

# Inaugural Address: The Use of Rhetoric to Speak to Our Needs

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The inaugural address for the President of the United States is the one speech where the President-elect steps forward to accept the Presidency and shows Americans what his being President will mean to them. It is the first speech that the President-elect gives that frames his presidency, outlines policies and goals for the future, distinguishes himself from his predecessor, and tries to unite all Americans to bring them together to work toward his goals. It is during the inauguration that Americans can celebrate the electoral process coming to full fruition, and when the embodiment of freedom and democracy swears in to become President. It is the inauguration speech that reaffirms previous ideas and traditions; while at the same time stating the goals of what the President sees and can do for our future. As voters, we have different needs, expectations, and even concerns for our country; and the inauguration speech is meant to help address those needs and concerns. The inaugural address is the first speech in which we get to see the elected President *as* President. It allows us to set pre-election judgments aside to see the new candidate as *our* President. It is also important to note that it is not just what the President says, but how he says it. His perceived confidence, enthusiasm, and understanding of what needs to be done also factor into our judgment of the speaker, as well as our judgment of the speech.

In the book, The Inaugural Story, the editors of American Heritage Magazine explain that the inaugural address started its tradition with President George Washington who, “stood at the corners of Broad and Wall street in New York City, and set a precedent of all those that would follow” (p. 13). Though inaugural speeches have changed quite a bit in delivery and attendance since Washington’s day, the fundamental purpose is still carried out. Like Washington, the President-elect still stands up in front of Americans, and today stands in front of most of the

world, to again introduce himself as the new President. He tells the audience what his plans for Presidency are, and what they can expect. In addition, like Washington, the President swears in to become President. Contrary to what one might think, this isn't a lengthy process. The editors of the American Heritage Magazine in The Inaugural Story say, "the constitution has only one simple requirement of the President-elect: it prescribes the simple oath that he must take, in which he promises to execute faithfully the office of President and to defend the constitution" (p. 7). This small promise may seem simple, yet it holds substantial meaning for every American. From the traditions of the past to the balls, parades, and media extravagance that the inauguration is today, Americans remember that there's reason behind this grand event. The editors of the American Heritage Magazine in The Inaugural Story say, "It reassures every American citizen, even those apprehensive of change, that the nation is in good hands; that policies may change but the Presidency remains unaltered" (p. 7).

The inaugural address is a very important speech for Americans and even piques the interest of many others in the world. This is most likely so because the President's plans for the future affect not only us as Americans but other countries as well. With this kind of attention it is interesting to analyze how effective the inaugural address is. Does it answer any questions, concerns, or worries the audience has? Does it connect with them? Does it allow them to walk away from the speech feeling like their questions were answered? Answering those questions, needs, and concerns all speak to the effectiveness. This is especially important for a speech of such magnitude as the inaugural address. However, in order to study this effectiveness, it will be important to have some tools to analyze it with. Thus, studying Obama's inaugural address will be done using a historical critical analysis to study the reactions of the audience. In addition, a rhetorical analysis will be conducted on Obama's inaugural address. A historical critical analysis



alongside a rhetorical analysis will determine if the needs, expectations, and concerns of that time were answered and how effective the speech was. In doing these analyses, studying not only if the rhetorical devices were used, but how they were used will help to determine the speech's effectiveness.

Rhetorical devices such as metaphor, parallelism, and antithesis help to clarify what is being said, and also help the audience visualize the ideas behind the words. Pause, rhythm, cadence and tone are also rhetorical devices that help the audience understand the message more clearly. As part of the study of Obama's inaugural address, these rhetorical devices will be counted and analyzed to determine their effectiveness.

#### Literature Review

Obama's inaugural address is a fairly recent speech, so there have not been many studies conducted on it to date. However, there has been a significant amount of research conducted on rhetoric in other political speech that is valuable for this study. Some of these studies explain how important or effective certain rhetorical devices are. One such rhetorical device that will be used to determine the effectiveness of the speech is metaphor. According to Jonathan Charteris-Black in his book Politicians and Rhetoric: The Persuasive Power of Metaphor, "Metaphor is a very effective means through which potential leaders can communicate with the 'voice within' because it creates evocative representation of the speaker and their policies by arousing emotions and forms part of that process by which an audience reconstructs the causal relationships of an argument" (p. 10).

Another important rhetorical device that will be effective for analyzing the inaugural address is the use of pause. Pausing is an effective tool because it helps to punctuate speech, get



feedback from the listener, and gives the audience a chance to keep up and think about what the speaker is saying. According to the Executive Communications Group in the article, “Slow Down, You’re Talking Too Fast!” it is important to punctuate your speech because “writing without punctuation is ambiguous and cumbersome. Speech without the punctuation of pauses, is unclear and hard to listen to. It makes listeners uncomfortable, not just because of the speed itself. The unrelenting stream of sound never gives us a chance to rest and ponder the movement of the speaker’s thought” (para. 6). The article goes on to explain that looking people in the eye is important because the speaker will automatically slow down to get feedback from the listener. This pause allows for the speaker to see whether or not the listener is following. This, again, leads to the effectiveness. When pausing, the listener also senses that the speaker is in control, which is a very persuasive tool when deciding whether or not to give merit to what the speaker is saying. When someone is in control, they seem confident and wise, all good things to be associated with when trying to get a point across to the audience. This is especially important to the President during the inaugural address because these are all attributes that Americans want and even need to see in their leader.

