Presidential Rhetoric and Media's Contribution to the Subjective Nature of Truth in American Democracy

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Presidential Rhetoric and Media’s Contribution to the Subjective
Nature of Truth in American Democracy

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May 7, 2021
Abstract

This thesis examines the role of media on the subjectivity of truth in presidential rhetoric and its ethical implications. In my three case studies, I find that there is some form of deception by each president in their chosen form of media. I analyze Roosevelt’s use of the radio, which he uses to hide his disability and gain more executive power to combat the Great Depression. I examine Reagan’s use of television and how he fabricates an intimate relationship with the American people to enact tax reform. Finally, I investigate Trump’s use of Twitter to deflect negative publicity as he claims that the news media spreads misinformation. I argue that Roosevelt and Reagan do not persuade unethically as they remain accountable to the public; however, Trump does persuade unethically because he forces the American people and the press to agree with his perception of the truth. I conclude that Trump’s dangerous rhetoric is partially a result of the network television news programs’ focus on entertainment, which has led to subjective truth dominating the political reality. Thus, I suggest that to fully understand any political situation, citizens must consume media from those whom they agree with and those whom they oppose. By not blindly trusting political rhetoric, the public is more able to play an active role in American democracy.
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INTRODUCTION

Media, Truth, and Ethics in the Rhetorical Presidency

This thesis explores the effectiveness of presidential rhetoric from the perspectives of three different forms of media: radio, television, and social media. However, effective and ethical rhetoric are not synonymous. In order to properly persuade a democracy like the United States, a president must embody both of these principles to speak to the American public. We live in a society that has an abstract perception of the truth; therefore, it is the responsibility of these government officials to ensure that they use good rhetoric to skillfully and virtuously persuade their audience. To explore how truth factors into governance, I will analyze Presidents Roosevelt, Reagan, and Trump and how they effectively, ineffectively, ethically, and unethically convince the American people to accept their agendas.

Going Public and Media’s Role in Relaying the Message

In the scholarly conversations about presidential rhetoric, Jeffrey K. Tulis’s assessment of the rhetorical presidency paradigm is one of the most prominent. Tulis claims that “the modern rhetorical presidency marks a change in the American meaning of governance” (6). He suggests that the rhetorical presidency is a twentieth-century development because presidents began publicizing the position to directly engage the people of the United States (Tulis 6). Furthermore, Tulis’ argument implies that the rhetorical presidency uses the public to indirectly influence congressional deliberations. This implication conveys that the general American audience plays a significant role in affecting policy change. Finally, Tulis asserts that the modern presidency should be considered from the perspective of two constitutions—the original Constitution and a second iteration. Tulis notes, “Central to this second constitution is a view of statecraft that is in
tension with the original Constitution—indeed, is opposed to the founder’s understanding of the political system” (18). Thus, Tulis demonstrates that this transformation of the presidency has deviated from the original Constitution and operates under external factors such as popular opinion. While Tulis coined “the rhetorical presidency” as a term, he does not necessarily argue that it is a beneficial transformation of the presidency; he simply claims it is a development that has influenced the climate of public policy making to be more conscious of communication than the act of governing.

With the rise of the rhetorical presidency, different forms of media have become crucial to presidential messaging toward the American public. In his book, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of the Man*, Marshall McLuhan argues that “the medium is the message” meaning that “the personal and social consequences of any medium—that is, of any extension of ourselves—result from the new scale that is introduced into our affairs by each extension of ourselves, or by any new technology” (19). In other words, mediated rhetoric or communication changes based on the form of the medium used whether it is radio, print, television, or now social media. McLuhan suggests that new technologies advance our understanding of the orator’s message as well as provide insight into our minds as technologies are an extension of the human. This argument reveals that media creates the message that identifies the values of the human being using the technology; the two are interconnected because choosing one medium over another is a deliberate choice. Thus, when a president chooses a particular medium, they make an active decision about their communication with the public to highlight their voice, accessibility, or image.

McLuhan also identifies the distinction between hot and cold media, which reveal the levels of audience participation that affects the ways in which presidents must utilize the
medium. He notes that “A hot medium is one that extends one single sense in ‘high definition’” and “high definition is the state of being well filled with data” as it does not “leave so much to be filled in or completed by the audience” (McLuhan 39). Here, McLuhan claims that hot media allows the audience to retain more information because there is less need for interpretation. By contrast, a cool medium has a “low definition” because “very little visual information is provided” (McLuhan 39). Thus, a cool medium requires more interpretation from the audience as they need to add more of the data. These characterizations of hot and cool media demonstrate that audience participation will vary based on what media is chosen. In short, “Hot media are…low in participation, and cool media are high in participation or completion by the audience” (McLuhan 39). Because of these differences in participation, presidents have to skillfully adapt to the medium in order to ensure that the populace comprehends their message. The cool media’s low participation from the audience allows presidents to merely impart the information on policy action while cool media’s highly participatory nature causes presidents to directly address their audience and request their action in the policy making process.

While McLuhan wrote about hot and cool media before the invention of social media, he labels radio and television based on their participatory nature to guide the user’s rhetorical choices; his scholarship also allows contemporary audiences to apply his theory to new technologies. McLuhan identifies radio as a hot medium, which displays that the audience can listen to the voice of the speaker and gather information without much effort. For President Roosevelt, his informative style well suited the medium as he explained the executive action he gained to remedy the Great Depression. On the other hand, McLuhan discerns that television is a cool medium, which requires the speaker to work harder for the audience’s attention on screen. This principle led President Reagan to use “you” and address his audience directly in order to
engage them as crucial actors in the policy making process. Today, McLuhan would likely identify social media, specifically Twitter, as a cool medium because it requires more attention from the audience as there are few cues to understand the message. Although a Tweet utilizes words and characters, the author can leave some of the message hidden. With his use of Twitter, President Trump highlights that Tweets can conceal the full message because he only portrays his version of the narrative. He is explicit in his rhetoric, but it requires his followers to fill more data through the comments on the Tweets and their own investigation of other sources. With such varying degrees of participation, there is more complexity in a democratic system for a president to effectively communicate with the people.

**Truth and Reality: The Ancient World and Now**

As the presidency has become more “public,” factual representation of government action carries less importance than persuading the American people to support the president’s policies. Tailoring their rhetoric toward the people, presidents are more likely to embellish the facts about their proposed legislation in order to make the agenda more favorable to the populace. Therefore, we can never know what is the definitive truth in politics as seen through this modern presidency. While the abstractness of truth pervades our society, the issue revisits the ancient Greeks’ notions of knowledge and truth as well as the different schools of thought surrounding this tenet of rhetoric. In the Classical tradition, those two competing perceptions of truth were Plato’s belief in absolute truth and the Sophists’ argument that there was not absolute truth, only subjective. These arguments for truth help establish the dilemma we now face in our current democracy.

Plato’s emphasis on absolute truth leads him to disapprove of rhetoric because it invites a subjective reading of the truth. In *The Rhetorical Tradition*, Bizzell, Herzberg, and Reames note
that “Plato articulates the belief in a transcendent truth that is accessible to human beings” (98). His view suggests that there is one objective form that all human beings should eventually know; therefore, Plato does not see truth as interpretive. Because of his perception of absolute truth or *Sophia*, Plato is not “fond of democracy because he thought that not everyone could access Truth through dialectic” (Rangappa & Merciera 3). Plato’s rejection of democracy demonstrates that he did not believe that the democratic system and *Sophia* could coexist because democratic deliberative rhetoric invites subjective opinions. Plato illuminates that there can be no absolute truth in a democracy, which implies the cause for subjective truth in our current state. Through this subjectivity, there is no definitive answer to any solution when it comes to politics.

Since Plato’s disapproval of democracy fails to describe our perceptions of truth, the Sophists belief in subjective truth creates a basis for our form of political knowledge. The sophistic movement opposes Plato’s notion that we can know absolute truth. Bizzell, Herzberg, and Reames state that the Sophists view language as “inducing belief rather than encouraging audiences to give themselves up uncritically to its power to move and persuade” (23). This perspective demonstrates that Sophistic rhetoric bestows the power in the language to the audience more so than to the orator. While the speaker’s task is to persuade the audience, the Sophists give the audience the opportunity to compose another position to the rhetoric, which includes the idea of *dissoi logoi* in presenting these opposing arguments (Bizzell et al. 69). Asha Rangappa and Jennifer Mercieca note that the Sophists focused on “Phronesis — practical truth” as they “taught how to make the stronger argument through debating competing narratives” (3). This portrayal of truth insists that there are possibilities for alternate facts; thus, the Sophists focus on opinions. Plato expresses his distaste for sophistic movement by “represent[ing] sophistic uses of rhetoric as the kind of political discourse that was corrupting Athens under
democratic rule” (Bizzell et al. 98). Plato’s portrayal of sophistic knowledge signifies that he views the Sophists’ rhetoric as manipulative and misinforming. However, the sophistic movement best represents how our democracy deliberates to come to a general consensus on policies in the contemporary era.

Another key sophistic ideal is the timeliness of rhetoric, *kairos*, to persuade the audience most effectively. *Kairos* is “the idea that the timely aspects of a situation, its cultural and political contexts rather than transcendent unchanging laws, will produce both the best solutions to problems and the best verbal means of presenting them persuasively” (24). The Sophists challenge the rigid structure of oratory by focusing on a more individualized experience that allows speakers to introduce their ideas at what they considered a proper time. This doctrine of *kairos* emphasizes the importance of time to rhetoric especially in a democracy. If a president wants to persuade his audience, he must choose a topic that is immediate and will engage his audience for such an occasion. Here, the Sophists further deviate from Plato’s absolute truth as they reject any unchanging principles that govern the rule of oratory.

While the Sophists reject Plato’s transcendental truth, Aristotle’s perception of truth incorporates both doctrines and offers an ideal way to view truth in a modern democracy. Bizzell, Herzberg, and Reames state that Aristotle believes that “only scientific demonstration and the analysis of formal logic can arrive at absolute truth” (201). Thus, Aristotle subscribes to Plato’s doctrine of absolute truth, but does not believe in its transcendentalism; absolute truth is accessible through empirical observation. Unlike the Sophists, Aristotle believes there is absolute truth. However, he highlights that science and fact must be present to support these claims. Aristotle also deviates from Plato as he sees the usefulness of rhetoric in society crucial to his view of “human inquiry” (Bizzell et al. 201). For Aristotle, “Rhetoric functions in situations in
which rigorous analysis is not possible (because the audience is not qualified) or desirable (due to the exigency of the questions at hand)” (201). This view of rhetoric demonstrates that the practice includes those who do not have the means to analyze, which is similar to our current democracy as it is the president’s role to speak to the American people and assist them in understanding the political reality.

Aristotle’s emphasis on rhetoric provides us an effective system to structure persuasive communication that still remains in our democratic rhetorical presidency. His invention of *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos* is paramount to this thesis as they are the main rhetorical appeals that I use to analyze presidential rhetoric. In Book I of *Rhetoric*, Aristotle identifies that these three main appeals correspond to the three parts of a rhetorical situation: the speaker, the audience and the speech itself. Aristotle defines *ethos* as “depending on the personal character of the speaker” (Bizzell et al. 212). This means that the rhetorician must establish his or her credibility to speak and persuade the audience on a particular subject. Next, Aristotle notes that *pathos* is the mode of persuasion that “put[s] the audience into a certain frame of mind” (Bizzell et al. 212). This suggests that the speaker persuades by appealing to the audience’s emotions. Finally, Aristotle states that *logos* is persuasion by “the apparent proof, provided by the words of the speech itself” (Bizzell et al. 212). Aristotle is particularly fond of *logos* because of his belief that humans can achieve absolute truth by empirical means. Although Aristotle invented this system in ancient Greece, these appeals remain crucial to understanding oratory and how the truth is portrayed.

Aside from the classical perspectives of truth, it is important to see how truth and fact has evolved in the contemporary world, specifically in the political sphere. We have seen an increased polarization surrounding beliefs that has made truth subjective beyond being able to know if anything is definitively factual. In her book, *Reality Bites: Rhetoric and the Circulation*...
of Truth Claims in U.S. Political Culture, Dana L. Cloud suggests that we must adapt to the subjectivity of reality and truth in our contemporary rhetorical situation. She highlights Karl Rove’s idea of a “reality-based community,” which is “people who ‘believe that solutions emerge from your judicious study of discernible reality’” (1). Rove means that when an empire like the United States acts, it creates its own idealized reality; in a sense, we can rewrite our own history with this paradigm. Cloud asserts that Rove was correct as reality-based communities “are left to study, deconstruct, analyze, and correct historical actions, but in a certain real sense, the actions of the powerful do create the truths of dominant common sense” (2). This explains the subjectivity that leads to fabrication of truth into common sense by those powerful individuals such as politicians to revise reality. Thus, we cannot know reality because it is reconstructed in this abstract sense.

While Cloud finds “reality-based communities” too simple to explain our situation, she believes that the truth is not fully accessible to the public. Cloud invents the term “rhetorical realism,” which is “the idea that there is a reality—but none of us can know it except through frames of mediation, or interpretation by politicians, activists, pundits, and the mass media” (2). Here, she claims that rhetorical mediation is key to understanding the truth and our political reality. This argument alludes to the audience’s need to then be persuaded to comprehend the mediated truth; however, the Right and Left use different persuasive tactics. Cloud notes that the Left focuses too intently on fact-checking to “speak truth to power” (1). She asserts that this tactic is ineffective in persuading the audience. On the other hand, Cloud concludes that the Right uses mediation to take “‘facts’ and turn them into beliefs and, ultimately, common sense” (2). Therefore, Cloud emphasizes the importance of making information believable and unchallengeable using such techniques, which is a form of persuasion in itself.
creating belief will be crucial to understanding the persuasion of Roosevelt, Reagan, and Trump in this thesis.

“A Culture of Demagoguery:” What Makes Rhetoric Ethical?

With such subjectivity surrounding truth comes great responsibility to ensure that the orator persuades the audience to agree and not to comply (Mercieca 277). In our current political climate, we must guard against disinformation that leads to the people not thinking critically, which is crucial to the democratic tradition. Rangappa and Merciera argue that “Propaganda and disinformation are persuasion without consent: In fact, by offering new versions of ‘facts,’ their authors try to hide that they’re persuading us at all” (4). This demonstrates that disinformation does not allow the audience to think critically and understand the “facts” presented because there are other unethical forms of persuasion operating. If we cannot consent to persuasion, then we comply with the speaker’s idea of the truth even if it does not necessarily have a basis in reality. Rangappa and Merciera also note that “Propaganda and disinformation create a realm where disbelief is disloyalty, rather than a shared attempt to search for truth” (4). This argument further implies that disinformation permits only one reality in which the orator chooses the truth of the situation; the audience remains inactive and must only accept their persuasion.

Polarization in our democracy has ignited this divided perception of truth that has evolved with the emphasis on rhetoric in the modern presidency, leading to increased demagoguery. According to Patricia Roberts-Miller, demagoguery “polarizes a complicated political situation into us (good) and them (some of whom are deliberately evil and the rest of whom are dupes)” (34). Roberts-Miller emphasizes the divide that is created in “a culture of demagoguery” because the audience must choose a side and there is no middle ground (78). Instead, there is good and bad in the demagogic culture in which only one can prevail.
Roberts-Miller also notes that demagoguery “insists that the Truth is easy to perceive and convey, so that complexity, nuance, uncertainty, and deliberation are cowardice, dithering, or deliberate moves to prevent action” (35). Here, she highlights the role of truth in persuasion; however, she reveals that it is not necessarily ethical to assume that there is a simple truth as complexity is not ideal with demagoguery. Having an obvious solution leaves no room for the audience to think individually, which leads them to comply with the orator’s words. While there could be a simple solution to some issues, the truth is often much more complex.

Although Roberts-Miller depicts demagoguery negatively, only demagogues who evade accountability and persuade to compliance are unethical. In her article, “Dangerous Demagogues and Weaponized Communication,” Jennifer Mercieca claims that demagoguery is merely using rhetoric to persuade an audience, which is not entirely problematic (267). With the rise of the rhetorical presidency, it is impossible to avoid persuasion and different perceptions of the truth. However, Mercieca distinguishes dangerous demagogues from heroic demagogues. She argues that the difference is “Heroic demagogues use rhetoric to persuade; dangerous demagogues use weaponized communication to gain compliance” in which weaponized communication is “characterized by aggression, disregarding ethics, and instrumentality (277; 271). Therefore, Mercieca corrects this negative perception of demagoguery because it is simply using rhetoric to persuade an audience. However, dangerous demagogues also evade accountability, an ideal that is imperative to ethical leadership. Mercieca notes that “The dangerous demagogue’s demagoguery—their rhetorical tactics—are useful insofar as they help demagogues to avoid accountability” (267). Here, she suggests that dangerous demagogues actively avoid being held accountable by the people and the press, which makes their rhetorical tactics unethical. This
avoidance further addresses the issue of persuading the audience to comply as dangerous
demagogues do not allow themselves to be held responsible for their words.

To that end, I will extend Mercieca’s division of the dangerous and heroic demagogues as
I explore the deception of Roosevelt, Reagan, and Trump in their uses of different forms of
media. I find that on the radio, television, and Twitter, Roosevelt, Reagan, and Trump deceive or
embellish the truth in some way to persuade the American people to accept their agenda.
Roosevelt uses honesty to persuade his audience. However, there is an element of deception in
hiding his disability behind the radio to ensure that he obtains expanded executive power to enact
New Deal policies. Reagan persuades the American public using *pathos* and appeals to them by
separating himself from the government, which deceives them to believe that they have an
intimate relationship with their president. He uses television to showcase his warm personality
that makes his words seem less important. Finally, Trump uses Twitter to deflect claims made by
the mainstream media using the economy as evidence for his success to correct what he believes
is misinformation by the news media sources in criticizing him. From these deceptions, I argue
that Roosevelt and Reagan do not persuade unethically as they remain accountable to the
American people; however, Trump uses unethical means of persuasion by which he forces the
American people and the press to comply with his perception of the truth. These developments
display that while truth is subjective, it is unacceptable to attack the opposition until they and the
audience comply with just one version of reality.

Chapter One examines President Roosevelt’s use of the radio to promote New Deal
policies. I argue that while he honestly informs the American people, FDR attempts to change
reality as he deceives his audience using the radio to hide his disability in order to reinforce his
*ethos* and obtain the necessary executive power to enact these policies. To make this argument, I
will analyze two Fireside Chats, “On the Banking Crisis” and “On Progress During the First Two Months,” in which he educates the public on the banking crisis and explains the actions taken by the government to remedy the situation including increased executive power. In the end, FDR’s deception is not unethical because hides a part of himself for the good of the nation’s recovery from the Great Depression and to give the American people a steady leader on whom they could rely.

Chapter Two focuses on President Reagan’s use of television to promote tax reform. In this chapter, I argue that President Reagan effectively persuades the American people to support his tax reform policy using *pathos* as he appeals to them by acting as a fellow citizen instead of a government official. I use his campaign advertisement on “Reaganomics” to establish the subjectivity surrounding his economic policies. Then, I analyze his 1981 “Address to the Nation of Federal Tax Reduction Legislation” and his 1985 “Address to the Nation on Tax Reform” to show how he deceptively makes the American people feel like they have an intimate relationship with their president despite this not being the reality. Although he unethically attempts to convince the American people that the government is their enemy, Reagan, on the whole, does not persuade unethically because he portrays himself as a servant to the American people exhibiting that he will be accountable to them.

Chapter Three turns to President Trump’s Twitter presence and his deflection of the news media claims about his presidency and personality. Here, I introduce a new form of media: the press. I argue that using Twitter, Trump defends himself against the negative news media attention and constantly engages an enemy to establish his superiority over his opposition that he charges with misinforming the people. In this chapter, I analyze several tweets in which Trump calls the media “Fake News” and defends the economy to prove he is a successful president. I
begin by contrasting Trump’s Twitter rhetoric with President Obama’s transparent Tweets to display that Trump was the first true “Twitter President.” I find that Trump’s Twitter tactics are unethical because he not only attacks his opponents, but he also rejects any unfavorable press claims as disinformation making the American people distrust any information presented.

Rhetoric to persuade in a democracy is not effective unless it is also ethical and allows the audience to think critically. While Trump is a skilled rhetorician, his tactics lead to compliance unlike Roosevelt and Reagan, whose tactics allow the American people to freely agree because they respect the need for presidential accountability. Thus, I seek to understand how our democracy has reached this point of dangerous rhetoric and examine how the truth factors into the rhetorical presidency that is so heavily mediated. By presenting their image through different forms of media, the people never see their president from an unfiltered lens. While there is not absolute truth like Plato hoped, there are certainly ways to assure the American people that there is some trustworthy information that comes from politics.
CHAPTER ONE

The Invisibility of the Radio and Honest Persuasion: How FDR Highlights the Strength of his Voice to Expand Executive Power

Through the radio, Franklin Delano Roosevelt developed an intimate connection with listeners at home. As Marshall McLuhan notes, “Radio affects most people intimately, person-to-person, offering a world of unspoken communication between writer-speaker and listener” (401). This means that the radio provides a personal connection to the listener that makes both speaker and audience feel like they are communicating with one another. Although his audience could not see him, FDR’s radio presence assured the American people that the Great Depression would end with his assistance and service. With his non-threatening yet commanding voice, Roosevelt entered Americans’ homes as their president to ensure that they were informed of the policies that he promoted and of the expansion of executive authority that occurred during the first months of his presidency.

