

WAVING THE BLOODY SHIRT AGAIN: RHETORICAL CODES OF EMOTION IN  
TRUMP'S CAMPAIGN SPEECHES

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## I. Introduction

Donald Trump survived an assassination attempt during his rally in Pennsylvania on July 13th, 2024. As a result of the attempt, Trump was injured in his ear and was widely remembered for his action after the injury, where he stood up, pumped his fist, and shouted, “Fight,” creating a wave of shouts in his audience. Only after two days, he made his first public appearance at the 2024 RNC address, the first and only speech where he directly addresses the assassination attempt. This speech has historical significance in American politics, making it a proper subject for rhetorical analysis. One of the reasons Trump's RNC speech became so historically significant is because James N. Schubert et al.'s (2002 ) rally effect, which highlights how a significant event in the course of the presidential election, like the assassination attempt, can also increase the significance of the address speech. Moreover, addressing such a tragic event lays the groundwork for a strong emotional appeal, which is often associated with Donald Trump’s campaign and presidential election strategies. Although many researchers address this rhetorical strategy of emotional appeal, it is still analyzed as part of a broader campaign strategy and is heavily affected by the political context and the audience as participants in the electoral process. Therefore, this study will examine rhetorical codes such as the Waving the Bloody Shirt Concept, False Intimacy, and Synecdoche as elements of content and stylistic strategies utilized by President Trump’s rhetoric, aligning with a broader trend of conversational rhetoric commonly followed by previous presidents and identified by Elvin T. Lim (2002). Shifting from a broader campaign analysis to a close analysis of utilized rhetorical codes shapes this study into answering the following questions:

1. In what ways does content contribute to the emotional appeal and Trump’s connection with the audience?

2. In what ways do stylistic approaches contribute to the emotional appeal and Trump's connection with the audience?
3. How do Trump's rhetorical strategies align with the rhetoric of previous presidents?

To answer these questions, the paper will be organized in the following way. I will begin with introducing the conducted research on the rhetoric of Trump by the representatives of the fields of rhetoric, political communication, and social psychology. Further, I will follow with the methods section, providing the key rhetorical codes and terminologies to establish foundational knowledge for the next section, where I break down Donald Trump's speech and analyze his usage of Waving the Bloody Shirt Concept, False Intimacy, and Synecdoche. The paper will be finalized with the discussion section, where I will address the presented research questions and a conclusion with suggestions for future work.

## **II. Literature Review**

“Trump is a buffoon who was lucky enough to somehow rise to become the most powerful human on the planet” (Steff, 2017, p. 5). If this is true, then how was Trump able to win the election despite his seemingly irrational and impulsive campaign speeches? In addressing this question, most researchers claim that Donald Trump successfully depicts America as a nation in crisis. As Robert C. Rowland (2019) highlights, Trump is creating a dystopian image of a country under crisis following his dystopian narrative, which was observed in speeches varying from campaign rallies to inaugural speeches. This narrative of a country under crisis is also identified by Stephen D. Reicher and S. Alexander Haslam (2017) who also stress that in this narrative of a dystopian country, people lack control and power by citing Trump who said, “the

failings are a matter of power and wealth rather than of moral purpose” (p.46). Kathleen Hall Jamieson and Doron Taussig (2017- 2018) also noted that Trump presents himself as the sole solution to the crisis that he introduced again by stating that the so-called powerful ones will no longer threaten the nation and that he has seen how this system works against the nation (p.624).

As Jamieson and Taussig (2017-2018) stress, creating an image of a nation under crisis also creates the right set of conditions for appealing to the nation that is suffering this crisis. Specifically, Trump mostly targets the white working class. Summarizing Trump’s campaign in Indianapolis, Robert E. Terrill (2017) notes how the audience was almost entirely white, Terrill claims that Trump created a space where the white audience feels safe as they come to the space where their personal interests were met, “his overwhelmingly white audiences felt safe because it was a space within which they are insulated from the burdens of reciprocity and where citizenship is reduced to self-interest” (2017, p.505) indicating how Trump represented the voice of the white voters of the nation. Interestingly, Panayota Gounari (2018) adds that Trump does not only appeal to the lower-middle class people, but also allies with the elites. Additionally, while Denis M. Bostdorff (2017) mentions that Trump creates a dystopian picture, he also highlights how, in Trump’s appeal to his supporters, they are described as the victims of the previous politicians and forces.

