



Name _____

History's Promise

Directions: Read the excerpt below from Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech (1963). As you read, think about the **historical context**: segregation, Jim Crow laws, and the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s-1960s. Answer the questions that follow, explaining how the meaning of the speech changes when placed in its historical moment. Support your answers with both **text evidence** and **historical knowledge**.

Excerpt from "I Have a Dream" (1963)

"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.

It is obvious today that America has defaulted on this promissory note insofar as her citizens of color are concerned. Instead of honoring this sacred obligation, America has given the Negro people a bad check, a check which has come back marked 'insufficient funds.'"

1. What metaphor does King use in this passage, and what does it suggest about America's treatment of Black citizens?
2. How does the historical context of segregation and discrimination shape the meaning of King's metaphor?
3. Why would mentioning the **Constitution and Declaration of Independence** resonate strongly in 1963?
4. How might this speech have inspired listeners to take action during the Civil Rights Movement?
5. Write a short paragraph (5-7 sentences) explaining how understanding the historical context changes the way a modern reader interprets this passage.