Obama’s Speech on Boston Marathon bombing: A Rhetorical Analysis

Boston Strong

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Barrack Obama gave a speech regarding the Boston Marathon bombing on April 18, 2013. He spent this time addressing the victims, families, and the nation as a whole on the revolting acts that were taken place on April 15, 2013. The Boston Marathon Bombing occurred during the annual Boston Marathon that has taken place for 117 years. During the race, two home-made pressure cooker bombs detonated and injured over 200 racers and killed five (Editors, 2014). This tragic occurrence leads the Federal Bureau to classify this as terrorisms. Following the bombing, the two men killed a police officer, kidnapped a man, and had a shoot-out with the police. During the shoot-out, one of the suspects was ran over and killed while the other suspect was taken into custody. The suspect was convicted of thirty charges and sentenced to death (Editors, 2014). Following the attack, Barrack Obama effectively convinced the audience of hope as he used pathos, ethos, and logos by the use of his words and phrases to make the nation as a whole feel safer and hopeful.

**Description of Artifact**

Barrack Obama gave this speech to ensure the overall being of America as a whole. Obama emphasized this wholesomeness by using words like “us” “whole” and “together” to make the nation feel like a united front. In his speech, he provided comfort to make the people of Boston feel heard and to tell them they were not alone. Obama made it clear that these acts of terrorism would not go unnoticed and that consequences would happen on behalf of those in Boston. For example, Obama states, “If they sought to intimidate us, to terrorize us, to shake us from those values that Deval described, the values that make us who we are as Americans, well, it should be pretty clear by now that they picked the wrong city to do it” (Obama, 2013). Furthermore, I chose this specific artifact because Obama made the citizens feel whole and safe in a time of crisis. Obama has a prominent way of speaking that makes the nation feel heard and understood. This specific speech made me feel empowered by our nation and the way he carried out the speech gave a sense of comfort and empowerment to each individual who viewed it.

**Analysis**

Through analyzing this speech I will be going in-depth on how Obama showed Pathos, Ethos, and Logos throughout his dialogue. Pathos is “an element in experience or in artistic representation evoking pity or compassion” (Webster, 2011). Pathos is used throughout this speech to make the audience, families affected by the bombing, and the nation feel something in order to convey passion or emotion. Obama used the pathos method the most to make the audience in the room and everyone watching feel as though they are not alone in this fight. Furthermore, he used this method to make the nation feel whole again. He wanted the nation to come together as a whole and fight back to these crimes. The first example of Pathos being shown in the speech is as stated, “When doctors and nurses, police and firefighters and EMTs and guardsmen run towards explosions to treat the wounded, that’s discipline” (Obama, 2013). This quote shows that nobody backed down from the bombs and that nobody turned a blind eye from the citizens of Boston; furthermore, stating that nobody would leave Boston to handle this alone, that the town of Boston had every resource and support they needed to get through this. The second example that shows Pathos is stated as, “When Bostonians carry victims in their arms, deliver water and blankets, line up to give blood, open their homes to total strangers, give them ride back to reunite with their families, that’s love” (Obama, 2013). This shows the unity that the Boston citizens had when the bombs went off and how they are not alone in this. This also shows all the hardship that the citizens of Boston went through, without question they all lined up to help those around them.

Lastly, Obama states,

“And our hearts are broken for 8-year-old Martin, with his big smile and bright eyes. His last hours were as perfect as an 8-year-old boy could hope for, with his family, eating ice cream at a sporting event. And we're left with two enduring images of this little boy, forever smiling for his beloved Bruins and forever expressing a wish he made on a blue poster board: No more hurting people. Peace. No more hurting people. Peace. Our prayers are with the injured, so many wounded, some gravely. From their beds, some are surely watching us gather here today. And if you are, know this: As you begin this long journey of recovery, your city is with you. Your commonwealth is with you. Your country is with you. We will all be with you as you learn to stand and walk and, yes, run again. Of that, I have no doubt. You will run again. You will run again because that's what the people of Boston are made of” (Obama, 2013).

