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Rhetorical Analysis on “Food Justice and Food Retail in Los Angeles”

Mark Vallianatos argues in his article, “Food Justice and Food Retail in Los Angeles”, published June 25, 2009 by *Ecology Law Currents*, that the people who need good food (good being healthy) the most, have the least means to get that food. He explains the problems and solutions to readers from, high officials, to, middle class citizens, by using our senses of logic, ethics, and emotion. All three of which were very prevalent, at times conveying all three senses at the same time.

Firstly, Vallianatos, states the problem, that is the limitations on where supermarkets are being built and the scarcity in healthy food being provided at the, small grocery stores that are in these neighborhoods. He then goes on to describe plans that have already been put into effect and that have ultimately failed, such as, Rebuild L.A. The next focus is his belief that people of color (although the word color is irrelevant, considering we all have color, so for lack of confusion the word “color” will be replaced by alternate words) are more susceptible to having a lower income, thus they will have a harder time, first, finding good food, second, paying for that food. These few ideas consist of the first half of the paper. The rest of the article is full of ideas on how to fix the problems in the lower-income, or underserved populations. They vary clear from ideas to commit supermarkets to move in, all the way to mobile food vendors. He ends by

saying that food could possibly make Los Angeles back into one city, whereas it is now “two” cities, split between the poor and rich (or well off.)

His sense of human emotion is most felt when describing the problems within the food industry in L.A. He tells us that “there were 3.04 times as many supermarkets per capita in upper income zip codes as in low income zip codes” (Valliantos 187). This number is about the same for the comparison of whites and African Americans, although it lessens a little when whites and Latino populations are compared (the whites still have more.) This isn’t to say that there is no hope left but, rather, to show that there needs to be something done about it, this tends to pull at people and make them feel guilty (which unfortunately is a big reason why people do certain things) that they are not helping in any way.

The fact that Vallianatos was willing to talk about the health issues in food deprived places show a sense of pathos as well. Most people do not want to talk about the problems in these areas. I’m sure the people that actually live there would speak up but, in all reality who would listen to them? Instead, he takes it upon himself to explain the problems and propose solutions, knowing that his influence will be a lot more effective than someone who would only be portrayed as “whining”.

Facts are something that most people see as unquestionable. Numbers and statistics then would be a very strong tool to use when trying to describe problems that have arisen in a society. First, the attention of the reader is drawn to the facts and then they begin to realize the meaning of numbers. This tends to be a lot more effective than simply stating- something bad is happening! “Between 1995 and 2002, the Rebuild L.A. area gained only one supermarket” (187). In this simple sentence the reader is given

evidence that this institution is not performing up to their standards, instead of just saying, they did not make it.

Pathos and Logos tend to go hand in hand in this article. He constantly throws facts and stats at you, these stats have intentions placed behind them, heavy intentions. “There were 3.04 times as many supermarkets per capita in upper income zip codes as in low income zip codes” (187). This sentence is not meant to provide meaningless information, it is meant to make people, such as yourself (you are a person right?), say-whoa, that’s not right, and then in turn, maybe, make you do something.

“In 2005, twenty-nine percent of adult Latinos and twenty-eight percent of adult African Americans in L.A. County were obese, compared to seventeen percent of adult Whites and six percent of adult Asian/Pacific Islanders” (188). The only writing style missing in this quote would be ethos. You could argue that he is building ethos because of the fact that he is giving us numbers, but there is no relevance to the numbers. Although, since his credibility throughout the rest of the paper has already been built you do not question that he is telling the truth. This forces you to look at his appeals of logos and pathos. Obviously, he is giving us statistics, and they are substantial statistics as well. If you look at them critically, say there are a twelve-hundred people in a room. All of them live in lower-income populations and are equally split up between races, according to the article there would be eighty-seven adult Latinos that were obese, eighty-four adult African Americans, compared to only, fifty-one Whites and eighteen Asian/Pacific Islanders. Now that the facts are provided the viewer once again is influenced by their human emotions, which would make most people feel bad, in turn convincing them to, if not, actually doing something, thinking about attributing.

