Critique: “I’m Back Home, But Still in Iraq’s Grasp”

In his personal account “I’m Back Home, But Still in Iraq’s Grasp,” William Quinn attempts to argue that people in America, especially on college campuses, are too untouched and separated from the war in Iraq using ethos and misguided logical and emotional appeals to the audience. Quinn’s failure to address the perspective of his audience explains the inability of his pathos and logos to effectively build the argument.

The author introduces himself as a soldier who spent eight months in Iraq and is having a difficult time adjusting to the “culture of individualism and self-promotion,” (par. 19) as he calls it, of the America he returns to. This self-introduction is used to establish his ethos, as someone who knows everything about the war. Quinn believes that this introduction is enough to establish himself as a reputable source because he seems to think that a soldier’s actions or “duty” (par.18), are unquestionable. This one of Quinn’s viewpoints is illustrated when he writes, “Though many [soldiers] question our government’s policies, they do their duty, which lies beyond the political debate,” as if a soldier’s duty cannot be subject to the scrutiny of the ideological debate of politics. While this attempt at ethos may work for some, other members of his audience, young American college students, may question the validity of such a claim; however, the author salvages some of his credibility by showing his value for welfare of others and his globalist perspective. In this quote, “If anyone ever deserved execution, it was he. But I still felt a pang of regret. His life, for all its horrors, mattered to me,” he shows his concern for another human, even though this person would be considered scum by many others.
The author shows opposition to his argument that college students are separated from and unconcerned with the war in the quote, "Many of my peers at school know much more about the world around them than my fellow soldiers do—international relations is a popular subject at Georgetown," (par. 19) saying that they are interested in foreign policy; however, in an attempt at logos he uses stereotypes about college students to override this professed interest in foreign relations. In the quote, "Students’ true priorities are demonstrated by their daily activities: They have friends to meet, parties to attend, internships to work at, extracurricular activities to participate in, papers to write and classes to attend," Quinn argues that students logically do not have time to think about the war or those that are less fortunate than them because of their "self promoting" obligations (par. 20). While this use of logos works well to demonstrate the argument, Quinn failed to understand his audience’s perspective. College students hold their busy daily schedules to a very high priority, seeing them as an important step in their development; moreover, many do not agree with the policy and ideals behind the war. Therefore, Quinn’s lack of understanding of his audience’s perspective leads to his argument falling on deaf ears.

An emotional appeal is also used in attempt to convey the point of this piece. Quinn attempts to rouse a feeling of guilt in his audience by making them feel useless in their actions. He compares the students’ widespread use of Facebook to his involvement in the war, assuredly a very unbalanced comparison; additionally, Quinn expresses his feeling of guilt for only doing one tour in Iraq and a fear of becoming “self-absorbed” like his college peers (par. 16). This use of pathos is fairly effective; however, many students would not feel guilty and therefore wouldn’t be appealed to if they were against the war. Opposition to the war in general is a perspective that Quinn failed to address, with dire consequence.

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