Antithesis is another device that will be used to determine the effectiveness of Obama’s inaugural address. Antithesis is easily remembered and understood because of the uncomplicated sentence structure, which makes it a helpful tool for speakers to use when trying to get the audience to remember and reflect on what’s being said. President Kennedy used antithesis in his inaugural address, which is one of his most famous speeches. He said, “ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country.” This is an example of how powerful antithesis can be. The audience remembers it because it is clever, easy to understand, and creates a new way to think about things. Arthur Mills in his book, Artful

Persuasion: How to Command Attention, Change Minds, and Influence People states,

“antithesis works because it uses simple, easy-to-understand words, and it is short and balanced” (p. 18).

Another rhetorical device that will be used to examine Obama’s inaugural address will be parallelism. According to Robert Harris in his book, Writing with Clarity and Style, parallelism is an effective rhetorical device because it creates balance and rhythm. This increases clarity because the audience isn’t focusing on awkward sounding sentences; they’re focusing on what the speaker is actually saying (p. 1-2). Parallelism in a sentence not only creates rhythm, it gives balance and grace to a speech. It can also make a sentence memorable, which is very important when making an effective speech. An effective speech sends a message to an audience that they can think about and respond to; and, in order to do so, the audience needs to remember what was said.

The final most prominent rhetorical devices that Obama uses are a combination of how language sounds via rhythm, cadence, and tone. Rhythm is a rhetorical device that is sometimes seen in alliteration or assonance, which is the repetition of consonants and rhyming respectively, but is often more. Jane Blankenship explains in Public Speaking: A Rhetorical Perspective that rhythm is a form of “repetition and expectancy. It is this very form of rhythm and expectancy which allows rhythm to animate and bring emphasis to ideas” (p. 117). Tone and cadence are both used in speech in a couple of ways. The cadence and tone of the speaker’s voice as he or she speaks tells a lot about the message they’re trying to get across because cadence and tone convey feelings and emotions. Also, the tone of the written words can come into play when analyzing the speech as a text.



The rhetorical devices metaphor, parallelism, antithesis, rhythm, cadence, and tone are all commonly found in political speech; and, are tools that Obama uses frequently throughout his inaugural address. According to Ofer Feldman and Christ'l De Landsheer in their book, Beyond Public Speech and Symbols, "Politicians often use alliteration, metaphors, and rhyme. They are frequently quoted and memorized. In traditional political communication, short and simple sentences with powerful content have powerful effects" (p. 262). In addition to identifying these rhetorical devices used in speech, it is important to realize that they are only effective if the audience responds to them. In the book, Reading Rhetorical Texts: An Introduction to Criticism, Andrews, Leff, and Terrill explain how audience members are really critics by saying, "To respond critically to a message, however, is to be able to distinguish between what is relevant and what is irrelevant in the message. It is to try to discern what the speaker was aiming to do, what the speaker said, and what the speaker meant" (p. 8). They go on to say that this is very important because "it gives the audience members tools to make some sense out of the speech by comparing the problem as it is addressed by the speaker with the problem as it is seen by the listener and by others who have experienced the problem".

Arthur Asa Berger in his book, Media and Communication Research Methods: An Introduction to Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches explains rhetoric as "the study of effective expression and of style in language. Rhetoric is also used to deal with the means by which people are persuaded. In recent years, rhetoric has also been used to study the mass media and popular culture" (p. 280). A rhetorical analysis is then, according to Berger, "an analysis of the devices used in language for style to persuade, and gives us an understanding of the meaning and people's emotions and/or behaviors used in the ways we communicate."



In addition to a rhetorical analysis, I will be studying Obama's inaugural address based on a historical critical analysis. This will be effective because, as stated before, what makes an effective speech is its ability to connect to an audience and address its needs. So, in order to do this effectively, a historical critical approach will be used to determine what the needs of our time are, and what parts of the speech help to address those needs. According to Arthur Asa Berger, history can be anything from the recent past to thousands of years ago. The time of history is not as important as how critics use their findings about history. Doing this Berger says, "we can speculate about the present or the future (or both)" (p. 142).

Andrews, Leff, and Terrill explain that "a prime function of rhetoric is to interpret and make meaningful what is in the process of happening" (p. 15). Thus, it is important for this thesis to know what was happening in the world at the time of the election. In doing so, it will help to find out if the inaugural address made sense, and provided meaning and insight into what was going on in the world and in the lives of the audience. In order to know what was happening, and what was concerning the audience during the time of Obama's inauguration a historical critical analysis will need to be conducted. This will be done by comparing and examining the issues and concerns around the world as well as the responses to Obama's inaugural address by various people around the world.

In doing this historical critical analysis, it will be very important to keep in mind the perspectives of not only Americans, but the perspectives of the people from other countries. For example, the war in Iraq is a concern and how world leaders involved in the war react will be important. Also, tensions in Korea will make reactions from Korea important to Obama's inaugural address important. In the book The Inaugural Story, the editors of American Heritage Magazine comment that "television has given ringside seats to the inaugural to millions of

people who could not possibly be accommodated within the geographical limits” (p. 63). These millions of people watching Obama’s inaugural address are not just people in the United States but are people around the world. The person that Americans choose as their President affects citizens and countries beyond the U.S. borders for many different reasons, which is why they need to be targeted and focused on as part of the audience when analyzing the inaugural address.

