descriptive analysis has also provided the evidence needed to consider what critical perspective or system might be most appropriate when the critical process advances to the third stage, which we discuss in Chapter Four.

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RECOMMENDED READINGS

Several published essays illustrate the use of careful descriptive analysis. These include:

Black, Edwin. "Ideological Justifications." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 70 (1984): 144–150. An editorial published in the *New York Times* is subjected to textual analysis.

Slagell, Amy R. "Anatomy of a Masterpiece: A Close Textual Analysis of Abraham Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address." *Communication Studies* 42 (1991): 155–171. A thorough explication of Lincoln's famous speech.

Stelzner, Hermann. " 'War Message,' December 8, 1941: An Approach to Language," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 33 (November 1966): 419–437. Using historical data and close textual analysis, Stelzner brings to our attention the artistic choices Franklin Roosevelt made in what initially appears to be a relatively simple, straightforward report on the attack on Pearl Harbor.

[handwritten note:] Campbell & Burkholder Critiques of Contemporary Rhetoric (Wadsworth, 1997)

CHAPTER THREE

Historical–Contextual Analysis: The Second Stage of Criticism

As we indicated in Chapter One, rhetorical acts do not come into existence or work to influence in isolation. Instead, they are a product of, and function within, a particular historical context. Rhetoric is *practical* because rhetors are motivated to speak or write by events and circumstances that they encounter. Their rhetoric is intended to resolve some problem or gap between personal or societal goals or values and existing structures, procedures, or conditions. Rhetoric is also *public* because it is addressed to a particular audience or audiences. The problems to be resolved through rhetorical action require the concerted effort of both the rhetor and the audiences. Thus, critics cannot adequately judge or evaluate rhetorical acts without understanding the historical context in which they occur. That understanding is the product of the second stage of rhetorical criticism. In this chapter, we discuss historical–contextual analysis and illustrate this stage of the process by illuminating the historical context of Nell Irvin Painter's essay.

Unlike the first stage, descriptive analysis, which is almost entirely intrinsic and organic, the second stage of criticism examines elements extrinsic to the discourse: the context and the occasion. Remember that any rhetorical act is a rhetor's effort to persuade audiences to view events and issues in a particular way. The "vision of reality" presented in the rhetorical act is the author's. Careful critics should consult sources outside the text to form their own conclusions about

those events and issues. That is not to say that rhetors always distort issues, or that evaluating the "truth" of a rhetor's vision of reality is the sole function of criticism.[1] Nevertheless, criticism that accepts the rhetor's vision of reality, without comparing it to the views of others, is heavily biased in favor of the rhetor and may be seriously flawed for that reason.

In the second stage, critics consult external sources in search of information about the historical–cultural context, the rhetor, the audiences exposed to the act, and the persuasive forces, including other rhetoric, operating in that scene. Only when that task is completed can critics begin to determine why the rhetor made particular choices about tone, purpose, persona, structure, supporting materials, and strategies discovered and explained in the descriptive stage of the critical process. Indeed, as we pointed out in Chapter Two, sometimes tentative conclusions about a rhetorical act formed during the descriptive analysis stage must be modified as a result of new information discovered in the second stage of criticism.

THE RHETORICAL PROBLEM

The extrinsic elements that influence and sometimes limit the rhetor's choices constitute what we call the *rhetorical problem* faced by the rhetor.[2] In this second stage the critic does not try to recreate the rhetorical event but rather looks at it in a rhetorical way as an artistic, strategic attempt to respond to a particular set of circumstances. In order to understand and evaluate that attempt, the critic needs to understand the barriers, the limitations, and the sources of resistance that might prevent the act from achieving its ends. The rhetorical problem is an "umbrella concept" that covers all the obstacles that prevent the rhetorical act from accomplishing its intended purpose immediately and easily. These elements can include the historical–cultural context, the rhetors themselves, the audience or audiences, and other persuasive forces operating in the context. We must note that these elements usually are not independent of each other. Rather, they interact and influence one another to make up the rhetorical problem.

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[1]Chapter Five suggests several criteria for evaluating rhetorical acts. The "truth criterion" is only one of them.
[2]The concept of "rhetorical problem" is borrowed from Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, *The Rhetorical Act,* 2d ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1995) 55–174.

Historical–Cultural Context

To interpret a rhetorical act, critics need information about the context in which the act occurred, including the particular events that motivated the rhetor to engage in rhetorical action and also the particular occasion, which may entail audience expectations about the function of an act and about what choices are appropriate to it. In other words, the act may be part of a particular genre or type of discourse, such as a eulogy for a person who has died, an apologia to defend oneself against accusations of misconduct, or a nomination acceptance address for some political office. Members of the audience may be so familiar with the type of occasion in general that they come to expect rhetorical acts that function in a particular way. Successful rhetors meet those general audience expectations and yet adapt their rhetoric to the specific occasion or issue. For example, the essay by Nell Irvin Painter, which we analyzed descriptively in Chapter Two, appeared in the "Hers" column that was then published regularly in the *New York Times* (and now appears in the *New York Times Magazine*). Readers of "Hers" expect the pieces to be editorial in nature and to address issues of particular interest to women, usually from a feminist perspective. Moreover, some event or occurrence motivated Painter to address the issue of affirmative action. Understanding the specific occasion or issue and discovering audience expectations are important parts of the second stage of criticism for Painter's essay and other rhetorical acts as well. However, the specific occasion or issue and the audience expectations for that particular occasion are only the narrow context for the rhetorical act. Critics should examine context in a broader sense as well.

