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R. Jackson Wilson
Smith College

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Edited by

David Nasaw
City University of New York
College of Staten Island

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Many of the leaders of the August 28, 1963, March on Washington link arms during the walk to the Lincoln Memorial for the major afternoon rally. Those in the front rank include National Catholic Interracial Council executive director Mathew Ahmann (in bow tie), CORE's Floyd McKissick, Martin Luther King, Jr., trade union leader Cleveland Robinson, Rabbi Joachim Prinz of the American Jewish Congress, civil rights lawyer Joseph Rauh (in bow tie), Whitney Young, executive director of the National Urban League, NAACP executive secretary Roy Wilkins, and Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters president A. Philip Randolph, the moving force behind the 1963 March. The participants' placards reflect how the explicit goals of the March gave jobs and employment as high a priority as the passage of federal civil rights legislation. *(Bettmann Newsphotos)*

"I Have a Dream" Speech

Commentary by David J. Garrow

Martin Luther King, Jr.'s, "I Have a Dream" speech at the August 28, 1963, March on Washington was one of the greatest orations in American history and one of the most notable highlights of the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s. Heard by over 200,000 people gathered near the Lincoln Memorial that warm summer day and by millions more on television and radio, King's speech conveyed the moral power of the movement's cause to an international audience and confronted white America with the undeniable justice of black citizens' demands for an end to racial segregation and discrimination.

King was only thirty-four years old when he gave that address, a still youthful Baptist minister who, as the eldest son of a well-to-do Atlanta clergyman, had grown up in the black Southern Baptist tradition. King had graduated from a trio of notable schools: Atlanta's Morehouse College, one of America's best-regarded black institutions, Crozer Theological Seminary, and Boston University, where he received a doctorate in systematic theology. Long before he had finished his education, King knew that he wanted to serve as a pastor in the South. In 1954 he became minister of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama, a well-to-do church in the rigidly segregated city that proudly styled itself "the cradle of the Confederacy."

New to town, new to his job, and with his wife Coretta expecting their first child, King took only a modest role in black civic affairs until December 1955, when Mrs. Rosa Parks was arrested for refusing to surrender her seat to a white man on a segregated city bus. King's colleagues drafted him as spokesman for the Montgomery Improvement Association, the new organization set up to oversee the black boycott of Montgomery's segregated bus line. King's gift for powerful Biblical oratory made him a public figure as the black community's year-long protest became a national and international news story.

Between 1957 and 1963, Martin Luther King, Jr., emerged as the foremost spokesman for black Americans in their renewed struggle to obtain their full constitutional rights. King's 1960 arrest for sitting-in at a segregated Atlanta lunchroom, his prominent role in sustaining the 1961 Freedom Rides, and his involvement in the 1961–62 demonstrations in Albany, Georgia, placed him in the nation's headlines and reinforced his role as the most visible representative of black southerners' increasing civil rights activism.

Early in 1963 King and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), the region-wide organization he had founded in 1957, launched a major protest campaign in Birmingham, Alabama, where public safety commissioner Eugene "Bull" Connor had already become famous for his rough tactics

against black demonstrators. Together with long-time Birmingham activist Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth, King's SCLC staff organized a month-long series of sit-ins and protest marches. Graphic news photos of Connor's men using police dogs and high-powered fire hoses against peaceful demonstrators created a national outrage and stimulated even hesitant supporters of civil rights, like President John Kennedy and Attorney General Robert Kennedy, to call for white concessions to SCLC's demands for desegregation.

