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**Contribution of Martin Luther King, Jr. to the African-American  
Civil Rights Movement**

Bakalářská práce

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Prohlašuji, že jsem závěrečnou práci vypracoval samostatně a použil jen uvedených pramenů a literatury.

V Olomouci .....

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## **Abstract**

The bachelor thesis is divided into four main parts. The first one focuses primarily on childhood of Martin Luther King, Jr., his studies, and briefly on his family and social background in which he grew up. The second part describes his fight for civil rights for African-Americans through civil disobedience and nonviolent resistance. The third part summarizes the major accomplishments of M. L. King, Jr. during his involvement in the Civil Rights Movement. The last part briefly deals with philosophy he followed, and depicts circumstances and consequences of his assassination.

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## Introduction

I have chosen this topic because I have always admired the peaceful and sometimes even touching way of Dr. King in which he kept enforcing his noble ideas of fair and just nation, his enthusiasm for what he believed in and also his defiant endurance, despite the problems and barriers he had to face during the rightful fight for his people. It is indisputable that Martin Luther King significantly changed the face of the United States. If he had not been assassinated, he could have done even more. Hopefully, his dream will come true one day:

“I say to you today, my friends, that even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow. I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream. I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed. We hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal.”

(Martin Luther King, Jr., August 28, 1963)

# 1. Personal life

## 1.1 Childhood

Martin Luther King, Jr. was born on January 15, 1929 in Georgia, Atlanta. He was the middle child; he was born a year after his sister and a year before his brother.

His father, Martin Luther King, Sr. was a son of a sharecropper and in his childhood he had to work hard in the fields with his ten brothers and sisters, helping to plant and harvest their meager crops of cotton and corn. He did not have much time to go to school and even if he did, he had a lot of chores to do. In the age of fifteen he left for Atlanta to work as a freight hauler, as well as to acquire a higher level of education in order to increase the quality of his life and his family. When he reached the age of thirty-one, King, Sr. managed to graduate from Morehouse College, being a minister, a husband and a father at the same time. He married Alberta Williams, the mother of Martin Luther King, Jr. (Clayton, 1968)

Alberta Williams was an educated woman and a daughter of A.D. Williams, one of the leading pastors of Atlanta. (Bennett, 1964) She attended high school at Spelman Seminary and continued in Hampton Normal and Industrial Institute where she obtained her teaching certificate. (*The Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Educational Institute*, 2005)

The period in which Martin Luther King, Jr. was growing up, was connected with the so called Jim Crow laws. They can be described as a series of rules that helped not only to separate the black minority from the white majority, but also to intimidate and discriminate the African-American people socially and psychologically in all aspects of life, including voting rights, work, education or public transportation. (Duncan, 2003)

For instance, when traveling on bus, the black people were obliged to sit in the back, they were ordered to sit in the rear of theaters, and they were not served in restaurants. The African-Americans were considered to be the second class citizens, as King, Jr. experienced when traveling in a car with his father. They were pulled over by a police officer for going through a stop sign. Even though Martin Luther King, Sr. was a grown man, the white police officer called him “boy“. King, Sr. replied that he should be treated with respect he deserves. Martin, Jr. was proud that his father stood up to the white officer, although, in general, nothing changed. (Schraff, 2008)

## 1.2 Education and Marriage

Martin Luther King, Jr. started his education in 1935 at the Yonge Street Elementary School, then he continued at the David T. Howard Elementary School. During this period, he already showed his appreciation of the power of language and he expressed his confidence that, one day, he would employ big words; and he truly began to practice his ability to speak, astonishing his teachers with constructions as “Cogitating with the cosmic universe, I surmise that my physical equilibrium is organically quiescent.”

(Bruns, 2006, p.5)

His studies continued at Booker T. Washington High School, where he managed to skip the ninth grade due to his hard work, and entered the sophomore class in the autumn of 1942. Soon, it was about time to decide on the future profession of young Martin. His father wanted him to be a minister, but he did not find religion intellectually respectable and socially relevant. Therefore, he decided to become a doctor, which was not his final decision yet. Because of the fact he was certain what his future career would be, he immediately started to practice his speeches in front of the mirror. In that year, he already turned fifteen and managed another important and admirable “leap“ in his life; he took and passed college entrance examination, which meant he was allowed to skip the twelfth grade, finishing his high school attendance in the age of fifteen.

Afterwards, he entered Morehouse College, following a family tradition. It should be noted that deep inside his mind there was an argument going on. He was not sure whether he had made the right decision to become a lawyer, being attracted to the career of a minister. Although the idea of studying religion was still repelling, he was convinced that in the African-American church there are too many unintellectual and incompetent ministers. (Bennet, 1964)

The argument in his mind continued until he met a young professor and a friend of the King family, George E. Kelsey, who received his doctorate from Yale University. Thanks to him, King discovered that religious teaching and social problems can be easily connected together, which would mean no ambivalence between the strict Baptist fundamentalism and freedom to explore other alternatives which would help him to pursue his goals. Due to this “awakening“ he even started to reconsider his former decision to completely leave religion and follow his preaching ancestors, adding his legal knowledge and becoming a powerful fighter for rights of African-Americans. (Branch, 1989)

While in his junior year at Morehouse, King made a serious decision to become



a minister as an urge to serve humanity. What also contributed to his decision to become a minister, was an essay written by Henry David Thoreau, Civil Disobedience. King admired his technique of civil disobedience and immediately realized that African-Americans could gain their rights through this method. (Clayton, 1968)

When his parents learned about his decision, King, Sr., pleased with this piece of news, immediately began preparations for a trial sermon that was to be held by his son at the church. The first sermon of King, Jr. was a big success. The congregation was astonished with his surprisingly mellifluous voice and maturity of the performance, as if he were an experienced preacher. Consequently, necessary steps to license young King were taken, after which he became officially an associate pastor of the church.

In June of 1948, he managed to graduate with a degree in sociology. Although he was not encouraged to continue his studies by his father, King, Jr. made a decision to leave Atlanta for some time and proceed in Crozer Theological Seminary in Pennsylvania (Bruns, 2006)

When enrolling the seminary, King was only nineteen years old, being younger than most of his classmates. For the first time, King attended a school that was not segregated. He suddenly felt a challenge to compete with the white students, which motivated him to work harder than before, getting little sleep and reading with great purpose. (Bruns, 2006)

With his speeches, he was very popular among other students. He managed to win an award for the most outstanding student, and obtained a cash fellowship for further studies at a university of his choice. At a lecture at Crozer, King encountered the ideas of Gandhi for the first time. (Bennet, 1964)

King admired the approach of active, loud, disruptive noncooperation through boycotts, strikes and protest marches of Gandhi. King said that the racial problem could be solved solely by the Gandhian philosophy of nonviolence, which is the only conceivable, logical and moral approach.

Although he received his Bachelor of Divinity degree, yet he was not ready to start career as a minister in Georgia. He decided to employ his fellowship cash and attempt to obtain his Ph.D degree. Being accepted by several colleges, including Yale or Edinburgh in Scotland, he finally chose the School of Theology at Boston University, which was known to be hospitable to black students.

