Donald Trump did a “very good” job: A rhetorical analysis of candidate Trump’s campaign speeches

Caroline Mohan
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Abstract

Since mid-2015, Donald Trump has shaken the political arena with an unprecedented yet effective public rhetorical repertoire. Regardless of alleged scandals, frequent social media usage, and extemporaneous and fiery rally speeches, the president’s approval ratings remain steady and he continues to move forward in his international and local political endeavors. Though these factors often posed large obstacles for past presidents, Trump has overcome them by use of audience identification, transparency, honorific pandering, and shrewd control of a vulnerable political sphere. In this study, rhetorician Kenneth Burke’s fantasy-theme and cluster criticisms are used to analyze Trump’s overall rhetorical themes, in social media and beyond, as well as to closely analyze three of his rally speeches. This kind of analysis provides context as to how successful Trump has been, what kind of strategy he uses, and provides a critical lens through which his audience, supportive or not, may interpret his rhetorical strategy and messages.
Introduction

On June 16, 2015, world-famous businessman and real-estate tycoon Donald Trump announced his candidacy for President of the United States. In the transcript of his announcement speech, delivered in Trump Tower in New York City, Trump was to begin the speech with a warning: “our country is in serious trouble” (qtd. in Time Staff). But before he delved into the reasons for and implications of such a statement, he noted the size of the crowd of attendees. He proclaimed that there had been “no crowd like this” at another announcement ceremony and followed up with an abrupt prediction that because his opponents could not procure such crowds, they would not be able to beat ISIS (qtd. in Time Staff). This seemingly disjointed and extemporaneous lead-in to his prepared speech drew the listeners’ attention and plucked a particular nerve of fear in them, to which Trump declared he has the sole remedy. This technique, what I call the “bait and fix,” is a rhetorical strategy that would eventually garner Trump unprecedented grassroots support and earn him arguably the most powerful office in the free world: the U.S. Presidency.

Almost twenty years before Trump’s announcement, political discourse in the United States made a serious shift. Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich took office in November 1994 halfway through the first term of President Bill Clinton. During his tenure as Speaker, Gingrich circulated a memo via his political action committee, GOPAC, to freshman Republican representatives. The memo was titled “Language: A Key Mechanism of Control,” and it encouraged the young lawmakers to use words with negative connotations when referring to their opponents, the Democrats. The letter states that “sometimes we are hesitant to use contrast” and that the reader should “remember that creating a difference helps you.” Contrasting words are listed in separated blocks and include word suggestions such as “reform,” “we/us/our,”
“building,” “destroy,” “pathetic,” and “greed” (“Language: A Key Mechanism of Control”). This kind of speak-first, substantiate-later rhetorical approach exploited a loophole in audience reception. Then-Washington editor of *The Nation* David Corn contends in his 2005 article “Gingrich-izing Public Broadcasting” that the point of the memo was to “turn name-calling into a strategic political tool” (Corn). Republican representatives heard their leader’s obvious strength over their Democratic counterparts and began to rely on their personal testimonies rather than the rationale behind those very testimonies. As lawmakers embraced Gingrich’s manipulative semantic tool, the pendulum of political rhetorical discourse was pushed into a new era: the era of the demagogue.

Today, Gingrich’s strategy can be found at the roots of many politicians’ communication playbooks, most notably that of President Donald Trump. While the commentary on Trump’s communication with his constituents and colleagues is continuous, this study serves as a close look at his approach to rally speeches. I chose rally speeches not because they reach the widest audience, but because they are a time-honored connection between the American people and their president. Since 25th President of the U.S., William McKinley’s, primary campaign in 1896 in which he delivered 350 speeches from the porch of his home in Canton, Ohio—an unprecedented political move to which his election can be attributed (Gould)—public speeches have become an essential facet of presidential campaigns. Examining rally speeches gives this analysis more context within the history of political discourse. I scrutinize candidate Trump’s spin on an age-old political practice and how he uses these speeches as a tool to circumvent scandal and appeal to his audiences in ways that past candidates have not.

I chose three of the 323 speeches delivered by candidate Trump throughout his primary and general election campaigns. The first speech that I analyzed was delivered to an undisclosed
number of audience members in New York City on June 22, 2016. The initial intention of the speech was to address the stakes of the election (Politico); however, the essential argument of the speech can be considered a demonization of Trump’s Democratic opponent, former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. The second speech was delivered on August 18, 2016, at Charlotte, North Carolina’s Charlotte Convention Center to an estimated 5,000 attendees. Aaron Blake, a journalist for The Washington Post, reported that this speech, which covered a range of topics from President Barack Obama to sanctuary cities, was the “best of the 2016 presidential campaign.” The third and final speech that I chose to analyze was delivered to a crowd of 7,502 in Phoenix, Arizona’s, Phoenix Convention Center on August 31, 2016 (Sanchez). The primary focus of the speech was immigration in the U.S.

These speeches fall within a three-month timeline. This seems small in the context of the almost two-year-long campaigning timeline; however, the diversity of the intended messages of the speeches, paired with their locations in the northeast, southwest, and southern U.S. provides a range of material into which I was able to dive. Along with geographical diversity often comes political diversity. This small sample size allowed me to take a close look at how Trump tailors his speeches to subsections of his primary audience. My intention was to find patterns which would signal to me that Trump’s rhetorical approach is sporadic and non-uniform. So that I could see how Trump uses various tactics to build different realities for varying groups within his audience, I chose not to analyze these speeches as a single unit. What sets the analysis of these speeches apart from the current deluge of Trump analyses is that I started from scratch. Personal biases aside, and Trump’s eccentricities ignored, I looked only at the words with which the speeches were sculpted by Trump and no doubt a battalion of communications specialists. This is not to say that Trump’s eccentric approach to his speeches is unimportant: quite the opposite.
Trump’s brute force, hawkishness, and colloquialisms are an essential part of what makes him the speaker and leader that he is. This analysis is merely a chapter of what could be a book dedicated to analyses of different areas of Trump’s rhetoric such as his visual rhetoric, online presence, and inflection and tone during speeches like these. And while my study does overlap with some of these areas, the primary goal of this close reading was to figure out just how President Trump has used Gingrich’s language-is-power manifesto and other techniques alike to attain success amidst countless blunders and missteps. Ultimately, my goal was to answer the apparently unanswerable: In an age of growing public mistrust, apathy, and fear, why is Donald Trump successful?

The easy answer to this question is that the people seem to have wanted—and still seem to want—change. In an essay for The Atlantic titled “Why Are We So Angry?” journalist Charles Duhigg states that “consultants to Barack Obama’s presidential campaign told me their motto—‘Change we can believe in’—was chosen, in part, because the phrase subtly embraced the anger so many voters felt: Other candidates had promised change, but never delivered” (Duhigg). The very same sentiment seemed to hold true during the 2016 general election and continues to do so today. In 2016, The Wall Street Journal reported that four in ten voters in an exit poll conducted by Edison Research said they wanted the next president to bring “needed change.” Among that substantial group, most voted for Trump (Meckler). In 2016, voters were desperate for policy and opinion to turn in their favor, and angry that they hadn’t yet. They let their belief in the principles of organized language, nuanced policy plans, and congenial competition that have been historically reflected in presidential leadership to fall by the wayside. The people were willing to sacrifice principle for power. And against Clinton’s campaign, which she framed as a
continuation of the previous eight years, candidate Trump’s promise for immediate, opposite,
and broad-stroke change was hot and unstoppable.

Trump invokes these promises in each of his speeches, including those studied in this
analysis. The speeches are surprisingly devoid of sophisticated policy detail, but this is not
uncommon. In order to make their policy plans more accessible to audiences that may not
understand the intricacies of government functions, presidents have “dumbed-down” their public
language over time, according to Caroline Jones in the Brown Political Review. Additionally,
perhaps to give his speeches a semblance of coherence, Trump punctuates his strings of simple
and often empty language (e.g., references to unsubstantiated numbers, numerous spontaneous
subject shifts, shallow dives into these subjects) with powerful statements on virtually every hot
topic being discussed within the public sphere. He uses networks of these powerful statements to
associate with them different meanings that lean more in his favor, and consequently uses them
to invoke this same meaning when he repeats phrases associated with the issues. Examples
include several phrases and words that are often picked up by Trump’s rally audiences and
chanted, such as “lock her up,” “build the wall,” and “U.S.A.” These chants symbolize different
things to different members of the audience; however, under the same name, the audience
believes they are of the same mind and beliefs and that these beliefs are factual and valid. In
reality, these phrases are merely words that often bear no weight in lawmaking and make empty
promises to people that yearn for quick and tangible change.

I used two methods to analyze the three chosen speeches: cluster criticism and a variant
of fantasy-theme criticism. These two Burkean criticism styles demand close examination of the
ways in which Trump attempted to shift the meaning of certain words and the ways that these
words create a shared altered reality among his supporters. The cluster criticism allowed me to
analyze the words that Trump placed in close proximity with words that are frequently discussed such as “immigration” and “jobs.” What I found was a direct application of Gingrich-style word association and demagogic, reality-skewing speech construction. In essence, Trump used a combination of symbolic convergence, word association, and selective perception to take advantage of people with vulnerable or no understanding of the political sphere. This study outlines the specific word combinations and symbols Trump used to cause confusion, fear, and consequent anger to win the White House.

Methodology

I approached this analysis by using two rhetorical criticism styles: cluster criticism and fantasy-theme criticism. Cluster criticism allowed me a word-specific understanding of the three artifacts. I was able to have a close look at sentence structure and its influence on rhetorical meaning. Fantasy-theme criticism allowed me to zoom my focus out and to look at the themes created by word choice and their influence on Trump’s message in each speech. I decided to narrow the fantasy-theme criticism to only pronoun usage when I noticed the way that Trump uses pronouns to achieve different rhetorical aims. While these tried-and-true techniques serve as the structure of my analysis, claims about the effects of communication on an audience are very difficult to substantiate. These techniques allowed me to outline different potential outcomes of Trump’s rhetoric, but they should be understood as a handful of hundreds of thousands of outcomes. I chose to analyze the speeches in the order in which they are presented simply by random choice. There are countless responses to Trump’s speeches, and the following analysis is one scholar’s perspective.
Cluster Criticism

Aside from the pentadic criticism style, renowned rhetorician Kenneth Burke created a tool called cluster criticism. Cluster criticism is based on semantic critical thought surrounding what seem like commonplace terms. This type of rhetorical tool is used to create a sort of web that captures the explicit and ultimately implicit meaning behind a given rhetorical message or discourse. The analyst begins by identifying the “key terms” within their artifact, which can be a handful of nouns that reflect the themes of the piece. After the key terms have been identified, the analyst must create clusters of words or phrases that literally surround these key terms. The only time a proximate word or phrase is not recorded is when the key term falls at the beginning or end of a sentence. The third and final part of the analysis is the “agon” analysis. This study is essentially a “compare and contrast” of the terms identified. For example, if a politician uses contrasting words like “farce” and “valid” while discussing a colleague’s ideas, she may be attempting to both toe the party line and present herself as superior to that colleague. Because these word clusters can be interpreted in different ways and can have various intentions, the formulation of a research question surrounding a cluster criticism can range from close analysis of word relationships and meaning to the author’s methodology when writing the artifact. Some research questions could synthesize these two ideas by analyzing the author’s intent and later analyzing the actual effect of the word choice and construction (Foss 140).

Fantasy-Theme Criticism

Fantasy-theme criticism (FTC) could be considered another term for what psychologists call “group-think.” While not exactly the same, the terms define how a group interprets a given stimulus (in this case, a rhetorically charged one) and consequently how it incorporates that interpretation into their understanding of reality, which is also called a “rhetorical vision.”
Created by communication theorist Ernest Bormann, FTC is based on Bormann’s symbolic convergence theory which implies that symbols create our reality and that these symbols can converge to create a shared consciousness or “community consciousness.” The primary task of FTC is to identify the character, setting, and action themes throughout the artifact. Character themes are constituted by words or phrases (in a textual artifact) that pertain to characters in the artifact such as pronouns and names; action themes are those words that describe the characters’ movements; and setting themes are those that construct the environment around the story. When connected, these fantasy themes create the different components of the rhetorical vision, which are ultimately communicated to and understood by the rhetor’s (or “sanctioning agent’s”) audience. The final product of an FTC is to come to a holistic understanding of the worldview that the rhetor has created for her audience. Understanding the themes’ correlation gives the rhetorical vision increasingly detailed context and helps the audience understand different phases and facets of the rhetorical message while simultaneously maintaining a group understanding of said message.

