

English Language and Literature, category 3

Title: Unmasking the Power of Pathos: A comparative analysis of the abuse and misuse of pathos in American political rhetoric to vilify the East.

Research Question: How is Pathos used to incite anger, fear, and patriotism in Donald Trump's 2020 Anti-China Speech in the White House Rose Garden and Joseph McCarthy's 1950 Anti-Communist Wheeling Speech?

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Introduction

History shows numerous examples of demagogues exploiting the emotions of multitudes to mould perspectives and shape narratives. Through a masterful use of language, speakers can manipulate their audiences into adopting false beliefs and dictated opinions that often culminate in destructive consequences. At its most extreme, this phenomenon has led to infamous historical events such as Hitler's Final Solution and Stalin's Great Purge. It is said that humanity should learn from history and not repeat past faults, but to this day, unethical politicians continue successfully swaying the masses with fallacious and manipulative rhetoric.

A nefarious speaker that took advantage of this phenomenon was United States Senator Joseph McCarthy. In the scandalous February 1950 Wheeling Speech, the politician announced a list of 205 Communists who supposedly infiltrated the government, giving rise to the anti-Communist movement in the 1950s later known as the Red Scare. Since then, McCarthy became an emblem of this demagoguery. His use of radical political repression and persecution of Communists became known as McCarthyism, imperative to igniting paranoia amongst the American population.

Similar tactics can be observed in today's political scene. Notably, the American Anti-China rhetoric has developed into a persistent component of Western media and politics, characterised by accusatory and aggressive language to vilify the People's Republic of China. The outbreak of the Covid 19 Pandemic by early 2020 bolstered this sentiment, encouraging politicians to take harsher measures against China. Donald Trump, Republican President of the US from 2017 to 2021, actively voiced this rhetoric during his presidency, urging the US to see China as their

ultimate enemy, comparable to McCarthy's message regarding Communists. An important speech by Trump that clearly demonstrates this is the one given in the White House Rose Garden on May 30, 2020, where he blatantly affirmed China is the US's greatest threat.

Aware of the power of emotions in influencing human judgement and decision-making, both McCarthy and Trump skillfully and disconcertingly use pathos to appeal to their respective audiences and defame an alleged "enemy of the nation". The Greek word 'pathos' was a term developed by Aristotle as one of the three pillars of his rhetoric. He argues that a speaker must understand human emotions, their causes, and their effects, stating that there is persuasion "through the hearers when they are led to feel emotion by the speech; for we do not give the same judgment when grieved and rejoicing or when being friendly and hostile."¹

This extended essay seeks to answer the question: **How is Pathos used to incite anger, fear and patriotism in Donald Trump's 2020 Anti-China Speech in the White House Rose Garden and Joseph McCarthy's 1950 Anti-Communist Wheeling Speech?** As such, it explores both the parallels in the persuasive strategies in both speeches as well as the individual characteristics of the speakers. Both figures use pathos as a potent rhetorical device to evoke fear, anger, and patriotism, albeit to different extents and with distinct approaches, highlighting the pervasive and evolving application of emotional appeal in political discourse.

¹ Dunbar, Laura. "Rhetoric's Audience." *CUPID Blog*, Elon University, 18 Mar. 2016, <https://blogs.elon.edu/cupid/2016/03/18/rhetorics-audience/>

Pathos in Political Speeches

Pathos to Evoke Fear

The way McCarthy exploits the Communist threat in the US, leveraging pathos to instill a profound and immediate fear in the audience, is immediately striking. McCarthy opens his speech by ominously framing the Cold War scenario. He directly quotes prominent Communist figures and provides data on the exponential growth of the Communist movement, exacerbating the audience's existing fear of Communism. He manipulates statistics when stating that "in less than six years the odds have changed from 9 to 1 in our favour to 8 to 5 against us," equating the growth of the Communist Party to the US's decreasing odds for survival. Through these figures, McCarthy quantifies the threat American people – his audience – are facing, implying their country is in immediate and grave danger. Midway through his speech, McCarthy voices the infamous statement: "In my opinion the State Department, which is one of the most important government departments, is thoroughly infested with Communists." The structure used in McCarthy's speech is extremely relevant, as he deliberately chooses to state this only after he had developed the two other pillars of the Aristotelean rhetoric: *logos*, the appeal to logic and reason, and *ethos*, the appeal to ethics and credibility². Thus, even though it is framed as his "opinion", the audience is led to interpret the statement as a fact. Furthermore, considering the Cold War context and extensive anti-Communist propaganda at the time, the fear incited by this assertion takes over any rationality, reinforcing a collective paranoia that discourages any critical analysis of his words. Moreover, through the choice of the verb "infested", which refers to being invaded by pests or parasites,

