

Black America's unfinished march on Washington

By Marc H. Morial
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This past weekend thousands of Americans gathered in Washington — joined in spirit, no doubt, by millions of their compatriots throughout the country — to celebrate the fortieth anniversary of the historic March on Washington that occurred August 28, 1963.

In fact, the commemoration had an even more important purpose: to declare that there's a great deal of work yet to be done on the civil rights and racial justice front. Our present and future is where, to use the words of a civil rights anthem of those years, we all need to keep our eyes most sharply on the prize of closing the egregious "equality gaps" in America.

But Saturday's celebration is also worthwhile in helping

us recall the racial tenor of the early 1960s in America, and in making clear how difficult and strewn with obstacles was the path that led to and from the Lincoln Memorial that sweltering August day.

One fresh look at those years can be found in the new gripping biography of President John F. Kennedy by the historian Robert Dallek, *An Unfinished Life: John F. Kennedy, 1917-1963*.

Dallek shows how lukewarm—at best—America's white majority was regarding the right of Americans of African descents to full citizenship. Most felt that the nonviolent demonstrations civil rights activists were using to challenge segregation in the South would do more to hurt than help bring about integration.

To Be Equal

By Marc H. Morial
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Forexample, in May 1961, when the Gallup Poll asked if integration should be brought about by every means in the near future, only 23 percent agreed; 61 percent preferred gradual change. Another Gallup poll that spring found that only 24 percent of the country approved of the Freedom Rides activists were staging to test the federal law barring segregation in interstate travel; 64 percent disapproved.

A May 1962 Gallup Poll found that 67 percent of Americans thought the Kennedy Administration's civil rights policy — which at that point was actually to do as little as possible — was either just right or pushing too fast for integration. Only 11 percent thought the Administration was not moving fast enough.

Kennedy's inactivity, as Dallek shows, was a product of both his personal lack of concern about civil rights up to that point and his political need not to antagonize the Southern segregationist Senators and Representatives who then dominated the Congress.

But in broader terms JFK also perfectly represented the great gap between White America's rhetorical allegiance to the ideals of the Constitution and the Declaration and the reality most whites either actively pursued or tolerated. It was the civil rights movement that helped

— and compelled — White America to narrow that gap.

That hypocrisy is what Martin Luther King, Jr. was referring to that day at the Lincoln Memorial when he declared the movement's intent "to dramatize an appalling condition" — namely, America's defaulting on its "promissory note" of "the inalienable rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" for all. "But we refuse to believe that the bank of justice is bankrupt," King went on, his metaphors drawing knowing laughter from the throng. "We refuse to believe that there are insufficient funds in the great vaults of opportunity in this nation."

Before King spoke, Whitney M. Young, Jr., then head of the National Urban League, had reminded those listening that while the March was "a tribute" to African-Americans' unstinting faith in America. "That we meet here at all, however, is to the shame of some who have always blocked the progress of the brown American."

The 1963 March on Washington was just one sign in the early 1960s that JFK and many others in White America, had, as Kennedy aide Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. later put it, "miscalculated the dynamism of a revolutionary movement."

I'm confident that those

present — in person and in spirit — at the Lincoln Memorial last Saturday understand that, contrary to the rhetoric of some, the need for a "revolutionary movement" for civil rights and racial justice remains.

It is America's paradox of progress that the considerable advances made on the racial front since the 1960s underscore the equality gaps that continue to exist between Blacks and Whites in such areas as education, in income and wealth, in access to health care and home ownership, and in the assurance of freedom from discrimination, and the guarantee of justice in the criminal justice system.

The "heavy lifting" in closing those gaps will be the responsibility of all Americans — even, if, as was the case during the civil rights years of the 1950s and 1960s, African-Americans must bear more than their share of the work.

That reality isn't something we should shrink from. It's something we at the National Urban League welcome, for we take as inspiration Whitney M. Young's closing words that day:

"This is the real significance of our March on Washington today, August 28, 1963," he said. "Our march is a march for America. It is a march just begun."

Fletcher

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current political practice: total leadership by polling rather than leadership by a combination of a sense of where the people are at plus the utilization of one's own conscience.

What is further infuriating is that the circumstances that California faces are, by and large, the direct result of national level policies by the Bush administration and, to a great extent, his predecessors. Every state in the USA is facing a major fiscal crisis. The national recession turned into something far deeper than the officials in government and media moguls wanted us to believe. California was wracked by both insane financial speculation in the dot com business world, as well as an energy crisis which was the direct result of deregulation that political conservatives advanced. Billions have been spent on an illegal war and occupation of Iraq at the national level, while state budgets are sliced, and workers with them, with no hope in sight for federal assistance.

So, actually, if the architects of the current California recall wanted to be true to their principles, they would mount a separate recall: one against President Bush. Alas, that would spoil the party, no pun intended, and instead would unmask the real, cynical objectives of this recall. It has little to do with the pluses or minuses in Gray Davis' column. Rather it concerns the ability of very wealthy and conservative politicians to manipulate the system, and the minds of the people, to serve their calculated ends.

Thus, we sit back and watch, some laughing while others cry, witnessing the lunacy of a highly financed political game played out before the world. Unfortunately, this spectacle has given new meaning to the notion of "reality television."

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Views

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white. Muhammad, 42, and Malvo, 18, have been linked to about two dozen shootings in several states. Neither Muhammad and Malvo have been charged with the shooting of Keenya Cook in Tacoma, Wash., but they are under investigation.

Cook, 21, was shot when she answered the door at her aunt's home. The aunt had been the bookkeeper for Muhammad's auto repair business, and had angered him by siding with his wife during a bitter divorce and custody battle, according to investigators.

No further details of Muhammad's alleged "bad acts" were included in the documents.

Also at Monday's hearing, Millette denied a request from Muhammad's lawyers to hire a jury consultant to help them screen potential jurors. In addition, the judge denied a defense request for extra peremptory challenges when a jury pool is created.

Defense lawyers had asked to hire a consultant at taxpayer expense to help with jury selection for Muhammad's capital murder trial, set to begin Oct. 14 in Virginia Beach.

Defense lawyer Jonathan Shapiro had said the circumstances of the case — especially the extensive pretrial publicity — made it necessary to have an expert to help question potential jurors.

Prosecutors said a jury consultant was an unneces-

sary extravagance, and Millette agreed.

"The court is confident of the extensive experience of lawyers at both tables," the judge said. "Jury selection is certainly a skill that attorneys develop."

Also Monday, defense lawyers received a two-week extension before they must give notice of any mental health issues they plan to raise. Shapiro said mental health experts need to conduct tests on Muhammad outside the jail at Prince William Hospital.

Prosecutors had argued that no extension was necessary and that defense lawyers should have been barred from mounting a mental health defense because they missed last week's deadline.

Overstreet

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gaming Mecca of the world.

Now the powers that be are afraid storage of nuclear waste in the proximity of Las Vegas will harm tourism and gaming. I do not have a clue how they could reason in this manner. It is as if they believe that people coming to Las Vegas for a week or less period of time are going to base their

decision to come on what is stored in the side of a mountain about 100 miles away.

As the current national advertising campaign states: "What happens in Las Vegas, stays in Las Vegas." As such, I am again going on the record with "the storage of nuclear waste is going to happen at Yucca Mountain and it's going to stay there for 10,000 years."

Curry

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week's march spoke of a 15-month rolling mobilization plan, aimed at stimulating activism through the next presidential election. But if the latest march is a measure of their clout, they may well roll over and surrender. If they can't beat the bushes for more people than showed up last week, they will not be able to remove George Bush from the White House in 2004.

In the words of Dr. King: Where do we go from here?

First, quickly convene a meeting of national leaders—a similar meeting should be arranged at the local level—and develop what civil rights activist Ron Daniels likes to refer to as operational unity.

Second, call an immediate moratorium on all national marches. Let's have a real one or not suffer the embarrassment of announcing a rally and then have so few people show. If we resume the marches, make sure the major

players are there, with their bands and not their quartets. And if they aren't there, let's make them explain why they are MIA.

Finally, let's re-examine our basic civil rights thrust. In our efforts to broaden the "civil rights coalition," we run the risk of becoming such a smorgasbord of everything that we end up standing for nothing. I know this position is not politically correct, but I am not trying to be political—just correct. Of course, I recognize the value of coalitions, but sometimes we become so entangled in them that the issue of racism gets lost in the endless laundry list of grievances.

If there is another national march, it should be well organized or we should stay at home. That's what most people did last week and we don't need to suffer through that indignity again.

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