

The need to disobey

[Literature](#), [Books](#)



The Need to Disobey Both Antigone by Sophocles and “ Letter from Birmingham Jail” (“ LBJ”) by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (MLK) are stories which portray the theme of civil disobedience. Antigone is a play written by Sophocles that takes place in Thebes, Greece. Antigone arrives in Thebes and learns that both of her brothers died in war. Her brother Eteocles has been given a proper burial while Creon, the King of Thebes, refuses to bury her other brother Polynices because he was a traitor. Antigone chooses to break the law and buries her brother, and gets caught.

Despite the pleas of Antigone and Haemon, Creon’s son and Antigone’s fiance, Creon sentences Antigone to death by live burial and starvation. Feeling that it is a better option than taking the sentence, Antigone hangs herself, and when Haemon finds her, he kills himself out of despair. Queen Eurydice, Haemon’s mother and Creon’s wife, kills herself with a sharp knife. Creon is left in sorrow and distress when he too late finds that he has made a fatal mistake. On the other hand, “ Letter from Birmingham Jail” is an essay written by MLK that he wrote in the city jail in Birmingham, Alabama.

He had been arrested for parading without a permit during his non-violent protest against racial segregation. His letter is addressed to the “ fellow clergymen” who criticized his work. Both writings have a character who defies the civil law because it breaks the moral law. However, the writings are also different in many ways. Overall, MLK’s “ LBJ” is better than Sophocles’ Antigone. Firstly, “ LBJ” is better than Antigone because the theme is portrayed in a more positive and successful way.

In Antigone, it is clear that civil disobedience brought Antigone to an untimely death as Creon finds out, “ Too late, too late you see what justice

means" (p. 124, l. 1400-1401). Though Antigone fully disobeys Creon's law by burying her brother, her actions are not successful and lead to her death instead of her triumph. Only after she dies, Creon realizes that she did it for a just cause, but he is unable to turn back time and is left in despair. However, MLK is more successful in addressing the problem before it is too late, " Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere" (pp. , p. 1). MLK explains that the injustice of racial prejudice he sees in the South cannot be ignored because, even if one is not part of it, it is morally wrong and unacceptable. MLK makes a more direct point that civil disobedience is necessary, and he is more effective in directly influencing the people around him, while in the play Antigone, Antigone is unable to influence Creon. " LBJ" is not only more successful in carrying out the theme, but is also more credible than Antigone. Since it is more credible, " LBJ" is better than Antigone.

Antigone is a play that takes place in Ancient Greece, " Land of Thebes, city of all my fathers -" (p. 107, l. 1027). Though Antigone has had a tremendous impact on society, the play itself is undeniably fictional and the events in it did not actually take place. The main character, Antigone, is also fictional and was made up by Sophocles to show his point on civil disobedience. On the other hand, " LBJ" is an essay written about true events by someone who was experiencing the injustice firsthand, " I am in Birmingham because injustice is here" (pp. 3, p.). MLK's " LBJ" is clearly a nonfictional writing and is therefore much more credible and can be referenced to as a primary source in history. MLK himself is still known to be one of the most important figures in American history and his writings are a very credible source as to

why he took part in civil disobedience. " LBJ" is not only more credible, but is also does a better job in persuading the reader. The writing style of " LBJ" makes it easier to understand and therefore better than Antigone because it uses more logos rather than pathos arguments.

When Antigone appeals to Creon, she uses the argument " I was born to join in love, not hate - that is my nature" (p. 86, l. 590 - 591). Though this argument is not completely invalid, it is weak because it cannot help Antigone when it comes to the law, which does not change because of people's emotional natures. Her pathos arguments did not appeal to Creon, who insists she disobeyed the law and should receive just punishment. Another factor of the play is that it is written in dialogue which is sometimes difficult to understand and follow Antigone and Haemon's arguments.

However, MLK is much more logical in his approach to the issue he is dealing with, " In any nonviolent campaign there are four basic steps..." (pp. 2, p. 2). By explaining the steps to his campaign, MLK shows that the actions he took were perfectly necessary and logical. After going into detail about each of the four steps, MLK proves that what he did was justified by logos arguments. Additionally, the writing style of MLK's essay is very methodical and is written in modern English. However, when examining the impact of each of these works, another very important point puts " LBJ" above Antigone. LBJ" is more relatable to modern society than Antigone, which makes it better. Some of the ideas used in Antigone are no longer relevant to modern society, which is evident when Antigone speaks about her brother's burial rites, " Hasn't Creon graced one with all the rites, disgraced the other? " (p. 60, l. 27). Though burial is still important in modern times, it had a

bigger significance in Ancient Greece because they believed that not being buried meant that the person would be in eternal unrest instead of being allowed into Hades.

Therefore, the reason for Antigone's disobedience is more difficult to understand for modern people. However, MLK says, " Let us all hope that the dark clouds of racial prejudice will soon pass away and the deep fog of misunderstanding will be lifted from our fear-drenched communities, and in some not too distant tomorrow..." (pp. 4, p. 12). The reason for MLK's disobedience is much easier to understand as the issue of racial segregation is still present in modern society. It is easier to see MLK's direct impact on modern society than Sophocles' indirect way of impacting society.

This is evident as MLK writes about a " not too distant tomorrow", which is now because the essay was written in 1963. In these ways, " LBJ" is more relatable to modern society. Therefore, since it portrays the theme better, is more credible, is easier to understand, and more relatable in modern times, MLK's " LBJ" is better than Sophocle's Antigone. Another example of civil disobedience in history was in Mahatma Gandhi. Just like Antigone and King, he used nonviolent protest in an attempt to liberate the Indian people from British control.

He first led peaceful protests against excessive land taxes and reached out to including all religious groups. Later, his success was evident after he assumed leadership of the Indian National Congress in 1921 and led nationwide campaigns for many national issues. Above all, his main goal and reason for his peaceful protest was to achieve independence of India from British domination, which was against the law and a great example of civil

disobedience. His actions resemble those of MLK and Antigone, and he was even looked up to by MLK as a role model in peaceful protest, making him the prime example of civil disobedience.