The Timeless Speech: A Close Textual Analysis Of John Fitzgerald Kennedy's Inaugural

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By

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Introduction

The thirty-fifth president, John F. Kennedy, has become one of the most famous and well thought of presidents in our country's history. Although he served fewer than 1,000 days, his words touched thousands and his inaugural address will be examined for years to come. John Fitzgerald Kennedy became the youngest President at the mere age of 43 and the first Catholic president. One of the many key attributes of John F. Kennedy was his seamless and eloquent ability to give speeches. This was one of the many reasons his inaugural was delivered flawlessly with his charming Bostonian accent.

Although his Inaugural was no more than fifteen minutes long, the message that he delivered was one that has resonated in the hearts of all Americans ever since that snowy winter day in January 1961. It was a time to call Americans to duty in their own country, to not depend on the government for ones own personal needs, but to take on personal responsibility. Kennedy's inaugural bestowed a sense of safety in the American people. At that time, every American had some fear of nuclear attack and enemies around the world. Kennedy made it clear he was going to be a president who would do all that was in his power to protect the American people.

John F. Kennedy's inaugural is a rhetorical masterpiece. Our world has aged forty-nine years and within those years the threats have remained the same with a few minor tweaks. Kennedy's inaugural is considered not only extremely effective but also immensely profound, because like any other great presidential inaugural it is timeless. Expressing such an idea,

Senator Reid of Nevada honors Kennedy in an Congressional Ceremony to honor Kennedy nearly fifty years after his inaugural address. Reid states, "We cannot fully articulate the lessons of President Kennedy's legacy in a single speech. No single ceremony can appropriately account for all he did to make our country a better place to live" (Reid). This shows the incredible impact Kennedy's inaugural had on the country and world; how it has lived on to today and how Kennedy's legacy cannot be summarized up in one ceremony. It is simply too large to be put into to words. To express the enduring effect of Kennedy's inaugural I will be comparing it to an inaugural of the past, Lincoln's second inaugural, and one of the present, Obama's Inaugural. Showing how these three relate proves the fact that Kennedy's inaugural will remain an immutable inaugural for years to come. I will look closely at rhetorical devices Kennedy uses to construct such a strong and powerful speech, as well as how these devices over lap in the other inaugurals. More so, his inaugural, unlike any other, was proven to hold true in a real life situation our country found itself in soon after the inauguration. According to Theodore O. Windt Jr., in the book *American Orators of the Twentieth Century*, "Kennedy's January 20, 1961, speech is one of the few truly memorable Inaugural Addresses in U.S. history." Windt states that "its elegant lyricism, its power, and its idealism called Americans to action and inspired real change." Also, according to Thurston Clarke in his book, *Ask Not: The Inauguration of John F. Kennedy and the Speech That Changed America*:

> Kennedy knew this speech represented an extraordinary opportunity to present himself, as he chose to be seen, for the pages of history, and few presidents in the twentieth

> century cared more about history, or its perspective, than John F. Kennedy (p.10).

These writers support the shear brilliance of Kennedy not only as a man, but as an amazing, driven, and charismatic President and leader. Kennedy's main ideas and purposes presented in his inaugural were to meet and end the challenge of communism, establish peace with our adversaries, and for all countries to succeed in their fight against world issues such as, poverty, disease, and war. Lastly, he expressed his support of the League of Nations. He focuses mainly on foreign policy, only touching on a small amount of domestic policy. Kennedy made it clear to the American people that attaining these goals would not happen in his term or even his life time, but that it was everyone's responsibility to start working towards our objective.

Rhetorical Criticism and Close Textual Analysis

I will be analyzing Kennedy's inaugural and comparing his inaugural to a few other well-known inaugurals using close textual analysis. Close textual analysis, as quoted by Carl. R. Burgchardt in his book, *Readings in Rhetorical Criticism,* is:

> Analysis which studies the relationship between the inner workings of public discourse and its historical context in order to discover what makes a particular text function persuasively…close textual analysis aims to reveal and explicate the precise, often hidden, mechanisms that give a particular text artistic unity and rhetorical effect (Burgchardt p. 563).

