No Easy Walk (1961-1963)

WYATT TEE WALKER: I don't think any white person can really understand what it is to be a Negro in America.

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR: There will be neither rest nor tranquility in America until the Negro is granted his citizenship rights.

LAURIE PRITCHETT: We didn't want to be forced into doing something, which is one sense what it was. We were intimidated, we were threatened.

NARRATOR: Segregation had learned to beat the civil rights movement at its own game. The movement leaders had to find new ways to fight back. But it was still no easy walk.

GEORGE C. WALLACE: I draw the line in the dust and toss the gauntlet before the feet of tyranny and I say segregation now, segregation tomorrow, and segregation forever.

NARRATOR: On January 14th, 1963, these words made Alabama Governor George Wallace the symbol of southern resistance. That year, movement leaders targeted the largest city in his state for a major civil rights confrontation, Birmingham, Alabama, a city that had attracted national attention for its strict segregation and racial hatred. A city that some called Bombingham because of the many bomb attacks against blacks. For years, Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth and others have fought the segregated system. In 1956, Shuttlesworth demanded the desegregation of city buses. Many of his friends tried to talk him out of it.

REV. FRED SHUTTLESWORTH: They say we ought to stop and think this thing out. I said, "There's nothing to think out. We say we're going to ride, and we ride. We do what we say for a change." So we rode the buses and over 250 people got arrested, I guess, and joined desegregated riding.

NARRATOR: Because of his efforts, his house and church were bombed as he slept.

REV. FRED SHUTTLESWORTH: They blew the floor out from under my bed, spaces I guess 15 feet. The springs I was lying on, we never found. I walked out from this and instead of running away from the blast, running away from the Klansmen, I said to the Klansmen police that came, he said, "Reverend, if I were you, I'd get out of town as fast as I could." I said, "Officer, you're not me. You go back and tell your Klan brethren that if God could keep me through this, then I'm here for the duration." I think that's what gave people the feeling that I wouldn't run, I didn't run, and that God had to be there.

NARRATOR: In September of 1957, Shuttlesworth was attacked again as he tried to enroll his children in an all white school. This kind of violence was not stopped by city officials. The most famous was Commissioner of Public Safety, Theophilus Eugene Connor, Bull Connor, whose opinions earned him election to six terms.

BULL CONNOR: The so-called Negro Movement is a part of the attempted takeover of our country by the lazy, the indolent, the beatniks, the ignorant, and by some misguided religions and bleeding hearts, and all being led by the politicians who stay in office by appealing, remember not to reason, but to the most votes.

NARRATOR: Public sentiment turned against Connor in 1961 when the Freedom Riders were attacked in Birmingham on Mother's Day. Connor was linked to the Klan violence and the local newspaper demanded to know where his police had been. The incident attracted national attention and the city was embarrassed into taking action.

DAVID VANN: Something had to be changed. The business community, when they had supported Bull Connor for election, they really hadn't intended for him to do things like the -- Allowing things like the bus station to occur.

NARRATOR: It was too late for an easy change. Birmingham was on a collision course with the national civil rights movement, and movement leaders were ready. They had just learned some hard lessons in a small city in southwest Georgia, Albany. Here, Martin Luther King suffered what some had called one of his greatest defeats. The Albany campaign started in 1961. Young organizers from the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, or SNCC, came here to help the black community organize against segregation. In November, a federal agency ordered the desegregation of all facilities used for interstate travel. SNCC representative Charles Sherrod sent students into the Trailways bus station to see if local authorities would arrest them.

CHARLES SHERROD: Some of us really didn't think they would get arrested because this was a federal mandate. They mess with us now, but they're going to get the federal government on them, you know. Nobody's going to mess with the federal government, we thought.

NARRATOR: But the students were arrested. Sherrod and SNCC continued to work with the community, finding it rewarding because of the special quality they found in the people of Albany.

