

BARRY WITTENSTEIN JERRY PINKNEY

Limited Edition
First Look

A PLACE TO LAND

Martin Luther King Jr. and the Speech That Inspired a Nation

Dear Reader,

There have been many picture books about Martin Luther King Jr., but few have been written so eloquently, and none have been illustrated so magnificently, as Barry Wittenstein's *A Place to Land*, with art by the incomparable Jerry Pinkney, winner of the Caldecott Medal, the Virginia Hamilton Award for Lifetime Achievement, and countless Caldecott Honors and Coretta Scott King Awards and Honors.

This is the story of the writing of the iconic "I Have a Dream" speech.

It begins on the evening of August 27, 1963, the night before the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, in the lobby of the Willard Hotel, with Martin seeking counsel from his trusted colleagues, among them Bayard Rustin, Ralph Abernathy, and Andrew Young. Each offers advice on what to write; Martin listens patiently, and eventually retreats to his room, spending much of the night, as Wittenstein puts it, *Writing. Rewriting. Rephrasing. Rehearsing the lines out loud to an audience of four walls . . . the handwritten speech finished, but not finished*, before Martin finally surrendered to sleep.

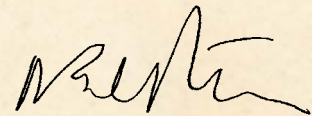
The scene shifts to the next day, as crowds assemble by the reflecting pool in front of the Lincoln Memorial. And still Martin is rewriting and rephrasing, crossing out words, adding more. And finally, at 3:30 PM on a blistering August day, the speech. Martin had not intended to utter those memorable words until he paused, and the great gospel singer Mahalia Jackson implored him to "Tell them about the dream, Martin, tell them about the dream!"

And so he did, using a metaphor he had used before, but had not intended to on that day.

This book has grandeur, tenderness, and undeniable power. It is meticulously researched, with ample back matter and detailed biographical information on the Willard Hotel advisors and others who spoke at the march that day. And it has that magnificent Pinkney art that transports you to the events that night and the day that followed, as well as so much more.

This limited edition first look contains only a handful of pages from the book, as well as a detachable print suitable for framing. *A Place to Land* will be published in fall 2019. We hope you find it as inspiring as we do.

Very best wishes,



Neal Porter
Vice President and Publisher

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Martin Luther King Jr.

was once asked if the hardest part
of preaching was knowing where to begin.

“No,” he said.

“The hardest part is knowing where to end.

“It’s terrible to be circling up there
without a place to land.”

Upstairs, alone in his suite,
surrounded by rough drafts
and scribbled notes on yellow legal pads,
Martin saw Rosa,
Fannie Lou,
Emmett,
Medgar,
the children of Birmingham,
and so many others,
—their faces forever seared into his memory.

Heroes, all,
chased by snarling police dogs,
knocked off their feet
by high-pressure water jets,
arrested, beaten, shot, and hung,
shocked and poked by cattle prods,
their homes,
schools, and churches
burned and bombed.



