



The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.

Martin Luther King Jr. , Clayborne Carson (Editor)

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Using Stanford University's voluminous collection of archival material, including previously unpublished writings, interviews, recordings, and correspondence, King scholar Clayborne Carson has constructed a remarkable first-person account of Dr. King's extraordinary life. Beginning with his boyhood, the book portrays King's education as a minister, his ascendancy as a leader of the Montgomery bus boycott, his pivotal role in the civil rights demonstrations in Washington, D.C., and his complex relationship with the Kennedy brothers, LBJ, Malcolm X, and numerous other leading figures of the day.

The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr. Details

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From Reader Review The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr. for online ebook

Samadrita says

I had to keep reminding myself that it's not the civil rights movement I am rating and reviewing, because the spectrum of legitimate excuses, let alone justifications, which could explain the withholding of a star or two is rather limited. It comes as a kick to the gut every time a young, unarmed Clifford Glover or a Trayvon Martin or a Michael Brown is shot for no valid reason and the realization sinks in that the process of integration which was initiated by Lincoln some 150+ years ago and furthered by Martin Luther is yet to reach its completion. So the essence of this book and MLK's doctrine of nonviolent agitation are now relevant more than ever.

In a way this is Martin Luther's own account of the movement he helped steer in a direction which not only sought to free an entire community from socioeconomic and political servitude but prevented America from becoming synonymous with the ultimate hypocrisy of all - preaching the infallibility of human rights abroad (by waging wars against Communist totalitarianism) but carrying on with its tacit agenda of institutionalized discrimination back home.

"I am convinced that if we are to get on the right side of the world revolution, we as a nation must undergo a radical revolution of values. We must rapidly begin the shift from a thing-oriented society to a person-oriented society. When machines and computers, profit motives and property rights, are considered more important than people, the giant triplets of racism, extreme materialism, and militarism are incapable of being conquered."

How the spirit of rebellion - which found expression for the first time with the Montgomery Bus Boycott in '55 (unwittingly started by Rosa Parks' act of denying her occupied seat to a white passenger) - trickled into the hearts of oppressed millions in Albany, Georgia, Birmingham, Alabama, Florida, Chicago, Boston, and Washington culminating in the passage of the landmark Civil Rights Act of 1964, is recounted by King himself.

That aside, there's a brief autobiographical sketch patched together from the fragments of writings gathered from the Stanford University archive by Clayborne Carson. Excerpts from King's speeches (sometimes even the full text) also make appearances in between the accounts of all the non-violent movements of civil disobedience he gave leadership to.

To put it more accurately, this is less of an autobiography (since King didn't live long enough to write one) and more like a montage of every single written document or important oratory piece which King left behind. So lucidly written are these that Carson's work must have been reduced to simple editing and piecing together a coherent narrative out of the vast amount of material at her disposal.

And yet there are such glaring mistakes here which marred my reading experience. Consider this excerpt from King's personal writings after his visit to India in '59 which cemented his faith in the inviolability of civil disobedience as an effective tool to usher in socioeconomic and political change -

*"On March 1 we had the privilege of spending at the **Amniabad** ashram and stood there at the point where Gandhi started his walk of 218 miles to a place called **Bambi**."*

It's not Amniabad. In all probability, it's the Sabarmati ashram in Ahmedabad King is talking about, while the historic walk was to 'Dandi' - a coastal village in Gujarat (the state our present PM hails from). Not Bambi, the iconic Disney deer.

Even if it was a memory lapse on King's part or a sad apathy for geographical names, as a King scholar looking to publish a work of monumental importance Carson should have been more vigilant for inconsistencies such as the above, especially since Gandhi gets mentioned several times by virtue of his being King's role model.

(Some quick googling led me to the unhappy discovery that the Stanford archive still retains the unedited, therefore, incorrect information derived from the original sources. I can understand the significance of preserving King's writings exactly as he authored them but the insertion of incorrect facts diminishes the integrity of this work.)

Also occasionally 'Gandhi' is spelled as 'Ghandi'. (Aaarrrrggghhhhh!)

