

The Life of Martin Luther King



Martin Luther King Jr. Was one of America's great leaders.



He spoke out against laws which kept black people segregated, and led protests and marches demanding fair laws for all people.



Martin Luther King Jr. was one of three children. He was born on January 15th 1929 in Atlanta, Georgia. His father was a pastor and his mother had been a teacher.

Young Martin liked sports. He enjoyed baseball, basketball and American football. He also liked singing and often sang in his father's church.

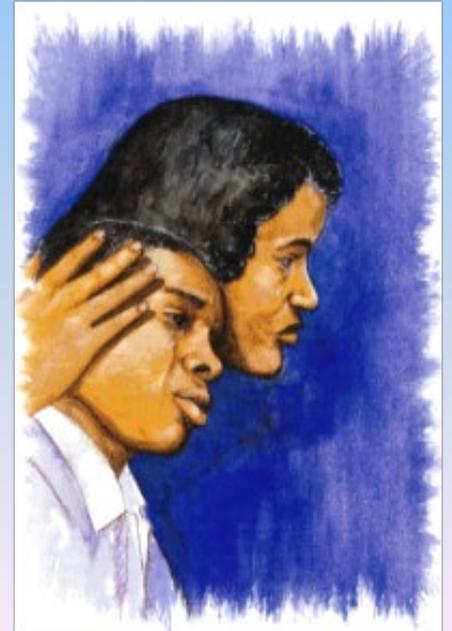


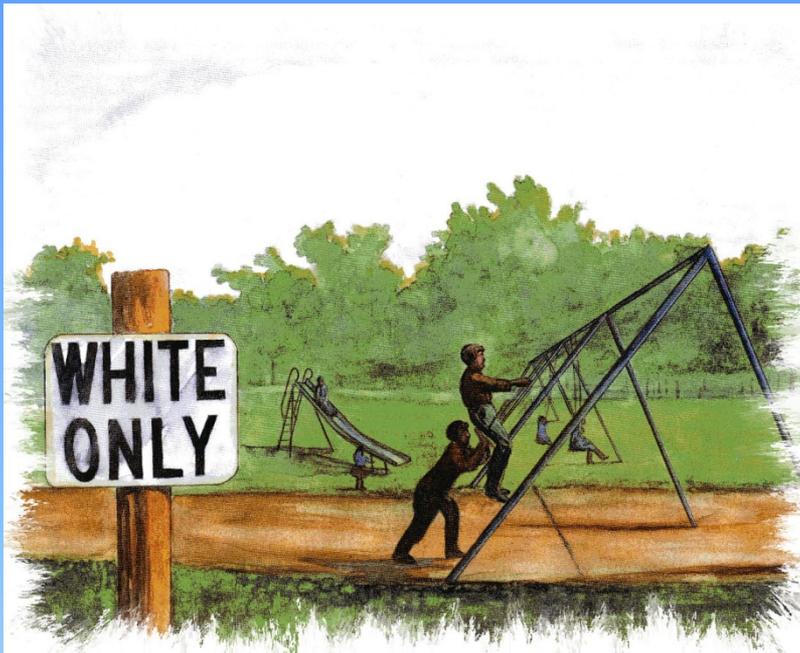


Like most children, Martin loved to play in his backyard with his friends. As he and his friends got older two of his friends stopped coming around to play with him because he was black and they were white.

Martin was very upset. He couldn't understand why the colour of his skin should make a difference.

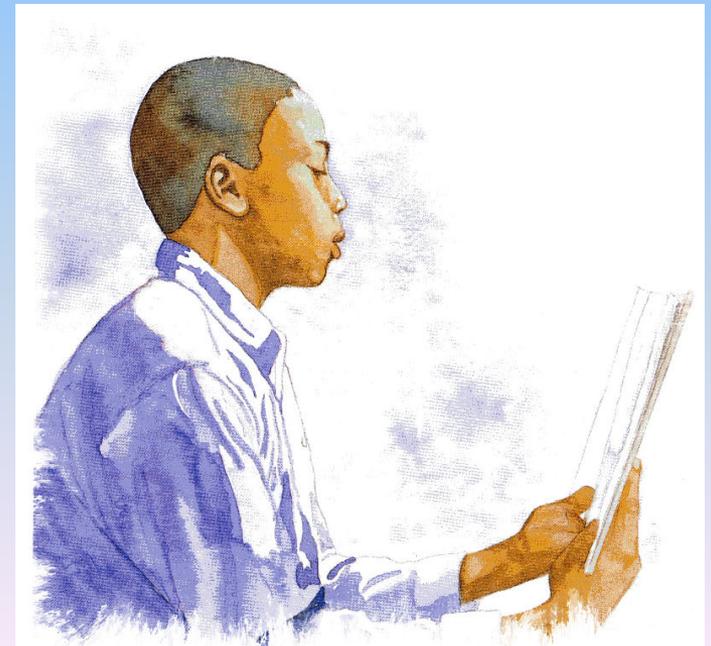
Martin's mother explained that, many years before, black people had been brought to America and sold as slaves. Some people still did not treat black people fairly.

