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Kindler's assignment, written for Professor Waite's Oral Discourse (Comm 15000), asked her to demonstrate an understanding of the relationship of the theory and practice of oral discourse using Ronald Reagan's 1992 National Convention Speech. Furthermore, Kindler was asked to critique the speech in terms of situation, content, source credibility, and delivery. The result? Kindler's "The Great Communicator," which not only fulfills the original assignment, but also persuasively explains why Reagan's speech was such a success at the time.

The Great Communicator

Ronald Reagan is known as the "Great Communicator" by many. In 1992, as he delivered a speech at the Republican Convention, one would not doubt his excellence in public speaking. He demonstrated superiority of speech and was easy to critique because of the situation, the content of his speech, his credibility, and his delivery.

The Republican Convention was held in support to reelect Republican Candidates President Bush and Vice President Quayle. There was an extremely large audience in support of the Republican campaign. Reagan was overwhelmed by the amount of applause and cheering from the audience. In fact, balloons, posters, and flags were everywhere displaying the pride of the nation and the Republican Party. The audience was composed of individuals from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds. A majority of the crowd consisted of male and female working class people. Representatives from each age group were present. Throughout the speech, all members of the audience showed support and approval through chanting, "We love Ron" and "God bless Ron."

The audience members of the upper and middle age brackets were conservative and more understanding toward the speech. Each member's perception of Reagan's speech was affected by his or her individual experiences and social framework. These educational and occupational experiences molded each listener's view. These members of the audience had quite a different opinion towards what Reagan was saying compared to the opinions of the younger members.
Reagan began his speech slightly agitated due to the overwhelming response of the audience. He used hand gestures and repeatedly thanked the audience for their continued support. After regaining the audience's attention, Reagan spoke of the many issues facing Americans. He used humor to deliver his factual message of the matters that have not only formed our country but are also still developing the citizens today.

Reagan stated that not only is America advancing rapidly, but also the best is yet to come. He noted a wide variety of accomplishments that America has experienced throughout the past several years. Reagan stressed that the rest of the world looks to America as the one nation for leadership. America was not the first force that defeated communism, and it has not always been a road of success. At one time, America was a country with mortgage rates that had doubled, but now we are sending individuals to the moon. He also noted that the ultimate direction is in the eyes of God. He used the phrases “America’s best days are yet to come” and “the country of tomorrow” to not only grab the attention of the audience but also to gain support for Bush as “he lives for the future.” Reagan satirized Democratic candidates Bill Clinton and Al Gore. The audience's reaction was overwhelming in response to those satirical remarks. Reagan strongly encouraged the audience to choose the Republican candidates, for they do not “inhale,” and America would only fall under a president that speaks no truth.

Reagan emphasized education as an important mental tool for the future. He believed that the most profound education begins in the home. He encouraged the need of parents to spend a significant amount of quality time to build a firm educational foundation. Furthermore, education is not the only issue of concern; there is also the need to get control of the federal deficit.

At the end of the convention, Reagan recognized his wife, who has not only supported him, but also showed him strength throughout his presidency. He did this to show America that not only is society important but the individual family member is also. He obviously believed that society is constructed of smaller integral parts called the family.

After giving so many speeches to earn his way to the Oval Office, Reagan gave this speech with pride in this country. He had no note cards and did not employ the use of visuals. He used voice inflection, made incredible eye contact, and remained very poised in his figure. The
format of the speech was clear and coherent, while he also used his experience as imagery to help make his purpose more vivid.

Many people see Reagan as a very credible and influential speaker. To know if a speaker is credible, four aspects such as competence, trustworthiness, dynamics, and co-orientation are analyzed. Reagan is a very competent speaker. He started out his political journey as a private citizen to a governor, then to the presidency and now back to a private citizen. The challenges he experienced as a president were probably the most overwhelming. However, all of these experiences have shaped Reagan's organized formality of speaking. Reagan also exemplifies trustworthiness. As an audience member, I trusted Reagan throughout this political speech because not only does Reagan have competence, but he is also one of the most knowledgeable politicians regarding the affairs of our nation. Reagan definitely shared common ground with the audience, which is also referred to as co-orientation. American citizens share many of the same interests as the president; therefore, the co-orientation of the speaker is superior.

All of these elements previously stated contribute greatly to the speaker's intent and purpose. Reagan was a fantastic speaker. As an audience member, I would have never guessed this man was ever nervous. However, little did the nation know that this would be the last of the many great deliveries of Reagan.

In addition, Reagan's speech is an example of an Aristotelian way of teaching. The audience has an exigency to hear improvement for the future of America. Reagan fulfills this need by providing inspiration in his speech. This convention is a political rally, and Reagan seizes the opportunity to persuade all to vote Republican: for if a Republican candidate is in office, the country will have a better chance for an improved America.