How it was then (reprints from AFRO files)

By Mary Stratford

The cry was "freedom!" The legions marched.

Some 244,000 singing, clapping, praying, marching Americans, Protestants, Jews, Catholics, blacks and whites flew, walked, rode, drove and roller skated to Washington Wednesday, to demand that a recalcitrant Congress pass effective civil rights legislation.

It was the largest demonstration in the capital in the nation's history.

Twenty-one chartered trains and 16 regular trains screamed along the rails into Union Station bringing 23,000 passengers.

Some 1,600 buses roared down the nation's highways bringing 60,000 passengers to Washington from as far west as Oklahoma City and Wyoming.

Over 30,000 marchers were from Philadelphia.

Clarksdale and Jackson, Mississippians, came in overalls, wearing them as a signal badge of honor.

The marchers wore sandals, loafers, high heels, tennis shoes, and Lena Horne walked in boots, but the marching cadence was the same. The synchronized beat was "Freedom Now!"

They thronged from the gathering site at Washington Monument, along Constitution and Independence Aves. to the Lincoln Memorial.

At the foot of the brooding statue of Abraham Lincoln, they stood, sat on the grass, sat in chairs and hung from the trees.

It was a clear, golden day. Temperatures hovered above 87 degrees.

The sky was cloudless. A slight breeze stirred. An occasional bird fluttered by. A few airplanes droned in the sky. Helicopters bearing the press hung suspended overhead.

One hundred thirty Congressmen spent 15 minutes with their constituents. Standing on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial facing the crowd, they heard the yells of "Pass the bill! Pass the bill!" The reference was to President Kennedy's proposed civil rights legislation.

The Congressmen left as A. Philip Randolph, director of the march explained that the legislators could not remain because of legislation pending on the threatened railroad strike.

Twelve of the nation's leaders, white and colored, addressed the thousands, youthful John Lewis chairman of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, early expressed the mood of some of the multitude who cheered when he shouted:

"The time will come when we will not confine our marching to Washington. We will march through the South, through the heart of Dixie, the way Sherman did , but we will march with a spirit of dignity."

Off to one side was erected a huge tent which sheltered the field headquarters of the March. The workers inside moved almost at a run, always sure of what they were doing and how they were doing it.

At the end of the tent were huge stacks of signs painted with the official slogans of the March. They could be had for the asking and there were many askers.

Stands erected for the photographers and television cameramen towered on spindly legs over the crowd. There were newsmen and newswomen from every magazine, radio and television network in the country.

The foreign press was there too — La Prensa from Argentina — the BBC from London — the Drum for Africa.

On this plot of ground the eyes of the world were focused, and what they saw were joyful and dedicated people whose hearts were too filled with the beauty of the moment to have room for anything else.

They were there from the big cities and the small cities, neatly dressed with a sense of dedication that spread upward and outward.

In other parts of Washington the city seemed almost asleep.

The streets were virtually deserted and in the government build ings that surrounded the line of March, those employees at work filled the windows to watch the greatest demonstration in the history of this nation.

From the very start it was evident that this would be a peaceful day, a day in which America could take pride. The marchers were determined that this would happen.

It was shortly after 11 a.m. when the first solid mass of marchers began to move away from from the Washington Monument down tree lined Constitution Avenue, to the Lincoln Memorial for the afternoon part of the program.

White and colored, the skilled and the unemployed, they walked together. There were some who could not walk, but who were there.

Junius Kellogg was one of these. There was a time when he was an outstanding professional basketball player, but an accident crippled him and left him in a wheel chair.

There was not bitterness in his voice or regret for what might have been. He felt the need to be here.

"This is supposedly a nation of laws instead of men. After 100 years it is time we had our rights. This is the way," he said as a friend pushed his chair along with the Marchers.

In the warm air, softly sounded the words of "We Shall Overcome."

The sea moved to the Lincoln Memorial and spread out on its four sides leaving directly before

(Continued on page 3)

Then and Now

By George W. Collins

(Editor's Note: George W. Collins is a former AFRO editor and was a member of the team of reporters who covered the 1963 March on Washington. He is now a broadcast executive with WMAR-TV, Channel 2, the NBC affiliate in Baltimore).

On the eve of the 1983 March on Washington for Jobs, Peace, and Freedom, as one who was there twenty years ago, I am struck by the sharp contrasts of then and now.

Perhaps the sharpest contrast is the absence of so many of the personalities who not only dominated the 1963 March, but combined their talents to hone the cutting edge of the crusade for political, economic, and social change, during the decade of the 60's.

A partial list is instructive:

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Southern Christian Leadership Conference; Roy Wilkins, NAACP; A. Philip Randolph, Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters; Whitney Young, National Urban League;

John F. Kennedy, president, U.S.A.; Robert F. Kennedy, U.S. attorney general; Lyndon Baines Johnson, vice president, U.S.A. Earl Warren, chief justice, U.S. Supreme Court; and Mahalia Jackson, gospel singer par excellence.

They are all dead now.

They have not been replaced.

The same can be said of the stout-hearted local leaders of that day. Among them:

Dr. Carl Murphy, publisher, AFRO - AMERICAN News papers; Dr. Lillie Jackson, Baltimore NAACP; Dr. Furman L. Templeton, Baltimore Urban League; and Theodore R. McKeldin, mayor, City of Baltimore.

Conceivably, their permanent absence is the real reason why it has been deemed that another march on Washington, twenty years later, is necessary.

Another significant contrast is found in the nature of the national political climate of the respective periods.

Leaders of the 1963 March warmly greeted by then President John F. Kennedy, who had early on, demonstrated his sensitivity to, and compassion for the plight of black and poor Americans.

The place the young and popular President held in the hearts a nd minds of those groups of Americans was underscored by their tears of sadness, regret, and bitterness when he was cut down by an assassin's bullet in Dallas, Texas, three months after the March.

On the flip side of the coin, which brings us back to 1983, Ronald Wilson Reagan, the current occupant of the house at 1600 Pennsylvania AVenue, he arrived there on the wings of a political conservative backlash is not likely to greet the leaders of the August 27th March.

First of all he is vacationing on his ranch in California and it is highly unlikely he will interrupt his vacation to greet people who strongly feel that the Reagan economic, legal and civil rights policies are responsible for much of the ingredients from which complaints are made.

President Reagan's only recent recognition of the existence of a hunger problem in America, despite a growing network of soup lines snaking across the national landscape;

His failure during most of his 72 years to recognize that racism exists in America, coupled with his administration's attack on affirmative action, and his support of tax credits for families whose children attend private schools, are but are but a few reasons why no love is lost between black and poor Americans and the White House in 1963.

Comparisons in the then and economic picture are also overshadowed by contrasts.

According to the U.S. Department of Labor Regional Office in Philadelphia the unemployment rate in August of 1963 was 5.4 percent. That contrasts sharply with the current jobless rate of 9.5 percent.

That, of course, is the general rate of joblessness nationally. But as history has repeatedly taught us, that rate is traditionally far behind the actual rate of joblessness for black males.

And when it comes to black male teenagers, who are chronically out of work — and who possess few marketable skills because school drop out— a bad situation is made much worse.

Further, when those youth who are no longer counted among active job seekers because they dropped out of the endless and, most often, futile search are considered, along with the aforementioned category, then the officially sanctioned national rate of unemployment becomes grossly inaccurate.

Those statistics have not improved since 1963. In fact current evidence suggests that they have grown worse.

To this dismal picture, another dimension has been added in 1983. It is called the new poor.

That category of jobless worker has been created by the dramatic leap of technology and the shift of the American economy from an industrial oriented to a service oriented base.

Those two developments have sidelined thousands of skilled workers who have spent all of their working lives in heavy industry, or whose training was devoid of technical proficiency.

Other economic contrasts of then and now show that the 1963 minimum wage was $1.25 per hour, the Labor Department reports.

Department statistical experts report that today's minimum wage is $3.35 per hour, but what cost consumers less than $100 twenty years requires an outlay of $298.10 today.

A sharp reduction in food stamps, school lunch programs, and many other initiative launched by the New Frontier and the Great Society philosophy of Presidents Kennedy and Johnson—designed primarily to improve the quality of life for the poor.—have made coping in '83 for millions of Americans somewhat less than easy.

Despite that less than inspiring 1983 scenaro, candor demands that we concede that more blacks and other minorities are holding political, economic, technical, and community service position than anyone would dare dream of in 1963.

Compared to the steadily increasing number of have nots of this society, who have already fallen through—or are in the process of falling through the so-called safety net—the percentage of Americans of color who allegedly have it made pales into insignificence.

This the validity of the jobs part of the theme of the 1983 March on Washington for Jobs, Peace, and Freedom, appears to be firmly established.

Peace was not one of the demands voiced during the March on Washington in 1963. While the Cold War between the superpowers continued unabated, there was an absence of military conflict per se.

