

## Journal of Social Signs Review

### Historical and Racial Narratives in Martin Luther King Jr.'s 'I Have a Dream' Speech: A Critical Discourse Analysis

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### Abstract

This study applies Ruth Wodak's Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) to analyze the racial and historical narratives in Martin's seminal "I Have a Dream" speech. Conveyed in 1963 march on Washington, the discourse is inspected as both a catalyst for and a reflection of socio-political change within the setting of the U.S. civil rights movement. Through DHA's framework including argumentation, nomination, perspectivation, predication, intertextuality, and intensification/mitigation, the research uncovers how King deliberately coordinating historical references, devout symbolism, and protected standards to build a comprehensive American identity whereas foregrounding the struggle of African American. Findings appear that King's discourse draws on foundational biblical scripture, national documents, and moral reasoning to position racial balance as both a protected commitment and a moral basic. The examination illustrates that his rhetorical strategies bridge historical treacheries with a forward-looking vision, fortifying the civil rights movement's authenticity and mobilizing different audiences. The study contributes to CDA scholarship by outlining DHA's capacity to put through linguistic techniques with socio-historical settings, highlighting the persevering significance of King's rhetoric in contemporary battles for equity.

**Keywords::** DHA, CDA, racial narratives, historical context, Martin Luther King Jr., "I Have a Dream," rhetoric.

## **Introduction**

### **Background of the Study**

CDA is a methodological approach that examines the relationship between power, ideology and language (Fairclough, 2013). Among CDA's different models, Ruth Wodak's Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) extraordinarily emphasizes the interaction of linguistic choices with socio-historical settings (Wodak & Meyer, 2015). DHA efficiently integrates intertextuality, historical background and interdiscursivity to uncover how discourse builds social substances. Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech, conveyed on August 28, 1963, in the March on Washington for Freedom and Jobs, is one of the foremost persuasive rhetorical texts in modern history. It not just tended to systemic racial injustice but moreover re-imagined the perception of equality within the American socio-political creative ability. Earlier research (Leeman, 2018) has analyzed King's metaphorical patterns, biblical references and rhetorical style, but few studies have connected a full framework of DHA to uncover the layered ideological and historical elements implanted within the discourse. This study's aim is to fill that gap.

### **Significance of the Study**

Discourse is one of the procedures and media for public communication, it conveys method to carry out of spontaneously, disturbance, full of excitement and propaganda in front of individuals. Although the speech "I Have a Dream" has been broadly inspected for its rhetorical creativity, there's a research gap in methodically connecting its linguistic procedures with the broader historical accounts of the civil rights movement utilizing DHA. Most earlier works center either on political context separately or stylistic devices instead of joining them into a bound together analysis. Applying DHA permits for a more profound understanding of how language of King draws from intertextual sources, such as the Emancipation Proclamation, the Statement of Freedom, and the Bible, while at the same time forming a forward-looking social vision. This study contributes to CDA scholarship by illustrating DHA's potential to bridge historical political realities and textual analysis.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The issue tended to investigate is the need of comprehensive DHA-based examinations of Martin Luther king Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech that coordinated intertextual references, historical context, discursive strategies. Whereas thematic and rhetorical analyses exist, they frequently ignore how linguistic strategies and historical narratives collectively develop a powerful vision for social change. This

study centers on applying DHA to reveal how King's discourse works as both a catalyst for and a reflection of historical change.

### **Research Questions**

How does speech of Martin Luther King Jr.'s I Have a Dream utilize discursive strategies, as laid out in Wodak's DHA, to communicate its political and ideological messages?

In what ways do intertextual references and historical context improve the enticing power of the speech inside the DHA framework?

### **Research Objectives**

To analyze and identify the discursive strategies utilized in "I Have a Dream" through the lens of Discourse-Historical Approach of Ruth Wodak.

To examine the part of intertextuality and historical context in reinforcing the speech's ideological and rhetorical affect utilizing DHA.

