



Historical Sketch: **BIOGRAPHY OF MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.**

Birth and Family

Martin Luther King, Jr. was born at noon on Tuesday, January 15, 1929, at the family home in Atlanta, Georgia. Dr. Charles Johnson was the attending physician. Martin Luther King, Jr., was the first son and second child born to the Reverend Martin Luther King, Sr., and Alberta Williams King. Other children born to the Kings were Christine King Farris and the late Reverend Alfred Daniel Williams King. Martin Luther King's maternal grandparents were the Reverend Adam Daniel Williams, second pastor of Ebenezer Baptist, and Jenny Parks Williams. His paternal grandparents, James Albert and Delia King, were sharecroppers on a farm in Stockbridge, Georgia.

He married the former Coretta Scott, younger daughter of Obadiah and Bernice McMurray Scott of Marion, Alabama on June 18, 1953. The marriage ceremony took place on the lawn of the Scott's home in Marion. The Reverend King, Sr., performed the service, with Mrs. Edythe Bagley, the sister of Mrs. King, maid of honor, and the Reverend A.D. King, the brother of Martin Luther King, Jr., best man.

Four children were born to Dr. and Mrs. King:
Yolanda Denise (November 17, 1955 Montgomery, Alabama)
Martin Luther III (October 23, 1957 Montgomery, Alabama)
Dexter Scott (January 30, 1961 Atlanta, Georgia)
Bernice Albertine (March 28, 1963 Atlanta, Georgia)

Education

Martin Luther King, Jr. began his education at Yonge Street Elementary School in Atlanta, Georgia. Following Yonge School, he was enrolled in David T. Howard Elementary School. He also attended the Atlanta University Laboratory School and Booker T. Washington High School. Because of his high score on the college entrance examinations in his junior year of high school, he advanced to Morehouse College without formal graduation from Booker T. Washington. Having skipped both the ninth and twelfth grades, Dr. King entered Morehouse at the age of fifteen.

In 1948, he graduated from Morehouse College with a Bachelors degree in Sociology. That fall, he enrolled in Crozer Theological Seminary in Chester, Pennsylvania. While attending Crozer, he also studied at the University of Pennsylvania. He was elected president of the senior class and delivered the valedictory address; he won the Pearl Plafker Award for the most outstanding student; and he received the J. Lewis Crozer fellowship for graduate study at a university of his choice. He was awarded a Bachelor of Divinity degree from Crozer in 1951.

In September of 1951, Martin Luther King began doctoral studies in Systematic Theology at Boston University. He also studied at Harvard University. His dissertation, "*A Comparison of God in the Thinking of Paul Tillich and Henry Wieman*," was completed in 1955, and the Ph.D. degree from Boston, a Doctorate of Philosophy in Systematic Theology, was awarded on June 5, 1955.

Honorary Degrees

Dr. King was awarded honorary degrees from numerous colleges and universities in the United States and several foreign countries. They include the following:

1957		1963
	Doctor of Human Letters, Morehouse College Doctor of Laws, Howard University Doctor of Divinity, Chicago Theological Seminary	Doctor of Letters, Keuka College
1958		1964
	Doctor of Laws, Morgan State College Doctor of Humanities, Central State College	Doctor of Divinity, Wesleyan College Doctor of Laws, Jewish Theological Seminary Doctor of Laws, Yale University Doctor of Divinity, Springfield College
1959		1965
	Doctor of Divinity, Boston University	Doctor of Laws, Hofstra University Doctor of Human Letters, Oberlin College Doctor of Social Science, Amsterdam Free University Doctor of Divinity, St. Peter's College
1961		1967
	Doctor of Laws, Lincoln University Doctor of Laws, University of Bridgeport	Doctor of Civil Law, University of New Castle Upon Tyne Doctor of Laws, Grinnell College, Grinnell, Iowa
1962		
	Doctor of Civil Laws, Bard College	

Martin Luther King entered the Christian ministry and was ordained in February 1948 at the age of nineteen at Ebenezer Baptist Church, Atlanta, Georgia. Following his ordination, he became Assistant Pastor of Ebenezer. Upon completion of his studies at Boston University, he accepted the call of Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, Montgomery, Alabama. He was the pastor of Dexter Avenue from September 1954 to November 1959, when he resigned to move to Atlanta to direct the activities of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. From 1960 until his death in 1968, he was co-pastor with his father at Ebenezer Baptist Church and President of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

Dr. King was a pivotal figure in the Civil Rights Movement. He was elected president of the Montgomery Improvement Association, the organization which was responsible for the successful Montgomery Bus Boycott from 1955 to 1956 (381 days). He was arrested thirty times for his participation in civil rights activities. He was a founder and president of Southern Christian Leadership Conference from 1957 to 1968. He was also vice president of the national Sunday School and Baptist Teaching Union Congress of the National Baptist Convention. He was a member of several national and local boards of directors and served on the boards of trustees of several institutions and agencies. Dr. King was elected to membership in several learned societies including the prestigious American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

Awards

Dr. King received several hundred awards for his leadership in the Civil Rights Movement.

