

## Honoring The Life of Martin Luther King Jr.



On Monday, January 21st, we as a nation will honor the birthday of Martin Luther King Jr., the pastor who became the spokesman for the Civil Rights Movement in the mid-1950s until his assassination in 1968.<sup>1</sup>

He was born on January 15, 1929, but the federal holiday in his name is observed each year on the third Monday of that month.

Dr. King did not set out to be the leader of the movement that is now synonymous with his name. On December 1, 1955 when Rosa Parks refused to give her seat up to a white passenger on a Montgomery, Alabama bus, King was just 26 years old.

Shortly after Parks' act of civil disobedience, King was asked by fellow Montgomery pastor E.D. Nixon if a bus boycott meeting could be held at King's Dexter Avenue Baptist Church. According the *Washington Post*, it wasn't because of King himself, but because his church was the closest to downtown.<sup>2</sup>

The meeting was not a promising start for the movement. Frustrated that it was going long with little being accomplished, one of the other pastors present whispered to King, "This is going to fizzle out. I'm going."

King, a brand new father, replied, "I would like to go, too, but it's my church."

Reporters Vern Smith and Ron Meacham write, "He took up the burden, however, and his greatness emerged. He led waves of courageous ordinary people of the

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South, from the bus boycott to the Freedom Rides."

Within ten years of that "fizzled" church meeting King had won the Nobel Peace Prize for combating racial inequality through nonviolent resistance, and saw the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Soon to follow was the Fair Housing Act of 1968, which demonstrated that racial inequality was not a problem exclusive to the South.<sup>3</sup>

Today, we cannot imagine an America without these legal protections in place. And we may wonder how some of our grandparents and great grandparents, who seemed like such decent people, could have resisted them so stubbornly. Now that we live in a nation where these problems have been remedied (legally, at least), our temptation is to see ourselves as more enlightened and in some ways superior to our ancestors.

However, it's important to remember that the next generation will most likely be able to pass a similar judgement on us. They may be able to point to some great injustice that we are either knowingly abetting because "that's the way things are" or are simply blind to.

If you don't know much about Martin Luther King Jr., it would be fitting on his holiday to take a few minutes to learn the basic facts of his life and the changes he helped bring about. You'll find out that, like all great people, he wasn't perfect. But he stepped forward when his country needed him.

Dr. King's legacy is an inspiring example of unending optimism. This Monday let's reflect on King's legacy and be thankful he was willing to sacrifice his reputation and his life to make ours a better nation.

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**Sources:**

1. <http://go.efficientadvisors.com/e/91522/wiki-Martin-Luther-King-Jr-/5s6zh3/611498880?h=L6JtV776qslFU8MedbBmX1tTUktbIVIV2WYqb7ACTDg>
  2. <http://go.efficientadvisors.com/e/91522/onqterm-mlk-legacy-legacy2-htm/5s6zh5/611498880?h=L6JtV776qslFU8MedbBmX1tTUktbIVIV2WYqb7ACTDg>
  3. <http://go.efficientadvisors.com/e/91522/wiki-Civil-rights-movement/5s6zh7/611498880?h=L6JtV776qslFU8MedbBmX1tTUktbIVIV2WYqb7ACTDg>
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