

Martin Luther King, Jr.

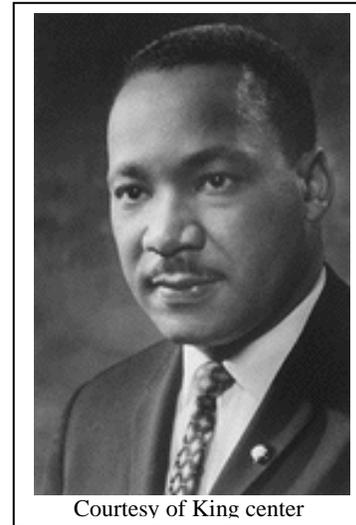
1964

*“It is not enough to say we must not wage war.
It is necessary to love peace and sacrifice for it.”*

Martin Luther King was born in Atlanta, Georgia. He was the son of a pastor. His was pastor of the Ebenezer Baptist Church as was his grandfather. Martin was co-pastor there from 1960 until his death.

He was named Michael when he was born but his name was changed at a young age to Martin. He attended **segregated** public schools in Georgia, and graduated from high school at age fifteen. He graduated from the all African American Morehouse College in Atlanta in 1948. His father and grandfather had graduated from this same school. King was called “ML” by his parents, older brother, and sister.

King’s mother and father taught their children to treat all people with respect. This idea would become an important part of his life. Martin’s father worked hard to break down the barriers between the races. His father strongly believed that African-Americans should vote on issues that were important to them. This idea was passed down to Martin at a very young age.



Courtesy of King center

- Lived 1929-1968
- Civil Rights Leader
- President Southern Christian Leadership Committee
- Leader Montgomery bus boycott
- Anti War Activist during Vietnam War
- Believed in non violence and civil disobedience

*“Everybody can be great
because everybody can
serve ... you only need a
heart full of grace ... a soul
generated by love”*

King studied **theology** for three years at Crozer Theological Seminary in Pennsylvania. He was one of the very few African Americans there. He was elected president of his senior class. There he became interested in the teachings of **Gandhi**, who had struggled to free the people of India from British rule by "peaceful revolution".

King was also inspired by the work of Henry David Thoreau, particularly his essay called “Civil Disobedience.” It stated that if enough people would follow their conscience and disobey unjust laws, they could bring about a peaceful revolution

King attended Boston University for graduate school and received his doctorate there in 1955. He married Coretta Scott, a woman with many intellectual and artistic achievements. Their family had two sons and two daughters.

In 1954 Martin became pastor of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama.

At this time he was a leader in the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). This organization was formed to help African-American people in the United States

In December of 1955 the African-American people of Montgomery began the first nonviolent demonstration of modern times. This was the bus **boycott** of Montgomery. This demonstration was an important **milestone** in Dr. King's involvement with the civil rights movement. The demonstration started with the arrest of Mrs. Rosa Parks. On December 1st, 1955, Mrs. Parks, an African-American seamstress on her way home from work, was arrested for not giving a white bus rider her seat. African-Americans were upset because she and other African Americans had to sit in the back of the bus or stand even when empty seats near the front were unoccupied. A **boycott** of all city busses began. Martin Luther King was designated as the leader of this boycott. The bus boycott lasted 382 days. African-American people in Montgomery walked everywhere rather than ride the bus. They walked great distances in all weather, winter and summer. On December 21, 1956 the Supreme Court of the United States declared the laws requiring segregation on buses were **unconstitutional**. African-Americans and whites then rode the bus as equals. During this demonstration King had been arrested, and his home had been fire bombed. The bus boycott was an important victory for civil rights.

In 1957 King was elected president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, an organization formed to provide leadership for the new civil rights movement.

King took the **ideals** for this organization from his Christian beliefs and the teachings of **Gandhi** who taught nonviolence. From 1957-1968 King traveled over six million miles and spoke over twenty five hundred times about these ideas.

He spoke out when he saw racial injustice and unfairness. He wrote five books and many articles on these issues. Dr. King and the SCLC organized drives for African-American voter registration, desegregation, and better education and housing throughout the South. Dr. King continued to speak out against injustice his entire life.

In February 1959 Dr. and Mrs. King went to India, the homeland of Gandhi, In India Dr. King studied Satyagraha, Gandhi's principle of nonviolence. Dr. King was determined to use Satyagraha as one of the **cornerstones** of civil rights social protest.

In January 1963 Dr. King announced he and the Freedom Fighters would go to Birmingham to fight the segregation laws. An injunction was issued forbidding any demonstrations and Dr. King and the others were arrested.

From his cell he wrote the famous "letter from a Birmingham Jail", a **manifesto** of the African-American Revolution. In his long letter he stated:

"I cannot sit idly by in Atlanta and not be concerned about what happens in Birmingham. Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. Never again can we afford to live with the narrow, provincial "outside agitator" idea. Anyone who lives inside the United States can never be considered an outsider anywhere within its bounds."

His letter discussed the extreme white violence of the south. He also objected that white people were unwilling to change their ideas and behavior in the treatment of African-Americans.

King was a strong advocate for voter registration for African-Americans. He directed a peaceful 1963 march on Washington DC of 250,000 people. At this rally he delivered his "I have a dream" speech. In this speech he shared his vision of an America where racial equality was for all citizens, black and white. He stated:

"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 the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at a table of brotherhood. I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a desert state, sweltering with the heat of injustice and oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice. I have a dream that my four children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character. I have a dream today."

King met with President John F. Kennedy and President Lyndon B. Johnson on these issues. He was arrested more than twenty times and assaulted more than four times as a result of his ideas. He was awarded five honorary degrees, was named Man of the Year by Time magazine in 1963, and became the symbolic leader of American blacks as well as a world figure in the struggle for freedom and peace.

