Title: Building a Dream

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ABSTRACT

The August 28, 1963 March on Washington is often remembered primarily for Martin Luther King, Jr.’s “I Have a Dream” speech, which serves as the pinnacle of civil rights movement oratory. This thesis, in contrast, examines speeches of the leaders of the “Big Six” organizations that preceded King’s well-known words in order to shed light on the complexities of the movement and the outcomes that can result from meaningful dissent. Occurring at a time of division, the March emerged as a symbol of hope for change in the nation. The addresses of the day reflected this hope and helped build a sense of community, not only through their words, but also through the embodiment of a community working together to achieve progress. This thesis argues that through its materialization as a dynamic spectacle, the arrangement of the discourse at the March, and its iconic representation of desired change, the March on Washington constructed community among civil rights activists. This sense of community, in turn, helped urge subsequent action and provided an identity for the African-American community.