A Persuasive Call to Action

On December 7, 1941, the day that is referred to as the one that will “live in infamy,” because of the attack on the United States Naval base in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii by the Japanese naval ships and planes. This attack was a surprise on the American military and civilians living in the Hawaiian Islands. Many Americans were killed, military and civilians alike. The attack was considered by many including Franklin D. Roosevelt as a Declaration of War as presented in his speech. His speech was given on December 8, 1941 a day after the attack, as so to answer any questions and to prove that they would not back down. Japan if anything awoke the sleeping American people to the fact of what they were trying to avoid, which was a world wide war. The American people did not want to get involved because of the fact that they had just gotten out of a world war two decades before. “A Date That Will Live in Infamy” helped the American people realize the need for their involvement and need to take action upon this threat. Roosevelt’s position as president builds positive ethos for him and had two major arguments that were used for his logos. Pathos was used to influence the listeners with the emotions that they were already feeling. Franklin D. Roosevelt’s powerful and effective use of logos, pathos, and ethos in his speech titled “A Date That Will Live in Infamy” has made it one of the greatest moments in American rhetorical history.

The method used to do a Neoclassical Criticism is simple, but somewhat drawn out. It includes around eight different steps not including the one in which they are to choose an artifact to your liking. The first part of a Neoclassical Criticism is the Rhetorical
situation, in which they have to discuss the period of time what recently happened to generate the artifact of their criticism. Then the Nature of the Audience is evaluated in which they look at who the rhetor is talking to and so what their demographic spells them out to be. This will then take them to the third step which is the Structure of the Message. In this one they will evaluate the way the rhetor set up his message and how it was delivered to the audience. After the structure of the message follows three steps that are strategically placed in the structure to get the best response, these are logos, pathos, and ethos. Logos is the arguments made by the rhetor in his speech and what they are to do in the criticism is to find them and explain their impact on the audiences response. Pathos is the values and emotions used by the rhetor of the speech and they will talk about how the rhetor’s emotions affect the emotions of the listener. Then finally, ethos is the credibility of the rhetor and how it had an affect on the audience. All three are judged by the following response of the audience. The final two are the evaluation of the style and delivery and assessment of effectiveness. These two are probably the hardest to talk about in a paper because they almost have to be there to write knowledgably on the style and delivery of the message. Then the effect that it has is always hard to judge because maybe the way the crowd reacted had nothing to do with the rhetor’s speech.

Franklin D. Roosevelt was President of the United States at the time of this attack by the Japanese, which adds to the strength of his ethos. As president he is also commander and chief of the United States Army and Navy, having the ability and authority to call these branches of military to war with the Japanese. Roosevelt quickly responded to the American people and the Japanese with this speech that addressed the state of the American union. He not only responded to the attack but made a promise of retaliation and drew the American people into a unified body with a solitary vision.
This situation was not a regular occurring event, which added to the importance of this message and the time of its delivery. The American people were not used to being attacked on their own home front. The most recent war in history was fought on the European continent and Asian Continent too, having no affect on where we lived. The last time any significant war was fought on the American continent was the Civil War. Japan in this instance brought the war to the American people by attacking the islands of Hawaii. This action required President Roosevelt to stand before the American people and call them together behind a unified cause in order to protect the United States. This occasion also called for a harsh warning to the Japanese government that we were not going to cower to their attack on our military, but that they will retaliate with a force that is incomparable to anything they could do to the United States.

