

Oklahoma city  
bombing rhetorical  
analysis bill clinton  
essay



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The Oklahoma City Bombing would be considered the worst terrorist attack on America prior to the 9/11 World Trade Center attack. Just outside of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building, on April 19th, 1995 a truck exploded, killing 168 people. 19 of those 168 being children. The explosion caused damage to 300 surrounding buildings. Oklahoma City was going through a tragedy and needed guidance from a leader. Who would be a better option to comfort the families and friends of the lost victim, than the current president of America, Bill Clinton, who had once resided in Oklahoma himself?

Oklahoma City needed someone to soothe their pain and give them back their lost hope. Clinton uses rhetorical strategies of ethos, pathos, and logos to appropriate an empathetic tone to the victims of the bombing.

Furthermore, he uses religion to explain that good things will follow for the victims, and that the evil which took place would not go unpunished. Doing so, Clinton got the community of Oklahoma City to regain their lost faith and move on from the tragedy. Clinton starts the speech by letting the families know he is also in pain because Oklahoma City was once the place he looked to as his home, he had spent part of his life there.

He relates to everyone in the crowd by saying, " I have to tell you that Hillary and I also come as parents, as husband and wife, as people who were your neighbors for some of the best years of our lives. " Clinton makes the audience feel comfortable with him because they have something in common, they were both citizens of Oklahoma. This statement uses a very strong ethos appeal, by making the audience feel like they were not just listening to America's president, but rather a neighbor or friend.

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Clinton wants the audience to feel like more of a family, because a few people in the audience had just lost family members and he was aiming to make them feel connected with the ones surrounding them. Clinton uses this strategy in the following paragraph. Clinton includes the entire nation of America in Oklahoma's grieving, by his next step being to make the nation feel unified. " Today our nation joins with you in grief. We mourn with you. We share your hope against hope that some may still survive. " In this statement, he is using a pathos appeal to make his audience feel one with their nation by their shared emotions of remorse and sadness, Oklahoma is not the only state that is grieving. America has lost many sons and daughters. By using the words " grief" and " mourn" Clinton shows how tragic and emotional the current event is and shows that he can interpret and understand exactly what his audience is going through. Clinton reminds them that he will be there for them for every step of the difficult process. Another way Clinton uses pathos is when he tries to comfort the people who have lost loved ones by saying, " You have lost too much, but you have not lost everything.

" Clinton lets the audience know that they have people that will help them through this hard time and they have the nation behind them: " You have certainly not lost America, for we will stand with you for as many tomorrows as it takes. " Clinton ultimately reaches his goal of comforting his audience by using ethos and pathos strategies throughout his speech. Clinton's next move was to give advice from someone who had been in a similar situation. Referring to the letters he received after the bombing, Clinton explains that one letter in particular stood out.

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Clinton gives words of wisdom from a widowed mother of three whose husband was killed when the Pan Am 103 was shot down in 1988. The advice she asked for him to share is the following: " The anger you feel is valid, but you must not allow yourselves to be consumed by it. The hurt you feel must not be allowed to turn into hate, but instead in the search for justice. The loss you feel must not paralyze your own lives. " Clinton shares this to encourage his audience to not seek revenge, but to continue on in the way their lost loved ones would have wanted.

Clinton also shares this knowing that this advice can be given to the parents that lost children in the attack. It is more helpful coming from someone who had previously dealt with all of the emotions, and learned how to channel them into something positive. Relating to the audience and making them feel more comfortable is a critical portion of Clinton's speech. Clinton hits home by quoting the Governor and his wife to make the audience feel even closer to him, and more intrigued by the speech. The governor says " If anybody thinks that Americans are mostly mean and selfish, they ought to come to Oklahoma.

If anybody thinks Americans have lost the capacity for love and caring and courage, they ought to come to Oklahoma. " Clinton uses others' quotes to make the audience feel more unified and also to give the state of Oklahoma a better sense of togetherness. One approach Bill Clinton uses to give a strong speech is his strategy of repetition, it makes his speech more structured and powerful. When talking about the lost lives, Clinton thanks them in remembrance: " Who worked to help the elderly and disabled, who

worked to support our farmers and our veterans, who worked to enforce our laws and to protect us.

” Clinton uses repetition in his religious references by saying “ let us” multiple times. “ Let us teach our children...Let us stand up and talk against it...” To give the listeners a feeling of unification Clinton uses the word “ we” often: “ We mourn with you...We share your hope...We thank all those...We pledge...We will stand with you...” By using these phrases Clinton lets the crowd know that anything they do through this rough time, they are not doing it alone. Using this repetitive structure makes the speech feel more inspirational and also uses strong ethical and emotional appeals.

Strategies of repetition give the audience motivation to move on and also excited to serve justice in memory of their loved ones. Another notable strategy Clinton uses throughout his speech is referencing his faith of Christianity. Clinton has lived in Oklahoma and knows the majority of the audience practices the Christian faith, and uses it for his benefit. For example, Clinton restates the citizens’ loss and relates to the pain that they are feeling in this quote: “ And to all the members of the families here present who have suffered loss, though we share your grief, your pain is unimaginable, and we know that.

We cannot undo it. That is God’s work. ” He ties his beliefs and religion in with his speech to further his point that justice will prevail and America will not forget the horrible crime that had been committed. Clinton then goes on to say, “ Let us teach our children that the God of comfort is also the God of righteousness. Those who trouble their own house will inherit the wind.

Justice will prevail. " These strong words mean that God will not let this wrongful act go unpunished.

A very strong sentence, often affiliated with this speech is the following: " When there is talk of hatred, let us stand up and talk against it. When there is talk of violence, let us stand up and talk against it. In the face of death, let us honor life. As St. Paul admonished us, let us not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. " This quote from Clinton is appropriately emotional and builds further ethical appeal through his reference to St. Paul. It is perhaps the strongest use of ethos and pathos in the entire speech.

This is not Clinton's only quote from the Bible; when referring to a tree planted in honor of the victims from the bombing, he quotes the Bible for a second time. " It embodies the lesson of the Psalms - that the life of a good person is like a tree whose leaf does not wither. " Clinton explains that the deaths of these amazing people will forever be remembered, and the tree is just a small symbol of the tragedy. Finally, Clinton uses religion to correlate with his audience in a very powerful last sentence: " My fellow Americans, a tree takes a long time to grow, and wounds take a long time to heal.

But we must begin. Those who are lost now belong to God. Someday we will be with them. But until that happens, their legacy must be our lives. " This quote gives the victim's friends and families the satisfaction and thought of knowing they will be with their loved ones someday in the future. This is yet another example of how effectively Clinton uses pathos to evoke emotion out of his audience. Bill Clinton was given a hard task when asked to comfort

the friends and families of victims in the horrible Oklahoma City Bombing Tragedy.

There was no question that he could not complete this task though. Clinton's strong rhetorical strategies used to comfort and relate to his audience are admirable and are not forgotten. Clinton's goal in giving this speech was to let the citizens of Oklahoma know they are not alone in this unbearably hard time and America was there to help them, but the goal was also to get across to the people that they could not let the rest of their lives be affected by the horrible tragedy. The only thing they could do is move on and let justice be served.

Clinton wanted his audience to know that better things were on their way and their lost loved ones would not want them to be forever in pain from their death. To get his point across, Bill Clinton used ethos, pathos, and logos while using repetition and bringing up the audience's religion to tug on their heart strings. All of these strategies structured his speech to do exactly what he was aiming for, soothe the pain of the citizens and give them back the hope and faith they had lost.