

A RHETORICAL CRITIQUE OF JOHN MCCAIN'S 2008 PRESIDENTIAL
CONCESSION ADDRESS

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This thesis is dedicated to those who -- like John McCain on November 5, 2008 -- find themselves on the losing end of a long political battle. May this study provide you direction not only for rhetorical success, but also for true graciousness.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

November 4, 2008, was one of the most memorable days in the history of the United States. Illinois Senator Barack Obama became the first person of color to be elected President of the United States when he defeated Republican challenger Senator John McCain. Obama started as an underdog and went on to beat a diverse field of talented candidates in the Democratic primary, including frontrunner Senator Hillary Clinton. Similarly, John McCain won the Republican nomination in an improbable, come-from-behind victory. The competition was fierce and both men ran strong campaigns, but Obama ultimately won the election.

When it was clear that Obama had secured the presidential victory, McCain delivered a powerful and well received concession speech. Chesebro and Hamsher (1974) defined a concession speech as an address delivered “after the issues have been resolved in fact” (p. 39). A concession speech is used by the loser of the competition to acknowledge his or her own defeat and reframe the event and himself or herself in a more positive light (Chesebro & Hamsher, 1974). Responses to McCain’s concession were extraordinarily positive. Reflecting the sentiment of many, John Watkis, a self-professed speech professional, wrote that he was impressed with McCain’s concession: “He was humble, gracious and authentic. I would like to see more of that John McCain” (Watkis,

2008). Joe Gandleman, the Editor In Chief of *The Moderate Voice* blog, noted that he thought McCain's speech "only said what he felt needed to be said" and that McCain did not linger, but moved on and helped the national begin to heal (Gandleman, 2008). *Fox News'* Brit Hume observed that the speech was "certainly a gracious concession" (AmyBLUF, 2008).

After losing the election, John McCain remained active politically. Unlike many presidential candidates who lose the presidency and sink into the background of the political landscape (such as recent examples Al Gore and John Kerry), McCain was constantly in the media, discussing candidly why he did not agree with the president's positions regarding foreign policy and domestic issues. He also held town hall meetings to discuss health care (events that were followed closely by the media), made numerous appearances on *Meet the Press* and other political talk shows, and responded on behalf of the GOP on various issues (Martin & Raju, 2009). Senator Lindsey Graham (R-SC) summed up McCain's new position after the 2008 presidential election: "He is now the de facto leader of the Republican Party" (Martin & Raju, 2009). This thesis argues that McCain used his concession speech to re-frame himself as a prestigious and relevant leader, not only in the Republican Party, but in the Senate and to the rest of the nation.

This study analyzes John McCain's 2008 presidential concession speech from a generic perspective. This study is guided by three key research questions:

RQ1: How well does McCain's 2008 concession speech demonstrate the qualities associated with the genre of concession speeches?

RQ2: Does McCain's 2008 concession speech function as a model concession speech?

RQ3: If McCain's 2008 concession speech does function as a model concession, in what way does it suggest a need for the genre to evolve?

Significance of McCain's Address

McCain's concession to the crowd at the Arizona Biltmore hotel in downtown Phoenix on November 5, 2008, was significant and worthy of studying for many reasons. First, McCain rose from being an underdog who was forced to lay off campaign staff members and who trailed in the national polls to become the politician who decisively won the party nomination. He defied almost everyone's expectations for his campaign, and nearly won the entire election. McCain's recovery and comeback were not only memorable, they were implausible. For this reason, the way he depicted the unfolding of his campaign in his concession address should be of scholarly interest.

Second, McCain's tone in his concession was memorable. In contrast to the recent concessions of John Kerry and John Edwards (Willyard & Ritter, 2005), McCain's speech was viewed by many critics as selfless and honorable. And unlike Hillary Clinton's primary concession, which took several days to emerge, McCain bowed out of the election quickly and gracefully. Critical responses to McCain's concession were overwhelmingly positive, causing many to remark that they wished the man giving the concession had been the same man who had been running for president¹. For example, Christopher Weber (2008), a writer for *Politics Daily* of AOL News, wrote that McCain "hit all the right notes" in his speech and that he had "never seen a candidate more

¹ This alludes to the fact that many felt McCain changed his principles from the 2000 presidential election when he ran during the 2008 presidential election.

gracious... [It] was a perfect speech.” Given how well received McCain’s concession was, it is worthy of examination.

Third, McCain’s concession was significant because he chose to address his opposition’s race and the country’s history of racism in his speech. Because McCain’s opposition, Obama, was the first African-American to run on a major party ticket during the general election, race became an issue throughout the entire campaign process². For example, Obama was given Secret Service protection in May 2007, earlier than any other presidential candidate (other than former First Lady Hillary Clinton) to protect him from hate groups seeking to assassinate him because of his race (Toomey, 2007). Obama also was forced to confront the issue of race in an address to the nation after questions arose regarding his affiliation with the controversial Rev. Jeremiah Wright (Pew Research Center, 2008). McCain knew race was an important issue and his concession specifically highlighted the historic nature of an election in which United States’ citizens elected a black president for the first time. McCain’s speech recognized this precedent and suggested the need to begin healing from the racism evident in the country’s past and during the 2008 presidential campaign.

Fourth, this proposed study of McCain’s address is important because the concession speech is an underdeveloped area of generic criticism. Currently only a handful of rhetorical examinations exist of concession addresses given by Presidents of the United States. This lack of concession critiques suggests a need for more analyses.

Given the recentness of McCain’s concession and the acclaim it received, its rhetorical

² Although many persons of color have run for president (including Bill Richardson, Shirley Chisholm, Jesse Jackson, and Al Sharpton, among others), Barack Obama was the first to become a major contender during the nomination process.

analysis is extremely appropriate. If McCain's concession address proves to be a model, we can begin to better understand the genre of concessions as a whole and appreciate McCain's address specifically.

Finally, McCain's status as a figure of public interest before and after the election suggests that any major speech given by him is worth consideration by rhetorical critics. In particular, his concession speech represents the culmination of many years of service by one of America's most honored military families, as well as a high point of McCain's storied political career. Four generations of the McCain family have graduated from the United States Naval Academy (i.e., John S. McCain Sr., John S. McCain Jr., John S. McCain III, and John McCain IV) and served their country (CNN, 2009). Both McCain's grandfather and father had particularly illustrious careers (Karaagac, 2000). McCain also has had a very prominent political career given the years he represented the state of Arizona in the Senate and his two attempts to run for presidential office. McCain's emphasis on service to one's country in his concession address speaks of this family legacy.

This thesis contains five chapters. In the first chapter, I have introduced my topic – John McCain's 2008 presidential concession address. However, to better understand McCain's concession address and its significance, this thesis also examines his personal background. Chapter Two, the literature review, examines McCain's family history, his military service and experiences as a prisoner of war in Vietnam, McCain's time spent as a Representative and a Senator from Arizona, and McCain's campaigns for president. Chapter Two also examines critical responses to McCain's concession. As Chapter Two makes clear, a better understanding of McCain's family's background in

the armed forces and his experience as a Naval pilot provide insight into how those events shaped his ethos during his 2008 presidential election run and his concession address . As I will argue, his rich and rather complicated background generates an interesting rhetorical situation. In Chapter Three, I review the generic method, the critical approach that I have used to analyze the concession speech. I define generic criticism, review the history of genre and generic criticism and the political speech genre, as well as examine the history and tenets of the concession genre. I also present a generic framework that integrates two models for examining concession speeches. In Chapter Four, I present the results of my analysis of McCain's concession speech. My goal was to determine if McCain's speech represented a true concession address and to establish if it can be considered a successful model. Finally, in Chapter Five, I answer my research questions, discuss the strengths and limitations of my work, and present directions for future research.

CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

A discussion of John McCain's background is pertinent to provide a foundation for this study. I will review McCain's family history, his military service and experience as a prisoner of war in Vietnam, his political background, and the critical responses to his concession address. The discussion of McCain's background helps to establish his ethos as a remarkable public figure and will provide insight into some of the factors that influenced his address. The discussion of critical responses later will help establish whether this address can indeed be considered a "model" concession address and will help explain why McCain remains politically relevant.

The McCain Family

To appreciate Senator John McCain as a leader, public servant, and rhetor, his background must be examined. McCain's family history is quite remarkable. His grandfather and father were both four-star admirals, the first father-son pair to achieve such an honor (McCain, 2000). McCain's history as a prisoner of war for five years during the Vietnam War is also an extremely important dimension of his life. Understanding these experiences will lend insight into his 2008 concession speech, especially the passages regarding public service and tributes to American democracy.

John Sidney McCain, Sr. and John Sidney McCain, Jr. McCain's family history played a huge determining factor in his life, specifically in regards to his public service. Senator McCain's grandfather, John Sidney "Slew" McCain, Sr., was born in Mississippi in 1884 and attended the United States Naval Academy. He spent his career with the Navy, specializing in aviation and rising to the rank of commander of all aircraft in the South Pacific islands after the start of World War II (McCain, 2000).

Later, McCain Sr. rose in ranks to become vice admiral, where he helped the United States achieve victory over Japan. Several days after the Japanese surrender at Tokyo Bay in September 1945, John McCain Sr. died of a heart attack at his welcome home party in Coronado, California (Karaagac, 2000; McCain, 2000). In 1949, the United States Congress passed a resolution post-humously promoting McCain Sr. as full admiral due to his achievements in World War II (McCain, 2000).

John Sidney "Mr. Seapower" McCain II was born in Council Bluffs, Iowa and grew up in Washington D.C. while his father was in the service. He followed in McCain Sr.'s footsteps by attending the United States Naval Academy as a young adult. After graduation, McCain II applied for aviation school, but was rejected as physically unqualified (McCain, 2000). After graduating from the academy, he instead joined the Navy as an ensign and was assigned to the *USS Oklahoma* battleship. McCain Sr. urged his son to work hard regardless of circumstance: "It doesn't make any difference where you go...you've got to command" (McCain, 2000). McCain II was then accepted to the New London Naval Submarine Base in Connecticut (McCain, 2000).

