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How to Critique Clinton

It is quite ordinary for a meticulous politician with a well-groomed image to suddenly put their foot in their mouth. How are these moments perceived in the media circles, and eventually perceived by the people? In the articles, “Hillary Clinton takes her ‘deplorables’ argument for another spin” and “On Hillary Clinton’s Pandering”, we see two interpretations of former presidential candidate Hillary Clinton’s campaign and her attitude. While one claims that her intentions are malicious due to how she speaks about her opponent’s voters, the other suggests that the unfortunate context of her comments may matter more than their authentic intentions.

Aaron Blake’s article on the Washington Post relies heavily on the artistic logic, but shows flaws occasionally, detracting from the argument as a whole. After discussing Clinton’s comments regarding how her voters are more intelligent and prosperous, Blake insinuates that Clinton believes “wealthy people’s votes should have counted for more”. Blake attempts to support this by saying that because she compares her voter base to that of her opponent, and does this critically, she believes that a particular group of people is more valid politically than another. Never does Clinton suggest that her voter’s votes are more valid, she only says that they are morally superior. While the latter is not a particularly empathetic point to make, the author of the article misconstrues it, turning rude remarks into a classist view of politics entirely.

Clinton’s comments are distorted once again later in the article. The author references a quote in which Hillary speaks on how Trump’s campaign appealed to bigotry, and from this

concludes that she said Trump's supporters, "didn't even want black people to have civil rights". Not once in the quote did Clinton say that all supporters of Trump were racist, she merely stated that aspects her opponent's campaign appealed to those ideas.

Blake goes on to use the bandwagon appeal, saying that "this is not a mainstream argument". He cites the fact that over two thirds of Americans thought that such an idea was unfair. The consensus around the unfairness does not inherently validate it. The claim presented here is both unsupported and hardly relevant to the actual comments made by Clinton. While it is clear that Clinton thinks less of Trump voters than of her own, to suggest that she believes their votes should not count or that they are all extreme bigots is a wild exaggeration. The author creates a straw man, and further fails to acknowledge any other perspective.

Aaron Blake's intentions are all too transparent. He writes to reinforce to his readers how reprehensible and out of touch Clinton is. His missteps in logic and failure to discuss an opposing perspective make a simple task difficult. Criticizing Clinton's remarks would have been done elegantly by writing about how revealing they are of Hillary's preference for a particular class of person, and how characterizing Trump's campaign in this particular manner eschews the large group of people who voted for Trump for reasons other than bigotry.

An article responding to Clinton's radio appearance by Vann R. Newkirk views the woman in a moderately more favorable light. The author writes on how Clinton's love for hot sauce, though genuine, may not have been without ulterior motives in the context of a hip-hop radio show. Newkirk points out that hot sauce, though once an "ugly caricature", has since been embraced as a symbol of cultural pride. Bringing it up on the radio station with a largely African-American audience, comes across as pandering, appealing to black culture to increase her support from this community.

Newkirk neither praises nor condemns pandering but explores the idea of it being a necessary evil. Acknowledging the existence of a counter-argument gives the author the opportunity to oppose it, which Newkirk does effectively. He accepts that “pandering works on some levels”, but then reveals that for Clinton there exists “a history of pandering that hasn’t always worked in her favor.” This logically and effectively counters the opposing viewpoint, backing up the claim with clear examples of Clinton’s calculated appeals to voter blocs, ones that have backfired in the past. The author points to a similar scenario in which the candidate compared herself to a Latino grandmother, another in which she attempted to use colloquialisms of the youth, and yet one more example where her campaign poorly incorporated an image of Rosa Parks.

Newkirk’s article is most effective because each point is backed up clearly with directly related examples, and because the opposing argument is represented and rebuked. The article provides the context of his argument within the spectrum of nuance and grey area. The intention of the piece is more to discuss the validity of Clinton’s critics without clearly coming down on one side or the other, giving the reader the knowledge necessary to carefully consider the subject and arrive at their own conclusion.

This is in stark contrast to the article by Aaron Blake. While Newkirk appears honest and understanding to his readers, Blake seems to write for an audience that already finds Clinton contemptible. Blake’s article has a valid point to make, but it becomes obscured by the many flaws that persist throughout the piece. Arguments that properly represent both the remarks of those they criticize and the adverse perspective are more legitimate than those that use fallacies and faulty logic to support their claims.