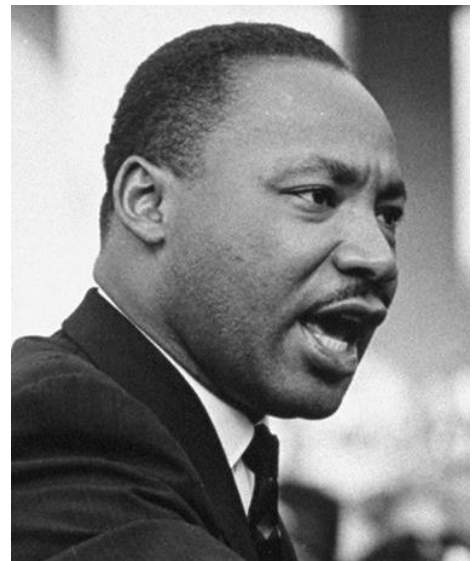


Today's email is about a black man who was born in the United States in 1929. By that time, the AMERICAN CIVIL WAR was over 60 years in the past. The slaves who were made to work in the American southern slave-holding states had all been freed - the THIRTEENTH AMENDMENT to the United States Constitution was passed in 1865 and said that slavery would not exist in the United States. Three years later, the FOURTEENTH AMENDMENT to the United States Constitution said that no one could lose their freedom or their property without DUE PROCESS OF LAW, and guaranteed to everyone living in the United States EQUAL PROTECTION under the law. So everyone was equal in the United States, regardless of their background or skin colour, right? Well, no.

The southern states that had lost the Civil War were really unhappy about treating black people as well as everyone else, so they started passing JIM CROW LAWS, which said that black people had to ride at the back of buses, and said that black people and white people had to use different water fountains to get a drink of water (can you imagine?), and that black people weren't allowed to eat in certain restaurants, and that black people had to work in separate areas from white people in factories. Generally, the object of these laws was to SEGREGATE white people from black people. These were really horrible laws, but if you don't like a law you can always vote for people who will promise to change it. But the southern states made it very hard for black people to vote - they said, 'Only people who can read can vote' or 'Only people who are intelligent can vote' and then created tests that black people had to pass to be allowed to vote, and told them they had failed the tests (when really they had passed them easily). So people who were unhappy about these laws went to court - they went to the highest court in the United States, the UNITED STATES SUPREME COURT, and said, 'All these laws, all these rules, that are designed to harm black people - they are invalid because the Fourteenth Amendment says that everyone is equal under the law.' But the court said, 'Yes, everyone is equal, but that doesn't mean they can't be separate - if the southern states want black people to be separate from white people, then there's nothing wrong with that: SEPARATE BUT EQUAL is okay by us.'

And so in 1929, black people in the American South had very tough lives. But the man I am talking about today helped to change all that. His name was MARTIN LUTHER KING - or, more accurately, MARTIN LUTHER KING JR, where 'JR' stands for 'junior' (if a boy had exactly the same name as his dad, he was known as 'Jr' or 'junior'; if that boy grew up, and had a son and gave him the same name, that son would have 'III' after his name, to show he was the third in a row to have that name in his family). Martin Luther King was born in GEORGIA - which was one of the southern states where black people were treated really badly. He grew up and became a minister in a church and saw how badly black people were treated where he lived, and he resolved to do something about it. But King followed GANDHI's example - he wouldn't have anything to do with using violence to improve the condition of black people in the American South. Instead, he urged everyone to engage in NON-VIOLENT RESISTANCE to bring about change.



His first opportunity to do this came when a very brave black lady called ROSA PARKS refused to move to the back of the bus in which she was sitting when a white person wanted her seat near the front of the bus. This happened in MONTGOMERY, ALABAMA, in 1955. When Rosa Parks was arrested, Martin Luther King helped to organise a BOYCOTT of the buses in Montgomery - black people refused to pay to use the buses and walked to work or wherever they wanted to go instead. The bus companies started to lose a lot of money and brought a lot of attention to the way black people were treated in places like Alabama. Taking on the people who wanted to treat black people badly was very dangerous - Martin Luther King's house was bombed - but King kept on pushing for change, but always through peaceful means. Change was starting to come: in 1954, the United States Supreme Court had ruled that they weren't okay with 'separate but equal' after all, and held that black children had to be allowed to go to the same schools as white children - with the result that the then PRESIDENT EISENHOWER (pronounced 'Eyes - zen - owa') sent in troops to protect black children as they went for the first time to the nice schools that white children got to go to in the American South. And then in 1960, JOHN F KENNEDY was elected President and made it clear to Martin Luther King that he wanted to do more to ensure that black people in the American South lived just as good lives as white people.



In order to keep up the pressure on Kennedy to protect black people in the American South from being treated really badly, Martin Luther King organised a MARCH ON WASHINGTON FOR JOBS AND FREEDOM, on August 28, 1963. About 250,000 people attended the march, and Martin Luther King gave his greatest speech ever, and you can watch the last five minutes of the speech here, and you must watch it because it is not only King's greatest speech ever, but one of the greatest speeches ever given. Everyone should know what King said that day:

<https://youtu.be/smEqnnklfYs?t=739>

And then, just three months later, on November 22 1963, President Kennedy was shot dead in DALLAS, TEXAS. (We will have to talk about that some other time.) His death plunged America into mourning, and there was a huge wave of support for Kennedy's



successor, PRESIDENT LYNDON (pronounced 'Lin-don') JOHNSON to do what Kennedy wanted to do, but never got the chance to do, to help black people in the American South. So the CIVIL RIGHTS ACT 1964 and the VOTING RIGHTS ACT 1965 were passed to get rid of all

the evil laws that were designed to ensure that black people were treated as second class citizens in their own country.

The passing of these laws was really important, but as should be obvious even today, wasn't enough to ensure that black people living in the United States had as good a chance of having a good life as white people did. So Martin Luther King kept on, travelling all over the American South to demonstrate and bring about change wherever black people were treated badly and unfairly. (A very good film called SELMA was made about this period in Martin Luther King's life.) And it was while he was doing this that he ended up in a hotel room in MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE (pronounced 'Ten - ah - see') on April 4, 1968. The day before he had given a speech, and talked about the fact that there had been a threat to bomb the plane he was travelling on to Memphis. This is what he said:

<https://youtu.be/FmkwI5ItCFk?t=27>

Martin Luther King was in his hotel room with four friends, and walked out onto the balcony to get some fresh air. He was then shot dead by a very evil man who had taken up a position with a gun in a room across the street from King's hotel, with a view onto King's room. This was what John Kennedy's brother ROBERT F KENNEDY said when he got news of King's death - once again a very great speech, and a very great tribute to Martin Luther King, that everyone should know:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GoKzCff8Zbs>



One of Martin Luther King's favourite sayings was that 'The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice' - which means it takes a long time for God's peace and love to prevail, but it always gets there in the end. And so it proved in King's case, despite his death (and also the death of Robert Kennedy, who was shot dead just two months later on June 6 1968). One of the men in King's room, who rushed out to help King when they heard the shot that killed him, was JESSE JACKSON, who went on to become the first black man to seriously run for President with a hope of winning the Presidency. He did not win, or even get his party's nomination for the Presidency, but of course in 2008 BARACK OBAMA became the first black man to become President of the United States - eighty years after the birth of the man who did so much, and in the end gave up his life, for the cause of ensuring that black people would be treated just as well as everyone else in the United States.