
September 2018

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Recommended Citation

Haynes, Connor (2018) "Did Donald Stump the Nation?," *The Idea of an Essay*: Vol. 5 , Article 19.
Available at: https://digitalcommons.cedarville.edu/idea_of_an_essay/vol5/iss1/19

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Connor Tomlin Haynes

Did Donald Stump the Nation?

Donald J Trump: the greatest man to ever grace the face of the planet, or so some might say. President Trump might have been the most polarizing presidential candidate in this country's history, with some praising him as the anti-politician America needs and others criticizing his brash stances. He has been known as a businessman, billionaire, reality television star, and now President, a title few thought would ever come to him. And in the long tradition of Presidents before him, Trump stood before the nation and delivered an inaugural address, setting the tone for his term as commander-in-chief and accomplishing items on his own agenda. Despite any possible moral or political objections, newly elected President Donald Trump effectively used the rhetorical situation to encourage his supporters that they made the right choice in voting him into office.

Although one might be tempted to think that President Trump was addressing the entire nation with his inaugural speech, his true target audience was his current supporters—the ones who elected him into office. Though he seemingly includes broad groups of people in many of his phrases, like “you, the people” and “everyone watching across America... this is your country,” his real target audience is only composed of those who voted for him. He wants to show he will carry through with the promises of his campaign and stick up for the “little guy” who put him in power. In fact, the whole rhetorical situation is one focused on power. Trump is addressing the people who just elected him into the highest rank in the nation; not only does he feel the immense proportions of his capabilities, he wants his audience to feel empowered because he is in power. He says, “We...are now joined in a great national effort to rebuilt our country,” at this very moment because he views the people who voted for him as participating in the “historic movement” for a better America by putting him in the power seat. As is seen throughout the speech, it turns out he understands his audience quite well. Those who voted for him are mostly middle-class, evangelical Caucasians or strict Republicans who voted more on the party platform—disregarding the lack of qualifications of the candidate—and are cautiously optimistic for the novelty he brings to the White House. Either way, he uses what he knows about his audience to his advantage.

In order to establish his authority, as a President who otherwise has very little in the realm of politics, Donald Trump appeals to strong religious ties present in most of his audience. Since he won 81% of the evangelical vote (Smith), Trump knows that the “almighty creator” is an

authority figure to most of his audience, even if he is not. He says, “The Bible tells us how good and pleasant it is when God’s people live together in unity,” and continues on about how the nation must pursue solidarity even when disagreeing. Not only does this give a reason for his evangelical supporters to love him even more—by portraying himself as a God-fearing man—but he also provides another level of evidence that his audience is not the entire nation; he knows that the entire nation is not a part of the Christian faith, and yet follows the “God’s people” comment with the pronoun “we,” indicating his audience is indeed those who identify as Christians along side him.

President Trump maintains his portrayal as distinct from other politicians to boost his credibility with his audience, who feels scorned by the government. A popular narrative floating around the conservative rhetoric is that current politicians take the working class’s hard-earned money and give it to those who do not deserve it. Trump reiterates that narrative in this very speech knowing that middle class Republicans accept that story and would appreciate a President who is the opposite of these things. Trump uses this to his advantage and reinforces the fact he is not a politician by saying things like “the establishment protected itself” and “they celebrated in our nation’s capital,” purposefully distancing himself from any corrupt politician who ever had power before him.

After establishing his credibility, Donald Trump focuses mainly on emotion, especially appealing to his audience’s sense of patriotism. Patriotic images of the “great American flag” and “red blood of patriots” flood the far reaches of Trump’s speech; these images stir the passions deep inside the cholesterol-clogged hearts of nationalists in his audience who still believe America is built on a foundation of guns, hot dogs, and sweet, sweet liberty. They have no reservations about the brazen inequalities and nastiness that have long infected the oldest roots of our country, and take Trump at face value like they have from the beginning of his campaign. Their minds are blinded by the American flag waving in their face and not only cease to care about some illogical statements the President makes, but praise Trump for standing up for traditional, American values.

Also in the realm of sentiment and passion, President Trump makes broad, absolute proclamations that the audience wants to hear, regardless of whether or not he can truly keep his promises. Some might criticize his overuse of sweeping statements, but they are perfect for his audience and their sheep-like following of Trump. If they had to do all the “thinking” when they voted for him, why would they think critically of his statements here? He makes claims about all the ways he will rebuild the nation like “the forgotten men and women of our country will be

forgotten no longer” and the audience believes every word. He says this to come off as the savior of the nation, the answer to everyone’s prayers. Later on he says, “I will fight for you with every breath in my body.” It is significant that he struggles against these issues for the American people and not with them; he is the king who sits on the throne and fixes all the nation’s problems with a wave of his hand, and those who voted for him are gratified, knowing that they played a part in Trump’s charity efforts.

Although critics claim Trump has abandoned all use of logic, one can find the smallest appeals to reason sprinkled throughout his speech, which is all he needs. One particular example of a logical flow occurs when he says, “Americans want great schools for their children, safe neighborhoods for their families, and good jobs for themselves. These are just and reasonable demands of righteous people and a righteous public.” Trump retains an unstated premise in this quote that the American people are a righteous public—which all people want to wholeheartedly believe about themselves—and the audience agrees. Just using the word “reasonable” appeals to his audience’s sense of logic. Many might say he was not logical enough in his speech, but he understands his audience has long forgotten the days when logic was at the forefront of political stances, and therefore uses other appeals far more often.

One does not have to be a raving fan of our new President to admit he is not a dumb man. He knows it is nearly impossible to sway his opponents—after saying so many things the media deemed as outrageous—so forgets about the opposition entirely and focuses on those who already pledged allegiance to him at the polls. He said what they wanted to hear, employing every word to hit their ears just right. One might venture to say Trump is already preparing the public for his reelection but there are too many factors in the current political climate to be certain of future plans just from this speech. It is evident however that he sees himself in the victory seat and, for the moment, enjoying the spoils of winning.

References

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