

"Yes we can"

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An Analysis of the Art of Speech, by René Scholz

"Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battle-field of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field, as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

But, in a larger sense, we can not dedicate - we can not consecrate - we can not hallow - this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us - that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion -- that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain - that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom - and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth."

Gettysburg Address: Abraham Lincoln, 16. President of the United States Of America, at the dedication of Soldier's National Memorial at Gettysburg, Penn., November 19th, 1863.

What is a speech? One person addressing many others. That is a speech.

As opposed to many people talking which may be . . . a mess. Two people talking may be a conversation, information being exchanged in both directions. It may help to create a sense of community, it provides means of power, and it assures us of values we share. This is the working level of communication.

In a speech, however, information flows from one person to all the others. In a speech we deliver results worked out in prior conversations. As soon as we know what should be done for the benefit of the people, we can prepare our speech.

What is a good speech? A good speech creates a sense of community. The Gettysburg Address (Bliss) contains 278 words: "we" ten times, but never the words "I" or "you".

A good speech provides means of power as it tells us *why* we do things: ". . . from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause . . . that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom - and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth." The question "why" (Aristotle) is the basis of all Western philosophy.

A good speech addresses value: ". . . all men are created equal." Furthermore, a good speech is short. It took approximately two minutes to deliver the Gettysburg Address.

Tomorrow, January 20th, 2009, Barack H. Obama will hold his Inaugural Speech as 44th President of the United States of America. An outstanding speaker, he already made history by providing a sound message of community, means of power, and value. "Yes" delivers "value", "we" means community, and "can" conveys means of power. In the shortest possible way he coined the epitome of a good speech: "Yes, we can."

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