In 1933, McCain II eloped with Roberta Wright, the daughter of Myrtle and Archibald Wright, a wealthy oil businessman (Alexander, 2003). He served on several

submarines while Roberta raised their children in the United States. From 1938-1940, McCain II taught at the United States Naval Academy, his alma mater (McCain, 2000).

As a young child, McCain III was routinely moved to wherever his father was most recently stationed. One of his earliest memories was at 5 years old, when he was living with his family in New London, Connecticut. A naval officer drove by the McCain home and yelled that “the Japs have bombed Pearl Harbor” (McCain, 2000). McCain saw very little of his father for the next four years, as his father commanded three submarines during World War II, most notably the USS *Gunnel*, assigned to reconnaissance missions for Operation Torch in North Africa (McCain, 2000).

Commended for his leadership of the *USS Gunnel* during World War II, McCain survived many close calls with allies and enemy ships. Admiral Vasey, who served several times under McCain II, said he was “the greatest leader of men I have ever known” (McCain, 2000, p. 84). McCain II commanded five patrols aboard the *USS Gunnel*, and was promoted as a Commander. He then led the *USS Dentuda* for one patrol, until the end of World War II (McCain, 2000).

Later in his career, McCain II served as vice chair of the United Nations Military Staff Committee delegation. In 1967, McCain II was sent to command the entire United States naval fleet in Europe, where he was promoted to admiral (Alexander, 2003). Ironically, he would eventually command all Navy forces during the Vietnam War, during which his son McCain III was a prisoner of war in Hanoi. McCain II was forced to bomb the areas in which he knew that his son might be located, putting McCain III at further risk as a prisoner of war. (Alexander, 2003; McCain, 2000). McCain II served as Commander in Chief of the Pacific Command (CINCPAC) until March 1972, and retired

in November 1972 (Alexander, 2003). John S. McCain II died in March 1980 of a heart attack, at nearly the same time his son retired from the Navy (Karaagac, 2000).

John Sidney McCain III. John Sidney McCain III was born on August 29, 1936, at Coco Solo Naval Base hospital in the Panama Canal Zone where McCain II was stationed as a naval officer (Alexander, 2003). Even at an early age, some of the personality traits that later defined McCain's reputation were evident. Specifically, as a two-year-old child, John McCain III often had extreme temper tantrums, holding his breath and knocking himself out, which shocked his parents. A doctor recommended that every time McCain got upset and held his breath, one of his parents should put him into a tub of cold water, teaching McCain to control his temper at a young age (Alexander, 2003).

During much of McCain's childhood, he traveled around the country with his family while his father was a Naval officer (McCain, 2000). As a child of a serviceman, he became used to constantly changing schools when his father was stationed in new places. In 1951, McCain attended Episcopal High School in Northern Virginia, a private, upper-class institution where he was the only military officer's son (McCain, 2000). He was often in trouble for misbehavior (much like his father), but was still well respected (Alexander, 2003). McCain (2000) wrote that his goal at this time was to go to the United States Naval Academy, as it was already "predestined" for him (McCain, 2000). In the spring of 1954, McCain passed his academy entrance exams, graduated from Episcopal High School and began his "plebe summer" in late June. He loved the physical challenges provided at the Naval Academy and enjoyed bonding with his classmates (Alexander, 2003).

In the fall of 1954, McCain began his plebe year at the academy. He reported that he despised the hazing rituals that upperclassman performed on plebes, although he understood why they occurred (McCain, 2000). He excelled in sports such as football and boxing, but McCain's grades were subpar; he preferred English and history to math, science, and engineering (Alexander, 2003; McCain 2000). He also misbehaved at the academy by drinking and chasing women with his friends. He once staged an indoor water balloon fight (Alexander, 2003). At one point, McCain even sent the cruise box of an upperclassman who had hazed him to an Ivy League fraternity (McCain, 2000). But McCain persevered and graduated in the spring of 1958, even though he ranked only 889 out of 894 in his class (Alexander, 2003; McCain, 2000).

In examining McCain's background and career of service to the United States, McCain's experiences in the military should be analyzed, specifically his time spent as a POW in Vietnam. McCain attributes the many challenges he faced in Vietnam to strengthening him as a leader and person. Also, McCain's status as a military hero propelled him into public service, which is significant as it led to his political career.

After graduation, McCain reported as an ensign to Pensacola, Florida where he received flight training. He was well known as a partier and a playboy, at one point even dating an exotic dancer named "Marie, the Flame of Florida" (Alexander, 2003; McCain, 2000). Later, he received more advanced flight training in Corpus Christi, Texas, where he crashed a plane off of a landing strip into Corpus Christi Bay due to engine failure (Alexander, 2003). By October 1962, McCain earned his wings as an aviator and was assigned to the Caribbean for two years as a pilot in the Navy. In 1964, McCain moved back to Pensacola and began dating Carol Shepp, whom he married in July 1965

(Alexander, 2003). Later that year, McCain survived another plane crash due to engine failure when he flew home from the Army-Navy football game (Alexander, 2003).

In late 1966, McCain was assigned to the USS *Forrestal*, located in the Tonkin Gulf at Yankee Station, as an A-4 pilot. He was involved in one of the worst naval tragedies in United States history on July 29, 1967 (Alexander, 2003; McCain, 2000). While McCain waited to fly a mission, another jet caught on fire, which caused a Zuni missile to hit McCain's plane. McCain's jet leaked over 200 gallons of fuel and a massive fire erupted on the deck of the *Forrestal*, killing 135 servicemen. With the *Forrestal* out of commission, McCain volunteered to serve on the USS *Oriskany*, despite the fact that he knew many of its planes had been shot down (McCain, 2000).

On October 23, 1967, McCain was flying his 24th solo mission above Vietnam, and his first over Hanoi (Karaagac, 2000). At 4,500 feet, his A-4 bomber jet was hit by Soviet surface-to-air missiles. McCain ejected and landed in Truc Bach Lake, located in the largest urban area of North Vietnam (Alexander, 2003). Though conscious, McCain began to sink into the lake due to the weight of the gear on his back. A Vietnamese man named Mai Van On helped McCain to the shore and the gathered crowd began stripping McCain down to check for weapons (Alexander, 2003; Karaagac, 2000). As the crowd started beating him, McCain realized that his right leg was badly broken. He feared the crowd was going to kill him, but the Hanoi police arrived and the crowd backed away. McCain was transported to Hoa Lo Prison, also known as the Hanoi Hilton (Alexander, 2003).

McCain was locked in a cell for four days and received no medical attention. Military interrogators came into his room and attempted to get information from him, but

McCain would only supply the information specified in the American Serviceman's Code of Conduct: his name, rank, and service number (Alexander, 2003; Karaagac, 2000). Because McCain refused to give any information beyond that, his North Vietnamese captors beat him until he blacked out. He also was given very little food and water. At one point, an interrogator realized that McCain's father was a Navy admiral. McCain was then referred to as the "Crown Prince" and he was transported to a hospital (Alexander, 2003).

At the hospital, McCain was given blood and plasma. A doctor reset the broken bones in his right arm, a procedure that McCain had to endure without the aid of a painkiller. North Vietnamese officials attempted to force McCain to apologize for his "war crimes," but McCain refused (Alexander, 2003). Eventually, McCain was moved to a North Vietnamese compound called "The Plantation." He was placed with two majors from the Air Force who helped him recover from three partially treated broken limbs and dysentery. McCain later wrote that Majors Bud Day and Norris Overly saved his life (Karaagac, 2000).

McCain continued to be a prisoner of war for the next five and a half years. In June of 1968, his captors asked him if he would like to go home as his health was still very poor. McCain realized that his release would only serve as positive propaganda for the North Vietnamese cause and he refused (Alexander, 2003). McCain told his captors he could not go home until the prisoners of war who had been shot down before him were also allowed to go home. North Vietnamese officials made several other attempts to persuade McCain to go home, but he refused. After that, McCain was subject to regular

beatings. His captors cracked his ribs and re-broke his left arm (Alexander, 2003). Stories like this illustrate McCain's famed willingness to sacrifice for his country.

In late December 1968, McCain was taken to a Christmas service for American prisoners of war. As he arrived, he realized the North Vietnamese intended to film the service and use the footage for propaganda purposes. McCain was infuriated and single-handedly ruined the footage of the service, swearing and shouting the entire time (Alexander, 2003). The Vietnamese were so upset with McCain that they moved him back to the Hanoi Hilton. In late 1969, his torture in the North Vietnamese prison dwindled (Karaagac, 2000). McCain continued to be a prisoner of war, but dealt with slightly better conditions.

In early 1972, President Nixon began "Operation Linebacker" which bombed downtown Hanoi. American prisoners of war in Hanoi reported that the bombings gave them hope that they would soon be rescued (Karaagac, 2000). In January 1973, both the prisoners and their captors realized that the war was nearly over. Conditions improved for the prisoners, as the North Vietnamese realized they could not return prisoners of war who appeared severely emaciated (Karaagac, 2000). On March 15, 1972, John McCain, along with other American prisoners of war, was taken to Hanoi's Gia Lam airport to an American military plane. McCain was finally free (Karaagac, 2000).

