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The Rhetorical Analysis of *Strivings of the Negro People*

The purpose of this essay is to provide a voice for African Americans. He wants to show how African Americans have to strive, because they are not given the same opportunities. Du Bois wants people to see that even though they are free from slavery, that they are not really free. The context of the writer when he wrote the essay is important. He wrote this in 1897. In 1897, he worked at the University of Atlanta(an all black school). He wrote his first book a year before he published this essay. His first book was, *The Suppression of the African Slave Trade*(1896). This essay was put into his book, *The Souls of Black Folk* in 1903. A year before Du Bois's essay was published, there was a court case. Plessy v. Ferguson established separate but equal. Even though Du Bois did not exactly talk about this, his essay can be seen as a response to the Plessy vs. Ferguson decision. The decision of separate but equal relates to what Du Bois talks about when he says that they are free but not really living in freedom. He later was a part of the NAACP(1909) which helped reverse the Plessy vs. Ferguson decision(*Plessy v. Ferguson*, pg. 140). The claim/thesis is that African Americans are not given enough opportunities to succeed in the world.

The issue of the essay is that African Americans have to strive to reach a place of success, because they are not given the same opportunities. Du Bois talks about how

he recognized this even as a young boy, "... for the world I longed for, and all its dazzling opportunities, were theirs, not mine. But they should not keep these prizes, I said; some, all, I would wrest from them"(*Plessy v. Ferguson*, pg. 142). Du Bois realized that the life he dreamed of would not come true, he realized that only the white people got the opportunities. He then resolved to get opportunities and take the rewards for himself. The gap is that he thinks that his readers(white Americans) do not understand how much African Americans have to strive to reach what they want. African Americans have to strive to accomplish their goals, and in the back of their head they know that white americans are thinking, "how does it feel to be a problem?"(*Plessy v. Ferguson*, pg. 141). He talks about how, "the freedman has not yet found in freedom his promised land...the shadow of a deep disappointment rests upon the Negro people, — a disappointment all the more bitter because the unattained ideal was unbounded..."(*Plessy v. Ferguson*, pg. 145). He thinks that white americans think that no slavery equals freedom. However, they are not really free because they do not have the same opportunities. The reason that African Americans are not given the same opportunities is because of racial bias. Even though the fifteenth amendment was passed, white Americans suppressed their votes and stuffed the ballot boxes. Dubois' warrant is that he believes people should be free to achieve their dreams and they should be given the opportunity to achieve those dreams. Du Bois shares his perspective, " he simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both Negro and an American without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without losing the opportunity of self-development"(*Plessy v. Ferguson*, pg. 143).

Du Bois uses pathos in his essay. He appeals to emotion through storytelling and expressing the idea that all African Americans want is to really be free and have opportunities. He talks about their thoughts and feelings, “ for the first time he sought to analyze the burden he bore upon his back, that dead-weight of social degradation partially masked behind a half-named Negro problem. He felt his poverty.... he had entered into competition with rich, landed, skilled neighbors”(*Plessy v. Ferguson*, pg. 146). African Americans carried around this burden of being seen as less than. They felt their poverty and the unfair competition with the rich white americans. He also uses anecdotal evidence(his own personal experience) as well. When, he talks about his experience as a young student in New England. The white school children were giving newcomers visiting cards, he tried to give one to a lady and she refused it with a glance (*Plessy v. Ferguson*, pg. 142). This caused Du Bois to realize that he was different from others and that he was an outsider in their world. He used logos when he talked about the history of African Americans. He talks briefly about how the war and Ku Klux Klan affected them. And, how they were hopeful when the fifteenth amendment was passed, then disappointment set in when their votes were suppressed and ballot boxes were stuffed. The decade(1875 to 1885) held the ideal of “book-learning”, mission and night schools started at the time of reconstruction, “here at last seemed to have been discovered the mountain path to Canaan”(*Plessy v. Ferguson*, pg. 146).

These rhetorical appeals make a persuasive argument, because he uses logos and pathos to talk about the emotions tied to his experience and the African American's experience. The readers are able to read about the African American's perspective and

feel the feelings that they felt. They can try and understand the deep longing that African Americans have to grow without being looked down upon. At this time there were very few African Americans that published their feelings, thoughts and experience. He had to rely on his own experience. The goal of this argument was to give a voice to African Americans, and make people aware of their struggles and their strivings. Dubois did achieve that through his essay.

Works Cited

Thomas, Brook. *Plessy v. Ferguson*.. [VitalSource Bookshelf].