Emma Frampton

Jesmyn Ward deploys ethos, logos, and pathos to craft an engaging detailed window into life with grief following her partner’s death, COVID-19, and the Black Lives Matter movement. “On Witness and Respair” is filled with pathos due to the nature of the emotional and impactful topics of loss and triumph. Ward begins the essay with the tender details and touching aspects of her late partner before diving into her devastating loss. Providing this vivid background full of parental imagery before ending with her partner's traumatic death allows the reader to fully empathize with Ward and feel the utter loss she and her children experienced.

Ward uses ethos to build credibility with her skilled storytelling and provides facts to illustrate her knowledge and subsequent grief over black oppression. Ward closely follows the time between her partner's death into the pandemic and Black Lives Matter movement to build rapport as a reliable author. The mentioning of George Floyd, Breonna, and Ahmaud allow her readers to relate to her timeline and reactions. She brings her background as a black girl from underfunded public schools who faced poverty and lost her great-great grandfather to a group of white men to show the extent of her marginalization. Her experience as a black woman has shaped her and allowed her to explain her grief and struggles so eloquently to her readers. By showing her direct experiences with the subject matter she is able to better communicate her innate understanding of the topics to her readers.

Although Ward is discussing highly emotional material, she incorporates plenty of logical appeal within her writing. By detailing Mississippi not removing their confederate battle emblem until 2020 and Mississippi preventing the ratification of the 13th amendment until 2013, she shows that overt racism is still prevalent. The hard evidence of bigotry allows Ward’s audience to understand just how deep racism extends politically and how deep her fear and grief subsequently are. Moreover, Ward expands on this by providing more evidence that backs up the existence of covert racism such as food deserts, poverty, and lack of access to support for undiagnosed underlying conditions. Providing evidence of these more forgotten inequalities conveys the depth of prejudice in American communities.