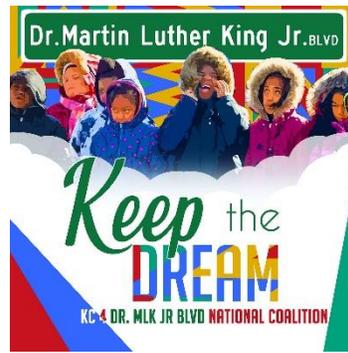


Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. BLVD
Keep the DREAM
VOTE NO ON 5
11-5-19



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The True Spirit of Dr. King: Resisting Hostility and Intimidation, Embracing Love and Justice

The KC4DRMLKJRBLVD National Coalition is proud of the numerous individuals and coalition partners who gave so much for the cause of a major thoroughfare to be named in Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s honor. This cause was and is a cause greater than ourselves. Many persons toiled tirelessly to both advocate for and defend our historic MLK BLVD victory which a majority of voters in the November 5 election decided to reverse, and thus strip away. It is a shameful day in Kansas City. We are one of the five most violent and crime ridden cities in this nation. The blood of our children flows through the streets. Yet the 1964 Nobel Peace Prize Winner was rejected by most of us as a symbol of who we are in this town. We needed Dr. King on that sign, and we don't even know it.

MLK BLVD RESIDENTS WHO ARE SUPPORTERS

Continually understated and often not stated at all, was the will and desire of dozens of MLK BLVD residents who supported the name change but who are not the noisiest or most spectacted during public discourse and advocacy. They are peaceful residents of nobility and honor. We are proud to have had the honor to advocate for them. They are to be commended as well for their loyalty and respect for our ancestors, namely Dr. King, who gave his life for the benefits we all now experience today in this city. They have received insufficient sympathy and have received no measure of adequate respect. We commend them.

KC IS NO PLACE FOR INTIMIDATION, HOSTILITY, AND DISRESPECT OF OTHERS

But the most of what ought to concern people of goodwill in Kansas City and the nation is the intimidation, hostility, and disrespect demonstrated by some of the Save the Paseo group two days before the election. Persons from their group barged into a black church where our GOTV rally was being held. After entering the sanctuary, they intentionally blocked the view of others by standing in the isles, presenting themselves in such a way that frightened children and their parents out of the sanctuary, and refused to sit or leave after being asked. The silence of their voices did nothing to soften the violence of their actions. We are proud of the composure of MLK BLVD supporters in the sanctuary that night who exhibited the true spirit of Dr. King. Save the Paseo floated bait for an altercation and conflict that would dishonor us all. Thank God our people had the spiritual fortitude not to take the bait.

They stood standing in front of attendees impeding the view of MLK BLVD supporters, blocking them from participation during prayer and praise, and then refused to sit down and cease when asked

to by ministers, the pastor of the church, and the Honorable U.S. Congressman Emanuel Cleaver II, also a long time minister and respected Civil Rights leader, who was the first African American mayor of Kansas City. Never would Dr. King, or anyone else of decency and respect for God and the church take such action. One wonders if this would have been the chosen form of conduct if we had been in a white church. Yet no matter how black or white the church, these tactics should be denounced by any and every one.

These actions led by a political consultant and sanctioned by the presence of other black leaders who are also aligned with the Save the Paseo group is now part of the Kansas City we have become. Is this what we do? Is this us? Is this part of who we are? We barge into sanctuaries of religious groups and faith-based organizations, intimidating parents, scaring children who are there to praise God, disrupting services, and disrespecting our spiritual and communal elders because we differ in perspective.

No matter any difference of opinion on public affairs such as MLK BLVD or The Paseo no one in this town should feel this kind of confrontation is ok and should condemn it in the strongest of terms. We at SCLC have engaged in principled non-violent direct-action campaigns and led them in the spirit of Dr. King. We have done it effectively without harm to fellow citizens, and certainly without harm to houses of worship. Principled non-violent direct action doesn't chase children from houses of worship and disrespect our spiritual leaders and elders.

CAN'T ERASE RACE

As it stands now, a majority of voters spoke clearly, as pertains to our Historic Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd. So be it. Democracy is good. Yet, the notion this issue is void of race is not realistic. A predominantly white group with black supporters has led a stripping of Dr. King's legacy from our children and community. And, is now deciding whether a black hero should be honored and where and how. We here in Kansas City are far behind in issues of racism, racial justice, and white privilege if we don't understand something is wrong with that picture. Hiding behind process doesn't make that go away.

UNFAIR BALLOT

Also problematic was the ballot language and structure. Firstly, the ballot confused voters, many not being sure what a yes or no vote meant because the yes-no question was inverted. Ballot language going forward needs more checkpoints with stakeholders and writers. Secondly, the positioning of Question 5 as the final measure appearing after four most likely "yes" votes set the question in a momentum for the opposition.

PROCESS WITH MLK BLVD WAS NOT HIGHJACKED

Finally, of great absurdity, is the claim that the process was flawed because the City waived a requirement for resident approval before acting. The City has always waved this when it has taken such actions in the past according to City Council proceedings discussing this matter. Yet somehow with MLK BLVD such concern was enough to mount a false narrative of "disenfranchisement" in the minds of the electorate when applied to MLK BLVD. We had hoped the electorate was more sophisticated than to fall for such misinformation. Disenfranchisement is the legal stripping away of voting rights which happened to no one anywhere in the process.

RACIAL UNITY WITHOUT SACRIFICING JUSTICE

Our coalition remains vigilante, poised, spirited, engaged, open to dialogue, and determined in the fight for peace and racial justice. We do not believe, however, Dr. King ever sacrificed racial justice for the sake of racial unity, and we will not either. We continue our quest for racial justice in the spirit of our many black ancestors, our ancestors whose spirit cry out, especially those whom this city called "pickaninnies" as they forcibly dislocated them from MLK BLVD and maligned them, clearing the way for the design and construction of this beautiful thoroughfare more than 100 years ago. Now with the dislocation of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., from the boulevard, we have not come so far as we thought.

"This is no time to engage in the luxury of cooling off or to take the tranquilizing drug of gradualism."
-Dr. Martin

Luther King, Jr.

With love and peace,

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KC4DRMLKJRBLVD National Coalition is a collaboration of peace, justice, & equity partners based in Greater Kansas City, advocating for Dr. King through preservation of the historic Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd in Kansas City, MO.

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If you would like more information about this topic, please call Rev. Dr. Vernon P. Howard, Jr. at 816-547-0719, or email drhowardjr@yahoo.com.