

In recent years The U.S. has seen a decline in the state of our economy. In “Confronting Inequality”, Paul Krugman argues for change of the current state we find ourselves in as a nation. His argument begins with connections on how our economy has given rise to a greater separation between the wealthy elite and the average citizen. Krugman identifies causes of this separation such as a lack of universal health care and tax cuts for the wealthy. He proposes change through eliminating these tax cuts, increasing taxes on the wealthy and using this additional capital to provide universal health care and other social safety nets. In addition, Krugman proposes America unionize again in order to reduce market inequality. Overall, Krugman’s hope is to reinvigorate the middle class and bring equality back to this nation.

Krugman uses various forms of rhetoric in his call for change. His paper is very dynamic in its appeals to the audience. Also, he identifies his audience and appeals to them personally in a very effective manner. The various methods Krugman uses combined with his appeals to his core audience make for a very effective argument in the case of economic change.

Krugman opens up the topic by appealing to the reader through ethos. He compares our current state with that of the Gilded Age. This era was rampant with the wealthy taking advantage of the not so fortunate and this comparison immediately conjures up ideas of injustice (Krugman 322). He goes on to bring up the lifestyle of the wealthy alongside the inequality America’s middle and low classes face today. This again brings up ideas of injustice as the wealthy live extravagantly and the others struggle to get by.

Alongside this, Krugman brings logos into the argument. He cites a study run by the National Center for Education Statistics. In this study, eighth grade students were sorted according to their economic status and their apparent talent based on a math test provided to the students. The results gave a percentage of students that graduated college compared to the

grouping they were placed under. The study found that the students with the low test scores but higher economic standing had a higher percent of finishing college than the students with high test scores but low economic standing (Krugman 327). This study proves the difficulty Americans experience when they try to move upward in their economic standing. Therefore, the use of the study is effective towards an argument to make a change.

He also cited a study run that showed middle-class families were spending less on luxuries and the rise in debt was a result of increased spending on housing (Krugman 326). Krugman ties this to parents trying to get their children into good school districts so their kids can get a good education. However, Krugman does not cite information to back his claim that an increased spending is largely a cause of parents seeking this education for their children. This causes a break in the effectiveness of his argument. He is defending the actions of the middle-class but his lack of proof raises questions of the legitimacy of his claim.

Regardless, his overall appeals in his presentation of economic inequality are effective. He continues along with this effectiveness when he brings up the topic of politics. He uses ethos again with statements such as, “hardly a week goes by without the disclosure of a case in which the influence of money has grotesquely distorted U.S. government policy” (Krugman 329). His claim is that the wealthy elite and the politicians are in bed together, with benefits going to both parties. This is where he brings in logos to further his use of ethos. Krugman introduces tax cuts for hedge fund managers that receive tax cuts amounting to 15% compared to the normal 35% (329). The idea of corruption in our government is present in many people which is what makes these appeals so effective.

He then effectively wraps up his summary of our current economy with pathos. This is done when Krugman brings up the connection of economic inequality and the unity of our

nation. He writes that with rising inequality comes rising distrust between the classes. Krugman uses this to incite feelings of patriotism and unity to convince the reader of the way our economic decline has rippled through our nation as a whole.

Following this, Krugman presents ideas to alleviate our nation from our current condition. He moves back his argument against tax cuts and does so by means of logos. He cites a study run by the nonpartisan Urban-Brookings Joint Tax Policy Center saying that “letting the Bush tax cuts expire for people with incomes over two hundred thousand dollars would be worth about \$140 billion a year starting in 2012” (Krugman 331). He backs this by means of ethos claiming that this increase in revenue could be used to fund universal health care, an amenity Krugman deems crucial for the middle class. The effectiveness of this argument comes from an idea that that health care is thought of as a necessity in first world countries and many find it unethical that many people living in America lack this health care.

Krugman continues along this path of logic when he suggests closing the loopholes that the wealthy elite slip through. He states a recent study found that “tax avoidance by multinationals costs about \$50 billion a year” (Krugman 332). From this, Krugman shows simply implementing basic safeguards against tax avoidance will yield vast revenue.

Moving forward, Krugman uses ethos when he brings up raising taxes beyond removing the Bush tax cuts. He brings up the high tax rates our nation use to impose on those in the top bracket of the economy. In this, Krugman acknowledges the argument that these tax rates only serve to punish the rich. However, he counters this stating that due to the increased concentration of wealth, the tax rates “would yield a significant amount of revenue, which could be used to help a lot of people” (Krugman 334). Finally, Krugman relies on ethos when he suggests raising taxes for the middle class. He realizes this is a sore topic but insists it would lead to more

security for people and would overall make their lives better. Krugman suggestions to raise taxes on the middle and high class are based an idea of the common good. Therefore, the stigma calling people to give up money is counteracted by his use of ethos stating the money they give up will go to help the country as a whole.

Krugman then moves on to the final piece of his argument; reducing market inequality. According to Krugman, the first step has already been taken by congress when they raised the minimum wage. He uses logos to defend why this action will have a positive effect on the U.S.A. study run by two labor economists at Princeton that Krugman cites found no correlation between minimum wage increases and job loss. Krugman also contradicts a claim that he brings up stating the minimum wage increase “will have little or no effect in raising wages” (Krugman 336). He presents estimates from the Economic Policy Institute that say 13 million workers will gain from the tax increase, with 5.6 million of these workers currently having wages under the new minimum wage. These uses of logos show the audience that changes to the market are predicted to work, thus new changes implemented also have a chance of equalizing the market.

Finally, Krugman uses ethos effectively in his argument to bring back the union movement. This is done through his claims that the U.S. experienced a drastic decline in unionization due to a change in the political climate. He states this allowed employers to break up unions and punish union members. By stating this, Krugman effectively brings up an idea that our rights are being obstructed when unionization is impeded. Worker’s rights are largely expected in America, therefore when Krugman points out that rights have been taken from workers shows a lack of ethics. Therefore, when Krugman says we should take back our rights it adds to the ethos of his argument.

Krugman also attempts to use logos to show how a union movement would reduce market inequality. He compares Canada to the U.S. by writing that Canada has seen much less of an increase in wage inequality, equating this to their strong unionization. In addition, he claims unions as an equalizing force in the market in that they take strides to distribute wages among their members. Krugman use of logos is not as effective here as it was in the rest of the article. His claims are based on speculation and add little to his argument.

However, this does not detract from the overall effectiveness of Krugman argument for decreasing market inequality. He weaves rhetoric through his writing and in doing so, adds to the legitimacy of his claims.

## Works Cited

Krugman, Paul. "Confronting Inequality." *They Say I Say*. Ed. Gerald Graff, Cathy Birkenstein, Russel Durst. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2009. 322-341. Print.