

Rhetorical analysis of thomas jefferson on the declaration of independence essay



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Thomas Jefferson was a man of great influence and respect. He was a Virginia landowner and the son of a very prominent political man, Peter Jefferson. As a lawyer he also became a government philosopher and was greatly respected by the colonial people who saw him as a leader for these very reasons. As a renowned writer, Thomas Jefferson found himself in Philadelphia in June of 1776 on a committee to draft the document that would declare the independence of the Thirteen colonies from the British Empire.

This was a great responsibility as the colonies had already gone to war with Britain over the king's oppression of the colonists. Jefferson had to use his skills as an influential writer to convince the people of the Thirteen Colonies that a resolution of independence was not a form of mutiny or disloyalty to their Father country and their brethren, but a natural, God-given right. The United States Declaration of Independence was the document that Jefferson wrote to accompany the Resolution of Independence declared by the Second Continental Congress against Britain. This declaration explained all the reasons why the Thirteen Colonies were breaking away from Britain, outlined the attempts to reconcile with the King of England and furthermore, announced the urgent appeals to their negligent British brethren. It is through these explanations that the document succeeded in convincing the colonies to denounce King George III as their king and wage war against their Father Country and brethren.

Jefferson uses many rhetorical strategies to stir the colonists into action against Britain. He uses an appeal to authority by pronouncing God as an ally to the cause, logos-using logic to convince his readers, pathos-using

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emotion to excite his readers, and anaphora-repeating the same words and phrases over and over. Although Jefferson's tone or how he feels about King George III and Parliament, is immensely present in his writing, it is the first four strategies that truly make this an exciting and convincing document. Jefferson begins the Declaration of Independence by first declaring God-given rights. Jefferson does this with the statements "...the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them..." and "that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. " These rights, as endowed upon mankind by the Creator Himself, certainly cannot be questionable rights by any government.

This sets the stage, since the remainder of the document explains how Great Britain and its king have robbed the colonies of these absolute rights. Immediately and throughout the document Jefferson is calling upon logical reasoning to persuade the audience. Jefferson states that "... when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security. " By beginning with such a logical statement, which is followed by a list of injuries from the British Crown upon the Colonies, he exposes the insufferable abuses the colonists have endured, and then reason follows that they must be overturned. Pathos becomes a natural strategy when Jefferson is announcing wrongs committed against the Colonists. The

surge of emotions incited by a pronouncement of wrongdoings against a people is only natural.

Anger and a cry for justice are absolute in such circumstances. Jefferson exposes the King's actions with such harsh realities as " He has plundered our seas, ravaged our coasts, burnt our towns, and destroyed the lives of our people. " What people in their own hearts would not fight against such an abuser? Finding strength in words, Jefferson uses anaphora to convince the Colonists that King George III is nothing but a tyrant. He repeatedly uses the word tyrant or forms of the word when discussing the King or Great Britain's actions against the Colonies. For example, " The history of the present King of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute Tyranny over these States.

" or "...to complete the works of death, desolation, and tyranny..." and " whose character is thus marked by every act which may define a Tyrant, is unfit to be the ruler of a free people. The connotation of the word " tyrant" is enough to stir the people against King George and is thus a powerful tool of persuasion. But Jefferson relies on one more strategy that actually would be ineffective without the other aforementioned rhetorical strategies. Jefferson's tone, or his feeling toward the tyrannical King and Great Britain, is strongly noticeable throughout the document.

However, it is not the strength of his persuasions. He sets the tone, but uses the other four strategies to strengthen his tone. Without appealing to a higher authority, who would be concerned about Jefferson's feeling toward the king? Without the emotional connection between him and reader with

pathos, or his unfailing logic, the tone Jefferson portrays throughout the whole document would not have the same effect in this reader's opinion. Even the use of the repeated word " tyrant" helps him to set his tone against King George III. So, although tone is a strategy involved in this document it is underlying and not enough without the other strategies combined.

All in all, the Declaration of Independence was an inciting and extremely persuasive document that changed the world forever. By using his writing skills to convince a people to turn against their Father Country and brethren to obtain the freedoms they believed were their rights to enjoy, Jefferson helped to create a whole country. Without the use of his persuasive tools- appeal to authority, logos, pathos, anaphora, and even his attempts at an underlying tone- this document would not have been so effective. We may not know the United States of America for what she is today.