I Have a Dream

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Though it was tragic how people viewed African-Americans during the Civil Rights Movement, Martin Luther King Jr. didn't let their negativity bring him down while leading his followers to triumph.

King was born on January 15, 1929, in Atlanta, Georgia. King had two siblings, Alfred Daniel Williams King, and Willie Christine King. “In 1934, his father attended Fifth Baptist World Alliance Congress at Berlin and came to know about German reformer Martin Luther.” After, he changed both of their names from Michael to Martin Luther. Martin went to school at Booker T. Washington High School, a segregated school meant for African-American students. Here he not only excelled in his studies but also made a name for himself in public speaking and took part in many school debates. Martin was considerably affected by the racial segregation of African-Americans and the accompanying humiliation that came with it.

White Supremacy followers believed that the White or lighter skinned people were superior, and that any other race was unequal and should be punished.” Some of the main people who were opposed during his quest were White supremacist groups.

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1 Who Was Martin Luther King Jr.? Everything You Need to Know.”
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such as the Ku Klux Klan (the KKK) and President Lyndon Johnson.\(^9\) The KKK had two main groups. One of the groups started right after the civil war, and it died out in 1870s.\(^10\)

The most recent group started in 1915, and has continued to the present.\(^11\) The second and biggest surge was in the 1920’s and memberships exceed over 4 million nationally.\(^12\) During the Great Depression, the Klan’s membership dropped and the organization temporarily disbanded in 1944.\(^13\) "Unlike the older KKK who was against Roman Catholics, Jews, Foreigners, and Organized Labour, the newer Klan has now been known to attack primarily African- Americans as well as Jews, immigrants, gays, and lesbians."\(^14\) The KKK is responsible for killing thousands of African- Americans, but that didn’t stop King from speaking up.\(^15\)

In the 1950s, African- Americans drank from separate water fountains, went to different schools, sat at the back of the bus, and were limited to many other basic needs, all because they were African- American.\(^16\) Black residents of Montgomery often avoided city buses if possible because they found the Montgomery bus law so demeaning.\(^17\) "Nonetheless, 70 percent or more riders on a typical day were black, and

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\(^17\) Carson, Clayborne, and David L. Lewis. "Martin Luther King, Jr."
on this day Rosa Parks was one of them.”¹⁸ Segregation was written into the law so that
the front of the bus was reserved for white citizens only, and the back of the bus was for
black citizens.¹⁹ Bus drivers in Montgomery had the authority to ask a black person to
give up a seat for a white rider.²⁰ There were two laws in Montgomery, one said
segregation must be enforced, but the other law said (which was largely ignored), said
no person (white or black) could be asked to give up a seat, even if there were no other
seat on the bus available.²¹ Nonetheless, at one point on the route, a white man had no
seat because all of the “white” section seats were taken.²² So the driver told the first row
of the “colored” section to stand, in effect adding another row to the ‘white’ section.²³
Every other person obeyed besides Parks.²⁴

“Meanwhile, black participation in the boycott was much larger than even
optimists in the community had anticipated.”²⁵ “Nixon and some ministers decided to
take advantage of the momentum, forming the Montgomery Improvement Association
(MIA) to manage the boycott, and they elected Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.—new
to Montgomery and just 26 years old—as the MIA’s president.”²⁶ Some of the laws such
as The Fair Housing Act of 1965 helped African- Americans to buy things like houses,
bonuses, and even small things like shoes or groceries.²⁷ The “I Have a Dream” speech

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¹⁸ Carson, Clayborne, and David L. Lewis. “Martin Luther King, Jr.”
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²⁵ Who Was Martin Luther King Jr.? Everything You Need to Know.”
²⁶ Who Was Martin Luther King Jr.? Everything You Need to Know.”
²⁷ Carson, Clayborne, and David L. Lewis. “Martin Luther King, Jr.”
was given on August 28, 1963, at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington D.C.\textsuperscript{28} It is considered the high point of the March on Washington because it helped African-Americans to find and acquire jobs and for equal rights.\textsuperscript{29} “To create his speech, King, who was a Baptist minister, drew on his knowledge of the Bible, the Emancipation Proclamation, the Gettysburg Address, and the Declaration of Independence.”\textsuperscript{30}

The first part of his speech is speaking from what he has seen from his perspective.\textsuperscript{31} The second half is talking about his dreams for America.\textsuperscript{32} He told the hushed crowd, “Go back to Mississippi, go back to Alabama, go back to South Carolina, go back to Georgia, go back to Louisiana, go back to the slums and ghettos of our northern cities, knowing that somehow this situation can and will be changed. Let us not wallow in the valley of despair.”\textsuperscript{33} Continuing his speech, he began to refrain what made his speech one of the best known in U.S. history, second to Lincoln’s 1863 “Gettysburg Address”.\textsuperscript{34}

