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Essay # 1—CRA
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Abraham Lincoln's 2nd Inaugural Address: What He Didn't Say

Introduction

Abraham Lincoln, America's 16th and perhaps most famous president, gave several important speeches during his lifetime, speeches such as the "Gettysburg Address" and the "Cooper Union Address." Although the occasion of his first inauguration as president presented him with significant rhetorical issues such as the fact that seven Southern states had seceded from the Union when he was elected, the rhetorical situation he faced at his second inaugural was equally thorny although different. As he stood before the audience on that rainy March 4, 1865, he faced an audience that felt confident that the Civil War was fast drawing to a close, an audience of people thirsty for revenge against the rebels who had dragged the nation into the bloodiest war in its history, an audience far from committed to accepting former slaves as equals in the workplace or in the voting booth, an audience eager to hear his plans for the post-war era. In general terms, we can ask, "How can a rhetor give a speech that does not fulfill his audience's expectations while preparing them for at least a hint of his overall intended policy?" And, perhaps more profoundly, "How does a rhetor give a speech that reaches across a century-and-a-half when the occasion essentially demands that the speech be time-bound and place-specific?" Such questions resonate for us today since we face situations in which we must deliver difficult ideas to unwilling listeners, both in our private and in our professional lives. Examining two rhetorical aspects of his speech will give us a sense of Lincoln's strategies, namely, his tone and his ethos.

Summary of the Speech

It is not difficult for us to imagine what Lincoln's audience expected from his speech because we expect the same things from Obama's inaugural speech. They and we want assurances that things will get better, we want to hear, in broad strokes, what policies the president will put into effect to make those things better. Given the nature and attitude of his audience, Lincoln had to walk a very thin line in his speech. For instance, if he explained any specific policies, there might have been immediate dissent and perhaps even violence. Therefore, he opted to give a speech that emphasized the lack of control humans have over events. Only after "softening up" his listeners with repeated themes that stress the fact that everyone shares guilt in some way for the war and that stress humans' inability to predict the outcome of any action--only then did Lincoln make somewhat explicit his thesis, namely, that the victors should treat the losers without malice and with charity in order to bind up the wounds that had been inflicted on the nation. His purpose, then, was to humble his audience, to

make them receptive to the policies which he was envisioning but which he was not ready to reveal.

In his first two paragraphs, Lincoln points out contrasts between the occasion of his first inaugural and his second. At the first, he had to give a lengthy address that spelled out his policies in case the impending rebellion came to fruition. But four years' of announcements about the progress of the war and major policies changes such as the Emancipation Proclamation left little new to be said about the war.

In the final three paragraphs, Lincoln gives a brief summary of the start of the war and the fact that both sides declared they wanted no war, yet Southerners were starting the war even as he was giving his first inaugural address. He points out that his government had not advocated ending slavery but only restricting its spread. Then he speaks at great length about the inability of either side to imagine the length and severity of the war or its unintended outcomes. He states that everything that happens is God's will. He ends with his thesis.

Definition

I will use ethos as my major unit of analysis. According to Hart and Daughton, *ethos* is "the rhetor's credibility or authority—the right to address an audience" (152). More can be said about ethos than that, however. For example,

Ethos names the persuasive appeal of one's character, especially how this character is established by means of the speech or discourse. Aristotle claimed that one needs to appear both knowledgeable about one's subject and benevolent. Cicero said that in classical oratory the initial portion of a speech (its exordium or introduction) was the place to establish one's credibility with the audience. (Burton "Ethos" screen)

Further, as Edward P.J. Corbett notes,

The ethical appeal is exerted, according to Aristotle, when the speech itself impresses the audience that the speaker is a person of sound sense (*phronesis*), high moral character (*arête*), and benevolence (*eunoia*). Notice that it is *the speech itself* that must create this impression. (80)

It is always difficult when dealing with such an iconic figure as Lincoln to separate the myth from the man, the historical personage from the person revealed only in the speech. One way of at least partially achieving that separation is by examining what the speech actually says and reveals.

