Disability Rights Are Civil Rights | CPD

Sue Reeves

01/22/2014

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. waves to supporters in Washington, D.C. in 1963. (Photo: AFP/Getty Images)

Every time I have the opportunity to go to Washington D.C., one of my favorite activities to do in the evenings after a long day of meetings or sessions is to go for a walk to visit the Washington, Lincoln and Martin Luther King Jr. memorials. I find it refreshing and uplifting to visit the sites remembering individuals that have shaped and transformed our nation for their great contributions. I find myself thankful and appreciative for such contributions.

As we commemorate the anniversary of the birth of Martin Luther King Jr., I would like to share some important information to remember a great man and his vision of equality for all individuals, regardless of race, color, gender and ability.

Martin Luther King, Jr., (January 15, 1929-April 4, 1968) was born Michael Luther King, Jr., but his father later changed both their names to Martin, after German reformer Martin Luther. Both his grandfather and father served as pastors of Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta. King served as co-pastor from 1960 until his death in 1968.

King attended segregated public schools in Georgia and received the B. A. degree in 1948 from Morehouse College, a distinguished Black institution in Atlanta from which both his father and grandfather had graduated.

In 1963, 250,000 demonstrators marched to the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, where King gave his famous "I have a dream" speech, that all inhabitants of the United States would be judged by their personal qualities and not by the color of their skin.

The following year, President Johnson got a law passed prohibiting all racial discrimination, and at the age of 35, King was the youngest man to have received the Nobel Peace Prize for his nonviolent campaign against racism. When notified of his selection, he announced that he would turn over the prize money of $54,123 to the furtherance of the civil rights movement.

On the evening of April 4, 1968, while standing on the balcony of his motel room in Memphis, Tennessee, where he was to lead a protest march in sympathy with striking garbage workers of that city, he was assassinated by a white racist.

One of my favorite quotes from Dr. King is from his 1963 book, Strength to Love: “The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy. The true neighbor will risk his position, his prestige, and even his life for the welfare of others.”

Civil Rights and Disability Rights

As we remember Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and his fight for civil rights, it's also a good time to think about how his legacy applies to disability rights.

Resulting from King’s extraordinary efforts in the civil rights movement, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was signed on July 26, 1990. Equal opportunities should be available to all shapes, sizes, ethnicity, disable or able-bodied. The disability right movement to this day can still be promoted and fought for by people with and without disabilities. King did his part by spreading awareness of the status and treatment of people with disabilities. Now, it is our privilege and responsibility to continue with these ideals and that his hard work is not forgotten.