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Reverence: Has Honor Left the Country?

Leonard Pitts' column "Don't attack the patriotism of our patriots" was published in the *Miami Herald* on July 2nd, 2008 in response to the disrespect that has overpowered the country. He gives the most recent example . . . "John McCain: traitor". Most Americans believe he is a hero for surviving solitary confinement, beatings, and even refusing early release to help his fellow men. John Avarosis on the other hand recently called McCain "disloyal" for reading a propaganda statement in confinement. Pitts argues that anyone, including John Avarosis, would read a statement "denouncing his own mother" (Pitts 1) to stay alive, and even she would forgive him. Therefore Pitts' purpose is to persuade the disrespectful population to be more appreciative and respectful to McCain and other veterans. Pitts cleverly influences his audience in the column to be more courteous towards service men in "Don't attack the patriotism of our patriots" by clearly stating his standpoint on reverence through the examples of McCain and Kerry (making the column non-biased), grabbing and keeping the audience's attention by provoking strong guilt from the readers, and using pronouns such as 'we' and 'us', as to include himself in the problem and reach a more broad audience through recent events.

Pitts intends to persuade his audience into being more respectful towards McCain by overall educating them without being biased. He uses both examples of McCain and Kerry to make his paper non-biased because he believes that *all* "military men become a

routine object of mockery and misinformation in the name of politics” (1). However, Pitts is a strong democrat so he primarily writes his column on McCain and convinces the audience that he is non partisan. Recently, John Avarosis blatantly showed his disrespect towards McCain publicly on his blog and Pitts didn’t condone it; he believes that something has gone wrong with our country because “we’re in a nation that forgets how to revere the service of military men and women” (1). Pitts focuses on McCain because he is the most recent object of disrespect because of politics.

When first reading the column the audience believes Pitts is only going to mention McCain because he is the first and only example of disrespect; at this point the audience is convinced that Pitts is only trying to sway Republicans. However, Pitts then introduces Kerry, making sure that he confronts disrespectful Democrats too. By introducing his own political party he assures the readers, letting them know he is non-biased to either political spectrum. Pitts challenges the readers to look at both perspectives through the examples of McCain and Kerry; this is very successful because it convinces the reader that “reverence [has] fled these shores” (1) and in all actuality it has nothing to do with political parties . . . it is because of us.

Pitts also persuades his audience through the use of emotional words, falling under the characterization of guilt, sarcasm, ethos, and pathos. Specifically in the beginning of his column Pitts states, “I give you John McCain: traitor” (1). Here Pitts underlying statement is elaborating on the perspective that in general the American society doesn’t realize how out of hand the disrespect has gotten. By calling McCain a traitor it forces the readers to assess themselves and their actions. Another way Pitts engages the audience is with embedded sarcasm throughout the column. An example of

this is when he asks where honor has gone and answers it himself, “Was it voted off the island on *Survivor*? Did it fail its audition to be the next *American Idol*? Was it not sexy enough for *America's Next Top Model* . . .” (1). His tone in this passage is disappointed and sarcastic; he is challenging the new generation to see how shallow they actually have become.

Constantly in the column Pitts attempts to influence his target audience through the use of ethos and pathos. Ethos is when a writer addresses the morals, values, or ethics of a reader. By making the audiences feel guilty through his column it targets their morals; an example of this is when Pitts says John Avarosis’ actions are “bizarre, shameful, and crude” (1). This makes a reader feel guilty because it is a *public* example of how Americans are really treating servicemen. Another way he includes the use of ethos is by saying that diminishing a man’s service just in the name of politics is “viscerally wrong” (1). This is a prime example of Pitts reaching the audience because many readers listen to the political slander, gossip, and rumors that are spread (especially through election times). Each of these examples persuades his audience to analyze and adjust their actions by making the reader look at *their own* moral standards.

Consequently Pitts also uses pathos, which appeal to a reader’s emotions and passions. He does this by telling the general stories of politicians under political slander. Pitts explains Kerry’s story; he was awarded a Purple Heart after braving enemy fire to save a fellow man and “delegates at the GOP convention mocked Kerry's wounds, sporting bandages bearing purple hearts” (1). This statement is meant to make a reader angry, just like the other stories he tells. Giving examples like this lets the reader really

see how far disrespect has gone. The stories are overwhelming and Pitts writes them with such anger and intensity that the audience can't ignore them.

Pitts also sways his audience into believing they need to be more respectful by including himself in the problem. He uses pronouns such as 'we' and 'us' to show that it's not only the readers fault, but everyone's. For example he explains how we all show pride and respect with ribbons, decals, flags, etc, but in all actuality these items are just "props, a means to display what we are supposed to feel but, as children of a shallow, glittery time, are no longer able to" (1). By saying 'we' instead of 'you' it suggests that he understands he doesn't display the level of respect he should either. He also includes himself when explaining the 'denouncing' statement that Avarosis made about McCain. Pitts proposes that Avarosis would read a statement criticizing his own mother . . . "most of us would" (1). This technique doesn't throw all of the responsibility onto the target audience to change because Pitts is admitting that he slips up too.

Another reason that using 'we' and 'us' is effective is because it gets the younger generation's attention. Pitts mentions recent disrespectful events because it is something that younger people can recall. A way he does this is by relating disrespect to *current* popular television shows and comments that they are making "irreverence the preferred pose, and our lives are so self-referential, so much me me me, that for entertainment we watch ourselves watching ourselves" (1). This includes all ages of readers because the younger generation can relate to the television shows while the older generation can relate to the politics he discusses and by saying 'we' and 'us' he includes every age in the problem.

Overall Pitts subtly and successfully persuades his readers into being more respectful by writing his column non partisan with the majority of the column on McCain, using strong emotional context, and including pronouns such as 'we' and 'us', to demonstrate that he too can make the mistake of being disrespectful and to get the attention of a wider audience. These ways are all effective in influencing his target audience because he addresses both logical and emotional arguments, therefore persuading the disrespectful population to be more respectful.