

# TEAMSTERS AND THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

STRENGTH>FUTURE>FOUNDATION> SERIES



# TEAMSTERS AND THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

Workers Rights and Civil rights go hand in hand. For more than a century now Teamsters have been working towards the goal of equal conditions for all working people.

Since our early years as an organization, the Teamsters, have taken a very clear stance that ***we have no color lines in our Union.***

*"When the prevailing winds were blowing racism through a nation purportedly built on the notion that "All men are created equal," the Teamsters stood strong...*

*No matter what the nation's most powerful politicians say; no matter what the prevailing norms of the American labor movement are; no matter how much resistance they faced from employers who sought at all costs to keep workers divided—the Teamsters Union will continue to fight for equality in the same ways we have since the beginning.*

*One of the first crucial decisions facing these workers who were coming together to form the International Brotherhood of Teamsters in 1903 was regarding this issue. Would the union fall in line with the prevailing segregation in American society and become a whites-only union? Or would it fight segregation by organizing all workers and demanding economic justice for all workers?*

*It was as clear in 1903 as it is now: There is no color line in the Teamsters Union.*

*"Excerpt From Life In the Teamsters: The Civil Rights Movement – International Brotherhood of Teamsters"*

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## *Our Responsibility to All workers*

The second article in the Teamsters Constitution establishes the mission and purpose of the organization. It states, in part that the Union's primary responsibility is to organize and educate workers so that they will attain a higher standard of living. In summary the key role that the union plays includes:

- [Organizing workers](#) so that they have a voice in the workplace.
- Educating workers so that they know their [workplace rights](#) and can participate fully in our democratic society.
- Involving workers in [the political process](#) so that their issues are addressed.
- Negotiating and enforcing contracts with employers so that each worker will be treated with dignity, justice and respect.

# TEAMSTERS AND THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

*For our entire history we have we have had a long standing devotion to equality and justice in the workplace. Those decades-long efforts are being translated into the modern working world where corporations are trying to tamp down on collective bargaining rights and with it the wages and working conditions of those on the job.*

*Over the decades we have had ties to other organizations to and leaders to advance the efforts of our Union and of those that advance all working people.*

*Today, we will be taking a closer look at one of our allies. There have been many notable people that we have locked arms with throughout our history (others we locked horns with), however one of the most influential and perhaps noble leaders we have ever had the pleasure to call a brother and work with was, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.*

## Life of a Dreamer

Born the middle child on January 15, 1929, Michael King, Jr. wasn't born into any privileges. His Father a Baptist Pastor in Atlanta, Georgia and his mother a homemaker were far from advantaged. The social and racial struggles for blacks in America were very present, especially in the south where young Michael was growing up.

Michael's father, Michael King, Sr. had taken over a church from his father-in-law and soon after adopted the name Martin Luther King, Sr. in honor of the German Protestant religious Leader Martin Luther. Some time later, Michael Jr. would follow his father's leads and adopt the name himself.

Martin Luther King, Sr. and his wife, Alberta, did their best to shield their three children from racism. Martin Sr. fought against racial prejudice, not only because his race suffered, but because he considered racism and segregation against God's will. He strongly discouraged any sense of class superiority in his children which left a lasting impression on Martin Jr.

## Life of a Dreamer

That impression would launch Martin Jr. towards his life's work in the Civil Rights Movement. Historians recount him as the most widely known African-American leader of his era. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s life had seismic impact on race relations in the United States. Years after his (assassination) death, he is the most remembered civil rights leader in modern history.

Many of the victories won for civil rights were in result of Dr. King's efforts. From the Boycott of buses after Rosa Park was arrested to striking black sanitation workers in Memphis, Tennessee Dr. King influenced and motivated people into action.

Many Teamster Locals were moved to aid in the civil rights struggle, donating time and resources. The International also donated large sums of money and many international leaders, including then General President (and Strawberry Boy) James R. Hoffa aided Dr. King and his Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). Likewise, Dr. King as well as many other civil rights leaders aided Teamsters and other Union efforts to organize the southern states.

## Life of a Dreamer

At the time of his assassination Dr. King was aiding in the efforts to organize sanitation workers in Memphis with AFSME. Ultimately he was murdered before the striking workers won their strike.

Today, The Teamsters represent workers in the sanitation industry (Republic Waste) Nationwide that benefited from the efforts of this group.

Dr. King's work with Labor were not just limited to these sanitation workers. His inspirational messages could be translated to all working people, even today. In his most famous speech he is quoted as saying:

*"I have a dream that my four children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by their Character"*

*Today, this is the work of Teamsters and Union and Non-union workers alike, protecting equality despite our race, religion, or as we more recently often face, social class. We are all Living that Dream today.*

# World Famous Principles: Observation of a Dreamer

*Observation of 3 Commitments required from World Famous Stewards:*

*"Human progress is neither automatic nor inevitable... Every step toward the goal of justice requires sacrifice, suffering, and struggle; the tireless exertions and passionate concern of dedicated individuals." - Martin Luther King, Jr.*

- 1. Sacrifice – Being a Steward is demanding and will require a lot of your time, effort and resources.*
  - Time spent away from things you used to do is difficult. Your Passion will make it rewarding.*
  - You will be required at all hours of the day. No Clocking Out. It is your dedication will make it worthwhile.*
- 2. Suffering – Being a Steward you will be tested by your peers and management.*
  - The constant pressure from what seems like all sides is sometimes overbearing. The product of that pressure will be the passion you have for our movement.*
  - The process will be determined by your dedication. Character or lack thereof is revealed through your willingness to commit.*
- 3. Struggle – Being a Steward is never easy.*
  - Because of your passion you will not be able to remain still. You can't just sit around and stay quiet.*
  - Because of your dedication you remain as a World Famous Shop Steward*

FRESH LOOK AT  
RIGHT-TO-WORK  
LEGISLATION