The Birmingham protests made civil rights a prominent national issue. Sympathy demonstrations took place in cities across the country as civil rights activists promised to intensify their nonviolent attack on segregation. Several of King's aides talked of staging a major demonstration in the nation's capital, an idea already proposed by A. Philip Randolph, president of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters and the Negro American Labor Council. The dean of America's black leaders, Randolph in 1941 had successfully used the threat of a massive march on Washington to pressure President Franklin D. Roosevelt into issuing an executive order banning racial discrimination by government defense contractors. Randolph's purpose in calling for a 1963 march on Washington was to highlight pervasive black unemployment and call attention to the need for greater economic justice in American life. Before the protests in Birmingham, black leaders had shown little interest in his proposal. In early June, however, as King and others began to articulate the need for comprehensive federal legislation to eliminate racial discrimination, Randolph's plans for a march and SCLC's idea of a massive civil rights demonstration were combined. A "March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom" was scheduled for late August.

The violence in Birmingham and the national indignation it aroused also had a powerful effect on John and Robert Kennedy. Although they had, in the first two years of the Kennedy administration, been reluctant to propose any meaningful civil rights legislation to a disinterested Congress, they now recognized that Birmingham had changed the political climate. They also realized, for the first time, that racial discrimination was a moral issue that America had to confront and resolve. In mid-June President Kennedy went on national television to announce his intention to ask Congress for a far-reaching civil rights bill. Kennedy and his aides worried, however, that the upcoming march on Washington would hinder rather than help congressional passage of that bill. King, Randolph, and others were summoned to the White House and asked to cancel the demonstration. They refused. Popular support for the march increased throughout the summer as a talented team of movement organizers, headed by long-time Randolph aide Bayard Rustin, made plans for the nationwide move on Washington. They anticipated more than 100,000 participants.

By mid-July the Kennedy administration, faced with the fact that the march was going to take place whether it wanted it to or not, endorsed the demonstration. Still hoping to avoid any damage to the civil rights bill's uncertain congressional fate, the Kennedys shifted to a strategy of trying to moderate the march's political tone. Middle-of-the-road civil rights leaders such as Roy Wilkins, executive secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and Whitney Young, executive director of the National Urban League, stressed that the primary purpose of the march was to rally support for Kennedy's civil rights bill, not Randolph's economic agenda. The addition of four white cosponsors—United Auto Workers President Walter Reuther, Protestant notable Reverend Eugene Carson Blake, Jewish leader Rabbi Joachim Prinz, and Catholic layman Mathew Ahmann—to the six-man black leadership also gave the march a more moderate and legislative orientation. What had started out as a protest against federal government inaction on civil rights was looking more and more like a celebration of the movement's growth and Kennedy's congressional initiative.

In the weeks leading up to the August 28 event, the march leaders decided to focus their efforts on a mass rally and program at the Lincoln Memorial rather than on any Capitol Hill protests. Each of the ten leaders would address the crowd. Popular entertainers and other celebrities would also appear on the podium. Some female activists complained privately about the absence of any woman from the list of speakers, but a more serious dispute broke out when Kennedy aides and supporters got a look at the advance text of Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) chairman John Lewis's speech, which blasted the Kennedy administration for its tardy and incomplete support of the civil rights movement. Throughout the night of August 27 and into the morning of the 28th, as other plans fell into place, the march leaders argued with Lewis and his SNCC colleagues about toning down the speech. Only moments before the actual program began was a final accord reached.

Martin Luther King, Jr., did not finish preparing his advance text until the early morning hours of August 28. What he wanted, King told a friend, was something short and straightforward, "sort of a Gettysburg address." When typed up double-spaced on legal-size paper for mimeographing and distribution to reporters, it came to only three pages. (With ten speakers, everyone had been instructed to keep his remarks brief.) King's speech was scheduled last, at the climax of the program. Long before he moved forward with his prepared text in hand, it had become clear that the massive rally was a powerful and joyous success. Official estimates numbered the crowd at over 200,000, the largest single gathering in American history.

