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13TH Rhetorical Analysis

Documentaries are films that inform the viewers about a specific topic or issue. The sole purpose of these films is to persuade the audience to support their ideology. *13TH* is a documentary made to bring light to the overlooked topic of the mass incarceration of African Americans in the United States. This film's purpose is to convince people that even though slavery ended years ago, the oppression of black people is still present in our society. *13TH* uses the three rhetorical elements, pathos, logos, and, ethos to urge the audience into agreeing with its message. When the documentary was released, there was no question that it was compelling and inspiring. However, there are mixed views on whether it is persuasive or not. *13TH* is a very persuasive documentary because it actively uses ethos, pathos, and logos to shine a light on the growing issue of racism towards African Americans.

13TH is a documentary that tells that story of African American oppression in chronological order. The speakers in the film first talk about slavery in the United States. They talk about how black people were mistreated, tortured, and abused. Then, they talk about the period of Jim Crow Laws. This was the period when African Americans were separated and treated differently from the whites even after the abolishment of slavery by the 13th amendment. The documentary then goes through the Civil Rights movement with Martin Luther King followed by the War on Drugs, and the mass incarceration of African Americans. Next, the

speakers talk about the Black Lives Matter movement where many people stood up against the injustice against black people. The documentary ends with police brutality against African Americans.

One of the rhetorical elements utilized in this documentary is pathos. Pathos is the tool used in an argument to appeal to the audience's emotions or feelings. This tool is crucial in documentaries because it makes the content of the film more emotionally relatable to the viewers. *13TH* uses this rhetorical device by displaying graphic images and heartbreaking stories. One effective example of the use of pathos in this documentary is the use of the pictures of lynchings and hangings of African American. Attorney and author Bryan Stevenson stated that “lynchings were common between Reconstruction and World War II because African Americans were wrongly accused of being criminals” (DuVernay). This quote is important because it shows the awful way in which African Americans were treated. These images are a good use of pathos because they are extremely graphic and disturbing. One of the other impactful use of emotional appeal is the successive showing of police brutality videos. This moment in the film is very heartbreaking because the viewers are hit back to back with graphic clips of African Americans being mistreated by the police. The most poignant use of pathos is the part of the video where Donald Trump’s speech is played over videos of racism from the past and present. Donald Trump said things like “I love the old days” and “In the good old days, they’ll rip him out of that chair so fast...”(DuVernay). Donald Trump saying these words prove to the viewers that he agrees with the way black people were treated in the past. This segment of the documentary is to show that nothing changed in our country from the times of slavery and segregation.

Ethos is the other rhetorical element used in this documentary. Ethos is the rhetorical tool that convinces the audience of the author's credibility. Ethos is essential in a documentary because it assures the viewers that the information given is trustworthy. *13TH* is a documentary packed with a significant amount of ethos. It uses the professions of the speakers, famous political figures, and opposing viewpoints to prove to the viewers that the information given is reliable. The documentary inserts descriptions of the speakers when they are taking to assure the viewers that they know what they are talking about. For example, when Angela Davis is telling her story of injustice, the viewers are forced to trust her because it is her personal story. A lot of famous political figures made appearances in this film. There are fragments of speeches from Ronald Reagan and Bill Clinton on the war against drugs. *13TH* also proves its credibility to the audience by allowing opposing viewpoints to appear in the video. These opposing views are there to show people that the film considers other ideologies. To secure its credibility, the documentary has a lot of journal news by well-known journal networks on issues like African American murders and incarceration.

13TH also contains many logoi. Logoi is the argumental tool that appeals to a person's logic or reason. Logoi is essential in a documentary because it supports the information stated by providing statistics and or facts. There is an impressive amount of logoi scattered in different parts of the film. During the film, graphs, and numbers of prison population rate of growth are randomly placed to show the audience how significant the change is. For example, “the prison population in 1980 was 513, 900, but ten years later, in 1990 it was 1,179,200” (DuVernay). The huge increase of the prison population displays how quickly the government was arresting and incarcerating African Americans. At one point of the documentary, the screen displays that facts

that “one in three black men is likely to go to jail while only one in seventeen whites men is most likely to be imprisoned” (DuVernay). This statistic is shocking because it is not something that the viewers often think about. One of the most impactful statistics was that 6.5% of the United States male population is African American, but they make up 40.2% of the prison population (DuVernay). This fact is so powerful because it helps the viewers get an estimate on the number of black males that are in jail for minor reasons.

Some people may claim that *13TH* is not a persuasive documentary. They argue that the film is extremely biased and does not give a strong voice to opposing viewpoints thus losing some of its Ethos. This statement is supported by the claim the weak arguments of the opposite side of ALEC. Michael Hough, a representative of ALEC, does not have a strong opinion and fails to convince the viewers of his credibility by sounding knowledgeable. While all of this evidence is pertinent, the documentary is still very persuasive because it has a lot of strong points. The documentary uses a lot of credible speakers, great pictures and statistics that made it a great film.

In conclusion, the documentary, *13TH* is a very powerful and compelling documentary because of ethos, pathos, and logos. The use of these three persuasion tools hugely impact and help the film gain recognition from the public. While some people may disagree, the film fulfills its purpose of educating people about the growing issues of racism, police brutality, and mass incarceration of African Americans. There are a lot of other grave issues in the United States and the world that need to be exposed to the public, and documentaries are and will always be great ways to achieve that goal.

Work Cited

DuVernay, Ava, director. *13TH*. Netflix, 2016.

Rhetorical Analysis Reflection

In the rhetorical analysis paper, I had to convince my audience that *13TH* is a compelling and persuasive documentary. To prove my argument, I had to use the three persuasion elements ethos, pathos, and logos. This paper was the harder thing I've ever had to write and it took me a lot of editing to get the grade I did. When I got my paper back, I realized that there were a few things that I didn't pay close attention to. To start, my summary of the documentary lacked some events. I also did not go in depth about the ones that I did have. Second, I didn't show clearly how the documentary used the rhetorical elements, and how they were effective. I should have focused a little bit more on the use of ethos in the documentary because it was my shortest paragraph. I lost more points on my use of grammar, so I should have read my paper a couple more times for grammar mistakes. With that being said, I feel like I am proud of how this paper turned out, and I am looking forward to writing a better rhetorical analysis in the future.