

DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

Martin Luther King, Jr. Day *Eckstein group*

On April 4, 1968, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was killed by a bullet. People were very sad about his death. Right away they started working to find a way to remember Dr. King. African American Congressman John Conyers Jr. was one of those people. Conyers had been involved in the Civil Rights Movement for a long time. He had helped the Voting Rights Act of 1965 get passed. Conyers had the idea to make King's birthday a national holiday. The King Memorial Center in Atlanta, GA was founded right around the time that Conyers began pushing for the holiday. The mission of the King Center was to remember the teachings of Dr. King. This organization worked with Conyers to sponsor the first observance of King's birthday. King's birthday is January 15th.

Dr. King's birthday celebration spread slowly but surely. In 1970, the governor of New York City organized celebrations. Several other large cities also celebrated. A year later, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference sent Congress a petition to make the day a national holiday. A **petition** is a written request. More than three million people signed the petition. Each person who signed the petition supported the national holiday to remember King. Eight years later, President Jimmy Carter became involved with the holiday. Dr. King's widow Coretta Scott King tried to get the bill passed by bringing the petition to Congress. Sadly, the holiday bill was shot down in November of 1979. The bill lost by just five votes in the House of Representatives.

Coretta did not want to give up on her dream of honoring her husband. She worked with singer Stevie Wonder to send a second petition to Congress. This time the number of signatures had doubled. It was signed by almost six million people! The bill reached the House of Representatives again. Some representatives thought that it would cost too much money to have the holiday. They thought that it would cost the government \$225 million each year since businesses would be closed on the holiday. Most representatives did not agree, so the bill was passed in the House by more than 240 votes. The bill faced a new set of arguments in the Senate. A group of senators charged Dr. King with crimes. They said he was working with communists and doing illegal activities. Other senators fought back against this group. They called the claims against Dr. King a "packet of filth." In the end, the bill was passed by the Senate. It was officially signed into law by President Ronald Reagan in November of 1983.

The first national celebration of Martin Luther King, Jr. Day happened on the third Monday of January in 1986. Coretta Scott King organized many events for the celebration. The holiday included over a full week of memorial celebrations surrounding Dr. King's actual birthday. President Ronald Reagan gave a speech about the man remembered by the holiday. He said, "It is a time for celebrating and reflecting. We celebrate because in his short life, Dr. King... challenged us to make real the promise of America as a land of freedom, equality, opportunity, and brotherhood." Today, Martin Luther King, Jr. Day is celebrated on the third Monday in January each year. Dr. King's actual birthday is January 15th.

FAST FACT: August 28 is called "Dream Day." On this day, people remember Dr. King's famous "I Have a Dream" speech that was given in 1963.

FAST FACT: South Carolina became the last state to officially recognize the holiday. It began recognizing the holiday in 2000, seventeen years after the holiday became legal.

FAST FACT: Dr. King and people who worked closely with him were secretly watched by the FBI for several years. The FBI thought that Dr. King might have relationships with communists. They also thought he was dangerous. In 1977, a judge ruled that the tapes had to be kept secret for fifty years before they could be opened.



DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. ▲

Martin Luther King, Jr. Day *Wattkins Group*

On April 4, 1968, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. lost his life to an assassin's bullet. Supporters of Dr. King wasted no time in looking for a way to remember him. Moved by the death of such an influential and significant man, African American Congressman John Conyers Jr. began pushing to make King's birthday a national holiday. Conyers had a long history of involvement in civil rights. He had helped the Voting Rights Act of 1965 get passed. The King Memorial Center in Atlanta, GA was founded right around the time that Conyers began lobbying for the holiday bill. The mission of the King Center was to remember the teachings of Dr. King. This organization worked with Conyers to sponsor the first observance of King's birthday. King's birthday is January 15th.