### **Literature Review**

According to Blommaert & Bulcaen (2000), CDA unequivocally intends to join social-theoretical experiences into talk examination and advocates social interventionism and commitment in research. The way in which CDA treats the historicity of content (to a great extent reducible to suspicions almost intertextual chains) seem advantage from really verifiable hypothetical insights. On the one hand, stock may be taken of the "natural histories of discourse" point of view created by Silverstein & Urban (1996); on the other hand, the affirmation of a natural and layered historicity of each social occasion may contribute to more precise evaluations of what certain writings do in social orders.

Ferguson, (2019) says that CDA is an approach that investigates social interaction, from the social activities of groups and people to the working of social teach to the broadest conceptions of social arrangement. Norman Fairclough, a longtime analyst within the field of CDA, portrayed how these levels of society impact each other bidirectionally; for case, political and financial frameworks impact schools at the regulation level, and schools shape the activities and occasions that happen inside and around them, from the classroom to the play area to the community and home and vice versa. Language plays a central part over society as it is the substance of these intuitive in that each social layer creates its claim discourses additionally reflects the nature of the interrelationships. CDA gives the field of communication disarranges with a framework in which to require an intelligent position to reevaluate understanding of the nature of clutters and to produce enhancements in ways to support the individuals whose lives are

influenced. The approach of CDA falls inside the more extensive system of critical studies and critical theory (Ferguson, 2019).

Wodak, (2015) says about his theory that the discourse-historical approach (DHA) has a place within the broadly characterized field of critical discourse studies (CDS). Numerous hypothetical conjointly methodological concepts utilized in DHA are similarly substantial for other strands in CDS even if their settings of development have driven to distinctive toolkits. Still, these approaches draw on each other, subsequently duplicating a common conceptual outline whereas they create their claim unmistakable introductions. Speech of Martin Luther King was effective and full of sensitivity not only to the around 250 thousand individuals who were within the occasion but moreover appreciated by academics. He was granted a privileged doctorate and in 1963 Time magazine named him as 'Men of the Year' (Ngabalin, 2020).

The substance of Martin Luther King's I Have a Dream employment a parcel of metaphorical symbols in communicating the political rights battle of black individuals who live beneath the weight of political segregation. King battled for unemployment, racial issues, requested social equity and civil rights, battled for sexual orientation uniformity between whites and blacks, and lacking for changes the segregation laws (Lestari, 2021).

A few studies have highlighted the complex abundance of King's speech. Bajri and Mariesel (2020) connected James Gee's building errands to analyze how King builds and deconstructs politics and identities through language, uncovering basic ideologies around flexibility and balance SciepubScience and Education Publishing. Other examinations center on figures of discourse: King's utilize of antithesis, 'a vast ocean of material prosperity' versus 'a forlorn island of poverty', creates effective contrasts that intensify passionate engagement Scribd. So also, representations like dark and destroy valley of segregation, compared with the 'sunlit way of racial justice, strikingly dramatize racial incongruities and ethical direness Scribd+1.

## **Research Methodology**

### **Research Design**

This study receives a qualitative research plan grounded in CDA, particularly utilizing Ruth Wodak's Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA). The qualitative framework is chosen as the research centers on interpreting the rhetorical, ideological and historical meanings implanted in Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" discourse, instead of measuring numerical factors. The DHA method is

especially appropriate because it efficiently coordinating linguistic analysis with socio-historical contextualization and intertextual references, permitting a comprehensive understanding of the speech's enticing power.

### **Sampling**

The study employs purposive sampling, a non-probability strategy, to choose the primary text. The speech "I Have a Dream" was chosen since of its rich intertextuality, historical significance, and relevance to civil rights discourse.

**Population of Interest:** Public speeches supporting for social change within the 20th century.

**Sample Size:** One primary content (speech's full transcript delivered on 28th august 1963).

**Justification:** This discourse is a seminal piece of American political rhetoric, broadly recognized for its integration of political, biblical, and historical allusions, making it perfect for DHA analysis.

### **Data Collection**

The data comprises of the verified, authentic transcript of "I Have a Dream" as documented by the Library of Congress and U.S. National Archives.

### **Procedure**

Get the official transcript to ensure textual precision.

Review secondary sources (civil rights archives, historical records) to contextualize the discourse.

Gather pertinent intertextual records referenced within the speech (e.g., Emancipation Proclamation, Declaration of Independence, Bible passages).

**Rationale:** Collecting both the primary content and its intertextual sources guarantees the DHA's historical and contextual integration.

### **Data Analysis**

Data will be analyzed utilizing the core three dimensions of the DHA (Wodak & Meyer, 2015):

Distinguishing Particular Discursive Strategies, including nomination (how events/people are named), predication (traits allotted), argumentation (defenses), perspectivization (perceptions), and mitigation/intensification.

Analyzing Historical Setting: Arranging the discourse inside the Cold War era, U.S. civil rights movement, and racial segregation laws.

Analyzing Interdiscursive and Intertextual Components: Recognizing how King draws upon historical reports, religious writings, and earlier political rhetoric.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Although the study analyzes a publicly accessible speech and includes no coordinate human participants, it maintains ethical standards. The investigate guarantees the exact representation of Martin Luther King Jr.'s words without mutilation, whereas giving full affirmation to all cited materials through legitimate citation. To maintain a strategic distance from distortion, the investigation is immovably grounded in confirmed contextual evidence and historical facts. Since the study is based exclusively on secondary literary information, no educated assent is fundamental; however, adherence to citation morals, academic integrity and intellectual honesty, remains central all through the research process.

### **Tools and Materials**

Primary Material: "I Have a Dream" speech's official transcript.

Secondary Materials: Prior scholarly analyses, Historical archives, referenced documents (e.g., Emancipation Proclamation).

### **Justification of Methodological Choices**

The qualitative design of CDA is legitimized because it empowers in-depth interpretation of how language develops social substances inside historical settings. DHA is chosen over other CDA models (e.g., Fairclough's 3d model van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach) because it emphasizes intertextuality and historical interconnection, both of which are central to King's rhetorical power. The purposive sampling guarantees center on a discourse that's verifiably and logically wealthy. These methodological choices increment the legitimacy of discoveries by guaranteeing that interpretations are historically grounded and evidence-based.

### **Data Analysis**

#### **Discursive Strategies**

**Historical Contextualization:** Martin Luther King Jr.'s I Have a Dream speech, conveyed on 28th august 1963 during the march on Washington for Freedom and Jobs, is inserted within the historical struggle for civil rights in the United States. At this point in history, African Americans confronted systemic racial isolation, disappointment, and financial marginalization, particularly within the southern states. The Civil Rights Movement, active all through the 1950s and early 1960s, had mobilized to challenge institutionalized racism and the Jim Crow laws. King's speech cannot be confined from its socio-political foundation; it was conveyed at the Lincoln Memorial, typically connecting the emancipation of oppressed individuals beneath President Abraham Lincoln with the unfinished battle for racial uniformity. By arranging his speech in this typical space and minute, King conjured



collective authentic memory to legitimize his requests for equality, justice, and freedom.

**Nomination (Referential Strategies):** Martin utilizes nominations to show key concepts and figures. His reference of landmarks which are historical, i.e. "the constitution and the declaration of independence" and "emancipation proclamation". By conjuring "a great American" and "the architects of our republic," Martin interfaces the civil rights battle to foundations of American standards. Martin often uses the term "Negro" which refers to African Americans, highlights their injustice experience collectively.

**Predication Strategies:** He builds American ideal as positive attributes, emphasizing failure of nation upholding for African Americans. Martin explains the constitution as containing "magnificent words" and 'emancipation proclamation' as a "beacon light of hope". Contrarily, he predicted the current state of injustice of racism as negative qualities by utilizing phrases, i.e. "manacles of segregation," "chains of discrimination," and "a lonely island of poverty." This difference highlights the discrepancy among American reality and ideals.

