

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR
“CIVIL AND HUMAN RIGHTS: THE MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. LEGACY”
a video interview with Dr. Clayborne Carson



Organizing Questions

- What are civil and human rights?
- What were the significant achievements of the Civil Rights Movement?
- What is Martin Luther King, Jr.’s legacy in terms of civil and human rights?
- How are Martin Luther King, Jr.’s vision, ideas, and leadership still relevant today?
- How is the American Civil Rights Movement similar and different from other rights-related movements?

Summary

In this video, Professor Clayborne Carson discusses Martin Luther King, Jr.’s legacy as a civil rights leader during the Civil Rights Movement in the United States in the 1960s and how he was more than a civil rights leader. He emphasizes how Martin Luther King, Jr.’s visionary ideas for global human rights and freedom struggles underpinned his work, which is still relevant today. He discusses what conditions and events led to the Civil Rights Movement; how Martin Luther King, Jr. became a civil rights leader; the passage of two legislations as the result of the movement; how Martin Luther King, Jr. saw African American struggles as part of a worldwide freedom struggle; and his ideas for “three central evils” in the world that impede progress on human rights around the world.

- Objectives** During and after the interview, students will:
- learn about civil and human rights and why they matter;
 - learn about the Civil Rights Movement and the passage of two legislations in the United States in the 1960s;
 - learn about Martin Luther King, Jr. and his legacy;
 - analyze Martin Luther King, Jr.'s vision, ideas, and leadership; and
 - discuss similar rights-related movements and leaders around the world in the past and present.
- Materials** Handout 1: *Questions on “The Civil Rights Movement in the United States,”* 30 copies
- Handout 2: *Video Notes*, 30 copies
- Teacher Information, *Video Transcript*
- Equipment** Computer with Internet access and speakers
Computer projector
- Teacher Preparation**
1. Instructions and materials are based on a class size of 30 students. Adjust accordingly for different class sizes.
 2. Make the appropriate number of copies of handouts.
 3. Set up and test computer, projector, speakers, and video before starting the lesson. Confirm that you are able to play the video with adequate audio volume.
 4. Familiarize yourself with the content in the following links:
 - a. “The Civil Rights Movement in the United States”: https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/sites/mlk/files/civil_rights_movement_peace_encyclopedia.pdf
 - b. Martin Luther King, Jr.: <http://projects.seattletimes.com/mlk/bio.html#life>
 - c. “I Have a Dream” speech: <http://freedomring.stanford.edu/?view=Speech>
 - d. Other classroom resources on Martin Luther King, Jr.: <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/liberation-curriculum/classroom-resources>
 5. Assign a reading homework prior to this lesson. Have students read about the Civil Rights Movement and Martin Luther King, Jr. in the following links:
 - a. “The Civil Rights Movement in the United States”: https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/sites/mlk/files/civil_rights_movement_peace_encyclopedia.pdf
 - b. Martin Luther King, Jr.: <http://projects.seattletimes.com/mlk/bio.html#life>

- c. "I Have a Dream" speech: <http://freedomring.stanford.edu/?view=Speech>
6. Have students answer the five questions at the end of the "The Civil Rights Movement in the United States":
- Who was Martin Luther King, Jr.?
 - How and why did the 20th century Civil Rights Movement emerge?
 - Which of the strategies employed by civil rights activists do you think were most effective?
 - What do you think was the most significant achievement of the Civil Rights Movement?
 - Did civil rights activists achieve all of the goals of the movement?

Time Two 50-minute class periods

- Procedures**
- Begin the lesson by engaging students in a brief discussion about different types of rights. Some suggested discussion points are provided below.
 - What are rights? "*A right is a moral or legal entitlement to have or obtain something or to act in a certain way.*" (Source: Oxford English Dictionary <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/right>)
 - There are different types of rights (e.g., political, economic, cultural, human, property). What are some of the examples of these rights? *Student answers may vary.*
 - Do these rights matter? Why or why not? *Student answers may vary.*
 - Recognizing the importance of rights for all members of a country, discuss the U.S. Civil Rights Movement of the 20th century from the reading that students did prior to this lesson. Review Handout 1 and ask what students learned about Martin Luther King, Jr. and his role in the Civil Rights Movement.
 - Who was Martin Luther King, Jr.?
 - How and why did the 20th century Civil Rights Movement emerge?
 - Which of the strategies employed by civil rights activists do you think were most effective?
 - What do you think was the most significant achievement of the Civil Rights Movement?
 - Did civil rights activists achieve all of the goals of the movement?
 - Inform students that they will now consider civil and human rights and Martin Luther King, Jr.'s legacy in greater depth by listening to a scholar, Professor Clayborne Carson, share his thoughts on the topic. Distribute one copy of Handout 2, *Video Notes*, to each student, and instruct students to complete the handout as they view the video.

