

# MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

Rosa Parks's workday was over. She got on the Montgomery bus that would take her home. She paid the fare. Then, she sat down in Row 11, just behind the "white" section of the bus.

The bus started to fill up. Pretty soon, all the "white" seats were filled. When the next white person—a man—got on, the bus driver told the African Americans, including Rosa, in Row 11 that they had to move. This was because the city of Montgomery, Alabama, in 1955 had a law that said on buses, whites would never have to sit with blacks. It said, "Every person operating a bus line shall provide equal accommodations . . . in such a manner as to separate the white people from the Negroes."

## Words of Wisdom from Martin Luther King, Jr.

How did Martin Luther King, Jr., forgive the white people who hated African Americans?

He told us we should love the people who hate us. They have been taught to hate us. Therefore, they are not fully responsible for their hate.

Why did Martin Luther King, Jr., decide to be nonviolent in his protests? He said we will wear down the people who hate us by showing our strength. This show of strength will cause them to give us our rightful freedom and earn their respect at the same time.



Rosa Parks is fingerprinted after her arrest in Montgomery, Alabama, on December 1, 1955.

Rosa Parks would not give up her seat. The driver stopped the bus and called the police. Rosa was arrested for breaking the Montgomery law. She was found guilty and had to pay a \$10 fine, plus \$4 in court costs.

Something else happened in Montgomery after Rosa was arrested. The African Americans there decided to stop riding the buses. They carpooled. They hitchhiked. They took cabs. And, they walked. But, they stayed off the buses. They decided to stay off the buses until the bus companies changed the rules.



*Martin Luther King, Jr., is shown here during one of his first nonviolent confrontations with police.*

The Montgomery bus boycott lasted over a year. A boycott is a way of protesting by refusing to buy or use certain products—like the Montgomery buses. This boycott didn't end until the U.S. Supreme Court agreed that the Montgomery law went against the Constitution.

### **Martin Luther King, Jr., Becomes a Leader**

One of the great leaders to come out of the Montgomery bus boycott was a man named Martin Luther King, Jr. Martin was born in Atlanta, Georgia. He went north to receive training as a minister. Then, he came south again, to work in a Montgomery, Alabama, church.

Montgomery's black leaders asked Martin to run the bus boycott. Martin agreed that the African Americans should protest their treatment. He also agreed that protests, like the bus boycott, should be nonviolent.

The Montgomery bus boycott eventually ended. However, the African American movement for equal rights did not end then. Martin's role as leader in the fight for civil rights did not end either.

