

# HE WAS THE ONE

By Roosevelt Fitzgerald

Thirteen. That number has historically been considered to be an evil omen. The etymology of the word, both in its cardinal and ordinal forms, could fill hundreds of pages. For our purposes, we will simply say that, like any other number, there are good things to say about it and there are those things which are not so good. Consider the following as an example of my hypothesis and see if you don't agree.

Until thirteen years ago, the fourth of April was one of my favorite dates. It was on that date that I was born almost two lifetimes ago. The events of that date in 1968, prompted me to peruse an Encyclopedia of World History to de-

termine what other history-making events had occurred on that date since the beginning of recorded history. I was amazed and, simultaneously, dismayed because of all the things which had occurred on that date prior to 1968, none more represented a cause for sadness. It was thirteen years ago, on April fourth, that Martin Luther King was assassinated.

Thirteen years before, in 1955, he had become the pastor of a small church in Montgomery. He had no reason to believe that his life would be as tumultuous as it became. He had expected that he would spend his time caring for the spiritual needs of his congregation. Little did he know that by go-

ing to Montgomery, he would place himself dead center of the bulls eye of the civil rights movement.

Rose Parks had been the spark which ignited the movement but it would be Martin Luther King, Jr. who would guide and nourish it. He was selected, by Black leaders of that community, to organize a boycott of the city's transit system. The action was contemplated because of the arrest of Rosa Parks who had refused to relinquish her seat on one of the city's buses. It was not anticipated that it would be any more than a quiet protest of a day or two. Little did they realize the proportions that that action would achieve.

For more than a year the boycott went on. White citizens of Montgomery had scoffed at

their efforts and had even jokingly reported it on the local television news and in the newspapers. They all got a big laugh out of it and sneeringly made snide remarks like "you can't get more than three of them nigras to agree on one thing for more than five minutes." They may have been right — up to that point — but to say such, in public for all to hear, added insult to injury. Black people of Montgomery might have had a history of being abused by their white 'christian' neighbors, but among themselves and within their families, dignity did indeed exist. A person's pocketbook might be attacked, a house might be attacked and the person might be attacked. All of those kinds of attacks might go on indefinitely with no aggres-

sive responses or reactions. It is profoundly different matter when it comes to dignity. Owen Wister probably describes it best in his famous book *The Virginian*, where he writes: "A man's sense of himself is the most important thing he has." Of course, this also applies to women and children.

In November of 1956, the Supreme Court ruled that segregation in seating in public transportation was unconstitutional. Victory. King was elected president. The organization was to coordinate all civil rights organizations and activities.

Within two years of the end of the Montgomery boycott, *Stride Toward Freedom* was published. While in a book department of a store in Harlem, he was stabbed with a letter opener by Izola Ware Curry. Fortunately, it was not fatal and he had a rapid recovery. He discovered, however, that even among Black people there were those who could be swayed to believe that he was a troublemaker and was "making things tough" for Black people in America.

He returned to Montgomery and continued his pastorate. It became increasingly difficult for him to wear two hats. As his involvement in the activities of SCLC grew, he had less time to spend in Montgomery. He was needed everywhere. After considerable thought, he finally began, in February of 1960, to devote all of his energies to the civil rights

sal brotherhood of man as it did on prayer in the schools or swearing on the Bible in a court of law.

Not too many weeks following the end of the Montgomery boycott, he invited a large number of Black southern leaders and church people to a conference in Atlanta. Ten states were represented in the persons of sixty individuals. Out of that grew the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). King was elected president. The organization was to coordinate all civil rights organizations and activities.

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movement and to SCLC. For the next eight years he became one of the most visible people on the face of the Earth. It was almost as though he had taken and paraphrased the primary order which had been given to naval commanders during World War II — "Seek out, engage and destroy" racism wherever it is to be found. His life's work was laid before him and he was determined to make the United States of America live up to its ideals of democracy and to make Christians live up to their principles.



Professor Fitzgerald is director of ethnic studies at University of Nevada-Las Vegas

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To effect such changes required full commitment. Not only did he have to attack the manner in which white Americans, in general, viewed Black people but he also had to attack the manner in which Black Americans, in general, viewed themselves.

