The Impact of Martin Luther King Jr. on Dealing with Racism Today

Jakšić, Sandra

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Sveučilište J.J. Strossmayera u Osijeku
Filozofski fakultet Osijek
Dvopredmetni sveučilišni preddiplomski studij engleskog jezika i književnosti i mađarskog jezika i književnosti

Sandra Jakšić

Utjecaj Martina Luthera Kinga na današnje načine suočavanja s rasizmom

Završni rad

Mentor: doc. dr. sc. Jadranka Zlomislić

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Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
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Sandra Jakšić

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Bachelor's Thesis

Supervisor: Dr. Jadranka Zlomislić, Assistant Professor

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Sandra Jakšić, 0122226286

Abstract

Racism is a serious issue that has been troubling the American society for decades. While the civil rights movement resolved some racial problems such as putting an end to racial segregation, there are still numerous issues that were not resolved, and African Americans remain disadvantaged in many areas of the society from unequal housing to inferior education and health care. This paper strives to illuminate the role of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. during the civil rights movement and to explain the influence he had as one of the leaders of the movement. King helped to improve the situation for many African Americans during his time by using various nonviolent methods which made him a renowned fighter for human rights. By explaining King's peaceful ways of fighting for freedom, this paper showcases how those methods influenced today's civil rights activists and how his ideas about nonviolent protest continue to play an important part of today's struggle for equality. This paper also gives an insight into the circumstances that have stirred up the racial situation in the year 2020 and led to mass protests for justice around the USA. In addition, this paper illustrates the present-day methods of fighting for freedom that were introduced with the advancement of technology, the Internet, and social networks.

Keywords: African Americans, civil rights movement, equality, King, nonviolence, racism

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Introduction

The civil rights movement was a long, hard struggle for racial equality that took place in the second half of the last century in the United States of America. It led to major changes which ultimately resulted in a constitutional ban of racial segregation. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was one of the greatest fighters for human rights who played a major role in this movement. The aim of this paper is to explore Martin Luther King's ideas and visions during the Civil rights movement, to emphasize the importance of his nonviolent protests and to showcase how his ideas influence and inspire todays generations to continue the fight for equality. Decades after the civil rights movement, dr. Martin Luther King's influence and ideas about peaceful protests still play a major role in today's fight against racism.

The first section of this paper describes King's influence on the American society during the civil rights movement. It focuses on depicting the tremendous effort he put into the fight for attaining equal rights. It also emphasizes his tendency to approach problems nonviolently and describes the methods he used to achieve his goals such as economic boycotts, sit-ins, marches, and speeches.

The second section deals with King's legacy today and its influence on the ways racism is currently being dealt with. It shines a light on the problems the civil rights movement did not resolve by focusing on inequality concerning housing, education, and health that African Americans continue to experience because of the color of their skin. This chapter also emphasizes the social prejudice that lead to immense brutality the police are exhibiting towards the African Americans and describes the most recent case of police cruelty over an African American man which shook the whole world and sparked a series of protests and riots – the George Floyd case. Moreover, the second section covers the ongoing battle against racism using the methods practiced by King as well as showcases the modern ways of achieving justice that have come about due to the development of technology and modern media.

1. Dr. Martin Luther King's Influence During the Civil Rights Movement

When talking about the civil rights movement, the name Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. is one of the first that comes to mind. The whole world is familiar with the impact he had on the American society during the period between the 1950s and the 1960s as well as the decades leading to today. By speaking up and fighting for equal rights for the African American community, he was one of the most influential people of his time who sparked a series of changes. King "was born in Atlanta, Georgia on January 15, 1929" (Bull 6) and since childhood, he questioned the position of African Americans in the American society and was persistent, dedicated and devoted to learning. Angela Bull describes him as "athletic, clever, and a good speaker" who "wanted to aim high in life" (10). Little did he know what a great future lay ahead and how significantly his nonviolent ways of protesting would contribute to the battle for equality.

1.1. Non-violent Struggle for Freedom

King was known for his tendency to approach problems peacefully his whole life. Bull explains that he was a devoted Christian and that he decided to follow in his father's footsteps by becoming a Baptist pastor, which he did by enrolling at the Crozer Seminary in Pennsylvania in 1948 (10). He finally got the opportunity to prove himself as he excelled in his studies. Being one of the few black students in a mostly white university, he knew that he had to work extra hard if he wanted to succeed (Jakoubek and Wagner 25). He was interested in the African American identity in the USA and was thinking about the ways of improving and enhancing their status. But what caught his attention the most and helped him realize that nonviolence is the key to achieving his goals was a lecture about Mahatma Gandhi.

