



SDI CASE STUDY

GULF WAR VETERANS TOOK CENTER STAGE DURING AN UNFORGETTABLE GROUNDBREAKING EVENT

Situation: In October 2021, the Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial in Washington, D.C. celebrated its tenth anniversary. The Memorial Foundation, builder of the memorial which now exists to promote the MLK Memorial and create programs to support Dr King's vision, hired SDI to plan and execute the anniversary celebration to increase awareness of the memorial and the foundation's programs. SDI has continued to support the foundation since designing and producing the dedication in October 2011.

The anniversary featured two signature events. The Gala was held on the evening of Oct. 20, 2021 at the Marriot Marquis in Washington, D.C. for top donors, Memorial Foundation fellows, elected officials, and other dignitaries. On Oct. 21, 2021, the formal Celebration took place at the MLK Memorial, featuring speeches from President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris

Approach: SDI organized both the Gala and Celebration, coordinating logistics, vendors, and entertainment for the hundreds in attendance. Each event featured strict COVID-19 protocols, as every attendee was required to provide proof of vaccination and have their temperature taken. Additionally, SDI developed the run of show and drafted the script for each event. For the Celebration on-site at the MLK Memorial, SDI worked closely with the Secret Service and the National Park Service to ensure compliance with security requirements, proper coordination and smooth arrivals for dignitaries and guests.

To garner media attention, SDI developed a narrative for the anniversary that focused on the evolution of the social justice movement since the dedication. In particular, the MLK Memorial had become a gathering point during the social justice protests of 2020. SDI showcased the future of the Memorial Foundation, leveraging the stories of Memorial Foundation fellows, an annual group of students who go through training and classes to learn about social justice, to showcase the future.

To encourage on-site coverage, SDI kept editors and reporters updated on key speakers and speeches. SDI promoted Gala emcee and actor Hill Harper, a keynote address from House Majority Whip James E. Clyburn (D-S.C.), and a video from anniversary co-chair and legendary singer Smokey Robinson. For the Celebration, SDI engaged with the White House press corps and national outlets to cover the speeches from President Biden, Vice President Harris, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA), and a Memorial Foundation fellow.

Results: Prominent preview stories featuring Memorial Foundation CEO Harry S. Johnson included a USA Today article, an op-ed by Johnson that ran in The Hill, and a one-on-one interview at the MLK Memorial with WAMU, Washington, D.C.'s NPR affiliate. For the evening Gala, SDI secured the attendance of several lifestyle photographers for media outlets, as well as a TV news feature from WJLA, D.C.'s ABC affiliate.

At the Celebration, the stunning backdrop of the MLK Memorial on a picturesque fall day and the presence of so many luminaries led to live coverage from PBS, CNN, and MSNBC and subsequent coverage from a wide range of national outlets, including the Washington Post, New York Times, and ABC News. Overall, nearly 800 print and TV stories were watched and read by millions, providing valuable publicity for the Memorial Foundation as it entered its next decade of sharing Dr. King's message and hope for the future.

