Rhetoric Analysis Of Masked Racism: Reflections On The Prison Industrial Complex

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Angela Davis was a proficient writer, black feminist, and social activist. Along with being an excellent writer, she will always be remembered as the black people's pride. Her audacity, clarity of vision and the power of her words distinguish her from others. For over thirty years, Davis used her power of words to write on sensitive issues like racism and feminism, imprisonment and liberation. The context of Davis's writings, interviews, and speeches revolved around progressive politics. Her intellectualism and audacity made her the oppressed black community's vocal person and a hope for freedom. The essay presents a rhetorical analysis of the techniques employed by Angela Davis in her article: Masked Racism: Reflections on the prison industrial complex. In the article, she unveiled the prison and punishment industry as being racially biased in America ("Masked Racism Reflections on", 1998).

An Audience Mobilized for Prison Reform

Her targeted audience was her ethnic race, the oppressed black community, which has long been fighting for its individuality. Her robust analysis and powerful words made her a more significant activist of her time. The projection of her ideas concerning the prison-industrial complex successfully captivated national attention and led to prison reform drives.

The Prison System as an Instrument of Repression

In masked racism, Angela Davis has presented the prison system as a weapon for repression. Not only are humans captivated, but their individuality, dreams, and intellects are also chained up. Hundreds and thousands of people live in the oppressed state just on the basis of their colour or societal disparity. Many liberation efforts of the poor are slightly veiled by the term "crime," and America's jail system serves to disappear these people. She had a strong notion that prisons in any society have the potential to reflect much about it ("Masked Racism Reflections on", 1998).

Logos Statistics and Private-Prison Profit

There is extensive use of logos and supporting evidence in Angela Davis's writings and speeches. Logos have been one of the fundamental techniques used throughout the literature. It not only helps

in grasping the attention of the audience by pronouncing the statistics but also adds weight to the arguments. She presented a new viewpoint on the prison system of America. Despite being behavior-mending places, these jails are just manifesting the illusion of solving social problems. Davis has highlighted the presentment as an industry being operative on both the government and the private level. The privatization of prisons in America also manifests the writer's stance. To support her claim, the writer has compared the revenue generation of the two leading private prisoning companies, namely Correction Corporation of America (CCA) and the Wackenhut Correction Corporation (WCC).

"Currently, the stock of both CCAA and WCC are doing extremely well. Between 1996 and 1997, CCA revenue increased by 58 per cent from $293 million to $462 million" (Davis).

Pathos Ethos and the Color of Imprisonment

Rhetorically analyzing Angela Davis's writings, one can always find extensive use of pathos and ethos. Black people have been fighting against slavery and for their rights for ages. Racism has always been a sensitive issue in America. Regarding the racism sentiments, Angela has used the concept of "colour of imprisonment" to add emotional weight to her claim that the United States' imprisonment was also racially biased. In her captivity, the writer observed the status quo as one of the significant reasons behind the barring of black people. However, one of the traits that made Angela's writing far more impactful than the rest of Afro-feminist writing was the supporting arguments for her claims. As she wrote:

"Almost two million people are currently locked up in the immense network of the US prisons and jails; more than 70 per cent of the imprisoned population are people of colour" (Davis).

Thus, by establishing her stance and supporting it with claims, she knew how to touch her audience's sentiments. Being a feminist and an activist for women's rights, the writer has always portrayed the hardships faced by black women in slavery and imprisonment, thus successfully touching black women's emotions. Many examples can be traced from her writings:

"… the political economy of the prison relies on the racial assumption of criminality … such as the images of the black mothers reproducing the criminal children" (Davis).

As in the above-quoted text, the writer's eloquent emotional delivery provided her with an emotionally touched audience.

Sustained Context and Structural Racism

Rhetorically analyzing Angela Davis's writing, another exceptional trait is the establishment and continuation of "context." As in the text, initially, the writer claims that jails are large corporations for disappearing people and capturing their dreams. She correlated her idea in the later section of the

“colour of imprisonment.” She delivers her context by touching on the sentiments of her race:

“Colored bodies constitute the main human raw material in this vast experiment to disappear the major social problem of our time” (Davis).

Root Causes Beyond Crime

Moreover, the writer did not rely on stating emotions and statistics alone. She presented her intellectualism in viewing the problems at the micro-level and came up with practical solutions. According to her, people of colour have long been facing social disparity in America and are more prone to unemployment, mental and physical illness, homelessness, abuse and civil rights disparity. Putting them in jails and dwindling their lifestyle below the average cannot be of any good. Instead, this serves as a means for burgeoning the societal disparity and psychological trauma. The root cause behind the imprisonment is not the crime but the racism that afflicted society, which causes the immigrants and people of colour to live a tormented life. As she wrote:

“Once the aura of the magic is stripped away from the imprisonment solution, what is revealed is racism, class bias and the parasitic behaviour of capitalist profit” (Davis).

Solidarity Between Prisoners and Workers

She raised the consolidation spirit in the freemen, too, as she elaborated on the pitiful condition of the prisoners; she used to relate it to the brown and black working community, addressing them as being no different from the imprisoned brothers and sisters, as they were facing the ugliness of racism and poverty imprisonment.

Rhetoric Against the Prison-Industrial Complex

In conclusion, ideally, the criminal justice system should provide justice to the victims and punish the oppressor. If the job is done on fair grounds, each guilty person should be convicted and should also be rehabilitated to make them good citizens when they return to society as they happen to meet the imprisonment conditions. However, deeply analyzing the prison system in America can lead to a more significant diversion from this ideal. One of the contrasting comparisons the writer has presented in this regard is the striking differences between the investments in the prison system and in the education sector. Since 1984, in the state of California alone, 20 new prisons have been established in a few decades, while only a single new department was established at California University. Thus, this clearly signifies the priorities of the governance. The low-wage labour providing the potential of this punishment industry has made it a gold mine for private corporations. In one of her compelling articles, “Masked Racism: Reflections on the Prison Industrial Complex”, Angela Davis used her individuality and intellectualism while addressing this issue. The employment of rhetorical skills, like

logos, ethos, pathos and progression of the context, is the key aspect of her writing. The established use of these writing techniques made her stance weighed by the facts and made her the voice of her society. The emotional portrayal of the black community in her writing and speeches made her the community leader (“Masked Racism Reflections on”, 1998).

Works Cited

Masked Racism: Reflections on the Prison Industrial Complex. None: Race Forward, 1998. Project Gutenberg. Web.