



Analyzing Political Speeches: Abraham Lincoln and John F. Kennedy

Introduction

Words matter and the words of the Presidents of the United States are especially important because our President serves as a symbol of the nation. From the first presidential speech to the last, the words of Presidents have the potential not only to shape policy but also to unite, challenge, and inspire citizens.

A president's first opportunity to speak as the President of the United States usually happens on Inauguration Day after the oath of office is administered. Although not mandated by the United States Constitution, an inaugural address has been central to every inauguration ceremony since George Washington's in 1789.

Inaugural speeches are important because they give the newly-elected President of the United States the opportunity to connect with the American public, to present the challenges of the era and to outline his goals and how the new administration hopes to meet the challenges facing the nation. Of the inaugural addresses given, only a few are considered by historians to be noteworthy. Among those are the Second Inaugural Address of Abraham Lincoln in 1865 and John F. Kennedy's Inaugural Address of 1961.

President Lincoln would be assassinated only a month after his address. President Kennedy gave the final two speeches of his presidency in Fort Worth, Texas on the morning of November 22, 1963 in Fort Worth, Texas; he would be assassinated that afternoon in Dallas, Texas.

Objectives

Students will:

- identify characteristics of good speeches
- analyze presidential speeches
- compare presidential inaugural speeches
- analyze the final two speeches delivered by President Kennedy in Fort Worth Texas on November 22, 1963

Standards

National Standards in History for Grades 5-12:

Standard 2A, B, C, E

Standard 3A, B, F

Standard 4 F

Standard 5A

Era 9 Standard 3B

Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills:

Grade 6: 21A, 21B, 22D

Grade 7: 7F, 13C, 21A, 21B, 22D



Grade 8: 8C, 22A, 29A, 29B, 29D, 30D

Procedure

Ask students to list what they think are characteristics of all good speeches and to give examples of good speeches they have read or heard.

Possible answers include: speaker should come across as knowledgeable of the topic/subject, have an awareness of the audience and the occasion, use humor, speak clearly and loudly enough to be heard, be brief and use short words and phrases.

Discuss what additional characteristics might be added if the speaker were the President of the United States. Update the list.

Possible answers include: unite the audience, use “we” instead of “I”, use examples from the past including Biblical references for communal values, clearly state the current situation and present views or policies related to the situation, set a tone of optimism, inspire hope, and challenge the audience to act.

Present students with information provided in the Introduction.

Have students read the Second Inaugural Address of Abraham Lincoln and John F. Kennedy’s Inaugural Address of 1961. Identify characteristics of a good speech in each address.

Continue to analyze the speeches by answering the following questions:

- What is the historical context at the time each speech was given?
- What is the focus or main idea of each speech?
- What is each president trying to convey about himself as a leader?
- What does each president say must be done or what is the agenda of each?
- What challenges are put forth for the American people?

Using the information gathered, have students write an essay in which they compare and contrast Lincoln’s Second Inaugural Address and Kennedy’s 1961 Inaugural Address.

Read and analyze the last two speeches given by President Kennedy in Fort Worth, Texas. Divide the class into two groups. Assign half to read the President Kennedy’s November 22, 1963 street speech and the other half his speech delivered at the Chamber of Commerce breakfast. Answer the following questions.

- What commonalities are found in these speeches and Kennedy’s inaugural address?
- What are specific examples that show that Kennedy was knowledgeable about and successful in connecting with his audience?
- How have the citizens of Fort Worth accepted the challenge to assume the burden of leadership?



Conclusion

Have students pretend they have been elected the president of your student body at school. Ask them to compose and deliver to the class an “inaugural address” that incorporates the characteristics of an effective presidential speech.

Extensions

Students write their own inaugural addresses as if they have just been elected president. Ask them to brainstorm current problems that the nation faces and the ways in which a new president may tackle the problems. Outline policy ideas to communicate to the nation. The speech should connect with, inspire, and challenge the citizens.

Compare President Barack Obama’s 2008 inaugural address to the Second Inaugural Address of Abraham Lincoln or to John Kennedy’s address of 1961.

Examine the often quoted words from the inaugural speeches of Presidents Lincoln and Kennedy.

With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation's wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan, to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations.
---President Lincoln

And so, my fellow Americans: ask not what your country can do for you--ask what you can do for your country. . . . Finally, whether you are citizens of America or citizens of the world, ask of us the same high standards of strength and sacrifice which we ask of you. With a good conscience our only sure reward, with history the final judge of our deeds, let us go forth to lead the land we love, asking His blessing and His help, but knowing that here on earth God's work must truly be our own.

