

## Rhetoric of a New Beginning: Ethos in Donald Trump's Inaugural Speech<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

This article examines the ethos of American President Donald Trump in the inaugural speech, which he delivered on January 20, 2025, in the United States of America upon his election victory for the second term of presidential office. Indeed, it treats his speech as a text of rhetorical artifact. Thus, this study focuses on how Trump's strategy of self-portrayal operates rhetorically to gain the confidence of his audience, especially the people of America. The paper applies the ethos as the analytical tool to discuss how Trump evokes the dominant values of nation-building, patriotism, and economic resurgence to establish himself as a credible and authoritative rhetor. Moreover, the paper aims to study the strategy of ethos-building that Trump deploys in his speech to persuade his audience to believe in the truthfulness of his argument and judgment. The study highlights that the core objective of Trump's speech is to warrant his audience's unanimity and consensus by focusing on what the American people missed in the past and how they will regain their lost justice, dignity, and sovereignty under the new administration. The findings of the study show that the rhetor evokes himself as an exemplar to underscore the idea that a new beginning is awaiting the people of America. The implication of the study reveals that the character of a person is crucial in instigating people to espouse certain values and beliefs at the expense of some others.

**Keywords:** Ethos, inaugural speech, rhetor, rhetoric

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## Introduction

This article examines the presidential inaugural speech of Donald J. Trump to illustrate how he pitches his character in front of his audience (i.e. the American people) to justify the veracity and authenticity of his speech. Trump delivered this speech on 20 January 2025 after his ascension of the presidency in the second term as he defeated his competitor, Joe Biden. To study the speech as a primary rhetorical text, this paper adopts the approach of textual analysis to analyze the ethos of the rhetor. The analysis is informed by the classical rhetorical mode of appeal—ethos—developed by the Greek philosopher Aristotle. On the basis of this rhetorical perspective, the paper argues that Trump invents a compelling ethos as a means of persuasion for audience endorsement of the claims and arguments that he proposes in the speech.

Rhetorical study is a critical act of analyzing the object of rhetoric, which can either be a rhetorical act or a rhetorical artifact. Moreover, texts that contain intentional messages are called “instances of rhetoric” (Kuypers, p.13). A rhetorical act is distinguished from a rhetorical artifact in that while the former “tends to be fleeting and ephemeral” (Foss, p.6), the latter is “tangible evidence of rhetoric” (Renegar & Malkowski, p.49). Because of its elusive nature, a rhetorical act “can never be re-created in its entirety” (Renegar & Malkowski, p.49). However, rhetorical artifacts are concrete and tangible texts. For the sake of convenience, rhetorical critics choose to analyze “the artifact of an act—the text, trace, or tangible evidence of the act” (Foss, p.6). Foss suggests that an act cannot be scrutinized over and over again as can be a rhetorical artifact.

A rhetorical artifact is far more diverse than that of a rhetorical act. According to Foss, a rhetorical act “is executed in the presence of a rhetor’s intended audience” only (p.6). Hence, it is confined to an immediate audience. Conversely, a rhetorical artifact has a much more diversified and wide audience when it “is transcribed and printed, posted on a website, recorded on video, or preserved on canvas” (Foss, p.7). Despite these differences, both acts and artifacts “are objects of rhetorical criticism” (Foss, p.7). A wide range of rhetorical artifacts, such as textbooks, newspapers, advertisements, architecture, music, and paintings, can be studied under the rubric of rhetorical criticism. At this backdrop, Sharma and Pokharel (2025) assert the role of media framing for highlighting or relegating the ideas as they focus: “Frames make some ideas more noticeable than others. They magnify some ideas, commemorate, omit, reemphasize,

relegate, or subordinate some others” (p.17). Consequently, rhetorical analysis is a scholarly engagement with any of these texts to understand how rhetoric operates with multiple purposes like persuasion, information, entertainment, invitation, and identification. Based on this description, this paper uses a transcribed form of Trump’s speech as a rhetorical text to study how he invents ethos to communicate his idea of beginning a new era in America.

