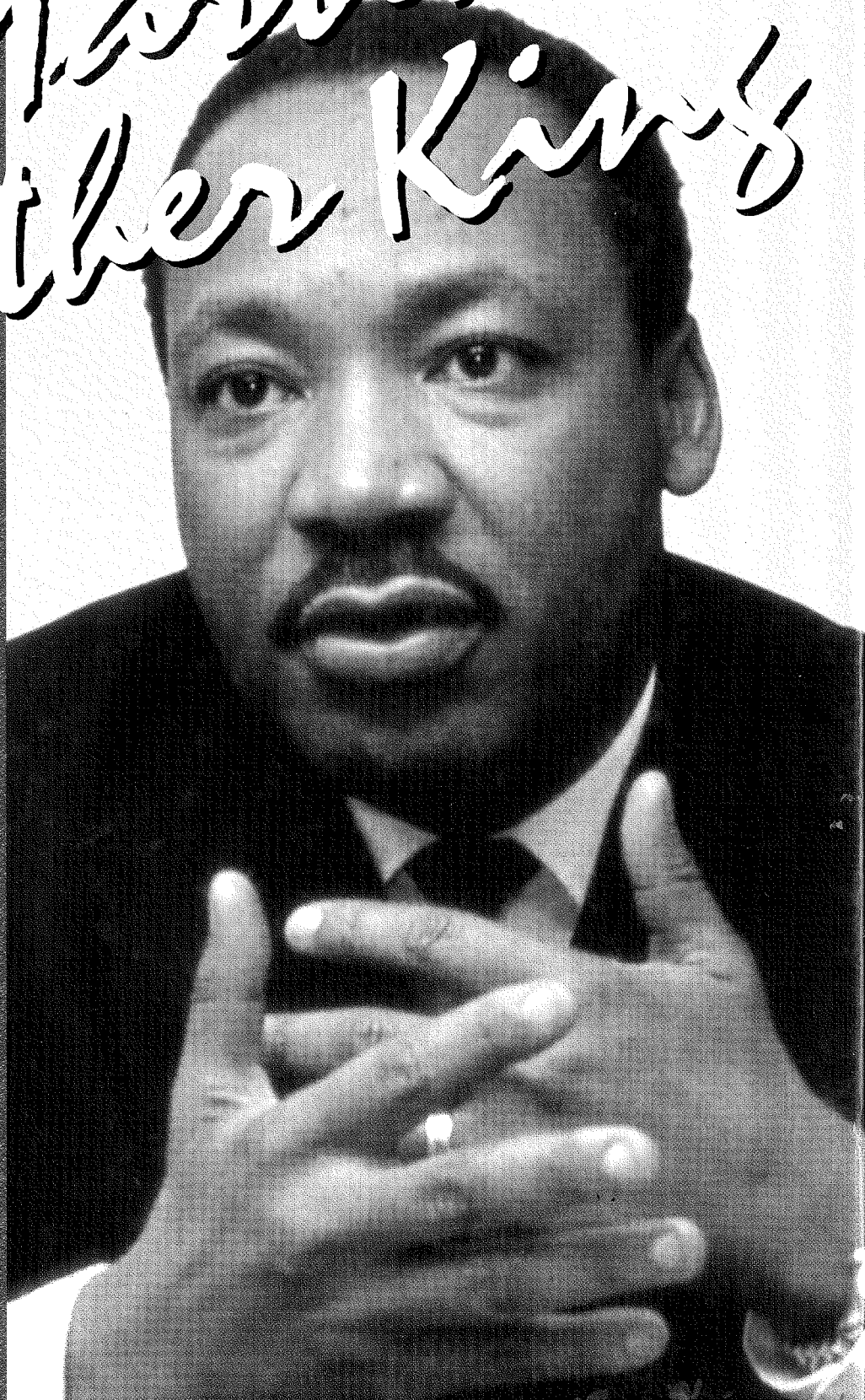


JUDGE
FOR YOURSELF

Martin Luther King



CHRISTINE
HAFF



CONTINUING THE STRUGGLE

that the new president would prove a far stronger advocate of civil rights than his fence-sitting predecessor Eisenhower.

KING AND KENNEDY

Kennedy was inaugurated in January 1961, the same month that King's third child, a boy named Dexter, was born. However, the President did not immediately make plans for new civil rights legislation, fearing this would only stir up southern opposition in Congress. Instead, he used his executive powers to further the cause. In particular, he ordered Robert Kennedy, now the Attorney General (chief law officer), to extend both the voting rights and school desegregation campaigns in the South.

To demonstrate his personal commitment to equality, President Kennedy also appointed many black people to top government jobs. For example, Thurgood Marshall, the NAACP lawyer who fought the Linda Brown case (see page 19), was made a judge in a New York Court of Appeals. King had hoped for more dramatic progress, however, and expressed his disappointment to President Kennedy when they met in the spring.

THE FREEDOM RIDES

Many civil rights organizations shared King's sense of disappointment. Among them was CORE (see page 17), whose members decided to take action. Back in 1946, the Supreme Court had ruled that segregation on interstate trains and buses was illegal. Then, in the 1960 *Boynton v. Virginia* case, it had

In early 1961, head of the FBI J. Edgar Hoover began a surveillance operation on King.

