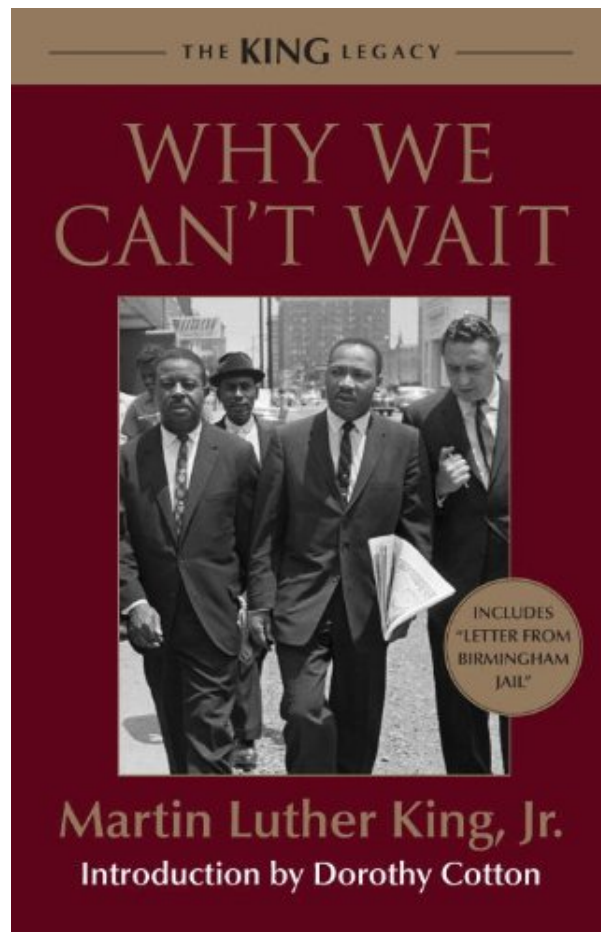


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THE KING LEGACY

# WHY WE CAN'T WAIT



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"LETTER FROM  
BIRMINGHAM  
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Martin Luther King, Jr.  
Introduction by Dorothy Cotton

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## Review

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Dr. King's best-selling account of the civil rights movement in Birmingham during the spring and summer of 1963

On April 16, 1963, as the violent events of the Birmingham campaign unfolded in the city's streets, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., composed a letter from his prison cell in response to local religious leaders' criticism of the campaign. The resulting piece of extraordinary protest writing, "Letter from Birmingham Jail," was widely circulated and published in numerous periodicals. After the conclusion of the campaign and the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom in 1963, King further developed the ideas introduced in the letter in *Why We Can't Wait*, which tells the story of African American activism in the spring and summer of 1963. During this time, Birmingham, Alabama, was perhaps the most racially segregated city in the United States, but the campaign launched by King, Fred Shuttlesworth, and others demonstrated to the world the power of nonviolent direct action.

Often applauded as King's most incisive and eloquent book, *Why We Can't Wait* recounts the Birmingham campaign in vivid detail, while underscoring why 1963 was such a crucial year for the civil rights movement. Disappointed by the slow pace of school desegregation and civil rights legislation, King observed that by 1963—during which the country celebrated the one-hundredth anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation—Asia and Africa were "moving with jetlike speed toward gaining political independence but we still creep at a horse-and-buggy pace."

King examines the history of the civil rights struggle, noting tasks that future generations must accomplish to bring about full equality, and asserts that African Americans have already waited over three centuries for civil rights and that it is time to be proactive: "For years now, I have heard the word 'Wait!' It rings in the ear of every Negro with piercing familiarity. This 'Wait' has almost always meant 'Never.' We must come to see, with one of our distinguished jurists, that 'justice too long delayed is justice denied.'"

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By JDL

This book will expose and explain all of American history that is deliberately being withheld from school curriculum. If you read this book you will suddenly become aware of why modern day society has reached its epidemic levels.

This book will thrust you into activism. Dr. King was an intellectual far beyond his years. We have to be concerned with all humanity. My life is changed forever after reading this book!

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A Classic in the Best Sense

By Roland Xavier

100 years from now this book will be more important than it is now "50 years" after Dr. King wrote it. White liberals, including white Christians, still "don't get it" and need to reflect on the deep, deep sense of injustice underlying all Dr. King says, and had earlier summarized in his "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" (appended). Conservatives and "apolitical" pop culture devotees need to take a real, hard look at what is truly important -- and how the common good or common bad affects all! Black young people and all people of whatever color need to be brought face to face with the reality of what 100 years of "blow back" following the Civil War's passage of the 13th and 14th amendments, blow back including what the frightful "Jim Crow" era and segregation had "accomplished" -- and then stand astonished at what Dr. King and his colleagues and followers found and effectively used to answer that seeming victory of racism and hatred: "nonviolence," that is, nonviolent resistance to injustice whether "legalized" or not, and the willingness to pay the price of nonviolent resistance. Having lived through these last 50 years one wonders at the extent of the victory of Dr. King's movement -- and realizes he truly deserves to stand with the "founders" of this nation, just as Lincoln does "fourscore and ten" years after the signers of the Declaration of Independence. "All men... are created equal... are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights..[including]. life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness...." Pursuing that with a tenacity rarely equaled alone makes Dr. King a truly great American. But Why We Can't Wait is not only our most important statement of the Civil Rights Movement. It is also, theologically, the best statement have yet to Christians (and, yes, I would include all people of good will) as to how to act until Christ comes again.. One can see the seeds of future struggle -- to bring some old issues to completion but to also address old/new oppression: against all the poor, a host of others caused by war, the way class (economic especially) slams hard against earlier victories, and more. But these are noticed in embryo here. Dr. King writes Why We Can't Wait thinking of an earlier time, he writes during a time at which his influence had achieved a kind of peaceful peak (the hell of 1968 with overt opposition to the Vietnam War, overt support for the poorest of the poor and... his assassination... lay ahead). Why We Can't Wait. doesn't summarize Dr. King and his legacy, but it does provide us with a center point, not only

for Dr. King's life but one that could provide a centering point for every true American.

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