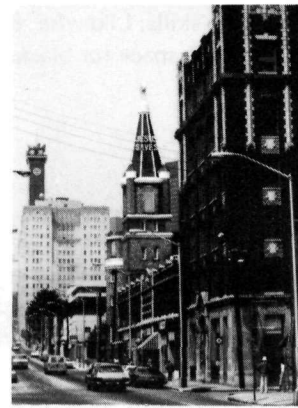
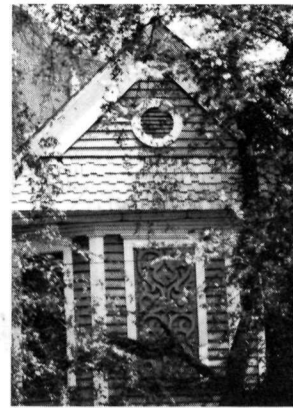
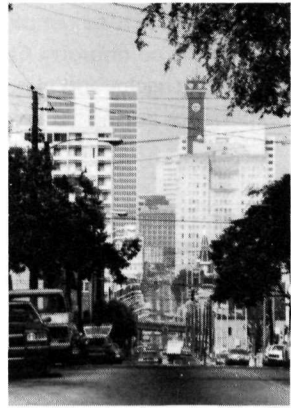


Martin Luther King, Jr.

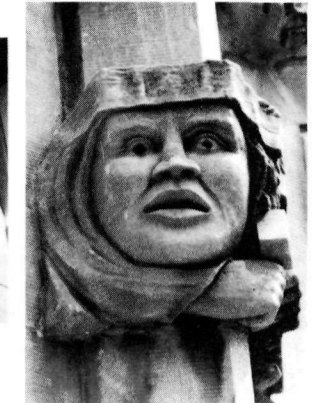
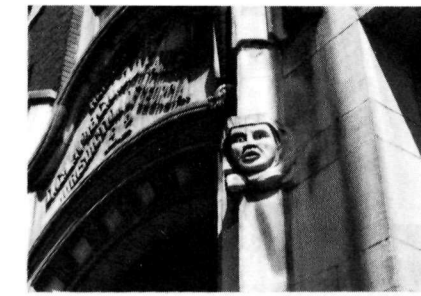
National Historic Site
and Preservation District / Georgia

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Martin Luther King, Jr., National Historic Site is a new unit of the National Park System and is not yet operational. Planning is currently underway to determine necessary visitor services, interpretative programs and ways of protecting important historic features. If you have suggestions or wish to find out the current status of planning and visitor services, write the Superintendent,

*Martin Luther King, Jr., NHS
National Park Service
75 Spring Street, S.W.
Atlanta, Georgia 30303*



The Life and Dream of Martin Luther King, Jr.

Born January 15, 1929, in Atlanta, Georgia, to respected members of a thriving black middle-class community, Martin was shaped by his environment. His father, the Reverend Martin Luther King, Sr., was pastor of Ebenezer Baptist Church. The man and the church were vital forces in the prosperous community known as Sweet Auburn. Martin junior grew up in a comfortable atmosphere of hard work and close family relationships centered around the church. The people and businesses of Sweet



Birth Home

Auburn were successful, active, and economically stable. But despite its internal success, this was a segregated neighborhood, a part of, but apart from, the rest of Atlanta. Martin recognized this paradox at an early age.

Admitted to Morehouse College at age 15, Martin began a course of study that he hoped would lead to a career in law or medicine. A gifted student, he was inspired by his father and his professors at Morehouse to enter the ministry. He was ordained a Baptist minister and named assistant pastor at Ebenezer Baptist. It was 1947 and Martin Luther King, Jr., was 18 years old.



Ebenezer Baptist Church

One year later he obtained his degree and continued his studies at Crozer Theological Seminary in Chester, Pennsylvania, and at Boston College, earning a Ph.D. in Theology in 1955.

Dr. King had moved — physically, intellectually, and spiritually — beyond the unmarked borders of Sweet Auburn. Wrestling with the ideas of thinkers like Thoreau, Ghandi, Hegel, and others interested in social change, he began to perceive not only the larger problem but also the solution to the great enigma of segregation and its debilitating effect on the fabric of the nation.

It was at his first pastorage, the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama, that the injustices Dr. King had come to know turned to the dream that would unlock the promise of a better future for blacks.

On December 1, 1954, a weary black seamstress, Mrs. Rosa Parks, was arrested for refusing to give up her seat on a Montgomery city bus to a white man.

Dr. King, 25 years old, a respected young professional, was chosen to lead the newly formed Montgomery Improvement Association in a nonviolent boycott of the city's transit system. His opening speech signaled the world that a fresh voice, announcing a dynamic doctrine of civil struggle, was on the scene:

We have no alternative but to protest. For many years we have shown an amazing patience. We have sometimes given our white brothers the feeling that we liked the way we were being treated. But we came here tonight to be saved from that patience that makes us patient with anything less than freedom and justice.

