



Related Reading - Martin Luther King, Jr.

During the early 1960s, Birmingham, Alabama was one of the most **segregated**, or racially separated, cities in America. Only 10 percent of the African-American community was registered to vote, and African Americans were barred from holding most jobs.

When Fred Shuttlesworth, a local minister, began challenging the legality of the city's policies, his home and church were bombed, he was jailed, and his petitions were literally thrown into the trash by the mayor. So Shuttlesworth contacted Dr. King, who quickly moved into the city.

Dr. King's strategy involved confronting the Birmingham establishment with non-violent tactics such as sit-ins, boycotts, voter registration drives, and marches. The city's commissioner of public safety, Bull Connor, was notorious for using excessive force to enforce segregation laws. King hoped that Connor would overreact to their campaign. If he did, and the media took notice, the whole world would see the brutal injustice of Southern segregation.

Connor did exactly that. Over the course of a few weeks in May 1963, he filled the Birmingham jail with thousands of civil rights protestors, including Dr. King (pictured). When the jail was full, Connor began clearing protestors—many of whom were children—off the streets with high-pressure fire hoses. He also unleashed fierce police dogs on them.

As King predicted, the media took notice, and images of the violence appeared in newspapers, magazines, and on TV across the globe. Still, the protestors kept coming. Faced with a crisis, the leaders of Birmingham had no choice but to meet the demands of the civil rights movement. It was a defining moment in American history.