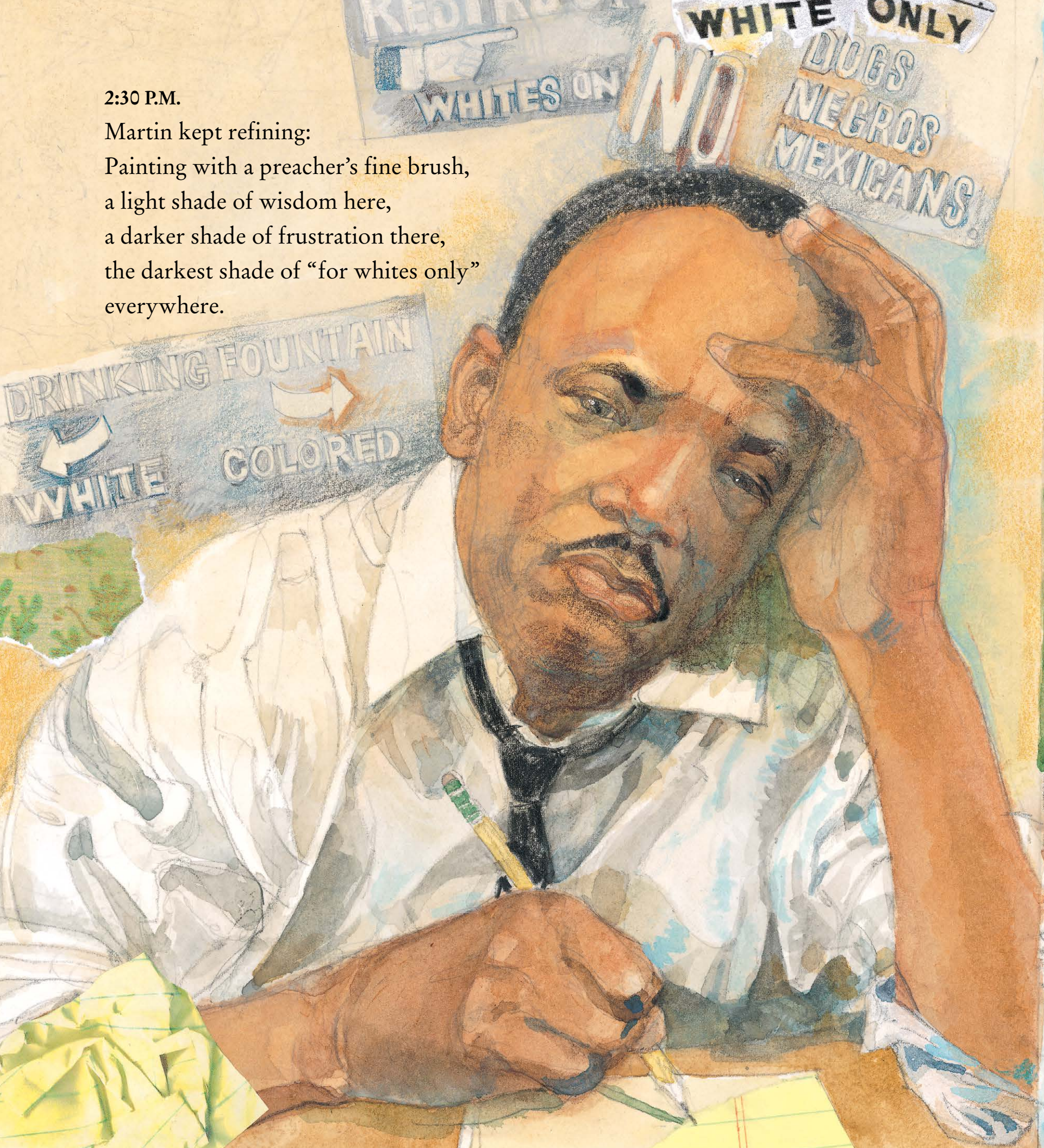
While at the same time,
up in Harlem in New York City,
on 125th Street,
in Chicago and Philadelphia,
Cleveland and Memphis,
crowds cheered friends and relatives
climbing aboard chartered buses and trains,
on foot and on planes,
singing “We Shall Overcome.”



2:30 P.M.

Martin kept refining:

