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901 G Street NW

Martin Luther King Memorial Library

DC's Memorial to the Slain Civil Rights Leader



Martin Luther King Memorial Library



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The DC Library Board of Trustees voted to name the new soon-to-open central library at 901 G Street NW for slain civil rights leader Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., in January 1971. One Board member proposed naming only the Black studies room for Dr. King, noting the library should be named for no one since main public libraries in New York City and Boston are not. A crowd attending the meeting, as well as the three Black Board of Trustee members, urged the Board to name the library for Dr. King. The Board voted 5-2 in support of naming the library Martin Luther King Memorial Library.

When the library was dedicated in 1972 it replaced the aging Carnegie Library at Mount Vernon Square. The new building is one of the few International Style buildings in Washington, DC, and the only building in DC designed by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, one of the most influential modern architects of the 20th century. In 1986 a mural depicting the life of Martin Luther King by Jamaican-American artist Don Miller has been displayed in the main lobby. The library was designated a DC landmark in 2007, which protects the building and requires review and approval for changes proposed to its exterior and public spaces including the lobby, vestibule, and reading rooms of the first-floor interior.

Public schools and facilities in DC are typically named for notable individuals of national or local importance. During the 20th century, names of schools were designated by the Board of Education and libraries by the Library Board of Trustees. In 2020, Mayor Bowser's DC Facilities and Commemorative Expressions Working Group reviewed the names of 1,330 public assets for alignment with current values of DC residents and identified 153 names of concern. Today, naming schools, parks, recreation centers and fields require Mayor and Council approval; libraries are still named by the Library Board of Trustees, but the Mayor and Council may also introduce legislation