BERNICE REAGON: If you have a gold mine, then there's a point in the gold mine when you have the richest part. And that's called the mother lode. That's what Albany is to black people in terms of just the concentrated essence of the spirit of the people. And if you can imagine black people at our most powerful point in terms of community and peoplehood, then that's Albany, Georgia.

NARRATOR: The black community attacked segregation wherever it existed. Demonstrations took place throughout the city, at libraries, schools, movie theaters, and City Hall.

CHARLES SHERROD: And we just put pressure, pressure, pressure. Sometimes we don't know who controls this, who controls the other. So we stomp around and stop and see whose feet we get. And then somebody's going to holler, "Oh, you got me." So then when he hollers, that's the direction we go in. And that was a general strategy. We didn't know what we were doing.
DR. W. G. ANDERSON: You want to know what the Negro in Albany is going to do? He's going to do whatever is necessary to insure his freedom.
NARRATOR: Dr. William G. Anderson was president of the Albany Movement, an umbrella organization formed to coordinate all the civil rights groups in the community. By mid-December, Dr. Anderson became concerned because more than 500 demonstrators had been jailed.
DR. W. G. ANDERSON: These were common, ordinary, every day people, housewives, cooks, maids, laborers, children out of school. We had made no provisions for these people going to jail because we did not anticipate the mass arrest. So we concluded that night that we are into something that really we need some extra help in.
NARRATOR: Dr. Anderson invited Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., to help in Albany. King brought with him the SCLC, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, a civil rights organization based in black churches and led by ministry.
ANDREW YOUNG: They had asked Martin to come down just to make a speech. And he went only to make a speech.
DR. W. G. ANDERSON: So Dr. King, right, he came there with not even an overnight bag or a toothbrush. I responded to my call, and I do not anticipate that he expected to get as intimately involved with the Albany Movement as he did.
ANDREW YOUNG: Dr. Anderson got carried away, and in public asked Martin to demonstrate, to lead the march with him and he agreed. And then he got put in jail, and with no plan, no thought of what we were going to do.
NARRATOR: King accepted release from jail. As he divided his time between Albany and other commitments, SNCC grew unhappy with SCLC's role.
CHARLES SHERROD: When Dr. King would come in, we'd get two or three thousand people without much effort, so that was in our favor. But when he left, it was more difficult for us to get people to come so that this phenomenon of Doc flying into places where we worked and then flying out to another place, which was needed, made it difficult for us to organize.
WYATT TEE WALKER: Well, in Albany we were like firefighters. The fire was already burning, and I'll try to say this as charitably as I can. SNCC was in over its head and they wanted the international and national attention that Martin Luther King's presence would generate, but they did not want the input of his organization.
MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR: I don't have but one speech. I don't have but one message as I journey around this country. And it is a message which says that I am convinced that the most potent weapon available to oppressed people as they struggle for freedom and justice is the weapon of nonviolence.
NARRATOR: As the movement took the nonviolent struggle into the streets of Albany, organizers expected the same reaction encountered in most southern communities, police brutality. But they had never met a law enforcement officer like this one, Albany's Chief of Police, Laurie Pritchett.
CHIEF LAURIE PRITCHETT: You're welcome to picket, just ... (inaudible) don't stop. You'll be allowed two here in this block, the others will move out. We'll allow two picketers in this block. If you're going to City Hall where you're picketing, you can leave two here, or you can go. Others that don't go will continue to be arrested unless they have two in this, right here where you picket.
I did research, I found his method was nonviolence, that his method was to fill the jail, same as Gandhi in India. And once they filled the jails, we'd have no capacity to arrest and then we'd have to give in to his demands.
NARRATOR: Pritchett made sure his jails wouldn't fill up, he had planned carefully.
CHIEF LAURIE PRITCHETT: I had sat down and took a map and went 15 miles, how many jails was in a 15 mile radius, how many was in a 30 mile radius, on up to maybe 50, 60 mile radius. And I'd contacted those authorities, they'd assured us that we could use their facilities. And we had, when the mass arrests started, and we'd have marches and there'd be 200, 300 -- At one time there, I think we had almost 2,000, but none in our jail.
DR. W. G. ANDERSON: But you'd have to understand that going to jail was probably one of the most feared things in rural Georgia. There were many blacks who were arrested in small towns in Georgia, never to be heard from again. We have every reason to believe that many of these were lynched. So going to jail was no small thing.
MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR: Dr. Steele, what are the conditions there? Is it crowded?
MAN: Yes, it's very crowded.
MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR: How many is that cell supposed to hold?
MAN: ... (inaudible) on the floor, some of them.
MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR: Is that so? It's built to hold ten, and there are 69 in there?

