

ANALYSIS

THE STYLE OF MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

(1929-1968)

"King's language in the pulpit and in his speeches was effective but not remarkably interesting. His style compares well, however, with the speeches of recent presidents and even with those of Adlai Stevenson, most of them bland and flat in print. In many ways, King was not Southern and rural in his address, although he had a melting Georgia accent and his discourse was saturated in the Bible. His was a practical, not a frenzied exhortation, inspiring the Southern Negroes to the sacrifices and dangers of protest and yet reassuring them by its clarity and humanity.

His speech was most beautiful in the less oracular cadences, as when he summed up the meaning of the Poor People's March on Washington with, 'We have come for our checks!' The language of the younger generation is another thing altogether. It has the brutality of the city and an assertion of threatening power at hand, not to come. It is military, theatrical, and at its most coherent probably a lasting repudiation of empty courtesy and bureaucratic euphemism."

Elizabeth Hardwick

"The Apotheosis of Martin Luther King" (1968)

The Collected Essays of Elizabeth Hardwick

The New York Review of Books (2017): 163

"On August 28, 1963, Martin Luther King, Jr. led a march on Washington, D.C. The speech he gave that day is one of the best known in American history. When people remember the 'I Have a Dream' speech, as it has come to be known, they recall King's message about civil rights. But perhaps the reason it is so memorable is because King was a master of literary and rhetorical devices: **alliteration, allusion, anaphora, assonance, extended metaphor, metonymy, hyperbole, parallelism, personification, simile, synecdoche.**

alliteration: *The repetition of sounds makes the speech more catchy and memorable:* 'In a sense we have come to our nation's capital to **cash** a check'; 'We **cannot** be satisfied as long as a Negro in Mississippi **cannot** vote and a Negro in New York believes he has **nothing** for which to vote. **No, no...**'

allusion: *By using a classic American President's speech and a famous African-American spiritual as bookends to the speech, he is demonstrating the equivalent worth of both cultures:* The speech begins with 'Five score years ago...', a reference to the Gettysburg Address, and ends with the words of the old Negro spiritual, 'Free at last! free at last! Thank God Almighty, we are free at last!'

anaphora: *This term describes the most famous part of the speech: King's repetition of "I have a dream:"* **I have a dream that one day** this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: 'We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal'; **I have a dream that one day** on the red hills of Georgia the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood'; **I have a dream that one day** even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the heat of oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice'; **I have a dream** that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character'; **One hundred years later**, the life of the Negro is still sadly crippled by the manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination. **One hundred years later**, the Negro lives on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity. **One hundred years later**, the Negro is still languishing in the corners of American society and finds himself an exile in his own land.'

assonance: *Like alliteration, assonance adds an element of musical poetry to the speech:* 'We **must** forever conduct our **struggle** on the high plane of **dignity** and **discipline**.'

extended metaphor: *King equates light with freedom throughout the speech. Here are two examples:* 'This momentous decree came as a great beacon light of hope to millions of Negro slaves who had been seared in the flames of withering injustice. It came as a joyous daybreak to end the long night of their captivity. Now is the time to rise from the dark and desolate valley of segregation to the sunlit path of racial justice.' *In the 3rd and 4th paragraphs, King plays with the extended metaphor of extending a check:* 'In a sense we have come to our nation's capital to cash a check...' (This check metaphor continues) *A musical metaphor:* 'With this faith we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood.' *There are many more metaphor examples.*

metonymy: *These places are not chosen at random. They represent locations that were filled with racism at the time. For instance, the KKK had just resurged in Stone Mountain:* 'But not only that; let freedom ring from **Stone Mountain of Georgia!** Let freedom ring from **Lookout Mountain of Tennessee!** Let freedom ring from every hill and molehill of **Mississippi!**'

hyperbole: *We could call this example hyperbole, because King is using lots of 'alls' and 'everys.'* *But this hyperbole belies a seriousness; he believes that true justice will only come when every person believes in freedom for all:* 'And when this happens, when we allow freedom to ring, when we let it ring from every village and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing.'

