



## Statement by Senator Feinstein in Recognition of Martin Luther King Day

January 13, 2006

*Washington, DC – U.S. Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) issued the following statement today commemorating Martin Luther King Day:*

**“On Monday, our nation honors the life and legacy of one of the most exceptional leaders in American history and a national hero – the late Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.**

**Seldom in history has one individual left such an enduring imprint on our nation’s consciousness, or done more to change the very fabric of our society, than Dr. King. His tireless efforts and the hardships he endured were instrumental in awakening the Civil Rights Movement and the unparalleled transformation of our nation in the 1950’s and 60’s.**

**It was during his tenure as pastor of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama, that Dr. King was first vaulted to the national stage. Inspired by the brave actions of a tired seamstress, Rosa Parks, who refused to give up her seat to a white passenger, Dr. King began what turned into a 13-month boycott of the City bus system’s segregation policies. The ultimate success of the Montgomery bus boycott firmly established Dr. King as a leader of the nation’s burgeoning Civil Rights movement and subsequently brought an end to legal segregation in America.**

**With the eyes of the nation increasingly on him, Dr. King continued to reach out in numerous ways to help end segregation and injustice. In 1959, he returned to Atlanta to direct the activities of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. As Conference President, Dr. King was instrumental in helping communities across the country organize their own peaceful protests against racial discrimination.**

**In 1963, Dr. King led a massive march on Washington, DC, where he delivered his now famous, “I Have A Dream” speech. The speech, with its stirring language and evocative message of hope, inspired millions to his cause and still rings true today.**

**Throughout the turbulent decades of the 1950’s and 60’s, Dr. King’s tactics of active nonviolence protest, including sit-ins and marches, garnered widespread admiration. And the brutal tactics used to by police against marchers were placed in drastic contrast with Dr. King’s dignified and resolute manner. In 1964, Dr. King was awarded the 1964 Nobel Peace Prize for his commitment to nonviolence as a means to achieve Civil Rights reform.**

**A deafening voice against injustice, Dr. King consistently challenged and inspired us to reach our full potential as a nation. He was a legendary speaker whose words continue to move us no matter how many times we hear them. His vision helped the nation form a new and better understanding of itself, one that celebrates its diverse nature and strengthens its commitment to the principals of equality and justice.**

**Dr. King was violently taken from us on April 4, 1968. During his short life, Dr. King truly redefined the political and social values of his time. And yet, although his accomplishments can never be diminished, we must acknowledge that many of the oppressive conditions existing in this country during his lifetime regrettably persist today. To say otherwise would deny our responsibility to Dr. King's vision.**

**Since Martin Luther King Day was established in 1986, it has served as an annual reminder of how far we have come and how much we have yet to achieve in realizing Dr. King's vision.**

**At the time of Dr. King's death in 1968, more than half of all blacks lived in substandard housing, and minority income was half that of whites. Thirty-eight years later, there still exist huge racial and ethnic disparities in housing standards and ownership. Nationally, less than half of black families own homes, compared to 76% of white families. In the housing market, blacks and Hispanics continue to face rampant discrimination. As a consequence, our communities remain highly segregated and the value of minority homes is depreciated.**

**Incredibly, the gap in income between whites and blacks has actually grown. In 1968, the real median family income for whites was \$15,243 higher than it was for blacks (in 2004 dollars). Today, the discrepancy has increased by well over a thousand dollars, to \$16,500. Nearly a quarter of blacks live under the poverty level and the unemployment rate of blacks is almost twice the rate of whites.**

**These challenges are daunting, but meaningful change is never easy. We will persevere, and we will make a difference. Dr. King himself was a living testament to the thirst of the human spirit for freedom. Surrounded by a culture of fear and violence, he demonstrated that the world need not define us, but rather we can shape our world to reflect our highest and most magnificent aspirations.**

**Recently, I co-sponsored a bill that approved funding for a national memorial to Dr. King. This memorial will be the first on the National Mall in honor of a person of color. It is my hope that this memorial will continue to remind the nation, and the world, of the powerful words of hope Dr. King expressed here in Washington, DC, more than 40 years ago.**

**Martin Luther King Day is a time to reflect on the many successes we have had, and to consider our next steps in the struggle against injustice. We can always do better, and**

**we must fight every day to continue the legacy of the Civil Rights movement and to make America a more perfect union.”**

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