Through the method of Neo-Aristotelian criticism, I have chosen to assess President George W. Bush’s Address to the Nation on September 11, 2001, also titled “A Great People Has Been Moved to Defend a Great Nation.” This address was televised and viewed by the American People as Bush spoke from the Oval Office. Throughout this speech the President encourages the nation to unite and stay strong after the terrorist attacks that had occurred on that very day. This speech is not purely informative, it also has a purpose to comfort and reassure the public. In my assessment I will be looking at the context of this address, and I will also analyze the rhetorical artifact itself, while focusing on two of the five canons of rhetoric. Furthermore I’ll study the effects of this speech. By the end of my assessment I will be able to tell just how Bush was able to carry out his goal of bringing hope to the American public. I will begin my criticism with the reconstruction of the context.

**Contextual Reconstruction**

The reconstruction of the context of this speech will involve various aspects, which relate to background information outside of the speech itself. These aspects include studying the rhetor, the rhetorical situation, and also the audience. The speaker in this situation happens to be one of the most high profile individuals in our country. George W. Bush, the president of the United States was inaugurated in January of 2001,
and his father was a former president. This speech was prompted by the terrorist attacks that occurred on September 11, 2001. On this day four planes were hijacked by terrorists and as a result, 3,047 people were killed as planes were flown into the World Trade Center towers. That figure does not include the many that were injured, as well as friends and family affected by this tragedy.

It is obvious that this is a very sensitive situation to handle, and considering that President Bush was delivering this address on the very day that the attacks occurred, there were still many facts that needed to be found or sorted out. Regardless of the available information, the leader of our country would be looked to in order for people to develop not only a sense of what was going on, but also to see what kind of outlook and attitude he would project. It was very important for Bush and his writers to keep in mind that he was speaking to an entire nation composed of those who were directly affected to those who were just curious about what happened. People of all ages were listening to what the president had to say on television, so Bush had to speak to them knowing that his words would have a great impact in this time of insecurity. After studying the context of this speech, I am now going to analyze the speech using the canons of rhetoric.

Analysis

When analyzing the rhetorical artifact, there are five possible canons that can be considered and these include invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery. These canons are the main concepts of speaking, and they originated with Aristotle and Cicero. For my analysis of Bush’s address, I want to focus on the canons of invention and style. The canon of invention centers on the critic’s concern with the speaker’s major ideas, line
of argument, and context. The style canon deals with the language used by the speaker. I’d like to begin my analysis of the rhetorical artifact with the canon of invention.

One aspect of invention that I’m going to study is the rhetor’s thesis, and also the persuasive goal. In my opinion, President Bush’s thesis would be that regardless of the hardships that America faces, we are still a strong and unified country. Though the speech is rather thick with emotional appeals, there is still some logical evidence that supports Bush’s thesis. For example we can prove that action is being taken to support those in need by the fact that people are giving blood (1). Bush also lets people know that emergency response plans have been called into action, the governmental functions would continue, and the financial institutions remain strong. Furthermore we are told that the “search is underway for those who were behind these evil acts” (2). Though the usage of the word “evil” may not be particularly logical, we are told for a fact that something is being done to find those responsible for this event. The fact that he informs us of this supports both Bush’s thesis and also his goal to persuade Americans that action is being taken to make things safe and under control. These facts provide proof that even though this terrible act occurred, our government is still able to do what it needs to do. The next aspect of invention that I want to study is the emotional appeals.

Pathos is known as the emotional appeals used in a speech. When looking at the canon of invention while analyzing this speech, it is easy to see that pathos is a prevalent factor. While reading the speech I found that I was made to experience different emotions from some of the phrases that President Bush uses. Many emotional statements did not only appeal to the way an individual might feel, but also the way America feels, and this reinforces the concept of a unified country. For example, Bush says that the
images of this tragedy “have filled us with disbelief, terrible sadness, and a quiet, unyielding anger” (1). This statement addresses the truth of the matter, and doesn’t try to candy coat the way people are really feeling at the time. Another part says that “These acts shatter steel, but they cannot dent the steel of American resolve” (1). It is thoughts like this that give survivors and American people in general hope of better things to come. Another aspect of invention that can help serve this function is ethos.

