



Nearly a quarter-million people descended on the nation's capital for the 1963 March on Washington. As the signs on the opposite page remind us, the march was not only for civil rights but also for jobs and freedom. Bottom left: Martin Luther King Jr., who delivered his famous "I Have a Dream" speech during the historic event, stands with marchers. Bottom right: A. Philip Randolph, the architect of the march, links arms with Walter Reuther, president of the United Auto Workers and the most prominent white labor leader to endorse the march.

Teaching the March on Washington

On August 28, 1963, the March on Washington captivated the nation's attention. Nearly a quarter-million people—African Americans and whites, Christians and Jews, along with those of other races and creeds—gathered in the nation's capital. They came from across the country to demand equal rights and civil rights, social justice and economic justice, and an end to exploitation and discrimination. After all, the "March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom" was the march's official name, though with the passage of time, "for Jobs and Freedom" has tended to fade.

The march was the brainchild of longtime labor leader A. Philip Randolph, and was organized by Bayard Rustin, a charismatic civil rights activist. Together, they orchestrated the largest nonviolent, mass protest in American history. It was a day full of songs and speeches, the most famous of which Martin Luther King Jr. delivered in the shadow of the Lincoln Memorial.

Last month marked the 50th anniversary of the march. Though the commemorations have subsided, the story of the march can be taught at any point in the school year. It's a story in which the labor movement played a significant role, but too often labor's part remains untold. Union members from various trades and the teaching profession not only joined the march that day, but also helped plan and mobilize support for it. Walter Reuther, the president of the United Auto Workers, was the most prominent white trade unionist to endorse the march. The labor leader spent his career speaking at many a union hall to convince the rank and file that the struggle of African Americans for decent jobs and working conditions mirrored the struggle of workers everywhere, regardless of race.

Over the next 19 pages, *American Educator* features articles that highlight labor's profound influence on civil rights leaders and the march's organizers. This package includes a comprehensive look at the history of the march; profiles of Randolph, Rustin, and Reuther; and personal reflections on that remarkable day from civil rights activists Norman Hill and Velma Murphy Hill. On page 41, we also provide a list of links to just a few of the excellent lesson plans developed by the Albert Shanker Institute and posted on the AFT's Share My Lesson website, as a starting point for teaching this historic event.

—EDITORS



The Move to Unity

Labor's Role in the March on Washington

BY WILLIAM P. JONES

Nearly every American and millions of people around the world are familiar with Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech, yet most know little about the March on Washington at which it was delivered. The tremendous eloquence and elegant simplicity of the speech meant that many, then and now, came to associate the broader goals of the demonstration with King's compelling vision of interracial harmony—a dream of a nation that would finally live up to its founders' proclamations about the "self-evident" equality of all people, in which children would be judged "by the content of their character" rather than the color of their skin, and in which citizens would "be able to work together, to pray together, to struggle together, to go to jail together, to stand up for freedom together, knowing that we will be free one day."

William P. Jones is a professor of history at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He is the author of The Tribe of Black Ulysses: African American Lumber Workers in the Jim Crow South (University of Illinois Press, 2005). This article is excerpted from The March on Washington: Jobs, Freedom, and the Forgotten History of Civil Rights, by William P. Jones. Copyright © 2013 by William P. Jones. With permission of the publisher, W. W. Norton & Company.

Few know that King's was the last of 10 speeches, capping more than six hours of performances by well-known musicians, appearances by politicians and movie stars, and statements of solidarity from groups across the nation and around the world—as well as an actual march. Even fewer know that it was officially called the "March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom," and that it aimed not just to end racial segregation and discrimination in the Jim Crow South but also to ensure that Americans of all races had access to quality education, affordable housing, and jobs that paid a living wage. We forget that King's task was to uplift the spirits of marchers after a long day in the sun and, for most, a night traveling by bus or train from as far away as New York, Chicago, Atlanta, and even Los Angeles. One reporter observed that while King "ignited the crowd" with his optimistic vision of the future, the other speakers "concentrated on the struggle ahead and spoke in tough, even harsh, language." Yet those other speeches have been virtually lost to history.¹

On August 28, 1963, nearly a quarter-million people descended on the nation's capital to demand "jobs and freedom." By "freedom" they meant that every American should be guaranteed access to stores, restaurants, hotels, and other "public accommodations," to "decent housing" and "adequate and integrated education," and to the right to vote. They also wanted strict enforcement of those civil

rights, including the withholding of federal funds from discriminatory programs and housing developments, the reduction of congressional representation in states where citizens were denied the right to vote, and authorization of the attorney general to bring injunctive suits when “any constitutional right is violated.” Some of those demands were addressed by a civil rights bill that President John F. Kennedy had introduced to Congress on June 11, 1963, two months before the demonstration. Marchers wanted to pass that bill, but they believed it was far too limited. In addition to equal access to public accommodations and the right to vote, they demanded a “massive federal program to train and place all unemployed workers—Negro and white—on meaningful and dignified jobs at decent wages.” They wanted to raise the minimum wage to a level that would “give all Americans a decent standard of living,” and to extend that standard to agricultural workers, domestic ser-

of the March on Washington. Randolph agreed with King on the need for integration and racial equality in the South, but he linked those objectives to a broader national and interracial struggle for economic and social justice. “We are the advance guard of a massive moral revolution for jobs and freedom,” he told the crowd that stretched out for more than a mile before him. He declared that the civil rights movement affected “every city, every town, every village where black men are segregated, oppressed, and exploited,” but insisted it was “not confined to the Negroes; nor is it confined to civil rights.” It was critical to end segregation in southern stores and restaurants, the union leader insisted, “but those accommodations will mean little to those who cannot afford to use them.” What good was an FEPC, he asked, if the rapidly expanding automation of industry was allowed to “destroy the jobs of millions of workers, black and

The March on Washington aimed not just to end racial segregation and discrimination but also to ensure that Americans of all races had access to quality education, affordable housing, and jobs that paid a living wage.

vants, and public employees, who were excluded from the federal law that created the minimum wage. For many marchers, the most important objective was the creation of a Fair Employment Practices Committee (FEPC) to prevent private firms, government agencies, and labor unions from discriminating against workers on the basis of race, color, religion, or national origin.²

King delivered the finale at the Lincoln Memorial, but the tone for the day was set in an opening address by A. Philip Randolph, the 74-year-old trade unionist who was the official leader

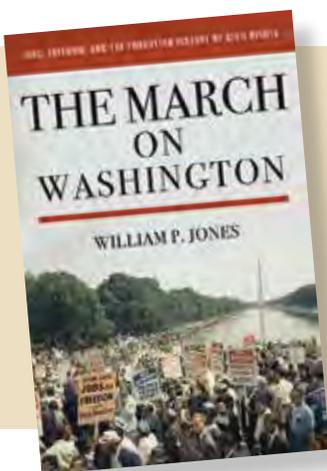
white?” Whereas King appealed to the nation’s founding principles of equality and freedom, Randolph insisted that “real freedom will require many changes in the nation’s political and social philosophies and institutions.” Ending housing discrimination, for example, would require Americans to reject the assumption that a homeowner’s “property rights include the right to humiliate me because of the color of my skin.” In the civil rights revolution, he declared, “The sanctity of private property takes second place to the sanctity of a human personality.”³

The signs above show the strong support among local labor unions for the march.

Randolph used language and imagery that reflected a lifetime of activism in organized labor and the Socialist Party, but his points were echoed by the younger and, for the most part, more moderate speakers who followed. Roy Wilkins of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the nation’s oldest and largest civil rights organization, charged that Kennedy’s civil rights proposal amounted to “so moderate an approach that if it is weakened or eliminated, the remainder will be little more than sugar water.” Emphasizing the need for an FEPC law, the 62-year-old former journalist stated, “We want employment, and with it we want the pride and responsibility and self-respect that goes with equal access to jobs.” Walter Reuther, the 55-year-old president of the United Auto Workers (UAW) union, concurred that “the job question is crucial; because we will not solve education or housing



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This article, “The Move to Unity,” is excerpted from *The March on Washington: Jobs, Freedom, and the Forgotten History of Civil Rights*, by William P. Jones. This book broadens our understanding of the march beyond Martin Luther King Jr.’s powerful “I Have a Dream” speech by exploring the march’s overall significance in American history and the civil rights movement.



Above left: A man carries his daughter on his shoulders during the march. Middle: Marchers cheer after King speaks. Right: A paperboy holds up a newspaper announcing the event.

or public accommodations as long as millions of American Negroes are treated as second-class economic citizens and denied jobs.” According to the *New York Times*, “Harshest of all the speakers was John Lewis,” the 23-year-old chairman of the Student

Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), who currently represents Georgia in the US Congress. Lewis endorsed Kennedy’s civil rights bill “with great reservations,” pointing out that the proposed legislation did nothing to protect African Americans from police brutality and racist violence, to uphold their right to vote in the South, or to “ensure the equality of a maid who earns \$5 a week in the home of a family whose income is \$100,000 a year.” Urging marchers to seek alternatives to a political system corrupted by power and money, Lewis declared, “Let us not forget that we are involved in a serious social revolution.”⁴

Tracing the roots of the March on Washington to A. Philip Randolph’s demand for fair employment during the Second World War demonstrates that the civil rights movement was always closely linked to the social democratic politics of the New Deal. Randolph initiated a march on Washington in 1941, before the United States entered the war, but federal investments in weapons, equipment, transportation, and military bases had already begun to lift the nation’s economy out of the Great Depression. President Franklin D. Roosevelt sought to strengthen the economic recovery by directing federal spending toward the South and other particularly depressed regions, and by strengthening federal labor laws to protect workers’ rights to form unions and bargain collectively for better wages and benefits. While those policies were ostensibly race-neutral, Randolph pointed out that they allowed private employers, unions, and local officials to bar African Americans from jobs that were funded by federal tax dollars and protected by federal laws. He demanded an FEPC law, not just to end discrimination by unions and employers but also to extend to African Americans the promise of economic and social citizenship that Roosevelt had linked to participation in the defense effort.