This technique takes a microscopic look at the artifact a rhetor is critiquing. A critic looks closely at the text to find and explain tropes and figures the author uses and what beneficial purpose those terms serve within the piece. It does not always have to be a written artifact; it can be visual as well.

I will be using close textual analysis to critique Kennedy's inaugural because it examines more than just the sheer structure of a particular piece, it looks at the impact of the artifact on the audience as well as the long term effects of it.

> A literary critic pays special attention to one of several aspects: its intended purpose, its effect on an audience, its language and structure, and the information and worldview it conveys. In studying the formal characteristics of a text, a critic usually recognizes the variability of performances of dramatic works and the variability of readers' mental interpretation of the texts…In studying what a literary work is about, a critic explores the complex relationship between truth and fiction in various types of storytelling. In studying the impact of the literature on its audience, a critic has been increasingly aware of how cultural expectations shape experience (Escote).

Being able to look at how a Kennedy's inaugural shapes American minds, and their experience of the Cuban missile crisis, which occurred just days after he took office, are important aspects that further demonstrate the effectiveness and solid intentions his speech possessed. This form of criticism, as Escote explained above, places the rhetor in a sink or swim position. It examines and closely observes the truths and the fictions of what was said, in the end uncovering how effective an artifact is to and for its audience. Textual criticism, Escote states is the "awareness of historical and theoretical context contributes to our understanding, appreciation, and

enjoyment of them" (Escote Para. 2). This provides capital for the bigger picture in which Kennedy's Inaugural plays the main role. It is not solely looking at rhetorical devices, it is also examining the effect his speech produced. Such as the strong ethos appeal that Kennedy aims for when delivering his address. When Leff and Mohrmann analyze Lincoln's Cooper Union address they talk about the path of election and the ethos appeal. Leff and Mohrmann say:

> The focal point is the speaker, and the message becomes a vehicle for enhancing ethos. Campaign orations, on this basis, tend to be examples of personal persuasion… In other words, the ultimate goal of the campaign orator is to promote himself as a candidate. Bothe policies and character are in question, but the treatment of issues is subsidiary to the purpose of creating a general identification between the speaker and the audience.

They talk about how through the text itself it has the ability to create a strong ethos appeal and thus a connection between the orator and the audience. Both Kennedy and Lincoln were able to do this, especially Kennedy in his inaugural. Kennedy says the word "we" thirty times throughout his speech which according to Leff and Mohrmann "reinforces and controls the emotional association." Lincoln reinforces his connection to the founding fathers of our country, but Kennedy reinforces his connection with the country. Making him seem just like you or I, not the Commander and Chief of the most powerful country of the United States. It reaches back to the ethos appeal he creates, through the text and the actual delivery. Also close textual analysis according to James Jasinski in his book *Source Book on Rhetoric*, he says

> *Close* readings of the sort reveal how art (e.g., grammar, style, structure) and strategy (e.g, purpose, explicit argument) interact in the realization of an instrumental effect (Jasinski 93).

This shows how Kennedy was using his speech to call people to work towards the greater good for the country. Telling them to use the instruments of the United States to accomplish something positive both for them personally and for the country.

Introduction to John F. Kennedy

To begin one must understand the accomplished and amazing life Kennedy led before he became president and his life ended so abruptly. John Fitzgerald Kennedy was born May 29, 1917 in Brookline, Massachusetts, on Beals Street to his mother, Rose Fitzgerald, and father, John "Honey Fitz" Fitzgerald. He was the youngest of a large family that included four boys and five girls. Growing up, his mother was very organized with her large family. She had note cards she kept for each of her children in a file box. These cards contained information regarding their doctor appointments to their clothing sizes and ages. John F Kennedy's father was a highly thought of and successful politician. As Boston Mayor he became popularly known as "Honey Fitzgerald."

