Rhetorical Analysis Essay

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Robert Kennedy in the speech “Remarks to the Cleveland City Club,” argues that violence has no place in society and all of the ways we try to justify it are false. Kennedy supports his argument by addressing all of the ways violence has become common place in our society and he also uses quotes and rhetorical questions. The authors purpose is to persuade people to believe that violence is bad for society no matter what shape of form it takes in order to incite change and get people to stop the violence which was prevalent at the time. The author writes in an antagonized tone for an audience that would consist of people in the country that are responsible for the violence because Kennedy is almost yelling at the to stop it, the broader audience would be the general population of the United States because he is addressing an issue that takes place on a national scale.

Kennedy starts off his speech by going in depth into violence of America and uses the two rhetorical strategies of the rhetorical question as well as allusion to back up his analysis. The rhetorical questions Kennedy uses in his speech function to make the audience personally reflect on the issues that he is bringing up. “What has violence ever accomplished?” says Kennedy virtually forcing the audience to agree with him because there can be no answer to that question that is within reason. Another example is “What has it ever created?” he uses these two rhetorical questions in a row to really get people’s attention and really make the audience think, this also means more people are now going to captivated by his speech and really listening. This is significant because it is the only time Kennedy uses the rhetorical question during his speech and it is placed strategically to really make the reader think about the issue which in turn draws more people into listening to his speech. Another rhetorical strategy that Kennedy uses to support his argument is an ethical appeal to the audience in the form of a quote from Abraham Lincoln. The quote goes “Among free men,” which he says before the authors name to put emphasis on this phrase as well as the authors name , “there can be no successful appeal to ballot from bullet” which means we cannot have a successful democracy, a government of the people, if the people are killing each other, “and those who take such appeal are sure to lose their cause and pay the costs”, which is effectively warning people that violence is not the answer and that the repercussions are costly. Kennedy supports the meaning of this quote but instead of saying something similar to it himself he uses a quote from Abraham Lincoln to build an ethical appeal with the audience. Abraham Lincoln is one of our nation’s most famous and popular presidents so by quoting him Kennedy gives himself more credibility because he views align with a person who is regarded very highly form a moral standpoint. This is significant because the building up of this credibility supports the authors purpose of trying to convince people violence is bad and credibility is a something Kennedy needs to convince his audience of viewpoint.

During his speech, Kennedy shifts from talking about violence on a shallow level to talking about the “violence of institutions” in our society. Kennedy uses some detail in form of examples of how bad the violence of institutions can be. “This is the violence that affects the poor”, before Kennedy was saying that anyone was prone to normal violence but now he has narrowed this kind of violence down to the poor, “that poisons relations between men because their skin has different colors” this has a direct connotation to the race related violence that was happening in America, “This is the slow destruction of child by hunger, and schools without books and homes without heat in the winter” here Kennedy is using the detail to emotionally appeal to the audience and get them to sympathize with his argument. Kennedy wants the reader to see how bad the violence of institutions is so they will agree with his point of view on the topic.

The use of repetition in the final paragraph of Kennedy’s speech functions to establish confidence within the audience and achieve the authors purpose. Kennedy repeats the word “surely” at the beginning of each independent clause in order to build confidence within the audience that they can make things change, he does this because he spent most of the speech almost yelling at the audience. This repetition helps to support the authors purpose to convince the readers that violence is bad in order to incite change, this repetition is giving people the confidence they need to incite this change.

Robert F. Kennedys “Remarks to the Cleveland City club was a very historically significant essay. It addressed the major problem that was present during the time period of race relations in America and this speech gave the people of America hope that the violence would stop. Kennedy uses rhetorical strategies such as the rhetorical question or purposeful detail to drive his point across and convince the audience of his purpose which was to incite change in the nation. This serves as a prime example of how a well written speech with properly used rhetorical strategies can be the one of the greatest ways to convince someone of something.