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“Why March? Because it’s Necessary”

“So how was the March?” was the question repeatedly posed to me in the days following the March in Washington, D.C. this summer. My gut response every time: “Necessary!”

Reflecting upon the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom organized by civil rights leaders and led by Martin Luther King Jr.; his son and daughter-in-law, Martin Luther King III and Arndrea King; and Reverend Al Sharpton determined to organize and lead the March this past August 26th. Appreciating that many people would assume the gathering to be a celebration of the 60th anniversary of the 1963 March, Reverend Sharpton preempted that designation and declared it “neither a celebration nor commemoration, but a continuation.”

This year’s March was convened for the express purpose of raising the consciousness of our elected officials to the ongoing plight of Black Americans; the increasing threats to Blacks and other persons of color, persons of the Jewish faith, and persons identifying as LGBTQ+; to women’s rights; and to the government’s responsibility to uphold and ensure the rights and protections guaranteed to all Americans by the United States Constitution.

Before locking arms and making their way from the Lincoln Memorial to the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial, marchers heard from leaders of civil rights and social policy and advocacy organizations. With just under 200 partner organizations representing people of different faiths, races, ethnicities, and gender identities; and causes centered on voting rights, education, health, economic rights, privacy rights, gun control, hate crimes, excessive use of force, and more, the gathering of tens of thousands was a remarkable demonstration of unity and a shared commitment to get behind and lift up all who continue to be marginalized and left behind throughout this nation.

Partner organizations included the Anti-Defamation League; UnidosUS; National Urban League; NAACP; NAACP Legal Defense & Educational Fund; Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights; National Council on Black Civic Participation; National Council of Negro

Women; the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees; AFL-CIO; United Federation of Teachers; the Divine Nine; The Links, Incorporated; and proudly, the Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies, which I am blessed to lead and serve.

Witnessing people from all walks of life and across the country stand united with a singular, overarching demand that America make good on its promise of equality for all engendered hope throughout the massive crowd. Attendees found community and comfort in strangers at a time when our country is becoming more and more divided and threats to measures heretofore taken to help ensure the well-being of those who suffer because of racism, bias, and prejudice are not just veil; they are real and being acted on. Throughout the day, America was challenged to live up to her promise of true democracy.

Being a child of the Black Church, the 60th Anniversary March was particularly inspiring in these increasingly challenging times. The Black Church was borne out of the need for refuge and hope for those whose very identity was made a threat to their physical, mental and emotional well-being. The Black Church was birthed to be revolutionary in its response to injustice—putting on the whole armor of God to speak truth to power. Appreciating that the National Action Network, the Drum Major Institute, and their respective leaders are rooted in the Black Church and its reason for existence—refuge and hope, and unrelenting activism—should inspire us all.

Marching this past August was just as necessary as it was in August 1963. When still today inequality and inequity abound in the pillars of society—in everything from safe and affordable housing, to jobs and meaningful wages, quality and affordable healthcare, education that ensures reading and math literacy at a minimum; criminal justice, voting rights, and environmental justice—marching to make clear our nonacceptance was necessary. Demonstrating with our feet that we shall not be moved was necessary. Being and evidencing the change we wish to see throughout this land was necessary. ■



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A CONTINUATION
60 MARCH ON
WASHINGTON
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