African American civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., is awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his nonviolent resistance to racial prejudice in America. At 35 years of age, the Georgia-born minister was the youngest person ever to receive the award.

Martin Luther King, Jr., was born in Atlanta in 1929, the son of a Baptist minister. He received a doctorate degree in theology and in 1955 organized the first major protest of the civil rights movement: the successful Montgomery Bus Boycott. Influenced by Mohandas Gandhi, he advocated nonviolent civil disobedience to racial segregation. The peaceful protests he led throughout the American South were often met with violence, but King and his followers persisted, and their nonviolent movement gained momentum.

A powerful orator, he appealed to Christian and American ideals and won growing support from the federal government and northern whites. In 1963, he led his massive March on Washington, in which he delivered his famous "I Have a Dream" address. In 1964, the civil rights movement achieved two of its greatest successes: the ratification of the 24th Amendment, which abolished the poll tax, and the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibited racial discrimination in employment and education and outlawed racial segregation in public facilities. In October of that year, King was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. He donated the prize money, valued at $54,600, to the civil rights movement.

In the late 1960s, King openly criticized U.S. involvement in Vietnam and turned his efforts to winning economic rights for poor Americans. By that time, the civil rights movement had begun to fracture, with activists such as Stokely Carmichael rejecting King's vision of nonviolent integration in favor of African American self-reliance and self-defense. In 1968, King intended to revive his movement through an interracial "Poor People's March" on Washington, but on April 4 he was assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee, by escaped white convict James Earl Ray, just a few weeks before the demonstration was scheduled to begin.