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Critical Review - JFK Inaugural Address

Inaugural speeches are woven with a lot of intricacies and subtleties to be delivered at important and significant events. Similarly, John F. Kennedy has also delivered his widely acknowledged and cherished inaugural speech after being selected as the youngest President of America. Since, presidential speeches have always impacted the audiences to great extent, but Kennedy's speech could be considered as one of the finest speeches mainly influenced by detailed analysis of Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address. This approach was solely opted for knowing the mystery of successful addresses and as expected along with Sorenson, Kennedy formulated the speech creating huge impact over the audience. The main concerns of Kennedy which he successfully conveyed to the people of America are knowing the worth of unity not just within the country but also its endeavors for transnational communities. He stresses world's peace which can only be achieved by having a collective progressing perspective. Moreover, he reassures people of America that he will always serve in the best interest of America while making them realize that their compliance to his decision would be of great help in achieving peace. He clarifies the real enemies of the nations which are not other nations rather "tyranny, poverty, disease, and war itself". Through his speech he clearly demonstrated that he is not a proponent of wars and anarchies rather his aim is to promote peace, harmony, and unity. Most of his speech can be seen as address directed only to Americans but there are some instances where he addresses the nations of entire

world, especially when he talks about attaining the peace globally. This paper intends to analyze Kennedy's inaugural speech considering the significance of the event and conveying his thoughts clearly using persuasive techniques for convincing the audience to believe in his ways of tackling situation in future.

This fine speech was not formulated by John F. Kennedy only, rather Sorenson played vital role in making it more effective by incorporating impactful techniques used by Abraham Lincoln and considering suggestions from Galbraith and Stevenson. Although Kennedy's ideology and perspective regarding the collective struggle for progressive world is similar to Lincoln, Gallbraith, and Stevenson's ideas, therefore most of his speech revolves around the perspectives discussed by them. For instance, emphasizing the friendly relations with allies is considered as part of speech due Stevenson's suggestion. Moreover, the idea "we shall never negotiate out of fear. But we shall never fear to negotiate" the idea conveyed through these lines are considered as one of the most important ideas discussed by Kennedy is also a suggestion from Galbraith. Therefore, writing speeches requires multiple tasking and then the final drafting gets approved by the speaker since the process of evaluating and re-evaluating helps in excluding the parts that might be offending for some community. Since the event was extremely significant for him that he could not afford offending the people of America or perhaps other nations as he had to rule America while trying to have impressive approach towards the foreign policy of the country. Due to the Cold War debates he stressed on developing and maintaining friendly relations with other countries in order to avoid the usage of nuclear weapons.

The speech is clearly written using the persuasive techniques since the address was organized to bridge the gap between newly appointed president of America and people of America. Therefore, the speech had to be a convincing and persuading speech to get the confidence of the

Americans. As expected, his speech was lauded by majority of the American population and also by the international community. Since the targeted audience was mainly Americans who just came out of the Cold War, Kennedy made sure that he preaches unity as a key to success in his inaugural address. He persuades American to realize that the real threat is not from other nations rather serious threat is posed by poverty, tyranny, disease, and war. This is why he tries to convince them for struggling against eliminating these problems “a struggle against the common enemies of man: tyranny, poverty, disease and war itself” (*Inaugural Address*). Furthermore, he implicitly tries to persuade his audience that making peace or trying to prioritize peace over war is not a weakness, implying that people must not confuse civility with weakness. According to John F. Kennedy “civility is not a sign of weakness, and sincerity is always subject to proof”. Therefore, this address could be categorized as solely for sharing Kennedy’s perspective with the people he is going to govern in future. Usually, presidential addresses comprise of efficiency of the political parties and the road map for governing the country but Kennedy’s inaugural speech was comparatively different from others since he appealed the citizens to acknowledge their moral responsibilities since his stance over this can be clearly seen in the address. He was of the view that its not just the responsibility of the state to struggle for making country progressive, but also its primary duty of the citizens to comply with government and are obliged to fulfil their moral and ethical responsibilities. As he states in his speech “—And so, my fellow Americans: ask not what your country can do for you – ask what you can do for your country”(*Inaugural Address*). This implies that if citizens are expecting form state to provide rights for the citizens, then citizens also have some responsibilities towards State which must be fulfilled in order to be a successful nation.