---President Kennedy

Discuss why you think the words are remembered. Do they have relevance today?

Examine the final two speeches of President Kennedy. JFK Tribute chose the words “There are no faint hearts in Fort Worth” as memorable. What other lines do you think are worthy of being remembered? Why?



SECOND INAUGURAL ADDRESS OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN

SATURDAY, MARCH 4, 1865

Fellow-Countrymen:

At this second appearing to take the oath of the Presidential office there is less occasion for an extended address than there was at the first. Then a statement somewhat in detail of a course to be pursued seemed fitting and proper. Now, at the expiration of four years, during which public declarations have been constantly called forth on every point and phase of the great contest which still absorbs the attention and engrosses the energies of the nation, little that is new could be presented. The progress of our arms, upon which all else chiefly depends, is as well known to the public as to myself, and it is, I trust, reasonably satisfactory and encouraging to all. With high hope for the future, no prediction in regard to it is ventured.

On the occasion corresponding to this four years ago all thoughts were anxiously directed to an impending civil war. All dreaded it, all sought to avert it. While the inaugural address was being delivered from this place, devoted altogether to saving the Union without war, insurgent agents were in the city seeking to destroy it without war--seeking to dissolve the Union and divide effects by negotiation. Both parties deprecated war, but one of them would make war rather than let the nation survive, and the other would accept war rather than let it perish, and the war came.

One-eighth of the whole population were colored slaves, not distributed generally over the Union, but localized in the southern part of it. These slaves constituted a peculiar and powerful interest. All knew that this interest was somehow the cause of the war. To strengthen, perpetuate, and extend this interest was the object for which the insurgents would rend the Union even by war, while the Government claimed no right to do more than to restrict the territorial enlargement of it. Neither party expected for the war the magnitude or the duration which it has already attained. Neither anticipated that the cause of the conflict might cease with or even before the conflict itself should cease. Each looked for an easier triumph, and a result less fundamental and astounding. Both read the same Bible and pray to the same God, and each invokes His aid against the other. It may seem strange that any men should dare to ask a just God's assistance in wringing their bread from the sweat of other men's faces, but let us judge not, that we be not judged. The prayers of both could not be answered. That of neither has been answered fully. The Almighty has His own purposes. "Woe unto the world because of offenses; for it must needs be that offenses come, but woe to that man by whom the offense cometh." If we shall suppose that American slavery is one of those offenses which, in the providence of God, must needs come, but which, having continued through His appointed time, He now wills to remove, and that He gives to both North and South this terrible war as the woe due to those by whom the offense came, shall we discern therein any departure from those divine attributes which the believers in a living God always ascribe to Him? Fondly do we hope, fervently do we pray, that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue until all the wealth piled by the bondsman's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with



the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said "the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether."

With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation's wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan, to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations.



INAUGURAL ADDRESS OF JOHN F. KENNEDY

FRIDAY, JANUARY 20, 1961

Vice President Johnson, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Chief Justice, President Eisenhower, Vice President Nixon, President Truman, reverend clergy, fellow citizens, we observe today not a victory of party, but a celebration of freedom--symbolizing an end, as well as a beginning--signifying renewal, as well as change. For I have sworn before you and Almighty God the same solemn oath our forebears prescribed nearly a century and three quarters ago.

The world is very different now. For man holds in his mortal hands the power to abolish all forms of human poverty and all forms of human life. And yet the same revolutionary beliefs for which our forebears fought are still at issue around the globe--the belief that the rights of man come not from the generosity of the state, but from the hand of God.

We dare not forget today that we are the heirs of that first revolution. Let the word go forth from this time and place, to friend and foe alike, that the torch has been passed to a new generation of Americans--born in this century, tempered by war, disciplined by a hard and bitter peace, proud of our ancient heritage--and unwilling to witness or permit the slow undoing of those human rights to which this Nation has always been committed, and to which we are committed today at home and around the world.

Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe, in order to assure the survival and the success of liberty.

This much we pledge--and more.

To those old allies whose cultural and spiritual origins we share, we pledge the loyalty of faithful friends. United, there is little we cannot do in a host of cooperative ventures. Divided, there is little we can do--for we dare not meet a powerful challenge at odds and split asunder.

