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Remembering a sad, fateful day, 50 years ago



Martin Luther King III hugs his sister, the Rev. Bernice King, after she spoke at the Mason Temple of the Church of God in Christ in Memphis, Tenn., Tuesday, April 3, 2018. The church is where their father, the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., delivered his final speech on April 3, 1968, the night before he was assassinated. (AP Photo/Mark Humphrey)

Colleagues,

On this day, 50 years ago, minutes after 6 p.m. in Memphis, the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated on the second-floor balcony of the Lorraine Motel.

The Associated Press presented a package of stories and photos - Martin Luther King Jr.'s Legacy - to its members and it can be found by [clicking here](#). In it, the AP reflects on King's life and impact around the world 50 years after his death.

We begin with a report - **AP was there** - that brings you the memories of AP journalists who covered the assassination - **Nancy Shipley, Gene Herrick, Jack Thornell** and **Kathryn Johnson**. They were interviewed by fellow Connecting colleague **Jay Reeves**.

If you have a story or memory of that day to share, please send it along.

Paul

AP was there: Journalists recall covering MLK assassination

By JAY REEVES

Nancy Shipley was working in a news office in Nashville, Tennessee, when the call came 50 years ago. Gene Herrick was in Chicago routing photos to newspapers when his phone rang. Jack Thornell got the call in New Orleans; Kathryn Johnson heard the news in Atlanta.

Together, over the next few days, the four helped The Associated Press inform the world about the stunning news that the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. had been assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee.

Shipley broke into AP's national wire with the original bulletin that King had been shot, and Herrick later stood in the sniper's perch to witness the killer's view of the hotel balcony where King was slain. Thornell made a heart-wrenching photo of King's widow and children standing beside his open coffin; Johnson spent days inside the King family home in Atlanta and greeted another famous widow, Jackie Kennedy, at the door.

Here are the stories of four people who helped shape AP's coverage of King's death in the minutes and days after that lone shot rang out in Memphis:

THE BULLETIN

Nancy Shipley was alone writing stories for radio and television stations the evening of April 4, 1968, when AP reporter Doug Stone called from Memphis with word King had been shot.



News flowed slowly before the internet age; teletype machines clacked out stories at 66 words per minute. Shipley first filed that news by ordering a machine operator to break into the AP's main national news wire; she later got confirmation from Stone and another AP reporter, Jay Bowles, that King had died.

"It was frantic in those first few minutes between the confirmation of the shooting and then the confirmation of the death," Shipley, now-retired, said during a recent interview in her home in Dayton, Tennessee.

With the initial news out, other reporters returned to the office from dinner and jumped in to help. Shipley took a break.

"I remember standing up and going into the ladies' room and just melting into tears," she said. "It was such a sad, stunning moment."

Shipley, 75, went on to become a broadcast executive for AP before becoming only the second woman to be named chief of bureau for the news agency. She retired in 1996.

A SNIPER'S PERCH

AP photo editor Gene Herrick found a commercial flight from Chicago to Memphis, but still had to talk the pilot into landing - the airport was closed because of martial law.

The next morning, Herrick stood outside the low-rent boarding house where police said James Earl Ray fired the fatal shot as King stood on the balcony of the nearby Lorraine Motel. Herrick ascended creaky wooden stairs to the second floor, where Ray had been.

"It was kind of ominous," Herrick, 91 and retired, said recently in an interview at his home in Rocky Mount, Virginia. "And there was, you know, little old rooms there and one bathroom for the whole floor. And the



killer had stood in the bath tub and looked out the window right next to the tub. And that was his view of Martin Luther King on the balcony."

Herrick covered the Korean War, and he covered presidents. He also covered King during the early days of his civil rights leadership in Montgomery, Alabama. That memory of standing in the killer's perch has stuck with him.

"It was very strange ... to sit there and just climb into the bath tub and put my arms on the windowsill just like the killer," he said.

A GRIEVING FAMILY



Pointing his camera toward the front of a chapel adorned with flowers, Jack Thornell pressed the shutter. His photograph showed the pain of Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination like few others: It was a scene of his widow and children viewing the body of the slain minister in an open wooden casket.

Coretta Scott King, third from right, is accompanied by her children, Yolanda, Bernice, Martin III, and Dexter at Sisters Chapel on the campus of Spellman College in Atlanta.



It wasn't Thornell's first landmark photo of the civil rights era. He'd already won a Pulitzer Prize for a photo made nearly two years earlier of activist James Meredith screaming in pain after he was shot while making a one-person march in Mississippi.

