

THE ASSASSINATION

IN causation and execution, the murder of Martin Luther King was both a symbol and a symptom of the nation's racial malaise. The proximate cause of his death was, ironically, a minor labor dispute in a Southern backwater: the two-month-old strike of 1,300 predominantly Negro garbage collectors in the decaying Mississippi river town of Memphis. The plight of the sanitation workers, caused by the refusal of Memphis' intransigent white Mayor Henry Loeb to meet their modest wage and compensation demands, first attracted and finally eradicated Dr. King, the conqueror of Montgomery, Birmingham and Selma.

Paradoxically, when a Negro riot en-

The Eastern Airlines jet that carried King from Atlanta to Memphis was delayed 15 minutes before takeoff while crewmen checked its baggage for bombs that anonymous callers had warned were aboard. That was nothing particularly unusual for a man whose life had been threatened so often, but when King arrived in Memphis he met a different challenge. Some newspapers had emphasized during the previous week that the prophet of the poor had been staying at the luxurious Rivermont, a Holiday Inn hostelry on the Mississippi's east bank, which charges \$29 a night for a suite. To repair his image, King checked into the Negro-owned Lorraine, a nondescript, two-story cinderblock

JOSEPH LOUW, PUBLIC BROADCASTING LABORATORY—LIFE



KING BEING CARRIED FROM MOTEL BALCONY
At a mere way station toward Washington.

sued during his first Memphis march a fortnight ago, and Loeb (along with Tennessee Governor Buford Ellington) responded with state troopers and National Guardsmen, King felt that his nonviolent philosophy had been besmirched and wanted to withdraw. Only at the urging of his aides in the Southern Christian Leadership Conference did he consent to return.

Repairing the Image. King was more concerned with his planned "camp-in" of poverty-stricken Southern Negroes in the nation's capital, planned for April 22. There, as he wrote in a news release that reached S.C.L.C. supporters the morning after his death, he hoped to "channelize the smoldering rage of the Negro and white poor" in a showdown demonstration of nonviolence. Memphis was supposed to be only a way station toward Washington. Yet when he agreed to continue the Memphis struggle, it was under threat of both death and dishonor.

structure near Memphis' renowned Beale Street (and conveniently close to the Claiborne Temple on Mason Street, kickoff point and terminus for the sanitation marches). At the Lorraine, King and his entourage paid \$13 a night for their green-walled, rust-spotted rooms.

The Fear of Death. Across Mulberry Street from the Lorraine, on a slight rise, stands a nameless rooming house adorned only with a metal awning whose red, green and yellow stripes shade an equally nameless clientele. Into that dwelling—actually two buildings, one for whites, the other for Negroes, and connected by a dank, umbilical hallway—walked a young, dark-haired white man in a neat business suit. "He had a silly little smile that I'll never forget," says Mrs. Bessie Brewer, who manages the rooming house. The man, who called himself John Willard, carefully chose Room 5, with a view of the Lorraine, and paid his \$8.50 for the week with a crisp \$20 bill—another rar-

ity that stuck in Mrs. Brewer's mind.

Back at the Lorraine, King and his aides were finishing a long, hot day of tactical planning for the next week's march—one that would be carried out in defiance of a federal district court injunction. In the course of the conference, King had assured his colleagues that, despite death threats, he was not afraid. "Maybe I've got the advantage over most people," he mused. "I've conquered the fear of death." King was well aware of his vulnerability. After the strategy session, King washed and dressed for dinner. Then he walked out of Room 306 onto the second-floor balcony of the Lorraine to take the evening air. Leaning casually on the green iron railing he chatted with his co-workers readying his Cadillac sedan in the dusk below.

"A Stick of Dynamite." To Soul Singer Ben Branch, who was to perform at a Claiborne Temple rally later that evening, King made a special request: "I want you to sing that song *Precious Lord** for me—sing it real pretty." When Chauffeur Solomon Jones naggingly advised King to don his topcoat against the evening's chill, the muscular Atlantan grinned and allowed: "O.K., I will."

