

# Paying Tribute to a King

*Iconic civil rights leader's message still resonates*

**By Malik Stewart**

There are many iconic figures throughout the world who have had a strong impact in communities, society and the world. Whether they focused on sports, politics, religion or race, they implemented and achieved goals that nobody else would imagine happening during that time.

For African-Americans, given everything that the racial group has gone through, they understand how important it is to remember and acknowledge the role models and legendary people that paved the way for change, equality and success among races and the world. Martin Luther King Jr., who is probably the most popular, meaningful, influential and powerful African-American male leader, civil rights activist and Baptist minister of his era, had the greatest impact on society, in a time where black people were punished and killed for the things that he attempted and accomplished.

**M**artin Luther King Jr. was born on January 15, 1929, in Atlanta, Georgia. He was the middle child of Michael King Sr. and Alberta Williams King. He attended Booker T. Washington High School. While in high school, Martin was known for his public speaking ability and was part of the school's debate team. King became the youngest assistant manager of a newspaper delivery station for the Atlanta Journal in 1942 at age 13. During his junior year, he won first prize in an oratorical contest sponsored by the Negro Elks Club in Dublin, Georgia. Because he was so smart and gifted in school, he skipped both ninth and twelfth grades and later entered Morehouse College in Atlanta at age 15, in 1944 after passing the entrance exam.

In 1947, the summer before his last year at Morehouse, 18-year-old King decided to enter the ministry after he concluded the church offered the most assuring way to answer "an inner urge to serve humanity." In 1948, King graduated from Morehouse with a bachelor of arts degree in sociology, and enrolled in Crozer Theological Seminary in Chester, Pennsylvania, from which he graduated with a divinity degree in 1951. King then began doctoral studies in systematic theology at Boston University and received his Ph.D. on June 5, 1955, with a dissertation on



"A Comparison of the Conceptions of God in the Thinking of Paul Tillich and Henry Nelson Wieman." King became pastor of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama in 1954 when he was 25 years old. As a Christian minister, his main influence was Jesus Christ and the New Testament gospels, which he would usually quote in religious meetings, speeches at church and in public places. King's faith was primarily based on Jesus' commandment of loving your neighbor

as yourself, loving God above all, and loving your enemies, praying for them and blessing them. His nonviolent ethos was based on Jesus' command to turn the other cheek and of putting the sword back into its place.

In 1952 in Boston, King met Coretta Scott over the phone through a friend named Mary Powell. The couple were married on June 18, 1953 in Marion, Alabama, and later had four children. They had two sons and two daughters by the name of Martin Luther III, Dexter Scott King, Yolanda Denise King, and Bernice Albertine King.

In 1955, a woman named Rosa Parks was arrested for refusing to give up her seat to a white person on a city bus, which sparked the Montgomery bus boycott. E.D. Nixon created the boycott, but it was led by King. The boycott lasted for 385 days, and King's role in the bus boycott transformed him into a national figure and the best-known spokesperson of the civil rights movement.

In January 1957, King, Ralph Abernathy, and 60 ministers and civil rights activists founded the Southern Christian Leadership Conference to connect the moral authority and organizing power of black churches. They would help conduct non-violent protests to promote civil rights reform.

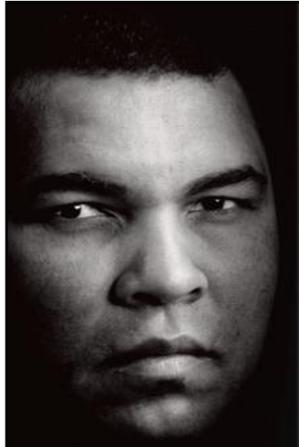
In the spring of 1963, King organized a demonstration in downtown Birmingham, Alabama. The young leader was jailed along with large numbers of his supporters, but the event drew nationwide attention. On August 28, 1963, the historic March on Washington drew more than 200,000 people in the shadow of the Lincoln Memorial. It was here that King made his famous "I Have a Dream" speech, emphasizing his belief that someday all men could be brothers. Many people in cities not experiencing racial tension began to question the nation's Jim Crow laws and the second-class treatment of African-American citizens. This resulted in the pas-

sage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 authorizing the federal government to enforce desegregation of public accommodations and banning discrimination in publicly owned facilities. This also led to King receiving the Nobel Peace Prize for 1964. On April 4, 1968 in Memphis, Tennessee, King was shot and killed by gunman James Earl Ray, while standing on a hotel balcony.

