

From the Roots of a Tree: The Genealogy of Martin Luther King, Jr. **Supplemental Material**

Use with Slide Two: *Family Tree for Martin Luther King, Jr.*

What is Genealogy? What is a Family Tree?

“Genealogy” is the quest to solve the mystery of a family’s history. We ask questions such as who were my ancestors, and where do I come from? And what were my ancestors’ lives like? Many families have records at home that can help answer these questions. Some of these include:

- Family Bibles
- Obituaries
- Baptism certificates
- Photographs
- Letters and Postcards
- Baby Books/School yearbooks
- Scrap Books/Newspaper clippings

While these records are a good place to start your family research, the National Archives also has many records that can help answer questions about your family. These records include federal census records, military draft registration cards, and immigration and naturalization records. The National Archives Southeast Region has compiled this booklet and accompanying CD to show how the family history of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. can be traced using Archive documents as well as non-Federal records.

Use with Slide 3: *The Williams Family*

What do the colors represent in the family tree diagrams?

Each color has a definite purpose in these family history diagrams. Light blue represents the direct line of the specific family in question and the peach color represents the spouse in that line. For example, for the Williams line, Willis Williams’ information is in a blue box and his wife’s (or spouse’s) information is in a peach colored box (his wife’s name was Lucrecia or “Creecy” Daniel). Their son’s, Rev. Adam Daniel Williams, information is in a blue box and his wife’s, Jenny Celeste Parks, information is in a peach colored box. Notice that Adam and Jenny have a daughter, whose information is in a blue box, and her husband (or spouse) is in a peach colored box. Just remember that blue is the direct line and the peach color is for the spouse which can be either a husband or a wife. Those family lines that we will focus on later will be in a cream colored box. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s box will always be red.

Use with Slide 4: *1860 Census*

Why did many slaves have the same last name as the slave owner?

Before the Civil War in the United States, slaves often used the last name of the family that owned them. In some cases, after emancipation, former slaves changed their names in an effort to distance themselves as much as possible from their former owners. In the case of Martin Luther King, Jr.’s family, however, his ancestors kept the name of their former slave owners even after they were granted their freedom. Because of this fact, we are able to locate both the slave owner of Martin Luther King, Jr.’s great-grandfather, Willis Williams, on census records before the abolition of slavery as well as Willis himself on the 1870 census, which was the first census in which the formerly enslaved were listed as citizens and free persons.

Use with Slide 5: 1860 Census – Slave Schedule

1850 and 1860 Slave Schedule explanation:

Article I, section 2, of the U.S. Constitution requires that a decennial population census, a nationwide enumeration or count of the population, be taken every 10 years. Congress uses the census figures to apportion seats in the House of Representatives. The census also determines each state's number of votes in the Electoral College, which selects the President and Vice President; and affects apportionment in state and local legislatures. Section 9 provides that "no capitation or other direct tax shall be laid, unless in proportion to the census or Enumeration herein before directed to be taken."

Census records can provide the building blocks of your research, allowing you to both confirm information, and to learn more. From 1850 to 1930, details are provided for all individuals in each household, such as:

- names of family members
- their ages at a certain point in time
- their state or country of birth
- their parent's birthplaces
- year of immigration
- street address
- marriage status and years of marriage
- occupation(s)
- value of their home and personal belongings

The 1850 census was the first to record each person's name, specific age, occupation of those over age 15, place of birth, and value of real estate. The slave schedules, however, name only the slave owner and indicate only if a slave was black or mulatto, and his or her sex and age. Free African-Americans were enumerated just as their white counterparts. The 1860 schedules were almost identical to those for 1850, but the 1860 census was the first to inquire about the value of each free person's personal estate.

Use with Slide 6: Willis Williams

Willis Williams:

Martin Luther King, Jr.'s great-grandfather, Willis Williams, was a slave on the Williams Plantation in Penfield, Greene County, Georgia, owned by William Nelson Williams. Willis was a slavery era minister, but since he was a slave, he could not actively preach in the church. Willis, his wife, Creecy, and the family of William Nelson, all attended Shiloh Baptist Church in Penfield before the Civil War. An interesting fact is that Shiloh Baptist considered both slaves and whites as members of their church, although there were still separate distinctions between the two groups.