Before expanding on the intimacy of radio, one must consider that the medium of radio concealed Roosevelt’s illness that otherwise could have inhibited him from even getting elected to public office; this concealment rewrote Roosevelt’s reality to protect his ethos. While it is now public record, Roosevelt spent much of his life hiding his disease in order to advance his career. According to Davis Houck in “Reading the body in the text: FDR’s 1932 speech to the democratic national convention,” Americans saw Polio as a disease of the “unhygienic, the lower-class, and immigrants” (22). Although Roosevelt did not fit any of these stereotypes, he could not escape the implications that came with the illness especially for someone in the public
eye. With a desire for a political career, Houck notes that, “Roosevelt’s political aspirations made the affliction even more insidious and cruel: disabled politicians had little if any electoral hopes—especially when those hopes involved the nation’s highest, and most visible, elected office” (22). Because of the standards of the 1930s, there was little hope of Roosevelt being elected president had he not concealed his disability. Thus, once the electoral process was complete, it is possible that the radio was a more favorable medium for Roosevelt to establish his credibility to hold the highest office in the United States, especially during the Great Depression.

While no one can assume that Roosevelt chose radio for the purpose of hiding his body, Marshall McLuhan’s characterization of radio as a medium supplements the claim that Roosevelt deliberately made a decision to use the radio. McLuhan writes, “Radio is provided with its cloak of invisibility, like any other medium. It comes to us ostensibly with person-to-person directness that is private and intimate” (404). This “cloak of invisibility” emphasizes the importance of concealment for Roosevelt during his presidency; therefore, the invisibility of the radio depicts him as a respectable president. The radio would be particularly crucial to promoting New Deal policies because the legislation required significant executive action. Thus, the “intimate” and “private” nature of the radio that McLuhan identifies demonstrates that Roosevelt could speak publicly, promoting such policies without divulging his private life that needed to be concealed at the time. While this poses an ethical issue today, the decision not to disclose his disease was imperative to his success in maintaining the trust of the American people and the power to end the Great Depression.

Aside from the personal implications of radio, Roosevelt used the medium to highlight his profound voice. In his book, *Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Rhetorical Presidency*, Halford Ryan notes that FDR “carefully turned his delivery to satisfy the technology of the era” (26). By
having the skill to adapt to different technology, Roosevelt presented his ability to reach wider audiences. As Martin Spinelli writes in his article, “Democratic rhetoric and emergent media: The marketing of participatory community on radio and Internet,” “the rhetoric of radio’s power to democratize brought with it a renewed interest in the idea of community” (272). With this perception of radio, Roosevelt needed to alter his message for having such power using the medium to supplement his leadership. In the “despatialized” experience of the radio, Roosevelt could use his voice to unite the American community (Wijfjes 159). This focus on community demonstrates the importance of his well-suited delivery for radio as he “knew his listeners would receive his words and the vocal cues to which he gave considerable attention” (Ryan 26). Therefore, Roosevelt recognized the importance of his vocal delivery and focused his skill on using the voice to persuade his listeners on the necessity of his increased executive action to recover the economy.

In this chapter, I argue that while he honestly informs the American people, FDR deceives his audience using the radio to hide his disability in order to ensure that he obtains the executive power to enact New Deal policies. Therefore, Roosevelt prioritizes the preservation of his ethos to succeed in saving the country from the Great Depression so his disability did not hinder this important responsibility. In the two Fireside Chats I will analyze, “On the Banking Crisis” and “On Progress During the First Two Months,” Roosevelt transparently explains the situation in the United States as well as the policies that he intends to implement to remedy the crisis. He is even honest that he will seek more executive power to ensure the implementation of these policies. Roosevelt’s confidence to enact the policies signals to the American people that they can trust their president to tell the truth and lead them out of the Depression. However, while FDR protects his ethos with the radio, he constructs a new reality that conceals the body
that if discovered, would minimize his credibility and make him less trustworthy to the American public. Although this deception could make him less trustworthy, Roosevelt chose to hide a part of himself for the good of the nation’s recovery from the Great Depression and to give the American people a steady and reliable leader.

**Roosevelt’s Fireside Chats**

With the radio as his medium, Roosevelt used Fireside Chats to develop a better relationship with the American public. Suzzane M. Daughton states that “The ‘fireside’ phrase...conveyed Roosevelt’s conception of himself as a man at ease in his own house talking frankly and intimately to neighbors as they sat in their living rooms” (39). While his audience could not see him, Daughton’s characterization of the “fireside phrase” demonstrates that Roosevelt intended to make the American public aware that he was also human. Therefore, Roosevelt’s use of this phrase allows his audience to imagine him comfortably speaking from his home like a normal citizen and not from the power of the presidency. Roosevelt does not appear above the American people, but rather as one of his constituents. Daughton’s description of Roosevelt “talking frankly and intimately to neighbors,” Daughton’s displays that Roosevelt focused on such equality and comfort of the American people with the president speaking to them. This fabricated intimacy operates persuasively and I will focus more intently on how Reagan expands Roosevelt’s technique on television in the second chapter.

Roosevelt gave 27 Fireside Chats during his three terms in office. There are different types of addresses that he gave over the course of those twelve years (Ryan 28). In *Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Rhetorical Presidency*, Halford Ryan cites the three categories of Fireside Chats that Roosevelt delivered. The first was pep talks, meaning that he would attempt to boost the morale of the American people (Ryan 28). These pep talks demonstrate Roosevelt’s desire to maintain a
sense of hope during the various times of darkness throughout his presidency. The second was “responses to significant exigencies” where he would calm the American people and attempt to “utter a unified response” (Ryan 28). This model similarly provides reassurance that the government will aid to remedy situations like the Great Depression. Finally, Ryan describes the last type of Fireside Chat as response to critics; Ryan states that his second Fireside Chat is an example of this chat as “he apologized for too much apparent presidential power over the Congress and cautioned people not to view the New Deal as control over business and industry but as a partnership” (29). This example shows that there is overlap between these different types of Fireside Chats because they all require some reassurance of the American people to remain hopeful about the state of the nation.

Roosevelt also had a distinct technique in writing and delivering these Fireside Chats that focuses on the Americans listening at home. Keiko Aoki notes that Roosevelt prioritized clarity so that “the layman” could understand by using “simple, easy to read” language, many concrete examples and explaining his speech as well as organizing his speech in a simple manner” (72). While Aoki analyzes his 1940 Fireside Chat on “War with Japan,” this emphasis of clarity also applies to his Fireside Chats on the banking crisis and the New Deal; he intended to plainly explain the state of the economic crisis and the steps he took. In addition, Aoki notes that Roosevelt persuaded his audience using “the listener-centered WE” when making assertions, which shows that he includes his audience and almost places his assertions as their own opinion (73). Roosevelt also “embedd[ed] his assertions into objective statements” meaning that he made his opinions appear to be more like a true fact than a claim (Aoki 73). This demonstrates that Roosevelt wanted to persuade while sounding informative and detached. In addition, Roosevelt’s objective rhetoric makes his audience believe the claims as it appears trustworthy and factual.
With these techniques, Roosevelt illuminated the importance of centering his Fireside Chats around the audience as a form of pathos that I will discuss in the analysis of the specific chats.

**Honesty and Prognosis in Fireside Chat on the Banking Crisis**

With the Great Depression destroying the nation, Roosevelt had to act quickly to begin healing America. On March 12, 1933, President Roosevelt delivered his first Fireside Chat on the banking crisis via the radio, just one week after his inauguration. Because of the state of the nation, Roosevelt needed to assure the American people that the government was actively providing relief to them. Roosevelt instills trust in the American people as he focuses on honestly informing the public of the situation with the banking crisis. By prioritizing transparency to educate the American people affected by the crisis, Roosevelt further reinforces his ethos through a careful use of logos to prove his confidence to lead the country out of the Great Depression. Despite Roosevelt’s focus on honesty, the President conceals his disability with his profound voice on the radio as well as his intricate use of medical language to establish a reality in which the nation, not him, is unhealthy and he is responsible for the remedy.

Throughout the address, Roosevelt expresses timely kairos as he takes immediate action to remedy the banking crisis by explaining the situation to the American people. March 12, 1933 was a Sunday and the broadcast aired at 10:00 PM (Alter 265). While most government business would be more likely to occur Monday through Friday, Roosevelt shows that the office of the President never rests. Therefore, by addressing the American public on a Sunday, Roosevelt displays his commitment to the people and demonstrates his willingness to serve them in order to control this crisis. Speaking late in the evening also shows his commitment to working for Americans as well as ensures that they are home to listen to him. While this represents his commitment, it also allows for more Americans to listen to his radio address because they are
likely at home on a Sunday. Roosevelt’s kairos also displays the intimacy of the fireside chat in that he is part of the family gathering together on a Sunday night. By “gathering” with the family, Roosevelt uses pathos to reveal his care for the American people as he values being a guardian for the people. Therefore, speaking to the American public just a week after his inauguration as well as on a Sunday suggests that his unwavering commitment to mitigating the effects of the banking crisis and to the family of Americans.

In his first Fireside Chat, Roosevelt emphasizes logos appeals by providing an honest account of the causes of the banking crisis and the steps the government has taken to remedy the effects. Almost immediately, FDR states, “I want to tell you what has been done in the last few days, why it was done, and what the next steps are going to be” (Roosevelt, “Fireside Chat 1”). Here, Roosevelt’s rhetoric is direct and clearly states his purpose; he does not use any elaborate language but instead makes it apparent that he will explain the situation to the American public as it has been presented to him. He uses the interrogative words—what, why, and what next—to signal to his audience that he will answer the questions that likely arise in their minds. Roosevelt assumes the responsibility of relaying what knowledge he can share to the American people to ease their qualms about the current situation. More importantly, Roosevelt creates a reality in which he values transparency and fact and does not conceal any government action, which poses a tension with him obscuring his body. However, the invisibility of the radio deceives the American people into believing that the President is only honest with them with his direct rhetoric.

Coupled with his focus on logos, Roosevelt implements pathos appeals as he considers how to properly inform the average American on the issue of the banking crisis so they understand the situation. Jonathan Alter states that when Roosevelt was writing his address, he
saw “a workman taking down the Inaugural scaffolding on the grounds of the White House” and said that “[he would] try to make a speech that this workman could understand” (263). This anecdote displays Roosevelt’s interest in including the average American in his speech, which signals that he centers the address around his audience and allows them to believe that he is a trustworthy leader willing to explain the situation. To assure he will effectively educate his audience, FDR states, “I recognize that the many proclamations from State Capitols and from Washington, the legislation, the Treasury regulations, etc., couched for the most part in banking and legal terms should be explained for the benefit of the average citizen” (Roosevelt, “Fireside Chat 1”). Here, Roosevelt acknowledges that the government’s “proclamations” have left the American people uninformed of the situation, which likely causes them anxieties about the unknown. His choice of “couch” to describe how the government expresses these statements signals that the language is highly specialized and less accessible to the average citizen. Because of the invisibility of the government behind these statements, the technical language makes the officials less human. However, Roosevelt directly claims that the terms “should be explained for the benefit of the average citizen;” this assertion exhibits that Roosevelt establishes the belief that American people are included in understanding the measures taken by the government. Using “benefit” signifies that he values the American people and wants to feel seen by their president. Roosevelt makes himself more trustworthy by using pathos to persuade his audience that he intends to keep them informed.

Despite being invisible behind the radio, FDR’s pathos permeates in this Fireside Chat as he creates the illusion of an intimate conversation between him and the American people. To begin the speech, President Roosevelt greets the American people by saying “My friends” (Roosevelt, “Fireside Chat 1”). By calling the American people “friends,” he becomes more
approachable though he is invisible to his audience. Not only does he create transparency about
the government’s actions, but he also fabricates a reality where the president sees himself as a
kindred spirit of the American people; President Reagan uses a similar form of pathos on
television that I will explore in my next chapter. As McLuhan notes, the radio’s invisibility
makes it more private for the speaker. Therefore, it is important that Roosevelt still engages with
the people in a meaningful way by calling them his friends. In having the invisibility of the radio,
Roosevelt can hide the disability that would take away from this position of elevated power.
However, he still brings himself to the level of average Americans by calling them his friends.
Because of this relatability, Roosevelt pathos appeals emphasize that he wants the American
people to feel part of a conversation rather than being governed.

Roosevelt’s honesty permeates his pathos as he acknowledges the plight of the banking
crisis by showing his gratitude toward the American people for remaining resilient; this pathos
builds his ethos because he does not neglect that his role is to serve the public. In the address,
Roosevelt states, “I owe this in particular because of the fortitude and good temper with which
everybody has accepted the inconvenience and hardships of the banking holiday” (Roosevelt,
“Fireside Chat 1”). The president’s use of “owe” is particularly effective because it shows that he
feels obligated to explain the situation to the American people who have tolerated the banking
crisis. “Owe” also suggests that he recognizes his role as a public servant rather than someone
who is above his citizens; this demonstrates that FDR reinforces his ethos as he remains aware of
his duty to the American people, which allows them to trust him more. Furthermore, he utilizes
pathos by complimenting the efforts of the people to remain in “good temper” during this crisis.
At the same time, he appeals to the emotions of the people by transparently describing the
banking holiday as an “inconvenience” and creating “hardships.” The president’s report on the
holiday further displays his honest disposition because he admits that this government action has created more difficulty for the American people. Thus, Roosevelt’s use of “hardships” not only serves as pathos to show his understanding that the American people have suffered from the temporary government action. This acceptance of responsibility for the inconveniences of his remedy establishes his ethos that he will lead humbly and effectively to end the banking crisis.

With a solid grounding on ethos, President Roosevelt focuses on transparency because he tells the American people what exactly happened to the banks, which indicates that he is a reliable source of information. To explain how the banking crisis began, FDR narrates:

What, then, happened during the last few days of February and the first few days of March? Because of undermined confidence on the part of the public, there was a general rush by a large portion of our population to turn bank deposits into currency or gold. A rush so great that the soundest banks could not get enough currency to meet the demand. (Roosevelt, “Fireside Chat 1”)

This first tactic that he uses is hypophora, meaning that he asks a question and then answers his own question (“Hypophora”). This rhetorical move demonstrates that he recognizes people are wondering about the events of the late February and early March that have greatly impacted their lives. Furthermore, the inflection in his voice on “then” signals this concern that Roosevelt must address for the American people as he knows that they want an answer. By imparting the details, Roosevelt establishes that he is a reliable informant to aid the American people in understanding the sequence of events that led to the bank closures. In his description of the “rush” for turning bank deposits into money, he displays the urgency of the situation, but also expands upon the rush. In the next statement, he escalates the issue of the “rush” to “so great that the soundest banks could not get enough currency to meet the demand.” Having identified his ethos to speak on this “rush,” the American audience feels comfortable receiving the information from the president. Roosevelt’s language and delivery of this information alludes to the chaos for the
banks in having such an influx of activity; it shows the urgency of the situation and why he needs to take more government action. Through such confident language on the radio, Roosevelt showcases his command of the situation that allows the American people to rely on his word.

Roosevelt also proves a dependable source by treating the radio as a personal conversation with the audience to assure them that they can trust him to provide honest answers about the reopening of the banks. In the address, he states, “A question you will ask is this—why are all the banks not to be reopened at the same time? The answer is simple. Your Government does not intend that the history of the past few years shall be repeated” (Roosevelt, “Fireside Chat 1”). Here, he uses hypophora again to answer his audience’s questions; the hypophora creates a conversation between Roosevelt and American people. He makes an assumption of what the American people want to know about the banking crisis, which demonstrates that he is in tune with the concerns of his constituents and this likely bestows him more credibility as a speaker. By anticipating that the American people want to know about the reopening of banks, he shows that it is a prevalent issue that he wishes to resolve and address in the speech presently. His following statement, “The answer is simple” reveals that he has thought about this question and is prepared to answer it clearly. Furthermore, he returns to the theme of servitude by saying “Your Government;” this suggests that he recognizes the government is the possession of the people and that the administration does not want to disappoint the people it serves by “repeat[ing]” “the history of the past few years.” Making this vow implies that FDR is aware the people do not trust the government because of the situation with the Great Depression. However, he proclaims his commitment to the American people to do right by them after the years through this fabrication of intimacy on the radio.
By establishing the people’s trust, Roosevelt creates a tension between the honest rhetoric that conveys his strength and the deception about his body behind the radio. When FDR engages the question that most Americans have about the banks, he provides assurance that the government will not fail the American people. Making this claim, Roosevelt states, “We do not want and will not have another epidemic of bank failures” (Roosevelt, “Fireside Chat 1”). First, he strikingly says “we” after using “Your government” in the previous statement. Here, Roosevelt likely refers to “we” as the government, which is a more casual and inclusive way to discuss the intentions of the government. By utilizing “we,” Roosevelt includes himself in the people’s government to show his commitment to the American people. Following this poignant use of “we,” Roosevelt states that they “do not want and will not have another epidemic of bank failures.” The President’s conviction to eradicate this bank crisis highlights his robust promise that he is strong enough to fight this disease; his confidence in saying “will not have” assure the people that they can trust Roosevelt’s administration to improve the situation. This guarantee demonstrates the necessity to gain the trust of the American people to have the same belief that he will end the banking crisis. Only hearing his voice allows them to imagine a body that matches the power and this leads to the deception of the American people as he is not honest about his personal malady.

Roosevelt’s use of medical language deflects any potential reveal of his own body’s disability as he argues that he is the strong leader who can care for a sick nation. Calling the bank failures an “epidemic” signals that the nation is ill and the government must find a treatment; Roosevelt argues that there is a necessity for action. As an epidemic occurs in a more limited geographical area, like a country, this medical language shows that the situation needs to be controlled nationally (“Epidemic”). Furthermore, this characterization of the bank failures
invokes Davis Houck’s analysis of Roosevelt’s 1932 speech to accept the Democratic presidential nomination. Houck writes that the Democratic presidential nomination speech was important because of “its masterful yet subtle emphasis on Roosevelt’s health, Hoover’s sickness, and the nation’s impending recovery” (29). This is an interesting parallel to draw because it persuades the audience that he is not sick; rather, his role is to doctor the ill country. Here, Houck illuminates FDR’s deflection of the reality of his disability to show his strength as a leader that would later occur in this Fireside Chat on the banking crisis. Implementing the language of illness to describe the situation of the banks allows Roosevelt to divert the attention from his own body that remains hidden behind the radio.

After diagnosing the nation’s illness, Roosevelt highlights his physical and vocal power with this language of healing, which also allows him to show his strength over the radio. When he discusses the reopening of the banks, Roosevelt states, “It is necessary that the reopening of banks be extended over a period in order to permit the banks to make applications for necessary loans, to obtain currency needed to meet their requirements and to enable the Government to make common sense checkups” (Roosevelt, “Fireside Chat 1”). First, he repeats “necessary” exhibiting his confidence in the government action being a crucial aspect of the banks opening properly. Second, he moves to the specific government in action in discussing the “common sense checkups” following the language of the “epidemic of bank failures” (Roosevelt, “Fireside Chat 1”). The use of “checkups” portrays Roosevelt as a doctor of the economy in examining the soundness of the banks as they reopen. This measure further conceals his disabled body as FDR prescribes the treatment for the nation’s banks. However, he does not fully deceive the audience as he hides behind the institution of “the Government” to provide credit to the entire body; this rejects the President as the only doctor of the nation, limiting the deception. Calling the checkups
“common sense” establishes that he has expertise on how to heal the economy from this banking crisis that also allows Americans to view him as a strong leader and further deviates from his disabled body. With the emphasis on prescriptive rhetoric, Roosevelt ensures that the American people see him as a confident leader that has the physical prowess to remedy the banking crisis.

