

Bank of Justice Texts 1 & 2 Handout

Text 1

“Gettysburg Address” by President Abraham Lincoln

As you read, circle examples of religious language in the speech and underline examples of birth symbolism.

Given at the dedication of the Soldiers’ National Cemetery in Gettysburg Pennsylvania

Thursday, November 19, 1863

Four score and seven years ago, our fathers brought forth upon this continent a new nation: conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

Now we are engaged in a great civil war – testing whether that nation, or any nation, so conceived and so dedicated – can long endure. We are met on a great battlefield of that war.

We have come to dedicate a portion of that field as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that this nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

But, in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate – we cannot consecrate – we cannot hallow this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract.

The world will little note, nor long remember, what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here.

It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have far so nobly advanced.

It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us – that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion – that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain – that this nation shall have a new birth of freedom – and that government of the people – by the people – for the people – shall not perish from this earth.

Text Dependent Questions for *Gettysburg Address*:

In what ways does the Civil War connect to the religious and birth symbols in this speech?

Why does Lincoln consider ‘four score and seven years ago’ to be an important date in American history?

How do the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution differ with regards to slavery and what does this tell you about Lincoln’s beliefs about slavery in America?

On your H-Chart, jot down information from this text that helps you to answer the essential question: “Has America adequately dealt with issues related to segregation and integration since the Civil War?”

Text 2

"I Have a Dream" (1963) by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Martin Luther King, Jr. gave this iconic speech at the March on Washington in 1963 amidst the Civil Rights Movement and directly in front of the Lincoln Memorial. This speech has become part of American culture. Yet the beginning of the speech is often overlooked and seldom understood. It is in the beginning of this speech where King sets up his central metaphor concerning the "promissory note" in the "bank of justice." To understand this metaphor is to better understand the subject of race relations from Independence to the Civil Rights movement.

I am happy to join with you today in what will go down in history as the greatest demonstration for freedom in the history of our nation.

Five score years ago a great American, in whose symbolic shadow we stand today, signed the Emancipation Proclamation. This momentous decree came as a great beacon light of hope to millions of Negro slaves who had been seared in the flames of withering injustice. It came as a joyous daybreak to end the long night of their captivity.

But one hundred years later, the Negro still is not free. One hundred years later, the life of the Negro is still sadly crippled by the manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination. One hundred years later, the Negro lives on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity. One hundred years later, the Negro is still languished in the corners of American society and finds himself an exile in his own land. And so we've come here today to dramatize a shameful condition.

In a sense we've come to our nation's capital to cash a check. When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir. 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." It is obvious today that America has defaulted on this promissory note, insofar as her citizens of color are concerned. Instead of honoring this sacred obligation, America has given the Negro people a bad check, a check which has come back marked "insufficient funds."

But we refuse to believe that the bank of justice is bankrupt. We refuse to believe that there are insufficient funds in the great vaults of opportunity of this nation. And so, we've come to cash this check, a check that will give us upon demand the riches of freedom and the security of justice...

Text Dependent Questions for *I Have a Dream*:

Circle or Underline phrases where MLK echoes Lincoln. Why do you think King did this?

What is the 'check' that civil rights marchers were cashing in 1963 in Washington D.C.?

What does it mean that there are 'insufficient funds' at the Bank of Justice?
Do you think the 'great vaults of opportunity of this nation' are empty or not? Why?

On your H-Chart, jot down information from this text that helps you to answer the essential question: "Has America adequately dealt with issues related to segregation and integration since the Civil War?"

In the center area of the H-chart, consider these two texts as a PAIR. TOGETHER, what do these documents tell you about race relations in the United States that they cannot tell you individually?