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### *13TH* Rhetorical Analysis

When companies or business are trying to convince people to buy something, they usually make advertisements to enhance their persuasion. The ads can either be in paper, audio, or video form, but it is up to them to decide which one of those would be best suited to persuade their audience. In whichever media they use, at least one of the three rhetorical elements, which are ethos, pathos, and logos, have to be used for their ad to be compelling. However, not only do ads use these elements, but so do documentaries. Documentaries are similar to ads in that they are both trying to persuade their audience but usually, instead of trying to make their audience buy their products and tangible materials, they are trying to get their audience to buy into an idea or certain belief while still applying ethos, pathos, and logos into their method of persuasion. *13TH* is a great example of an argument that is persuasive because it ideally used ethos, pathos, and logos to promote its idea.

*13TH* is a documentary that shows the timeline from slavery, to Jim Crow laws/Segregation, to the civil rights movement, to mass incarceration, to the Black Lives Matter movement, the drug laws, and ending with police brutality. At the beginning of the film, it briefly went through the history of slavery and displayed images and videos in a graphic and real way. It was an introduction to show how black people were always prejudiced, mocked, and treated poorly from the beginning. Later, African Americans were free, well kind of. Jim Crow

laws and segregation took place and drew a bold line between white and black people. This sparked the Black Lives Matter movement, which was during the Civil Rights Movement as well. Overall, it mainly focuses on the high population of prisoners and how most of themselves black people. It questioned the validity of the 13th amendment and how slavery is not over and still is being performed in some ways.

The first rhetorical element that *13TH* uses is the ethos. It is a rhetorical element that proves the credibility of an argument, or in this case, documentary. One of the most prominent forms of ethos used in the documentary is the title or position of every speaker in the documentary. When discussing a topic such as this, one wants to make sure that people take the topic seriously, therefore showing people with positions such as professors, educators, and formerly incarcerated people to show the credibility of the documentary because these types people are viewed in society as knowledgeable and trustworthy people. There were also images of well-known people such as Richard Nixon, Barack Obama, and Donald Trump. Also, there was a case involving Angela Davis who was a political activist in the Black Panther party during the Civil Rights Movement. One of her many quotes in the documentary is, “In many ways, the so-called war on drugs was a war on communities of color, a war on black communities, a war on Latin communities” (DuVernay). This quote proved how valuable she was to this documentary because it showed her credibility and thoughts about how the war on drugs was just a way to unreasonably arrest and brutally treat African Americans and Latinos. Her being one of the interviewees in the documentary to talk about the case of what happened to her in court, made the whole documentary, or at least that part, more credible.

The second rhetorical element used in this documentary is pathos. It is a method of persuasion which specifically appeals to the audience's emotions. All arguments use all three rhetorical elements, but even if they do, some tend to learn more on the one that will impact the audience. In this case, pathos drove the overall concept of the documentary. Most of it was due to the images and videos displayed throughout the documentary. At the start of the film, images of black people being hanged, beaten and just treated like super predators truly opened the theme of the film. That was a way to let the audience know how graphic this documentary is about to be. One of the most graphic parts of the documentary was the tragic death of Emmett Till. He was severely beaten and drowned after being accused of flirting with a white woman cashier (DuVernay). His mother and family decided to have an open-casket funeral to show people how brutally he was killed for something so minor (DuVernay). The fact that they showed his appearance and how deformed and unrecognizable he was, must have been to make the audience empathize with him, his family, and the situation that they were in. Other cases involved Trayvon Martin, who was fatally shot by a man named George Zimmerman because of racial profiling, and Kalief Browder who was wrongfully accused of stealing a backpack (DuVernay). He could not pay for his bail and pleaded guilty, so he would not have to stand in a trial (DuVernay). After being released, he stated "After a while, I just kept hearing the same things from the whole three years, and I just learned to cope with being in there. That was rough. I already knew, after a while, I just gave up hope"(DuVernay). This resulted in him committing suicide in 2015, two years after being released from jail (DuVernay). One last moving part of the documentary was when clips of the physical abuse and treatment that black people experienced back in the days were being shown along with clips of current times with the same thing

happening, especially during Donald Trump's rally, with Trump's voice in the background (DuVernay). Right after that, tapes with the name of black people that were wrongfully brutalized by the police were displayed, then the screen has zoomed out to show even more names that were illegible (DuVernay). This sums up the message that the documentary is trying to send because it shows that things have changed, yet not enough.