The two major groups that this speech addressed were the American people and the Japanese people. This essay focuses on the American people and the distinction of the populace of the American people. The few distinctions of the American people that were addressed were first the United States Congress, then the United States military forces, and American civilians. The President made this address before both the House of Representatives and The Congress, in order that he might call them to enact a formal declaration of war on the Japanese. This is seen in the last line of the speech document when Roosevelt says, “I ask that the Congress declare that since the unprovoked and dastardly attack by Japan on Sunday, December seventh, a state of war has existed between the United States and the Japanese Empire.” So because he was President (ethos) and his use of logos seemed logical at the time following the attacks the Congress responded to his plea and the American citizens answered the call too with their help.
Logos is the arguments and the evidence of those arguments that the rhetor makes in his speech. President Roosevelt had two major arguments that drew up emotions (pathos) with in the audience and himself. The first of these arguments is, “...our people, our territory and our interests are in grave danger.” “Since the unprovoked and dastardly attack by Japan on Sunday, December seventh, a state of war has existed between the United States and the Japanese Empire,” is the other major argument that will be reviewed in this essay. These two arguments (logos) were used to play on the crowd emotions (pathos) in order to find his desired end, which was an immediate reaction to this hostility.

“Our people, our territory and our interests are in grave danger” was a great statement to highlight the intensity of this moment and situation. The fact that the attack was committed on an American base in Hawaii and killed American people simply implies that our interests were in danger as well. This argument was well thought out because it makes the attack personal to each individual that heard the President speak. So whether the listener was a politician, soldier, mother or father the President’s argument left that individual feeling as if it was their own personal war too. This use of logos is very effective in getting a desired outcome, such as the support of the American people.

The other argument made by Roosevelt was “since the unprovoked and dastardly attack by Japan on Sunday, December seventh, a state of war has existed between the United States and the Japanese Empire.” This argument makes the point to the politicians that whether they vote for a declaration of war that Japan has all ready declared war on the United States. This argument also helps to move those that are still against going to war to supporting the cause. Especially with the help of the last argument that made the war personal. It convinces the majority of the population of the United States to support the President as he led their country into another world war.
*Pathos* is the use of values and the emotions that the rhetor has used to achieve the desired outcome of his speech. He uses an emotion of redemption of the wrongs to motivate the listeners of his speech. He uses arguments and proof of the devastation that the attacks of December 7, 1941 using vividness of words in order to draw on the emotions of the listeners. Then the repetition of who all that they have attacked adds to the emotion of fear inside the thoughts of the American people. By show an example of the depths the Japanese will go to destroy the United States and it allies. In the audio feed provided in class and in the public folder you hear tones of anger and disgust, but calmness in the voice of Roosevelt. All these emotions are transmitted from the speaker to his audience, because of his credibility and position, which is *ethos*.

*Ethos* is the credibility that the medium has and also its charisma, which in turn can affect the feelings of the audience and change their minds to go against what they normally want or would do. In this case his credibility and charisma did just that, the majority of Americans wanted to stay out of war. But with this speech they seemed to change their minds, now maybe the events had a lot to do with this, but they did follow a leader that shared their wants and provided a direction. Roosevelt provided a direction that solved their problem.

Roosevelt formulated his message in a way that it pointed out the problem and then he provided a solution. He claims that the Japanese have declared war on us and that we should answer their challenge with our own formal Declaration of War. The Congress answered Roosevelt’s challenge with the solution that he suggested. His style helped the message to be friendly to all types of crowds in order that the message would be understood by the simplest of folks. He was slow and articulately so as to fully convey
every word of his message. His structure, use of *logos*, *ethos*, and *pathos* provided the
action that he was calling for from his audience.

The result of Roosevelt’s address to the congress returned the result that he was
desired. Roosevelt wanted to go to war because of this atrocity and the congress passed his
declaration of war. The American people were moved to go to war and the home front put
out a major effort to supply all the needs of the military. The end of the war is obvious the
enemy was defeated. There was the total triumph that Roosevelt promised everyone.

This speech was needed and rallied a whole country behind a unified front, which
was retaliation on the Japanese. The speech affected a group of people’s emotions and a
landslide decision was made in the Congress, where only one person didn’t want to go to
war. Then everyone rallied together behind the President and claim total victory. The
speech that Roosevelt gave was arguably the best formal speech given in the history of the
United States. Roosevelt used *logos*, *ethos* and *pathos* powerfully to get what he desired of
his audience.
Bibliography


3. Roosevelt, Franklin D. “A Date That Will Live in Infamy: audio” 8 December 1941. (Public Folders)