Allow students to read through the handout before they watch the video.

3. Play and project the video “Civil and Human Rights: The Martin Luther King, Jr. Legacy.” If necessary, allow students a few minutes after the video ends to finalize their notes.
4. Lead a classroom discussion to review and debrief the video. Some suggested discussion points are provided below. (Those marked with asterisks involve discussion that goes beyond the scope of the video itself.)
 - How does Professor Carson describe Martin Luther King, Jr.? *According to Professor Carson, King was more than a civil rights leader with a larger vision — a social gospel minister.*
 - According to Professor Carson, what types of issues was Martin Luther King, Jr. interested in? *Before King became a civil rights leader, he was interested in global issues, such as poverty and economic issues, political issues, and war and peace, which motivated his entire career.*
 - What does Professor Carson say about how Martin Luther King, Jr. emerged as a civil rights leader? *Professor Carson says that “Rosa Parks turned Martin Luther King, Jr. into a civil rights leader.” In 1955, Rosa Parks was arrested for refusing to give up her seat on the segregated bus in Montgomery, Alabama, and it sparked a long protest of a boycott of the buses, and Martin Luther King, Jr. was chosen to lead the Montgomery boycott movement. At the 1963 March on Washington, he gave the “I Have a Dream” speech, which became the basis for his national stature as a civil rights leader.*
 - What was the message in the “I Have a Dream” speech as described by Professor Carson? *Professor Carson says, “He called upon the nation to live up to its ideals that were expressed in the Declaration of Independence: that all men are created equal and they’re endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. So he was saying these were the words that justified the establishment of the United States as a nation. They were written by Thomas Jefferson. But the nation had never really lived up to that. So his speech was a call for Americans to live up to those ideals.”*
 - What legislations were passed as a result of the civil rights movement? What significance do these legislations hold? *The 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Voting Rights Act.*
 - What does Professor Carson say about what Martin Luther King, Jr. did after 1965, when the Voting Rights Act was passed? *Professor Carson thinks that “it was human rights that was at the forefront of what Martin Luther King was fighting for after 1965” as “he saw the African American struggle as part of a worldwide struggle. People around the world were fighting for their citizenship rights, especially people in European colonies, people who were dominated by other nations. They were fighting for the right to be free to determine their own destiny.” Professor Carson says that Martin Luther King, Jr. “saw this in a global context and he said that now that we have civil, citizenship rights, we need*

to use those citizenship rights to fight for a broadening of human rights.”

- What is the difference between civil and human rights, according to Professor Carson? How would you define and differentiate them? *Professor Carson says that citizenship rights are only a part of human rights. Citizenship rights are rights to citizens of a certain country. Human rights apply to you simply because you’re a human being. Student answers may vary.*
- What are the three “evils of the world” that Martin Luther King, Jr. was concerned about? Do you agree or disagree? Why? *According to Professor Carson, the three evils of the world that Martin Luther King, Jr. was concerned about are racial discrimination/oppression, poverty, and war and violence.*
- *What do you think is Martin Luther King, Jr.’s legacy in the global context today?
- *In your opinion, was Martin Luther King, Jr. an effective leader? Why or why not? What do you think are essential qualities of an effective leader and leadership?

Optional Activities

For a more in-depth exploration of the topics and themes raised in the video, a list of activity ideas is provided below.

- *“Three Central Evils in the World” Case Studies.* In the video, Professor Carson states that Martin Luther King, Jr. delivered a lecture the day after receiving the 1964 Nobel Prize for Peace, outlining “a broad agenda in which he says there are three central evils in the world,” namely, racial oppression/discrimination, poverty, and war and violence. Provide examples that demonstrate how the “three central evils” persist in the world today that hinder ensuring human rights of all people. In other words, how do the issues of racial oppression/discrimination, poverty, and war and violence—individually or together—produce challenges in the struggle to protect human rights of all people around the world today? You may select one country to illustrate all three challenges within that country or several countries to organize and highlight each of the three challenges thematically.
- *Written Reflections.* Read and listen to Martin Luther King, Jr.’s “I Have a Dream” speech (<https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/i-have-dream-address-delivered-march-washington-jobs-and-freedom>). Write your thoughts on either (1) how Martin Luther King, Jr.’s vision of equality reflects both civil and human rights; or (2) how he saw the civil rights movement as part of a global human rights movement.
- *Human Rights Movement Around the World.* In addition to the Civil Rights Movement and Martin Luther King, Jr., choose one or more examples of human rights movements around the world (past and present) and the leaders who led or lead them. Identify the goals of the movements, how they were or are being carried out, who were or are involved, and so forth and analyze the ways that they are similar or dissimilar. Then write a short essay comparing and contrasting

