

# Martin Luther King, Jr. And the Civil Rights Movement

## Themes

United States History  
Safeguarding Freedoms  
Conflict, Growth and Change

## Overview

Born in 1929, an eager Martin Luther King, Jr. skipped grades 9 and 12 and entered college at 15. He found his calling early: at 18 he was ordained as a minister. Married to Coretta Scott in 1953, King became minister of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama, the city where Rosa Parks was arrested for refusing to give up her seat on a public bus. In response, Martin Luther King called for a one-day boycott, thus beginning a life of leadership based on passive resistance and the “right to protest for right.”

King studied the philosophies of Indian leader Mahatma Gandhi, whose belief in relentless non-violent mass confrontation had finally led his country to freedom from Great Britain. Martin Luther King’s strong convictions led him on a path of leadership in “active refusal to cooperate.” During the bus boycott, despite many attempts to intimidate him, King adhered firmly to his policy of non-violence and in 1956 the Supreme Court ruled that segregation on public buses was illegal.

*Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Civil Rights Movement* gives viewers an insightful look at King as a leader. Through the events of the 1950s and ‘60s, until his untimely death by assassin in 1968, he remained a dedicated role model, nurturing the “...dream of a land where men of all races, of all nationalities, and of all creeds can live together as brothers...”

## Vocabulary

**act:** a law

**boycott:** to join together and refuse to use, buy, or deal with something for the purpose of persuasion.

**insurrection:** rebellion against established authority

**intimidate:** to make afraid

**opposition:** resistance to something; action against something

**passive:** inactive, but acted upon

**passive resistance:** opposition to something by refusal to comply or with non-violent behavior

## Topics to discuss before viewing

1. Ask students to provide the meanings of the words *segregation* and *integration*, or to look up their meaning in a dictionary. If applicable, model sharing an experience.
2. Ask students to tell what they already know about Martin Luther King, Jr. Why do they think his birthday is celebrated as a holiday (in most states)?
3. Martin Luther King, Jr. believed people could create change with non-violent passive resistance. Begin discussion about today’s world and its problems with violence on the streets and in schools. Ask students to talk about what the world would be like if everyone believed in, and acted with, non-violence.

## Questions to ask after viewing

1. What leader influenced Martin Luther King, Jr. as a student? Why? (Mahatma Gandhi, the Hindu leader who led India’s fight for freedom from Great Britain by insisting on passive resistance.)
2. Why was Rosa Parks arrested in Montgomery, Alabama in 1955? What law had she broken? (She was arrested for refusing to give up her seat on the bus. The law stated that Negroes had to move to the back of the bus or give up their seat to a white rider.)
3. What action did Martin Luther King, Jr. take in response to the arrest of Rosa Parks? (He called for a boycott, for all Negro riders to refuse to ride buses, instead taking alternative transportation such as carpools or walking.)
4. During his peaceful demonstrations, Martin Luther King, Jr. was arrested many times. Why did he say he was “proud of his crimes”? (He knew his actions were for the good of people. He said he had the “right to protest for right.”)
5. In the 1960s, George Wallace was Governor of Alabama. What was his opinion of the civil rights movement? (He was against it. He called for “segregation forever.”)
6. What was a “sit-in”? Where and how did it get its name? (In Greensboro, North Carolina, where college students entered a segregated Woolworth’s, sat at the lunch counter, and peacefully ordered food and drink.)
7. Who did Martin Luther King, Jr. and other black leaders support during the 1960 Presidential election? (John F. Kennedy. The black vote for JFK was so strong; it may have been responsible for the narrow margin that won him the election.)
8. What were “freedom riders”? (Civil rights workers, black and white, many of them college students, who rode buses across the country testing or proving the new desegregation laws.)

9. In 1963, President Kennedy agreed to push the Civil Rights Act through Congress. Did he? (No. He was assassinated before the act was signed.)
10. By 1966, Martin Luther King, Jr. broadened his focus to include issues of poverty, unemployment, and world peace. What was a major contributor to the country's overwhelming unrest? What was King's response? (The war in Vietnam was causing conflict here and abroad. Martin Luther King, Jr. was one of the first U.S. leaders to speak out against the war.)

#### Additional activities

- ◆ Martin Luther King, Jr. was an eloquent speaker. See how many of the quotes below students can identify. You may want to have them research to find the entire speech to read to the class.

*"...free at last, free at last. Thank God Almighty, we're free at last."*

*"It is no longer a choice between violence and non-violence in this world; it is non-violence or non-existence."*

*"America is essentially a dream..."*

*"We will be the participants in a great building process that will make America a new nation."*

- ◆ Have students conduct further research into the history of the Nobel Prizes. You may initiate interest by having them find the answers to these questions: Who was Alfred Nobel? When was the first Nobel Prize awarded? What are the categories for which a Nobel Prize is awarded?
- ◆ The word *boycott* comes from a British landowner named Charles C. Boycott. Have students find out why his name became a word in common use. Then open a discussion about the effectiveness of boycotts in recent history. Ask students to use their critical thinking skills to hypothesize about

how they might use a boycott to make a change in world or community current events.

- ◆ The 1964 Civil Rights Act was an extension of 1860's 15<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the Constitution of the United States, giving all citizens the right to vote. Encourage students to research the Constitution and select an amendment to support. Then let them create a billboard or poster that expresses their support.

#### Additional AIMS Media titles

*American Chronicles Series*  
*The John F. Kennedy Series*  
*Malcolm X*  
*Nelson Mandela and the Struggle to End Apartheid*

#### Length

- 29 minutes

#### Subject areas

- American History

#### Audience Levels

- Grade levels 8-12, Adult

#### Catalog number

- 8830

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AIMS  
 Discussion Guide

## Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Civil Rights Movement

#### Objectives

- ◆ Students will have a better understanding of the racial tensions in the United States prior to 1968.
- ◆ Students will appreciate the significant role Martin Luther King played in obtaining equal rights for all people.
- ◆ Students will comprehend the meaning of "passive resistance" and "non-violent mass confrontation," and be able to cite examples of their effectiveness.

