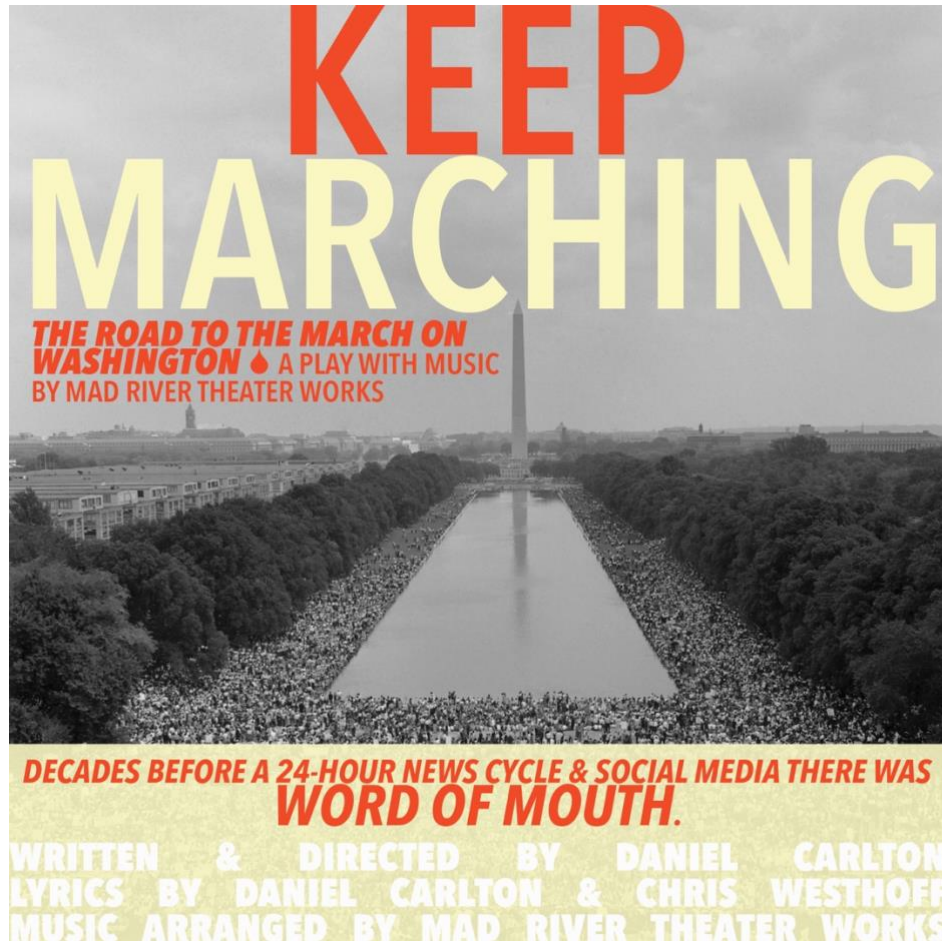


***Keep Marching***  
**by Mad River Theater Works**

*Flynn Student Matinee Study Guide*



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**FLYNN**

## About Mad River Theater Works

*“Our plays aim to be joyful and entertaining experiences that take our audiences, often children, to the historic moments where individuals make hard decisions to stand on the side of what is right.”*

-- Mad River Theater Works

Mad River Theater Works is a touring theater company that creates vibrant and evocative plays with music for families and young audiences, based on American history and folklore. Their shows combine stories of ordinary life with tales of extraordinary individuals, weaving together live music, storytelling, and drama, exploring the grit and humanity of characters from the past.

The company began in 1978 in Ohio and since then has toured their original performances throughout the United States and Canada. The ensemble is made up of a group of writers, performers, and theater educators who collectively create and perform the company’s vibrant plays.

Other original shows made by the company include *Walk on: The Story of Rosa Parks*, a play with music that tells the story of civil rights leader Rosa Parks, and *Freedom Flight*, which interweaves the true story of Addison White, an enslaved Black man who, in 1853, escaped and fled to Ohio, and the fictional story of a contemporary Black teenager, exploring questions of freedom and prejudice, today and in the past.

