

"a presidential candidate" by mark twain essay sample

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“ A Presidential Candidate” by Mark Twain Essay Sample

Writer, Mark Twain, in his essay, “ A Presidential Candidate,” critiques the characteristics of political candidates by creating a persona which embodies a characteristic not common among such candidates honesty. Twain’s purpose in doing so is to exploit politicians as cowardly, illogical, and inhumane people. He adopts a mockserious tone in order to convey to his audience the idea that politicians disguise themselves as highly respectable when in reality, they are simply trying to cover up the many vices they are often guilty of.

Twain begins his essay by establishing his persona. He introduces himself as a potential presidential candidate, a candidate who unlike many others, is honest and open about the vices he is guilty of. He alludes to the wellknown fact that political candidates are often pretentious, publicly over exaggerating what good they have done while burying each of their vices. While exploiting the artificial presentation of the common politician, he additionally criticizes those who fixate of vices the candidates are often guilty of in order to emphasize the idea that a candidate can be completely honest and still, there will always be those in opposition who relentlessly try to unbury the wrongdoings they are so sure the candidate is hiding. The indirect criticism of such people involved in politics reveals a playful tone which is an indication that Twain’s view on politicians in that they are people who should not be taken too seriously.

Following his introduction, Twain shifts to a series of anecdotes, each of which address a specific vice the common politician is guilty of. He begins by

describing a time when he held his own grandfather at gunpoint simply because he was snoring. In telling such a story, Twain is criticizing a trait which many politicians are guilty of: ruthless behavior which directly results in them destroying everything that gets in their way, regardless of how insignificant it may be. Twain's playful account of his confrontation with his grandfather establishes a playful tone which places an emphasis on how soulless he finds politicians to be.

Twain then goes on to discuss the time he was at war as a soldier, specifically focusing on his experience during the battle of Gettysburg. As a soldier, Twain claims to have been "scared" and unwilling to fight, ironic statements when taking into consideration the fact that this man does recognize himself as a soldier. Twain expands on the cowardly behavior of his persona by alluding to the infamous war leader Napoleon. Napoleon, famous for his bold yet foolish attitude, is not a leader commonly compared to a soldier who wants to be seen as someone who bravely fought for his country. Here, Twain's use of irony reveals how ridiculous it is when politicians put a great deal of emphasis on their part, if any, in the armed services in his opinion. Whether or not they actually fulfilled their duties is irrelevant; politicians are only concerned with presenting themselves as brave, patriotic people, even if they are not. In this anecdote, Twain clearly exposes that very trait.

Succeeding his wartime anecdote, Twain moves on to explain the time he buried his dead aunt under his grapevine, justify his action by claiming that the "vine needed fertilizing." He focuses in this section on using rhetorical

questions in order to emphasize how illogical politicians often are. Twain's adaptations of an amusing tone reveals the tendency of politicians to conjure up the most ridiculous excuses when in need of a reason to justify whatever evil it is they have done, often thinking that their excuses are actually believable.

Twain then goes on to express his opinion on the poor, referring to them as beings who are insignificant and should be used solely for the benefit of everyone above them. His use of distortion on the way the poor could be beneficial for America reveals the great extent to which Twain views politicians as inhumane. The persona in which Twain has created here adopts an unsympathetic tone, which allows Twain to reveal how cruel he believes the common politician actually is, for in his eyes, they show no remorse for mistreating those below them.