Context also includes the cultural milieu and the climate of opinion in which a rhetorical act appears. Those factors develop over time and can exert a powerful influence over both the rhetor's motivation for engaging in rhetorical action and how members of the audience receive the rhetorical act. For that reason, critics must discover the place of the discourse in an ongoing dialogue about some issue. Because the rhetor's aim or purpose is to enlist the aid of the target audiences to influence that issue, a primary function of the second stage of criticism is to define or explain the issue. In so doing, critics seek answers to questions such as: What events preceded or followed the rhetorical act that focused public attention on the issue discussed or that made its claims more or less credible? Is the issue one that has been discussed over a period of years so there is resistance to additional rhetoric about it? Are there slogans that have polarized the audiences so it is hard to take a fresh position or to reach those on one or the other side? What are the social, political, and economic pressures on the rhetor and the

members of the audience? What are the costs of responding to the rhetor's appeal? Is acceptance likely to produce ridicule or loss of status, position, votes, or other support? How is the issue related to deeply held cultural values—such as the commitments to free enterprise, equality of opportunity, conspicuous consumption as a sign of success, and so on? Answering questions such as these leads critics beyond the narrow context into the wider context for the rhetorical act.

Of course, the enlarged context can be virtually unending. The history of many issues that are the subject of contemporary rhetorical action can be traced for years, if not decades. For example, the issue Painter addresses, affirmative action, is a direct outgrowth of the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s. The civil rights movement itself can be traced back to efforts to improve the quality of life for African Americans following the end of slavery in the United States in the 19th century. And those efforts, in turn, can be traced back decades further to the movement to abolish slavery. Those subjects are of great interest to rhetorical historians. But rhetorical critics must draw a line somewhere; recounting in detail the history of slavery in the United States, the abolition movement, emancipation, the civil rights movement, *and* affirmative action is unnecessary for understanding and evaluating Painter's essay.

Where, then, should critics draw the line? That is a matter of judgment. We believe the best way to make that judgment is to rely on the text. When critics complete the descriptive analysis in the first stage of the critical process, the rhetorical act itself should suggest what historical–cultural material is relevant. Whereas historians may examine rhetorical acts in order to illuminate historical events, critics examine historical events in order to illuminate rhetorical acts. At the end of the descriptive analysis phase, critics should have at least an initial idea of what historical information is needed in order to understand the rhetorical act in question. Of course, as we indicated earlier, critics must turn to sources external to the rhetorical act to gather the necessary historical–cultural information. As the second stage progresses, critics may modify their initial conclusions about what historical information is necessary. But beginning with the text keeps the rhetorical act itself at the center of the critical process. It also provides critics with a reliable starting point for judging where to draw the line with regard to historical–cultural analysis of the rhetorical problem.

Rhetor/Author

A rhetorical act does not blossom on its own. It is created and delivered by someone, and, thus, part of its meaning originates from the character of the rhetor or author. The association between act and

rhetor/author is important because the character, credibility, or ethos of the rhetor can be a significant persuasive influence. In Chapter Two, we discussed the role or persona of the rhetor, which is created by the rhetorical act itself, and how that persona functions to enhance the rhetor's ethos. In the second stage, critics turn to external sources for similar information, independent of the rhetorical act. In some cases, the search requires discovering biographical information about the rhetor or data about the author. But again, critics must concentrate on understanding and evaluating the rhetorical act. Although biographical information is sometimes useful in fulfilling that goal, writing a full-blown biography of the rhetor is not the aim.

Instead, critics try to discover information about the history of the author or the rhetor's actual experience, knowledge, and prior rhetorical actions relevant to understanding the rhetorical act under consideration. Is the rhetor generally recognized as an expert on this subject? What statements made by the rhetor in the past limit his or her choices in this case? What associations or relationships—such as financial interests, constituency, ideology, ambitions, and the like—influence the rhetor's or author's choices? With what other issues and causes is the rhetor or author associated? Does the rhetorical act represent the rhetor's own thinking, or is it the product of speechwriters or an organization? Answering questions such as these can help reveal the relationship between the rhetor or source and the overall rhetorical problem.

For example, descriptive analysis of Painter's essay revealed that persona and ethos are particularly important elements in that rhetorical act. The persona Painter adopted grew out of her personal experiences, both as a student and as a university professor. Thus, biographical information about those aspects of Painter's life is important for understanding the rhetorical problem.

Audience

At this stage, critics are concerned with discovering as much information as possible about those actually exposed to the discourse, the empirical audience, as well as those specifically targeted by the rhetor. The medium (television, radio, print, live presentation, and so on) through which the audience members participated in the rhetorical situation is important in determining the characteristics of the actual audience or audiences. Whether or not that medium allowed the rhetor or source to reach the target audiences is important.

Whether a given audience was exposed to the entire discourse, excerpts, an edited version, or merely a commentary about it is also important. The attitudes and beliefs of the audience members—

discovered through demographic research on age, occupation, political affiliation, cultural experience and expectations, education, interests, economic status, and social class—affect their attitudes toward the rhetor and the issue and provide insights into the rhetor's choice of persuasive strategies. The audience members' degree of involvement with the issue and their feelings—apathy, ignorance, hostility, or the like—toward the issue, the rhetor or source, and the purpose of the discourse are also particularly relevant.

For example, because Painter's rhetorical act appeared in the *New York Times,* the empirical audience was limited initially to readers of that newspaper. Demographic information about those readers, if available, would help critics understand that empirical audience. Further, because our descriptive analysis of Painter's essay suggested particular target audiences, demographic information about readers of the *New York Times* should reveal whether the medium Painter selected allowed her to reach those target audiences. Moreover, because affirmative action has been an issue of public interest for some time, information should also be available to determine the beliefs and attitudes of audience members toward the issue, at least in a general sense.

Competing Persuasive Forces

Closely related to the historical–cultural context are competing persuaders and alternative policies and positions. Thorough critics determine what information about the issue was generally disseminated through influential media and consider whether and how the rhetor dealt with alternative policies and opponents. They also discover what groups are in conflict with the rhetor's position and what groups are associated with it. In addition, critics consider whether rhetors or sources attempt to associate with, or dissociate themselves and their position from, other groups or causes and try to discover possible reasons. The influence of competing persuaders on the audiences is of potentially great importance. Policies proposed by powerful groups are more likely to be accepted because they have the means to generate large amounts of supportive discourse and to disseminate their views widely. Policies such groups oppose have a smaller chance of success as do policies advocated by the less advantaged in the society.