> One Sunday, King attended a lecture in Philadelphia by Dr. Mordecai W. Johnson, the president of Howard University. Johnson, who had recently returned from India, spoke about Mahatma Gandhi, the leader of the struggle of the Indian people for independence from Great Britain. Unique among political leaders, Gandhi believed in the power of love and insisted that any action or protest against the British imperialists be peaceful and nonviolent. In 1947, Gandhi, a tiny, simple man who did not eat meat and on occasion wore only a loincloth, saw the struggle won when the British admitted defeat and allowed India its freedom. (Jakoubek and Wagner 26)

King was tremendously affected by this lecture. He started learning a great deal about Mahatma Gandhi and was immensely influenced by the ways Gandhi fought for justice. After learning

that somebody could use peace, love and understanding to oppose the strength of a mighty enemy, King realized that he could use the same peaceful approach in his own upcoming fight. It was easy for King to connect Gandhi's words with his Christian point of view because through the Biblical words of Jesus Christ he had already been introduced to the idea of loving your enemies and praying for those that persecuted you (Little). King's strong Christian religion supported nonviolence and he soon realized that "[g]entleness and peace . . . could overcome prejudice" (Bull 11). Moreover, at the time, he was very hopeful that these nonviolent methods could work against the oppressing system which used violence and force as its main methods of dominance. He faced everything with calmness and kindness while struggling to gain equal rights for all races. His whole life he insisted on peace and introduced numerous peaceful methods to obtain justice, among them boycotts, sit-ins, marches, and speeches.

1.1.1. Economic Boycotts

Encyclopaedia Britannica describes a boycott as "a collective and organized ostracism applied in labor, economic, political, or social relations to protest practices that are regarded as unfair" ("Boycott"). Boycotts were generally used throughout the world history to fight against unfair practices and ideas. During the American civil rights movement of the 1950's and 1960's, boycotts played a major role, not only as a social but also as a political tool ("Boycott"). The companies discriminated against African Americans by denying them the same terms of use that they offered to the white consumers. So, by refusing or boycotting their services they damaged the companies financially. King realized the benefits and importance of boycotts early on and he used this knowledge to his advantage since the beginning of the civil rights movement. He recognized that a lot can be achieved by simply denying companies of their services and he shared that with his community. Many African Americans decided to avoid places which were demanding segregation and it eventually worked, because this affected the economy in a bad way. The most famous economic boycott of the time was the Montgomery bus boycott.

1.1.1.1. The Montgomery Bus Boycott

The event that triggered this mass public bus boycott was the case of Rosa Parks, an African American woman who was arrested after she refused to give up her seat on a bus to a white male passenger. After hearing about what happened to Parks, King decided to organize a

boycott across the whole city of Montgomery to finally put an end to racial segregation on public transportation (Bond-Nelms).

In the period between 1955 and 1956, African Americans refused to use public buses in Montgomery, Alabama. It is important to note that they were very persistent in their decision to carpool or even walk instead of using the buses. “On every line, on every bus, black Montgomerians, nearly to a person, honored the boycott. Some took cabs, some drove with friends, one man rode a mule, and a great many walked” (Jakoubek and Wagner 37). The African Americans of Montgomery stood their ground united and even held weekly meetings to discuss further actions. The richer African Americans who owned cars offered carpools to poorer members of the community and thereby got to know the laborers who had to use the bus every day (Jakoubek and Wagner 40).This helped people of Montgomery become even closer and more determined to achieve their goals. It is important to note that many white Americans, especially white women, were sympathetic to the boycott. Unfortunately, this was not favorably looked upon by most of the white Montgomery community who retaliated against the white supporters with ostracism and violence.

Jakoubek and Wagner explain that the African Americans of Montgomery led by King demanded their basic human rights as citizens of the USA and asked for three things: for bus drivers to stop insulting African American passengers, for passengers to be seated on a first-come, first-served basis, and for the bus companies to employ more African American drivers (39). This would take a lot of time and effort but eventually they succeeded. “The boycott continued for 381 days and was very effective. In June 1956, a federal court ruled that the laws in place to keep buses segregated were unconstitutional, and the U.S. Supreme Court eventually agreed” (Bond-Nelms). The bus boycott of Montgomery was one of the first peaceful battles won in the long battle against racism and segregation during the civil rights movement.

1.1.2. Sit-ins

During the civil rights era, diners and other facilities were labeled as white only. African Americans were offended by this and considered they were treated unfairly, but no one actually acted on this matter. Until one day, four students decided they had had enough. Jakoubek and Wagner describe the situation involving these four African American students who sat down at a whites only counter in a Greensboro restaurant and when they were denied service, they decided to stay seated and to simply study there as a sign of protest (54). It is important to note that most of the people taking part in the sit-ins were students and throughout the whole

movement they followed King's example and his nonviolent rules no matter how badly or abusively they were treated. The most positive fact was that the African American students kept their dignity from the moment they came into a restaurant until the moment they exited. They suffered the abuse and violence from the angry whites who attacked them and tried to push them out of the restaurants in a violent and degrading way. However, these brave students set an example for others who decided to follow their path and nonviolently request the same service as white people. Their efforts paid off, because in a matter of days their success was apparent. Word of this courageous act of protest soon spread across the town and encouraged others to join the sit-ins. What started out as four students demanding to be waited on, soon became a whole movement inspiring many others to join them and demand service in numerous facilities around the USA. Once again, it is worth noting that the white student activists who joined in the sit-ins were exposed to the same brutality as the African American protesters. Sit-ins proved to be a successful nonviolent way of achieving equal rights and they helped to desegregate many facilities. As Jakoubek and Wagner observed:

> [t]he sit-ins were remarkably effective. The well-mannered black students contrasted vividly with the whites who swarmed into the lunchrooms to denounce, abuse, and sometimes burn the protesters with lighted cigarettes. Bad for business, the sit-ins forced many places to give in; before 1960 was over, 126 Southern towns had desegregated their lunch counters. (56)

Without knowing it, King inspired the students to start with the sit-ins by encouraging them to aim for a brighter future and to stand out for their kindness and decency. They applied his peaceful methods and once again proved that nonviolent means of protest could work.

