

**For Immediate Release:
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ReThinkNYC is a New York City based non-profit organization specialized in transportation infrastructure and how it relates to complex urban, governance and socio-economic issues, including a call to rebuild a modernized version of the Original Penn Station

**ReThinkNYC
Rumination Number 5: The March on Washington-
One Day in the Life of the Original Penn Station**

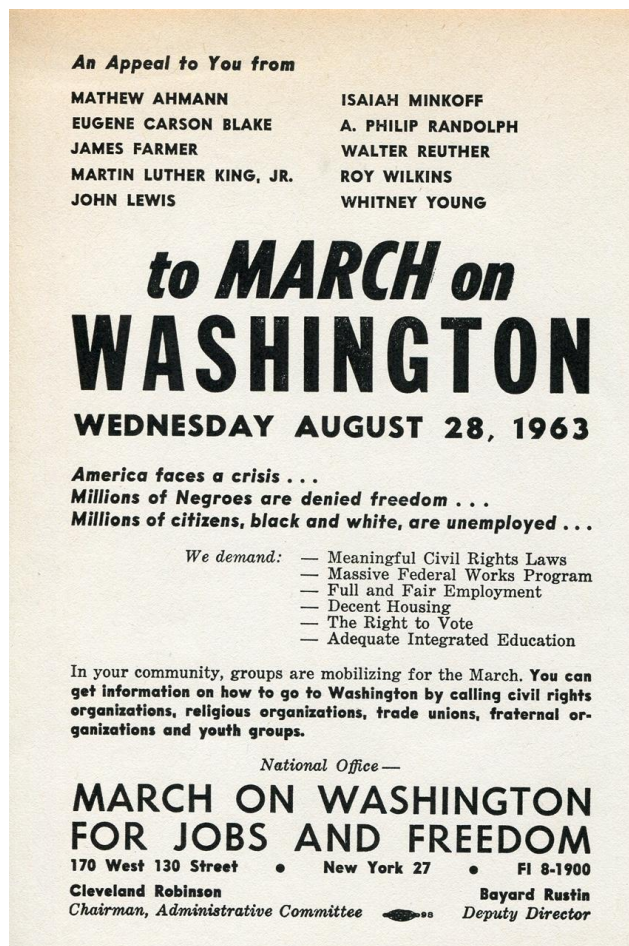


August 28th, 1963, Track 11, Penn Station New York - A separate track marker and train took New Yorkers to Washington DC on that memorable morning

Photo by Robert Parent

The day started early for many New Yorkers 58 years ago on Wednesday, August 28th, as hundreds of thousands began leaving for Washington DC for the March on Washington. Organizers of the event had asked that people arrive and depart Washington on the same day, fearing that after-rally revelry or altercations would undermine the day's mission. There is much to be said for this thinking.

In New York City, Robert Parent, the legendary jazz photographer, arrived from his Soho residence at 6:00 a.m. During the 1960s, he had turned to social and political photojournalism. When Parent arrived, the station was buzzing with activity from those going to the March, promoted by labor unions and in churches by flyers like the one below.



