

**M-Voice OP/EDs** Because whatever happens to America happens to Black America first...

# The Black Church Charged with Failing the Black Family

By Susie Clemons  
**GREENVILLE, NC** - The Pentecostal Clergy and the Rev. Eugene Rivers III, founder of the Seymour Institute of Advanced Christian Studies, held a National Press Club conference mid-July 2005, in Washington D.C. to discuss the release of their report, "God's Gift: A Christian Vision of Marriage and the Black Family." The report maintains "the important answer to the crisis in the Black family is the Black church returning to its leading role as an example for the national Black community and speaking out against social ills and immorality."

The Seymour Institute of Advanced Christian Studies has authored a forceful and detailed assessment based on statistical data, reminiscent of "The Negro Family: The Case for National Action," a report written in 1965 by the late Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, then hailed as both historic and controversial for its examination of the unusual and perplexing familial circumstances of the Black family.

The Seymour Institute proposes, "through the release of God's Gift, the Institute has set forth a challenge for the Black church and Black clergy to recognize this crisis and to take a strong unmistakable position on the sanctity and meaning of marriage and begin the process of teaching Black men and women to reverse self-defeating and destructive social behavioral patterns through a Christian vision

for marriage and family." The Rev. Eugene Rivers III, who is Black, is pointing the finger at the Black church for reneging on its patriarchal advocacy of the sanctity of the Black family union, an action upheld by its "okie-doke" on trends of infidelity, extra-marital sex, and out-of-wedlock childbirth. These conditions result in embittered relations between Black men and women, both married and unmarried." Moreover that members of the Black Clergy are increasingly found guilty of their own excursions of infidelity, out of wedlock meddling, as well as embezzlement is unacceptable as it invites negative publicity to their ranks. Hazel Trice Edney, NNPA Washington Correspondent, cited in a recent article the statistical data of the report issued by the Seymour Institute, which stated Blacks were 38.6 percent less likely than Whites to be married at a rate of 35 percent to that of Whites 57 percent."

That in mind, the late Senator Patrick Moynihan,

during an interview with Ben Wattenburg of the then PBS series, The First Measured Century, was quick to point out that he, as lead man for the Bureau of Labor and Statistics, was not looking at or measuring data on Black families as a basis for a report, his team was investigating unemployment data across the board.

In an unusual twist, the early 60's produced data that showed the unemployment rate going down for both Blacks and Whites, however, welfare rates continued to rise. Moynihan's group made a connection between high unemployment rates and absent fathers and broken homes.

The phenomena thus became the known as "A New Social Circumstance". Moynihan, in his interview, confessed that he was no closer to understanding the data thirty-five years after the fact than he did when it landed in his lap.

The day after the Watts riots, the team of writers Bob Novak and Rowland Evans - in a play of words - linked the riot in Watts to the illegitimacy

rate of Blacks as a causal relationship and called it "the Moynihan report", later labeled anti-Black by many.

However anti-Black the Moynihan Report, it gave rise to dialog while also challenging Black adults to look at their conditions of living and of family. Likewise, the Seymour Institute report, should it also be concluded as anti-Black in its public announcement of the Black Clergy's moral deficiencies, it is but once again a challenge of introspection to Black adults.

Yet, should the Black Church fail to rise to the called self correcting message, will Black men and women have the courage to claim individual responsibility for their destructive actions or will the Black Church go down in modern history as understanding God's plan for divine family living the least - since slavery?

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## MARCH ON WASHINGTON FOR JOBS AND FREEDOM

On 28 August 1963, more than two hundred thousand demonstrators gathered at the Lincoln Memorial to take part in the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. A coalition of civil rights organizations planned the march to demonstrate to the entire nation that a gap existed between the tenets of American democracy and the everyday experience of black Americans. During this march, Martin Luther King, Jr. delivered his "I Have a Dream" speech. The march was successful in pressuring the Kennedy administration to commit to passing federal legislation.

In the summer of 1941, A. Philip Randolph, founder of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, called for a march on Washington because the economic opportunities of the War years did not afford economic progress for the black community. The threat of 100,000 marchers in Washington D.C. pushed Roosevelt to issue executive order #8802, desegregating the defense industries, and Randolph cancelled plans for the march in response.