### **Research Methodology**

This paper highlights the inaugural speech as the primary text for the analysis and interpretation. Based on the interpretive paradigm of qualitative research design, this study applies the rhetorical tool of ethos to discuss how the rhetor (Donald Trump) justifies his stance through the claim of his forthrightness. The inaugural speech delivered by Donald Trump after his second time chairing as the President of the United States of America has been critically analyzed using the ethos of the speech. To justify the argument, the rhetorical tool ethos, framed by Kuypers and Foss, has been rigorously used.

### **Literature Review**

The scholarship of presidential rhetoric in inaugural addresses has been highlighted in the academic arena for long. In this regard, Campbell and Jamieson (1900) define inaugural address as the text that focuses on “the unification of the nation and the veneration of traditional values as the most fundamental element” (P. 10). Similarly, Tulis (1988) emphasizes that the presidential inaugural address refers to the genre called presidential rhetoric. While it covers a wide range of topics, it is principally intended for “popular leaders” (p. 4). Williams (2003) explains how ethos operates. He likens ethos to ‘character’ (p. 22). In addition, he describes that a “speaker or writer has to project a good character to audiences, a character that is, say, a kind, considerate, intelligent, and reasonable” (p.22). Elaborating the nature of what a good character constitutes, he contends that “a good character simply is more believable than one who isn’t, and audiences want to accept what he or she has to say” (p. 22). In the same way, the elaboration of Selzer’s (2004) ethos is the “quality of a piece of writing” which “persuades through the character and trustworthiness of the speaker or writer” (p. 287). Similarly, Longaker and Walker (2011) state, “the apparent character of the speaker—whatever inspires trust (or the opposite)” (p.45). The rhetor plans to persuade the masses by covering a wide range of themes.

Bines (2009) notes that rhetorical presidency is ubiquitous, stating the view that “Rhetoric is not simply a popular appeal to a mass audience, nor is it a substitute for or a false form of political action. It is itself a symbolic form of action that is endemic to political and social life” (p.216). Likewise, Jones (2010, p.98) points out the aim of an inaugural speech. He highlights that an inaugural speech “is uniquely sacramental: the peaceful transfer of power it represents is one of the key elements that have made ours the oldest surviving democracy on earth” (Jones, 2010, p. 98). An inaugural speech encompasses core values, faiths, and national agenda. Pertaining to this feature of such speech, Stuckey (2010, p.261) maintains that presidents utilize their speech to call “upon shared national values and ideals and enunciate broad national political principles.” Stuckey also holds the view that inaugural speeches frame national guidelines that govern “the new administration, enunciate a general political philosophy” (2010, p.261). The speech is set to be a significant milestone for nation building.

Karlyn and Jamieson (2010) portray that inaugural addresses as a text of epideictic rhetoric. They give details that an inaugural speech “praises or blames on ceremonial occasions, invites the audience to evaluate the speaker’s performance, recalls the past and speculates about the future while focusing on the present, employs a noble, dignified literary style, and amplifies or rehearses admitted facts” (Campbell & Jamieson, 2010, p.29). They also emphasize that a presidential inaugural speech performs multifaceted functions. According to them, presidential speeches are “delivered on ceremonial occasions, link past and future in present contemplation, and affirm or praise the shared principles that will guide the incoming administration” (p.30). They further explain that presidential rhetorical texts invite “the audience to gaze upon traditional values, employ elegant, literary language, and rely on heightening the effect by amplification and reaffirmation of what is already known and believed” (p.30). The audience believes in the rhetorical artifacts more than the message.

One of the prominent appeals of persuasion is ethos; the other two are pathos and logos. At this backdrop, Greene and Lindinsky (2022) point out that a rhetor can employ three specific tactics to evoke an appeal of ethos. First, a rhetor earns people’s trust through “good judgment.” The second strategy is for a rhetor to give a sufficient reason for being “knowledgeable.” Finally, the ethos appeal consists of the fact that the rhetor understands “the complexity of the issue” (p.205). Thus, rhetoric use develops confidence among the public and accelerates reliability.

Chinwe (2024) studies the language strategy employed by President Barack Obama and Nigerian President Goodluck Ebere Jonathan. Examining the inaugural speeches of these two presidents, his main focus was to “uncover the persuasive strategy types they employ in achieving their political purposes” (p.120). The language functions as a mission to accomplish political ends.

