



# People

## Martin Luther King

1929–1968



Although there were some gains in civil rights in the middle years of this century blacks felt that their progress was too slow. Among these was Dr. Martin Luther King.

In 1955 the Southern custom of segregating blacks at the back of public buses triggered a widespread protest. Under the leadership of Dr. King, a boycott of all city buses was organized in Montgomery, Alabama. Old and young blacks walked for miles, refusing to ride a bus. As the boycott continued, the bus company suffered serious financial loss, and so did local merchants, whose black customers had stopped travelling to their stores.

Finally the United States Supreme Court settled the issue by ruling that such segregation violates the Constitution of the United States. As a result, the bus company ended its practice of having blacks sit only at the back of a bus. It also began to hire some blacks as drivers.

After this experience, King and other leaders used non-violent methods in various anti-segregation efforts in the South. There were protest marches; the most impressive of these was a civil rights march in Washington, D.C., in August, 1963, in which hundreds of thousands of blacks and whites participated.

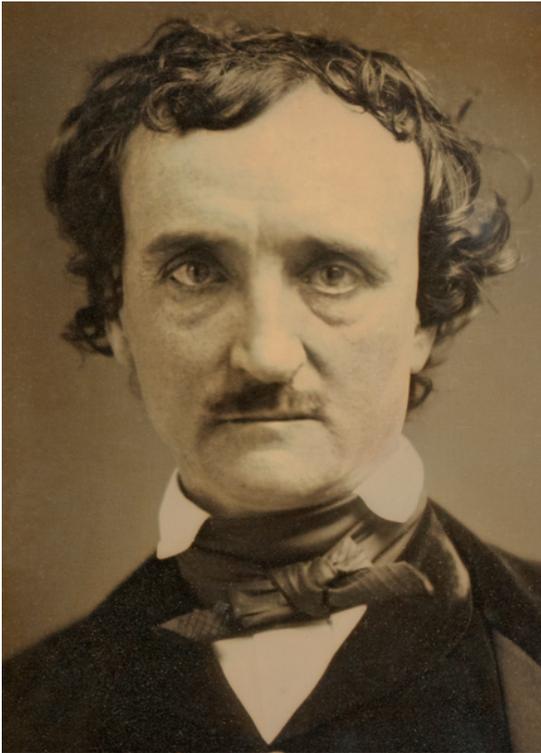
In 1964 Martin Luther King was greatly honored by being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his contribution to the cause of human rights. On April 4, 1968, the whole country was shocked by the news of his murder by a sniper. He is remembered and honored by people all over the world as a fighter for human rights. His birthday, January 15, is a national holiday in the United States.

*Source: What it is like in the USA (Natalia Tokareva, Victor Peppard)*

## Edgar Allan Poe

1809–1849

Born on January 19, 1809, in Boston, Massachusetts, writer, poet, critic, and editor Edgar Allan Poe's tales of mystery and horror gave birth to the modern detective story (his nickname is "Father of the Detective Story") and many of his works, including *The Tell-Tale Heart* and *The Fall of the House of Usher*, became literary classics. *The Raven*, which he published in 1845, is considered among the best-known poems in American literature.



### Early Life

Poe never really knew his parents — Elizabeth Arnold Poe, a British actress, and David Poe, Jr., an actor who was born in Baltimore. His father left the family early in Poe's life, and his mother passed away from tuberculosis when he was only three. Separated from his brother William and sister Rosalie, Poe went to live with John and Frances Valentine Allan, a successful tobacco merchant and his wife, in Richmond, Virginia. Edgar and Frances seemed to form a bond, but he had a more difficult relationship with John Allan. By the age of 13, Poe was a prolific poet, but his literary talents were discouraged by his headmaster and John Allan, who preferred that Poe follow him in the family business. Preferring poetry over profits, Poe reportedly wrote poems

on the back of some of Allan's business papers.

Money was also an issue between Poe and John Allan. Poe went to the University of Virginia in 1826, where he excelled in his classes, however, he didn't receive enough funds from Allan to cover all of his costs. Poe turned to gambling to cover the difference, but ended up in debt. He returned home only to face another personal setback—his neighbor and fiancée Sarah Elmira Royster had become engaged to someone else. Heartbroken and frustrated, Poe moved to Boston.

### Early Career

While in Boston, Poe published his first book, *Tamerlane and Other Poems* in 1827. He also joined the U.S. Army around this time. Two years later, Poe learned that Frances Allan was dying of tuberculosis, but by the time he returned to Richmond she had already passed away. While in Virginia, Poe and Allan briefly made peace with each other, and Allan helped Poe get an appointment to the United States Military Academy at West Point.