Before President Johnson Lyndon sent troops to fight the Vietnam war, he and King were very close and King shared his ideas about how he wanted to see America together, not separated by color or race.\textsuperscript{35} King thought that the Vietnam War should not

\textsuperscript{28} Who Was Martin Luther King Jr.? Everything You Need to Know.” Childhood, Life Achievements & Timeline, www.thefamouspeople.com/profiles/martin-luther-king-jr-48.php.
\textsuperscript{29} Carson, Clayborne, and David L. Lewis. “Martin Luther King, Jr.”
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have been fought and violence was wrong.\textsuperscript{36} King’s opinion on the Vietnam War damaged his relationship with Johnson and brought an end to an alliance that had enabled major civil rights reforms in America.\textsuperscript{37} King once said "War is a poor chisel to carve out tomorrow".\textsuperscript{38}\textsuperscript{38} He found the law that required African-Americans to give up their seats to white passengers while traveling in public transport system undoubtedly humiliating and highly respected his father for his proud and fearless protest against segregation.\textsuperscript{39} In 1944, Martin Jr. graduated from high school, skipping both ninth and twelfth grades and entered Morehouse College at the age of fifteen.\textsuperscript{40} Following his graduation of high school, he received his bachelor’s degree in sociology in 1948, and entered Crozer Theological Seminary in Pennsylvania for his theological training.\textsuperscript{41} King then received his degree in Bachelor of Divinity on May 8, 1951.\textsuperscript{42} He then won a comradeship and joined Boston University for his doctoral studies in systematic theology, completing his residence in 1953, and afterwards he received his Ph.D. on June 5, 1955.\textsuperscript{43}

His father was an American Baptist pastor, missionary, and an early figure in the Civil Rights Movement.\textsuperscript{44} Martin’s mother played a significant role in the affairs of the

\textsuperscript{36} Who Was Martin Luther King Jr.? Everything You Need to Know.”
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Ebenezer Baptist Church.\textsuperscript{45} Martin’s mom was shot and killed in the Ebenezer Baptist church six years after his own assassination.\textsuperscript{46} Martin had four children Bernice Albertine King, Dexter Scott King, Martin Luther King III, and Yolanda Denise-King.\textsuperscript{47}

“On April 3, 1963, the SCLC, under the leadership of King, began another nonviolent campaign against racial segregation as well as economic injustice in Birmingham, Alabama.”\textsuperscript{48} The African-American people, regardless of age or sex, were banned from any marches and sit-ins, but in this protest did so to prove a point.\textsuperscript{49} On April 12, King along with many others was arrested and put in a Birmingham jail, where he had to put up with unusually harsh conditions because of his race.\textsuperscript{50} During his stay at Birmingham jail, he came across a newspaper in which a white missionary had criticized his actions and called for white unity.\textsuperscript{51} In retaliation, Martin wrote an open letter from Birmingham jail. In the letter, he mentioned, ‘Why We Cannot Wait’.\textsuperscript{52} The letter than later became famous as ‘Letter From Birmingham City Jail’.\textsuperscript{53} In the letter he stated his beliefs about how saddened he felt about the inequality amongst the races.\textsuperscript{54} As the protest continued, Birmingham police reacted violently towards the protesters and used

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high-pressure water jets and even police dogs against them.\textsuperscript{55} The news shocked many white people and united people of all races.\textsuperscript{56}

As a result, public spaces became more open to blacks. In this rally, King made his famous speech “I Have a Dream”, in which he called for the end of racism.\textsuperscript{57} He also emphasized his belief that someday all men could be brothers, irrespective of the color of the skin.\textsuperscript{58} In March 1964, King and from the other "The Southern Christian Leadership Conference" leaders joined the St. Augustine Movement; inspiring white civil rights activists from the North to join the movement.\textsuperscript{59} Many people believed that the movement played a major role in the passage of the Civil Rights Acts of 1964, enacted on July 2.\textsuperscript{60} In 1965, King along with others organized three marches from Selma to Montgomery.\textsuperscript{61} However, he was not present during the second march, which faced the most brutal police action.\textsuperscript{62}

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King commented that he regretted that he was not there to lead the march. So on March 25th, he led the third march from the front. At the conclusion of the march, he gave his famous speech, “How Long Not long”. “On March 25, 1965, the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. and a crowd of 25,000 marched from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama, in support of voting rights for African-Americans.” At the end of the march, King delivered this speech, that is often referred to as "How Long, Not Long." Subsequently, he took up the cause of the poor people living in the North, especially in Chicago. He also led a campaign against US involvement in the Vietnam War.