1.1.3. Marches

Marches played an important role during the civil rights movement. They were a means of unifying people into masses and demanding a change in a nonviolent way. For many people this finally meant that they too could join a movement and fight for a just cause. It was an opportunity to be seen and heard as a mass, and together they could stand united against all problems marching proudly regardless of their skin color, race and ancestry. The march on the capital city was one of the key events that marked the civil rights movement.

1.1.3.1. The March on Washington

On August 28, 1963, "The March on Washington, in full March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom" was organized "by civil rights leaders to protest racial discrimination and to show support for major civil rights legislation that was pending in Congress" ("March on Washington"). It is significant to note that "[a] century after the abolition of slavery, they were still fighting for an end to segregation and the laws that barred voting rights" (Green). A great mass of people gathered in Washington to show support for the civil rights movement. According to Jakobek and Wagner, "[n]early 250,000 people — black and white, farmers and machinists, Northerners and Southerners, a great cross section of the civil rights movement — proceeded from the Washington Monument to the Lincoln Memorial" (81). Just how big it was is evident from the fact that the March on Washington is still considered one of the largest political rallies for human rights in the United States (Bond-Nelms). The people who gathered in Washington wanted equality for themselves and their fellow protestors and they demonstrated it by walking together, singing songs, shouting words of support and by holding signs pointing out the current problems of the American society at the time. African Americans led by Dr. King wanted to show how persistent and united they were, and they wanted to address many issues that were being overseen.

> Many marchers carried red-white-and-blue placards that had been handed out by the march sponsors. The signs announced: "**WE MARCH FOR INTEGRATED SCHOOLS NOW**!" or, "**WE MARCH FOR MINIMUM WAGE COVERAGE FOR ALL WORKERS NOW**!" The marchers had been instructed that only slogans approved by the march organizers would be allowed, but some carried hand-lettered signs, one of which read, "we demand an honest investigation of the police brutality in southwest **GEORGIA**." (Hansen 40-41)

The situation with unequal wages and housing, segregated schools and police brutality presented a huge problem for the African American society and King helped to raise awareness about each of them. In the end, the march was more than successful as it was credited with helping pass the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Bond-Nelms). As mentioned earlier, the March on Washington is remembered for being the largest political rally in US history and its highlight remains the inspiring speech delivered by King.

1.1.4. Speeches

Ever since he was a child, King was fascinated with language and very good with words. According to Hansen, King "once said to his mother, 'You just wait and see. I'm going to get

me some big words'" (100). It is worth noting that when he was only fifteen years old, he won a first prize for a public speaking competition where he spoke courageously about the Constitution and the African American position in the USA" (Bull 8). Even though he was young, he realized the problems surrounding him and showed great passion when trying to speak up about them. It is apparent that he was mesmerized by words throughout childhood, and that he possessed a gift for delivering inspiring sermons and speeches. Bull explains that between 1957 and 1958 King made 208 speeches (18). The most famous speech he wrote and delivered, and the speech that he is most remembered by is the "I Have a Dream" speech.

1.1.4.1. The "I Have a Dream" Speech

During the March on Washington in 1963, King delivered his famous "I Have a Dream" speech (Bull 26). African Americans remember with great pride that "[o]n the steps of the memorial for the president that signed the emancipation proclamation, King delivered one of America's most treasured speeches on civil rights" ("'I Have a Dream' named greatest speech in 20th century"). King's speech was broadcasted all around the world which helped spread the message about the ongoing fight against racial segregation. In addition, it is evident how powerful and moving this speech was as it was even named the greatest speech of the twentieth century (Wolff). The speech inspired the people, sparked a fire in their hearts, and gave them a new form of hope. King indeed shared his dream with the masses, and they all found themselves in that speech. The people realized they all shared the one same dream – a dream of equality. As Hansen observed, "[h]is speech in 1963 had been soaring and hopeful, full of the faith that God would lead the movement to victory" (204). What gave this speech even more strength was the style in which it was delivered. It is important to note that this speech, like many of his other speeches, was delivered in the style of a sermon, which makes sense because throughout his life, King gave a great deal of sermons and was a trained preacher. Being a reverend, King was very eloquent and had the ability to capture the listener's attention. Moreover, the crowd supported him entirely. Hansen repeats King's words and adds the following comments shouted by the crowd that was eager to hear more: "Tell us, tell us," . . . "Dream on!" "I see it!" "Keep dreaming! Keep dreaming!" (60). Because of the crowd's positive response King felt even more empowered to continue. His speech inspired many to join the movement for equal rights and it was one of the most memorable parts of not only the March on Washington, but rather of the whole civil rights movement. It was a great symbol of peace and a representation of what could be achieved using only words and kindness.