By creating such a reality with the invisibility of the radio, Roosevelt further certifies his *ethos* to obtain more executive power. FDR ensures that he ethically argues for the necessity to broaden his government responsibilities by explaining the Congress’s role. In his justification, Roosevelt states,

> The second step was the legislation promptly and patriotically passed by the Congress confirming my proclamation and broadening my powers so that it became possible in view of the requirement of time to extend (sic) the holiday and lift the ban of that holiday gradually. (Roosevelt, “Fireside Chat 1”)

Since he has proven a capable leader, Roosevelt turns to educate the American people on the legislation passed in Congress. Signaling with “second step,” it is clear that Roosevelt intends to remain transparent about the increased executive power; however, his honesty operates to defend the increased executive power. Here, he describes the legislation passed by Congress as “patriotic,” which displays his attempt to persuade the audience that the action is for the good of the nation. Because he explains that the actions taken were legislation, Roosevelt reveals that he still respects the power of the checks and balances system to assure that the broadening of the president’s powers is not unconstitutional. However, Roosevelt’s honest explanation only provides his biased voice on the subject; therefore, it is possible that FDR only displays a subjective view of the Congressional action to assure the American people that their government remains loyal to the Constitution. Honesty can conceal his intentions as much as radio conceals his body.
Because expanded executive power supports stronger leadership, Roosevelt’s *ethos* through his invisible voice on the radio allows him to further persuade his audience that he has not overstepped. To show that he is not a dictator, he emphasizes the bipartisanship of the legislation as Republicans and Democrats took action together. He stresses the importance of disclosure by saying:

> I want to tell our citizens in every part of the Nation that the national Congress—Republicans and Democrats alike—showed by this action a devotion to public welfare and a realization of the emergency and the necessity for speed that it is difficult to match in our history. (Roosevelt, “Fireside Chat 1”)

Here, Roosevelt’s clarity and openness about government proceedings demonstrates his intention to inform Americans of the actions he takes in order to end the bank crisis. He, again, emphasizes the *logos* of the speech by stating “I want to tell our citizens” directly of the Congressional action so they know his intention is to remain transparent. Thus, by appearing transparent and not abusing his power, Roosevelt can persuade them to accept the expansion of his power. If his body were revealed, the strength of his voice and *ethos* would potentially be harmed and not allow for such persuasion. Calling the legislation an act of “devotion to public welfare,” FDR also evokes *pathos* to illuminate that the expansion of power is an act of commitment to the nation; he does not rely solely on honesty here to persuade his audience. The justification of the legislation in itself a method of persuasion to fabricate transparency for the American people to accept his increased power.

Once Roosevelt discloses the need for broadened executive powers, his commanding voice overpowers his disabled body through the invisibility of the radio allowing him to persuade the public to halt their hoarding practices. In the address, Roosevelt emphasizes the issue of hoarding as many Americans began to take their money out of banks and keep their earnings in their homes. To discourage such practices, the president states, “Let me make it clear that the
banks will take care of all needs” and that he believes that hoarding has “become unfashionable pastime” (Roosevelt, “Fireside Chat 1”). Here, Roosevelt expresses his disapproval of these practices cordially in saying it is “unfashionable;” this disapproval still relays his message without chastising the American people. Because he has reinforced his ethos with his voice and his emphasis on logos, saying “Let me make it clear” exhibits his assertiveness that the banks will aid people when they reopen. FDR has made the American people believe they can trust his word and this statement shows that he recognizes his reliability. Through his rhetoric, President Roosevelt illuminates that the radio allows him to govern the people directly to the people; by “mak[ing] it clear” to the American people that the banks will function, he asserts his power to end the hoarding while he has the platform to persuade against the practice. Therefore, FDR’s voice serves as his main vehicle to create action and mobilize the American people.

FDR’s pathos shows an awareness of the democratic limitations on executive power as he uses pathos to soften the command to discontinue hoarding to a request. He further discourages hoarding and places more trust in the banks as he states, “I can assure you that it is safer to keep your money in a reopened bank than under the mattress” (Roosevelt, “Fireside Chat 1”). By acknowledging that his audience has been keeping their money “under the mattress,” Roosevelt implies his understanding of the situation while encouraging the American people to engage in safer banking practices. The President’s rhetoric works to persuade his audience to choose safety over fear, but he does not make them feel ashamed of hoarding. Jonathan Alter states, “By surfacing an issue that made so many feel shameful, he lifted the shame—and offered his listeners a way out…by simply depositing money into a solvent bank” (269). Therefore, he explains to the American people there is no need to feel shame and that there is a simple solution to not mitigate that shame. For Roosevelt, it is possible that his pathos comes from the shame
that he feels in concealing his body; he must reconstruct that reality by helping the American people choose the safety of their money. As a result, many Americans deposited their money immediately (Alter 271). By limiting the hoarders’ shame, FDR invisibly invokes his own struggles with paralysis to step back from the position of power that overshadows his personal reality and identifies with American’s humility.

Although Roosevelt spends most of the address justifying his actions and explaining the situation, he uses his reinforced ethos to charge the American people to be active in the rehabilitation of the economy by providing an honest perception of the situation. To end the address, Roosevelt states, “It is your problem no less than it is mine. Together we cannot fail” (Roosevelt, “Fireside Chat 1”). Roosevelt is transparent in placing the problem on the shoulders of the American people as well as himself. His statement is honest and straightforward, but also creates a tension with the rest of his speech. Throughout the Fireside Chat, Roosevelt illuminates his voice to garner more executive power to repair the economy; however, he asks for the American people to take action now that they have more knowledge of the reality. Here, he considers his honest diagnosis of the situation. Much like a doctor can only prescribe a patient to follow the treatment, the nation will not recover without Americans doing what Roosevelt suggests. This medical metaphor also permeates his focus on unity in “Together” as it takes both parties to remedy the situation. Ultimately, Roosevelt’s purpose is to unite the people to have patience with the reopening of banks as the government takes action. Through the radio, FDR uses his profound voice to remind the American people that while he has been given the executive power he desired, they must aid him in the nation’s recovery, which again, suggests his humility to cover the deception of his body.
In President Roosevelt’s first Fireside Chat on the banking crisis, he seeks to educate the American people enough on the situation in order to display the necessity for his expanded executive power. Despite the honest portrayal of the national emergency, Roosevelt conceals his body behind the invisibility of the radio to ensure that he appears powerful and strong as a leader. Through medical rhetoric, diagnosing the banking crisis as an epidemic, and calling for “checkups,” FDR creates an alternate reality in which he does not have polio and that the nation is the one that is ill; in this reality, he is the doctor who remedies the illness. While he does not have a strong physical body, the concealment allows him to portray himself as mentally fit to lead. What is unfortunate is that this is actually true, but if the American people knew of his condition, his political career would be less successful. However, because FDR must deceive his audience about his body, it is uncertain whether his honesty provides the whole truth of the reasoning for him needing more executive power. Therefore, this later knowledge of his disability makes the radio more deceptive and causes us to question his transparency.

The Nation’s Doctor in Fireside Chat on Progress During the First Two Months

As the title suggests, President Roosevelt’s second Fireside Chat highlights the progress that the government has made to remedy the banking crisis that he spoke about in his first Fireside Chat. On May 7, 1933, FDR delivered this second Fireside Chat in which he illuminates where the country was after his inauguration, where the progress has brought the nation, and what the government will continue to do to recover from the Great Depression. While Roosevelt still focuses on the need for government action to mitigate the crisis’s effects, he also distances the nation and himself from the reason for the situation: the banking crisis. By distancing the country from the Great Depression, he intends to separate himself through his invisibility on the radio from his disabled body. In the second Fireside Chat, the President falters on commanding
the necessity for executive action as he distances the nation from its plight and focuses on a hopeful future. Although Roosevelt still garners government action, he reinforces his ethos to be more democratic as he has established his ability to gain the power to lead the recovery as the nation’s doctor.

President Roosevelt speaks, again, on a Sunday reflecting that he serves a father figure addressing his family; he builds his ethos by showing solidarity with the American people. Once again, he chooses to speak to worried Americans on their day of rest and ask them to consider the financial affairs on a Sunday. To begin this Fireside Chat, FDR reflects, “On a Sunday night a week after my Inauguration I used the radio to tell you about the banking crisis and the measures we were taking to meet it” (Roosevelt, “Fireside Chat 2”). Here, Roosevelt specifically notes that he previously spoke to Americans on the radio to educate them about the banking crisis. This choice of the day displays that Roosevelt makes it a tradition to impart his wisdom to his citizens as a father sometimes does for his family. FDR serves the nation as a doctor to remedy, but displays a greater commitment by devoting himself to them on Sundays. Again, while unemployment still remained an issue, Sunday traditionally meant that people would be at home. In maintaining this tradition of speaking on a Sunday, Roosevelt maximizes his influence and ability to reach the American people with such unwavering loyalty to his role as president.

As Roosevelt reflects on his previous Fireside Chat, he builds upon his own ethos, admitting that he values transparency and informing the American people honestly, which deflects from the deception that the radio creates surrounding his body. Before discussing the subject of this Fireside Chat, Roosevelt pauses to reiterate his focus on the truth and facts of the matter in his previous address. Giving himself credit, he states, “I think that in that way I made clear to the country various facts that might otherwise have been misunderstood and in general
provided a means of understanding which did much to restore confidence” (Roosevelt, “Fireside Chat 2”). Here, Roosevelt uses *ethos* to show how he is credible to speak on the subject of the banking crisis. Using “I think” and “I”-centered statements displays that he expresses his own opinion about his *ethos*; this demonstrates that he separates truth from opinion, but he also attempts to persuade the American people that he has successfully informed them. Reflecting and establishing that he provides the necessary information to “restore confidence” exhibits his own confidence in his actions to restore the nation’s economy. In addition, he defends the content of his first Fireside Chat stating that he believes he effectively provided “a means of understanding” to the situation. With the explanation of his actions, Roosevelt demonstrates his intent to clearly inform his listeners so that they are aware of the actions taken in Washington. The radio allows him to hide his personal reality and relay a transparent message about the government as an institution only.

FDR continues to consider the beginning of the banking crisis as he candidly diagnoses the state of the nation in March, which further creates the reality of him being the nation’s doctor rather than a man with a disability. As he reflects on the situation, Roosevelt states, “Two months ago we were facing serious problems. The country was dying by inches” (Roosevelt, “Fireside Chat 2”). Here, Roosevelt expresses the severity of the economic maladies that plagued the nation; he draws a contrast to the improvements that have occurred since that Fireside Chat. His first statement is straightforward and blunt as he does not use elaborate language to describe the condition of the nation. However, in the second statement, Roosevelt uses metaphor to display the severity of the banking crisis as he personifies the country leading to what seems like its death. This diagnosis also displays his honest perception of the country’s well being as bleak, which demonstrates that a remedy was necessary. Playing the role of doctor, President Roosevelt
conveys his strength over the diagnosis as he could aid in the nation’s recovery from such a hopeless illness; this parallels the nature of his own terminal illness as he can control the nation’s health, but not his own physical well-being.

While Roosevelt provides a bleak diagnosis of the country two months prior, his rhetoric separates the people from the state of the nation, mirroring his creation of distance between his body and his voice on the radio. In “Medical Metaphors and the Role of Physician in the Fireside Chats,” Suzanne Daughton states that saying “the country” instead of “we” “allow[s] FDR and his listeners to presume themselves active, able agents rather than recovering victims who needed to treat themselves gingerly” (56). This distancing and her use of “able” signifies that the subject change further conceals his own disability as he acts as a doctor diagnosing the previous ailments of the country. With the country being separated from the people and Roosevelt, he maintains his power over his body and the Depression recovery especially with the invisibility of the radio. By providing an account of the state of the nation two months later, Roosevelt distances the American people from the events without erasing them completely; this allows the audience to reflect on their hardships, but also separate from the situation that can no longer be changed. For FDR, this rhetoric allows him to assert the power of voice to empower the American people to continue to accept his executive decisions made for the good of the nation.

Despite creating the distance between the people and the nation’s malady, Roosevelt’s implementation of medical metaphor and performance as the nation’s doctor strategically employs pathos as he treats them for the trauma instead of being treated as a patient himself. In his address, he states, “We were faced by a condition and not a theory” (Roosevelt, “Fireside Chat 2”). By making this distinction, Roosevelt conveys the illness of the nation permeating the lives of Americans; a “condition” makes the banking crisis concrete and part of reality instead of
abstract. Unlike the country “dying by inches,” Roosevelt uses “we” to include the American people’s suffering, putting aside his strength as president. According to Suzanne Daughton, Roosevelt’s “embracing” of being “Dr. New Deal” shows “Roosevelt responded to the economic emergency of the Great Depression on multiple rhetorical levels, as if it were a life-and-death medical situation” (75). His repetition of medical language in calling the situation a “condition” demonstrates that he diagnosed the nation as president; this places him in a position of power having such knowledge and the means to remedy the condition. Daughton also argues that Roosevelt chose this metaphor “because that is how it was perceived by those who experienced it” (75). Daughton’s claim reveals that Roosevelt wants to appear sympathetic to the American populous as he does not minimize their experience. Thus, with Roosevelt’s ability to diagnose and cure the country’s condition, he displays his command over the nation as well as the radio with his ability to use his voice to gain the trust and attention of the American people.

FDR’s diagnosis of the condition requires expanding the power of government in order to remedy the situation, which displays that he continues to transparently persuade the American people. Similar to the first Fireside Chat, Rooseveltportrays a clear, logical reasoning for the actions that he intends to take including when he discusses the necessity for more executive power. Because of the system of checks and balances and the power of the different branches, Roosevelt must explain to the American people the constitutionality of Congress’s expansion of his power. To assure the American people that the action was appropriate, Roosevelt states,

The Congress, and when I say Congress I mean the members of both political parties, fully understood this and gave me generous and intelligent support. The members of Congress realized that the methods of normal times had to be replaced in the emergency by measures which were suited to the serious and pressing requirements of the moment. There was no actual surrender of power, Congress still retained its constitutional authority and no one has the slightest desire to change the balance of these powers. (Roosevelt, “Fireside Chat 2”)
Here, he reiterates the expansion of his powers like he does in the first Fireside Chat to show that he is not abusing his presidential power; he provides a clear explanation of the Congressional action to show that they were not coerced. Roosevelt implements the rhetorical figure, distinctio, which explains the previous statement with an introductory phrase (“Distinctio”). This occurs when he says, “and when I say Congress I mean the members of both political parties,” to clarify that the decision had bipartisan support. This clarification also signifies to the American people that he wants to support bipartisan solutions in this crisis. Roosevelt uses *logos* in these statements as he explains the role of Congress in granting such power. Furthermore, the use of “emergency” demonstrates that he understands the Congress would not act in this way had these been “normal times;” this contrast between normal and emergency indicates the necessity for more government action to the American people. As the nation’s doctor, he must continue to enact recovery efforts. Roosevelt ends this appeal with “no one has the slightest desire to change the balance of these powers.” Here, he does not refer specifically to himself to not to implicate himself in having such desire. However, he also distances himself from the excess power that he has been bestowed. Through such transparency, Roosevelt, again, reminds the American people that they can trust him despite his concealment behind the radio as his voice signals sincerity that he will uphold democracy.

Since FDR has reinforced his *ethos* and his ability to gain more executive power, the President begins to persuade his audience that he will uphold democracy instead of usurp power. Later in the address, Roosevelt defends the necessity for government power as he previously does in order to provide continued assurance that his Administration is not abusing his position. In the speech, he states, “It is wholly wrong to call the measure that we have taken Government control of farming, control of industry, and control of transportation” (Roosevelt, “Fireside Chat
Miccolis 39

2”). Here, his repetition of “control” displays an attempt to dismantle this concern of Government takeover; by placing emphasis on the word, Roosevelt shows that he intends to minimize the fear of such “control.” With this repetition, FDR does not use an authoritarian tone, but rather one of a concerned leader with his calm and even voice. Behind the invisibility of radio, it is possible to believe that the disabled man wants to show his prowess in being able to control the industries to prosperity. However, Roosevelt ensures that the American people recognize that the Constitutional powers are not being violated.

To show that he is not controlling the entire country, Roosevelt recenters the reality by emphasizing the government and industry partnerships to ensure the trust of the American people. Roosevelt continues by saying, “It is rather a partnership between Government and farming and industry and transportation, not partnership in profits, for the profits would still go to the private citizens, but rather a partnership in planning and partnership to see that the plans are carried out” (Roosevelt, “Fireside Chat 2”). Here, Roosevelt repeats “partnership” to clarify what he means by the term and restates that it would be a partnership between the government and these private sectors. Furthermore, stating, “not partnership in profits, for the profits would still go to the private citizens,” he promises that the Government is not trying to take what belongs to the American people; this reminds the people that Roosevelt and his administration serve, not control, especially since he places emphasis on “still” in his delivery to show a continuation of such a tradition. He reiterates the service to the people by following with, “but rather a partnership in planning and partnership to see that the plans are carried out.” Using planning, Roosevelt shows the American people that there are efforts to redirect the country so that it can operate as it once did. Through his continued assurance, Roosevelt’s tone on the radio allows the American people to not object to the extended control by the government.
However, Roosevelt, again, permits his commanding voice to overpower his invisible body as he still defends the use of government power with clear explanations to educate the public. After using an example to show how these partnerships will work, Roosevelt states, “And that is where government comes in. Government ought to have the right and will have the right, after surveying and planning for an industry to prevent, with the assistance of the overwhelming majority of that industry, unfair practice and to enforce this agreement by the authority of government” (Roosevelt, “Fireside Chat 2”). First, he makes a clear claim that the government has a role in the proceedings with partnerships; he emphasizes its importance through providing an example and then makes this strong assertion at the end. Therefore, this final statement resonates with American people as the government’s necessary action is the important takeaway. His subsequent language in saying that the government “ought to and will have the right” demonstrates that his administration should be responsible for such measures, but also that it has the right to intervene. Furthermore, he argues with conviction that the government will have the right; this is somewhat dictatorial jargon because of the affirmation that the government will have such authority. By vocalizing this, Roosevelt reveals his command of his office and his confidence to have such authority, which again, highlights his voice over his body that the American people will never know.

As he explains the necessity for government action, FDR revisits his performance as the nation’s doctors to provide an honest prescription of why there is still a need to have such action; the Great Depression is not over. Roosevelt prioritizes not giving the American people false hope about this progress. Like he reminds his audience in his first Fireside Chat, Roosevelt emphasizes the slow recovery of the nation. In this address, Roosevelt says, “We cannot bally-ho ourselves back to prosperity” (Roosevelt, “Fireside Chat 2”). Since “bally-ho” is no longer used
in common English speaking, the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines it as “a showman’s touting speech, or a performance advertising a show” (“Ballyhoo”). Here, Roosevelt likely uses a common colloquial phrase that his audience would understand. Using this specific word, however, he suggests that prosperity cannot be achieved through showy speech or performance. He calls for the government to not fall victim to such practices and give false hope. Aside from implicating the government, FDR signals that he intends to follow procedure as a doctor would carry out a treatment. It is not enough to prescribe a treatment, but Roosevelt must ensure that the treatment is enacted. Focusing on the importance of action over rhetoric, Roosevelt actively fights against his own inability to walk unaccompanied as he acts through his words.

Roosevelt uses the radio to balance his *ethos* with his audience’s perception of him to ensure that he does not portray himself as infallible; this also checks his built up power to compensate for his body. As FDR garners more executive power, he appears authoritative and could be seen as the embodiment of truth. However, as he discusses his policies, Roosevelt acknowledges that he will likely make mistakes. To highlight this principle, Roosevelt states, “I do not deny that we may make mistakes of procedure as we carry out the policy. I have no expectation of making a hit every time I come to bat” (Roosevelt, “Fireside Chat 2”). Here, Roosevelt relies on his commitment to honesty to display his humanity as a leader. In his first statement, he recognizes his ability to make mistakes in a less direct form of language by saying, “I do not deny” instead of “I will” or “I know I will.” Furthermore, Roosevelt uses “may” before saying “make mistakes;” this demonstrates that while he may be honest, he also wants to maintain the trust of the American people that he is capable of leading them and carrying out the policies. This indirect admission of humanity likely compensates for the body he conceals behind the radio. Along with this condition, Roosevelt uses “we” to implicate his administration rather
than just himself in potentially faltering. However, in the next statement, he utilizes “I” as he uses a baseball metaphor to describe the situation that he faces as president. This metaphor operates to make him active again through the invisibility of the radio while also displaying his imperfection. By stating “I have no expectation,” Roosevelt further proves to the American people that he knows his own limitations. Therefore, FDR’s transparent and direct acknowledgement reminds the American people that he is a democratic leader who needs the leniency to make the mistakes that will inevitably happen.

While President Roosevelt corrects the potential perception of him as infallible, he also idealizes the reality of the Great Depression as he reconstructs his own situation to include all nations, not just the United States. With the United States being a prominent nation before this crisis, Roosevelt needs to remind Americans of the nation that they were before the Depression. However, he also offers comfort in saying, “All of the Nations have suffered alike in this great depression” (Roosevelt, “Fireside Chat 2”). Placing emphasis in his delivery on “all,” Roosevelt also signals to the American people that they are not the only population suffering; this demonstrates that the Depression is a universal condition, which again brings FDR back to his position as an economic doctor. In appealing to their patriotism, Roosevelt displays his commitment to returning the United States to this prosperous nation on the world stage as he fosters self-respect in the unemployed and the nation as a whole. By vocalizing his commitment to recovery on the radio, Roosevelt conveys the sentiment with clarity and ensures understanding that he wants the nation to return to such prosperity. Because of this appeal to prosperity, Roosevelt exhibits that his broadened executive power will aid to get to that reality. In the meantime, the President must assure the American people that they are not alone as he connects with them on the radio.
Throughout his second Fireside Chat on the progress of during the first two months, FDR performs as the nation’s doctor because his ethos has established that the nation can trust him to tell the truth and actively lead. Even when he does use explicit medical language, he continues to prescribe treatments to the nation as the Depression still affected Americans. Again, Roosevelt uses the invisibility of the radio to his advantage as the voice and rhetoric of “Dr. New Deal” overpowers his hidden body that he conceals from the American people. As he treats the nation’s malady with his words, FDR maintains the focus on the country instead of himself, which allows for this deception to persist. Since Roosevelt lays the foundation for his ethos in the first Fireside Chat and through his actions during both of these chats, he spends more time qualifying the executive action to remind the American people that he abides by the democratic principles; he is not a dictator. Roosevelt also corrects the possible perception of infallibility by acknowledging that the government will likely make mistakes. Therefore, Roosevelt confesses to his limitations as a government official without having to reveal his disability. This admission further makes the deception through the invisibility of the radio less problematic because he does not portray himself as all-powerful but merely as a president who wants the trust of the American people to lead a recovery from the Great Depression.