## About “Keep Marching”

*Keep Marching: The Road to the March On Washington* is a new play with music created by Mad River Theater Company – it’s brand new, and you’ll be among the first audiences to see this show! (Lucky you!)

The show explores the historic 1963 March on Washington, a key moment in the Civil Rights movement of the 1960’s. The March on Washington is perhaps most famous for being the setting in which Martin Luther King, Jr. gave his famous “I Have A Dream” speech, on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C.

At the heart of the play is this question: Not knowing that Dr. King was going to deliver one of the most iconic speeches in modern history, why did so many people go? And seeing that 1963 was one of the most violent years of the civil rights movement, this question is then further focused to: *“What inspired young people in their teens or 20s to go?”*



*An unprecedented 250,000 people showed up for the 1963 March on Washington*

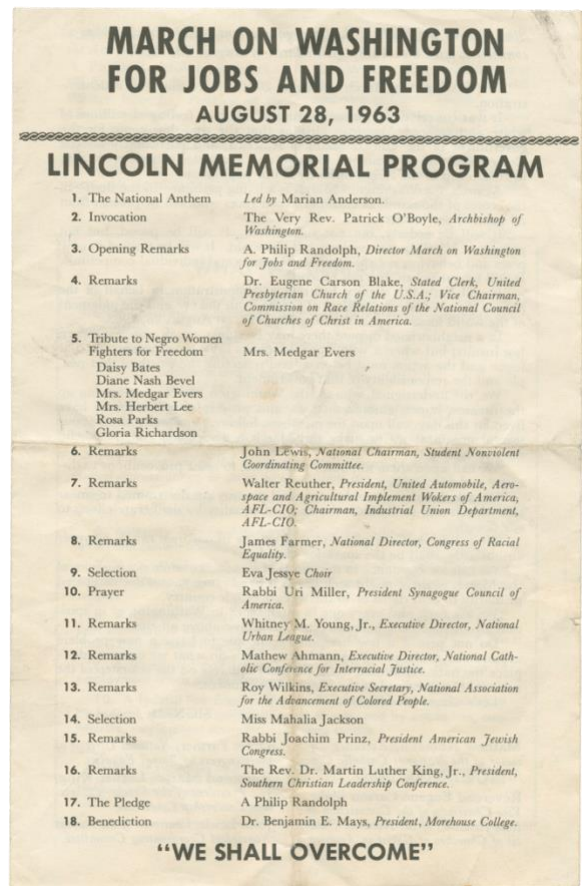
The play incorporates historical records of the plans, motivations, fears, and concerns that went into organizing the march, as well as oral histories of people who attended the march, collected by playwright Daniel Carlton. The play is held together by the characters of news reporters, fictional characters who guide us through the story and brings to life many of the iconic figures who dreamed up the March on Washington and made it a reality.

As playwright Daniel Carlton explains in an [interview](#) about a different project of his, “as I was writing [the play]... I realized that it’s just so flat if I’m just taking history. Documentaries do it better, because you see pictures. So what I decided was, what if I found people who went [to the march]... the stories started coming through: the music they were listening to, the memory of the day, the reasons that they went, the trip there on the day itself... their stories will live forever in this play. And these are people that history has not marked in any books, but they were part of history. You let them tell the story, and see what comes out of it.”

Carlton [talks about his process](#) and some of the people he interviewed for the project in an episode of the podcast Creation Grounds (starting at 33:55). When thinking about the power of illuminating history through a play like *Keep Marching*, Carlton explains, “[the play] was not about Dr. King, it was about people needing to love and believe; things that aren’t news stories. So that’s how I used history. But history itself is dry, because it’s already happened. Now, all you get is pictures, unless you get the people who had the experiences. They’re going to teach you more about that than anybody who’s written a book about it. I apply that to other aspects of my art when I can, when it’s dealing with history. I try to find sources, and I try to meet [the subject] where it was culturally, and then I ask myself what was the resistance.”

**Historical Context: The March on Washington**

Despite slavery becoming illegal in the United States in 1863 when President Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation, and Black Americans becoming constitutionally protected as full citizens under the 15<sup>th</sup> Amendment in 1870, Southern states in the late 1800s and early 1900s put into place laws which **disenfranchised** Black Americans. These laws, called Jim Crow laws, were a system of legal discrimination that upheld **segregation**, prevented interracial marriage, prevented Black Americans from getting good jobs, and kept citizens from exercising their right to vote. They were often enforced with violence.



