

Martin Luther King, Jr.

When you sit back and take in the phenomenal achievements of black history, it is natural to be moved to admiration by some of the great figures of black history including Booker T. Washington, George Washington Carver and many more. But one name stands head and shoulders above the rest and that is the name Martin Luther King, Jr.

Dr. King's legacy of change and his call for the end of racism and segregation in American society is without question the voice that has moved America as no other has done. For while many have showed tremendous leadership, Dr. King clearly demonstrated a vision for the future of America in which black and white worked, lived, played and worshipped together as one society not two.

The honor and reverence all American's have for Martin Luther King, Jr. is evident in how honored his name has become since his tragic death at the assassins hand in 1968. All around this nation, virtually every U.S. city has named a major road after the great civil rights leader. He singularly has a U.S. holiday named after him, an honor usually reserved for presidents. He has been honored on the U.S. stamp and no school child gets through his or her elementary education without knowing the key phrases from Dr. King's famous "I have a dream" speech.

Dr. King's career in civil rights is inseparable from the early struggles of the civil rights movement from the late fifties going forward. Our images of him walking side by side with his people unifying them behind his leadership and facing tremendous hatred and racial bigotry to take a stand in America to say without compromise that racism would not stand in this country any more.

Those images of Dr. King working and marching with others who shared his courage to step out and make a change for the better are indelible on the American consciousness. For Dr. King was not a leader who sent his messages from the safety and comfort of a far away office. No, he was there, in the midst of his people, marching on Washington arm in arm with the everyday men and women of this country who banded together to fight the evils of racism. It took tremendous courage for Dr. King to take to the streets with his people like he did and it was a risk that eventually cost him his life. But his courage inspired thousands to be courageous too and be one people, one brotherhood who would no longer allow racism to be the rule of law in America.

Dr. King's famous speech from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial on a hot August 28, 1963 has become so central to our American heritage that it is quoted with reverence by scholars, students and all people seeking their own inspiration from this great man. This speech ranks with Kennedy's inaugural speech and the Lincoln's Gettysburg Address as words that have inspired this nation as none other have been able to do. It is impossible not to get goose bumps reading these key phrases from that historic speech.

* I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the

true meaning of its creed: 'We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.'"

* "I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character."

* "Let freedom ring. And when this happens, and when we allow freedom ring—when we let it ring from every village and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children—black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics—will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual: "Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty, we are free at last!"

When reading Dr. King's prophetic words to us all, his ideas become our ideas and we all become challenged to make his dream come to life. And that is what is truly the definition of a great leader.

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