Martin Luther King Essay, Research Paper

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr

Martin Luther King was born in 1929 and was killed in 1968. He was an American clergyman and civil-rights leader. He graduated from Morehouse College in 1948. The then went on to the university of Boston to get his Ph.D in 1955. He led the black boycott of segregated city bus lines and in 1956 gained a major victory and prestige as a civil-rights leader when Montgomery buses began to operate on a desegregated basis. King organized the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), which gave him a base to pursue further civil-rights activities, first in the South and later nationwide. His philosophy of nonviolent resistance led to his arrest on numerous occasions in the 1950s and 60s. His campaigns had mixed success, but the protest he led in Birmingham, Ala., in 1963 brought him worldwide attention. August, 1963, March on Washington, which brought more than 200,000 people together. In 1964 he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. King’s leadership in the civil-rights movement was challenged in the mid-1960s as others grew more militant. His interests, however, widened from civil rights to include criticism of the Vietnam War and a deeper concern over poverty. His plans for a Poor People’s March to Washington were interrupted for a trip to Memphis, Tenn., in support of striking sanitation workers. On Apr. 4, 1968, he was shot and killed as he stood on the balcony of the Lorraine Motel.

In the 35 years since the Rev. Martin Luther King described a “dark and desolate valley” of racial segregation in his “I Have a Dream” speech, America has yet to meet King’s challenge to make real its promise of brotherhood to African Americans. Particularly in economic terms, the dream of political, social and economic brotherhood that King shared with the hundreds of thousands who gathered at the Lincoln Memorial on Aug. 28, 1963, is a dream deferred for many minorities.

In many ways, of course, all minorities have made tremendous progress since the “Jobs and Freedom” march came to the capital in 1963. The huge, peaceful gathering helped persuade lawmakers to sweep away legal barriers to voting, jobs, housing and education, and set up a system of affirmative action to begin making amends for past discrimination.

There is considerable evidence that even the private attitudes of Americans (and especially those of Southerners) about racial matters have changed dramatically since King offered his vision of a time when Americans would be judged by their character rather than their skin color. Few Americans can measure that distance as accurately as Lewis, who is one of the defining figures of the modern civil rights movement and also spoke at the 1963 March on Washington. And yet, for all the “sense of hope and optimism” that he encounters today in his extensive travels as a member of Congress, Lewis said that as a nation, “we have not yet arrived at the beloved community” King envisioned.