Conclusion

After 60 million people listened to his first Fireside Chat, they immediately redeposited their money after the President told them to end hoarding and “three quarters of the recently closed banks reopened” (Alter 271). These immediate actions as well as the number of people tuning in to Roosevelt’s address signify that the first Fireside Chat accomplished what the President intended. As Halford Ryan notes, however, it is because of his “brilliant but straightforward” rhetorical strategy in issuing an announcement on March 11 that he would
speak to the country on March 12, which allows him to “secure a national audience” (31).

Roosevelt methodically demonstrates his concern for the nation as he ensured that he would have the national audience to speak about the anxieties that faced Americans at the time of his Inauguration. Thus, by emphasizing the importance of such a message, Roosevelt is able to reassure Americans and also accomplish his agenda of reopening the banks.

While these successes are specific to the first Fireside Chat, his delivery was well-received by his listeners. Ryan notes that ordinary Americans appreciated “FDR’s polished delivery of his addresses and Fireside Chats” (23). Ryan’s claim displays that the common man felt comforted by Roosevelt’s voice; instead of sounding pompous or above the nation, the President makes his Fireside Chat accessible while also maintaining his ethos and establishing his knowledge about the affairs of the bank crisis. Ryan also includes feedback on the First Fireside Chat from a man saying, “The calm confident voice everyone heard or should have heard seemed to be another step toward prosperity” (23). Thus, Roosevelt succeeds in his honest yet calming voice having an effect of peace on the American people suffering from the consequences of the Depression. It is also important that he reaches average Americans who may not be interested in politics as he speaks to their immediate concerns to provide hope for the future.

Alongside persuading the American people, Roosevelt also reached Congress as the body passed his policies and expanded his executive power. Ryan argues that Roosevelt’s Fireside Chats reflected the “rhetorical presidency” because he “used them to maintain and to enhance his presidential power by persuading the people to move the Congress” (30). As Tulis argues in The Rhetorical Presidency, modern presidents have appealed to the American people in order to persuade Congress to act. Here, Roosevelt appears to persuade both at the same time when he
explains to his listeners that the Congress supports his actions, which persuades Americans to support his policies as well. This demonstrates the key role of the American audience in allowing Roosevelt to continue to promote his New Deal policies with increased executive power. These appeals to the American people to motivate Congressional action is something I will further explore in Ronald Reagan’s use of television speeches to promote tax reform.

Despite Roosevelt’s apparent success using the radio, there is criticism that radio is not as democratic as it appears. Martin Spinelli questions the accessibility of radio for Roosevelt’s audiences as he notes that people who could afford a radio, which was around $80, would have to be car owners and “those that owned a country (presumably second) home” (271). Spinelli’s characterization of radio owners suggests that radio was not accessible to everyone, especially those who likely needed to hear Roosevelt’s address the most. He pushes against the equality of radio and its rhetoric, which minimizes Roosevelt’s success. However, with the 60 million listeners of the first Fireside Chat, the President’s message extended to about half of the country, which shows that it was successful. It is important to acknowledge that the radio would not reach all Americans. While his message should have been heard by all, there are inherent disadvantages that still persisted with the emergence of the new technology.

While there are limitations to the radio reaching all Americans, Roosevelt effectively uses the medium to persuade Americans of the need for his increased executive power to mitigate the effects of the banking crisis. McLuhan notes that the radio’s invisibility allows Americans to focus on the orator’s voice and not on his physical appearance. In his necessary deception of the American people about his disability, Roosevelt is most honest about the state of the nation, his executive actions using the radio because he is concealed behind the voice; there is no added illusions in making him stand as he would in person. Thus, the radio elevates Roosevelt and his
policies because it only illuminates the power of his voice. However, Roosevelt does not abuse such power with his honest and clear statements for the average American. Although Roosevelt could have become a dictator like his political contemporaries through mass media, he upholds democracy in his rhetoric to demonstrate his desire to serve the American people.

Because of Roosevelt’s careful balance between reinforcing his ethos and ensuring that he respects the constitutional limits of executive power, the President’s deception remains ethical. Although he uses the radio to conceal his body, it does not change the actions that he took to remedy the Great Depression and therefore, should not have affected his ethos. His honesty, even if it is for persuasion, proves that he is credible to lead the recovery from the banking crisis. While he wanted a chance at a political career, the deception also emphasizes that a disabled man could successfully treat the maladies that ravaged the nation; he likely used the radio’s invisibility so that Americans would trust him as he was capable of taking the necessary actions. In addition, Roosevelt appears to remain truthful in all aspects of his rhetoric because he commits to “be honest at all times with the people of the country” (Roosevelt, “Fireside Chat 2”). He reinforces his credibility and his ethical agenda by working to serve the people. However, Roosevelt’s deception illuminates that it was only unfair to him that he had to create such an illusion of being abled body in order to solidify his ethos; therefore, FDR deceives necessarily in order to ensure that he could appear as strong as he was in his voice and rhetoric on the radio.
CHAPTER TWO

I am One of You: Reagan’s Televised Performance as an Average Citizen to Enact Tax Reform Policy

Many scholars agree that Ronald Reagan’s rhetorical genius on television was the key to his success as president. In their book, *Ronald Reagan: The Great Communicator*, Kurt Ritter, and David Henry claim that “Reagan’s success as a political speaker was intimately tied to television” (108). This success reveals that Reagan’s television presence helped him to effectively communicate his economic campaign to the people. According to Robert Denton, in *The Primetime Presidency of Ronald Reagan: The Era of the Television Presidency*, “Ronald Reagan was the first true television president...Reagan made television the instrument of governing. His presidency provides the blueprint for public esteem and popularity” (xxi). Following an increase in televised addresses, it is possible that the television presidency began with Reagan. Television became the primary method for the president to govern the people directly and Reagan could use *pathos* to speak to the American people. Thus, television allowed President Reagan to focus on this *pathos* to ensure the public believed his version of American life to promote the necessity for his tax policy.

In his rhetoric, President Reagan adapts reality to the optimistic events that Marshall McLuhan argues present best on television. McLuhan describes television as the “timid giant” because “it is unsuited to hot issues and sharply defined topics” (414). These hot issues include anything controversial that would cause the audience to become uneasy. The highly participatory nature of television makes the audience more sensitive to the topics presented. Therefore, networks would rather present conflict remotely and distanced from reality as to not alarm the
audience (McLuhan 415). The producer of the television program must be aware of what to portray on television in order to please the audience. This suitability also relates to the acceptable and unacceptable personalities on television that McLuhan identifies. In his continued discussion of sharpness, he states that “…anybody whose appearance strongly declares his role and status in life is wrong for TV” is an unacceptable personality for television (McLuhan 438). It is more acceptable to be unclassifiable, or someone who could be any variety of personalities. Because television is highly participatory, he argues that the audience needs to make some decisions about who this person is; however, with only certain personalities and qualities being acceptable on television, the people do not get the true reality of the situation.

McLuhan’s claim applies to President Reagan because while he held the highest office in the nation, he still maintained an ordinariness that allowed the audience to see themselves in him. This demonstrates that Reagan was most concerned with persuading his audience to accept his reality of the situation. According to John Sloan in *The Reagan Effect: Economics and Presidential Leadership*, “As an optimist, Reagan was prone to think that there was a solution—usually a simple one—to any problem” (81). This outlook would comfort the American people whether or not it was the right solution or rooted in the reality of the situation; having an optimistic outlook displays that Reagan uses Cloud’s idea of common sense knowledge rather than focusing on hard facts. Because of his use of *pathos*, Reagan could make the American people identify with him despite him being in the highest office of the presidency. Ritter and Henry note that on television, “He appeared to be no more than a fellow citizen earnestly speaking his mind” (100). Along with the optimism to depict a hopeful America, this emphasizes his appeals to the American people as he wants to make them feel comfortable. In
showing his ordinariness, President Reagan deceives the public to think he is one of them despite being in the highest position of power.

Reagan’s act of relatability to his audience displays the power of his rhetoric because the intimacy allowed the American people to feel comfortable believing the President’s diagnosis and remedies for the country. With his laid-back and cool style, Reagan was well-suited for television as he made himself relatable to his audience. Denton states that “Reagan was able to literally step through the television and join Americans in their living rooms in discussing the state of the nation” (64). This demonstrates the personalized nature of television that Reagan comprehended in his years as president similar to Roosevelt on the radio. Furthermore, this suggests that Reagan’s television personality was relatable and made the public feel comfortable and as if they could speak to the president directly. This relatability is similar to what Roosevelt did on the radio as he spoke directly to the American populace calmly to assure them they would eventually escape the Great Depression. From Denton’s characterization of Reagan’s personalized approach to television, the American public almost had a relationship with the President. By producing a feeling of closeness to Reagan, the President facilitates his ability to persuade the audience to support his policies.

Given the intimacy of television, the problem of audience passivity makes television complicit in the American people getting lost in Reagan’s rhetoric in feeling a false sense of security that television allows them to converse with their leader. While McLuhan argues that television requires high participation, Jerry Mander claims that television is more passive, making it detrimental to the mind. In Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television, Mander refers to McLuhan and critiques his choice of words to describe television. Whereas McLuhan uses “participatory” to describe television, Mander suggests that it is actually the complete
opposite and is instead “overpowering” (194). Mander asserts that television does not provide any ability to think, unlike what McLuhan claims. Although many of us raised with television were told not to watch too much TV, Mander takes an extreme approach to this principle as he focuses on the deadening aspect of partaking in this activity. Mander does not argue that television is hypnotic, but he notes that hypnosis exists in the medium as “a one-way channel—the set speaking into the mind of the viewer” (200). This characterization takes Reagan’s televised addresses and alters the effect in a rather disturbing way. However, there is some validity to Mander’s claim because there is no way for the audience to engage with the President as he engages with them. Thus, this one-way engagement manipulates the American public’s minds as it allows them to believe Reagan’s rhetoric as truth instead of persuasion.

Because of President Reagan’s acting experience, the American people could never be certain what was genuine truth from his rhetoric because an actor often oscillates between reality and illusion. Undoubtedly, Reagan’s Hollywood experience benefited him in his television persona as president and prepared for his public presidency. While Reagan began his career as a Hollywood actor, Denton argues that “Reagan is a much better actor as president on television than he ever was in Hollywood” and that failure in Hollywood often succeeds in politics (71). Denton’s observation reveals that Reagan had difficulty finding his proper place in the public eye, potentially because his personality may have been too personal for the silver screen. Furthermore, Denton states that Reagan’s acting philosophy was “an actor sees himself as others see him, from the outside rather than the inside out” (73). According to Denton, this philosophy made him well-suited to television because he first thought about the audience and their emotions before showing his true self (73). Thus, President Reagan’s approach to television through his professional experience allowed him to perform his role as a rhetorical president.
Reagan’s acting roots also led to his administration focusing more on entertainment than the hard facts of governing, which further demonstrates that television compounded the issue of truth’s subjectivity during the Reagan years. It is documented that President Reagan was concerned with cultivating his television as president. Ritter and Henry quote Reagan’s longtime public relations aid, Michael Deaver on creating content for television during Reagan’s presidency. Deaver states, “We tried to create the most entertaining, visually attractive scene to fill that box…We became Hollywood producers” (Ritter & Henry 103). This exhibits that Reagan capitalized on his Hollywood experience as he and his team knew what would present well on TV. In addition, focusing so intently on entertainment allowed him to gain the attention of the American public in order to persuade that he had the best perception of life in the United States. Being preoccupied with ratings and entertainment, Reagan and his communications teams display a lack of concern about delivering the truth of his policy; rather, he prioritized it is depicting the economy as prosperous and Reagan as a man of the people in order to be most effective in persuading Americans on the necessity of tax reform.

In this chapter, I argue that President Reagan effectively persuades the American people to accept his tax reform policy using pathos as he appeals to them by separating himself from the government. Television suits his rhetorical skill because it showcases his warm personality that makes his words seem less important; therefore, Reagan’s television rhetoric compels the public to believe him instead of investigating whether or not his claims are fully grounded in the truth. However, Reagan does not present the true reality of the situation because there is a definitive difference between the president and the people: he is not one of them. On television, Reagan creates his own reality that is not entirely true by appealing to the American public with his feigned ordinariness. While Reagan artfully uses pathos to become an average American, this
technique poses the issue that his rhetoric is considered fully factual despite him not being an infallible source. Thus, the trust in the rhetoric, especially with the passivity of a television audience, makes the American people more vulnerable to Reagan’s subjective reality in discussing the economy.

**Reaganomics and a Subjective Account of the Economy**

Before delving into President Reagan’s “Addresses to the Nation” discussing tax reform, it is important to understand that we can only comprehend “Reaganomics” from the subjective facts surrounding the policy. In a 1984 campaign advertisement, “Reaganomics,” a male narrator tells the audience about the differences between “the two ways to deal with the nation’s economy” (Reagan-Bush ‘84 00:03-00:05). The narrator’s distinction reveals that this is an informative advertisement, using information rather than elaborate images to persuade citizens to vote for Reagan; however, informative does not necessarily mean factual. On the screen appears a black background with “REAGANOMICS” and “MONDALENOMICS” at the top divided by a thin blue line (Reagan-Bush ‘84 00:05). Attaching “economics” to the candidates’ names implies that the policies connect to their identities and values as politicians. In addition, this effectively aids the Reagan campaign in appealing to the American people because the simple visuals lacking in distraction restricts their attention to a specific set of information: the economy. Those Americans watching this campaign advertisement are limited to the chosen policy and the information provided by Reagan’s team.

The advertisement simplifies the information to reduce the Mondale policy to just raising taxes elevating Reagan’s plan to a more suitable option. As seen in the figure below, the outcome of the campaign advertisement juxtaposes Reagan’s diverse economic strategies with a repetition of Mondale only raising taxes. Visually, this demonstrates that the Mondale policy lacks the
same depth as Reaganomics. By depicting “RAISE TAXES” four times under “MONDALENOMICS,” the Reagan campaign suggests that there is no need to investigate the specifics of Mondale economic plan because it includes a tax raise (Reagan-Bush ‘84 00:25). Here, Reagan’s campaign limits the knowledge the American people receive on television about the tax plans. Whether this is true of Mondale’s policy, the reduced explanation weakens Mondale-nomics in comparison to the diversity of Reaganomics. This strategically affects the audience because the lack of detailed information about Mondale-nomics manipulates them into thinking that all Mondale will do as president is raise taxes. As with Mondale’s policies, Reaganomics is still vague as to how the president plans to cut taxes and create growth. However, these promises are more positive in contrast to raising taxes; therefore, this presentation likely convinces American to vote for Reagan.

![Figure 1: This is the image in the “Reaganomics” campaign advertisement.](image)

Returning to the audience passivity produced by television, the narrator’s use of the second-person point of view deceivingly creates intimacy that makes the audience more vulnerable to believe in Reaganomics. After the narrator introduces the topic of the campaign advertisement, he states, “With Reaganomics, you cut taxes. With Mondale-nomics, you raise taxes” (Reagan-Bush ‘84 00:05-00:10). This presentation of Reagan’s material clearly conveys
that the advertisement wants the audience to support Reagan’s tax cuts. While it is a direct message, using “you” tactically deceives the American audience to believe they are actively participating. Upon hearing such an assumption about the Mondale economic policy, Americans likely would be intrigued by Reagan’s alternative plan. Since the narrator addresses the audience throughout the commercial, the tone is more informal and easier to follow. In addition, the narrator utilizing “you” places the viewer in a position to imagine enacting the different policies. By engaging with this tactic, the audience is under the illusion that they are making their own decision as to which policy they prefer; however, the decision has already been made by the selective truth that Reagan displays to persuade his audience.

“Reaganomics” illuminates President Reagan’s emphasis on persuasion when he informs the American public on television. While a campaign advertisement is inherently rhetorical, “Reaganomics” clearly identifies that Reagan does not intend to inform his audience objectively, but instead to portray his policies most favorably. This principle is understandable as a presidential candidate's goal is to win the election. However, Reagan continues to use these tactics to depict his economic policies only positively throughout his presidency as I will explore in the rest of this chapter. Unlike Roosevelt, Reagan does not make promises to be honest to his audience, but he promises that “Reaganomics” benefits all Americans; therefore, Reagan need not focus on honesty because he is confident that the tax reform has no flaws. Reagan’s belief in “Reaganomics” from this campaign advertisement emphasizes that his persuasion will permeate throughout his presidency until he is able to successfully pass tax cut legislation. Using television facilitates this process because the people cannot actively engage with the debate and must listen to his argument to decide if they are convinced. With his focus on creating intimacy
between him and his audience, Reagan effectively persuades Americans on television to support Reaganomics.

**Feigned Intimacy in Address to the Nation of Federal Tax Reduction Legislation**

In July of 1981, President Reagan was coming to the end of his initial campaign for economic recovery in America to promote his policy proposals. After months of campaigning, Reagan’s opponents in Congress stagnated the momentum by proposing alternative legislation to his tax reduction legislation (Ritter & Henry 71). However, the President remained determined to pass tax legislation and complete the first phase of this economic recovery. As a result, Ritter and Henry state, “Convinced that an informed American public would apply the pressure needed to ensure passage of the administration’s proposals, Reagan addressed the people from the White House on July 27” (72). This action demonstrates that Reagan utilized Tulis’s principle of the rhetorical presidency in going public to enlist the nation’s assistance to urge Congress to pass the legislation. Reagan addressing the nation displays that he uses his charisma and *pathos* to make the American people feel intimately tied to their President so they believe in the necessity of his tax legislation.

In “Address to the Nation on Federal Tax Reduction Legislation,” President Reagan implements effective *kairos* in swiftly responding to the Congressional opposition as well as choosing a sufficient day and time to deliver the address. According to a transcript, “The President spoke at 8:01 p.m. from the Oval Office at the White House” (Reagan, “Tax Reduction Legislation”). It is important to note that July 27 was a Monday that year; therefore, Reagan likely reaches many Americans who are at home watching television with their families after a day of work. This is also crucial because Reagan later notes in the speech that Congress will be debating on the floor that Wednesday about the two bills, just two days after this speech.
Although this timeliness is not unique to Reagan, it is a tactical effort to obtain a wider audience by broadcasting at 8 PM when most Americans relax in front of the television or watch the news. This demonstrates Reagan’s urgency to appeal to the American public in order to combat Congress’s opposition with only two days before the voting. By taking to the television, President Reagan places his trust in the American people to have an active role in the affairs of the nation.

Reagan’s direct addresses to the American people suggests that he sees them as a pivotal group in acting against previous government measures that he deems insufficient for his view of democracy. Early in this address, Reagan utilizes “you” and speaks directly to the American people about their efforts to help pass tax reform. In this section, Reagan states:

> Your voices have been heard—millions of you, Democrats, Republicans, and Independents, from every profession, trade and line of work, and from every part of this land. You sent a message that you wanted a new beginning. You wanted to change one little, two little word—two letter word, I should say. It doesn’t sound like much, but it sure can make a difference changing “by government,” “control by government” to “control of government.” (Reagan, “Tax Reduction Legislation”)

First, the President appeals to the people by stating that their “voices have been heard,” which signals that Reagan’s administration has paid attention to the needs of the American public. Whether or not the President has actually been attentive, the appeal makes the American people feel connected to him on television. In addition, he says, “millions of you” and alludes to the diversity of political parties and professions that have been heard by the President. Here, Reagan encourages his audience to see him as “America’s president,” not just for those who support his policies. However, while it is true that he is every American’s president, this is persuasive rhetoric because he wants all Americans to accept his economic policy. By including all Americans with himself, Reagan continues to present a deceiving intimacy between the audience and the President on television that allows the people to believe his words without challenge;
with such charisma on television and making the audience feel heard, Reagan makes his words less important to the American people as his appeal evokes emotion rather than a necessity to impart knowledge.

Using “you” and sentiments that empower Americans to enact change, Reagan conceals his agenda to persuade by informing the audience that he knows that they want a government that does not interfere with their affairs. In these direct addresses, he conveys that the American people wanted a “new beginning,” meaning that they were displeased with the state affairs before Reagan’s presidency. Although wanting “a new beginning” is unproblematic, President Reagan uses the intimacy of television in order to explain their disappointment with the state of affairs before he was president; he suggests that they needed his policies in order to obtain the results they wanted. Since Mander notes that television is “a one-way channel,” the audience cannot engage with him or correct his assumptions (200). Whether a new beginning is the wish of the American people, the President places his agenda on the shoulders of the country’s citizens in utilizing “you” to supplement his argument that the government works against the interests of the people. Reagan presents this argument as a reality that is not necessarily true; however, this perception of reality attempts to show the necessity for his economic policies and his hands-off governing philosophy. This further demonstrates Reagan’s subjective opinion about the role of the government that portrays him as an ordinary citizen. Because he provides comfort by appearing on their side, Reagan convincingly identifies his agenda as the American public’s own desires.

