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POTRERO VIEW

BLACK ISSUE

Potrero Hill Marchers Help Keep King's Dream Alive

By Ruth Passen

A band of determined Potrero Hill young people flew 3,000 miles late last month to march in tribute to a 25-year-old dream; under a torturous sun, they held hands and signs, and sang freedom songs.

These young people joined with a Potrero Hill and San Francisco Bay Area group - and more than 55,000 others - to honor the anniversary of the greatest civil rights gathering in the nation's history. For many other young people, the 1963 March on Washington and the stirring "I Have A Dream" speech of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. is barely a note in a history text. But for these young members of the Potrero Hill Neighborhood House-based Omega Boys Club and the House's Girls Club, there was a strong commitment to keep King's dream alive.

Among the Hill delegation to the Washington, D.C. march were Neighborhood House Executive Director Enola D. Maxwell and other members of the Neighborhood House staff and Board of Directors. The Bay Area contingent also included representatives from Glide Memorial Church, which organized the trip, headed by Revs. Cecil Williams and Lloyd Wake. Also participating was San Francisco Supervisor Carol Ruth Silver.

The San Francisco delegation received VIP treatment for having traveled the farthest for the march and for having brought together the group of youngsters, as well as a number of recovering alcohol and drug addicts. Northern California marchers were placed far up in the line of thousands paying tribute to King, and they helped ease the 90 degree weather by singing traditional freedom songs such as "We Shall Overcome" and "Down By the Riverside."

During the program, speakers repeatedly reminded the crowd to remember "the dream" of Dr. King, to fight for the civil rights of all, and to work together to overcome prejudice. The march did more than honor the memory of that dream. The presence of black elected officials and union officers as well as hundreds of other minority officials provided dramatic testimony to the changes that have taken place in 25 years.

The importance of this march was hardly lost on the participants. Winning the battle for civil rights in the '60s "doesn't mean halting the movement," warned Maxwell. "To maintain freedom requires continuous vigilance."

In the struggle to overcome drug problems besetting parts of the community, Potrero Hill young people wear their "ID" (I Don't Do Drugs) T-shirts wherever they go. These representatives of the Omega Club are helping to turn around

the lives of kids involved in selling or using drugs. They are also preparing to continue their own schooling with hopes of entering college. They brought their message to Washington and returned with a better understanding of who they are and what they must do.

"I'm in the same place where Dr. King stood 25 years ago," 17-year-old Jody Daggs said as he stood in awe before the Lincoln Memorial. "I've learned that to stick together with your people - as well

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Potrero Hill was represented at the August 27 Anniversary of the 1963 March on Washington, D.C.

Lester Zeidman photo

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as with other people - helps you fight for your rights, and for what you believe in."

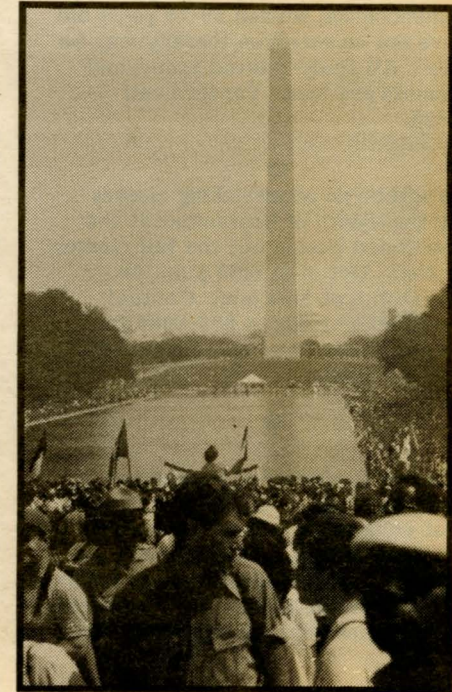
Other lessons were learned as well: A 21-year-old was "amazed at the number of people, and that they weren't all black." And a 14-year-old was surprised to learn that in 1963, "being colored couldn't get you anything."

