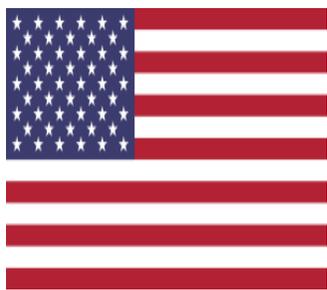


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Martin Luther King Jr. (1929-1968) was a Baptist minister and social activist who played a key role in the American civil rights movement from the mid-1950s until his assassination in 1968. Inspired by advocates of nonviolence such as Mahatma Gandhi, King sought equality for African Americans, the economically disadvantaged and victims of injustice through peaceful protest. He was the driving force behind watershed events such as the Montgomery Bus Boycott and the March on Washington, which helped bring about such landmark legislation as the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. King was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964 and is remembered each year on Martin Luther King Jr. Day, a U.S. federal holiday since 1986. King was posthumously awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom and the Congressional Gold Medal. The Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., was dedicated in 2011.

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Where & when born

King was born on January 15, 1929, in Atlanta, Georgia, to Reverend Martin Luther King, Sr., and Alberta Williams King. King's legal name at birth was Michael King, and his father was also born Michael King, but the elder King changed his and his son's names following a 1934 trip to Germany to attend the Fifth Baptist World Alliance Congress in Berlin. It was during this time he chose to be called Martin Luther King in honor of the German reformer Martin Luther. King had Irish ancestry through his paternal great-grandfather.

Brief history of the person -personal

Martin, Jr., was a middle child, between an older sister, [Willie Christine King](#), and a younger brother, [Alfred Daniel Williams King](#). King liked singing and music. King's mother, an accomplished organist and choir leader, took him to various churches to sing. King said his father regularly whipped him until he was fifteen and a neighbor reported hearing the elder King telling his son "he would make something of him even if he had to beat him to death." When King was a child, he befriended a white boy whose father owned a business near his family's home. When the boys were 6, they attended different schools, with King attending a segregated school for African-Americans. King then lost his friend because the child's father no longer wanted them to play together. King suffered from depression throughout much of his life. In his adolescent years, he initially felt some resentment against whites due to the "racial humiliation" that he, his family, and his neighbors often had to endure in the segregated South. King was originally skeptical of many of Christianity's claims. However, he later concluded that the Bible has "many profound truths which one cannot escape" and decided to enter the [seminary](#).

Growing up in Atlanta, King attended [Booker T. Washington High School](#). He became known for his public speaking ability and was part of the school's debate team. During his junior year, he won first prize in an oratorical contest sponsored by the Negro Elks Club in Dublin, Georgia. Returning home to Atlanta by bus, he and his teacher were ordered by the driver to stand so white passengers could sit down. King refused initially, but complied after his teacher informed him that he would be breaking the law if he did not go along with the order.

At age 15, King passed the exam and entered Morehouse. The summer before his last year at Morehouse, in 1947, an eighteen-year-old King made the choice to enter the ministry after he concluded the church



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offered the most assuring way to answer "an inner urge to serve humanity". King's "inner urge" had begun developing and he made peace with the Baptist Church, as he believed he would be a "rational" minister with sermons that were "a respectful force for ideas, even social protest.

In 1948, he graduated from Morehouse with a B.A. degree in sociology, and enrolled in Crozer Theological Seminary in Chester, Pennsylvania, from which he graduated with a B.Div. degree in 1951. King's father fully supported his decision to continue his education. King was joined in attending Crozer by Walter McCall, a former classmate at Morehouse. At Crozer, King was elected president of the student body.

King married Coretta Scott, on June 18, 1953, on the lawn of her parents' house in her hometown of Heiberger, Alabama. They became the parents of four children: Yolanda King (b. 1955), Martin Luther King III (b. 1957), Dexter Scott King (b. 1961), and Bernice King (b. 1963). During their marriage, King limited Coretta's role in the Civil Rights Movement, expecting her to be a housewife and mother.

King then began doctoral studies in systematic theology at Boston University and received his Ph.D. degree on June 5, 1955, with a dissertation on "A Comparison of the Conceptions of God in the Thinking of Paul Tillich and Henry Nelson Wieman".

