

One of the world's best known advocates of non-violent social change strategies, Martin Luther King Jr. was a true man of peace. As we take this day to reflect and remember him, following are some interesting facts about the man who strived to make the world a better place for all of us: Martin Luther King, Jr., was born on January 15, 1929, in Atlanta, Georgia, the middle child of the Reverend Martin Luther King, Sr. and Alberta Williams King .King's father was born "Michael King", and Martin Luther King, Jr., was originally named "Michael King, Jr.," until the family traveled to Europe in 1934 and visited Germany. His father soon changed both of their names to Martin Luther in honor of the German Protestant leader Martin Luther.



King sang with his church choir at the 1939 Atlanta premiere of the movie *Gone with the Wind*. Growing up in Atlanta, King attended Booker T. Washington High School. A precocious student, he skipped both the ninth and the twelfth grade and entered Morehouse College at age fifteen without formally graduating from high school. King married Coretta Scott, on June 18, 1953, on the lawn of her parents' house in her hometown of Heiberger, Alabama. They had four children; Yolanda King, Martin Luther King III, Dexter Scott King, and Bernice King. King became pastor of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama when he was twenty-five years old in 1954.



Inspired by Gandhi's success with non-violent activism, King visited Gandhi's birthplace in India in 1959. The trip to India affected King in a profound way, deepening his understanding of non-violent resistance and his commitment to America's struggle for civil rights.



On December 1, 1955, Rosa Parks was arrested for refusing to give up her seat on a bus in Montgomery, Alabama. As a result, King helped organize The Montgomery Bus Boycott. Lasting for 385 days, the situation became so tense that King's house was bombed and he was also arrested at one point. In the end however, the United States District Court ruled to end racial segregation on all Montgomery public buses.



In 1957, King, Ralph Abernathy, and other civil rights activists founded the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). The group was created to harness the moral authority and organizing power of black churches to conduct non-violent protests in the service of civil rights reform. King led the SCLC until his death.

King made the cover of *Time* magazine on February 18, 1957.

In 1959, King wrote *The Measure of A Man*, from which the piece *What is Man?*, an attempt to sketch the optimal political, social, and economic structure of society, is derived.



King was awarded the *Pacem in Terris Award*, named after a 1963 encyclical letter by Pope John XXIII calling for all people to strive for peace.

King, representing SCLC, was among the leaders of the so-called "Big Six" civil rights organizations who were instrumental in the organization of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, which took place on August 28, 1963. It was at this event that King gave his electrifying "I Have A Dream" speech.

More than a quarter million people of diverse ethnicities attended the event, sprawling from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial onto the National Mall and around the reflecting pool. At the time, it was the largest gathering of protesters in Washington's history.

King's "I Have a Dream" speech electrified the crowd. It is regarded, along with Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address and Franklin D. Roosevelt's Infamy Speech, as one of the finest speeches in the history of American oratory.

The March, and especially King's speech, helped put civil rights at the very top of the liberal polit-



King was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize on December 10, 1964.

King attempted to organize a march from Selma, Alabama to the state capital of Montgomery, Alabama for March 7, 1965. This march was aborted however, because of mob and police violence against the demonstrators. This day has since become known as Bloody Sunday.

The march finally went ahead fully and peacefully on March 25, 1965. At the conclusion of the march and on the steps of the state capitol, King delivered a speech that has become known as "How Long, Not Long".



As an educational experience and to demonstrate their support and empathy for the poor, King and other civil rights leaders moved into the slums on the west side of Chicago. They however, received a worse reception than they had in the South with their marches being met by thrown bottles, screaming crowds and near riot circumstances.

King, who received death threats throughout his involvement in the civil rights movement, was hit by a brick during one of these marches but continued to lead-on even in the face of personal danger.



Starting in 1965, King began to express doubts about the United States' role in the Vietnam War.

On February 2, 1965 King is arrested in Selma, Alabama during a voting rights demonstration.