An important event that changed King's life occurred, while he was visiting New England Conservatory of Music; he met his future wife, Coretta Scott. She came from

Marion, Alabama, where she lived on the farm of her parents. Her grandfather, Jeff Scott, similarly to the father of King, was a prominent figure in the local black community, especially in church affairs. Her parents, Obie and Bernice Scott, tried to earn enough money to be able to support their children during their college studies, which had not been available for the two of them. (Bruns, 2006)

Not long after, King started to think about marriage. But he told Coretta that there would be a catch; if they got married, she would have to give up her musical career; he saw her as a homemaker and mother of their children. Reluctantly, she agreed, although it was very hard for her to abandon her lifelong dream. (Schraff, 2008)

They were married on June 18, 1953 in a fashionable garden wedding in Heiberger, Atlanta, by Martin Luther King, Sr. who officiated the ceremony. (Bennet, 1964)

## 2. Civil Rights Movement

### 2.1 First employment

After their honeymoon, they moved in a four-room apartment near the conservatory and continued their studies. King, while writing his doctoral dissertation, started to consider what type of employment he should choose to begin his career.

Once having finished his work at Boston University, he discovered that Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama is short on a pastor. So far, it was a church which resisted racism and second-class citizenship, supporting social reform movement against segregation and discrimination. Ironically, the church stood among several impressive buildings, one of which was the Alabama State Capitol where the Confederate States of America were born. (Bruns, 2006)

It was not an easy decision, as King had received many interesting job offers. He discussed this matter with his wife and, finally, they both agreed that it would be wise to join the academic world, similarly to Benjamin E. Mays, idol of King and president of Morehouse College, although Coretta was not particularly happy to stay in the South, being annoyed and disgusted by local conditions. (Bennet, 1964)

Coretta said she did not want to raise their future children in the segregated South, but she told her husband that if that was what he wanted, she would accept it. She liked the North much better due to better previous experience of her and her husband. (Schraff, 2008)

Not even King, Sr. was happy that his son had chosen to accept the pastorate of Dexter Avenue Baptist Church. He had hoped younger Martin would stay in Atlanta as copastor of Ebenezer, but he had also had a bad personal experience regarding his colour of skin, while visiting Montgomery some years before; since the situation had not changed, his worries were understandable. (Clayton, 1968)

Nevertheless, King began his work in Montgomery in the spring of 1954; the local congregation was smaller than the one he was accustomed to in Ebenezer, it was around four hundred people. The congregation consisted of people of different social backgrounds; many were poor lower-class citizens, but there were also college graduates and successful business leaders, physicians and teachers. In a short time, King was offered to become Dexter's twentieth pastor, although he had received many other offers from churches and colleges. (Bruns, 2006)

## **2.2 Road to Civil Rights**

In September 1955, after King had been awarded Ph.D, he and Coretta moved into the parsonage. Immediately after his installation, he prepared a change in the handling of finances of the church, and also a fund and renovation programme. According to his vision, every member of Dexter should have prospectively become a registered voter, too, and join the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People). A social and political comitee was established in order to encourage the members to become politically active and inform them of important issues of the day.

As his popularity and visibility grew, King kept increasing his involvement in activities that were aimed against unjust segregation of the black people in the South. For example, in Montgomery there were 50,000 African-Americans living with 70,000 white citizens; of the 50,000 African-Americans, only 2,000 were allowed to vote. Thus, King began to lead his church toward social protest; he was elected to the executive comitee of the Montgomery chapter of the NAACP and he also entered the Alabama Council on Human Relations.

After giving one of his powerful speeches at an NAACP meeting at the Metropolitan Methodist Church in August 1955, King was introduced to a long-time social activist, Edgar Nixon, president of Alabama Division of the union of black Pullman porters, who looked for an opportunity to challenge the city law that segregated whites from blacks in the seats of city buses. (Bruns, 2006)

## **2.3 Montgomery Bus Boycott**

As it has already been mentioned, Montgomery, Alabama, was one of the most segregated cities in the South and a so called “cradle of confederacy”, for the city became the first capital of Confederacy in 1861. 48,000 black residents, who mostly lived in ramshackle houses, often without electricity and running water, located on dirty, unpaved streets, constantly felt the sting of segregation in the total population of 120,000 citizens living in the city at that time. (Jakoubek, 2005)

The majority of black people at that time in Montgomery were low-paid labourers and domestics; only few of them could afford to buy a car, thus the public transportation was necessary for them to get to school and work. It is believed that more than 75% of passengers were black; some say the actual percentage was even higher. The system of

public transportation in Montgomery was peculiar in a way that after the black passengers had paid their fare in the front, they were not allowed to go through the white section to the rear; they were obliged to disembark and reenter the bus from the rear. In the meantime, the white driver often closed the door, leaving those people behind and deceived, although they had paid as anyone else. (*Civil Rights Movement Veterans*, 2011)

On the afternoon of December 1, 1955, an incident occurred in one of the buses in Montgomery, Alabama, when certain Rosa Parks refused to yield her seat to a white man, being not aware of the consequences that her courageous act against uneven treatment would have; she was taken into custody, although she had not intended to be arrested in the first place; her original aim was to get home. (*Montgomery Advertiser*, 2005)

After the two incidents, Nixon and other activists saw a great opportunity to challenge and finally change the public transportation system of Montgomery. Immediately, they started mobilizing their forces. Dr. King and his oratory skills were seen as the most effective tools to lead a boycott of the bus system. Although he needed some time to think over the offer to become a leader, during his Sunday sermon he asked the congregation not to ride the city buses.

When King got up on Monday morning, December 5, 1955 and walked to the window, he saw several buses with no passengers inside passing his home. He got dressed and drove to pick up Ralph Abernathy, the fellow pastor of Montgomery's First Baptist Church, in order to find out, whether the boycott worked in other places. After the initial success, a meeting of the ministers of the city was arranged in order to explore the possibility of extending the boycott to a long-term campaign. As the result, the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA) was established; it is not surprising Dr. Martin Luther King became its first president. (Bruns, 2006)

MIA determined four main demands: first, the black passengers must not be insulted by bus drivers. Second, the passengers should be seated on a first-come, first-served basis, blacks taking seats from the back of the bus and moving toward the front, whites vice versa. Third, the bus company should consider employing also black drivers, not only the white ones. It should be noted that the demands in no way called for segregation to be ended. If the plan were adopted, the black passengers would still have to sit apart from whites. (Jakoubek, 2005)

During following days, King kept convincing people to employ non-violent responses to any provocations and assaults performed by the whites. Although it was thought that the boycott would not last for very long, on December 8, the fourth day, a meeting between

black leaders, Dr. King and representatives of the bus company was arranged in order to solve the problem of segregation. Despite all hopes for quick and fair solution, the black leaders faced cold defiance from city and bus company representatives. They rejected the proposed plan and, moreover, it was announced that any taxi driver charging less than 45-cent fare would be prosecuted.

The views of the black commuters were not good. Fortunately, they managed to organize a “private taxi“ plan under which those who possessed vehicles picked up and dropped off other “rebels“ who needed to be given a ride. Although the tensions grew every day, the black citizens kept persisting, helping each other commute to and from work, schools and shops. (Bruns, 2006)

The drivers, however, experienced rough treatment by police officers who were stopping them, making “classic“ pretext: questioning them, checking their headlights and windshield wipers, writing traffic tickets for minute and often imaginary violations of the law. Although the drivers tried not to give the policemen any excuse, they kept ticketing them anyway. (Branch, 1989)

Being a leading person of the boycott, Dr. King had to face many anonymous threatening phone calls. He received between 30 and 40 calls per night, being ordered to leave Montgomery or threatened with physical extermination. On January 30, 1956, even an attempt on life of King was committed, but, fortunately, nobody was hurt thanks to Coretta, who had heard strange noises coming from their front porch and ordered the other people in the house (her daughter Yoki and Mrs Williams) to go to the next room, by which she probably saved their lives.

