



# America's Promise

Jason Whitlock

I want to tell you something that everybody once knew, and now many have either forgotten or never learned. Pay very close attention: America promises you freedom. America does not promise you love.

Let's start with the freedom part. It's all right there in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution: Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Free speech. Freedom to practice the religion of your choice. The purpose of government is to protect your freedom. Period. America was a rough-and-tumble place in its early days. It still is. Let's hope it always remains so. You don't want to live in a country where all your needs are taken care of by the government. That's not how you become great. That's how you become dependent, vulnerable, and truly oppressed.

America is a land of opportunity for anyone of any color. Just follow some basic rules—get an education, work hard, act responsibly—and you'll have a good shot at a good life. But you might also fail. You might fail a bunch of times... and then succeed. Or you might succeed and blow it all. That's America—a never-ending dance of risk and reward. All made possible by freedom.

Freedom is America's source of power, and the denial of that power to black people and others at the inception of this nation and for nearly 200 years after its founding remains a stain and a source of pain. Yes, some of the Founders had slaves. But almost all of them knew that it was morally wrong and would one day end.

When Thomas Jefferson wrote the words, "All men are created equal," the slavery question was resolved. The only issue was how and when. And it took a lot longer than it should have. But it did end. And a lot of good people died on the battlefield to see that it did. And when it ended, giants like Booker T. Washington and Frederick Douglass understood that black Americans would have to succeed on their own as free men and women. They had no illusions that the government would save them. They only wanted what all Americans should ever want the government to do: protect their freedom.

But the Founders never promised love—not to whites or blacks or anyone else. During his famous "I have a dream speech," Martin Luther King referenced freedom 20 times. He never once spoke the word "love." Why not? Because America has nothing to do with that. If you want love—and we all do—look to God, your family, and your friends. The government doesn't love you and isn't supposed to. The government is a poor and abusive provider. It offers the bare minimum and fosters a dependency that undermines freedom.

During the 2020 "Black Lives Matter" season, NBA players actually wore jerseys with the

slogan “Love Us” emblazoned on the back. You can’t demand love from people. Love is freely given, or not given at all. Telling people not to call you this name or that name, or not to act this way or that way—consciously or unconsciously—because it offends you will not bring you love.

Love is your mother’s smile or that look your kid gives you when you come home from work. Love is that man or woman who protects you when you’re scared and provides a home where you can flourish. And love is what God offers you every moment of every day. To the government, you’re just a Social Security number—nothing more. And I’m okay with that. Because I don’t want or expect the government to know or care about me. Mostly, I want the government to leave me alone.

I’m proud to be an American. And I’m proud to be a black man in America. Blacks have made enormous contributions to this country. But let me tell you what our single greatest contribution has been: We have been this nation’s moral conscience. Blacks have forced America to live up to its best ideals. Our righteous pursuit of freedom—pursuit of *freedom*, not love—compelled this nation to seek and find its better self.

It’s been a long, hard road. But we’re close to Dr. King’s promised land. We have reached the mountaintops in politics, in medicine, in space, in literature, in sports, in music, in business. No other majority-white country has ever been led by a black man or woman.

Blacks can demand opportunity. That’s every American’s right. We can demand freedom. That’s every American’s right. But we can’t demand love. That’s no one’s right. And that brings me back to God.

Blacks have suffered mightily and prospered mightily in America. But in our long journey, we’ve always been headed in the right direction. Until now. Because we have taken a wrong turn—away from God where we have, as a community, always found strength and solace—and toward government, which offers us nothing but empty promises.

I’m Jason Whitlock for Prager University.