

DR. KING'S DREAM AT 100

RACE IN AMERICA: A HISTORICAL TIMELINE

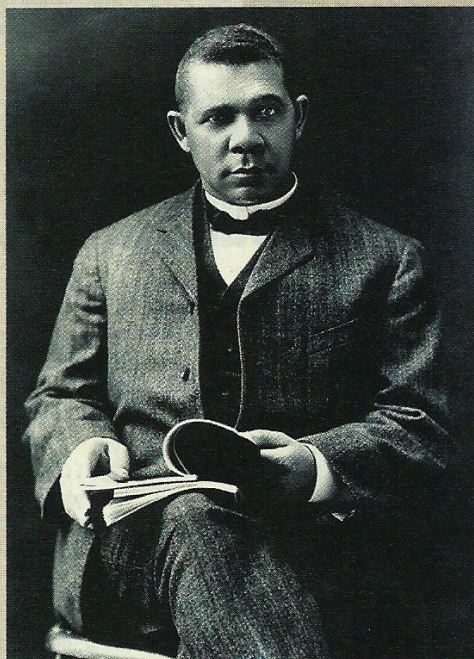
1891

► Referring to Liberia as "the Promised Land" for American blacks, AME Bishop Henry McNeal Turner calls for a massive emigration to that country. The American Colonization Society circulates his letters about Liberia through black churches. Hundreds of blacks travel east, only to find that the Society has neither boats nor funds nor any real hope of being able to sustain an exodus. Some of these disappointed people travel westward, to the Oklahoma Territory, while others remain and find work in the cities.

1892

► Black Codes in many Southern states allow for black men to be arrested for petty crimes and assigned to forced labor; the most common charges are vagrancy and loitering. Some states, including Alabama, Georgia, and Tennessee, have programs that allow prison officials to lease convicts to private firms; in Tennessee, most of these men are sent into the coal mines. But in August, white miners (unhappy with the Tennessee Coal and Iron Company for giving their jobs to the convicts) join with the prisoners to burn down the convict camp and free the prisoners at Tracy City, Tenn. The state militia is called out and subdues the rebellion, killing one black leader,

Jake Witsen. Thousands attend his funeral, and within a year, the Tennessee legislature will vote to end the convict leasing system.



1895

► **Booker T. Washington** makes his controversial "Atlanta Compromise" speech at a trade exposition. He discourages blacks from leaving the South or depending on Northerners for assistance. He suggests instead that they better their own lives, by striking a bargain with whites: in return for better working conditions and better pay, blacks would abide by the law and not press for radical political change. He acquiesces to segregation: "In all things that are purely social, we can be as separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to

mutual progress." He will later elaborate that "I believe it is the duty of the Negro—as the greater part of the race is already doing—to

deport himself modestly in regard to political claims, depending upon the slow but sure influences that proceed from the possession of property, intelligence, and high character for the full recognition of his political rights." Not all black leaders agree; T. Thomas Fortune tells an audience "we are here today as representatives of 8 million freemen, who know our rights and have the courage to defend them." W.E.B. Du Bois will break with Washington in his 1903 book, *The Souls of Black Folk*, advocating more strident steps against racism.

1896

► In *Plessy vs. Ferguson*, the U.S. Supreme Court upholds segregation: As long as the separate facilities are equal in quality, there's no discrimination. Therefore, the Court says, the Jim Crow laws are constitutional actions by state legislatures.

1898

► When a black man is appointed postmaster in the town of Lake City, S.C., some whites react violently. A mob surrounds his home at night and burns it, with the postmaster and his family still inside. When they try to escape, they are shot as they emerge from the house. During the two decades leading up to 1900, more than 100 reported lynchings of blacks occur each year. In 1899, black churches will set aside a day of fasting and prayer for justice; schoolteacher **Ida B. Wells** (fired after



she wrote a newspaper article pointing out the inferior quality of the public schools set aside for blacks) becomes an anti-lynching activist.

1900

► The Jim Crow laws are now both entrenched and effective. Louisiana, for example, has poll taxes, literacy tests, and property requirements

to discourage blacks from voting. In 1896, 130,344 blacks were registered to vote there. Four years later, there are 1,342.

