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The Urgency for Racial Equality

William Lloyd Garrison, a prominent abolitionist and journalist, was probably best-known for his weekly abolitionist newspaper, *The Liberator*. He initially launched the newspaper with a letter to the public titled “Prospectus for *The Liberator*,” in which he states his reasons for being an abolitionist and for trying to persuade others to understand his beliefs. In this open letter written by Garrison, the speaker uses parallelism and anaphora to appeal to the audience through pathos, and an allusion and metaphors to appeal to the audience through ethos. He uses these various strategies to argue in favor of racial equality, and to express an urgency to rid the nation of the horrors of slavery.

Right from the first paragraph, Garrison boldly claims that justice will not be achieved until every slave is free; he says, “That standard is now unfurled; and long may it float, unhurt by the spoils of time or the missiles of a desperate foe-yea, till every chain be broken, and every bondman set free!” (Garrison para 1). He later argues that the Declaration of Independence states that all men are created as equals and as people, which must include African-American men as well. He says, “Assenting to the ‘self-evident truth’ maintained in the American Declaration of Independence, ‘that all men are created equal, and endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights -- among which are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness,’ I shall strenuously contend for the immediate enfranchisement of our slave population” (Garrison para

3). Throughout the entire document, the author's goal is to convince his readers that racism and slavery are weighty matters that should be taken seriously and dealt with urgently. He specifically emphasizes these ideas in the fourth paragraph: "I am aware that many object to the severity of my language; but is there not a cause for severity? I will be as harsh as truth, and as uncompromising as justice. On this subject, I do not wish to think, or speak, or write, with moderation" (Garrison para 4). He achieves a persuasive voice throughout the letter by using classical arrangement to organize his writing and by appealing to the audience through pathos and ethos using numerous rhetorical strategies.

Garrison begins his essay with the exordium. Right from the beginning, he talks about his experiences traveling around the nation and speaking with Northern apologists and Southern slaveholders. In this first paragraph, he draws readers into the piece, he mentions controversial issues to capture the reader's attention, and he uses a contentious metaphor to gain sympathy. He explicitly talks about the incompetence of slaveholders, and ends the paragraph speaking about his contemptful wishes for them using parallelism and anaphora. One example of parallelism from the exordium includes the following quote: "I found contempt more bitter, opposition more active, detraction more relentless, prejudice more stubborn, and apathy more frozen" (Garrison para 1). He uses parallelism again, along with anaphora, near the end of the paragraph: "Let southern oppressors tremble-let their northern apologists tremble-let all of the enemies of the persecuted blacks tremble" (Garrison para 1). In the second paragraph, Garrison moves on to the narration part of his essay. In this paragraph, background material is offered as he explains his reasons for revising his original "Prospectus for *The Liberator*," and his choices to leave religion and politics out of this document. He also offers points to substantiate the argument, and

provides reasons in support of those points. Additionally, he speaks about certain topics he hopes to avoid. He makes a smooth transition into his third paragraph, the partition. In this paragraph, the speaker divides his piece into separate ideas, makes clear which ideas he will primarily address, and alludes to the Declaration of Independence: "Assenting to the 'self-evident truth' maintained in the American Declaration of Independence, 'that all men are created equal, and endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights -- among which are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness,' I shall strenuously contend for the immediate enfranchisement of our slave population" (Garrison para 3). Garrison also provides additional background in order to support his stance on the process of achieving abolition by slow and tactful means. In the fourth paragraph, the author begins his refutation. In this portion of the essay, Garrison considers possible objections to the argument: He starts the paragraph with, "I am aware that many object to the severity of my language; but is there not cause for severity?" (Garrison para 4). The speaker uses multiple metaphors in a row to assist him in his refutation, and exemplify some qualities of a confirmation as well: "Tell a man whose house is on fire, to give a moderate alarm; tell him to moderately rescue his wife from the hand of the ravisher; tell the mother to gradually extricate her babe from the fire into which it has fallen" (Garrison para 4). He wraps up his refutation and other ideas in the fifth paragraph; the peroration. In the fifth and final paragraph, Garrison makes confident conclusions: "Posterity will bear testimony that I was right" (Garrison para 5). He uses parallelism to help create a steady rhythm in the paragraph: "...not perniciously, but beneficially-not as a curse, but as a blessing" (Garrison para 5). Finally, He gives thanks in a concluding tone to God: "I desire to thank God...and to speak his truth in its simplicity and power." (Garrison para 5). His utilization of the classical arrangement and the many rhetorical

strategies found in the essay are extremely effective in light of the rhetorical situation, and in appealing to his audience through ethos and pathos.

“Prospectus for *The Liberator*” exemplifies many of the traditional qualities of the rhetoric of reform, and is highly successful in questioning the ethics of his audience members. Garrison’s letter is critical, but optimistic. It is nonviolent, yet confrontational. It is both radical and rebellious, but still maintains a visionary and inclusive tone. Garrison does advocate a revision of ineffective structures, but does this without advocating revolution or separation. The allusion to the Declaration of Independence brings forth an unspoken hypocrisy between those who agree with the sentiment stated in the document that all men are created equal, then go on to own slaves and treat them as though they are animals or even less than that. This allusion, along with the figurative language in the fourth paragraph, is very effectual in appealing to the audience through ethos. The repeated utilization of parallelism and the usage of anaphora in the first paragraph help to create a rhythm which brings forth more emotion in the speaker’s tone. This strongly assists Garrison in appealing to his audience through pathos. Garrison is able to evoke a strong sense of urgency in the mind of his readers, and his confident voice helps to carry the effectiveness of his diction and syntax to an even more sophisticated and powerful place.

In “Prospectus for *The Liberator*” by one of journalism’s most prominent abolitionists, William Lloyd Garrison, the writer uses parallelism and anaphora to appeal to the audience through pathos; and an allusion and metaphors to appeal to the audience through ethos. He writes confidently and with a steady rhythm. He keeps his essay organized in the classical arrangement, helping to ensure maximum persuasion and keep his audience interested. He very confidently,

powerfully, and successfully argues in favor of racial equality.