

**WE ALL KNOW THE MONUMENT,  
THE LARGER-THAN-LIFE LEGEND.**





**What about the man behind the myth?**

# THERE IS THE LOUD CLAMOR OF MLK THE PUBLIC FIGURE...

## The New York Times

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**THE NOBEL PEACE PRIZE FOR 1964 WAS AWARDED TODAY TO THE REV. DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.**

Oslo, Norway, Oct. 14  
The prize honors acts "for the furtherance of brotherhood among men and to the abolishment or reduction of standing armies and for the extension of these purposes." In a broadcast from Atlanta, Ga., Dr. King said that he was deeply moved by the honor. "I am glad people of other nations are concerned with our problems here," he said. He added that he regarded the prize as a sign that world public opinion was on the side of those struggling for freedom and dignity. He also said he saw no political implications in the award. "I am a minister of the gospel, not a political leader," he said.

UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT  
**Memorandum**

TO : Mr. A. H. Belmont  
DATE: August 30, 1963

FROM : Mr. W. C. Sullivan

SUBJECT: COMMUNIST PARTY, USA  
NEGRO QUESTION  
IS - C

Reference is made to the enclosed material on which the Director has written: "This memo reminds me vividly of those I received when Castro took over Cuba: You contended then that Castro and his cohorts were not Communists and not influenced by Communists. Time alone proved you wrong. I for one can't ignore the memos re King, et al as having only an infinitesimal effect on the efforts to exploit the American Negro by the Communists."

The Director is correct. We were completely wrong about believing the evidence was not sufficient to determine some years ago that Fidel Castro was not a communist or under communist influence. On investigating and writing about communism and the American Negro, we had better remember this and profit by the lesson it should teach us.

I do think that much of the difficulty relating to the memorandum rightly questioned by the Director is to be found centered in the word "influence." We do not have, and no Government agency or private organization has, any yardstick which can accurately measure "influence" in this particular context, even when we know it does exist such as in the case of the obvious influence of over Martin Luther King, Jr.



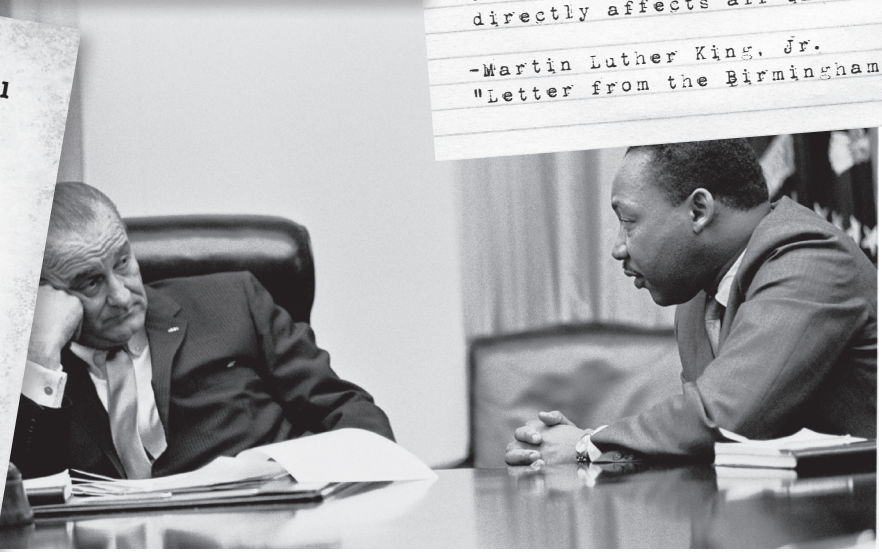
Few can explain the extraordinary King mystique. Yet he has an indescribable capacity for empathy that is the touchstone of leadership. By deed and by preaching, he has stirred in his people a Christian forbearance that nourishes hope and smothers injustice. Says Atlanta's...Ralph D. Abernathy...: "The people make Dr. King great. He articulates the longings, the hopes, the aspirations of his people in a most earnest and profound manner. He is a humble man, down to earth, honest. He has proved his commitment to Judaeo-Christian ideals. He seeks to save the nation and its soul, not just the Negro."

—"America's Ghandi," *Time Magazine*  
1963 Man of the Year



I came across your recent statement calling my present activities "unwise and untimely." I cannot sit idly by in Atlanta and not be concerned about what happens in Birmingham. Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly.

-Martin Luther King, Jr.  
"Letter from the Birmingham Jail."



**The Memphis Commercial Appeal**  
March 18, 1968

Martin Luther King did nothing to hasten the settlement of the Memphis sanitation strike in his Monday night speech at Mason Temple. But he saw how many Negroes were aroused and quickly decided to attach himself to the local issue. He'll return to Memphis Friday to lead a march, which is usually good for a spot on the evening television broadcasts. The sanitation strike gave him a handy starting place to make his pitch for bigger things.



## Family Man

"I used to love to be at their home. He had a game he played with each child. They had a kiss mark. One child had a forehead and one had a cheek, the other had the other cheek and the other one had the chin. And what he would do sometimes he'd grab 'em and to give a kiss and he'd pretend like he's going to the wrong side. 'No, no, no, Daddy, that's my side. That's my side.' And he was doing that just to add some jocular moments to the setting."

—Xernona Clayton, SCLC Secretary

## Man of Faith

"In order to understand Martin Luther King you must start with the fact that he was a minister. That is the key to who Martin Luther King Jr. was. If you try to take him as a, quote, civil rights leader, or a political leader, you will miss the real King. He was first and foremost a minister."