1906

► More than half of all blacks are members of churches; the largest black denomination is the National Baptist Convention, with 2.2 million members, followed by the AME Church with about 500,000. Scholar



W.E.B. Du Bois

writes that "Baptism, wedding and burial, gossip and courtship, friendship and intrigue—all lie within these walls." Two-thirds of the members of the National Baptist Convention are women.

1910

► Du Bois and his Niagara Movement of black Northern intellectuals join with white liberals to form the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

1916

► The Great Migration begins when industrial firms in the North send recruiters to the South with promises of higher wages and better living conditions for black workers. In the first three years alone, half a million blacks will leave the agricultural areas of the South for the Northern cities,

especially Chicago, New York, and Pittsburgh. Predictably, this rush will cause some racial tension. In East St. Louis, Ill., when thousands of blacks arrive to work in the aluminum plants, factory owners use them to replace striking whites, and a race riot breaks out. Forty blacks and nine whites are killed. Thousands of blacks are burned out of their homes. A worse riot occurs in Chicago, where blacks and whites clash for five days. Riots break out in more than 300 cities.

1920

► But the Great Migration bears other fruit; four black men pen *Shuffle Along*, a musical that will signal the start of the **Harlem Renaissance**. Much comes out of this small New York neighborhood during the next decade, but Langston Hughes will later write, "I remember *Shuffle Along* best of all.

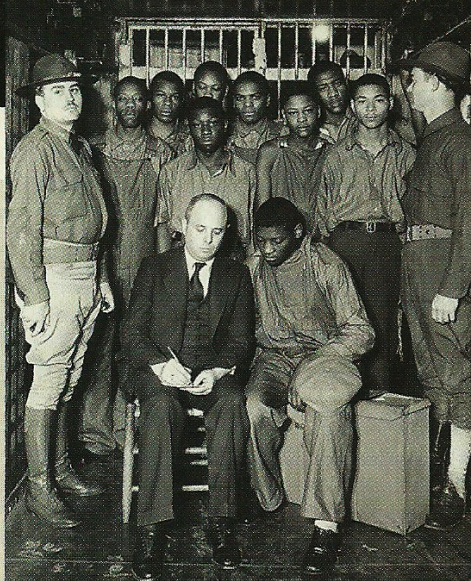
It gave just the proper push—a pre-Charleston kick—to that Negro vogue of the '20s that spread to books, African sculpture, music, and dancing."

1925

► Howard University Professor Alain Locke publishes his book about *The New Negro*, an identity and a movement that can bring together the best elements of Booker T. Washington's conscientious compromise and the NAACP's and Du Bois's more assertive approach, along with the optimism of the Great Migration. Two principles will guide the New Negro: self-respect and self-reliance.

1931

► Nine black youths are pulled from a train in Paint Rock, Ala., along with two white women. The women claim to have been raped at knifepoint.



The boys, ages 12-20, are jailed in nearby Scottsboro.

More than 10,000 would-be spectators show up for the trials of the boys. A Tennessee attorney (who is drunk) is appointed to defend the boys in the Alabama court—he's assisted by a local lawyer—and given less than half an hour to meet with his clients before the trial starts. Their already inadequate defense falls apart when the boys begin accusing each other; the jury deliberates for only two hours before finding all nine boys guilty. All but the 12-year-old

are sentenced to the electric chair. At first, the NAACP balks at getting involved, and by the time it does, a branch of the U.S. Communist Party has stepped in to defend the boys. The new attorneys win a stay of execution just 72 hours before all eight of the condemned are scheduled to die. In the second trial, which begins in March 1933, the defense closes with one of the alleged victims, Ruby Bates, admitting that they made up the story of the rapes. The second jury brings back guilty verdicts, but after a public outcry Judge James Horton sets aside the verdict, based on the evidence, and orders a new trial. A third trial opens in November 1933; it also ends with a guilty verdict, which the U.S. Supreme Court in 1935 sets aside because the jury rolls had been tampered with. The fourth trial opens in January 1936. Five are found guilty, four are freed. Eventually, all five of those convicted are cleared of the charges, the last being freed after World War II.

