

Martin Luther King Jr.

Martin Luther King Jr. was born in the city of Atlanta in the state of Georgia in 1929. His father was a minister, a Christian church leader. Martin became a minister himself after he studied at a religious school called a seminary in Pennsylvania. It was at the seminary that he read about Mohandas Gandhi, a famous leader and human rights activist from India.

Gandhi taught that even when someone is being very cruel and doing wrong things, we must not use violence to stop them. At the time, the British army was occupying India and the policies of the British government were very cruel to Indians. Gandhi led a movement of people in protests against British rule and won. Martin believed that African Americans in America, who suffered from discrimination and racist hatred, could do the same thing.

Martin figured out a plan for how African Americans could get equal rights in America through peaceful actions and demonstrations. Part of his plan was that everyone who agreed that black people should have the same rights as white people should boycott companies that wouldn't serve black and white people equally. To boycott something means that you don't buy anything from them. If companies that discriminated against black people unfairly were boycotted, they would lose money and Martin believed they would change.

In 1963, Martin led a huge demonstration in the American capitol, Washington DC. He gave a famous speech that people still talk about today. He said, "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." Today this may just sound like nice words but at that time many people didn't agree. Martin became famous all over the world because of that demonstration and he won one of the most important awards in the world, the Nobel Peace Prize, a year later. In that year, the Civil Rights Act, a law that made it illegal to discriminate against people because of the color of their skin, was passed in America. It was a big win for the demonstrators. But four years later, Martin was shot and killed by a man who wanted discrimination to continue and many Americans were very sad.

1. Where and from which person did Martin learn about using peaceful protest to win?

2. How did Martin's plan to end discrimination through boycotting work?

3. In what ways did Martin win his struggle and in what ways do you think he lost?
