

REPRINT

**ANNUAL REPORT**

**DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.  
MEMORIAL COMMISSION**

**TO THE GOVERNOR AND  
THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF VIRGINIA**



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## ANNUAL REPORT \*

### MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. MEMORIAL COMMISSION Pursuant to § 9-145.45, Code of Virginia

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Senator Joseph V. Gartlan, Jr., *Vice-Chairman*  
Delegate Flora D. Crittenden  
Delegate Jay W. DeBoer  
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Senior Committee Coordinator

\* This report subsumes the work of the Commission from 1992 through 1997.

\*\* Former Senator Mark L. Earley served on the Commission from 1992 through 1997; Senator J. Randy Forbes currently serves on the Commission. Former Delegate V. Thomas Forehand, Former Senator Robert L. Calhoun, Ms. Nina F. Abady (deceased), Ms. Linda Dawn Gross, Mr. Everette A. Hicks, Sr., the Reverend Ralph Reavis, Sr., and Dr. Edgar A. Toppin also served on the Commission for a term of two or more years. Among the members designated in statute by position, the Honorable Salim Khalfani replaced the Honorable Lynda Byrd-Harden in 1998, and, in 1999, the Reverend Willie Woodson will replace the Reverend Tyler C. Millner, upon his retirement.



## **ANNUAL REPORT**

### **MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. MEMORIAL COMMISSION Pursuant to § 9-145.45, Code of Virginia**

#### **LEGISLATIVE HISTORY**

The Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Commission was established by the 1992 General Assembly pursuant to House Bill 997, patroned by Delegate William P. Robinson, Jr. The enactment of H.B. 997 established the Commission in statute as § 9-145.45 of the Code of Virginia. The current members are Delegates Flora D. Crittenden of Newport News; Jay W. DeBoer of Petersburg; Kenneth R. Melvin of Portsmouth; Anne G. Rhodes of Richmond; William P. Robinson, Jr., of Norfolk; Senators J. Randy Forbes of Chesapeake; Joseph V. Gartlan, Jr., of Mason Neck; Benjamin J. Lambert, III, of Richmond; Henry L. Marsh, III, of Richmond; and citizens Lynda Byrd-Harden, Executive Director of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Virginia State Conference; Raymond Eaddy of Richmond; Harrietta Eley of Norfolk; the Rev. Tyler C. Millner of Axton; the Rev. Leonard N. Smith of Arlington; and Onzlee Ware, Esq., of Roanoke. Former Senator Mark L. Earley of Chesapeake also served on the Commission from 1992 until his election in 1997 as Attorney General of Virginia. Delegate William P. Robinson, Jr., of Norfolk and Senator Joseph V. Gartlan, Jr., of Mason Neck serve as chairman and vice-chairman, respectively.

In 1997, the Commission was elevated to a permanent legislative commission, pursuant to House Bill 2198. The primary mission of the Commission is to ensure the furtherance of the philosophy and memory of Dr. King. The Commission's statutory duties are to:

- Identify, plan, develop, and implement appropriate programs and events that further the philosophy and memory of Dr. King.
- Monitor the educational goals, programs, and objectives of public and private schools to ensure the recognition and inclusion of the achievements and contributions of ethnic and minority groups.
- Inventory and review, biennially, activities and events sponsored by localities in the Commonwealth and those instituted or offered by public and private institutions of higher education designed to honor Dr. King's memory, and encourage the participation of persons representative of the demographic composition of the Commonwealth, to the end that Dr. King's philosophy of social justice and racial equality is reflected in public policies and affairs, and an appreciation of diverse cultures is promoted among the citizenry.
- Collaborate with the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission and other established state and local entities and community organizations in activities and events that commemorate the birth, death, and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

- Establish a mechanism in honor of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., by which (i) the records and memorabilia documenting his relationship with and impact on the Commonwealth may be acquired and preserved; (ii) information concerning his life and philosophy may be collected and disseminated for educational and cultural purposes; and (iii) scholarly inquiry, writing, graduate study, and policy analysis may be conducted.
- Encourage and engage in the dissemination of appropriate information and collaborative activities which emphasize the noncommercialization of the commemoration of Dr. King's birth, present his life and achievements in historical context, articulate the relationship between his philosophy, contributions, and current public policies, and demonstrate his philosophy consistently through significant participation of persons of diverse racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds in public and private affairs and enterprises.
- Perform such other functions and activities as may be necessary to facilitate or implement the Commission's objectives.