Similarly, Bhusal (2024) analyzes the victory of Joe Biden using pathos as a rhetorical lens. He studies Biden’s victory speech to explore “how the emotional appeals enhance the central message, that is, a call for unity, reconciliation, and mutual understanding” (p.23). In the same text, he categorizes the emotional appeals into seven types: “confidence, trust, optimism, (in)gratitude, empathy, camaraderie, and American pride” (p.23). The speech, according to him, generates hope among people.

In the same way, Nurkhamidah et al. (2021) also examine the presidential address of Joe Biden. Employing the Aristotelian model of rhetoric, they have attempted to study how Biden has used this model to communicate his message of presidential speech. Their conclusion is that President Biden “skillfully used and applied Aristotle’s rhetorical theory in his inauguration address to engage and build trust with the American people” (p.73). Thus, they assert the purpose of the speech is to motivate the American people for trustworthiness.

Current scholars on the inaugural speech asserted that the speech prioritizes national unification, importance to traditional values, rhetorical strategies for political purpose, praise and blame, political speech, emotional values of the message ways for message delivery. However, this study deals with the ethos building of the president to generate trustworthiness among the people, generating unanimity and conscientiousness.

### **Rhetorical Explorations of Trump's Inaugural Speech**

The inaugural speech revolves around three specific themes: nation-building, patriotism, and economic resurgence. Anchored to these issues, Trump expends most of this time in the speech in a bid to establish himself as a trustworthy rhetor. As a rhetor, he raises a number of issues throughout the speech, citing examples and testimonies to substantiate his assertions. He invokes the past to evaluate the present situation and to provide a justification for his “historic political comeback” (p.7). Being aware that a credible image is necessary for his argument to be reliable and robust, Trump’s daunting early task is to project himself as a plausible and reasonable character. Moreover, he knows the magnitude, depth, and diversity of his audience, which clearly testifies that his

task to convince is rather tough and complicated. Accordingly, he should not only win over this audience but also keep them engaged throughout the speech.

Thus, with his first rhetorical move, Trump greets the American people with the assurance of a new beginning tinged with immediacy and urgency. He affirms that “The golden age of America begins right now” (p.1). This early declaration acts as a motif. With the phrases “right now” and “from this day forward” (p.1), Trump clearly points out that America is making headway into a new epoch. He also promises a country that will “flourish” and “be respected again all over the world,” projecting American people as “the envy of every nation” (p.1). With this affirmation and prediction, along with the use of the inclusive pronoun “we” (p.1), Trump not only creates a secure ground early in the speech in the process of ethos-building but also establishes his connection and affinity with the audience.

The entire speech follows a clear-cut transitional structure. First, a flowery future has been carved as Trump opines: “the golden age of America begins” (p.1). This pronouncement is then followed by a series of evaluations to weigh the ‘challenges’ (p.1) that the American people have confronted. Lastly, on top of everything else heads the topmost priority of the national agenda: “I will, very simply, put America first” (p.1). This emphatic, verdict-like statement corresponds to the core theme of a new beginning for nation-building along with patriotism and economic revitalization, closing up the circle of the whole argument. The whole speech revolves around these neatly tied three-fold primary propositions.

First and foremost, Trump endeavors to convince his audience that his second ascension to the presidency has rendered him “confident and optimistic” (p.1). This self-portrayal forms a solid ethos base for instilling a faith in the audience to believe that Trump’s agenda of national transformation is plausible, rational, and agreeable. Indeed, Trump is conscious that the value and authenticity of his statement are contingent upon a positive public image of his character. Hence, after projecting himself as “confident and optimistic” (p.1), he delivers his audience a compelling reason to endorse his visions to “restore the integrity, competency, and the loyalty of America’s government” (p.2). Consequently, Trump completes his first task of creating an inspiring image in his audience to believe that he is truly capable of building their nation anew and therefore deserves their solidarity and trust.

