

One of the most popular and significant expressions in recent American history is 'I have a dream.' It's an expression that Martin Luther King Jr., the Christian pastor, and civil rights leader, used in a statement he made during the 1963 Washington March. He was urging on Black people across America for liberty and justice.

This speech represents, to many still, the conceptual height of the 1960s American civil rights movement that King helped form, mobilize, and encourage. In 1963, King was awarded Time Magazine's Man of the Year for his historic relevance to the revolution, won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964, and was sadly murdered in 1968.

But what was this national symbol of peace and justice created by private, political, and social forces?

From the King's viewpoint, this review sheds light on the man behind the campaign. These sections, compiled from his writings, documents, speeches, observations, and quotes, provide an overview of his life's main events and his thoughts and feelings about them.

Chapter 1 - Martin Luther King Jr. witnessed social and economic discrimination firsthand while he was growing up.

Martin Luther King Jr., born in Atlanta on January 15, 1929, came into a fractured nation that was in profound economic distress. It was also heavily divided in the American South, and the Great Depression was just falling on the nation.

The Kings, however, found themselves to be one of the more fortunate Black families of the period. They weren't rich, but they enjoyed a pleasant if modest lifestyle as a Christian minister on Martin Luther King Sr.'s paycheck. Furthermore, a pillar of devotion and power was their religion.

Martin Luther King's dad was a pastor by birth. Strong-willed and dynamic, he was respected in Atlanta's Black culture and became a prominent figure in the civil rights struggle that his son would eventually lead.

The King's mother, Alberta, by comparison, was sweet and gentle. But when it came to establishing a sense of self-respect in her girls, considering the bigotry they encountered, she was similarly committed. It was she who told King the history of U.S. segregation and tried her best to justify the continued culture of segregation in the U.S. South.

As a boy, the arbitrary injustices that segregation created also baffled King. In most city parks, he wasn't permitted to play. Even if it was empty, he had to sit on the back of the bus. And when a new film was released, he had to wait several months for it to hit the Black Theaters. But when his best friend, a white boy living in his community, was abruptly no longer permitted to play with

him, one of his most vivid early impressions of bigotry happened. The boy's father no longer wanted his son to be identified with black people.

The racist systems around him only became more visible to him as King grew older. He witnessed police abuse and beatings by the Ku Klux Klan. And the suffering he was seeing in the Black community persuaded him that racist racism and economic inequality had a structural connection.

As a consequence, King started to promote social justice early on. He organized groups for church and Bible research. He engaged in a speech competition for area public schools at the age of fourteen, enthusiastically supporting the abolition of segregation. And this was just the start.

Chapter 2 - King was refining his religious and metaphysical viewpoints at college.

Skipping a grade and early graduating from high school, at only fifteen years old, King joined Atlanta's Morehouse College. There he had his initial experience with the idea of nonviolent dissent that would become a foundation of his ideology. His influence was the article "On Civil Disobedience" by Henry David Thoreau, in which Thoreau speaks of his unwillingness to pay taxes in reaction against the Mexican-American War and the proliferation of slavery.

King discovered that walking in his dad's footsteps and becoming a preacher would be the perfect way of serving mankind. He was licensed as a minister in his senior year at Morehouse.

In 1948, in Pennsylvania, King joined the Crozer Theological Seminary. Reading anything from Plato to Mills to Locke, he became passionate about his academic quest to grasp and overcome social evil. None of these thinkers, however, left an impact on him as much as Walter Rauschenbusch, an American theologian who believed that the religious duty of preachers was to combat poverty, abuse, and oppression.

At Crozer, King also strengthened his perception of the peaceful, pacifist stance. Mahatma Gandhi and his peaceful resistance efforts in India against British rule intrigued him.

King eventually moved to Boston to pursue a Ph.D. at the School of Theology at Boston University. By now he was profoundly persuaded that a Christian obligation was nonviolent opposition to evil regimes.

In addition to this ideological development, for King, the college had another private transition. A mutual acquaintance in Boston introduced him to Coretta Scott, an Alabama musician. For King, it was love at first sight. He promised his mother after their initial date that Coretta would become his partner—and so she did. His intuition did not fail him: during their union,

Coretta would prove a devoted partner and pillar of immense power for King, helping the campaign every inch of the process. The couple had four kids together: Martin Luther III, Dexter, Yolanda, and Bernice.