MAN: Yes.
MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR: Uh-huh.
NARRATOR: Because Chief Pritchett sent prisoners into these jails, some questioned how nonviolent he really was.
WYATT TEE WALKER: I think the apt description was slick. He did have enough intelligence to read Dr. King's book, and he culled from that a way to avoid the confrontation in inducing the great ferment in the national community by being non-brutal rather than being nonviolent. It's almost bizarre to say that a segregationist system or a law enforcement official of a segregationist system could be nonviolent because first of all, nonviolence works in a moral climate, and segregation is not a moral climate.
CHARLES SHERROD: I remember a statement that Chief Pritchett made to me one time when he said, "You know Sherrod, it's just a matter of mind over matter. I don't mind and you don't matter."
NARRATOR: Against the solid resistance of city officials, the Albany Movement found strength in mass meetings and song.
BERNICE REAGON: Mostly the mass meetings were singing in Albany. There was more singing than there was talking. And so most of the work that was done in terms of taking care of movement business had to do with nurturing the people who had come. And there would be two or three people who would talk, but basically the song was the bed of everything.
NARRATOR: July, 1962, Dr. King and Reverend Ralph Abernathy began serving a 45-day sentence. They were determined to stay in jail to protest Albany's segregation. But three days later, they were released. A stunned Dr. King explained that someone had mysteriously paid their fines.
MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR: At which time the chief said to us that we had been released. In other words, that our fine had been paid. I said, "Well Chief, we want to serve this time." His only response then was, "God knows, Reverend, I don't want you in my jail."
CHIEF LAURIE PRITCHETT: I knew that if he stayed in jail, we'd continue to have problems. So I talked to some people, I said, "We've got to get him out. And once we do, I think he'll leave here." And arrangements were made. Frankly, I don't know who the man was who paid the bond.
MAN: But it was done at your request?
CHIEF LAURIE PRITCHETT: Yes, it was done at my request. And it sort of surprised Dr. King. This was the one time that I -- Only time I've ever seen him when he seemed -- When he didn't know which way to go.
NARRATOR: In late July, the Albany Movement received another setback. At the city's request, federal judge J. Robert Elliott issued a restraining order to end the demonstrations which had been going on for almost nine months.
CORETTA SCOTT KING: When the federal court started ruling against us, that created a whole different thing in terms of what strategy do you use now? Because up to that point, mine had been willing to break state laws that were unjust laws, and our ally was the federal judiciary. And so if we would take our case to the federal court and the federal court ruled against us, what recourse did we have?
NARRATOR: Frustrated by the federal court action, Dr. King called for President Kennedy to intervene, but Kennedy remained distant.
BURKE MARSHALL: The President had decided that he was going to delegate the civil rights matter to the Attorney General, and that that was going to be a primary area of responsibility for the Attorney General. And the President was going to spend his time dealing with other parts of the administration policy, and especially, of course, foreign affairs.
PRESIDENT JOHN F. KENNEDY: The United States government is involved in sitting down at Geneva with the Soviet Union, I can't understand why the government of Albany, city council of Albany, cannot do the same for American citizens.
NARRATOR: By August, Dr. King realized there would be no clear cut victories in Albany. He was depressed as he left the city. Albany remained as segregated as it was the previous December when he first arrived.
MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR: I'm under orders to keep walking.
NARRATOR: The Albany Movement continued without him.
CHARLES SHERROD: Don't get weary and do it until the end. What does the Bible say about it? Victory is not to the swift or the strong, but the hero who's holding out until the end. We got to hold out.
Now, I can't help how Dr. King might have felt, or Wyatt Tee might have felt, or Bernard Leo and the rest of them in the SCLC, in NAACP, CORE or any other groups were felt. But as far as we were concerned, things moved on. We didn't skip one beat.
NARRATOR: The ministers of SCLC left Albany, but they took with them some important lessons, lessons that defined movement strategy for Birmingham.

