

# DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

*Historical Paper No. 10*



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## Introduction

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. inspired people throughout the world to strive for the ideals of equality and non-violence to which he dedicated his life. Dr. King's life and legacy are commemorated in many celebrations, monuments, and historic places locally and nationally. This historical paper provides information about public places in King County and historic places elsewhere in the United States which are associated with Dr. King and the Civil Rights Movement. It also includes some information about annual, local celebrations which commemorate Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, and background information on his life and writings.

## Chronology of Dr. King's Life, 1929-1968

- 1929: Born January 15, in Atlanta, Georgia to Alberta Williams King and Rev. Martin Luther King, Sr.
- 1948: Ordained to the Baptist Ministry
- 1953: Married to Coretta Scott
- 1955: Awarded Ph.D. in Theology from Boston University. (He had previously attended Morehouse College in Atlanta, and Crozer Theological Seminary in Chester, PA); Lead the Montgomery Improvement Association in a nonviolent boycott of the city bus system which lasted for over a year, after Mrs. Rosa Parks was arrested in Montgomery, Alabama on December 1, 1954 for refusing to give up her bus seat to a white man. The boycott ultimately resulted in the desegregation of public transit
- 1957: Southern Christian Leadership Conference is founded; Dr. King is elected president
- 1958: Publication of *Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story*
- 1959: Dr. and Mrs. King visit India to study techniques of nonviolence
- 1960: First lunch counter sit-in held in Greensboro, North Carolina; Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) founded
- 1961: First group of Freedom Riders leaves Washington D.C. on a Greyhound bus
- 1963: "Letter from Birmingham Jail" written while Dr. King was imprisoned for demonstrating; Medgar Evers assassinated in Jackson, Mississippi; March on Washington, at which Dr. King delivers his "I Have A Dream" speech on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial; President John F. Kennedy assassinated in Dallas, Texas; publication of *The Strength to Love*
- 1964: Mississippi Freedom Summer voter registration project; Civil Rights Act signed by President Lyndon B. Johnson; civil rights workers James Chaney, Andrew Goodman and Michael Schwerner murdered in Neshoba County, Mississippi; Dr. King receives the Nobel Prize for Peace in Norway; publication of *Why We Can't Wait*
- 1965: Malcolm X murdered in New York City; March from Montgomery to Selma, Alabama; Voting Rights Act signed by Pres. Lyndon B. Johnson; Watts riots
- 1966: Rise of Black Power Movement; drive for desegregated housing in Chicago
- 1967: Riots in Newark, Detroit; beginning of Poor People's Campaign; publication of *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?*
- 1968: Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. assassinated April 4 in Memphis by James Earl Ray

1986: Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day established as a National Holiday

### Namesake of King County

In 1986, the King County Council passed a motion redesignating the namesake of King County, to commemorate the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., rather than William Rufus DeVane King for whom the county was named in 1852.

The King for whom the county was originally named had been elected Vice President of the United States under President Franklin Pierce in 1852, but he died in 1853 after serving only a short time. In naming the county for the Vice President, an Alabama slaveholder, officials in what was then Oregon Territory hoped to flatter the distant official, thereby gaining his support in their bid for statehood.

In redesignating the name of King County to honor Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., County Council members intended to honor the slain civil rights leader, and provide an educational opportunity for citizens to further consider King's accomplishments and principles.

Motion 6461, which was adopted February 24, 1986, includes the following language:

*"Whereas, Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. believed in the dignity and self-worth of every individual, and subsequently, gave his life defending his beliefs, and*

*Whereas, Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. inspired people and nations world-wide to strive in a non-violent manner for human rights, civil liberties, and economic guarantees rightfully due people of all races;*

*...The King County Council hereby sets forth the historical basis for the "renaming" of King County in honor of Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., a man whose contributions are well-documented and celebrated by millions throughout this nation and the world, and embody the attributes for which the citizens of King County can be proud, and claim as their own."*

A bronze memorial plaque located in the first floor lobby of the King County Courthouse at 3rd Avenue and James Street in downtown Seattle commemorates this designation. The plaque contains the following inscription:

*The name King County has been redesignated to honor Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. A motion introduced and co-sponsored by Councilman Ron Sims and Councilman Bruce Laing honors a man who inspired a nation to strive in a non-violent manner for human rights, civil liberties and economic guarantees rightfully due all people; a man who with fortitude and vision opened doors of opportunity for all to participate fully in the fabric and richness of the American experience.*

### Excerpts from Dr. King's Speeches and Writings

*We know through painful experience that freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor, it must be demanded by the oppressed...*

*There are just laws and there are unjust laws. I would agree with St. Augustine that an unjust law is no law at all. I hope you can see the distinction I am trying to point out. In no sense do I advocate evading or defying the law as the rabid segregationist would do. This would lead to anarchy. One who breaks*

*an unjust law must do it openly, lovingly...I submit that an individual who breaks a law that conscience tells him is unjust, and willingly accepts the penalty by staying in jail to arouse the conscience of the community over its injustice, is in reality expressing the very highest respect for law...* Excerpts from Letter From a Birmingham Jail, April 1963.

