Martin Luther King, Jr. Essay, Research Paper

Martin Luther KingThe most important person to have made a significant change in therights of Blacks was Martin Luther King. He had great courage and passionto defeat segregation and racism that existed in the United States, and itwas his influence to all the Blacks to defy white supremacy and his beliefin nonviolence that lead to the success of the Civil Rights movement.Martin Luther King was born on January 15, 1929 in Atlanta, Georgiawhere the city suffered most of the racial discrimination in the South,and, in addition, the Ku Klux Klan had one of it’s headquarters there. Butit was his father, Martin Luther King Sr. who played an important role inshaping the personality of his son. M.L. Sr. helped to advocate the ideathat Blacks should vote. He was involved with the National Association forthe Advancement of Coloured People, an important Civil Rights group. Theseefforts to improve the way of life for Blacks could be seen by his son.In December 5, 1955 King began to be significant in the changing ofthe Black man’s way of life. The boycott of the Montgomery Bus was begunwhen Rosa Parks refused to surrender her seat on a bus to a white man onDecember 1st. Two Patrolmen took her away to the police station where shewas booked. He and 50 other ministered held a meeting and agreed to start aboycott on December 5th, the day of Rosa Parks’s hearing. This boycottwould probably be successful since 70% of the riders were black. The buscompany did not take them seriously, because if there was bad weather, theywould have to take the bus. The Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA)was established to co-ordinate the boycott. They had a special agreementwith black cab companies, in which they were allowed to get a ride for amuch cheaper price than normal. Blacks had to walk to work, and so they didnot have time to do any shopping and therefore the sales decreaseddramatically. On January 30, while M.L was making a speech, his house wasbombed. Luckily his wife and baby had left the living room when the bombexploded, but a black mob formed and was angry about what had happened, andPolicemen were sent to the scene to control the situation, even though theywere outnumbered. King, however, because of his strong belief innonviolence, urged the crowd to not use their guns and to go home.The news coverage increased on the Montgomery boycott as monthspassed. He travelled to many places and made speeches in order to raisemoney for the MIA’s legal fees. When he returned he found that he wascharged for breaking an anti-boycott law. He and the others were foundguilty, but they appealed the sentence. When in November 13, the MIA wasfined $15,000, at the same time, the Supreme Court found the Alabama’ssegregation laws were unconstitutional. That night the KKK looted 40 carsin hopes of scaring the Blacks. But the black people did not hide in theirhomes and turn the lights off. They stayed on their porches and wavedshowing that they were not afraid of them at all. By 1957 Martin LutherKing became a national figure. Time magazine wrote a story on him, and hisideology of nonviolence began to spread throughout the country. The boycottgave a strong psychological push of courage that would continue untilBlacks obtained what was morally right.What made Martin Luther King striking was his conviction onnon-violence. He believed that this belief could give blacks a superiorlevel of morality over whites. This ideology was important for his successin later years. As a result, it helped restrain the use of violence fromwhites to blacks and vice versa. This philosophy was tested during theMontgomery bus boycott. Before the successful boycott, blacks used violencein order to protest racism. During the boycott, however, on both sidesviolence was not a measure to be taken. When someone bombed King’s home,the fact that violence was used against a nonviolent group made the idea ofthe black man’s cause more agreeable.Whites, as a result of the boycott, realised the threat for blacks tobe equal was increasing. They used legal measures to break up the NAACP(National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People). In time theNAACP became very weak, and so the SCLC (Southern Christian LeadershipConference) became more significant to the black man’s cause. It was leadby King, Rustin, Levison, and Baker, and was a Negro church whichrepresented “the most stable institution of the Southern Negro community”.

The party gave a tremendous morale strength in the goal for the equality ofblacks. The SCLC was stronger than the NAACP because it did not depend onstate officials. Because there were no membership lists, it was difficultto single out individual black followers.It is noteworthy to mention one incident that occurred in 1958 when hemade visits to promote his book. A demonic woman attempted to stab him.When he was rushed to a hospital, he later found out that if he had triedto take out the knife or if it moved in any way, he would have died becausethe tip of the knife was touching the aorta of his heart. King’s will andcourage to fight for civil rights was affected by the achievements ofGandhi’s philosophy. On February 10, 1959, he toured India and admiredGandhi for his achievements in breaking down the caste system, which was asystem in which the hierarchy of social classes dominated the country.His influence onto black students was incredible. They felt thecourage to revolt against segregation. For example, on February 1, 1960,there was a group of black college students in Greensboro, North Carolina,who sat down in a lunch room for whites. This tactic became popular and wasbeing used everywhere. As a result, King suggested that they create apermanent organization. The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee(SNCC) was formed.One of the instrumental factors which aided King to his role in theCivil Rights Movement was Senator John F. Kennedy’s support for hisbeliefs. Kennedy showed his support when King, for example, was foundguilty of driving with an invalid license, and was find $25 plus one year’sprobation. When police arrested him again during the probationary period,he was sentenced to four months in a jail which demanded heavy labour. Thisjail was also the home of KKK criminals. Senator Kennedy promised to helpKing and by doing so, won the support of 75% blacks. King urged for Kennedyto help the Civil Rights Movement, and so the Congress of Racial Equality(CORE) decided to see for themselves whether the banning of segregation wasactually working. These civil rights activists were called Freedom Riders.But white activists beat them and burnt the buses they were on. Kingrealised that the media was a very powerful tool when they covered the useof violence by the KKK.The continual effort to strengthen the message for rights can beoutlined in Birmingham, Alabama. After King and three other leaders werereleased from jail (they were arrested because during one of his organizedprotests), they were surprised to find that 1000 youths were protesting.Though 900 were arrested, the next day 2500 children were protesting. Waterhoses were used by authorities to fight the blacks. Attack dogs were alsoused to control the mob. But when the public was shown of the violentmethods, it increased the sympathy onto King’s cause. Despite this, 3000youngsters demonstrated the next day. There was no more space in the jailsand finally the business leaders of the community realized that the wouldneed to start negotiating, or they would suffer financially.The height of King’s career was in 1964, when the Civil Rights Act wasenacted. It was sent through Congress by President Kennedy in 1963, but hedid not live to see it go through. He was assassinated on November 22,1963. His successor, President Johnson, passed it through Congress. Itallowed the federal government to enforce any racial discrimination inpublic areas like restaurants and hotels. It allowed the government to holdfederal funds from places where racism existed. It also prohibiteddiscrimination in the voter-registration procedures. Whites previouslydiscriminated Blacks from voting if they were illiterate, but the Actforbade this. M.L.’s success was acknowledged when he was awarded the NobelPrize in the same year.A tragic day struck on April 4, 1968 in Memphis, Tenn.. He wasplanning to participate in a Poor People’s March to Washington. Whilestanding on the balcony of the motel where he was staying with hispartners, he was killed by a bullet which was shot by James Earl Ray. OnMarch 10, 1969, he pleaded guilty and was sentenced 99 years in prison.Martin Luther King was able to achieve the impossible. He was anambitious man who wanted to make a difference in the lives of everyAmerican Black. Step by step, he organized demonstrations and made speechesto further strengthen his cause. His philosophy of non-violence played akey role in the success of the right to be free. Carved on his crypt is aphrase he said many times:Free at last, free at lastThank God AlmightyI’m free at last.