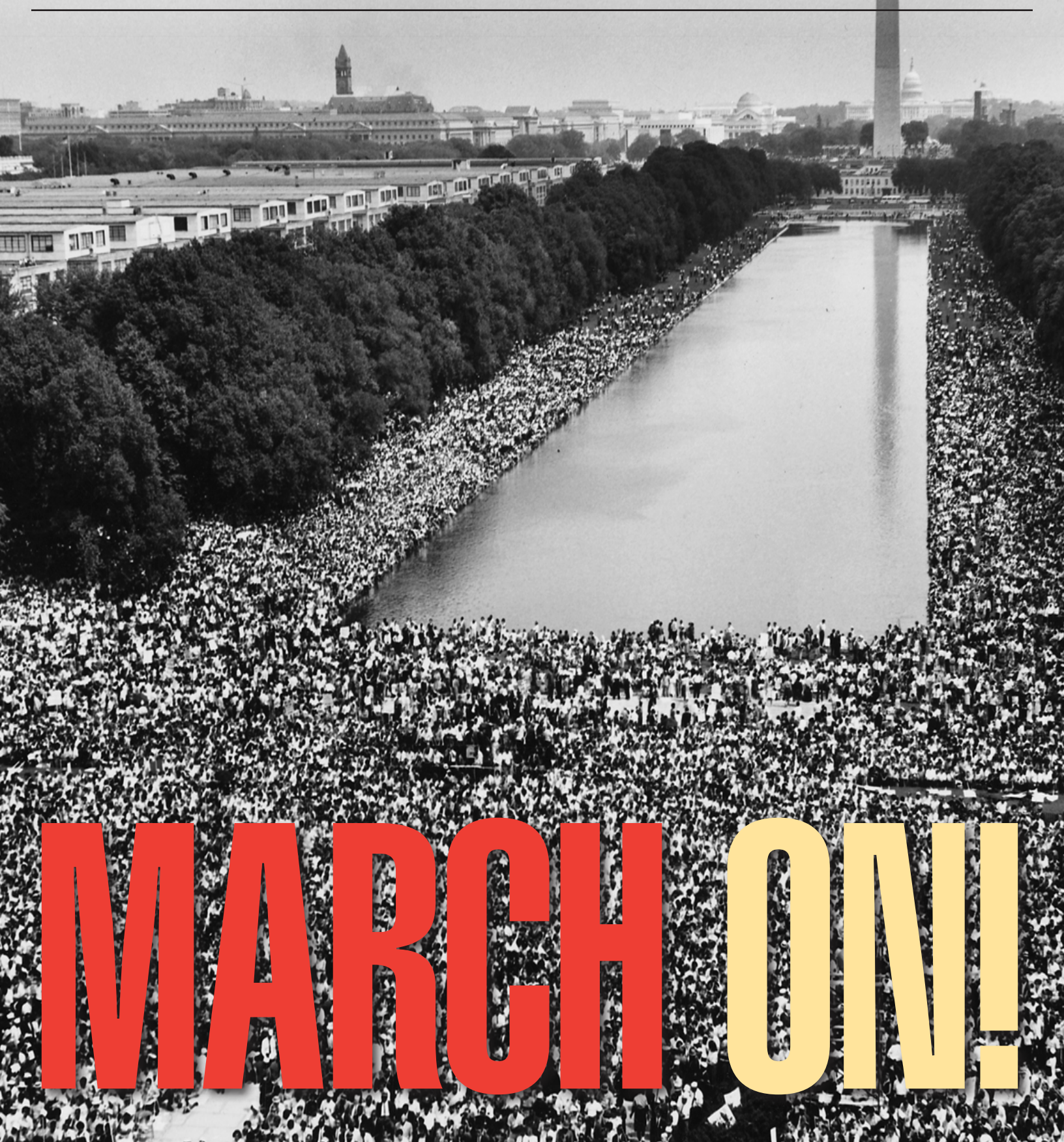


APOLLO

EDUCATION

THE APOLLO THEATER STUDY GUIDE

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MARCH ON!

