

Martin Luther King: the story of struggle against racism

[Sociology](#), [Racism](#)



A famous quote by Martin Luther King Jr. says, "Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that" (King qt. in Mindock). King demonstrated this quote in his daily life while fighting for civil rights. He believed that kindness had a greater impact than being contentious. King was a very important and influential leader in the American civil rights movement. Martin Luther King Jr. made a great impact on the American civil rights movement by providing leadership in the Montgomery Bus Boycott and establishing the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, delivering his famous "I Have a Dream" speech, and many other significant speeches.

Martin Luther King Jr. was born on January 15, 1929, in Atlanta, Georgia as Michael King Jr. He grew up in a middle-class family where his father and maternal grandfather were pastors for Ebenezer Baptist Church. "He never forgot the time when, at about age six, one of his white playmates announced that his parents would no longer allow him to play with King because the children were now attending segregated schools" (Carson and Lewis). King had one of his first experiences of racial segregation when he was six. That experience stuck with him throughout his life. At the age of twelve, he tried to commit suicide by jumping from a second-story window when he learned that his maternal grandmother, who he was very close to, died from a heart attack. He went to Crozer Theological Seminary for three years in Chester, Pennsylvania, where he was introduced to Gandhi's nonviolent philosophy. As a teenager, he changed his name to Martin Luther King Jr. because he was inspired by Martin Luther.

One important movement that King led was the Montgomery Bus Boycott. The Montgomery Improvement Association was formed by activists to boycott the transit system, so they chose King as their leader. “ He had the advantage of being a young, well-trained man who was too new in town to have made enemies; he was generally respected, and it was thought that his family connections and professional standing would enable him to find another pastorate should the boycott fail” (Carson and Lewis). King was a great leader for the boycott because he didn’t have enemies yet and if it failed, he could find another pastor to lead. “ We have no alternative but to protest. For many years we have shown amazing patience. We have sometimes given our white brothers the feeling that we liked the way we were being treated. But we come here tonight to be saved from that patience that makes us patient with anything less than freedom and justice” (King qt. in Mindock). King says that they have been patient, but they should start to stand up for themselves so they can achieve justice. King’s family’s safety was threatened, but he kept leading the boycott for a year until the buses were desegregated.

Another influential movement that King provided leadership for was the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. The Southern Christian Leadership Conference was formed in 1957 as a nonviolent organization for “redeeming ‘ the soul of America’” (“ Southern Christian Leadership Conference”). The SCLC wanted to bring America back to how it started, with freedom. King stated, “ This conference is called because we have no moral choice, before God, but to delve deeper into the struggle—and to do so with

greater reliance on non-violence and with greater unity, coordination, sharing and Christian understanding” (King qt. in “ Southern Christian Leadership Conference”). King believed that they must rely on nonviolence and unity to help them to obtain civil rights. Their first campaign was the Crusade for Citizenship. They wanted to be able to vote as a start to convince the nation to change its current conditions. They also helped with the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom and other local movements for voting rights.

“ I Have a Dream” is one of the most famous speeches in history delivered by Martin Luther King Jr. during the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom in 1963. The founding fathers signed a promissory note that granted freedom and opportunities (“ I Have a Dream’ Speech”). “ Instead of honoring this sacred obligation, America has given the Negro people a bad check, a check which has come back marked ‘ insufficient funds” (King qt. in “ I Have a Dream’ Speech”). King stated that the country had not carried out what they agreed to by treating the African Americans with less respect than other white people. Halfway through the speech, Mahalia Jackson told King to tell them about his dream, which led him to repeat the phrase “ I have a dream” throughout the rest of the speech. King stated during the speech, “ 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” (King qt. in “ I Have a Dream’ Speech”). King believed that one day there could be enough peace that his children would be able to have the same opportunities given to white children.

Before King's assassination in April of 1968, he led a group of sanitation workers who were striking. Henry Loeb became mayor in 1968 and lowered the pay for black sanitation workers, including suspension of overtime pay. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People supported the strike. The City Council voted to increase the pay for the black sanitation workers, but Loeb rejected their vote and insisted that only he could increase their wages. " You are demonstrating that we can stick together. You are demonstrating that we are all tied in a single garment of destiny and that if one black person suffers if one black person is down, we are all down" (King qt. in " Memphis Sanitation Workers' Strike"). After everyone joined in the strike to support the sanitation workers, King pointed out that if the African Americans stick together, they can achieve their goals". We've got to give ourselves to this struggle until the end. Nothing would be more tragic than to stop at this point in Memphis. We've got to see it through" (King qt. in " Memphis Sanitation Workers' Strike"). King inspired others to persevere through their fight for civil rights.

King was shot while standing on his second-floor balcony at the Lorraine Motel in Memphis, Tennessee at 6: 05 pm on Thursday, April 4, 1968. A policeman found a 30. 06 Remington rifle next to the motel that led the FBI to James Earl Ray, a fugitive from prison in Missouri, who had fingerprints in an apartment in Atlanta, Georgia. They found out that he had rented a room in a motel on the second floor facing the Lorraine Motel across the street. James Earl Ray was brought over from Britain for his trial. He pleaded guilty and was sentenced to ninety-nine years in prison, but later recanted his

confession. The jury would not reopen his case, so he died in prison on April 23, 1998. At King's funeral, a tape recording was played where King said, "I'd like somebody to mention that day that Martin Luther King, Jr., tried to give his life serving others" (King qt. in "Assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr").

Martin Luther King Jr. served as an influential leader in many aspects of the American civil rights movement. King provided leadership during the Montgomery Bus Boycott and for the Southern Christian Leadership Association. He also delivered "I Have a Dream," one of the most famous speeches in history. Before he was assassinated in 1968 at the Lorraine Hotel, he was a leader in the Memphis Sanitation Workers' Strike. While there are still problems with racism today, Martin Luther King Jr. played an important role in gaining the same rights that white people had for the African Americans who lived in America.