

Mario Aguilera Piceno

Professor Fricke

English 101

28 January 2025

Rhetorical Situation Assignment

Speeches can be used to convey messages that are seemingly understandable to many by making use of a rhetorical form, especially to those who they are intended for. Martin Luther King Jr. made use of rhetorical devices in his famous “I have a dream” speech to make it understandable to many people worldwide. Understanding rhetorical text can be crucial to understanding who we are as people, and this is seen in MLK’s speech in the way that it uses exigence, audience, and constraints along with rhetorical devices such as parallelism and anadiplosis to strongly convey such messages that stick with individuals that take their time to listen and try to meaningfully understand what was said.

American citizens, and especially people of color were the primary audience of black inequality speeches and protests alike. At the time of Martin Luther King Jr’s speech, people of color were uniting to stand against racial inequality and racial segregation in the United States, leading to the creation of one of his most profound and impactful speeches, the “I Have a Dream” speech. In the 1950’s, a famous incident regarding racial injustice took place when Rosa Parks was arrested after refusing to give up her bus seat to a white individual. This led to a boycott against the cities public

bus system, and eventually a profound story about racial inequality and a need for change.

The main exigence of the speech involved a need for change regarding laws and racial discrimination injustice. In his “I have a dream” speech, MLK states that 100 years, or after the abolishment of slavery, black individuals are still not free to do as others are and that they are still discriminated against for the color of their skin, stating this as “But 100 years later, the Negro still is not free. One hundred years later, the life of the Negro is still sadly crippled by the manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination.” This uses rhetorical analogy to demonstrate how despite freedom to black slaves, it’s as if they were still not free to live a normal non-segregated life. This eventually led to laws such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964 which helped in equal opportunity rights, and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 which helped in stopping racial discrimination when it came to voting.

In his speech, he makes use of several rhetorical devices to ensure that his speech came out profoundly. He first of makes use of anadiplosis in which he states “And so even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream”. MLK uses the word “dream” in this case to show connection between both clauses. MLK also makes use of parallelism in the way that he proficiently uses repeated phrases such as the “I have a dream” phrase which he uses many times in his speech to convey continuous connection between his speech such as when he used it to describe one of his most profound parts of the speech “I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where

they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character. I have a dream today.” In this case he used parallelism to bring a sense of a continuous waterfall.

Several constraints took place along the way while the speech was being formed and performed. One major constraint included police brutality oriented towards black individuals and people of color at the time. This led to MLK aiming towards using peaceful and non-violent protests in his goal of reaching a world-wide viewing showing that there is no need for discrimination or unjust violence against people of color, mostly in hopes of gaining empathy from viewers. Another major constraint consisted of racial discrimination towards black individuals following decades after the freeing of slaves following the civil war, including the Jim Crow laws that enforced the racial segregation of black and white individuals. This in turn led to black individuals being oppressed racially and physically by white individuals up until the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, following years after MLK’s long fought battle against racial discrimination. These constraints tie into his speech in the way that they show the rhetorical constraints Martin Luther King faced before, during, and after his speech.

We as people need to understand rhetorical usage in the world around us as it helps in understanding why and how something was said. In class, we studied “Backpacks vs. Briefcases” by Laura Bolin Carroll in which it covered the importance of understanding media rhetoric, and in which she states that “mindless consumers” are formed by people who do not take their time to understand why something can persuade them. This correlates to MLK’s speech in the way that when one takes their

time to understand it, it can help them understand the context and reasoning behind their words.

After learning a lot more about rhetorical usage throughout this course, it gave me an insight on the necessity of it for understanding how and why certain things are said. Researching about the importance of analyzing rhetorical text in this has taught me much about the reasons why things are said and or going on around us. As described previously, Martin Luther King's speech is a profound example of this in the way that it contributed to and impacted the United States in terms of equality and justice towards people of color. This demonstrates that rhetorical literacy is an important tool that can be used to aid in understanding ourselves in a way.

To conclude, Martin Luther King's "I have a dream" speech was a phenomenal speech that contained well written rhetorical literature. The parallelism and anadiplosis used in his speech helped with making his speech profoundly impactful. Taking time to understand rhetorical phrases can help in understanding what is going on around us.

Works Cited

Cook, Jeremy. "What Is Parallelism in Literature? - Definition & Examples - Video & Lesson Transcript | Study.com." Study.com, 2019, study.com/academy/lesson/what-is-parallelism-in-literature-definition-examples.html.

NPR. "'I Have a Dream' Speech, in Its Entirety." *NPR*, NPR, 16 Jan. 2023, www.npr.org/2010/01/18/122701268/i-have-a-dream-speech-in-its-entirety.

"Anadiplosis | Literature | Britannica." *Www.britannica.com*, www.britannica.com/art/anadiplosis.

Cook, Jeremy. "What Is Parallelism in Literature? - Definition & Examples - Video & Lesson Transcript | Study.com." Study.com, 2019, study.com/academy/lesson/what-is-parallelism-in-literature-definition-examples.html.

Moore, Leonard. "Police Brutality in the United States." *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Britannica, 27 July 2020, www.britannica.com/topic/Police-Brutality-in-the-United-States-2064580.

NAACP. "Martin Luther King, Jr." NAACP, NAACP, 2022, naacp.org/find-resources/history-explained/civil-rights-leaders/martin-luther-king-jr.

National Archives. "The Emancipation Proclamation." National Archives, 5 Jan. 2018, www.archives.gov/exhibits/featured-documents/emancipation-proclamation.