### **DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.**

The world remembers Martin Luther King, Jr., best for his efforts to eradicate racism and segregation, and for his philosophy of nonviolence. However, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., the man, was much more than an icon of the civil rights movement. He was a devoted father, a loving husband, a Baptist minister, a theologian, philosopher, teacher, pioneer, great civil rights leader, martyr, and the conscience of America during one of the darkest moments in its history. His bold and committed leadership resulted in the birth of the civil rights movement in America. His vision of world peace, the brotherhood of mankind, and racial equality conflicted with the social and political order of the nation, particularly the legacy of second-class citizenship and dehumanizing treatment to which African-Americans have been historically subjected. His views, principles, beliefs and deeds pricked the social consciousness of the country in the depth of its hypocrisy. C. Eric Lincoln states in *Martin Luther King, Jr.: A Profile*, that:

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.

His fight for freedom took him from Montgomery to Selma, and through boycotts, sit-ins, marches and rallies to the Nobel Peace Prize. Ultimately, his fight for freedom and dignity for all persons led to his assassination in Memphis, Tennessee, on April 4, 1968. Nevertheless, his principles and dream of a higher and better world social order--"the Beloved Community"--have been inscribed indelibly on the soul of this nation.

## **ACTIVITIES OF THE COMMISSION**

Since its inception, the Commission has:

- Conducted a survey of the Commonwealth, with the assistance of the Virginia Association of Counties and the Virginia Municipal League, to determine how the King holiday is observed.
- Conferred with the Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission on appropriate commemorative activities.
- Conferred with the Community Learning Week Committee to determine ways in which the Committee's annual observance of the King holiday may be replicated throughout the state, and how the commemorative activities recommended by the Commission can best augment the events and activities offered during Community Learning Week.
- Encouraged localities to develop and implement commemorative activities, using available local and community resources which are similar to those used by the Community Learning Week Committee.
- Determined how public and private schools observe the holiday and reviewed the policies and initiatives of the Board and Department of Education to integrate instruction on the life, teachings, principles, and work of Dr. King, within the appropriate historical context, into the curriculum.
- Considered legislation to require that the Board of Education promulgate regulations to ensure the inclusion of multi-ethnic studies in the public schools.
- Considered legislation to request the Board of Education to require public schools to incorporate the contributions of African-Americans to the culture, history, and society throughout the curriculum.
- Introduced legislation to request the State Council of Higher Education to determine whether and how colleges and universities in Virginia observe the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., holiday.
- Considered the need for legislation to encourage and/or require the observance of the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., holiday by public schools with appropriate commemorative and substantive activities.
- Assessed the efficacy of establishing a separate holiday for the observance of the anniversary of Dr. King's birthday.
- Initiated the compilation of commemorative alternatives to encourage the business community to observe the holiday without commercializing it, and to reward and recognize persons, organizations, and others in the community for exemplifying the teachings of Dr. King.

