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DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.

Five score years ago, a great American, in whose symbolic name we gathered here today, signed the Emancipation Proclamation. This momentous decree gave the promised freedom to millions of Negro slaves who had been seared in the flames of withering injustice. It was a day that lived! A day that will live in the annals of our American history. Years later, we must not let the great fact that the Negro still is not free pass us by. One hundred years later, the life of the Negro is still sadly crippled by the manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination. He still lives in a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity. One hundred years later, the Negro is still languishing in the corners of American society and finds himself an exile in his own land.

A LEGACY OF PERSISTENCE AND HOPE

So we have come here today to dramatize an appalling condition. We have 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 citizen was bound.

This note was a promise that all men would be guaranteed the rights of citizenship: liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. It is obvious that this promissory note insofar as her citizens of color are concerned, has been defaulted on this sacred obligation, America has given the Negro people a check, but it has come back marked "insufficient funds." But we refuse to accept this. We consider this American bankruptcy. We refuse to believe that there are insufficient funds to provide the opportunity of this nation.

So we have come to cash this check -- a check that will come due soon. We cannot allow our sacred inheritance of freedom and the security of independence to be evaded. We must not allow America of the fierce urgency of now to be delayed. We must not allow the great promises of the Declaration of Independence off or to take the tranquilizing drug of gradualism. We must open the doors of opportunity for all of our citizens, black and white. We must open the doors of opportunity from the quicksands of racial isolation and segregation.

It would be fatal for the nation to overlook the urgency of the situation and to underestimate the determination of the Negro. This sweltering summer of the Negro's legitimate discontent will not pass until there is an invigorating autumn of freedom and equality. Nineteen sixty-three is not an end, but a beginning. Those who hope that the Negro needed to blow off steam and will now be satisfied have been grossly miscalculated.

PENN STATE HARRISBURG

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