For this study, I used a variation of Bormann’s FTC by identifying the most frequently used pronouns as the characters in the pieces. This way, I am able to understand and decode how President Trump perceives his audience’s and his actions as well as how he uses the audience’s pre-conceived fantasy themes to form a message that may persuade or reaffirm their ideologies in his favor.

**Audience: The Silent Majority**

President Richard Nixon used the term “silent majority” in its modern definition for the first time on November 3, 1969, in a televised speech addressing national solidarity in the face of the Vietnam War. Rick Perlstein, a historian specializing in conservatism during the Nixon era,
has identified the "two kinds of Americans” that existed under Nixon: “the ordinary middle-class folks with the white picket fence who play by the rules and pay their taxes and don't protest and the people who basically come from the left.” Perlstein’s definition holds some value today; however, the definition of the term develops a new identity during each campaign cycle. During candidate Trump’s, he used his own definition of the silent majority to validate the sense of victimhood in those against whom the political pendulum had swung.

According to a Gallup poll conducted after the speech during which Nixon first used the term, he rallied 77% of Americans in support of his Vietnam policy by “calling on the ‘great silent majority’ for their support as he worked for ‘peace with honor’ in Vietnam” (“This Day in History”). President Nixon also applied this term to those who decided to abstain from the Vietnam political discussion. Nixon used the neologism to call on unheard citizens of the United States to quell the anti-war sentiment by casting their vote for him. He used it to empower them and compel them to voice their opinions, which he swayed in favor of his pro-war policy. Nixon used this ideologically vulnerable group of people to change the tone of the war in the United States. By suggesting that the “silent majority” speak up, he was using the power of his position to push people in one direction. Candidate Trump capitalized in the same way on the same overlooked group.

According to the Hoover Institution, “Trump’s numbers jumped from 2 percent to over 25 percent either from supporters of other Republican candidates and/or voters who did not have a preference before Trump entered the race” (Brady). Trump convinced people that did not have a particular opinion that they indeed had an opinion. He used fear of the unknown to push people towards the right, into his pocket. Clinton did not stand a chance with the undecided Americans (roughly half of the electorate). In an article published in Time, journalists Zeke J. Miller and
Chris Wilson conducted an analysis of Trump’s success through the Rust Belt (parts of the northeastern and midwestern U.S.). They found that “Trump snagged 220 counties that voted for President Obama in 2012, while Clinton poached [only] 17 that went for Mitt Romney.” Additionally, “Of the 3,112 counties for which there is county-level data, 2,728 shifted toward the GOP, 383 shifted Democratic” (Miller). Trump overwhelmingly flipped crucial parts of the voter pool in his favor when compared to Clinton. It seems that his approach to the silent majority and his rhetoric of respect for and validation of their feelings of disenfranchisement convinced usual non-voters to finally get out and vote. They saw the change in Trump that they had not in most other conservative candidates—change that made them the priority.

George Davey, a devout Trump supporter, claims that “the silent majority is always going to be a state of mind.” In NPR’s January 2016 report “Trump Champions the ‘Silent Majority,’ but What Does That Mean in 2016?” Davey calls the sentiment of the silent majority a “feeling of dispossession” that occurs “when things seem to be changing” (qtd. in Sanders). Today, the silent majority has taken up a different dimension of meaning. The “silent majority” is mentioned frequently in political dialogue, oftentimes in the context of a conservative individual attempting to mobilize a notoriously immobile group, the inactivity of which has earned them this name. Sometimes used pejoratively, the label “silent majority” has been taken back by those that identify with it and what they believe defines it. And the mobilization of this modern silent majority has been spearheaded recently by Donald Trump. His focus on empowering the people seems to resonate with individuals that can be considered a part of this silent majority. NPR conducted an investigation in 2016 into the group and how the people interpret the label today. They highlighted Trump’s frequent use of the phrase “silent majority” and collected testimonies from attendees of his rallies. One woman, Patty Hughes from
Indianola, Iowa, defined the group as “the people that mind their own business, [that] don’t depend on anyone else,” noting that “they’re not activists” (qtd. in Sanders). This type of understanding of the Trump base is important and provides for Trump an “in” with a previously untapped political market.

In the context of this research project, the “silent majority” will be defined as Americans, voters or not, that feel disenfranchised. A sense of disenfranchisement runs strong through fly-over states (Kansas, Nebraska, Idaho, the Dakotas, etc.) where the concentration of blue-collar work and farming is higher. A solid understanding of this group and its values eludes the mainstream media, in part because “pundits are disconnected from a vast majority of voters in middle America,” an NBC News editorial by Marie Whitaker contends. Politicians virtually ignore these states because their populations tend to be politically inactive and their populations thin. And in the context of this definition, it seems that Trump’s primary audience is comprised primarily of individuals who identify with the silent majority.

During its investigation of the term’s current definition, NPR spoke to a man from Mason City who said, “the quintessential member of the silent majority would be Joe the Plumber” (qtd. in Sanders). While these folks form the backbone of our country’s industrial and agricultural infrastructure, they are often overlooked. This neglect on the part of politicians across party lines leaves the residents of these states feeling disillusioned with and cynical of the political arena and how it represents them. In an editorial titled “America Is Held Hostage by Flyover States,” published in The Hill, Duane Townsend defines the flyover states:

A flyover state is the huge region between the coasts. As opposed to the eastern seaboard, northern post-industrial states and Pacific Ocean states. They’re overwhelmingly Republican, staunchly conservative, regressive right wing,
evangelical Christian and working class [—] well, the loudest, most ill-informed of them are.

In states like West Virginia and Wyoming, President Trump found the greatest voter support in the General Election (68% in both) (“Presidential Election Results”); however, he held a total of one rally in West Virginia during the campaign season and zero in Wyoming (Faulders). While these states don’t hold the greatest political weight because of their smaller populations, they provide a litmus test for how Donald Trump mobilized the silent majority that supposedly fills these states. According to Townsend’s editorial, Trump’s campaign is made to seem as if it took advantage of the nation by means of the silent majority, hence the article’s title. Townsend connects the silent majority to the flyover states when he says, “They’re overwhelmingly middle-aged to senior, white, semi-rural, increasingly suburban and indignant.” He goes on to elaborate upon the silent majority’s indignance by accusing them of justifying “electing right-wing theocrat/closed minds, austerity minded, cultural fascists to office” by claiming that “they’re tired of being ignored.” This rather demeaning depiction contrasts with the silent majority’s foil: liberal disappointment. That aside, President Trump’s supposed use of the silent majority does not seem to be as strong an asset as he intends.

It is simple and easy to say that the silent majority was manipulated in Donald Trump’s favor, and in some ways, it was. In a geographical analysis conducted by the Los Angeles Times, White House correspondent Eli Stokols reported that “of 34 cities where Trump has held rallies since taking office… only three are among the country’s 30 most populated.” While the analysis conducted in this study covers only pre-election speech rhetoric, Stokols’s post-election analysis is representative of Trump’s entire political approach. Trump’s focus on the silent majority is apparent in that he concentrates on smaller cities, which could be those that are often neglected
by politicians but that may contain an untapped voter demographic. Many are places that have struggled economically and where people are unaccustomed to such visits, in keeping with his professed appeal to “the forgotten men and women” (Stokols) (see Figure 1).

**Trump rallies since taking office**


Trump’s attempts to appeal to the silent majority are lucrative because the optical opportunity that his presence in small towns presents shows that he is for the common man. He appeals to the unspoken and unheard masses by proving to them that he will show up. Presence precedes message when the audience can barely have their votes taken into account. In his language, he expresses the importance of his speeches in these thinly populated states by telling them that they will no longer be unheard; his message to them is that he is their savior, their mouthpiece, their way back to security and political power.

**American Fear**

According to Roger Scruton, author of the *Palgrave Macmillan Dictionary of Political Thought*, a demagogue is “a person able to obtain political power through rhetoric, by stirring up
the feelings of his audience,” quite often visceral emotions like fear and anger, “and leading them to action despite the considerations which weigh against it” (169). In the public sphere, demagoguery often negatively impacts people’s attempts to define their ideologies and their perceptions of certain issues. Presidents have time and again catered to those who fear disenfranchisement—including the Silent Majority of 2016. As citizens develop a deeper mistrust of news sources and government, fear grows, creating a larger target for those able to take advantage of the people and increasing the suggestibility among people as they decide what to believe and what not to.

In his 2007 book *The Assault on Reason*, former Vice President Al Gore uses then-Senator Ed Muskie’s lamentation that there are “only two kinds of politics” to categorize political rhetoric: “the politics of fear and the politics of trust” (qtd. in Gore 43). Both types seem to work in favor of those who employ such strategies; however, one holds more detrimental implications than the other. While Gore’s appraisal of the political sphere could be viewed as tilted to the left, Muskie’s categories hold true today, and Donald Trump’s ability to capitalize on his audience’s fear is a testament to this.

Trump’s rhetorical strategy during his almost two-year campaign seemed to be primarily to take the offensive against his opponents. He frequently used Hillary Clinton’s email scandal to fire up his crowds and played up their fear of “corruption” or “crookedness” to his advantage (Beinart). His propensity to “other” those who attempted to check his power at all (inner- and outer-party opponents, commentators, and prominent news outlets) allowed him to be the sole provider of information for many Americans. Professor of rhetoric at the University of Texas at Austin, Dr. Patricia Roberts-Miller, looks at “othering” through a political lens in her article “Democracy, Demagoguery, and Critical Rhetoric”: “Demagogues polarize a complicated (and
often frightening) situation by presenting only two options: their policy, and some obviously stupid, impractical, or shameful one” (462). Trump used this strategy both to convince his audience that his platform is superior to all others and to invalidate the platforms of his opponents. Not only does Trump employ this kind of polarization technique against his political rivals, he also seeks to alienate external sources of information like the press and polling agencies. Rather than overtly manipulating the press, Trump, as a mere presidential candidate, openly opposed news outlets like *The New York Times* and CNN and cultivated an even deeper divide between the people and their sources of information. His confident remarks about the crookedness of his opponents and their policies reaffirmed what the people were feeling uncomfortable about and purported that Trump could make them comfortable again. Trump’s ability to push the people to fear everything mobilized radicals and validated their ultra-partisan beliefs. Donald Trump effectively cut his people off from all sources of information and allowed himself to be the gatekeeper of their news.

While he gained massive national support for his rhetorical offensives, Trump’s defensive rhetoric seemed to lack substance. When asked about policy particulars, he floundered and pulled the questions apart and deflected to ambiguous threats such as immigrations rates, email scandals, and the “death of coal” (Plumer). Trump’s tendency to “[emphasize] the importance of control and mastery” (Johnson 241) when discussing policy rather than explaining why his policy is the strongest won him the upper hand because the audience could see and hear strength and in that strength find security and clarity, even if they might not have understood the complexities of the issues. In the speeches analyzed below, one of the most common words is “enforcement.” It is repeated constantly in his speech on immigration delivered in Phoenix and
its repetition seems to symbolize that Trump’s priority is to take control and win back the country for those who believe they cannot do it for themselves.

In order to convince his audience of his capability to take effective control of an America that has “stopped putting the people first” (Politico), Trump uses a fusion of Gingrich’s language-as-a-tool method and symbolic meaning. Essentially, he uses buzzwords to keep his audience engaged with his message and enraptured by his insistence that he could fix their problems. When he uses immigrants, walls, and malicious politicians to threaten his audience and put them in what Gore calls a “quasi-hypnotic state” (35), his audience members are drawn in by what he says because they hear something that is minorly relevant to them and begin to believe that it is a serious threat to their way of life. When they’re drawn in by the perils that Trump is depicting, he feeds them strongman answers and confident declarations that he alone can be the conqueror of their fears. President Trump’s 100-Day Plan reflects his rather brash and simple rhetorical fear-mongering well. The plan included his intention to construct a wall along the border of the United States and Mexico, prosecute Hillary Clinton, and suspend immigration from “terror-prone regions” (Sanders). These tenets of his platform were what drove his success. He indicated to the people that he would circumvent “the swamp” that requires such changes to be incremental and slow.