*The program of events for the March on Washington*

It was clear that something had to be done on a national level to overturn these laws. The growing Civil Rights Movement, which began in the early 1950s, was a social movement across the United States that organized demonstrations and nonviolent protest to demand equality for Black Americans and an end to the Jim Crow laws.

In the early 1960s, civil rights leaders begin organizing what would become the historic March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. Key organizers were **A. Phillip Randolph**, a union labor organizer who, in the 1920s, organized the first Black-led labor union in the U.S.; **Bayard Rustin**, a gay rights and civil rights activist who learned techniques of nonviolent civil resistance in India from followers of Gandhi, and advised Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. on these techniques; **John Lewis**, one of the first **Freedom Riders** and a founding member of the **Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee**; and **Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.**, chairman of the Southern Christian Leadership Council and the most well-known leader of and spokesperson for the Civil Rights movement.



*Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. addressing the crowd at the March on Washington*

On August 28, 1963 – the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation – an estimated 250,000 people participated in the March on Washington. They began at the Washington Monument in Washington, D.C. and then marched peacefully for one mile until arriving at the Lincoln Memorial, where they listened to three hours of speeches about keeping hope alive in the fight for equality and a better future. The final speaker was Dr.

Martin Luther King, Jr., who shared his famous “[I Have A Dream](#)” speech in front of the crowd.

After the speeches, the leaders of the march walked over to the White House where they met with President John F. Kennedy and Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson to demand their support for a national civil rights bill.

And finally, thanks to the monumental efforts of these leaders, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was passed the following year. This act made it illegal to discriminate based on race, sex, religion, or national origin and outlawed segregation nationwide. In 1965 Congress passed the Voting Rights Act, which allowed the federal government to overturn state laws that made it more difficult for Black Americans to vote.

The fight for justice and equality for Black Americans, Indigenous Americans, and Americans of color is certainly not over even today, sixty years after the March on Washington. But it’s

undeniable that the march played a crucial role in the movement toward that better future which Dr. King dreamed of.

This short video from the National Museum of African American History & Culture “[Why We March](#)” presents photographs and quotes from the 1963 March on Washington, contemporary Black Lives Matter protests, and many other marches in between – all of which illustrate the necessity of showing up for justice and the continued legacy of the March on Washington.

## **Glossary**

***Disenfranchise*** – to deprive someone of a right or privilege, especially the right to vote. In 1883, the Supreme Court ruled that Congress did not have the power to prohibit discrimination in the private sector, which led directly to southern legislatures using violent intimidation tactics and passing restrictive voter registration and electoral laws in order to prevent Black citizens from participating in democracy. Anyone attempting to defy those laws faced arrest, fines, violence, even death.

***Segregation*** – an enforced system of separation of people into racial or other ethnic groups in all aspects of daily life. After the passing of the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment, Jim Crow laws were enacted in many states, enforcing segregation in public transportation, schools, parks, theaters, restaurants, and more. This was reinforced by the 1896 Supreme Court case Plessy v. Ferguson, which explicitly permitted so-called “separate but equal” facilities.

***Freedom Riders*** – civil rights activists who rode interstate buses into the segregated South beginning in 1961 in order to protest the unconstitutional segregation of public buses. Though two Supreme Court decisions (one in 1946, another in 1960) ruled that segregated public buses were unconstitutional, southern states ignored the rulings and the federal government was doing



*Freedom Riders waiting to board a bus, while a National Guard escort stands nearby*

nothing to enforce them. A group called CORE (the Congress of Racial Equity) organized activists of different backgrounds, races, and ages to ride together on interstate buses. You can learn more in this video from Georgia Public Broadcasting, “[Who Were the Freedom Riders?](#)”

***Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee*** – a group founded in 1960 by young people dedicated to nonviolent, direct action tactics. The group was formed after a veteran civil rights organizer named Ella Baker invited Black college student activists to a conference in Raleigh, North Carolina and encouraged them to form their own autonomous organization. Dr. Martin

Luther King, Jr. issued a press statement on the first day of the conference, calling on students to “delve deeper into the philosophy of nonviolence.” The SNCC became heavily involved in Freedom Rides, despite violent attacks by segregationists on CORE sponsored buses.

