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# Alexandria's Martin Luther King Day tradition

Since 1986, Alexandria has celebrated Martin Luther King Jr.'s life and message. That year, the city celebrated the new federal holiday with the annual Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Program at Washington Street United Methodist Church, which featured speeches by the Rev. Moses Beasley of Shiloh Baptist Church, the Rev. Columbus Watson of Beulah Baptist Church and Melvin L. Berghem, former vice mayor of Alexandria.

Although President Ronald Reagan declared Martin Luther King Day as a federal holiday on Nov. 2, 1983, it wasn't until 1986 that the holiday was first observed. On Jan. 20, 1986, The Alexandria Gazette published the article, "City to commemorate King's life."

"Today marks the first observance of Martin Luther King's birthday as a national holiday. It is also the first celebration of a national holiday to honor a Black American. It is also the natural culmination of what he accomplished during a lifetime that ended early and senselessly. ... What he really started was the process that is still going on in Alexandria and across the nation. ... What this new national holiday should become is a time to measure the progress of this process of opening up our society. ... He set



PHOTO/ALEXANDRIA BLACK HISTORY MUSEUM

The city is hosting another poster commemoration and exhibition to celebrate Martin Luther King Jr.

all Americans of all colors and shades on a path that takes us closer and closer towards the American dream."

This year, the Alexandria Black History Museum honors Martin Luther King Jr. with the Annual MLK Poster Commemoration and Exhibition in the Vola Lawson Lobby in City Hall. Started by the Alexandria Society for the Preservation of Black Heritage, Inc., and supported by the Alexandria Black History Museum and Alexandria City Public Schools, this event highlights the artwork

of ACPS students.

This year's theme is "MISSION: POSSIBLE Protecting Freedom, Justice, and Democracy 2024-2025."

The posters remain in City Hall through the end of February for the community to appreciate. There will be a free poster exhibition awards ceremony in City Council Chambers on Feb. 9 from 1 to 3 p.m.

The 52nd annual citywide Martin Luther King Jr. Celebration will be held at the George Washington Masonic Memorial on Monday, with

a reception from 5:30 to 6:30 p.m., and a program from 6:30 to 8 p.m. You can register for this free event at [drkingmemorialprogram.org/annual-commemoration](http://drkingmemorialprogram.org/annual-commemoration).

Thirty-nine years have passed since Alexandria's first MLK holiday. On Monday, let us reflect on the progress that the United States and specifically, Alexandria, has made toward racial equality.

*Out of the Attic is provided by the Office of Historic Alexandria.*