English II

Martin Luther King, Jr.: "I Have a Dream"
delivered 28 August 1963, at the Lincoln Memorial, Washington D.C.

1. I am happy to join with you today in what will go down in history as the greatest
demonstration for freedom in the history of our nation.
2. 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.
3. 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. And so we've come here today to
dramatize a shameful condition.
4. 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 note 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."
5. 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.
6. 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.
7. 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.
8. 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. And 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. And 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.
9. 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.
10. 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.
11. We cannot walk alone.
12. And as we walk, we must make the pledge that we shall always march ahead.
13. We cannot turn back.
14. 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 a Negro in Mississippi cannot vote and a Negro in New York believes he has nothing for

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which to vote. No, no, we are not satisfied, and we will not be satisfied until "justice rolls down like
dwaters, and righteousness like a mighty stream."
I am not unmindful that some of you have come here out of great trials and tribulations. Some
quest -- 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.
And 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.
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 slave owners 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 every valley shall be exalted, and every hill and mountain shall be
made low, the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight; "and
the glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all flesh shall see it together."
This is our hope, and 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.
And 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!
And if America is to be a great nation, this must become true.
And 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 snow-capped Rockies of Colorado.
Let freedom ring from the curvaceous 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 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!