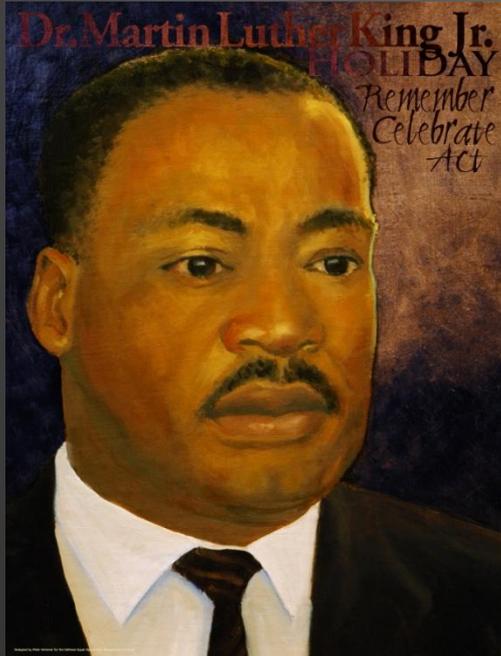


Martin Luther King, Jr. Day Celebration January 16, 2012



“Remember! Celebrate! Act!
A Day On...Not A Day Off”

Martin Luther King, Jr. Day

Martin Luther King Jr. was a fundamental force behind the Civil Rights Movement in the United States; still, establishing his Jan. 15th birthday as a national holiday took struggle and persistence.



Courtesy of Dr. Martin Luther King.net

Martin Luther King, Jr.

Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated April 4, 1968, while standing on the balcony of the Lorraine motel in Memphis, Tennessee.

King was in town to support a protest march for striking garbage workers.

Martin Luther King, Jr. Day

Four days later—one day before King's burial, Congressman John Conyers, Jr., introduced legislation seeking to make King's birthday a federal holiday.



Courtesy of conyers.house.gov

Martin Luther King, Jr. Day

“I never viewed it as an isolated piece of legislation to honor one man. Rather, I have always viewed it as an indication of the commitment of the House and the nation to the dream of Dr. King. When we pass this legislation, we should signal our commitment to the realization of full employment, world peace, and freedom for all.”

— John Conyers, Jr.

Martin Luther King, Jr. Day



Courtesy of Dr. Martin Luther King.net

Martin Luther King, Jr. Day

In June 1968, The Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Center was founded in Atlanta.

The center's mission: to serve as a living memorial to Dr. King, to preserve his papers and promote his teachings.

Martin Luther King, Jr. Day

In January 1969, The King Center sponsored the first annual observance of Dr. King's birthday, and called for nationwide commemorations.

This observance became the model for subsequent commemorations to celebrate Dr. King's life, his teachings, and commitment to nonviolent actions.

Martin Luther King, Jr. Day

In 1971, three years after Conyers' proposal, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference—which King headed from its inception until his death—presented Congress with a petition signed by more than three million people supporting a King holiday.

Martin Luther King, Jr. Day

The bill languished in Congress for eight years, unable to gain enough support. This changed when President Jimmy Carter vowed to support a King holiday.



Courtesy of the White House

Martin Luther King, Jr. Day

King's widow, Coretta, testified before joint hearings of Congress and organized a nationwide lobby to support the bill.

Still, in November 1979, Conyers' King holiday bill was defeated in the House by just five votes.

Martin Luther King, Jr. Day

*"This is not a black holiday;
it is a people's holiday." —*

Corretta Scott King, wife of Martin Luther King, Jr.



Courtesy of the Associated Press

Martin Luther King, Jr. Day

Coretta continued her fight, testifying before Congress several more times and mobilizing governors, mayors, and city council members across the nation to make the passage of a King holiday bill part of their agenda.

Martin Luther King, Jr.

Singer Stevie Wonder became a prominent proponent and released the song "Happy Birthday" in 1980. The song became a rallying cry for the cause.

He and Coretta went on to present a second petition to Congress with six million signatures. Their work finally paid off when the House passed the bill.

Martin Luther King, Jr. Day

The bill faced a tougher fight in the Senate.

An opposition campaign was led primarily by Senators John P. East and Jesse Helms.