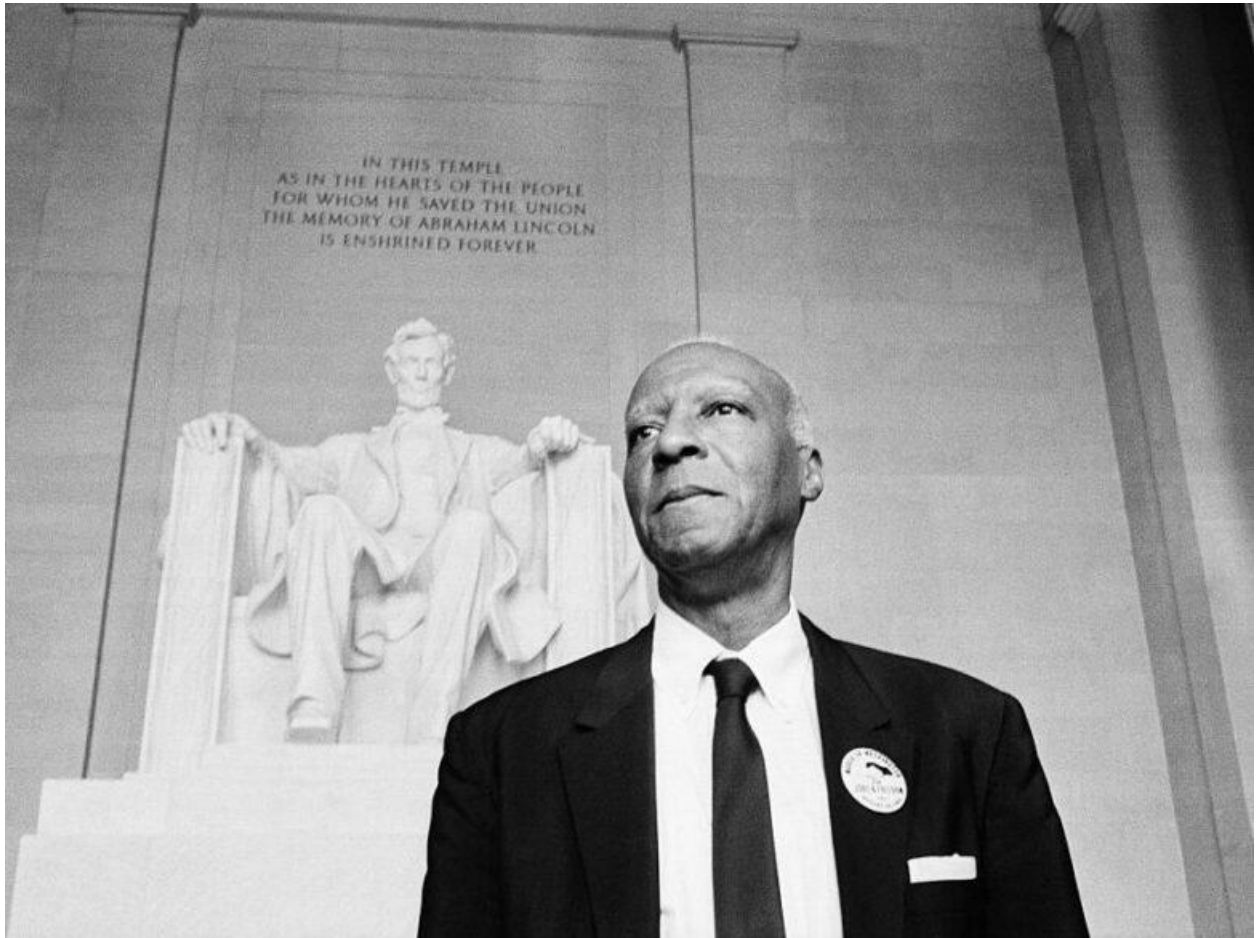
March on Washington handbill
Photo from the Robert Parent Archives

The handbill listed one of the event's lead organizers, Bayard Rustin, who lived a few blocks from Penn Station at the Penn South housing complex. Bayard's accomplishments on this historic day are recognized in a plaque at Penn South. Promoters of the Empire Station Complex have rightly renamed their call for a "Penn South" Station to a Penn Station "Expansion" in deference to this important housing complex.



