

PROFESSOR DREW SMITH ATTENDS RECEPTION AT WHITE HOUSE REMEMBERING THE MARCH ON WASHINGTON

Fifty years after the historic March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, the Rev. Dr. R. Drew Smith, professor of urban ministry at PTS, joined thousands of others to reflect on the 1963 civil rights event. “There was a spirit of reflection remembering the march 50 years before and also a determined spirit as people assessed the current contexts as it relates to civil rights in the country,” said Professor Smith. “Much work still needs to be done and the hope is that the march will serve as a rallying point as people look toward the future and the urgencies that are yet to be addressed in our nation and our world.”



While in Washington D.C., Drew and his wife, the Rev. Dr. Angelique Walker-Smith — executive director of the Church Federation of Greater Indianapolis— attended an invitation-only reception at the White House the Tuesday evening before the commemorative march. This gathering, hosted by President Barack Obama and First Lady Michelle Obama, included several hundred people representing various connections to the marches in 1963 and 2013. Drew and Angelique were invited because of her connection with the National Council of Churches, a sponsoring organization of the 1963 march, and because she is the ecumenical representative of the National Baptist Convention USA Incorporated, the largest African American ecclesiastical organization in the US.

More broadly, those attending were persons involved in many of the social justice issues and public policy concerns at the heart of both marches. Dr. Smith has extensively researched policy issues related to civil rights and has recently edited the book *From Every Mountain Side: Black Churches and The Broad Terrain of Civil Rights* in which he wrote a chapter on educational fairness. Speakers that evening included Martin Luther King III, Congressman John Lewis—civil rights icon and the youngest speaker at the 1963 march—and President Obama.

Though his trip to Washington was special because he was able to celebrate these marches, Drew was also thrilled to visit the White House where his two great uncles once served. Alonzo Fields served as the maître d’hotel (headwaiter) at the White House from 1932-1953—he hired Eugene Allen on whom the current movie *The Butler* is based—and Clinton Fields served as the personal valet to President Franklin Roosevelt. “To attend a White House reception hosted by President and First Lady Obama, against the backdrop of my two uncles’ years as service staff, was a poignant reminder for me of how far this nation has traveled in the past half-century,” says Dr. Smith. At the reception, Drew and his wife conversed with many leaders from the religious, political, and advocacy sectors, and were able to greet the President and First Lady, but they also made a special point of meeting with as many White House service staff as possible and sharing their family story.

On the morning of the Wednesday march, Drew and Angelique attended an inter-faith worship service at Shiloh Baptist Church. During the service the Rev. Dr. Bernice King said that her father, MLK Jr., is often remembered as a freedom fighter for equal rights and human rights. But she said he was most importantly a man of faith. Bernice said the faith community must continue to lead every movement for justice and equality. The service included Jewish, Muslim, Catholic, Sikh, and other Christian faith leaders celebrating King’s legacy.

Following the service, Drew and Angelique listened as dozens of speakers reminded the tens of thousands of persons gathered on the National Mall that we must continue to fight for equal rights. President Obama spoke, as well as former Presidents Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton. “The test was not and never has been whether the doors of opportunity are cracked a bit wider for a few,” President Obama said. “It was whether our economic system provides a fair shot for the many — for the black custodian and the white steelworker, the immigrant dishwasher and the Native American veteran. To win that battle, to answer that call, this remains our great unfinished business.”

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