

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!"

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