2. The Legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. against Modern Day Racism

King achieved many great things during his life, for which he gained international recognition. Hansen explains that in 1963 King was named Time's "Man of the Year" and in the following year he won the Nobel Prize for peace (178). He was a great leader and knew how to inspire the masses to push on. Like many other great human rights activists, he was also modest and often did not want to take credit for all the things he had done. Sadly, this extraordinary life was ended on April 4, 1964 when James Earl Ray, a 40-year-old escaped fugitive shot him while he was standing on a balcony outside of his hotel room in Memphis ("Assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr."). King's untimely death shook the whole world and left everyone speechless. However, he encouraged the crowds to follow his example and to use nonviolence as their main means of fighting. King's generation of civil rights activists achieved great changes for the better of humanity, and now it is time for his legacy to achieve the rest by fighting against problems that were not resolved by the civil rights movement. People are continuing his never-ending fight today and even though King's life was ended prematurely, his legacy lives on. Inspired by his example they march together to form a better world with equal rights for all.

2.1. Racial Issues Still Occurring in the USA after the Civil Rights Movement

Despite King's many accomplishments, there was a big part of the USA which did not approve of him and thought he was wrong to interfere with the situation with the African Americans because they believed it was good as it was, if not better than it should be. Many even blamed King for helping pass the Civil Rights Act of 1964 as it was thenceforth forbidden by the law to treat anyone differently because of their race. Of course, many of those people were racists who enjoyed their white privilege mostly at the expense of the non-white population. King gave his life for the cause of equality for people of all races, religions, and genders and he truly helped to improve the situation in the USA massively. However, racism persists to be a big issue in the USA today. African Americans remain disadvantaged in almost every area of society, merely because of the color of their skin. Problems with housing, education, health, and social prejudice are, unfortunately, commonplace for a big part of the African American community in the USA and those problems will be clarified in the following paragraphs.

2.1.1. Housing

Housing is one of the main areas where African Americans suffer from discriminatory public policies. Although "the Civil Rights Act of 1968, also known as the Fair Housing Act, prohibit[ed] discrimination in relation to selling, renting, and financing housing," housing discrimination ("Housing Discrimination") is still happening today. People often struggle with finding a quality place to live in good neighborhoods for themselves and their families because of discrimination. This struggle only increases if the person searching for a home is African American. Stereotypes are some of the reasons many landlords and house owners do not want to sell or rent a house to African Americans. They are concerned that renting or selling to them will lead to problems with drugs, gangs or violence or generally lower the prices of the neighborhood houses. Even in 2020, many African Americans are still affected by housing discrimination and unequal housing opportunities and forced to live in bad or segregated neighborhoods, and even forced into vagrancy.

2.1.1.1. Disadvantaged Neighborhoods

The neighborhoods in some cities of the USA are heavily segregated and the difference between them is massive. While some neighborhoods are the epitome of perfection being family friendly with low crime rates, others are severely damaged, polluted, and not equipped for proper living. Unfortunately, many people do not get to choose a neighborhood or community in which they will spend their lives, as the living situation in the USA is generally dictated by incomes and social or economic conditions. A large portion of African Americans live in underprivileged neighborhoods and deal with numerous problems such as neighborhood violence, pollution, a lack of clean drinking water, exposure to lead paint, and other disadvantages. It is important to note that many of these neighborhoods also have very high criminal rates and assaults, drug and alcohol abuse, theft, and murders are very common. Living in disadvantaged neighborhoods only leads to more problems such as health issues and not getting the right education, which ultimately forces the individuals to remain living there and forms a never-ending circle of suffering because of injustice.

2.1.1.2. Homelessness

Due to years of discrimination and racism, many African Americans were failed by the system and forced into homelessness. Some sources state that African Americans compose around 37%

of the homeless population, even though they make up only around 13,2% of the United States population (Day). Many of them found themselves in a desperate situation when they lost their jobs, homes, money, and most devastatingly hope because no one offered to help them, not even their government. These people are not the ones to blame for their situation as they were let down by the system that does not care for them and does not offer them a chance to improve their disadvantaged situation. What makes matters even worse is that instead of helping these people, the state hurts them even more by installing the so-called hostile architecture. The authorities do not want the homeless to sleep on public surfaces, so around numerous cities in the USA they installed "anti-homeless" benches that have a metal railing going through the middle which prevents a person to lie or sleep on them and only gives them an option to sit there. There are also many covered areas that the homeless people could shelter under, but now metal spikes are installed on the ground of these areas that serve the same purpose as those benches.

2.1.2. Education

When it comes to education, the situation is quite similar the one with housing, while many sources claim that it is even worse. Segregated neighborhoods lead to segregated public schools and leave a large group of children disadvantaged because of it. Author Richard Perry gives us an insight into the seriousness of this situation with his claim that public schools in some parts of the USA were undoubtedly more segregated in 2005 than they had been forty of fifty years prior (186). "In the United States, higher education and higher income have long been associated with each other" ("Housing Discrimination"). Because of the housing issue and a big wealth gap, many children who live in impoverished neighborhoods are attending poor public schools and receiving a poor education.

