

## Martin Luther King Jr.

# APOSTLE OF CRISIS

*Critics accuse him of arrogance and opportunism, but his talent for inspiring "mass violation of immoral laws" has made him the most powerful Negro leader in America.*

Since early April, temperatures had been rising inside the racial pressure cooker called Birmingham, Alabama. One muggy afternoon last month the lid blew off.

City Commissioner Eugene (Bull) Connor, deploying police forces to contain demonstration marches, had watched with growing impatience as a noisy Negro crowd filled Kelly Ingram Park, a square block of tall elms, walkways and green turf in the main Negro business section. Bellowing, laughing and jeering, the crowd—mostly students—taunted Connor's blue-clad policemen and the firemen sweating in dun-colored, knee-length slickers. Whining shepherd dogs strained at chains held by the cops, while the firemen manhandled big monitor nozzles combining two hoses for high pressure.

"Freedom!" shouted a Negro boy, flailing his arms. "Get white dogs!"

"Let 'em have it," said the Bull.

The firemen moved, and water shot from the nozzles. With a sound like automatic gunfire, a

powerful stream rattled rapid-fire over elm trees, whacking off strips of thick, black bark. Then it slammed into a slim, white-clad Negro girl in the distance. She braced against it for a moment, then was knocked over into the dirt.

A group of unruly, drunken Negroes swung their arms and rocks began to fly. One crashed near the police. A bottle fell and shattered. Shouts of defiance came from the milling crowd. Rocks continued to clatter. The dogs whined eagerly. And over the cacophony of other sounds lay the crashing of the big hoses. The only still figures were about 200 whites watching somberly from across the street. Finally, with the Negroes pushed back, the water was shut off. "God bless America," a reporter mumbled in disgust.

Thus did racial violence come this spring to the most rigidly segregated major city in America. It marked a collision of two power systems, the first represented by Bull Connor, vigorously enforcing laws that preserve the status quo of racial discrimination, the second by Dr. Martin Luther

By REESE CLEGHORN





*Negro girls, arrested for taking part in the Birmingham protests, huddle in 4-H building used to handle overflow from the jail.*

King Jr., making a carefully planned assault on those laws and that discrimination.

For the crisis in Birmingham did not just happen. The Negro leader lighted a fire under the pressure cooker, well knowing that the "peaceful demonstrations" he organized would bring, at the very least, tough repressive measures by the police. And although he hoped his followers would not respond with violence—he has always stressed a nonviolent philosophy—that was a risk he was prepared to take. Two months earlier his No. 1 staff assistant, the Rev. Wyatt Tee Walker, had explained, "We've got to have a crisis to bargain with. To take a moderate approach, hoping to get white help, doesn't work. They nail you to the cross, and it saps the enthusiasm of the followers. You've got to have a crisis."

King got his crisis in a hymn-singing, rock-throwing crescendo of peaceful marches and violent strife that sent more than 2,400 Negroes to jail, most of them for such offenses as parading without a permit. It was the largest number ever arrested in an American racial protest. And even after he seemed to have won his fight for an agreement easing discrimination, 2,500 Negroes angrily responded to night riders' bombings by three hours of midnight rioting. Scores of cars were crumpled, torches were put to ramshackle stores and two apartment houses, a policeman and a cab driver were stabbed, and about 50 other people were injured. Later that black Sunday, President Kennedy ordered riot-trained combat troops to nearby bases.

In the days that followed, the tension eased, and integration leaders in Birmingham and around the nation tried to assess the results of King's invasion of this Deep South bastion. If the city's white business and political leaders stand by the agreement worked out in unofficial negotiations between white and Negro spokesmen, King will have won significant victories for the city's Negro population. This agreement calls for desegregation within 90 days of some lunch counters and other facilities in a number of down-

town department and variety stores, for upgrading of Negro employment and hiring on a non-discriminatory basis, and for the formation of a biracial committee.