The Bay of Pigs Incident was behind us. The tragedy that was to become Vietnam was still aborning.

And an end to American's involvement in that bloody episode of military adventure became part of the peacy advocacy of Dr. King before he was ushered into the shrine of martyrs by an assassin's bullet in Memphis, Tennessee, five years after the original march.

America's military posture is drastically different in 1983.

With its current involvement—passive though it is—in the violence in the Middle East, Central America, and other hot spots around the world, peace is one of the concerns of the sponsors of the August 27th march.

In fact, the demand by sponsors of the march that America end its involvement in the Middle East is causing concern in the American Jewish community.

Many of its leaders are convinced that military and other forms of support from the United States are essential to the survival of Israel.

Tension created by disagreement over that issue between sponsors of the march and some leaders of the Jewish community is expected to be reflected in the participation —or the lack of same—by that community.

Participation in the upcoming march by whites calls to mind another sharp contrast between '63 and '83.

Twenty years ago, an estimated sixty to eighty thousand white citizens actively participated in the march.

The peace and job issues are expected to attract a considerable delegation of supporters from the white community, for the 1983 march, but that support is not anticipated to come near what it was in the original pilgrimage to the Nation's Capitol.

That consensus is based, in part, on the realization the majority population, on cue from the leaders of the national government, is becoming increasingly conservative.

Thus a prediction on that aspect of the current march is risky at best.

That Dr. King's profound dream that someday all Americans will be free from the fear of war, poverty, racism, and injustice is still light years away from reality, is beyond dispute.

The passage of 20 years has not changed that basic fact.

Whether the 1963 march will change any of that is, of course, left to speculation.

But for those of us who have a sense of deja vu about such things as marches on Washington, over the past two decades have found precious few reasons to be optimistic that the dream will, eventually, be converted into reality.

That, perhaps, is the real tragedy of the march of '63 and its sequel, twenty years later.

LABOR SUPPORTERS with Dr. Martin Luther King, Charles Zimmerman, chairman of the Civil Rights Committee AFL-CIO; Joe Curry, president, National Maritime Union and A. Philip Randolph, president, Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters and AFL-CIO vice-president.

Movie stars and entertainers

By Sam Lacy

Entertainers of every description, and from all media, opera, movies, television, night clubs and the stage — joined hands here Wednesday to add glamour and color to the gigantic success of the March on Washington.

From the awesome dignity of Marian Anderson to Sammy Davis Jr., every plateau of culture was represented in the delegation from the world of entertainment.

From Charlton Heston, who rode to a drama award in a Ben Hur chariot, to Dick Gregory, who transformed bigotry into a meringue pie and hurled it into the face of the Dixiecrat, colored and white artists were present to rub elbows with the more than 200,000 demonstrators seeking equality and jobs.

They came from New York and Philadelphia and Chicago and Detroit and Los Angeles. Josephine Baker and Burt Lancaster flew in from Paris just for the occasion.

Operatic and concert stars like Miss Anderson and Camilla Williams performed. So did pop artists, country and western guitar plunkers, spiritual singers.

All fused their talents to keep the mood of the constantly swelling throng alive and expectant.

The entertainment began shortly after 9:30 a.m. at the Monument Grounds, where Ossie Davis, the prolific playwright and actor, served as master of ceremonies.

Opening was folk singer Joan Baez, who did "O, Freedom Over Me," and "We Shall Overcome."

Next was a reading by actress Ruby Dee, whose face was familiar to onlookers because of her recent effort in the movie "The Balcony." She read from the Margaret Walker work, "For My People."

Because of traffic congestion and other problems encountered in the handling of a crowd of such magnitude, Davis made an appeal for help from Birmingham, Ala., Miss Dorothy Dale, responded with a number that was warmly received.

Then came the popular trio, Peter, Paul and Mary, to offer two numbers, "How Many Years" and "All Over This Land."

Next on the impromptu program was folk star Odetta. After solo renditions of "O, Freedom Over Me" and "I'm On My Way," Odetta was joined by Josh White, Miss Baez, Mary of the Peter, Paul and Mary threesome, Lonnie Sattin and Country and Western Star of Rob Dillon, in an unrehearsed vocal jam session.

While strumming in guitar accompaniment, they sang "The House I Live In," after which they continued with Sattin's offering of "Go Down Moses" and "Tell Me Where Can (Go."

