I Have a Dream Study Guide

I Have a Dream by Martin Luther King, Jr.

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Introduction

Martin Luther King Jr. delivered his "I Have a Dream" speech on August 28, 1963, at the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. Many regard it as the greatest speech of the twentieth century and, more than that, one of the greatest speeches in history. Though King was one of several featured speakers that day, "I Have a Dream" became synonymous with the aims of the march and the entire civil rights movement. His dream represented the dream of millions of Americans demanding a free, equal, and just nation.

A scholar and a pastor, King was able to combine academic, political, and biblical elements in his "I Have a Dream" speech. He referenced the Bill of Rights, the Declaration of Independence, the Emancipation Proclamation, and the Bible. When delivering his address, he spoke with accessible language and used repetition to drive home important points; the phrase "I have a dream" is repeated nine times in the speech. Though King had a script in front of him, as the speech progressed and the crowd responded, he began to improvise his message. The "I have a dream" section of the speech is the most well-known portion of the address, and it was entirely extemporaneous. The power of this section is a testament to King's oratory skills and the conviction with which he spoke. Just as his namesake Martin Luther sparked the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century, King and his "I Have a Dream" speech emboldened his followers and changed history.

In the speech, King demands the same justice and equality for black Americans that is promised to all citizens in the Declaration of Independence. While he calls on fellow civil rights activists to persevere in the face of brutality, violence, and oppression, he also cautions against the use of violence. King believed in what Henry David Thoreau termed "civil disobedience," in which individuals use nonviolent means to achieve social change, and studied Mahatma Gandhi's peaceful protests for Indian independence in the 1930s and 1940s. "Again and again," he counsels the crowd, "we must rise to the majestic heights of meeting physical force with soul force."

Television played an important role in delivering King's speech to the masses. Recent events in the civil rights struggle had been televised, including police brutality in Birmingham, Alabama, earlier in 1963, and television had become an important catalyst for the civil rights movement. The March on Washington, including King's speech, was broadcast live throughout the country. This allowed leaders like King to reach a new demographic. As William G. Thomas III writes in "Television News and the Civil Rights Struggle":

They had talked to the converted and they had talked to the irreconcilable, but it was the vast mass of Americans who either had no opinion of the matter or did not yet care that they needed to reach.

"I Have a Dream" comprises a large part of King's legacy. Portions of the speech are instantly recognizable and have become part of America's culture. King's dream

became the nation's dream, and it did not die when he was assassinated in 1968. That year, his widow Coretta Scott King founded the King Center for Nonviolent Social Change in Atlanta, Georgia, as a way of furthering her husband's work for change. In 1986, King became the only twentieth-century figure whose birthday has been designated a public holiday, celebrated on the third Monday of January. However, it was not until 1993 that Martin Luther King Day was celebrated in all fifty states.

The text of "I Have a Dream" is widely available on the Internet and is collected in several anthologies and books, including *I Have a Dream: Writings and Speeches That Changed the World*, by Martin Luther King, and the *American Rhetoric* website at www.americanrhetoric.com.

Author Biography

Martin Luther King Jr.

Martin Luther King Jr. was born January 15, 1929, in Atlanta, Georgia, to Martin Luther King Sr. and Alberta Williams King. His father was the pastor of Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta and provided him with a middle-class upbringing that allowed for a more extensive education than was typically available to black children in the South. Though it was expected that King would follow in his father and maternal grandfather's footsteps and become a pastor, he was initially more interested in working for social change.

King attended Morehouse College in 1944 and, after a change of heart in 1948, entered Crozer Theological Seminary. From there, he attended Boston University, where he received his Ph.D. in 1955. Shortly after, he became the pastor of Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama, where he was instrumental in organizing the Montgomery bus boycott in 1955. He was named the president of Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) in 1957, a position that gave him even wider influence on the civil rights movement. King married Coretta Scott in 1953, and the couple had four children.

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, King led nonviolent protests, demonstrations, and marches in support of civil rights across the South, and was a featured speaker at the 1963 March on Washington. He won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964. On April 4, 1968, King was assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee.