Again, our descriptive analysis of Painter's essay suggested the primary competing persuaders: the Reagan administration and its conservative supporters. Examining their rhetorical attacks on the policy of affirmative action, and the influence of those attacks on members of the audience, is important for understanding the rhetorical problem Painter faced.

In summary, in the second stage of criticism, critics explicate the rhetorical problem faced by the author of the rhetorical act. In so doing, they turn to extrinsic sources to examine both the broad and narrow historical–cultural contexts, the source, the audiences, and the influence of competing persuaders. Although those elements are easy to enumerate individually, we must emphasize that they are often difficult to separate in practice. They are closely related, and the rhetorical problem is a product of their influence on one another. For example, public opinion about affirmative action is a significant aspect of the historical–cultural context for Painter's essay. But those opinions are also potentially significant characteristics of Painter's audiences and are at least partly the result of competing persuasive influences. Thus, critics must choose where and how to discuss those opinions in the second stage of criticism. Ultimately, the heading under which they are discussed is not as important as the discussion itself.

Supporting Materials

The second stage of criticism is also an appropriate time for critics to test the validity, adequacy, and credibility of the supporting evidence employed in the rhetorical act: How accurate are the citations? What sources are used? Are sources indicated? Are the supporting materials cited typical of the available data? During this stage of the critical process critics should consider all the tests applicable for the particular types of evidence.

Generally, all supporting material can be subjected to tests of relevance, verifiability, consistency, timeliness, and bias. In determining *relevance,* critics ask how well the supporting material is linked to the claim: Is the evidence actually relevant to the point being made? The *verifiability* of supporting material depends on whether the rhetor provides sources for the evidence. Ideally, rhetors provide enough information about their sources that critics or audience members can examine those sources to verify the authenticity of the evidence. *Consistency* is both internal and external. In determining internal consistency, critics ask whether the supporting evidence, as it appears in the rhetorical act, is consistent with itself. In other words, does the material contradict itself? External consistency can be determined only by comparing the evidence with prevalent research in the subject area and by examining the original source from which the rhetor took the supporting material. Thus, external consistency depends on verifiability. Critics ask whether the supporting material carries the same meaning in the original source that it appears to carry in the rhetorical act. In other words, is the supporting material taken out of context? *Timeliness* is

especially important for issues that are "time-bound"—that is, for issues that change with time. Rhetors usually do not need to employ supporting material that is "hot off the press," but the supporting material must be recent enough to reflect the "current reality" of the issue being addressed. In determining *bias,* critics try to discover the motive the sources had for providing the supporting material. Sources closely associated with any issue may have a vested interest in how others view that issue; in short, they are rhetors themselves. Sometimes, that vested interest is so great that it produces a "disqualifying bias," which casts suspicion on supporting material taken from that source. However, the best sources of information on most subjects—authorities—are also those most closely associated with an issue. That association alone does not guarantee bias.

Aside from these general tests of supporting material, authority evidence and statistics can be subjected to additional tests. Because authority evidence draws its persuasive influence from the expertise and character of its originator, critics examine the credentials of that source. What are the source's qualifications? Is that person truly an "expert" on the issue being addressed? In examining statistical supporting material, critics try to discover the conditions under which the data were collected, the method of their collection, and the statistical manipulations to which they were subjected. Faulty statistical methods result in untrustworthy statistical data.

Supporting material that passes all these tests would be ideal, but in practice, few rhetorical acts include ideal supporting material. That is not necessarily a result of a rhetor's dishonesty. For example, speakers are seldom allowed adequate time to document fully the sources for all their supporting material. And even experienced, honest, and talented rhetors can be misled by their own sources; sometimes rhetors make honest mistakes.

Moreover, some rhetorical acts include very little supporting material. In Painter's essay, for example, our descriptive analysis revealed that, aside from examples drawn from her personal experience, Painter employed only one other example and a single piece of statistical evidence. Other rhetorical acts, such as eulogies and presidential inaugurals, may use even less supporting material or even use unconventional supporting material in unconventional ways. Thus, to expect all rhetorical acts to pass a rigid set of tests for supporting evidence would be unreasonable. Although we acknowledge the potential importance of careful analysis of supporting material, most public discourse does not conform to rigid standards of proof and logic. In such cases, other methods of examination and evaluation, which we discuss in Chapter Five, must be applied.

HISTORICAL–CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS APPLIED

To illustrate historical–contextual analysis, we return to Nell Irvin Painter's essay, "Whites Say I Must Be on Easy Street." In this second stage of our criticism of Painter's work, we shall explain the rhetorical problem the rhetor faced. To do so, we turn to external sources to gather information about the historical–cultural context, the rhetor, the audiences, competing persuasive forces, and supporting material.

Historical–Cultural Context

The narrow context of Painter's essay, those events that immediately motivated her rhetorical action, is a matter of speculation. The text suggests that a series of encounters with peers and students, such as the two conversations she described in the introduction, may have provided the immediate motivation. But as we will explain shortly, Painter's interest in civil rights and affirmative action was not new. Further, her essay was published on December 10, 1981, near the end of Ronald Reagan's first year as president. Given Reagan's opposition to affirmative action, which we discuss later, his election and policies undoubtedly contributed to Painter's immediate motivation for rhetorical action.

In a broader sense, the issue Painter addresses—how the public should view the federal policy called affirmative action—has captured attention for years. According to Susan D. Clayton and Faye J. Crosby, "a glance at any newspaper reveals that affirmative action is currently one of the most controversial policies in the United States. The issues are complex, they stir strong feelings, and in the media everyone seems to have an opinion on the topic" (1). Yet despite the controversy, the issue remains unresolved. As James E. Jones, Jr., explains: "The modern debate over affirmative action has occupied us for over 20 years without achieving resolution of the underlying issues or contributing to clarification of what divides the nation" (346). Thus, the context in which Painter's essay occurred cannot be understood without first examining the origin and aims of affirmative action.