Before going to West Point, Poe published a second poetry collection *Al Aaraaf*, *Tamerlane*, and *Minor Poems* in 1829. Poe excelled at his studies at West Point, but he was kicked out after a year for his poor handling of his duties. During his time at West Point, Poe had fought with his foster father, who had remarried without telling him. Some have speculated that Poe intentionally sought to be expelled to spite Allan, who eventually cut ties with Poe.

After leaving West Point, Poe published another book and focused on his writing full time. He traveled around in search of opportunity, living in New York City, Baltimore, Philadelphia and Richmond. From 1831 to 1835, he lived in Baltimore, where his father was born, with his aunt Maria Clemm and her daughter Virginia. In 1834, John Allan died, leaving Poe out of his will, but providing for an illegitimate child Allan had never met.

Poe, who continued to struggle living in poverty, got a break when one of his short stories won a contest in the Baltimore Saturday Visitor. He began to publish more short stories and in 1835 landed an editorial position with the Southern Literary Messenger in Richmond. During this time, Poe also began to devote his attention to his young cousin, Virginia, who became his literary inspiration, as well as his love interest. The couple married in 1836 when she was only 13 years old.

At the Southern Literary Messenger, Poe developed a reputation as a cut-throat critic, writing vicious reviews of his contemporaries. His scathing critiques earned him the nickname the "Tomahawk Man." Poe also published some of his own works in the magazine, including two parts of his only novel, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*. His tenure at the magazine proved short. Poe's aggressive-reviewing style and sometimes combative personality strained his relationship with the publication, and he left the magazine in 1837. His problems with alcohol also played a role in his departure, according to some reports.

Poe went on to brief stints at Burton's Gentleman's Magazine, Graham's Magazine, The Broadway Journal, and he also sold his work to Alexander's Weekly Messenger, among other journals. Despite his success and popularity as a writer, Poe continued to struggle financially and he advocated for higher wages for writers and an international copyright law.

### **Major Works**

In late 1830s, Poe published *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque*, a collection of stories. It contained several of his most spine-tingling tales, including *The Fall of the House of Usher*, *Ligeia* and *William Wilson*. Poe launched the new genre of detective fiction with 1841's *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*. A writer on the rise, he won a literary prize in 1843 for *The Gold Bug*, a suspenseful tale of secret codes and hunting treasure.

In 1844, Poe moved to New York City where he published a news story in *The New York Sun* about a balloon trip across the Atlantic Ocean that he later revealed to be a hoax. His stunt grabbed attention, but it was the 1845 publication of his poem *The Raven* which made him a literary sensation. *The Raven* is considered a great American literary work and one of the best of Poe's career. In the work, Poe explored some of his common themes—death and loss. An unknown narrator laments the demise of his great love Lenore. That same year, he found himself under attack for his stinging criticisms of fellow poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. Poe claimed that Longfellow, a widely popular literary figure, was a plagiarist, which resulted in a backlash against Poe.

Continuing work in different forms, Poe examined his own methodology and writing in general in several essays, including *The Philosophy of Composition*, *The Poetic Principle* and *The Rationale of Verse*. He also produced another thrilling tale, *The Cask of Amontillado*, and poems such as *Ulalume* and *The Bells*.

### **Mysterious Death**

Poe was overcome by grief after the death of his beloved Virginia in 1847. While he continued to work, he suffered from poor health and struggled financially. His final days remain somewhat of a mystery. He left Richmond on September 27, 1849, and was supposedly on his way to Philadelphia. On October 3, Poe was found in Baltimore in great distress. He was taken to Washington College Hospital where he died on October 7. His last words were "Lord, help my poor soul."

At the time, it was said that Poe died of "congestion of the brain." But his actual cause of death has been the subject of endless speculation. Some experts believe that alcoholism led to his demise while others offer up alternative theories. Rabies, epilepsy, carbon monoxide poisoning are just some of the conditions thought to have led to the great writer's death.

Shortly after his passing, Poe's reputation was badly damaged by his literary adversary Rufus Griswold. Griswold, who had been sharply criticized by Poe, took his revenge in his obituary of Poe, portraying the gifted yet troubled writer as a mentally deranged drunkard and womanizer. He also penned the first biography of Poe, which helped cement some of these misconceptions in the public's minds.

While he never had financial success in his lifetime, Poe has become one of America's most enduring writers. His works are as compelling today as they were more than a century ago. An innovative and imaginative thinker, Poe crafted stories and poems that still shock, surprise and move modern readers.

*Source: biography.com*

## William Thornton

1759–1828



One of the earliest American architects, William Thornton achieved early fame for his design of the US Capitol Building in Washington DC, in the style of neoclassical architecture. He was also active in domestic architecture, being responsible for the John Tayloe town house, known as The Octagon and Thomas Peter's villa, Tudor Place.

A serious and sophisticated, if, strictly speaking, amateur artist, Thornton is significant for his experimentation with classicism and his efforts to express the meaning of the new American political order in the language of late-18th century architecture.

*Source: visual-arts-cork.com*