

# I have a dream speech analysis

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Due to the continued presence of racial inequality, segregation, and discrimination, Martin Luther King, Jr.

, uses allusions, metaphors, and parallelism in order to unite and motivate his audience to make a change and end racial inequality in America. In the very beginning, King opens his speech with the line “ Five score years ago a great American in whose symbolic shadow we stand in today signed the Emancipation Proclamation.” This opening line alludes to Abraham Lincoln, one of the greatest presidents of America. The archaic language used serves to make the listeners think about American history and its foundation. Throughout his speech, he continues to allude to important people and documents of America’s past.

He alludes to the Declaration of Independence when he states, “ This note was a promise that all men—yes, black men as well as white men—would be guaranteed the unalienable rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.” King even alludes to a popular song about America, “ My Country ‘ Tis of Thee,” when he sings the words of the song, and he continues to allude to them when he repeats, “ let freedom ring.” These allusions to memorable and significant symbols of America makes the listeners remember and think about their nation’s past and the principles it was founded on. However, these allusions also serve to emphasize freedom and liberty, the ideas embodied by America. They unite the audience under their nation and add credibility to Martin Luther King, Jr.’s movement to end racial inequality—a movement not to end racial problems but a movement to bring about freedom and to make their nation once more glorious.

Throughout his speech, King continues to elicit emotional reactions from the listeners. He describes to them the injustices they suffer, mentioning the “manacles of segregation,” “the chains of discrimination,” and “lonely island of poverty.” These metaphors create images of the cruelty caused by racial inequality, which serve to further dramatize the conditions that many blacks live in. He continues on, stating that it is time to “rise from the dark and desolate valley of segregation to the sunlit path of racial justice” and time to “lift our nation from the quicksands of racial injustice to the solid rock of brotherhood.” These metaphors serve as calls to action, evoking feelings of revolutionary change. He urges them to action, motivating them as “whirlwinds of revolt will continue to shake the foundations of our nation until the bright days of justice emerge.

” However, he also urges them to not seek to satisfy their thirst for freedom “by drinking from the cup of bitterness and hatred.” These metaphors invoke emotional reactions to his words, making them poetic and more memorable in the listener’s mind. Through his metaphors, King makes the point of his speech distinct—they need to make a change to end racial injustice, but they should do it without the use of violence. King also utilizes parallelism, apparent at the very beginning and throughout the rest of his speech. He states, “One hundred years later the life of the Negro is still badly crippled by the manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination. One hundred years later the Negro lives on a lonely island of poverty....

One hundred years later the Negro is still languished in the corners of American society....” This parallelism drives the point home that nothing has

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changed since the Emancipation Proclamation—the lives of blacks have not become better. In addition, it also emphasizes the “ one hundred years” and how long the state of racial injustice has remained unchanged. King continues on to say that “ 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....” He motivates his audience, spurring them to take action to change the unchanging century long period of racial injustice.

This also serves to emphasize the urgency of the situation and how steps must be taken to make a change for the better. King adds on that they cannot be satisfied by making small changes, they must strive to make a revolutionary movement that the effects would last into the future when he states, “ We can never be satisfied as long as our bodies,...., cannot gain lodging in the motels of highways.... We cannot be satisfied as long as the Negro’s basic mobility is from a smaller ghetto to a larger one. We can never be satisfied....” He also uses parallelism to encourage his listeners and provide them hope and motivation as seen when he states, “ I have a dream....

“ All these usages of parallelism serve to drive home certain parts of his speech, making the words poetic and more memorable. It keeps the listener’s attention at the most important parts of the speech, emphasizing the central point that change needs to be made now so that its effects will continue well into the future in order to ensure a better and brighter tomorrow for their friends and family, other blacks, and their nation. Through the use of allusions, metaphors, and parallelism, Martin Luther King, Jr. inspires his audience to make a better future by bringing racial injustice to

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an end. He moves them to action, to take a step towards making a change, as his usage of rhetorical devices sparks a flare of hope within each and every one of his listeners.