It was that egalitarian vision of social citizenship, as much as the constitutional principles of political equality, that inspired the modern civil rights movement. Like many other labor leaders of his generation, Randolph believed that the most effective path to

“first-class citizenship” was to ensure that black men had access to wages and benefits necessary to ensure economic and social security for their families. The march never became the mass movement that he envisioned in 1941, but its objectives were sustained by a generation of young militants who would play key leadership roles in the civil rights movement. Emphasizing the need for sustained grass-roots organizing rather than a nationwide mobilization, activists linked the March on Washington initiative to women’s organizations, unions, and churches in com-

Rather than narrowing objectives in the interest of gaining broader support, organizers united the various strands of black protest around the bold and expansive demand for “jobs and freedom.”

munities across the country. Inspired by the movement against British imperialism in India, they adopted the nonviolent techniques of civil disobedience that had been developed by independence leader Mohandas Gandhi. They also expanded the agenda of the movement from winning jobs to building unions and, more controversially, to demanding family-supporting jobs for black women as well as for black men. Finally, they pushed for an immediate end to segregation in the armed forces, universities, and other public institutions, which they viewed as inherently discriminatory and incompatible with the democratic rhetoric that Roosevelt used to inspire the defense effort.

Rather than narrowing their objectives in the interest of gaining broader support, organizers of the March on Washington united the various strands of black protest around the bold and expansive demand for “jobs and freedom.” The initial proposal for the 1963 march came from the Negro American Labor Coun-

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Key Figures behind the March

Randolph, the Consensus-Builder

BY CHARLES EUCHNER

A. PHILIP RANDOLPH

LIFE: 1889–1979

BORN: Crescent City, FL

WORK: Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, President

ROLE IN MARCH: Architect

The only person allowed a good night's sleep on the eve of the March on Washington was Asa Philip Randolph.

Randolph stood above all the factions and feuds of the movement. An unapologetic Socialist, he still escaped attacks from mainstream politicians. Randolph's courtly ways, and his complete faith in friends and colleagues, set him apart.

From a young age, Randolph looked and sounded like a distinguished man. Tall and bronze-skinned, he was balding and graying, with just a small tuft of hair on his forehead, by his 30s. He wore the finest clothing he could buy—dark three-piece suits, usually wool, with dark homburg hats. His baritone spilled out in resonant British trills, which he had cultivated as a performer.

But Randolph's statesmanlike aura went beyond looks and sounds. To Randolph, anyone in the loose coalition of labor and civil rights activists—with one exception, the Communists—was basically

Randolph believed in the power of the masses, which included not only educated and professional people but also factory workers, longshoremens, sharecroppers, porters, and the unemployed.

good. Even in the midst of disagreements, Randolph remained serene. As a young man, Bayard Rustin joined the youth arm of the Communist Party for three years. Randolph told him he was making a mistake, that the Communists did not really care about blacks but wanted to exploit civil rights for their own purposes. When Rustin left the Communists, Randolph embraced him. Later, Rustin attacked Randolph for canceling protests in 1948, and the two did not speak for three years. But when Rustin approached him again, Randolph said, "Bayard, where have you been? I haven't seen you around lately."

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Randolph did not hold grudges. He cared about alliances and action.

Randolph learned about race when he was 9, growing up in Jacksonville, Florida. A gang of white hoodlums threatened to kidnap and lynch a black man in jail, and his father, the Reverend James Randolph, joined a black posse to surround the jail and fend off the mob. His mother sat by the window all night with a shotgun on her lap, prepared to use any means necessary to protect her home and children. That night, no lynching took place. But even though he was painfully conscious of race, Rev. Randolph did not see blackness as either superior or inferior. God and Christ, he told his son, have no color.

At the age of 21, Phil Randolph moved to New York City, where he found a calling onstage. He won starring roles in *Othello*, *Hamlet*, and *The Merchant of Venice*. Acting taught Randolph how to attract and hold the attention of a crowd. Randolph adopted his powerful voice in those roles, but left the theater when his father objected. He turned to politics, developing his own stump speeches about labor, race, Communism, war—every topic in the news those days. He became a soapbox newsreel.

Randolph gained a larger following as the founding editor of the *Messenger*, a journal of news and commentary on race, labor affairs, and politics. It was the only independent publication for blacks and rivaled the *Crisis*, the publication of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).

Randolph's early efforts to organize—first waiters on a steamship, then porters at an electric utility—failed miserably. Then, for 12 years, starting in 1925, Randolph battled the Pullman Company for the right to organize its workers. At the time, Pullman employed more blacks than any other company. When Randolph started his drive, porters made \$67.50 for 300 or 400 hours of work a month, with no paid vacation or benefits. Porters also had to pay for their own uniforms and got wages deducted when anything was stolen on their watch.

The Pullman Company responded with righteous anger. One Pullman executive called Randolph a "wild-eyed uppity Negro hustler who never made up a Pullman berth in his life." Over the years, Pullman fired 800 porters in retaliation for working with Randolph. The company also started its own company union. Pullman goons beat organizers, mob-style, and threatened worse if they didn't stop organizing. When intimidation failed, the Pullman Company attempted to bribe Randolph, sending him a blank check in return for halting his organizing drives. Randolph made a photostat and sent the check back.

The union finally won recognition in 1937. Within years, wages more than doubled and working conditions improved. Porters finally won pay for their five hours of work preparing berths for customers, which previously came before they punched in. Randolph was the greatest star in black America—called "St. Philip of the Pullman Porters" and the "Black Messiah."

With the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters firmly established, Randolph decided to hold a massive march on Washington in 1941.

Randolph envisioned a column of 10,000 black men—or more, as many as 100,000—marching down Pennsylvania Avenue, carrying banners ("WINNING THE WAR FOR THE NEGRO IS WINNING THE WAR FOR DEMOCRACY"), shouting slogans ("We die for our



Several march leaders talk to one another in the shadow of the Lincoln Memorial. Seated in the middle is A. Philip Randolph, veteran labor leader and the march's official organizer.

country! Let us work in our country!"), and singing labor songs ("Which Side Are You On?"). President Franklin D. Roosevelt would look through the White House windows to see the greatest gathering of blacks ever—all protesting *his* administration. Plans called for long lines of marchers walking to the muffled drums of a funeral procession.

Washington had been the scene of four other marches, but blacks had never massed together for a major protest. Before Randolph, the civil rights movement remained torn between Booker T. Washington's conservative approach (creating a vibrant culture of education, business, and faith while accepting white dominance) and W. E. B. Du Bois's "talented tenth" (forging a black leadership class from the best and brightest of all blacks). Randolph believed in the power of the masses, which included not only educated and professional people but also factory workers, longshoremen, sharecroppers, porters, and the unemployed.

"Nobody expects 10,000 Negroes to get together and march anywhere for anything at any time," Randolph said. "In common parlance, they are supposed to be just scared and unorganizable. Is this true? I contend it is not."

To claim the citizenship that was their birthright, Randolph understood, blacks needed to get in the streets. To be free, Randolph said, blacks must overcome "the slave psychology and inferiority complex in Negroes which comes and is nourished with Negroes relying on white people for direction and support."

Randolph believed—more than anyone else in civil rights or labor—that a mass demonstration would change the psychology of both blacks and whites. Blacks would gain pride, a sense of brotherhood that comes from marching with countless others. Whites—and the political system they controlled—would feel apprehensive about disorder and bad public relations. Some might even be impressed enough to support civil rights.

A march down Pennsylvania Avenue would be Roosevelt's greatest humiliation as president—greater, even, than the Supreme Court's rejection of a dozen New Deal programs and Congress's rejection of his bid to pack the Supreme Court. This humiliation would be global. These black marchers would not just battle Roosevelt's administration; they would embarrass America before the whole world.

To organize marchers, Randolph deployed his Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. Local union leaders and porters spread the word as railroad cars clacked from place to place. In the weeks before the march was to take place, Rustin hitchhiked up and down the East Coast to rally union locals, churches, and universities to march.

Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt implored Randolph to call off the demonstration. A wartime march would be too disruptive. What signal would 100,000 angry Negroes send to the world when the United States was fighting abroad for democracy?

Roosevelt called Randolph and his supporters, like the NAACP's Walter White, to the White House.

"What do you want me to do?" the president asked. "Mr. President," Randolph said, "we want you to do something that will enable Negro workers to get work in these plants."

"Why, I surely want them to work, too," Roosevelt said. "I'll call up the heads of the various defense plants and have them see to it that Negroes are given the same opportunity to work in defense plants as any other citizen in the country."

"We want you to do more than that. We want something concrete, something tangible, definite, positive, and affirmative."

"What do you mean?" Roosevelt asked.

"Mr. President, we want you to issue an executive order making it mandatory that Negroes be permitted to work in these plants."

The president wondered aloud whether Randolph could get 100,000 Negroes to march on Washington. Walter White said he could. New York City Mayor Fiorello La Guardia, called to the White House to help the president confront Randolph, told Roosevelt to find a solution that would satisfy the organizer.

So on June 25, 1941, just days before the planned march on Washington, Franklin Roosevelt signed Executive Order 8802, formally mandating equal opportunity in defense industries. And Randolph called off the march.

Randolph made a habit of planning and canceling marches—four in the 1940s—and his supporters attacked him for losing nerve. But to Randolph, the primary purpose of any political action was to achieve specific goals. To march after achieving those goals would risk his credibility in future bargaining. So the larger goal of demonstrations—changing the psychology of blacks and of the nation as a whole—had to wait for another day. By 1963, the civil rights movement convulsed the country. Never before had so many people taken to the streets or gotten arrested for any cause.

Now Randolph was ready for one last hurrah.