King turns his attention to those watching the civil rights movement from the outside, wondering when the civil rights activists will be satisfied. To this question, he responds: "We can never be satisfied as long as the Negro is victim of the unspeakable horrors of police brutality." Alluding to the book of Amos in the Bible, King says they will not be satisfied until "justice rolls down like waters, and righteousness like a mighty stream."

He acknowledges that it has not been an easy struggle for many present in the crowd, who have endured brutality, violence, and jail time. He encourages them to continue their fight:

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.

Encouraging the crowd not to be disheartened or defeated, King tells them that he has a dream, "a dream deeply rooted in the American dream." He dreams of a day when the descendents of slaves and slaveholders in Georgia will sit down together; when Mississippi, "a state sweltering with the heat of oppression," will be a place of freedom to all; and when black and white children will hold hands and join together in the state of Alabama. King dreams of a day when his four children will live in a country "where they

will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character." He dreams of a day when all the obstacles preventing equality and respect between black and whites in America have been leveled. It is with the faith in this dream that King resolves to return to the South and fight. This faith can unify the masses, and "we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope." This faith will sustain those who fight, "knowing that we will be free one day."

On the day that this freedom is achieved, King believes that all Americans will be able to sing "My Country 'Tis of Thee" with new meaning. The words to this anthem must be true in order for America to be a great nation. King closes his speech by invoking freedom to ring from New York to California, but also from "Stone Mountain of Georgia … Lookout Mountain of Tennessee … [and] every hill and molehill of Mississippi." He assures that when this freedom is a reality,

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!"

Plot Summary

Martin Luther King Jr. greets the crowd assembled at the Lincoln Memorial by expressing his joy over the turnout for "the greatest demonstration for freedom in the history of our nation." He refers to Abraham Lincoln, in whose "symbolic shadow" the crowd is gathered. Lincoln was responsible for issuing the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, thus freeing American slaves from "the long night of their captivity." However, King continues, black Americans are far from free one hundred years later. Segregation, discrimination, poverty, and mar-ginalization remain realities for black Americans in the 1960s, and it is for the purpose of dramatizing this "shameful condition" that hundreds of thousands have gathered for the March on Washington.

He tells the crowd that they have come to the nation's capital to "cash a check" that was promised to all men by the Declaration of Independence. All Americans, regardless of color, are heirs to the promise of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, yet he declares the government has defaulted on this promise for black Americans. He says that blacks have received instead a "bad check, a check which has come back marked 'insufficient funds.' " But the crowd gathered at the capital, King says, refuses to believe there are not enough funds or opportunity for all Americans, and thus they have come to demand "the riches of freedom and the security of justice."

King emphasizes the importance of making sweeping changes to the racial disparity found in America. He rejects the idea of gradual changes or taking excess time to consider the problem. He demands immediate action and encourages the rise of brotherhood and equality throughout the country in order to "make justice a reality for all of God's children." King insists that black Americans will continue to rise against institutionalized racism and injustice until these evils are eliminated. This is not a temporary letting off of steam or a momentary need for revolt, he warns: "[T]here will be neither rest nor tranqui-lity in America until the Negro is granted his citizenship rights."

He implores lawful and peaceful demonstrations and acts of civil disobedience. He warns against falling into rage, bitterness, and hate, extolling the crowd to seek the "high plane of dignity and discipline." Peace and equality will not be possible through hatred, especially by blacks hating white people, as King notes that there are many whites in the crowd as well, and "they have come to realize that their freedom is inextricably bound to our freedom. We cannot walk alone." Those fighting for freedom must always seek progress and forward motion; they cannot stop and cannot turn back.

