

A LIFE REMEMBERED

Celebrating the legacy of civil rights leader, Martin Luther King Jr.

BY STACEY HOLLENBECK
McClatchy-Tribune

The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. made his mark on history during the civil rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s. Motivated by his faith, King fought against the oppression of his fellow African-Americans by protesting segregation. His efforts to combat the injustices were met with hostility and hatred, and eventually led to his early death. But King’s drive to achieve harmony among the races led to the desegregation of the country and set America on the path toward racial equality.

History of the day

In 1986, nearly 18 years after his assassination, Americans celebrated the first Martin Luther King Day, a holiday established to pay homage to the preacher and inspirational leader. By this time, 17 states already had established holidays to honor Martin Luther King Jr. Coretta Scott King, his widow, worked hard to make the national holiday a reality.

In 2003, the theme of Martin Luther King Day became, “Remember! Celebrate! Act! A day on, not a day off.” Although some professionals and students see the third Monday in January as a day off from work or school, others see it as an opportunity to volunteer their time. By working to improve their communities and help those in need, these Americans are acting on behalf of King’s generous spirit.



Bernice King, daughter of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. addresses the audience at the official ceremony of the MLK memorial at the the National Mall in Washington in October 2011.

Famous quotes

Through his eloquent speeches, sermons and writings, Martin Luther King Jr. inspired a nation. Here are a few of his most memorable and moving quotations:

“Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.”
— “Letter from Birmingham Jail,” April 16, 1963

“I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: ‘We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.’”
— King’s “I Have a Dream” speech, Aug. 28, 1963

“I believe that unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the final word in reality. This is why right, temporarily defeated, is stronger than evil triumphant.”
— King’s Nobel Prize acceptance speech, Dec. 10, 1964

“Like anybody, I would like to live a long life — longevity has its place. But I’m not concerned about that now. I just want to do God’s will. And he’s allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I’ve looked over, and I’ve seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the Promised Land.”
— King’s “I’ve Been to The Mountaintop” speech, April 3, 1968

Remember! Celebrate! Act!

To truly celebrate Martin Luther King Day and honor its “Day of Service” theme, Americans can work to improve the lives of those in need or help out in their communities. Here are some ways to celebrate the day through community service:

- Bring meals to homebound neighbors
- Shovel elderly neighbors’ walkways
- Serve meals at a homeless shelter

To find a specific volunteer opportunity near you, go to www.mlk-day.gov and click “Search for MLK Day Project.”



NIKKI KAHN/MCT
Coretta Scott King, pictured here in 2003.

Martin Luther King Jr. devoted his life and career to protesting injustice. The following timeline identifies the times and places in King’s short life where he significantly influenced the civil rights movement and the future of America.

- **Jan. 15, 1929:** Martin Luther King Jr. was born to the Rev. and Mrs. Martin Luther King Sr. in Atlanta, Ga.
- **1947:** King became licensed to preach.
- **June 18, 1953:** King married Coretta Scott in Marion, Ala. Coretta Scott King continued her husband’s legacy as a civil rights activist until her death on Jan. 30, 2006.
- **June 5, 1955:** King received a Ph.D. in Systematic Theology from Boston University.
- **Feb. 21, 1956:** King and other demonstrators were arrested for participating in the Montgomery Bus Boycott. In December of that same year, the federal government ordered Montgomery buses to integrate.
- **Feb. 18, 1957:** Martin Luther King Jr. appeared on the cover of Time magazine.
- **February 1959:** King and his wife spent a month in India studying Mahatma Gandhi’s technique of non-violence. King was an avid fan of nonviolence, a strategy where demonstrators, instead of using violence, protest peacefully.

