

# Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Born: January 15, 1929 in Atlanta, GA

Assassinated: April 4, 1968 in Memphis, TN

1955 Earned Ph.D.

1963 Time Magazine "Man of the Year"

1964 Nobel Peace Prize

November 2, 1983, Bill that made MLK Day National Holiday

January 20, 1986, First Celebration of MLK Holiday

# MLK Timeline

Key dates in the life of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.:

- 1929** January 15. Michael Luther King Jr., later renamed Martin, born to schoolteacher Alberta King and Baptist minister Michael Luther King. Boyhood in Sweet Auburn district.
- 1948** King graduates from Morehouse College in Atlanta, Ga., with a B.A.
- 1951** Graduates with a B.D. from Crozer Theological Seminary in Chester, Pa.
- 1953** June 18. King marries Coretta Scott in Marion, Ala.. They will have four children: Yolanda Denise (b.1955), Martin Luther King III (b.1957), Dexter (b.1961), Bernice Albertine (b.1963).
- 1954** September. King moves to Montgomery, Ala., to preach at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church.
- 1955** After coursework at New England colleges, King finishes his Ph.D. in systematic theology.
- 1956** January 26. King is arrested for driving 30 mph in a 25 mph zone.  
January 30. King's house bombed.
- 1957** January. Black ministers form what became known as the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. King is named first president one month later.  
In this typical year of demonstrations, King traveled 780,000 miles and made 208 speeches.
- 1958** King's first book published, "Stride Toward Freedom" (Harper), his recollections of the Montgomery bus boycott. While King is promoting his book in a Harlem book store, an African American woman stabs him.

- 1959** King visits India. He had a lifelong admiration for Mohandas K. Gandhi, and credited Gandhi's passive resistance techniques for his civil-rights successes.
- 1960** King leaves for Atlanta to pastor his father's church, Ebenezer Baptist Church.
- 1962** King meets with President John F. Kennedy to urge support for civil rights.
- King leads protests in Birmingham for desegregated department store facilities, and fair hiring. April. Arrested after demonstrating in defiance of a court order, King writes "Letter From Birmingham Jail." This eloquent letter, later widely circulated, became a classic of the civil-rights movement.
- 1963** August 28. 250,000 civil-rights supporters attended the March on Washington. At the Lincoln Memorial, King delivers the famous "I have a dream" speech.
- King's book "Why We Can't Wait" published.
- 1964** King visits with West Berlin Mayor Willy Brandt and Pope Paul VI. December 10. King wins Nobel Peace Prize.
- January 18. King successfully registers to vote at the Hotel Albert in Selma, Ala. and is assaulted by James George Robinson of Birmingham.
- 1965** February. King continues to protest discrimination in voter registration, is arrested and jailed. Meets with President Lyndon B. Johnson Feb. 9 and other American leaders about voting rights for African Americans. March 16-21. King and 3,200 people march from Selma to Montgomery.
- 1968** April 4. King is assassinated in Memphis, Tenn., by James Earl Ray.
- 1986** January 20 is the first national celebration of King's birthday as a holiday

Timeline from: <http://seattletimes.nwsourc.com/mlk/man/MLKtimeline.html> Accessed 1/16/2002

# I Have a Dream

## Address at March on Washington

August 28, 1963. Washington, D.C.

“I am happy to join with you today in what will go down in history as the greatest demonstration for freedom in the history of our nation. [Applause] Five score years ago, a great American, in whose symbolic shadow we stand signed the Emancipation Proclamation. This momentous decree came as a great beacon light of hope to millions of Negro slaves who had been seared in the flames of withering injustice. It came as a joyous daybreak to end the long night of captivity.

But one hundred years later, we must face the tragic fact that the Negro is still not free. One hundred years later, the life of the Negro is still sadly crippled by the manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination. One hundred years later, the Negro lives on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity. One hundred years later, the Negro is still languishing in the corners of American society and finds himself an exile in his own land. So we have come here today to dramatize an appalling condition.