The third and last rhetorical element used in this documentary was logos, which deals mostly with logic and reason. Throughout the film, the main statistics that was shown was the rapid growth rate of the population of incarcerated people from 1999 to 2014. One example would be how from 1972 to 1980; the prison population went from 357,292 people to 513,900 people (DuVernay). Also, 1 in 3 African Americans will experience prison in their lifetimes, while only 1 in 17 white Americans would experience jail time (DuVernay), which is probably why although only 6.5 % of Americans are black, they make up 40% of the prison population (DuVernay). Showing all of these statistics throughout the documentary influences the audience to believe in the argument presented because it shows that the facts cannot be debated.

Some people may claim that the documentary *13TH* was not persuasive because of its ethos and pathos. They say that it overall extremely bias and overly graphic. This may be true; however, the whole point of the documentary was to debate on the topic of the 13th amendment, while focusing on the fact that the prison population is infused disproportionately by African Americans. The documentary pivots on African Americans, so saying that it is biased is kind of expected; one must have known what it is about before watching it. Also, the documentary included some opposing viewpoints to balance it out. Lastly, the intense graphics was to back up

the facts that were already given throughout the documentary. Without the graphics, the documentary would not have had such an impact.

In conclusion, *13TH* is a persuasive documentary because of its well-implement of ethos, pathos, and logos. The ethos was mainly shown by the professional position that the speakers had because it made their words much more believable. The pathos was established via the graphic images and videos of the sad stories and treatment that African Americans endured. The statistics of the prison population throughout the film was one of the many statistics that formed logos. Documentaries, such as this one, are one of the many ways that people try to persuade their audience in believing their idea. Nevertheless, they must do so by applying at least one of the three rhetorical elements. Also, deciding which media to use to best get their message across. The idea in this documentary was best suited for a film because it allows for not only words and pictures, but actual videos of events that happened and real people being interviewed to talk about their thoughts and opinions.

Work Cited

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

### Rhetorical Analysis Reflection

My rhetorical analysis was on a documentary that I have watched in class called *13TH* directed by Ava DuVernay. It is a documentary that showed the timeline from slavery, to Jim Crow laws/Segregation, to the civil rights movement, to mass incarceration, to the Black Lives Matter movement, the drug laws, and ending with police brutality. Since this is a rhetorical analysis, the three rhetorical elements, ethos, pathos, and logos had to be implemented in the writing. I was glad that I had written an ad critique prior to that to be prepared to write this because that assignment as well required the application of the three rhetorical elements. When writing this essay, I struggled with my introduction and specifically, my thesis statement. Writing the thesis statement in just one sentence without making it sound like a summary was a bit difficult because the documentary discussed many topics. After it was graded, that was the section of the rubric where I scored lower on. In quote, my thesis statement was, “*13TH* is a great example of an argument that is persuasive because it ideally used ethos, pathos, and logos to promote its idea.” The purpose of a thesis statement is to introduce the topic of a paper and choose a position in relation to the topic; meaning that if someone reads your thesis statement only, they should have an idea of what your paper is going to be about. Clearly, my thesis statement did not accomplish that. Instead of writing “to promote its idea,” I should have written, “to display on the issue of racism, prejudice, and unfair treatment of African Americans in the United States.” Overall, this rhetorical analysis challenged me to think harder and improve my thesis statements in my future writings.