This context, where Trump creates a picture of a dystopian country while also appealing to his supporters, who are mainly described to be a working white class group, creates a beneficial position for Trump to appear as a strong leader. To promote his image as a strong leader, many researchers claim that Trump says things that others are afraid to and frequently employs name-calling. In this case, Reuben Steff (2017) makes a strong statement by saying, “[what] would have been a campaign killer for a normal candidate, really [only] dented his

campaign” (p. 3) referring to Trump’s offensive comments addressed toward his opponents such as ‘Little Marco’, ‘Lying Ted’ and calling other politicians stupid; highlighting how this behavior benefitted Trump even though it would be a great harm for other politicians. Steff further credits this to Trump’s persuasive power and stresses how those seemingly simple nicknames stuck with people and changed their cognitive biases, restraining them from voting for politicians who were associated with those foolish labels (e.g. low “low-energy Bush,” “crooked Hillary”). David Masiel (2016) describes how Trump speaks the language that people do not want to be caught saying but want to hear. He then continues stating that Trump speaking plain language allows people to speak the same language and get away with it. This, according to Mansiel, is what makes him appear as a strong leader that people long for. Terrill, in this matter, says that “Trump speaks plainly, unconstrained by the bogeyman of ‘political correctness” (2017, p.498) while also adding that many observers noted this tendency is in Trump’s delivery. They noted that Trump is willing to say things that others can only imply, a mode of delivery that is Trump’s only difference from other Republicans, as Terrill says. Rowland (2019), in his turn, states that Trump depicts himself as a “truth teller” (p. 363).

Most of this closely correlates with Trump’s charismatic outsider persona, which Rowland (2019) describes as a persona who promises to bring the country back to its great times, exemplifying Trump’s common phrase, “Make America Great Again.” This is, as he describes, a great fit for feelings like “lost opportunities” (p. 349) and “alienation” (p. 349), which are common to Trump’s main audience, a white working class, as it makes them support the charismatic outsider. He also points out how Trump’s speeches, as a norm, do not include any policies (p. 363). He then continues saying that although Trump talked about immigration policies, there were no detailed explanations and policy arguments. Despite this, Trump’s big

promises in his speech were effective with his audience, as most of his promises were not about policy making but an emotional reassurance that those promises were possible (p. 357).

Additionally, Steff (2017) notes the strategic move behind adding Steve Bannon to Trump's campaign as chief executive, who was an outsider and who appealed to the white working class by explaining how globalism didn't benefit them without referring to Trump as an outsider (pp.2-5). In their turn, Reicher and Haslam (2017) highlight Trump's difference from other politicians and how his entrepreneurial identity plays to his benefit, particularly, "Trump insisted that he is not like other politicians. He knows how to make a deal" (p.47), which is also supported by people's lack of trust in politicians (p.48). Gounari (2018) also adds to this claim by presenting the idea that Trump employs binaries like strong-weak and leader-follower explaining it as an authoritarian behavior that "relies on [the authoritarian leader's] personal politics as an individual brand" (p.210), highlighting how Trump presents himself as the only "hero" who can bring an instant change thanks to his knowledge of political system and the ability to make deals. Bostdorff (2017) also notes that because Trump is an outsider, people believe that he will bring change after they have been emotionally challenged in the previous context of the dystopian country. Kellner (2018) calls Trump a "magic helper" (p. 73) who solely solves all the issues of fighting the threatening Other.

The 'threatening other' is another topic that is commonly discussed by researchers. Rowland (2019) notices Trump's pattern of referring to the threatening other and elites whom he blames for the crisis. He even says that Trump's goal is not to make people support him but to "activate fear of the other" (p. 372), which creates a condition for him to emotionally appeal to the audience. Gounari (2018) says that Trump appeals to the fears of people and portrays a particular group as dangerous and as a threat to him and his supporters. As Gounari says, any

individual or group was added to the enemy category if against his political agenda. Like Gounari, Reicher and Haslam (2017) also highlight how others caused county's failures, not the nation, supporting the narrative of the enemy and the dangerous *other*, "that they are caused by the depredations of others rather than the weaknesses of the in-group" (p. 46) stressing that all the problems were the consequences of the enemies' actions. Finally, Bostdorff (2017) provides Aristotle's idea that these strong emotions, like anger, make people believe that they are the ones who were wronged, but not the wrongdoers (p. 697).