King was called upon to work as the pastor of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama, after graduating from Boston. He had a spiritual responsibility to represent the Black community in this struggling area, though he was worried about moving to the segregated South. In May 1954, he delivered his first preach in Montgomery as a preacher. He was at precisely the right location at the right moment, as it played out.

Chapter 3 - King appeared as a new civil rights activist after the Montgomery bus demonstrations.

The King enjoyed church service from the start. He became actively engaged with civil rights groups in Montgomery, alongside his responsibilities as a minister. He entered the NAACP's local branch in 1954, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and urged his community members to do so as well.

The Supreme Court had recently abolished high school segregation, a major victory for the civil rights struggle, but many stores, bars, and all vehicles stayed segregated in Montgomery.

One Montgomery citizen declared on December 1, 1955, that she'd had enough with the waiting in the back of the bus. And Rosa Parks declined to relocate when the bus driver told her to leave her front place to the white man who had just boarded. Little did she realize that it would set off a whole revolution with this simple act of defiance.

He quickly started to work when King learned that Rosa Parks had been detained. He arranged for the Black ministers and civil leaders to speak, and they agreed that it was time to boycott the discriminatory bus system. They encouraged the black population of Montgomery to avoid riding buses by flyers and word-of-mouth. They intended to compel the introduction of buses with this mass demonstration of refusal to cooperate.

Not a single black individual was seen taking the bus in Montgomery for the past three months. Rather, they commuted into an intricate carpooling scheme with the assistance of black taxi companies that joined the rally.

King and his supporters had agreed to create a new institution: the Montgomery Improvement Association, or MIA, to oversee the campaign. As its President, King made it known to the bus company and city authorities that until Black citizens got fair service on the buses, the protest would not end.

Without a war, the bus operator, backed by the city council, did not give up. Firstly, all-black taxi drivers were required by the police chief to charge at least 45 cents a ride. Then there were reports that King had used MIA contributions to purchase a completely new Cadillac for himself. Ultimately, the police began arresting black drivers who were involved with the carpooling scheme for small traffic offenses, including King himself.

After his short imprisonment, King acknowledged that without massive opposition, most white people would not give up their privilege. Still, he had not stopped fighting.

Chapter 4 - When the war started to take a personal cost, King discovered the power in his religion.

The lead position of King in the bus demonstrations came at a high expense. With his duties as president of the MIA, he scarcely had time for his family, and much of the child care was assigned to Coretta. She stayed, however, unquestioningly respectful of his efforts.

The King's busy calendar was not the only worry. King continued to obtain warnings as the bus boycott attracted nationwide attention. An agitated person on the phone one day threatened King that his house was going to burn down. He was also threatened with death, and the King's family started to worry about his security.

As tensions grew and his fear rose, King turned for help and encouragement to God. He believed like when he prayed, he heard God telling him that by speaking up for justice, he was doing the proper thing.

It was his strong faith in the strength of the love of God that stopped the King from becoming cynical in the face of white backlash and abuse. The first thing King did after a bomb exploded on his house's porch, thankfully without hurting anybody, was to warn his Black followers not to turn to violence.

The campaign staged a nonviolent "jail-in" after the city council finally declared the bus boycott unconstitutional. All at once, thousands of Black people, including King, volunteered themselves to be detained over the new rule. There was just too much to be treated by the police. In the overcrowded prisons, King recalled that there was a 'holiday mood.' Fortunately, a lot of those convicted didn't make it to court.

The US Supreme Court eventually ruled bus segregation unlawful in November 1956, after 381 days of the boycott. King felt optimistic about the positive news, but his excitement was dulled by the white segregationists' final display of power. The Ku Klux Klan rode on the night of the great triumph, and the King's phone rang every five minutes with fresh violent threats. Yet he knew it was just the outbursts of several diehards. King traveled Montgomery's first integrated bus in December, one month after the court's ruling, alone in the front seat among two white

males. He had shown that peaceful opposition was not only feasible in Christian nature, it was also efficient.

