

# Benjamin benneker essay



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

In 1791, astronomer, mathematician, and author, Benjamin Banneker, in his letter addressed to Thomas Jefferson argues about slavery. Banneker's purpose was to persuade Jefferson of the injustice of slavery and alter his view on it. Banneker adopts a formal yet condemning tone in order to appeal to Jefferson's sense of moral character. He also uses several rhetorical techniques such as tone, diction, ethos, and pathos to make his position of the given subject clear.

Banneker begins his letter by having the reader recall a time " in which the arms and tyranny of the British Crown exerted every effort in order to reduce you to as State of Servitude. " He states this to show Jefferson the double standard of the American people, for they fought against England for freedom, however, then enslaved Africans Americans. This rhetorical strategy ethos is used to highlight the injustice African Americans are facing.

Banneker goes on to say " you cannot but acknowledge that the present freedom and tranquility which you enjoy have mercifully received and that is the peculiar blessing of Heaven", this is written to make aware to Jefferson how blessed he is. He uses this strategy pathos, to have Jefferson realize how fortunate he is and create a sympathetic tone toward the slaves. Using the rhetoric strategies pathos and ethos, Banneker increases his effectiveness to sway Jefferson's stance on slavery. Banneker then shifts to a more accusatory tone by pointing out the unfairness and irony of the Declaration of Independence.

He states " this sir, was a time in which you clearly saw the injustice of slavery here sir, was a time in which you were then impressed with proper

ideas of the great valuation of liberty”, by using the Declaration of Independence as an example, Banneker is essentially taking Jefferson’s own words and using them against him. The writer creates a scholarly diction through the use of a parable from the bible and historical examples which make Banneker seem sophisticated and well educated, ergo having his opinions hold more value.

For instance, Banneker starts every paragraph with addressing Jefferson as “sir”, he sounds formal and respectful which is imperative in order to appeal to the higher-class society and educated patriots, such as Thomas Jefferson. He uses complex diction in order to form a reasonable and practical argument and establishes himself as a reliable adversary in obtaining equal rights for his people. Banneker continues his letter by vividly discussing the unfairness of slavery to emphasize Jefferson’s hypocrisy and attempt to change his views of slavery.

Banneker writes to Jefferson, “ how pitiable it is to reflect that although you were convinced of the benevolence of the Father of mankind...you should at the same time counteract his mercies in detaining by fraud and violence. ” Banneker highlights the inequality of people, who received blessing from God, and then simultaneously rebuked his gifts by snatched freedom away from Africans and placing them in “ groaning captivity and cruel oppression.”

The writer uses a mix of tone and diction to have the act of having slaves seem more personal; therefore have the words carry more weight. This is seen when could Banneker uses “ you” to address Jefferson in, “ that you should at the same time be found guilty of that most criminal act which you

professedly detested in others. ” His condemning and critical tone mixed with irrefutable evidence shames the reader. His use of ethos to guilt the reader and confront his ethical and moral character increases his effectiveness to write a compelling letter.

In Benjamin Banneker letter to Thomas Jefferson which argues the issue of slavery. Banneker’s uses a variety of rhetorical techniques to efficiently persuade Jefferson the injustice of slavery and change his opinions regarding it. Banneker’s tone, diction, and examples he uses to appeal to Jefferson emotionally or ethically all contribute to the compellingness of the letter. Banneker uses examples in history and even Jefferson’s own piece the Declaration of Independence to create a rational and moving argument to obtain equal rights for his people.