

March on Washington Part 2: Poster and Demands Worksheet

Present your small group's top two demands to the whole group. Write down all the demands below. Try to combine similar ones:

- 1) After you've decided on demands, in your small group, design a poster to display at the protest that focuses on one of your key demands and connects directly with the struggles of one or more of the other organizations that you met with. You want your poster to appeal to many people at the march. Use both words and images.
- 2) Read through the actual March on Washington demands. What do you notice that is similar and what is different from what you came up with in class? What might account for these differences? Did any demands surprise you? Why?

MARCH ON WASHINGTON FOR JOBS AND FREEDOM

AUGUST 28, 1963

WHAT WE DEMAND*

1. Comprehensive and effective *civil rights legislation* from the present Congress—without compromise or filibuster—to guarantee all Americans
 - access to all public accommodations
 - decent housing
 - adequate and integrated education
 - the right to vote
2. Withholding of Federal funds from all programs in which discrimination exists.
3. *Desegregation of all school districts in 1963.*
4. Enforcement of the *Fourteenth Amendment*—reducing Congressional representation of states where citizens are disfranchised.
5. A new *Executive Order* banning discrimination in all housing supported by federal funds.
6. Authority for the Attorney General to institute *injunctive suits* when any constitutional right is violated.
7. A massive federal program to train and place all unemployed workers—Negro and white—on meaningful and dignified jobs at decent wages.
8. A national *minimum wage act* that will give all Americans a decent standard of living. (Government surveys show that anything less than \$2.00 an hour fails to do this.)
9. A broadened *Fair Labor Standards Act* to include all areas of employment which are presently excluded.
10. A federal *Fair Employment Practices Act* barring discrimination by federal, state, and municipal governments, and by employers, contractors, employment agencies, and trade unions.

* Support of the March does not necessarily indicate endorsement of every demand listed. Some organizations have not had an opportunity to take an official position on all of the demands advocated here.

March on Washington Part 3 — Dilemmas Before the March

After the solidarity meeting there are a number of problems that activists learn about and need to confront before the March on Washington.

Group 1: SNCC – Cambridge, Maryland and McComb, Mississippi

Situation: Initially most mainstream Civil Rights organizations were lukewarm about the March on Washington. But SNCC and CORE — the organizations with the largest activist bases in the North and the South — were enthusiastic about the idea. But you didn't want just a passive march down the street. You wanted to bring the movement to D.C.: stage sit-ins across Washington, lie-ins on airport runways, tie up traffic, invade offices of congressmen and senators, camp on the White House lawn, cause mass arrests and paralyze the city. But as the date got closer, more conservative Civil Rights organizations like the NAACP and the Urban League jumped on board. But these organizations worried about maintaining their relationship with President Kennedy. They pressured the organizers to abandon proposals for mass civil disobedience, and abandon plans to give a speaker's slot to an unemployed worker and to march around the White House.

Now, the night before the march you've gotten more bad news. SNCC chairperson John Lewis, was supposed to deliver a speech at the march that many SNCC members helped write. A copy of the speech was leaked and some of the less radical organizers of the march are demanding it be changed. The speech makes several references to "revolution" and calls Kennedy's civil rights bill "too little and too late." It attacks those calling for patience, saying "We cannot be patient, we do not want to be free gradually. We want our freedom, and we want it now." Washington's Archbishop Patrick O'Boyle, who is scheduled to give the march's invocation, has threatened to pull out of the march if the speech isn't edited. Some of the more conservative march organizers are demanding you tone down the speech in order to not antagonize liberal allies and the Kennedy administration.

Question: Will you agree to edit the speech?

Group 2: CORE – Brooklyn, New York and Los Angeles, California

Situation: James Farmer, one of CORE's founders and one of the key March on Washington organizers went down to Plaquemine, Louisiana a few weeks before the march. CORE had sent civil rights organizers from the North who had been registering people to vote and protesting school segregation in Plaquemine for months. As the movement gained steam, Farmer was sent down to make speeches and inspire more people to take action. Many white Plaquemine residents blamed CORE and Farmer for "stirring up trouble." When Plaquemine police heard about a rally taking place at a local church that Farmer was going to speak at. They stormed the church with cattle prods and tear gas.

