**2019 OCSS Conference Session: The 1963 March on Washington for Jobs   
and Freedom: So Much More than “I Have a Dream**  
  
Presenter: Dan Langen

**Lesson Plan**

**Compelling Question:** How was the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom a defining moment for the civil rights movement in the United States?

**Supporting Questions:**

* Who were the people and groups seeking civil rights gains?
* What civil rights goals were being sought in the period being studied?
* What elements of the 1963 march represented shifts in the civil rights movement?
* What strategies were available and how was a specific strategy selected to achieve the goal(s)?
* What obstacles did the march planners face?
* To what extent were the civil rights goals successfully met?

**Engage:**

**Preview Activity:** You and your friends (or siblings) would like to convince your parents that you are old enough and responsible enough to make your own decisions about your curfew and the activities you attend. What are some strategies you could use to convince your parents and which strategy do you think will have the greatest opportunity for you to achieve your goal? Explain.

**[** Ask students to freewrite their responses, then discuss their answers in a small group. Lead a class discussion, with a focus on why most students would select a strategy that could win support without alienating the decision makers. Also discuss why students did, or did not choose to work cooperatively with their friends or siblings to achieve their goal. Explain to students that today’s lesson will address how major civil rights groups collaborated to call attention to lagging progress in achieving civil rights gains and call for comprehensive civil rights legislation.**]**

**Teach:**

**Introduction:** Explain to students that you will be conducting an investigation/inquiry into the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom focused on the compelling question: *How was the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom a defining moment for the civil rights movement in the United States?* They will be investigating a series of primary and secondary sources to look at1) Why civil rights groups with competing strategies chose to work together, 2) How previous civil rights successes informed the call to march on Washington, D.C., and 3) To what extent did the event meet the goals of promoting equality?

* Display the slidedeck introduction slide

**1. Plan the Inquiry:** Write or display the essential question and ask students to individually generate 2-3 supporting questions. Students share the questions in small groups and small groups each share1-2 of the questions to the whole class. Add to the essential questions from the list above as needed to complete a list that will guide the inquiry.

**2. Set the stage**: Remind the students of civil rights actions or events prior to 1963 that they have previously studied and identify strategies and key individuals/groups associated with those actions. Explain that they will see many of the same people and groups engaged in the 1963 action and that different groups preferred different strategies.

* Students may have studied strategies such as constitutional revisions during the Reconstruction period (Reconstruction amendments), legal challenges like *Brown* v. *Board*, and nonviolent direct-actions like the Montgomery Bus Boycott.

**3. Conduct the Inquiry:** Divide the class into three working inquiry groups. Each group determines the supporting questions that apply to their packet of readings. Students read independently then collaborate to answer the “Consider:” questions for each source, then answer their supporting questions. Ask each group to present what they learned from each source they review to the class.

* The first group will examine the antecedents to the march, focusing on the work of A. Philip Randolph and Bayard Rustin in using threatened marches on Washington, D.C. to win civil rights gains in the 1940s, other gains in the 1950s, and the lagging progress of the late 1950s and early 1960s. Sources include:
  + 1941 March on Washington flier
  + Executive Order 8802
  + *United We Win* poster (1943)
  + Newspaper front page – headline about Executive Order 9981
  + Timeline of civil rights events 1940-1961
* The second group will examine the planning of the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, focusing on competing goals of civil rights groups, eventual cooperation between he groups to plan the march, and challenges faced in planning the march, including opposition from organizations and the Kennedy Administration. Sources include:
  + Table and image of march planners
  + Table of competing strategies and the agreed-upon goals from the march program
  + Quotes from Malcolm X and Stokely Carmichael
* The third group will examine voices heard at the march and voices missing from the program. They will investigate how the voices of women were excluded from main program and how the more confrontational language in John Lewis’s speech was edited out at the last moment. They will also explore the significance of Dr. Martin Luther King’s speech.
  + Impact of Dr. King’s speech: how the media covered the Aug. 28, 1963 event
  + Excerpts describing how John Lewis’s speech was altered; Bill Moyers; John Lewis
  + Excerpts: women’s inclusion/exclusion from the program; Gail Collins; Pauli Murray
  + Excerpts: Dr. Martin Luther King’s “I Have a Dream” speech

**4. Whole Class Discussion/Extension:**

* Ask representatives from each group to present the key information they learned from each source reviewed. Students should take notes about key information. Display the sources with the student answers to “consider “questions around the room. Students may refer to them later as they complete their summative activity.
* Conduct a whole-class discussion focused on the essential question.

