

The king years: historic moments in the civil rights movement by taylor branch bo...

[Countries](#), [Vietnam](#)



- In what way did Dr. Martin Luther King use non-violent protests in the Civil Rights Movement?

At the staff retreat of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), King talked about the dangers of violence. King said, " Violence has been the inseparable twin of materialism, the hallmark of its grandeur", and he stood his ground against it on the basis that hate engenders violence. Hence, to curb hate and violence, King saw the importance of participating in peaceful protests no matter how unjust the situations they were in and how difficult it was for Black people to attain freedom. Inspired by Gandhi, King established his campaign initiative on the foundation of peaceful protest. King believed that Black people can inspire, push, and attain reform through non-violent means because it shows a desirable ideal that could inspire people, even their ' enemy', to support freedom and democracy. As King said, people would not be able to fight evil by turning evil.

Perhaps one of the ways that King used non-violent protests during the Civil Rights Movement is to encourage people to engage in peaceful protests so they can show what an ideal society looks like. People can protest without fighting or hurting other people. It is a means for protesters to set an example, so to speak, and to shed light on wrongdoings in society by differentiating right from wrong. Segregationists can ridicule or discriminate Black people and they suffered for years because of it while the government remained passive in reversing racial discrimination in the US. By engaging in non-violent protests, their actions can show the opposite of segregation and underscore the difference between both. Furthermore, and more importantly, King used non-violent resistance to draw attention to their

campaign. It was a strategy on King and the SCLC's part to use non-violent protests to draw media attention. Suddenly, racial discrimination became a national issue because of the media's coverage, showing segregationists exacting violence and harassing Black people who did not fight back. In addition, shows of non-violent resistance drew the sympathy and support of the public, even White people, and consequently brought about pressure on government to push for reform. Overall, non-violent resistance was not merely a principle that King picked up while studying Gandhi but also part of the SCLC's campaign strategy in order to win support from the public and the government.

- What role did the media play in the Birmingham Alabama protest movement?

Birmingham, Alabama implemented stricter segregation policies during the 1960s. Extreme segregation eventually pushed Black people in the city to organize and participate in protests against racial segregation as well as discrimination and violence against them. Since the 1940s until the 1960s, a series of bombings occurred, all aimed against harming Black people in Birmingham. At this point, King was preparing to ramp up his campaign against desegregation and although the SCLC's efforts in Albany, Georgia failed, he felt compelled to continue. King went to Birmingham to support the series of protests organized by the SCLC and locals alike. King and the SCLC sought to pressure the locality into eradicating segregation by attacking the local economy. Protesters boycotted local businesses that adopted segregation. Businessmen, and eventually, the Chamber of Commerce noticed the impact of boycotts on business. The city government retaliated

several times but city officials' hostilities only fueled anger and willed protesters to continue fighting.

Conflict escalated when city officials and locals became involved in thwarting the protests. Birmingham's administrator of public safety often retaliated through violent means. It was then that the SCLC realized that they could turn violence against their enemy through the media. The media played an important role during this period by capturing footages of ongoing violence against Black protesters. King and the SCLC influenced all protesters to remain calm and adhere to non-violent protests despite harassment and threats from local police officers, officials, and segregationist Whites. The media successfully captured the contrast between violent segregationists and Black protesters, and the influence was in favor of the latter because people saw the injustice done to them. King and SCLC intentionally launched the peaceful protests amidst the chaos in Birmingham because they wanted the whole of America to see the situation of Black people, especially in the South. Campaign strategies were successful with many White people expressing disdain towards the actions of segregationists. Even some White locals in Birmingham openly supported Black protesters because they witnessed the unjust treatment of Black people in their city. Even when King went to prison in Birmingham, the SCLC deliberately failed to pay bail. The purpose of which was to maintain the media's focus and the public's attention on Birmingham as protests and violence continued and while King was in jail for fighting for Black people's rights. Moreover, King's arrest elicited public outrage. Consequently, boycotts intensified, further collapsing the local economy, thus, forcing, city officials to ask Kennedy to resolve the

situation.

- Why did King oppose the war in Vietnam? Was his Opposition to the war a distraction?

