



# MEETING IN A BOX:

## Martin Luther King Jr. Day



**Martin Luther King Jr. Day** is a federal holiday celebrated the third Monday in January each year, coinciding with Dr. King's birthday on Jan. 15. On MLK Day 2023 (Jan. 16), we honor Dr. King's civil rights leadership and legacy, celebrate our country's civil rights achievements, and acknowledge how much work we need to do to make sure we continue fighting for Dr. King's dream.

Dr. King's strong oratory played a pivotal role in the Civil Rights Movement and inspired other movements throughout the 20th and 21st centuries. This Meeting in a Box is a valuable tool to share with your staff to honor Dr. King's legacy and initiate conversations on how to fight for civil rights moving forward. We have included a timeline of Dr. King's activism, the process of making MLK Day a national holiday and a fact sheet about Dr. King and the struggle for civil rights in the U.S.



# TIMELINE

**1929**

**Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.** was born Michael King Jr. on Jan. 15, 1929, in Atlanta, Georgia. He was raised in a middle-class family steeped in the Baptist tradition. Both his father and maternal grandfather were preachers, and he would grow up following in their footsteps.

**1944**

King entered Morehouse College under a wartime initiative aimed at boosting enrollment by admitting promising high schoolers.

**1946**

The Atlanta Constitution published Dr. King's letter to the editor arguing for the basic rights and opportunities of Black people as American citizens.

**1948**

Dr. King became an ordained pastor and is appointed to the Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta. That same year, he graduated from Morehouse and began his studies at Crozer Theological Seminary in Pennsylvania. He became known for his strong oratory skills and was elected as the president of Crozer's overwhelmingly white student body.

**1951**

Dr. King graduated from Crozer as valedictorian and went on to attend Boston University, where he studied people's relationship with God and received a doctorate in 1955. While in Boston, he met Coretta Scott, who was studying at the New England Conservatory of Music. They married in 1953 and had four children.

**1954**

Dr. King served as the pastor of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama. Following Rosa Parks' arrest, civil rights advocates created the Montgomery Improvement Association. The group planned a protest against segregation laws and appointed Dr. King as their leader. Because of his activism, his family's home was bombed, and his family's safety was threatened, but he continued the boycott.

**1957**

Dr. King organized the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), under which he visited religious and civil rights leaders throughout the country and abroad to discuss race-related issues.

**1960**

Dr. King's organization of the lunch counter sit-in at an Atlanta department store landed him in jail, but he was eventually released because of the intercession of then-presidential candidate John F. Kennedy.

**1961**

In a meeting with President John F. Kennedy, Dr. King asked the president to issue a second Emancipation Proclamation to eliminate racial segregation.

**1963**

Dr. King's eloquence and poise had earned him publicity via the relatively new medium of television, and his forms of civil disobedience made him popular with Black and liberal white Americans across the country. There is perhaps a no greater example of this than his "I Have a Dream" speech in front of more than 200,000 demonstrators in Washington, D.C.

Dr. King's 1963 protests in Birmingham, Alabama, landed him in jail. From his cell, he wrote the now-famous "Letter from Birmingham Jail," which outlined his philosophy of nonviolence.

**1964**

Dr. King was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize and named Man of the Year by Time Magazine. In a busy year, King also met with Malcolm X for the first time, as well as FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover.

**1965**

Voting rights marchers are beaten in Selma, Alabama, in what became known as Bloody Sunday. Dr. King, along with John Lewis and James Forman, responded by leading civil rights marchers from Selma to Montgomery just weeks later after a U.S. District judge upheld their right to do so in an orderly manner. It became one of the landmark events of the Civil Rights Movement.

## 1967

Dr. King reveals his plans for the Poor People's Campaign, a civil disobedience campaign organized in Washington, D.C., to force the government to end poverty.

## 1968

Dr. King delivers his final speech, titled "I've Been to the Mountaintop" in Memphis, Tennessee. The next day he is shot and killed while standing on a balcony at the Lorraine Motel. He would be buried five days later in Atlanta.

## 1969

James Earl Ray pleaded guilty to assassinating Dr. King. He received a 99-year prison sentence. However, in the coming years, theories arise that suggest Dr. King was killed through a government conspiracy. To this day, Dr. King's family says it does not believe Ray was the gunman or sole perpetrator.

