



## 5 Things You Didn't Know About NH's Fight to Honor MLK

*Written by Avalon Lustick on January 14, 2018 5:53 pm.*

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New Hampshire was the last state to declare Martin Luther King Jr. Day as a state holiday.

It took a while for the Granite State to get here, so let's take a look at what contributed to our late arrival to the party.

### **5. Martin Luther King day was first voted to be a NH state holiday in 1985.**

Ronald Reagan made Martin Luther King Jr. Day an official federal holiday in 1983. New Hampshire, however, did not recognize the holiday until 2000 even though it was introduced to the legislature in 1985.

Arnie Arnesen remembers the day the legislature voted on the bill telling Democracy Now

([https://www.democracynow.org/2012/1/11/how\\_new\\_hampshire\\_became\\_last\\_us](https://www.democracynow.org/2012/1/11/how_new_hampshire_became_last_us)) it was her first floor fight, "I was this young woman. I had just given birth to a baby. You can actually see a film of me handing my 4-month-old to the woman sitting next to me, as I am frightened and going down to the floor to fight for Martin Luther King Day."

The bill only received 60 votes in favor of Martin Luther King Day out of 400.

### **4. NH opted for Civil Rights Day instead of Martin Luther King Jr. Day**

In addition to abolishing the religious Fast Day in 1991

(<http://www.holidays.net/national-holidays/civil-rights-day.html>), Civil Rights Day was created to replace the holiday and recognize the civil rights movement as a whole rather than have one person be recognized.

### **3. White Supremacists supported NH's lack of an MLK day.**

In 1996, a white supremacist group from Mississippi held a Statehouse rally supporting New Hampshire's decision against Martin Luther King Jr. Day.

The American Friends Service Committee

(<https://www.afsc.org/sites/afsc.civicaactions.net/files/documents/The%2020-year%20campaign%20for%20MLK%20Day%20in%20NH.pdf>) wrote that the rally followed two years of bills requesting to change Civil Rights Day to include Martin Luther King's name but was rejected both times.

### **2. The other 48 states with an MLK state holiday threatened to boycott NH**

Before New Hampshire made Civil Rights Day a state holiday, Ken Braiterman (<http://kenbraiterman.com/how-new-hampshire-got-its-martin-luther-king-holiday-the-inside-story/>), said that states withdrew their business support from the Granite State.

At this time, Arizona was the only other state that did not have an official day honoring Martin Luther King Jr. The National Football League scheduled a Super Bowl for Tempe, Arizona but moved the game to California.

New Hampshire heavily relied on its tourist and travel industry to run their economy. Braiterman said that an MLK day would help end the boycott.

### **1. MLK has only been a celebrated as a state holiday since 2000.**

Then-Gov. Jeanne Shaheen, the first female governor in New Hampshire, signed the bill to finally make Martin Luther King Day an official state holiday on June 7, 1999. (<http://www.thekingcenter.org/making-king-holiday>).

The bill passed with 212 votes favoring King's name included in the holiday and 148 opposing.

"In my second inaugural address as governor, I told New Hampshire families: 'We cannot end this century without making Martin Luther King Day a part of the heritage we leave to our children.' This was personal to me; as a student and teacher in Mississippi during the civil rights movement, I learned first-hand about the daily injustices of life under Jim Crow segregation. It still moves me today, nearly twenty years later, as we stand in the shadow of Barack Obama's historic presidency," Sen. Shaheen told NH1. "I hope Granite Staters will join me and our community members in remembering Dr. King and the heroic men and women who fought beside him to push our country forward and will continue their work to protect civil liberties and equal rights in New Hampshire and across the country."

### **Fun fact**

In King's famous "I Have a Dream Speech" (<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2008/aug/28/uselections2008.constitution>; 1968, he mentions New Hampshire by saying, "So let freedom ring from the prodigious hilltops of New Hampshire."