

Retorical essay

[Politics](#), [Civil Rights](#)



During the mid-20th Century, racism was a huge issue in the United States, which the most prominent was the racism of African-Americans. Although all blacks were supposed to be free, under a corrupt law system, blacks were victimized mercilessly. Therefore, blacks decided to try and change the system and multiple civil rights activists and groups appeared. The most notable activist of them was Martin Luther King Jr. of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, or the SCLC (Martin Luther King, Jr. Biography).

Throughout the 1960s, King engaged in various civil rights boycotts and protests, helping to further the movement and gaining its eventual victory. Out of all of his civil rights-related efforts, the "I Have a Dream" speech, given on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial during the "March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom" in 1963 ("March on Washington For Jobs and Freedom"). The speech had a massive impact as it managed to illustrate the racist problems of the time and provoke the audience into feeling sympathy while providing hope to the depressed African-American population.

Sadly, the speech also made the movement and King very popular, making his opponents treat him as a threat, causing him to be assassinated 4 years later and he was unable to enjoy the fruits of his work. The reason for "I Have a Dream" massive impact is due to the tense social mood of the time and that it reflects the conditions of the time, giving black activists a vision for the future. It struck directly into the hearts of blacks across America, made whites ashamed of their actions and willing to have a new start and shook society to its roots.

In just 17 minutes, King influenced and informed the generations and generations of people about racial equality and fairness. According to almost all scholars, the seventeen-minute speech is a masterpiece of rhetoric (Edwards). This is obvious when analyzing the speech as one can notice that King carefully structures his speech to appeal to the different types of audience, supporting it with the three rhetorical modes of ethos, pathos and logos which are reinforced with different rhetorical tropes and schemes, marking King's name in history.

The most important of any speech is its structure - something which King does extremely well in his speech by showing the plight of the Negroes, showing the truth of the civil rights movement and that there is hope in the future. Basically, the speech's structure is intended to appeal to the three types of audiences likely to be listening to King's speech - the average blacks who are discriminated against, the average whites who harbor thoughts typical of that time and the militant blacks and racist supremacists who argue that blacks are evil and the civil rights movement is violent.

In the first part of his speech, King, cleverly paints a picture of the plight of the Negroes and thoroughly describes their condition. For example, in the start of the essay, King says that the life of the blacks is "crippled by the manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination" and that the blacks are living on a "lonely island of poverty" in the midst of a "vast ocean of material prosperity. This first makes the whites realize how the blacks are in a terrible plight and make them dislike their actions while striking deep into the hearts of blacks as this clearly paints out their situation. Further on, King continues to emphasize this by continuing to list examples of the Negroes'

problems, which continues to strike at the Negroes as they are stirred by descriptions of their sadness and makes whites uncomfortable as they think that they are the ones responsible for this.

Also, King makes references to how America has literally broken their promise to the Negroes by refusing them the rights granted in the Constitution. Therefore, the plight of the Negroes is not their fault; it is the fault of the whites. One problem with the civil rights movement, however, is that many enemies of the movement argue that activists of the movement act aggressively and use violent methods to seek their goals. This has caused many people to lose their support for their movement.

In order to stop this, King, who was a public face for the movement at the time, states that the Negroes must conduct their struggle “ on the high plane of dignity and discipline” and must not allow their “ creative protest to degenerate into physical violence” for the “ marvelous new militancy which has engulfed the Negro community must not lead us to a distrust of all white people. ” Later, near the end of his speech, King continues to “ preach” this point, for example by stating that he has a dream that “ little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers. Through this, King intends to say that the black militants are not supported by the majority of the civil rights movement and that the movement is intent on reaching their goals nonviolently. This also has the additional effect making the whites uncomfortable when they think how the blacks are not really the savages they think they are and are instead dignified, honorable people who continue to endure and that the whites are the true savage beasts. However, this is not the end.

After portraying multiple examples of white brutality and the pain of the Negro people, however, King knows that it is important to give the Negro people a message of hope. Therefore, at the very end, King starts to talk about the future and how one day, freedom will “ring” from all across the United States and how people of all races will be able to “join hands” and be “brothers and sisters.” Overall, King intelligently uses a well-planned structure to manipulate his audience into agreeing with him by painting an image of the Negroes’s plight.