In 1964 he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. He was 35 years old and the youngest man to even receive the award. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for his work in settling racial disputes with nonviolence and his belief in equality.

Dr. King was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize as someone who "had contributed the most to the furtherance of peace among men." Dr. King divided the prize money among various civil rights organizations. In 1964, President Lyndon Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act into law. It guaranteed that "No person in the United States shall, on the ground of race, color, or national origin, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination."

In the winter of 1965 Dr. King led a march from Selma, Alabama to the state capital in Montgomery to demand voting reforms. Six hundred marchers began the march but after six blocks the marchers were met by a small army of police. The police used clubs, whips and tear gas to try to stop the marchers. It was described "as a battle zone." The marchers were driven back as whites on the sidewalks cheered. Two ministers, one white and one African-American, were killed and over seventy were injured with seventeen hospitalized. It was the most violent confrontation Dr. King had experienced

Dr. King believed that poverty caused much of the unrest in America. This poverty was not only in communities for African-Americans, but also neighborhoods of whites, Hispanics, and Asian-Americans. Dr. King believed that the United States involvement in Vietnam was also a mistake. He believed that the Vietnam War was causing conflict in the whole country. Many people were against this war.

This belief against the war caused problems between King and the African-American leaders. They felt that racial problems deserved priority and that the African-American leadership should concentrate on fighting racial injustice at home. By early 1967 Dr. King had become associated with the antiwar movement.

Dr. King continued his campaign for world peace. He traveled across America to support and speak out about civil rights and the rights of the underprivileged

On April 4, 1968, while standing on the balcony of a motel in Memphis, Tennessee King was shot and killed. He was in Memphis to speak in support of city sanitation workers.

In his speech to the Memphis sanitation workers the night before and other community members on April 3, 1968 he stated:

*“And then I got into Memphis.
And some began to say the threats, or talk about the threats that were out.
What would happen to me from some of our sick white brothers?
Well, I don't know what will happen now.
We've got some difficult days ahead.
But it really 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!
And 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!”*

In this speech he urged the Black people of Memphis to boycott businesses that were not treating them fairly, as well as banks, and insurance agencies,

On January 15, Martin Luther King, Jr.'s birthday, the United States celebrates a national holiday in honor of him. Schools are closed so that people may celebrate the life of Martin Luther King, Jr. It is a day of action and remembrance.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. changed the world. His lectures and ideas sparked the conscience of a generation. The movements and marches he led brought significant changes in the direction of American life through his courage and selfless devotion. This devotion led thirteen years of civil rights activities. His **charismatic** leadership inspired men and women, young and old, in this nation and around the world.

Dr. King's ideas inspired the celebration of human worth and the conquest of **subjugation**. It gave black and poor people hope and a sense of dignity. His philosophy of nonviolent direct action, and his strategies for rational and non-destructive social

change, mobilized the conscience of this nation and reordered its priorities. His wisdom, his words, his actions, his commitment, and his dream for a new way of life are intertwined with the American experience and an important part of history.

Suggested Classroom Activities

Martin Luther King, Jr.

Introduction/Warm Up: Use these quotes to discuss or write about Martin Luther King, Jr.

Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.

In the End, we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends.

Life's most persistent and urgent question is, 'What are you doing for others?'

Discussion Questions

1. How did King's family influence his ideas on nonviolence? (Level 1)
2. How did King follow in his father and grandfather's footsteps? (Level 1)
3. What were some of the ways people tried to stop King from his work? (Level 2)
4. Where did King learn of the philosophy of nonviolence? (Level 2)
5. What did King state in his "Letter from the Birmingham jail?"
6. Why did civil rights leaders disagree with King's stand on the Vietnam War? (Level 3)
7. How did King risk his life for his beliefs? (Level 3)
8. How did King's ideas beliefs live on after his death? (Level 3)

Vocabulary Terms:

1. **advocacy**
2. **boycott**
3. **charismatic**
4. **manifesto**
5. **milestone**
6. **theology**
7. **subjugation**
8. **unconstitutional**

Activities

Discuss this excerpt from King's acceptance speech for the Nobel Peace Prize.

Nonviolence is the answer to the crucial political and moral questions of our time: the need for man to overcome oppression and violence without resorting to oppression and

violence. Man must evolve for all human conflict a method which rejects revenge, aggression and retaliation. The foundation of such a method is love.-Martin Luther King, Jr., Nobel Prize acceptance speech, Stockholm, Sweden, December 11, 1964.

Participate in Martin Luther King Jr. Day in January. If your community does not have one organize one for your own school. Create posters and read from his speeches during your school announcements.

Invite a speaker to come and talk about poverty, nonviolence, and racial equality in your community.

Watch “The Long Walk Home”. This movie tells the story of the Montgomery bus boycott. Write a review of the movie.

Volunteer in your community to help improve the lives of others.

Interview someone who lived through the civil rights movement of the 1960’s. Find out about the changes that took place as a result of Martin Luther King’s work and life.

Technology Option:

Listen to the [I Have A Dream Speech](#). Write 3 or more ideas King discussed in this speech. Write your response to this speech. How do you think you would have felt being there as this speech was given? Do you think people who were there were influenced by this speech?

Resources

<http://www.thekingcenter.org/> Speeches, biography, educational activities from the King Center in Atlanta

<http://www.kingian.net/> Site for teens on non violence and the ideas of Martin Luther King Jr.

http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/m/martin_luther_king_jr.html Quotes from King Speeches

http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/ Nobel site for Peace Laureates

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