McCain's experience in Vietnam as a prisoner of war lends insight into the rhetorical situation surrounding his campaign, as well as the meaning and power of his concession speech. McCain spent his entire adult life in public service, including his five years of incarceration in Hanoi. He paid one of the ultimate prices for service to America with the loss of his physical health. In part, McCain's campaign was structured around

his experience as a public servant in the military, often capitalizing on his military record and hero status. His campaign's motto, "Country First" represented how he had put his country before himself his entire life. McCain's positioning worked, as 66% of Americans reported in a *Gallup* poll after the 2008 primary that they viewed McCain as an American hero (Saad, 2008). Knowing McCain's military background also helped his rhetorical audience comprehend his concession speech. For example, his use of "battle" metaphors makes sense and appears credible because McCain's audience knows that he lived these experiences.

However, to understand McCain's life until Vietnam is only to understand half of the story. McCain's post-Vietnam and post-military careers also contributed to his ethos.

McCain's Life Post-Vietnam.

McCain spent nine months rehabilitating from the injuries he sustained in the Vietnam War. In late 1974, McCain's flight status was reinstated and he was assigned as the commanding officer of a training squadron in Florida. He wanted to continue serving in the Navy, but realized that his injuries were permanent and prevented him from being able to serve physically. Instead, McCain accepted a position as the Naval liaison to the United States Senate in 1976 (A&E Television Networks, 2008; Alexander, 2003.)

In McCain's personal life, his relationship with Carol began to deteriorate. He later accepted responsibility for the problems, admitting to extramarital affairs (Nowicki & Muller, 2007). One of those was with Cindy Hensley, a teacher from Phoenix, Arizona. When they began dating, McCain asked his wife Carol for a divorce. In 1980,

soon after his divorce, McCain married Hensley. He then retired from the Navy and moved to Phoenix to live with her (A&E Television Networks, 2008).

Almost immediately, McCain got involved in local politics in Arizona. In 1982, McCain ran for representative in Arizona's 1st Congressional District and won his first election, beating Democrat Bill Hegarty by a nearly 2-to-1 margin. McCain battled against allegations that he was a carpetbagger, arguing he had never lived anywhere longer than Hanoi due to his family's service in the Navy. Nowicki and Muller (2007) note that McCain wore out three pairs of shoes while campaigning for his election. His wife Cindy had the third pair immortalized in bronze to celebrate the victory (Nowicki & Muller, 2007).

In 1986, McCain won Barry Goldwater's seat in the U.S. Senate after Goldwater's retirement. He was known as a member of the "new Right," but also garnered a reputation for speaking out against governmental actions that he thought were wrong, including the Iran-Contra affair (A&E Television Networks, 2008). Given his status as co-author of the McCain-Feingold Bill, it was ironic when, in 1987, McCain was investigated as a member of the "Keating Five." He was alleged to have tampered with federal regulators on behalf of a friend, Charles Keating. McCain had accepted money from Keating for campaign purposes. After a two-year investigation, federal investigators dropped charges against McCain, but did note that he used "poor judgment." McCain later agreed with their assessment of his involvement in the scandal (Nowicki & Muller, 2007).

McCain continued to serve in the U.S. Senate, winning three times. He developed a reputation as a "maverick," sometimes siding with Democrats when he believed their

position made more sense. McCain also became known as a reformer as he worked to correct the campaign finance system. However, McCain's interest in political service extended beyond his long-held position in the legislative branch of the government. He also demonstrated an interest in occupying the Oval Office. This dream almost came to fruition when he ran for President in 2000 and 2008.

Campaigning for President.

On September 27, 1999, Senator John McCain announced his intention to run for President of the United States in Nashua, New Hampshire (Alexander, 2003). Knowing McCain was considered by many to be an underdog, campaign manager Rick Davis decided to make him available to the press at all times. The McCain for President campaign bought a bus and deemed it "The Straight Talk Express" (Ferullo, 2000). Reporters could ride with McCain to events and ask him questions on any matter, and McCain would answer with "straight talk" (Ferullo, 2000). Perhaps as a result, McCain was considered to be a "media darling" who received preferential treatment from news outlets when compared to other candidates in the race (Lehrer, 2000; Thomas, 2000). McCain's popularity surged, and he became the main challenger to the frontrunner Governor George W. Bush (Alexander, 2003).

At the same time, McCain gained a reputation as being a "hothead" after the *Arizona Republic* published an editorial calling McCain's temper into question (Thomas, 2000). Still, McCain continued to campaign. In November 1999, he announced that he would launch his campaign for the nomination in New Hampshire instead of Iowa (Alexander, 2003). As poll numbers between Bush and McCain grew closer and closer,

politicians in Washington began a “whisper campaign” against McCain, calling into question his mental stability and ability to manage his anger (Alexander, 2003).

The Navy war hero turned politician shocked the Republican Party and the rest of the nation when he demolished frontrunner George W. Bush in the New Hampshire primary with 49% of the vote, as compared to Bush's 30% (Corn, 2000). After this, the competition for the Republican nomination became fierce, hard fought, and extremely personal. McCain's campaign was thrown off track when he was the subject of untrue rumors in South Carolina that alleged that he was gay, that he had fathered a black child out of wedlock, that his wife was a drug addict, and that he was brainwashed to betray the United States when he was a prisoner of war (Steinhauer, 2007). McCain ended up losing to Bush in South Carolina with 42% of the vote compared to Bush's 53% (Steinhauer, 2007). McCain's campaign never fully recovered from this blow. Bush went on to win the Republican nomination in 2000 (Steinhauer, 2007).

McCain 2000-2006.

After Bush's inauguration in January 2001, McCain seemed to establish himself as a charming, media-friendly politician. His popularity was high in national polls and he was a frequent guest on political talk shows (Nowicki & Muller, 2007). McCain's popularity, combined with the 50-50 split in the U.S. Senate between Democrats and Republicans, provided McCain with the opportunity to push his agenda using a bi-partisan approach (Nowicki & Muller, 2007). Against the wishes of most of the Republican establishment, McCain and fellow Senator Russell Feingold (D-WI) introduced a campaign finance reform bill on January 22, 2001. The bill was intended to curb “soft money” donations to political groups and parties (Alexander, 2003; Drew,

2002). McCain introduced the bill quickly, knowing that Bush could not veto it because he needed the legislative victory after coming into office (Drew, 2002). A month later, McCain again defied the majority of Republicans by working with Senators Edward Kennedy (D-MA) and John Edwards (D-SC) on an HMO reform bill. And in May 2001, McCain was one of two Republicans who voted against President Bush's \$1.3 trillion tax relief package. After making so many bi-partisan moves, rumors began circulating that McCain was planning to leave the Republican Party and become an Independent. Although McCain vehemently denied the rumors, several groups sought to recall McCain as an Arizonian Senator (Nowicki & Muller, 2007).

After the events of September 11, 2001, McCain was highly sought after by the media due to his military background. Efforts to recall McCain in Arizona died down after McCain made it clear that he supported President Bush as the country's leader. McCain still worked in bi-partisan efforts, however, teaming up with Senator Joseph Lieberman (D-CN) to pass legislation to form the independent 9/11 Commission to investigate the security failures that led to the events of September 11, 2001. McCain also continued to work toward campaign-finance-reform in February 2002, when his bill (co-sponsored by Feingold) was re-introduced in the Senate. In a 60-40 vote, the U.S. Senate adopted the House's version of the McCain-Feingold bill. President Bush signed the legislation into law on March 27, 2002; it remains McCain's greatest legislative accomplishment (Drew, 2002). Additionally, in October 2002, McCain supported a declaration of war on Iraq. In an address to the Senate, he argued that Saddam Hussein was a danger to Americans and should be removed from office. The House passed the

Iraqi resolution with a 296-133 vote; then the Senate followed with a 77-23 vote.

McCain voted in favor of invading Iraq (Nowicki & Muller, 2007).

In the years to come, McCain worked again with Senator Kennedy (D-MA) to pass a comprehensive immigration reform plan, which angered many conservatives. The bill passed the Senate in 2006 but failed in the House. On November 7, 2006, Democrats won control of both the House and the Senate in a midterm election considered a referendum on the Iraq war. During this time, McCain's support for the war in Iraq had begun to wane. In January 2007, President Bush announced the "troop surge" in Iraq that was intended to help American forces finally tame Baghdad and other violent provinces (Nowicki & Muller, 2007). McCain expressed his firm support for the troop escalation. Democrats capitalized on this and emphasized his stance, knowing that a majority of Americans were unhappy with the Iraqi war. At the same time, McCain was working behind the scenes with former members of Bush's campaign team to secure support in Washington for a potential 2008 presidential run (Nowicki & Muller, 2007).

The 2008 Presidential Campaign.

John McCain formally announced his 2008 campaign for the United States presidency on April 25, 2007, in Portsmouth, New Hampshire (BBC News, 2007). Given his 2000 presidential run and well-documented work in the Senate, McCain was considered a front-runner in the campaign for the Republican nomination. But McCain experienced problems with campaign fundraising; the Republican base remained frustrated by his support of the Comprehensive Immigration Reform Act of 2007 and refrained from donating as generously as they might. McCain later lost his campaign manager and his chief strategist and his numbers dropped rapidly in national polls (CNN,

2007). Luckily for McCain, no Republican had yet claimed the title of outright frontrunner. McCain chose to forego campaigning in Iowa's caucuses, and instead focused his attention on the state in which he experienced much success in 2000 -- New Hampshire. McCain's gamble paid off; he won the New Hampshire primary and re-established himself as the Republican front-runner.

McCain went on to win the South Carolina and Florida primaries as well. During the latter primary, Rudy Giuliani ended his campaign and endorsed McCain (FOX News, 2008). On Super Tuesday, February 5th, McCain dominated the primaries, winning the vast majority of votes. McCain then won the majority of states up for grabs on March 4, 2008, which put him over the threshold of minimum votes needed to become the Republican nominee. The next day, President Bush met with McCain and endorsed him for the presidency (CNN, 2008a).

