



LANGUAGE LEVEL: **B2 UPPER INTERMEDIATE**

Positives and Negatives

Even though he died more than 40 years ago, Dr Martin Luther King, Jr. played a significant role in getting Barack Obama elected president.

When King began his civil rights campaign in Montgomery, Alabama in 1955, the Deep South was still segregated. African Americans were treated as second-class citizens and were often unable to vote. At that time the idea of an African-American becoming president was pure fantasy. King, who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964, did much to advance racial integration in the United States. His campaigns led to the Voting Rights Act of 1965, but his life's work was cut short¹⁶ when he was assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee in 1968. He was 39 years old.

Memphis has a special museum dedicated to King and the civil rights movement, but so does the city of his birth: Atlanta, Georgia. Here you will find the Martin Luther King Center. We asked its communications director, Steve Klein, to describe what happened to black people when they tried to vote in the segregated South:

Steve Klein (Standard American accent): They would be subjected to these ridiculous literacy¹⁷ tests. The voter registrar¹⁸ would sit there and ask them, "How many gallons of water in the Mississippi River?" Or they'd have a big jar¹⁹ of marbles²⁰ or jelly beans²¹. How many marbles are in that jar?" And if you can't answer it, you don't get to vote. Of course, nobody could, but the biggest thing was just outright²²

intimidation. On voting day there would be... sometimes there would be people with guns²³ sticking out²⁴ of their belts²⁵, standing at the polls²⁶. This still goes on – not the guns so much, but the intimidation – even today, in some black communities, they did this in Florida. This is how Bush got elected. In the polling areas in the black communities the police were patrolling²⁷ aggressively, and giving a lot of cars tickets²⁸, put up all these temporary 'No parking' signs: a lot of tricks²⁹ like that, still being done, to suppress black voters. That's still a very serious problem.

But Steve Klein also sees the positive side:

Steve Klein: There's, I'd say, 10 times, maybe 100 times, more interracial socializing, black and white folks³⁰ going out to dinner together. You know, you see it all over, and Atlanta's a good example. Atlanta's really very, very good on that: probably the best city, in terms of interracial friendships – you see it more out on the streets and in the workplace and so forth. But, you know, the neighborhoods are still pretty segregated, and you'll see this all over America. There are some nicely integrated neighborhoods, and even Dr King said the most segregated hour in America is 11am Sunday morning: church. Still pretty true. Here in Atlanta there's a couple of churches, large churches, that are fairly well integrated, but most... neighborhoods, most churches and most schools, are still pretty segregated.

EXERCISES

Listening Questions

1. Choose the best answer.
 - a) The Voting Rights Act was instituted in 1. the 1950s. 2. 1976. 3. 1965.
 - b) African Americans were treated as 'second-class citizens' means
 1. there was no racial integration.
 2. they were treated as less important citizens.
 3. they couldn't vote.
 - c) One of the things that was done to make it difficult for them to vote was
 1. they had to do a literacy test that was impossible.
 2. they had to write a letter.
 3. they were asked to produce a passport.
 - d) The word 'outright' means
 1. serious. 2. obvious. 3. nearly
 - e) During the Bush election campaigns, police
 1. patrolled parking lots.
 2. tricked black voters.
 3. had guns in full view.
 - f) In Atlanta you see lots of
 1. black politicians.
 2. families coming out to vote.
 3. interracial couples and friendships.
 - g) That the South was 'segregated' means that
 1. African Americans could not vote by law.
 2. African Americans lived only in Atlanta.
 3. African Americans were treated as a separate class.
 - h) The place Martin Luther King said segregation was still evident was
 1. in schools.
 2. in neighborhoods.
 3. in churches.

Answers

1. a) 3, b) 2, c) 1, d) 2, e) 1, f) 3, g) 3, h) 3

MORE EXERCISES ON CD

GLOSSARY

- 16 TO CUT SHORT: interrumpir
 17 LITERACY: alfabetismo
 18 VOTER REGISTRAR: encargado de decidir quién puede y quién no puede votar
 19 JAR: bote
 20 MARBLE: canica
 21 JELLY BEAN: gominola
 22 OUTRIGHT: puro
 23 GUN: pistola
 24 TO STICK OUT: sobresalir
 25 BELT: cinturón
 26 POLL: colegio electoral
 27 TO PATRÖL: patrullar
 28 TICKET: multa
 29 TRICK: truco
 30 FOLKS: gente