20 Standing With Lincoln

"We are not going to stop until the walls of segregation are crushed," said King. "We've gone too far to turn back now."

The civil rights leaders were human, and so there were rivalries and jealousies. They disagreed among themselves. Those from older organizations, like the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People), were at their best working through the courts and trying to change the laws. That was a slow process; it took skilled leadership. The lawyer Thurgood Marshall and the labor chief A. Philip Randolph were that kind of leader.

NAACP

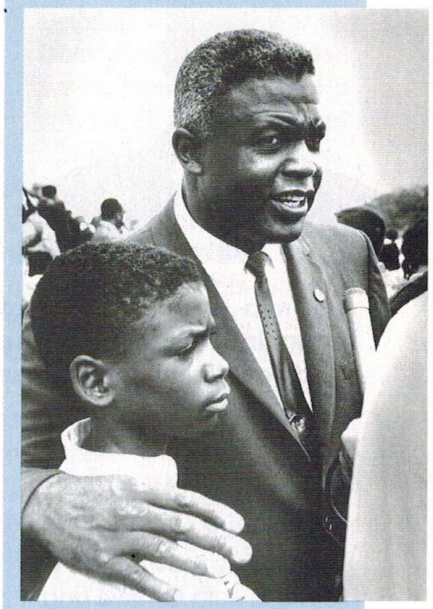
Martin Luther King, Jr., had helped organize the SCLC (the Southern Christian Leadership Conference). Its appeal was to the mass of moderate churchgoing blacks; most of its leaders were ministers. But many young people were impatient with both of these approaches, which seemed too slow-moving. They formed the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), known as SNICK. SNCC and the Congress for Racial Equality (CORE) organized many of the sit-ins in college communities.

SCLC

CORE

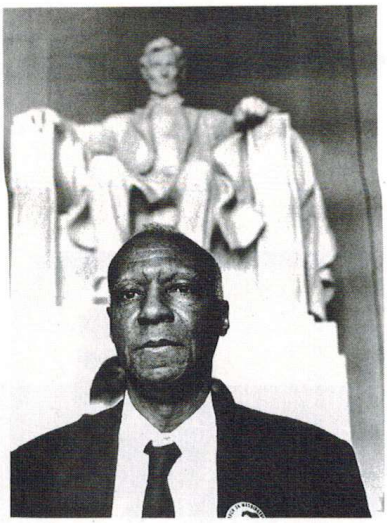
SNCC

Some black groups wanted to fight with fists, weapons, and anger. Everyone knew that if they



Former Brooklyn Dodger Jackie Robinson with his son at the March on Washington.

You will never know how easy it was for me because of Jackie Robinson," said Martin Luther King, Jr., to Dodger pitcher Don Newcombe as the two of them ate dinner together one evening. "I never forgot those words," Newcombe remembered later. "It's a shame today when I ask a young ballplayer, or a young black kid I'm counseling on drug and alcohol abuse, who Jackie Robinson was and he can't tell me. It was Jackie and then it was me and Campy [Roy Campanella]....I make sure I talk about Jackie wherever I go. He was my idol, my mentor, my hero."



A. Philip Randolph, one of the main organizers of the March on Washington, at the Lincoln Memorial.

got their way, much of the high purpose of the civil rights movement would be lost. Leaders like Martin Luther King, Jr., had made civil rights a cause for all Americans. It was about equality. It was about justice and freedom for all. It wasn't just for blacks—although most of the leadership was black.

For years, A. Philip Randolph had talked of a freedom rally in the nation's capital. Perhaps it would bring the diverse black leaders together. Perhaps it would bring black and white people together. Perhaps it would influence Congress.

President Kennedy had sent a civil rights bill to Congress. Would it be passed? No one was sure. A march would show Congress and the president the importance of the civil rights movement. Many thought that Kennedy was paying more attention to affairs in Cuba and Vietnam than to the problem of unfairness at home. When President Kennedy gave a speech in West Berlin, Germany, about political freedom, it inspired cheers from people around the world. But some Americans weren't enthusiastic. They knew there was a kind of freedom that was missing right here in America—it went straight to the soul and spirit of an individual. The black leaders understood that soul freedom.

Exactly 100 years had passed since Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation. Some white people were still telling black people to be patient. Martin Luther King, Jr., said, "We can't wait any longer. Now is the time."

Philip Randolph was 74. If ever he was to have his march, it had to be soon. And so it was decided: on August 28, 1963, there would be a march for freedom in Washington, D.C. Black leaders hoped that 100,000 people would participate. The marchers were going to demand four things: passage of the civil rights bill; integration of schools by year's end; an end to job discrimination; and a program of

"We Shall Overcome" became the anthem of the civil rights movement. The song is said to have originated in the 1940s at Tennessee's Highlander Folk School, where black textile workers gathered together.

We shall overcome,
We shall overcome,
We shall overcome
someday.
Oh, deep in my heart,
I do believe,
We shall overcome
someday.

