

# Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Pulpit Rhetoric of Freedom: An Exegesis of His Discourse Mechanism

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## Abstract

The world mostly remembers that Martin Luther King, Jr., was the leader who made a speech known as “I Have a Dream”. He indeed addressed tens of thousands of people on August 28, 1963, to tell them about his dream. However, before that historical date, King had been resourceful in many ways. Besides, five years after that unforgettable date, he would keep showing his ability to produce prolific and enriching works until he passed away in 1968. From his pulpit, surrounded by microphones and cameras, or sitting at his desk, King demonstrated his talent of mastering the word. With turns of phrases, instructive and well-documented contents, as well as quotations, King’s oral and written productions are seductive thanks to their constructiveness. This paper investigates the discourse mechanism that made King a great international public speaker. Through an analysis of the matter and manner of King’s rhetoric, this paper will reveal the secret that is intricately woven into the erudition fabric that enabled King to make good use of eloquence, articulateness, knowledge and charisma. This paper will probe King’s great oratory skills by the agency of Roman orator Marcus Fabius Quintilian’s five oratory devices that are famous among public speakers.

## Keywords

American Studies, Oratory Devices, Public Speaking, Pulpit Rhetoric

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## 1. Introduction

Martin Luther King, Jr., partly owes his celebrity to his oratory skills. His gift of spreading the word of God from a pulpit against human exploitation, injustice, war, poverty, racism, to list a very few themes that constitute the basics of his

productions, rarely finds its match. King used history, literature, especially poetry and psychology to embellish his words. Although they do not mean anything crucial to the understanding of the message, embellished words are all about rhetoric and the splendor of the English language King mastered so much.

As Hansen (2003) purports, King was fascinated with language since childhood. He once said to his mother, “You just wait and see. I’m going to get me some big words” (Hansen, 2003: p. 100). In his Ph.D. dissertation, Dieng (2003) analyzes a King’s speech in these words:

The rest is the preacher’s rhetoric in the good tradition in which the verb, the rhythm and emotion combine so that the orator can be applauded. It is a charming operation without great substance, but which impresses and, sometimes, makes even forget the real substance of the speech. (p. 309)

Next to King’s beautiful phrases, his discourse mechanism is rich. Toulon (2013) probes three critical aspects of the pastor’s enchanting pulpit rhetoric through an analysis of his “I Have a Dream” speech of 1963. Toulon (2013) pretends that great speeches are those that jump at the chance combining a coherent structure, a well-balanced strong message mixed with *pathos*, *ethos* and *logos*. Aristotle developed these sub-devices as the three general means of persuasion (Reich, 2011: p. 3). In fact, King was a teacher, a moralizer and an orator who knew how to make people develop feelings and emotions.

In another part, King would not have been that charismatic in the eyes of African-Americans, in particular, if he had not aligned himself with the *Zeitgeist*, the cultural, social and political mindset of the 1950s and 1960s. He knew it very well as he would quote great French writer Victor Hugo, “There is no greater power on earth than an idea whose time has come (King, 1986: p. 75).” In “Conquering Self-Centeredness”, King humbly explains the reason why he is famous:

Help me, O God, to see that I’m just a symbol of a movement. Help me to see that I’m the victim of what the Germans call a *Zeitgeist* and that something was getting ready to happen in history; history was ready for it. And that a boycott would have taken place in Montgomery, Alabama, if I had never come to Alabama. Help me to realize that I’m where I am because of the forces of history and because of the fifty thousand Negroes of Alabama who will never get their names in the papers and in the headline. O God, help me to see that where I stand today, I stand because others helped me to stand there and because the forces of history projected me there. And this moment would have come in history even if M. L. King had never been born. (King, 1957)

His fame is also partly indebted to the circumstances of the 1950s and 1960s out of the USA, the period of King’s height of career (see Sunnemark, 2004). It was the period of the Cold War. It was the most determinant decade of South Africa’s black populations’ destiny through the charismatic leadership of Nelson Mandela and that of vast decolonization campaigns in Africa through the strong

leadership of Kwame Nkrumah and Patrice Lumumba. In “Time for Freedom Has Come” (1961), he links the civil rights struggle in the United States of America to the vague of independence movements in Africa in these words:

Many of the students, when pressed to express their inner feelings, identify themselves with students in Africa, Asia and South America. The liberation struggle in Africa has been the greatest single international influence on American Negro students. Frequently I hear them say that if their African brothers can break the bonds of colonialism, surely the American Negro can break Jim Crow. (King, 1986: p. 76)

In another speech, “The Birth of a New Nation” (1957), King speaks of Africa at great length and with a detailed argumentation. Apart from his recorded and often filmed addresses, if King had not put his thoughts down on paper, the posterity could not have been that interested in his philosophy today. But as the saying goes, “*Verba volant, scripta manent.*” King did make a tremendously prolific production of articles, sermons, speeches and interviews, let alone his dissertation thesis titled: “A Comparison of the Conceptions of God in the Thinking of Paul Tillich and Henry Nelson Wieman.”

This paper highlights the structuring of King’s speeches and writings that made him a microphone star. What do pulpit rhetoric, mechanism and discourse mean? According to Merriam-Webster (n.d.), a pulpit is an elevated platform or high reading desk used in preaching or conducting a worship service; a mechanism is a process, technique, or system to achieve a result; and a discourse is a mode of organizing knowledge, ideas, or experience that is rooted in language and its concrete contexts.

All great speeches are famous. But the same fame does not apply to great authors. An author might be a best-seller but the content of his writings might be strange to many whereas a famous orator is well-known so much so that his thoughts are often quoted as references. What makes King’s speeches so famous? Why did King use figures of speech in his discourse? What are the different discourse types of King? How did King structure his discourse?

To answer these questions appropriately, I will take heed of the five recommended Quintilian’s rhetorical devices: invention, arrangement, style, memory and delivery (Reich, 2011: p. 3; Ericson, 2016; Sunnemark, 2004; Duchan, n.d.). These devices function like pillars upon which rhetoric rests as they give effectiveness to written and oral discourse (Ericson, 2016).

These criteria encompass King’s educational background, both as a kid and as a student, that had influenced his oratory skills, his ornamental turns of phrases, favorite figures of speech, historical, literary and poetic references. After several readings (Reich, 2011: p. 3; Ericson, 2016; Sunnemark, 2004), I have decided to articulate this paper around these five devices including all necessary details in each one of them in a logical way. This goes beyond pulpit rhetoric even if every Sunday the congregation expects the pastor to speak to them; even if the latter might be in great need of it, especially during a social crisis. Howev-

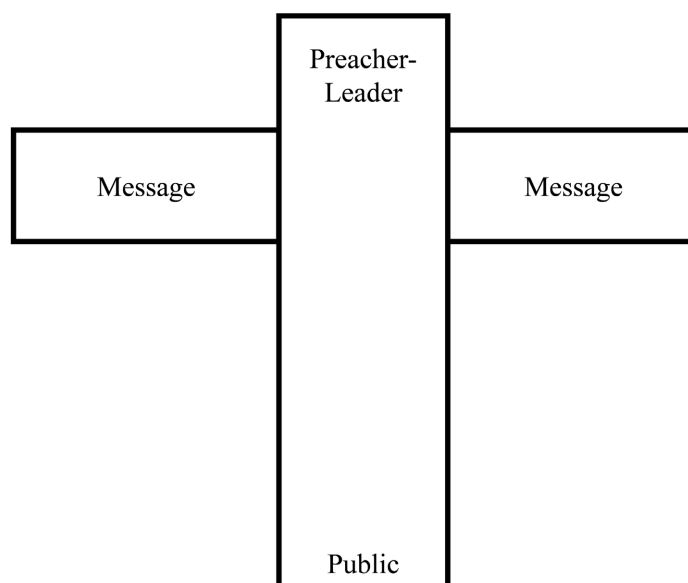
er, every public speaker, whether a political, or a religious leader, needs these rhetorical elements to give credit to their message.