the ways in which the leaders led the movements and the results of those movements. For example, like Martin Luther King, Jr., Mahatma Ghandi in India and Nelson Mandela in South Africa were leaders who led nonviolent protests in their countries. You can also mention their leadership styles, principles and beliefs, and the characteristics of the movement.

handout 2

- j. In your opinion, was Martin Luther King, Jr. an effective leader? Why or why not? What do you think are essential qualities of an effective leader and leadership?

VIDEO TRANSCRIPT

On-screen text:

Civil and Human Rights: The Martin Luther King, Jr. Legacy

On-screen text:

Clayborne Carson, Professor of American History and Director, Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute, Stanford University.

Carson: Hello. I'm Clayborne Carson, Professor of History here at Stanford University. I'm also Director of the Martin Luther King Research and Education Institute at Stanford.

In 1985, Mrs. Coretta Scott King asked me to edit and publish the papers of her late husband, Martin Luther King. Since that time, I've studied the life and work of Martin Luther King, and in the course of that, I've come to understand that he's more than simply a civil rights leader. Of course, he accomplished a great deal as a civil rights leader.

During the 1960s, the United States passed important laws—the 1964 Civil Rights Act, the 1965 Voting Rights Act—and Martin Luther King was, in large measure, one of the people responsible for that. But I should also say that Martin Luther King always had a larger vision than simply civil rights. He was what I would call a social gospel minister, and this is what I've learned in 30 years of studying his life: that deep down, before he became a civil rights leader, he was concerned about economic issues. He was concerned about global issues. He was concerned about war and peace, as well as poverty. So these issues were among those that motivated his entire career before he became a civil rights leader.

I often say that Rosa Parks turned Martin Luther King into a civil rights leader. In 1955, he was in Montgomery, Alabama, when Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on a segregated bus. And her actions sparked a long protest, a boycott of the buses. Black residents in Montgomery refused to ride the buses unless the seating was on a first-come, first-served basis, rather than black people sitting at the back of the bus.

And that boycott led to Martin Luther King's becoming a leader. He went to a meeting a few days after Rosa Parks was arrested for refusing to give up her seat, and at that meeting, he was unexpectedly chosen to lead the boycott movement. And for the next year, black residents stayed off the buses, and that was the beginning of the modern stage of the African American civil rights struggle.

During subsequent years after the success of the boycott, other people besides Martin Luther King, were vanguard in the struggle. In particular, in 1960s, students—college students, sometimes even high school students—took leading roles in that struggle through a movement called the sit-ins. What they would do was go into segregated lunch counters, restaurants, parks, even libraries, and demand to be treated on an equal basis. Demand to be allowed to use these public facilities. And they refused to leave, so that's why it was called a sit-down or a sit-in. They would simply stay there until police removed them, and this form of protest became extremely popular among young people.

So during the 1960s, the sit-ins spread throughout the nation, particularly in the southern states, where segregation was enforced by law. And that resulted in some changes, and these culminated in the 1964 Civil Rights Act, which made segregated facilities illegal throughout the United States. So Martin Luther King was one of the leaders who was very outspoken on the need for what we called at that time “freedom now.”

I was one of those. I guess it was 250,000 people who came to Washington for the 1963 March on Washington. And that was the culmination of this protest movement. I was 19 years old at the time, so I was the same age as many of these students who took part in the sit-ins. And that protest at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington was the largest of all the protests during the early 1960s.

Martin Luther King gave the concluding speech at that march, and I remember being there when he gave his famous “I Have a Dream” speech. And like his leadership of the Montgomery bus boycott, the “I Have a Dream” speech became the basis for his national stature as a civil rights leader. It was a great piece of oratory. He called upon the nation to live up to its ideals that were expressed in the Declaration of Independence: that all men are created equal and they’re endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. So he was saying these were the words that justified the establishment of the United States as a nation. They were written by Thomas Jefferson. But the nation had never really lived up to that. So his speech was a call for Americans to live up to those ideals.

