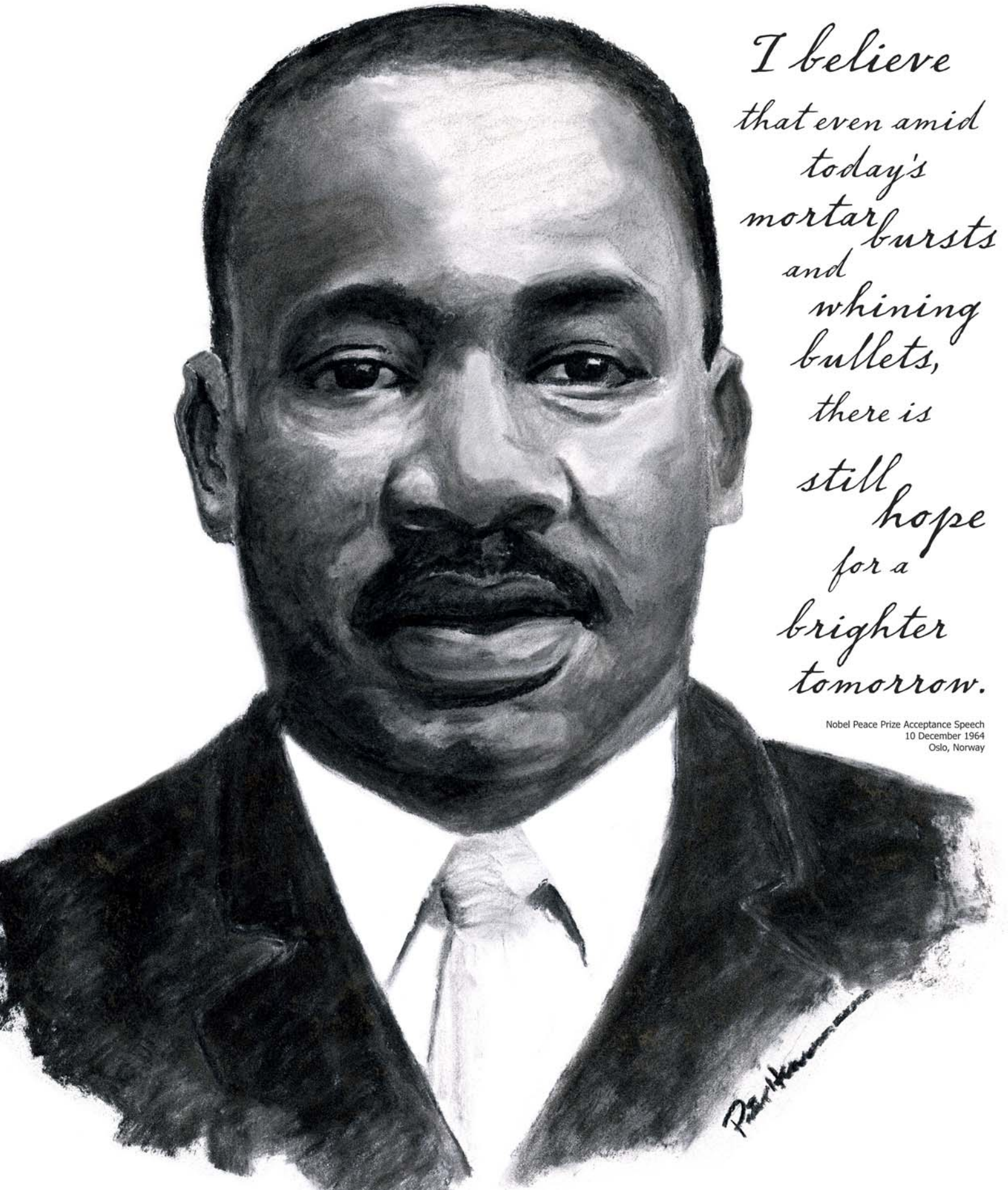


Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday



*I believe
that even amid
today's
mortar bursts
and
whining
bullets,
there is
still
hope
for a
brighter
tomorrow.*

Nobel Peace Prize Acceptance Speech
10 December 1964
Oslo, Norway

Paul Harris

Preface

Chief Librarian, Karen Olender, at the Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute (DEOMI), created this document that provides background and reference material information for the 2009 Martin Luther King Jr., observance. This document is posted on the Internet at <http://www.deomi.org>. Additionally, there are various materials on the Web site that support other national observances.

The opinions expressed in this report are those of the author and should not be construed to represent the official position of DEOMI, the military Services, or the Department of Defense.

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INTRODUCTION

Over forty-five years ago, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. inspired us with his “I Have a Dream” speech. In January 2009, America will inaugurate its first African-American President and we will reflect on Dr. King’s leadership and social activism to change this country in order to give all Americans equal rights and opportunities and make America “...a place where all things are possible” (Barack Obama speech, November 5, 2008).

BIOGRAPHY

Born in Atlanta, Georgia on January 15, 1929 to Martin (originally Michael) Luther King, Sr. and Alberta Williams, daughter of the pastor of the Ebenezer Baptist Church, Dr. King was raised in a family of faith and his early life revolved around learning the Bible and church activities.

He graduated from Morehouse College, one of the first private colleges for African-American men with a Bachelor’s degree in Sociology just after becoming ordained as a minister. He subsequently went to Crozer Theological Seminary in Chester, Pennsylvania to earn his divinity degree. He married Coretta Scott on June 18, 1953 and in 1955, he received his Doctorate of Philosophy in theology from Boston University.

Dr. King came back to the south after graduation to lead the Montgomery Bus Boycott in 1955. In 1956, the United States Supreme Court ordered that Montgomery, Alabama provide integrated public bus service. In 1957, Dr. King was one of the founders and became the first president of the Southern Leadership Conference that advocated nonviolent civil rights demonstrations. In 1963, the March on Washington took place where Dr. King gave one of his most inspiring speeches, “I Have a Dream.” Over 200,000 people attended the march. In 1964, he received the Nobel Peace Prize for leading nonviolent protests.

Major victories of Dr. King and the Civil Rights Movement include the Civil Rights Act of 1964 which was passed prohibiting racial discrimination in public places and provided for equal opportunity in education and for jobs. A year later the Voting Rights Act was enacted outlawing discriminatory voting practices.

On April 4, 1968 while in Memphis to support the garbage workers’ strike, Dr. King was on the Lorraine Motel’s second floor balcony when he was shot by an assassin.

FEDERAL HOLIDAY

President Ronald Reagan signed Public Law 98-144 on November 2, 1983 establishing Martin Luther King, Jr. Day. The first official observance was held in January 15, 1986 on, the date of Dr. King’s birthday. In 1992, President George H.W. Bush proclaimed that the federal holiday honoring Dr. King would be observed on the third Monday of January. On this day we remember and honor the civil rights leader who brought change through nonviolent protest. The theme each year remains the same: A DAY ON, NOT A DAY OFF!!!

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