

Family values richard
rodriguez analysis
essay



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Bernardo Cabrera Ken Carter AP Language and Composition 30 January 2012

Family Values Because of the opposing cultures and ideas that collide in the mind of Richard Rodriguez, his arguments tend to break boundaries of traditional philosophical writing. As a Catholic, a homosexual, a Mexican immigrant, and an intellectual, the meaning of family values can differ significantly from one aspect of his life to the next.

By gathering input from each of those sectors, Rodriguez composes an array of personal anecdotes and hypothetical examples in "Family Values," to profess his theory that Americans' supposed beliefs do not always align with reality. With the use of generalization and paradoxical exemplification, Rodriguez is able to portray his beliefs about family values in America. Rodriguez's analysis of American culture falls in category with many of his other essays as he constantly compares it to others, particularly his own.

A second generation immigrant, he was exposed to a simplistic family-oriented environment at home and a progressive individualistic setting at school. As his studies took him to graduate from Stanford University with a BA, from Columbia University with an MA, and later a PhD in Renaissance literature from University of California, Berkeley, Rodriguez claims to have realized that his education in America led him to some degree of detachment from his family (Rodriguez 309).

The piece begins and concludes with the image of Rodriguez in his car outside his parents' house, ready to confess his homosexuality to them. This shows the heavy bulk of personal connection that the author includes in his essay. While he goes on to stray from the references to his childhood to

include separate examples and general ideology, he centers the essay around his overall life experiences to create a sense of self awareness.

Rodriguez's past is evidently a tremendous motivation for his writing as he constantly writes about topics strongly related to it.

The inspiration for Rodriguez's writing is made clear as he states his theory. He uses his opinions to create collective stereotypes as support for his argument. Though generalization in nature excludes outliers and exceptions, it serves as a perfect method of exemplification in Rodriguez's essay, as his argument involves not a specific situation or individual, but rather a national culture as a whole. Throughout the essay, Rodriguez states several themes of American society to support his idea that Americans have weak family values.

The principle of departure from home is mentioned early in the essay. "The assurance of family-continuity, inevitably-is precisely what America encourages its children to overturn. Become your own man," Rodriguez states (Rodriguez 310). Americans see dependence on family members as a terrible weakness. Therefore, committing an act like living with one's parents during an economically difficult time, such as Rodriguez in fact committed, is frowned upon by society. Going away to study, and leaving one's guardians is a sign of manhood and success.

Ignoring the exceptions to this argument, such as the parents that persuade their children to study near home, or the children who come home with much enthusiasm, Rodriguez simply states what he thinks is dominant in American culture. He mentions particular examples that represent the weaknesses in

American family life to make a generalization that allows his argument to appear much stronger. Later in the essay, he goes on to compare American values to those of the Chinese. A comment made by Rodriguez's close friend explains why the Chinese supposedly will never "take over" the city of San Francisco.

Chinese people ignore the expectations of society because they are much too concerned with taking care of their families. "All they care about is double-parking smack in front of the restaurant on Clement Street and pulling granny out of the car—and damn anyone who happens to be in the car behind them or next to them," Rodriguez's friend claims (Rodriguez 311). The reason for this comment is to express the difference between American people and Chinese people. One culture encourages separation while another disregards all to take care of a family member.

These generalizations remain valid because they make clear that the claims made are in fact stereotypes and not all-inclusive. Referring to American people as a whole allows Rodriguez to strengthen his argument about Americans' supposed beliefs in contrast with the values they actually encourage. After making general statements regarding his theory, Rodriguez provides further support by including paradoxical examples. He mentions an anecdote about a radio announcer who spent nearly an entire session expounding a polemic about the importance of family values.

Ironically, this man was a divorced individual living alone in New York City, making him a poor representative of the very principles he was professing (Rodriguez 310). Later in the piece, Rodriguez mentions the irony in

Americans' admiration of their immigrant ancestors. Typically, immigrants, particularly those who traveled to America since the late 1800s, are admired for leaving hardships in their native countries to start a new, more opportunistic life in the United States. Americans claim that these immigrant ancestors are the founders of family traditions and values.

Why then do they deny immigrants in current times social and economic acceptance? Though many people in the United States do treat immigrants as equals, a general negativity against foreigners is undeniably present. What Americans claim to value is clearly distinct from what they practice. This evidence is not surprising as the immigrants that created American culture are famous for leaving home. Separation from one's birthplace and inevitably one's family roots is a definite theme in American culture.

Rodriguez uses these paradoxical examples to unmask the facade of American family values and to emphasize the weaknesses in them (Ferszt). Showing the irony in American society and making statements to generalize his argument proves successful in Rodriguez's essay. The pure basis of his argument, however, would not be professed in the same manner had he lived in a different, more conservative time. The postmodernist influence and the current events of Rodriguez's time affect the essay tremendously.

In postmodernism, authors began to include self-reflection and personal thoughts. Written in 1982, this essay has decades of postmodernist literature ahead of it to provide a strong influence. Rodriguez's comfortable narrative style would not have been the same had he lived prior to World War II. His time period also opens a conversational ease to the topic of homosexuality.

Though homosexuals are still not completely accepted by society, they were somewhat peacefully acknowledged by many during the late twentieth century.

If Rodriguez had lived a hundred years prior, confessing his homosexuality to his readers might have been a career-ending blow, however, the window of acceptance provided for gays during his time period allowed him to add dimension to his essay. The argument created in “ Family Values” is not one built on hasty assumptions. In fact, it is built from a lifetime of experience with opposing opinions from different aspects of his life, such as the Catholic Church, the gay community, his Mexican parents, and American society.

The contrasting viewpoints that Rodriguez was exposed to helped him synthesize the belief that Americans have weak family values as what they claim to believe is not always what they actually encourage. Through generalizations and paradoxical exemplification, Rodriguez is able to portray his theme about family values. Works Cited Ferszt, Elizabeth. “ Richard Rodriguez: reluctant romantic. ” *Early American Literature* 43. 2 (2008): 443+. Literature Resource Center. Web. 29 Jan. 2012. Rodriguez, Richard. “ Family Values. ” Comp. Lynn Z. Bloom. *The Essay Connection*. 8th ed. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2007. 309-17. Print.