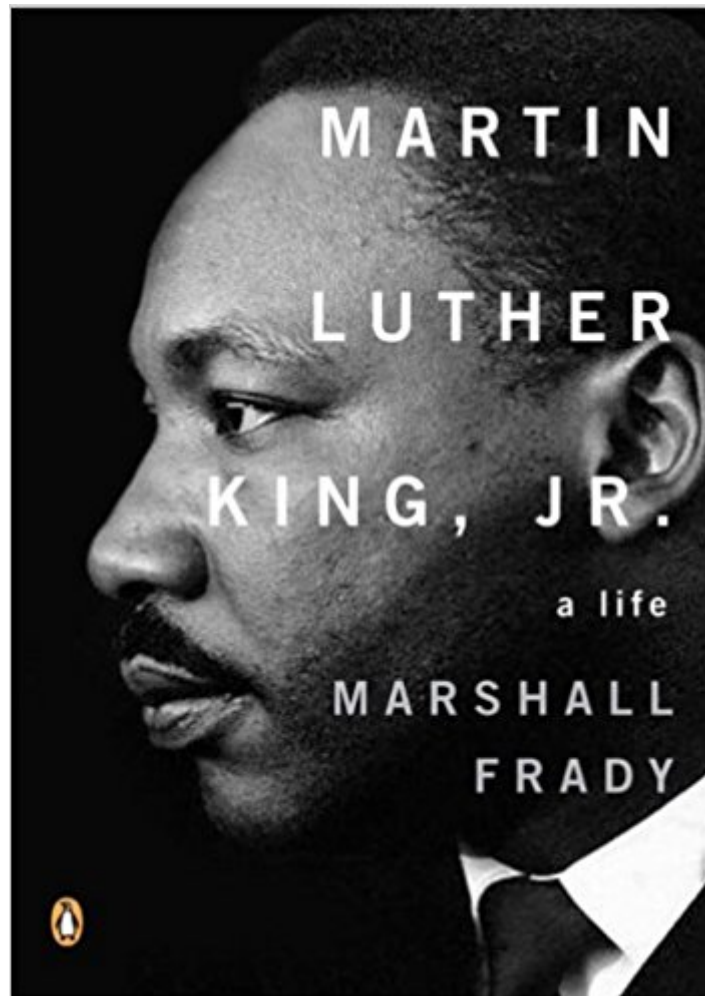




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# Martin Luther King, Jr.: A Life (Penguin Lives Biographies)



## Synopsis

Marshall Frady, the reporter who became the unofficial chronicler of the civil rights movement, here re-creates the life and turbulent times of its inspirational leader. Deftly interweaving the story of King's quest with a history of the African American struggle for equality, Frady offers fascinating insights into his subject's magnetic character, with its mixture of piety and ambition. He explores the complexities of King's relationships with other civil rights leaders, the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, and the FBI's J. Edgar Hoover, who conducted a relentless vendetta against him. The result is a biography that conveys not just the facts of King's life but the power of his legacy.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Unheroic in appearance, given to "deacon-sober suits" and "ponderous gravity," Martin Luther King Jr. ushered in an epochal era of change in the United States. Closely watching King's journey from Montgomery to Birmingham to the Lincoln Memorial to Memphis was journalist Marshall Frady, who honors the minister's achievement and spirit in this lucid biography. "Almost a geological age ago, it seems now--that great moral saga of belief and violence that unfolded in the musky deeps of the South during the civil rights movement of the fifties and sixties." So Frady opens his account, which traces King's transformation from withdrawn, unconfident child to eloquent champion of the oppressed, ever unafraid to trouble the waters. Frady explores King's conflicts, contradictions, and

triumphs, as well as the great personal cost he bore in urging nonviolent change in a singularly violent time. Part of the excellent Penguin Lives series, this slender volume sheds much light on a prophet now honored, but still too little understood. --Gregory McNamee --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

When Dr. King made the cover as Time's Man of the Year in 1963, FBI director J. Edgar Hoover "snorted in a remark passed around the Bureau, 'They had to dig deep in the garbage for this one.'" It is details such as this that make this short biography of a much-written about subject both potent and illuminating. For the latest entry in the Penguin Lives series, Frady (Jesse: The Life and Pilgrimage of Jesse Jackson) has produced a sharp, politically insightful, emotionally astute and psychologically complex portrait of a man whose complicated life and work is often reduced to simplistic hagiography. While this biography uses a standard chronological narrative as its spine, Frady constantly reframes facts and their accepted meanings with new information that gives readers fresh, often startling interpretations, or reminds us of facts that have slipped to the periphery (Rosa Parks was not simply a woman who refused to change her seat on the bus, but an active member of the NAACP who knew the political implications of her act). Never shying away from controversial topics, such as King's deep rage against the U.S. war in Vietnam or the plagiarized portions of his writing, Frady also perceptively analyzes how King's political strategizing emerged from his often conflicted emotional needs many of his bold, decisive gains for the civil rights movement were predicated on a Clintonian need for contact and adulation, according to the author. Yet Frady's sensitive, succinct presentation never lets King's foibles obscure his tremendous contributions to American life. (Jan.)Forecast: With such titles as Edna O'Brien's James Joyce and Wayne Koestenbaum's recent Andy Warhol, the Penguin Lives series has propagated a distinctive form of biography, drawing heavily on the magazine profile form. A few readers may be starting to follow the series as a whole and will pick this up; others will find reacquaintance with King's nonviolent tactics for liberation a refreshing read in difficult times.Copyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

