



# Alexandria Times

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## Out of the Attic

### Martin Luther King Day: Past to present

*Alexandria Times, January 17, 2019*

*Image: Tanya Zabala Costilla of Mt. Vernon Elementary School shows her artwork at the city's 2018 MLK Poster commemoration. Photo, Missy Schrott.*

**O**n the night of Jan. 14, 1986, Alexandria's then-mayor, James P. Moran, proclaimed Jan. 20 as Martin Luther King Day in the city.

Alexandria celebrated the life and message of the civil rights leader with the annual Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Program at Washington Street United Methodist Church with speeches by the Rev. Moses Beasley of Shiloh Baptist Church, the Rev. Columbus Watson of Beulah Baptist Church and Melvin L. Bergheim, former vice mayor of Alexandria.

This year, the Alexandria Black History Museum will honor Martin Luther King Jr. with the Annual MLK Poster Commemoration and Exhibition on Jan. 21 from 1 to 3 p.m. at the Vola Lawson Lobby in city hall. This event was created by the Alexandria Society for the Preservation of Black Heritage, Inc. and is supported by the Alexandria Black History Museum and Alexandria City Public Schools.

The event highlights the artwork of ACPS students. The theme for 2019 is Stand Up and Fight, and asks the questions: "What would you stand up and fight for? When have you been brave in your life?"

The posters will remain in city hall through the end of February for the community to appreciate. The Black History Museum will continue to celebrate Black History Month with the following programs:

- The Underground Railroad: An exhibition of 50 color photographs by photographer Jeanine Michna-Bales. February through March 16.
- An Outrage: A Documentary Film on the History of Lynching in the American South. Feb. 2 at 2 p.m. • African American Storytelling for Adults. Feb. 2 at 6 p.m.
- Alexandria's Freedmen's Cemetery: A Legacy of Freedom. A lecture and book signing with professional genealogist, Char McCargo Bah. Feb. 9 at noon.
- African American Children's Book Fair. Feb. 16 from noon to 4 p.m.

Although President Ronald Reagan declared Martin Luther King Day as a federal holiday on Nov. 2, 1983, it wasn't until 1986 that the holiday was first observed. On Jan. 20, 1986, The Alexandria Gazette published the article, quoted below, "City to commemorate King's life."





## Office of Historic Alexandria City of Alexandria, Virginia

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"Today marks the first observance of Martin Luther King's birthday as a national holiday. It is also the first celebration of a national holiday to honor a black American. It is also the natural culmination of what he accomplished during a lifetime that ended early and senselessly. ... What he really started was the process that is still going on in Alexandria and across the nation. He began opening up mainstream America for black citizens to compete on equal footing for the best this nation has to offer. What he opened up for mainstream America were the skills, intelligence and energy of millions of black citizens, who could go places and do things previously denied them. The process is, as yet, not completed. There are whites who retain a residue of prejudice and fear and hate. There is a black underclass which does not recognize that doors are open to advance in the economic system. ... What this new national holiday should become is a time to measure the progress of this process of opening up our society. ... He set all Americans of all colors and shades on a path that takes us closer and closer towards the American dream."

Thirty-three years have passed since Alexandria's first MLK holiday. On Monday, let us reflect on the progress that both the United States and the City of Alexandria have made toward racial equality.

*"Out of the Attic" is published each week in the Alexandria Times newspaper. The column began in September 2007 as "Marking Time" and explored Alexandria's history through collection items, historical images and architectural representations. Within the first year, it evolved into "Out of the Attic" and featured historical photographs of Alexandria.*

*These articles appear with the permission of the Alexandria Times and were authored by staff of the Office of Historic Alexandria.*