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cil, a largely forgotten organization that Randolph and other black trade unionists created to highlight the economic crisis caused by black workers' exclusion from skilled jobs and unions. Anna Arnold Hedgeman pushed the union activists to expand their agenda to include access to public accommodations and voting rights in the South, a move that allowed them to gain support from King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC); John Lewis's SNCC; and the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), a network of nonviolent activists that Bayard Rustin helped to create during the Second World War. Hedgeman also persuaded them to seek support from the National Council of Negro Women, a network of organizations claiming nearly 800,000 members, although Randolph and other male activists rejected her request to include black women in the official leadership of the march. The most reluctant supporters of the demonstration were Roy Wilkins of the NAACP and labor leader Walter Reuther, who joined the mobilization only after they were convinced that it would occur without them.⁵

We must not only focus on leaders and experienced activists in the civil rights movement, but also challenge the assumption that their beliefs and concerns differed significantly from those of their followers. While Randolph, King, and other national figures were the official spokesmen for the March on Washington, the primary task of organizing the protest fell to staff and elected officials of local civil rights organizations, unions, churches, and other groups who lived in the same working-class communities that formed the primary base of support for the movement. Perhaps the most important evidence of agreement between leaders and marchers was sim-

ply the fact that so many people traveled hundreds or even thousands of miles—most missing a day or more of work and all but a few paying their own way—to be in Washington that day. Some were students or full-time activists, but the vast majority consisted of autoworkers and meatpackers, teachers and letter carriers, domestic servants and sharecroppers who—aside from their membership in unions and civil rights organizations—had little history of political protest. Journalist Russell Baker described them as “a gentle army of quiet, middle-class Americans who came in the spirit of the church outing,” suggesting that they were in Washington for pleasure or out of a sense of religious or patriotic duty. Malcolm X, a black nationalist who accused Randolph, King, and other leaders of tempering the radicalism of the protest, argued that the marchers had been “fooled.” Given the size and enthusiasm of the crowd, however, it seems more likely that they believed deeply in the message that Randolph, King, and others proclaimed from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial that day.⁶

At the “Salute and Support the Heroes of the South” rally in Madison Square Garden on May 31, 1956, Eleanor Roosevelt and several other speakers emphasized that “everything isn’t sweetness and light in the North insofar as the Negro is concerned,” and that discrimination existed in New York as well as in Montgomery, Alabama. Earl Brown, the city coun-

At right: A. Philip Randolph, president of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters; Roy Wilkins, executive secretary of the NAACP; and civil rights leader Anna Arnold Hedgeman plan the march route and discuss strategy. Bottom left: Marchers arrive at Union Station in Washington, DC. Bottom right: Participants line up to board buses home after the march.



TOP: © BETTMANN/CORBIS; BOTTOM LEFT: FLIP SCHULKE; BOTTOM RIGHT: DECLAN HAIN

cilman who had urged a mass exodus from Mississippi following Emmett Till's lynching, disagreed. "By no means should we overlook or cover up racial ills existing North of the Mason-Dixon line. But conditions are far different below it than above," wrote the black journalist and politician. Pointing out that racism was more firmly planted in southern "law, public opinion and practices," Brown insisted: "We cannot solve our problems in the North until we at least make some appreciable headway toward solving them in the South." For that reason, he applauded A. Philip Randolph for initiating the "truly mammoth" event. In addition to letting "the enemy know we are coming," the councilman wrote, it was significant that the rally was sponsored by a black trade unionist who had succeeded in convincing white union leaders that "their welfare is tied up in civil rights as well as the Negro's."⁷

Brown overestimated the support that Randolph received from white union leaders, but it was true that Randolph and other black trade unionists played key roles in drawing attention to and raising funds for the grass-roots movements that erupted in the South following the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. The massive rallies after Emmett Till's murder in August 1955 had been initiated by Willoughby Abner, a leader of the United Auto Workers in Chicago. That September, activists from the Chicago district of the United Packinghouse Workers had accompanied Till's mother to Harlem, where she spoke at a rally sponsored by the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. Cleveland Robinson and other black leaders of the Retail Workers District 65 had organized the Garment Center Labor Rally on October 11, 1955, in New York, and the Madison Square Garden rally had been organized primarily by Maida Springer of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union.⁸

While black trade unionists agreed with Councilman Brown that segregation and discrimination were more deeply rooted in the laws and customs of the South, they were equally committed to eliminating them in the North, and specifically within the AFL-CIO. In July 1959, Randolph called a meeting of black trade unionists who had traveled to New York City for the 50th annual convention of the NAACP. The meeting was closed to the press and overshadowed by the controversy surrounding Robert F. Williams's call to "meet violence with violence." Nevertheless, more than 60 black trade unionists attended. Pointing out that more than a million black workers belonged to unions affiliated with the AFL-CIO—constituting the largest membership of African Americans outside the black church—Randolph urged the assembled to organize themselves for leadership in the "struggle for economic equality and the pressing needs for civil rights." The group resolved to introduce a resolution at the national convention of the AFL-CIO later that year, calling for the expulsion of any union that did not drop racial bars on membership and integrate segregated locals before June 1960.* They also decided to form a more formal network to coordinate their activities in various cities.

A public labor session at the AFL-CIO convention featured speeches by Randolph and white labor leader Walter Reuther, the president of the UAW and a vice president of the AFL-CIO. Randolph began on a positive note, pointing to the unprecedented number of black workers and the rise of nonwhite trade unionists

to positions of leadership in the union movement. He also praised Reuther, AFL-CIO President George Meany, and the executive committee of the AFL-CIO for their personal commitments to civil rights. But he closed by blasting the federation for its "quite inadequate and much too slow" progress toward realizing those ideals, and he demanded that it "require labor organizations at all levels to comply with its constitutional provision outlawing race and religious discrimination."⁹

Despite its influence in black working-class communities, Randolph's organization, the Negro American Labor Council (NALC), made little headway with the AFL-CIO. At a meeting in Washington following the inauguration of President John F. Kennedy in January of 1961, trade unionists called on the AFL-CIO to set firm timelines for affiliates to drop racially exclusive language from their bylaws, expand opportunities for black workers in union leadership and

Randolph believed that the most effective path to "first-class citizenship" was to ensure that black men had access to wages and benefits necessary to ensure economic and social security for their families.

apprenticeship programs, and integrate "qualified Negro office and staff workers into all departments of the general headquarters of the AFL-CIO." Meany did not respond to these requests, but noticed that the NALC letterhead listed Theodore Brown, who was the assistant director of the AFL-CIO's Civil Rights Department, as secretary of the NALC. On April 30, 1961, Meany fired Brown on the grounds that he had charged the federation for unauthorized travel to civil rights meetings. Brown responded that the meetings were consistent with his duties, and accused Meany of punishing him for fulfilling those duties.¹⁰

Black trade unionists responded to Brown's dismissal by calling for a march on the AFL-CIO's national headquarters in Washington. After much debate, however, they resolved to delay plans for a march until Randolph could discuss the issue with Meany and other AFL-CIO leaders at a meeting of the AFL-CIO executive council in June.¹¹

Tensions only grew when Randolph showed up at the executive council meeting with a detailed memorandum calling for stronger civil rights policies in the AFL-CIO, describing the growing problem of unemployment in black communities, and lamenting the "widening gulf between Negro and labor communities." He also presented reports on discrimination by unions at the port of New York City, and the practice of segregating housing and social events at state AFL-CIO conventions in the South. Reporting that the Virginia AFL-CIO had agreed to desegregate its convention that year after NALC activists threatened a boycott, Randolph announced a nationwide campaign to ensure that "all AFL-CIO

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*In 1957, the American Federation of Teachers expelled locals that refused to desegregate.

Key Figures behind the March

Rustin, the Coordinator Extraordinaire

BY CHARLES EUCHNER

BAYARD RUSTIN

LIFE: 1912–1987

BORN: West Chester, PA

WORK: Civil rights activist

ROLE IN MARCH: Chief Organizer

After years of controversy, Bayard Rustin lived for the day when he would coordinate a mass demonstration on the scale of the March on Washington. Since his college days three decades before, Rustin had worked behind the scenes to organize people for civil rights, labor, and peace.

Years before, W. E. B. Du Bois talked about the “twoness” of blacks in America: “One ever feels his twoness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.”

But if black America struggled with twoness, Rustin struggled with threeness, or fourness, or even moreness.

Bayard Rustin’s manyness was palpable. Rustin could be formal and elegant, but he could also be rough, with his wrinkled linen suits and worn ties. He was tall and wiry—six feet one inch, 190 pounds—but moved like an athlete. Brown-skinned with a Clark Gable mustache—and a shock of an Afro that reached upward into a jagged flat-top—Rustin was a kinetic force, always searching and moving. He lived on the road, but his apartment was rich and comfortable, filled with art from all over the world—centuries-old statues and paintings of Christ, Civil War-era lithographs and engravings, a Jacobean carved bed from the 1600s, Turkish rugs, and even columns from the old Penn Station. He could speak formally, with an affected British accent, or he could talk like a street agitator.

Rustin came from West Chester, Pennsylvania, a Quaker town 25 miles from Philadelphia. The son of a single mother, he did not know until he was 11 who was who in his own family. At that point, he learned that the couple he considered his parents, Janifer and Julia, were really *his mother’s* parents; that the woman he considered his sister Florence was really his mother; and that his other “sisters” and “brothers” were really aunts and uncles.

Growing up in a Quaker community, Rustin embraced nonviolence, finding pacifism a compelling, consistent worldview: aggression begets aggression, love begets love, peace begets peace. Pacifism was close to absolute for Rustin. Morally, he did not believe that aggression and violence could build or repair anything. Violence spun out of control, breaking bodies and property and breeding resentment. But nonviolence could overcome even the most relentless violence.

“My activism did not spring from my being black. Rather, it is rooted fundamentally in my Quaker upbringing,” Rustin said. “Those values were based on the concept of a single human



WORLD TELEGRAM & SUN PHOTO BY O. FERNANDEZ

Bayard Rustin, left, stands with fellow civil rights activist Cleveland Robinson, in front of the March on Washington’s headquarters in Harlem.

family and the belief that all members of that family are equal. The racial injustice that was present in this country during my youth was a challenge to my belief in the oneness of the human family. It demanded my involvement in the struggle to achieve interracial democracy, but it is very likely that I would have been involved had I been a white person with the same philosophy.” Rustin’s grandmother gave him Quaker values, but he attended the African Methodist Episcopal Church of his grandfather. That placed Rustin deep in the tradition of gospel music and emotional preaching.

