

TWENTIETH-CENTURY HISTORY MAKERS

MARTIN LUTHER KING JR



FROM MINISTER TO CIVIL RIGHTS LEADER

encouragement and speeches to the protesting students.

As the sit-ins continued, the students were confronted with increasingly violent retaliation from the police, including beatings and tear gas. But they continued undaunted and the sit-ins spread to other areas – swimming pools, libraries, theatres, hotels – indeed, anywhere where there was racial segregation. As a result of the sit-ins, the segregation laws were eventually changed in many places.

Freedom Rides

Another famous non-violent protest started in 1961. The “Freedom Rides” came about because, despite a Supreme Court ruling about integration on long-distance buses, many southern states simply ignored the law. Thirteen students, seven black and six white, decided to take the first Freedom Ride together, starting in Washington D.C. and

◀ *Dr King leaves an Atlanta shop in October 1960, under arrest for taking part in a lunch counter sit-in. Later that year presidential candidate John F. Kennedy intervened to have King released from jail.*

The Kennedys step in

In October 1960 Dr King was arrested during a student sit-in in a store in Atlanta. He was put in jail with the students and held for many days. When the students were eventually released on bail, King was immediately rearrested on a technicality. He was transferred in chains to another jail and sentenced to four months hard labour.

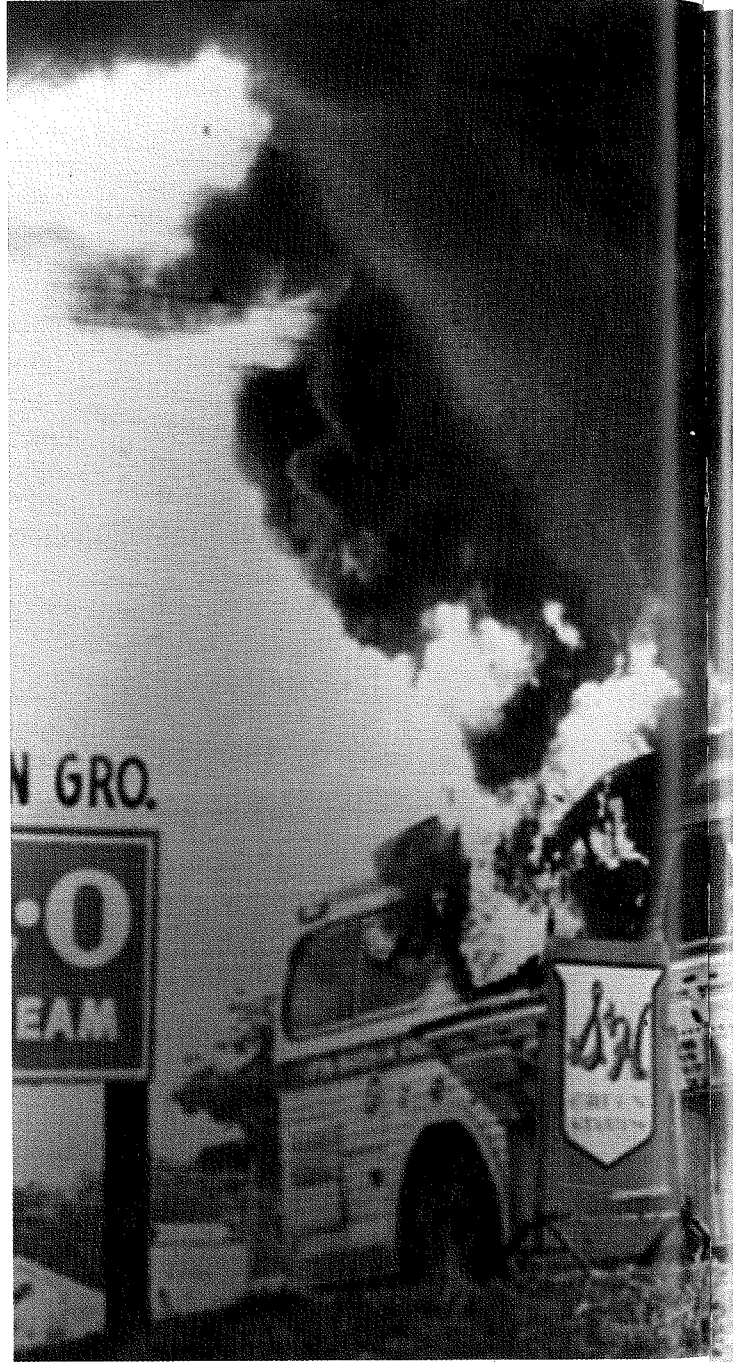
John F. Kennedy, who was running for president of the USA at that time, heard of King’s situation and both he and his brother, Senator Robert Kennedy, intervened on King’s behalf. Dr King was released and thanked the Kennedys for their courage in helping him. In the election that followed in November, many black people voted for J. F. Kennedy. He duly became president of the USA.

then heading south through the southern states to New Orleans in Louisiana.

The buses on which they were travelling were attacked and the students were badly beaten. The second Freedom Ride ended in Montgomery. Dr King travelled to the city to give the riders support.

But as he was speaking to a mass meeting in Ralph Abernathy's church, a white mob surrounded the building. Stones and tear-gas bombs were thrown into the church and a car was set ablaze.

The Freedom Rides continued, but in September 1961 new laws ended segregation on the buses for good.



► This 1961 photo shows a bus set ablaze by anti-integration protesters during a "Freedom Ride".