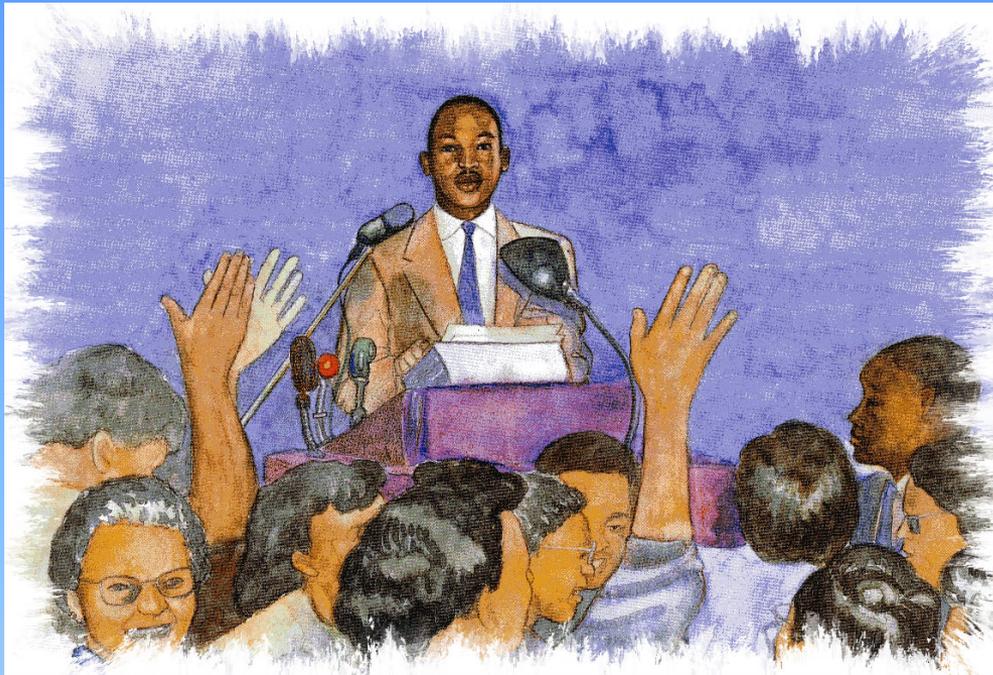




In Atlanta, and elsewhere in the USA, there were signs which read 'White Only'. This meant black people were not allowed in. These signs were on parks, hotels, restaurants and even schools. There were also restrictions on jobs.

Martin was a bright child. He had learned to read before he started school and loved finding out about black leaders of the past.

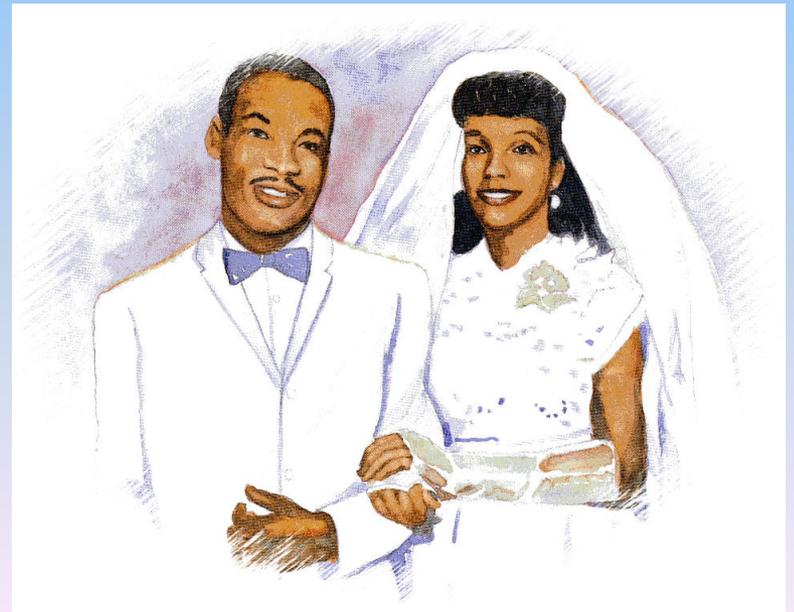




Martin worked hard at his studies and entered Morehouse College in Atlanta when he was just fifteen years old.

While he was at college he had decided to become a minister.

After Morehouse College, Martin travelled to Boston to study further. He met Coretta Scott there and they got married. He completed his doctorate and became Dr. Martin Luther King.



