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English 1302

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11 September 2018

The King of Appeals

The first month of 1929 was born a revolutionary man who would later on dramatically change the course of our history in the United States of America. Martin Luther King, Jr. had many great accomplishments in his life: received a Nobel Peace Prize for his, “I have a dream” speech and obtained a leadership role at the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (“Martin Luther King Jr.”). Among many motivational and inspirational speeches, King delivered his “I’ve been to the mountaintop” speech exactly one day before his assassination. In this speech, King explains to the audience why he would choose to live his life just a few more years to see what happens in the future. King continues to describe how “the nation is sick. Trouble is in the land; confusion all around.” King abruptly switches the topic to shed light on such a dark topic. He preaches that all people are children unified by God, and he and his people are lucky to be where they are in the world. He goads the audience to stand up for themselves and protest peacefully by marching downtown or halting the support of companies who don’t support their workers. King concludes his speech by comparing a story from the bible to a letter he received from a white, high school female, who expressed compassion and regard for equality. This speech is a great example of how King was able to influence so many people with emotion (pathos), authority (ethos), and reasoning (logos).

King’s appeals to reasoning helps build his moral character. He brings all the darkness of inequality to light by stating, “It is no longer a choice between violence and nonviolence in this world; its nonviolence or nonexistence. That is where we are today” (King). He is making a connection to the amount of peaceful protests that have ended with violence or death from the opposing supporters. If people protest with violence, than they will die. King does not ask but instead tells his audience there will be no violence because it would end with bad repercussions. Reassurance is present when he states that “We aren’t engaged in any negative protest and in any negative arguments with anybody. We are saying that we are determined to be men” (King). He is using reasoning to explain how his people are not men even though they are not acting negatively. The way King uses words to emphasize the logical meanings he wants to portray, helps build his sense of logical morals.

The appeals to emotion that King uses in this speech helps reveal the true darkness and hardships within the unequal society. Fear and hatred was a major contributor to the society’s view on King and his people. Although his people don’t have the human rights they deserve, they are important to society and deserve to be treated like human beings. King states that “if something isn’t done, and done in a hurry, to bring the colored peoples of the world out of their long years of poverty, their long years of hurt and neglect, the whole world is doomed”. He is explaining how the world would fall apart without his people. King makes a connection to the fact that his people are doing the hard manual labor jobs all around the world. He uses appeals to emotions when he says, “thirteen hundred of God’s children [are] here suffering” (King). King is using the audience’s emotions to force people to see how his people are God’s children too and that they are truly suffering.

Authority is the most well know appeal in King's speeches. God is a religious figure that many people around the world look up to and worship. First, King says that "if I were standing at the beginning of time, with the possibility of taking a kind of general panoramic view of the whole of human history up to now, and the Almighty said to me, 'Martin Luther King, which age would you like to live in?'". He then continues to take the audience on a verbal trip through history, starting in Egypt. King talks about many great people in different time periods. As he goes through history, he explains that "I wouldn't stop there" (King) in order to conclude that the present time is the only time he wants to be alive. Not only did King talk about history's important people, he continues to name-drop important people of his time period. He further explains how

God has commanded us to be concerned about the slums down here, and his children can’t eat three square meals a day. It’s all right to talk about the new Jerusalem, but one day, God’s preacher must talk about the new New York, the new Atlanta, the new Philadelphia, the new Los Angeles, the new Memphis, Tennessee. That is what we have to do. (King)

King is using God's authority to show the audience why segregation is wrong, even God says that everyone is equal. Lastly, King preaches a story from the bible that connects to the way he believes people should act. He explains how Jesus determines a good man from his actions. A good man asks himself, "If I do not stop to help the sanitation workers, what will happen to them" (King).

King was a lyricist and was able to accurately and persuasively convey his message to everyone. King finishes his speech with "We've got some difficult days ahead. But it really doesn't matter with me now, because I've been to the mountaintop.” Within twenty four hours after these words left Martin Luther King, Jr.'s mouth, he was struck by a sniper bullet, shot by a former convict named James Earl Ray. Although his ending was tragic and sudden, the legacy of Martin Luther King lives on to combat hate and promote the equality for all.

Works Cited

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