

The First Amendment on the National Mall

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C.



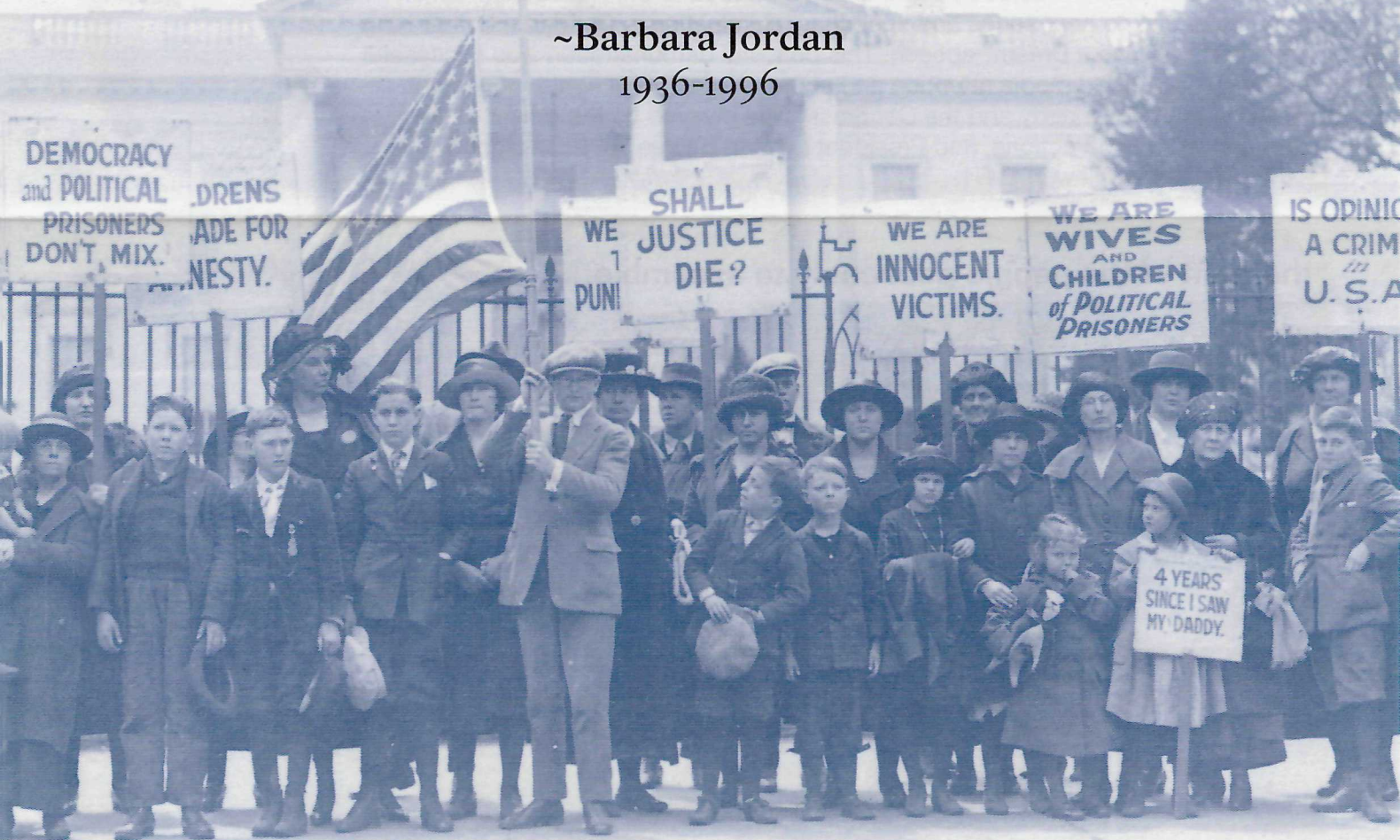
“In all our associations; in all our agreements let us never lose sight of this fundamental maxim— that all power was originally lodged in, and consequently is derived from, the people.”

~George Mason
1725–1792

The National Mall serves many purposes. As a public space, it provides people with a forum to assemble and express their views and opinions. Freedom of speech, together with freedom of the press, allows people to continue the world debate on important issues, whether they are social movements, religious ideologies, or political protests. Ensuring that these demonstrations will continue is a fundamental mission of the space known as “America’s Front Yard.”

**“What the people want is very simple.
They want an America as good as its promise.”**

~Barbara Jordan
1936–1996

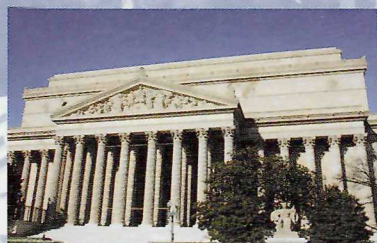


Foundations of Freedom



George Mason Memorial

Called “The Father of the Bill of Rights,” Virginia Delegate George Mason refused to support ratification of the U.S. Constitution unless it included a definite list of rights. Those rights could never be denied to the nation’s citizens, no matter how powerful the government became. The Bill of Rights has been protecting our freedoms since 1791.



