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Leadership and Society

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Leadership

Martin Luther King Jr. is recognized as a leader of the civil rights movement. He was a Baptist minister who advocated for legal segregation for Black Americans. He delivered a famous speech called “I Have a Dream,” which emphasized his dream of racial equality and justice throughout the country. Although he did not live to see his dream come true, before he was assassinated in 1968, his acts of leadership reshaped American society as we know it. While other civil rights leaders employed violent methods, Martin Luther King Jr. advocated for a nonviolent approach to social change (McGuire, D., and Hutchings, K., 2007). Despite the backlash MLK Jr. received, he continued to push for change, for people of color to live comfortably in their own skin.

People may debate about what defines a great leader. It can be about how they motivate those around them, or how they tell them what to do. McGuire and Hutchings (2007) explain that Bass (1990) has four significant characteristics of a transformational leader: “Inspirational Motivation, Intellectual Stimulation, Individual Consideration, and Idealised Influence.” Inspirational motivation is defined as motivating followers and building their confidence to face the challenges they encounter. Dr. King pushed his followers to continue their peaceful fight despite resistance from the rest of the community. Intellectual stimulation encourages people to challenge societal norms and develop creative strategies. Dr. King developed ways to protest segregation peacefully. Individual consideration is thinking about everyone’s developmental

needs, meaning teaching and guiding them towards growth opportunities. Lastly, idealised influence is the moral and ethical standing that creates trust between the followers and the leader (Bass, 1990). These are all traits that Martin Luther King Jr. has. His contribution to the Civil Rights Movement shows that he has led a large group of people in changing societal norms. He inspired people of color to rise against systemic injustice, challenged societal norms, and took a leadership role despite the difficulties he faced.

Martin Luther King Jr. stayed humble while leading the civil rights movement. He did not want to be remembered for his achievements and rewards, but rather as a man who spread love and stood up for his community. Carson (1987) talks about how charismatic leaders often demand blind loyalty. He argues that MLK Jr. did not demand loyalty or believe he was above other leaders. Instead, Martin Luther King Jr. took responsibility in a moment of societal crisis. Carson (1987) states, “King was a leader full of self-doubts, keenly aware of his own limitations and human weakness.” Martin Luther King Jr.’s journey to being a Civil Rights leader started with the Montgomery bus boycott in Alabama. When starting this journey, he was terrified for his family’s safety. Carson (1987) believed that MLK Jr. was filled with anxiety and fear, but he relied on his faith to keep him safe during all the threats to him and his family. He knew that he alone could not accomplish the mission; he relied on God and other leaders to help him reach his goal. Charismatic leaders are often presented as confident and above their followers. Martin Luther King Jr. recognizes that he is only a human who experiences fear and doubt. However, these challenges did not prevent him from leading a movement that changed the future for people of color in the United States.

On a Buddhist standpoint, Sally King (2023) wrote about the interaction between a Buddhist monk, Thich Nhat Hanh, and Martin Luther King Jr. King (2023) wrote about how

Hanh was inspired by the peaceful movement that MLK Jr. promoted. He led an entire nation without promoting violence; they agreed that without the people's support, they would not succeed. The beautiful part about MLK Jr.'s movement was the peacefulness. He believed that when a community is built upon nonviolence, it is free from hostility and animosity. Buddhists believe in true peace, a state of calm and compassion. They believed that anger and hate are the evils of the world, and love and peace should always be spread. Martin Luther King Jr. once said, "The end of violence or the aftermath of violence is bitterness" (1958). Despite his anger, fear, and anxiety about the nation, he still led a large group of people in a peaceful movement.

Without the Civil Rights Movement, racial equality and justice would have come much later. His leadership influenced people to fight against segregation and racism when it was the societal norm. Additionally, his movement redefined racism as a moral issue, rather than a political issue. Racism should not be a topic that makes people uncomfortable. People of color should not be treated wrongly simply because of their skin.

Martin Luther King Jr. has set a blueprint for modern protests. He showed us that reform can happen without violence. The way our society protests for abortion rights, LGBTQ+ equality, and climate activism is influenced by Dr. King's peaceful approach to racial equality. These peaceful movements also directly led to significant legislation, such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. These legislations prohibited segregation in the workplace, schools, and public places. Martin Luther King Jr. showed us that peaceful protesting can go a long way; with the strength of love and support from a large group of people, they can achieve something greater than themselves.

Martin Luther King Jr. serves as an example of a great leader because of his qualities. He did not want to be recognized for these qualities, but for the love he spread despite a period of

repression and hate. He was a man full of integrity, empathy, and moral courage; he encouraged people to stand up to societal norms regardless of the resistance they would face. Even in a world full of hate, he chose peace and love to fight back.

References

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