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## Power Of Persuasion In Letter From Birmingham Jail

Imagine being thrown into a dark, damp, cold-stone jail cell, for peacefully assembling and expressing your freedom of speech? Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was arrested and thrown in the Birmingham Jail for expressing what we know today as our first amendment right. He wrote his "Letter from Birmingham Jail" in response to the eight white Alabama clergymen who released and publicized their statement in a local newspaper. They accused King of being an "outsider", of using "extreme measures" which directly encouraged "hatred and violence", calling his demonstrations "unwise and untimely", and stating that segregation should be "properly pursued in the courts" ("Public Statement by Eight Alabama Clergymen"). Martin Luther King Jr. uses a combination of the three rhetorical appeals: ethos (ethical appeal), pathos (emotional appeal), and logos (logically appeal), as essential tools to be persuasively powerful concerning his ambition to end racial segregation and the injustices brought against African Americans.

Dr. King employs ethos in his "Letter" first and foremost in response to the Alabama clergymen who publicly questioned his legitimacy and deemed him an "outsider".

In regards to this defamation King feels the need to state the following; 'I think I should indicate why I am here in Birmingham since you have been influenced by the view which argues against 'outsiders coming in.' I have the honor of serving as president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. . . We have some eighty five affiliated organizations across the South, and one of them is the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights. . . I was invited here. I am here because I have organizational ties here' (King Para 2).

Dr. King felt the need to list out his credentials and point out the personal relationship and organizational ties he had with the Birmingham community. His presidential position in the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, active involvement in these various organizations, and King's close connection to the Birmingham community prove that he 'isn't really an outsider; the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights is an affiliate of SCLC' (Rieder 48). Dr. King uses ethos to appeal to his reader's ethics to convince his readers concerning his own character and persuasive credibility. In doing so, King successfully reestablished himself as a credible speaker and respectable authority figure whom his audience can trust to receive reliable information regarding the subject of segregation and the injustices brought towards African Americans.

King creates a periodic run-on sentence focusing on pathos, to clarify and support his claim concerning the injustices African Americans face. He uses visually descriptive language to create mental pictures of these horrific injustices to appeal to the reader's emotions. King use of language places the reader to briefly change their perspective by stating, "When you have seen vicious mobs lynch your mothers and fathers at will and drown your sisters and brothers at whim; when you have seen hate-filled policemen curse, kick and even kill your black brothers and sisters. . . then you will understand why we find it difficult to wait' (King Para 12). Dr. King does not simply say or point out that there is injustice in the world, he gives the reader a way to visualize it and feel it. King created this periodic run-on sentence to purposely delay its true meaning until the very end. This writing strategy forces the reader to 'wait' while simultaneously being emotionally overwhelmed, so the reader could understand why it is so difficult for African

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Americans to simply “wait” for justice. Dr. King is reporting a list of his own grievances which are a reflection of own personal experiences that are inflicted upon African American people. King shared his experiences with “intensity and transferred it to the movement's relationship to the public audiences' (Patton 60). As the speaker, he was successfully able to “move a listener to more. . . intensely felt states of mind by bringing the objects of emotions closer. . . from the listener's temporal/spatial field of perception' (Patton 60).

King successfully emotionally appealed to his readers (specifically the white moderates), he consistently used the phrase “when you” to force his reader to briefly be placed in the shoes of an African American. He wanted his readers to become emotionally overwhelmed and 'respond to the cry for justice if they could first feel the injustice' (Rieder 63). King's use of pathos gives the reader a whole new perspective on the suffrage, humiliation, and injustices African Americans faced.

Dr. King utilizes logos to show various facts and examples which uphold his claim that although segregation and The Jim Crow Laws are indeed fact the law, it does not make them just laws. He strategically presents the argument of just and unjust laws alongside St. Thomas Aquarius' an expertise on the subject to serve as an example and known fact to provide factually based information to support his claim.

Martin Luther King Jr. defines: “a just law is a man made code that squares with the moral law or the law of God. An unjust law is a code that is out of harmony with the moral law. To put it in the terms of St. Thomas Aquinas: An unjust law is a human law that is not rooted in eternal law and natural law. Any law that uplifts human personality is just. Any law that degrades human personality is unjust. All segregation statutes are unjust because segregation distorts the soul and damages the personality” (King Para 13).

Dr. King presents a historical analogy between his own definitions of a just and unjust law with those of St. Thomas Aquarius to appeal to his reader's logic and reason concerning the subject of segregation. King clearly expresses that a “natural law is the ‘ought’ that the positivists seek to distinguish in their search for the ‘is’. . . although the will of the state is segregation Martin Luther King, Jr., can say with authority, ‘ it' ought not to be’ and therefore it is no law at all and there is ‘legal’ right to disobey the will of the state” (Hurtado and Govern). King provides clarity to his audience by defining a just law (natural law) and an unjust law. These definitions appeal to the reader's logic, then pinpointing that segregation is wrong because God would never separate his people and find it unjust because we were all created equal. King's intellectual argument is as follows: “Just laws are those that support humanity and unjust laws are those that do not. . . Therefore, if segregation ‘distorts the soul and damages the personality’ it is necessarily unjust” (“Rhetorical Analysis”). King's utilized his own definitions along with those of Thomas St. Aquarius logically appeals to the reader, forcing him or her to come to the rational conclusion that segregation is an unjust law.

In conclusion, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. utilizes ethos, pathos, and logos to appeal to the reader's ethics, emotion, and logic throughout his “Letter from Birmingham Jail” to powerfully persuade his audience to take action to end racial segregation and injustice everywhere. Dr. King employs ethos to establish his credibility, reinforce his legitimacy, and knowledge to the reader by providing various examples and clarifications that help reassure his audience that he is a trustworthy and respectable author. King effectively utilizes pathos by vividly describing the injustices African Americans even himself face, he wanted his readers to feel these brutal

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injustices and spark a response for justice in his readers. Also, King uses logos by defining a just and unjust law to force the reader to come to the logical conclusion that segregation while it may be a law, it is an unjust law. Many times, injustices are indescribable unless you have experienced it yourself. King employs the three rhetorical appeals to force his readers to place themselves in the shoes of an African American. To allow his readers to experience injustice through imagery and empathy from a credible author who supports his claims with reason. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s power of persuasion calls for an intervention because "injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere" (King Para 4).

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