

The Real Meaning Of The King Holiday

Three hundred and sixty-six years after 20 Blacks landed at Jamestown, 122 years after the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation, and 31 years after the Supreme Court banned segregation, the United States of America — North and South, Black, Brown and White — will stop for 24 hours to honor the memory and the light of a Black American.

Because he lived and dreamed and died, many factories, offices, and schools and all federal and many state agencies will be closed.

All over America, men, women and little children will link hands and hopes in an unprecedented national holiday for Martin Luther King Jr., a grandson of a former slave who rose to spiritual heights attained by few mortals and thereby fulfilled the Biblical adage which says that he who is last shall be first.

This astonishing recognition of Black initiative and leadership would have been inconceivable a few years ago, and it marks a great divide in the relationship between Black and White Americans. For on King Day, Americans of all races, backgrounds and political persuasions, segregationists as well as integrationists, will be forced to take official notice not only of Martin Luther King Jr. but also of the maids, the sharecroppers, the students and the Rosa Parks who made him what he was.

This is the tradition and the hope that the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday brings to the Republic. And that tradition speaks in and through the King holiday, telling us that a people who could produce a King has no need for fears or apologies or doubts.

As the first Black American so honored, Martin Luther King Jr. joins the most exclusive of all American clubs. Ironically, and significantly, the only other American honored by a national holiday is George Washington.

There is irony — and truth — in this. For King and his nonviolent army gave America a new birth of freedom. They banished the Jim Crow signs, browned American politics, and transformed the student movement, the women's movement and the church. And all Americans are indebted to King and the nonviolent liberators who broke into American history like beneficent burglars, bringing with them the gifts of vision, passion, and truth. It can be argued, in fact, that King freed more White people than Black people.

This, then, is a national holiday with national implications. And we are called, in and through the holiday, to the national task of continuing the struggle for the fulfillment of King's dream.

The crucial point here and elsewhere is that this is not a holiday for rest and frivolity and play. This is a day for study,

struggle and preparation for the victory to come. It is a day set aside for measuring ourselves and America against the terrible yardstick of King's hope. And if we ever loved him, we will use this time to mobilize against the evils he identified in his last article — the evils of racism, militarism, unemployment and violence.

It is on this deep level, and in the context of personal responsibilities, that the King holiday assumes its true meaning. For it is not enough to celebrate King; it is necessary also to vindicate him by letting his light shine in our own lives.

It was King's genius to suggest that every man, woman and child is responsible for his/her own freedom.

"A man who won't die for something," he said, "is not fit to live."

And the only question before us in this holiday season is what are we doing and what are we prepared to do to ensure that King did not dream and die in vain.

Beyond all that, we are challenged in this month to

remember one of his greatest legacies, hope. For he never gave up hope. He never ceased to believe that the Dream and the dreamers would prevail. And if he could speak to us this month from his living grave, he would tell us that nothing can stop us here if we keep the faith of our fathers and mothers and walk together and dream together.

It is with this understanding, and this hope, that we dedicate this issue to the memory of an American giant who will be remembered, to appropriate the words of poet Robert E. Hayden, "not with statues' rhetoric, not with legends and poems and wreaths of bronze alone, but with the lives grown out of his life, the lives fleshing his dream of the beautiful needful thing."

— Lerone Bennett Jr.

Believe In Yourself



Thank you Coretta, Kate, Andrew, Stevie and John.

Coretta Scott King, Kate Hall, Andrew Young, Stevie Wonder and John Conyers, Jr. These people helped make January 20 a national holiday honoring Martin Luther King, Jr. It was a victory won through the efforts of many people, and it is a day in which we can all rejoice. But our commemoration of this great American hero should not be limited to once a year. Rather, we should reflect on his legacy every day. Because Martin Luther King, Jr., did make a positive impact upon all Americans. And that's something we should never forget.

Joe Black
The Greyhound Corporation

COMMUNITY STORE

1218 North D St.



**WE SALUTE
DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.**

**A MAN
AHEAD OF HIS TIME**