Themes

Equality

The purpose behind the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom and King's speech was a demand for equality for all Americans, regardless of skin color. King speaks in front of the Lincoln Memorial one hundred years after Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation. Though the Proclamation legally freed the slaves, King argues that "one hundred years later, the Negro still is not free" because of racism and discrimination. Segregation, Jim Crow laws, fear, and violence have kept black Americans from enjoying freedom and equality, and instead "the Negro is still languished in the corners of American society and finds himself an exile in his own land." America's persistence in this inequality based solely on race is keeping the country from truly being great, King insists. He encourages those fighting for equality and freedom to continue their fight in a peaceful manner, confident in the knowledge that this collective action has the power to change the nation. He tells the crowd not to despair over the struggle and not to give up: "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.'" King is certain that this dream will some day lead to a country where equality is the birthright of every citizen of every color. Until then, he says, blacks and whites fighting for equality will continue their peaceful, determined fight: "This sweltering summer of the Negro's legitimate discontent will not pass until there is an invigorating autumn of freedom and equality."

Justice

King's demand for equality is a demand for justice. In a nation that prides itself on constitutional justice and freedom, the lack of both for black citizens denies them their quintessential American rights. King points to the Declaration of Independence's promise of the "Inalienable Rights" of "Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness" for every man. He states that the government has written a "bad check" to black Americans with respect to those rights, and he is demanding full payment. He refuses to believe that "there are insufficient funds in the great vaults of opportunity of this nation." Therefore, black citizens' lack of access to these rights and opportunities constitutes an injustice, one that must be immediately righted. Rejecting calls for gradualism or time to think, King insists, "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."

On the theme of justice, King alludes to the Old Testament book of Amos, in which Israel's prosperity conceals corruption, asserting that "we will not be satisfied until justice rolls down like waters, and righteousness like a mighty stream." King dreams of the day when justice will come, allowing his children and future generations of black Americans to be judged on their individual merit, rather than physical characteristics. On

that day, Americans of every color, creed, race, and gender will be able to sing "My country, 'tis of thee / sweet land of liberty" with the conviction that is it true for every citizen. King is adamant that the livelihood and future of the country depends on this: "[I]f America is to be a great nation, this must become true." Justice for every American is nothing short of the American dream itself, King argues, and his dream for this justice is therefore nothing less than a patriotic plea. He urges for freedom to ring not only in the North, but in the South as well, and in every place in America.

Oppression

By 1963, the civil rights movement had been a force to be reckoned with for several years, after having slowly gathered steam for generations. As the movement grew, so did the violent response to it. Many in the crowd who heard King's speech, and even King himself, had been victims of violence and oppression, both at the hands of private citizens and public servants. In the opening paragraphs of King's speech, he refers to this brutality as a modern slavery: "the manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination." Because of this subjugation, King explains, both black and white citizens fighting for racial equality will not cease until freedom has been won, no matter what the consequences might be: "The whirlwinds of revolt will continue" until justice has been achieved for all.

King's speech is peppered with references to the oppressive system that blacks are forced to live under, not only in the South, but in northern cities as well. He refers to the voting restrictions in Mississippi that make it nearly impossible for a black person to vote, and the "Negro in New York [who] believes he has nothing for which to vote." He also calls Mississippi a state "sweltering with the heat of oppression," and refers to Alabama with "its vicious racists, with its governor having his lips dripping with the words of 'interposition' and 'nullification.'"

Though he acknowledges the heavy price many have paid for their participation in the civil rights movement, King cautions against turning to violence. He refuses to embrace the same brutal, dehumanizing tactics that many white segregationists and racist politicians have employed in an effort to keep black Americans separate and unequal. King recognizes those who have been jailed, "veterans of creative suffering," and those who have been "battered by the storms of persecution and staggered by the winds of police brutality." Yet despite these hardships, King encourages those who have suffered this violence to return to the South and keep fighting, "knowing that somehow this situation can and will be changed."

Brotherhood

Throughout his speech, King repeatedly uses the term we to refer to those involved in the fight for civil rights. This rhetorical device has the effect of creating unity and suggests the brotherhood of those involved in the civil rights movement. By doing so, King connects individual suffering with the greater movement, creating the big picture of

progress. In this way, civil rights proponents are forwarding the movement "until the bright day of justice emerges" each time one is threatened, beaten, or jailed.

