

Introduction: Martin Luther King Jr. in one of his letters from Birmingham prison said that through painful experience alone we can know that freedom is not something that is freely given. The ones who do not have it, must demand it. It shows his grit and perseverance even in the face of opposition. King was a civil rights activist for the Afro-American people. Never forgetting his ideals and principles of non-violence, he fought for the freedom of his people. His leadership was pivotal in legally putting an end to racial segregation in America.

Childhood: Racism was something that he was acutely aware of as he grew up. Right from the age of six, his friendship with a white boy was taken away when his parents decided that they did not want their son to associate with a black boy. His father played a significant role in educating King about the long history of oppression and racism that his people had faced in America for years. His father was also someone who took a stand against segregation and discrimination when he could. Something that King watched that left a deep impression upon him.

Adolescence: Growing older, King began to hate the whites for the racism he had seen and gone through. He also began to stray from what he had learned in his Baptist upbringing. The oratory skills that King would later be famous for began to bloom around his adolescence. The very first speech that he gave was in his junior year. He said that the black Americans still wear chains, though slavery was abolished years ago. Even a highly esteemed black man is still inferior to the cruelest white man. On his ride home with his teacher on the bus, he was ordered by the driver to stand to let the white passengers sit down. He refused to until his teacher said that he should do what was told, as he would be breaking the law otherwise. When he wrote of the bus ride, he recorded that it was the angriest he had ever been.

King spent all his childhood in a segregated neighborhood and had a chance to see the opposite in Connecticut. He came to Morehouse here for his freshman year and had an opportunity to see things from a new perspective. Here was also where King reconciled with his Baptist upbringing. He graduated in 1948 with a Bachelor of Arts from Morehouse.

Marriage and Ministry: In 1953, he married Coretta Scott and were parents to four children, Yolanda King, Martin Luther King III, Dexter Scott King, and Bernice King. It was also in the 1950s that his activism began, which he continued till his death.

King became the pastor of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Alabama in 1954. He was also a member of the executive committee of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

Activism: In 1955, Claudette Corvin and Rosa Parks refused to give up their seats for white people on the bus in separate incidents. This sparked off the Montgomery bus boycott that King led. It lasted for 385, during which King's house was bombed. He was arrested as well, but this incident resulted in removing segregation on public buses in Montgomery. This boycott launched King into a national figure and spokesman for the movement against racial discrimination.

With other civil rights activists, King came together and founded the Southern Christian Leadership Conference in 1957. Among other purposes, this group was to organize non-violent protests and movements in their pursuit of ensuring civil rights for all, regardless of race. King was a leader of the SCLC till his death.

Governmental Opposition: While he found favor in some officials' eyes, he put himself squarely in opposition to the President when he spoke against the war in Vietnam. King not only fought for his people but spoke out against all injustice whenever he could. He was also branded a communist by the FBI and was under constant surveillance. So much so that when he was assassinated, it was speculated whether it was the work of just one man or King's death was a part of a bigger conspiracy.

Death: James Earl Ray was the man who ended King's long fight against racial discrimination. King was fatally shot, and not even surgery could save him. His death caused nationwide rioting, which took great effort to put an end to.