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### Martin Luther King, Jr. - a Fighter Who Obtained a Lot without a Real Fight

Martin Luther King, Jr., is a Baptist clergyman, an activist, and a leader of the USA Civil Rights Movement. Martin Luther started to fight for equal civil rights in the early 1950-s and continued doing this up to his assassination. His entire life and work were devoted to stopping the African-American population segregation in the USA.

This paper will focus on the life of Martin Luther King, Jr., and everything what is connected with this person.

#### **Brief Biography**

Martin Luther (Michael) King, Jr., was born in Atlanta, in 1929. His father, Michael King, Sr., took the name Martin Luther King, Sr. He did this in honor of Martin Luther, the well-known German leader of the Protestant Church (Martin Luther King, Jr., Biography). In some years, Martin Luther (Michael), Jr., followed his father's example and adopted the same name. Martin Luther's father tried to fight against racial discrimination because he observed the suffering and disrespect of his race. He believed that racism and discrimination of other people are against the will of God. These ideas had a rather remarkable influence on Martin Luther King, Jr. (Tutu 2007).

When Martin was five years old, he went to Booker T. Washington School where he was one of the best students. In 1944, Martin entered Morehouse College and got a degree in Sociology. In 1948, he entered the Liberal Crozer Theological Seminary in Chester, the state of

Pennsylvania. Being one of the best students in the college, he gained a scholarship for further education. While studying at Boston University and working on his doctoral thesis, Martin married Coretta Scott in 1953. In 1954, Martin Luther King, Jr., became a minister of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church of Montgomery. In 1955, Martin Luther organized Montgomery Bus Boycott and initiated the foundation of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). In 1957, he became the head of the aforementioned conference. In 1963, Martin organized the March on Washington in order to make the USA President and the Government pay attention to the problems of the African-Americans. During this March, Martin Luther King delivered a speech known as *I Have a Dream* (Hall & Hall 363). In 1964, Martin Luther King, Jr., received the Nobel Peace Prize for his aim to stop racial discrimination and segregation. During 1965-1968, King managed to expand the movement for the civil rights to the different parts of the USA. In 1968, Martin Luther King, Jr., was cruelly assassinated in Memphis, the state of Tennessee.

### **Biographical Sketches of Two Martin Luther King's, Jr., Associates**

Ralph David Abernathy and Stokely Carmichael were among several prominent leaders of the Civil Rights Movement. He was born in 1926 in the town of Linden, Alabama. He served in the USA army and took part in the Second World War. After the war, Ralph entered Alabama State University where he got a Master of Science. Abernathy was one of the initiators of Montgomery Bus Boycott. When the Civil Rights Movement started, he was a college professor and a minister at the First Baptist Church. Martin Luther considered Ralph his best friend. They met while studying at school in Atlanta and had very close and friendly relations up to King's death. Abernathy supported Martin in all his ideas as well as actions. He occupied a position of the First Financial Secretary of the SCLC. After King's death, he became a new leader of the

movement. He continued to support King's idea that there should be no violence in achieving any goals. Abernathy was the last person who saw King dying. He devoted his life to the Civil Rights Movement and the ideas of Martin Luther King, Jr.

Stokely Carmichael was an active member of the Civil Rights Movement. He was a leader of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Community (SNCC) as well as the Black Panther Party. He was born in 1949, in Trinidad. At first, his parents left for the USA, and then, he moved to this country as well. He studied very well at school and was known as a rather sophisticated person. Stockly was even suggested a scholarship to Harvard, however, he refused to take it. He was very inspired by the sit-in protests and joined the movement for Civil Rights. At the very beginning, Carmichael supported the ideas of King that violence should not be applied to. He was arrested more than 30 times for taking part in different demonstrations and acts of protest. Carmichael changed his point of view with time and suggested using forceful actions in order to reach some other changes. His points of view led to the contradictions with other leaders of the movement.

