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*Last Updated: 05/3/2023*



## Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, 1986

*By the President of the United States of America*

### A Proclamation

This year marks the first observance of the birthday of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. as a national holiday. It is a time for rejoicing and reflecting. We rejoice because, in his short life, Dr. King, by his preaching, his example, and his leadership, helped to move us closer to the ideals on which America was founded. We reflect on his words and his works. Dr. King's was truly a prophetic voice that reached out over the chasms of hostility, prejudice, ignorance, and fear to touch the conscience of America. He challenged us to make real the promise of America as a land of freedom, equality, opportunity, and brotherhood.

Although Dr. King was an uncompromising champion of nonviolence, he was often the victim of violence. And, as we know, a shameful act of violence cut short his life before he had reached his fortieth birthday.

His story is well-known. As a 26-year-old minister of the Gospel, Dr. King led a protest boycott of a bus company that segregated blacks, treating them as second-class citizens. At the very outset he admonished all those who would join in the protest that "our actions must be guided by the deepest principles of our Christian faith. Love must be our regulating ideal." Otherwise, he warned, "our protest will end up as a meaningless drama on the stage of history . . . shrouded with ugly garments of shame." Dr. King's unshakable faith inspired others to resist the temptation to hate and fear. His protest became a triumph of courage and love.

Almost 30 years ago, on January 30, 1956, Dr. King stood amid the broken glass and splinters of his bombed-out front porch and calmed an angry crowd clamoring for vengeance. "We cannot solve this problem through retaliatory violence," he told them. Dr. King steadfastly opposed both the timid and those who counselled violence. To the former, he preached that "true peace is not merely the absence of tension; it is the presence of justice." To the latter, he said that "in the process of gaining our rightful place we must not be guilty of wrongful deeds."

Dr. King's activism was rooted in the true patriotism that cherishes America's ideals and strives to narrow the gap between those ideals and reality. He took his stand, he once explained, "because of my love for America and the sublime principles of liberty and equality on which she is founded." He wanted "to transform the jangling discords of our Nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood."

The majesty of his message, the dignity of his bearing, and the righteousness of his cause are a lasting legacy. In a few short years he changed America for all time. He made it possible for our Nation to move closer to the ideals set forth in our Declaration of Independence: that all people are created equal and are endowed with inalienable rights that government has the duty to respect and protect.

Twenty-three years ago, Dr. King spoke to a quarter of a million Americans gathered near the Lincoln Memorial in Washington—and to tens of millions more watching on television. There he held up his dream for America like a bright banner:

"I have a dream," he said, "that my four little children will one day live in a Nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character . . . This will be the day when all of God's children will be able to sing with new meaning, 'My country 'tis of thee, sweet land of liberty, of thee I sing.'"

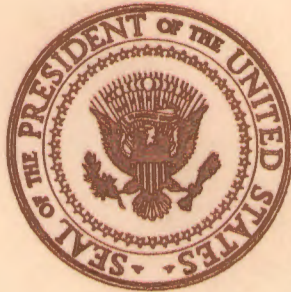
Let all Americans continue to carry forward the banner that 18 years ago fell from Dr. King's hands. Today, all over America, libraries, hospitals, parks, and thoroughfares proudly bear his name. His likeness appears on more than 100 postage stamps issued by dozens of nations around the globe. Today we honor him with speeches and monuments. But let us do more. Let all Americans of every race and creed and color work together to build in this blessed land a shining city of brotherhood, justice, and harmony. This is the monument Dr. King would have wanted most of all.

By Public Law 98-144, the third Monday in January of each year has been designated as a public holiday in honor of the "Birthday of Martin Luther King, Jr."

NOW, THEREFORE, I, RONALD REAGAN, President of the United States of America, do hereby proclaim Monday, January 20, 1986, as Martin Luther King, Jr. Day.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this eighteenth day of January, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and eighty-six, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and tenth.

*Ronald Reagan*



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