

Martin Luther King, Jr. Day

It's Martin Luther King, Jr. day in the U.S. It's the day that the United States has dedicated to remembering the **civil rights** movement in the United States. It's named for Martin Luther King, Jr., one of the movement's best-known leaders, though there are many others from the movement whom most Americans know: Malcolm X and Rosa Parks, for example.

The day should remind us to appreciate our civil rights. Civil rights—sometimes called “human rights”—are **rights** that can't be taken from you. I was a child in the United States in the 1980's and **took** these rights **for granted**, but as recently as the mid-twentieth century, not everybody had the same rights. Rights were denied based on **race**, **religion**, and **gender**.

Guaranteeing civil rights does not mean an end to **racism**—or **sexism**—because it's a violation of your human rights to tell you what to think. But, the legal measures to guarantee rights is a good first step.

Do you think we take our civil rights too much for granted now? As we think about civil rights today, are there any civil rights leaders from your own country or culture you think should be honored? What did they do? What kind of celebration would you have for them?

Vocabulary

Right: A right is something you can have, or can do. The right to freedom of speech means that you can say what you want, and nobody is allowed to stop you. A right is sometimes something that nobody can make you do: it's a right in the United States that you don't have to talk to the police when they ask you questions. You can have rights based on your job (the right to a parking space, for example), or have certain rights in your family (when I turned seventeen, I had the right to drive the “kids' car” in my family.)

Civil Rights: In the last description, I talked about my right to drive the kids' car in my family. That was a right that only kids in my family had, and it was a right that my parents could take away, if they wanted. Some rights, however, belong to everyone and *nobody* can take them away.. The right to say what you want, is one example. The right to visit whatever church you want, is another example. We call these civil rights. Your civil rights are what an American policeman has to tell you when you're arrested (you probably have seen this on TV. It starts with: “You have the right to remain silent. . .”)

Take something for granted: I live in Dresden, Germany. It's a beautiful city, and has a lot of

trees and parks. I like the way it's so green, I love the historic architecture. But, because I live here, sometimes I stop seeing all the things that I like. I think about my day-to-day life, and overlook all the great things in the city around me. Then I go somewhere else, and I'm reminded of how great a city Dresden is. When I forget all the great things, I take them for granted. To take something for granted means to forget that it's special. Most of us take having a warm bed and food for granted, for example, because we've always had them. Most of us take for granted how difficult our native language is to learn, because we learned it as children.

Race: Whether a person is Black, or White, Asian or Native American Indian is all a question of race. Race is a group of people you belong to because of the color of your skin and the way you look.

Religion: The words 'Christian,' 'Jewish,' 'Muslim' and 'Buddhist' all describe Religions. A religion is determined by what god you believe in, and how he or she affects your life.

Gender: Are you a man? A woman? I'm asking for your gender. Gender is the fancy word that we use for 'sex.'

Racism: When someone treats you differently because of your **race**, whether they treat you better or worse than other people, we say that they are racist, or you are the victim of racism. Racism is the belief that some **races** are better than others.

Sexism: Did anyone ever treat you differently because of your **gender**? If they did, you were the victim of sexism, the person who treated you differently is a sexist. Sexism is the name of the belief that one **gender** is better than the other.