

21W.016 Essay 1 Assignment: Argument Analysis

The Next Four Years of Values

On January 20, 2009, Barack Obama delivered his Presidential Inaugural Address. Marking the 44th president's beginning as the leader of the United States of America, Obama spoke about what he envisions the country should be like. This speech sets the stage for Obama to create an improved union. In the address, Obama highlights the successes in America's past using Stasis Theory's "cause" stasis and emphasizes new changes for the present through the "policy" stasis to underscore the necessary values for the fighters of a better America.

To begin, Obama explains why he is up there. He mentions that there have now been 44 presidents who have taken the oath, and that establishes his reason for standing in front of his fellow Americans. Furthermore, he expresses gratitude for the Americans because they were the ones who indirectly allowed him to step on that podium and deliver the address. With these acknowledgements, Obama has used ethos, which are features that makes a rhetor more credible, to establish his authority as president (Selzer 284). He establishes that he was the one chosen to be up there, hoping to gain America's attention for the remainder of the speech and their support for his plans for the future.

Throughout the entire speech, Obama also creates a concept pair regarding time. Concept pairs, as described by Scott Consigny, are related to the "Art of Topics" when someone uses the correct arrangement of a few ideas to produce a persuasive point (Consigny 182). The "past versus present" concept pair inserts a juxtaposition that helps Obama establish a point and structure his speech. Although he does not have a fix past-present-future structure, he flows from time to time quite well by extracting the successful aspects of the past and the present and explaining how to develop them for the future. In talking about the past, Obama praises the men

and women who have put in the labor and sacrificed to improve lives of future generations. He puts the work of the Founding Fathers in positive light, and he suggests the “we are ready to lead once more” (Obama). Obama believes that the past has led its people, and he hopes to continue that for the present. He wants to persuade America to retain the values and ideals that have made America rise up as a powerful nation.

This “past versus present” concept pair uses Stasis Theory’s stasis of “cause” to emphasize America’s past fighters and founding leaders. Obama mentions that Americans have been using the ideals of its forebearers, such as maintaining an “enduring spirit” and pursuing a “full measure of happiness” (Obama). The words “enduring” and “full measure” illustrate the reasons why America is at its current successful state. This demonstrates the stasis of “cause.” In Stasis Theory, there are multiple stages—fact, definition, cause, value, and policy—that are entered when discussing an idea (Fahnestock 428). In this case, the “cause” stasis helps Obama connect the past forebearers to the present because they are why America is the way it is today. Obama discusses a lot about the past and the impact forebearers had on the country, which may have weakened the arguments since this is an Inaugural Address that should highlight his hopes for the next four years—not the past. Despite that, however, this use of the “cause” stasis allows Obama to give the forebearers recognition for the building of America, which appealed to ethos to give his speech more credibility while setting up the transition into the present and future.

Meanwhile, Obama also wants modifications to the past in the “past versus present” concept pair by creating new plans for the future, which he conveys through the “policy” stasis of Stasis Theory. By jumping into the stasis of “policy” with this, he urges people to realize that he wants to help America take action. While the past has values that he highly respects, he does not believe that the current state of America is where it should be. He wants to fix problems such

as less creative and innovative minds, narrowed interests, and lowered confidence in people (Obama). Mentioning this during his Inaugural Address implies that his presidency is the time to make changes. Despite the remarks of critics who do not believe that his goals are achievable, Obama demonstrates his confidence through two sentences: “All this we can do. All this we will do” (Obama). The succinctness in these two short sentences helps appeal to ethos, giving the audience trust that Obama will push forward the modifications he wants for the future. Whether discussing the past that he honors or mentioning the present that needs changes, Obama successfully weaves the stasis of “policy” into the concept pair to persuade people about his desires for his presidency.

