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Colleges and Universities That Don't Observe the Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday

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**Colleges and Universities That Don't Observe the Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday**

*When is a national holiday not a holiday? Nine of the nation's 25 highest-ranked universities continue to hold classes on the holiday honoring the birthday of Martin Luther King Jr. Are conservative alumni influencing the decision?*



In 1983 Congress voted overwhelmingly to establish the third Monday in January as a national holiday to honor the birthday of civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. Faced with a certain override of his veto, President Reagan reluctantly signed the bill into law. The

first official national holiday to honor Reverend King was observed in 1986. At first, only the federal government, retail banking operations, and the post office took the holiday seriously. Very few major corporations gave their employees the day off. The nation's financial markets remained open.

Slowly, the holiday gained wider acceptance in the corporate world. According to a survey by the Bureau of National Affairs (BNA), approximately 26 percent of all U.S. companies were closed for business on Martin Luther King's birthday this year, up from 14 percent in 1986.\* A major breakthrough occurred this year when

\*Bureau of National Affairs, *Bulletin to Management*, January 8, 1998.

**High-Ranking Colleges That Still Hold Classes on the Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday**

University	Classrooms Closed for Students?	College Offices Closed?
Duke University	No	Yes
Yale University	No	No
University of Pennsylvania	No	No
California Inst. of Technology	No	No
Northwestern University	No	No
Cornell University	No	No
University of Chicago	No	No
University of Notre Dame	No	No
Vanderbilt University	No	No

Source: JBHE telephone survey.

**High-Ranking Colleges That Observe the Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday**

University	Classrooms Closed for Students?	College Offices Closed?
Harvard University	Yes	Yes
Princeton University	Yes	Yes
Stanford University	Yes	Yes
Mass. Inst. of Technology	Yes	Yes
Dartmouth College	Yes	Yes
Brown University	Yes	Yes
Columbia University	Yes	Yes
Emory University	Yes	Yes
Johns Hopkins University	Yes	Yes
Rice University	Yes	Yes
Washington University	Yes	Yes
Georgetown University	Yes	Yes
University of Virginia	Yes	Yes
Carnegie Mellon University	Yes	Yes
Tufts University	Yes	Yes
Univ. of California, Berkeley	Yes	Yes

Source: JBHE telephone survey.

Jesse Jackson, who has mounted considerable pressure on Wall Street firms to offer more job opportunities to African Americans, persuaded the major stock and commodities exchanges to close on the holiday for the first time.

*"The nine institutions that kept regular classroom schedules on the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday were Duke University, Yale University, the University of Pennsylvania, California Institute of Technology, Northwestern University, Cornell University, the University of Chicago, the University of Notre Dame, and Vanderbilt University."*

According to the BNA survey, 74 percent of all educational facilities nationwide observed the holiday. JBHE surveyed the nation's 25 highest-ranked colleges and universities to determine whether classes are held on Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday. We also determined whether the institution's administrative offices were closed on the holiday. Our survey found that 9 high-ranking colleges and universities held classes whereas 16 schools observed the holiday. The nine institutions that held classes on the Martin Luther King holiday were Duke University, Yale University, the University of Pennsylvania, California In-

stitute of Technology, Northwestern University, Cornell University, the University of Chicago, the University of Notre Dame, and Vanderbilt University. At eight of these nine universities, the administrative offices of the institution were also open for business on the holiday. Duke held classes on the holiday but the university's administrative offices were closed. It should be noted that some of the colleges that did not hold classes on the holiday were on semester break and for this reason did not hold classes on the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday.

#### **The Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday Universally Observed at Black Colleges**

As expected, historically black colleges and universities universally observed the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday. A random survey of a selection of black colleges, including Spelman, Morehouse, Florida A&M, Clark Atlanta, and Howard, found that none of the schools held classes on the holiday and all administrative offices were closed.

At some of the colleges and universities that do not observe the holiday, students have mounted protests. At Duke University, the policy of holding classes is being reconsidered by the academic planning committee. In an editorial opposed to canceling classes on the holiday, the student newspaper at Duke called the holiday plan "superficial symbolism." Whatever the decision of the planning committee, due to long-range scheduling of the academic calendar, the change is not expected to go into effect for a number of years.

The University of Pennsylvania holds a seven-week-long Martin Luther King Jr. Commemorative Celebration each year but continues to hold classes on the holiday. On the holiday this year, about 60 students attended a candlelight vigil calling for the university to close classrooms on the holiday. University of Pennsylvania spokesman Ken Wides defended the school's policy: "Universities aren't about closing, they are about engaging in meaningful discussion. You close for snow."<sup>\*</sup>

<sup>\*</sup>*Weekly Pennsylvanian*, January 27, 1998.

#### **The Ballrooms of the New South Africa**



**In the new South Africa, the old segregated ballroom dancing federations have been outlawed. Girls in new dresses from the black townships and boys in dinner jackets are now winning championship prizes in the newly integrated halls of ballroom dancing. Thami Tsama (left) has won national trophies.**

Photo: Jodi Bieber