The Story of America’s “Greatness”: A Rhetorical Analysis of

President Trump’s July 4th Salute to the Nation

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**Introduction**

On July 4th, 2020, Donald Trump, the 45th president of the United States addressed his constituents in a Salute to the Nation. Trump’s address came during extremely troubled times for Americans after experiencing the death of hundreds of thousands to a global pandemic, racial injustice, police brutality towards marginalized groups and a collapsing economy. The president’s rhetoric holds intense meaning, given the situational circumstances of the speech, as well as taking place on the nation’s birthday. Beyond this, Trump, arguably America’s most disfavored president, makes strong claims about the success of the nation in reference to his administration, as he negates specific worldviews and holds steady with his narrative. Trump uses his dialogue in to unite the nation on a day that is typically celebrated and prideful but has a different tone in context of 2020. The president uses rhetoric that builds upon the concept of American exceptionalism, viewing America as a God-favored country, and attempts to unite America with this ideology, although the country is struggling with polarized views. Trump’s discourse on July 4th attempts to unite the American people and draw upon the successes of his presidency and past leadership as he tells the story of America – the greatest country on Earth.

This paper will attempt to work through important points leading up to Trump’s Salute to the Nation. It will draw upon the context of 2020, and more specifically the context leading up to the few days before Trump’s address. It will then look at past research on presidential rhetoric, Trump’s previous discourse and the ideology behind white supremacy as it works to draw connections between these previous conclusions in reference to Trump’s national address. The paper will then work through a methodological analysis of the Salute to the Nation, using Kenneth Burke’s pentad to examine Trump’s motives and goals behind this important speech. This paper will then critically discuss how Trump’s rationale and objectives may be misconstrued in context to the experiences of the country and the four years under his presidency, ultimately drawing the conclusion that Trump’s worldview is vastly different from reality. Overall, this paper attempts to examine how Trump’s July 4th rhetoric serves as a metaphor for his wavering leadership and how he ultimately attempts to tell a story of American greatness that cannot coexist with reality.

**Rhetorical Context**

On the nation’s 244th birthday (July 4, 2020), Donald Trump, the United States 45th President, addressed the country in a Salute. In history, 2020 will be marked by a global pandemic, country-wide protests, and dividing leadership, with the culmination of these reaching a pinnacle at the delivery of Trump’s 2020 Salute. It is through explaining the context of 2020 one can begin to analyze Trump’s 2020 Salute to the Nation. Without a core understanding of what those living through 2020 have endured, a rhetorician may struggle to find substantial meaning in Trump’s national address.

America’s 2020 struggles start to unfold in late February/early March. COVID-19, a newly discovered virus that originated in China, emerges across the United States after global stories of outbreaks for roughly three months prior. American citizens struggle to adapt to this tag-lined ‘unprecedented’ way of life, requiring them to wear masks routinely, significantly reduce in-person interactions, and socially distance themselves in-person to avoid the virus’ spread. By the end of March, the United States has nearly 130,000 confirmed cases, more than any other country in the world, but Trump continues to mitigate the severity of the virus, making statements about how COVID-19 will “go away” and “is something that we have tremendous control over,” (Stevens & Tan, 2020).

The week of May 25th added to the tension of America’s struggles when George Floyd, a 46-year-old Black American, was murdered on the streets of Minneapolis, Minnesota by a police officer over a potential counterfeit $20 bill (Cobb, 2020). This filmed murder re-sparked the Black Lives Matter movement across America, a movement fueled by the lack of justice for Black Americans in the United States. The broadcasted injustice of George Floyd’s murder led to nation-wide protests as other inequalities across the American justice system were brought to light. The pandemic and the Black Lives Matter movement became political phenomena, splitting the historic divide in American political parties even further.

Given the heightened tension across the United States, both from racial inequality and large death tolls from COVID-19, it can be inferred that Americans were expecting a very different message from their president than they received. Donald Trump’s 2020 Salute was more than just a speech to the nation; it was a celebration, paired with fireworks and unmasked attendees (Mark, 2020). Trump invited several hundred guests to his event, many of which not wearing masks and social distancing, in direct opposition of medical professionals and other government officials, like D.C. Mayor Muriel Bowser (“Trump ‘Salute to America,’” 2020). Trump took his celebration to the next level, including a milelong firing of 10,000 fireworks, called “the largest in recent memory” by Interior Secretary David Bernhardt, (“Trump ‘Salute to America,’” 2020). In direct contrast, most U.S. cities canceled or scaled back their firework displays, encouraging Americans to keep gatherings small or nonexistent given the heightened concern of COVID-19 (“Trump ‘Salute to America,’” 2020). Despite medical officials across the country pleading Americans to curb July fourth celebrations, and a remarkable record loss of citizens to COVID-19, Trump sent a strong message to American citizens by hosting such an event during peak transmission in the United States (Berry & Madhani, 2020).