The boycott lasted 383 days. At its conclusion the Montgomery bus system was integrated and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., was recognized as a potent force in the infant civil rights movement.

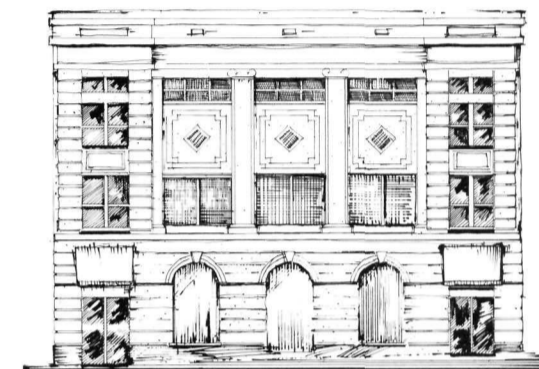


After Montgomery, Dr. King moved back to Atlanta to lead the newly founded Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). From this base he began a national campaign to achieve equal rights for black citizens. Speeches, beatings, threats, world recognition, jail terms, marches, writings, sit-ins, and honors became part of his daily life as the United States moved ponderously towards the goal of equal rights.

The philosophy of nonviolence, of passive yet solid resistance — the philosophy molded and nurtured around Sweet Auburn, at Ebenezer, at Morehouse, on the marches — was eloquently spelled out in a letter sent from a Birmingham jail cell in 1963:

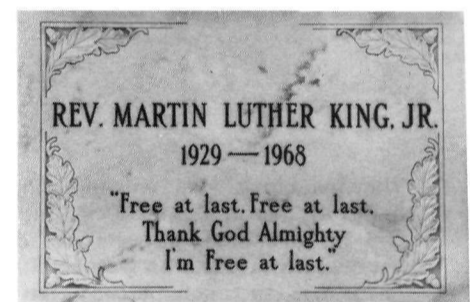
You may well ask: "Why direct action? Why sit-ins, marches and so forth? Isn't negotiation a better path?" You are quite right in calling for negotiation. Indeed, this is the very purpose of direct action. Nonviolent direct action seeks to create such a crisis and foster such a tension that a community which has constantly refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issue. It seeks so to dramatize the issue that it can no longer be ignored. . . . We know through painful experience that freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed.

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 finally put a legal end to segregation. And, in international recognition of his leadership, Dr. King was awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace in 1964.



Prince Hall Masonic Building

Four years later, at age 39, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., was dead. Minister, father, philosopher, scholar, humanitarian, social activist, husband, and finally, martyr to the noblest of causes — the brotherhood of all men.



The assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., in Memphis, Tennessee, April 4, 1968, ended the life of one of America's most influential leaders. Yet we continue struggling to realize the dream he envisioned. Together as equals, blacks and whites are working to achieve the goals established years before by those who laid the foundations of America.

"When we allow freedom to ring, when we let it ring from every village and every hamlet, from every State and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual: 'Free at last, Free at last, Thank God Almighty, we are free at last.'"

Lincoln Memorial, 1963
© 1963 by Martin Luther King, Jr.

"I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed, 'We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.' I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia, sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood. . . . I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skins, but by the content of their character."

Lincoln Memorial, 1963
© 1963 by Martin Luther King, Jr.



"The nonviolent approach does something to the hearts and souls of those committed to it. It gives them new self-respect. It calls up resources of strength and courage that they did not know they had. Finally, it so stirs the conscience for the opponent that reconciliation becomes a reality."

Strength to Love, 1963
© 1963 by Martin Luther King, Jr.

"Give us the ballot and we will no longer plead — we will write the proper laws on the books. Give us the ballot and we will fill the legislature with men of goodwill. . . . Give us the ballot and we will transform the salient misdeeds of the bloodthirsty mobs into the calculated good deeds of orderly citizens."

Washington, 1957
© 1957 by Martin Luther King, Jr.

Sweet Auburn: A Multidimensional Community

Auburn Avenue, the main street running east-west through the Martin Luther King, Jr., National Historic Site and the surrounding Preservation District, reflects perhaps better than any other street in America the historical achievements of black families, businesses, churches, and other public institutions.

The Auburn Avenue area became a predominantly black community in the early 20th century. By the time of Dr. King's birth in 1929, it was one of the leading centers of black business in the country. The eastern end of Auburn, a stylish residential section, contained the homes of many black community leaders and long-time Atlanta families.