Then, from a window of the rooming house across the way, came a single shot. "It was like a stick of dynamite," recalled one aide. "It sounded like a firecracker, and I thought it was a pretty poor joke," said another. All of the aides hit the deck. The heavy-caliber bullet smashed through King's neck, exploded against his lower right jaw, severing his spinal cord and slamming him away from the rail, up against the wall, with hands drawn tautly toward his head. "Oh Lord!" moaned one of his lieutenants as he saw the blood flowing over King's white, button-down shirt.

His aides tenderly laid towels over the gaping wound; some 30 hard-hatted Memphis police swiftly converged on the motel in response to the shot. In doing so, they missed the assassin, whose weapon (a scope-sighted 30.06-cal. Remington pump rifle), binoculars and suitcase were found near the rooming house. A spent cartridge casing was left in the grimy lavatory. The range from window to balcony: an easy 205 ft.

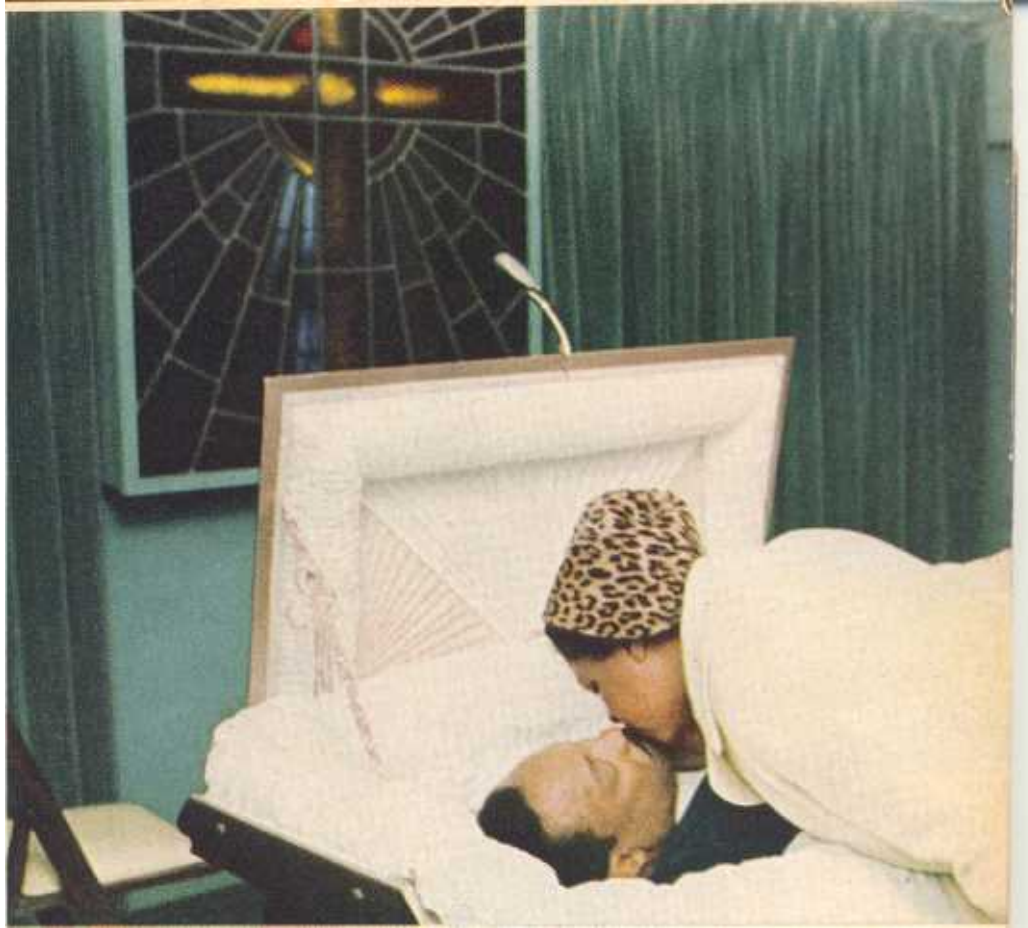
An ambulance came quickly, and raced him to St. Joseph's Hospital 1½ miles away. Moribund as he entered the emergency ward, Martin Luther King Jr., 39, was pronounced dead within an hour of the shooting. His death was the twelfth major assassination and the most traumatic in the civil rights struggle since 1963.

