

***“Black and White Together,
We Shall Overcome. . . .”***

The Poor People's March was planned for April. But a month before then, Martin was asked to go to Memphis, Tennessee. Black garbage workers there were striking for higher pay. The city government was not paying any attention to their demands. So the strike leaders wanted Martin to come to their city and lead a march. Maybe then they could get some action.

Martin didn't want to go. He was far too busy. "But these are poor folks," he told his staff. "What is the point of going



The governor of Tennessee called out the National Guard when black garbage workers were asking for equal pay and equal treatment.

to Washington in April if we don't stop for them?"

On the day of the march in Memphis, Martin took his place in the front row. But the march had barely begun when he heard a crash, and the sound of shattering glass. Some teenagers were smashing store windows. Now the police had an excuse to move in.

"Call it off," Martin cried. "I will never lead a violent march!"

Martin was very sad as he flew back to Atlanta. Nothing like this had ever happened before. "I'll have to go back and lead a second march," he told his aides, "for nonviolence itself is on trial in Memphis."

A week later Martin and his co-workers returned. For the next few days they would work with the people of Memphis to see that *this* march stayed peaceful.

That first evening Martin spoke at a mass rally. He spoke about what a wonderful life he'd had. He talked about how happy he was to be alive in these times—no matter what troubles and problems the times brought. "So it really doesn't matter what happens with me now," he said. "Because I have been to the mountaintop. And I've looked over, and I've seen the promised land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight that we as a people will get to the promised land. So

I'm happy tonight. I'm not worried about anything. I'm not fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord!"

It was Martin Luther King's last speech.

The next day he spent quietly in his room at the Lorraine Motel, working on plans for the Poor People's March. Just before suppertime he stepped onto the balcony for a breath of fresh air.

"Hey, Doc!" one of his aides called from the parking lot below. "You better put a coat on. It's getting chilly."

"Okay," Martin said with a grin, "I'll do it." He started to turn toward his room. Then there was the sound of a single shot. And Martin slumped to the floor of the balcony.

He had said it so often. "I'm not going to live a long life." He was right. Martin Luther King, Jr., was dead at 39. His killer was James Earl Ray—a white man who hated him and all other blacks.

All across America—all across the

world—people felt a deep sense of loss. Some tried to put their feelings about what had happened into words.

Jacqueline Kennedy, the widow of President John F. Kennedy, wrote a letter to Coretta. She asked, "When will our country learn that to live by the sword is to perish by the sword?"

Other people tried to express what Martin had meant to them. "It isn't how long one lives, but how well," said Dr. Benjamin Mays, the President of Morehouse College.

"The grave is too narrow for his soul," a friend in the civil rights movement mourned.

"He had a way of giving people the feeling that they could be bigger and stronger, more courageous and loving than they thought they could be," someone else added.

Coretta and the children. This photo was taken after Martin's death, on the airplane that brought his body back to Atlanta.



President Johnson ordered that the American flag fly at half-staff until after Martin's funeral. And from all across the country people began to stream into Atlanta. They wanted to say a final good-bye to the gentle dreamer.

On the day of the funeral thousands gathered at Ebenezer Baptist Church. There they listened as his deep voice rolled out one last time—for someone had recorded a sermon he had given a few months before.

In that sermon Martin said he didn't want to be remembered because he'd won a Nobel Peace Prize. That wasn't important. "I'd like someone to mention that day that Martin Luther King, Jr., tried to give his life serving others. I'd like for somebody to say that Martin Luther King, Jr., tried to love somebody."

After the funeral service Martin's coffin was placed on an old farm wagon—a wagon Martin had planned to use during the Poor People's March. Two Georgia mules

pulled it through the streets of Atlanta. Behind it almost 100,000 people walked—rich and poor, famous and unknown, black and white. It was Martin Luther King's last march.

At the cemetery there was another brief service. Then everyone joined hands and sang, "Black and white together, we shall overcome one day. . . ."

Martin would have liked that.