Sorenson and Kennedy integrated multiple literary devices or perhaps used figurative language in abundance to enhance the general appeal of the speech while making it effective and

interesting for the audiences. Some of the most important literary devices used by Kennedy in his speech are metaphor, parallelism, repetition, anaphora, and making references to the past (*Inauguration of John F. Kennedy - Wikipedia*). All of these mentioned literary devices are used for either stressing over something of great significance for Kennedy and Americans or for making speech more interesting rather than a tedious conventional address. Metaphors used in the speech includes “—And if a beachhead of cooperation may push back the jungle of suspicion...”, “the bonds of mass misery”, “the chains of poverty”. Similarly, another most frequently used literary device is repetition which could be considered as stressing over important messages conveyed to the audience, including ““For man holds in his mortal hands the power to abolish all forms of human poverty and all forms of human life”. Here he tried to give confidence to his people so that they can believe in themselves and participate in making state progress. While also conveying the message that human ignorance can have really bad impact on “all forms of human life”. Moreover, parallelism is used for the balancing the rhyming pattern of the text and it makes the text more appealing and interesting. Therefore, Kennedy also use parallelism in his speech like ““United there is little we cannot do in a host of cooperative ventures. Divided there is little we can do...”. Such rhyming lines can be learned easily and also convey deeper meaning. Henceforth, every literary device used in the speech is used for specific purpose and mainly for creating impact on the audiences.

Kennedy appeals to pathos through parallelism. “Like our century, the first revolution was “tempered by combat, disciplined by a long and dreadful peace, and proud of our historic heritage” (Kennedy). These words are intended to persuade the audience that our country requires their assistance to progress and avert another conflict. The sentence is an outstanding example of asyndeton due to the absence of conjunctions. “Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well

or ill, that we will pay any price, bear any burden, endure any suffering, support any friend, and resist any adversary, to secure liberty's survival and success." Kennedy uses it to emphasize the importance of a nation's liberty to individual liberty

Prior to the start of his speech, Kennedy addressed his audience of previous presidents, vice presidents, and regular citizens. He invokes ethos by proclaiming, "For I have taken the same solemn pledge before you and Almighty God that our forebears took over a century and three-quarters ago," and "the notion that man's rights arise not from the generosity of the state, but from the hand of God" (Kennedy). By offering these promises, Kennedy creates his reputation and earns his audience's trust.

Finally, Kennedy uses logos to convince his audience to join by making promises to various factions. He makes commitments to old allies, new states, indigenous peoples, our sister republics south of the border, the United Nations, and nations that would attempt to be our adversary. By doing so, Kennedy is demonstrating that "civility is not a sign of weakness" and that "sincerity is always verifiable." He continues, "Let both sides" (Kennedy), reinforcing his idea that governments must collaborate to accomplish goals.

The genre of the speech could be regarded as an extract from John F. Kennedy's world-famous inauguration speech, which launched his presidency of the United States of America. The speech's audience included members of JFK's staff and those who aided in the speech's writing, as well as an audience present during the address and a massive audience watching broadcast versions of the speech from throughout the world. The major objective was to instill motivation in the American people. To reassure Americans of their country's strengths and inspire them to serve both their country and the world. To build the groundwork for future initiatives (during his president) and to acquaint himself with the United States and the rest of the world.

This paper will examine Kennedy's inaugural speech, taking into account the historical significance of the event and communicating his thoughts clearly utilizing persuasive approaches in order to persuade the audience to believe in his methods of dealing with situations in the future. This excellent speech was not written only by John F. Kennedy; rather, Sorenson had a key part in improving it by using powerful strategies utilized by Abraham Lincoln and taking into account comments from Galbraith and Stevenson. Since the presentation was designed to bridge the gap between the newly chosen president of America and the American people, the speech is obviously written utilizing persuasive strategies. Kennedy's inauguration speech was distinct from others in that he urged citizens to recognize their moral obligations, as evidenced by his position in the address. Sorenson and Kennedy used a variety of literary devices, as well as a lot of metaphorical language, to improve the overall attractiveness of the speech while keeping it effective and engaging for the audience. Metaphor, parallelism, repetition, anaphora, and connections to the past are among the most important literary devices used by Kennedy in his speech. Kennedy conveys to Americans the importance of freedom through appeals to ethos, pathos, and logos. He fills up the gaps between these rhetorical methods with figurative language, such as asyndeton, parallelism, and anaphora. Americans must contribute to their liberty's preservation.

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