In addition to these turn-offs, nearly all of King's speeches are so chock full of archetypal metaphor after metaphor that I felt it weakened the gravitas of the narrative. Perhaps, they would have been better off being included in shortened formats. The fact of God's mercy and benevolence being invoked (quite natural since King was a pastor) in every alternate sentence also served as an effective irritant. These are undoubtedly the primary reasons why it took me a whole month to finish reading this.

But these causes of botheration aside, there's plenty of good to be found in this compilation. Like the way MLK expresses his disappointment with 20th century capitalism in a letter addressed to his wife, Coretta -

"...I am not so opposed to capitalism that I have failed to see its relative merits. It started out with a noble and high motive, viz., to block the trade monopolies of the nobles, but like most human systems it fell victim to the very thing it was revolting against. So today capitalism has out-lived its usefulness. It has brought about a system that takes necessities from the masses to give luxuries to the classes."

or his critique of the Vietnam War and correlation drawn between American militarism and the dangerously skewed nature of race relations in the deep south-

"I do not believe our nation can be a moral leader of justice, equality, and democracy if it is trapped in the role of a self-appointed world policeman."

The absence of that missing star, thus, should be attributed to my personal aversion to factual inaccuracies, overused metaphors and bad analogies. Otherwise no rating system in existence can measure MLK's significance in American history and all that he stood for.

Rowena says

"To deprive man of freedom is to relegate him to the status of a thing, rather than elevate him to the status of a person."- Dr. King.

Lincoln emancipated the slaves but more than 100 years later, the descendants of the slaves were still living under segregation and fear. They weren't free in the true sense of the word. There were separate facilities for

Blacks and Whites; separate drinking fountains, restaurants, schools, churches etc, there was also widespread poverty. There were men and women who could not take this lying down. Probably one of the most famous was Dr. King himself. Using the philosophy of non-violence, which he adopted from Mahatma Gandhi, he and many others began the struggle for civil rights.

Dr. King's speeches and letters, which were printed all through the book, were phenomenal. The only one I'd heard/read thus far was his famous "I Have a Dream" speech but I must say his "Letter from Birmingham Jail" was one of the best things I've ever read in my life.

"Actually, we who engage in nonviolent direct action are not the creators of tension. We merely bring to the surface the hidden tension that is already alive. We bring it out in the open, where it can be seen and dealt with. Like a boil that can never be cured so long as it is covered up but must be opened with all its ugliness to the natural medicines of air and light injustice must be exposed with all the tension its exposure creates, to the light of human conscience and the air of national opinion, before it can be cured."

— Martin Luther King, Jr. - Letter from Birmingham Jail

The section depicting the Montgomery Bus Boycott was one of my favourite parts of the book. It started with Ms. Rosa Park's refusal to move to the back of the bus, and set off a chain of events that were felt worldwide. It showed that if we all work in unity, great things can happen. Can we have a movement these days that has a similar impact?

What I liked about Dr. King's character, apart from his humility and his desire for freedom for all, was his willingness to learn from people who may have radically different ideas from his own. Also, despite the fact that he was fighting for "Negro rights", he did not attempt to paint White people as evil but acknowledged the ones who were allies for not being afraid to take a stand for civil rights.

"Of course there is one phase of liberalism that I hope to cherish always: its devotion to the search for truth, its insistence on an open and analytical mind, its refusal to abandon the best light of reason."

Throughout the book I got the feeling that Dr. King knew he was going to be assassinated. I may be wrong of course but that's definitely what it felt like.

When the end did come I couldn't be more in awe of a man who felt so strongly for what he believed in that he sacrificed himself for the cause. Dr. King is a truly inspirational figure and I believe that this should be required reading for everyone.

Minzi says

Best.Book.Ever. The chapter 'Letters from Birmingham Jail' is the most compelling thing I've ever read. Dr King was the real deal. I realize this is not a 'comprehensive' autobiography, meaning it was not intentionally written as one, the King family but Dr. Clayborne Carson in charge of the King Papers and he did a great job. On finishing this book, I e mailed Dr. Carson at Stanford University - it was a Saturday - and I had a response in 5 minutes. A very humble response to my overly gushing e mail, and an invitation to his private 'Gandhi King Community' which made my year. I am sure you could get many things from reading this book, for me it was the best 'self help' book I ever read. How to get your act together on a grand scale and stop thinking about all the things you 'could do / should do' to help your community and just do it. Its been over

a year now, and I'm still doing it - and I don't plan on ever stopping.