To those new States whom we welcome to the ranks of the free, we pledge our word that one form of colonial control shall not have passed away merely to be replaced by a far more iron tyranny. We shall not always expect to find them supporting our view. But we shall always hope to find them strongly supporting their own freedom--and to remember that, in the past, those who foolishly sought power by riding the back of the tiger ended up inside.

To those peoples in the huts and villages across the globe struggling to break the bonds of mass misery, we pledge our best efforts to help them help themselves, for whatever period is required--not because the Communists may be doing it, not because we seek their votes, but because it is right. If a free society cannot help the many who are poor, it cannot save the few who are rich.

To our sister republics south of our border, we offer a special pledge--to convert our good words into good deeds--in a new alliance for progress--to assist free men and free governments in



casting off the chains of poverty. But this peaceful revolution of hope cannot become the prey of hostile powers. Let all our neighbors know that we shall join with them to oppose aggression or subversion anywhere in the Americas. And let every other power know that this Hemisphere intends to remain the master of its own house.

To that world assembly of sovereign states, the United Nations, our last best hope in an age where the instruments of war have far outpaced the instruments of peace, we renew our pledge of support--to prevent it from becoming merely a forum for invective--to strengthen its shield of the new and the weak--and to enlarge the area in which its writ may run.

Finally, to those nations who would make themselves our adversary, we offer not a pledge but a request: that both sides begin anew the quest for peace, before the dark powers of destruction unleashed by science engulf all humanity in planned or accidental self-destruction.

We dare not tempt them with weakness. For only when our arms are sufficient beyond doubt can we be certain beyond doubt that they will never be employed.

But neither can two great and powerful groups of nations take comfort from our present course--both sides overburdened by the cost of modern weapons, both rightly alarmed by the steady spread of the deadly atom, yet both racing to alter that uncertain balance of terror that stays the hand of mankind's final war.

So let us begin anew--remembering on both sides that civility is not a sign of weakness, and sincerity is always subject to proof. Let us never negotiate out of fear. But let us never fear to negotiate.

Let both sides explore what problems unite us instead of belaboring those problems which divide us.

Let both sides, for the first time, formulate serious and precise proposals for the inspection and control of arms--and bring the absolute power to destroy other nations under the absolute control of all nations.

Let both sides seek to invoke the wonders of science instead of its terrors. Together let us explore the stars, conquer the deserts, eradicate disease, tap the ocean depths, and encourage the arts and commerce.

Let both sides unite to heed in all corners of the earth the command of Isaiah--to "undo the heavy burdens ... and to let the oppressed go free."

And if a beachhead of cooperation may push back the jungle of suspicion, let both sides join in creating a new endeavor, not a new balance of power, but a new world of law, where the strong are just and the weak secure and the peace preserved.



All this will not be finished in the first 100 days. Nor will it be finished in the first 1,000 days, nor in the life of this Administration, nor even perhaps in our lifetime on this planet. But let us begin.

In your hands, my fellow citizens, more than in mine, will rest the final success or failure of our course. Since this country was founded, each generation of Americans has been summoned to give testimony to its national loyalty. The graves of young Americans who answered the call to service surround the globe.

Now the trumpet summons us again--not as a call to bear arms, though arms we need; not as a call to battle, though embattled we are--but a call to bear the burden of a long twilight struggle, year in and year out, "rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation"--a struggle against the common enemies of man: tyranny, poverty, disease, and war itself.

Can we forge against these enemies a grand and global alliance, North and South, East and West, that can assure a more fruitful life for all mankind? Will you join in that historic effort?

In the long history of the world, only a few generations have been granted the role of defending freedom in its hour of maximum danger. I do not shrink from this responsibility--I welcome it. I do not believe that any of us would exchange places with any other people or any other generation. The energy, the faith, the devotion which we bring to this endeavor will light our country and all who serve it--and the glow from that fire can truly light the world.

And so, my fellow Americans: ask not what your country can do for you--ask what you can do for your country.

My fellow citizens of the world: ask not what America will do for you, but what together we can do for the freedom of man.

Finally, whether you are citizens of America or citizens of the world, ask of us the same high standards of strength and sacrifice which we ask of you. With a good conscience our only sure reward, with history the final judge of our deeds, let us go forth to lead the land we love, asking His blessing and His help, but knowing that here on earth God's work must truly be our own.



REMARKS BY JFK IN FRONT OF HOTEL TEXAS

NOVEMBER 22, 1963

Mr. Vice President, Jim Wright, Governor, Senator Yarborough, Mr. Buck, ladies and gentlemen:

There are no faint hearts in Fort Worth, and I appreciate your being here this morning. Mrs. Kennedy is organizing herself. It takes longer, but, of course, she looks better than we do when she does it. But we appreciate your welcome.