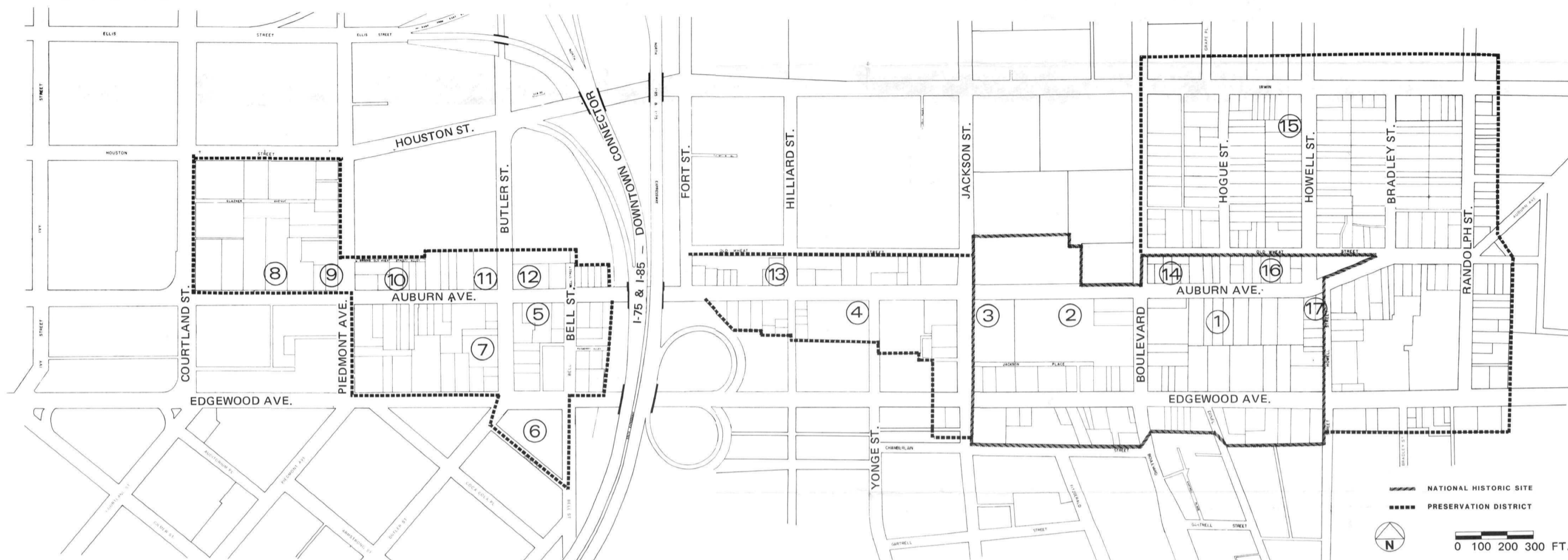
Tremendous success was realized by blacks on Auburn Avenue. Several major economic enterprises, including the Atlanta Life Insurance Company and Citizens Trust Company Bank, began here. Numerous professional offices and retail stores converged in the area, making Auburn Avenue the black economic and commercial center of Atlanta

and the Southeast. A number of major black churches, including Ebenezer Baptist, were active along Auburn. The churches were some of the earliest organizations to be black owned and controlled, giving their members an opportunity to develop important political and business skills. Likewise, they provided scarce meeting space for blacks in a segregated

society. Important social and political organizations developed in the area, including the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. The community's success led John Wesley Dobbs to dub the area "Sweet Auburn" because of the opportunities for advancement and the examples of success it offered Afro-Americans.

This area has been included in the Martin Luther King, Jr., Preservation District because it was the vital center of the community in which Martin Luther King, Jr., grew up. Sweet Auburn proved to him that blacks could achieve economic success in the face of legal segregation. This example of achievement within the community helped prepare Dr. King for the struggles and victories he was to experience during his life.

Major Landmarks and Sites



The two-block area encompassing the birth home of Martin Luther King, Jr., his church, and his memorial gravesite was designated a national historic site on October 10, 1980. The residential and commercial sections of the Sweet Auburn community in which Dr. King grew up comprise the preservation district. Together, the preservation district and the national historic site tell much of the history of black urban culture in the South and provide the background for the story of the civil rights movement.

The Sweet Auburn community, located east of Atlanta's central business district, contains many important structures with a variety of architectural styles.

1 Martin Luther King, Jr., Birth Home
The birth home of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., is a two-story, Queen Anne style frame house, built in 1895. The Reverend Alfred D. Williams purchased the structure in 1909. Following their marriage in 1926, Alberta Williams King and the Reverend Martin Luther King, Sr., moved into the upstairs portion of the house, where Martin was born on January 15, 1929. He lived here until 1941, when the family moved several blocks north on Boulevard.