In a sense we have come to our nation's capital to cash a check. When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir. This note was a promise that all men would be guaranteed the inalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

It is obvious today that America has defaulted on this promissory note insofar as her citizens of color are concerned. Instead of honoring this sacred obligation, America has given the Negro people a bad check which has come back marked "insufficient funds." But we refuse to believe that the bank of justice is bankrupt. We refuse to believe that there are insufficient funds in the great vaults of opportunity of this nation. So we have come to cash this check -- a check that will give us upon demand the riches of freedom and the security of justice. We have also come to this hallowed spot to remind America of the fierce urgency of now. This is no time to engage in the luxury of cooling off or to take the tranquilizing drug of gradualism. Now is the time to rise from the dark and desolate valley of segregation to the sunlit path of racial justice. Now is the time to open the doors of opportunity to all of God's children. Now is the time to lift our nation from the quicksands of racial injustice to the solid rock of brotherhood.

It would be fatal for the nation to overlook the urgency of the moment and to underestimate the determination of the Negro. This sweltering summer of the Negro's legitimate discontent will not pass until there is an invigorating autumn of freedom and equality. Nineteen sixty-three is not an end, but a beginning. Those who hope that the Negro needed to blow off steam and will now be content will have a rude awakening if the nation returns to business as usual. There will be neither rest nor tranquility in America until the Negro is granted his citizenship rights. The whirlwinds of revolt will continue to shake the foundations of our nation until the bright day of justice emerges.

But there is something that I must say to my people who stand on the warm threshold which leads into the palace of justice. In the process of gaining our rightful place we must not be guilty of wrongful deeds. Let us not seek to satisfy our thirst for freedom by drinking from the cup of bitterness and hatred.

We must forever conduct our struggle on the high plane of dignity and discipline. We must not allow our creative protest to degenerate into physical violence. Again and again we must rise to the majestic heights of meeting physical force with soul force. The marvelous new militancy which has engulfed the Negro community must not lead us to distrust of all white people, for many of our white brothers, as evidenced by their presence here today, have come to realize that their destiny is tied up with our destiny and their freedom is inextricably bound to our freedom. We cannot walk alone.

And as we walk, we must make the pledge that we shall march ahead. We cannot turn back. There are those who are asking the devotees of civil rights, "When will you be satisfied?" We can never be satisfied as long as our bodies, heavy with the fatigue of travel, cannot gain lodging in the motels of the highways and the hotels of the cities. We cannot be satisfied as long as the Negro's basic mobility is from a smaller ghetto to a larger one. We can never be satisfied as long as a Negro in Mississippi cannot vote and a Negro in New York believes he has nothing for which to vote. No, no, we are not satisfied, and we will not be satisfied until justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream.

I am not unmindful that some of you have come here out of great trials and tribulations. Some of you have come fresh from narrow cells. Some of you have come from areas where your quest for freedom left you battered by the storms of persecution and staggered by the winds of police brutality. You have been the veterans of creative suffering. Continue to work with the faith that unearned suffering is redemptive.

Go back to Mississippi, go back to Alabama, go back to Georgia, go back to Louisiana, go back to the slums and ghettos of our northern cities, knowing that somehow this situation can and will be changed. Let us not wallow in the valley of despair.

I say to you today, my friends, that in spite of the difficulties and frustrations of the moment, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream.

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."

I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at a table of brotherhood.

I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a desert state, sweltering with the heat of injustice and oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice.

I have a dream that my four 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.

I have a dream today.

I have a dream that one day the state of Alabama, whose governor's lips are presently dripping with the words of interposition and nullification, will be transformed into a situation where little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls and walk together as sisters and brothers.

I have a dream today.

I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together.

This is our hope. This is the faith with which I return to the South. With this faith we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope. With this faith we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood. With this faith we will be able to work together, to pray together, to struggle together, to go to jail together, to stand up for freedom together, knowing that we will be free one day.

