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Summary of “America is Not Made for People Who Pee”

In “America is Not Made for People Who Pee,” the main issue that Nicholas Kristof highlighted was the lack of bathrooms in America and how it is becoming a huge issue for society, especially for people such as the homeless, delivery drivers, parents with young children, tourists etc. One key point that Kristof focused on was the irony that public toilets were accessible in Ancient Rome more than 2,000 years ago. He presents the idea that society has gone backwards, and it is causing problems for citizens. By not having bathrooms be accessible, people are forced to use the bushes and alleyways and other inappropriate places to pee. In this article there is an anecdote about a man who was registered as a sex offender after publicly urinating due to their not being any bathroom available for him to use. This charge would go on to cause this man huge problems in his life solely because he could not find anywhere to pee through no fault of his own. In the past, cities in America had public restrooms; however, they were removed due to reasons that Kristof stated such as cost cutting and misuse. The article does however provide solutions which include using strategies used from other parts of the world such as India and implementing them in the US cities, as well as incentivizing businesses to allow their bathroom to be used by the public. The article emphasizes how the lack of bathrooms available for public not only causes humanitarian issues such as raising health risks and insulting people’s dignity, but it also causes infrastructural problems as damage is caused to the city’s liveability. Kristof calls on political leaders to address this problem and make a safer environment for everyone.

Analysis

Nicholas Kristof's Call for Change in a Nation Without Public Restrooms

The lack of public restrooms in the United States is a problem that probably does not cross many people's minds until they are busting for a wee and have no place to go. This issue may seem of minor concern for many, but it has caused major consequences, leaving people in unjust and difficult situations as expressed in the article, "America Is Not Made for People Who Pee." *The New York Times*, 6 Mar. 2021 by Nicholas Kristof. Nicholas Kristof highlights this issue and the severity of it throughout the article, using a variety of rhetorical devices to put across his point whilst engaging the audience and motivating them to take action against the problem. Some of these rhetorical devices included inclusive pronouns, humour, and anecdotes which helped Kristof to present his viewpoint in a way that engages the audience, unifies them and motives them to make a change.

Kristof's article is littered with anecdotes to represent the severity of the situation and the unjust system, evoking emotions of outrage and sympathy amongst the audience allowing them to engage further and feel more passion and motivation about the subject. For example, his first anecdote involves a father and son: "Walter Rice took his son behind a bush, where the Rices' 4-year-old urinated as well. A police officer arrested Rice for child neglect, and he was held in jail for nine hours and later found guilty by a judge." This signifies how having no public bathrooms can lead to extreme consequences that are severely unjust such as a father helping his child relieve himself. The anecdote adds a more serious tone to the argument where people usually interpret "peeing" as a flippant and silly topic. It causes the audience to feel emotions of rage and sympathy, evoking their emotions and getting them more engaged in the argument as they feel more passion for the topic. The fact that Mr Rice was charged for 'neglecting' his child is highly ironic since the whole of the United States has

been 'neglected' for years without any accessibility to public toilets. This intensifies the audiences rage, further fuelling their passion to act on the topic. Kristof also used an anecdote when talking about how a man "was considered a lifelong sex offender and not allowed to live near a park." This anecdote again highlights the severity of the situation and evokes further anger in the reader as the charge has a severe impact of the man's life, all because he had no access to a toilet when he was clearly desperate. These anecdotes show how innocent people are being punished by no fault of their own and the impacts that these punishments have on their life are catastrophic. By including all these anecdotes, it engages the audience, heightens their understanding of the situation making them more empathetic as it really puts this problem into real life perspective. By having this effect on the reader, it influences them to agree with the article and the viewpoint of the writer.

In this article Kristof also uses a significant number of inclusive pronouns, especially towards the end of the article, which provides the audience with a sense of empowerment and unity and motivates them further to do something about the matter. When he uses these inclusive pronouns, he incorporates humour to add light to the situation so that the reader does not feel so heavy. When he talks about the fact that multiple other countries around the world provide the public with restrooms he states, "surely we can, even if we'll want to skip those shared sponges." By using inclusive pronouns, it makes the audience feel as if they are involved in the issue and provides them with a sense of responsibility which will motivate them to do something about the matter. It creates a sense of unity and puts the writer on the same level as the readers which engages the audience further. Whilst this quote highlights how Romans manage to provide the public with places to pee almost 2 millenniums ago, there is also a touch of humour incorporated in the quote when Kristof talks about the 'shared sponges.' This takes away from Kristof sounding like too much of a harsh critique and further engaging the audience by providing them with something to laugh about surrounding a

serious topic. The use of pronouns unifies the readers, making them feel included and optimistic about overcoming this national problem. The balance of humour and criticism avoids Kristof from coming across as too negative whilst also making the argument more captivating and approachable. By making the audience laugh it again provides them with a sense of unity and brings them closer and adds to the effect that the inclusive pronouns provide. Kristof uses more inclusive language when talking about the solutions that can be put in place to solve the issue at hand: “We can work with corporate sponsors. We can use advertising to help underwrite the expense. We can give tax breaks to businesses that make restrooms open to all.” By using the inclusive pronoun, ‘we’ it again highlights that this problem is everyone’s responsibility and the public do have the power to make a change. The writer also uses the rule of three here which exaggerates his point further and reinforces the sense of unity. By using the word ‘we’ three times in a row really embeds the idea into the audience’s mind that they are all together in this fight and they have a role to play to fix this problem and provide Americans with access to pee without the fear of sever repercussions. Using these devices is a strategic choice when presenting to people in society these days. In these polarized times, Kristof makes an effort to unify the audience throughout the article which is something that can be a heavy struggle these days.

Nicholas Kristof also uses a sequence of questions which causes the audience to think on a deeper level about the issue of America not having any public restrooms. It slows down the pace and rhythm of reading as it causes the audience to pause and reflect on the concerns. Towards the end of the article Kristof presents a list of questions asking, “What’s a parent supposed to do when a toddler needs to wee? And what about people with medical conditions that require more frequent urination or defecation? Why do we make life so difficult and humiliating? How is it that we can afford aircraft carriers but not toilets?” By having so many questions presented back-to-back it belittles the leaders of America in a way. It causes the

audience to judge the lack of common sense there is as Kristof is presenting lots of reasonable questions that he puts across to be simple knowledge and there are no answers to them. It also casts a negative light towards the people power as Kristof portrays them to be heartless and inconsiderate monsters when he mentions that they “make life so difficult and humiliating” especially for “people with medical conditions.” This again causes an uproar of rage amongst the audience, further motivating them to act against the matter. Using these questions, it strongly engages the audience, unifies them and fuels a deeper anger in which that they can use to make a positive change for the people of America.

Nicholas Kristof’s article successfully enlightens the audience of the significant issues that are a consequence of the lack of accessibility to public restrooms in the states. He brings attention to the problem that has been neglected for way too long by using emotional anecdotes, inclusive pronouns and a balance of critique and humour. This causes the readers to understand fully the gravity of the situation and the problems it has caused for many innocent individuals, whilst inspiring them to take action to change the situation. By Kristof presenting his work in this way, it makes the audience feel united in a society that is plagued by division and brings a sense of unanimous fight.

Kristof, Nicholas. "America Is Not Made for People Who Pee." *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 6 Mar. 2021, www.nytimes.com/2021/03/06/opinion/sunday/public-toilets-united-states.html.