Brian says

I am not certain, fifty years later, that White America can really appreciate what Martin Luther King, Jr. did for this country. Beyond the necessary needed to be done for the African-American population, it is difficult - impossible, really - to imagine how much our nation would have further suffered had MLK not been the one to lead the charge for change. As a middle-class white man in 2014 would I have been able to relate to a militant, angry, disenfranchised black man/woman willing to kill or die for an improvement in his/her world had MLK not preached - and lived by example - a course of non-violent yet aggressive resistance to the unjust status quo? What would life be like in a 2014 America rife with two races at war - a land that might not look too different from a country today brutalized by sectarian strife? If a 50 year course of escalating violence, bombings, retaliations and continual reprisals had happened, what else could occur other than Perpetual Other Hatred? Reading this book made me realize how very close we were to this reality. MLK didn't save a race, he saved a nation, and perhaps the world.

A social movement that only moves people is merely a revolt. A movement that changes both people and institutions is a revolution. MLK's goals may have been lofty, but he understood that to eat the elephant you must do so a teaspoon at a time. Mistakes and mis-steps yielded fast learnings, and as a Christian philosopher of the soul he always was certain to allow his sensitive filters to absorb the fundamentals of what makes us human, black or white, and then to assimilate that understanding into becoming a better person. And leading others to understand the same.

This wonderful book was carefully created by Clayborne Carson, a Stanford University academian that focused specifically on compiling the narrative history of MLK in King's own words, taken from countless documents and primary source material. I am not certain that had MLK lived to be 100 that he would have (re)written this portion of his life any better. His original words, presented in historically chronological context, show his maturity as a leader, an author and an agent of change.

I wish that this book was required reading in every American school. William Vollmann first pointed me to this text, and then friend Rowena, but honestly - I should have read more of MLK long ago. I am proud to count him as a hero - and I want to understand (and learn from his example) how to be a non-violent positive agent of change.

Diane Wallace says

Excellent read! great insight into his life and story (paperback!)

Jeremy Perron says

The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr. is an incredible work; however one needs to remember that it is not a real autobiography. Like The Autobiography of Malcolm X, it was written after he died. It was assembled by the editor, Clayborne Carson, who went over King's papers both public and personnel and

edited his work into a biographical format. The book received the endorsement of Coretta Scott King in 1998. The book is a brilliant piece of literature. Carson is careful to let the reader know what the material is and is not edited. When he takes Dr. King's words directly and unaltered he puts them in italics, so the reader knows for certain that he is getting pure primary material.

King is a combination of many influences though out his life, he begins by talking about his boyhood growing up in the segregated south, where his father was a preacher in the local church. Martin Luther King, Sr. was a take-no-crap-from-anyone type of guy, which was hard for a black man in the segregated south. His mother, Alberta Williams, he describes as being more of a gentle soul whom a lot of his patience would come from. As the Pastor's son he had a type of special status within the local community. He describes his first experience with racism at the age of six when his white friend told him that his (the white boy's) father would not let them be friends anymore because he was black. As the book goes on King discusses his education and how the works of different scholars and philosophers had upon his world view, whether Reinhold Niebuhr, Karl Marx or Mahatma Gandhi.

King discussed meeting his future wife, getting married, and the hard decision to go back to the segregated South. King would take the ministry at the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, and from there he would build an activist base. He encouraged his membership to register to vote and to join the NAACP. When the now internationally famous Rosa Parks refused to get from her seat, she started a movement. The Montgomery Bus Boycott did not even start out as a movement to end segregated bussing, just as a movement for more fair treatment. It was not until the outrageous response by those in power backed by the majority of the white community that caused the movement to push further. The Montgomery Bus Boycott was a form of nonviolent protest that was inspired by the Mahatma Gandhi and Christian doctrine.