parallelism: *If you ever want to jazz up a crowd, use some parallelism in your sentences. It will make people ready to fight...peacefully, of course. It also makes the lines memorable, and perhaps represents the equality of the people fighting together:* 'Go back to Mississippi, go back to Alabama, go back to South Carolina, go back to Georgia, go back to Louisiana, go back to the slums and ghettos of our northern cities, knowing that somehow this situation can and will be changed. With this faith we will be able to work together, to pray together, to struggle together, to go to jail together, to stand up for freedom together, knowing that we will be free one day.'

personification: *King is casting American society as a person who has done African-Americans wrong. He believes that people who are fighting for civil rights aren't fighting a person, but rather a system:* 'It is obvious today that America has defaulted on this promissory note insofar as her citizens of color are concerned. Instead of honoring this sacred obligation, America has given the Negro people a bad check, a check which has come back marked "insufficient funds".'

simile: *This simile demonstrates the power of justice and righteousness, as well as the belief that equality is a natural thing. It's also one of the most famous lines of the speech:* 'No, no, we are not satisfied, and we will not be satisfied until justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream.'

synecdoche: *By representing people as bodies or flesh, King is reminding his audience of that the problems they're currently facing are related to their skin color:* 'We can never be satisfied, as long as our bodies, heavy with the fatigue of travel, cannot gain lodging in the motels of the highways and the hotels of the cities. I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together'."

"I Have a Dream' Speech Analysis"
Flocabulary.com (11 January 2012)

"I Have A Dream' by Martin Luther King Jr. is a widely known speech that demonstrates the power of rhetoric and the effect it can have on the audience. This speech was written and presented by King in the year 1963. He uses *symbolism, metaphorical imagery, and powerful diction* to create an impact on the audience. These rhetorical strategies demonstrate *ethos, pathos, and logos* to help the audience understand King's message and purpose.

The speech opens with a very strong use of diction that creates a logical and emotional appeal to the audience. The main target of this speech is African--Americans living in the United States. Martin Luther

King Jr. opens his speech stating that he is grateful for everyone who attended 'the greatest demonstration of freedom.' At this point the speech is already creating an appeal of *pathos*. He then goes on to create a very logical appeal when stating that the Emancipation Proclamation gave 'hope to millions of Negro slaves who had seared in the flames of withering injustice.' The Emancipation Proclamation was the first event where African-Americans were increasing up the ladder of social hierarchy. Dr. King uses *anaphora*, the repetition of a word or words at the beginning of successive clauses, to create an appeal of emotion and logic. He describes that it has been one hundred years since the Emancipation Proclamation but 'the life of the Negro is still badly crippled by the manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination'; 'the Negro lives on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity'; 'the Negro is still languishing in the corners of American society and finds himself in exile in his own land.' King repeats the words 'One hundred years later the Negro...', targeting the audience who is mostly comprised of African-Americans, saying that they are still under oppression and that must change.

Dr. King uses many instances of *symbolism* and *metaphorical* speech to help explain to the audience that there must be equality for all races. A very clear instance of *symbolism* and *metaphorical* speech Dr. King demonstrates occurs in the second paragraph. King is comparing the 'sacred obligation' that America has to the African-Americans during that time to a "bad check, a check which has come back marked 'insufficient funds.' He is stating that America has given promises to the African-Americans; however, those promises are empty.

There are countless instances of *symbolism* that occur throughout this speech and he is attempting to really connect with the audience and demonstrate an appeal of emotion and logic. He is stating that America has given all these opportunities and chances yet King believes all of those opportunities are empty, they are just words. In response King states to his audience that he refuses 'to believe that the bank of justice is bankrupt,' and again he uses *anaphora* stating that he refuses to believe 'there are insufficient funds in the great vaults of opportunity of this nation.' As stated before, these 'insufficient funds' are empty promises that the United States of America has given to the African-Americans. Everywhere we turn in the speech, there is a demonstration of some sort of call to action, telling the audience to rise up and demonstrate their freedom. King tells the audience that it is time to make 'real the promise of democracy' and 'it is time to rise from the dark and desolate valley of segregation to the sunlit path of racial justice.' This statement is teeming with emotional appeal, telling the audience that the time is over to stay in the shadows of segregation, and King creates this emotional appeal with a very repetitive statement to stand up and represent the African-Americans and the ideal of racial equality.

