

Brief Bio: Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Born on January 15, 1929, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was the third generation of men in his family to graduate from Morehouse College with honors. He stood out for his academic excellence and went on to earn his doctorate from Boston University. He met and married Coretta Scott in Boston, and they raised two daughters and two sons together. King became pastor of a Baptist church in Montgomery, Alabama in 1954.

Upset by the unfair ways that African Americans were treated, King decided to become actively involved in fighting for their civil rights. He was a member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, often known today by the initials: NAACP. In 1955, when Rosa Parks was arrested because she would not give up her bus seat to a white passenger, King led a non-violent bus boycott that lasted 382 days. Despite dangerous attacks on his church, his home, and his family, King never lost faith or determination. Though his home was bombed and he was arrested, he fearlessly led the movement. The boycott was a success, ending the separation of races on public transport, and making the nation aware of the need for civil rights reform.

Elected as the president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, King used the peaceful methods of another important human rights activist, Mahatma Gandhi, which he combined with his own Christian faith, to promote equal rights for all races of people. He traveled around the country, giving speeches and writing articles and books. He organized opportunities for African Americans to register to vote.

Dr. King's most famous speech was in front of over 250,000 people who gathered at the March on Washington. In his speech, King spoke about his dream. He dreamed that his descendants would one day live in a world where they would be judged by their accomplishments, not by the color of their skin. His inspirational words are still some of the most quoted today. He met with Presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson. His mission caused him to be arrested by some, and honored by others.

When King was a young 35 years old, he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. He donated the money earned from the prize back into the fight for civil rights. Had Dr. King been able to live out his full life, there is no doubt he would have continued to be a positive force for change during the Civil Rights Movement.

Unfortunately, his life was cut short by an assassin's bullet. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. died on April 4, 1968 in Memphis, Tennessee, where he was preparing to lead another protest march for the rights of workers who were being unfairly treated. Each January, we celebrate his birthday to honor his dream, and remember all that he did to protect the rights of all of the people of the United States.