Donald Trump won the presidency because he claimed that he could do something about the myriad impending threats to the U.S.—something that he declared nobody else was capable of. Though these threats have little effect on the majority of Americans, Trump’s voter base felt compelled to take action because he had convinced them that their livelihoods were at stake. In his Phoenix immigration speech, Trump ended the speech with a slew of guest speakers: a group of women called “Angel Moms” who are mothers of children killed (accidentally or
intentionally) by undocumented immigrants (Fearnow). This group of mothers gave individual accounts of their children’s deaths and followed up with endorsements for candidate Trump. This use of graphic visualization of violence and death instills in the people a primal fear of the worst possible circumstances. The audience was potentially led to believe that these mothers’ tragedies could become their own. In conjunction with his “enforcement” rhetoric, Trump focused on his political “competition as about domination and submission” rather than political “interconnectedness” (Johnson 242) and understanding of circumstances on either side of the party lines or either side of the border.

Donald Trump’s use of fear is well known and criticized by many. It can be identified throughout the three speeches analyzed below and is a main reason for his success as a rhetor and leader. His powerful policy promises have put him in a position of almost supreme superiority. His followers invest themselves deeply because he covertly threatens their lifestyles and holds their votes hostage by claiming to be the only one that can remedy the country’s security, economic, and social issues.

**Findings**

**Speech in Phoenix, Arizona**

This speech was delivered on August 31, 2016, at the Phoenix Convention Center in Phoenix, Arizona. The topic of the speech was immigration in the United States, specifically Mexican undocumented immigrants. In the CNN broadcast archived on YouTube, President Trump stands behind a narrow lectern in front of four tall U.S. flags. As he adjusts the microphone, he distributes several thank yous and then segues into pandering to the crowd. Then-candidate Trump uses several tools in the hour-long speech to both communicate his firm
approach to immigration and encourage his audience to embrace it. The following is an analysis of this speech through semantic and symbolic lenses.

Cluster Criticism. Initially, I read the transcript of the speech as it was intended for delivery, so, without the ums, pauses, and extemporaneous meanderings. During this reading, I looked for key terms and recurring language and made note of these. Next, I read the transcript of the speech as delivered while listening to it along with the CNN recording. Following these reads, I used an online word quantifier called WriteWords.org.uk (see Figure 2).

![Word Frequency Counter](image)

**Figure 2.** The top of the word frequency list in Trump’s Phoenix speech. Source: WriteWords.org.uk.

Of these words, I identified the ten most frequent nouns used in the speech as delivered. These words, from most frequent to least, were “people,” “immigration,” “country,” “Hillary,” “American,” “immigrants,” “border,” “number,” “system,” and “United States.” After isolating these words, I searched a PDF transcript of the speech for each word and recorded the immediately proximate nouns, adjectives, and verbs before and after the recorded term to form the term clusters (see Appendix A).
The most prevalent theme within the term clusters not directly related to the United States (e.g., “immigration,” “border”) is pejorative language. When candidate Trump spoke about immigration, he almost always checked his speech by singling out “illegal” immigrants; he used “illegal” twelve times to characterize the immigration to which he referred. Because his speech focuses heavily on illegal immigration and minimally on legal immigration, his language could instill in his audience that perhaps all immigration is bad or detrimental to the United States and its citizenry. Trump’s discussion of immigration, a word which he says a total of 47 times, is surrounded by terms and phrases such as “fundamental problem,” “low-skilled,” “issue,” “quagmire,” “reduce jobs,” and “reform.” Just under half of the items I recorded carry a negative connotation. This is a classic occurrence seen in powerful and strategic rhetors.

Association by proximity is the very notion that cluster criticism aims to identify and examine. In his essay “Attitudes toward History,” Kenneth Burke quantifies rhetoric and calls the symbolic nature of rhetoric a use of “implicit equations” within a given artifact. These implicit equations are ways in which a rhetor may, intentionally or not, create meaning beyond whatever is being explicitly spoken or communicated. Burke concludes that while a rhetor can be conscious of his act of speaking and how it may incite a certain “mood,” he “cannot possibly be conscious of the interrelationships among all these equations” (Burke 232). Thus, while candidate Trump is effectively communicating to his audience what he intends, it is possible that he is unconscious of and ultimately powerless to the various and almost entirely negative interpretations each of his audience members has of his speech. In simpler terms, Trump is achieving his goal: he is associating immigration with danger and threats; however, his audience may come to this negative understanding on their own terms. This is what *The New York Times* journalist Farhad Manjoo calls “selective perception” (65).
In his 2008 book *True Enough: Learning to Live in a Post-Fact Society*, Manjoo defines selective perception by citing an instance of it in a formerly popular television show. Manjoo explains the premise of the 1970s show *All in the Family*, and its main character, Archie Bunker, whom Manjoo labels a “loveable bigot” (60). Archie, a character that was meant to portray the perils of being uneducated and who frequently used racial slurs to refer to people of color, was meant to be a parody of racists in America. Though Archie’s satirical purpose was obvious to half of the show’s millions of fans and validated their disdain for people like Archie, the other half missed the satire because what they felt was affirmation. They saw Archie as the personification of their ideals and sentiments. This perceived contrast in viewers’ understanding of the show prompted a study by two psychologists, Neil Vidmar and Milton Rokeach, and was eventually proven correct. The parallels between Archie Bunker and candidate Trump are obvious and important.

In this speech, the language surrounding the ten key terms is quite broad. While his ideas and address of multiple topics are clear, Trump’s sentences are often not so. The fragmentary nature of his sentences allows for a lot of rhetorical space, or leeway, in his message. For example, when one audience member hears “immigration” surrounded by “quagmire” and “fundamental problem,” and their preconceived understanding of immigration in the U.S. is that it is an unsolvable problem, these preconceptions are affirmed. Another audience member may hear “immigration” next to “reform” and “will be enforced” and will have their interpretation that illegal immigration, while still bad, should be managed by the law. Essentially, Trump is using “immigration” as a negative umbrella term to cover each audience member’s perception of it. His conversation around immigration in this speech has several branches such as how it affects job availability, how immigrants do not assimilate themselves to American culture, and
how immigration brings crime. Trump uses the word “immigration” as a buzzword to grab the attention of his audience and then associates the words vaguely with every negative branch topic that he can. This strategy allows the audience to selectively perceive the issue to fit their preconceived understanding of it. The word “immigration” is effectively a rhetorical catchall that Trump employs to make his audience members believe that he has the answer to each of their own individual qualms with immigration.

The tone of candidate Trump’s speech is often jolted in another direction as he peppers the speech with positive pro-United States sentiment. He says “United States” a total of fourteen times. When speaking about the U.S., he uses phrases such as “can’t obtain legal status,” “protect,” and “friendship between Mexico.” He also often used phrases such as “criminal aliens to return” and “terror cases inside” in close proximity to “United States.” These two themes create a tone of threat. He reaffirms the audience’s patriotism and national pride and follows this up with threats against American values, lifestyle, and livelihood. Trump’s use of this mixed rhetoric suggests that if great change does not come soon, the greatness of the United States will falter.

This rhetorical technique is more apparent in the contrast between the “American” and “United States” clusters. When listeners hear the adjective “American,” they would imagine the American way of life or the American Dream. When Trump uses the term “American” in this speech, he accompanies it with terms like “vulnerable,” “incredible,” “safety of,” “security for all,” “life,” “first,” and “futures.” The “American” cluster is overwhelmingly positive, proud, and protective. Candidate Trump rarely threatens the American lifestyle with impending immigrant violence, and he does not address this term with the same urgency that he does when he evokes the threats against the United States. When invoking the “United States,” he notes that we
“[w]on’t have a country” should Hillary Clinton be elected. He states that open borders may “destroy our country.” This is a striking contrast to the primarily positive tone of the “American” cluster. It is as if Trump is attempting to establish urgency in the issue of illegal immigration but not at the cost of the citizenry’s identity as “American.” In other words, it seems like he is creating a threatening connotation around immigration in the U.S. while simultaneously removing responsibility from his audience. The onus of illegal immigration does not lie on them the “Americans”; it lies on the government. It is the government’s responsibility to protect the lifestyles and livelihoods of the American people. This validates the audience’s national pride while effectively addressing the issue of immigration.

This same urgency is established and perpetuated by candidate Trump’s use of oversized descriptors when discussing numbers. In the “number” key term cluster, Trump accompanies the word “number” with words like “vast,” “triple,” “expand,” “largest,” and “large.” He uses these often-exaggerated terms to signal to the audience his power and stature. When the audience hears these words, they are conditioned to associate him with large turnout, great numbers, and thus greater influence and power. Additionally, when he breaks his policy down, Trump numbers his points both to organize his topics and to quantify them. This symbolizes to his audience that he has an extensive, organized plan, and when he supplements these policy proposals with ballooned numbers, it seems as though they are statistically substantiated and will be successful.

Terms like “Hillary Clinton” and “American” and their conflict within this speech are the result of what Kenneth Burke describes as god and devil terms (A Grammar of Motives 102). God terms are those that are the greatest case in the rhetorical situation that the rhetor is trying to communicate; devil terms are the worst case in the rhetorical situation. When I conducted an agon analysis, as described in the methodology, it is noticeable that this speech is riddled with
these contrasting terms. For example, when discussing immigration, Trump communicates mainly strict opposition (e.g., “fix,” “cut it off,” “will be enforced”); however, these are punctuated by occasional concessions such as “debate” or “complex subject.” These phrases, while few and far between, are breaks from candidate Trump’s cut-and-dry approach to illegal immigration. As he preaches strict immigration policy, even going as far as to suggest we are entitled to choosing who enters our country based on “merit” or how well they might “assimilate,” Trump uses this language to shift the blame. He uses these contingencies to communicate to his audience that he will be tough on immigration, but that there is some red tape and that perhaps his solution won’t be as direct as he’s letting on. This establishes a rhetorical loophole, which his followers could use to justify potential failure to come through on some of his policy promises.

Trump’s use of grandiose and urgent terms to associate certain meanings with buzzwords is the one fundamental of his rhetorical repertoire. He uses these words to cultivate his audience’s fear of things that, while often distant and indirect, could pose a threat to their comfort and lifestyle. This is only one of the ways in which Trump uses Gingrich’s tactic to create a reality based around fear for his audience. In the following analysis, I will look at the facets of this reality and how Trump uses it to instill fear and then anger in his audience.

Fantasy-Theme Criticism. In A Rhetoric of Motives, Kenneth Burke defines “consubstantiality” as a mode of identification or oneness with the audience (21): “You persuade individuals ‘only insofar as you can talk’ their ‘language by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, idea, identifying your ways’ with theirs” (qtd. in Foss 61). Candidate Trump’s Arizona speech and his use of pronouns and colloquialisms is a perfect illustration of Burke’s
consubstantiality. He shapes new definitions of words by associating them with words that imply certain positive or negative things.

In the speech, Trump uses the pronoun “we” 150 times and “us” 10 times, whereas he uses “I” only 57 times. This type of pronoun use establishes a collective mind, and in conjunction with verbs such as “will,” “can,” “want,” and “must,” Trump creates urgency in his audience. He uses this “we” mindset to semantically form common ground and immediately establishes rapport with his vast audience. Trump’s language deflects from his class and his scandals because his audience has been swept away by the power, urgency, and will in his voice and language. He has embodied the Silent Majority by way of simple language and short statements. His often-curt language harnesses the dispersed and avid anger of the people across the underrepresented states and voices it just as the citizens of those states would themselves (Starobin). When Trump is not talking about himself and his audience as a collective body, he is directing his speeches at them. He uses the word “you” 80 times. This maintains the power within the people, but it also gives candidate Trump direct authority over the audience’s opinion and understanding of issues through his lens. He repeats the phrase “you know” to inspire confidence in his audience that not only does he understand them, he knows that they understand the issue being discussed. Seemingly establishing mutual respect by a combination of subordination and pandering is effective in moving the crowd: they often break into applause and chants.

Aside from identification via consubstantiality, perhaps candidate Trump’s soundest rhetorical tool was his formation of the us-versus-them mentality among his audience. He uses what Dr. John A. Powell, a professor of law at the University of California, Berkeley, calls “othering,” “which not only encompasses the many expressions of prejudice on the basis of
group identities, but provides a clarifying frame that reveals a set of common processes and conditions that propagate group-based inequality and marginality.” In the Arizona speech, Trump uses the word “they” 86 times and “them” 32 times. When he used these terms, they were almost always accompanied by verbs like “can’t,” “won’t,” “are going,” “say,” and “will.”

