

The Arrangement of Robert Kennedy's Eulogy for Martin Luther King

Question: Explain why RFK used Rogerian strategies in his speech and hypothesise as to whether such strategies could be useful in today's context.

Introduction (Exordium, Partitio):

From the 1960s to today – has anything changed?

- **HOOK:** Similarity between race riots of the 1960s and 2015.
 - Mention new academic textbook on #blacklivesmatter (Arnett, "Dialogue on campuses") – highlight the importance of discussions about #blacklivesmatter in education contexts, but ask how best to structure such discussions? Perhaps rhetoric of RFK can help.
- **THESIS:**
RFK provides a good rhetorical model BECAUSE he uses Rogerian strategies in his eulogy to calm his audience and open people to various points of view.
- **STRUCTURE:** Briefly describe structure (definition of Rogers's rhetoric, Context of RFK's speech, Analysis of speech, Refutation of Criticisms of Rogerian rhetoric).

Body (Narratio, Confirmatio, Refutatio):

Analysing RFK's Rogerian strategies

- **Body Paragraph 1: Define Rogerian argument (Narratio)**
 - See section on "Rogers's Original Goals" in Kearney, "Rogerian Principles and the Writing Classroom", p. 169.
 - Describe the 2 key features of Rogerian argument (RA) and why they work. For example, Kearney describes the creation of a nonthreatening environment (170) and the listening with understanding (170).
 - State that these strategies were obviously suited to the heightened emotional context of RFK's speech on MLK (LINK).
- **Body Paragraph 2: Explain the context of RFK's speech (Narratio)**
 - Describe the context of RFK's speech, focusing on violent riots leading up to the speech. Refer to Sussman's "Oratory of Tragedy" and emphasise the tragedy of MLK's death and how it would have threatened the audience. State that Kennedy turned to Rogerian strategies to negotiate any threats (LINK)
- **Analyse the speech's use of Rogerian strategies (Confirmatio)**
 - **Body Paragraph 3: Quote example of Rogerian argument in Kennedy's speech** – "Could you lower those signs, please? -- I have some very sad news for all of you" and "Martin Luther King dedicated his life to love and to justice between fellow human beings" (Kennedy)
 - These quotes highlight the way an author begins a Rogerian argument by creating a nonthreatening environment. Politics are removed (lowered signs), the speaker works in the audience's interest ("for you"), and their love of MLK is acknowledged.

- Body Paragraph 4: Quote example of Rogerian argument in Kennedy's speech – "For those of you who are black [...] For those of you who are black" (Kennedy)
 - These two parts of Kennedy's speech highlight exemplify how an author can demonstrate listening with understanding. The two main sections of the speech are validations of feelings the audience might have. Ask whether these are genuinely Rogerian techniques or good adaptations of existing techniques (LINK).
- Body Paragraph 5: Refute criticisms of Rogerian rhetoric (Refutatio)
 - Look at critics of Rogerian rhetoric summarised by Kearney.
 - Kearney describes how Rogers never intended his principles of communication to be applied to written or uni-directional arguments (like RFK's). She concludes by saying that adaptations of Rogers's techniques in writing classrooms are good even if they don't follow Rogers's initial intentions.
 - Refutation would need to acknowledge that the analysis of RFK's speech does not mean that RFK was following Rogers's advice or that he was true to Rogers's intentions. Nevertheless, the analysis reveals how RFK's rhetoric worked to calm and convince the audience.

Conclusion (Peroratio):

The effectiveness of Rogerian strategies and how they could be used today

- Summarise RFK's effective use of Rogerian strategies (refer to the fact that there were no riots in Indiana).
 - Refer to Sussman again (RFK's speech is linked to the nonviolent aftermath in Indiana): "Soon after [RFK's speech] rioting broke out in 76 American cities; 46 died, 2500 were injured; some 70,000 federal and National Guard soldiers were needed to quell the violence. Notably, Indiana was not one of those cities" (74).
- Return to the recent race riots (2014/2015), and describe the need for understanding to overcome hatred/fear/separation. Refer to comments by the author of *Black Lives Matter*, that "A lot of emotions running strong" is why a textbook is necessary (Finley). Suggest that further research might examine whether the rhetorical strategies of *Black Lives Matter* presents Rogerian rhetoric, or an argument structure that is as effective as RFK's speech.

Works Cited

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