At this time, the Democratic primary for the 2008 Presidential election was still in full swing. Senator Hillary Clinton (D-NY) and Senator Barack Obama (D-IL) were engaged in a fierce battle for the Democratic presidential nomination. This race was unique in that it was the first time that two minorities, a woman and a person of color, were major contenders for the office of President of the United States. The contest lasted until June 3, 2008, when Obama won the amount of primary votes needed to clinch the Democratic nominee. However, Clinton did not immediately concede to Obama. Rather, she announced during an address on June 3 at Baruch College in New York City that she wanted "the nearly 18 million people who voted for me to be respected and heard" (NBC News, 2008). On June 5th, 2008, Obama and Clinton met for a secret meeting at Senator Dianne Feinstein's home, where they discussed the terms of Clinton's endorsement of

Obama. On June 7, four days after her initial announcement, Clinton finally and graciously promised her support to Obama and told her followers they should support him as well (Snow & Harper, 2008).

After the concession of Hillary Clinton, John McCain and Barack Obama turned their attention towards each other. In a hard-fought campaign, both men blasted the other for their respective stances on issues while trying to build up excitement for each party's national convention. On August 23, 2008, Barack Obama announced that Senator Joe Biden (D-DE) was his choice for vice-presidential candidate. On August 29, 2008, John McCain announced Governor Sarah Palin (R-AK) as his vice-presidential running mate, a move that excited many in the Republican base (CNN, 2008c).

The McCain/Palin and Obama/Biden teams continued to fight hard through the next two months, discussing issues such as the Iraq War, gas prices, abortion, health care, taxes, and the economy. Each campaign employed the rhetoric of "change." Obama argued that he was the true candidate of change, and that McCain would institute another eight years of George W. Bush's policies. McCain countered that he would be a change from the "typical" Washington insider, because he was a politician who was known as a maverick and was not afraid to "reach across the aisle" (CNN, 2008b).

Both candidates claimed victories whenever possible. In the four September and October 2008 presidential and vice-presidential debates, both McCain/Palin and Obama/Biden claimed victory for their respective parties (Commission on Presidential Debates, 2008). McCain continued to campaign in areas he considered battle ground states, vastly ignoring many of the states Bush won in 2000 and 2004, while Obama employed the Democratic Party's "50-state strategy" (Democratic Party, 2008).

As the race wound down, each candidate strived to generate strong media attention, making appearances on television almost daily and conducting interviews with hundreds of journalists. Despite these efforts, McCain lagged in the polls through most of October and into the beginning of November (Glover, 2008). On November 4, 2008, he lost his bid for the United States presidency to Barack Obama. That evening, McCain stood with his running mate Sarah Palin and their respective spouses and delivered a concession speech to thousands of his supporters at the Arizona Biltmore Hotel in Phoenix, Arizona (Spillius, 2008). McCain's speech emphasized his record as a public servant and his love of America, and contained calls to unify the country behind President-elect Barack Obama.

Critical Response to McCain's Concession Speech.

Responses to McCain's concession speech were extremely positive. From bloggers to newspaper opinion editors, commentators felt McCain's concession was positive, well delivered, selfless, honorable, gracious, and helped unify the American people. The power of McCain's speech seemed to be derived from the emotions and reactions that it inspired in listeners and followers.

Julie Schwiertert, the managing editor of *Matador Pulse*, considered McCain's concession the best speech of his campaign. She mentioned that McCain "took the high road...avoided mudslinging and encouraged his booing supporters to redirect their energies and unite as Americans." Schwiertert (2008) also observed that McCain "renewed his own commitment to public service...Despite the bitter disappointment of his loss...he appears poised to renew his admirable history of reaching across the aisle." She also acknowledged that McCain maintained his composure at all times and "modeled

the behavior Americans need to adopt,” calling for American unity (Schwietert, 2008). Joe Gandleman, Editor In Chief of *The Moderate Voice* blog, observed that McCain's speech was “vintage 2000 John McCain.” He asserted that McCain said “only what he felt needed to be said...he wasn't worrying about the reaction of the party's base.” Gandleman (2008) also wrote that McCain didn't linger after the concession like past candidates, but rather moved on and helped to begin the country's post-election healing process.

Mettycat, a blogger for *Vet Voice*, noted that he often questioned McCain's decisions and judgment, but felt that McCain's concession “was as gracious as it was honorable...McCain is and always has been a patriot” (Mettycat, 2008). Robert Dougherty wrote that McCain's concession took the first step in rebuilding his image, as “his reputation and legacy took a major hit” during the campaign process (2008). Dougherty (2008) also noted that McCain “used his concession” to give a more positive message to his followers, which included praise for Obama and the historical context of the election.

John Watkis, a self-professed speech professional and harsh critic of McCain's public speaking performances, wrote on his blog that McCain's concession was “his best speech.” Watkis (2008) noted that in McCain's concession, “he seemed more comfortable with the words and rarely struggled with the teleprompter...he did lose his rhythm a few times, [but] the timing of his words was far better.” Watkis (2008) was also impressed with McCain's tone: “He was humble, gracious and authentic. I would like to see more of that John McCain.”

Prominent U.S. news magazines *Time* and *Newsweek* each noted McCain's graciousness in his concession. *Time* magazine's Joe Klein (2008) wrote that even though McCain started with several disadvantages in the election, including being a Washington "insider" and being overly aggressive when attacking Obama, he still gave a "gracious concession speech" (p. 26). In the same issue, Nancy Gibbs concurred with Klein's assessment of McCain's concession speech as gracious. She also wrote that McCain demonstrated nobility and courage throughout the "losing battle" (Gibbs, 2008, p. 28). Later, Gibbs noted that when McCain called Obama to concede the race, Obama asked him for assistance and McCain "offered it without reservation" (p. 28). *Newsweek's* "Conventional Wisdom," a section of the magazine dedicated to rating the week's newsmakers with an up, down, or sideways ranking, wrote that McCain's was gracious and reminded them "of the candidate he could have been if he hadn't abandoned his own principles" (*Newsweek*, 2008, p. 13).

Several network news anchors also had positive things to say about McCain's concession speech. *NBC News* anchor Brian Williams noted that "even some Republican stalwarts will tell you that the John McCain they've known for many years wasn't always the McCain they saw making some campaign decisions and appearances" (McCain concession speech and Obama victory speech on election night, 2009). Williams later mentioned that McCain's remarks were gracious. Brit Hume, one of *Fox News'* anchors, described the address as "certainly a gracious concession," and noted that McCain spent his speech congratulating Obama and thanking his family, running mate, and his supporters (AmyBLUF, 2008).

Christopher Weber, a writer for *Politics Daily* of AOL News, considered McCain's concession to be one of the best concession speeches ever given. He highlighted several reasons for this, noting that McCain hit "all the right notes" in his speech. He indicated that the address was especially powerful after such a heated election. Weber also acknowledged McCain's calls for unity and support of the new president. In addition, he mentioned that before McCain, he had "never seen a candidate more gracious in defeat...it was a perfect speech, delivered with humility and grace" (Weber, 2008).

This examination of McCain's family history, background in public service, and campaigns for the Presidency suggests what kind of man McCain is. McCain was so stubborn as a two-year old that he had to be soaked in cold water. He spent his entire life looking up to his father and cherishing the memories of his grandfather, both high-ranking Naval officers with incredible public service to the United States. McCain was an American hero who refused to cave to the demands of the North Vietnamese for five incomprehensible years, despite the horrific physical and emotional consequences for himself. He even chose to continue serving in the Navy after returning home! And McCain was the man who made decisions he felt were right politically, even though he alienated members of his political party when doing so. As is evident in his life experiences and his concession speech, McCain clearly feels very strongly about service to his country. This portrait of McCain indicates that he is not only a politician, but a person, a "maverick," and a hero, all components of his persona that are evident in his concession speech. Attention now turns to the method that will be used to analyze this speech.

CHAPTER THREE

METHOD

John McCain's presidential concession speech received great acclaim. Critics considered it a selfless, heartfelt concession that painted McCain in a positive light (e.g., Glaister, 2008; Spillius, 2008). However, to better understand McCain's address, a method of rhetorical criticism must be chosen to guide examination of his speech. I have chosen to employ the method of generic criticism to evaluate McCain's concession address. From my analysis, I intend to answer three questions about the artifact:

RQ1: How well does McCain's 2008 concession speech demonstrate the qualities associated with the genre of concession speeches?

RQ2: Does McCain's 2008 concession speech function as a model concession speech?

RQ3: If McCain's 2008 concession speech does function as a model concession, in what way does it suggest a need for the genre to evolve?

After analyzing McCain's concession, I will answer these research questions and delineate the larger significance of McCain's speech to the genre of concession addresses.

Generic Criticism

Generic criticism provides a means to analyze recurring types of rhetorical events. Karlyn Kohrs Campbell and Kathleen Hall-Jamieson (1990) wrote that the distinguishing characteristic of discourse qualifying as a genre is the “recurrence of the forms together in constellation” that possess similar “substantive, stylistic, and situational characteristics” (p. 335). Hall-Jamieson (1973) further indicated that the generic method involves analyzing “specimens of rhetoric which share characteristics distinguishing them from specimens of other rhetorical genres” (p. 162). Essentially, both definitions state that items in a genre share particular features that allow them to be categorized together.

Sonya Foss (2008) wrote “the purpose of generic criticism is to understand rhetorical practices in different time periods and in different places by discerning the similarities in rhetorical situations and the rhetoric constructed in response to them” (p. 137). She noted that generic speeches have much in common, including the context of the rhetoric (i.e., situational elements); content of the rhetoric (i.e., substantive characteristics); format of the rhetoric (i.e., stylistic characteristics) and an overarching organizing principle, which combines the other three elements to identify the essence of a genre. Although an artifact may show strategic responses and stylistic characteristics, it would not necessarily be unified by the same organizing principle.