South Toward Home. The flurry of Negro outrage that followed the murder in Memphis was conducted mostly by high-spirited youths—and was more

* *Lead, lead, lead me on to the Land, Oh, oh, oh, take my hand, Precious Lord, And lead your child on home.*

A LEGACY OF LOVE AND ANGER

At the funeral parlor in Memphis, one among the thousands of unknown admirers who trooped by Dr. Martin Luther King's coffin pays a last tribute.



WILSON—LEVITON—ALTANTA



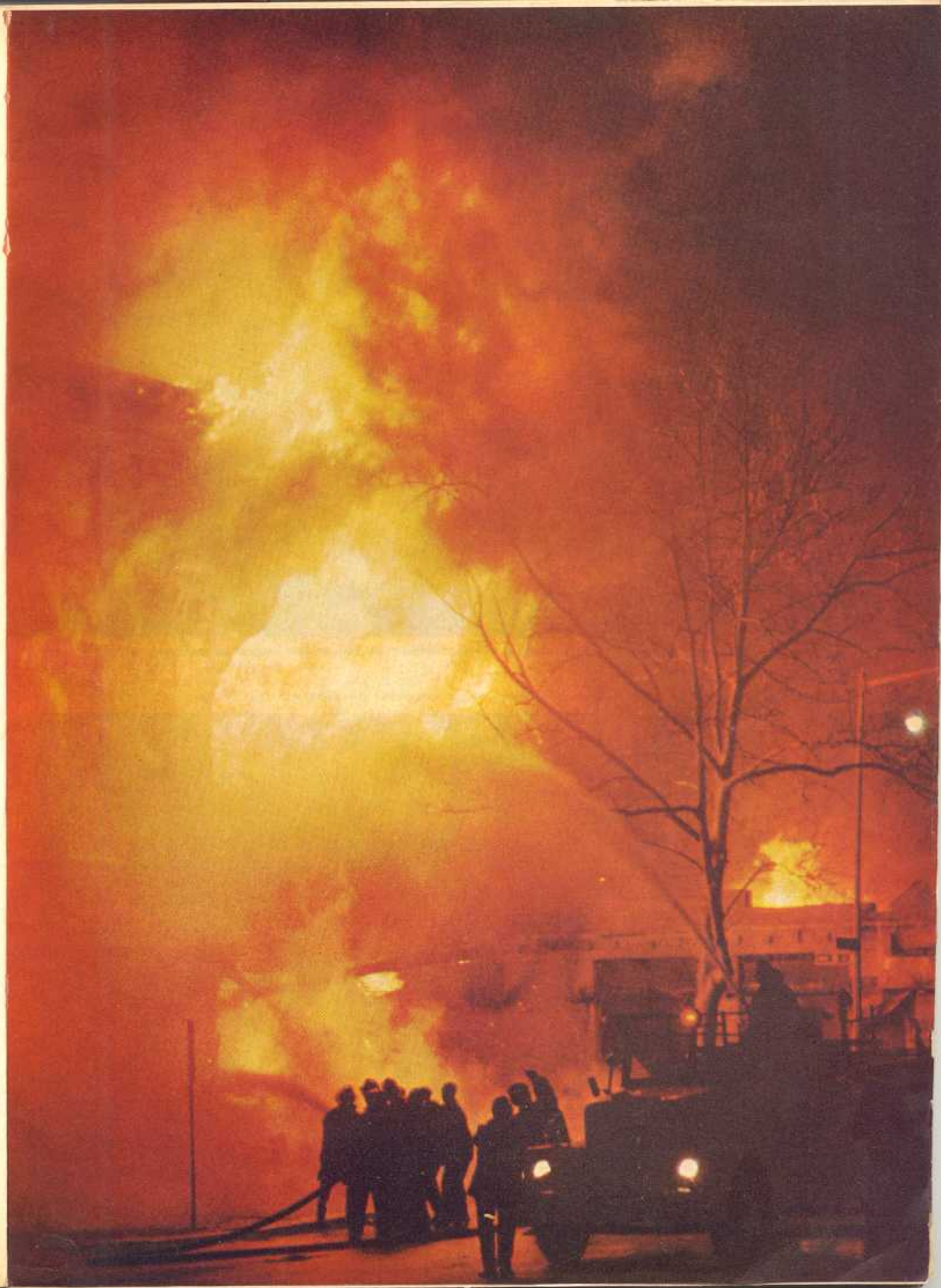
The majesty of grief in her face, Mrs. Coretta King brings her husband's body back to Atlanta, helping her daughter Bernice Albertine, 6, down airplane steps. Behind her is Dr. King's brother, the Rev. A. D. Williams King, and her son, Martin Luther King III, aged 11.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY JIM WELLS

