

Letter From Birmingham Jail Ethos Pathos Logos

Martin Luther Kings' Use of *Pathos* and *Logos* in his "Letter from Birmingham Jail"

April 16, 196, Martin Luther King, Jr., wrote the "Letter from Birmingham Jail," a response to "A call for unity." "A call for unity" was written by eight white clergymen stating that there was racial segregation that should be righted, but that was a job for the courts to handle, not everyday people. King defended the idea that injustice is everywhere, not just in the courts. King uses all *pathos*, *logos*, and *ethos* in his letter to really get his message across. Though he uses all three very effectively, I believe King most effectively uses *pathos* and *logos* by giving illustrations of what African Americans faced every day, examples in history in which the law was not right, and the make-up of a just or unjust law.

One way I personally believe King uses *pathos* so effectively is by giving examples of what happens to African Americans frequently while the law stands by and does nothing. He talks about how mothers and fathers are lynched and siblings are drowned because white men felt like it. This made me feel the heart break that these people are experiencing. He also talks about a little girl who sees an advertisement for an amusement that is opening. She cries when she's told that she is not allowed to go because they do not allowed colored people in there. This shows the extent of racism even children are not spared. These illustrations made me upset at what African Americans had to deal with, and infuriated that the law was not doing anything about it. *Pathos* is used very effectively if I am feeling such emotions by just reading a paragraph.

I believe King uses *logos* most effectively by using examples in history of how the law was not right. He talks about how Hitler killed many and it was considered under the law "legal." Hitler tortured people, tore apart families, destroyed towns in the name of "racial cleansing." The law said it was perfectly fine, but morally that was very wrong. Hitler and his Nazis killed over eleven million people, and only six million were Jews. Hitler targeted not only Jews, but also Gypsies, homosexual, physically and mentally disabled, Poles, Jehovah's Witnesses, socialists, and communists. Millions of these were children. While this was legal, the efforts to save these groups from torture were considered illegal. No one was allowed to help any one of the groups out of a concentration camp or even out of the country. By comparing these two actions and the legality of both, I saw the logic of his argument. A law may be a law, but that does not mean it is right. This helps King's letter be even more credible because of his use of *logos* in his illustration between Hitler and the relief organizations during the Holocaust.

In addition, King describes the differences between a just and an unjust law. He quotes Thomas Aquinas who states, "An unjust law is a human law that is not rooted in eternal law and natural law." This means that laws that are beneficiary to only a small amount of people and have no religious or just outcomes for society as a whole are not good. King continues with the message that if the majority votes in a law and the minority has no say and the law benefits only the majority, then it is not a right law. This to me was very logical and made me think about the unjust laws African Americans dealt with on a daily basis. Because they had almost no rights and were segregated, they did not have a say in many laws. The outcome of that was America had many laws that benefited Whites but hardly any that benefited African Americans. Reading this made me believe King even more, because of how logical and sound this letter is.

King does use *ethos* in his letter to the clergymen, and very effectively too, even though I found *pathos* and *logos* were more effective to me. One way King uses *ethos* is by quoting multiple historical figures in his speech in order to get to the point across that being an extremist is not necessarily evil. Some historical figures he lists are Peter, an extremist for the Gospel, Abraham Lincoln, an extremist for liberty, and Thomas Jefferson, an extremist for equality. These men were great, and through seeing how these men were extremists, I see how the clergymen were wrong in saying that extremists are bad. King's list of historical figures is effective in *ethos* because it made me believe that an extremist can be very powerful and right.

In King's letter, even though *ethos* was used very well, I believe *pathos* and *logos* are used most effectively with the illustrations of what African Americans faced every day, examples in history in which the law was not right, and the make-up of a just or unjust law. King describes what they had to face on a daily basis and the emotional toll it took on families, which is a prime example of *pathos*. *Logos* is shown through historical events where the law was not just like in the Holocaust. *Logos* is also shown when King describes the differences between a just and unjust law, for example if a law benefits only a small group and harms the whole, it is not a good law. All the components made King's letter credible, emotional, and very persuasive.