



## Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Day - 20 January 2017

As we commemorate the life of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and his legacy that changed our nation and our world, we make a special commitment to living the spirit of Martin Luther King Day – we remember and we celebrate, but most importantly we act.

This day has special meaning to me. I am a child of the 1950's who grew up as the energy of the civil rights movement burgeoned. It is difficult to describe the pressures in our society in the 1960's. Violence was a daily occurrence. Protests and demonstrations against injustice convulsed our country, especially in the south where the constitutional decisions of the 1860's were subsumed by a different set of rules, laws passed by states enshrining systematic discrimination as a legal but unacceptable practice.

Doors throughout our society were closed to huge swaths of our citizenry, and many families were divided in how to respond to increasingly visible injustice. Should they stay out of it? Should they actively choose one side or another? Should they uphold or upend the law? Should they engage in peaceful protest in the face of violence or embrace violence as the only way to win?

Out of the shadows threatening to engulf our nation stepped a young man – a preacher, a scholar, a gifted orator who in the short span of time that he was with us, became a beacon of light in a world where change and the resistance to change contended at great human cost.

Martin Luther King, Jr. stands out in American history as a leader. Door opener for equality in a society that deprived some of its citizens of the inalienable rights described in the Declaration of Independence. A society where many were threatened, harassed, arrested, beaten, and even murdered for daring to confront injustices directly; for daring to open doors that were closed to them and others like them.



Had he lived beyond his 39th year, this would mark Dr. King's 88th birthday. Every year we come together to remember him, to celebrate his life, and to be inspired to act to carry out his legacy. His words were inspiring, and his actions were no less so. He led a movement of revolutionary change in our country through non-violent means. He opened doors that irrevocably altered not only American history, but also that of the world in ways that were nearly impossible to imagine in the 1960s.

As Dr. King himself said on the steps of the Lincoln memorial in August 1963, "we have come to this hallowed spot to remind America of the fierce urgency of now. This is no time to engage in the luxury of cooling off or to take the tranquilizing drug of gradualism. Now is the time to make real the promises of democracy."

Dr. King opened the doors of the polling booths in the American South by organizing and lending his personal presence to campaigns to register disenfranchised voters. These non-violent efforts were met with hatred, violence, and terror tactics. Yet, 60% of eligible black voters in the former confederate states were registered, and both major political parties aggressively courted their votes.

Death tolls escalated. Murder and intimidation became the weapons of desperation to counter the momentum building upon Dr. King's campaigns, but they could not stop a non-violent but radical cultural revolution from accelerating to an unstoppable pace.

Now, two generations removed from the days of Martin Luther King, we can all join together, sit together, ride together; eat, live, and serve our nation together; excel together, using and improving the benefits of a diverse society and heralding an example of hope in an uncertain world.

This day is more than just thinking about a dream, it is about internalizing, and acting on that dream. It is about honoring a legacy. It is about living a life consistent with the principles by which Dr. King patterned his short life. It is to improve and mold us, not just as Americans, but as human beings – brothers and sisters engaged in deeds both great and small, for the betterment of the world.



Each of us can, and must, remember and celebrate the doors that have been opened to us, but each of us is called in to action to carry on the legacy of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., by ceaselessly opening doors to equality in our own corners of the world, and by ensuring that our children can walk through those doors and open doors for future generations.

From Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. we all draw inspiration for our continuing service to the United States of America and the Republic of Korea. We go together!

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VINCENT K. BROOKS  
General, U.S. Army  
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