The solidarity that King encourages is not just among black Americans, but among all Americans fighting for civil rights. As he looks out into the crowd, he acknowledges "our white brothers" who are a part of the movement and cautions against a rising black militancy that leads to a "distrust of all white people." "We cannot walk alone," King points out, and therefore "we must make the pledge that we shall always march ahead." As King relates his dream for a free America, he speaks on behalf of all black Americans, and indeed every American of every color. His dream is a future where color does not divide the nation, and where the freedoms promised in Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation are realities. King has faith in this dream; it is why he fights and why he will return to the South. But he knows this faith in the dream is not his alone, but that of the brotherhood of both white and black civil rights activists. "With this faith," he says, "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."

Historical Context

King and the Civil Rights Movement

Though black Americans had been struggling for equality and freedom since the rise of Jim Crow legislation at the end of the nineteenth century, the civil rights movement began in earnest with the use of civil disobedience, or the disregard for unjust laws. In 1955, African American Rosa Parks refused to yield her seat on a Montgomery, Alabama, bus to a white passenger. Her subsequent arrest led to a boycott of the Montgomery bus system, organized in part by Martin Luther King Jr. The boycott lasted for thirteen months and resulted in the integration of the bus system.

In the wake of the success in Montgomery, black leaders formed the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) as a way to organize further social protests against segregation and racism in the South. King became a major figure and main spokesman for the SCLC as its president and traveled across the country giving speeches and participating in rallies. After a trip to India, King became increasingly interested in Gandhi's nonviolent protest tactics and encouraged civil rights supporters in the United States to embrace peaceful, passive resistance rather than violence.

In 1963, King traveled to Birmingham, Alabama, a stronghold in the segregationist South. He helped organize a protest against segregated lunch counters and downtown stores. Alabama police officers with attack dogs and billy clubs met these first protests. The city sought an injunction against King and his associates to prevent them from congregating in town; when King refused to follow the order, he was arrested and found guilty of contempt of court. When he was released, he organized a second march that included many women, students, and children. Under the direction of police commissioner Bull Connor, Birmingham police turned high-pressure fire hoses on the unarmed protesters and jailed nearly three thousand. In 1964, the year King won the Nobel Peace Prize, the Civil Rights Act was passed by Congress, banning discrimination in schools, public areas, and the workplace.

In 1965, King organized a voters march in Selma, Alabama, which was met with similar resistance. Six hundred civil rights marchers were attacked by police on the Edmund Pettus Bridge on March 7; only one-third of the marchers reached Selma. The day become known as "Bloody Sunday" and was televised nationwide. The event drew national attention and helped bring increasing awareness to the civil rights movement. Two marches followed. That year, President Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act into law, which prohibited discrimination, literacy tests, and poll taxes in voting places.

March on Washington

The concept for the March on Washington originated in the early 1940s. Angered at how black Americans failed to prosper from the New Deal programs during the Depression,

A. Philip Randolph, a labor union president and civil rights activist, organized a march to demand change. He initially called for five thousand participants, but as news of the march grew and was published in black newspapers, the expected turnout grew to tens of thousands. In order to avoid the embarrassment that such a march could bring to his administration, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 8802, which prohibited racial discrimination in certain lines of work. The march was cancelled.

The idea of a march resurfaced in the 1960s as the civil rights movement gathered momentum and began to see progress. The organizers of the march hoped that it would influence the civil rights legislation that was stalled in Congress. Randolph organized the march, with a goal of bringing one hundred thousand people to the nation's capital to demand freedom and equality. Organizations such as the SCLC and the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) lent their support to the march. On August 28, 1963, over two hundred thousand citizens, black and white, participated in the march of nearly a mile from the Washington Monument to the Lincoln Memorial. In "Backers Pleased with Washington Civil Rights March," Al Kuettner quotes Floyd McKissick, the chairman of the board of the Congress of Racial Equality, as saying that the march marked "the end of the Negro protest and the beginning of the American protest." Kuettner also notes President Kennedy's reaction to the peaceful assembly; the president "could not help but be impressed with the 'deep fervor and the quiet dignity' of the gathering." Kennedy backed the Civil Rights Act that summer, and it became law in the 1964.

