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This resulted in the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, authorizing the federal government to enforce desegregation of public accommodations and outlawing discrimination in publicly owned facilities. This also led to Martin Luther King receiving the Nobel Peace Prize for 1964.

King's struggle continued throughout the 1960s. Often, it seemed as though the pattern of progress was two steps forward and one step back. On March 7, 1965, a civil rights march planned from Selma to Alabama's capital in Montgomer turned violent as police with nightsticks and tear gas met the demonstrators as they tried to cross the Edmond Pettus Bridge. King was not in the march, however the attack was televised showing horrifying images of marchers being bloodied and severely injured. Seventeen demonstrators were hospitalized leading to the naming the event "Bloody Sunday." A second march was cancelled due to a restraining order to prevent the march from taking place. A third march was planned, and this time King made sure he was on it. Not wanting to alienate southern judges by violating the restraining order, a different tact was taken. On March 9, 1965, a procession of 2,500 marchers, both black and white, set out once again to cross the Pettus Bridge and confronted barricades and state troopers. Instead of forcing a confrontation, King led his followers to kneel in prayer and they then turned back. The event caused King the loss of support among some younger African-American leaders, but it nonetheless aroused support for the passage of the

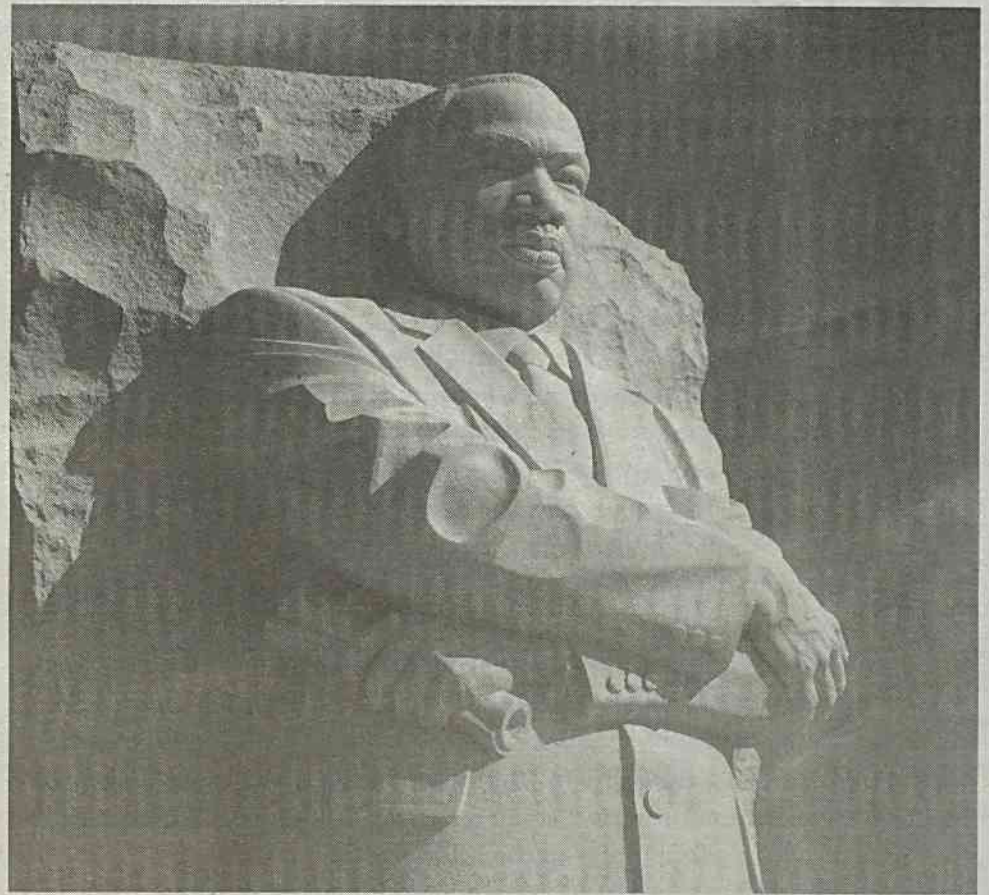
Voting Rights Act of 1965.

From late 1965 through 1967, Martin Luther King Jr. expanded his Civil Rights Movement into other larger American cities, including Chicago and Los Angeles. But he met with increasing criticism and public challenges from young black-power leaders. King's patient, non-violent approach and appeal to white middle-class citizens alienated many black militants who considered his methods too weak and too late. In the eyes of the sharp-tongued, blue jean young urban black, King's manner was irresponsibly passive and deemed non-effective. To address this criticism, King began making a link between discrimination and poverty. He expanded his civil rights efforts to the Vietnam War. He felt that America's involvement in Vietnam was politically untenable and the government's conduct of the war discriminatory to the poor. He sought to broaden his base by forming a multi-race coalition to address economic and unemployment problems of all disadvantaged people.

Assassination and Legacy

By 1968, the years of demonstrations and confrontations were beginning to wear on Martin Luther King Jr. He had grown tired of marches, going to jail, and living under the constant threat of death. He was becoming discouraged at the slow progress civil rights in America and the increasing criticism from other African-American leaders. Plans were in the works for another march on Washington to revive his movement and bring attention to a widening range of issues. In the spring of 1968, a labor strike by Memphis sanitation workers drew King to one last crusade. On April 3, in what proved to be an eerily prophetic speech, he told supporters, "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." The next day, while standing on a balcony outside his room at the Lorraine Motel, Martin Luther King Jr. was struck by a sniper's bullet. The shooter, a malcontent drifter and former convict named James Earl Ray, was eventually apprehended after a two-month, international manhunt. The killing sparked riots and demonstrations in more than 100 cities across the country. In 1969, Ray pleaded guilty to assassinating King and was sentenced to 99 years in prison. He died in prison on April 23, 1998.

Martin Luther King Jr.'s life had a seismic impact on race relations in the United States. Years after his death, he is the most widely known African-American leader of his era. His life and work have been honored with a national holiday, schools and public buildings named after him, and a memorial on Independence Mall in Washington, D.C. But his life remains controversial as well. In the 1970s, FBI files, released under the Freedom of Information Act, revealed that he was under government surveillance and suggested his involvement in adulterous relationships and communist influences. Over the years, extensive archival studies have led to a more



balanced and comprehensive assessment of his life, portraying him as a complex figure, flawed, fallible and limited in his control over the mass movements with which he was associated, yet a visionary leader who was deeply committed to achieving social justice through nonviolent means.

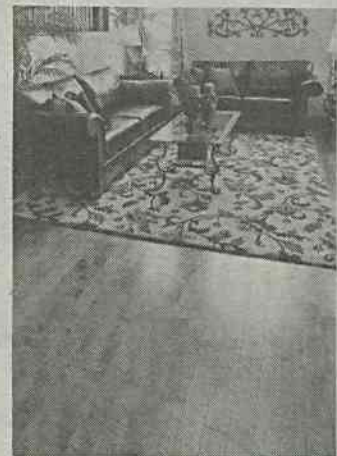
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