

Faith & Justice in the 1960s



RELIGIOUS NEWS SERVICE Covers Civil Rights

During the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s, the **Religious News Service (RNS)** documented moments of joy and cooperation, as well as violence and struggle, as grassroots and interdenominational groups battled racial discrimination.

Impelled by their beliefs, Black Americans and their allies protested, prayed, defied unjust laws, risked their lives, and crossed racial and religious lines to strive for equality and a better society—a fight that continues today. These images from the RNS Photograph Collection provide a narrow window into coverage of the movement from 1961 to 1965, illuminating some lesser-known stories of people of faith who fought for justice, transforming the United States.



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PERSPECTUS

- No rental fee: we are pleased to be able to present this exhibition free of charge to borrowers through a grant from Lilly Endowment Inc.
- Space requirement: 34 linear feet with at least 36 inches of passing space in front of each banner.
- Format: Ten one-sided pop-up banners
- Transportation: PHS is pleased to be able to cover all shipping costs for this exhibition.
- Ideal Venues: Churches, community centers, schools, museums, and libraries.
- Shipping Information: Banners are shipped in pelican hard cases, five banners and their sleeves per case. Two Cases; exterior dimensions of cases are 45"x21"x13". The cases have wheels for ease of transport.
- Contact:
Nancy Hill, Exhibits Manager
Presbyterian Historical Society
425 Lombard St.
Philadelphia, PA 19147
nhill@history.pcusa.org
215.928.3884

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AUGUST 28, 1963 WASHINGTON, D.C.
(top) Large NCC delegation marches in the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. (middle) Members of the National Council of Churches.

SEPTEMBER 1963 BIRMINGHAM, ALA.
(above) Martin Luther King Jr. stands before a crowd of people in Birmingham. (below) A church is bombed during the Birmingham Civil Rights Movement.

“More than half of the banners [are] identifying marching groups as those of churches, synagogues and related agencies and organizations.”

—Caption for an RNS photograph of the March on Washington, August 28, 1963

“Who would you have been in this moment?”



As a historian, I look to photographs for details about the past that don't show up in documents—what people wore, the expressions on their faces. The immediacy of photos is also powerful for me as a viewer and useful to me as a teacher. I wonder, and I ask my students, “Who would you have been in this moment?”



Elasha Coffman, a former journalist, is professor of history at Baylor University.
Photo courtesy of Debra Coffman

FEBRUARY 3, 1964 NEW YORK CITY

Support: NEW YORK STUDENT NON-VIOLENCE SCHOOLS—Schools across the city were closed for a day in support of the March on Washington. (above) A group of students from the City of New York City march in front of St. Ann's Episcopal School.

MARCH 25, 1964 BIRMINGHAM, ALA.

Support: BIRMINGHAM LEGION FIELD FOR AN EARLY SERVICE ADDRESSING BY MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.—The Rev. King addressed the largest meeting of the city's Black community.

AUGUST 1963 WASHINGTON, D.C.

Support: ACTING CHURCHES TO COOPERATE IN RIGHTS DRIVE—A plan to have churches across the country open their doors to the March on Washington. (above) A group of people from the Washington Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) march in support of the March on Washington. (below) A group of people from the NAACP march in support of the March on Washington.

Exhibit developed in 2025 by



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We Shall Overcome

The March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom

An estimated 250,000 people rally for civil rights legislation, economic equality, and an end to racial discrimination, in one of the most significant human rights demonstrations in U.S. history.

Civil rights organizations, religious groups, and labor unions coordinate the event, along with thousands of volunteers.

AUGUST 28, 1963 WASHINGTON, D.C.

THE NATIONAL LUTHERAN CIVIL RIGHTS MARCH PROGRAM – A young choir, holding up at right, stands among other religious, civil rights and labor leaders on the platform in front of the Lincoln Memorial during the national anthem at the opening of the March on Washington.

Local: BANNERS PROCLAIM RELIGIOUS SUPPORT FOR MARCH – In addition to many banners and signs denigrating specific religious groups, many churches and centers throughout Washington, California and New York, united in their support of full equality for all American citizens.

