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MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.
SUPPLEMENT



"We Are One"

MLK DADADDE

MLK Parade Tradition Continues in Historic Anacostia

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On Monday, January 16, the 11th annual Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Peace Walk and Parade with the theme "We are One," honored the life and legacy of the Civil Rights leader as hundreds marched through the streets of Southeast.

The peace walk preceded the parade and assembled at 2500 MLK Ave SE and ended at the R.I.S.E Center at 2730 MLK Ave SE. The parade which followed moved along a new route this year aimed at assisting businesses located in downtown Anacostia.

King was the main proponent for nonviolent activism during the Civil Rights Movement and successfully protested racial discrimination on both the national and state levels.

"We do this to educate our people about the life and legacy of Dr. King," said Stuart Anderson, co-chair of the MLK Steering Committee.

The march and parade can both be traced to a tradition that began more than 30 years ago commemorating Dr. King's life and work that also included the fight to have his birthday recognized as federal holiday.

Six years before King's birthday became a federal holiday, Washington Informer publisher and philanthropist Dr. Calvin W. Rolark, former Ward 8 Councilmember Wilhelmina J. Rolark and talk show host and community activist Ralph Waldo "Petey" Greene organized the first parade in 1979.

The road to securing King's birthday as a federal holiday didn't proceed without struggle. It began shortly after his assassination in 1968 but wasn't signed into law until 1983 under President Ronald Reagan, first being observed by the country three years later. It would not be observed in all 50 states until 2000 as several states resisted observation of the holiday by giving it alternative names and combining it with other holidays.

Organizers and participants say they're committed to continuing the local tradition.

"I've come every year for as long as I can remember, even with the gaps," said Tasha Y., a Ward 7 resident. "Dr. King was an important person and this parade shows how far we've come and I want my children to see that."

In years past, the parade has been canceled or moved. From 2007 to 2011, the Peace Walk organized by the Coalition for Peace replaced the parade, though it followed the same route along Martin Luther King Jr. Avenue. Then in 2012, the parade was resurrected, replaced again by the peace walk from 2015 to 2016.

This year the parade and walk took place as complimentary events.

Notable figures have participated in the parade and peace walk including singer Stevie Wonder and Dick Gregory. At this year's parade, the Ballou High School marching band played a rendition of Wonder's "Happy Birthday," a song he composed decades ago while advocating for a national acknowledgement of King's sacrifices with a federal holiday.

Mayor Muriel Bowser, former mayor Vince Gray and WPGC radio personality Joe Clair joined nearly 70 community organizations and over a dozen bands in the parade procession.

"The entire city is participating in this parade and I'm excited about that," said Denise Rolark Barnes, co-founder of the peace walk and chair of the MLK Steering Committee.

Representatives from all over the city participated in the parade.

"I think [the parade] is a great way to bring people together," said Ward 8 Councilman Trayon White who added that he's been coming out to the parade since he was seven or eight years old.

Walk participants included The Alliance of Concerned Men, 100 Fathers and Cease Fire Don't Smoke the Brothers and Sisters.

"I'm loving it. This is my first year here," said Amina Salami.

Salami handed out free coffee and hot chocolate to parade spectators with the Islamic Relief USA organization who set up several stations along the parade path to distribute free refreshments and fresh produce.

She said serving refreshments at the parade was a "nice and handy" gesture and a way to give back to the community.

"I will definitely be back," Salami said. **MLK**



Photo by Travis Riddick



Photo by Shevry Lassiter



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