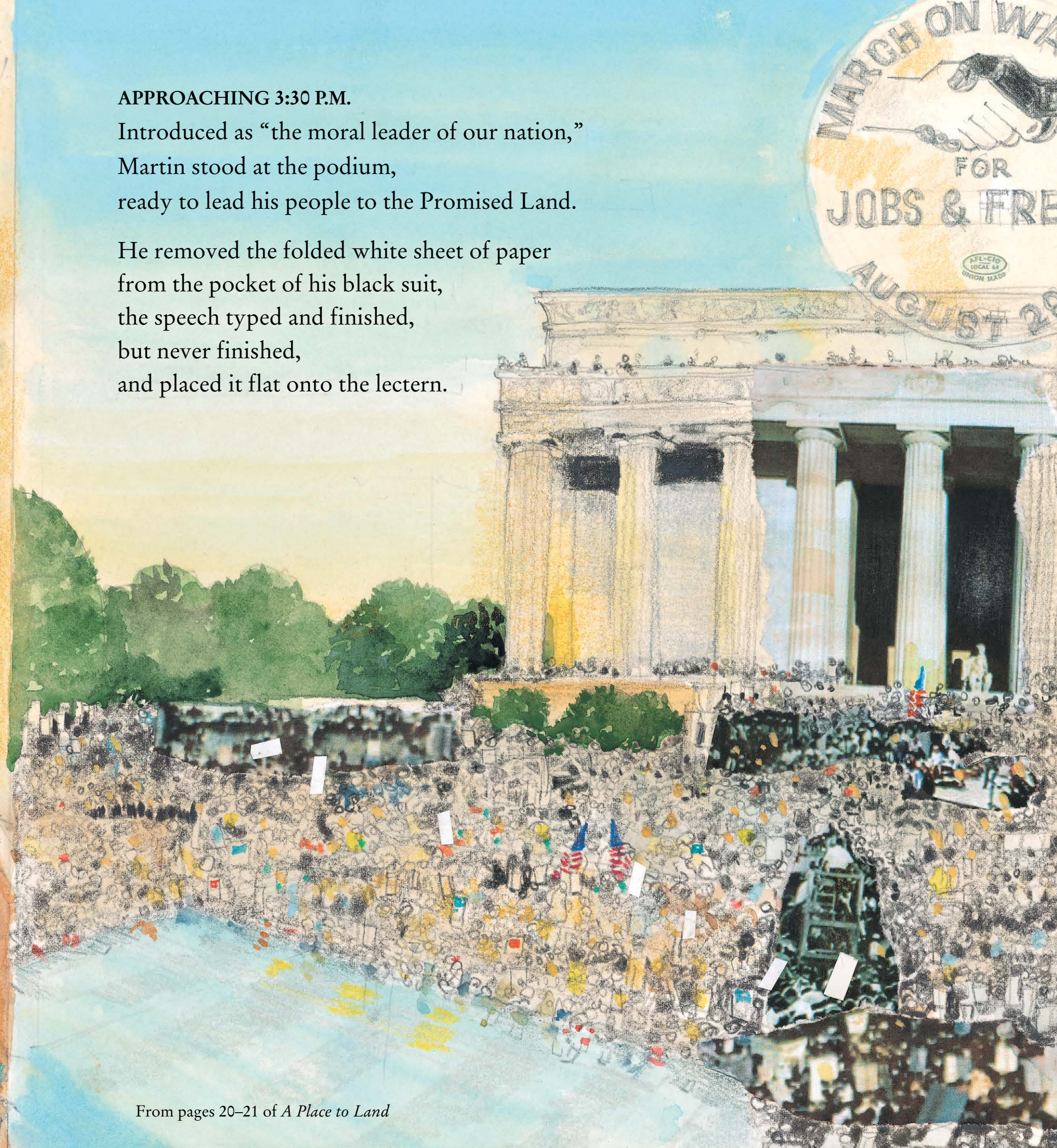
Painting with a preacher's fine brush,
a light shade of wisdom here,
a darker shade of frustration there,
the darkest shade of "for whites only"
everywhere.



APPROACHING 3:30 P.M.

Introduced as "the moral leader of our nation,"
Martin stood at the podium,
ready to lead his people to the Promised Land.