On April 4, 1967, King appeared at New York City's Riverside Church—exactly one year before his death—and delivered a speech titled “Beyond Vietnam”. In the speech, he spoke strongly against the U.S.'s role in the war, insisting that the U.S. was in Vietnam “to occupy it as an American colony” and calling the U.S. government “the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today”.



The Supreme Court upholds a conviction of King by a Birmingham court for demonstrating without a permit. King spends four days in a Birmingham jail.



In 1968, King and the SCLC organized the “Poor People’s Campaign” to address issues of economic justice. The campaign culminated in a march on Washington, D.C. demanding economic aid to the poorest communities of the United States.

On March 29, 1968, King went to Memphis, Tennessee in support of the black sanitary public works employees, who had been on strike since March 12 for higher wages and better treatment.

On April 3, King addressed a rally and delivered his “I’ve Been to the Mountaintop” address at Mason Temple, the world headquarters of the Church of God in Christ.



King was booked in room 306 at the Lorraine Motel. The Reverend Ralph Abernathy, King's close friend and colleague who was present at the assassination, swore under oath to the United States House Select Committee on Assassinations that King and his entourage stayed at room 306 at the Lorraine Motel so often it was known as the “King-Abernathy suite”.

According to Jesse Jackson, who was also present at the assassination, King's last words on the balcony prior to his assassination were spoken to musician Ben Branch, who was scheduled to perform that night at an event King was attending: “Ben, make sure you play “Take My Hand, Precious Lord” in the meeting tonight. Play it real pretty.”



At 6:01 p.m., April 4, 1968, a shot rang out as King stood on the motel's second floor balcony. The bullet entered through his right cheek, smashing his jaw, then traveled down his spinal cord before lodging in his shoulder.

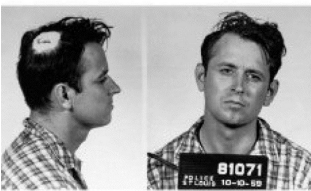
After emergency chest surgery, King was pronounced dead at St. Joseph's Hospital at 7:05 p.m.



King's autopsy revealed that although he was only thirty-nine years old, he had the heart of a sixty-year-old man, perhaps a result of the stress of thirteen years in the civil rights movement.

The assassination led to a nationwide wave of riots in Washington DC, Chicago, Baltimore, Louisville, Kentucky, Kansas City, and dozens of other cities.

Presidential candidate Robert Kennedy was on his way to Indianapolis for a campaign rally when he was informed of King's death. He gave a short speech to the gathering of supporters informing them of the tragedy and urging them to continue King's ideal of non-violence.



King made a request that at his funeral no mention of his awards and honors be made, but that it be said that he tried to “feed the hungry”, “clothe the naked”, “be right on the [Vietnam] war question”, and “love and serve humanity.”

Two months after King's death, escaped convict James Earl Ray was captured at London's Heathrow Airport while trying to leave the United Kingdom on a false Canadian passport.



In 1971, King was posthumously awarded the Grammy Award for Best Spoken Word Album for his *Why I Oppose the War in Vietnam*. Six years later, the Presidential Medal of Freedom was awarded to King by Jimmy Carter. King and his wife were also awarded the Congressional Gold Medal in 2004.

On January 31, 1977, United States district Judge John Lewis Smith, Jr., ordered all known copies of any recorded audiotapes and written transcripts resulting from the FBI's electronic surveillance of King between 1963 and 1968 to be held in the National Archives and sealed from public access



At the White House Rose Garden on November 2, 1983, President Ronald Reagan signed a bill creating a federal holiday to honor King. Observed for the first time on January 20, 1986, it is called Martin Luther King, Jr. Day. Following President George H. W. Bush's 1992 proclamation, the holiday is observed on the third Monday of January each year, near the time of King's birthday.

On January 17, 2000, for the first time, Martin Luther King Jr. Day was officially observed in all fifty U.S. states. The Lorraine Motel, where King was assassinated, is now the site of the National