In the above excerpt, President Reagan exhibits pathos by announcing to the American people that he shares the sentiment with the audience that they should have control of the government; thus, he focuses on persuasion more than truth to promote his tax policy. This
appeal highlights his persuasion because it is not rooted in reality as he is part of the government that he suggests they want to control. With his description of the little change from “control by government” to “control of government,” Reagan displays that the American people want to regain control of their lives and avoid the implications of big government. Reagan’s understanding of the small, but significant change of these “two-letter” words reveals he wants to appear to empower the American people to regain power over their government; he believes it is the government’s responsibility to serve the people, not control them. This is an interesting appeal for Reagan because he continues to show that he is not on the side of “big government” at the expense of his own position. As President, Reagan presides over all government affairs while also criticizing the institution for controlling its people. Thus, Reagan creates an ideal reality that he deems the people want with “control of government” within the true reality in which they are “controlled by government.” However, it is uncertain which is the correct reality because he clearly has a complicated relationship with the institution as its leader but also its foe. This tension between these two realities deceives the American people to believe that Reagan is only for the ideal situation in which they control the government.

Despite his control of the agenda, Reagan’s use of *logos* to present the facts of the tax policy creates a tension with his persuasive rhetoric and manipulates the audience to think that they are simply being informed at this moment. To further include the American people in the process of enacting federal tax reduction legislation, Reagan provides a thorough explanation of the two bills like Roosevelt when he explains the government actions to mitigate the effects of the banking crisis. While the data of the two bills is skewed to favor Reagan’s policy, his explanation creates the illusion that the citizens have an active role in the policymaking process. However, as Mander argues, “the more that public issues are confined to television, the less
knowledgeable the public seems to be about them” (207). Taking Mander’s argument into account, Reagan’s education on the bills discourages the audience from individually investigating the differences between the legislation. Although we cannot know for certain, Reagan could be aware of the fact that people do not retain as much from TV and capitalizes on this principle to promote his legislative agenda. Because Reagan puts an emphasis on *logos* in the address, his extensive explanation of the bills makes the people believe that he wants them to have a genuine understanding to make an informed decision on whether or not to support his legislation; again, he appears on the side of the American people.

Reagan’s active explanation using visual charts further reveals the tension between his *logos* and persuasion; however, the charts further decrease the chances that Americans will examine more information about the bills. Reagan refers to and provides detailed explanations of two charts (in the figure below) to show the difference between the “Tax Increase vs. Tax Cut” in the first one and how the two bills will affect “Your Taxes” in the second. Both charts include the labels, “Their Bill” and “Our Bill,” which alienates the Committee bill while Reagan’s bill retains a more inclusive title; it indicates that the American people could be included to support the President’s legislation showing his confidence in its positive effects. In the first chart labeled, “Tax Increase vs. Tax Cut,” the chart clearly uses a bold, blue line to display where a 22-percent increase occurs that Reagan notes is “built into [the] present system” (Reagan, “Tax Reduction Legislation”). This distinction obtains the audience’s attention with such bold lines and thus, establishes the visual contrast between the two bills; the Committee bill, depicted by a red column, does not clear that threshold whereas the green column does. When discussing this chart, Reagan notes, “The red column—that is the 15-percent tax cut, and it still leaves you with an increase. The green column is our bipartisan bill which wipes out the tax increase and gives
you an ongoing cut” (Reagan, “Tax Reduction Legislation”). Here, he identifies the important aspects of the image for the audience to ensure that they understand that Reagan’s bill is the more favorable of the two. While the audience sees what he describes illustrated in the chart, Reagan reaffirms that they see these positive aspects by distinctly directing their attention to them.

Throughout the contrast that he creates, President Reagan emphasizes that the audience can see what he explains to them demonstrating that the facts tell the story without a need for persuasion. First, he notes that the Committee’s tax cut “is the dotted line” and “ours is the solid line” (Reagan, “Tax Reduction Legislation”). Like he does with the first chart, Reagan directs the audience’s attention to the illustrations that contrast the two bills in order to allow the *logos* to speak for Reagan’s argument. In addition, the President highlights how the audience can see these differences. Reagan states, “As you can see, in an earning bracket of $20,000, their tax cut is slightly more generous than ours for the first 2 years. Then, as you can see, their tax bill, the dotted line, starts going up and up and up” while his bill remains low (Reagan, “Tax Reduction Legislation”). Here, he repeats “as you can see” twice emphasizing the idea that the facts are presented clearly; therefore, Reagan limits the choice of the American people to his bill because he presents it as the superior option. For one moment, he uses “as you can see” to admit that the Committee bill provides a larger tax cut, which exhibits that he does intend to deceive the American people. By making his concession and referring to the facts that they can also see, Reagan establishes *ethos* in appearing to honestly inform the audience like Roosevelt. However, he quickly turns to using “as you can see” to display that the large tax cut does not last more than two years as it “starts going up and up and up” to signify the Committee bill will still raise taxes. By stating “as you can see” again, Reagan portrays himself as relying on *logos* to persuade his
audience to support his bill. These visual aids allow the American people to believe that their president intimately informs them on television as he teaches them the differences between the bills.

*Figure 2: These are the charts that Reagan uses to illustrate the difference between the two bills in “Address to the Nation on Federal Tax Reduction Legislation.”*

Although Reagan emphasizes *logos* using charts, he ultimately expresses that *logos* operates with *pathos* to persuade the audience to support his bill. Throughout his explanation, Reagan distinguishes the Committee bill from his own to display his legislation’s superiority. The President refers to his proposal as the “bipartisan bill,” which makes it appear to be more favorable with Republican and Democrat support. Furthermore, using these charts facilitates the viewer’s comprehension of the bills as well as diverts from the image of Reagan to maintain their attention. As Reagan explains what is on the charts, he makes it more emotion-driven stating, “The lines on these charts say a lot about who’s really fighting for whom. On the one hand, you see a genuine and lasting commitment to the future of working Americans; on the other, just another empty promise” (Reagan, “Tax Reduction Legislation”). While Reagan takes the time to explain the statistical differences between the bills, his true goal is to make the American people
feel compelled to support his policy because of the pathos with which he supplements the facts of the legislation; these emotional appeals request loyalty to the man who seems to be working for the audience. By relating the statistics to a sentiment about who fights more for Americans, Reagan demonstrates his ability to persuade with logos as well as pathos to assume the role of the people’s president.

As he argues that the bipartisan bill benefits the American people, the President’s pathos displays that he is actually deceiving them to think that he is not a government official. Reagan positions himself against the government but instead with the people as he asks, “Are you entitled to the fruits of your own labor or does government have some presumptive right to spend and spend and spend?” (Reagan, “Tax Reduction Legislation”). Here, President Reagan creates a tension between his position as president, which makes him a government official, and his rhetoric to convince Americans that he is like them, which is simply untrue. In the latter part of the question, Reagan suggests that he has this “presumptive right” to spend their money; therefore, this serves to exhibit the power that he could have though he does not want to use that power. While Reagan appeals to Americans’ desire to keep their money and pay fewer taxes, his pathos covers the truth that he is not one of them and that he has the power to “spend and spend and spend.” However, he chooses to fabricate this direct relationship in which he rejects the government’s right to spend “the fruits of [Americans’] labor” in order to show a commitment to the American people. Although it is a claim that is not based in reality, Reagan’s pathos effectively persuades the American people that his economic plan is sound because he understands their struggles.

In the final minutes of the address, President Reagan creates an illusion that bestows the responsibility of choosing a bill to the American public by directly speaking to his audience;
however, television’s one-way channel makes this a false sense of choice. As he asks Americans to write their Congress members to support the bipartisan bill, he also depicts an image of two roads:

In a few days the Congress will stand at the fork of two roads. One road is all too familiar to us. It leads ultimately to higher taxes. It merely brings us full circle back to the source of our economic problems, where the government decides that it knows better than you what should be done with your earnings and, in fact, how you should conduct your life. The other road promises to renew the American spirit. It’s a road of hope and opportunity. It places the direction of your life back in your hands where it belongs. (Reagan, “Tax Reduction Legislation”)

Here, the President establishes a dichotomy that limits the public’s choice to what Congress will debate. Although the decision belongs to Congress, Reagan’s presentation of the two roads empowers the audience to feel that they can assist their members in the decision. By calling the first road “all too familiar” in bringing the economic problems “full circle,” he suggests that the American people have been disappointed by the government in the past, which conditions the audience to believe that he will lead them in the right direction. Again, it is not necessarily true that the public has been wronged by previous administrations; this is Reagan’s argument. Furthermore, he discourages Americans to support the Committee bill by adding “the government decides that it knows better than you” “in fact, how you should conduct your life.” Reagan implies that the government wants to decide the ways in which citizens spend their earnings, showing a control that he assumes no American wants. By making this claim, Reagan falsely induces the belief that government takes over the lives of its people to persuade his audience that he will provide such freedom.

Despite using rhetoric of freedom, Reagan essentially tells the audience he knows what is best for them, distorting this sense of responsibility because he presents the road of the bipartisan bill as the obvious choice. In contrast to the first road, Reagan depicts a more hopeful road that
leads to the bipartisan bill. By associating this road with “renew[ing] American spirit,” Reagan appeals to the American people’s patriotism as he looks forward to a better future that only he can provide with their assistance. He also corrects the “control by government” with this road “plac[ing] the direction of your life back in your hands where it belongs.” Nevertheless, this is not an undisputed reality as Reagan’s words are merely rhetoric of persuasion that suggest only his policies offer this independence. Reagan’s implication of one choice directly contrasts his claim that the Committee bill allows the government to control the lives of Americans as he does the same with his words; however, he still steers them toward his ideal road with positive rhetoric of “renew[ing]” “hope” and “opportunity.” Here, Reagan intends to show his unwavering commitment to produce an economy that allows Americans to keep their earnings and maintain control of their own lives. While the President attests to his loyalty to serve, he conveys that he is unique from other government officials in caring about Americans. Reagan’s claim may not be true because other government officials tend to have the best interests of the American people in mind. Thus, his rhetoric is perilous in that he limits their choices because of these appeals of pathos in showing his explicit and emotional support in describing the two roads. With these choices, Reagan makes it nearly impossible to choose the road of the Committee bill because of his vivid descriptions to influence his audience to accept his bill.

The President’s use of pathos toward his audience empowers the American people to convince themselves that they agree with Reagan’s bill. After his description of the two roads, Reagan says, “I’ve not taken your time this evening merely to ask you to trust me. Instead, I ask you to trust yourselves” (Reagan, “Tax Reduction Legislation”). This trust illuminates his continued pathos in placing himself on the American people’s side by giving them sovereignty to trust their own opinions. While he is the figure on television, he shines the spotlight on the
audience by charging them with the request to trust themselves; this effectively makes the people feel uplifted to act. In addition, this is similar to Roosevelt asking the American people to act at the end of his Fireside Chat on the banking crisis. Ritter and Henry note that Reagan asking the people to trust themselves “juxtaposes the people’s freedom, initiative, and hope for the future to the inevitable failures accompanying continued government power” (72). Therefore, by turning the focus of action to the American people, Reagan acts on his claim that he will restrict government power. However, by asking Americans to trust themselves, President Reagan also implicitly demands that they support his bill. To Reagan, trusting themselves means that supporting tax reduction is the obvious choice. Although President Reagan appears to bestow freedom to the American people, the autonomy is merely an illusion because he assumes that they will choose his economic plan.

In “Address to the Nation of Federal Tax Reduction Legislation,” President Reagan’s language and pathos suggest his unwavering commitment to the American people as he speaks to them on television. However, the warm rhetoric and appeals to the audience invite deception as he plays the role of fellow citizen. By siding with the average American and criticizing government control, Reagan highlights his subjective reality that the government does not have the interest of the people in mind; this is not necessarily true, but it serves as Reagan’s argument for tax reduction legislation. Furthermore, Reagan’s pathos in acting as a fellow citizen creates tension between his argument and the reality that he is the top government official. Despite speaking on freedom to their earnings, Reagan controls their decision by assuming their desires are to pay less taxes and have more income as he persuades them to support his bill. This persuasion is not necessarily unethical because he promotes freedom and appears not to force them to agree; however, it displays the limitations of television. While Reagan directly addresses
his audience, the intimacy fabricated on television does not allow the American audience to disagree with his sentiment. Therefore, President Reagan’s empowerment of the audience only reinforces his voice and perception of reality on the screen.

**Revolution and Reagan’s Heroism in Address the Nation on Tax Reform**

At the beginning of his second term, President Reagan was determined to pass comprehensive tax reform. According to Jeffrey Tulis, the President launched another campaign in 1985 to promote the policy, introducing the idea at his 1985 Inaugural Address, his 1985 State of the Union Address, on several trips around the country to campaign for legislation as well as a televised “Address to the Nation on Tax Reform” on May 28, 1985 (Tulis 193). In this televised address, President Reagan formally introduced the tax reform policy to persuade the American people of its importance. Like in 1981, Reagan uses *pathos* by directly addressing the audience as well as placing himself in their position and acting as their fellow citizen. Throughout the speech, Reagan also appeals to the audience’s patriotism to emphasize the historic nature of such tax reform in comparing his impending legislation to the tax reform of the American Revolution. Therefore, Reagan’s emphasis on the American Revolution portrays him as a fellow citizen seeking tax reform as he hopes to serve as an ordinary hero for the people.

In this address, Reagan continues to be conscious of *kairos* speaking at primetime television hours. Identical to his “Address to the Nation on Federal Tax Reduction Legislation” in 1981, the President spoke at 8 PM from the Oval Office. Instead of a Monday, however, the President spoke on a Tuesday. Similarly to his address in 1981, Reagan speaks to the American people about tax reform, which affects their income, on a day that they have gone to work. Furthermore, Reagan’s address serves as a formal introduction to the details of the bill; therefore, this indicates that the people are officially included to understand what Reagan’s tax reform
entails. Because of this inclusion, it is important for Reagan to address the American people at an opportune time by using a weeknight and prime television time in order to reach as much of the public as possible.

Reagan begins by describing how his economic policies have defied odds and uses *pathos* to appeal to the emotions of his audience to further separate Americans from his perception of “big government.” In the beginning of the address, Reagan emphasizes that there were critics in 1981 who “charged that letting you keep more of your earnings would trigger an inflationary explosion, send interest rates soaring, and destroy our economy” (Reagan, “Tax Reform”). Here, he attempts to incite frustration with the institution of government in the audience as he claims that his critics thought letting Americans “keep more of [their] earnings” would only harm the economy. Like in 1981, he uses “you” to directly appeal to the audience’s emotional response though he speaks at them on television. This direct address further implicates the fabricated intimacy of television because Reagan converses with them about the government not understanding that they should keep their earnings, which also distances them from the President.

After establishing that there were obstacles passing his economic policy, Reagan displays his desire to serve as a hero, but includes his audience as part of the effort to produce tax cuts that passed earlier in his presidency. Instead of succumbing to the criticism, Reagan states, “Well, we cut your tax rates anyway by nearly 25 percent. And what that helped trigger was falling inflation, falling interest rates, and the strongest economic expansion in 30 years” (Reagan, “Tax Reform”). Here, the President demonstrates that he ignored the criticism to cut taxes while also claiming that his tax cuts created “the strongest economic expansion in 30 years.” From Reagan’s perspective, the tax cuts did the opposite of what the critics suggested.
This juxtaposition reveals the heroism that Reagan wants to embody in saving the American people from the critics who wanted to increase taxes. According to John Sloan, “As president, he enjoyed playing the ultimate hero who saved the nation from the internal threat of big government” (83). Therefore, Sloan’s characterization of Reagan implies that he is acting on such heroism from big government at this moment of the address because he notes that he succeeded in cutting taxes. However, using “we,” Reagan also implicates the American people in the heroic effort to defeat the opposition. While he likely means his administration and friends in Congress defied the odds, the “we” language implies that he includes the American people to commend them for their support assuming that they supported the tax cuts. Through such appeals to Americans, Reagan constructs the reality of his humble heroism as he works for the people, but gives them the credit for supporting him.

Reagan emphasizes fairness, freedom, and hope to signify that he intends to include all Americans in his prosperous future that is only achievable with his tax reform. In the beginning of the address, Reagan states, “I’d like to speak to you tonight about our future, about a great historic effort to give the words ‘freedom,’ ‘fairness,’ and ‘hope’ new meaning and power for every man and woman in America” (Reagan, “Tax Reform”). Like in the previous address, Reagan builds upon his claim that he can provide the American people more liberty than previous administrations; again, he uses freedom rhetoric that he presents as undisputed fact. Reagan focuses on the future to highlight that he is capable of improving the country in a way that will have a lasting impact and establish his influence on reality beyond his presidency. Although he calls it a “historic effort,” he intends to build on his progress during the 1980s in order to give “new meaning” to these issues of “freedom, fairness, and hope.” By looking forward and giving these ideas new meaning and “power” for all, Reagan demonstrates that he
sees himself as the provider of fairness through this legislation and he intends to convince his audience of this heroic effort. Reagan displays that his actions serve American people, but he also wants to gain more popularity with the American people and he sees bestowing fairness as an effective way to achieve that goal.

Reagan’s focus on fairness also relates to his necessity for deflecting a competing reality that claims that he only serves the rich as he discredits the allegation with his examples. According to Mary Stuckey, Reagan’s domestic policy rhetoric in 1985 was more defensive because he needed to refute “charges of being a ‘rich man’s president,’ lacking in compassion, and being someone who was uninterested in the effects of his budget policies on the poor” (87). Therefore, his emphasis on fairness likely responds to these indictments as Reagan emphasizes that his tax reform benefits low-income families. In his address, he uses the example of a family of four “struggling at a poverty-level existence, with an annual income of $12,000” and states that they would not have to pay any income taxes (Reagan, “Tax Reform”). The inclusion of this example reveals that Reagan intently stresses how the plan affects lower income families in order to portray him as a president for all, not just the rich. Furthermore, he depicts himself as a hero for the lower class by stating, ‘We’re offering a ladder of opportunity for every family that feels trapped, a ladder of opportunity to grab hold of and to climb out of poverty forever’ (Reagan, “Tax Reform”). This action demonstrates that Reagan wants reality to reflect that he provides resources to those in poverty in order to help them prosper. Therefore, while he does not want government interference, he attempts to deflect the criticisms of him as the rich man’s president by providing such hope for opportunity to correct the assumptions.

To further appeal to his audience, Reagan’s claims that fairness is a uniquely American ideal playing into the patriotism of the American people; this further establishes his sense of
reality to which he wants his audience to subscribe. After discussing his plan to tax Americans fairly, he argues that the tax system “must be rooted in that unique American quality, our special commitment to fairness” (Reagan, “Tax Reform”). Here, Reagan points to the pride in America as he calls fairness, “that unique American quality.” This separates the United States from other countries that he considers to not pay the same attention to fairness in their taxes. Again, he uses this optimism that is well-suited for television to support his argument that he is committed to putting America first. By calling fairness America’s “special commitment,” Reagan claims that America has a superior dedication to the principle than other countries and that the American tradition is to care more deeply for its citizens. Here, he attempts to persuade his audience to accept his perception of American life with patriotism as this claim creates a feeling of pride in their country; therefore, Reagan continues to implement pathos to connect with his audience from the television screen.

After appealing to the patriotism of his audience, Reagan’s indictment that the tax system is “un-American” also evokes an emotional response from the audience with such a strong claim that is not necessarily rooted in reality. Early in the address, President Reagan states, “I believe that, in both spirit and substance, our tax system has come to be un-American” (Reagan, “Tax Reform”). In this moment, the President briefly deviates from the optimistic rhetoric that is well-suited to television, which signals that he is seriously dedicated to changing the tax system to become “American” again. However, Reagan displays with his rhetoric that this charge is his belief rather than something that is undisputedly true about the current tax system. By stating “I believe,” Reagan takes responsibility for the claim though he wants to ensure that he convinces the audience that the tax system has become un-American. Expressing this opinion is another form of pathos to frustrate the American audience about their ideals being lost in the tax system.
With this sentiment, Reagan plays into the audience’s patriotism to persuade them that the tax code must be reformed.

Reagan expands his perception of the current tax system as un-American using the American Revolution as a comparison to the tax reform he intends to lead; however, it creates a tension between his rhetoric and his real position as president. After claiming the system has become un-American, President Reagan proclaims, “The first American Revolution was sparked by an unshakable conviction—taxation without representation is tyranny” (Reagan, “Tax Reform”). Here, Reagan recounts that the American Revolution arose from unfair taxation by British. Therefore, his characterization of the current system as “un-American” demonstrates that Reagan views the system as resembling the British tyrannical taxation that led to the birth of the United States of America. When he claims “taxation without representation is tyranny,” Reagan essentially argues that the government is treating Americans as the British did in the 18th-century. This creates a tension between his performance as a fellow citizen and his actual role as president because he could implicate himself in such tyranny. The reality of the situation is that he is the president and thus has the most responsibility in the government that he charges for creating a tyrannical tax code. Despite the truth of the matter, Reagan attempts to establish a new reality that he will be different from other presidents and repair the system.