Analysis

After an examination of Lincoln's ethos in general, I will do a close reading of the fourth and fifth paragraphs, for nowhere in the speech is that ethos more textured than in that passage.

Ethos

Lincoln's refusal to address those most pressing topics is almost off-handed, stated as though the audience does not even expect him to address those topics. For instance, after noting that "public declarations have been constantly called forth" (par. 1) about the war, he says "little that is new could be presented" by him during this speech (par. 1). This statement is disingenuous at the very least. Even in 2010 with all the instantaneous and on-the-spot news outlets at our disposal--e.g., newspapers, magazines, 24-hour news broadcasts on radio and on television and the Internet-- it is impossible to get all facts and accurate interpretations of the meaning of those facts. Imagine how much more difficult it was for audiences in 1865 to have accurate and up-to-date information about the war (or anything else). Further, as with our news sources today, reports were inevitably biased, either on purpose or simply because humans are imperfect recorders of events or interpreters of their significance. Hence Lincoln's audience was thirsting for the latest and most official information about the progress of the war, but Lincoln says, using the passive voice, that "little that is new could be presented" (par. 1). In fact, he even denies having any additional information, saying that the "progress of our arms ... is as well known to the public as to myself" (par. 2). Using the passive voice again, Lincoln ends this section of his speech by saying "no prediction in regard to it [the war] is ventured" (par. 2).

This use of the passive voice signals another amazing aspect of Lincoln's rhetoric and ethos in this speech. After the second paragraph, he uses no first-person pronouns. Inaugural speeches are an occasion for an incumbent president to trumpet his accomplishments and to get the audience on board with his plans for the next four years. And Lincoln had some heady accomplishments, not the least of which was the Emancipation Proclamation and the impending end of the war (five weeks after this speech, Lee surrendered and the war was over). Yet there is none of that here.

The most notable aspect of Lincoln's ethos, though, is his sense of what might be called powerlessness or his sense of God's will. Perhaps four years of being president and seeing the war drag on and seeing the blood lust build up in the Congress with its desire for revenge on the South, perhaps four years of maneuvering policies into place only to have them gelded or misapplied or ignored or, worst of all, of seeing those policies enacted with unexpected and contrary results, perhaps four years of having power but not being able to bend events to his will—perhaps four such years changed Lincoln into a man who had to acknowledge that the flow of events was beyond his control, beyond human control. Who can know for sure?

What we can know, though, is that the ethos in this speech is not a triumphant victor glorifying his own accomplishments. The personality that comes through this speech is tired, sad about the turn of events, and profoundly aware of the fact that neither side is without guilt.

Close Reading

For my readers' convenience, here are the fourth and fifth paragraphs:

Neither party expected for the war the magnitude or the duration which it has already attained. Neither anticipated that the cause of the conflict might cease when, or even before the conflict itself should cease. Each looked for an easier triumph, and a result less fundamental and astounding. Both read the same Bible and pray to the same God, and each invokes His aid against the other. It may seem strange that any men should dare to ask a just God's assistance in wringing their bread from the sweat of other men's faces, but let us judge not that we be not judged. The prayer of both could not be answered. That of neither has been answered fully. The Almighty has His own purposes. Woe unto to the war because of offences, for it must needs be that offences come, but woe to the man by whom the offence cometh. If we should suppose that American slavery is one of those offences which, in the providence of God, must needs come, but which having continued through His appointed time, He now wills to remove, and that He gives to both North and South this terrible war as the woe due to those by whom the offence came, shall we discern there any departure from those divine attributes which the believers in a living God always ascribe to Him? Fondly do we hope, fervently do we pray that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet if God wills that it continue until all the wealth piled by the bondsman's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn by the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said, that the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.

With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation's wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow and his orphans, to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and a lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations.

