

INTRODUCTION

“We must meet hate with love.”

Martin Luther King, Jr. was one of America’s greatest leaders. He was not a president, but his birthday is a national day in the US. Presidents are the only other Americans who are remembered in this way. King became famous around the world in the 1960s.

In the first half of the 1900s in the American South, African-Americans suffered terribly under white men’s laws. King loved his country, but he hated these laws. He wanted an end to laws that were wrong. He wanted an end to segregation in the South. His dream was for black people and white people to live together peacefully. “All men are equal,” he said. But in the US at that time, all men were not equal.

King had to change the way that people thought. His message of love had to change people’s hearts and minds. It was a very difficult and dangerous plan. He led thousands of his black “brothers and sisters” in peaceful protests against the government. He led boycotts and protest marches. He taught African-Americans to use love against their enemies. Violence was always wrong.

People around the world read about King in the newspapers and saw him on TV. Many people were angry when they saw police violence against him and his followers. His peaceful fight for equality brought him pain and suffering. But he had a dream—for a better world for all people. African-Americans, and all Americans, have a better life today because of Martin Luther King, Jr. and the civil rights campaign.

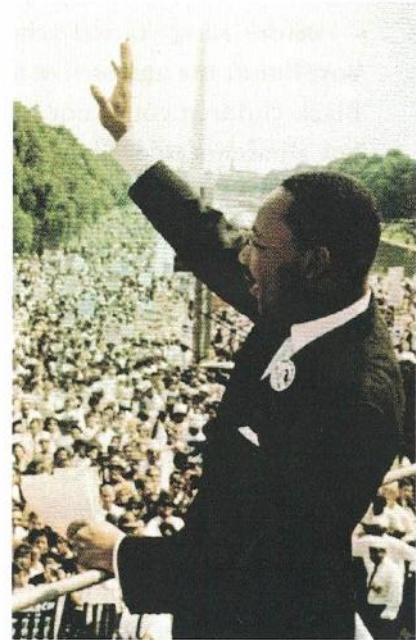
“I HAVE A DREAM”

On August 28, 1963, Martin Luther King, Jr.* stood in front of more than 250,000 protest marchers in Washington, D.C. and gave one of the most famous speeches in US history. This protest march was the largest demonstration in the US at that time. About 60,000 marchers were white people; the other marchers were black. They came from all parts of the country into the nation’s capital because they wanted change. They wanted equality for all Americans.

In the weeks before this march, the organizers invited important speakers. King worked on his speech all night, trying to find the right words. But the next day, in the middle of his speech, he changed it. He looked up at the crowd and spoke about his dream for America:

“I have a dream today . . . one day little black boys and little black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and little white girls as sisters and brothers.”

King’s dream has not come true yet. But many Americans today have the same dream. His fight for peace, equality, and freedom for all people continues.



*Jr.: short for “Junior.” This word is used after a man’s name when he has the same name as his father.