Just one day prior to his 2020 Salute, Trump also held a rally and firework display in the Black Hills of Mount Rushmore, an area of American land sacred to Native American tribes. With similar response to the Black Lives Matter movement sweeping the country, Trump’s Mount Rushmore rally was met with resistance from protestors, many of whom identified as members of Oglala Lakota or Sioux Native American tribes (Bormett & Huber, 2020). Trump chose to press on with this rally, but then negated responsibility for the ever-increasing civil unrest among persecuted groups in America in his 2020 Salute: a position that is in direct opposition to his treatment of marginalized communities as seen at Black Hills.

While Trump’s 2020 salute took place behind the White House fences, thousands of Americans holding polarizing views gathered throughout Washington D.C. for the address. Many of the Trump supporters who traveled across the nation for the July fourth event made statements about the severity of COVID-19. Take, for example, Pat Lee, who stated that “POTUS said it would go away” in response to the pandemic and “Masks, I think, are like a hoax,” (Berry & Madhani, 2020, para. 13). Other Trump supporters, some of whom identify as Proud Boys, engaged in dialogue with journalists about the Black Lives Matter movement with phrases such as “When I hear about racism, I don’t see it,” or “This is not about racial equality, this is not about justice. This is about people who want anarchy” (Sadon et al., 2020, para. 41). Many Americans who disagreed with these viewpoints took to the streets of D.C. as well, such as Shyrah Perkins who stated “America is about stealing; it’s about taking opportunities away from people. It’s about taking freedom away” (Davies et al., 2020, para. 2). Donald Trump’s choice to hold a celebration among such a politically tense climate (both COVID-19 and Black Lives Matter) only further divided America, which can clearly be seen from the two polarizing sides that gathered outside the White House for his Salute.

Finally, Trump’s speech shows the differing perspectives of what Americans expected from their leader versus how Trump actually responded. While Trump endorsed large gatherings at both the National Mall and Mount Rushmore, many communities across the nation decided to hold off on celebrating the nation’s birthday to the same caliber as previous commemorations (Berry & Madhani, 2020, para. 26). Trump’s decision to move ahead with his July fourth celebrations in light of the nation’s struggle seems to exhibit a determination to return to normalcy, an ache shared by many Americans for a more accustomed way of living (Berry & Madhani, 2020, para. 27). In direct contrast, Joe Biden, the prospective Democratic Nominee and Trump’s opponent for the 2020 presidential election, offered a message of unity, hope and perseverance on July Fourth (Politi, 2020, para. 1). Biden released a video saying, “we have a chance to rip the roots of systemic racism of this country” and “live up to the words that founded this nation,” (Politi, 2020, para. 1). Trump on the other hand, chooses to ignore the racial tension and focuses instead on the American military and the success of historical American heroes (Politi, 2020, para. 2). The distinct difference between Biden and Trump’s rhetoric can be seen as a metaphor for America’s divide and the expectations constituents have for their president.

**Literature Review**

July 4th is a day that holds intense meaning, as it symbolizes the anniversary of America becoming a free nation. However, July 4th, 2020, painted a very different picture than past independence days, given the tremendous struggles Americans have faced over the year. Past research on presidential discourse, Trump’s rhetoric and the ideology behind white nationalism helps explain what makes Donald Trump such a unique and disfavored president, but how he is able to appeal to a certain type of American, nonetheless.

***Presidential Discourse and American Exceptionalism***

“American exceptionalism at its core is the idea that the United States is a singular, superior and perhaps even God-favored country in the international community,” (Gilmore, 2015, p. 303). This idea is accepted as truth for most Americans, whether it be due to public schools expecting students to recite the Pledge of Allegiance every day, American flags hung outside of houses as a sign of patriotism, or from the way American leaders address the nation. The idea of American exceptionalism has been deeply embedded in the psyche of Americans, existing even before the official foundation of the country,” showing how fundamental it is to both American constituents and their elected officials, (Gilmore & Rowling, 2017, pg. 46),

