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Enhancing the dream

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His name was Martin Luther King Jr., a 1964 Nobel Peace Prize winner, a non-violent civil rights leader. He organized the Montgomery, Ala., public transportation boycott, causing the Supreme Court decision outlawing segregation of public transportation. His march on Washington created the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and in 1965 the federal government passed the Voting Rights Act as a result of King's efforts. He was the hope for many blacks who deserved a better standard of living at the time.

He was born Jan. 15, 1929 in Atlanta Ga., and assassinated on April 4, 1968. Now 15 years later, there is a bill in the United States Senate to make King's birthday a national holiday. A White House spokesman said Monday President Reagan is prepared to sign the bill creating the nation's 10th federal holiday.

But, this piece of legislation is being challenged by Sen. Jesse Helms, R-N.C. On Monday, Helms began a filibuster to block the bill's passage. Helms said the nation needs "more productivity, not more leisure time."

The point is not to limit our productivity. It is doubtful that one day will make a difference. The point is to honor a man who made many valuable contributions to our society and whose memory stands for the belief that all people are created equal.

In an article run in the Bangor Daily News (10/4/83), Helms said many senators are being threatened and pressured to vote for the King bill, but he "isn't going to knuckle under." Thursday, Helms dropped his filibuster as the King bill draws closer to passage.

The bill is scheduled for a Senate vote Oct. 19.

"If the Martin Luther King bill comes to the president's desk, he will sign it," a White House spokesman said.

If Reagan signs the bill, the third Monday in January, starting in 1986, will be set aside to honor the slain civil rights leader. To honor such a man will bring honor to our country.

Despite Helms' actions, all indications lead to the belief that in three year's King's birthday becomes a national holiday. This measure will remind us all of the man who fought for change through peace and for the most part succeeded. But, as we all know, it was only a start in changing people's prejudiced attitudes.

Perhaps honoring him as such will give us a chance to continue his struggle. It will remind us of the basis on which this country was built: all people are created equal.

This measure is a way to recognize King's accomplishments and to express regret that he died so young. A Martin Luther King national holiday will not stop oppression and prejudice but it's another beginning step in this direction, and may enhance the understanding of the plight of his followers, and of his accomplishments.

This bill deserves to pass in recognition of the one man who meant so much to so many. An honorable individual's fight to free his people from mockery, discrimination and prejudice should no longer be ignored. Setting a special national day aside for King may erase some of our ignorance.

The bill is almost certain to pass through the Senate on Oct. 19 and it is almost certain Reagan will sign the bill. Reagan should then be praised for his act of humanity.

We can not allow King's dream to die: "A dream of time when the evil of prejudice and segregation will vanish."

Lisa Reece