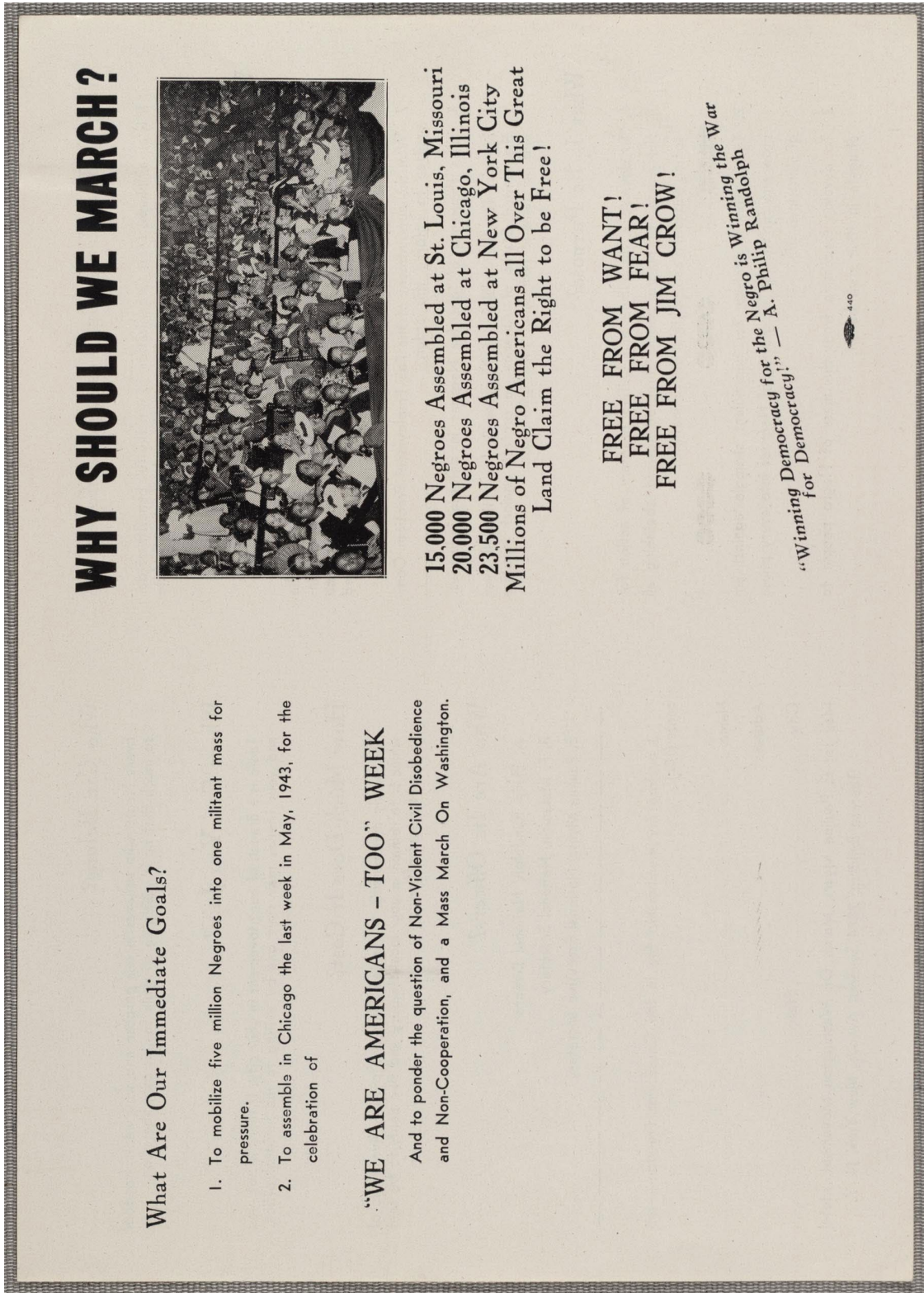


Document Set Five

Poster, "Why Should We March?," 1941. A. Philip Randolph Institute Library of Congress (mssmisc ody0808)



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W. E. B. DuBois, Letter to U.S. Selective Service System, June 23, 1942

Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries

23 June 1942

My dear Mr. Berry:

18-46-46

Answering your letter of June 18, I beg to say that I would be glad to write for your office a statement on the following thesis: that despite the amount of discrimination and segregation which today faces the Negro American, he can by comparing his condition now and that at the time of the First World War take great courage. In the first World War there was a movement to keep him out of the draft on the ground that he was not really an American. There was not only no effort of the Federal Government to incorporate him into industry but on the contrary there was a series of riots unpunished to force him out of industry by brute force. These riots were caused not only by the strong opposition of unions but also by lack of housing and lack of effort to furnish housing. There was determination to train no Negro officers and especially to refuse to allow them to be trained with white officers. Finally a segregated camps was established and then hesitation at commissioning the graduates at this camp. The officers finally inducted into the army were treated with ~~white~~ discrimination and suffered great injustice especially in the A. E. F. in France. There was curious discrimination in the draft and Negroes were inducted, especially in the South, in considerably larger proportion than whites even though cantonments were not ready for them.

Finally, there was no official action of the Federal Government which could possibly be construed into a basic attack upon racial discrimination as an hindrance to war effort. The present situation is a great improvement upon that of 1917 to 1920. It leaves numbers of things undone and untouched but if we recognize that cultural change is slow and so long as change is evident we ought to be not satisfied but encouraged. Then certainly the recent meeting of the FEP in Birmingham should be an encouragement to all Americans.