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“American Resolve”: The Power Behind the Attentive Language of the President

2001 would go down in the history of the United States as the year of a national crisis. In the face of devastation, the nation stood strong as the president’s voice ignited unity and restored order in the chaos. The American people entered the new millennium with hope and optimism. The constant fear of nuclear warfare and destruction during the Cold War had disappeared as the United States of America remained the sole superpower after the dissolution of the Soviet Union near the end of the 20th century. A time existed when America seemed to be invulnerable and no one dared to lay their hands on the might of the nation. But this era of peace did not last long: just more than one year into the new millennium, Americans faced the cruel truth. On the morning of September 11th, 2001, the iconic Twin Towers of the World Trade Center became the targets of deliberate and tragic suicide attacks, causing them to completely collapse into debris after 102 minutes. Images of flames, smoke, and even people falling from the towers signaled an abominable crime in broad daylight, implanting a horrific scene in the minds of the people who were there to witness or were informed via televisions around the world. 2,996 innocent and heroic lives, in the airplanes, in the offices, in the Pentagon, and in the field of Pennsylvania were taken away by the Islamic terrorist group al-Qaeda in an organized scheme to destroy America physically and mentally. In deep sadness and disbelief of families whose loved ones

were lost, the American public and peace-loving people worldwide were desperate for an adequate answer to the question of how this country would recover from destruction. Following the tragic events, the forty-third president of the United States George W. Bush addressed the terrifying acts of horror in his televised speech, uniting the thoughts and spirit of American citizens under the common struggle. As the country's leader, Bush knows his responsibility to dominate public interpretation and response to the attacks. Therefore, President George W. Bush delivers a grieved yet unyielding and patriotic speech, utilizing effective rhetorical techniques, namely repeating a specific pronoun for effect, employing figurative language, and juxtaposing the American people with the terrorists in order to create a sense of solidarity, while restoring the firm and undefeatable image of the United States in the eyes of the heartless penetrators, of the American people, and of the world.

As a way to set up the speech effectively and make it memorable, President Bush employs repetition for effect throughout his speech in order to emphasize the painful and destructive nature of the attacks while demonstrating to the world that his country would remain united despite harsh challenges. At the very beginning of the speech, President Bush states that “our fellow citizens, our way of life, our very freedom” was being threatened. He then assures his citizens by saying that “our country is strong” and confirms that much of “our” civil infrastructure is in action or still remains functional (Bush). By repeatedly using “our,” President Bush is creating a sense of national unity, which is necessary during a time of chaos when division only hurts the country even more. The recurring pronoun establishes the impression that there is no difference between New York City and the rest of the country, or between the government and its citizens. Bush wants to underscore that everyone, including the president

himself, is in this together. The repetition of “our” successfully highlights how the attacks have caused significant destruction to not just the World Trade Center but also the social structure and the daily lives of Americans. Yet despite the loss, America still projects itself as a mighty and resilient nation of brave people who have strived together to protect their land of the free.

Bringing all Americans together as one serves Bush’s purpose of portraying to the country and to the world that the United States remains united after setbacks and implying that the country, as a whole, will continue to protect their freedom. As a result of the practical use of repetition in different sections of the speech, President George W. Bush reinforces the steadfast tone of the statement, accomplishing his goal to uphold the image of a strong and willful America in the face of devastation.

For the purpose of signifying and arousing the patriotic tradition throughout the history of the United States, and from there fostering unity among the people, President George W. Bush deliberately uses figurative language early in his speech. The use of symbolic expression is identified when Bush emphasizes that the terrorists can “shake the foundations” of buildings but cannot “touch the foundation of America,” or the attacks can “shatter steel” but cannot “dent the steel of American resolve.” “Foundation” and “steel” are used twice in their respective sentences, implying the unbroken and undying values, power, and will that the American people hold dear. The symbols remind the audience of how America is shaped the way it is: a country that strived from struggle, built on the basis of freedom and democracy, and rose with the steel that brought the country over the skyline to reach the height of mankind. By appealing to patriotism, Bush gives prominence to the fact that the United States of America has gone through many difficulties, and these dire moments of terror only make them stronger. By emphasizing on

