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## Judgement Kills: A Rhetorical Analysis of an Anti-Racial Profiling Visual

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### Judgment Kills:

#### A Rhetorical Analysis of an Anti-Racial Profiling Visual

According to Benjamin Todd Jealous “racial profiling punishes the innocent individuals for the past actions of those who look and sound like them.” By this standard the largest killers of minorities in America are not violence or crime, but the misconceptions and stereotypes that are misattributed to them. In modern American society one of the most debated sociopolitical topics is the equality of men in a “post-racial” society. Some believe that five decades removed from the American Civil Rights movement, the discussion of race in America is a moot point. However according to *Black Stats: African Americans by the Numbers*, Over 46 percent of black high school dropouts are unemployed as opposed to 26 percent of white ones. African American writers and creators are underrepresented at a ratio of 2 to 1 in television and film despite their percent makeup of the population (qtd. in New Press 2014). Moreover, although the National Football League is 67 percent black, black players account for 92 percent of all personal fouls: most related to perceived “cockiness” and unsportsmanlike conduct. These statistics contribute to a fixed narrative of the black community by using prejudices and assumptions against them. In Moise Morancy’s photo series “It Doesn’t Matter,” he challenges the idea that being a model citizen shields one from these assumptions and injustices. Using a combination of an emotionally jarring image, juxtaposed with anecdotal images of “ideal” and “imperfect” Americans, the

visual effectively targets a diverse audience and leads them to ponder: Is America so post-racial after all?

Morancy's photo series argues that African Americans still face systemic lynching from a society that enslaved them hundreds of years before. The uniqueness of the visual is that Morancy is not trying to sway the viewers in one direction or another. He is in effect telling the audience that this claim is true, and through the audience's personal experience or second hand experience through news or media, the audience is able to decide whether they agree. Morancy uses the classical rhetorical appeals of ethos, pathos, and kairos along with historical references to further build the claim.

Ethos is the subtlest appeal used in the visual. To a certain portion of the audience, the face behind all of the characters in the pictures is well known. Moise Morancy is a popular musical artist and social activist known mainly through his work in black empowerment and the Black Lives Matter movement on Twitter. By using his own face instead of models, Morancy is able to attract the millennial who is familiar with his work. This viewer is aware of his status as an activist and can thus be assured that he is qualified to speak on the topic. Though his resume may seem too narrow for instant recognition by the older audience or those without social media, Morancy uses ethos in characterization to still appeal to a broad audience. He is not presented as a celebrity or particularly affluent or flashy, but instead, he appears as the common person. He could be the audience's brother, uncle, or friend. By painting himself with a broad brush Morancy effectively solicits trust from the viewer despite any deficits in familiarity.

Pathos is heavily relied upon in the visual. The most emotionally charged symbol in the images is an intertwined American flag and noose. The noose is known historically in America as a symbol of the brutal and unwarranted murders of blacks and slaves in the South. It also

helps the audience recall another time in history when racial tension was elevated. In contrast, the image of the flag is seen as hallowed and known as a symbol for American liberty and democracy. By showing the noose as intertwined with the flag, Morancy pushes the point that America and race are inseparable and that one cannot exist without the other. The message that is ultimately taken away from the combination is that there is only liberty for some, not all.

The appeal of pathos is also used in the connotations of the characters portrayed. The audience is introduced to a graduate, inmate, businessperson, and members of the Bloods and Crips gangs. Although some characters have positive associations and others have negative ones, all characters don the flag and noose. The audience is expected to have a negative reaction towards the inmate and the gang members. However, when confronted by the businessperson and graduate, an emotional conflict occurs. The viewer is forced to drop the assumption that the inmate and gang members “deserve it” because the respectable men get the same treatment.

Lastly, the appeal of kairos is used to create a climate for the narrative portrayed. In current news media, it is hard to go a day without seeing a story regarding racial profiling or a police shooting. In statistics published by the Leadership Conference (2011), whites are twice as likely as blacks to receive a verbal warning for the same offenses; and unarmed blacks are three and a half times more likely to be shot than white offenders are. Though these statistics are not included in the visual itself, it proves that profiling is rampant in America. This gives an objective standard by which the audience can judge Morancy’s claim because it’s not just an emotionally charged argument but also one that is backed by relevant statistics. The visual’s publication in a period of racial tension and increased police brutality allows the audience to see the urgency of the message because it is happening currently.

Despite a perceived advancement in civil rights, the issue of racial profiling is still prevalent in America. Moise Morancy successfully orchestrates a simple artwork that encapsulates this ideal using familiarity, emotional triggers, and historical timing. The summation of each creates a poignant message on the status of race in America today. The message's delivery compels the viewer to challenge his or her own assumptions and becomes a call to action for the fight against racial profiling.

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