But the circumstances of the King photo were different.

Thornell, 78, had covered the sanitation worker's strike that preceded King's assassination in Memphis, and he was later told to rush from New Orleans to Atlanta after the killing. His first assignment was to photograph the family viewing King's body at the Spelman College's Sisters Chapel, and he was late.

Thornell said he dashed around another photographer and climbed atop a pew, clambering toward the casket by stepping over pew after pew. He made that picture of the family but then felt all eyes upon him.

"I was shaken when I left there. I had my eyes on the floor because I knew everyone was looking at me for my despicable behavior," Thornell said in a recent interview at his home in Kenner, Louisiana. "But I didn't leave without the picture."

"LET KATHRYN IN"

Kathryn Johnson was a young AP reporter in Atlanta when the civil rights movement began, and she wound up on the civil rights beat partly because older, male reporters didn't want it.

Johnson had been covering King and his wife for years by the time she stood outside their home with other journalists on a rainy night in Atlanta following the assassination. From inside, widow Coretta Scott King called out.

"Let Kathryn in," she said. That invitation began a remarkable period in which AP was alone in having a reporter with the King family for five days following the killing.

Johnson called in details for the funeral plans. She watched TV coverage of the assassination with the family, acted as a chauffeur for King's grieving father, cooked breakfast for the family and then greeted former first lady Jackie Kennedy when she arrived on the morning of the funeral.

"I had an apron on and a towel over my hand and she made a beeline for me and she shook my hand to my astonishment," Johnson said in a recent interview in Atlanta. "To this day, I think she thought I was the King's white maid. I was the only white person in the house."

Like many white Southerners of her time, Johnson grew up knowing blacks mainly as people who worked around the homes of whites as cooks or yard help. Her work changed that; she came to see the effects of racism and segregation and the nobility of the cause of freedom.



"It was a life-transforming experience for me," Johnson said.

[Click here](#) for a link to this story. Shared by Valerie Komor, Jay Reeves.

Associated Press journalists Allen G. Breed in Rocky Mount, Virginia; Robert Ray in Atlanta and Gerald Herbert in Kenner, Louisiana, contributed to this report.

It Happened Today - 50 Years Ago

By Gene Herrick ([Email](#))

A white man of questionable character, with a heart of steel, stepped into the bathtub of a starkly barren bathtub of a Memphis, Tennessee flophouse. He was fully clothed.

This man had a purpose.

It was 50 years ago today, but it seems almost like yesterday.

The man had a name, but was a virtual unknown, except maybe to his mother, and a few others who were also questionable.

The man had a rifle. He stepped into the bathtub, fully clothed, laid his rifle on the window sill, took a steady aim through an alley-way at one of four black men standing on the second-floor balcony of the Lorraine Motel. At the right moment, his finger pulled the trigger - BAM!

His aim was perfect. That tragic bullet struck the man in the jaw and severed his spine. The black man died.

That bullet, that shot, changed the face of history.

That bullet ended the life of the man who opened the doors of the Civil Rights Movement, and the man we came to know as The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

King was the young black preacher who started out in Atlanta, but soon went to the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama. At the same time, in Montgomery, a black woman named Rosa Parks, refused to go to the rear black section of a city bus. She was arrested.

That event brought Rev. King out of his pulpit and into the fray of Civil Rights. He too was arrested.

Those two being arrested sent shock waves throughout the country.

Black people, who had suffered the vagaries and humiliation of years, and years, of slavery, rose up in protest. Many white people joined in to show their support. The Civil Rights Movement was born, and on its way to worldwide attention. Dr. King spoke loudly and eloquently from the pulpit and public platforms about the need for equality, but he also used the Mahatma Ghandi passive resistant, non-aggressive means.

In 1968 Dr. King went to Memphis to support the garbage workers strike. Some members of his entourage had, for some time, said that King worried about death, but nevertheless kept on with his challenging movement.

The night before that single, unconscionable bullet ripped through his head, Dr. King gave a talk in Memphis. In what many describe as a powerful voice, one that kept people on the edge of their chairs, Dr. King said, in part, "We've got some difficult days ahead. But it really doesn't matter with me now, because I've been to the mountaintop...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."

It would appear the assassin's bullet quieted the powerful voice of Dr. King, but his words continue to echo through the mountains, and the valleys, and through the hearts of millions of wounded people about whom, and for whom, he fought the battle of racism, and mankind's inequality to each other.