Overall throughout this piece it is easy to recognize the style of *diction* that Martin Luther King uses to demonstrate his point of view on the subject matter. The diction is one that calls for justice and it constantly repeats itself. The most repeated word throughout the speech is the word 'justice.' This word is accompanied by the request for justice and that too is constantly repeated throughout the text. However, the most significant moment in this speech occurs in the closure. It occurs at a time when Martin Luther King demonstrates 'his dream.' He uses *anaphora* combined with powerful *diction* to create his final emotional appeal. He asks for America to follow up on its promises to become true to its words, 'We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.'

This speech had the power to move millions of people and to get them to fight for their freedom. Martin Luther King Jr. achieved this with this one speech. This speech demonstrates the *diction*, *symbolism*, and *metaphorical* language needed to create an emotional, logical, and credible appeal that helped the nation jump on its feet and make the better of it. During a time when segregation was everywhere and the racial minorities felt like they had no freedom, Martin Luther King Jr. stepped in and helped save their freedom and individualism through this speech'."

Michael Hyun, Jr.

"Rhetorical Analysis of 'I Have a Dream'"

psu.edu.hyunrclblog Hyun's Rhetoric and Civic Life blog (2 October 2013)

"Jan. 18 marks over three decades of national celebrations dedicated to the legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr. King is known around the world as an activist and humanitarian, but his skill as a writer and communicator played an important role in bringing his advocacy to a broader audience. His speeches have

been praised for their rhetoric, and he wrote one of his most passionate essays from an Alabama prison cell. King's words were not only transcendent in their message, but in their linguistic elegance....

'[Letter from Birmingham Jail](#)' was the result of King's arrest in April of 1963. He began writing it on the back of a newspaper smuggled into his cell, and finished on a legal pad his lawyers were eventually able to obtain for him. Although the circumstances in King's case were extreme and far less than ideal, he still didn't wait to get his ideas onto the page. He practiced '[the fierce urgency of now](#),' a resilience and ingenuity that brought his thoughts and dreams into the world despite the odds against them. His letter reads in part: 'Perhaps it is easy for those who have never felt the stinging darts of segregation to say, "Wait." But...when you take a cross-country 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 forever fighting a degenerating sense of 'nobodiness'--then you will understand why we find it difficult to wait'.... King used several [variations](#) on the words "I have a dream" before they became the refrain that is instantly associated with him today. According to the [King Center](#), there are nearly a million documents associated with the life of Martin Luther King, Jr. Their site serves as a massive database of sermons, speeches, essays, and letters.

King's style is forthright and even, with no room for passive language. He periodically employs parallelism or anaphora (a literary device with ancient Biblical roots) to draw attention to a particular statement through repetition. The effect is a voice that is full of conviction. He is undeniably firm, but his message never waivers or devolves into cynicism. King took a very participatory tone in his speeches and essays. His words were a call to action, not a mere condemnation; it's a huge part of what makes them so inspirational. One of his greatest gifts as an orator was his knack for understanding an audience, and it was this empathy that allowed him to captivate such a large and diverse group of people. It's something that all writers strive for--that ability to get inside of another human being's head."