After creating a motivating reason for his audience to trust his claims, Trump builds an agreeable audience to garner their approval for his programs about nation building. Leading off from this strategy, Trump lends strength and authenticity to his statements about national programs. The first of these is cloaked in a metaphorical evocation of a new epoch: “The golden age of America begins right now” (p. 1). This announcement is followed by a survey of the specific problem areas that Trump envisages to revamp: ‘sovereignty’, ‘justice’ (p.5), defense of ‘American borders’ (p.2), “basic services” (p.2), “public health system” (p.2), “education system” (p.2), ‘democracy’ (p.2), and ‘freedom’ (p.2). The extensive identification of these plans further consolidates his ethos to claim that American people are now ready to take a march into “a thrilling new era of national success” (p.1). Thus, Trump as a rhetor first raises the value of his utterance through a positive self-image and creates a foundation by appealing to nationwide enthusiasm and trust.

Continuing his ethos appeal, Trump justifies the reason for his election victory. He considers his victory as a “mandate to completely and totally reverse a horrible betrayal” (p. 2). To clarify “a horrible betrayal” (p. 2), Trump starts the strategy of appraisal and vetting. The first to draw Trump’s criticism are both the previous governments and the immediate one. Through a covert comparison strategy, Trump alleges that the preceding government begot “a crisis of trust” (p. 1) in the country. The speech then moves back and forth, swinging from the past to the future to establish the justifiability of the allegation and rationale of his election victory. Across the speech, the past is time and again held liable for failing to “manage a simple crisis at home” (p.1). The centerpiece of this argument hinges on the reiterative reference to the preceding government’s myopic vision.

Thus, right from the beginning of the speech, Trump is conscious about the validity of his argument, which is contingent upon the judgment of his audience. While the second term of the presidency is well in his favor, he feels that his credibility is still at stake. He is, therefore, not only tasked with gaining the favorable perception of the audience but also retaining their faith in his truthfulness in a sustained way. Throughout the speech, persuasion by means of ethos appeal is the only staple instrument for him. He has to embody forthrightness and present himself as an unbiased, detached, and balanced orator to convince the audience that he is not motivated by partisan views and cronyism. He knows that failing to do so will weaken his argument and cost him the reliability of



his audience. Therefore, from the point he begins his speech until the utterance of the last word in the text, Trump is concerned to keep his ethical leadership intact.

One of the rhetorical tactics of Trump throughout the text is illustrated in exuding endearment, exemplified in the inclusive pronoun –‘we’ In ethos-building, this address is crafted very wittily. This way of salutation immediately serves him two specific purposes. First, the strategy connects the rhetor with his audience and deepens intimacy. Second, it serves to invent identification with a wider audience, inviting them to impersonate the rhetor with the common purpose and responsibility in his agenda. Such a strategy, apart from facilitating easy endorsement, also contributes to watering down any prospect of opposition. Thus, this strategy enables him to promote unity among American nationals by emphasizing shared values of nationalism.

In order to substantiate his early assertion like “The golden age of America begins right now”, the orator—being a part of the national fraternity denoted by the inclusion ‘we’—assures his compatriots of ‘a country’ that “will flourish and be respected again all over the world.” The urgency is indicated by the confident expression “from this day forward” (p.1). With this is coupled the rhetor’s sure-footed prediction: “We will be the envy of every nation” (p.1). Likewise, the wrong suffered by the American in the past weighs down the rhetor, and he promises to redress the injustice with the reaffirming remarks that “we will not allow ourselves to be taken advantage of any longer” (p.1). He notes that a single-focused agenda of “the Trump administration” (p.1) will be to “put America first” (p.1). The assurance of a prosperous and just future along with the determined announcement of the national agenda of “America first” (p.1) does a lot of ground clearing for his ethos-building.

Trump’s rhetorical strategy, based on his bold promises and camaraderie with fellow Americans, completes the two key tasks as part of ethos appeal. First, he arouses their interest in the topic raised. Second, through his decisive actions, he creates a compelling cause for the audience to trust his judgment. With this early rhetorical move, the odds are already in his favor. While his initial step to pull the attention and credibility of the audience fulfills the requirement of a willing and attentive audience for a successful rhetoric, he confronts another challenge: that of retaining the endorsement and faith of the audience for the rest of the speech. Notwithstanding this, by presenting them with “a nation that is proud, prosperous, and free” (p.1), Trump seems to have won the goodwill and trust of his audience straight away. With this solid base for his ethos,



Trump now elaborates on his initial promise of the approaching “golden age” (p.1) in America.

