

JOIN THE MOVEMENT



Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and the New Abolitionists Building Intergenerational Movements

Did you know...

...the first iconic lunch counter sit-in of the Civil Rights era was organized by four college freshmen?

...the majority of people engaged in leading Freedom Rides and Freedom Schools that indelibly shaped the movement were between the ages of 15 and 29?

...more than 2000 students, aged 7-18, skipped school and marched in downtown Birmingham for almost a week in May 1963 to demand an end to segregation in the city?

Each year in January, we take time to honor the incredible legacy of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King and the leadership and vision he brought to what we now know as the Civil Rights Movement. Dr. King gave embodied and gave voice to a radical vision of equity that sought to disrupt, address and transform the harmful intersections of racism, classism and imperialism which became the heart of the movement.

Yet, as another prominent leader of the time Rev. James Lawson, reminds us, what we now call a “movement” was actually a loose collection of actions taken and ideas shared between a variety of locally-situated groups. “There was no civil rights *movement*,” Lawson says, “just a whole lot of civil rights movers.” From the young people of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee to the long-time nonviolence practitioners of the Congress of Racial Equality to the many affiliates and established chapters of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, to the Children’s Crusade, there were hundreds of local groups taking local action to bring about greater equity and justice across racial lines.

So this year, as we embark on our remembrances and celebrations of Dr. King’s life and legacy, the UCC’s **Join the Movement toward Racial Justice** initiative invites us to bring our awareness to the “network of mutuality” that supported, surrounded and influenced Dr. King, taking particular note of its intergenerational strength. If we learn anything from taking a deeper look at Dr. King’s legacy this year, let it be that liberation takes all of us.

Praying an Intergenerational Movement: Worship Resources

CALL TO WORSHIP

(with gratitude to Ruth Moody and the Wailin’ Jennys)

Leader: There are no words for what this testimony means
only the wonder at how it feels like grace.

**Assembly: We celebrate the prophets and visionaries;
in story and song, we awaken to the sound of one voice.**

Leader: There is no way to know what this following will take
only the hope that it is leading us deeper into the heart of love.

**Assembly: We cherish the risk-takers and the tide-turners:
in prayer and praise, we witness to the sound of voices two.**

Leader: There is no telling when the struggle will end,
only the faith in a future we cannot yet behold.

**Assembly: We become the movement and the liberation:
in worship and wrestling, we create the sound of all of us.**

PRAYER FOR TRANSFORMATION AND NEW LIFE

In this moment of stillness,
feel for the rhythm of your own pulse
listen to the cadence of your own breath.

[pause]

When we lose touch with our own flourishing,
Holy One, forgive us, reconnect us.

In this moment of stillness,
feel for the rhythm of another one's pulse
listen to the cadence of another one's breath

[pause]

When we lose touch with the celebrations and struggles of our neighbors,
Holy One, forgive us, reconnect us.

In this moment of stillness,
feel for the rhythm of the pulse of justice for all
listen to the cadence of the breath of love

[pause]

When we lose touch with our collective liberation,
Holy One, forgive us, reconnect us.

WORDS OF GRACE

Leader: Thrill and rejoice, people of God:
God's grace and love meet us at every turn,
no matter where our journeys lead.

Assembly: **Praise God who gives us each the chance
to be epiphanies of redeeming love and liberating justice.**

INVITATION TO GENEROSITY

There can be no flourishing for some of us without liberation for all of us. Our offering gives us the opportunity to invest in our collective liberation. May our giving be a revelation of God's love, made known and being made known in our midst.

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING AND DEDICATION

(with quotes from [Remaining Awake through a Great Revolution](#) by Martin Luther King, Jr.)

“All life is interrelated” – Praise!

“We are all caught in an inescapable network of mutuality” – Praise!

“We are tied in a single garment of destiny” – Praise!

Use our gifts to empower us to lean into this reality and this calling,
more and more fully,
until we become the salvation we are dreaming of.

May it be so. Amen.

For more, see [Sermon Seeds](#) and [Worship Ways](#) for January 15, 2023.

