

english lit

by Qq Qq

Submission date: 28-Nov-2019 06:30PM (UTC+0530)

Submission ID: 1223266322

File name: english_literature_analysis_paper.edited.docx (16.64K)

Word count: 2495

Character count: 12312

3

Student's Name

Professor's Name

Course title

Date

2

Analysis of "Letter from a Birmingham Jail"

Martin Luther King Jr was an American; born on January 15th, 1929. He hailed from a middle-class family that was infused in the traditional black ministry that later saw him transform his name from Michael to Martin to successfully become a pastor of the Dexter church. During his early days had received a well-compacted education background with a consequent secure upbringing under the care of his maternal family. This did not, however, exempt King from having a taste of the societal bias that was commonplace in the south during this time. Issues such as racial segregation were common experiences for blacks in this area. Martin's life was somehow shaken by the death of his maternal grandmother in the year 1941 before joining Morehouse College in 1945 at the age of only 15 years. King Jr et al (177-187)

The period before joining college, King had spent the previous summer in the North's Connecticut spending most of his time in a tobacco farm; this was, however, a first time experience away from the high racially segregated south, he was amazed at how the whites freely mixed with the blacks and even ate at the same joints. This peaceful environment here only intensified his hate for racial segregation. In a letter he had addressed to his parents, he noted that he had never believed that a person of his race could go to the same church with the whites.

This could be considered as the basis for Martin's indulgence into the fight against racial segregation; in his later life, Martin had been committed to fighting racial inequality as he openly criticized oppression. His strong oratory character had always brought him crossroads with the authorities. (177-187)

Martin's activism in the fight against racial inequality and racial segregation had seen him being arrested, for he has always championed for non-violent resistance against racism. While in the Alabama prison also known as the Birmingham Jail, he had decided to write a letter in defense of his non-violent strategy against racism. In the letter, Martin has expressed the ⁴ moral responsibility of people to break unjust laws in response to unjust oppression while seeking justice through courts.

Martin's letter had been addressed to eight white men of God who had the tendency of condemning him openly in Alabama; in the letter Martin notes that he had always strived to ensure that he gives the least attention to criticism but however he has expressed his belief in the men of God to be of goodwill and very sincere concerns; and by this belief he is willing to respond to their sentiments in, "*patient and reasonable terms*" at this point, Martin commends the men of God and subsequently establishes a tone of cordialness and a further willingness to engage in a well-reasoned discourse. What King does is very vital since all along he has been labeled a radical offender of the law by the white administration.

King consequently engages the clergymen on the issue of the leadership of the church from where they had indirectly referred to him as an outsider. He makes them aware of the invitation by African American residents and their subsequent need for assistance in the fight against racial discrimination in Birmingham; this can be considered as the starting point of King's denial of the claims and issues labeled against him, with full conviction he, therefore, states that he was in the correct place at the required time and thus all his actions that were considered as extreme were "necessary" King martin et al (254-264)

Besides the invitation, King says he was in Birmingham since he felt he is obligated to react to injustices as soon he gets to realize the occurrence of one regardless of the region where it is. In the letter from the jail, King has compared himself and his work to that of the ancient biblical apostles like Paul who are reported to have moved far away from their homelands to make known the word of God. And according to his argument, he, therefore, questions the idea of the men of God referring to him as an outsider yet he is a resident of the United States. In the letter, he argues that the injustice affecting those living in Birmingham is also part of the racial injustice that he is concerned with on the national scale. (177-187)

Considering and taking into account that King was a Baptist minister and that he had a greater knowledge of the bible and its contents, he has subsequently put to use this knowledge to work to his advantage by comparing his role and that which the early protesters played and by this he has made sure to remind the clergy and others who had previously opposed him that he together with the other protesters are American citizens and should not be referred to as outsiders in their own country.

