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Martin Luther King, Jr. Day Speech Resources: Fact Sheet

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Introduction

Martin Luther King, Jr. Day is a federal holiday observed annually on the third Monday in January. It celebrates the life and legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr. in honor of his birthday and achievements, and was established “to be a time for Americans to reflect on the principles of racial equality and nonviolent social change espoused by Martin Luther King, Jr.” (P.L. 98-399). The day is also referred to as the Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday; MLK Day; Martin Luther King Day; the King Holiday; and the King Day of Service. In 2026, this holiday is on January 19.

This guide assists congressional offices with work related to Martin Luther King, Jr. Day. It contains links to legislation, CRS reports, sample speeches and remarks from the *Congressional Record*, and presidential proclamations and remarks. It also contains links to additional government resources and selected educational, cultural, and advocacy organizations.

History

On November 2, 1983, President Ronald Reagan signed legislation making the birthday of Martin Luther King, Jr. a legal public holiday to be observed on the third Monday of every January (P.L. 98-144). In 1984, the Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission was created to encourage activities commemorating the holiday throughout the United States (P.L. 98-399). President Reagan delivered the remarks “Message on the Observance of Martin Luther King, Jr. Day” on January 14, 1986, and issued Proclamation 5431 on January 18, 1986, as part of the first recognition of Martin Luther King, Jr. Day as a federal holiday.

When President Bill Clinton signed the King Holiday and Service Act on August 23, 1994 (P.L. 103-304), the Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission was charged with encouraging observation of the holiday as a day of community service. While the commission dissolved in 1996, the day remains a federal holiday, with many observances focusing on community service, interracial cooperation, and youth antiviolence initiatives.¹

Legislation

P.L. 98-144—Authorized Dr. King’s birthday to be a legal public holiday, on the third Monday in January (97 Stat. 917; November 2, 1983).

P.L. 98-399—Created the Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission (98 Stat. 1473; August 27, 1984).

P.L. 103-304—Authorized appropriations and amended existing statutes to support the planning and performance of national service opportunities in conjunction with the legal holiday honoring the birthday of Martin Luther King, Jr. (108 Stat. 1565; August 23, 1994).

Related CRS Reports

CRS Report R41990, *Federal Holidays: Evolution and Current Practices*, by Jacob R. Straus

¹ <https://nmaahc.si.edu/explore/stories/15-year-battle-martin-luther-king-jr-day>.

CRS Report R43743, *Monuments and Memorials Authorized and Completed Under the Commemorative Works Act in the District of Columbia*, by Jacob R. Straus

CRS Report R47655, *1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom: Fact Sheet*, by Elizabeth C. Larson

Selected Congressional Statements and Remarks

Elected officials often deliver speeches, make floor statements, issue press releases, or enter Extensions of Remarks into the *Congressional Record* to recognize federal holidays and observances. The following are some examples:

H.Res. 48—119th Congress, “Honoring Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., by celebrating diversity, promoting tolerance, and condemning hate” (January 16, 2025).
Retrieved from Congress.gov.

Delegate Aumua Amata Coleman Radewagen, “Amata Honors Martin Luther King Jr. Day” (January 16, 2025).

Retrieved from the official website of Delegate Radewagen.

Representative Alma Adams, “Embracing Infinite Hope Among Finite Disappointment” (January 20, 2025).

Retrieved from the official website of Representative Adams.

Senator Amy Klobuchar, “Klobuchar Statement on Martin Luther King, Jr. Day” (January 20, 2025).

Retrieved from the official website of Senator Klobuchar.

Senator Mitch McConnell, “Honoring Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.,” *Congressional Record*, daily edition, vol. 170, no. 8 (January 16, 2024), p. S106.

Senator Dick Durbin, “Honoring the Legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr.,” *Congressional Record*, daily edition, vol. 170, no. 6 (January 11, 2024), p. S88.

Representative Betty McCollum, “McCollum Statement on Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Day 2024” (January 12, 2024). Retrieved from the official website of Representative McCollum.

Selected Presidential Proclamations, Statements, and Remarks

One of the many uses of a presidential proclamation is to ceremoniously honor a group or call attention to certain issues or events. The list below includes Martin Luther King, Jr. Day proclamations, statements, and remarks:

Presidential Proclamations, Statements, and Remarks, *Compilation of Presidential Documents*—Donald J. Trump (2025-)²

² Link provides access to proclamations, statements, and remarks made by President Trump during both of his nonconsecutive terms, where available.

Joseph R. Biden, Presidential Proclamation 10884 (January 17, 2025), *Federal Register*, Vol. 90, No. 13, p.7649.³

Presidential Proclamations, Statements, and Remarks, *Compilation of Presidential Documents*—Joseph R. Biden (2021-2025)

Presidential Proclamations, Statements, and Remarks, *Compilation of Presidential Documents*—Donald J. Trump (2017-2021)⁴

Presidential Proclamations, Statements, and Remarks, *Compilation of Presidential Documents*—Barack H. Obama (2009-2017)

Presidential Proclamations, Statements, and Remarks, *Compilation of Presidential Documents*—George W. Bush (2001-2009)

Presidential proclamations, statements, and remarks from 1993 to the present are available through the GovInfo service on the Government Publishing Office website. Earlier remarks (including selected audio and video clips) are available through The American Presidency Project, established by the University of California, Santa Barbara.

Government Resources

Architect of the Capitol’s Bust of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., in the Rotunda

The National Archives, Martin Luther King, Jr. (January 15, 1929–April 4, 1968)

U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Birthday of Martin Luther King, Jr.

A Man to Remember: Commemorating Martin Luther King, Jr. (Teaching with the Library of Congress, January 10, 2017), Dr. King Remembered (Folklife Today, January 16, 2017), and Music for MLK Day (In the Muse, January 18, 2020)—Library of Congress blog posts that provide information about the Library of Congress’s collections and teaching resources on the civil rights era and Dr. King.

Prints and Photographs Online Catalog—Prints and photos of or related to Dr. King in the collection of the Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.

Educational, Cultural, and Advocacy Organizations

The King Center—The Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change (“The King Center”) was established in 1968 by Mrs. Coretta Scott King in Atlanta, GA. The website provides access to the digital archive that houses the works and papers of Dr. King.

Morehouse College Martin Luther King Jr. Collection—Provides information about Morehouse College’s collection of the personal books and papers of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The Office of

³ This proclamation is listed individually since it is not listed in the *Compilation of Presidential Documents* search results list.

⁴ Link provides access to proclamations, statements, and remarks made by President Trump during both of his nonconsecutive terms, where available.

the Morehouse College King Collection establishes programming and community outreach initiatives that highlight the teachings and philosophy of Dr. King.

Spotlight: Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.—A collection of archival materials from the Smithsonian Museums that document Dr. King’s life and work.

Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute (Stanford University)—A collection of facts, resources, primary documents, multimedia, and recommended readings.

Martin Luther King, Jr.—Biographical information and selected readings from the official website of the Nobel Prize.

Author Information

Devon Galena
Senior Knowledge Management Librarian

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