Ernest Rodriguez, born in 1928, was a civil rights activist that was a part of many different organizations that advocated equality towards Latinos in Iowa, and across the country. He helped with the founding of local chapters of the American GI Forum and the League of United Latin America (LULAC) in Iowa (Mason 2005). Many of these organizations were created for the civil rights movement known as the Chicano movement. The term “Chicano” means an American of Mexican ancestry. This movement started in the 1960s, where Chicanos demanded equal rights and opportunities as a U.S. citizen (Rodriguez 2013). During and after this movement, Rodriguez did many speeches in regards to civil rights, one of them being “Power of Love”. This speech was given at a Toastmasters speech competition located in Muscatine, Iowa in 1982. In this speech, Rodriguez shares a solution to the problems the world faces. He believes that love is the answer. Rodriguez’s main objective with this speech was not only to win this speech competition, but also make people aware that something needs to be done to repair the nation.

In the first part of Rodriguez’s speech, Rodriguez sets the audience up in their living room watching TV, a commonplace for the audience. He alludes to many horrendous events that have been broadcasted on TV. One event he mentions is the recent war during that time period, the Vietnam War. He says recently “we”, him and the audience, watched family leave to Vietnam “to fight a war that made little sense to anyone with sense” (Rodriguez 1982, p.1). The Vietnam War was a confusing time for everyone due to many events that happened during the war. The following line Rodriguez says, “We watched pictures of our loved ones burn villages populated by
innocent men, women, and children” (Rodriguez 1982, p.1). He refers to the infamous massacre during the Vietnam War, My Lai. My Lai was the name of the village that troops were sent to destroy since it was believed that the enemy was located in the village. Through troops did not confront any enemies, the innocent civilians who lived in the village were killed anyways (My Lai Massacre 1998). Rodriguez continues illustrating horrific stories of violence that have circulated like “massacres of thousands of peasants whose only crime is to be free from oppression” and “government troops in Guatemala bayoneting innocent babies and bashing their heads against stone walls to save ammunition” (Rodriguez 1982). Rodriguez appeals to pathos with the audience, but at the same time, creates a connection with them. He explains the scenes of violence, creating a sense of guilt with the audience since many of them are watching these events being broadcasted in the comfort of their living room but doing nothing to help. Rodriguez also builds a connection with the audience in his speech by using the word “we”. By using this word, he makes the audience apart of the speech. The connection with the audience helps emphasize the emotion throughout the speech.

As Rodriguez’s speech continues, he continues to create a deeper connection with the audience. He keeps the audience apart of the second part of the speech by referring them as “my friends”. He highlighted that poverty is causing violence and greed in the world (Rodriguez 1982, p.2). He directly tells the audience that it is their duty to fix this problem before it can no longer be fixed. Rodriguez once again pulls the audience into the problem. He makes the audience guilty and makes them feel it is their job to help those affected from poverty. Rodriguez states that this problem reminds him of a different situation, drug abuse. He says that drug abuse was a problem for minority groups, except it wasn’t considered a problem until it affected the majority (Rodriguez 1982, p.2). When
this speech was written, it was nearing the end of the Chicano movement. Rodriguez was seen as a Chicano activist, so he was a huge supporter of the Chicano movement (Mason 2005). Though it seems the Chicano movement was ending, Rodriguez still believed equal rights towards all groups is important. He wanted the audience to show how problems are handled in regards to minority groups.

In the last part of the speech, Rodriguez offers a simple solution to every problem the nation is suffering with: love. First, Rodriguez tells the audience that he is not talking about the love we see in movies, books or songs. He repeats the line “I am not talking about...” multiple times in order to make his point clear. He begins repeating the line “I’m talking about...” instead to emphasize the definition of love he is talking about (Rodriguez 1982, p. 3). He believes that the love for humanity, and love through selfless acts is the love we should be sharing. Those in support of the Chicano movement usually supported pacifism, non-violence, as well (Rodriguez 2013). He believes that love is a non-violent way to fix problems that have caused so much violence. Rodriguez mentions Martin Luther King Jr’s love towards humanity. Like Rodriguez, King advocated non-violence and civil rights. King was able to make the whole nation realize the inequality
with minority groups. This helps Rodriguez prove his point that showing love for humanity is something that can help the nation out.

Though Rodriguez did this speech to compete in a speech competition, he also wanted both minority and majority groups to come together and fix the nation with the power of love. He shows the audience horrifying events that happened all around the world. Love is something Rodriguez truly believes is something that can solve problems. Although Rodriguez is not clear what problem he wants the audience to fix, he is clear on what he wants the audience to accomplish.

References


