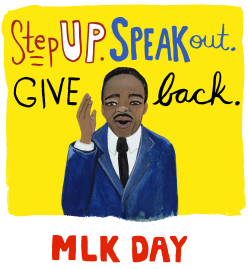
Freedom's Feast MLK DAY

On-line ceremonies to get the most out of your AMERICAN holiday celebrations.

★ THE CHILDREN MARCH! ★



Leader: We celebrate **Martin Luther King, Jr.**'s birthday because of what Dr. King did with his life and what he did for our country.

Reader: Slavery was outlawed in 1863, but many new laws made life hard for African Americans – especially in the south where Dr. King grew up. Segregation kept blacks and whites apart in public.

Reader: **Segregation** meant that a black person couldn't use the same water fountain, library, lunch counter, bus seat, hotel room or public pool as a white person. Black children couldn't go to the same schools as white children. Black men and women couldn't register to vote or dream of having the same jobs as white men and women.

Reader: Dr. King knew this wasn't right or just. As the son and grandson of preachers, he knew that our religions didn't teach this behavior. He believed America was ready for a change but he knew change wouldn't be easy.

Reader: He used his beautiful voice to share bold ideas. He gave ordinary people the courage to join non-violent protest marches and boycotts. He and others also used civil disobedience: without hurting anybody or anything they would break a law to show it was unjust knowing that they might be arrested.

Reader: People who wanted to keep things the way that they were would do the opposite. They violently broke or ignored the laws they were supposed to obey. They didn't think about television, one of the biggest changes since 1863. The rest of the country was watching.

Reader: The people who marched and boycotted for their **civil rights** were trained not to respond with violence or hatred no matter what happened.

ALL: *"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.

Reader: Dr. King hoped that adults would join him and thousands upon thousands of them did even though it was very dangerous and hard to do. Still they did not give up. Like the protesters he led, Dr. King wanted to change the world for himself and his children.

ALL: "**I have a dream** 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…"

Leader: But what Dr. King and adults did not fully appreciate is how much children wanted to change the world for themselves.

Reader: Children began to make a difference too.

Reader: *In 1951,* 16 year old **Barbara Johns** no longer wanted to go to school in a tar paper shack. She convinced NAACP lawyers to represent her and joined nearly 200 other children and their families for the 1954 **Brown vs Board of Education** Supreme Court decision that ordered the integration of our nation's public schools.

Martin Luther King's achievements by age 39:

He earned his doctorate,wrote 6 books, was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, was arrested 30 times for civil disobedience and received 20 honorary degrees.

Segregation: policy that kept whites and blacks apart from each other and provided separate facilities and services for each. "Separate but equal" was really separate and less than equal.

Civil rights: the rights and protections given to all citizens that are guaranteed by law.

August 28, 1963 March on Washington: 250,000 gather on the National Mall to hear Dr. King's "I Have a Dream" speech

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Reader: Nine brave black high school students became the 1957 "Little Rock Nine" in Arkansas. They attended Central High school for a whole year even when state police and vicious crowds tried to keep them away.

Reader: In 1960, 6 year old **Ruby Bridges** was the only student in her class all year long. Federal marshals escorted her each day so that she could help begin the integration of the New Orleans public school system.

Reader: Thousands more children began to get the attention of the nation in ways that no one had expected.

Reader: Young college students and youth staged lunch counter **sit-ins** throughout the south beginning in February, 1960. They refused to wait any longer for the basic right to sit at a restaurant counter and eat.

Reader: In 1961, the **Freedom Riders**, a group of young black and white protesters determined to integrate public transportation throughout the South began their difficult work.

ALL: *"If not us, then who? If not now, then when? Will there be a better day for it tomorrow or next year? Will it be less dangerous then? Will someone else's children have to risk their lives instead of us risking ours?"* JOHN LEWIS, ORIGINAL FREEDOM RIDER, FUTURE US CONGRESSMAN

Reader: Over 1900 black children ages 8-18 joined the non-violent **Birmingham**, Alabama protests and were arrested and put in jail in May of 1963. Eugene "Bull" Connor, the city Commissioner of Public Safety, told his armed men to turn their attack dogs and fire hoses on them. Broadcasts of the attacks on national television horrified the entire nation.

Reader: **Four school girls** lost their lives in a church bombing in the city 18 days later. Citizens were stunned. We might treat our adult citizens badly but we did not see ourselves as a nation that hurt our children.

Reader: On July 2 1964, a little more than 100 years after the Emancipation Proclamation, the federal **Civil Rights Act** passed. Businesses and public facilities were now open to African Americans. Black people could begin to dream of any job.

Reader: In March, 1965 children marching for the right to vote were part of another violent attack by armed state troopers on horseback in Selma, Alabama. Americans everywhere saw **"Bloody Sunday"** on their living room television sets.

