



“I HAVE A DREAM”

Martin Luther King, Jr.

BACKGROUND Because speeches are written to be spoken aloud, they are a more fluid form of literature than most other nonfiction. A strong speaker will react to unspoken signals from his or her listeners and adjust a speech accordingly. He or she might change words or add whole phrases. This is the case with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., one of the greatest speakers of the modern age. The text that appears here represents the speech exactly as it was delivered by Dr. King on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial.

Five score years ago, a great American, in whose symbolic shadow we stand today, signed the Emancipation Proclamation. This **momentous** decree came as a great beacon light of hope to millions of Negro slaves who had been seared in the flames of withering injustice. It came as a joyous daybreak to end the long night of their captivity.

But one hundred years later, the Negro still is not free. One hundred years later, the life of the Negro is still sadly crippled by the manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination. One hundred years later, the Negro lives on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity. One hundred years later, the Negro is still languished in the corners of American society and finds himself an exile in his own land. So we've come here today to dramatize a shameful condition. •

In a sense we've come to our nation's Capital to cash a check. When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note¹ to which every American was to fall heir. This note was a promise that all men, yes, black men as well as white men, would be guaranteed the unalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

It is obvious today that America has **defaulted** on this promissory note insofar as her citizens of color are concerned. Instead of honoring this sacred obligation, America has given the Negro people a bad check; a check which has come back marked "insufficient funds." But we refuse to believe that the bank of justice is bankrupt. We refuse to believe that there are insufficient funds in the great vaults of opportunity of this nation. And so we've come to cash this check—a check that will give us upon demand the riches of freedom and the security of justice. We have also come to

1. **promissory** (prăm' i sôr' ē) **note** written promise to pay a specific amount.

◀ Critical Viewing

Which details in this photograph demonstrate the importance of the event at which King gave his speech?

◀ Vocabulary

momentous

(mō men' tēs) *adj.*
very important

defaulted (dē fôlt' ed) *v.*

failed to do something or be somewhere when required or expected; failed to make payment when due

Spiral Review

WORD CHOICE What

ideas and images do King's words evoke in the paragraph beginning, "But one hundred years later..."?

Persuasive Speech

Explain King's analogy between a financial transaction and the idea of justice.

Comprehension

What injustices are King and his listeners protesting?

Vocabulary ►

hallowed (hal' ōd)
adj. sacred

Persuasive Speech

What idea does King's repetition of the word "Now" help to emphasize?

▼ Critical Viewing

Describe King's expression as he delivers his speech.

this hallowed spot to remind America of the fierce urgency of *now*. This is no time to engage in the luxury of cooling off or to take the tranquilizing drug of gradualism.

Now is the time to make real the promises of Democracy.

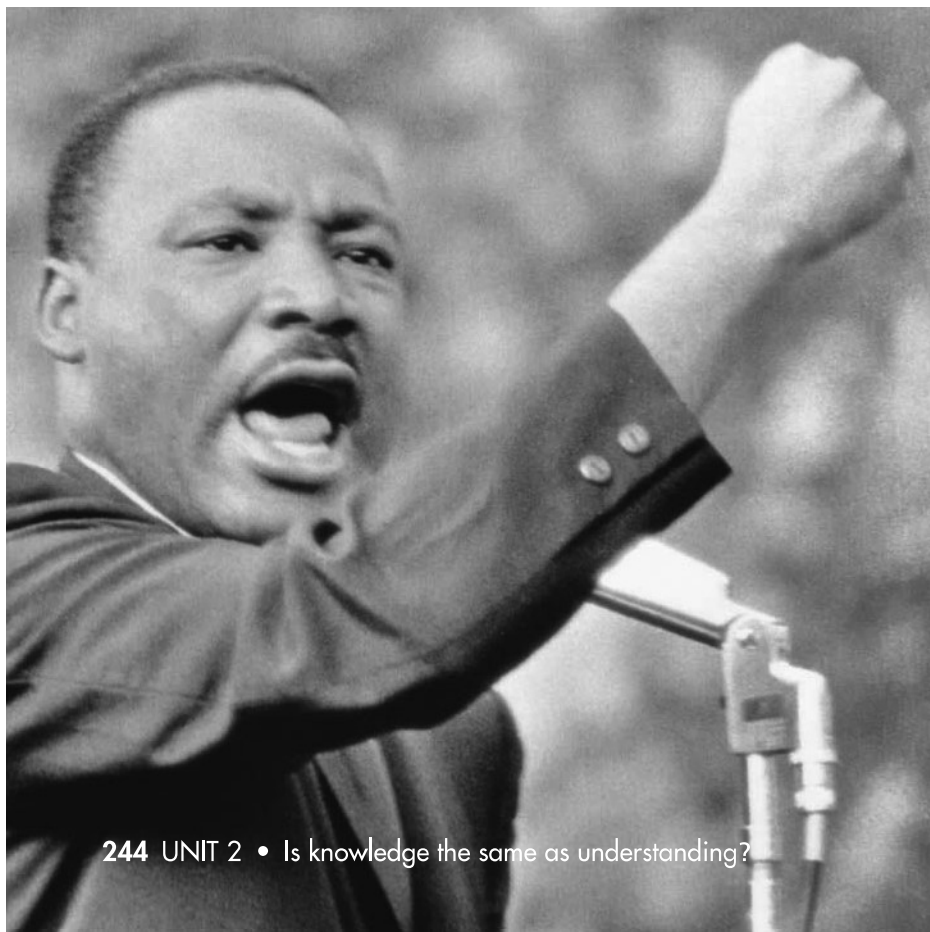
Now is the time to rise from the dark and desolate valley of segregation to the sunlit path of racial justice.