King became pastor of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama, when he was twenty-five years old, in 1954. As a Christian minister, his main influence was Jesus Christ and the Christian gospels, which he would almost always quote in his religious meetings, speeches at church, and in public discourses. King's faith was strongly based in Jesus' commandment of loving your neighbor as yourself, loving God above all, and loving your enemies, praying for them and blessing them. His nonviolent thought was also based in the injunction to turn the other cheek in the Sermon on the Mount, and Jesus' teaching of putting the sword back into its place. In his famous Letter from Birmingham Jail, King urged action consistent with what he describes as Jesus' "extremist" love, and also quoted numerous other Christian pacifist authors, which was very usual for him.

In another sermon, he stated:

"Before I was a civil rights leader, I was a preacher of the Gospel. This was my first calling and it still remains my greatest commitment. You know, actually all that I do in civil rights I do because I consider it a part of my ministry. I have no other ambitions in life but to achieve excellence in the Christian ministry. I don't plan to run for any political office. I don't plan to do anything but remain a preacher. And what I'm doing in this struggle, along with many others, grows out of my feeling that the preacher must be concerned about the whole man." —King, 1967

In 1957 he was elected president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, an organization formed to provide new leadership for the now burgeoning civil rights movement. The ideals for this organization he took from Christianity; its operational techniques from Gandhi. In the eleven-year period between 1957 and



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1968, King traveled over six million miles and spoke over twenty-five hundred times, appearing wherever there was injustice, protest, and action; and meanwhile he wrote five books as well as numerous articles. In these years, he led a massive protest in Birmingham, Alabama, that caught the attention of the entire world, providing what he called a coalition of conscience. and inspiring his "Letter from a Birmingham Jail", a manifesto of the Negro revolution; he planned the drives in Alabama for the registration of Negroes as voters; he directed the peaceful march on Washington, D.C., of 250,000 people to whom he delivered his address, "I Have a Dream", he conferred with President John F. Kennedy and campaigned for President Lyndon B. Johnson; he was arrested upwards of twenty times and assaulted at least four times; he was awarded five honorary degrees; was named Man of the Year by Time magazine in 1963; and became not only the symbolic leader of American blacks but also a world figure.

At the age of thirty-five, Martin Luther King, Jr., was the youngest man to have received the Nobel Peace Prize. When notified of his selection, he announced that he would turn over the prize money of \$54,123 to the furtherance of the civil rights movement.

On the evening of April 4, 1968, while standing on the balcony of his motel room in Memphis, Tennessee, where he was to lead a protest march in sympathy with striking garbage workers of that city, he was assassinated.

Career in political

King became a civil rights activist early in his career. On December 1, 1955, Rosa Parks was arrested for refusing to give up her seat. The Montgomery Bus Boycott urged and planned by Nixon and led by King, soon followed. The boycott lasted for 385 days, and the situation became so tense that King's house was bombed. King was arrested during this campaign, which concluded with a United States District Court ruling in *Browder v. Gayle* that ended racial segregation on all Montgomery public buses. King's role in the bus boycott transformed him into a national figure and the best-known spokesman of the civil rights movement. Thus he led the 1955 Montgomery Bus Boycott and in 1957, King, Ralph Abernathy, Fred Shuttlesworth, Joseph Lowery, and other civil rights activists founded the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and King was its first president. The group was created to harness the moral authority and organizing power of black churches to conduct nonviolent protests in the service of civil rights reform.

As the leader of the SCLC, King maintained a policy of not publicly endorsing a U.S. political party or candidate: "I feel someone must remain in the position of non-alignment, so that he can look objectively at both parties and be the conscience of both—not the servant or master of either." In a 1958 interview, he expressed his view that neither party was perfect, saying, "I don't think the Republican party is a party full of the almighty God nor is the Democratic party. They both have weaknesses ... And I'm not inextricably bound to either party.

King organized and led marches for blacks' right to vote, desegregation, labor rights and other basic civil



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rights. Most of these rights were successfully enacted into the law of the United States with the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the 1965 Voting Rights Act. King and the SCLC put into practice many of the principles of the Christian Left and applied the tactics of nonviolent protest with great success by strategically choosing the method of protest and the places in which protests were carried out. There were often dramatic stand-offs with segregationist authorities. Sometimes these confrontations turned violent. Throughout his participation in the civil rights movement, King was criticized by many groups.

