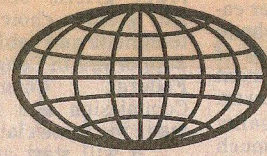


Kingsport Times-News



January 20, 1998

Price 50 Cents

★★ 2 Sections

82nd Year, Number 20



timesnews.net

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Marchers take part in Kingsport's first Martin Luther King Jr. Birthday Commemorative March, which was organized by members of the Tennessee and Virginia Fellowship Against Racism.

Kingsport marchers honor King, dream. Amy Stevens. Kingsport Times-News. January 20, 1998.

Tuesday

January 20, 1998 / Kingsport Times-News

Kingsport marchers honor King, dream

By AMY STEVENS
Times-News Staff Writer

Speakers both black and white Monday talked of peace, healing and racial equality at Kingsport's first Martin Luther King Jr. Birthday Commemorative March. But the words that seemed to most reverberate throughout the crowd were those spoken 30 years ago by the slain civil rights leader himself.

A hush enveloped the 50 or so marchers gathered in a downtown parking lot as a recording of one of King's speeches was played over a sound system.

"America must not become a na-

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tion of onlookers. America must not remain silent — not merely black America but all of America. It must speak up and act from the president down to the humblest of us. And not for the sake of the Negro, but for the sake of the image, the idea and the aspiration of America itself."

King's 30-year-old call to action was echoed by members of the Tennessee and Virginia Fellowship Against Racism, which organized Monday's event. Co-director Carol

Green said fellowship members created the march to honor the memory of King and keep his dream alive.

"We as a people can make a difference," Greene said. "We're marching because the dream can be a reality. We're marching because we can make the dream a reality."

Participants from numerous regional groups joined in the march, which began in the Riverview community and wound through downtown to City Hall. Among those joining in the event were members of the Concerned Citizens Coalition of Northeast Tennessee and Southwest Virginia, the Tennessee Hunger Coalition, the Institute for the

Healing of Racism, and Joshua Generation International Inc.

Joshua Generation leader Pastor Ronnie Collins called on those in attendance to follow the example of King and take a stand in their own communities.

"I believe Martin Luther King tried to challenge all of us not to be silent onlookers," he said. "I think most people that see things go on around you and hear about things that are happening, you'd rather go and pray about it when Martin Luther King went to jail about it. I believe God wants us to stand up and finally recognize that things won't change until we do something."

Sullivan County Judge Steven Jones called on those in attendance to foster racial harmony through personal character and morality. And the Rev. Dr. Frank Hawkins, senior pastor of Kingsport's First Baptist Church, in a closing prayer stressed that peace must be a part of any solution to America's racial divide.

"As we remember Dr. King and his example, and as we remember Christ and his example," Hawkins prayed, "help us to go forth from this event with a recommitment to be peacemakers. And give us the courage to stand up and take a stand where we can in our world."