

Ban the War Criminals from King Day Celebrations

Most Martin Luther King birthday celebrations are tawdry displays of political cynicism and cooptation. The people must recapture the day from war criminals and their Black misleadership puppets

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Global Research, January 16, 2024

[Black Agenda Report](#) 10 January 2024

Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [Law and Justice](#)

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The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was born on January 15, 1929. His birthday became an official federal holiday in 1983 and predictably the understanding of the significance of his work is worse due to the designation of this supposed honor.

King's assassination on April 4, 1968, was one of the most public attacks on the liberation movement. His death was followed by decades-long imprisonment of other liberation fighters, the mass incarceration system, and the creation of a buffer class for the purposes of cooptation. All of these issues should be the subject of remembrance and discussion instead of the maudlin exercises that we are subjected to every January.

It is true that Ronald Reagan signed the federal holiday law under duress, which gave the holiday the appearance of importance. We now sing a Stevie Wonder happy birthday song which came out of the holiday advocacy effort. But making King's birthday official ended its important role as a people's holiday. It is now a means for cynical individuals and institutions to pimp off of his memory while acting against all that he stood for.

It can be argued that the most important act of King's career took place one year to the day before he was assassinated. On April 4, 1967 he publicly broke with President Lyndon Johnson and condemned the war in Vietnam. In his speech, [Beyond Vietnam: A Time to Break the Silence](#), King assailed the United States government as "the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today." His words were true then, and they are true now as the U.S. continues a two-year-long anti-Russian proxy war in Ukraine and now commits war crimes against the people of Gaza.

Martin Luther King Day celebrations should be serious occasions for people who oppose what he called the “giant triplets of racism, extreme materialism, and militarism.” Instead, they have been turned into opportunities for promotion of corporate America and slick politicians who work on behalf of the very forces that King opposed.

Every year his memory is degraded with shallow analysis of his famous [I Have A Dream](#) speech, as if it was the only speech he ever gave, and sanctimonious blather from the Black misleadership class, big banks and other malefactors.

In 2024 the United States government that he so courageously condemned, is engaged in a genocide along with its client state Israel. So obvious is the criminality that South Africa has [invoked the 1948 genocide convention](#) against Israel. The 84-page document meticulously describes what Israel has publicly bragged about doing, as it carries out “acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group.”

In an odd turn of events, the same people who want to celebrate King’s memory will invite senators and members of congress who vote for austerity at home and aggressions around the world, to pretend King Day celebrations. This charade must come to an end, and what better time than January 2024, as the International Court of Justice prepares to hold hearings where South Africa and other nations will present their case against Israel.

Simply put, the war criminals must be banned from all King Day commemorations. The bought off cowards who defend Israel should be disinvited and they should be protested wherever they go, on King’s birthday or any other day. Allowing them to continue their pretense is an insult to King’s memory and to the moral integrity of all Black people.

The hypocrisy should have been called out long ago. Every president goes through the motions of concern, claiming to work for King’s “dream” even as they commit terror around the world. It is sad that Reagan’s official declaration was sought after at all.

He signed the bill which proclaimed the holiday in November 1983, one month after sending the marines to invade Grenada and destroy that country’s popular revolution. Reagan changed the trajectory of U.S. politics forever with his attack upon the welfare state with tales of “welfare queens” and exhortations not to trust the government he was in charge of. No one should have looked to Reagan to validate King.

In the 40 years since, U.S. presidents have interfered in Panama, Afghanistan, the former Yugoslavia, Sudan, Angola, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Somalia, Iraq, Iran, Haiti, Venezuela, Libya, Syria, Palestine, Yemen, and Ukraine to name a few. Yet all of these men will solemnly declare on the third Monday in January that they admired Dr. King.

There was a revolution of values, but not in the way that King wanted. Wages for workers in this country have not gone up for decades, the military budget is larger than every other country on earth and so is the prison system. We surely need to remember King’s words and heed his warnings. We must do so without the people who undermine his work with once per year platitudes and offensive pretense.

The churches and organizations that preen for presidents and other powerful people to grace their King Day celebrations must stop. They are complicit too unless they act as King did and tell their supposed patrons, “No more!” Let us not join in mocking Martin Luther King, but instead be as revolutionary as he was.

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Featured image: Martin Luther King at Riverside Church on April 4, 1967 (Photo: John C. Goodwin, Courtesy of Riverside Church)

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