WYATT TEE WALKER: The strength of the Albany Movement was it was perhaps the first time in this period of struggle of black people that we had mobilized an entire community against segregation. And secondly, we learned that valid and crucial lesson, that you must pinpoint your targets so that you do not dilute the strength of your attack.
REV. FRED SHUTTLESWORTH: Coming out of Albany, which many people considered not a victory, they need a victory. Dr. King's image at this time was slightly on the wane because he had not projected. I said, "I assure you if you come to Birmingham, this movement can not only gain prestige, but really shake the country."
NARRATOR: SCLC's leaders accepted this challenge. They arrived in Birmingham in the midst of a campaign to replace Bull Connor and the other commissioners with a new form of government.
DAVID VANN: I'm pleased to have a cloud removed so the people of the city can get down to the very serious business of securing the very best men possible to man the new city government.
BULL CONNOR: Regardless of what form of government we have, it is important that we put in office men who have records which show that they are not owned or controlled by anybody, or by any group.
NARRATOR: Bull Connor tried to keep power by running for mayor. But on April 2nd, 1963, he lost to Albert Boudwell, a racial moderate. The next day, SCLC launched Project C, C for confrontation.
WYATT TEE WALKER: Learning by the Albany circumstance, I targeted three stores because this was one, I don't recall the other two stores now. And since the 16th Street Baptist Church was going to be our headquarters, I had it timed as to how long it took a youngster to walk down there, how long it would take an older person to walk down there, how long it would take a middle aged person to walk down there. And I picked out what would be the best routes. Under some subterfuge, I visited all three of these stores and counted the stools, the tables, the chairs, etc., and what the best method of ingress and egress was.
NARRATOR: Twenty-one demonstrators were arrested on the first day of protest, and the city of Birmingham discovered it had another problem. The outgoing commissioners announced that they had no intention of stepping aside for the newly-elected government.
DAVID VANN: I remember now the day we swore in the mayor and before the day was over, we discovered we had two mayors, two city governments and Dr. Martin Luther King and the SCLC starting marches up and down the street. The marches occurred almost entirely during the 37 day period when Birmingham had two governments. On Tuesdays, the commission met, proceeded to govern the city. And when they finished, they would march out and nine council members would march in and they would proceed to adopt laws and spend money and conduct the affairs of the city.
NARRATOR: Until the courts could decide which city government was the legal one, Bull Connor remained in charge of the police and fire departments. And Connor took a lesson from Laurie Pritchett showing restraint as he supervised the arrest of hundreds of demonstrators. It was a week and a half before Easter. As planned, the demonstrations affected business during a major shopping season. Merchants and community leaders were upset.
A. G. GASTON: We got some mighty good people in this income, both white and colored.
NARRATOR: Businessman A. G. Gaston supported the new administration.
A. G. GASTON: We didn't anticipate the need for Martin King at that time. This Martin King thing came and all of sudden.
DAVID VANN: I was upset with Dr. King because he wouldn't give us a chance to prove what we could do through the political processes. And a year and a day after Connor had been elected with the largest vote in history, a majority of the people of this city voted to terminate his office. And when he ran for mayor, they rejected him.
ROBERT KENNEDY: I believe a representative of my office at the Department of Justice--
NARRATOR: The federal government also thought the protests were ill timed.
ROBERT KENNEDY: The fact that there was a change in administration in Birmingham, that the new administration had not yet taken over in their responsibilities and their duties and perhaps the timing of these demonstrations could be reconsidered.
NARRATOR: On April 10th, Birmingham obtained a state court injunction, ordering an end to the demonstrations. Dr. King grew discouraged, worried that the campaign here, as in Albany, would stall.
ANDREW YOUNG: We had about five or six hundred people in jail, but all the money was gone and we couldn't get people out of jail. And the business community, black business community and some of the white clergy, were pressuring us to call off the demonstrations and just get out of town. And we didn't know what to do. And he sat there in room 30 in the Gaston Motel and Martin didn't say anything. And then finally, he got up and he went in the bedroom and he came back with his blue jeans on and his jacket and he said, "Look," he said, "I don't know what to do. I just know that something has got to change in Birmingham. I don't know whether I can raise money to get people out of jail. I do know that I can go into jail with them." And not knowing how it's going to

work out, he walked out of the room and led his demonstration and went to jail. That was, I think, the beginning of his true leadership.

NARRATOR: At this time local white clergy were criticizing King and the campaign.

ANDREW YOUNG: The ministers published in the newspapers a diatribe against Martin calling him a troublemaker and saying that he was there stirring up trouble to get publicity. And he sat down and took that newspaper and he had no paper, and he was in solitary confinement. And he started writing an answer to that one page ad around the margins of the *New York Times*.

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR: I have yet to engage in a direct action campaign that was well timed in the view of those who have not suffered unduly from the disease of segregation. For years now, I have heard the word wait. It rings in the ear of every Negro with piercing familiarity. This wait has almost always meant never. We must come to see with one of our distinguished jurists that justice too long delayed is justice denied.

NARRATOR: As King sat in Birmingham jail, the demonstrations lost supporters. Eight days after his arrest, King accepted release on bond to plan the next phase of Project C. It would be the most controversial move yet.

JAMES BEVEL: We wanted to get the black community in Birmingham involved, and the way you get people involved is to get their children involved.

A. G. GASTON: They were taking the kids out of school, you know, marching, and I thought that was unnecessary. In fact, my idea was that the kids, many of them didn't know what it was all about ... (inaudible).

JAMES BEVEL: Most adults have bills to pay, house notes, rents, car notes, utility bills. But the young people, wherein they can think at the same level, are not at this point hooked with all those responsibilities. So a boy from high school, he get the same effect in terms of being in jail, in terms of putting pressure on the city as his father, and yet he's not -- There's no economic effect on the family because the father's still on the job.

NARRATOR: Thursday, May 2nd, would be the day the children began to march in Birmingham. At first, the groups were small. Police arrested them, loaded them in paddy wagons and took them away to Birmingham jail. As the children continued to march in increasing numbers, paddy wagons became inadequate. Finally, school buses were brought in to gather the demonstrators. By the end of that Thursday, 700 children were taken to Birmingham jail.

Friday, more than 1,000 children stayed out of school and arrived at the 16th Street Church to march. Bull Connor tried to stop the marches before they began and brought out the city's police dogs. Next, the fire department was brought in and Bull Connor ordered water hoses turned on the demonstrators. With 100 pounds of pressure per square inch, the water hit with enough force to knock the bark off trees. As water pounded the demonstrators, David Van was on the phone with A. G. Gaston.

DAVID VANN: And he was expressing a great deal of resentment about King coming in and messing up the -- Saying just we were getting a new start. And then he said to me, "But Lawyer Vann, they've turned fire hoses on a black girl. They're rolling that little girl right in the middle of the street now. I can't talk to you any longer."

A. G. GASTON: It was standing on my building looking down on Bull Connor and them shooting water in the park right across from my office there in that park. I guess that's the most outstanding thing in my mind right now. I just couldn't imagine what could happen.