Personally, I was there in Montgomery when Rosa Parks, and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., were arrested.



One of Gene Herrick's most iconic images shows Martin Luther King Jr.'s wife, Coretta, kissing him on the cheek in Montgomery, Ala., in March 1956 after a judge suspended his fine in connection with a boycott of the city's buses.

I was an Associated Press photojournalist. Ironically, I arrived in Memphis just a very few hours after Dr. King was assassinated. It was a time span of 50 years, from the beginning in 1956, until the tragic end in 1968. I remember authoring the pictures of Mrs. Parks being fingerprinted, as well as the one of Dr. King being kissed by his wife, Corretta, among a large group of followers on the courthouse steps. I also clearly remember covering King at his church; one time I was the only white person, and listening to his resounding voice and seeing the total attention of his flock. I remember Easter Sunday, when each black congregant wore a little bamboo cross on their chests. They put a little white strip of tape across the bar, which said, "God Forgive Them." After the service that day, they started leaving by the double front

doors, and were greeted by an angry white mob, which obviously were looking for a fight. The black churchgoers just calmly, in their passive movement way, walked right out into the mob, saying nothing. The mob was dumbstruck, and did them no harm.

I also remember that horrible, haunting feeling I had, when I stood where the killer stood - in the bathtub - and leaned on the windowsill where the gun was rested to fire that single bullet that made such tragic history.

Yes, Dr. King had a dream, a dream of peaceful and equal co-existence of peoples of the world, but we often wonder how he would now see his dream unfolding? One could ask if the world and its massive battles of hatred and killings would be a terrible shock to his dream.

Washington then and now 50 years after MLK death



By AP Images

Violent riots erupted in America's capital in the hours after Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated on April 4, 1968. Grieving and angry, rioters smashed windows, looted

and burned buildings for several days, and at least 10 people lost their lives as a result of the violence.

With the Washington, D.C. police force overwhelmed by the rioting, the federal government deployed the National Guard to protect government buildings and maintain some semblance of order in the city. Soldiers carrying rifles in the streets of the capital became commonplace as officials struggled to calm angry residents.

It took decades for some predominantly black neighborhoods in the District of Columbia to recover from the destruction.

Today, 50 years later, the landscape of the city has changed with newer, more modern buildings replacing the damaged and burned facilities with little trace remaining from the days of rage following Martin Luther King's death.

Read more [here](#). AP Photos by Pablo Martinez Monsivais.

More on Sinclair Broadcasting

My son once worked at a Sinclair station

Jim Spehar ([Email](#)) - My son, an honors grad from Arizona State University's Walter Cronkite School of Journalism, spent a year working at a Sinclair station before moving to a new job in January. He was among many who begrudgingly tolerated the forced commentaries and the resulting dissension in his own local newsroom at being forced to toe the corporate line, even though those commentaries were separated as much as possible from the daily newscasts.

Ironically, it was the \$1,000 "tax cut bonus" he received that helped pay moving expenses to his new job in television news. Sometimes karma is kind.

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Confessions Of A Former Sinclair News Director (HuffPost)

By Aaron Weiss, Guest Writer

I was a Sinclair news director. For a few months, at least.

In 2013, I was a young news director at a struggling small station in the Midwest, having worked my way up the ranks as a producer in larger markets. I'd uprooted my family the year before and moved from the West Coast to "earn my stripes" running a newsroom. I had a small team with a handful of veterans and eager new reporters I enjoyed mentoring.

That fall, Sinclair Broadcast Group bought the station. Sinclair was not a household name at the time, but it did have a reputation in the business for being heavy-handed in station operations and for having a conservative editorial lean. The company first made national headlines when it forced all its stations to run an anti-John Kerry documentary just before the Democratic nominee lost the 2004 presidential election.

Still, I went in with an open mind. As Sinclair prepared to purchase my station, I emailed a colleague to say, "From everything I've seen so far, it's not the evil empire some people think."

It took just a few months to realize how wrong I was.

Read more [here](#). Shared by Richard Chady.

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With Sinclair, We Have Trump TV. America Doesn't Need More. (New York Times)**By Cliff Schechter**

Mr. Schechter was a political analyst for the Sinclair Broadcast Group in 2004.

The Sinclair Broadcast Group, the country's largest television broadcaster with 193 news stations, recently forced local news anchors across the country to read identical scripts.

