Paper 2

Instructor:  James Knippen

Notes:
- Prompt included (same prompt as Paper 1)
- Handwritten instructor feedback
- Paper includes both margin comments and terminal comment
PAPER THREE: THE APPEALS PAPER

OPTION ONE
In “Letter from Birmingham City Jail,” Martin Luther King uses Logos, Pathos, and Ethos to support his argument(s). In at least 750 words, explain which of these modes of appeal you personally find to be the most effective in King’s “Letter,” and why. Pick no more than two modes of appeal.
In Martin Luther King’s Letter From Birmingham City Jail, he uses all three examples of appeals to support his claim that there is great injustice in Birmingham. He writes this incredibly long and well thought out masterpiece from the confines of his jail cell and has plenty of time to refine his argument. Although he uses Logos and Pathos extremely well, I believe that the appeal he uses most strongly is Ethos. The way he establishes his credibility through his description of his background, his calm and collectiveness, and his place of position in the organizations that he deals with, is extremely effective.

King had been involved in a lot of things such as this; this was not nearly the first time. He is a black male who has grown up with racial oppression and he knows all about it. Some might even say he is the expert. He conveys a sense of wisdom in this letter that he backs up by telling of times of hardship he has gone through to get to where he is today. In one of the earlier paragraphs of this letter, he writes of all the things that black people had to go through and implies that he himself had seen all of these things first hand, such as his son asking “why do white people treat colored people so mean?”, in one of the longest most heartfelt sentences I have ever read where he describes having to explain the horrible things that African
Americans have to deal with. This sentence could also be considered pathos which is another appeal he uses awesomely, but I believe it more expresses ethos because of how much experience he has because of these hardships he describes, and it just proves that he is very credible on the topic and he uses ethos very well in this way.

Since King had grown up under the tyranny of the white man’s laws he has a huge reasoning behind his arguments. He could take the white man’s actions toward him in the past and turn his feelings into a rage and become another racist just as bad as the people who bring him down, but he is better than that, and keeps his words to relaxed debate like conversation. He does not attack the people to which he is writing his letter, which would cause them to quickly disregard what he has to say, and him their enemy. No, he is much smarter than that and treats these men the way he wants to be treated, with respect. There is nothing more noble and credible than this way of writing. King words his points carefully to show intelligence as well as care and proves that he knows exactly what he is talking about. Had he not been a well read man on the subject, as he proves by quoting many people and using many facts and knowledge, he would not be worth listening to. However, he presents his argument with a cool head and a peaceful air about him, and this really conveys his trustworthiness.

One of the main components of ethos is the speaker’s experience in the subject. The subject of Martin Luther King’s Letter from Birmingham Jail is racism, and more specifically, the inequality of the white man and black man through the unjust law of segregation. Who could be more credible on this subject than he who is the president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, which is an organization dedicated to gaining civil rights through the
use of nonviolent protest and civil obedience. King had also been leading boycotts for many years and is a very responsible and well respected member of the civil rights movement. As if these men didn’t already know who he is and what he is done, and what it means that he is writing a letter to them, he mentions often all of the things he has done and seen that have to do with inequality. He does not over exaggerate any of the things he has done nor does he ever lie about any of the horrible ways he has been treated. He merely says that he wishes that these two groups could be seen as equals under the church that they are both a part of, under God, where he and they are both influenced greatly by. He uses his trustworthiness to prove that the only differences they hold are the color of their skin.

The way Dr. King uses his past experiences, argues without being hostile, and uses his position and accomplishments is well refined. He allows for almost no argument the way he is so knowledgeable and well read on the issues. The reader has no reason not to trust him the way he is so matter of fact; he gives no personal attacks and is extremely respectable the way he is above treating people poorly even though they don’t treat him with respect. This calmness is key to how effective his words are. His position as president of a major organization that covers the whole south that deals with the very same issue that is at hand in this instance every day is a major aid to his ability to influence his captors. King’s use of logos and pathos are incredibly effective in this essay, however, ethos I believe has a little extra punch on this subject. His logos is very strong; he has extremely well placed facts and statistics that almost seem unarguable. He plays at your emotions with his use of pathos in a way that anyone could relate to. Those two are so well used, but they would mean so much less without his rock solid appeal to ethos. The credibility is the foundation of his fortress where the walls are his pathos.
and ethos. His resume of fighting injustice is what really makes this letter brilliant, and gives
you no choice but to believe and take sides with what he has to say.

Casey,
This essay was a pleasure to read—especially since you are the only one in class who argued the only one in class who argued
ethos is the most effective appeal in the letter. Your points of support are well-chosen! However, remember that the prompt asked you to explore the reasons behind your own reaction to the appeals—this personal reflection is largely missing from your essay. Pulling quotes from the letter as illustrations would also be very helpful in giving your readers a better perspective of your argument. For these reasons, I strongly suggest you revise this essay for Paper Five—I can envision your bumping this grade up quite a bit.