In his speech, in order to back up his basic structure King uses rhetorical modes, one of which is pathos, or the mode of utilizing human emotions, by making his audience no longer hate Negroes and instead hate racism and wish for a new, better world, which is part of the structure of his essay. King tries his best in the speech to make the audience sympathize with the Negroes, dislike racism and then be filled with hope of a new world without racism by using strong adjectives and metaphors.

For example, King constantly describes the Negroes as being “crippled” by the “manacles of segregation” and “chains of discrimination.” Through this, King makes the audience feel that the Negroes are in great calamity; as if the Negroes had committed a crime and have to be restrained, something which King emphasizes on when he compares the situation of the Negroes as to being stranded on a “lonely island of poverty” while everybody else around them are indulging in a “ocean of material prosperity. Therefore, through this, the audience realizes how it is not because the Negroes are stupid that they live in poverty, but because the white American society is literally holding them back. Later, King then aims to make the audience hate

racism by giving them a metaphor: that racism is a “ dark and desolate valley” while racial justice is a “ sunlit path. ” It results in the audience first realizing that their society is in that dark and desolate valley then thinking that without racism, the American society could then climb onto the sunlit path of racial justice. Throughout his speech, King does this again and again, such as writing that black children are “ stripped of their selfhood” and dignity by “ signs stating ‘ For Whites Only’” and that black people are “ judged by the color of their skin” instead of the “ content of their character. ” This all serves to make the audience feel ashamed of racism. Finally, King paints a picture of his vision and hope in the audience’s mind by repeating “ I have a dream” followed by optimistic statements, repeating “ Let freedom ring! and that one day all of “ God’s children,” no matter what their race or color, will be able to be brothers and sisters without racial injustice. Overall, King effectively uses pathos in his speech, guiding the audience’s feelings to go along his plans and making them sympathize with Negroes, hate racism and be filled with a hope of an equal world. Other than pathos, King also utilizes the other two modes of rhetoric, ethos and logos, the art of using social ethics and logic and examples, although logos is used far less frequently compared to the other two modes.

These two modes help in King’s structure to make the audience think that the whites have lied and broken their promises to the Negroes. In the late beginning of his speech of his speech, King writes that when America was founded, “ the Constitution and Declaration of Independence” stated that all men, black or white, were to be granted the same rights. However, nowadays, America has not kept its promise to the black people - King

compares this to having given Negroes “ a bad check,” a check which has come back marked “ insufficient funds” despite the “ promissory note” of the “ Constitution and Declaration of Independence”.

Ethically, most people believe that it is necessary to keep a promise. Therefore, this puts racism in a whole new light: that racism is not justified as the US has failed to deliver their promises. This helps in making whites uncomfortable about their actions - something important in King’s structure. Later on, King mentions that racial equality can only be achieved until “ justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream. ” This deliberately makes the audience think that racial segregation is wrong and against basic moral principles.

Finally, King also attacks the enforcers of racial segregation, or the police, by citing “ police brutality” and insufficient living conditions for the prisoners. Meanwhile, the one example of logos in the speech is when King refers to the Emancipation Proclamation Lincoln signed 100 years earlier. King writes in the very beginning that “ five score years ago,” Lincoln signed the “ Emancipation Proclamation” that declared slaves free and blacks were no longer to be treated like property.

King uses this piece of evidence to show that even Lincoln, one of the most admired men in US history, supported the freeing of blacks, creating an ethos appeal through the logos of Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation. However, there is also a logos appeal as well because when audiences think about it, the Emancipation Proclamation, or the order to free slaves and start of racial equality, had been written a hundred years ago.

Yet, in all that time, the idea of racial equality, instead of increasing, had decreased. Therefore, America should start adopting the ideas of racial equality. In summary, King's speech also utilizes the modes of ethos and logos in the first half of his speech as the civil rights movement is based heavily in ethics and to show that Lincoln, one of the most respected Americans in history, supported the freeing of blacks and since it has been one hundred years since the black equality movement really started.

To assist in his rhetorical modes, King uses rhetorical tropes in his modes such as when he alludes to several different works like the Bible, Lincoln's Gettysburg Address and Shakespeare's "Richard III" syncing King's ideas with what is considered righteous by many people, makes the audience remember important parts of the past and helps audience understand the situation, all of which are important to the success of the speech. An example of this is when King writes "justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream. This is a direct biblical allusion to Amos 5: 24 - "But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!" Another biblical allusion is when King writes that he has a dream that one day, "every valley shall be exalted," every hill and mountain "made low," all rough places will be "plain" and crooked places "straight" and that the "glory of the Lord shall be revealed." Other than the direct Christian allusion by mentioning God, this phrase also alludes the Isaiah 40: 4-5 - "Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain.

