DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING JR: THE MAN WHO BECAME A MONUMENT

DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. WAS A PASTOR AND CIVIL RIGHTS ACTIVIST WHO IS REMEMBERED AS ONE OF THE PILLARS OF THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT. BORN MICHAEL KING JR. ON JANUARY 15, 1929, KING WAS A PRECOCIOUS STUDENT, ENTERING MOREHOUSE COLLEGE AT JUST FIFTEEN YEARS OLD AND BEGINNING A LIFE SHAPED EARLY BY THEOLOGY, RHETORIC, AND MORAL INQUIRY. IN 1953, HE MARRIED CORETTA SCOTT, FORGING A PARTNERSHIP THAT WOULD SUSTAIN BOTH HIS FAMILY LIFE AND HIS PUBLIC CALLING. ONE YEAR LATER, KING BECAME PASTOR OF DEXTER AVENUE BAPTIST CHURCH IN MONTGOMERY, ALABAMA. HE EARNED HIS PHD IN SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY FROM BOSTON UNIVERSITY IN 1955.

THAT SAME YEAR, KING EMERGED AS A NATIONAL FIGURE WHEN HE LED THE MONTGOMERY BUS BOYCOTT, LAUNCHING A PHILOSOPHY OF NONVIOLENT RESISTANCE ROOTED IN CHRISTIAN ETHICS AND INSPIRED BY GLOBAL MOVEMENTS FOR JUSTICE. AN AVID FOLLOWER OF MAHATMA GANDHI, KING TRAVELED TO INDIA IN 1959 TO STUDY GANDHI'S METHODS BEFORE RETURNING TO ATLANTA IN 1960 TO CONTINUE ORGANIZING ACROSS THE SOUTH. KING'S LEADERSHIP CULMINATED IN LANDMARK MOMENTS SUCH AS THE MARCH ON WASHINGTON IN 1963, HIS RECEIPT OF THE NOBEL PEACE PRIZE IN 1964, THE SELMA MARCHES OF 1965, AND THE MEMPHIS SANITATION WORKERS STRIKE OF 1968.

ON APRIL 3, 1968, KING DELIVERED HIS FINAL SPEECH, REMEMBERED AS "I'VE BEEN TO THE MOUNTAINTOP," REFLECTING ON MORTALITY, FEAR, AND FAITH. THE FOLLOWING DAY, APRIL 4, 1968, KING WAS ASSASSINATED ON THE BALCONY OF THE LORRAINE MOTEL.

EVERYONE KNOWS THE STORY OF THE MONUMENT, BUT KATORI HALL'S *THE MOUNTAINTOP* ENDEAVORS TO DISPLAY A KING THAT IS HUMAN.

TACOMA LITTLE THEATRE

A SHORT HISTORY OF

THE LIFE OF DR. KING

Birth

Born as Michael King Jr. on 1/29/1929 in Atlanta, GA

Anointed

Becomes Pastor of Dexter Avenue Baptist Church

Organizatio

Forms the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC)

Recognition

King Receives the Nobel Peace Prize

Death

King is Assassinated in Memphis, TN

1929 | 1944 | 1954 | 1955-6 | 1957 | 1960 | 1964 | 1965 | 1968 | 1986

Education

Enters Morehouse College at the Age of 15

Boycott

Leads the Montgomery Bus Boycott

Arrest

Arrested During One of the Atlanta Sit In Events; Sentenced to 4 Months of Hard Labor

Selma

King Leads the Selma March

Legacy

Martin Luther King Jr. Day Becomes a National Holiday

AKA WHAT THEY TEACH IN SCHOOLS

A LESS-CLINICAL HISTORY OF

THE LIFE OF DR. KING

1929 — Birth

Born as Michael King Jr. on 1/29/1929 in Atlanta, GA

1934 — Name

Name is Changed to Martin Luther King, Jr.