Though the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom was overwhelmingly viewed as a success, there was quite a bit of opposition to it. President Kennedy himself was initially opposed to the march for fear that it would anger segregationists in Congress and permanently sink the Civil Rights Act. White supremacist groups such as the Ku Klux Klan feared the galvanizing power of the march. Some black groups also opposed it; Malcolm X and the Nation of Islam prohibited its members from participating, as they viewed the march as a whitewashing of the race issue in America. Thomas's "Television News and the Civil Rights Struggle" records that Virginia Congressman Thomas N. Downing called the March itself "orderly, well done, and well coordinated." Yet, many Southern lawmakers were derisive about the march's ultimate ability to make an impact; Congressman J. Vaughan Gary dismissed the march as nothing more than "a giant pep rally" (quoted in Thomas).

King's Assassination

On April 4, 1968, Martin Luther King Jr. was in Memphis, Tennessee, preparing for a demonstration on behalf of the predominantly black local sanitation workers' union. That evening, while on the balcony of the Lorraine Motel near downtown Memphis, King was shot in the throat by a sniper in a nearby building. He was rushed to the hospital and pronounced dead an hour later. Following the news of King's death, riots broke out in over sixty U.S. cities. President Johnson declared April 9, the day of King's funeral, a national day of mourning. Over three hundred thousand mourners attended the funeral.

The night before his assassination, King delivered a speech in Memphis that has come to be known as "I've Been to the Mountaintop." In it, he appears to presage his own death, though he is focused only on the victory to come:

Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will. And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the promised land!

James Earl Ray was apprehended two months after King's assassination and pleaded guilty to the murder. In 1969, he received a ninety-nine-year sentence. Until his death in 1998, the imprisoned Ray insisted that he was not involved with the murder and had never intended to plead guilty. His initial plea had eliminated the need for a trial, and Ray petitioned the court for an opportunity to try his case. King's son Dexter became an unexpected ally in Ray's cause, and the entire King family fought on Ray's behalf for an opportunity to try the case in open court. Ray maintained that his brother Johnny and a Canadian man using the alias "Raoul" were involved in the assassination and that he himself did not shoot King. The King family maintains that Ray was not involved in the assassination. The Lorraine Motel is today the site of the National Civil Rights Museum, where King's hotel room—preserved as it was on the night of his death—serves as the final exhibit.

Critical Overview

The speech "I Have a Dream" by Martin Luther King Jr. closed the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom and immediately came to symbolize the civil rights movement. By the time of the march, King's reputation was already nationally known; in a 1962 *New York Times* article titled "Spokesman for Negroes; Martin Luther King Jr.," King is noted as having "power and prestige approach[ing] the dimensions of Booker T. Washington." For many Americans, King was the face of the civil rights movement. His academic training and experience as a pastor helped him become a great orator. He drew on biblical, historical, political, and educational images and themes in his speeches, which allowed him to reach a wide audience. In "Voice Merging and Self-Making: The Epistemology of 'I Have a Dream,'" Keith Miller refers to this mix of influences, stating "No other liberal or radical in [the twentieth] century has approached King's success in defining the stock motifs of nationalism and Biblical religion as demands for massive social change."

Reaction to King's speech was immediate and overwhelming. The more than two hundred thousand march participants gathered at the Lincoln Memorial applauded wildly. According to "Marching for a Dream" in *Time* magazine, as President Kennedy listened to King's speech, he remarked that King was "damn good."

The true measure of King's speech was felt long after it was delivered, and many critics and historians use it as a meter to measure the progress made toward racial equality and justice. While some praise the strides made since 1963, many see various unfulfilled promises yet to be addressed. Peter Ling calls the speech "far more of an icon than a simple historical document" in "Martin Luther King's Half-Forgotten Dream." In Jerelyn Eddings's "'I Have a Dream'—30 Years Ago and Now," she notes the "emotional chord" that King's speech struck, and that the "magic of the moment was that it gave white America a new perspective on black America and pushed civil rights forward on the nation's agenda." However, writing thirty years later, she notes that the discrimination King spoke out against still exists, yet it is "more a matter of dark hearts than evil laws." Pamela Schaeffer agrees in "A Dream Dishonored After 30 Years." Quoting scholar Roger D. Hatch, Schaeffer writes that "some of King's most ardent ideals seem frozen in time," and that Hatch believes that "King's 1963 message has been twisted and exploited by opponents of civil rights."