### Methodology

While doing this historical critical research and rhetorical analysis I will uncover, based on the needs of the time, how rhetorical devices are used to connect with the audience. In order to do effective research, it will be imperative to have an understanding of what these rhetorical devices are. In his book, Arthur Asa Berger defines these terms. Metaphor is defined as, “a figure of speech that conveys meaning by analogy” (p. 276). Harris explains that metaphors are said to produce a more dramatic effect because the qualities of the image are transferred to the subject. This is important especially for Obama because through metaphor, he can help the audience visualize what he is saying. This allows the audience to understand and remember the message more clearly.

Antithesis, as stated before is an effective rhetorical device, and is defined by Harris in his book, saying that it “contrasts two ideas by placing them next to each other almost always in a parallel structure” (p. 7). It can also “convey a sense of complexity by presenting opposite or nearly opposite truths,” according to Harris. He also points out that this is valuable when analyzing speech because placing contrasting ideas in the same grammatical position in the sentences using parallelism allows the contrast to be that much more obvious to the audience.



Parallelism, is defined by Harris as, “the presentation of several ideas of equal importance by putting each of them into the same kind of grammatical structure” (p. 1). In addition to the similarity in grammatical structure, parallel sentences have latitude. Latitude helps the audience hold the entire sentence more easily and clearly in mind. Thus, parallelism provides clarity and balance. “Sentences with parallelism are easier to understand than those without it because a repeated grammatical structure requires less mental processing than a series of new structures,” says Harris. He also says, “parallel structures make it easier for the reader to hold each of the ideas in mind while reading the subsequent ideas.”

As previously explained, the use of pause will also be valuable. Pausing is normally defined as a break in speech. However, for purposes of this study, I will consider a pause to be any break in speech that is equal to, or longer than three seconds. This three second break in speech will only be considered a pause because it’s long enough to allow the audience to reflect on what was just said. This kind of pause is very important in a speech because it gives the speaker an air of confidence. When pausing, the speaker shows that they are not in a hurry, and can control their nerves so that they don’t talk too fast. Also, when pausing, it gives the audience members a chance to catch up with the speech, and analyze the words that are being said. This allows them to remember it a little bit better, because when one thinks about something, and comes to their own conclusion about it, they tend to remember what they heard.

The last few rhetorical devices rhythm, cadence, and tone are defined as follows. Rhythm is, as defined by Berger, “patterned and recurring alternations, at various intervals, of sound or speech elements” (p. 64). This can also be explained as “the collection of stressed and unstressed syllables,” as is done by Harris (p. 9). According to Harris, tone and cadence are a combination of expression and volume used to convey additional meaning to the content of the



words being spoken. Tone in text can also convey meaning by the way words are put together. For example, tone in text can take on a serious, ironic, condescending, optimistic, or humble tone (p. 156).

Previous research of rhetoric in political speech indicates that well received speeches contain the aforementioned rhetorical devices. Thus, it is hypothesized that these devices will be prominent in President Obama's inaugural address. In addition to the presence of these rhetorical devices, it is hypothesized that the devices helped to speak to and/or resolve the needs and concerns of the audience.

### Findings

Going into this election, the U.S. was immersed in a time of uncertainty, standing on the edge of a recession, and not quite sure if the country would topple down into the challenges of a depression, or step back onto sure ground. Americans were concerned about the economy, the future of many businesses, and the number of available jobs. We were also involved in the war with Iraq, worried about our dependence on foreign oil with soaring gas prices, and even global warming. We were not only concerned about what this was going to mean for us as individuals, or as a country, but also the impact that this would have on the world. Many other countries are directly affected by the decisions our President makes, and are thus, very interested in what he has to say.

In times like this, it is safe to say that the nation needs a leader who can restore hope. At the time of the election, the world looked to us Americans to elect a leader with confidence, with a vision to bring us together in order to work towards our goals to face the challenges that were looming. On Tuesday Nov. 4, 2008, we chose this leader; Barack Hussein Obama was elected

44<sup>th</sup> President of the United States. Just electing him was a historic moment for our nation. It was a defining moment in history where we took another step towards equality and elected a black man as President.

Obama was sworn in as President on Tuesday, Jan. 20th 2009 at the National Mall in Washington, D.C. Facing the Lincoln Memorial, in front of a crowd of 1.5 million people, with millions more watching on TV, listening on the radio, or watching/listening via the internet, Obama gave his inaugural address. In a 19 minute long speech, Obama talked about the difficult time that our country was experiencing, and how we need to work together to rise above our difficulties. It was a speech that ignited a fire of conversation around the world. It was a speech that many found amazing and historic. However, not all opinions were this favorable. So, the question then to be asked is, was this a good speech? Was it effective? Did it satisfy our needs, questions, or concerns?

In order to come to some conclusion about these questions, I studied the speech, and looked at it from a rhetorical analysis perspective in order to analyze the tools used by Obama. The rhetorical devices used to analyze the speech were, parallelism, antithesis, metaphor, rhythm, pause, cadence, and tone. I then looked at the use of these devices in order to determine if they helped to address and clarify some of the questions, concerns, and fears that the audience had during the time of the speech.

