Martin Luther King`S “I Have A Dream” Essay, Research Paper

Douglass Project’s sponsor/source for this text:

Martin Luther King, “I Have a Dream,” 28 August 1963

Occasion: The keynote speech at the 1963 March on Washington for

Jobs and Freedom, King gave the address from the steps of the

Lincoln Memorial to about 250,000 people assembled before him. The

speech was also broadcast on TV and published in newspapers. Since

1963, King’s “I Have a Dream” speech has become the most famous

public address of 20th century America. The immediate effect of the

speech also shaped American history. Julian Bond, a fellow

participant in the civil rights movement and student of King, would

write, “King’s dramatic 1963 ‘I Have a Dream’ speech before the

Lincoln Memorial cemented his place as first among equals in civil

rights leadership; from this first televised mass meeting, an American

audience saw and heard the unedited oratory of America’s finest

preacher, and for the first time, a mass white audience heard the

undeniable justice of black demands” (Seattle Times, 4 April 1993).

“I Have a Dream”

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.

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.

Find out

how you can

contribute to

the study of this

text

User notes

But 100 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.

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

that 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 security of justice. We have also

come to his 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 hoped 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 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 can never be satisfied as long as

our children are stripped of their selfhood and robbed of their dignity by

signs stating “for whites only.” 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 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.

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 down in Alabama, with its vicious racists,

with its governor having his lips dripping with the words of interposition and

nullification – one day right there 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, 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. 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 father’s 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, and 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!”

Where the text can be found: Congressional Record, 88th Congress,

(Washington: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1963) Washington, vol. 109,

pt. 12, pp. 16241-16242. The speech has been widely anthologized.

Special distribution copy of King’s “I Have a Dream” speech: The normal

Douglass policies regarding copyright and use have been waived for a special

distribution copy of King’s speech. It is available here: ihaveadream.txt.

Copyright ? 1997-1999 Douglass Project. All rights reserved.

Home | Speech Guides & Notes | Reference | Featured