Chapter 5 - As the revolution struck the South, King improved his non-violence stance.

It wasn't long before the flame began expanding to other areas in Montgomery. Across the South, the methods of passive rebellion made famous by King were discovered by Black groups as a way of fighting for their interests.

Meanwhile, King wanted to relocate his family back to Atlanta, Georgia, his homeland. From there, he decided to work on directing the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) Civil Rights Campaigns, an association of pastors and activists he had helped start.

Two towns soon emerged as the South's final hotbeds of segregation. Albany, Georgia was recognized for the wide-ranging repression of Black people by civil, political, and academic means. And Birmingham, Alabama, in the city's large manufacturing market, was home to a profoundly poor Black community struggling for slave wages. Naturally, King and the SCLC vowed to all groups their full spiritual and financial assistance.

To counteract the social and political institutions promoting apartheid, the Albany Campaign used several strategies. Eventually, several months of boycotts, followed by jail-ins and marches, resulted in merging buses and stores.

But King believed later that the Albany Campaign had not completed what it should have done. The demonstrations were too general, he felt, and their requests too abstract. Having learned from this error, when it went on to Birmingham in 1963, the SCLC agreed to concentrate on one type of segregation. Its participants will stage a protest of segregated downtown stores in this stronghold of neoliberal oppression. Then to free up the voter registration campaign, they would walk to the county courthouse.

They met a tough adversary almost instantly in Bull Connor, Birmingham's Public Safety Commissioner. Mass arrests, initially, slowly flooded the prisons with protesters. In one of the overpopulated cells, King quickly found himself but got support from an unlikely side: several days later, presidential candidate John Kennedy made the connections that contributed to his liberation.

Connor became more frustrated and more violent as the demonstrations proceeded. Newspapers quickly published photographs of black bodies being abused, swept out by pressure hoses, and assaulted by guard dogs. The protesters maintained their non-violence pledge, and the public mood was now transforming in their favor.

City leaders in Birmingham learned on May 10 that they could not hinder the unavoidable. They declared an arrangement to integrate stores, toilets, and drinking fountains to guarantee that on a non-discriminatory basis, Black workers were employed and compensated.

Chapter 6 - King soon appeared in the international arena as a symbol.

The energized civil rights struggle received national recognition with the bus marchers in Montgomery. Time Magazine released a news article on the demonstrations in 1957, notably featuring their spokesman, Martin Luther King Jr.

While the national papers frequently commented on the demonstrations in a negative and biased way, the national and foreign media were generally supportive. And with the revolution moving through the South, King's star only kept rising.

King was conscious of being a symbol and even became self-conscious of it. He felt obliged to live up to the high expectations people had for him, fearing that "a guy who reaches the top at 27 has a tough job ahead of him."

But his popularity also allowed him to make valuable connections that he used to further his mission in the US political community. He interacted extensively with Presidents Dwight Eisenhower, John Kennedy, and Lyndon Johnson throughout the years. Although he was dismissive of the contribution of Eisenhower and Johnson to social justice issues, Kennedy, who was a vocal advocate of the cause, saw a friend in him. John and his brother Robert Kennedy had used their political influence over and over again to get the King out of prison. During his presidential race, though, King never supported Kennedy, so he didn't want to generate the appearance that the civil rights campaign was a political endeavor.

King was also active in the global community. In 1957, after the Gold Coast had been liberated from British rule, he participated in independence ceremonies in Ghana. The ritual moved him profoundly, persuaded that Ghana's narrative was indicative of the utter victory of equality over the powers of oppression, patriarchy, and imperialism. He traveled to India in 1959, where he met Prime Minister Nehru and followed in the footsteps of Mahatma Gandhi, his icon. The injustice he witnessed and the cruelty of the Indian caste system affected him. He declared unity with India's lowest caste, the untouchables, in one of his sermons there, comparing their experience with that of Black Americans in the United States.

His global fame didn't stop King from constantly emphasizing the campaign's communal essence. When King was awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace in 1964, he stated that "if it were not for the ground crew, it would not be in orbit to fight for human dignity and social justice."

Chapter 7 - For America, the March on Washington represented a change in awareness.