With the constant references to the past and the present, Obama uses the appeal of ethos with the word “we.” In talking about the past, he indicates that the forebearers have helped shape America, and he specifically emphasizes that “We the People” have continued to follow the forebearers’ ideals. When discussing the present and future throughout the speech, Obama uses “we” as a linkage word between him and his fellow Americans. Instead of using “you” or “I” to refer to the people or himself, he uses “we” to say that he and the people of America are one entity—they’re all Americans who want the best for the country. This is a powerful way of gaining the audience’s support with ethos. When he mentions that “we” have remained faithful to what the forebearers established, he uses ethos for people to agree that the forebearers deserve the recognition he gives them. In fact, the word, “we,” would appeal to ethos to ensure that Americans will agree with Obama for the rest of the speech because he is one of the many Americans he is addressing. The repetition of the word “we” makes Obama, someone who is serving his people, appear to be a credible, approachable, and understanding leader.

Using “we” also adds another layer of importance to the speech, for it invokes several uses of active voice. As mentioned by Dr. Annabelle Lukin, who describes the role of grammar in rhetoric, the active voice and passive voice can highlight the agency or story of a sentence (Lukin). Different voices and grammar structures can achieve various goals (Lukin). Whether Obama says “we are the keepers of this legacy” or “we will defeat [former foes],” he is certain that America will take action (Obama). The subject of these sentences containing active voices is the American population. In other words, Obama believes that the story of America is the story of “we.” Obama wants to address the Americans. He acknowledges America’s past by indicating that “we” have stayed faithful to their beliefs, refers to America’s current status by mentioning that “we” are still the most powerful nation, and says that “we will do” when discussing America’s to-do list for the future. He wants them to know that he will help shape the story of America.

With so many hopes for the future, there are cynics who question whether his changes are viable, and this prompts Obama to introduce a new idea of “cynics versus fighters.” Cynics do not believe in the revisions that Obama desires for his nation. Fighters are the people who have fought in the past, fight in the present, and will fight in the future. Although Obama does not use the concept pair of “cynics versus fighters” throughout the entire speech, which may weaken his claims about the two groups, he clearly expresses his hope to be a fighter. In order to support his case for being a fighter who will achieve the goals that he established, Obama appeals to logos and pathos. He uses logos, which are features that use reasoning, by explaining that cynics are unreasonable (Selzer 284). He logically argues that the cynics have forgotten what this great country has already achieved in the past, and he believes that they simply fail to understand the problems that the nation needs to address (Obama). Meanwhile, he mentions fighters and their

values. This appeals to pathos, which are persuasive features that creates urgency for the audience, for values and morals can resonate with the audience and cause it to take action for the changes Obama hopes to implement (Selzer 284).

Obama's choice to use pathos with the "cynics versus fighters" concept pair exemplifies an excellent use of the stasis of "value." In Stasis Theory, "value" comes before "policy" because it is necessary to set up the same values before defining policies (Fahnestock 428). Thus, Obama connects with the people based on morals anyone should hold and uses that to shape his policies for the next four years. By mentioning that the people of America should have values such as "kindness," "selflessness," "courage," and "willingness," Obama makes a connection with people based on basic morals (Obama). In order to be a fighter for a better America, Obama believes that these values, which America already contains, are incredibly important. He wants America to support him with these shared values. He even sets up his goal of his speech to be for America to develop better values as a nation. Through the use of ethos and pathos, the "past versus present" concept pair, and the fighters and cynics contrast, Obama persuasively introduces new values for America to embody. This will prepare America for the policies under Obama.

With these new values that the success of America relies on, there are also duties for the people. Obama appeals to pathos and logos to logically argue that people should retain the values of the country to attack every difficult task that is presented. The speech then goes full circle with the title, "What is Required, The Price and Promise of Citizenship" by mentioning that these duties are the price and promise of citizenship (Obama). The use of the word "citizenship" helps unite all of America to increase support for Obama. Moreover, by going back full circle and discussing what the title of the speech is, Obama presents the speech as a way of providing America with the values and duties that they should have for a better union.

By the end of the speech, Obama has reached his goal: to instill trust into his fellow Americans and communicate the expectations he has for his nation. This success was achieved through the linkage of the “cause” stasis of Stasis Theory that highlighted the past of America and the “policy” stasis that pinpointed the necessary actions for the future. By praising fighters in America as people who hold good values, Obama also use the stasis of “value” to further emphasize his point. With such a powerful Inaugural Address, Obama successfully puts Americans in the same mindset to stress certain values. Obama is on that stage as the new president to help his people change for the future. He wants people to know that.

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