

Speech Analysis: "I Have a Dream"

Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech was given August 28, 1963 at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington D.C. The audience that day was not only African-Americans but Caucasians as well. The purpose of the speech was to motivate people to continue fighting for civil rights and to continue believing in it and caring about it. Also, to persuade people who may not already be on board to see the injustices happening and to rise to action.

Martin Luther King Jr. did many things that made this speech so memorable that nearly 50 years later people still remember it and value it. He put his points across in ways that make it easier for the audience to understand. Some of these were his use of anaphora, imagery, and emphasis on particular words.

Martin Luther King Jr.'s use of anaphora

Anaphora is when a speaker takes a list of items and begins each point on their list using the same word or phrase. According to A Pocket Guide to Public Speaking, using repetition, like anaphora, creates a distinctive rhythm which implants important ideas in the minds of the audience. The book also says that to use repetition well, deliver it with appropriate voice inflections and pauses, creating the rhythm you desire.

Martin Luther King Jr. used anaphora several times throughout the speech. It was even a little surprising to see how many times he did use it. He used it a total of five times. He used it right at the beginning and close to the end, as well as using it in between. At times, the rhythm that he set with the anaphora made it sound like he was putting the repeated phrase at the end of a sentence rather than at the beginning because he would hurry on into his next sentence quickly. It could possibly have been because he was trying to make sure the audience wouldn't break into applause too soon before he had completed his thought and finished the section of his speech that he wanted to.

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Martin Luther King Jr.'s use of imagery

Imagery is defined in *A Pocket Guide to Public Speaking* as, "Colorful and concrete words that appeal to the senses." (O'Hair, Rubenstein, Stewart. P 297). The book also directed readers to see analogy, metaphor, and simile. The book explains that imagery should be used to paint mental pictures. It is explained that listeners will respond better to speeches that use imagery than to those that do not. Speech writers use the senses to create these pictures for their audiences. Imagery can be created by modifying nouns and verbs with descriptive words.

Martin Luther King Jr. used imagery quite a bit in this speech. One of the first examples of imagery that he uses is an analogy. He to the situation with the African Americans trying to get their government to give them rights as going to the bank to cash a check that the government had given them and then having the check come back marked "insufficient funds." The purpose of using an analogy is that it can make something easier for your audience to understand. This analogy was very clever and definitely put across the right point in the right way for the audience to understand what he was trying to tell them.

Another example of imagery that he uses is simile. For example, he says, "...we are not satisfied, and we will not be satisfied until 'justice rolls down like waters, and righteousness like a mighty stream.'" This was a good comparison to make because it really paints a picture in the audience's mind because everyone knows what rolling waters and strong streams look like and feel like. It gives a nice explanation of what his expectations are for the receiving of justice.

Another example of a simile he uses is when he talks about the Emancipation Proclamation. He says, "It came as a joyous daybreak to end the long night of their captivity." Again this creates a wonderful and easy to understand image, everyone has witnessed the sun rising after a long dark night at some point. Describing it this way makes it clear that he wants his audience to think of his subject as a

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beautiful thing, something to be appreciative of. He wants them to recognize the beauty and relief that it holds.

Martin Luther King Jr.'s use of emphasis on particular words

Placing more emphasis on certain words brings them out more and draws more attention to them, causing them to stick out in the minds of the audience more. Emphasizing one word over another can change the flow and rhythm of the sentence or phrase. It can also change the point that the audience takes away from that particular phrase or sentence.

Martin Luther King Jr. emphasized the word "all" a lot. Whether saying, "*All* of God's Children" or "*All* men..." he put emphasis on that word almost every time that he said it. He was really trying to make clear that rights of the Constitution and The Declaration of Independence are for *all* men. Black and White. That our government should protect the rights of *all* men regardless of their race, and that black men should be allowed the same privileges as white men. The audience always responded well to this emphasis, the people were definitely all in agreement and understood what it was he was trying to accomplish by emphasizing this particular word. Although it is possible that not everyone necessarily understood what he was trying to accomplish by doing this, everyone at least reacted the way he was most likely hoping that they would.

In conclusion, there are many things that Martin Luther King Jr. did with this speech that made it one that will never be forgotten. Anaphora, imagery, and emphasis of certain words were just a few examples. It goes without a doubt that this will be a speech that will be remembered and valued by many for generations to come.

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Works Cited

O'Hair, Rubenstein, Stewart. A Pocket Guide to Public Speaking. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2010.