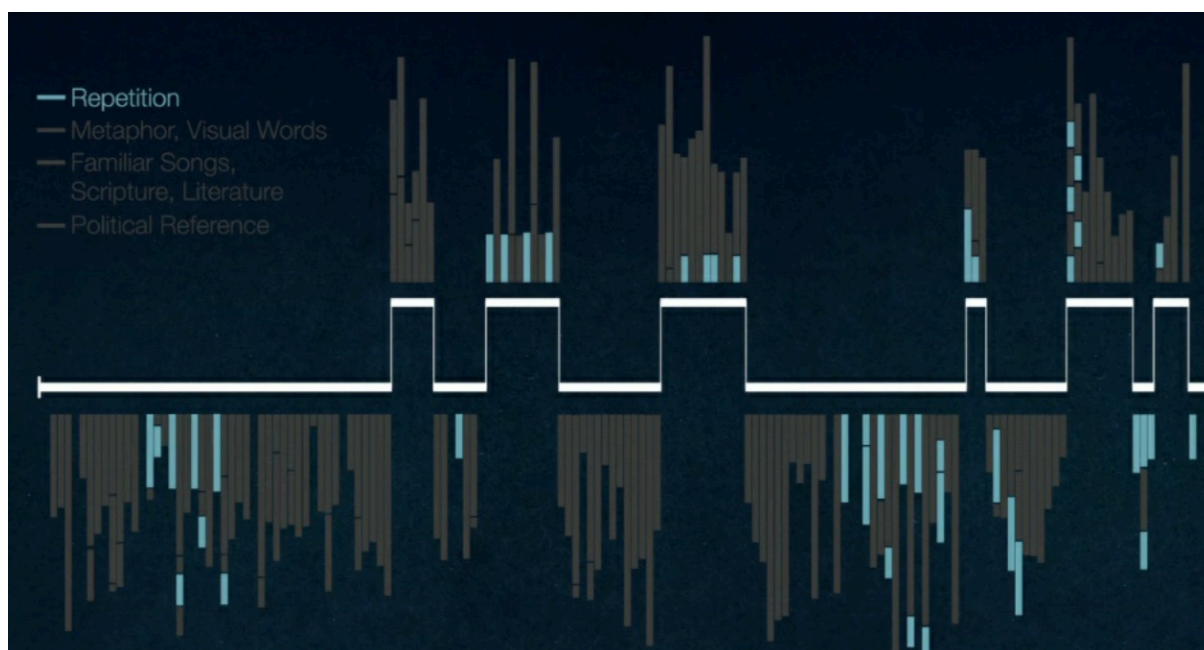


Repetition (identified in blue), a device to drive a point home, and usually done in threes – here are points in the Dr King’s speech where repetition was used:



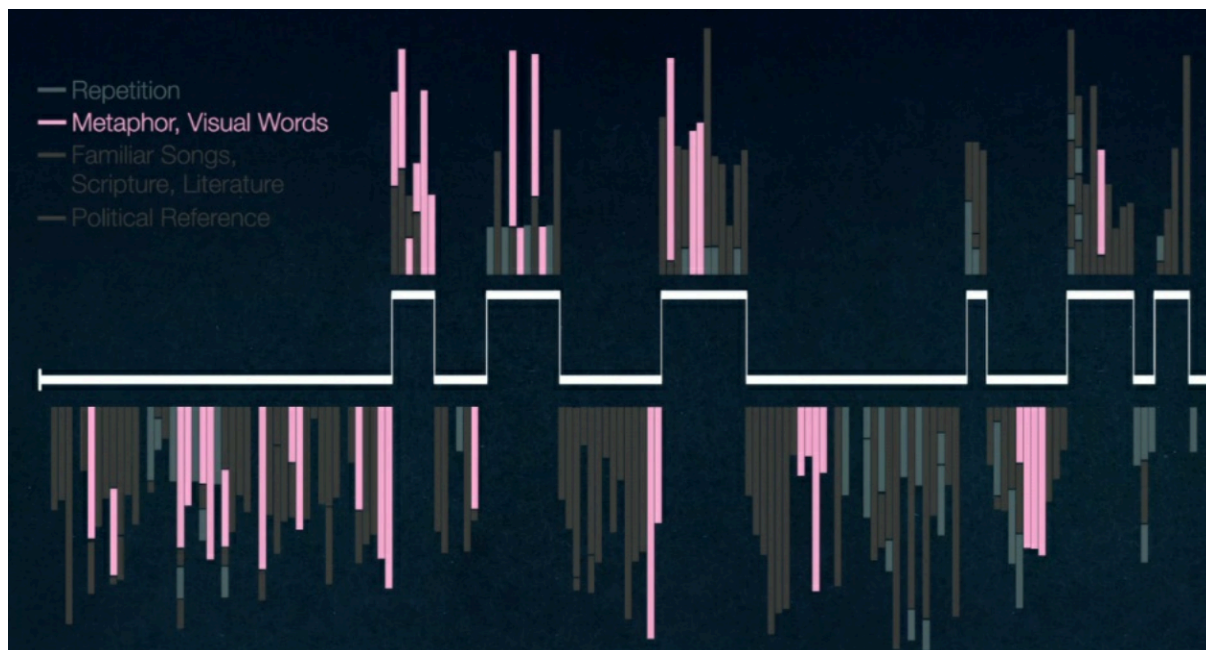
Dr King’s most well-known repetitions from this speech were the words ‘I have a dream...’, but he also used it in other sections of his speech:

*But **one hundred years later**, we must face the tragic fact that the Negro is still 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.*

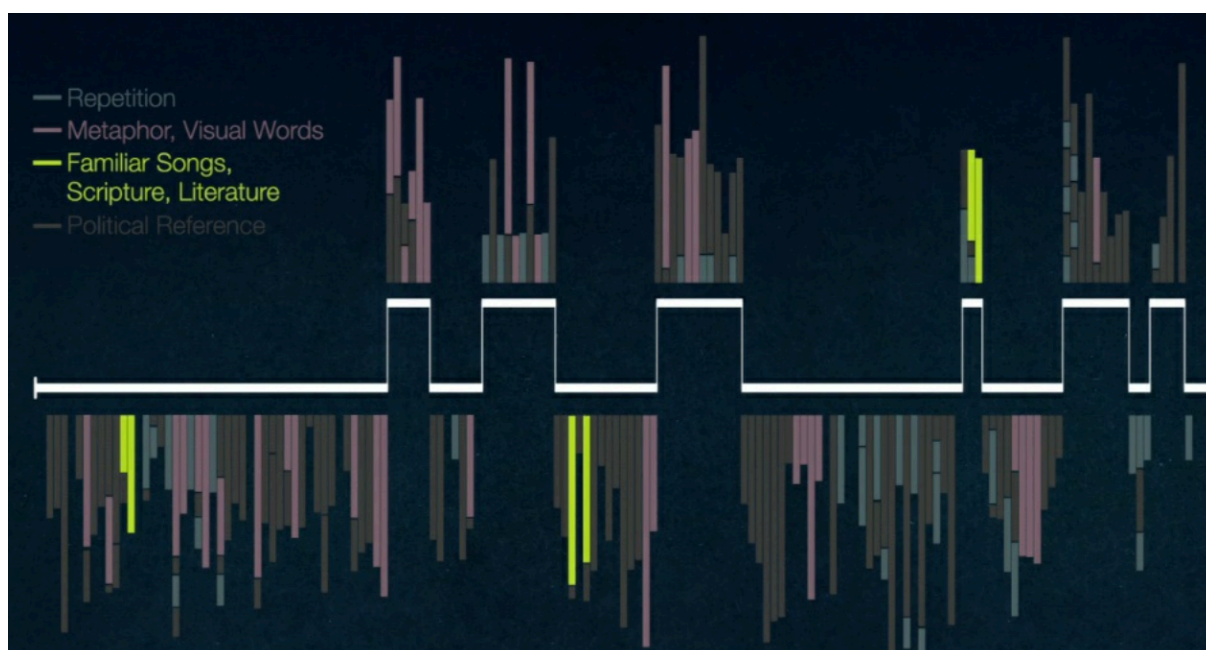
Metaphors and visual words (identified in pink) were used liberally by Dr King: Dr King uses the metaphor of a check, and a bank account – one that would be familiar to most people – to speak of justice:

*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 would be guaranteed the inalienable 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** which has come back marked "**insufficient funds.**" But we refuse to believe that the **bank of justice is bankrupt.** We refuse to believe that there are **insufficient funds in the great vaults** of opportunity of this nation. So we have come to **cash this check** – a check that will give us upon demand the **riches of freedom and the security of justice.***



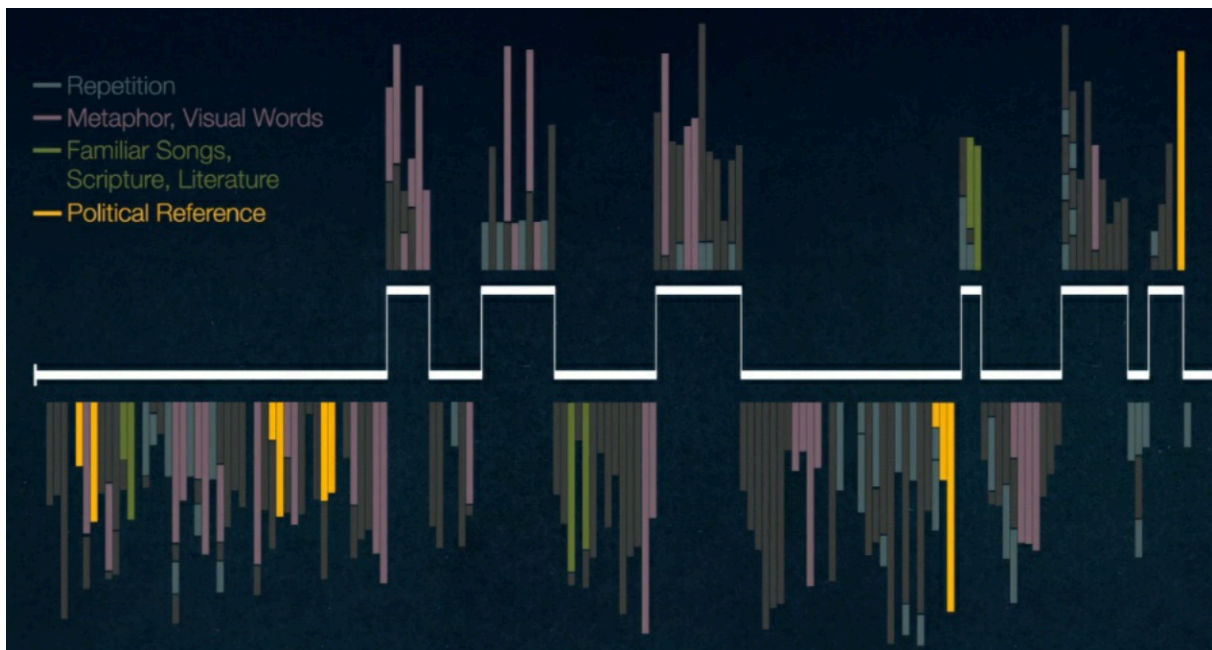
Cultural references (identified in green), show where Dr King used songs, scripture, literature that were familiar and dear to the audience:



