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March on Washington
Benjamin Zelenko remembers attending the March on Washington and its impact on Members of Congress.

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From the congressional point of view, the Congress was very—the Members of Congress were very jittery about hundreds of thousands of people coming to Washington, in light of all of the violence that had occurred in various cities over the course of the year, year and a half. And it was mirrored by the attitude of the administration. The White House feared—would have preferred not to have a large gathering in Washington, because of the danger of violence. The Members of Congress would have preferred, generally, not to see a gathering where violence was a possibility. Because from the point of view of the Members who supported civil rights legislation, violence in Washington by proponents of civil rights legislation could jettison any effort to enact comprehensive legislation. So it was feared. It came about. And when the day arrived, a staffer with whom I worked, very dear friend, said, “Let’s go down and see the march.” And he, he was accompanied by the then copyright register, who was a friend also. And I was very reluctant to do it. Because I didn’t like large crowds and I didn’t know what to expect. But I did go with them. And we did walk down Independence Avenue, over to the Mall. And it was a joyous occasion. It was—we were at a distance. We were onlookers. We weren’t in the group. We were standing back, as it were, and looking out. But the spirit of the march, the songs, the speeches, the attitude of the people who were participating, black and white, young and old, was truly overwhelming. And if anything, it shattered all of the fears of the administration. And it educated Members of the Congress as to really what was going on, that this was a—the size of the demonstration was much greater than anyone had anticipated. And it was a peaceful demonstration. And more than peaceful, it was inspiring.