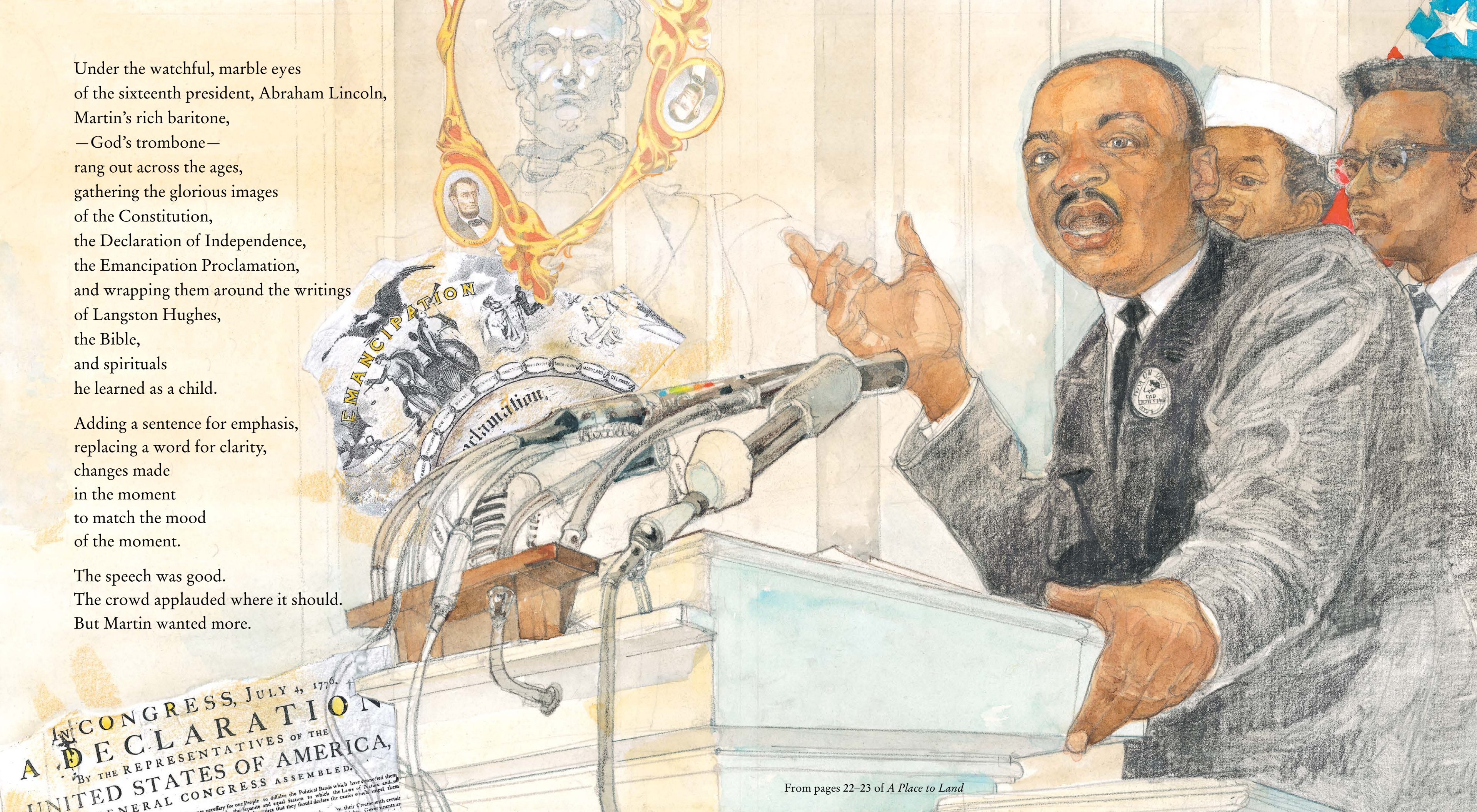
He removed the folded white sheet of paper
from the pocket of his black suit,
the speech typed and finished,
but never finished,
and placed it flat onto the lectern.



Under the watchful, marble eyes
of the sixteenth president, Abraham Lincoln,
Martin's rich baritone,
—God's trombone—
rang out across the ages,
gathering the glorious images
of the Constitution,
the Declaration of Independence,
the Emancipation Proclamation,
and wrapping them around the writings
of Langston Hughes,
the Bible,
and spirituals
he learned as a child.