This literature review reveals that the substantial majority of researchers attribute President Trump's success in the election to his ability to create the right emotions in the right audience and to choose the right behavior to appeal to his supporters. Particularly, by creating a dystopian image of a country under crisis where the nation is portrayed as the powerless victims, he creates feelings of fear and anger in the white working-class people. Further, introducing a 'threatening other' in the form of politicians and elites allows him to present himself as the savior and perfect persona for the voters, appearing as someone different from traditional politicians and capable of bringing instant changes. By identifying these factors, most researchers conclude that Trump's success is rooted in his ability to emotionally appeal to his audience and create an affective connection with them.

Yet, the literature is often limited often limited because it broadly analyzes the whole presidential campaigns and Trump's behavior throughout the period, while lacking the close rhetorical analysis of President Trump's speeches. While this approach contributes to the field of politics, a closer rhetorical analysis is still needed to contribute to the understanding of how rhetorical strategies work and influence the audience.

## I. Methods and Terminologies Introduced

To provide a more narrow and specific analysis of rhetorical codes used by President Trump, I will build my research on the modern rhetorical trends identified by Elvin T. Lim (2002) during the computer-based content analysis of inaugural and annual speeches delivered between 1789 and 2000. Lim introduces two transformational shifts in the presidency, where the latter shift divided the presidential rhetoric into the speeches of founding presidents (e.g., George Washington and Thomas Jefferson) and modern rhetorical presidents, meaning the transition to a different rhetoric (from Theodore Roosevelt to Bill Clinton). He explains the initial institutional transformation that shifted the presidency from administrative to a more rhetorical one with more frequent exposure to the public, noting “these scholars observe a significant transformation of the presidency at the turn of the twentieth century from a traditional, administrative, and unrhetorical office into a modern, expansive, and stridently rhetorical one” (Lim, 2002, p. 329). Within this shift, he identified the following major trends: anti-intellectual rhetoric, abstract rhetoric, assertive rhetoric, democratic rhetoric, and conversational rhetoric.

It is essential to note that President Trump’s success in the election is associated with his emotional appeal and connection with his audience rather than logic and facts, “it is quite clear that fact checking and other argumentative critique had little influence on his affective relationship with core supporters” (Rowland, 2019, p. 347). Additionally, the emotions like, “the anger expressed at rallies against elites, the media, immigrants, and others” (Rowland, 2019, p. 347) created by President Trump also played a key role in his success and rhetoric, what makes it essential to study how President Trump was able to create as Rowland observes, “strong emotional bond”(2019, p.347). Therefore, I will focus on Conversational Rhetoric as a trend

identified and presented by Lim (2002). Conversational Rhetoric involves reliance on intimacy, trust, and anecdotes. Specifically, Lim mentions how presidents shifted towards telling the stories of the American people, explaining “modern-day presidents have preferred to pay reverence instead to the wisdom and experiences of the American people” (2002, p. 344), showing presidents’ increased and targeted focus on resonating with the audience. Particularly, Presidents use stories of the American people to give the audience something that they can relate to and connect with, and for the audience to see the president as one of them. This trend is especially vivid in President Trump’s 2024 RNC speech, where he utilizes the forgotten concept of Waving the Bloody Shirt to discuss the country’s issues in a strategic way that evokes stronger emotions. Additionally, following the trend of intimacy and anecdotes of conversational rhetoric, Trump tells the stories using a particular pattern that creates images and an illusion of intimacy when sharing three cases of illegal immigration victims. By doing this, Trump utilizes rhetorical devices like synecdoche and cultivates a sense of false intimacy with the audience. This study will address the analysis of Trump’s speech through the lens of these three rhetorical codes, but before that, I will define and explain the mechanics of each code with examples from President Trump’s RNC 2020 speech to show that these codes are, in fact, strategic decisions.

### **Waving the Bloody Shirt**

First, Waving the Bloody Shirt is a historical technique used by the Republican Party, which reminded the public of the rebellions and the Civil War caused by the Democratic Party, as described by A. James Fuller in his work and analysis of Oliver P. Morton’s Bid for the 1876 presidency. Within this concept, Republicans blamed democrats for the “blood” of Union soldiers who fell during those rebellions, making an emotional appeal to the audience and distancing them from the opposing party. This practice was used for a long time until, as James