On the other hand, coworkers in the civil-rights movement, which today teems with dissent and self-criticism, argue that these gains might have been won even without King. After decades of iron-fisted white supremacy, a series of elections in the past year had brought rejection of the old-line leadership, and white-Negro negotiations had established unprecedented rapport. (Speaking of a local Negro leader and head of the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights, a white merchant who a year ago grumbled, "I never thought I'd be sitting down with Fred Shuttlesworth," recently volunteered in obvious sincerity, "I'm delighted to know you, Reverend Shuttlesworth.")

Now, however, Birmingham's Negroes face a backwash of troublesome problems. White hoodlums have been aroused. Negro demonstrators may be faced with heavy fines. School authorities suspended or expelled 1,100 children who left classes to march in the protests. And both the outgoing commission-type administration of Mayor Art Hanes and Commissioners Bull Connor and J.T. Waggoner, and the incoming mayor-council form of government headed by Mayor Albert Boutwell have publicly stated that they were not bound by the white-Negro negotiations. It will be months before anyone knows how much the Negroes won, or whether the battle of Birmingham is over.

For these and other reasons, some integrationist leaders felt that King had blundered in bringing crisis to Birmingham. It was not the right place, they maintained; this was not the right time; and mass marches to fill the jails—a tactic that bears King's personal brand—was not the right tactic. Furthermore, King had gone into Birmingham not only against the advice of these leaders but without even informing them. "That's just arrogant," one said in exasperation.

Other detractors within the desegregation movement have bitterly accused King of tackling Birmingham primarily to raise money and to keep his name and his organization, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (S.C.L.C.), out in front on the teeming civil-rights scene.

But despite such criticism, King's magic touch with the masses of Negroes remains. They do not understand the intricacies of his tactics. What they see is a powerful crusader for equality who does something instead of just talking, who sticks lighted matches to the status quo and who is impatient with talk of waiting. Given the increasing unrest among Negroes, King's flare seems likely to spread a trail of little Birminghams through the nation during the next few months.

For King endows this American struggle with qualities of messianic mission. A short man whose thick neck and heavy shoulders convey an impression of height and power, he can fill New York's cavernous Riverside Church with eloquence about "the battering rams of historical necessity," or set rural Negro Baptists in Georgia to clapping and shouting rhythmic responses when he says, "The cloud is dark, but the sun is shining on the other side."

This oratorical blend of intellectual content with the imagery of an old Southern preacher is natural. King, 34, holds a theological degree from Crozer Theological Seminary in Chester, Pennsylvania, and a doctor-of-philosophy degree from Boston University. But some think his family heritage and home community explain much more about him than his education.

His father, usually known as "M. L. Sr.," was a strong figure in Atlanta for many years before young Martin became famous. The son of a hard-drinking part-Negro, part-Irish Georgia sharecropper, M. L. Sr. came to Atlanta as a largely unlettered young working man. He went to college, became a preacher, married a daughter of a man who had founded Ebenezer Baptist Church, and later became pastor of this politically influential church, as he still is today.



# "In the North, discrimination is even more agonizing than in the South."

Young Martin grew up as the son of a man of prestige in the community. Except that he was a Negro in a segregated Southern city, it was almost a typical middle-class American setting.

People who knew young Martin noted one characteristic early: He played rough games, but he didn't like a fight. Once the school bully knocked him down a flight of stairs and beat him, but he didn't fight back.

He was sensitive, and twice as a young boy he seemed to lose control of himself in heartbreak. Once A.D., his younger brother, sliding down a banister, knocked their grandmother unconscious. Thinking she was dead, Martin ran to a second-floor window and jumped out, but the fall was only 10 or 12 feet and he was not injured. Later, when he was 11, he learned that his grandmother really had died and took the same jump out the window—again escaping injury.

King's sensitivity and reluctance to fight back physically remain two of his outstanding characteristics. When a 200-pound self-styled American Nazi attacked him during a speech in Birmingham, King took the man's blows and never tried to retaliate. But his courage is not seriously questioned, even by those who find other characteristics to criticize. Although he does get tense and even tighten up in his speech when faced with arrest—possibly because of arm-twisting mistreatment he has received from police in the past—he does not let that deter him from following his chosen path.