Like other former slaves after the abolition of slavery, the Williams family stayed in Greene County as sharecroppers even long after the death of Willis Williams in 1874, living and farming in Penfield and in Skull Shoals until moving to Atlanta in 1893.

Use with Slide 7: 1870 Census

1870 Census explanation:

The 1870 census was the first federal census to record all persons as free; in other words, slavery had been abolished and former slaves were now recorded as free individuals on the census.

Use with Slide 8: *Rev. Adam Daniel (A.D.) Williams*

Rev. Adam Daniel (A.D.) Williams:

Rev. Adam Daniel (A.D.) Williams was the son of Willis and Creecy Williams, and the grandfather of Martin Luther King, Jr. A.D. and his mother left the Williams Plantation after his father's death in 1874, but continued to sharecrop in the Penfield area until 1893 when they moved to Atlanta. In 1894, one year after moving to Atlanta, A.D. became the second pastor of Ebenezer Baptist Church on Auburn Avenue. He attended Atlanta Baptist College (later named Morehouse College) and graduated in May 1898. Even as a child, A.D.'s "greatest pleasure [was] to preach the funeral of snakes, cats, dogs, horses or any thing that died. The children of the community would call him to preach the funeral and they would have a big shout."¹ A.D. Williams was also the organizer and first President of the Atlanta Chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).

Use with Slide 8: *Rev. Adam Daniel (A.D.) Williams*

NAACP:

Founded February 12, 1909, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) is the nation's oldest, largest and most widely recognized grassroots-based civil rights organization. Its more than half-million members and supporters throughout the United States and the world are the premier advocates for civil rights in their communities, conducting voter mobilization and monitoring equal opportunity in the public and private sectors. Both the Williams and King sides of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s family were involved in the NAACP.

Use with Slide 8: *Rev. Adam Daniel (A.D.) Williams*

Ebenezer Baptist Church:

Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta was founded in 1886. The Rev. John A. Parker, born into slavery, was the founder and first pastor. The original church was a box-like structure on Airline Street, NE. The Rev. Adam Daniel Williams succeeded Rev. Parker on March 14, 1894. One of his first achievements was to add approximately 65 members to the church during the first year. His next achievement was to build a church on McGruder Street. That church later became known as Mt. Pleasant Baptist Church.

The membership moved from there to Bell and Gilmore streets eventually worshipping in a storefront at 444 Edgewood Avenue from 1912 to 1914 while the basement of a new church building was under construction. In 1914 the congregation moved into the basement at 407 Auburn Avenue and in 1922 the sanctuary, now known as the Heritage Sanctuary, was completed. Ebenezer Baptist church was expanded in 1999 with the construction of the Horizon Sanctuary directly across the street from the original building. Currently, Historic Ebenezer Baptist Church is undergoing much needed renovation.

¹ Clayborn Carson, ed., *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr., Volume 1: Called to Serve, January 1929-June 1951* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992), 4.

Use with Slide 8: *Rev. Adam Daniel (A.D.) Williams*

Morehouse explanation:

Founded in 1867 as the Augusta Institute in Augusta, Ga., Morehouse College is the nation's largest liberal arts college for men. Historically, Morehouse has conferred bachelor's degrees on more African American men than any other college or university in the United States. The 66-acre campus is located three miles southwest of downtown Atlanta.

Below is a list of several members of the King family who attended Morehouse College:

- Dr. Adam Daniel Williams, Martin Luther King, Jr.'s grandfather, class of 1898, Atlanta Baptist College (became Morehouse College in 1913)
- Dr. Martin Luther King Sr., Martin Luther King, Jr.'s father, class of 1930
- The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., class of 1948
- The Rev. A.D. Williams King, Martin Luther King, Jr.'s brother, class of 1960
- Martin Luther King III, Martin Luther King, Jr.'s son, class of 1979
- Dexter Scott King, Martin Luther King, Jr.'s son, attended 1979 to 1984

Use with Slide 12: *Alberta Christine Williams*

Alberta Christine Williams:

Alberta Christine Williams was the mother of Martin Luther King, Jr. She attended high school at Spelman Seminary in Atlanta, which is the oldest historically black college for women in the U.S. After completing her studies at Spelman, Alberta enrolled in the Hampton Normal and Industrial Institute in Hampton, Virginia, and received her teaching certificate in March of 1924. The local school board in Atlanta did not allow married women to teach, so Alberta only taught school for a short time before she married Michael King on Thanksgiving Day in 1926. She founded and trained the Ebenezer Baptist Church choir, organized and was president of the Ebenezer Women's Council from 1950 to 1962, and was the church organist from 1932 to 1972.

