

BHARDVAJ PATEL

An Apology for Apologies

I. Address

To the President Donald Trump, the elected officials of the House and Senate, and to the people of the United States, I, Bhardvaj Patel, son of Ravindrakumar and grandson of Manibhai, natives of Gujarat in India, present this address and petition on behalf of all those citizens of this and all democratic nations who are inadequately educated for the purpose of public participation in the governance of our great political bodies.

II. Justice Demanded

Democracy, as a political framework, requires of its citizenry their participation in directing the course of governance through the ore of wisdom forged in the flames of argumentation and tempered by the training of eloquent speech. Rhetoric and, more specifically, the apologetic genre, in the Greek sense of a defense, has been discarded in recent years as the primary vehicle by which we, the people, achieve the oratory and inter-subjective reasoning skills necessary to deliberate publicly and defend our varied positions. As such, we have been left defenseless against the mechanisms of the media and excluded from the political arena for a lack of ability to engage either on firm footing. Do you then, as our elected representatives and thus accountable to our will, hear this address and honor it? If you are rightly to be called our leaders and upholders of these democratic institutions, there should be no doubt of it. We have come, neither to depose nor threaten you, nor impress nor bribe you, but to urge your impartial investigation into, and reintegration of, the disavowed methods of our education for their link to our lack of adequate capability in the public forum. For as we run our current course, our freedoms and responsible involvement in our institutions rapidly decline and we are stripped of our defense against such encroachments that run counter to the foundational principles of our great nation.

III. The Historical Basis of Our Claim

To reason against any claim that our position is errant or invalid, we demand an examination of the history from which we derive our institutions and the behavior and education proper to the citizens that participate in them. Beginning with the Greeks, to whom we owe the debt of our democracy, it should be noted what role rhetoric and the apology played in thoughtful public involvement. The education of the Greek citizen in Athens was based in the application of practical wisdom to the sphere of the polis. In this sense, the content and delivery of public speech was directed at a particular audience in a particular context, and not abstracted from that which grounded the people in the process of self-governing. The purpose of rhetorical practice was tied to the execution of the duties of the citizenry in the decisions of the court and the formation of policy. To the extent that any political involvement was marked by the ability to mount a defense for a given position, and required that education be directed toward this end, the functioning of the citizen as a political agent came first and foremost, leaving other specialized concerns, such as mathematics and poetry, as secondary. This preparation of the average person as a political agent is that from which we derive the force of our current system. The direct democracy characteristic of the Greeks, where each citizen shares in a one to one relationship between their own concerns and that of the government, differs from the representative system we hold to through choosing officials to mediate between our concerns and that of the government, but the emphasis on the ability of citizens to engage thoughtfully in the ordering of our society remains central to our system. Yet, more and more, we find ourselves divorced from the efficacy of our speech in interacting with our democracy.

IV. The Apologetic Genre in Defense of Christianity

Beyond the Greeks, we find the apologetic genre taken up by the Early Christians as a testament to the power of this form of education in mediating the conflict between various beliefs and their resolution. Christianity owes to rhetorical training in the apologetic genre a great debt for its existence. An education in apologies was key to the survival of a people and their navigation of the Roman Empire, where again we find institutions which we have borrowed for our own government. Without the capability of the defense aimed at the leaders of the empire, early Christians would have been swept under the tide of Roman rule with little means to negotiate their existence under the banner of their differences. The crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth would be little more than a historical footnote, if noted at all, without the relentless apologetic stands taken against the early persecutors of Christians by the most active of his followers. Negotiation of vastly different belief systems among people who share a political system is, in many ways, a cornerstone of the philosophical impetus that burgeoned into what we now call the United States. Without the means to conduct these confrontations, nurtured in the public through education, these conflicts are left to be resolved by the blunt force of a blind majority. A democracy abdicates its structure as a rule by the people in such a situation, and as time presses forward, such

situations are bound to repeat on larger and bloodier platforms rather than recede into history. The nature of the conflict between early Christians and the Roman Empire is telling of the necessity of such an education in the apologetic genre, as without such an education being present in those that mounted the defense for Christians, there would be little case in the history and genesis of our political body for the plurality of positions honored in our United States.

V. Our Withered Rhetoric and the Death of Democracy

When wisdom is no longer directed toward the general good, but to increasingly specialized occupation, we become bound to lofty theoretical concerns and untethered from that which grounds us practically as a people.

WHEN MADNESS MEETS OUR LEADERS' LIPS, WE REMAIN LISTLESS
FOR A LACK OF PROSE TO SPEAK TRUTH TO POWER.

WHEN THE MEDIA IS LEFT TO SPEAK FOR US, WE BECOME
COMPLICIT IN OUR INABILITY TO ANNOUNCE OURSELVES AS
MEMBERS OF OUR POLITICAL BODY.

WHEN RHETORIC IS DISAVOWED AS A TOOL OF TRAINING IN
ELOQUENT ARGUMENT AND SENTIMENT, WE ARE FORCED TO
LISTEN, MUTED IN OUR PRESENCE AS CITIZENS.

WE ARE NEITHER WHOLLY APATHETIC NOR UNINTELLIGENT, BUT
UNINFORMED OF OUR ABILITY TO PUT POLITICIANS AND POLICIES
ON TRIAL AS WE ARE BARRED FROM THE COURTROOMS OF PUBLIC
DISCOURSE.

WE ARE TAUGHT IN A TRADITION HELD TO BE THE BACKBONE
OF THE CIVILIZATION WE HAVE BEEN BORN INTO, YET WE ARE
BARRED FROM EXERCISING A PIVOTAL COMPONENT OF THE
EDUCATION CENTRAL TO THAT TRADITION.

WE LEARN OF THE GREAT ORATORS, TO WHOM WE OWE THE DEBT
OF THE PROMISE OF OUR AGE, YET WE ARE GIVEN NO MEANS BY
WHICH TO FOLLOW IN THEIR FOOTSTEPS.

WE ARE A BUDDING GENERATION CHARGED WITH SECURING
THE FUTURE OF OUR NATION, LEFT TO ROT ON A WITHERING
PLATFORM OF SECONDHAND PLATITUDES.

WE YEARN FOR OUR OWN WORDS TO CAPTURE OUR OWN ELUSIVE
HORIZON, BUT SETTLE FOR THE VERBAL SEDIMENT AT THE
BOTTOM OF THE GLASS HANDED TO US BY OUR INSTITUTIONS.

WE ARE TOLD TO PARTICIPATE, YET OUR ONLY MEANS OF PARTICIPATION IS A VOTE ON MATTERS THAT ARE FRAMED FOR US RATHER THAN BY US, OR THROUGH SPEECH THAT MUST BE LIMITED TO 160 CHARACTERS, FLASHING AS QUICKLY OUT OF RELEVANCE AS THE WORDS APPEAR.

WE ARE TOLD TO PARTICIPATE, BUT OUR DISCUSSIONS ARE NEGLECTED FOR OUR LACK OF PROWESS IN THE ARENA OF INFORMED PUBLIC DEBATE.

To this, our reply is a demand for the reformation of our education system towards these ends for which we've been left on the wayside of opportunity.