NARRATOR: Bull Connor's white tank patrolled the city streets as the fire hoses stopped the demonstrators. Some hid behind the trees of Kelly Ingram Park. Others frolicked in defiance. The conflict gained national attention and news coverage the event shocked the American public.

DAVID VANN: And it was a masterpiece of the use of media to explain a cause to the general public of the nation because in those days, you had 15 minutes of national news and 15 minutes of local news. And in marching only one block, they could get enough news film to fill all the newscasts of all the television stations in the United States.

NARRATOR: Photographs appeared in newspapers throughout the world, and the Birmingham story was told in many languages. The Russian newspaper *Pravda* ran a cartoon of police intimidating a black child. The federal government worried about America's image in other parts of the world. Governor Wallace saw it differently.

GOVERNOR WALLACE: It seems that other parts of the world ought to be concerned about what we think of them instead of what they think of us. After all, we're feeding most of them and whenever they start rejecting 25 cents of each dollar of foreign aid money that we send to them, then I'll be concerned about their attitude toward us. But until they reject that 25 cents out of each dollar that southern taxpayers pay for foreign aid to these countries, I will never be concerned about their attitude. In the first place, the average man in Africa and Asia doesn't even know where he is, much less where Alabama is.

NARRATOR: On Saturday, the dogs and water hoses provoked angry responses from bystanders, some of them carrying weapons. Seeing the beginnings of violence, James Bevel borrowed a bull horn from a nearby policeman.

JAMES BEVEL: So I took the bull horn and said, "Okay, get off the streets now. We're not going to have violence. If you're not going to ... (inaudible) policemen, you're not going to be in the movement and, you know." So it was strange, I guess, to them. I'm with the police talking through the bull horn and giving orders and everybody was obeying the orders. [laughter] It was like, wow. But what was at stake was the possibility of a riot and that once in a movement, once a riot break out, you have to stop, takes you four or five more days to get reestablished and I was trying to avoid that kind of situation.
NARRATOR: Monday, the fifth day of the children's campaign. Comedian Dick Gregory arrived in Birmingham and marched with the young demonstrators. Like hundreds before him, he was arrested. Law enforcement officials were working over time to keep up with the arrests.
MEL BAILEY: There was no such thing as off days, everybody working seven days; sleeping, cat napping and just holding firm. We all had the confirmed belief that this couldn't go on for long because it was pressing the issue to the wall.
NARRATOR: The confrontation moved outside the park. Once again, Bull Connor summoned his firemen. With no place to run, no trees for protection, the demonstrators were hit with the full force of the water. By Monday night, 2,500 demonstrators had been arrested, over 2,000 of them children. All jails in the city and county were filled.
MEL BAILEY: At one time, I had here in this building on the 7th and 8th floor, we had over 1,200 male juveniles, black, on top of our regular complement of probably near a thousand. At the same time, I had nearly 600 females who were now in the ... (inaudible) dormitory at the fairgrounds.
NARRATOR: Meanwhile, the Justice Department tried to move negotiations forward.
BURKE MARSHALL: I participated in all of -- In order to try to get some kind of agreement between people that often wouldn't talk to each other at all. I don't mean that the blacks wouldn't talk to anybody, but I mean there were any whites who wouldn't talk to any blacks and there was some -- And there were many more whites who wouldn't talk to certain blacks, and there were no whites, I think, except for David Vann, who would talk to Martin King.
NARRATOR: Tuesday, May 7th. Fighting broke out between blacks and whites in the downtown area. Both marshal and the business leaders had just left the negotiating table for lunch. The situation was fast reaching the riot proportions that James Bevel had feared. The businessman quickly returned to negotiations ready to talk.
DAVID VANN: As we began to analyze, now what are your problems, what are our problems. We got to recognize one, that we don't have a government. We've got two governments, neither of them can be effective. We've got to find a way to work this thing out within private sector formats.
NARRATOR: Both sides agree to a day of truce. A resolution was reached, but there was a last minute hitch.
DAVID VANN: After we reached the settlement, and it looks like a mole hill today, to say we were going to take down the signs. We'd have a 60 day cooling off period and desegregate lunch counters and begin a program of employment in downtown Birmingham with at least three clerks hired. I think somebody in New York asked Reverend Shuttlesworth, did he -- Why he would settle for just three clerks in downtown Birmingham. And he said, "I meant three in every store." And the thing almost came unglued.
ANDREW YOUNG: By that time, Reverend Shuttlesworth was so worked up that I can remember Fred cussing and David Vann crying, and it just seemed like when David Vann wanted to settle, Fred wasn't ready to settle.
REV. FRED SHUTTLESWORTH: Well, you must remember that as always, some disagreement when it looks as if you're not getting what you're aiming at. And there are people who want victories, social victories, to come quickly.
NARRATOR: On Friday, May 10th, 38 days after Project C began, an agreement was reached with the business community. Reverend Shuttlesworth had been right. When the movement came to Birmingham, it won a much needed victory and to gain national attention. The next night, the Ku Klux Klan met outside the city, and Grand Dragon Robert Shelton gave this opinion of the Birmingham Agreement.
ROBERT SHELTON: No businesspeople in Birmingham or any other city has the authority to attempt any type of negotiation when it deals in governmental affairs and municipality. Martin Luther King, in my opinion, epitaph can be written here in Birmingham.
NARRATOR: Several hours later, a bomb exploded outside Martin Luther King's room at the Gaston Motel. King had already left Birmingham, and no one was in the room at the time. As a large crowd gathered, the Alabama state police moved in and began beating blacks with clubs and rifles. In response, angry blacks rioted and set fire to several buildings. Over the next few weeks, the riots that began in Birmingham spread to other cities. Racial tensions gripped the country, and President Kennedy was moved to action. On June 11th, he took a stronger position than any president since Lincoln, calling civil rights a moral issue.
PRESIDENT JOHN F. KENNEDY: Now the time has come for this nation to fulfill its promise. The events in Birmingham and elsewhere have so increased the cries for equality that no city or state or legislative body can prudently choose to ignore them. The fires of frustration and discord are burning in every city, north and south, where legal remedies are not at hand. Regress is sought in

