

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ *Caleb McWhorter — Solutions*  
MAT 222  
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MLK Bonus

*“Life’s most persistent and urgent question is, ‘What are you doing for others?’”*

*– Martin Luther King, Jr.*

Martin Luther King Jr. (1929–1968) was an American Baptist minister and arguably the famous leader in the Civil Rights Movement. We now celebrate his life, work, and the movement he stood for every third Monday in January. King is the only non-president to have a national holiday in his name.

**Problem 1:** At what age did Martin Luther King, Jr begin college? What famous boycott did Martin Luther King Jr. help lead, bringing him into the national spotlight. [*Hint: This involves another famous Civil Rights Figure.*]

*Martin Luther King Jr. began college at age 15. On December 1, 1955, Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat in the “colored” section of a bus to a white passenger. Parks herself remarked, “I thought of Emmett Till, and I just couldn’t go back.” Months after her arrest, she would remark, “I would have to know for once and for all what rights I had as a human being and a citizen.” The arrest of Parks, among other issues, led to a boycott of the Montgomery bus company. Martin Luther King Jr. was among the leaders of the boycott.*

**Problem 2:** How did Martin Luther King Jr. die?

*On April 3, 1968, King delivered his famous “I’ve Been to the Mountaintop” address at Mason Temple. In the speech he said, “Well, I don’t know what will happen now. We’ve got some difficult days ahead. But it doesn’t matter with me now. Because I’ve been to the mountaintop. And I don’t mind. Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I’m not concerned about that now. I just want to do God’s will. And He’s allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I’ve looked over. And I’ve seen the promised land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the promised land. So I’m happy, tonight. I’m not worried about anything. I’m not fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord.” The next day while on the balcony of his hotel room, he was assassinated by James Earl Ray.*

**Problem 3:** How long after Martin Luther King Jr.'s death was it before MLK Day was officially signed into law as a national holiday? When did the last US state recognize and observe this holiday by name?

*MLK Day was signed into law in 1983, 15 years after King's death. Though the first national celebration would not occur until three years later in 1986. Despite the national law, it was not until the late 1980s until most states would recognize MLK day as a paid federal holiday, the last being New Hampshire. Virginia, Utah, and South Carolina would not recognize the holiday by name until 2000. It is worth noting that until 2000, MLK Day was celebrated in Virginia but as Lee-Jackson-King Day, to honor Robert E. Lee and Thomas J. Lee, Confederate heroes.*

Though Martin Luther King Jr. died, the Civil Rights Movement continued on. The next few questions address the (only a few) reasons why the Civil Rights Movement was needed, what problems it was trying to address, and why the movement continues to this day.

**Problem 4:** What was Plessy v. Ferguson? What Supreme Court decision overturned it? Did this end segregation?

*Plessy v. Ferguson was a Supreme Court case in 1896 that ruled that segregated facilities were legal so long as they were 'equal' in quality. This later became known as the doctrine of 'separate but equal.' This ruling was later overturned unanimously in the Supreme Court case Brown v. Board of Education (1954), stating "separate educational facilities are inherently unequal." Though this legally ended segregation, it did not end segregation in practice for many years. There was great resistance in the South, where some closed schools rather than de-segregate. Though this was not limited to southern states. The Supreme Court case ended legal segregation, it did not address segregation created by economic inequality, housing inequality, etc.. In fact, the New York State is now the most segregated state, primarily due to levels in NYC.*

**Problem 5:** What were Jim Crow laws? Give some examples.

*Plessy v. Ferguson that ruled in 1896 that segregated facilities were legal so long as they were 'equal' in quality. Jim Crow laws were state and local laws which enforced racial segregation in the United States. Examples include segregation of schools, public parks and seating, water fountains, building entrances, restaurants, movie theaters, bus seating, etc.. Though the Supreme Court case ruled that 'separate but equal' was legal, these services offered to African Americans or people of color generally and whites were often not equal. Even more, they often did not exist for persons of color.*