Throughout the speech, Obama used these rhetorical devices in an effective manner. The use of metaphor in political speech is effective because it allows the audience to gain a clearer picture of what the speaker is trying to say through examples. In his inaugural address, Obama uses metaphor twenty one times, which is frequent for a speech of this length. He talks about



things like, “the rising tides of prosperity and the still waters of peace.” One place that this works very well is when he is addressing rival countries saying “we will extend a hand if you are willing to unclench your fist.” Other examples of metaphor in the inaugural address include, “the long, rugged path toward prosperity,” and, “America, in the face of our common dangers, in this winter of our hardship, let us remember these timeless words; with hope and virtue, let us brave once more the icy currents, and endure what storms may come...”

One specific example where Obama uses metaphor to help the audience understand the message is when he is talking about war and tensions with other nations. He says, “To those who cling to power through corruption and deceit and the silencing of dissent, know that you are on the wrong side of history, but that we will extend a hand if you are willing to unclench your fist.” The metaphor of an extending hand reaching out to a clenched fist allows the audience to see this in their minds and to understand what we are facing. It is with this metaphor that Obama is saying, “we are willing to help, but we cannot help someone who’s not willing to work with us.”

War is something that is not always easy to understand, and in most cases cannot be easily fixed. Many people during the time of the election were concerned about the war and what the President-elect was going to do about it. With the metaphor of extending a hand to a clenched fist, Obama explains the problem America is facing, and also reveals his attitude towards fixing it. He is saying that he is willing to reach out to the people of Iraq and help them if they are willing to accept help. We will get nowhere; however, if they are resistant to change. He could have just explained that we were at war, and tensions were high with other countries, and that we were going to try to fix those tensions. However, by using metaphor, the audience



sees that picture in their minds, which makes it much more powerful, and people can remember and understand the message much better.

Another effective rhetorical device that I looked at was antithesis. Antithesis was used five times throughout the speech. For example, Obama says, "The nation cannot prosper long if it favors only the prosperous," and, "...know that your people will judge you on what you can build, not what you destroy." It is this sentence structure and the similarities between the two parts of the sentence that allows the audience to clearly see what is being said and what lies behind it. When Obama says, "the nation cannot prosper long if it only favors the prosperous" he is talking about the state of the economy. He is explaining to American citizens that America will not be successful economically speaking if it continues to make the rich richer and the poor poorer. With antithesis it is really easy to see what Obama is trying to say because the sentence structure is uncomplicated. The audience can focus more on the meaning behind the words. The focus is also displayed by stating the opposites next to each other so that the audience can clearly see what is being juxtaposed. In the inaugural address, the use of antithesis really implies change.

The use of antithesis in Obama's inaugural address isn't as effective as some of the other devices, because he doesn't use it when directly talking about some of the important issues. However, Obama does use antithesis to indirectly talk about what he plans on doing. For example, after talking about how the government should behave to help the economy, Obama says, "The nation cannot prosper long when it favors only the prosperous." This isn't so effective taken out of context, but after the audience has heard what it means, it is a powerful statement. The audience doesn't have to think about what the message is, because it's not complicated. Also, it's a balanced sentence that can easily be remembered. This is so important

for the audience because they can then remember that Obama addressed the economy, and they can think about what favoring the prosperous really means to them.

Going into the election, another thing on the minds of most Americans was the economy. At one point in the speech, Obama says, "The success of our economy has always depended not just on the size of our gross domestic product, but on the reach of our prosperity; on the ability to extend opportunity to every willing heart – not out of charity, but because it is the surest route to our common good." This use of antithesis is not quite as effective as some of the other rhetorical devices that Obama uses, because it is not as concise but it still conveys the message. He is saying that our country has always been successful because it does not turn a blind eye to the rest of the world. We have not been only concerned about the wealth of our nation, but about how we can help other nations be more successful also. Obama then goes on to explain that we haven't had a hand in other countries politics out of charity but because helping them means helping ourselves as well. It is what is best for everyone.

Parallelism was another device used to analyze the speech. Parallelism is used ten times during the speech. An example of parallelism in the speech is when Obama is talking about governmental programs and says, "Where the answer is yes, we intend to move forward. Where the answer is no, programs will end." Another good example of parallelism is when Obama is referencing Thomas Paine by speaking about, "a small band of patriots huddled by dying campfires on the shores of an icy river," he says, "The capital was abandoned. The enemy was advancing. The snow was stained with blood." There is something so powerful about those words because they are uncomplicated by sentence structure, and the repetition hits the listener like a drum beat, creating a clear visual as well as a sense of what those men must have been feeling. In this use of parallelism, Obama is comparing the challenges of our nation now to the



challenges of those men during that time. The power in these words effectively shows the audience that the challenges our nation faces are serious, and cannot be taken lightly. As stated before, the parallelism hits you like a drumbeat, and you can feel it like the beating of your own heart in your chest. It is more than words, it is a feeling. It is this feeling that makes parallelism such a powerful rhetorical device.

Like antithesis, parallelism in Obama's inaugural address isn't used to effectively explain some of the issues concerning Americans during that time. However, there are parallel sentences that help to gain a clearer picture overall. For example, after Obama is talking about what he would like to do about alternative energy sources and some of the environmental concerns, he says, "All this we can do. All this we will do." These two parallel sentences make this statement much more believable because they are punchy, concise sentences that feel powerful. They really give the illusion of conviction and purpose with confidence that Obama can make it happen.