*Exploring an Intergenerational Movement:
Movement Partners and Excerpts from Speeches and Sermons*

STUDENT NONVIOLENT COORDINATING COMMITTEE

Founded in April 1960, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee initially came together to offer support and structure to the rapidly growing student movement of nonviolent direct actions aimed at making real the Supreme Court's 1954 decision in favor of desegregation. The first lunch counter sit-in on February 1, 1960 began with 4 college freshmen; within a year, 50,000 people had participated in some kind of demonstration, with over 3600 demonstrators jailed. As Howard Zinn described in his 1964 book about SNCC, “they are the most serious force in the nation today.” In his and many others' estimation, they were the front line of the civil rights movement.

From Dr. King's Press Release at the start of the conference in April 1960 that would give birth to SNCC:

“This is an era of offensive on the part of oppressed people. All peoples deprived of dignity and freedom are on the march on every continent throughout the world. The student sit-

in movement represents just such an offensive in the history of the Negro peoples' struggle for freedom. The students have taken the struggle for justice into their own strong hands. In less than two months more Negro freedom fighters have revealed to the nation and the world their determination and courage than has occurred in many years. They have embraced a philosophy of mass direct nonviolent action. They are moving away from tactics which are suitable merely for gradual and long term change."

Find the [full text of the press release here](#).

From [notes for Dr. King's speech](#) at that same conference:

The highest expression of [nonviolence] is love... Nonviolence is the relentless pursuit of truthful ends by moral means. The nonviolent resister is not victimized with the illusion that all conflicts will be eliminated; he aims at raising them from the destructive physical plane to the constructive moral plane [where] differences can be peacefully negotiated toward justice. Thus, he seeks to eliminate antagonisms rather than antagonists.

From [a letter to Dr. King from SNCC's first officers, Marion Barry and Edward Biking](#), after his arrest and sentencing for participating in a sit-in with SNCC leaders at the Rich's department store in Atlanta:

The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, speaking for students all over America, reaches across the bars of the DeKalb county jail, in thanks to you for your deep commitment to the concept of no violence, and your vision of a free society which makes possible this student movement. You sat in with us, you went to jail with us, we want you to know that the fight will not end for we have taken up the torch for freedom, we will not forget that you are behind iron bars. We ask that you remember us as we try to remove the bars that exist in the hearts of men.

From Howard Zinn's book, *SNCC: The New Abolitionists* (1965):

These 150 [SNCC organizers]...are the new abolitionists. It is not fanciful to invest them with a name that has the ring of history; we are always shy about recognizing the historic worth of events when they take place before our eyes, about recognizing heroes when they are still flesh and blood and not yet transfixed in marble. But there is no doubt about it: we have in this country today a movement which will take its place alongside that of the abolitionists...and may outdo them all. Their youth makes us hesitant to recognize their depth. But the great social upsurge of post-war America is the Negro revolt, and this revolt has gotten its most powerful impetus from young people, who gave it a new turn in 1960 and today, as anonymous as infantrymen everywhere form the first rank in a nonviolent but ferocious war against the old order.

CONGRESS OF RACIAL EQUALITY

In some ways, the Congress of Racial Equality represents the elders of the civil rights movement. Founded by student members of the Christian pacifist group called the Fellowship of Reconciliation in Chicago in 1942, CORE led the way in using the methods of nonviolent direct action in the work of social change and grounded generations of leaders in these important tactics and values. CORE began by using these tactics to challenge segregation in northern cities during the 1940s and moved their work into the south during the 1950's and 60's. They partnered with Dr. King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference and SNCC to organize and support the Freedom Rides in 1961 and Freedom Summer in 1964, as well as the March on Washington.

On the organization's founding moment, from CORE founder James Farmer's memoir *Lay Bare the Heart*:

An air of expectancy hung over the room, for we were there to accomplish something unheard of in this nation. We were about to form an organization that would seek to impale racism and segregation on the sword of nonviolent techniques...Like a seed, a real core, it would germinate and radiate its equality in wider and wider circles until it encompassed the whole nation.

Conversation between Dr. King and James Farmer on continuing the freedom rides after one of the busses was attacked and burned and others met with mobs, from Farmer's memoir *Lay Bare the Heart*:

King emerged from the office looking very weary. He called me to him and said, "The attorney general asks that you halt the Freedom Rides and have a cooling-off period to give him time to try to work things out."