The National Archives

The three documents collectively known as the “Charters of Freedom,” the Declaration of Independence, the U.S. Constitution, and the Bill of Rights, are housed in the main building of the National Archives, where they are displayed daily for all to see. The rights and freedoms that all Americans enjoy find their beginnings in these documents.

Foundations & Footsteps

Use this map to visit sites relevant to the foundations of our First Amendment rights and walk in the footsteps of patriots and citizens who came to the nation’s capital to exercise those rights. Keep in mind that even though you may stand where these people gathered, their words and actions often spread much further, to inspire people to assemble and speak out, not just in America, but around the world.

Cell Phone Tour

For more information, call (202) 595-0085 to listen to accompanying audio programs at each site.

- 1) The Supreme Court (Judicial Branch)
- 2) The Capitol Building (Legislative Branch)
- 3) Union Square
- 4) The National Mall
- 5) The National Archives
- 6) The Grand Army of the Republic
- 7) Women’s Suffrage March (1913)
- 8) The White House (Executive Branch)
- 9) The AIDS Quilt (1987, ’88, ’89, ’92, ’96)
- 10) March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom (1963)
- 11) Anti-Vietnam War Protests (1966, ’67, ’69)
- 12) George Mason Memorial



The First Amendment to the United States Constitution reads:

“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.”

Because Washington, D.C., is the seat of the United States government, people come here to demonstrate, and because of the First Amendment, they will always have the right to do so.



Legislative Branch
The Capitol



Executive Branch
The White House



Judicial Branch
The Supreme Court



“to petition the Government for a redress of grievances...”

National American Woman Suffrage Association, March 3, 1913

On the eve of President Woodrow Wilson’s inauguration, thousands of women marched down Pennsylvania Avenue to demonstrate on behalf of women’s right to vote. This gathering was just one of many important events that united women in their struggle for equality. It would be another seven years before women finally achieved the right to vote with the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment on August 18, 1920.

The March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, August 28, 1963

Coming to the nation’s capital to petition the government for freedom and equality for all Americans, over 200,000 people assembled around the Reflecting Pool on the National Mall to hear songs and speeches, culminating in Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s famous “I Have a Dream” speech. This peaceful demonstration was successful in getting widespread media attention and support for the civil rights movement. President John F. Kennedy and the Congress were swayed by the power of the marchers’ words and actions, and President Lyndon Baines Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act into law in 1964.



“the right of the people peaceably to assemble...”



American citizens and freedom-loving people from around the world have come to the National Mall to raise awareness and make a statement about the ideas that they believe in.



“To suppress free speech is a double wrong. It violates the rights of the hearer as well as those of the speaker.”

~Frederick Douglass
1818-1895

The Office of Park Programs, located in the National Capital Region Headquarters building, issues approximately 4,000 permits per year, including those for public gatherings such as special events and demonstrations. The permit system is intended to help assure, to the extent possible, that the multitude of activities that may be taking place on any given day will not conflict with each other or with general visitor activities.

Please note that all applications, unless determined to be a First Amendment activity, must be accompanied by a \$50.00 payment. The application processing fee represents the average costs incurred by the park in mailing, distribution, and initial review of applications to make sure the information supplied is sufficient to inform a decision.



For more information about National Mall and Memorial Parks, please contact:

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Cover, March on Washington, 8/28/1963, March on Washington, detail, 8/28/1963; Corbis; White House, political prisoners, 4/29/1922, Commerce protest, 1/18/1937, NAWSA March 3/3/1913, Pueblo Indians, 1/16/1923, Anti-Vietnam War, Lincoln, 10/21/1967, Lincoln Club, 1929, March on Washington Crowd 8/28/1963; Library of Congress (LOC); George Mason Memorial, National Archives, Map, White House, Supreme Court Building, Capitol Building; National Park Service (NPS); U.S. Constitution, Dr. King, MOW, 8/28/1963; National Archives; Promise Keepers, 10/4/1997, Promise Keepers, 10/4/1997; Sam Friedman Photography; Wheelchair Demonstration, 3/12/1990, Moratorium Capitol, 10/15/1969, Million Man March, 10/16/1995, Immigration Demo, 4/10/2006; AP Images; Peace signs, WAMO, 1969, G&L March, shouting woman; DC Public Library, Star Collection, Washington Post; AIDS Quilt, 10/1992; National Institutes of Health.