

H: ~~Hey Fortinbras!~~ Fair day, noble Fortinbras!

F: Greetings Hamlet! What brings you here?

H: I was just thinking...

F: Nothing new there... (groans)

H: ... about the Gettysburg Address by Abraham Lincoln. It seems to me that its primary purpose was to persuade his audience of the righteousness of the Union's involvement in the Civil War.

F: I always thought it was merely to pay tribute to the fallen soldiers at Gettysburg — and what a glorious battle I might add! Ahh the clash of ten thousand men and mighty armies!

H: Yes, but the primary purpose of any oratory is to persuade the audience to espouse the



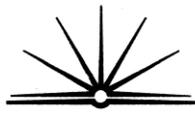
ideas and values being expounded.

F: Fine then, what about Martin Luther King Jr.'s I Have A Dream speech?

It was designed to provoke urgently needed civil reform, ~~not~~ to indulge in any of your procrastination.

H: No, the purpose of that speech was to dramatize the suffering of Negro Americans, even after ~~the~~ Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, and to dramatize their hardships under the focus of national attention.

F: Very well, let's take a closer look. We'll start with Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address. Now, you cannot deny that it was written to honour the soldiers who fought and died

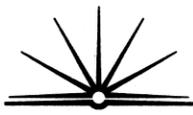


at Gettysburg.

H: I am not disputing that. What I'm saying is that the primary purpose of the Gettysburg Address was to persuade Lincoln's audience of his moral righteousness, and to convince them to adopt his political stance regarding the Civil War.

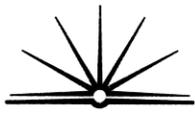
F: How so?

H: A tone of formality and statefulness is immediately established, with the line "Four score and seven years ago", whereas references to "our forefathers" and "fellow countrymen" align with the concept of unity. Lincoln glorifies the Union, and the anaphora of "nation so conceived, so dedicated" invigorates the



audience and inspires patriotism. Also, the simplistic Jeremiad structure is immediately established by drawing attention to the immediate challenges of the present. Lincoln's use of a dramatic tri-colon in rising cadence "cannot dedicate—cannot consecrate—cannot hallow" resembles a spiritual incantation, and conveys a comforting sense of moral righteousness.

F: It seems to me the Address was merely a eulogy given to the fallen soldiers of the Union. Lincoln pays homage to the dead, by referring to them as "honoured dead", by "dedicating a portion of that field as a final resting place," and by saying

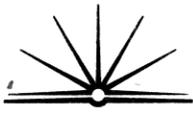


"The world can never forget what they did here". In doing so, he creates a sense that the fallen have died for a worthy cause.

H: Which leads into the real purpose of the Gettysburg Address — to convince those politically opposed to him to adopt his stance.

F: However, the catalyst for the speech was the heavy loss of life at Gettysburg...

H: ...and Lincoln humbles both himself, and his audience, and indeed everybody alive, by saying that the dead "have consecrated it for a use our poor power to add or detract"; creating a sense of shame and insufficiency in the audience at



their collective inaction and political vacillation, inspiring them to "be dedicated to the unfinished work" so that the dead "shall not have died in vain".

~~Finally~~

F: So you're saying that in drawing on the audience's sense of waste, he is inspiring them to "take increased devotion to their cause in the Civil War."

H: Exactly. Finally, Lincoln makes reference to a "new Birth of Freedom", and "government of the people, by the people, for the people", justifying the Emancipation Proclamation as necessary steps to ensure that "their way of life shall not perish from the earth", juxtaposing

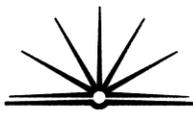


He glorified ideals of the Union with apocalyptic horror.

F: Alright you've made your point. So the primary purpose of the Gettysburg Address was to persuade the audience to espouse his values.

Now, what about Martin Luther King?

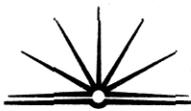
H: Over eighty years later, Martin Luther King Jr. made his historic I Have A Dream speech on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial "in whose symbolic shadow they all stood". King's pursuit of non-violent protest in a time of racial segregation and militant tension ultimately gave him the means to reach all of America with his words.



F: King believed that urgent reform was necessary to alleviate "the Negro's legitimate discontent", and drives his views of America's dismal state through the abundant use of imagery, such as his opening reference to "millions of Negro slaves who have been seared by the flames of withering injustice".

H: Go on...

F: King follows on with an extended metaphor with recurring references to business terminology with negative connotations such as "bad cheque" and "insufficient funds" drawing upon the capitalist nature of the American audience. Furthermore, King urges action by insisting that "this is no time to engage in the



luxury of cooling off" or the
"tranquillizing drug of gradualism".

H: I know, but coupled with the constant repetition of "Now is the time" King inspires hope in a community that is accustomed to, yet anguished, at waiting for change.

F: You interest me greatly, continue.

H: I agree with what you said about King encouraging civil reform, but you're missing the point of the speech. The title "I Have A Dream" is one of the most important elements of the speech. Anaphora is used with the namesake, and after each iteration of "I have a dream", King describes a different aspect of his vision, such as "the day that my children



shall be judged, not by the colour of their skin, but by the content of their character", appealing to a theme which any parent would sympathize with.

F: What does King hope to accomplish by telling us of his dream? I don't see the point...

H: That's why you're the general and I'm the philosopher. In portraying his dream, King reminds his audience of the disparities which exist between their nation as it is, and as it should be according to "the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence"

F: Hah! ~~As~~ in doing so, he encourages civil reform. Rather successfully too,



I might add, judging from the events of the forty years after his speech, which had sweeping repercussions on the course of civil reform in America.

H. True, true. You may be right.

However, I think by now you'll agree with me, dear Fortinbras, that great speeches are designed to persuade! Persuasion is the fundamental purpose of any oratory, to persuade the audience to espouse the values and ideas being expounded. It is the success with which a speech persuades its audience which ultimately determines the speech's effectiveness and greatness.

F: Oh very well, Hamlet. Adieu!

H: Adieu!