Ordinarily he can match Perry Como in languid laziness of appearance. His broad face has an Oriental aspect, with a down-curving moustache and oval eyes, and he never seems to hurry.

His most frequent response is "Oh, yeeees." The word stretches out like a baritone's last four full notes. When he laughs at someone's trivial humor, the laugh seems just a moment too late, as if he has been contemplating even this.

## King can clown in private

Many people think he has no sense of humor; yet he can clown in private, parodying a swinging gospel singer's radio routine, for instance. But few people ever see such a performance or realize that, behind a public dignity of ecclesiastical proportions, he is an avid sports fan. Swimming, tennis and fishing have been among his own pursuits, but he has little time for them these days.

His limited time, in fact, is largely spent with his family—his wife Coretta, a pretty former Alabamian who sometimes sings soprano in concerts; Yolanda (Yoki), 7; Martin III, 5; Dexter, 2; and Bernice Albertine, born March 28. They live in a large, two-story brick house in one of Atlanta's less fashionable Negro neighborhoods. He is at home about 10 days a month on the average.

More often he is traveling. A recent schedule took him to Chicago for four speeches on a Sunday, to the University of Minnesota Monday, back to his Atlanta S.C.L.C. office Tuesday with a church meeting at home that night; Wednesday through Friday there were meetings with the S.C.L.C. staff; Saturday, counseling at his church and visits to hospitalized members; Sunday morning, preaching. And then on the road for New York, Connecticut and Tennessee.

Despite the pace, he almost always appears fresh. His dress leans to brown, gray and some-

times dark blue; and his suits, which Mrs. King helps choose, usually look more respectable than stylish. He once bought some suits in the \$150-\$200 price range, with a preference for high-shine dressy ones, but his taste seems to be more modest now.

Price, however, is not the problem. Testimony from state investigators in an unsuccessful Alabama tax case against King revealed substantial income. For 1958, for example, he reported \$25,348—and the state charged him with having made almost twice that much. He attributed the tax case to persecution, and was acquitted of fraud, but he had by then paid some additional tax which the state claimed was due.

King receives one dollar a year from S.C.L.C. and \$6,000 from Ebenezer Baptist Church, which lists him as co-pastor. Most of his income comes from speaking fees, gifts and books, of which his third, titled *Strength to Love*, has recently been published by Harper & Row.

For these latter sources of income, King naturally must thank his national prominence as a Negro leader; and it is a curious fact that, between crises, his place in the civil-rights struggle seems to slip. After his first ascent to fame during the 1956 bus boycott campaign in Montgomery, Alabama, he passed through a period of limbo. "The rest of my life will be anticlimactic," he told a good friend.

But the next year he reestablished himself on the national scene when he proposed a "prayer pilgrimage" to Washington, won out against N.A.A.C.P. opposition and, on May 17, spoke from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial to 25,000 Negroes. "Give us the ballot" was his theme, rolling out like the refrain of an old hymn. "Give us the ballot, and we will transform the salient misdeeds of bloodthirsty mobs into the abiding good deeds of orderly citizens. Give us the ballot. . . ." The crowd boomed its approval, and editor James L. Hicks of New York City's *Amsterdam News* wrote that King "emerged from the Prayer Pilgrimage to Washington as the No. 1 leader of 16 million Negroes. . . . At this point in his career, they will follow him anywhere."

Still, King, who in those days wore a floppy, broad-brimmed hat, unfashionable wide-lapel suits and floral-design ties, was often out of the limelight. In the fall of that same year, 1957, the Little Rock explosion thrust other leaders into the headlines; Daisy Bates of the N.A.A.C.P. was the Negro of the hour then.