Now is the time to lift our nation from the quicksands of racial injustice to the solid rock of brotherhood.

Now is the time to make justice a reality for all of God's children.

It would be fatal for the nation to overlook the urgency of the moment. This sweltering summer of the Negro's legitimate discontent will not pass until there is an invigorating autumn of freedom and equality. Nineteen sixty-three is not an end, but a beginning. Those who hope that the Negro needed to blow off steam and will now be content will have a rude awakening if the nation returns to business as usual. There will be neither rest nor tranquillity in America until the Negro is granted his citizenship rights. The whirlwinds of revolt will continue to shake the foundations of our nation until the bright day of justice emerges.

But there is something that I must say to my people who stand on the warm threshold which leads into the palace of justice. In the process of gaining our rightful place we must not be guilty of wrongful deeds. Let us not seek to satisfy our thirst for freedom



Now

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by drinking from the cup of bitterness and hatred. We must forever conduct our struggle on the high plane of dignity and discipline. We must not allow our creative protest to **degenerate** into physical violence. Again and again we must rise to the majestic heights of meeting physical force with soul force. The marvelous new militancy which has engulfed the Negro community must not lead us to a distrust of all white people, for many of our white brothers, as evidenced by their presence here today, have come to realize that their destiny is tied up with our destiny. And they have come to realize that their freedom is inextricably bound to our freedom. We cannot walk alone. •

And as we walk, we must make the pledge that we shall always march ahead. We cannot turn back. There are those who are asking the devotees of civil rights, “When will you be satisfied?” We can never be satisfied as long as the Negro is the victim of the unspeakable horrors of police brutality. We can never be satisfied as long as our bodies, heavy with the fatigue of travel, cannot gain lodging in the motels of the highways and the hotels of the cities. We cannot be satisfied as long as the Negro’s basic mobility is from a smaller ghetto to a larger one. We cannot be satisfied as long as a Negro in Mississippi cannot vote and a Negro in New York believes he has nothing for which to vote. No, no, we are not satisfied, and we will not be satisfied until justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream.

I am not unmindful that some of you have come here out of great trials and tribulations. Some of you have come fresh from narrow jail cells. Some of you have come from areas where your quest for freedom left you battered by the storms of persecution and staggered by the winds of police brutality. You have been the veterans of creative suffering. Continue to work with the faith that unearned suffering is redemptive.

Go back to Mississippi, go back to Alabama, go back to South Carolina, go back to Georgia, go back to Louisiana, go back to the slums and ghettos of our northern cities, knowing that somehow this situation can and will be changed. Let us not wallow in the valley of despair.

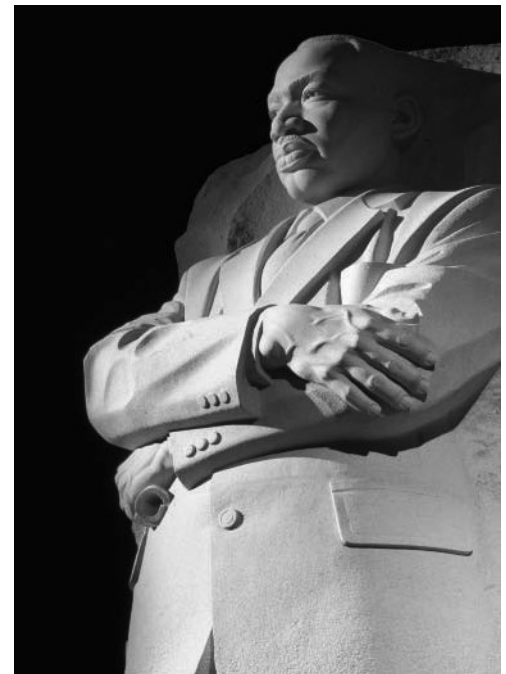
I say to you today, my friends, so even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream.

◀ Vocabulary

degenerate (dē jen’
ər āt’) v. grow worse

Persuasive Speech

What idea does King restate when he says, “We cannot walk alone”?



The Martin Luther King, Jr., Memorial in Washington, D.C.

Comprehension

According to King, how should his people react to physical force?

Vocabulary ►

creed (krēd) *n.*
statement of belief

oppression

(ə presh' ən) *n.* keeping
others down by the
unjust use of power

Persuasive Speech

Identify the parallel
clauses in this passage
and explain how they
emphasize King's ideas.

Persuasive Techniques

What idea does King
reinforce using the
rhythm of repetition?

► Critical Viewing

Based on this image, in
what ways does King
use body language to
make his speech more
effective?

