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Metaphor in MLK's "I Have a Dream" Speech

Martin Luther King Jr. powerfully uses figurative language throughout his famous "I Have a Dream" speech to urge all Americans, regardless of background, to accept one another as equals. For example, after he emphasizes the nation's creed that all men are created equal, King proclaims, "I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slaveowners will be able to sit down together at a table of brotherhood" (165). The minister incorporates the metaphorical "table of brotherhood" to express his desires that all Americans come together as one, such as a family that might sit together for meals at the kitchen table. The reference to "brotherhood" also connotes a fraternity or association of men treating each other as brothers united for common purposes. Likewise, King also employs figurative language later in the speech. For example, once he shares his views on improvements in the states of Mississippi and Alabama, he states, "I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plains, and the crooked places will be made straight ..." (165). King strongly uses geological imagery such as mountains, plains, and valleys to explain his desire for equality. Just as those features of the earth would be metaphorically lowered, raised, flattened, or straightened, so does King hope that certain social equalities could be made possible so that all people are treated equally. Ultimately, the use of figurative language allows King to dramatically express his main point that Americans should see each other as equals.

Works Cited

King, Jr., Martin Luther. "I Have a Dream." *Prentice Hall Literature: Gold Level*.

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