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King and Cahns

Throughout American history, many movements have taken place and have changed American culture to what it is now. We can see change on a small local level such as between the Baby Boomer generation and the Millennial generation, or through more global levels like the time of racial reform to now. Martin Luther King Jr. in his “Letter from Birmingham Jail, ” talks about racial inequality in America during the time of racial reform. David and Jack Cahn in their chapter, “Equality For All: Freedom is Nonnegotiable”, from their book, “When Millennials Rule: The Reshaping of America” talk about the social values that Millennials share concerning controversial topics in current politics. King and Cahn and Cahn, despite the time period, share many similarities in values and morals along with many differences on their viewpoints of their time’s political situation.

King’s letter was a direct response to criticism of his protests in Birmingham. The criticism contained ideas such as protesting in a city not of his own was "unwise and untimely,” and that to fight for racial reform, he should fight it in a court of law and not on the streets. He responds to this criticism by stating in his letter that “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere,” and that direct action is the only way to truly confront issues of racism. He exclaims that fighting injustice is his responsibility along with any Americans who believe in his movement and ideas. He goes off to say in his letter that people who believe in his movement but are not taking any action towards furthering it are detrimental in his cause. He finishes his letter by stating that direct action is a must for all people who want racial equality, and that African Americans will obtain their social equality despite the current opposition.

King’s critics were eight white clergymen who questioned his motives and ideals on racial reform. They questioned his position being in Birmingham, as King is originally from Atlanta, Georgia. They questioned his motives towards helping people who were from a completely separate city of where he is from. The critics continue to say that they thought King should not have gone along the route of civil disobedience, but instead fight for racial equality in a court of law.

King uses many rhetorical strategies to clarify his ideas on racial reform and to respond to opposing arguments of such. To justify his protests in Birmingham, he uses an appeal to Ethos, as he states his position as the Leader of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, who received a message to help protest injustice there. He uses this credibility as a way to justify his protest in Birmingham and to strengthen his argument that he doesn’t need to be from Birmingham to fight injustice there. He states that his organization helps with the fight for racial equality all across the South. This shows that he doesn’t help in any one specific place and is leading an example of nonviolently fighting racial equality anywhere he can help. During this time, many people though it was useless fighting for something they would never achieve, but his use of ethos could be used to give people hope in his movement and to show that with his organizations and leadership, racial equality is an actual reachable goal.

King also uses an appeal to pathos to strengthen his argument that civil disobedience is needed to get rid of unjust laws. King says in his letter, “ One may well ask, ‘How can you advocate breaking some laws and obeying others?’ The answer is found in the fact that there are two types of laws: there are just laws, and there are unjust laws. I would agree with St. Augustine that ‘An unjust law is no law at all.’” He uses this appeal of pathos by trying to appeal to his audience’s sense of justice and fairness. He uses this as a way to convince his audience that laws can be broken if there is a probable reason for doing so, such as the laws being unjust and unfair to the majority of to whom the laws pertain to. This appeal and rhetorical strategy is used to strengthen his main argument that these unjust laws need to be fought with direct action.

In Cahn and Cahn’s chapter they discuss the viewpoints that Millennials share about topics such as women’s rights, LGBT equality, and police violence towards African American citizens. They state that Millennials do not share the same values of the older politicians currently making laws and governing the country. They continue to state that Millennials are setting the path to true equality for everyone, which includes people of different skin colors, people with disabilities, and people with mental illness. They exclaim to their audience that Millennials are currently working towards a more tolerant society that shows respect and equality for all.

Cahn and Cahn use an appeal to logos to argue the viewpoints of Millennials. Their statements on what Millennials believe in are backed up with statistics from credible sources. Their use of studies from ABC/Washington Post show statistics on how 65% of Millennials agree for laws towards LGBT antidiscrimination reform. The use of logos, or an appeal to logic, is used often as it is a stronger rhetoric strategy for an audience of older congressman and government workers. This allows them to give factual insight on the changing values of American society to their audience. Cahn and Cahn attempt to show this insight as a way to let politicians understand that with a changing society, laws need to be changed to align with the changing values. Cahn and Cahn rely on the warrant that all laws and reform should be fair and just for the sake of the majority. They rely on this warrant to convince their audience that Millennials and generations that follow will all share these values, thus bringing upon social reform.

In Cahn and Cahn’s conclusion to their chapter, they align their goal to what King’s goal was in his letter. They both share the message of the necessity of social reform and direct action to it. Cahn and Cahn exclaim to their audience that equality for all and fairer laws to make a more tolerant society is a must and Millennials will be at the front of this change. King exclaims to his audience that to get rid of the social injustice and aim for a more equal society, nonviolent protesting is crucial in furthering his movement. The two authors share the need for change as well as the need of bringing upon that change through direct action.

Cahn and Cahn share their own unique argument that Millennials are already pushing their changing values and the ones who need convincing is the older generations. King had to convince not only his opposition, but also convince his fellow African Americans. He had to convince his opposition that his racial equality was right for Americans and would lead to a better future. He also had to convince two groups of African Americans, one group being for violent protest and another that did not believe that protesting and civil disobedience would bring upon any change. Cahn and Cahn already had the support and statistics of Millennials supporting his claims and only needed to convince one audience group. However, understanding their audience, they utilized specific rhetorical strategies to discuss about many different topics of inequality.

King and Cahn and Cahn share many similarities in their values and overall theme present in their writings. The authors share the value of bringing about change that would lead to a more fair and just society that will fit the needs of the majority. King highlights his main argument of bringing change to the racist laws and his nonviolent, direct method of doing so. Cahn and Cahn highlight their main argument as bringing change to laws that discriminate many groups within society along with laws that no longer align with the current generation’s values. The authors’ differences come from the different time period in which they are both fighting in. King and Cahn and Cahn’s differences is mainly their audience and how they use specific rhetorical strategies to convince them. In conclusion, through the different time periods in which each of the texts were written, the authors share many similarities and differences to convince their respective audiences to understand their values and goals.

Works Cited

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