



Martin Luther King Jr. and his wife, Coretta and their children (from left) Martin, Dexter and Yolanda. A fourth child, Bernice, was born in 1963.

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Memphis," he told the crowd. True to his word, on Thursday, March 28—a hot, uncomfortable day—King was back in town. The march began shortly after 11 o'clock in the morning, with King leading the way, Abernathy and the Memphis ministers at his side, their arms interlocked, their voices raised, singing "We Shall Overcome."

Slowly, they moved through the streets toward City Hall, and thousands followed.

They had gotten only a few blocks when everything started to go wrong. Toward the rear of the march, some angry and undisciplined black youths started breaking store windows and looting merchandise. "We can't have that!" King shouted after he heard the sound of glass shattering.

But there was nothing he could do.

ASSASSINATION

The march disintegrated into chaos and the youths went on smashing windows and throwing stones and bottles. The Memphis police charged after them, and a full-scale riot was in the making.

King himself appeared to be in danger. "You've got to get away from here!" someone yelled at him. Confused and frightened, the group around him pushed forward to main street, where King's bodyguard waved a white Pontiac to a stop.

"Madam," he said to the black woman behind the wheel, "this is Martin Luther King—we need your car." She consented, and King and Abernathy piled into the back seat. The car then peeled off, racing for a hotel on the other side of town.

By nightfall, a 17-year-old black had been shot dead by the police, 60 of the marchers had been clubbed, and nearly 300 had been arrested.

Memphis was declared in a state of emergency. Several thousand National Guardsmen were called in to patrol the streets.

At the Rivermont Holiday Inn, on the banks of the Mississippi, King lay on his bed, the covers pulled up to his chin. He was heartsick. His march had turned into a riot, and the marches had started it. Had all the years of preaching nonviolence counted for nothing? Were people no longer listening to him?

"Maybe we just have to admit that the day of violence is here," he said to Abernathy, "and maybe we have to just give up and let violence take its course. The nation won't listen to our voice—maybe it'll heed the voice of violence."

"It was the most restless night," Abernathy later said.

"It was a terrible and horrible experience for him. I had never seen

him in all my life so upset and so troubled." Throughout the night, King brooded over the damage done to his movement and to his reputation. His critics, he knew, would have a field day.

White conservatives would point to the Memphis fiasco and say that King's nonviolence was a sham. Cautious, moderate blacks would urge him to slow down, to cancel the Poor People's Campaign in Washington. And the militant advocates of Black Power would proclaim the days of nonviolence and "Martin Loser King" at an end.

Though agonized and in despair that night, King resolved not to give in to his critics or to give up on Memphis. He had to return and lead a peaceful march and demonstration. The Poor People's Campaign de-

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