This will be the day when all of God's children will be able to sing with a new meaning, "My country, 'tis of thee, sweet land of liberty, of thee I sing. Land where my fathers died, land of the pilgrim's pride, from every mountainside, let freedom ring."

And if America is to be a great nation this must become true. So let freedom ring from the prodigious hilltops of New Hampshire. Let freedom ring from the mighty mountains of New York. Let freedom ring from the heightening Alleghenies of Pennsylvania!  
Let freedom ring from the snowcapped Rockies of Colorado!  
Let freedom ring from the curvaceous peaks of California!

But not only that; let freedom ring from Stone Mountain of Georgia!

Let freedom ring from Lookout Mountain of Tennessee!

Let freedom ring from every hill and every molehill of Mississippi. From every mountainside, let freedom ring.

When we let freedom ring, when we let it ring from every village and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual, "Free at last! free at last! thank God Almighty, we are free at last!"

# Quotes

Somehow this madness must cease. We must stop now. I speak as a child of God and brother to the suffering poor of Vietnam. I speak for those whose land is being laid waste, whose homes are being destroyed, whose culture is being subverted. I speak for the poor in America who are paying the double price of smashed hopes at home and death and corruption in Vietnam. I speak as a citizen of the world, for the world as it stands aghast at the path we have taken. I speak as an American to the leaders of my own nation. The great initiative in this war is ours. The initiative to stop it must be ours.

-Martin Luther King, Jr., *The Trumpet of Conscience*, 1967.

A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death.

-Martin Luther King, Jr., *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?*, 1967.

The limitation of riots, moral questions aside, is that they cannot win and their participants know it. Hence, rioting is not revolutionary but reactionary because it invites defeat. It involves an emotional catharsis, but it must be followed by a sense of futility.

-Martin Luther King, Jr., *The Trumpet of Conscience*, 1967.

Nonviolence is the answer to the crucial political and moral questions of our time: the need for man to overcome oppression and violence without resorting to oppression and violence. Man must evolve for all human conflict a method which rejects revenge, aggression and retaliation. The foundation such a method is love.

-Martin Luther King, Jr., Nobel Prize acceptance speech, Stockholm, Sweden, December 11, 1964.

Man was born into barbarism when killing his fellow man was a normal condition of existence. He became endowed with a conscience. And he has now reached the day when violence toward another human being must become as abhorrent as eating another's flesh.

-Martin Luther King, Jr., *Why We Can't Wait*, 1963.

The curse of poverty has no justification in our age. It is socially as cruel and blind as the practice of cannibalism at the dawn of civilization, when men ate each other because they had not yet learned to take food from the soil or to consume the abundant animal life around them. The time has come for us to civilize ourselves by the total, direct and immediate abolition of poverty.

-Martin Luther King, Jr., *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?*, 1967.

[I]t is necessary to understand that Black Power is a cry of disappointment. The Black Power slogan did not spring full grown from the head of some philosophical Zeus. It was born from the wounds of despair and disappointment. It is a cry of daily hurt and persistent pain.

-Martin Luther King, Jr., *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?*, 1967.

Discrimination is a hellhound that gnaws at Negroes in every waking moment of their lives to remind them that the lie of their inferiority is accepted as truth in the society dominating them.

-Martin Luther King, Jr., speech, Southern Christian Leadership Conference, Atlanta, Georgia, August 16, 1967.

When we ask Negroes to abide by the law, let us also declare that the white man does not abide by law in the ghettos. Day in and day out he violates welfare laws to deprive the poor of their meager allotments; he flagrantly violates building codes and regulations; his police make a mockery of law; he violates laws on equal employment and education and the provisions of civil services. The slums are the handiwork of a vicious system of the white society; Negroes live in them, but they do not make them, any more than a prisoner makes a prison.

-Martin Luther King, Jr., *The Trumpet of Conscience*, 1967.

It may be true that the law cannot make a man love me, but it can keep him from lynching me, and I think that's pretty important.

-Martin Luther King, Jr., *Wall Street Journal*, November 13, 1962.

Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that. Hate multiplies hate, violence multiplies violence, and toughness multiplies toughness in a descending spiral of destruction....The chain reaction of evil--hate begetting hate, wars producing more wars--must be broken, or we shall be plunged into the dark abyss of annihilation.

-Martin Luther King, Jr., *Strength To Love*, 1963.

Success, recognition, and conformity are the bywords of the modern world where everyone seems to crave the anesthetizing security of being identified with the majority.

-Martin Luther King, Jr., *Strength to Love*, 1963.

Like an unchecked cancer, hate corrodes the personality and eats away its vital unity. Hate destroys a man's sense of values and his objectivity. It causes him to describe the beautiful as ugly and the ugly as beautiful, and to confuse the true with the false and the false with the true.

-Martin Luther King, Jr., *Strength To Love*, 1963.

Human salvation lies in the hands of the creatively maladjusted.

-Martin Luther King, Jr., *Strength to Love*, 1963.

I am aware that there are many who wince at a distinction between property and persons--who hold both sacrosanct. My views are not so rigid. A life is sacred. Property is intended to serve life, and no matter how much we surround it with rights and respect, it has no personal being. It is part of the earth man walks on; it is not man.

-Martin Luther King, Jr., *The Trumpet of Conscience*, 1967.

The bombs in Vietnam explode at home; they destroy the hopes and possibilities for a decent America.

-Martin Luther King, Jr., *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?*, 1967.

We must combine the toughness of the serpent and the softness of the dove, a tough mind and a tender heart.

-Martin Luther King, Jr., *Strength to Love*, 1963.

The church must be reminded that it is not the master or the servant of the state, but rather the conscience of the state. It must be the guide and the critic of the state, and never its tool. If the church does not recapture its prophetic zeal, it will become an irrelevant social club without moral or spiritual authority.

-Martin Luther King, Jr., *Strength to Love*, 1963.

Power at its best is love implementing the demands of justice. Justice at its best is love correcting everything that stands against love.

-Martin Luther King, Jr., *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?*, 1967.

The Negroes of America had taken the President, the press and the pulpit at their word when they spoke in broad terms of freedom and justice. But the absence of brutality and unregenerate evil is not the presence of justice. To stay murder is not the same thing as to ordain brotherhood.

-Martin Luther King, Jr., *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?*, 1967.

Many of the ugly pages of American history have been obscured and forgotten....America owes a debt of justice which it has only begun to pay. If it loses the will to finish or slackens in its determination, history will recall its crimes and the country that would be great will lack the most indispensable element of greatness--justice.

-Martin Luther King, Jr., *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?*, 1967.

Man is man because he is free to operate within the framework of his destiny. He is free to deliberate, to make decisions, and to choose between alternatives. He is distinguished from animals by his freedom to do evil or to do good and to walk the high road of beauty or tread the low road of ugly degeneracy.

-Martin Luther King, Jr., *The Measures of Man*, 1959.

A good many observers have remarked that if equality could come at once the Negro would not be ready for it. I submit that the white American is even more unprepared.

-Martin Luther King, Jr., *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?*, 1967.

Nonviolent action, the Negro saw, was the way to supplement, not replace, the progress of change. It was the way to divest himself of passivity without arraying himself in vindictive force.

-Martin Luther King, Jr., *Why We Can't Wait*, 1964.

If a man hasn't discovered something that he will die for, he isn't fit to live.

-Martin Luther King, Jr., speech, Detroit, Michigan, June 23, 1963.

To be a Negro in America is to hope against hope.

-Martin Luther King, Jr., *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?*, 1967.

Being a Negro in America means trying to smile when you want to cry. It means trying to hold on to physical life amid psychological death. It means the pain of watching your children grow up with clouds of inferiority in their mental skies. It means having your legs cut off, and then being condemned for being a cripple. It means seeing your mother and father spiritually murdered by the slings and arrows of daily exploitation, and then being hated for being an orphan.

-Martin Luther King, Jr., *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?*, 1967



"Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that."

- Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.