In Washington, Negroes reacted violently to the murder of the champion of nonviolence. Here looters sack a store in the N.W. section of the city.

Only ten blocks from the White House, firemen battle one of some 500 fires set by angry Negroes, who have taken to heart the Watts slogan of defiance, "Burn, baby, burn."





Chicago, fires flared for three miles through the Negro area centering on West Madison Street.

On Roosevelt Road,

splashes through water sprayed on a burning store by Chicago's harassed firemen.



than compensated for in solemn grief. As soon as he learned of the shooting, Atlanta's Mayor Ivan Allen Jr., one of the South's best-accredited white civil rights advocates, called Mrs. Coretta King—who only last January had undergone major surgery—and arranged a flight to Memphis. At the Atlanta terminal, Allen received word that King had died at the hospital, and he broke the news to the widow in the foyer of the ladies' rest room. Mrs. King returned to the family's modest home on the edge of Atlanta's Vine City, a middle-class Negro neighborhood, where the phone was already ringing with calls from across the country. On hand to help answer was Mrs. Eugene McCarthy, wife of the Minnesota Senator, who had long worked with Mrs. King in ecumenical church affairs. One caller was New York's Senator Robert Kennedy, who had come to King's aid in 1960 when he was in jail for his Atlanta sit-ins. R.F.K. promised to send a plane to transport the leader's body back to Atlanta.

To many whites, the subsequent mourning might have seemed unbearably emotional. In Memphis, before it was carried south toward home, King's body lay in state at the R. S. Lewis & Sons Funeral Home in an open bronze casket, the black suit tidily pressed, the wound in the throat now all but invisible. Many of those who filed past could not control their tears. Some kissed King's lips; others reverently touched his face. A few women threw their hands in the air and cried aloud in ululating agony. Mrs. King was a dry-eyed frieze of heartbreak. At the funeral this week, to be attended by many of the nation's and the world's great men, her composure will be hard to match.

Highest Priority. For all the sense of personal loss that pervaded the nation with his death, Martin Luther King's heritage of nonviolence seemed to have endured its architect's demise. Those who predicted that racial pacifism had passed with him were contradicted last week from Harlem to Watts, in Northern ghettos and Southern grit towns, where black leaders and youths in great numbers took to the tense streets and urged their brothers to "cool it for the Doc." Mississippi's Charles Evers curbed a Jackson rising with Kingly oratory. Even such hardcore militants as Harlem Mau Mau Leader Charles 37X Kenyatta and Los Angeles' Ron Karenga, the shaven-skulled boss of "US," manned sound trucks and passed resolutions calling for calm. Yet in the unhappy racial climate of the U.S. today, that forbearance could unravel with calamitous speed.