Adding a sentence for emphasis,
replacing a word for clarity,
changes made
in the moment
to match the mood
of the moment.

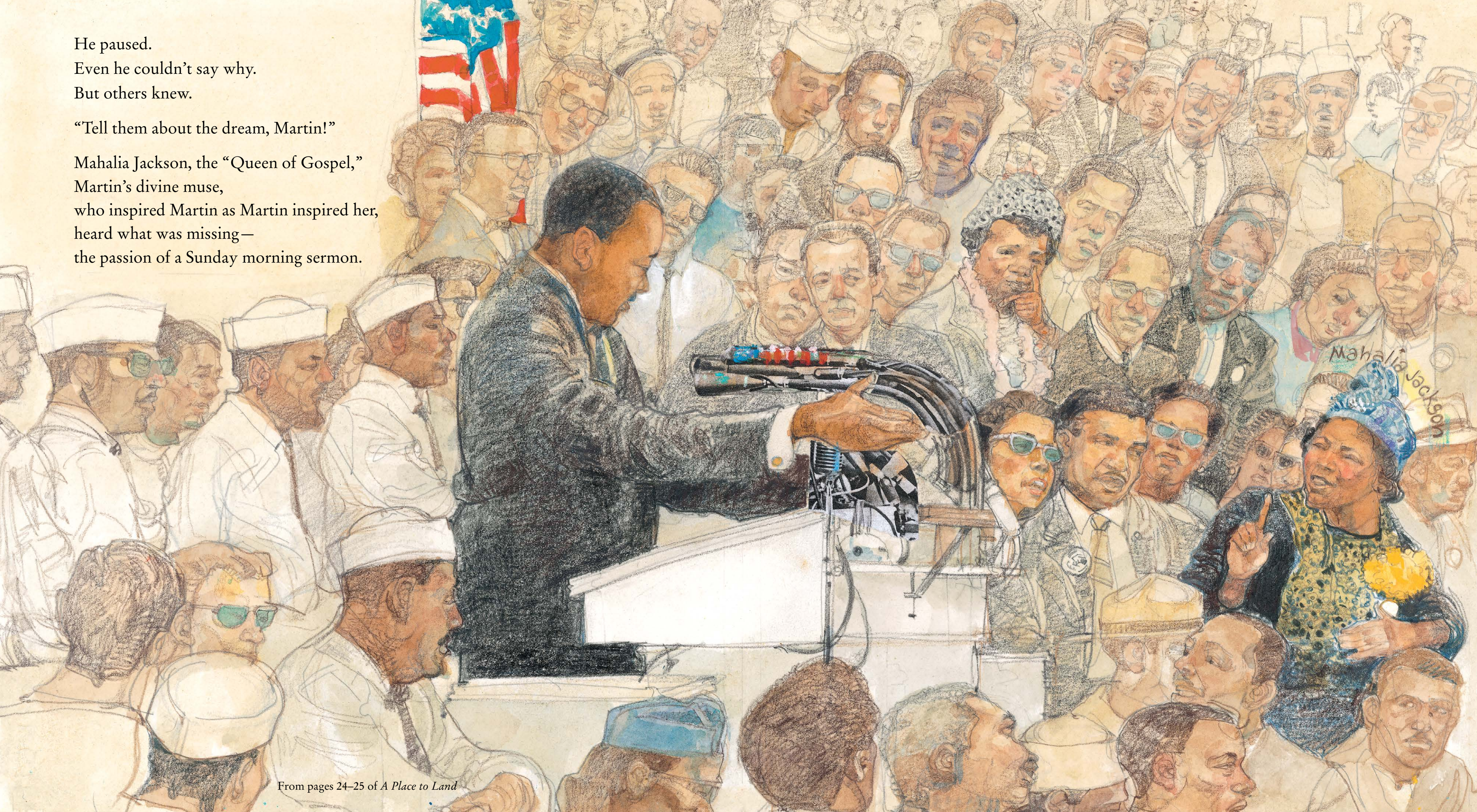
The speech was good.
The crowd applauded where it should.
But Martin wanted more.



