



Office of General Services

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LEGACY OF DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. TO BE CELEBRATED IN ALBANY ON JANUARY 21, 2019

Former NY Giants Running Back & ‘Dancing with the Stars’ Champion Rashad Jennings to Give Keynote Address and Tony Award-Winning Broadway Vocalist Lillias White to Perform

RoAnn Destito, Office of General Services Commissioner, today reminded the public that New York State’s celebration of the life and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. will be held on January 21, 2019 at 9 a.m. in the Empire State Plaza Convention Center. The public is invited to attend the free program in observation of Dr. King’s birth or watch it streamed live at empirestateplaza.ny.gov/nyking. The Be a King Volunteer Fair will begin at 9 a.m. at the base of The Egg; a musical prelude will start in the Convention Center at 9 a.m.; and the program will begin promptly at 10 a.m.

“Each year we celebrate the life and legacy of our nation’s most important civil rights leader by enjoying talented performers and inspirational speakers who pay tribute to Dr. King, at the NYS MLK Memorial Observance. This year we are especially excited to have Rashad Jennings giving the keynote address and Lillias White singing,” Commissioner Destito said. “I join Governor Cuomo and Acting Civil Service Commissioner Lola Brabham, who will give this year’s Call to Commemoration, in inviting everyone to come in person or watch the live video of this important tradition at the Empire State Plaza where we rededicate ourselves to keeping Dr. King’s dream alive.”

“I am proud and humbled to deliver this year’s Call to Commemoration and join with fellow New Yorkers as we celebrate and embrace Dr. King’s dream of peace and unity,” said Department of Civil Service Acting Commissioner Lola W. Brabham. “Through Dr. King’s legacy, let us continue to remember the importance of leading by example and recommitting ourselves to achieving greatness by making a positive difference in our communities.”

This year’s keynote speaker is Rashad Andre Jennings, a former National Football League running back. He was drafted by the Jacksonville Jaguars in the seventh round of the 2009 NFL Draft. He also played for the Oakland Raiders and the New York Giants. Jennings played college football at the University of Pittsburgh but made the difficult choice to transfer to Liberty University to be by the side of his ailing father.

Upon becoming a free agent in the NFL, Jennings took his athleticism to the stage of ABC's hit show "Dancing With The Stars." Applying the same unwavering dedication to outworking all of his peers, Rashad took the dancing world by storm and was crowned Dancing With The Stars Season 24 Mirror Ball Champion. He has also made guest appearances on TV shows such as Starz network's "Power" and NBC's "Great News."

Along with being a philanthropist as founder of his national Rashad Jennings Foundation, Rashad continues to pursue dancing, acting, and a host of other entrepreneurial endeavors. He is also a noted speaker and has given motivational addresses to thousands across the country. At the young age of 33, he reached another great milestone in his storied career, becoming a published author with the release of his first book, "The IF in Life," in which he wrote about the decisions that shaped his destiny.

This year's celebration will include a special performance by Tony Award-winning Broadway actress and vocalist Lillias White.

Born in Brooklyn, White was recognized with Broadway's prestigious quadruple crown – Tony Award, Drama Desk Award, People's Choice Awards and The Outer Critics Award for Best Actress in a Musical for her 1997 role as Sonja in "The Life," White has also received several awards and accolades, including The Obie Award for Best Actress in a Musical for her portrayal of Hennie in "Romance in Hard Times," The Drama League Award for Best Actress in a Musical for her role in the national tour of "Dreamgirls," and, more recently, a Tony nomination for her appearance in "Fela" on Broadway.

Her other theater credits include Broadway productions of "How to Succeed in Business," "Once on This Island," "Rock n' Roll: The First 5,000 Years," "Barnum," "Carrie," and "Dreamgirls," as well as the off-Broadway productions of "Crowns," "The Vagina Monologues," "Waiting for Godot," "The Princess & The Black-Eyed Pea," and "Dinah Was."

White has also gone on national and international tours for "Ain't Misbehavin'," "Tintypes," and "The Wiz." Her TV and film credits include featured roles in the films: "Pieces of April," "The Grinch That Stole Christmas," "Gloria," "North," and Disney's "Hercules." In 1992 she won an Emmy Award for her role as Lillian Edwards in "Sesame Street."

The Dr. King Memorial Observance will also include several performances honoring the legacy of Dr. King by local and regional performers, including Marcelle Johnson and the Dr. King Community Choir and Ensemble of the Capital Region, the Paul Robeson Theatre from Buffalo, the Giroux Honors Jaz Quintet from the SUNY Potsdam Crane School of Music, and the Narthanalaya School of Arts in Loudonville,

Following the formal program, the City of Albany "Beloved Community March" will begin at the Plaza Concourse entrance on Madison Avenue. The march will conclude at the

King Monument in Lincoln Park with a wreath-laying ceremony. A CDTA bus will be available for those requiring transportation to the monument.

An Albany City Hall Carillon Concert will take place at noon.

There will also be several additional activities taking place at the Empire State Plaza, including:

- Empire State “Be A King” Volunteer Fair.
- Empire State Dr. King Quilt Display.
- Dr. King Statewide Children’s Art and Essay Exhibit.
- Commemorative Dr. King cookies provided by Price Chopper/Market 32.

To honor Dr. King’s message throughout the year, a number of events are held to remind people of his vision for the community. These include The Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Statewide Food Drive held December 14, 2018 to February 14, 2019, the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Statewide Children’s Literacy Drive held February 25 to April 25, and the 2019 Dr. King Statewide Career Fair on April 4, 2019.

The Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Observance will be streamed live, beginning at 10 a.m. on January 21 at empirestateplaza.ny.gov/nyking.

For up-to-the-minute information on the celebration, visit empirestateplaza.ny.gov/nyking, and follow @NYSMLK on facebook and Twitter.

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