Also like antithesis, the mirrored sentence structure in the parallel sentences allows the audience to listen to the message and then hear what we can and will do about it. Those two sentences are very simple ones, but together they make it memorable and easy to understand. Obama could have said something like, "These are the things we can do to help our country, and we will accomplish them." However, this is not nearly as effective as the parallel sentences. Without the parallelism, the audience most likely wouldn't have remembered that he said this, and would have probably felt like their questions about foreign oil and the environment were not answered.



Another rhetorical device that is effective, especially in political speech, is the use of pause. Again, the use of pause is very effective because it allows the audience to stay with the speaker, and also gives them time to think about what was just said. The more the audience thinks about what is being said, the more they will reflect and further analyze the speech. This is so important when making a speech that makes an impact. Throughout the inaugural address, Obama pauses several times and for different lengths. For this study, a break in the speech was only determined to be a pause if it was three seconds or longer. In the address, Obama pauses for three seconds or longer forty times.

A good example of where Obama pauses is right away in the beginning of the speech. He says, "My fellow citizens: I stand here today humbled by the task before us, grateful for the trust you have bestowed, mindful of the sacrifices borne by our ancestors." This sentence takes Obama 25 seconds to say, pausing after "citizens," and after each of the commas. This use of pause gives the audience the impression that Obama is under control, and is confident in what he is saying. This was so important for Obama, because during this time so many people were unsure of what was going to happen with America. Many people were questioning our economy, the war, and how America was being viewed by other countries. Americans needed reassurance that they picked the right person to lead the country.

The use of pause right away in the beginning of the speech not only gave the impression of being in control, but also allowed the audience to think about what he was saying. He is addressing American citizens, world leaders, citizens of other countries, critics, and other political parties with confidence. This use of pause creates a presence that surrounds Obama and declares, "I'm a leader." Obama says a lot in this sentence, and for the audience to be able to comprehend it all, they needed to be able to think about it. Pausing after each phrase allowed the

audience to do so. The audience can think about what kinds of tasks are before us. For example, they can think about what trusting Obama means for the country; and, they can reflect on where we've come from as a nation. This use of pause was very effective in framing the speech, as well as his presidency.

The final rhetorical devices used to analyze this speech were rhythm, cadence, and tone. The whole speech arguably has rhythm. The way Obama orates the speech never makes it awkward, and all of the parts flow together in a persistent rhythm. This rhythm is amplified by Obama's cadence and tone. He speaks with an air of confidence, looking over the massive crowd, pointing, and maintaining eye contact with the audience. His tone really works to his advantage, stressing important and meaningful points by getting quieter or getting louder. For example, when he says, "This is the meaning of our liberty and our creed, why men and women and children of every race and every faith can join in celebration across this magnificent mall. And why a man whose father less than 60 years ago might not have been served at a local restaurant can now stand before you and take a most sacred oath." He starts out strong, not overly loud, but then gets quiet when he talks about his father. This differentiation in tone shows how emotional a subject it is when he gets quiet. This softer tone can also indicate a reflective quality, which also conveys how the speaker feels about the subject. By getting quiet when Obama say, "a man whose father less than 60 years ago..." you can feel the emotion and how humbling and meaningful this moment is for Obama.

Another example of Obama's tone change is when he says, "We remain a young nation, but in the words of Scripture, the time has come to set aside childish things. The time has come to reaffirm our enduring spirit; to choose our better history; to carry forward that precious gift, that noble idea, passed on from generation to generation: the God-given promise that all are



equal, all are free, and all deserve a chance to pursue their full measure of happiness.” He starts out with a normal tone, then grows louder and louder to the end. This intense tone again shows emotion, but it sounds more determined, more powerful and passionate when it is louder.

Another good example of tone, cadence and rhythm is when Obama says, “Today I say to you that the challenges we face are real, they are serious and they are many. They will not be met easily or in a short span of time. But know this America: They will be met.” While listening to the speech Obama starts out slowly, and at a moderate volume. Then, he gets stronger, and a little bit louder. His tone changes, and when he says, “They will be met” he says it with such conviction; it not only speaks of passion and confidence but embodies it.

This use of rhythm, and the change in cadence and tone makes the speech much easier to listen to, and again allows the audience to remember it better. The whole speech has this rhythm that makes it easy to follow and listen to, and is used when he talks about many of the issues that were on the audience’s minds during that time. He also changes his tone during times that are important, growing stronger to show confidence, or getting softer to convey emotion. If these devices were not used, Obama could have still addressed some of the concerns or questions that the audience had; however, they would not have been as powerful or left as much of an impression on the audience. When these devices are used, the audience can remember the message a little bit better, and when things are said with the power that Obama uses, they tend to resonate and stay with people.

All of these rhetorical devices were used throughout the speech, and helped to illustrate the points that Obama was making during the address. However, as part of the historical critical research, it needs to be determined if he answered those concerns that individuals had going into

the election, and if he did this effectively so that the listeners understood what he was talking about.

### Conclusion

As stated before, millions of people watched Obama's inaugural address, and as one can imagine, there were a wide range of opinions on how good or bad the speech was. For this research, it was important to look at a wide range of opinions by many different people, and in different formats. After reading blogs, newspaper articles, Op/Ed pages, and listening to radio interviews, I found that there were a lot of different opinions about the speech. The types of reactions could be best broken down into three categories: favorable, favorable but with some criticism, and unfavorable. Most reactions fell into the favorable but with some criticism category.