He paused.
Even he couldn't say why.
But others knew.

"Tell them about the dream, Martin!"

Mahalia Jackson, the "Queen of Gospel,"
Martin's divine muse,
who inspired Martin as Martin inspired her,
heard what was missing—
the passion of a Sunday morning sermon.



A Note from the Author,
Barry Wittenstein

Martin Luther King Jr. arrived in Washington, D.C., on August 27, 1963, the evening before the March on Washington. His speech the next day would be heard by 250,000 in attendance, and broadcast to millions around the world. After months of organizing the massive event, agonizing over details, there was just one issue left to resolve. The speech. It was not yet finished. In fact, no final words had been put to paper. For good reason. The speech was a tightrope King had to navigate if the march was to be successful. It needed to present a compelling and convincing argument for the end of segregation, and had to put the need for integration in a historical, moral, and patriotic context. Plus, it had to speak to a number of disparate groups, each of which had its own agenda. Is there any wonder Martin was not settled on what to say, or what tone to use to say it?

The next day Martin took the podium. Reading from his prepared remarks, he sounded more university professor than preacher. Suddenly, ten minutes in, he went off script, improvising the last seven minutes of his speech into what we now know as “I Have a Dream.” While Dr. King’s powerful preaching and oratory skills were well known to the African American community, they were largely unknown and unheard by white America.

Today, however, the words “I Have a Dream” have traveled around the world, across generations, and given hope to all who are oppressed.



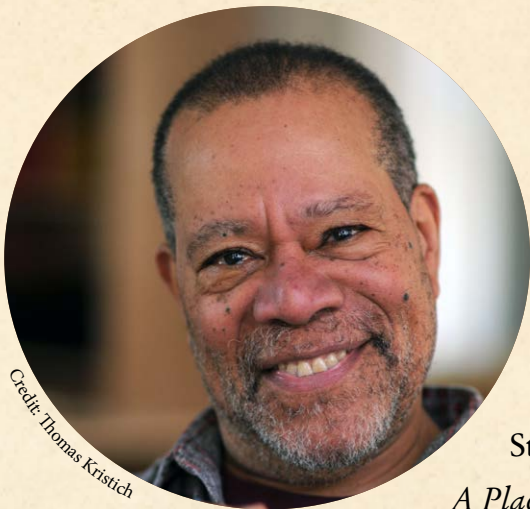
A Note from the Artist,
Jerry Pinkney

Twice now I have had the privilege of being challenged to create images honoring the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. The first was in 1979, when I designed the United States Postal Service Black Heritage Stamp commemorating MLK’s life and courage.

A Place to Land gave me an opportunity to go even deeper. In his “I Have a Dream” speech,

