# Context:

During the 60’s racism was common place and segregation was still the law in most of the south, despite the Supreme Court ruling of Brown vs Board of Education declaring segregation in schools to be unconstitutional nearly a decade before the “I have a Dream” speech. Segregation was often referred to as separate but equal, even though it was nowhere near equal. The civil rights movement sprang up because of the inequalities of this segregation. However not everyone was as peaceful and non-violent as Mr. King. Groups like the Nation of Islam and Black Panthers openly pushed for better rights by any means necessary including the use of violence. This was a direct result of the brutality that police, and groups like the Ku Klux Klan, were using to stop civil rights protestors. Beatings, dog attacks, and firehoses were constantly used to disperse the peaceful demonstrations. This led to the tense feelings surrounding every protest, sit-in, and march. There was a real sense that violence could break out at any moment during the gatherings. Martin Luther King Jr. was such a great leader that his presence and words could turn that unpredictable energy into a focused instrument for progress. Quotes like, “Darkness cannot drive out darkness: only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate: only love can do that.” show just how powerful Mr. King’s words could be at disarming the hatred felt on both sides.

Martin Luther King Jr.’s historic I have a dream speech took place on August the 28th 1963 at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington D.C. in front of over 200,000 people. Bustling with excitement the highly charged atmosphere of the civil rights demonstration gave the feeling that things could have gotten out of hand quickly, as they had at many other demonstrations. But Mr. King didn’t gather everyone for a declaration of war; instead he came to spread a message of peace, love, and equality. And because his message was broadcast on radio the entire country got exposed to this side of the civil rights movement, some for the first time. This speech and the demonstration helped turn the tide against segregation. Only a year after this historic gathering the Civil Rights Act was signed into law.

# Canons of Rhetoric:

When it comes to style Martin Luther King Jr. is unique, with his metronome like pace of saying every word slowly and clearly. It comes across as very soothing and empowered, you can see why it was easy for others to follow him. His specific word choices add so much color to the speech, and the almost rhythmic repetition of key phrases seems to swell with emotion infecting all who listen. It still causes me to tear up every time I listen to the speech.

Mr. King’s delivery of the speech is amazing. Even when he made a mistake he just quickly corrected what he was saying and continued the speech with confidence. He does it so well that I almost didn’t notice the few times Mr. King stumbled over a word. He also knows how to pause for dramatic effect and to let the cheering/ applause die down, thus making sure he will not have to talk over anyone. The speech starts off demanding but switches at about 12 minutes in to his “I have a dream” speech. By listening to the crowd and seizing the moment he was able to change the direction of the speech entirely and again remind us that the future can exist without prejudice and racism. His delivery of the last five minutes in which he preaches about his dream of a better America is what solidified this speech as such a momentous turning point in the civil rights movement. Had his speech or delivery of the speech stayed on track it might not have been so effective.

# Improve my skills:

I actually try to use some of Mr. King’s techniques when giving speeches, granted his voice is much more powerful than mine. I always noticed how confident he seems and I feel a lot of it is due to the speed at which he gives his speeches. Nervous people tend to speak fast and mumble, which makes listening to them difficult. By slowing down and speaking clearly I am able to give the illusion of confidence even when I don’t actually have it. I have been known to use a metronome when practicing a speech to get the timing down right. I know that sounds weird but I really feel it helps. And when I am giving the speech I try to keep the beat in my head so that I can notice if I speed up to much. By reminding myself to slow down it becomes easier to think about what I am going to say next so that I don’t stumble over words. Taking my time also allows me to enunciate each word so that I am fully understood. I really feel this is my greatest strength when it comes to making speeches. I don’t really feel that I have my own style as of yet. I probably need to give a lot more speeches to a wider audience if I want to truly develop my own style.