Use with Slide 12: *Alberta Christine Williams*

Spelman explanation:

Spelman College is a private, independent, liberal arts, historically Black college for women, founded in 1881 as Atlanta Baptist Female Seminary. In 1884, the name changed to Spelman Seminary in honor of Mrs. Laura Spelman Rockefeller and her parents Harvey Buel and Lucy Henry Spelman, longtime activists in the antislavery movement.

Martin Luther King, Jr.'s grandmother, Jennie Celeste Parks, and his mother, Alberta Christine Williams, attended Spelman Seminary. Jennie Celeste Parks attended Spelman at the age of fifteen. Alberta Christine Williams attended Spelman before pursuing her teaching degree in Hampton, Virginia.

Use with Slide 18: *William and Fannie Parks*

William and Fannie Parks:

Not much is known about Martin Luther King, Jr.'s great-grandparents William and Fannie Parks. The only information about them is what can be gathered from census records

Use with Slide 19: *Jennie Celeste Parks*

Jennie Celeste Parks:

Jennie Celeste Parks was the daughter of William and Fannie Parks, and one of 13 children. She was the grandmother of Martin Luther King, Jr., and was affectionately called "Mama" by her family. Her father was a carpenter in Atlanta. At the age of fifteen, she attended Spelman Seminary in Atlanta. Jennie was the president of Ebenezer Baptist Church's Women's Missionary Society.

Use with Slide 23: *Jim Long and Jane Linsey*

Jim Long and Jane Linsey:

Not much is known about Martin Luther King, Jr.'s great-grandparents Jim Long and Jane Linsey. Like the Parks family, the only information about Jim and Jane is what can be gathered from census records

Use with Slide 24: *Delia Linsey*

Delia Linsey:

Delia Linsey, the daughter of Jim Long and Jane Linsey, was the grandmother of Martin Luther King, Jr. Her father, Jim Long, was a former slave. Delia had nine children with her husband, James King. She attended Floyd Chapel Baptist Church in Stockbridge, Georgia with her children. Martin Luther King, Sr. said his mother, Delia, was so devoted to her family's survival that she "had babies, worked the fields, and often went during the winter to wash and iron in the homes of the whites around town."

Use with Slide 25: *1900 Census*

1890 Census explanation:

Look at the order of the census records for Martin Luther King, Jr.'s family. Why is there no census record for 1890? On January 10, 1921, a fire occurred in the Commerce Department building in Washington, DC, where the federal census records for 1890 were stored. This fire destroyed many of the 1890 population and special schedules, and the water used to extinguish the blaze damaged even more. As a result of this damage, the Government disposed of most of these schedules. Due to the destruction of this census, we only have a partial record for one city in Georgia (Columbus city in Muscogee County). This explains why we can not find the King family on a census record in 1890.

Use with Slide 29: *James Albert King*

James Albert King:

James Albert King was Martin Luther King, Jr.'s grandfather. James and his wife, Delia, were sharecroppers, but he also worked at the rock quarry in Stockbridge for a while. He and his family moved throughout Henry and Clayton counties working as sharecroppers on farmland until they finally settled in Stockbridge, Georgia.

Use with Slide 29: *James Albert King*

Explanation of sharecropping:

According to the New Georgia Encyclopedia, sharecropping was an agricultural labor system that developed in Georgia and throughout the South following Reconstruction and lasted until the mid-twentieth century. Under this arrangement, laborers with no land of their own worked on farm plots owned by others, and at the end of the season landowners paid workers a share of the crop.