In 1964, Martin Luther King Jr. received Nobel Peace Prize for his non-violent campaign against racism. On June 18, 1953, King married Coretta Scott, an accomplished singer, author, and a civil rights activist. On March 29, 1968, King went to Memphis, Tennessee to address rallies. On April 3, he addressed his last rally and on April 4, while standing in the motel's second-floor balcony, he was shot by a white fanatic at 6:01 pm. The bullet entered through his right cheek, smashed his jaw, then traveled down his spinal cord and finally lodged in his shoulder. He was immediately

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65 "Martin Luther King, Jr." National Archives and Records Administration, National Archives and Records Administration.
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taken to St. Joseph’s Hospital, where he underwent emergency surgery; but died at 7:05 pm. He was only 39 years old then. King's death was followed by a nationwide race riot. All around the country there were riots on how African-Americans were being treated, fights broke loose all over and were out of control. The riots were not just happening at one place in particular, but all over the country. Much later, the National Civil Rights Museum was built around the former Lorraine Motel. Many streets around the country have also been named after him.

In 1986, it was decided to observe January 15 as a federal holiday, the day Martin Luther King Jr. was born. In 2011, The Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial was opened on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. After Martin’s death, President Reagan released laws against discrimination and segregation. If he would not have died the way he did, who knows if we would have more laws against segregation and discrimination against African-Americans.

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His death paved the way for the African-American Rights. His death caused lawmakers and the president to make new laws stating that there can be no laws discriminating against a certain race, gender, and or belief.

Though many people at the time were against what he was doing some high profile and well-known people were supportive such as Harry Belafonte, Folk singer Joan Baez, Josephine Baker, Bob Dylan, Ossie Davis, Mahalia Jackson, James Garner, Diahann Carroll, writer James Baldwin, Jackie Robinson, Frank Mankiewicz, Sammy Davis Jr., and actress Ruby Dee. If these people would not have helped Martin along the way, we may have never improved African-American Rights. In 1939, after being denied the opportunity to sing in Constitution Hall because of her race, the great African-American contralto Marian Anderson sang to a crowd of 75,000 people at the Lincoln Memorial.

With this event, the free Easter Sunday Concert of 1939, the Lincoln Memorial became not only a place to remember and honor an important president, but also a place to represent the struggle to extend freedom and equality to every American citizen. On August 28, 1963, the Lincoln Memorial would once again hold center stage
in the struggle for equality in the United States. On this day, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. delivered his famous “I Have a Dream” speech. Dr. King, along with 200,000 other people (50,000 of whom were white), assembled at the memorial for the “March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom.” The 200,000 who gathered there represented a broad diverse mix of Americans. People of every occupation and religion were present along with celebrities such as Marlon Brando, Bob Dylan, and others who performed. The crowd listened to performances by Mahalia Jackson, Marian Anderson, and Odetta. The grand finale of the day, Dr. King’s “I Have a Dream” speech, left the American people with the true spirit of the Civil Rights Movement. The Lincoln Memorial has been the site of many large public gatherings and protests.

For millions of people, Americans and others, the Lincoln Memorial is an inspiring and enduring symbol of freedom. Designed after the temples of ancient Greece, Lincoln Memorial National Memorial honors the 16th president of the United States of America. Standing at the west end of the National Mall, this neoclassical monument is a powerful and moving tribute to the legacy of Abraham Lincoln: his high ideals, his belief in the freedom and dignity of people, and his love of the Union he worked so hard

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100 .https://www.nps.gov/nr/travel/cultural_diversity/Lincoln_Memorial_National_Memorial.html
Lincoln Memorial National Memorial not only honors Lincoln, but its design and its use by Americans over the years have made it a symbol of America’s democratic principles and beliefs. It is fitting that the memorial has been the site of some of the nation’s most stirring civil rights demonstrations and events.

Lincoln, long viewed by the American people as a symbol of honesty, integrity, and humanity, died from an assassin’s bullet in April 1865. While the nation did not build a national monument to commemorate Lincoln until the 20th century, Americans began expressing their desire for an appropriate memorial soon after his death. By 1867, two groups were making plans to commemorate his memory in the nation’s capital.

One group, led by a black woman born into slavery, began to collect money to honor the author of the Emancipation Proclamation. In 1867, Congress incorporated the Lincoln Monument Association to construct a memorial; however, it was not until 1911, with the creation of a new Lincoln Memorial Commission, that work proceeded to determine a location and design for the monument. Though it was tragic how people

103. https://www.nps.gov/nr/travel/cultural_diversity/Lincoln_Memorial_National_Memorial.html
104. https://www.nps.gov/nr/travel/cultural_diversity/Lincoln_Memorial_National_Memorial.html
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viewed African Americans during the Civil Rights Movement, Martin Luther King Jr.
didn’t let their negativity bring him down while leading his followers to triumph.
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