



Freedom's Feast MLK DAY

On-line ceremonies to get the most out of your AMERICAN holiday Celebrations.

TEN MINUTE RETROSPECTIVE

Leader: Over 50 years ago, many black Americans struggled to secure their basic civil rights. They deserved the same guarantees of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness as all other citizens.

Reader: They wanted what all Americans want: (use the list below and ask participants to call out their ideas) to live in the house and neighborhood of our choice • to go to any restaurant and be served • to get the best possible education for our children • to plan a vacation and stay where we choose • to have access to all public transportation • to shop where we want • to seek a job as far as our ability takes us • to have the right to vote and a voice in our future.

Reader: These rights should have been theirs because they were citizens of this country.

Reader: But all over our country and especially in the south, black Americans lived a life apart from white Americans.

Reader: Centuries of slavery that ended with President Lincoln's **Emancipation Proclamation** in 1863 and the conclusion of the civil war in 1865 did not end the deep-seated prejudice that claimed black people were inferior to whites.

Reader: Many courageous men and women challenged that evil idea over the centuries. Abolitionists argued that slavery was a sin. A number of our founding fathers agreed. The freed slave and orator, Frederick Douglass said that slavery violated the very spirit of the Constitution.

Reader: Other black Americans took cases to the Supreme Court. The ruling in the 1896 Plessy v. Ferguson case led to the infamous "separate but equal" decision. It allowed states to create a range of segregation laws that affected every part of daily life.

Reader: **Justice Harlan**, the one dissenting judge wrote: "Our Constitution is color-blind... In respect of civil rights, all citizens are equal before the law. ..The thin disguise of 'equal' accommodations... will not mislead anyone, nor atone for the wrong this day done."

Reader: As Justice Harlan predicted, a wave of laws followed that created a world of separate and less than equal. There were separate entrances for whites and blacks in public buildings and separate cemeteries. Blacks were barred from using public pools and parks. Worst of all, they were illegally denied the right to vote.



MLK DAY

The Constitution is a glorious liberty document... let me ask, if it be not somewhat singular that, if the Constitution were intended to be, by its framers and adopters, a slaveholding instrument, why neither slavery, slaveholding, nor slave can anywhere be found in it.

FREDERICK DOUGLASS, ORATOR AND ABOLITIONIST, 1818-1895

Would anyone believe I am the master of slaves of my own purchase! I am drawn along by the general inconvenience of living here without them. I will not, I cannot justify it... I believe a time will come when an opportunity will be offered to abolish this lamentable evil.

PATRICK HENRY FOUNDING FATHER, ORATOR, POLITICIAN, JANUARY 18, 1773

Dred Scott, a one-time slave, took the question of his status as a citizen to the Supreme Court in 1856 and lost.

In 1896 **Homer Plessy** took his case to the Supreme Court when he got on the "whites only" car of a train in New Orleans and refused to get off.

Reader: A black person couldn't use the same water fountain, library, lunch counter, bus seat, hotel room or public pool as a white person. Black children couldn't go to the same schools as white children. Black men and women couldn't register to vote or dream of having the same jobs as white men and women. These ideas found homes everywhere in our country, but vicious enforcement was the hallmark of the south.

Reader: In 1955, Dr. Martin Luther King, a young preacher with a gift for connecting the words of sacred texts to the urgency of the moment helped lead the **Montgomery bus boycott**. The timing was right for change.

Reader: He was a gifted leader and the Civil Rights movement had a new advantage. Television cameras now broadcast "**the wrong this day done.**" Dr. King and an army of young men, women and children confronted centuries of "evil" with another powerful tool.

Reader: They used non-violent protest to show the brutality of those who wanted to deny them their rights. As **John Lewis**, a young freedom rider and now deceased congressman from Georgia, put it then:

ALL: "If not us, then who? If not now, then when? Will there be a better day for it tomorrow or next year? Will it be less dangerous then? Will someone else's children have to risk their lives instead of us risking ours?"

Reader: It was dangerous. Many risked and lost their lives: (Choose entries from list below or ask participants to call out their suggestions.)

- 1900 children were jailed and attacked with fire hoses and police dogs in **Birmingham, Alabama**.
- **4 school girls** lost their lives when their church was fire bombed.
- 200 children and their families joined the 1954 Supreme Court, **Brown vs. Board of Education** ruling that integrated our nation's public schools.
- Hundreds of Freedom Riders were beaten and jailed during the **Freedom Rider campaign**.
- **Emmitt Till, Medgar Evers, Jimmie Lee Jackson**, James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, Michael Schwerner, **Reverend Jamie Reeb** and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., were all murdered.
- Hundreds were assaulted, beaten and jailed during the **lunch-counter sit-in campaign**.
- 250,000 people **gathered on the National Mall** to hear Dr. King deliver his famous "**I Have A Dream**" speech at the foot of the Lincoln Memorial.
- Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was **arrested 30 times** for civil disobedience.
- 9 brave students, the "Little Rock Nine," went to school for a whole year while Arkansas state police and violent crowds tried to keep them away.
- 6 year-old **Ruby Bridges** did the same with a year-long Federal Marshall escort in order to integrate the New Orleans school system.
- It took tens of thousands of church meetings, countless non-violence workshops, innumerable letters and phone calls, and hundreds of legal actions.

Reader: The **National Civil Rights Act** passed on July 2, 1964. All businesses and public facilities were open to African Americans. Black people could begin to dream of any job.

Reader: On August 6, 1965, President Johnson signed the **Voting Rights Act** making it illegal to withhold the right to vote from any American citizen.

Reader: Many of us were born after 1965. This movement changed America in ways that are often hard to appreciate today. But it laid the foundation for the critical and challenging work that remains. Racism and its injustices creates serious problems throughout the United States.

ALL: "We must learn to welcome and not to fear the voices of dissent. We must dare to think about 'unthinkable things' because when things become unthinkable, thinking stops and action becomes mindless." **James William Fulbright**

In a sense we have come to our nation's capital to cash a check. When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir. This note was a promise that all men would be guaranteed the inalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.
CIVIL RIGHTS LEADER
1929-1968
"I HAVE A DREAM" SPEECH



PRESIDENT LYNDON B. JOHNSON SIGNING THE VOTING RIGHTS ACT, AUGUST 6, 1965

36TH PRESIDENT

It is wrong—deadly wrong—to deny any of your fellow Americans the right to vote in this country.

Between 1882 and the early 1950's, there were nearly 4500 lynchings in which a black man or boy was executed without a trial.

"Never, ever be afraid to make some noise and get in good trouble, necessary trouble."

JOHN LEWIS
1940-2020