**Problem 6:** What are anti-miscegenation laws? What do they have to do with Mildred and Richard Loving?

*Anti-miscegenation laws were laws passed to prohibit miscegenation, more commonly known as interracial marriage and sex laws. For a large portion of the 1900s, even beyond Brown v. Board of Education. Richard Loving and Mildred Loving were a couple in Virginia. They went to Washington D.C. to marry in an attempt to avoid Virginia's laws against interracial marriage and sexual relations. They were later arrested and told their marriage certificate was not valid in Virginia. They plead guilty and were given a year sentence, unless they left Virginia and did not return for 25 years. They took the deal, but later frustrated by their inability to visit family, appealed the sentence. The case went to the Supreme Court in Loving v. Virginia (1967), who ruled state laws banning interracial marriage were unconstitutional. It is worth noting that laws against homosexual relations were not struck down until Lawrence v. Texas (2003) for sexual relations and Obergefell v. Hodges (2015) for marriage.*

**Problem 7:** Who were Emmett Till, Jesse Washington, Mary Turner, and James Byrd? What happened to them? [Warning: Answering this question involves reading graphic details one may find disturbing.]

*Emmett Till was a young African American who was accused of making verbal and physical advances on Carolyn Bryant, a white woman, at a store. Bryant would later state that she had fabricated portions of her story where Till grabbed her waist and uttered obscenities. Some dispute that the boy that whistled at her was even Till. Till was taken by force from his home between 2:00 am and 3:00 am and taken to Money, Mississippi. He was beaten, shot and killed. He was found in the Tallahatchie River, his body mutilated, naked, with his eye dislodged from its socket. He was 14 years old.*

*Jesse Washington was a 17-year old African American farmhand. He was convicted of the rape and murder of Lucy Fryer. The trial lasted one hour and the jury took only four minutes to reach a verdict—a death sentence. A large crowd was present for the trial and after the verdict a mob formed. Washington was given to the crowd, where a chain was wrapped around his neck and he was dragged from the grounds. While being dragged, he was stabbed and beaten. He was stripped, doused in oil, and tied to a tree. It was said crowd members tried to mutilate his restrained body, including removal of fingers, toes, and genitals. Washington was then set on fire and raised and lowered on the chain until dead. A crowd of 10,000–20,000 people witnessed the lynching. His body was then bagged and brought to Washington's hometown Robinson, Texas, where it was hung from a utility pole.*

*Mary Turner was a 25-year old African American woman. An African American named Sidney Johnson shot and killed Hampton Smith. During the manhunt for Johnson, at least 13 African Americans were killed. One was Hayes Turner, who knew Smith. He was arrested but later taken out of court and lynched by a mob just outside of town. His body was left hanging over the weekend. His wife Mary Turner, then eight months pregnant, denounced her husband's lynching. Determined to "teach her a lesson" for speaking out, a mob formed to capture her. Turner fled but was caught at noon on May 19, 1918. She was tied and hung upside down, soaked in gasoline, and burned to death. While still alive, her belly was cut open and her unborn child fell to the group. Members of the crowd stomped the child, who was said to let out cries before this, and then Turner's body was shot hundreds of times.*

*The Tuskegee Institute figures that between 1882 and 1951, 4,730 people were lynched in the*

*United States. Though lynchings were more common decades ago (and not all were persons of color), they have not ended. On June 7, 1998, James Byrd Jr. was taken by three men out to a remote country road, beaten, urinated and defecated on, then chained by his ankles and dragged for 3 miles. An autopsy suggested that Byrd was alive for much of the dragging. The men then dumped the remains and drove to a barbecue.*

**Problem 8:** What is the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement? What does it have to do with the issues above?

*The Black Lives Matter Movement (BLM) is an international movement to protest violence and racism toward African Americans. The hashtag #BlackLivesMatter began appearing after the acquittal of George Zimmerman for shooting Trayvon Martin in February 2012. The movement protests the treatment and inequity of policy/enforcement of laws towards African Americans. These are all the same issues brought up by Civil Rights leaders in decades past. Whether this is an extension of the Civil Rights movement, the similarities and differences between the two, etc. are for future historians to examine as the movement continues to unfold.*