And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed." King also alludes to Psalms 30: 5 by writing "It came as a joyous daybreak to end the long night of their

captivity” as the second half of Psalms 30: 5 states, “ weeping may remain for a night, but rejoicing comes in the morning. ” All these biblical allusions remind the audience that what King says is in accordance to the Bible. Large quantities of the 1960s American population were churchgoers.

Therefore, as the audience would all hold the Bible to be righteous, by making the audience think that King words are in sync with the Bible, King manages to make the audience feel as if his arguments are all definitely righteous and should be supported. Another allusion, this time a literary one, is to Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address when King states “ Five score years ago” at the start of his speech, which is an direct allusion to the phrase “ Four score and seven years ago” at the start of the Gettysburg Address.

Due to the fact that the Gettysburg Address is also about human rights and that most people remember Lincoln as being a staunch supporter of blacks, this allusion makes the audience remember that one of the greatest men in history opposed segregation. The final allusion, also a literary allusion, is when King writes that the “ summer of the Negro’s legitimate discontent will not pass until there is an invigorating autumn of freedom and equality. ” This alludes to the opening lines of “ Richard III,” a historical play by William Shakespeare, which are “ Now is the winter of our discontent.

Made glorious summer by this sun of York. ” In “ Richard III,” the main character, Richard, and his brother, Edward, are constantly in a state of conflict. Therefore, through this allusion, King attempts to make the reader think that the situation between black and white men are the same - both are technically “ brothers,” yet are both struggling and fighting against each other. The allusions used by King reinforces his message as they make it

seems to be in sync with the Bible and make the audience that like the story of “ Richard III,” black and white men, technically “ brothers,” are battling each other.

Through these allusions, King intends to support his ethos as the Bible is a great source of ethics, Lincoln is historically famous for his ethical beliefs and because an allusion to “ Richard III” invokes the ethic that brothers should not discriminate against each other. Metaphors, another useful rhetorical trope, are essential to help audiences fully understand an idea as it compares an idea with something the audience is familiar with, which is important to bring out modes such as ethos and pathos. King uses a series of more complicated metaphors in the middle of his essay.

He claims that by “ the Constitution and Declaration of Independence,” the forefathers of America were “ signing a promissory note” that all men, whatever color, would be granted the same rights. However, King then says in the view of the Negroes, the US government have given the Negroes a “ bad check,” a bad check that does not promise them the same results that have been given to the white population. Later on, King says that many equal rights activists have been “ battered by the storms of persecution” and the “ winds of police brutality. Through this metaphor, King paints the upholders of the Jim Crow laws, the laws suppressing blacks (Jim Crow Laws), in a bad light. These two metaphors both relate to ethos as the first metaphor invokes the ethic of keeping your promises while the second metaphor involves torture, something which most of the American population was against. Finally, King uses several last metaphors when he writes that with faith, it is possible to transform the “ jangling discords” of

our nation into a “ beautiful symphony of brotherhood. This metaphor, on the other hand, is related to pathos as the audience immediately feels good due to the King’s choice of words. All of these metaphors are aimed to make the audience realize that continued racial injustice will lead to total chaos while racial equality leads to a beautiful society. Overall, the metaphors King uses are effective to support the ethos and pathos as they make the audience realize that the US have cheated the Negroes, that those who uphold the Jim Crow laws are evil and that it is possible to transform the US society.

Like the metaphor, the simile is useful to help the audience understand ideas and is also part of the rhetorical modes. Examples of the simile in King’s speech is when he writes that the Emancipation Proclamation came “ as a joyous daybreak” to the black slaves to end the “ long night of their captivity. ” This simile tells and emphasizes to the audience how the Emancipation Proclamation was a great “ beacon of hope” to the slaves and how they rejoiced when they received the news.

Therefore, this also helps to make the audience delighted and happy for the Negroes, which means they become saddened when King tells them how 100 years later, the Negroes, however, are still not free. Also, this simile fits the mood of the speech as the speech occurred near the Lincoln Memorial. King implies to this by writing that the Emancipation Proclamation was signed by a “ great American” whose “ symbolic shadow” they stand in. Other similes are “ justice rolls down like waters” and “ righteousness like a mighty stream. These similes intend to tell the audience that King and his friends will not stop until justice comes down and sweep away all racism and injustice King also uses a rhetorical question, the final trope in his speech -“

when will you be satisfied? ” in his speech in order to trigger a flood of answers and to stir up the feelings of blacks. In the middle part of his speech, King writes that some whites ask black activists when blacks will be satisfied. King then writes that blacks will not be satisfied as long as there is racism.

