

# On the March

*For decades, kids have led the way in the fight for civil rights.*

By Brian S. McGrathSeptember 4, 2020

On August 28, thousands of protesters gathered on the National Mall, in Washington, D.C., for the March on Washington 2020. They were expressing anger about the unjust treatment of Black people, by law enforcement and elsewhere in American society. For months, marches have taken place across the United States. They started after a man named George Floyd was killed by police in Minneapolis, Minnesota, on May 25.

“Genuine equality is why we are here today,” Yolanda Renee King said to the crowd. “We stand and march for love, and we will fulfill my grandfather’s dream.”

Yolanda, 12, is the granddaughter of Martin Luther King Jr. She was speaking on the same date that King gave his famous “I Have a Dream” speech, exactly 57 years earlier. That was during the 1963 March on Washington, a milestone in the struggle for civil rights.

Like the 1963 march, the 2020 march attracted a diverse group of people of all ages, including kids. Young people have played an important role in the civil rights movement for decades, and they continue to be leaders in the quest for *social justice*.



JONATHAN ERNST—POOL/GETTY IMAGES

**Youth Leads** Yolanda Renee King and her father, Martin Luther King III, stand before the crowd of thousands that gathered on August 28 for the March on Washington 2020.

## Looking at History

In May 1963, thousands of Black children in Birmingham, Alabama, took part in the Children’s Crusade. They walked out of school to protest *segregation*, marching peacefully toward City Hall, singing, “I ain’t gonna let nobody turn me round.”

Freeman Hrabowski, who was 12 at the time, decided to march when Martin Luther King Jr. visited his church. King was there to ask kids for their help. “He believed in us, that we had a role to play in our democracy,” Hrabowski told TIME Edge.

Hrabowski’s parents allowed him to march. They were aware of the dangers that existed at the time, but they thought it was worth the risk. Some of the children who marched were arrested and put in jail for a few days, Hrabowski among them.

The march was effective. Americans watched it on television, and they were outraged to see how police treated kids in Birmingham. “More people began to talk about how bad things were,” Hrabowski says.

The civil rights movement gained support, leading to the 1963 March on Washington that took place a few months later and drew 250,000 attendees. The march pushed the U.S. Congress to outlaw discrimination against Black people.

## Positive Change

Americans are still fighting racism, and children are still speaking out. Kids' marches have taken place in cities all over the country, including Kirkwood, Missouri; New Orleans, Louisiana; and North Las Vegas, Nevada.

In June, Aidan Carter, who is 10 years old and in fifth grade, organized a march in Portland, Oregon. His mom, Alisha Carter, marched at his side.



ALISHA CARTER

**Face of Change** Aidan Carter, 10, leads a kids' march against racism in Portland, Oregon, on June 17.

Portland has seen many demonstrations lately, some of which have turned violent. But Aidan's demonstration was different. Many of the hundreds who showed up were kids. Whole families participated, some riding bikes or pushing babies in strollers. Bullhorn in hand, Aidan led the crowd, which chanted, "Black Lives Matter."

"I felt like one of the big people," Aidan says. "Even though you're little, you can still be brave and stand up for rights."

Aidan's mom, Alisha, who's a teacher in Portland, says she's proud that her son took a stand. "Sometimes, you have to do tough things to help your community," she says. "It's important for Aidan to see that he can make a positive change for those around him."

## Speaking Up

Also in June, hundreds of young people attended a kids' march in Saint Paul, Minnesota. Baylor Peterson, 11, who joined in with her parents and sister, says, "Little kids are smart enough to see that racism is not okay. I don't understand why some older people can't see that."

Saunya Peterson is Baylor's mom. "We want our daughters to be aware of the *privilege* they carry [as white people]," she says. "They should use their voice and power to help others."

Maggie Barnes, who owns a day-care center in Saint Paul, a few miles from where George Floyd was killed, organized the march so kids would have a safe way to voice their feelings. "Children have a lot to say, if they're given a chance," she says. "They have a right to be seen, to be heard."



SAUNYA PETERSON

**For the Kids** Maggie Barnes leads the June march in Saint Paul, Minnesota. Kids have a “right to be seen, to be heard,” she says.

The line of marchers, many of whom carried signs calling for respect and equality for all, stretched more than four blocks. Those in front held a long, red banner that read, “Kids March.” It showed an image of Floyd.

## A Better Tomorrow

Barnes says she’s encouraged by the sight of parents supporting their kids at marches. “There are future politicians in there, doctors, every walk of life,” she says. “They can all benefit from learning to speak up.”



BLAKE NISSEN—THE BOSTON GLOBE/GETTY IMAGES

**Family Affair** Parents join children at a demonstration in Somerville, Massachusetts, in June. The kids’ marches, and the March on Washington 2020, remind Freeman Hrabowski of something Martin Luther King Jr. told him and other young protesters in 1963: “Tomorrow can be better than today.” For Hrabowski, that statement has proven true.

“In the 1960s, I could not have imagined seeing large numbers of families who were not Black out protesting and saying, ‘Black Lives Matter,’” he says. “That’s not something we should take for granted.”



## Art for Justice

Taking part in a march or large protest isn’t the only way to fight for equality. Some kids write letters to local and national leaders, and others raise money to support groups that work to help people. Lately, some young people have been using art as a form of protest. Kids all over the country are showing support for social-justice issues by writing messages and drawing pictures with sidewalk chalk. It’s a quieter way to protest that can still make a big impression.