By 1962, the goals of the original march on Washington movement, jobs and freedom, had still not been realized. The turmoil of the South, the high levels of unemployment and the absence of franchise for many blacks, prompted Randolph to call for a new march "for jobs and freedom." Working with Bayard Rustin and other civil rights activists—from the NAACP, the National Urban League, the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), the National Catholic Conference for Interracial Justice, the National Council of Churches, the United Auto Workers (UAW), and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) — Randolph pursued plans for a new march. The proposed march caused great concern within the Kennedy administration. Kennedy believed that the march had the potential to undermine efforts being made to secure civil rights legislation and would damage the image of the United States internationally. He also believed that it might further aggravate racial tensions in America. Kennedy called Martin Luther King, Jr. and other civil rights leaders to the White House in late June 1962 but was unable to persuade the leadership to cancel the march.

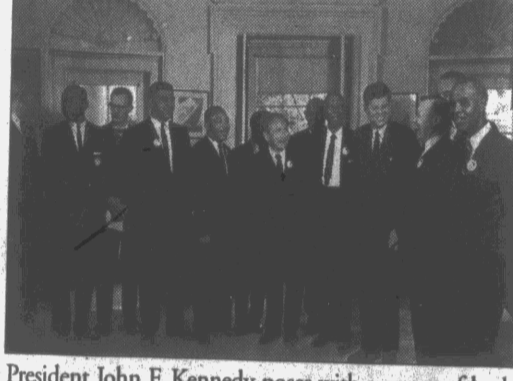
A flyer produced by the National Office of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom articulated the six goals of the protest as: "meaningful civil rights laws, a massive federal works program, full and fair employment, decent housing, the right to vote, and adequate integrated education." In the wake of Kennedy's announced proposal for federal legislation after the campaign in Birmingham, the goal of the march increasingly turned toward passing the bill. The purpose of the march transcended these tangible goals in providing visibility to the struggle for civil rights. "The March on Washington established visibility in this nation. It showed the struggle was nearing a close, that people were coming together, that all the organizations could stand together," Ralph Abernathy wrote of the march. "It made it clear that we did not have to use violence to achieve the goals which we were seeking."

The Kennedy administration, politicians and southern segregationists were not the only entities initially opposing the March. Malcolm X and the Nation of Islam condemned the march as well, with Malcolm continually referring to it as the "farce on Washington." Any member of the Nation who attended the march was subject to a ninety day suspension from the organization. The National Council of the AFL-CIO chose not to support the march, adopting a position of neutrality.

However, a number of international unions independently declared their support, and were present in substantial numbers; and hundreds of local unions fully supported the effort. Further, the presenters and performers at the march represented the diversity of the marchers in race and creed. They included Marian Anderson, Daisy Lee Bates, Joan Baez, Bob Dylan, John Lewis, Odetta, Peter, Paul, and Mary, Rabbi Joachim Prinz, A. Philip Randolph, Walter Reuther, Bayard Rustin, Roy Wilkins, and Whitney Young, Jr.

After the march, King and other civil rights leaders met with President John F. Kennedy and Vice-president Lyndon B. Johnson at the White House. Feeling the pressure of 200,000 Americans, Kennedy told them that he intended to throw his whole weight behind civil rights legislation.

**August 28, 1963**  
**THE DAY WE MARCHED ON WASHINGTON**  
*"The struggle continues...."*  
**"2005 - FREE AT LAST...?"**



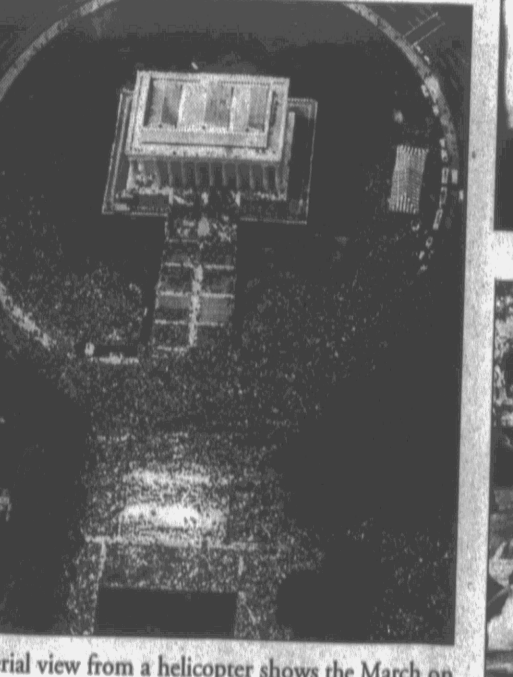
President John F. Kennedy poses with a group of leaders of the March on Washington on Aug. 28, 1963 to observe Martin Luther King Jr.'s call for equality in his 'I Have a Dream' speech and the historic March.



