

Marching for Equal Rights: Evaluating the Success of the 1963 March on Washington

Topic: March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom

Grade Level: 9-12

Subject Area: US History after World War II – History and Government

Time Required: 1-2 hours

Goals/Rationale

The August 28, 1963 March on Washington is well known as the largest civil rights march of its time. Over 200,000 people attended and heard speeches delivered by the major civil rights leaders. But, why was it considered a success? What makes a march successful?

Essential Question: How did civil rights activists use non-violent direct action in the 1950s and 1960s?

Connection to Curricula (Standards)

National History Standards

US History, Era 9

Standard 3B: The student understands the “New Frontier” and the “Great Society.”

Standard 4A: The student understands the “Second Reconstruction” and its advancement of civil rights.

Common Core Standards

RH.9-10.1: Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, attending to such features as the date and origin of the information.

RH.9-10.2: Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events or ideas develop over the course of the text.

RH.9-10.8: Assess the extent to which the reasoning and evidence in a text support the author’s claims.

W.9-10.2: Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

W.11-12.1: Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

SL.9-10.1 and 11-12.1: Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9–10 and 11-12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

SL.9-10.3: Evaluate a speaker’s point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric, identifying any fallacious reasoning or exaggerated or distorted evidence.

SL.9-10.4: Present information, findings, and supporting evidence clearly, concisely, and logically such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and task.

Massachusetts History and Social Science Framework

USH.T4 - Defending democracy: the Cold War and civil rights at home

GOV.T1 - Foundations of government in the United States

Objectives

Students will:

- consider what makes a non-violent protest march successful.
- analyze primary sources.
- evaluate the success of the August 28, 1963 March on Washington.
- discuss and write the rationales for their conclusions.

Materials

1. Handout – “Evaluating the Success of the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom” (included in this PDF)
2. [July 11, 1963 Memorandum from Rodney H. Clurman to Charles Horsky](#) which details the careful planning involved in preparing for the March.
3. [July 17, 1963 Press Conference](#) in which President Kennedy responds to a question about whether the planned march in August would be a handicap to him, and he responds in the negative and discusses the importance of addressing the civil rights issues that give rise to these kinds of demonstrations.
4. [August 7, 1963 letter to the leaders of the National Catholic Conference for Interracial Justice from John P. Sisson](#), a member of that organization, which discusses the importance of having a large turnout of white people, especially Catholics, at the March on Washington.
5. [August 13, 1963 letter to President Kennedy from A. Philip Randolph](#) discussing the March and asking for an appointment to meet with the President on August 28.
6. [August 20, 1963 Press Conference](#) in which President Kennedy responds to a question about what effect he thinks the March will have, and he responds that it will bring attention to the strong concerns of African Americans.
7. [August 28, 1963 Lincoln Memorial Program for the March.](#)
8. [August 28, 1963 NARA-541997 photo](#) of crowds overflowing the given area.
9. [August 28, 1963 NARA-542008 photo](#) of camera crew on the scene.
10. [August 28, 1963 NARA-542045 photo](#) of the crowd assembling.
11. [August 28, 1963 NARA-542068 photo](#) of King speaking.
12. [August 28, 1963 NARA-49737](#) selected video of the day.
13. [August 28, 1963 Press Release](#) with President Kennedy’s official statement regarding the March.
14. [August 28, 1963 Associated Press coverage of the event.](#)
15. [September 10, 1963 Proclamation 3554](#), from President Kennedy in which he calls the attempt of Governor George Wallace and other Alabama State officials to keep Alabama public schools segregated an obstruction of justice, and demands that the resistance end.
16. [September 16, 1963 telegram from Roy Wilkins to President Kennedy](#) in which he decries the bombing of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church that killed four children and demands action from the federal government—including the passage of a strong civil rights bill. If the federal government does not respond, Wilkins notes that African Americans will need to rally together to protect their people.
17. [November 14, 1963 Press Conference](#) in which President Kennedy is asked about the status of the civil rights bill and explains that it may not be passed in 1963.

Historical Background and Context

In the mid-1950s and early 1960s, one significant form of civil rights activism involved non-violent direct action. The 1960 sit-in movement, the 1961 Freedom Rides, and the 1963 Birmingham Campaign all set the stage for the largest civil rights march of its time. Planning for the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom began in the spring of 1963, with the involvement of “the Big Six,” prominent leaders of some of the major civil rights organizations: Martin Luther King Jr. (Southern Christian Leadership Conference), James Farmer (Congress of Racial Equality), John Lewis (Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee), A. Philip Randolph (Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters), Roy Wilkins (National Association for the

Advancement of Colored People), and Whitney Young (National Urban League). One of the main goals of the March was the passage of comprehensive civil rights legislation.