Most people have heard of the iconic speech given by Martin Luther King during the March on Washington. This large scale protest became the emblematic highpoint of the American movement for civil rights to most. But do you know how that protest and the popular "I have a dream" quote came about?

King and the SCLC directed their focus to the rest of the nation after the campaign had expanded to all of the large cities in the American South. Black Americans were coming to recognize in northern cities that hidden racism had an equally disastrous impact on their societies in voting registration, recruitment, accommodation, and education practices, such as the straightforward segregation laws of the South.

On August 28, 1963, the March on Washington was intended to illustrate the issue of civil rights as a nationwide issue. Two hundred thousand Black people came from all around the nation and their white supporters and gathered in front of the Abraham Lincoln Stone Monument in Washington, D.C. To fight for human justice, equal justice, and equal opportunity. King was motivated by the fact that many white churches had gradually come forward to publicly support the cause and marched with them.

King was about to talk to the audience, but he didn't complete composing his statement until 4 a.m., distracted with other plans. Just on the day of the meeting. He had not yet included the famous expression "I have a dream" at that time, but he was overcome by their surreal reaction as he began talking to the audience about the potential of this nonviolent Black movement. He decided to ditch his script on an impulse to continue his free-form address.

He spoke of his childhood hope to a cheering audience that one day America will "wake up and carry out the true sense of its religion," that all people are born equal, and that his children will live "one day in a country where their skin tone will not be punished." He ended his speech with a pledge to "let freedom ring" from every city and town in America.

For the very first time, the widespread attention of the march enabled many white Americans to realize what their black countrymen were striving for. The SCLC spread its efforts into the Deep South, inspired by the recent overwhelming support. They began planning a Ku Klux Klan based in St. Augustine, Florida and went on to Mississippi and Alabama.

Chapter 8 - King's ideology of peaceful resistance became more difficult to carry on as the struggle went on.

The SCLC's efforts in the Deep South lays the foundation for several big wins, including the vocal encouragement of President John F. Kennedy. King would persuade Lyndon Johnson to keep working on some of the radical laws established under Kennedy after Kennedy's tragic murder in November 1963. Johnson signed the 1964 Civil Rights Act into law just a few months into his administration.

In colleges, work, and public areas, the new Civil Rights Act outlawed racial voter identification provisions and discrimination. The Civil Rights Act of 1965 further reinforced the demise of racist voting practices, following another big voting rights drive by the SCLC in Alabama.

However, the groundbreaking Civil Rights Act has come at a high expense. During their protests, the police in Alabama were especially violent against the unarmed demonstrators, and many central leaders in the campaign were targeted, beaten, and even murdered by white supremacists. Black people were angry around the world. They started to understand that their community's issues of crime, unemployment, and lack of opportunity wouldn't go away instantly. People were disappointed, particularly in northern cities, that the great hopes of the civil rights struggle had not yet created any results for them.

In several towns well away from the segregated South, protests erupted as a result. Thousands of poor Black residents in the Watts neighborhood of Los Angeles marched in the streets to rob and vandalize. King acknowledged the systemic brutality that shaped their resentment and had immense compassion for the protesters. But he still believed that violence was not just an immoral tool for change, but also an inefficient one.

Still, the Los Angeles riots showed King the paramount role of economic deprivation in upholding racism. That's why, in 1966, King moved with his family to one of Chicago's poorest neighborhoods to organize a campaign for housing, better employment, and equal education. He was adamant about training all protestors in the principle of nonviolence, and even got known gang leaders to join the peaceful marches. But King also contended that he'd never seen white mobs "as hostile and as hate-filled" as the ones in Chicago. The war against secret racial institutions in the north was in many ways, harder to achieve than the struggle against segregation in the south. And many Black protesters became progressively radicalized with the continuing white reaction.

Chapter 9 - King was aware of Malcolm X and the Black Power movement but skeptical of them.

Throughout his existence, King stayed a powerful believer in the Christian tradition in peaceful resistance. His reform plan was straightforward: crowds of unarmed protesters marched in the streets in the first phase, voicing their requests. With the second phase, by letting loose violence on peaceful protesters, police, city officials, and other white racist people uncovered themselves. As a consequence, the issue became known to "good" Americans around the

nation, showing solidarity with the protesters and seeking government action. Eventually, under popular public pressure, the state collapsed and put new laws in place.

