

# Investigating the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom

**Topic:** Civil Rights History

**Grade level:** Grades 4 – 6

**Subject Area:** Social Studies, ELA

**Time Required:** 2 -3 class periods

## Goals/Rationale

- Bring history to life through reenacting a significant historical event.
- Raise awareness that the civil rights movement required the dedication of many leaders and organizations.
- Shed light on the power of words, both spoken and written, to inspire others and make progress toward social change.

## Essential Question

How do leaders use written and spoken words to make change in their communities and government?

## Objectives

- Read, analyze and recite an excerpt from a speech delivered at the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom.
- Identify leaders of the Civil Rights Movement; use primary source material to gather information.
- Reenact the March on Washington to gain a deeper understanding of this historic demonstration.

## Connections to Curriculum Standards

### Common Core State Standards

#### *CCSS.ELA-Literacy RI.5.1*

Quote accurately from a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

#### *CCSS.ELA-Literacy RI.5.2*

Determine two or more main ideas of a text and explain how they are supported by key details; summarize the text.

#### *CCSS.ELA-Literacy RI.5.4*

Determine the meaning of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases in a text relevant to a grade 5 topic or subject area.

#### *CCSS.ELA-Literacy SL.5.6*

Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and tasks, using formal English when appropriate to task and situation.

#### National History Standards for Historical Thinking

Standard 2: The student comprehends a variety of historical sources.

#### NCTE/IRA Standards for the English Language Arts

3. Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts.

4. Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.

### **Prior Knowledge and Skills**

Students should be familiar with the historical context of the civil rights movement and know basic information about the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom.

### **Introduction**

Many students know that Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. gave his historic “I Have a Dream” speech on August 28, 1963, at the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. They may not know, however, that nine other civil rights leaders spoke that day: A. Philip Randolph, Dr. Eugene Carson Blake, John Lewis, Walter Reuther, James Farmer (whose speech was read by Floyd McKissick), Whitney Young, Mathew Ahmann, Roy Wilkins, and Rabbi Joachim Prinz. These ten speakers were known as the “Top Ten,” the team of civil rights activists who, along with Bayard Rustin, organized the March. In this activity, students work in small groups to learn about one of the speakers at the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. They then reenact the March and recite an excerpt from one of the speeches delivered that day.

### **Materials**

- speech excerpt handout (included in downloadable pdf)
- program from the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom (included in downloadable pdf)
- photograph of speakers from the March (included in downloadable pdf)
- biographical information handout (included in downloadable pdf)

### **Procedure**

1. Divide students into ten groups and provide each group with the March program and the photograph of the leaders, a speech excerpt, and biographical information. Have them locate their leader on the program, examine the photograph, and share any prior knowledge about the person.
2. Have students read the biographical information provided. Alternatively, have students research their speaker and share information with group members.
3. Have students read the speech excerpt and discuss the following:
  - How would you summarize the text?
  - What are two main ideas in the text?
  - What words from the text provide evidence of the main ideas?
  - What are other important words? What do they mean?
  - What feelings will they put forth when they recite the speech?
4. Have each group practice reciting their speech excerpt in preparation for a reenactment of the March.
5. In further preparation for the reenactment, have students make signs depicting their wishes for racial justice and equal rights. Practice singing freedom songs such as *We Shall Overcome* and *This Little Light of Mine*.
6. After students march on a pre-planned route, singing as they walk, assemble the group to hear the speech excerpts. Introduce each group to recite its excerpt for the class.
7. Conclude the lesson with a discussion on challenges to racial justice today.

## **Assessment**

Have students write their responses to the discussion questions.

## **Extension**

Have each group conduct further research on its assigned leader and create a Pinterest page to show the websites, photographs, and videos they think best represent the person. Have each group present the resources and reasons for choosing them.

# **Excerpts from Speeches from the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom**

## **August 28, 1963**

### ***A. Philip Randolph, Director, March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom***

Fellow Americans, we are gathered here in the largest demonstration in the history of this nation... It was not until the streets and jails of Birmingham were filled that Congress began to think about civil rights legislation. It was not until thousands demonstrated in the South that lunch counters... were integrated... The March on Washington is not the climax of our struggle but a new beginning not only for the Negro but for all Americans who thirst for a better life.