2.1.2.1. Inferior Neighborhood Schools

Inferior neighborhood schools essentially have fewer resources than public schools in wealthier neighborhoods. They are equal according to the law but are undeniably different in practice. Race, class, and income dictate the situation once again, and many people are suffering because of it. It must be pointed out that research has shown that around forty two percent of African American children receive their education in these unprivileged schools (Day). These children are not shown equal opportunities as the ones in wealthier schools and have no chance to grow

and prosper in these disadvantageous surroundings. They get second-rate equipment with worse textbooks and a scarce choice of extra-curricular activities which affects the students' general knowledge. Many of them exhibit poor academic achievements and have significant difficulties with reading and math. The lunches in those schools are of low-quality and unhealthy which again affects their general health. Furthermore, these schools often employ teachers that are not as qualified as the ones in wealthier neighborhoods as not many teachers desire to work and teach in such environments. What is worse is that the teachers teaching in high-poverty schools have lower expectations from their students and thereby do not motivate them to aspire for more. The most distressing fact is that the children in inferior neighborhood schools are often not encouraged and made aware of greater possibilities, so many of them think they have no future and because of that they do not even finish school. They rather drop out and turn to a world of crime.

2.1.3. Health Care

A vast majority of African Americans face numerous health-related problems, most of which are caused by poverty, unemployment, and an absence of good medical care or medical insurance. The purpose of health care is to help people increase the quality of their lives and to give them an opportunity to reach their full potential. Sadly, in the case of a large portion of underprivileged African Americans, health care does neither of those things. Many of them often lose their lives because they lack health benefits and cannot get the appropriate medical care. "For the past one hundred years, the U.S. black male has had the shortest life expectancy of any other U.S. racial or ethnic group" (Gadson qtd. in Braithwaite et al. 5). It seems unbelievable that the government would let this kind of discrimination continue in the health system, which is for many people the most important system of all. Furthermore, research has also shown that African Americans are more likely to die of heart disease, cancer, diabetes, and HIV than any other members of the American population (Walker). Poor education is also one of the factors which leads to bad health decisions, as individuals do not know how to stay healthy nor have the income to maintain a healthy life. Health care equality is of utmost importance and it is the first thing that should be changed in this chaotic system, which is something King fiercely advocated. "Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. once said, 'Of all the forms of inequality, injustice in health care is the most shocking and inhuman'" (Walker).

2.1.3.1. African Americans and COVID-19

In 2020, the COVID-19 virus just exacerbated the already existing problems with the health care system in the USA. The USA is on the top of the list when it comes to the number of people who have contracted the virus and the number of those who have subsequently died because of it. African Americans are more likely to contract the virus and die from it because many of them are frontline workers who risk their lives every day. Some sources state that African Americans are twice as likely to wind up in the hospital from COVID-19 as they make up around 75% of New York's frontline workers (Fottrell). The situation only gets worse for those members of the African American community who live in densely populated neighborhoods and buildings with little or no access to proper sanitation or hygiene where the virus is spreading at very high rates. It makes it impossible for them to stay healthy in these conditions. The country's poor health care, criminal justice and housing systems only contribute to more African Americans contracting the virus and ultimately losing their lives because of it.

2.1.4. Social Prejudice

Throughout history, white privilege and black disadvantage were common concepts. Regardless of the fact that African Americans have been a part of the American society since its very beginnings, prejudice remains an issue that was not solved during the civil rights movement and it aggravates the African American population greatly. This prejudice comes in all sorts of forms from insulting, underestimating, and stereotyping to unfair conduct from the police who stop and frisk African Americans significantly more often than Caucasians. Racial profiling presents a big problem as it is costing many African Americans numerous opportunities, jobs, and sometimes even their lives.

2.1.4.1. Police Brutality

Police violence in the USA represents one of the biggest problems for the African American community and is currently the main issue people are protesting not only in the USA but also around the whole world. The distressing facts on the Mapping Police Violence website gives us an insight into just how bad the situation is. Other than the fact that African Americans are most likely to be killed by the police, they claim that 99% of killings done by the police between the years 2013 and 2019 have not resulted in officers being charged with murders and that in the year 2019 the police have killed 1,098 people, whereas in 2020 alone the police have killed

765 people so far ("Mapping Police Violence"). It is shocking to think that the government organization that should be protecting its citizens is actually hurting them. The police incidents make evident that the situation is made even worse by hurting those members of the community that are already disadvantaged. Furthermore, even though African Americans make up around 13% of the general population, they comprise a big part of the imprisoned population. Some sources state that African Americans make up around one million out of a total of two point three million people incarcerated and are imprisoned almost six times as often as Caucasians (Day). It is indisputable that African Americans are systematically targeted by the police because of their race. This type of discrimination has not changed since the civil rights movement as many police officers continue to exert violence against many minorities, especially African Americans. One of the unfortunate people who was killed by the police is George Floyd and his case is one of the most upsetting events that marked the year 2020.