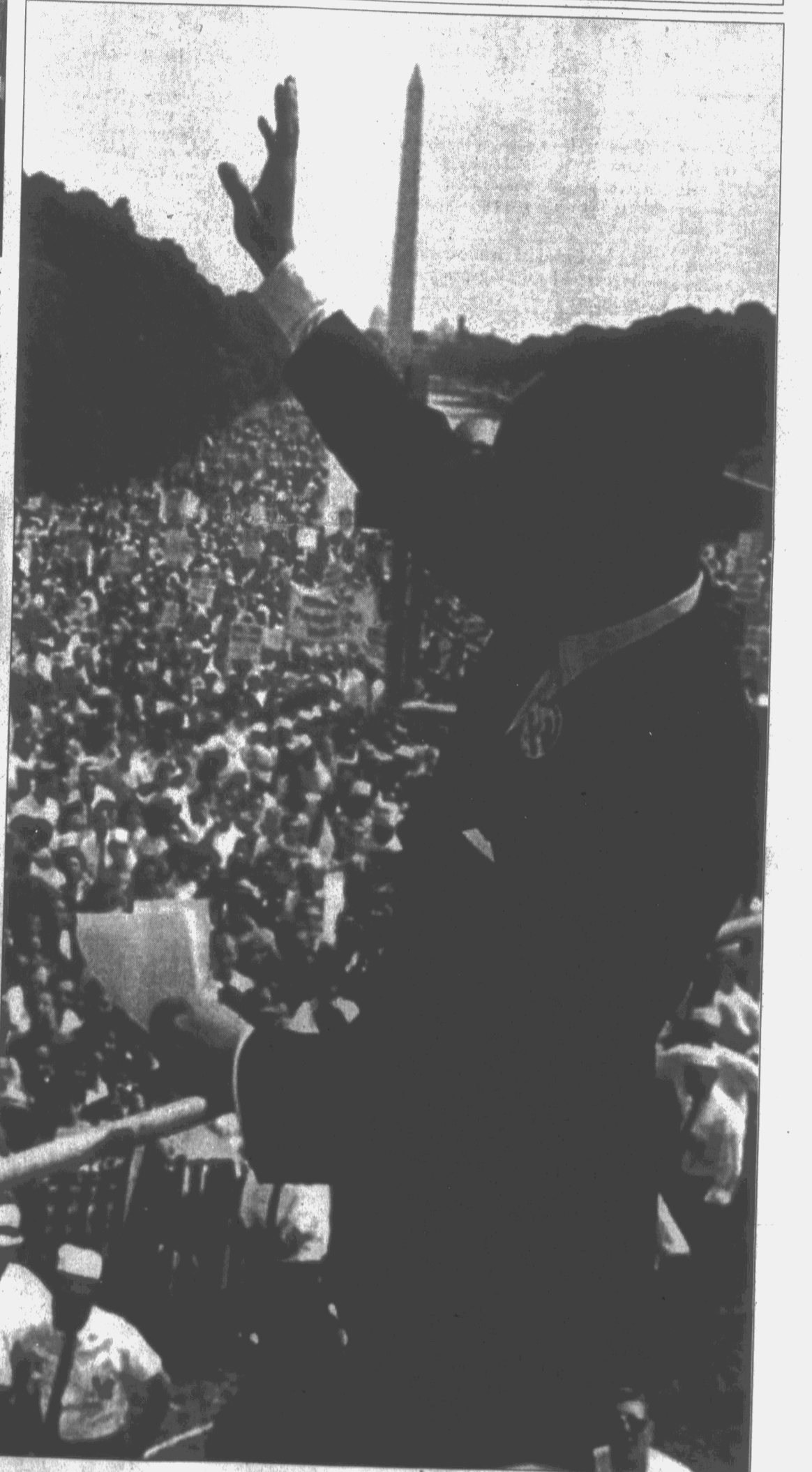
Six leaders of the nation's largest Negro organizations meet in New York's Hotel Roosevelt July 2, 1963 to plan a civil rights March on Washington. From left, are: John Lewis, chairman of the Student Non-Violence Coordinating Committee; Whitney Young, national director of the Urban League; A. Philip Randolph, president of the Negro American Labor Council; Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference; James Farmer, Congress of Racial Equality director; and Roy Wilkins, executive secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.



An aerial view from a helicopter shows the March on Washington at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C. on August 28, 1963. Over 250,000 people fighting for pending civil rights laws, such as desegregation, gathered at the Lincoln Memorial after a sign-carrying parade from the Washington Monument grounds.



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Crowds gather in front of the Lincoln Memorial during the March on Washington for civil rights, August 28, 1963.



Sitting on his placard with his shoes off, a civil rights marcher cools off his bare foot on the surface of the reflecting pool near the Lincoln memorial following the March on Washington, August 28, 1963.