King slipped further from view after he narrowly escaped death on September 20, 1958, when a mentally deranged Negro woman named Izola Curry plunged a letter opener into his chest as he autographed his first book, *Stride Toward Freedom*, in a Harlem department store. "I've been after you for six years," she exclaimed. The blade narrowly missed his aorta, and King probably would have died if he had pulled the blade out, a doctor said later. Instead, he waited calmly for medical attention, with the stoical bravery he has shown on other occasions. His recovery was delayed by pneumonia, and for two years he remained largely out of public view except for a trip to India to talk to Nehru.

He did not emerge until 1960, with the advent of more crises. That year he set up offices in Atlanta for S.C.L.C.—"Slick," in the jargon of the movement—which had been largely dormant since he and his supporters had founded it three

years earlier. But it was the lunch-counter sit-ins in the Carolinas and the rising restlessness of the Negro students which brought him to the fore again. Not leadership but agility put him there.

Students from about 40 communities where there had been sit-ins met in Raleigh, North Carolina, in April, to organize; and because King was, to them, the great symbol of the movement, they asked him to help. Though they had moved ahead of him in pressing "selective buying" programs—boycotts—he had quickly adopted this as his own cause. ("He had to run to catch up with them," a friend remembers.) And now, when they organized the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (S.N.C.C.), he became its patron saint. S.N.C.C.—usually called "Snick"—has since become a grass-roots organization carrying the dangerous burden of direct action in the tough black-belt areas of the South.

The revolutionary new youth tide that flowed from Raleigh had the effect of thrusting King into the front of a civil-disobedience movement now identified with his name, although in actual practice it was a young people's tactic at that time. Mass violation of the law by sit-ins and jail-ins was the banner that impatient students thrust into his hands for the 1960's. It was a sort of "black man's burden," and he was carrying it when he went to jail in Atlanta's sit-ins of 1960.

The Atlanta showdown exemplifies an essential fact about King: Here, as has often been the case, he was the Negroes' symbol and public spokesman; but actually the sit-in campaign was run by the students, and the command of Negro forces dealing with the Atlanta city administration was exercised by the established Negro power structure of Atlanta. On the operating level, King was a major factor only once, when the power of his oratory was needed to persuade a rally of rebellious students to accept the desegregation timetable which the local Negro leaders had negotiated.

Partly because his method is to move about in evangelical fashion, with local people remaining to reap whatever harvest may come, King has

Police Chief Laurie Pritchett of Albany, Georgia, orders King arrested during demonstrations in 1962.





## Get on your walking shoes and don'tcha get weary



Blast of fire hose hit this Birmingham demonstrator.

been called the Billy Graham of the civil-rights movement. Unlike Billy Graham, however, King bears heavy organizational responsibilities, and it is in this realm that he is most criticized.

"I really don't have a great interest in administration," King said one day recently, semi-reclining in a swivel chair in his simple, cheaply furnished Atlanta office. He tapped a wooden letter opener rapidly in his palm as he thought. "But I have come to see the necessity of that emphasis. I've never thought I couldn't do it. But I have thought my function was creative leadership, without doing the day-to-day detail. In recent months I have tried to strengthen my administrative ability."

Though King and the N.A.A.C.P.—of which he is a member—periodically deny any rivalry, it is obvious that "the N-double-A" is warily watching one plan he mulls over. It is twofold: First, S.C.L.C. would become a membership organization, composed primarily of individual members rather than affiliate organizations, as at present. Second, it would become truly national. In sum, this move would put S.C.L.C. into full competition with the N.A.A.C.P. for members, dues, contributions and general support.

"I will have to face the decision soon on whether I should be limiting myself to the South," King said. "In the North there are brothers and sisters who are suffering discrimination that is even more agonizing, in a sense, than in the South. . . . In the South, at least the Negro can see progress, whereas in the North all he sees is retrogression."

At present, S.C.L.C.'s most far-reaching and, many civil-rights workers think, most useful activity is its citizenship-training program. In an attractive brick building called the Dorchester Center in rural McIntosh, Georgia, S.C.L.C. trains people it calls "the noncommissioned officers of the civil-rights movement." Most are leaders from small communities, learning how to teach basic literacy, voter-registration processes and procedures for obtaining government benefits. So far, about 600 Negroes from all over the South have gone through Dorchester. In Georgia alone, these graduates recently were conducting 50 local classes.

