

Martin Luther King Jr. Day

1 Martin Luther King Jr. Day is a U.S. **holiday** that celebrates the
2 birthday of one of America's greatest civil rights leaders. Dr. King's
3 date of birth is January 15th, but the **actual** holiday is on the third
4 Monday in January. The holiday **recognizes** the great **achievements**
5 Martin Luther King made to American society.

6 His **leadership** in the **campaign** to achieve equal rights for **black**
7 **Americans** changed America forever. His focus on **non-violent**
8 **strategies** such as **boycotts** (large number of people refusing to buy
9 certain service or products), **sit-ins** (groups of people sitting peacefully
10 at lunch counters or in restaurants that refused to serve them),
11 **freedom rides** (**busloads** of **northern liberals** coming to the South to
12 force **integration** of public **facilities**), and **protest marches** (large
13 groups of people walking in the streets carrying **signs** that states their
14 goals), led to new laws that ended **racial discrimination** in America.
15 In many of these activities black Americans were joined by **white**
16 **Americans**. Combined, these powerful campaigns were known as **The**
17 **Civil Rights Movement**, and helped to make the USA become a more
18 **equal society**.

19 The holiday is only one of four national holidays in America to
20 **commemorate** a person. This shows just how important Martin Luther
21 King was – one of the greatest Americans ever. Dr. King was
22 **assassinated** in 1968, in Memphis Tennessee, while preparing to lead
23 a protest march. In 1983, then President Ronald Reagan **signed** this
24 holiday into U.S. law.

25 People first **observed** the holiday three years later, in 1986. At first,
26 the holiday was not **popular** with all American states. Some didn't like
27 the name and so they called it "Civil Rights Day". However, in the year 2000, all 50 states
28 observed the holiday using its correct name. The musician and singer Stevie Wonder helped
29 the campaign for the holiday. He wrote and recorded a song called "Happy Birthday" in 1980.
30 The song made millions of Americans **aware** of the campaign. **Six million** people signed a
31 **petition** for the American **Congress** to create the holiday. It is still the largest petition in U.S.
32 history in favor of an issue.

33 Martin Luther King Jr. is also **honored** in other ways. More than 730 American cities have
34 streets named after him. There is a **memorial** to him on the National Mall in Washington,
35 DC, where some U.S. presidents are honored. The King memorial, which opened in August
36 2011, has a 30-foot statue of him. **Quotations** from some of his speeches are **carved** into
37 the stone wall **anchoring** the statue.

Extra Facts

- King was born on January 15, 1929, in Atlanta, Georgia.
- He entered college when he was 15 years old.
- At 24 years old, he became the minister of Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama.
- For 382 days he led the Montgomery Bus Boycott.
- Dr. King believed in nonviolent civil disobedience.
- In 1963, during the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, he gave his famous "*I Have a Dream*" speech in front of the Lincoln Memorial.
- His dream was equality and civil rights for all Americans.
- In 1964, he won the Nobel Peace Prize.
- King was shot and killed by James Earl Ray in Memphis, Tennessee, on April 4, 1968.
- About 300,000 people attended his funeral.
- Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. is buried at the King Center, in Atlanta, GA. His wife Coretta Scott King is buried with him.