By stating specific facts about the victims that have passed, Obama is essentially putting a face to the victim. Furthermore, he uses this appeal to show respect to the families that have lost loved ones in this heinous crime. Obama applied the method Ad Populum when he stated “You will run again. You will run again because that’s what the people of Boston are made of” (Obama, 2013). Obama appealed to what the people of Boston wanted to hear at this moment and used this to his advantage to grab the audience’s appeal to emotion and sympathy. The method of using pathos in this speech was intended to present the nation as a whole, provide comfort and make the people of Boston feel heard. This all-around was an essential way that president Obama could get the nation’s attention while conveying his emotion for the injuries and fatalities of the citizens of Boston.

Ethos is best described as, “represents credibility, or an ethical appeal, which involves persuasion by the character involved” (Ethos, 2018). Ethos is used to convince the audience of credibility. Barrack Obama used this method to make the people of Boston feel as if he understood what they went through and that his emotions for the town of Boston are valid for many reasons. During the speech, Obama does not use ethos often. I believe the reason for this is because he does not feel the need to convince the audience of his credibility. However, he does portray Ethos once through-out the speech. Obama states, “Like you, Michelle and I have walked these streets. Like you, we know these neighborhoods and like you, in this moment of grief, we join you in saying: Boston, you’re my home. For millions of us, what happened on Monday is personal. It’s personal” (Obama, 2013). Obama used this technique to show the people of Boston that he stands with them and that he is not going to let this act of terrorism go over-looked. While providing this example he makes the citizens of Boston feel emotion, it likely was a way that Obama could make the individuals of Boston feel more connected with him. Additionally, Obama uses Logos to persuade an audience with reason, use facts and figures. Logos is defined as “a literary device that can be described as a statement, sentence, or argument used to convince or persuade the targeted audience by employing reason or logic” (Logos, 2019). An example of this is “And this time next year on the third Monday in April, the world will return to this great American city to run harder than ever and to cheer even louder for the 118th Boston Marathon” (Obama, 2013). This quote portrays Logos because it is convincing the audience that things will get back to normal in Boston. Along with convincing the audience, Obama portrays the fallacy Ad Populum by telling the nation what they want to hear at this time while giving them hope that Boston will regain its formal glory in time.

**Fallacies**

The different fallacies that Obama portrayed are an unqualified generalization, testimonial, Ad Misericordiam, and as shown above, Ad Populum. Unqualified generalization is shown in many different points. For example, “Every one of us have been touched by this attack on your beloved city” (Obama, 2013). Obama also states, “We’ll choose friendship. We’ll choose love” (Obama, 2013). By Obama using words such as “everyone” and “we”, he made a generalization that the situation is black and white and that everyone will follow in his lead. Testimonial is shown by his statement as followed, “Because scripture teaches us God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline” (Obama, 2013). He uses testimonial in this statement to appeal to those with religious-based viewpoints. Ad Misericordiam is shown by, “In the words of Dick Hoyt, who has pushed his disabled son Rick in 31 Boston marathons, we can’t let something like this stop us” (Obama, 2013). Obama stated this to paint the picture of the credibility Dick Hoyt has on speaking about the Boston Marathon, while making the audience feel a sense of emotion that Dick Hoyt has pushed his disabled son, Rick in 31 Boston Marathons. Each fallacy plays into the feeling or emotion that the audience develops during the speech.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, Barrack Obama uses Pathos, Ethos, and Logos to establish emotion, credibility, and fact in his speech about the Boston Marathon Bombing. Using these three methods along with logical fallacies, Obama shed light and respect on a situation that was deemed a tragedy. This speech led the nation to believe that they would prevail after the Boston Marathon Bombing and that the victims and individuals that were injured did not go unnoticed in the eyes of the President of the United States.

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