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SCLC-GKC OPPOSES RENAMING OF J.C. NICHOLS PARKWAY TO DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

Location Would Not Meet Principled Mission of Dr. King and Protection of Black Life

KANSAS CITY, MO, June 16, 2020 The Southern Christian Leadership Conference of Greater Kansas City continues to support the renaming of a major boulevard or thoroughfare in Kansas City, MO, which would carry the name of The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., our national founder and visionary. J.C. Nichols Parkway would not be appropriate.

Our organization was asked by Kansas Citians, including some Paseo residents and community leaders, to lead the previous effort to rename The Paseo. We are honored to have worked with a broad base of coalition partners across race, class, geography, and political spectrum to successfully advocate for that historic victory in January of 2019. Unfortunately, it was overturned.

The principles upon which we were asked to forge a name change centered upon connecting that name change to real impact upon Black life, a cause which Dr. King and our work here at SCLC-GKC has been wed for almost half a century. The principles were, and remain, that a name change should include:

- **Economic leveraging and investment for Black urban business and residential areas**
- **Cultural and educational empowerment for Black children whose lives and aspirations matter**
- **A “major” thoroughfare honoring the unmatched global, national, and local impact of Dr. King**

While renaming J.C. Nichols Parkway could make a statement about this generation’s regret of the society’s past wrongs, naming it after Dr. King is not appropriate. The potential renaming of this miniscule Parkway does not arise to such principled standards of freedom and justice for Black life.

The renaming of the fountain to “Dream Fountain” is rather obscure. Dr. King’s dream was of “justice” which seems a far better option.

J.C. Nichols Parkway has not been an enrichment to Black business and entrepreneurship in any significant way. Simultaneously, mainly white businesses on the Plaza have profited from Black consumer spending while Black businesses in the urban core and elsewhere suffer from a lack of white consumer dollars contributing entrepreneurial inequity, stagnant Black business growth,

and Black business failure. Most Black children would never see and be inspired by Dr. King's name in that location as young Blacks are socially unwelcomed on the Country Club Plaza, as attested to by historical curfews banning their presence.

In 1972 it was SCLC-GKC which inaugurated and set into motion assembly for protest and justice at the Mill Creek Park and Country Club Plaza. Then we launched Resurrection City, a Poor People's Campaign action highlighting the systemic racism which produced and still produce such grave economic disparities remaining today. Having been a part of so much of Kansas City's history and present on issues of racial justice, we welcome inclusion in the conversation.

However, may we all remember, it is the victims of racism who own the right to speak with authority and educate the world regarding how racism works, how racism injures and destroys us, how it works within white privilege and power, and what is needed to solve it.

Justice and Equity Now,

The Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) is a non-violent, direct action, social change organization founded nationally in 1957 by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and a group of Southern ministers. The Greater Kansas City Chapter of SCLC was formally organized in 1972 and is dedicated to the continuation of Dr. King's dream in Metropolitan Kansas City. Since 1969, SCLC of Greater Kansas City has sponsored the annual King Holiday Celebration during January. The Celebration has grown to be one of the most extensive observances in the nation.

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If you would like more information about this topic, please call Rev. Dr. Vernon P. Howard, Jr. at 816-547-0719, or email drhowardjr@yahoo.com.