Past American presidents have utilized the concept of American exceptionalism for hundreds of years, in an attempt to “inspire, motivate, and ultimately achieve their political objectives,” (Gilmore & Rowling, 2019 pg. 392). As far back as 1801, president Thomas Jefferson evoked the concept of American exceptionalism, referring to the country as the “world’s best hope,” (Gilmore, 2015, pg. 304). More recently, Barack Obama spoke on the concept of American exceptionalism at the United Nations general assembly, stating, “Some may disagree, but I believe America is exceptional – in part because we have shown a willingness through the sacrifice of blood and treasure to stand up not only for our own narrow self-interests, but for the interests of all,” (Gilmore, 2015, pg. 302). The mythos of American exceptionalism has served as a driving force behind American identity, becoming an ideal that constituents not only expect from their elected officials, but demand, (Gilmore & Rowling, 2019, pg. 393). Americans so strongly believe in American exceptionalism that any presidential invocation that overtly mentions it will immediately resonate with the majority of the American people, despite whether fact can prove genuine truth behind this ideal,” (Gilmore & Rowling, 2017, pg. 48).

The concept of American exceptionalism is so deeply engrained in America’s core values and identity that a president would be naïve to not utilize such a concept. United States presidents will typically argue American exceptionalism in one of three ways: describing America as the greatest country on earth, as being singular among the global community, or as being specifically favored by God or a higher power, (Gilmore, 2015, pg. 304 & 305). Presidents utilize this ideal to not only draw out unity in their constitutions, but also to instill hope in their current leadership, leading to stronger American exceptionalism appeals in reelection years, (Esbaugh-Soha, 2010, pg. 5). “A president who is perceived to be insufficiently sympathetic or supportive of the idea of American exceptionalism, therefore, is likely to be regarded as ill-equipped or incapable of advancing America’s interests in the world,” (Gilmore & Rowling, 2019, pg. 396). Clearly, the concept of American exceptionalism plays a large role in presidential rhetoric, as it is an ideal that is deeply engrained in American culture and identity.

***Trump’s Rhetoric***

Unlike past presidents, Trump’s unwavering support is not fundamentally based off his policies, but rather, a charismatic persona and “the affective connection he created with his supporters,” by utilizing the promise of a greater America, (Rowland, 2019, pg. 350). Trump’s rhetoric resonated strongly with white working-class voters who were afraid of losing their identity to a demonized Other and wanted a president who would speaks as the “voice of Everyman,” (Penman & Cloud, 2018, pg. 109 & Rowland, 2019, pg. 354). At the same time, Trump was able to use his rhetoric to draw support out of white supremacist groups, like the KKK, by utilizing the concept of winking. “The purpose of winking is so the rhetor can speak implicitly about a discourse and still claim allegiance to a cause without employing overt language,” (Sanchez, 2018, pg. 49). Trump’s rhetoric has the power to be so harmful because he “presents the wrong kind of ideas to the wrong kind of people,” by giving an already hateful, power-hungry sector of the American population a platform (Penman & Cloud, 2018, pg. 116). Trump’s rhetoric is distinctly different from past presidents, as he creates a discourse that remains versatile enough to be understood differently depending on the audience, (Sanchez, 2018, pg. 49). To the average American, Trump speaks of a country that returns to old values and security, but for white supremacists, Trump’s rhetoric has the power to incite a dangerous movement.

Beyond this, Trump “enables and emulates [other] authoritarians with his rhetoric,” as some critics believe that the main motive behind his discourse is power-seeking authoritarianism, (Penman & Cloud, 2018, pg. 120). Trump feeds into the groups where he is able to congregate the most support, be that white working-class Americans who fear alienation and lost opportunities or self-proclaimed white supremacists who view Trump’s presidency as the “era of revenge,” (Rowland, 2019, pg. 349 & Sanchez, 2018, pg. 47). Trump’s ultimate goal with his rhetoric is “autocratic power – unquestioned, unilateral and crucially removed from the democratic process,” leading Trump to behave in the way he does not because it’s where his beliefs lie, but rather because it’s where he finds the most support and power, (Penman & Cloud, 2018, pg. 124). While Trump’s rhetoric was not aimed primarily at persuading people to support him, he worked to activate fear in Americans afraid of losing their sense of identity to some villain-like Other, and “in turn fed support for his message and campaign,” giving Trump the vigor and support he sought through the presidency (Rowland, 2018, pg. 372).