On June 11, 1963, President Kennedy spoke to the nation about civil rights and presented the Civil Rights Act of 1963 to Congress on June 19, 1963. When he was informed about the planned March on Washington, he was initially concerned that a large demonstration at the Capitol might intimidate some senators who would use it as an excuse to vote against his broad-reaching bill which included provisions for equal access to privately owned establishments such as theaters, restaurants and motels; authorizing the attorney general to initiate school desegregation suits when requested by people unable to initiate or maintain legal proceedings; and equal voting standards.

Despite President Kennedy's concerns, plans for the March developed rapidly. Bayard Rustin, a veteran of civil rights activism, took charge of the operation, renting a tenement in Harlem as his headquarters. Organizers sought the support of labor unions and reached out through religious organizations and other socially active groups to bring in as many participants as possible.

But, not everyone was supportive of this demonstration. The Nation of Islam and Malcolm X belittled the effort, and the Executive Board of the American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) declined to endorse the event.

On August 28, 1963, more than 200,000 Americans of all races celebrated the centennial of the Emancipation Proclamation by joining the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. The "Big Six" led the March (all except James Farmer, who was imprisoned in Louisiana), but the most memorable moment came when Martin Luther King Jr., delivered his "I Have a Dream" speech from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial. The March was orderly and without any violent incidents. The media broadcast the event around the nation and world, providing images of an interracial crowd peacefully demanding change.

Although the March gave hope to many Americans across the country that civil rights problems would be addressed, resistance still flared in many regions. A few days later, in early September, the Governor of Alabama, George Wallace, declared that his state would not desegregate its schools, and on September 15, 1963, a bomb at the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham killed four young African-American girls. By the time of President Kennedy's assassination on November 22, 1963, the civil rights bill had overcome hurdles, but was stalled in Congress.

Prior Knowledge and Skills

Students should have a basic understanding of the struggle for civil rights in the United States during the 1950s and early 1960s.

Procedure

1. Discuss with students the meaning of non-violent direct action protests and review with students the various non-violent direct action protests that civil rights activists participated in during the 1950s and 1960s.
2. Provide students with the handout "Evaluating the Success of the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom" and ask students to brainstorm what they consider makes a march for social change successful. Take notes of these standards for the class, asking students to fill in the standards in first column of their handout. [Some standards might include clear goals for the march, good planning, a large turnout,

- focusing national and/or international attention on the issues addressed at the march, substantive changes addressing the problems that gave rise to the march (i.e., passage of the civil rights bill).]
3. Discuss with the students a brief history of the August 28, 1963 March on Washington.
 4. Tell students they are going to use the standards they have brainstormed as they go to the *1963: The Struggle for Civil Rights* microsite to analyze primary sources which will help them determine what aspects of the March they think was fully successful or less than fully successful. Tell them to locate primary sources from the list you provide which they will use to fill in the “Primary Source Used and Evidence” column of their handout. Provide them with a list of these primary sources for their investigation:
 - [July 11, 1963 Memorandum from Rodney H. Clurman to Charles Horsky](#)
 - [July 17, 1963 Press Conference](#)
 - [August 7, 1963 letter to the leaders of the National Catholic Conference for Interracial Justice from John P. Sisson](#)
 - [August 13, 1963 letter to President Kennedy from A. Philip Randolph](#)
 - [August 20, 1963 Press Conference](#)
 - [August 28, 1963 Lincoln Memorial Program for the March](#)
 - [August 28, 1963 NARA-541997 photo of crowds overflowing the given area](#)
 - [August 28, 1963 NARA-542008 photo of camera crew on the scene](#)
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 - [August 28, 1963 Press Release with President Kennedy’s official statement regarding the March](#)
 - [August 28, 1963 Associated Press coverage of the event](#)
 - [September 10, 1963 Proclamation 3554 from President Kennedy](#)
 - [September 16, 1963 telegram from Roy Wilkins to President Kennedy](#)
 - [November 14, 1963 Press Conference](#)
 5. Tell students that after they have written down the evidence to determine whether or not each particular standard was met (and the primary source they used to provide the evidence), they need to fill in the third column to note whether or not that particular “Standard for Success” was fully met. If so, they will explain how they determined it was met. If it was less than fully successful, they will note how it fell short.
 6. Discuss with students the fact that the Civil Rights Act of 1963 was not passed during President Kennedy’s lifetime, but was signed into law by President Johnson on July 2, 1964.
 7. After the students have filled in their handouts, have students report back to the class their results and their interpretations. If the primary sources do not provide evidence for some of their standards, discuss with the class where they might find additional sources for evidence. As an extension, you might have students do additional research to find the sources that will help fill in their gaps.
 8. Ask students whether or not the March was a success in historical terms. Why or why not? [Have them consider the possible long-lasting impact of a peaceful, multi-racial gathering, the significance of King’s speech, etc. Why do we still talk about the March today?]