### ***Reverend Eugene Carson Blake, 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***

Yes, we come to march behind and with these amazingly able leaders of the Negro American... They have offered their bodies to arrest and violence, to the hurt and indignity of fire hoses and dogs... for this just cause... We come to present ourselves this day, our souls and bodies... We come in prayer... We come in faith that the God who made us... will overrule the fears and hatred that so far have prevented the establishment of full racial justice in our beloved country... And we come in that love... which reconciles into true community all men of every color, race and nation.

### ***John Lewis, National Chairman, Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee***

To those who say "be patient and wait," we must say that we cannot be patient... we want to be free now. We are tired. We are tired of being beaten by policemen. We are tired of seeing our people locked up in jail over and over again, and then you holler to be patient. How long can we be patient? We want our freedom and we want it now... We will march with the spirit of love and with the spirit of dignity that we have shown here today.

We must say wake up America, wake up for we cannot stop and we will not and cannot be patient.

### ***Walter Reuther, President, United Automobile, Aerospace and Agricultural Implement Workers of America, AFL-CIO; Chairman, Industrial Union Department, AFL-CIO***

I am here today... because the struggle for civil rights and the struggle for equal opportunity is not the struggle of Negro Americans but the struggle for every American to join in. If we can have full employment... for the negative end of war then why can't we have a job for every American in the pursuit of peace? This rally is not the end, it is the beginning. So let this be the beginning... so that we can win freedom and justice and equality... for every American... from Boston to Birmingham, from New York to New Orleans and from Michigan to Mississippi.

***Floyd McKissick, Chairman, Congress of Racial Equality will read the words of James Farmer, National Director, Congress of Racial Equality***

The message that I shall give to you today was written by Jim Farmer from a...jail and I shall quote his message now:

“From a South Louisiana parish jail, I salute the March on Washington for jobs and Freedom. Two hundred thirty-two freedom fighters jailed with me ... also send their greetings. I wanted to be with you with all my heart on this great day. My imprisoned brothers and sisters wanted to be there too...

“You have come from all the nation and in one mighty voice you have spoken to the nation... we will not stop our demands for freedom now. We will not slow down. We will not stop our militant peaceful demonstrations. We will not stop until the heavy weight ...of oppression is removed from our backs and...we can stand tall together again.”

***Whitney Young, Executive Director, National Urban League***

... We must work together...to see that Negro Americans are accepted as first-class citizens. ..They must march from the congested, ill-equipped schools...to the well-equipped, integrated facilities through the city. They must march from the play areas in crowded and unsafe streets to the newly opened areas in the parks and recreational centers...they must march from a present feeling of despair and hopelessness, despair and frustration, to a renewed faith and confidence...walking together to PTA meetings, to the libraries, to voter registration booths. Our march is a march for America.

***Mathew Ahmann, Executive Director, National Catholic Conference for Interracial Justice***

We are gathered a long 100 years after Lincoln declared slavery at an end in the United States. Yet, slavery is all too close to us as we demonstrate for equality and freedom today...we have permitted racial discrimination to remain with us too long...But we are gathered ...to dedicate ourselves to building a people, a nation, a world which is free...of discrimination based on race, creed, color or national origin... There is no turning back.

***Roy Wilkins, Executive Secretary, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People***

My friends, we are here today because we want the Congress of the United States to hear from us in person what many of us have been telling our public officials back home and, that is, WE WANT FREEDOM NOW... We want employment and with it we want the pride and responsibility and self-respect that goes with equal access to jobs...the President should join us in fighting to be sure that we get something more than pap. Now we expect the passage of an effective civil rights bill. If those who support the bill will fight for it as hard as the southern opposition fights against it, victory will be ours.

