

BY C.L. LANEY

MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.

CIVIL RIGHTS LEADER



CHAPTER 1

Who Was Martin Luther King Jr.?

“The time is always right to do what is right.”

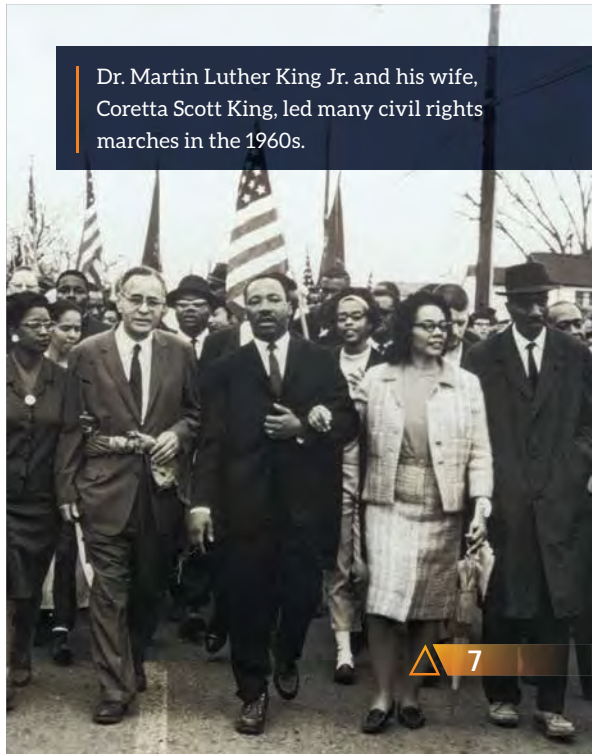
These are the words of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. They show the kind of person he was. Throughout his life, King saw people mistreated. He experienced **injustice** himself. This led him to dedicate his life to helping others.

King came from a long line of religious leaders. He became a minister too. This shaped the way he treated others. The Bible taught love for all. Compassion was important to him.

King was also an **activist**. He saw injustice in many forms. Rights were denied. People were beaten and sometimes killed. All of this happened because of **racism**.

For centuries, racist laws divided America. African Americans were treated poorly. They were not seen as equal to white people. **Segregation** kept them apart. Black people lived under one set of rules. White people followed another. King knew this was wrong. There should be one set of laws for all. He spoke up. Through preaching and community work, Dr. King gained respect. His speeches inspired others. This made him a great leader.

King fought for equality. He once wrote, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." These words were powerful. They spoke of the importance of justice for all. Dr. King inspired progress. His voice and leadership made a huge impact. Indeed, they changed the course of history.



Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and his wife, Coretta Scott King, led many civil rights marches in the 1960s.

This wood engraving by artist Frederick Dielman shows a crowd celebrating the abolition of slavery in Washington, D.C.





CHAPTER 2

A World Apart

The Declaration of Independence says that “all men are created equal.” However, this idea has not always been accepted.

When the U.S. was founded in 1776, many people had slaves. Black men, women, and children were seen as property. They worked without pay. Many were treated very poorly. In 1865, the Thirteenth Amendment abolished slavery. Still, Black people struggled for equality.

For almost 100 more years, segregation was the law. From the late 1870s to the 1960s, Black people were separated. They lived in different neighborhoods than white people. Often, they had to sit in the back of buses. Only white people could eat inside many restaurants. Drinking fountains and bathrooms were labeled “white only.”

Education was segregated too. Black children went to one school. White children attended another. Some called this “separate but equal.” It meant that races were kept apart. Still, students were supposed to get the same education.

But this did not happen. White schools got more funding. They had better books. Buildings were in good condition. Black schools had little money. Many buildings were run down. Students had to use outdated textbooks.



Segregation laws forced Black people to sit in the back of buses.



Black children attended racially segregated schools with fewer resources than those of white schools.



In 1957, 15-year-old Elizabeth Eckford became one of the first Black students to attend Little Rock Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas. A mob followed her to class on her first day.



In 1955, civil rights activist Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on a bus in Montgomery, Alabama. This led to the Montgomery bus boycott.

The situation was starting to change though. In 1954, an important court case was decided. It was *Brown v. Board of Education*. The U.S. Supreme Court ruled that separate schools were not equal. They had to **integrate**. Some people did not like this. Black children faced violence. Many braved it for a better education.

Other things were changing too. In 1955, a Black woman took a stand. Her name was Rosa Parks. She refused to give up her seat on a bus.

These events sparked the civil rights movement of the 1960s. This would change King's life—and the world—forever.

Martin Luther King Jr. grew up going to Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, Georgia. His father was the pastor there.

