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13 December 2022

Political Communication

Kennedy, Pathos, and Unity

Introduction:

In a time of worldly conflicts, economic uncertainty, and political hostility, it is always comforting to me when I look at past leaders for inspiration and motivation. I always feel admiration for the past leaders of America, whether they be Government Officials or Cultural figures, for they too were in times of great adversity. The date is 1960, and America faces a rising communist threat at Florida's doorstep, Cuba, as well as the threat of the Cold War with the Soviet Union. America was faced with two leadership directions: John F. Kennedy was the young option but, with him in office, he argued the country would be "on the edge of a new frontier." In this paper, I will be analyzing John F. Kennedy's Inaugural Address to discuss his topics regarding pathos; furthermore, this artifact will be especially engaging due to the historical context and how it also relates to pathos.

Keywords: Pathos; Narrative; Rhetoric; John F. Kennedy

Lens Description:

When applying for political positions, candidates must accumulate support using a collection of campaign strategies, one of which is appealing to the emotions of the people. Pathos discusses multiple ways of appealing to an audience's emotions; Values, history, religion, and guilt are all present and defining of the chosen artifact. The artifact is attributed and

applauded for its level of detail in rhetoric, as James Martin put it: “President John F. Kennedy’s Inaugural Address of 20 January 1961 is a familiar, iconic speech and a much-admired example of liberal idealism at the height of the Cold War.” Martin’s article examines Kennedy’s speech with an emphasis on discussing its rhetorical significance of it. Rowlands's chapter on analyzing emotional responses to rhetoric is noteworthy to remember when compared to Kennedy’s speech because the speech is a real-life example of a successful address, according to the public response, regarding pathos and utilizing emotion-producing rhetoric.

Analyzing Kennedy’s Speech:

Among the most prominent emotional-producing rhetoric is John F. Kennedy’s appeal to the nation's basic, and historic, values of freedom and liberty. It is without question our country takes pride in owning the many titles relating to liberty and freedom, so it is not surprising that Kennedy takes advantage of this. However, the significance of Kennedy’s speech is his mentioning of our founding fathers, “We dare not forget today that we are the heirs of that first revolution. Let the word go forth from this time and place to friend and foe alike, that the torch has been passed to a new generation of Americans--born in this century, tempered by war, disciplined by a hard and bitter peace, proud of our ancient heritage--and unwilling to witness or permit the slow undoing of those human rights to which this nation has always been committed, and to which we are committed today at home and around the world.” In the excerpt, Kennedy references themes of revolution and discipline, and how it is inherited within each generation but specifically the “new generation of Americans.” This direct appeal to the values of the common people of America is powerful because it can be implied to every American as we are all, mostly all, descendants of our founding and the revolution against the British empire. It is

important to realize that nearly all Americans understand the basics of our founding: We revolted against the most powerful forces on the planet with overwhelming odds against us. So for Kennedy to invoke this innate knowledge to the audience, he is effectively appealing to the notion that we are all just as disciplined and strong as our ancestors. Furthermore, John F. Kennedy, who is known for being the first Catholic president, appeals to the emotions of the audience through religion. This is no surprise as all presidents are typically not discreet about their faith; However, Kennedy is a significant case because of the way he connects religion to the audience. Yes, Kennedy reflects the origins of the Nation are due to the “generosity from the hand of God,” however he takes the emotional appeal of religion a step further by calling upon our cooperation with other nations with similar descent, “To those old allies whose cultural and spiritual origins we share, we pledge the loyalty of faithful friends. United, there is little we cannot do in a host of cooperative ventures. Divided, there is little we can do--for we dare not meet a powerful challenge at odds and split asunder.” Kennedy particularly appeals to our connection with foreign nations under the commonality of religion with the pursuit of national cooperation. By conjuring a commonality with other nations, Kennedy effectively appeals to the religious branch of pathos, as he expresses the connection we share is culturally and spiritually meaningful. Additionally, John F. Kennedy appeals to our connection and responsibility, as an advanced nation, to the less fortunate people of the world. It can be implied that this is the emotional appeal to guilt, due to the fact that Kennedy compares our nation to one of quality and promise, as opposed to a nation that lacks it. Kennedy states, “To those peoples in the huts and villages of half the globe struggling to break the bonds of mass misery, we pledge our best efforts to help them help themselves, for whatever period is required--not because the communists may be doing it, not because we seek their votes, but because it is right. If a free

society cannot help the many who are poor, it cannot save the few who are rich.” Kennedy approaches the audience's emotions through the guilt of not being able to save those in need. By stating the importance of helping those in need, Kennedy appeals to the guilt of the audience, whom he highlights the importance of having the capability to provide for those in need which reflects their capability to help themselves.

Discussion:

John F. Kennedy’s use of emotional appeals remains a cherished and motivational experience for most Americans because of its ethics and relatability. My judgment is no different, Kennedy exemplifies the righteous ideals present, and innate, in every American. As Americans, we are all bound by similar connections of value/heritage, faith, and responsibility, as defined in Kennedy’s speech. Kennedy’s speech, and the emotional appeals made, are ethical in the sense that we are connected as a nation, which is true.

Conclusion:

John F. Kennedy’s inaugural speech is one of the key defining moments in our nation’s history where the speaker effectively delivers emotionally appealing messages in an ethical manner. This paper established the prominent passages in the speech regarding the values of our founding, emotions linked to faith, and guilt that remind us of our responsibility. The examination of John F. Kennedy’s speech holds significance for our generation who faces adversity, at the time of this writing, as it presents how one Man appealed to our emotions with the pursuit of a United Nation.

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