

# Portraits of Character

## from the National Portrait Gallery

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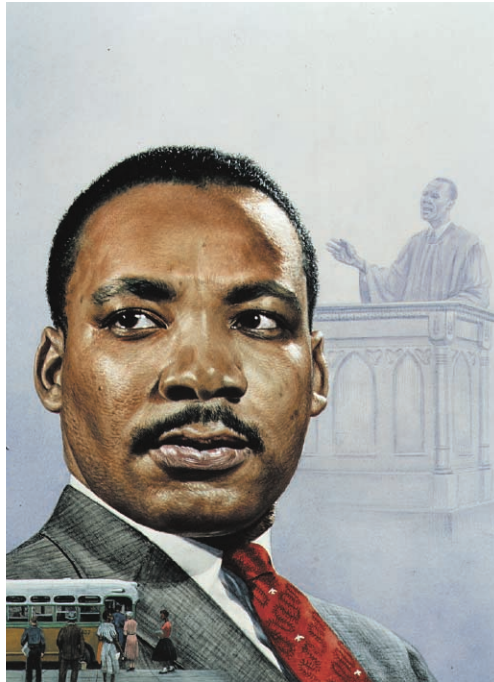
### Martin Luther King Jr. Impassioned Voice for Equality

In the story of the black civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, many figures contributed to the substantial gains made in the United States toward eliminating racial discrimination. But the figure who came to personify the cries for equality in those decades was the Atlanta preacher Martin Luther King Jr. (1929–1968). A key strategist in such events as the forcing of bus integration in Montgomery, Alabama, in 1955–1956 and in the nonviolent protests leading to the landmark civil rights legislation of the 1960s, King is best remembered by many for his impassioned eloquence.

*I have a dream that one day... this great nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal."*

These emotion-laden words, which he spoke at Washington, D.C.'s Lincoln Memorial as part of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom on August 28, 1963, have become classic in the annals of American oratory.

In 1968 an assassin's bullet struck King down. By then, however, the impact of his work was already deeply felt, and it was clear that at least part of his vision for a society founded on racial equality had been realized.



Martin Luther King Jr. (1929–1968) by Boris Chaliapin (1904–1979), watercolor and pencil on board, 1957. Gift of *Time* magazine

### Taking a Closer Look

Boris Chaliapin, who painted this portrait of Martin Luther King Jr. for the cover of *Time* in 1957, was a frequent cover-maker for the magazine. Painted in a meticulously realistic style, it includes a vignette in the lower left foreground that indicates the occasion for which the likeness was created—the triumphant close in the struggle to integrate buses in Montgomery, Alabama. What other background elements in the painting contribute to your understanding about King's role in the civil rights movement?

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*Martin Luther King Jr.'s leadership contributed substantially to many important advancements toward racial equality, including passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1964 and the Voting*

*Rights Act in 1965. Learn more about King, listen to excerpts from many of his speeches, and explore an interactive chronology of his life at the following Web site:*

The Martin Luther King Jr. Papers Project at Stanford University

<http://www.stanford.edu/group/King/home.html>



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