***Rabbi Joachim Prinz, President, American Jewish Congress***

When I was the rabbi of the Jewish community in Berlin under the Hitler regime, I learned many things. The most important thing that I learned under those tragic circumstances was that bigotry and hatred are not the most urgent problem. The most urgent...problem is silence. A great people which had created a great civilization had become a nation of silent onlookers. They remained silent in the face of hate, in the face of brutality and in the face of mass murder. America must not remain silent. Not merely black America, but all of America. It must speak up and act, from the President down to the humblest of us, and not for the sake of the Negro, not for the sake of the black community but for the sake of the image, the dream, the idea, and the aspiration of America itself.

***Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., President, Southern Christian Leadership Conference***

I am happy to join with you today in what will go down in history as the greatest demonstration for freedom in the history of our nation. ....Now is the time to make real the promises of democracy...Let us not seek to satisfy our thirst for freedom by drinking from the cup of bitterness and hatred...We cannot turn back...No, no, we are not satisfied and we will not be satisfied until justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream...Let freedom ring...From every mountainside, let freedom ring. And when we allow freedom to ring, when we let it ring from every village, from every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up 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!"

# MARCH ON WASHINGTON FOR JOBS AND FREEDOM

AUGUST 28, 1963

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## LINCOLN MEMORIAL PROGRAM

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

**"WE SHALL OVERCOME"**

# Photographs of the Leaders of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom

*Mathew Ahmann*

St. John's College, online magazine

[http://issuu.com/csbsju/docs/2013\\_full\\_st\\_john\\_s\\_magazine\\_pdf/27?e=1392978/450015](http://issuu.com/csbsju/docs/2013_full_st_john_s_magazine_pdf/27?e=1392978/450015)

Several photographs of Ahmann, an alumnus of St. John's College, appear in this article describing his involvement in the civil rights movement. Captions included.

*Reverend Eugene Carson Blake*

National Council of Churches USA

<http://www.nccusa.org/news/NCCPresBlake.htm>

Several photographs including the May 26, 1961 cover of *Time Magazine* and an August 28, 1963 White House photograph of President Kennedy with speakers from the March on Washington.

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, online newspaper

<http://www.ajc.com/photo/news/look-some-listed-participants/pxKPt/>

A 1964 photograph from the Associated Press.

*James Farmer*

University of Mary Washington, James Farmer Collection

<http://archive.umw.edu:8080/vital/access/manager/Collection/umw:1012>

Over 45 photographs that span Farmer's life. Includes one photograph of him as a young boy, images of him at civil rights actions, and photographs of him with President Nixon and President Carter. Captions included.

Lyndon B. Johnson Library

<http://digital.lbjlibrary.org/record/W46-3>

White House photograph of Farmer with President Johnson from December 4, 1963.

*John Lewis*

Academy of Achievement

<http://www.achievement.org/autodoc/page/lew0gal-1>

Seventeen photographs including images from civil rights actions of the 1960s as well as current photographs. Captions included.



*Reverend Martin Luther King Jr.*

National Geographic for Kids

<http://kids.nationalgeographic.com/explore/history/martin-luther-king-jr.html>

Ten photographs with student-friendly captions that depict key moments in King's life.

Beaumont Enterprise: Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., His Life in Pictures

<http://www.beaumontenterprise.com/photos/article/Dr-Martin-Luther-King-Jr-His-life-in-pictures-956071.php#photo-516604>

A slideshow of 125 photographs from King's college years through the aftermath of his death. Associated Press photographs with captions.

The Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change ("The King Center")

<http://www.thekingcenter.org/archive/tile/59506>

Twenty images, including a few documents, of King delivering speeches, meeting dignitaries, and spending time with his family.

*Rabbi Joachim Prinz*

Alliance for Justice

<http://afjjusticewatch.blogspot.com/2013/08/the-most-tragic-problem-is-silence.html>

The author of this article attended Hebrew School at Temple B'nai Abraham in New Jersey, Prinz's congregation. There is a photograph of Prinz with Martin Luther King Jr., Eugene Carson Blake, and Walter Reuther.