One such criticism is from an article called, "Obama Historical Speech Misses Its Mark" by Mary Ziebler. In this article, she talks about how it wasn't a bad speech, but it could have been better. She says, "The inaugural address seemed to lose its way. I kept looking for the theme, the central point that President Obama wanted to convey to the billions around the world that were listening. President Obama is one of the greatest orators of our time. His profound and effortless ability to deliver a message and mesmerize an audience is well-known. I thought he would then pick up the themes of hope and unity of purpose, but still the speech struggled to find its foundation" (para. 3). Going along with this type of reaction, Jeff Shesol, a Clinton speechwriter commented on the speech in an editorial in the New York Times entitled, "'The Speech': The Experts Critique" that, "It was quite a severe speech — muscular, tough-minded and unsparing (at times startlingly so) in its critique of the outgoing administration. It was a



display of strength (his) and a summoning of strength (ours). Never again, I suspect, will his critics talk of the wispieness of “hope” and the emptiness of “change.” (They will talk of other things, but not this.)” (para. 1).

The next most popular reaction was the favorable reaction. For example, there’s a reaction from the Muslim world in an article by Ravi Khanna from VOA.com (an international multimedia broadcasting service funded by the U.S. Government through the Broadcasting Board of Governors) entitled, “Muslim Nations React to Obama Inaugural Speech” she says that, “Many Muslim nations are welcoming Barack Obama as the new President of the United States – yet there are also expressions of caution over whether much will really change in U.S. relations with the Muslim world. Mr. Obama made a special point of addressing Muslims around the world in his inaugural speech Tuesday and reaction has been coming in” (para. 4). She goes on to say that he offered a new relationship with the Muslim world saying, “To the Muslim world, we seed a new way forward, based on mutual interest and mutual respect. To those leaders around the globe who seed to sow conflict, or blame their society’s ills on the West – know that your people will judge you on what you can build, not what you destroy” (para. 4). It is evident with this reaction that Obama’s reached the Muslim world effectively with the help of the metaphors mentioned earlier.

This article is representative of a demographic that undoubtedly had many questions and concerns going into Obama’s presidency. This reaction shows that Obama addressed their concerns about their nation in his speech, and even shows that he used the rhetorical device antithesis to do so. By providing a positive reaction, it shows that the rhetorical device helped to

clarify what Obama meant, that they remembered what he said, and that he addressed one of their biggest concerns; thus, showing effectiveness.

In order to confirm that Obama's inaugural address was effective, it was necessary to look at a number of reactions. In order to do so, it was determined that the most important audiences of the speech were American citizens, world leaders, citizens of other countries, oppositional groups such as terrorists, and people with an opposing political view. Also, it was necessary to determine some of the major themes that were in the speech that needed to be addressed. These were the economy, the war with Iraq, terrorism and tensions with other countries, and the historical significance. In an article entitled, "Barack Obama's Inauguration: Reaction from the World's Media" by Jon Swaine, newspapers from around the world gave their verdicts on the inauguration and described their hopes for his Presidency. These reactions were from the major audience groups. They commented on the major themes of the speech, revealing that the speech was indeed effective.

In his article, Swaine quotes the New York Times saying, "But it left no doubt how Mr. Obama sees the nation's problems and how he intends to fix them and, unlike Mr. Bush, the necessary sacrifices he will ask of all Americans. ... It filled us with hope that with Mr. Obama's help, this battered nation will be able to draw together and mend itself" (para. 1). This reaction is important because it represents how many Americans feel about the address. It shows that the audience remembers the important issues that were discussed and that they will be dealt with.

Swaine also quotes The Washington Post in his article, saying "It was a moment of hope, because Mr. Obama sought to combine a sober acknowledgment of the perils the nation faces -- the wars, the recession, the mounting debt and ebbing confidence -- with an unflappable



assurance that they can be overcome. The nation's challenges 'are serious and they are many,' he said. 'They will not be met easily or in a short span of time. But know this, America -- they will be met'" (para. 2). This is also important because it represents the American citizens' point of view. This quote reveals that Americans took from the speech a feeling of hope because Obama addressed the concerns of our country and, with confidence, said that they will be taken care of.

Quoting *The Asian Age*, an Indian newspaper, Swaine reports, "The world may not agree with America and Americans at all times and on all issues, but in almost no other major country does one see the victor accept his laurels with such magnanimity and the vanquished the lesson of defeat with such grace. We in India pride ourselves on being the biggest democracy in the world: but here the victor revels and the vanquished sulks; and the celebrations often degenerate into taunts, muscle-flexing and bitterness. Why can't we ever see such grace in this country (para. 8). This quote is important because it talks about India's perception of Obama. This quote explains that even though other countries may have differing opinions about what America does, they recognize that Obama is humble about our accomplishments as a nation while also accepting our faults. This quote also remarks on Obama's cadence and tone. Although not saying it directly, it is cadence and tone that convey that a speaker has grace.

Swaine also quotes from *Joong Ang Daily*, a Korean paper saying, "For Koreans, the North Korea nuclear issue and the pending Korea-US free trade agreement are of the utmost interest. The US should try to balance resolving the North's nuclear issue through close cooperation with South Korea while at the same time adopting a tough diplomatic stance. The Obama administration needs to decide whether delaying approval of the bilateral trade deal with Korea and pursuing protectionism will serve US national interests and the spirit of the Korea-US alliance. It is natural that Obama prioritizes U.S. interests. Therefore we may be disappointed

sometimes. However, it is clear that the U.S. cannot do everything by itself. Obama must seek ways for both America and the world to prosper in peace. We truly hope Obama's presidency will be blessed with success" (para. 9). This quote is important because it, again, shows that North Korea's concerns about the new American President were addressed, and that his ideas about how to move forward with Korea were effectively conveyed.