The anchors warned, without a hint of irony, that "some members of the media use their platforms to push their own personal bias and agenda to control 'exactly what people think.'" It is, they said, "extremely dangerous to a democracy."

Indeed it is. And it is exactly what Sinclair is doing, even as the company is trying to use a regulatory loophole and the President Trump-pliant Federal Communications Commission to acquire 42 more broadcast properties in a \$3.9 billion merger with Tribune Media.

However, the propaganda is not something new; it has been going on for at least a decade and a half now. I know: I once worked there. Sinclair shouldn't be allowed to gobble up another 42 stations to add to its outsize and deleterious role in our civic life.

Read more [here](#). Shared by Sibby Christensen.

To Trump, It's the 'Amazon Washington Post.' To Its Editor, That's Baloney.

By SYDNEY EMBER

The New York Times

Amazon does not own The Washington Post. President Trump, however - impervious to certain facts and armed with a Twitter account - has tried hard to convince the public otherwise.

On more than one occasion, the president has called the newspaper the "Amazon Washington Post." He has also accused it of being used as a "scam" to keep Amazon's taxes low. And on Twitter over the weekend, he escalated his attack, declaring the "Fake Washington Post" a "lobbyist" for Amazon and demanding that it "REGISTER."

Jeff Bezos, the founder and chief executive of Amazon, bought The Post for \$250 million in 2013. Under his ownership, the paper has flourished. Buoyed by new resources, it has added more than 200 newsroom employees and recently surpassed one million digital subscribers.

While Mr. Bezos has reinvigorated The Post, he has found himself vulnerable to the president's attacks. Since 2015, Mr. Trump has linked The Post and Amazon on Twitter a dozen times.

"If @amazon ever had to pay fair taxes, its stock would crash and it would crumble like a paper bag. The @washingtonpost scam is saving it!" Mr. Trump tweeted in December 2015.

"The #AmazonWashingtonPost, sometimes referred to as the guardian of Amazon not paying internet taxes (which they should) is FAKE NEWS!" he wrote in June last year.

"Is Fake News Washington Post being used as a lobbyist weapon against Congress to keep Politicians from looking into Amazon no-tax monopoly?" he tweeted the next month.

How do the president's broadsides play inside The Post's newsroom?

"I don't even know how to describe what goes through my mind," Martin Baron, the paper's executive editor, said in a telephone interview on Monday. "It's completely made up."

Read more [here](#).

Today in History - April 4, 2018



By The Associated Press

Today is Wednesday, April 4, the 94th day of 2018. There are 271 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On April 4, 1968, civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr., 39, was shot and killed while standing on a balcony of the Lorraine Motel in Memphis, Tennessee; his slaying was followed by a wave of rioting (Washington, D.C., Baltimore and Chicago were among cities particularly hard hit). Suspected gunman James Earl Ray later pleaded guilty to assassinating King, then spent the rest of his life claiming he'd been the victim of a setup.

On this date:

In 1818, Congress decided the flag of the United States would consist of 13 red and white stripes and 20 stars, with a new star to be added for every new state of the Union.

In 1841, President William Henry Harrison succumbed to pneumonia one month after his inaugural, becoming the first U.S. chief executive to die in office.

In 1859, "Dixie" was performed publicly for the first time by Bryant's Minstrels at Mechanics' Hall in New York.

In 1864, President Abraham Lincoln, in a letter to Kentucky newspaper editor Albert G. Hodges, wrote: "I claim not to have controlled events, but confess plainly that events have controlled me."

In 1917, the U.S. Senate voted 82-6 in favor of declaring war against Germany (the House followed suit two days later by a vote of 373-50).

In 1933, the Navy airship USS Akron crashed in severe weather off the New Jersey coast with the loss of 73 lives.

In 1949, 12 nations, including the United States, signed the North Atlantic Treaty in Washington, D.C.

In 1958, Johnny Stompanato, an enforcer for crime boss Mickey Cohen and the boyfriend of actress Lana Turner, was stabbed to death by Turner's teenage daughter, Cheryl Crane, who said Stompanato had attacked her mother.

In 1975, more than 130 people, most of them children, were killed when a U.S. Air Force transport plane evacuating Vietnamese orphans crash-landed shortly after takeoff from Saigon. Microsoft was founded by Bill Gates and Paul Allen in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

In 1983, the space shuttle Challenger roared into orbit on its maiden voyage. (It was destroyed in the disaster of January 1986.)