2.1.4.1.1. The George Floyd Case

The story of George Floyd's death is one that shook the nations across the whole world. This case was covered by every news channel and every broadcasting network and the video of his murder circled the Internet. On May 25, 2020 Floyd was at a store buying himself a pack of cigarettes which he paid for with a counterfeit twenty-dollar bill, after which the store employee called the police. This was his only crime, the only thing he did wrong was paying with a counterfeit bill and he was ruthlessly killed for it soon after the arrival of the police. The police came, pulled him out of his car, and handcuffed him. They should have taken him to the police precinct to clear up the situation, which is what they would normally have done if the person in question was white. Instead, they pinned him to the ground with his face down and the situation escalated quickly. Three officers were restraining a man who was already handcuffed and showed no signs of resisting arrest, who was unarmed and not acting violently. One of the officers, Derek Chauvin, pressed his knee on Floyd's neck disabling him from breathing. Floyd's screams for help can be heard from all of the videos and security tapes that recorded this situation: "I can't breathe, man, please! I can't breathe, please, the knee on my neck! I can't breathe!" More than twenty times Floyd said that he could not breathe, but the officers did not listen as Chauvin continued kneeling on Floyd's neck, even after he had already lost consciousness (Singh). Unfortunately, the violence did not stop there as Floyd soon died of the consequences of police brutality. His death was a pure hate crime, and it is heartbreaking to think that one human being could do such a thing to another simply because of the color of their

skin. His death was, sadly, only one in a long line of cases of police violence that ended in murder, but the difference now is that his murder was recorded and available for the whole world to see. This time there was no question that the police behaved disgracefully and this brutal act of injustice sparked a series of protests for justice all around the world.

2.2. The Impact of Unifying the Masses in the Push for One Common Goal

King recognized that only by working together, he and other civil rights activists could impact the policies to bring about the needed changes across the country. He gave the masses a reason to hope for a better future and encouraged the people to come together and stand united in order to achieve their goals. As efforts to attain civil rights remain a challenge today, his example continues to impact civil rights movements today. Civil rights activists following King's example have realized that unity and nonviolent protest are very effective for achieving goals. There are many protests occurring in today's civil rights movements that are similar to King's, such as marches, speeches, and legal means. King's generation was brought together by the continuous racial problems which they endeavored to solve. Unfortunately, many of these problems have continued throughout the decades and at the present time people are uniting to voice their great dissatisfaction. The main incident that has connected and unified Americans in 2020 was the brutal murder of George Floyd. After years of injustice done to African Americans, Floyd's death was the final straw which started a whole new civil rights movement that is happening now with one common goal to finally achieve racial equality and put an end to immense police brutality. The impact of this unity is huge because, unlike in the previous decades when different races were most often on opposing sides of the problem, now people of all races, genders, religions, sexualities, economic or social status are standing united to finally bring racism to an end and resolve a problem that should have been resolved decades ago. It should be noted that on August 28, 2020 a Get Your Knee Off Our Necks march, which is said to be the largest political gathering in Washington since the COVID-19 outbreak, was organized to address the problem of police brutality, but also to commemorate the 57th anniversary of the famous March on Washington (Greve and Gabbatt). People are being led by one common goal and following King's example, they are amassing and unifying, showing their opinions nationwide holding banners and posters addressing the current issues.

Fig. 1. “A young woman holding a sign that states: “Never again will we relent. Never again will we be silent. Power in unity.” during the Black Lives Matter protests of 2020.” (O’Malley, Katie. “How Black Lives Matter Protests Have Changed the World, A Month After George Floyd’s Death.” *Elle*, 25 June 2020 https://www.elle.com/uk/life-and-culture/culture/a32822672/black-lives-matter-protests-achievements-statues-police-reform/. Accessed 4 September 2020.)

2.3. Black Lives Matter Movement

The website Britannica describes the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement as an international social movement dedicated to fighting racism and anti-Black violence, especially in the form of police brutality (“Black Lives Matter”). The movement started in 2013 as a response to the acquittal of George Zimmerman for the killing of Trayvon Martin, when Alicia Garza used the phrase “Black lives matter,” which she coined and is now used across the world (Hartigan). Since 2013 their goal has been to eliminate the differences between the races and to empower the African American population to successfully prosper in the USA. The movement gained even more national attention in 2020 during the series of protests sparked by the death of George Floyd. Many media organizations nowadays have referred to the Black Lives Matter as the new civil rights movement and the largest movement in the U.S. history as protests in 2020 exceeded every expectation with more than half a million people protesting on June 6, 2020 on the streets of nearly 550 cities across the United States (Buchanan et al.). Seven years after the Black Lives Matter movement was founded, they are still putting their efforts into this cause and are fighting for justice like they have never fought before. The progress they have made is significant and that is what makes them fight for equality even more. Garza said in an interview: “Even though this time is really intense, it makes me hopeful because this is the second time around. The first

time we were fighting people to even say Black lives matter. Now everybody's saying Black lives matter" (qtd. in Hartigan). In addition, racial diversity differentiates these protests from those in the past because now many of the people wanting justice for African Americans are white. "Unlike with past Black Lives Matter protests, nearly 95 percent of counties that had a protest recently are majority white, and nearly three-quarters of the counties are more than 75 percent white" (Buchanan et al.). As of 2020 one of the goals of the Black Lives Matter movement is to defund the police. By doing that they believe they would stop the violence and killings done by the police, and at the same time they could invest those resources into local African American communities, health care, and overall improve the conditions of the lives of the African American population in the USA. One of the important things that the Black Lives Matter protests have helped with in 2020 was to finally bring to justice the police officers who killed George Floyd as ex-officer Derek Chauvin was charged with second degree murder and his accomplices were charged with aiding and abetting a murder (Pengelly). They have also helped to reopen many cases of police brutality against African Americans that were swept under the rug years ago by the authorities but are now being reinvestigated.

