

**\*\*If you are reading the hard copy, you will be unable to see the pictures that go with the article\*\***

## **Where the Streets Have MLK's Name**

**More than 1,000 roadways worldwide honor Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., a reflection of his enduring impact across cultures.**

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**Three weeks after** Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s assassination in 1968, the city council in Mainz, Germany, named a street for the slain civil rights leader—doing in just a few days what King's birthplace of Atlanta took eight years to do. Memphis, Tennessee, the place where King was killed, also named a city street after him—but not until more than 40 years after his death.

A new name can signal a brilliant future, as when the Old Testament's Abram, "exalted father," was divinely renamed Abraham, the "father of many nations." When the name of a place is changed, it's also a sign of power and influence—it reflects who is in charge and who has made an impression on the culture. And so in Schwerin, Germany, Dr. Martin Luther King Strasse keeps company with Anne Frank Strasse. In Saint-Martin-d'Hères, France, Rue Martin Luther King abuts Rue Rosa Lee Parks, in honor of the woman who sparked the Montgomery, Alabama, bus boycott in 1955. In Port-au-Prince, Haiti, the road named for the 18th-century revolutionary Toussaint L'Ouverture segues into the street named for King.

Two years before his death, King's approval rating in the United States was just 33 percent, likely a reflection of racism and many white Americans' discomfort with his radical agenda for economic justice. With every passing decade, though, his stock climbs—even while his agenda can seem

increasingly blurred. Today, 50 years after his death, some 90 percent of Americans have a favorable view of King.

At least 955 streets in the U.S. bear King's name. Many run through lower income areas. But the stereotype of them all as bleak thoroughfares in decaying neighborhoods is overblown. A study of hundreds of such streets by University of Tennessee geographer Derek Alderman found little overall difference in business activity there and on the nation's Main Streets.

“Once you name a street after someone like King, you better be certain that you maintain the street as a monument to him, so that if he were to come back and visit the street, he would be proud,” said Daniel D’Oca, who taught a course called “The MLK Way: Building on Black America’s Main Street” at Harvard University Graduate School of Design in 2015. The course asked students to visualize King streets that echoed his values—racially integrated, thriving and peaceful, economically stable, with commerce that meets the needs of nearby residents.

The global MLK street count is upwards of a thousand, including a number of Martin Luther King streets in Germany, the country from which he got his name.

King and his father were originally named Michael. But the elder King, also a Baptist preacher, was so taken with Protestant reformer Martin Luther during a 1934 trip to Berlin that he changed his name and that of his firstborn, then age five.

The victories of the civil rights movement made progress toward Martin Luther King, Jr.’s dream of ending state-sanctioned segregation. His death hastened Congress’s passage of the Fair Housing Act. For black Americans, the decades after King’s death brought a decline in poverty and an increase

in high school graduation and homeownership rates. But the proliferation of MLK streets doesn't signify a global commitment to end poverty.

In Memphis, the city where King was killed, poverty rates have outpaced the nation's. A 1971 attempt to rename a city street for King failed. In 2012 the plan was resurrected by city councilman Berlin Boyd and was approved.

"This is a city where his blood cries from the streets," Boyd said. About two miles long, Dr. M.L. King Jr. Avenue is one of the last streets on which King marched. Most of its landscape is unremarkable as it lumbers along a route that includes views of the back sides of an NBA arena and a community college. On March 28, 1968, King led thousands of protesters on what was then Linden Avenue to city hall to confront the anti-union, segregationist mayor, Henry Loeb, who had refused to negotiate with striking black sanitation workers. The march turned violent. To prove he could lead a peaceful demonstration, King returned on April 3.

That night he delivered his "I've Been to the Mountaintop" speech. The next day he was gunned down on a motel balcony. Today Memphis is trying to honor King's sacrifice. Last summer the city council approved payouts to the 29 surviving sanitation strikers to make up for circumstances that shorted their retirement accounts. After taxes, the men will get about a thousand dollars for each year since King's death. But for some who are still climbing into garbage trucks, the money isn't enough to retire on.

King is often remembered for speaking of a simple goal: Black children and white children hand in hand, as if they were siblings.

The King more frequently forgotten asked for far more, demanding "a radical redistribution of political and economic power."

“All over the globe,” King said a year before he was killed, “men are revolting against old systems of exploitation and oppression, and out of the wounds of a frail world, new systems of justice and equality are being born.”

**\*\*For Question 3, you will need to look up the streets using Google Maps since you are not using the information from the NatGeo website\*\***

## See Thousands of Streets Named for Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Almost immediately after the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., cities began honoring the civil rights leader by renaming streets after him. Half a century later his name now graces boulevards and byways in hundreds of communities across the globe.

From Africa to Europe, from dirt roads on the outskirts of São Paulo, Brazil, to ocean-side thoroughfares in the Caribbean, explore the streets that pay tribute to King below.

No comprehensive global index of the streets named for King exists, but there are more than a thousand entries for such eponymous streets in [OpenStreetMap](#), the publicly maintained database where citizens around the world can add and edit road maps.

This interactive pairs those records with Google Street View images, where available, to provide a glimpse of the places where King’s name and legacy have become part of the landscape.

Read more about the significance of these street name salutes in our feature [Where the Streets Have MLK's Name.](#)

<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/magazine/2018/04/martin-luther-king-streets-worldwide/>