the street, in demonstrations, parades, and protests which create tensions and threaten violence and threaten lives. Next week, I shall ask the Congress of the United States to act, to make a commitment it has not fully made in this century to the proposition that race has no place in American life or law.

NARRATOR: Kennedy pushed for a new civil rights bill but was troubled when the movement announced plans for a mass march on Washington. Fearing more violence, Attorney General Robert Kennedy had tried to prevent the march, without success.

A. PHILIP RANDOLPH: There will be a mass march, there is no doubt about that.

MAN: How many people?

A. PHILIP RANDOLPH: And it is our purpose and it is our hope that this march will carry on in a manner that will be definitely and effectively in support of a civil rights program.

LOUDSPEAKER: Freedom Now movement, hear me. We are requesting all citizens to move into Washington.

NARRATOR: The movement that had learned to mobilize communities now set about trying to mobilize a nation. Across the country, people made plans to attend the march on Washington, demonstrating for jobs and freedom. Among the thousands who traveled to Washington, there were black and white activists, labor leaders, clergy, and Hollywood stars.

BAYARD RUSTIN: They came from every state, they came in jalopies, on trains, buses, anything they could get, some walked.

NARRATOR: Bayard Rustin was the master organizer behind the day's events, coordinating hundreds of details. Volunteers painted signs to state the issues. They made 80,000 cheese sandwiches to feed the marchers. Security was carefully set up so violence would not mar the day. As the day began, march organizers worried that the turnout would not be large enough to attract the nation's attention. By early afternoon, more than 200,000 people gathered for the symbolic march from the Washington Monument to the Lincoln Memorial. It was a triumphant day for ... (inaudible) who had first proposed the idea for such a march in 1941 during Franklin Roosevelt's administration.