The Albany Movement was a desegregation coalition formed in [Albany, Georgia](#), in November 1961. In December, King and the SCLC became involved. The movement mobilized thousands of citizens for a broad-front nonviolent attack on every aspect of segregation within the city and attracted nationwide attention. King returned in July 1962, and was sentenced to forty-five days in jail or a \$178 fine. He chose jail. Three days into his sentence, Police Chief Laurie Pritchett discreetly arranged for King's fine to be paid and ordered his release. After nearly a year of intense activism with few tangible results, the movement began to deteriorate. King requested a halt to all demonstrations and a "Day of Penance" to promote nonviolence and maintain the moral high ground. Divisions within the black community and the canny, low-key response by local government defeated efforts.

In April 1963, the SCLC began a campaign against racial segregation and economic injustice in [Birmingham, Alabama](#). The campaign used nonviolent but intentionally confrontational tactics, developed in part by Rev. [Wyatt Tee Walker](#). During the protests, the Birmingham Police Department, led by [Eugene "Bull" Connor](#), used high-pressure water jets and police dogs against protesters, including children. Footage of the police response was broadcast on national television news and dominated the nation's attention, shocking many white Americans and consolidating black Americans behind the movement. King and the SCLC were criticized for putting children in harm's way. But the campaign was a success: Connor lost his job, the "Jim Crow" signs came down, and public places became more open to blacks. King's reputation improved immensely.

On February 6, 1964, King delivered the inaugural speech of a lecture series initiated at the [New School](#) called "The American Race Crisis". No audio record of his speech has been found, but in August 2013, almost 50 years later, the school discovered an audiotape with 15 minutes of a question-and-answer session that followed King's address. In these remarks, King referred to a conversation he had recently had with [Jawaharlal Nehru](#) in which he compared the sad condition of many African Americans to that of India's [untouchables](#).

In December 1964, King and the SCLC joined forces with the [Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee](#) (SNCC) in [Selma](#), Alabama, where the SNCC had been working on voter registration for several months. A local judge issued an injunction that barred any gathering of 3 or more people affiliated with the SNCC, SCLC, DCVL, or any of 41 named civil rights leaders. This injunction temporarily halted civil rights activity until King defied it by speaking at [Brown Chapel](#) on January 2, 1965



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King, representing the SCLC, was among the leaders of the so-called "Big Six" civil rights organizations who were instrumental in the organization of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, which took place on August 28, 1963. The march did, however, make specific demands: an end to racial segregation in public schools; meaningful civil rights legislation, including a law prohibiting racial discrimination in employment; protection of civil rights workers from police brutality; a \$2 [minimum wage](#) for all workers; and self-government for [Washington, D.C.](#), then governed by congressional committee. Despite tensions, the march was a resounding success. More than a quarter of a million people of diverse ethnicities attended the event, sprawling from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial onto the [National Mall](#) and around the reflecting pool. At the time, it was the largest gathering of protesters in Washington, D.C.'s history.

King delivered a 17-minute speech, later known as "[I Have a Dream](#)". In the speech's most famous passage—in which he departed from his prepared text, possibly at the prompting of [Mahalia Jackson](#), who shouted behind him, "Tell them about the dream!"—King said:

I say to you today, my friends, so even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream.

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 the table of brotherhood.
I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the heat of oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice.
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 skin but by the content of their character.
I have a dream that one day, down in Alabama, with its vicious racists, with its governor having his lips dripping with the words of interposition and nullification; one day right there in Alabama, little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers.

"I Have a Dream" came to be regarded as one of the finest speeches in the history of American oratory. The March, and especially King's speech, helped put civil rights at the top of the agenda of reformers in the United States and facilitated passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964

Acting on James Bevel's call for a march from Selma to Montgomery, King, Bevel, and the SCLC, in partial collaboration with SNCC, attempted to organize the march to the state's capital. The first attempt to march on March 7, 1965, was aborted because of mob and police violence against the demonstrators. This day has become known as [Bloody Sunday](#), and was a major turning point in the effort to gain public support for the Civil Rights Movement. It was the clearest demonstration up to that time of the dramatic potential of King's nonviolence strategy. King, however, was not present

The march finally went ahead fully on March 25, 1965. At the conclusion of the march on the steps of



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the [state capitol](#), King delivered a speech that became known as "[How Long, Not Long](#)". In it, King stated that equal rights for African Americans could not be far away, "because the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.

