

Martin Luther King, Jr. (MLK)



Born: January 15, 1929 in Atlanta, GA

Died: April 4, 1968 in Memphis, TN – Assassinated

Early Life: Named Michael King at birth, MLK's father was compelled to change both of their names after a trip to Germany in 1934. Having learned more about the Martin Luther, the leader of a protest movement that led to the Protestant Reformation in the 1500s, and having witnessed the current rise of Nazism, King Sr, a Baptist minister, was inspired to act. Hence, MLK grew up in a minister's household, with the specter of past activist leaders always at the forefront. His name was officially changed in 1957.

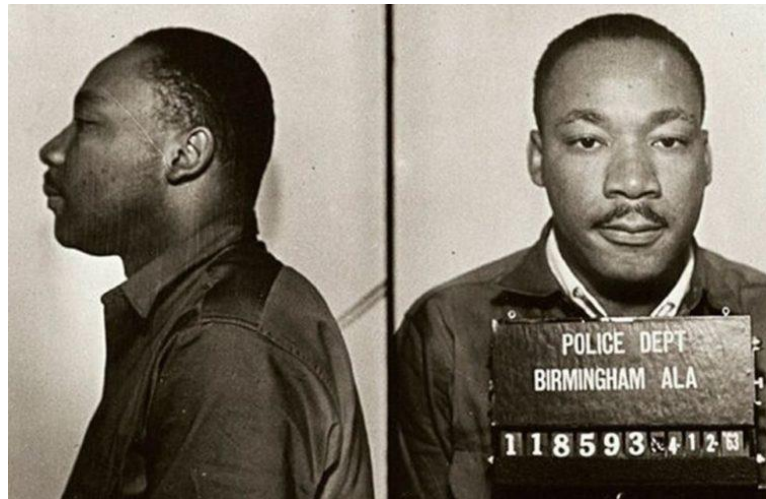
MLK, attended segregated schools in Atlanta, GA where he was known for his public speaking abilities and was a member of the debate team. MLK graduated from High School two years early and entered Morehouse College at the age of 15 and graduated in 1948 at the age of 18. He then attended Seminary and became a minister. He went on to earn a doctorate in 1955.

MLK married Coretta Scott in 1953, and they had four children.

Involvement in Civil Rights: After Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat to a white man on a bus, MLK and others organized the successful Montgomery Bus Boycott. This launched MLK to national prominence as a civil rights activist.

Working with other activists, MLK was instrumental in the founding of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). The group focused on non-violent protests and acts of passive civil disobedience that became the cornerstone of the movement. They believed this strategy would call national attention to the intensity and persuasiveness of Jim Crow laws. MLK led protests and marches to fight for blacks' right to vote, desegregation, non-discrimination in the workplace, and other civil rights.

During the course of his activism, MLK was arrested 29 times, once in Montgomery, AL for doing 30 in a 25. After being arrested during the course of a Birmingham, AL protest march, MLK wrote his famous "Letter from Birmingham Jail." The Letter was widely published in 1963 and is considered a tipping point toward national Civil Rights legislation.



Legacy: MLK is credited with being instrumental in the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 which ended segregation in public places and banned employment discrimination on the basis of race, color, sex, religion or national origin. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 outlawed discriminatory voting practices. The 24th Amendment further prohibited any use of a poll tax to prevent voting.

At least 77 public schools are named after MLK as are over 900 streets. Many states celebrate Martin Luther King, Jr. Day on January 15 every year.

A national monument to MLK has been erected in Washington, DC.

Death: MLK was shot outside his Memphis, TN hotel room on April 4, 1968 where he had traveled to support the city's striking sanitation workers. James Earl Ray was arrested in London four days later, and extradited back to America where he pled guilty to the murder. MLK's family maintains that Ray was involved in a conspiracy with the government to commit the assassination.



