

**February is Black History Month**



# Black History Month Essay Competition 2011 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.

## PRESIDENT OBAMA'S PROCLAMATION ON MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. HOLIDAY



"Half a century ago, America was moved by a young preacher who called a generation to action and forever changed the course of history. The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. devoted his life to the struggle for justice and equality, sowing seeds of hope for a day when all people might claim "the riches of freedom and the security of justice." On Martin Luther King, Jr., Federal Holiday, we commemorate the 25th anniversary of the holiday recognizing one of America's greatest visionary leaders, and we celebrate the life and legacy of Dr. King.

Dr. King guided us toward a mountaintop on which all Americans -- regardless of skin color -- could live together in mutual respect and brotherhood. His bold leadership and prophetic eloquence united people of all backgrounds in a noble quest for freedom and basic civil rights. Inspired by Dr. King's legacy, brave souls have marched fearlessly, organized relentlessly, and devoted their lives to the unending task of perfecting our Union. Their courage and dedication have carried us even closer to the promised land Dr. King envisioned, but we must recognize their achievements as milestones on the long path to true equal opportunity and equal rights.

We must face the challenges of today with the same strength, persistence, and determination exhibited by Dr. King, guided by the enduring values of hope and justice embodied by other civil rights leaders. As a country, we must expand access to opportunity and end structural inequalities for all people in employment and economic mobility. It is our collective responsibility as a great Nation to ensure a strong foundation that supports economic security for all and extends the founding promise of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness to every American. Dr. King devoted his life to serving others, reminding us that "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." Commemorating Dr. King's life is not only a tribute to his contributions to our Nation and the world, but also a reminder that every day, each of us can play a part in continuing this critical work. **The White House**, January 14, 2011

<http://www.whitehouse.gov>



## THE LIFE AND LEGACY OF 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 17, 2011, 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..."*

### Civil Rights Victories

In 1964, President Lyndon Johnson signed the historic Civil Rights Act, which banned discrimination in employment, public accommodations and other aspects of life. King attended the signing of the act into federal law (pictured). He continued to press for a law to ensure that blacks could not be denied the right to vote by discriminatory practices such as literacy tests, and in 1965, Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act. King received the Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts in 1964, which he accepted on behalf of everyone who was part of the civil rights movement.

### In the Wake of Assassination

On April 4, 1968, King was assassinated on the balcony outside his Memphis, Tennessee, hotel room. At his funeral, thousands of mourners marched through Atlanta behind a mule-drawn wagon bearing his coffin. In a posthumously published essay titled "A Testament of Hope," King urged black Americans to continue their commitment to nonviolence, but also cautioned that "justice for black people cannot be achieved without radical changes in the structure of our society." Numerous organizations and individuals have taken up the mantle of nonviolent change and carried King's legacy forward in the United States and around the world.

### King's Legacy: Nonviolent Protest

In a 1959 radio address during his visit to India, King said: "Today we no longer have a choice between violence and nonviolence; it is either nonviolence, or non-existence." His philosophy was inspired by Gandhi's nonviolent action to end British rule in India. In turn, King has inspired countless others to change their societies through nonviolent means, from the Solidarity movement's cracking of Soviet occupation in Poland, to Nelson Mandela's struggle to end apartheid in South Africa.

### King's Legacy: Fighting Prejudice

During the 1963 March on Washington, King declared that all people should be judged "not by the color of their skin, but the content of their character." The King Center in Atlanta is a living memorial to King's vision of a free and equal world dedicated to expanding opportunity, fighting racism and ending all forms of discrimination.

### King's Legacy: Pursuing Social Justice

The Martin Luther King Jr. Research and Education Institute at Stanford University is home to the King Papers Project, a comprehensive collection of all of King's speeches, correspondence and other writings to preserve his lifelong commitment to building the "beloved community" for future generations. The institute is also involved with the Liberation Curriculum Initiative and the Gandhi-King Community, both of which use King's life and ideas to connect social activists around the world working to promote human rights and justice through nonviolent means.

