

# Famous Speeches: President Kennedy's 1963 Speech on Race

By John F. Kennedy, adapted by Newsela staff on 11.30.17

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President John F. Kennedy as he made a nationwide televised broadcast on civil rights in the White House, June 11, 1963. His talk climaxed a day during which Alabama Governor George Wallace defied a federal court order to admit two black students to the University of Alabama at Tuscaloosa. Wallace withdrew after the National Guard was federalized and placed on duty on the university campus. The president asked the American people for help in ending racial discrimination and termed the fulfillment of African American rights a moral issue. Kennedy spoke from his office. AP Photo/Charles Gorry

*Editor's Note: On June 11, 1963, President John F. Kennedy spoke to the nation. The president said he was about to ask Congress to pass major new laws. These laws would help black Americans have equal rights. At the time, blacks were treated very unfairly. In many places, they were not allowed to go to the same schools as whites. They were kept out of many restaurants and hotels. The president hoped to end this. In his speech, Kennedy spoke about what happened at the University of Alabama. Earlier that day, two black students were not allowed in. Kennedy had sent National Guard troops to the university to let them in. Here is a short version of Kennedy's speech.*

## **"Each Man And Woman Should Have The Same Rights"**

Good evening my fellow citizens:

This nation was founded on the idea that all men are created equal. Each man and woman should have the same rights. The color of their skin should not make any difference.

No matter their color, all Americans should be able to go to good schools. They should not be kept out of hotels, restaurants or stores. They should be able to vote freely.

Every American ought to have the same rights. Their chances should be the same as everyone else's. But this is not the case.

A black American today does not have the same chances as a white American. He has much less chance to go to a good school. He has much less chance to find a good job. He is much more likely to end up poor.

This is true all across this country. It is true in every state, in every city.

## **"It Is Time To Act"**

It has been 100 years since President Lincoln freed the slaves. Yet, today black Americans are still not fully free. They still face injustice and inequality.

The time has come for this nation to live up to its promise. It is time to act.

I am asking Congress to pass major new laws.

One law will give all Americans the right to be served in hotels, restaurants, stores and other public places. Every American should have this right. Yet many do not.

## **"I Will Ask For Other Changes As Well"**

I am also asking Congress to give government more power to end school segregation. Blacks and whites should not be educated separately. Blacks must not be kept out of any school just because they are black. All-white schools must become a thing of the past.

I will ask for other changes as well. But new laws alone cannot solve this problem. It must be solved by every American. We must all learn to treat each other fairly.

I am asking you to help make this country a better place. Please help us provide all Americans the rights we want for ourselves.

Thank you very much.