Beginning in Greensboro, N.C., his sojourn was initiated. He taught "non-violence" to a people who had been brutalized by violence all their lives. Wherever mistreatment of Black people was to be found, Martin Luther King and his followers went. They marched, they picketed, they demonstrated and they also went to jail. They filled the jails to capacity and were then placed in open wire-fenced stockades in the sweltering sun. Nothing could stop them.

Their adversaries beat them, unleashed dogs on them, poked them with cattle prods, turned high-powered pressurized water hoses on them, threw bombs and dynamite at them, destroyed their churches, fired them from their jobs, set fire to their homes, kicked pregnant women, burned crosses, connected explosive devices to the ignitions of vehicles, assaulted them with intent to kill, shot some, wounded, some, blew some faces away, simply murdered others and for others they not only murdered but also castrated and generally mutilated them. The aforementioned were some of the lesser acts of brutality. The greater act was that none, in positions of authority, did anything to stop it. Verbal reprimands ran rampant but they rolled right off the rabble rousers who were ready, roaring and raring to send recalcitrant "righters" reeling and rolling in the red river clay of an apparently racist republic. Most merely took a look the other way.

An atmosphere of lawlessness, which had always existed under the surface, was beginning to become more and more apparent. Americans had not yet learned that so long as any American's rights are not protected and so long as any American is not safe, the Republic isn't safe.

"We shall overcome." Everywhere, those lyrics could be heard. What had started as a mere trickle was growing into a tidal wave of aspirations for "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." Martin Luther King became the tube through which the seeds, which had been planted in 1776, traveled to the eggs of the principles of democracy. In manner more spiritual than that utiliz-

ed in "Network," he said to millions of Americans to link him if they were as "made as hell, and not going to take it any more."

Friends and enemies. They were everywhere. How do you tell what the enemy looks like. You just have to risk it out. Some of his enemies, who regretted the conditions which Margaret Mitchell described when she wrote: "There was a land of cavaliers and cotton fields called the Old South. Here in this pretty world, gallantry took its last bow. Here was the last ever to be seen of knights and their ladies fair, of masters and of slaves. Look for it only in books, for it is no more than a dream remembered. A civilization 'gone with the wind,' was determined to return things to the way they were in the 'good 'ol days' of a hundred years before.

Martin Luther King was equally determined that not only would such not occur but that the status quo would be changed. His efforts carried him around the country, including Las Vegas. His travels made him aware of the plight of other groups of people in America and he sought to bring the attention of the nation on those conditions under which a large percentage of Americans lived. He did not win each time, but each time he kept coming back.

From the beginning, he had realized that there were risks involved but he also realized that it mattered not how long a person lived but how that person lived. He went to the mountain top and he saw the other side. On April 4, 1968, America's best friend stepped into eternity.

He did not do it to make a name for himself

He was not in it for the glory

He was not a very abrasive man

Just one who thought democracy was holy

On numerous occasions he placed his life on line

On numerous times he was attacked

Each time his efforts were seemingly thwarted

Somehow he would manage to come back

To thousands of people he extended his hand

In efforts to make them stand tall

When the powers that be rained down their force

He stood with his people, one and all

What does friendship mean to you?

Is it merely for relationships filled with fun?

To Blacks & Whites and all lovers of democracy

Martin Luther King was indeed "The One"

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**ANSWER:** According to the Nevada Revised Statutes obtained from the Nevada Consumer Affairs Division, they are: (1) Comply with the terms of the rental agreement; (2) Keep that part of the premises which is occupied and used as clean and safe as the condition of the premises permit; (3) Dispose of all ashes, garbage, rubbish and other waste from the dwelling unit in a clean and safe manner; (4) Keep all plumbing fixtures in the dwelling unit as clean as their condition permits; (5) Use in a reasonable manner all electrical plumbing, sanitary, heating, ventilating, air-conditioning and other facilities and appliances, including elevators, in the premises; (6) Not deliberately or negligently render the premises uninhabitable or destroy, deface, damage, impair or remove any part of the premises or knowingly permit any person to do so; and (7) Conduct himself and require other persons on the premises with his consent to conduct themselves in a manner that will not disturb a neighbor's peaceful enjoyment of the premises.

Enquiries can be registered weekdays between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. by mail and in person at 2501 E. Sahara Avenue, Suite 304, Las Vegas, Nevada 89158 or by phone Area Code 702-386-5293.

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