

King-for-a-day sales? They've done it to George

A month ago, Bill Wilson was expressing concern about the future of Martin Luther King Day.

Wilson, president of the St. Paul City Council and the head of King Day ceremonies, was concerned because a couple of banks that had honored the holiday in past years decided to open their vaults for business on King Day this year.

Wilson, and others who have worked hard to make King Day a meaningful national holiday, feared the start of a

trend. They feared that King Day would become like Presidents' Day, the day America goes on sale.

Monday, in honor of our nation's leaders, unpainted furniture was on sale. Trench coats were on sale. Double-breasted suits were on sale. ("Executive privilege," read the ad for the suits.) Plaid Bermuda shorts on sale. (25 per cent off on shorts that regularly sell for \$36.) Slinky women's pajamas on sale. Waterbeds on sale. ("America Celebrates Presidential Savings!") There was a



Doug Grow

20 Percent Off on All Dry Cleaning President's Birthday Sale. Computers were on sale. Ovens, refrigerators, washers and dryers were on sale.

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And yesterday presidents were honored with car sales of all sorts. There were Japanese cars. ("Over 200 Toyotas.") Swedish cars and German cars. ("Over 100 VW-Saabs.") Why, even Presidents' Day sales on American cars! ("We're chopping prices to the ground... Take \$7,000 off original list price value.")

King Day sales?

Wilson gasped.

"I hope that never happens," he said. "It's too bad. We need to pay attention to these things, but we don't. There seems to be absolutely no sense of history... The reason I express concern for Martin Luther King Day is because I'm chairman of that event. But I'd be willing to help if somebody wants to put some focus on Presidents' Day."

Any focus there might have disappeared in 1971 when Congress passed a law that shifted observance of Veterans Day, Memorial Day and George Washington's birthday to Mondays. (Veterans Day was returned to Nov. 11 in 1978). In the process of making Washington's birthday (Feb. 22 is the actual date) a Monday holiday, Washington's day was tied to the birthday of Abraham Lincoln (Feb. 12) and the name was

Veterans' organizations and churches have helped preserve at least some of the dignity of Veterans Day and Memorial Day. But given a choice of presidents to honor, most Americans have chosen shopping.

Despite growing numbers of sales, retailers say Presidents' Day isn't one of the major moneymaking days of the years. One Edina store owner speculated that more retailers than ever got into Presidents' Day sales this year, not because of a frenzy of patriotism but because retailing is generally slumping. "People are trying to liquidate a lot of stock," he said.

Not everyone forgot that Monday was a holiday dealing with national heritage as well as 50 percent off Jockey shorts, however.

On Monday morning, Paul Arnopoulos (Pastor Paul of food give-away fame), decided he would celebrate Presidents' Day by unloading some of the 20,000 pounds of granola bars he recently received.

Pastor Paul put the word out on the street that he would be giving away the bars to kids at the church in north Minneapolis and that there would be extra prizes (more granola bars) for those who wrote down the name of a U.S. president. The celebration, he said, was such a success that he's going to plan a

"This year we had 834 kids, with no notice," said Pastor Paul. "Next year we'll get the word out and we'll have up to 6,000."

And next year the prizes will be more than extra granola bars. Next year, he said, he'll have drawings for special prizes for kids who can name all of the presidents.

As it was, Pastor Paul's giveaway was the closest thing that appeared to be a ceremony honoring presidents around the Twin Cities. By far the most popular president of the kids who wanted those extra prizes was John Kennedy.

Kennedy was named by 252 granola-bar-seeking kids. Washington was named by 186 kids, Lincoln was named by 177. Rounding out the list of honored presidents were Ronald Reagan (57); Jimmy Carter, Thomas Jefferson and Franklin Roosevelt (12 each); Richard Nixon (9); Gerald Ford (6), and John Adams, James Buchanan and Ulysses Grant (3 each).

"Drawings for bicycles," said Pastor Paul. "That's what we'll have for kids who can name all of the presidents. Really nice bicycles."

They'll have to be nice enough to lure the kids away from the sales.