For these and other operations conducted by its staff of 40, S.C.L.C. has a 1963 budget of about \$450,000, up from \$60,000 in 1960, when the staff numbered three. Fees from its affiliates amount to only about \$15,000 of this. Doctor King himself raises about \$100,000 with rallies, dinners and other personal appearances. A surprising \$150,000 or so comes through the mail, some spon-

aneously but most in response to appeals from Doctor King to a mailing list of 35,000 people. When a crisis such as Birmingham's comes, an "emergency appeal" may be sent out, and sometimes it adds substantially to the year's budget. For example, the National Maritime Union alone sent King more than \$32,000 in the midst of the Birmingham crisis.

About \$100,000 of the S.C.L.C. budget is a grant by the Field Foundation to the home mission board of the United Church of Christ, which finances the citizenship school that S.C.L.C. administers. The remainder of the S.C.L.C. budget comes from periodic benefits, concerts and assorted entertainment.

King's financial reporting worries some people. In contrast to the N.A.A.C.P., which reports its money handling extensively and likes to emphasize that it must be "as above suspicion as Caesar's wife," S.C.L.C. reports little. Its only known published financial statement is a one-page, carbon-copied sheet with a very general listing of income and disbursements in round figures.

Partly because of its laxity in providing reports even to those with whom it deals on a professional level, S.C.L.C. seems to have suffered badly as a participant in the foundation-financed Voter Education Project, set up last year to manage voter-registration programs through five participating organizations. S.C.L.C., which had enthusiastically disclosed that it would receive about \$90,000 from the fund last year, actually wound up getting less than \$25,000. And when the project drew up its tentative 1963 allocations this April, S.C.L.C. was down for none.

Others in the civil-rights movement are also taking a tough, critical look at S.C.L.C.'s work in voter registration. And, despite King's statement in an April fund-raising letter that "We are making the main thrust of our work in the area of voter registration," the "specialty of the house" with S.C.L.C. remains the mass protest. The ultimate outcome in Birmingham will be a judgment of this tactic, just as Albany was.

The name of Albany has come to have a special meaning in the rights movement. In that busy little city of 58,000 in the old plantation country of southwestern Georgia, a total of more than 1,100 Negroes marched to jail with King in December, 1961, and the spring of 1962, demanding desegregation. Thundering applause had nearly drowned out King's rising, falling oratory when he told a meeting of Albany Negroes: "Get on your walking shoes; walk together, children, and don'tcha get weary!"

King himself had been trapped in the kind of emotion that builds up at these meetings. When he went to Albany he did not intend to go to jail or, apparently, to allow his entire prestige to be committed. But by the time he reached the church, earlier speakers had already fired up the crowd. A local Negro leader, Dr. W. G. Anderson, whirled in the midst of an oration about marching to certain arrest and exclaimed, "Reverend King will lead us, won't you, Reverend King?" The answer had to be yes. "I don't think King leads the movement," said a former associate. "It leads him."

Looking back, an executive of another rights group has commented, "As a professional, I was appalled by the lack of planning in the Albany campaign. They just charged off."

Almost everybody outside King's immediate camp thinks the Albany protest was a failure. "Albany can never be the same again," King had said at the time. But the walls of segregation did not come tumbling down anywhere there, and the Negro's lot today is little different except for some new hardships. Slater King, an Albany Negro leader and businessman, thinks the campaign was worth-while on the whole, but he estimates that 20 percent of the work force of Negro maids and cooks lost jobs permanently because of white hostility aroused by the marches.

"Albany is just as segregated as ever," says Police Chief Laurie Pritchett, who is credited with giving King his first major defeat. And Mrs. Ruby Hurley, Southeastern regional director of the N.A.A.C.P., says, "Albany was successful only if the goal was to go to jail."

### A difference in objectives

Doctor King himself, though he admits he might do things differently now, believes the marches did achieve something. "Negroes have straightened their backs in Albany," he says, "and once a man straightens his back you can't ride him anymore." It is a view that sheds light on the cause of many of his differences with leaders of other rights groups. As one such executive said, "We [various rights organizations] meet and decide on tactics for bringing about desegregation. I have the feeling S.C.L.C. does not regard this as the primary objective. For them it's to increase the self-esteem of the Negro. That calls for different tactics."

Doctor King, having established himself as the foremost practitioner of the "fill the jails" tactic, now has set up a legal wing that may be useful when and if thousands more of his followers go to jail. Contributions to this new Gandhi Society will be tax-exempt—unlike those to S.C.L.C., a political-action group. Doctor King, honorary chairman of the Gandhi Society, acknowledges that it may enjoy foundation support—some, hopefully, from the Rockefeller Foundation.

The relationship between King and New York Governor Rockefeller has aroused a good deal of curiosity, especially since an S.C.L.C. official resigned with charges that Rockefeller was a heavy contributor to King for political reasons. The two men met at a Harlem rally in 1957 but had little contact until 1960. That year, when King was to speak at a fund-raising dinner in Albany, New York, the governor greeted him in New York City and then flew him to Albany in his personal plane. They had long talks. "I was very much impressed by him and the strength of his commitment," King recalls. They have talked since then, King says, but not frequently. "I must say he has shown a strong concern for civil



rights. I do not think it is wholly political." But King is hard to corner on the question of whether President Kennedy or Governor Rockefeller has more appeal as a civil-rights advocate.

"I don't endorse candidates and will continue to follow this policy," King said, but he added, "I will go to the extent of telling people who ask my advice what I think the candidates stand for."

Even that could be an important endorsement. During the 1960 campaign his father, the Rev. M. L. King Sr., publicly endorsed John F. Kennedy for President because of the candidate's "call of concern" to young Doctor King's wife Coretta, while her husband was confined at Georgia's Reidsville State Penitentiary. That call, and another by Bob Kennedy to a Georgia judge handling a traffic case against King, are credited by many political observers with swinging enough Negro votes to elect Kennedy.

King's position in the rights movement unquestionably is enhanced by the fact that he has the ear of the President and, for that matter, of figures around the world. He knows African premiers better than he does the influential whites in his own hometown—recently he could not recall the names of two of the most important churchmen in Atlanta, both of whom had lunched with him to talk race relations. Not only is he on speaking terms with many African leaders; to an extent few white Americans appreciate, his name is known and revered throughout much of the world.

