B2 Seminar: Letter from Birmingham Jail

Absent: Connor Peed, Nate Fowler

Olinger: No profanity…no anger.

Eble: Let’s talk.

Fendinger: Started with question #3—it wouldn’t work. Soft… it might get lost from folks on Fox News.

* Geyer: Today, attention spans are short, so long letters may not have much of an effect. Thus, Tweets from Teju Cole cause an uproar. That’s our main form of media. Carries into Malcolm Gladwell’s article.
* Menke: Assuming that he has the same ethos today as he had then. Letters from Pope, President.
* Eble: What was King’s ethos?
* Menke: Leader of the Civil Rights movement.
* Geyer:
* Noah: We look back… of course, now… then, though, we can’t pay attention.
* Marshall: Building ethos. References people—Jesus, Lincoln, Jefferson, Paul—to build his ethos, make himself more likeable.
* Fendinger: I don’t think he was trying to be likeable; he wanted the tension. Persona = well-read.
* Marshall: Going for a noble cause
* JJ: Working today… length doesn’t always matter. Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address was brief.
* Geyer: One reason I don’t think it would work—media would focus on one part. Referenced CIA report. Text = all of the pathos, rhetorical devices give it more meaning. General thesis ignores the effect.
* JJ: General reaction—newspapers that cherry-picked.
* Olinger: Open letter…

Eble: Challenged Marshall on pronoun—not “his,” but “their” cause.

* Marshall: “Their…”
* Fendinger: “Our…” Pronouns with a cumulative effect.
* Eble: How does he transform this from a fringe group’s movement into a national movement?
* Fendinger: Unjust laws…
* Menke: Biblical allusion, Hitler, Boston Tea party
* Geyer: Appeal to the Church.
* JJ: Here comes everybody. You swoop in your opponents.
* Eble: Yes! How else?
* JJ: Ethos… minister… audience = people who should understand that. To not understand would be a logical error.
* Geyer: King included internal, external conflicts. Look at O’Brien: His whole conflict was in his head. To whom will O’Brien succumb?
* Fendinger: King drops the royal “we” (pun on his name) with “our nation” and “the American people.”
* Austin: He also uses the second person in paragraph 14’s periodic sentence; this helps connect his audience to the cause.
* Herriott: Paragraph 4… metaphors…
* Eble: Yes!

JJ: Flips the whole case on his head. Paragraph 47. Read from 47 *very* passionately. Explained why he read the paragraph. It ties the bow on it; do you really want to challenge? You’re for, against; the line is drawn here.

* Eble: If you’re against us, you’re on the wrong side of history.
* JJ: Yes.
* Marshall / Wright: Makes this seem inevitable.
* Fendinger: Which one would be the right side of O’Brien’s history?
* JJ: Should I stay or should I go?

JJ: Establishes ethos. “What else can one do…?”

* Eble to Wright: Talk about his tone…
* Wright: Whole essay, he’s very respectful (priests, rabbis)… much disappointment, scolding. At some point, we’ll meet under the helm of brotherhood.
* Eble: Let’s look at the conflicts of our life. How easy is it to forgive?
* JJ: turning the other cheek… spoke about Walter Wink’s reading.
* Eble talked, read the conclusion.
* Geyer: He humbles himself in the last few paragraphs. In the rest, he sounds authoritative; yet, he puts himself beneath the guys he’s talking to.
* Noah: At first, if I were to write this letter, I wouldn’t be this kind. But he’s super humble
* Liam: I have to take one for the team.
* Geyer: Thoreau—spent less than 24 hours in jail and bitched; King was in jail longer, didn’t complain.
* Liam: He even apologizes—not a punishment.
* Geyer: You wouldn’t even know this was written from jail.
* Diesslin: Sign-off line.

Austin: Allusion we haven’t discussed. Socrates (paragraph 25): Tension = necessary to create change. Socrates uses questions to force, to dig up the answer from the person he’s teaching. Tension on a societal level *and* on an individual letter.

Luke: Adolf Hitler = very recent. Read from the section regarding legality of those situations.

Eble / Menke: Unjust / just law…

Eble: Allusions = Venn diagram. About whom would he talk today?

* Olinger: He would mention the same people.

Fendinger: Would this work to justify protests in Ferguson?

* Callahan: Ferguson is violent. King was not. This letter would be disproved by Ferguson.
* Menke: Police have taken the role of nonviolent protesting.
* Geyer: Ferguson hasn’t worked because they don’t have a figurehead. They have a martyr. King had thousands of African Americans to back him. Jesus was a figurehead and a martyr. Connected to Gladwell, his criticism of the internet. Thoreau was the main guy in jail.
* Noah: Nobody would really care about a letter.
* Eble: Not even published online?
* Liam: MLK, figurehead in Ferguson.
* Geyer: Letters in the past… Chris Kluwe’s letter.
* Eble: Yes. Media circus.
* Marshall: Madden letter.
* Eble: Noah—would the tone work in our culture today?
* Noah: Depends on the scenario.
* Geyer: We’d experience the same problems as King—white middle class folks. Peace movement…
* Noah: We can’t really relate to people who are suffering.

Eble talked…and he talks too much.