

Brèves propositions de corrigé pour le devoir
« Barack Obama's Inaugural Address »

Introduction

Although not a constitutional requirement, the Inaugural Address is one of the very important moments in a Presidency. It takes place just after the oath of office and usually aims at establishing the style of the new president, especially as it is now televised and thus heard and seen – rather than read – but many people and political commentators. Jill Lepore who studied the inaugural addresses of US Presidents finds them often unsatisfactory and not necessarily harbingers of what the actual presidency might turn out to be.

President Obama's was particularly expected as his election was a major landmark in American political history. A study of this essentially rhetorical exercise shows that Obama and his speechwriters produced both a classical piece – displaying all the expected signs from a newly elected president – and a speech that clearly displayed the Obama touch.

His being the first African American president in a country where the race issues have been so central in the construction of the nation as well as in its bitter divisions President Obama's inaugural address offers both new vistas and reassuring words.

1. A classical speech (ie predictable / as part of a tradition or genre) [doc 1]
 - a. Little (or no) policies, or merely general principles (36-40)
 - b. Calls for unity (use of an ambiguous, all-catching « we »)
 - c. Dramatizes present day perils to appear as savior/leader and galvanize energies.
2. Yet a speech adapted to the issues of the day
 - a. Get over the Bush years. Defines GB's presidency as a parenthesis, even one marked by childish notions. A break which thus appears as a continuity.
 - b. Reassure Americans by stressing the continuity of American traditions and values. Simple values (courage and hard work).
 - c. Stresses America's responsibility but mostly its power : fair but not weak, both idealistic and paternalistic (the world on their own terms), and no apology of their way of life (a term purposefully ambiguous as to what it exactly refers to).
3. And mostly claiming a new American heritage/history
 - a. Rewrites American heritage by including the multicultural heritage in mainstream American culture. The country's main strength is its heritage of commonality and suffering : the true American promise.
 - b. An actualization of MLK's dream (Doc. 2 & 3) : what includes is common suffering which allows the sharing of a common land. Now

symbolical change of place from Lincoln Memorial to bottom of Capitol hill. Not only the blacks, but the US has come full circle. (A new era can begin.)

- c. Manages to unite the ideas of freedom and equality (see Doc 3) in the notion of citizenship.

Conclusion

With its short but not snappy form (see doc.1), Obama's Inaugural Address carries the trademark of the new president's style. Few one-liners but a real philosophy of the nation combining the power of politics (which unites towards a common purpose) and a deep sense of the place of the whole American heritage in the process of nation building. One of his main contributions lies in reinscribing the darker sides of American history and make them into an asset for the future – himself being a living proof of such transformation. In such way he reinterprets MLK's message of peace and brotherliness through a fairly moderate and humanistic Christian message in keeping with the religious mainstream of American society. As opposed to Jimmy Carter before him, however, his message of fraternity is steeped in a very high sense of America's power, the power to defend itself efficiently against its enemies when its way of life – a fairly broad term – is threatened. With such statements, he places himself as a continuator of great presidents such as FDR, JFK, or even Richard Nixon who reinterpreted the sense of American mission in the light of their times. He could thus prove that despite his young age and his color, he was fit to become the president.