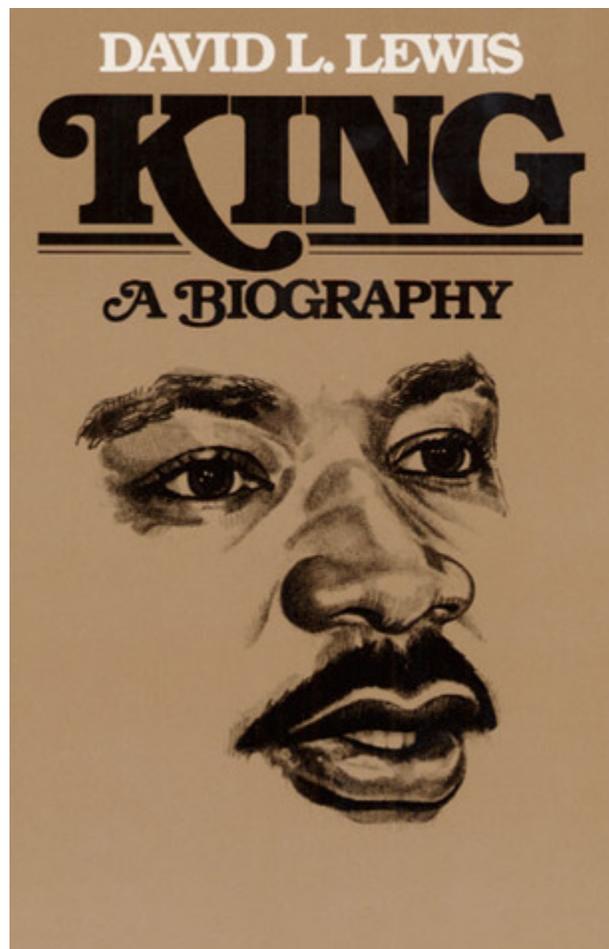


**The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.
January 15, 1929 – April 4, 1968**

The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. would be 90 years old today. We can only speculate had he lived what his thoughts would have been on his 80th birthday, one week before the inauguration of Barack Obama. Ten years later there are significant issues that the voice and pen of Dr. King would be addressing.

I have selected a few excerpts from the biography of Dr. King written by Professor Dr. David Levering Lewis. David signed the contract to write King's biography two weeks before his death and published the book one year later. His book is the first of many biographies of Dr. King. Click on this link to remember Dr. King with personal stories that can be shared with your K-12 students.



On Education

“The function of education, therefore, is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically. But education which stops with efficiency may prove the greatest menace to society. The most dangerous criminal may be the man gifted with reason, but with no morals.” (p.25)

Acceptance to Morehouse College

“Wishing to enter Morehouse College, he studied hard. But there was no good reason for a bright young man to spend the required years at Washington High. Almost a decade later, the Ford Foundation, reaching the same conclusion, was to provide Fisk and Morehouse colleges with funds to establish an early-entrants program for second and third year black high school students, enabling them to enter college without diplomas, in order to pursue specially enriched curricula. President Mays of Morehouse, who was concerned about the mangling of black talent by segregated high schools and was worried that wartime conscription would seriously deplete his enrollment, pioneered a special program for gifted high school students at Morehouse. After successfully completing a battery of Morehouse-designed tests, Mike entered the college in September, 1944, again skipping a high school grade. He was fifteen. His father was delighted, as was his mother, for matriculation at Morehouse represented a continuum in family tradition. Articulate and precocious, Mike would add luster to his family. Moreover, although his father was careful not to make the point, Mike would remain at home for those four college years, time enough to prevail upon him to enter the ministry and accept the co-pastorship of Ebenezer.” (p. 17-18)

Early experiences with prejudice and racism:

“His chief extracurricular passion was rewarded by the Elks, who bestowed upon him their annual oratorical prize for his presentation that year of a topic dealing with the Negro and the Constitution. But one of his experiences with oratory was as cruel as any of the racial contretemps by which he had been previously beleaguered. Years later, his smothered anger at being compelled with his fellow high school debaters to surrender his seat to white passengers boarding the bus returning from Valdosta, Georgia, was eloquently communicated to a correspondent from *Time* magazine. Cursed by the driver, they had had to stand in the aisle for 90 miles. ‘It was a night I’ll ever forget. I don’t think I have ever been so deeply angry in my life.’” (p. 16)

“The most casual acquaintance of the King family would probably have predicted that “Mike” King (he would become “Martin Luther” and “Dr. King” later) was destined from birth for the cloth. His maternal grandfather, the Reverend Alfred Daniel Williams, had founded Ebenezer Baptist Church, and Mike’s father, Martin, Sr., had made it one of the largest and most prestigious Baptist churches in Atlanta. Mike’s upbringing was pious and deeply influenced by the immensely varied activities arising out of his father’s pastoral responsibilities. His precocious vocabulary and uncanny appreciation for the rhythms of language were clearly the patrimony of two generations of fundamentalist ministry. Mike knew by instinct the code that unlocked the powerful emotions of black worshippers. When he was only four, his mother regularly took him to smaller churches in the Atlanta area, where the people “rocked with joy” to his rendering of religious songs.” (p.4)

“He had scarcely noticed the attractive daughter of the white superintendent of buildings and grounds, but before the end of the first semester (at Crozer Theological Seminary in Chester, PA), their relationship had deepened into serious mutual attraction. Although he was obviously popular with his white classmates, his position (president of the student body) carried no

immunity from the campus racism that always lay just below the surface. His good friends Dupree Jordan and Francis Steward, both white Georgians, might have stood by him, but public knowledge of a white sweetheart, not withstanding the Christian training of its student body, would have created a *cause celebre* at Crozer.

Fortunately, interested members of the black community intervened. When Mike was seen with the young lady on one of the black cafes, Reverend Barbour was informed. He was told by Mike that they were in love and wished Barbour to marry them. A long fatherly lecture ensued, ending with a plea that the couple weigh the horrendous complications that usually accompanied intermarriage. Mike did so. And so did the young lady's family. She left Chester before the end of the academic year." (p. 33)

"Sometime before this romance, Mike and Walter McCall had been subjected to the vagaries of Northern prejudice in the small New Jersey village of Maple Shade, near Camden. With two dates, they had sought service in a restaurant whose staff politely ignored their repeated requests for a menu. When they insisted, the proprietor suggested that "the best thing would be for you to leave." They refused, were threatened by the owner's pistol, and finally left only because of the danger to the girls. Returning half an hour later with a policeman, Mike and McCall obtained the promises of three students from the University of Pennsylvania to testify to the proprietor's violation of the state civil rights code. The matter was duly turned over to the Camden branch of the NAACP, which filed suit. The two students were to be cruelly deceived, however, for their witnesses, now embarrassed by their initial temerity, professed not to recall the circumstances of the case and declined to testify. It is remarkable that Mike could nevertheless maintain his faith in the inevitability of racial progress." (p. 33,34)

On meeting Coretta Scott

"As he told Mrs. Powell, an Atlantan residing in Boston, "Mary, I wish I knew a few girls from down home to go out with. I tell you, these Boston girls are something else. The ones I've been seeing are so reserved." And Mrs. Powell could tell by the way Mike drawled out his plea in the Western Lunch Box that day that he really did need the familiar and empathetic companionship of a Southern girl. She suggested that it might be possible for him to arrange a meeting with Coretta Scott, a graduate of Antioch College, presently studying voice at the New England Conservatory of Music.

Miss Scott was the daughter of a prosperous storekeeper from Marion, Alabama. She was attractive and endowed with charm and intelligence. Mike was almost tactless in importuning Mrs. Powell for the address. He also wanted her to convey to Miss Scott a description of himself that was scarcely in keeping with the love of truth he displayed in the classroom. Mrs. Powell, although willing, warned him that Coretta was exceedingly reserved in her dealings with unknown young men and inclined to be contemptuous of ministers of the gospel. Nevertheless, a telephone number was given, and Mike phoned Coretta a few days later. Martin King, jr. was certainly not inexperienced in his dealings with women. And, had Coretta been the ordinary female, ready to be dazzled by the ordinary suitor, Mike's cliched introduction, delivered in his most liquid baritone, might have been overwhelming. "I am like Napoleon at Waterloo before your charms," he oozed into the telephone receiver. Coretta's rejoinder to his fulsome salutation was devastating: "Why, that's absurd. You haven't seen me yet."

