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# THE SPEECH THAT MADE HISTORY!

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*“I Have A Dream” - Martin Luther King Jr.*

Standing on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, a man changed the whole thought process of an entire nation. Seldom has anybody influenced so many people with such élan as the all-time black hero and dauntless crusader of liberty, Martin Luther, King Jr. did with his speech on August 28, 1963. A man of the likes of whose statue he stood in shadow of, King, in his speech, “I Have a Dream” gave a clarion call for equality and freedom. The speech was delivered by him on the historic occasion of ‘March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom’. In this superb rhetorical discourse, Martin Luther King issues a wakeup call to his black brethren to rise and claim their rightful place in the American society. King spearheaded the mass demonstrations against colossal cruelty unleashed against innocent blacks by the white majority in his times. The speech is the one of the most vehement indictments of social injustice, racism and apartheid.

Dr. King fired and inspired the imagination of millions of black Americans with his extremely impressive speeches. “I Have a Dream” stands out of the

rest of King's discourses due to its unrivaled eloquence, unsurpassed rhetoric and matchless persuasiveness.

Exceedingly inspired by the magnetism and charisma of this epoch-making speech, the blacks could actually visualize their emancipation and the prospect of ushering into an era of bright future under King's leadership. "Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. delivered what went on to become one of the greatest, most profound speeches in history. King told of his "dreams" for racial equality and cohesiveness for all of mankind, to an audience totally well over 200,000 people" ("Dreams"). In this speech, Martin Luther King reminds the exploitative white administration to stop the ongoing injustice with immediate effect as this couldn't possibly continue forever.

King laments at the sorry state of affairs and resolves to do something concrete about it. He feels sorry that "the life of the Negro is still sadly crippled by the manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination." This extremely motivating speech is recognized as one of the major turning points in the African American history.

King adds credibility to his speech by drawing his audience's attention to the grim factual situation in the present time and calls for a change in the light of his vision of the future. "When Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. gave this famous speech, the U.S was ripe for change. African Americans had been free of slavery's chains for nearly 100 years. But in the South, unfair laws still made their lives far from free. African Americans could not drink from the same water fountains as whites, (or) be served at most restaurants, or go to the same good schools as whites" ("Scholastic" 79).

The prominently noticeable gap between the realities of the present time and King's future vision indeed spurred the people into action. King's reputation as a forceful orator coupled with his convincing tone make this speech very effective and authoritative.

He opens the speech with a grim reminder that although a lot of time has gone since the proclamation of emancipation signed by Abraham Lincoln, there is practically no change in the predicament of Negroes in America.

King praises the blacks for their courage, persistence and perseverance in the speech and blames the white administration for gross breach of promise. He compares their unfulfilled promises to a check that has bounced due to lack of funds. It is more of facts than fiction. It draws huge strength from its truthfulness and honesty of expression. The speech is indeed attacking in

nature and exhorts the exploited and downtrodden to rise and claim their rightful place in society. King's message is loud and clear. He issues a stern warning to the whites that corrective measures must be taken immediately to avoid a full-fledged revolt but he cautions the blacks against nursing any bitterness or animosity as this may prove to be counterproductive. He dissuades his audience from indulging in violence and preaches the gospel of non-violence. The speech is a testimony to the fact that how greatly Martin Luther King Jr. was influenced by the philosophy of non-violence propounded by personalities like Henry David Thoreau and Mohandas K. Gandhi.

In describing his dream of a nation "where a person would be judged not by the color of their skin but by the content of his character", he appeals to America to put an end to the age long racial discrimination in America. He passionately dreams of an America where there would be complete adherence to values like justice, equality and sense of brotherhood.

The main idea of the speech is to convince America that no nation can ever become great until it embraces true freedom for one and all. The speech doesn't aspire to preach or delight but to persuade America endlessly to live in peace and harmony. His speech makes a powerful plea for equal civil rights and aims at a federal legislation to improve the lot of Afro-Americans. It is this relentless crusade against social injustice that made him one of the most influential leaders in the history of mankind. Largely due to the success and popularity of this speech, King's name and fame transcended the boundaries of America and he got the true recognition as a force to reckon with.

King sounds confident that the crusade against injustice would meet success and America will soon become a land of justice and joy, instead where everyone would live in perfect harmony. His original targeted audience is not merely the blacks but entire America, both black and white, "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 their freedom is inextricably bound to our freedom. We cannot walk alone" (Dream). The discourse appeals to the conscience of entire America and hopes that good sense would prevail ultimately.

"I Have a Dream" fully succeeds in achieving its desired goal. It is a strong document against slavery and a masterpiece in civil rights movement. Since,



King was a man of letters and a PhD. from Boston University; he had sound knowledge of American history and religious scriptures including the Bible. The expressions like, “the old Negro spiritual”, “I have a dream” and “Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty, we are free at last!” are unmistakably inspired from the Bible. King is fully aware of the exigencies of the time, circumstances and the mood of his audience. He makes good use of this scholarship to make his speech rich in content and appeal. He touches the innermost chords of his audience by making a passionate, intellectual and eloquent appeal to them in a most effective manner.

King makes use of various rhetorical devices in order to achieve the desired effect. This includes different figures of speech like alliteration, similes, metaphors and allusions. King displays superb oratory skills in “I Have a Dream” and stirs the inner most chords of his audience through the use of powerful imagery and mental pictures, “This sweltering summer of the Negro's legitimate discontent will not pass until there is an invigorating autumn of freed”. King makes masterful use of recurring repetitive words or phrases to bring home his ideas effectively.

The repetitive use of these phrases helps King to hammer home his ideas with rare impact. Apart from “I have a dream”, “Let freedom ring” and “Now is the time” are some other examples of anaphora or refrains used by Martin Luther King in his speech. The entire speech is very well-crafted and well-organized with a clear eye on swaying the public opinion through solid argumentation and oration.

“I Have a Dream” has accorded Martin Luther King Jr. an iconic stature and has surely immortalized him forever. The speech has acquired such a huge symbolic significance that Barack Obama’s grand success in becoming the first black President of United States of America is also viewed by many as the crystallization and ultimate realization of Dr. King’s passionately cherished dream. The speech would always be remembered as one of the most potent weapons of social change that paved way for a monumental transformation in the history of America.

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