Among them were:

- Selected one of the most outstanding personalities of the year by **Time**, 1957.
- Listed in *Who's Who in America*, 1957.
- The Spingarn Medal from NAACP, 1957.
- The Russwurm Award from the National Newspaper Publishers, 1957.
- The Second Annual Achievement -- The Guardian Association of the Police Department of New York, 1958.
- *Link Magazine* of New Delhi, India, listed Dr. King as one of the sixteen world leaders who had contributed most to the advancement of freedom during 1959.
- Named *Man of the Year* by **Time**, 1963.
- Named *American of the Decade* by Laundry, Dry Cleaning, and Die Workers International Union, 1963.
- The John Dewey Award, from the United Federation of Teachers, 1964.
- The John F. Kennedy Award, from the Catholic Interracial Council of Chicago, 1964.
- The Nobel Peace Prize in 1964. At age 35, Dr. King was the youngest man, the second American, and the third black man awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.
- The Marcus Garvey Prize for Human Rights, presented by the Jamaican Government. (Posthumously) 1968.
- The Rosa L. Parks Award, presented by the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. (Posthumously) 1968.
- The preceding awards and others, along with numerous citations, are in the Archives of the Martin Luther King, Center for Nonviolent Social Change, Inc. in Atlanta, Georgia.

Publications

Speeches

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was a vital personality of the modern era. His lectures and remarks stirred the concern and sparked the conscience of a generation; the movements and marches he led brought significant changes in the fabric of American life; his courageous and selfless devotion gave direction to thirteen years of civil rights activities; his charismatic leadership inspired men and women, young and old, in the nation and abroad.

Dr. King's concept of "*somebodiness*" gave black and poor people a new sense of worth and dignity. His philosophy of nonviolent direct action, and his strategies for rational and non-destructive social change, galvanized the conscience of this nation and reordered its priorities. The Voting Rights Act of 1965, for example, went to Congress as a result of the Selma to Montgomery march. His wisdom, his words, his actions, his commitment, and his dreams for a new cast of life, are intertwined with the American experience.

Dr. King's speech at the march on Washington in 1963, his acceptance speech of the Nobel Peace Prize, his last sermon at Ebenezer Baptist Church, and his final speech in Memphis are among his most famous utterances (*I've Been to the Mountaintop*). The Letter from Birmingham Jail ranks among the most important American documents.

Death

Dr. King was shot while standing on the balcony of the Lorraine Motel in Memphis, Tennessee on April 4, 1968, by James Earl Ray. James Earl Ray was arrested in London, England on June 8, 1968 and returned to Memphis, Tennessee to stand trial for the assassination of Dr. King. On March 9, 1969, before coming to trial, he entered a guilty plea and was sentenced to ninety-nine years in the Tennessee State Penitentiary. Dr. King had been in Memphis to help lead sanitation workers in a protest against low wages and intolerable conditions. His funeral services were held April 9, 1968, in Atlanta at Ebenezer Church and on the campus of Morehouse College, with the President of the United States proclaiming a day of mourning and flags being flown at half-staff. The area where Dr. King was entombed is located on Freedom Plaza and surrounded by the Freedom Hall Complex of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change, Inc. The Martin Luther King, Jr. Historic Site, a 23 acre area was listed as a National Historic Landmark on May 5, 1977, and was made a National Historic Site on October 10, 1980 by the U.S. Department of the Interior.

Compiled by Louisiana State University

Source: <http://www.lib.lsu.edu/hum/mlk/srs218.html>



Historical Sketch: UPBRINGING

By Julie Stokes, Ph.D.

Associate Professor and Director of the African American Resource Center
California State University, Fullerton

Martin Luther King, Jr. was born on Tuesday, January 15, 1929 at the family home in Atlanta, Georgia. He was born the second child and first son of Reverend Martin Luther King Sr. and his wife Alberta. He had one older sister and one younger brother.

At the age of five, Martin Luther King, Jr. began school, before reaching the legal age of six, at the Yonge Street Elementary School in Atlanta. When his age was discovered, he was not permitted to continue in school and did not resume his education until he was six. Young Martin grew up in an environment filled with racism and segregation.