Local: UNITED CHURCH SENDS LARGE DELEGATION – One of the largest delegations among religious groups to the National March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom was that of the United Church of Christ. More than half of the banners sent, identifying leading groups in home churches, synagogues and related agencies and organizations.

Local: DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING ADDRESSES WASHINGTON MARCHES – A solemn silence is proclaimed during the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom was reached when Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., stepped to the microphone and called on the marchers to end racial discrimination. "Now."

AUGUST 28, 1963 WASHINGTON, D.C.



Behind the Scenes ["Operation Sandwich"]

People participate in the Civil Rights Movement in a variety of ways, sometimes quietly and out of the spotlight.

For the March on Washington, the National Council of Churches (NCC), a leading Christian ecumenical organization, gathers nearly 400 volunteers in New York City for "Operation Sandwich."

Over 13 hours, the volunteers assemble 80,000 lunches for marchers, with cheese sandwiches, apples, and slices of marble cake. Refrigerated trucks transport the lunches, which sell for 50 cents each.



AUGUST 27-29, 1963 NEW YORK CITY

Local: OPERATION SANDWICH AIDS MARCH WASHINGTON MARCHES – Eighty thousand cheese sandwiches, with apples and pieces of marble cake, were packed into hundreds of thermal cases in New York City. The cases are refrigerated trucks to the nation's capital for the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. More than 400 volunteers – Catholics and Jews as well as Protestants – assemble the lunches.

Local: LUNCHES FOR CIVIL RIGHTS MARCHES – Interracial and interfaith – that was the theme of a joint ecumenical planning program called on by the National Council of Churches, which prepared 80,000 hot lunches for participants in the civil rights march on Washington.

Local: OPERATION SANDWICH AIDS MARCH WASHINGTON MARCHES – Dr. Robert Spivey and Dr. Vera Arnold Hudspeth, of the NCC, believe the lunches "for the nourishment of thousands" absent to Washington "to see with their bodies and lives that we shall overcome," local reports.



"We now dedicate these lunches for the nourishment of thousands who will be coming long distances...to say with their bodies and souls that 'we shall overcome.'"

—Dr. Robert Spivey, Commission on Religion and Race, National Council of Churches (NCC), 1963



SEPTEMBER 17, 1963 BIRMINGHAM, Ala.

THE SHARPEFIELD MOB CHARGE BOMBING VICTIM — A member of church at the edge of a mob. Friends and relatives gather around Mr. and Mrs. Ann Robinson, Sr., a wife of eight, and a sister, at left, of 14-year-old bombing victim Coretta Scott King.

SEPTEMBER 22, 1963 SAN FRANCISCO, Cal.

CHURCH IN MEMORIAL SERVICES FOR MARTYRS — On Sunday, Sept. 22, the nation's churches joined interdenominational services. Here, at St. Dominic's Roman Catholic Church, more than 2,500 attending services mourned the bombing. The great voice emanates in the "red of martyrdom" instead of the black of mourning.

SEPTEMBER 1963 BOSTON, Mass.

INFLAMMABLE PICKETS PROTEST BIRMINGHAM BOMBING — Racial violence in Birmingham, Ala., was protested in Boston by pickets who paraded back and forth in front of the city's Federal Building. They were led by the Rev. Vernon D. Carter, pastor of St. Columba Lutheran Church.

Four Little Girls

The Bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church

Less than three weeks after the March on Washington, white supremacists plant dynamite at a prominent Black church in Birmingham, Alabama, killing four young girls preparing for Sunday services. People all over the country are shocked and appalled by this brutal act of domestic terrorism.

This is the third bombing in the city in eleven days, after the issuing of a federal court order to integrate Alabama public schools.

SEPTEMBER 15, 1963 BIRMINGHAM, Ala.

"The blood of four little children is on your hands."

—Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., telegram to Alabama governor George Wallace, September 15, 1963



Healing Through Faith

In Birmingham and around the nation, people gather together to help heal wounds caused by racial violence.

Seven months after the bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church, an integrated, interfaith group organizes a massive Easter service in the city. Later that year, the repaired church reopens for worship with a solemn service.