From the letter, according to Martin's opinions, the epidemic racial segregation and racial inequality in Birmingham had grown to greater heights leaving the African American citizens with little or no avenues to channel their claims regarding the injustices. With vivid examples, Martin has pointed out to police brutality, segregation in the city aimed at the Negroes. He says this is coupled with lack of fair and just court hearings and the unresolved burning of the residences and worship areas belonging to the African Americans; these he says are enough reasons that prompted him to initiate the non-violent resistance. While his critics are only focused on his actions, King has overrun them by making them aware by pointing out to the injustices that have necessitated his actions, he has focused on the claims of racism that the administration has for a long time ignored and by this emphasis and explanation he has tried to defend the actions of the protestors basing his arguments on the current social and political conditions of the negroes. Leff et al (37-51)

In the letter, it is noted that the Negroes have tried to negotiate with the Birmingham administrators but their hopes of being heard were all thwarted. He has cited, the local businessmen promise of removing their "*humiliating racial signs*" these signs were considered as factors responsible for establishing and supporting segregation in the downtown stores of Birmingham. Due to the demonstrations, only some businessmen pulled down their signs while others put theirs back after some time. According to Martin, this convinced the Negroes that non-violent civil disobedience was necessary to ensure that their views were heard and acted upon. In this part of the letter, King has gone into details regarding their decision to protest with a consequent focus on the failure or rather reluctance of the white administration to act upon the "*humiliating signs*". From this Martin has further exposed the psychological effect of the signs on the African Americans.

He has further clarified the objectives of the protests by stating that the protests were to create a situation that is packed with several crises ultimately forcing the negotiation door open, he states that people only gave up their privileges under the application of intense pressure and they, therefore, needed to apply this pressure so as to ensure that their desire was accomplished. King Jr et al (835)

At this part of the letter, King has asserted the sheer importance of creating an unfavorable condition for the white men living in Birmingham, a condition that he says would ensure enough pressure is mounted on them, enough to initiate a reasonable dialogue.

Some factions of Martins critics had previously labeled the protests as ill-timed with further advice of having to wait for the desegregation to happen during its own time, however in this letter; he has given a reply to them stating that in the context of “*civil rights*” the word wait was same as never. This question about the timing of these protests has been raised and Martin has subsequently tried to diligently respond to this from his perspective a black American. Cooke et al (23-25)

Trying to make the readers of this letter understand in-depth the experience of the black Americans in relation to the racial injustices, King has outlined the various common forms of injustices by subsequently presenting a list that includes: lynching coupled with serious levels of police brutality, extreme poverty and the subsequent psychological torture associated with the segregation. He says that as a result of the emotional effects of the racial segregation, his younger daughter sees nothing but has her tiny mind occupied by inferiority, he says he is not willing to wait for natural change to occur considering the psychological torture on the people.

Besides the above, he has listed factors that affect the Black Americans that required quick action such as financial stress and a sense of inferiority. In the next part of the letter, King has touched on some of the allegations that some protesters break the law, which he responds by saying that there is a difference between law and justice and ends by posing a question as to whether the laws that were broken were just or not. According to him, it is a moral responsibility not to be part of unjust laws. Considering the ground from which to consider a law as being unjust, King has presented a valid argument with a focus on the Christian requirements regarding laws, he has reminded the clergy that Christian moral codes are more important than the societal laws and by this, he had focused on the racial separation which he considered to be immoral and ought to be stamped out regardless of the laws which supported it. King Jr et al (835)

From this part of the letter, King notes his willingness and that of other protesters to be arrested for breaking the unjust laws. He has established the difference between a normal crime and civil disobedience, he states that the protesters are protesting openly and are willing to be arrested to bring to attention the effects of the unfair laws. He does this by comparing the protesters and those of the early church thus creating an ethical relationship between the two. King at this point has tried to bring out what he feels about segregation; he condemns those in support of the whites for their acceptance of the inequalities. With reference to the letter he had received from a white man in Texas who had stated that he was in *"a too much religious hurry"* he describes the white moderates as being hypocritical towards handling of the issues relating to the racial injustices and has thus emphasized on the important role played by the protests in fighting for change.