"As the days unfolded, however, the inspiration of Mahatma Gandhi began to exert its influence. I had come to see early that the Christian doctrine of love operating thought the Gandhian method of nonviolence was one of the most potent weapons available to the Negro in his struggle for freedom. About a week after the protest started, a white woman who understood and sympathized with the Negroes' efforts wrote a letter to the editor of the Montgomery Advertiser comparing the buss protest with the Gandhian movement in India. Miss Juliette Morgan, sensitive and frail, did not long survive the rejection and condemnation of the white community, but long before she died in the summer of 1957 the name of Mahatma Gandhi was well known in Montgomery. People who had never heard of the little brown saint of India were now saying his name with an air of familiarity. Nonviolent resistance had emerged as the technique of the movement, while love stood as the regulating ideal. In other words, Christ furnished the spirit and motivation while Gandhi furnished the method." p.67

After victory was achieved in Montgomery, King became internationally famous. This was both a blessing a curse at the same time. A blessing in the way he was now able to carry his message to a much larger audience, but a curse in the way that it set some impossible standards for him to meet in future struggles. King would travel the world eventually going to India, the home of his idol. He was very pleased by what he saw when he got there.

"That night we had dinner with Prime Minister Nehru; with us as a guest was Lady Mountbatten, the wife of Lord Mountbatten, who was viceroy of India when it received its independence. They were lasting friends only because Gandhi followed the way of love and nonviolence. The aftermath of nonviolence is the creation of the beloved community, so that when the battle is over, a new relationship comes into being between the oppressed and the oppressor." p.125

At home things were heating up, as the fifties, which had seen some very positive developments such as the

Montgomery Bus Boycott and Brown v. the Board of Education, rolled into the sixties things were going to begin to move at a much faster pace. Also, 1960 was a presidential election year, with two candidates John F. Kennedy and Richard M. Nixon were trying for the nation's top job.

"With Mr. Kennedy, after I looked over his voting record, I felt at points he was so concerned about being president of the United States that he would compromise basic principles to become president. But I had to look at something else beyond the man--the people who surrounded him--and I felt that Kennedy was surrounded by better people. It was on that basis that I felt that Kennedy would make the best president.

I never came out with an endorsement. My father did, but I never made one. I took this position in order to maintain a nonpartisan posture, which I have followed all along in order to be able to look objectively at both parties at all times. As I said to him all along, I couldn't, and I never changed that even after he made the call during my arrest. I made a statement of thanks, and I expressed my gratitude for the call, but in the statement I made it clear that I did not endorse any candidate and that this was not to be interpreted as an endorsement.

I had to conclude that the then known facts about Kennedy were not adequate to make an unqualified judgment in his favor. I do feel that, as any man, he grew a great deal. After he became president I thought we saw to Kennedys--a Kennedy of the first two years and another Kennedy emerging in 1963. He was getting ready to throw off political considerations and see the real moral issues. Had President Kennedy lived, I would probably have endorsed him in 1964. But, back at that time, I concluded that there was something to be desired in both candidates." p.150

As the battles raged on they moved to a new and more dangerous front, Birmingham, it was here that a great amount of the famous images of dogs and people attacked with high pressure water hoses were captured. In this fight King would be imprisoned and while in jail, he had been criticized by a letter written by a group of white clergy. King responded with his famous 'Letter from Birmingham Jail.'

"First I must confess that over the past few years I have been gravely disappointed in the white moderate. I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the Negro's great stumbling block in his stride toward freedom is not the White Citizen's Council or the Ku Klux Klanner, but the white moderate, who is more devoted to 'order' than to justice; who prefers the a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive which is the presence of justice, who constantly says: 'I agree with you in the goal that you seek, but I cannot agree with your methods of direct action'; who paternalistically believes he can set the timetable for another man's freedom; who lives by a mythical concept of time and who constantly advises the Negro to wait for a 'more convenient season.' Shallow understanding from people of good will is more frustrating than absolute misunderstanding from people of ill will. Lukewarm acceptance is much more bewildering than outright rejection." p.195