Both the Williams and King sides of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s family worked as sharecroppers in from the late 1800's to the early 1900's. His grandfather, A.D. Williams, and his parents continued to work on the land of their previous slave owners in Greene County after they were granted their freedom. Although Martin Luther King, Jr.'s grandfather, James King, was not a slave, he and his wife Delia worked as sharecroppers in Stockbridge, Georgia in order to make a living for their family.

Use with Slide 30: *Where the King Family Lived and Worked in Henry County*
Explanation of where the King family lived and worked:

On February 12, 1970, an article was published in The Weekly-Advertiser that talked about the King family working on farmland in Stockbridge in Henry County, Georgia.

Reverend Martin Luther King Jr.
1929-1968

Did you know that Martin Luther King Sr. is a former resident of Henry County? Born and raised here.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. did have a family background in Henry County. When news of him appeared before the public in 1955-56 as a Civil Rights Leader, this information was related by Mrs. Claude A. Smith, now deceased, the former Rosa Lee of Stockbridge, Ga. She owned and operated a large farm on the outskirts of town.

One of her tenants was Jim King, a Negro, who married on 20 August, 1895, Delia Lindsey.

After the boll-weevil laid waste to cotton until she was forced to discontinue, she called Jim in and explained the situation. She told him to take his wagon and team and move on to seek other ways of earning a living, and to forget his indebtedness to her. Consequently, Jim King the father, of Rev. Martin Luther King Sr. went to Atlanta.

This is the Henry County background of Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. 1929-1968, Atlanta born, a graduate of Morehouse College, a young Negro minister and Civil Rights Leader, who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964. No Atlantan of the century had a greater impact on the nation.

Rosa Lee Smith owned large landholdings near the eastern and western borders of Clayton and Henry counties, respectively. The Lee family owned land in this area since Rosa's great-grandfather, Samuel Lee, bought property in Stockbridge near Lake Spivey in 1853. Her grandfather, William C. Lee, owned a plantation on part of the family's landholdings. When Rosa's father, Canady M. Lee, died in 1891, he left her 100 acres around the intersection of Highway 138 and Highway 23-42 and another 100 acres around Walt Stephens Road near Blackhall Road. From the article above as well as from federal census records, we know that James (Jim) King and his family worked as sharecroppers at one or both of these locations.

Use with Slide 31: *Martin Luther “Daddy” King, Sr.*

Martin Luther “Daddy” King, Sr.:

Martin Luther King, Sr. was the father of Martin Luther King, Jr. He was born Michael L. King, but he later changed both his and his son’s names to Martin Luther King. He was also known by many as “Daddy King.” He was the son of sharecroppers and became a country preacher when he grew older. He attended Bryant Preparatory School in Atlanta before enrolling in the three-year minister’s degree program at Morehouse College in 1926. Martin received his degree in 1930. Martin Luther King, Sr. became the minister of Ebenezer Baptist Church after the death of his father-in-law, A.D. Williams in 1931, and he worked hard to help the community and the church through the Depression. He once said that, “We cannot expect our people to register and become citizens until we as leaders set the standard.” He also delivered the invocations at the 1976 and 1980 Democratic National Conventions. Martin Luther King, Sr. resigned from Ebenezer Baptist Church after the death of his wife, Alberta, in 1974.

Use with Slide 32: *World War I Draft Registration Card for Michael King*

WWI Draft Registration explanation:

On 6 April 1917, the United States declared war on Germany and officially entered World War I. Six weeks later, on 18 May 1917, the Selective Service Act was passed, which authorized the president to increase the military establishment of the United States. As a result, every male living within the United States between the ages of eighteen and forty-five was required to register for the draft.

Not all men who registered for the draft actually served in the military, and not all men who served in the military registered for the draft. Only a small percentage of these men who registered were actually called up for military service.

In many areas, the draft registration was an event. Some cities held parades and closed businesses for the day. Other cities announced the start of registration by blowing whistles, ringing church bells, and firing canons.

In 1917 and 1918, approximately 24 million men living in the United States completed a World War I draft registration card. The total U.S. population in 1917-1918 was about 100 million individuals, which means that close to 25% of the total population are represented in these records. If you had family in the United States during WWI, you are likely to find at least one relative’s information within this large collection. In addition, these cards contain more than just names and dates; they contain significant genealogical information such as birthplace, citizenship status, and information on the individual’s nearest relative.

