

Where are we now?

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. (AP) — The Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. fought for many issues throughout his life as a minister and the leader of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, speaking out against various barriers holding back blacks, Hispanics, Asian Americans and Native Americans. Fifty years after his assassination, some of these barriers have fallen — but others remain.

Segregation: Four days after Rosa Parks was arrested for refusing to give up her seat on a Montgomery, Alabama, city bus, King exhorted a crowd at the Holt Street Baptist Church to launch a bus boycott. “Now let us go out to stick together and stay with this thing until the end,” he told the thousands gathered at the church that day in 1955.

A federal court ended racial segregation on Montgomery public buses, elevating King into the national spotlight. Years later, he stood behind President Lyndon Johnson at the signing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which banned segregation in public places and employment discrimination on the basis of race or national origin.

Still, King’s legacy concerning desegregation remains mixed, according to Gordon Mantler, a professor at George Washington University. “Yes, the traditional spaces like lunch counters and restrooms were integrated,” Mantler said. “But some lunch counters were shut down and public pools became private.”

And while schools became largely integrated in the 1980s, many have re-segregated. In

1988, for example, about 44 percent of black students went to majority-white schools nationally. Only 20 percent of black students do so today.

Voting: King’s participation in the 54-mile march from Selma, Alabama, to the state capital of Montgomery elevated awareness about the troubles blacks faced in registering to vote.

President Johnson addressed a special session of Congress after marchers were attacked by white mobs and police, successfully urging lawmakers to pass the Voting Rights Act.

Here, Mantler said King achieved a lasting effect. By the 1970s and 1980s, the American South had elected thousands of blacks to various offices, compared to almost none in the 1950s.

Black and Latino coalitions sprouted in Chicago, Los Angeles, New York and Houston to elect people of color to local and federal offices — and eventually aided in electing the nation’s first black president.

Poverty: Former U.S. Sen. Fred Harris of Oklahoma, the last surviving member of the Kerner Commission, said the fight to reduce poverty remains one of King’s most significant unfinished works.

“There are far more people who are poor now than was true 50 years ago,” Harris said. “Inequality of income is worse.”

The percentage of people living in deep poverty — less than half of the federal poverty level — has increased since 1975. About 46 percent of people living in poverty in 2016 were classified as living in deep poverty — 16 percentage points higher than in 1975.

KING: ‘We’re not past all of that history’

Continued from 1A

King had won victories on desegregation and voting rights and had been planning his Poor People’s Campaign when he turned his attention to Memphis, the gritty city by the Mississippi River.

On Feb. 1, 1968, two sanitation workers were crushed when a garbage truck compactor malfunctioned, sparking a strike by about 1,300 black sanitation workers weary of horrible working conditions and racist treatment in the dirtiest of municipal jobs. The words that would come to signify their protest — “I Am a Man” — were not a given with everyone in Memphis at that time.

“We didn’t have a place to shower, wash our hands, nothing,” said Elmore Nickleberry, who at 86 still drives a truck for the department.

King tried to lead a peaceful march on March 28, but it turned violent. Storefront windows were smashed, and police wielded clubs and tear gas.

King went back to Atlanta but vowed to return to show that non-violent protest still worked. Criticism mounted in the press. He was suffering headaches and feeling depressed. He met with his advisers, the Rev. Jesse Jackson said, and “talked himself out of the depression.”

He flew back to Memphis on the morning of April 3.

Mike Cody was among the lawyers working to persuade a judge to lift an injunction against a new march who met with King in his motel room.

“King felt strongly that unless he could get a success here in Memphis, with these workers using nonviolent, civil disobedience, then he would never get the Poor People’s March in Washington that summer,” said Cody, 82.

Cody was in the crowd



Barney Sellers/The Commercial Appeal via AP
In this April 3, 1968 photo, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., center, and his aides walk at the Lorraine Motel, in Memphis, Tenn., discussing the restraining order King had just received barring them from leading another march in Memphis without court approval.

another that evening at the Mason Temple. Though King was ill, the Rev. Ralph Abernathy asked him to address the thousands who turned out despite a thunderstorm.

“It’s a tin roof, so that’s banging. There’s rafters up there above us, and the rafters are blowing with the wind and hitting each other and hitting the walls from the fierceness of the wind and the rain,” said the Rev. James Lawson, a prominent civil rights activist.

With little preparation, King delivered a speech that, in retrospect, seemed to foretell his death: “Well, I don’t know what will happen now; we’ve got some difficult days ahead. But it really doesn’t matter to me now, because I’ve been to the mountaintop.”

Cody went to court the next day with King aide Andrew Young, then dropped Young back at the Lorraine Motel in the late afternoon.

As dinner approached, King and his friends moved to the motel balcony. King turned to a bandleader who was standing nearby and made a request: Later, could he play his favorite song, “Take My Hand, Precious Lord”?

Then: “Pow! A bullet,”

recalled Jackson, pointing to the right side of his own face.

“At first I thought it was a firecracker or car back-firing,” Young said.

Jackson ran toward the balcony steps.

“Someone said, ‘Doc has been shot,’ and ‘Get low,’” Jackson said.

Earl Caldwell, a *New York Times* reporter who had interviewed King on the balcony the previous day, ran out of his motel room in his boxer shorts. “I was thinking, ‘It was a bomb. It was a bomb.’ Because the noise was greater than a gun,” he said.

