

# San Diego marches honor Black women's struggles

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1619 National Celebration of Black Women march, March 2. Photo: 1619 NCBW

San Diego celebrated Women's History Month by commemorating the 400th anniversary of the arrival of the first enslaved Africans in Jamestown, Va., in 1619, as recorded by historian Lerone Bennet Jr. in "Before the Mayflower: A History of Black America."

Two Black women's marches were held in San Diego: the 1619 National Celebration of Black Women (1619 NCBW) and the Second Annual March for Black Women-San Diego (M4BWSD). Both events were organized and led by Black women.

### **A tale of two marches**

The 1619 NCBW march and rally was held on March 2 in Ruocco Park, at one of San Diego's ports of entry near downtown. Sheryl Malory-Johnson, founder and visionary of the 1619 march, explained: "This historic national movement arose out of the necessity to honor women in American history who have emerged from slavery, defied the odds and come out victorious. Women who bred, fed and nurtured an entire nation.

"Our mission is to recognize the extraordinary contributions women of African descent have made in building this country," said Malory-Johnson. "Through a dynamic vision of uplifting and educating Black women and girls about their ancestors, we inspire them to walk in their power."

The second annual M4BWSD was held on March 10 in Southeast San Diego, in the heart of the Black and Brown community. Kelsey Daniels, one of the co-founders, explained that M4BWSD was "created for the purpose of uplifting the demands of Black women." It originated in San Diego as a result of two town hall meetings in 2017 where Black women made it clear that they had something to say about our current condition.

Born in response to the "Black Women's Blueprint" call to action and the legacy of the October 1997 Million Women's March in Philadelphia, organizers emphasized that it is not and never will be a knee-jerk reaction to the failures of white feminism.

Both marches featured drumming, music, poetry and speakers who addressed the issues facing Black women.

## **1619 NCFBW: Honor the past, fight for the future**

Many people came out in the rain to participate in the 1619 NCFBW march and rally, prompting Sheryl Malory-Johnson to say, “The rain is the tears of our ancestors.” Other speakers noted that the rain was nothing compared to what our ancestors had to endure since arriving on this soil.

Speakers honored many Black women in history, past and present, including Harriet Tubman, Rosa Parks, Ella Baker, Maya Angelou and Michele Obama. Honor was given to Black women survivors, inventors, writers, nurses, scientists, artists, architects, astronauts, journalists and the list goes on. Name it, we’ve done it.

Elected officials sent representatives with resolutions and congratulatory messages. California State Assembly member Dr. Shirley Weber reminded everyone that even as we celebrate the accomplishments of Black women, we must recognize that it has been a struggle from day one and we continue to struggle today. Every success that we have won, little or big, has been through struggle.

Rafael Castellan, commissioner from the Port of San Diego, spoke about the significance of having the 1619 celebration there, where ships carrying enslaved people once docked.

Organizers of the 1619 NCBW event were presented with a San Diego City Council proclamation declaring March 2, 2019, to be “1619 National Celebration of Black Women’s Day.”



March for Black Women. Photo: Gloria Verdieu

### **M4BWSD: Giving voice to the voiceless**

Organizers of the M4BWSD passed the mic to Black women who are rarely given the opportunity to speak, and whose voices need to be heard. Speakers praised the courage, strength and power of Black women. But they also spoke truth about what we are facing today in San Diego.

One example is an upcoming court hearing in the case of [23-year-old Aleah Jenkins](#), who died in police custody on Dec. 6. Jenkins was arrested by police in La Jolla on a warrant. Then, something happened to Jenkins in the back seat of the police car. Police body cam footage showed her asking for help and finally saying she couldn't breathe. By the time Jenkins was finally taken to a hospital, she was in a coma with severe brain swelling; she died nine days later.



Then there is [Muna Kuri, a 36-year-old Somali woman](#), who was found dead in her City Heights apartment on March 7. Authorities identified her husband as the main suspect. Kuri's cousin, who spoke at the rally, reported that Black women are killed at nearly three times the rate of white women.

Organizers emphasized that “we represent the most oppressed women,” including trans women, and gave a condensed version of their four demands: Challenge and acknowledge the violence, end the abuse, increase access to health care and economic justice for low-income women.

The opening rally ended with the reading of the community agreements, which began, “We march for all Black women, especially Black trans women,” followed by a list of biases that would not be tolerated; an urging to pick up trash and keep Southeast clean; and the affirmation that Black women, grandmothers, mothers and children were encouraged to lead.

March 10 was a beautiful, sunny day, and the march was over 300 strong. Marchers stepped off with a call and response chant: “Say their names!” and the response began with the names of Aleah Jenkins and Muna Kuri. Brown Berets provided security.

Although the two marches had different themes, speakers and atmospheres, both were successful, had community support and were about empowering Black women.

### **But wait, there's more!**

That wasn't the end of the powerful events. The expanded weekend program of the second annual M4BWSD included a Black women's summit titled “Black Womxn Save My Life.” This gathering of Black women and girls, held the day before the march, included a discussion of demands, including an end to violence against Black women and an end to the deportation of migrant women. This was a strong show of

self-determination.

Then, on March 12, a meeting with organizers from both marches was held at the Malcolm X Library. We discussed and analyzed both actions and talked about how the two groups can organize together. People discussed what's next for Black women locally and nationally, now that the marches are over.

One question that came up was why both actions were held in March. Organizers of the 1619 March answered, "We wanted to celebrate the accomplishments of Black women during Women's History Month 2019." Organizers from the second annual M4BWSD noted that the marches were also planned around Harriet Tubman Day, which is March 10.

This Black woman writer learned that March 10 is officially Harriet Tubman Day from these amazing Black Women. My shero, awesome!

The M4BWSD planning committee is already organizing for the third annual march on Sunday, March 8, 2020, in San Diego.

Love, protect and respect Black women.