***White Nationalism***

“White nationalism in the United States is as old as the nation,” (Amaya, 2018, pg. 367). Despite the progress the country has made, one cannot erase the racist history of this country, especially when it is so blatantly supported in an ever-changing world. According to Hartzell, “white nationalism is a pro-white ideology that calls for a separate territory and/or enhanced legal rights and protections for white people,” (Hartzell, 2018, p. 10). White nationalism works as an umbrella term for all white superiority groups, who range in ideology but ultimately believe in building up the white man and tearing down the Black man. Due to the foundation of America and inherent white privilege, all white Americans benefit from white nationalism in some capacity, although acceptance of this fundamental truth is difficult and leads to rage at the mere suggestion of the possibility, a concept known as white fragility, (Kelly, 2020, pg. 201).

White fragility is based off of the threat of “displacement and replacement,” a core fear of white Americans that they will one day be outnumbered and replaced by a demonized Other, or any group of individuals that are not white, (Amaya, 2018, pg. 371). “White fragility is a mechanism by which white people insulate themselves from the charges of racism by withdrawing from people of color altogether,” (Kelly, 2020, pg. 201). White ambivalence, the idea that white history deserves to be celebrated and viewed as superior, but at the same time, not be characterized as white supremacy, has been able to maintain such a status of dominance and centrality by operating primarily under the radar, (Kelly, 2020, pg.197). Americans will attempt to evade responsibility for racism or even claim that it is impossible that racism still exists in the United States, arguing that America is a post-racial society because there are no longer overtly racist policies in place, like Jim Crow, (Hartzell, 2020, pg. 8). By utilizing the above techniques, self-proclaimed white supremacists and white Americans alike are able to “gain mainstream legitimacy and acceptance by branding themselves with language that obscures their connection to race and racism,” suggesting that it does not even exist (Hartzell, 2018, pg. 9).

The concept of white ambivalence and white fragility are taken one step farther with the introduction of colorblindness, the belief that “people should be seen and treated as individuals only, not as persons or groups whose identities or social positions have been shaped and organized by race,” (Hartzell, 2018, pg. 12). Colorblindness is used as a tool to argue that one does not gain privilege from being white in America, and rather that People of Color fail to get ahead because they do not take advantage of the opportunities presented to them, effectively negating the possibility of racism and white privilege in America (Kelly, 2020, pg. 199). By using rather level-headed arguments, white nationalists are able to frame this viewpoint as rational, genuinely leading Americans to believe that they live in a post-racial society, (Amaya, 2018, pg. 369). White nationalism in America runs deep and is a rather intricate concept to fully understand, but one that many white Americans refuse to accept as truth.

***Contributions***

The above research helps an audience critically understand the dynamic of previous presidential rhetoric, how this relates to Trump’s rhetoric, and how this potentially ties into white nationalism. Despite this, the majority of research presented above is from Trump’s campaign trail or was published before his presidency, missing the distinct component of how Trump ties all the above concepts together as president of the United States. In addition, the above research fails to take into account how 2020 struggles have impacted his ability to communicate with the American people. My research intends to draw distinct connections between Trump’s 2020 Salute to the Nation, and how this relates to past research on presidential rhetoric, Trump rhetoric and the ideology of white nationalism. By utilizing all of the above ideas, I attempt to draw conclusions on the connection between Trump’s ability to appeal to white supremacists using distinct rhetoric that is uniquely different from past presidents.

**Methods**

After critically watching Trump’s 2020 Salute to the Nation multiple times, I decided that the best way to analyze his speech was with Kenneth Burke’s pentad. Trump is trying to tell a story about the history of America and how the country is destined for greatness. He focuses primarily on a specific worldview of both past and present-day America and how these help to explain the successes of his presidency. There are key distinctions in Trump’s national address between the five elements of the Pentad, making it a realistic and objective method for analysis.

Kenneth Burke, who could be considered to be the most influential rhetorical critic of the twentieth century, developed a “theory of language and human action” he referred to as dramatism,” (McGeough & King, 2016, p. 147). This theory included the idea of the pentad, which Burke developed to “make visible how persuaders use language to change our beliefs and influence our actions,” (McGeough & King, 2016, p. 149). Burke did not invent the concept of the pentad, but rather, built upon the work of earlier critics to provide a more streamlined method. The pentad has been used by rhetorical scholars for years to criticize a wide variety of works, showing that it is a multi-faceted critique. Burke’s pentad has been used to rhetorically criticize different aspects of politics, from congressional hearings (Darr & Strine, 2009) to addresses to the nation (Ling, 2015).

