

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. AND THE "I HAVE A DREAM SPEECH"

In a June of 1963, President John F. Kennedy delivered a powerful televised address on civil rights. In it, he asked for legislation "giving all Americans the right to be served in facilities which are open to the public—hotels, restaurants, theaters, retail stores, and similar establishments."

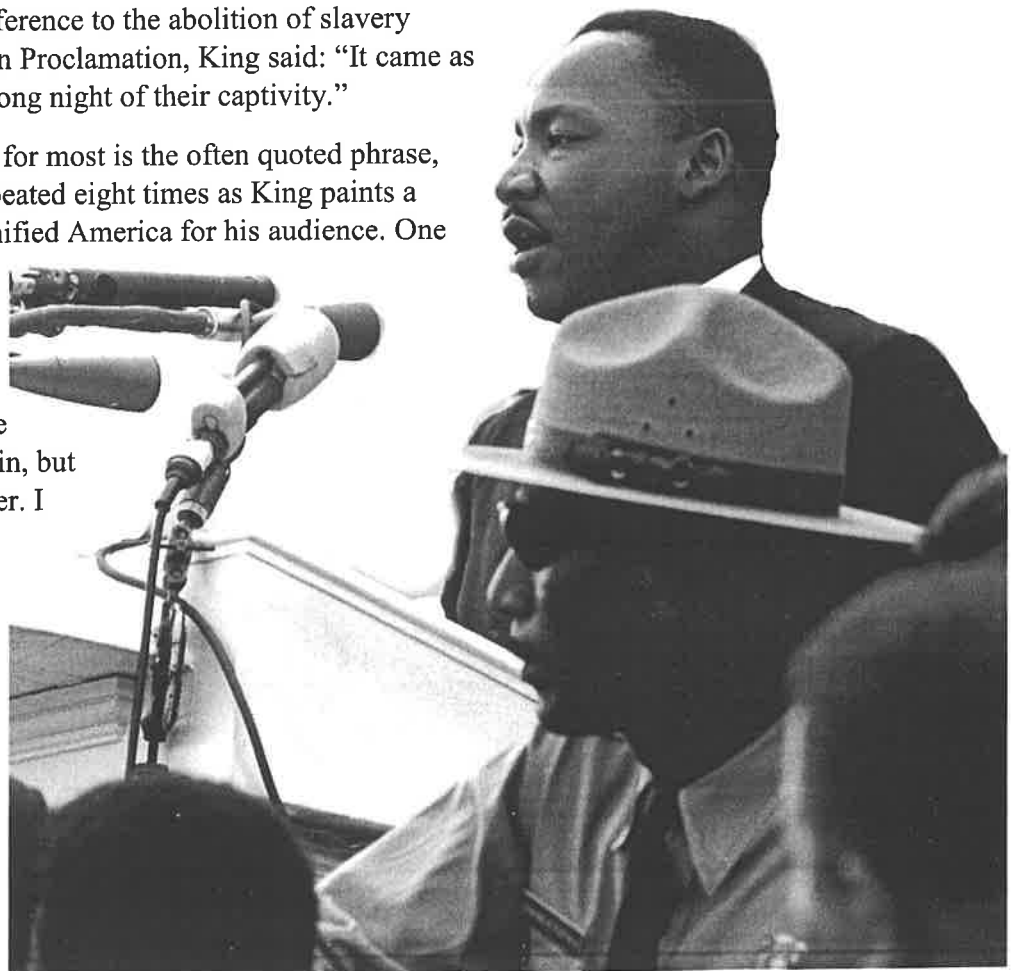
The passage of such a bill, however, was anything but a sure thing, as many Southern Congressmen opposed any legislation regarding desegregation. Various civil rights leaders began planning a mass rally at the Lincoln Memorial. The Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) saw a rally as a way of raising both civil rights and economic issues to national attention. The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) saw it as a way of challenging the Kennedy administration to do more for civil rights for African Americans.

Some feared that a mass protest might turn violent. Therefore, Martin Luther King and other leaders agreed to keep their speeches calm and to avoid provoking the civil disobedience which had become the hallmark of the civil rights movement. Indeed, it was King's "I Have a Dream" speech that became the defining moment of the March and one of the great moments in American history.

On August 28, 1963, about 250,000 people converged on Washington, DC for the March and to hear Dr. King's speech. In his address, King invoked America's Declaration of Independence, the Emancipation Proclamation, and the Constitution. He alluded to Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address by saying "Five score years ago..." In reference to the abolition of slavery articulated in the Emancipation Proclamation, King said: "It came as a joyous daybreak to end the long night of their captivity."

The most captivating moment for most is the often quoted phrase, "I have a dream", which is repeated eight times as King paints a picture of an integrated and unified America for his audience. One of the most quoted lines of the speech is, "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!"

King's speech and the March on Washington are credited with finally propelling the U.S. government into action on civil rights and creating momentum that lead to the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965.



After reading about Dr. King's speech and the **March on Washington** of 1963, answer the following questions in the spaces provided.

1. According to the reading, what were some of the reasons for holding the **March on Washington**?

2. Why do you think Dr. King invoked America's *Declaration of Independence*, the *Emancipation Proclamation*, and the *Constitution* in his speech?

MARCH ON WASHINGTON FOR JOBS AND FREEDOM

AUGUST 28, 1963

LINCOLN MEMORIAL PROGRAM

3. Do you believe the March on Washington and Dr. King's speech lead to a transformation in American culture? Explain

4. Based on the program to the right, which group was **not** represented at the March on Washington?

- Jewish Leaders
- Labor Union Leaders
- Civil Rights Leaders
- Political Leaders

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| 1. The National Anthem | Led by Marian Anderson. |
| 2. Invocation | The Very Rev. Patrick O'Boyle, <i>Archbishop of Washington.</i> |
| 3. Opening Remarks | A. Philip Randolph, <i>Director March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom.</i> |
| 4. Remarks | Dr. Eugene Carson Blake, <i>Stated Clerk, United Presbyterian Church of the U.S.A.; Vice Chairman, Commission on Race Relations of the National Council of Churches of Christ in America.</i> |
| 5. Tribute to Negro Women
Fighters for Freedom
Daisy Bates
Diane Nash Bevel
Mrs. Medgar Evers
Mrs. Herbert Lee
Rosa Parks
Gloria Richardson | Mrs. Medgar Evers |
| 6. Remarks | John Lewis, <i>National Chairman, Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee.</i> |
| 7. Remarks | Walter Reuther, <i>President, United Automobile, Aerospace and Agricultural Implement Workers of America, AFL-CIO; Chairman, Industrial Union Department, AFL-CIO.</i> |
| 8. Remarks | James Farmer, <i>National Director, Congress of Racial Equality.</i> |
| 9. Selection | Eva Jessye Choir |
| 10. Prayer | Rabbi Uri Miller, <i>President Synagogue Council of America.</i> |
| 11. Remarks | Whitney M. Young, Jr., <i>Executive Director, National Urban League.</i> |
| 12. Remarks | Mathew Ahmann, <i>Executive Director, National Catholic Conference for Interracial Justice.</i> |
| 13. Remarks | Roy Wilkins, <i>Executive Secretary, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.</i> |
| 14. Selection | Miss Mahalia Jackson |
| 15. Remarks | Rabbi Joachim Prinz, <i>President American Jewish Congress.</i> |
| 16. Remarks | The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., <i>President, Southern Christian Leadership Conference.</i> |
| 17. The Pledge | A Philip Randolph |
| 18. Benediction | Dr. Benjamin E. Mays, <i>President, Morehouse College.</i> |

"WE SHALL OVERCOME"