

# US: Protesters jeer Bush in Atlanta on King's birthday

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A crowd of some 1,000 demonstrators booed and jeered George W. Bush when he showed up to lay a wreath at the tomb of Martin Luther King, Jr. in Atlanta on the slain civil rights leader's birthday January 15. Antiwar protesters, environmentalists and human rights activists were joined by many black residents, angry at Bush's attempt to gain political credibility by linking himself to King's legacy.

The crowd shouted, "Bush go home!" and "Peace, not war," and carried signs reading, "War is not the Answer," "Promote Peace, Not Halliburton," "Impeach the Liar," "No Blood for Oil," "I Have a Dream ... To Rule the World—G.W. Bush," and "It's not a photo-op, George."

Police attempted to keep the crowd at a distance from Bush, so that its presence would not intrude on the cynical stunt. Angry demonstrators refused to be moved behind buildings across the street from the King tomb and out of sight. Two protesters were arrested during the police operation.

Atlanta Independent Media Center notes: "In response to the crowd's refusal to move, and after police tape was cut and several barricades were looking fragile, police parked several buses along the street to cordon off the protesters." Police officers in riot gear took up positions atop the buses as demonstrators pounded the vehicles with their fists. The boos and chants were audible to the members of the Bush entourage, who ignored them.

Lance Grimes, a 55-year-old black social worker from Decatur, Georgia, told the *New York Times*, "Bush was not invited. It is a desecration for him to lay a wreath at the tomb of Dr. King. He is diametrically opposed to everything Dr. King stood for." Beth Anne Matari, 51, of Atlanta echoed this comment to the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, adding, "It's hypocritical

for him to come on Dr. King's birthday."

Protest organizers in the MLK March Committee offered only muted criticisms of the decision by Coretta Scott King, the civil rights leader's widow, and other relatives to accompany Bush during his wreath-laying. No formal invitation had been extended to Bush, but the King family accepted his offer to come.

The *Chicago Tribune* noted that Bush "stood briefly in silent prayer before being whisked away to attend a \$2,000-a-plate re-election fundraiser where he was introduced by Democratic supporter Sen. Zell Miller of Georgia."

Bush's stop in Atlanta was part of a two-state tour of Georgia and Louisiana to shore up support from his right-wing fundamentalist "base," make inroads among the black clergy and other middle class minority layers and cement ties to right-wing Democrats like Miller.

The first stop on Bush's one-day sojourn was New Orleans, where he spoke at a mostly black church on his retrograde "faith-based" initiative. The president boasted that after failing to persuade Congress to change laws governing federal funding of religious-based programs he had signed an executive order "instructing all federal agencies not to discriminate against religious groups." His order opened \$3.7 billion in Justice Department grants to "faith-based" institutions, a clear violation of the constitutionally-guaranteed separation of church and state.

Bush, with a great deal of money to hand out, received a friendly reception from the crowd at Union Bethel A.M.E. Church in New Orleans. David Shelton Jr., minister at a nearby church, told *ABC News*, "That's why I'm here, to get involved with the faith-based initiative."

However, more than 100 demonstrators behind a barricade a block away chanted "Down with Bush."

The two fund-raisers on his one-day trip netted Bush \$2.3 million for his re-election campaign. A host of Democratic politicians attended the Atlanta event, in addition to Miller, to show their support for the Bush-Cheney ticket in 2002. Among them was Griffin Bell, attorney general in the Carter administration. Also on hand were former US Senator David Gambrell, former Rep. Doug Barnard and Virgil Williams, former chief of staff to Miller when he was Georgia governor.

Former Atlanta mayor Andrew Young, who participated along with King in civil rights protests in the 1960s, was a prominent and significant attendee. Young told the *Journal-Constitution*, "I've had as much access to this president as I've had to any president."

Along with Miller, 11 Georgia state Democratic legislators were on hand to endorse Bush's re-election, including the chairmen of several key committees. Rep. Mike Boggs of Waycross told the Atlanta newspaper, "There's a lot of conservative Democrats in the Georgia Legislature who support President Bush. I don't think it's controversial at all."

During his introduction of Bush, Miller told the crowd, "I can guarantee you I will not be the only Democrat working for his re-election." The Georgia senator called Bush a president with "a good heart and a spine of steel" and said, "I want a commander in chief like George Bush. I want a man who doesn't suffer from analysis paralysis."

Bush received his strongest applause from the right-wing crowd when he promised US troops would stay in Iraq. "All Iraqis who have taken the side of freedom have taken the winning side," Bush commented, presumably referring to those who have lined up with the US puppet regime in Baghdad. "America will never be intimidated by a bunch of thugs and assassins," he added.



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