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### Dr. King's use of Metaphors in "I Have a Dream"

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr's speech "I Have a Dream" was a historically significant piece that utilized vivid imagery and metaphor to address the issues of racism pervading the United States. Rather than delineating case incidents and abstract concepts of racism, Dr. King used metaphors to impress in the hearts of America an emotional awareness instead of an intellectual acknowledgment. Dr. King used metaphors to expose the severity and cruelty of the situation, to describe the strength and resolve of the civil rights movement, and to present an ideal to strive towards.

Dr. King begins by using a phrase that harkens back to the language used by President Abraham Lincoln, "Fivescore years ago" (King 41). He uses this to begin his analogical and simile based address. Dr. King draws this connection by describing a "symbolic shadow" in which they are to feel the pressure of being under. This symbol sets the foundation for paralleling the purpose of Lincoln to liberate slaves and Dr. King's pursuit of abolishing segregation. He compared Lincoln's actions as a "beacon of light" and a "joyous daybreak to end the long night of their captivity" (King 41). This duality between light and dark is the introduction of an illustration of moral tension that will appear throughout the entirety of the speech. Dr. King begins to describe the current state of affairs, and metaphorically paint the

picture of the horrors occurring at that time. He describes segregation as “manacles” and the prejudice of the whites as “chains” (King 41). By describing segregation with words with the connotation of bondage, he is making a statement that African Americans are still in a form of slavery, while not according to servitude, he is making apparent the slavery of being deprived of social and political equality. Further, he describes the pseudo freedom that is championed by the Americans as a “cash check” and likens the government to a “bank of justice” (King 41). He exposes the hypocrisy of America, as being a country defined by so-called “freedom” to the relationship between a check and a bank that corruptly refuses to honor the request to withdraw on the basis of prejudice. This use of vivid imagery was very effective in conveying the hypocrisy of America because money was a universal concept that everyone could relate to, especially the privileged white Americans. Dr. King also depicts the values of the racists as a “cup of bitterness and hatred”, a clear rebuke of their character (King 42).

Dr. Kings then begins to reassure his fellow African Americans, and at the same time communicate to the racist Americans that they will not back down. He uses metaphors to convey this point. Dr. King likens the passion of the civil rights movement as a “sweltering summer”, a concept that evokes in the listener a sense of strength and even discomfort (King 42). This both relays the idea that the protesters are strong, but that they are also discontent, and will not relinquish their efforts until they are met with the terms they are seeking. Dr. King compares their goal to an “autumn of freedom and equality” (King 42). He also compares their resolve as “whirlwinds of revolt”, a powerful image of persistent opposition (King 42).

After this, Dr. King closes his address with a call to bring about an idealistic world, by which he connects the concept of a “dream” to (King 43). He urges America to one day be able

to sit together at the “table of brotherhood” and to participate in the “oasis of freedom”. He starts to urge America to build the image of a future that is conceptually antithetical to the way he described it at the time. He uses words that serve as unifying agents, “table of brotherhood” being a symbol of fellowship. Sitting at a table denotes some level of mutual respect, and by the context of his statement, Dr. King is actually describing a joyous scenario. In this way, Dr. King is presenting an ideal by which he is urging Americans to strive towards, a future which he expects they should all feel morally compelled to work for.

Dr. King through his use of metaphors described the horrors of racial segregation and discrimination and then contrasted it with the delights of a utopia-like reality to evoke a sense of urgency within the listener. He did this so that the listeners could be able to appreciate and understand the emotional, moral, and sensitive nature of their plight. Through his use of metaphors, Dr. King was effective in communicating not only his message but to instill in the listeners the values of consideration on part of the oppressed.

#### Works Cited

King, Martin Luther, Jr. “I Have A Dream.” *Readings for Writers*, edited by Jo Ray

McCuen-Metherell and Anthony C. Winkler, 15th ed., Cengage Learning, 2016., pp. 40-44.