A photo shows Jackson, Young and others pointing across the street, where the shot came from.

“I remember Rev. Abernathy saying, ‘Back up, back up, this is my dearest friend. Martin you can’t give up, don’t leave us,’” Jackson said.

Ester said she noticed King’s tie had been blown off. His eyes were open “with almost a pleasant expression on his face,” she said.

Sirens blared. People screamed. Police rushed to the motel.

King was rushed to St. Joseph’s Hospital, where college student John Billings

worked as a surgical assistant on the night shift.

“Three doctors came over and walked to where I was standing. They said, ‘OK Billings, go find somebody in charge and tell them that Dr. King has expired,’” he said.

Billings was then ordered to stay with King’s body until someone could come get him.

“I walked over, pulled the sheet back, and there he was,” Billings said. “His eyes were closed. I thought, ‘How strange this is.’”

Security was heavy when Dr. Jerry Francisco, the Shelby County medical examiner, arrived. Men holding shotguns stood inside and outside the room. After the 1½ hour autopsy, Francisco drove home through a city that had been placed under curfew, for fear of rioting.

“The streets were just virtually empty. I was the only car moving on the street,” he said. It was eerie, he recalled.

Coby Smith, a leader of the Invaders organization, which had a militant reputation, vividly remembers the aftermath, when tanks rolled into neighborhoods, the National Guard was called in, and police began arresting blacks in the streets.

“(Police) had put tape over their badges,” Smith said. “This was like a war.”

Fifty years after King’s assassination, Billings, who is white, came to a new understanding of the struggle Southern blacks faced. He became a private investigator, met James Earl Ray, who pleaded guilty to killing King, and explored the notion that someone else had been involved.

If King were alive today, “he’d be in people’s face” about issues relating to race, poverty and inequality, Cody says.

“We’re not past all of that history.”

WORK: MLK killed at age 39

Continued from 1A

The barriers King helped tear down assisted in paving the way for people like Carbage, who got a graduate degree from Amberton University in Garland, Texas, even though his parents had never finished high school. He now works as a manager for Union Pacific Railroad.

The work that King left behind at age 39 was unfinished, however, as Carbage experienced attending school in the 1970s and 1980s in the South.

“When I graduated from high school we had separate proms, separate swimming pools,” he said. “We went to school together but we weren’t allowed to socialize together.”

He remembers going with his family to the pharmacy for prescriptions and being required to go around to the back door, away from the white customers. They were only allowed to seek those prescriptions from certain doctors.

If King had lived longer, Carbage said, those discriminatory practices likely would have ended sooner and the country would be more united today than it is now.

“He was taken from us far too soon, before we were

able to see his full potential,” Carbage said.

The years King worked on the civil rights movement left behind a powerful legacy as it was, however. Carbage said King taught the power of the non-violent protest, and the importance of loving all people, not just those of one’s own race.

He pointed to a sit-in at Howard University, which on Tuesday was in its sixth day of demanding changes at the university after six employees were fired for alleged misappropriation of financial aid. Those types of peaceful demonstrations, he said, had their roots in King’s teachings of nonviolent protest.

As the country is rocked by debates over racial profiling, police shootings of unarmed black citizens, white supremacists who feel more comfortable parading their views in public and the place of nonviolent protests such as kneeling during the national anthem, Carbage said King’s teachings of unity and love are still important today. Those who don’t learn from history are doomed to repeat it, he said.

“We still have some work to do, but we have come a long way from where Dr. King started,” he said.

STUDENT OF THE WEEK

BRIANNA HERNANDEZ
Senior – McLoughlin High School

Brianna is a senior at Mac-Hi and has a 4.0 Grade Point Average. She is a member of National Honor Society, Varsity Club and Key Club. Brianna is currently ASB Treasurer. Brianna is a two sport athlete she plays Basketball and Track. She has been a Greater Oregon League Scholar Athlete. Brianna is very active in the Leadership at Mac-Hi by giving many hours of community service to her school and community.

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Umatilla County Year of Wellness

First Quarter: April - June 2018

YOW MISSION

The Year of Wellness strives to increase community engagement at health related events and programs throughout the county in an effort to educate and promote healthy lifestyle choices that can be easily adapted by all county residents.

WIN A PRIZE!

Attend any YOW event to enter into a raffle to be chosen at the end of the quarter. The more events you attend the more chances you have to win!

1st Draw - \$200 Echo Bike & Board Gift Certificate, Pendleton
2nd & 3rd Draw - \$50 Scott’s Cycle & Sports Gift Certificate, Hermiston

MONTH’S THEMES

April Environmental Health
May Physical Health
June Nutrition

THIS QUARTER’S EVENTS

FREE Passport to Wellness Health Fair
April 14th • 9 AM - 2 PM
Pendleton Convention Center

Community Clean-Up Day
May 3 • 12 PM - 3 PM
Pilot Rock

Cinco de Mayo Celebration
May 5th & 6th
EOTEC, Hermiston

May Madness 3v3 Tournament
May 19th • Saturday
Downtown Pendleton

Landing Day
June 22nd & 23rd
Umatilla City

Farmers Market
First Friday of the month, Pendleton
Last Wednesday of the month, Milton-Freewater

FOR MORE INFORMATION:
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