### **Native State and City of Martin Luther King, Jr.**

The native state of Martin Luther King, Jr., was a state of Georgia. In 1732, the state of Georgia was established and named in honor of the King George II of Great Britain. This state was the last of the Thirteen Colonies that were founded at the territory of the American continent. In 1788, Georgia ratified the Constitution of the United States of America and became a member of the Confederation.

This state is situated in the southern-east of the USA. It borders on Florida in the south, on South Caroline in the east, on North Caroline and Tennessee in the north, and on Alabama in the west. The eastern part of the state is washed by the Atlantic Ocean; while the Blue Ridge

Mountains are situated in its northern part. Brasstown Bald is considered the highest point, and the Atlantic Ocean is the lowest one in the state of Georgia. The Mississippi River flows through the territory of the state.

Atlanta is the capital of Georgia. Initially, it was a small settlement which happened to be located at the railroad line terminus. The appearance of the railroad turned this settlement into one of the most flourishing cities of the Southern United States. In those times, Atlanta was known as a center of political power, cultural development, and of course, black wealth. Black people were used as slaves and were not treated as rightful representatives of the society as well as the country. During the period of the American Civil War, Atlanta became the target of the Union invasion. As a result of the Atlanta campaign, the whole city was completely burnt in 1864, but Atlanta coped with the full destruction rather quickly and renewed its former status. It is worth stressing that slavery was abolished, black slaves got freedom, and economy stopped being focused on the agriculture only. Due to these remarkable changes, the black upper and middle classes appeared in the USA, but segregation and discrimination went on dominating in the American society. In the 1950s-1960s, the city of Atlanta was a key center of the Civil Rights Movement led by Martin Luther King, Jr.

### **Brief Historical Settings**

#### *Montgomery Bus Boycott*

It was the 2<sup>nd</sup> of March, 1955, when an accident changed the life of the USA society. An African-American teenager girl, Claudette Colvin, disagreed to a demand of her giving up a seat to a person who was a white one. Claudette was arrested by the local police and imprisoned.

In December, 1955, one more accident took place. Rosa Parks refused to give her seat to a white person. After Rosa having been arrested, the leaders of the Montgomery National

Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) decided to initiate a protest known as a bus boycott in the city. Martin Luther was chosen as the head of this boycott. Martin met with protesters and pronounced a speech. It was Martin Luther's first public speech where he focused on the future strategy of his fight for equal civil rights for all people:

We have no alternative but to protest. For many years we have shown an amazing patience. We have sometimes given our white brothers the feeling that we liked the way we were being treated. But we come here tonight to be saved from that patience that makes us patient with anything less than freedom and justice (quoted in Martin Luther King, Jr., Biography).

Martin Luther started a new era in the fight for civil rights in the USA.

*The Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC)*

After gaining the victory in Montgomery, the leaders of the civil rights movement decided to act not only at the Southern states level but at the national level too. Martin Luther, his friends, and colleagues initiated the foundation of the SCLC. The main goal of this conference was to promote the changes in the society and the civil rights reforms, but all actions should have been realized without any violence and power. Martin Luther considered that the only possible way to reach a consensus was a peaceful one. Martin Luther King, Jr., lectured at many meetings throughout the whole country to explain the necessity of solving the problems of the USA nation. He wished that all people had equal rights not taking into account the color of their skin. For instance, the African-Americans had no right to take part in any voting until 1958; though, they were, too, the citizens of the USA (King Online Encyclopedia).

In 1960, many African-American students started the movement which was called the sit-in protest. In the city of Greensboro, they occupied all seats, for the whites and for the blacks, in

the store. They were asked to leave the section for the whites, but they went on sitting not paying attention to the different abuses. This movement was followed throughout the whole country.

Martin Luther met with the leaders of this movement and supported their actions. This protest did bring some results. The white and black sections in the shops were annulled in many cities.

#### *The Albany Movement*

In 1961, King was involved in the movement that was organized in Albany. This movement aimed to stop all aspects of segregation which occurred in the city. Many people and Martin Luther were arrested in the first days of the movement taking place. King embraced that the movement tactics should be changed and continued calling people to follow the non-violence and moral virtues in order to pursue their aims.