After college Dr. King began his first job as a pastor in Montgomery, Alabama in 1954.



One year later, Rosa Parks was arrested in Montgomery for refusing to give up her seat on a bus to a white man. The 'White Only' section of the bus had been full and she was in one of the seats just behind.

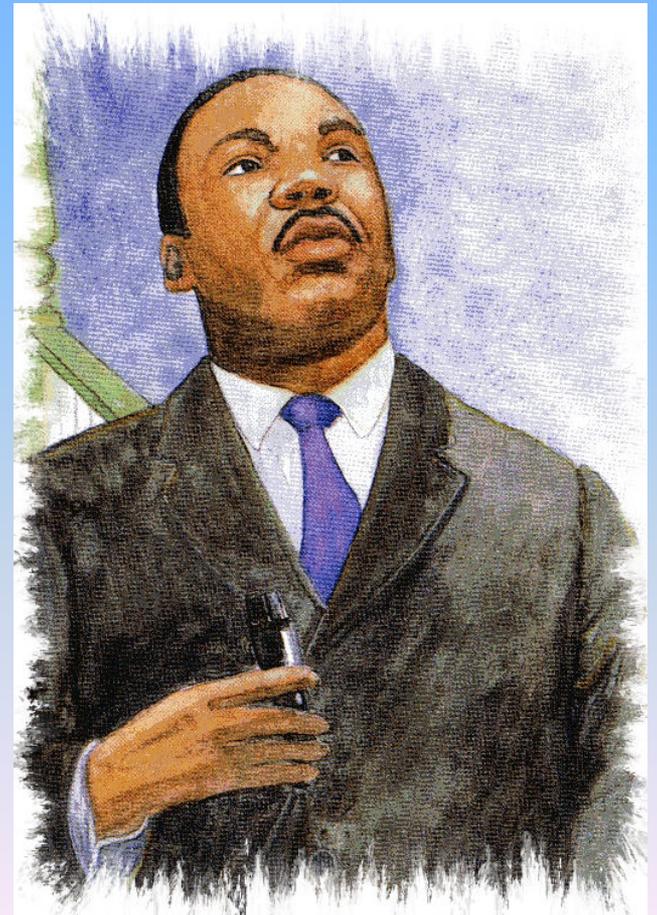
Dr. King led a protest. Black people throughout the city refused to ride the buses.





One night a bomb was
throw into Dr. King's
house while he was out.

Many of his followers were very
angry and wanted to fight. Martin
wanted things to be resolved
peacefully. He encouraged black
people to try to get along with
white people.



The bus protest lasted a year.

When it ended there were
no more 'White Only'
sections on buses



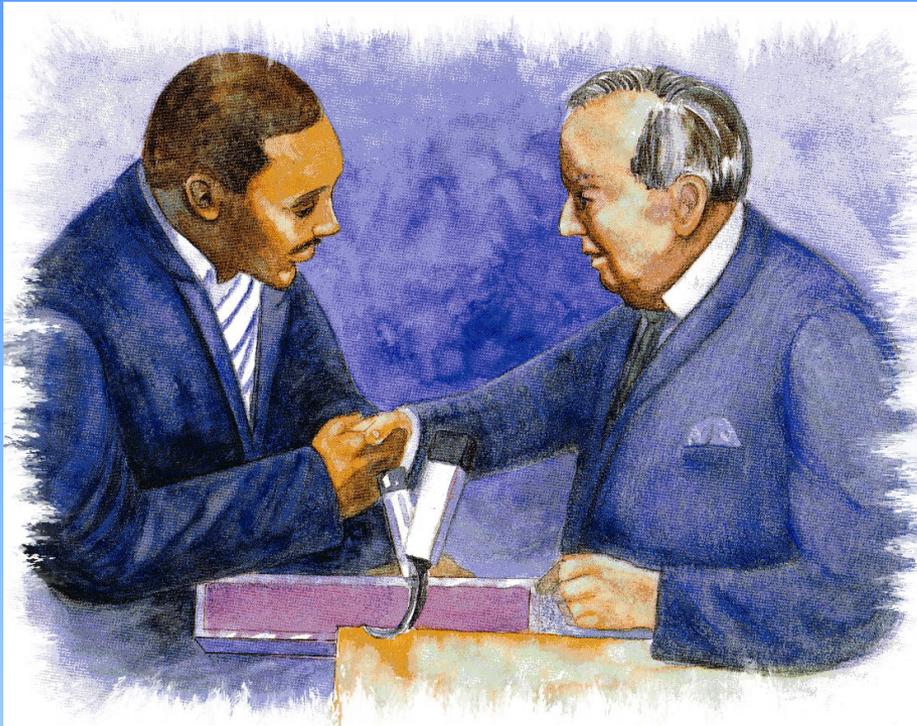


In 1960, Dr. King moved back to Atlanta. He continued to lead peaceful protests for equal rights and to stop segregation. He was arrested many times, even though he was a peaceful man.