Kelli Marshall

"Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Art of Persuasion"
medium.com (17 January 2016)

"Martin Luther King Jr.'s 'Letter from Birmingham Jail' (also known as 'The Negro Is Your Brother')... was written during 'a critical turning point in the struggle for African American civil rights' and is, therefore, generally considered 'the most important written document of the modern civil rights movement and a classic text on civil disobedience' (Milestone Documents). But also, the letter is a brilliant example of the art of persuasion as it masterfully analyzes its dual audience: the eight clergymen who reacted to King's nonviolent activities, and King's fellow demonstrators. And like all well-crafted persuasive writing, the letter employs all of the rhetorical methods of appeal: the appeal to *reason*, *character*, *emotion*, and *style*. Look at this passage, for example, to see how King's letter appeals to his audience via *style*, or those choices a writer makes at the level of words, phrases, and sentences:

'We have waited for more than 340 years for our constitutional and Godgiven rights. The nations of Asia and Africa are moving with *jetlike speed* toward gaining political independence, but we still creep at *horse-and-buggy pace* toward gaining a cup of coffee at a lunch counter. Perhaps **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 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-country 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. There comes a time **when** the *cup of endurance runs over*, and men are no longer willing to be plunged into *the abyss of despair*. I hope, sirs, you can understand our legitimate and unavoidable impatience.'

First, along with creating in the readers a sense of outrage, King's concrete examples, personal experiences, metaphors/similes, sharp contrasts/comparisons, and sentence rhythms paint a picture; they appeal to sight. For example, the jailed preacher contrasts the phrase *jetlike speed*, the pace at which Africa was overcoming colonialism, with the phrase *horse-and-buggy pace*, the unfortunate rate at which America was attempting to do the same. See also *stinging darts of segregation*, *clouds of inferiority*, *little mental sky*, and the other picturesque phrases in blue above. Second, even when read silently, King's words here also possess sound, a variation of sentence length, a use of rhythmic patterns, and repetition for emphasis.

Regarding the latter, see his use of the phrase *when you*. Through the repetition of these two words [marked in **bold** above], the writer 'piles up examples of racial discrimination' that he and the black community have experienced, driving home his point about the need for racial equality. King also makes use of parallelism in this portion of the letter, employing similar words phrases to reiterate a point: *lynch your mothers and fathers at will* and *drown your sisters and brothers at whim*...Finally, King's fondness for alliteration is also evident here when he describes the police's horrific actions: 'curse, kick, and kill'...As the authors of *Aims of Argument* point out, the repetition of this hard 'K' sound, 'especially in words of one syllable, suggest the violence of the acts themselves.'

The next time you read Martin Luther King Jr.'s writings--be it his 'I Have a Dream' or 'I've Been to the Mountaintop'--I hope you'll notice the clergyman's/activist's/rhetorician's appeal to style as well as his art of persuasion alongside his many other monumental accomplishments for this country."

Leah Dearborn
"Lessons from Martin Luther King, Jr., The Writer"
Litereactor.com (18 January 2016)

"There is no need to say that Martin Luther King Jr. is one of the most outstanding orators in American history. In this essay I would like to describe his talent as a speaker and also his magnificent use of detail, imagery, and figurative language that are in part what made his messages resonate with so many in a time of national turmoil.

According to Analysis of 'Letter from Birmingham Jail,' 'Letter from Birmingham Jail' was an open letter posted on April 16, 1963 by Martin Luther King Jr., who is considered as one of the leaders of the Civil Rights Movement in the United States. King wrote the letter from the jail in the city of Birmingham in Alabama, where he was arrested after a nonviolent protest against racial segregation. The letter is a response to a statement issued by eight white clergymen in Alabama on April 12, 1963 entitled 'A call for unity.' It declared the existence of social injustice but expressed the belief that the battle against racial segregation should be carried out only in the courts and not bring them to the streets. I think this statement is very important, thus it is shown that King does not want a further escalation of racial conflict and wants to achieve his goals nonviolently...

King responded that without strong direct action, like yours, the country could never achieve true civil rights. As he said, 'This Wait has almost always meant Never.' In my opinion in this statement King wanted to say that society needs change, African Americans can no longer wait and their time has come. At first the letter was published as 'Letter from Birmingham Jail' in the edition of June 12, 1963. The letter includes a quote that is often used: 'Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.' I think by this King was trying to say that every episode of race discrimination is important and authorities with civil society must pay attention to it....