Master of ceremonies A. Philip Randolph introduced King as "the moral leader of our nation." King began with his untitled, advance text, following it closely as he made reference to Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation and to the promises of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, all of which, he noted, remained unfulfilled for black Americans. Speaking metaphorically, King compared those promises to a "bad check" which the United States now had to make good on. Using one of his favorite rhetorical devices, King reiterated that "Now is the time" for America to live up to those commitments. Linking the goal of racial equality to the language of traditional American patriotism, King underlined the necessity of nonviolence and biracial cooperation in the civil rights struggle and cited some of the discriminatory evils that federal legislation could eliminate. Then, after quoting the prophet Amos on justice and righteousness and emphasizing his own conviction that unmerited suffering was redemptive, King was close to the end of his prepared

text. He recalled that moment in an unpublished interview several months later. "Just all of a sudden—the audience response was wonderful that day—and all of a sudden this thing came to me that I have used—I'd used it many time before, that thing about 'I have a dream'—and I just felt that I wanted to use it here. I don't know why, I hadn't thought about it before the speech." King believed he had used the phrase at a rally in Albany eighteen months earlier and at a Birmingham mass meeting that spring. He had also employed it at a huge civil rights rally in Detroit on June 23. But on none of those occasions had it had anywhere near the impact that it did at the March on Washington.

"I have a dream," King declared, introducing a strong, repetitive cadence often used in the oratorical tradition of black Baptist preaching. He quoted from the Declaration of Independence, alluded to the segregationist legal doctrines of interposition and nullification that Alabama Governor George C. Wallace had cited in his unsuccessful effort to block court-ordered desegregation of the University of Alabama, and then repeated his "dream" that one day even Alabama would achieve a state of interracial harmony. He ended his "I Have a Dream" passage by quoting from the Bible's Book of Isaiah, and then, in his concluding lines, returned in large part to the closing that appeared in his prepared text. He added a passage of several lines from a traditional American patriotic song, and expanded on its call to "let freedom ring" from every mountainside by appending the names of some notable southern mountains to the list of American peaks. He ended the speech with a line he had often used as his closing. "Free at last, free at last. Thank God Almighty, we are free at last." Dripping with sweat, King stepped back as the audience gave him a thundering ovation.

DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

"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 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 in exile in his own land.

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 the 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 in so far 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. 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.

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

"March on Washington," Lincoln Memorial, Washington, D.C., August 28, 1963. Reprinted by permission of Joan Daves. Copyright © 1963 by Martin Luther King, Jr.

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. 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. 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 worn 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 plain of dignity and discipline. We must not allow our creative protests 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 the 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 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, 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 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. 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 father died, land of the pilgrims' pride, from every mountainside, let freedom ring." And if America is to be a great nation, this must become true.

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 mole hill of Mississippi. "From every mountainside, let freedom ring."

And when this happens, and when we allow freedom to 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."

Commentary: Part II

Although King did not then know it, the speech had been the rhetorical achievement of a lifetime, a clarion call that had communicated the moral justice and spiritual fervor of the civil rights movement to an audience of millions. Now, more than ever before, America and the world were faced with the powerful truth about black people's unavoidable demand for justice and equality.

As the crowd quieted, Bayard Rustin stepped to the podium and presented to the audience the specific goals of the March on Washington: passage of Kennedy's civil rights bill, a two dollar minimum wage, desegregation of schools, a federal public works job program, and federal action to bar racial discrimination in employment practices. The crowd roared its approval as each demand was read. As the last act of an incredible drama, Morehouse College President Benjamin E. Mays, King's mentor from his college years, came forward and gave the benediction. While the crowd slowly dispersed, the march's leaders headed to the White House for an appointment with President Kennedy.

The president was in a jovial mood when King and his colleagues arrived. He was especially pleased that no disruptive incidents had marred an event that had begun as a demonstration against him but had ended as a public relations bonanza for both the civil rights movement and Kennedy's new legislative effort. When Roy Wilkins mentioned that the leaders had all missed lunch, Kennedy ordered sandwiches for them from the White House kitchen.

