

Civil Rights Address

“Black Lives Matter“, this is what see and hear in the news from people protesting in the US and all over world now. The reason for these protests is the tragic death of George Flyod, a black man, who was choked to death by a white police officer.

Since racial discrimination hasn't ended, the goal of “Black Lives Matter“ is to stop racism towards black people. This was also John F. Kennedy's goal on June 11, 1963, when he gave a speech on national television. But how did he try to reach his aim?

At first, John F. Kennedy begins his speech with directly addressing the audience (“Good evening, my fellow citizens[...]“ (l.1)). With a direct address of the audience, a bond between the speaker and his audience is created. By beginning the speech with the words “my fellow citizens“, Kennedy attempts to show that he's one of his people. To strengthen this bond he uses pronouns throughout his speech (“I hope [...]“ (l.10); “[...] we are committed [...]“ (l.15)). Just as in the beginning of his speech, the former president tries to proof by using pronouns, as “we“, that they're in this together and that only if they work together, this problem can be solved.

Creating a bond with the audience right at the beginning is important, as he wants to earn the trust of his nation.

Moreover, Kennedy illustrates the injustice of black American citizens by a using an anaphora (“It ought to be possible [...] for American students[...]. It ought to be possible for American citizens[...]“ (ll.17-23)). Repeating the beginning of the sentence over again, reminds the audience that African Americans have way less rights than white Americans. He goes on drawing a contrast by informing the audience about the reality of the life of African-Americans in the US. He uses an anaphora to stress the contrast between whites and blacks (“[...] one third as much chance of becoming [...]. [...] twice as much as becoming [...]“ (ll.33-34)). The contrast created between the desired life and the reality, promotes the main purpose of Kennedy's speech: equal treatment for all American citizens.

Furthermore, Kennedy illustrates the dissatisfaction of the Americans by a metaphor (“[...] tide of discontent that threatens the public safety“ (l. 40)). This metaphor makes clear how unsatisfied Americans all over the country are, which effects everyone.

He compares this issue with the Bible and the constitution (“It is as old as the Scriptures and is as clear as the American Constitution“ (ll.46-47)). As this comparison is easy to understand for every American. As a result, it's brought to the listeners' mind, for how long and how obvious this problem has been in our society.

Additionally, he then makes a historical allusion to President Lincoln and how he freed the slaves (“One hundred years of delay have passed since President Lincoln freed the slaves[...]“ (ll.48-49)). He uses this allusion to strengthen his antithesis that even though their ancestries were freed, they aren't fully free now. This he underlines with an anaphora (“They are not yet freed from [...]“ “They are not yet freed from[...]“ (ll.49-50)). It also draws the audience's attention to the injustice of black citizens, as they aren't “fully free“. Thereupon he alludes that the US won't be a free country until all of the people are equal (“And this Nation, for all it hopes and all its boats, will not fully be free until all its citizens are free.“ (ll. 51-52)). To internalize the importance of this sentence, Kennedy uses onomatopoeic language (“[...] for all it hopes and all its boats [...]“ (l.51)).

The reference to “this nation“ is a motive, which is found in other parts of his speech as well (“Now the time has come for this Nation to fulfill its promise“ (l.53)). By referring to the Nation and personifying it as if it were a person, all people are embodied, which creates a sense of community.

He illustrates the unavoidable necessity of equality by using a metaphor (“[...] cries for equality[...]“ (l.54) ; “The fires of frustration and discord [...]“ (ll.55-56). Thus an emotional vivid image is created, which influences the audience’s feelings directly.

He goes on criticizing the moral crisis and its results by using an anaphora to underline the obvious anger of the society (“It cannot be met by repressive police action. It cannot be left to increased demonstrations [...]. It cannot be quieted [...]“ (ll.60-63)).

When addressing the Congress to end segregation, he uses an enumeration (“[...] giving all Americans the right to be served in facilities which are open to public-hotels, restaurants, heaters, retail stores, and similar establishments“ (ll.70-72)). This enumeration highlights how limited the lives of African-Americans are.

Kennedy thanks those people, who fought for equal rights (“[...] I want to pay tribute to those citizens North and South who’ve been working in their communities to make life better for all.“ (ll.80-82)). By thanking those who support civil rights, he emphasizes, that he shares their values, which again promotes his purpose of his speech.

At the end of his speech he again enumerates the injustices of African Americans (“[...] denied equal rights, denied the opportunity to eat at a restaurant [...], denied the right to a decent education, denied almost today the right to attend a State University even though qualified.“ (ll.90-93)). Naming them at almost the end of his speech, makes the audience internalize the issue even more.

To reach his aim he addresses the audience directly asking them for help (“ Therefore, I’m asking for your help [...]“ (l.103)) and telling them that’s best, as that’s what they would want ([...] which we would want ourselves; to give a chance for every children to be educated [...]“ (ll.104-105)). As a result, the listener’s feelings are influenced, which gains him emotional support for helping to reach his goal: civil rights.

In conclusion, John F. Kennedy employs a lot of different rhetorical devices, just as anaphoras and addressing the audience, to convey his main idea of his speech among every citizen of the United States. As we can see today, African-Americans have equal rights, but still Kennedy didn’t fully reach his aim, as racial discrimination is still a huge problem not only in the United States, but also in the rest of the world.