Right after the attempt, an outrageous crowd of sympathizers of King called for revenge, being armed and resolved to strike back, but reverend King told them to put away their weapons, because more violence would not resolve a thing. Using words of Ghandi, he also told them to love their enemies, be good with them and let them know that they love them. (Jakoubek, 2005)

King also became a victim of police misconduct. When helping drive black citizens to their jobs, he was pulled over by police officers on motorcycles for speeding. Instead of giving him an ordinary fine, they arrested him and drove him to a police station in a northern section of Montgomery, far from his home. While being alone in his jail cell, he was seriously worried about his life, thinking that he would be drawn outside and killed for challenging white authority.

Although King, Sr. tried to persuade his son to leave Montgomery and return to Atlanta,

King, Jr. refused, being aware of the moral stakes and irreparable damage to the civil rights cause that his retreat would cause. His attitude did not change even after a bomb attempt on his friend, E.D. Nixon, who, fortunately, had not been hurt. He refused to be intimidated; on the contrary, he travelled to northern cities several times and managed to raise nearly one hundred thousand dollars from civil rights supporters.

Efforts were made to divide the black community. City Commission tried to intimidate three black ministers who were not directly involved with the boycott, convincing them to come to terms with a system that was not very different from the one currently in use. After obtaining their verbal approval to the “compromise“, City Commission declared the boycott to be over.

King and the MIA responded quickly in order to disprove that piece of news. Members of the MIA were supposed to contact their friends and acquaintances to spread the word that information about the end of the boycott are untrue, and the whole cause is just a plot to disrupt the protest. The black ministers who originally came to terms with the so called compromise admitted that they had been misled and the buses remained empty of black passengers.

The boycott was then brought to trial; 89 black African-Americans were charged under an old law which prohibited boycotts. As an icon and a leader of the boycott, Martin Luther King was the first one to be tried. As a result, he was given a choice: either pay five hundred dollar plus another five hundred dollar in court costs, or spend three hundred and eighty-six days in the state penitentiary. With help from his friends and supporters, he managed to pay the fine.

Although the obligation to pay the fine was rather unpleasant, King and the boycott were given a greater publicity, which was the goal and function of non-violent protest. Despite the continuing harassment and violence, the black leaders kept meeting in various secret locations and planning their strategy. The attacks were concentrated on black churches and homes of black leaders; the church of Mr Abernathy was bombed even several times, not mentioning the attack on his home itself. (Bruns, 2006)

Because of the fact the car-pool system ran smoothly, the boycott seemed to last indefinitely. This defiant determination probably helped the court to make a final decision; the United States Supreme Court affirmed the decision of a special three-judge U.S. District Court and declared local laws requiring segregation in public transportation unconstitutional. Finally, the boycott was over once and for all, and all African-Americans could experience what it is like to sit in a front row, where, not a long time ago, only the “chosen few“ had been allowed to sit. (Jakoubek, 2005)

The boycott took 381 days and brought the bus company to its knees, losing between thirty and forty thousand fares a day. Despite the gigantic loss, Montgomery City Lines only reluctantly desegregated its buses after the Supreme Court ruling, but it did. (Bruns, 2006)

## **2.4 Southern Christian Leadership Conference**

Dr. King and other black leaders decided to lay out plans to create an organization that would maintain the pace of change in the society that the bus boycott had unleashed. On February 14, 1957, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) was established and Martin Luther King was elected its first president. The philosophy of the organization was based on the Christian principles of love and understanding. King and several other African-American ministers became the spine of the movement, travelling from town to town and persuading local communities to accept and follow their strategy of confronting government and business power with non-violent methods; they kept working, singing and marching. (Bruns, 2006)

### **2.4.1 Little Rock Crisis**

One of the main goals of the SCLC was to end school segregation. The desegregation of schools was now possible thanks to the decision of the Supreme Court in case *Brown v. Board of Education*. Until then, segregated schools could exist, but they had to be of the same quality as schools for white students. The decision, however, led to the crisis at Little Rock. (Duncan, 2003)

On September 4, the National Guard was ordered by governor Orval Faubus to prevent nine African-American students from enrolling in local Central High School. An angry mob of white adults gathered in order to make sure the troops would turn those students away. (Branch, 1989)

Martin Luther King was anxious to see the results and he decided to use his publicity, which he obtained as a new spokesman for civil rights, in order to enforce justice. He warned president Eisenhower that if the federal government did not take a quick and appropriate action, the outcome would set back the difficult process of integration by fifty years.

A few days later, a meeting was arranged by president Eisenhower who summoned



governor Faubus in order to find solution to the crisis. The two discussed the options and, at the end of the gathering, Eisenhower thought they came to an agreement that the black students would be enrolled. He also said the National Guard troops would stay in order to protect the African-American students from the angry mob of white people. He was terribly wrong.

Faubus decided to use a tactical maneuver that he had come up with on his way back to Arkansas; he ordered the National Guard to withdraw, leaving the nine students only under protection of the Little Rock police, which was the main reason why the situation started to get out of control rapidly. (Bruns, 2006)

President Dwight Eisenhower had to call in the 101st Airborne Division in order to protect those nine students from the angry mob. Some people feared this incident could become an excuse for starting a new civil war. (Williams, 2007)

Finally, on September 25, the nine black students, accompanied by the paratroopers, who stood at parade rest against the increasingly raging mob, headed to their classes. After that, each of the nine students was assigned a personal guard from the 101st Airborne for the first few days.

Martin Luther King knew the actions of Eisenhower which led to that partial victory in Little Rock would inevitably set a critical precedent in the role of the federal government in the civil rights movement; that is why he wrote to the president in order to thank him and probably encourage him to continue enforcing equality of rights. On the other hand, although the black students were allowed to enroll at last, they had to face harassment, intimidation and physical violence. Out of the "Little Rock Nine", only one eventually received his diploma. (Bruns, 2006)

#### **2.4.2 Voter Registration Campaign**

On one Saturday afternoon, while on visit of Harlem, Dr. King sat in Blumstein's department store on 125th Street, Manhattan, New York, autographing copies of his new book *Stride Toward Freedom*, and surrounded by his admirers. Suddenly, a middle-aged African-American woman stormed in the room, asking, whether there was Martin Luther King. Dr. King gave her a positive answer, after which the woman pulled a seven-inch-long letter opener and stabbed him in the chest. The reverend was taken to the local hospital, the woman was handcuffed, dragged off and eventually confined to a mental institution.