His peaceful tactic was effective in many ways, but as the campaign expanded and differentiated, King found that his pacifist stance was opposed by more and more people.

To the Black world, 1963 was a year of the disaster. NAACP chief Medgar Evers was murdered in Mississippi by gunmen. In Birmingham, soon after the cops shot an eight-year-old boy on his bike, four young black girls were killed by the bombing of a black church. Police across the nation appeared to have reacted with new violence to Black demonstrations. And President Kennedy's murder in November only added to the ambiguity.

King found that black people were getting overwhelmingly frustrated around the world. To him, one of these furious individuals was Malcolm X, a Muslim minister, and fellow civil rights activist. For his honesty and ability as a speaker, King admired Malcolm X, but he considered his theory of Black nationalism inflammatory and detrimental. In contrast, Malcolm X felt King's conception of the white-and-black fraternity was misguided and unprincipled.

Some of his supporters founded the Black Power movement after Malcolm X's murder in 1965. During one of the Mississippi Independence Marches he assisted lead, King first heard the "Black Power " phrase. Fellow coordinator Stokely Carmichael proposed in one of the organizing meetings that they use the phrase during the march. King had doubts. He did not believe in Black separatism and felt that future white supporters could be alienated by the phrase.

King also consulted with his leaders and supporters as Black Power was evolving into its movement. He claimed that the revolution was a genuine outcry for political and economic influence, but that this ideology was largely based on a cynical conception of authority and a denial of hope. To King, the major ingredient of any constructive movement had to be passion.

Chapter 10 - Before his murder, King struggled to bring an end to war and misery.

Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated on April 4, 1968, at the Lorraine Motel in Memphis, Tennessee. He centered on specific problems in the last years of his existence that he had struggled with since his teenage years.

King observed accounts of thousands of young Black men killed in the Vietnam War in the 1960s and millions of Southeast Asian people. He had been cautious of becoming interested in political topics not specifically linked to his campaign in previous years. But after the U.S. government rejected a peace deal in 1967 to end the North Vietnam bombing, King determined

that he could no longer remain quiet. He began engaging in and leading anti-war marches and pleaded with President Johnson personally to quickly end the war.

The newspapers, who had increasingly grown more favorable to him throughout the civil rights movement, were not entertained, as he would have predicted. His opponents, including even some of his NAACP colleagues, said that instead of getting caught up in foreign affairs, he should stick "to the business of civil rights." The power of the reaction took King aback, but his morality would not let him abandon the matter.

He had been convinced that colonialism was inescapably associated with Western hegemony, militarism, and materialism in America. Although the war was a profitable business for the US administration, many of the young men battling in Vietnam, particularly the young black men, fought in poverty at home. Thus in later years, the second, related topic that King turned to was capitalism's underlying economic inequality. In one address, he advised his crowd that if it were to thrive as a democracy, America "must quickly begin the transition from a thing-oriented to a person-oriented culture."

The SCLC initiated the national Poor People's Movement in 1968, leading thousands of disadvantaged people to Washington, D.C. Poor Black people, Native Americans, Puerto Ricans, and Latinos joined poor white people to protest racial rights, honorable jobs, and decent accommodation. Sadly, King was killed in Memphis a couple of weeks later.

In compositions before his death, King said that as a human who lived his life helping, compassionate, and supportive of others, he wanted to be known. He stated: "If I can assist someone as I pass by, my life will not be in vain."

The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr. by Martin Luther King Jr., Clayborne Carson Book Review

Martin Luther King Jr., who was born in Atlanta at the beginning of the Great Depression, came across segregation and prejudice firsthand. He believed that it was his responsibility, as a good Christian, to give nonviolent demonstrations to these immoral oppressive systems. He rapidly became a prominent figure in civil rights protests and demonstrations, starting with the Montgomery bus boycotts. Even when the movement's groups grew more radical, King was assertive in his non-violence dedication. His political involvement didn't end with significant problems of civil rights. He also battled against economic inequality and the Vietnam War before being assassinated.

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