The ever-dramatic Rustin adopted a British accent in high school, both to overcome stuttering and to assert his own independence. By taking on a different persona, he cloaked his nervousness. The accent gave him courage—and authority. He used the accent to confront racist bullies. When other blacks were refused service on Route 40, the corridor in Delaware and Maryland notorious for its Jim Crow ways, Rustin stood over his tormenters and demanded service. Rustin also used this persona at protests. At one demonstration in Brooklyn, Rachelle Horowitz, who worked closely with Rustin in her role as transportation coordinator for the March on Washington (and later served as the AFT’s political director), was taken away in handcuffs. Rustin turned toward the police. “*Officer,*” he said in his most dramatic British accent, “take those *handcuffs* off her *immediately!*” It worked. The cuffs came off.

A natural performer—on the tennis court, football field, stage, concert hall—Rustin once sang with Josh White and Leadbelly. He performed on White’s album *Chain Gang Songs*. He traveled tens of thousands of miles a year, speaking and organizing. He organized and agitated wherever he was—the local theater, school, football field, churches, union halls, even jails.

Rustin first got involved in labor organizing in 1933. Expelled from both Wilberforce College and Cheyney State College, he moved to Harlem to live with his sister/aunt Bessie. Sitting at a park on 150th Street one day, he heard goons talking about a strike at Horn & Hardart, a chain of coin-operated self-service restaurants immortalized in Edward Hopper’s painting *Automat*. They boasted about disrupting a labor picket line by throwing bricks at the restaurant and blaming the picketers. Rustin decided to join the picket line. Sure enough, someone threw a brick at the restaurant, and the police came and beat the demonstrators with clubs and carried them away to jail.

After spending a month volunteering for the planned 1941 march on Washington that never took place, Rustin worked full time for the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR), a global organization dedicated to pacifism and disarmament.

In 1942, Rustin joined James Farmer, George Houser, and Bernice Fisher in creating the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE). Like the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), CORE was an integrated group dedicated to promoting civil rights. Unlike the NAACP, CORE was committed to nonviolent direct action. The organization would *confront* racism, physically—involving ordinary people in their own liberation. “Our power is in our ability to make things unworkable,” he said. “The only weapon we have is our bodies, and we need to tuck them in places so wheels don’t turn.”

CORE’s boldest early experiment, the Journey of Reconciliation of 1947, tested recent court decisions that struck down segregation of all forms of interstate travel. Eight black men and eight white men—including Rustin—traveled together on buses through Virginia, North Carolina, Kentucky, and Tennessee. The Freedom Riders were jailed several times. Rustin was sentenced to 22 days on a chain gang for violating North Carolina’s Jim Crow laws.

As part of his creed of nonviolence, Rustin openly accepted physical attacks by others, believing his pacifism could change their hearts and minds. Serving time for refusing service in World War II, Rustin became a jailhouse activist, forcing racial integration of cells. But one white prisoner resented mixing with blacks. He attacked Rustin with a club, splintering the weapon, until he exhausted himself and could attack no more. Rustin took the blows with equanimity, protecting himself by crouching in a fetal position. A fellow prisoner later recalled: “Completely defeated and unnerved by the display of nonviolence, [Rustin’s attacker] began shaking all over, and sat down.”

Over the next decade, Rustin became one of the most prominent pacifists in America. He was the “American Gandhi” in training, admired equally for his intellect and courage.

Then he crashed. In January of 1953, after a speaking engagement in California, Pasadena police arrested Rustin on a morals charge. Rustin never hid his homosexuality—his flamboyant escapades were well known in the movement—but he was now publicly humiliated. A. J. Muste, his mentor at FOR, fired him. For six months, he wrestled with his conscience, concluding that excessive pride had led to his humiliation.

The War Resisters League, seeing an opportunity to work with the most gifted pacifist around, hired him. It was like a ball club getting a star slugger for a cut rate because of the star’s past controversies. The War Resisters League gave him permission to go to Montgomery and advise Martin Luther King Jr., the young leader of the bus boycott. He also staged three marches on Washington—the 1957 Prayer Pilgrimage and the 1958 and 1959 Youth March for Integrated Schools.

By the time of the 1963 March on Washington, Rustin was both the most gifted and the most damaged organizer in the civil rights movement. Given a chance, he could use the hard-earned wisdom of his many controversies to make the march a success.

Rustin’s greatest lesson in planning came from his youthful involvement with the Young Communist League, a quarter century before.

“The minute you get a blueprint, you tend to get ends and means separated,” Rustin later said. “Because if you got a blueprint, then any means is good enough to get to it. But I reverse the process: nonviolent creative action now, take care of the rest as you go along.”

(Continued from page 29)

State Federation Conventions are completely desegregated.” In August, Meany expressed support for a bill sponsored by Congressman Adam Clayton Powell to restrict federal funding from vocational schools that were not open to all workers. Although a spokesman from the US Labor Department complained it would be too costly to enforce, Meany endorsed the bill “as a start toward the larger goal of legislation on fair practices” in employment. When the executive committee met again on October 12, however, Meany blamed Randolph, rather than discriminatory unions, for “the gap that has developed between organized labor and the Negro community.” At his suggestion, the white members of the executive committee voted to censure Randolph for making “incredible assertions, false and gratuitous statements, and unfair and untrue allegations” against organized labor. They also prepared a motion to expel the black union leader from the executive council at the AFL-CIO convention in December.

At a rally in 1961, King told supporters, “Segregation is on its deathbed. But history has proven that the status quo is always on hand with an oxygen tank to keep the old boy alive.”

On October 13, 1961, the day after the AFL-CIO censured Randolph, the US Commission on Civil Rights issued a 246-page report on employment that “in effect upheld most of Mr. Randolph’s charges.” While it praised the Packinghouse, Auto, and Garment unions for taking “forceful steps” against discriminatory locals, the commission found that “most international unions have failed to exhibit any profound concern over civil rights problems.” Investigators were particularly critical of craft unions in the building trades, where black workers were routinely denied access to apprenticeship programs and employment in skilled jobs. “Within the labor movement itself civil rights goals are celebrated at the higher levels,” the commission observed, “but fundamental internal barriers tend to preserve discrimination at the workingman’s level.” Concluding that current “federal law has little impact on the discriminatory practices of labor organizations,” the commission recommended that Congress and the president take stronger measures to prohibit discrimination by any agency, contractor, or union involved in a federally financed project; require state employment offices to ensure equal access to jobs and training programs; and deny collective bargaining protections to unions that denied membership to “any person because of race, color, religion, or national origin.” In an editorial printed on October 15, the *New York Times* pointed out that the AFL-CIO’s statements about civil rights were contradicted by the fact that “Negroes were barred, by a Washington electricians’ local, from work on the construction of the AFL-CIO national headquarters” in 1959.¹²



Ironically, the report from the US Commission on Civil Rights seems to have given Meany reason to seek common ground with Randolph. On November 10, 1961, 300 angry black trade unionists gathered in Chicago for the NALC's second annual convention. The treasurer of the NALC was Richard Parrish, a school teacher from New York City and a leader of the American Federation of Teachers. "This was a show of power to demonstrate to Negro union members that they represent nothing when it comes to setting policies in the labor movement even though they pay dues," Parrish said of Randolph's censure, asking why liberal labor leaders such as Reuther or David Dubinsky of the Garment Workers had not stopped it. Rejecting NALC Vice President L. Joseph Overton's plan for a mass march, delegates resolved to work through their local unions and labor councils to elect delegates who would oppose Randolph's expulsion at the AFL-CIO convention a month later. By the time they got to the convention, however, they discovered that Meany had invited King to address the three-day meeting at Bal Harbour, the Miami resort where AFL leaders had gathered every winter since 1951.¹³

King did not know what to expect as he flew to Miami from Los Angeles, where he had spoken at a major rally sponsored by a black businessmen's club and a Baptist church. "Segregation is on its deathbed," he had told nearly 2,000 supporters in the Santa Monica civic auditorium on December 8. "But history has proven that the status quo is always on hand with an oxygen tank to keep the old boy alive." King got a "tumultuous standing ovation" by ending the speech with a line that he planned to use in Miami. Quoting a traditional spiritual, he looked forward to the day when he could truthfully sing: "Free at last, free at last, thank God Almighty, we are free at last."

