

# A Study of Persuasion in President Reagan's Second Inaugural Address

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## I. Introduction

The purpose of this study is to analyze the art of persuasion in the second inaugural address delivered by President Reagan on January 21 in 1985. The writer analyzed the speaker's background, occasion, source materials and three modes of proof of the speech.

## II. Background of the Speaker

Ronald Wilson Reagan was born in Tampico in Illinois on February 6 in 1911. He learned the skill of acting and speech from his mother in his childhood. Mrs. Reagan, in fact, arranged regular readings of plays and stories for the various ladies societies in Tampico and the other Illinois towns in which the Reagans lived. Ronald was under the instruction of B.J. Fraser and studied the fundamentals of drama in his high school days. <sup>(1)</sup>

At Eureka College, Ron majored in economics. In between sports and classes he joined the campus dramatic society and enrolled in the dramatic course under Miss Ellen Marie Johnson, who saw talent in the tall, handsome, young man with the resonant, baritone voice. The high point of his collegiate dramatic career came in the annual one-act play contest sponsored by North-western University. After graduating from the college, he decided to go into show business and became a sports announcer at station WOC. Reagan rose swiftly to the top of his profession, becoming one of the best known sports announcers in the Midwest. His rise was boosted considerably when WOC merged with its sister station,

WHO, to become WHO Des Moines, NBC's key station in the Corn Belt. But he was having problems; he was not good at reading manuscripts. When he tried to read the commercials, his voice became stiff and wooden. The challenge was just what he needed. With his adrenalin flowing freely, he read every piece of copy they handed him like an old pro. <sup>(2)</sup>

In 1937, he went to Hollywood and became a screen actor. He appeared in fifty-four long pictures and eight short pictures from the age of twenty-seven to fifty-four. In 1940, Miss Jane Wyman, a screen actress, and Ron were married. He played an important role as president of the Screen Actors Guild as well as an actor. They were divorced on June 28 in 1948, after eight years of marriage. During the divorce proceedings in 1948, Miss Wyman stated that she did not share her husband's intense interest in politics and the Screen Actors Guild. Thereafter he got married to Nancy Davis in 1952 and he was elected Governor of California in 1966. Nancy Reagan was a good political partner for Ron. He accepted the Republican's nomination for President on July 1 in 1980, then he took the Oath of Office as 40th President of the United States.

As the writer mentioned above, Reagan trained his techniques and advanced further through many experiences and speech trainings. Some effective elements which influenced his skill as a great orator were: (1) The skill of acting and speech given by his mother; (2) Things he acquired through studying the fundamentals of drama in his high school days; (3) Voice and action training in the campus dramatic society and the dramatic course in his college days; and (4) Speech training and experience as a sports announcer.

### III. Occasion of the Speech

Ronald Reagan, President of the United States, delivered the second inaugural address to the American people on January 21 in 1985. Wide World Photos Inc.(WWF) broadcast the scene when Reagan, with first

lady Nancy Reagan looking on, took the Oath of Office for his second term from Chief Justice Warren Burger. Reagan, aged 74, was the oldest president in the American history. Newsweek described it in the following manner:

Americans liked Ronald Reagan the man, almost to the point of indulgence. They liked his seeming innocence, his sense of command, the confidence that borders on the happy-go-lucky. They did not forget the humor and grace with which he came through the attempt on his life in April in 1981. <sup>(3)</sup>

As the Republican's 50th inauguration fell on Sunday, the pageantry came on Monday, January 21. The Japan Times dated January 23 stated the atmosphere of the day as follows:

Earlier in the morning it had been minus 22°C and the wind-chill factor was minus 25°C. Inaugural officials, in announcing cancellation of events, spoke of the dangers posed to "exposed flesh" by the numbing cold... These conditions, ... gave the ceremonies an unusual air of intimacy. His address, delivered without the aid of a Teleprompter ... was vintage Reagan. In this speech, which he read in a conversational tone, his words echoing throughout the packed chamber, Reagan urged action to reduce the national debt, promised to submit to Congress a budget aimed at freezing government program spending for the next year and received his greatest applause when he said... <sup>(4)</sup>

