



From Minnesota Public Radio's Sound Learning (www.soundlearning.org)

Sound Learning Feature for February 2005

From American Public Media's [American RadioWorks](#)

This month we revisit a special from American Public Media's *American RadioWorks*.

When the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr.'s I Have a Dream speech is broadcast each February to mark Black History Month, the magnetic cadence of his words is almost impossible to resist. King was a remarkable orator, but he was hardly alone. He was nurtured in a centuries-old African American tradition of spoken narrative and oral persuasion. Sound Learning's February feature takes this tradition and puts it in an academic context, illuminating students to the profound effect African American oratories have in our shared history.

The articles in this month's feature are of particular interest to teachers and students of American history, political science, and civics.

In the following pages, find instructional ideas and study guides intended to aid in the teaching of:

- Reading comprehension.
- Listening comprehension.
- Critical thinking.
- Research and writing challenges.
- Key terms and topics.



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Questions are based on the feature "Say it Plain: A Century of Great African American Speeches" (<http://americanradioworks.publicradio.org/features/sayitplain/>), from American Public Media's *American RadioWorks* Web site, <http://americanradioworks.publicradio.org>. Sound Learning is a production of Minnesota Public Radio.



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Segment 1: Tracing the Impact of African American Speechmaking

Tracing the impact of African American speechmaking: preaching, telling jokes and bearing witness to abuse, discrimination and brutality. Segment features Martin Luther King, Jr., comedian Dick Gregory, activist Fannie Lou Hamer, and historian James Horton. Also traces some of the earliest known recordings of African Americans, including the influential leaders Booker T. Washington and Marcus Garvey.

Reading Comprehension

Read the testimony by [Fannie Lou Hamer: *Testimony Before the Credentials Committee, Democratic National Convention*](http://americanradioworks.publicradio.org/features/sayitplain/flhamer.html)

<http://americanradioworks.publicradio.org/features/sayitplain/flhamer.html>

Answer the following questions:

1. What crucial piece of information did Fannie Lou Hamer learn at the age of 44?
2. What consequences did Hamer face in 1962 when she tried to register for vote?
3. What were the two central goals of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP), of which Hamer was an active member in 1964?
4. What kind of treatment did Hamer and her colleagues receive when they were thrown in jail in 1963?
5. After she suffered humiliation in a Mississippi jail, what did Hamer do?

Key Terms and Topics



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From Fannie Lou Hamer's "Testimony Before the Credentials Committee, Democratic National Convention"

- Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC)
- Sharecroppers
- Ku Klux Klan (KKK)
- Impromptu
- Literacy test
- Blackjack
- Medgar Evers

Segment 2: Bringing African American Oratory to a Larger Audience

In the early decades of the 20th century, some black leaders like Marcus Garvey argued that black people should turn away from white society. In the 1940s, the advent of radio brought powerful speakers like Mary McLeod Bethune to a wide audience. In the 1960s, some activists lost faith in the slow pace of change. Includes Stokely Carmichael and the last speech by Martin Luther King Jr—given on the eve of his assassination.

Listening Comprehension Questions

Read the following questions, then listen to the second segment of "[Say it Plain](#)" to find the answers.

Segment 2: Bringing African American Oratory to a Larger Audience

<http://www.publicradio.org/tools/media/player/americanradioworks/features/sayitplain/full?start=00:00:15:30.0&end=00:00:34:00.0>

1. According to Marcus Garvey, what steps should African Americans take in order to improve their lives?



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2. How did the advent of radio the audience for African American speeches during the middle of the twentieth century?
3. What First Lady was a close friend of Mary McLeod Bethune?
4. According to James Cone, why did Mary McLeod Bethune promote racial justice by celebrating the core democratic principles such as equality, freedom, and courage?
5. What experience led Stokely Carmichael to reject the civil rights movement's goal of racial integration?
6. Why was Martin Luther King Jr. in Memphis, Tennessee in April 1968?
7. Why was Martin Luther King Jr. aware that his life was in danger when he gave his last speech in April 1968?

Key Terms and Topics

From "Say it Plain: A Century of Great African American Speeches" Segment 2

<http://www.publicradio.org/tools/media/player/americanradioworks/features/sayitplain/full?start=00:00:15:30.0&end=00:00:34:00.0>

- Endemic
- Lynching
- Exodus
- Militant
- Rhetoric
- Commonwealth
- Theology
- Aspiration
- Integration



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- Subterfuge
- White supremacy
- Protégé
- Open occupancy
- Injunction
- Totalitarian
- Longevity
- Crispus Attucks
- "Thalidomide drug of integration"
- Black Power

Segment 3: Speeches from Positions of Power

In this last segment, we listen to African Americans as they moved into mainstream positions of power. Shirley Chisholm was the first black woman elected to Congress and Barbara Jordan was one of the representatives to sit on the House Watergate committee; Reverend Jesse Jackson formed the Rainbow/PUSH Coalition and ran for President; Barack Obama gave a memorable speech at the 2004 Democratic National Convention.

