
The Rhetorical Analysis Of Just Walk On By: Black Men And Public Space By Staples

In Brent Staples's essay "Black Men and Public Space," the author argues that while in public space young black men are stereotyped to be a dangerous threat. He also claims that while in public space he and other black men must change their appearance and attitude to come off as law abiding citizens. He uses several different rhetorical techniques in the essay. Two techniques that he uses most productively are exemplification and cause and effect. These techniques work well to prove to his readers that young black men are being stereotyped as a threat to others in every day social settings.

He starts his essay off with an exemplification that has a dark tone to it. Setting his audience up to believe he is stalking his victim he says, "my first victim was a women..., I came up on her late one evening on a deserted street in Hyde park" (226). After setting his audience up he continues to tell us how the lady glances back at him. After a few more of her worried glances she picks up her pace and is soon running and disappears in a cross street. After using this experience to set up his essay he starts to tell us who he really is. In the second paragraph we learn that he is harmless "who is scarcely able to take a knife to a raw chicken – let alone hold on to a person's throat" (226). This was his first encounter with being misinterpreted as a dangerous person by another person he had never met. He uses cause in effect in the second paragraph when he claims that being perceived as danger is a hazard to himself and other young black men he says "I only needed to turn a corner into a dicey situation, or crowd some frightened, armed person in a foyer somewhere" (227). He also claims how cops were a hazard to him and other young black men. This creates the reader to feel sympathy for the author to have to worry about walking into a dangerous situation by just walking down the street.

He builds his essay by using incidents. While walking at night and crossing intersections he would "elicit the thunk, thunk, thunk, thunk of the driver- black, white, male, or female – hammering down the door locks" (227). This is a vivid experience to support the buildup of his argument. He broadens his audience by electing to say that he was perceived as dangerous by both genders and all races. This incident also appeals to pathos because many people can relate to locking their doors while someone has moved towards or past their car without any reason except automatically stereotyping the individual as dangerous.

He changes to a more deliberate tone when in the ninth paragraph he is mistaken as a burglar at his place of work. While trying to make a deadline the author rushed into his office building. The office manager calls security fearing that he was a threat. The buildings security pursued him almost to his editor's door. He claims he had no way of proving who he was and says he had to "move briskly to the company of someone who knew me", in order to prove he was not a burglar (227). Here he is using pathos, gaining credibility from his audience. Being mistaken as a burglar for no logical reason other than him being a black man at the place of his work is a solid incident to back up his thesis.

Getting to more serious exemplification, the author keeps the same deliberate tone in the tenth paragraph. This is the first time he encounters being in a hazardous situation because of someone being scared of him. He was killing time before an interview when he stepped into a

jewelry store. "The proprietor excused herself and returned with an enormous red Doberman pincher straining at the end of the leash" (227). He says he simply took a "cursory look around, nodded, and bade her goodnight" (227). This appeals to the reader's emotion also because even when put in a situation where he could have made a remark, the author remained calm and politely bade her goodnight and left. It shows his audience that he is a good person and not willing to let other's mistakes interfere with his ethics. It also appeals to emotion because his audience starts to feel sorry for a good person simply trying to kill time and almost getting attacked by a huge dog for being a different color.

His final exemplification is an instance of a black journalist friend of his. The journalist was working on a story of a murderer in Waukegan, Illinois. While the journalist was there Staples tells us "mistaking the reporter for the killer, police officers hauled him from his car at gunpoint and but for his press credentials would probably have tried to book him" (228). This is the very scenario that Staples feels is a hazard to him and other black men. So in order not to be mistaken as a criminal or worse the author uses different techniques to diffuse the cause and effect reactions he has demonstrated in public space. While walking the author says he will simply "whistle melodies from Beethoven and Vivaldi and more popular classical composers" to himself (228). He claims that people feel more relaxed around him and sometimes join in on his whistling.

Brent Staples made a strong argument and used exemplification well throughout his essay. He built his essay up by using different experiences from simple having young women run away from him in the street to an instance of his journalist friend having guns pointing at him for simply being in the wrong place at the wrong time. He tells us how he has to change in order to be perceived as a good person by whistling melodies so people can feel at ease and crossing the roads first so people don't feel uncomfortable. He continuously appeals to pathos in the essay by using different incidents involving people acting out in ways of fear. This creates reader awareness that he has a valid argument about people stereotyping young black men before really knowing their intent.

Work cited

1. Staples, Brent "Black Men and Public Space," *The Bedford Reader*. E. X.J.
2. Kennedy, Dorothy M. Kennedy and Jane E. Aaron. Boston: Bedford St. Martin, 2012, 226-232. Print.