

Labor Rights and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s Legacy

How has the activism and scholarship of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. influenced labor rights today? Join us for a conversation about Dr. King's influence upon the modern-day labor movement.

Conversation Questions

1. What are the differences between “right-to-work” versus other laws related to workers' rights?
2. How did the Poor People's Campaign lead to legislation around economic justice?
3. What is a living wage, and why is it important?
4. How is essential work defined, and how does that definition affect workers?

Key Definitions (adapted from *Merriam-Webster*)

- *Labor union* – an organization of workers formed for the purpose of advancing its members' interests with respect to wages, benefits, and working conditions
- *Collective bargaining* – negotiations between an employer and a labor union, usually on wages, hours, and working conditions

Read

“Martin Luther King Jr.'s was as vocal about union power as he was about racial injustice – but no one remembers it” by Allana Akhtar for *Business Insider*

<https://bit.ly/3nti1WZ>

This brief article provides a timeline of union rights, development, and decline while framed by Dr. King's influences on the labor movement.





“What Happened to Martin Luther King Jr.’s Dream of Economic Justice?” by Michael K. Honey for *Time*

<https://bit.ly/3gSvS6G>

Martin Luther King Jr. is most remembered for his “I Have a Dream” speech but Honey outlines King’s advocacy for economic justice as it applies to equality in the United States today.

“Is it great to be a worker in the U.S.? Not compared to the rest of the developed world.” by Andrew Van Dam for *The Washington Post*

<http://wapo.st/2JC6mX9>

This 2018 analysis compares workers’ protections as well as income inequality in the U.S. to those in other developed countries.

Watch

“At the River I Stand” by David Appleby, Allison Graham, and Steve Ross on Kanopy

<https://skokielibrary.kanopy.com/product/river-i-stand>

An award-winning documentary about Martin Luther King Jr. and the Memphis sanitation workers strike in 1968.

“On MLK Day, the need for a ‘deeply moral argument’ about American injustice” from PBS NewsHour for WTTW

<http://to.pbs.org/2KM590g>

Host Judy Woodruff interviews Reverend William J. Barber, the co-chair of the 2018 Poor People’s Campaign, who draws parallels between the first campaign led by Dr. King in 1968 and the 2018 campaign in terms of the wealth gap and the criminalization of the working poor.





“Bill Londrigan” from *The People's Campaign*

<https://bit.ly/387K0qZ>

The leader of Kentucky's chapter of the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) speaks on the legacy of MLK in workers' rights movements ahead of the 2018 MLK Memorial March to Move. AFL-CIO is the largest federation of labor unions in the United States.

Listen

**“Who Is Continuing Martin Luther King’s Fight Against Poverty”
by 1A for NPR**

<http://n.pr/38ECQbS>

Originally recorded in April 2018, this podcast episode includes excerpts from Dr. King's speeches about economic justice, from 1962 to 1968, and asks the question: With economic inequality growing, who is carrying on King's economic fight today?