Dr. King was very lucky; if the blade had penetrated his chest only a bit deeper, he would have bled to death. While recovering from that horrible experience and resting at home with Coretta, Yoki and the newest family member, Martin Luther King III., he decided to make a sentimental journey to India, the fatherland of Gandhi. He met Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, an ally of Gandhi in the struggle for Indian independence. Being impressed by Nehru and the Indian disciples of Gandhi, he returned home in order to get the SCLC voter registration campaign started. The campaign was called Crusade for Citizenship. (Jakoubek, 2005)

The main goal of the campaign was a drive to register five million new African-American voters in the South. Being deeply distressed by the increasing militancy of the white resistance movement, King and SCLS, with support and help of the NAACP, doubled their efforts to involve the federal government in their campaign. On June 23, 1958, a conference in White House was arranged thanks to initiative of Dr. King. A nine-point proposal was presented; to sum up, the proposal stated the need for restoring communication between white and black Southerners, and the need for making the problems of integration available to all officials and community groups who try to devise a program of education and action. Both parties, Democrats and Republicans, should also put aside prejudice, so that the Congress can enact a civil rights bill which will include a part that allows constitutional rights other than voting rights to be enforced by the United States Attorney General. The President of the United States should make sure that the right of citizens to register and vote is protected by the Department of Justice. In addition, the President should clarify both in statement and in act that federal money should not be used to support segregation of millions of African-American citizens in all aspects of life, including education, health care, housing, etc. Finally, the Federal Government should finance continuation of public schools where state funds are withdrawn because of integration. (Bennett, 1964)

### **2.4.3 The Sit-in Movement**

Because of the fact the SCLC established its headquarters in Atlanta, it was impossible for King to have a hand in day-to-day activities if he continued living in Montgomery. In order to give the SCLC his full attention, he and his wife had to make a difficult decision to leave the Dexter Avenue Church in Montgomery.

On January 31, 1960, he held his farewell sermon at Dexter Avenue, during which he

told the congregation about his plans in Atlanta. He also asked it for sustained protest in order to reach their common goal. (Jakoubek, 2005)

Short after his departure, King was indicted by the Montgomery Grand Jury back in Alabama for tax fraud. Since bomb attacks on home of the King family did not stop his efforts, people who hated him hoped to destroy him in this way. The family never had much money. Most of what King earned, he gave to the SCLC. Eventually, on May 23, he stood a trial. Although he was convinced he would be convicted, the jury found him not guilty, maybe also because of the fact the good friends of King hired good lawyers. (Schraff, 2008)

After the previous appeal of Dr. King, a very effective and powerful form of protest proved itself, when four black freshmen from North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University broke the whites-only law flashed across the campus and sat down at Woolworth's lunch counter. Since no one waited on them, they kept sitting and studying. (Jakoubek, 2005)

At a mass meeting in Durham, North Caroline, Dr. King told the students that they must be willing to fill in the jails. The students took his words seriously; in Raleigh, North Carolina, over forty students vere imprisoned. In Nashville, over one hundred protesters were taken into custody because they refused to leave the lunch counters, pursuing Ghandian nonviolent resistance. (Bruns, 2006)

King himself took part in one of the sit-ins on October 19, 1960. At lunchtime, seventy-five African-Americans came to one of the whites-only restaurant of downtown Atlanta stores and, naturally, wanted to be waited on. Not only they were not served, King and thirty-five other protesters were arrested for trespassing after they were refused to be waited on.

For the mayor of Atlanta, William Hartsfield, this was not the kind of publicity he wanted to have. He promised to release all the protesters arrested for trespassing and to act as an intermediary in talks between the students and the store owners. Unfortunately for King, months before, he had been arrested there for driving with an expired license and the officials said that King had violated the terms of his probation. This was the reason why he was not released.

Within ten days, the so called sit-ins had spread throughout North Carolina into Virginia and South Carolina. This form of protest was particulary bad for business, which is the reason why many places were forced to give in. The encouraging outcome was that by the end of year 1960, one hundred and twenty-six Southern towns desegregated their lunch

counters.

In April 1960, King called a conference of the student leaders at Shaw University in Raleigh, North Carolina, at which he expressed his intention to form a permanent student organization, making it a youth division within the SCLC. The students, however, liked their independence, and they founded the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) instead. (Jakoubek, 2005)

#### **2.4.4 Freedom Rides**

A very similar form of protest to the sit-ins was developed, the so called freedom rides. Groups of whites and blacks from all over the country boarded buses and together they took their seats in the white section. Again, the so called freedom-fighters were taken into custody by hundreds. (Clayton, 1968)

It had all started in 1960, when the Supreme Court ruled in case *Boynton v. Virginia* that segregation within interstate was illegal. Separate toilets and dining rooms for interstate travellers were no longer allowed. All travellers, no matter of race, had the right to use those facilities and sit wherever they wanted. (Carson, 1981)

Not long after the decision, two young students from Nashville decided to check if the new rule was kept, and took their seats at the front of the bus, which headed out of state. Since the two did not encounter any serious resistance, they were asked to lead another, more daring, protest ride by the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), a civil rights organization led by James Farmer. Parents of one of the students, Bernard Lafayette, did not allow him to participate, but the other one, John Lewis, joined twelve other activist in order to commence freedom rides.

The first freedom ride took place on May 4, 1961 in two buses headed to Washington, D.C. Their strategy was to scatter throughout the buses and to incite incidents by entering white facilities in order to make the federal government enforce the law, as it had in the Little Rock integration struggle. Although the Freedom Riders met sporadic threats and incidents of violence and did not expect to meet serious resistance, eventually, they did meet it. The night before their trip to Montgomery, they were appreciated by Dr. King for their courage, although deep inside he was feared the next day something terrible might happen to them. (Bruns, 2006)

In order to gain political points, railing against integration, the segregationist politicians let a mob of more than one hundred Klansmen, with the cooperation of the policemen,

ambush the Riders in Anniston, Alabama. The attackers smashed the windows, slashed the tires and set it on fire. Thanks to an undercover police officer on board, who pulled his gun to force the Klansmen back, all passengers managed to disembark the bus just before the petrol tanks exploded. After that, in Birmingham, the Freedom Riders were ambushed again and beaten with baseball bats. The next day, the bus drivers refused to drive any bus carrying Freedom Riders. (Carson, 1981)

Nevertheless, the student protesters who had led the sit-ins in Nashville agreed to continue the ride from Birmingham to Montgomery. Unfortunately, although full of enthusiasm, on May 17, the Nashville students were arrested, as the police said, for their own protection, and taken to prison.

That was, of course, only a pretense. The next morning, they were put in police vehicles, driven several miles away and left on the side of the road. The Birmingham authorities assumed the Freedom Riders would head back to Nashville, but they walked railroad tracks, were assisted by a black couple and managed to locate a driver who agreed to take them to Birmingham. (Branch, 1989)

The racial clashes over the Freedom Riders became a matter of political disputes and battles. The Attorney General, Robert Kennedy, and his brother, President Kennedy, were deeply worried that violence would flare further in the Freedom Rides protest. Because of this fact the Attorney General arranged negotiations between a number of involved subjects, including the Greyhound Bus Company. Despite the bluster of Alabama Governor, John Patterson, an avowed segregationist, an agreement was accomplished on the matter of protection of the riders as they rode the highways of Alabama.

The following ride was protected by the police and was uneventful; it was watched by reporters, plainclothes state detectives and FBI observers. When the Riders reached Birmingham, they suddenly realized there were no police around. Although they realized they had been led into a trap, it was too late for them to escape, and many of the Riders were beaten unconscious.

After that, Dr. King thanked CORE for organizing the ride and urged his fellow freedom fighters to continue the path of nonviolence. He also emphasized the need for intensifying their efforts in the deep South generally, even though he knew the protesters would suffer due to angry passions of the opposition.

