



# IN REMEMBRANCE OF THE REV. DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

*JANUARY 15, 2007*

**I**t is good that we join together each year on the third Monday in January to remember a remarkable man, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

In the simplest terms, Dr. King's life represented the continual struggle to promote freedom, equality, peace, justice and dignity for all races and peoples, and to bring an end to man's inhumanity to his fellow man.

Even after having risen to national prominence, Dr. King was shot and killed in Memphis, Tenn., on April 4, 1968. He had gone there the day before to support a strike by 1,300 sanitation workers. Dr. King's legacy to all people is to remind us that injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. Injustice is what he called moral blindness. Sadly, we see it around us every day.

Because controversy surrounded him, not all people believed in him or his message. Even our great states of Arizona and Utah were among the last to acknowledge the life and work of this man. Arizona came to remember him only after a tourism boycott crippled the state economy, compromising with the creation of Civil Rights Day in 1992. In Utah, this is known as Human Rights Day, and both are celebrated on Martin Luther King Day.

Dr. King's life and death inevitably reminds Navajos and Native people of our own great leaders of the past, the struggles they confronted to achieve justice for their people, and their ultimate ends for unpopular ideas of their times which we now often take for granted. Our own great Navajo leader Narbona was known as a fierce warrior for most of his life, changing to become one of our greatest peacemakers, and ultimately being shot and killed in 1849 after having just negotiated peace with the American soldiers he knew as "the New Men."

Like the virtues of love, tolerance, understanding, and empathy, the shortcomings of hatred, intolerance, racism, and apathy are learned from childhood. We must teach our children well, and the teachings of our Navajo elders hold all that we need for a good life.

In the words of our 42<sup>nd</sup> U.S. President, Bill Clinton, "We all tend to fear and distrust those who don't look like us, talk like us, worship like us, think like us. When you're afraid of somebody, you don't trust them. It's a short step to disliking them. If you dislike them, it's a short step to hating them. If you hate them, it's a short step to dehumanizing them. Once you do that, it's not very difficult to justify killing them."

On this Martin Luther King Day, I ask that our thoughts for our families, our Navajo Nation, and our country be good thoughts, and that we release blame and strive to forgive the shortcomings of those around us. *Abe'bee.*

DR. JOE SHIRLEY, JR., PRESIDENT  
**THE NAVAJO NATION**