

The rhetoric of Henry Highland Garnet in his "Address to the Slaves of the United...

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The Rhetoric of Henry Highland Garnet in His “ Address to the Slaves of the United States” Essay Sample

The Rhetoric of Henry Highland Garnet in his “ Address to the Slaves of the United States” Henry Highland Garnet exerted powerful rhetorical strategies to the abolition and Civil Rights Movements during the nineteenth century. His spiritual and loyal appeals complimented rigorous and sometimes conflicting principles as seen in his “ An Address to the Slaves of the United States of America.” The captivating rhetoric of Garnet and his ability to form new alternatives and redefine elements of contention signifies the rhetoric of strife, promoting African American loyalty and emphasizing the courage of African American males. Garnet was a dynamic elocutionist, enabling him to emotionally appeal to his audience and contribute to crucial historical and political concepts. One can also appreciate how rhetoric can affect the antiquity of beliefs and encourage social and political change with Garnet’s argumentative techniques as an example. Garnet believed abolitionists should partake in any activity possible if it enhanced the potentiality to free enslaved blacks. Abolition was a righteous exigent which is reflected throughout the speech.

The aggressive style in Garnet’s address is what historically signifies his speech. It was not until 1843 that Garnet’s rhetoric evidently advocated enraged opposition to slavery. He begins by giving his recount on the current state of slavery “ Slavery has fixed a deep gulf between you and us, and while it shuts out from you the relief and consolation which your friends would willingly render, it afflicts and persecutes you (...)” (Garnet 347).

Garnet begins his speech by personifying slavery and clearly placing slavery as the enemy. In doing so, Garnet captured the entirety of what slavery encompassed: violence, heartbreak and the deprivation of liberties and loved ones. Thus, he arouses the abolitionists and enslaved peoples he was targeting by clearly painting an evil that must be defeated. This also enables Garnet to attribute many vicious characteristics to slavery.

These ascribed characteristics utilized through personification conveys what slavery is precisely doing to the people stripped of their freedom— clarifying this for his intended audiences. He goes onto ardently challenge the slaves to “ Let your motto be resistance!(...) No oppressed people have ever secured their liberty without resistance (...) What kind of resistance you had better make you must decide by the circumstances that surround you? (Garnet 352). Albeit Garnet’s impressive rhetorical skills are successful in arousing the slaves, Garnet’s ethical appeal is lacking because he was a freed slave from Maryland, New York. This makes it seemingly difficult for him to understand the institution of slavery in the south. Another aspect discrediting his petition is Garnet’s criticism of slaves who do not rebel when he is watching from afar, not comprising his own life nor willing to take the risks he is asking of his audience, therefore, making his argument seem hypocritical.

Although, some contradictions appear in Garnet’s address, he began to expand his message at this time to highlight the repression against the enslaved peoples of the South suffering under the brutality of their masters and his validation for a rebellion. He appealed, “ Go to your lordly enslavers

and tell them plainly you are determined to be free(...) Entreat them to remove you from the grievous burdens which they have imposed upon you” (Garnet 350). Garnet was sympathetic and understood the depth of the loss of lives, pride and the pure callous acts enforced upon the people from his native country. Expressive and powerful visualizations like these are characteristic of the rhetoric of Garnet. For instance, when he discusses the church’s role in the institution of slavery, “ The bleeding captive plead his innocence, and pointed to Christianity weeping at the cross(...) But all was vain. Slavery had stretched its dark wings over the land, the church stood silently by...” (Garnet 347). It is clear how Garnet feels about the churches’ lack of support for emancipating slaves. However, instead of simply stating it, he utilizes an extended metaphor, personification and dark imagery to capture the evils slavery will extend to all. Appealing to his audiences’ (fellow abolitionists) pathos is vital in his cause to call for a revolution to free slaves in order to reveal the imperiousness of the situation and allow the audience to empathize more so with slaves remaining in the south.

Furthering his purpose, Garnet’s ability to construct new alternatives and readdress elements of conflict is delineated by emphasizing the strength of African American males. He proposes, “ Fellowmen! Patient sufferers! Behold your dearest rights crushed to the earth! See your sons murdered, and your wives (...) let it no longer be a debatable question, whether it is better to choose liberty or death” (Garnet 350). Garnet asks the men if it is worth standing by, watching your family endure such brutalities or die for their freedom. Offering an alternative and redefining the reason behind his

proposal is vital to the intended purpose of the message—the lucidity of the assertion, the logic of its motives and the effect of its evidence. The clout of logos on an audience is imperative when trying to get the audience to join a cause.

Henry Highland Garnet’s “ Address to the Slaves of the United States” is acknowledged for the impact it has had historically due to the astounding rhetoric articulated in the piece. The argument’s logical appeal is executed by remaining focused on the consistency of the message, making his argument clear, and offering an alternative followed by the effectiveness. The argument’s ethical appeal is lacking due to Garnet’s lack of knowledge regarding enslavement in the south. His inability to empathize as well as comprehend the risks he is asking of the slaves is questionable. Garnet’s emotional appeal is quite enticing. His appeal to the audiences’ pathos causes the audience not just to respond emotionally but feel compassion for his cause. Garnet’s rhetoric evokes such pathos that it enables his audience to feel sympathies and pain hypothetically. Garnet’s values and considerations are implicit in the piece and conveyed inventively to the audience. The utilization of motivational appeals, powerful expressive language and abundant sensory details provided Garnet the ability to truly impact his audience. This effect would later be a solution to the evils of slavery as a result of Garnet’s and fellow abolitionists’ efforts.