

**Martin Luther King Jnr’s Prior Knowledge**

1. He knows that he is being watched not just by the crowd of around 250,000 people in front of him, but also the television cameras who can show his speech to the rest of the country and the rest of the world.
2. He knows he is probably being watched by politicians including the president of America, President Kennedy. The politicians have the power to pass laws ending segregation and establish the civil rights he is trying to achieve.
3. He is very well educated and has a PhD.
4. He has trained as a Christian minister, believes in God and knows the Bible very well.
5. He is married with four young children: two boys, two girls, aged between 5 months and 8 years.
6. He knows that President Abraham Lincoln made slavery illegal in America by signing the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863 that led to the abolition of slavery in 1865.
7. He knows that since 1865, when slavery was finally abolished in the Southern Confederacy states, ‘Jim Crow’ laws have continued ‘segregation’ which prevents black people from using the same public facilities as white people, including sitting in the same areas on buses and at lunch counters.
8. He knows these laws also prevent black and white students from studying together in schools and universities and make it very difficult for African-Americans, as well as many poor white people, to vote.
9. He knows that unemployment for black people is twice as high as for white people.
10. He knows that many of the people in the crowd have spent time in jail for protesting against the ‘Jim Crow’ laws in their own towns.
11. He is committed to non-violent protest but knows other leaders are ready to use violence if they think it will bring change. This includes Malcolm X, another well-known civil rights activist.
12. He knows he successfully led the 1955 Montgomery bus boycott (which followed Rosa Parks refusing to give up her seat on a bus to a white man). As a result of the boycott, segregation on the buses in Montgomery, Alabama was stopped.
13. He knows that when black schoolchildren marched against the segregation laws in Birmingham, Alabama earlier in the year on May 2nd, the police there arrested hundreds of the children, turned high power fire hoses on others and then chased them away with dogs. He knows that other protests have also been broken up by the police using force.
14. He knows that certain white people, opposed to his calls for civil rights for African-Americans, have committed acts of violence against his fellow activists, including bombing their homes and shooting a leader called Medgar Evers on his own doorstep.
15. He knows that in the 250,000 strong crowd are people of all walks of life, all ages, and all religions. Many have come as part of a trade union or church.
16. He knows there are around 50,000 white people in the crowd, including some high-profile Hollywood celebrities.
17. He has been using the phrase ‘I have a dream…’ in other speeches and knows it works well to capture people’s imagination.
18. He knows the speech he has written for this occasion does not include the sections beginning ‘I have a dream…’ (He makes them up in response to the moment.)
19. He knows the audience have been standing around on a hot day for several hours listening to nine other speakers along with songs and prayers. Many have travelled a long way and had to get up early to arrive in time for the start of the march.
20. He knows he is the last speaker of the day.

**Martin Luther King Jnr’s ‘I have a Dream…’ speech (edited)**

Delivered at the ‘March for Jobs and Freedom’ in Washington, DC on 28th August, 1963.

-1-

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[[1]](#footnote-2) years ago, a great American, in whose symbolic shadow we stand today[[2]](#footnote-3), signed the Emancipation Proclamation[[3]](#footnote-4) - a great light of hope to millions of African-American[[4]](#footnote-5) 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.

 -2-

But one hundred years later, the African-American still is not free. One hundred years later, the life of the African-American is still sadly crippled by the manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination. One hundred years later, the African-American lives on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity. One hundred years later, the African-American still finds himself in exile in his own land.

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We have come to remind America of the fierce urgency of now. Now is the time to make real the 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 African-American’s legitimate discontent will not pass until there is an invigorating autumn of freedom and equality.1963 is not an end, but a beginning.

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There will be neither rest nor tranquillity in America until the African-American is granted his citizenship rights. But there is something that I must say to my people: 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 not allow our creative protest to degenerate into physical violence. We must rise to the majestic heights of meeting physical force with soul force. Many of our white brothers, as evidenced by their presence here today, 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.

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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 African-American is the victim of the unspeakable horrors of police brutality. 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 an African-American in Mississippi cannot vote and an African-American in New York believes he has nothing for which to vote.

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I say to you today, my friends, 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."[[5]](#footnote-6)

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.

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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.

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I have a dream that one day down 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.

This is our 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.

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And if America is to be a great nation, this must become true. So let freedom ring and when we let it ring from every village, 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[[6]](#footnote-7): "Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty, we are free at last!"

1. 100 years ago (1 score = 20) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. King delivered this speech standing in front of the monument to Abraham Lincoln, 16th President of America, 1861 - 1865 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. In 1862 slavery was legal in some states but not in others. Lincoln issued an executive order stating that from 1st January 1863, enslaved people in any state rebelling against Lincoln’s government were free and would receive protection. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. In his speech, King uses the word ‘Negro’. This is not a word used in the UK or America today as it can cause offence. For the purposes of this exercise each use of the word has been changed to African-American. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. This line is from the 1776 United States Declaration of Independence by the founding thirteen states of what is now the United States of America. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. Religious songs sung by African-American slaves in the southern states of America [↑](#footnote-ref-7)