#### **IV. Preparation of the Speech**

He made drafts of the speech mostly by himself. He usually planned, prepared, and organized the speech by his own hand. The writer found an article by Evan Thomas in Time as follows:

Drafts of the speech, largely written by the President himself, were long on uplifting themes and short on specific proposals. Reagan called for "American renewal" that frees up the nation's

entrepreneurial spirit by shrinking big government. <sup>(5)</sup>

Lee Edwards also described the drafts of the speech in his book:

Ronald Reagan researches and writes many of his own speeches. He is particularly proud of two awards he has received: Freedom Foundation Awards in 1960 and 1962 for outstanding achievement in bringing about a better understanding of the American way of life. <sup>(6)</sup>

## 1. Source Materials

The materials supporting this address were:

(1) Citations from the remarks of Senator Mathias, (2) Presentation of historical events and the present situation, (3) Citations from his first inaugural address, (4) Citations from Jefferson's letter, and (5) Presentation of historical facts.

### (1) Citations from the Remarks of Senator Mathias

Before he discussed historical events, he began the paragraph with the remarks of Senator Mathias as follows:

This is, as Senator Mathias told us, the 50th time that we, the people, have celebrated this historic occasion.

### (2) Presentation of Historical Events and the Present Situation

Reagan presented historical and present facts as follows:

When the first president, George Washington, placed his hand upon the bible, he stood less than a single day's journey by horseback from raw, untamed wilderness. There were four million Americans in a Union of 13 states.

Today we are 60 times as many in a Union of 50 states. We've lighted the world with our inventions, gone to the aid of mankind wherever in the world there was a cry for help, journeyed to the moon and safely returned.

These two paragraphs also cited numbers and statistics to clarify the

facts to the people.

(3) Citations from His First Inaugural Address

Reagan cited a part of his remarks from his first inaugural address as the following:

Four years ago I spoke to you of a new beginning, and we have accomplished that. But in another sense, our new beginning is a continuation of that beginning created two centuries ago when, for the first time in history, government, the people said, was not our master. It is our servant; its only power that which we, the people, allow it to have.

(4) Citations from Jefferson's Letter

Reagan referred to the fact that a Boston lawyer named Adams and a Virginia planter named Jefferson, known as two of the American founding fathers, met in Independence Hall and dared to think they could start the world over again. Moreover, Reagan cited from Jefferson's letter addressed to Adams in the sunset of their lives as follows:

It carries me back to the times when, beset with difficulties and dangers, we were fellow laborers in the same cause, struggling for what is most valuable to man, his right of self-government. Laboring always at the same oar, yet passing harmless, we rode through the storm with heart and hand.

(5) Presentation of the Historical Facts

Reagan discussed the historical facts of Valley Forge, and explained the American "sound" to emphasize unity, affection and love to the people. Reagan stated:

A general falls to his knees in the hard snow of Valley Forge; a lone'y President paces the darkened halls and powers, ponders his struggle to preserve the Union, the men of Alamo call out encouragement to each other; a settler pushes west and sings a song, and the song echoes out forever and fills the unknowing air.

It is the American Sound: It is hopeful, big-hearted, idealistic—

daring, decent and fair. That's our heritage, that's our song. We sing it still. For all our problems, our differences we are together as of old. We raise our voices to the God who is the author of this most tender music. And may He continue to hold us close as we fill the world with our sound—in unity, affection and love.

Valley Forge was a campsite in Pennsylvania where Washington and his corps had a hard fight. Alamo is the name of a church at San Antonio in Texas, where the border guards including Davy Crockett were annihilated by Santa Anna and his army from Mexico in March, 1836. As stated above, Reagan used various citations effectively to specify his assertions.

## 2. Three Modes of Proof

According to Aristotle, a speaker can choose among three persuasive modes in order to make his or her message effective. The three modes of proof were designated as “ethos” or ethical proof which derive from the character of the speaker and consist of high moral character, sagacity, and good will; “pathos” or emotional proof which provides the sugar coating which makes the stern logical proof palatable and finally, “logos” or logical proof which includes all factual material necessary to substantiate a speaker's contention.<sup>(7)</sup>

### (1) Ethical Proof

Reagan used ethical proof skilfully in this address. He developed good will in the first example. The words “faith”, “strength” and “individual freedom” conveys a high moral character in the following paragraph.

