

January 22, 1968

Dear Dr. King,

I am writing to you to tell you all the things I admire about you. I also admire your parents, Martin, Sr. and Alberta, who taught you not to hate people because they are white. They said as a Christian to love everyone. I know where you grew up in the South black people could not sit where they wanted or do what they wanted. I know this made you very angry. Thinking about it makes me angry too.

You should be proud of yourself for working so hard in school and graduating high school at fifteen years old and graduating from Morehouse College at only nineteen years old. I am so glad you studied Henry David Thoreau and Mahatma Gandhi who taught you that you could protest peacefully.

Where did you meet your wife, Coretta Scott? Was it when you were studying at the Boston University School of Theology? I'm glad you married Coretta because you guys both believed in the same things, it was hard being black in the South and you wanted all people to live together in peace. I'm happy to hear you became a minister in Montgomery, Alabama after you got married.

After Rosa Parks was arrested for not giving her seat up on the bus, I was so glad to hear that you and other black leaders in Montgomery, Alabama decided not to take busses until after they changed the laws that you could sit wherever you wanted. I feel so bad for the many people, who had to walk long distances to work and school, but this peaceful protest worked. The Supreme Court of the United States finally said that the laws separating whites and blacks on busses should change. This still meant in some places blacks and whites were still separated.

I think that it was a good idea that you and your family decided to move back to Atlanta so you could be a co-pastor at your father's church and work on the civil rights movement. You set a good example by participating in "sit-ins" at white only lunch counters. Even though you were arrested you still believed in peaceful protest. Later when you were arrested for driving in Georgia with an Alabama driver license it was lucky that your followers called Senator John F. Kennedy, who was running for president. Senator Kennedy and his brother Robert Kennedy, who was a lawyer, did everything they could to help. They called the judge who sent you to jail and got him to agree to set bail. I'm glad Kennedy was elected that November.

Since you wrote your letter from the Birmingham jail telling people they should obey just laws but they should disobey unjust laws but always behave peacefully, riots began in the city. This made business men lose a lot of business and because of this they started giving in on some of the marchers' demands. They made promises to end the Jim Crow laws in Birmingham. This showed people what protesting could do.

In 1963 I loved your "I Have a Dream" speech that you made after President Kennedy asked Congress to pass a civil rights bill. This speech made you the voice of the civil rights movement. After President Kennedy was assassinated in November, President Johnson talked to Congress and asked them to pass the civil rights bill to honor President Kennedy. Congress agreed. I was so excited to see you standing next to President Johnson when he signed the Civil Rights Act on July 2, 1964.

Congratulations on winning the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964. I can't believe you gave away all your money to civil rights groups. Since you are such an inspiration to me, I plan to be in Memphis on April 3, 1968 to see you.

Sincerely,

Harper