King had grown close to Randolph, Cleveland Robinson, and other black trade unionists since 1956, and had spoken to interracial meetings of District 65 and the Packinghouse and Auto unions. But the AFL-CIO convention in Miami was his first encounter with the 3,000 white men, a few women, and "a handful of Negro delegates" who headed the House of Labor. Meany received a standing ovation when he opened the meeting on December 9. President Kennedy gave a blistering talk about the

threat of Communism and enlisted unions in the fight for freedom. Delegates rejected the proposal to expel Randolph and adopted what Randolph called "the best resolution on civil rights the AFL-CIO has yet adopted." They also applauded when Meany pinned a union button on King's lapel and introduced him for the closing address on December 11. Then they were silent.¹⁴

"Less than a century ago the laborer had no rights, little or no respect, and led a life which was socially submerged and barren," King began, reaching out to his audience by asserting that the "inspiring answer to this intolerable and dehumanizing existence was economic organization through trade unions." Pointing out that many had opposed unions at the time, the young minister noted: "Now everyone knows that the labor movement did not diminish the strength of the nation but enlarged it." He continued by recounting how workers had been "emancipated" by the Wagner Act and other New Deal laws only to discover that they "tended merely to declare rights but did not deliver them." Now that African Americans found themselves in a similar situation, he declared, it was "not an historical coincidence" that they looked to labor for support. "Negroes are almost entirely a working people," King declared, and thus had the same interest as other workers in decent wages and working conditions; quality housing; health, education, and welfare policies; and pensions. That also led black organizations to support labor's legislative agenda and to "fight laws which curb labor." King won applause by pointing out that the same politicians who attacked unions were usually the ones who also rejected civil rights, and by calling on employers to ensure that automation does not "grind jobs into dust as it grinds out unbelievable volumes of production."¹⁵

King moved cautiously toward a more direct criticism, urging Meany and the others to take seriously Randolph's criticism of segregation and discrimination within the AFL-CIO. Asking the AFL-CIO to "accept the logic of its special position with respect to Negroes and the struggle for equality," King urged the organization's leaders

Above: Marchers carry signs demanding integrated schools, voting rights, and an end to the South's repressive Jim Crow laws.

to follow through with their 1956 pledge to donate \$2 million to the civil rights movement. He also noted that when “a Negro leader who has a reputation of purity and honesty which has benefited the whole labor movement criticizes it, his motives should not be reviled nor his earnestness rebuked.” Then he closed with an uplifting refrain that he would use frequently in the next few years, asking labor leaders to join him in the struggle to “bring into full realization the dream of American democracy—a dream yet unfulfilled.” Emphasizing economic concerns that could unite the two movements, King described a “dream of equality of opportunity, of privilege and property widely distributed; a dream of a land where men will not take necessities from the many to give luxuries to the few ... the dream of a country where every man will respect the dignity and worth of human personality—that is the dream.”¹⁶

The motive behind Meany’s invitation to King became evident a month later, on January 24, 1962, when the AFL-CIO president testified before Congressman Adam Clayton Powell’s Committee on Education and Labor. “In our view, Mr. Chairman, the time is overdue to establish a policy—by the enactment of an enforceable statute—dealing with discrimination in employment for the United States as a whole,” Meany began. As he continued, it was clear that this was not a sudden conversion to Randolph’s side, but a realization that federal legislation would free him from the burden of confronting the Jim Crow unions himself. He conceded that “discrimination does exist in the trade union movement,” but declared that the AFL-CIO was “a generation or more ahead of the employers” in the fight against discrimination. Besides, Meany added, when “the rank-and-file membership of a local union obstinately exercises its right to be wrong, there is very little we in the leadership can do about it, unaided.”¹⁷

As he had repeatedly throughout his life, Randolph responded to the mounting frustration within the Negro American Labor Council by calling for a march on Washington. In January 1963, he asked his old friend Bayard Rustin, who was working for the left-wing War Resisters League, to prepare a proposal that could win support from civil rights and labor leaders for a “mass descent” on the nation’s capital. Excited by the opportunity to revive mass-based protest, Rustin spent the next month planning Randolph’s demonstration. He worked closely with Norman Hill, an NALC member who was employed by the Congress of Racial Equality, and Tom Kahn, a young white Socialist who was on vacation from Howard University. At the end of January, they delivered a three-page memorandum outlining an ambitious campaign to draw attention to “the economic subordination of the Negro,” create “more jobs for all Americans,” and advance a “broad and fundamental program for economic justice.” Their plan centered on a massive lobbying campaign, in which 100,000 people would shut down Congress for one day while presenting legislators and the president with their legislative demands, followed the next day by a “mass protest rally.”* Randolph liked the idea, and the NALC vice presidents approved it on March 23. By then, the plan had expanded to include a mass march from the Capitol to the Lincoln Memorial.¹⁹

*March organizers decided not to go through with the lobbying campaign. In early August, Bayard Rustin announced that the demonstration would include no civil disobedience and that lobbying would be restricted to formal meetings between leaders of the sponsoring organizations, President John F. Kennedy, and Congress, while other marchers were encouraged to leave Washington immediately following the march.¹⁸

By the time King came to the stage at the March on Washington on August 28, he may have felt that the other speakers had focused too much on specifics, whether social or political. It was nearly 4 p.m., and some marchers had already been forced to head back to Union Station so they would not miss their train home. Gospel singer Mahalia Jackson warmed up the crowd by singing the defiant spiritual “I’ve Been ’Buked and I’ve Been Scorned,” which King had requested, and, when Randolph introduced the young minister, he got only as far as “the leader of the moral revolution” before the crowd erupted into applause for the man who was already recognized as the movement’s most powerful speaker. King began with a scripted speech that emphasized the links between economic justice and racial equality, albeit more poetically than others, that had dominated the afternoon. “In a sense we’ve come to our nation’s capital to cash a check,” he stated, pointing out that 100 years after Lincoln had freed the slaves, their descendants were “still sadly crippled by the manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination” and restricted to “a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity.”²⁰

Halfway into the prepared text, King pushed his notes aside and delivered an improvised version of the “I Have a Dream” refrain.

King continued along the same themes as the other speakers—denouncing those who called for patience, emphasizing the national scope of the problem, and urging marchers to return home “knowing that somehow this situation can and will be changed.” Halfway into the prepared text, however, he pushed his notes aside and delivered an improvised version of the “I Have a Dream” refrain that he had pioneered at the AFL-CIO convention in 1961 and elaborated in several settings before delivering it at the Detroit “Walk to Freedom” a month earlier. Mahalia Jackson was heard shouting from behind him, “Tell them about the dream, Martin,” although it is not clear whether he heard her. Whatever his inspiration for the shift, it provided King with an ideal ending for the most important speech of his career. “So even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow,” he stated sternly, “I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream. I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: ‘We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal.’” The audience roared.²¹

King’s “I Have a Dream” speech is justifiably remembered as the most powerful and effective address given at the March on Washington; but, taken out of context and often viewed as the only speech, it was the least representative or attentive to the specific goals and demands of the mobilization. Writing in the *New York Times*, journalist E. W. Kenworthy noted that while the other speakers “concentrated on the struggle ahead and spoke in tough,

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Key Figures behind the March

Reuther, the Labor Ally

BY CHARLES EUCHNER

WALTER REUTHER

LIFE: 1907–1970

BORN: Wheeling, WV

WORK: United Auto Workers, President

ROLE IN MARCH: Speaker, Supporter

Walter Reuther bathed in applause after delivering his speech at the March on Washington and worked his way back to his seat. He reached out, instinctively, for hands and hugs. And then he sat down.

Reverend Eugene Carson Blake, a Protestant leader who also spoke that day, leaned toward him.

“How do you *do* that?” he asked.

“Easy,” Reuther said. “When you speak at union halls—for conferences and conventions and board meetings—you’re always competing with people talking at tables, waiters coming and going, doors opening and closing, plates crashing, and union members heckling, and you still have to keep people listening. It’s a formula,” Reuther told Blake. “You get the audience with jokes. Joke, laugh, make a point; joke, laugh, make a point; joke, laugh—and then give the message of the day.”

“Whatever you do,” Reuther told Blake, “don’t write out a text. Reading kills a speech. When you script a speech, you talk to your text. But you need to talk to the audience.”

But even the best speech will only carry people so far.

“You’re having the same problem as me,” Reuther told Blake.

“Yeah, how’s that?”

“Well, the leadership says all the right things, but the locals haven’t heard yet.”

Walter Reuther, the president of the United Auto Workers (UAW), thrived in chaos—negotiating contracts with the Big Three automakers, addressing rebellious affiliates, confronting the white racism in union locals, engaging in Democratic Party intrigue, collaborating behind the scenes with the president, battling other labor leaders like George Meany for primacy. Sometimes explosive, Reuther found ways to assert himself in a noisy environment.

Since A. Philip Randolph first announced plans to hold a massive march on Washington, Reuther had played a major role. Labor had two resources the march would need—money and bodies. Reuther also had an extensive political network and a close working relationship with President John F. Kennedy.

The White House asked him to infiltrate the march and steer it away from radical rhetoric and direct action. And so he did. During the planning meetings in New York, Reuther wondered aloud about where to put 200,000 people in Washington. Pennsylvania Avenue and Capitol Hill—where the march was originally planned to take place—could never hold such a throng. Might it be better to move the march to the National Mall, between the Washington Monument and Lincoln Memorial? That was sly.

For years, Reuther had made civil rights a central part of his politics. Labor unions were almost as lily-white as southern schools and Sunday church services. Workers in factories, mines, and furnaces and at construction sites often considered civil rights a



Walter Reuther holds the arm of Martin Luther King Jr. as King prepares to address the crowd during the march.

zero-sum game. *If blacks get the jobs, we don't.* But Reuther worked hard to convince laborers everywhere, including the South, to accept blacks. Workers are workers, he said, and need to stick together. “Make up your mind whether you want your paycheck or your prejudice,” he said.

By appearing at the march, Reuther defied the don of the labor movement, AFL-CIO President George Meany. In a four-hour meeting, Reuther and Randolph begged the union’s executive committee to endorse and contribute to the march. “The labor movement is about the struggle of the people who are denied their measure of justice,” Reuther later said, “and if the labor movement is not in the front rank ... [it] begins to forfeit the loyalty of the people whom I profess to lead and represent.”

Meany argued that the march would produce riots and bloodshed. Reuther pointed out that more than 100,000 people had rallied in Detroit the previous week without any disorder.

“But George Meany made this a personal thing,” Reuther told his UAW board. “You were either voting for him or against him. It had nothing to do with the idea, and after four hours of this, it was quite obvious that George Meany did not want the council to authorize participation.”

Meany allowed a special committee to draft a statement of sympathy for the march, then ripped it up and substituted his own statement lauding the AFL-CIO’s leadership in civil rights. After the meeting, Reuther told reporters that that official statement “is so weak they will have to give it a blood infusion to keep it alive long enough to mimeograph it.”

