

Martin luther king junior is a giant in american history

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**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Martin Luther King Junior is a giant in American History. He was a famous leader within the American Civil Rights movement of the 1950's and 1960's and helped lead the way for many improvements for African Americans as they sought to realize their human and civil rights which were guaranteed them under the Constitution of the United States. In trying to secure his civil rights and the rights of all peoples of the United States, he succeeded where other factional parties failed. While the Black Panthers, Marcus Garvey and Malcolm X preached separatism and sometimes hate, Martin Luther King, building upon the teachings of Jesus Christ and his own background as a Baptist minister, taught love and to turn the other cheek, but at the same time, never giving up on what they knew to be right.

Martin Luther King's political life began in 1955 with his leadership in the Montgomery Bus Boycott. On December 1, 1955, Rosa Parks was arrested for refusing to comply with the Jim Crow law which prohibited blacks from sitting anywhere on a bus other than in the back. Also, within these Jim Crow laws, an African American would be forced to give up that seat to a white man if there was limited room on the bus.

The Montgomery Bus Boycott soon followed. Incidentally, earlier that year, the same thing had happened to a 15 year old girl named Claudette Colvin but King was not prompted to get involved in this case, instead opting to concentrate on the running of his church. But this time, King felt that it was necessary to take a stand. And a stand would be required. The bus system was patronized by African Americans to a great degree. And with there being no set date on when the boycott would end and if it would be successful at

all, a great sacrifice was going to have to be made. The boycott ended up lasting 382 days.[1] It was only then that the bus system of Montgomery, almost bankrupt by their sharp decline in revenue, decided to integrate all of their buses. The boycott had become a success and with it, the name of Martin Luther King had become a household name within the African American community.

Dr. King was also instrumental in the Southern Christian Leadership Conference or the SCLC. This group, popular among both white and black college students, harnessed the moral authority and organized black churches to conduct non-violent protests in the service of civil rights reform. The key to this method was the use of nonviolence. Dr. King was always insistent on this tactic be kept as central to their methods.

The main target of these non violent protests was the Jim Crow laws which had attempted to keep African Americans in a quasi state of slavery after the Civil War and which had been very hesitant to yield any power over to the black community within the Southern States. Dr. King also knew that these methods, especially on a large scale, would yield a fair amount of press coverage which would work in their favor within the country as a whole. Newspaper, radio and television accounts of the deprivations and inequalities suffered by African Americans helped to shed light on a subject that a good portion of the white community was not fully aware of and needed to be reminded if they were ever going to get involved themselves or at the very least, be sympathetic about the cause.

This involvement hit its peak on an August day in 1963 when it was later estimated that over 250,000 people came to march on Washington.[2] The main speaker of the day was Martin Luther King Junior in what contemporary historians have finally come to recognize as one of the most important speeches in not only American History but also world history as his words that day have been quoted by leaders of any country or group that have sought to secure their civil rights. In that speech, Dr. King spoke on the need for people to be judged on the content of their character and not on the color of their skin. As it was too often the case, African Americans would be met with a great deal of assumptions about every aspect of their life by white people who had never really known a black person and therefore, their judgment was based upon ignorance rather than on facts.

Dr. King wished to change this impediment into successful race relations and harmony among all of God's peoples on this earth. The title of the speech was "I Have a Dream." It was a theme that he had spoke on before. He never said it better than on that day. It was the realization that proper race relations could be realized in the future if people came to the realization that they could work together, play together, cry together and pray together and that each person had similar wants and dreams within their own life and for the life of their children. It was this speech, along with his efforts to pass the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Voting Rights Act, the most important civil rights bill in a hundred years, since the passage of the 13th amendment, ending slavery in the United States.[3] These rights helped to close the gap between what was promised to African Americans and the rights that they

actually received. Chief among them: the right to vote which had been greatly curtailed with the implementation of the oppressive Jim Crow laws.

Civil rights for any people cannot be discussed when there is a major difference in the amount of monetary compensation that one receives which is much less than is paid out to somebody of another race. The march on Washington in August of 1963 did not just talk about an idealistic hope of the future but also dealt in some hard facts. Within that speech, were a number of specific demands. One of these demands called for the end of racial discrimination in employment.[4]

There was no affirmative action and employers were not pressured to hire African Americans, let alone hire African Americans because they felt that the individual was the most qualified. If the hiring was against the wishes of the employer or if he thought that such a hiring would decrease his business by inciting reprisal from his area, the African American would not be employed. This kept the possibility of African Americans pulling themselves out of poverty and menial jobs, to a minimum and frustration to a maximum. The SDLC was instrumental in setting up protests in the city of New York with signs that read "Don't buy where you can't work." [5] If there were not laws that helped end employment discrimination, then the next logical step was to hit these businesses, King thought, in the pocket book as was done during the Montgomery Bus Boycott.