Candidate Trump uses these phrases to cast out those that do not share his vision. By repeating phrases like these, he is defining the “out-group” as less competent and less worthy of respect by the “in-group.” President Trump condemns the out-group as those that deny the silent majority their voice. They—Hillary Clinton, Democrats, illegal immigrants—are the ones stealing American jobs, ruining lives, and effectively running the country into the ground.

Consubstantiation with pronouns is a powerful tool in speech rhetoric, especially for the audiences directly present at Trump’s rallies. By creating the out-group, Trump solidifies the us-against-them mentality and uses the anger that he stokes to continuously push his audience closer to their pole. He uses these techniques to compel his audience to believe the reality that he has established and never to open their minds to something outside of this reality. By creating this new political reality, he lures his audience into an echo chamber outside of which he says there lies great danger.

**Speech in New York City**

This speech was delivered in New York City on 22 June 2016. The focus of this speech is the policy of candidate Trump’s primary Democratic opponent, Hillary Clinton. When this speech was delivered, both candidates Trump and Clinton had reached the number of pledged delegates to score their respective party nominations (Trump on May 26, Clinton on June 6). The election had begun to pick up speed, and this was perhaps candidate Trump’s attempt to target his opponent and deflect rising suspicion in the wake of the June 9 meeting in Trump Tower.
between Donald Trump, Jr., Paul Manafort, Jared Kushner, and a Russian lawyer. The attempt to divert attention from this seemingly scandalous affair was effective. According to political news and database FiveThirtyEight.com, candidate Trump’s chance of winning the election—after a continuous and steady decline—jumped a little over 1% after the day of this speech (Silver). Trump uses several rhetorical tools to craft this attack speech in order to give it edge against Clinton while shedding positive light on his platform.

Cluster Criticism. The ten most frequent nouns in this speech are “Hillary/Hillary Clinton,” “America,” “people,” “country,” “jobs,” “state,” “President,” “workers,” “policy,” and “China.” When discussing Hillary, Trump defaults to statements on the negative things Clinton has done. He accompanies her name with things like “got rich,” “tryout for the presidency,” “not concerned,” and “slept soundly in her bed” to make Clinton seem flippant and careless. These casual phrases make Clinton seem not only careless but spineless. Trump’s negative rhetorical approach surrounding Clinton worked well in conjunction with his powerful statements about proposed policy and the strength of Americans and their country. He minimizes Clinton and lifts his audience, the “American people,” to a higher plane than she. by frequently stating that putting “Americans first” would be his priority, he further reaffirms their belief in Clinton’s inferiority and ineptitude to run the nation well.

When he delivers this speech, candidate Trump rarely breaks from the teleprompter in front of him. In the first few lines, the Politico transcript of the speech as prepared for delivery says, “Today I’d like to share my thoughts about the stakes in this election”; however, in the FOX 10 Phoenix recording of this speech, Trump says, “Today I’d like to share my thoughts about the stakes in this upcoming and very important election.” A few lines later, Trump, instead of saying, “I quickly answer,” says, “I very quickly answer.” And just a few words after that, he
says, “a country that has been so very good to me,” instead of “so good to me.” Throughout the speech, Trump peppers the word “very” here and there where he can, though the transcript as prepared for delivery includes only two instances of the term. While this may seem a minor attribute of Trump’s rhetorical tendencies, it serves to place emphasis within his speech and to add urgency to his message. It seems as though he is using this urgency to engage his audience by occasionally emphasizing a point and to eventually spur them to act out.

Trump’s breaks from his teleprompter are obvious and seemingly intentional. When he breaks from the moderately eloquent writing to add his own commentary, it seems as though he removes himself from the role of speaker. Trump plays two roles on stage during this speech: the speaker and, for lack of a better name, the peanut gallery. He delivers his lines quickly and chopply, but when he breaks to add a “so important” or “I’ll tell you,” his speech relaxes and becomes more conversational. It is difficult to tell if Trump does this on purpose because, of course, this could just be his attempt to level with the audience or make his speech more personal. Either way, it removes him from the rhetorical situation. It is as if he lets the words speak for themselves and then follows up with his own point of view or his opinion on the matter.

A recurring theme in this speech is the American workforce. Trump uses the word “jobs” fifteen times and “workers” nine times. This seems to be a direct appeal to the silent majority. As discussed above, the silent majority can be considered to be comprised of the United States’ blue-collar workers or those disenfranchised citizens who seek a job that will merely earn them a living. Trump uses phrases like “stronger than ever before,” “best,” “good-paying,” and “creating,” when describing jobs. This instills in the audience that jobs are Trump’s priority and that if he is elected, he will bring them the jobs that they seek. Reducing the idea of a “job” to
just “manufacturing” or some number allows the audience to easily perceive the idea of the national job market. Trump uses his language around “jobs” in the United States to make them an easily attainable goal for those who feel as though they could never reach that goal without him.

*Fantasy-Theme Criticism.* The primary subject of this speech is candidate Trump’s opponent, Hillary Clinton. He uses the pronoun “she” a total of 47 times, almost always supplemented by a negatively connotated commentary on Clinton. It is the most frequently used pronoun in the speech and is almost immediately established as a trigger for negative implication, as it is almost always used to refer to Clinton. “She” is repeatedly accompanied by negative verbs including “deleted,” “betrayed,” “sold out,” and “hurt.” This is not a surprise given candidate Trump’s tendency to use his opponents as lightning rods. He uses primarily negative verbs and descriptors to paint a caricature of Clinton in his audience’s minds. By covering a range of topics including immigration, deleted emails, her tenure as Secretary of State, etc., he essentially touches all the bases but only glancingly. He reinforces these issues in the people’s minds without steering them in any direction of thought besides negative. He implies that Clinton is incapable of sound ethics in any situation, but he does not provide specific reasons why. This implication allows his audience the power of selective perception. They hear exclamations like “she let China steal hundreds of billions” and “she ran the State Department like her own personal hedge fund” almost entirely without context and are not encouraged to believe anything beyond that Clinton is a monster for any reason they can conjure within their minds. These “she” statements at the beginning of Trump’s sentences create a web of hypnotic, chantlike phrases that obscure the lack of evidence.
The pronoun “we” is used 43 times in this speech. This number compared to the number of occurrences of “she” highlights the use of othering in Trump’s speeches. He is using the power of the us-versus-them mentality yet again to capitalize on the power of the people’s anger. By pitting the “we” against “she,” he forms a concrete mobilization tactic that allows people to rebel against the obvious target based on their individual reasons or prejudices. The phrases surrounding “we” such as “come to work together,” “can fix,” and “will build” are overwhelmingly positive, which works well to counteract the overall negativity of the speech. This dissonance emphasizes the divide between Trump’s camp and Clinton’s camp. It provides the only point of context for the audience: that of the righteousness of Trump’s platform in the context of Clinton’s entitled, conniving character.

Again, as we saw in his Phoenix speech, Trump uses powerful words like “workers” and “America” to invoke strong ideas in his audience. A difference in this speech, however, is that Trump defines and personifies the out-group in this speech. Clinton and her following are the face of the “others” in the context of this speech. This isn’t the first time that Trump used Clinton as the lightning rod for his audience’s anger, but dedicating an entire speech to the purpose of “othering” created a strong rhetorical theme in the reality that Trump was trying to build.

**Speech in Charlotte, North Carolina**

This speech was delivered on August 18, 2016, at the Charlotte Convention Center in Charlotte, North Carolina. It was one of two delivered in the city during the campaign cycle, and it is considered by *The Washington Post* to be Trump’s best speech of the 2016 campaign. In *the Post’s* coverage, the speech is characterized as “broadly appealing, focused and animated” which culminate in one of Trump’s best speeches (Blake). In the FOX 10 Phoenix recording of the speech on YouTube, the candidate can be seen behind a lectern, flashing thumbs-ups to the
crowd while “God Bless the U.S.A.” plays. His tempered speech and relatively calm demeanor captured the audience’s attention for just over 45 minutes. This speech is out of the ordinary in terms of Trump’s rhetorical history. It represents a shift in rhetoric that makes Trump’s underlying message more covert and therefore potentially more insidious.

Cluster Criticism. The ten most frequent nouns in the transcript of the speech as spoken were “country,” “American,” “people,” “Hillary Clinton,” “Americans,” “time,” “jobs,” “future,” “change,” and “children.” The variation in language in this speech is apparent in that the most frequent noun, “country,” is used only 26 times, compared to the most frequent noun in his 41-minute New York City speech (49 Hillary Clintons) and in his 90-minute Phoenix speech (50 peoples). This variation shows that Trump’s speech was unfocused. Whether intentional, this variation shows that the speech covers several topics and indicates that these topics are shallowly addressed.

An agon analysis of the term “country” shows positively no pattern. The term is surrounded by words and phrases like “knows,” “everyone,” and “safe,” as well as “stripped,” “don’t have a voice,” and “wrong track.” While many of the terms are used to warn the people, what could happen should they not elect him president, candidate Trump often breaks from his stream of positive rhetoric to stoke fear in the hearts of his audience. He encourages them to fear what they cannot predict and to default to trusting his confident and strong language.

Trump expresses superiority over his opponent, Hillary Clinton, in intelligence and aptitude for combatting the multiple issues he invokes by associating Clinton’s name with negative words and phrases. His frequent use of the word “she” to identify Clinton is Trump’s use of “othering” to place absolutely no blame on his audience and consequently placing all blame on his opponent. By establishing the out-group as Clinton and her following, Trump
grants his audience peace of mind in that they are righteous and that they are the victims of Clinton and other political “bigots.” Trump venerates them as the “countless” Americans who “don’t get credit” for their tribulations. He repeats the word “bigotry” when speaking about Hillary Clinton. This rebranding of a term often associated with extremists allows the symbolic meaning of the idea that it represents to change in the people’s minds from the hegemonic definition (e.g., perhaps a racist individual, hateful person, etc.) to something tailored to fit their enemy. Trump uses a word that is defined by intolerance of opinions different to one’s own to express his intolerance of his opponent’s entire platform. Painting Clinton as a bigot implies that Trump, too, is a bigot; however, the audience may understand the word “bigot” under a different definition than that under which is usually accepted. Trump seems to be changing the usual meaning of a powerful word to reflect his rhetorical vision and simultaneously dissociate himself from the original meaning of the word.

The “silent majority” narrative makes a reappearance in this speech. Candidate Trump invokes this when he uses the term “people.” He uses phrases like “rigged against,” “terrorizing,” and “have suffered.” In the case of the use of “have suffered,” candidate Trump seems to be building a victim-of-the-system narrative that appeals directly to those who feel most disenfranchised by previous administrations’ failure to pay attention to the group’s needs and travails.

_Fantasy-Theme Criticism._ The most frequent character pronoun used in candidate Trump’s Charlotte speech is “I.” This signals that he spends most of his time speaking about things he has done, is currently doing, or promises he will do. This pronoun is often accompanied by phrases like “am not a politician,” “can promise you this,” “speak the truth,” and “will never.” These definitive statements that connote change may reaffirm the audience’s
rhetorical vision that Trump is the ultimate cure for the United States’ problems. They hope that Trump is the man for the job, and he reaffirms this hope and nearly fulfills it by implying that he will do what he says at all costs. This kind of ruthless approach appeases their potential desire for an aggressive, maybe even angry leader. In his previously mentioned article for *The Atlantic*, titled “The Real Roots of American Rage,” Charles Duhigg discusses the power of anger in public opinion. His theory is that people perceive angry leaders as effective ones. Trump puts this theory into practice in this speech. His use of sharp statements and inflected tone of voice create a powerful combination to portray his strength and anger at vague issues. His anger is either undirected or directed at everything that is not him or his followers. His angry othering validates his audience’s beliefs and allows them to ignore the frequent lack of policy detail in favor of his rhetorical style.