**Argumentation Strategies:** Martin builds arguments by utilizing historical references and metaphors. He further states that America is failed on its "promissory note" for African Americans, by showing metaphor of 'bad chcek' to show the broken promises of justice and equality. He claimed that there should be immediate action and gradualism is not acceptable by asserting "fierce urgency of now." Argumentation of Martin is strengthening through moral appeals, implying that these promises' fulfillment is lined up with divine justice and democratic value of America. King's thinking within the "I Have a Dream" discourse draws upon a few topoi, or argumentative warrants, as recognized within the DHA. The topos of justice underscores the conviction that equality is a principal right, and any refusal of it is inalienably unreasonable. The topos of history offers to the authoritative guarantees enunciated within the Declaration of Independence, surrounding them as commitments that rise above time. The topos of direness is passed on through the rehashed express "Now is the time", emphasizing the quick need for societal change. At last, the topos of profound quality positions isolation not just as a political off-base but moreover as a significant ethical failing. Together, these topoi shape the argumentative backbone of the discourse, giving a compelling method of reasoning for the call to civil rights reforms.

**Perspectivization Strategies (Framing or Discourse Representation):** Martin's frames the moral and historical context by civil rights movement. He frames struggles as

overall, i.e. to all Americans not only to African Americans, can be seen as "brotherhood" and "all of God's children." Martin's way of framing movement, he locates the civil rights struggle and looks to garner broad support in national identity which is shared.

**Intensification and Mitigation Strategies:** Mitigation appears when Martin implores peaceful opposition to and union, admonishing opposed to "bitterness and hatred" and caution that militancy should not "lead us to distrust of all white people." This evaluative perspective builds up his call for majesty and regulations. Repetitive phrases like "now" is the time "and" "I have a dream" King used these phrases in order to intensify the importance of the message to stress the importance of constitutional rights Time period. Martin raised the moral appeal by relating it to racial discrimination as "the solid rock of brotherhood" and "the bright day of justice".

### **Levels of Context**

#### **Immediate Co-Text**

This speech's immediate co-text comprises of its structure, rhetoric and language. The speech of Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" is a precisely crafted piece of eloquence that utilizes various rhetorical devices that includes anaphora, metaphors, and repetition to highlight his key aspects. "I have a dream" is a repeated phrase that builds an emotional and rhythmic culmination, which highlights his vision which is racial justice and equality. The speech starts by mentioning the historical events and documents, particularly the Emancipation Proclamation, which shows the promises of equality and freedom that are unfulfilled for African Americans. Martin uses vivid imagery such as "the manacles of segregation," and "a lonely island of poverty" which emphasize the picture of Black American's ongoing struggles.

#### **Intertextual and Interdiscursive Relationships**

Speech of Martin is strongly intertextual which draws the range of cultural and historical texts. He mentions the constitution and declaration of independence, painting them as promissory notes which are not honorable for the African Americans. So, Martin lines up the civil rights struggle with the principles of American democracy, portraying it as an upholding of the country's original principles. Moreover, Martin mentions the Negro and Bible spirituals, which are strongly resonating with his audience which were Christians. These intertextual references His message is legitimized by these intertextual allusions, which also appeal to a common sense of religious and moral obligation. This speech by engaging with current civil rights discourse answering to critiques of the



movement's methods and pace, recommending for immediate action and non-violent protest.

### **Extralinguistic/Sociopolitical Context**

Speech is delivered on 28<sup>th</sup> August, 1963 in the March on Washington for freedom and jobs, in the context of American civil rights movement this speech is place. That was the period of widespread activism racial tensions against discrimination, economic inequality and segregation. The speech occurs in historic occasions' context i.e. the Montgomery bus boycott and the voting right's fight in the South which is continuous. Martin talks to 250,000 demonstrators, in the Lincoln Memorial's symbolic shadow, highlights the urgency and gravity of the cause of civil rights.