Martin Luther King, Jr.’s father (born Michael King) had to register for this draft. By looking at his draft card, we can see that he registered in Stockbridge, Henry County, Georgia on 12 September 1918. He was 18 years old and listed his mother as his nearest relative.

Use with Slide 34: 1930 Census

Explanation of name difference on 1930 Census:

The 1930 census is unique because it asked new questions of American citizens. Some of these questions included:

- Did the family own a radio set?
- If you were born in a foreign country, what year did you immigrate to the United States?
- Do you have a Native American tribal affiliation?

The 1930 census record for Martin Luther King, Jr. and his family is even more interesting. In previous years, Martin Luther King, Sr. was listed by his birth name “Michael”, but in 1930 both he and his son are recorded as “Martin”. The date at which Martin Luther King, Sr. changed his and his son’s names has some mystery behind it, but we can say that by 1930, the decision was made to change their names to those that we know today.

Use with Slide 36: *Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.*

Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.:

Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was, like his father and grandfather, a graduate of Morehouse College, and received his degree in 1948. He was an important leader of the Civil Rights Movement in the United States. He was a minister at Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta with his father. Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated on 4 April 1968 in Memphis, Tennessee.

Use with Slide 37: *Draft Registration Card for Martin Luther King, Jr., 23 January 1947*

Selective Service System Draft Registration explanation:

The U.S. officially entered World War II on 8 December 1941 following an attack on Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. Just about a year before that, in October 1940, President Roosevelt had signed into law the first peacetime selective service draft in U.S. history, due to rising world conflicts. After the U.S. entered WWII a new selective service act required that all men between ages 18 and 65 register for the draft. Between November 1940 and October 1946, over 10 million American men were registered.

Martin Luther King, Jr. registered for the draft on 23 January 1947 in Atlanta, Georgia. At the time, he was a student at Morehouse College and lived with his parents at 193 Boulevard.

Sources and Further Reading:

- Carson, Clayborne, ed. The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr. New York: Grand Central Publishing, 1998.
- Carson, Clayborne, ed. The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr., Volume 1: Called to Serve, January 1929-June 1951. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992.
- Draft Registration Card for Martin Luther King, Jr.; Records of the Selective Service System, 1940-, Record Group 147; National Archives and Records Administration – Southeast Region (Atlanta).
- Draft Registration Card for Michael King; Records of the Selective Service System (World War I), Record Group 163; National Archives and Records Administration – Southeast Region (Atlanta).
- Farris, Christine King. Through It All: Reflections on My Life, My Family, and My Faith. New York: Atria Books, 2009.
- The Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute. King Online Encyclopedia. Stanford University, Stanford, California. http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/resources/article/king_online_encyclopedia/.
- Morehouse College Web Site. Morehouse College, Atlanta, Georgia. <http://www.morehouse.edu/>.
- Morehouse King Collection. Morehouse College, Atlanta, Georgia. <http://www.morehouse.edu/kingcollection/background.html>.
- NAACP Web Site. National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. <http://www.naacp.org/>.
- Rainer, Vessie Thrasher. *Henry County, Georgia: Landmark Houses.* McDonough, Georgia: Vessie Thrasher Rainer, 1986.
- Rainer, Vessie Thrasher. *Henry County, Georgia: The Mother of All Counties.* McDonough, Georgia: Vessie Thrasher Rainer, 1971.
- “Sharecropping.” The New Georgia Encyclopedia. Georgia Humanities Council and the University of Georgia Press. <http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/nge/Article.jsp?path=/HistoryArchaeology/CivilWarandReconstruction/Topics-12&id=h-3590>.
- Spelman College Web Site. Spelman College, Atlanta, Georgia. <http://www.spelman.edu/>.
- Turner, Freda Reid. *Henry County, Georgia, 1821-1894: Marriage, Colored/Freedmen Records of Sales Inventory and Wills.* McDonough, Georgia: Freda Reid Turner, 1995.
- United States Federal Census Records, 1860-1930; Records of the Bureau of the Census, Record Group 29; National Archives and Records Administration – Southeast Region (Atlanta).