Reuther frequently complained that the labor movement had gotten sluggish and bureaucratic, lacking the daring of a quarter century before, when sit-down strikes forced automakers to capitulate to union demands. In his own union, he battled southern whites who opposed civil rights and working with blacks. When he sent \$50,000 to bail out civil rights protesters, white locals burned with anger. For years, the labor movement assumed that progress for all workers would eventually lift up the black worker. Reuther rejected that idea and spoke out for civil rights before most other prominent white leaders. After the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, Reuther warned Democrats against “straddling” on the issue. Straddle is exactly what the Democrats did. Civil rights laws were essential to prodding everyone—business firms, unions, local government—to do the right thing.

Meany and Reuther had long been rivals. The two battled for the attention of the president and congressional leaders. As head of the UAW, Reuther was part of the AFL-CIO executive board. Meany regularly thwarted Reuther's efforts to speak for labor and assume policy positions (like the post Reuther craved as a labor delegate to the United Nations). Reuther's many contacts with the Kennedy administration only increased Meany's ire. Reuther regularly met with the president, for hours at a time. In those White House meetings, Reuther sometimes lamented the way Meany treated him; Kennedy sympathized but said Reuther had to accept Meany's status as the top labor leader.

As Reuther became a national spokesman for civil rights, he also struggled to address the UAW's own problem of black exclusion. Reuther had promised blacks a leadership position in the UAW back in 1936; 23 years later, when no blacks sat on the UAW board, a rebellion took place. A leader of the black uprising attacked the UAW leadership for talking a good game on civil rights while resisting, "with every means at their disposal, any efforts to change the lily-white character of their own international executive boards."

On this day of the march, Walter Reuther could bask in the sun as the most significant white figure in the March on Washington. He had mobilized organized labor and served as a conduit between the Kennedys and the movement.

For years, the labor movement assumed that progress for all workers would eventually lift up the black worker. Reuther rejected that idea and spoke out for civil rights before most other prominent white leaders.

When he spoke, he stated the matter simply: "We must determine now—once and for all—whether we believe in the United States Constitution."

Reuther called civil rights the key to America's credibility in the Cold War.

"We can make our own freedom secure only as we make freedom universal so that all may share its blessings. We cannot successfully preach democracy in the world unless we first practice democracy at home. ... There is no halfway house to human freedom. What is needed in the present crisis is not halfway and halfhearted measures, but action, bold and adequate to square American democracy's performance with its promise.

"If we fail, the vacuum created by our failure will be filled with the Apostles of Hatred, who will search for answers in the dark of night, and reason will yield to riot, and the spirit of brotherhood will yield to bitterness and bloodshed, and the fabric of our free society will be torn asunder."

As Reuther spoke, he pumped his left arm, pointing with his forefinger. One of Reuther's assistants at the UAW, Irving Bluestone, stood nearby on the platform. Bluestone overheard two black women talking.

"Who is that white man?" the first asked.

"Don't you know him? That's Walter Reuther. He's the white Martin Luther King."

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even harsh, language, ... paradoxically it was King—who had suffered perhaps most of all—who ignited the crowd" with a utopian vision of the future. Looking to a day when "the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood" and expressing a messianic confidence that "the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed," the preacher delivered a much-needed respite to marchers who had endured a long day of intense political engagement. Ending with a picture of "that day when all of God's children—black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics—will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual, 'Free at last, free at last, thank God Almighty, we are free at last,'" King emanated an infectious optimism that brought even the most hardened and cynical SNCC activists to their feet, "laughing, shouting, slapping palms, hugging," and wiping tears from their eyes.²²

After several minutes of roaring applause, Rustin returned to the podium and refocused the crowd on the specific tasks ahead. "The moment in that afternoon which most strained belief," according to journalist Murray Kempton, was the sight of the "radical pacifist" reciting the official demands of the march while "every television camera at the disposal of the networks was upon him." Randolph followed Rustin to the stage and led the crowd in a mass pledge to "join and support all actions undertaken in good faith in accord with the time-honored democratic tradition of nonviolent protest, of peaceful assembly and petition, and of redress through the courts and the legislative process." Close to 5 p.m., the march ended with a benediction led by Benjamin Mays, King's mentor from Morehouse College.²³

By sundown the National Mall was deserted, save for the team of 400 city employees charged with picking up garbage, dismantling stages, and hauling away the portable toilets. Rustin had offered to recruit volunteers to do this, but city officials seemed eager to get the crowds out of town. Organizers of the march were happy to oblige. "We've got to get back home and finish the job of the revolution," CORE chairman Floyd McKissick declared as he left the Lincoln Memorial.²⁴

As the representative of one of the civil rights groups responsible for the event, McKissick in fact had one final duty to perform before leaving Washington; with Randolph, Rustin, King, and other march leaders, he climbed into a shuttle for the short ride up Constitution Avenue to the White House. President Kennedy congratulated them for keeping order and sending a clear message to Congress but, in his excitement, seemed to have forgotten that his guests had been working since early that morning. "Mr. President, I wonder if I could have just a glass of milk," Randolph asked politely, and Kennedy sent for sandwiches and refreshments before they settled into a 60-minute conference with Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson, the secretary of labor, and the head of the Civil Rights Division of the Department of Justice. Afterward, Kennedy joined the march leaders for a press conference on the White House lawn, where he vowed to continue his work toward "translating civil rights from principles into practices," and promised to expand that struggle to ensure "increased employment and to eliminate discrimination in employment practices, two of the prime goals of the march." Echoing Randolph's insistence that such policies would benefit Ameri-

cans of all races, Kennedy declared that the March on Washington had advanced the cause of 20 million African Americans, “but even more significant is the contribution to all mankind.” Randolph concurred, expressing confidence that Congress would not only pass Kennedy’s pending civil rights bill but a Fair Employment Practices Act as well. Celebrating “one of the biggest, most creative and constructive demonstrations ever held in the history of our nation,” he called it an achievement of which “every American could be proud.”²⁵

As history would have it, debate on all sides continued over the contents of the pending civil rights bill, and it would be Johnson, not Kennedy (assassinated three months after the march), who as president would lead its eventual passage through a divided Congress.

Few civil rights leaders predicted that Johnson would become a more passionate supporter of their cause than Kennedy had ever been. The day after Kennedy’s assassination, Roy Wilkins of the NAACP received a call from the White House asking him to meet with President Johnson to discuss a strategy for passing the civil rights bill. Similar calls were made to Whitney Young of the National Urban League, King, Randolph, and James Farmer of CORE. On November 27, 1963, Johnson made civil rights a focus of his first major address as president. Against the advice of aides, who warned him not to waste time and political capital on a bill that had little hope of becoming law, he told a joint session of Congress that “no memorial oration or eulogy could more eloquently honor President Kennedy’s memory than the earliest possible passage of the civil rights bill for which he fought so long.” Most importantly for civil rights leaders, Johnson made it clear that he intended to sign the version that the House Judiciary Committee had drafted in October, including a fair employment clause and stronger enforcement measures, rather than the much weaker bill that Kennedy had originally proposed in June. Johnson’s actions were calculated to win votes from northern liberals and African Americans who saw him simply as a southern Democrat, but he also acted out of a sincere hatred for injustice and exploitation. In stark contrast to Kennedy, who came from one of the richest families in New England, the new president had grown up in relative poverty on a small farm in central Texas. In addition to making Johnson a staunch supporter of Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal in the 1930s, that background also gave him an acute appreciation of the linkages between economic and racial inequality in the 1960s.²⁶

Wilkins met with Johnson on November 29 and left the White House more optimistic about passing the civil rights bill than he had been in months. Calling leaders of the Big Six organizations (NAACP, NALC, SCLC, CORE, SNCC, and the National Urban League), as well as Dorothy Height of the National Council of Negro Women, Wilkins asked them to meet in New York the following Tuesday to coordinate their lobbying efforts. While each of those groups had suspended demonstrations temporarily in the wake of Kennedy’s assassination, he asked them to consider declaring a moratorium on protests while the bill worked its way through Congress. To the dismay of Rustin, who stood to lose his only official position within the civil rights movement, the others also agreed to close the March on Washington’s headquarters in Harlem and shift to a more traditional lobbying effort under the direction of the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights.²⁷



Not all civil rights leaders were so impressed with Johnson. The only Big Six organization not invited to send a representative to the White House was the SNCC, despite the fact that its leadership was already in Washington for the organization’s fourth national convention. But the four civil rights leaders who met with Johnson the week after the SNCC convention were optimistic, although they agreed with the young militants that further pressure was needed to realize the broader goals of the March on Washington.

By the end of 1963, the prospects for linking struggles for racial equality with struggles for economic justice looked better than they had since the march. Before meeting with King on December 3, Johnson convinced leaders of the House to file a discharge petition that would force conservatives to bring the civil rights bill to a vote before Christmas. He then sent his chief political aide to gather signatures for the petition on Capitol Hill, the first time a sitting president had intervened so closely in the workings of Congress since Franklin D. Roosevelt secured passage of the Fair Labor Standards Act in 1938. The following day, Johnson met with AFL-CIO President Meany, who had never been a reliable ally to the president or the civil rights movement, and asked him to endorse the petition strategy. Meany demonstrated his support by attending a strategy session organized by the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, stating that labor backed the bill “as a matter of simple justice” and “as a memorial to President Kennedy.” Randolph called Meany’s support for the bill “complete, comprehensive, positive and without reservations,” and the *New York Times* reported that veteran observers “sense a possible dramatic breakthrough” on the civil rights bill. “It is too turbulent to predict anything certainly now,” one congressman stated, “but I’ve never seen one before where we’ve had the president going, and the civil rights groups, and labor, and the church people.”²⁸

The House did not vote on the bill before Christmas, but a major victory came two weeks later, when, in his first State of the Union

President Lyndon B. Johnson signs the Civil Rights Act on July 2, 1964, as Martin Luther King Jr. and others look on. The march contributed to the law’s passage.

