

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Class: \_\_\_\_\_

# Martin Luther King, Jr.

By USHistory.org  
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*Martin Luther King, Jr. was an integral part of the Civil Rights Movement, a social movement in the United States that worked to end racial segregation and discrimination against African Americans. King's contributions to this movement continue to be felt today and inspire others to combat inequality through nonviolence. As you read, identify the tools and strategies that Dr. King used to help bring about positive changes in America.*

[1] As the leader of the nonviolent Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s, Martin Luther King, Jr. traversed<sup>1</sup> the country in his quest for freedom. His involvement in the movement began during the bus boycotts<sup>2</sup> of 1955 and was ended by an assassin's bullet in 1968.



*"Martin Luther King Jr. St Paul Campus U MN" by Minnesota Historical Society is licensed under CC BY-SA 2.0*

As the unquestioned leader of the peaceful Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was at the same time one of the most beloved and one of the most hated men of his time. From his involvement in the Montgomery bus boycott in 1955 until his untimely death in 1968, King's message of change through peaceful means added to the movement's numbers and gave it its moral strength. The legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr. is embodied<sup>3</sup> in these two simple words: equality and nonviolence.

King was raised in an activist family. His father was deeply influenced by Marcus Garvey's<sup>4</sup> Back to Africa Movement<sup>5</sup> in the 1920s. His mother was the daughter of one of Atlanta's most influential African American ministers. As a student, King excelled. He easily moved through grade levels and entered Morehouse College, his father's alma mater,<sup>6</sup> at the age of fifteen. Next, he attended Crozer Theological Seminary, where he received a Bachelor of Divinity<sup>7</sup> degree. While he was pursuing his doctorate at Boston University, he met and married Coretta Scott. After receiving his Ph.D. in 1955, King accepted an appointment to the Dexter Street Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama.

1. **Traverse (verb):** to travel across or through
2. **Boycott (noun):** an act of refusing to use, buy, or deal with a person, organization, or country as a form of protest
3. **Embody (verb):** to represent (something) in a clear and obvious way
4. Marcus Mosiah Garvey was a Jamaican political leader, journalist, and public speaker.
5. The "Back to Africa Movement" in America was a movement that encouraged those of African descent to return to the African homeland of their ancestors.
6. "Alma mater" refers to the school, college, or university that someone attended.
7. Divinity is the formal study of religion, religious practices, and religious beliefs

After his organization of the bus boycott, King formed the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, which dedicated itself to the advancement of rights for African Americans. In April 1963, King organized a protest in Birmingham, Alabama, a city King called "the most thoroughly segregated<sup>8</sup> city in the United States." Since the end of World War II, there had been 60 unsolved bombings of African American churches and homes.

- [5] Boycotts, sit-ins and marches were conducted. When Bull Connor, head of the Birmingham police department, used fire hoses and dogs on the demonstrators, millions saw the images on television. King was arrested. But support came from around the nation and the world for King and his family. Later in 1963, he delivered his famous "I Have a Dream" speech to thousands in Washington, D.C.

After the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964,<sup>9</sup> King turned his efforts to registering African American voters in the South. In 1965, he led a march in Selma, Alabama, to increase the percentage of African American voters in Alabama. Again, King was arrested. Again, the marchers faced attacks by the police. Tear gas, cattle prods, and billy clubs<sup>10</sup> fell on the peaceful demonstrators. Public opinion weighed predominantly<sup>11</sup> on the side of King and the protesters. Finally, President Johnson ordered the National Guard to protect the demonstrators from attack, and King was able to complete the long march from Selma to the state capital of Montgomery. The action in Selma led to the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965.<sup>12</sup>

Early in the morning of April 4, 1968, King was shot by James Earl Ray. Spontaneous violence spread through urban areas as mourners unleashed their rage at the loss of their leader. Rioting burst forth in many American cities.

But the world never forgot his contributions. Time magazine had named him "Man of the Year" in 1963. In 1964, he won the Nobel Peace Prize and was described as "the first person in the Western world to have shown us that a struggle can be waged without violence." In 1977, he was posthumously<sup>13</sup> awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom,<sup>14</sup> the highest award a civilian American can earn. In the 1980s, his birthday became a national holiday, creating an annual opportunity for Americans to reflect on the two values he dedicated his life to advancing: equality and nonviolence.

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8. separated based on race, ethnicity, religion, etc.; referring to the historical segregation of black and white people in the U.S.
  9. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 outlawed discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin.
  10. another name for a baton used by law enforcement
  11. **Predominantly (adverb)**: for the most part, mainly
  12. a law in the United States that prohibits racial discrimination in voting
  13. following death, often awarded or published after death
  14. The Presidential Medal of Freedom is awarded to individuals who have made exceptional contributions to the security or national interest of the United States.

## Text-Dependent Questions

**Directions:** For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: Which statements identifies the central idea of the text?
  - A. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s commitment to nonviolent protest resulted in many achievements for African Americans during the Civil Rights Movement.
  - B. Despite Martin Luther King, Jr.'s passion for nonviolent protest, nonviolent protests were not enough to achieve what activists desired during the Civil Rights Movement.
  - C. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s opinions and dreams were not widely accepted during his time.
  - D. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s fight for equal rights for African Americans was supported by the government, both nationally and locally.
  
2. PART B: Which detail from the text best supports the answer to Part A?
  - A. "Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was at the same time one of the most beloved and one of the most hated men of his time." (Paragraph 2)
  - B. "Since the end of World War II, there had been 60 unsolved bombings of African American churches and homes." (Paragraph 4)
  - C. "Finally, President Johnson ordered the National Guard to protect the demonstrators from attack, and King was able to complete the long march from Selma to the state capital of Montgomery." (Paragraph 6)
  - D. "In 1964, he won the Nobel Peace Prize and was described as 'the first person in the Western world to have shown us that a struggle can be waged without violence.'" (Paragraph 8)
  
3. PART A: How does paragraph 3 contribute to the development of ideas in the text?
  - A. It proves how intelligent Martin Luther King Jr. was from a young age.
  - B. It shows how many world leaders ended up impacting the Civil Rights Movement.
  - C. It shows how Martin Luther King Jr.'s upbringing contributed to his commitment to activism and religious leadership.
  - D. It shows that Martin Luther King, Jr.'s beliefs were not his own, but that his ideas were largely borrowed from other lesser-known leaders.
  
4. PART B: Which quote from paragraph 3 best supports the answer to Part A?
  - A. "King was raised in an activist family. His father was deeply influenced by Marcus Garvey's Back to Africa Movement in the 1920s."
  - B. "As a student, King excelled. He easily moved through grade levels and entered Morehouse College, his father's alma mater, at the age of fifteen."
  - C. "While he was pursuing his doctorate at Boston University, he met and married Coretta Scott."
  - D. "After receiving his Ph.D. in 1955, King accepted an appointment to the Dexter Street Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama."

5. How does the author support the idea that Martin Luther King, Jr. significantly contributed to African Americans' rights?

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