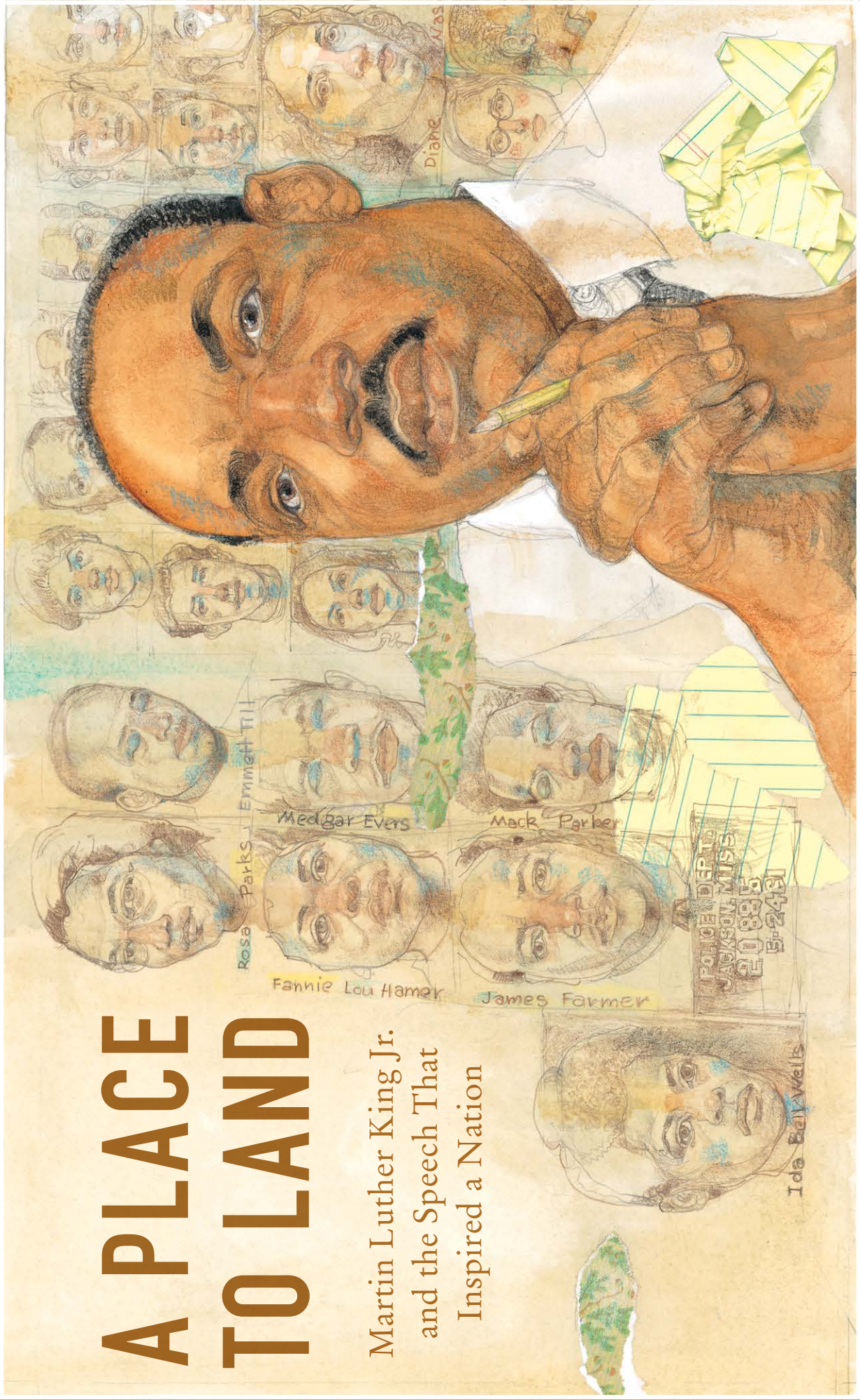
King had the audacity of aligning himself with the U.S. Constitution, which states that all men are created equal.

My task was to dramatize King’s process in drafting his remarks for that all-important hot day in August 1963, that historic touchstone in our country’s struggle to remain true to its foundation. I felt a heightened enthusiasm for how I could make my artistic practice do justice to such a monumental figure and such a potent time in American history.



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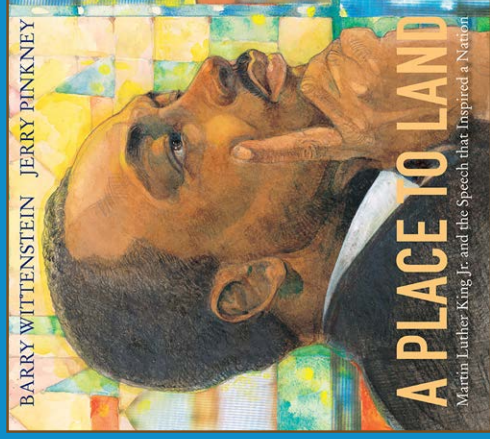
JERRY PINKNEY

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Barry Wittenstein
Illustrated by Jerry Pinkney



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