Eventually, the Freedom Riders accomplished their goals. On May 24, a Freedom Ride to Mississippi was accompanied by federal marshalls on the authority of the Attorney General, Robert Kennedy. At that time, however, there were no angry mobs waiting for the

Riders. Their efforts forced the administration of Kennedy to take a stand and order the Interstate Commerce Commission to prohibit segregation in all facilities under its jurisdiction. (Bruns, 2006)

Although the majority of black citizens supported the nonviolent vision of solving problems, there were also radical groups, such as the Black Panthers, who wore uniforms, patrolled African-American neighbourhoods, monitored police treatment of people of colour, and were heavily armed. There was also Malcolm X, a Nation of Islam convert, who founded the Organization of Afro-American Unity, and, before his assassination, he planned to present charges of U.S. crimes against humanity at the United Nations and the World Court. (Duncan, 2003)

## **2.5 Albany, Georgia**

In 1961, Albany became the center of national attention due to three young civil rights workers, Charles Sherrod, Cordell Reagon and Charles Jones, members of the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee, who were organizing effort to register black voters. During their campaign, they had to face a frustrating array of forces.

At first, they concentrated on students at Albany State and organized study groups, workshops and held meetings in black churches, managing to interest a sizable number of young people in matters of civil rights movement. Later, they were successful in arranging meeting with city leaders in order to negotiate some of the grievances, but they were defiantly rejected. What is more, the city representatives were ready to ignore the order of Interstate Commerce Commission that banned the segregated facilities in public transportation. Again, a wave of violence struck homes of those who were involved in the movement. (Bruns, 2006)

### **2.5.1 President Kennedy**

After the inauguration of a new President, John Fitzgerald Kennedy, Martin Luther King redoubled his efforts to involve the federal government in the deepening racial crisis. He would later say that, in fact, there had been two John Kennedys: one presided in the first two years under pressure of the uncertainty caused by his close victory, hesitant in his decisions, and the other one who had found out that public opinion was not in a rigid mold. Dr. King was very disturbed by his initial vacillations. (Bennett, 1964)

President Kennedy was not particularly popular among African-American people. He was certainly less popular than his Republican opponent, Richard M. Nixon. The main reason was that the civil rights record of Nixon, unlike the one of Kennedy, was generally considered creditable. He made himself visible due to his dispute at the Republican Convention, in which he had insisted on a strong civil rights plank, whereas Kennedy angered African-Americans by choosing Lyndon Johnson, who was considered to be an unscrupulous politician, as his running mate. Dr. King did not take active part in their campaigns. (Branch, 1989)

Nevertheless, a long-expected meeting was arranged and Dr. King was invited to the White House by President John Fitzgerald Kennedy. Martin Luther wanted to discuss civil rights ever since the election, but Kennedy refused to come to terms with him. When in the study of president, King pressed for legislation to safeguard black voting rights, reminding the President that a hundred years ago Abraham Lincoln had worked in the very room where they were sitting, and then he asked for a “second Emancipation Proclamation“ that would declare all forms of segregation illegal. (Jakoubek, 2005)

Not only was Kennedy urged by Dr. King to issue a Presidential executive banning all forms of segregation, he also wanted a Secretary of Integration to be appointed, and called for a Marshall Plan for America, by which he meant a massive commitment of federal money and energy for the South. (Bennett, 1964)

Kennedy replied that it had been a bad time for civil rights legislation because he had to face a strong opposition in Congress. King, although disappointed, was not surprised by that kind of an answer, realizing that it was unlikely for a president of either party to willingly join the movement. The African-Americans had only one option: massive nonviolent demonstrations. (Jakoubek, 2005)

### **2.5.2 Albany Movement, Part I**

In mid-November, 1961, a group called the Albany Movement was established, and the first president was selected William G. Anderson, a young black osteopath. The Albany Movement was a coalition of the NAACP, community associations and ministers, whose main goal was to end all forms of discrimination and segregation in the city. The protesters followed previous advice of Dr. King, employed the sit-ins, boycotts, legal actions, marches, mass demonstrations, and two thousand students managed to fill prisons of Albany. Anderson, a former fellow student with Martin Luther King, Jr.,

decided to invite him to Albany in order to support efforts of the Albany Movement. (Bruns, 2006)

King went to Albany with the intention of making a single, morale-boosting speech, that would take place at the Shiloh Baptist Church. The congregation welcomed him, shouting and singing: “Free-dom, free-dom, free-dom“. In his speech, he talked about nonviolence and civil rights; the attending listeners did not mind that they were hearing words he had used many times before. Dr. King encouraged the people to continue fighting against racial segregation and discrimination, which was followed by an old spiritual, sang by the crowd. This spiritual eventually became the anthem of the Civil Rights Movement; its name was We Shall Overcome. (Jakoubek, 2005)

The spiritual was determined to be the Marsellaise of the African-American Revolution. As they marched, the protesters sang:

The truth will make us free,  
The truth will make us free,  
The truth will make us free some day,  
Oh, deep in my heart, I do believe  
We shall overcome one day.

We are not afraid,  
we are not afraid,  
We are not afraid today  
Oh, deep in my heart, I do believe  
We shall overcome some day.

(Bennett, 1964, p.125)

Being pleased with the response and aware of the fact that the city government refused to end local segregation, Dr. King decided to stay. On December 16, he led a group of two hundred and fifty black supporters on a march from the Shiloh Church to City Hall. They were awaited by Chief of Police, Laurie Pritchett, and his one hundred officers who, using minimum force, arrested all the protesters for obstructing traffic. (Jakoubek, 2005)

Pritchett was peculiar in a way that unlike the most of the law enforcement authorities that King had faced, he was not determined to make the same public relations mistakes that had given the black movement national attention. Pritchett ordered his officers to treat



the protesters humanely and to avoid brutality, even name-calling. He was aware that King and the others needed overreaction on the part of local authorities in order to gain a successful outcome; that is why he kept enforcing law in a nonviolent way of his own, not giving the present cameras any image of brutality or racism. Anyone who violated local laws was peacefully rounded up and taken to prison.

On the other hand, when cameras and reporters were not present, the arrested people suffered. The jails were wretched and dirty, but most of the demonstrators had already had a jail experience, thus they were not surprised. Although the Albany movement did not gain national attention through images of violence and racism, the simple fact that Dr. King took part in the protest was a great help. King, Abernathy and Anderson claimed they were ready to stay imprisoned until they had achieved some acceptable agreement from city officials regarding change in segregation practices of the city, turning the Albany Movement into a national story. (Bruns, 2006)

Dr. King, due to his involvement in various matters, had only little time to spend with his family. In the meantime, the third child, Dexter Scott, was born, while his father was serving time in jail, and also the fourth child, Bernice Albertine, the youngest daughter, arrived under the same circumstances. As the children grew, they started asking why their father keeps going to prison because they were told only people doing wrong get arrested. Their mother, Coretta King, explained them their father goes to prison in order to help people, while other children kept teasing them about it anyway. Although King had always tried not to miss any holiday at home, the civil rights movement, demonstrations and speeches demanded more and more time. (Clayton, 1968)

Surprisingly, on December 18, King received news that some of the leaders of the Albany Movement managed to reach a tentative agreement with city leaders. Without reading all the details, he agreed to accept bail and left the prison. Not a long time after, he realized he had been fooled, because the so-called “agreement“ contained only small, almost meaningless concessions. As he found out, all that was a simple sham designed to persuade King to leave the jail and Albany.