1933

► Eleanor Roosevelt befriends NAACP leader Walter White and black activist Mary McLeod Bethune; she soon pushes her husband, President Roosevelt, toward a stronger stance on civil rights. Particularly after the election of 1936, the first lady endorses laws abolishing the poll tax and making lynching a federal offense. FDR uses the New Deal to advance the cause, issuing executive orders that will force the WPA and other agencies to end discrimination in hiring, training, and awarding contracts. In 1941 his Executive Order 8802 will ban racial discrimination in government and the defense industry.



1939

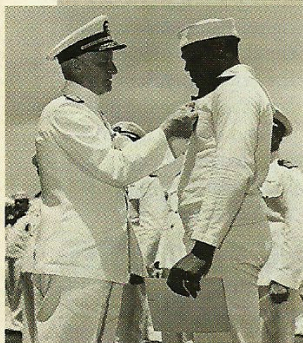
► Renowned vocalist **Marian Anderson**, born to a working-class black family in Philadelphia but trained in Europe, returns to the United States to tour. When she's booked into Constitution Hall, the Daughters of the American Revolution (who own the venue) refuse to let her perform there. Eleanor Roosevelt, the DAR's most prominent member, resigns from



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the group in protest. Interior Secretary Harold Ickes opens the Lincoln Memorial to Anderson; 75,000 attend her performance, and millions more listen to a radio broadcast of the event.



1941

► When the Japanese attack Pearl Harbor, Mess Attendant First Class **Doris "Dorie" Miller** is gathering up laundry aboard the *USS West Virginia*. He hears the alarm for general quarters, but finds his battle station, an anti-aircraft battery magazine, already wrecked by torpedoes. He rushes on deck and begins carrying wounded sailors below; when this task is completed, he mans a Browning .50 caliber machine gun (for which he was never trained). He fires for about 15 minutes, until he runs out of ammunition. By this time, the *West Virginia* is sinking and officers order the crew to abandon ship. Miller will receive the Navy Cross for his valor.

1943

► The "Zoot Suit Riots" in Los Angeles (in which police clashed with dapper blacks and Latinos) are eclipsed by the events on a hot summer day in Detroit, when fights break out between blacks and whites at Belle Isle Amusement Park. After a night of destruction and looting by blacks, federal troops arrive to put down the riot. The final tally is 34 dead, 675 injured, and more than 1,800 arrested.

1946

► The U.S. Supreme Court rules in *Morgan vs. Virginia* that segregated seating on interstate public transportation is unconstitutional. Irene Morgan of Virginia had refused to give up her seat on a Greyhound bus ride to Baltimore. In the spring of 1947, 16

men will test Southern compliance with the ruling by taking what they call "Freedom Rides" across state lines. Their "Journey of Reconciliation" is put together by the Congress of Racial Equality, a Chicago-based group. The Freedom Riders meet with resistance, of course; on one trip, three Riders are arrested in North Carolina and sentenced to 21 days of hard labor on a prison farm. But they are committed to nonviolent resistance, and their Journey will be the model for further Freedom Rides in the summer of 1961.

1947

► **Jackie Robinson** signs with the Brooklyn Dodgers and becomes the first African-American to play in major league baseball. He bats right and throws right; in



1949 this second baseman will be named the National League's MVP, hitting a league-leading .342 and driving in 124 runs.

1948

► President Truman ends segregation in the armed forces.

1954

► Oliver Brown of Topeka, Kan., was upset that his third-grade daughter couldn't go to the school just five blocks from their home—instead, she was bused across town to the school for blacks. He sued the school board, and his case is one of the five the Supreme Court hears on school segregation. The Court rules in *Brown vs. Board of Education* that "in the field of public education the doctrine of 'separate but equal' has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal." It's a broad ruling, broad enough that eventually lower courts will order not only desegregation but integration by forcing districts to bus students from predominantly black neighborhoods to predominantly white schools, and vice versa. This will



often be done not only against the wishes of many whites, but also against the wishes of many black community leaders.