But there was trouble behind the scenes as the marchers gathered at the Lincoln Memorial. The White House was upset about a speech that was to be given by John Lewis, national chairman for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee.

JOHN LEWIS: In the first part of the speech, I said something like we cannot support the proposed bill then introduced or being presented by President Kennedy. It was too little and too late.

COURTLAND COX: And John's speech was the only speech at the March on Washington that criticized the Kennedy Administration for lack of civil rights enforcement because SNCC before being brutalized in the south. Bayard asked us to change his speech and we told him that we weren't going to change the speech and that, you know, he would have to do it over our dead bodies, we weren't going to change it. Then he went down in the crowd and got A. Philip Randolph.

NARRATOR: Lewis was to be speaker number six on the program. The opening speeches were already under way and the conflict remained unsolved. A. Philip Randolph finally made a personal appeal to the young men from SNCC.

COURTLAND COX: He was 75, and here we were, you know, one-third his age and, you know, he was asking us to do this for him. He said, "I waited all my life for this opportunity, please don't ruin it." And we felt that for him, we had to make some concession.

JAMES FORMAN: So the three of us, John Lewis, Cortland Cox and myself, you know, we huddled and sat together and the rewriting took place at the Lincoln Memorial and, you know, the -- And it was then out of a spirit of unity. You know, we wanted the March on Washington to go forward and we wanted, you know, the SNCC participation to be very visible, and we certainly weren't interested in withdrawing from the March on Washington.

JOHN LEWIS: If we do not get meaningful legislation out of this Congress, the time will come when we will not confine our march into Washington. We will march through the South, through the streets of Jackson, through the streets of Danville, through the streets of ... (inaudible) the streets of Birmingham. How long can we be patient? We want our freedom, and we want it now.

NARRATOR: The disagreement over this speech was contained so well, few people knew of the problem. The speech that captured the nation's attention was the stirring oratory of Martin Luther King.

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR: So let freedom ring from the prodigious hilltops of New Hampshire. Let freedom ring from the mighty mountains of New York. Let freedom ring from the heightening Alleghenies of Pennsylvania. Let freedom ring from the snowcapped Rockies of Colorado. Let freedom ring from the curvaceous slopes of California. But not only that, let freedom ring from Stone Mountain of Georgia. Let freedom ring from Lookout Mountain of Tennessee. Let freedom ring from every hill and mole hill of Mississippi, from every mountainside, let freedom ring. When we are allowed to let freedom ring, when we let it ring from every village and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children, black men and white men, Jews and gentiles, protestants and Catholic, will be able to join hands and sing in the ways of the old Negro spiritual, "Free at last, free at last, thank God Almighty we are free at last."

NARRATOR: Only one year after the doubts and despair of Albany, Georgia, Martin Luther King had triumphed. Much of the nation now saw him as the leader of the movement. In the White House, President Kennedy saw the marchers support for passage of his civil rights bill. That evening, Reverend Ralph Abernathy returned to the Lincoln Memorial.
REV. ABERNATHY: Where 250,000 people had sat that day, there was nothing but the wind blowing the leftover programs and scattered them across the way, across the Reflection Pool, the wind was moving and blowing and blowing and keeping music. And we were so proud of the fact that no violence had taken place that day, and we were so pleased. But this beautiful scene of the wind dancing and the sands of the Lincoln Memorial will never forget. This was the greatest day of my life.
NARRATOR: Eighteen days after the March on Washington, Birmingham, Alabama, a bomb exploded in the 16th Street Baptist Church just before a Sunday morning service. Fifteen people were injured, four children were killed. The murder of these children shook the nonviolent movement to its core. As the people buried their dead, they sang "We Shall Overcome," but in anger and in rage, many wondered how.