## 2. Rhetoric Invention

Invention involves the search for creativity, imagination, content, search for knowledge and production. The public speaker should be aware of the problem to address; be capable of defining and clarifying the problem, analyzing and evaluating the problem and envisaging solutions. This is the sermon sketch and outline phase for constructiveness. The easiest way to assure coherence, unity and direction to oral discourse is by outlining (Ericson, 2016). The public speaker is like an architect or a graffiti artist, out of nothing they all create something tangible. The public speaker produces a text he will read, or memorize, the architect draws a blueprint and the graffiti artist engraves decorations. King confirms this when he writes:

I was also spending a minimum of fifteen hours a week in preparing my Sunday sermon. I usually began an outline on Tuesday. On Wednesday I did the necessary research and thought of illustrative material and life situations that would give the sermon practical content. On Friday I began writing, and usually finished the writing on Saturday night. (1956: p. 13)

However, an involved structure which is acceptable in written composition may verge on the unintelligible if used in oral discourse (Ericson, 2016). So it is part of the public speaker's qualities to be public-conscious. Public-consciousness defines the three sub-devices of the speech content: *pathos*, *ethos* and *logos*. Although it is a moot point, Ericson (2016) suggests that the preacher acting as a political leader has his own Trinity, which is different from the Christian one. **Figure 1** below delineates this suggestion.



**Figure 1.** The preacher-leader's Holy Trinity.

Each one of these sub-devices has a specific purpose that will make the case convincing (Reich, 2011). *Pathos* is a representation evoking pity or compassion (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). King starts a large number of his speeches with the *pathos* sub-device. He is aware that the principal issue refers to the race relations crisis. He then evokes milestone dates in the African-American experience:

The first Negroes landed on the shores of this nation in 1619, one year ahead of the Pilgrim Fathers. They were brought here from Africa and, unlike the Pilgrims, they were brought against their will, as slaves. [...] The famous Dred Scott decision of 1857 well illustrates his status during slavery. In this decision the Supreme Court of the United States said, in substance, that the Negro is not a citizen of the United States; he is merely property subject to the dictates of his owner.

After his emancipation in 1863, the Negro still confronted oppression and inequality. It is true that for a time, while the army of occupation remained in the south and Reconstruction ruled, he had a brief period of eminence and political power. But he was quickly overwhelmed by the white majority. Then in 1896, through the Plessy v. Ferguson decision, a new kind of slavery came into being. In this decision the Supreme Court of the nation established the doctrine of “separate but equal” as the law of the land. (King, 1991: pp. 5-6)

When King began speaking out against the Vietnam War, he remained constant as well. His perseverant attitude never changed though his real problems with the government or state-related organizations occurred when his positions radically changed into those of a conscientious objector. The content of his speeches kept their liveliness to tell the truth whatever it cost. In “A Time to Break Silence” (1967), he depicts the cruelty of the war to touch his fellow Americans’ hearts and defends the Vietnamese’s rights to live in peace.

This is indeed legitimization as King seeks to prove that the struggle for equal rights and freedom is legal and legitimate. But this is dramatization, too, because King emphasizes African-Americans’ plight from ancient times up to then to demonstrate the urgency to solve African American problems. King’s attempts of wreaking emotional havoc was an opportunity for him to use the *ethos* device. *Ethos* is the distinguishing character, sentiment, moral nature, or guiding beliefs of a person, group, or institution (Merriam-Webster, n.d.).

King (1986) loved reminding his listeners of his Christian education and core values, his commitment and calling, and his being “a preacher by trade” or “a son of the living God”. In his indictment against the Vietnam War, his first line says:

I come to this magnificent house of worship tonight because my conscience leaves me no other choice. I join with you in this meeting because I am in deepest agreement with the aims and work of the organization which has brought us together: Clergy and Laymen Concerned about Vietnam. (King, 1986: p. 136)

Raising the faith issue to speak against an armed conflict gives credit to the public speaker. One can see that *pathos* and *ethos* are close. Apart from the long sentences, even the words are well chosen. The lexical field of ethics clearly appears in this antiwar speech: “the sentiments of my own heart”, “silence is betrayal”, “inner truth”, “mandates of conscience”, “my moral vision”, etc. Both speech sub-devices *pathos* and *ethos* are encompassed by *logos* defined as reason that in ancient Greek philosophy is the controlling principle in the universe (Merriam-Webster, n.d.).