They emphasized King's suspected associations with communists and his alleged sexual misconduct as reasons not to honor him with a federal holiday.

Martin Luther King, Jr. Day



Courtesy of United Press International

Martin Luther King, Jr. Day

Helms argued that any person opposing a King holiday would automatically be dubbed a racist.

He urged the Senate not to be bullied into elevating King to *"the same level as the father of our country and above the many other Americans whose achievements approach that of Washington's."*

Martin Luther King, Jr. Day

Mrs. Coretta Scott King said:

“As a nation chooses its heroes and heroines, a nation interprets its history and shapes its destiny. The commemoration of the life and work of Martin Luther King, Jr. can help America realize its true destiny as the global model for democracy, economic and social justice, and as the first nonviolent society in human history.”

Martin Luther King, Jr. Day

After 15 years of continuous struggle, Congress passed the legislation. In November 1983, President Ronald Reagan signed the bill into law, establishing the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday.



Courtesy of the White House

Martin Luther King, Jr. Day

The holiday celebrates the life and achievements of Martin Luther King Jr. and encourages people everywhere to reflect on the principles of nonviolent social change and racial equality.

Martin Luther King, Jr. Day

While the first official federal holiday was observed in 1986, Illinois became the first state to adopt Martin Luther King Jr. Day as a state holiday in 1973.

Martin Luther King, Jr. Day

Arizona did not recognize the holiday until 1992.

South Carolina became the last state to sign a bill recognizing Martin Luther King Jr. Day as a federal holiday in 2000.

Martin Luther King, Jr. Day

Today, the King holiday is celebrated at U.S. military installations and is observed by local groups in more than 100 nations.



Courtesy of Dr. Martin Luther King.net

Martin Luther King, Jr. Day

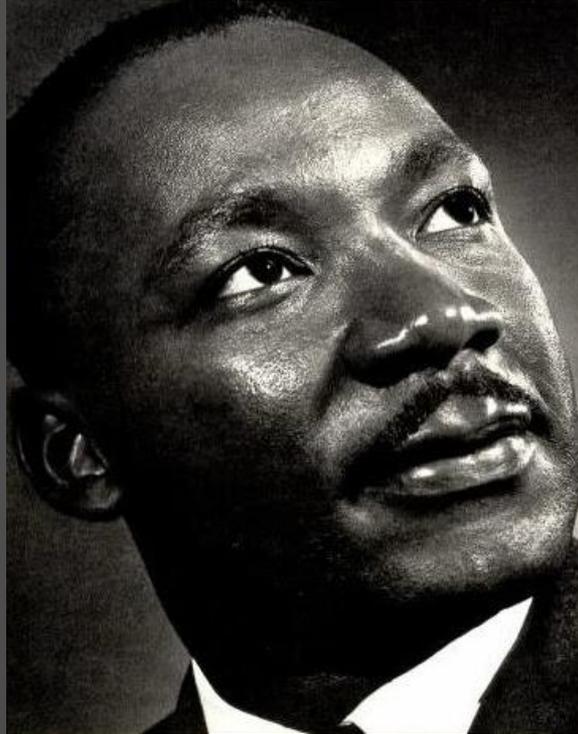


Courtesy of Dr. Martin Luther King.net

“Human progress is neither automatic nor inevitable... Every step toward the goal of justice requires sacrifice, suffering, and struggle; the tireless exertions and passionate concern of dedicated individuals.”

— Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Martin Luther King, Jr. Day



“Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.”

Bibliography

http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/features/us/jan-june11/mlk_01-

<http://mlkday.gov/>

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/about/presidents>

<http://www.thekingcenter.org/>

<http://www.biography.com/people/martin-luther-king-jr-9365086>

<http://www.history.com/topics/martin-luther-king-jr>

http://conyers.house.gov/index.cfm?FuseAction=News.PhotoGallery&ImageGallery_id=0a4caf05-7e9c-9af9-701c-c2b12e70c67f

**Prepared by Dawn W. Smith
on behalf of the Defense Equal
Opportunity Management Institute
Patrick Air Force Base, Florida
December 2011**

**All photographs are public domain and are from various sources
as cited.**

**The findings in this report are not to be construed as an official
DEOMI, U.S. military services, or Department of Defense position,
unless designated by other authorized documents.**