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### "It is a new kind of militancy": March on Washington Movement, 1941-1946

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Date of Award

5-2010

Document Type

Open Access Dissertation

Degree Name

Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

Degree Program

Afro-American Studies

First Advisor

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Keywords

A. Philip Randolph, Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, Double V, March on Washington Movement, Pacifism, World War II

Subject Categories

African American Studies

Abstract

This study of the March on Washington Movement (MOWM) investigates the operations of the national office and examines its interactions with local branches, particularly in St. Louis. As the organization's president, A. Philip Randolph and members of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters (BSCP) such as Benjamin McLaurin and T.D. McNeal are important figures in this story. African American women such as Layle Lane, E. Pauline Myers, and Anna Arnold Hedgeman ran MOWM's national office. Of particular importance to this study is Myers' tenure as executive secretary. Working out of Harlem, she corresponded with MOWM's twenty-six local chapters, spending considerable time espousing the rationale and ideology of Non-Violent Goodwill Direct Action, a trademark protest technique developed and implemented alongside Fellowship of Reconciliation members Bayard Rustin and James Farmer. As a nationally recognized African American protest organization fighting for a "Double V" against fascism and racism during the Second World War, MOWM accrued political capital by the agitation of its local affiliates. In some cases, like in

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Washington, D.C., volunteers lacked the ability to forge effective protests. In St. Louis, however, BSCP official T.D. McNeal led a MOWM branch that was among the nation's most active. David Grant, Thelma Maddox, Nita Blackwell, and Leyton Weston are some of the thousands joining McNeal over a three-year period to picket U.S. Cartridge and Carter Carburetor for violating the anti-discrimination clause in Executive Order 8802, lobby Southwestern Bell Telephone to expand employment opportunities for African Americans, stage a summer of sit-ins at lunch counters in the city's largest department stores, and lead a general push for a "Double V" against fascism and racism. This study of MOWM demonstrates that the structural dynamics of protest groups often include a discrepancy between policies laid out by the organization's national office and the activity of its local branches. While national officials from MOWM and National Organization for the Advancement of Colored People had an ambivalent relationship with each other, inter-organizational tension was locally muted as grassroots activists aligned themselves with whichever group appeared most effective. During the Second World War, this was often MOWM.

#### Recommended Citation

Lucander, David, "'It is a new kind of militancy': March on Washington Movement, 1941-1946" (2010). *Dissertations*. Paper 247.  
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