

(continuation)

Class Handout NY-5 New York, Reading 14

The Aspirations of Martin Luther King, Jr.

Until his assassination on April 4, 1968, Martin Luther King, Jr., commanded the loyalty, respect, and devotion of blacks and whites alike as the leader of the SCLC (Southern Christian Leadership Conference). Beginning with his handling of the bus boycott in Birmingham, Alabama, in 1956, Dr. King inspired most of the nonviolent civil rights demonstrations in this country. These excerpts are taken from his speech to nearly a million Americans who staged the civil rights march on Washington in the summer of 1963.

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 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."

I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slaveowners 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. . . .

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 become true. So let freedom ring from the prodigious hilltops 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 snowcapped 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 Lookout Mountain of Tennessee!

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

When we let freedom ring, when we let it ring from every village and every hamlet, 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, "Free at last! free at last! thank God almighty, we are free at last!"

Martin Luther King, Jr., Address at the March on Washington, 1963. From SCLC *Newsletter*, I, 12 (September 1963), 5, 8. Copyright 1963 and reprinted with permission of the estate of Martin Luther King, Jr., and Joan Daves, as agent.