Reader: Two weeks later, **President Johnson** asked congress in a televised address seen by 70 million Americans to pass the **Voting Rights Act**. He signed it on August 6, 1965.

ALL: *"It is wrong—deadly wrong—to deny any of your fellow Americans the right to vote in this country."* PRESIDENT LYNDON B. JOHNSON

Reader: It is also wrong to think that children can't change the course of history. One marcher from Birmingham recalls "Bull" Connor spitting on him, but he also treasures this lesson:

ALL: *"We learned that America…cares deeply about its children.…The nation's conscience was stirred, and people of all colors came to see this struggle not simply as a racial conflict, but… as a question of American justice."* FREEMAN A. HRABOWSKI III CURRENT PRESIDENT OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND, BALTIMORE COUNTY, 12 YEAR OLD BIRMINGHAM PROTESTOR

Reader: Dr. King taught us many things. He taught us to speak up and to act when we see something that is unjust. He believed in the great promise of The United States and wanted us to believe in it too.

It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men.
FREDERICK DOUGLASS
19TH C. AFRICAN AMERICAN ORATOR & ABOLITIONIST

"Little Rock Nine"
September 4, 1957
Students first attempt to integrate Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas.

The new way for Americans to stand up for their rights is to sit down
JOHN FITZGERALD KENNEDY
35TH US PRESIDENT

Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.
DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.
1929–1968

…people were running and falling and ducking and you could hear the whips swishing and you'd hear them striking people. I tried to run home as fast as I could.
NINE YEAR OLD SHEYANN WEBB, FROM PETTUS BRIDGE ATTACK IN SELMA

DR. FREEMAN HRABOWSKI III

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There's not an American in this country free until every one of us is free.

JACKIE ROBINSON, 1ST MAJOR LEAGUE AFRICAN AMERICAN BASEBALL PLAYER 1919–1972

It is not the style of clothes one wears, neither the kind of automobile one drives, nor the amount of money one has in the bank, that counts.These mean nothing. It is simply service that measures success.

DR. GEORGE WASHINGTON CARVER, AFRICAN AMERICAN EDUCATOR, SCIENTIST, INVENTOR1864?–1943

SING:

We Shall Overcome

We shall overcome
We shall overcome
We shall overcome
some day.

Chorus:Oh deep in my heart I do believe
We shall overcome some day.

We'll walk hand in hand…
We shall all be free…
We are not afraid…
We are not alone…
The whole wide world around…
We shall overcome…

WE SHALL OVERCOME

Stories about this song which became the movement anthem suggest that the original lyrics came from Reverend Charles Tindley's gospel song "I'll Overcome Someday" while some of the melody came from a pre-civil war spiritual "No More Auction Block for Me." The song was taught at the Highlander Folk School where early civil rights activists often went for training. Pete Seeger learned "We Shall Overcome" from an activist there and taught it to other folk singers including Joan Baez. Both performed and popularized it at their concerts.

Leader: *(choose to include next two entries or skip to "Over a generation ago,")*: Many of us were born after 1965. We don't all share memories of the world that Martin Luther King Jr. fought to change. That world no longer exists but we have other problems that make America a less than just place for all. (Ask each person to name a problem we struggle with or use the following list):

Reader: **Poverty, continuing prejudice, homelessness, hunger, poor health care and a lack of education** put "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" beyond the reach of too many of our citizens.

Leader: Over a generation ago, many Americans knew that something was deeply wrong with our nation. They were ordinary citizens just like us. Adults and children. They knew that if they didn't fix the problem of segregation it would be their shameful legacy.

Reader: In their honor and in memory of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. we, too, should fix things that are wrong. We too can serve. There is much to be done but Americans have always been ready and willing to help.

ALL: *"Everybody can be great because everybody can serve."* *(Quote from Dr. King's sermon* **"The Drum Major Instinct"**)

Sources

The Children, David Halberstam, A Fawcett Book published by the Ballentine Publishing Group, 1998

Freedom, A History of US, Joy Hakim, Oxford University Press, 2003

At Canaan's Edge, Taylor Branch, Simon and Schuster, 2006

Layne Cecil. *Little Rock Nine and Daisy Bates Posed in Living Room*. 1957. Miscellaneous Items in High Demand Collection. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, DC, 20540.

What injustice do you see in your community?

How can your service make a difference?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR OBSERVING MLK DAY

"Table Talk" for MLK day: Discuss simple questions with images from the civil rights era to help share stories and dreams.

"Everybody Can Be Great Because Everybody Can Serve:" Explore how service can be part of your MLK Day observance and year round experience.

"Make a Service Medallion:" Create keepsakes to express your service passions. Share your creations on **Facebook**.
Explore More: Discover a range of resources to expand learning and action.

Enjoy a meaning and memorable Martin Luther King Jr. Day Celebration. Please visit us again for Presidents' Day at **www.freedomsfeast.us**!

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