- Initiated discussions on ways to encourage tangible and productive investments in minority communities, such as mentoring, work/study programs, on-the-job training and other innovative employment opportunities to assist residents in mastering marketable skills.
- Determined that the business community should be encouraged to contribute time, employees, and resources to public schools in the Commonwealth with high concentrations of at-risk students.
- Initiated discussions on ways to develop and promote linkages between professional and trade organizations and the African-American religious community to augment educational programs, provide leadership in strengthening African-American families and communities, and ensure a viable support system for minority students.
- Determined that a comprehensive plan should be developed to promote programs and events which further Dr. King's philosophy and memory on the designated holiday and throughout the year.
- Collaborated with the Community Learning Week in 1992 to commemorate the birth of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., by participating in the statewide read-in of Dr. King's book, *Stride Toward Freedom*.
- Deliberated on the most effective and efficient means of continuing the Commission as an independent and voluntary entity.
- Determined that the availability of grants, donations, and contributions from philanthropic organizations and other resources to provide initial and long-term financial support for the Commission after July 1, 1997, should be explored.
- Recommended the establishment of the Martin Luther King, Jr., Living History Memorial and Public Policy Center.
- Introduced a budget amendment in the 1993 Session to obtain funding to support the work of the Commission and planning and implementation of the Martin Luther King, Jr., Living History Memorial and Public Policy Center.
- Determined that the recommendations of the State Council of Higher Education on higher education reform should be reviewed and analyzed relative to the immediate and long-term impact on (i) access to higher education by minority students; (ii) Virginia's public policy in higher education; (iii) current and projected economic conditions in the Commonwealth; (iv) educational disparity; (iv) race relations, civil rights, freedom; and (v) equality in public education.



- Distributed copies of Dr. King's book, *Stride Toward Freedom*, to Commission members, representatives of state agencies, members of the General Assembly, and other persons during the 1993 Community Learning Week. Persons who received copies of the book were encouraged to read it and donate the book to a child or a school or public library in their locality.
- Requested that the administrator of Virginia Commonwealth University's project to catalog historical artifacts which, originally, were scheduled to be destroyed or discarded identify and include any materials pertaining to Dr. King in the university's collection.
- Initiated discussions with Virginia Commonwealth University's Department of Mass Communications regarding filming, interviewing, and producing materials for the Martin Luther King, Jr. Living History Memorial and Public Policy Center.
- Developed a plan to implement the Living History Memorial and Public Policy Center.

Throughout 1996, the Commission pursued its plans for the establishment of the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Living History Memorial and Public Policy Center. Public policy centers associated with institutions of higher education throughout the nation were researched and evaluated relative to the goals and mission of the Commission's proposed Living History Memorial and Public Policy Center. It conferred with relevant state agencies and representatives of various policy centers throughout the country, including the Virginia Commonwealth University Center for Public Policy, the University of Virginia's Carter G. Woodson Institute, and the W. E. B. DuBois Institute at Harvard University. The Commission developed the following criteria for the Living History Memorial and Public Policy Center.

### **MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. LIVING HISTORY MEMORIAL AND PUBLIC POLICY CENTER**

The proposed *Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Living History Memorial and Public Policy Center* would be established as a center devoted to preserving and advancing the philosophy of Dr. King, and to conducting scholarly inquiry and public policy analysis for the purpose of promoting social change and achieving the "Beloved Community." The Memorial would also:

- Function as a clearinghouse of oral history consisting of the taped recordings and interviews of Virginians who knew Dr. King and/or whose lives have been affected by him and his historic achievements.
- Highlight the responsibilities of the individual and social institutions to achieve the society envisioned by Dr. King.
- Provide opportunities for public participation.
- Address the relevancy of Dr. King's philosophy and principles to current social problems within the African-American community.

- Recognize the achievements and contributions of individuals and organizations to peace and nonviolence.
- Promote activities which further the teachings and memory of Dr. King.
- Provide financial assistance, e.g., scholarships and fellowships for scholarly inquiry into the teachings of Dr. King and for the implementation of projects and programs which promote and exemplify the principles he espoused.
- Advocate in the areas of human and civil rights nationally and internationally.
- House the collection of information about Dr. King, the civil rights movement, human and civil rights, etc.
- Monitor problems in living conditions and the quality of life in the Commonwealth relative to the King principles, and recommend to federal, state, and local policy makers appropriate strategies and actions to ameliorate or eradicate such problems.