This speech is different from the other two examined because toward the middle of this speech, candidate Trump admits that he has made verbal mistakes before. He has said the wrong thing in public before. He says, “I have done that” and “I regret it” in reference to no misbehavior in particular. He allows himself to be vulnerable with his audience and then sweeps them away with a list of things he *will* do and will not regret. Trump is allowing a new, softer, and more thoughtful facet of his personal rhetorical vision to develop. This rhetoric is a wild digression from his usual strongman approach. This shift is important because it signals a change in the audience’s rhetorical perception. He now not only can channel his anger towards general foes of him and his audience, but he can also admit his flaws and encourage his audience to overlook them. This expression of vulnerability and range in rhetoric is perhaps what gained this speech the title of Trump’s “best” during the campaign.
It seems as though this speech is candidate Trump’s chance to explain himself, to express his ideas and promises in an organized way, and to appeal to whatever doubt his audience might harbor. This speech came about a month after Clinton accepted the nomination from the Democratic National Committee. Trump had been on the offensive since Clinton’s acceptance; however, this speech signaled a change in Trump’s rhetorical approach. Trump is attempting to refocus his audience on the greater meaning of his campaign slogan “Make America Great Again.” He is leading them to envision a brighter future beyond the pure turmoil that he claimed the country was embroiled in at that moment. The consecutive series of “will” statements (e.g., “I will tell you,” “I will fix it,” “I will do a great job,” “I will work as hard as I can”) focus the audience’s attention on a brighter future instead of allowing them to see the greatness of our country in its current state. This kind of rhetoric recruits the audience to Trump’s camp, almost as if he’s pitching to them the return on investment they will receive if they fully invest in his plan for a better America. And Trump promises everything: he feeds the audience exactly what they want to hear, regardless of its rationale or potential consequence.

Trump’s approach combines well with a strong and confident invoking of “we.” Trump uses the pronoun “we” a total of 57 times. He uses this pronoun in conjunction with verbs like “have enough problems,” “will not rest,” “don’t pay ransom,” and “all hurt.” These verbs give the American people a sense of victimhood. It seems like Trump is pandering to the audience’s sense of entitlement to a winning candidate, one who will give them what they want and need and end their immense suffering. Thomas Tripp, a professor of psychology at Washington State University, discusses the anger that Trump gins up in his audience:

“Think about presidential elections,” Tripp said. “Every four years, roughly half the nation is deeply disappointed. So why don’t they get out their pitchforks?”
Because as long as they believe it was a fair fight, they tolerate losing. But when both the process and the outcome seem unfair, that’s when we see riots” (qtd. in Duhigg).

The disenfranchised, the silent majority, the deplorables felt downtrodden for having so much to say and nobody to listen for so long, and instead of seeing it as they usually do after a fair fight, the way that Tripp describes it, Trump is instilling in them this paranoia that perhaps the fight wasn’t as fair as they’d been told it was in the past. He’s saying that he can circumvent this unfairness and win the race for them. He can be their truth-seeker and preserver. It’s almost as if candidate Trump provides for the people a guideline for their emotions. They aren’t sure what to feel or how potently they should feel it, so they follow him and the emotional standard he sets. Consequently, they become irrationally upset or unjustifiably angry. This anger is what fueled Trump’s campaign. Duhigg goes on to say that when we start to believe things like Trump is claiming in this speech—that politics has wronged working-class America, that the enemy is in Washington—“we get the desire for revenge.” We no longer expect our anger to be heard; we don’t express ourselves with the hope of finding accommodation.” Trump’s audience becomes enraged, so much so that they sometimes break into fights among themselves (see figure 3).
Trump transitions from “we” to second person frequently in this speech to propel this vengeful emotion. Second person allows him to make his statements directly applicable to his audience. A member of Trump’s audience can feel the weight of his words when he says, “if something is broken, you fix it.” When he uses “you,” he reaches into the crowd and implores them to act in the way that he does because he has just stated the virtuousness of his actions. He is telling them what the normal thing is to do; what he says is just what “you” do. Trump’s use of second person makes his statements personal and “others” those that don’t believe what he does. Eventually, those that don’t believe are pressured by what seems like a universal idea into believing this very idea.

This speech is an outlier in Trump’s campaign rhetoric, but it signifies an interesting reactionary rhetorical approach. Trump uses controlled speech to show his audience that he has more than just anger and impassioned extemporaneous speech. His tempered speech and this
close reading of the speech as it was prepared for delivery allow his message perhaps less immediate rhetorical sway, but more overarching meaning. This more deliberate and intentional approach could allow the audience to slow down and to consider the Trumpian ideas they have accepted. Trump’s overall clean and moderate speech also masks his rather radical ideas. By embedding the same urgency that we saw in the Phoenix speech in this speech and communicating it in a relatively poised and controlled manner, he gives this message greater validity. It hides extremism in his words and could subconsciously instill these ideas in his audience’s interpretation of the reality that Trump has been building. Perhaps this rhetorical approach is more dependent on Trump’s speech-writing team; however, it shows a different and even more powerful strategy in Trump’s reality building.

**Audience Reaction**

In the context of this analysis, it is crucial to examine candidate Trump’s online presence because this is the area of the public sphere in which his audience responds to his rhetoric. These responses are many in number and broad in scope, however looking at a small sample size can give this analysis some of the other side of the rhetorical conversation. These responses exemplify how Trump’s supporters support and react to his words in speeches like those analyzed in this study. This type of investigation not only helps further define his primary audience, but it allows me to see some of their direct reactions to his rhetoric, both before and after Trump’s election. While the participants within Trump’s online sphere do not necessarily represent the entirety of his following, social media is a good way to attempt to understand the audience’s reaction to Trump’s rhetorical approach. Because online forums such as Facebook and Twitter allow the participants to engage freely and without physical danger, the responses and posts in these forums are raw and often expose the vulnerability of their posters. Taking a
deep look at Trump-supportive pages gives me a peek into his audience and allows me to perceive his message from their point of view.

A primary issue with President Trump’s social media, is that when Obama was president, he set himself apart from the negative news media by tweeting consistently positive messages—tweets that were few and far between and that had been well crafted by a team of public relations people. He reported—often directly by signing the tweets “B.O.”—to the people his precise sentiments. When his beliefs changed (for example, his opinion of gay marriage), he noted that they had and held himself accountable. By contrast, the frequency of President Trump’s tweets is overwhelming. With such a quantity, the margin for error, misaligned thoughts, and emotional irrationality grow ever larger. President Obama gave his followers a refuge from the mainstream media, a means to receive comforting and encouraging words directly from the Commander in Chief himself. Trump’s social media presence is a means of catharsis for not only Trump but also for his followers. Unrelenting and ruthless, it appears to stoke the people’s anger, sometimes even juvenility, instead of provoking critical thought and understanding. This reaction has been a recurring theme in his audience’s response to his rhetoric. As mentioned in the analysis of his speech in Charlotte, his audience is given the platform during these speeches to express their most visceral and primitive emotions and to have them validated. This is reflected in the responses to his online presence, and these tweets prove that Trump is using his language to push his audience into impassioned and sometimes unreasoned anger. It seems that prior to the election, Trump was attempting to create this reality centered around fear and now, via tweets and other online communication, he is maintaining this fear and pushing it in order to stoke anger.
With the frequency of tweets comes a tumult of response. The responses to Trump’s tweets, and the messages that are associated with his followers and their own tweets, play an important role in the creation of a shared reality among Trump and his followers. In Purdue University Professor Sean M. Eddington’s article “The Communicative Constitution of Hate Organizations Online: A Semantic Network Analysis of ‘Make America Great Again,’” Eddington analyzes hundreds of tweets surrounding President Trump’s campaign slogan to look for themes of white supremacy and extremism. Eddington argues that the ways that these groups’ (and their users’) fears are framed are representative of the ways in which there is a very real threat of a racialized “other” attacking the status quo of society. There is a quest to silence, breed division, and engage in fearmongering. One key example of this is the prevalence of the hashtag #rapefugees within this semantic network. #Rapefugees refer to a Breitbart News–promoted narrative that frames Syrian refugees as rapists, which furthers opposition [to] open borders within both the United Kingdom and the United States. (9) Eddington’s observation serves to represent the vulnerability of President Trump’s primary social media audience by way of viral hashtag. In his study, Eddington mapped out the semantic pathways woven through the tweets that mention “Make America Great Again” or #MAGA (see figure 4).
Media outlets like Breitbart News pump out sensationalized information to sway the public opinion, and the public obliges. Breitbart and hundreds of others like it scattered across the political spectrum prioritize widening the chasm between the already staunchly divided party system in America. In conjunction with Trump’s rather dark and aggressive rhetoric, this works well to mobilize the people. It creates a sort of urgency that can only be produced from a fear for one’s livelihood (Starobin). As can be seen in Eddington’s visualization of the Trump- Trump follower #MAGA tweet network, those that use #MAGA also frequently use hashtags like #AmericaFirst and #DraintheSwamp. These show that they people feel that there is serious action to be taken to change the way that the government functions. It holds the government in contempt by the people and almost fuels their fear of Washington, also referred to as “the Swamp.”
When he has the chance, President Trump uses moments of national attention to change the tone of something that he has said or done, or to improve his general public standing. On January 20, 2019, President Trump responded to one of his wife’s tweets celebrating the beginning of the third year of the President’s time in office (see figure 5).

![Figure 5](https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/1087150318079610880?lang=en)

His tactfulness when victimizing his wife while also commending her for the public is impressive to say the least. In this tweet, the audience is inclined to take pity on Melania and Donald for not receiving the credit they deserve and simultaneously to fawn over Donald’s expression of pride in Melania. In other words, President Trump is playing for both sides of the American media consumer: emotion and family values, sympathy and pride, the country and his wife. He establishes that he is able to withdraw himself from the political tornado that he is usually swept up in, and he combines that move with an accusation against the people. He has skirted all blame for his self-inflicted frequent bad press but inspires other people to think of him as another family man, there to support his thriving and powerful wife.
As social media begins to play a larger and more influential role in the public sphere, it has come to be the playground for players of the game of politics—players for either side. While both sides have their extremes, those extremes are magnified, and their extremism amplified, by the safety that their screens provide. Online forums such as exclusive Facebook groups and virtual news articles are cesspools for extremists to float their ideas and reaffirm their radical beliefs. The safety and lack of responsibility that a screen provides make these kinds of connections prone to extreme beliefs and offer ways for people may air grievances not usually appropriate for physical public forums. In a private Facebook group called “Official President Donald Trump 2020” which hosts 4,178 members, one user shared a link to a Hill-HarrisX daily poll published by The Hill on January 1, 2019. The title of the article that included the poll results was “Poll Shows Voters Blame Trump More Than Dems for Government Shutdown” (Sheffield) (see figure 6).
The user accompanied the post with a caption of his own: “‘Blame’? Again, use a BIASED term where you know the better term would be ‘Credit’, as in ‘Standing up for what you want’ or ‘Having a backbone’. I detest ‘reporters’!!! And, this type is the WORST!!!” The caption of the article was rather expected, as when someone sees something they don’t agree with, it’s only natural that they should turn to a group of kindred spirits to collectively tear the thing to bits. What was surprising, however, were the reactions to the post. In the comments section, other members of the Facebook group were outraged that a news source should use their platform to spread what the users believed to be “fake news” (see figure 7).

The responses from the commenters were astoundingly dismissive of a source that frequently leans to the right, in their favor. This is a prime example of the anti-news-media movement that
has gained momentum. President Trump’s most devoted followers are pushing facts away that contradict their understanding of the truth. “Truth” is by no means objective; fact, however, is objective. Fact, as defined by Oxford dictionary is “a thing that is known or proved to be true.” The third definition is “The truth about events as opposed to interpretation” (“fact”). The Hill has proven the fact behind their poll. The issue with this kind of media reception lies not in the article, but in the readers’ failure to look beyond the headline. The point of fact is not to be the entire truth. Facts are the building blocks of truth. They are the apparatus upon which we construct our collective understanding of the truth. No un-factual truth is true.

Truth is almost always influenced by our language and the language of our leaders. We look to them for the ultimate truths, as any Trump supporter does. Renowned author George Orwell sums up the state of the English language and its influence on our beliefs well in his essay “Politics and the English Language”: “[English] becomes ugly and inaccurate because our thoughts are foolish, but the slovenliness of our language makes it easier for us to have foolish thoughts” (McQuaid 533). In this essay, Orwell notes that rhetors often fall to two vices when speaking, the second of which is indifference “as to whether [their] words mean anything or not.” This indifference can cause slippage in thinking and political reasoning and consequent volatility and conflict. Prose consists less and less of words chosen for the sake of their meaning, and more and more of phrases tacked together like the sections of a prefabricated hen-house” (McQuaid 535). Today, we use buzzwords and symbols to evoke our meaning in our audiences because we have associated different meanings to these things like “immigration” and “national security.” Candidate Trump tosses out catchphrases—“Build the wall!” or “Lock her up!” or “fake news!” to his audiences, and they are immediately overtaken by the rhetorical power of the situation. Standing amongst their peers, their president is using these catchphrases to let them in
on the conversation they have been excluded from for the last eight to twenty years. The catchphrases are the panels of the “hen-house” about which Orwell warns his readers. Though the compilation of these buzzwords draws the audience in and reassures them that Trump is hitting all the issues, it seems he is just building an empty rhetorical message to provoke his audience.