Building upon the components of generic speeches, Foss (2008) observed that analysis of an artifact can be done in three different ways: generic description, generic participation, and generic application. In generic description, a rhetorician seeks to determine if a genre exists. To do so, the critic must research, define, and theoretically

construct characteristics of a genre (Foss, 2008). For generic participation, a scholar seeks to determine whether a specific artifact belongs to a particular genre. This analysis involves testing an artifact against a genre's previously identified characteristics with the goal of assigning the artifact to a specific genre. Finally, in generic application, a rhetorical critic applies the characteristics of the genre to a predetermined artifact to determine if the artifact constitutes a strong example of the genre (Foss, 2008).

History of Genre and Generic Criticism

Aristotle separated rhetoric into three categories: deliberative (i.e., political), forensic (i.e., legal), and epideictic (i.e., ceremonial) (Aristotle as cited in Bizzell & Herzberg, 2000; Foss 2008). Foss (2008) noted that each category has a unique aim – “expedience for deliberative, justice for forensic, and honor for epideictic speaking” (p. 138). She also observed that each type of rhetoric had its own unique strategy in delivery: “exhortation and dissuasion for deliberative speaking, accusation and defense for forensic speaking, and praise and blame for epideictic speaking” (p. 138). Aristotle's articulation of rhetorical genres was not again addressed by rhetorical scholars until 1965 when Edwin Black critiqued Aristotle's model.

Edwin Black's 1965 critique also offered an alternative for evaluating artifacts – generic criticism³. Specifically, Black wrote that there were only so many ways that a rhetorician could respond to a situation, and that a repeated event in history could give cause for a critic to respond to such a situation with similar discourse. Black (1965), like

³ Foss (2008) noted that Black was the first to use the term “generic criticism.”

those who came after him, observed that rhetorical situations arise from recurring events. He also postulated that audiences who hear similar forms of rhetoric will react to each of them in similar ways.

Lloyd Bitzer (1968) built upon Aristotle's and Black's (1965) description of genres and criticism, writing that while "audience," "speaker," "subject," "occasion," and "speech" were common vocabulary in rhetorical theory, "situation" was not (p.1). He examined the influence of situation on rhetoric and noted that "no major theorist has treated the rhetorical situation thoroughly" (p. 2), even though types of proof and argument, persuasive strategies, and other methods were commonly used to critique rhetoric and categorize it into unique genres. Bitzer (1968) focused particularly on recurring situations: "From day to day, year to year, comparable situations occur, prompting comparable responses; hence rhetorical forms are born and a special vocabulary, grammar, and style are established...It seems that rhetoric is situational" (p. 13).

Furthermore, Bitzer proclaimed that there are three components of a rhetorical situation: exigence, audience, and constraints. Exigence, Bitzer noted, is "an imperfection marked by urgency; a defeat, an obstacle...but not all are elements of a rhetorical situation" (p. 6). Exigence is the phenomenon that causes a need for a rhetorical reaction, a problem that can be addressed by rhetoric. Bitzer used the example of John F. Kennedy's assassination to illustrate a situation with exigence. Specifically, Lyndon B. Johnson and other political leaders felt the need to quell the political unrest with speeches following the assassination. Bitzer then addressed the rhetorical audience, explaining that it goes beyond a "body of mere hearers or readers," representing a group

of people who are able to be persuaded by the rhetor and may be able to affect the rhetorical situation (p.8). In the example of the John F. Kennedy assassination, the rhetorical audience consisted of United States citizens who were persuaded by President Johnson to remain calm in the face of Kennedy's untimely death. Finally, Bitzer defined constraints as a set of "persons, events, objects, and relations" that have the ability to "constrain decision and action needed to modify the exigence" (p. 8). Essentially, constraints are factors that can help the rhetor make changes to the exigence (Bitzer, 1968). These can shape the rhetoric that a speaker uses when addressing the problem at hand. In regard to President Kennedy's funeral, an example of constraints might be Kennedy's Catholic faith, Kennedy's political beliefs, the immediate audience, or even Kennedy's tragic death. These constraints helped shape the rhetoric that took place during the rites.

Several scholars have criticized and/or built on Bitzer's conceptualization of the rhetorical situation. For example, Vatz (1998) wrote that Bitzer placed too little responsibility on the rhetoricians for choosing the situation for an artifact to emerge, as Bitzer (1968) argued the rhetorical situation creates itself. Vatz (1998) observed that a rhetorician's own bias may create a rhetorical situation as much as an artifact may create the situation. Jamieson (1973) partially agreed with Bitzer, observing that rhetoric is often "prompted by comparable responses to comparable situations," and noted further that a response to a new rhetorical situation would not only be influenced by the situation, but also previous rhetorical situations (p. 163). Miller (1984) observed that Burke and Bitzer both used the term "rhetorical situation," but Bitzer's remains more popular in rhetorical theory due to his focus on "exigence as a focus of situation" (p. 155).

This overview of generic method and the history of genre and generic criticism provides a frame from which to begin understanding McCain's concession speech from the field of rhetoric. To better contextualize McCain's concession speech and the genre of concession addresses more specifically, this study examines research conducted on the genre of political speech and its various sub-genres, including inaugural addresses, acceptance speeches, keynote speeches, and responses to national tragedies.

Genres of Political Speech

As Aristotle noted, deliberative (i.e., political) acts create a unique genre of rhetoric: political speech (Bizzell & Herzberg, 2000). Romagnuolo (2009) wrote that rhetorical criticism of political discourse has grown in recent years, especially after the events of September 11, 2001. In America, several genres of political address have been identified and studied by critics. Each genre contains similarities in their rhetorical situation, substance, style, and organizing principles. Those genres include inaugural addresses, acceptance speeches, keynote speeches, and responses to national tragedies.

Since George Washington's inauguration, all United States presidents have delivered inaugural addresses after being sworn into office. Several rhetorical critics have analyzed and evaluated these inaugural addresses. For example, Toolin (1983) analyzed the content of each inaugural address from 1789 to 1981 to determine the religious themes present. Examining the relationship of presidents with constituents, Korzi (2004) detailed the three models of relational types (i.e., constitutional, party affiliated, and plebiscitary) evident in inaugural addresses. In addition, Whitehead and Smith (2002) reported on presidents' use of non-verbal communication (e.g., hand gestures, body stances, facial expressions, and other gestures) during their inaugural

speeches. They found that presidents used hand gestures more than smiling during their delivery.

Acceptance speeches have existed in American politics since 1932 when Franklin Roosevelt addressed the Democratic nominating convention to announce his acceptance of the party's nomination (Nordvold, 1970). Since then, every candidate for both the Republican and Democratic national parties has accepted their nominations at a national convention. Nordvold (1970) noted that an acceptance speech "has come to represent the apotheosis of political oratory...elements in the occasion itself demand formal oral address" (p. 34). Benoit (2001) wrote that an acceptance address "is the climax of a political nominating convention ... [and] fulfills multiple purposes (unifying the party, rallying the troops, setting the issue agenda)" (p. 70).

Other scholars have examined specific acceptance speeches. For example, Norvold (1970) examined Hubert Humphrey's acceptance of his nomination at the 1968 Democratic National Convention. He found that critical responses to Humphrey's acceptance speech were mixed, and that he might have succeeded more so in the election if he had not avoided divisiveness in his speech. Benoit (2001) wrote about Bob Dole and Bill Clinton's use of metaphor in each of their acceptance addresses. Dole first remarked during his acceptance speech that he would help build a bridge to the past, which he felt represented a better time for Americans. During Clinton's acceptance speech, he replied to Dole's declaration of easier times in the past, asserting that he would instead "build a bridge to the future" (Benoit, 2001, p. 75). Benoit (2001) argued that Clinton "skillfully employed his discourse to shape perceptions not only of himself but of his opponent, Bob Dole" (p. 70), ending in a favorable outcome for Clinton. Finally, Scheele (1984) studied

Reagan's use of persuasion during his acceptance speech in the 1980 presidential race. He found that Reagan improved his chances of winning the presidency by employing rhetorical strategies to influence his constituents (Scheele, 1984).

Similarly, many scholars have examined convention keynote addresses and have found recurring similarities. Frye and Krohn (1977) observed that a "political convention is a unique event wherein the party faithful are able to unmercifully castigate the opposition without fear of immediate contradiction...[and] recall the evils of the opposition party while emphasizing the glorious deeds of 'our party'"(p. 74). Smith (1975) critiqued the events surrounding the 1968 Republican National Convention and the keynote speech of Gov. Daniel Evans (WA-R) who was seeking re-election. Smith argued that Evans' speech was not only a speech to his national party, but was also a speech to an extended, national office. Similarly, Frye and Krohn (1977) analyzed Rep. Barbara Jordan's keynote address to the 1976 Democratic convention, noting the extremely powerful effect it may have had on black voters in America. Another address, given by Barack Obama in 2004, was critiqued and compared to other keynote addresses of the past (Rowland & Jones, 2007). Specifically, Rowland and Jones examined how Barack Obama's "American Dream" compared to other personal narratives of the American dream.

Another growing body of critical discourse examines presidential responses to national tragedies. Thankfully, tragedies such as the space shuttle Columbia explosion, the devastation following Hurricane Katrina, or the horror surrounding the September 11, 2001 terrorist bombings occur sparingly. However, when they do occur, the president is expected to respond to the situation through a national address. Lule (1990) and Tobey

(1987) both analyzed President Ronald Reagan's response to the Challenger explosion in 1986. Lule (1990) applied Kenneth Burke's idea of victimage to Reagan's response to the catastrophe, noting that victims must be cleansed and made perfect before meaning can be applied to the events. Tobey (1987) dissected the tragedy from a different angle, applying Burke's model of dramatism to explain Reagan's eulogy for the event.