"You speak of our activity in Birmingham as extreme. At first I was rather disappointed that fellow clergymen would see my nonviolent efforts as those of an extremist. I began thinking about the fact that I stand in the middle of two opposing forces in the Negro community. One is a force of complacency, made up in part of Negroes who, as a result of long years of oppression, are so drained of self-respect and a sense of 'somebodiness' that they have adjusted to segregation; and in part of a few middle-class Negroes who, because of a degree of academic and economic security and because in some ways they profit by segregation, have become insensitive to the problems of the masses. The other force is one of bitterness and hatred, and it comes perilously close to advocating violence. It is expressed in the various black nationalist movement groups that are springing up across the nation, the largest and best known being Elijah Muhammed's Muslim movement. Nourished by the Negro's frustration over the continued existence of racial discrimination, this movement is made up of people who have lost faith in America, who have absolutely

repudiated Christianity, and who have concluded that the white man is an incorrigible 'devil.'" p.196-7

As his work continued things started to change. King's main rival as the primary leader in the struggle for civil rights, Malcolm X, was becoming more popular. The primary difference between the two men was that Malcolm X was an advocate for violent resistance. In some ways he was a help to King, because he represented what the alternative to King's message was. However, as a proponent of violence, he attracted it in kind and otherwise alienated members of the white community who might have otherwise been sympathetic.

"Malcolm X came to the fore as a public figure partially as a result of a TV documentary entitled 'The Hate That Hate Produced.' That title points clearly to the nature of Malcolm's life and death. He was clearly a product of the hate and violence invested in the Negro's blighted existence in this nation. He, like so many of our number was a victim of the despair that inevitably derives from the conditions of oppression, poverty, and injustice which engulf that masses of our race. But in his youth, there was no hope no preaching, teaching, or movements of nonviolence. He was too young for the Garvey Movement, too poor to be a Communist--for the Communists geared their work to Negro intellectuals and labor without realizing that the masses of Negroes were unrelated to either--and yet he possessed a native intelligence and drive which demanded an outlet and means of expression. He turned first to the underworld, but this did not fulfill the quest for meaning which grips young minds. It was a testimony to Malcolm's personal depth and integrity that he did not become an underworld czar, but turned again and again to religion for meaning and destiny. Malcolm was still turning and growing at the time of his meaningless assassination." p.267

As time went on the rise of Black Nationalism, which was abhorrent to King, was growing stronger. Even though the Civil Rights Movement had achieved incredible success, the Civil Rights Act in 1964 had been passed and was breaking down the wall of legalized segregation, some felt unsatisfied. The 'black power' movement, King felt was trying to undo what he had achieved. King began to envision a 'poor people's campaign' that would use the strategy of Civil Rights Movement to achieve economic justice for all citizens of all races. How successful he would have been is unknown because that is where his story untimely ends.

Sandy says

Carson takes some liberties adopting an "autobiography" construct. By using the first person singular, the author makes the subject of his book seem, for example, more defensive when Dr. King decided not to remain in jail awaiting trial instead of remaining true to the nonviolent direct action tenet of demonstrating civil disobedience by remaining incarcerated. The story does benefit from this personal perspective as King explores his religion, his career choices, his opposition to Viet Nam and other deep philosophical and/or personal decisions. The author has heavily borrowed from a number of Dr. King's books and writings; authentic, but for someone familiar with civil rights best known martyr, a bit redundant. A good book, but a bit disappointing in that the author has such access to and knowledge of Martin Luther King's mind and conscience.

Jenny says

The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr. gives an overview of the major movements in King's life, from his childhood, up until his death. Although the book is written in King's own words, the book is

actually a compilation of his various writings: essays, sermons, speeches, letters, etc. Because of his untimely death, King was not able to write his own autobiography. King's wife enlisted the historian of Stanford University (Clayborne Carson) to go through King's extensive writings to put something together. I think that Carson did an extremely fine job, capturing King's thoughts and perceptions of what unfolded before him.

