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Rick Warren's Inaugural Invocation: A Generic Application

“God is looking for people to use, and if you can get usable, he will wear you out.

The most dangerous prayer you can pray is this: ‘Use me.’”

- Rick Warren (thinkexist.com)

On January 20, 2009, Barack Obama was sworn in as the 44th president of the United States of America. Like the great men before him, he was prepared for such a pivotal moment in history and ready to take his place as the head of the country. The acceptance of the prestigious position called for action. It called for rhetoric. Thus, carefully and tediously a speech was crafted to address to the American people, and give them the oratory that was worthy of the moment. However, we often overlook what precedes a recognizable piece of rhetoric like an inaugural address. It is the invocation that sets the stage for the moment in time, and symbolizes the reference in which we as a nation share in feeling. The invocation is the opportunity in which we come together united in appealing to a higher power for the goodwill of our country, and the provision and guidance of our new leader.

Rick Warren's purpose for being in Washington that January morning was simple enough; he was asked to deliver a prayer. That 20th of January Warren faced the nation not as the next in line as leader of the country, but as a conservative pastor from Southern California. He would later be described as looking a little uncomfortable without his typical Hawaiian shirt and in front of millions instead of his home congregation (Miller). Yet, this particular morning Warren would not be deliver a sermon, or give a lengthy

speech full of eloquent meditations. He was merely there to say a short invocation asking for God's blessing at this moment in time.

Tradition dictates the historical importance and significance the invocation plays in its role in rhetoric. Yet somehow the form is almost entirely ignored in academia.

Inaugural prayer is one of the many rhetorical forms which, due to its ritualistic nature, has been relatively untouched by contemporary rhetorical scholarship. The failure to take note of such seemingly innocuous forms has resulted in a trained incapacity to perceive shifts in ritualistic rhetoric which often carry important implications for rhetorical scholarship. (Medhurst)

The forgotten genre sets the stage for momentous occasions. It heralds inaugurals, meetings, awards ceremonies, ground-breakings, and weddings. The importance of this type of rhetoric is what makes it so unique; prayer promises what other speeches cannot.

The significance of Warren's Invocation may seem slim at first glance. Few scholars have examined and prodded through the simple text, and even fewer college classes will ever look at the invocation of our first African-American President's inaugural. Warren's dialogue is merely an introduction to the occasion and preparation for Obama's address shortly afterward. Rick Warren's prayer is important because of the fundamental differences it has from Obama's speech. Warren's dialogue presents an example of a very absent form of discourse presented in the most public of times. By delving into the fine print and particular details of the artifact, we gain insight into the inner-workings of America's dominating political ideals, societies overreaching opinions, and the role of religion in the beginning of the 21st century.

Reaction to the invocation was mixed. *U.S News* reported that the prayer had a theme of unity remarking that, “Invoking a God that he said was ‘loving to everyone you have made’ and praying for ‘civility in our attitudes, even when we differ,’ Warren clearly opted for a conciliatory tone that eschewed any mention of culture-war issues” (U.S News). *Newsweek* described the prayer like a good short story, “in the end, it was both inevitable and surprising” (Newsweek.com). The amount of opinions and media’s attention to the short speech spoke to the greater social commentary that the prayer came to embody.

In this essay I will describe in greater detail the essence of Rick Warren’s invocation. The purpose of this is to determine whether the artifact is successful in containing and communicating the characteristics that the genre of public prayer employs. Rhetorical scholars have examined the principles and processes used in past public prayers, creating a formula to identify this genre of rhetoric. I will use the standards of evaluation outlined by these scholars to examine Warren’s invocation as an artifact in the genre of public prayer.

In the following passages of my paper, I will first describe the rhetorical situation of the artifact. This will include looking into the specifics of the format and text of the artifact, the rhetor and his sense of self he brings into the prayer, the occasion for which the artifact is called upon, and the intended audience. After exploring the context, I will describe my method of analysis in surveying the artifact. This will include the origins of the genre of public prayer, other examples of rhetors who have used the genre, and specific elements present in the genre. Next I will examine Rick Warren’s invocation and compare the requirements of public prayer to the artifact. Lastly, I will conclude with my

findings of the analysis, the contributions found to rhetorical theory, finally answer if the artifact is a successful representation of the genre of public prayer.