²Aristotle. *Rhetoric*. Translated by W. Rhys Roberts, BOCC, University Fernando Pessoa,.
<http://bocc.ufp.pt/pag/Aristotle-rhetoric.pdf>

McCarthy not only hyperbolizes the magnitude of the Communist presence but also suggests they are carrying a contagious illness, metaphorically alluding to Communism as an infection that could spread in the US. The infestation metaphor is a recurrent trait in political rhetoric. Notably, it was used by Hitler when he described the Jewish people as “cancer”, constituting his rhetoric around the metaphor of parasitism instead of evidence, and by the Hutu-led radio station RTLM during the Rwandan Genocide of 1994, which characterized the Tutsi ethnic group as subhuman, often referring to them as “cockroaches”³. This rhetoric is used to fuel and justify extreme actions against a group by presenting them as an infestation that must be exterminated, dismissing the need for logical reasoning. In addition, McCarthy also employs different collective pronouns when referring to Communists and the American people, positioning “them” in opposition to “us”. In doing so, he portrays Communists and Communist sympathizers as un-American, subhuman and dangerous. McCarthy thus establishes Communists as “the Other”, a concept developed by philosopher Edward Said in his work “Orientalism”⁴. Said’s theory explains how the West has historically constructed the Orient as different, inferior, and threatening to assert its own superiority. Under this lens, McCarthy exploits this phenomenon to create a unifying enemy for his audience. McCarthy’s speeches are also marked by an authoritative, intimidating and accusatory tone, creating an atmosphere of fear and suspicion around Communism and making those who doubted his actions feel afraid to contest him. The fear of being accused of being

³ Cavazos, Richard. “Words as Weapon.” *The Journal of Undergraduate Research and Scholarly Works*, vol. 8, University of Texas at San Antonio, <https://provost.utsa.edu/undergraduate-research/journal/files/vol8/Richard%20Cavazos--Words%20as%20Weapon-Final.pdf>

⁴ Burney, Shehla. “CHAPTER ONE: Orientalism: The Making of the Other.” *Counterpoints*, vol. 417, 2012, pp. 23–39. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42981698>.

Communist themselves was one of the factors that led McCarthyism to dominate the US for four years.

In Trump's speech, the blatant use of pathos when evoking fear of the Chinese threat is also profoundly unsettling. In the first sentence of his speech, Trump decides to highlight facts that illustrate the stealthy, corrupt, and evil nature of the Chinese government, as evident when he states "China's coverup of the Wu Han virus allowed the disease to spread all over the world, instigating a global pandemic that has cost more than 100,000 American lives and over a million lives worldwide." The death tolls are used to underscore the damage of the pandemic, drawing attention to the massive scale of the loss and therefore amplifying the gravity of the situation. The mention of the "100,000 American lives" lost is particularly effective in appealing to the American audience, prompting the audience to connect personally to what is being described. Most of the people in the audience would have experienced first-hand hardship, suffering, and fear brought by the virus, and Trump makes them recall this pain, hence exacerbating the emotional response. This is further emphasized by the portrayal of the US as a victim of external violence, which enhances the emotional appeal not only by suggesting they were undeservedly harmed but also by positioning them as morally justified to take retributive measures against China. Furthermore, Trump makes use of opinion as fact and syllogism when he affirms, with an accusatory tone, that the spread of the virus was the result of a deliberate "coverup" by China. Trump leverages the audience's awareness regarding theories conjecturing that China developed the virus as a way of inflicting crisis in the Western World, thus making his statement more convincing. This frames China as ominously powerful and nefarious, making the audience fear being misled or betrayed in the future. This simultaneously constructs an image of China being fundamentally opposed to the

Western world and determined to destroy it. This thereby underscores the US's moral superiority, establishing a clear dichotomy between the two nations. As a conservative politician, Trump strategically employs the metaphor of moral strength, a concept in George Lakoff's "Moral Politics Theory"⁵. According to Lakoff, moral strength is the primary metaphor in the conservative moral system, where morality is conceptualized as having the strength to resist evil, a powerful force that must be fiercely fought against. Trump's rhetoric therefore frames China as the evil force which must be combated, underscoring the US's moral righteousness in fighting against that evil. Trump frames the conflict between China and the US as a moral battle between the bad and the good, respectively, thus exacerbating the perception of direct threat and the fear-mongering effect of his words.