Commission plans to launch the Memorial include:

- Recruiting Virginians who knew Dr. King or were affected by his life, and who would consent to a filmed or taped interview or recording of their experience with him, which would become a part of the Memorial.
- Soliciting the voluntary participation and assistance of schools of journalism and mass communications, the Department of Information Technology, and local broadcast media to conduct and/or film the interviews and produce the recordings.
- Requesting the State Archivist and/or the Virginia Historical Society to assist the Commission in the process of preserving the recordings and other memorabilia.

In addition, the Commission considered the implications of the growing incidence of racially motivated and hate crimes and the pervasive anti-affirmative action and civil rights mood across the country, particularly as these problems relate to Dr. King's legacy and his dream of justice and freedom, and of a society in which persons are judged by "the content of their character and not by the color of their skin." It was agreed that the Commission would provide the necessary leadership to engage policy makers and the general public in confronting these problems. Therefore, plans were made to sponsor a statewide conference to facilitate dialogue among all interested parties regarding the implications of these problems for the future of the Commonwealth, and to encourage visionary thinking and commitment to fostering tolerance and racial harmony.

In 1997, given the common goals of the Commission on Access and Diversity in Higher Education, the Joint Subcommittee on the Status and Needs of African-American Males in Virginia, and the King Commission, these groups co-sponsored a statewide legislative conference on access and diversity, and issues regarding affirmative action and civil rights. Therefore, the King Commission deferred its work on the Living History Memorial and Public Policy Center, and on other matters before it, until the legislative interim in 1998.

## FINDINGS OF THE COMMISSION

Over the past decade, the minority population in the nation has increased more rapidly than the white population. The Commission on Minority Participation in Education and American Life stated in its report, *One Third of A Nation*, that "14 percent of all adults in the United States and 20 percent of children under 17 are members of the African-American, Hispanic, Native American, and Asian-American populations. By the year 2000, almost 42 percent of all public school students will be minority children or other children in poverty." Already, in 25 percent of our largest cities and metropolitan areas, more than half of the public school students come from minority groups. The recent controversy concerning the flood of new immigrants, the demand to ensure that public agencies and functions and social institutions are reflective of the growing ethnic, cultural, and religious diversity in the general population, and the scope and significance of these demographic changes are just beginning to penetrate the American consciousness.

According to the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB), the Hispanic population grew by 53 percent, the African-American population by 13 percent, and other minorities increased 182 percent in the SREB region between 1980 and 1990. Over half of the nation's African-Americans live in the SREB region. This shift in population, if for no other reason, will require a change in public attitude, the views of policy makers, and the re-education of Virginia's citizens toward the needs, contributions, and inclusion of minority populations into the mainstream of society.

Similar demographic change has been observed in Virginia. According to the Joint Subcommittee Studying the Needs of Foreign-Born Persons in the Commonwealth, it is estimated that "of the more than one million immigrants who entered the United States in 1994, approximately 10,000 settled in Virginia, ranking it 18th among the states by the percentage increase in numbers over the total 1980 immigrant population. The Commonwealth can expect more than 7,000 refugees each year, with the disproportionate share, 62 percent, going to Northern Virginia." These demographic changes burden strained state and national budgets, and efforts to maintain economic growth and meet human services needs are compounded in urban cities where minorities are concentrated.

Among its other findings, the Commission noted particularly the following:

- Many public and private schools in the Commonwealth do not have organized activities or incorporate any reference to the observance of the life, teachings, and contributions of Dr. King.
- Despite legislative requests that the Board and Department of Education develop initiatives to encourage school divisions to integrate into their curricula instruction on the life, teachings, principles, and work of Dr. King, within the appropriate historical context, this has not been accomplished.