the values that have made the nation, President Bush is also reminding his citizens that the country they live in is so powerful and irresistible because the symbols that might have been destroyed yet are still standing exemplify the legacies that have lived through the great history of the United States, and American people should embrace it even more. Following right after that, George W. Bush once again uses figurative language to highlight the values that America represents. The symbolic language can be identified when President Bush compares the role of the United States to “the brightest beacon for freedom and opportunity in the world.” It is generally understood that beacons are always placed on the top of lighthouses, so tall, shining bright and guiding ships to navigate in the night. Realizing the allegorical image of the beacon, President Bush utilizes it in his speech to imply America as the light that leads people to their dream, to the land of liberty and justice. By using the symbol of the beacon, Bush reminds people of the old time when people from all over the world would move from their native countries, leaving everything behind to come to this land where they were guaranteed a chance to succeed. And these people full of ambition and dedication were the ones that made America the land of freedom and opportunity as the president claims. Bush knows the history of his nation, and through the use of the historical symbol, he appeals to the patriotic feeling that he knows exists in the heart of every true American. During times of hardship, the power from triumphant historical narratives is a sharp weapon to unite a people and defend a nation; the heroic story behind the symbolic image of the beacon was chosen by President Bush as a way to inspire his citizens. Therefore, the appeal to patriotism through symbolic language reinforces President George W. Bush’s message of dedication to the glorious cause of the nation, the moral compass that has guided the American people through many trials.

Last but not least, another method used by President George W. Bush to assert the strong image of the United States against all enemies while continuing to create a sense of unity through the appeal to patriotism is by utilizing juxtaposition. Starting the speech, President Bush quickly identifies the fateful events as “terrorist acts” carried out brutally against the innocent “victims.” By mentioning the victims immediately after pointing out the terrorist nature of the attacks, President Bush builds the contrasting image in the mind of the audience. Contrasting the terrorists to the victims creates a narrative that America was the innocent target of a systematized plot by a vicious foreign force, which would wound the national pride of many Americans. Bush is intentional when he uses juxtaposition of two different forces because this has been the method used by multiple presidents before him to persuade the audience. For instance, Franklin D. Roosevelt juxtaposed calm America from the Japanese Empire and its dishonorable actions in order to convince Congress to declare war. Against any enemy, America has always proved itself as the superior side, especially after the victories in both World Wars and the Cold War. By juxtaposing the terrorists with the American people in order to create a new enemy, President Bush is recovering that triumphant image of the United States. In any difficult circumstance, American people have always demonstrated to the world that they are a united people when there is a common struggle, a common enemy. Bush knows this, and the juxtaposition bears the purpose of turning this psychological phenomenon into the necessary reality. Yet that is not the only time President George W. Bush uses juxtaposition in his speech. In the next section of the speech, Bush solidly states that the terrorist acts represented “the very worst of human nature” and that the penetrators will get the response from “the best of America.” The contrast between “the worst” and “the best” emphasizes the inhumane nature of the attacks, while hinting a

narrative that America is on the “humane” side of history, which is essential if President Bush wants his people to go on the same boat since Americans tend to believe that they are always on the right side of history, with logical historical claims. By juxtaposing “the worst” of the enemy with “the best of America,” Bush is creating a distance in the military strength between the forces, further confirming the well-known power of America. During a time when America seems to be weakened, President Bush realizes the essentiality to remind the world of the vigor of his nation, what has been proved by the truth that the United States was the leader of the victorious Allied forces against major deadly powers, let alone the fact that America was one of the strongest military forces at the time. Bush has a ground to make such a juxtaposition between his country and the terrorists, and he is able to strengthen the image of America even more. If “the very worst of human nature” consists of weapons and hatred, “the best of America” is made by the people that hold a strong belief in the values of freedom and democracy, and are willing to defend their values. President Bush wants to underscore this difference while highlighting the unity of his people with the use of juxtaposition. Appropriately, with the flexible use of juxtaposition, President George W. Bush has succeeded in restoring and emphasizing the military potential of the United States in the eyes of countries around the world, while forging connections among the patriotic people.

All in all, the image of unyielding and unbeatable America, built by a brave and united people, has been demonstrated to the world through the use of repetition of a pronoun for a long-lasting and solidary effect, symbolic language to represent American values, and juxtaposition between America and the penetrators of its struggle, in a firm and patriotic speech by the forty-third president of the United States George W. Bush. The persuasiveness of the

speech reflects the expected duty of a leader: to guide the nation to peace and prosperity not only through policy but also through rhetoric. It has been discussed that this is not the first time a president uses rhetorical language to achieve the goal of uniting the hearts and minds of the people. American people have “ask[ed] what [they] can do for [their] country” after listening to the inspirational speech of John F. Kennedy. American people have enjoyed a moment of national unity and pride when Barack Obama declared that “justice has been done” following the death of Osama bin Laden, almost ten years after George W. Bush gave his speech to the nation on the September 11 attacks. Being the President of the United States is not an easy task, it requires a bold and rigid voice to be spoken up in the right place at the right time. It was thanks to Franklin D. Roosevelt’s speech to Congress after the “Day of Infamy” that the United States and the world enjoyed victory. It was with Ronald Reagan’s call to “tear down th[e] wall” that people are enjoying freedom. The influence of the President of the United States' words has had a significant impact on world history. Therefore, understanding the rhetoric behind any president’s speech reveals the quality of their leadership and their knowledge, demonstrating what it takes for a person to reach such a great position.

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