American Jewish Archives

<http://americanjewisharchives.org/exhibits/aje/details.php?id=519>

A photograph of Rabbi Joachim Prinz speaking at the March on Washington. Bayard Rustin, deputy director of the March, is to his right.

*Asa Philip Randolph*

Philip Randolph Pullman Porter Museum

[http://www.aphiliprandolphmuseum.com/evo\\_history4.html](http://www.aphiliprandolphmuseum.com/evo_history4.html)

This history of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters describes Randolph's role in organizing the first labor union for African Americans. In the section on the March on Washington, there is a small photograph of Randolph; Bayard Rustin is on his left.

National Archives, U.S. Information Agency

<http://research.archives.gov/search?sw-arc-id=541992&sw-desc-level=series&expression=a+philip+randolph>

Three photographs of Randolph at the Lincoln Memorial. Two of the images include other leaders of the March on Washington. Captions included.

Getty Images

<http://www.gettyimages.com/editorial/a.-philip-randolph-pictures>

A collection of 53 images taken from 1937–1976. This commercial site places a label across each photograph. Captions included.

*Walter Reuther*

Michigan History for Kids

<http://scope.oakland.k12.mi.us/docs/SS/Michigan%20History%20for%20Kids/MHK%20Labor%202.pdf>

This four-page biographical article on Walter Reuther includes four photographs. The first two have captions and the second two, taken by a *Detroit News* photographer, are in a sidebar which describes the May 26, 1937 Battle of the Overpass.

*Roy Wilkins*

Library of Congress blog

<http://blogs.loc.gov/loc/2014/05/the-power-of-one-roy-wilkins-and-the-civil-rights-movement/>

This profile of Wilkins includes three photographs: one with Martin Luther King Jr., another with President Johnson, and a third one at the March on Washington. Captions included.

Lyndon B. Johnson Library

[http://digital.lbjlibrary.org/items/browse?search=&collection=&type=&advanced%5B0%5D%5Belement\\_id%5D=51&advanced%5B0%5D%5Btype%5D=contains&advanced%5B0%5D%5Bterms%5D=still+image&advanced%5B1%5D%5Belement\\_id%5D=114&advanced%5B1%5D%5Btype%5D=contains&advanced%5B1%5D%5Bterms%5D=civil+rights&submit\\_search=Search&tags=&page=1](http://digital.lbjlibrary.org/items/browse?search=&collection=&type=&advanced%5B0%5D%5Belement_id%5D=51&advanced%5B0%5D%5Btype%5D=contains&advanced%5B0%5D%5Bterms%5D=still+image&advanced%5B1%5D%5Belement_id%5D=114&advanced%5B1%5D%5Btype%5D=contains&advanced%5B1%5D%5Bterms%5D=civil+rights&submit_search=Search&tags=&page=1)

Nine photographs of a January 18, 1964 meeting with President Johnson and civil rights leaders. There are some interesting candid images of Wilkins. Captions included.

*Whitney Young*

John F. Kennedy Library and Museum

<http://www.jfklibrary.org/Asset-Viewer/Archives/JFKWHP-AR6998-A.aspx>

A photograph of President Kennedy, Whitney Young, and Henry Steeger III from January 23, 1962. Caption included.



Leaders of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom at the Lincoln Memorial. Back row, L to R: Mathew Ahman, Rabbi Joachim Prinz, John Lewis, Reverend Eugene Carson Blake, Floyd McKissick, Walter Reuther. Front row, L to R: Whitney Young, Cleveland Robinson, A. Philip Randolph, Reverend Martin Luther King Jr., Roy Wilkins. Note: James Farmer, one of the key organizers of the March, is not pictured here. Farmer was jailed after his arrest at a protest in Louisiana and asked Floyd McKissick to represent him. Cleveland Robinson, seated in the front row, was the administrative chairman of the March but did not address the crowd at the Lincoln Memorial rally. (Photograph 27 – 0328, National Archives, US Information Agency, Press and Public Relations Service, August 28, 1963.)