In 2003, on the fortieth anniversary of the March on Washington and King's speech, thousands of black Americans gathered at the nation's capital to reflect on King's dream. In "Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Dream Remembered as Thousands Gather at Lincoln Memorial" in *Jet* magazine, King's son Martin Luther King III speaks of the enduring legacy of his father's words: "I do think people remember because they resonate so clearly…. Components of the dream have been realized, but the entire vision of freedom, justice and equality for all humankind has not." In the *Black Collegian*, Martin Luther King III further reflects on the impact of his father's speech in "'I Have a Dream': 40 Years Later," in which he remembers his father as "more than a dreamer"

whose top priority was "redeeming the bad check that America had given African Americans."

Numerous books and texts have been devoted to studying King's rhetoric and impact on American and world history. It is often studied in history and speech curricula, as well as English courses. As Doug DuBrin notes in " 'I Have a Dream' as a Work of Literature," King's speech "became one of the most influential and inspirational pieces of rhetoric in American history." In 2000, *USA Today* reported that "I Have a Dream" had been rated as the greatest political speech of the twentieth century, topping other notable entries such as John F. Kennedy's inaugural address, Franklin D. Roosevelt's "A Date that Will Live in Infamy," and Malcolm X's "The Ballot or the Bullet."

Audio recordings of Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech are widely available on the Internet, including www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/Ihaveadream.htm where it is available as an audio MP3.

Martin Luther King Jr.—I Have a Dream is a collection of archival footage and images including King's memorable speech, scenes of opposition that civil rights supporters faced in Alabama, King's death, and Robert Kennedy's eulogy. It is available on VHS and DVD from Mpi Home Video.

The Speeches Collection: Martin Luther King, Jr. is a collection of King's speeches, including "I Have a Dream" and "I've Been to the Mountain-top," among others. It is available on VHS from Mpi Home Video.

The 1978 television miniseries *King* follows King's rise in the civil rights movement, from his days as a pastor in Alabama to his assassination in Memphis. Starring Paul Winfield as King and Cicely Tyson as Coretta Scott King, the series is directed by Abby Mann. It is available on DVD from MGM.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2

Critical Essay #1

In the following excerpt, Wortham argues that King's appeal to the masses in his "I Have a Dream" *speech rather than the individual was a critical mistake that negatively impacted future generations of black Americans*.

Annually, throughout the month of February, known as Black History Month, Martin Luther King Jr.'s voice punctuates the airwaves like a public-service announcement, delivering his "I Have a Dream" speech at the 1963 March for Jobs and Freedom in Washington, D.C.

What listeners usually hear is the speech's rousing "Let freedom ring!" finale, which begins with King's invocation of the patriotic hymn "America" and ends with the vision of

the day when all 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!"

Although this climax receives the most airplay and seems to be most often included in film documentaries, it is the preceding "Dream" sequence that is most often quoted. King told a quarter of a million people at the Lincoln Memorial that "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."

The rhetorical flourish that followed, in which he wished that his 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," was but an abbreviated portrayal of his vision of the Beloved Community.

King's dream was "no private vision, nothing esoteric," observes biographer William Robert Miller in *Martin Luther King, Jr: His Life, Martyrdom, and Meaning for the World* (1968). Rather, it was "a personalized translation of the American heritage taught to every schoolboy, forged anew in a context of the Negro experience."

The words of the speech, which invoked the patriotic symbolism of the Declaration of Independence, Gettysburg Address, and Emancipation Proclamation, "came right out of elementary school civics," Miller concludes. Indeed, as King stated in the Washington speech and asserted several years later, in the May 1968 issue of *Negro History Bulletin:*

It is a dream of a land where men of all races, of all nationalities and of all creeds can live together as brothers. The substance of the dream is expressed in these sublime words, words lifted to cosmic proportions: "We hold these truths to be self-evident—that all men are created with inalienable fights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. This is the dream."

