Duc Phu Pham

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Composition 2

**Dr. King’s Letter from Birmingham Jail**

“*Letter from Birmingham Jail*” was written on April 16, 1963 by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr in response to the criticisms from “A Call for Unity” by eight Alabama clergymen.

**Ethos**

The first mode of persuasion is Ethos (appeal to ethic), used as a way to convince the audience using credibility of the persuader or other figures as well as popular entities. Dr. King uses of Ethos can be seen at the very beginning of his letter, he said “*My Dear Fellow Clergymen*” (King). In just four words, he has established his stand as equal to those whom he is writing this letter to. He then further reinforced his and his organization Ethos when he explained that he is the serving president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and that “*We have some eighty-five affiliated organizations across the South, and one of them is the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights*” (King, 2).

Dr. King uses of Ethos can also be seen when he called on the credibility of others, whether bad or good, to help support his arguments. In response to the opposition arguments that the demonstration is illegal, Dr. King reminded them “*We should never forget that everything Adolf Hitler did in Germany was "legal" and everything the Hungarian freedom fighters did in Hungary was "illegal”* (King, 17).

**Logos**

The second mode of persuasion is Logos (appeal to logic), is a way of persuading the audience using reason, facts, and data. It is no surprised that Dr. King uses of Logos can be found in almost every paragraph, because after all, logic is truth. In response to the opposition’s argument of calling the demonstrators as “*outside agitator*”, Dr. King argued, “*Anyone who lives inside the United States can never be considered an outsider anywhere within its bounds*.” (King, 4).

Furthermore, he addresses the condition in Birmingham, noting that it is “*the most thoroughly segregated city in the United States*” (King, 6) and that “*Its ugly record of brutality is widely known.”* (King, 6). He states that the Negroes have been treated unfairly in the courts and that there are more unresolve bombings of Negroes homes and churches in Birmingham than anywhere else in the United States, he calls these “*the hard, brutal facts*” (King, 6). By stating these facts, he is establishing a legitimate reason of why and how the movement came about.

**Pathos**

The third and last persuasion mode is Pathos (appeal to emotion), a way of persuading the audience by evoking emotional response from a story or experiences. Dr. King uses of Pathos can be seen when he compares the United States to Asia and Africa, expressing how those two countries “*are moving with jetlike speed toward gaining political independence*” (King, 12) comparing to the United States “*but we stiff creep at horseand-buggy pace toward gaining a cup of coffee at a lunch counter.”* (King, 12) in relation to the unfair treatment that the Negroes community have to endure, even though the United States has gained it independency long before the other countries that are mentioned.

Dr. King then continues to paint a truthful and powerful picture of the reality that the Negroes have to dealt with in every aspects of their lives “ *But 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; when you see the vast majority of your twenty million Negro brothers smothering in an airtight cage of poverty in the midst of an affluent society; 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 that has just been advertised on television, and see tears welling up in her eyes when she is told that Funtown is closed to colored children, and see ominous clouds of inferiority beginning to form in her little mental sky, and see her beginning to distort her personality by developing an unconscious bitterness toward white people; 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?"; when you take a cross-county drive and find it necessary to sleep night after night in the uncomfortable corners of your automobile because no motel will accept you; when you are humiliated day in and day out by nagging signs reading "white" and "colored"; when your first name becomes "nigger," your middle name becomes "boy" (however old you are) and your last name becomes "John," and your wife and mother are never given the respected title "Mrs."; when you are harried by day and haunted by night by the fact that you are a Negro, living constantly at tiptoe stance, never quite knowing what to expect next, and are plagued with inner fears and outer resentments; when you are forever fighting a degenerating sense of "nobodiness" then you will understand why we find it difficult to wait.”* (King, 12).

**CITING**

* King, M. L. (1994). *Letter from the Birmingham jail*. San Francisco: Harper San Francisco.