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AP Language and Composition

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ICE- Banneker Letter

Banneker forces the reader, Thomas Jefferson, to recall a time when he was treated unjustly and to remember how he himself fought for justice and freedom. Banneker uses both example, and comparison, to reveal that slavery is wrong.

The passage starts with Banneker discussing the time when Great Britain ruled the colonists. He starts by speaking in a very dark way about that time, causing the reader to have to re-experience that time and re-live the emotions, such as frustration and anger from being ruled. The example clearly parallels slavery and the manner in which Africans and African-Americans were being put into slavery. The narrator states that, "This sir, was a time in which you clearly saw into the injustice of a state of slavery and in which you and just apprehensions of the horrors of its conditions" (15-17). Banneker even goes so far as to include a quote from the Declaration of Independence, that only further backs up his point that it is hypocritical to keep others chained and oppressed when that is exactly what the colonists fought to be free from. Jefferson can no longer justify slavery because if so, then he too, would be admitting that it was okay that the British had been oppressing the colonists.

While the majority of the essay is focused on the example and causing the reader to infer its parallel about slavery, at the end of the letter, Banneker directly compares the white men and colonists' position with the British, to the slaves' position with the colonists. Banneker

reveals the hypocrisy when he states, "...how pitiable is it to reflect that although you were so fully convinced of the benevolence of the Father of mankind and of his equal and impartial distribution of those rights and privileges which we had conferred upon them , that you should at the same time counteract his mercies in detaining by fraud and violence is numerous a part if my brethren under groaning captivity and cruel oppression" (32-38). The letter is written in such a manner that Jefferson is forced to realize the hypocrisy of what is being done by encouraging or even allowing slavery. There is a direct comparison which is not revealed until the end of the passage, which only strengthens the argument. Furthermore Banneker uses an allusion to even further his point. The Biblical allusion is to show that even the bible frowns upon slavery.

Slavery is clearly revealed to be a hypocritical system because the colonists themselves were oppressed and are now doing the same to Africans and African-Americans. By using comparison, examples, and allusions, Banneker is able to demonstrate the hypocrisy of slavery in the United State.