

THE UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON CIVIL RIGHTS

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PRESS RELEASE

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U.S. CIVIL RIGHTS COMMISSION COMMEMORATES 41ST ANNIVERSARY OF DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.'S DEATH

Washington, DC - The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights today urged all Americans to reflect on the life of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., by recalling the legacy of the civil rights leader on the anniversary of his death forty-one years ago. On April 4, 1968, Dr. King was shot and killed as he stood on the balcony of the Lorraine Motel in Memphis, Tennessee, where he had gone to support black sanitary public works employees who had been on strike for better wages and working conditions. His murder happened the day after his famous "I've Been to the Mountaintop" sermon, in which he revealed that he was not afraid to die.

"Dr. King's 1963 leadership of a peaceful demonstration of more than 250,000 people on the steps of the Lincoln memorial in Washington D.C. is considered by many to be a defining moment of the twentieth century," said Gerald A. Reynolds, Commission Chairman. Only five years later, Dr. King's life was brutally cut short, setting off a wave of riots in over 110 cities and mourning throughout the nation. But his assassin's bullet could not extinguish King's vision a color-blind society and message of equality and dignity for all persons, which transcended his death. Because of Dr. King's inspiring leadership, our nation has made extraordinary progress in eradicating discrimination and promoting equal opportunity for all its citizens.

Dr. King was a founder and President of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. His strategy of nonviolent resistance in the face of inequity and systemic institutional discrimination led to numerous arrests in the 1950s and 1960s for his civil rights activities. In 1964, he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. The nation celebrates his birthday as a national holiday every third Monday in January.

"Dr. King voiced the hope that his four children would one day live in a nation where they would be judged not by the color of their skin but the content of their character," Reynolds said. "He inspired us to stand together against discrimination and oppression that had for years limited freedom for many Americans. We reflect on his life and contributions on this 41st anniversary of his untimely death."

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The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights is an independent, bipartisan agency charged with monitoring federal civil rights enforcement. Members include Chairman Gerald A. Reynolds, Vice Chair Abigail Thernstrom, Commissioners Todd Gaziano, Gail Heriot, Peter N. Kirsanow, Arlan D. Melendez, Ashley L. Taylor, Jr., and Michael Yaki. Martin Dannenfels is the Staff Director. Commission meetings are open to the general public. The Commission's website is <http://www.usccr.gov>.