*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.' I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia, sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood...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.* Speech at the Lincoln Memorial, 1963.

*When we allow freedom to ring, when we let it ring from every village and every hamlet, from every State and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual: 'Free at last, Free at last, Thank God Almighty, we are free at last'.* Speech at the Lincoln Memorial, 1963.

*...I don't know what will happen now. We've got some difficult days ahead. But it doesn't matter with me now, because I've been to the mountain top. And I don't mind. Like anybody, I would like to live a long life; longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will. And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the promised land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight we as a people will get to the promised land. And I'm happy tonight, I'm not worried about anything. I'm not fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord.* April 3, 1968, Memphis, Tennessee, the day before Dr. King was assassinated.

#### Celebrating Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day: Local Events

Congress established Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day as a national holiday in 1986. The City of Seattle, King County, Washington State and the Federal Government officially recognize the third Monday in January as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day. King County has since 1988 held an annual celebration in honor of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The event includes a presentation of the annual Martin Luther King, Jr. Humanitarian Awards. Additional information is available through the King County Office of Civil Rights Enforcement, at (206) 296-7592.

Other commemorative annual events are sponsored by Mt. Zion Baptist Church, Garfield High School, Seattle Central Community College, University of Washington, the Museum of History and Industry, several local parks departments, and other arts and heritage organizations throughout the region.

#### Local Memorial for a National Hero: Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Park, Seattle

The Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Park is a four and a half acre City of Seattle park on the east side of Martin Luther King, Jr. Way, between South Walker and South Bayview Streets. The park is designed around a black granite 'mountain' -- a dramatic, thirty-foot sculpture inspired by the civil rights leader's "I've Been to the Mountaintop" speech, made the day before he was assassinated in 1968. The idea of the monument originated with Seattle resident Charlie James in 1983; the sculpture was designed by the late Robert Kelly, who was an instructor at Edmonds Community College; and the project was realized through organizing and fundraising efforts by the Martin Luther King Memorial Committee, chaired by Herman McKinney. The memorial was dedicated November 16, 1991.

The sculpture is a symbolic memorial to Dr. King, made of three segments which represent both the Christian Trinity and the union of the family. The sculpture rises from an elliptical reflecting pool, surrounded by a low wall and walkway. Around its edge, positioned as the hours on the face of a clock, twelve bronze plaques recall events in King's life: his birth, his winning of the Nobel Peace Prize, his assassination and the creation of the national holiday in his honor.

#### Students Taking Initiative: Martin Luther King Elementary School

In the early 1970's, students at what was then known as Harrison Elementary School in Seattle's Madison Valley initiated a project to research the process of renaming their school to honor one of their heroes. The students participated in every stage of the process, including appearing before the Seattle School Board, and holding a school-wide election to vote on the name change. Martin Luther King Elementary School plays a vital role in its community. The school is located at 3201 East Republican St., Seattle WA 98112, and can be reached at (206) 281-6510. The school's home page address is: [http://mlk\\_www.ssd.k12.wa.us](http://mlk_www.ssd.k12.wa.us)

#### Honoring His Memory: Martin Luther King, Jr. Way, Seattle

In 1983, the City of Seattle changed the name of Empire Way to Martin Luther King, Jr. Way, within the city limits. Later, the name change was extended beyond the city limits through unincorporated King County along an additional four miles of State Highway 900. This thoroughfare extends southward from the intersection of East Madison Street and 28th Avenue East in Seattle, along an approximately eight mile stretch through the Central Area and Rainier Valley, to Renton, where it becomes Sunset Boulevard. Throughout Seattle's history, the Central Area has constituted the heart of the Seattle/King County African American community, and includes numerous historic and cultural sites.

#### Public Artwork Celebrating African American History: The Crespinel Mural, Seattle

During the summer of 1995, artist James Crespinel painted a seventeen foot tall mural of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. on the side of the Catfish Corner restaurant at the corner of Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard and Cherry Street in the Central District. Crespinel worked as a volunteer on the project, which was initiated by AmeriCorps volunteers working through the Seattle Police Department.