He has then addressed the issue of being regarded as radical, an argument which his critics have used while trying to brand the protests unlawful by saying that his protests were not extreme as it was assumed to be but considered the black nationalists' parties as being extreme since they lacked the religious morals. King has further warned his critics, that due to the much-needed freedom by the African Americans, they are willing to engage themselves in more extremist groups, and due to this he urges his critics to consider the role played by the nonviolent protests as compared to the extremists' alternatives, (835) Considering the historical figures both in the bible and in the American history, Martin, therefore, redefines the idea of extremism and acknowledges that one can become an extremist for just cause. He says Jesus was an extremist of love while Abraham Lincoln was also considered as an extremist to his cause. He states that he is willing to be considered as being radical to achieve the much-desired change that he yearns for.

Towards the end of this letter, King decides to condemn those in support of the segregation but however thanks those who have tried to support the cause even in the smallest manner possible such as Reverend Stallings (one of the clergy) for at one time allowing African Americans to worship alongside his white congregants. It is important to note that King has tried to maintain the cordialness in his tone. Except for Reverend Stallings (8), King shows his discontentment with the white church because of a lack of the will to take action regarding racial inequality. He decides to remind his readers that the most vital role of the church in the ancient times was to act as an agent of change however that was not the case in the modern society neither was the features of the intended transformation visible in the American churches during this time, and through this letter he has tried to urge the clergy to try and remain relevant by remaining focused on the course of ending racial inequalities.

In the final pieces before concluding the letter, King has commented on the police brutality, citing that police are commended, the abuse meted on African Americans by the police has still gone ahead to receive commendation from those in authority. Africans are physically abused by denying them food in the city jail yet the authorities are only concerned about preventing violence against the whites. Despite the police diligently carrying themselves while in the public, this he considers as not worthy of praise and still focuses on the unjust laws based on segregation that the police are meant to protect and he concludes that there is no need of upholding unjust laws. Ling et al (8)

King uses the last paragraphs to commend and praise those protesting from his perspective because he assumes none of the clergymen are willing to do so, and he says that even though he may not live to see the end, but the protests shall be the foundation of democracy in American history. In the last paragraph, King has apologized first for the length of his letter to the men God and subsequently acknowledges the fact that they are both religious leaders who should be destined for the same purpose of spreading peace, however unlike his readers who are free, he is in prison but has taken to his advantage the fact that he can write to pass his message to them about the injustices and how absurd the situation has become. Cooke et al (23-25)

Works cited

Cooke, Tim. *Martin Luther King Jr.* Gareth Stevens Publishing LLLP, 2016.

King Jr, Martin Luther. "from Letter from Birmingham Jail." *Liberating Faith: Religious voices for justice, peace, & ecological wisdom* (1964): 177-187.

King Jr, Martin Luther. "Letter from Birmingham Jail." *UC Davis L. Rev.* 26 (1992): 835.

King, Martin Luther, and C. T. Vivian. "Letter from Birmingham Jail." *Arguing about the law* (2013): 254-264.

Leff, Michael C., and Ebony A. Utley. "Instrumental and Constitutive Rhetoric in Martin Luther King Jr.'s Letter from Birmingham Jail." *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 7.1 (2004): 37-51.

Ling, Peter J. *Martin Luther King, Jr.* Routledge, 2015.

english lit

ORIGINALITY REPORT

2%

SIMILARITY INDEX

1%

INTERNET SOURCES

0%

PUBLICATIONS

1%

STUDENT PAPERS

PRIMARY SOURCES

1

effingham.illinoisgenweb.org

Internet Source

1%

2

Submitted to Saint Leo University

Student Paper

<1%

3

www.beststudentessays.com

Internet Source

<1%

4

Submitted to Austin Peay State University

Student Paper

<1%

Exclude quotes Off

Exclude bibliography On

Exclude matches Off