

'I HAVE A DREAM'

The most famous speech in the history of the civil rights movement was delivered by the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. on August 28, 1963. The occasion was the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, a giant protest attended by more than 250,000 people, black and white, from all over the country. King drew on his training as a minister, his force as a public speaker and his skill as a writer to deliver a speech that was as powerful as it was poetic. The phrase "I Have a Dream" is still used widely to symbolize the struggle for equality and justice in America.



The "I Have a Dream" speech should be read aloud. Divide it up among the students in your class. Have each person read a section, or go around the room, paragraph by paragraph. Stand up when you read your part. Fill the words with emotion! Dare to shout them out with feeling!

FIVE SCORE YEARS AGO, a great American, in whose symbolic shadow we stand, 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 captivity.

But one hundred years later, we must face the tragic fact that the Negro is still 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 still languishes in the corners of American society and finds himself an exile in his own land.

So we have come here today to dramatize an appalling condition. In a sense we have 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 note to which every American was to fall heir. This note was a promise that all 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. So we have 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 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 open the doors of opportunity to all of God's children. Now is the time to lift our nation from the quicksands of racial injustice to the solid rock of brotherhood.

It would be fatal for the nation to overlook the urgency of the moment and to underestimate the determination of the Negro. 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 tranquility 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 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

Civil Rights Timeline (1850 - 1899)

1850 Congressional compromise upholds and strengthens 1793 Fugitive Slave Act; California enters union as a free state.

1854 Kansas-Nebraska Act repeals Missouri Compromise and permits admission of Kansas and Nebraska territories to union, whether or not they allow slavery.

Republican Party is formed to oppose extension of slavery into the territories.

1856 California court affirms freedom of Biddy Mason, who stayed in California when her master returned South.

1857 In Dred Scott v. Sanford case, U.S. Supreme Court rules that Dred Scott cannot sue for his freedom in a free state because he is property.

Maine and New Hampshire continue to grant freedom and citizenship to blacks.



1859 John Brown raids federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry, WV to undermine slavery. He and 18 other men are captured and executed.

1861 Civil War begins when Confederates attack Fort Sumter, SC.

1866 First Civil Rights Act declaring freed blacks to be U.S. citizens and nullifying black codes passes in Congress, which overrides President Andrew Johnson's veto.

Ku Klux Klan begins campaign of terror against blacks and white Republicans.

1862 U.S. Congress bans slavery in the District of Columbia and U.S. territories; slaveholders compensated for their lost "property".

Harriet Tubman serves as a spy, scout and guerrilla for Union Army.



1863 Abraham Lincoln issues Emancipation Proclamation; freeing all slaves in those states rebelling against union.