In 1967, King expressed his concerns regarding the Vietnam War in a speech, *Beyond Vietnam: A Time to Break Silence*, before the people in the Riverside Church in New York. King said that he opposes the war because of the United States' questionable intentions in engaging Vietnamese rebels and intervening in the conflict. King felt that he had to publicly denounce the Johnson's administration decision and strategies in the country's intervention because it is aligned with his principle when it comes to peace and democracy. The Johnson administration chose to intervene because of America's fear of the rise and spread of communism. Instead of espousing peace and looking for ways to initiate peaceful negotiations between Vietnamese communist and anti-communist groups, US perpetuated violence by sending its troops and with the ensuing series of attacks that eventually escalated the conflict.

Apart from the involvement of the US in the war that propagates violence, King believed that the move illustrates imperialism because he thought that US planned to extend its influence in Asia under the guise of supporting anti-communist groups from Southern Vietnam. Furthermore, King believed that the war worsened the situation of disempowered populations in America.

Aside from the fact that many American soldiers died during the Vietnam War, King believed that the war diverted precious resources or funding from the social sector to fuel military support. This, in itself, was injustice for King because resources that the US government should have used to help and

support disadvantaged populations in America went to the purchase of weapons and ammunition. Therefore, King's stance on the Vietnam War was not a distraction but one that also affected the Civil Rights Movement because the Johnson administration's foreign policy affected domestic policies and situations.

- Why did Dr. King want to launch a Poor People's Campaign in Washington D. C.?

During the SLSC's week-long retreat on November 26, King discussed his interest and support not only for protests against racism and discrimination but also against poverty. SLSC's growing frustration during this time because previous efforts failed to make a dent reform. Personally, King felt that merely fighting against racism and discrimination is inadequate in helping Black people fight for equality. People, not only Blacks, especially from the disadvantaged sector need to come together to fight for economic justice. King believed and sided with the goals and objectives of the Poor People's Campaign, which is to help the disadvantaged attain equal access to opportunities because economic security would solidify citizenship and engagement for this population. Moreover, King influenced SLSC to participate in the campaign because he believed that poverty is a greater problem than racism, discrimination, and suffrage, and mobilizing the disempowered poor would help the vulnerable fight for their rights. Although the Kennedy Administration addressed workplace discrimination through its submission of a civil rights legislation, geared towards the abolition of segregation in public spaces, King realized the administration's lack of earnestness in the matter during a strategy meeting on with

President Kennedy on June 22, 1963. Kennedy's officials were willing to pass the legislation on the condition that King cut his ties with suspected left-wing insurgents supporting King's campaign such as Stanley Levison, King's own adviser. Later on, Kennedy had King join him to talk about the same issues but King had doubts. The confrontation is not the reason behind the Poor People's campaign but the needless hindrances to the passage of the legislation spurred the need for Washington to see for themselves that number of people suffering due to poverty and hear their pleas. It is an effort on their part to sway public opinion and Congress into clearing legislation.

- One very important statement about the book.

I personally admire King's stance on hate and violence. The Civil Rights Movement was a tumultuous period in history and although both sides were active participants in the back and forth violence and conflict, King was one of those that strongly supported non-violent protests. Even if racism and discrimination persisted during that time, King still encouraged Black people to not fight back and become entrenched in the cycle of violence but to engage in peaceful protest. It is true that racism and discrimination still exists today but King's persistence and support of non-violent protest is both inspiring and baffling to me. Branch also talked about the events that occurred during the Civil Rights Movement. Many Black people during that time died or were injured due to extreme violence. What is worse is that they did not attain justice because the system perpetuate violence due of the lack of laws to protect minorities against racism and discrimination. Despite these, King inspired them to engage in peaceful protest because he believed that hate only engenders hate.

Another important idea in the book is King's consistency. He may have been criticized by various groups and individuals, others turned away from his campaign, and he sometimes failed to leave a mark where it was warranted but his stance, especially as evidenced by his campaign against the Vietnam War, illustrated consistency. King paid attention to the issues, such as the war, that relate to the Civil Rights Movement, and sought to change the conversation by highlighting detriments in issues and discussed how they would affect civil rights in America.

Works Cited

Branch, Taylor. *The King years: Historic moments in the Civil Rights Movement*.