1941 — Lows

Grandmother Passes Away; Second Suicide Attempt

1944 — Beginnings

Gives 1st Public Speech During an Oratorical Contest; Enters Morehouse College

1953 — Love

Marries Coretta Scott

1955-63 — Next Generation

Has Four Children (Yolanda, 1955; MLK III, 1957; Dexter, 1961; Bernice, 1963)

1958 — Survival

Survives Stabbing Incident (Izola Curry and the Letter Opener)

1959 — Travel

Travels to Europe and India, Learns More About Gandhi's Teachings

1960-8 — MOVEMENTS

Atlanta Sit Ins, Albany Movement, Birmingham Campaign, Selma...

1968 — Final Speech

Gives Final Speech ("I've Been to the Mountaintop") the Day Before Assassination

AKA WHAT THEY LEFT OUT... AND THIS IS STILL JUST THE TIP OF THE ICEBERG.

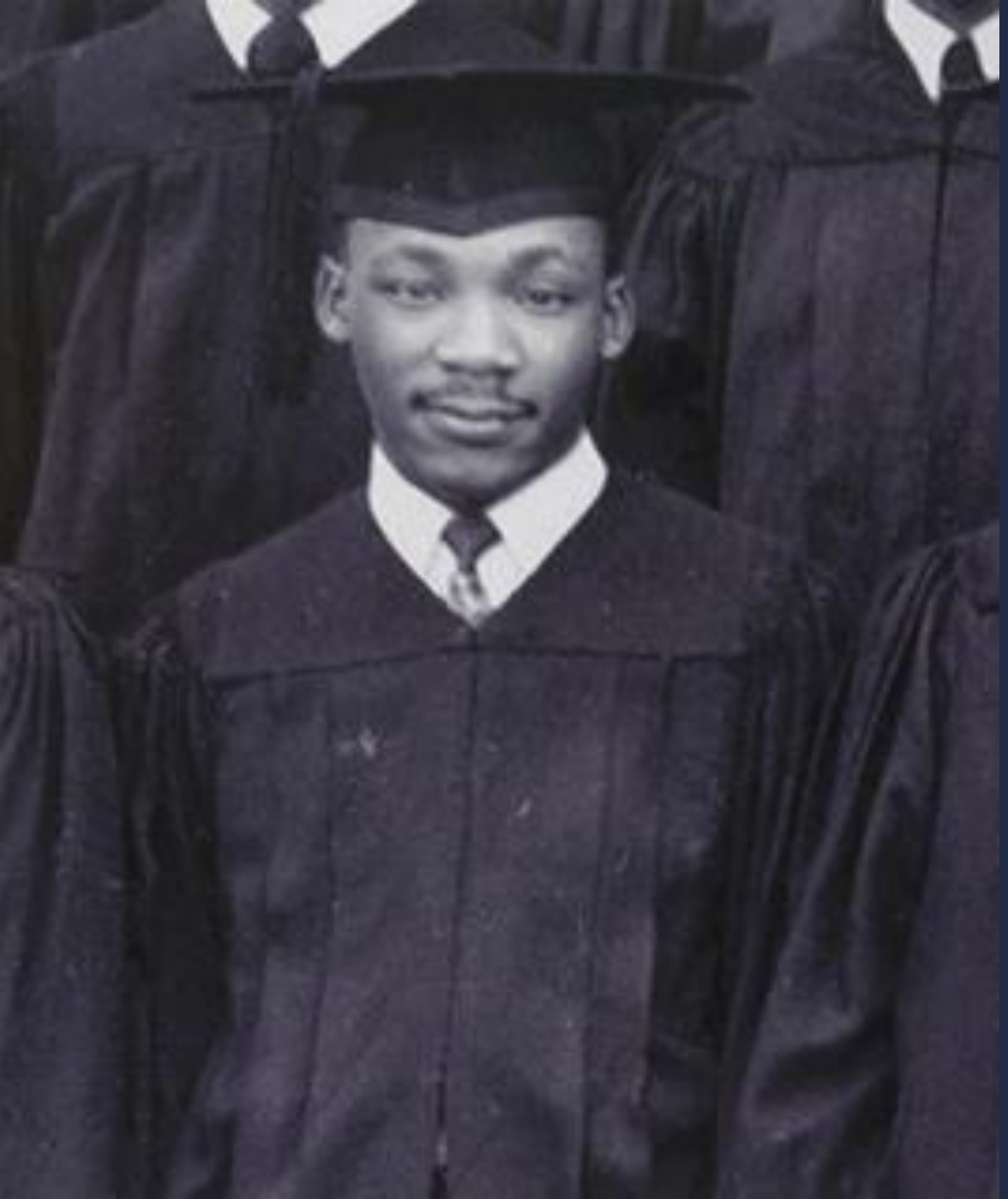
EARLY STRUGGLES
& EMOTIONAL LIFE

Attempted suicide (age 12)

Upon hearing of his grandmother's death, King reportedly jumped from a second-story window, believing that her death was punishment for his sneaking out earlier that night.