John attended The Chaote School for 9th grade through 12th grade, and graduated in 1935. His college career began at Harvard College. He was fortunate enough to have the opportunity to travel through many countries while he studied at Harvard gaining and storing knowledge of all of the places he visited and saw throughout his travels. Being an Irish Catholic, he faced many prejudices during his schooling years, which made him even more determined to become rich and successful in a short amount of time. He obtained a degree in international affairs. He graduated from Harvard in 1940 and in that same year, wrote and published a book

called *Why England Slept*, which quickly became a best seller. This book was based on his thesis that took a closer look at how and why England was so unprepared to go to war with Germany ("History Central").

He then soon joined the United States Navy in 1941 where he became an intelligence officer. In August 1943 he was sent to the South Pacific where a Japanese destroyer hit his boat. Two of the men in his crew were killed, but the other six men managed live by gripping what was left of their PT boat. The remaining crew, after about a five hour struggle, was able to finally reach an island about five miles away. From the accident Kennedy suffered a terrible back injury and was sent back to the United States in December of 1963. After his recovery he was promoted to the rank of lieutenant and became a PT boat instructor in Florida. Kennedy did not return to civilian life until 1945 (Manali).

Soon after returning from the Navy, he began to focus on advancing in his professional and political life, he followed in his father's political footsteps and became very involved. As a young Democrat, he served three terms (six year total) in the House of Representative, and was finally elected to the Senate in 1952. JFK soon wrote and published yet another promising book called *Profiles in Courage*. This one shed light on the several Senators who had risked their careers to fight for the things they believed in. This book brought him recognition and the honor of receiving the Pulitzer Prize in 1957. That very same year, he and his wife welcomed their first child into this world, Caroline Kennedy (Manali).

In addition to his successful book and flourishing family life, his political career was also on a steady rise. He was offered the opportunity to run for vice president in 1956, but turned it down because he had decided to run for president in the next election. However, running for president, he knew, would be no easy task. He began working longer hours and traveling around the United States on the weekends. His hard work finally paid off when the Democratic Party nominated him for their presidential candidate on July 13, 1960. Kennedy then asked Lyndon B. Johnson, who was a senator from Texas, to run as his vice president candidate. They ran against and defeated Republican candidate Richard M. Nixon. Just before JFK was inaugurated he and his wife welcomed their second child into this world, and named him John Jr. ("History Central").

The Inauguration

Inaugurals are epidictic, meaning they are called forth for an occasion or some sort of traditional occurrence. Two prominent and well-known figures in rhetorical theory, Karlyn Campbell and Kathleen Jamieson, have analyzed the growing genre of inaugurals. They determined five essential parts of inaugurals. They are 1. It unifies the audience by reconstituting its members as the people who can witness and ratify the ceremony; 2. Rehearses communal values drawn from the past; 3. Sets forth the political principles that will govern the new administration; and 4. Demonstrates through enactment that the president appreciates the requirements and limitations of executive functions. Finally, 5. Each of these ends must be achieved (Campbell & Jamieson, 1990, p. 15). Campbell and Jamieson say an eminent point is focusing on the present while incorporating past and future, and praising the institution of the

presidency and form of the government. They argue that the most fundamental elements of the inaugural address are the unification of the audience and the veneration of traditional values

Some of the more prominent people who attended the inaugural were Vice President Johnson, the Speaker of the House who swore Kennedy in, Sam Rayburn, the Chief Justice Earl Warren, President Eisenhower, Vice President Nixon, President Truman, and the Reverend John Barclay who delivered the prayer. In addition, the entire Kennedy family was there showing their support for his great achievement. Thousands of American citizens packed themselves in front of the Capital Building eager to hear what their new president had to say about them and their country. At the time the American citizens had many concerns about the threat of other nations. Kennedy was able to quickly appease all of their concerns with his inaugural.

