

Reflections on the Life of Dr. Martin Luther King and his visit to Ohio Northern University

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Introduction:

Dr. Martin Luther King is a household name across the globe. This is due to his courageous efforts and contributions to the civil rights movement. King was not always well-known, however. His background and the community surrounding him can be credited for some of his ability to make the impact that he did. Dr. King's legacy can be traced to many moments in history, including the passage of several landmark legislative acts. Ohio Northern University had the honor of hosting Dr. King in January, 1968, just four months before he was assassinated. His speech was attended by thousands of students and faculty and is one of the most historic events ever held on our campus.

Question #1: Who was Martin Luther King Jr.?

Martin Luther King Jr. is well known for being an African American social activist that led the civil rights movement starting in the 1950s. He was a Baptist minister, just like his father and grandfather. King came to national prominence after his involvement with Rosa Parks, who was arrested for not giving up her seat to a white man in Montgomery, Alabama. A group of fellow activists chose King to be the leader of the boycott against the transit system. After protesting the transit system, King was a founding member of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, using the group to obtain a national platform to speak on civil rights issues.

Dr. King grew a large following and was able to organize many peaceful protests and sit-ins. Throughout the civil rights movement, King and his supporters were jailed multiple times yet they continued to engage in nonviolent resistance. One of the most monumental moments organized by King was the March on Washington, where he delivered his famous "I Have a Dream" speech. In 1964, largely due to the efforts of King and his followers, the Civil Rights Act was passed and in 1965 the Voting Rights Act was passed. He was awarded a Nobel Peace Prize for his impact upon the civil rights movement. King continued to champion civil rights causes and voiced his opposition to the Vietnam War. Sadly, on April 4th, 1968, Dr. King was assassinated by James Earl Ray. His assassination sparked outrage across the country, but his legacy continued to endure.

Question #2: Why do we observe Martin Luther King Jr. Day?

Dr. King left a lasting impact on civil rights in the United States. Martin Luther King Jr. day is a way to honor and consider the messages he espoused. It is extremely important that the next generation of young people know who Martin Luther King Jr. was and what he did for our society. Celebrating MLK Day provides an opportunity to examine issues relating to equality and justice. It also underscores the importance of nonviolence as a means to have one's voice heard.

Martin Luther King Jr. Day is not a day off, but is instead a day for reflection and action. On this day many try to support the black community and educate themselves on issues communities of color face. Dr. King showed how peaceful civil disobedience can be used and citizens of the United States of all ideologies can use his methods to affect change.

Question #3: What was the impact of Martin Luther King Jr. visiting Ohio Northern University?

On January 11, 1968 Dr. King spoke at Ohio Northern University to a full crowd in Taft Memorial Gymnasium. Students attending ONU were let out at 10 a.m. so they could attend the speech. This event was organized by Dr. James Udy, Ohio Northern's Chaplain at the time and a former friend of King. The speech King gave on this day was a part of the chapel's lecture series "The Christian Faith and Contemporary Problems." In it, he delivered what is referred to as his "[Hammer of Justice](#)" speech.

The visit did not come without controversy. Following its announcement, Ada's mayor received death threats, the FBI was called to investigate the threats, and the Ohio National Guard was stationed in Ada the morning of January 11th.

Just over 54 years later, Ohio Northern looks back on Dr. King's visit in celebration. On January 20th, Chaplain David MacDonald has arranged for a speech to be given in King's honor. A bronze statue of King stands outside of Taft memorializing his visit to campus. An ONU webpage hosts a recording and transcript commemorating the visit. Dr. King's speech at ONU is believed to be the last on campus speech he ever gave. That day will forever be celebrated amongst the Ohio Northern Community.

Conclusion:

Martin Luther King's role in the civil rights movement paved the way for future generations. His commitment to justice and racial equality has made him one of the most significant figures in American history. On this MLK Day, we encourage all to remember that "the time is always right to do what is right."