



Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., was America's greatest 20th-century civil-rights leader.

We learn more about Dr. King [from the Library of Congress](#):

*Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., twentieth-century America's most compelling and effective civil rights leader, was born on January 15, 1929, in Atlanta, Georgia.*

*After entering Morehouse College at age fifteen, King followed his father and grandfather into the Baptist ministry. He received a bachelor of divinity from Crozer Theological Seminary in 1951 and a Ph.D from Boston University in 1955.*

*King entered the civil rights movement in 1955. A young, newly married pastor of a Montgomery, Alabama church, he was asked to lead a bus boycott aimed at ending segregation of public transport in Montgomery.*

*The boycott, initiated by Rosa Parks' refusal to surrender her bus seat to a white passenger, lasted over a year and resulted in the desegregation of the city's busses.*

*A founder of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, King advocated non-violent action as a means of lifting racial oppression. Sit-ins, marches, and peaceful demonstrations highlighted issues of inequality.*

*The commitment and moral integrity of activists who remained calm in the face of violent opposition inspired national admiration. Jailed during an Alabama campaign to abolish segregated lunch counters, King delineated his philosophy of nonviolence in the now famous "Letter From the Birmingham Jail."*

The following are some interesting, little-discussed facts, about Dr. King and his family:

- When he was born - on January 15, 1929 - his parents named him Michael King, Jr. Five years later, after King's father took a trip to Germany - where he was inspired by the Protestant-Reformation leader, Martin Luther - King, Sr. renamed himself and his son.
- Because he was such a gifted high-school student, King was able to skip his freshman and senior years. That allowed him to start college (at Morehouse) when he was 15 (in 1944).
- Although he would have been a fourth-generation Baptist pastor, King did not intend to become a minister until Benjamin E. Mays, president of Morehouse College, convinced him to follow that path. Before he graduated with a sociology degree, King became an ordained pastor.
- Becoming a scholar, the future Dr. King earned his divinity degree (from Crozer Theological Seminary) and received his PhD (in 1955) from Boston University. He called his dissertation "[A Comparison of the Conceptions of God in the Thinking of Paul Tillich and Henry Nelson Wieman.](#)"
- On the 17th of May, 1957, Dr. King gave his first speech at the Lincoln Memorial. It was also the first time he delivered a voting-rights speech at a national forum. Urging America to "give us the ballot," that speech helped

to position Dr. King as a national civil-rights leader.

- Jailed 29 times, according to the King Center, he endured arrests not just on civil-disobedience charges but also on trumped-up charges. Once, in 1956, he went to jail in Montgomery, Alabama for exceeding the 25 mph speed limit by five miles.
- Attacked by a mentally ill person, wielding a sharp letter opener - on September 20, 1958 - Dr. King narrowly survived that assassination attempt. Izola Ware Curry saw King in Blumstein's department store, in Harlem, where he'd been signing copies of his book "Stride Toward Freedom." She identified King, then rammed the letter opener into his chest.
- Curry's blade tip reached the side of King's aorta, where it rested before surgeons could carefully and delicately remove it. One sneeze, his doctors later told King, could have caused the blade to puncture his aorta. From his hospital bed, Dr. King forgave his attacker.
- Dr. King's family members, including his wife, did not believe that James Earl Ray acted alone in the 1968 death of the civil-rights leader. The jury in a civil trial, which took place in Memphis during 1999, concluded the assassination was the product of a conspiracy in which Ray was set-up. Mrs. King praised that result.
- Alberta Williams King - Dr. King's 69-year-old mother - also died from a bullet wound. On the 30th of June, 1974, she was playing the organ during Sunday services at the Ebenezer Baptist Church. A man sitting in a front pew - Marcus Wayne Chenault, Jr. - had two pistols with him. Originally wanting to kill Dr. King's father - who was present at the service - the shooter aimed for Mrs. King instead because she was closer to him. He also killed a church deacon.
- Receiving a death sentence for his crimes, the shooter ended-up with a commuted sentence (to life in prison) because (at least in part) Dr. King's family members opposed capital punishment.

A gifted orator, Dr. King gave numerous memorable speeches. Some of his most-famous are:

- "[I Have a Dream](#)"
- "[We Shall Overcome](#)"
- "[I've Been to the Mountaintop](#)"

Click on the image for a better view.

Credits:

Image online, courtesy U.S. Library of Congress.

Text quoted above from the U.S. Library of Congress, American Memory, January 15th.

PD

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/Dr.-Martin-Luther-King-Jr.-0>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/Dr.-Martin-Luther-King-Jr.-0>