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Thousands Gather in D.C. for 'Millions More Movement'

By Hamil R. Harris

Washington Post Staff Writer

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The sun rose over the Capitol this morning where thousands of men, women and children were gathering for the Millions More Movement. And even though the crowd was not as large as the hundreds of thousands at the Million Man March a decade ago, or as the Promise Keepers who gathered five years ago, black leaders at the event said the success of the day cannot be measured by numbers.

"The need to mobilize and the need to organize is here, like it was 10 years ago," said the Rev. Al Sharpton, as he walked to the stage with the Rev. Jesse L. Jackson. "The determination of whether this event is significant will not be determined on how many people came, but how they left and what they did. What made the 1963 march is that we passed the 1964 civil rights bills. The success of this march will be that we take charge of our communities and make a difference in the 0-6 elections." The 1963 march was the occasion of the famous "I Have a Dream" speech by the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.

Unlike the Million Man March, the gathering this time not only includes women, but also elected officials such as the chairman of the Congressional Black Caucus, Rep. Mel Watts (D-N.C.) who was one of several members of Congress to speak in the first hours of a program today that is expected to last until sunset.

Gay leaders have felt shut out of the organizing of events led by Louis Farrakhan, head of the Nation of Islam, but there was an indication earlier this week that Keith Boykin, president of the National Black Justice Coalition, would speak today. However, gay black leaders said Boykin had been rebuffed yesterday and that he would give his speech, instead, to a gathering of gay blacks elsewhere.

Russell Simmons, hip-hop entrepreneur who has been making some rounds with Farrakhan, discounted those complaints: "Everything is going well . . ." He said Farrakhan promotes tolerance and said he hoped gays had a voice. He said it was important to promote peace "and let God be our judge."

The day also featured gospel choirs and liturgical dancers, but the most of the time was spent in continuous speeches from African American leaders, many of whom took the opportunity to talk about rebuilding in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. The plight of the poor of New Orleans was highlighted by the aftermath of the hurricane, which left many displaced and homeless.

Bob Ximiez, 49, who works for a managed care organization in Philadelphia, said, "I was here for the first Million Man March and it was so positive at a time when there was so much negative going on. I am looking for bigger and better things today."

Jorge Torro echoed those sentiments and said he had brought along his nephew to continue what he called a family legacy. "My father," he said, "attended the 1963 March on Washington. And now it time for me to do what I have to do for this generation," he said, referring to his nephew.

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