

I have a dream...

The following is an excerpt from Martin Luther King Jr.'s speech in Washington, D.C. August 28, 1963.

... 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 struggle. 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 the 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 in spite of the difficulties and frustrations of the moment I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream.

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 desert state sweltering with the heat of injustice and 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 the state of Alabama, whose governor's lips are presently dripping with the words of interposition and nullification, will be transformed into a situation where little black boys and little black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls and walk together as sisters and brothers.

I have a dream today.

I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plains, 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 with which I return to the South. With this faith we will be able to hew out the mountains 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 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 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 come true. So let freedom ring from the prodigious hill-tops 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 peaks of California!

But not only that; let freedom ring from Stone Mountain of Georgia!

Let freedom ring from every hill and molehill of Mississippi. From every mountainside let freedom ring.

When we let freedom ring, when we let it ring from every village and hamlet, from 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 that old Negro spiritual "Free at last! Free at last! Thank God almighty, we are free at last!"

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.

— Martin Luther King Jr.



COMMENTARY

Blacks waking from the dream

Recently I had the "pleasure" of viewing an ad campaign focusing on the Bill of Rights. You also might have had this opportunity. The ad that stands out clearly in mind pictures Martin Luther King Jr. in front of the Washington Monument delivering his "I Have A Dream" speech. Next to this picture is the statement "If it wasn't for the Bill of Rights this speech would have never happened."

Who are we trying to play as a fool? Black Americans have always understood the wisdom of Frederick Douglass who stated that "power concedes nothing without demand." Martin Luther King was allowed to give his speech at the Washington Monument because of the U.S. government's fear of Blacks using non-violent tactics to shut down the nation's capital. (For a further analysis, read Malcolm X's speech "Message to the Grass Roots," Nov. 1963).

Neither the Bill of Rights nor the Constitution has ever been protectorates of the Black people — before or after the Emancipation Proclamation. It did not protect Marcus Garvey, leader of the largest Black organization in U.S. history in 1920, nor the Black Panthers, who became the victims of the U.S. government's now infamous Counter-Intelligence Program, COINTELPRO, in the late 1960s. And certainly the Bill of Rights did not protect Rodney King from enduring the mother of all beatings from Los Angeles police on the city streets. White America is so full of contradictions between what it says and does, it is almost schizophrenic.

After nearly 30 years of being lulled to sleep by a dream White Americans never intended to allow, Blacks are awakening to the reality that nothing has changed. Except for a few tokens scattered around for good measure, the majority of Blacks are still suffering from the mental and physical abuses of white supremacy — better

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known as the United States of America.

Question: Why are Black men more than 50 percent of the prison population when they comprise less than five percent of the total population of the United States? It seems that any way Black people turn we get burned. We are over-represented in mortality rates, homelessness, prisons and gangs and underrepresented in managerial positions, schools and every other sector of society. Oh, except in sports, which has become the modern plantation system of the Western World.

And of course, it is OK for us to sing and dance about love or even about Blacks killing Blacks, but let a Black artist tell the truth about our current situation and all of a sudden the media portray them as "racist" and "violent," daring to scream "reverse racism" in a society that has created and perfected the systematic destruction of Black peoples.

Why is it that Whites seem to be so shocked that race relations are becoming more and more confrontational? They have always been that way. The only difference is that Blacks and other people of color are no longer the only victims. Increasingly, Whites are the recipients of racial abuse from people of color. White Americans have always been unprepared to understand the society

that they continue to perpetuate.

At the University of Oregon, Black students have realized that this University, like the larger society, cannot separate its illusion of racial diversity with the reality of institutional White Supremacy. For example, while the administration claims to be increasing the traditional U.S. minority student population, the reality is that, while percentages sound great, whole numbers are far from impressive.

We as Black students can no longer sit by idly and allow this society to dictate who will be chosen for our leaders and what our direction will be.

We recognize that this is a divided society of privileges based on the color of one's skin.

We also understand that an American Express gold card or a college degree will not protect Black people from a society that lives in an illusion of equality and justice for all.

We did not come here to educate white society about White Supremacy. Black students are learning that White society is not one we want to emulate. It is your problem, not ours. We did not invent it. Unfortunately, it is the Black community who is on the receiving end of your disease.

One last thing: Please remember that we do not have time for your guilt. We understand that you were not here when this system was set up. So why would an intelligent person feel guilty? What one should feel is a responsibility for the fact that racism continues to persist in the age that you live in, and that by your complacency, you benefit from the system of institutional White Supremacy. As Audre Lorde says, "Guilt is another excuse for inaction."

This essay was written by University student Eric Ward on behalf of the Black Student Union.