The SCLC formed a coalition with CCCO, Coordinating Council of Community Organizations, an organization founded by [Albert Raby](#), and the combined organizations' efforts were fostered under the aegis of the [Chicago Freedom Movement](#)

When King and his allies returned to the South, they left [Jesse Jackson](#), a seminary student who had previously joined the movement in the South, in charge of their organization. Jackson continued their struggle for civil rights by organizing the [Operation Breadbasket](#) movement that targeted chain stores that did not deal fairly with blacks

King long opposed American involvement in the Vietnam War, but at first avoided the topic in public speeches. However, at the urging of SCLC's former Director of Direct Action and now the head of the [Spring Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam](#), James Bevel, King eventually agreed to publicly oppose the war as opposition was growing among the American public. King also opposed the Vietnam War because it took money and resources that could have been spent on [social welfare](#) at home.

In 1968, King and the SCLC organized the "Poor People's Campaign" to address issues of economic justice. King traveled the country to assemble "a multiracial army of the poor" that would march on Washington to engage in nonviolent civil disobedience at the Capitol until Congress created an "economic bill of rights" for poor Americans. The campaign culminated in a march on Washington, D.C., demanding economic aid to the poorest communities of the United States.

On March 29, 1968, King went to Memphis, Tennessee, in support of the black sanitary public works employees, represented by [AFSCME](#). On April 3, King addressed a rally and delivered his "I've Been to the Mountaintop" address at [Mason Temple](#),

Then, at 6:01 p.m., April 4, 1968, a shot rang out as King stood on the motel's second-floor balcony. After emergency chest surgery, King died at [St. Joseph's Hospital](#) at 7:05 p.m. The assassination led to a nationwide wave of [race riots](#) in [Washington, D.C.](#); [Chicago](#); [Baltimore](#); [Louisville](#); [Kansas City](#); and dozens of other cities. President Lyndon B. Johnson declared April 7 a national day of mourning for the civil rights leader. Beginning in 1971, cities such as [St. Louis, Missouri](#), and states established annual holidays to honor King. On January 17, 2000, for the first time, Martin Luther King, Jr. Day was officially observed in all fifty U.S. states.



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Leadership qualities

1. Have total commitment.

Dr. King was a man who had a dream bigger than the times in which he lived. He stayed committed to his vision even when he knew it was unpopular and his life was in danger. He was arrested upward of 25 times and assaulted at least four reported times.

2. Embrace fear.

King was scared before every speech and worried that his points wouldn't be well received or that he would be met with violent protests. But he faced his fears head on. King's willingness to embrace his fear is a great lesson for leaders.

3. Disrupt the status quo.

Dr. King knew that his dream was more important than the status quo. His actions shook up the popular culture of the time. Sometimes doing things different is necessary for evolution and innovation. He used the words "creative tension" to explain that fairness and change come only when you shake things up. Dr. King never accepted that just because things were a certain way, it made them right.

4. Paint a vivid picture.

King never grew weary of articulating his dream or vision. He helped his followers to see what he saw.

5. Involve everyone.

King inspired community involvement because people wanted to be part of something bigger than themselves. In business, people really perform when they feel like they are part of something special. King used to say, "People derive inspiration from involvement."

6. Always help others.

We've all heard the term "servant leadership." Well, King had it down to a science. He dedicated his life to helping others, and people would follow him anywhere.

7. Never give up on your dreams.



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King reminds us that even when crawling, the important thing is to keep moving forward. Look, crawling isn't necessarily a dignified position to be in, but if it allows you to continue to move forward and reach your goal, that's what will be remembered. While his life was cut tragically short, he died in pursuit of his dream and in spite of everything he faced, he never gave up on it.