- There appears to be little interest or commitment in ensuring that students are exposed to multicultural studies and positive images of minority groups. This is evidenced by the failure to pass legislation requiring such studies, and by the omission and diminution of the historical presence and contributions of certain minority populations in textbooks, instructional materials, and the Standards of Learning.
- Legislation is needed to encourage and/or require the observance of the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., holiday by public schools with appropriate and substantive commemorative activities.
- Communication and collaboration between public schools and the business community are needed to encourage the creation of sound and tangible investments in minority communities, such as mentoring, work/study programs, on-the-job training and other innovative employment opportunities to assist residents in mastering marketable skills.
- The business community should be encouraged to contribute time, employees, and resources to public schools in the Commonwealth with large concentrations of at-risk students.
- The development and promotion of linkages between professional and trade organizations and the African-American religious community are needed to augment educational programs, provide leadership in strengthening African-American families and communities, and ensure a viable support system for minority students.
- A comprehensive plan is necessary to incorporate Dr. King's principles and philosophy in public policy, and to promote programs and events that demonstrate the relevancy of his principles to contemporary social problems.
- The Martin Luther King, Jr. Living History Memorial and Public Policy Center should be established as a clearinghouse of oral history and memorabilia, and as a public policy and research center.
- Education reforms must be analyzed relative to their immediate and long-term impact on the access of minority students to a quality public education, postsecondary education and training opportunities, current and projected economic conditions in the Commonwealth, the viability of the educational system, educational disparity, race relations, and civil rights.

## **CONCLUSION**

Dr. King espoused a way out of the American dilemma, and, as such, a means of addressing a problem that has plagued all of humanity. The Commission notes that mankind has been the beneficiary of Dr. King's achievements and great sacrifices.

However, throughout the Commonwealth and the nation, many persons, particularly young people, lack the knowledge and understanding of the significance of his life and principles. Consequently, they do not appreciate his accomplishments and cannot relate his teachings to contemporary issues and problems. Given the growing incidence of racial animus, and the reversal of social and political gains for minorities, the litmus test to determine the need for continuing Dr. King's work is, how close is society to judging children by their character and not by their color? Therefore, the Commission agrees that its primary focus must be to work toward equality for all persons, and to develop a center for the analysis of public policy to promote social change and achieve the society that Dr. King envisioned. Further, it is the Commission's position that social institutions, policymaking bodies, public schools, and institutions of higher education share in the responsibility to educate students and the public concerning the contributions and achievements of minority and ethnic populations, the benefits of diversity, and of the need for racial tolerance.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS: CHALLENGES TO THE COMMONWEALTH**

As the melting pot continues to bubble over and the demands of a competitive global economy and chronic social problems increase, the struggle to protect and balance the rights of a multicultural and multi-ethnic society will present several challenges in the next century.

**Challenge 1: Diversity.** The challenge to public schools in the 21st century is multi-fold. One of the most difficult challenges will be how to achieve pluralism while recognizing, accepting and celebrating diversity. Consideration will need to be given to the advantages of placing greater emphasis on our commonalities instead of our differences.

**Challenge 2: Minority Academic Achievement.** Poor academic achievement is cited as the primary cause of school failure and school drop out among African-American children. Research indicates a nexus between poverty and poor academic performance. The economic vitality of the Commonwealth and the nation, and the well-being of its people, depend on a superior education for all children. Ensuring equity while providing rigor in curriculum offerings and basic school aid funding will help minimize the stigmatization of many students as at-risk, and lessen the need for costly remediation due to disparate educational opportunities. However, the challenge will be to provide quality instructional programs and ensure equal educational opportunities for all students while preserving the state's fiscal integrity.

**Challenge 3: Equal Educational Opportunities.** Minority students continue to be under-represented in Virginia colleges and universities and in institutions of higher education throughout the nation. Data reflecting Virginia's college entrance rates showed that while 21,257 (48.8 %) white high school graduates enrolled as first-time freshmen at state institutions in the 1996-1997 academic year, only 5,656 (40 %) African-American high school graduates were enrolled as first-time freshmen. Research findings indicate that minority students are often perceived as having low or no ability to perform college-level work; are often urged to pursue non-college preparatory programs; are frequently tracked into programs of study taught by the least capable teachers in an atmosphere of low or no expectations of them to excel; and are often stigmatized by the low-ability group assignment.

