

Mr. Freitas Daily Overview

WARNING: Ingestion of English Content May Cause the Rise of Intellectual Ability.

In his post-9/11 speech—an address that recounts the state of the nation after deadly terrorist attacks—former President George W. Bush varies his pronouns, subtly shifts his tone, and repeats patriotic images in order to highlight that although all are experiencing tragic grief, the country is—and will remain—strong, ultimately moving the divided American public to unite and prepare for retaliatory action.

At the beginning of the speech, Bush repeats communal pronouns in order to connect himself with the grieving public and prompt them to take action. Take, for example, how in the very first line of the speech, he reveals that due to the horrible events, “our fellow citizens, our way of life, our very freedom came under attack” (Bush 1). The word “our” unites the public because Bush allows himself to be grouped in with all Americans. This is important in that, first, being the president, many individuals would see him as someone of higher status, but here he exposes that no element of social class could protect any American from experiencing the sorrow and loss of the day. Furthermore, by linking himself with the general public, he removes any political sentiments that would have prevented any individuals from listening to him, as all Americans were detrimentally affected. Also, his repeating the word “our” creates enmity with the terrorists due to the fact that by uniting the American public as those who value “citizens[hip]...life...[and] freedom” (Bush 1)—which are all positive traits—he establishes a clear schism between his audience and those who “attack[ed]” (Bush 1): the people who don’t value such positive traits. This, consequently, lays the groundwork for a competition, one that he would soon suggest later in his speech: war. Following this, Bush shifts toward identifying himself with singular pronouns in order to firmly establish himself as the authoritative and active leader of the American Public. After detailing the horrors of the day and the altruism of the public, he discusses how he “implemented [the U.S] government’s emergency response plans [...] to help local rescue efforts” (Bush 16-18). The switch to “I” establishes him as an authoritative leader because once he singularly identifies himself, he ties himself to a position of action; he is able to “implement” the important response plans of the nation’s leadership. Since he solely has the power to control the national rescue efforts, and the public seemingly desires to assist in the rescue efforts, they are then put under his control as well, since they would be more inclined to work with someone who has the power to support them in their cause. And yet, in the midst of all of this, Bush also reminds the public that the “military is powerful and [...] prepared” (17) which highlights the true underlying purpose of this address: war.

Bush goes on to subtly shift his tone in order to surreptitiously suggest that the audience unite in support of potential retaliation toward the terrorist attacks. Take, for example, how before mentioning how the public has been “filled[...]with[...]quiet, unyielding anger,” Bush unites the audience around their feelings of “disbelief [and] terrible sadness.” In collectively getting Americans to recognize the truth of their grief, he relies on this this moment of communal empathy to direct their thoughts toward anger because, even if some individuals are not angry, they could be moved to such an emotion just by identifying with his initially listed emotions. By collectively inciting anger, Bush then foreshadows his later claim, where he insists that “a great people has been moved to defend a great nation,” (Bush 8) due to the fact that individuals, when angry, are naturally drawn toward seeking revenge against whatever has incited the emotion—in this case, the attackers. Once the public is primed to desire revenge in an attempt to satiate their anger, they will be prompted to join in support for war because the words “move” and “defend” directly refer to the action that he feels is necessary to obtain the “justice and peace” everyone desires in this time of turmoil. This shift is more readily visible when he details the country’s aggressive response to bring the perpetrators to justice. (I would then add the text where this shift shows up more visibly (lines 24-26) and explain how this declaration unites the public and then moves them to support a war-like response)

Evoking pride and hope for future success, Bush also repeats patriotic metaphors. (I would then add the text where these show up and explain how they unite the public and then moves them to support a war-like response and then do the same with one more strategy.) ***Have students finish this paragraph***

Throughout his speech, Bush lights the torch of unification and justice in order to dispel the darkness of isolation and suffering. Even when an event that occurs whose effects pale in comparison to the magnitude of September Eleventh, individuals must strive to come together and support one another as they address the physical and emotional consequences, regardless of any dividing factors.