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Ronald Reagan and Challenger Launch

The Challenger launch was a notorious part of American history that will be etched in the memories of Americans as a devastating end to the spacecraft’s 10th mission. The whole nation was shocked as the spacecraft and its crew was disintegrated after 73 short seconds. After the launch, Ronald Reagan, rather than giving a report on the state of the union, decided to recognize the deaths of the Challenger crew. A careful examination of Reagan’s speech shows that his use of pathos, analogy, and anaphora, make his speech a proper farewell to the pioneers that were lost in the Challenger disaster.

Since the speech by Reagan was dedicated to the deaths of the astronauts, it was filled with pathos. The use of pathos by Reagan not only spreads a feeling of sadness throughout the audience, but also makes the audience sympathize with the relatives of the astronauts. While the whole nation mourns for the loss of seven great lives, Reagan acknowledges the fact that the family feels the full burden of the loss by saying, “we cannot bear, as you do, the full impact of this tragedy.” By bringing up the family of those who passed away, Reagan emphasizes the feelings of gloom that spread after the crash. However, rather than mourn the loss of these astronauts, Reagan decides to celebrate their lives. In his message to the schoolchildren, Reagan decides to make a shift from mourning to celebration by saying, “The Challenger crew was pulling us into the future and we’ll continue to follow them.” While the deaths of the Challenger crew was a national tragedy, Reagan’s major shift in tone was not only very motivational, but shows that the Challenger crew’s deaths will not stop Americans from fulfilling the crew’s dreams. Reagan realizes that rather than lament the deaths of the crew, the best way to remember them would be to continue their journey and fulfill their goals.

The use of reasoning by analogy in this speech full of pathos, was very subtle, but sometimes the most subtle things are the most powerful. In his speech, Reagan employs reasoning in order to make the Challenger crew more memorable. This was done by comparing the crew to Sir Francis Drake, the first captain to circumnavigate the world. Throughout history, Drake was known as a hero amongst the English as being the man who paved the English in to the New World. Likewise, Reagan is trying to imply that the Challenger crew are the men and women who will pave our way into history. While Drake’s frontiers were the oceans, the crew of the space shuttle Challenger’s frontier was the never ending space. The use of analogy is very powerful because of the implication that the challenger crew was equal in significance. This implication is brought upon when Reagan says, “He lived by the sea, died on it, and was buried in it…their dedication was like Drake’s, complete.” With Drake in every history book being the harbinger of the New World, the implication is that the Challenger crew and their dedication will lead us to greater fronts. While showing that Reagan mourns for the deaths of the crew, he acknowledges that their deaths will not be in vain, but rather a motivation for generations to come.

While the pathos and analogy were a very important part of the speech, the most noticeable aspect of Reagan’s speech would be his use of anaphora. Throughout the speech Reagan uses many examples of anaphora which gives the challenger crew a memorable farewell. For instance, Reagan says, “They had a hunger…they wished to serve…they served us all.” Keeping the general idea of mourning, this use of anaphora is also used as a tool in order to give significance to the lives of the crew. Anaphora is a great way for Reagan to express this very significance. The quote used previously, was used towards the beginning of the speech, where Reagan was still mourning the losses of the crew. As the speech proceeds, so does the general message. This also brings with it, more anaphora, each emphasizing a different emotion. Towards the middle of the speech, Reagan tries to give meaning to the Challenger 7 mission. He does this by saying, “We’ve grown used to wonder…We’ve grown used to the idea of space…We’re still pioneers…they were pioneers.”(Reagan) Once again the anaphora here not only shows the shift in message but also pulls the audience in closer to the meaning of Reagan’s words. The reason anaphora was so important in this speech was the fact that many people were listening to the live broadcast. The anaphora that Reagan used brings along with it some repetition. This repetition of anaphora makes the speech more memorable and influential in the speech. The repetition is spread throughout the speech in order the make the vital parts more memorable, all while making the speech sound more pleasant. Anaphora plays a vital part in Reagan’s speech as it acts as a way for Reagan to connect with his audience, in addition to changing the message of the speech from a more somber message to a more forwards-thinking one.

Ronald Reagan’s speech the day of the Challenger Seven accident is a very thought provoking speech which not only grieves the losses of the seven astronauts but also appreciates the hope that they left behind. Starting from the very beginning, the speech was intended to acknowledge the deaths of those who died in the space shuttle Challenger. However, the speech was also extended to those who were direct family of the astronauts, those who felt the most pain. Reagan then goes on to assure the American people that their deaths will not be forgotten and that their legacy will carry on. These points are all brought upon by careful use of pathos, analogy, and anaphora which made Reagan’s points even more sincere. Ultimately, Reagan’s speech goes on to conclude that the Challenger tragedy should be an inspiration to us all and that the incident should motivate us to do better things, as this would be the only way to give a proper farewell to the lives lost on the launch.

Works Cited

Reagan, Ronald. "American Rhetoric: Ronald Reagan -- Address to the Nation on The Space Shuttle "Challenger" Disaster." American Rhetoric: Ronald Reagan -- Address to the Nation on The Space Shuttle "Challenger" Disaster. N.p., n.d. Web. 26 Sept. 2014.