Authorities credit President Lyndon Johnson with initiating the policy. Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, which became law during Johnson's administration, contained what was probably the first legally significant reference to affirmative action. Clayton and Crosby say, "Section 706(g) [of Title VII] states that a court may order 'such affirmative action as may be appropriate' following a finding of intentional or nonaccidental discrimination. Title VII also specifies the

means by which to enforce the new regulations, setting up the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission" (13).

The 1964 Civil Rights Act was intended to end the brutal effects of "intentional or nonaccidental discrimination," what most experts call "overt racism" when directed toward ethnic minorities. The aim was to promote equal opportunity through "race-neutral" policies. However, Johnson augmented the Civil Rights Act with two Executive Orders intended to go beyond ensuring equal opportunity. In September, 1965, he issued Executive Order 11246, which, according to Clayton and Crosby, "required any organization that had a contract with the federal government to take affirmative action to ensure the just treatment of employees, and potential employees, of all races, colors, religions, or national origin. . . . The order was amended to prohibit sex discrimination in 1967 with Executive Order 11375" (13–14). In 1972, these Executive Orders were amended again to apply to educational institutions (Washington and Harvey 9).

These changes were significant because they shifted the emphasis from promoting equal opportunity to redressing the effects of past discrimination. As Clayton and Crosby argue:

> Affirmative action refers to positive measures taken to remedy the effects of past discrimination against certain groups. Where a policy of equal opportunity requires merely that employers and institutions not discriminate on the basis of group membership, and in fact encourages them to ignore characteristics of group membership, affirmative action mandates a consideration of race, ethnicity, and gender. (2–3)

Because both ethnic minorities and women were victims of overt discrimination in the past, proponents of affirmative action argued that these new policies, which gave those groups special consideration, were necessary to attain genuine equality. In other words, because ethnic minorities and women were for so long relegated to low-wage, low-status, second-class positions in education and the workplace, racism and sexism had become "institutionalized" and thus could not be ameliorated through "equal opportunity" alone. Affirmative action was intended to combat institutionalized racism and sexism.

Institutionalized racism and sexism persist despite efforts to guarantee equal opportunity. Gertrude Ezorsky explains that "institutional racism can occur when employees are selected through personal connections or by qualifying for certain requirements or seniority standards. These procedures are intrinsically free of race prejudice, and they exist in areas where no blacks reside. Nevertheless, these institutional procedures perpetuate the effects of overt racism" (2). Studies

indicate that "communicating job information to family, friends, neighbors, and acquaintances by word of mouth is probably the most widely used recruitment method," Ezorsky says. Thus, because they lack "ties to whites as family, friends, fellow students, neighbors, or club members, blacks tend to be isolated from the networks in which connections to desirable employment—where whites predominate—are forged" (15). Moreover, because of overt racism and sexism, ethnic minorities and women were frequently excluded from training programs that would prepare them for more desirable employment. Likewise, supposedly neutral policies, such as "last hired, first fired," perpetuate discrimination; because of overt racism and sexism in the past, ethnic minorities and women were often "last hired" and "first fired" (Ezorsky 10).

In higher education, the area of greatest interest for Painter, the history of both overt and institutionalized racism and sexism is similar. For decades, overt racism excluded ethnic minorities from the most desirable academic positions. According to Valora Washington and William Harvey, "before World War II, Hispanics and African Americans were virtually invisible in higher education." They go on to point out that even acquiring the necessary qualifications was no guarantee of employment in predominantly white institutions: "Even by 1936, there was a sizable group of African Americans with Ph.D.s, 80 percent of whom taught at three historically African-American institutions (Atlanta, Fisk, and Howard Universities)" (iii). The percentage of university faculty who are ethnic minorities has been consistently small for decades. Washington and Harvey conclude:

> By 1972—the year affirmative action in higher education was initiated—African Americans represented 2.9 percent of all faculty (including those at historically African-American universities). Other minority groups (including Hispanics, but not Asians) were 2.8 percent of the total faculty. There were only 1,500 faculty who could be identified as Mexican American or Chicano. (iii–iv)

In academia, as in employment generally, efforts to ensure equal opportunity were unable to overcome institutionalized racism. Traditional hiring processes, Washington and Harvey explain, "did not entail specific guidelines for posting announcements, advertising, interviewing, or extending offers. Personal connections, associations, and friendships constitute what is called the 'old boy system,' which was the mechanism through which vacant faculty positions were likely to be filled" (12). In addition, supposedly race-neutral employment policies were again subverted. For example, "an important race-neutral qualification standard in the academic marketplace is published

research," Ezorsky says. "Publication requirements, however, worked against the recruitment of black professors because the majority taught heavy course loads in predominantly black colleges, which limited their time for research and writing" (22).

Affirmative action was intended to ameliorate the effects of institutionalized racism by filling the gaps in "race-neutral," equal opportunity programs. According to Ezorsky, "the primary importance of affirmative action lies in its effectiveness as a remedy for institutional racism, by which race-neutral policies and practices can lead to the exclusion of blacks" (2). On one level, the aim of affirmative action was to improve the economic conditions of ethnic minorities and women. But a larger aim was to help eliminate racism and sexism. As Clayton and Crosby explain: "On a deeper level, however, [affirmative action] also responds to a psychological and sociological condition, which is the perception that members of these groups are second-class citizens in the United States. It is hoped that affirmative action will eliminate the social barriers by eliminating the financial ones" (3–4).

Results have been mixed. On one hand, Clayton and Crosby believe that "both the decreased extent of gender discrimination and the increased sensitivity toward gender issues can be linked to our nation's policy of affirmative action" (11). On the other hand, the authors also argue that "women in America confront an unfair disadvantage in the marketplace. Being female serves both to restrict career choice and to handicap economic potential. Sex segregation is pervasive in the work force, with women largely excluded from the more prestigious and high-paying jobs" (9).