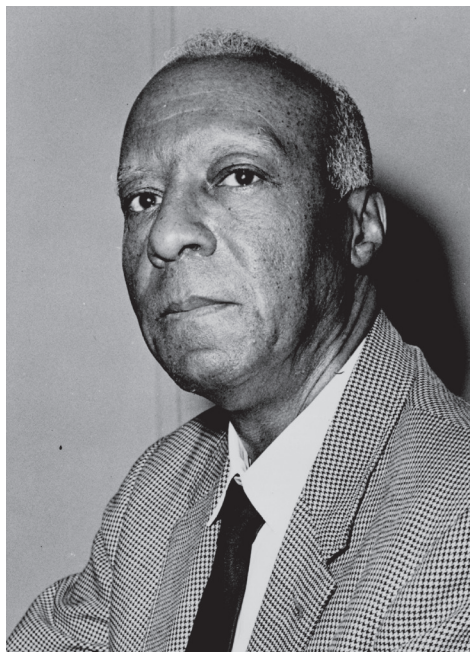


THE APOLLO THEATER & ACTIVISM IN THE 60'S



Performances and programming at the Apollo Theater do more than entertain. Performances and programming at the Apollo serve movements and moments that impact the well being of its artists and audiences. Since opening in 1934, the Apollo has been a home and resource for artists, entertainers, and activism.

It was the 1960s and the Civil Rights Movement was heating up! The United States Supreme Court ruled "separate but equal" unconstitutional in the landmark case, *Brown v. Board of Education*. African-American students across the nation started to **integrate** classrooms. One of the most well



Left to right: Thelonious Monk, 1947; Jackie "Mom's" Mabley, 1962; Max Roach, 1947.

Bottom: A. Philip Randolph was a political leader and one of the lead organizers of the March on Washington. Throughout his life he advocated for civil rights, the integration of the armed forces, and for the rights of workers.

known cases was that of the Little Rock Nine.

College students in Greensboro, North Carolina started to "**sit-ins**". They sat at "whites-only" lunch counters and waited to be served to protest **segregation**. Soon after, hundreds of students in various

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states organized sit-ins, marched, and continued to fight for civil rights.

A result of their protest and despite the laws that should have protected them, many students were arrested and unable to pay their bail. The National Student Association, a coalition advocating for the liberties of college students, refused to let jail stop the movement. After some conversation, on August 11, 1962, they helped produce a benefit concert at the Apollo Theater. Jazz pianist and composer Thelonious Monk, drummer Max Roach, and comedian Jackie “Moms” Mabley, were some of the famous artists to perform. Proceeds from the concert went to the Southern Student Freedom Fund, a fund created to assist students who had been jailed or expelled from school for participating in civil rights activism.

In the following year, talk of the March on Washington started to rise. It was estimated that more than 100,000 people would attend the march. With such a high turnout, coordinators of the march, like A. Philip Randolph, made plans to finance the event. One plan included hosting a show at the Apollo Theater. On August 23, 1963, the Apollo hosted a fund-raiser for the March on Washington.

Two years later, in 1965, the Apollo continued to use its stage and relationships to serve the community. In collaboration with radio station WWRL, the Apollo created a weeklong benefit concert called “Freedom Week.” The money raised went to several civil rights organizations like the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE). A year earlier, in 1964, the Apollo held a donation drive for CORE. Any patron donating \$2.50 to CORE received one free admission ticket into an Apollo show.

Today, the Apollo continues to use its stage not only for performances, but also for educational programming, fundraisers, and other activities that serve its community better.

