

President kennedy 1961 inaugural address term papers examples

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On the 20th of January 1961, John Fitzgerald Kennedy took oath as the 35th president of the United States of America and delivered the inaugural address in front of over 20, 000 people who had braved the snow and cold weather. The 1961 Inaugural Address of president John. F. Kennedy was similar and different from the inaugural addresses of other presidents. It was similar to other inaugural speeches as he mentions American history, situates himself in the importance of the occasion and also talks fervently about his hope for the future. It was also different from the other presidents' inaugural speech as his speech included references to challenges he faced during his time as well as rhetoric that was his own. President Kennedy had help from his main speechwriter and advisor, Theodore Sorenson in writing the inaugural address. On top of these inputs was help from Galbraith and Stevenson, an economics professor from harvard and a former democratic candidate.

President Kennedy's inaugural address was not only directed at the people gathered to hear him or to the citizens of the United States of America but to the world as a whole as it was tough times with the cold war peaking and need for hope and peace in the increasingly nuclear world. President Kennedy's inaugural speech is 1355 words in length and one of the shorter inaugural addresses. In preparing for it, he went through the inaugural speeches of other presidents and also took advice and inputs from a lot of people. He modelled his address after the inaugural address of president Lincoln. It was filled with short sentences and words. This style ensured that the people hearing it would remember everything that was said but it also proved to be a good rhetorical device. Although he was one of the first

presidents to win the presidential election by a small margin of popular vote, he impressed the nation with his inaugural address and over seventy five percent of the population expressed their approval. Sorensen who helped President Kennedy with his inaugural address said that, " He liked to be exact. But if the situation required a certain vagueness, he would deliberately choose a word of varying interpretations rather than bury his imprecision in ponderous prose (Sorensen 61)." He goes on further to say that the intellectual nature of the address showed his erudition and not arrogance.

The success of the delivery rested to a large extent in the poetic nature and the power of his speech. A lot of poetic elements can be seen in the address including alliteration, anaphora, anastrophe, antithesis, assonance and consonance. In the following lines, " Let us go forth to lead the land we love" " Pay any price, bear any burden" " its writ may run", there can be found elements of alliteration where the same sound is used to begin different words in a sentence. " To those old allies To those new states To those people (Kennedy 1961)". here he employs the poetic element of anaphora. The repetition of these words in different sentences increase the effect of the whole speech. President Kennedy calls for the whole nation to stand behind him in facing the enemies and also sacrifice for the sake of the nation. His speech thus is laced with dramatic yet subtle elements that would appeal to the emotions of the audience and support him. The speech is also a rally cry asking the people to stand behind their president as well as their country. Perhaps the striking part of his speech is the use of Antithesis. In the following lines, " Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can

do for your country.” “ Let us never negotiate out of fear, but let us never fear to negotiate.” , he contrasts ideas and words in a parallel structure (Kennedy 1961). Taken apart from the speech, these lines can stand alone as quotes. As previously noted, the use of short sentences with dramatic flair makes the presidential address all the more emotional and to the point.

Through his address he sends the message that there is no beating around the bush and that just like the speech his ideas are clear and sharp. Here is a president who knows what he wants and isn't afraid to say it to the people who had elected him. There are also repetitions of the vowel and consonant sounds throughout the speech that gives it a poetic lilting effect while at the same time making it effective when spoken.

The inaugural address also has a lot of references to the past, especially that of president lincoln. By referring to president Lincoln's speech, president Kennedy not only marks a continuation with the past but also makes the audience subconsciously relate him to the ideals put forth by Lincoln.

President Kennedy says, “ With a good conscience our only sure reward, with history the final judge of our deeds”. This resonates a lot with what President Lincoln had said decades ago, “ With malice toward none, with charity toward all (Lincoln 1865)” He also employs paradox in his speech, seemingly conflicting ideas that have a rational meaning. Although he makes an implicit reference to being armed with nuclear weapons to protect his country come what may, he also says that they can be rest assured that it would not be used in vain. The speech is also filled with words that arouse the emotions of the listeners such as liberty, fear, poverty, battle, freedom, cooperation, conquer, eradicate disease and so on.

Thus president Kennedy in his inaugural address employs techniques of poetry and rhetoric to deliver a very powerful speech. The speech is not all fluff as he talks about him and the people of the United States as a team that would make the country proud and strong. He portrays the country as strong and benevolent at the same time. While protecting itself and the rest of the world against enemies, he says that the country would also ensure that those who are in need of help would be given a helping hand. The United States had emerged out of the World Wars as one of the superpowers and in the existing cold war situation, President Kennedy used his inaugural address to alleviate any fears the people might have and also gave an idea of the kind of power the country would become in the future.

Works Cited

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