

The Duty of a Columnist

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A columnist writes with a purpose, perhaps with a vendetta to argue for or against a figure scrutinized by the public eye. Especially in the time approaching a presidential election, any political figure will be punched and pelted from all sides, tested by every columnist, news reporter, and voter of his/her competence. Rather than focusing on the selected candidates from the two major parties like most columnists near the climactic November of a presidential election, columnist Victor Davis Hanson of the National Review focuses on President Obama's failures in office and the problems Obama supposedly created to be solved by the coming president. His analysis of the presidential candidates compared to President Obama is supported by uses of rhetoric that are persuasive to some and unpersuasive to others. Victor Davis Hanson, although using listings, juxtaposition, and nationalist pride to create a strong argument of President Obama's incompetence and weakness when compared to presidential candidates Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump, is unable to evoke the same agreeable response because of his lack of logic and abundance of straw man arguments and circular logic.

Hanson begins "The Legacies of Barack Obama" with a list of Obama's statements from his Asian tour in an attempt to portray President Obama as an inherently 'un-American' figure who does not believe in American superiority. Though his listing of evidence generates a feeling of frustration from Americans who see Obama as personally blaming them for the "Vietnam war [,] ... environmental desecration, and ... treatment of Native Americans", his following circular logic would evoke a grimace from any unbiased reader ("The Legacies of Barack Obama" 4). He follows the list of evidence with an attack on Obama being a hypocrite to accuse American citizens of being insular while he "knows no foreign languages" ("The Legacies of Barack

Obama” 8). What the author fails to recognize is that past presidents were not exactly the most cosmopolitan people either. In fact, they were primarily only English speakers themselves, making Hanson’s attempt to substantiate his claim illogical. Obviously, not all people who speak a single language are ignorant of worldly issues. Additionally, in Hanson’s “A Convention of the Absurd”, he argues Hillary Clinton’s hypocrisy, substantiating his claim with her statement at the Democratic National Convention that the “last eight years were good but the next years could be even better” with a Clinton presidency (“A Convention of the Absurd” 118-119). Well, Mr. Hanson, what else could Secretary Clinton have said? Could she have said that “Obama ... doubled the national debt in just eight years [,] [that] [Obama] abdicated U.S. leadership abroad [,] [or] [that] [Obama] ... overtaxed the economy into near-zero-growth stasis” (“A Convention of the Absurd” 4-7)? Of course not. As a candidate from the same party, it would be political suicide to criticize the weaknesses of President Obama. Although Hanson uses lists of evidence to prove his opinion of Obama’s legacy and Clinton’s credibility, his arguments fall short of total persuasion because they lack evidence worthy of an objective audience.

Hanson, in “The Legacies of Barack Obama”, continues to persuasively argue the failures of President Obama as a truly American president through the juxtaposition of “he” and “Americans” through the piece. His portrayal of President Obama as an outsider when “[Obama] ... deride[d] Americans for a list of ... transgressions” uses Obama’s words against his appearance as a patriotic president (“The Legacies of Barack Obama” 3). Hanson portrays Obama as ungrateful for the country’s opportunities, as he labels the president as “a critic of the culture and country in which he has thrived” as the Chief Executive (“The Legacies of Barack Obama” 60). Hanson’s specific naming of the culture of America depicts Obama as an outsider who was somehow able to thrive in a culture unlike his own. This argument is more an ad

hominem used to insult Obama without fully persuading the audience of Obama's incompetence as a president. Hanson does not acknowledge that it is natural for the president to address the people as a separate entity, for the two are separated by the many barriers between leader and citizen. Not only does Hanson argue that Obama is an 'un-American' president, but he also argues that the Democratic party's ideals contradict patriotic ideals of American superiority. He argues that progressive Democratic ideals seen in the Democratic National Convention (DNC) "divide the [United States] ... by identity groups, politicize the bureaucracies, and ignore the old working class", thus destroying the traditional American dream of unity and opportunity for all ("A Convention of the Absurd" 17-18). Hanson creates a two-world scenario, juxtaposing the world of the Democrats and the world of reality, noting that "African-American speakers ... proclaimed the need for ... unity, leaving the public ... confused as to whether having an African-American president, attorneys general, national security advisor, ... and [secretary] [of] homeland security" was enough proof of equality in America ("A Convention of the Absurd" 36-40). Hanson does not acknowledge that the Democrats are trying to improve the faults in the status quo and that a call for unity would be natural, given the recent racial injustices. His juxtaposition of Obama and the Democratic party versus Americans are persuasive in using Obama's and Democratic speakers' words against their purposes, but Hanson is unable to be fully persuasive because his warrants do not acknowledge the context of his evidence.

Hanson continues to argue President Obama's incompetence through the evocation of nationalist pride in the reader through the juxtaposition of "Obama" and "Americans". He argues that Obama "attack[ed] ... supposedly insular Americans" in speeches from his Asian tour, his diction creating a sense of otherness around the president ("The Legacies of Barack Obama" 7). The use of "attack" immediately evokes a feeling of nationalism, a feeling of American

superiority and offense to President Obama's words. "Attack" is often used for not only physical attacks in conflict, but also challenges by other countries or groups. Evoking a sense of nationalism in the reader allows Hanson to continue without credible evidence when using other forms of rhetoric, as a blindly conservative reader would agree with Hanson's every word when emotionally persuaded. Hanson continues this argument through calling Democratic speakers at the DNC hypocrites because although the speaker America Ferrera said that "color, gender, or economic status [do] [not] matter", Ferrera only said this after informing the audience of her Honduran background ("A Convention of the Absurd" 113-114). Hanson does not acknowledge that Ferrera might be trying to make the same argument as he is, for he only chooses few of her words. An objective audience would not be swayed by this form of emotional persuasion that lacks credible evidence.

Hanson's arguments about President Obama's successes and failures during his two-term presidency target an audience less aware of the inner workings of the government. His use of listing appeals to those who would not scrutinize the evidence, but the listing is persuasive to a reader who would feel overwhelmed, even angered by how much his evidence outweighs any other arguments. His juxtaposition of Obama and Democrats versus Americans only gains support from those who are already in agreement with his political stance, which is nationalist and purely anti-Obama. In essence, Hanson is able to write an 'agreement piece' not a 'persuasive piece', thus neglecting the true duties of a columnist.

Works Cited

Hanson, Victor Davis. "A Convention of the Absurd." *National Review*. National Review, 03 Aug. 2016. Web. 29 Sept. 2016.

Hanson, Victor Davis. "The Legacies of Barack Obama." *National Review*. National Review, 15 Sept. 2016. Web. 29 Sept. 2016.