Economic problems for the African American was a source of concern for Dr. King and many of his speeches are concerning this. King had read Karl Marx while at college and while he could not support the link to atheism that

communism has, he rejected traditional capitalism and sometimes, spoke of his support for a democratic form of socialism. The distribution of wealth for the African American was definitely an impediment to their success. Dr. King spoke to this problem: You can't talk about solving the economic problem of the Negro without talking about billions of dollars.

You can't talk about the ending of the slums without first saying profit must be taken out of the slums. You're really tampering and getting on dangerous ground because you are messing with folk then. You are messing with captains of industry... Now this means that we are treading in difficult water, because it really means that we are saying that something is wrong with capitalism... There must be a better distribution of wealth and maybe America must move toward a democratic socialism.”[6] Dr. King often said that the United States was on the wrong side of revolution in the world. The United States would support the revolt of “ the shirtless and barefoot people” of the world but seemed to turn a blind eye towards the problems that a large segment of their own population was enduring right here in America. Economic problems for the African American, Dr. King recognized, was at the center of the frustration that black people felt and the disillusion that they felt in America's democratic and economic success.

This press towards economic equality was part of Dr. King's passion until the end of his life. Dr. King also pushed for the passage of what was known as the Poor People's Bill of Rights. This called for a massive increase in government jobs programs which would be designed to rebuild America's inner cities and to finally do away with the slums of America which were

serving as an impediment to the success of the African American as it could only breed more poverty as well as disunion within one's own country.[7] Dr. King saw the need as well, to confront Congress' hostility to the poor and the fact that billions of dollars were being spent to fund the war in Vietnam but only a small percentage of that money was actually being used to rebuild the infrastructure of cities right here in America. King saw a vision for change that engulfed many aspects of life and sources of trouble and pain for the African American. Poverty, racism, the government's importance on militarism and materialism as well as the need to reconstruct society were all passions of Dr. King which he felt was worthy enough of becoming his life work.

Dr. King was a man who became famous and more importantly influential, because of his mind and heart acting as one. There have been smarter people than Dr. King but none have been as effective because they could spark the passions of a country in the way that Dr. King did. Dr. King was the recipient of the 1964 Nobel Peace Award to which he told his friends and family, he was not proud of receiving this award. He also won the 1965 American Jewish Committee award for exceptional advancement of the principle of human liberty. Dr. King was not the first person to recognize the inequality that was present in the lives of African Americans but there were none that put that pain into the series of effective sentences and themes to which he was able to formulate.

This takes a mind that is able to encompass a wide range of ideas and theories. Dr. King took his inspiration from the Bible and the teachings of Jesus as he was a Baptist preacher before he was a civil rights leader. But he

also read Marx and was inspired by the non violence tactics of Gandhi as he led India against British colonist in the 1940's. This makes an intellectual: "one who gathers among himself, a wide range of ideals and motivations and through a careful study of a specific problem, learns to use what he will to his advantage and the advantage of his people for the greater good of society." [8] The Black Panthers certainly didn't do this and Malcolm X did to a degree but not in the way and not to the degree that Martin Luther King did. And that made all the difference.

King also received a long list of other prestigious awards. In 1971, he won a Grammy for the Best Spoken Word in *Why I Oppose Vietnam* and was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom. He is also the author of a number of important and influential books as well which he wrote during his time as the leader of the American Civil Rights Movement. Some of these were *The Stride Toward Freedom* (1958) which detailed the Montgomery Bus Boycott. *Where do we go from here: Chaos or Community?* (1967) This book answered some his critics, including influential Black Panther leader Hoagie Carmichael, in why violent tactics in the attempt to gain civil rights would only lead to chaos and a step back within the civil rights movement.

However, in later years, his intellectual skills within his writings and books have come under scrutiny. Beginning in the 1980's, questions were being raised as to the authenticity of King's writings as there was suspicion of plagiarism within some of his speeches. Even his doctoral dissertation which he wrote while attending Boston University was examined and it was

asserted that a sizable portion of his writings (25%) had under them a suspicion of plagiarism.

University officials within Boston College came to that conclusion after a lengthy investigation. It was also recognized that Dr. King got his material from a number of black as well as white preachers on the radio and was accused of passing off those words and ideas as his own. But it has also been pointed out that within African American folk preaching and the oral traditions, that often times the ideas of one are fine tuned and changed slightly in order to fit the audience to which Dr. King was speaking. Despite Boston University's own opinion about these speeches, Dr. King's degree was not revoked because the officials still believed that the speeches still made an important contribution to the academic world.

Dr. King was an intellectual but also a man of the people. Dr. King had a keen understanding of the plight of the African American because he was black, but more importantly he was able to transpose himself into the life and troubles of a garbage worker in Memphis or an elderly lady going home after a hard day at work and simply not wanting to give up her seat to a man simply because he is white. Even with all of the awards that he won and the books that he wrote, this still remained the case until his death in 1968.