1955

► Local NAACP leader **Rosa Parks** challenges the segregated bus service in Montgomery, Ala. On the morning of Dec. 1, she takes a seat at the front; when the bus driver

tells her to give her seat to a standing white man, she refuses. A police officer called to the scene asks why she won't obey the driver; "I don't think I should have to," she responds. Parks is arrested, and soon bailed out by NAACP co-workers. The plan was to make this a test case, but events soon overtake plans and a bus boycott commences. Buoyed by its success, black leaders meet to plan their strategy; to his surprise, the young minister Martin Luther King Jr. is chosen by the others to lead the

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new Montgomery Improvement Association. He never veers from his commitment to nonviolent resistance. "I want to say that we're not here advocating violence," he says later that evening, to a gathering at the Holt Street Baptist Church. "I want it known throughout Montgomery and throughout this nation that we are a Christian people. We believe in the teachings of Jesus. The only weapon that we have in our hands this evening is the weapon of protest."

1956

► On the night of Jan. 30, two months into the Montgomery bus boycott, Coretta Scott King and a friend hear a thud on the front porch of the King home (Martin Luther King Jr. is attending a meeting); the women run to a back room, where the Kings' daughter is sleeping. The stick of dynamite that had landed on the porch blows up, destroying the porch and shattering windows. By the time King arrives home, 15 minutes later, hundreds of blacks have gathered; some are armed, all are angry. King calms the crowd. "We believe in law and order. Don't get panicky, don't get your weapons. He who lives by the sword will perish by the sword. . . . We want to love our enemies. Be good to them. Love them and let them know you love them."



1957

► The school board in Little Rock, Ark., announces its plan to "voluntarily" desegregate its schools, starting with the all-white **Central High School**. Seventy-five black youths volunteer to attend Central; the board picks 25, then cuts that number to nine. Arkansas Gov. Orville Faubus (with an election looming) calls out the Arkansas National Guard to keep the students from entering the school; eventually President Eisenhower will send in federal troops to escort the students in. The pressure on these nine kids is tremendous, and one finally gives in. Minnie Jean Brown, after suffering weeks of unrelenting jeers, pours her bowl of chili on the head of one of her tormenters. The cafeteria workers (all blacks) applaud. Minnie Jean is suspended from Central High School and

finishes out the school year in New York City.

1959

► The fringe group Nation of Islam begins winning mainstream black support. The African-American newspaper *Philadelphia Courier* writes that NOI leader Elijah Muhammad "may be a rogue and a charlatan, but when anybody can get tens of thousands of Negroes to practice economic solidarity, respect their women, alter their atrocious diet, give up liquor, stop crime, juvenile delinquency, and adultery, he is doing more for the Negroes' welfare than any other Negro leader." A rising leader within the NOI is Malcolm Little, renamed by Elijah

Muhammad as **Malcolm X** while in prison for burglary. Malcolm X will emerge as a harsh critic of civil-rights leaders who advocate integration.



1960

► Four college students from the all-black North Carolina Agricultural and Technical College plan a protest at the all-white lunch counter at the Woolworth's department store in Greensboro. On Monday morning, Feb. 1, with scrubbed



faces and their best clothes, they enter the department store, buy a few items, and sit down at the lunch counter. When asked to leave, their spokesman, Ezell Blair Jr., says politely, "I beg your pardon, but you just served us [in accepting their money for items], why can't we be served here?" They refuse to leave until they're served; the

manager closes the store early and the youths return to school. Word spreads about their protest, and on Tuesday morning, 19 students sit politely and ask to be served at the Woolworth's counter. More than 80 show up on Wednesday, and since there's no more room, they descend on the neighboring S.H. Kress store's lunch counter.

1961

► Activists travel through the South to test enforcement of a U.S. Supreme Court order that all bus terminals be desegregated. Again organized by the Congress of Racial Equality, these new **Freedom Riders** arrive and use the water fountains, benches, waiting areas, and restrooms

previously reserved for whites. They also ask to be served at the lunch counters. They encounter violent resistance; in Anniston, Ala., for instance, their bus is firebombed. President John F. Kennedy and Attorney General Robert Kennedy work to persuade activists to change their focus from confrontation to voter registration.