By 1980 we knew it was time to renew our faith, to strive with all our strength toward the ultimate in individual freedom consistent with an orderly society.

In the second example, Reagan emphasized the importance of freedom, dignity and opportunity as the birthright as American citizens.

We are creating a nation once again vibrant, robust and alive. But there are many mountains yet to climb. We will not rest until every American enjoys the fullness of freedom, dignity and opportunity as our birthright. It is our birthright as citizens of this great republic.

In the third example, he urged the audience to meet the challenge and showed various ethical elements such as progress, peace and human freedom.

And if we meet this challenge, these will be years when Americans have restored their confidence and tradition of progress; when our values of faith, family, work and neighborhood were restated for a modern age; When our economy was finally freed from government's grip; when we made sincere efforts at meaningful arms reduction and by rebuilding our defenses, our economy, and developing new technologies helped preserve peace in a troubled world; when America courageously supported the struggle for individual liberty, self-government and free enterprise throughout the world and turned the tide of history away from totalitarian darkness and into the warm sunlight of human freedom.

In the fourth example, the development of high moral character was shown.

My fellow citizens, our nation is poised for greatness. We must do what we know is right and do it with all our might. Let history say of us, there were golden years - when the American Revolution was reborn, when freedom gained new life and America reached for her best.

In the fifth example, both the good will and the high morals of the speaker were developed.

We must simplify our tax system, make it more fair and bring the rates down for all who work and earn. We must think anew and move with the new boldness so every American who seeks

work can find work; so the least among us shall have an equal chance to achieve the greatest things - to be heroes who heal our sick, feed the hungry, protect peace among nations and leave this world a better place.

In the sixth example, Reagan demonstrated good ethical proof.

From new freedom will spring new opportunities for growth, a more productive, fulfilled and united people and a stronger America, an America that will lead the technological revolution and also open its mind and heart and soul to the treasures of literature, music and poetry, and the values of faith, courage and love.

The elements which make this address a virtuous one are :

(a) Renewal of our faith, (b) Strife toward the ultimate in individual freedom, (c) Creating a vibrant, robust and alive nation, (d) Preserving peace in a troubled world, and (e) The warm sunlight of human freedom.

## (2) Emotional Proof

Reagan used emotional proof effectively in this address. In the following example, Reagan welcomed Senator John Stennis in the first paragraph, prayed for Representative Gillis Long of Louisiana in the second paragraph, and cited God in the third paragraph. By overlapping emotional and ethical proof, Reagan developed his skill of persuasion effectively.

This day has been made brighter with the presence here of one of who for a time has been absent. Sen. John Stennis, God bless you and welcome back.

There is, however, one who is not with us today. Representative Gillis Long of Louisiana left us last night. And I wonder if we could all join in a moment of silent prayer.

One people under God, dedicated to the dream of freedom that He has placed in the human heart, called upon now to pass that

dream on to a waiting and hopeful world. God bless you and may God bless America.

In addition, Reagan used parallelism and repetition very skilfully. The following examples showed parallel sentence structure. The first one began with "And we were right."

And we were right.

And we were right to believe...

The second example repeated "We must." Reagan used "not repeat" in the first sentence and "never again abuse" in the next sentence to emphasize his idea.

We must not repeat the well-intentioned errors of our past.

We must never again abuse the trust of working men and...

The third example contrasted "You elected us" and "You re-elected us."

You elected us in 1980 to end this prescription for...

And I don't believe you re-elected us in 1984 to reverse...

The fourth example began with "we must" and emphasized his idea.

...we must take further steps to permanently control...

We must act now to protect future generations...

The fifth example showed audience-centeredness by using the expressions with "Let us."

Let us resolve: There will be no turning back or hesitation...

Let us resolve that we, the people, will build an American...

Again, let us remember that,...

The sixth example made a contrast between "we're" and "we're not."

And this we're trying to do in negotiations with the Soviet...

We're not just discussing limits on a further increase ...

The seventh example repeated "We seek" and conveyed the speaker's aims.

We seek, instead, to reduce their number,

We seek the total elimination, one day, of nuclear weapons from the face of the earth.

The eighth example contrasted “It wouldn’t” with “It would” to emphasize the latter.