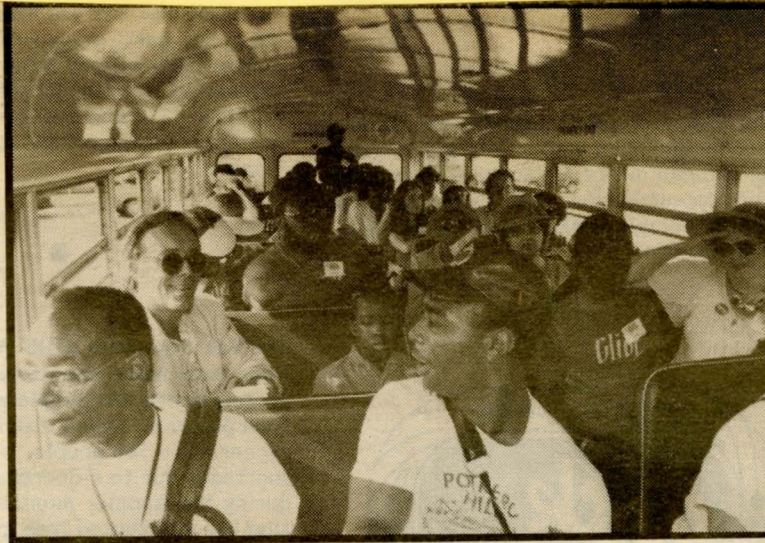
The 1963 "dream" has come true, Maxwell observed. "The people who were in closets then are in the open now; we don't have to sit in back of the bus, nor use separate bathrooms and water fountains. But the struggle continues for economic justice - another element of the 'dream'."

Journeying with the youngsters also

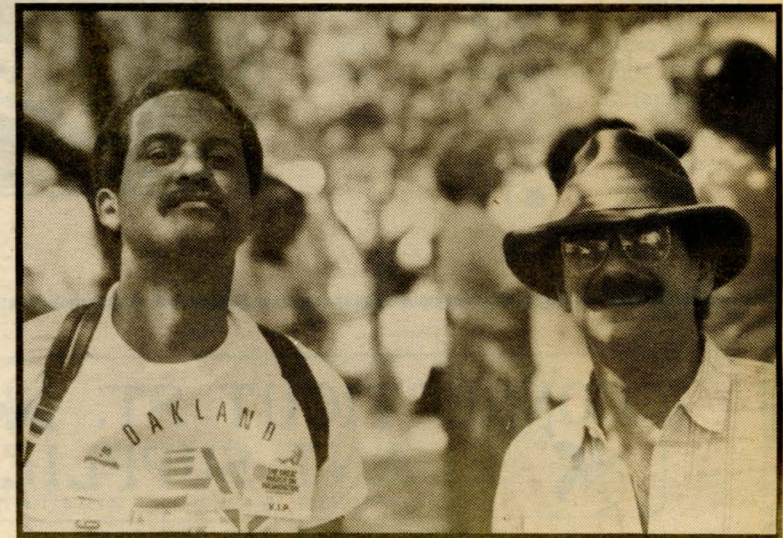
provided adults an opportunity to offer knowledge and information along the way. Hill merchant Lester Zeidman was impressed with the young peoples' desire to visit some of the historic sites of Washington after the march. I think it's important that we choose to honor the civil rights movement each anniversary - it gives a real feeling of participation and is not just symbolic. I know these kids have gained from the experience."

The Washington visit ended with a Monday morning tour of the Capitol, a visit to Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi's office, and a talk by a member of the Congressional Black Caucus. "This was the most remarkable experience I've ever had in my life," said 17-year-old Jerome Holland.





Potrero Hill activists were busy throughout the August 27 march in the nation's capitol - advocating causes such as the Equal Rights Amendment, being interviewed by the news media, greeting old friends such as former Hill resident Phil DeAndrade (Page 10 lower right) and listening to speakers Michael Dukakis (Page 11 top right), Jesse Jackson (Page 11 bottom left) and Coretta Scott King (Page 10 bottom left).



Neighbors Recall Memories Of Historic '63 Gathering

They marched in the nation's capital 25 years ago, but a number of people on Potrero Hill carry memories of the historic 1963 March on Washington that are as fresh as if it happened yesterday.

Dan Berman of Rhode Island Street had been a volunteer with the Northern Student Movement in Boston during that summer, and remembers the triumphant crowd "like a river flowing". That march, Berman notes, got him and others "starting to question how the government is run. People like myself got educated and were pulled into the social movements." He's been involved ever since, he says.

