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Martin Luther King Jr. Speech Rhetorical Analysis

INTRODUCTION – Throughout his speech, Dr. King utilizes multiple rhetorical devices to impress upon his audience that while much work has been done in the realm of civil rights, there is still much left to do.

TONE – Hopeful, confident, imploring, supportive, incredulous. Repetition, emotional appeal, collective language. Storytelling. Dr. King’s strategic use of language and intonation both engages his audience and impresses upon them the imperativeness of action.

STRUCTURE – “Compliment sandwich” – How things have improved – history of slavery to modern era. Still work that needs to be done – adopts a structure of problem, acknowledgement of opposition, response to opposition, call to action. Includes South Africa. By using this approach, Dr. King clearly outlines the problems at hand and the steps necessary to solve them.

IMAGERY – Storytelling language, poetic phrasing, metaphors, similes. By leveraging imagery, Dr. King creates a vivid experience in the mind of the audience, imparting both urgency and a sense of shared humanity that will spur his audience to action.

LOGOS PATHOS ETHOS KAIROS – Logos – voting numbers, economic numbers, laws. Pathos – Empathy, concern, pride, humor. Ethos – Bible, calls to morality, historical knowledge. Kairos – Mandela, Sobukwe. 1964 Civil Rights Act passage. LBJ beating Goldwater – “we can’t help”, and Wallace – segregationist. Dr. King skillfully weaves these rhetorical elements to convince the audience that work remains to further the civil rights movement and that their own actions are urgently needed.

CONCLUSION – Reiteration of rhetorical devices used. Reiteration of thesis and how proven. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s masterful use of rhetorical devices ensures his audience leaves with a deep understanding of the progress made, the challenges still faced, and the path one must take to get there. He compels each listener that contributing to the struggle is not only a necessity for Black Americans but a moral imperative crucial for the progression of humanity itself.