The Rhetorical Situation

The number of scholars who have dedicated their research to analyzing the specific elements of public prayer is limited. Isaac Watts, a famous hymn-writer in 18th century England similarly digressed that “While institutions of logic and rhetoric abound, that teach us to reason aright, and to speak well among men, whys should the rules of speaking to God be so much untaught” (Watts, 1). Perhaps this genre has been somewhat ignored because of its personal nature, with the regular context being a single individual appealing to his or her own idea of God. However, prayer has become increasingly public and thus a viable and necessary object of study as a rhetorical genre.

The controversy surrounding Rick Warren’s invocation directly relates to the debate of prayer as a public practice. Recitation of prayers in public school was ruled unconstitutional in 1962. In *Engle v. Vital*, a group of families from New Hyde, New York, appealed to the Supreme Court that this prayer, “Almighty God, we acknowledge our dependence upon Thee, and we beg Thy blessings upon us, our parents, our teachers and our country. Amen,” contradicted their religious beliefs. The court ruled in favor of the families and the case set the stage for several other limitations on public prayer, including clergy led prayers at public high schools (*Lee v. Weisman*), and later the court extended the ban to student-led prayer at football games (*Santa Fe ISD v. Doe*).

Despite prayer’s limitations in the public sphere, prayer has been used as a medium of communication by such world leaders ranging from St. Augustine to Martin

Luther King Jr. Public figures in all fields of study and walks of life have offered up significant prayers before a Supreme Being on behalf of themselves and their audience. Evidence of this is clearly seen by the fact that the United States, a country that claims separation of church and state, still invites pastors such as Rick Warren to maintain the tradition of an inaugural invocation.

Rick Warren was born the son of a Southern Baptist Preacher on the 28th day of January, 1954. Shortly after finishing seminary in Texas, Warren felt called to serve in Los Angeles, California. For the past 29 years that is where Warren has been the senior pastor of Saddleback Church, which is currently the eighth largest church in the United States (Sermon Central). Warren became known nationally when his book, *The Purpose Driven Life*, sold more than 30 million copies worldwide (Bashir, Apton). He has been invited to speak at forums including the United Nations, the World Economic Forum in Davos, the African Union, and the Council on Foreign Relations. Warren was named by *Time* magazine as one of “15 World Leaders Who Mattered Most in 2004” and in 2006 *Newsweek* called him one of “15 People Who Make America Great” (Fairchild).

Despite the controversial issues surrounding the 2008 presidential campaigns Warren did not shy away from politics. In August, Saddleback Church hosted a Civil Forum on the Presidency. Presidential candidates John McCain and Barack Obama were both in attendance and answered questions exposing their positions on a number of issues including same-sex marriage, stem cell research, and abortion. Despite the occurrence of this civil dialogue, when President-elect Barack Obama chose Warren to deliver the invocation at his presidential inaugural, many people were outraged at the idea. Part of this fury was because of Warren’s stance on gay marriage and his endorsement of

California's Proposition 8. In a mass email, he is quoted as saying, "There is no reason to change the universal, historical definition of marriage to appease 2% of our population" (Salmon, Slevin). Despite Warren's opposition to the keystones of Obama's campaign platform Obama defended his choice by saying that Warren invited him to speak at the Civil Forum at Saddleback "...despite his awareness that I held views that were entirely contrary to his when it came to gay and lesbian rights, when it came to issues like abortion. That dialogue, I think, is part of what my campaigns been all about" (Salmon, Slevin).

The blogosphere lit up with the news that Rick Warren would deliver the invocation at Obama's inauguration. Perez Hilton, a gay rights activist and well known Hollywood blogger, described Obama's choice to invite Warren on his Web site as "such a disappointment," and that "things would have been different had Hillary Clinton secured the Democratic Party nomination" (Perezhilton.com)! Likewise, the ladies of "The View" had a debate on the subject matter where regular Joy Behar responded, "It's like putting Cheney in charge of gun control. It's just wrong." Co-host Elizabeth Hasselback quickly brought up another controversial issue of Obama's campaign and asked, "Who would you rather have, Reverend Wright" (The Huffington Post)? The issue was so disturbing to some that groups on Facebook were created devoted to the topic, one being, "Barack Obama: Anyone but Rick Warren." Even on inauguration day, protesters watching the event on a big screen in San Francisco let their disapproval known by booing Warren as he approached the lectern (latimes.com). These types of discussions indicate the amount of controversy Warren's appointment to present the invocation brought to the Obama Administration. Key supporters and dissenters were able to express

their intense emotions on the matter of his invitation through a very public avenue, creating an even bigger storm.

