

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

A Man Of Great Spirit And Love

By John Williams, Jr.
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THE SON of a baptist minister and a school teacher mother, Martin Luther King, Jr. was destined for greatness.

King's grandfather on his mother's side, Rev. Alfred Daniel Williams, had founded the Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, Georgia in 1895. His father, who had become a pastor in 1932, built the church into one of the most important and influential churches in that city. Both King's father and grandfather had used the pulpit and church to gain rights for Afro-Americans in Atlanta. His grandfather, who was a charter member of the NAACP, was a leader in the 1920's of a drive to defeat local bond issues until a Black public high school was built.

During the same period he helped organize a successful boycott against a local newspaper that ridiculed Afro-Americans for seeking equal education. His son Martin Luther King, Sr., continuing in his father's tradition, protested against the humiliating effects of segregation in the South, while at the same time seeking improvements within the segregated system that cast Afro-Americans into inferior positions.

THROUGH ALL these protests, Martin Luther King, Jr. was present, a witness to the existing racial tensions and the possibilities for change. The young

King, whose original name (Michael) had now been changed by his father, attended Booker T. Washington High School for Blacks in Atlanta. Skipping the ninth and twelfth grades, he was admitted to Morehouse College, in Atlanta, at the age of 15.

King was ordained at his father's church in 1947, and received a B.A. degree in sociology from Morehouse in 1948. Immediately thereafter, he entered Crozer Theological Seminary in Pennsylvania. In 1951, he became president of his senior class and won numerous honors. He was also awarded a fellowship to study on the graduate level at any college of his choice. He chose Boston University's School of Theology to study for a Ph.D., where he met, courted and eventually married Coretta Scott of Heilberger, Ala., who was studying voice at the New England Conservatory of Music (Boston, Mass.).

In 1954, King accepted the pastorship of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Ala. and there the legend began.

THE BOYCOTT lasted a year and finally in 1956, the federal District Court ruled against segregated seating on municipal buses. Five months later, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the decision and the bus segregation came to an end in Montgomery. King, who practiced the non-violent techniques of Mohandas Ghandi during the boycott, received in-

ternational fame for his leadership during the boycott.

Before leaving Montgomery in 1959 to become co-pastor, with his father, at Ebenezer Baptist Church, King organized the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) "to carry on non-violent crusades against the evils of second class citizenship throughout the South."

In Dec. 1961, King began a campaign against segregation in Albany, Ga., at the invitation of several local leaders. It was a failure, and he withdrew in the fall with no victories, but a clear insight into his tactical weaknesses. Thus, in 1963, after reassessment, King launched a series of successful non-violent demonstrations in Birmingham that led to his arrest and confinement in jail during which time he wrote "Letter From a Birmingham Jail."

THESE demonstrations led to federal intervention and aided greatly in the passage of the 1965 Civil Rights Act. After his 1963 successes, King was one of the principals in the spectacular "March on Washington" that drew some 250,000 people to demonstrate in behalf of the pending civil rights bill. It was here, at the Lincoln Memorial, that he delivered his famous "I Have A Dream" speech. About this time, Time magazine selected him as Man of the Year, and in 1964 he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

The next few years were not good ones for King. He moved north to try to break down segregation. He was rudely greeted in Los Angeles and Chicago.

Back in the South in 1965, he helped to conduct a march that aided in bringing about the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

In 1967, aware of the restlessness of those young Black leaders that championed militance and Black power, King denounced the American war in Viet Nam. In his view, the war was draining away the country's resources that, he felt, could be used to eliminate some of the poverty, misery and disease at home. His move to unite in one coalition the antiwar and civil rights causes gained him harsh criticism, but he nevertheless continued to speak out against the war.

ON APRIL 4, 1968, about 6 p.m., while on the balcony of the Lorraine Motel in Memphis, Tenn., where he had come to help the local sanitation workers in their strike for higher wages, he was shot by an assassin, allegedly James Earl Ray. King was pronounced dead at 7 p.m. in the emergency room at St. Joseph's Hospital.

King, who had touched the world with his magnificent manner and non-violent approach, met a violent end. His death caused riots, looting, killings and waves of disorder in more than 120 U.S. cities, with the worst destruction taking place in Washington, D.C., only ten blocks from the White House. In a week or so the riots subsided, but the anger and frustration that had caused them remained.

Martin Luther King, Jr. left a legacy of spiritual leadership and love. His accomplishments were many, but he wanted to accomplish so much more. Though the years have gone by since his passing, his words and actions remain inspirational to those who were but children in the 1960's.

The world is a better place because Dr. King wanted every man and woman to have the chance to live a normal, healthy, and dignified life.

**"Some men and women
see things
as they are
and say why.
I dream things
that never were
and say, why not?"**

The Dream is 20.

**Don't let it
disappear. 20 years ago
Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
shared his vision with us.**

**Let's keep alive
his dream of all people
walking together in Peace
and Brotherhood.**

**He's gone.
The dream lives.**

