

Young people call for equality, justice during Wednesday's Black Lives Matter Peace March

Procession from Fauquier High School to Eva Walker Park draws 250 participants

By Coy Ferrell Times Staff Writer Jun 11, 2020 Updated Jun 12, 2020 8



Led by Tiana Minor (with megaphone), the demonstration passes the Warrenton courthouse as it turns down Alexandria Pike toward Eva Walker Park. Coy Ferrell

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On Wednesday afternoon during one of the hottest days of the year so far, about 250 people walked from Fauquier High School to Eva Walker Park in Warrenton in what organizers called the Black Lives Matter Peace March.

Lasting a little more than an hour, the event was organized by local high school students to spread a simple message: black lives matter, too. The overwhelming majority of marchers were young people, though a few parents and teachers joined them.

At times, the march was joyful. At other times, tears flowed. At all times, it was peaceful. Warrenton police officers and deputies from the Fauquier County Sheriff's Office escorted the marchers, temporarily blocking streets to let the marchers pass through safely.

On several occasions along the route, the occupants of stopped cars got out and raised a fist in solidarity with the demonstrators. Other drivers honked their horns and waved in support as they passed. When the marchers arrived at the park, several speakers addressed the crowd briefly before observing a minute of silence for black victims of violence.

The march came in the wake of nationwide protests following the death of George Floyd, a black man who died in the custody of Minneapolis, Minnesota police officers. The flyer for the event asked all participants to wear face masks, and the vast majority of participants complied.

Juddy Jolicoeur, a rising freshman at Fauquier High School, was the main organizer of the march. Other students helped plan the event: Lily von Hurbulis, a rising freshman at Kettle Run High School; Molly Kirk, a rising junior at Fauquier High School; Nathan Kim, a rising senior at KRHS, and Tiana Minor, the chair of the Fauquier County NAACP youth committee and a recent graduate of FHS. “I don’t to see my brother or my sisters die in the hands of racist police officers,” Jolicoeur said afterward about what inspired her to organize the march. She had begun to address the crowd assembled at Eva Walker Park at the event’s terminus but was overcome with emotion and yielded to other speakers. “We are all hurting and I’m genuinely angry. I don’t believe all cops are bad, but in certain states or areas, it’s corrupt,” she said. “I don’t understand what’s intimidating about black people, people of color. We all aren’t the same. Not all of us are thugs or in gangs. Not all of us do drugs, steal [or] murder people. The point I’m trying to get across is, just treat people with equality,” she said, elaborating later, “All I want is change, and to be heard.”

Jolicoeur added she has been encouraged by the response of the local community in recent weeks. “It’s crazy how many people showed up [to the march],” she said. “I didn’t expect it to become a movement within Fauquier County, and I would 120% do it again.” Her family has been supportive of her, but she said her brother was skeptical that the turnout would be very high. “He said people wouldn’t show up because I’m a kid. Well, I taught him wrong,” she said in a text, adding a laughing-face emoji.

During the procession across town, Minor usually took the lead, sometimes leading participants in slogans – “black lives matter,” “no justice, no peace,” “students for peace, students for equality” – and other times guiding the procession to follow the route indicated by their police escorts. For periods of the march, the demonstrators were mostly silent, sometimes simply raising their fists and holding up signs in solidarity as they walked. “This is not only about George Floyd. This is not only about Ahmaud Arbery. This is not only about only about Brianna Taylor,” Minor told the assembled crowd at the park. “This is not only for the injustice we see on Instagram, Twitter and Facebook. This is for the injustice we do not see, when they are not recording ... that happens every day.” She said at another point, “This is the year that we grow: you, me and everyone,” adding that the march demonstrated that “we accept that a change needs to be made.”

Minor said afterward that she hopes the recent anti-racist energy will encourage more people to speak up about injustices they experience or see in their everyday lives, and that ultimately systemic changes – brought largely by people exercising their right to vote – would occur. “We need to be putting people that look like us [in leadership positions] so that they can be a positive influence on us,” she said.

Jasmin Morton, a KRHS graduate, told the crowd at the park, “Don’t let this be your only form of action ... continue the conversation” with classmates, friends and family. “Education is your most powerful weapon ... each and every one of you has a great amount of power,” she added, encouraging the young people in the crowd to go on to become teachers and doctors, to run for public office someday and to, above all, vote. She cited what, in her view, have been successes resulting from recent protests. Minneapolis, Minnesota will “defund” its police department. New York City will now allocate more money to its department of social services. Statues honoring leaders of the Confederacy have been removed from public places around the country. “Continue to make noise and shake the table,” she concluded. “Black lives matter.”

Arleena Allen, who graduated from KRHS in 2017 and organized a black lives matter demonstration in Warrenton last month, also addressed the crowd. “Growing up in Fauquier County was hard, especially as a black woman,” she said. “I am not impressed by the mural in D.C. It’s not enough,” she added, a reference to a street in Washington recently emblazoned with the words “black lives matter.” She continued, “We can have millions of discussions with law enforcement, but it’s not enough until we see change.” Warrenton Town Councilman Renard Carlos (at-large) briefly addressed the crowd and praised the peaceful demonstration. “You didn’t have to pick up any bricks, you didn’t have to break any windows, all you had to do is lift your voices and your elected officials know that black lives matter,” he said.

Steven Bucher, a teacher at Taylor Middle School, spoke about the protest movements of the 1960s and 1970s and encouraged the young people in attendance to continue that tradition of advocating for justice and equality. “We were outraged. We stood up and we spoke out.” he said of those protest movements. But, he said, “it’s not enough to get it right. You have to keep it right. And we fell short. ... And when you don’t keep it right, you wake up one morning and there’s a knee on your neck.”

When the speakers were finished, Jolicoeur asked participants to observe a minute of silence “for all the black lives taken every day.” Most attendees took a knee and raised a fist in the air. The crowd then quietly dispersed, with some riding buses provided by the school division back to the high school.

Ngozi Alia, a student at Liberty High School, said she participated in the march “to fight for my rights. I shouldn’t have to worry about whether I can get a job or get pulled over because of the color of my skin.” She said that she was encouraged that young people “of all different colors” had joined the demonstration to show their support.

Olivia Stith, 16, attended the march with her mother and a friend. “This has been happening for too long,” she said of violence perpetrated on black people. “I don’t want my children to experience the same thing.”

Lillian Kincaid, 15, attended the march with three of her friends; they all attend FHS. She took part, she said, “Because black lives matter. Because one day when I have kids, no matter what race they are, they shouldn’t have to deal with this.”

Elise Henry, 15, chimed in. “We’ve been in the same rhythm for hundreds of years. That needs to change.”

Next to her, Cat Chau, 16, said she participated “because I’m the only one in my family who supports this.”

Olivia Gulick, 17, a rising senior at FHS, said that her generation is better able to be aware of injustice because so many instances of police violence are now captured with a smartphone camera. “I had never been to a protest before. I went to the first one in Warrenton ... I was so glad I was there.”

Warrenton Police Chief Mike Kochis was present at Eva Walker Park. “It was a great event, well organized,” he said afterward. “Knowing that we have young people who can put this kind of thing together – it’s inspiring.”

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