I originally picked up this book while in seminary, I think at the bookstore because there was a class (that I was not taking) on Martin Luther King, Jr. I had not touched it until these past weeks, as I was asked to give a sermon on Martin Luther King day on King and the homeless family nonprofit for which I am president. Before reading the book, all the knowledge I had of King was really what I learned in high school, so some concrete facts, but mostly haze. I appreciated reading King's writing, especially reading what he thought about the situations as they were happening. The book also gave me a sense of how long the struggle for civil rights really took. That seems like a dumb statement, but I really got the sense of weariness in the late half of the book of how tiring it must have been to continue to demonstrate repeatedly and, in a sense, see no real progress or, even, degeneration in the movement with those who wanted to turn to violence. Mostly, I appreciated reading about King's solid religious understanding of justice and reading about his thoughts as he thought twice about whether he was doing the right thing.

Monique Gerke says

Tem livros que nos abalam a estrutura.

Este com certeza é um deles. Mudanças profundas (e práticas) se operaram (e continuam a operar, e espero que continue por todo sempre) após essa leitura.

No Brasil, num momento em que vivemos uma cultura de ódio por parte de quase todos os grupos que pensam diferente, ler Martin Luther King é um bálsamo de esperança, de que somente o amor, e a consequente não violência (de ação e de palavras) podem mudar o mundo, criar condições de existência mais justas para todos, e transformar vidas e formas de pensamentos. Um amor que fica no sentimentalismo é inútil, um amor que opera com justiça é transformador;

MLK foi um exemplo de cristão, que viveu o evangelho de Jesus em todas as esferas de sua vida, que se posicionou contra a injustiça, lutou pela liberdade e dignidade dos negros, dos pobres, que espalhou a graça e o amor de Cristo.

Recomendo!

Francisco says

I was drawn to this book at this particular time because I needed to hear the words of someone who believed with his life that hatred and anger were not the answer. The concept of non-violence and the discipline that it requires of the individual seems outdated. As out of touch with our current culture as repression of our instinctual drives is out of touch with current psychology. The thing now is the expression of anger. Anger is the new virtue. But here is the life of a man who at times felt anger and hatred and yet believed that the expression of it was strategically and morally wrong. Violence would not correct the social evil that needed correction. Hatred would beget even more hatred. Violence motivated by the need to retaliate was, it needs to be said, not the Christian way. King felt that no amount of twisting Jesus' words would ever permit the existence of hatred in a person's heart. It was not good tactically, as Gandhi had shown, and it was not good for the person who hated. I needed to hear the words and be in touch with the soul of a man who fought

against and defeated the easy temptation to hate. I needed re-assurance that non-violent resistance to evil will work in the long run because my faith in the long term power of love runs low at times. I needed to be reminded that non-violence is more than simply refraining from striking or even verbally abusing another person. Non-violence for King was a way of life, a way of seeing the world. That's what I needed to hear.

Harrison says

Disclosure: I own the physical book of this, but I consumed it via its Grammy-winning audiobook instead. Why?

1. It's narrated by LeVar Burton, the former host of Reading Rainbow--there's a reason kids listened to him and wished they knew how to read, and it's because he makes whatever he's saying jump to life.
2. It's peppered with clips (or full recordings) of numerous speeches by Dr. King himself. Some you've doubtless heard before, like his "I have a dream" speech or even his "I've been to the mountaintop" address, but some you likely have not--his speech at the rally before the start of the Montgomery bus boycott is a moving example. In all cases, these words take new meaning when put into the context of King's life, the progress of his actions, and of his thoughts.

In modern America, Dr. King has a mythical quality surrounding him: some in my generation are liable to see his work as merely inevitable, having never known an America divided de jure by segregation. To the young student of civil rights, this narrative of King's life, his development and his impact as a civil rights leader is truly fresh, revealing with gripping immediacy the struggle at each step of the journey, from Montgomery to Albany to Salem to Chicago and beyond.

And yet, even to those who are well versed in the civil rights movement, who can name prominent figures like Roy Abernathy and Fred Shuttlesworth, or key opponents like Bull Connor, there is still a depth of detail into King's personal development that speaks directly to mainline questions of ethics, morality, and the human condition.