#### *The Campaign in Birmingham*

This campaign was another attempt of the SCLC to make some radical changes concerning civil rights. Many people and even children took part in the demonstration, but they were cruelly treated by the local authority and the police. Many supporters and King got into prison. It should be stressed that this campaign drew attention of the whole American nation. Some blacks and whites did not approve the fact that children had been involved into the demonstration (King Online Encyclopedia). The leaders of the SCLC and King planned to organize a massive national demonstration in order to promote the needed changes. They began preparing the March on Washington.

#### *The March on Washington*

Martin Luther King, Jr., was among the initiators of the March on Washington. This march started on the 28<sup>th</sup> of August, 1963. The main goals of this action were freedom and jobs for the African-American population of the USA. King pronounced the most outstanding speech,

*I Have a Dream*, in front of many people who gathered near the Lincoln Memorial in Washington. This march is considered to be the largest and the most prominent protest during the whole history of the USA capital (King Online Encyclopedia). This march did have a remarkable influence on the development of civil rights in the USA. In 1964, some changes were introduced to the Act of Civil Rights: the racial discrimination and segregation were stopped in all institutions and organizations, people were supposed to be protected from any violence.

### *Blood Sunday*

In 1965, King suggested the organization of the march from Selma to Montgomery. This turned out to be very violent and cruel. The police used tear gas and nightsticks against the demonstrators. Many participants were injured and hospitalized. This fact gave a name of Blood Sunday to the march (King Online Encyclopedia). However, in 1965, King's leadership was recognized again due to the fact that the Voting Rights Act came into force.

In 1965-1968, King managed to expand the movement for the civil rights to different cities and towns of the United States of America. His ideas were supported and followed in some parts of the country; although, they were criticized and contradicted as well (King Online Encyclopedia).

On the third of April, 1968, Martin Luther King, Jr., delivered his last public speech at the sanitation workers strike in Memphis. His last speech turned out to be very prophetic: "I have seen the promised land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight that we, as a people, will get to the promised land" (quoted in Martin Luther King, Jr., Biography).

On the fourth of April, Martin Luther King, Jr., was cruelly assassinated when he stood on the balcony of the hotel in Memphis. The killing of Martin Luther King, Jr., evoked massive demonstrations and protests in many parts of the USA.

## **The Economic and Social Situation**

The post-war period was a period of great changes in the USA economic and social life. In the 1950-1960s, America began developing its economy rather quickly and successfully; though, there were a lot of poor, unemployed and unprotected people. They were, of course, African-Americans only. It should be mentioned that African-Americans were treated in a rather inadmissible way and got limited rights in everything. Many of them wanted to stop these horrible things and become the rightful representatives of the American nation. In those years, life was really unbearable. Bizarre codes and rules were established in each city and state. For instance, there were places for white or black people only. The Whites were superior over the Blacks. I think that it is a nonce to observe or hear such a slogan: 'For the Whites Only.' The Civil Rights Movement aimed to change this situation. The key demands were: to give equal civil rights to all people; to stop racial discrimination and segregation within the country; to provide work places and a minimum wage.

## **Conclusion**

Martin Luther King, Jr., had a crucial influence on the development of democracy not only in the USA but in the whole world. Martin Luther King, Jr., is recognized as one of the best-known African-American leaders of the XX century. His entire life was devoted to the fight for the equal rights for all American people. He always stressed that everything in this life should be gained only in a peaceful way. Due to King's work, the African-American population got the equal civil rights in the United States of America. His work and devotion to the non-violent fight for the equal rights as well as the fight against racisms were recognized not only by the American population but by the whole world. As a result of this work, Martin Luther King, Jr.,

was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. After his death, Martin Luther King, Jr., was awarded the Congressional Gold Medal and the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

Nowadays, Martin Luther King, Jr., is highly honored in the United States of America. The Day of Martin Luther King, Jr., has been celebrated as a federal holiday in the USA since 1986.

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