After giving some hard evidence of the so called “grocery gap”, that being, peoples in low income areas have a harder time getting good food, thus they are more susceptible to obesity. He then quickly explains why this is happening by using a sense of pathos, “When compounded with poverty, a lack of parks and safe places to play, and inadequate access to health care, a lack of food access predictably leads to a disturbing double bind of hunger and obesity” (187). Peoples in these areas have no way to get good, healthy, food with the budget they possess. Either grocery stores are too far away and they do not have vehicles, or they are too expensive. This kind of statement works very hard at people internally, especially in the United States, because we all believe that every citizen should have a rather “healthy” life. This means being able to provide for a family, and not only providing them but giving them things like food that will not further harm them.

Earlier it was said that logos and pathos tend to go hand in hand, well, towards the middle of the article the reader starts to see an appearance of ethos, combined with pathos “This community-based research confirmed the abundance of fast food, corner stores, and liquor stores” (188). This “community-based research” was an effort called Project CAFÉ (Community Action on Food Environments). Vallianatos was a part of the project, lead by his organization, the Center for Food and Justice, “the Center for food and Justice, partnered with three community groups to map food resources, survey stores, and develop possible intervention and policy strategies” (188). For five years the organization gathered information and they came up with the conclusion provided in the quote above. Ethos is categorized as dealing with, ethics, character, trustworthiness and credibility. The fact the Mr. Vallianatos not only studied the subject but he physically went and did

hands on research for five years, makes his credibility, undeniable. It is a very well used tactic to make the reader trust him. They will think, well if he was the one actually doing the study, obviously he knows what he is talking about. Only a slim example of the credibility provided in the article was just shown. At the bottom of every page in the article there are footnotes that send you to different websites that provide information about the food availability or lack there of, in low-income communities. He is very one sided on the subject, but the fact is that he can be and he provides plenty of help to make his opinion unquestionable.

“The flip side of the lack of grocery stores in some low-income neighborhoods is the super saturation of fast food restaurants in the same areas” (191). This is the essence of the “double-bind” in the low-income communities. If fast-food is the only food available and it is also the cheapest, then people are going to get it and that is going to contribute to obesity in the area, which as we saw is more common in underserved areas. Ethos is then flipped to pathos, right after you read something that makes you believe him, he makes you feel bad, while also educating you.

After building his credibility and providing information so that the recipient of this information is well aware of the problem at hand and in fact, making the reader feel like something needs to be done, he (Vallianatos) goes in to detail on how he believes the problems can be fixed and examples of processes that are already in motion, such as The Alliance for Healthy & Responsible Grocery Stores “Its creation was prompted by concerns over the regional entry of Wal-Mart supercenters as well as interest in attracting supermarkets to low-income areas and improving existing stores” (190). The “Alliance” is offering healthy food and locating in underserved areas, as well as, providing economic

sustainability and furthering environmental sustainability, which should convince big supermarkets to move locations to the low income cities. In turn, with these big stores coming in, the stores already in these areas will have to compete with the big stores, making them healthier.

Whether a person is nice or not may not seem relevant in writing an article, but people are going to be more inclined to believe you when they like you. By supporting these organizations Vallianatos is building his character, thus providing people with reasons to like him. He provides many more currently in motion answers and not yet in progress “any establishment which dispenses food for consumption on or off the premises, and which has the following characteristics: a limited menu, items prepared in advance or prepared or heated quickly, no table orders, and food served in disposable wrapping and containers” (192). The statement is made by L.A. City Councilperson Jan Perry, in ordinance with fast food city planning, meant to limit fast food development in the region. Vallianatos includes the quote because it gives the image in the readers mind that something can be done and in fact something is being done, so maybe they will involve themselves.

By using the rhetorical appeals logos, pathos and ethos, Mark Vallianatos, effectively executed the meaning he wanted to portray to all reading. Low-income communities (specifically, in this article Los Angeles) have a surplus of bad food, or fast food and not anywhere near enough grocery stores or whole food retailers. This has attributed to rising rate of obesity, heart problems, and high blood pressure. The fact is something needs to be done and Vallianatos has some of those answers as well.

Cite Page

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