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1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom: Fact Sheet

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Contents

| | |
|--|---|
| Introduction | 1 |
| History | 1 |
| Commemorations | 1 |
| Legislation..... | 1 |
| Sample Congressional Speeches and Recognitions | 2 |
| Presidential Proclamations and Remarks | 2 |
| Selected Resources | 2 |

Contacts

| | |
|-------------------------|---|
| Author Information..... | 3 |
|-------------------------|---|

Introduction

This fact sheet is designed to assist congressional offices with work related to the anniversary of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom (the March). It contains a brief history of the March, lists sample commemorations, and cites selected historical resources.

History

The August 28, 1963, March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom is a landmark of the civil rights movement and widely known for Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech. The marchers started at the Washington Monument and progressed along the National Mall to the Lincoln Memorial, where the main program was held. Observers called the size of the March "unprecedented."¹ Organizers anticipated between 100,000 and 150,000 marchers. On the day of the March, the District of Columbia Metropolitan Police Department reported that "by 3 p.m. an estimated 210,000 persons were at the rally," excluding those that left early or arrived late.² National and international press outlets widely reported the March, broadcasting significant television coverage for the time.³

A broad coalition of civil rights and labor groups organized and endorsed the March. The initial idea is credited to its director, A. Philip Randolph, president of the Negro American Labor Council (NALC). Bayard Rustin served as deputy director, in charge of logistics. In addition to Randolph and Rustin, March leadership included John R. Lewis, director of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC); Whitney Young, executive director of the National Urban League (NUL); James L. Farmer Jr., national director of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE); Roy Wilkins, executive secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP); and Martin Luther King Jr., president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC).⁴

March organizers issued 10 official demands, though not all organizations involved endorsed all of them. The demands focused on racial discrimination in accommodations, housing, education, and employment; disenfranchisement; unemployment; and a national minimum wage.

Commemorations

Legislation

H.Res. 352 (108th Congress).

¹ U.S. Congress, Senate Appropriations, District of Columbia Appropriations, *District of Columbia Appropriations for 1964*, hearing on H.R. 7431, 88th Cong., 1st sess., September 28, 1963 (Washington: GPO, 1963), p. 132.

² *Ibid.*, p. 2120.

³ Lucy G. Barber, "In the Great Tradition: The March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, August 28, 1963," in *Marching on Washington: the forging of an American political tradition* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002), pp. 141-178; Gene Roberts and Hank Klibanoff, *The Race Beat: The Press, the Civil Rights Struggle, and the Awakening of a Nation* (New York: Vintage Books, 2007), p. 346; William P. Jones, *The March on Washington: Jobs, Freedom, and the Forgotten History of Civil Rights* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2013), p. 201.

⁴ Barber, *Marching on Washington*, p. 148.

Sample Congressional Speeches and Recognitions

Representative Corrine Brown, “50th Anniversary for the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom,” Extensions of Remarks, *Congressional Record*, vol. 159 (August 2, 2013), pp. E1228-E1229.

Representative Laura Richardson, “Recognizing the 48th Anniversary of the March on Washington,” Extensions of Remarks, *Congressional Record*, vol. 157 (September 2, 2011), p. E1537.

Representative John D. Dingell, “Honoring the 40th Anniversary of the March on Washington,” Extensions of Remarks, *Congressional Record*, vol. 149 (July 24, 2003), pp. E1581-1582.

Presidential Proclamations and Remarks

U.S. President (Trump), “Statement on the 55th Anniversary of Martin Luther King, Jr.’s ‘I Have a Dream’ Speech,” *Daily Compilation of Presidential Documents*, DCPD-201800556 (August 28, 2018).

U.S. President (Obama), “Proclamation 9004—50th Anniversary of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom,” 78 *Federal Register* 53235-53236, August 28, 2013.

U.S. President (Obama), “Remarks at the ‘Let Freedom Ring’ Ceremony Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom,” *Daily Compilation of Presidential Documents*, DCPD-201300581 (August 28, 2013).

U.S. President (Clinton), “Remarks on the 35th Anniversary of the March on Washington in Oak Bluffs, Massachusetts,” *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents*, vol. 34 (August 28, 1998), pp. 1660-1664.

Selected Resources

The Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Online Catalog provides access to a selection of digitized photographs of the March on Washington. Other materials include

- oral histories from participants;
- the “Final Plans for the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, August 28, 1963,” a manual for local organizers, and “We Shall Overcome: March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, August 28, 1963,” a souvenir booklet; and
- items from the exhibit “A Day Like No Other: Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the March on Washington.”

The National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) holds many documents regarding the March on Washington, including

- “Official Program for the March on Washington (1963)”;
- “The March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom” collection, which includes congressional and international reactions to the March; and
- the documentary film *The March*, produced by the United States Information Agency in 1964, and other recordings from the day.

The John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, a part of NARA, holds photographs and a recording of a post-March meeting between President Kennedy and March leaders. The library

also holds digitized letters from the public sent to the president about the March, either supporting or objecting to it.

The U.S. Senate Historical Office has collected floor speeches Senators made before and after the March on August 28, 1963.

The Smithsonian Institution's 1963 March on Washington page contains digitized items related to the March from across its museums.

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