If the murder of Martin Luther King is not to further polarize the racism, both black and white—decided only last month by the President's riot commission—the nation will have to accept the need for new programs, new laws

and new attitudes toward the Negro. As the commission concluded, "There can be no higher priority for national action and no higher claim on the nation's conscience."

Transcendent Symbol

For Martin Luther King Jr., death came as a tragic finale to an American drama fraught with classic hints of inevitability. Propelled to fame in the throes of the Negro's mid-century revolution, he gave it momentum and steered it toward nonviolence. Yet the movement he served with such eloquence and zeal was beginning to pass him by, and nonviolence to many black militants had come to seem naive, outmoded, even suicidal.

Black militants used his murder to cry, "The civil rights movement is dead!" But they had said it long before his assassination. King was dangerously close to slipping from prophet to patsy. When his previous week's march in Memphis degenerated into riotous looting, a black gang leader who organized the violence chortled: "We been making plans to tear this town up for a long time. We knew he'd turn out a crowd." For years, behind his back, King's Negro denigrators had called him "de Lawd." Lately he had heard himself publicly called an Uncle Tom by hotheads out to steal both headlines and black support.

Yet if ever there were a transcendent Negro symbol, it was Martin Luther King. Bridging the void between black despair and white unconcern, he spoke so powerfully of and from the wretchedness of the Negro's condition that he became the moral guidon of civil rights not only to Americans but also to the world beyond. If not the actual catalyst, he was the legitimizer of progress toward racial equality. His role and reputation may have been thrust upon him, but King was amply prepared for the thrust.

Michael to Martin. Born Jan. 15, 1929, in a middle-class Georgia family active for two generations in the civil rights cause, he was the second child and first-born son, named after his father, Michael Luther King. The elder King, pastor of Atlanta's Ebenezer Baptist Church, changed both their names when Martin was five to honor the Reformation rebel who nailed his independent declaration to the Castle Church.

The small cruelties of bigotry left their scars despite King's warm, protective family life. He zipped through high school, entered Atlanta's Negro Morehouse College at 15, pondered a career and searched for "some intellectual basis for a social philosophy." Thoreau's essay "Civil Disobedience" showed him the goal, and King picked the ministry as a proper means to achieve it.

At Crozer Theological Seminary in Chester, Pa., where he was elected class

president and outstanding student, he discovered the works of Hegel and Kant. Here also he was exposed to the writings of Mohandas Gandhi, whose mystic faith in nonviolent protest became King's lodestar. "From my background," he said, "I gained my regulating Christian ideals. From Gandhi I learned my operational technique." Indeed, Gandhi's word for his doctrine, *satyagraha*, becomes in translation King's slogan, "soul force."

Moving on to Boston University, King gained a doctorate and a bride, Antioch College Graduate Coretta Scott, and in 1954 took his first pastorate in Montgomery, Ala. There in 1955, a seamstress' tired feet precipitated the first great civil rights test of power and launched King's galvanic ca-



ARREST IN MONTGOMERY, ALA., 1958

As the horizon grew, so did the clout.

reer. Mrs. Rosa Parks's arrest for refusing to give her seat on a town bus to a white man ended 382 days later with capitulation of the Montgomery bus line to a comprehensive Negro consortium and the U.S. Supreme Court. King, too new to Montgomery to have enemies in the usually fragmented Negro community, became its chief. His march to martyrdom had begun.

"All a Hoax." The initial triumph annealed his philosophy but taught him little about strategy. When the following years brought sit-ins and freedom rides, King was there with organizational support. He formed the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and midwived the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. Nonetheless, his preoccupation with ideas instead of details was irking his own camp, and Albany, Ga., gave him a rueful jolt. In 1961, just two days after he led a mass