First, King is answering many whites: blacks will not be satisfied until everybody is equal. Then, King stirs up the feelings of the blacks with his question when he includes all sorts of examples of racial injustice to colored people when he answers himself. This is intended to support pathos as it is effective in stirring up the black audience’s feelings and anger. The rhetorical question is useful to King because they answer questions posed by the whites and stir up the Negroes’ feelings about racism.

Other than tropes, though, King uses schemes as well, such as epistrophe. He uses epistrophe when he writes “ With this faith we will be able to work together, to pray together, to struggle together, to go to jail together, to stand up for freedom together, knowing that we will be free one day. ” Epistrophe, which is when a certain word at the end of a clause is repeated again and again, is effective in this case as it puts emphasis on the fact that the civil rights movement will always work together and will never forget or leave anybody to suffer alone.

Without this, many civil rights activists might come under the impression that they have been forgotten whenever they got arrested or prosecuted and would stop working for the civil rights movement. King utilizes this to support his pathos as it effectively motivates the civil rights movement. Therefore, the world is informed that the civil rights movements are united together

and to all activists they are not alone. Martin Luther King uses anaphora multiple times in his speech as it is also closely related to the rhetorical mode of pathos.

Examples are when he repeats " One hundred years later" three times in one paragraph and " Now is the time" four times in another paragraph. Through constant repetition, King aims to emphasize his point in the reader's mind. Another example, when asked when Negroes will be satisfied, King repeats " We will not be satisfied" multiple times, followed by an example of injustice suffered by African-Americans - which impresses on the audience (this was broadcast on live TV as well) that blacks will not stop until they are not discriminated against.

Other than those occasions, there are other examples, such as when King writes " I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed..." " 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 the table of brotherhood.... every valley shall be exalted...and the glory of the Lord...shall see it together. " By repeating " I have a dream," King emphasizes the fact that he can see a new America, an America free from racial injustice and cruelty.

King also writes how " let freedom ring from the prodigious hilltops of New Hampshire...from Stone Mountain of Georgia...Lookout Mountain of Tennessee...hill and molehill of Mississippi...let freedom ring. " The anaphora used here emphasizes King's point and wish for freedom from all parts of the nation, evidenced by how he references to places all over America. It also backs up King's pathos as the constant repetition is very useful for arousing

the audience's emotions, especially when combined with the moving content anaphora is often used in conjunction with.

Overall, the multiple use of anaphora in King's speech emphasizes the point to the audience that the blacks will not stop until the Jim Crow laws are gone and that when those laws are gone, a new America will emerge. Throughout the speech, another scheme King uses frequently is parallelism, the strategy of repeating similar clauses, several times. Parallelism is useful to emphasize things and ideas to the audience, which, like all the other tropes and schemes. Early in his speech, King writes "riches of freedom" and "security of justice" and then "justice rolls down like waters" and "righteousness like a mighty stream. In these two examples, King is using parallelism to express that the African American wants justice and freedom by repeating them next to each other and mentally connecting them in the reader's mind, which is also connected with pathos as the terms King uses subtly emphasize those words and create good feelings in the reader. As campaigning Negroes have been prosecuted by the police, King makes a mention of them when he writes that those activists have been "battered by the storms of persecution" and "staggered by the winds of police brutality. This emphasizes to the audience that many racial demonstrators, despite being brutally treated (which supports ethos as it is a reference to police brutality), have not given up on their efforts. At the end of his speech, King uses parallelism two more times when he writes "Let freedom ring" multiple times followed by "from (American place name)." King decides to again emphasize the importance of freedom by using parallelism and by

mentioning place names to implant in the reader of how they should “ let freedom ring” from across the US.

Finally to cap his speech King writes how one day when “ all of God’s children,” no matter if they are “ black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics” will be able to sing together “ in the words of the old Negro spiritual, ‘ Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty, we are free at last! ’” In this case, King expresses how all people in the world, despite their differences, are God’s children and should not be discriminated against by putting almost all of the different groups of people together in a parallel structure.