In academia, Washington and Harvey report that in 1972–1973, when affirmative action requirements were applied to colleges and universities, "African Americans comprised 2.9 percent of all college and university faculty." By 1976, after four years of affirmative action, "African Americans were 4.4 percent of all faculty" yet they remained "heavily concentrated in historically African-American institutions." But in 1979, seven years after affirmative action, and just two years before Painter's essay was published, "African Americans were still 4.4 percent of the full-time faculty in the nation" (p. 7). Apparently, the aim of diversifying college and university faculties remains elusive.

The mixed results of affirmative action are reflected in public attitudes toward the policy. Clayton and Crosby report the results of a recent survey:

Among white respondents, 52 percent believed that affirmative action programs had helped blacks to get better job opportunities, and only 10 percent said they had hurt; the percentages among black respondents were slightly more neutral, with only 45 percent feeling

that affirmative action had helped but only 5 percent thinking it had hurt. Thus 38 percent of whites and 50 percent of blacks felt that affirmative action had made no difference. Asked if current government efforts to help blacks get better job opportunities had gone too far, 31 percent of whites and only 13 percent of blacks answered affirmatively. (21)

As these figures indicate, because the policy of affirmative action is intended to address the emotion-laden issues of racism and sexism, and because the results have been mixed, affirmative action continues to generate controversy. Although that controversy is an important aspect of the historical–cultural context for Painter's essay, we believe it is best examined in greater depth later, as a characteristic of Painter's audiences.

Rhetor/Author

Descriptive analysis demonstrated that persona is an important element in Painter's essay. That persona is based upon Painter's own experiences as an African American woman, both as a student and as a university professor. Thus, biographical information about Painter's academic career is important for understanding how persona functions in her essay.

Painter's academic credentials as a student are impressive. According to Nancy Elizabeth Fitch, Painter received her undergraduate degree in anthropology from the University of California at Berkeley in 1964, an M.A. from the University of California, Los Angeles, in 1967, and a Ph.D. in history from Harvard University in 1974. In addition, in 1962–1963, Painter studied at the University of Bordeaux in France, and in 1965–1966 at the University of Ghana (379).

Painter's career as a professor is equally impressive. Fitch reports that Painter taught at the University of Pennsylvania from 1974 through 1980. During that time she was also a resident associate of Afro-American studies at the W. E. B. Du Bois Institute at Harvard, 1977–1978. From 1980 through 1988, Painter taught at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and in 1989 she began teaching at Princeton University. In 1991 Painter was appointed Edwards Professor of American History at Princeton, the position she currently holds (379).

Fitch comments that "Painter herself has said that she is more researcher than teacher" (379). Her contributions as a scholar have earned her numerous awards. *Who's Who Among Black Americans* reports that Painter was awarded a John Simon Guggenheim Foundation fellowship in 1982–1983. In 1988–1989 she was a fellow of the

Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences. She received a Peterson Fellowship from the American Antiquarian Society in 1991 and a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Humanities in 1992–1993. She is the author of over 30 publications and 18 reviews and review essays (1127). According to Fitch, "her books have been critically reviewed and include *Exodusters: Black Migration to Kansas after Reconstruction* (1977), *The Narrative of Hosea Hudson: His Life as a Negro Communist in the South* (1979), and *Standing at Armageddon* (1987)" (379). Moreover, Painter was National Director of the Association of Black Women Historians, 1982–1984; she was on the executive board of the Organization of American Historians, 1984–1987; and she was a member of the National Council of the American Studies Association, 1989–1992 (*Who's Who Among Black Americans* 1127).

Painter's experiences as an African American woman influenced her career from the beginning. "She became interested in history," Fitch explains, "because she found inadequate treatment of race and race relations in the United States in American textbooks and wanted to correct that situation." Fitch goes on to say that Painter "has been part of the recent discussion on multiculturalism on American campuses and has said that, if people remembered the past condition of college and university campuses, 'they would hesitate before assailing the attempt to forge a pedagogy appropriate for newly diversified student bodies and faculties'" (379).

Because of her background, it is not surprising that Painter was motivated to publish her essay, "Whites Say I Must Be on Easy Street," yet her personal experiences both contribute to her rhetorical problem and provide her with resources to overcome that problem and influence her audiences. On one hand, because Painter is an African American woman, readers would expect her to support affirmative action. That is, because she is a member of a group protected by the policy, readers might dismiss her essay as biased. In that way, her background contributes to her rhetorical problem. On the other hand, her background as a historian could enhance her credibility on historical issues related to affirmative action. And her personal experiences provide vivid examples to influence her readers.

Audience

As we indicated earlier, the policy of affirmative action continues to generate controversy. Because of the emotion-laden issues involved, racism and sexism, because resolving those issues addresses traditional values of fairness and equality, and because affirmative action poten-

tially affects nearly everyone in the areas of education and employment, many individuals hold strong opinions about the policy.

Clayton and Crosby argue that "demographic characteristics can predict attitudes toward affirmative action. Not surprisingly, women, nonwhites, younger people, and Democrats show more support for affirmative action" (23). Presumably, then, men, whites, older people, and non-Democrats show less support for the policy. Because attitudes held by those groups of people influence how they might receive Painter's essay, the "ideal" audience, those disposed to be most receptive to her message, would be composed of young, nonwhite women who are Democrats. That ideal audience corresponds to the "target audience" revealed during our descriptive analysis of Painter's essay. Thus, the demographic characteristics of Painter's audience are important.

The initial empirical audience for Painter's essay was made up of readers of the *New York Times*. That is significant because the *Times* is a newspaper read by millions throughout the nation and around the globe; Painter's empirical audience was potentially very large. The *1986 Media Guide* calls the *Times* "the most important newspaper in the world" and notes its "history and standing, its immense influence on global opinion, and its responsibility in maintaining journalistic standards" (15). Thus, the *Times* and its readers play an important role in shaping public opinion. Although information about the political party affiliation of *Times* readers is not available, statistics for the other categories enumerated by Clayton and Crosby suggest that readers of the *Times* are demographically diverse.