Kenneth Burke’s pentad is well-regarded as an important and applicable rhetorical critique. The pentad allows us to understand a narrative in different terms as Burke “believed that analyzing the focus that a narrator placed on some features of a conflict over others could provide insight on the narrator’s perspective,” (Bowman, 2017, p. 2). Unlike other methods, Burke’s pentad breaks down a narrative in terms of five common rhetorical elements, the act, agent, agency, scene, and purpose, and explains how each of these devices interact with one another to create a singular narrative and story. The pentad helps us identify the motivations of the speaker and how he or she attempts to influence an audience to believe a specific narrative with the elements listed above. This allows critics to see an artifact in a new light by taking into account all of these pieces and ultimately allows for a more thorough analysis as it works to lay out the groundwork by critically examining the purpose and meaning behind the artifact.

This method works well for my artifact because it allows a critic to analyze Donald Trump’s speech beyond the obvious motives and goals. The pentad ultimately attempts to understand the motive of the speaker or the “underlying worldview and philosophy of the speaker and the worldview the speaker wants us to adopt,” (McGeough & King, 2016, p. 152). From a different methodological perspective, Trump’s speech and motives can be defined easily. Like most leaders, Trump attempts to depict America as the greatest country in the world, drawing upon past achievements dating as far back as the foundation of the country and more recent accomplishments under his administration. Trump also works to evoke a patriotic mindset out of the nation, which is in line with past presidential speeches. However, there is far more at play with Trump’s national address and the pentad helps the critic understand these other elements and describe them in a way that would make sense to an audience.

However, by utilizing a pentadic critique, one will be able to see how Trump paints a distinctive narrative that goes beyond the initial motives and goals of his rhetoric. Trump is not just addressing his constituents on the nation’s birthday, but rather telling a story of American history, one that discusses America’s past and present successes and denies American failures. By doing so, Trump is painting a picture of America that is in line with his worldview, a viewpoint that draws upon key American principles like American exceptionalism and further promotes a God-favored narrative of a country that is realistically struggling.

The pentad consists of five key elements: the act, the scene, the agent, the agent, the agency, and the purpose. These elements are not as simple as who, what, when, where, and why, but rather, take a critical rhetorical approach to understanding an artifact beyond what meets the eye. The act or the element that describes what is being done, is more than the mere act of giving a speech. Rather, it attempts to conclude what the underlying meaning behind the action is and from a metaphorical perspective, how Trump’s salute is doing more than simply addressing his constituents, as he paints a picture of American history and with it, how the American people have played a role in key American successes. The scene is a “focus on the physical or semantic environment or setting,” and once again, goes further than the backdrop the artifact took place in (Bowman, 2017, p. 2). The scene element of the pentad works to help the rhetorician understand the overarching environment behind the artifact and plays a key role in Trump’s 2020 salute as it attempts to explain the foundation of America. The agent is the character or person performing the act, which in this case can be seen as Donald Trump, but is actually more intricate then that initial thought. Rather, Trump utilizes a collective *we* to evoke other pentadic elements in his speech, making the American people – past, present and future – the agent in this speech. The agency is concerned with “analyzing the means or methods by which an act took place,” such as the instruments the agent used to carry out the act and what potential symbolism these choices represent (Bowman, 2017, p. 2). Lastly, the purpose of the narrative, arguably the most important part of the pentad, works to unpack the overarching meaning or intention behind the narrative. In Trump’s case, there are key elements that a rhetorician can derive purpose from, but ultimately, he is attempting to unite the American people with a distinct worldview.

While all elements of the pentad are important for formulating a critical analysis of an artifact, they do not all hold equal weight. This is where the concept of ratios come in, which is based off the idea that these elements do not exist separately, but rather are “interconnected in a dramatic structure of action,” (McGeough & King, 2016, p. 155). Regardless of which specific pentadic ratio an analyst chooses to focus on the primary goal of utilizing this ideal is to “find those key elements that seem to be the most revealing of a narrative’s underlying conflict and then specify which element appears to be a causal agent of other,” (Bowman, 2017, p. 3). In reference to Trump’s 2020 Salute, it’s key to hone in on the purpose-scene ratio, to help critically examine how the scene of American history is constrained by Trump’s purpose of uniting America. Through this brief explanation of Burke’s pentad in reference to Trump’s salute, the audience should follow the analysis provided in the next section and the following critique.