—William Gray, King family friend

"In New York, a few months before his death, we had lunch... and King turned philosophical about the limits of political change. It was a leisurely and convivial lunch. The restaurant had been alerted that the famous Dr. King was coming, and the waiter assumed that the white man in the clerical collar must be he, and so throughout the lunch addressed me as Dr. King. It both astonished and amused that one of the most famous people in the world was not recognized, and King enjoyed it immensely, taking the opportunity to smoke cigarettes throughout lunch, a regular habit that he usually indulged only in private. Among many other things, we talked about the abiding wisdom of Reinhold Niebuhr and the need to recognize the distinction between the morally imperative and the historically possible, agreeing also on the moral imperative to press the historically possible. It was the last time I saw him."

—Father Richard John Neuhaus

"Faith in the dawn arises from the faith that God is good and just. When one believes this, he knows that the contradictions of life are neither final nor ultimate. He can walk through the dark night with the radiant conviction that all things work together for good for those that love God. Even the most starless midnight may herald the dawn of some great fulfillment."

—Dr. King, "Knock at Midnight," in *Strength To Love*



**and there is the quiet reflection  
of a private person.**

# ON THE STREETS, THERE WERE THE TRIUMPHS OF NEW CHALLENGES MET, THE PROMISE OF THE POOR PEOPLE'S CAMPAIGN, AND THE NEW BATTLES OF THE 1968 SANITATION WORKERS' STRIKE IN MEMPHIS.

"If a man is called to be a street sweeper, he should sweep streets even as Michelangelo painted, or Beethoven composed music, or Shakespeare wrote poetry. He should sweep streets so well that all the hosts of heaven and earth will pause to say, here lived a great street sweeper who did his job well."

—Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

"I was a young guy and I've always been one of those people that's going somewhere else. I want to see it from a different angle. I wanted to see MLK up close and personal so I walked over to the door and just as I walked to the door, this white cadillac pulls up and he gets out and I open the door for him. Well this is no big thing because he wasn't the same person then as he has come to be known, so wasn't no big event but I opened the door and he thanked me. I never will forget that. I looked back and went, 'Whoa,' because I really got to see somebody. We didn't hug or kiss but he did say, 'Thank you young man,' and he and his people walked up to the podium.

King [said]: 'We gonna shut this city down' and then says the magic words to me, 'Ain't gonna be no school in Memphis on Friday' and I perked up and I look over at God, who's my daddy, and say, 'Is that right? You mean to tell me I ain't got to go to school?' So I'm signed on. If this man got the power to say I ain't got to go to school on Friday, I'm going with him. That was how I felt. I was like, 'I think I just became a fan.' I pledged that I was gonna do my part. 'Whatever y'all need, I'm willing to do.' That was really the jumping off point, not just for me—I think after that, that's when it really became an issue."

—Memphis native Aaron Lewis remembers the sanitation strike.

There was this stretch of the highway on the outskirts of Montgomery, which is like motel row—the Ramada Inn, Holiday Inn—a whole row of them. So the rain has finally stopped and all the maids are out there in front with their mops and their carts and their pails and stuff, and they're just looking. And they're looking, and right behind them are their managers. The maids are all Black, the managers are all white. And they're looking at us, and they look at their manager, and they look at us, and they look at their manager, and they look at us, and some of them, they drop their mops and join the march.

—Interview with a civil rights activist

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## But behind closed doors, there were also moments of quiet doubt, of exhaustion—or of laughter.

**XERNONA CLAYTON:** I was home this particular day, January 15. They were at the church planning a, a march and they called me and said, “You know, we’re concerned about Doc...we haven’t seen his laughter in a long time and we need to see that old spark again, and we think you can help us get that spark back. So will you come over to the church and we’re going to celebrate his birthday. We’re going to take a break around four or five o’clock and we’re going to celebrate and give him a little surprise.”...Usually the staff would give him a suit for his birthday and this time, Andrew Young and Abernathy and Jesse Jackson and the people around him said, “Let’s don’t give him a suit, let’s give him some laughter. Let’s make him laugh.” And so that was my assignment to come over and make him laugh.

**JUANITA ABERNATHY:** Well, that evening we were supposed to go out to dinner and, um, he called and said to me... “Juan, I don’t want to go out to dinner. Um, I want to come to your house. If I get some fish, Ralph and I bring the fish, would you cook it?” I said, “Yes.” So they came over with the fish and, um, we cooked fish and the news was on and Martin was very sensitive about violence. And I had never seen him with the kind of spirit he had that night. He was just sad. He looked like he was burdened down. And we tried to make small talk, light talk. But every time we would lift the conversation to something lighter you could see him just sink. He was more distraught that night than I have ever seen him in my life....



**ANDREW YOUNG:** He was exhausted, he had a slight fever. ... When I came in the room he said, “Where have you been?” And he threw a pillow at me. And I was trying to tell him, you know, that I’d been in court all day. And he said, “Don’t you know you can’t stay in court? You supposed to report to me. You supposed to let me know what’s going on. I’ve been worried all day long.” And he kept throwing pillows at us so I started throwing ‘em back at him. And the next thing you know they had all jumped on me and, and put me down between these two beds and piled the pillows on top of me and it was, you know, it was just childish play.

**CHARLEY COBB:** The eyes were tired. I’ll stop short of saying “defeated.” He was smoking and, and he looked something short of disheveled. Looking at him, there’s a sense of...being alone. Not, or at least being uncertain as to who your allies are.



—Above recollections from the PBS documentary, *Citizen King*