**Assess**: Communicate Conclusions

Teacher choice, focused on providing evidence to support analysis

* Ideas include individual or cooperatively-generated written response to the essential question, response to a prompt or retrospective article about the 1963 march (there are numerous articles from the 50th anniversary of the event), multimedia project, etc.

**Taking Informed Action:**

Research an issue related to civil rights and identify the progress or lack of progress made since the 1963 march. Identify several organizations that continue to advocate change on that issue and explain which organization takes an approach to change that you could support.

**Content Background for the Teacher**

**Themes addressed:**

1. The pivotal role played by A. Philip Randolph and Bayard Rustin in initiating the march
2. The significance of merging competing interests among civil rights organizations into a collaborative effort
3. Efforts to stop or discredit the march
4. The exclusion of women from the list of main speakers

**Key people and organizations:**

* **NALC**: Negro American Labor Council
* **NAACP**: National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
* **SCLC**: Southern Christian Leadership Conference
* **NUL**: National Urban League
* **SNCC**: Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee
* **AJC**: American Jewish Congress
* **NCCIJ**: National Catholic Conference for Interracial Justice
* **NCNW** - National Council of Negro Women
* **NCC** - National Council of Churches

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| --- | --- | --- |
| * NAACP * NUL---------> | * SCLC * CORE * SNCC ------> | * Nation of Islam * Malcolm X * Stokely Carmichael |

Favored legislation, favored education, favored more  
negotiation, nonviolent direct “radical” approaches  
legal actions (1963) action, civil disobedience

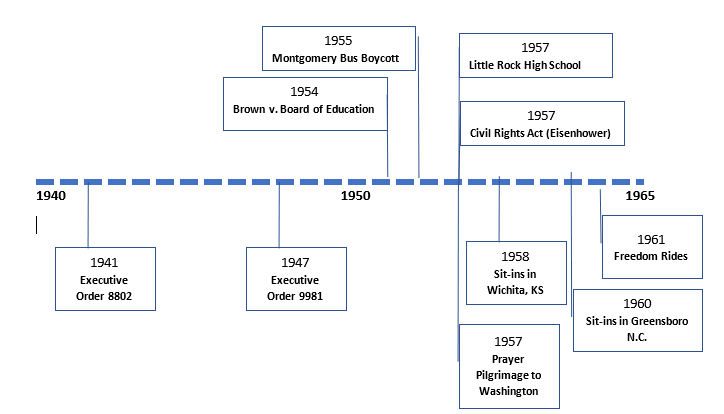
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| **The “Big 6” organizations and their leaders in 1963**   * NAACP – Roy Wilkins * NUL – Whitney Young * SCLC – Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. * CORE -James Farmer * SNCC – John Lewis * NALC – Randolph (and Director of MOW) | **In Addition to the Big 6**   * Dorothy Height (NCNW) * Bayard Rustin * Walter Reuther (UAW) * Joachim Prinz (AJC) * Mathew Ahman (NCCIJ) * Eugene Carson Blake (NCC) |

**Selected Opponents to the March on Washington for jobs and Freedom**

* President Kennedy – opposed at first, but ended up ensuring gov’t cooperation
* AFL-CIO leadership
* Malcolm X
* Hate groups, such as the KKK

**Content Groupings:**

1. **Significant Events Prior to 1963  
   These events will help build a context for the 1963 march. They demonstrate some significant events and gains in the 1940s and 1950s that, while certainly fall short of what was needed and achingly slow, did help provide a sense that change can happen. Gains began to slow in the early 1960s.**