It wouldn’t kill people, it would destroy weapons.

It wouldn’t militarize space, it would help demilitarize...

The ninth example showed a great contrast by repeating “That’s our.”

That’s our heritage, that’s our song.

Now the following examples showed a parallel phrase structure. The first one repeated the conjunction “when.”

...when Americans have restored their confidence and...

...when our values of faith, family, work and neighborhood...

...when we made sincere efforts at meaningful arms...

...when America courageously supported the struggle...

The second example repeated “if not.” By asking questions, the speaker let the audience think of the matter objectively.

If not us, who?

And if not now, when?

The third example began with the same phrase “with our.”

With our alliance strengthened,...with our economy leading...

The fourth example strengthened the key word “history.”

History is a ribbon, always unfurling;

.....history is a journey.

In addition to these examples quoted above, Reagan used many emotionally loaded words and expressions.

...individual freedom... human freedom... Freedom and incentives unleash the drive and entrepreneurial genius that are the core of human progress...new opportunities for growth, a more productive, fulfilled and united people, and a strong America... and the values of faith, courage, and love... There’s no story more heartening in our history...brotherhood of man...peace on earth...human dignity... One people under God...the dream of freedom... God bless you... may God bless America...

### (3) Logical Proof

Ronald Reagan used both induction and deduction effectively in his speech. Particularly his inductive reasoning was effective and this proof strengthened his statements in his address.

There were 4 million Americans in a Union of 13 states.

Today, we are 60 times as many in a Union of 50 states. We've lighted the world with our inventions, gone to the aid of mankind wherever in the world there was a cry for help, journeyed to the moon and safely returned.

So much has changed. And yet, we stand together as we did two centuries ago.

The next example employed a good deduction and was supported by historical facts. By giving historical facts with a deduction, logical proof and emotional appeals were overlapped so that the speech was very persuasive.

History is a ribbon, always unfurling; history is a journey. And as we continue our journeys we think of those who traveled before us...and we see and hear again the echoes of our past.

A general falls to his knees in the hard snow of Valley Forge, a lonely president paces the darkened halls, and ponders his struggle to preserve the union, the men of the Alamo call out encouragement to each other, a settler pushes west and sings a song, and the song echoes out forever and fills the unknowing air.

## V. Conclusions

Eleven observations were made within the limits imposed by this study.

- (1) Reagan had learned the skill of speech since his childhood. And he got technical speech training as a professional announcer after graduating from college.

- (2) The source materials were (a) Citations from a talk of Senator Mathias, Reagan's first inaugural address, and Jefferson's letter; and (b) Presentation of the historical facts, events and the present situation.
- (3) Reagan cited from numbers and statistics to specify the facts.
- (4) Various citations conveyed Reagan's ideas with high ethical value.
- (5) Presentation of historical events worked effective to persuade the audience to agree to Reagan's policy.
- (6) He prepared the drafts of the speech mostly by himself.
- (7) This address presented high moral character and good will, because he used ethical proof so often.
- (8) He used emotional proof and emotionally loaded words many times.
- (9) Parallelism were given to emphasize his idea. Especially asking questions is very effective to let the audience think of the matter objectively.
- (10) As for logical proof, Reagan used both induction and deduction.
- (11) By overlapping two modes of proof, Reagan developed his skill of persuasion effectively.

President Reagan trained his techniques through a lot of experiences and speech training. He prepared the drafts of the speech so carefully and used three modes of proof so skillfully that the whole address was easy to understand and very persuasive.

## Notes

- (1) Lee Edwards, *Ronald Reagan - A Political Biography*, Texas, Nordland Publishing International, Inc., p. 13.
- (2) *Ibid.*, p. 30
- (3) "Reagan had the Right Staff," *Newsweek*, January 7, 1985, p. 27.
- (4) *Japan Times*, January 23, 1985, p. 24.
- (5) Evan Thomas, "High Hopes, Hard Choices," *Time*, 28 Jan. 1985, p. 24.

(6) Edwards, op. cit., p.67.

(7) Joseph A. Wagner and Takehide Kawashima, *An Introduction to Modern English Speech Communication*, Tokyo, Gaku Publishing Co., Ltd. 1977, p. 86.

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