After pointing out the irony of the fact that no one expected the war to last very long and the irony of the fact that Northerners and Southerners both pray to the same God, Lincoln seems to make the North's case for seeing God on its side, but then seems to quickly retreat from that idea. He says, "It may seem strange that any men should dare to ask a just God's assistance in wringing their bread from the sweat of other men's faces, but let us judge not that we be not judged" (par. 4). Let's consider that statement for a moment. The "It may seem strange" is notable for its use of the word *may*, a word that already signals that Lincoln's final pronouncement will deny that "it is strange." The *may* is his accommodation of his audience, indicating to them that he understands their position before hearing his point. His statement "but let us judge not that we be not judged" changes the Bible's word *ye* to *we* ("judge not that ye be not judged" [Matt 7:1]), thus turning the speaking situation from a superior-to-inferior (president-to-citizens) to a "peer-to-peer" situation (Strang 3). Lincoln thus

suggests that he himself cannot understand the reason, but he is wise enough to know that neither he nor his listeners are in a position to be judges. This strategy reinforces his earlier statement that he knows no more about the progress of the war than his listeners do--on one level that is obviously false (as I noted above), but, on a more metaphysical level, it is true because Lincoln is acknowledging the very great limits on human ability to actually **know** anything.

In fact, the whole fourth paragraph reveals and deepens our sense of Lincoln as a man who no longer believes that humans control events. As he says, "The Almighty has His own purposes" (par. 4). Even more significantly, Lincoln eliminates one of the standard defenses of anyone who is put on trial for war crimes, namely, that the situation "made him do it." Lincoln says, "Woe unto the war because of offences," meaning, that the war is horrible and causes serious moral crimes to be committed. But the end of that sentence issues a warning to individuals—"but woe to the man by whom the offence cometh" (par. 4). This line could be interpreted at least two ways. First, "you Southerners caused the war and hence will suffer." Second, and the way I think Lincoln meant it (and this borne out by the ending of the speech), "neither you Southerners nor we Northerners will be exempt from punishment for this war."

Puzzled by the fact that an all-powerful God could allow slavery in the first place but not willing to say so, Lincoln instead resorts to a conditional *if* clause—"If we should suppose that American slavery is one of those offences which, in the providence of God, must needs come" (par. 4). In other words, although he cannot fathom God's reasons for allowing slavery, he is going to assume that God might or must have good reasons. He then hypothesizes that slavery has continued "through His appointed time" and that God now wants slavery to end and so is punishing both North and South with the war. **If** that is the case, Lincoln says, who are **we mere humans** to suggest that God's plan deviates at all from his "attributes" of being all good, all powerful, and all-knowing. I suggest that Lincoln is indeed doubting God's plan here and that his language reveals this aspect of his ethos even though it was no doubt not clear to a listening audience.

Once Lincoln has established the "fact" that God's plan cannot be questioned, he says that if there has to be a complete balancing of the books, if every drop of slave's blood that was shed has to be compensated for by drops of blood of Union and Confederate soldiers, then we still cannot doubt that "the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether" (par. 4). What he strongly implies is that we cannot understand those judgments either.

The final aspect of Lincoln's ethos, and the most important, is revealed in the speech's powerful last sentence which constitutes the whole of the fifth paragraph:

With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation's wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow and his orphans, to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and a lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations.