The observance of King's birthday spread slowly but surely. In 1970, Conyers was able to convince the Governor of New York City to honor Dr. King's birthday. Several other large cities followed suit. A year later, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference sent Congress a **petition** to make the day a national holiday. The Southern Christian Leadership Conference was an organization that King was heavily involved in during his life. This petition was signed by more than three million people. Each of the signatures represented a person's support for a national holiday to remember King. Eight years later, President Jimmy Carter offered his support for the petition. Excited by the President's support, Dr. King's widow Coretta Scott King went before Congress to share the petition. She tried to get the bill passed. Unfortunately, the holiday bill was shot down in November of 1979. The bill lost by just five votes in the House of Representatives.

Despite the outcome of the vote, Coretta wasn't willing to give up on her dream of honoring her husband. She partnered with singer Stevie Wonder to present a second petition to Congress. This time the number of signatures on the petition had doubled. The petition was signed by almost six million people! The bill reached the House of Representatives again. Some representatives argued that it would be too expensive to create the holiday. They estimated that it would cost the government \$225 million each year since businesses would be closed on the holiday. Despite this argument, the bill was passed in the House by more than 240 votes. The bill faced a new set of arguments in the Senate. A group of senators accused Dr. King of associating with communists and engaging in illegal and shameful activities during his lifetime. Other senators fought back against this group. They called the allegations about Dr. King a "packet of filth." In the end, the bill was passed by the Senate. It was officially signed into law by President Ronald Reagan in November of 1983.

The first national observance of Martin Luther King, Jr. Day took place on the third Monday of January in 1986. Coretta Scott King organized many of the events for the celebration. The holiday included over a full week of celebrations surrounding Dr. King's actual birthday. President Ronald Reagan spoke of the man remembered by the holiday. He said, "It is a time for rejoicing and reflecting. We rejoice because in his short life, Dr. King... challenged us to make real the promise of America as a land of freedom, equality, opportunity, and brotherhood." Today, Martin Luther King, Jr. Day is celebrated on the third Monday in January each year. Dr. King's actual birthday is January 15th.

FAST FACT: August 28 is called "Dream Day." On this day, people remember Dr. King's famous "I Have a Dream" speech that was given in 1963.

FAST FACT: South Carolina became the last state to officially recognize the holiday. It began recognizing the holiday in 2000, seventeen years after the holiday became legal.

FAST FACT: Dr. King and many of his fellow activists were secretly monitored by the FBI for several years. The FBI suspected that Dr. King had relationships with communists. They also thought he was dangerous. In 1977, a judge ruled that the tapes had to be sealed for fifty years before they could be opened.



TEXT-BASED EVIDENCE QUESTIONS**Martin Luther King, Jr. Day**

Directions: Answer these questions after you read the passage. Remember to begin your answer by restating part of the question, use direct evidence from the text, and explain your thinking.

KEY IDEAS & DETAILS

1. When did Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. die? How did he die? **RI.1**

2. Explain how the idea of creating a holiday to celebrate Dr. King began. **RI.3**

3. Describe the role that Dr. King's wife Coretta played in making King's birthday a holiday. **RI.3**

4. Explain the argument made by the people who did not want Dr. King to have a holiday. **RI.3**

5. Summarize the timeline of events that took place leading up to King's birthday becoming a holiday. **RI.2**

TEXT-BASED EVIDENCE QUESTIONS**Martin Luther King, Jr. Day**

Directions: Answer these questions after you read the passage. Remember to begin your answer by restating part of the question, use direct evidence from the text, and explain your thinking.

CRAFT & STRUCTURE

6. In your own words, explain the meaning of President Ronald Reagan's quote about Dr. King. **RI.4**

7. How is the passage organized? (Chronological, cause/effect, comparison/contrast, description, problem/solution). Use evidence from the text to explain your answer. **RI.5**

INTEGRATION OF KNOWLEDGE & IDEAS

8. What is the author's message about the importance of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s birthday? Use evidence from the text to support your reasoning. **RI.8**