King was a true revolutionary of love, an orator of unparalleled power whose brief life (thirty-nine years!) lit up the firmament and left the world forever changed. Marshall Frady, who as a young journalist in the South in the 1960s interviewed King and other civil rights leaders, has written a dense, lyrical, evocative account of both the triumphs and the complexities and defeats of King's life. Through the careful use of telling detail, this brief book (216 pages)

plumbs King's soul as well as the soul of America. It's a spellbinding tale of a very different time, a time when principled nonviolent resistance was a force greater than guns and money. I highly recommend reading this, as I did, directly after watching the excellent documentary King: A Filmed Record . . . Montgomery to Memphis.

Best short biography that I have read of King so far. Author brings scenes to life with the way he puts them together. Author's writing is brilliant. He makes King's thunderous oratories give you chills again like he did when he was alive and on the stage. Frady gives the highlights of King's short life and shows his work and life as the great movement that it created in America. Frady grew up in the south and had practiced the art of journalism for several years mostly in magazines where he had a little time to polish the scene he had just witnessed and Marshall Frady was a magician with putting words together so that the scene he painted gave you more than if you had been there personally. I read it twice in the same afternoon.

The book is interesting and gives a good picture of the life of Martin Luther King and the harsh struggle for civil rights. The author however, is determined to use a complicated and obscure word every time when a simple word would suffice. Instead of highlighting his erudition it only makes the book much less readable.

This book presents a warts and all review of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr and his achievements. Though this book is short, it is very comprehensive and will encourage people to further explore the life of Dr. King in other books. This short and well written book is highly recommended for those who want to learn of this man and why he is so important in the history of our country and the lives of black Americans and many other Americans. His influence continues to reverbrate to this day, and this book helps us to better understand why.

Frady hits the major highlights of King's life. Like other bios in the series, it aims to provide a good introduction to the subject. It succeeds!

The author ran amok with his thesaurus. He presents Dr. King as a conflicted preacher/sex addict throughout. The parts about the Kennedys seemed too choppy and not properly woven into the history.

Great read! Yes the writing is a bit bombastic and over the top in terms of verbiage, but overall a great read!

Martin Luther King, Jr. was one of those Americans like Ben Franklin, George Washington, Abe Lincoln, and FDR, who, to me, were far too perfect to be interesting. When we learn about these people in grade school, we are taught about how awesome and nice they were to the point they become rather dull. When I got older and I started to read more about these people, I discovered their true greatness. King was probably the greatest American never to hold public office, yet, had had an effect on this country similar to that of Franklin Roosevelt or John Marshall. Unfortunately, like many great leaders of our past, King's legacy now clouds the image of who the man was. When I read King's Autobiography, I felt I had come to a greater understanding of him as a person and his perspective on himself. Reading Marshall Frady's *Martin Luther King: A Life* has given me more of a clear image of who the man was and times that he lived. Frady's King is a man who, like all men, is flawed human being. Here he is presented as Oliver Cromwell once said 'with warts in all'. But even the 'sins' of Martin Luther King are very minor when compared to other American icons, and King clearly paid for them more than he should have in his war with J. Edgar Hoover. The United States of America today is a very different place than it has been because King was a major player in his era. For me, the highlight of this book is the struggle between King and Hoover. One of things America has learned since the sixties and seventies have become more history than memory for an entire generation of people, was the war between the leaders of the Civil Rights Movement and Director of the FBI. J. Edgar Hoover was a legend in the United States in the area of crime fighting. In 1924, Hoover was appointed Director of the Bureau of Investigation, which was the predecessor of the FBI, and he was instrumental in founding the FBI in 1935. He would still be the Director when he died in 1972. Hoover is credited with building the FBI into a large and efficient crime-fighting agency and with instituting a number of modern innovations to police technology, such as a centralized fingerprint file and forensic laboratories. Hoover's efforts had put a huge dent into organized crime operations during his tenure. If he had stuck to actual criminals, his legacy would be untouchable as some of his legendary G-Men were. However, convinced through very little evidence-and much more racism and paranoia-that Civil Rights organizations were communist plots against the government and he would have to stop them. He would go out of his way to wage an irrational campaign against them. "While King still had no inkling of it, there had in fact commenced what was to become a prolonged shadow war between him and Hoover. Though it would take place mostly out of the public eye, the two of them were to be looked into an elemental conflict as figures

