

Benjamin banneker's letter to thomas jefferson: syntax, tone, pathos

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Benjamin Banneker's Letter to Thomas Jefferson

Benjamin Banneker, a strong supporter of the movement to abolish slavery, developed a letter addressed to Thomas Jefferson concerning the issue of slavery. His letter was written in an era during which slavery was commonly practiced in the United States. Banneker attempts to persuade Jefferson to support the anti-slavery movement, arguing that in order to establish the nation as a free country, slavery must be eliminated. With use of syntax, tone, and pathos, Banneker creates a very effective argument.

Banneker utilizes a very humble tone to gain the respect necessary for persuading Jefferson. Banneker recognizes the great difference in social class between himself and Jefferson, as he addresses Jefferson as “ sir.” His polite mannerism creates a great possibility of receiving Jefferson's consideration. Furthermore, Banneker emphasizes the severity of slavery by writing in such way that it appears he has experienced the issue first-hand. Being the son of former slaves provided him with a great deal of knowledge on the subject, allowing him to write in said manner. His plea for the freedom of slaves is so strong that it is hard to believe he himself is not in the position of one.

Banneker clearly possesses strong feelings against slavery; however, he ensures that his tone reflects his respect for Jefferson as a man of good morals and great political power.

The priority of effectively appealing to Jefferson led Banneker to producing a carefully structured letter. He presents all evidence, uses emotional appeal to connect to Jefferson, and uses potent rhetoric before explicitly presenting his position. His argument is evident throughout the letter; however, much of

said argument is very implicit. Instead of explicitly conveying the message that slavery is immoral, Banneker provides examples and analogies that depict this point. This method is exemplified when Banneker asks Jefferson to reduce himself to a “ State of Servitude.” This phrase is used to describe the concept of slavery. It is as if slaves exist in an entirely different nation than the individuals who have the privilege of experiencing the freedom provided to them by America. Since there is such a large divergence between the lives of these two social classes, the only way for Jefferson to understand Banneker’s position is to imagine himself in this “ State of Servitude.”

To further his emotional appeal, Banneker connects the position slaves are in to events that undoubtedly affected Jefferson. Banneker mentions the time “ in which the arms and tyranny of the British crown were exerted” asking Jefferson to “ reflect on that time, in which every human aid appeared unavailable.” Thus providing a relevant comparison to the isolationism and hopelessness slaves endure at their present time. Additionally, Banneker alludes to the Declaration of Independence, referring to it as a “ true and invaluable doctrine.” He asks that slaves may be provided with “ liberty and free possession of those blessings” established by the document. Banneker identifies that as a document defending the human rights of man, slaves should be treated as equal members of society. Banneker reaches out to Jefferson and hopes the analogies provided will move his “ tender feelings.”

As Banneker concludes his letter, he asks that Jefferson has “ kindness and benevolence” towards the slaves. It is a simple act to request considering

the struggle slaves face daily, and the slaves are highly deserving of it. Banneker hopes that Jefferson will correct this social issue with use of his political power, and direct the nation in the path designated by the Declaration of Independence. After all, Banneker provided sufficient reasoning for the abolition of slavery to be initiated.