To prove that a more just and prosperous America is not far away, Trump invokes the past as evidence to illustrate how the inefficiency of the past governments has deepened the “crisis at home” (p.2) in the present. The rhetor brings up a litany of charges directed at the various governments in the past. Although he does not pinpoint a single government, he labels them as “radical and corrupt” (p.1). He blames such governments because they fail to “protect our magnificent, law-abiding American citizens but provide sanctuary and protection for dangerous criminals” (p.2). A grimmer picture of the past government is brought up to characterize the fallout in the present. He is indignant at the “unlimited funding to the defense of foreign borders” (p.2) and disheartened at the fragmentation of “the pillars of our society” (p.1), which is on the verge of “complete disrepair” (p.1). He employs the comparison as a strategy to justify that his “comeback” (p.7) was the inevitable demand of the time and a testimony to people’s desire for change.

In the process of building and strengthening his ethical leadership, the rhetor has to ensure that his claims are reinforced with authentic data and genuine information. Therefore, he harps on the past in his bid to show the disparity between what the preceding governments achieved or failed to achieve and how his own rule will fare under the present circumstances. In his bold announcement, he states that “During every single day of the Trump Administration, I will, very simply, put America first” (p.1). The implication of this proclamation is two-fold: that America was not a top priority for the past governments and that for him any other considerations are simply subordinate to the American people and their interests. For Trump as a rhetor, he is concerned with what issues should be given prominence and how to categorize them. This factor is crucial in determining whether his audience will choose to listen to him. This process also governs the value and credibility of his claims.

As a testimony to his national agenda, Trump pinpoints some key national problems that he claims require immediate attention. He says that the American ‘sovereignty’ (p.1), ‘safety’ (p.1), and ‘justice’ (p.1) are at peril. Rhetorically, in terms of the value factor, this disclosure subtly draws the attention of his audience to the disturbing fact that national problems such as ‘sovereignty’ (p.1), ‘safety’ (p.1), and ‘justice’ (p.1) were long ignored or not prioritized in the past. Additionally, this generates

a sense of alarm in the audience, compelling them to believe that action is necessary to address the issue. Having established the depth and seriousness of the issue—threatened nationality, safety, and justice—the rhetor raises the value of his statement and strengthens the credibility of his judgment. This background generates a necessity in his speech to emphasize the issue of ‘sovereignty’ (p.1), ‘safety’ (p.1), and ‘justice’ (p.1). Immediately, he also announces that America “will soon be greater, stronger, and far more exceptional than ever before”. These strings of decisive statements serve not only to assuage the alarmed audience but also contribute to strengthening the justification of his ‘comeback’ (p.7) in the world power.

Trump’s self-portrayal is remarkable in elevating his reliability. He points out that his return to power a second time renders him “confident and optimistic” (p.1). He introduces these two terms not just to characterize how he emerged after the election but also to generate the favorable anticipation in his audience that a confident and optimistic person will not only not let them down but also bail them out of protracted national issues of ‘sovereignty’ (p.1), ‘safety’ (p.1), and ‘justice’ (p.1). His second coming as an enthusiastic and resilient president strikes a subtle bond of mutual trust between the rhetor and his audience. This self-projection justifies the decision of the audience that they voted for the right person to lead them and guide their country in the right direction.

After projecting himself in positive terms, Trump feels more encouraged, and with a far more authoritative voice, he consolidates his credentials. In a flurry of metaphorical expressions, he delineates a rosy future for American people. He is elated to announce that America has now ushered in “a thrilling new era of national success” (p.1) with “a tide of change . . . sweeping the country” (p.1). This new change is not limited to the national boundary alone. In this regard, he remarks that after his ascension to the presidency, the “sunlight is pouring over the entire world” (p.1). The impact of these emotionally loaded expressions leads to his final punchline: “America has the chance to seize this opportunity like never before” (p.1). With this significant stride in the process of ethos appeal, Trump establishes his credibility and succeeds in commanding the respect and confidence of his audience.