By trying to move his audience with the predicament of African-Americans from slavery to Jim Crow laws, by endeavoring to raise consciousness about the destructive effects of war King teaches them well-documented history lessons with dates and names. King mixes quotations from great authors of various nationalities and knowledge, he explains complex concepts and retraces his education career to reason his listeners, especially the white establishment. Speech content mattered during the Civil Rights Movement, and it matters during social crises everywhere.

In his younger years, King himself listened to public speakers’ rich speeches, which influenced him considerably. By the end of 1946, King did secretly listen to his father’s rival, Reverend W. H. Borders’s 11:00 PM Sunday radio program, *Seven Minutes at the Mike* (Diop, 2022: p. 251). One Sunday afternoon at the Fellowship House in Philadelphia, in 1950, he experienced a mentality change about nonviolence. He was among an audience captivated by Mordecai Wyatt Johnson’s sermon (Diop, 2022: p. 251). These experiences played a significant role in helping him firmly decide to serve the church as a pastor as explained in the following:

King’s dual background in the preaching tradition of the African American church and the academic world positioned him to use a rhetorical technique in which the texts and thoughts of others were drawn into his projects. (Sunnemark, 2004)

### 3. Arrangement of the Content

Arrangement is the distribution of the matter, making clear the place to which each thing is to be assigned (Reich, 2011). Furthermore, it involves orderliness, clarity, unity, direction, coherence and purposefulness (Ericson, 2016). French classicist poet Nicolas Boileau teaches how to write efficiently in these fine words:

Some darker souls, infused with blackened thoughts,  
Beneath the dullest, darkest clouds must walk,  
Where Reason’s light has never yet shone through.  
So think before you write; know what you do.  
Ideas are more, or less, obscure, and each.  
Requires words that fit them, match their reach.  
Ideas completely mastered fall in line,  
The poet never needs to force a rhyme. (Boileau, 2007)

Arrangement is a reasoning process, a road map because the public speaker employs it to know where to go and how to go there. As [Ericson \(2016\)](#) puts it, it heeds a logical pattern, deductive and inductive methods; a chronological pattern, a sequence of events; a space pattern, a description of spaces or objects; and a psychological pattern, satisfaction of the emotional and rational needs of the audience, that is to say the *pathos*, *ethos* and *logos* sub-devices described in the invention section. In “Our Struggle” (1956), a post-bus boycott article and in his last sermon “I See the Promised Land” (1968), King gives examples of the chronological and space patterns.

In his article, he constructively employs both sub-devices *pathos* and *logos* to rouse indignation, and to dramatize the situation in which African-Americans have been living since 1619. The lexical field of black enslavement clearly appears in the first two paragraphs: “forced separation”, “slavery”, “poverty”, “deprivation”, “less than human,” “second-class status”, “inferior nature”, “something less than men”, “uneasy peace”, etc. ([King, 1991: p. 75](#)). In his last sermon full of emotions, he shares his dream of visiting so many historical places and persons that include Egypt, Mount Olympus, Plato, Aristotle, Socrates, Euripides, Aristophanes, the Roman Empire, the Renaissance, Martin Luther in Wittenberg and Abraham Lincoln ([King, 1986: pp. 194-195](#)).

Arrangement does not stop at the reasoning process. Transitional elements are part of it. Transition is a passage of discourse in which a shift is effected ([Merriam-Webster, n.d.](#)). Nevertheless, the beginning of a speech should also have a lead-in to avoid addressing the issue abruptly and to make sure the listener’s attention is attracted. [King \(1986\)](#) gives straightforward examples in the following paragraph:

This morning I would like to use as a subject from which to preach: “The Drum Major Instinct.”  
(p. 181)

I am happy to join with you today in what will go down in history as the greatest demonstration for freedom in the history of our nation.  
(p. 102)

Let us consider some of the challenges of this new age.  
(p. 19)

Let us turn to a more concrete example of just and unjust laws.  
(p. 89)

#### 4. Language Style

Plain English style has its requirements. By watching his videos on YouTube, one could notice the way King delivers his speeches making pauses where necessary. These pauses are commas, new lines and periods in written language. Style has four virtues: correctness, clarity, ornamentation and propriety ([Reich, 2011](#)). According to [Reich \(2011\)](#), for Quintilian, the orator’s message should be “so clear that our words will thrust themselves into his [the judge or audience

member] mind even when he is not giving us his attention, just as the sunlight forces itself upon the eyes” (p. 36).

