

John fitzgerald kennedy inaugural speech rhetorical analysis essay



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John Fitzgerald Kennedy is considered one of America's greatest speakers. In his inaugural speech he utilized many rhetorical devices to convey his message and established ethos, pathos, and logos. He skillfully persuaded the millions listening, whether in the live audience or watching it at home, to trust him and accept him as president.

Immediately, Kennedy established ethos, " We observe today not a victory of a party but a celebration of freedom—symbolizing an end as well as a beginning—signifying renewal as well as change." He is identifying himself with the " citizens of the world" to fight for the freedom of man rather than dictating. He also established himself as everyone's president, not just his party's, or those who share his belief system, and emphasized the celebration of freedom gained through his election, not his victory itself.

In his speech, Kennedy's establishment of pathos is far greater than that of logos. He again identified himself with all his citizens and promoted a common goal, " 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." By describing the responsibilities passed on to the new generation of Americans, Kennedy invoked nationalistic feelings in the listening citizens.

He pointed to the resiliency of the United States and the need for the people to continue to support the ideals of freedom that have made the country so

successful. The people were challenged to “ Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe, to assure the survival and the success of liberty.” Kennedy also invoked emotional responses, and also established ethos, by pledging to help nations less fortunate than America, not for votes or power, but because it is morally correct.

The tone of this speech was one of formality, yet with a youthful aspect of looking to the future, developed by the carefully crafted diction and syntax. Formality is sustained with the use of anaphora, “ Not as a call to bear arms, though arms we need; not as a call to battle, though embattled we are.” Kennedy also used a lot of archaic diction, such as asunder, foe, writ, and forebears.