Ethos refers to the character of the speaker. In Bush’s speech, the line is kind of blurry between what we see as ethos and what is seen as pathos. I feel that we get a sense of the ethos of President Bush at the end of the speech, where he states that “I pray they will be comforted by a Power greater than any of us” (2). Then he goes on to quote a verse in the Bible. Simply bringing a religious idea into play at the end of his address lets the people know that this is something he values, and is something worth sharing with the public. Prior to that statement he requests prayers for those who grieve and also the children. That once again brings the thought into peoples’ minds that it is a sensitive and emotional situation, and it is something real people of all ages are facing. While I know that ethos is meant to be the character of the speaker, I could see that character and credibility were brought up and geared toward others. We see this when the President thanks Congress “who have joined me in strongly condemning these attacks” (2). He also thanks world leaders who have offered support (2). Though it might go without saying that our government and our allies should be supportive of America, just the fact that Bush says these things contributes to the good character of America and friends of our country. It once again puts it in the audience’s mind that the country has solid backing and will continue to prosper.
The final part of invention that I want to look at is whether or not the rhetor’s argument constitutes an appropriate response to the rhetorical situation. I personally feel that Bush’s address is very appropriate to his audience as well as the situation. Throughout the speech Bush recognizes the “evil” and “terror” that the American people have faced and he sympathizes with the way many people are feeling. But rather than centering the whole speech in a negative light, he tries to make some encouraging statements. I think the positive statements he makes are not only appropriate, but necessary to give the rest of America a somewhat optimistic attitude about the future of our country. Our president serves as our example and how he acts toward an unusual and scary circumstance will color the way we see it as well. He practically states in a reassuring way that the strength of our country has not been touched when he says, “These acts of mass murder were intended to frighten our nation into chaos and retreat. But they have failed. Our country is strong” (1). Though many of the people who were directly affected do not feel “strong,” it is something that everyone needs to hear from our leader. Basically, his argument is that even though this tragedy happened, life will continue. He carries this out through telling us factual evidence of what is being done, uses emotional appeals to allow all audiences to understand the severity, and also shows the character of himself and the government. Having used these means of persuasion in the way that he did, I believe the response will be appropriate. The next part of my paper will deal with style.

Style is also referred to as the language used by the rhetor. Because of the events that occurred, there is some very vivid language used to convey both negative and positive points. In the beginning when we are getting a description of what has occurred,
Bush’s phrases are riddled with negative words. These negative words are necessary to describe the events that occurred that day. Words such as “deliberate,” “deadly,” “evil,” “despicable,” “sadness,” “terror,” and “unyielding anger” are all used within the first four sentences. These descriptive words grab the audience, appeal to the way they are feeling, and allow for visualization of the events that happened. However, the last word of that first section is “strong,” describing our country. Symbols of optimism continue throughout the speech.

The second section is filled with positive and optimistic thoughts. Our people and our country are both referred to as “great”. Following that Bush is practically rationalizing the situation for the American people as he quotes Ronald Reagan when he says, “America was targeted for attack because we’re the brightest beacon for freedom and opportunity in the world” (1). Though the attacks are nothing to be happy about, I believe this statement is capable of bringing out some pride in the American people. In sections to come, President Bush describes what measures are being taken to ensure that normalcy will return. The military is described as “powerful” and “prepared,” and the financial institutions are said to be “strong” (2). And the final sentence kind of sums up his goal as he states, “None of us will ever forget this day, yet we go forward to defend freedom and all that is good and just in our world” (2). President Bush’s style functions to truthfully convey the extent of the attacks so he uses bold and negative language in his description. However, as he tries to raise the morale of his audience, he uses positive, encouraging words that convince us that things will actually be better again. This brings me to the final part of my analysis.
Assessment of Effects

The third and final section of my Neo-Aristotelian criticism of George W. Bush’s 9-11 address is the assessment of effects. Considering the criteria I have used throughout this analysis, I believe that this is an effective speech. First I’ll look back to the context. Bush was dealing with a very sensitive situation in that there were so many people that may have been connected to a victim of the tragedy. He almost had to be in defense of the government, and have explanations for the efforts being made to help the situation. Bush also had to be careful to not be too negative so that Americans would see that the government is confident in their abilities. When studying how the speech was put together, I can easily see examples of logos, pathos, and ethos. We see logos in the factual information about what is being done, pathos in his sensitivity to the subject, and ethos directed toward his own faith and the character of our Nation’s supporters. His language choice also provided emphasis, to not only the negative aspects, but positive and encouraging words were used as well. How was President Bush able to make it seem like there was some hope from this tragic situation? He did this through paying close attention to context, utilizing the means of persuasion, and making good stylistic decisions.