

Community in Liberty: MLK Day Celebrations in Miami

Written by Alessandra Djohan

Every Jan. 19th, Miami hosts an unmissable celebration honoring Dr. Martin Luther King, complete with numerous black-owned businesses advertising their best products and a colorful parade.

As the smell of barbeque wafted through the air, the humming of food trucks continued to buzz through the Miami humidity. The sound of music got closer as colorful floats began to become visible in the distance, adorned with bedazzled signs and tinsel. This is what Dr. Martin Luther King Memorial Park has looked like annually since 1977, which marked the first year that this community-building tradition began.

According to the [Miami Dade County of Cultural Affairs](#), this tradition began when Preston Marshall Jr., a Miami civil rights leader and educator, who met and marched with Martin Luther King in college, established this parade in Miami-Dade County, creating the nation's first and largest MLK day parade. He established this tradition years before it became a federal holiday, institutionalizing Martin Luther King's memory in the city, which forever established Miami as a hub for social progression. Now, this culturally significant parade routinely draws an average of 500,000 people every year and millions of media viewers, according to the [Official Website of Greater Miami and Miami Beach](#).

Beyond the fun that takes place during this annual event, this gathering symbolizes a day of unity and progression for the black community in Miami-Dade County as multiple sources have mentioned. Jasmine Adeyemi, a 32-year-old jewelry business owner whose parents migrated all the way from Haiti stated that, ‘this event was important in shedding light on the emancipation of black people,’ and that this gathering is a good reminder to people that we, ‘can always do better, especially by bringing community together.’ Multiple other sources highlighted the same thing, emphasizing how important MLK day is as a reminder of community, love and togetherness for African Americans in Miami. Nate Diaz, a 28-year-old real estate agent from Liberty City highlighted that, ‘we need community in this country because we all deal with our problems and feel alone.’ He then went on to say, ‘once we come out and create a community we realize that we can actually make a difference for folks.’

Although the celebrations were mostly in honor of African-Americans living in Miami, everyone is welcome to join in on the festivities, as it is open and accessible for all. According to [The Official Website of Greater Miami and Miami Beach](#) the two-and-a-half-hour parade begins at 11 a.m., whilst a festival takes place at the memorial park from noon to 5 p.m. This festival is family friendly, featuring many activities for kids such as a bouncy castle and multiple street vendors selling snacks.

However, with any large-scale event in a bustling city like Miami come problems. Diaz highlighted that the venue was ‘pretty inaccessible’ for people who did not have a car, suggesting that next time there should be a ‘dedicated route,’ or ‘more established public transit,’ for people to be able to access this gathering alongside other events/amenities in Miami.

Furthermore, according to Adeyemi, ‘last year there were too many people and a lack of control over the crowds,’ even stating that, ‘it nearly broke out in fights.’ She recalled how scared she was at that moment. According to [CBS News](#), in 2024, ‘over 160 people were arrested during the MLK Day holiday with ‘dozens of weapons confiscated and stolen vehicles recovered.’ This was reportedly due to ‘street takeovers’ which was the activity of people ‘gathering in a public street, typically in cars, bikes or ATVs, and taking over the roadway.’ This activity is highly illegal, and law enforcement have taken measures to stop it ever since with a \$4,000 fine charged to individuals caught in the act.

With the celebrations also came the opportunity for black-owned small businesses to showcase their products to the community. According to [The Miami Times](#), vendor applications were open until Jan. 5th before the event. This Jan. 19th, long lines snaked around Dr. Martin Luther King Memorial Park as people sought to try the different local food vendors that were on display. Nasir Mitchell, a 42-year-old taxi driver local to Miami, stated that it was ‘lovely, lovely,’ seeing many black owned business owners finally getting ‘much deserved recognition for their hard work.’

Alexander Caldershaw, a 52-year-old CNC reporter stated that his favourite part of the day had been, ‘watching people come together,’ and ‘being able to celebrate their differences.’ To conclude, even though every large-scale event in an extensive city like Miami comes with its challenges, we must remember that, especially with today’s MLK festivities, we must adhere to its main purpose of fostering community and spreading love.

Photos (attached separately as instructed):



Pictured above, food trucks are set up near Dr. Martin Luther King Memorial Park.



Pictured above, bouncy castle for children.



Pictured above, police car with singular officer monitoring the event.



Pictured above, local vendor selling lemonade.