Fuller states in his article, “the country had changed and Americans had grown tired of waving the bloody shirt” (2017, p. 209 ). This practice had lost its rhetorical power and even triggered a negative attitude from voters. However, even though the topic of the Civil War became worn out, it does not mean the basis of the technique is out of use. It is still possible to use this concept by altering it and adjusting the initial roles to new ones. There are two essential building blocks or the major components involved in the Waving the Bloody Shirt technique: the one for blame (Democratic Party) and the loss (Union Soldiers, their blood). While the role of Democrats can stay as the ones to blame, as it is still relevant for the Republican Party, the Civil War, and Union Soldiers can be substituted with something similar in its moral significance. For instance, in his RNC 2020 speech, Trump highlights the American sons and daughters that Biden sent to war, “Joe Biden spent his entire career outsourcing the dreams of American Workers, . . . , sending their sons and daughters to fight in endless foreign wars” (Trump, 2020, as cited in The New York Times, 2020). Framing soldiers as sons and daughters increases the significance of this loss, creating a negative image for Biden and the Democratic Party, who are thought to be at fault for this loss. Another way through which Trump increases the significance of the loss is by applying the themes of death, struggle, and destruction in instances like “he [Biden] is the destroyer of America’s Jobs, and if given the chance, he will be the destroyer of American Greatness,” and “[we] withdrew from the last Administration’s job-killing Trans Pacific Partnership” (2020). Using words like ‘destroy’ and ‘killing’, Trump triggers a stronger emotional response from the audience and makes the losses perceived more devastating and significant. Therefore, I reformulate the concept of Waving the Bloody Shirt as it is a practical structure that speakers can use to appeal to the audience and deter them from their opponents. This will be achieved by

analyzing how President Trump, with a particular stylistic choice highlighting the themes of killing and destruction, practices the Concept of waving the Bloody Shirt in his speech.

### **False Intimacy**

Second, false intimacy is the speaker's appeal for empathy within the audience by creating an illusion of a close relationship. This is achieved by integrating stories and narratives of people as part of the content choice and through the employment of particular word choice as part of the stylistic approach. An example from Trump's other speech, particularly RNC 2020, is his content choice of adding the stories of police workers, victims of riots. To be specific, President Trump talks about Detective Miosotis Familia, who was killed in the line of duty. Not only do stories, as a content choice, act as a major device for emotions, but the stylistic choice that Trump employs when narrating this story showcases the usage of false intimacy code. When referring to Familia, Trump says, "Detective Familia was a single mom—she'd recently asked for the night shift so she could spend more time with her kids" (Trump, 2020, as cited in *The New York Times*, 2020), revealing the victim's intention, which would be only known in case of a close relationship. Additionally, Trump includes, "Two years ago, I stood in front of the U.S. Capitol alongside those children, and held their Grandmother's hand" (2020) when referring to the family of Familia. He does not just recount the event, but uses this to forge emotional connections between the audience and the tragic event, and also for them to see their leader as someone close to the nation. These same patterns are observed in Trump's RNC 2024 speech as well.

### **Synecdoche**

Third, synecdoche is the code targeted at creating an image for communities to perceive individuals as part of their communities. Eric Ringmar (1998) makes the following point that

showcases the importance of creating an image in *Nationalism: The Idiocy of Intimacy*, "Thus, although not every member of a group can know more than a handful of the other members, he or she can make the others present by conceiving of them in a certain manner" (p. 537), which is visible in Trump's speech when he discusses and refers to people in "a certain manner" by identifying them not as just people but through their family roles and their life values and habits. This creates a sense of relatedness and communality in his audience while also making those people in Trump's speech easier to imagine for the audience and perceive them as part of the same community that aligns with what Ringmar says, "in this sense, all communities are, and must be, imagined" (1998, p. 537). As for the example of synecdoche, the repeated pattern of referring to the victims through their family roles that are easily imagined as a shared identification and/or including their family members, encouraging collective mourning. Continuing on the victims of riots, Trump talks about Captain David Dorn's death through his family, "here tonight is the grieving family" (Trump, 2020, as cited in The New York Times, 2020) and "We are honored to be joined tonight by his wife Ann and beloved family members: Brian and Kielen" (2020). This involvement of family ties presents the victim not only as a case, but frames him in a personal context, making the audience feel empathy and grief towards the victim. Additionally worth noting that besides framing victims through their family roles, Trump also shares their life values and habits that make those victims even more identifiable as the same as the audience and as a part of one community. In the above example of Detective Familia, Trump says, "she'd recently asked for the night shift so she could spend more time with her kids" (2020), which is a deliberate act of adding a shared value and principle of spending time with one's children that is common and emotional for most people. Again, similar instances from Trump's 2020 RNC speech are observed in his 2024 RNC speech that will be discussed below.