### **Institutional Frames**

Institutional frames which surrounds the media, organization of civil rights and speech of the Martin include federal government. Coalition of civil rights groups organized the march on Washington which includes (SCLC), leads by Martin. To advise for social and legislative change, these organizations worked outside and within institutional structures. Framing of this speech includes Lincoln Memorial which is its location that evokes quest for the fulfilment of promises of Emancipation Proclamation and Abraham Lincoln's legacy. Media plays an important role as it shapes the perception of public and garnering international and national support for the moment of civil rights.

### **Themes and Topics**

#### **Theme**

**Justice and Freedom:** Speech of the Martin's speech have a theme of "justice and freedom" which shows the African American's historical struggle against segregation, discrimination, and slavery. Emancipation Proclamation's reference shows that "five score years ago," demonstrate historical anchor, highlights that freedom' fight begins during the Civil War is unfinished. Martin emphasize that beyond end of slavery legally, African Americans suffering from social inequality and systemic injustice continuously.

#### **Topics of Theme**

**Discrimination and Segregation (under Freedom and Justice):** Martin narrate the realities which are ongoing of discrimination and segregation. Phrases like "chains of discrimination" and "manacles of segregation" use physical and stark imagery which emphasize how serious these injustices are.

**Economic Injustice (under Freedom and Justice):** "Bad check" is a metaphor which represents disparity of economy. Martin claimed that America didn't fulfilled the promise of equality, utilizing financial terminology to highlights the failure of nation.

#### Theme

**Faith and Hope:** Martin evokes the feeling of faith and hope in his listeners. He speaks about the future where equality and racial harmony would be realized by underpinning his faith that there would be the universe where justice is implied.

#### Topics of Theme

**Dream of America** (under Hope and Faith): Martin's well known "I have a dream" component gives the vision of a nation where equality of racism wins.

#### Theme

**Urgency of Now:** The immediate action theme reoccurring in the speech thoroughly. Martin argues opposed to gradualism and insists on racial injustice to be solved without delay.

#### Topics of Theme

**Movement of Civil Rights** (under Urgency of Now): Martin's makes a pressing appeal to action. The utilize of "sweltering summer of the Negro's legitimate discontent" and "fierce urgency of now" insists civil right issues to be solved quickly.

#### Theme

**Brotherhood and Unity:** Martin emphasize on a future in which there would be brotherhood and unity, emphasizing all people's interconnectedness in the freedom of struggle.

#### Topics of theme

**Nonviolent Protest** (under Unity and Brotherhood): Martin insisted his followers to meet "physical force with soul force." that recommends a protest which is non-violent.

**Interconnected Destiny** (under Unity and Brotherhood): Martin speaks about the destiny of all Americans which are shared nevertheless of race. Phrases like "we cannot walk alone" and "our freedom is inextricably bound to our freedom" gives the sense of Unity.

#### Theme:

**Historical Context and Legacy:** The speech falls on continuing legacy of segregation and slavery and Emancipation Proclamation's historical context.

### **Topic of Theme**

**Historical Reflections** (under Historical Context and Legacy): Martin mirrors the promises of the declaration and constitution of independence, narrating them as a "promissory note" which is honored for African Americans till now.

### **Discussion**

The findings from the DHA examination adjust with existing grant that views "I Have a Dream" as both a transformative explanatory occasion and a significant political mediation. The speech's adequacy lies in its capacity to consolidate the instantaneousness of the civil rights battle with a vision of a comprehensive American future. By establishing his requests within the verifiable promises of flexibility and uniformity, King outlines racial equity not as a modern request but as the success of the nation's long-standing commitments. The speech challenges power relations by reframing African Americans from inactive beneficiaries of segregation to dynamic specialists of democratic reestablishment. This reconfiguration not just challenges the authenticity of systemic racism but moreover reclassifies American identity in comprehensive terms. The discursive strategies revealed through DHA illustrate how language can mobilize communal memory, offer to shared values, and develop ethical criticalness without turning to polarizing rhetoric.