Rhetorical Criticism

Unlike today's presidents, Kennedy delivered his speech with no teleprompter; however, similar to most of our recent presidents he had quite a bit of help in writing his speech. His speechwriter was Ted Sorensen. Kennedy first hired Ted Sorensen as a researcher to help him while was working on his book *Profiles in Courage* in 1956. From then on he became a close advisor and friend of Kennedy's. He is now extremely famous for his lines such as "Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country," and "The torch has been passed to a new generation of Americans…" He was known as having a rare gift that formed phrases such as those that penetrated the minds of American Citizens (Weiner).

When drafting his inaugural, Kennedy gave Sorensen four guidelines to follow. One: add style and elegance, two: shorten the sentences, three: eliminate the word "I," and four: keep

the speech short. Eradicating the use of the word "I" creates a sense of unity and fellowship between the speaker and the audience. Lincoln, Obama, and Kennedy's inaugurals all have the common theme of "we" throughout their entire speeches. This demonstrates the power of such a small and simple word. Kennedy uses the word "we" approximately thirty times throughout his mere nine-minute speech. The amount this word is used compared to the short time period in which he was talking shows how much Kennedy wanted to build and improve the unity and rapport with the audience.

One of the many key attributes to John F. Kennedy was his seamless and eloquent ability to give speeches. His inaugural was presented smoothly and with his charming New Bostonian accent. He pauses at the right moments for the crowd to applaud and the speech as a whole flows very smoothly for those who hear it presented by him. His speech was one of the first ever to be broadcast nationwide. Being able to see him deliver it supports his talents as a natural rhetorician.

Kennedy begins his speech with a very strong ethos appeal. In his speech he says "The world is very different now," "We dare not forget today that we are the heirs of that first revolution." Kennedy, like Lincoln, refers to the founding fathers of our country and gives them a few words of tribute and respect. As Kennedy continues, with his first few paragraphs which contain language from Lincoln's time of presidency, he uses words like "abolish," "revolutionary," and "forebears." He also is quick to remind all of the citizens of the struggles we went through as a country during the revolutionary war. He mentions the past only in the

beginning of his speech, but then quickly turns it towards focusing on the future. Lincoln had the burden of the revolutionary war on his shoulders when delivering his second inaugural, and Kennedy had the threat of nuclear war burdening him when he delivered his inaugural. To further his ethos appeal Kennedy says:

> Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe, in order to assure the survival and the success of liberty. This much we pledge—and more (Sorensen).

His ethos appeal comes out here in the speech as almost a fatherly and protective voice. He is saying that the country will meet any challenge head on and do their best to overcome it while working towards what is in the best interest for the country. Demonstrating his upstanding character, moral, and beliefs throughout the entire election, Kennedy was able to speak to the citizens using a genuine, truthful, and credible voice. He refers back to our founding fathers with great respect and politely lets our "friends" and "foes" know that he is here to protect our country come rain or shine, he implies nothing will stop him from doing just that. These are just a few of the many ethos driven portions of his inaugural. Overall his speech reaches out to the hearts and minds of Americans, supporting and outlining the ways in which he intends to improve upon the already amazing country we live in. As he intends to improve our country, he also intends to protect it. Referring to what I said before; one of the main burdens on Kennedy's shoulder was the threat of nuclear attack which was every Americans mind as he gave his speech

He first sheds light on the fears of Nuclear War then moves on to the importance of mutual progress and alliances when he begins to address foreign policy. He talks about our "old

allies," meaning our European allies from WWII and addresses Communism as the "challenge." The "Challenge" was said singular, not plural, because at that time it was thought of as one entity. The threat of potential nuclear war was considered the largest and most prominent fear in every citizen of the country. People were not scared of the dangers of terrorists or criminals; they had one thing on their minds, nuclear war. Kennedy knew it was his responsibility to show the country and the world his fearless attitude to work for and protect the people of the United States to his best abilities. He addresses South America by saying:

> To our sister republics south of our border, we offer a special pledge- to convert our good words into good deeds- in a new alliance for progress- to assist free men and free governments in casting off the chains of poverty… And let every other power know that this Hemisphere intends to remain the master of its own house (Sorenson).