Moreover, after returning to Atlanta, he learned that the “agreement“ was completely ignored by city officials. The fight, nevertheless, was not over. King rejoined the protesters, who continued to hold sit-ins, marches, and continued serving time in prisons. (Bruns, 2006)

### 2.5.3 Albany Movement, Part II

Although King had apologized for his impetuous act regarding coming to “compromise“ by signing the bail, he had to face criticism coming from his former supporters; they were deeply embittered by his blunder. An SNCC leader, Julian Bond, even complained that more African-Americans and white Americans would become disillusioned by him, finding out that he is nothing more but another preacher who can talk well. (Jakoubek, 2005)

Because of the repeated arrest of Dr. King, demonstrations kept increasing. Chief of Police, Laurie Pritchett, in order to decrease mobilization of protesters, told King and Abernathy that their bail had been paid and they were being released. But the memory of what happened last time when he was released was still fresh, and King protested, insisting on serving his whole time. He argued that he had the right to stay, and could not be forced to leave the prison against his will, but Pritchett ordered him to leave.

King promised to stay in Albany until city officials backed away from their segregation policies. During the following month, protests and marches followed by arrests continued, but with almost none discernible effect. Moreover, the protesters received a federal injunction that banned them from protesting. This was an order from the federal government which was given despite the fact King was in regular touch with Attorney General Kennedy, and he also wired the president on several occasions.

In late August, fifteen Jewish and Protestant ministers, who came to mediate the differences, were arrested after holding a prayer vigil. King sent a wire to Kennedy about the outrageous incident and asked him to call representatives from the Albany City Commission and the Albany Movement together in Washington in order to resolve the crisis. Although the president was in an awkward political situation due to the civil rights demonstrations, he decided not to acknowledge the telegram and to turn down the proposal of King to organize a meeting. (Bruns, 2006)

The Albany Movement kept weakening. Friday, December 16, was the first morning without marches or arrests. The Albany Movement leaders found out the spirit of the mass meeting was hard to preserve; the supporters were in jails, losing their jobs. Presenting a compromise, they sent the mildest four-part proposal they could tolerate, but it was not acknowledged. (Branch, 1989)

On one hand, ninety-five percent of the black population boycotted buses and shops, more than five percent of the black population were voluntarily imprisoned and

the boycotts were economically damaging the bus company and other merchants, but on the other hand, the city leaders held their positions and refused to discuss matters regarding segregation. Without any discernable outcome, Martin Luther King returned to Atlanta, leaving the racial barriers in Albany unbroken. (Bruns, 2006)

#### **2.5.4 Lesson from Albany**

After the events that took place in Albany, Dr. King was frustrated, but, on the other hand, more experienced and ready for another struggle. He realized it would have been better to attack the aspects of segregation and discrimination one by one, than to vaguely assault the whole issue. King also stressed the need to attack the economic power rather than the political structure; the victory is more probable if the merchants have to choose between profit and loss.

Dr. King also realized that as a celebrity he had to consider his strategy and selected targets more thoroughly, as he was nominated the major figure of the movement by the press. Some people also thought he was excessively conservative in his tactics and weak, which was annoying for them. (Carson, 1981)

#### **2.6 FBI and the Conspiracy**

At that time, Communism was considered a real threat to the free, western countries. The U.S. Government knew very well that in many countries, the Communists tried to undermine local authorities by provocations and by stirring up minority groups. The intelligence services believed that Dr. King and his supporters fell victim to that kind of subversive behaviour. They also had a list of supposed sympathizers, one of which King would soon become. (Schraff, 2008)

After the protests in Albany, King and the movement experienced new elements in their lives. With the Cold War going on and the domination of the Soviet Union in 1960s, the American society and its authorities began to fear communist infiltration. The world was not far away from a nuclear war, and paranoia, spreading throughout the American nation, led to frequent interrogations of people and their possible links to communist groups. The Federal Bureau of Investigation and its leader, J. Edgar Hoover, were seen as a force which was able to reveal possible infiltrators in the highest echelons of government and also amongst ordinary people. It is logical that Dr. King and his movement also got in

sight of the FBI. (Bruns, 2006)

On October 1, 1961, W. E. B. Du Bois, a friend of Martin Luther King, Jr., applied for membership in the Communist Party of the USA. Although he was ninety-three, he was still interested in public affairs, and he decided that capitalism is doomed to self-destruction due to its inability to reform itself. This piece of news also found its way to Dr. King who said that if the problem of racial discrimination was not solved soon, some African-Americans would turn to some other ideology out of frustration, discontent and despair. (Branch, 1989)

Moreover, the FBI learned that one of the most trusted advisors of Dr. King was Stanley Levison, a man with close ties to the Communist Party. All those facts were a reason to begin large investigation on the part of the FBI. (Bruns, 2006)

Not only King, but also organizations of which he was a part, soon became the subjects of COMINFIL (meaning communist infiltration) investigation. The CORE and SNCC were labeled by the FBI as organizations of “Black Hate“ type. Their plans and intentions were targeted for covert disruption, but the most brutal attack was prepared for Dr. King and the SCLC; for this purpose, Hoover approved use of all possible investigative techniques and expressed the need for imaginative and aggressive tactics. The FBI agents installed wiretaps, bugging activities of Dr. King, in order to destroy his reputation by those means. (Halperin, 1976)

Both President Kennedy and Attorney General Kennedy tried to persuade King to cut ties to Levison, but he would not comply, denying his connections to communism, or connections to communism of any of the organizations involved in the investigation. After that, Hoover called Dr. King the most notorious liar in the country, and considered him to be an immoral instigator of lawless actions and a communist sympathizer, if not an actual worker for the party. (Bruns, 2006)

The FBI agents were, however, not able to obtain any information that would convict King or Levison of subversive activity. The recordings contained conversations about harmless matters, such as ground leases, rental payments, unions, fund-raising of the SCLC and city tax appeals. (Branch, 1989)

The hostility between the FBI and Martin Luther King, Jr. can be depicted by one of the efforts of the bureau to contact him. When the head of the Crime Records Division of the FBI, Cartha DeLoach, made a phone call to his SCLC office in Atlanta, the secretaries promised her to tell Dr. King to return the call. When he did not respond, she wrote in an FBI memo: “It would appear obvious that Rev. King does not desire to be told the true

facts. He obviously used deceit, lies, and treachery as propaganda to further his own causes.... I see no further need to contact Rev. King as he obviously does not desire to be given the truth. The fact that he is a vicious liar is amply demonstrated in the fact he constantly associates with and takes instructions from a member of the Communist Party.” (Bruns, 2006, p. 67)

What is more, the agents kept sending letters and attached wiretapes to Dr. King in which they were urging him to commit suicide or publicly face revelation of the information recorded on the tapes. When they failed to accomplish their goal in those ways, they tried to portray him in a bad light and find his successor, who would be more suitable for the adversaries of the Civil Rights Movement, but, again, they failed. The investigations continued even after his death. (Halperin, 1976)

## **2.7 Birmingham**

There is one city in the South where people did not believe that any change in laws regarding segregation and discrimination is possible. The city is called Birmingham and lies in Alabama. It is said that there had been the most brutal police department in the USA, having Commissioner of Public Safety, T. Eugene “Bull” Connor, in charge. He was known to use force and fear in order to keep the city segregated, and he never hesitated to use it. (Jakoubek, 2005)

There was a numerous population of black citizens living in the city, who had previously worked in the fields, and, at that time, they worked in large steel factories. All public facilities were segregated; moreover, in order to prevent desegregation, the city leaders had city parks and public golf courses closed. In the city, there was also one of the last remaining Ku Klux Klan (KKK) cells.

