



A Community Celebration January 18, 2009 - 3:00 PM

This event is free to the public!

In association with the Mansfield Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance, the Renaissance is proud to host this very special event. Join us and a city wide mass choir as the life of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. is remembered through song, reflection and tribute. Over one hundred singers will take the stage, from churches and choirs all over the city of Mansfield, to once again remember that it's up to us to make the dream a reality.

Martin Luther King is probably the most famous person associated with the civil rights movement. King was active from the start of the Montgomery Bus Boycott of 1955 to 1956 until his murder in April 1968. To many, Martin Luther King epitomized what the civil rights campaign was all about and he brought massive international cover to the movement.



Martin Luther King

Martin Luther King was born in Atlanta, Georgia on January 15, 1929. The church was very much a part of his life as both his father and grandfather had been Baptist preachers. They themselves were involved in the civil rights movement. By the standards of the time, King came from a reasonably comfortable background and after graduating from college in 1948 he was not sure about which profession to join. He considered a career in medicine and law but rejected both and joined the Baptist Church. He studied at the Crozer Theological Seminary in Pennsylvania. It was while studying there that King learned about the non-violent methods used by Mahatma Gandhi against the British in India. King became convinced that such methods would be of great value to the civil rights movement.

After leaving Crozer, King got married to Coretta Scott. He became a Baptist pastor at the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama. He was in Montgomery at the start of the Montgomery Bus Boycott. He was appointed the president of the Montgomery Improvement Association which was created during the boycott. King became a prominent leader - even driving some of the black community to work as the buses had been boycotted. His house was fire-bombed and others involved with MIA were also intimidated - but by the end of 1956, segregation had been lifted in Montgomery and bus integration had been introduced.

Another result of the boycott was the establishment of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). This organization was committed to the use of non-violence and its motto was "Not one hair of one head of one person should be harmed." Martin Luther King was elected its president. The importance of the SCLC's involvement was simply because the churches that represented the black population in the South were potent organizations. Now that they had combined their power and influence, this power was multiplied.



King also placed great faith in the power of the vote. Many black Americans in the South still faced enormous problems doing something as basic as registering to vote, such was the intimidation they faced. In Mississippi, 42% of the state's population was black but only 2% registered to vote in the 1960 election. However, more and more did register throughout the South, and in 1960 their support (70%) helped to give the Democrat J F Kennedy the narrowest of victories over Richard Nixon.

In 1963, Kennedy proposed his civil rights bill. To persuade Congress to support this bill King, with other civil rights leaders, organized the legendary March on Washington. The march - officially the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom - was a major success. Held on August 28, 1963, it attracted between 250,000 and 400,000 people. The final speaker was Martin Luther King and it was here that he made his legendary 'I have a



Dream' speech, which was heard throughout the world and did a huge amount to publicize the civil rights movement in America across the world. Congress did accept Kennedy's civil rights bill and it became the 1964 Civil Rights Act - a far reaching act that many saw as a fitting tribute to the assassinated Kennedy. King then moved on to a bill that would guarantee the voting rights of the black community in America. This led to the 1965 Voting Rights Act.

On April 4, 1968, Martin Luther King was shot dead by an assassin. His death sparked off riots in many cities and 46 people were killed during these. In March 1969, James Earl Ray was found guilty of King's murder and sentenced to 99 years in prison. Many years after starting his sentence, Ray claimed that he was innocent and that he could not have killed King.

Source: www.historylearningsite.co.uk/martin_luther_king.htm