In 1988, the Arizona Senate convicted Gov. Evan Mecham (MEE'-kuhm) of two charges of official misconduct, and removed him from office; Mecham was the first U.S. governor to be impeached and removed from office in nearly six decades.

In 1991, Sen. John Heinz, R-Pa., and six other people, including two children, were killed when a helicopter collided with Heinz's plane over a schoolyard in Merion, Pennsylvania.

Ten years ago: Texas authorities started removing the first of more than 400 girls from a compound built by a polygamist sect. Lisa Montgomery was sentenced to death in Kansas City, Missouri, for killing Bobbie Jo Stinnett (STIN'-net), a mother-to-be, and cutting the surviving baby from her womb. (Montgomery remains on death row.) Pirates seized the French luxury yacht Le Ponant and its 30 crew members off the coast of Somalia. (The crew was released a week later; six alleged pirates ended up being captured.) Beyonce and Jay-Z were married during a private ceremony in New York.

Five years ago: Connecticut Gov. Dannel P. Malloy signed into law sweeping new restrictions on weapons and large capacity ammunition magazines similar to the ones used by the young man who gunned down 20 children and six educators in the Sandy Hook Elementary School massacre. At least 72 people were killed in the collapse of an eight-story residential building being constructed illegally near Mumbai, India's financial capital. Pulitzer Prize-winning film reviewer Roger Ebert, 70, died in Chicago.

One year ago: A chemical attack on an opposition-held town in northern Syria left about 100 people dead; a joint investigation team made up of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and U.N. experts concluded that the Syrian government was responsible. A federal appeals court ruled for the first time that the 1964 Civil Rights Act protected LGBT employees from workplace discrimination; the 8-3 decision by the full 7th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Chicago concerned the case of an Indiana teacher who charged that she wasn't hired full-time because she was a lesbian.

Today's Birthdays: Former Sen. Richard Lugar, R-Ind., is 86. Recording executive Clive Davis is 86. Author Kitty Kelley is 76. Actor Craig T. Nelson is 74. Actor Walter Charles is 73. Actress Christine Lahti is 68. Country singer Steve Gatlin (The Gatlin Brothers) is 67. Actress Mary-Margaret Humes is 64. Writer-producer David E. Kelley is 62. Actress Constance Shulman is 60. Actor Phil Morris is 59. Actress Lorraine Toussaint is 58. Actor Hugo Weaving is 58. Rock musician Craig Adams (The Cult) is 56. Talk show host/comic Graham Norton is 55. Actor David Cross is 54. Actor Robert Downey Jr. is 53. Actress Nancy McKeon is 52. Actor Barry Pepper is 48. Country singer Clay Davidson is 47. Rock singer Josh Todd (Buckcherry) is 47. Singer Jill Scott is 46. Rock musician Magnus Sveningsson (The Cardigans) is 46. Magician David Blaine is 45. Singer Kelly Price is 45. Rhythm-and-blues singer Andre Dalyrimple (Soul For Real) is 44. Country musician Josh McSwain (Parmalee) is 43. Actor James Roday is 42. Actress Natasha Lyonne is 39. Actor Eric Andre is 35. Actress Amanda Righetti is 35. Actress-singer Jamie Lynn Spears is 27. Actress Daniela Bobadilla is 25. Pop singer Austin Mahone (muh-HOHN') is 22.

Thought for Today: "The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy. The true neighbor will risk his position, his prestige and even his life for the welfare of others." - Martin Luther King Jr. (1929-1968).

Got a story or photos to share?

Got a story to share? A favorite memory of your AP days? Don't keep them to yourself. Share with your colleagues by sending to Ye Olde Connecting Editor. And don't forget to include photos!

Here are some suggestions:

- **Second chapters** - You finished a great career. Now tell us about your second (and third and fourth?) chapters of life.

- **Spousal support** - How your spouse helped in supporting your work during your AP career.

- **My most unusual story** - tell us about an unusual, off the wall story that you covered.

- **"A silly mistake that you make"** - a chance to 'fess up with a memorable mistake in your journalistic career.

- **Multigenerational AP families** - profiles of families whose service spanned two or more generations.

- **Volunteering** - benefit your colleagues by sharing volunteer stories - with ideas on such work they can do themselves.

- **First job** - How did you get your first job in journalism?

- **Connecting "selfies"** - a word and photo self-profile of you and your career, and what you are doing today. Both for new members and those who have been with us a while.

- **Most unusual** place a story assignment took you.



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