



Related Reading - Martin Luther King, Jr.

Every year, you get a day off of school for **Martin Luther King Day**, which is observed on the Monday closest to King's birthday (January 15). The story of the holiday's creation began shortly after King's death, when Congressman John Conyers of Michigan introduced a bill proposing a federal holiday be created in King's honor.

The bill was greatly supported by labor unions across the country, which began demanding that their employers give them King's birthday off. This was a fitting tribute, since King collaborated closely with unions during his lifetime. (In fact, he was lending his support to a strike in Memphis when he was killed.) One by one, unions' demands were met by their employers, and during the 1970s, city and state governments across the U.S. began giving workers Martin Luther King Day off as well.

However, the movement stalled during the late 1970s. The power of unions in general had weakened, and Senator Jesse Helms of North Carolina stalled the bill in Congress, claiming that King was unworthy of a federal holiday. Undaunted, the Martin Luther King Center in Atlanta started a petition to get the holiday recognized. Recording star Stevie Wonder helped popularize the issue by dedicating his hit song "Happy Birthday" to King, and in 1983, King's widow Coretta Scott King presented Congress with 6 million signatures.

That year, the bill finally passed in Congress, and it was signed into law by President Ronald Reagan (pictured). However, it was not until 2000 that every state in the Union recognized it as a paid holiday for all employees.

