Historical Background:
An unprecedented number of demonstrations swept the country in the first half of 1963. Civil rights organizations demanded the right to vote, full access to jobs and education, and an end to segregated public accommodations. These demands were met with strong resistance and violence from local governments. Justice Department records list more than 978 demonstrations in 109 cities, with over 2,000 arrests and four deaths including the murder of National Association for the Advancement of Colored People leader Medgar Evers in Jackson, Mississippi.

As demonstrations and violence spread across the country in the spring and summer of 1963, interest in a march grew. On July 2, 1963, leaders representing six national civil rights organizations met at the Roosevelt Hotel in New York to announce a march demanding jobs and freedom. The group appointed A. Philip Randolph the march director and Bayard Rustin his principal deputy. In just eight weeks, they proposed to hold the largest demonstration in American history.

As the day of the march approached, no one really knew what to expect. Demonstrators across the country finalized their travel plans; others were already on the road. Organizers had hoped for as many as 100,000 participants, but would they come and would their journey be blocked along the way?

On August 28, 1963, work in the nation’s capital came to a halt as thousands of demonstrators made their way to Washington, DC to participate in the largest demonstration up to that time in the city’s history. The events that day helped mark the centennial of the Emancipation Proclamation and reminded Americans that the goals of the ongoing civil rights movement were united with the nation’s long pursuit to fulfill its founding principles of liberty and equality for all.

By the end of the day, an estimated 250,000 people participated in the march to demand social justice.

Assignment: Read the question and supporting documents carefully. Using the documents, the historical background, and your own prior knowledge, write a persuasive essay that takes a position on the following question:

Scholars of the modern civil rights movement have debated the relative importance of grassroots organizing and so-called ‘charismatic leaders’ in the movement. Is the March on Washington evidence of the power of grassroots organizing or of charismatic leadership?

The essay should present a thesis statement and supporting points drawn from your knowledge of the period and incorporating evidence from at least three of the sources provided.

Alternative activities:

- Create a slide presentation outlining the issues.
- Create a podcast that considers the debate.
- Create a dramatic monologue that presents an argument on the issue.
Document A: March on Washington Flier

1. What does this document suggest are the goals of the movement?

2. What organizations are included on this document?

3. How might this document help you to address the central question?
Document B: March on Washington Organizing Manual. This manual was distributed to local organizers by leaders of the march including Bayard Rustin. See the Changing America exhibition for the full document.

1. Review the document carefully. What is the purpose of this document?

2. Who do you think is the audience for this document?

3. How could this document help you to answer the central question?
Document C: Draft Budget

1. Review the document carefully. What can this document tell you about the timeframe in which the March was organized?

2. How might this document help you to answer the central question?
Document D: ABC News Footage:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZA9TJCV-tks to 1:17

1. Watch the video footage carefully and record what you see.

2. How could this document help you to answer the central question?
**Document E: Transportation List.** This document lists the number of potential demonstrators using organized transportation, and does not include those who came on their own. An estimated 2,500 people participated in the march.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>West Coast</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Coast</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Examine the document closely. From what regions of the country are the protestors traveling? How large might the crowd become?

2. How could this document help you to answer the central question?

Danville, Virginia, June 13, 1963

Seattle, Washington, June 16, 1963

Also:
Birmingham, Alabama
University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, June 11, 1963
Detroit, Michigan
June 23, 1963

1. What regions of the country does this list represent?

2. For what are protestors marching in the image from Seattle?

3. How might these images and dates help you answer the central question?
Writing Support:

Define grassroots organizing in your own words:

What is the main question being asked, in your own words?

What position do you take on the question? What is your thesis statement?

What are the three strongest pieces of evidence in support of your argument?

a.

b.

c.

What evidence does not support your argument? How can you address it?

a.

b.

c.