

The perils of indifference essay sample



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On April 12, 1999, Nobel Peace Prize winner, Elie Wiesel delivered the speech that expressed the thoughts of thousands of Holocaust survivors. The speech "The Perils of Indifference", was presented to the entire White House, all members of Congress, and thousands of others to thank President Clinton and the United States Government for helping all Jewish people in the way that they did. There are hundreds of different opinions on the heart-felt speech, some saying that it wasn't effective enough, and others saying that it was perfectly delivered for the audience and time that it was. Since Elie Wiesel went through the same hell that all other Jewish citizens went through, he was able to be incredibly successful in his speech. Wiesel was raised in the small town of Sighet, where he spent most of his early life devoted to religion and contemplation. However, in 1944, when he was only a teenager, Hitler ordered his troops to invade the small town that he once called his home.

All houses were swept clean of their families and their character, and the families that once happily lived in them were sent into the cold town of Auschwitz where they would soon be separated, starved, beaten and (mostly) killed. After five years of enduring the worst possible circumstances that any human could stand, Elie was finally shown mercy and was freed. When giving his speech, Elie spoke about a young Jewish boy; another survivor, and how he felt after being freed. "He was finally free," he said "...but there was no joy in his heart". This is where Elie uses the pathos (or emotional) appeal. He uses this countless other times in the course of his speech due to the long and emotional journey that he had overcome. After some time, he also talks about the "Muselmann prisoners" and how they

felt when they were sleeping in town blankets, having their skin pinched by the cold, crisp air, as they “stared vacantly into space”. “They feared nothing” he said, with a look of disgust on his face, “...they were dead and did not know it”.

He talks about starving children, homeless refugees, how abandoned they all felt. Soon after saying this, he uses the ethos (also known as the ethical) approach by thanking Mrs. Clinton for something that she said, the American soldiers for freeing him, and all the “victims” of injustice for “being there”. He brings up the people listening to him numerous times throughout the whole speech, as though he is trying to make sure that they are paying attention to the words that he wanted for them to hear. He also uses God as an approach by expressing his thoughts during the time that he was being tortured. He said that he felt abandoned by God while he was in the concentration camp, however when standing in front of the large crowd, with full faith he said “God is wherever we are.” Then he looked around the crowd and asked “Even in suffering?” as though they were the ones that asked him if that was true. “... Even in suffering”.

Wiesel used both ethos and pathos when he brought up Franklin D. Roosevelt. He uses ethos because, due to the fact that Roosevelt was former president, everyone in the United States knew and (most) looked up to him. He uses pathos in the beginning of the speech by explaining that it was the anniversary of his death. To express his sadness on the topic, he says “...I say it with some anguish and pain, because, today is exactly 54 years marking his death”. This caused the audience to open their ears and take the words that he was saying completely to heart. He said that he was an

amazing president, and that the things that he did throughout his presidency was remarkable, but then he stated that Franklin D. Roosevelt's image in Jewish history was flawed. To explain himself, he then told the "depressing tale" of the St. Louis.

He told the audience a story that took place sixty years before he gave the speech, when a human cargo ship was turned back to Nazi Germany by FDR. He wondered why he would do such a thing to people in need. "I don't understand" he said after saying how good of a man Roosevelt was, "Why didn't he allow these refugees to disembark?" He wondered why Roosevelt would allow almost one thousand Jews to be sent back to Germany to be killed in concentration camps. When saying this, the audience can hear the pain in his voice. He then thanks the people that they called the "Righteous Gentiles", meaning the people who went out of their way to show their faith by helping the Jews in any way that they could. Again using pathos, he asked "why were there so few?" of course asking about the righteous gentiles. He wondered why people couldn't help them during the war, but only after the war.

He wanted to know why the United States Army didn't help them earlier, before thousands of Jewish people lost their lives in the most disgusting and disrespectful way imaginable and for something that they had no control over; indifference. Though through this speech, there were many times that he used both the ethos and pathos approaches, he also uses the logos or factual approach by using the date that FDR passed, defining the word "indifference", and by telling the story about the St. Louis. He uses this

approach throughout the entire speech, however the audience may not take it that way when listening to it.

Wiesel needed to have all factual information through the production of his speech in order to make sure that it was entirely effective. If he had didn't have his facts straight, then he would have a hard time collecting the audience's attention and having an efficient speech. All in all, this speech was incredibly heart-felt, Wiesel finds a way to express his feelings in such a way that he was able to express what he felt without becoming too emotional or overwhelming. He used all approaches such as ethos, pathos and logos in his speech and made the audience land on the same page as he was on. He spoke efficiently and allowed his speech to become one of the most successful and most popular speeches of all time.