

# Alton NAACP Holds First-Ever Motorcade In Celebration Of Dr. Martin Luther King's Jr. Birthday

by Colin Feeney, Contributing Sports Writer  
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ALTON - The Alton chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) held its first-ever motorcade ceremony to honor the life and accomplishments of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. on Sunday in a procession that started at Lincoln-Douglas Square in Downtown Alton, and ended at James H. Killian Park.



The theme of this year's ceremony, the 41st annual observance, was "Making Lives Matter - Where Do We Go From Here?," and in the keynote speech, the attendees were asked and encouraged to make sure their commitments to Dr. King's dream of racial equality for all were real and genuine. The annual NAACP in Alton King event in Alton is normally held in a church setting, but this time because of COVID-19, it was held outside and included a motorcade ceremony.

"It has just been an awesome day," said Alton NAACP Second Vice President Rosetta Brown. "It started at one o'clock, people were pouring in Downtown Alton at the Lincoln-Douglas square, cars were coming from everywhere. I really can't even count the number of cars that were in the motorcade for Dr. King. The Alton community should be very proud of themselves because they came out in numbers, they came out in droves.

"It was to celebrate our own Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., our hero, our leader, our trailblazer. After we assembled, we traveled down Dr. King, up to 20th (street), down Washington to the James Killian Park. And once we got here, we had an awesome celebration. We had a wreath ceremony, we were addressed by Elder Jason Harrison; he was our keynote speaker. He spoke on some wonderful ideas. And he spoke on unity, and how to stay together, and to know what you mean when you say what you mean.

"And we do know that all lives matter," Brown continued. "All lives matter, and our theme was "Making Lives Matter - Where Do We Go From Here/?"

At the beginning of his speech, Rev. Harrison touched on seeing the recent experience of his daughter's wedding, his father, who officiated the ceremony, asked the questions of "Do you take this person to have and to hold, for better or worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health?"

"Maybe you don't know how he asked what you said," Harrison said to the laughs of the audience. "You have no clue what it's like to be poor, you don't know the ups, the downs, the rollercoaster that you go through. But are you committed to that?"

Harrison talked about pictures on social media that people put out to show commitments to various causes, and also used an example of people who got upset when some officers left their posts during the recent riots at the U.S. Capitol building on Jan. 6.

"But never in a million years do they think that something like that would happen," Harrison said. "But then, I also thought, on the other hand, if I was the officer, and somebody coming up there, and I heard one guy say that 'our beef isn't with you, we'll let you go,' and I'd say 'well, if it ain't with me, I think I should probably go,'" he said to the laughs from the audience. "But are you committed to what you say and I serve to?"

That's the question I'd go to any leader and ask. From mayors to governors, to judges. Whatever position you're in, are you committed? You're going to have us when the people are praising you and saying oh, you're great. But can you have the fortitude to deal with it when they lie about you when they're talking about you when they say you'll never be anything? When there are nights when you have to cry alone, and the nights you're sitting there, and you have to make decisions that will affect your community, and you really don't want to make them, but you have to do it for the bigger of the picture. Are you committed?

"Are you committed when people are offering you money to do illegal things?," Harrison continued in his stirring and inspiring speech, "but you say 'no, I'm not going to take the money. I'm going to have integrity, I'm going to walk in the right.' Are you committed to walk alone? You can talk about Dr. King, and Dr. King was a great person, but Dr. King was not respected like that when he was living. Did you know that the Baptist church put him out? Did you know his friends and them talking about him? Did you know his family got threats? Did you know about that? But he was committed to his vision. Everybody wants to be Dr. King until they start taking your stuff away from you."

Harrison asked if the audience was committed enough to lose their social status, and asked if they were committed to walk to their neighborhoods and ask residents about their needs, saying that everyone wants recognition for their deeds, but wondered where

those same people were during the night out in the streets with the widows, the crying children, challenging those to create their own vision.

"That's what I really want to know," Harrison said. "We stand out here in the cold so some people can say 'I observed Dr. King day, and that was great,' and you can go home in your warm homes and think about it. But for real, are you committed to the vision that Dr. King had? About true unity, about true peace, about true love. How many are reaching out to people that you don't even know? How many are going to pass the racial barriers, and go and pass the line and say 'I'm here with you,' and inspire all. Are you committed?"

Harrison also challenged the audience to hold firm in their commitments, even if they lose friends and followers on social media and in real life, also challenging those to keep their vision both in good and bad times, such as the vows taken in wedding ceremonies.

During the ceremonies, mask-wearing and social distancing were required, due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, and did the motorcade this year instead of having a major service at its usual site in Alton.

"Due to the pandemic, this is the reason why we did it this way," Brown said.

"Normally, we have a huge service every year at the Tabernacle Missionary Baptist Church. But we wanted to keep everybody safe. Now after this, we will go back to the drawing board, and begin to plan for our next year's Dr. Martin Luther King. We're not going to let anything stop us. So, if we know that the pandemic did not stop us this year, we are going to move forward strong, long and hard."

Brown also hopes that events such as the annual Dr. King service serves as an example of all people coming together in love and unity, and that people can walk together in a common cause.

"The impact that I would like events like this to have is to come out and not only show peace, and unity, and love to Dr. King," Brown said, "but to show Alton, Illinois and the surrounding cities that we can come together. We can walk hand-in-hand, and we do stand up when it's time to stand up to celebrate a cause."