

A Synopsis History of The Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday

Lexington's observance of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday began in 1974, more than a decade prior to the establishment of MLK Day as a national holiday. Under the leadership of the late Jerry Stevens, UK's first director of Minority Student Affairs and the late Edgar Mack, professor in the UK College of Social Work, the UK observance of MLK Day began as a modest candlelight march and program which attracted a small but faithful following from the university as well as the area community. During the 1980's, the march and commemorative program experienced dramatic growth and development, largely due to the efforts of Dr. William Parker, then UK Vice-Chancellor of Minority Affairs. Not only was the route of the march altered to an off-campus route, but the program, for the first time, was able to engage a speaker of national recognition when Dr. William A. Jones served as the 1985 MLK Day keynote speaker. More importantly, it was during this period that the university and city government formalized a partnership as the primary sponsors of Lexington's Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday.

From these beginnings, the MLK Holiday Celebration has evolved to become one of the highlights in the annual cultural calendar of central Kentucky. It enjoys support and participation from businesses, organizations, schools, churches and individual citizens from across the entire region. It is well known for its high quality programming and its long record of presenting outstanding speakers of national and international renown. Names the likes of the late Ossie Davis, Susan Taylor, Congressman Ron Dellums, the late Reverend James Lawson, Dr. C.T. Vivian, Dr. Renita Weems, Dr. Na'im Akbar and Dr. Freeman Hrabowski are but a few of the many stellar personalities who have keynoted the commemorative program.

With the presentation of the American Spiritual Ensemble as the centerpiece of its 2009 program, Lexington's MLK Holiday observance adds to its well-established reputation as a program which is a national model in its celebration of the great legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr.