



Freedom's Feast MLK DAY

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

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.

Jim Crow: name for laws that made segregation legal

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.

Lynching; execution without a trial in order to punish or intimidate others.

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

Ability is of little account without opportunity.

LUCILLE BALL, 20TH C COMEDIENNE, TV PRODUCER 1911-1989

Where there is no struggle, there is no strength.

OPRAH WINFREY, AFRICAN AMERICAN PRODUCER, ACTRESS, ENTREPRENEUR

Leader: When we pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, we agree to be part of this republic and all the things for which it stands. We are members of one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

Reader: In 1954 when we added the words "under God" to the pledge, the United States was not a just place for all. One young man named Martin Luther King, Jr. emerged to speak about the injustices that African Americans experienced every day. He was a gifted, third generation preacher with a magnificent voice who used the words of our founding fathers and Old Testament prophets in new ways.

ALL: "We will not be satisfied until justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream." "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.'"

Reader: He learned lessons from other great leaders like **Mahatma Gandhi** and taught that the best way to defeat violence and hate was with non-violence and love.

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

Reader: **Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.** didn't live a long life but he believed that each day matters when we have big dreams. Only 39 when he was killed, the civil rights movement that he led for 13 years transformed our nation.

Reader: Dr. King and others gave their lives so that black people living in America would have the same rights as whites. Black Codes, **Jim Crow**, poll taxes and other laws that had been used for centuries to open doors for whites and close them for blacks. Legalized segregation barred African Americans from many public places, jobs, and opportunities.

Reader: Some Americans thought whites were better than blacks and did not want the two races to mix anywhere. In 1955 **Emmett Till**, a 14 year old teenager from Chicago, was brutally lynched by two white men in Mississippi just because he talked to and whistled at the wife of one of the men. His mother chose an open casket funeral, explaining: "The murder of my son has shown me that what happens to any of us, anywhere in the world, had better be the business of us all."

Reader: Change can be violent and dangerous. **Civil rights protestors** lost their jobs, got evicted, had their houses burned down. Others were murdered. Laws were used to prevent peaceful demonstrations. Some thought Dr. King and his supporters should not push so hard for change. While in jail in April, 1963 for breaking a law he believed was unjust, Dr. King wrote:

Reader: "We have waited for more than 340 years for our constitutional and God given rights...Perhaps it is easy for those who have never felt the stinging darts of segregation to say, "Wait." But when you have seen vicious mobs lynch your mothers and fathers at will and...you seek to explain to your six year old daughter why she can't go to the public amusement park that has just been advertised on television, and see tears welling up in her eyes when she is told that Funtown is closed to colored children,...when you are forever fighting a degenerating sense of "nobodiness"—then you will understand why we find it difficult to wait...."

(Excerpts from "Letter from Birmingham Jail")

Reader: Others also found it hard to wait. **Rosa Parks** decided one day in **1955** that she no longer wanted to sit at the back of the bus or give up her seat to a white person. Thousands of African American men and women joined her for 381 days in a boycott of the Montgomery buses. In the end, the buses were integrated.

Reader: Brave college students and youth staged lunch counter **sit-ins** throughout the south beginning in February, **1960**. These sons and daughters of share-croppers, school teachers, preachers, and small business owners no longer wanted to wait for the right to eat at a counter like anyone else. Though white segregationists attacked and abused them they got some counters integrated.

Reader: In **1961**, the **Freedom Riders** were born. They wanted to integrate public transportation throughout the South. John Lewis, one of the young leaders said, "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?"

Reader: In Montgomery the Riders were almost murdered by a violent mob. Floyd Mann, Alabama's Commissioner of Safety, is the only reason they all lived. Mann honored the law and tried to make sure that others did too.

Reader: In **Birmingham** in **1963**, other adults who found it hard to wait for their equal rights joined Dr. King and marched on city hall in violation of a court order against parades. Eugene "Bull" Connor, the City Commissioner of Public Safety, believed that his rule was above the law. He arrested them. More adults came and he arrested them too. It became harder to find adults to demonstrate because they were worried they would lose their jobs.