In addition, Samanna-Spagnoli (2007) analyzed the rhetoric of an address that President George W. Bush delivered commemorating the fifth anniversary of the September 11, 2001, tragedy. She noted that:

The study of presidential rhetoric lends itself to a few rationales... analyzing presidential rhetoric can illustrate how presidents deflect criticism or change the nature of public criticism directed towards them...[and] by exemplifying leadership, presidents can gain argumentative power through definition that may be also used to gain public support (Samanna-Spagnoli, 2007).

In her research, she argued that Bush's discourse was mostly based on emotional appeals (i.e., praise and blame), and that Bush used traditional speech venues to support his agenda.

Like Samanna-Spagnoli (2007), Benoit and Hensen (2009) analyzed presidential communication in the wake of tragedy. They examined the image repair techniques that President Bush utilized during a September 15, 2005, speech after Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans and other parts of the southern coast. Benoit and Hensen (2009) wrote that Bush used three specific image repair techniques (i.e. bolstering, defeasibility, and corrective action), but his poll numbers still suffered afterwards due to the

government's slow response to the tragedy and the lack of problem solving evident in his address.

As the body of research related to political genres such as inaugural addresses, keynote addresses, and responses to tragedy have grown, so too has the literature associated with the concession genre.

The Concession Genre

Thus far, the presidential concession genre appears to be a relatively untouched, but growing area of academic inquiry. Chesebro and Hamsher (1974) were among the first to describe and evaluate concession speeches, although they did not limit their focus to presidential candidates' addresses. The genre of concession speeches is defined as a formal concession of a conflict "after the issues have been resolved in fact" (Chesebro & Hamsher, 1974, p. 39). A concession could be likened to the children's game of "Mercy." Two children will face each other, each grasping the others' hands and squeezing tightly until one child yells, "Mercy" to signify that the game is over. The child who yells "Mercy!" concedes that he or she cannot endure the pain, and therefore wants the game to end with the other child as victor.

Chesebro and Hamsher (1974), Ritter and Howell (2001), and Willyard and Ritter (2005) each considered the concession speech to be in its own genre of rhetoric and one of great value. Chesebro and Hamsher (1974) stated, "Concession speeches are an extremely useful form to explore and assess because of the self-contained and self-generated dialectic conflicts found within these symbolic acts" (p. 39). They noted that "any situation involving a conflict in which one side wins and the other loses is the preliminary for a speech of concession" (p. 39). The theme of a concession is persistent: a

statement after the fact acknowledging the defeat. And, in American culture, the concession speech is typically offered before the winning side delivers their acceptance speech.

Concession speeches recur throughout our culture, although not always in an obvious fashion. They are employed at both the end of political election campaigns and the conclusions of other competitive events. For example, the losing quarterback in the Super Bowl typically delivers a concession to his teammates, fans, the media, and the victorious team. The defeated family in *Family Feud* may offer a concession to the host, the audience, and the family who beat them. Any statement acknowledging one's loss could be viewed as a concession.

A concession can be used for multiple purposes (Chesebro & Hamsher, 1974). A concession from a defeated person could be delivered to show genuine respect to the winner. The losing side also may offer a concession to reduce the damage to its reputation caused by a loss. In other words, it seeks to promote itself in a more positive light rather than being seen as "the loser." A concession might also be used by the losing party to save face during the awkward time period following conflict resolution. Finally, a concession can serve as the beginning to the healing process caused by the tension of the conflict. Chesebro and Hamsher (1974) stated that a concession can "shift the clash of interests between two groups to a different but more acceptable level of conflict" (pp. 39-40), meaning the conflict may not be completely resolved, but the tension is lowered through the demonstration of a concession.

The sentiment of a concession tends to recur as well. The losing side must gracefully balance losing and its own desire to be seen as "meaningful": "the concession

speech generally requires that he or she [the losing politician] admit that the campaign organization has been lost, while claiming simultaneously that the campaign organization has efficiently and productively exerted meaningful time and energy” (Chesebro & Hamsher, 1974, p. 40). The sentiments emphasized in concessions include calls for unity between the conflicted sides, expressions of bitterness, references to fate (e.g., “we gave it all we had...it was meant to be”), appeals to the losing side to continue on “fighting the good fight,” and acknowledgement of the opposition’s supremacy (e.g., “we were beaten by the better team”). Often those messages are blended together into a succinct and powerful statement (Chesebro & Hamsher, 1974).

A concession also provides closure to a conflict. Chesebro and Hamsher observed “The concession speech is the vehicle used to secure a new social relationship – it is intended to purify and redeem both sides involved in the conflict...which allows power realignments to occur in a socially acceptable way” (Chesebro & Hamsher, 1974, p. 40). Without a proper concession in place, both sides may leave the conflict feeling tainted, which may then possibly constrain future achievement. Therefore, a concession is both expected after a major conflict by all involved and is necessary for an optimal outcome.

Ritter and Howell (2001) identified six reliable, distinguishing characteristics of concession speeches, some of which mirror those evident in Chesebro and Hamsher’s work. They used these characteristics to analyze the concession of Al Gore and the acceptance of George W. Bush in the very close and extremely contentious 2000 presidential election. Specifically, Ritter and Howell used their criteria to determine if Gore’s speech truly represented a presidential concession address. The characteristics

outlined by Ritter and Howell (2001) include: (1) a formal declaration of defeat, (2) a call for national unity, (3) a tribute to American democracy, (4) an affirmation of the candidate's campaign, (5) a recognition of the transformed roles for candidates, and (6) an expression of appreciation for supporters.

A formal declaration of defeat allows the losing presidential candidate to finally admit to his or her supporters, potential constituents, and opponents that he or she realizes the race is concluded and lost (Ritter & Howell, 2001). In the call for national unity, the presidential candidate tries to bridge the gap between him/herself and the opposition, as well as frame national unity as being an important outcome of the race. The call for national unity helps the nation heal after a hard-fought election. In a presidential race, candidates often make tributes to American democracy while conceding, which is important as they do not want to be seen as sore losers. A tribute to American democracy often entails reviewing why America's political system and democracy is strong. As the defeated candidate attempts to make a positive out of the loss, he or she moves to portray the campaign as worthwhile and just, while simultaneously acknowledging that he or she will be adopting a new role in politics. In some cases, a candidate may seek to appear different than he or she did before, attempting to cast him/ herself in a different light. For example, a candidate who incorporates a multitude of personal attacks against his or her opponent may try to reframe him/herself in a more positive way. Finally, in a concession address, the losing candidate thanks his or her supporters for giving their time, energy, and votes to the campaign. This criterion is significant because a candidate who does not thank the people who supported him or her would appear ungrateful, which could hurt the candidate in future endeavors.

Concession addresses, as previously stated, represent a growing area of rhetorical study. In 1994, Corcoran analyzed concession speeches from every losing presidential candidate between 1952-1992. He observed that presidential concessions were often similar in regards to ideas, intention, and delivery style. Willyard and Ritter (2005) used their established framework to evaluate John Kerry and John Edwards' presidential concession speeches. They found that Kerry mostly stayed within the confines of their criteria for a concession, but that Edwards delivered a concession that was very different from Kerry's. They also asserted that Edwards' address fell outside of their criteria of a concession speech, in particular because of the negative tone he maintained throughout his address. Given this analysis of 2004 presidential concession addresses, it only makes sense to wonder how McCain's 2008 concession fares by comparison.

The generic method is the best tool to analyze John McCain's concession. It provides the comparative framework needed to understand McCain's address as a concession speech specifically and to assess the quality of the address from that perspective. McCain's address should also be compared to other concessions to determine the success of his speech. While an audience member may feel that McCain's concession was powerful and moving, he or she might not know how the speech compared to concessions of the past or how well it stands next to the criteria associated with concession speeches. Using the generic method, it is possible to compare concession addresses to each other to determine how and why a specific speech was successful. As more scholars choose to implement a generic method to critique concession addresses, the easier it will be to determine the success of individual concessions. Therefore, the generic method is the best way to analyze McCain's

concession and answer the research questions at hand. Other methods of criticism would not allow me to successfully address my research questions. For example, if I were to apply Burke's pentad to McCain's concession, I might be able to understand the events in a different light, but I would not be able to understand the significance of McCain's address as compared to other concessions. And, by the same token, if I were to compare a press conference of professional athlete's trade to another team to John McCain's concession, I would not be able to properly evaluate either of the rhetorical situations because of their lack of congruity. McCain's concession address should only be compared to other concessions to evaluate if his speech met the qualifications of a concession.

Procedures

Foss (2008) outlined the general procedures to be used when critiquing a rhetorical artifact. She also delineated the steps specifically associated with conducting a generic criticism. For this analysis, I have merged the characteristics associated with concession speeches into Foss's framework to provide a set of procedures that will guide this study of John McCain's 2008 concession speech.

My first step entailed selecting an artifact: McCain's 2008 concession speech. The second step involved formulating research questions to guide the focus of my study, which I have already articulated. Third, I analyzed McCain's concession speech using the generic application lens. My steps for evaluating the speech followed Foss' four steps for generic analysis:

- (1) Describing the perceived situational requirements, substantive and stylistic strategies, and organizing principle of a genre; (2) describing the perceived

situational requirements, substantive and stylistic strategies, and organizing principle of an artifact that is representative of that genre; (3) comparing the characteristics of the artifact with those of the genre; and (4) evaluating the artifact according to its success in fulfilling the required characteristics of the genre (Foss, 2008, p. 144).

The characteristics of a concession that were analyzed are listed below.