Nearly 65 percent of African Americans were on public relief in the community he grew up in, during the 1930s.ⁱ However, the King family was not on public relief.

At the age of six, young Martin was told he could no longer play with his young white friend, by his friend's father. Later his parents informed him of the facts of life, as it pertained to race relations, and reminded him that it was his duty to love "the white man."ⁱⁱ

Following Yonge School, Martin was enrolled in David T. Howard Elementary School. He also attended the Atlanta University Laboratory School and Booker T. Washington High School. Because of his high scores on the college entrance examinations in his junior year of high school, he advanced to Morehouse College without formal graduation from Booker T. Washington. Having skipped both the ninth and twelfth grades, Dr. King entered Morehouse at the age of fifteen.ⁱⁱⁱ

Education and exposure greatly influenced Martin's thinking. He came to see racism as a structural problem linked to the political economy of capitalism rather than a personal one.^{iv} He eventually came to believe that by making race irrelevant,

racism could be eliminated and justice achieved with intelligent people working together. He became a social activist pastor, speaking against injustice and segregation. Integration became the major theme in King's political philosophy.^v

Martin Luther King Jr. had become the symbol of the civil rights movement when his life was ended, by assassination, on April 4, 1968 by James Earl Ray.^{vi} He gave numerous speeches and led non-violent marches during his lifetime as a way to advance his desire for equality, freedom, and opportunity for all. A great deal of progress has been achieved in regards to social equality. Still, in regards to political and economic equality, much remains to be done.

ii Cone, J. H. (1992). *Martin & Malcolm & America: A dream or a nightmare*. New York: Orbis Books, pp23.

ii Cone, J. H. (1992). *Martin & Malcolm & America: A dream or a nightmare*. New York: Orbis Books, pp23.

iii <http://www.thekingcenter.com/mlk/bio.html>

iv Cone, J. H. (1992). *Martin & Malcolm & America: A dream or a nightmare*. New York: Orbis Books, pp27.

v Cone, J. H. (1992). *Martin & Malcolm & America: A dream or a nightmare*. New York: Orbis Books, pp36.

vi Clayborne, C. (1998). *The autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.* New York: Warner Books.



Historical Sketch: **IDEAS & PHILOSOPHY**

By Julie Stokes, Ph.D.

Associate Professor and Director of the African American Resource Center
California State University, Fullerton

Martin Luther King Jr. (MLK) is a national icon for projects promoting service to ones fellow man through action related to social change and non violence, such as that practiced by Mahatma Gandhi, as a method for achieving one's goals. As a young child MLK was greatly influenced by his religious and church upbringing and his minister father (Martin Luther King Sr.), who himself became a symbol of thrift, service, responsibility, and sacrifice.

In his adult life, Martin Luther King Jr. was influenced by ideas advanced by the progressives and John Dewey who wrote that "ideas could become instruments of change"ⁱ, evangelical liberalism stressing "people... should be involved in practical affairs to improve both the larger society and the lives of individuals"ⁱⁱ, and theological personalism which located "moral value exclusively in human personality."ⁱⁱⁱ Most progressives were environmentalists. The progressives were convinced that environment was much more important than heredity in forming character (e.g., trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, and caring). Their approach suggested that if one could build better schools and houses, one could make better people and a more perfect society. Martin Luther King Jr. extended ideas offered by progressives to include all people.

Evangelical liberalism moved the concern for improving the lives of all humanity from not only spiritual to also the practical (i.e. meeting an individual's needs for food, shelter, safety, love, belonging). Theological personalism provided King with a grounding for his belief in "the dignity and worth of all human personality."^{iv} Martin Luther King Jr. believed in the ideas offered by influential thinkers of his time. Moreover, Martin Luther King Jr. embraced significant ideas presented to him and transformed them into effective social action.

ⁱ Nash, G. B., Jeffery, J. R., Howe, J. R., Frederick, P. J., Davis, A. F., & Winkler, A. M. (1990). *The American People: Creating a Nation and a Society* (2nd ed.). New York: Harper Collins Publishers, pp. 712-713.

ⁱⁱ Writings of Vernon Johns, copyright 2001 by the estate of Vernon Johns, <http://www.vernonjohns.org/tcal001/vjwscgsp.html>

ⁱⁱⁱ PART III. LIBERALISM IN RELIGIOUS THOUGHT CHAPTER 6. WHITE SOCIAL GOSPEL <http://www.vernonjohns.org/tcal001/vjwscgsp.html>

^{iv} Cone, J. H.(1992). *Martin & Malcolm & America: A dream or a nightmare*. New York: Orbis Books, pp29.