Dr. King, by the very nature of his work, was a man that possessed a great social consciousness. Always on the side of the oppressed, Dr. King still continued to recognize the importance of continuing his stance on non violence in order to obtain civil rights for African Americans. This, along with his superior ability as an orator, helped to make him so effective. He knew

that he would never be taken seriously and his message would never be able to resonate within the white majority if he had preached separatism or the idea that all white people were devils as Malcolm X did for a good portion of his time as the leader of the Nation of Islam.

King knew, and genuinely felt, that it was not the race of an individual but rather racism, discrimination, and inner prejudice which served as the chief impediment towards one being able to love and respect their fellow human being. Setting the civil rights problem as a moral issue, was able to resonate among many more people than if he had listened to the Black Panthers or angry African American young people who chided him for what was seen as his weakness of non-violence. Due to this, many young people as well as students, professors, and others who perhaps had never before been motivated to take a stand for anything before in their lives, flocked to King's speeches, protests, and marches. This is the work of a man who knew how to use the crowd and their underlying sense of morality, to aid in the securing of civil rights for all peoples within America. The Civil Rights Movement centered on the social injustices that many African Americans were facing in every pocket of the United States.

But it would also be Dr. King's feelings on Vietnam that would prompt him to alienate himself from a large majority, the "silent majority" as President Nixon labeled them, that was in support of the War in Vietnam and therefore, against the harsh criticism that Dr. King levied against the government's role in that conflict. To be socially conscious does not necessarily mean that one is only aware of what is happening within one's own town, state, or country.

but the injustice that are occurring anywhere in the world. Not since The Civil War has a conflict polarized the country to the degree that The Vietnam War was able to place upon the country. " And by 1965, Dr. King was vocal in his opposition to the war and America's heavy involvement in that conflict in which he saw thousands of poor African Americans, unable to secure a seat in a college university and escape the draft, be sent to the front lines and fight and die for a country that has treated them often times, as second class citizens." [9]

This at a time when billions of dollars are being spent to fund this war, when Dr. King saw dozens of other more worthy projects in which the money could be spent to better the lives of not only African Americans but poor whites and Latinos within America's poorest cities. And Dr. King was all too aware of the fact that these poor cities and the lack of opportunities for the above mentioned only breeds frustration which often times lead to crime and a cyclical effect upon the next generation is often times too strong to avoid. It is this level of social consciousness that helped endear Dr. King to the masses of African Americans, not only during his short time as leader of the civil rights movement but which continues to this day as well. He often times makes the list of the most important and revered figures in American history. His ability of being conscious of the social ills that befell many African Americans and being able to put those struggles into words is one of his most enduring qualities.

Dr. King was so effective a leader of the civil rights movement because he was a great orator. If the masses, both then and now were not inspired by

his speeches and written word, Dr. King would have become as successful as Ralph Abernathy or Jesse Jackson. Anyone in a leadership position at such a crucial time within the civil rights movement would have gained some degree of recognition but Dr. King would never have reached the level of greatness that he did if he was a poor orator or writer.

His Letter from a Birmingham Jail as well as his "I Have a Dream Speech" are seen as masterpieces to be studied in history as well as political science and English classes all over America and the world. The success of his academic works comes from the fact that he writes and speaks with such passion. During his "I Have a Dream Speech," King knew exactly the right time to increase the volume of his diction and when to speak in a calm yet assertive way. If he had shouted the entire speech or had given a meeker version of the speech, it still would have been regarded as important but it could never have risen to the level of greatness which that speech has enjoyed these past forty years.

His text as well as his diction and delivery were all flawless. Great orators are also great writers on many occasions. Both Abraham Lincoln and Winston Churchill were methodical in the preparation of their speeches and would practice each speech numerous times as they debated over each and every word within their speech.[10] This was the case with Dr. King. Each speech, especially his "I Have a Dream Speech" as well as his acceptance speech at the Nobel Peace Prize ceremony, had within its pages, every word in its specific order, the way in which Dr. King felt his messages would be most effectively portrayed to his audience.

And also, speeches whose contents were not practiced to the same degree and repetition are also wonderful as well because Dr. King spoke from the heart, from his experiences and he knew his crowd. This was never seen better than in the last speech he would ever make. On April 3rd, 1968 at Mason Temple, King gave a prophetic speech: it doesn't really matter to me now.... 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 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. My eyes have seen the Glory of the coming of the Lord"[11] Such a speech, if anyone has had the pleasure to view it, cannot help but be moved. But the fact that Dr. King was assassinated the very next day, makes the speech that night as well as what makes up the body of his works, that much more important to be saved and remembered.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was an essential figure in American History and specifically, the Civil Rights Movement. His speeches have been repeated by every leader of every movement that has sought to secure for its people, equal rights and equal treatment under the law. His importance cannot be underestimated as he took his political, social, economic, intellectual and artistic understandings and molded them together to form a man who was aware of the plight of the poor and oppressed and was able to capture that pain and put it into words in order that the nation as a whole might understand that pain, in a more real, human and affective way than perhaps

anyone in American history. And those are the reasons why Dr. Martin Luther King Junior is the great man that he was and which makes him motivate people forty years after his premature death.

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