



# 10 Things You May Not Know About Martin Luther King Jr.

**1. King's birth name was Michael, not Martin.** Dr. King was born Michael King Jr. on January 15, 1929. In 1934, however, his father, a pastor at Atlanta's Ebenezer Baptist Church, traveled to Germany and became inspired by the Protestant Reformation leader Martin Luther. As a result, King Sr. changed his own name as well as that of his 5-year-old son.

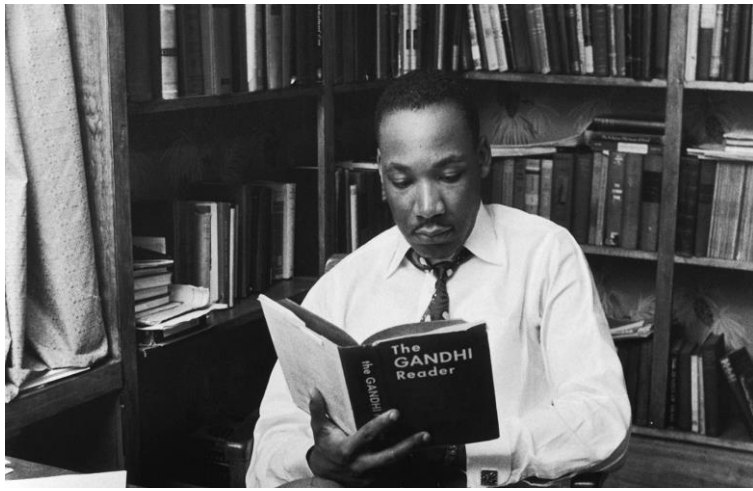


**2. King entered college at the age of 15.** King was such a gifted student that he skipped grades nine and 12 before enrolling in 1944 at Morehouse College, the alma mater of his father and maternal grandfather. Although he was the son, grandson and great-grandson of Baptist ministers, King did not intend to follow the family vocation until Morehouse president Benjamin E. Mays, a noted theologian, convinced him otherwise. King was ordained before graduating college with a degree in sociology.



**3. In Jan. 1957, Martin Luther King Jr. and a group of about 60 ministers and civil rights leaders met in Atlanta to discuss their next step after the Supreme Court ruled bus segregation unconstitutional.** The Southern Christian Leadership Conference first gathered in 1957 to discuss appropriate non-violent protest options and potential events that would further the civil rights cause across the country. The SCLC encouraged African American citizens to vote in elections to make their voices heard and sponsored more than 20 events in major southern cities to register African American voters.

**4. King was imprisoned nearly 30 times.** According to the King Center, the civil rights leader went to jail 29 times. He was arrested for acts of civil disobedience while fighting for civil rights, coordinating protests and sit ins.



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**5. King received his doctorate in systematic theology.** After earning a divinity degree from Pennsylvania's Crozer Theological Seminary, King attended graduate school at Boston University, where he received his Ph.D. degree in 1955. The title of his dissertation was "A Comparison of the Conceptions of God in the Thinking of Paul Tillich and Henry Nelson Wieman."

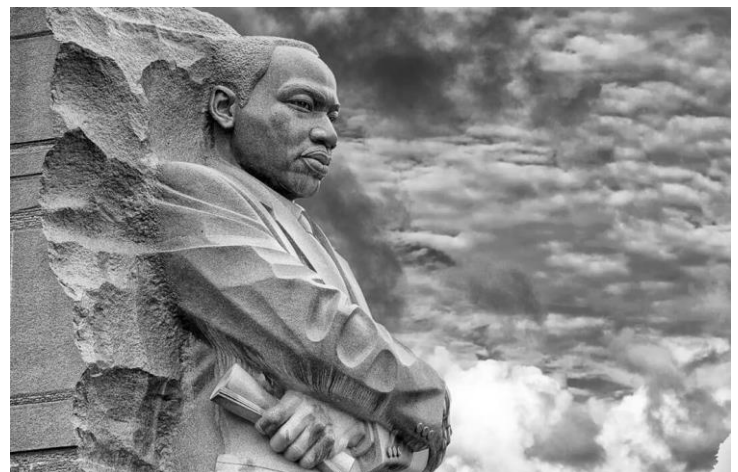
**6. When Dr. King won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964, he was the youngest man to receive the award.** Dr. King was 35 years old when he received the Nobel Peace Prize, at the time making him the youngest. He was awarded a Nobel medal and \$54,123 in prize money that was donated to help further the civil rights movement. Malala Yousafzai in 2014 became the youngest ever Nobel Peace Prize winner at the age of 17.

**7. King narrowly escaped an assassination attempt a decade before his death.** On September 20, 1958, King was in Harlem signing copies of his new book, "Stride Toward Freedom," in Blumstein's department store when he was approached by Izola Ware Curry. The woman asked if he was Martin Luther King Jr. After he said yes, Curry said, "I've been looking for you for five years," and she stabbed Dr. King in the chest with a seven-inch letter opener. The tip of the blade came to rest alongside his aorta, and Dr. King underwent hours of emergency surgery. Surgeons later told Dr. King that just one sneeze could have punctured the aorta and killed him. From his hospital bed where he convalesced for weeks, he issued a statement affirming his nonviolent principles and saying he felt no ill will toward his mentally ill attacker.

**8. King's last public speech foretold his death.** Dr. King had come to Memphis in April 1968 to support the strike of the city's Black sanitation workers, and in a speech on the night before his assassination, he told an audience at Mason Temple Church: "Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now ... I've seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the Promised Land. And I'm happy tonight. I'm not worried about anything. I'm not fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord."

**9. George Washington is the only other American to have had his birthday observed as a national holiday.** In 1983 President Ronald Regan signed a bill that created a federal holiday to honor Dr. King. The holiday, first commemorated in 1986, is celebrated on the third Monday in January, close to the civil rights leader's January 15 birthday.

**10. The Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Stone of Hope at the National Mall stands 30 ft tall.** The Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Stone of Hope was opened in 2011 at the National Mall. The monument to Dr. King stands 30 feet tall. On one side, it reads: "Out of the mountain of despair, a stone of hope," a line used by Dr. King in his famous "I Have a Dream" speech.



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