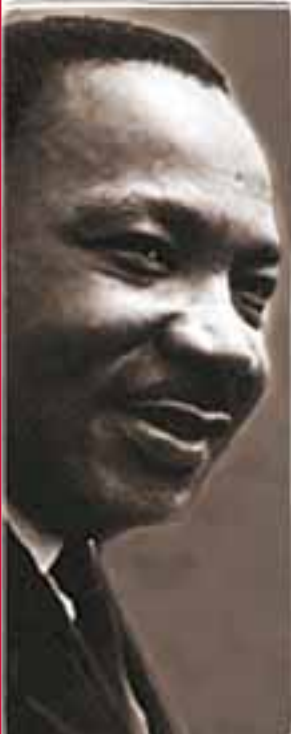


### III. SOCIAL ISSUES

**Martin Luther King Jr. (1929–1968).** Born into a long line of Baptist preachers, Martin Luther King Jr. understood the value and power of language. His speeches inspired many people, both black and white, to correct racial injustices nonviolently.

King was raised in a middle-class home in Atlanta where he was taught that people should not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character. At the age of fifteen, he entered Morehouse College. Two years later, he was ordained a minister. King also studied at Crozer Theological Seminary and earned his Ph.D. degree in theology from Boston University. While doing postgraduate work, he became intently interested in the work of Mohandas K. Gandhi, who fought for social and political change in India. King adopted Gandhi's philosophy of nonviolent protest as his own.



In 1953 King married Coretta Scott and accepted the pastorate of a Baptist church in Montgomery, Alabama, the following year. After Rosa Parks was arrested for refusing to give up her bus seat to a white woman, King organized a bus boycott. The nonviolent protest lasted for a year, ending in the outlawing of segregation on buses in Montgomery. The victory pushed King to the forefront of the civil rights movement.

Despite threats on his life, his house being bombed, and unlawful arrests, King continued to carry out nonviolent protests. In August 1963, he led a march on Washington, during which he delivered his “I Have a Dream” speech to more than two hundred fifty thousand protesters. The following year, King was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize and the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was passed, desegregating hotels and restaurants. His dream was coming true.

But in 1968, the nation witnessed another nightmarish event. After delivering an address titled “I’ve Been to the Mountaintop,” King was shot and killed while standing on a hotel balcony. In a most prophetic fashion, King had told the crowd that night, “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.”

In many of his speeches, King used biblical stories to illustrate his people's struggles. He often compared himself with Moses and his people's difficulties with ancient Israel's enslavement to Egypt. This technique in literature is called typology. King's use of typology was powerful in its ability to persuade a nation to “let his people go!” He is also known for using powerful language in his speeches and writing, full of imagery and figurative language. His language also demonstrates how race terminology was different during the time; King never intends disrespect with his language used.



Fill in each of the blanks using items from the following word list.

Egypt	Baptist	protestors
segregation	Boston	Moses
boycott	Washington	Atlanta
Mohandas K. Gandhi	biblical	

- 3.1 Martin Luther King was raised in a middle-class home in \_\_\_\_\_.
- 3.2 King was from a long line of \_\_\_\_\_ preachers.
- 3.3 King earned his Ph.D. degree in theology from \_\_\_\_\_ University.
- 3.4 He adopted the nonviolent protest philosophy of \_\_\_\_\_.

- 3.5 He organized a year-long bus \_\_\_\_\_, which brought about the outlawing of bus \_\_\_\_\_ in Montgomery, Alabama.
- 3.6 In August 1963, he led the march on \_\_\_\_\_, in which he delivered his “I Have a Dream” speech to more than two hundred fifty thousand \_\_\_\_\_.
- 3.7 King used \_\_\_\_\_ stories to illustrate his people’s struggles.
- 3.8 He often compared himself with \_\_\_\_\_ and his people’s difficulties with ancient Israel’s enslavement to \_\_\_\_\_.

### What to Look For:

Dr. Martin Luther King’s political speeches were firmly grounded in his training as a preacher. As you read the following address, notice the connections that he made between freedom and Christianity and between freedom and the Constitution of the United States. Why do you think Dr. King’s speeches were so powerful?

### Address at March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom

August 28, 1963  
Washington, D. C.

## “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. 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 manacle 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. So we’ve come here today to dramatize a shameful condition.

In a sense we have 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 inalienable 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.”

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. So we have come to cash this check, a check that will give us upon demand the riches of freedom and the security of justice.

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. 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 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.

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 ever 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. 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 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 the storms of persecutions 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, 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.

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 down 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 will 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 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 to ring, when we let it ring from every tenement 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."

by Martin Luther King, Copyright © Coretta Scott King



**Answer true or false for each of the following statements.**

- 3.9 \_\_\_\_\_ One hundred years after the Emancipation Proclamation, black people was still not free.
- 3.10 \_\_\_\_\_ The Constitution and the Declaration of Independence promised that only white men were guaranteed the unalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.
- 3.11 \_\_\_\_\_ There would be neither rest nor tranquility in America until black people were granted their citizenship rights.
- 3.12 \_\_\_\_\_ Protests must not be allowed to turn into physical violence.
- 3.13 \_\_\_\_\_ White people had come to realize that their freedom was not tied to the freedom of black people.
- 3.14 \_\_\_\_\_ Martin Luther King had a dream that one day the nation would live out the true meaning of its creed: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal."
- 3.15 \_\_\_\_\_ He wished that one day children would not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.
- 3.16 \_\_\_\_\_ Our hope is in coming together to see the glory of the Lord revealed.
- 3.17 \_\_\_\_\_ Martin Luther King stressed the "beautiful symphony of brotherhood" among all Americans.
- 3.18 \_\_\_\_\_ For America to be a great nation, it must allow freedom to ring.
- 3.19 \_\_\_\_\_ Martin Luther King quotes two songs, a Negro spiritual and "America."

**Ralph Ellison (1914–1994).** Although deeply concerned about the struggles that faced black Americans, Ralph Ellison never wished to write "protest" works. He argued that he was "a human being, not just a black [writer]."

Born and raised in Oklahoma, Ellison attended Tuskegee Institute in Alabama. He began as a music major but moved to Harlem to earn more money for college as a jazz trumpet player. While in New York, he came in contact with Langston Hughes and Richard Wright, both of whom encouraged him to write.

From 1938 to 1942, he worked for the New York Federal Writers Project. Later, he joined the merchant marines. While on vacation, Ellison began work on his novel, *Invisible Man*, which took him seven years to complete. In 1952 it was published and became a bestseller. As one critic has observed, the story is about not only a black man who tries to find his identity in a cold and uncaring modern world but also all Americans and their search for self and being.