In response to the sheer number of comments and feedback regarding the appointment, political communication scholar David Domke explained in an article for the *Washington Post* that a few years ago, "...most Americans did not have a clue..." who presented the invocation for the president, "Who would have known, and who would have cared?" But "in the new media environment, everything becomes a firestorm. . . . It's all documented and circulates around the Internet more quickly" (Salmon, Slevin).

Technological advances in social networking and the popularity of political talk shows definitely played a part in fanning the fire of the controversial pick. However, they were merely consequences of the catalyst behind the heart of the issue. The foundations of such resentment throughout liberal circles had to deal with the values surrounding why they elected Obama in the first place. Democrats voted for change and the decision to invite Rick Warren to their celebration of victory looked more reminiscent of something former president Bush would have done. These voters chose Obama to defend *Roe v. Wade*, to give the gay community equal rights, and to keep the separation of religion and state as clear as possible. Rick Warren seemed to represent everything but these ideals. Thus, when that cold January morning did arrive, audiences from around the world tuned in a little earlier than usual, and all eyes and ears were on Rick Warren and his invocation to the masses. They had to see if the tumultuous nature of Obama's selection was worth all of the excitement.

According to ABC News, the audience surrounding the Washington Mall during the inauguration was approximately 1.8 million people (Barrett). For the first time in

history The Presidential Inaugural Committee opened the entire length of the National Mall as the public viewing area for the swearing-in ceremony, breaking with the tradition of past inaugurations (Rhee). Additionally, Obama's inauguration was the most watched since Reagan's, with Nielsen Media Research reporting that 37.8 million television viewers were in attendance figuratively (Hibbard). Essentially, Rick Warren had an estimated audience of 40 million people listening to his prayer. The make-up of the audience did not all believe in the same God who Rick Warren spoke of in his prayer. The diversity of society present and watching at home encompasses nearly every constraint on a rhetor possible. However, it is also this wide array of people and the different walks of life they come from that makes possible the values and freedoms Rick Warren spoke so fondly of in his invocation.

By understanding the historical context and rhetorical situation of Rick Warren's invocation at President Obama's inaugural we are one step closer in answering our question of the validity of this text being considered part of the rhetorical genre of public prayer. Further than that, we can determine if the artifact is a good or poor representation of the genre of public prayer.

Description of the Method

Genre criticism stems from a culmination of scholars work in rhetoric, beginning with Aristotle in 330 BC. Aristotle solidified genres into rules for style and form such as poetry, drama, and song. As explained by communication scholar Richard Measell, the term "genre" comes from the Latin word "genus" which itself connotes sameness in kind, type, or form. "With reference to rhetoric, the term has been broadly used to

encompass addresses which have similar characteristics” (Measell, 1). Walter Fisher explains that, “The test of a genre, any generalization, is the degree of understanding it provides of phenomena. This test is also, it should be noted, the measure of rhetorical criticism” (Fisher, 291).

In 1978 Karlyn Kohrs Campbell and Kathleen Hall Jamieson wrote a clear explanation of genre criticism in, *Form and Genre: Shaping Rhetorical Action*. They allowed the world to see the benefits of using a methodology that analyzed an artifacts construction of genre. They believed that a critic before them, Lloyd Bitzer, helped to set the stage for generic criticism. Bitzer argued that rhetorical action is prompted by particular and specific sets of circumstances. These circumstances consisted of what he coined as “rhetorical situations.” Bitzer thought that similar situations create similar dialogues and he emphasized the importance that prior rhetorical action held on later pieces (Bitzer).

Campbell and Jamieson took the ideas attributed as situations by Bitzer and defined them as “genres” that allowed for certain groups of rhetorical acts. They assessed that “genre analysis reveals both the conventions and affinities that a work shares with others; it uncovers the unique elements in the rhetorical act, the particular means by which a genre is individuated in a given case” (Burghardt, 407). Despite its controversial nature in today’s society, prayer is a common fixture in the public sanction. Campbell and Jamieson offer the opinion that by using generic criticism, we are able to explore the distinctiveness of public prayer, its elements, effectiveness and ultimate purpose in rhetoric.