MARCH 29, 1964 BIRMINGHAM, Ala.

THE INTEGRATED CROWD IN SOUTH HEARS BILLY GRAHAM — Just integrated crowd, gathered around the 16th Street field for an Easter service addressed by evangelist Billy Graham. The 16th St. was destroyed in the largest integrated gathering ever organized in this city of racial violence.

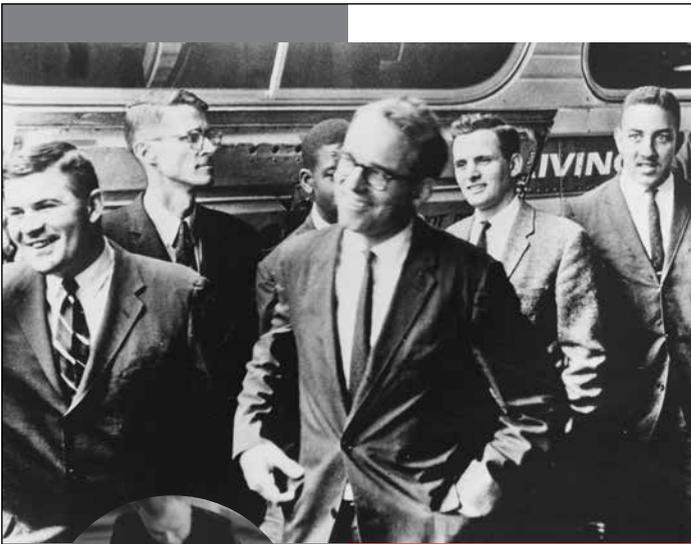
REVEREND BILLY GRAHAM'S EVANGELIST — A leading non-sectarian Billy Graham led his preaching to about 25,000 people, including an unprecedented integrated Easter service in Birmingham. The United Evangelist made a special plea to all — to seek peace for each other.

JUNE 7, 1964 BIRMINGHAM, Ala.

THE BOMBED CHURCH REOPENS — Birmingham's most solemn with their children as they gathered the 16th Street Baptist Church of Birmingham for the first time. Some, used to be burned and by charity given resident Rubin Hoff which still bore the mark of the bombing.

"[He] urged his audience to make new efforts...to end prejudice in America."

—Caption for an RNS photograph of Billy Graham's Easter service, March 29, 1964



MAY 1961 MONTGOMERY, AL.
 The **WINEWATER BELIEVING PROTESTORS** SILENCE ALL FREEDOM BUSES. — These "Freedom Riders" were waiting as they arrived home by bus, but all were arrested the next day as they sought service at a segregated bus terminal lunch counter before their scheduled departure for Jackson, Miss.

MAY 4, 1964 MEDIA, Pa.
UNION HUNGER STRIKE FOR CIVIL RIGHTS — The Rev. Clayton K. Howard, Episcopal minister of Media, Pa., takes part in a hunger strike. — Here he sat in a county jail annex at Media, Pa. The clergymen went on a prolonged hunger strike to protest racial segregation in public schools after he was arrested at demonstrations at Chester, Pa.

AUGUST 2-5, 1964 JERSEY CITY, N.J.
DIVINE CLERGYMAN APPEAL FOR CALVIN JERSEY FOOT — Clergymen and police cooperate in the effort to calm rioters who looted through Jersey City, N.J., for three successive nights. Here Black rioters drive through the city's poor neighborhoods in a bus they were equipped for manufacturing an appeal to end the racial violence.

Countering Violence

A Powerful Moral Force

In their fight against entrenched, brutal racism and discrimination, Black and white civil rights activists turn to nonviolent direct action.

They put their bodies on the line—praying in public, riding segregated buses, sitting in at lunch counters, marching in picket lines, and going on hunger strikes. Many are arrested or injured, and some are killed. But nonviolence, often supported by religious faith, is a powerful and persuasive force.

News photographs multiply the impact of local actions across the country and around the world.