## Biographical Information

### (Asa) Philip Randolph

- Director of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom.
- He was born on April 15, 1889 in Crescent City, Florida. He was 74 years old at the time of the March.
- As a young boy, he would recite sermons, imitating his father who was a minister. He was the valedictorian, the student with the highest rank, who spoke at his high school graduation.
- He grew up during a time of intense violence and injustice against African Americans.
- As a young man, he organized workers so that they could be treated more fairly, receiving better wages and better working conditions. He believed that black and white working people should join together to fight for better jobs and pay.
- With his friend, Chandler Owen, he created *The Messenger*, a magazine for the black community. The articles expressed strong opinions, such as African Americans should not go to war if they have to be segregated in the military.
- Randolph was asked to organize black workers for the Pullman Company, a railway company. He became head of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, the first black labor union. Labor unions are organizations that fight for workers' rights. Sleeping car porters were people who served food on trains, prepared beds, and attended train passengers.
- He planned a large demonstration in 1941 that would bring 10,000 African Americans to the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, DC to try to get better jobs and pay. The plan convinced President Roosevelt to take action. When Roosevelt signed an executive order banning discrimination in defense jobs, Randolph called off the march.
- Succeeded in convincing President Truman to integrate the US military after World War II.
- Originally named the 1963 march, "Emancipation for Jobs." When other civil rights leaders were not interested, he changed the name to "March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom" so it would appeal to them.
- His big concerns were jobs, unemployment, and workers' rights. He believed all workers should receive fair pay and be treated with dignity. He thought that true equality would come when people earned enough money to live a decent life.

## **Eugene Carson Blake**

- He was born on November 7, 1906 in St. Louis, Missouri. He was 57 years old at the time of the March.
- He spent a year studying at the University of Edinburgh in Scotland and then graduated from Princeton University in 1928. He spent the following year teaching English in Lahore, Pakistan (it was India at the time.)
- He worked as a Presbyterian minister in New York and California for almost 20 years.
- Stated Clerk (executive head) of the United Presbyterian Church and former president of the National Council of Churches.
- He became the secretary general to the World Council of Churches, an organization which brings together churches around the world to improve people's lives through better education, health care, and improving human rights.
- On July 4, 1963, he was arrested with 283 other activists for trying to integrate an amusement park. He was the only white leader who spoke at the March who had been arrested in a civil rights action.
- One of three religious leaders invited to speak at the March.
- He was one of the March leaders who pressured John Lewis to change his speech at the last minute. Blake thought the language was too strong.
- Helped integrate national offices of the Presbyterian Church.
- Planned participation of church support for civil rights.
- Justice and fairness were the most important values to him.
- He had been former President Eisenhower's pastor during his time in office. After the March, Kennedy asked him to meet with Eisenhower to get the former president's help in convincing lawmakers to pass the civil rights bill. Blake then met with Kennedy for over an hour to report on the Eisenhower meeting.
- He once said, "Ministers must risk being wrong rather than to be silent and safe."

## John Lewis

- He was born on February 21, 1940 outside of Troy, Alabama. At 25 years old, he was the youngest speaker at the time of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom.
- His father was a sharecropper and Lewis, from an early age, worked alongside him. As a young boy, he practiced his preaching skills on his “congregation” of chickens and even baptized them. Instead of starting farm work in the morning, he would hide and then jump on the school bus when it arrived, so as to not miss school.
- Growing up during segregation, he was puzzled by what he saw around him. Not being allowed into the public library made him furious. His family had to bring food on road trips since they would not be able to stop at restaurants.
- He was inspired by Martin Luther King Jr. from the first time he heard him on the radio. Lewis followed the news of the bus boycott in Montgomery which was about fifty miles from his home. He wanted to fight for civil rights, too.
- As a student at Fisk University, he studied how to fight injustice with “nonviolence.” He helped create SNCC (pronounced “snick”), the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, and then became its national chairman. SNCC was an important civil rights organization that led young people to participate in sit-ins and other protests. Lewis was one of the first students to participate in sit-ins and Freedom Rides.
- He believed that the best way to challenge segregation was by taking action that would get people’s attention, including police and elected officials.
- Between 1960-1966, he was jailed more than 40 times and beaten severely several times.
- He was forced to change parts of his March on Washington speech by government and religious leaders who did not like the angry tone and some of the sentences. They thought it would make people take dangerous action.
- A US Congressman representing Georgia since 1986, Lewis has devoted his life to working for justice.
- The John F. Kennedy Presidential Library Foundation honored him with the Profile in Courage Award for Lifetime Achievement, and President Obama awarded him the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

