

ENGL 4670
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DEATH AND RHETORIC: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE ROLE OF FUNERAL ORATORY IN THE HISTORY OF RHETORIC

We began the semester by taking advantage of our knowledge of how the word *rhetoric* is typically used in our culture, that is, to characterize some political uses of language, as when Peter Grier, writing for the *Christian Science Monitor* last week about the events following the police shooting of Michael Brown in Missouri, looked into the question, How are blacks and whites reacting to Obama's "Ferguson *rhetoric*" (emphasis added)? Or similarly, as Charles Lane wrote in an opinion piece for the *Washington Post*, "Amid *rhetoric*, President Obama's uncharismatic response so far to Ferguson is apt" (emphasis added).

Our readings for the next several sessions will take advantage of another common cultural association regarding "rhetoric," that is, the fact that our culture has come to valorize a specific kind of political discourse: the memorial address, or funeral oration. In fact, what is regarded as one of the greatest, if not the greatest speech in American history is Abraham Lincoln's "Gettysburg Address." So, we will give some attention to the "rhetorical" aspects of these kinds of speeches; in addition, we will use the idea, or genre of the "memorial address" to begin tracing the connections between modern political rhetoric and the traditional of rhetorical theory that begins with the ancient Greeks. In other words, we will find that this genre has played a central role in how the Western tradition has thought about rhetoric; and we will want to try to understand why.

Here is what I would like you to read for next Thursday. I've chosen to begin with the chapter from Ochs's "Consolatory Rhetoric" because he frames his discussion by using a rhetorical theory that we're familiar with, that is, Bitzer's theory of the rhetorical situation. Next, with the benefit of Ochs's observations about the rhetorical aspects of "consolatory rhetoric," we will talk about President Clinton's memorial address for the victims of the Oklahoma City bombing and President Bush's memorial address for the victims of the September 11 attacks. The following week, we will shift to Lincoln's "Gettysburg Address," guided by Garry Wills's discussion of how ancient Greek ideas influenced Lincoln's composition. Here is a list of the readings for Thursday, with the two presidential addresses attached:

Donovan J. Ochs, "Death and Its Effects," Chapter 2 of *Consolatory Rhetoric: Grief, Symbol, and Ritual in the Greco-Roman Era* [Walker eBook].

Bill Clinton, "Remarks at a Memorial Service for the Bombing Victims in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma (April 23, 1995)" [photocopy].

George W. Bush, "Remarks at the National Day of Prayer and Remembrance Service (September 14, 2001)" [photocopy].