This sentence reveals a man of amazing compassion, a compassion that was established in the fourth paragraph by his willingness to quiet his own doubts and questioning with a reliance on a belief in God's plan. Instead of devoting long paragraphs to explaining policies that would allow the Southern states back into the Union, he simply says, "With malice toward none, with charity for all"—in other words, he is trying to forestall the revengeful blood lust that raged in the Northerners, to turn it into Christian charity and compassion. He knows that "the work we are in" (i.e., the war) must be finished, and he knows that victory is imminent. The rest of the sentence deepens and alters the meaning of "the work we are in"; suddenly the work is transformed into binding up "the nation's wounds." With another rhetorical move, he turns the binding up of the nation's wounds into the personal, for Lincoln tells us that we must take care of the soldiers, and we must take care of the widows and orphans of those soldiers who died in the war. And he is not distinguishing between Northern and Southern soldiers or their dependents. He is thus revealed as a man of compassion who sees both the big picture (the nation's wounds) and the individual's agony, who see the nation's needs and the individual's. As a nation and as individuals, Lincoln says, we must "do all which may achieve and cherish a just and a lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations." In this last sentence we can see Lincoln's vision for the post-war period. Not reparations and revenge, but helping and healing, justice and peace.

The ethos that is revealed in this speech, then, is complex—a leader who has come to see that human power is essentially an illusion, a leader who cannot fathom but still believes in God's just purposes, a leader who does not trumpet victory but advocates charity and forgiveness.

Insight into Rhetoric

This speech is important not only diachronically as the last major speech given by one of our greatest presidents at a crucial moment in our history, but also synchronically because it shows us how a rhetor can disappoint his audience's expectations and still deliver a powerful speech. Further, the speech reveals how a rhetor can give a speech whose content is usually dictated by the occasion and the genre (inaugural addresses) in such a way that it transcends the limitation of that occasion and genre.

What my approach has demonstrated is the complexity of ethos that can exist in such a short text. By using classic invention, it is possible to think about all the topics that might have been covered in a text. With just a little bit of historical background (often found in the speech or in the rhetorical situation itself), it is then possible to imagine which of those topics would most likely be included. Then, when we look at the text itself, we discover whether those likely topics have indeed been addressed. If they haven't, we are forced to ask ourselves, "Why weren't they covered? Are there clues in the rest of the text that suggest explanations or possible reasons?" What a rhetor leaves out often reveals much about the rhetor and/or the situation.

As I set out to examine Lincoln's "Second Inaugural Address," I asked the following research questions: "How can a rhetor give a speech that does not fulfill his audience's expectations while preparing them for at least a hint of his overall intended policy?" and "How does a rhetor give a speech that reaches across a century when the occasion essentially demands that the speech be time-bound and place-specific?"

I think my analysis has revealed the answer quite clearly: The rhetor first dismisses the audience's expectations in an almost off-handed manner and then moves somewhat swiftly to much larger, more metaphysical issues. He dwells not on "how will we punish the South" but rather on "Who is not guilty in this war?" He contemplates not "What punishment shall we inflict on the South?" but rather "Who but God has the right to judge any human endeavor?" He asks not "Why does the South want to spread slavery?" but rather "How can God allow slavery in the first place?" Only then, after he has humbled his listeners into realizing that events are moved by powers far greater than theirs and motivated by intentions far beyond their ken, only then does he hint at his policy, a policy that seems to have grown out of that humility and out of that belief that we cannot know what lies ahead. He hints that his policy will be one of charity and mercy and that his goal will not be to punish but to heal.

Herein lies the answer to the second research question I asked. By dismissing the specific issues of the moment and by raising profound and eternal questions, Lincoln was able to write a speech that is more important synchronically than it is diachronically.

How is this so?

Reflection

I often wonder what American history would have been like if Lincoln had not been assassinated and had had a chance to enact his policies. Perhaps he could have ended or at least mitigated the animosity between North and South. Perhaps African Americans could have been made full citizens much more swiftly. Perhaps racism itself might have been lessened.

Or perhaps not.

Perhaps we would have ended up where we are anyway, since Congress and the Northerners were so intent on revenge. Perhaps they would have added more proof to Lincoln's conviction that humans don't really control events and that some other force with different motivations and visions controls us. Perhaps Lincoln would have ended his second term a totally disheartened man, bitter at the failure of people to live up to even the most basic of Jesus' commands to "love our neighbors as ourselves" and to embrace Lincoln's own vision of "with malice toward none, with charity for all."

