

An Analysis of the Rhetorical Choices in Obama's Rosa Parks Statue Speech

On February 27, 2013, former President Barack Obama delivered a momentous address in the National Statuary Hall of the United States Capitol, dedicated to Rosa Parks, the courageous African American civil rights activist. Parks' refusal to give up her seat on a segregated bus in Montgomery, Alabama, ignited a spark in the fight against racial segregation. In this rhetorical analysis, we will examine the strategic choices made by Barack Obama as he delivers his address, focusing on how he employs ethos, pathos, logos, rhetorical devices, style, structure, and audience awareness to convey a powerful message about Rosa Parks' legacy and the ongoing struggle for equality. Through his deliberate and skillful use of rhetoric, Obama not only honors the iconic figure of Rosa Parks but also inspires the audience to continue the pursuit of justice and equal rights for all.

Analysis of Ethos, Logos, and Pathos

In his address dedicating the Rosa Parks statue, Barack Obama strategically employs ethos, logos, and pathos to effectively convey his message about the enduring legacy of Rosa Parks and the ongoing struggle for equality. Firstly, Obama establishes his credibility and authority through his role as the President of the United States. He states, 'As President, I'm here to tell you that my faith in the American people is rewarded every day. But it's more than that; it's rewarded in particular when I see young people like the students here who, in their own ways, are making a difference' (Obama). By connecting his own position of leadership to the efforts of young people, he creates a sense of shared purpose and emphasizes the significance of Parks' actions in inspiring future generations.

Secondly, Obama employs logos by presenting logical arguments supported by historical evidence. He highlights Rosa Parks' pivotal role in the civil rights movement,

stating, 'By the time she died, she was hailed as a living saint. And I think it's fair to say that there are very few Americans who've had such an impact on the country where they've become a symbol as Rosa Parks has' (Obama). Through this factual reference to Parks' lasting impact, Obama emphasizes the historical significance of her actions and reinforces the importance of recognizing her contributions.

Lastly, Obama utilizes pathos by evoking emotions of admiration, gratitude, and unity. He acknowledges the struggles faced by Parks and others, stating, 'And we gather here, in a house built by slaves, reminding ourselves that even though our road has been crooked, even though it's been tough, we have always moved forward' (Obama). This powerful statement connects the struggle for civil rights to the broader narrative of progress and resilience. By appealing to emotions and inspiring a sense of collective responsibility, Obama effectively communicates the enduring significance of Parks' actions and encourages the audience to continue working towards equality.

Analysis of Rhetorical Devices and Style

Barack Obama's address dedicating the Rosa Parks statue showcases his adept use of rhetorical devices and a compelling speaking style, enhancing the impact of his message. One notable rhetorical device he employs is the use of parallelism. Obama states, 'But, no, this statue speaks for itself. (Applause.) It is a tribute to the American people, to the ever-expanding promise of this country we love and the ideals that still light the world. (Applause.) And we gather here, in a house built by slaves, reminding ourselves that even though our road has been crooked, even though it's been tough, we have always moved forward' (Obama). The repetition of 'no,' 'to,' and 'even though' creates a rhythmic pattern, emphasizing the message of progress despite challenges. This parallel structure adds a sense of unity and reinforces the theme of resilience.

Additionally, Obama employs vivid imagery to engage the audience's senses and evoke emotions. He describes the Rosa Parks statue as 'a tribute to the American people, to the ever-expanding promise of this country we love and the ideals that still light the world' (Obama). This imagery paints a vivid picture of America's values and evokes a sense of pride and patriotism. Furthermore, Obama's speaking style is marked by his deliberate pacing and pauses, allowing his words to resonate and giving the audience time to reflect on the significance of Parks' legacy. His measured tone and eloquent delivery contribute to the gravitas of the occasion, capturing the attention and respect of his listeners. Through the strategic use of rhetorical devices such as parallelism, vivid imagery, and a compelling speaking style, Obama elevates his address and effectively conveys his message of admiration and appreciation for Rosa Parks' enduring impact.