## II. Close Analysis of the Artifact — The Concept of Waving the Bloody Shirt.

### Waving the Bloody Shirt at RNC 2024

There are a few instances where the structure of waving the bloody shirt is seen in Trump's speech at the Republican National Convention (RNC). There, Trump blames the current administration that has been operating since January 20th, 2021, for the number of deaths and "damage" (Trump, 2024, as cited in The New York Times, 2024) that have been done.

Particularly, this rhetorical code is integrated and adhered to by Trump when he talks about the country's issues, such as illegal immigration and border issues, inflation, and the ongoing wars around the world. Trump, as part of his content, adds the stories of illegal immigrant' victims, and for the stylistic choice, he employs the themes of death and suffering.

Trump describes the ongoing illegal crossings at the Southern border and its consequences as an "illegal immigration crisis"(Trump, 2024, as cited in The New York Times, 2024), which also "has spread misery, crime, poverty, disease, and destruction to the communities" (2024), highlighting the urgency of the issue. He uses a chart with statistics on the rate of illegal immigration to showcase and juxtapose the outcomes of his work on illegal immigration and the work of the current administration. He states how low the rates were during his leadership and how the current, "foolish" (2024) administration led to the "greatest invasion" (2024). From this statistic, he moves on to the origins of these invaders, which highlights that the majority of invaders are prisoners, murderers, and criminals sent from other countries. There, he includes several cases where Americans were killed. First, he starts with the case of "Jocelyn Nungaray, a 12-year-old girl from Houston who last month was tied up, assaulted, and strangled to death after walking into the convenience store a block away. Her body was dumped near the

side of the road in a shallow Creek” (2024). He points out how the onlookers who found the body of a dead girl couldn’t believe what they had witnessed, highlighting the cruelty of the crime. The murderers of Jocelyn Nungaray were alien immigrants from Venezuela who were first in custody but later released into the country by this “horrible” (2024) administration. Although he already stated that it is alien immigrants responsible for this murder, he deliberately puts the “horrible” (2024) administration under the spotlight, convincing people that they are the root of the issue.

He moves to the next case by saying, “Rachel Morin was a 37-year-old mom of five beautiful children who was brutally raped and murdered while out on a run” (Trump, 2024, as cited in The New York Times, 2024). This seemingly unnecessary description of murder evokes stronger emotions of compassion that grow into fear and anger directed towards the ones to blame. Trump is skillful in pointing the finger at the one to blame, saying the murderer responsible for Rachel Morin’s death was let into the country by the White House. Worth mentioning that Trump also clearly repeats himself, “White House let them in” (2024), stressing that these murders happened because of their decisions. The same murderer, as Trump continues in his speech, “attacked a 9 year-old-girl and her mother in a home invasion” (2024). Trump points out how this dangerous murderer traveled throughout the country doing “tremendous damage” (2024), highlighting the heavy consequences that a single illegal immigrant can bring.

After this, he proceeds to the case of Laken Riley, a 22-year-old nursing student. He shared, “she was so proud of being first in her class who was out for a jog on the campus of the University of Georgia when she was assaulted, beaten, and horrifically killed” (Trump, 2024, as cited in The New York Times, 2024). It is visible how Trump contrasts the positive picture of a student being first in her class and the detailed description of death that creates a deeper emotion

of devastation over an unrealized potential and valuable loss. After introducing another victim's story, he says, "another American life was taken because of a criminal alien led by the administration"(2024), not forgetting to hold his opponents accountable for the loss. By referring to these victims as "great people" (2024) and referring to these murders as "another American life" (2024) in the speech, he doesn't merely state facts or news, but creates stories and shares their good traits. This makes these cases more appealing to the American audience and puts a significant weight of shame on the Democratic administration that let this happen. All the building blocks of the Waving the Bloody Shirt concept are met in Trump's referral to the invasion. The lives of innocent people have been taken away because of the Democrats, as they were the ones who let those alien immigrants into the country. By stating it this way, he waves the bloody shirts of these victims to draw everyone's attention to the bloodshed of fellow Americans that his opponents have caused.