address, Johnson vowed not only to pass a strong civil rights law but also to couple it with an “unconditional War on Poverty in America.” The idea of an “attack on poverty” had been floated during the Kennedy administration, but Johnson’s program was far more ambitious. Concerned primarily with civil rights and tax assistance for “the middle-income man in the suburbs,” Kennedy had insisted that antipoverty programs remain modest and focused narrowly on remedial health and education for poor children and young adults. In contrast, Johnson called for a billion-dollar investment in “better schools, and better health, and better homes, and better training, and better job opportunities to help more Americans, especially young Americans, escape from squalor and misery and unemployment rolls.” The large scale of the program, however, and the inclusion of policies that had been demanded by the March on Washington—such as a public works program and extending minimum wage laws to all workers—indicated that the War on Poverty was also influenced by the civil rights movement.²⁹

The clearest evidence of civil rights leaders’ influence on Johnson was his insistence that the War on Poverty would complement rather than compete with policies banning discrimination. “Let me make one principle of this administration abundantly clear,” Johnson stated in his State of the Union address. “All of these increased opportunities—in employment, in education, in housing, and in every field—must be open to Americans of every color. ... For this is not merely an economic issue, or a social, political, or international issue. It is a moral issue, and it must be met by the passage this session of the bill now pending in the House.” Johnson affirmed that synergy between civil rights and economic policies when he invited civil rights leaders to the White House a week after his speech to hear specifics about the War on Poverty and to suggest additional measures “to eliminate economic hardship among Americans.” According to James Farmer, Johnson “made it very clear that he feels the fight on poverty and illiteracy is a vital part of the fight on discrimination.” Whitney Young agreed that job creation and improved public services were critical to black communities, where nearly a quarter of all workers were unemployed; and although Johnson assured them that the House would vote on the civil rights bill before the end of January, Roy Wilkins stated that discussion of antidiscrimination policies “was only incidental to the main thrust on poverty and the fact that the anti-poverty bill will affect Negroes.”³⁰

Johnson’s machinations helped guide the civil rights bill through the House, but, as expected, it required more pressure to win a hearing in the Senate. This time around, the president was adamantly opposed to any compromise, as were key allies in the Republican Party, so the prospects of a prolonged standoff were more likely and eventually led to a filibuster. Strategic differences sharpened as the stalemate dragged on. Black trade unionists responded to the filibuster with a mass mobilization, and this time their proposal was even more ambitious than the March on Washington. On May 2, 1964, the NALC’s L. Joseph Overton asked the national board of the NAACP to support a “Nation-Wide One-Day Work Stoppage and Prayer Vigil.”

The NALC approved the proposed strike. But even as Randolph called for it to break the filibuster, he warned that the civil rights bill would not address all the concerns identified at the march. Meeting the most pressing demands of the march, the bill would ban discrimination in stores, restaurants, hotels, and other public

accommodations; prohibit state and local governments from discriminating in access to public services or the right to vote; and empower the federal government to speed the desegregation of schools. Most importantly for Randolph, the law would create an Equal Employment Opportunity Commission to prevent businesses, unions, and government from discriminating against potential employees on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, or sex, thus making permanent and expanding the power of the FEPC that President Roosevelt had created to stop the planned march on Washington in 1941. While Randolph emphasized the importance of passing the bill, he also noted that it was insufficient to overcome the “economic, social, cultural and political deprivation” caused by three centuries of slavery and “semi-feudal serfdom under segregation.”

It is not clear what impact the threat of a general strike had on the filibuster, but it seems to have encouraged senators to resolve the impasse over the civil rights bill. On May 6, 1964, one of the nation’s most widely respected observers of organized labor

In his first State of the Union address, Johnson vowed not only to pass a strong civil rights law but also to couple it with an “unconditional War on Poverty in America.”

devoted his nationally syndicated column to the work stoppage. Reporting that NALC members held leadership positions in AFL-CIO unions in 31 cities across the United States, Victor Riesel argued that black trade unionists were likely to gain support from local chapters of the NAACP, the National Urban League, SCLC, and SNCC. Some labor leaders predicted the effort would fail, but Riesel noted that they were “the same forces which shied from the capital demonstration until it became apparent in cities across the nation that the big unions would support it and that scores of thousands would pour into Washington.” It was significant, “especially in this election year,” that black trade unionists were most influential in “the vast northern and far western industrial areas,” the columnist predicted, noting that if the strike won support from the same unions that had endorsed the March on Washington, it “could roll and keep workers from huge factories, transportation facilities and service industries across the land—and set a precedent for a series of stay-aways.” Senate staffers may have missed the articles in the *Amsterdam News* on May 30 and the *Chicago Defender* on June 8, both of which reported that 300 black trade unionists had endorsed Randolph’s strike proposal at the NALC convention, but it is almost certain that Riesel’s column made its way through the Senate office building at some point before June 10, when northern Republicans broke with the southern Democrats and voted to end the longest filibuster in US history. After a series of fights over amendments and a second vote in the House, Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act on July 2, 1964.³¹ □

(Endnotes on page 43)

Living History

Two Civil Rights Activists Remember the March on Washington



JOHN HARRINGTON

BY NORMAN HILL AND VELMA MURPHY HILL

There is little reason to believe that late August was any kinder a thousand years ago in the swampy wilderness that hugged a bulging curve of the Potomac River than it was in the early years of the seventh decade of the 20th century. By 1963, the swamps were long gone. So were the area's original inhabitants, members of Native American tribes, who likely greeted whites as they first made their way into the region in the early 17th century.

In 1963, Washington, DC—at least the parts the tourists saw—was at once majestically American as the nation's capital and yet very much European in its presentation, in its penchant for the monumental. It was dressed in tons of limestone, granite, and marble, in fluted Grecian columns, in pedestals and porticoes, and accented with manicured Baroque landscapes, vistas common to London and Paris. The actual design of the District of Columbia, which in 1790 was deemed by its namesake to be the

*Norman Hill was the staff coordinator of the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom and is president emeritus of the A. Philip Randolph Institute. Velma Murphy Hill is a former vice president of the American Federation of Teachers and the former civil and human rights and international affairs director of the Service Employees International Union. This excerpt from their upcoming memoir, *Climbing Up the Rough Side of the Mountain*, has been adapted for purposes of this article.*

“federal city,” was principally the work of a French-born American, Pierre Charles L'Enfant.

The original vision called for broad, long avenues radiating from the Capitol building. One of those “grand” avenues never materialized and instead evolved, largely as a consequence of neglect, into a long, grassy front yard. It became the National Mall, the people's parade grounds for pageantry and protests, for presidential inaugurations, rallies, and celebrations.

NORMAN HILL: On the cool, early morning of August 28, 1963, I, at age 30, walked those grounds with my 51-year-old mentor, Bayard Rustin. There we were, two men appearing—at least on the outside—calm and in control, casually strolling along the edge of the reflecting pool in the far western end of the Mall. We were not far from the stony glare of Abraham Lincoln seated stiffly in his memorial. Except for a gaggle of news reporters and photographers, we were practically alone. I was not certain what Rustin was feeling, although I learned later that he was terrified. I was more than a little concerned.

This was the day for what we hoped would be the great Washington march. While I, the staff coordinator of the march, and most of its other planners and organizers, publicly avoided any predictions of numbers, we all not-so-secretly hoped that the march would bring tens upon tens of thousands of people streaming into this part of the Mall. We wanted it to be big.

My wife, Velma, then 24, was a field secretary for the Congress of Racial Equality. We knew that reputations were at stake, perhaps even the future of the civil rights movement and its alliance with labor.

In planning for the march, one of the last major elements we saw lock into place was organized labor. A. Philip Randolph, the architect of the march, so badly wanted the trade union movement in the initial coalition. Labor came in late, but then it came in very strong.

In 1963, Velma and I understood that in a very real sense there were always, at least historically, two labor movements. This was symbolized by the American Federation of Labor and the Congress of Industrial Organizations, which merged in 1955 to become a federation of unions, the AFL-CIO. Today, it represents more than 12 million members, including teachers, doctors, nurses, engineers, miners, plumbers, painters, firefighters, public workers, and more.

Before the merger, the CIO represented the progressive wing of the labor movement, the more industrial part of the labor movement—autoworkers and steel workers, for instance. On the other hand, the AFL's members were more craftspeople and seemed more conservative; sometimes you really had to work hard to bring them along to support progressive issues and causes.

In 1963, George Meany, who had fought to create the AFL-CIO, was still its first and only president. Walter Reuther, the president of the CIO at the time of the merger, was made one of many vice presidents in the combined federation. He was also the president of the United Auto Workers (UAW) from 1946 to his death in 1970, and he drew additional clout from his position as the president of the AFL-CIO's Industrial Union Department.

After the merger in 1955, Reuther, on more than one occasion, had disagreed with Meany on matters that came before the AFL-CIO's governing executive council. I used to tell Velma how I would hear Reuther continually say, even after the merger, "Well, if Meany doesn't like it, or doesn't go along, or doesn't support this, I'm going to do it anyway." That was Walter Reuther.

Randolph appealed to Meany, a tough New Yorker who was born into the labor movement, to join the coalition backing the march. But Meany was cool to the idea and said no. He thought the march would draw too many people to Washington. He doubted that we could control the crowds, keeping everything peaceful and under control. He said that the last thing he wanted to be associated with was a march that would embarrass the federation he had worked so hard to create.

In attempting to line up major labor support, Randolph made one tactical mistake: he reached out to Reuther about the march before he spoke about it with Meany. Reuther didn't wait for Meany to move. He said right away that he was on board, adding that "I'm going to support the march no matter what Meany says or does."

In reaction, Meany said, "Well, I'm going to show Reuther who actually runs the AFL-CIO." Before we fully realized it, the Washington march had become a political football; a personal, political, and ideological tug of war.

Thereafter, Meany's earlier reservations about the march quickly hardened to the point where the AFL-CIO would not endorse the march. But several individual unions, mainly indus-



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trial unions, 17 or so, including the UAW, did openly support and later participate in the march. Reuther was very, very involved.

Women, holding signs and wearing hats in support of civil rights, stand in front of the White House during the march.