The same remark applies to anaphora, the repetition of a word or expression at the beginning of successive phrases, clauses, sentences or verses especially for rhetorical or poetic effect; and to epistrophe, the repetition of a word or expression at the end of successive phrases, clauses, sentences or verses especially for rhetorical or poetic effect (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). King excelled in both devices, anaphora and epistrophe:

Let us march on segregated housing...  
 Let us march on segregated schools...  
 Let us march on poverty...  
 Let us march on ballot boxes...

(King, 1991: p. 229)

His truth is marching on.  
 Our God is marching on.

(King, 1991: p. 230)

...I want you to be first in love.  
 I want you to be first in moral excellence.  
 I want you to be first in moral generosity.

(King, 1991: p. 230)

I have already developed the sub-devices of *pathos*, *ethos* and *logos* but it is relevant to add that through this triade, King (1986) uses different tones, especially the satirical, sarcastic, instructive, religious and dramatic tones as in these examples:

...“mere tokens” of integration (“tokenism,” they call it)...

(p. 81)

...Gunnar Myrdal described the ambitious Negro as “an exaggerated American.”

(p. 76)

They must see Americans as strange liberators.

(p. 140)

The Vietnamese people proclaimed their own independence in 1945...

(p. 141)

...and the Almighty said to me, ...

(p. 194)

...napalm, that burner of all things and flesh in its path.

(King, 1991: p. 618)

In the first example with the satirical tone, the author caustically rejects gradual integration. In the second example, he ironically exposes the ridiculous behavior of African-Americans who thought imitating the Whites would make them gain social integration. He went even further in a subversive tone declaring that he is “proud to be maladjusted” to avoid the “neurotic personality” (King,



1991: p. 216). In the third example, the pastor turns into a teacher to give a history lesson about Vietnam. In the last three examples, he respectively imagines a personal conversation with God and gives examples of the dramatically lethal consequence of war.

Moreover, King also uses apostrophe, a direct way of addressing people, and utilizes rhymes. “Apostrophe is an interesting figure of speech because in itself it displays the emotion of the public speaker or the desired effect upon the audience” (Reich, 2011: p. 45). Apostrophe has the specificity to catch attention, whereas rhymes bring music to the ear as in these sentences and phrases:

My people, my people, listen!

My dear Fellow Clergymen,...

(King, 1991: pp. 229-282)

...shall never call retreat.

...His judgement seat.

Be jubilant, my feet.

(King, 1991: p. 230)

To understand how rhetoric was dear to King, one has to revisit the Holy Scriptures. In the gospel of Luke, Reich (2011) has found approximately seven hundred figures of speech. The Lukan Jesus speaks in the manner of an educated man of high social status. Certain well-known quotations would not have been that powerful without the craft of rhetorical figures of speech (Reich, 2011: p. 2). Style as the third rhetoric device offers the public speaker the occasion to use visual images, decoration and virtuosity. As Ericson (2016) summarizes, “The language used must, above all, serve the ideas and purpose of the speech.” You cannot read one King’s piece of work until the end without coming across any trace of personification, hyperbole, antithesis, metaphor and allegory, to list a few, all used with illustrative adjectives and powerful nouns.

Examples of personification for the representation of a thing or abstraction as a person or by the human form:

We may cry out desperately for time to pause in her passage, but time is deaf to every plea and rushes on.

(King, 1986: p. 151)

...Old Man Segregation is on his deathbed.

(King, 1986: p. 24)

The morning stars will sing together...

(King, 1986: p. 28)

Examples of hyperbole to make his message sound a lot more dramatic than it already is. Sometimes, this sounds high-flown language as in the following:

The oceans of history are made turbulent by the ever-rising tides of hate.

(King, 1986: p. 150)

...many streets of the South would be flowing with floods of blood.

