



Martin Luther King Jr. meets President Johnson during a press conference.

Three White Presidents and One Black Man

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Also struck by Dr. King's gentle manners and nonviolent Gandhian approach, the Kennedy's opened up a friendly working relationship with MLK. By 1963 demands for equality and rioting increased. On Aug 28 nearly a quarter of a million people marched on Washington D.C., demanding equal rights for African Americans.

President Kennedy helped push through the Civil Rights Act of 1964, banning discrimination on the basis of color, race, national origin, religion or sex. The act, which protected the rights of blacks and other minorities, is still today one of the nation's strongest civil rights laws. Kennedy, who proposed the act in 1963, was assassinated before it passed. However, Vice President Lyndon Johnson was sworn in as the next President and continued to support it, passing the law early in his term.

Throughout his short life, JFK became very committed to equality, an act that brought him the vast majority of black votes. During his brief term in office Kennedy often worked behind the scenes helping King with his imprisonments and other roadblocks that kept him from achieving his goal of racial equality. Sometimes when things got rough Coretta King

would call the white house and talk to John or Bobby Kennedy, apprising them of MLK's difficulties.

The White House generally showed all the support it could. In fact, many believe it was Kennedy's close relationship with King and his support of the African-American cause that may have cost him his life.

President Lyndon Johnson was also responsible for additional civil rights laws such as a Voting Rights

Law in 1965 that was designed to ensure the voting rights of African Americans and the Civil Rights Act of 1968 that was designed to stop racial discrimination in housing, allowing any American to live where they wanted to.

Although Dr. King helped make enormous gains in terms of civil rights for minorities, he would not live long enough to see the fruit his efforts would bare. On April 4, 1968 Martin Luther King was assassinated.

His political life had found him at odds and then on more friendly terms with three different presidents. Though he is gone, his ideals and morals are still among us. The legacy Dr. King left will be with America for centuries to come. Without the perseverance of this one leader, several of our nation's presidents may have been able to skirt past the issues of discrimination, segregation, and racial equality.

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