2.4. The World Stands in Solidarity

2020 marks a year of a global fight against racism. Inspired and motivated by the Black Lives Matter movement in the USA, many countries around the world started protesting continual racism and police brutality as a sign of support. Peaceful protests for justice started occurring in numerous countries and cities across the globe to support their cause and many are gathering in masses to demand justice despite the deadly COVID-19 pandemic that has afflicted the world. "In the month since George Floyd's death at the hands of the police, the world has witnessed some of the most engaged, passionate and determined anti-racism protests and calls-to-action in recent memory" (O'Malley). The protests started in Minnesota, where Floyd was killed, and soon spread across the globe with large protests seen in the UK, Australia, Canada, and across Europe, Africa, and Asia. Many of the protests were held on the main city squares and in front of United States embassies with thousands of people around the world holding signs and banners with words, such as "Black Lives Matter," "I can't breathe!" and "Protect Black lives" with some even displaying "I can't breathe" on their face masks, which were essential for protestors to wear in order to prevent the virus outbreak during the protests. The United Kingdom showed support with thousands of protestors amassing in all the big cities. London has seen some of the biggest protests in the UK "with hundreds taking a knee in Trafalgar Square for nine minutes, signifying the amount of time the former Minneapolis police

officer Derek Chauvin pinned Floyd to the ground" (Hagemann). Moreover, Mexico held a candlelight vigil for Floyd and hung his portraits and put flowers and candles outside of the US embassy, while a Syrian painter created Floyd's mural on a bombed building to show solidarity with the fight for equality in the USA (O'Malley). Zagreb also hosted a Black Lives Matter protest with protestors kneeling in support, shouting: Black Lives Matter!" and singing a Croatian song "Vjeruj u ljubav" ("Believe in Love") in hopes of showing that love could overcome all obstacles. Furthermore, even though Germany cancelled the Octoberfest and many other important events, it held significant protests supporting the Black Lives Matter movement with thousands of people gathering in Berlin, Frankfurt, Hamburg, and other big cities. It is important to note that a memorial appeared on one of the last remaining sections of the Berlin Wall honoring Floyd's life and once again showed that addressing an issue can be done in more than one nonviolent way (Schmitz). These many peaceful gestures of support around the world showed that peace could send the right message and standing united against the common enemy is the key to achieving any goal. King would have been proud to see this many countries united and peacefully protesting a common issue, he so fiercely fought against.

Fig.2. "Artist Eme Freethinker kneeling in front of his memorial to George Floyd, which he painted on one of the last remaining sections of the Berlin Wall." (Schmitz, Rob. "In Germany, George Floyd's Death Sparks Protests and Artwork That Honors His Life." NPR, 8 Jun. 2020, https://www.npr.org/sections/live-updates-protests-for-racial-justice/2020/06/08/872137235/in-germany-george-floyd-s-death-sparks-protests-and-artwork-that-honors-his-life. Accessed 4 Sept. 2020.)

2.5. New Means of Peaceful Protests through the Internet, Especially Social Media

The Internet culture and Social Networks play a major role in today's fight against racism. Twitter, Instagram, and many other social networking services are uniting, educating, and influencing people in a peaceful way. People are spreading the news more quickly and sharing the latest happenings. Furthermore, many of these social networks and platforms are offering different ways to help in the fight against racism. For those people who want to help but cannot take direct action there are numerous online petitions that can be signed demanding justice for people who were hurt by racism or police brutality. Also, there are many organizations collecting donations to help support the cause and help the families of those afflicted by injustice. For example, Crowdsourced memorial funds for the families of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery and Breonna Taylor, African Americans who were, unfortunately, killed at the hand of the police, have amassed more than $23 million (Goldmacher). It also needs to be mentioned that a Virtual March on Washington was held on August 28, 2020. The whole event was streamed for those who could not participate in the event in person but wanted to take part in it and also to help protect the people from contracting the COVID-19 virus that is still a very serious current problem.

2.5.1. Prominent Persons Using Their Platforms to Speak out and Contribute to a Call for Changes

Celebrities nationwide are fighting racial injustice by using their platforms to speak up about current issues and thereby are educating and influencing their fans across the globe. Some are helping support the cause financially, some are spreading the word via social networks, whereas some are giving public speeches and inspiring the crowds. The examples of these prominent persons are countless, but it is important to emphasize that these are people of all races, genders, and professional profiles such as actors, singers, and athletes. Starting from the music industry, celebrities such as Kendrick Lamar, YG, Beyonce, Terrace Martin and Che Lingo are using their music to promote the Black Lives Matter movement with their new songs and videos (Joseph). The summer of 2020 saw numerous new antiracial songs with moving videos published that are now listened to during many protests around the world. Other than that, numerous actors have decided to speak up on many social media networks and some even took it a step further. Sarah Paulson, Justin Theroux, Aaron Paul, Debra Messing, Kristen Bell, Julianne Moore and other white celebrities made a video named "I take responsibility" which features these white celebrities addressing police brutality and checking their privilege for the #ITakeResponsibility campaign (Carras). In addition to this, various actors participated in

