

# Make It Real

## Lessons on emancipation from Martin Luther King Jr.

In September, thousands waited for hours at the Oncenter for a glimpse of President Abraham Lincoln's Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation on its 150th anniversary. Also on display were two pages of civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr.'s Sept. 12, 1962, speech commemorating the proclamation's centennial.

On the national holiday set aside to honor King, we reprint a portion of that speech. For the full text, go to <http://1.usa.gov/XivFeP>.

**I**f our nation had done nothing more in its whole history than to create just two documents, its contribution to civilization would be imperishable. The first of these documents is the Declaration of Independence and the other is that which we are here to honor tonight, the Emancipation Proclamation. All tyrants, past, present and future, are powerless to bury the truths in these declarations, no matter how extensive their legions, how vast their power and how malignant their evil.

The Declaration of Independence proclaimed to a world, organized politically and spiritually around the concept of the inequality of man, that the dignity of human personality was inherent in man as a living being. The Emancipation Proclamation was the offspring of the Declaration of Independence. It was a constructive use of the force of law to uproot a social order which sought to separate liberty from a segment of humanity.

Our pride and progress could be unqualified if the story might end here. But history reveals that America has been a schizophrenic personality where these two documents are concerned. On the one hand she has proudly professed the basic principles inherent in both documents. On the other hand she has sadly practiced the antithesis of these principles.

... our Federal form of government has been, from the day of its birth, weakened in its integrity, confused and confounded in its direction, by the unresolved race question. . . .

The somber picture (of the condition of the American Negro today) may induce the sober thought that there is nothing to commemorate about the centennial of the Emancipation Proclamation. But tragic disappointments and undeserved defeats do not put an end to life, nor do they wipe out the positive . . .

The Emancipation Proclamation had four enduring results. First, it gave force to the executive power to change conditions in the national interest on a broad and far-reaching scale. Second, it dealt a devastating blow to the system of slaveholding and an economy built upon it, which had been muscular enough to engage in warfare on the Federal government. Third, it enabled the Negro to play a significant role in his own liberation . . . Fourth, it resurrected and restated the principle of equality upon which the founding of the nation rested.

... There is but one way to commemorate the Emancipation Proclamation. That is to make its declarations of freedom real; to reach back to the origins of our nation when our message of equality electrified an unfree world, and reaffirm democracy by deeds as bold and daring as the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation.