SNCC Chairman John Lewis’s Speech
March on Washington, August 1963
(Modified)

We march for jobs and freedom, but we have nothing to be proud of, for hundreds and thousands of our brothers are not here. They have no money for their transportation, for they are receiving starvation wages, or no wages at all.

In good conscience, we cannot support wholeheartedly the administration’s civil rights bill, for it is too little and too late. There’s not one thing in the bill that will protect our people from police brutality....

I want to know, which side is the federal government on?...

To those who have said, "Be patient and wait," we must say that "patience" is a dirty and nasty word. We cannot be patient, we do not want to be free gradually. We want our freedom, and we want it now. We cannot depend on any political party, for both the Democrats and the Republicans have betrayed the basic principles of the Declaration of Independence....

Mr. Kennedy is trying to take the revolution out of the streets and put it into the courts. Listen, Mr. Kennedy. Listen, Mr. Congressman. Listen, fellow citizens. The black masses are on the march for jobs and freedom, and we must say to the politicians that there won't be a "cooling-off" period....

We won't stop now... The time will come when we will not confine our marching to Washington. We will march through the South, through the heart of Dixie, the way Sherman did. We shall pursue our own "scorched earth" policy and burn Jim Crow to the ground — nonviolently. We shall fragment the South into a thousand pieces and put them back together in the image of democracy. We will make the action of the past few months look petty. And I say to you, WAKE UP AMERICA!

[The Kennedy administration and some of the more conservative speakers objected to some of Lewis’s language. Lewis agreed to modify some elements of the speech. He cut the words that criticized the President's bill as being "too little and too late," as well as the call to march "through the heart of Dixie, the way Sherman did." He also didn’t ask, "which side is the federal government on?" The word "cheap" was removed to describe some political leaders].
John Lewis’s Speech Guiding Questions

**NOTE:** SNCC stands for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, a civil rights organization that played a critical role in the Freedom Rides of 1961 and the voter registration efforts of the 1960s.

1. Who wrote this document? Where was it delivered? Who was the audience? (You might need to look up the March on Washington to answer this question).

2. When was the speech delivered? Is this before or after Kennedy’s speech?

3. According to Lewis, what was the problem with Civil Rights Act? Explain.

4. Does Lewis think that JFK has been supportive of the Civil Rights Movement? Provide a quote to support your answer.

5. At the end of the document, what does Lewis say that those fighting for civil rights will do?

6. What was the overall tone of Lewis’ speech? What parts of Lewis’ speech were changed? Why?

7. Using BOTH documents, would you say that JFK was a strong supporter of civil rights? Why or why not?