→ Early experiences with **grief, guilt, and emotional intensity**

→ King in *The Mountaintop*: **vulnerable, tired, and human**--not just a symbol



FIRST PUBLIC SPEECH

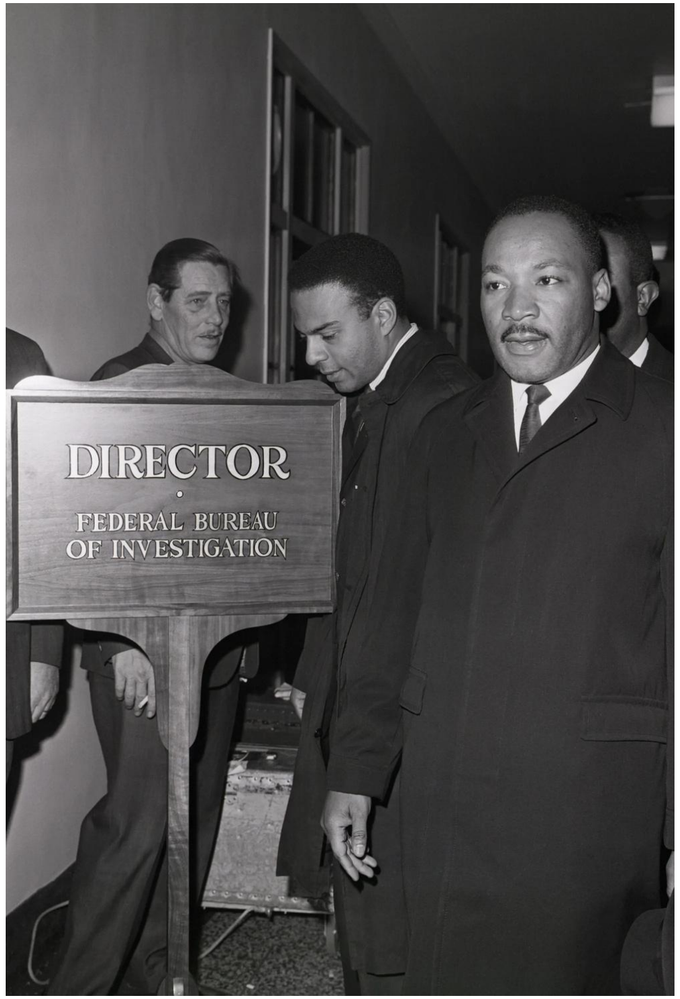
As a teenager, King gave an impromptu speech during an oratorical contest. He spoke of **racial injustice and equality**--themes that would come to define his life.

→ Framed justice in moral and almost spiritual language.

→ *The Mountaintop* captures a King who is still wrestling with **the weight of his own voice and legacy.**

VIOLENCE AND SURVEILLANCE

"As the weeks passed, I began to see that many of the threats were in earnest. Soon I felt myself faltering and growing in **fear.**"1



IZOLA CURRY

In 1958, King was stabbed in the chest with a letter opener at a book signing in Harlem. He mentions in his final speech that doctors said that if he had sneezed, he could have died.

→ Also received constant death threats throughout his life.