Assessment

For homework, ask students to imagine they are reporters from August 28, 1964, reporting on the first year anniversary of the March, and write a two-page article on the March addressing in what ways it was successful or less than successful.

Extension

Have students compare the effectiveness of the 1963 March on Washington with the strategy and success of other movements' marches.

Evaluating the Success of the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom

1. Fill in the “Standards for Success” column of the table.
2. Go to *1963: The Struggle for Civil Rights* and use the primary sources provided to fill in the “Evidence” column. Be sure to include information about the primary source you used to provide evidence.
3. Note in the “Outcome?” column whether or not that particular “Standard for Success” was fully met. If so, explain how you determined it was met. If it was less than fully successful, note how it fell short.

Standards for Success	Primary Source Used and Evidence	Outcome?

Teacher’s Guide
Evaluating the Success of the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom

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2. Go to *1963: The Struggle for Civil Rights* and use the primary sources provided to fill in the “Evidence” column. Be sure to include information about the primary source you used to provide evidence.
3. Note in the “Outcome?” column whether or not that particular “Standard for Success” was fully met. If so, explain how you determined it was met. If it was less than fully successful, note how it fell short.

Standards for Success	Primary Source Used and Evidence	Outcome?
Clear goals	<p>The <i>August 13, 1963 letter from A. Philip Randolph to JFK</i> discusses details of the March and its goals “to focus nationwide attention on the plight of millions of Negro Americans...and to press for a redress of their intolerable grievances in the present session of Congress.”</p> <p>The <i>August 20, 1963 Press Conference</i> includes JFK’s description of the purpose of the March— an “attempt to bring to the attention of Congress and the country the strong feeling of a good many thousands of citizens.”</p> <p>The <i>August 28, 1963 Press Release with JFK’s official statement on the March</i> includes his description of how the March brings attention to efforts that must move forward in the area of civil rights, and underscores the continued actions that are needed by the Executive and Legislative branches of government.</p>	<p>The goals of the March, as stated in Randolph’s letter to JFK, were clear enough to have them articulated by the president in his August 20th press conference. After the March, JFK once again discussed its goals, in claiming “[T]he cause of 20 million Negroes has been advanced by the program conducted so appropriately before the Nation’s shrine to the Great Emancipator...”</p> <p>This standard was met successfully.</p>
Good planning	<p>The <i>July 11, 1963 Memorandum from Rodney H. Clurman to Charles Horsky</i> provides a summary of a meeting between March organizers and police and other government officials. During this meeting, Bayard Rustin, the head organizer of the March, discusses plans as of the meeting date, including the timing of the march; the plan to arrange for ambulances; first aid stations, doctors, nurses, and water stations; the plan to use African American police force members as marshals; and the plan to organize transportation to and from the event.</p> <p>The <i>July 17th Press Conference</i> includes JFK’s statement about arrangements that had been developing</p>	<p>In planning for everything from African American marshals to water stations, Bayard Rustin worked diligently to see that the March ran smoothly. Organizations such as the National Catholic Conference for Interracial Justice planned how they might recruit as many members as possible, and informed their members of the details they would need to know to arrive, participate, and depart with a minimal of hassles. After the March, JFK commended the leaders and participants for their detailed preparation.</p> <p>This standard was met successfully.</p>

