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September 30, 2001

History of Rhetoric

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A Rhetorical Analysis of:
Evil is as Evil Does
By Leonard Pitts

PURPOSE:

The famous Greek philosopher Aristotle once said, concerning the art of rhetoric, "[it] is the faculty of discovering in every case the available means of persuasion." A suitably eloquent phrase, the definition lends itself to images of momentous speeches amongst great crowds and heated debates in which the fluent, forceful language of one person casts a shadow over the rural diction of another. Leonard Pitts' purpose in his article, *Evil is as Evil Does*, is to argue that, "The events of September 11 did not happen because we did something wrong. Or because we somehow 'deserved' them." Pitts feels very strongly that we were attacked on September 11 "because certain religious extremists hate us." Pitts is writing a heated response to the arguments and comments he has heard over the past couple of weeks concerning why we were attacked.

AUDIENCE:

Since this article was in a local professional newspaper for the public, Pitts' audience would consist of people in Columbus, Georgia, regions close around the city, and in Florida because he is a writer for the Miami Herald. The audience would consist of mainly middle-aged, middle class people. Pitts seems to be aiming this article particularly at those who are trying to empathize and rationalize the terrorist attacks in New York

City and Washington D.C. Pitts seems to feel they need to be convinced that evil cannot be rationalized and that the United States did not do anything to deserve these horrendous attacks. He says, although our “government has dirtied its hands in foreign affairs” we do not “drive planeloads of noncombatants into buildings filled with the same. And we don’t dance in the street when innocents die.” Therefore, he targets those who are trying to rationalize the motives of the terrorists because they are the people that are the most directly affected by the article, and the ones that need the most convincing.

APPEALS:

Pitts tries to reach his intended audience by making appeals to ethos, pathos, and logos. Throughout the article, he points out the facts of his argument, and then he relates them directly to his topic. Pitts shows ethos by making a logical argument for his own opinions, and attempting to persuade his audience to see his side. He uses logos to invent pathos for the attacks in order to draw out the emotions of the readers. For instance, he aggressively attacks those who are trying to figure out what we might have done to deserve what happened. Even his voice seems to be filled with anger and condescension. He argues, “Despite all of our transgressions, we don’t sanction the murder of those who have neither the capacity nor the intention to harm us.” Then, he reiterates that this is what the terrorists did. Pitts also argues that, “the claim that there might be some sort of moral equivalency between us and them is misguided at best, offensive at worst.” Here he relate his argument to pathos by stating that “Hell no,” we did nothing wrong and nothing to deserve these attacks. He claims that these attacks happened because the terrorists hate us. Pitts’ states that “they hate us because our foreign policy has been supportive of Israel. They hate us because we helped repel Saddam Hussein from Kuwait in 1991. They hate us because we are the biggest, the wealthiest, the most influential, and the most powerful. They hate us because we are not them, and, moreover, because they are not us.”

STYLE:

The style of this article is of a basic format. Pitts begins his article with a bold sentence to catch the attention of the reader. Kinneavy states in his book, “**A Theory on**

Discourse”, that, “the distinctive function of the entrance paragraph is to introduce the subject and make clear the end and object of the speech” (Kinneavy, 266). He clearly introduces the purpose of his article in the first paragraph. He then transitions into his narrative and proof. He explains what propelled him to write this article and he proceeds with his proof as to why America is not at fault for the terrorist attacks. He concludes his article with another bold statement, which says, “We are right and they are evil. End of story.” This concluding paragraph shows the readers how strongly he feels about his argument. The reader can clearly see after reading this article that Pitts is using inductive reasoning to persuade his audience.

The article was very easy to read and understand. There were no words that one would stumble over or that were hard to define and the paragraphs flowed and transitioned smoothly. The sentence structure was also varied well between long and short sentences.

AUTHORITY:

Pitts establishes his authority at the very beginning of the article by including his job title with his name: Leonard Pitts, Commentary. Right away, his audience is aware that he is an educated man because, otherwise, he would not be a writer for such a well-known newspaper as the Miami Herald. He is also an American, which, at this point, gives him good authority to write such an impassioned commentary concerning the recent attacks.

Another thing that shows a writer to be credible is how one would define his character. Aristotle listed three aspects that would help with the credibility of a writer. “The speaker must appear to have a practical knowledge about the reality at issue, he must seem to have the good of the audience at heart, and he must portray himself as a person who would not deceive the audience in the matter at hand” (Kinneavy, 238). This is divided into good sense, good will, and good moral character. Pitts shows his good sense by showing his readers that he is well informed about the topic he is writing on. He goes through his article systematically, and reasonably refutes those people with which he does not agree.

He shows his good will by explaining that we are better than the terrorists and the country they came from because we do not hurt innocent people on purpose or celebrate when they die. With his good will, he is establishing that as a fellow American, he does not, and will not empathize with the terrorists or anybody from the Middle East.

Finally, Pitts expresses good moral character by showing his anger over the events mentioned. He also gives examples of the atrocities of the terrorists: flying airplanes into buildings filled with innocent people and “sanctioning the murder of those who have neither the capacity nor the intention to harm us.” He reminds those that are feeling sorry for the terrorists that Americans would never have done the evil things that terrorists do. He is expelling his good moral character by showing that he does not condone the acts of the terrorists.

ORGANIZATION:

Pitts starts his article with a quick and bold statement, “Let’s get one thing straight.” He then presents his thesis which states that we did not do anything wrong to deserve these attacks. He then begins to follow up with comments he has heard and e-mails he has received concerning why they believed the United States was attacked. Then he vehemently states that “In a word, no. To all of the above, to all the tortured reflection and moral distress: no. Hell no.” After this statement he proceeds to explain why he so adamantly disagrees with the empathetic reactions of the comments he has heard. First, he expresses acknowledgment that some people “might have legitimate reason for animosity toward this country.” He then transitions to state that although we might do things to cause anger in other countries, we do not respond in a violent and evil manner because of this. Pitts explains that when the United States is forced to take military action, we limit it to military targets and that we do not kill innocents on purpose. Pitts then states trying to change ourselves and the way we run this country in order to insure that “no one will ever steer a plane into one of our buildings again is foolishness.” Pitts then ties all these previous ideas together in his implications and conclusions section. He does not revisit each argument, but instead says that “they hate us” and “there is nothing about our enemies that deserves to be dignified by our moral distress.” He concludes his argument by asserting that “We are right and they are evil. End of Story.”

EFFECTIVENESS:

This article was a very effective argument. The author made a point by providing facts to support that point, and countering the opposition. The article flowed well, and the diction was not so complex that one could not understand. The passionate voice Pitts uses and the facts he provides clearly express his feelings on the issue at hand. I do agree with Pitts' assertion that these attacks were not the fault of America and I also believe we did not deserve these vicious attacks. The acts of the terrorists were cowardly and evil. And in my own opinion, I believe that the attack backfired on them. Although they caused mass chaos and much pain, they also caused a revival of American pride and unity in our nation that has not been seen since World War II. Pitts' article completely convinced me because I believe the same things that he does. We are certainly not a perfect nation and we do not always do the right things, but we do not condone the slaughter of innocent people, and there is no cause that would justify such an action.

Works Cited

1. Kinneavy, James. *A Theory of Discourse*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1980

2. *Introduction To Aristotle*. Co-Directors Sally Jackson and Scott Jacobs. San Francisco University. September 28, 2001

<<http://www.sfu.ca/~muntigl/aristotle.html>>.