

He Had a Dream

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Martin Luther King was a preacher, a man from Georgia and a Negro who became a golden-tongued orator, a spokesman for the Deep South and the Ghetto North, a symbol above color of undying yearnings and imperishable rights. He was an American in the truest historic sense: for he had a dream.

He dreamed for the black youth of his country.

From a jail in Birmingham, citadel of segregation, his words leaped through the bars: "When you suddenly find your tongue twisted and your speech stammering as you seek to explain to your six-year-old daughter why she can't go to the public amusement park that has just been advertised on television, and see tears welling up in her little eyes when she is told it is closed to colored children, and see her begin to distort her personality by unconsciously developing a bitterness toward white people; when your first name becomes 'nigger' and your middle name becomes 'boy' however old you are—then you will understand why we find it difficult to wait."

He dreamed for the poor of his country.

Marching for equal laws, he quickly recognized that equal opportunity was just as necessary. For black and white, he called for a Bill of Rights for the Disadvantaged: "In addition to a revolution in attitude, our country must undergo a revolution in values. The billions of dollars now directed toward destruction and military containment must be redirected to provide an adequate education, income, home and recreation, as well as physical and mental care. Once we develop the will to do so, we will discover that our own self-interest, both as individuals and as a nation, lies in sharing our wealth and resources with the least of God's children here and around the world."

He dreamed for the peace of his countrymen, at home and abroad.

When the United States was honored by his Nobel Peace Prize, he felt obliged to extend his personal philosophy of nonviolence from the streets of Selma and Memphis to the rice paddies of the Mekong Delta and the jungles of Vietnam. He saw the impediments to race and economic progress at home while a war was raging abroad: "It's inevitable that we've got to bring out the question of the tragic mix-up in priorities. . . . When a nation becomes involved in this kind of war, when the guns of war become a national obsession, social needs inevitably suffer."

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It was said of Dr. King that he had a naive optimism in nonviolence. But his militant nonviolence accomplished more in his short lifetime than all the violence of the racists, black or white. He set the civil rights movement on a new course in the United States; and it will yet prevail. He helped to unify the races by showing what one man could do by believing in brotherhood; others will continue the work of this fallen martyr.

He was a Negro who made Americans aware that the better angels of our nature could dominate the struggle of the United States and its people. The dream of true equality of rights and opportunities without regard to race is nearer because in our lifetime there lived an American named Martin Luther King.