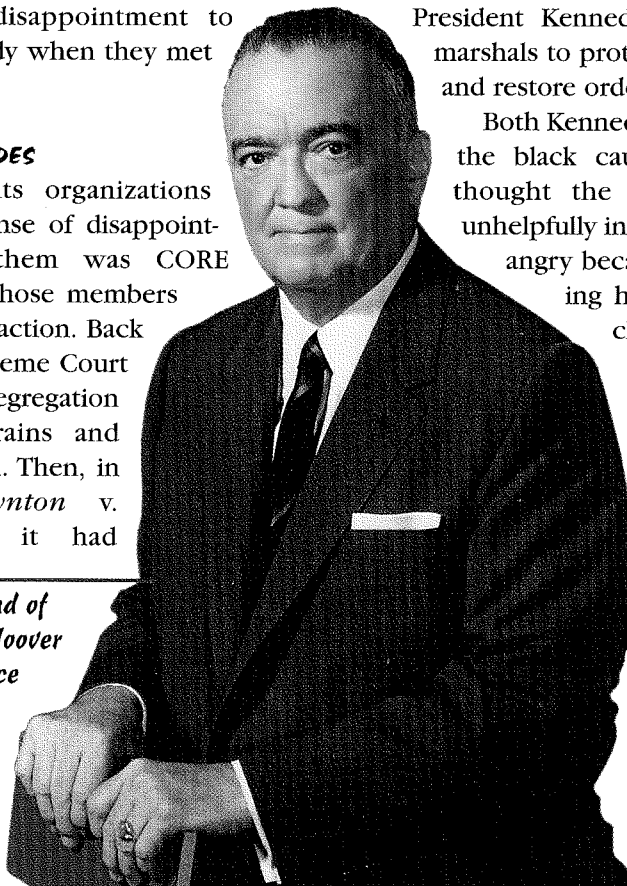
banned segregation at interstate bus and railway stations, too. Across the South, the rulings had been widely disregarded. CORE's aim was to bring this state of affairs to national attention.

CORE's chosen method was to set out on 'Freedom Rides', interstate trips from Washington D.C. to New Orleans, Louisiana on two buses. The passengers, black and white, were both to travel and disembark at terminals together, then see how local authorities reacted. The buses left the capital in May 1961. When they reached Anniston, Alabama, one vehicle was set on fire. Then, in Birmingham, Ku Klux Klan members attacked the Freedom Riders with baseball bats.

But there was worse to come. The few riders who had chosen to continue made their way to Montgomery, where they were attacked by a 1,000-strong white mob. The police were reluctant to intervene and the segregationist state governor, John Patterson, refused to call out the National Guard. When King arrived to support the protesters, the situation grew yet more tense. Finally, President Kennedy sent in 600 federal marshals to protect the Freedom Riders and restore order.

Both Kennedys were sympathetic to the black cause. But the President thought the Freedom Rides were unhelpfully inflammatory. He was also angry because they were distracting him from foreign policy clashes with the USSR.

Throughout the summer Robert struggled to stop further protests. In September, he finally persuaded the Interstate Commerce Commission to issue an order outlawing segregation on buses and in terminals once and for all. A short





When this 'Freedom Ride' bus stopped outside Anniston, Alabama in 1961, white protesters threw a fire bomb through its windows.

time afterwards, the victorious campaigners ended their rides.

THE ALBANY MOVEMENT

Another campaign soon demanded King's attention. In December 1961, he was called to Albany, Georgia, where the struggle to desegregate public facilities was in full swing. However the city leaders, backed by police chief Laurie Pritchett, were stubbornly resistant. King was reluctant to go, as SNCC, which often resented his involvement, was very active in the area. But Dr. William G. Anderson, leader of the Albany Movement, pleaded so hard he decided to make the journey.

In the event, King and the SCLC organized a huge range of marches, sit-ins and other anti-segregation protests in Albany. Pritchett, however, was too wily to beat black protesters in full view of television cameras, knowing this would provoke federal intervention. Instead he put them all in jail - King himself spent time in prison, but was always released so that he could not attract publicity. By

August 1962, it was clear the campaign was failing, so it was ended. The poorly planned enterprise had achieved little apart from worsening tensions between the SCLC and SNCC, which was increasingly critical of King's tactics.

TROUBLE IN MISSISSIPPI

The civil rights struggle received another blow in September, when black student James Meredith tried to enrol at the all-white University of Mississippi in Oxford. The Kennedys had sent federal marshals to protect him, but he was turned away by National Guards on the orders of state governor Ross Barnett. A second enrolment attempt led to a riot in which two people were killed. Meredith was eventually able to enrol on 1 October, but only after the administration had ordered in troops.

King was appalled by this episode and partly blamed Kennedy's lack of commitment to total desegregation. The incident also stiffened his resolve. The coming year, 1963, would mark the 100th anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation (see page 11). Now, surely, was the time to settle the segregation issue once and for all.