This city has been a great western city, the defense of the West, cattle, oil, and all the rest. It has believed in strength in this city, and strength in this State, and strength in this country.

What we are trying to do in this country and what we are trying to do around the world, I believe, is quite simple: and that is to build a military structure which will defend the vital interests of the United States. And in that great cause, Fort Worth, as it did in World War II, as it did in developing the best bomber system in the world, the B-58, and as it will now do in developing the best fighter system in the world, the TFX, Fort Worth will play its proper part. And that is why we have placed so much emphasis in the last 3 years in building a defense system second to none, until now the United States is stronger than it has ever been in its history. And secondly, we believe that the new environment, space, the new sea, is also an area where the United States should be second to none.

And this State of Texas and the United States is now engaged in the most concentrated effort in history to provide leadership in this area as it must here on earth. And this is our second great effort. And in December--next month--the United States will fire the largest booster in the history of the world, putting us ahead of the Soviet Union in that area for the first time in our history.

And thirdly, for the United States to fulfill its obligations around the world requires that the United States move forward economically, that the people of this country participate in rising prosperity. And it is a fact in 1962, and the first 6 months of 1963, the economy of the United States grew not only faster than nearly every Western country, which had not been true in the fifties, but also grew faster than the Soviet Union itself. That is the kind of strength the United States needs, economically, in space, militarily.

And in the final analysis, that strength depends upon the willingness of the citizens of the United States to assume the burdens of leadership.

I know one place where they are, here in this rain, in Fort Worth, in Texas, in the United States. We are going forward.

Thank you



REMARKS AT THE BREAKFAST OF THE FORT WORTH CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

NOVEMBER 22, 1963

Mr. Buck, Mr. Vice President, Governor Connally, Senator Yarborough, Jim Wright, members of the congressional delegation, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Attorney General, ladies and gentlemen:

Two years ago, I introduced myself in Paris by saying that I was the man who had accompanied Mrs. Kennedy to Paris. I am getting somewhat that same sensation as I travel around Texas. Nobody wonders what Lyndon and I wear.

I am glad to be here in Jim Wright's city. About 35 years ago, a Congressman from California who had just been elected received a letter from an irate constituent which said: "During the campaign you promised to have the Sierra Madre Mountains reforested. You have been in office one month and you haven't done so." Well, no one in Fort Worth has been that unreasonable, but in some ways he has had the Sierra Madre Mountains reforested, and here in Fort Worth he has contributed to its growth.

He speaks for Fort Worth and he speaks for the country, and I don't know any city that is better represented in the Congress of the United States than Fort Worth. And if there are any Democrats here this morning, I am sure you wouldn't hold that against him.

Three years ago last September I came here, with the Vice President, and spoke at Burke Burnett Park, and I called, in that speech, for a national security policy and a national security system which was second to none--a position which said not first, but, if, when and how, but tint. That city responded to that call as it has through its history. And we have been putting that pledge into practice ever since.

And I want to say a word about that pledge here in Fort Worth, which understands national defense and its importance to the security of the United States. During the days of the Indian War, this city was a fort. During the days of World War I, even before the United States got into the war, Royal Canadian Air Force pilots were training here. During the days of World War II, the great Liberator bombers, in which my brother flew with his co-pilot from this city, were produced here.

The first nonstop flight around the world took off and returned here, in a plane built in factories here. The first truly intercontinental bomber, the B-36, was produced here. The B-58, which is the finest weapons system in the world today, which has demonstrated most recently in flying from Tokyo to London, with an average speed of nearly 1,000 miles per hour, is a Fort Worth product.

The Iroquois helicopter from Fort Worth is a mainstay in our fight against the guerrillas in South Viet-Nam. The transportation of crews between our missile sites is done in planes produced here in Fort Worth. So wherever the confrontation may occur, and in the last 3 years it has occurred on at least three occasions, in Laos, Berlin, and Cuba, and it will again--wherever it occurs, the products of Fort Worth and the men of Fort Worth provide us with a sense of security.



And in the not too distant future a new Fort Worth product--and I am glad that there was a table separating Mr. Hicks and myself--a new Fort Worth product, the TFX Tactical Fighter Experimental--nobody knows what those words mean, but that is what they mean, Tactical Fighter Experimental--will serve the forces of freedom and will be the number one airplane in the world today.

