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A Developing Nation: Reaching For the Stars

On September 12th, 1962 President John F. Kennedy gave a speech in Houston, Texas at Rice University. He spoke to all those physically present as well as the entire American nation and ultimately the world. His words echoed strongly a message that he wanted the people to take to heart; a message that transcended a vision many had never dreamed of. This message was that the United States of America would be the first nation to have a select number of its citizens sent to the Moon. Through his effective use of language, John F. Kennedy is able to convince the nation that dedication to a space program is necessary for the growth of America in his speech "We Choose to go to the Moon." First, President Kennedy convinces the nation he is knowledgeable of this subject by building his ethos. Next, he highlights the importance of certain aspects of this new adventure through his use of repetition. Moreover, Kennedy’s inclusion of imagery instills a mental picture of the benefits of previous accomplishments have done for the nation and therefore what the development of a space program could do for America in the future. Overall, Kennedy reveals his passion and commitment for the space program in his words, which gives the people of the United States confidence in the idea of sending a man to the moon.

To begin, President Kennedy sets up his argument for further development in a space program with the setting of his speech. Specifically, he uses the location where the speech itself is delivered itself to promote the validity of his decision to dedicate time and money to this new adventure. In his opening statement, Kennedy states “we meet at a college noted for knowledge, in a city noted for progress, in a state, noted for strength” in order to set the stage for a valid argument (Kennedy 1). A college is a higher place of learning, an institute where a person’s mind is encouraged to dream, and challenged to turn impossibilities into possibilities. Kennedy specifically chose to give his speech at a university, particularly one with a background of research regarding space in order to bolster his enthusiasm for development of the space program. With this immediate statement, Kennedy attests to the space program and his confidence in where it is being developed.

Moreover, Kennedy uses the influence of American history to gather support for his aspiration involving the nation as a whole. He references the vast amount of discovery Americans and the human race in general has made throughout the course of history in order to enhance his effort for new advancement. For example, he mentions specifically the inventions of the printing press, the steam engine, electricity, and television to convince his audience that new discoveries are being made at record pace and America will be next to add to list increasing list. As illustrated above, technology has only advanced throughout the years and therefore will continue to advance if the American nation supports certain goals for advancement, this particularly being space travel. By instilling in his audience a reminder that advancement is normal and routine for the American nation, Kennedy strengthens his argument regarding space travel. Also, Kennedy reflects upon an experiment revolving around the subject of space travel that has already been tested and succeeded. He states “transit satellites are helping our ships at sea to steer a safer course. Tiros satellites have given us unprecedented warnings of hurricanes and storms, and will do the same for forest fires and icebergs” (Kennedy 2). With this specific information, Kennedy’s argument progresses because he has comforted the American people by letting them know satellites in space have succeeded in the past, giving them encouragement that other experiments in space will as well. In summary, Kennedy builds up his ethos with reference to past accomplishments in order to voice a stronger, more convincing argument.

Additionally, Kennedy’s frequent use of anaphora stresses the importance of his words, revealing the key reasons for dedication to the space program. For example, he repeatedly states the whole reason he is giving this speech, while at the same time relating it to other simple reasons why we take certain actions. As he is progressing through his speech he relates to his audience

But why, some say, the moon? Why choose this as our goal? And they may well ask why climb the highest mountain? Why, 35 years ago, fly the Atlantic? Why does Rice play Texas?  We choose to go to the moon. We choose to go to the moon in this decade and do the other things, not because they are easy, but because they are hard, because that goal will serve to organize and measure the best of our energies and skills, because that challenge is one that we are willing to accept, one we are unwilling to postpone, and one which we intend to win (Kennedy 2).

With excitement in his voice and a firm goal in mind Kennedy inputs the concept that America will travel to the moon in the people’s minds. Furthermore, Kennedy stresses the importance of the United States being the first nation to set foot on the moon with the hope that Americans will support this urge to progress at a faster pace. He wants to be the first to attempt this experiment, to “do all this, and do it right, and do it first before this decade is out” (Kennedy 3). This constant enthusiasms and urge to excel is used by Kennedy to light a fire in the American people so that they will support him and those involved in developing the space program. As a whole, the use of anaphora is a key element in Kennedy’s speech.

Furthermore, Kennedy’s descriptive use of imagery adds to his argument by connecting goals of the space program to common everyday scenes. For instance, the use of a boat on the ocean is used to describe the action America is taking by putting faith into the space program. Kennedy addresses the nation and states “We set sail on this new sea because there is new knowledge to be gained, and new rights to be won, and they must be won and used for the progress of all people” (Kennedy 2). With the use of this imagery, the American people is able to identify with Kennedy’s intention and realize that for the nation, this will be a new adventure involving both risk and reward. In addition, the president refers to the space program in a way as a person that grows and develops. Since the program is a recent development, President Kennedy states, “the space effort itself, while still in its infancy, has already created a great number of new companies, and tens of thousands of new jobs” (Kennedy 3). This is a attempt at persuading the American public that investment in the space program can only lead to further benefits because it has already provided a multitude without being around a long time. Finally, Kennedy helps influence the American people with his use of imagery and persuasive techniques.

Overall, in his speech, John F. Kennedy is able to convince the American public that dedication and commitment to the space program can lead to great discovery and development for the United States through his effective us of ethos, repetition, and imagery. To emphasize, by building up his ethos, Kennedy gives Americans a reason to trust his instincts and wishes to send man to the moon. In addition, repetition causes the American people to understand the importance of this new development. Furthermore, the complex use of imagery allows the audience to foresee the road this advancement will lead us down through descriptive pictures. Throughout his entire speech Kennedy has been building up a dream for the American people that he hopes one day will be a reality. When people think of the moon, a beautiful picture comes to mind and people are in aw of its distance from Earth. However, the moon is also a symbol for hope and dreams as the common saying goes shoot for the moon. Well with this speech, Kennedy takes that saying literally and delivers his reasons for such thinking to the nation. All in all, President John F. Kennedy utilizes the use of rhetorical devices in order to enhance his argument and find favor regarding his argument among the citizen of the nation over which he governs.

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Works Cited

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