

# STATUS REPORT

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**Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Commission**  
§ 30-192 et seq., Code of Virginia  
General Assembly of Virginia

## **Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.**

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., the son and grandson of Baptist ministers, was born on January 15, 1929, in Atlanta, Georgia. He was educated in the Atlanta public schools, and, at age fifteen, entered Morehouse College where he earned a baccalaureate degree in sociology in 1948. He was licensed and ordained as a minister of the Gospel and earned the Bachelor of Divinity degree from Crozer Theological Seminary in 1951, while also attending the University of Pennsylvania. He was awarded the doctor of philosophy in 1955 from Boston University, while also studying at Harvard University. Dr. King was an ardent believer and promoter of education, and during his lifetime, received many honorary degrees, and numerous other recognitions, accolades, and awards.

After graduation from Boston University, Dr. King was called to the pastorate of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama. While serving as pastor of this church, he was catapulted onto the world stage when he led a boycott of the Montgomery city bus system to protest the city's segregated transportation system and the arrest of Rosa Parks, who refused to relinquish her seat to a white man. Armed with the victory in *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954, the boycott led to court cases around the nation that challenged and overturned the constitutionality of Jim Crow laws. Dr. King rose to the leadership of the newly birthed Civil Rights Movement and remained in the forefront of American politics and social debate until his death on April 4, 1968 in Memphis, Tennessee while championing the cause of sanitation workers in a protest against low wages and intolerable working conditions.

The world remembers Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. best for his efforts to eradicate racism and segregation, and his philosophy of nonviolence. However, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was a Baptist pastor, a devoted father and husband, philosopher, theologian, teacher, a great civil rights leader, a martyr, a pioneer, and the social conscience of the nation during some of its darkest hours. His vision of world peace, the brotherhood of mankind, and racial equality, conflicted with the social order of this nation, particularly given the dehumanizing status and treatment to which African-Americans have been subjected throughout America's history. His views, principles, beliefs and deeds pricked the social consciousness of the country at the heart of its hypocrisy. Dr. King's fight for freedom took him from Montgomery to Selma and through boycotts, sit-ins, marches, and rallies to the Nobel Peace Prize. The principles he espoused and his dream of a higher and better world social order—*“the Beloved Community”*—have been kept alive by the indelible mark of his life on the soul of this nation.

*"Martin Luther King, Jr. is the tragic hero by whose lumen the profile of Western culture, American style, was projected on the conscience of the nation for one brief moment of history. The significance of King is measured not so much by the nature of his accomplishments or the realization of his dreams as by the power of the paradox he created for America by being who he was and doing what he did." C. Eric Lincoln, ed. (New York: Hill and Wang), 1970.*

Today, many people benefit from the sacrifices and achievements of Dr. King, but lack the knowledge and understanding of the significance of his life and principles. They do not possess the ability to apply his teachings to contemporary issues and problems. Given the growing incidents of racial animus and reversal of social and political gains for minorities, the litmus test to determine the need for continuing Dr. King's work is, "do we, today, judge persons by the content of their character or by the color of their skin?"

### **Legislative History of the Commission**

Federal legislation was signed by President Ronald Reagan on November 3, 1983, to establish the third Monday of every January as the Martin Luther King, Jr. National Holiday. On August 27, 1984, he signed into law legislation providing for the Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission. The first national King Holiday was observed on January 20, 1986, and by January 16, 1989, approximately 44 states had established a state holiday to honor Dr. King. In the years immediately following the establishment of the federal King Holiday, the Commonwealth of Virginia was among the first states to establish state legislative or executive level commissions, pursuant to the federal law, to implement the objectives of the federal law at the state level.

In 1992, pursuant to House Bill 997, patroned by the late Delegate William P. Robinson, Jr., the Virginia General Assembly created the Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Commission as a legislative study commission by the 1992, in compliance with the federal law. In 1997, House Bill 2198 (Robinson), was enacted to elevate the Commission to permanent legislative commission status under the authority of the General Assembly. The Commission's charge was broadened significantly to more adequately reflect the scope of its responsibilities.