Trump's next discussion of the ongoing wars around the world that started under the current administration is an example of the shifted waving the bloody shirt concept. In this discussion of the war between Russia and Ukraine and "the attack on Israel"(Trump, 2024, as cited in The New York Times, 2024), Trump highlights how these wars and conflicts "wouldn't have happened under him"(2024), but happened under his opponent's period of administration. Again, this deliberate contrast between him and the current administration works effectively for his approval and as a deterrent for his opponents, which is a major goal of the Waving the Bloody Shirt concept. These conflicts stand for the bloodshed and death that were caused by the Democrats' administration. Trump, in his RNC 2024 speech, starts to list the wars that happened under previous presidents by saying, "Under President Bush, Russia invaded Georgia, under President Obama, Russia took Crimea, under the current administration, Russia after all of

Ukraine, under President Trump, Russia took nothing” (2024). This is another way of getting citizens’ votes by pointing out Democrats’ and other presidents’ mistakes and blaming them for the wars and rebellions being fought in the world. As Howlett (2003) states that peace historically has been, “reform sought most vocally by Americans” (p. 297), these ongoing wars act as a morally significant damage to the American audience due to their long emotional investment in this topic of peace. Additionally, Trump not only talks about ongoing wars, but also goes deeper and reminds people of soldiers’ deaths by saying, “thirteen heroic U.S. service members were tragically and needlessly killed. Forty-five others were horrifically wounded” (2024), and the damage in the world that Democrats have caused. He also mentions the death of 13 US service members who were “tragically” (2024) and “needlessly killed” (2024), and 45 of them were “horrifically wounded” (2024) by the Taliban. This way, besides appealing to the American people’s support for world peace, he draws a direct connection between the wars and Americans, increasing the urgency and significance of the issue of ongoing wars.

Another key topic in Trump’s speech at the RNC 2024 is the problem of inflation. Although inflation is not a living entity, but an economic one, an abstract concept, Trump integrates the elements of death and suffering through the particular word choice. In his speech, Trump stated, “inflation has been a killer for our country” (Trump, 2024, as cited in The New York Times, 2024) and “Inflation is eating you alive” (2024). Putting stress on the damages that inflation has led to and using phrases like “killer” and “eating you alive”, Trump humanizes inflation as something that kills and eats the American people, presenting it as a living entity that can inflict physical harm onto people which makes this issue morally significant in the audience’s eyes. This way he evokes fear, urgency and emotional responses rather than a rational and analytical response. As he did before, he draws a comparison between his administration and

the current administration by saying that under his presidency, the USA had the largest economy. In the same speech, he also mentions the second building block of the Waving the Bloody Shirt concept which is the one to blame by stating that all of the inflation issues happened under the current administration, “we’ve had the worst inflation we’ve ever had under this [Joe Biden] person” (2024), directly correlating people’s sufferings to his opponents, the current administration. This fits into the description of the shifted waving the bloody shirt concept. Trump depicts people’s suffering as a bloody shirt of soldiers by stating how the U.S. citizens had to open their savings accounts to meet their ends and that “they’re barely living” (2024). Trump’s vivid description of people’s struggling state of life and being “physically” harmed goes hand in hand with the responsibility put on the Democrats, fulfilling the key points of the Waving the Bloody Shirt concept.

### **False Intimacy**

As False intimacy is a rhetorical code aimed at creating an illusion of a close relationship, it includes information that is normally accessible to close people as part of the content. Additionally, in his stories of illegal immigration victims, President Trump does not mention the tragic events neutrally to recount them, but uses descriptive language that conveys a sense of familiarity. This helps to create a sense of proximity between the audience and illegal immigration victims and presents Trump as an empathic and caring leader who is capable of being close with his people.

First, the descriptive language that Trump utilizes to introduce the victims creates an illusion of a close relationship, portrays Trump as an emotional leader, and evokes an emotional response from the audience. For example, when Trump says, “I spoke to the grieving mother of Jocelyn Nungaray, a wonderful woman” (Trump, 2024, as cited in The New York Times, 2024),

