

Exploring the Ideas and Logistics Behind the March on Washington Using a Planning Document

Stephen Wesson

The March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom was a landmark moment in the twentieth-century battle for African American civil rights. It was also a tremendous logistical undertaking.

The March brought 250,000 people to Washington, D.C., on August 28, 1963, for the largest civil rights gathering the nation had ever seen. Marchers from across the United States filled the streets, delivering a demand for change. Delegations of activists met with elected officials in the halls of Congress and in the Oval Office to advocate for sweeping civil rights legislation. Songs and speeches rang out from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, culminating in an address by Martin Luther King Jr. that entered into legend.

None of this could have taken place without months of careful planning and attention to detail. Hundreds of buses had to be chartered, tens of thousands of lunches prepared, and arrangements made for safety, bathroom facilities, first aid, and more. A constellation of civil

In front of the March on Washington headquarters in Harlem, Deputy Director Bayard Rustin (far left) and Chairman of Administrative Committee Cleveland Robinson

(World Telegram & Sun photo by O. Fernandez/Courtesy of the Library of Congress)



rights organizations, leaders, and speakers were involved in the March, and each one's role needed to be defined. Beyond that, someone had to secure the funding needed to make the event happen at all.

Coordination of the March was the responsibility of Bayard Rustin, a longtime civil rights activist with decades of experience organizing marches, boycotts, and campaigns. As a gay man, Rustin faced discrimination from inside and outside the civil rights movement, but he persevered and served as a formidable organizer and an influential force in the movement's philosophy. For the 1963 March on Washington, Rustin and other organizers marshaled a small army of volunteers to address the countless logistical issues and to communicate and coordinate with hundreds of thousands of attendees using the most effective tools available.

One of those tools, a leaflet titled *Final Plans for the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, August 28, 1963* provides students with many opportunities to explore the thinking of the behind-the-scenes organizers.

In this 11-page document, which is available in the online collections of the Library of Congress, today's readers can find a wide range of information intended for participants of the March, from high-level goals and political talking points to parking directions and advice on packing a lunch. By examining details within the leaflet, making inferences, and

asking questions, students can gain insights into which information March planners thought participants needed most, and why they chose to present this information the way they did.

Begin students' exploration of the *Final Plans* leaflet by inviting them to look at its early pages, and to examine and ask questions about not only its content but also its design and general appearance. The Library's Primary Source Analysis Tool can help them organize their responses to the document, and the Teacher's Guide to Analyzing Documents and Other Printed Texts provides prompts to further students' analysis process. See: www.loc.gov/programs/teachers/getting-started-with-primary-sources/guides.

The visual design of a document can lead students to productive speculation about its purpose and the priorities of its creators. Draw student attention to the design of the *Final Plans* leaflet and invite them to consider what it was intended to communicate to its readers. Ask: Does its appearance help a reader understand its purpose? Encourage students to compare the document to programs for events that they have attended or organized and consider what differences in approach and mood they can identify. Ask: How is this document different from a program intended to serve primarily as a souvenir?

Focus students' attention on the leaflet's title page and table of contents and lead a class discussion about the overall scope and structure of the document.

Ask students to consider what they reveal about the priorities of the organizers. Ask: Do the topics fall into any larger categories? What topics did the organizers want participants to see first? Are any topics missing from the document?

Lead students deeper into the document, to the "Who Is Sponsoring the March?" section that provides not only an overview of the major groups supporting the March, but also rich opportunities for further research. Each of the organizations listed played a significant role in U.S. politics and culture in the twentieth century, and each was involved in the civil rights movement in its own way. At the same time, each of the individuals chosen to represent those organizations played a unique role in the movement. Ask students to each select one individual or organization and investigate their role in the March on Washington and the civil rights movement. Challenge students to find out how their organization became a sponsor of the March, and how their sponsorship may have shaped the event.

The "Why We March" and "What We Demand" sections of the leaflet present core messages and root causes of the March briefly and succinctly. These concise summaries allow students to connect the goals and causes with their prior knowledge of the civil rights movement and provide more opportunities for research. Encourage students to search writings

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Final Plans for the

MARCH ON WASHINGTON FOR JOBS AND FREEDOM

AUGUST 28, 1963

This is the **SECOND** and **LAST** Organizing Manual of the **MARCH ON WASHINGTON FOR JOBS AND FREEDOM**

READ IT CAREFULLY. *There have been changes in arrangements* since the publication of Organizing Manual No. 1.

- 1. There will be NO separate state locations. All buses will proceed directly to the Washington Monument.**
- 2. The NEW routes of March are Independence and Constitution Avenues.**
(Read further for full details)

Distribute this manual today. Time is short. If you need additional copies, let us know **TODAY!**

MARCH ON WASHINGTON FOR JOBS AND FREEDOM
170 West 130th Street • New York, N.Y. 10027 • FI 8-1900

Cleveland Robinson
Chairman, Administrative Committee

Bayard Rustin
Deputy Director

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National Office
MARCH ON WASHINGTON FOR JOBS AND FREEDOM
 170 West 130th Street
 New York, New York, 10027
 Fillmore 8-1900

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WHO IS SPONSORING THE MARCH?