The leadership group briefed the president on the success of the day's events, pressed him to strengthen certain provisions in the civil rights bill, and then posed with smiles as photographers snapped pictures of them with the president. From the White House they went to a television studio to tape a special hour-long interview on the march. Randolph stressed that "the mood of the Negro today is one of impatience and anger, frustration if not desperation." Wilkins and King emphasized the importance of obtaining congressional passage of the landmark civil rights bill. "This is a revolution to get in," King said of the civil rights movement, "a quest to get into the mainstream of American society."

After the taping, King returned to his hotel in a particularly buoyant mood. It had been a memorable day, one of the two or three most gratifying moments in his civil rights career. He and the movement's small group of full-time activists were no longer alone; hundreds of thousands of people were now willing to actively support their cause.

It was a moment of supreme pleasure, but one that Martin King knew would be short-lived. His faith that the movement could "redeem the soul of America," as SCLC's official slogan put it, had been reinvigorated. But he knew that

the dream was still far from fruition, and that the task at hand, as he had indicated that afternoon, was to "go back to the South" and resume a struggle that now, for the first time in its history, appeared to have truly massive support among the American people.

The March on Washington generated an emotional and political glow in which the civil rights movement could bask for weeks. It culminated a summer during which the race issue finally had moved to the front of the American political agenda. Although most press coverage focused on the impressive turnout and tone of the march rather than on the leaders' speeches, King's address had had an impact unlike any previous articulation of the movement's cause. Some activists took the opportunity to catch their breath. The principal leaders, however, were afraid of a letdown and hopeful that the march could inaugurate a period of renewed activism. Bayard Rustin stressed that it ought to be viewed as "not a climax but a new beginning." He worried that an atmosphere of stagnant self-satisfaction would result from the march and he feared, as did many march organizers, that the economic goals of the pilgrimage had made no impact at all on the wider public. King shared those concerns, and told reporters that he would soon launch new demonstrations in the South.

King and Rustin also appreciated how the march had succeeded in drawing new white allies to the movement's side. The potential political influence of such a broadened interracial coalition seemed enormous, and Rustin busily sketched out the possibilities while King pondered how to initiate new protests across the South.

The pleasant afterglow of the march and King's speech was suddenly and completely wiped away on Sunday morning, September 15, when white terrorists bombed Birmingham's Sixteenth Street Baptist Church, one of the movement's major churches, killing four young girls who were attending Sunday school. The rage and desperation felt by black Birmingham exploded on the city's streets. Hundreds of furious citizens pelted police with rocks, two black youths were killed in shooting incidents, and a half dozen other people were injured.

King flew to Birmingham where he called for U.S. army intervention, warning that the city faced an "emergency situation." President Kennedy decried the bombing but decided against any federal military action. He met with King and black Birmingham leaders to discuss other possibilities. "The Negro community is about to reach a breaking point," King cautioned the president while asking for clear federal action to reassure black Birmingham and black America. Kennedy agreed to send two presidential mediators to the city. King welcomed the decision as evidence of "the kind of federal concern needed." Nonetheless, in the weeks to follow, King would argue again and again that only quick congressional passage of an undiluted civil rights bill could meaningfully stem the deep anger and frustration that the Birmingham killings had awakened in black America and the civil rights movement.

The fatal bombing, hardly two weeks after the march, substantially circumscribed the ongoing short-term impact of the Washington pilgrimage and

King's "I Have a Dream" oration. Indeed, the conjunction of those two events later loomed large in the retrospective memories of both King and other movement activists.

In historical perspective, the march on Washington appears as one of the two emotional high-water marks of the 1960s civil rights crusade. The other, the dramatic Selma-to-Montgomery voting rights march in early 1965, brought an even greater outpouring of white support for the movement and helped secure congressional passage of the civil rights movement's second great legislative milestone, the Voting Rights Act of 1965. The first milestone had been reached a year earlier when President Lyndon Johnson successfully steered Kennedy's 1963 civil rights bill through Congress.