- **Oct. 19, 1960:** King was arrested for trespassing while taking part in a sit-in demonstration at a lunch counter in Atlanta, Ga. Sit-ins were nonviolent anti-segregation protests where Black demonstrators refused to leave restaurants and public places that were designated as White-only.
- **Dec. 16, 1961:** While protesting segregation in Albany, Ga., King was arrested.
- **July 27, 1962:** King was again arrested in Albany, Ga., after taking part in a prayer vigil. He was charged with failure to obey a police officer, obstructing the sidewalk and disorderly conduct.
- **April 16, 1963:** After being arrested in Birmingham, Ala., for participating in a sit-in, King wrote “Letter From Birmingham Jail.” The letter is now one of King’s most famous statements about injustice.
- **Aug. 28, 1963:** King delivered his “I Have A Dream” speech in front of the thousands who gathered for The March on Washington. Afterward, he and other Civil Rights leaders met with President John F. Kennedy in the White House.
- **Dec. 10, 1964:** King received the Nobel Peace Prize.
- **Aug. 5, 1966:** King was stoned in Chicago as he led a march through crowds of angry Whites.
- **April 4, 1968:** King was shot while on the balcony of his second-floor motel room in Memphis, Tenn. He later died from a gunshot wound to the neck. A day earlier, King gave his final speech, “I’ve Been to the Mountaintop.”
- **March 9, 1969:** James Earl Ray plead guilty to killing King and was sentenced to 99 years in the Tennessee State Penitentiary.
- **Jan. 20, 1986:** The first national King holiday was observed.

HOW MUCH DO YOU KNOW ABOUT DR. KING?

How well do you know Martin Luther King Jr.? Test your knowledge about the civil rights leader whose legacy is celebrated every year.

1. How many children did King have?
- A. 1
 - B. 3
 - C. 4
 - D. 5

2. How old was King when he was assassinated?
- A. 35
 - B. 39
 - C. 42
 - D. 50

3. King gave his famous, “I Have a Dream” speech Aug. 28, 1963, in front of what landmark in Washington, D.C.?
- A. The Washington Monument
 - B. The White House
 - C. The Jefferson Memorial
 - D. The Lincoln Memorial



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On June 23, 1963, civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. led more than 125,000 people on the “Walk to Freedom” down Woodward Avenue in Detroit.

4. King was named president of what influential civil rights group in 1957?
- A. Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee
 - B. Southern Christian Leadership Conference
 - C. Congress of Racial Equality
 - D. National Association for the Advancement of Colored People

5. Which president signed the bill establishing the third Monday of every January as the Martin Luther King Jr. national holiday?
- A. Ronald Reagan
 - B. Lyndon B. Johnson
 - C. John F. Kennedy
 - D. George H.W. Bush

Answers: 1-C; 2-B; 3-D; 4-B; 5-A.

BOOKS ABOUT THE CIVIL RIGHTS ICON

Below are some resources for kids and teens who want to learn more about Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and his legacy.

Good reads for kids

- **“A Picture Book of Martin Luther King, Jr.”** by David A. Adler and illustrated by Robert Casilla (Holiday House, \$6.95)
- **“Happy Birthday, Martin Luther King Jr.”** by Jean Marzollo (Scholastic Paperbacks, \$5.99)
- **“My Brother Martin: A Sister Remembers Growing Up with the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.”** by Christine King Farris (Simon & Schuster Children’s Publishing, \$17.95)



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“My Brother Martin: A Sister Remembers Growing Up with the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.”

- **“Martin’s Big Words: The Life of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.”** by Doreen Rappaport (Jump At The Sun, \$6.99)

Good reads for teens

- **“The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.”** by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and edited by Clayborne Carson (Grand Central Publishing, \$15.95)
- **“A Knock at Midnight: Inspiration from the Great Sermons of Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr.”** by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and edited by Peter Holloran and Clayborne Carson (Grand Central Publishing, \$20)
- **“A Call to Conscience: The Landmark Speeches of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.”** edited by Clayborne Carson and Kris Shepard (Grand Central Publishing, \$14.95)

ILLUSTRATION BY EARL F. LAM/MCCLATCHY NEWSPAPERS

SOURCES: THE KING CENTER; DOCUMENTS FROM THE KING RESEARCH AND EDUCATION INSTITUTE AT STANFORD UNIVERSITY; WWW.MLKDAY.GOV.