Ultimately, the weaponizing of fear in political speeches is particularly disturbing as it perpetuates a cycle of polarization and hostility. McCarthy and Trump both use sensationalism and syllogism to amplify the fear of an Eastern enemy, undermining the audience's sense of rationality, therefore shaping their thinking more easily. The infestation metaphor is also recurrent in Trump's rhetoric, often describing immigrants and Communists as epidemic-carrying and subhuman. Nonetheless, there are differences in the extent of the fallacious nature of the syllogisms employed and the emphasis given to each. In 1950, McCarthy would have been the first to publicly make the accusation of Communism in the government, uttering his accusation as a statement in itself and thus enhancing its dramatic effect. Trump's accusation, however, was structured as an affirmation followed by facts, making it better supported and less emphasized. Given the repeated historical instances where

⁵ Lakoff, George. "Metaphor and War, The Metaphor System Used to Justify War in the Gulf." *The Washington Weekly Commentary and Dispatch*, <http://www.wwcd.org/issues/Lakoff.html#CONMOR>

speakers manipulated their audience, there is now a greater need for substantial evidence to support syllogistic and sensationalist claims for them to be accepted. Arguably, McCarthy's extremely unsubstantiated speculation would be an ineffective use of pathos today.

Pathos to Evoke Anger

To evoke anger towards the Communists in the audience, McCarthy expertly uses pathos when portraying them as the perpetrators responsible for robbing them of the peace they rightfully earned after the war. In the first part of his speech, McCarthy chooses to describe the peace Americans should be experiencing after the war, stating that “Five years after a world war has been won, men’s hearts should anticipate a long peace, and men’s minds should be free from the heavy weight that comes with war”. The alliteration in “World War has been won” brings rhythm to the phrase and emphasizes the dramatic effect of the sentence. The repetition of the voiced labial-velar approximant ‘w’ sounds bold and resonant, capturing the audience’s attention at the start of the speech. The needed articulation and time to voice the alliteration gives impact to the phrase and mimics the long, arduous process that was winning the war, thus highlighting the need for peace after such a long period of violence. McCarthy follows this with the anaphora and personification in ‘men’s hearts should anticipate a long peace, and men’s minds should be free from the heavy weight that comes with war’. The parallelism in the same syntactical structure emotionally engages the audience, reinforcing the fact that the audience deserves to feel relief and solace. The personification of specific body parts connected to emotions strengthens the pathos appeal, as it further specifies the emotions the audience deserves to be feeling but is not. Litotes is subsequently used as McCarthy says, “But this is not such a period—for this is not a period of peace. This is a

time of the Cold War". After skilfully cultivating emotions of exemption and ease in the audience, McCarthy brusquely changes his pathos approach, asserting that the "Cold War" renders such sentiments untenable. This likely triggers a sense of outrage in the audience, who had had their hopes for peace elevated by the speaker just moments before. When McCarthy tersely takes this away from them, the audience is left mourning their deserved ideal. The anadiplosis in "This is not a period" emphasizes the harsh reality the audience is currently facing, and McCarthy's use of simple sentence structures and low register makes this point perfectly clear to the audience. Therefore, the audience is led to lament what they could have had and feel anger towards those responsible for taking their well-earned tranquillity.

Trump uses pathos when highlighting how the US has been wronged by China, inciting intense anger in a patriotic audience. He states, "For decades, they've ripped off the United States, like no one has ever done before. Hundreds of billions of dollars a year were lost dealing with China, especially over the years during the prior administration. China raided our factories, off shored our jobs, gutted our industries, stole our intellectual property and violated their commitments under the World Trade Organization." Trump targets a nationalist audience with his pathos approach throughout his entire speech, continuously referring to the way China deceived the US. Considering that the US is culturally a very patriotic country, the American audience would be left indignant that another country managed to take advantage of them, hence triggering anger. The use of colloquialism in "ripped off" emphasizes the betrayal of the Chinese whilst establishing Trump as a man of the people, using informal and fierce language to make his speech relatable. Furthermore, the repetition of the collective pronoun "our" in the listing of what China did to the US further enforces this sense of community and engagement with the audience, making the public feel they were each individually wronged