When Farmer led a march downtown protesting police brutality, he was arrested, along with local leaders and more than two hundred activists. CORE doesn't have enough money to bail out everybody, but Farmer

is scheduled to give a speech and represent CORE at the March on Washington. CORE has a principled position of staying close to their base and you worry what kind of message it will send to bail Farmer out and not others. Wouldn't it send a powerful message to make it known that Farmer was not at the march because he was in jail fighting for civil rights? Or would CORE be missing too big an opportunity to have one of your leaders speak at one of the biggest civil rights marches in history?

Question: Should you arrange the release of CORE leader James Farmer so he can speak at the March?

Group 3: Women Leaders – Detroit, Michigan and Birmingham, Alabama

Situation: The speakers list for the rally during the March on Washington has been released: not a single woman is scheduled to speak. Anna Hedgeman, who was a key organizer for the March has been pushing the issue from day one. But March organizers say they are worried that picking one woman to speak would cause serious problems because there are so many other key female leaders in the movement. (The idea that multiple women might speak was too far-fetched for them to even consider.) So instead of allowing a woman to speak at the march they have decided to hold a "Tribute to Women" honoring six female leaders: Rosa Parks, Gloria Richardson, Diane Nash, Myrlie Evers, Prince Lee, and Daisy Bates. According to march organizers "the Chairman would introduce these women, telling of their role in the struggle.... As each one is introduced, she would stand for applause." In addition, the male leaders would lead the march. Not even the wives of these leaders would be allowed to march with their husbands. Finally, no women are scheduled to be part of the delegation of ten civil rights leaders who will meet with President Kennedy after the march.

Many female leaders are frustrated by this treatment. Some are not even planning to show up. Others are considering organizing a special event to discuss race, gender and the participation and treatment of women in the struggle. Still others think this isn't enough to address the discrimination women have faced at the most public gathering of the movement.

Question: How will you respond?

March on Washington Part 3 — What Really Happened?

Group 1: “It looked as if no one was going to budge,” wrote Lewis. “Then [A. Phillip] Randolph stepped in. He looked beaten down and very tired.” “I have waited twenty-two years for this,” said Randolph. “I’ve waited all my life for this opportunity. Please don’t ruin it.” His entreaty melted Lewis’s [and other SNCC members] resolve. Lewis’s speech had openly questioned Kennedy’s commitment to civil rights and lambasted the legislation he was proposing in particular and the political class in general. Line by line, some of his most scathing criticisms and inflammatory metaphors were stripped away. Lewis took out the parts about the bill being “too little and too late.”... The question “Which side is the federal government on?” was also deleted, as was the word “cheap” to describe some political leaders. “I was angry,” said Lewis. “But when we were done, I was satisfied.... The speech still had fire. It still had bite.... It still had an edge.” Of all the speeches that day, Lewis’s did indeed stand out.... “Right away it was clear to the crowd that John Lewis did not sound like any of the other speakers they had heard,” writes Drew Hansen in *The Dream*. When Lewis finished, the clapping was louder than it had been for anyone else. “On the speaker’s platform every black speaker rushed up to Lewis to shake his hand and pound him on the back. Every white speaker stayed seated and stared into the distance.

—Gary Younge, *The Speech: The Story behind Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s Dream*

Group 2: [CORE] decided to resist significant pressure from the march organizers and keep Farmer where he was. “We decided at CORE that we would make a better statement with Jim in jail than at the March on Washington,” Lolis Edward Elie, the group’s lawyer told Charles Euchner. “Anybody with an ounce of ego would want to be in Washington.... [Jim] wanted to be there. But the group made that decision not to be there.” Rudy Lombard, leader of CORE’s Louisiana campaign, added: “We would not ask local people to do anything that the CORE representatives would not do. That would apply to all of us, including Jim. We didn’t think that going to Washington and participating in the march was any more important than staying involved with the community.”

—Gary Younge, *The Speech: The Story behind Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s Dream*

Group 3: That August day, these women of courage—Bates, Parks, Richardson, and Lee—sat silently on the [stage]. (Myrlie Evers wasn’t there—she was in Detroit for a previous engagement—nor was Diane Nash.) “This was very upsetting to me, especially when there were so many battle-weary female veterans who deserved to speak.... But that’s how chauvinistic the leadership was at that time,” Coretta Scott King later observed.... Indeed, the only words spoken to acknowledge the role of women were written for Bates by a man and contained a pledge that women would support the men of the movement, despite the fact that the women... had risked their lives for years—some even decades—to press for civil rights.... After the rally, no women were part of a delegation of ten leaders who met with President Kennedy. Dorothy Height observed, “I’ve never seen a more immovable force. We could not get women’s participation taken seriously.”... Height convened an interracial gathering of women the next day.... Black women activists, according to Height, became “much more aware and much more aggressive” in calling out the sexism of the male leadership of the movement.

