

Rhetorical Analysis of TED Talk

Alice Goffman, the speaker in this TED Talk, does a great job at reaching her audience in number of different ways and does it very effectively. Her purpose in this TED Talk, titled “How We’re Priming Some Kids for College, and Others for Prison”, is to grab the attention of everybody willing to listen, but is directed mainly towards the younger generation to show them that change can come if people unite and work together. The change would be working together towards ending the problem of mass incarceration and to completely rebuild the Criminal Justice System. Throughout the video, she continuously mixes in examples logos, ethos, and pathos in order to effectively reach her audience and inform them of the issues with in the United States Justice System.

The issue of mass incarceration is real and needs to be corrected. By providing the information that the incarceration rate has grown over 700% in the past 40 years, this shows why her speech is so important. She also presents a chart to her audience that shows The United States imprisons about 716 people per 100,000 citizens, which compared to all the other countries in the world, the United States incarceration rate is extremely high. This information is a great example of a use of logos.

The speaker is able to uses pathos, ethos, and logos all in one story. She talks to the audience about the time she had spent living in a Philadelphia neighborhood and had recorded every contact between the police and her neighbors. Over a period of 18 months, she watched police search people, chase people through the streets, and stop and frisk individuals. She recorded 52 times where the police had broken down a neighbor’s door and chased people through homes, and 14 times where police had beaten and abused individuals after they had been arrested. By sharing a personal story and providing exact numbers to the things she saw, it allows her to easily connect with the audience.

The majority of this TED Talk was effective uses of pathos and ethos. One example discussed in the TED Talk would be when a boy who was still in high school was issued fines from the court systems, but was unable to pay them off since his family was poor. This is a great use of pathos since the audience can understand how this boy is trapped in a situation. The courts expect people to somehow come up with money and pay their fines and if they are unable to make these payments, then they will have a warrant issued for their arrest. So, if a person isn’t fortunate enough to have wealth, the Justice System will not take that into consideration and will just have that individual

arrested. The speaker shows how the Justice System is structured to target the poor. Throughout this TED Talk, the speaker reinforces the tactic of prevention and individual rehabilitation, instead of strict punishment. She stresses that the Justice System needs to be restructured, and has to focus on the concept of justice. The message is delivered effectively by speaker's use of pathos and ethos.

When it comes to my social justice topic of prison recidivism, people returning to jail after previously being arrested, I've always believed that one of the easiest ways to make this rate go down, would be to prevent people from going to jail in the first place. The one thing this TED Talk does very well, is it shows how preventing people from going to jail may be difficult, since some people are at a huge disadvantage at no fault of their own. Some people are not given a fair shot at living a normal life. If there isn't a complete rebuild of the justice system, the prison recidivism rate will never dramatically change since certain groups of individuals are targeted and are never given a fair chance.