By comparing the tax reform to the American Revolution, President Reagan acts as the ordinary hero leading the revolution to create a fair tax system that is more American. Continuing the comparison to the American Revolution, Reagan states, “Two centuries later, a second American revolution for hope and opportunity is gathering force again—a peaceful revolution, but born of popular resentment against a tax system that is unwise, unwanted, and unfair” (Reagan, “Tax Reform”). In this performance, he clearly sees himself as the hero trying
to resolve this injustice inflicted on the American people. He calls his tax reform a “second American revolution for hope and opportunity,” which demonstrates that there is a necessity for change from Reagan’s perspective. Instead of taxation without representation, this revolution originates in “resentment” against an unfair tax system. While the President does not use “I” or explicitly state that he will lead the revolution, he implicitly reveals his desire to act as the hero of America. However, he seems to selflessly credit the revolution “gathering force” to the American people as he suggests that they want this reform and that he will assist them to achieve this desire. Therefore, executing the reform allows Reagan to become the hero and restore fairness to the tax system.

Reagan further performs the selfless hero role when he uses *pathos* to commiserate with the audience who suffers under the current tax code, but this is simply untrue because the President does not have the same tax burden as the American people. To mobilize the audience, he states, “...we must radically change the structure of a tax system that still treats our earnings as the personal property of the Internal Revenue Service” (Reagan, “Tax Reform”). Using “we,” Reagan further positions himself as the people’s president in that he includes them in the policy making process; like in his 1981 address, Reagan is portrayed as valuing the action of the American people. Furthermore, he makes a direct criticism of the government, specifically the IRS for “treat[ing] our earnings as [its] personal property.” Using “our” poses a critical rhetorical tactic in Reagan being one with the people. It shows that even the president feels that the IRS, which serves him in the chain of command, robs him of his hard-earned income, just as the average American may feel. Ritter and Henry reinforce this characterization as they note, “Ronald Reagan played the role of the American everyman with genuine modesty as he starred in his portrayal of the rebirth of American majesty” (190). This demonstrates that Reagan
performs rather than presents an unmediated portrayal of his true self. However, Reagan’s statement has no basis in reality because the IRS works at his command, which further displays the tension between his rhetoric and his position. Thus, Reagan’s use of “our” and being one with the people serves as pathos toward the audience to make them believe that he has the same struggles. By making this claim, Reagan can better persuade the American people of the necessity for his tax reform.

As their hero, Reagan also empowers them to support his legislation with pathos that compliments their spirit and suggests that they want to make his reality come true. President Reagan further places himself amongst Americans as he encourages, “...we—the sons and daughters of those first brave souls who came to this land to give birth to a new life in liberty—we can change America” (Reagan, “Tax Reform”). This historic comparison assumes the pride in the Americans watching as it encourages them to fight for their country’s greatness like the Founding Fathers. By optimistically portraying the reform, President Reagan shows that changing America is well-suited to television and should empower Americans. Following this appeal, Reagan further mobilizes the audience as he states, “Let’s change the tax code” (Reagan, “Tax Reform”). Here, Reagan places his agenda on the audience to enact the change. Including the audience displays that Reagan infers that they share the sentiment for changing the tax system. Because of the nature of television, there is no way for them to speak back to the president; therefore, the American people cannot easily reject his charge for tax reform and his role as their hero.

Along with using “we,” Reagan develops his role as the hero by directly addressing one citizen creating the illusion for all Americans that he has a personal connection to their concerns. Reagan argues that taxation can destroy the lives of America’s families. Of course, this argument
is not an undisputed reality, but rather it is Reagan’s hope to appeal to the American people. To supplement this point of destruction, President Reagan uses the testimonial of an American:

“As one man from Memphis, Tennessee, recently wrote: “The taxes that are taken out of my check is money that I need, not extra play money. Please do all that you can to make the tax system more equitable toward the family.” Well, sir, that's just what we intend to do — to pass the strongest profamily initiative in postwar history. (Reagan, “Tax Reform”)

By using the experience of a concerned citizen, Reagan expresses to the American people that their fellow Americans share his sentiment in wanting to change the tax code. To an extent, Reagan’s inclusion of the man’s origin, “Memphis, Tennessee,” displays the *pathos* that individualizes the man in Reagan’s mind. In addition, Reagan’s response to the letter, “Well, sir, that’s just what we intend to do” directly addresses the writer, which makes television seem like a personal conversation between the President and the man. By reading from the letter, the audience realizes that the President considers himself one of them as he takes the time to review the letters he receives from Americans. Here, Reagan conveys to the audience that he hears their concerns, which further makes him heroic. However, the letter carefully supports his argument for the tax system reform; therefore, Reagan is foremost motivated to persuade the audience by using the words of a fellow citizen that agrees with his policy. The intimacy serves as a technique to cover this persuasion and create the perception of Reagan as a hero to the average American.

Like in 1981, President Reagan mainly relies on *pathos* to show the American people that tax reform is what is best for their earnings and prosperity. However, the passage of tax reform also benefits Reagan in portraying himself as the hero of the American people, which is the reality that he hopes to come true. Throughout “Address to the Nation on Tax Reform,” Reagan focuses on patriotism and compares the tax reform to the American Revolution to establish that he is the selfless leader bringing a prosperity that the American people have been devoid of in
the current tax system. By directly speaking to the audience and using “we” often, Reagan acts as a fellow citizen that understands the necessity for improving the tax code. Reagan performs in a way that implies his genuine concern for the American people and separates himself from the government that he leads. Again, Reagan consistently understates his position as president to create a different reality that he is one of the people. Television aids Reagan in fabricating this illusion as his rhetoric warmly praises the people to believe that tax reform is the answer to having a hopeful future in America.

**Conclusion**

Reagan’s presidency is marked by his victories in passing major economic and tax legislation. Two days after his “Address to the Nation of Federal Tax Reduction Legislation,” 48 Democrats voted with House Republicans to pass the Economic Recovery Tax Act of 1981, the largest tax cut bill in history; this completed the first phase of Reagan’s economic recovery campaign (Ritter & Henry 73). With such an achievement, Reagan won the 1984 presidential election only to continue his economic campaign. While his “Address to the Nation on Tax Reform” only introduced the legislation in 1985, Reagan signed the 1986 Tax Reform Act into law on October 22, 1986 (United States, Congress). This great achievement of bipartisan legislation reveals that Reagan’s inclusion of all parties and the public led to a victorious passage of the bill. Because of these achievements, it is clear that Reagan’s rhetoric successfully aided to persuade Congress through the American people.

Communicating directly with the public, television highlights Reagan’s performance strategies; however, it also allowed for the deception that the American people could talk to their president. Scholars argue that this personality calls his ability to govern into question as well as the legitimacy of the office after Reagan. Robert Denton writes, “Ronald Reagan is simply a
television personality. His manner of communication fits the requirements of television as a medium—not necessarily those of governing or ruling a nation” (72). While this invalidates his ability to govern, Denton’s indictment also displays that his performance relates to the illusion of him speaking directly to the American people. Furthermore, Tulis argues that attempts to “mobilize the public through the use of personal and charismatic power delegitimizes constitutional or normal authority” (190). Tulis’s claim suggests that Reagan’s use of the rhetorical presidency operates outside the normal means of governing to destabilize the laws of the Constitution. At the same time, it illustrates Reagan’s deception in concealing his agenda behind the warm, charismatic personality on television. The actual policies lack importance because Reagan’s use of pathos and his skillful delivery of his addresses makes the logos less poignant in persuading his audience.

The emphasis on television during the Reagan years also suggests that this administration was not necessarily rooted in reality, but instead in creating an image that the American people could believe to be true. John Sloan quotes one of Reagan’s former White House staff members, Peggy Noonan who said, “When I was in the White House, TV was no longer the prime means of receiving the presidency, TV in a way was the presidency” (91). This illustrates an issue that many scholars find with Reagan’s presidency: he spent eight years producing a television show in a sense. By thinking carefully about television with every decision, Reagan’s administration may not have not adequately emphasized the importance of governing. Noonan’s observation also highlights that Reagan focused on entertaining his audience and ensuring that the American people were empowered by his rhetoric. However, prioritizing television production also makes his pathos disingenuous because it infers that these sentiments are untrue or less important to him. In the end, television serves to maintain his popularity.
Although he deceives his audience, President Reagan’s television rhetoric is mostly ethical except for his allegations that the government does not properly serve the people. His criticism and charge that the government wrongs the people may pose an ethical dilemma because it creates false distrust in the institution. Separating himself from government, Reagan presents his anti-big government rhetoric as fact, which deceives the American people to accept his argument. If President Reagan more clearly indicated that this was only his argument, these claims would not violate any ethical implications because the people would know it is simply his belief. By portraying the government’s taxation as tyrannical and its practices as controlling, Reagan allows the American people to believe these depictions as an undisputed reality when it is only his subjective opinion that government should be smaller.

However, Reagan focuses on the American people, which displays that he respects the need for accountability as a servant of the public. Reagan’s use of pathos outweighs the logos and ethos in these addresses. While a reliance on pathos can become unethical in certain persuasive situations, his use of the appeal does not operate unethically because this pathos harmlessly makes the American people feel like they have an intimate connection with their president; he wants to connect with them so they recognize that he has their bests interest in mind. In 1981, he used logos to show differences between the Committee and bipartisan bills in “Address to the Nation of Federal Tax Reduction Legislation” alongside the pathos to persuade his audience with facts. In 1985, he used pathos to appeal to his audience’s patriotism to promote tax reform. Presidents will always present their policies and personalities most favorably and effective persuasion comes with engaging the people. Ultimately, Reagan respects democracy in considerately expressing his views merely illuminating that he is truly the “Great Communicator.”
CHAPTER THREE

@realdonaldtrump vs. the News Media: Trump’s Use of Twitter to Force his Version of Truth into Reality

Thus far, I have only focused on McLuhan’s version of media that allows presidents to relay their message to the American people. However, there is another form of media, the press, that will play a significant role in this chapter alongside Trump’s use of the McLuhan mode of media. The role of the news media is to serve as “a watchdog that can investigate and report on government wrongdoing” (“Freedom of the Press”). This means that the press holds those in power accountable for their words and actions to ensure that the American people are informed about government operations. Furthermore, this role of the media is protected under the First Amendment of the Constitution, which states that “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances” (US Const. amend. I). From this amendment, it is clear that the Founding Fathers emphasized the importance of having a free press in order to uphold democracy and not fall to a dictator.

While the Framers’ prioritization of a free press remains true in contemporary America, President Trump’s distrust of the news media has jeopardized this founding principle. In 2017, Senator John McCain told Chuck Todd on Meet the Press, “If you want to preserve democracy as we know it, you need to have a free and many times an adversarial press” (McCain 00:47-00:54). McCain’s comment responded to President Trump’s attacks on the media in calling it the “Fake News.” Thus, McCain suggests that Trump’s opposition to the media poses a dilemma for our
democracy as he does not respect a free press or the truth through his combative Tweets labeling the media “Fake News.” For Trump, Twitter serves as a way that he can promote his perception of the truth; however, by correcting what he sees as misinformation, he attempts to limit the press’s ability to hold him accountable. Although he has the right to defend himself against allegations, his outright attacks imply his lack of concern for the democratic tradition of a free press.

Returning to McLuhan’s version of media, Twitter remains an emergent medium, meaning that we are still learning its mechanisms and how to use it to persuade. Until Donald Trump became president, the medium’s rhetorical breadth was not fully developed as Obama often tweeted informatively providing deadlines and statistics about different policies. However, Trump reinvigorated the medium becoming the first true “Twitter President” to speak to the American people. According to Matthew R. Miles and Donald P. Haider-Markel, in “Polls and Elections: Trump, Twitter, and Public Dissuasion: A Natural Experiment in Presidential Rhetoric,” “President Trump uses Twitter more often and in ways unlike any of his predecessors” because he uses it more like a public speech (438). With Twitter’s widespread accessibility in 2016 and throughout his presidency, Trump could easily speak to his supporters and opposition alike to ensure that his message was broadly received. Before his Twitter was suspended following the January 6 incident at the Capitol, Trump had 88,776,124 followers, which highlights that he reached many Americans (“Donald J. Trump Statistics”). Having such a wide influence comes with responsibility not only in the office of the President, but also in the conduct of speaking to the people over such an accessible medium.

Analyzing Trump’s Twitter activity at this time includes considering the recent suspension of his account. While Trump used Twitter as an outlet to defend himself against his
critics, there are ethical implications that led to the permanent suspension of his Twitter in January 2021. The suspension followed months of Twitter flagging Trump’s Tweets as having disputable facts about the COVID-19 pandemic, his comments after the Capitol storming, and his continued contestation of the 2020 election results. On January 8, Twitter, Inc. posted a blog explaining the decision to suspend President Trump’s account. In the blog post, the company stated that they reviewed two Tweets following the Capitol violence “under [Twitter’s] Glorification of Violence policy, which aims to prevent the glorification of violence that could inspire others to replicate violent acts” (Twitter, Inc.). This shows Twitter’s values and community standards to which they hold all users, even the most powerful users on the medium. In a way, the Glorification of Violence policy serves as a check on these influential figures to ensure that they do not abuse their platform. After the assessment, Twitter “determined that [the tweets] were highly likely to encourage and inspire people to replicate the criminal acts that took place at the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021” (Twitter, Inc.). Coming to this decision was a strong act to silence the President illuminating the ability for Twitter to mediate the knowledge and opinions we can see.

The methodology of this chapter must also account for the ethical dilemmas that arise from the suspension of his Twitter. An unprecedented move by Twitter, the suspension of the former President’s account surfaces questions to consider throughout this chapter as I explore the role of truth in persuasion, especially in spreading information about the government’s policies. First, it is important to understand the subjectivity of truth as Trump’s supporters believe him while Democrats and opposers do not believe anything that he says. Second, there is the question of whether the suspension is an infringement of our First Amendment right to free speech for Twitter to silence President Trump. This is a lofty and complicated issue as Trump has used
unethical language on the platform; however, Twitter also may have overstepped in exerting power over his First Amendment right. Therefore, these issues will permeate through the rest of the chapter as the tweets identify the struggle with the notion of “Fake News” and reality.

In his Tweets, Trump illuminates that truth and reality is subjective as he presents one version of the truth whereas the left-leaning media portrays an opposing narrative. Dana Cloud states that “The truth does not necessarily set us free; indeed, the powerful often control the circulation and authority of what counts as truth” (1). In this reading of truth, Cloud demonstrates that the truth is not readily available to everyone, but rather mediated by those in power because they have the platform to persuade. Applied to this media situation, there is a struggle between the Left and Trump to persuade the American people to believe in their perception of the Trump administration reality. However, Cloud argues that the Left obsessively fact-checks anything they oppose whereas the Right and Trump focus more on mediating the truth into a “common sense or doxa” truths that encourage people to believe what the orator presents (3). Despite the possibility of the truth not being fully communicated, Cloud claims that people can only digest facts with such mediation, which makes it more persuasive.

Although Cloud concedes that the Left has used these methods of persuasion in the past, Cloud does not concede to this point enough as the leaders in the Democratic party also used these same demagogic methods. If this use of language is so persuasive by members of the Right, why could Trump not gain more support from those who consider themselves independents or moderate Democrats? It is because the Left uses the same tactics in their own way of fact-checking and then turning to a dramatic critique of Trump’s policies. Therefore, there is never a moment where private citizens are not being manipulated by the political reality and truth as there is no particular way to understand reality in its pure form because of this mediation.
While the Left uses hard facts unlike Trump who argues with emotion and by implication of the current events, Trump’s opposition contributes to increasing the political drama that leads us to have to choose one side of the truth to believe.

With such a fluid perception of truth, the state of American politics is subject to ideology, which makes truth nearly impossible to find. Instead, we must choose what is most believable through these mediated forms of rhetoric. As Cloud implies, these forms of doxa or common-sense knowledge are the strongest case for truth because they are rooted in our existing beliefs. Because political activity has become so polarized, the truth will always be subjective to individuals. Trump’s supporters will believe what he believes because they find his claims convincing. What is most important is that President Trump appears to believe the reality that he creates of the media spreading false information about him. Twitter became a way for him to combat the negative media attention of which he claims to be a victim. Although he only shares his perspective, his rhetorical skill is convincing enough to move his supporters to reject the media.

In this chapter, I argue that President Trump uses Twitter to defend himself against the negative media attention using the economy as evidence for his success; however, he always engages an enemy that he can prove wrong to boost his ego and assert his power as superior to those who hold him accountable. He conceals this ego-centric agenda as correcting the misinformation spread by the news media sources in criticizing him instead of praising his policies because of the economic success. Although the media does not necessarily cover Trump objectively, his constant tweeting and rhetoric deepens the divide among Americans as he makes the truth seem more debatable. Therefore, Trump’s villainizing of the media signals that the people should not believe its portrayal of reality, but they should believe his version elevating
himself to an infallible source of information. This constant battle with his opposition on Twitter demonstrates that Trump never accepts a truth that rivals his own, showing that he is merely motivated by his own ego-mania.

**Obama and the Emergence of Twitter**

While Trump is the first true “Twitter President,” Obama’s use of the medium displays its rise to becoming a major part of the presidency. With the ever-changing Internet, President Obama was the first president to proficiently use the source as it became more accessible during his presidency. As a president that was part of the younger generation after Bush, Obama more easily grasped using such technology as it continued to emerge. Despite being an “Internet President,” the issue of Twitter’s continued emergence made it difficult for President Obama to capture the full breadth of the medium’s persuasiveness. Only starting his own account in 2015, the former President did not obtain the full range of skills during his presidency to use Twitter as proficiently as President Trump (@potus44). Obama used Twitter to inform his audience of the administration’s developments with infographics and reminding people to register for health care. Miles and Haider-Markel state that “Obama uses Twitter differently” than his successor who uses it like past presidents have used public speeches (438). While Obama does not appear to prioritize influencing public opinion, his reliance on *logos* highlights his accomplishments that implicitly persuades his followers that he has succeeded in his initiatives. President Obama illuminated the potential for the medium to inform the American people that allowed Trump to introduce Twitter as an imperative communication tool for persuasion.

Obama uses Twitter to inform the American people of the accomplishments of his administration by showing the progression of the policies surrounding issues such as unemployment. On September 15, 2015, President Obama posted a series of Tweets showcasing
the developments of the administration regarding health insurance, unemployment, and the automotive industry; these Tweets identify how Obama dealt with the recession upon taking office. In the series, Obama tweets, “When I took office, 800,000 Americans lost their jobs each month. Our businesses have now added 13.1 million jobs over 66 straight months,” followed by “We’ve cut the unemployment rate in half – from a high of 10% down to 5.1%. And we’re not done.” (@potus4). While Obama promotes the accomplishments of his administration, there is only implicit persuasion occurring in the Tweet; he merely informs that the unemployment rate was high at the beginning of his presidency and has now declined favorably. Using numerical statistics and hard facts, Obama reveals his indifference to Twitter as an explicit rhetorical device.

In the first part of the Tweet, President Obama employs honesty to persuade his audience of the administration’s accomplishments similar to Roosevelt on the radio during the Great Depression. By saying “When I took office, 800,000 Americans lost their jobs each month,” Obama acknowledges that there was a continued job loss for Americans even when he was in office; he does not immediately turn to the decline in the unemployment rate, but rather openly communicates the truth of the situation. Using “I” implies that he takes responsibility for the loss of jobs at the beginning of his presidency and that he does not deflect any criticism that circulated at that early point of the Obama administration. Furthermore, President Obama does not immediately take credit for cutting the unemployment rate as he establishes the difficult situation with which he began his presidency. Obama also uses specific statistics like 800,000 jobs lost and pointing out this was happening every month, which demonstrates his commitment to honesty and accurately informing the American people. Finally, President Obama calls the unemployed people, “Americans,” a more formal way to address the people in the Tweet, which
is indicative of Obama’s style. This shows that he is not directly speaking to the American people as he merely informs his followers of the beginning state of the American unemployment rate. Obama’s transparent language mirrors Roosevelt’s that I analyze in Chapter One as he also provides an honest diagnosis of the banking crisis like Obama does with the unemployment rate.

Obama’s delay in taking credit for the decline in unemployment further suggests that he uses Twitter to impart information about the developments. After taking responsibility for the slow decline of the unemployment rate, Obama does not claim credit for businesses adding more jobs, but almost commends their efforts to lower the unemployment rate. In the next sentence, he states, “Our businesses have now added 13.1 million jobs over 66 straight months.” Again, Obama uses logos, showing the actual value of the number of jobs and the duration of time. By tweeting “our” businesses, the President displays that he places himself with the American business without taking the credit for their additional jobs; this signals it is a point of pride for the President to see Americans working to add more jobs to the market. In addition, Obama presents the addition of jobs as occurring for “66 straight months,” which shows the consistency of the success of these businesses. It is interesting that he is not particularly taking credit for the developments like his successor, President Trump. Instead, by focusing on hard facts as Dana Cloud would note, Obama’s Twitter rhetoric is still persuasive but not as explicitly as Trump is Trump’s reinvention of the medium’s rhetorical purpose.