When carrying out the first and second steps of Foss's framework, I grounded my analysis of rhetorical situation, substance, and style in the literature associated with concession addresses. I first examined the rhetorical situation of McCain's concession, where I discussed how his speech mobilized a significant number of conventional forms of support. Then I dissected the substantive features of McCain's speech, noting how McCain met key requirements of the genre: a formal declaration of defeat, a call for national unity, a tribute to American democracy, an affirmation of his campaign, a focus on the candidates' transformed roles, an expression of appreciation for supporters, expression of an altruistic rather than an egotistic end, and identification of an explicit opponent. Then I looked at the stylistic features of McCain's concession. In this instance, I observed how McCain maintained high credibility, trustworthiness, and prestige prior to and during the concession speech, and that the speech reflected the classical dramatic frames of exposition, rising action, climax, resolution, and culmination. This analysis enabled me to answer my three research questions:

RQ1: How well does McCain's 2008 concession speech demonstrate the qualities associated with the genre of concession speeches?

RQ2: Does McCain's 2008 concession speech function as a model concession speech?

RQ3: If McCain's 2008 concession speech does function as a model concession, in what way does it suggest a need for the genre to evolve?

Conclusion

This chapter argues for the merits of using the generic method to analyze Senator John McCain's 2008 presidential concession speech. It contains a review of the history of the genre and generic criticism and details previous work in the field, including analyses of various genres of political address. The characteristics associated with concession addresses are given particular attention. The next chapter of this thesis examines the artifact itself, with analysis provided using an integrated framework taken from Chesebro and Hamsher (1974), Ritter and Howell (2001), and Foss (2008).

CHAPTER FOUR

ANALYSIS

Analyzing John McCain's 2008 presidential concession speech will lend insight into the significance of the address to the field of rhetorical study. First, I will examine the concession using Foss' approach to generic analysis. This analysis entails detailing the rhetorical situation, substantive and stylistic strategies, and the organizing principle that guides McCain's address. I will assess his concession "according to its success in fulfilling the required characteristics of the genre" (Foss, 2008, p.144) using an integrated framework from Ritter and Howell (2001) and Chesebro and Hamsher (1974). This framework will enable me to evaluate the effectiveness and success of the concession.

Rhetorical situation

Concession addresses are a type of recurring political rhetoric. Chesebro and Hamsher (1974) note that the "concession speech is an established convention in American politics" (p. 39). With every election in America, a candidate wins and one or more candidates lose. In the modern political era, Americans have grown accustomed to having their political candidates concede after an election (Corcoran, 1994). This has created a need for the concession genre.

Bitzer (1968) detailed three components of the rhetorical situation that undergird all rhetoric, including political rhetoric such as concession speeches: exigence, audience,

and constraints. Exigence, as Bitzer noted, is the phenomenon that necessitates a rhetorical response and can only be corrected by a rhetorical response. Exigency, in regards to concession speeches, is the need for all characters involved in the political process to hear a response from the election's loser so that they might move on after the conclusion of the election. There were several exigencies that created the need for McCain to concede. First, concessions are an expectation of the American political process. As the polls began to close and vote tallies began to be made public, there was no doubt that Obama had won the election. Since McCain lost the election, the expectation of all involved was for him to concede. And since Americans have been watching televised concession and acceptance speeches from presidential candidates since the 1950s (Ritter & Howell, 2001), there was an expectation that McCain would concede quickly.

The second exigency was the need for McCain to help bring closure to the 2008 presidential election, thereby enabling himself and others to "move on." These others included his supporters the Republican Party, and his competitor, Barack Obama. McCain was a major player in the 2008 presidential election from beginning to end, and his concession of the election made it clear to all participants that they should look to one leader, Obama, instead of McCain. Win or lose, McCain's supporters (i.e., the audience at the Arizona Biltmore hotel and millions of other McCain supporters across the nation) expected a response from the Republican candidate, whether that was a concession or an acceptance speech. A concession would enable them to move on as well. Ritter and Howell (2001) noted that audiences need reassurance to move on after a loss towards a "future victory," presumably electoral victories in the party's future (p. 2316). McCain

also needed to move on for himself, McCain's response allowed him to move past the election and his role as "Presidential candidate" and revert to his identity as "Arizona Senator." Because McCain not only represented himself during the election, but the Republican Party also, his concession allowed the party to move on and focus on new endeavors. Finally, just as McCain needed to leave the election and move on, his opponent Obama needed to move on as well. McCain's concession allowed Obama to accept the results of the race and declare himself the winner through his acceptance address.

Bitzer also asserted that the rhetorical situation requires a rhetorical audience. This audience represents more than the immediate audience of a rhetorical address, but the individuals who could assist the rhetor in addressing the exigence surrounding the rhetorical address. The rhetorical audience for McCain's concession speech included the immediate audience at the Arizona Biltmore hotel and the millions watching on television nationally and internationally. Beyond McCain's in-person audience and television audience, there were other parties "able to be persuaded" by observing McCain's concession (Bitzer, 1968, p. 8). Specifically, McCain's opponents also represent part of the rhetorical audience, as they waited on his final words as a candidate and hoped for closure to the campaign. For example, Obama, his party, and his supporters wanted the election to be finalized, so they could announce their victory, celebrate winning the presidency and move on to the White House. They (the opposition) needed McCain to concede so they could continue their celebrations knowing that the race was truly over.

Next, the media represented part of McCain's rhetorical audience, as commentators discussed and wrote about his speech after it concluded. Ritter and Howell

(2001) noted that television news pundits from different networks during the 2000 presidential election waited on Gore's formal announcement of concession and wondered how he might present the information. The press's critical response to McCain's speech could signal whether he had successfully addressed the exigencies underlying the speech. Their declarations of his success or failure then could influence the other audience's perceptions of the speech and determine whether they could "move on." Also worth noting, the media's critical responses to the McCain speech could impact his ability to remain politically "relevant" after announcing his loss. Bitzer finally addressed the constraints of a rhetorical situation, which he defined as "persons, events, objects, and relations" that helped shape the rhetoric (Bitzer, 1968, p. 8).

Bitzer (1968) further noted many sources of constraint, including "beliefs, attitudes, documents, facts, traditions, images, interests, motives, and the like," (p. 8). There were several constraints affecting McCain's rhetorical response. First, the demographic characteristics of each candidate modified the rhetorical response. McCain was a seventy-two year old (at the time of his speech) white, heterosexual Protestant man. His opponent Barack Obama was a forty-seven year old (at the time of the concession), black, heterosexual, Protestant man. McCain and Obama's age, race, and religion all impacted the exigence of McCain's concession. Issues like McCain's age and Obama's race and religion were topics discussed about the candidates, sometimes in a negative fashion, throughout the campaign. McCain noted that the campaign had been hard fought ("a contest as long and difficult as this campaign has been"), and part of that passage likely referred to the negative comments and personal attacks directed towards the candidates. McCain specifically observed the historical nature of Obama's candidacy

and victory due to his race in his speech: “This is an historic election, and I recognize the special significance it has for African-Americans and for the special pride that must be theirs tonight,” (McCain, 2008). McCain also referenced his age when he noted that he had “the extraordinary privilege of serving this country for over a half century,” a longer time than his opponent had even been alive.

McCain’s party affiliation also affected his rhetorical response. Because McCain identifies as a Republican, his speech was geared towards issues the Republican Party stands for, such as reform, defending democracy, restoration of American prosperity, and national defense. For example, McCain stated, “I urge all Americans who supported me to find ways to come together to find the necessary compromises to bridge our differences and help restore our prosperity, [and] defend our security in a dangerous world,” (McCain, 2008). McCain also spoke to the country’s need for recovery and his party’s hope for the future when he noted the addition of Sarah Palin to the national political scene and to the leadership of the party: “[Palin is] one of the best campaigners I’ve ever seen...and an impressive new voice in our party for reform and the principles that have always been our greatest strength.” His comments point to Palin as a “new voice” in the Republican Party that will help lead them into the future.

Next, McCain’s background of public service in both the military and in the political arena affected the claims in his concession. If he had not been a war hero or a longtime public servant, McCain could not legitimately make a claim referencing his service to the nation. For example, he stated, “I would not be an American worthy of the name, should I regret a fate that has allowed me the extraordinary privilege of serving this country...tonight, I remain her servant (McCain, 2008). By indicating his dedication

to his country, McCain paints himself in a gracious light. McCain made it obvious his objective was always to serve as America's "servant," and his audience responded favorably.

Finally, as Ritter and Howell (2001) and Chesebro and Hamsher (1974) wrote, the public has expectations for concession speeches. These expectations also function as a constraint. McCain was expected to concede in a gracious and humble manner, and he did: "Today, I was a candidate for the highest office in the country I love so much. And tonight, I remain her servant. That is blessing enough for anyone, and I thank the people of Arizona for it." Many critics noted the gracious nature of his tone, including John Watkis, a self-professed public speaking professional: "He was humble, gracious and authentic." (Watkis, 2008). McCain's ability to address the rhetorical situation also was affected by choices he made regarding the physical and temporal environment on the evening of the speech. For example, he chose to address the crowd at the Arizona Biltmore Hotel on a patriotically themed stage. This speaks directly to the first criterion of the Chesebro and Hamsher (1974) and Ritter and Howell (2001) model of concession addresses: the concession speech mobilizes a significant number of conventional forms of support.

Chesebro and Hamsher (1974) noted that conceding candidates often mobilize various forms of support, such as timing and staging, to make their announcements. They cited the example of General Douglas MacArthur, who conceded his position of commander of the Far East because of conflicts between himself and the Harry Truman administration. He mobilized certain factors to make the announcement of his

concession more favorable, including the timing (i.e., conceding when he wanted) and the backdrop/staging (Chesebro & Hamsher, 1974).

