

# Martin luther king jr. paper



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Juan Lopez Professor Lonsdale English 1A 27 September 2012 America's Freedom Call We as all Americans know of our past history, Americans were never given the same rights as every person living in America. America was known for its unequal, unjust laws, and segregation.

As a result of the segregation occurring in America, African Americans were the most involved ethnic group fighting for equal rights, as defined by in the Declaration of Independence by Thomas Jefferson: " We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness" (80). Throughout our history we have had extraordinary civil rights leaders such as Frederick Douglass, John F.

Kennedy, Abraham Lincoln, and Malcolm X who have sacrificed their lives for equal rights in the United States of America. Between the years 1958 to 1968, it was Martin Luther King Jr. who engaged in fighting for the equal rights of African Americans, primarily in the South. King was the most influential civil rights leader in America for a long period of time. During his struggle for civil rights, he was arrested in Birmingham, Alabama for a program of sit-ins at luncheon counters without a permit.

As a result of this incident, King composed a famous letter, " Letter from Birmingham Jail" in response to the criticism he received after these nonviolent demonstrations. King states in the very beginning his reasoning for writing the letter as a response to the clergymen's statement calling his " present activities unwise and untimely"(King 213). He wanted to make clear the misunderstandings from his fellow clergymen. The purpose in his letter was to clarify to them his reasons for engaging in the demonstration.

To get his reasoning across to his fellow Clergymen, King uses two compelling rhetorical strategies of logos and pathos to demonstrate his intelligence and ability to compose a direct argument for the clergymen of Birmingham. He refutes all the points that his fellow clergymen make by using logical reasoning and tells them about the unjust situation in Birmingham. In his accomplishment of the letter, King seeks to convince his fellow clergymen as well as the entire world that civil rights should be granted to African Americans along with ending segregation once and for all.

King's use of logos makes his argument strong and evident. He ratifies facts that cannot be argued. Throughout the letter he supports his technique very adequately; for example explaining the difference between a just and unjust law. In his letter King states, " Let us consider a more concrete example of just and unjust laws. An unjust law is a code that a numerical or power majority group compels a minority group to obey but does not make binding on itself. This is difference made legal. By the same token, a just law is a code that a majority compels a minority to follow and that it is willing to follow itself.

This is sameness made equal" (219). Here King is basically saying that if a majority does not follow a law, but the law is enforced on a minority, it would be difficult to argue that this is a fair ruling. Any " just" law is obligated and must be followed by all the citizens of that country, majority or minority. Another vivid logic reason in his letter is when King remarks on the crooked methods that were being used to prevent African Americans from voting in public elections. As he states, " Who can say that the legislature of Alabama which set up that state's segregation laws was democratically elected?

Throughout Alabama all sorts of devious methods are used to prevent Negroes from becoming registered voters, and there are some counties in which, even though Negroes constitute a majority of the population, not a single Negro is registered. Can any law enacted under such circumstances be considered democratically structured? " (219-220). The United States having a established legal system set up on the bases of representative democracy, meaning that the population of that country elect officials and by default, choose who makes the laws.

By delivering his used of logos, if a majority of the people is not granted to take democratic action, therefor the United States " legal system" is failing its goal. Another very effective rhetorical strategy that King uses to convince his audience his claim is pathos. King attempts to create a feeling of sympathy and proximity for the civil rights cause. To establish this point, he uses in his letter an emotional and powerful complex example to relate to the emotion felt by the African American, patiently waiting for their Constitutional rights.

It states as follow, " But when you have seen vicious mobs lynch your mothers and father .. when you have seen hate-filled policemen curse, kick, and even kill your black brothers and sisters; when you suddenly find your tongue twisted and your speech stammering as you seek to explain to your six-year-old daughter why she can't go to the public amusement park and see her beginning to distort her personality by developing an unconscious bitterness toward white people; when you are forever fighting a degeneration sense of " nobodiness"--- then you will understand why we find it difficult to wait" (King 217-218).

King acknowledges and understands that people who have never experienced segregation might not be able to fully put themselves in the position to make a fair decision through the use of pathos. He describes seeing police officers, people who are supposed to uphold the law killing African Americans or failing to enforce order when mobs make it their duty to lynch an innocent mother because of their skin color. He uses allusion as in “ your tongue twisted and your speech stammering” in describing the disgrace he felt as a father having to tell his six-year-old daughter that she was “ not good enough” to go the segregated amusement park (218).

Kings use of pathos helps visualize and focus his audience on the words and imagine a clear mental image. Lastly, through the use of specific rhetorical strategies such as logos and pathos, Martin Luther King Jr. effectively refuted the clergymen’s argument. Kings success was also due to his unique strategy of directly addressing his audience, the clergymen, to create the basis of his argument. From that point on, King was able to slowly blame and refute the clergymen’s claims.

This effective method allowed King to present his counterargument with more conviction and authority and achieve his goal: justifying the reasons for nonviolent demonstrations and ending segregation once and for all. Works Cited Jefferson, Thomas. “ The Declaration of Independence. ” A World of Ideas. Ed. Lee A. Jacobus. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2010. 77-85. Print. King Jr. , Martin Luther. “ Letter From Birmingham Jail. ” A World of Ideas. Ed. Lee A. Jacobus. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2010. 211-231. Print.