However, Trump also introduces a transition. He makes a swift shift from a hypothetical situation to evaluation. He takes stock of the situation, pointing out “the challenges” (p.1) that are likely to impede what he calls ‘this opportunity’ (p.1). He uses

a crucial word, 'honest' to assure his audience that his evaluation is realistic and objective, thereby strengthening the veracity of his remarks. By saying "we must be honest about the challenges we face" (p.1), he not only confesses things candidly but also alerts his audience that the American future is riddled with odds and ordeals. Weighing up both sides of the situation raises the stakes of his statements and contributes to the trustworthiness of his ethical leadership.

Trump lays out a list of the challenges that he referred to earlier. He accuses the past government of being responsible for them. He criticizes the prior governments on the issues of national crisis, national border, and illegal immigration. First, he notes that presently American people are facing "a crisis of trust" (p.1). Trump argues that the American people were betrayed by "a radical and corrupt government" (p.1). The alleged government, according to him, "has extracted power and wealth from our citizens" (p.1). Second, he charges that this government has aggravated the crisis because it failed to "manage even a simple crisis at home while, at the same time, stumbling into a continuing catalogue of catastrophic events abroad" (p.2). He is outraged because the prior governments could not "protect our magnificent, law-abiding American citizens" and instead provided "sanctuary and protection for dangerous criminals. . . that have illegally entered our country from all over the world" (p.2). Lastly, he lashes at the government for failing to keep national borders intact. Directing his criticism at such establishments, he says that they have lent "unlimited funding to the defense of foreign borders but refuse to defend American borders or, more importantly, its people" (p.2). The rhetor's ethos can be conveyed to readers by defining such adversities.

Data and facts substantiate the charges against the immediate past government. Trump illustrates two primary areas where the past "government" demonstrated utter ineptitude. According to him, it has utterly failed in delivering "basic services in times of emergency" (p.2) in 'North Carolina'(p.2) and "other states" (p. 2) where many people were rendered homeless because of "a hurricane" (p.2). He further provides evidence of the government's indifference and apathy to the people of 'Los Angeles' (p.2), where many inhabitants lost their "houses and communities" to 'fires' "without even a token of defense" (p.2). He labeled the victims of these natural catastrophes as "the wealthiest and most powerful individuals in our country" (p.2), with no "home any longer" (p.2). Trump's ironic invective "That's interesting," veiled in a mocking tone, closes up the

circle with the assertive two powerful statements: “But we can’t let this happen. That’s going to change” (p.2). The innovative America is his point for motivation.

The bashing does not end with the example of natural disasters. Thus, critics also target America's public health system and education system. Trump contends that the existing “public health system” is almost defunct and inadequate because it “does not deliver in times of disaster” (p. 2). Similarly, educational establishments have failed to meet the national objective. The inefficiency of the government draws Trump’s scathing flak for promoting the education system that “teaches our children to be ashamed of themselves” (p.2). Thus, Trump’s allegations range from domestic crises and natural disasters to health systems and educational practices in America. To show that his allegations are not vacuous and baseless, he provides examples and details. Such reinforcements, along with the avowal to begin the changes “starting today” (p.2) and “very quickly” (p.2), The immediacy denoted by these phrases render his speech robust and factual, contributing to rising his credibility.

In the process of making an ethos appeal to his audience, Trump pitches the election victory as an infallible gesture to argue that his leadership is indispensable to address the missteps committed by the prior governments. He describes his election as ‘a mandate’ (p.2) given to him by the American people to redress the ‘horrible betrayal’ (p.2) of the past government. For him, his election victory meant an opportunity to prove how “America’s decline is over” (p. 2). Not only this, he also vows that under his administration, he will reclaim what he calls “our liberties and our nation’s glorious destiny” (p.2). He delivers revive America as the persuasive message to motivate the audience.

Trump continues his ethos-building by emphasizing his self-portrayal, highlighting the numerous upheavals and ordeals that punctuated his life. First, he invokes the whole gamut of presidential time in the "250-year history" (p.2) of America to demonstrate that he has been tested and challenged more than any American president "over the last eight years" (p.2). Then, he refers to a life-threatening assault on him, saying that the circumstances leading up to the seat of American president were not “an easy one” (p.3). He holds up the incident of the attempted assassination in “a beautiful Pennsylvania field” (p.3) to show that he survived “an assassin’s bullet” (p.3) there “for a reason” (p.3). Proudly, he announces that “I was saved by God to make America great again” (p.3). Trump capitalizes on these trying circumstances as an opportune time to

justify his survival for a noble cause. This also shows why people should place their trust in him as a mature and competent leader.