by China. This also constructs China as Said's concept of "the Other", ultimately positioning China in opposition to the US. Moreover, the verbs "raided", "stole", "gutted", and "violated" all connote criminal activities, thus portraying China as unethical and corrupt, further establishing it as a villain that must be defeated. Trump also scapegoats prior presidents for America's grievances, saying China was only able to "get away with" all this because of "past presidents". This also supports Lakoff's concept of "Strict Father" as a conservative moral metaphor, which is based on the belief that authority figures are morally obliged to impose and enforce strict rules to develop the self-reliance and self-discipline of the nation⁶. Trump thereby scorns the leaders who did not adopt this moral metaphor, blaming them for the harm done by China and presenting himself as the 'strict father' who, if elected, will not allow China to deceive and harm the US again. Thus, the audience is also left angry at past politicians who allowed the Chinese to exploit their country. This aligns with the context of upcoming elections as Trump will be looking to raise support for his re-election campaign.

In essence, evoking anger in an audience through pathos makes the audience more connected to the issue, elevating their emotional engagement. Both Trump and McCarthy skilfully make use of this to vilify the East, however, the way in which these speakers evoke this sentiment is different: McCarthy opts for appealing first to a positive emotion of relief and subsequently taking it away, blaming it on Communists, whilst Trump chooses to immediately appeal to rage through listing how China has wronged the USA. The choice of a more direct approach by Trump could be attributed to the context of presidential elections, as one of the main assets of Trump's campaign was indeed his aggressive approach to the Chinese threat. Moreover, McCarthy's tactics can be

⁶ Lakoff, George. "Metaphor, Morality, and Politics, or, Why Conservatives Have Left Liberals in the Dust.", <https://george-lakoff.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/metaphor-morality-and-politics-or-why-conservatives-have-left-liberals-in-the-dust.pdf>

seen as melodramatic and overly theatrical to a modern audience, who have been brought to adopt a more sceptical mindset when listening to politicians.

Pathos to Evoke Patriotism

To deepen the emotional response of the audience and build a sense of pride and community, McCarthy adeptly uses pathos to leverage American patriotism, thereby compelling resolute support. Considering that McCarthy's audience was completely American, which is a culturally nationalistic country, just after their victory in World War II, the feeling of national pride was especially prominent. McCarthy uses this sentiment in his favour when he states, "At war's end we were physically the strongest nation on Earth and, at least potentially, the most powerful intellectually and morally. Ours could have been the honour of being a beacon in the desert of destruction, a shining, living proof that civilization was not yet ready to destroy itself. Unfortunately, we have failed miserably and tragically to arise to the opportunity." The use of the superlatives "strongest" and "most powerful" when describing the US's position after the war, combined with the affirmation that the country had the opportunity to be an example to the world makes the audience feel proud of being American. This use of language to evoke patriotism can be interpreted as a form of cultural hegemony. This concept was coined by Antonio Gramsci⁷ to explain how the ruling class managed to impose their worldview upon all citizens. McCarthy reinforces the cultural value that the East is a threat, which aligns with his political agenda. This is further enhanced by the homoioteleuton observed in the repeated endings of the adverbs

⁷ T. J. Jackson Lears. "The Concept of Cultural Hegemony: Problems and Possibilities." *The American Historical Review*, vol. 90, no. 3, 1985, pp. 567–93. JSTOR, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1860957>.

“physically”, “potentially”, “intellectually” and “morally”, which emphasizes the vast potential of the country to lead all these different aspects. The visual imagery in the metaphor “beacon in the desert of destruction” makes the audience clearly picture America’s great potential, hyperbolically describing it as a utopian oasis amidst a chaotic world. This also implies McCarthy has the same values as the audience, which increases his support. After a full stop, he adds that “we failed miserably and tragically”, blaming the American population, including himself, for the reality of the country not being what he previously described. The use of those specific adverbs evokes a sense of shame in the audience, who would presumably despise hearing that their country was not the greatest. This sentiment is made even more impactful because of the appeal to patriotism in the previous phrases of the speech, leaving the audience to think they let their country down by not protecting it against Communism. This further incentivizes the audience’s urge to act and join McCarthy to save their country.