Reader: Dr. James Bevel, a young civil rights minister, knew that adults were not the only ones who found it hard to wait for their rights. He recruited school children. They took non-violence workshops but no one fully expected what came next.

Reader: On May 2, Connor and his men arrested and jailed over 900 children ages 6 to 18. The next day, another 1,000 gathered and began to march. Connor turned fire hoses on them and called out police attack dogs. Blasts of water slammed children up against buildings or threw them to the ground. Three teenagers went to the hospital with dog bite wounds. The nation was horrified to see the **images** broadcast on national television.

Reader: On **August 28, 1963** over 250,000 people (instead of the 100,000 expected) gathered on the national mall for the **march on Washington**. King electrified the crowd with his dream of the future:

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..."

Reader: Not all Americans agreed. Eighteen days later, four young girls were murdered in the Sunday morning firebombing of **The Sixteenth Street Baptist Church** in Birmingham. A local Klanswoman declared: "[They] weren't children. Children are little people, little human beings and that means white people."

Reader: On **July 2, 1964**, the **Civil Rights Act** passed. Businesses and public facilities were now open to African Americans who could no longer be denied a job because of race. Many unjust laws were instantly struck down. But the beliefs and behaviors behind them were much harder to change. Prejudice is persistent.

It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men.

FREDERICK DOUGLASS
19TH C AFRICAN AMERICAN
ORATOR & ABOLITIONIST

Our mistreatment was just not right, and I was tired of it.

ROSA PARKS
CIVIL RIGHTS PROTESTOR
1913-2005

The new way for Americans to stand up for their rights is to sit down

JOHN FITZGERALD KENNEDY
35TH US PRESIDENT

You can only protect your liberties in this world by protecting the other man's freedom. You can only be free if I am free.

CLARENCE DARROW
FAMOUS CIVIL LIBERTIES
LAWYER 1857-1938

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...

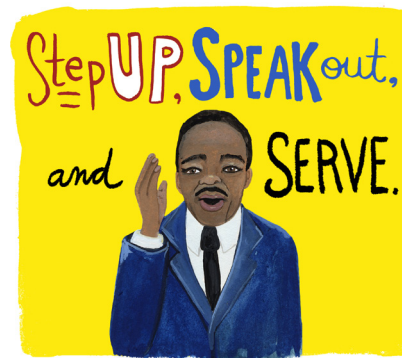
FREEMAN A. HRABOWSKI III
12 YR. OLD BIRMINGHAM
PROTESTOR & CURRENT
PRESIDENT, UNIVERSITY OF
MARYLAND, BALTIMORE COUNTY

This country will not be a permanently good place for any of us to live in unless we make it a reasonably good place for all of us to live in.

TEDDY ROOSEVELT
26TH US PRESIDENT

What role do you think television played in the civil rights movement?

How is media playing a role in other civil rights movements today?



...really it's all of us who must overcome the crippling legacy of bigotry and injustice. And—we—shall overcome.

PRESIDENT LYNDON BAINES JOHNSON, MARCH 15, 1965

...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

Is it not amazing that... in such an age and in such a country we find men professing a religion the most humane, mild, gentle and generous, adopting a principle as repugnant to humanity as it is inconsistent with the Bible, and destructive to liberty?... Would anyone believe I am the master of slaves of my own purchase! I am drawn along by the general inconvenience of living here without them. I will not, I cannot justify it... I believe a time will come when an opportunity will be offered to abolish this lamentable evil.

**PATRICK HENRY
FOUNDING FATHER, ORATOR,
POLITICIAN,
JANUARY 18, 1773**

Make your own civil rights timeline. What do you think is most important?

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ALL: It's hard to let go of what you believe in when it's all you've ever known. "Segregation now, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever!" (*George Wallace, Governor of Alabama*)

Reader: Five hundred African American children marched in Selma, Alabama in **1965** to support a federal law for their 15th amendment right to vote. When Jimmy Lee Jackson was shot to death while trying to protect his mother and grandfather during a demonstration, an integrated group of 600 men, women and children began a 54 mile march from Selma to Montgomery. State troopers met them within 6 blocks and attacked them on horseback with clubs, whips and tear gas. The "**Bloody Sunday**" attack on Edmund Pettus bridge was seen on TV by Americans everywhere.