The Rhetoric of the Inaugural Invocation

Today there are a limited number of occasions where public prayer is recognized as appropriate. Most often public ceremonies that allow for prayer are rooted in deep traditions. One such occasion is the U.S Presidential Inauguration. The practice began in 1937 and most often portrays an intensely Christian worldview. Imagery of the United States is portrayed as a “city on a hill” as famous from the Puritan teachings of John Winthrop. There is frequently a sense in the inaugural invocations that the country needs to return to its spiritual roots in order for the present conflicts and trials to disappear (thestar.com).

Traditionally, the person performing the prayer will include in these addresses the “lifting up” of the family and the President himself. The speaker will appeal to God for protection and guidance for the First Family. The uniformity of inaugural invocations that include this crucial component makes it central to the rhetoric of these addresses.

Martin Medhurst, Communications Professor at Baylor University, has been extremely instrumental in the study of the rhetoric found in inaugural prayers. In his article, “American Cosmology and the Rhetoric of Prayer,” he argues that inaugural prayers commonly refer to the creation myths of the United States and refer to phrases like “Faith of our Fathers,” “the American ideal,” and “our blessed heritage” to align the founding of the nation with religious imagery (Medhurst). He views the invocation and the entire inauguration as a rite of passage for the new president. The clergy-member delivering the prayer plays a direct role in reinforcing the cosmogony myth of the nation and the new president’s role in it.

The inaugural invocation thus has the reputation of containing three basic elements:

1. A Christian prayer in its entirety.
2. Contributes to a sense of a “Rite of Passage” to the President, including elements of the cosmogony and the creation myth of America with it.
3. Praying for the blessing of the President and his family as they transition into their new roles.

These three components that are listed present the audience with a sense of familiarity for the occasion and the overall ambiance of the selection.

Prayer as a Rhetorical Strategy

Prayer comes from the Middle English word, *priere*, meaning “to ask earnestly” (merriamwebster.com). J.J. Makay and Paul Tuchardt argue in *Public Prayer: A Field for Research in Public Address*, that there are two types of public prayer. The first is public prayer in its purest form, where communication from a source (clergy or laity) transmits a message to a deity, on behalf of those gathered. However this prayer has transformed into the second type of public prayer that is often used as an instructional device to the gathered, with the purpose of persuading humans to behave in a particular way.

Makay and Tuchardt explore the characteristics that make public prayer a unique rhetorical genre with the following specific requirements:

There are five divisions of prayer, just as historically speech has been viewed in divisions. Initially there is the invocation, or the call in or invitation for the deity to listen, the second division is confession. At this juncture the speaker

makes mention of known inequities, mistakes, faults, and/or other apparent transgressions of those for whom he is speaking. A third division is thanksgiving, where the speaker expresses gratitude for what is perceived as blessings or benefits. Petition is the fourth division, and is a request for things such as peace, prosperity, converts to the faith renewed spiritual strength, etc. The last general division of public prayer is intercession, which is the speaker's attempt to consider not only the needs of the people present, but the needs of the community, the nation, and the world.

These requirements outlined in the above text will serve as my procedures for determining whether the genre of Public Prayer and is fulfilled in Warren's Invocation at Obama's Inaugural. I will also look at the suggestions on what a rhetor should consider when delivering a public prayer, and my findings of the specific elements commonly found in inaugural invocations before finally making the decision if Rick Warren's Address can be considered included in the genre and, if so, how successful is the artifact in encompassing the requirements of the genre?

The Application of the Genre

Makay and Tuchardt contend that the first element of a public prayer is the invocation or invitation for the deity to listen. In Warren's prayer he includes this important first step and begins by making his address to the "Almighty God—Our Father." Warren's Invocation goes on to praise the deity, acknowledging the goodness and holiness in his Savior:

Everything we see, and everything we can't see, exists because of you alone. It all comes from you. It all belongs to you. It all exists for your glory. History is your story.

Warren chooses to fulfill this first requirement in a fairly non-controversial manner. His invitation is addressed to two names, one in the same, God and Father. The following description of this God is universal, acknowledging this deity as sovereign, glorious, and as the writer of our shared human narrative. This anticipated introduction from Rick Warren left critics disarmed and called for a sense of unity among all people who share in this same history. Unity is expressed through Warren's use of repetition and his emphasis on the word "all". Alliteration is found in the phrases; "It all comes from you. It all belongs to you. It all exists for your glory." In a stylistic and simplistic manner, Warren crafted a memorable section of his speech, where we are all together, and unified in our purpose of coming before God now, on this special occasion.