These reactions all follow the one from the Muslim world. Each of these countries have different concerns about how Obama's Presidency will affect them. They also show that Obama addressed their concerns, which leads to the speech being effective. The reaction from the New York Times shows the opinions of American citizens and that their concerns about the economy were addressed, and now fill them with hope that it will get better. The reaction from the Washington Post also shows that the American citizen's concerns about the war, the economy, and terrorism were addressed. This reaction also specifically quotes one of the times that Obama uses parallelism which further proves the hypothesis to be correct. The reaction from The Asian Age in India shows a reaction from other countries. It shows that their concerns about tensions with other countries and the historical significance of the speech were addressed effectively. The reaction by Joong Ang Daily also shows the reactions from other countries and that their concerns about terrorism and tensions with other countries were met.

There were many reactions stating how well Obama addressed the concerns that face America like the tensions between us and the Muslim world, the war in Iraq, our environment, our economy, etc. For example, in the Washington Post article, they comment on Obama's acknowledgement of our fears about the recession, the wars, and the mounting debt. He did so by saying that the nation's challenges "are serious and they are many. They will not be met easily or in a short span of time. But know this America – they will be met."



Obama's use of the rhetorical devices throughout the speech, especially during points that he addressed our concerns, fears, and questions allows the conclusion to be drawn that these rhetorical devices helped to illustrate and clarify some of the concepts that were being spoken about. Also, based on the reactions, these concepts addressed the concerns, needs, and questions of our time. As stated earlier, an effective speech is one that's memorable and one that speaks to the audience's needs. The fact that Obama used the different rhetorical devices that help to clarify and allow the audience to remember the words being spoken, along with his acknowledgement of many of the things that the audience needed to hear, all led to his speech being an effective one.

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## Appendix

## Obama's Inaugural Address

My fellow citizens:

I stand here today humbled by the task before us, grateful for the trust you have bestowed, mindful of the sacrifices borne by our ancestors. I thank President Bush for his service to our nation, as well as the generosity and cooperation he has shown throughout this transition.

Forty-four Americans have now taken the presidential oath. The words have been spoken during rising tides of prosperity and the still waters of peace. Yet, every so often the oath is taken amidst gathering clouds and raging storms. At these moments, America has carried on not simply because of the skill or vision of those in high office, but because We the People have remained faithful to the ideals of our forbearers, and true to our founding documents.

So it has been. So it must be with this generation of Americans.

That we are in the midst of crisis is now well understood. Our nation is at war, against a far-reaching network of violence and hatred. Our economy is badly weakened, a consequence of greed and irresponsibility on the part of some, but also our collective failure to make hard choices and prepare the nation for a new age. Homes have been lost; jobs shed; businesses shuttered. Our health care is too costly; our schools fail too many; and each day brings further evidence that the ways we use energy strengthen our adversaries and threaten our planet.

These are the indicators of crisis, subject to data and statistics. Less measurable but no less profound is a sapping of confidence across our land — a nagging fear that America's decline is inevitable, and that the next generation must lower its sights.



Today I say to you that the challenges we face are real. They are serious and they are many. They will not be met easily or in a short span of time. But know this, America — they will be met.

On this day, we gather because we have chosen hope over fear, unity of purpose over conflict and discord.

On this day, we come to proclaim an end to the petty grievances and false promises, the recriminations and worn out dogmas, that for far too long have strangled our politics.

We remain a young nation, but in the words of Scripture, the time has come to set aside childish things. The time has come to reaffirm our enduring spirit; to choose our better history; to carry forward that precious gift, that noble idea, passed on from generation to generation: the God-given promise that all are equal, all are free, and all deserve a chance to pursue their full measure of happiness.

In reaffirming the greatness of our nation, we understand that greatness is never a given. It must be earned. Our journey has never been one of short-cuts or settling for less. It has not been the path for the faint-hearted — for those who prefer leisure over work, or seek only the pleasures of riches and fame. Rather, it has been the risk-takers, the doers, the makers of things — some celebrated but more often men and women obscure in their labor, who have carried us up the long, rugged path toward prosperity and freedom.

For us, they packed up their few worldly possessions and traveled across oceans in search of a new life.

For us, they toiled in sweatshops and settled the West; endured the lash of the whip and plowed the hard earth.

For us, they fought and died, in places like Concord and Gettysburg; Normandy and Khe Sanh.

Time and again these men and women struggled and sacrificed and worked till their hands were raw so that we might live a better life. They saw America as bigger than the sum of our individual ambitions; greater than all the differences of birth or wealth or faction.

This is the journey we continue today. We remain the most prosperous, powerful nation on Earth. Our workers are no less productive than when this crisis began. Our minds are no less inventive, our goods and services no less needed than they were last week or last month or last year. Our capacity remains undiminished. But our time of standing pat, of protecting narrow interests and putting off unpleasant decisions — that time has surely passed. Starting today, we must pick ourselves up, dust ourselves off, and begin again the work of remaking America.