In this part of the essay I would like to consider the 'I Have a Dream' speech. 'I Have a Dream' is the popular name of the most famous speech of Martin Luther King Jr., 'when he spoke powerfully and eloquently of their desire for a future in which people from black and white complexions could coexist harmoniously as equals.' This speech, on August 28, 1963 from the Lincoln Memorial during the 'March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom,' many experts consider as a key moment in the Civil Rights Movement in America. It is often considered one of the best speeches in history, and was in first place among the speeches of the twentieth century by scholars of rhetoric.

According to 'I Have a Dream--Turning Dreams Into Reality,' widely acclaimed as a masterpiece of rhetoric, Martin Luther King's speech has the style of the sermon of a black Baptist minister. Calls upon iconic and widely respected sources like Constitution of the United States, the Declaration of Independence of the United States, the Emancipation Proclamation and of course, the Bible. As a fact, King uses language phrases of important cultural texts for their own rhetorical purposes. Near the beginning King alludes to Lincoln's Gettysburg Address by saying: 'Five score years ago...' a particular way of saying hundred in English (since score is 20 years and $20 \times 5 = 100$).

The biblical allusions are also common. For example, King alludes to *Psalms* 30:5 in the second part of his speech; he says, referring to the abolition of slavery articulated by the Emancipation Proclamation: 'Came as a joyous daybreak to end a long night of captivity.' Another biblical allusion is found in the tenth stanza: 'No, no, we're not satisfied and will not be satisfied until justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream.' This statement shows his determination to go all the way.

It should be noted that the speaker's religious background is clearly seen as he uses three times the expression 'sons of God,' says 'the glory of God shall be revealed and will join the human race,' and gives encouragement to people by telling a Christian message: 'Continue to work with the faith that unearned suffering is not deserved but is redemptive,' and closing his speech with 'Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty, we are free at last!'

It can be said that in his speech King uses parallelism--this describes the same initial wording in a sequence of statements or phrases to add emphasis, order, or climax to an idea--as a rhetorical tool employed throughout the speech. An example of parallelism is found near the beginning as King urges his audience to seize the moment: 'Now is the time' is repeated four times in the sixth stanza. The most cited example of parallelism is found in the phrase 'I have a dream...' which is repeated eight times when King describes to his audience a picture of a United States integrated and united,' as described in 'I Have a Dream--Turning Dreams Into Reality.'

King starts talking about the Emancipation Proclamation as signed a hundred years ago (1863), and how segregation still exists despite what this and other historical documentation of the country promised. He emphasizes that this is the time for change, and although it clear that violence is not the way, his message is powerful and persuasive. Seeking justice and change, he says it is the beginning of the fight, but rules out violence as a means. He describes the condition of blacks at that time with strong requests to them to continue fighting for their ideals. The most moving moment is when he describes, with the famous 'I have a dream,' the country for their children: one in which white and black children live together without any prejudice. He ends by broadening the vision of a united country to speak not only of races putting aside their differences, but also religions.

According to Martin Luther King's 'I Have a Dream,' very important is the following quote: 'Now, I say to you today my friends, even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream. I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: 'We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.'" As well, it should be noted that this quote clearly characterizes the spirit of Martin Luther King's 'I Have a Dream.' I think by this phrase he tries to bring to the people the statement that from now on, Americans all should live together in peace, because we all are equal humans and citizens of a great country. In my opinion, the phrase 'I have a dream' expresses that Martin Luther King sees the better future for Americans and if everybody believes in his statement--together, Americans will be able to bring this phrase into reality."

unidentified student

"Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. is well-known as a reverend, a rousing speaker and the leader of the Civil Rights Movement that changed the United States forever. What is often overlooked, however, is the fact that Reverend King was an amazing writer. While he wrote his own sermons and speeches, the skill behind those works often gets put aside in favor of discussions about King as an orator and his ability to move a crowd. It is Dr. King's way with the written word that is essential to his rhetorical success, and it is this ability that I will explore in what follows.

