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| |  |  | | --- | --- | | *Why We Can't Wait* | [Next entry](http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/encyclopedia/enc_wilkins_roy_ottaway_1901_1981) | |
| After the conclusion of the [**Birmingham Campaign**](http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/encyclopedia/enc_birmingham_campaign/) and the [**March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom**](http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/encyclopedia/enc_march_on_washington_for_jobs_and_freedom/) in 1963, Martin Luther King commenced work on his third book, *Why We Can’t Wait*, which told the story of African American activism in the spring and summer of 1963.  In July 1963 King published an excerpt from his ‘‘[**Letter from Birmingham Jail**](http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/encyclopedia/enc_letter_from_birmingham_jail_1963/)’’ in the *Financial Post*, entitling it, ‘‘Why the Negro Won’t Wait.’’ King explained why he opposed the gradualist approach to civil rights. Referring to the arrival of African Americans in the American colonies, King asserted that African Americans had waited over three centuries to receive the rights granted them by God and the U.S. Constitution. King developed these ideas further in Why We Can’t Wait, his memoir of what he termed ‘‘The Negro Revolution’’ of 1963 (King, 2).  With the aid of his advisors [**Clarence Jones**](http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/encyclopedia/enc_jones_clarence_benjamin_1931/) and [**Stanley Levison**](http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/encyclopedia/enc_levison_stanley_1912_1979/), King began work on the book in the fall of 1963. To explain what King called the ‘‘Negro Revolution,’’ he drew on the history of black oppression and current political circumstances to articulate the growing frustration of many African Americans with the slow implementation of the [***Brown v. Board of Education***](http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/encyclopedia/enc_brown_v_board_of_education_of_topeka_kansas_347_us_483_1954_349_us_294_1955/) decision, the neglect of civil rights issues by both political parties, and the sense that the liberation of African peoples was outpacing that of African Americans in the United States (King, 2). King pointed in particular to President Abraham Lincoln’s [**Emancipation Proclamation**](http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/encyclopedia/enc_emancipation_proclamation_1893/), observing that the ‘‘milestone of the centennial of emancipation gave the Negro a reason to act—a reason so simple and obvious that he almost had to step back to see it’’ (King, 13).  Several chapters detailed the costs and gains of the ‘‘nonviolent crusade of 1963’’ (King, 30). In a chapter titled ‘‘The Sword That Heals,’’ King wrote that nonviolent direct action was behind the victory in Birmingham. Later in the book, King reflected on the sight of hundreds of thousands participating in the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, commenting: ‘‘The old order ends, no matter what Bastilles remain, when the enslaved, within themselves, bury the psychology of servitude’’ (King, 121). King concluded the book by calling for a ‘‘Bill of Rights for the Disadvantaged’’ that would affect both blacks and poor whites (King, 151).  Harper & Row published the book in June 1964. New York Governor [**Nelson Rockefeller**](http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/encyclopedia/enc_rockefeller_nelson_aldrich_1908_1979/) told King the volume was ‘‘an incisive, eloquent book,’’ and King’s mentor [**Benjamin Mays**](http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/encyclopedia/enc_mays_benjamin_1894_1984/) called it ‘‘magnificently done. In fact the last chapter alone is worth the book’’ (Rockefeller, 23 May 1964; Mays, 20 July 1964). Other reviewers applauded the book as ‘‘a straightforward book that should be read by both races,’’ and ‘‘one of the most eloquent achievements of the year,—indeed of any year’’ (Hudkins, ‘‘Foremost Spokesman for Non-Violence’’; Poling, Book review).  **References**  Lonnie Hudkins, ‘‘Foremost Spokesman for Non-violence,’’ *Houston Post*, June 1964.  King, ‘‘Why the Negro Won’t Wait,’’ *Financial Post*, 27 July 1963.  King, *Why We Can’t Wait*, 1964.  Mays to King, 20 July 1964, MLKJP-GAMK.  Daniel A. Poling, Book review of Why We Can’t Wait, for *Christian Herald*, 12 May 1964, MLKJP-GAMK.  Rockefeller to King, 23 May 1964, MLKJP-GAMK. |