At one moment in “Politics,” Orwell swings his argument into a narrow focus when he explicates the word “fascism,” which he says has “now no meaning except in so far as it signifies ‘something not desirable.’” Orwell goes on to explain that words like “fascism” are almost always “used in a consciously dishonest way” because they allow the rhetor to inspire one definition of these words in the audience’s mind and instead imply another. The destructive nature of such coercive symbolic language is beyond measure, according to Orwell.

The issue lies not in that this kind of language damages, it is in that President Trump seems to fulfill the description that Orwell gives the common political orator: “tired hack on the platform mechanically repeating the familiar phrases” (McQuaid 540). The President often uses his slew of catchphrases to start a wave of chanting that immediately sweeps through any audience of his. In other words, he repeats familiar phrases, and it works for him. These chants could be considered an example of what Orwell calls “a reduced state of consciousness” that is “favourable to political conformity” (McQuaid 540). For example, the chant “lock her up” symbolizes the promise to prosecute Hillary Clinton for her use of a private email server, but it has come to mean something grander than that: the promise that Donald Trump will bring down all of his opponents mercilessly, just as he will bring down Clinton. Orwell later implies that inevitably “political language...is designed to make lies sound truthful...and to give an
appearance of solidity to pure wind” (McQuaid 543) in order to appeal to the masses and their varied understanding of chants and what they symbolize.

As he winds down the essay, Orwell makes an interesting statement: “When there is a gap between one's real and one's declared aims, one turns as it were instinctively to long words and exhausted idioms, like a cuttlefish spurtling out ink” (McQuaid 541). In this statement, one may begin to see the understanding of the American pro-Trump demographic. President Trump is perceived by his supporters as sincere because he uses simple language to express “the truth,” or his version of the truth. No president before him has expressed such easy-to-swallow rhetoric and authentically spoken their minds. And his followers appreciate it. One Trump supporter, Tom Carls of Sycamore, Illinois, says, “I’m proud as heck of Trump…. I know he says a lot of dumb things, but it is what it is. He’s himself” (qtd. in Stokols). Regardless of speech blunders and innumerable factual inaccuracies, Trump is admired for his simple and authentic language. Orwell concludes that the key to the revitalization of English is “using the fewest and shortest words that will cover one's meaning.” President Trump presents himself as a masterful and innovative rhetor as he uses his audience’s propensity for simple language to propel his agenda. Trump’s success finds its origins in what Orwell has called the death of English. The issue, then, if not the simplicity of his language, is perhaps his message and the information that he uses this language to disseminate to his particularly susceptible audience.

American Anger

In his 2019 feature article in The Atlantic, Pulitzer-prize winning journalist Charles Duhigg stated that “we’re more likely to perceive people who express anger as competent, powerful, and the kinds of leaders who will overcome challenges.” Duhigg’s argument is that anger has propelled the United States into a political upheaval, a pivotal moment in the American
political tapestry, and we’re so angry we’re tearing it apart: “Anger is one of the densest forms of communication. It conveys more information, more quickly, than almost any other type of emotion.” Donald Trump has recast fear politics and into anger politics. His use of pejorative language and negative connotation is playing well to an audience that has spent the last fifteen or twenty years in what seems like self-inflicted political darkness.

Duhigg begins his essay with the description of a 1977 study conducted by a professor of psychology at University of Massachusetts at Amherst, James Averill. Averill surveyed the 18,000 people of Greenfield, Massachusetts, to understand their anger. Surprisingly, the sample group was more than willing to describe their everyday anger. Often, their bouts of fury would not be huge ordeals; rather, they would be short bursts of conflict which almost always vastly improved the situation thereafter. A couple would scream for five minutes and almost immediately find common ground and compromise. Duhigg states that in the Greenfield study, “people reported that they tended to be much happier after yelling at an offending party. They felt relieved, more optimistic about the future, more energized.” Duhigg goes on to apply this understanding of emotional catharsis to the political public sphere. He points to “a poll by The Washington Post [that] found that 35 percent of voters in battleground districts of the 2018 midterm election chose the word angry to describe their feelings about the campaign; 24 percent chose patriotic.” The sentiment of Trump’s audience is reflected in this statistic. According to a study led by researchers at University of Pennsylvania and published in the journal Epidemiology, cities that hosted Trump rallies experienced an average of 2.3 more assaults than on a typical day. Violence frequently breaks out at Trump’s rallies, which “appeared to be a phenomenon that’s unique” to Trump (Morrison 490). Trump incites violence when he stirs up chants and condones violence against hecklers or bystanders by saying things like “any guy who
can do a body slam, he is my type!” (qtd. in McGraw). This type of language validates the people’s anger towards ambiguous targets, often various news outlets and specific politicians, and encourages them to release their anger in the form of verbal and physical violence. Trump provides and maintains an outlet for the people’s rage, and this satisfaction seems to be one of the strongest draws of Trump’s rhetorical approach. After the attack on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, George W. Bush launched a war that would go on to last well into the next decade. He used the anger of the people to propel them into a war that perhaps was not in their best interest. Now, President Trump is doing the same thing with the awareness that his followers’ anger has been fermenting for years, preparing to boil over the moment Trump took office. He is the mouthpiece for the people that had been silent for almost ten years before him.

In an op-ed published on right-leaning news site Watchdog.org titled “Will the Silent Majority Please Speak Up?” author William Haupt III makes a sweeping statement about Trump voters: “The aftermath of a decade of progressive leadership woke up the sleeping giant again.” The issue in this statement is not the explicit message, that the silent majority must mobilize again, but the implicit one in which Haupt insinuates that “progressive leadership” is not inherently good. In other words, it seems the meaning of words like “progressive” has fallen by the wayside in favor of semantic demagoguery. People like Haupt use the symbolic meaning of both “progressive leadership” and “silent majority” to appeal to the conservative masses. By doing this, he not only reaffirms their belief that both of these hegemonic definitions are legitimate, he also allows the people to give in to their hatred different frameworks and insinuates that they may not be in the minority when they express this hatred. The positive feedback loop established here is almost impenetrable because publications like Watchdog.org require readers to feed into (i.e., click on) their content in order to make money; thus, the content
must include buzzwords accessible to a particularly conservative audience. This is an example of a follower of Trump’s rhetorical style. Haupt uses the term “progressive leadership” to describe how Republicans interpret the term. “Progressive,” on its own, signifies something that proceeds, step by step, which can be considered a positive, if not neutral, thing. In Haupt’s case, however, “progressive” is considered negative, as if he is in favor of regressive politics or political stasis. Trump uses the same symbolic tool. By using the hegemonic understanding of certain things that he has instilled in his audience like the dangers of sanctuary cities and welfare, which can be considered inherently virtuous programs, Trump creates anger towards those things. He points to them as the perpetrators of wrongdoing against Americans and simultaneously aggravates his audience and pushes them against issues that oppose his platform.

In this study, party-line politics as a response to anger is a common theme. In the three artifacts analyzed, it’s important to note President Trump’s use of the audience’s outrage and their understanding of their toeing-the-party-line opinions. Trump lists several solutions to issues that his audiences supposedly face, including high taxes, murder by undocumented immigrants, and lack of job opportunity. The people are furious, and President Trump uses that anger to his immense benefit. Duhigg notes that “for anger to be productive, at some point, it must stop.” It seems, however, that as the anger in Trump’s audiences is stoked, it doesn’t falter at many points and instead contributes to his general success and popularity. Duhigg says in the article that “in 2012, political scientists at Emory University found that fewer than half of voters said they were deeply angry at the other party’s presidential nominee. In 2016, almost 70 percent of Americans were.” Aside from the nicknames he has coined for her, Trump used Clinton as a focal point for the anger of his supporters by consubstantiating her name with verbs like “owes,” “never tells the truth,” and “doesn’t care.” Unrelenting bashing of his opponent makes it easy for his audience to
place blame and to justify their anger. In the three speeches analyzed, Trump’s use of Gingrich-style rhetoric is both explicit and implicit. Trump often uses demeaning nicknames to refer to his opponent, and his creation of a negative connotation around Clinton allowed the people to direct their anger at her as the single target, thus eliminating any potential for moderate interpretation of her, much less her policy. Because Trump directed all of his fury at Clinton and effectively made her the primary political target for their anger, the people accepted her alleged malice as truth and followed suit.

**Conclusion**

For just about the last four years, Donald Trump has dominated the news and social forums. His speeches, tweets, press conferences, and sound bites have created a whirlwind of rhetorical material to be analyzed. This study provided substantial evidence that, during his campaign, Trump used several tactics including fear- and anger-mongering, inflaming the sentiment of repression that defines the silent majority, and tapping into his audience’s shared consciousness to allow them rhetorical understanding and influence in situations where they usually have none.

Candidate Trump strung together ambiguous phrases, perforated by buzzwords, to allow his audience to fill in whatever antihegemonic definition they already associate with these issues. This “rhetorical space” allows the audience individual autonomy when they hear Trump’s speeches and is the ultimate example of Farhad Manjoo’s “selective perception” theory. This theory states that when an audience is subjected to a given message about which they already have preconceived perceptions, they are only able to understand the message in the context of these preconceptions. Because candidate Trump injected urgency and used conflicting connotation in his speeches, every individual in his audience is able to understand what he is
saying how they want to understand it. Many leaders have done this before; however, Trump supplemented his use of selective perception with arguably the most powerful tool of all: the people’s outrage and fury.

This analysis showed that Trump used several tools to create and maintain for his audience what can be considered an alternate reality defined by fear and anger. I set parameters around this study by first identifying what I saw as Trump’s primary audience. Both online and in his speeches, Trump continuously referenced the silent majority, whether through direct usage of the phrase or by discussing America’s working class and their underrepresentation. His voter data shows overwhelming support from flyover states and industry-heavy areas like the Midwest and the rural south and west. In combination, it seems as though these areas and the high concentration of first-time voters in these states are the vehicle that Trump used to push his campaign. In his speeches, he uses several strategies to fuel his audience’s anger and further push them into his fear-based rhetorical vision. By studying these speeches separately, I was able to isolate each of these strategies and understand their dynamic in the context of the singular speech and then pan out to consider how they could be applied in other speeches. This also allowed me to have a detailed look at the strategies and to piece them together with the overarching rhetorical vision that Trump creates for his audience.

**Moving Forward**

As I mentioned in the beginning, this is a chapter of what could be a book. The largest obstacle that I faced while completing this project was the scope. I decided I wanted to analyze Trump as a candidate because he is an anomaly. After reading analyses of his words in the news every day since 2015, I decided I wanted to conduct my own analysis. Eventually, I decided not to narrow my focus any more than to his speeches because I wanted to see everything I could.
This has created some areas in the study which could be further expanded and some facets of my argument that could be further substantiated. Three speeches out of a collection of around 370 pre- and post-election offer only a small portion of insight into Trump’s strategy. Analyzing every speech via cluster and fantasy-theme criticisms would give a holistic image of Trump’s rhetorical technique. There is also opportunity here to combine this study with one that examines Trump’s visual and political rhetoric as well. This way, the main components of effective speech-giving rhetoric can be completely analyzed. My analysis was limited; however, it serves merely as a greater chance for me to continue this analysis into the future of the Trump presidency.

Cluster and fantasy-theme criticisms are fundamental rhetorical criticism methods. While they may seem simplistic, these methods gave me lenses through which to conduct my research and analysis. The methods gave me a basic apparatus around which to structure my analysis and to format my close-reads. This study serves to promote the importance of close-reading and holistic understanding not only of a politician’s explicit message, but also of the nuances, whether intentional or not. This analysis required substantial understanding of audience and how an audience may consciously and unconsciously interpret a given message. The perceptions from the audience play an important role in a rhetorical situation. In the pursuit of truth, the audience of a rhetor like Trump must (but does not always) think beyond their initial intuitions. The ultimate significance of this study is that it serves as a tangible example of the critical thought with which we, as citizens and the audience of our politicians, should approach our leaders’ language. Of course, analyzing every word that tumbles out of Trump’s mouth is impossible, but we should make it a regular practice to read headlines and speeches and posts
with a grain of salt, to pick apart each word of something eye-catching, and to consider the consequences of word choice.