2 Freedom Hall Complex
Property adjacent to Ebenezer Baptist Church was selected for the living memorial to Dr. King. The complex, which includes his gravesite and Freedom Hall, is the permanent home of The Martin Luther King, Jr., Center for Non-Violent Social Change, Inc. The center, under the direction of Coretta Scott King, carries on the legacy of Dr. King by continuing to work for nonviolent social change leading to economic and social equality for all.

3 Ebenezer Baptist Church
Ebenezer is the spiritual home of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The church was founded in 1886, and construction of its present three-story building began in 1914. For more than 80 years (1894-1975), a member of Dr. King's family served as pastor of the church. It was the scene of many strategy sessions during the civil rights movement.

4 Wheat Street Baptist Church
Organized in 1870 as the Mt. Pleasant Baptist church, this congregation is an outgrowth of the first Baptist Church for Afro-Americans in Atlanta. The church moved to Wheat Street (now Auburn Avenue) in the 19th century, and it retains the original street name.

5 Herndon Building
The three-story, multiple-use Herndon Building was constructed in 1924 to compete with the Odd Fellows Building across the street. It was a main center of professional and business activity in the Sweet Auburn community. Designed in large part by black entrepreneur Alonzo Herndon, the building is easily recognized by the large "H" on the front facade.

6 Atlanta Municipal Market
One of the few common marketplaces for black and white Atlantans for over 50 years, the market is still a source of fresh produce and meats for downtown shoppers. It is one of the few remaining city-owned markets in the country.

7 Butler Street YMCA
A Georgian Revival style building completed in 1920 houses one of the most significant institutions in the community. The YMCA provides recreational and educational facilities for young men and has furnished meeting space

for many civic and political organizations, including the Hungry Club, a major political forum for black Atlantans. In 1949, the first black city policeman used its facilities instead of the whites-only locker room at police headquarters. The Y's alumni include many leaders of the civil rights movement, such as Vernon Jordan, Whitney Young, Julian Bond, and Dr. Benjamin E. Mays. It has also played host to interracial organizations such as the Community Relations Commission.

8 The Atlanta Life Insurance Company Building (148 Auburn)
A two-story building with a Neo-Classical facade is the former home office of the Atlanta Life Insurance Company. Founded in 1905 by Alonzo Franklin Herndon, a former slave, it is the largest black-controlled stockholder life insurance company in America.

9 The Rucker Building
Atlanta's first black-owned office building was a three-story, red brick structure completed in 1906 by Henry A. Rucker. An early black businessman and politician, Rucker was appointed Georgia's collector of revenue in 1897 by President McKinley.

10 Royal Peacock Nightclub
Originally called the Top Hat, the Royal Peacock operated from the 1930s to the 1960s and was the scene of performances by many black entertainers, including Harry Belafonte, Louis Armstrong, the Supremes, and Gladys Knight and the Pips.

11 Big Bethel AME Church
Big Bethel grew from the first church for Afro-Americans in Atlanta. Originally a slave congregation, it became affiliated with the African Methodist Episcopal Church in 1865 and moved to Auburn in 1868. The present structure, of rough hewn granite in modified Romanesque Revival form, is a prominent Atlanta landmark.

12 Odd Fellows Building and Auditorium
A six-story office complex and adjacent auditorium-theater for black professionals and businessmen were built in 1912 and 1913 by Benjamin J. Davis and the Georgia Odd Fellows. The stone and terra-cotta figures are important exterior details because of their recognizable African features.

13 Prince Hall Masonic Building
Constructed in 1937 by the M. W. Prince Hall Grand Lodge of Georgia, the Masonic Building houses the national offices of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference organized by Dr. King. This building was also the home of WERD, the first black owned and operated radio station in the United States. From 1932 to 1961, the Prince Hall Lodge was led by John Wesley Dobbs, a prominent civic figure and grandfather of former Atlanta Mayor Maynard Jackson.

14 Double Shotgun Houses (412-488 Auburn)
In 1905, the Empire Textile Company financed the construction of nine duplex residences on Auburn Avenue. These typical Victorian "shotgun" houses were part of Dr. King's early environment.

15 Alexander Hamilton, Jr., Home (102 Howell Street)
The Hamilton home combines details from several architectural styles. Built around 1895, it was the home of Alexander Hamilton, an early black contractor who built many fine homes in Atlanta.

16 Two-Story Victorian Homes (510-530 Auburn)
Constructed in the 1890s, these Queen Anne style houses are typical of the residences occupied by some of Auburn Avenue's black families.

17 Charles L. Harper Home (535 Auburn)
This Queen Anne style house was the residence of Professor Charles L. Harper, an educator and political activist. In 1924, Professor Harper became the first principal of the newly opened Booker T. Washington High School, Atlanta's first public high school for blacks.