The Montgomery Bus Boycott:

“Now the three, Nixon (E.D.), Ralph (Abernathy) and Martin (King), worked in concert to alert the other leaders and to propose decisive action. The ladies of the Council were even busier. The boycott was, after all, their idea; and Mrs. Mary Fair Burks and Jo Ann Robinson were determined to maneuver the men, especially the ministers, into a firm position from which retreat would be difficult and embarrassing. By early afternoon, Friday, December 2, Mrs. Robinson had prepared ten stencils, each containing this statement in duplicate:

Don't ride the bus to work, to town, to school, or any place Monday, December 5.

Another Negro woman has been arrested and put in jail because she refused to give up her bus seat.

Don't ride the bus to work, to town, to school, or anywhere on Monday. If you work, take a cab, or share a ride, or walk.

Come to a mass meeting, Monday at 7:00 P.M., at the Holt Street Baptist Church for further information.

Then she drove to Alabama State College, where she corralled two loyal students. They entered the administration building, unauthorized, and reproduced 40,000 copies of the statement. Before 5 P.M., the bulk of the copies had been distributed to the community by students and members of the Council.” (pp. 52)

“The Montgomery boycott struggle gained support from a number of outside sources. Although monthly operating expenses were in excess of \$5,000 (fifteen station wagons were acquired in January for the car pool), adequate donations flowed to the Association from literally every corner of the world. Ed Nixon, who was then treasurer, estimates that by March, the MIA had received nearly \$64,000. The NAACP donated generously through its numerous local chapters. Religious and civic organizations contributed a significant amount of money. The United Auto Workers sent a check for \$35,000. And from Singapore, Tokyo, new Delhi, London, and Paris, and hundreds of other cities came the donations of concerned, private citizens, many of whose emotions must have been explained in quaint English, “Since I have no possibility to help you in an efficacious manner (this is such a bad feeling, believe me) and I burningly would like to do just something, I send you these 500 dollars....You should make me a very great pleasure, if you accepted, because what else could I do?” (pp. 71,72)

On Bombing the parsonage of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church

“At about 9:15 P.M., January 30 (1955), Coretta and a friend had been chatting in the living room of the South Jackson street parsonage when they heard the thump of an object tossed on the front porch. The Kings' baby was sleeping in the rear of the house, so, believing themselves safer there, the two ladies were just retreating to the bedroom when the front of the house shook, rattled, and coughed a barrage of glass into the room they had just vacated. As the din subsided,

Coretta, in admirable control of herself, answered the telephone. “Yes, I did it,” said a woman’s nasal voice, “And I’m just sorry I didn’t kill all you bastards.”

Martin pushed and pleaded his way to his house through a crowd of more than three hundred furious blacks, a few of them armed. As he did, he overheard alarming threats being exchanged. One man, told to move on by the police, turned angrily and shouted, “You white folks is always pushin’ us around. Now you got your .38 and I got mine so let’s battle it out.” Finally, Martin reached the front door. Minutes later, having been assured by Coretta that they were all unharmed, Martin returned to the porch at the urgent request of Mayor Gayle and the police commissioner. There was no danger of a race riot, but the volatility of the crisis made it imperative to prevent trigger-happy and nervous policemen from being provoked by the uncustomary belligerence of a small number of irate bystanders. Martin asked for quiet: “We believe in law and order. Don’t get panicky. Don’t do anything at all. Don’t get your weapons. He who lives by the sword will perish by the sword. Remember, that is what God said. We are not advocating violence. We want to love our enemies. We must love our white brothers no matter what they do to us.” The crowd dispersed and the crisis passed.” (p.70)