

Students Plan King Day Observances

Contributed by Michelle D. Anderson, Drew Daniels and Dante Mozie - Black College Wire
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Activities include rallies, convocations, worship

As people around the country plan their Martin Luther King Day celebrations, college campuses gear up for organized events, and students reflect on the real meaning of the holiday.

Some plan to join friends for special activities ranging from community service to parades and lectures.

At the Atlanta University Center, which annually holds several events to observe the King birthday, numerous events are planned for the week -- from Jan. 15, the actual birthday, through the observed holiday, which this year falls on Jan. 21.

King graduated in 1948 from Morehouse College, one of the four schools in the AUC.

Last year Jordan Casson, a Morehouse junior and Georgia State NAACP youth and college division president, participated in a parade, attended several concerts and Morehouse's community service project. He also attended various church programs. This year Casson plans to commemorate the holiday in the same way. Many of these activities took place at the MLK Center for Nonviolent Social Change

in downtown Atlanta or in the Atlanta University Center.

Casson says Morehouse does a good job of observing the holiday properly. "This year with our new president it's going to be observed even stronger. The president is making an initiative to make sure that everyone on campus makes a major, major community service observation," Casson said. "Morehouse really shuts down, and Spelman as well, for King Weekend."

"This year the administration is making huge strides to make sure that everyone is doing something productive and positive. It won't just be another day we get off%97for the most part."

Amber M. Scott, a senior and president of the Spelman College NAACP chapter, says Spelman has a special worship service planned, but that the entire AUC community pays tribute to King throughout the year. "For example, the Spelman NAACP chapter plans to take a trip to the Martin Luther King Center for Nonviolent Change during Black Heritage Month and in March we will host our third annual charity basketball game."

Morehouse College sophomore Everett Dixon is a member of the school's famed Glee Club and will be performing in the King Celebration Concert taking place in the Atlanta University Center on Jan. 17. "I'm definitely looking forward to the concert," Dixon says. "It's one of our biggest concerts of the year. Dedicating a concert to someone is one of the most amazing things you can do to honor them."

Kamali Warner, a Grambling State University senior, says he plans to participate in a candlelight vigil, march and spiritual concert. "Being that we are an HBCU it is important that we recognize our struggles of yesterday and our

advancements of today. Activities like this show we are honoring the past heading towards peace."

Students at non-HBCUs also see the importance of the holiday.

"I don't think people celebrate like they are supposed to. A lot of people treat it as a day off from school or work. People know about Dr. King but don't participate in the marches and need to understand that this man played a major role in helping gain our civil rights. He risked his life and his family for our advancement," says Alexcia Hollis, a Georgia State University senior. Hollis says she volunteered in a community service project last year on the King holiday and that this year she plans to participate in a march.

Lorenza Cooper, a graduate student studying meteorology at Virginia Tech and a member of the university's NAACP chapter, celebrated King Day last year at an NAACP rally.

He says the importance and meaning behind King Day are not observed.

"They can further expand their celebrations of the day by applying the principles behind the great man of Martin Luther King throughout the year," Cooper said. "I celebrate Martin Luther King's Day by honoring his fight for equality (and) as a reminder to strive for excellence and a reminder that social equality has not yet become a reality. Therefore, I must continue to push for equality as a reality for myself and future generations of people of color."

Christopher Stewart, a Dillard University senior, recalls that last year he participated in the MLK Week for Peace, during which "we had church service, a community service project and a talent show."

Stewart says he thinks the day gets overlooked in general. "I don't think many Americans celebrate this day. To a lot of people it is just another day and a lot of people still don't feel Dr. King should have a day."

Dillard is one of the four New Orleans colleges that participate in the annual Week for Peace. Each year Dillard along with Loyola, Tulane and Xavier come together for activities on all four campuses that include a convocation, a candlelight vigil and an interfaith worship service. This year's Week for Peace actually runs for almost two weeks, beginning Jan. 16 and ending Jan. 31.

Crystal Young, a junior at South Carolina State, says she didn't celebrate King's birthday last year, instead choosing to spend time with friends.

She said that S.C. State doesn't observe the holiday well enough.

"Something we could do is have a program in his honor -- a carnival or a festival, or a movie night featuring a film about him," Young said.

Some students planned personal observations of King's birthday. Brandon Brown, a junior at S.C. State, said he celebrated last year by reflecting on all the adversities African-Americans went through to achieve greatness.

Stephanie McDuffie, a business marketing major at S.C. State, wore a commemorative pin and watched a documentary on King with a friend last year.

She believes S.C. State does not celebrate King Day as well as it should, despite the fact that the school's auditorium is named in his honor. "We could a memorial service in the auditorium," McDuffie said. "We could also show a movie about him and have kids come or have a rally."

S.C. State plans to celebrate King Day with a special program on Jan. 24 in the Martin Luther King Jr. Auditorium.

Signed into law by former President Ronald Reagan in 1983 and first celebrated in 1986, Dr. Martin Luther King Day was created to commemorate and project King's dream of ending racism and prejudice in America. According to the King Center, the holiday is not only designed to honor King, but to promote his ideals and methods of nonviolent action, such as love, tolerance and forgiveness.

The King Center also considers this holiday as a day of service to their communities and asks all Americans to volunteer their time to help those that are less fortunate.

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