(King, 1986: p. 93)

A century ago there were no skyscraping buildings to kiss the stars and no gargantuan bridges to span the waters.

(King, 1991: p. 618)

Examples of antithesis to contrast his ideas by means of parallel arrangement of words, clauses or sentences:

Transforming the fatigue of despair into the buoyancy of hope.

(King, 1986: p. 61)

This is no day to pay lip service to integration, we must pay life service to it.

(King, 1991: p. 474)

Visible is a shadow cast by the invisible.

(King, 1960)

You may be in good health today and plunged to the nadir of bad health tomorrow.

(King, 1960)

Examples of metaphors, King's favorite and better mastered figure of speech, to denote an idea or concept used in place of another to suggest a likeness or analogy between them:

...the surging murmur of life is a restless sea.

(King, 1986: p. 62)

He was merely a depersonalized cog in a vast plantation machine.

(King, 1986: p. 17)

Man through his scientific genius has been able to dwarf distance and place time in chains; he has been able to carve highways through the stratosphere.

(King, 1986: p. 19)

...surely the American Negro can break Jim Crow.

(King, 1991: p. 162)

Examples of allegory to repeat syntactic similarities introduced for rhetorical effect in parallelisms and biblical parables with representations full of imagery with symbolic meanings:

- Pharaoh and the Israelites;
- Rip Van Winkles' twenty years of sleep;
- The decline and fall of the Roman Empire;
- The parable of the lost sheep;
- The story of Nicodemus;
- The good Samaritan;
- The parable of Dives and Lazarus;
- The parable of the rich fool;
- The parable of the Pharisee and the publican;
- The parable of the prodigal son;
- The parable of the talents, etc.

Besides, higher education benefited King considerably in arranging his speech style. In "Pilgrimage to Nonviolence" (1960), King details his mental develop-

ment thanks to his intensive readings. King's (1986) interdisciplinary knowledge covers liberalism, neo-orthodoxy, and existentialism with Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Jaspers, Heidegger, Sartre and Paul Tillich (pp. 56-57). But it also encompasses great psychological, psychoanalyst, and literary figures such as Fosdick, Sigmund Freud, Langston Hughes, Victor Hugo, Josiah Gilbert Holland, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Benjamin Mays, James Russell Lowell, Thomas Carlyle, etc. His beautiful quotations came from these eminent intellectual figures.

In all the above examples on figures of speech, one can easily notice how they are full of telling, poetic adjectives. Descriptive adjectives matter in discourse. When a group of white clergymen qualified King's activities in Birmingham as "unwise and untimely", and "extreme", he could not help retorting them with his most famous and longest letter. So, adjectives have great value. Finally, yet importantly, King's rhetoric also bears indelible marks of "God talk", a term found in the rhetoric book by Ericson (2016). King's "God talk" comes in the form of a religious tone as in the previous examples, but it also comes as the lexical field of religion, especially Christianity with terms such as "heaven," "God," "Jesus," "Heavenly Father," "pulpit," "pew," "church," "the Creator," etc.

## 5. Public Speaker's Memory

Memory is the firm retention of the speech words, their arrangement and the style that makes the arrangement pleasant to hear or to read. The public speaker's gift to retain words might subjugate the audience so that they will be able to quote unabridged passages from his speech. A good memory is a great advantage for a public speaker. Even though being able to address a public for half an hour or more without reading one's speech on a paper seems challenging, it is not defensible to depend on one's paper slavishly. A good public speaker has a command of what he says. He does not hesitate and does not search his words.

King was an exceptional orator because he gave his listeners the impression that he was a walking encyclopedia and a trustworthy leader who would be faithful to his ideals as he was already with the words he mastered so much. This was thanks to his intellectual talent. For instance, he skipped the ninth grade and the twelfth grade, completing his high school work at fifteen, whereas other students of his age finished their high school studies at seventeen or eighteen (Young, 1981). It was in 1963 that King proved he had a photographic memory with his heartfelt and book-like "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" written while confined in prison and not "from a comfortable desk" (King, 1986: p. 100).

