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Rhetorical Précis Joel Stein

In his Op-Ed, "We're teaching kids to follow their dreams. Maybe teach them to be helpful instead," Joel Stein, author of "In Defense of Elitism: Why I'm Better Than You and You're Better Than Someone Who Didn't Buy This Book," asserts that rather than being taught the importance of toiling to help others, American society teaches children to reach for dreams of personal achievement, thereby creating a dangerous mindset. To help his audience conceptualize American society's emphasis on individual achievement, Stein notes examples of students' speeches during his son's class, living wax museum. In one instance he observes, Stein remarks, "Ruth Ginsburg did not toil to be one of the first female Supreme Court justices; she fought to expand the rights of all women." Stein uses the student's speech regarding Ginsburg as an example of the failure of students to recognize Ginsburg's motives for working hard to become a Supreme Court Justice. He notes that her goal was not to become a Supreme Court Justice, as he implies the student pointed out, instead, he emphasizes the idea that she labored herself to fight for women's rights. As a result, Stein's example provides evidence for his audience that students fail to recognize the motives of the hard work that famous figures endured to help others and instead focus on the personal achievements that those figures attained. By highlighting this, he helps lead his readers to conclude that children, like the students he observed, are focused on dreaming to attain personal achievements just as the important figures they chose did, rather than harboring genuine desires to contribute to creating a better world. By establishing that students are focused on attaining individualistic dreams, Stein suggests that raising children to believe in this way is ultimately dangerous for society through an allusion. At the end of his op-ed, he notes that children who seek individualistic accomplishments will create a future generation that "will be asking not what can they do for their country, but rather what the country can do for them." In this line, he makes a clear allusion to President John F. Kennedy's inaugural address, where he called upon Americans not to seek what their country could do for them but rather seek what they could do for their country to promote his New Frontier policies which depended on the cooperation and effort of the American people. By alluding to Kennedy, an integral figure of American history, and the society he attempted to promote, Stein highlights to his audience that if children continue to be raised without a genuine desire to help people, society will ultimately follow a dangerous direction away from a society that works to build itself together. By alluding to a reversal of the ideas Kennedy remarks in his address, Stein infers that American society will also oppositely fail to succeed. All together, Stein creates a constructive tone as he attempts to warn parents, teachers and adults that kids must learn to seek to help one another or else American society will be filled with the conflict of individualism.