

CMST 4165
HISTORY AND CRITICISM OF AMERICAN PUBLIC ADDRESS
SPRING 2016

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OFFICE HOURS:
M,W,F: 8:50-9:20
11:40-12:20

THE COURSE:

In this course we will examine the ongoing rhetorical construction of American life and culture through the medium of public address. Public address has held a central position in American public life since before the founding of the nation. In that time span expectations have been fashioned and generic constraints have emerged which shape and define an effective speech for an American audience.

Of course, as the course title suggests, this is also a class about rhetorical criticism. Accordingly, our mission requires that we adopt a rhetorical stance toward the public and social. Rhetoric is, after all, the art of dealing with the contingent. If, as Berger and Luckmann tell us, our inhabited world is socially constructed, then Bryant's formulation of rhetoric as "an art of adjusting ideas to people and people to ideas through the manipulation of symbols" places rhetoric at the core of all that is social.

Of course the very term "Rhetorical Criticism" summons us to approach rhetorical artifacts with a critical stance. A critical stance requires that we remove ourselves from the action such as is possible – that we set aside our immediate, often conditioned, response and attempt to describe, analyze, and interpret a message before evaluating it. An unfortunate, albeit understandable, feature of contemporary American life is the tendency to exclaim some view on an issue, backed by little but an "irritable mental urge" in Lionel Trilling's famous phrase, self-satisfied that we have exercised our right to an opinion and confident that all opinions are equal. Well, they are not all equal. Far too often the ill-informed rot that people profess masquerades as legitimate civic participation, diminishing the quality of life for us all.

Rhetorical Criticism is a tool to combat the impoverishment of the public debates that impact us all. In the end, a critical/rhetorical bearing is an approach to critical thinking. By adopting this posture we are better equipped to discriminate among messages and to make choices that better serve ourselves and our society. The design of the assignments in this class is intended to both sharpen your skills as a consumer of rhetorical discourse and heighten your ability to articulate your thoughts in the marketplace of ideas.

Along the way then, we will take a crack at the following sort of questions:

How and why did this nation emerge at the time and place it did?
What key issues were focal points in the debates which shaped us?
Why have speeches been central to communal life? Are they still?
How do speeches create and legitimate a community?
How was an American public constructed?
What happens to speeches as they become increasingly mediated?
What are the criteria for the Great Speech? Are they universal?
What is the connection between power and speech?

THE TEXT (*required*):

1) Foss, S.K. (2009). *Rhetorical Criticism: Exploration and Practice*. Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press.

AND A URL:

1) www.americanrhetoric.com

THE SIMPLE MATH:	<u>PTS.</u>
Mid-Term Exam	200
Final Exam	200
Short Paper and presentation	150
Term Paper	400
Participation & Preparedness	50
Total	<hr/> 1000

THE GRADING SCALE:

<u>%</u>	<u>POINTS</u>	<u>LETTER</u>
97	>970	A+
93	930-969	A
90	900-929	A-
87	870-899	B+
83	830-869	B
80	800-829	B-
77	770-799	C+
73	730-769	C
70	700-729	C-
67	670-699	D+
63	630-669	D
60	600-629	D-
<60	<600	F

THE ASSIGNMENTS:

Exams: The Midterm and Final exams will consist of objective questions such as true/false, multiple choice, matching, and definition. Questions may come from the text, the speeches, class lecture, or student presentations.

Short Paper and presentation: I will require you to select a speech from the list of 100 greatest speeches of the 20th century and prepare a short neo-Aristotelean analysis of that speech. While the Neo-Aristotelean method is somewhat outdated, it remains a good training exercise due to its formulaic, cookie-cutter method. Remember that I'm looking for *your* perspective to be applied within the parameters of the method. The only way you can go wrong is to rail us with asinine, unsupported assertions. Half of this grade will rest on a 5-6 page paper with the remainder riding on a 5-6 minute presentation of your findings to the class followed by a self-led discussion. Think of this as a dry run for your term paper. I intend to engage you and provide feedback as well as foster an environment that will encourage peer feedback. My focus will be on the skill with which you apply and articulate your approach to your artifact. As we better understand rhetorical processes as students we become better practicing rhetoricians as citizens. The paper will be worth 100 points while the presentation and discussion will carry 50 points.

Term Paper: A 10 page applied rhetorical analysis paper is due no later than 4/15. Select one of the critical approaches (**NOT** neo-Aristotelean) addressed in the text and engage a significant American speech from any era and illustrate how the rhetorical precept advances our understanding of the chosen artifact. You should choose an artifact first, then select a rhetorical/critical approach that you feel fits that artifact. The book provides excellent examples – read them and use them as models for your own work. Feel free to discuss or email potential ideas for the paper early on in the semester. The American Rhetoric website is your artifact bank for this assignment. However, a word of caution is in order: Many of the speeches archived in those files are not American speeches. Clear your choice with me!

Advice for both papers: There are no right or wrong answers; you will be evaluated on your ability to research, and articulate a rhetorical/critical approach, and how well you apply it to illuminate a particular artifact. Explore your curiosity, but keep your focus narrow (one rhetorical method, one artifact).

Participation and Preparedness: I'm looking for class discussion in this course. Accordingly, you should be familiar with readings before class. I will ask questions randomly from both the theoretical content as well as assigned speeches.

SCHEDULE: Will follow shortly on Moodle.

THE RULES:

I'm not going to insult your intelligence with a litany of specific rules. Rather, I simply expect decorum appropriate to a senior level class.

A note on attendance/participation: Both are important in any class at this level. You are certainly going to find out what I think -- I want to know what you think as well. It is through such a dialectic that knowledge is sharpened, wisdom gained. You will find that it is important to your overall success that you keep up with the reading schedule and attend class. My experience teaches me that these two factors correlate tightly with the final grade earned by a student.

FINALLY:

The Americans with Disabilities Act and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973: If you have a disability that may have some impact on your work in this class and for which you may require accommodations, please see a coordinator in the Office of Disability Affairs (112 Johnston Hall) so that such accommodations can be arranged. After you receive your accommodation letter, you must meet with me to discuss the provisions of those accommodations.