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Barack Obama's Inauguration Speech: Rhetorical Analysis:

Looking Forward to the Future

The presidential inauguration happens every four years in America, people travel from near and far to attend this historical event. It is customary that the new president would give a speech after being sworn in. Barack Obama, a two term president, is known for impeccable public speaking skills and writing moving and empowering speeches. His inauguration speech on January 21, 2013 was given in the nation's capitol, the District of Columbia. He is known for being the 44th president of the United States of America and the first African- American president. This address took place during his inauguration just after he took the oath of office for the second time. He took the oath and gave this speech in front of senators, congressmen and women, past presidents, and many other distinguished guests.

This rhetorical analysis will address the use of ethos, pathos, and logos throughout former president Barack Obama's speech. His effective use of ethos, pathos, and logos allows him to communicate with the audience in a way that others cannot do. He is able to form a bond with the audience due to his choice of language, making it possible for millions of Americans to trust him, although most of them have only seen him on television. His rhetoric appeals to the diverse populations including average Americans and upper class or highly distinguished Americans. He uses words and phrases that everyone can understand, so that he is appealing to

America as a whole, not a select few. Barack Obama appeals to the emotions and hearts of minority groups, those stuck in the cycle of generational poverty, and many other groups of Americans. From a logical approach, he uses quotations from famous documents that he uses to build his credibility. This helps remind the audience that not only does he know American history, but he wants to build and learn from it. He uses quotes to point out things that should be given or obvious to Americans, by quoting documents such as the Declaration of Independence.

Description Artifacts

This speech was given after Barack took the oath of office. The speech addresses the need to protect the safety net, so that individuals who are not privileged have access to resources that are much needed. In his speech he states, “We understand that outworn programs are inadequate to the needs of our time” (Stewart, Inaugural Address by President Barack Obama). Other issues addressed are climate change, sustainable energy, immigration, the need to lead transition, and many other social and global issues. President Obama also address human rights including: women’s rights, LGBT rights, racial rights, and the right to vote He uses vivid imagery to depict the issues at hand to utilize ethos and pathos. Obama’s ability to utilize these rhetorical devices enabled him to gain the trust of millions of Americans. While his speech might address a larger number of issues at once, his word choice allows the audience to walk away feeling confident in this past Presidents agenda for his four year term.

Methods

This analysis will use classic Aristotelian perspectives to examine this well known speech. The use of his three rhetorical appeals ethos, pathos, and logos are beneficial for analyzing artifacts such as speeches, because they cover a variety of topics that are addressed in

speeches. Ethos is described as an argument that is based on the credibility of one's character (Heinrichs 39). Pathos is described as a type of argument that appeals to the emotions of the audience members. Typically, the speaker will use things that they are positive will have an effect on the audience. For example, speakers will use emotions and their character to appeal to the audience, to help persuade the audience's opinion. This is effective for President Obama in a political environment, so that he can continue to push his political agenda. An example of this would be commercials on television that depict animals in cages after being rescued from homes in which they were beaten or starved or giving stories filled with imagery of the lifestyle of refugee children. Last but not least, logos is described as an argument by logic. (Heinrichs 40). This analysis suggests that Barack Obama effectively used all of these tools in his speech to pull at the heart strings of Americans of all ages. He used quotations from important legal and historical documents to gain authority with his audience. He used these quotations to address social issues in the United States that he aspires to address in his next four years in office. President Obama establishes a sense of compassion and empathy for his fellow Americans while using these rhetorical techniques. He uses power, motivation, and drive to establish a sense of pride and excitement about building a better future, where America is leading the rest of the world in medicine and technology. The following three paragraphs will address the usage of ethos, pathos, and logos in former President Obama's speech.

Analysis

Ethos was presented in the speech multiple times. Ethos is a set of guiding beliefs that Mr. Obama would set and use to establish his character. He used ethos to establish his character, to create a bond or sense of trust between himself and the audience. These guiding beliefs are set

for Americans as a whole and for Mr. Obama himself. He sets his guiding beliefs for the next four years by uniting the nation with his rhetoric and bring attention to policy issues and freedoms taken for granted so that Americans will view him as the ultimate leader. One way that he establishes his ethos by using the identity strategy. The identity strategy is all about getting the audience to bond as see you as the “ideal leader” (Heinrichs 250). Mr. Obama does this repeatedly during his speech by starting statements with, “We, the people”, using the phrase we, this generation, and fellow Americans (Stewart, Inaugural Address by President Barack Obama). This identity strategy creates a sense of unity among Americans, regardless of their political beliefs. This identity is found around Barack Obama as their new leader, someone they can look to as a guiding light, someone who does not want the nation to be separate, but united. Another way he establishes his ethos is code grooming. Code grooming is the use of insider terminology to help the audience see the speakers point of view and begin to identify with them. An example is, “For history tells us that while these truths may be self-evident, they’ve never been self-executing; that while freedom is a gift from God, it must be secured by His people here on Earth” (Stewart, Inaugural Address by President Barack Obama). The code words that former President Obama uses are worlds from the Declaration of Independence: self-evident, and truths. Other words he used to utilize code grooming are gift, self-executing, and secured. He uses this statement to instill a belief set that while freedom is essential for a good nation, it is something that the people inevitably will have to work to achieve and maintain. Obama does an effective job of establishing his ethos because he establishes his character and establishes a set of beliefs for Americans through a simple speech. He uses the speech to discuss policies and social problems he would like to address. Not only does he address what the problem is but how it

should look in an ideal world. Guiding beliefs are used to help create ideas for potential solutions to these societal issues. He utilizes different rhetorical techniques to add to his argument and create a community within the audience listening to this speech. Obama does an excellent job of using imagery to paint a vivid image in his readers mind of what could be in America, if everyone believed in his guiding principles. He uses his imagery to prove that the guiding beliefs would make a more fair and safe America that truly lives out the values started in the Declaration of Independence. Mr. Obama establishes his ethos as a man who craves social equality, freedom for Americans, and a united front between the government and the people.