Probably the best example of Martin Luther King's skill as an author is the document known as 'Letter from Birmingham Jail.' It is a wide-ranging piece, and King is in full command of references that run from the Bible to ancient and modern philosophy--he even quotes T. S. Eliot near the close of the letter. The letter is dated April 16, 1963. King had been in Birmingham to lead a nonviolent protest and was in jail on the charge of having a parade without a permit. Given the stakes involved and the magnitude of what King was fighting for, arresting him on the charge of holding a parade without a permit might seem ridiculous to some today, but King is very careful in outlining the exact problem: *'Sometimes a law is just on its face and unjust in its application. For instance, I have been arrested on a charge of parading without a permit. Now, there is nothing wrong in having an ordinance which requires a permit for a parade. But such an ordinance becomes unjust when it is used to maintain segregation and to deny citizens the First Amendment privilege of peaceful assembly and protest.'* Whereas others might be dismissive of such a charge, Dr. King is very specific and clear about his objection to his imprisonment. It is this kind of care in terms of craft that one finds throughout 'Letter from Birmingham Jail' which makes it such a valuable document for the history of the Civil Rights Movement and as a piece of writing on its own merits.

An interesting word animates the early parts of the letter, and that word is 'tension.' Even more than 50 years removed from the protests, a viewer of the news footage of the standoffs between the police and the protestors can sense the heated air between the groups, and one is tempted to say that that atmosphere is riddled with *tension*, but Dr. King had an interesting perspective on that word: *'Nonviolent direct action seeks to create such a crisis and foster such a tension that a community which has constantly refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issue. It seeks so to dramatize the issue that it can no longer be ignored. My citing the creation of tension as part of the work of the nonviolent resister may sound rather shocking. But I must confess that I am not afraid of the word 'tension.' I have earnestly opposed violent tension, but there is a type of constructive, nonviolent tension which is necessary for growth. Just as Socrates felt that it was necessary to create a tension in the mind so that individuals could rise from the bondage of myths and half truths to the unfettered realm of creative analysis and objective appraisal, so must we see the need for nonviolent gadflies to create the kind of tension in society that will help men rise from the dark depths of prejudice and racism to the majestic heights of understanding and brotherhood.'*

Dr. King has taken a word, *tension*, and not only diffused its main associations with violence about to erupt, but also elevated a different kind of tension into an intended goal of this human endeavor. By tying 'nonviolent tension' in with the Socratic search for truth, King communicates that the journey will be a struggle and sometimes ugly, but it is something that must be done, no matter whom it makes uncomfortable, because real advancement is at stake. Later in the letter, during an excoriation of 'white moderates' who agree with his goals but not his methods, King elaborates on where this tension comes from, and what it reveals: *'Actually, we who engage in nonviolent direct action are not the creators of tension. We merely bring to the surface the hidden tension that is already alive. We bring it out in the open, where it can be seen and dealt with. Like a boil that can never be cured so long as it is covered up but must be opened with all its ugliness to the natural medicines of air and light, injustice must be exposed, with all the tension its exposure creates, to the light of human conscience and the air of national opinion before it can be cured.'*

Like the best teachers, Dr. King approaches this concept of 'nonviolent tension' from multiple perspectives, to be sure that it is understood. Upon reaching the second metaphor of the boil, the reader understands King's premise that this tension will be there anyway--that the protestors are not the real source of the tension. Furthermore, by combining the two illustrations King provides, the reader can see that the

tension is too poisonous to leave alone and that the advantage to be gained by exploiting this tension for his cause is too great. In explaining why he does what he does in the way he does it, King convinces the reader that there can be no other course of action.