Knowing all this, Martin Luther King, Jr. decided that this city would be the best choice for confrontation in order to gain national attention. He called the Birmingham plan “Project C”; the “C” stood for confrontation. Again, it was a plan consisted of nonviolent demonstrations, economic boycotts and a call for human justice. But, having learned a lesson in Albany, he and his supporters prepared an elaborated plan, and recruited over two hundred protesters who would voluntarily go to prison. Afterwards, Dr. King publicly announced his intention to lead the demonstration. He also warned his colleagues about the extreme danger he saw ahead, being aware of history and nature of Eugene Connor. (Bruns, 2006)

Dr. King referred to Abraham Lincoln:

“One hundred years of delay have passed since President Lincoln freed the slaves, yet their heirs, their grandsons are not fully free. They are not yet freed from bonds of injustice; they are not yet freed from social and economic oppression. And this nation, for all its hopes and its boasts will not be fully free until all its citizens are free.” (Bennett, 1964, p.157)

Each night, Martin Luther King, Jr. spoke to masses, recruiting volunteers willing to go to prison. He said:

“I got on my marching shoes! I woke up this morning with my mind stayed on freedom! I ain't going to let nobody turn me around! If the road to freedom leads through the jailhouse, then, turnkey, swing wide the gates!” (Jakoubek, 2005, p.73)

The actions commenced on April 3, 1963, when Dr. King presented a “Birmingham Manifesto“, in which he demanded that public facilities be desegregated and that local African-Americans be employed by resident merchants. That day, sixty-five black citizens held sit-ins at several facilities, of which twenty were arrested by police officers led by Eugene Connor. (Jakoubek, 2005)

On April 7, the assumptions of King regarding anticipated behaviour of Connor, finally proved. The police employed dogs which were pinning the protesters down and snarling at others who wanted to help the poor demonstrator. The next day, photographs taken at the demonstration appeared in a number of newspapers around the country.

After that, Dr. King and a group of fifty volunteers participated in the next march, being aware of the fact that it would culminate in their arrest. Their assumption was correct. When they were protesting, they knelt in prayer, after which Connor had them arrested. During his first days of confinement, Dr. King was allowed only little direct contact with anyone; he was even denied to contact his wife. (Bruns, 2006)

Coretta was, not surprisingly, very worried about her husband. Being almost desperate, she dialed the telephone number of the White House, being persuaded that a direct and personal call to the president is the best way to draw attention to unsatisfactory conditions of imprisonment of King. President Kennedy promised he would look into the situation. The next day, he called Coretta back, as he had promised, and assured her that her husband would call her soon. (Jakoubek, 2005)

Not even in prison did Dr. King idle; writing on scraps of paper, he concluded a letter addressed to “My Dear Fellow Clergymen“ in which he looked back at his opinions and taken actions. He defended his tactic and the right of the Civil Rights Movement to defy the law. He wrote about years of long suffering of his people and codified hatred, which were the segregation laws. Finally, although he had not planned it, his letter was pieced together and published in newspapers around the country. It gave confidence to millions of black citizens who were frustrated and ready for a social change. King was, eventually, released on April 20. (Bruns, 2006)

As time passed, the demonstrations began to cease, having not fulfilled the jails, as it had been planned. Dr. King, although reluctantly, decided to use children as demonstrators. He recruited them from a local black high school and expressed the need for children to gain their own experience with fighting for freedom and justice. The pictures of the attacked children in newspapers made President Kennedy sick. After a period of chaos, when houses of Dr. King and his brother, A.D., a local preacher, were bombed, which triggered riots on the part of the black citizens, the message of determination of black people reached the White House. (Jakoubek, 2005)

After experience from Birmingham and also from previous nonviolent protests in other cities, which supported the civil rights movement, President Kennedy, eventually, began to work on a broad civil rights legislation to Congress. (Bruns, 2006)

## **2.8 March on Washington**

Since the beginning of year 1963, King and his supporters had been planning a protest march on Washington. After the incidents in Birmingham, they decided it was the right time. On August 28, nearly two hundred and fifty thousand people of all races, professions and origins, marched from the Washington Monument to the Lincoln Memorial in order to support the Civil Rights Movement. (Jakoubek, 2005)

At the Lincoln Memorial, dr. King gave his most famous speech, later called “I have a dream“:

“I have a dream today. 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. I have a dream today. I have a dream that one day the state of Alabama, whose governor's lips are presently dripping with the words of interposition and nullification, will

be transformed into a situation where little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls and work together as sisters and brothers. I have a dream today. I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together..." (Bennett, 1964, p.162)

The event was one of the first to be broadcasted live around the world. After the speech, Dr. King and the other leaders gathered at the White House to discuss a new civil rights bill with President Kennedy. He considered the matter very important and promised he would make things move forward in order to achieve the objectives that had been demanded before the march. The accomplishments, however, were followed by church bombing performed by the KKK, and consequent violence which resulted in deaths of innocent children. (Bennett, 1964)

Later, Dr. King was also involved in protests against the war in Vietnam, mostly in 1967. Besides the fact he followed the Gandhian philosophy of nonviolence, which means he was, naturally, against the war, Dr. King also criticized the fact that the U.S. government kept sending the poorest people, mostly black, to Vietnam, where they were obliged to fight for their country, but, back home, they were not allowed to attend the same schools as the whites. (Bruns, 2006)

His words were, though, twisted; his opponents declared that he had wanted to connect civil rights with a proposal that would lead to abject surrender in Vietnam, betraying the cause for which he had worked. The concept of protests, unfortunately, failed as the war escalated and expanded. (Jakoubek, 2005)



## **3. Major Achievements**

### **3.1 Civil Rights Act**

After assassination of President Kennedy, his successor, Lyndon B. Johnson, immediately started working on passing a new civil rights bill, and he intended no compromises; everyone would be allowed to vote and get all education that one can get. This act would be, as he said, a way how to honour the fallen president. Johnson advised Dr. King not to demonstrate, but, meanwhile, actions were taken in St. Augustine, and they, again, reargarded segregation and racism.

On July 2, 1964, President Johnson put his signature to the historic legislation. The new act outlawed discrimination in hotels, restaurants, theatres and other public facilities, at the same time, banning employment discrimination on the basis of race, colour, religion, sex or national origin. (Bruns, 2006)

### **3.2 Nobel Prize**

In October 1964, Martin Luther King, Jr. was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize of 1964. The Nobel Prize Committee were convinced that he deserves it due to his nonviolent struggle for ending segregation and his part which he took in battle for the new Civil Rights Bill. His acceptance statement was ended by words from the famous spiritual, We shall overcome. (Bennett, 1964)

### **3.3 Voting Rights Act**

Despite the new Civil Rights Bill, only a handful of African-Americans were registered voters. That is why Dr. King and his supporters began effort to register them by nonviolent protests in Selma, Alabama. President Johnson, in response to new demonstrations and demands by those who wanted to become registered voters, prepared a voting-rights legislation that was sent to the Congress

The protesters kept marching and demonstrating in Selma; unfortunately for them, one of the meetings was proclaimed unlawful and the demonstrators were ordered to dismiss. The assembly refused to comply, after which they were brutally attacked by state troopers;

this incident was later called “Bloody Sunday“.

