

The Virgin Islands Consortium

In Light Of Official Event's Cancellation, St. Croix Residents Organize Their Own Martin Luther King Day March

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ST. CROIX -- In an age when racism and bigotry seems to be a constant topic on the U.S. mainland, and with talk that President Donald Trump allegedly called African nations "shithole countries" [during a recent White House meeting with lawmakers](#) discussing a possible immigration overhaul, many see the importance of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s sacrifice, and the need to honor it with the traditional marches and other commemorative events, as more indelible than ever before to the black community -- not only in the U.S. but around the world.

It was with such conviction at the forefront of their minds that St. Croix residents -- dismayed that organizers of the annual MLK march had cancelled the event -- quickly mobilized over the weekend, publishing posts on social media platforms stating that an impromptu march would be held. Organizers included the St. Croix Federation of Teachers and community activist Eurman Fahie, among others.

About 150 people participated, including a number of local organizations. The event was deemed successful even with the relatively small turnout, as it was a last-minute effort that only started coming together over the weekend when residents learned that the official march was cancelled.

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And those who participated, did so with passion and purpose. Walking in the blistering sun and sporadic rainfall, participants sang "We Shall Overcome" and other homogeneous hymnals as they marched through the town of Frederiksted guided by police escort. Mr. Fahie, a well-known activist in the community, spoke in a bullhorn criticizing people of color who he argued were ignoring the importance of Martin Luther King Day. Later at the Budhoe Park, Mr. Fahie contended that people of color were yet to be freed of many injustices and mental slavery.

"We ain't free; we're in financial slavery. Martin Luther King [spoke] about this in the 60s, we're in 2018 today, and we're still not free," Mr. Fahie said.

Speaking on behalf of Delegate to Congress Stacey Plaskett, Richard Motta, a communications employee of Ms. Plaskett's, reminded the audience at the Budhoe Park of the importance of Dr. King's legacy, and the need for Virgin Islanders, through meaningful actions, to keep the fire burning. "When we as a people feel like there's an impediment large enough to prevent us from celebrating the life and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, or D. Hamilton Jackson even, we're keeping that flame burning," Mr. Motta said.

Keynote speaker Dr. Edward Brown gave a powerful speech that drew contrast with the racial occurrences of modern day and how Dr. King would have addressed them. The speech also moved beyond the racial divide, speaking of the other issues that were part of Dr. King's cause, including gender equality and equal work for equal pay, among others. "If Dr. King was alive today, he would advocate against violence in our homes, in our schools and in our communities," Mr. Brown said. "If Dr. King was alive today, he would almost certainly express the view that girls and women are equals and should be treated as such in both their personal and professional lives."

Former senator Kenneth Gittens, who participated in Monday's march, lauded the efforts of those who worked to organize the last-minute march. "Certainly it is important to carry on his legacy," Mr. Gittens said, speaking of Dr. King. "He believed that a person's worth should not be measured by their color, race or gender, but rather believed that one's worth should be measured by their commitment."

While yesterday's affair did not match the annual extravaganza that includes marching bands from various schools parading through the streets of Frederiksted, it had special moments of its own, including poems by students and steelpan performances by Kevin

Williams Jr.

Dr. King was the chief spokesperson for nonviolent activism in the Civil Rights Movement, which successfully protested racial discrimination in federal and state law. The campaign for a federal holiday in Dr. King's honor began soon after his assassination in 1968. President Ronald Reagan signed the holiday into law in 1983. At first, some states resisted observing the holiday and gave alternative names or combined it with other holidays.

The holiday was officially observed in all 50 states for the first time in 2000.

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