Beyond his skill at designing an argument, as demonstrated by his use of 'nonviolent tension' above, Martin Luther King, Jr. also possessed the ability to construct a memorable sentence. Although this part of the writer's art is often maligned as superficial, King understood that the ability to 'turn a phrase' would make his arguments easier to digest and remember. 'Letter from a Birmingham Jail' contains many memorable phrases, and at least one that has surpassed its source in notoriety: 'Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.' People may argue about the content of this sentence, but its power as a statement of purpose is undeniable.

Less famous, but no less memorable, is how King phrases his disappointment in those he thought were his allies: 'Shallow understanding from people of good will is more frustrating than absolute misunderstanding from people of ill will. Lukewarm acceptance is much more bewildering than outright rejection.' 'Letter from Birmingham Jail' is a statement of purpose and method, but it is also a document rich in literary and philosophical value. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. invokes names like Socrates, St. Augustine, Lincoln and Niebuhr to show that his mission is the next in this storied line of thought and action. Dr. King's arguments were, of course, made up of the words that he used. Those words evoke connections and resonate with readers decades after they were first written because they have the ring of truth and give the entire document a sense that King's moral victory is inevitable."

Adam Cooper
"The Literary Merits of 'Letter from a Birmingham Jail'
vocabulary.com (10 January 2017)

"Politicians and political figures often use *anaphora* in speeches to emphasize their points. A classic example of *anaphora* comes from Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s 'I Have a Dream' speech. King uses the *anaphoral* phrase, 'I have a dream,' to start eight consecutive sentences: 'I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi...will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice. I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character. I have a dream today!' King uses *anaphora* to highlight the difference between how things are and how he hopes they will be. Yet, *anaphora* is a poetic device...and that's why MLK Jr.'s speech lives among the greatest poems. What is *anaphora*? *Anaphora* is 'the repetition of a word or phrase at the beginning of consecutive sentences, poetry stanzas, or clauses within a sentence.' It can be as short as a single word, such as *I*, *when*, or *and*. It can also involve several words, like Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s *anaphoral* phrase 'I have a dream.' *Anaphoral* phrases are rarely longer than a few words (lengthy, repeated phrases can be confusing to readers). Fun fact: The opposite of *anaphora* is *epistrophe*, 'a word or phrase repeated at the end of consecutive lines.'

Poets use *anaphora* to establish a rhythm, structure a poem, or highlight certain ideas. Some poets use extreme *anaphora* as a stylistic choice. 'Howl,' by Allen Ginsberg, does this. Almost every line in the first section starts with *who*. The second section repeats the name *Moloch* at the beginning of each line. The repetition gives the poem rhythm and makes it feel energetic. *Anaphoral* phrases are pretty common in daily speech, too. People use them to express desires or needs. A petulant child might say 'I don't want to get out of bed. I don't want to get dressed. I don't want to go to school. I just want to go back to sleep!' So, basically, we can all be poets...but we'll probably never be as poetic as Martin Luther King Jr."

"Why Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s 'I Have a Dream' Was Pure Poetry"
Dictionary.com (2020)

Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. is an icon of social justice, the greatest American civil rights leader of the 20th century, as Frederick Douglass was in the 19th. With courage, a resonant mellow voice and a poetic talent for metaphor, King became one of the most inspirational speakers in history. He was a master of black pulpit oratory and spoke with a musical passion and power, visibly controlling his emotions, using abundant repetition and recurrent rhythms in building to crescendos—in the spirit of a gospel singer. His "I Have a Dream" speech at the Washington Memorial in 1963, overlooking the mall packed with 200-

300,000 people, is a landmark in American history. The march and his speech are credited with passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

King ardently preached the traditional ideal of the American “melting pot” later rejected by black leaders and advocates of other interest groups in favor of “identity politics.” Many people, and even King himself, anticipated that he would be martyred. The most tragic aspect of his assassination is that it worked: After his death, politicians and Postmodern academics did the opposite of what King had preached. Instead of judging students by the “content of their character” educators and even the government began judging all people by their skin color, gender, class, sexual orientation, and beliefs—by Political Correctness. They institutionalized the prejudice that King tried to overcome and set back racial progress by generations.

Michael Hollister (2020)