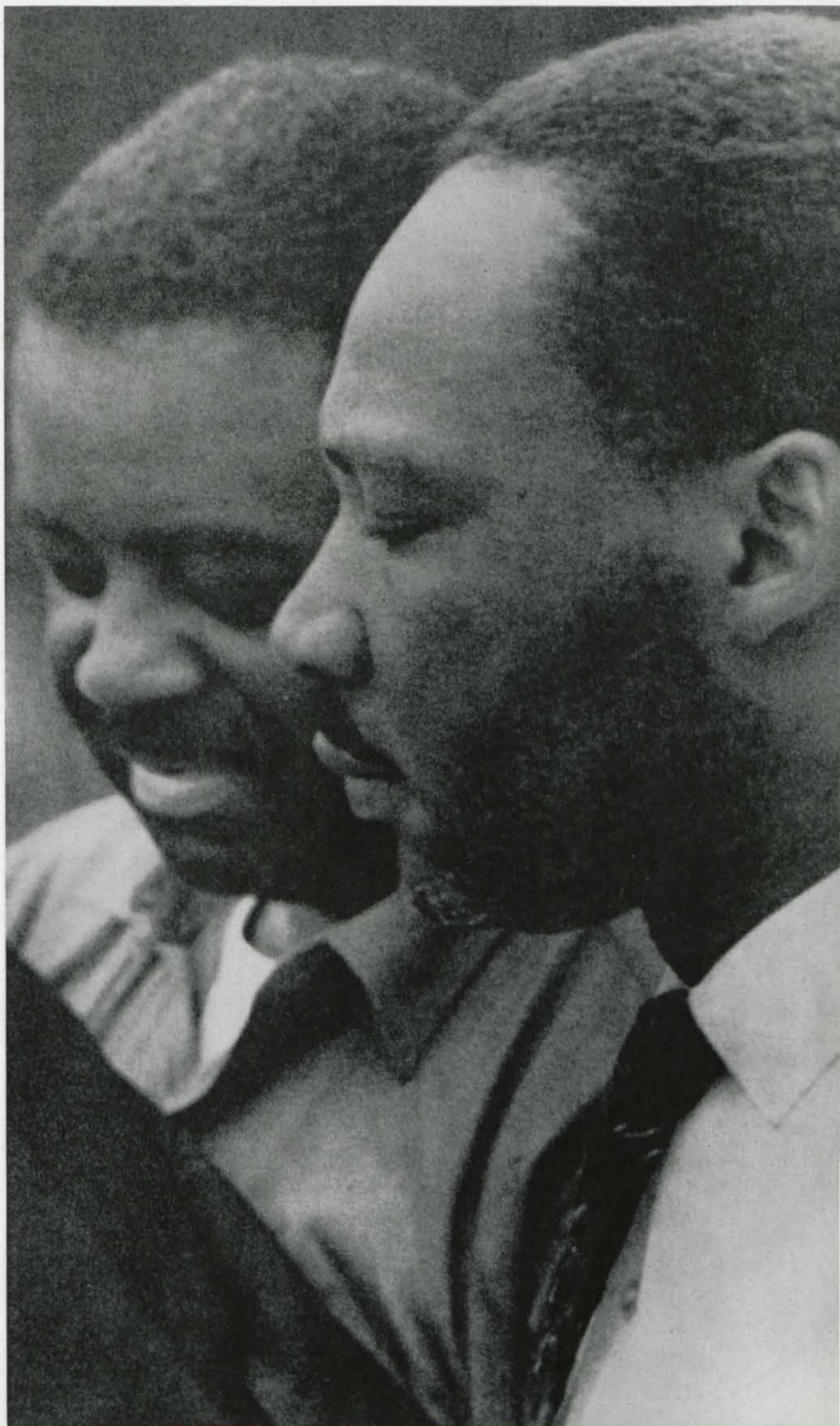
During the Birmingham push, for example, a Peace Corps official visiting in Senegal was plied with questions about why America had put Martin Luther King in jail. And by now most of the world knows that he has been jailed 14 times—as this is written.

Jail usually is the place where King catches up on his reading, but in the Birmingham jail a few weeks ago he caught up on some writing. Seven leading Alabama churchmen, some of whom had staked their prestige and positions upon a moderate solution in Birmingham, had openly criticized his actions there. He answered them with a publicly released 9,000-word letter which his staff later dubbed *Birmingham Jail Treatise of Martin Luther King Jr.* It was a telling document. More than ever it split him from the white moderates of the South and suggested that Negroes would plot their own course in the future.

The moderates, he wrote, had "gravely disappointed" him: "I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the Negro's great stumbling block in the stride toward freedom is not the White Citizens Council-er or the Ku Klux Klanner, but the white moderate who is more devoted to 'order' than to justice; who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice; who constantly says, 'I agree with you in the goal you seek, but I can't agree with your methods of direct action'; who paternalistically feels that he can set the timetable for another man's freedom. . . ."

As for his own course, he said, he was the man in the middle in the Negro community. He stood between "a force of complacency" and "one of bitterness and hatred" exemplified by the Black Muslims, and he realized that he should have known that "few members of a race that has oppressed another race can understand or appreciate the deep groans and passionate yearnings of those who have been oppressed. . . ."

More than a "treatise" it sounded like a declaration of black independence in the civil-rights crises of the future. THE END



*Unshaven after stretch in Birmingham jail, King (right) and Rev. Ralph D. Abernathy pray silently.*