

Black History Month Essay Competition 2012

Presidential Proclamation on 2012 Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday

January 13, 2012

BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
A PROCLAMATION

On a hot summer day nearly half a century ago, an African American preacher with no official title or rank gave voice to our Nation's deepest aspirations, sharing his dream of an America that ensured the true equality of all our people. From the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. inspired a movement that would push our country toward a more perfect Union.

At a time when our Nation was sharply divided, Dr. King called on a generation of Americans to be "voices of reason, sanity, and understanding amid the voices of violence, hatred, and emotion." His example stirred men and women of all backgrounds to become foot soldiers for justice, and his leadership gave them the courage to refuse the limitations of the day and fight for the prospect of tomorrow. Because these individuals showed the resilience to stand firm in the face of the fiercest resistance, we are the benefactors of an extraordinary legacy of progress.

Today, Dr. King is memorialized on the National Mall where he once spoke, a symbol of how far our Nation has come and a testament to the quiet heroes whose names may never appear in history books, but whose selflessness brought about change few thought possible. Dr. King's memorial reminds us that while the work of realizing his remarkable dream is unending, with persistence, progress is within our reach.

On the Martin Luther King, Jr., Federal Holiday, we celebrate the man who fought for the America he knew was possible. Dr. King's faith in a God who loves all His children and a Nation grounded in the promise of equality would not let him rest until victory was won. As we work to meet the challenges of our time -- from fixing our schools so every child gets a world-class education to ensuring all Americans have access to strong and secure economic opportunity -- let us draw strength from Dr. King's stirring affirmation that "Everybody can be great because everybody can serve." In his memory, let us continue climbing toward that Promised Land, one more fair and more just for all people.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, BARACK OBAMA, President of the United States of America, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and the laws of the United States, do hereby proclaim January 16, 2012, as the Martin Luther King, Jr., Federal Holiday. I encourage all Americans to observe this day with appropriate civic, community, and service projects in honor of Dr. King, and to visit www.MLKDay.gov to find Martin Luther King, Jr., Day of Service projects across our country.

BARACK OBAMA

THE LIFE AND LEGACY OF MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.

Celebrating Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

"Life's most persistent and urgent question is: 'What are you doing for others?'"

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Honoring Martin Luther King Jr.

Martin Luther King Jr. dedicated his life to the nonviolent struggle for racial equality in the United States. January 16, 2012, marks the 25th anniversary of Martin Luther King Day, a federal holiday that honors King's legacy and challenges citizens to engage in volunteer service in their communities. It is observed on the third Monday of January.

Beginning the Journey

Born on January 15, 1929, to a long line of Baptist ministers, King grew up in Atlanta at a time when Jim Crow laws made segregation and discrimination a daily reality for blacks in the South. King attended Morehouse College in Atlanta, where he came to view religion as a powerful catalyst for social change. He received his doctorate from Boston University's School of Theology before returning to the South, where he served as pastor of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama. Today, King's Atlanta birthplace is registered as a National Historical Site with the National Park Service.

An Iconic Figure of the 1960s

Joining his father as co-pastor of the Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, King continued to use his oratorical gifts to urge an end to segregation and legal inequality. Throughout the 1960s, he was arrested during nonviolent protests in Alabama, Florida and Georgia. King led the 54-mile-long Selma-to-Montgomery march for voting rights (pictured) and many other protests. While incarcerated in 1963, King penned the Letter from Birmingham City Jail, outlining the moral and philosophical basis for the civil rights movement. That August, he delivered his famous "**I Have a Dream**" speech to more than 200,000 people gathered on the National Mall in Washington. *"...I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up... live out the true meaning of its creed. We hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal..."*

Dr. King was assassinated by a gunman on April, 4, 1968, in Memphis, Tennessee.