and refers to Jocelyn Nungaray as a “precious” (2024) girl, describing them as “wonderful” and “precious” suggests personal connection and affection. Rather than introducing these people neutrally by their names only, he uses this positive language to position himself as someone who knows these people beyond the surface level, having access to their character. Showing such a close attitude towards these victims translates to the audience as well, making them respond to these cases emotionally. Further, he proceeds to the next victim, “I’ve also met with the wonderful family of Laken Riley, the brilliant 22-year-old nursing student” (2024). Similar to the previous cases, he utilizes descriptive language that includes their positive character and traits, such as “wonderful” and “brilliant student”, as if saying I know them and I have spent time with them. Not only does this put him in a good position as an empathic and caring leader, but it also shows the audience that he is displaying compassion, like they would for someone they knew. Speaking of spending time, in his RNC 2024 speech, Trump directly states that he, in fact, has done that, “Rachel’s mother will never be the same. I spent time with her. She will never be the same” (2024), which conveys the idea that Trump is aware of the consequences that a victim’s family is going through and that he has shared their sorrow and tragic experience. By repeating, “she will never be the same” (2024) he shows that he personally witnessed her pain and can understand how permanent it can be. This illusion of closeness presents Trump as emotional and trustworthy, creating a safe ground for the audience to be emotional as well.

Besides introducing the victims’ personal traits, Trump also shares their everyday life habits and values, which are typically known by those in close relationships with them. For instance, referring to Rachel Morin, he says, “she wanted to keep herself in good shape. It was very important to her” (Trump, 2024, as cited in The New York Times, 2024), sharing her values and motivation. This presents Trump as someone who not only knows her but is invested in her

inner life. Next, he moves on to Laken Raley and states, “she was so proud of being first in her class” (2024), which is again a piece of information that is not usually accessible to a person in a distant relationship. Sense of pride over an accomplishment is normally an intimate to a person feeling and by revealing this, Trump reinforces the illusion that he had a personal connection to Laken on a deep and intimate level. Such intimate information that is only shared with a close circle of people allows Trump to create a personal narrative charged with emotions. Utilizing the rhetorical code of false intimacy further sets the audience in the same state, making them address the speech through a perspective highly wired with emotions.

### **Synecdoche**

Sharing the victims’ life habits and values is also one of the two ways Trump utilizes synecdoche, particularly in creating an image of a community. Everyday habits like running and wanting to keep one’s body in good shape, like in this victim’s case, are a value and principle many would resonate with. Portraying people through the lens of their values and principles makes them easier for an audience to imagine, resonate with, and create a sense of shared communality. This image creation evokes the sense of proximity and relatedness between the audience and the victims. This same pattern is noticed in the description of Laken Riley's case when he shares her being proud to be the top of her class and that she out on a run, he is also sharing the details that are common for many people. Particularly, a common and admired feeling of pride invites the audience to reflect on their similar experiences. They perceive these victims not as cases, but as part of the same community that was lost to the tragic events. Moreover, portraying victims’ lives positively in contrast to the crime amplifies the sense of devastation and loss, creating a significantly emotional response. This repeating pattern of stating

the victim's deeper values and emotions helps the audience to imagine those people and relate to them.

Moving onto the second way how Trump employs synecdoche is he frames the victims through their family roles and relationships to create a collective mourning. For instance, when referring to the death of Joselyn Nungaray, Trump adds that he spoke to her, "grieving mother" (Trump, 2024, as cited in The New York Times, 2024), referring to her role as a mother, making this case more relatable for the audience. Next, when mentioning the case of Rachel Morin, he follows the same pattern by starting the description with her family members, "I also met recently with the heartbroken mother and sister of Rachel Morin" (2024) to evoke a deep emotional response by defining identity through her family members. Thus, this phrasing expands the impact span, resonating with mothers, sisters, and daughters in the community, and thus encouraging them to empathize with the grief of those left behind and creating collective mourning. He then frames Rachel Morin's identity as "a 37-year-old mom of five beautiful children" (2024), deliberately appealing to the emotions of the audience by stating her role as a mother, not just a statistic. This creates a loss of not only a single person, but a valuable member of a society, leaving a mourning behind them. Therefore, these statistics do not convince with their quantity and urgency, but with their vivid portrayal that creates emotional heaviness and a sense of personal relationship between them and the audience.

### **III. Discussion**

If emotional appeal and connection with an audience are what distinguish Trump from other candidates, what does he do in particular to evoke the audience's emotions and attract votes? The Rhetorical codes, such as Waving the Bloody Shirt, False Intimacy, and Synecdoche,

cover both content choices and stylistic approaches that emotionally appeal to the audience, evoking judgment driven by feelings. As part of his content, Trump adds information that is not necessarily verifiable, but if true, it still serves the purpose of emotional appeal. For example, like in the RCN 2020 speech, where he claims that he was holding hands with Familia's mom, he also talks about how he has spent time with the victims of illegal immigrants, which is then further extended to the information on the victims' intentions, everyday life habits, and values, information typically shared with close ones. This repeating pattern from the RNC 2020 speech to the one in 2024 suggests the intentional selection of information that would set the tone of the presidential speech to an emotional one, encouraging emotional thinking rather than analytical.

