchased a large home on predominately black Auburn Avenue. As pastor of Ebenezer Baptist Church, Rev. Williams was not only an

eloquent speaker, but a political activist who vigorously supported organizations dedicated to the education, social advancement, and well-being of African Americans. After Rev. Williams died in 1931, his son-in-law Rev. Martin Luther King, Sr., took over as Ebenezer's pastor. But it was Rev. Williams's grandson whose name would become synonymous with the civil rights movement in America.

On January 15, 1929, Martin Luther King, Jr., was born at his grandparents' home, 501 Auburn Avenue. Young M.L. lived with his grandparents, parents, brother, sister, and other close relatives. Their neighbors were businessmen, porters, teachers, millworkers, clergymen, domestics, and laborers. Nearby were banks, insurance companies, real estate agencies, medical and law

King Birth Home

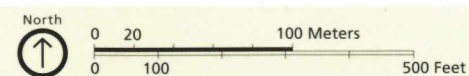


Fire Station No. 6



offices, funeral parlors, a drugstore, library, and business college—all black-owned or black-operated. Despite Atlanta's segregation laws, political leader John Wesley Dobbs was inspired to call the area "Sweet Auburn." Years later his grandson, Mayor Maynard H. Jackson, added that Sweet Auburn had offered African Americans "the three B's—bucks, ballots, and books!"

Dr. King never forgot the community spirit he had known as a child. Nor did he forget racial prejudice. He returned in 1960 to serve with his father as co-pastor of Ebenezer Baptist and to head the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. And, as the world mourned on an early spring day in 1968, it was to Sweet Auburn that the body of Martin Luther King, Jr., was brought one last time.



Andrew Young International Boulevard

Exit 248D Jesse Hill, Jr. Drive

Ellis Street

Courtland Street

John Wesley Dobbs Avenue

Piedmont Avenue

Brooks Alley

Atlanta Life Insurance Company Building

148 Auburn Ave. Completed 1920; annex (142 Auburn) built 1936.

Auburn Avenue

Butler Street YMCA

Built 1918-20.

Atlanta Daily World Building

145 Auburn Ave.

Auburn Avenue Research Library

101 Auburn Ave.

APEX Museum

135 Auburn Ave.

Edgewood Avenue

Coca-Cola Place

Jesse Hill, Jr. Drive

Boaz Street

Sweet Auburn Curb Market

209 Edgewood Ave. Completed 1923. The market is still in operation.

Herndon Building

231-45 Auburn Ave. Built 1926.

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