In 1963 Dr. King led his biggest march of all - the March on Washington. More than two hundred thousand people, of all colours, followed him. It was here that he gave his most famous speech.

"I have a dream that my four children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the colour of their skin but by the content of their character."



In 1964, Dr. King was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize - a great honour. The USA was changing. New laws were passed and 'Whites Only' signs were against the law.

In some areas, however, there were still problems. Although Dr. King told his followers to protest peacefully there were sometimes outbreaks of violence and riots.



Dr. King travelled to Memphis, Tennessee in April 1968. He planned to march for equal pay for white and black refuse workers.

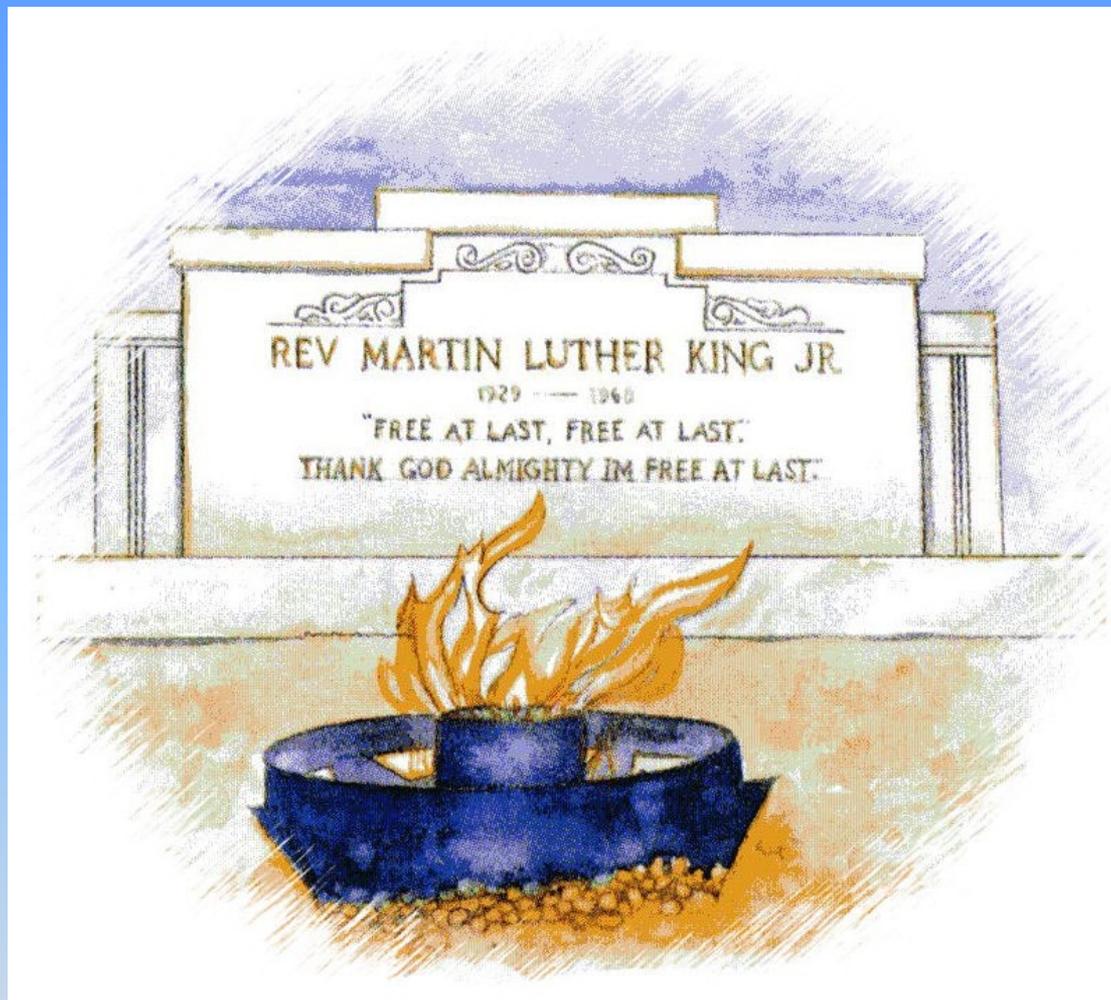
But, on April 4th in Memphis, Dr. King stood outside his motel room and was shot by a man called James Earl Ray. He had been hiding nearby and waiting for his opportunity. Dr. King died and hour later.



Dr. King achieved many things
within his lifetime.



He had dreamed of a world
free of hate, prejudice and
violence.



In 1983, the US government declared that the third Monday in January would be made a holiday to honour the life and ideals of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Images by David A. Adler, available from Getty images



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