Pathos is used to persuade the audience based on their emotions. Barack Obama used pathos to appeal to the emotions of those who have been marginalized by social norms, generational poverty and systematic discrimination. This was former President Obama's most effective tool. Obama effectively uses this method by discussing the idea of being born into poverty but still having a bright future.

We know that America thrives when every person can find independence and pride in their work; when the wages of honest labor liberate families from the brink of hardship. We are true to our creed when a little girl born into the bleakest poverty knows that she has the same chance to succeed as anybody else, because she is an American; she is free, and she is equal, not just in the eyes of God but also in our own (Stewart, Inaugural Address by President Barack Obama).

He uses this statement to show that in an America that that is fair everyone has equal rights and an equal opportunity to climb the social ladder. He utilizes the emotions that run high from those who have been "stuck" in the cycle of generational poverty. He knows that often times, those born into poverty feel as if there is no way out of it. In this statement he is showing that he believes that America could function in a way that assists members of the community who have been born into poverty, allowing them to have a fair chance to have a steady income, access to

healthcare, and a comfortable life. This is appealing directly to the emotions of those who have been marginalized, giving them hope. This also appeals to the emotions of those who are not stuck in the cycle of poverty because it is something that feels good supporting and makes them feel more comfortable about their privilege. Another way this appeals to the emotions of those who are privileged would be the access to resources that those who were part of a cycle of generational poverty could have if this statement were to come true. Another way he utilizes pathos is, by addressing America's history with war and slavery. He tells Americans that nations who have those who are slaves and those who are free cannot survive. He states, "Through blood drawn by lash and blood drawn by sword, we learned that no union founded on the principles of liberty and equality could survive half-slave and half-free (Stewart, Inaugural Address by President Barack Obama). He appeals to the emotions of those who have been shipped off to war and to those who have been enslaved. Again, he uses vivid imagery, which is one of the strong suits of his rhetoric, to paint an image in his audience's mind. The image he painted appeals to the emotions because it discusses the idea of blood shed by unnecessary violence. He appeals to the emotions of those who have fought and continue to fight against discrimination today. Through this claim he appeals to the emotions of anger and shame that occurred with America's history of slavery and oppression. He appeals to the emotion of fear that if we are careless and do not fight injustice we, as a nation, might become slaves to inequality for the rest of lives. Another emotional appeal is his call to promote gay rights and to make them a social norm. In his speech he says, "our journey is not complete until our gay brothers and sisters are treated like anyone else under the law" (Stewart, Inaugural Address by President Barack Obama). This is a direct appeal to the LGBT community and their allies as they have fought hard for decades to not

only have the same rights, but to normalize their relationships, and for society to stop making it a taboo subject. Acceptance of gay marriage and overall societal acceptance are things that, unfortunately, the gay community is still fighting for. In this statement Mr. Obama is acknowledging, that while improvements have been made, there is still room for growth and it should not be overlooked. The emotion of fear of discrimination, hatred, violence, and rights being taken away are appealed to. Also, the emotions of joy to come and love and acceptance are appealed to when he talks about what could be in the future. Pathos is utilized by promoting patriotism, using phrases like “we the people” to help create a united front (Heinrichs 424).

Logos is appealing to the audience by reason or logic (Ethos, Pathos, and Logos, the Modes of Persuasion – Explanation and Examples). While Mr. Obama did a good job utilizing logos, it was not as strong as his use of pathos. Using quotations from historical documents was the basis of his argument from this perspective. He did this to show that he knows and understands what beliefs America was founded upon and how we have fallen short in achieving those goals. Most Americans take pride in their culture and have a large sense of patriotism, so quoting famous lines from these documents helps build his sense of credibility with the audience. One of the most famous historical documents in America, The Declaration of Independence, was quoted to appeal to the logic of Americans everywhere. Reminding them of simple truths that they have been promised by the documents that founded this country. “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” (The Declaration of Independence). This quote appeals the logistical fact that all Americans have these rights and that they are created equal. This is a known fact within the American society, but

Mr. Obama uses it to unite Americans, to remind them of basic truths that they are guaranteed, regardless of the social climate of the nation.

Conclusion

Former president Obama knows how to utilize the aristotelian rhetorical techniques effectively in his speeches, which is part of the reason why he was such a beloved president. Future presidents and current politicians should take note of Mr. Obama's ability to unite Americans with his rhetoric. He ends his speech with a call to action for Americans to address the issues that he has just identified. He does this by saying, "That is our generation's task -- to make these words, these rights, these values of life and liberty and the pursuit of happiness real for every American" (Stewart, Inaugural Address by President Barack Obama). Mr. Obama uses a mix of ethos, pathos, and logos in this statement to conclude his speech: establishing his credibility, acknowledging the emotions of Americans, and pulling from reliable sources.

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