



Martin Luther King Day

On the third Monday in January America celebrates Martin Luther King Day. This is quite a new public holiday in the United States: it started in 1983.

Doctor Martin Luther King, Jr. ¹ was an important person in the American Civil Rights movement. He believed in non-violence.

Dr King was born on 15 January 1929 in Atlanta, Georgia and became a Baptist minister. ² At that time there was segregation in the southern states of America. Black people could not use certain types of public transport and go to the same schools and churches as white people. Dr King didn't agree with this and he protested in public. The police arrested him several times. On one occasion John F. Kennedy asked the police to free Dr King.

In many southern towns and cities, black people sat at the back of the bus and white people at the front. In 1955 in Montgomery, Alabama, one lady, Rosa Parks, refused to give her seat to a white person. The police came and arrested her. Dr King then organized a boycott of the Montgomery Bus System. No black person used a bus in Montgomery for 382 days. In the end the Supreme Court decided to stop segregation on public transport. After this victory Dr King was famous.

After this there were many other victories. He campaigned against segregation and inequality in other cities in the South. In 1963 in Birmingham, Alabama he organized another peaceful protest. He invited children and young adults to march with him. The police commissioner, Eugene 'Bull' Connor, ordered his policeman to attack them with dogs and water cannons. Televisions and newspapers all over the world showed these pictures of police brutality.

In August 1963 Dr King helped to organize the Civil Rights march on Washington, DC. On that day he gave his most famous speech: everybody now knows the phrase 'I have a dream'.

These are some lines from that speech:

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

In Washington, DC more than 200,000 people listened to this speech.

In 1964 America passed the Civil Rights Act. This changed the lives of African-Americans forever. In this year Dr King won the Nobel Peace Prize.

On 4 April 1968 a man called James Earl Ray assassinated Dr King in Memphis.

Every year Americans remember Dr King's work by celebrating this national holiday. All the schools close for the day. People try to remember what Dr King believed in. They try to help someone on this day. It is not a day for rest but a day to think about how we can help people around us. In 1969 Dr King's wife, Coretta Scott King opened the Martin Luther King, Jr. Center in Atlanta, Georgia. She wanted to help society change in a peaceful way.

1. **Jr.** : Junior. Some men use this title after their name if their father also has the same name.
2. **Baptist minister** : a religious leader in the Baptist Christian religion.



UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

1 Are the following sentences true (T) or false (F)? Correct the false ones.

- | | T | F |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Americans celebrate Martin Luther King Day on the second Monday in January. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. Martin Luther King Day started in 1983. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. Martin Luther King was born in Memphis in Tennessee. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. Martin Luther King was a Baptist minister. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. There was segregation in all American states. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6. John F. Kennedy asked the police to arrest Dr King. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 7. In 1961 Dr King organized the march on Washington, DC. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 8. He believed in violence. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 9. Martin Luther King won a Nobel prize. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 10. Martin Luther King Day is a day of rest. Many people play sports. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

2 Dr King was born in *Atlanta*, Georgia; In 1963 Dr King helped to organize the March on *Washington, DC*; a man named James Earl Ray assassinated Dr King in *Memphis*. Do you know where these places are? Look at these descriptions and write the names in the correct boxes.



- Memphis is in the south-central part of the United States. It is on the Mississippi River.
- Washington, DC is on the East Coast of the United States, on the Potomac River, to the north of Virginia.
- Atlanta is in the South East of the United States, above Florida.
- New York City is on the north-east coast.
- Philadelphia is in the East. It is between New York City and Washington, DC.