



# Jacob's Ladder



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Rev. Roger Wilson, Pastor

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## Icons of Black Culture and History

In celebration of Black History Month Oxford First UMC would like to thank Kenneth J. Franklin for his illustration of Black cultural and historic icons shown here. From a church

and an historical point of view we are presenting a summary of Dr. King's famous "Letter from Birmingham Jail" as well as other events.

# Letter from Birmingham Jail

"Letter from Birmingham Jail," written by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in April 1963, is a powerful defense of the strategy of nonviolent resistance to racism. Dr. King penned this letter in response to a group of white clergymen who had criticized his participation in civil rights demonstrations in Birmingham, Alabama.

## Key Points of the Letter:

- 1. Justification for Direct Action:** Dr. King explains that African Americans have waited long enough for civil rights and that direct, nonviolent action is necessary to create a crisis that forces negotiation. He emphasizes that freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed.
- 2. Critique of White Moderates:** He expresses his disappointment with the white moderate, whom he sees as more devoted to "order" than to justice. He argues that their preference for a "negative peace," which is the absence of tension, over a "positive peace," which is the presence of justice, perpetuates injustice.
- 3. Moral Responsibility:** Dr. King asserts that individuals have a moral duty to disobey unjust laws. He distinguishes between just and unjust laws, stating that a just law aligns with moral law or the law of God, while an unjust law degrades human personality and is not rooted in eternal and natural law.
- 4. The Timing of Justice:** He responds to criticisms that the protests were "untimely" by arguing that "justice too long delayed is justice denied." He underscores that African Americans have been waiting for their constitutional and God-given rights for more than 340 years.
- 5. Disappointment with the Church:** Dr. King expresses his disappointment with the white church and its leadership, who he believes should be supporting the civil rights movement instead of cautioning against it.
- 6. Hope for the Future:** Despite the criticisms and the struggle, Dr. King conveys a sense of hope. He believes that justice will eventually prevail, and he urges people to continue fighting for equality and freedom.

Dr. King's letter remains a seminal document in American history, articulating the philosophical and moral foundations of the civil rights movement. It is a profound and eloquent call to action, advocating for justice and human dignity through nonviolent means.

# Significant Moments in Black History

Black American history is rich with significant events that have shaped the nation. Here are some key moments:

1. **1619: Arrival of the First Enslaved Africans:** A Dutch ship brought the first enslaved Africans to the British colony of Jamestown, Virginia.
2. **1776: Declaration of Independence:** While the document declared freedom, it did not apply to enslaved people.
3. **1793: Invention of the Cotton Gin:** Eli Whitney's invention revolutionized the cotton industry, leading to an increase in the demand for enslaved labor.
4. **1808: Abolition of the Transatlantic Slave Trade:** Congress outlawed the importation of enslaved people, but the domestic slave trade continued.
5. **1857: Dred Scott v. Sandford,** was a landmark decision by the U.S. Supreme Court. The Court ruled that African Americans, whether free or enslaved, were not American citizens and therefore had no right to sue in federal court.
6. **1863: Emancipation Proclamation:** President Abraham Lincoln issued this proclamation, which declared that all enslaved people in Confederate-held territory were free.
7. **1865: 13th Amendment:** This amendment abolished slavery in the United States.
8. **1870: Hiram Rhodes Revels:** First African American U.S. Senator.
9. **1896: Plessy v. Ferguson:** The Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of racial segregation under the "separate but equal" doctrine.
10. **1948: Shelley v. Kraemer:** Ruled that courts could not enforce racial covenants on real estate.
11. **1954: Brown v. Board of Education:** The Supreme Court ruled that racial segregation in public schools was unconstitutional.
12. **1963: March on Washington:** Martin Luther King Jr. delivered his iconic "I Have a Dream" speech.
13. **1964: Civil Rights Act:** This landmark legislation outlawed discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin.
14. **1965: Voting Rights Act:** This act aimed to overcome legal barriers at the state and local levels that prevented African Americans from exercising their right to vote.
15. **1967: Thurgood Marshall:** First African American Supreme Court Justice
16. **1967: Loving v. Virginia:** Struck down laws banning interracial marriage.
17. **1969: Shirley Chisholm:** First African American woman elected to the U.S. Congress

18. **1978: Regents of the University of California v. Bakke:** Addressed affirmative action in higher education.
19. **2003: Grutter v. Bollinger:** Upheld the constitutionality of affirmative action in education
20. **2008: Election of Barack Obama:** Barack Obama was elected as the first Black president of the United States.
21. **2013-Present: Black Lives Matter Movement:** This movement began as a response to police violence and systemic

racism, advocating for justice and equality.

**“Won’t it be wonderful when Black history and Native American history and Jewish history and all of U.S. history is taught from one book. Just U.S. history.”**

-Maya Angelou

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Oxford, MS 38655

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