

ELA 8 Unit 5-6 Persuasion Across Time and Space

Activity 4 - MLK Speech Background Information Handout

Group A
Background Information
I Have a Dream

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. delivered his famous speech, I Have a Dream, on August 28, 1963 to an audience of more than 200,000 people. These people had come together from all over the United States to gather at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington D.C. for the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom.

1963 was a time in American history that was characterized by many forms of racial discrimination and injustices in education, employment, housing, military service, and voting. There were separate schools for white and black children, and many landlords refused to rent houses to black families, forcing them to live in poor and overcrowded neighborhoods.

In the months leading up to the March on Washington, there was a lot of frustration at racial inequity in black communities. Demonstrations by African Americans and confrontation with police were common. By the end of the year, twenty thousand activists had been arrested and over nine hundred demonstrations had taken place in over one hundred cities.



Dr. King, a Baptist minister, won the Nobel Peace Prize when he was only 35 years old. A follower of the philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi, King is one of the world's best-known modern advocates of nonviolent social change. One year after the March on Washington, Congress passed the Civil Rights Act. Four years later in 1968, King was assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee.



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Group B
Background Information
On the Death of Martin Luther King

Robert Kennedy, the younger brother of slain president John F. Kennedy, was a passionate Civil Rights supporter and former presidential candidate. On April 4, 1968, Robert Kennedy was campaigning to a large group of African Americans in Indianapolis, Indiana for the Democratic nomination for President of the United States.

Initially, the police had told Kennedy to not campaign in this particular neighborhood because it was considered to be a dangerous ghetto in the city. When he arrived to deliver his speech, he was told that Dr. Martin Luther King had been shot and killed. He realized that the people in the audience had not yet heard of this event. Rather than giving the speech that he had prepared, he decided to tell them the news that Dr. Martin Luther King was dead.

Kennedy realized that the death of Dr. King would be devastating to the Black community. In his speech, he urged people to follow Dr. King's message and respond to the catastrophe with prayer and understanding. During the days following the murder of Martin Luther King there were riots in cities across America, but the people in Indianapolis remained calm that night and the following days, as they thought about the message of peace in Robert Kennedy's speech.

On June 4, 1968, two months after he gave his famous speech On the Death of Martin Luther King, Robert Kennedy was shot and killed. His contribution to the civil rights movement is considered to be his greatest achievement.



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Group C

Background Information

The Civil Rights Movement: Fraud, Sham, and Hoax

George Wallace was born in Alabama in 1919 to a farming family. He attended the University of Alabama Law School, and became a judge of the Third Judicial Circuit of Alabama in 1953.

He became governor of Alabama for the first time in 1962, during a time of great racial tension in the south, especially in Alabama. Promoting segregation between white and black people, Wallace won the election by a large margin. In his acceptance speech, he told the people of Alabama that they would have, "Segregation now, segregation forever."

During this time, Alabama was the state with some of the worst violence and mistreatment of its citizens in the country. There was rampant police brutality against African Americans, and at the peak of the Civil Rights Movement, there were over 3,000 African Americans in jail in the city of Birmingham, Alabama.

In 1964, Wallace began his (unsuccessful) campaign to become president of the United States, using segregation as his platform. He openly stated that he did not believe that African American should be able to vote, serve on juries, or hold public office. In addition to his stated views, he physically attempted to block African American students from entering the University of Alabama, stating that he would, "Stand by the schoolhouse door" in order to stop integration.

On July 4th, 1964, George Wallace gave a speech in Atlanta, Georgia called, "The Civil Rights Movement: Fraud, Sham, and Hoax" in which he condemned The Civil Rights Act. The Civil Rights Act had become a law the day before Wallace's famous speech, and was a very important piece of legislation. The Civil Rights Act made discrimination against women, religion, and race illegal in the United States. It ended school segregation as well as other laws, such as laws preventing African Americans from attending all-white movie theaters, certain public parks, and living in all-white neighborhoods. This law, George Wallace argued, was a threat to individual liberty and individual rights.

George Wallace was elected Governor of Alabama four times, in 1962, 1970, 1974, and 1982. He also, unsuccessfully, ran for U.S. President four times.



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