**A. Philip Randolph** – a union labor organizer who organized the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters (BSCP) in 1925, the first Black-led labor union in the U.S. In the 1930s, his organizing efforts played a crucial role in ending racial discrimination in defense industries and segregation in the U.S. military.

***Bayard Rustin*** – a gay rights and civil rights activist who learned techniques of nonviolent civil resistance in India from followers of Gandhi, and advised Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. on these techniques. He was the deputy director of the March on Washington, and had been organizing protests, marches, and sit-ins promoting nonviolence for decades before the March.



*Bayard Rustin, a key organizer of the March on Washington*

***John Lewis*** – president of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), Lewis was the youngest speaker at the March on Washington. He was asked to tone down his speech to avoid offending Congress and the president. Lewis was one of the original thirteen Congress of Racial Equity (CORE) Freedom Riders and helped lead the Selma to Montgomery March in 1965. He was elected to Congress in 1986.

***Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.*** – elected president of the Southern Christian Leadership Council in 1957, an organization formed to provide new leadership for the civil rights movement. Among his many actions for civil rights, in the eleven years between 1957 and 1968, King traveled over six million miles and spoke over 2,500 times, wrote five books and numerous articles, led a massive protest in Birmingham, Alabama, and was arrested twenty times. He received the 1964 Nobel Peace Prize at the age of 35, making him the youngest man to receive the prize. He is the most well-known leader of and spokesperson for the Civil Rights movement.

### **Reflection Questions**

*Here are some example questions to prompt deeper engagement from your students, both before and after the show:*

#### **Before the Show:**

- Have you ever been to a theater before? What are some ways an audience is expected to behave in a theater that are different from how you behave in other places you go for entertainment, like a movie theater?
- When you think about historical theater, what comes to mind?
- What do you know about the civil rights movement? Who are some of the people involved in the movement?

- What do you know about the 1963 March on Washington?

### **After the Show:**

- How did the show meet or break your expectations of historical theater?
- How does theater give you a different perspective on history? What do you think is accomplished by creating a play about historical events? How is it different from reading about it, or watching a documentary, etc?
- How did the show make you think differently about the issues facing our country today?
- How did the show make you feel? Was there a specific moment when it caused an emotional reaction in you? How did it do that? What did the show make you think about?
- In theatre, symbolism is the use of one or more objects to represent something else. The object may represent an idea, a feeling, or a physical entity. Symbols allow theater makers to convey messages to audiences that would be difficult to communicate through dialogue or action alone. Did you see any symbolism in the show?
- If you were to write a review of the show, what would you say? What stood out to you? Would you recommend it to other people? Why

### **Resources**

- Mad River Theater Works website  
<https://madrivetheater.com/about>
- National Geographic Kids: 1963 March on Washington  
<https://kids.nationalgeographic.com/history/article/march-on-washington>
- Footage of Dr. King’s “I Have A Dream” Speech  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vP4iY1TtS3s>
- The Historical Legacy of the March on Washington  
<https://nmaahc.si.edu/explore/stories/historical-legacy-march-washington>
- “Why We March” from the National Museum of African American History & Culture  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8eq8QjqNKbQ&t=140s>
- “Finding North” Interview with Daniel Carlton & David Gonzalez  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uj7KZ4SF4nQ&t=304s>
- Playwright Daniel Carlton Interview for Creation Grounds podcast  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mXtxP4O9ztE>
- Georgia Public Broadcasting Video: “Who Were the Freedom Riders?”  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E1smGpGSa14>
- About the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (Stanford University)  
<https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/encyclopedia/student-nonviolent-coordinating-committee-sncc>
- Profile: A. Philip Randolph  
<https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/a-philip-randolph>
- Throughline podcast episode: “Remembering Bayard Rustin: The Man Behind the March on Washington”  
<https://www.npr.org/2021/02/22/970292302/remembering-bayard-rustin-the-man-behind-the-march-on-washington>
- Nobel Prize Biography Article on Martin Luther King, Jr.  
<https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/1964/king/biographical/>