→ The looming presence of death in *The Mountaintop* is not abstract. **It was King's daily reality.**

SURVEILLANCE & PRESSURE

King was targeted by the FBI under J. Edgar Hooverfor over a decade, from 1955 utnil his assassinatin in 1968. He was wiretapped, surveilled, and publicly discredited.

→ Labeled a "radical" and threat to national security.

→ Adds tension in *The Mountaintop:* King isn't just tired, he is under **immense political and psychological pressure.**

RADICAL LOVE

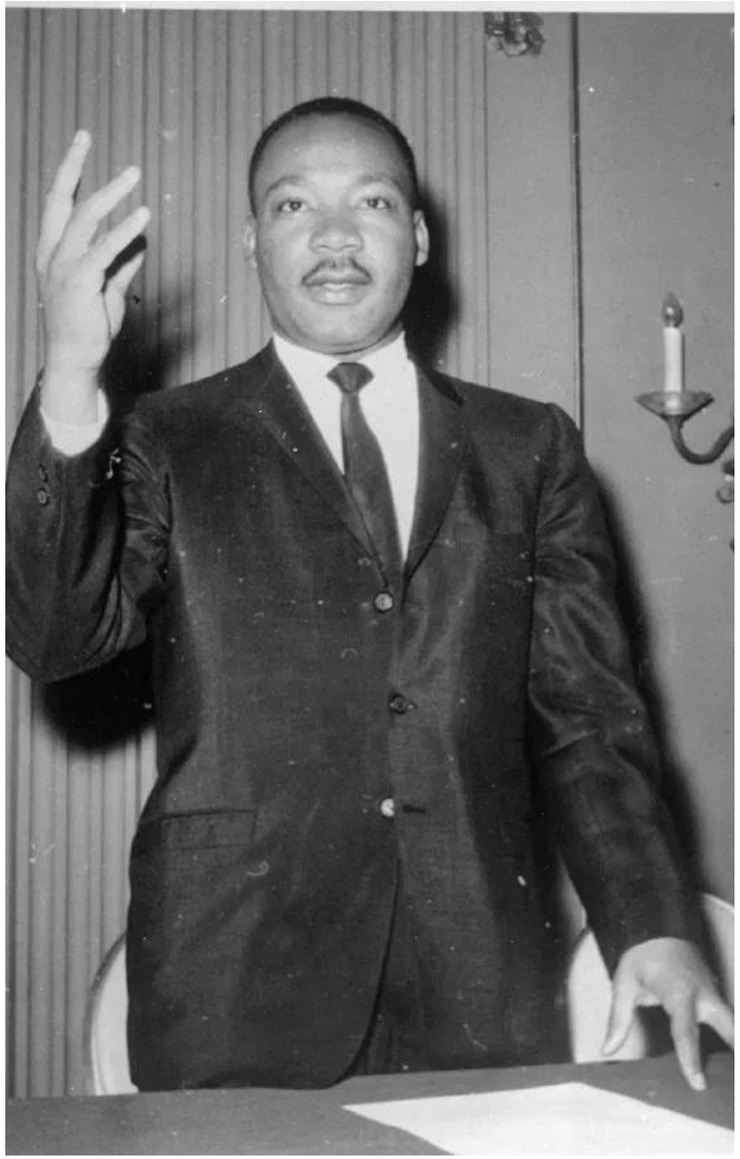
King’s idea of radical love:

- Goes beyond kindness
- Love as a **force for justice**, not passive acceptance
- Requires confronting systems of oppression
- Disruptive, political, and demanding
- Critiques capitalism, militarism, and white moderates who preferred “order” over justice

In *The Mountaintop*, King questions his impact and future.

This radical philosophy underscores the stakes of his work.

“What is needed is a realization that power without love is **reckless and abusive**, and that love without power is **sentimental and anemic**.”2



THINGS TO CONSIDER

HUMANIZING THE ICON

FRAMING THE ACTION THROUGH GRIEF, VOICE, AND LOVE

CENTERING BLACK LANGUAGE & CULTURE