Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. **I Have A Dream Speech**

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**I Have A Dream Speech Summary**

The “I Have a Dream” speech by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was delivered during the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. He gave the speech at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C.; this speech expresses King’s notorious hope for America and the need for change. He opens the speech by stating how happy he is to be with the marchers, and emphasizes the historical significance of their march by calling it “the greatest demonstration for freedom in the history of our nation.” He talks about Abraham Lincoln signing the Emancipation Proclamation one hundred years before the march. He calls that proclamation “a joyous daybreak to end the long night of their captivity,” where “their” refers to those who were enslaved. King then comes to the problems faced by African Americans in 1963, saying that one hundred years later, they still are not free. Instead, they are “sadly crippled by the manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination.” He also discusses the poverty endured by black Americans. King talks about when the founders of the nation (“the architects of our republic”) wrote the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence. He says they were writing a promissory note to every American, that all men were guaranteed the unalienable rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, and that this included black men as well as white. He states that America defaulted on that check where black citizens are concerned by denying them those rights. “America has given the Negro people a bad check, a check which has come back marked insufficient funds,” he says.

King then adopts a more hopeful tone by adding that the “bank of justice” is not bankrupt. He also states that there is urgency in their cause: “This is no time to engage in the luxury of cooling off or to take the tranquilizing drug of gradualism.” He uses the seasons as a [metaphor](http://www.supersummary.com/metaphor/) to describe this urgency by saying that the legitimate discontent of African Americans is a “sweltering summer,” and that freedom and equality will be an “invigorating autumn.” He also promises that this protest is not going away. It’s not about voicing grievances and then going back to the status quo: “The whirlwinds of revolt will continue to shake the foundations of our nation until the bright day of justice emerges,” he states. King then cautions his people not to commit any wrongful deeds. He says, “Let us not seek to satisfy our thirst for freedom by drinking from the cup of bitterness and hatred.” This is a crucially important sentiment, as King’s leadership was defined by civil disobedience, not violence. He proved that real legal change could be made without resorting to violence. Though there was much violence during the Civil Rights movement, he was always for peace, and urged others to protest peacefully, what he calls in his speech “the high plane of dignity and discipline.” He also stresses the importance of recognizing white people who want to protest for this same cause—those allies that are necessary to its success. King provides some specific goals. He says they can’t stop marching so long as they suffer police brutality, so long as they’re turned away from hotels, so long as they’re confined to ghettos, so long as they’re subject to segregation, and so long as they do not have the right to vote. He then recognizes the struggles that many of the marchers have already endured, and asks them to undertake that struggle again, and to have hope that their situation can and will change.

Then comes the most famous part of this speech, for which it is titled. King says his dream is “deeply rooted in the American dream.” This reinforces the protestors’ rights to equality in America. He says he dreams that “the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood.” This emphasizes the need for black and white Americans to work together. Central to the message of this speech, and the Civil Rights movement more generally, is this line: “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.” He talks about the importance of faith, and that “all flesh shall see [the glory of the Lord] together.” That faith, he says, will help them in the struggles they’ve faced, the struggles they still face, and those struggles yet to come as they peacefully fight for liberty and equality. King then uses a line from the song, “My Country ‘Tis of Thee”: “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 pilgrim’s pride, from every mountainside, let freedom ring!’” Only by realizing this as truth, King says, can America become a great nation. He begins the next section by mentioning mountainsides throughout the country, repeating “Let freedom ring.” King closes the speech with another iconic line: “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 the words of the old Negro spiritual: ‘Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty, we are free at last!’”

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. delivered what is commonly known as the "I have a dream" speech on Aug. 28, 1963, at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C. The speech, which was partly improvised by King on the spot, started off with an observation that black people were still not free more than 100 years after the Emancipation Proclamation and ended with the famous "I have a dream" section in which he hoped for a better future for all people. King's speech is considered by many to be one of the key defining moments of the civil rights movement.

King's "I have a dream" speech moves chronologically through the history of black people in the United States. It begins by referring to the Africans who were brought to America as slaves and celebrates the Emancipation Proclamation, which set them free legally.

However, King quickly turns to the present day to point out that 100 years after the passage of the Emancipation Proclamation, black people were still mired in poverty, injustice, police brutality and segregation. In the "present day" section of the speech, he urges people not to turn to bitterness, hatred or physical violence in confronting the injustices the speech chronicles.

In the most famous section of the "I have a dream" speech, King looks to the future and, quoting from the Bible, the Declaration of Independence and American songs, puts forth his hopes for the years to come. Speaking poetically and with great power, King paints a picture of a country in which all are equal, blacks and whites work together and freedom is available to everyone.