Next, Warren transitions into one of the essential components of an inaugural invocation by appealing to the cosmogony of America, while also engaging in the aforementioned requirement of prayer, thanksgiving, where the speaker shows gratitude for the blessings bestowed on him and his audience. Most importantly though, Warren acknowledges the importance of the day and the gravity of him being able to bless, before God, the first African-American president:

Now today we rejoice not only in America's peaceful transfer of power for the 44th time, we celebrate a hinge-point of history with the inauguration of our first African-American president of the United States. We are so grateful to live in this land, a land of unequalled possibility, where the son of an African immigrant can

rise to the highest level of our leadership. And we know today that Dr. King, and a great cloud of witnesses, are shouting in heaven.

Warren uses this second section of his prayer for his audience to be able to grasp just how amazing and groundbreaking this day is. He addresses the crossing of racial boundaries not as something to be afraid of but rejoiced in. He shows us that the American dream is only now fulfilled, now that the dreams of Martin Luther King Jr. are realized in the presidential appointment of Barack Obama.

By using key phrases such as “land of unequalled possibility” Warren is able to equate the election to the imagery of heaven, where the founders of our nation are in exultation over the appointment of President Obama because it symbolizes the rite of passage for the next generations of their country. The ability to live in this land that holds these values so close to their people and their foundations is something Warren conveys to be worthy of gratefulness for.

After, Warren acknowledges the presence of sin in the world. In his confession, he stresses that sin is always present and it is not a matter of *what* we do wrong, but *when* we do it. It is for this reason why we ask for forgiveness:

Help us, oh God, to remember that we are Americans, united not by race, or religion, or blood, but to our commitment to freedom, and justice for all. When we focus on ourselves, when we fight each other, when we forget you, forgive us. When we presume that our greatness and our prosperity is ours alone, forgive us.

When we fail to treat our fellow human beings and all the earth with the respect that they deserve, forgive us.

The confession makes known the faults of those present so that the prayer can transition into petition and intercession. This is made clear when Warren makes the earnest appeal to God to help us turn to Him as Warren must "...attempt to consider not only the needs of the people present, but the needs of the community, the nation, and the world" (Takay).

And as we face these difficult days ahead, may we have a new birth of clarity in our aims, responsibility in our actions, humility in our approaches, and civility in our attitudes -- even when we differ.

Help us to share, to serve, and to seek the common good of all. May all people of good will today join together to work for a more just, a more healthy, and a more prosperous nation, and a peaceful planet. And may we never forget that one day, all nations and all people will stand accountable before you.

Warren acknowledges that we will differ in our understanding and our approaches to our shared history and continued future. These differences had been highlighted in his days before presenting the invocation. Here, though, instead of highlighting where people may not agree, he responds in ways how we may disagree with clarity, responsibility, humility, and civility. Warren's petition to God for unity continues with his use of "all". This time, however, "all" is used to account for the people in the world. That we may all join together, and that we will all "stand accountable before you".

One of the outlined regularities in inaugural invocations was the commitment of the president and his family to God. Warren continues with the tradition of the men before him offering: We now commit our new president, and his wife Michelle, and his daughters, Malia and Sasha, into your loving care. Choosing to include the dedication is a traditional choice and withholding such a recognizable aspect of an inaugural invocation would be considered in bad taste. Choosing to commit the first family into the “loving care” of a Savior also points to the traditional Christian invocation.

Similarly, the Inaugural Invocation has been customarily Christian in essence. While Warren begins the prayer by appealing to an ambiguous “Almighty God,” he ends the prayer in a more personal nature, to the one who changed “his” life, Jesus. The Lord’s prayer follows which is found in the New Testament and distinctly Christian.

I humbly ask this in the name of the one who changed my life -- Yeshua, Isa, Jesús, Jesus -- who taught us to pray:

Our father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever.

