

#ReclaimMLK in Oakland empowers communities

written by Carl Muhammad
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Oakland, Calif. — On Martin Luther King Day, Jan. 21, Oakland’s Anti Police-Terror Project (AFTP) held its 5th Annual People’s March and Day of Action to Reclaim King’s Radical Legacy.

Starting at 8 a.m. and ending around 8 p.m., the full day of events included meals, meditation and sound healing, a youth teach-in, speeches by mothers of Black men killed by the Oakland Police Department (OPD), a march through downtown, a musical celebration and people’s assemblies.

The AFTP, which did not request a permit from the city, was the chief organizer of the event, but many other groups helped make the day successful.

Abundant Beginnings, a Bay Area group dedicated to helping “grow learners who think critically, live responsibly and create meaningful change,” organized a youth teach-in and march. People as young as 3 or 4 years old led chants. After a march around Frank H. Ogawa Plaza, unofficially renamed Oscar Grant Plaza by the people of Oakland, the young people held a mini concert with youth singing uplifting and self-empowering songs and raps.

Third World Resistance, an organization seeking to link colonized and oppressed

nations with the Black struggle, was responsible for the march and rallies downtown. At OPD headquarters, event co-organizer and former Oakland mayoral candidate and “people’s mayor” Cat Brooks (who received 40,000 votes in the recent election) led a rally, which included a presentation by her daughter Luna, who was called the n-word and threatened with gun violence by a white male classmate. Luna announced she had formed a block of Black girls to fight back, and she received a rousing response.

Marchers then continued to the office of Alameda County Sheriff Greg Ahern. There, they celebrated the recent victory of shutting down Ahern’s Urban Shield program, which included police trips to Israel to train at the Nesh-AR Training Institute for Counter-Terrorism alongside the “YaMaM,” an Israeli Border Police “counter-terrorism” unit.

Along the route and throughout the day, spirited and inspiring drumming, singing and chanting was provided by Boom Shake and the Thrive Street Choir.

When the marchers returned to Oscar Grant Plaza, they were treated to spoken word and musical performances by Young Gifted and Black, Poor Magazine, Claudia Alick, WordSlanger, Ras Ceylon, Gina Madrid, Jennifer Johns and Kev Choice. They also heard from five Black women, all of whom gave compelling talks about their son’s deaths at the hands of police and community violence.

During the event, an organization called The Village quickly constructed a 10-foot by 12-foot “tiny home.” Tiny homes are small houses built for the city’s estimated 9,000 homeless people. The Village drew attention from officials in 2017 when they began constructing tiny homes without city authorization in a West Oakland public park. Though the original Village was disbanded, they were able to eventually win support from the City Council and an official site was found for a new village.

Community Ready Corp for Self-Determination, an organization working to “build

and/or contribute to self-determination in disenfranchised communities,” provided security and logistics. They organize “to protect Black spaces and communities from racist intimidation, harassment and violence,” along with providing security and self-defense training.

After the presentations and performances, attendees broke into seven people’s assemblies focusing on various topics: Public Safety/Use of Force, Oakland Schools/Teachers’ Strike, Sanctuary for All, Housing/Homelessness, Inner Communal Violence, Development/Displacement, and Mini First Responder Training.

At the Public Safety/Use of Force session, for example, attendees were asked to think of alternative ways to spend 10 percent of the OPD’s more than \$270 million annual budget. Responses included paid positions for first responders dealing with mental health crises and funding an alternative to 911. Organizers plan to create an action plan based on input gathered from the breakout sessions.

The day ended at sunset with Lead to Life melting down guns into shovels. The shovels are then used to plant “culturally significant” trees in healing ceremonies, allowing for communities to memorialize members lost to violence.

The level of organization seen at the People’s March and Day of Action to Reclaim King’s Radical Legacy is needed around the country and the world. It was clear that many activists spent long hours putting this event together and those efforts showed. There is little doubt that many people left Oscar Grant Plaza truly inspired to keep up the revolutionary struggle. I know, because I am one of them.

Photos: Carl Muhammad