Critical moments in the Movement of Civil Rights

FBI director J. Edgar Hoover personally ordered surveillance of King, with the intent to undermine his power as a civil rights leader. According to the Church Committee, a 1975 investigation by the U.S. Congress, "From December 1963 until his death in 1968, Martin Luther King Jr. was the target of an intensive campaign by the Federal Bureau of Investigation to 'neutralize' him as an effective civil rights leader. The Bureau received authorization to proceed with wiretapping from Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy in the fall of 1963 and informed President John F. Kennedy, both of whom unsuccessfully tried to persuade King to dissociate himself from Stanley Levison, a New York lawyer who had been involved with Communist Party USA. Hoover listed the SCLC as a black nationalist hate group, with the instructions: "No opportunity should be missed to exploit through counterintelligence techniques the organizational and personal conflicts of the leaderships of the groups ... to insure the targeted group is disrupted, ridiculed, or discredited. The FBI feared Levison was working as an "agent of influence" over King, in spite of its own reports in 1963 that Levison had left the Party and was no longer associated in business dealings with them.

In a secret operation code-named "Minaret", the National Security Agency (NSA) monitored the communications of leading Americans, including King, who criticized the U.S. war in Vietnam. A review by the NSA itself concluded that Minaret was "disreputable if not outright illegal

For his part, King adamantly denied having any connections to communism, stating in a 1965 Playboy interview that "there are as many Communists in this freedom movement as there are Eskimos in Florida". However, the civil rights movement arose from activism within the black community dating back to before World War I. King said that "the Negro revolution is a genuine revolution, born from the same womb that produces all massive social upheavals—the womb of intolerable conditions and unendurable situations. However, by 1976 the FBI had acknowledged that it had not obtained any evidence that King himself or the SCLC were actually involved with any communist organizations.

Agents were watching King at the time he was shot. Police officers were stationed in the fire station to keep King under surveillance. Immediately following the shooting, officers rushed out of the station to the motel. Marrell McCollough, an undercover police officer, was the first person to administer first aid to King. The antagonism between King and the FBI, the lack of an all-points bulletin to find the killer, and the police presence nearby led to speculation that the FBI was involved in the assassination.

Principles & Practices

King practiced the following six principles of Non-Violence throughout his life along with helping others, doing things with total commitment and never gave up his dreams for the people of oppressed.

1. Nonviolence is a way of life for courageous people.



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2. Nonviolence means seeking friendship and understanding among those who are different from you.
3. Nonviolence defeats injustice, not people.
4. Nonviolence holds that suffering can educate and transform people and societies.
5. Nonviolence chooses loving solutions, not hateful ones.
6. Nonviolence means the entire universe embraces justice.

Awards and achievements

King was awarded at least fifty honorary degrees from colleges and universities.^[298] On October 14, 1964, King became the youngest recipient of the [Nobel Peace Prize](#), which was awarded to him for leading nonviolent resistance to racial prejudice in the U.S.^[299] In 1965, he was awarded the American Liberties Medallion by the [American Jewish Committee](#) for his "exceptional advancement of the principles of human liberty"

In 1957, he was awarded the [Spingarn Medal](#) from the [NAACP](#).^[302] Two years later, he won the [Anisfield-Wolf Book Award](#) for his book *Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story*.^[303] In 1966, the Planned Parenthood Federation of America awarded King the [Margaret Sanger Award](#) for "his courageous resistance to bigotry and his lifelong dedication to the advancement of social justice and human dignity"

In 1971 he was posthumously awarded a [Grammy Award for Best Spoken Word Album](#) for his *Why I Oppose the War in Vietnam*

In 1977, the [Presidential Medal of Freedom](#) was posthumously awarded to King by President [Jimmy Carter](#). King was second in [Gallup's List of Most Widely Admired People of the 20th Century](#)

In 1980, the U.S. [Department of the Interior](#) designated King's boyhood home in Atlanta and several nearby buildings the [Martin Luther King, Jr. National Historic Site](#).

Literary Works

- [Letter from Birmingham Jail](#)
- [Second Emancipation Proclamation](#)
- [Strength to Love](#)
- [Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story](#)
- [Measure of a Man](#)
- [Why We Can't Wait](#)
- [Conscience for Change \(The Trumpet of Conscience\)](#)

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