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Title: Rhetorical analysis

The “*Letter from Birmingham Jail*” was written by Martin Luther King Jr., one of the most eminent civil rights activists. The letter was written on April 16, 1963, and it serves to defend King against the clergymen’s allegations. King explains the main cause behind the civil rights movement and defends the strategy of non-violent confrontation to prejudice and injustice. The audience of King’s letter was the religious leaders, white moderates and the devout population to whom it was addressed that people have a moral right to break unjust laws and take direct action against them. Throughout the letter, King utilizes various rhetorical devices and techniques to establish himself as a legitimate leader, to highlight the trials of black Americans and to defend the cause of instantaneous actions.

Martin Luther King Jr. uses the appeal of ethos in addressing the clergymen in his letter to establish his own legitimate authority on the matter of racism and discrimination. The letter begins with the words “My Dear Fellow Clergymen”, which tells the clergymen that King is no less or better than them but owing to the injustice he is in Birmingham, “I am here because I have organizational ties here” (Letter from a Birmingham Jail [King, Jr.]). He further establishes his credibility as a member of the United States of America, “I have the honor of serving as president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, an organization operating in every southern state. We have some eighty-five affiliated organizations across the South, and one of them is the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights”. He shares the examples of philosophers, Socrates and Aquinus to reflect his knowledge and intellect. He backs his words by the philosophy of Socrates, “Just as Socrates felt that it was necessary to create a tension in the mind so that individuals could rise from the bondage of myths and half-truths”.

He also uses the appeal of pathos or emotions by showing his feelings and sympathies towards the people who suffer from discrimination and prejudice. He says that he cannot sit idle and he is highly concerned with this injustice, “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere” (Letter from a Birmingham Jail [King, Jr.]). He shows his sympathy towards the victims of racism by using the lines such as, “When you have seen vicious mobs lynch your mothers and fathers at will and drown your sisters and brothers at whim.”, and “when you have seen hate-filled policeman curse, kick, and even kill your black brothers and sisters.” He is making the reader realize that what it feels when friends and family of someone have to go through such trials. This whole paragraph makes the reader imagines the position of King and feels the pain of the sufferers. The entire paragraph is in an emotional tone, for instance, “when you have to concoct an answer for a five-year-old son who is asking: "Daddy, why do white people treat colored people so mean?" (Letter from a Birmingham Jail [King, Jr.]). He used these words to make the audience feel the strong emotion and pain as he felt himself. The persuasiveness in tone keeps the reader indulge in the emotions and make them justify his reason for writing this letter.

The third appeal that has been employed by King in the letter is the appeal of logos or logic to justify his causes for the fight for equal rights. He points out specific examples that how the law is unfair by raising several examples from the past, “We should never forget that everything Adolf Hitler did in Germany was ‘legal’ and everything the Hungarian freedom fighters did in Hungary was ‘illegal.’ It was ‘illegal’ to aid and comfort a Jew in Hitler’s Germany. Even so, I am sure that, had I lived in Germany at the time, I would have aided and comforted my Jewish brothers” (Letter from a Birmingham Jail [King, Jr.]). Here he creates an example of unjust law and how he would respond to it. Martin Luther King Jr. also encourages clerics to think of the correct cause of action and also justifies his cause of fighting for an extremist cause. “Was not Jesus an extremist for love… was not Amos an extremist for justice. Was not Paul an extremist for the Christian gospel… was not Martin Luther an extremist… and John Bunyan… and Abraham Lincoln… and Thomas Jefferson.” Here he gives logic that his extremist cause is not wrong” (Letter from a Birmingham Jail [King, Jr.]).

Throughout the letter, King’s tone is very polite towards the clergymen and his tone also shows the disappointed at how the events have soared. His tone also changes between the bitter and sift tone and in the last section and when he shares the suffering of people, his tone becomes slightly emotional. Using different tones he urges the readers and audience to show some actions and also show some concern towards these issues. Overall, it is witnessed that throughout the letter, King is able to maintain himself as the legitimate authority by employing the appeal of ethos. He shows how he has gone through different trails, justifies his reason for working towards equal rights and also shows the necessity of taking action towards unjust laws and rights of colored people in America. He is emotional regarding the sufferings of colored people and uses the power of emotions to persuade the clergymen. He also uses the power of imagery, the appeal of logic to make a well-rounded and effective argument so that the white religious people reading the letter may understand the problem and take action.

Works Cited

*Letter from a Birmingham Jail [King, Jr.]*. http://www.africa.upenn.edu/Articles\_Gen/Letter\_Birmingham.html. Accessed 2 June 2019.