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MLK Jr.: why should he be remembered?

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The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. is the only American besides George Washington to have a national holiday designated for his birthday... a man who, during a time of racial turmoil and an unbalanced society, knew it takes time for attitudes to change.

Most of us know him for "having a dream." Our generation was taught briefly about him in school; some recall watching his struggles on television during the civil rights movement. At Clackamas the holiday was not

even observed until 1993.

So why is a man's birthday nationally observed every January and yet so many people know so little about him?

Force for desegregation

Martin Luther King Jr. was one of the leading forces behind the withdrawal of segregation laws in the 60's. Known mainly as a civil rights activist, he also spoke out against poverty and the Vietnam War.

King was born in Atlanta, Georgia to Alberta Williams King and Martin Luther King Sr. His father was a pastor at the Ebenezer Baptist Church, one of the

larger churches in Atlanta.

King entered college early and by 1948 he had graduated and decided to pursue the ministry.

By 1955 he received his doctoral degree from Boston University, where he met his wife,

Coretta Scott. They would have four children together. The next year King was selected as pastor of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama.

Leads bus boycott

Soon after Rosa Parks refused to give her seat to a white passenger on Dec. 1, 1955, King led the year-long Montgomery bus boycott. The boycott resulted in the federal court ordering Montgomery's city buses to be desegregated. By the end of the boycott, King was a national figure.

As one of the founders of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) in 1957, (an organization of black churches and ministers aimed to change racial segre-

gation), King led and organized many nonviolent marches, demonstrations and boycotts. One of these marches took place in Birmingham, Alabama in May of 1963. Hundreds of singing school children filled the streets of downtown Birmingham. Police officers, attack dogs and firefighters were ordered to stop the protestors. Scenes of young protestors being

attacked by dogs and pinned against buildings by fire hoses were shown in newspapers and on television around the world.

A man who won't die for something is not fit to live.

Martin Luther King Jr.

During the demonstration, King was arrested and sent to jail. He wrote a letter to local clergymen who had criticized him for creating disorder in the city. His "Letter from Birmingham Jail," which argued that individuals had



the moral right and responsibility to disobey unjust laws, was widely read and added to King's stand-

ing as a moral leader. National reaction to the violence built support for the struggle for black civil rights.

"I have a Dream"

King and other black leaders organized a march on Washington in 1963, a massive protest for jobs and civil rights. On Aug. 28, 1963, King addressed an audience of more than 200,000 civil rights supporters. His speech expressed the hopes of the civil rights movement and was more moving than any in American history.

The combination of the speech and the march, on top of the Birmingham demonstrations, created the political momentum that resulted in the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibited segregation in public accommodations, as well as discrimination in education and employment.

As a result of King's leadership during the American civil rights movement, and his highly visible moral stance, he was awarded the 1964 Nobel Peace Prize. The same year he also became the first black American to be honored as *Time* magazine's Man of the Year.

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How the King holiday evolved

April 8, 1968: Rep. John Conyers, D-Mich. submits the first legislation proposing King's birthday a holiday, four days after King was assassinated.

March 25, 1970: Conyers and Rep. Shirley Chisholm, D-N.Y., announce hearings to study holiday issue after petitions carrying 6 million signatures are submitted to Congress.

April 10, 1970: California passes legislation making King's birthday a school holiday, first state to do so.

July 15, 1970: State Rep. George Fleming begins hearings to make the date a legal state holiday.

Aug. 2, 1983: House of Representatives approves legislation, 338-90, making birthday a national legal holiday the third Monday in January beginning in 1986.

Oct. 19, 1983: Senate, defying efforts by Sen. Jesse Helms, R-N.C., to sidetrack legislation, approves measure 78-22.

Nov. 2, 1983: Legislation for national holiday signed by President Ronald Reagan.

Jan. 20, 1986: First observance of birthday as a legal holiday nationwide.