—Jeanne Theoharis, *A More Beautiful and Terrible History: The Uses and Misuses of Civil Rights History*

MARCH ON WASHINGTON FOR JOBS AND FREEDOM

AUGUST 28, 1963

LINCOLN MEMORIAL PROGRAM

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|---|---|
| 1. The National Anthem | Led by Marian Anderson. |
| 2. Invocation | The Very Rev. Patrick O'Boyle, <i>Archbishop of Washington.</i> |
| 3. Opening Remarks | A. Philip Randolph, <i>Director March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom.</i> |
| 4. Remarks | Dr. Eugene Carson Blake, <i>Stated Clerk, United Presbyterian Church of the U.S.A.; Vice Chairman, Commission on Race Relations of the National Council of Churches of Christ in America.</i> |
| 5. Tribute to Negro Women
Fighters for Freedom | Mrs. Medgar Evers |
| Daisy Bates | |
| Diane Nash Bevel | |
| Mrs. Medgar Evers | |
| Mrs. Herbert Lee | |
| Rosa Parks | |
| Gloria Richardson | |
| 6. Remarks | John Lewis, <i>National Chairman, Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee.</i> |
| 7. Remarks | Walter Reuther, <i>President, United Automobile, Aerospace and Agricultural Implement Workers of America, AFL-CIO; Chairman, Industrial Union Department, AFL-CIO.</i> |
| 8. Remarks | James Farmer, <i>National Director, Congress of Racial Equality.</i> |
| 9. Selection | Eva Jessye Choir |
| 10. Prayer | Rabbi Uri Miller, <i>President Synagogue Council of America.</i> |
| 11. Remarks | Whitney M. Young, Jr., <i>Executive Director, National Urban League.</i> |
| 12. Remarks | Mathew Ahmann, <i>Executive Director, National Catholic Conference for Interracial Justice.</i> |
| 13. Remarks | Roy Wilkins, <i>Executive Secretary, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.</i> |
| 14. Selection | Miss Mahalia Jackson |
| 15. Remarks | Rabbi Joachim Prinz, <i>President American Jewish Congress.</i> |
| 16. Remarks | The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., <i>President, Southern Christian Leadership Conference.</i> |
| 17. The Pledge | A Philip Randolph |
| 18. Benediction | Dr. Benjamin E. Mays, <i>President, Morehouse College.</i> |

"WE SHALL OVERCOME"

March on Washington Part 3 Debrief Questions

1. The “Dilemmas Before the March” tell us about divisions within the Civil Rights Movement. How does learning about these divisions give us a more complicated picture of the movement? Is this important?
2. Pick one dilemma in Part 3. Do you think activists made the right choice? Would you have done something differently? Explain.

“Between them the Pentagon, the White House, the Justice Department, and the DC police force turned the policing of the march into a military operation. It was codenamed Operation Steep Hill. One thousand troops and thirty helicopters were deployed in the DC area. The Pentagon put nineteen thousand troops on standby. The Eighty-Second Airborne Division, based in Fort Bragg, North Carolina, stood by with C-82 ‘flying boxcars’ loaded with guns, ammunition, and food, ready at a moments notice to make the 320-mile trip to Andrews Air Force Base in Maryland, from which soldiers would be dispatched to the Mall by helicopter to quell riots. Around six-thousand law-enforcement officers of different kinds would be deployed that day (with another four thousand in the vicinity awaiting orders), all armed with guns, clubs, and tear gas. The one concession to the civil rights sensitivities was that there would be no dogs.”

—Gary Younge, *The Speech*

3. Read the paragraph above. What does this say about the government’s relationship to the Civil Rights Movement? What or who do you think the government was trying to protect? Do you think this protection was necessary? Does this challenge or confirm what you’ve learned in the past about the role the government played in granting Civil Rights?

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