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I Have a Dream Analysis

People can often hear an incredibly effective and well crafted speech but never ask, “what is it about it that makes it so good?” A perfect example of this is Dr. Martin Luther King Jr’s “I Have a Dream” speech, which was given in our nation's capital in 1963. The speech was spoken to a lively crowd of civil rights activists who were highly encouraged by his words. But the question still is… why? The subject of the speech, it’s speaker and the people receiving the speech given to was a large part of its impact. Dr. King’s use of extended metaphors, emotionally strong words, and historical reference also strengthened the speech.

Preached loudly and with determination by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., a large and very powerful voice in the civil rights movement. He used logic mixed with emotion mixed with ethics to motivate and encourage masses of people to peacefully fight for equality of all. The audience, as previously stated, was a group of civil rights activists, as well as others there to hear what King had to say. They had just participated in a march in DC and were very excited to hear what Dr. King had to say. The subject of the speech

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was the United States is long overdue on a promise given to African Americans for equality. He clearly stated this by saying, “But one hundred years later, we must face the tragic fact that the Negro is still not free.”

King's diction is also a crucial part of his speech. He used words and phrases to create strong waves of emotion among the crowd. For example the infamous part of his speech where he references the children of different colors holding hands in unity sparked something within the crowd. “I have a dream that my four 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.” This specific portion is the most well known part of the speech, given the fact that it really drives into the emotions of people listening. Anytime a speaker or public figure puts emphasis on the well being of children, it's highly likely they're doing it for the reason of pulling on the hearts of the listeners. He also makes a point to address the great suffering of African American people at this time. This is meant to cause a sadness and give reason for what they have to fight for. These emotional points are like an abridged version of what was stated in his “Letter from Birmingham Jail”. The letter was much longer and went much farther into detail regarding the struggles of African Americans. “We have waited for more than three hundred and forty years for our God-given and constitutional rights.” King says in the letter, emphasizing the most

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important similarity between the letter and the speech. Which is that they both highlight the fact equality was assured yet, never received.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. also made references to moments in American history that gave him some credibility as a speaker. He began his speech by immediately

referring to “The Gettysburg address” and Abraham Lincoln and the Great Emancipator. This gave him credit as an educated man aware of the history of African Americans. He also made references to the Declaration of Independence which said “we hold these truths to be self evident that all men are created equal”. King used this quote to explain how

blacks in America had been robbed of this statement. He was emphasizing that it was about time they were given this basic human right. King also used an extended metaphor to strengthen his argument. He gave the comparison of African American promised freedom to be a check that when they tried to cash in, came back as “insufficient funds”. He stated how they have been cheated because it was not in fact insufficient funds but and unwillingness to give them what they rightfully, as human beings deserve. He used this example of a bounced check because it was something that people could understand and relate to. The speech was meant to be heard by not only the people on the steps of the Lincoln monument that day, but by everyone in the country. The strongest way to get people not facing oppression to understand it is to put it into a comparison that is known

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by all. That was exactly what King did with that extended metaphor which made his speech one to be heard and understood by everyone.

The “I Have a Dream” speech is one that will go down in history. Through Dr. King's use of extended metaphors, emotionally powerful words, and references to other times in history, he created a speech that will always be remembered and respected.