

MLK: Holiday honors legacy

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Violence erupts: Bloody Sunday

In 1965 SCLC joined a voting-rights protest march planned from Selma, Alabama, to the state capital of Montgomery, over 50 miles away. The goal of the march was to draw national attention to the struggle for black voting rights in the state. The March was stopped outside of Selma where protestors were beaten and tear-gassed by police. The violence was televised and came to be known as Bloody Sunday.

SCLC petitioned for and received a federal court order barring police from interfering with a new march. Two weeks after Bloody Sunday, more than 3000 people, including a core of 300 who would make the entire trip, set out towards Montgomery. They arrived five days later, when King addressed over 200,000 people in front of the capitol building.

Focus Shifted

After the Selma protests, King had less dramatic successes in his struggle for black civil rights. Many white Americans who had supported his work believed that the job was done. He also lost support when he joined the antiwar activists in 1965 and publicly criticized American foreign policy in Vietnam.

By the mid-1960's, King's role as the unchallenged leader of civil rights was questioned. Many younger blacks were looking towards the beliefs of the recently assassinated black Muslim leader, Malcolm X, whose insistence on black self-reliance and the rights of blacks to defend themselves against violent attacks captured the youths' attention.

King shifted his focus to the North. He realized that the economic difficulties of blacks in northern cities had been ignored. Throughout the late 60's, King turned his focus of civil rights activism to economic issues. His new emphasis on economic rights took King to Memphis, Tennessee to lead a demonstration

on March 28 in support of striking sanitation workers. When the march became violent, one black was killed and more than fifty people were injured. King left Memphis distressed over the violence. He returned April 3 in the hopes of leading a peaceful march. King told a crowd at the Memphis Masonic Temple, "I may not get there with you, but I want you to know tonight that we as a people will get to the promised land."

Reno reopened a limited investigation into the assassination. In Dec.



Ebenezer Baptist Church

Assassination: A Conspiracy?

King was assassinated the following day, April 4, on the balcony of the Lorraine Hotel in Memphis. He died at St. Joseph's Hospital of a gunshot wound in the neck. James

Earl Ray, an escaped white convict, was convicted of the murder and sentenced to 99 years in prison. News of the assassination resulted in shock and anger throughout the nation and the world, prompting riots in over a hundred U.S. cities.

Although over the years many investigators have suspected that Ray did not act alone, no accomplices have ever been identified. After King's death, historians discovered that the FBI often tapped King's phone line and reported on his private life to the president and other government officials. The FBI's reason for the invasion of privacy was that King associated with Communists and other "radicals."

Since his assassination over three decades ago, many conspiracy theories have emerged. These theories gained renewed momentum when King's son Dexter met with James Earl Ray in prison in 1997. Dexter shook his father's alleged assassin's hand and said the words "I believe you" after Ray repeatedly denied any involvement in King's assassination. The King family has supported Ray who supposedly pled guilty to King's murder in 1968 under "hostile circumstances involving his legal counsel."

A second boost to one of the conspiracy theories came in August 1998 when Attorney General Janet

1999, a Memphis jury awarded the King family \$100 in a wrongful death suit. The jury decided that the murder was indeed a conspiracy.

The memory lives on

King's historical importance was memorialized at the Martin Luther King Jr. Center for Social Justice, a research institute in Atlanta. Also in Atlanta is the Martin Luther King Jr. National Historic Site, which includes his birthplace, the Ebenezer Church, and the King Center, where his tomb is located. But perhaps the most important memorial is the national holiday in his honor which took over two decades to make a legal holiday.

The first legislation to commemorate King's birthday was submitted four days after his assassination in 1968. After 15 years of lobbying throughout the nation, President Reagan signed the legislation in 1983. The holiday, which is the third Monday of January, was first ob-



King is shot on his hotel balcony; his entourage point to the source of the shot. April 4, 1968.

served in 1986. It is the first new holiday since 1948, when Memorial Day was created as a "prayer for peace" day. And it's only the third of the 20th century (the other being Veterans Day, started in 1926 to honor those who gave their lives in World War I).

On a day when you don't have to come to classes, maybe you will have time to reflect and appreciate the impact that one single man has made on society and the world.

Excerpts from Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech

Dec. 10, 1964



"I accept the Nobel Prize for Peace at a moment when twenty-two million Negroes of the United States of America are engaged in a creative battle to end the long night of racial injustice."

"Therefore, I must ask why this prize is awarded to a movement which is beleaguered and committed to unrelenting struggle; to a movement which has not won the very peace and brotherhood which is the essence of the Nobel Prize."

"Sooner or later all the people of the world will have to discover a way to live together in peace."

"I believe that unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the final word in reality. This is why right temporarily defeated is stronger than evil triumphant."

"I believe that even amid today's motor bursts and whining bullets, there is still hope for a brighter tomorrow."

"I have the audacity to believe that peoples everywhere can have three meals a day for their bodies, education and culture for their minds, and dignity, equality and freedom for their spirits."

"I accept this prize on behalf of all men who love peace and brotherhood... I am aware that this prize is much more than an honor to me personally."

"Yet when years have rolled past and when the blazing light of truth is focused on this marvelous age in which we live -- men and women will know and children will be taught that we have a finer land, a better people, a more noble civilization -- because these humble children of God were willing to suffer for righteousness' sake."

To find out more about MLK go to: www.mlk-online.net



Signing of the Civil Rights act July 1964.



King and his wife Coretta.



King, below left, waves to a crowd with Coretta by his side. His grave, center, is located at the Martin Luther King, Jr. National Historic site. King, right, in his office, a picture of Gandhi in the background. King followed Gandhi's non violence ideals.



REV MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

1929 — 1968

"FREE AT LAST. FREE AT LAST. THANK GOD ALMIGHTY I'M FREE AT LAST."