Trump does not discriminate, either. This is another rhetorical strategy to retain his hard-earned ethos. His address is encompassing. He refers to all the citizens as 'American patriots' (p. 3) and garners their support "to meet every crisis with dignity and power and strength" (p.3). Not only this, he reiterates that he won the election with the "purpose" (p.3) of unifying "citizens of every race, religion, color, and creed" (p. 3) under the common fold of American patriotism. Moreover, Trump seizes this inaugural occasion to dignify "January 20th, 2025" (p.3) as a 'Liberation Day'(p.3) with a reference to "powerful win in all seven swing states" (p.3). A reminder of the election win helps to unify people from all walks of life and sections of American society: "young and old, men and women, African Americans, Hispanic Americans, Asian Americans, urban, suburban, rural" (p.3). The invocation of "Martin Luther King" (p.3) and his dream further adds to his credibility as a well-informed person. The reference to a historical person and the way Trump touts his inaugural speech as marking a new day in the history of America, the purpose of his victory, and patriotism play a vital role in consolidating the truth of his remarks.

As a testimony to what he professes, Trump announces he will "sign a series of historic executive orders" (p.3). These presidential orders range from the deportation of illegal immigrants to the deployment of the army in the South to "repel the disastrous invasion of our country" (p.4). They also encompass stringent action against the terrorist organizations operating in America. As a part of this action, he cracks down on all kinds of illicit entry into America. He describes the unlawful migrants as "criminal aliens" (p. 4), who will be sent "back to the places from which they came" (p.4). He also declares harsh actions against "all foreign gangs and criminal networks" (p.4) by using "the Alien Enemies Act of 1798" (p.4). Trump also invokes his own power as a "commander in chief" (p.4) to protect America from different "threats and invasions" (p.4). His decisive action against all those who have jeopardized America's sovereignty and integrity garners readers' trust, enhancing his reputation as a reliable speaker. His statements in the speech are well-grounded on facts.

In a warlike announcement, Trump spares no effort in the task of ethos building. He declares "a national energy emergency" (p.4) because of "massive overspending and escalating energy prices" (p.4). He contends that his next move is to grapple with "record

inflation and rapidly bring down costs and prices” (p. 4). He envisions America to be an exceptional country as “a manufacturing nation once again” (p. 4). Through these announcements, Trump instills a sense of pride in his audience, saying that he will tap “the largest amount of oil and gas . . . on earth” (p. 4) for the country’s economic resurgence. He also prepares a basis for America’s rise to global economic prowess by replenishing what he says are “our strategic reserves up again right to the top” and exporting American energy all over the world. (p. 4). Moreover, he terminates all previous agreements like “the Green New Deal” (p. 4) in favor of “our great American autoworkers” (p. 4). This promise and gratitude serve as reinforcement to consolidate Trump as a trustworthy president even more.

The frequently used pronouns of ‘I’ and ‘we’ throughout the speech emphasize his own involvement with others in the affairs he discusses and foster a sense of solidarity with his audience. In his next hard work of ethos-building, Trump refers to his ‘leadership’ (p.5) . . . to re-establish a “fair, equal, and impartial” (p. 5) system of justice and build “a society that is colorblind and merit-based” (p. 5). Other notable initiatives include allowances to the pandemic victims “with full back pay” (p. 5). His self-portrayal as a “peacemaker and unifier” (p. 5) recurs again as a testimony to prove the soundness of his claims for laying a foundation for peace and unification in the country. Immediately, he backs up this announcement by referring to a release of American “hostages in the Middle East” (p. 6). His reference to how America was deceived on “the Panama Canal” (p. 6) project finds a scornful and remorseful articulation: “We have been treated very badly from this foolish gift that should have never been made.” Boldly, referring to this historical wrong as he claims it, he declares that “we’re taking it back” (p. 6) to redress the mistake.