There has been a good deal of discussion of the long and hard fought competition to win the TFX contract, but very little discussion about what this plane will do. It will be the first operational aircraft ever produced that can literally spread its wings through the air. It will thus give us a single plane capable of carrying out missions of speed as well as distance, able to fly very far in one form or very fast in another. It can take off from rugged, short airstrips, enormously increasing the Air Force's ability to participate in limited wars. The same basic plane will serve the Navy's carriers, saving the taxpayers at least \$1 billion in costs if they built separate planes for the Navy and the Air Force.

The Government of Australia, by purchasing \$125 million of TFX planes before they are even off the drawing boards, has already testified to the merit of this plane, and at the same time it is confident in the ability of Fort Worth to meet its schedule. In all these ways, the success of our national defense depends upon this city in the western United States, 10,000 miles from Viet-Nam, 5,000 or 6,000 miles from Berlin, thousands of miles from trouble spots in Latin America and Africa or the Middle East. And yet Fort Worth and what it does and what it produces participates in all these great historic events. Texas, as a whole, and Fort Worth bear particular responsibility for this national defense effort, for military procurement in this State totals nearly \$1 1/4 billion, fifth highest among all the States of the Union. There are more military personnel on active duty in this State than any in the Nation, save one--and it is not Massachusetts--any in the Nation save one, with a combined military-civilian defense payroll of well over a billion dollars. I don't recite these for any partisan purpose. They are the result of American determination to be second to none, and as a result of the effort which this country has made in the last 3 years we are second to none.

In the past 3 years we have increased the defense budget of the United States by over 20 percent; increased the program of acquisition for Polaris submarines from 24 to 41; increased our Minuteman missile purchase program by more than 75 percent; doubled the number of strategic bombers and missiles on alert; doubled the number of nuclear weapons available in the strategic alert forces; increased the tactical nuclear forces deployed in Western Europe by over 60 percent; added five combat ready divisions to the Army of the United States, and five tactical fighter wings to the Air Force of the United States; increased our strategic airlift capability by 75 percent; and increased our special counter-insurgency forces which are engaged now in South Viet-Nam by 600 percent. I hope those who want a stronger America and place it on some signs will also place those figures next to it.

This is not an easy effort. This requires sacrifice by the people of the United States. But this is a very dangerous and uncertain world. As I said earlier, on three occasions in the last 3 years the United States has had a direct confrontation. No one can say when it will come again. No one expects that our life will be easy, certainly not in this decade, and perhaps not in this century. But we should realize what a burden and responsibility the people of the United States have borne for



so many years. Here, a country which lived in isolation, divided and protected by the Atlantic and the Pacific, uninterested in the struggles of the world around it, here in the short space of 18 years after the Second World War, we put ourselves, by our own will and by necessity, into defense of alliances with countries all around the globe. Without the United States, South Vietnam would collapse overnight. Without the United States, the SEATO alliance would collapse overnight. Without the United States the CENTO alliance would collapse overnight. Without the United States there would be no NATO. And gradually Europe would drift into neutralism and indifference. Without the efforts of the United States in the Alliance for Progress, the Communist advance onto the mainland of South America would long ago have taken place.

So this country, which desires only to be free, which desires to be secure, which desired to live at peace for 18 years under three different administrations, has borne more than its share of the burden, has stood watch for more than its number of years. I don't think we are fatigued or tired. We would like to live as we once lived. But history will not permit it. The Communist balance of power is still strong. The balance of power is still on the side of freedom. We are still the keystone in the arch of freedom, and I think we will continue to do as we have done in our past, our duty, and the people of Texas will be in the lead.

So I am glad to come to this State which has played such a significant role in so many efforts in this century, and to say that here in Fort Worth you people will be playing a major role in the maintenance of the security of the United States for the next 10 years. I am confident, as I look to the future, that our chances for security, our chances for peace, are better than they have been in the past. And the reason is because we are stronger. And with that strength is a determination to not only maintain the peace, but also the vital interests of the United States. To that great cause, Texas and the United States are committed.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9 a.m. (c.s.t.) in the Texas Hotel in Fort Worth. In his opening words he referred to Raymond Buck, president of the Fort Worth Chamber of Commerce, Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson, and to Governor John B. Connally, Senator Ralph W. Yarborough, Representative Jim Wright, Byron Tunnell, Speaker of the State House of Representatives, and Waggorier Cart, State Attorney General, all of Texas. He later referred to Marion Hicks, a vice president of Fort Worth General Dynamics and vice president of the Fort Worth Chamber of Commerce.