**Analysis**

This section will work to examine the rhetorical choices made by Donald Trump during his address to the nation. It will draw rational conclusions on the impact his discourse made on the American people and how his constituents may view him after such an address. By utilizing Kenneth Burke’s “Dramatistic Pentad,” this paper will focus heavily on the ultimate purpose behind Trump’s discourse and the way in which he intended his audience to receive this address. This paper will briefly describe all five elements of the Pentad – the act, scene, agent, agency, and purpose – as well, and ultimately draw the conclusion that the purpose and scene hold the most weight within this specific rhetoric. After these initial descriptors, this analysis section will work through the different ratios portrayed in Trump’s speech, ultimately making the argument, that through a purpose-scene lens, Trump attempts to tell a story of American greatness.

***Purpose***

In order to analyze Trump’s rhetoric, one must first work to understand the pentadic element of purpose, which attempts to explain the reason or rationale behind the overarching action. Given Trump’s title and the placement of the speech, as the leader of the free world giving a national address on the nation’s birthday, it can easily be inferred that Trump’s discourse is an attempt to unite the country. Trump does this in a congruent tone to previous presidential rhetoric, by drawing upon the greatness of America. On the nation’s birthday, the president reminds his audience of the struggles and sacrifices American ancestors endured to bring about this great nation, stating, “Thanks to the courage of those patriots of July 4th 1776, the American Republic stands today as the greatest, most exceptional, and most virtuous nation in the history of the world,” (Trump, 2020, para. 5). Trump reminds his audience that America is a God-favored, powerhouse of a country, drawing upon key American principles like American exceptionalism, when he states, “our movement is based on lifting all citizens to reach their fullest, God-given potential,” (Trump, 2020, para. 17). In opposition to Trump’s previous rhetoric as president, he attributes American successes, both past and present, to a united *we*, rather than an individualistic *I*. He credits the American people as a whole, inferring that all American citizens, no matter what may set them apart, played a vital role in America’s success. In a modern-day America that is struggling with strong divide and opposition, Trump attempts to unite his constituents with his rhetoric, stating, “Never forget: we are one family and one nation. This rich heritage belongs to every citizen, young and old, first generation American and tenth-generation American…we are American. We are from the USA, (Trump, 2020, para. 18). Through nationalistic ideals and a collectivist identity, Trump’s address to the nation’s overarching purpose is to unite a struggling America.

However, Trump’s address to the nation does more than just unite America. Rather, Trump frames his rhetoric to tell his audience about the historical successes of America and how, despite all odds, America continues to thrive, under both past and present leadership. He draws upon past victories, such as winning world wars and remaining a powerhouse in the international community, stating, “American heroes defeated the Nazis, dethroned the fascists, toppled the communists, saved American values, and chased down the terrorists to the very ends of the Earth,” (Trump, 2020, para. 6). By touching upon these difficult feats that America has overcome, Trump is drawing a sense of unity and patriotism out of his audience. The president shows that America has thrived and continues to do so both nationally and internationally. Trump takes this purposeful rhetoric one step further as he relates it to present-day battles, such as COVID-19 or the divided ideals of America, stating, “We are now in the process of defeating the radial left, the Marxists, the anarchists, the looters, and people who, in many instances, have absolutely no idea what they are doing,” (Trump, 2020, para. 6). Trump uses a combination of historical successes and strong American ideals to tell his audience that just as in the past, struggles may plague the country, but America will stand undefeated.

Lastly, and arguably most important, Trump uses his Salute to the Nation to remind his constituents that America will stand tall and continue to succeed under his leadership, no matter how unlikely it may seem in the current reality. As mentioned previously, America has faced intense adversity in 2020, which many have blamed on Trump’s wavering leadership. Trump reminds his audience in his address that things are not as grim as they seem, as there are always groups and individuals who attempt to burden America and tear down the country’s successes. Trump’s rhetoric attempts to bring out nationalistic pride in his audience, reminding them that although the country may seem divided or failing, history will not remember America this way. Trump specifically uses this portion of rhetoric to drive home the idea that there are groups in America who are attempting to lie, steal and cheat the country. Despite this, Trump reassures his constituents that these people will not win, stating, “We will never allow an angry mob to tear down our statues, erase our history, indoctrinate our children, or trample on our freedoms,” (Trump, 2020, para. 9). Overall, Trump utilizes this very impactful and metaphoric discourse to remind his constituents that America has survived dark times, and will continue to do so, as long as citizens put faith in one another and America’s leadership.

