

What Does Freedom Now mean in 2015?

In Selma in 1965 we marched for **Freedom Now!** What we meant then was that everyone had to have the freedom to vote to choose who would govern them; to get equal, quality education; to live where they wanted; to work at decent well-paying jobs. And we succeeded—in part. We ended Jim Crow segregation and the regime of terror, killings and bombings that enforced it across the South, making life better for millions.

But do we now—black or brown or white working people in the US—have the freedom that we marched for 50 years ago? Do we get equal, quality education? Do we live where we want? Do we work at decent, well paying jobs? Do we get quality medical care we can afford? Do we get to vote for those who defend our interests or only to choose between two parties who serve the rich?

Today schools are still segregated, with 80% of African American and Latino student attending schools with only a minority of white students. Free public education for **all** students, of whatever color, is falling apart with larger class sizes, underpaid staff, and funding cuts. The college degrees needed for good jobs are now unaffordable for most students even at public universities. Police harassment remains widespread. Decent housing is slipping beyond the reach of more and more families as home ownership declines and rents increase, and gentrification forces the many to make way for the few. Today, the United States has HALF as many hospital beds per capita as it did 40 years ago.

Seven years after the crash of '08 the proportion of working-age people with jobs is lower than it was 35 years ago. Real hourly wages are below those reached in 1973, 42 years ago. Tens of millions are frozen out of good jobs because they are undocumented immigrants or formerly incarcerated.

Today, as 50 years ago, Freedom Now means free quality education for ALL through university, free health care for ALL, affordable quality housing for ALL and well-paid jobs for ALL. The private sector can't do this. To provide this, we need what the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom demanded—

A Massive Government Public Works and Public Services Program with direct government employment.

We need to demand this be paid for by taxes on the rich and corporations.

To win such a demand, we need a unified movement as strong or stronger than the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960's, a movement entirely independent of the two parties of the rich—Democrats and Republicans. Such a movement is just starting. We need your help.

In The New York Metropolitan area, activists from many organizations have endorsed this demand, and are organizing a regional conference to decide on a concrete plan to build this movement both regionally and nationally. ***If you want to help organize this movement, contact us at info@njmay1.org.***

In addition, we are asking you to co-sign a web-based version of this call. Please let us know if you participated in the Selma March of 1965 or were a veteran of the Civil Right movement of the 1960's, as we will have a special section for those signers.

Eric Lerner, participant, March 21, 1965 Selma-to-Montgomery March
Jay Arena, Prof. Sociology, College of Staten Island, long-time activist

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