

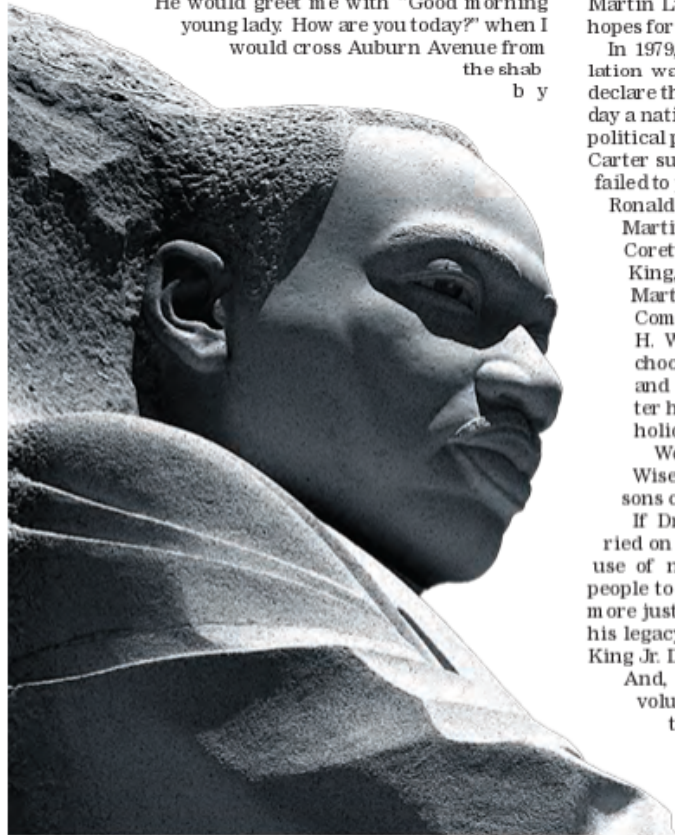
OP-ED

Do something for Martin Luther King Jr. Day 2025

BY JOAN C. BROWNING

Thirty-two-year-old Martin King was showing promise to become the extraordinary advocate for peace and social justice when I met him in 1961 – but he was not yet a Day. He was, though, already someone special. He was introduced in an October 1961 lecture, as a “major prophet.” (as a “major prophet,” he graciously gave me an autograph, which is now in the “Joan C. Browning papers” at Emory University Library archives.)

He would greet me with “Good morning young lady. How are you today?” when I would cross Auburn Avenue from the shabby
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Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee offices to his Southern Christian Leadership Conference offices to request stamps to mail our press releases. I doubt he ever knew my name, but he was always friendly.

And then, toward the end of the decades of the 1960s, when he was only 39 years old, he was assassinated. His assassination was followed shortly by that of presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy. For many, their deaths marked the time that the music died.

But the dream could not die. The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. became the symbol of hopes for a better world.

In 1979, only a decade after his death, legislation was introduced in the US Congress to declare the Monday closest to his Jan. 15 birthday a national holiday. Elected officials of both political parties supported it. President Jimmy Carter supported creating the King Day but it failed to pass Congress by five votes. President Ronald Reagan signed the law creating the Martin Luther King Jr. Day on Nov. 2, 1983. Coretta Scott King, widow of the Rev. Dr. King, was added as a life member of the Martin Luther King Jr. Federal Holiday Commission in 1989 by President George H. W. Bush. Each of the 50 states could choose whether to observe the holiday and some were slow. Thirty-two years after his assassination, in the year 2000, the holiday was celebrated nationwide.

West Virginia congressman Robert E. Wise Jr. was one of the 108 congresspersons co-sponsoring the bill.

If Dr. King had lived, he would have carried on his life's work: focus on civil rights, use of nonviolence to promote change, call people to DO SOMETHING to make the world more just. Since he is not here, we who honor his legacy do so by celebrating Martin Luther King Jr. Day.

And, as in 2002 when Americorps VISTA volunteer Elizabeth Wilson helped revitalize the day in Lewisburg, we celebrate a “day on, not a day off” to call people into public service. Morgantown’s Community Coalition for Social Justice (CCSJ)

is celebrating this Martin Luther King Jr. Day on Monday, Jan. 20, 2025, at 2 p.m.

With the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute, CCSJ is hosting a Zoom celebration entitled “Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. as Remembered by Storytellers in the graphic novel, West Virginians’ Experiences in Civil Rights.”

This film comes from CCSJ’s graphic novel, “West Virginians’ Experiences in Civil Rights: How We Have Been Connected All Along.” The video features five of the persons in the book who remember encounters with Dr. King. Eve Faulkes and Mike Attfield are organizing the Zoom program which will feature filmed interviews with Al Anderson, Rev. Ronald English, Joan Browning, Don Spencer and Sierra Velez, all of whom are featured in the book. Al Anderson will also sing.

The program is free but you must register to get the Zoom link. Registration link is <https://bit.ly/41JeSJM>

In preparation for the CCSJ Zoom program, groups or families might want to read the CCSJ’s graphic novel, “West Virginians’ Experiences in Civil Rights: How We Have Been Connected All Along.” The book is available locally at:

- Appalachian Gallery, 270 Walnut St., Morgantown.
- Barnes & Noble, 3000 University Town Centre Drive, Granville.
- Terra Cafe, 4325 Industrial Avenue, Star City.

The book also is available on Amazon as both paperback (\$15) and Kindle (\$8) versions. The easiest way to find it is to type “Eve Faulkes” in the Amazon search engine.

The CCSJ’s graphic novel along with the six six-foot panels that have appeared around the state after their introduction in Morgantown’s main library and the accompanying listening experience, all present Martin Luther King Jr. and 1960s civil rights movements in fresh ways. Whatever you do on Jan. 20 to recall the Rev. Dr. King’s legacy DO SOMETHING!

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