For example, the *Simmons 1982 Study of Media and Markets* reports that readers of the *New York Times* are 54.7 percent male and 45.3 percent female (4). Ethnically, readership is 88.3 percent white, 9.3 percent African American, and 2.4 percent other ethnic groups; 3.2 percent are Spanish-speaking (28). Readers classified as "younger," ages 18–34, make up 32.7 percent of *Times* readers; somewhat older individuals, ages 35–54, constitute 36.9 percent of readers (8).

Given the "ideal" or "target" audience for Painter's essay, cross-referencing the relevant demographic characteristics for *Times* readers is revealing. Women classified as younger, ages 18–34, make up 15.3 percent of *Times* readers (*Simmons* 180). Ethnically, women readers are 11.1 percent nonwhite, and 2.9 percent are Spanish-speaking (*Simmons* 178). Although these percentages may seem relatively small, the number of people who make up Painter's empirical audience is potentially quite large because the circulation of the *New York Times* is so great. If Clayton and Crosby are correct about those individuals who "show more support for affirmative action," then Painter's target audience is also large, even though the percentage figures may seem small.

Nevertheless, we must point out that there are important exceptions to this generalization about Painter's audiences based upon demographics. Many individuals who are members of groups that theoretically benefit most from affirmative action oppose the policy. Some of those individuals are extremely influential people. In his confirmation hearings for a position on the U.S. Supreme Court, Clarence Thomas voiced opposition to the policy. As Clayton and Crosby also point out,

> Justice Thomas is not the only African American to oppose affirmative action: Thomas Sowell, Shelby Steele, and Glenn Loury are some of the more prominent black critics who have gained national attention as they have spoken and written against the policy. Stephen Carter, the William Nelson Cromwell Professor of Law at Yale University, has also questioned the wisdom of the policy, even as he characterizes himself as an "affirmative action baby." (1–2)

Apparently, membership in one of the so-called "protected classes" is no guarantee of support for affirmative action.

For example, Thomas Sowell, a senior fellow of the Hoover Institution at Stanford University, is harshly critical of numerical requirements for hiring ethnic minorities, often called "quotas," which have sometimes been enacted because of affirmative action. "Today's grand fallacy about race and ethnicity," Sowell says, "is that the statistical 'representation' of a group—in jobs, schools, etc.—shows and measures *discrimination*. This notion is at the center of such controversial policies as affirmative action hiring, preferential admissions to college, and school busing." He continues, "But despite the fact that far-reaching judicial rulings, political crusades, and bureaucratic empires owe their existence to that belief, it remains an unexamined assumption" (417). Sowell is blunt in his attack on advocates of affirmative action based on numerical goals or requirements. "'Representation' talk is cheap, easy, and misleading," he says. "Discrimination and opportunity are too serious to be discussed in gobbledygook" (419).

Glenn C. Loury, professor of political economy at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, is equally critical of affirmative action programs. Indeed, he believes that those programs can be harmful to the very groups of people they are designed to benefit. According to Loury,

> . . . The broad use of race preference to treat all instances of "underrepresentation" introduces uncertainty into the process by which individuals make inferences about their own abilities. A frequently encountered question today from a black man or woman promoted

to a position of unusual responsibility in a "mainstream" institution is: "Would I have been offered this position if I had not been a black?" Most people in such situations want to be reassured that their achievement has been earned, and is not based simply on the organizational requirement of racial diversity. As a result, the use of racial preference tends to undermine the ability of people to confidently assert, if only to themselves, that they are as good as their achievements would seem to suggest. (447)

In other words, Loury argues that affirmative action programs can hurt targeted groups by undermining their self-confidence and self-esteem, qualities essential for success in both education and employment.

In education, the area of greatest interest for Painter, Sowell argues that the effects of affirmative action can be even more significant. Under pressure to meet numerical requirements for admissions, Sowell says, colleges and universities tend to employ a double standard for screening applicants; admission requirements are lower for targeted ethnic groups than for other potential students. The result, he claims, is that "thousands of minority students who would normally qualify for good nonprestigious colleges where they could succeed, are instead enrolled in famous institutions where they fail" (422). The effect ripples through the academic population. According to Sowell,

> When the top institutions reach further down to get minority students, then academic institutions at the next level are forced to reach still further down, so that they too will end up with a minority body count high enough to escape criticism and avoid trouble with the government and other donors. Each academic level, therefore, ends up with minority students underqualified for that level, though usually perfectly qualified for some other level. The end result is a systematic mismatching of minority students and the institutions they attend, even though the wide range of American colleges and universities is easily capable of accommodating those same students under their normal standards. (423)

Because Sowell and Loury are respected and potentially influential members of a group that supposedly benefits from affirmative action, their statements illustrate the rhetorical problem Painter faced with her target audiences.

Clayton and Crosby also observe that "ideology, more than personal circumstances, may ultimately underlie most people's positions on affirmative action," although they quickly add that "ideology is

influenced by personal circumstances" (25). The assumption is that in general, individuals with liberal political ideology tend to support the policy of affirmative action, whereas conservatives tend to oppose it. Nevertheless, there are notable exceptions to this ideological generalization as well.

For example, Clayton and Crosby note that "the liberal Anti-Defamation League . . . has consistently filed briefs against affirmative action in court cases" (11). Apparently, some liberals fear that by "highlighting category differences," affirmative action will only increase conflict and undermine efforts to achieve equality (11). On the other end of the ideological spectrum, many ostensibly conservative leaders of the business community wholeheartedly support affirmative action. A 1984 survey of chief executive officers of large corporations revealed that 90 percent of their companies had implemented "numerical hiring objectives," similar to those frequently required by affirmative action, and 95 percent of those who had implemented such programs indicated that they would continue, regardless of government action (Clayton and Crosby 24). Those companies seem to believe "that affirmative action leads to a variety of benefits, including increased productivity, diversity of ideas, a more rational personnel policy, and improved community relations" (Clayton and Crosby 21). Thus, because of these noteworthy exceptions, conclusions about the influence of political ideology on attitudes toward affirmative action are far from certain.

