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The Extraordinary Life of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was born on January 15, 1929 in Atlanta, Georgia. King was the son of Reverend Martin Luther King, Sr. and Alberta Williams King. His maternal grandparents were Reverend Adam Daniel Williams and Jenny Parks Williams; James Albert and Delia King were sharecroppers on a farm in Stockbridge, Georgia. King had an older sister, Christine, and a younger brother Alfred Daniel. And although none of these facts are, by themselves, extraordinary, the rest of Reverend Martin Luther King Jr.'s life most certainly is.

Dr. King attended Booker T. Washington High School, skipping ninth and twelfth grade. He entered Morehouse College at the age of fifteen, an age when most students are struggling with tenth grade in high school. King graduated from college in 1948 with a Bachelor's Degree in Sociology. Soon after, he enrolled in Crozer Theological Seminary in Chester, Pennsylvania. During this time, he also studied at the University of Pennsylvania. King received the J. Lewis Crozer Fellowship for graduate study at the university of his choice. He was awarded a Bachelor of Divinity degree from Crozer in 1951. King studied for his doctoral degree in Systematic Theology at Boston University. By the time he was twenty-six, Dr. King held a PhD from Harvard University on June 5, 1955 (Biographical Outline of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr).

At the age of 19, King entered the Christian ministry and was ordained in February 1948. He worked at Ebenezer Baptist Church, Atlanta, Georgia. After he was granted his PhD, he and his family moved to Montgomery, Alabama, to work at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church from September 1954 to November 1959. King resigned and moved to Atlanta to become the leader and director of the activities of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. King became a national figure among the Civil Rights movement. He was arrested thirty times for his nonviolent protest demonstrations.

Dr. King's extraordinary contribution to American (and global) society was his belief and promotion of nonviolent protest. He was a man that took action and spoke out against the cruel injustices that were placed upon African Americans. In a time when a race was suppressed, one man stood out by teaching the power of "loving" your enemies-an extraordinary philosophy in a time of extreme violence against blacks. King was not afraid to speak out and stand up for what is right. His "I Have a Dream" speech proved that he wanted his message of unification heard by whites and blacks. Dr. King learned of the values of social protest from the readings on Mohandas Gandhi. He traveled to India in 1959 and spoke to followers of

Gandhi. It was at this time that King came to understand that the most powerful weapon against injustice was nonviolent protest. King was the leader of the Montgomery bus boycott, practicing his ideas of nonviolence during this protest. He and ninety others were arrested and found guilty under the charges of obstructing the operation of a business. The success of the Montgomery bus boycott made King a national hero among the civil rights movement. King prevailed through the struggles and hardships that he encountered in his "fight" for freedom, although in the end, he died fighting for racial justice and integration.

On April 4, 1968, King was in Memphis, Tennessee to help rally sanitation workers in a strike against low wages and inhumane conditions. King was shot while standing on the balcony of the Lorraine Motel. His assailant was captured in London, England on June 8, 1968 and entered a guilty plea on March 9, 1969 before even going to trial. James Earl Ray was sentenced to ninety-nine years in the Tennessee State Penitentiary.

Despite his despicable murder, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. lived an extraordinary life. He was a great visionary and human rights leader. He will live on as a symbolic figure of cultural unification, human love, and nonviolent protest.

Works Cited

Biographical Outline of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Accessed March 28, 2004.
<http://www.thekingcenter.com/mlk/bio.html>