

Rhetorical Analysis Essay

“December 7th 1941- A date that will live in infamy.” This sentence is one that is forever ingrained in the minds of every well-educated American. The bombing of Pearl Harbor is an event that no one can forget and President Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s speech in response to this horrific attack is just as significant. FDR’s speech after Pearl Harbor is one of the most recognizable and significant speeches in American history. It was this that brought America into World War Two and solidified America’s status as the premier world superpower for the next half-century. Given the day after the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor, the objective of this speech was to urge Congress to declare war on Japan. The country was still in shock after hearing the news of the bombing and the tone of this speech was similar to that of George W. Bush’s speech immediately following the attacks on the World Trade Centers. Although the primary purpose of this speech was to urge Congress to declare war on Japan, it was also televised nationally and served the secondary purpose of urging the American people to take up the fight against Japan as well. FDR’s use of both pathetic and logical proofs was extremely effective in spurring America to declare war on the Japanese Empire.

The ethos of Roosevelt is quite apparent. As the President of the United States, he is obviously viewed as a credible source for information. At the time that this speech was given, FDR was nearing the end of his fourth and final term as president. This clearly shows that he was well loved and well trusted by the people of the United States. They would never have elected him in four straight elections if they did not think that he was a capable and trustworthy leader. Whereas many other speakers might have to prove their credibility with facts and statistics during their speech, FDR does not have to do this because his mere title proves his credibility and establishes his ethos for him. In addition to the ethos of his political status, FDR also

provides a significant number of details pertaining to the attack on Pearl Harbor and other attacks that the Japanese carried out in conjunction with the bombing of Pearl Harbor. By sharing additional details about the events of December 7th, it lends credibility to what he was saying about the bombings of Pearl Harbor. If FDR had simply said that the Japanese had attacked Pearl Harbor, it may not have been as well-believed as it was since he provided so many details about the attack.

However important ethos may be in establishing the credibility of the speaker, FDR's argument is even more so based on pathological arguments. Given the emotional nature of this event, it makes sense that FDR's speech is heavily based off appeals to the emotions of the American people and government. To start off, the somber tone of the speech indicates to people the extreme seriousness of the situation at hand. When we hear someone speaking in a very serious tone, we automatically pay attention and are more likely to care about what is being said. FDR goes on to explain how the attacks were clearly premeditated and that there had been severe damage done to American forces and many lives had been lost. This serves to strike into the very hearts of the American people and make them angry about the attacks and eager to retaliate. It is the same idea as with the September 11th attacks on the World Trade Centers; George W. Bush's speech angered the country and thus, most people supported his decision to invade Afghanistan. Both Presidents employed the same "we won't stand for being attacked like this" theme to call people to follow them. FDR gave people a reason to be angry at the Japanese, "*the unprovoked and dastardly attack*," he said. With this he painted the Japanese as evil aggressors. In a speech designed to call people to war, it was key for FDR to give people a reason to fight. And he did this with extreme effectiveness. Passionate soldiers fight so much more effectively than other soldiers. As we saw with the war in Vietnam, the Viet Cong outfought a much more powerful

American army because they had something significant to fight for. FDR's message of "come defend your country" gave people a higher purpose to fight for than simply to have a steady job with a good pension. And by using the phrase "*righteous might*," FDR justified this war. Not only did he inspire people to fight for him, he justified doing so by saying that it was the right thing to do. He portrayed the United States as the honorable, god-sent warriors and the Japanese as the evil, untrustworthy enemy.

Roosevelt coupled his pathetic argument with an equally important logical argument as well. Whereas emotional appeals were very effective at convincing the American people to go to war, Congress was probably more concerned with this logical approach. The government has always tried to act without the influence of emotions and in this case Congress probably wanted to hear what benefits would come from attacking Japan or even what consequences could come from not retaliating. FDR's logical argument is headed by the news of other Japanese attacks across the Pacific.

"Yesterday, the Japanese government also launched an attack against Malaya.

Last night, Japanese forces attacked Hong Kong.

Last night, Japanese forces attacked Guam.

Last night, Japanese forces attacked the Philippine Islands.

Last night, the Japanese attacked Wake Island.

And this morning, the Japanese attacked Midway Island."

These were FDR's words to Congress and the American people. Seven different attacks in a 24 hour time period, this is too much to be pure coincidence or the acts of rogue factions of the Japanese military. These details proved that this was a coordinated, premeditated attack. FDR uses this number of coordinated attacks as a reason to retaliate now or possibly risk being

attacked again. Especially in a world where image is of supreme importance, if the United States had not struck back, they would have been seen as weak and impotent, possibly leading to invasions by other countries. As with the time shortly after the 9/11 attacks, preemptive warfare was necessary to protect against and prevent further attacks. During his closing statement, FDR said *“There is no blinking at the fact that our, people, our territory, and our interests are in grave danger.”* This statement creates an obvious and immediate need to respond as soon as possible in order to protect our country. FDR is proving to everyone that we needed to act and immediately. In addition to these arguments, FDR also explains how the distance between the United States and Japan proves that this attack was planned weeks in advance. Knowing that this attack had been planned long in advance meant that the Japanese had been deliberately deceiving the United States with false statements and expressions of hope for continued peace in order to cover up the fact that they were planning a large scale air and naval assault. Treachery on this scale warrants a swift and deliberate response to show that we will not stand for being attacked as such and we will retaliate.

This speech, given by our 32nd President, is a chilling call to war for both Congress and the American people. The sole purpose of this speech was to convince Congress to declare war on Japan and to rally Americans to the cause. FDR’s uses of mostly pathetic and logical arguments in this situation were undoubtedly extremely effective. Not only did Congress declare a state of war with the Japanese Empire that very day with a unanimous vote in the Senate and a 388 to 1 vote in the House of Representative, this speech also spurred the enlistment of hundreds of thousands of Americans into the United States military. These two days in our history, December 7th, 1941 and December 8th, 1941, galvanized the country in a way that had never been

seen before and would never be seen again until the terrorist attacks of September 11th, 2001 and it is clear that President Roosevelt's speech played a large role in this rush of patriotism.