I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its **creed**: "We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal."

I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slaveowners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood.

I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the heat of **oppression**, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice.

I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.

I have a dream today.

I have a dream that one day down in Alabama, with its vicious racists, with its governor having his lips dripping with the words of interposition and nullification;² one day right down in Alabama little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers.

I have a dream today.

I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plains, and the crooked places will be made straight, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together.³

This is our hope. This is the faith that I go back to the South with. With this faith we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope. With this faith we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood. With this faith we will be able to work together, to pray together, to struggle together, to go to jail together, to stand up for freedom together, knowing that we will be free one day.

This will be the day, this will be the day, when all of God's children will be able to sing with new meaning:

My country, 'tis of thee,
Sweet land of liberty,
Of thee I sing:
Land where my fathers died,
Land of the pilgrims' pride,
From every mountainside
Let freedom ring.

2. **interposition** (in' tər pə zish' ən) and **nullification** (nul' ə fi kă' shən) disputed doctrine that a state can reject federal laws considered to be violations of its rights. Governor George C. Wallace of Alabama used this doctrine to reject federal civil rights legislation.

3. **every valley . . . all flesh shall see it together** reference to a Biblical passage (Isaiah 40:4–5). King is likening the struggle of African Americans to the struggle of the Israelites.



I HAVE A DREAM that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: “We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal.”

From every
mountainside,
LET FREEDOM RING.

And if America is to be a great nation this must become true. So let freedom ring from the prodigious hilltops of New Hampshire. Let freedom ring from the mighty mountains of New York. Let freedom

ring from the heightening Alleghenies of Pennsylvania! Let freedom ring from the snowcapped Rockies of Colorado!

Let freedom ring from the curvacious slopes of California!

But not only that; let freedom ring from Stone Mountain of Georgia!

Let freedom ring from Lookout Mountain of Tennessee!

Let freedom ring from every hill and molehill of Mississippi. From every mountainside, let freedom ring.

And when this happens, when we allow freedom to ring, when we let it ring from every village and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual, "Free at last! free at last! thank God almighty, we are free at last!"

Language Study

Vocabulary The words listed below appear in "I Have a Dream." Use one word from the list to complete each analogy that follows. In each, your choice should create a word pair that matches the relationship between the first words given.

momentous defaulted hallowed degenerate oppression

1. stumble: glide :: _____: improve
2. barren: desert :: _____: church
3. dull: interesting :: trivial: _____
4. supportive : harmful :: freedom : _____
5. broken: promise :: _____: agreement

WORD STUDY

The **Latin root -cred-** means "to trust; to believe." In this speech, King refers to America's **creed**, or statement of belief, that all people are created equal.

Word Study

Part A Explain how the **Latin root -cred-** contributes to the meanings of *credit*, *credential*, and *incredible*. Consult a dictionary if necessary.

Part B Use the context of the sentences and what you know about the Latin root *-cred-* to explain your answer to each question.

1. Should a judge in a criminal trial have *credibility*?
2. How would you feel if someone tried to *discredit* you?



Literary Analysis

Key Ideas and Details

1. What central idea does King express in this speech—what does he want his audience to think or to do?
2. **(a)** Which words does King quote from the song "My Country 'Tis of Thee"? **(b) Interpret:** What message does King convey through these words? Explain.
3. **Evaluate Persuasion (a)** Which parts of the United States does King mention in his speech? **(b)** How does the mention of these places help to support King's central idea and purpose? Explain your reasoning.
4. **Evaluate Persuasion** What evidence in the speech supports the idea that African Americans were not treated equally in the United States? Cite specific examples from the text.

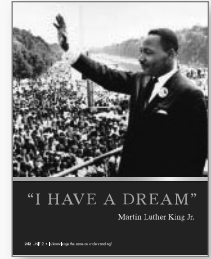
Craft and Structure

5. **Persuasive Speech (a)** Identify a passage in which King uses emotionally charged language. **(b)** How does this language contribute to the power of the speech? Explain.
6. **Persuasive Speech (a)** Use a chart like the one shown to list at least one example of each rhetorical device as King uses it in this speech. **(b)** Describe the effect of each device.

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

7. **(a) Hypothesize:** Why do you think "I Have a Dream" has lived on as one of the best-known speeches in modern history? **(b) Make a Judgment:** Do you think it deserves this standing? Support your evaluation with evidence from the text.
8. **(a) Connect:** King begins this speech, "Five score years ago," and refers to a great American. To what famous document and great American is King alluding? **(b) Synthesize:** How does this reference suit both the location and the occasion of King's speech? Cite evidence from the text to support your answer.

9. **THE BIG ?** **Is knowledge the same as understanding? (a)** Cite facts and information from the speech that increase your understanding of America in the early 1960s. **(b)** How do the details King shares help you understand the importance of his dream? Explain.



Example	Effect
Repetition:	
Restatement:	
Parallelism:	
Analogy:	

ACADEMIC VOCABULARY

As you write and speak about "I Have a Dream," use the words related to knowledge and understanding that you explored on page 189 of this book.