

Martin Luther King

Martin Luther King was born in Atlanta, Georgia, in the USA on 15th January 1929. After finishing college in 1948, he went on to become a Christian Minister.

Martin Luther King believed strongly in using non-violent protest to improve life for black people in America, who, at the time, were forced to go to separate schools and to give up their seats on public transport if a white person got on. This method of separating different people because of their skin colour was known as segregation. People like Martin Luther King were known as civil rights campaigners. This meant they wanted a more just society, with people from all ethnic backgrounds treated equally. They wanted an end to segregation.

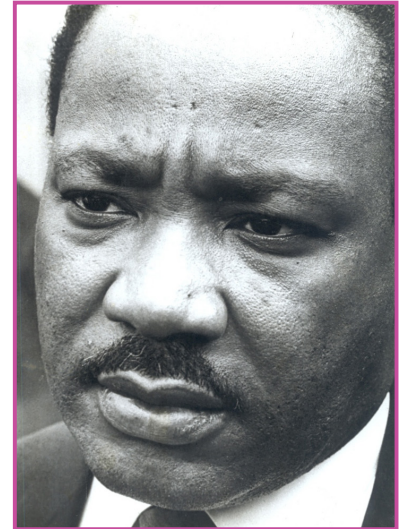


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The Montgomery Bus Boycotts

On 1st December 1955, a woman called Rosa Parks was riding home from work on the bus and refused to give up her seat to a white person. Rosa Parks was arrested. After the arrest, Martin Luther King helped organize protests against the bus company and he and his friends boycotted the buses. This means they refused to use them. This protest lasted for 13 months and 17,000 black people in Montgomery walked, drove or got lifts to work rather than use the buses. During the time of the protest, Martin Luther King's house was fire bombed and he had threats made against his life. Martin Luther King continued his non-violent protests against the bus company. Eventually, the bus company was forced to give up and accept that segregation on buses was wrong. The bus boycott came to an end on 20th December 1956.

Role in Civil Rights Movement

After the bus boycott, Martin Luther King (often known as Martin Luther King Jr.) became a key figure in America in the Civil Rights Movement. He wrote books and travelled the country urging non-violent protest against poor treatment of black people through boycotts, peaceful marches, sit-ins and only buying goods from companies that did not support segregation.

Martin Luther King went on to demand that black people have equality in the USA. He called for a Civil Rights Act to ensure that black people had rights and were able to vote in elections. Martin Luther King organized a peaceful march to Washington to help persuade the government to pass the Civil Rights Act. On 28th August 1963, around 400,000 people saw Martin Luther King make his famous 'I have a dream' speech in Washington. In this speech, he told the crowd of his dream for a world free of racism and where black and white people were equal. The speech is one of the most famous ever given.

In 1964, the government passed the Civil Rights Act, which improved the situation for black people in the USA. This was largely down to Martin Luther King and his supporters. Martin Luther King continued to speak out against unfair treatment and always did so without violence. He also encouraged people not to fight in wars. In 1964, Martin Luther King Jr. became the youngest person to win the Nobel Peace Prize.

Death

However, Martin Luther King gained many enemies, and continued racism in the USA meant that lots of people felt he was wrong. Martin Luther King was, tragically, assassinated on 4th April 1968 in Memphis, USA. He was shot dead on his balcony by a man called James Earl Ray.

Martin Luther King inspired many people to demand a fairer world, in which people of different races were treated equally. In the USA, there is a public holiday every year called the Martin Luther King Day of Service. Martin Luther King remains a hero for many in the fight to end racism in the USA.

Dr. King earned many awards, including the Congressional Gold Medal and the Presidential Medal of Freedom in recognition of his amazing achievements.