Many other minority high school graduates who attend college have not enrolled in courses at the high school level to prepare them for college and, as a result, frequently require remedial course work as entering freshmen. Due to the practice of ability grouping and tracking, a disproportionately low number of minority students are represented in advanced placement courses, honor and accelerated courses, gifted and talented programs, and the regional Governor's schools. Further, too many African-American students fail to receive the advanced studies diploma, which would provide vital learning experiences and opportunities to prepare them for college. Unfortunately, this phenomenon occurs even within Virginia's public schools and, without appropriate intervention, may be exacerbated by the new Standards of Learning and the Standards for Accrediting Public Schools. The challenge to the Commonwealth will be the forging of an educational system in which the invidious obstacles to a quality education have been removed, such that minority students are free and encouraged to pursue their dreams and life goals.

**Challenge 4: Minority Teachers.** Demographic analyses indicate that although the minority population is increasing in the public schools, the number of minority teachers is decreasing. The dramatic increase in the size of minority populations emphasizes the need to ensure that all teachers possess the skills, training, and experience to teach students from diverse backgrounds. The availability of such professionals becomes critically important when the college entrance rates of minority students are examined. Many factors affect the supply of minority teachers; however, low college admissions rates and extensive use of testing to determine entry into the teaching profession and career advancement have adversely affected their recruitment and retention. Further, many more respected and lucrative professions have attracted a number of minority teachers in search of greater monetary and psychological rewards. Successful recruitment and retention of minority teachers will be the challenge to the Commonwealth, now and in the coming years.

**Challenge 5: Racial Equality.** From the perspectives of African-Americans and other racial and ethnic minorities, racial equality is long overdue. Although the nation no longer writhes in the throes of legally sanctioned racial separation, nevertheless, there exists a social milieu that fosters more subtle and insidious ways to effectively perpetuate the status quo. African-Americans are still under-represented in professions historically dominated by whites. Minorities still struggle to shed racial stereotypes that serve no purpose other than to maintain the status quo. Upwardly mobile minorities are still trapped by a glass ceiling, and others on the lower socioeconomic rung are forced to place their faith in the ghost of government. Some persons point to the lost momentum of social and economic gains of minorities over the last 10 years; recent court, state and federal decisions regarding affirmative action; the resurgence of undisguised racism; the disproportionate number of impoverished, uneducated, unemployed, and incarcerated African-Americans; drug- and crime-infested inner-city communities; the deterioration of the infrastructure of core cities; pervasive hopelessness; and third-world living conditions to which many minorities are subjected as evidence of a national conscience reminiscent of the mood that gripped the country 300 years ago. The concern of African-Americans regarding the encroaching reversal of their social, political, and economic progress is not easily grasped or even acknowledged by mainstream society.

Too often, the cries of minority citizens concerning injustice, their plight, and the racially motivated indignities which they suffer daily receive little attention today because of the mistaken notion that America has solved its racial problems. Although genuine racial equality continues to be an elusive goal, Virginia can become the pacesetter for the country. The challenge will be to summon the collective will, resolve, and moral consciousness of the Commonwealth to provide leadership in expurgating racism from the social fabric.

### **PROPOSED ACTIVITIES**

- Resume work on the planning, development, and establishment of the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Living History Memorial and Public Policy Center.
- Cooperate and collaborate with other legislative study committees with goals similar to those of the Commission.
- Participate, with the Commission on Access and Diversity, the Joint Subcommittee on the Status and Needs of African-American Males, and the Joint Subcommittee on the Educational Needs of Underserved Gifted Students, in post-conference activities.
- Execute its other statutory duties.

Respectfully submitted

The Honorable William P. Robinson, Jr., *Chairman*  
The Honorable Joseph V. Gartlan, Jr., *Vice-Chairman*  
The Honorable Flora D. Crittenden  
The Honorable Jay W. DeBoer  
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