

Analysis Questions: “I Have a Dream” by Martin Luther King Jr.

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1. Find out some facts about the author.

Martin Luther King Jr. was a Baptist minister, a husband and father, and one of the most influential leaders of the American Civil Rights Movement. He was born in 1929 and became known for his powerful speeches and peaceful protests. Inspired by Jesus and Gandhi, he believed in nonviolence and love as the path to justice. In 1964, he received the Nobel Peace Prize. His words and actions helped change laws, but more importantly, they touched hearts and awakened consciences across the world.

2. When and where did MLK Jr. deliver this speech?

He gave the “I Have a Dream” speech on **August 28, 1963**, at the **Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C.**, during the **March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom**. More than 250,000 people gathered peacefully to demand civil and economic rights for African Americans. The location was symbolic, standing before the statue of Abraham Lincoln, who had signed the Emancipation Proclamation 100 years earlier.

3. What was the occasion that motivated this speech?

The speech was motivated by the deep injustice still faced by Black Americans. Although slavery had ended a century earlier, segregation, poverty, and violence continued. The March on Washington was organized to demand fair treatment, equal opportunity, and dignity. King’s speech gave voice to the pain of generations and offered a vision of hope rooted in faith and unity.

4. How many years is ‘a score’ equivalent to? How many years is ‘five score years ago’? (par. 1 and 2)

A “score” is equal to **20 years**, so “five score years ago” means **100 years ago**. King used this phrase to reference the Emancipation Proclamation signed in 1863, reminding the audience that a century had passed and yet true freedom had not been achieved.

5. What is the main concern of MLK in this speech?

His main concern is that **Black Americans are still not free**. They continue to face segregation, discrimination, and economic hardship. In paragraph 7, he says, “We can never be satisfied as long as the Negro is the victim of the unspeakable horrors of police brutality.” King is calling for justice, not just legal change, but a transformation of the heart and society.

6. What does he mean when he says, “We have come to Washington to cash a check”? (par. 3)

King uses this metaphor to say that America made a promise, a “check” of freedom and equality guaranteed by the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence. But when Black Americans tried to claim those rights, they were told there were “insufficient funds.” Coming to Washington was a way of saying: we are here to collect what was promised, peacefully but firmly.

7. Why isn’t MLK satisfied? (par. 7)

He isn’t satisfied because injustice is still everywhere. Black Americans are denied basic rights, face police violence, and live in poverty. Children are separated by race in schools, and families are treated unfairly. King’s dissatisfaction is rooted in love and a deep longing for dignity and equality for all people.

8. Who is MLK addressing to when he uses the pronoun ‘you’ and the phrase ‘my friends’? (par. 8 and 10)

He is speaking to **everyone**, to white allies who must stand up for justice, to Black Americans who are weary but still hopeful, and to the nation as a whole. His words are inclusive and compassionate. “My friends” is a phrase of unity, reminding us that this dream belongs to all of us.

9. Read the last paragraph, and write in one sentence what is the most important idea? (par. 27)

The most important idea is that **freedom must ring from every corner of the United States so that all people, Black and white, can live together in peace and equality as brothers and sisters.**

References:

King, Martin Luther, Jr. *I Have a Dream*. Speech delivered at the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, Washington, D.C., August 28, 1963.

Transcribed by American Rhetoric. Accessed November 7, 2025.

<https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/mlkih>