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Rhetorical paper

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Shameful Patriotism

[Fellow citizens; above your national, tumultuous joy, I hear the mournful wail of millions! Whose chains, heavy and grieves yesterday, are, today, rendered more intolerable by the jubilee shouts that reach them.] (Fredrick Douglass 4)

In “What to the slave is the Fourth of July”, Fredrick Douglass was effective in persuading white audiences because his use of pathos that would give the mixed emotions of pride and shame. These emotions affect the white audience by playing on the heartstrings of the people to build them up to feel patriotic for their country but break them down by telling them the unconstitutional things they are allowing to happen.

Fredrick Douglass was an African-American man in 1818-1895, who became the leader of the abolitionism movement in New York after escaping slavery in Maryland. He was able to show that he was a functional American citizen, while slaveholders said slaves were unable to have an intellectual capacity to do be one. On July 5, 1852, he gave his speech “What to the slave is the Fourth of July” in Rochester, New York to the Ladies Anti-Slavery Society. There are always negatives to every positive and that is what he was trying to convey to white people about the American values seen by themselves and to the enslaved people of the United States.

Fredrick Douglass talks about the white audience’s forefathers as “They went so far in their excitement as to pronounce the measures of government unjust, unreasonable, and oppressive, and altogether such as ought not to be quietly submitted to” (1). He is talking about how the aforementioned forefathers felt as if they were ‘slaves’ to their government who was controlling everything that happened in their daily lives. It goes on to state that they “ought not to be quietly submitted to” and alas the revolutionary war was fought to achieve their freedom. “The freedom gained is yours; and you, therefore may properly celebrate this anniversary” (Douglass 3). He’s able to connect many sentences like these together that makes the audience have a positive utmost feeling of pride for their country, but he quickly turns that pride into shame.

To build people up on a positive feeling just to knock them down with shame of the disgusting truth is a fast way to show how wrong they are. “America is false to the past, false to the present, and solemnly blinds herself to be false to the future” (Douglass 5). He goes back and forth a couple times like this with pathos to tell this message over and over about how yes, you can be patriotic, but remember what the founders fought for and what they are still allowing to happen even though their forefathers fought because they felt the same as slaves. He keeps using this structure of building up the people’s pride and patriotism, just to put them back into a place of shamefulness. The patriots celebrating the fourth aren’t the only ones who should be shameful though but also the religious people who celebrates this day too.

Religious leaders also celebrate this day of freedom while denying slaves the same rights of freedom. “…[The] church regards religion simply as a form of worship, an empty ceremony, and not a vital principal, requiring active benevolence, justice, love and good will towards man” (Douglass 10). One of the reason the Americans fought for their freedom was to obtain freedom of religion. The religious people go on to preach about how Moses saved the Israelites from slavery and led them to the promised land. But as they are preaching and celebrating these things, they are turning a blind eye on the situation in America. “…Scribes, Pharisees, hypocrites, who pay tithe of mint, anise, and cumin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgement, mercy, and faith.” (Douglass 10) The works of pathos here convey the feeling of shame once again by saying how dare you, priests, call yourselves men of religion, you talk about freedom and preach about how all men are created equally in gods image, but just a difference in skin color or because it is the ‘law’ makes this belief obsolete. Is this how Christianity is throughout the world of is the American system falling behind in old ways of thinking.

Christianity in America is a bi-product of the Evangelical Christianity that was practiced in Great Brittan. They felt as if the crown was too much in control of the way the church was ran so they moved to America to practice it how they wanted to. Overall the barebone of both types are still roots of Christianity which believes “that, of one blood, God made all nations of men to dwell on the face of all the earth, and hath commanded all men, everywhere to love one another.” (Douglass 12) What he does here in this section is comparing the two religions and their values to one another. Did Europe originally have slaves? Yes, but some time prior to this speech the churches decided to pursue an anti-slavery movement. “There, the church, true to its mission on ameliorating, elevating, and improving the conditions of mankind, came forward promptly, bound up the wounds of the West Indian slave, and restore him to his liberty.” (Douglass 12) He goes on shaming them and ask why hasn’t the American church system done the same as their European brothers who have opened their eyes to the disgusting truth that they were allowing.

Christianity in America has no reason not to fallow suite and help fight against slavery as well but “yet you notoriously hate, (and glory in your hatred), all men whose skins are not colored like your own.” (Douglass 12) He pounds the feeling of shame with every paragraph here by telling them, how can you believe in a religion that is practicing lies. If they are so easily to forget what they have learned every day in church then how can they call themselves worshipers of God. Shame is the premise of how he makes the audience feel throughout his speech but did it really work?

“The existence of slavery in this country brands your republicanism as a sham, your humanity as a base pretence, and your Christianity as a lie.” (Douglass 13) The use of pathos throughout this paper played on the heartstrings of the audience to build up their pride just to show them how shamed they should be. The truth hurts and that is what he conveys over and over again by pounding the realities of the disgusting shameful truth into the mind, heart, and soul. As he stated “there is not a man beneath the canopy of heaven, that does not know that slavery is wrong for him.” (6) And after hearing or reading this speech how could any of the audience members feel that slavery is the right thing to for any reason.