***Scene***

The Pentadic element of scene, the setting or background of an action, helps shape the importance of Trump’s rhetoric, specifically as it relates to the American people. Trump is using his rhetoric to narrate a historical arc, one that tells a story of American history and in turn, American greatness: “The incredible story of American progress is the story of each generation picking up where the last finished – linked by time, by fate, and the eternal bonds of our national affection,” (Trump, 2020, para. 21). Trump’s scene of American history includes the country’s present-day struggles and is marked by the driving successes the United States has seen despite all the trouble it has endured, which can be seen when Trump states, “throughout our history, our country has been tested and tried – but we have always fought to victory,” (Trump, 2020, para. 40). Trump uses the scene to remind Americans that the country has always won in the face of adversity and 2020 will be no different – now is not the time to give up or give in to those who want to see America fail – rather, this is the perfect opportunity to remind the world of past successes and how these wins will come to fruition again.

Trump’s entire address to the nation is shaped to tell the story of America and to ultimately describe the greatness this country has created, despite every possible failure. He draws connection to the success of past American heroes and modern-day citizens to paint this scene, stating, “All Americans living today are the heirs of this magnificent legacy. We are the descendants of the most daring and courageous people to walk on the face of the Earth,” (Trump, 2020, para. 8). Statements like this are consistent throughout his national address, which attempt to create a sense of pride among his audience. By creating a narrative that not only recognizes the greatness of past American heroes and leaders, but also metaphorically connects these successes to The White House’s current administration, Trump is painting a picture of American exceptionalism, one that is applicable to both historic feats and modern-day accomplishments. The scene ultimately derives most of its meaning from the purpose, as these two elements work together to convey Trump’s rhetorical message.

***Act, Agent, and Agency***

The last three elements of Burke’s Pentad, act, agent, and agency hold less importance in context of Donald Trump’s Salute to the Nation but are still worth mentioning. The act works to describe what is being done or created within a specific narrative. In relation to Trump’s national address, the act is in many ways similar to the scene, as the president is working to evoke strong American principles and ideals out of his audience. The act is more than just Trump’s ability to give the speech, but rather, the way in which he frames his rhetoric to bring about a specific worldview, one that triumphs in America’s successes and does not believe in America’s failures.

Although Donald Trump is the individual giving the speech, he is not the sole agent, or the person involved in the action and the roles these people play. Trump’s rhetoric is framed around the collective *we,* a group that includes Trump and his administration, but also historic American leaders, heroes, colonizers, and of course, present-day citizens. Trump intensifies this element of agent by drawing upon historic successes, such as when he states, “We honor the legends of our history, the glories of our founding fathers, and the giants of the past, and the heroes of today who keep us safe, who keep us strong and proud, and who keep us free, (Trump, 2020, para. 42). By consistently utilizing the pronouns *we* and *us* Trump is using his rhetoric to unite and show that the successes of past and present America are not the result of a sole individual, but rather a collective whole. All Americans have played a role in the creation of the United States as it stands today; therefore, all citizens are a key agent in Trump’s discourse.

Finally, Trump’s agency, or the means by which an action occurred, is built on his ability to hold a prominent position in the minds of his constituents and the world. He utilizes his platform as president, one that he has no doubt stretched the limitations of, to further his narrative as truth. In combination with the meaning that July 4th holds for Americans and the respect that the president typically receives, Trump’s narrative persuades the audience to believe his words as truth. No matter how many Americans actually trust the president’s salute, Trump is able to use this agency to his advantage and create a more influential narrative.

***Purpose-Scene Ratio***

Arguably the most important piece of Trump’s 2020 Salute to the Nation is his ability to connect his specific motive, or purpose, with the overarching meaning, or scene, of his narrative. This can be analyzed through Burke’s concept of ratios, specifically the purpose-scene ratio, ultimately making the case that how Trump’s audience perceives his purpose will end up shaping the success or failure of the scene. Trump’s national address is dependent on what the audience thinks his ultimate motives are, in this case, if they are in line with Trump’s ultimate purpose, that America is a powerhouse and will continue to succeed against all odds, then the scene, or America’s historical arc of greatness, will come to fruition. Consequently, if the audience mistakes his purpose for something else, potentially as a dividing rhetoric or a hero-like narrative, disastrous results may occur for the scene - the country. Trump brings this ultimate ideal to a head in his speech by showing time and time again that the scene is constrained by the purpose. Trump’s scene is the ideal that America is great, both under past administrations and his own, and anyone who says otherwise is attempting to divide the country. On the contrary, Trump demonizes those who disagree with him, referring to them as “anarchists,” “agitators,” and “looters,” who ultimately want to bring about destruction to America and American history (scene) by diminishing Trump’s attempt at uniting America (purpose), (Trump, 2020, para. 8).