Having properly built up the rhetorical situation, Trump finally sets out to buttress his credentials by means of an infallible ace: nation-building. To win his audience to his side, Trump wastes no time in establishing rapport with them by addressing them again as “we.” This strategy has stood him in good stead throughout the speech because his intended audience feels that they are also a part of the agenda that Trump has raised and are concerned about it. In the final part of the speech, Trump caps his argument in a more summative and emphatic manner. He acknowledges the support of American people for his “. . . historic political comeback” (p.7), saying, “The American people have spoken” (p.7). He extols them as “explorers, builders, innovators, entrepreneurs, and pioneers”

(p.6), describing them as playing a vital role. He presents a long list of “generations of patriots” (p.7): “farmers and soldiers, cowboys and factory workers, steelworkers and coal miners, police officers and pioneers” (p.7). All the above statements close with an all-resounding statement: “We will restore an American promise, and we will rebuild the nation that we love” (p.7). His point for persuasion is for national integrity.

The final self-image that Trump projects is that of an iconic fighter. His promise echoes one after the other: “I am with you, I will fight for you, and I will win for you” (p.7). His method of impersonation, that of identifying himself with the widest possible audience, renders him an even more infallible and reasonable person. His assurance that the American people are “one people, one family, and one nation under God” (p.7) is an attempt to unify his audience in the same fold of one single nationalism with no distinctions at all.

Trump poses as a reasonable and responsible person as he cruises along, combating all adversities and unfavorable situations. The motif of nation-building and overall resurgence recurs time and again in the speech. He continues to urge people to accompany him in the march of building a nation that is “full of compassion, courage, and exceptionalism” (p.7). Announcing his promises in quick succession, he calls upon all to join him in his cause of making America a “free, sovereign, and independent nation” (p.8). He urges people through nationalism.

Trump continues to employ the technique of affinity and intimacy to secure assent and acceptance from his audience. By lending a sense of ownership of nation-building to the people of all “religion, faith, and goodwill” (p.8), Trump spares no effort in the task of winning over his audience. He emphasizes that the unity among Americans nurtures a parallel progress in the overall national upliftment, leading to his proud pronouncements: “America will be respected again and admired again” (p. 8). The frequently used pronoun of “we” throughout the speech emphasizes his own involvement with others in the affairs he discusses, fostering a sense of solidarity among all. The reference not only serves as a touchstone but also appeals to all of them to share Trump’s prediction of a ‘prosperous’, ‘proud’, and ‘strong’ (p.8) America.

Towards the end of the speech, Trump’s ethos building becomes fast-paced and far more intense. He emphasizes invincibility, resolution, and resilience as the national character of American people in a string of breathless expressions: “We will not be conquered, we will not be intimidated, we will not be broken, and we will not fail” (p. 8).



Referring to his election win as beckoning the dawn of a new era in America, his assuring closing remarks once again echo the metaphor of “golden age” (p.8) with which he caps his overall argument and completes his speech.

### Conclusion

Using the Aristotelian model of rhetorical appeal of ethos, this paper examines the inaugural speech of the American President Donald J. Trump as he has maneuvered his character to sound just and reasonable to reach out to a larger section of the American audience. The exploration of this article reveals that Trump pitches his positive self-image to call upon his audience (American people) for the endorsement of what he states and argues in the speech. Trump’s painstaking task was to draw the audience’s attention to the compelling imperatives of national revitalization, economic revival, and national dignity. To do so, Trump uses an interplay of the inclusive pronouns “I and we” across the speech to arouse a sense of fraternity, intimacy, and endearment. His self-projection as a fighter, unifier, and national leader produces a reason for the audience to trust his vision of nation-building. Trump clearly points out who is at fault for the abysmal scenario of America and thereby compels his audience to think about who can rescue them now. His speech teems with facts, data, real-life stories, and his own personal incident of an attempted assassination. Trump marshals all these examples to strengthen his trustworthiness and to win his audience over to his side. Thus, as a president who is going to run for a second term for presidential office of America, Trump relies on his own character to communicate the central message of the speech, persuading his audience that only he can work them out of the challenges that they have confronted all through.

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