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# A Rhetorical Analysis of I Have a Dream Speech by Martin Luther King Jr.

## I Have A Dream Rhetorical Analysis Essay

On the steps of the Lincoln Memorial on August 28, 1963, Martin Luther King Jr. presented his speech advocating for the freedom and equality of all races in front of over 250,000 people. His "I Have A Dream" speech became widely known for demonstrating the power of rhetoric that left an impact on America. Through the use of allusions, metaphors, and repetition, King was able to influence Americans to finally see that all men are created equal.

Drawing upon years of public speaking experience, King knew an emotional speech would have greater impact upon a large, outdoor crowd rather than a political one. By making allusions to the Declaration of Independence by citing "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" and "we hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal." he was able to specifically appeal to listeners' patriotism. America should embody freedom and symbolize a time of new beginnings. Although the American dream is freedom and justice and liberty for all, it was not true for African Americans during the time. He reminds people about the foundations and morals of which America was built upon and stresses the importance of an individual's human rights. He states that beneath skin color, we are all the same. We are all human. By alluding to the Declaration, King is able to present a beautiful and compelling vision of equality.

Dr. King uses metaphors to help explain to the audience the need for equality for all races. He elaborates his argument about the lack of civil rights in a banking metaphor: "America has given the N\* people a bad check, a check which has come back marked 'insufficient funds.' But we refuse to believe that the bank of justice is bankrupt." Through his metaphor he suggests that people come to America in order to gain opportunities at a better chance at life however, people of color are unable to do so due to the unjust laws. He himself along with other African Americans refuse to accept this fate and abide by the unfair rules placed by people who do not understand what it feels like to be judged before even opening their mouth and uttering a sound. He believes that there is hope for the country and that America has room to change and grow however, in order to so, people must speak up. Everywhere in King's speech, there is a demonstration of some sort of call to action. King wants people to realize how unfair the system is and that they should not allow for it to continue. In a nation of unjust laws, he encourages people to rise up and demonstrate their freedom.

Throughout his speech, King repeats certain phrases such as "we can never be satisfied", "let

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freedom ring”, and most the most iconic “I have a dream”. The intensity of King’s speech is built through bold statements and rhythmic repetition. Each repetition builds on the one before and is reinforced by Martin Luther King’s increasing passion. The phrase resonates with the listener and leaves them with ideas that they will easily remember. As the speech comes to a close, the pace of his repetition increases, helping to build to a crescendo.

Be the change you want to see in the world. In order for there to be a change, people have to step up and discuss the topics that deserved to be talked about; and that is exactly what Martin Luther King Jr. did. He was a remarkable man that inspired thousands. He was not afraid to confront the problems at hand and figure out ways to change them and he encouraged others to do the same. King’s words and actions were able to make a mark in America and change history. His message of equality is still heard in our society today.

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