Trump also manipulates the sentiment of patriotism to bolster his support through pathos by appealing to shared values and emphasizing his policy of “Putting America First”. Trump was steadfast about his nationalistic policy, and this was one of the main successes of his presidential campaign, thus his speeches recurrently highlight his defense of national interests. Throughout the speech, Trump describes the US’s current problems and his proposed solutions, for instance when he states, “For years, the government of China has conducted illicit espionage to steal our industrial secrets, of which there are many. Today, I will issue a proclamation to better secure our nation’s vital university research and to suspend the entry of certain foreign nationals from China who we have identified as potential security risks.” The affirmation that China worked stealthily to “steal our industrial secrets” highlights the value of American assets, tapping into the pride Americans feel for their research achievements. The fact that the Chinese are conducting “illicit espionage”

to steal this core aspect of American identity evokes a patriotic outrage in the audience, who feel personally attacked by this act. Furthermore, the use of the collective pronoun “our” makes the threat feel direct and personal to the audience. This also creates a sense of unity and shared responsibility to protect their country. Moreover, the use of the problem-solution structure in the way Trump subsequently states he would, on that day, issue an action to solve this, makes him appear decisive and efficient, whose greatest goal is to defend the country, thus relating to the audience’s own patriotic feelings. Additionally, by describing the Chinese as “potential security risks”, Trump reinforces that there is an imminent threat to their country, thus when he introduces an immediate solution to the issue, a patriotic audience feels reassured that steps are being taken to protect their country. This works to persuade the audience that the actions proposed by Trump are cogent and imperative.

Evidently, in a country where national pride is so fervent, appealing to a sense of patriotism is incredibly powerful. Patriotism is evoked in both speeches by appealing to shared values and ideals, leveraging the sentiment of American superiority. There is a clear parallel in the way both speakers appeal to patriotism, as each refers to the infiltration and espionage of a national enemy. However, McCarthy’s strategy is to first appeal to national pride and, subsequently, shame, creating a rhetorical feint in his speech. Trump, on the other hand, is more straightforward and appeals to patriotism through strong, affirmative and direct language. He focuses on issues the US is facing and how he as president is planning to fix them, showing that his priority is indeed “putting America first”. This difference is understandable considering the context of the speakers – Trump, as president, had the power to address the Chinese issue with immediate action, so his aim was not to persuade the audience to act but rather to maintain popular support. Contrastingly,

McCarthy was a senator and could not conduct actions against Communism without persuading people of the Communist threat.

Conclusion

As Aristotle and many who came after him would argue, pathos is an irreplaceable part of rhetoric. When looking to persuade the masses verbally, it is imperative that speakers appeal to the emotions of their audience, as they are the principal guides of people's actions. Making an audience feel what you want involves ample skill and careful manipulation of language through an array of literary devices and rhetorical techniques. Although pathos initially referred mainly to appealing to pity and sympathy, speakers throughout history have experimented with manipulating an array of emotions in their speeches to engage and compel their audiences.

This investigation has allowed me to explore how McCarthy and Trump used pathos to appeal to fear, anger, and patriotism in their speeches with the finality of setting the audience against a specific group of people. Their rhetoric shares characteristics, including the use of syllogism, sensationalism, hyperboles, and collective pronouns. As populist politicians, both their speeches are also characterised by an aggressive and urgent tone when referring to “enemies of the nation”, instilling outrage, fear, and a sense of duty within the American public. The divergence in the time and context of their speeches accounts for differences in some of their tactics, especially considering the increasing scepticism of the public regarding the ethics of using pathos. It is evident that McCarthy’s approach is much more dramatic and sensationalist, whilst Trump’s is more assertive and grounded.

To present a focused analysis within the word limit, I confined this investigation to one speech from each speaker. While this allowed me to develop a more comprehensive analysis of language, this choice limited my ability to explore each speaker's stylistic patterns and identify recurrent uses of pathos across multiple speeches. Focusing on only two speakers also limited the scope of my analysis, inhibiting broader insights into rhetorical trends in political discourse. Moreover, emotional appeal is inherently subjective, and individual responses might differ based on values, experiences, and personal beliefs. This is especially significant in political rhetoric, where responses strongly diverge depending on political alignment. Thus, it would be pertinent to also investigate how political bias influences the impact of pathos. Furthermore, expanding the analysis to include ethos and logos, alongside a greater array of critical theories, would provide a fuller picture, though such expansion was constrained by the word limit.

As history continues to show that politicians cannot always be trusted, the appeal to pathos is facing changes. Amidst heightened suspicion and distrust, speakers must modify their strategies for swaying the public, ensuring their discourse avoids excessive sensationalism that undermines their credibility. Ideally, this evolution will eventually culminate in a future where audiences are less susceptible to rhetorical fallacies and speakers are held to higher standards of truthfulness, though time will be the ultimate judge of our progress.

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