Practical lessons aside, this analysis presents other interesting implications for the future of rhetorical understanding. It showed that there are naturally multiple facets of a public speech and that candidate Trump used many of them to his advantage, perhaps to win the presidency. Trump used fear and consequent anger to corral his audience into a—to use Orwell’s term—rhetorical “hen-house” of his own design. In other words, Trump constructed a reality around his audience that suited each of their individual woes because it gave them the power without any of the responsibility. And he is not the only politician to do this. Through the ages, leaders within the United States and beyond have exploited the fear and vulnerability of the citizenry for the sake of political advantage. Trump uses simple language to give the audience the impression that they are in control and that he is just their mouthpiece. Though Trump claims to be the people’s president, he continues to use their suggestibility, especially in more politically volatile populations like the silent majority, to push his agenda for greater influence and political power. He convinces his audience to believe that he has the solutions to their problems and that he will put them before anything else. In some cases, Trump has followed through; however, his continuous aggressiveness in both policy and communication has caused quite some damage to the very people he said he would prioritize.

For instance, China, one of the United States’ most powerful economic competitors and patrons, buys 60 percent of the U.S.’s soybean crop, and “soybean-producing counties went for Trump by a margin of more than 12 percent in 2016” (Hohmann). These soy-centric areas fall primarily in the Midwest, concentrated most in states like Iowa, Minnesota, Illinois, and Indiana and can be considered “flyover states” as discussed above. States like these, where the silent
majority often thrives, have taken a serious hit following President Trump’s trade war with China in which both countries imposed upon each other heavy tariffs on billions of dollars’ worth of exports. Throughout his campaign, Trump has advertised his strict, almost isolationist approach to prioritizing the U.S. or “putting Americans first.” It seems he thought this kind of promise would be best be carried out by entirely cutting off our diplomatic relations with international trade competitors, thus making domestic products more marketable. But Trump’s vision was not to be. Industries such as meat, automobiles, and farming have taken profit blows, and according to the International Monetary Fund, “an escalation of the tit-for-tat tariffs could shave 0.5% off global growth by 2020” (da Costa). Not only would Trump’s trade war with China be a serious detriment to the very farm-heavy audience he pandered to, it could disturb the international economy, which includes the United States and its allies. But this is just one example.

After years of promising a wall along the border of the U.S.-Mexico border and fueling passionate “build the wall” chants at his rallies, Trump resorted to shutting down the government and engaging in a political staring contest with Congress to coerce them into providing the funds for the project. The wall was a point of great rhetorical strength in candidate Trump’s communication repertoire, and it serves as an apt example of consubstantiality. Trump used the word “wall” to instill in his audience, simply, strength, American values, and security. It was a cut-and-dry way to “solve” the “crisis at the border.” When Trump decided to shut down the government, his followers remained steadfast since this was part of the plan and because there was an endgame. However, this tactic failed. Millions of Americans were affected indirectly and directly. Taxes were deferred, local government contractors went without pay, and almost 100,000 federal employees were left in paycheck limbo (Viser). Though he insisted that Mexico
would front the money for the wall, Trump eventually took to the federal budget to find the money that Mexico refused him. After a month-long standstill, Trump was forced to circumvent Congress and declare a national emergency in order to get the wall funded via the federal budget (which it ultimately was, but only partially). While Trump’s shutdown fiasco was a serious setback to hundreds of thousands of working-class Americans, its effect has been all but forgotten. Trump used his anti-government narrative to divert his audience’s attention. His going against Congress fit perfectly into the rhetorical structure of his entire campaign. His ability to associate the shutdown with a positive connotation among his audience, in that it was a move against Congress and “the swamp,” worked well for him in convincing his audience to believe the shutdown was ultimately worthwhile.

This analysis reveals that perhaps Trump’s failure to entirely come through on promises like these was imminent. Nevertheless, empty promises and broken plans are overlooked by his base because Trump continues to make new promises. He capitalizes on the people’s desperation for change because they are willing to overlook his political ineptitude and gradual party alienation. The reality that he built and reaffirmed around his audience was always rather flimsy. Reaffirmation of the people’s angry beliefs and desires works to mobilize them, but in the case of complex policy, brute force cannot solve the intricate problems that Trump frequently discussed in his rally speeches. He made promises for change that could not be entirely fulfilled. Diversion of the audience’s attention from these failures allows Trump to continue to develop an alternative reality for his audience that he is making political moves always in their favor, which, it seems, is not the case. Trump’s entire rhetorical approach is to say the few words that people want to hear and allow them to fill in what suits their personal understanding the best. Trump kept his people comfortable; he kept them happy. It seems like he created a shared alternate
reality and allowed the people to find in that reality what best suited their opinions, only as long as these opinions fell in favor of Trump. If they did not, they became part of the out-group, and they were stripped of their voices. With their newfound political power on the line, many of Trump’s followers within the silent majority are quick to support his every word and to cast out those who do not. Trump took advantage of a vulnerable population and used his rhetorical strategies to exploit them in his favor.

The aftermath of candidate, now President, Trump’s rhetorical approach serves to show that rhetoric extends beyond surface symbolism like metaphor and extemporaneous speech. It is between every word, inside every word association, and within every sentence structure. With every syllable, a rhetor is instilling a message within their audience beyond their immediate one. For some rhetors, the message is one of hope in trying times; for others, like Trump, their message is of fierce superiority and rooted in anger and indignance. These are the messages we, the larger audience of all of “the people,” should see and try to understand in the context of future policy. As members of a national and political global audience, as citizens of a democracy, it is our responsibility to look beyond the words and into their relationships as they construct our very reality—our shared reality.
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### Appendices

#### Appendix 1: Cluster Criticism, Phoenix

<table>
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<td>Phoenix thank you Arizona across Mexico doesn’t serve you forgotten record pace so many so sad countless wanting many cannot get open borders come from from Syria directly impacted great leaders don’t talk about it criminal aliens they want they can’t gone under investigation don’t like it back (2) around the world come into our country will know deserve answers gotten to know going through</td>
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<td>today Mexico United States serves wealthy donors successfully assimilate $113 billion a year good people great dignity our citizens by the way represent workers back to the country where they came from two million crime will stop a disaster don’t have is a mess has to straighten out share our values love our people tremendous costs make the product come in legally properly vetted its people for the better leaving our children</td>
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great contributions
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well being
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reduce jobs and wages of
African- (2)
on behalf of
protect all aspects of
open jobs are offered
do nothing for
beginning with
terrorists entering on visas
will affect
killing
security for all
unemployed
save
citizens (4)
people (2)
lives have been stolen
died in recent years
Sarah Root
workers (3)
families
open borders
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in our country
lower skilled workers
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breaking the federal budget
have fled
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terrorists
evaded justice
Iraq and Afghanistan
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## Appendix 2: Cluster Criticism, New York City

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<td>13</td>
<td>fix the system for rigged against you promise with you for all putting detriment of protective policy betrayed poor African-unemployed (2) African-</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>thousands of lives uranium holdings to Russia in danger first 100 days could do back rich again safe again have asked ask me rigged it know politicians who share our values believe women will have a chance tamed the West</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>been so good to me could be will be for Beijing over to (2) into breathing life going</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>since these two Hillary-backed effectively let China overseas (2) economic independence drive down</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>people (4) worker (3) voter people first economy government Hispanic workers out of work opportunity are are going</td>
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<td>State</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>ran</td>
<td>Department (7) disgraceful performance been more wrong sanctions approved the transfer plus millions more emails</td>
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<td>Secretary (4) used</td>
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<td>Hillary Clinton’s (2) faced possible stashed</td>
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<td>President</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>running for (2) elected (2) wants to be (2) judgment Republican become to be increase over</td>
<td>end the unfairness I will Abraham Lincoln she will Obama United States</td>
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<td>Workers</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>fire</td>
<td>sell their foreign countries employed country need jobs she wants not been raised</td>
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<td>sold out</td>
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<td>Hispanic (2) new low-wage real wages</td>
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<td>Policy</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>switched middle class protective center of US foreign (3) deadly foreign open door</td>
<td>Americanism Globalism American government toward China cost America disaster she refuses to criminals</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>switched middle class protective center of US foreign (3) deadly foreign open door</td>
<td>Americanism Globalism American government toward China cost America disaster she refuses to criminals</td>
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### Appendix 3: Cluster Criticism, Charlotte

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>TERM</th>
<th># OF OCCURRENCES</th>
<th>TERM/PHRASE PRECEDING</th>
<th>TERM/PHRASE SUCCEEDING</th>
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<td>Country</td>
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<td>knows one back to law and order officers children of every color everyone safe at stake save whole (2) across families really matters media people forgotten part great</td>
<td>praying one people sacrificed fully included doesn’t have a voice living with no security loses when young people are denied loses when kid doesn’t graduate laying out what’s really going on sent their cameras don’t have a voice waiting and hoping under President Obama quickly jobs and wealth together</td>
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<td>failed status quo</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>African- (4) Hispanic-all majority forgotten wonderful young countless common</td>
<td>loved ones were killed get the credit forced voters not working</td>
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<td>---</td>
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<td>Time</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>feels difficult too much loses every liars of all many same spent get deported five spent it is (3) very long</td>
<td>like can often a kid doesn’t graduate she’s betrayed you’ll get to with families from Hillary Clinton lots investigating for a change to break to vote</td>
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<td>Jobs</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>bring safety creating schools manufacturing (2) American many country good paying send part-time</td>
<td>back rebuilding moving since China lost overseas wealth NAFTA</td>
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<td>Future</td>
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<td>one great New American (3) people new (2) America comes first hoping for a better worthy of a better brighter</td>
<td>we are going break from the failures honesty justice opportunity built common culture</td>
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<td>Change</td>
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<td>make all about to (2) modern agenda real fighting for time for I am</td>
<td>soon real (2) I propose I promise candidate</td>
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<td>Children</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>African-American (2) will not rest generation American let lost sanctuary for</td>
<td>living in poverty every color excluded from the American Dream dreamers too violence spilling across border killed by illegal immigrants</td>
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<td>World</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>dreadful ISIS across partner best best prosecutors</td>
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<td>-------</td>
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<td>--------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Laura, Michelle, Sabine, and Jamiel</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>drugs and crime</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>I come from Middle East</td>
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**Appendix 4: Pronoun Fantasy-Theme Criticism, Phoenix**

United States

- We: 150

  - Going to win
  - Going to Arizona
  - Agree
  - Creating a new relationship
  - Want fairness
  - Must change quickly
  - Going to make our immigration system work
  - Have to be prepared
  - Have to listen
  - Have to be honest
  - Think
  - Get
  - Going to spend
  - Provide one million at-risk students
  - Been hearing that number for years
  - Will treat everyone living
  - Will be fair
  - Have no idea
  - Can tell them that
  - Doing
  - We all respect police
  - Restore the highly successful Secure Communities Program
  - Will expand and revitalize the popular 287(g) partnerships
  - Don’t even know that
  - Headed in a totally opposite direction
  - Get them out
  - Going to triple the number of ICE deportation officers
  - Will turn the tables
  - Will end the sanctuary cities
  - Will work with Congress to pass legislation
  - Will immediately terminate
  - Have never seen before
  - Will set priorities
  - Don’t have a country
  - Going to suspend the issuance of visas

- Don’t even know
- Have to straighten out fast
- Got to have a country
- Going to stop the tens of thousands of people coming in from Syria
- Have no idea who they are
- Have to build safe zones
- Get the money from the Gulf states
- Don’t want you to put up the money
- Owe almost $20 million
- Say O.K.
- We’ll keep them
- We would act properly
- We had leaders that knew what they were doing
- We don’t
- We have them all over the place
- Have
- Like the big bully that keeps getting beat up
- Take them (2)
- Will finally complete
- Need desperately
- Will ensure that this system is in place
- Will have a proper tracking system
- Take care of you
- No longer have a country
- Must send a message
- Will turn off the jobs
- Will ensure that e-verify
- Will work with Congress
- Only enforced the laws against crime
- Will reform legal immigration
- Going to take care of our workers
- Going to make great trade deals
- Going to renegotiate trade deals
- Going to bring our jobs back home
- Have the most incompetently worked trade deals
End up with is no taxes and total unemployment
Admitted 59 million immigrants
Now have an obligation to them
Are following
Had some big waves
Want to ensure that it works
Take anybody
Need a system that serves our needs
Going to go together
Want people to come into our country
Been living under outdated immigration rules
Should sunset our visa laws
Wouldn’t put our entire federal budget
Do the same
Do it right (2)
Will accomplish
Do

