

MLK's "I Have a Dream" Speech Has Roots in North Carolina

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Martin Luther King Jr. delivered his "I Have a Dream" speech 57 years ago at The March on Washington. Motown Records [released](#) audio of the speech as a single on the anniversary.

While King's speech in front of 250,000 in front of the Lincoln Memorial is often considered one of the most iconic in American history, it has roots in North Carolina.

"I Have a Dream" Speech in Rocky Mount

On November 27, 1962, eight months before The March on Washington, King stood in front of 1,800 people gathered in a Rocky Mount gymnasium and began,

“And so my friends of Rocky Mount, I have a dream tonight. It is a dream rooted deeply in the American dream.”

The speech was captured on reel-to-reel audiotape and stored in the Rocky Mount public library. The speech was largely unknown outside of Rocky Mount until North Carolina State professor W. Jason Miller digitized it in 2015.



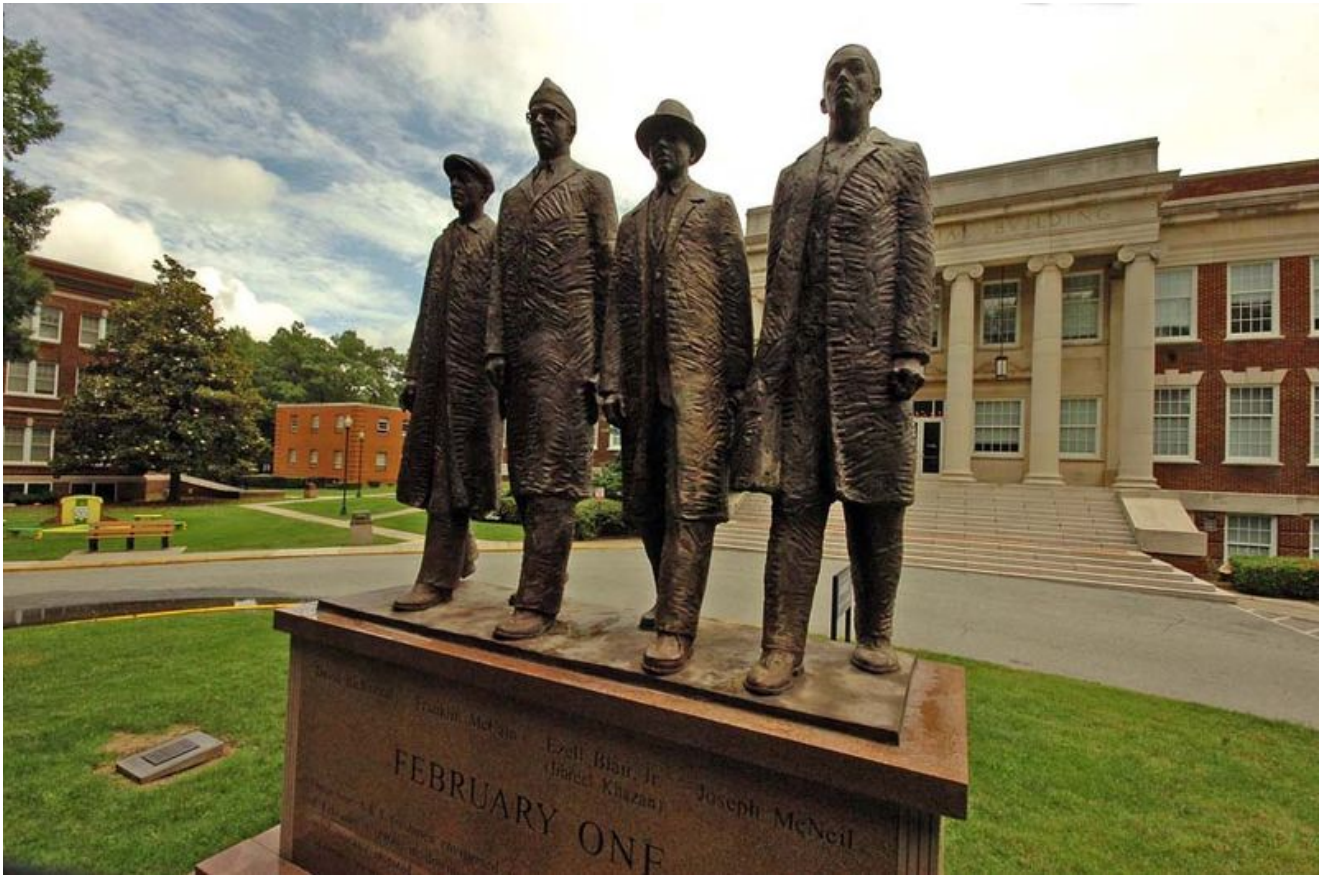
Photo credit W. Jason Miller / N.C. State University

Miller, who was studying King’s speeches at the time, took the tape to Philadelphia to have it restored. There, archivist George Blood worked to refurbish the audio and transfer it to a digital format.

Dr. King’s Legacy in North Carolina

The Rocky Mount speech was not the only time Dr. King joined Civil Rights efforts in North Carolina.

On February 1, 1960, four students from North Carolina A&T staged a sit-in at the Woolworth’s lunch counter in Greensboro. On day two, more than 20 students joined “The Greensboro Four.” By February 4, more than 300 had joined the protest and expanded it to other lunch counters.



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Shortly after, Dr. King visited Shaw University in Raleigh. Joined by the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), he held talks with local sit-in leaders. During these talks, Dr. King encouraged the leaders to use non-violent means of protest.

In the following months, sit-ins were held in 27 cities across the south. By August of that same year, the protests successfully ended segregation at lunch counters.

You can hear audio from Dr. King’s Rocky Mount speech here:

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About author

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David Straughan is a writer, editor, and coffee nerd from Durham, North Carolina. Before coming back home, David served as Editor of two English-language magazines in Ningbo, China. Now, back in Durham, he is an obsessive investigator of local businesses, culture, and politics.



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