WORDS TO KNOW

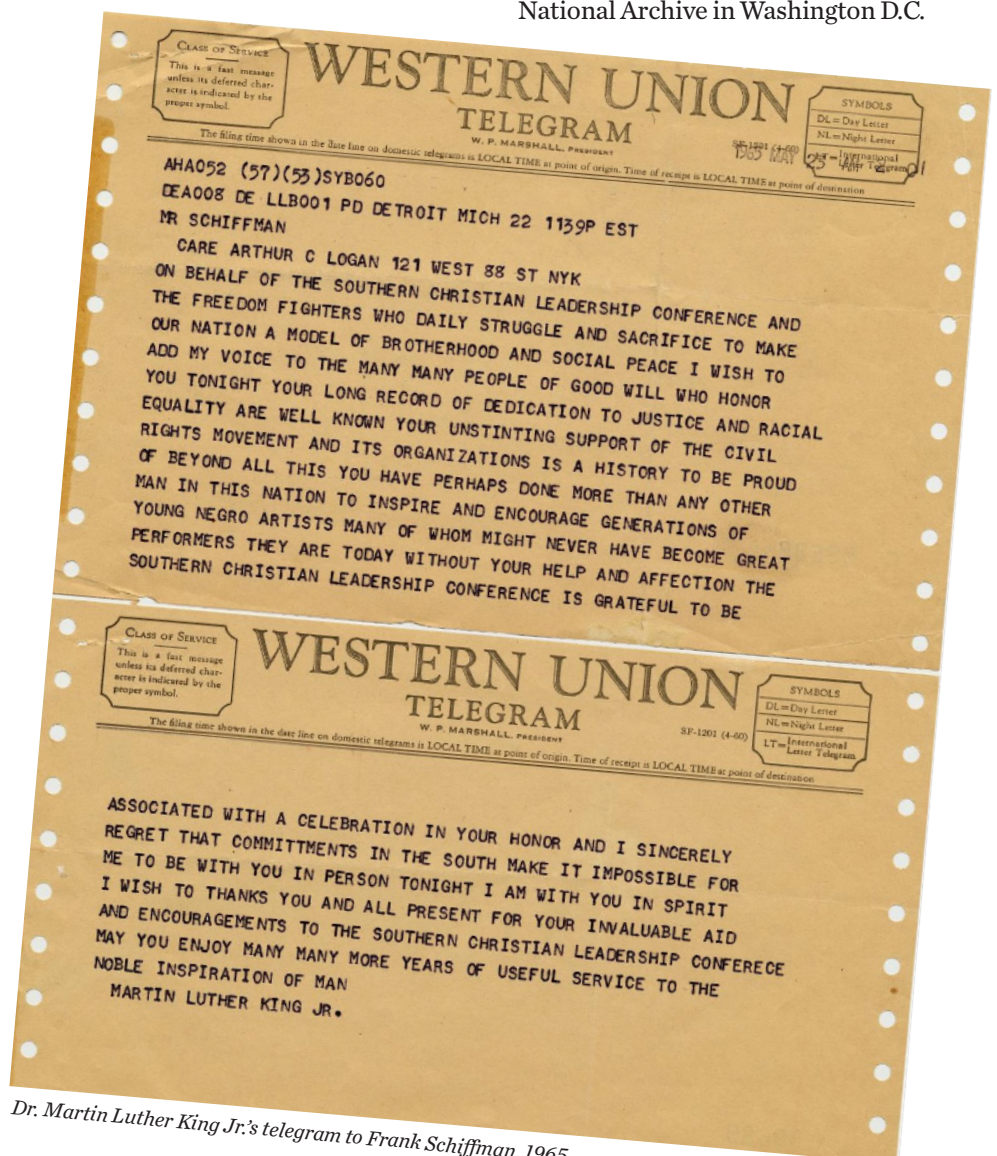
Segregation: the separation of groups of people by race

Integrate: to join together formerly separated groups of people

Sit-In: a method of non-violent protest where demonstrators sat at segregated lunch counters and waited to be served.

A TELEGRAM TO THE APOLLO

Frank Schiffman managed the Apollo Theater from 1935 until his death in 1974. On May 25, 1965, on the eve of an event celebrating Schiffman’s and the Apollo Theater’s commitment to civil rights, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. sent him a telegram. A source of pride to Schiffman, the telegram now resides in the Frank Schiffman Archive at the National Archive in Washington D.C.



Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s telegram to Frank Schiffman, 1965

CLICK [HERE](#) TO CHECK OUT THE MARCH ON! INTERACTIVE TIMELINE

BROWN V. BOARD OF EDUCATION

The ruling of “separate but equal” was what allowed segregation to continue for so long. In *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* (1954), the Supreme Court said “separate but equal” did not provide equality. The decision called for an end of segregated public schools throughout the country.

LITTLE ROCK NINE

In 1957, nine African-American students integrated Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas. Their names were: Melba Pattillo Beals, MinniJean Brown, Carlotta Walls LaNier, Elizabeth Eckford, Ernest Green, Gloria Ray, Jefferson Thomas and Terrence Roberts.

CONGRESS OF RACIAL EQUALITY (CORE)

The Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) was organized in 1942. They organized the first Freedom Rides and used other non-violent methods to protest segregation and racism.