Dr King referenced 'Free At Last', a Negro spiritual song in his rousing finish to his delivery:

*Let freedom ring. And when this happens, and when we allow freedom ring—when we let it ring from every village and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children—black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics—will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual: "**Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty, we are free at last!**"*

Political references (identified in orange), show where Dr King refers to political events, dates or documents, like the Declaration of Independence:



At the beginning of his speech, Dr King invokes abolitionist President Abraham Lincoln and echoes Lincoln's Gettysburg Address (which began 'Four score and seven years ago...')

***Five score years ago**, a great American, in whose symbolic shadow we stand signed the Emancipation Proclamation.*

It is worth noting that **the most powerful and memorable part of Dr King's speech combined ALL of these elements**: repetition, metaphor, cultural and political references:

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.” (political)

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 a table of brotherhood. (repetition, metaphor)

I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a desert state, sweltering with the heat of injustice and oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice. (repetition, metaphor)

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

I have a dream today. (repetition)

I have a dream that one day the state of Alabama, whose governor’s lips are presently dripping with the words of interposition and nullification, will be transformed into a situation where little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls and walk together as sisters and brothers. (repetition, metaphor)

I have a dream today. (repetition)

I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together. (repetition, metaphor, cultural – scripture)

Each of these elements, along with Dr King’s measured delivery and speaking style, combined to create a powerful emotional call to action. Dr King was not appealing to the ‘logical’ part of the brain, but intent on shifting the heart. Here is [Duarte’s analysis](#) in full (7 mins).

It is more effective to inspire and involve people, and give them a sense of agency over their situation than it is to rationalise and instruct. Martin Luther King appealed to people with 'I have a dream' – not 'I have a plan'.

It would be fascinating to see a similar visual analysis of speeches by another great political orator of King's era, President John F Kennedy.

A cursory glance at [JFK's Inaugural Address from 20 January 1961](#) shows all of the elements of King's speech: repetition, metaphor, scripture, political references:

Let both sides explore what problems unite us instead of belaboring those problems which divide us...

Let both sides seek to invoke the wonders of science instead of its terrors. Together let us explore the stars, conquer the deserts, eradicate disease, tap the ocean depths, and encourage the arts and commerce. (repetition, metaphor)

Let both sides unite to heed, in all corners of the earth, the command of Isaiah – to "undo the heavy burdens, and [to] let the oppressed go free." (cultural – scripture)

And, if a beachhead of cooperation may push back the jungle of suspicion...(metaphor)

And so, my fellow Americans, ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country. (repetition, call to action)

In his address at the [American University, 10 June 1963](#):

"When a man's way[s] please the Lord," the Scriptures tell us, "He maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him." And is not peace, in the last analysis, basically a matter of human rights: the right to live out our lives without fear of devastation; the right to breathe air as nature provided it; the right of future generations to a healthy existence? (repetition, cultural – scripture)

For in the final analysis, our most basic common link is that we all inhabit this small planet. We all breathe the same air. We all cherish our children's futures. And we are all mortal. (metaphor, repetition)

Duarte has also applied this technique to other historical speeches, such as Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, and from more recent times, Steve Jobs's iPhone launch speech.

Yet King's speech is perhaps the best example – not only is it memorable, it has become a cultural touchstone that has impacted on audiences beyond those who were immediately involved in the civil rights struggle, and has continued to be influential beyond the time and cultural context in which it was made.

[Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s Address at March on Washington, August 28, 1963. Washington, D.C. \(17 mins\)](#)

Its success depended very much on the spirit of the man, but also on the structure and delivery of his most cherished message.

Which other great historical or contemporary speeches would you like to see dissected and analysed?

How well do you know your audience? What metaphors would you use, and what cultural and political references could you tap into when presenting to them?