Listening Comprehension Questions

Read the following questions, then listen to the third segment of "[Say it Plain](#)" to find the answers.

Segment 3: Speeches from Positions of Power

<http://www.publicradio.org/tools/media/player/americanradioworks/features/sayitplain/full?start=00:00:34:00.0&end=00:01:00:00.0>



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1. What is "the inquiry" that Jordan refers to in her speech?
2. When was the Constitution completed?
3. How does Ms. Jordan feel she, and other African Americans, have been included in the group that the Constitution refers to as "We the people"?
4. According to the Constitution's description of the impeachment process, is the House of Representatives' job to accuse the president or to judge whether the president should be removed from office?
5. Why does Jordan think that this division of roles is a good idea?
6. According to Jordan, why does the Constitution outline a process by which the president or other high-ranking officials can be impeached?
7. Which president said that impeachment should only happen when the "plain law of the land" is violated?
8. What things did Jordan say the president knew about on June 23, 1972?

Critical Thinking Questions

These activities are based on "[Say it Plain, segment 3](#)"

<http://www.publicradio.org/tools/media/player/americanradioworks/features/sayitplain/full?start=00:00:34:00.0&end=00:01:00:00.0>

Answer the following questions:

1. What are the parallels between the civil rights movement and the women's rights movement pointed out by Shirley Chisholm? Why do you think women were not more prominent in the leadership of the civil rights movement?
2. What does Rev. Jesse Jackson mean when he compares American society to a quilt? Do you think this is an apt analogy? Why or why not?



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3. Do you agree with James Cone's claim that, there are fewer leaders who seem to transcend racial boundaries as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. did? Why or why not?"
4. Do you think there will be an African American president in your lifetime? What are the factors that make this more or less likely?
5. What does Senator Barack Obama mean by "red states" and "blue states" when talking about the United States? Do you think his examples of what happens in the various states are effective? Why or why not?

Research Challenges

1. Do you know anyone who participated in the civil rights movement of the 1960s? If so, interview them to learn about their experiences during that era.
2. Select any of the speeches that are part of the Say It Plain Web site and research the speaker to learn more about his or her life.
3. Besides its powerful speeches, the civil rights movement also has a rich musical legacy. Find out what you can about the songs written and sung by civil rights activists.
4. Many civil rights leaders, such as Martin Luther King Jr., were also ministers in the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) church. Investigate this denomination to learn more about the connections between the religious sermons and speeches delivered by African American leaders.
5. Booker T. Washington's ideas are often compared to those of W.E.B. Du Bois, a scholar and activist who opposed many of Washington's arguments. Find out what you can about the similarities and differences between their arguments.
6. Alabama was the site of very significant civil rights struggles during the 1960s. Find out what you can about the 1965 march, led by Martin Luther King Jr., from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama.





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7. Read Martin Luther King Jr.'s "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," which he wrote when he was imprisoned in 1963. How does this written document differ in content, tone, and style from the 1968 speech that is on the Say It Plain Web site?
8. Find out what you can about Marcus Garvey and his organization, the Universal Negro Improvement Association. How was his mission different from those of other African American leaders?
9. Mary McLeod Bethune and Fannie Lou Hamer are two women whose civil rights work is widely known. Find out what you can about the role of women in the civil rights movement, both as leaders and as participants.

Key Terms and Topics

From [Barbara Jordan's Statement at the U.S. House Judiciary Committee Impeachment Hearings](http://americanradioworks.publicradio.org/features/sayitplain/bjordan.html)

<http://americanradioworks.publicradio.org/features/sayitplain/bjordan.html>

- Amendment
- Hyperbole
- Impeachment
- Inquest
- Inquisitor
- Juxtapose
- Obfuscate
- Perjury
- Subpoena





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- Surreptitious
- Thwart
- Committee for the Re-Election of the President (Jordan misspoke, the organization was actually named Committee to Re-elect the President)
- Separation of Powers
- Watergate

From "Say it Plain" segment 3

<http://www.publicradio.org/tools/media/player/americanradioworks/features/sayitplain/full?start=00:00:34:00.0&end=00:01:00:00.0>

- Forthwith
- Hierarchy
- Liberation
- Supremacy
- Grand Jury
- Rainbow Coalition
- Women's Movement



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