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Pamela Taivassalo

Speakers' Corner

Dr Martin Luther King Jr

Kristina Leon:

In the program today; Dr Martin Luther King Jr. and his [speech](#) I Have a dream. Our specialist and political rhetoric Doctor Nick Turnbull from Manchester University. Meet Amina Jamil and Daniel Edmundson from the Debating Society at Parris Wood High school.

This is Speaker's Corner.

Dr Martin Luther King Jr:

I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: "We hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal."

Dr Nick Turnbull:

I'm Doctor Nick Turnbull and today we are going to talk about Martin Luther King and his famous I Have a Dream-speech.

Dr Martin Luther King Jr:

I have a dream that one day, on the red hills of Georgia, the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood. I have a dream...

Dr Nick Turnbull:

Martin Luther King was certainly a great political figure, leading social movement, leading the Civil Right movement for many years. And the I Have a Dream-speech is the classic of the rousing political speech. It was delivered to hundreds of thousands of people at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, speaking in favour of the Civil Rights



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movement and evoking the war against slavery led by Lincoln many years before. Martin Luther King spoke like a preacher. Many allusions to the Bible in the speech but also to the US constitution to the Declaration of Independence. But the idea is to move the emotions of the audience, to speak very emotionally and in this speech is still inspiring now and raises the hair on the back of your neck. So he speaks like a preacher because that's the background he's come from.

From the black churches where people would give these rousing speeches, where people would cheer in the congregation and sing along and shout out. So the idea is to inspire belief.

Martin Luther King wanted people to believe that social change was possible, against evidence to the contrary. When many afro American people didn't have rights at that stage. Inspiring belief was the central emotion.

So he speaks I Have a Dream and when he delivers the speech he uses a rising crescendo, each time he brings his pitch to a higher level, and then to a higher level again. And then to a higher level again. And brings the audience with him. And you can hear people shouting along as he speaks.

So he says I Have a Dream and he repeats it several times over. Now this is a device known as anaphora, the repetition of a clause to bring different ideas into that clause and heighten the emotion as he goes along. And King was so successful at doing this, he inspired not just afro Americans but white Americans who saw that the Civil Rights movement was essential. And they also came to believe that change could occur and still now we see even that idea, that ideal directing much of politics in the United States.

Pamela:

Have you heard a rumour that it was woman called Mrs Jackson shouted Tell them about your dream.

Dr Nick Turnbull:

And he did tell us about that dream. And last part of this speech is improvised. Just the way jazz musicians would improvise he had a script, he used to write his speeches in great detail, he would go over and over them. And this speech he'd practiced several times in different locations before he got to this point. Always working in refining in order to meet the



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reaction of the crowd just like a piece of music rewritten all the time by the musician, in response of the reaction from the audience. So and yes someone shouted out Tell us your dream and then he's improvising with the I Have a Dream at the end, repeating and repeating as it gets more of a reaction from the crowd. It's brilliant stuff.

Dr Martin Luther King Jr:

I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the colour of their skin but by the content of their character.

I have a dream today.

I have a dream that one day down in Alabama, with its vicious racists, with its governor having his lips dripping with the words of interposition and nullification, one day right down in Alabama, little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers.

I have a dream today.

I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted...

Kristina Leon:

In Parrs Wood High School in Manchester the Debating Society gathers every Tuesday. Our reporter Pamela Taivassalo paid them a visit.

Pamela Taivassalo:

This is Mahelia Jackson, the woman who shouted Tell them your dream, Martin.

And I'm standing here with Amina Jamil and Daniel Edmundson of Parrs Wood Debating Society. And we're talking about the speech I Have a Dream.



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Amina Jamil:

Well that is an inspirational speech because it's basically it says 1963 is not an end but a beginning and that is what it was. It was a beginning of a society that is more tolerant and more equal and more integrated because previous this you had to sit on a separate side of the bus if you were black or if you were white. All of Gods children as he said, everyone is all the same so why should we be treated differently depending on colour of your skin.

Pamela Taivassalo:

How much do you allow yourself to improvise?

Daniel Edmundson:

Sometimes you completely have to do things off the cuff, especially if you get a completely crazy emotion. I mean sometimes they're ridiculously complicated, there was one I think it was an Oxford Nationals competition about army drones. This house would stop funding into the use of army drones in the military and nobody, I don't think anyone in the room really knew what the speech was actually talking about and I certainly didn't so that speech was entirely off the cuff. But of course I didn't win that one because and that just shows there's only so much value in improvising. I think certainly if you use improvising sparingly you can give it your own flavor and you know sometimes some of your best points come at the last minute. So it is, you shouldn't always stick really rigidity to your plan. If you suddenly think of another thing you should find a way to work it in. But don't do what I sometimes do and completely improvise the whole thing on the spot because that just that doesn't go down well.



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Kristina Leon:

And now Doctor Nick Turnbull with a few tips on how to give a great speech.

Dr Nick Turnbull:

How much can you allow such improvise, I think you should be prepared to improvise. Public speaking is often too staged. Many politicians these days have a script in their head which they read from and sound bites and pre-prepared phrases. Allow yourself to react to the audience. If you getting no reaction, change what you're saying. Think about delivering in a different way. If you have an idea at the time perhaps elaborate. If you've practiced well and you know your words in advanced you can always come back to the script as maybe. Throwing in a joke, throwing in at aside, changing a word here and there is a great idea and that improvisation comes across actually to an audience they can detect that there's more of a human way of speaking. You can be too stilted and you can be too robotic when you speak. Of course don't get too carried away, be appropriate. But I think it's a great lesson that you play to the audience. Speeches are always to an audience, you work out who they are and you adapt to them as the circumstance demands.

Kristina Leon:

In Speaker's Corner today you've heard Doctor Nick Turnbull, Daniel Edmundson and Amina Jamil. And Dr Martin Luther King Jr. This programme was produced by Pamela Taivassalo, Ingela Håkansson was our sound engineer and my name is Kristina Leon.

For more on Dr Martin Luther King jr:

http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/1964/king-bio.html

Watch *I Have A Dream* delivered at the Lincoln Memorial, Washington on August 28 1963:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=smEqnklfYs>