#### National Historic Site in Atlanta, Georgia

In 1980, the National Park Service designated the Martin Luther King, Jr. National Historic Site and Preservation District in Atlanta, Georgia. This district, in the neighborhood known as Sweet Auburn, includes: King's birth home; Ebenezer Baptist Church where King, Sr. and King, Jr. were both pastors; the Freedom Hall Complex which is the home of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change; the Prince Hall Masonic Building which houses the national offices of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference; and many other historic places which preserve and commemorate the achievements of Dr. King and a vital community of Black families, businesses, churches, and other public institutions.

Together, the preservation district and the national historic site tell much of the history of Black urban culture in the South and provide the background for the story of the Civil Rights Movement. For additional information, the following organizations can be contacted:

- *Martin Luther King, Jr. National Historic Site/National Park Service*  
Interpretation Division: (404) 331-5190, Dean Rowley, Park Historian

75 Spring Street SW, Atlanta, GA 30303

The National Park Service provides extensive interpretive resources concerning the role of this national historic district in the life of Dr. King, the African American community, and the Civil Rights movement. A curriculum packet is available.

- *Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change, Inc.* (404) 524-1956  
449 Auburn Avenue NE, Atlanta, GA 30312

The Center for Nonviolent Social Change, under the direction of Coretta Scott King, carries on the nonviolent tradition of Dr. King through education, research and creative programs which operate within the permanent Program Institute of the Center. The center includes Freedom Hall, exhibit space, the library and archives housing Dr. King's papers, crypt and memorial.

- *Southern Christian Leadership Conference* (404) 522-1420 Historian/Archivist Dana Swan  
334 Auburn Avenue, NE, Atlanta, GA 30312

The SCLC National Headquarters offers tours of its offices, maintains historic archives including many tapes of Dr. King's speeches, publishes a quarterly magazine, and administers numerous youth and student activities.

### National Civil Rights Museum in Memphis, Tennessee

The Lorraine Motel in Memphis, Tennessee, where Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated on April 4, 1968, has been dedicated to the memory of Dr. King and the Movement to which he dedicated his life. This building now houses the National Civil Rights Museum. The museum, which opened in 1991, is a tribute to Dr. King and others, both celebrated and unknown, who participated in the Civil Rights Movement. For additional information, contact Museum Curator Barbara Andrews at (901) 521-9699, or 450 Mulberry Street, Memphis, TN 38103.

### Traveling Exhibit

Exhibit Touring Services offers a traveling exhibit honoring the life and work of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. consisting of sixty-five photographs, facsimiles of archival documents, quotations from the speeches and writings of Dr. King and brief narrative texts. Consisting of twenty panels, the exhibit covers the civil rights movement from King's emergence as a regional leader in 1955 to his death, as an international figure in 1968, and focuses on not only the major events of the civil rights movement, but also its historical context, extending back to the Declaration of Independence. For more information, contact Jim Rosengren, Associate Director of Exhibit Touring Services, a program of the College of Letters, Arts and Social Sciences at Eastern Washington University, (800) 356-1256; (509) 359-4331; 526 5th St., Cheney, WA 99004-2431.

### Educational Programs and Resources

The Washington State Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction sponsors an annual essay contest to promote study and thought about the life and meaning of Dr. King. The essay contest is collaboratively supported by the OSPI's Curriculum and Assessment, Title I, and Equity Education departments. Each year has a specific theme. Students in grades 5, 8, and 11 are eligible to participate, and submissions are due each February.

OSPI produced a *Resource Guide on Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.* in 1985. This guide is currently out of print; however, the OSPI intends to revise and reissue it as funding becomes available. For more information, contact Gayle Pauley, Program Supervisor, Reading and Language Arts (360) 753-2858 or Gail Jones, OSPI Curriculum & Assessment (360) 753-3449; Old Capitol Building, PO Box 47200 Olympia, WA 98504-7200.

### Seattle Times Essay Contest

The Seattle Times *Newspapers In Education* Program sponsors an annual essay contest for students in conjunction with African American History Month, and provides extensive curriculum material on celebrated African Americans. Additional information is available from June Saty, Seattle Times/NIE Educational Services, (206) 464-3806.

### Research Collections

The Center for Nonviolent Social Change, under the leadership of its founder, Mrs. Coretta Scott King, has undertaken a massive acquisition effort resulting in the creation of the King Library and Archives, the largest existing collection of civil rights materials.