This analysis reveals how the scope and diversity of Painter's audiences contribute to her rhetorical problem. Readers of the *New York Times,* those potentially exposed to the rhetorical act, were demographically and, presumably, ideologically diverse. The medium Painter selected allowed her to reach a large target audience but also required her to adapt her essay to diverse readers.

Competing Persuasive Forces

Although the policy of affirmative action has generated controversy for decades, for Painter, the major competing persuasive influences were members of the Reagan administration and its conservative supporters. Consistent with promises made during the 1980 presidential campaign, Ronald Reagan entered office committed to easing affirmative action requirements, if not eliminating the policy altogether.

According to Howard Ball and Kathanne Greene, "President Reagan's world view on civil rights is contrary to views held by his predecessors" (16). Reagan's position was apparently based on his firm

belief that conditions that once may have justified policies such as affirmative action had changed. As Ball and Greene explain:

> For Reagan, the time has ended for extending special treatment to various groups in the larger society because an entire nation has changed its attitudes toward racial and gender discrimination. Wedded philosophically to an "ability conscious" society, rather than to a society based on color consciousness, the message from the highest White House levels is that harsh remedies, e.g., busing, set-asides, quotas, etc., for naked and unrestricted discrimination based on various neutral factors are no longer appropriate. (16–17)

In other words, Reagan believed that programs such as affirmative action were no longer necessary because overt racism no longer existed in the United States.

Proponents of affirmative action would argue that Reagan's belief was ill-founded in at least two ways. First, overt racism and sexism are far from dead in the United States. Ezorsky cites the following examples of overt racism, which she claims is common: increases in racial violence against African Americans, disparities in sentences imposed on murderers who kill whites compared to those who kill African Americans, housing discrimination, and lower funding and inferior education in predominantly African American schools (12–13). She concludes that "abundant evidence shows that overt racism is widespread today" (12). Clayton and Crosby go even further, suggesting that "resistance to affirmative action is sometimes a manifestation of hostility toward the beneficiary group" (24). Second, even if overt racism and sexism are not as virulent as they once were, Reagan's position seems to ignore the lingering institutionalized racism and sexism that affirmative action was intended to combat. Nevertheless, Reagan's beliefs and ideology influenced the policies of his administration.

According to Janet K. Boles,

> the [Reagan] Justice Department announced that it would no longer advocate affirmative action goals and timetables, even in cases where courts had found discrimination by employers. The enforcement of equal opportunity laws by both the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) and the Office of Federal Contract Compliance (OFCC) declined sharply under Reagan, and, as a matter of announced policy, class action suits were no longer filed. Under new regulations proposed by the administration, three-quarters of all federal contractors were exempted from filing affirmative

action plans; existing requirements that promoted jobs for women in construction were weakened as well. (69–70)

Furthermore, Jones explains that "under the Reagan administration the United States Department of Justice aggressively attacked affirmative action, appearing in the Supreme Court in opposition to existing programs and counseling cities and other local entities to revoke or modify their affirmative action requirements" (352). Charles M. Lamb added that "the philosophy on school desegregation of most Reagan political appointees at DOE [the Department of Education] is that assertive enforcement is unnecessary and cooperation is absolutely essential with school systems accused of discriminating" (85). These policy changes were consistent with Reagan's political ideology.

A long-standing objection to affirmative action is that the policy "reverses" discrimination by favoring women and nonwhites at the expense of white males. The Reagan position fueled that objection. As Boles says, "the Reagan administration was much more concerned with 'reverse discrimination' against white males in the work force" than with any continuing need for affirmative action (69–70). Indeed, Ball and Greene believe that Reagan saw affirmative action programs not as the remedy for, but as the cause of, racism in the 1980s: "In the president's [Reagan's] mind, the denial of equal opportunity in the 1980s results from 'the very laws designed to secure them.' The laws that have been developed, especially the affirmative action legislation and regulations of recent decades, must be set aside because they are morally reprehensible and legally unconstitutional" (15). Clearly, both in word and in deed, the Reagan administration constituted the major competing persuasive influence for Painter.

That influence shaped the attitudes and opinions of potential audience members and, thus, contributed to Painter's rhetorical problem. For example, Clayton and Crosby comment that "white male students have complained to us about not getting into law school because of affirmative action; the implication is that the slot a student 'deserved' was reallocated to a less-deserving member of a minority group" (23–24). Such resentment of affirmative action is not confined to academia. One survey indicated that "only 17 percent of whites and 7 percent of blacks felt that affirmative action programs often discriminated against whites, but 60 percent of whites and 42 percent of blacks felt that this sometimes happened" (Clayton and Crosby 21–22). These attitudes are undoubtedly due to the efforts of competing persuasive influences, and they help reveal the rhetorical problem Painter faced.

Supporting Material

Aside from examples drawn from her own personal experiences, Painter used just one important piece of supporting material, the example of John Hope Franklin. As Painter indicated in her essay, Franklin is a member of that generation of Americans who came of age before the civil rights movement. *Who's Who Among Black Americans* reports that he was born January 2, 1915, in Rentiesville, Oklahoma, the son of Buck Colbert Franklin and Mollie Parker Franklin. He attended Fisk University, a predominantly African American institution, receiving his A.B. in 1935. He received a masters degree in 1936 and a Ph.D. in 1941, both from predominantly white Harvard University (499).

From 1936 to 1937, Franklin was an instructor of history at Fisk. He was professor of history at St. Augustine's College, a predominantly African American institution, in Raleigh, North Carolina, from 1939 to 1943, professor of history at North Carolina College at Durham, a predominantly African American institution, from 1943 to 1947, and professor of history at Howard University, another predominantly African American institution in Washington, D.C., from 1947 to 1956. From 1956 through 1964, he was chair of the Department of History at Brooklyn College. During that time, he was also Pitt Professor of American History at Cambridge University, 1962–1963. From 1964 through 1982, he was professor of American History at the University of Chicago, and from 1982 to 1985, he was James B. Duke professor of history at Duke University. Currently, he is Professor Emeritus of History, Duke University (*Who's Who Among Black Americans* 499). Franklin's career as an educator was truly distinguished.