In the three years between the Selma march and King's April 1968 assassination in Memphis, Tennessee, the character of the black freedom struggle and the content of King's own thinking changed significantly. Following the triumphant Selma campaign, King and SCLC's attention turned to a year-long effort in the urban ghettos of Chicago that ended without notable success, while in the South, the real shock troops of the movement, the young field workers of SNCC, became increasingly disillusioned with the ideals of nonviolence and integration as white harassment and terror took their emotional and physical toll. When James Meredith, who in 1962 had become the first black student at the University of Mississippi, was shot and wounded during a one-man "March Against Fear" across the state in June 1966, SNCC joined with other groups to take up his trek and introduced the call for "Black Power" to America's civil rights vocabulary. Martin King had mixed reactions to the phrase, but NAACP and Urban League chiefs Roy Wilkins and Whitney Young openly condemned both the slogan and the racially separatist ideas that activists in both SNCC and CORE were beginning to articulate. The movement increasingly split into two opposing wings, with King struggling unsuccessfully to preserve an undergirding of unity.

King too changed substantially in the years after his "I Have a Dream" speech. In particular, he came to see that antidiscrimination legislation like the 1964 Civil Rights and 1965 Voting Rights Acts could have only a modest impact in alleviating the actual day-to-day burdens of many black Americans. Economic deprivation and inequalities, King realized, played an even larger role than racial discrimination in keeping black citizens at the bottom of American society. More and more King focused his complaints on those concerns—on inadequate housing, insufficient jobs, and inferior schools—and on the need for the federal government to undertake a massive program of economic redistribution. King also became an extremely outspoken critic of America's involvement in the Vietnam War and of U.S. policies that he considered militaristic and imperialistic.

In the final eight months of his life King laid plans for a massive "Poor Peoples Campaign" that would involve a descent on Washington quite unlike the one of 1963. This time, King warned, the movement's supporters would go to the nation's capital not to beseech the federal government to approve reform legislation, but to nonviolently disrupt the day-to-day functioning of

Washington until the Congress and President Johnson implemented programs to eliminate poverty and suffering in America. King spoke in strong language about America's need for "a radical redistribution of economic and political power." The movement, he claimed, needed to address "class issues . . . the problem of the gulf between the haves and the have nots." In the relative privacy of SCLC staff meetings, King now talked of how America would have to move toward some type of democratic socialism.

Throughout those last three years of his life King repeatedly told his audiences that "the dream I had in Washington back in 1963 has too often turned into a nightmare." Indeed, King in those later years had little of the optimism about American society and its chances for extensive racial progress that he manifested in his 1963 address. His understanding that the roots of black oppression were deeply economic was coupled with a growing sadness that much of white America seemed largely disinterested in achieving a more racially just society. The upbeat comments King had offered in earlier years about white people's support for black freedom were more and more replaced by an angry, sometimes bitter condemnation of the white disinterest that greeted black initiatives as the years passed and graphic pictures of southern lawmen with police dogs and fire hoses no longer filled American television screens.

In recent years, some commentators and political figures have cited King's "Dream" as an example of what King and the movement were about. King's "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," is sometimes quoted as proof that King and the mid-60s movement favored a "color blind" approach to public policy questions and opposed any programs involving "affirmative action." In fact, however, King openly and explicitly supported special remedial plans designed to redress the ongoing effects of past, widespread deprivations suffered by millions of Americans simply because of the color of their skin.

Thus it would be misleading for anyone to draw their image of either Martin Luther King, Jr., or the civil rights struggle of the 1950s and 1960s entirely from King's magnificent "I Have a Dream" oration. At the time of his death, King explicitly believed that his dream had *not* come true, and that the political direction of American society offered little hope that it would. The years since 1968 have done little to challenge King's expectation.

In short, while "I Have a Dream" represents one of the emotional peaks of the civil rights era, it is simply one snapshot—an upbeat and uplifting snapshot—from the history of a movement that so far has achieved only a part of its agenda and only a part of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s, "dream."