



LEADERS TO FOLLOW

DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. AND FREEDOM

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Martin Luther King, Jr., (January 15, 1929-April 4, 1968) was born Michael Luther King, Jr., but later had his name changed to Martin. His grandfather began the family's long tenure as pastors of the Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, serving from 1914 to 1931; his father has served from then until the present, and from 1960 until his death Martin Luther acted as co-pastor. Martin Luther attended segregated public schools in Georgia, graduating from high school at the age of fifteen; he received the B. A. degree in 1948 from Morehouse College, a distinguished Negro institution of Atlanta from which both his father and grandfather had graduated. After three years of theological study at Crozer Theological Seminary in Pennsylvania where he was elected president of a predominantly white senior class, he was awarded the B.D. in 1951. With a fellowship won at Crozer, he enrolled in graduate studies at Boston University, completing his residence for the doctorate in 1953 and receiving the degree in 1955. In Boston he met and married Coretta Scott, a young woman of uncommon intellectual and artistic attainments. Two sons and two daughters were born into the family.

In 1954, Martin Luther King became pastor of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama. Always a strong worker for civil rights for members of his race, King was, by this time, a member of the executive committee of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the leading organization of its kind in the nation. He was ready, then, early in December, 1955, to accept the leadership of the first great Negro nonviolent demonstration of contemporary times in the United States, the bus boycott described by Gunnar Jahn in his presentation speech in honor of the laureate. The boycott lasted 382 days. On December 21, 1956, after the Supreme Court of the United States had declared unconstitutional the laws requiring segregation on buses,



Negroes and whites rode the buses as equals. During these days of boycott, King was arrested, his home was bombed, he was subjected to personal abuse, but at the same time he emerged as a Negro leader of the first rank.

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 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.



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MLK, Jr. and Freedom

By Sara Tusek

I was a senior in high school, just getting ready to leave Louisville for New York City, when the unthinkable happened. The great civil rights leader, the Christian preacher, the winner of the Nobel Peace Prize, had been shot while taking a breath of air on the balcony of a segregated motel in Memphis. The assassin was believed to be James Earl Ray, an escaped convict who purchased the rifle found near the assassination scene and was caught in flight two months later. On April 4, 1968, Dr. Martin Luther King was pronounced dead at St. Joseph's Hospital in Memphis.

It was a blow that the nation felt to the bone. Riots broke out in 110 American cities, with fires, looting and deaths. The National Guard and federal troops augmented local police efforts to restrain the anger and grief unleashed by the hate-filled murder of a man who sought reconciliation and justice for everyone.

Personally, I was sick at heart. My confidence in my country's good will was shaken, and my belief that people could act reasonably was brought into serious question. Dr. King was not proposing a radical break with the past when he asked for equality under the law for all people, of all races; he was simply affirming the words of the U.S. Declaration of Independence: "all men are created equal."

Dr. King became a martyr, and, like all martyrs, was an inspirational figure who pushed people into change. Some felt shamed that King was killed by a white man; others felt pride that King had elevated the reputation of Blacks through his political, social, religious and educational achievements. These emotions kept the



civil rights movement alive after King's death; the Equal Opportunity Act, federal programs for disadvantaged children and a conscientious effort to right the wrongs of the past have resulted in a much more just and free United States of America. As Irish singer Bono of U2 sings of Dr. King:

*Early morning, April 4
Shot rings out in the Memphis sky
Free at last, they took your life
They could not take your pride

In the name of love
One more in the name of love
In the name of love
What more in the name of love?*

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