



## Martin Luther King Jr.

*"Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly."*

Martin Luther King Jr. (1929-1968) was the most prominent leader during the transformational events of the Civil Rights Movement. Born Michael King Jr., his father changed both of their names after being inspired by the initiator of the Protestant Reformation. A promising student, he entered preparations for the ministry after graduating from Morehouse College, becoming Rev. King in 1951 and Dr. King after earning his doctorate from Boston University in 1955. There, he met Coretta Scott, the woman who would be his partner in life and advocate after his death. They married and settled in Montgomery, Alabama, where he became the pastor of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church. Soon after the arrest of Rosa Parks, King was chosen to lead the boycott of the public transportation system. After the successful desegregation of the buses, King became head of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference to campaign for more widespread change across the South. King moved to Atlanta in 1960, where he was jailed under false pretenses, and only released due to the intervention of John F. Kennedy, who would soon win the presidency by a narrow vote. King continued to be a critical leader as the sit-in movement to desegregate dining places picked up, and he was imprisoned again in 1963. This resulted in the writing of the "Letter from Birmingham Jail," a vital statement of his core ideas. His release was followed by the March of Washington that featured the immortal "I Have a Dream" speech. The power of his words contributed to the passing of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, and King received the Nobel Peace Prize that year. His focus then turned to political gains, leading the famed march across the Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama, that helped lead to the 1965 Voting Rights Act. His later years were dedicated to the struggle for economic justice for the poor. He also vigorously opposed the war in Vietnam, an unpopular position that cost him a great deal. In 1968, he traveled to Memphis, Tennessee, to offer support for a strike by the city's mostly Black sanitation workers. On April 4<sup>th</sup>, he was struck down by an assassin's bullet.

Today, Dr. King is beloved almost universally as a unifying figure for peace, justice, and equality, despite being highly controversial during his life. Most importantly, his words and deeds challenge us to continue to strive for the freedom and dignity of all people.