Despite the limitations placed on Franklin's career by the sort of overt racism we described earlier, he also became a renowned scholar. He was on the editorial board of *American Scholar*, 1972–1976, and he was chair of the board of trustees of Fisk University, 1968–1974. In 1969 Franklin was president of the Southern Historical Association, and in 1979 he was president of the American Historical Association. He is a member of Phi Beta Kappa and Phi Alpha Theta (*Who's Who Among Black Americans* 499). Franklin was a Guggenheim Fellow 1950–1951 and again 1973–1974. He is the author of *From Slavery to Freedom, a History of Negro Americans*, 1987; *The Militant South*, 1956; *Reconstruction After the Civil War*, 1961; *The Emancipation Proclamation*, 1963; *A Southern Odyssey*, 1976; *Racial Equality in America*, 1976; *George Washington Williams, a Biography*, 1985; *The Color Line: Legacy for the Twenty First Century*, 1991; as well as other works (*Who's Who Among Black Americans* 499).

Franklin's scholarly contributions in American history have received the highest recognition. He was awarded the Jefferson Medal in 1983, the Clarence Holte Literary Prize in 1986, the Cleanth Brooks Medal, Fellowship of Southern Writers in 1989, the John Caldwell Medal from the North Carolina Council on the Humanities in 1991, the University of North Carolina Medal in 1992, and the Encyclopedia Britannica Gold Medal Award in 1990 (*Who's Who Among Black Americans* 499). Painter's use of Franklin as an example clearly passes all the relevant tests of evidence.

CONCLUSION

This brief analysis illustrates the complexity of the issues surrounding the controversial policy of affirmative action. Honest individuals with good intentions on both sides of the controversy deplore the overt racism and sexism that the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the subsequent Executive Orders were intended to overcome. Because fairness and equality are celebrated as traditional U. S. values, the goal of equal opportunity in education and employment is applauded by virtually everyone. Policies enacted to help achieve that goal, however, continue to provoke disagreement.

Advocates of policies such as affirmative action argue vehemently that overt racism and sexism continue almost unabated. Moreover, they argue that regardless of overtly racist and sexist actions, institutionalized racism and sexism continue to thwart equal opportunity policies, making affirmative action necessary. Opponents of affirmative action argue just as vehemently that the policy creates a new form of discrimination directed at groups not protected by affirmative action. Furthermore, they contend that the protected groups themselves are harmed by the policy. Rhetors on both sides face a formidable rhetorical problem.

This analysis also illustrates how, in the second stage of the critical process, critics try to describe the rhetorical problem. It reveals that Painter addressed an issue, affirmative action, with a long and controversial history. Her empirical audience was large and diverse. Evidence suggests that the medium of communication through which she spoke, the *New York Times,* allowed her to reach relatively large target audiences, but many within those targeted groups were probably skeptical about Painter's purpose. Thus, she faced the problem of adapting her rhetorical act to that large, diverse, and potentially reluctant audience. Painter's rhetorical problem was made more difficult by the presence of powerful competing persuaders—Ronald Reagan, his

administration, and its conservative supporters. Their statements and actions fueled opposition to affirmative action. Research reveals that the persona Painter adopted in her essay was entirely consistent with her past accomplishments and experiences, as well as with her previous statements on the issues of civil rights and affirmative action. Finally, the primary example, other than her own experiences, that Painter employed, John Hope Franklin, was authentic and accurate.

The first stage of the critical process, descriptive analysis, revealed in detail how Painter's rhetorical act worked to achieve its purpose. The second stage, historical–contextual analysis, illuminated the rhetorical problem she faced. We are now prepared for the third stage of the critical process: selecting or inventing a critical perspective to guide our evaluation of Painter's essay.

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RECOMMENDED READINGS

Lucas, Stephen E. "The Schism in Rhetorical Scholarship." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 67 (1981): 1–20. An essay that explores conflicts between rhetorical history and rhetorical criticism and then illustrates their interrelationship through an analysis of Thomas Paine's *Common Sense.*

Nichols, Marie Hochmuth. "Lincoln's First Inaugural." *American Speeches.* Ed. W. M. Parrish and M. H. Nichols. New York: David McKay, 1954. This is the classic example of historical–contextual analysis. A critique of its narrow compass is found in Edwin Black, *Rhetorical Criticism: A Study in Method.* New York: Macmillan, 1965: 37–42.

Philipsen, Gerald. "Mayor Daley's Council Speech: A Cultural Analysis." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 72 (1986): 247–260. This critical analysis dramatically illustrates the links between knowing the context and understanding the meaning of a rhetorical act.

CHAPTER FOUR

Selecting or Inventing a Critical Perspective: The Third Stage of Criticism

In the third stage of analysis critics select or "invent" a critical perspective or approach from which to interprete and evaluate a rhetorical act. They base their decisions on both their intrinsic descriptive analysis and their extrinsic analysis of the historical–cultural context. That is, information discovered and conclusions drawn in the first two stages guide critics to a perspective or approach suitable for completing the critical process. In this chapter we discuss the third stage in the critical process and illustrate it by inventing a critical approach to Nell Irvin Painter's essay.

In contrast to the first stage, which focuses on the discourse, and the second stage, which focuses on the context and scene, the third stage focuses on the critic, reflecting that person's interests and biases. In other words, on the basis of their conclusions in the first two stages and on their own knowledge and experience, critics make subjective decisions about the perspective best suited to a particular rhetorical act. Perhaps for that reason, George Bernard Shaw once wrote that "all criticism is autobiography," and other theorists have recognized that criticism is persuasive discourse. In this sense rhetorical criticism is entirely reflexive; all critical processes used to evaluate a discourse should also be used to evaluate the criticisms of that discourse.

Although our discussion of the first two stages of the process indicates strongly that critics must test their judgments both against the discourse and against research from other sources, "good" criticism is not objective and impersonal—it is evaluative. It makes clear and