A group organized by CORE for the March on Washington gets ready to board the buses. "If I ever had any doubts before, they're gone now," said one marcher. "When I get back tomorrow I'm going to do whatever needs to be done."

Bayard Rustin addresses a group of march marshals in New York as they prepare for the march on Washington.

job training. Bayard Rustin, who was a whiz at organizing, was in charge.

Rustin got to work. He had 21 drinking fountains, 24 first-aid stations, and lots of portable toilets set up on Washington's grassy Mall. Workers made 80,000 cheese sandwiches. Movie stars, singers, high-school bands, preachers, and politicians practiced speeches and songs. The speakers and entertainers were to stand on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial and look toward the tall, slender Washington Monument and, beyond that, to the nation's Capitol.

Rustin worried about every detail. He got a big hook and put it on the end of a long stick. Then he gave careful instructions to a helper he called the "hook man." Anyone who spoke too long was to be pulled from the microphones by the hook man.

Two thousand buses headed for Washington, and 21 chartered trains. A man with a freedom banner roller-skated from Chicago. An 82-year-old man bicycled from Ohio. Another, who was younger, came by bike from South Dakota. Sixty thousand whites came. Television crews, high in the Washington Monument, guessed that there were 250,000 people altogether.

It was a day filled with song, and hope, and good will. Finally, in the late afternoon, the last of the speakers stood on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial. It was Martin Luther King, Jr. He began with a prepared speech, which was formal and dignified, as was his nature. Then something happened inside him. Perhaps he responded to the crowd. Perhaps his training as a preacher took over. Whatever it was, he left his written speech and began talking from his heart. *"I have a dream,"* he said.

> *I have a dream that one day down in Alabama...little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers.*
>
> *I have a dream today!*

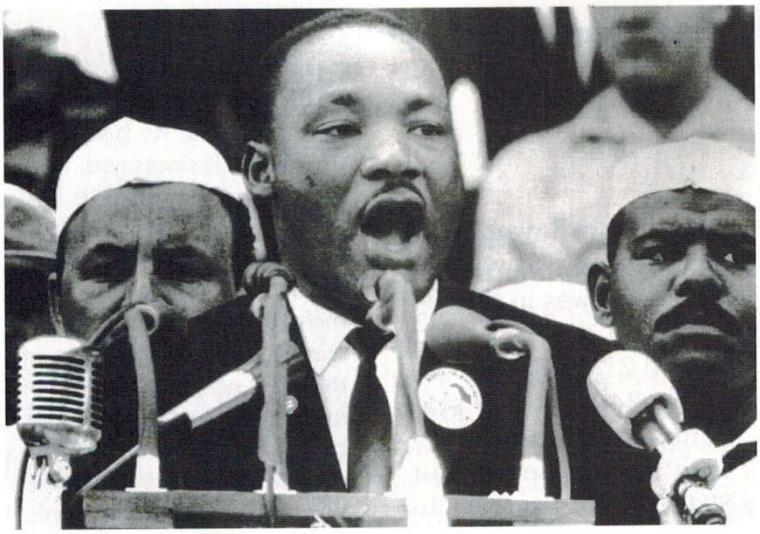
Then he challenged the whole nation, not just those who were marching.

> *So let freedom ring from the prodigious hilltops of New Hampshire, let freedom ring from the mighty mountains of New York, let freedom ring from the heightening Alleghenies of Pennsylvania, let*

W. E. B.

Someone was missing on August 28. He had gone to Africa, discouraged, feeling that nothing like the march could ever take place in America. And yet it was he and his ideas that had helped make the march possible. He was W. E. B. DuBois, one of the best-educated men—of any background—that this country has produced. He was a writer, a thinker, and a spokesman for his people whose masterwork, a book called *Souls of Black Folk,* had inspired new scholarship in black history. As marchers gathered around the Lincoln Memorial, a whisper went through the sweltering crowd. Minutes before Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., carried them away with his passionate words, people told each other the news they had just heard: W. E. B. DuBois was dead. Perhaps he was there with them after all.

Less than a year after the march, groups of volunteer workers, black and white, most of them students, arrived by the busload in Mississippi on the Freedom Summer project. Their mission: to encourage blacks to register to vote. Three of them—James Chaney, a black Mississippian, New Yorkers Michael Schwerner and Andrew Goodman—disappeared, murdered by the Ku Klux Klan of Philadelphia, Miss. The killers were never convicted of murder.



"I have a dream," said Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. "I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character. I have a dream today!"

What made King the most powerful and extraordinary black leader of this century was not his race but his morality.

—SHELBY STEELE

freedom ring from the snow-capped Rockies of Colorado; let freedom ring from the curvaceous slopes of California. But not only that. Let freedom ring from Stone Mountain of Georgia; let freedom ring from Lookout Mountain of Tennessee; let freedom ring from every hill and molehill of Mississippi. From every mountainside, let freedom ring.

And when this happens and when we allow freedom to ring, when we let it ring from every village and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all 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."