Us: 10
Love
Important to
Want to see
No longer with
Allowing
One country

They: 86
Are making an absolute fortune
Usually mean the following
Have to be enforced
Will be joining me on this stage
Knew it was going to happen again
Knew it was no good
Knew it was going to happen
Can ever possibly pay back
Hurt a lot of our people
Treated better than our vets
Have no idea what the number is
Doing on many, many fronts
Talk about
Also think the biggest thing
Support catch and release
Support visa overstays
Support the release of dangerous
Support unconstitutional executive amnesty
Come from
Never even mentioned her plan
Don’t get the credit
Great people
Know who these people are
Live with these people
Get mocked by these people

Will have a peace dividend
Going to build them
Will break the cycle of amnesty
Will break the cycle
Have accomplished
Be in a position
In the middle of jobs crisis
Should be having at this time
Must now focus on fixing
Deserve answers from Hillary Clinton
Do know
Fighting for (2)
Came here legally
Won’t have a country
Going to be leaving our children
Going to remember this evening
Have to get everybody (2)
Going to bring
Going to take our country back (2)
Can save American lives

Can’t do anything about these people
Want to
Know who these people are
Gone
Going to be gone
Going out
Going out fast
Will be placed into immediate removal proceedings
Want to do
Will go face
Going to go
Be able to deport her
Know each and every one by name
Live
Will work so fast
Don’t have to be abused by these thugs anymore
Put up with it for years
Do is incredible
Ever endorsed a presidential candidate
Have been forgotten
Say
Are justified
Would comply
Were doing
Really are a big problem
Can just come on a temporary visa
Want to go TPP
Want to leave other states
Not going to be leaving
Have to come into our country legally

Decades and decades old
Archaic
Ancient
Will have one route and one route only
Murdered him
Are incredible
Going through is incredible

• Them: 32
  Report on
  Talk about
  Cover
  Call
  Admitting
  Order
  Keep
  Release
  Have
  Take (3)
  Telling
  Revisit
  Bring
  Rebuild
  Give

• You: 80
  Know (6)
  Will get the truth
  Can do
  Have known
  Tells
  Were watching the news
  Saw thousands and thousands of people
  Heard about Hillary Clinton’s plan
  Tell (2)
  Notice (2)
  Ready? (2)
  Understand
  Go to vote
  See what bad judgment she has
  Imagine
  Ever see that

• I: 57
  Love people
  Said
  Am going to deliver
  Am a man who loves my country
  Expect
  Have met with many of the great parents
  Look forward to introducing
  Always say Trojan horse
  Also worked with lawmakers
  Ever notice
  Want
  Know what that could have meant
  Think
  In four years
  Have to lose
  Watch
  Will be proud
  Notice
  Are standing there
  Got to get out and vote
  Have my vote
  Know what
  Don’t vote Trump
  Have always given me
  Haven’t been looking to what’s been happening
  Should start looking (2)
Mexico

- We: 150
  - Discussed
  - Going to win (2)
- Us: 10
  - Work with (2)
  - Along with
- They: 86
  - Don’t know it yet
  - Going to pay for it
  - Are great people and great leaders
  - Going to pay for the wall
  - Want to solve this problem along
  - Will
  - Came
- Them: 32
- You: 80
- I: 57
  - Have just landed having returned from
  - Like and respect
  - Met with the people directly impacted
  - Really believe it
  - Absolutely believe it
  - Really believe they want to solve this problem
  - Sure they will
  - Think it’s so great
  - Take office
  - Can tell you
  - Am going to ask Congress
  - Am proposing is the passage of legislation
  - Am going to create a new special deportation
  - Had a chance to spend some time
  - Want to take a moment to thank them
  - Can say
  - Enter office
  - Am going to enter the Department of State
  - Call it extreme vetting right
  - Want extreme
  - Am talking about
  - Will tell you
  - Say what do you have to lose
  - Believe we should sunset our visa laws
  - Am not behold to any special interest
  - Have spent a lot of money on my campaign
  - Will tell you
  - Write those checks
  - Will get this done for you
  - Believe this
  - Really believe this is it
  - Want to remind everyone what we’re fighting for
  - Am going to ask
  - Have gotten to know
  - Am going to ask all of the “Angel Moms”
  - Have become friends with so many
  - Totally support you
  - Personally support Mr. Trump
  - Support this man
  - All I can say is they murdered him
  - Want to thank Phoenix for all the support
  - Want to tell you what
  - Truly believe that Mr. Trump is going to change
  - Am not asking for their endorsement
  - Just think
  - Have gotten to know
  - Will tell you
  - Think you should start looking
  - Love you

Border

- We
  - Will build a great wall
  - Will use the best technology
  - Going to end catch and release
  - Catch them
  - Not dropping them right across
Take them great distances
Take them to the country where they belong
Begin moving them out day one
Will issue detainers for illegal immigrants
Will terminate the Obama administration’s
Going to hire 5,000 more border patrol agents
Will expand the number of border patrol agents significantly
Block the funding
Will get the money from the Gulf states
Supervise it

• Us: 10
• They: 86
  • Are removed
  • Be brought great distances
  • Learned that
  • Drop them across
  • Come back
  • Flew them to a long distance
  • Came from
  • Don’t come in here (2)
  • Going to be good
  • Are
  • Come from
  • Order them deported
  • Been ordered to leave the United States
  • Won’t take them back
• Them: 32
  • Catch (2)
  • Dropping
  • Drop
  • Flew
  • Take (3)
  • Moving
  • Get out
  • Put
  • Thank
• You: 80
  • Can call it deported
  • Want
  • Can call it whatever the hell you want
  • Get the right people
  • Cannot obtain legal status
  • Can’t just smuggle in
  • Never hear from the government
  • Won’t like what you’re hearing
• I: 57
  • Think all of us want to see

Appendix 5: FTC, NYC
We: 42
  o Come to work together
  o Think big
  o Make
  o Can come back bigger and better
  o Can’t solve any of these problems
  o Will never be able to fix
  o Are asking Bernie Sanders’s voters to join
  o We can fix the system for all Americans
  o Are going to put America first
  o Going to make America great again
  o Are ruled by the people
  o We stopped putting the American people first
  o Got here because we switched from a policy of Americanism
  o Reward companies for offshoring
  o Punish companies for doing business
  o Need to reform our economic system
  o Can all succeed together
  o Mean by America first
  o Start making our own products again
  o Have lost nearly one-third

They: 9
  o Totally own her
  o Have to be great for the United States
  o Are or what they believe
  o Decided to pay Bill Clinton
  o Probably now have a blackmail file
  o Are the ones she will hurt the most
  o They will have a chance to vote
  o Do

You: 9
  o Know
  o The American people (3)
  o Don’t want this person to be president

I: 35
  o Would like to share my thoughts
  o Am running for president (3)
  o Have built an amazing business
  o Love (2)
  o Do
  o Am grateful
  o Am running (2)
  o Quickly answer
  o See the crumbling roads and bridges
  o Know these problems can all be fixed
  o Look
  o See the possibilities
  o I started off in Brooklyn, New York
  o End the special interest monopoly
  o Am with you
  o Know it’s all about you
  o Know it’s all about making America great again
  o Have visited the cities and towns
  o Have pointed out why it would be such a disastrous deal
  o Want trade deals
  o Become president
  o Want the whole world to know it
  o Was not in government service
  o Was among the earliest to criticize
Know this to be true
Only want to admit people
Know
Am also going to appoint great
Supreme Court Justices

She: 47
Said she was under attack
Even tried to attack me
Ran the State Department like her
own personal hedge fund
Left
Made $21.6 million giving
speeches
Does not want to reveal to the
public
And Bill made $153 million
Doesn’t have the temperament
Believes she is entitled
Thinks it’s all about her
Supported China’s entrance
Should not be congratulated
Let China steal hundreds of billions
Gets rich making you poor
Sold out our workers
Is pretending that she is against it
Even deleted this record
Is very good at
Is elected president
Will adopt the TPP
Will do this

Appendix 6: Pronoun Fantasy-Theme Criticism, Charlotte

I: 69

Would like to take a moment to talk about
the heartbreak and devastation in Louisiana
Hope everyone in Louisiana knows
Would like to talk about the New American
Future
Laid out my plan (2)
Talked about how we are going to restore
law and order to this country
Am elected president
Will not rest until
Promise to African-Americans
Am not a politician
Have worked in business
Have never wanted to use the language of
the insiders
Have never been politically correct
Have done that
Regret it
Can promise you this
Will always tell you the truth
Speak the truth (4)

Am fighting for these forgotten Americans
Declared my campaign for president
Have worked to repay
Think about how much is at stake
Refuse to let another generation of
American children be excluded from the
American Dream
Look at the failing schools
Know all of this can be fixed
Come from
Have no patience for injustice
Am running to end the decades of bitter
failure
Mean always
Have travelled all across this country
Will never lie to you
Will never tell you something I do not
believe
Will never put anyone’s interests ahead
yours
Will never, ever stop fighting
Have no special interest
• Am spending millions of dollars
• Can be too honest
• Think you’ll get that apology
• Have spent time with the families
• Have embraced the crying parents
• Will never put personal profit before national security
• Will never leave our border open
• Will never support a trade deal
• Will never put the special interests before
• Will never put a donor before a voter
• Will be a champion for the people
• Said
• Am running to be your voice
• Running to be the voice for every forgotten part
• Am glad that

I make the powerful a little uncomfortable
• Am fighting for you
• Propose
• Have a message for the terrorists trying to kill our citizens
• Most look forward to doing
• Am going to enforce all laws
• Am going to forbid senior officials from trading favors
• Am going to ask my senior officials to sign an agreement
• Will tell you
• Will fix it (2)
• Will do a great job
• Will work as hard as I can
• Am promising to all of you
• Am the change candidate

Do not need more
• Are going to add more police
• Will pursue strong enforcement of federal laws
• Are going to renegotiate NAFTA
• Will withdraw
• Are going to withdraw from TPP
• Owe $20 trillion
• Are going to massively cut tax rates
• Are going to get rid of regulations
• Are going to make it easier for young people
• Are going to give students choice
• Are going to end tenure policies
• Are going to work closely with African-American parents and children
• Are going to work with the parents’ students
• Are going to work with everybody
• Are going to repeal and replace
• Are going to replace this disaster
• Are going to restore honor to our government
• Are going to bring our country together
• Are going to bring it together
• Are going to do it by emphasizing what we all have in common
• Are going to reject bigotry
• Have nothing to lose
• Will reject bigotry
• Can never fix our problems
• Will make America strong again
• Will make America proud again
• Will make America safe again
• Will make America great again

We: 57
• Are one nation
• We all hurt
• Must all work together
• Send them our deepest condolences
• Are one country
• Will have together one great future
• Are going to create together
• Are going to restore law and order
• Must protect all of our people
• Must also provide opportunities
• Cannot make America great again
• Leave any community behind
• Must break from the failures
• Failed to provide them the opportunities
• Are going to put the American people first
• Now know
• Don’t pay ransom
• Will deliver justice for all
• Will create a system
• Are going to end the era of nation-building
• Will use military
• Will find you
• Will destroy you
• Will absolutely win
• Will win soon
• Will temporarily suspend immigration
• Will screen out anyone who doesn’t share our values
• Will promote our American values
• Doing?
• Have seen how much crime
• Have enough problems

You: 44
• Know
• Don’t choose the right words
• Say the wrong thing
• Have put in me
• Fix it
• Replace it
• Make a change
• Will get that apology
• Will get to see her 33,000 deleted emails
• Want to join our society
• Must embrace our society
• Will have much better healthcare
• Are
• Have to lose by trying something new
• Have nothing to lose (2)

She: 17
• Never tells the truth
• Has told to them
• Has betrayed them
• Apologized for lying to the families
• Apologized for putting Iran
• Apologized for Iraq
• Apologized for unleashing ISIS
• Made that have led to so much death
• Can never be allowed to be President
• Was a disaster
• Was gunned down by an illegal immigrant
• Will make sure the system
• Doesn’t care how many young dreams are dashed
• Sees communities of color only as votes
• Sees
• Does nothing about it
• Has been there forever