## Walter Reuther

- He was born on September 1, 1907, in Wheeling, West Virginia. He was almost 56 years old at the time of the March.
- The second oldest of five children. His father, who worked in a brewery – a factory that makes beer, was a union member. Walter learned about justice and social issues through lively family debates.
- He was trained as a “tool and die” worker, a skilled worker who makes tools and other machine parts. He moved to Detroit to work in the automobile industry. He saw early on how poorly workers were treated. He believed everyone deserved to be treated with dignity and respect.
- Reuther began to organize workers into the United Auto Workers union so that they could have a voice in the automobile industry. He helped lead strikes during which union members stopped working until their employer such as Ford or Chrysler would negotiate, or discuss their demands.
- The struggle to organize workers was dangerous. Automobile companies such as Ford and Chrysler did not want to have to have unions which would give workers more power. Reuther was attacked while trying to give out union information. Gunmen fired into his home and wounded his right arm.
- He was elected president of the United Auto Workers, a powerful, mostly white labor union, and served 1946-1970.
- As an advisor to four US presidents, he used his influence to help those in need.
- The United Auto Workers Union provided support to Cesar Chavez and the United Farm Workers in their effort to gain better wages and working conditions.
- Reliable friend of the civil rights movement and a friend of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. His union gave money to Martin Luther King Jr. to help free hundreds of young people jailed during the Birmingham demonstrations.
- His guiding philosophy: “There is no greater calling than to serve your fellow men. There is no greater contribution than to help the weak. There is no greater satisfaction than to do it well.”
- At first he was against the March. He worked closely with President Kennedy and wanted to keep good relationships with him and other government officials. After Kennedy met with him and civil rights leaders, Reuther invited the activists to lunch to discuss plans for moving forward with the demonstration.

## James Farmer

- He was born on January 12, 1920 in Marshall, Texas. He was 43 years old at the time of the March.
- He was the son of a preacher and scholar, and a grandson of a former slave. His father is believed to have been the first black man in Texas to earn a doctoral degree (Ph.D.) He worked as a minister and college professor. The family's house was full of books and conversations about ideas.
- Farmer did well in school and began attending Wiley College at the age of 14. He was captain of the debate team, whose story is portrayed in the film *The Great Debaters*. He was president of his senior class.
- He first became aware of segregation when, as a young boy, he asked his mother if they could go into a store to buy a drink. She had to explain that they could not because of the color of their skin.
- He wanted to devote his life to making things more fair. During his graduate studies at Howard University, he learned about Mohandas Gandhi, a leader in India who led people to fight for change through nonviolent civil disobedience.
- Farmer created the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) in 1942 and became its National Director. CORE was the first organization to use non-violence to fight segregation. He led the first sit-ins, in 1943, and a Freedom Ride in 1947.
- As National Director of CORE, he organized the Freedom Rides of 1961 to challenge segregation in buses and bus stations across different states. Freedom Riders were beaten and arrested. Farmer spent forty days in Mississippi jails in harsh and humiliating conditions. He risked his life in organizing demonstrations.
- He was one of the "Big Six" leaders of the March, but was in jail at the time of the demonstration, having been arrested at a protest in Louisiana. He chose not to leave fellow activists in jail to attend the March. He asked Floyd McKissick, the National Chairman of CORE, to read his speech.
- He ran for US Congress in 1968 but lost the race to Shirley Chisholm, an African-American woman who also supported better access to jobs, healthcare, and education for people of all races.
- Farmer worked in the administration of President Nixon as an assistant secretary in the Department of Health, Education and Welfare.
- President Clinton awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom to him in 1998, a year before Farmer's death.



