

# Argument essay: ethos vs. pathos and logos

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Pathos, logos, and ethos are rhetorical devices that appeal to our emotions, logic, and morals respectively. Out of these three, ethos is the most effective in influencing our actions as morals are shared among many people and are the things that guide us through our lives—they motivate us to do what is morally right and to put an end to what is morally wrong. Martin Luther King, Jr. often utilized ethos in his speeches in order to motivate his listeners into taking action to end racial inequality and injustice. In his speech, “ I Have A Dream,” King often alluded to significant people and symbols of America.

He starts off stating, “ Five score years ago a great American in whose symbolic shadow we stand today signed the Emancipation Proclamation,” alluding to the document that ended slavery and freed all African Americans. However, even “ 100 years later the Negro is still not free” as he is still “ badly crippled by the manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination.” King’s strong use of language following his allusion to the Emancipation Proclamation appeals to the listeners’ morals that humans are not objects and that justice needs to be upheld—Americans fought to bring justice against the inhumane way slaves were treated and slavery itself in the Civil War, and in the end they should follow through with their decision. Furthermore, Martin Luther King, Jr. also refers to the Declaration of Independence and Constitution, stating that all men “ would be guaranteed the unalienable rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

” When this statement is compared to the reality of the present time, it highlights the fact that these unalienable rights have yet to be recognized for all men, as African Americans were still subjected to racial inequality and injustice. This further instills the fact that African Americans are treated

unfairly, despite the fact that they were citizens—Americans—allowed the same rights as other Americans, further appealing to his listeners' morals regarding human equality and the need to uphold justice. By appealing to his listeners' morals, he motivates them to bring about justice for the African Americans and their rights as citizens and humans, winning over a large number of his listeners—both white Americans and African Americans. His mild approach and appeals to the morality of audience gained him many supporters that eventually created a movement that ended racial injustice and inequality, providing irrefutable evidence that Martin Luther King, Jr. was one of the most influential leaders in African American history despite his more mild approach compared to other orators of his time.

While many would argue that pathos would be more effective in inciting actions from people, it often leads to violence and can become too militant in nature. Consider Malcolm X who mostly used pathos in order to invoke emotions of anger and resentment within his listeners in his speeches, most notably in “ The Ballot or The Bullet” and “ Who Taught You to Hate Yourself.” His speeches incited anger and resentment against white Americans in his African Americans listeners, and in turn he created enemies against himself, losing the support of white Americans that may have otherwise supported the end of racial injustice and inequality. His use of pathos may have incited strong support in his movement, but it also created numerous enemies, leaving his number of supporters lower than it would have been if he had appealed to more than just African Americans. Likewise, logos is not as effective as ethos in motivating others to take actions, as

while it may appeal to a larger audience like ethos, not many people follow the same logic or reasoning.

In addition, while people may see the logic in one's argument it does not guarantee support for a cause, as people may not be easily persuaded. For example, Mahatma Gandhi's use of logos and non-violent non-cooperation may have gathered a large number of supporters from other Indians, but in the end it was not able to convince the British court to take actions to end British Imperialism of India as Gandhi was still sentenced to six years' imprisonment. Even though pathos may create a more dedicated and fervent group of supporters and logos may appeal to a large amount of people like ethos, in the end, ethos is more effective in motivating people to take actions as it provides a common perspective of what is right and what is wrong. Unlike pathos, ethos does not always lead to the alienation of others or violent actions and unlike logos, ethos appeals to morals that tell us what is right and what is wrong.