With the scheduled start of the main ceremonies at Lincoln Memorial still some three hours away, this small band of dedicated artists made a gallant effort to keep the ever growing throng from becoming restless. And they succeeded. Lena Horne and Bobby Darin made their way to the platform for bows, and a group of teenaged youngsters who braved police dogs, high-pressure firehoses and electrified cattle prodders in Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana, joined in a stirring rendition of the spiritual "I'm Gonna Let It Shine."

Later, the group was joined by Harry Belafonte, Burt Lancaster, Davis Jr., Heston, Diahan Carroll, Dick Gregory and his family, author James Baldwin, Marlon Brando, John Killens, Len Chandler and Sidney Poiter.

Why we marched

By Sen. Troy Brailey

We marched in 1963 to redress old grievances and to help resolve an American crisis.

That crisis is born of the twin evils of racism and economic deprivation. They rob black and poor people of dignity, self-respect and freedom. They impose a special burden on blacks who are denied the right to vote, economically exploited, refused access to public accommodations, subjected to inferior education, and relegated to substandard ghetto housing.

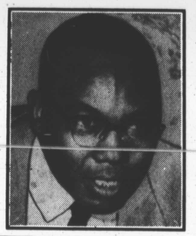
Discrimination in education and apprenticeship training renders blacks, Puerto Ricans, Mexicans and other minorities helpless in our mechanized, industrial society. Lacking specialized training, they are the first victims of automation. Thus the rage of black unemployment is nearly three times that of whites.

Their livelihoods destroyed, the black unemployed are thrown into the streets, driven to despair, to hatred, to crime, to violence. All America is robbed of their potential contribution.

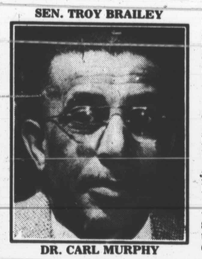
Despite this crisis, reactionary Republicans and Southern Democrats in Congress are still working to defeat effective civil rights legislation. They fight against the rights of all workers and minority groups. They are sworn enemies of freedom and justice. They proclaim states rights in order to destroy human rights.

The Southern Democrats came to power by disenfranchising blacks. They know that as long as black workers are voteless, exploited and underpaid, the fight of the white workers for decent wages and working conditions would fail. They know that semi-slavery for one means semi-slavery for all.

We marched to demonstrate, massively and dramatically, our unalterable opposition to the forces of discrimination and to their century-long robbery of the American people. Our bodies, numbering over 200,000 bore witness — served historic notice — that jobs and freedom were needed at once.



SEN. TROY BRAILEY



DR. CARL MURPHY

WHAT WE DEMANDED

(1) Comprehensive and effective civil rights legislation from the present Congress — without compromise or filibuster — to guarantee all Americans:

— Access to all public accommodations

— Decent housing

— Adequate and integrated education

— The right to vote

(2) Withholding of Federal funds from all programs in which discrimination exists.

(3) Desegregation of all school districts in 1963.

(4) Enforcement of the Fourteenth Amendment — reducing Congressional representation of states where citizens are disenfranchised.

(5) A new Executive Order banning discrimination in all housing supported by federal funds.

(6) Authority for the Attorney General to institute injunctive suits when any constitutional right is violated.

(7) A massive federal program to train and place all unemployed workers — blacks and other minorities — on meaningful and dignified jobs at decent wages.

(8) A national minimum wage act that will give all Americans a decent standard of living. (Government surveys show that anything less than $2.00 an hour fails to do this.)

(9) A broadened Fair Labor Standards Act to include all areas of employment which are presently excluded.

(10) A federal Fair Employment Practices Act barring discrimination by federal, state, and municipal governments, and by employers, contractors, employment agencies, and trade unions.

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NATIONAL LEADERS

A. Philip Randolph — National Chairman and Organizer.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. — President of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

James Farmer — National Director of the Congress of Racial Equality.

Rev. Dr. Eugene Carson Blake — Vice-Chairman of the Commission on Race Relations of the National Council of Churches of Christ in America.

Walter Reuther — President of the United Automobile, Aerospace and Agricultural Implement Workers of America, AFL-CIO, and Chairman Industrial Union Department, AFL-CIO.

Roy Wilkins — Executive Secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

Whitney Young — Executive Director of the National Urban League.

Rabbi Joachim Prinz — Chairman of the American Jewish Congress.

Mathew Ahmann — Executive Director of the National Catholic Conference for Interracial Justice.

John Lewis — Chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee.

—20 years

Continued from page 1

chauvinism of race, sex, class and nation are seriously undermining our national unity and sense of human solidarity.

