

# Notes of a native son vs. letter from a birmingham jail essay sample

[Sociology](#), [Racism](#)



Baldwin and King apply first-person narratives, allowing the audience to experience an immediate encounter toward the authors situation at the time. Baldwin starts the essay with my father died. This short but poignant sentence not only sets the tone for the whole story, but also engages the audience to share his despair, hatred and relief. Similarly, Kings holograph sounds professional and convincing because his first-person defense clearly reasons why his nonviolent protest is necessary through the constant repetition of I hope and I must. King, as the leader of the civil rights movement, uses the repetition of the first-person defense to strengthen his argumentation. Yet King, unlike Baldwin, engages the audience by directly addressing them in the second-person narrative, I hope you, and appeals together with the audience, we must, we will to shows his commitment and care for the people. Also, Baldwin and King focus on the issue of race segregation and unjust treatment that African-Americans undergo. Baldwin is inspired by his fathers death, which brings him some understanding about his fathers life and reasons for his fathers paranoia. This understanding helps him know the truth that African-Americans are receiving unjust treatment, which becomes the theme of the essay. Eventually his purpose is to come up with ways to face this unfair reality, through acceptance or by reaching equal power.

Focusing on the same theme of segregation, King responds to the issue of injustice among blacks and whites by convincing the audience, who are the unwise and untimely critics, that only through nonviolent direct protest, could the conference be informed of the seriousness of the issue. Focusing on the similar theme of race relations, Baldwin and King apply similar literary

techniques. They both use antithesis to show the injustice existing in the world they belong to. In *Notes of a Native Son*, Baldwin contrasts the death of his father and the life stirred within his mother's womb. In some ways, the death is a symbol standing for his gradually fading hatred toward his father, as well as the death of his ideal of equal rights to exist for all black Americans. As for the newly born baby (him in his mother's womb), both the race riot that broke out in Harlem and Baldwin's new understanding of racial discrimination could be considered forms of birth because of their newness. As in *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*, King contrasts just and unjust laws in several ways. If it uplifts the human personality, or develops the free will of a minority, then it is considered a just law.

His contract further convinces the reader that African-Americans are living under a great injustice, and the act of solving this injustice cannot be deferred. Both writers apply repetition to reinforce their statements. When Baldwin was refused service in several restaurants, he mentions the waiter's response "we don't serve Negroes here" three times, in order to highlight the unfair treatment that African-Americans face in the real world, unlike what he once thought. Similarly, King repeats "justice more than ten times justice too long delayed is justice denied," and this repetition gives the readers a sense of urgency to deal with the racial problem as soon as possible, furthering proving that immediate action is right. In addition, both authors utilize similes and metaphors to visualize an abstract idea. When Baldwin entered a dim street during the time called the brownout, he compares the feeling of being crushed among white passengers to a physical sensation of

disconnecting his head from his body, a vivid description of his inner tension and fear. Similarly, King describes that if the white moderates fail to understand the purpose of establishing justice, they would become the dangerously structured dams that block the flow of social progress.

This metaphor vividly warns the audience of the urgency to establish just laws. Although sharing lots of similarities in themes and writing techniques, there are still differences in their tone and diction. In *Notes of a Native Son*, the tone is emotional and intense. Baldwin constantly emphasizes his hatred and despair toward his father, bitterness that his father once suffered, and anger toward the discrimination he constantly undergoes in restaurants. All his negative feelings were shown through pathos that Baldwin applies in his writing. But in *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*, the tone is more objective, logical and convincing. Since it is a letter responding to a criticism, King applies historical facts (such as the refusal of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego) to show how common it was for civil disobedience to exist and be relentlessly pursued throughout history. Mostly, King applies ethos. He logically comes up with rhetorical questions to change the critics perspective and indirectly proves their criticism to be wrong. When others point out that Kings peaceful actions potentially set higher possibilities for violence, King challenges their logic by asking whether it is right to condemn a victim of robbery of making too much money to be robbed.

His logical defense successfully indicates mistakes in his critics censure.

Moreover, there are differences in their writing techniques. Baldwin mostly uses his personal experience to recount the process when he realizes racial

discrimination. He creates imagery to provide the readers a visual strike that allows them to better experience the emotions he underwent smashed plate glass, moving toward me, against me, and that everyone was white and mob to swell and to spread in every direction. These visuals describe a depressed funeral scene, a crushed and pressured alley full of white people that if we were to look from a birds eye view, we would see a dot of black shadow amidst an overwhelming whiteness. Yet King does not create much imagery instead, he provides a literal strike. King applies parallelism and anaphora to rhythmically state his determination in taking direct actions. When you have seen vicious mobs...when you have seen hate-filled policemen...when you see the vast majority of yourbrothers smothering in an airtight cage of poverty, when sentences applied anaphora repeat for ten times (in this case), they become a mental emphasis that pushes the audience to believe people in these specific conditions cannot wait to greet a just law.

They need immediate actions like what King has done. It also abashes his critics on their myopic assertion that cares not about a broader circle of people. Also, he applies anaphora in his call for actions let him marchlet him have his prayer He lists ways that oppressed people stand up to fight for racial justice, indirectly telling the white preachers to sympathize and give liberty to the oppressed. Moreover, King applies a variety of literary allusions that serve to historically support his contentions. Most of his references allude to the Bible, which not only shows his knowledge of religion and faith, but also helps him connect to his white audience who are mostly religious leaders. For instance, when he distinguishes just and unjust laws, he calls

upon the Catholic saying that Any law that uplifts human personality is just. Any law that degrades human personality is unjust. King supports himself by referring to what has been evidenced in history which leaves no ambiguity for the readers to suspect his defense.

Baldwin is writing for all African-Americans, and King is responding specifically to the white readers. Aiming toward different audiences, Baldwin and King place different emphasis on the purpose of their writing. Baldwin believes that there still exists African-Americans idealizing an equal racial treatment, so by applying ethos, Baldwin is able to correct their misguided beliefs his words are a wake-up call for those who are in denial about reality. King applies more pathos to logically describe the urgency of pushing forward nonviolent protest, and also to draw the readers sympathy toward the unjust treatment of black Americans his words are a defense for the advancement of racial justice. The literary techniques they apply contribute to better represent the essences of both essays, where antithesis, repetitions, parallels and literary allusions all serve to emphasize the authors purposes. Therefore, the two remarkable essays establish peoples awareness to solve racial discrimination urgently. Angela Fang Y, 6Q