Under the current law, § 30-192.4 of the Code of Virginia, the Commission has the following powers and duties:

1. Identify, plan, develop, and implement appropriate programs and events that further the philosophy and memory of Dr. King;
2. Monitor the educational goals, programs, and objectives of public and private schools to encourage the recognition and inclusion of the achievements and contributions of ethnic and minority groups;
3. Inventory and review, biennially, activities and events sponsored by localities in the Commonwealth and those instituted or offered by public and private schools and institutions of higher education designed to honor Dr. King's memory;
4. Facilitate the analysis of public policy relative to Dr. King's principles and philosophy, including his work pertaining to social and economic justice, ethics, and racial equality, and promote the appreciation of diverse cultures among the citizenry;

5. Collaborate with The King Center in Atlanta and other established state and local entities and community organizations in activities and events that commemorate the birth and death, and in initiatives designed to perpetuate the work and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.;
6. Establish a memorial to honor Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., in which (i) records, oral histories, and memorabilia documenting his relationship with and impact on the Commonwealth may be acquired and preserved; (ii) information concerning his life, work, teachings, writings, and philosophy may be collected, preserved, and accessed for educational and cultural purposes; and (iii) scholarly inquiry and writing, undergraduate and graduate study, and policy analysis may be conducted;
7. Encourage and support collaborative activities among state, local, and national organizations that (i) emphasize the noncommercialization of the state and federal King Holiday, (ii) present his life and achievements in historical context, (iii) articulate the relationship between his philosophy, contributions, and current public policies, and (iv) demonstrate his principles consistently through significant participation of persons of diverse racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds in public and private endeavors and enterprises;
8. Monitor and evaluate state, local, and national public policy relative to the principles and philosophy of Dr. King, and make appropriate recommendations to the Governor and the General Assembly to maintain progress towards social and economic justice and equal opportunity for all citizens;
9. Apply for and expend such gifts, donations, grants, bequests, and other funds from any source as may be received or that becomes available in connection with its duties under this chapter, and may comply with such conditions and requirements as may be imposed in connection therewith;
10. Seek, accept, and direct the expenditure of public and private contributions to enable it to carry out the purposes of this chapter and to enhance its fiscal stability, financial management, and fund-raising abilities; and
11. Perform such other functions and activities as may be necessary to facilitate or implement the Commission's objectives.

### **2009 Interim Activities**

The focus of the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Commission included the following:

- (i) planning and implementing commemorative programs for the Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial, and distribution of the National Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission's keepsake publication to members of the executive and legislative branches of state government, teachers of the year, Virginia History Conference, and the media center of each Virginia public school;
- (ii) developing year-round activities to promote the legacy of Dr. King;
- (iii) recognizing the King Holiday;
- (iv) encouraging citizen participation in community service;
- (v) establishing partnerships to facilitate the Commission's mission and work;
- (vi) obtaining custody of all copies of the master tapes of its film, *Brown v. Board of Education: The Turning Point*, from New Millennium Studios;
- (vii) supporting the film, "They Closed Our Schools;"
- (viii) participating in and supporting the annual Community Leaders Prayer Breakfast;
- (ix) selecting recipients of the Commission's annual Civil Rights Award and the Spirit of Martin Award;
- (x) preserving archaeological treasures related to minority history in the Commonwealth, e.g. formerly all-Black public schools;
- (xi) launching a interactive website and obtaining copyright clearances;
- (xii) continuing the follow up of initiatives and activities resulting from the two-year commemoration of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *Brown v. Board of Education*;
- (xiii) building and enhancing the visibility of the Commission;
- (xiv) legislative initiatives to commemorate the Lincoln Bicentennial and to protect archaeological treasures and minority history; and
- (xv) the 2009 Presidential Inauguration Initiative, which was conducted in concert with the Martin Luther King, Jr. Living History and Public Policy Center.

## 2009 Legislative Initiatives

**SB 1416 (Blevins). Preservation of historical sites and architectural areas.** Provides that local governing bodies may include in ordinances establishing areas of known historical or archaeological significance, that any applicant must submit documentation that any development in such areas will preserve or accommodate the historical or archaeological resources.

**SJR 342 (Marsh). Commemorating the Centennial of the NAACP.** Commemorates the 100th anniversary of the founding of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the nation's oldest civil rights organization.