The Ten Chairmen of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom are:

- Mathew Ahmann**, Executive Director of the National Catholic Conference for Interracial Justice
- Reverend Eugene Carson Blake**, Vice-Chairman of the Commission on Race Relations of the National Council of Churches of Christ in America
- James Farmer**, National Director of the Congress of Racial Equality
- Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr.**, President of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference
- John Lewis**, Chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee
- Rabbi Joachim Prinz**, Chairman of the American Jewish Congress
- A. Philip Randolph**, President of the Negro American Labor Council
- Walter Reuther**, President of the United Automobile, Aerospace and Agricultural Implement Workers of America, AFL-CIO, and Chairman, Industrial Union Department, AFL-CIO
- Roy Wilkins**, Executive Secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
- Whitney Young**, Executive Director of the National Urban League

In addition, the March has been endorsed by major religious, fraternal, labor and civil rights organizations. A full list, too long to include here, will be published.

WHY WE MARCH

We march to redress old grievances and to help resolve an American crisis.

That crisis is born of the twin evils of racism and economic deprivation. They rob all people, Negro and white, of dignity, self-respect, and freedom. They impose a special burden on the Negro, who is denied the right to vote, economically exploited, refused access to public accommodations, subjected to inferior education, and relegated to substandard ghetto housing.

Discrimination in education and apprenticeship training renders Negroes, Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, and other minorities helpless in our mechanized, industrial society. Lacking specialized training, they are the first victims of automation. Thus the rate of Negro unemployment is nearly three times that of whites.

Their livelihoods destroyed, the Negro unemployed are thrown into the streets, driven to despair, to hatred, to crime, to violence. All America is robbed of their potential contribution.

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and speeches from civil rights leaders to find places in which the messages and themes in “Why We March” appear, and to discuss how those messages are stated differently in those writings and speeches. Invite students to select one of the demands listed in “What We Demand” and trace its fate after the March. Which of these demands were successfully met? How was that success achieved?

The *Final Plans for the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, August 28, 1963*

provides countless opportunities for exploration of the ideas and methods underlying the historic march, from the powerful statements of purpose found in the opening sections to the carefully detailed logistical procedures described in the later sections. The fact that a march that helped change a nation is contained within a few short pages is both a marvel and an inspiration. Enable students to imagine how such a momentous event could be planned today, and what communication tools would be needed to keep such a vast and powerful group of participants informed, organized, and

moved to take action.

Library of Congress Blog

If you try these suggestions, or a variation of them, with your students, **tell us about your experience!** During the last week of February, the Teaching with the Library of Congress Blog at blogs.loc.gov/teachers will feature a post tied to this article and we invite you to comment and share your teaching strategies.



Stephen Wesson is a Supervisory Educational Resources Specialist at the Library of Congress. For more information on the education programs of the Library of Congress, please visit www.loc.gov/teachers.

New Primary Source Sets for Teachers from the Library of Congress

The leaflet *Final Plans for the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, August 28, 1963* is part of a new teacher resource from the Library of Congress, the Civil Rights Movement Primary Source Set (www.loc.gov/classroom-materials/civil-rights-movement). This set includes photographs, manuscripts, newspaper articles, and oral histories that allow teachers and their students to explore moments and issues from the civil rights movement through primary sources, the raw materials of history.

The Library offers more than 90 primary source sets, each of which brings together rights-free items from the Library’s online collections on individual topics, together with background information and teaching ideas. These sets cover topics that range from ancient astronomy to women’s suffrage, from scientific data to nineteenth-century authors, and all are available on the Library’s free portal for educators, loc.gov/teachers.

Over the past two years, the Library has launched several new primary source sets:

- **LGBTQ Activism and Contributions** showcases Library of Congress collection items that document the lives, freedom struggles, and cultural contributions of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) Americans. www.loc.gov/classroom-materials/lgbtq-activism-and-contributions.
- **Charts and Graphs** presents a sampling of the methods people have used since the nineteenth century to graphically represent data and inform, convince, and catch the eye of their audiences. www.loc.gov/classroom-materials/charts-and-graphs.
- **Women in Science and Technology** brings together items from the Library’s collections that highlight some of the roles women have played and the work women have done in the development of science, technology, and medicine over the centuries. www.loc.gov/classroom-materials/women-in-science-and-technology.
- **Transportation through U.S. History** documents many of the changes in transportation technology that have fueled the nation’s growth, shaped how its citizens live and work, and transformed American life. www.loc.gov/classroom-materials/transportation.
- **Natural Disasters** features pictures, maps, film, recordings, sheet music, and newspaper articles that document a variety of devastating natural disasters, providing entry points to discussions of historical events, climate science, and community response. www.loc.gov/classroom-materials/natural-disasters.