This portion clearly outlines his opinion of working with South America; he respects them and wants to work together for the greater good. However the political and social situation down in Cuba was a healthy one in the least. In the late 1950's Castro had begun guerilla attacks on Cuba's current Presidents, General Fulgencio Batista, armed forces. It did not take long for Castro to force Batista to resign and flee the country. On January 1, 1959 Fidel Castro took power of Cuba calling himself the "President for Life". At first the United States actually supported him, but by February that same year, Castro had already had about 550 of Batista's associates executed. And it was not much longer until Castro established a communist government and he became the dictator, forming new relations with the Soviet Union (Oracle ThinkQuest).

Kennedy talks about wanting progress and stronger alliances, but he plainly states that the way in which the countries achieve more progress and alliances will not hurt the power of the United States. This supports his belief on Hemispheric Policy. He states, “We shall not always expect to find them supporting our views. But we shall always hope to find them supporting our view” (Sorensen). This shows that Kennedy will respect how other countries choose their alliances and policies, but also that he is reminding others to also respect our freedom filled Democratic government style.

Throughout his speech he echoes a sense of one united country, the idea of our nation joining together to work together. He really captures this idea with the line, “Divided, there is little we can do- for we dare not meet a powerful challenge at odds and split asunder” (Sorensen). He is telling the citizens that we need to remain a united country, and at the scare of a nuclear war we still will have to stick together to get through it. Splitting due to different viewpoints and opinions that are not part of the bigger picture will only hurt the country in the long run. Kennedy really pushes to make this understood to the people.

Rhetoric terms were used in his speech numerous times. Some of the examples that are as follows: “Our Adversary” was singular and monolithic. This title he gives to our enemies ties back to the idea that the single thing that the American people are afraid of is Nuclear Attack. This is why I feel he capitalizes on it and makes it singular. Kennedy wants to further support his attitude of fighting the largest fear that all citizens share. He uses the litotes of “We dare not…” An litotes is an understatement in which an affirmative is expressed by the negative of the contrary (Merriam-Webster: Litotes). It is a rhetorical device which uses a double negative to emphasize a statement. The two negatives make sure it is an affirmative that the United States

does not split under the pressures of world politics and decisions. Essentially they are both negative, making the message clear, so there is no chance of misunderstanding on the reader audiences interpretation. It leaves the reader no room for misunderstanding about the message he is trying to vocalize. Also he exercises the use of a sententia with "If a free society cannot help the many who are poor, it cannot save the few who are rich." A sententia is figure of argument in which a wise, witty, or pithy maxim or aphorism is used to sum up the preceding material (Eidenmuller). The technique of building with words makes it very clear the message the rhetor is trying to make.

And we cannot forget those famous words Kennedy uttered towards his closing, "Ask not what your country can do for you, but what can you do for your country." This phrase, written by Sorensen, is the corner stone of the patriotism in our country. It clearly states that hard work, respect and honesty will bring the many positive opportunities the country has to offer. People should not be lazy and expect things to be done for them, they need to take action and make things happen for themselves. This phrase sums up the entire speech that came before it. It is about the collective effort that needs to come from the citizens just as much as from the government. Kennedy is quick to remind the people that,

> All this will not be finished in the first 100 days. Nor will it be in the first 1,000 days, nor in the life of this Administration, nor even perhaps in our lifetime on this planet. Bet let us begin (Sorensen).

This quote shows that he realizes the great challenges he faces being the Commander and Chief of our Country, and humbles himself by making the problem that everyone will work on bigger

than his administration. It shows he really is for the best interest of the country, not just out to further his political career.