But as Richard Lescher points out in *The Preacher King: Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Word That Moved America* (1995), King meant to convey more than a civics lesson; the speech was a rhetorical strategy that identified black aspirations with the traditional consensus ideals of America and "assured his hearers that history and universal moral law are aligned with the black quest for freedom."

As King stated in a 1967 *Playboy* article, "A Testament of Hope," he believed that blacks could provide "a new expression of The American Dream that need not be realized at the expense of other men around the world, but a dream of opportunity and life that can be shared with the rest of the world." His aim was to expand the dream and give blacks a central role in its fulfillment.

That the speech was more than rhetoric for King is clearly documented by Ira Zepp in his study *The Social Vision of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (1989).

As Zepp shows, through the use of a synthesis of biblical and civil-religious rhetoric, King expressed his preoccupation with the establishment of the Beloved Community—a completely integrated society, a community of love and justice, based on what he called the "solidarity of the human family" and the "inescapable network of mutuality" with which we are tied together. He believed the Beloved Community would be the ideal corporate expression of the Christian faith and was the only form of association that could foster an egalitarian approach to wealth and property.

King's abiding faith, as he said in the Washington speech, was that "the glory of the Lord shall be revealed," that God had the power to achieve His purpose among mankind within history. And it was with this faith that Americans

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 play together, to struggle together, to go to jail together, to stand up for freedom together, knowing that we will be free one day.

King saw his dream as rooted in the American dream. His dream is more properly seen, however, as a collection of conflicting premises borrowed from the American creed and its corollary, the American dream.

In his powerfully argued book, *American Exceptionalism* (1996), sociologist Seymour Martin Lipset quotes G.K. Chesterton, who observed that "America is the only nation in the world that is founded on a creed. That creed is set forth with dogmatic and even theological lucidity in the Declaration of Independence."

The two values at the core of the American creed are individualism and egalitarianism, or freedom and equality. As Lipset points out, "Americans believe strongly in both."

King's dream of the Beloved Community was partially grounded in a distorted version of the egalitarian element of the American creed, not in its individualism. Had he been an advocate of individualism, he would have possessed a conceptual basis for a far more

inspiring dream speech, the thrust of which would have served both blacks and whites better than the speech he delivered.

For the country surely could have used a good dose of back-stiffening rational individualism rather than the sugarcoated collectivism that was ladled out that day. Such a speech would have had as its central feature not compulsory social egalitarianism in racial matters but the primacy of individual freedom, achievement, and equality of opportunity and their dependence on a competitive market economy.

Had King's dream been a more consistent reflection of the American dream, there would have been less talk about the table of brotherhood and more about the table of plenty. He would have done better by us to insist not on a Beloved Community (which can hardly be taken as an irreducible primary) connected by the most unrealistic quality of "disinterested love" but on a pluralistic community of achievers connected by the very real requirement of individual rights.

Harold Cruse points out in *Plural but Equal* (1989) that King was the first black leader in over seventy years who possessed the charisma, moral authority, and broad-enough community base to tell blacks in the wake of civil rights gains "how they might reorganize their lives to cope with the demands of freedom in a pluralistic society."

King came close to doing so, even to the extent of using the words of Booker T. Washington to say in *Where Do We Go From Here?* that "[the Negro] must not wait for the end of the segregation that lies at the basis of his own economic deprivation; he must act now to lift himself up by his own bootstraps." But, as Cruse demonstrates, in the end King foundered and dissipated his moral authority in the interests of the "brotherhood of man" and the redemption of America's soul.

The Martin Luther King who is lionized by intellectuals, theologians, the media, civic organizations, and professional black activists is not the potential bootstraps King but the "I have a dream" King. One wishes that if he could not have strategically delivered a bootstraps speech during the March on Washington, that he could have at least delivered a "civics lesson" which more accurately depicted the American creed and the American dream.

