

## Statement Announcing the March on the Conventions Movement for Freedom Now

9 June  
1960

[9 June 1960]  
[New York, N.Y.]

*The following statement, released during a press conference at Randolph's New York City office, announces plans for "massive" demonstrations at the upcoming Republican and Democratic national conventions.<sup>1</sup> King and Randolph demand that the major political parties recognize the "revolutionary mood and determination of the Negro people," and they contrast the courage of the southern student protesters with presidential candidates who "have looked the other way when their parties have tolerated racists or made deals with racists."*

A civil rights crisis rocks the nation. We are on the threshold of a new decade in which the masses of Negro people are coming on to the stage of history and demanding their freedom now.

We have witnessed the first stage of a revolution in the South against segregation and discrimination. Heroic Southern students have injected their very bodies into the non-violent struggle for freedom and have declared undying battle against Jim Crow. In recent years scores of thousands of Negroes and their white allies have converged on the nation's capital to demand an end to gradualism in all of its forms.<sup>2</sup>

These historic actions have been expressions of the profound political and social frustration of our people. Their demands have been met with the condescending smile of inert government, by incredible political deception and double-dealing, by an ingrained indifference to the democratic ideals of equality and freedom. Everywhere we look, the cry for justice is answered by a shrug, by business-as-usual. Government, far from meeting the needs of the times, has retreated. School integration has virtually ground to a halt. Six years after the Supreme Court decision, only 6% of Southern Negro students attend integrated classes. Congressmen of both parties this year conspired to deprive the Negro of his right to vote, for the 1960 Civil Rights Bill obstructs the voting process by placing overwhelming burdens of prosecution on the Negro rather than on those who oppress him.

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1. Rustin coordinated arrangements and publicity for the press conference (Rustin to Press agencies, 8 June 1960; see also Press release, Demonstrations to occur at the Democratic and Republican conventions, 9 June 1960). For more on the demonstrations, see King, Address at NAACP Mass Rally for Civil Rights, 10 July 1960, and Interview by Lee Nichols at Republican National Convention, 25 July 1960, pp. 485-487 and 492-493 in this volume, respectively.

2. King refers to the 1957 Prayer Pilgrimage for Freedom and the two Youth Marches for Integrated Schools. For more information on these events, see King, "Give Us the Ballot," 17 May 1957, and King, Address at Youth March for Integrated Schools, 25 October 1958, in *Papers* 4:208-215 and 514-515, respectively; and King, Address at the Youth March for Integrated Schools, 18 April 1959, pp. 186-188 in this volume.

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In our travels throughout the length and breadth of this country over the months, Negroes from every walk of life have repeatedly asked us: what is to be done this election year to cease the equivocation of both political parties on the issue of civil rights? What is to be done to register our insistence that both political parties repudiate the segregationists within their ranks or any political alliances with segregationists?

The time has come when the political parties of this country must feel this revolutionary mood and determination of the Negro people. We have therefore wired prominent community leaders, Negro and white, in Los Angeles and Chicago, informing them that we intend to be present at both the Democratic and Republican Conventions.<sup>3</sup> We are asking them to cooperate with us in a massive non-violent "March on the Conventions Movement for Freedom Now!"<sup>4</sup> The millions of Negroes denied the right to vote in the South are appealing to the people of Los Angeles and Chicago to represent them before the Conventions.

We believe that if the candidates and parties expect Negroes and their white allies to have any confidence in them, they must make a forthright declaration that racial segregation and discrimination in any form is unconstitutional, un-American, and immoral. The Supreme Court decision on integration can become the law of the land, and the elementary requirements of democracy be satisfied, only if both parties repudiate the minorities in their ranks who have combined in Washington to thwart the Supreme Court decision and the cry for justice of the Negro people. Unless the two major parties make such a declaration, the Negro people will remain doubly disfranchised: first, because they are barred from the polls, and secondly, because they are denied political representation through the existing parties. In the spirit of the Southern students, we shall march on the conventions in mass to serve notice that we will no longer endure this double disfranchisement, and that no party which ignores the just demands of our 18 million people can look to a long future.

At present, no candidate for the presidency has measured up to the courage of the Southern students.<sup>5</sup> All of them have looked the other way when their parties have tolerated racists or made deals with racists. We are going to present a list of questions to all the candidates. We are going to demand specific answers and a specific program to implement them. The time of compromise and empty gen-

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3. Rustin may have prepared the text of a telegram regarding the protest (King and Randolph, To Los Angeles community leaders, June 1960; see also Randolph to Maurice Dawkins and Augustus F. Hawkins, 17 June 1960). In CBS film footage of the press conference, King estimated that "five thousand or more" protesters would participate in the demonstrations (Press conference on the March on the Conventions Movement for Freedom Now, 9 June 1960).

4. In his comments to reporters, King underscored the protesters' commitment to "the philosophy and the technique of nonviolence" and guaranteed that it will be made "clear to all of the persons who will assemble for the demonstration, for the march, that the movement is to be nonviolent through and through" (Press conference, 9 June 1960).

5. After accusing both political parties of failing to understand that "civil rights should constitute an issue in this election," Randolph concluded that no "single candidate for the presidency has completely earned the right to expect the support of Negro voters in this campaign" (Press conference, 9 June 1960).

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eralities is over. The time for action is now.<sup>6</sup> The heroic students of the South have shown the way, and the least we can do is to carry their demands, and those of all Negroes who are denied the right to vote, directly to the political conventions.

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TD. BRP-DLC.

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6. At the conclusion of the press conference, Randolph acknowledged that “the probability of a candidate emerging which would reflect the spirit and purpose of our position on civil rights seems quite unlikely” (Press conference, 9 June 1960).