## 6. Delivery of the Message

There are three types of delivery: impromptu or extemporaneous, manuscript and memorized (Ericson, 2016). Making a speech *extempore* is not recommended because of its recklessness. A manuscript speech is good, but as already evoked, the public speaker must not entirely depend on a paper. This gives a bad impression as his audience may feel he is neither genuine nor reliable. The ora-

tor's charisma often comes from his ability to attract people through subjugation. Memorizing one's speech could be advantageous. Instead of reading an extended quotation, a short poem or verse from a hymn, speaking from the head and heart may add a fresh dimension that can be highly effective (Ericson, 2016).

So, adjustment to the speaking situation, modulation of rate, pitch, volume are part of the delivery process. The mechanics of delivery also include diction, gesture, movement, breathing, articulation, pronunciation usage, pauses, eye contact and voice. In the same way a teacher who cannot raise his voice cannot affirm his authority in class, a public speaker who cannot project his voice so that people at the back seats can hear him will not make his words penetrating. A high-pitched voice helps. Editor Clayborn Carson confirms it, "His [King] mellow baritone voice could soar toward the sweet relief that only clarity and insight can provide, and then collapse in the often somber or sober embrace of finely woven metaphors" (King, 1991: p. 491).

As the pastor of First Baptist Church in East Elmhurst, William E. Gardner had evaluated King's performance as a religious leader. Although he noticed in King "an attitude of aloofness, disdain, and possible snobbishness which prevent his coming to close grips with the rank, and file of ordinary people", he ranked King as above average in his pulpit ability which involved general impression, enunciation, sentence structure, content, organization, use of voice, effective of delivery, effectiveness of public reading and ability to lead worship (Gardner, 1950).

What kind of public listens to the preacher who also assumes the role of leadership out of the church? If King had not practiced social gospel, he would not deem it mandatory to resort to so many devices. Making sermons simply on Sundays, and afterwards go back home next to one's wife and children does not necessarily requires the preacher to prepare so rich a content. King preached for his fellow Christians but he also communicated to African-Americans from the Nation of Islam, and to people of other races from other religions and creeds across the USA. So different kinds of listeners were part of King's audience as shown in the following Figure 2.

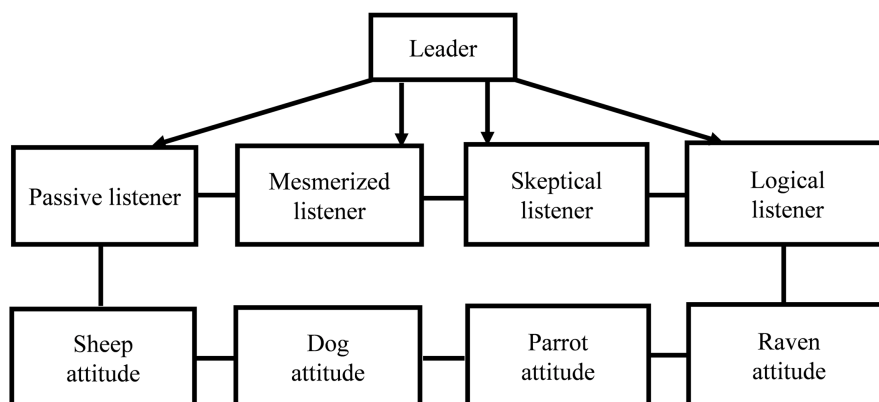


Figure 2. The leader's four audience types.

The figure above presents four types of audience. First, passive listeners have the sheep behavior. Sheep cannot act with proper judgement. If a thief decided by guile to give fodder to sheep, they would follow him without suspecting that the thief is not their guardian who regularly feeds them, shears them and washes them. The sheep-like listeners blindly follow the leader with no purpose in head. They are exactly those feeble-minded people who would exchange their dignity for small fry. They can be relegated to the status of things because they are not ambitious, never react positively and never comment the leader's ideas. This is the category of the audience who are illiterate and idle adults, or too young to discern truth or lie. This type of audience would throw themselves into the sea if the leader asked them to.