	<p>(including cooperation with the police) to help ensure the march would be peaceful. The <i>August 7th letter from John P. Sisson to the National Catholic Conference for Interracial Justice</i> provides information from Sisson as he attempts to bring in a large number of Catholics. His planning document includes detailed information about how the participants should arrive and what they should expect when they get to Washington. It also provides suggestions about how to enlist as many Catholics as possible for this event.</p> <p>The <i>August 28th Press Release with JFK's official statement on the March</i> includes praise for the leaders of the March for their "detailed preparations that made it possible for the orderly manner in which it has been conducted."</p>	
Large number of participants	<p>The <i>NARA-541997 photo</i> shows crowds overflowing a given area.</p> <p>The <i>NARA-542008 photo</i> shows a camera crew on the scene with the crowds in the background.</p> <p>The <i>NARA-542045 photo</i> shows the crowds assembling.</p> <p>The <i>NARA-49737 selected video</i> of the day shows crowds of people marching.</p> <p>The <i>August 28, 1963 article from the Associated Press</i> shows a mostly positive description of the day.</p>	<p>In the July 11, 1963 memo from Rodney H. Clurman to Charles Horský, Rustin noted at the meeting his expectation that there would be 100,000 or more marchers. From the photographs and estimate of the crowd by the Associated Press (more than 200,000), the March had a larger than expected turnout of both Black and white participants. Considering that this march took place on a weekday, the vast turnout was extraordinary.</p> <p>This standard was met successfully.</p>
High profile speakers	<p>The <i>Lincoln Memorial Program for the March</i> shows that the speakers included not only the "Big Six" and Labor leader Walter Reuther, but also the singers Mahalia Jackson and Marian Anderson.</p> <p>The <i>NARA-542068 photo</i> shows King, one of the most prominent civil rights leaders of his day, speaking.</p> <p>The <i>August 28, 1963 article from the Associated Press</i> notes that during the day movie stars Marlon Brando and Burt Lancaster addressed the crowd.</p> <p>The <i>NARA-49737 selected video</i> of the day includes in the background the singing of Joan Baez.</p>	<p>Nationally known civil rights and labor leaders addressed the crowd, as did Hollywood stars. Well-known singers performed.</p> <p>This standard was met successfully.</p>

<p>No violence at march</p>	<p>The <i>August 28, 1963 Press Release with JFK's official statement on the March</i> includes his praise of the participants for their "quiet dignity" and "orderly manner."</p>	<p>This March was completely peaceful, despite fears by some that, with such a large crowd gathering to demand civil rights, they might become targets for segregationists and violence might ensue.</p> <p>This standard was met successfully.</p>
<p>Focusing of national and/or international attention on issue</p>	<p>The <i>NARA-542008 photo</i> shows an NBC network camera crew on the scene. The <i>August 28, 1963 article from the Associated Press</i> presents mostly positive press coverage of the event, calling it "a great dramatic demonstration."</p>	<p>Images from the March were broadcast around the nation and the world. Though there were still those (such as Malcolm X) who were unimpressed, most of the news coverage was highly favorable.</p> <p>This standard was met successfully.</p>
<p>Redressing grievances giving rise to the March (in this case, eliminating civil rights problems).</p>	<p>The <i>July 17, 1963 Press Conference</i> provides JFK with an opportunity to speak about the importance of actions in Congress and in peoples' lives that would address grievances that gave rise to the March.</p> <p>In the <i>September 10, 1963 Proclamation 3554 from President Kennedy</i>, he calls the attempt of Governor George Wallace and other Alabama state officials to keep Alabama public schools segregated an obstruction of justice, and demands that the resistance end.</p> <p>In the <i>September 16, 1963 telegram from Roy Wilkins to President Kennedy</i> Wilkins decries the bombing of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church that killed four children and demands action from the federal government – including the passage of a strong civil rights bill. If the federal government does not respond, Wilkins states that African Americans will need to rally together to protect their people.</p> <p>The <i>November 14, 1963 Press Conference</i> includes a question to Kennedy about the status of the civil rights bill and his explanation that it may not be passed in 1963.</p>	<p>Although the March gave the president an opportunity to encourage Congress to pass his comprehensive civil rights bill, the bill did not pass before Kennedy's assassination. So, in fact, the March did not quickly bring about the legislative change that many of the marchers had hoped to press forward. In addition, civil rights problems in Alabama and many other states continued. State officials in Alabama were not moved by the March to desegregate their schools, and violence continued to plague Birmingham, as illustrated by the bombing of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church less than three weeks after the event.</p> <p>Although this standard might be seen as less than fully successful, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was, in fact, passed on July 2, 1964.</p>