

Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain's Character and the Power of Persuasion



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Considering the impact of different aspects in an argument is the key to accomplishing effective rhetoric. In the case of Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain, the success of his persuasion depended upon his knowledge of his purpose, audience, speaker, and subject. The purpose of his argument was to convince the audience, mutineers from the Second Regiment of Maine, that the extended enlistment was not something to dread since the Civil War was about maintaining their freedom as Americans rather than abolishing slavery. As the speaker, Chamberlain recognized the subject of controversy was deployment contracts, so he integrated his own thoughts and feelings as well as the audience's into his rhetoric. These factors led to the success of his rhetoric.

For all forms of persuasion to be effective, the audience must feel a connection to the speaker. Chamberlain utilized comfort, or cognitive ease, to soften his audience. Cognitive ease is an ethos-related tactic that involves consoling the primary audience and countering dissatisfaction by keeping things simple, empowering the audience, and putting them in a better mood. Chamberlain adopted a calm, informal tone with the Regiment's designated speaker in order to establish a feeling of trust. The excerpt states, "... Chamberlain said with the same light, calm, pleasant manner that he had developed when talking to particularly rebellious students who had come in with a grievance and who hadn't yet learned that the soft answer turneth away wrath" (p. 23). Chamberlain was aware that the mutineers were wary of him, so he managed to redirect their frustration enough for him to convince them to fight alongside him. In his speech, he kept his words simple and honest; Chamberlain sided with the mutineers because he knew

that by empowering them, they would be willing to fight. His choice to use comfort as a rhetorical tactic gained enough of the Regiment men's trust for them to listen and relate to his argument.

In effective rhetoric, it is important for a speaker to establish a connection between the audience and the goal of the argument. The overall intention of Chamberlain's speech in *The Killer Angels* was to evoke patriotism in order to identify the commonplace between him and the mutineers. A commonplace is a shared public opinion the speaker uses to convince their audience their goal is the best option; patriotism is an ethos-related tactic, as well as one of the strongest persuading emotions, that attaches the speaker's intent to the audience's sense of identity. Chamberlain talks about the vitality of the Union and its connection to freedom by saying, "This is free ground. All the way from here to the Pacific Ocean. No man has to bow...Here you can be something...It's the idea that we all have value" (p. 30). He attached a commonplace between the regiments by stating, "What we're all fighting for, in the end, is each other" (30). In summary, he effectively explained that they had the same goal in mind; the preservation of the Union. Once the men recognized this perspective, the majority opted to join Chamberlain and his men.

In some forms of persuasion, showing doubt or weakness may decrease the effectiveness of the argument. However, Chamberlain uses rhetorical doubt to his advantage. *Dubitatio* involves projecting uncertainty on how to start or proceed with a speech. It lowers an audience's expectations, which allows the speaker to surprise them with facts later in the argument. It is a pathos-related tactic that evokes pity and sympathy. Chamberlain starts by timidly <https://assignbuster.com/joshua-lawrence-chamberlains-character-and-the-power-of-persuasion/>

explaining how the war had affected his regiment. He states, " There were a thousand of us then. There's not three hundred of us now" (p. 29). By admitting to the radical decline of his soldiers, he revealed his doubt in himself and the war. The excerpt also states, " He spoke very slowly, staring at the ground" (p. 29). *Dubitatio* focuses on conveying an illusion of doubt. By avoiding eye contact with the mutineers, he is convincing his audience that he doubts his rhetorical ability. Chamberlain's strategy was to stimulate sympathy from the Regiment members, opening them up to his upcoming argument. Since the mutineers responded poorly to authority, Chamberlain deliberately portrayed himself the way a fellow soldier would, which would lead Regiment men to be more responsive. His attempts at *dubitatio* are effective since the audience saw him in a new, more humble light, which further inclines them to consider his argument.

A vital question considered by rhetoricians is how to deal with a reluctant audience. In the excerpt, mutineers were livid about having to stay at war while others in their Regiment were permitted to return home. Reluctance is the illusion that a speaker is forced to reach their conclusion despite their own beliefs and desires. It relates to *ethos* because it convinces the audience the speaker believes in their commonplace but is compelled to draw a different conclusion due to undeniable logic. Chamberlain uses this tactic to convince the audience of his hesitance to follow orders. As stated in the excerpt, "' I've been ordered to take you along, and that's what I'm going to do...The whole Reb army is up the road a ways waiting for us and this is no time for an argument like this'" (p. 29). Chamberlain used reluctance to convince his audience he supported their commonplace but was forced to

bring them to the battlefield, regardless of their desires. Chamberlain knew associating himself with their cause would lead them to be more receptive, which was effective since the men felt as though their grievances were being heard.