Ben Jealous to Headline Week of MLK Celebrations

Martin Luther King Jr. Day celebrations at UNC will offer students opportunities to engage with other students, explore issues of social justice, and "rise above" differences to find meaningful connections throughout the community.

Headlined by former NAACP CEO and President Ben Jealous who will deliver an address at Memorial Hall to conclude a week of celebration and service, the MLK Celebration Steering Committee has put together a program of events to honor the memory and legacy of Martin Luther King Jr.

Sophia McFarlane, Student Coordinator of Diversity Education and MLK Celebration, expresses that "the whole week is designated to celebrate Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday, his legacy, and his passion for service and community-building. All of the events our committee has planned will play into these ideas and focus on bridge-building and service." Sophia is a senior, majoring in chemistry with a minor in social and economic justice and health and society, from Concord, NC.

Since late September, the students onboard the MLK Celebration Steering Committee have been hard at work to organize the week of events. The MLK Celebration Steering committee is a group of on-campus leaders that represent various interests and organizations across UNC and they come together to craft the intersection of MLK Jr.'s vision at the UNC community. The organizations represented this year through the committee are: Diversity and Inclusion, Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity Inc., Black Student Movement, Campus Y, Carolina Indian Circle, Student Government ? MADO, CUAB, Carolina Women?s Center, Mi Pueblo, NAACP, NC Hillel, NPHC, and Student Life and Leadership.

Each group has provided valuable input into the planning process. "My goal throughout the week of events is that we can assist student groups to be heard not just feel heard," says Serena Singh, a MLK Celebration Steering Committee member. Serena is a junior, majoring in political science with a minor in entrepreneurship, from Fayetteville, NC.
This year’s theme for the week of celebrations is “Rise Above,” inspired by MLK’s quote, “We are challenged to rise above the narrow confines of our individualistic concerns to the broader concerns of all humanity.” Ultimately, the goal is to foster a community-based message that aligns with MLK Jr.’s vision.

The week of events for the Martin Luther King Jr. Birthday Celebration kicks-off on Sunday, January 20th and continues through Thursday, January 24th.

The week begins with the 34th annual University/Community Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Banquet and Award Presentation, hosted by the MLK Jr. Corporation, in partnership with UNC’s Office for Diversity & Inclusion. At the banquet, the MLK Unsung Hero Awards are annually awarded to two UNC staff/faculty, department or community/corporate entity who have made significant contributions to social justice, equity, and diversity, and have made a positive difference in the lives of others at Carolina. The banquet is held on Sunday, January 20th at the Friday Center from 6 to 9 pm.

The following day, Monday, January 21st, kickstarts the MLK Service Social Media Campaign. To instill in students the passion for service, the committee has devised a week-long initiative rather than a day-long initiative. Students are encouraged to utilize #UNCMLK whenever they do an act of service and post it to their social media. Three winners will be randomly chosen and the reward will be an incentive that ties back to service to instill the idea that service extends beyond one day or MLK day, rather it is an intrinsic part of Martin Luther King Jr.’s message. The MLK Service Social Media Competition continues up until Thursday, January 24th - which is the last day of the Martin Luther King Jr. Birthday Celebration.

On Tuesday, the 2nd Annual Unity Dinner will be held with over 20 on-campus student organizations in attendance. The Unity Dinner provides an opportunity for student leaders across UNC’s campus to come together and create solidarity. The event is an invite-only event and will take place in the Great Hall from 6 to 8 pm. If you would like to attend the Unity Dinner and did not receive an invitation through an on-campus organization, you have the opportunity to ask organizers at the event whether or not seats are available.

Wednesday, January 23rd, is the day of the Pit Photo Campaign called “Rise Above.” Various cultural and performance groups will be performing in The Pit and students are encouraged to take photos with whiteboards that are labeled with “I Rise Above Because?? Some of the groups performing in The Pit will be: EROT, Unheard Voices, Harmonyx, and Bhangra Elite.

To end off the week, the 38th Annual Martin Luther King, Jr. Keynote Lecture and Awards Ceremony will take place and will feature Ben Jealous, former president and CEO of the NAACP, as the keynote speaker. Additionally, awards will be given out for the UNC MLK Student Scholarship and Unsung Heroes awards. The event will take place in Memorial Hall at 7 pm and is free to attend; however, tickets are required. Tickets will be available at the Carolina Performing Arts/Memorial Hall Box Office or online.

With all of the events being held in honor of the Martin Luther King Jr. Birthday Celebration, the same mission holds true: community-building. “There are so many interests and groups represented through the committee that are coming together to build one cohesive vision, and I feel as if that is reminiscent of MLK Jr.’s dream?” says McFarlane.
Download a schedule of schedule of events: MLK Week Schedule.pdf