At the end he leaves the audience by stating the official oath for the Presidency of the United States. He also begins and ends his speech with the mention of God. At the beginning he stated "the belief that the rights of man come not from the generosity of the state, but from the hand of God" (Sorensen). And the end of his inaugural he closes with

> With a good conscience our only sure reward, with history the final judge of our deeds, let us go forth to lead the land we love, asking His blessing and His help, but knowing that here on earth God's work must truly be our own (Sorensen).

This rings the essence of Lincoln's second inaugural, however, Lincoln refers back to God throughout his entire speech, not just the beginning and end. Because Kennedy was the first Catholic president I feel it was important for him to include the mentioning of God in his first address as the President of the United States.

Kennedy, in a sense, warns other countries and nations that if they are to threaten us, we will do all in our power to secure our freedom and liberty. This I feel relates to today's situation. President Barack Obama reaffirmed it in his inaugural as well. George W. Bush also reaffirmed it as well in his speech shortly after the terrible attacks of September 11th. Bush's were a bit more severe, but still had the idea of protecting our freedoms, liberties, and safety, all of which we hold so dear. Kennedy also has another similarity to Obama's inaugural; stating that if those better off in our society cannot help those in need, then the society will not be able to help the few that are poor. They both clearly recognize the responsibility that each and every American

has on his or her shoulders. Obama states in his inaugural:

> Starting today, we must pick ourselves up, dust ourselves off, and begin again the work of remaking America…What is required of us now is a new era of responsibility — a recognition, on the part of every American, that we have duties to ourselves, our nation, and the world, duties that we do not grudgingly accept but rather seize gladly, firm in the knowledge that there is nothing so satisfying to the spirit, so defining of our character, than giving our all to a difficult task (Favreau& Obama).

This parallels the same ideas Kennedy included in his speech:

> In your hands, my fellow citizens, more than in mine, will rest the final success or failure of our course… And so, my fellow Americans: ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country (Sorensen).

Both Presidents make a clear and concise effort to tell the American people that it is not the government's responsibility to take care of them while they relax and expect everything to be done for them. Action needs to be taken by the people to make the necessary changes in the country to make it better than it already is and was.

Kennedy also enforces the fact that we are and plan to keep the United States of America the powerhouse of the hemisphere. This is important because as he talks about the future and threats such as nuclear attacks, he lets the American people know that he plans to protect them. The fear of a nuclear attack was the number one most frightening thing on Americans minds at

the time of his inauguration. At the time when he gave this speech, he did not know that very soon he would be met head on with a real live nuclear threat in Cuba. However, in his speech he does an outstanding job to remind the American people that we are the most powerful nation in the world and will remain to be the most powerful nation in the future. The Cuban missile crisis is a prominent moment in our history and is what makes Kennedy's speech not only powerful, but effective and lasting. He states what he will do, and before Kennedy knew it, he was put in the hot seat and had to defend our country from potential nuclear attack.

Kennedy plainly and in a straightforward manner addresses the threat of nuclear warfare saying:

> But neither can two great and powerful groups of nations take comfort from our present course—both sides overburdened by the cost of modern weapons, both rightly alarmed by the steady spread of the deadly atom, yet both racing to alter that uncertain balance of terror that stays the hand of mankind's final war. So let us begin anew—remembering on both sides that civility is not a sign of weakness, and sincerity is always subject to proof. Let us never negotiate out of fear. But let us never fear to negotiate (Sorenson).

This showed the people that he knew the potential of nuclear warfare was not far from reality and to express his concern for the inspections and control of arms calmed many people. It showed a fearless leader of the most powerful country in the world. It is proven that people look to their leaders in times of crisis. At that moment in our history we were afraid and about to be

in a crisis. Having the new leader of our country stand up and reaffirm the fact that he will protect this country was an amazing accomplishment for him and his administration.

