

A rhetorical analysis of the declaration of independence

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In “ The Declaration of Independence” Thomas Jefferson calls for the separation of the American colonists from the grips of an abusive and tyrannical England. He makes his position clear to the colonist and most importantly the world by using persuasive appeals, syntax and diction. In the first two paragraphs of the Declaration, Jefferson not only establishes the credibility of the revolutionaries, but also lays out a logical argument that sets forth the philosophical beliefs upon which America was founded. In paragraph one, he acknowledges the need to justify the radical position the colonies took against their king. He says that he recognizes the need to state “ the causes that impel that separation,” showing that he is conscious of his obligation to explain the actions of the colonist and that he has a “ decent respect for the opinions of mankind.

” The use of ethos helps Jefferson to present himself and the revolutionaries as reasonable, respectable and conscientious even though the actions they are about to take are radical and revolutionary. In paragraph two, Jefferson sets forth a logical argument for those actions. He uses deductive logic in the form of a syllogism to clearly present his argument. He states that all people have rights guaranteed by their Creator, that it is the role of government to protect those rights, and that when it does not, “ it is their right, it is their duty,” to alter or abolish that government. He cautions again, using ethos, that “ Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes, meaning that the grievances of the colonist regarding the King’s abuses must be so great that it is necessary to take action.

He ends the paragraph with a direct accusation against the king, stating that

“ The history of the present King of Britain is a history of injuries and
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usurpations,” and then leads into a list of “ facts” that will persuade his audience of the truth of these grievances. In just two paragraphs Jefferson manages to establish the need for revolution and convince the world that those supporting this radical view are indeed credible. In lines 45 through 148 of the Declaration, Jefferson builds on his argument with inductive reasoning, syntax, and diction. Beginning in line 45 Jefferson lays down his massive list of specific grievances that the King of England has committed against America. He states that he is very well aware that King George has “ refused his Assent to Laws, the most wholesome and necessary for the public good,” showing that he understands that the colonist have indeed been wronged. The use of inductive reasoning helps Jefferson to present himself and his fellow revolutionaries as knowing and logical.

Taking place in lines 45 through 91 the phrase, “ He has,” serves to further strengthen Jefferson’s argument. With its parallel and anaphora structures it hammers in with a repetition the fact that King George “ has” without a doubt committed these specific actions against the colonist. Allowing Jefferson to conclude with conviction that the king is “ unfit to rule free people.” In lines 137 through 148 Jefferson ends his logical argument with a strong emotional appeal. He states that King George has “ excited domestic insurrections amongst us,” and that King George has, “ endeavored to bring on the inhabitants of our frontiers, the merciless Indian Savages,” to kill them. Overall, Thomas Jefferson in lines 45 through 148 of the Declaration of Independence, establishes a great logical argument by using inductive reasoning, syntax, and diction.

In the last two paragraphs Jefferson uses syntax and ethos to convey the extent to which he and the colonies are willing to sacrifice for freedom. Beginning in the first of the last two paragraphs, Jefferson uses the phrase, "We have." It is this parallel structured phrase of, "We have," that repeats over and over again to demonstrate that they have appealed to their, "British brethren," and that the British are not listening. So after all of these cries for action the Americans have come to the conclusion that their so called brethren are, "Enemies in War, in Peace Friends." The chiasmus conveys perfectly that Jefferson and the colonies are willing to go to war with even their families for the price of freedom. The chiasmus ending Jefferson's second to last paragraph also further establishes his credibility.

It shows that he and his revolutionaries will stand by their "unalienable rights," no matter the cost. In the final paragraph Jefferson again furthers his credibility when he calls his fellow revolutionaries, "the good People of these Colonies." This statement in essence means that colonist are not uncivilized monsters who just want to get rid of the king, but are actual good natured people. Jefferson climaxes the last paragraph with the statement, "we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor," a chilling statement that ultimately paints its speaker and his cohorts as heroes willing to risk their whole existence for their cause. Altogether, the final two paragraphs of the Declaration of Independence served as a final grab at credibility by using syntax. In writing the Declaration of Independence not only did Jefferson create a historically appreciated document, but a persuasive masterpiece that thoroughly

convinces its audience of the extreme importance of America needing to separate from Britain.

Its powerful use of persuasive appeals, syntax, and diction are in fact what made it great. Without these the world as we know it might not have been.