1963

► Martin Luther King Jr. is jailed in Birmingham, Ala., for marching on Good Friday. Local ministers publish a letter in a Birmingham newspaper calling for “moderate” change and an end to the protests. King responds with his “Letter from a Birmingham Jail”: “I guess it is easy for those who have never felt the stinging darts of segregation to say ‘Wait.’” The protests get bigger. On May 2, police detain more than 600 children. On May 3, Police Chief Bull Connor tells his forces to set upon protesters with fire hoses. Detailed press accounts—including coverage on the new medium of television—shame the Kennedy administration into acting. A plan to desegregate Birmingham is brokered and announced on May 7. King and others plan to follow up their Birmingham success with a 100,000-person March on Washington. More than 250,000 arrive and hear King’s “I Have a Dream” speech. But on Sept. 15, just weeks after the march, a bomb explodes in the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham as people are gathering for the morning services. Four girls, ages 11 to 14, die in the blast.

1965

► Congress passes the Voting Rights Act, giving the 15th Amendment

of the U.S. Constitution some legislative teeth. It authorizes federal supervision of voting and voter registration in states with a history of discrimination. Martin Luther King leads a 5-day, 54-mile march from Selma to Montgomery. Five days of riots destroy much of the Watts district of Los Angeles; the riots begin when residents see a black driver harassed by white patrolmen; the final toll is 34 dead and more than \$35 million in property damage.

1966

► Black militants Bobby Seale and Huey P. Newton establish the Black Panthers and quickly become involved in violent confrontations with police and federal authorities. The Black Panthers are overtly Marxist (preaching that the poor and oppressed will revolt and overthrow the capitalistic system). Law enforcement officials crack down on the Panthers in 1969, arresting 348 of them for offenses ranging from robbery to assault and murder.

1968

► After making his “I’ve Been to the Mountaintop” speech the night before, **Martin Luther King Jr. is assassinated** on April 4. Riots break out in more than 100 cities and towns nationwide, leaving 39 people dead. President Johnson sets aside April 7 as a day of mourning.

1971

► The Congressional Black Caucus forms, with the goal of pressuring the Democratic Party to be more attentive to African-Americans. This approach isn’t radical enough for some; activists gather in Gary, Ind., the next year for the National Black Political Assembly. They

craft the “Gary Declaration” that says relying on either the Democrats or the Republicans is useless: “History leaves us no other choice. White politics has not and cannot bring the changes we need.” But the separatism of the Gary Declaration is quickly abandoned, and the CBC is back to endorsing white Democrats by the 1972 campaign season.

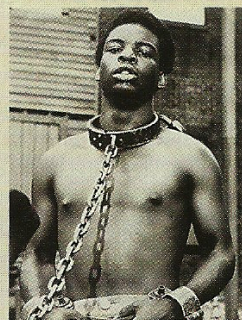
1974

► U.S. District Judge W. Arthur Garrity Jr. orders Boston to begin **busing school children** from schools in the poor and predominantly black Roxbury neighborhood to schools in the white Charlestown neighborhood, and vice versa, in

an effort to achieve integration. Protests turn violent; buses are stoned. But many opponents of busing—both black and white—say the debate isn’t about racism, it’s about community pride, and the rights of parents to send children to their neighborhood school.

1977

► The television miniseries **Roots**, based on the Pulitzer-winning



novel by Alex Haley, is watched by a record 130 million viewers.

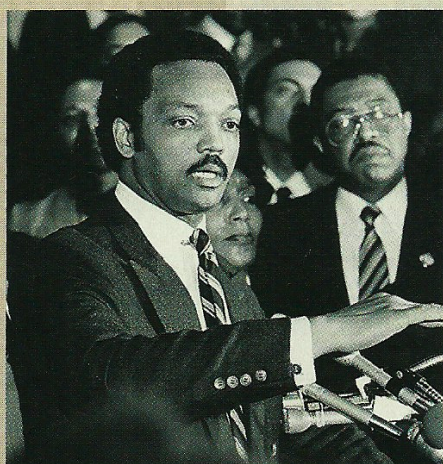
1978

► White student Allan Bakke wins his lawsuit against the University of California at Davis, as the U.S. Supreme Court rules that denying him admission while admitting black students with lower test scores is reverse discrimination. The Court declares racial quotas unconstitutional. It does not dismantle affirmative action; the Court upholds a congressional program that sets aside 10 percent of public-works money for minority contractors.



