

MARTIN THE DREAMER

Martin Luther King (1929-1968) was a black Baptist minister. Forty years ago in southern United States, where he lived, many people thought that black people were inferior to white people. They were kept apart - segregated. Black Americans had to sit in the back seats of the buses, they could not use the same restaurants, parks and swimming pools as white Americans. They had to go to different schools and hospitals. Many black citizens were not allowed to vote.

Martin Luther King led a civil rights movement to change these injustices. Thousands of people, black and white, young and old, joined him in protest marches and suffered the violence that was used against them. They were beaten and kicked, had police dogs and fire hoses turned on them, and many were arrested and put in prison. Martin told his supporters to stand up for what was right but, whatever was done to them, never to use violence themselves. He reminded them of what Jesus said: "Love your enemies. Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who treat you badly."

In 1963, Martin led a march to Washington DC demanding freedom and jobs. A vast crowd heard his most inspiring speech:

"I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the colour of their skin, but by the sort of persons they are.... I have a dream that one day... all of God's children, black and white, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing, in the words of the black people's old song, 'Free at last, free at last, thank God almighty, we are free at last'."

The struggle for civil rights was successful. Segregation was made illegal. Black people won the right to vote. The laws changed but some people still had hatred in their hearts. Martin Luther King was shot and killed by a white racist in 1968. He gave his life in the struggle for equality and his birthday on 15 January is now a public holiday in the United States.

Martin was a dreamer. He dreamed of justice and freedom for all.