For example, early in his development at Morehouse College (where he enrolled at the age of 15!) King faced a dilemma squaring his religious upbringing and belief with intellectual rigor and modern sciences. Guided by the models of Dr. Benjamin Mays, president of Morehouse, and Rev. George Kelsey, prominent African American theologian, King came to square these influences, becoming a man both of great intellect, and unshakable faith. This internal dialogue of his is profound, and is of great value to any student who asks such questions.

Another moment of interest is the conflict between King's devotion to the principles of non-violence and the ideologies of other leaders like Malcolm X and Stokely Carmichael. I never even considered how MLK might feel about the notion of "black power" but the result is fascinating, and was another highlight of this story.

Later in his life, King became an outspoken critic of the Vietnam War, and this chapter grapples with bedrock questions about the role of US military might in the global community, the growth of the military-industrial complex, the conflict between solving domestic problems and engaging military actions abroad, and numerous other ethical dilemmas that have emerged in the globalized world. He roots the problem to materialism in a fascinating way, and one that is moving.

I cried at the end of this book, gripped by the passion, the faith and the mission of Dr. King's life and

message. Yes, it's easy to let MLK day pass with a "gee he was a good guy" attitude, but to learn more about him is a truly enriching pursuit, and this book is an excellent introduction to a full life. Please listen to this audiobook.

Carla says

In school we listened to and read some of Martin Luther King's speeches and in recent years I had read a sermon or two of his, but that was the breadth of my experience with his work. Having now read the autobiography, I think it should be required reading in high schools.

As many reviewers have mentioned, it is a little strange to call it an autobiography. However, there is so much first hand accounts that I don't really have a problem with it. I don't think that the editor, Clayborne Carson steered the book in a way unbecoming to King.

The book gives you a thorough account of King's actions and involvement in the civil rights movement, as well as insight into his personal struggles. Two things really struck me about King's character throughout the book: his willingness to sacrifice and his strong faith in God. He (and his wife) were willing to sacrifice not only their time, efforts and resources but also their security in order to fight for civil rights. It doesn't seem that many Americans these days are willing to sacrifice much of anything for anything. The second aspect that struck me, his faith in God, is well-known. However, it was remarkable to read how he was constantly questioning himself, checking his motives and his intentions and realigning himself with God's will. His faith and his actions resulting from that faith are stunningly humbling.

Another thing that I think is worth mentioning is the social power of the church. This account demonstrates how the church at one time really was a social engine in the community. Nearly all of King's civil rights movements were organized through and in the church or affiliates of the church. It's unclear to me if this would still be the case today. I think that generally, America's churches need to reconsider their missions, both in advocacy and community service.

The book ends with King's last speech "I've Been to the Mountaintop" and his last sermon "The Drum Major Instinct." You can't help but get chills reading these, as it seems that King has come to the realization that his days are numbered and has made peace with this and with God.

There are too many outstanding quotes to mention...just go read it!

Adam Wiggins says

This is not quite a true autobiography, but rather a collection of King's writings and speeches throughout his life, edited and assembled by a third party. I found this disappointing because it lacked the benefit of hindsight perspective that a biographer could have brought, but also doesn't necessarily have the personal tone and thesis of an autobiography.

I listened to this in audio form, which included many recordings of King's sermons and speeches. This gives a firsthand glimpse at his fantastic gift as an orator, especially the later recordings which are higher quality.

It also didn't spend much time explaining the historical events, but rather King's feelings and motivations about them. So it would be helpful to already be familiar with the major events of the civil rights movement in the 60s, such as the Montgomery bus boycott, the march on Washington, and the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

I enjoyed the description of his educational background as a philosopher, his deep inspiration from Ghandi, and his complex relationship with the Black Power movement. King is undoubtably one of the most important figures in American history, and an inspiring champion of freedom and equality. I guess this is as close as we'll ever get to hearing his life story in his own words.

Rosa Ramôa says

"Eu também sou vítima de sonhos adiados, de esperanças dilaceradas, mas, apesar disso, eu ainda tenho um sonho, porque a gente não pode desistir da vida".

(Martin Luther King)

Nii Lamptey says

Martin makes Christianity attractive.
He's somebody to model a life after.