"No Martin," I replied. "I won't stop now. If I do, we'll just get words and promises."

"But, Jim," King said in his slow southern drawl, "don't you think that maybe the Freedom Ride has already made its point and now should be called off, as the attorney general suggests?"

I...said, "My objective is not just to make a point, but to bring about a real change in the situation. We will continue the Ride until people can sit wherever they wish on buses and use the facilities in any waiting room available to the public. Please tell the attorney general that we have been cooling off for 350 years. If we cool of any more, we will be in a deep freeze. The Freedom Ride will go on."

CHILDREN'S CRUSADE IN BIRMINGHAM

Early in 1963, the SCLC under Dr. King's leadership had decided to make Birmingham Alabama a focal point for desegregation efforts at the request of local leaders. Known as the most segregated city in the country, the movement for civil rights had long been a part of local organizing, with limited success. A campaign was initiated that included a series of protests in April that were brutally broken up by police and led to many arrests, including that of Dr. King. It was following these arrests that Dr. King wrote his famous "Letter from a Birmingham Jail." As mass arrests and threats to life and livelihood ensued for demonstrators, fewer adults were willing to volunteer. So organizers turned to the children. Beginning on May 2 and for nearly a week, children as young as 7 took to the streets with picket signs and were met with arrests, water hoses, beatings, and attacks by guard dogs, receiving international media attention. City officials felt the pressure of this attention and by May 10 had reached an agreement to release the demonstrators and desegregate local businesses and schools.

From [Letter from a Birmingham Jail](#):

Before closing I feel impelled to mention one other point in your statement that has troubled me profoundly. You warmly commended the Birmingham police force for keeping "order" and "preventing violence." I doubt that you would have so warmly commended the police force if you had seen its dogs sinking their teeth into unarmed, nonviolent Negroes. I doubt that you would so quickly commend the policemen if you were to observe their ugly and inhumane treatment of Negroes here in the city jail; if you were to watch them push and curse old Negro women and young Negro girls; if you were to see them slap and kick old Negro men and young boys; if you were to observe them, as they did on two occasions, refuse to give us food because we wanted to sing our grace together. I cannot join you in your praise of the Birmingham police department...

I wish you had commended the Negro sit inners and demonstrators of Birmingham for their sublime courage, their willingness to suffer and their amazing discipline in the midst of great provocation. One day the South will recognize its real heroes. They will be the James Merediths, with the noble sense of purpose that enables them to face jeering and hostile mobs, and with the agonizing loneliness that characterizes the life of the pioneer. They will be old, oppressed, battered Negro women, symbolized in a seventy two year old woman in Montgomery, Alabama, who rose up with a sense of dignity and with her people decided not to ride segregated buses, and who responded with ungrammatical profundity to one who inquired about her weariness: "My feets is tired, but my soul is at

rest." They will be the young high school and college students, the young ministers of the gospel and a host of their elders, courageously and nonviolently sitting in at lunch counters and willingly going to jail for conscience' sake. One day the South will know that when these disinherited children of God sat down at lunch counters, they were in reality standing up for what is best in the American dream and for the most sacred values in our Judaeo Christian heritage... Let us all hope that the dark clouds of racial prejudice will soon pass away and the deep fog of misunderstanding will be lifted from our fear drenched communities, and in some not too distant tomorrow the radiant stars of love and brotherhood will shine over our great nation with all their scintillating beauty.