In the days leading up to the inaugural, bloggers and journalists alike speculated if Warren would invoke Jesus’ name in his prayer. “The long and short of it: If Warren leaves Jesus out, evangelicals will be let down. If Warren mentions Jesus, Jews, and

Muslims, secular Americans will be put off” (U.S News). Warren seems to validate his earlier statement of “I’m a Christian pastor, so I will pray the only kind of prayer I know how to pray.” with praying in Jesus’ name and the recitation of the Lord’s Prayer. Warren thus far has been speaking as a voice of everyone, and in essence all of humanity. When he switches gears and decides to raise the prayer to his Savior, it is a very personal decision. However, where praying in Jesus is normally a divisive position to take, Warren makes clear that this personal decision is not placed upon his audience like the rest of the prayer has been. This allows Warren to remain faithful to his evangelical faith while also trying to not offend those who chose not to invoke the name of Jesus. It is also worth noting, that while presenting his own personal faith, he does so in a multi-cultural manner. Warren’s decision to use “Yeshua, Isa, Jesús, Jesus” all show the inclusiveness in what could be the most dangerous line in his prayer. The prayer concludes with a simple “Amen,” and the invocation was brought to a close.

Conclusion

The prayer lasted less than 5 minutes and was mostly uneventful to the speculating world. It was delivered between California Senator Dianne Feinstein’s welcoming remarks, and the musical selection of “My Country ‘Tis of Thee” sung by Aretha Franklin. Warren began by praising God for his holiness, worthiness and goodness. “Everything we see, and everything we can’t see, exists because of you alone.” He then transitioned into thanksgiving and recognized the historical significance of the occasion: “We are so grateful to live in this land, a land of unequalled possibility, where the son of an African immigrant can rise to the highest level of our leadership.” Warren

then asked God for guidance. He asked for wisdom for the country's leaders and help to remember the foundations of America, its freedom and justice for all. Warren added a plea for forgiveness, "When we focus on ourselves, when we fight each other, when we forget you, forgive us." Finally, Warren committed the President and his family to God's care and ends the invocation with the way Jesus taught his disciples to pray, "The Lord's Prayer."

Warren's prayer constitutes every element in the aforementioned requirements of an inaugural invocation and public prayer. While continuing the tradition of inaugural invocations of being Christian in nature by praying to Jesus Christ, contributing to the cosmogony of America as Obama is the next in line of historical assignments for the country, and including the traditional blessing of the presidential family, every element of public prayer outlined by Makay and Tucharadt is present. This included the invitation for the deity to listen, confession, thanksgiving, petition and intercession. He is able to implement each of these components into a natural flowing prayer without discernable leaps of thought or incongruous meanings. Warren does not stray far from past rhetoricians on what should be included in an inaugural invocation.

In 1977, Martin Medhurst predicted that the genre of public prayer would depart from its traditional form, and the cosmogonic myth that is central to the genre would eventually fade into obscurity. In Medhurst's analysis of the Bishop William R. Cannon's invocation at President Jimmy Carter's inauguration he predicts the coming trend:

By examining four aspects of the invocation, the essay has outlined what seems to be a significant shift in the rhetorical forms of inaugural prayer. Since the rhetorical forms of inaugural prayers have always revolved around the

recitation of the cosmogonic myth and the concomitant destiny of the nation, any shift away from the myth is a departure from the form. It has been the contention of this essay that Bishop Cannon's failure to utilize some portions of the myth and his direct disavowal of other portions constitutes a formal departure significant enough to foreshadow a possible realignment of the symbols and myths to which the American people are invited to pay homage. Such a realignment could carry with it serious implications for both religious and political persuaders.

However, Medhurst was too soon in concluding such projections. Thirty years after his case study, Rick Warren's invocation holds tight to the traditional cosmogonic myth. The departure is not found in the form but rather the content, which has developed and evolved to fit the occasion of the times. Warren introduces the recognition of race tied to a theme of unity while molding it into the traditional genre of public prayer. Thus we see Warren's advancements to the genre are not found in his restructuring of the form, but rather in the available topics of discussion including racial recognition.

This essay attempted to explicate Warren's Invocation at President Obama's Inaugural to the genre of public prayer, while also researching Warren's additions and advancements to the genre, so as to see the significance that his prayer contributed to the genre. Warren's traditional stance to the invocation took the attention away from him and the controversy of his selection to do so, and placed it on to the President and this very special and historically important moment in time.

On January 20, 2009, Pastor Rick Warren prayed the most dangerous prayer of his life, as an evangelical he stood before a diverse nation and delivered the invocation for the United States first African -American president. Although, many who voted for

the new president would have preferred someone else to deliver the inaugural invocation, Warren succeeded in bringing together a nation for at least one moment of silence. In it the country found that the potential of a prayer to create conflict and division pales in comparison to its potential to create unity and lasting importance.

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