Second, mesmerized listeners have the dog behavior. Their good characters are loyalty and faithfulness. It is not because they are imbeciles or half-educated persons, but because they love the leader too much and adamantly believe in his project. Mesmerized listeners have spanned history, from Adolf Hitler to Donald Trump. The leader takes advantage of despair or crisis and acts as their savior, their long-awaited messiah who comes to deliver them.

Hitler had done so in Germany during the 1930s when the economic crisis characterized by unemployment plunged Germans into hopelessness. Trump has American bigot followers who could kill for him by simple orders. Mesmerized listeners are intelligent but their intelligence had been frozen by impetuous zeal. Fanaticism might lead them to the irreversible. When they open their eyes, it will be too late. Third, skeptical listeners behave like parrots. They always question the leader's words and deeds, whether good or not. They are smart but not fair enough to accept the leader's positive points. They are pessimistic. They spend time commenting the leader's opinions to search weak points for criticism, which they always find since perfection is not human but divine.

Fourth, logical listeners behave like ravens. They use reason and good sense above anything else. They can distinguish truth from falsehood. They are educated and may belong to any social class because good human qualities do not depend on social stratifications or wealth. To every crisis, they suggest solutions with wise restraint and proper discipline. They are optimistic but to certain degrees. They may be pessimistic if the situation requires to. They also spend time commenting the leader's opinions in a constructive way.

In Islam, the raven has a divine dimension in the dramatic story of Abel (Haabil) and Cain (Kaabil), two sons of Adam. Abel was the younger, the righteous and innocent brother, whereas Cain, the elder, was puffed with arrogance and jealousy, which led him to commit the crime of murder (Qur'an, 1990, S. 5:27). This was the very first crime on earth. The very first time a person spilt human blood. After killing his brother, Cain did not know what to do until:

Then Allah sent a raven, who scratched the ground, to show him how to hide the naked body of his brother.

“Woe is me!” said he; Was I not even able to be as this raven, and to hide

the naked body of my brother?”  
Then he became full of regrets.

(Qur'an, 1990, S. 5:31)

These comparisons with animals offer a visual, and easier understanding of audience types because:

When a human being is metaphorically described as a fox or a pig or a rat, as in the example above, quite a few of the most conspicuous and concrete characteristics of real foxes, pigs, or rats are suppressed, for instance physical characteristics like having four legs, a coat of fur or hair, a snout, and a tail. Instead such a metaphorical characterisation focuses on attitudinal reactions to behavioural traits and personality qualities that are considered piglike. (Alm-Arvis, 2003: p. 22)

For any type of audience, it is compulsory for a leader to be careful about his image. Here, image does not refer to pictures but appearance and behavior in public because the public figure has the obligation to calculate his public, people who revere him. King's statesmanship and traits of character are unfaltering evidence that leadership requires more than words and deeds. Virtues and exterior qualities are its complementary components. His biographical and autobiographical works substantiate how much sartorial appearance is crucial for a leader. He does not care about his image out of arrogance but duty. Sartorial appearance inspires trust from those he led, and it imposed their respect.

## 7. Conclusion

The discourse mechanism of Martin Luther King, Jr., articulates around five main rhetoric devices advocated and vulgarized by Quintilian. Those devices involve sub-devices, figures of speech, tones and lexical fields. With all these devices and sub-devices, King molded his discourse with beautiful and strong literary words that enabled him to waltz back and forth from legitimization and dramatization to radicalization. Ericson (2016) summarizes the five rhetoric devices in these thoughtful words:

For most pastors, the sermon time is the most important fifteen or twenty minutes of the week, the time when the pastor is being pastor to the whole flock. [...] One must find the content, then organize it, then settle on the best words to express one's ideas that actually deliver the content.

To solve King's rhetorical mechanism puzzle, one must understand that these reference areas illustrate his words: science, the American political tradition, history, theology, literature, sociology, psychology and philosophy. Being educated in respected institutions was an invaluable asset for King. He was a born public speaker who had the Christian faith in the veins and his father, Martin Luther King, Sr., had strict ideas about discipline. Indeed, King, Sr., educated his children "in a rather strict fundamentalistic tradition" (King, 1986, p. 55). King

reached his peak in the middle of an era which mindset coincided with his convictions about freedom fighting. This undoubtedly contributed to making him a great orator.

### Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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