

Student Sample

February 5, 2015

BUS 714 - Greg Christensen

Week 2 Argument Analysis

Over the past few years, economic improvements in some sectors of the population in the western hemisphere have brought issues of class and income inequality back to the forefront of public discourse. One recent piece of writing that grapples with this conundrum of our macro-economic landscape is an editorial called “Hiking L.A.'s minimum wage is a win-win” by Eli Broad of the *Los Angeles Times*. Eli Broad, the primary author of the piece, is in favor of raising the minimum wage in Los Angeles as way of ameliorating perceived gaps in wage distribution across lower income brackets. Although the author’s epideictic argument is well researched and he further employs pathos to increase his persuasive power, the argument is missing some key supporting facts that would have made it a much more effective polemic.

Broad successively opens by offering us a convincing and comprehensive analysis of the economic problems faced by residents of Los Angeles today. He explains the challenges this way: “[a]fter decades of slow job growth and stagnant wages, 28% of Angelenos — 1 million people — today live below the poverty line” (para 1). It’s a sufficiently fact-laden statement that needs no defense, as it quite succinctly distills the issue at hand for his readers. The opinion piece then goes on to discuss additional structural issues the population faces today in support of his analysis – this fairly clinical approach to the discussion signifies that he’s using an “epideictic” or ceremonial argument to lay out his case for change, as he’s discussing a clear and present danger amongst our most vulnerable economic communities and the need for change, now – all of this is what an epideictic argument sets out to do.

Since this piece is published in and debates a problem that is present in Los Angeles, it can be concluded that the piece is primarily aimed at the local population; however, the article has a wider audience and appeal as well (being distributed in a major national daily like the *LA Times*), and Broad seems to understand that. He uses facts and figures to build his argument, but the most important aspect of his argumentative approach here really is the emotional appeal he makes to his wider audience. It's the level of pathos consciously deployed in the writing of the editorial that really attempts to deliver the rhetorical punch the piece needs in order to make the argument work. The following is an example in how he does that:

If you are someone who earns more than [that], think for a moment about how difficult it would be to find a decent place to live, feed your family and pay for health insurance, child care, transportation and utilities — much less save for retirement, birthday presents for the kids or a rainy-day fund — on \$2,500 a month before taxes. The sad truth is, many families in Los Angeles survive on even less (para 3).

This quote quite effectively gets Broad's point across by pulling on the tender heartstrings of its readers, asking them if they can picture themselves in that situation. It's a successful attempt to line his numbers-based argument with the emotional fabric it needs to get us at the gut level, which any argument has to do at some point in order to win us over to its position.

A place where the argument falls short though is the lack of a more nuanced perspective on the problems he's presenting to us as well as their possible solutions. Although Broad provides mounting evidence for lawmakers to raise the minimum wages in Los Angeles, there must be some economic downsides too, either in the short or long term, but he doesn't appear at

all willing to confront them here, making the editorial feel one sided, anemic, or too easy. The reader ought to be allowed to consider potential drawbacks like a short-term rise in unemployment rate and higher prices of goods, for example. He mentions that many (unnamed) Nobel Prize winners have signed a petition to raise the minimum wage (para 7), but unless there are hard projections or facts given to us also about how the economy will actually be impacted by an arbitrary across-the-board bump in wage levels, then the feeble defense he offers here hardly seems enough. The lack of a counter-argument, even if only presented as a hypothetical “straw man” he can then tear down for us with his own positions, makes the piece appear quite biased, which only functions to weaken, not strengthen, its rhetorical force and effectiveness in the end. He needs countervailing evidence to help him extol the virtues of his own approach – that’s how good argument builds its case. A good argument construction contains both the *yin* and the *yang* of the argument. He only gives us the *yin*, making the argument spiritually if not factually lopsided and tone deaf.

So even though the author makes some excellent points throughout the piece, the lack of nuance and deference to competing positions detracts from ultimate effectiveness of the appeal to our higher moral selves. Broad offers some important insights about the situation in Los Angeles, such as it is, and effectively deploys an abiding level of pathos to further underscore this very epideictic argument about the current economic landscape in Los Angeles. He ultimately fails to convince though, because in order for the reader to be persuaded by an argument both sides need to be represented fairly, or at least it needs to appear as so to us. He needs the other guy’s position to be there in order to knock it down. He doesn’t have it though, not here, and so the editorial more closely resembles a passionate diatribe that speaks only to the already converted, not the forceful argument designed to sway the naysayers and economic supplicants that it needs to be.

Works Cited

Eli, Broad. "Hiking L.A.'s Minimum Wage Is a Win-win." *Los Angeles Times* 1 Sept. 2014. Los Angeles Times. Web. 6 Feb. 2015. <<http://www.latimes.com/opinion/op-ed/la-oe-broad-minimum-wage-20140902-story.html>>.