Besides, the speech embodies how interdiscursivity the mixing of political, devout, and legal discourses can make multi-layered influence, making the message reverberate over different audiences. The integration of religious symbolism with sacred standards reinforces the moral appeal whereas strengthening the all-inclusiveness of King's vision. From a broader viewpoint, the DHA analysis underscores the significance of arranging discourse inside its ideological and historical context to completely grasp its affect. Within the case of "I Have a Dream", this approach uncovers how vital linguistic choices, entwined with historical awareness, can drive social developments and shape national identity.

Historically, the discourse situates itself inside a continuum of unfulfilled promises, drawing unequivocally on the the Declaration of Independence, Emancipation Proclamation, and the U.S. Constitution. The topos of history, a central pugnacious gadget in DHA functions here to interface the battles of African Americans with foundational American standards, in this manner highlighting the inconsistency between declared national values and lived substances. By conjuring these chronicled reports, King not just legitimizes the civil rights movement's requests but moreover positions them as fundamental steps toward satisfying the

nation's self-declared character. This technique reframes the development not as a challenge to the country but as a completion of its ethical and political extend. Racial narratives within the speech are carefully developed through predication and nomination strategies. King substitutes between collective pronouns that cultivate inclusivity ("our", "we") and particular references to "Negro" and "Black" characters that frontal area the special verifiable treacheries confronted by African Americans. Predications depict African Americans as "crippled" by isolation or stranded on a "lonely island of poverty," which assist both to humanize their enduring and to dramatize the ethical criticalness for change. These explanatory moves counter dehumanizing generalizations by showing African Americans as rightful claimants of equity instead of detached beneficiaries of kindness.

### **Conclusion**

The application of the DHA to the speech of Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" uncovers a modern transaction between historical contextualization, and ideological framing rhetorical strategies. The examination illustrates that King deliberately positions his message inside the socio-political substances of 1960s America whereas conjuring profoundly established moral and historical narratives. Through nomination strategies, Martin builds a comprehensive national identity whereas expressly recognizing the marginalized status of African Americans. Predication strategies emphasize systemic persecution through capable metaphors, framing African Americans as ethically meriting of freedom and justice. Argumentation procedures depend on the topoi of equity, urgency, history, and morality, making a consistent and moral establishment for social change. Perspectivation positions Martin as both an insider to the African American encounter and an ethical direct for the whole country. Heightened strategies, especially anaphora and repetition, intensify direness and enthusiastic reverberation. The intertextuality of speech drawing from the Bible, the Declaration of Independence, the Emancipation Proclamation, strengthens its authenticity by inserting the civil rights struggle inside the foundational narratives of the US.

Eventually, the analysis affirms that "I Have a Dream" remains a masterclass in rhetorical strategy and political discourse. Its persevering significance lies in its capacity to associate historical memory with present battles and future goals, all whereas keeping up an ethical and comprehensive vision. Martin's discourse destroys the authenticity of racial disparity by surrounding it as a betrayal of both American beliefs and widespread human rights. In doing so, it not just reflects the sociopolitical realities of its time but also proceeds to motivate contemporary

struggles for justice around the world. Generally, the findings affirm that King's discourse not only enunciated a clear ethical and political demand but also deliberately adjusted the civil rights movement with the broader American ethos, subsequently maximizing its influential and mobilizing potential. Hence, the study concludes that the racial and historical accounts in King's discourse, as lit up through the Discourse-Historical Approach, embody how language can be mobilized to challenge dug in disparities, reframe national identity, and galvanize collective activity. It certifies that critical discourse analysis, when attentive to power, history, and identity, offers significant experiences into the components by which rhetoric shapes social change.

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