To date, two volumes of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s papers have been published by University of California Press/Berkeley: *Volume I: Called to Serve* (January 1929-June 1951) and *Volume II: Rediscovering Precious Values* (July 1951-Nov. 1955). The series is edited by Clayborne Carlson.

The Reference Department at the Suzzallo/Allen Library, University of Washington, provides numerous nationwide listings of research and archival collections which relate to Dr. King, the Civil Rights Movement, and African American heritage. For more information, the library can be reached at (206) 543-9158.

### Seattle Public Library Resources

The Douglass-Truth Library and African American Collection, a branch of the Seattle Public Library located at 2300 East Yesler Way, (206) 684-4704, contains the largest collection of African and African American material in the Northwest. The west wing is allocated to the African American collection, which includes a children's literature research collection tracing the portrayal of the African American experience in children's literature. The library also contains collections devoted to the historical and cultural contributions of African Americans to the nation's heritage.

Seattle Public Library produces a brochure entitled *Martin Luther King, Jr.: A Selected Reading/Viewing List*, from which several citations in the attached bibliography were reprinted. SPL also produces several brochures relating to African American History, including: *Resources from the African American Collection at the Douglass-Truth Library*; *Dreams To Grow On: Books About Black Children*; and *I Have A Dream: Selected Materials concerning Martin Luther King, Jr.*

### On-Line Resources

Stanford University has a web site with all of Dr. King's speeches and other information on-line. The address is <http://www-leland.stanford.edu/group/King/>

The Seattle Times maintains an educational area on the World Wide Web which focuses on the life and legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr. and the holiday declared in his honor. The site provides students with multimedia material, interactive activities and a cross-country exchange involving schools in the Pacific Northwest and the South. To access it, type: <http://www.seatimes.com/mlk/>

### Selected Published Resources

Baldwin, Lewis V.

1991 *There is a Balm in Gilead: The Cultural Roots of Martin Luther King, Jr.*

Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

Blythe, Robert W., Maureen A. Carroll, and Steven H. Moffson

- 1994 *Martin Luther King Jr. National Historic Site: Historic Resources Study*.  
Atlanta: Cultural Resources Planning Division, Southeast Regional Office,  
National Park Service, Department of the Interior.

Branch, Taylor

- 1988 *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years 1954-1963*. New York: Simon  
& Schuster.

Crawford, Vicki L., Jacqueline Anne Rouse, and Barbara Woods

- 1990 *Women in the Civil Rights Movement: Trailblazers & Torchbearers 1941-  
1965*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Garrow, David

- 1986 *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Southern Christian  
Leadership Conference*. New York: William Morrow.

Haskins, James

- 1992 *I Have a Dream: The Life and Words of Martin Luther King, Jr.* [child/young  
adult]. Brookfield, CT: Millbrook Press.  
1993 *The March on Washington* [child/young adult]. New York: Harper Collins.

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- 1997 *Tribute: A Guide to Seattle's Public Parks and Buildings Named for Black People*.  
Seattle: Statice Press.

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Row.  
1986 *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings*. Edited by James Melville  
Washington. San Francisco: Harper & Row.  
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Essays, and Books of Martin Luther King, Jr.* Selected by Coretta Scott King;  
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Mumford, Esther Hall

- 1993 *Calabash: A Guide to the History, Culture & Art of African Americans in  
Seattle and King County, Washington*. Seattle: Ananse Press.

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- 1983 *Let the Trumpet Sound: The Life of Martin Luther King, Jr.* New York: Harper  
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Quayle, Louise

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Tucker, Deborah J. and Carolyn A. Davis

1994 *Unstoppable Man: A Bibliography, Martin Luther King, Jr.*. Detroit: Wayne State University.

Watley, William D.

1985 *Roots of Resistance: The Nonviolent Ethic of Martin Luther King Jr.* Valley Forge: Judson Press.

Williams, Juan

1987 *Eyes on the Prize: America's Civil Rights Years, 1954-1965*. [A companion volume to the six-part television series.]

### Acknowledgments

Information resources consulted for the preparation of this historical paper include: Mumford's *Calabash*; Washington's *Testament of Hope*; The Seattle Medium/Tacoma True Citizen MLK Birthday Special 1989; numerous newspaper articles on file at the Douglass-Truth Branch of the Seattle Public Library; and the files of Heritage Program of the Cultural Development Authority of King County.

<p>This information is available upon request in alternative formats for persons with disabilities. TTY Relay: 711.</p>
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Revised 5/06