reflecting--more, virtually embodying--two poles of the American character: that ethic lasting Plymouth's starch-collared society of probity, discipline, righteousness as a matter of a ruthless cleanliness of behavior, this rectitudinousness in schizophrenic tension with an unrulier urge lasting from the frontier, a restlessness with authority and convention, a readiness for adventure in exploring the farther, windy moral opens of life. Since assuming power as director of the FBI in 1924, Hoover had not appreciably changed his notion of what should be the character of the nation--sedate, sober, orderly, and properly segregated, like his FBI--and he had ever since applied all the energies of the institution he had created to keeping it that way, to preserve the plainer America of his nostalgias against alien contamination and the subversions of more diverse cultural weathers. By the fifties, he had become for much of the country--this stubby, pluggish, stern little pug-bull of a man with a cauliflower pallor and flat, blunt face--a kind of totem figure of law and uprightness. In the process, he had consolidated the FBI into perhaps Washington's greatest private preserve of official power ever, his intelligence files holding even many in the halls of government in fear." p.81-2

The book also discuss the famous March on Washington in 1963. It discusses the event, the organizers, its purpose, and even some of the people who did not want it to proceed, including President Kennedy. Kennedy sometimes gets criticized for this but that is with hindsight being twenty/twenty. It is a great testament to those marched that day that not one act of violence occurred. Had there been a riot, it might have been a huge set-back for the movement. Fortunately the march was completely peaceful."The mass pilgrimage into Washington had been entrepreneured by movement patriarch A. Philip Randolph, in concert with other leaders like King, and despite his crankiness about the SCLC's ascendancy after Birmingham, Roy Wilkins, to demonstrate the expanse and spirit of the movement with a colossal rally to appeal to Congress for passage of the public accommodations bill presented by Kennedy. The president himself, however, was more than a little edgy about it all, trying to dissuade the march's organizers with warnings, in a conversation with them beforehand, that thousands of demonstrators converging into the capital could be seen by Congress as an attempt at mob intimidation, resulting in their all losing the legislation he'd introduced, many on the Hill already looking for a pretext anyway to avoid supporting it. King offered the observation he had put to Birmingham's ministers: 'Frankly, I have never engaged in any direct-action movement which did not seem ill-timed. Some people thought Birmingham ill-timed.' To which the president rejoined, with a small smile, 'Including the Attorney General.'" p.121-2

There is a focus on King and his main competitor of ideas in the African-American community, Malcolm X. Frady discusses how King and Malcolm came from two very different walks of life."They were, King and Malcolm, really projections of two entirely different cultures. King's was

a ministry congenial to his mostly churchly, respectably middle-class black constituency, eager to join in a coalition of purpose with the nation's white liberal establishment. But Malcolm was a prophet of another America, having arisen out of a childhood of cold miser that could not have been more unlike King's snugly privileged upbringing, and the vicious and gaudy hustler society of the black underclass in those mammoth ghettos of the North's 'great cities of destruction,' in E. Franklin Frazer's phrase. Such inner exiles lived without any sense of connection to the rest of the country, bereft of that sense of their individual worth without which 'they cannot live,' as James Baldwin wrote during the time, and 'they will do anything whatever to regain it. That is why the most dangerous creation of any society is that man who has nothing to lose.'" p.129As time went on a new battles emerged, King would go on and face new challenges as younger and more militant generation were rejecting his message of love for a Black Nationalist ideology that he was completely repulsed by."Yet King was to cast himself against all this anyway. He may have arrived with Birmingham and Selma at his apotheosis as the Mosaic figure leading his people out of the old Egypt of their bondage in the South, but with this grander aspiration 'to confront the power structure massively' on a national scale, he was entering full into his tragic arch."p.169There is also discussion of his last uncompleted mission in which he was going to challenge the great economic forces of our nation, a mission that he would be slain before he could truly begin."Thus, in the summer of 1967, King announced what would be the most expansively radical adventure of his life: a national movement called the Poor People's Campaign. It would mobilize into one wide popular front not only blacks but all the country's disregarded and outcast--poor whites, Hispanics, Native Americans--in a great Gandhian crusade that would challenge the nation's entire custodial complex, not just its corporate citadels but its central institutions of government, to free the destitute of America from their generational ghettos of hopelessness." p.194I highly recommend this work it is a great and fascinating look into one of the greatest leaders of any age. This book captures the highs, lows, battles one and battles lost in a career that challenged and changed a nation, the American Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr.

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