

Mass marches across the nation to expose vast racial inequities

Written by Hazel Trice Edney NNPA Editor-in-Chief
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WASHINGTON (NNPA) - According to civil rights veteran the Rev. Jesse Jackson, Sr., an estimated 23,000 people were arrested in civil rights protests across America between February 1, 1960 and August 28, 1963. On that day, 47 years ago, people not only marched on Washington, but in cities and towns around the nation.

“That day a thousand marches took place around the country at the same time, marches for justice and jobs,” Jackson recalled in a recent interview with the NNPA News Service.

As a result of those marches and the publicity they got, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 were passed by a U. S. Congress that was hard-pressed to say no to hundreds of thousands of voters chanting in the streets. This appears to be the strategy being employed once again as at least four major marches and rallies will hit sidewalks and parks across the nation for the purposes of calling attention to social ills and prevailing inequities mainly in America’s Black and Latino communities.

“We’ve never lost a battle we’ve had mass marches for,” said Jackson. “Mass marches laid the ground work for mass registration. And forces immediately respond to the cry of the masses.”

Details for the four marches are as follows:

- Saturday, Aug. 28, Detroit, MI: “Rebuild America: Jobs, Justice, Peace” march, led by Rev. Jesse Jackson Sr.’s Rainbow/PUSH Coalition.

According to Jackson, the march aims to focus on the void in urban policy. “Dry roots do not produce fruit. People are disengaging in politics because their needs are not being addressed. In Detroit, Chicago, Memphis, vacant lots, boarded houses, rising unemployment, rising violence and closing schools are leading to low [voter] turnout. We want a focus on the need for a renewed commitment to an urban policy. It’s a key to November and beyond,” he said.

- Saturday, Aug. 28, Washington, D.C. “Reclaim the Dream” March, sponsored by the National Action Network, led by the Rev. Al Sharpton.

Sharpton told the NNPA News Service that the march is intended to expose the issues still disparately plaguing Black communities and then “lay out legislative actions we want to see enacted.

“Marching is not designed to solve the problems. Marching is designed to expose the problem. But, if you don’t expose the problems, no one is going to solve it because no one’s going to be forced to,” Sharpton said. “We want to expose that there is double unemployment, Black to White in this country. We want to expose the education gap that is clearly in this country...Also, we want to expose the criminal justice system from police brutality to the question of high incarceration and fourthly we want to say that we want to expose the health disparities. We want to say that we’ve made a lot of progress in 47 years but we’re still not equal and that life for Blacks in this country is still qualitatively different that life for Whites,” said Sharpton.

- Sunday, Aug. 29, New Orleans, LA: Fifth Anniversary of Hurricane Katrina, sponsored by the Black Leadership Forum and the Hip Hop Caucus.

Protestors will reveal obvious racial bias in the lack of reconstruction in the predominately Black Ninth Ward; a 75 percent reduction in public housing apartments which were 98 percent African American; and a 50 percent dropped in the 90 percent Black public schools population. For

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more information visit www.HipHopCaucus.org or email Darryl Perkins at Darry@HipHopCaucus.org.

- Saturday, Oct. 2, Washington, D.C. Mall: "One Nation, Working Together for Jobs, Justice and Education for All", sponsored by the NAACP and more than 200 social and civil rights organizations around the nation of multiple races and socio-economic statuses.

NAACP President and CEO Ben Jealous said the march is aimed to push for progress in the U.S. Senate by encouraging people to vote on Nov. 2.

"We have made tremendous progress in this country over the last two years. We have seen this progress destroyed by obstructionists in the Senate, including on job creation, justice for Black farmers, and urgently needed funding for schools," Jealous said.

"Where we've made progress, we've made progress because Blacks, Latinos, organized labor, students and small business people found a way to work together and put our shoulders to the wheel together. We saw that with health care, for instance, which was pronounced DOA and then revived by us coming back together and working hard together."

The October march, nicknamed the "10-2-10 March", will have a three step goal, Jealous said. "Step one will get people to Washington on October 2 so we are reenergized and refocused. Step two is to return to our communities to re-energize, refocus and reconnect our neighbors, get them committed to vote and turnout. Step three is to return to Washington next spring with the agenda of the march and work with Congress to get bills passed and assure that progress is made."

The fact that America has its first Black president has not slowed the need to press for change in racial inequities.

Anyone who thought marching and rallies would be over due to the Obama presidency had a "foolish thought," said Jackson. "There's always been a competition for the attention of the president. Whoever has the most activity and strength gets on the priority list. ... Marching empowers the president."

President Obama himself, during his historic campaign, repeatedly quoted Frederick Douglass', "Power concedes nothing without a demand."

Said Jackson, "In 2010, nobody has to get arrested in order to make an impact, but people who feel they can't do it alone feel courage when they do it together. Marches involve action. Moses marched when Egypt crossed the Red Sea to Cannon. Jesus marched on Palm Sunday. Ghandi marched. Dr. King Marched...We're encouraging people to march wherever you are."