

# Strengthening the Black-Jewish Alliance is as Critical as Ever



Civil Rights leaders including *Martin Luther King, Jr.* meet with then-US President *John F. Kennedy* and members of his administration, in the Oval Office of the White House on August 28, 1963, the day of the March on Washington.

Photo: Library of Congress/Reuters.

*On the 60th anniversary of the March on Washington, the Black-Jewish alliance must maintain its vigilance.*

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*By Rabbi Marc Schneier  
Courtesy of Foundation for  
Ethnic Understanding*

On August 28, 1963, an estimated 250,000 Americans joined together in the historic March on Washington; gathering at the Lincoln Memorial to demand our nation fulfill the promise of Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation and accord full citizenship to African Americans.

The March on Washington ended with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s transcendent "I Have a Dream" speech in which he articulated a soaring moral vision that helped make possible the passage of the historic Civil Rights Act and Voting Rights Act of 1965. Racism, a foul stain on American democracy since its formation, finally appeared to be on the way to being excised.

Sadly, as we have learned in the decades since 1963, history often unwinds in cycles; with great leaps forward followed by dismaying reversals. In recent years, the US Supreme Court has largely gutted the Voting Rights Act, while Florida and other states are taking steps to prevent an honest presentation of Black History in public schools.

It is with these concerns in mind that thousands of Americans will be gathering again on August 26 for the 2023 March on Washington under the slogan "Not a Commemoration, A Continuation."

According to convener Martin Luther King III, "As the nation reckons with historic levels of violent hate crimes and threats to its democracy, we must continue the decades-old fight for democracy, social justice, and civil rights."

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*The role American Jews played in the March on Washington*

For our part, American Jews proudly recall the outsized role our community played at the 1963 March on Washington. Tens of thousands of Jews from across America arrived in Washington by bus, train, and plane, while leaders of major Jewish organizations; including the American Jewish Committee, Central Conference of American Rabbis, United Synagogue of America, and the Synagogue Council of America were on the podium.

Jews are prominent at this year's march as well, with the Anti-Defamation League, National Council of Jewish Women, and Union for Reform Judaism, among the partnering organizations at the event.

The Foundation for Ethnic Understanding, which I serve as president remains deeply

engaged in sustained efforts to revitalize the historic Black-Jewish Alliance, which played an indispensable role during the Civil Rights movement of the 1960's. Two months ago, on the Juneteenth national holiday commemorating the liberation of African Americans from slavery in 1865, I had the honor to host House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries at my own Hampton Synagogue.

Jeffries eloquently expressed to the packed sanctuary his appreciation of the unique bond between the Jewish people and African Americans, remarking, "Both were knocked down but not out" adding that, in terms of the Black-Jewish alliance, "The best is yet to come."

On the 60th anniversary of the March on Washington, the Black-Jewish alliance must maintain its vigilance, as we are painfully aware that the growth of White nationalism in America has translated into unprecedented levels of antisemitism and racism.

The Black-Jewish alliance is about coming together as we did on that historic date, August 28, 1963, to preserve democracy and pluralism in the United States itself.

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*The writer is the president of the Foundation for Ethnic Understanding and the author of *Shared Dreams: Martin Luther King Jr. and the Jewish Community*.*