President Johnson was deeply moved by courage and suffering of the protesters who participated in demonstrations in Selma. He decided to support the movement because he felt it is wrong to deny any American the right to vote only because of the colour of skin. On August 6, 1965, the Voting Rights Act was signed by President Johnson, which banned any qualification tests used to prevent some of the African-Americans from voting.

(Bruns, 2006)

## **4. Philosophy and Assassination**

### **4.1 Nonconformity**

Martin Luther King, Jr. believed that although humans have tendency to conform, the Western society as Christians, have a mandate to be nonconformists. He liked to quote the Apostle Paul: “Be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind“. (Romans 12:2) He meant that people should be beings of conviction, not conformity, and of moral nobility, not social respectability.

He stressed the need to cherish permanent values, not material things, and to suffer for righteousness, following the path of conviction. In his opinion, people should love their enemies and not to be revengeful, do good to them and pray for them.

Dr. King also did not like the fact that we have cultivated mass mind in a way that we have moved from the one extreme of rugged individualism to the greater extreme of rugged collectivism, and people are, thus, shaped by the majority. According to him, people are afraid to take a position different from the prevailing opinion, but they should be not.

He also criticized the church which was seen as an institution that crystallizes, conserves and sometimes even blesses the patterns of majority opinion, and some of the preachers who measure their achievements by the size of their parsonage and avoid saying anything which might disturb the respectable views of the comfortable members of their congregations. The future, in his words, lies in justice, peace and brotherhood.

(Warner, 1999)

### **4.2 Assassination**

In April, 1968, Dr. King was preparing his idea of a “Poor People's March on

Washington” to be put into practice. The aim was to draw the attention of Congress to the grave matter of poverty. King and his supporters planned to build shanties and occupy Washington, until the government complied. The planning, nevertheless, did not go well, moreover, the striking garbage collectors of Memphis, Tennessee, asked for his help, and he answered their plea. (Jakoubek, 2005)

During his stay in Memphis, he gave several strong speeches and organized a protest march. Since Memphis did not meet the demands of the union, there was another protest march scheduled for April 5. At 6 PM, on April 4, Dr. King and his friend, Ralph Abernathy, were preparing for the march. King went out to the balcony and began talking to a group of people gathered below. He was not aware that there was a man across the street, holding a rifle in his hands, and filled with anger. The man was James Earl Ray, a drifter who hated black people.

All of a sudden, a rifle shot came from across the street and hit King in the lower right jaw, driving further and tearing his major blood vessels. Efforts to stop his bleeding failed. Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. died at 7:05 PM, April 4, 1968. (Schraff, 2008)

## Conclusion

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was, undoubtedly, one of the most famous and, regarding the civil rights of African-Americans, one of the most important figures of the twentieth century. Although his childhood was hard due to strict upbringing of his parents and hostile conditions, which ruled in the segregated South of the United States of America, he eventually managed to go through elementary school, high school, university, and even obtained a Ph.D degree. On his journey to fair and just American society, he married a supportive and very understanding woman, Coretta Scott, who sympathized with his ideas of nonviolent protesting, although she was, of course, disappointed that her husband had only little time spare for her and their young children.

Dr. King reached numerous accomplishments which helped people in their everyday lives. He used his oratory abilities during sermons in order to give intimidated and frustrated African-Americans hope, strength and will to continue their struggle against segregation and discrimination; he passed his faith and religious knowledge to his congregation, convincing it to believe in God that would, eventually, help the oppressed to succeed. Until King became well-known, the African-Americans were shattered; he managed to unite them and encouraged them to work together for their common goal.

Without his courage to stand up for his rights in public transportation matters during the Montgomery Bus Boycott, Freedom Rides, and involvement in the Albany Movement, it is possible that laws which forbade segregation would have come into existence decades after the Civil Rights Movement had enabled any person, regardless of religion, race or sex, to sit anywhere in a bus and use common facilities.

King and his supporters established a powerful organization, Southern Christian Leadership Conference, whose purpose was to enforce juridical changes in the American legal system; thanks to its support the black students were allowed to attend schools together with their white classmates, and the sit-in movement, supervised also by the SCLC and King, made sure that in all restaurants, all people are served properly, no matter of what colour their skin is.

Although he faced harassment and oppression by the police, though he was imprisoned several times, and the FBI even suspected him of involvement in the Communist Party, Dr. King never stepped back and remained loyal to his beliefs and millions of people who relied on him. Despite those acts of injustice, he managed to organize a massive march on the capital city of Washington and gave there his well-known and most powerful speech,

I Have a Dream.

As a follower of nonviolence, it was his duty to fight and organize protests against the war in Vietnam. Although he was not successful due to critical voices which considered that efforts to be solely pragmatic, he manifested that the important and dangerous topic is not indifferent to the Civil Rights Movement.

Besides that, Dr. King helped to enforce the Civil Rights Act that banned employment discrimination and discrimination in hotels, restaurants, theatres and other public facilities. Thanks to his participation in authorization of the Voting Rights Act, no African-American should be prevented from voting. Eventually, for his lifelong and nonviolent struggle for the civil rights, Martin Luther King, Jr. was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

He remained loyal to his conviction until the bitter end. His life was ended abruptly by a hateful racist in Memphis, while Dr. King was trying to help the poor people improve their lives. I believe that if Martin Luther King had not been assassinated, he would have reached many other achievements in a continuing process of social integration of African-Americans, that was sparked off by very him.

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## Annotation

<b>Jméno a příjmení:</b>	Lukáš Číkl
<b>Katedra:</b>	Katedra anglického jazyka
<b>Vedoucí práce:</b>	PhDr. Světlana Obenausová, MLitt, Ph.D.
<b>Rok obhajoby:</b>	2012

<b>Název práce:</b>	Přínos Martina Luthera Kinga, Jr. hnutí za práva Afroameričanů
<b>Název v angličtině:</b>	Contribution of Martin Luther King, Jr. to the African-American Civil Rights Movement
<b>Anotace práce:</b>	Cílem této práce je shrnout přínos Martina Luthera Kinga, Jr. pro hnutí za práva Afroameričanů. Pojednává o jeho práci pro hnutí The Civil Rights Movement a uvádí jeho největší úspěchy v oblasti boje za práva Afroameričanů.
<b>Klíčová slova:</b>	Martin Luther King, Jr., hnutí za práva Afroameričanů, USA
<b>Anotace v angličtině:</b>	The aim of the thesis is to summarize contribution of Martin Luther King, Jr. to the African-American Civil Rights Movement. It deals with his work for the Civil Rights Movement and states his major accomplishments in the field of struggle for the rights of African-Americans.
<b>Klíčová slova v angličtině:</b>	Martin Luther King, Jr., African-American Civil Rights Movement, USA
<b>Přílohy vázané v práci:</b>	
<b>Rozsah práce:</b>	40
<b>Jazyk práce:</b>	angličtina