The Cuban Missile Crisis

Kennedy was able to hold up his commitment to the people of the United States when the Cuban Missile Crisis ensued barely a year after he was elected. This has so far been the closest the United States had ever come to nuclear warfare. In 1962 the Soviet Union was behind us, but not by much, in the arms race. The soviets had only developed weapons powerful enough to launch and attack countries in Europe and the United States had weapons capable of destroying all of the Soviet Union. It was in April of 1962 that Premier Nikita Khrushchev convinced the Soviet Union to place weapons in Cuba, right next door to the United States. The Soviet's idea was that being this close to the United States would deter us from attacking the Soviet Union. Castro at that time was looking for a way to defend the small island from the United States. He felt that a second attack from the United States was inevitable after the invasion of the Bay of Pigs in 1961. So by the summer of 1962 the Soviet Union had secretly moved in missile installations in Cuba (Oracle ThinkQuest).

It was on October 15, 1962 that the United States received reconnaissance photographs that uncovered the Soviet Unions nuclear weapons under constructions in Cuba. Kennedy acted quickly and by the next day he had assembled a group of his twelve most important advisors to help him sort out this crisis. It was called Ex- Comm. The next twelve days that unfolded were grueling and tiring for the president and his advisors. At the end of the twelve days Kennedy

decided to impose a naval quarantine around Cube so no more of the Soviet Union's weapons could be delivered. He finally announced the discovery of these weapons to the American public on October 22. He clearly stated that any missile launched from Cuba would be considered an attack by the Soviet Union and demanded that the Soviets remove all weapons from Cuba. The public was terrified and Kennedy did the best he could, sending reconnaissance missions every two hours and eventually pulling the quarantine back on the 25th (Oracle ThinkQuest).

The United States received a letter from Khrushchev on the 26th that stated if the Soviet Union removed their weapons, the United States would not invade Cuba. The alarm level rose tremendously on the 27th when an American U-2 was shot down over Cuba. The United States received a second letter that asked us to remove our weapons from Turkey and the Soviet Union would remove theirs from Cuba. However, Kennedy decided to contact the Soviet Ambassador, Anatoly Dobrynin, to tell him that the United States was agreeing to the first letter, totally ignoring the second one sent. Finally, tension was loosened when Khrushchev announced on October 28th that he would dismantle his countries weapons in Cuba. Further agreements were discussed and decided on between Kennedy and the Soviet Union. Nuclear war was avoided thanks to the heroic actions of Kennedy under serious threat (Oracle ThinkQuest).

Conclusion

Kennedy was evaluated in office sooner then he could have ever imagined. Only a few months into his term he came through upholding his word and promise he made to the people of the United States on January 20, 1961. The main massage of safety and peace of mind that his

inaugural sent was truly challenged in reality quicker than most thought. It seems today that politicians are mostly full of "steam" with the promises they make. Most of what politicians talk about in their speeches does not really come true. So the fact the Kennedy addressed the idea of probable nuclear attacks in his speech made it ironic that he had to deal with it so suddenly after taking office. Americans have forgotten great leaders such as President Kennedy who, when tested, was able to defend and save our liberties, freedoms and lives.

In his speech he is also careful to close by reminding the citizens that the work of improving our country will not be accomplished in his term or even in our lifetime, but nonetheless, we all have the responsibility to start towards improvement. It is up to the citizens of our country to make the changes we want to see. Changes that will better our country for our children and grandchildren. This also parallels the Obama's inaugural. He too calls us to put in out own effort for the better of our country.

The similarities of Lincoln, Kennedy and Obama's inaugurals defend the fact that Kennedy's inaugural is timeless. It shows the bigger idea that our country can age hundreds of years and our need for a strong and charismatic leader will never fade. It is shown that the people of the United States look to our leaders in times of crisis for answers and protection. Whether it is in the midst of the revolutionary and civil war, the threat of nuclear warfare, or the threat of terrorism today, our anxieties and worries will always attempt to be appeased by our leaders. These three inaugurals depict that, and further the notion of President Kennedy's inaugural remaining a timeless speech in our country.

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