NATIONWIDE, 1960s



Belief in Action

Nonviolent direct action takes many forms. Wives of Episcopal bishops use their social standing to gain publicity for anti-segregation protests and arrests.

Responding to church bombings and arson attacks in Mississippi, college students spend their winter break reconstructing a burned church.



MARCH 29, 1964 BOSTON, Mass.
BISHOP'S WIVES BACK INTEGRATION: TWO SAILED — Three wives of Protestant Episcopal bishops, boarded a plane in Boston en route to Jacksonville, Fla., where they joined in integration efforts. Two of them were arrested in Jacksonville. They Elizabeth Whitehead, 72, said they took part in the segregation protest like any "three nice peaceful women."

DECEMBER 25, 1964 RIPLEY, Miss.
UNION CHRISTMAS SERVICE IN NEW MISSISSIPPI CHURCH — A group of northern college students, called "Operation Christmas," joined with members of the congregation of the Antioch Baptist Church near Ripley, Miss., for Christmas services. The church burned, Oct. 29 after a cold night only was held there.

DECEMBER 21, 1964 RIPLEY, Miss.
NORTHERN STUDENTS REBUILT BURNED MISSISSIPPI CHURCH — A group of "Operation Christmas" — students from five colleges in northern states — lay the foundation for reconstruction of the Antioch Baptist Church, burned by the crowd at Ripley, Miss., after a civil rights meeting was held there.

"[We] have demonstrated that nonviolence is not sterile passivity, but a powerful moral force."

—The Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., 1964



FEBRUARY 3, 1964 NEW YORK CITY
 (top) **NEW YORK STUDENTS BOYCOTT SCHOOLS** — Schools, where civil rights groups have charged the existence of racial discrimination were picketed by students who boobyed up with during one-day boycott. Here, Black, Puerto Rican and white students march in front of General High School on the City's Lower East Side.

(bottom) **FREEDOM SCHOOLS HELD FOR BOYCOTTING STUDENTS** — Several hundred "Freedom Schools," special classes supervised by volunteer teachers, were established throughout New York City during the boycott. — Here, at Grace Episcopal Church in Harlem, the class was composed of Black and Puerto Rican students.

(bottom) **NEW YORK SCHOOL BOYCOTT KEEPS MANY OUT OF CLASS** — Though "Freedom Army" picketers and demonstrators were present at schools, the picketing was orderly and unobstructed. Many of the boycotting students spent the day at "Freedom Schools," established mainly in local churches.

Stay Out For Freedom Public School Boycotts

Civil rights leaders and student activists in northern U.S. cities organize massive one-day boycotts of public schools to protest segregation and unequal treatment.

More than 460,000 students and teachers stay out of school in New York City. Large boycotts are also held in Chicago, Boston, Cleveland, and elsewhere.

Many participating students attend "Freedom Schools," mostly in churches, to learn about the Civil Rights Movement and other subjects.

1963-64 NORTHERN U.S. CITIES



About the Religious News Service

founded in 1954, the Religious News Service (RNS) was a news agency affiliated with the National Conference of Christians and Jews. Its goal was to share accurate and engaging information about the world of religion.

In the 1960s, RNS had a diverse clientele including newspapers, magazines, religious publications, radio and TV stations, and other organizations. A network of nearly 1,000 correspondents provided domestic and foreign news coverage and photographs.

Over the years, changes in journalism challenged RNS to reinvent itself. Now named Religion News Service, it is an independent, nonprofit organization with an audience of millions.

RNS Covering the world of religion.

As otherwise noted, all photographs in this exhibit are from the Religious News Service Photograph Collection, held at the Presbyterian Historical Society in Philadelphia. Photograph captions in this exhibit are taken from the original captions accompanying the file, with edits for length and outdated language.

Image ownership of RNS photos varies by image.



(top) **After World War II**, RNS reports extensively on reconstruction efforts in Europe. **RNS Correspondent Ernest Zappo** is seen here with his typewriter in Budapest, Hungary, 1946.

(bottom) **Recent RNS staff** at work in New York City office, ca. 1960.

To learn more and explore the RNS collection online, visit the [CRS](http://CRS.columbia.edu) website.

