ARTICLE II: THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH

Abraham Lincoln & Martin Luther King Jr. Speeches

Lafayette Park: A First Amendment Site

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Abraham Lincoln and Martin Luther King Jr. Speech Excerpts and Connections: A Student Worksheet

The Lincoln Memorial reminds us of President Abraham Lincoln, the role of the United States Constitution, and the significance of the Civil War. Below are several of President Lincoln’s quotes. In your own words write what you think they mean:

“A house divided against itself cannot stand.”
—Speech at the Illinois Republican State Convention; June 16, 1858.

“In your hands, my dissatisfied fellow-countrymen, and not in mine, is the momentous issue of civil war. The Government will not assail you. You can have no conflict without yourselves being the aggressors. You have no oath registered in heaven to destroy the Government, while I shall have the most solemn one to ‘preserve, protect, and defend it.’”
—First Inaugural, 1861

The following words are from Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s “I Have a Dream” speech delivered on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial. Read his words and explain why you think that Dr. King chose to give this speech at the Lincoln Memorial rather than another memorial?

“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 languishing in the corners of American society and finds himself an exile in his own land. So we have come here today to dramatize a shameful condition.

In a sense 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 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.”
About Article II: The Executive Branch
Lafayette Park, A First Amendment Site: Background Information

Congress shall make no law... abridging the freedom of speech... or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances. Excerpt from the First Amendment, U.S. Constitution.

To the north of the White House is a seven-acre plot called Lafayette Park. Named after Revolutionary War hero Marquis de Lafayette, who visited the White House in 1825, Lafayette Park has served many purposes throughout history. Early on, there was a graveyard. It was the site of a racetrack and also an encampment for soldiers during the War of 1812. Slaves were once sold here. In the 19th century it was a prime residential neighborhood. It is a reviewing area for inaugural parades. Like many spaces inside national parks, it also acts as a site for First Amendment activities.

Lafayette Park is a place where many influential protests have taken place. It has been, and continues to be, a focal point for the expression of American ideals. Inspired by the First Amendment, citizens exercise their rights of free speech here, using Lafayette Park as their stage and the White House as their audience.

The Suffrage Movement
When examining the suffrage movement in early twentieth-century America, students must know when the cause originated. Suffragists of the early 1900s were not the first to fight for a woman’s right to vote. They were continuing a struggle that had been building for more than 60 years. This movement extended from 1848, with the first convention for women’s rights in Seneca Falls, New York, until 1920, when women in the United States won the right to vote with the adoption of the Nineteenth Amendment.

The National Woman’s Party moved into its headquarters on Jackson Place at Lafayette Park in 1916 and from there they staged a series of pickets in front of the White House. From this vantage point, President Woodrow Wilson could not escape their calls for the vote. As a result of the suffragists’ endurance, women in the United States were finally granted the right to vote in 1920.

Civil Rights Protest: Protecting the Selma Marchers
When most people think of the civil rights movement and the nation’s capital, they picture the mass of people stretched out from the Lincoln Memorial, listening intently to Martin Luther King Jr. and his “I Have a Dream” speech in 1963. Yet Lafayette Park also played a pivotal role. Its symbolic location at the President’s doorstep made it favorable for speaking out during the 1960s, especially during March 1965.

Early that month, civil rights activists attempted to march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama, demanding voting rights for African Americans. After they were brutally attacked by state and local police, the day became known as “Bloody Sunday.” Immediately, supporters flocked to Washington, D.C., and gathered in Lafayette Park. They positioned themselves in front of the White House and demanded
that President Lyndon Johnson send federal troops to protect the marchers in Alabama. Lafayette Park played host to a number of sit-ins, vigils, marches, and prayer meetings that, along with the backlash from the violence during the march, prompted Johnson to send troops to Alabama.

The President was aware of the presence of the Lafayette Park protestors and especially those who staged a sit-in on the floor of the White House. As he introduced his proposed voting rights act to Congress on March 15, 1965, he praised the protestors from across the nation, thousands of whom were not far from his doorstep at the time.

Congress took President Johnson’s words to heart. In August 1965, the Voting Rights Act was signed into law.

Activity: Write a Letter to the President

Lafayette Park is a place where citizens go to speak their minds to the President. But there are other ways to tell the President about issues of concern. While they visit Lafayette Park, students can take notes and begin thinking about what they will include in their letter to the President. When they return to class, ask students to write a letter to the President expressing their views.

Address letter and envelope to:
President Barack H. Obama
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20500

Educators: Please send all class and individual letters in one envelope. A cover letter providing the teacher’s name, the grade of the students, and the complete mailing address of the school would be appreciated and would help to speed a response.

To learn more about Lafayette Park and the first amendment, and to hear an audio tour, visit www.whitehousehistory.org/tours/protest. This site was created by students at School Without Walls, DCPS, with help from the White House Historical Association.
About Article II: The Executive Branch
Lafayette Park, A First Amendment Site: A Student Activity

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For at least one hundred years in Lafayette Park, citizens have spoken out—both for and against—issues that concern them. Lafayette Park is a place to voice an opinion to the President and your fellow citizens.

Match the photograph of a demonstration with the description. For each photograph write the message of the protestors in your own words.

A. Protect our people!

A. Reporters surround a man who has just completed a sit-in inside the White House in March 1965. He wanted President Lyndon Johnson to send federal troops to Selma, Alabama to protect civil rights marchers.

B. In February 1970, more than 400,000 peace petitions are stacked at the White House fence during the Vietnam War period.

C. In 2001, demonstrators speak out against creating more nuclear weapons.

D. Suffragists ask President Woodrow Wilson to give women the vote.

How to Request a Tour Inside The White House

If you are a resident of the District of Columbia or are making requests for residents of the District of Columbia and would like to tour the White House you may contact the office of Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton to request your tour. Below are two ways to go about requesting a tour of the White House through the Congresswoman’s office:

1. Contact Congresswoman Norton’s office and speak with Ms. Tai Brown, the Congresswoman’s Tour Coordinator.
   - Phone: 202-225-8050
   - Fax: 202-225-3002
   - tai.brown@mail.house.gov

   Ms. Brown will want to know:
   a. The date for which you would like the tour
   b. Your Washington, D.C. address
   c. The telephone number where you can be reached most frequently
   d. The number of people in your class/group/family

2. Visit Congresswoman Norton’s website and enter your request there, on-line.
   - The web address is www.norton.house.gov.
   a. Once on the Congresswoman’s site look for the section called Explore D.C. Click here and you will go to a screen that lists all of the Federal buildings for which the Congresswoman can arrange tours. The White House is one of these.
   b. Find the White House among the list of options and click where it says click here.
   c. Clicking will take you to the White House Tour page.
   d. Look for the White House Tour Request Form. Complete the form as directed and submit it to:
      - Ms. Tai Brown via email or fax.
      - Fax: 202-225-3002 (fax)
      - tai.brown@mail.house.gov

Touring the White House consists of a tour of the East Executive wing only. Check the Congresswoman’s website for the rules and regulations for visiting the White House. You should place your request for a White House tour several months before the date on which you would like to take a tour.