

Analyzing language

[Linguistics](#), [English](#)



Presented An Analysis of Dr. Kings ' Letter from Birmingham Introduction Dr. King is a true model of civility and good citizenship. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines civility as a " polite act or expression," or " courtesy." (Merriam-Webster, April 19th 2012). Dr. King employs caution, politeness and courtesy in his address to his audience-the moderate white clergy- even as he criticizes them. For instance, he refers to one of his critics as " white brother" (King, Jr., Pg 4) and other s, " sirs" (King' Jr., pg 2), therefore demonstration much restraint even when his attitude towards those he addresses is a challenging one. He therefore succeeds in being both assertive and courteous: firm and polite, and forthright and respectful, all in one breathe.

2. Good Citizenship

In my opinion, a good citizen is one who puts the interest of society before his own; and is ready to champion a course for the common good, without necessarily seeking for personal profit. Dr King has his objectives set beyond his immediate society to global concerns. Though his primary motivation is the liberation of the African-American, he uses this opportunity to go further to other people's concerns- Jews, Asians, South Americans, Caribbeans and Africans. This concern for and awareness of global issues makes him a global citizen of sorts.

Dr. King is accommodative of other people. Even as he accuses the whites of injustice, he admits that there are some who partner with him in his course. " Some, like Ralph McGill ..., have written about our struggle in eloquent, prophetic, and understanding terms." (King Jr., pg 4). He concedes that some whites have suffered with them in jail, police brutality and being branded "

dirty nigger lovers." (King Jr., pg 4). As a good citizen, he does not condemn the entire white race, but wisely singles out the " moderate brothers" (King Jr., pg 4) whom he addresses. Besides, he condemns the " white church", but concedes that " there are some notable exceptions." (King Jr., pg 5)

Dr. King is a mediator and an advocate for non-violence. He stands "... in the middle of two opposing forces". On one end are the complacent and insensitive African-Americans; and on the other, the extreme African American who is at the verge of violence in the course of fighting for their rights. The complacent African-Americans have been so subjected to oppression "... that they have adjusted to segregation," (King, Jr. Pg 4) while the extremist African-Americans have been so frustrated by racism that they "...have lost faith in America." (King Jr. Pg 4). As a good citizen, he seeks to reconcile these two and rally for one itinerary

3. Methods Employed to Avoid Antagonizing the White Majority

Dr. King has been kind to his audience, and has succeeded in avoiding antagonizing them. As a result, he has employed the following devices, among others.

a) Quotations

He has gone far and wide-American history, Greek philosophy as well as Christianity-to borrow relevant quotes. For instance, in defending his ' extremist' conduct he asks whether Jesus Christ, who said, " Love you enemies..." (King Jr., pg 4) was an extremist.

b) References

Dr. King refers his critics to respected figures such as St. Thomas Aquinas and Socrates, in order to convince them that the prevailing situation is not

unique to America. For instance, he credits academic freedom to Socrates' civil disobedience. He seems to tickle the ego of the white moderates by comparing their resistance with historical cases.

c) Appeal to Emotion

Dr. King appeals to the emotion of his audience in the endeavor of winning their understanding. For instance, he does this by vividly describing the white regime's "...ugly and inhuman treatment of Negroes..." (King, Jr. Pg 5) such as cursing, pushing, slapping and kicking them.

d) Use of Reason

Dr. King justifies his actions by logically breaking down the reason for his actions and the steps he has taken before arriving at his present decision. He observes that " In non-violence campaigns there are four basic steps..." followed, and that he had exhausted them going to the streets. (King, Jr., Pg 1)

4. Conclusion

Dr. King is a true model of civility and good citizenship especially due to his non-confrontational (yet assertive) and polite approach to injustice. His work is as relevant today as it was in his days.

WORKS CITED

King Jr., Martin Luther, " Letter from Birmingham." The Atlanta Monthly. August 1963. Print

Merriam-Webster Dictionary, " Civility." Merriam-webster. com. Merriam-Webster, Incorporated. April 19th 2012. Web