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*What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July* Rhetorical Analysis

Frederick Douglass perfected the art of using the theories of Aristotle in most of his speeches. Aristotle argued that an author or a speaker can employ three core approaches when persuading a target audience. First, logos, or the appeal to logic in a given argument. The talented American orator perfected the use of logos while providing crucial and in-depth facts about the legislative and American political scene, including proposed and enacted laws. Douglass was also instrumental in dismantling arguments of his opponents.

According to the text of the speech, the speaker uses logos, or the ability to speak to the feelings and convictions of a gathering of people. In addition, Douglass utilizes a fire-and-brimstone tone to create idyllic bits of analogies, distinctive pictures, rhythmic developments, and expressions to appeal to target listeners. The third tactic is the usage of ethos, or the appeal to the author's or the speaker's own character and credibility. The orator creates ethos by commencing his speech with a rich sense of humility by honoring the founding fathers. This article explores how Douglass employs ethos, pathos, and logos in "What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July."

On July 5, 1852, Douglass shared "What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July" in Rochester, New York. This great piece elaborates on what the Fourth of July means to freed slaves. Douglass uses three rhetorical devices to make a great speech, including logos, pathos, and ethos. The orator starts his speech by explaining how and why he was asked to provide a

speech about this event. Douglass provides a brief statement by explaining the hardships of his journey and why he tried to share his thoughts with the target audience. He explains that the Fourth of July is a day of celebration for their country rather than his country. Douglass explains that his country is still young, but there are many obstacles to overcome.

The orator employs logos to talk about the “Declaration of Independence” and its authors. The argument is logical and factual. Douglass also provides logic: slaves are human beings. He also observes how people acknowledged this fact, but they opt to overlook it. Douglass also appeals to logos when explaining how giving this speech itself is outrageous. The people seem not to understand the importance of the Fourth of July and view it as a holiday for African Americans. In essence, pathos or the appeal to emotions takes the greatest part in Douglass’ speech. The orator appeals to the emotions of the audience by providing crucial insights about forefathers and their achievements. This helps to share the concept of nationalism of the American people.

Douglass also creates pathos when he argues that the day is crucial to people, but not to him. The American orator also appeals to pathos by reciting a powerful and thrilling poem. The poem affirms that slaves are disappointed and they are still pursuing freedom. The poem provokes a white audience to think about the need for equality and freedom, and explains how blacks are desperately looking for freedom and equality. The poem also points out the will of God to have all humanity enjoy the freedom of equality. Douglass proceeds to demonstrate to the freed Americans, the slaves, and the white majority, that the Fourth of July is one of the grossest mockeries of human history.

The orator does not recognize that independence and he does not share the joy associated with that day. In the fourth paragraph, the speaker draws a clear line for the audience.

Douglass stops posing rhetoric questions and lays out the truth. The orator decides to use more prolific terms such as “them,” “us,” “me,” and “you” to affirm the fact that the holiday has a double meaning. It provides blind joy to the whites and a mourning moment for African Americans. Such terms are also italicized in the text to apply pressure or put emphasis on the target audience. The most important factor at this moment is that Douglass’ audience in July 1852 consisted mostly of white abolitionists.

In essence, Douglass was addressing audiences who supported his cause and even persuades them to “argue more and denounce less... persuade more and rebuke less” (Douglass 2). The orator affirms that debate lacks the required attention and effort, and the American people and authorities have failed miserably to guarantee freedom and equality. Douglass speaks in a harsh tone to the target audience to show that he is passionate about the cause of oppressed people.

On the last page, the speaker references the Bible and applies the situation to what is described by his compelling quotes. The orator finds it hard to forget his people or even express joy when his people continue to express pain. The simple logic provided in the speech is proved several times: “My People Mourn,” “You Rejoice,” “My people have no freedom, have no liberty” and “This holiday is to rejoice for the sake of freedom and liberty.” The speaker also makes it clear that the holiday is a mockery to the oppressed.

The reference to the mockery is also made several times and with poignant logical statements, arguing for its validity. The author also speaks about the various errors made by the American people and how they continue to make the same mistakes. Douglass affirms that anyone who is free from prejudice will see the truth in his speech. The American orator draws his arguments from God, the Bible, and the American constitution. Based on the credible references

used to backup Douglass' arguments, it is difficult for anyone to attempt to disagree. In the last part of his speech, the speaker points out his basis or argument and what he intends to speak about. Douglass provides crucial details about the black community that needs to enjoy the same freedom and natural human rights like the white majority.

Douglass points out that slavery is not divine and even slaves need to enjoy liberty rather than being treated as "brutes." Douglass also affirms that freedom is a basic right to all humanity. Therefore, presenting any argument against it is like attempting to disapprove a scientific fact. The speaker concludes his speech with the main message he has been attempting to prove all along. The Fourth of July only functions as a disgusting reminder to him and the freed slaves about the mockery and cruelty subjected to them by the government and oppressors. The oppressed continue to mourn and live with sadness, while other Americans continue to rejoice.

In my view, Douglass associates the oppression of slavery to the colonialism which the American society had to overcome to embrace and enjoy the Fourth of July. Although the nation fought oppression, as well as gained sovereignty, it has continued to support the institution of slavery and the culture of oppression. Douglass also attacks all the "religious justifications" for the slavery and pronounces it as "blasphemy." The orator builds a strong bridge for the recognition of the audience by drawing several parallels.

If the audience acknowledges that colonization, slavery, and oppression is evil, they will see the evils and the afflictions of slavery and fight against this vice. Douglass succeeds to juxtapose himself as an African American and a fellow citizen appealing to the white audience to embrace the idea of equality in the country. Through the above rhetorical strategies, Douglass has demonstrated the hypocrisy and the injustice of the American government that continues to

perpetuate segregation against a section of the society.

Both inductive and deductive reasoning helped Douglass appeal to his audience and create a strong argument against slavery in America. In essence, Douglass perfected Aristotle's use of rhetorical writing. The rhetorical triangle comprising of ethos, pathos, and logos provides an effective message ready to persuade a pre-determined audience.

Work Cited

Douglass, Frederick. *What to the Slave is the 4th of July?* South Chicago ABC Zine Distro, 2014.