Analysis of Structure and Organization

The structure and organization of Barack Obama's address dedicating the Rosa Parks statue play a significant role in conveying his message with clarity and impact. From the outset, Obama establishes a clear introduction that provides context and sets the tone for his speech. He begins by acknowledging the significance of the occasion, stating, 'Today, we celebrate a seamstress, slight in stature but mighty in courage' (Obama). This opening line immediately captures the audience's attention and sets the focus on Rosa Parks and her remarkable bravery. Furthermore, Obama effectively employs a chronological narrative structure, starting with the historical background of Rosa Parks' actions and leading up to the unveiling of the statue. This structure allows him to guide the audience through the progression of events and emphasize the historical significance of Parks' actions.

Additionally, Obama uses transitions effectively to guide the audience from one section to another. For instance, he smoothly transitions from discussing the impact of Parks'

actions on the civil rights movement to the broader themes of unity and progress by stating, 'And we gather here, in a house built by slaves, reminding ourselves that even though our road has been crooked, even though it's been tough, we have always moved forward' (Obama). These transitional statements help maintain a coherent flow of ideas and ensure that the audience can follow the logical progression of Obama's message. Lastly, Obama concludes his speech with a powerful call to action, urging the audience to carry forward the legacy of Rosa Parks and continue the pursuit of equality. This conclusion reinforces the main message of the speech and leaves a lasting impact on the listeners. Through a well-structured and organized address, Obama effectively engages the audience, highlights the significance of Rosa Parks' actions, and inspires a sense of collective responsibility.

Analysis of Audience and Purpose

In his address dedicating the Rosa Parks statue, Barack Obama demonstrates a keen understanding of his audience and purpose, allowing him to effectively connect with and persuade his listeners. Firstly, Obama tailors his rhetoric to resonate with a diverse audience comprising government officials, civil rights activists, and members of the general public. He acknowledges the historical significance of the event and the weight it carries, stating, 'We gather here today in a country that dedicated a monument to the rest of us who've ever dreamed of being free' (Obama). By framing the statue dedication as a collective celebration of freedom, he creates a unifying atmosphere that appeals to the shared values of liberty and equality.

Additionally, Obama highlights the importance of Rosa Parks' actions in shaping America's identity, stating, 'Rosa Parks' singular act of disobedience launched a movement' (Obama). Through this statement, he positions Parks as a catalyst for change and emphasizes the significance of her actions in inspiring the larger civil rights movement. Furthermore,

Obama's purpose in delivering the speech is to reinforce the enduring significance of Rosa Parks' legacy and to inspire the audience to continue the pursuit of equality. He states, 'We, the people, declare today that the most evident of truths – that all of us are created equal – is the star that guides us still' (Obama). By aligning his purpose with the core principles of equality and justice, Obama motivates the audience to reflect on the progress made thus far and to consider the work that still lies ahead. Through a careful consideration of his audience's diversity and his purpose of inspiring continued activism, Obama effectively communicates his message of unity, equality, and the enduring importance of Rosa Parks' actions.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Barack Obama's address dedicating the Rosa Parks statue exemplifies his mastery of rhetoric and his ability to effectively convey a powerful message about the enduring legacy of Rosa Parks and the ongoing struggle for equality. Through a careful analysis of ethos, logos, and pathos, it is evident that Obama establishes his credibility, presents logical arguments, and evokes emotional connections with the audience. Additionally, his adept use of rhetorical devices, skillful structure and organization, and understanding of the audience and purpose further enhance the impact of his speech. By honoring Rosa Parks and emphasizing the importance of her actions, Obama leaves the audience with a call to action, inspiring them to continue the pursuit of justice and equality. Ultimately, his address serves as a powerful testament to the enduring significance of Rosa Parks' courage and the ongoing fight for a more just and equal society.