

Honoring King



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The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King addresses a group of followers.

Americans pay tribute to a leader's legacy.

For many Americans, Martin Luther King Jr. Day isn't just a "day off" from school or work. They will make it a "day on" and participate in community service projects in honor of Martin Luther King Jr. Day.

A Great Leader

King (1929-1968) was a famous **civil rights**¹ leader. When King was growing up, the South was **segregated**,² or separated by race.

Black people did not have the same rights as white people. Under the law, they were not allowed to attend the same schools as white people and had to sit in the back seats of buses. Black people also had to use separate restrooms and drinking fountains.

When King was older, he worked to change those unjust laws. During the 1950s and 1960s, he gave speeches and organized peaceful marches and protests. Beginning in 1955, King led the famous Montgomery bus boycott. For 381 days, African Americans **boycotted**,³ or refused to use, public buses in the Alabama city. A year later, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that segregation on buses was illegal.

King gained national attention from the boycott and, in 1963, delivered his famous "I Have a Dream" speech. He told a crowd of more than 200,000 people in Washington, D.C., that his dream was for all people to be treated fairly and equally under the law. As a result of his work, civil rights laws were passed. Those laws protect the rights of all Americans.

¹ **civil rights:** entitlement of citizens to be treated equally and fairly by law

² **segregated:** kept apart from other groups

³ **boycott:** protest by not using the services of a particular company or business

A Day of Service

Many people celebrate King's **legacy**⁴ on Martin Luther King Jr. Day with parades and other events. The legacy of a leader is something he or she has accomplished that would benefit future generations. For King, that meant making the world a better place. Thousands more honor King by cleaning parks, volunteering at homeless shelters, and participating in other community service projects.

"Everybody can be great because everybody can serve," King once said. By taking part in community service projects, Americans are able to keep this leader's dream alive.

A Civil Rights Hero: Martin Luther King Jr.	
January 15, 1929:	Born in Atlanta, Georgia
August 28, 1963:	Delivers his "I Have a Dream" speech in Washington, D.C.
December 10, 1964:	Becomes the youngest person to receive the Nobel Peace Prize
April 4, 1968:	Is assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee
January 20, 1986:	Martin Luther King Jr. Day first observed as a national holiday

⁴ **legacy**: something valuable left by a person when he or she dies