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1984

► **Jesse Jackson** makes a serious bid for the Democratic nomination for the presidency, winning 3.5 million votes in the primaries. *The Cosby Show* premieres and soon becomes the most popular series on television.

1985

► Philadelphia Mayor Wilson Goode, who is black, authorizes the aerial bombing of the headquarters of a militant black organization called MOVE, which has built a back-to-nature commune in the middle of the Powelton Village neighborhood. A police helicopter drops a bomb, but it misses the bunker atop the house and instead burns down an entire city block. Eleven people die, including five children; 61 row houses are destroyed and 250 are left homeless.

A special commission, appointed by Goode, will later contend that "dropping a bomb on an occupied row house was unconscionable." A jury will order the city to pay \$1.5 million to survivors.

1987

► **Michael Jordan** of the Chicago Bulls, a player once cut from his high-school basketball team, averages

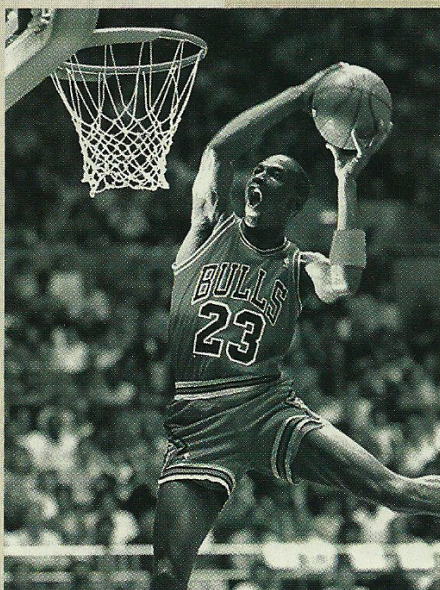
37.1 points per game, and will lead the league in scoring for the next seven consecutive seasons. He'll earn three league MVP awards. By the time he retires (for the first time) in 1993, he'll have a career average of 34.7 points per game, the best in NBA history.

1988

► Jesse Jackson's second bid for the Democratic Party's presidential nomination earns 7 million votes in the primaries.

1992

► Four white police officers are acquitted of using excessive force on Rodney King, despite videotape footage showing them beating him. The acquittals spark the worst race riots in American history; after four days of



rioting, there are 55 dead and 2,383 injured. More than 8,000 people are arrested and property damage tops \$1 billion.

1994

► Six black Secret Service agents sue the Denny's restaurant chain for systematic discrimination, alleging the chain keeps blacks waiting, offers inferior service, and in some instances even requires that blacks pay for their meals up front. This soon becomes a class-action lawsuit, with nearly 300,000 plaintiffs. Denny's agrees to settle the suit for \$54 million, and to work with the NAACP on improving service to minorities.

1995

► O.J. Simpson goes on trial after his ex-wife, Nicole Brown Simpson, is found murdered outside her Los Angeles home. Her friend, Ron Goldman, was also killed. After the most publicized trial in history with continual coverage on cable television, the mostly black jury acquits him. Americans are sharply divided in their reactions; most blacks, who have known police corruption and racism before, are elated. Most whites are horrified, believing

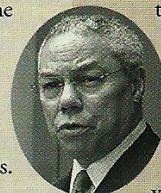
that Simpson has bought the verdict with high-priced lawyers who weren't afraid to play "the race card" to win.

1997

► **Eldrick "Tiger" Woods** wins the 1997 Masters Tournament. He will win it again in 2000, along with the PGA Championship, the U.S. Open, and the British Open, becoming the first player ever to hold all four crowns at once.

2001

► **General Colin Powell** is sworn in as the nation's first black secretary of state. A few days into his tenure he tells some visiting school-children it's not that big a deal. "It isn't that unique to see somebody in a position like mine. That's what makes this country so great, that you can see this kind of change. But that change was fought for. We got it because of people like Martin Luther King, whose birthday we recently celebrated, Rosa Parks, and so many other people who struggled." ●



Sources: To Make Our World Anew: A History of African Americans, edited by Robin D.G. Kelley and Earl Lewis (Oxford University Press, 2000); Encyclopedia of American History, Seventh Edition, edited by Richard B. Morris and Jeffrey B. Morris (HarperCollins Publishers, 1996); various press reports