I truly believe that my life would be different and my country would be a better place had Martin Luther King been the kind of man who could insist on the whole of the American creed and merge his voice not only with Jefferson and Lincoln and Isaiah but with John Locke, Adam Smith, and Booker T. Washington. And not just these, but with the voices of ordinary blacks like my working-class, achievement-oriented father—a true yeoman of black progress—who, by the time of King's emergence as a black leader, had already taught me those commonsense sayings of Benjamin Franklin's Poor Richard (some of which can also be found in Saint Paul):

God helps them that help themselves.

Lost time is never found again.

Never leave that till tomorrow which you can do today.

If you would know the value of money, go and try to borrow some; for he that goes a borrowing goes a sorrowing.

Imagine hearing words like these punctuating the airwaves during Black History Month!

Source: Anne Wortham, "Martin Luther King's Flawed Dream," in *World and I*, Vol. 13, No. 6, June 1998, pp. 66-71.

Critical Essay #2

In the following article, Eddings traces the influence of King's speech at the March on Washington on the civil rights movement and modern racial and political climates

Few issues are as clear as the one that drew a quarter-million Americans to the Lincoln Memorial thirty years ago this August 28. "America has given the Negro people a bad check," the nation was told. It had promised equality but delivered second-class citizenship, a back-of-the-bus status because of race. Few orators could define the injustice as eloquently as Martin Luther King Jr., whose words on that sweltering day remain etched in the public consciousness: "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."

The March on Washington had been the dream of a black labor leader, A. Philip Randolph, who, like the NAACP's Roy Wilkins, was a potent figure in the civil-rights movement. But it was King who emerged as the symbol of the black people's struggle. His "I have a dream" speech struck such an emotional chord that recordings of it were made, sold, bootlegged, and resold within weeks of its delivery. The magic of the moment was that it gave white America a new perspective on black America and pushed civil rights forward on the nation's agenda.

When the march was planned by a coalition of civil-rights, union, and church leaders, nothing quite like it had ever been seen. Tens of thousands of blacks streamed into the nation's capital by car, bus, train, and foot, an invading army of the disenfranchised singing freedom songs and demanding rights. By their very numbers, they forced the world's greatest democracy to face an embarrassing question: How could America continue on a course that denied so many the simple amenities of a water fountain or a lunch counter? Or the most essential element of democracy—the vote?

Three decades later, we still wrestle with questions of black and white, but now they are confused by shades of gray. The gap persists between the quality of black life and white life. The black urban underclass has grown more entrenched. Bias remains. And the nation is jarred from time to time by sensational cases stemming from racial hate. But the clarity of the 1963 issue is gone: No longer do governors stand in schoolhouse doors. Nor do signs bar blacks from restaurants or theaters. It is illegal to deny African-Americans the vote. There are 7,500 black elected officials, including 338 mayors and 40 members of Congress, plus a large black middle class. And we are past the point when white America must look to one eloquent leader to answer the question "What does the Negro want?"

The change is reflected in the variety of causes on the wish list of this year's anniversary March on Washington. Health care reform. Job training. Religious freedom for American Indians. Statehood for the District of Columbia. Head Start for young people. Security for the disabled. And an end to racism.

The compelling issue of 1963—discrimina-tion—today is more a matter of dark hearts than evil laws. And the legislative agenda of modern-day marchers is American, not black.

Source: Jerelyn Eddings, *"'I Have a Dream'*—30 Years Ago and Now," in *U.S. News and World Report*, Vol. 115, No. 9, August 30, 1993, p. 10.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Novels for Students (NfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's"For Students" Literature line, NfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on "classic" novels frequently

studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of NfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of NfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of "classic" novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members—educational professionals— helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in NfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed—for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man–the character is listed as "The Narrator" and alphabetized as "Narrator." If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. • Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name "Jean Louise Finch" would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname "Scout Finch."
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by NfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an “at-a-glance” comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author’s time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

NfS includes “The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,” a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children’s Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Novels for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Novels for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Novels for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from NfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

"Night." Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234–35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from NfS (usually the first piece under the "Criticism" subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on "Winesburg, Ohio." Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335–39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. "Margaret Atwood's "The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition," Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9–16; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133–36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. "Richard Wright: "Wearing the Mask," in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69–83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59–61.

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