

Remembering Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Rosa Parks started it. Martin Luther King made it matter. She was tired and just sat down on the bus, refusing to move to the back. It was 1955 in Montgomery, Alabama, and Parks was arrested and jailed.

King led the successful Montgomery Bus Boycott that lasted 381 days and produced a Supreme Court ruling declaring segregated seating on public buses unconstitutional. Date: November 1956.

The march toward civil rights was on, with King very much in the lead and a target of hate. His home was firebombed by white supremacists two months after the 1956 Supreme Court ruling. In 1958, he was stabbed in an assassination attempt. In 1968, age 40, he was murdered by a sniper.

Murdered at 40, but not before leading marches and demonstrations attracting hundreds of thousands and the attention of the world. Not before being named Man of the Year by *Time* magazine in 1963 and receiving the

Nobel Peace Prize in 1964. Not before seeing the passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

An extraordinary man. A man whose speeches could be pure poetry and who was known to end some of them with lyrics listeners might sing together. His oratory was powerful and spoke to the core of our democratic institutions:



“...to deny a person the right to exercise his political freedom at the polls is no less dastardly an act as to deny a Christian the right to petition God in prayer.” (Letter to *New York Amsterdam News*, June 1965).

But, civil justice wasn't his only concern. Of the 10 demands in the 1963 March on Washington, No. 7 was a massive federal program to train and place all unemployed workers—Black and white—in meaningful and dignified jobs at decent wages, and No. 8 was a national minimum wage that will give Americans a decent standard of living. Sometimes we forget the 1963 march on Washington was called the “March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom.”

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Vice President Kamala Harris remarked on January 18, “I think it’s important to remember that Dr. King was killed in large part, I believe, because he was on the verge of bringing together the civil rights movement around racial justice with the fight for economic justice.”

Indeed, only three weeks before he was assassinated, King addressed 15,000 people at rally in Memphis in support of striking sanitation workers. “You are reminding the nation,” he told attendees, “that it is a crime for people to live in this rich nation and receive starvation wages...working on a full-time basis and a full-time job getting part-time income.”

King wasn’t shifting his concern, but turning the national spotlight onto what would be even more uncomfortable for the populace in the 1960’s; asking not only that they open their eyes to racial injustice but open their bank accounts and state budgets to address the inequities that racial injustice had built.

He knew the difficulties he faced, now that the movement was struggling “for genuine equality.” In his 1967 speech at Stanford University entitled “The Other America,” he said, “It’s much easier to integrate a lunch counter

than it is to guarantee a livable income and a good, solid job. It’s much easier to guarantee the right to vote than it is to guarantee the right to live in sanitary, decent housing conditions. It is much easier to integrate a public park than it is to make genuine quality integrated education a reality.”

Regretfully, his words are no less true today than in the 60s. —*Susan Haase*

URGENT RESOLUTION: RACIAL JUSTICE FOR BLACK PEOPLE AND ALL PEOPLE OF COLOR

This resolution addresses racial injustices experienced by Black People, Indigenous People, and all People of Color (BIPOC) in our country. Racism is at the core of the national upheaval following George Floyd’s death on May 25, therefore it is fitting that League of Women Voters members consider how to address racism while carrying out the public policies of LWV. We ask that delegates to the 54th Convention of the League of Women Voters resolve to advocate throughout our country for the eradication of systemic racism within every level of government; for the end of excessive force and brutality in law enforcement; and for equal protection under the law regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, disability, and gender identity or sexual orientation.

This resolution is based on LWV positions found in the Impact on Issues 2018-2020, Individual Liberties (p.31), Equality of Opportunity (p.68), and in LWV’s Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Policy (lwv.org/league-management). Resolution approved LWVUS 2020