The civil rights icon's life had a gigantic impact on race relations in the United States. His life and work have been honored with a national holiday, schools and public buildings named after him, and a memorial on The Mall in Washington, D.C.

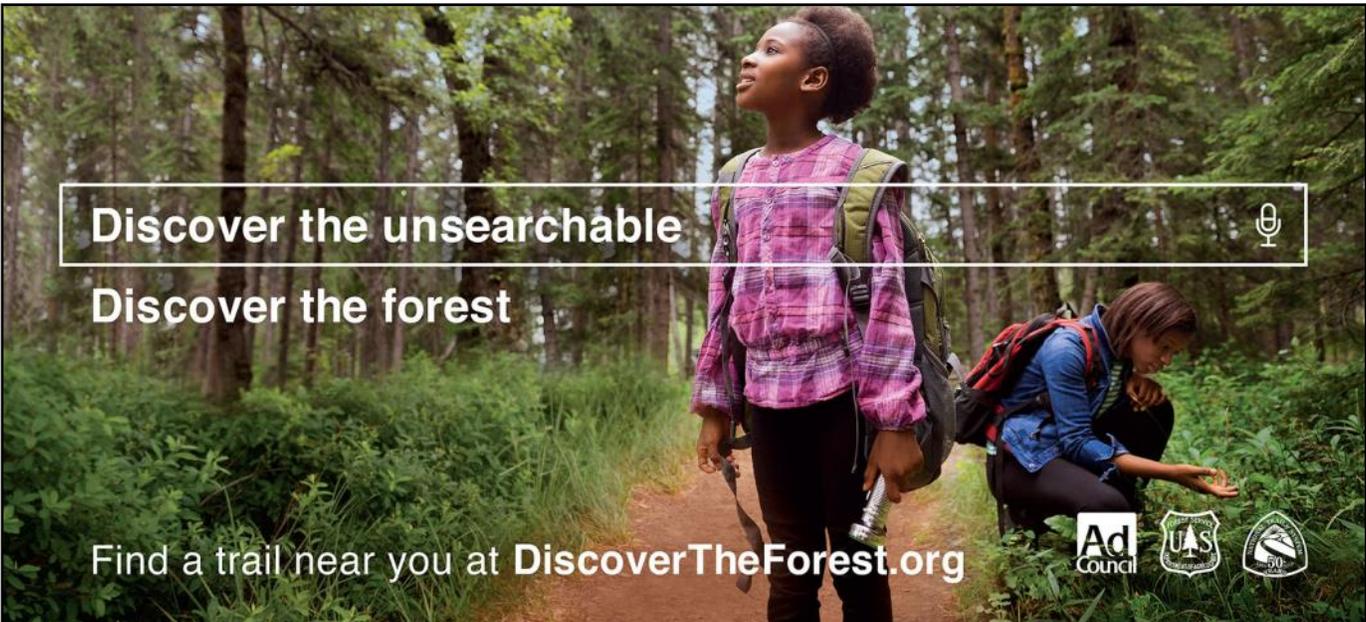
What makes King so unique, famous and memorable is his legacy of pressing for nonviolent social change. He accomplished this without ever using violence, guns and foul language. He was able to turn the other cheek, despite criticism, threats of physical harm and tremendous personal sacrifice at a time when many others would have given up or respond with violence.

King will forever be honored and remembered as America's best advocate for nonviolent social change, a drum major for justice and one of the greatest nonviolent leaders in world history.



His biggest fight yet isn't in the ring.

**COURAGE**  
Pass It On.  
VALUES.COM THE FOUNDATION FOR A BETTER LIFE



Discover the unsearchable  
Discover the forest

Find a trail near you at [DiscoverTheForest.org](https://www.DiscoverTheForest.org)

Ad Council UAS 50