### King's Legacy: Service to Others

Martin Luther King Day has been designated a national day of service since 1994; Americans are urged to celebrate "a day on, not a day off" in honor of King's commitment to improving the lives of others. President Obama has promoted service and volunteerism as a critical way to help meet the challenges facing our world in the 21st century.

[http://www.america.gov/multimedia/photo-gallery.html#/30145/mlk\\_legacy/](http://www.america.gov/multimedia/photo-gallery.html#/30145/mlk_legacy/)





## MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. NATIONAL MEMORIAL – 2011

### Keeping the Dream Alive

A national memorial to King is tentatively scheduled to be dedicated in August 2011 on the National Mall in Washington. Built near the Lincoln Memorial, where King delivered his "I Have a Dream" speech in 1963, the MLK Memorial will invite thousands of visitors to reflect on the life and legacy of King for years to come.

### History

On September 28, 1996 the U.S. House of Representatives passed Joint Resolution 70 authorizing Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. to establish a memorial in Washington, DC to honor Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The Senate followed by passing Joint Resolution 426 on October 3, 1996, and on July 16, 1998, President Clinton signed a Joint Congressional Resolution authorizing the building of a memorial.

### Location

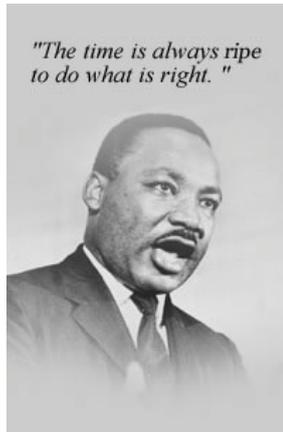
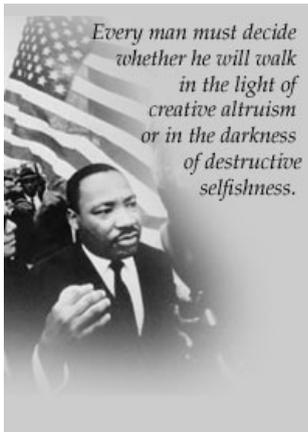
Situated on a four-acre site along the Tidal Basin, the Washington, DC Martin Luther King, Jr. National Memorial will be adjacent to the Franklin D. Roosevelt Memorial and on a direct line between the Lincoln and Jefferson Memorials.

### Design

In December 1999, the Foundation formed an international panel of architects and designers to develop and coordinate the program of requirements for the Memorial. The design competition attracted more than 1,900 registrants and over 900 submissions were received from architects, landscape architects, students, sculptors, and professors representing 52 countries around the world. In September 2000, Entry #1403 by ROMA Design Group of San Francisco was selected as the winning design. Then in 2006, Master Sculptor Lei Yixin was named Sculptor of Record. The sculptor is charged with the task of capturing not only the likeness of Dr. King, but his essence and spirit as well. Finally, the McKissack & McKissack / Turner Construction / Tompkins Builders / Gilford Corporation Design-Build Joint Venture was selected as the contractor for the project in 2007.

### Vision

The Memorial will evoke the memory and spiritual presence of Dr. King. It will honor not only a great man, but the values that empowered his leadership, including courage and truth, unconditional love and forgiveness, justice and equality, reconciliation and peace. <http://www.mlkmemorial.org>



## FURTHER WEB RESOURCES

Video of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" Speech, Aug. 28, 1963

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PbUtl\\_0vAJk](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PbUtl_0vAJk)

Martin Luther King Jr. Day

<http://www.MLKDay.gov>

Martin Luther King Jr. Center | Atlanta

<http://www.thekingcenter.org>

Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial | District of Columbia

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

Take the virtual tour of the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial

[http://www.mlkmemorial.org/site/c.hkIUL9MVJxE/b.6021495/k.7E74/Virtual\\_Tour\\_Flyover.htm](http://www.mlkmemorial.org/site/c.hkIUL9MVJxE/b.6021495/k.7E74/Virtual_Tour_Flyover.htm)

Americans Urged to Do Volunteer Work on Martin Luther King Day

<http://www.usaservice.org>

