

# The life of Martin Luther King Jr.

Martin Luther King Jr. devoted his life to the fight for full citizenship rights of the poor, disadvantaged, and racially oppressed in the United States.

Born on Jan. 15, 1929 in Atlanta, he received a bachelor's degree in sociology in 1948 from Morehouse College, a divinity degree from Crozer Theological Seminary in 1951, and a doctorate in philosophy from Boston University in 1955.

King accepted his pastorate — the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Ala. He and his wife, Coretta Scott King, whom he had met and married in June 1953 while at Boston University, were living in Montgomery for less than a year when Rosa Parks defied the ordinance concerning segregated seating on city buses in December 1955.

His successful organization of the Montgomery Bus Boycott, with the assistance of the Rev. Ralph Abernathy and Edward Nixon, catapulted him into national prominence as a leader of the Civil Rights Movement.

King studied the life and teachings of Mahatma Gandhi and further developed the Indians leader's doctrine of nonviolent civil disobedience. After the Montgomery, he traveled, delivered speeches, and wrote his first book, "Strive Toward Freedom" in 1958.

Two years later, he accepted copastorship with his father of the Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta and become president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). King led major campaigns in Albany, Ga., Birmingham, Ala., Danville, Va.

He organized the March on Washington in August 1963, where in his brilliant "I Have a Dream" speech, he subpoenaed the con-

science of the nation before the judgment seat of morality.

King was chosen as Time magazine's Man of the Year in January 1964, the first African American honored with the award. Later that year, he became the youngest recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize.

After supporting desegregation efforts in Saint Augustine, Fla., King focused in the voter-registration drive in Selma, Ala., leading a harrowing march from Selma to Montgomery in March 1965.

He assailed economic and social discrimination in Northern cities, marking a shift in SCLC strategy, one intended to "bring the Negro into the mainstream of America life as quickly as possible."

Recognizing a deeper relationship between economics and poverty to racism, King began calling for a reconstruction of society and a revolution of values. He demanded stronger civil and voting rights legislation and a significant poverty budget. A critic of the Vietnam war, he told an audience on April 4, 1967 that President Johnson antipoverty program know as "The Great Society" had been shot down on the battlefields of Vietnam.

In 1968, King planned a multiracial poor people's march on Washington to demand an end of discrimination and the funding of a \$12 billion "Economic Bill of Rights." In the midst of organizing this campaign, he flew to Memphis, Tenn., to assist striking sanitation workers.

There on April 4, 1968, King was killed by an assassin's bullet. Riots in black ghettos nationwide followed his death.

James Earl Ray was convicted of King's murder, but questions remain whether he was a paid agent of conspirators. King's birthday was declared a federal holiday in 1983.



*"If any of you are around  
when I have met my day . . .  
I'd like someone to mention  
that day that  
Martin Luther King, Jr.  
tried to give his life  
serving others.*

*I'd like for somebody to say that  
Martin Luther King, Jr.  
tried to love somebody."*

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## Martin Luther King Jr.

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of equality.  
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live his dream . . .  
today, and forever.*

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