
Presidential Documents

Title 3—

Proclamation 6967 of January 17, 1997

The President

Martin Luther King, Jr., Federal Holiday, 1997

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

People throughout the world celebrate the birthday of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., as a tribute to his shining example of love and justice.

Dr. King was a man of clear and powerful vision who offered an uncompromising message of brotherhood and hope at a time when violence and racial intolerance tore at the seams of our Nation. In addressing these ills, he often referred to what he called the “magnificent words” of the Declaration of Independence, which proclaimed that “all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” He declared these words to be “a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir,” and upon which payment could no longer be delayed. Dr. King’s struggle made it possible for all of us to move closer to the ideals set forth in the Declaration of Independence and in our Constitution.

Although ours is the most successful multiracial, multicultural society in human history, in the words of Dr. King, “our work is not yet done.” We have not yet fully realized Dr. King’s dream of a Nation of full opportunity, genuine equality, and consistent fair play for all.

Every citizen must rise to meet that challenge because America’s promise of freedom and opportunity cannot truly be realized for any of us until it is realized for every one of us. We all have an obligation to reach out to one another—across the artificial barriers of race, gender, religion, class, and age—so that each member of our society shares fully in the promise of the American Dream.

In the spring of 1963, Dr. King was arrested in Birmingham, Alabama, while protesting discrimination in public accommodations and employment. From his jail cell, he wrote of his faith that ultimately what was good in America would prevail over fear and prejudice:

We will reach the goal of freedom in Birmingham and all over the nation, because the goal of America is freedom. Abused and scorned though we may be, our destiny is tied up with the destiny of America. . . . We will win our freedom because the sacred heritage of our nation and the eternal will of God are embodied in our echoing demands.

As I begin my second term as the last President of the 20th century, I ask each American to work with me to usher in a new era of hope, reconciliation, and fellowship among all our people—rich and poor, young and old, and men and women of every race. I urge all Americans to put intolerance behind us, seek common ground, and strive for justice and community in our Nation.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, WILLIAM J. CLINTON, President of the United States of America, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and laws of the United States, do hereby proclaim Monday, January 20, 1997, as the Martin Luther King, Jr., Federal Holiday. I call upon the people of the United States to observe this occasion with appropriate programs, ceremonies, and activities.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this seventeenth day of January, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and ninety-seven, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and twenty-first.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "William J. Clinton". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "W" and "C".

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