The content selection goes alongside the stylistic choices. Particularly, Trump delivers the stories in a highly descriptive way by adding redundant adverbs, "brutally raped," and "horrifically killed". This stylistic choice was even noticeable in the abstract concept, like inflation, that implies a deliberate act of emotional manipulation that evokes fear and urgency. Additionally, Trump identified the victims through their family roles or their habits and values that allows him to achieve several effects: he makes it easier for an audience to imagine those people and thus their shared community, and these identifications generate the sense of relatedness, familiarity, and communality, easier said, it propels the feeling, "they are like me and I am like them." By achieving these effects, he propels feelings such as devastation and anger over a loss of a close one within his audience.

Finally, Trump's usage of these rhetorical codes aligns with the claims discussed by the representatives on presidential rhetoric, and Trump's rhetoric in particular. Overly described cases of death and issues in the country allow Trump to promote his agenda to an audience already primed by fear and anger. As Bostdorff (2017) describes is a strategy to, "put listeners in

an emotional frame of mind conducive to the persuasive goal at hand” (p. 698), indicating that this audience with this emotional state is more receptive towards President Trump’s goals. This is further reinforced by the effect of the Waving the Bloody Shirt Concept that creates an image of a country that is being ‘killed’ and suffered’ by the issues in the country brought by the ones at blame, a previous administration. This aligns with the themes identified by other researchers including: America as a dystopian country (Rowland, 2019; Reicher & Haslam, 2017; Jamieson & Taussig, 2017-2018) and the invocation of a threatening other (Rowland, 2019; Gounari, 2017; Bostdorff, 2017) who is responsible for the nation’s struggles. In this context, where the nation is portrayed to struggle because of the previous administration, he appears to be a desired leader who, unlike traditional politicians, is capable of empathy, compassion, and connecting with people on a deeper level. This supports the claims of Trump appearing as a charismatic leader who is not like other politicians.

Turning to Lim’s description of modern presidency, Trump follows the conversation trend of presidential rhetoric with his usage of stories as part of the content and his stylistic choice of descriptive and thematic delivery. However, Trump’s rhetoric still seems to go further than that of modern presidents, with his rhetoric of direct blame, vivid imagery, and common identifications. Although this study does not analyze other presidents, the rhetorical codes, such as Waving the Bloody Shirt, False Intimacy, and Synecdoche, identified by this study, show Trump’s strategic rhetoric that aimed at evoking an emotional connection with his audience. Additionally, the recurring usage of the same rhetorical patterns from Trump’s 2020 RNC speech to RNC 2024 speech in a different context, with different events, not only shows consistency but also an intentionally designed strategy aimed at persuasion based on strong emotions like devastation and empathy that grow into fear and anger.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

In conclusion, this study shifts from a broader presidential campaign analysis to a closer rhetorical analysis. It builds on the existing research, focusing on Lim's broader conversational trend of the modern presidency, specifically focusing on Trump's strategies that create an emotional appeal and connection with his audience. Within the analysis of his content and stylistic choice, I identified three rhetorical codes, such as Waving the Bloody Shirt concept, False Intimacy, and Synecdoche. While the study provides a deeper rhetorical analysis, it is limited by its qualitative and interpretive methodology. However, the identified rhetorical codes were supported by evidence from the speech and analyzed in both the RNC 2020 and the RNC 2024 speeches, locating the recurrence of the same pattern. This recurrence across four years indicates that this pattern is not a short-term behavior that was recently developed, but a deliberate strategy sustained and implemented across time.

This study contributes to the field of rhetoric and political communication by presenting how emotional appeal is systematically constructed through deliberate rhetorical strategies and adding to the understanding of how these strategies work. Additionally, this study demonstrates how rhetorical trends presented by Lim are too broad to classify and generalize across presidents, and a closer analysis of presidential rhetoric is needed to identify the specific rhetorical practices used for emotional appeal and persuasion. Therefore, for future research, I suggest conducting a close rhetorical analysis to identify how emotional appeal works across different presidents and contexts, and a comparative analysis between modern presidents, and going further in exploring other trends of modern presidency identified by Lim.

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