The 1963 march had a large contingent of labor union members, 30 from the Intl. Longshoremen's & Warehousemen's Union. One of them was DeHaro Street resident Bill Ward. "I think what happened 25 years ago," he muses, "had a lot to do with acceptance by people who hadn't taken a position before and during the crusade for civil rights. Now I see that they're out there helping to stop the bigotry, and getting along together. I see it especially in California, even though I see prejudice in smaller pockets within the state."

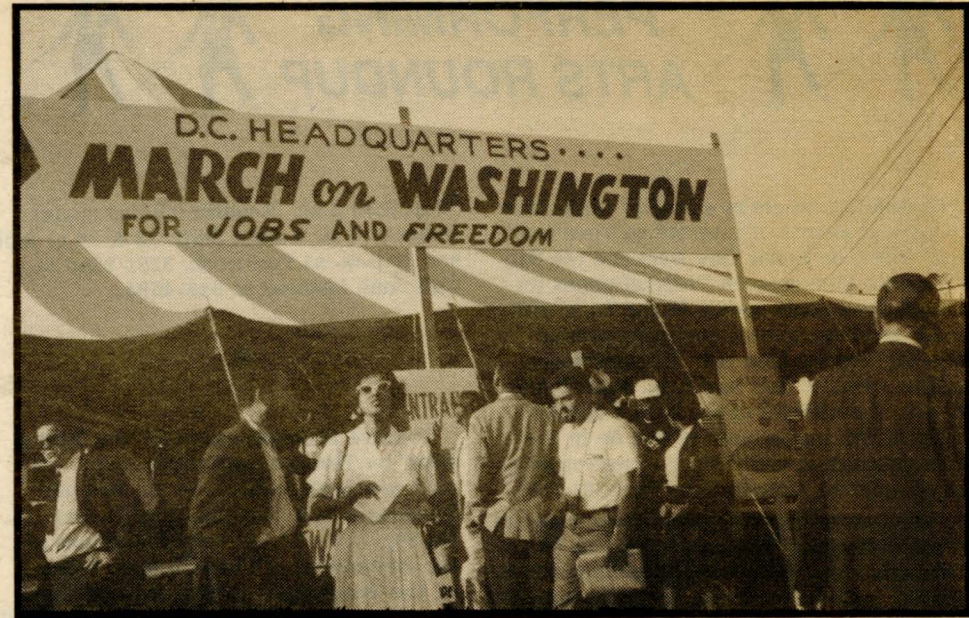
How much have things changed

in the 25 years since Martin Luther King Jr. stirred the nation with his "I Have a Dream" speech?

"There's still a negative lack of achievement, but knowing what it was like to be black in America, I think we have achieved a lot." stresses Potrero Hill Neighborhood House Executive Director Enola D. Maxwell, who also went on the recent commemorative march.

"If you haven't experienced looking for a 'colored only' toilet in an airport, or sitting in the back of the bus," Maxwell points out, "it's horrible and inconvenient and you suffer such indignities." Not only are those aspects of segregation a thing of the past, she says, but "we had no black representatives to speak of, and now we have elected representatives in all categories. Just to think that you can run for office and be taken very, very seriously is amazing."

But DeHaro Street's Sylvia Woog isn't so sure that major improvements have taken place. She went to the 1963 march with the New York Teachers Union, and remembers that 25 years ago, "the integration order was disregarded and public schools closed down rather than admit black children to their classrooms. "Today, I don't think things



250,000 people gathered in 1963 for the first civil rights march in Washington.

Monroe Schwartz photo

are that much better," she says. "Sure, there've been legal changes, but for actual changes in people's lives, I don't know. Family structure - even in the South - is lost."

But Eddie Reed of 24th Street would disagree. Dr. King's legacy has come true for him. "I see little children of all colors walking together, and I have a mixed marriage with two mixed kids - Italian and black. I was a medic in 'Nam, and still have white buddies from the Army; I was the only black medic in the Southern Baptist Hospital in New Orleans, and I'm a professional now in the nursing field."

Reed, who traveled to Washington, D.C. from New Orleans with his father, a member of the Natl. Association for Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), still remembers "the great moment when I shook hands with Dr. King."

Also remembering a special feeling from 25 years ago is Monroe Schwartz of DeHaro Street. "It was the first time I felt real pride in this country," he emphasizes. "It was a great historical event and I was privileged to take part in it."

- R. P.