One can use distinctly see how the Burkian concept of ratios can constrain the scene in relation to how an audience views Trump’s purpose. While the first half of Trump’s rhetoric focuses solely on uniting the American people, the difference in scene and purpose starts to come out in his discourse towards the end of the speech. Trump still works to unite America in the latter half of his rhetoric but does so in a way that demonizes those that disagree with him, drawing metaphoric relations to key American problems like a lack of justice and equality. This can be inferenced when Trump states, “No matter our race, color, religion, or creed, we are one America and we put America first. We will not allow anyone to divide our citizens by race or background. We will not allow them to foment hate, discord, and distrust,” (Trump, 2020, para. 19). This quote draws an immediate connection to the purpose behind Trump’s national salute, as he works to unite the American people, drawing upon historic and present-day ideals. However, depending on how the audience views the scene, or the history of America, one can receive a different tone from this quote. For American’s living within Trump’s intended purpose-scene, those who attempt to “divide our citizens” are hateful people who are working to discredit American successes, both in a past and present-day sense. However, for others, who may see the scene of American history as one that stole, cheated, and lied its way to success and international respect, Trump’s rhetoric is more so a threat to those who are attempting to enact real change. It is here that a rhetorician can see how the scene of the speech is ultimately constrained by what the audience believes the ultimate purpose of his discourse is.

This concept can be seen repeatedly in Trump’s discourse, as he continually draws upon past American ideals to evoke his purpose and scene in the audience. Once again, Trump works to demonize those who hold a different worldview, stating, “In every age, there have always been those who seek to lie about the past in order to gain power in the present. Those that are lying about our history, those who want us to be ashamed of who we are, are not interested in justice or in healing, their goal is demolition,” (Trump, 2020, para. 20). Trump is clearly showing with this quote that the scene of American history and American success is engrained in the purpose of his speech. If a constituent believes that Trump has disheartening or dividing interests as the motivator of his speech, this sort of rhetoric can be hurtful as it attempts to negate the experiences of many Americans. Trump takes this a step further by driving his ultimate purpose home, stating, “Our goal is not to destroy the greatest structure on Earth, what we have built: The United States of America. [It is] To build a future – where every family is safe, where every child is surrounded by love, where every community has equal opportunity, and every citizen enjoys great and everlasting dignity,” (Trump, 2020, para. 20). Clearly, Trump’s scene of a united and successful America is dependent on how the audience views his purpose – if it is congruent with his motive of uniting America, the audience will see those attempting to negate American history as a demonized other, if it is incongruent with his motive of uniting America, the audience will see Trump’s rhetoric as corrupt and pervasive – showing the incredible importance behind the purpose-scene ratio.

**Conclusion**

Throughout this paper, I attempt to understand the intended purpose behind Donald Trump’s Salute to the Nation on America’s birthday. The 45th president of the United States chose to address his constitutions during an intense year, plagued with a global pandemic taking the lives of hundreds of thousands, racial injustice, worldwide climate change, and rather wavering leadership. Trump, who could be considered America’s most disfavored president, used his address to the nation to promote his specific worldview, in an attempt to unite America during a very divided time period. Through a thorough rhetorical analysis utilizing Kenneth Burke’s pentad, I attempt to discover the purpose behind Trump’s national address, in addition to the different meaning that could be inferred depending on the audience’s mindset.

This paper provided a very thorough analysis of the rhetorical context of Trump’s speech, showing the reader that there were important implications behind the president’s rhetoric due to the circumstances surrounding the year. The paper also utilizes past research, specifically on presidential discourse, Trump’s rhetoric on the campaign trail and among supporters, and the ideology behind white supremacy. It is through this past research that this paper is able to combine meaning among these three themes, showing how Trump’s rhetoric differs distinctly from previous presidents and draws upon white ideologies. Furthermore, this paper worked through the different features of Burke’s pentad, critically explaining them as a whole and in reference to Trump’s 2020 Salute. Finally, the paper provided a key analysis of Trump’s rhetoric in relation to Burke’s pentad, ultimately arriving at the conclusion that the purpose-scene ratio works together to depict a 2020 that benefits Trump’s worldview. This paper attempts to bridge the gap between Trump’s 2020 Salute to America and previous rhetoric and ultimately explains how his original motives and intentions hold very different from how the American people view the president.

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