"We believe that this is the historic moment to bring together again a coalition of goodwill and conscience, that will address the welfare of the whole nation and not merely some of its parts; that will be unified by a common vision of the American Dream, and that can act as a power and as a leaven to help this nation live out its full meaning and move again toward that Dream."

"To bring all these issues together, we will launch a year-long mobilization of a New Coalition of Conscience that will:

(1) Bring together a massive MARCH ON WASHINGTON, D.C. on Aug. 27th, 1963 to reaffirm the Dream and continue activities on August 28th to unite as never before this New Coalition around specific goals and common objectives; and

(2) Develop a broad non-partisan coalition to press for basic legislation to turn this nation around in the areas of JOBS, PEACE AND FREEDOM; and

(3) Work for passage of legislation that would designate January 15th as a national public holiday in honor of the birth of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.; and

(4) Work on the state and local level to implement the full agenda of a New Coalition of Conscience.

CO-CHAIRPERSONS

Ms. Asia Bennett
American Friends Serivce Committee
Ms. Judy Goldsmith
National Organization for Women
Mr. Stevie Wonder
Rev. Benjamin Hooks
National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
Mrs. Coretta Scott King
Martin Luther King Center for Non-Violent Social Change
Dr. Joseph Lowery
Southern Christian Leadership Conference

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CONVENERS

Senator James Abourezk
Arab-American Anti-Discrimination Committee
Ms. Bella Abzug
Women USA
Bishop John H. Adams
Congress of National Black Churches
Bishop James Armstrong
National Council of Churches
Mr. Harry Belafonte
Mr. Clyde Bellecourt
U.S. Student Association
Honorable John Conyers
Member of Congress
Mr. Richard Deats
Fellowship of Reconciliation
Honorable Walter E. Fauntroy
Member of Congress
Mr. Murray Finley
Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union, AFL-CIO
Ms. Mary Futrell
National Education Association
Honorable Robert Garcia
Member of Congress
Ms. Dorothy Height
National Council of Negro Women
Rev. Jesse Jackson
Operation PUSH
Dr. T. J. Jemison
National Baptist Convention of the U.S.A.
Mr. John Jacob
National Urban League
Mr. Cleveland Robinson
District 65-UAW

—How it was then

(Continued from page 2)

the brilliantly white Colorado-Yule marble hall, chairs filling the space reserved for special guests.

The people pressed forward against the temporary fence that had been set up as the crowd built up behind them, but there was no shoving.

Soon they were so closely gathered together they seemed to be an extension of each other.

They spread down both sides of the reflecting pool that lies between the Monument to Washington and the building that houses the huge statue of the Great Emancipator.

This was a demonstration such as Washington has never seen and may never see again.

Over 210,000 people jammed into one area under a hot summer sun and if there was a mood, it was a mood of love.

This could never be called a demonstration of colored people alone, for in the crowd were thousands of white persons who joined in the demand that all America must be free.

They were old and they were young, they were from the North and the South — they were the voice of America on this day.

Inside the cavernous like Memorial, the leaders of the demonstration sat in a tight circle protected by marshals, as they talked of whatever they talked about.

Dr. Ralph Bunche was there in the hall and in his quiet but firm way he said "this is the greatest expression of democracy in action." James Baldwin was there, the literary voice of black America.

Lena Horne and Josephine Baker met there and embraced.

Josephine Baker, her trim uniform dotted with medals, turned to France to be free, who was now back to tell her people that she was proud "you are a united people at last."

On the speaker's stand, Sidney Poitier, Harry Belafonte, Burt Lancaster and Charlton Heston sat together and looked out at the crowd that now stretched almost the full half mile back to the Washington Monument.

The steps outside the Memorial were filled with people, so many that the speaker's stand was partly hidden from view.

As the program moved on the heat began to take its toll. People grew weak and fainted and were passed over from hand to hand, over the fence to first-aid aides, who laid them gently on the ground.

Not now a sea, but an ocean of people, so well behaved, so concerned, so polite, that they made mockery of those who had predicted such a thing could never happen.

As the time passed, the crowd grew even larger. It was as if the flow of people would never stop.

Those marchers who were not standing either lay or sat on the grass at the periphery of the mass, and listened to the words that rang out.

"America has given the black citizen a bad check , a check which has come back marked insufficient funds." — Martin Luther King, Aug. 28, 1963.

"THE BATTLE FOR FREEDOM BEGINS EVERY MORNING"
— John H. Wheeler

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