## Whitney Young

- He was born on July 31, 1921 in Lincoln Ridge, Kentucky. He was 42 years old at time of the March.
- His father was a teacher and head of the Lincoln Institute, a black high school. Young watched his father carefully. His father knew how to talk with white businessmen and government officials to raise money for the school.
- Even though his father was head of a school, Young lived in a segregated world. He had to drink out of separate water fountains, sit in a separate section in the movie theater, and eat in certain restaurants. He was called names on his way to elementary school. He admired how his mother spoke out when she or anyone in her family was treated with disrespect.
- He graduated from Kentucky State College and wanted to go to medical school but not many programs accepted blacks. After college, he taught and coached sports in a high school.
- He served in the Army in World War II. Black soldiers were segregated from whites. Young learned that he had a talent for working out disagreements between black soldiers and white officers.
- Young first became involved in the National Urban League, the second oldest civil rights organization for blacks, when he attended graduate school in social work at the University of Minnesota. The National Urban League was created by blacks and whites to improve conditions for blacks in cities. It is still in existence today.
- After he received his graduate degree, he taught social work at a college and worked as a dean, or head, of a school of social work.
- He stayed involved in the National Urban League and was elected executive director in 1961. Young was very skilled at working with wealthy white people in business, government, and organizations. He knew how to explain the challenges blacks faced and was able to raise large amounts of money so that people could learn job skills, find jobs, and better their health and education.
- He advised three presidents.
- At first he did not want to hold the March because he wanted to keep good relationships with the president and other government officials. He did not want to cause conflicts with them. He eventually agreed to support the March.

## Mathew Ahmann

- He was born on September 10, 1931 in St. Cloud, Minnesota. He was the second youngest speaker at the March at 32 years old.
- He grew up in a mostly white community but from an early age took action when he witnessed someone being treated unfairly because of race or religion. When he was a teenager, his cousins made fun of a Jewish woman who was a dinner guest. He demanded that they stop. She stayed in touch after this incident.
- A graduate of St. John's College, he then attended the University of Chicago for graduate studies but left to become a civil rights activist.
- In Chicago, he worked with Sargent Shriver, President Kennedy's brother-in-law, to convince Catholic leaders and church members that they should get involved in the fight for racial justice.
- He created and then became the director of the National Catholic Conference for Interracial Justice, an organization that encouraged Catholic leaders and church members to learn, discuss, and take action to help attain civil rights for everyone.
- Traveling throughout the United States, he helped create groups all over the country to involve Catholics in the struggle for equal rights.
- He organized the 1963 National Conference on Race and Religion which was the first meeting in which leaders of the three main religious groups of the United States – Jews, Catholics, and Protestants—came together to speak out in favor of civil rights. Martin Luther King Jr. and other March leaders spoke at this historic meeting.
- He is the author of two books, one of which is called, *The New Negro*, and includes writings by well-known black writers such as James Baldwin.
- He was one of three religious leaders invited to speak at the March.
- After protesters were terribly beaten at the 1965 Selma, Alabama march for voting rights, Reverend Ralph Abernathy called for religious leaders to come to Selma to support the protest. Ahmann organized priests, nuns, and other Catholics all over the country to travel to Alabama for a second demonstration to complete the planned route of the march.