Top photo: March on Washington attendees, 1963

Bottom photo: Members of CORE prepare for their first Freedom Ride, the Journey of Reconciliation, 1947

DID YOU KNOW:

The college sit-in movement started with four young African-American men in Greensboro, North Carolina. Feeling the need to do something to challenge segregation, Ezell Blair Jr., David Richmond, Franklin McCain, and Joseph McNeil, held the first sit-in at a diner for whites-only. Six days after their first sit-in, at least five other white-only lunch counters had African-American students sitting at them.



The Southern Student Freedom Fund was co-founded by the United National Student Association and the Students for a Democratic Society. The Fund helped with the financial needs of student activists who had been expelled from school or imprisoned for participating in civil rights activities. The Fund also educated people living in Western and Eastern states about the problems confronting African-Americans in the South.

The National Student Association was founded by college students in 1947. They represented and fought for the liberties of students on college campuses. In the 1960's they supported other civil rights organizations by hosting events, publicizing information, and providing resources to support the movement.

FROM MEMORY TO PAGE TO STAGE

Before Google and computers, libraries and books, oral history was one of the primary ways in which people kept track of events. Today oral history continues to be a form of documenting historical events.

An oral history is the recording in interview form of the personal narratives of people with first-hand knowledge of historical or current events.

In writing *March On!*, playwright Daniel Carlton used the oral histories of four attendees of the 1963 March on Washington: Don Quinn Kelley, Carl Berry, Ellen Frankel, and a fictional reporter. Throughout the play the characters talk about their lives, traveling to Washington D.C. and what it felt like to be among the hundreds



March On! playwright Daniel Carlton

of thousands of people crowding in front of the Lincoln Memorial to hear Martin Luther King Jr. deliver his historic “I Have a Dream” speech.

In West African cultures, the Griot (pronounced gree-oh), is the person who keeps the oral history of a group of people and preserves traditions. Among their many roles, they remembered and retold the history of the people through music, song, art, dance or speech. The play, *March On!* is an artistic retelling of their oral histories with additional words, fictional characters, music and enactment. Don’s, Carl’s, and Ellen’s first hand experiences of the 1963 March On Washington were recorded through oral history interviews and then transcribed so that there was also a written document of their memories.



NOW THAT YOU KNOW WHAT AN ORAL HISTORY IS, CONDUCT YOUR OWN ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW!

Here Are Some Tips for Conducting an Oral History Interview:

- Pick an interesting relative or person to be the subject of your interview. They should enjoy talking or have an interesting story about their life, historical events, or popular music from the 1960s.
- Do research about your subject—either the person or the era—before your interview begins; this way, you will be able to ask more insightful questions.
- Prepare a list of questions based on your research and knowledge of your subject. Your questions should be open-ended, meaning they can be answered with more than a “yes” or “no” answer.
- Arrange an interview time with your subject.
- If possible, use a phone or another recording device to record your interview. Be sure to bring a charger in case the interview lasts longer than expected.
- Have plenty of paper and a good pen or pencil. Even if you are recording the interview, take notes.
- After the interview is complete, read your notes and listen to the recording. If you want to be like a professional, you can *transcribe* your interview by writing or typing everything that was said.
- Pick out the topics that are most interesting to you. These are called *highlights*.
- Write out your interview, either as an article or a report.
- As a courtesy, share the article with the person you interviewed. If you have gotten that person’s thoughts down correctly, he or she will feel honored.
- Read your interview to your family and your class or, like Daniel Carlton, transform the content of interview into a creative project using theatre, visual arts, music or dance.



Students at C.S. 154, the Harriet Tubman Learning Center interview a community elder about her life in Harlem. Photographer: c. bay milin

NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS MARCH ON WASHINGTON FOR JOBS & FREEDOM

WED. AUG. 28th

PROMPT SIGNS



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Boyd, Herb. "The Apollo and Civil Rights." *Ain't Nothing Like the Real Thing: How the Apollo Shaped American Entertainment*, edited by Richard Carlin and Kinshasha Holman Conwill, National Museum of African American History and Culture through Smithsonian Books, 2010, 170- 173.

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Images:

Jackie "Moms" Mabley, Getty Images
Max Roach: Gottlieb, William P., Library of Congress
Thelonius Monk: Gottlieb, Williams P., Library of Congress
Telegram from Martin Luther King, Jr. to Frank Schiffman: Frank Schiffman Apollo Theatre Collection, National Museum of American History Archives Center

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