protests for equality and are sharing their stories with their fans so more people could join the movement. Furthermore, the year 2020 has seen an increase of athletes becoming human rights activists and using their voices to take a stance against racial injustice. Some of the famous athletes taking action against racism are: Matt Ryan, a white football player who is using the NFL platform to learn about racism and fight discrimination, and Lebron James, a professional basketball player who has been increasing the awareness about racism for years now, often commenting on the issue during his interviews. It is important to note that even famous people see, hear, and feel the racial injustice every day and they have decided not to stay quiet anymore but to use their powerful platforms as a form of activism. More and more prominent persons are joining the movement every day, putting their careers at risk, and even losing their fans to raise awareness of the situation.

2.5.2. Blackout Tuesday

2020 marked a beginning of yet another social movement. Blackout Tuesday is a social media movement focused on protesting against police brutality and racial discrimination and showing solidarity with the protest started oved Floyd's death. The movement first began in the music industry and soon spread across many social networks. It started with celebrities posting blank black squares on Instagram and using the hashtag #BlackoutTuesday and soon millions of people followed their example and spread black squares all over the world of social networks. It enabled people across the globe to help support the cause, even if they could take no direct action to affect the problems. With the deadly COVID-19 pandemic raging, many people could not join the live protests out of fear of infecting themselves or their loved ones with the virus, so this was their way of showing support for the cause.

2.6. Television as a Means of Fighting Racism

While the Internet mostly keeps influencing the younger people, television continues to enlighten all the members of the community. Television helped spread the news during the civil rights movement, and while it is doing the same thing now, much has changed for the better. After the civil rights movement, television producers realized they could help make a difference by using television as their means of speaking out about racial issues. They started employing more African Americans as well as other minorities in the television industry to make the TV program more racially diverse and thereby tried to lessen the racial concerns occurring through the decades. Also, they started broadcasting movies and shows pointing out racial issues and showing a realistic picture of the American society. Television took on the role of educating

the population with a particular focus on teaching children about racism through the introduction of different characters in kids' TV shows and cartoons to show children how to embrace the differences between the races. Moreover, the year 2020 saw some additional changes in the television industry as well.

> After 32 years, "COPS" has been canceled. HBOMax has temporarily pulled "Gone with the Wind." These are just two of the moves the television industry has made in response to the civil unrest following the killings of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor and George Floyd. Executives and hosts are looking to remove programming that perpetuates racist stereotypes or dangerous tropes and to educate audiences on the harsh realities of racism in the United States. (Flach)

Other than these changes, another thing that marked 2020 is that several white voice actors who were giving voices to African American characters decided to step away from their roles so producers could recast authentic voice actors for the roles (Romano). White people giving voices to minority characters has been a controversial subject for years now, and many are happy to see this improvement. In addition, in the days following Floyd's murder, Don Lemon, a television journalist working for CNN made a powerful headline addressing the issue of racism saying: "Two deadly viruses are killing Americans: COVID-19 and racism" (Zidel).

Conclusion

In conclusion, dr. Martin Luther King Jr. achieved great things during his time, and he has helped to massively improve the situation of African Americans in the United States. He was an excellent leader who demanded justice in a peaceful way and always persisted. King has presented successful nonviolent methods of attaining equal rights and gave his life for the cause he deeply believed in.

Since racism continues to be a serious problem in the American society, just as it had been during the civil rights movement, many African Americans are still disadvantaged by racial injustice and discrimination. It is evident that African Americans as a minority go through all sorts of problems solely because of their race. From living in segregated and disadvantaged neighborhoods flawed with many shortcomings, poverty, and crime, to receiving inferior education and low-quality health care, African Americans are put in such hopeless positions that they often do not see a way out. What is worse is that they are systematically targeted by the police, who are stopping and frisking, incarcerating, and killing them significantly more than Caucasians. One of the most recent cases of police brutality was the killing of George Floyd, whose murder initiated some of the biggest global movements against racism that the world has ever seen.

The aim of this paper was to show that King's nonviolent ideas are still very influential and effective in these modern times, maybe even more impactful than before. The power of unity is one of the things King showed us during the civil rights movement and it still plays a big role today as American society is united by a common goal of putting an end to racism.

Finally, we have seen some major improvements in the fight against racism as technology and modern media have been helping to spread information at enormous speeds and quantities across the globe. The past civil rights movements did not have these particular technological advantages which are increasing people's awareness by helping to educate the public worldwide about the current racial issues. Many prominent persons and celebrities have decided to speak up and use their powerful platforms as tools for activism to influence people around the world to start fighting against discrimination and police brutality exhibited towards African Americans.

There is still a lot of work ahead for the modern civil rights activists, but it is apparent that they have come a long way in the fight for freedom and still pursue justice. In the words of dr. Martin Luther King Jr. himself: "The time is always right to do what is right" (qtd. in Lockwood-Shabat).

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