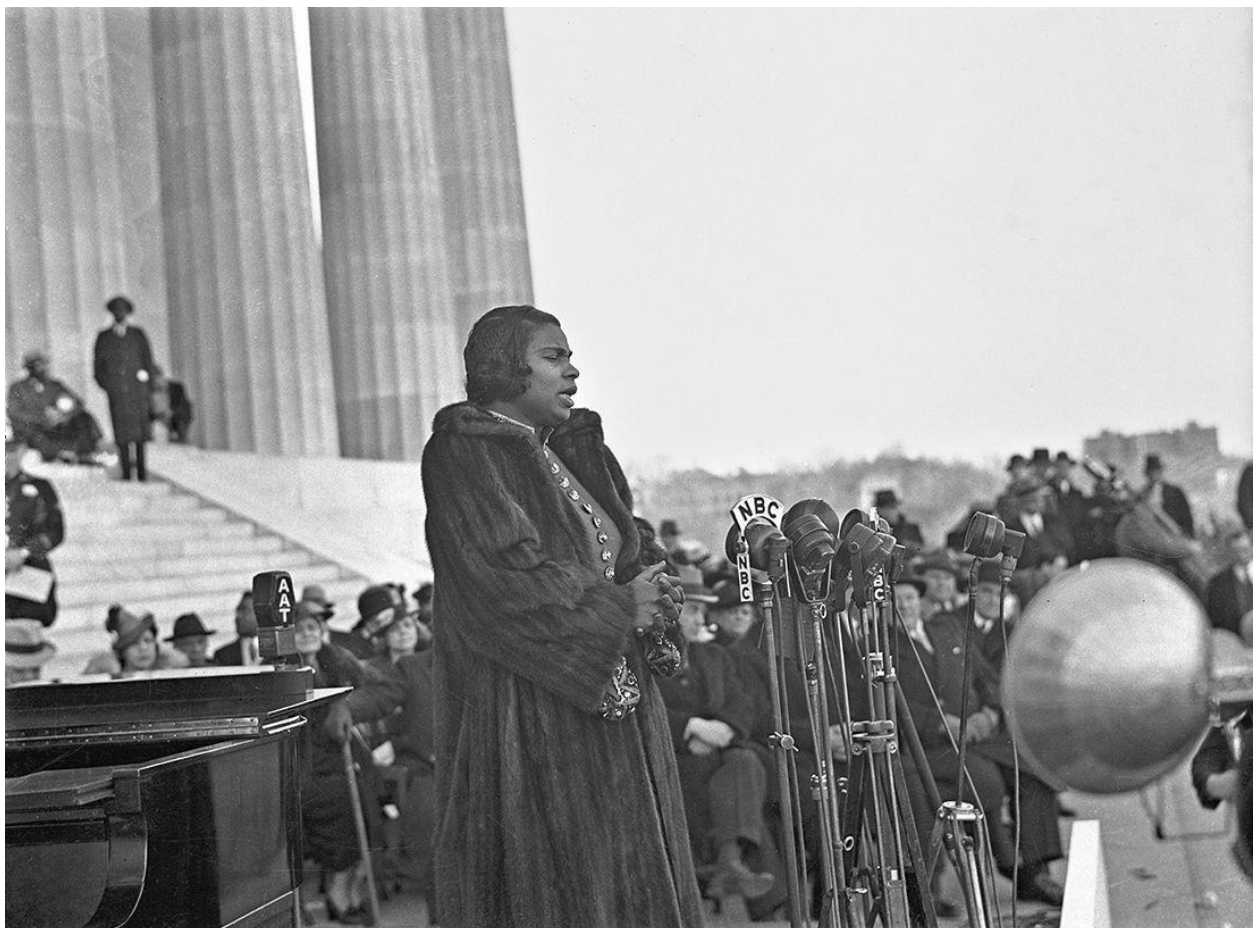
Bayard Rustin Plaque at Penn South, unveiled on June 28, 2018
 Photo by Dale Parent (Robert Parent's nephew and archivist)

Railroads played an additional part in the March on Washington, as one of its organizers, A. Philip Randolph, leader of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, the first mainly African-American labor union, threatened President Franklin Roosevelt with such a march in 1941. New York City has a library and high school named after him, and Amtrak named one of their best sleeping cars, Superliner II Deluxe Sleeper 32503, the "A. Philip Randolph" in his honor.



A. Philip Randolph stands before the Lincoln Memorial at the March on Washington
AFL-CIO Still Images, Photographic Prints Collection

The day proceeded without incident and after King's soaring rhetoric, he and other Civil Rights leaders visited President Kennedy at the White House that very same afternoon. As planned, most protesters went home.



Marian Anderson singing at the Lincoln Memorial. Easter Sunday, April 9th, 1939.
Universal History Archive

There were stories within stories. World famous Marian Anderson, the first African-American to sing at the Metropolitan Opera, sang "He's Got The Whole World In His Hands." Almost twenty-five years before, in that very same place, Marian Anderson gave her memorable Easter Sunday concert after being denied permission to perform at Constitution Hall by the Daughters of the American Revolution. And, not yet world famous, twenty-two year old folksinger, Joan Baez, a native of Staten Island (her Dad was a professor at Wagner College), sang the movement anthem, "We Shall Overcome."



Joan Baez backstage at the Lincoln Memorial
barefoot and wearing our nation's colors
Photo by Robert Parent

As Dr. King predicted the day would end as a celebration of freedom. His speech would stand with the Gettysburg Address as a high water mark in American Democracy. The speakers and musicians of the day channelled the words of Langston Hughes, who described the original Penn Station as a "vast basilica ... a bulwark and protection to the soul", by letting the world know that "[They], too, sing America".



All aboard! Few could have predicted how important this day would become.

Charles McKim, the architect of the original Penn Station and son of legendary abolitionist James McKim, would be very pleased to know the role that his design played on this great day.

Photo by Robert Parent

From our corner of the world, which is focused on rebuilding a modernized version of the original Penn Station, we thank the late Robert Parent for capturing the part Penn Station played on that day, and for proofs like the photo of Joan Baez, one of the few color photos of Baez on this day. We thank Robert's late brother Donald and his nephew, Dale (who also lived for a time at Penn South) for preserving this archive and allowing the use of these images.



Bob Parent, Darlene Parent (sister in-law), Don Parent (brother), Dale Parent (nephew), August 14, 1970

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For details of the ReThinkNYC plan, [click here to see our complete proposal](#).