VELMA MURPHY HILL: Some march organizers around Randolph were very upset with Meany. But Norman and I never heard Randolph say a bad word about Meany—about anybody, as a matter of fact. After the march and its stunning success, Meany would come around in ways that seemed unimaginable in the months leading up to the march.

Norman and I knew it was special, but it really didn't dawn on us until it happened just how special that day really was. It was a Wednesday that felt like a Sunday. We understood what the march meant in terms of Randolph's hopes for it—the melding of jobs, labor, a national minimum wage of no less than \$2 an hour, with all this stuff going on in the South, people standing up and getting hurt, the civil rights legislation taking shape, thousands of voices chanting, "Pass the BILL. Pass the BILL. Pass the BILL."

There was this air of real excitement. People were saying hello to people they didn't know. People were shaking hands, and people were looking for people they knew. It was just wonderful. We were trying to figure out how many different unions were there. So many people wore buttons and paper hats that bore the names of their unions, like the UAW or the American Federation of Teachers, in big, bold letters.

NORMAN: There is no doubt that the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom was a resounding success, despite the fact no march, no matter how massive, could secure either one of these goals. We saw the march as an important start, a declaration of action. Randolph and Rustin certainly felt that the event had exceeded even their considerably high expectations. But in the wake of the march, there was a feeling that the real work was about to begin.

Within an hour of the last speech of the day, leaders from the march were ushered into the Cabinet Room. There, they met President John F. Kennedy, flanked by Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson. Kennedy, like millions across America, had watched the march live on television. He was duly impressed with Martin Luther King Jr. and his speech, even famously greeting him with “I have a dream” and a kind of “good-job” nod.

And while Velma and I learned that the meeting was cordial, we know Randolph urged Kennedy to press more vigorously to get the civil rights bill through Congress. But Kennedy, facing reelection pressures, soon began supporting a more limited civil rights bill, thinking perhaps that it could find support among powerful elements in Congress that opposed it. By October, a compromise bill was hammered out with House leaders. This bill watered down the public accommodation clause, exempting retail stores and personal services. Voting rights protections would only apply to federal elections. And the labor provisions, like a Fair Employment Practices Committee, were removed and the proposed Equal Employment Opportunity Commission weakened.

So much of what the march achieved is still shaping the best of this nation’s possibilities. It has proven to be what Randolph described it to be, a “massive moral revolution for jobs and freedom.”

That bill passed the Judiciary Committee on November 20. Two days later Kennedy was dead.

But strengthened by the march, some of the bill’s supporters continued to lobby for a stronger bill. The Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, a coalition of organizations to protect civil and human rights in the United States, had become the main lobbying body pushing for an effective bill. It felt that it was extremely important, for instance, to have civil rights legislation that included a ban on employment discrimination because that was such an essential, important area of life. The Kennedys, both the president and the attorney general, argued against including that ban because they said they would never be able to get the legislation through Congress and overcome a southern filibuster.

The Leadership Conference—founded in 1950 by Randolph; Roy Wilkins, the executive secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP); and Arnold Aronson, a leader of the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council—would not accept this setback. Its leadership, which included the Washington director of the NAACP, Clarence Mitchell Jr.—sometimes known as the 101st senator—went to George Meany. While Meany had refused to endorse the march, the Leadership Conference asked him to help get an amendment to the weakened civil rights legislation that would outlaw employment discrimination.

Meany agreed to do that. He also went before Congress and testified that he and the AFL-CIO supported a civil rights bill that included the ban. He went further, saying that the amendment should not only include employers and employment agencies, but unions as well. He said that there was a need for an “extra stick” to clean up the House of Labor.

As a result, Title VII—the section that bans employment discrimination—was added to the civil rights legislation. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission would enforce the ban.

I think the success of the march had something to do with Meany’s evolution. It likely influenced him to belatedly offer his endorsement to one of the march’s central demands.

On July 2, 1964, President Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act. It was a landmark piece of legislation. The act banned major forms of discrimination against blacks and women. It set out to end unequal application of voter registration requirements. And it prohibited racial segregation in schools, the workplace, and facilities that served the general public. Over the years, the federal government’s capacity to enforce the act grew increasingly stronger.

VELMA: But Norman and I think the Washington march could have done so much more for the cause of women.

It bothers me to this day that not a single woman spoke at the podium during the march. Its leadership had a separate program, a tribute to black women in the civil rights movement, earlier that day. Yes, their names were called: Daisy Bates, Diane Nash Bevel, Mrs. Medgar Evers, Mrs. Herbert Lee, Rosa Parks, Gloria Richardson—and they each got some applause. But this was done before the march really got started. I mean, come on.

At that time, the question of women, women’s liberation, was not a big question among most of us. But listen, it would not have in any way taken anything from the march to expand the Big 10 to the Big 11 to include a woman. Dorothy Height, the president of the National Council of Negro Women from 1957 to 1997 and a lifelong civil rights activist, could have spoken. She represented a major organization just like the men who spoke that day. A number of other women pushed to have women among major speakers that day. But in the end, all of those calls were rejected or simply not acted upon.

NORMAN: I believe Velma is right. I think that was the one major failing of the march. It could have been done.

VELMA: But we do not believe that this failure at all tarnishes the overall brilliance of the march’s legacy. So much of what was achieved that day is still shaping the best of this nation’s possibilities. It has proven, all these decades later, to be precisely what Randolph described it to be, a “massive moral revolution for jobs and freedom.” President Johnson’s War on Poverty, while unfortunately short-lived under the monstrous weight of the Vietnam War, had deep roots in the vision and spirit of the march.

At the close of that day, Norman and I looked at each other, and we knew that the Washington march had crystallized all we had been taught by Randolph and Rustin—the power of coalition politics; the importance of direct, nonviolent action; and the relevance of combining the struggles for economic justice and racial equality. □



To commemorate the 50th anniversary of the March on Washington, the Albert Shanker Institute worked with classroom teachers, scholars, and surviving march organizers to develop terrific lesson plans on this historic event. A few of these lesson plans are highlighted here, but all are available at www.shankerinstitute.org and on ShareMyLesson at www.sharemylesson.com/MOW.

STRATEGIZING FOR FREEDOM

“Whose strategy for advancing the African American freedom struggle—that of Booker T. Washington, W. E. B. Du Bois, Marcus Garvey, or A. Philip Randolph—was most effective?” This lesson helps students in grades 9–12 understand four leaders who constructed different strategies for winning civil, political, and economic rights for African Americans. The lesson, which looks at how those strategies endure today, is appropriate for US history or African American history classes. It requires one or two 40-minute periods, and it assumes student knowledge of conditions in the Jim Crow South and in northern cities following African American migration.

LEADERS FOR TODAY

“Are the leaders and the organizers of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, an important milestone in winning full rights for African Americans, role models for us today?” This lesson for students in grades 9–12 focuses on A. Philip Randolph, Bayard Rustin, Norman Hill, and Rachele Horowitz—four of the principal organizers of the march. It challenges students to describe their roles in the event, identify their leadership qualities, and illustrate the contributions of each through a writing exercise and simulated press conference. This lesson spans two 45- to 50-minute periods and is appropriate as a unit on the civil rights movement in an American history class.

MARCH LOGISTICS THEN AND NOW

“What would be required to organize a March on Washington today, 50 years after the 1963 March on Washington?” Designed for grades 6–8, this lesson asks students to identify the logistical elements that went into the march, and how the organizers emphasized and maintained the event’s nonviolent tone. Students also compare and contrast means of communication available in 1963 with those available today, and analyze the extent to which fears of violence surrounding the original event were based on racism. The official organizing manual for the march, available from the Albert Shanker Institute, is included as a resource.

DREAM UNDER DEVELOPMENT

“How did Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s ‘I Have a Dream’ speech differ from the one he had prepared? Why did he change his prepared speech?” Designed for the secondary level (particularly grades 11 and 12), the lesson asks students to explain how King’s prepared remarks differed from the address he delivered—and to formulate reasoned opinions on why changes were introduced. Students

identify rhetorical devices underpinning the speech, including rhetorical questions, figurative language, allusion, and strategic repetition. Appropriate for US history as well as English language arts classes, the lesson is designed for two 45-minute periods (or one longer period) and culminates in two assessments: a civil rights-themed paper based on multiple sources, and a speech that students write on a topic of their choice.

MAKING THE CASE FOR EQUALITY

“Which text makes a more persuasive case for overcoming racism—Martin Luther King Jr.’s ‘I Have a Dream’ speech or the closing argument of Atticus Finch in *To Kill a Mockingbird*?” This lesson is designed for grades 9–12 and asks students to identify rhetorical devices in one version of King’s speech and in the trial argument of the protagonist in Harper Lee’s novel. In both works, students analyze the power of rhetoric to persuade, explore the connection between literature and history, and explain how both works reflect their times. The lesson is designed for one or two 50-minute periods.

WHO WAS BAYARD RUSTIN?

“Why has Bayard Rustin, the main organizer of the 1963 March on Washington and an important leader in the civil rights movement, been hidden from American history?” The lesson asks students in grades 6–8 to describe Rustin’s accomplishments, explain his philosophy of nonviolent action, and provide a reasoned opinion on whether students would have followed Rustin’s nonviolent example. The lesson also asks students to describe Rustin’s “outsider” status (African American, pacifist, socialist, and gay) and explain how it might shape an individual’s awareness of injustice. The lesson is designed for up to two 40-minute periods. It uses the film *Brother Outsider: The Life of Bayard Rustin* as a resource.

THAT STUFF ABOUT JOBS

“Why did the organizers of the 1963 March on Washington demand jobs as well as freedom for African Americans?” This lesson for the secondary level (particularly grade 8) challenges students to use Bureau of Labor Statistics data to develop scatter plots and draw conclusions about African American employment from the end of World War II until the march. The data will inform students’ analysis of why the march’s organizers identified freedom and jobs as central demands. Students will understand that African Americans historically have experienced greater rates of unemployment and economic hardship than society at large. The lesson is designed for four 45-minute periods.

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The Move to Unity

(Continued from page 37)

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