After the first part of the Tweet provides statistics, the second Tweet gives some credit to the administration to prove that Obama played a role in the decrease in the unemployment rate; however, he maintains his informative tone. Obama tweets, “We’ve cut the unemployment rate in half – from a high of 10% down to 5.1%” (@potus44). Here, he continues to use more statistics that exhibit the specific decrease in the unemployment rate. Using “we” signals the
administration’s involvement and persuades the audience that Obama has succeeded in increasing employment. To certify that Obama is credited, he adds “we” to integrate his actions into the reality of the situation. Furthermore, “cut[ting] the rate in half” is a positive development and uses simple yet descriptive language to present this decrease in unemployment. This clear, concise language supported by the numerical percentages of the decline in unemployment makes the Tweet a comprehensible, informative appeal to convey that the administration has succeeded. Finally, he makes one explicit appeal to the American people in saying, “And we’re not done.” Here, Obama promises to prioritize the economy and ensure that the American people know that this is a positive development, but that there is still room for improvement. He remains critical of his own administration by noting that it is important to continue to work toward a lower unemployment rate. Obama’s portrayal of his achievements deviates from Trump’s explanation of his success as Obama uses hard facts and critiques his own work.

With Obama’s language displaying his implicit persuasion, his use of an infographic also works rhetorically to make the information presented appear transparent. The reply Tweet includes a graphic that visually depicts the decrease of the unemployment rate to show the progress that the Obama administration has made as seen in the figure below. The title reads, “The unemployment rate is the lowest it’s been in more than 7 years.” This headline describes what is going on to emphasize the improvements that are depicted in the graphic; the title argues that Obama has been more successful than Bush at decreasing unemployment. Moreover, there is a portion from 2008-2010 shaded and labeled “recession” to demonstrate that Obama took office during a recession; this signals that when he took office, he inherited an economic depression. While he takes responsibility for the slow decline of the unemployment rate, this shaded area excuses the slow progress at the beginning of his presidency. However, the graphic also does not
hide the fact that the unemployment rate continued to increase during the first year of his presidency. Obama wants the audience to believe that the infographic imparts the truth and reality of the recession. Finally, to demonstrate his commitment to honest facts, the bottom of the graphic cites its source as “Source U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.” Including this citation gives the appearance that it is a credible source of information; however, the source is an Obama office so the results may be skewed to effectively make the logos seem unbiased. Therefore, the presentation encourages the audience to believe that the infographic prioritizes transparency and facts though it may be a biased depiction.

![Infographic on the economy included in @potus44 September 15, 2015 Tweet.](image)

While President Obama establishes his credibility in presenting factual information, his use of an official account weakens this ethos in comparison to President Trump using his personal account. Obama does not use Twitter in the same way as Trump because the medium has evolved since his presidency with Trump’s focus on using Twitter “to shape the attention of the national news agenda” and “to gauge public support for policy proposals” (Miles & Haider-Markel 438). Unlike Trump, Obama more commonly used Twitter as an accessible form for information. Because of this purpose, using the @potus44 account demonstrates that he was not attempting to speak directly to the people. Instead of using @potus45 regularly, Trump uses
his personal account, @realdonaldtrump, which is a form of ethos because it shows that he directly engages with the American people. Although @potus44 maintains Obama’s voice, Trump uses his personal voice and a personal account to display that he is the person tweeting from the account. By using the @potus44 account, followers would not know if President Obama was physically tweeting the material or if it were a member of his communications team. Thus, that direct line of communication that Trump creates for his audience makes him more appealing to his supporters and exhibits his purpose to persuade using Twitter.

Obama’s Tweets prioritize logos as the @potus44 Tweets include factual claims with supporting evidence. Aristotle “emphasized the empirical means by which [absolute knowledge] was obtained (Bizzell et al. 201). Like Aristotle, President Obama’s Twitter values these ways to responsibly impart information to the American people. While the persuasion is subtle, Obama’s communications team chooses ethical means to use the medium by relying on more definitive truths. However, there are still possibilities that the information could be misinterpreted in our climate where truth is so subjective and information can be presented as transparent even if it is not. Obama’s informative Tweets came before the shift of “fake news” rising in 2016 “fueled in no small part by Trump’s election campaign” (Ross & Rivers 2). Thus, people were more likely to believe the official government account of the President because it is the government’s ethical responsibility to properly inform the people. The American people could trust Obama’s form of presidential rhetoric with such informative methods of tweeting and a more common truth climate that Trump dismantled.

**Trump’s Use of Twitter to Reject “Fake News”**

Throughout his presidency, Trump used Twitter as a primary form of communication to correct the American people’s perception of him as the media often portrays him negatively. This
is similar to what Reagan did to deflect claims of being a rich man’s president, but Reagan did so more eloquently than Trump as he did not insult his opposition or spread misinformation. As Miles and Haider-Markel note, “Trump uses Twitter to change the subject when it suits his needs” (438). This means that he turns the attention to the Democrats and media that he claims are slandering him. In addition, Miles’s and Haider-Markel’s claim also invokes Jennifer Mercieca’s discussion of a dangerous demagogue who “overwhelms the news cycle to prevent negative stories from gaining attention” (272). Because Trump has dealt with significant negative media attention, his deflection of the stories with attacks and alternative information identifies him as a dangerous demagogue. He does not allow any negative news media to go unnoticed and ensures that he acknowledges those stories to discredit the claims to make himself look favorable at all times.

However, Trump’s Twitter tactics are more complicated in how he persuades his audience because of the polarization that rose during the Trump years. On the Left, members of Congress, the media, and the general public resisted any comments from Trump to defend himself; they focused on his personal life, his alleged collusion with Russia in the 2016 election, and other controversial topics that reporters would cover on CNN and MSNBC. On July 24, 2018, Wolf Blitzer of CNN exposed that the U.S. Intelligence Committee concluded that Russian President Vladimir Putin interfered in the 2016 U.S. election and that the leader himself admitted to preferring Trump (Blitzer 00:26-01:12). On October 3, 2018, Rachel Maddow reported on a New York Times article that suggested President Trump’s self-made persona that he used to run for office is allegedly fraudulent as his father bankrolled his projects; she also indicted him for potential criminal tax evasion (Maddow 00:00-14:39). Stories like Blitzer’s and Maddow’s fueled Trump’s villainizing of the media and his defensive tactics to correct the public perception
of him to fit his narrative. Because he could not sway the Left, Trump also alienates the Democratic party in his Tweets, further creating a divide between him and the other American Democrats as he made the party his enemy. Trump’s denial of the media’s accusations forces us to choose a side to believe; for ordinary Americans, they must decide who is more convincing as the President and the media present different arguments and examples of the success or failure of Trump.

In this debate of true reality, Trump skillfully uses the economy as a deflection for the other issues that the left-leaning media covers in the news. Because Trump cannot persuade the Left, he must find a way to persuade the people who consider themselves independents or moderates in order to be deemed successful. While Trump does not necessarily deny every accusation, he responds to the media by using the news about the stock market increases as well as appeals about the addition of jobs to emphasize his success as president. With 55% of Americans invested in the stock market, this is an effective use of *logos* and *pathos* because the economy is pulled in that moderate voter base (Saad). Thus, Trump’s focus on the economy provided him the best chance at making those moderate Americans believe his perception of reality at least as a tactic to win the 2020 election. By using divisive rhetoric in his Tweets, however, Trump forces the middle to choose a side; this makes his rhetoric wholly unethical as he misinforms those who do not necessarily know where they stand.

Trump’s Twitter rhetoric consistently implements methods of persuasion that imply the success of the economy. On several occasions, beginning March 14, 2017, Trump tweeted “JOBS, JOBS, JOBS!” (@realdonaldtrump). While the Tweets can no longer be accessed on Twitter, most of them are accompanied by an image or link likely praising the state of the economy. This simple Tweet is effective in its concise message as it is quick to read; Trump
clearly refers to the increase in jobs in the United States with minimal language. In addition, the repetition of “jobs” demonstrates that Trump focuses on clarity and simplicity in his Tweets. It is a universally positive word to use to describe the state of the economy as most Americans would likely want to see that there are more jobs available. Trump also tweets in Caps Lock, which is effective because it further emphasizes the message that the economy and as a result, his administration is generating growth in the job market. While the capitalized letters signal emphasis, Trump also includes an exclamation point to show the excitement that Americans should feel about the economy; this excitement works as a directive for the American people to share his enthusiasm about the good news. In this simply worded Tweet, Trump argues implicitly about the developments in the economy that require some knowledge of the stock market or the economic state. By tweeting this repeatedly, Trump reminds the American people that he believes his administration has delivered on “Mak[ing] America Great Again.”

“Jobs, Jobs, Jobs” permeates throughout Trump’s Twitter rhetoric that he uses to defend himself against the claims of the media. By including the “Jobs, Jobs, Jobs” slogan in his Tweets, he demonstrates that he intends to combat such criticism with the economy as his supporting evidence. On December 20, 2017, Trump tweeted:

The Tax Cuts are so large and so meaningful, and yet the Fake News is working overtime to follow the lead of their friends, the defeated Dems, and only demean. This is truly a case where the results will speak for themselves, starting very soon. Jobs, Jobs, Jobs! (@realdonaldtrump)

Referring to the 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act, Trump argues that his tax policy is effective, but suggests that the “Fake News” and Democrats who oppose him are trying to deter his success. He implies that there will be great results that will prove his opposition wrong as the economy continues to improve in his opinion. He, again, ends with “Jobs, Jobs, Jobs!,” which shows that he associates an increase in jobs with the tax cuts as he expects the legislation to reinvigorate the
economy. This is an effective appeal to the American people because people seek to find jobs; Trump emphasizes that the economy is an important issue for the American people or at least the audience that he tries to target. By connecting the tax policy to an increase in jobs, Trump focuses on the ways in which all of his economic policies contribute to the overall growth of the economy.

Aside from the “Jobs, Jobs, Jobs,” Trump uses more simple language to build his argument for his superior tax cuts further expressing his confidence that the legislation highlights his “genius” as a policymaker. Beginning with “The Tax Cuts are so large and so meaningful,” Trump clearly states the positive effect of the tax cuts from his perspective that commends his economic shrewdness. To convey this perspective, Trump uses his distinct voice in this phrase by repeating “so” before each adjective; utilizing “so” reflects his common conversational language that is characteristic of his in-person rhetorical style. Trump does not adapt a different style for Twitter, but instead makes the Tweet sound like he is speaking to the American people. This is effective for his supporters in connecting them to Trump more personally as he adapts a common style to be for the people like Reagan. Furthermore, “large” and “meaningful” are relatively simple words that quickly relay the point that Trump has skillfully created a tax policy that will benefit all Americans. By using such simple and imprecise adjectives, Trump suggests to his followers that it would be a big tax cut that would make a significant impact on the public’s lives. Trump’s appeals about the tax cuts provide little detail, but evoke a “feel-good” sentiment for the audience as he describes the policy positively in a way that illuminates his intelligence and skill as a businessman. This simple explanation and claim demonstrates that Trump does not intend to offer true details and facts because he is most focused on proving himself worthy of the credit.
Trump’s use of capitalization is especially poignant in how he describes his opposition as he attempts to establish his *ethos* through creating proper nouns that he wants adopted into the common vernacular of the people. By capitalizing “the Fake News,” Trump highlights his intent to create a divide between the media and him in which he prevails as the honest and reliable truth-teller. Using capitalization distinguishes that this is a common name that Trump often references in his Tweets that is recognizable for his supporters as well as his dissenters. Generating terminology to describe those who oppose him is a powerful technique because it is now commonly known by most Americans that he refers to the media as “Fake News.” Whether one can believe him or not, inventing a name that has significantly impacted media and the American public displays his brilliance as a Twitter rhetorician. Although people recognize his term “Fake News,” Trump uses it to unethically gain *ethos* to seem more truthful than his media counterparts demonstrating that he does not need to be held accountable for his actions because of this “moral” superiority.

Furthermore, Trump identifies the alliance between the media and the Democratic party arguing that Democrats subscribe to “Fake News,” which operates to further elevate his version of the truth. After discussing the tax cuts, he contrasts his good news with the agenda of the media. Here, he states, “and yet the Fake News is working overtime to follow the lead of their friends, the defeated Dems, and only demean.” Trump establishes his perspective of the media’s agenda by saying they are “working overtime” to discredit him. This language demonstrates that he believes and wants his followers to agree that they intentionally belittle his accomplishments. By accusing the media of having an agenda, he also signals that there is an alliance between the “Fake News” and Democrats to show that he is the victim of their actions. He calls the Democratic party, his staunch opponents, the “friends” of the media, displaying that there is
some agreement between the party and the media to work against him; this is what he wants the Twitter community to believe. In “follow[ing] the lead” of the Democrats, Trump persuades his audience to believe that the media conspires with the Democrats to “demean” as he says. By tweeting they “only demean,” Trump wants the Twitter followers to know that the media does not give him praise for the tax cuts that he has promoted though he believes they should. “Demean” indicates that the media tries to take away his dignity and their lack of respect for him. In opposition, Trump suggests that he deserves more than that. Thus, Trump intends to create a reality in which he does not attack the media, but rather the media attacks him.

The President attempts to build an image that he is more credible than and superior to his rivals by insulting his opposition and promising that he will prove them wrong. First, Trump calls the Democrats, the “defeated Dems,” which is an explicit attack on his opposition as “Dems” is used as a negative descriptor of the party by Trump supporters and some Republicans. This name demonstrates the power of his rhetoric in being critical of his opposition. However, after he insults them, he takes a different approach to responding to their “demeaning” comments. Toward the end of the Tweet, Trump states, “This is truly a case where the results will speak for themselves, starting very soon.” Here, Trump foreshadows that the tax cuts themselves will prove his critics wrong without him having to defend himself; if the results “speak for themselves,” Trump suggests that he will allow the effects of the tax cuts to vindicate him. Instead of being overtly critical of the “Dems” and the “Fake News,” Trump portrays himself as morally upstanding in relying on the tax cuts to invalidate their claims. This establishes his confidence in the tax cuts again by placing his trust in their impending success; instead of talking about the promised results, he uses this method of persuasion to be more believable. With such
trust in the policy, Trump elevates his *ethos* to appear more ethical than his opponents despite having already insulted them in the same Tweet.

In addition to directly attacking his opposition with this phrase, President Trump uses “Jobs, Jobs, Jobs!” for proving that the economy is prospering to implicitly defeat these perceived detractors. On October 5, 2020, Trump tweeted, “STOCK MARKET UP BIG, 466 Points! 28,149. Great News for America. Jobs, Jobs, Jobs!” (@realdonaldtrump). Again, he ends the Tweet with his repeated “Jobs, Jobs, Jobs!,” continuing to highlight his focus on the economy and his intention to increase jobs in America. While there is no mention of the “Fake News,” the repetition of “Jobs, Jobs, Jobs” implies that he proves his opposition wrong through economic success. Furthermore, it is another simple, yet effective sentence as he repeats “Jobs” three times showing the correlation between the stock market rising and the job market also increasing because of this development. Thus, Trump suggests that the stock market and the job market have a cause-and-effect relationship. Finally, using the exclamation point again, signals that this is a positive development that he hopes the American people will share with him as he operates on the assumption that people want to see more jobs. “Jobs, Jobs, Jobs” still serves as Trump’s slogan that he can use to argue against his opposition even if he does not openly admit to doing so in the body of the Tweet.

Trump implicitly directs his slogan at his opposition, but also confronts his imagined enemies more explicitly by arguing that the stock market numbers are positive developments. After providing the statistics on the stock market, Trump writes, “Great News for America,” which further demonstrates that he speaks indirectly to the media; he seemingly emphasizes that the media is incorrect to criticize him and provides good news that they should alternatively report. In addition, by spreading his own great news, he directly tells Americans about the stock
market. He takes credit for the stock market indirectly as he hides behind his use of “America” in order to emphasize that Americans should be pleased with this development. Focusing on the idea of “News,” Trump displays that he obsesses over his public image and wants to control the information that determines this persona. Although he does specifically credit himself in this Tweet, Trump clearly seeks to build his ethos to combat what the media says in opposition to the stock market success. Having a detractor at every turn allows Trump to elevate himself above the media in order to present his subjective reality in which he is ethical, shrewd, and powerful.

While Trump sometimes indirectly opposes the media, he also combatively uses the economy to defend himself against what he perceives as misinformation by his foe. Using similar language to his other Tweet to discredit the media, Trump focuses on the desperation of the “Fake News” to criticize him. On June 4, 2018, Trump tweeted, “The Fake News Media is desperate to distract from the economy and record setting economic numbers and so they keep talking about the phony Russian Witch Hunt” (@realdonaldtrump). Calling the media “Fake” attempts to discredit the media as he indicts them with creating untrue facts about his actions in office and before entering office. Trump also claims that the media wants to avoid talking about the economy because it would derail their criticism of him; while this is a compelling argument and rhetorically effective, it is a subjective truth to Trump’s experience. By asserting that the Fake News is “desperate to distract,” Trump shows the media’s urgency to remain critical of his policies. This places him in a position of power over the media because he exposes them for being “desperate” to take away from his success, which also portrays him as a victim to their tactics. Here, Trump essentially describes the media as ravenous to find something else to talk about other than his success.
Moreover, Trump implies the well-being of the economy as an attempt to make the media an enemy of the people for not disclosing the specific facts to prove his success. Instead of providing specific statistics to show the economic success that the media does not highlight, Trump implies the accomplishment by merely saying, “the economy and record setting economic numbers,” which is rather vague. In this case, Trump argues that the entire economy is prospering under his administration; however, he provides no evidence. Rather, Trump invokes Cloud’s interpretation of “common sense” or doxa truth as well as Aristotle’s idea of “common topics” in which the rhetorician builds his argument upon shared beliefs of the audience (Bizzell et al. 203). Since his supporters who would likely read his Tweets believe the economy is doing well, Trump could argue by implication that the media is distracting from this economic growth. According to a 2018 Comercia report, “The U.S. unemployment rate ticked down to 3.8 percent in May, the lowest since April 2000” and “Average hourly earnings were up 2.7 percent over the 12 months ending in May” (Dye & Sanabria). As economists, Robert Dye and Daniel Sanbria provide impartial, statistical evidence to support Trump’s claim. In addition, the President implies that people know about the “recording setting economic numbers,” which is another substantial claim to not provide numbers to supplement the argument. These implied results show that people do not know anything about the economy because he suggests the mainstream media fails to impart information about the economy. Therefore, he vilifies the media for misinforming the American people by failing to disclose Trump’s economic success, elevating him as the reliable source and allowing him to evade accountability.

However, he clearly needs to be held accountable as he uses the same misleading tactics to deflect the allegations from the Russia investigation. As evidence of the media distracting from his success, he notes “so they keep talking about the phony Russian Witch Hunt.” His use
of “keep talking” displays that there is ongoing coverage of the Russia investigation that he would rather see end. This demonstrates that the constant reporting frustrates Trump, which he illuminates in this rhetoric as he wants to deflect claims of his involvement; it detracts from his superior image that he constructs. Furthermore, Trump calls the investigation the “phony Russian Witch Hunt,” showing his personal defensiveness about his slandered name. Using “phony” suggests that the claims of the Russia investigation are fraudulent and baseless. However, it also declares that the investigation is “fake” like the “Fake News Media” as he calls them; this is likely intentional to argue that only the “Fake News” could fabricate such misinformation. By labeling the investigation a “Russian Witch Hunt,” Trump further reveals that he sees no basis in reality of the situation as witches do not exist and this is a common phrase people use to signal a claim lacking solid grounding. Rather, Trump creates a reality that he wants to persuade the American people to believe in which the economy is the only factor that determines his success as president. Capitalizing “Witch Hunt” also identifies the name as a proper noun to be accepted into the Trump vocabulary that people will recognize; this is likely deliberate to make his argument memorable and to try to tweet his reality into existence. In this final part of the Tweet, Trump portrays himself as holding the media accountable for misinforming the public to deflect the attention from his own unethical rhetoric that evades the same accountability.

Trump becomes more defensive in his rhetoric when he perceives the media as attacking his economic success, which serves as the body of his credibility. While he uses the economy to deflect from other negative media attention, another issue arises when the news media highlights the impermanence of economic prosperity. On August 23, 2019, Trump tweeted:

The Economy is strong and good, whereas the rest of the world is not doing so well. Despite this the Fake News Media, together with their Partner, the Democrat Party, are working overtime to convince people that we are in, or will soon be going into, a Recession. They are.....willing to lose their wealth, or a big part of it, just for the
possibility of winning the Election. But it won’t work because I always find a way to win, especially for the people! The greatest political movement in the history of our Country will have another big win in 2020! (@realdonaldtrump)

Here, Trump uses many of the same rhetorical tactics that he has previously employed in using his speaking voice and similar language to describe the media. He, again, partners the media with the Democratic party to show how they conspire against him. However, instead of focusing on other aspects of his presidency, this time, Trump emphasizes that they are attacking the economy. He also tweets in two segments as he goes over the character limit of a Tweet. By continuing the Tweet into a reply, Trump demonstrates the passion and frustration that comes from correcting the Democrats’ and the media’s perception of his policies. He wants to ensure that he has the final word by indirectly arguing with his opposition to make it clear that he is superior and more powerful; therefore, he intends to prove that their tactics will not humble the President.

