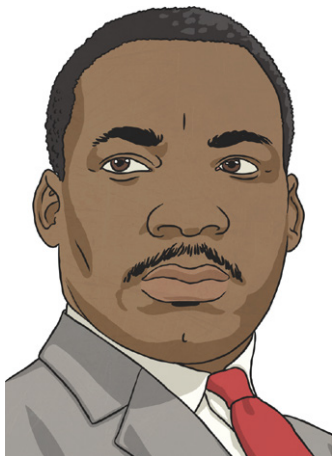


# Martin Luther King Jr. and Non-Violence

When slavery was abolished in the USA, technically speaking black people were free. However, in southern states which had opposed the end to slavery, they started to introduce laws called 'Jim Crow' laws which separated black and white people and meant that black people were treated badly. For example, black and white people could not sit together in restaurants or on buses and some black people were denied the right to vote.



This was the USA that Dr Martin Luther King Jr. was born into in 1929. He attended school and university, eventually becoming a pastor in a Baptist Church in the southern state of Alabama.

King's religious beliefs affected his ideas. He believed that Jesus' teachings about 'love thy neighbour as yourself' meant that we should all be treated equally. His belief in non-violence stemmed from the 'Sermon on the Mount' (Matthew Chapter 26, verse 52 in the New Testament), where Jesus states that one should 'turn the other cheek' rather than reacting violently.

He was also inspired by the example of Mahatma Gandhi's struggle to gain freedom for India from colonial rule. He visited India in 1959, a trip that is said to have greatly affected him.

"Since being in India, I am more convinced than ever before that the method of non-violent resistance is the most potent weapon available to oppressed people in their struggle for justice and human dignity."

He believed that by protesting against unjust laws non-violently it would highlight the injustice. He campaigned for equal rights for black and white people and an end to laws that discriminated against black people in the southern states. The rights he demanded were called civil rights – that is the rights of people to be treated equally according to the law.

The non-violent protests of the civil rights campaigners included: refusing to sit in segregated areas in public places such as restaurants and on buses, peaceful protests held in public to highlight the problems faced and supporting black people to register to vote.

The March on Washington took place in 1963 and involved 250 000 people marching to the Lincoln Memorial (Abraham Lincoln was the American president who abolished slavery). King gave his famous "I Have a Dream" speech in which he called for all people to be treated equally regardless of race and for Americans to live together in a manner that respected equality, freedom and justice.