
Writer's Statement about "Exploiting the American Dream: The Political Rhetoric of Julian Castro"

KATELYN VAN DE WATER

When I was tasked with writing a rhetorical analysis piece in the fall of 2012, the country was overrun with political advertisements, presidential debates, and potential topics for my paper. The 2012 presidential election couldn't have come at a more opportune time, as it gave me numerous ways to see the rhetoric I had been learning about in the classroom applied to life outside those four walls.

Despite knowing how intertwined politics and rhetoric can be, I didn't choose to watch Julian Castro's keynote speech at the Democratic National Convention in hopes of finding a topic for my assignment. I chose to watch it because 2012 was the first year I was going to be able to exercise my right to vote in an election. However, as I listened, I found myself questioning a lot the decisions Julian Castro was making in regards to his speech. Why was he speaking so much about himself, his background, and his family if he wasn't the one running for president? And why did he wait until fourteen minutes into a twenty-minute speech to begin talking in depth about the man who was running? Surely, there had to be a rhetorical strategy in place, and I wanted to know what it was.

Before even beginning to analyze the rhetoric of Castro's speech in depth, I faced my first obstacle. Taking a twenty-minute long speech that employed numerous rhetorical techniques and fitting it into one arguable claim proved to be a daunting task. I started to question whether or not I should even continue analyzing Castro's speech. I knew there were specific strategies being used and I could point out singular examples, but, at the time, it seemed to contain only a hodgepodge of rhetorical techniques that didn't truly fit together. However, when I voiced my concerns to my classmates, the discussion that ensued caused the overall rhetorical strategy to become blindingly clear and my claim was set.

Once my claim was in place, I faced my second (and most frustrating) challenge. I struggled with how to organize such a long paper in a way that would allow my ideas to build off one another and, more importantly, in a way the audience would understand. Deciding on an organizational pattern was probably one of the longest parts of this process. I went through so many different drafts organized so many different ways, because I knew that even if I had brilliant ideas, a poor organizational pattern could ruin my whole analysis. My professor, Dr. Rounsaville, really helped me get over this hurdle. She read just as many drafts as I wrote and her suggestions on how to organize my paper helped me to decide on the most beneficial way to do so.

My intended audience for this paper was geared towards anyone in the country who votes in elections, specifically first-time voters like myself. I think it is well known that politicians are

masterful speakers, but I wonder how many people truly know how much planning and thought goes into each political speech. Politicians are good at what they do, and that is using words to make voters think and feel what they want them to think and feel. When voters are uninformed or oblivious to these rhetorical devices, a real problem can arise in that elections are no longer won based on true facts, but rather on the facts the politicians sold to us the “right” way. I’m hoping that my paper will cause readers to listen a little more closely and recognize when rhetoric is being used to win us over. Politicians are smart, but we can be smarter.