

Was Martin Luther King Jr. a Republican? No, and here are his own words to prove it.

by Arthur Lewbel, 2013

Aug 28, 2013 is the 50th anniversary of the march on Washington, organized by Martin Luther King Jr., among others. On anniversaries and events involving him, stories always come out claiming that Martin Luther King Jr. was a Republican. Typing "Was MLK" into google autocompletes with "a republican?" The truth comes from letting MLK answer the question himself. To do so, I've compiled a list of relevant quotations of his, which appear at the end of this article.

As these quotes show, MLK jr. expressed liberal or socialist views, not conservative or republican views. King denied association with either party but voted democrat. He was pro-union, pro-labor, supported the minimum wage, questioned capitalism, favored social programs, supported democratic socialism, opposed military spending, opposed right to work laws, and strongly favored affirmative action.

In contrast, as far as I can tell, the only arguments favoring the claim that he was republican or conservative are that he supported individual achievement, was religious, and he wore a suit.

The strongest evidence for claiming MLK jr. was republican comes not from anything he ever said himself, but from his niece Alveda C. King, who claimed "My uncle, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., during his lifetime, was a Republican." However, MLK jr's own son and namesake, Martin Luther King III, strongly disagreed, saying in 2008, "It is disingenuous to imply that my father was a Republican. He never endorsed any presidential candidate, and there is certainly no evidence that he ever even voted for a Republican. It is even more outrageous to suggest he would support the Republican Party of today, which has spent so much time and effort trying to suppress African American votes in Florida and many other states."

MLK jr's niece, son, and many, many others may try to exploit his legacy for their own ends. That's why it's important to read the following quotations, to see what MLK jr. himself wrote. Everthing else is just spin.

"In the past I have always voted for the Democratic ticket."

2 Oct. 1956, Letter to Miss Viva Sloan, The papers of Martin Luther King jr.

"I felt that Kennedy would make the best president. I never came out with an endorsement. Had President Kennedy lived, I would probably have endorsed him in 1964."

-The autobiography of Martin Luther King jr.

"I don't think the Republican party is a party full of the almighty God nor is the Democratic party. They both have weaknesses. And I'm not inextricably bound to either party."

Feb. 11, 1958, in *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.: Symbol of the Movement*.

"Actually, the Negro has been betrayed by both the Republican and the Democratic party... This coalition of southern Dixiecrats and right wing reactionary northern Republicans defeats every bill and every move towards liberal legislation in the area of civil rights."

Jan 1 1957, in *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.: Symbol of the Movement*.

"Something is wrong with capitalism...There must be a better distribution of wealth, and maybe America must move toward a democratic socialism."

1966 speech, quoted in Franklin, Robert Michael (1990). *Liberating Visions: Human Fulfillment and Social Justice in African-American Thought*. Fortress Press. p. 125.

"I imagine you already know that I am much more socialistic in my economic theory than capitalistic. And yet 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 nobles, but like most human systems it falls victim to the very thing it was revolting against. So today capitalism has outlived its usefulness."

- July 8 1952 letter to Coretta Scott

"A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual doom"

1967, in "Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?" by Martin Luther King, Jr.

"Why are there 40 million poor people in America? When you begin to ask that question, you are raising questions about the economic system, about a broader distribution of wealth. When you ask that question, you begin to question the capitalistic economy. "

1967, in "Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?" by Martin Luther King, Jr.

"We know of no more crucial civil rights issue facing Congress today than the need to increase the federal minimum wage and extend its coverage.

MLK statement on minimum wage legislation, March 18, 1966

"No amount of gold could provide an adequate compensation for the exploitation and humiliation of the Negro in America down through the centuries... Yet a price can be placed on unpaid wages. This law should be made to apply for American Negroes. The payment should be in the form of a massive program by the government of special, compensatory measures which could be regarded as a settlement in accordance with the accepted practice of common law."

Why We Can't Wait, by Martin Luther King jr., 1964.

"In our glorious fight for civil rights, we must guard against being fooled by false slogans, such as 'right to work.' It is a law to rob us of our civil rights and job rights. It is supported by Southern segregationists who are trying to keep us from achieving our civil rights and our right of equal job opportunity. Its purpose is to destroy labor unions and the freedom of collective bargaining by which unions have improved wages and working conditions of everyone... Wherever these laws have been passed, wages are lower, job opportunities are fewer and there are no civil rights. We do not intend to let them do this to us. We demand this fraud be stopped. Our weapon is our vote."

—Speaking on right-to-work laws in 1961

"Many white Americans of good will have never connected bigotry with economic exploitation. They have deplored prejudice but tolerated or ignored economic injustice."

Why We Can't Wait, by Martin Luther King jr., 1964.

"Now everyone knows that the labor movement did not diminish the strength of the nation but enlarged it. By raising the living standards of millions, labor miraculously created a market for industry and lifted the whole nation to undreamed of levels of production. Those who attack labor forget these simple truths, but history remembers them."

1961, Martin Luther King Jr.'s speech at AFL-CIO's Fourth Constitutional Convention.

"The labor movement was the principal force that transformed misery and despair into hope and progress. Out of its bold struggles, economic

and social reform gave birth to unemployment insurance, old-age pensions, government relief for the destitute and, above all, new wage levels that meant not mere survival but a tolerable life. The captains of industry did not lead this transformation; they resisted it until they were overcome. When in the thirties the wave of union organization crested over the nation, it carried to secure shores not only itself but the whole society."

— Speech to the state convention of the Illinois AFL-CIO, Oct. 7, 1965