

WRITING THROUGH THE RHETORICAL MODES

SECTION 1: A RHETORICAL MODES READER

Chapter One: The Narrative Mode

Narration and Reflection: Reading 2

Brent Staples, “Just Walk On By: A Black Man Ponders His Power to Alter Public Space”

Brent Staples is an author and editorial columnist for the New York Times. The essay below was first published in 1986 in Ms. Magazine under the title “Just Walk On By: Black Men and Public Space.”

<http://citytech.ezproxy.cuny.edu:2048/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=959581&site=ehost-live&scope=site>

Questions for Reading and Discussion

- 1) What is the effect of Staples’ first sentence? Does Staples show sympathy in his essay for the women who run or act defensively when they see him?
- 2) According to Staples, how do black men have the power to transform public space? What is the effect of this power on Staples’ own emotional well-being? How does he try to diminish this power?
- 3) Discuss the essay’s concluding sentence, in which Staples makes an analogy between himself and a hiker in bear country. Why does he compare himself to a hiker? Who or what are the bears? Which is more dangerous, according to his analogy, and why?

Questions for Writing and Research

- 1) Write an essay in which you reflect on your own “bear country.” Are there places in which or people around whom you do not feel safe or in control of your own well-being? What do you do under these circumstances in order to protect yourself?
- 2) Read Topher Sanders article, “‘Only White People,’ Said the Little Girl,” published in the *New York Times* in October of 2016, thirty years after the original publication of Staples’ essay. Write a paper in which you compare the two men’s representations of race relations in this country, as well as how each author discusses his ability to alter public space. From your comparison, do you think that American society has improved or otherwise changed in the thirty years since the original publication of Staples’ essay?

https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/16/opinion/sunday/only-white-people-said-the-little-girl.html?_r=0



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