For everywhere we look, there is work to be done. The state of the economy calls for action, bold and swift, and we will act — not only to create new jobs, but to lay a new foundation for growth. We will build the roads and bridges, the electric grids and digital lines that feed our commerce and bind us together. We will restore science to its rightful place, and wield technology's wonders to raise health care's quality and lower its cost. We will harness the sun and the winds and the soil to fuel our cars and run our factories. And we will transform our schools and colleges and universities to meet the demands of a new age. All this we can do. And all this we will do.

Now, there are some who question the scale of our ambitions — who suggest that our system cannot tolerate too many big plans. Their memories are short. For they have forgotten



man, woman and child who seeks a future of peace and dignity, and that we are ready to lead once more.

Recall that earlier generations faced down fascism and communism not just with missiles and tanks, but with sturdy alliances and enduring convictions. They understood that our power alone cannot protect us, nor does it entitle us to do as we please. Instead, they knew that our power grows through its prudent use; our security emanates from the justness of our cause, the force of our example, the tempering qualities of humility and restraint.

We are the keepers of this legacy. Guided by these principles once more, we can meet those new threats that demand even greater effort — even greater cooperation and understanding between nations. We will begin to responsibly leave Iraq to its people and forge a hard-earned peace in Afghanistan. With old friends and former foes, we will work tirelessly to lessen the nuclear threat and roll back the specter of a warming planet. We will not apologize for our way of life, nor will we waver in its defense, and for those who seek to advance their aims by inducing terror and slaughtering innocents, we say to you now that our spirit is stronger and cannot be broken; you cannot outlast us, and we will defeat you.

For we know that our patchwork heritage is a strength, not a weakness. We are a nation of Christians and Muslims, Jews and Hindus — and non-believers. We are shaped by every language and culture, drawn from every end of this Earth; and because we have tasted the bitter swill of civil war and segregation and emerged from that dark chapter stronger and more united, we cannot help but believe that the old hatreds shall someday pass; that the lines of tribe shall soon dissolve; that as the world grows smaller, our common humanity shall reveal itself; and that America must play its role in ushering in a new era of peace.

To the Muslim world, we seek a new way forward, based on mutual interest and mutual respect. To those leaders around the globe who seek to sow conflict or blame their society's ills on the West — know that your people will judge you on what you can build, not what you destroy. To those who cling to power through corruption and deceit and the silencing of dissent, know that you are on the wrong side of history; but that we will extend a hand if you are willing to unclench your fist.

To the people of poor nations, we pledge to work alongside you to make your farms flourish and let clean waters flow; to nourish starved bodies and feed hungry minds. And to those nations like ours that enjoy relative plenty, we say we can no longer afford indifference to suffering outside our borders; nor can we consume the world's resources without regard to effect. For the world has changed, and we must change with it.

As we consider the road that unfolds before us, we remember with humble gratitude those brave Americans who, at this very hour, patrol far-off deserts and distant mountains. They have something to tell us today, just as the fallen heroes who lie in Arlington whisper through the ages. We honor them not only because they are guardians of our liberty, but because they embody the spirit of service; a willingness to find meaning in something greater than themselves. And yet, at this moment — a moment that will define a generation — it is precisely this spirit that must inhabit us all.

For as much as government can do and must do, it is ultimately the faith and determination of the American people upon which this nation relies. It is the kindness to take in a stranger when the levees break, the selflessness of workers who would rather cut their hours than see a friend lose their job which sees us through our darkest hours. It is the firefighter's courage



to storm a stairway filled with smoke, but also a parent's willingness to nurture a child, that finally decides our fate.

Our challenges may be new. The instruments with which we meet them may be new. But those values upon which our success depends — hard work and honesty, courage and fair play, tolerance and curiosity, loyalty and patriotism — these things are old. These things are true. They have been the quiet force of progress throughout our history. What is demanded then is a return to these truths. What is required of us now is a new era of responsibility — a recognition, on the part of every American, that we have duties to ourselves, our nation and the world, duties that we do not grudgingly accept but rather seize gladly, firm in the knowledge that there is nothing so satisfying to the spirit, so defining of our character, than giving our all to a difficult task.

This is the price and the promise of citizenship.

This is the source of our confidence — the knowledge that God calls on us to shape an uncertain destiny.

This is the meaning of our liberty and our creed — why men and women and children of every race and every faith can join in celebration across this magnificent mall, and why a man whose father less than 60 years ago might not have been served at a local restaurant can now stand before you to take a most sacred oath.

So let us mark this day with remembrance, of who we are and how far we have traveled. In the year of America's birth, in the coldest of months, a small band of patriots huddled by dying campfires on the shores of an icy river. The capital was abandoned. The enemy was

advancing. The snow was stained with blood. At a moment when the outcome of our revolution was most in doubt, the father of our nation ordered these words be read to the people:

"Let it be told to the future world ... that in the depth of winter, when nothing but hope and virtue could survive ... that the city and the country, alarmed at one common danger, came forth to meet [it]."

America. In the face of our common dangers, in this winter of our hardship, let us remember these timeless words. With hope and virtue, let us brave once more the icy currents and endure what storms may come. Let it be said by our children's children that when we were tested we refused to let this journey end, that we did not turn back nor did we falter; and with eyes fixed on the horizon and God's grace upon us, we carried forth that great gift of freedom and delivered it safely to future generations.