Reader: Clergy from around the nation came to Selma at Dr. King's request. **James Reeb**, a white minister from Boston, died from a clubbing he received as he left an integrated restaurant. In a televised address seen by 70 million viewers, **President Johnson** called on Congress to pass the Voting Rights bill, "It is wrong—deadly wrong—to deny any of your fellow Americans the right to vote in this country." On **August 6, 1965** the President **signed** the **Voting Rights Act**.

Reader: Some thought Selma was the turning point in the struggle. Others thought it was the March on Washington or the Freedom Riders taking a stand in Montgomery or Rosa Parks refusing to move to the back of the bus. Maybe it was the murder of James Reeb. Or the **Brown vs. Board of Education Supreme Court Decision** that ordered the integration of our public schools. It could have been all of these things.

Reader: Or maybe it was the children who saw a past they could no longer live with and a future they would not accept. Maybe it was 16 year old **Barbara Johns** who was tired of her tar paper shack school and convinced NAACP lawyers in **1951** to take her case to the courts. Maybe it was 6 year old **Ruby Bridges**, the first student to integrate the New Orleans schools, who went to an empty classroom, escorted by federal marshals, past jeering adults, for one whole year.

Reader: It could have been all the other children, in towns and cities around the country, who had the courage to walk past adults spitting on them and kids throwing things at them—just because they wanted the same opportunity to learn that their white brothers and sisters had.

Reader: Maybe it was Emmett Till, who had grown up with too much freedom to expect less, and likely died of that expectation. Maybe it was girls being blasted with fire hoses so they could eat at a lunch counter or a boy being attacked by a police dog so he could ride on a bus in the seat of his choice. Perhaps it was the three young **CORE** workers murdered in Mississippi for trying to register voters and investigate a church bombing.

Reader: Maybe it was the Mexican-American children President Johnson taught in 1928 and remembered in 1965 when he said to Congress, "I never thought that I might have the chance to help the sons and daughters of those students and to help people like them all over this country. But now I do have that chance, and I let you in on a secret: I—mean—to—use—it." Or, was it the children who began to march 54 miles from Selma to Montgomery so that one day they could vote for President of the United States?

ALL: Maybe it was **we** who needed our children to show us who we were and who we could be.

Reader: Dr. King challenged Americans to live up to the promise of our founders' dreams. Nearly half a century ago, he stood on the mall in Washington DC and said that the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence were a "promissory note to which every American was to fall heir." He wanted every American to receive their "justice" inheritance.

Reader: While some of the injustices Dr. King fought were corrected, many remain. Prejudice still exists. Poverty, homelessness, joblessness, poor health and a lack of education put "life, liberty and the

pursuit of happiness” beyond the reach of too many of our citizens. But we can all choose to be servants in Dr. King’s “Beloved Community.”

Leader: A generation ago, many Americans knew that something was deeply wrong in our nation. Ordinary citizens like us knew that if they didn’t fix the problem of segregation it would be their shameful legacy.

Reader: They gave of themselves to make things better and did not expect their service to be easy or safe. They were willing to take big risks for the future that they wanted for themselves and for their children.

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. And Americans like to help.

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

Conclude with *We Shall Overcome*

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...*



*Injustice anywhere
is a threat to justice
everywhere.*

DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.
1929–1968

*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, INVENTOR**
1864–1943

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.

**“Little Rock Nine”
September 4, 1957**
Students first attempt to integrate Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas

Sources

A Death in the Delta: The Story of Emmett Till, Stephen J. Whitfield, The Free Press, 1988

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.freedomfeast.us!



PRESIDENTS’ DAY



MEMORIAL DAY



INDEPENDENCE DAY



LABOR DAY



THANKSGIVING