* **1941** : A. Philip Randolph, founding president of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters (union), along with Bayard Rustin, and pastor/activist A. J. Muste proposed a march on Washington, D.C. to pressure President Roosevelt to issue an executive order barring discrimination in defense industries that have federal contracts. The march is canceled when Roosevelt signs Executive Order 8802, or the Fair employment Act.
* **1947** : A. Philip Randolph helps form League the for Non-Violent Civil Disobedience against Military Segregation, eventually convincing president Harry S. Truman to sign Executive Order 9981, ending racial segregation in the U.S. armed forces.
* **1957-1959** A. Philip Randolph and Bayard Rustin formed a partnership with Dr. Martin Luther King to organize the Prayer Pilgrimage for Freedom at the Lincoln Memorial on the third anniversary of the *Brown* v. *Board of Education of Topeka* Supreme Court ruling. The goal was to pressure the federal government into implementing desegregation of schools. Later, Randolph and Rustin organized the Youth March(es) for Integrated Schools in Washington, DC.
* **1959**: Randolph becomes the first president of the Negro American Labor Council NALC), working to end discrimination inside of the labor unions. He also served as the vice-president of the merged AFL-CIO labor union. 

**2. Early planning 1962-summer 1963**

* **1962 -A. Philip Randolph** (at that time the head of the Negro American Labor Council) called for a march on Washington to push for government action to increase economic opportunities for African Americans. The centennial anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation in 1963 would be a time to call out the continuing struggle for rights.
* **May-July, 1963 – Randolph and Bayard Rustin** begin initial plans for a march.   
  Other civil rights leaders and organizations were also seeking an action that would help focus support for comprehensive civil rights legislation.
  + The Big 6 organizations formed the Council for United Civil Rights Leadership (CUCRL) in June-July of 1963 with the purpose of coordinating funding from donors for civil rights work. At the invitation of Randolph, these organizations joined the March on Washington planning committee. Dorothy Height of the National Council of Negro Women also assisted with planning but was given a limited role, mostly attributed to sexism and a patriarchal leadership structure.
  + A. Philip Randolph was named the director, and Bayard Rustin was appointed deputy director. In three days, Rustin produced a plan for organizing the march and spent the next month creating a training manual, planning logistics, and training volunteers in nonviolent methods of crowd control.
  + The March organizers (excluding Dorothy Height) met with President Kennedy to discuss the march and support for Kennedy’s civil rights bill. The president expressed opposition to the march, fearing the crowds and potential violence would upset Southern legislators he needed to support the bill. He later decides to use his administration to remove some barriers and help ensure peace during the march, but also convinced the planners to march to the Washington Monument rather than the U.S. Capitol.
  + March leaders reached out to include union support (UAW supported, AFL-CIO withheld support), as well as several religious civil rights organizations to broaden support among northerners and predominantly white organizations.

**3. August 1963**

* Theday’s program was developed in the weeks preceding the event, including speeches from march organizers and organization leaders, prayers, musical selections, and a pledge to return home to continue the work. No women were originally included among the speakers, prompting protests from Dorothy Height, Pauli Murray, and other female civil rights leaders.
* A. Philip Randolph and Bayard Rustin proposed a “tribute to women” that would highlight 6 women, including Rosa Parks. Daisy Bates (instrumental in the Little Rock integration events). Speaking for Myrlie Evers who could not be present, delivered a 142 word introduction that was written by male organizers that pledged women’s’ support for the male leaders and the movement. Rosa Parks spoke a mere 7 words when she was recognized. No women delivered speeches.
* John Lewis of SNCC included harsh language criticizing the Kennedy Administration’s lack of substantive action on civil rights. He was pressured by Roy Wilkins and others to edit out the criticism, fearing it would damage the efforts to get Kennedy’s civil rights bill passed.
* Dr. Martin Luther King’s “ I Have a Dream” speech represents one of the best examples of American oratory, with the second half of the speech improvised at Mahalia Jackson’s urging to “tell ‘em about the ‘dream.’”

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