We can be certain of one thing: We Americans still have not learned the lesson that Lincoln tried to teach us. We Americans did not even learn any lessons from the Reconstruction period that followed Lincoln's death, as the same type of policies after World War I led to the conditions that fostered the rise of Nazis and World War II. And certainly we did not learn any lessons about

leaping into a war without considering the long-range consequences, as America's ill-advised sallies into Vietnam and Iraq continue to prove. Perhaps "speeches for the ages" cannot, in the end, teach people because we are always caught up in the moment's fear and rage.

When I first started this project, I selected Lincoln's speech simply because it was relatively short and because I have always admired Lincoln. Having done this analysis in order to answer my research questions, however, I have to say that I find this a profoundly moving speech, one that is rhetorically sophisticated and effective, and one that was well worth the effort of examining it, one whose lesson is still left to be learned—be wary of what we begin since once it is begun, it will have dire consequences that we did not imagine and can not control.

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My workshop partners Mike, Yi, and Sarah gave some good initial feedback. Both Sarah and Carlos were confused by my original expression of ideas about Ethos, and they pointed out some places that needed clarification. Yi pointed out that I needed to explain the connection between my thesis and the quotations I used. Mike got me to use forecasting in the sections to make the organization clearer. Except for Sarah's suggestion that I add another unit of analysis, I used all their suggestions. Thanks to them, this essay is stronger than it would have been.

Writing Center Acknowledgement

I visited the Center twice for this essay—once before workshop and once afterwards. I am grateful to Writing Center consultant Amanda whose suggestions helped me get deeper into Lincoln's tone. Her repeated questioning helped me discover several of the ideas that I later developed in my Reflection section, specifically blah and blah.. I am grateful to Bob for pushing me to say explicitly for my readers what I thought was obvious about Lincoln's ethos. In particular, blah and blah. Thanks to them, this essay is stronger than it would have been.

Postwrite

My Thesis

- Lincoln's "Second Inaugural Address" reveals a complex intertwining of situational irony with the ethos of a leader who admits to not understanding the ways of God but who is adamant about putting into political practice the Christian idea of forgiving one's enemies.

My Audience

- Before they read my essay, my audience probably had some clear ideas about the speech since we were all assigned to read it, but I can not assume that any of them have analyzed it. Also, since I'm a peer rather than an expert in rhetoric or Lincoln, they might be hesitant to accept what I say as authoritative.
- Before they read my essay, my readers' attitude toward me as rhetor was probably based on what I've said in class. For instance, blah blah blah
- My major strategy for dealing with my audience's initial attitudes was to sound knowledgeable.
- Since this essay is a CRA, I doubt my readers were expecting much of appeal to their emotions. I think my "Reflection" section, though, might have surprised them because blah blah blah

How I used Ethos (Aristotle)

- The ethos was trying to project was one of blah blah blah
- The strategies I used to enhance my ethos were:
 - My sagacity by blahing

- My goodwill by blahing
- My character by blahing
- Blah

How I used Pathos

- The specific emotions I was trying to invoke in my audience were blah blah
- Specifically, I wanted to change their blah into blah-2
- To accomplish that, I used the following to appeal to my audience's emotions
 - Blah
 - Blah
 - Blah

How I used Logos

- I used logos in the following places:
 - Par. # when I said blah
 - Par. # when I referred to blah and then blah2
- My major types of evidence were blah and yaddy-ya

How I used Style

- I used 3 specific stylistic devices
 - In pars. # and # and #, I used blah
 - In pars. # and # I used yaddy-ya
 - Throughout the essay, but most noticeably, I used whatyamacallit and thingamajig

Note: you should **not** consider the “blahs,” “thingamajig,” “whatyamacallit” or “yaddy-ya” as models for your assignment. I will be talking my Postwrite to you as we work our way through the essay in class.

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