Joining an Intergenerational Movement: Resources for Further Reflection

LEARN MORE ABOUT SNCC

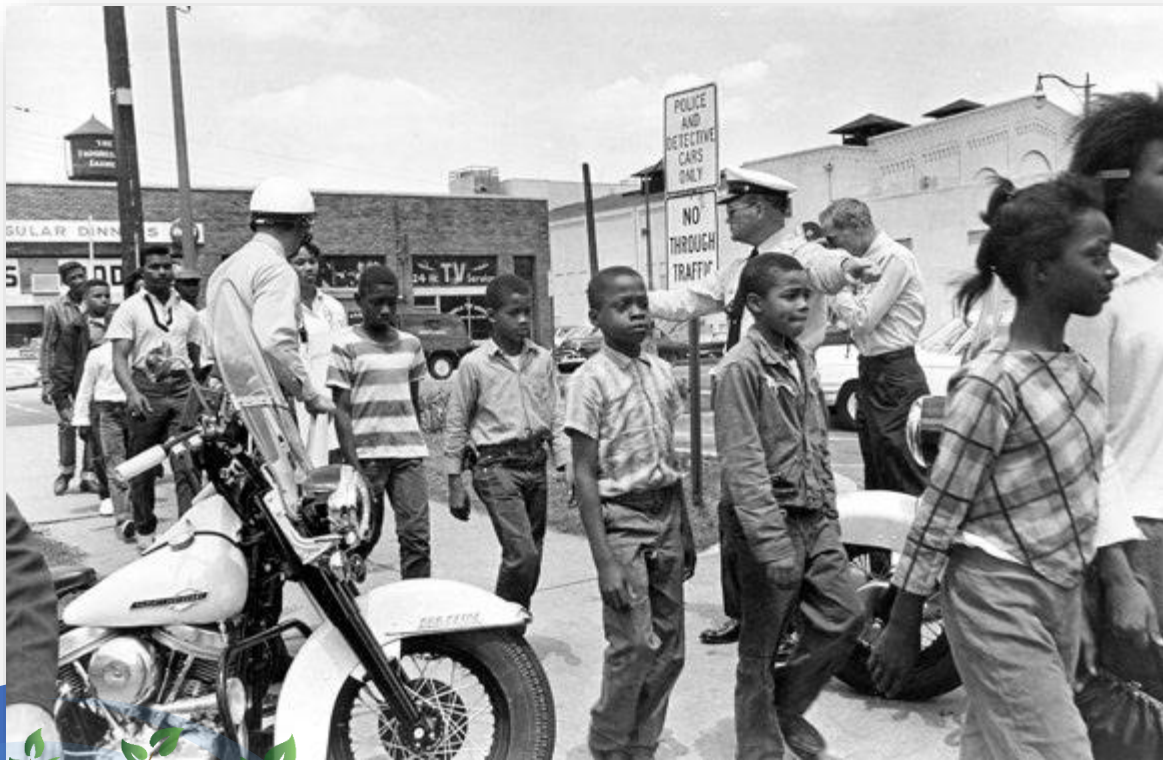
- Article: <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/encyclopedia/student-nonviolent-coordinating-committee-sncc>
- Article, video and many other resources: <https://snccdigital.org/>
- Curriculums for engaging youth and children about SNCC: <https://www.zinnedproject.org/materials/teaching-sncc>
- Children's book: [Sit In: How Four Friends Stood Up by Sitting Down](#) by Andrea Davis Pinkney
- Children's book: [Lift as you Climb: The Story of Ella Baker by Patricia Hruby Powell and R. Gregory Christie](#) See also this [important review](#) with helpful tips.

LEARN MORE ABOUT CORE

- Article: <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/encyclopedia/congress-racial-equality-core>
- Article and videos: <https://socialwelfare.library.vcu.edu/eras/congress-of-racial-equality-core/>
- Article: <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/congress-racial-equality-1942/>
- Article: <https://snccdigital.org/inside-sncc/alliances-relationships/core/>
- Article for kids: <https://kids.britannica.com/kids/article/Congress-of-Racial-Equality-CORE/632849>
- Children's book: [Freedom School, Yes! by Amy LittleSugar](#)

LEARN MORE ABOUT THE BIRMINGHAM CHILDREN'S CRUSADE

- Article: <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/encyclopedia/birmingham-campaign>
- Article and letters: <https://snccdigital.org/people/james-bevel/>
- Article for kids: <https://www.blackpast.org/childrens-page/the-birmingham-childrens-crusade-may-1963-2/>
- Children's book: [The Youngest Marcher: The Story of Audrey Faye Hendricks, A Young Civil Rights Activist](#) by Cynthia Levinson
- Children's book: [Let the Children March](#) by Monica Clark-Robinson and Frank Morrison



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Join the Movement toward Racial Justice today!

<https://JoinTheMovementUCC.org>