

Interview by Lee Nichols
at Republican National Convention

[25 July 1960]
[Chicago, Ill.]

Delegates attending the opening session of the Republican National Convention at Chicago's Amphitheater waded through five thousand picketers led by King, Randolph, and Wilkins. The protesters shouted "Jim Crow must go" and snarled area traffic until a Republican official promised a convention floor debate over the party's civil rights plank.¹ The following transcript was drawn from NBC film footage of the demonstration.

[Announcer]: [words inaudible] Beside him is the Reverend Martin Luther King, one of the leaders of this march. Lee is going to ask him what this is all about—what they hope to accomplish. So let's go outside the amphitheater to the street corner and to Lee Nichols.²

[Nichols]: [words inaudible] about five thousand marchers. How's this [words inaudible] compare to the one in Los Angeles?

[King]: It's about the same. We urged five thousand people to participate. We had about five thousand in Los Angeles, and I understand we have five thousand or more today. So I think it's equally successful.

[Nichols]: What's the purpose of the demonstration? What do you hope it would achieve?

[King]: Well, we are here to dramatize the significance of the civil rights issue. We feel that this is the most pressing moral issue facing our nation, and we are here to urge the Republican Party to come out with a strong, forthright civil rights plank in the platform.

[Nichols]: Do you consider that a specific mention, support of the sit-in demonstrations is important in the plank?

1. Thomas Powers, "5,000 Demonstrate for Civil Rights Plank," *Chicago Tribune*, 26 July 1960.

2. Leland L. Nichols (1929–), born in Hawthorne, California, earned a B.A. (1950) and an M.S. (1952) from the University of California at Los Angeles. Nichols began his career in broadcasting as an intern at NBC in 1954 and was hired as a reporter and commentator, covering political news and the 1960 Democratic and Republican national conventions. Nichols later worked in California state government and public broadcasting before teaching at California State University, Sacramento (1970–1992).

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[King]: Yes, I think it's very important. As you know the Democratic Party in its plank at least expressed sympathy for the sit-ins, and I think the Republican Party should do the same. In fact, I would like to see the Party come out with an explicit statement endorsing the sit-in demonstration.³

[Nichols]: There's been a suggestion that the Republican platform not promise more than can be delivered. Do you think that the Democratic plank on civil rights promise more than can be delivered?

[King]: Well, this is difficult to say. We will have to wait to see. They have promised to deliver it. We would hope so, and we will certainly demand and urge the leaders of the party to come out with it. Whether this will be done is something else, but the implementation is certainly the important issue now.

[Nichols]: Have you had a chance to compare the points of those fourteen points approved by Vice President Nixon and Nelson Rockefeller?⁴ How does that point compare to the Democratic platform plank?

[King]: Well, I think it's [*break in tape*] very well. Mr. Rockefeller and Mr. Nixon came out with something very significant and important, and I think it [*words inaudible*] with it very well. Now, whether this will come out as the final statement of the final plank is not known yet, but I think this would be very important if it does emerge.

[Nichols]: Well, I thank you very much, Reverend Martin Luther King. This is Lee Nichols in front of the amphitheater with the NBC mobile unit.⁵

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3. The final draft of the 1960 Republican platform reaffirmed "the constitutional right to peaceable assembly to protest discrimination by private business establishments" and applauded "the action of the businessmen who have abandoned discriminatory practices in retail establishments." The platform also pledged "the full use of power, resources and leadership of the Federal Government to eliminate discrimination based on race, color, religion or national origin" (*Official Report of the Proceedings of the Republican National Convention* [Washington, D.C.: Republican National Committee, 1960], p. 256).

4. On 22–23 July, Vice President Richard Nixon met with New York governor and Republican candidate Nelson A. Rockefeller to draft a platform to be ratified by the convention's platform committee (William Fulton, "Platform Views Outlined by Nixon and Rockefeller: 14 Points Agreed Upon Called a Basis for Victory Planks," *Chicago Tribune*, 24 July 1960).

5. As the camera pulls away, the film focuses on a large group of protesters carrying signs that read "End School Segregation—Endorse Supreme Court Decision" and "End Your Equivocation—Oppose Job Discrimination—Support FEPC."