

# IS YOU THE ONE?

By Roosevelt Fitzgerald

"Is you the one?" That question has been asked for centuries and by numerous groups of people. It might have been phrased differently but the basic meaning has always been the same. It has been asked most by those who have been oppressed. "The chosen people" waited for centuries for a savior who would deliver them from the throes of slavery and into the "promised land." Throughout the period of American slavery, the oppressed waited for deliverance. At those times when their optimism was put to the test, their anticipatory concerns were vocalized in song:

**He delivered Daniel  
from the lion's den  
Saved Jonah from the  
belly of a whale  
And the Hebrew Children  
from the fiery furnace  
Then, why not  
deliver poor me**

The question continued — "Is you the one?" Each time a newborn would arrive, the question would rhetorically be put. Who would be the one to deliver Black people from the fiery furnaces of their oppressors? Through the seventeenth, eighteenth and on into the nineteenth century and beyond, they waited. From time to time, there appeared — as with the prophets preceding Christ recorded in the Old Testament — some who initiated the journey. Harriett Tubman, Frederick Douglass, Sojourner Truth, Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. DuBose, Marcus Garvey and others were among those who tried. They all set out from the destination of freedom and citizenship but, while they were in the target area, they did not hit the "bull's eye." It would not be until beyond the half-way mark of the twentieth century that

"YES" would become the resounding answer.

It did not just happen. Had he lived, he would have been fifty-eight years old.

At the time when ominous economic rumblings, not unlike those we are hearing today, were being made and when Las Vegas was busily preparing for initiating the construction of the Boulder Dam, Martin Luther King, Jr. was born in Atlanta, Georgia. At a time when the KKK was running rampant throughout the country and the life of a Black person was not worth a plug nickle, Martin Luther King, Jr. began his thirty-nine-year trek through life.

He had a relatively sheltered life. His father was a minister and, for the times, his family was fairly well off. They lived in a nice home and the children were well-mannered. Through his life, Martin abhorred violence. While in elementary school, the bully walloped him but he did not fight back. Even as a child he did not subscribe to the belief of "an eye for an eye." In the common conflicts between siblings, he never actively participated. He was a good boy and everybody liked him — he thought.

He was first made aware of the differences in races when he was six. Two white boys with whom he had played, were told by their mothers not to play with him anymore. He could not understand what had happened. His mother's only reply was "not to forget that he was just as good as anyone else." When he was eight, while on a shopping trip to a shoe store with his father, they were told to go to the back of the store. His father, a proud man who had probably suffered those indignities before, did not want his son to have those kinds of experiences as part of his

daily bread. They left without making a purchase. There were many other incidents which occurred in his lifetime as they occurred in the lives of all Black people, which painted a vivid picture of the abundance of injustices which he and other people like him, had to endure. All of those prepared him for a rendezvous with destiny which he did not know awaited him.

As was the case in most southern towns, there were very little recreational outlets and even fewer for Black people. There were no bowling alleys, golf courses,

negative feelings about the ministry in spite of the fact that his father was himself a minister. "I had doubts that religion was intellectually respectable. I had revolted against the emotionalism of Negro religion — the shouting and the stamping. I didn't understand it and it embarrassed me."

At Morehouse, he met Dr. Benjamin Mays and Dr. George Kelsey, who was professor of religion and philosophy. Those two men gave him a deeper understanding of social philosophy and religion. Because of their influence, he decided that

perhaps the ministry would be acceptable after all. Four years later, he graduated with honors. He was offered several scholarships to attend seminaries. He turned them down because his father felt that those scholarships should go to students whose families could ill afford to send them to college. His father used his savings to send Martin to Crozer Theological Seminary in Pennsylvania. He learned an important lesson during that exchange — just because help is available, it should not be taken unless it is needed.

His arrival at Crozer placed him in an environment unlike any in which he had ever lived — integration. He had a great deal of difficulty in adjusting. There were no problems with his white classmates. The problems were a result of the way in which he had been programmed after nineteen years of living in an oppressive, stagnant and demeaning society. He was aware of all the old stereotypes of Black people and he was determined that he would not manifest any of them. To counteract his anxieties, he went to the opposite extreme. He was never late, he never laughed, he was always neatly dressed, clean shaven, never sloppy and once, during a class outing, he avoided eating a piece of watermelon.

Perhaps more than anything else, he overcame those fears which caused one not to live but to simply follow a script. He did very well at the seminary. He was class president and graduated at the top of his class. The awards kept rolling in. He received a fellowship to study for a Ph.D. at Boston University. It was there that everything, which would ultimately become him, came together. In reading Aristotle, Plato, Rousseau, Locke and Hegel, he began to appreciate such thoughts as "strength through struggle, harmony out of pain." He also read Thoreau's 'Civil Disobedience' and understood the cause of the peaceful protest against the Fugitive Slave Laws which led to Thoreau's arrest. He also discovered Mahatma Gandhi. More than any other, Gandhi influenced the approach to life which he would take. Tatyagraha — truth force of love force — was profoundly significant to him. 'passive resistance was to become the force by which he would live — and die.

ted to become a singer but, for reasons not too clearly understood by her, she gave up her possible career and opted to be with Martin.



Martin Luther King, Jr.

And then there was the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church with Shakespeare, Socrates, Galileo and others. White citizens looked upon him as some kind of rabble rouser while Black citizens wondered silently and aloud,



Martin Luther King, Sr.

"who is this guy?" or, in better phraseology, "what manner of man?"

The cards were still being shuffled  
Some people didn't even know where  
They went about their normal chores  
As though they did not care  
The forces were a gathering  
From every direction they came  
Not all were noticed by some  
But by some others just the same  
Centuries of traditions were coming under fire  
Those who had been docile  
Were beginning to aspire

**HE WAS THE ONE.**



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

YMCA's or supervised swimming facilities available to Martin. Because his father was a minister, he could not hang out around the pool halls and other "juke joints." His time was spent at home and at home he studied. He was an exemplary student and his grades were always superior. Because of his talents he skipped several grades and completed high school in two years. All of these events were comparable to the shuffling of a deck of cards. Each movement rearranged the order in which they would ultimately fall.

At the age of fifteen, he entered Morehouse College. It was there that he decided upon a life in the ministry. Previously, he had had

perhaps the ministry would be acceptable after all.

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1. I am easily irritated when required to stand in line.
2. My level of refinement is average.
3. Off-color language is embarrassing.
4. Perfection is often just an accident.
5. Most people would consider me unsophisticated.
6. I dislike having to get dressed up to go out.
7. Early hotel check-out times are annoying.
8. People place too much emphasis on sex these days.
9. Moral values are lower now than ever before.
10. Love and commitment should precede sex.