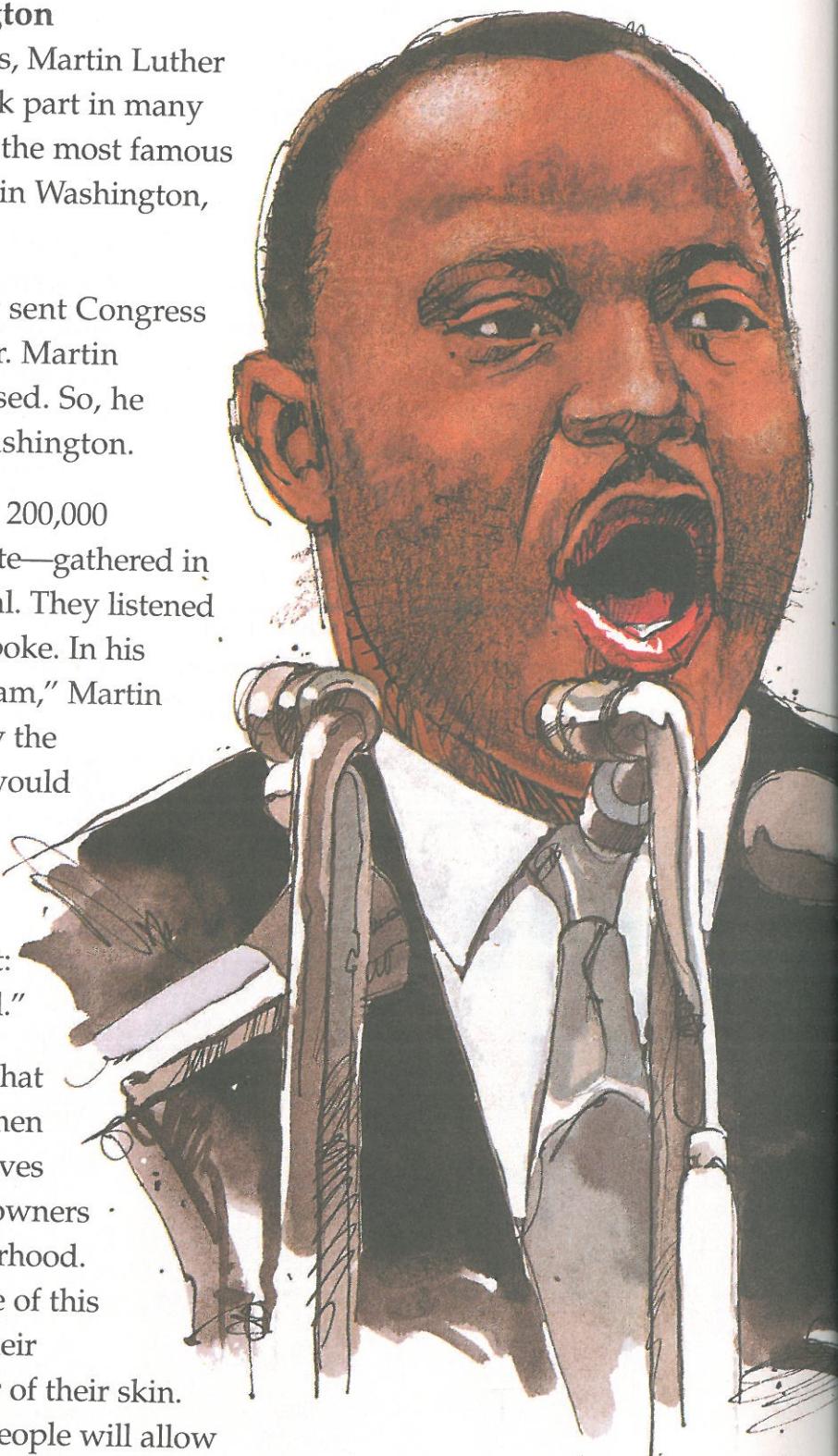
## Martin Goes to Washington

For the next twelve years, Martin Luther King, Jr., organized and took part in many nonviolent protests. One of the most famous of these protests took place in Washington, D.C., in 1963.

President John Kennedy sent Congress a civil rights bill to consider. Martin wanted to make sure it passed. So, he organized the March on Washington.

On August 28, 1963, over 200,000 people—both black and white—gathered in front of the Lincoln Memorial. They listened as Martin Luther King, Jr., spoke. In his speech, called “I Have a Dream,” Martin said he believed that one day the people in the United States would live according to the words in the Declaration of Independence: “We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal.”

Martin told the audience that he dreamed about the day when the descendents of former slaves and the descendents of slaveowners would live together in brotherhood. It was his hope that all people of this nation would be judged by their character and not by the color of their skin. He said that freedom for all people will allow us—all races and religions—to one day join together and sing the words of the old Negro spiritual, “Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty, we are free at last.”



## Martin Dies for His Cause

Martin knew that what he was doing was very dangerous. There were many Americans who wanted him in jail. There were even some who wanted him dead.

Martin told his fellow civil-rights fighters that, if something happened to him, they should go on fighting without him. He told them that God would be with the movement.

On April 4, 1968, in Memphis, Tennessee, Martin Luther King, Jr., was killed by an assassin's bullet. He was buried in Atlanta, Georgia.

Over his grave, his tombstone uses words from the same Negro spiritual Martin quoted in his Washington speech. It says, "Free at last, free at last, thank God Almighty, I'm free at last."

## Show What You Know

The civil rights Martin Luther King, Jr., wanted for African Americans are the same rights the Constitution guarantees to all U.S. citizens. In fact, the Constitution guarantees many freedoms for American citizens. The First Amendment of the Constitution guarantees five rights by itself!

Below are the rights the First Amendment guarantees. Think about each right. Next, rate them, from 1 to 5, in order of how important each is to you. Then, write a paragraph telling why you think your first choice is so important.

- \_\_\_\_\_ Freedom of religion—This means all Americans can worship as they choose.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Freedom of speech—This means all Americans are free to express themselves in words.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Freedom of the press—This means that people can express themselves in newspapers, on radio and television, and in other media.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Right to assemble—This means that people can freely gather together.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Right to petition—This means that people can ask the government to fix wrongs and deal with citizens' concerns.