After that, the major goal of the movement became voting rights. And this culminated in a march from Selma, Alabama, to Montgomery, Alabama, that Martin Luther King participated in. And it led to President Lyndon Johnson introducing voting rights legislation that was passed in 1965.

Now, Martin Luther King, if he had simply been a civil rights leader, he might’ve retired after the 1965 protest. But because he was concerned about broader issues—economic issues, political issues, issues of war and peace—he decided to continue his activism. And in fact, in some ways, he became more intensely involved. He went to Chicago and helped participate in the Chicago campaign, which was concerned about issues of segregation in housing, issues about employment opportunities. All of these issues that concern the black community even in places where there was no racial segregation, at least legally segregated facilities.

So Martin Luther King, during the period after 1965, became much more widely known for what I would consider his visionary ideas. He saw the African American struggle as part of a worldwide struggle. People around the world were fighting for their citizenship rights, especially people in European colonies, people who were dominated by other nations. They were fighting for the right to be free to determine their own destiny.

So one of the great accomplishments of the 1960s that I think Martin Luther King symbolized was this notion that every person should be a full citizen of the place where they happen to live. That had never happened in human history. Most people had always been subjects of some other power. But now they were demanding their full citizenship rights. And that was achieved for most people in the world by the 1960s.

Now, one of the things that I’ve come to decide, as I’ve thought about why that didn’t mark the end of the freedom struggles, is that citizenship rights were only part of what we could call human rights. That is, citizenship rights apply to the rights that you have as a citizen of your country. But human rights apply to the rights that you should have simply as a human being, the rights that you would carry with you even if you left your country and went to another

country. And one thing that I've concluded is that by accomplishing citizenship rights, we have become more complacent about human rights.

And I think it was human rights that was at the forefront of what Martin Luther King was fighting for after 1965. He saw this in a global context and he said that now that we have civil, citizenship rights, we need to use those citizenship rights to fight for a broadening of human rights. And I think that over the last 50 years, one of the things we found is that that complacency, the reluctance to move from civil rights to human rights, is one of the reasons why we have movements, for example in the United States: the Black Lives Matter movement. What they are protesting against is not the denial of citizenship rights, per se. What they're seeing is that whatever citizenship rights you might have, they can still be denied if you can be shot by a policeman without cause or if you can have your human rights denied often by governments themselves, or the people acting on behalf of governments.

So I think in the world today, Martin Luther King's ideas still have a great deal of relevance. What we see in him is someone speaking about the issues not just of yesterday, not just the issues of legalized segregation in the American South, but the global issue of human rights.

And I think Martin Luther King made one of his greatest statements on human rights when he received the 1964 Nobel Prize for Peace. And if you go and look at his lecture that he delivered the day after receiving the prize, what you see is Martin Luther King laying out a broad agenda in which he says there are three central evils in the world.

One of them is racial discrimination, and we still see evidence of that throughout the world. People of color, black people particularly, are often denied equal treatment by the authorities, whether that be police or by governments, and we still need to deal with this issue of racial oppression. But he said there are two other issues that should be foremost in our agenda.

The second one was poverty. Said that this is a global issue. And we've seen that that is true. Despite the gains of the 1960s, despite the fact that people have full citizenship rights, they often don't have economic opportunity. And this is a global problem, and I think from King's perspective, we'll only solve it when we see it as a global problem. Because poor people throughout the world are always going to want to move to areas where they have greater economic opportunity. And often, they are denied that right.

The third problem that King saw was the problem of war and violence, that that often affects oppressed people more than any other people in the world. And often, and even during the Cold War when there was relative peace between the major powers in the world, one of the things that Martin Luther King noticed was that in many of the areas of Latin America, Central America, Africa, and Asia, many countries during the Cold War experienced a very hot war. Because that was where the major powers fought against each other, not against—not by firing missiles from, say, the United States to Russia, but rather, the United States and Russia having battles over who was going to dominate Central Africa, or South[east] Asia, or many other parts of the world. And the victims of these wars were often people who were also poor and also victims of racial oppression.

So what I see in King's thought is a way of understanding these problems and the way they have persisted since the 1960s. And I see King as a great symbol for a freedom struggle that did not end in the '60s, but is still continuing today as people begin to deal with these three central issues—these issues of racial oppression, poverty, and war.