Both of those two final examples are pathos-related as the first example creates good feelings and is inspirational while the final example creates hope for the future in the audience. In summary, parallelism connects different points and, like all other devices, tells the audience of how blacks want justice and that how all people of the world should not be discriminated against. Antithesis is when two utterly different ideas are put together, which is useful for grabbing attention and emphasizing.

King uses it in his speech in order to express all his points. First, King writes that “ the Negro lives on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity. ” This antithesis makes the audience realize that the Negroes have been left behind and ignored while the rest of modern society has charged forward into prosperity and fortune. From this revelation, the audience will also realize that it is no fault of the Negro that they have been left behind - in contrast, modern society have been dragging them back through racism.

In order to dispel any misguided ideas that whites have of the Negroes' fortune, King tells them directly that Negroes are in poverty as everybody is blocking them from entering the ocean of "material prosperity." The second time King uses antithesis is when he states that "Nineteen Sixty-Three is not an end, but a beginning," which he aims to express that the revolution will not stop at 1963; rather it will have a new beginning. Finally, King uses antithesis one more time at the end of his speech, when he writes "when all of God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands. The pairs he mentions are all the direct opposites of each other, yet he says that they will all join hands together and be friends. King implies that one day, all differences will fall away as, no matter what our race and color, we are God's children. Overall, antithesis is used by King to grab the audience's attention and emphasize to them that the Negroes' poverty is the fault of the whites, that the revolution will not end at the Washington march and that all men are God's children.

Finally, the last scheme used by King is the isocolon, or repetition of grammatical structure in several clauses, as it builds rhythm and can be used to connect ideas. An example of this is when King writes "Go back to Mississippi, go back to Alabama, go back to South Carolina, go back to Georgia, go back to Louisiana." Through this use of isocolon, King lifts the hearts of blacks and tells them not to give up and continue their cause as someday, the blacks will be free from discrimination.

Although those place names King mentions means nothing to the bystander, the audience King was facing would have recognized them as places where segregation was strictly enforced. Another example of isocolon is in the final

part of King's speech, when he writes " from every village and everyhamlet, from every state and every city" after writing about freedom ringing from all parts of America. This isocolon simply summarizes his claim of freedom ringing everywhere. It creates a good rhythm and connects ideas.

These two usages of isocolon are intended to boost the pathos of King's speech as they both boost the emotions of the audience. Overall, King uses the isocolon to tell blacks to never give up as one day, freedom will ring everywhere. Although all of the rhetorical strategies are interesting, the most important aspect is how they relate to each other and the effect they create. As the structure of " I Have a Dream" is vital to its success, King carefully tries to relate all of his rhetorical strategies with his structure.

For example, part of King's structure is intended to make the audience harbor bad feelings about racism. To achieve this, King uses the rhetorical strategy of pathos along with metaphors and other rhetorical tropes and schemes to make the audience feel for the blacks. Also, King carefully chooses the rhetorical strategies in his essay in order to make them fit with the structure. For example, anaphora and parallelism combines in the speech to create the famous " I have a dream" and " let freedom ring" repetition.

The constant repetition coupled with King's deep inspirational voice serves to inspire the audience, audible when cheers are heard in the recording of King's speech as he says " I have a dream" and " let freedom ring. " After hearing these repetitions, the viewer is filled with hope. This is in alignment with King's structure as King intends for the end to be about hope for the future and those two repetitions both occur at the end. In brief, the rhetorical

strategies of King's speech combine to create a combining effect, supporting and reinforcing each other.

In conclusion, Martin Luther King, Jr's most famous speech was the " I Have a Dream" speech given in 1963 during one of the most famous marches in history, the 200, 000-strong " March on Washington For Jobs and Freedom. " At the time, America was in the grips of racism and segregation, making the lives of many blacks living hell. " I Have a Dream," however, played a major step into changing it. It managed to inspire a generation of blacks to never give up and made thousands of white Americans bitterly ashamed of their actions, forging a new start for society.

Even now, it continues to make generations of people, not just Americans, to give up their racist beliefs and advocate social colorblindness. Without King, America would be probably still heavily segregated. Other than the speech's heartwarming and moving content, King's effective structure along with the usage of all three rhetorical modes and certain rhetorical tropes and schemes has revealed the reason " I Have a Dream" as a masterpiece of rhetoric and it persuades hundreds of thousands of people support the blacks instead of treating them unfairly.

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