## Roy Wilkins

- He was born on August 30, 1901 in St. Louis, Missouri. He was 62 years old at the time of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom.
- His mother died when he was four years old and he went to live with his uncle and aunt in St. Paul, Minnesota. His uncle taught him that blacks could do well in the United States if they got a good education and stayed out of trouble.
- When he was in college at the University of Minnesota, a young black man was lynched (killed) in Duluth, Minnesota. Wilkins became committed to fighting for racial justice.
- As editor of *The Call*, Kansas City's black newspaper, he made his strong opinions known about the widespread segregation in that city.
- He believed the best way to make things more fair for African Americans was to work through the legal system, the courts, and to challenge unfair laws.
- He went to work for the NAACP in 1931 and became its leader in 1955. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People was one of the oldest and most important civil rights organizations in the US and is still in existence today. Wilkins was executive director until 1977 (20 years!)
- He played an important role in challenging segregation through court cases such as *Brown v. Board of Education*. In this case, the NAACP argued that students could not receive an equal education in segregated schools. Winning the case was a turning point in civil rights history.
- Wanted to stay on good terms with government leaders and not come into conflict with them.
- At first, he did not support the idea of having the March because he did not think it was the best way to achieve equal rights. When it was clear that a main goal of the March was to support a new civil rights law, he decided to support it.
- When he saw that fifteen civil rights leaders had been chosen to plan the March, he chose himself and five others to be the main planners: A. Philip Randolph, Whitney Young, James Farmer, Martin Luther King Jr., John Lewis, and himself. They were called the Big Six.
- He was a journalist and editor before he became a civil rights activist.
- In 1967, President Johnson awarded him the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

## **Rabbi Joachim Prinz**

- Born in a small village in Upper Silesia (which was Germany and is now Poland) on May 10, 1902. He was 61 years old at the March.
- His family was not religious but he became a rabbi and, at 24 years old, the youngest rabbi ever to lead a congregation in Berlin, Germany. He served as a rabbi there for over eleven years. He was so popular that people waited in line to go to his services.
- He wrote and spoke about the dangers of Nazism long before Adolph Hitler came into power in 1933. Under Hitler, the government began to segregate and take away the rights of Jews and other minorities. But many German Jews did not think Hitler was a threat. Prinz urged Jews to leave Germany.
- He was arrested several times and then forced to leave Germany in 1937. With a pregnant wife and two children, he traveled by ship to New York.
- When he became a rabbi of a large congregation in New Jersey in 1939, many new members joined. It was not unusual for 1,000 people to come to a service.
- He worked with national and international organizations on such issues as getting funds for Jews who had lost possessions during World War II, and helping to create the State of Israel. He even visited his former home, Berlin, which had been destroyed during the war.
- President of American Jewish Congress 1958-1966.
- Committed to civil rights struggle. Participated in demonstrations and had close relationships with the black community. In April, 1960, he led a demonstration in front of a Woolworth's in New York City to protest segregation in the South.

## Reverend Martin Luther King Jr.

- Born on January 15, 1929 in Atlanta Georgia. He was the third youngest speaker at the March at 34 years old.
- Growing up in the segregated south, he faced discrimination. A white man who owned a neighborhood store would not let his son be friends with King. Also, the boys had to go to separate schools.
- He went to Morehouse College like his father, and then was president of his class at Crozier Theological Seminary, a mostly white school. He also received a very difficult degree to earn, a Ph.D., from Boston University.
- He was a young minister in Montgomery, Alabama when Rosa Parks was arrested for not giving up her seat to a white person. He was selected to be president of the Montgomery Improvement Association, the organization that led the bus boycott after Rosa Parks was arrested.
- King was committed to non-violent resistance based on the teachings of Mohandas K. Gandhi who had led India to independence from Great Britain. Non-violent resistance means that you take action to challenge something that isn't fair but you don't use weapons or other forms of violence.
- He believed in loving one's enemy and creating a community based on love.
- Believed active protest and direct action were the best way to end segregation.
- With Bayard Rustin, created the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) to organize protests and demonstrations against segregation. He was elected president of the organization in 1957.
- Led many protest campaigns, including Project C in Birmingham, Alabama in 1962-1963 to desegregate stores and businesses. Even high school students marched in these demonstrations and provoked a violent reaction from police.
- After President Kennedy introduced a civil rights law, King thought the March would encourage Congress (the people who make our laws) to vote for it.
- FBI "bugged" or wiretapped King's telephones because they thought he was a Communist.
- He was newer to the civil rights movement than some of the other leaders but he was the most well-known.
- He received the Nobel Peace Prize at age 35.