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In Los Angeles, Black and Brown celebrate MLK Parade, in spite of cops

written by Reece Evans
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Striking teachers and supporters march in Los Angeles MLK Day Parade, Jan. 21.
Photo: Reece Evans

Jan. 21 marks Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Day in the U.S. — a holiday won after many years of struggle as a symbol of unity and celebration of the deceased African-American leader's legacy. His life was ended far too soon by the evils of white supremacy.

This year, Los Angeles celebrated the 34th anniversary of the Kingdom Day Parade in honor of Dr. King's legacy. This event draws people from all over the city to march along MLK Boulevard from Western to Crenshaw. The parade is full of music, dance

and cultural celebration.

A contingent representing striking Los Angeles teachers participated in the celebration. Dr. King himself was a supporter of labor struggles and spent his last days in Memphis, Tenn., aiding Black sanitation workers who were on strike against exploitation and racist oppression.

It's a beautiful thing to see Los Angeles coming together in unity to carry on the fighting spirit of Dr. King.

LAPD presence is a threat

With that said, the safety of the entire community was put in grave danger by the presence of armed police — who patrol the event as well as marching in their own contingents of the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD), the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department (LASD) and the California Highway Patrol (CHP).

The presence of armed military personnel is also antagonistic towards the legacy of Dr. King, who rightfully pointed to U.S. imperialism as the greatest purveyor of violence in the world.

The existence of armed police and military in a parade like this is not only a departure from the legacy of Dr. King. It also creates an environment of trauma that can inflict deep wounds on community members who seek to participate in the celebration.

The participation of the LAPD and other police forces is merely a PR stunt for the capitalist press. The cops aren't so friendly in South Central Los Angeles when they're only being seen by the local community.

Police harassment part of everyday life

LAPD harassment of Black and Brown people is a part of everyday life in South Central. I witnessed the reality of how these racist pigs operate in the community at the intersection of MLK and Western just days before they were marching and waving to the crowd.

On Jan. 19, the LAPD responded to a call about a Black man with a gun, wearing a black hoodie — the kind of call that is all too common in the U.S. and that often leaves innocent people dead, injured, incarcerated or traumatized.

I first noticed the scene that night when people ran for cover in nearby buildings. The LAPD charged into a laundromat with high-powered rifles displayed. The cops quickly ran back out of that laundromat and proceeded to another one around the corner. Police cruisers filled the area and a helicopter hovered overhead.

At the next laundromat, the cops took aim at the first Black man they saw wearing a black hoodie. With weapons drawn and out for blood, they began to yell demands as they approached this innocent person. Then, they proceeded to humiliate and traumatize him as they searched him.

Despite finding no gun, the LAPD continued to detain the man to see if there were any outstanding warrants or other reasons they could justify their racial profiling. When he protested this racist police harassment, the pigs said to “Watch out or you’ll talk yourself into jail.”

This person had clearly committed no crime, but he was a Black man in South Central LA — and that was crime enough to the police. It wasn’t the first time that he had faced this type of racist harassment. And it’s a similar story for many community members.

This commonplace occurrence shows that the real danger is the racist cops who terrorize the Black and Brown community.

Continue Dr. King's true legacy

The legacy that Dr. King left behind was one of ultimate perseverance and determination for the just struggle for freedom of his people in the Black nation and of all oppressed peoples throughout the world. His legacy was one that challenged the capitalist political and economic system in the U.S. It was also one that stood firm against U.S. imperialist war.

This is the legacy that we honor when we examine the tremendous contributions made by Dr. King, not the deradicalized, whitewashed revision pushed out by the capitalist media.

The Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Day parade organizers must end all cooperation with the police and military in order to create a peaceful and trauma-free event. The LAPD operates as a fascist military force in these working-class, poor and oppressed communities. Ultimately, the corporations that control the parade must be pushed aside so that the community can hold an event that honors the true legacy of Dr. King.

If you would like to share your story regarding racist police terror or work together with us in fighting police brutality, please reach out to the Harriet Tubman Center for Social Justice. Send an email to HarrietTubmanCenter@gmail.com or call (323) 413-2120.

