

Extension Activity:

Martin Luther King Jr. on the Declaration and the Constitution

At the height of the historic civil rights movement of the 1950s and '60s, Martin Luther King Jr. delivered his famous "I Have a Dream" speech. He gave the speech at the Lincoln Memorial as part of the August 28, 1963, March on Washington. In the speech, King made specific remarks about the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution. King's speech is available in many places and can be found online from the website "American History: From Revolution to Reconstruction and Beyond." It is available at [Martin Luther King's I have a dream speech August 28 1963](#)

Recommended Activity: Ask students to read King's speech. Perhaps supply additional background information on the speech. Then ask students to write a brief essay in which they address the following specific questions:

1. What does King mean when he uses the phrase "a promissory note"?
2. What does he mean by his reference to "a bad check; a check which has come back marked "insufficient funds"? What other details in his speech support his claim that Black Americans have been given "a bad check"?
3. Read over this lesson's Sources 8 and 9. Include in your essay your view as to which of the two sources King would most likely have agreed with.
4. Share some of these essays or portions of them in a class discussion of this lesson's essential question.