In this Tweet, Trump uses language that mirrors his speaking tone and language that maintains his style and delivery even though it is not spoken to establish his ethos to overpower the media to portray himself as the only truthful speaker. Trump begins with “The Economy is strong and good,” which reflects his normal use of language as he employs simple words that will detail the positive effects of the economy. “Strong” is a more apt description of the economy because it suggests robustness. On the other hand, “good” just signals to his supporters that there is nothing to worry about in terms of the state of affairs; this is not the most eloquent adjective, but is certainly accessible to all audiences. Again, the umbrella term of the “economy” serves as a vague assurance to the American people there is prosperity in the nation. Trump further illuminates his speaking voice as he continues with “whereas the rest of the world is not doing so well.” His juxtaposition of the different states of world economies shows that Trump continues to use his simple, not particularly articulate language that makes him sound like he is actually
speaking to the American people. First, by contrasting the United States as doing better than the rest of the world, Trump appeals to the sentiments of patriotic Americans. This showcase of American superiority compliments his leadership in that he implies that he is responsible for creating a prosperous economy unlike the leaders of the rest of the world. Second, his language is rather imprecise in the way that he tweets that they are “not doing so well.” This demonstrates that he is not completely insulting other countries, but wants to make the distinction that he believes his economy is prevailing. Here, Trump does not make the best use of logos; rather, he is more interested in ethos and giving himself the credit to appear as a successful president because the media does not portray him in this way.

After highlighting the economy’s strength, Trump accuses the media and Democrats of conspiring to attack him signaling that he faces many enemies, which portrays him as the most truthful and superior. Using a transitional phrase “Despite this,” Trump contrasts his accomplishments and the alliance of the media and the Democratic party. He continues to construct this alliance as he explicitly states, “the Fake News Media, together with their Partner, the Democrat Party,” which reveals that he views them as working together against him. Trump maintains this alliance that he has created in previous Tweets of the media colluding with the Democratic party to spread misinformation about his administration. In addition, he uses language from other Tweets claiming they “are working overtime to convince people that we are in, or will soon be going into, a Recession.” Here, he further alludes to the misinformation being spread to discredit him with such an alliance. “Working overtime” is a phrase that he has used before to identify the relationship between the media and Democrats to ensure that he does not receive any positive media attention. Trump is suggesting that they try to reduce the country’s economic prosperity by creating the idea that there is a recession. He also negates that the
economy could be in a recession at that specific time because of his previous statement defending the strength of the economy. Finally, saying that the Democrats think it “will soon be going into” a recession shows that he thinks they are trying to find ways to criticize him when there is nothing negative to report. Therefore, Trump sees the critical predictions about the economy as attempts by his opposition to discredit him because they know he is far superior to them; he plays into his ego to prove that the media and Democrats are merely envious of his success.

Trump then shames the Democratic party and the media for spreading disinformation as an attempt to gain the people’s support by dismissing the media to elevate him to a reliable and superior source. In the Tweet, Trump charges that the Democrats and the media are “willing to lose their wealth, or a big part of it, just for the possibility of winning the Election.” This allegation asserts that the Democratic party and media prefers to suggest that there could be an economic downturn and hope for a recession in order to cost Trump the election. He argues that the Left and media would rather the country’s well-being worsen in order to eliminate Trump. Furthermore, using the language “wealth, or a big part of it” appeals to Trump supporters in claiming that the Left are elitists and that they will continue to have wealth. Here, Trump implies that these opposition establishments could not even lose all their wealth in an economic downturn parsing that they do not care about the needs of the American people, who want to see the economy prosper for their own well-being. By claiming that the Democrats and media would sacrifice their own wealth to see Donald Trump fail, the President portrays himself not only as the only leader telling the truth, but also the only leader that supports the American people in producing a robust economy.
While Trump defends his discredited economy, the Tweet highlights his necessity to have an enemy he can defeat by promising a 2020 election win. By now, the President’s 2020 reelection was well-established. According to Jessica Taylor of *NPR*, he “filed his official paperwork with the Federal Election Commission on Jan. 20, 2017,” the day of his inauguration, and held “a rally...that was paid for by his campaign committee” “less than a month later” (Taylor). Therefore, Trump began campaigning through his Tweets during his presidency. By deflecting the media’s claims about the impending economic recession, the President states, “But it won’t work because I always find a way to win, especially for the people!” Trump establishes confidence in his own ability to win the 2020 election, which persuades his voter base that he will continue to fight and that he is confident that his economic policies will reelect him anyways. Moreover, he uses the same confidence that he instills in the economy as well as his success as president to display that he will prevail. Using strong language, Trump assures that the efforts of the media to discredit him will not work as a way to build his ego and further fabricate the superiority complex he has to evade any accountability for his actions or rhetoric.

By exhibiting his confidence in his ability to win, President Trump’s language constructs a tension between unethical, demagogic rhetoric and appeals to *pathos* that show his commitment to the American people. Trump saying, “I always find a way to win” is very powerful language and establishes his confidence in his ability to obtain the results he wants; he uses language in order to gain power and attempt to win the election. However, Trump’s rhetoric carries fearful and unethical undertones as he claims that he will continue to govern at whatever cost. This perhaps threatens the Left and the media that they cannot eradicate his influence as he will continue to win. On the other hand, he also uses *pathos* in suggesting that he claims victory for the people as he believes that they need him. Similar to Reagan, Trump places himself with
the people as opposed to the Washington establishment and the media that he has villainized. Qualifying that he “especially” finds a way to win “for the people” reveals that he prioritizes the people in his agenda and his motivation to win. Finally, the exclamation point at the end of each sentence highlights his passion for helping the people. With the tension between the unethical claim of power and an appeal to the people, Trump’s election rhetoric reveals that he is foremost interested in appearing likeable to the people; however, this is only to validate ego that motivates him to prove his opposition inferior.

Following this promise or threat of winning, the President makes lofty claims about the historic nature of his political movement to spite his opposition and illuminate his unique success. Trump proclaims, “The greatest political movement in the history of our Country will have another big win in 2020!” Here, he makes another large claim in calling his 2016 win and his economic movement or the general movement of Trump as president historic. Using “greatest” builds on the “Make America Great Again” slogan and shows that he maintains his positive language about his policies. Furthermore, by stating, “in the history of the Country,” Trump boldly yet confidently emphasizes that he believes in the movement; exuding such confidence is a skillful rhetorical move because it establishes his ethos. Since this Tweet refers to the 2020 election, he reiterates his confidence in the campaign that will get him reelected. By arguing it will be a “big win,” the President also reveals that he is even more assured about his success as he suggests he will win by a landslide against any opponent. This assertive language seeks to correct his opposition’s deception of him to identify Trump as a monumental figure in American political history and he believes that he should be portrayed in this way.

Although Trump is often defensive about “Fake News Media” attention, he uses their infrequent recognition of the economy to convey that he has defeated his opposition as they must
admit to his success. On July 2, 2019, President Trump tweeted, “The Economy is the BEST IT HAS EVER BEEN! Even much of the Fake News is giving me credit for that!” (@realdonaldtrump). Here, Trump appears to qualify this claim using the media’s compliments of the economy to validate the news. However, this inclusion of their favorable coverage demonstrates that he has prevailed in having his version of the truth accepted. He maintains the tense relationship by stating “much of the Fake News” “is giv[ing] [him] credit,” meaning that not all will admit to his victory. Since he labels the media “Fake News,” he implies that he still sees them as an enemy. While calling them “Fake News” almost makes his economic news appear untrue, Trump implies that the media can no longer misinform the American people because of the strength of the evidence to support that the economy is “BEST IT HAS EVER BEEN.” By using exclamation points at the end of both sentences, the President signals that he is pleased that the media is portraying him more favorably; the punctuation, in a sense, also indicates that he gloats toward his opposition. Although Trump seemingly validates his claim with the media’s recognition, he uses his opposition’s compliments to display that he remains above them as he suggests they have no choice but to admit his success.

President Trump’s Tweets about the economy’s strength are not about promoting the economy, but rather endorsing his superior persona that does not need to be held accountable. Foremost, in these Tweets, Trump seeks to discredit the media that is supposed to hold him accountable as part of the democratic system. By calling the media “Fake News” and outright attacking them, the President displays that he must have an enemy to defeat in order to show the full breadth of his power and success. His avoidance of accountability makes his rhetoric unethical because he suggests that he is above any check on his power, which could have led him to fracture the system of checks and balances on which the government relies. However, Trump
conceals this agenda to assert his power by depicting himself as the conveyor truth; he acts as a victim of the media’s defamation and that he does not deserve such treatment as an honest, Reagan-like leader for the people. He constructs a reality in which there is no credible media and therefore, the people are left with only one source: Trump, himself. This development demonstrates that President Trump uses such divisive rhetoric on Twitter to obtain power and idealize his public image. As Jennifer Mercieca notes, Trump uses the techniques of a “dangerous demagogue” by forcing his audience to comply with his argument (266). Making the media his enemy signals such compliance as he attacks his opposition for spreading misinformation instead of engaging in ethical debate about his policies. As a result, he does not respect the need for the adversarial press that John McCain deemed necessary for a democracy to flourish. Therefore, President Trump unethically prioritizes his image as a successful leader over being held accountable by the media and truthfully informing the American people.

Conclusion

It is true that the President and the media should commit to telling the American people the truth; it is an ethical obligation to correctly inform. However, in the Trump era, neither the President nor the media fully allowed the American people to know the truth as each side presented its own version of the political reality. As Patricia Roberts-Miller argues in *Demagoguery and Democracy*, we live in a culture of demagoguery, meaning that it is not just the powerful figure, in this case, Trump, that is responsible; instead, our shift to a demagogic society allowed for him to use the platform (9). This especially applies to the political television news media as Fox News, CNN, and MSNBC, in their ongoing battles with Obama or Trump, have focused on news for entertainment rather than information; we do not obtain the full story unless we watch all news sources, Left and Right. Roberts-Miller states that the media is more
like “infotainment,” meaning that it appears like it is seeking to inform, but “the real goal is entertainment that will improve ratings” (89). Here, Roberts-Miller suggests that media outlets have their own agendas that allow demagoguery to persist. Of course, Trump’s conversational and inaccurate Tweets have provided CNN and MSNBC the drama to increase their ratings while also warning the American public of Trump’s disagreeable tactics. As Fox News likely did the same with Obama and now Biden, these media outlets persuade the audience so they do not watch or consult other competing sources of information.

    Trump has unethically persuaded using Twitter, but the media, as in network television political news programs, is also complicit in deepening these divides among the American people to disregard any opposing arguments. Roberts-Miller notes that the “demagogic media presents its consumers with dumbed-down (or even completely fabricated) versions of opposition arguments” (91). Her diagnosis of the media demonstrates that there is no way of knowing the truth if Americans only rely on one news outlet. This also applies to relying on Trump’s Tweets as his supporters fail to see the Left’s perspective in listening to one fallible source. However, the same principle holds true for Trump’s opposition: both the media and the American public. There is evidence presented by economists and by watching the stock market that his claims about the economy had some validity. At the same time, his claims that the news is “fake” and that the Democrats only attack him fail to have the same validity. The media and Trump continue the “us vs. them” mentality that Roberts-Miller identifies in a culture of demagoguery that minimizes opposing arguments (34). Thus, the media creates this issue of them having an invalid opinion or argument; the drama generated by the media as well as Trump on Twitter does not encourage us to investigate the true reality, but rather to take one side.
Neither Twitter nor the news outlets are an infallible source because of the biases that all media presents, and this is what makes human knowledge imperfect.

Because of such infallibility, the relationship between the media and the truth is rather paradoxical as we can never fully know what is true; thus, Twitter’s suspension of Trump’s account poses some difficult issues. In their article, “The Ancient Greeks’ Guide to Rejecting Propaganda and Disinformation,” Asha Rangappa and Jennifer Mercieca state, “So when Twitter tries to insert facts into Trump’s tweets, it is using a very old and democratic method that goes back to the ancient Greeks. It reminds us that we have a responsibility to ourselves and to our fellow citizens to search for, and debate, the truth” (4). Rangappa and Mercieca highlight that truth is debatable, which in turn makes it subjective. While the authors correctly suggest that Twitter can debate Trump’s claims, Trump has the same right to challenge his opponent’s negative opinions and present his own truth. Because of this right, there is no genuine truth left in our society. For the American people, it becomes difficult to choose what to believe with so much debate around topics that concern our everyday lives.

While the Classical rhetorical tradition provides Trump the ability to debate other truths, it does not excuse him for misleading the American people. In the early uses of Twitter, Obama chose to persuade the American people with facts and did not discredit sources because there was not as much debate on Twitter or about the truth. Although we can never definitively know if Trump tells the truth or some version of it, it would be his ethical responsibility to use his position of power to accurately inform. With such subjective truth, President Trump chose to use his rhetoric to gain more power, which likely factored into Twitter’s decision to suspend his account. The problem, then, becomes that people genuinely believe his words and Twitter definitively eliminated this truth for certain Americans. Perhaps, Twitter’s decision actually
benefited these Trump supporters in putting an end to their misinformed beliefs. However, in our society of fluid truths, Twitter’s decision to ban @realdonaldtrump is an ineffective remedy because his followers will continue to subscribe to his rhetoric and reality and no form of mediation, not even Twitter, can deactivate such strong human beliefs. The influence of President Trump’s rhetoric has already permeated the minds of both his supporters and opposition to forever change the landscape of American politics.
CONCLUSION

A Fractured Media and a Remedy to Save Democracy from Dangerous Rhetoric

Media takes on two different forms throughout this thesis; however, in the end, they intertwine upon reaching our contemporary situation. There is McLuhan’s version of media that Roosevelt, Reagan, and Trump use to relay their messages and then, there is the media, the press, to which Trump responds on Twitter. While the press exists during Roosevelt’s and Reagan’s presidencies and they are aware of the news cycles, Roosevelt and Reagan do not discredit or attack the media in order to gain power and influence over the narrative; they remain accountable to the people and the media. Of course, Roosevelt and Reagan still present their most flattering images so that the press reports positive news rather than criticizes them. They deceive the American people to create a prosperous narrative as well as appear empathetic and reliable as presidents. Roosevelt uses the invisibility of the radio to conceal his paralyzed body in order to assure the American people and the press that their president is strong and can lead them out of the Great Depression. Reagan accentuates his television charisma to convince the American people and the media that he is one of them and will serve all Americans. Despite their deceptions, Roosevelt and Reagan stay accountable as they show respect for their opposition, the press, and the American people by recognizing their humble role as civil servants.

While Roosevelt and Reagan display their understanding of a free press, Trump attacks the media in order to prove that he is the superior source of information that the American people must trust. By calling the media “Fake News,” Trump discredits the press, creating distrust in the American people about whether or not they should believe the news. Trump wants the people to
reject the media and to believe his version of the truth that ultimately serves to feed into his ego. Although Trump uses Twitter effectively, his rhetoric is unethical because he dismisses the media with insults and misinformation that demonstrate his lack of respect for the free press. His presence on Twitter highlights that the truth is subjective and we can never uncover the full truth of a situation with such contested debate. Therefore, Trump’s upheaval of the factual reality signifies that we must remain guarded in order to ensure we do not fall victim to compliance as Mercieca warns.

Nevertheless, Trump’s disregard for the free press and his unethical Twitter rhetoric does not excuse the media for engaging in similar tactics. To be clear, I acknowledge that there is a spectrum of media outlets, some that follow editorial standards and others that favor opinion and border on propaganda. When I refer to the media, I mean the latter as many political network television news programs on Fox News, CNN, and MSNBC sacrifice journalistic integrity for entertainment. As I state in the last chapter, Patricia Roberts-Miller asserts that the media is part of the problem with creating a culture of demagoguery by focusing more on its ratings and competition between other news sources (91). I would further argue that the media contributes to the problem of truth’s subjectivity in our society because of this emphasis on entertainment. In 1971, U.S. Supreme Court Justice Hugo Black said, “The press was to serve the governed, not the governors” (“Freedom of the Press”). However, I do not believe that the news media serves the governed at all times. For one, Fox News has served the governor during the Trump era by supporting his attacks on the left-leaning media and Democrats. While the left-leaning press does not serve Trump as he would desire, these network television news programs, both left- and right-leaning, serve their own companies instead of the governed by heightening the political drama in order to increase ratings and by discouraging audiences from watching stations with
differing views. This development of news media again complicates our ability to trust the reliability of any source because of its rhetorical nature.

How Did We Get Here and What Do We Do?

The rise of the rhetorical presidency has led the truth to become more subjective to the persuasion of presidents like Roosevelt, Reagan, and Trump. However, the media’s role has also shifted from being an impartial reporter to contributing to the polarization of our political climate. John Duffy discusses “toxic discourse,” which he defines as “language that is disrespectful to strangers, hostile to minorities, contemptuous of compromise, dismissive of adverse evidence, and intentionally untruthful” (30). The “intentionally untruthful” discourse is most relevant to this discussion as our politicians, like Trump, as well as the media utilize this rhetoric often to increase the divide ideologically. Duffy outlines four potential causes for our descent into toxic discourse, but I will only highlight the argument for its structural cause because it implicates the media. He notes that the deregulation of mass media during the Reagan administration allowed news companies to present more biased coverage of politics and focus more on entertainment (36). This deregulation demonstrates that the media now has more freedom to choose the stories that they want to cover with less restrictions on how they can present material. In the 1930s, “The public airwaves were regarded as a vital public interest, especially for communicating with citizens in times of emergency and promoting attitudes and viewpoints thought to be essential for a healthy, functioning democracy” (Duffy 36). Thus, during Roosevelt’s presidency, the press relied on impartial reporting in order to effectively inform the public. The shift from public interest to private interest for this media coverage also applies to imparting the truth.
Alongside the deregulation of mass media, the ability to self-publish as Trump did on Twitter contributes to this subjective truth and increase in unethical rhetoric. Duffy notes that “the democratization of the media space...has additionally contributed to the increase in outrage discourse as the technical and financial barriers to self-publishing have largely come down” (37). By creating a more democratic media, there is more liberty for misinformation to permeate because anyone can post or assert their opinion without providing facts to support their claims. As I have already suggested, Trump is notorious for self-publishing to discredit the journalistic media and portray himself as a superior economic genius. Therefore, not only does the press contribute to the unethical methods of informing the public, but anyone who uses McLuhan’s forms of media has the potential to misinform. We must be aware of this lack of reliable information as we continue to read Tweets, watch YouTube, CNN, MSNBC, or Fox News.

Now that I have depicted a seemingly hopeless situation for truth, I will propose a way in which we can respond to such a subjective reality. Jennifer Mercieca quotes American philosopher, John Dewey, who said, “Democracy will be a farce...unless individuals are trained to think for themselves, to judge independently, to be critical, to be able to detect subtle propaganda and the motives which inspire it” (276). In other words, John Dewey argues that a democracy can only flourish if the citizens think critically. Critical thinking may seem too simple of an answer to such a complicated issue; however, too many Americans comply with Trump’s version of reality or the political talk show media’s version, which illuminates that we are neglecting the importance of individual thinking in our society. Charismatic political power limits our own critical thinking about policies and we must guard against such a reality by holding our leaders and the media accountable for their words.
Although all sources of news appear to present subjective ideas, it is important to review both sides of a debate in order to obtain a fuller picture of the political reality. This remedy returns to the sophistic philosophy of knowledge in that we must gain an understanding of truth through opposing arguments. Part of the problem is that people believe rhetoric for what it appears to be instead of trying to understand the different opinions involved; this issue particularly relates to Trump supporters who take his word that the media is dishonest. To acknowledge both sides means reading articles or watching coverage on the same subject from CNN and Fox News. It entails reading Trump’s Tweets and Tweets of Democrats that oppose his beliefs. For Reagan, looking at both sides requires watching his “Addresses to the Nation” and listening to what the Democrats who endorsed the Committee bill thought of his tax legislation. For Roosevelt, it means listening to his Fireside Chats about obtaining executive power and hearing statements from Congressional members that opposed such expansion of power. People are opinionated and biased, but knowing all the arguments allows us to make our own conclusions instead of blindly accepting one side.

The full truth is unattainable and abstract, but we do not have to sacrifice the truth altogether. By learning to think critically and become informed on multiple sides of an argument, Americans can protect themselves against believing misinformation or from having complete distrust in the news. At the core of democracy is the ability to reflect individually and reviewing various perceptions of an issue permits the public to reclaim that right. Of course, the truth is always mediated; on the radio, television, and Twitter, Roosevelt, Reagan, and Trump share their opinions and perspective on the political reality. The press condenses these direct addresses and offers a mediated summary of what these presidents proclaim for the people who do not see the primary source. While truth is always mediated, being reminded of this mediation empowers us
to guard against taking rhetoric as it is presented by the speaker. We must engage in political debate to obtain the proper understanding of the truth the best we can to ensure that we remain active participants in the democracy that ultimately belongs to us, the people.
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