## 1980

The Martin Luther King Jr. National Historic Site is established in Atlanta. It includes his birthplace, Ebenezer Church and the King Center.

## 1985

Coretta Scott King and three of the King children are arrested in Washington, D.C. while protesting apartheid outside the South African Embassy.

## 1986

Martin Luther King Jr. Day is first celebrated as a federal holiday.

## 1991

The National Civil Rights Museum opened at the former Lorraine Motel, where Dr. King was fatally shot in 1968.

## 2006

Coretta Scott King delivered her last speech at a "Salute to Greatness" dinner as part of the Martin Luther King Jr. celebrations in Atlanta, Georgia. She died 17 days later on Jan. 31.

## 2008

The National Civil Rights Museum and others commemorate the 50th anniversary of King's assassination with memorial events throughout the year.

## 2011

The Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial is established on the National Mall in Washington, D.C.

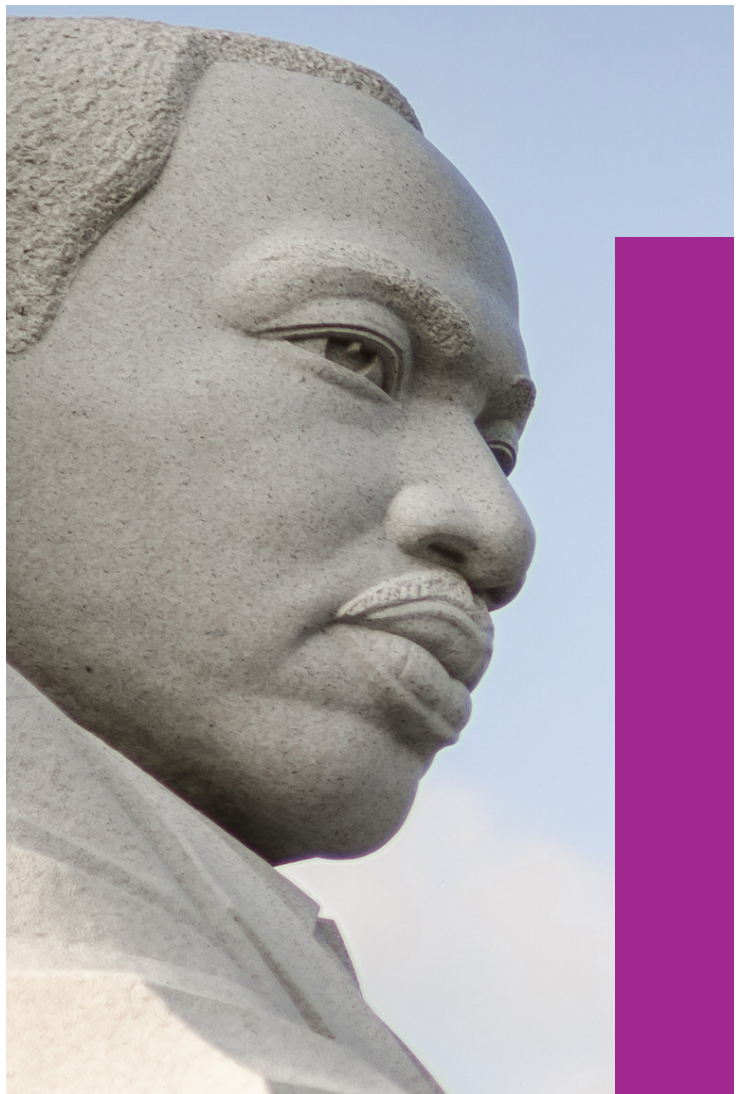
## 2021

The 10th anniversary of the dedication of the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial is celebrated. More than 3 million people visit the National Mall memorial each year, and it serves as a gathering place for civil rights marches and demonstrations.

## 2022

On what would have been Dr. King's 93rd birthday, his granddaughter, Yolanda Renee King, called on a group of supporters to continue what her grandfather started at a MLK Day press conference in Washington, D.C.

Groundbreaking for the Boston Common 'The Embrace' monument begins in April. The finished product is set to be unveiled in January 2023. The Boston Common was chosen as the home of the statue because this is where Dr. King led 22,000 people in a march for civil rights down Columbus Avenue to the Boston Common.



# QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION



What do you already know about Dr. King's life and activism?



How can expanding your knowledge of the Civil Rights Movement benefit you and your community?



Why is it important to discuss Dr. King's work and legacy in the workplace?



How are the problems Dr. King and the Black community faced in the 20th century similar to what we are dealing with today? In what ways have we made progress, and in what ways have we not?

# FACT CHECK: MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT MLK

Dr. King is central to American civil rights history, but many still misunderstand his ideologies and how they all relate to civil rights and resistance today. Here, we debunk some commonly held misconceptions about Dr. King.

## **MISCONCEPTION:**

Dr. King believed in colorblindness.

## **FACT CHECK:**

This misconception often makes Dr. King more palatable to mainstream society. Dr. King's famous quote, "I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character," has been misinterpreted to oppose affirmative action.

However, Dr. King knew the issue of race in society was complex. In 1968 when he spoke to the striking Memphis sanitation workers, he said, "When there is vast unemployment and underemployment in the Black community, they call it a social problem. When there is vast unemployment and underemployment in the white community, they call it a depression."

## **MISCONCEPTION:**

Dr. King's advocacy is far-removed from current Black Lives Matter causes that focus on police brutality.

## **FACT CHECK:**

Mass incarceration and police brutality were also issues during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. As evidenced by the Montgomery, Selma and Birmingham protests where police brutalized demonstrators, systemic abuse of Black people was an issue that King also focused on.

During the eulogy of Jimmie Lee Jackson, who was killed by an Alabama state trooper in 1965, Dr. King said: "A state trooper pointed the gun, but he did not act alone. He was murdered by the brutality of every sheriff who practices lawlessness in the name of law. He was murdered by the irresponsibility of every politician, from governors on down, who has fed his constituents the stale bread of hatred and the spoiled meat of racism."

### ***MISCONCEPTION:***

Dr. King only focused on racism and segregation in the South.

### ***FACT CHECK:***

Dr. King is best known for his work prior to the Civil Rights Act of 1964, but for the years after its passage and up until his death, Dr. King led movements that focused on racial-economic inequality, labor rights and anti-Vietnam War activism.

### ***MISCONCEPTION:***

Without Dr. King, the Civil Rights Movement would not have happened.

### ***FACT CHECK:***

Dr. King was just one of many figures — men and women, peaceful and radical — that led the Civil Rights Movement. Female activists like Ella Baker, Daisy Bates, Joanne Grant, Fannie Lou Hamer and Septima Clark are often forgotten about, while those like Jesse Jackson, Al Sharpton, Malcolm X and James Forman are criticized and viewed as angry or militant. Attributing the Civil Rights Movement to one man ignores the contributions of men and women who, despite having diverse ideologies, played key roles.

### ***MISCONCEPTION:***

Dr. King and Black Power movement leader Malcolm X were ideological opposites.

### ***FACT CHECK:***

Dr. King studied and preached peaceful protest, but deradicalizing Dr. King is another way to simplify his views. Malcolm X advocated for armed rebellion in the North, but as Dr. King's career progressed, he also advocated for a "radical revolution of values." Malcolm X broke with the Nation of Islam in 1964 and joined Dr. King's Selma campaign in 1965.

### ***MISCONCEPTION:***

Dr. King's movement was 100% inclusive.

### ***FACT CHECK:***

Dr. King's leadership was an important catalyst, but civil rights activists would grow more inclusive of people of different genders and sexualities with time.

# QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION



What are some of the earliest details you learned about Dr. King? How might these only be partial truths?



How can remembering Dr. King as a race-blind, slow-to-anger martyr erase the reality of his movement and discredit the tactics and anger of activists today?



Why might a simpler, more pacifistic version of Dr. King be easier for us to memorialize? How can anger and grief be justified catalysts for meaningful change?



What other ways can we observe and honor MLK Day? How can we continue this historical knowledge-sharing throughout the year and not just on the third Monday in January each year?



In what ways does our company recognize MLK Day, both publicly and internally? What is some employee feedback about these observances? Are they effective in sharing knowledge and encouraging cultural celebration?