**SJR 343 (Marsh) and HJR 685 (McClellan). Commemorating the bicentennial of the birth of Abraham Lincoln, 16th President of the United States.** Commemorates the 200th anniversary of the birth of President Abraham Lincoln, and encourages the participation of the Commonwealth in the national and statewide commemorative programs and events.

## Representation at Events

**Annual Community Prayer Breakfast.** This event is sponsored by Living Dream, Inc. each year in January to kick off the week-long celebration of the federal King Holiday in Virginia. The Commission was represented by several of its members, staff, and guests of the Commission.

**Annual King Center Awards Banquet.** The Commission was represented by the Honorable William Cleveland at this annual event sponsored by the King Center in Atlanta.

**Brown @ 55: Fulfilling the Promise.** The Commission was represented at the April conference sponsored by the University of Richmond at its new Downtown campus by the Chairman, Lincoln Bicentennial Subcommittee members, and staff. This conference was co-sponsored by the Commission and the *Brown v. Board of Education* Scholarship Committee.

**Walk Toward Freedom.** The Commission was represented by the Chairman and staff at the weekend Lincoln Bicentennial events.

**Lincoln in Petersburg.** The Commission was represented by staff at this Lincoln Bicentennial program.

**Banquet Honoring Reverend Willie Woodson.** The Commission was represented by the Chairman at this event honoring the work of Reverend Woodson, upon his retirement as Executive Director of Living the Dream, Inc.

**Lincoln and the South.** The Commission was represented at the March conference by staff and members of the Lincoln Bicentennial Subcommittee. This

conference was sponsored by the University of Richmond and the American Civil War Center at Tredegar.

**Eve of the American Civil War Conference.** Senator Marsh and members of the Lincoln Bicentennial Subcommittee represented the Commission at the first signature conference of the Virginia Sesquicentennial of the American Civil War Commission which was held at the University of Virginia. Some members participated by webcast.

**Library.** Additional books, media and other resources, equipment, and subscriptions to professional journals are being added to the Commission's collection to facilitate its work.

**Website.** The Commission's website maintained by the Division of Legislative Services (DLS) has been updated to reflect the Commission's expanded work and as a temporary measure prior to the launching of the new website upon receiving copyright clearance for selected materials.

### **2010 Interim Activities**

The many initiatives of the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Commission are designed to perpetuate Dr. King's dream of the "Beloved Community" in Virginia, and to educate citizens concerning the totality of Dr. King beyond his place in history as a great civil rights leader and peacemaker. Working with The King Center in Atlanta, the Commission's efforts include familiarizing the public with Dr. King's work as a scholar, prolific writer, philosopher, historian, educator, humanitarian, gifted orator, theologian, and a man of deep faith. The Commission has also designed its work to emphasize Dr. King's passion for lifelong learning and history, commitment to democracy and freedom, social and economic justice, fiscal responsibility, public and community service, faith and traditional values, sound and equitable public policies that promote employment, housing, public safety, health care, national security, successful international relations and global competitiveness, science and technology, and human dignity for all persons.

The Commission engaged in the following activities and events during 2010.

- Preservation of Lincoln Homestead in Rockingham County
- "Lincoln in Petersburg, Phase III," to commemorate the Bicentennial of Abraham Lincoln and his visit to Petersburg in April 1865
- Northside High School Museum Committee for the preservation of formerly all-Black schools in Virginia
- "They Closed Our Schools," Prince Edward County documentary and book, to publish the account of desegregation in Prince Edward County
- Robert Russa Moton Museum, Phase III, to relate the Prince Edward County story during Massive Resistance
- Desegregation of Virginia Education (DOVE) Project at Old Dominion University to catalog for the purpose of preserving public records and promoting scholarship on Virginia's desegregation history
- "Lincoln Symposium," to commemorate the Bicentennial of Abraham Lincoln and his visit to Richmond in April 1865
- Slave Burial Ground/African American Cemetery Project with the Institute for Historical Biology at the College of William and Mary.

- Symposium on the Legacy of the Emancipation Proclamation and the Reconstruction Amendments
- Emancipation Proclamation Jubilee
- Commemoration of the Public School Closings in Virginia (Massive Resistance)
- Black History Month

This document includes the activities and summary of the work of the Commission during the 2009 and 2010 legislative interims. A report was not submitted for publication as a state document.