McCain had some independence with regard to the forms of support he utilized. For example, McCain chose where to present his concession - - the Arizona Biltmore Hotel. He also chose the group who would stand on stage with him - - his wife; Gov. Palin, his running mate; and Palin's husband. Additionally, McCain's choice of staging was very "presidential." McCain's stage was draped in blue. As he stood at the podium, an enormous American flag hung horizontally behind him on a video screen. Large pillars framed the stage. These featured the blue and gold star design that was the decorative theme of his campaign. Before and after McCain spoke, patriotic music played on the speakers. McCain may have chosen these forms of support to appear more presidential to his audience, even in the wake of his loss. In turn, his campaign reframing may have suggested his ability to continue being politically relevant even after his presidential loss.

While McCain did control the staging of his speech, he had little control over the timing of his address. McCain was expected to concede his candidacy as soon as the media announced the election was out of McCain's reach. If McCain had not conceded shortly after learning of his loss, it would have been viewed by the press, politicians, and public as "bad form" for delaying the process of healing and moving on. In some recent unresolved political elections, the loser did not deliver a concession on the night of the election, although that was a rare outcome of an election (Ritter & Howell, 2001). For example, Hillary Clinton's concession to Barack Obama in the 2008 Democratic primary

was delivered several days after she was eliminated as a candidate. Critics responded negatively to the delay (NBC News, 2008).

McCain's ability to choose some support enabled him to adequately strengthen his concession. He picked a memorable place in Arizona to speak to his supporters, and he gave the speech in a timely manner. The thing he could not control, having to deliver it on election night, was something he knew was a possibility as a candidate. Knowing that he must either give an acceptance or concession enabled him to prepare to meet that requirement, if needed. It is interesting to note that if McCain had won the election, the place, staging, and people involved in his concession would likely have remained the same. The only thing that would have changed would have been McCain's acceptance speech, which he would have delivered after first being conceded to by Barack Obama.

Substantive features

The substantive features of McCain's speech are the next components to be analyzed. To determine if a group of rhetorical artifacts constitute a genre, common substantive features must be evident. Foss wrote, "substantive characteristics are those that constitute the content of the rhetoric" (Foss, 2008, p. 137). She also noted common substantive features in rhetoric included images, settings, arguments, and characters. This broad understanding of substantive features is made more specific to the genre of concession speeches by looking to the framework provided by Chesebro and Hamsher (1974) and Ritter and Howell (2001).

Eight substantive features of concession addresses are evident after integrating the models of concession speeches developed by Ritter and Howell (2001) and Chesebro and Hamsher (1974). I will discuss how McCain addresses each of the following eight

criteria: 1) formal declaration of defeat, 2) call for national unity, 3) tribute to American democracy, 4) affirming the candidate's (McCain) campaign, 5) transformed roles for candidates, 6) thanking supporters, 7) speaker's concession appears to be associated with an altruistic rather than an egotistic end on the part of the speaker, and 8) the concession does not identify an explicit opponent or enemy.

1) Formal declaration of defeat

Ritter and Howell (2001) wrote that a "formal declaration of defeat" was essential to a concession speech. The losing candidate must initiate the ritual of campaign conclusions by "offering a private concession to the victorious candidate followed by a public declaration of concession" (Ritter & Howell, 2001, p. 2316). A formal declaration of defeat could be described as a statement announcing the end of one's candidacy due to electoral loss and acceptance of that fact. In this instance, McCain began his speech by launching into his declaration of defeat:

My friends, we have come to the end of a long journey. The American people have spoken, and they have spoken clearly...I had the honor of calling Senator Barack Obama to congratulate him on being elected the next president of the country we both love...his success alone commands my respect for his ability and perseverance (McCain, 2008).

McCain very clearly conceded the election to his audience and to Obama immediately within his speech. The most reasonable reason for McCain's quick concession might be that he just wanted to be done with the election loss and move on to working for the American people again. Additionally, McCain likely understood that a quick concession likely would be viewed as gracious. Doing so set a tone of graciousness for the

remainder of the speech. It also would have been out of character for McCain to delay in giving his concession. As a man, he was decisive and straightforward, a “straight shooter.” To delay this statement by placing it later in the address would not have reflected these dimensions of his personality. Making the announcement immediately also aligned with McCain’s larger concession message. Because McCain left the race as soon as it was over, he was able to personally move on from the election, allow his party to begin regrouping for the next election, prevent any hurt feelings that might have been caused by a delayed concession (such as those caused by Hillary Clinton’s tardy concession in the 2008 Democratic primary (Snow & Harper, 2008). In McCain’s concession, he acknowledged that the American people had clearly made their choice. He also shared that prior to delivering his speech, he had *already* congratulated Obama for his success in being elected the next president. The losing candidate calling the winning candidate is a traditional step in presidential election concessions, and paves the way for the President-elect, Barack Obama, to then deliver his acceptance speech.

A later statement in McCain’s contains an important statement about the reasons for McCain’s defeat: “Senator Obama and I have had and argued our differences, and he has prevailed...Though we fell short, the failure is mine, not yours” (McCain, 2008). In this passage, McCain’s expression of defeat was a reflective statement. He blamed himself for the loss, not his supporters. McCain accepted full responsibility for the loss of the election, a strong statement of personal responsibility, a trait for which he was well known. It would have been highly out of character for McCain to place the responsibility of his campaign on anyone’s shoulders but his own. If he had done so, it would have

disrupted the healing process for all and would potentially prevent Republicans from rebounding toward victory in the next election.

2) **Call for national unity**

A call for national unity is conveyed by the losing candidate to all of the audience so that all parties can come together in the interest of improving the nation. Ritter and Howell (2001) described the call for national unity as an appeal “for the healing of partisan wounds” (p. 2316). McCain clearly called on Americans to come together and support the new President:

I urge all Americans who supported me to join me in not just congratulating him [Obama], but offering our next president our goodwill and earnest effort to find ways to come together, to find the necessary compromises, to bridge our differences...and leave our children and grandchildren a stronger, better country (McCain, 2008).

McCain made it very obvious that national unity would be in America's best interest for the present and for the future. To do so required accepting the decision made by the American people and to move on by supporting the opposition, Obama. This statement is especially powerful coming from McCain, as he is well known for pursuing political compromises. As such, this statement also reflects McCain's ethos as someone who had demonstrated multiple times in his career his dedicated to doing what was best for country, even if it was not yield the best outcome for him personally.

McCain then acknowledged the inevitable frustration that comes with loss: “It is natural tonight to feel some disappointment, but tomorrow we must move beyond it and work together to get our country moving again” (McCain, 2008). McCain acknowledged

that the result of the election was very upsetting for himself and for his followers, but that moving forward was in the best interest of everyone in the country. By noting the idea of “moving again,” McCain also may have been trying to acknowledge that America’s economic difficulties had stopped the progress of the country, but that both parties needed to unite to improve the country’s economic circumstances.

McCain also drew his audience’s attention to believing in the country’s ability to overcome by requesting that every American “believe in the promise and greatness of America.” He attempted to inspire his audience to unite in the belief that America is great and can rebound from any problems, including the present difficulty posed by the economic recession. McCain again referenced the current problems in America later in his speech, “I call on all Americans...to not despair of our present difficulties but to believe always in the promise and greatness of America.” McCain may have been referring to the financial hardship America was experiencing, the multiple wars being fought, or other issues that were trying for the nation. Finally, McCain echoed a sentiment common in concession and acceptance speeches: “God bless you, and God bless America” (McCain, 2008). For the conclusion of his speech, McCain asked for kindness to be bestowed on all of America, a unifying statement intended to bring everyone together. This statement was not only directed at his party and supporters, but towards everyone in the political process and in the country.

3) Tribute to American democracy

Ritter and Howell (2001) observed that after the losing candidate concedes, he or she will then try to “reconstitute that common ground on which all Americans may meet...identified and solemnized by a tribute to American democracy” (p. 2316). A

minute into his concession, McCain made the first of many tributes to American democracy. This particular tribute focused on the progress that America has made in the realm of civil rights:

I've always believed that America offers opportunities to all who have the industry and will to seize it...[W]e have come a long way from the old injustices that once stained our nation's reputation, and denied some Americans the full blessings of American citizenship (McCain, 2008).

He continued to the racial progress of America,

America today is a world away from the cruel and prideful bigotry of that time.

There is no better evidence of this than the election of an African-American to the presidency of the United States. Let there be no reason now for any American to fail to cherish their citizenship in this, the greatest nation on Earth (McCain, 2008).

McCain's critique of democracy is important for two reasons. First, it demonstrated his own commitment to "solemn ground" that all Americans share - - a belief in democratic ideals and the democratic process. He called on his fellow Americans to unite and take pride in their citizenship in a country constantly evolving to become better. McCain maintained these beliefs, even though he did not win the election.

Second, while McCain's critique of old "injustices" recognized that America's past was not so democratic, it allowed him to emphasize progress made by depicting present-day American as fulfilling its promise of democracy. This change is important and deserves tribute particularly given the historic nature of Obama's election. To McCain, Obama's election is a sign that America has improved greatly since people were

openly discriminated against. McCain portrayed himself as respectful of the American electoral process, grateful for the opportunities America provides to its citizens, and proud of the progress made since slavery and prevalent racism. McCain then called on all of his supporters to cherish their American citizenship. Through this, McCain again portrayed himself as a servant to America; he was grateful for all of the opportunities he was given, and proud of the country's decisions, regardless of the outcome.

This part of McCain's address is interesting in that he critiques the country's history of racism rather than offering pure praise of democracy. Although his critique of America is a fair assessment of its history, it may violate expectations and had the potential to generate a less than favorable audience response. However, he has focused enough attention on how things have changed that it appears to mitigate the potential negative impact of the criticism. His criticism simply sets a foundation for his move to praise America because of the improvements the country has made.

McCain returned to his praise of American democracy near the end of his speech, I would not be an American worthy of the name, should I regret a fate that allowed me the extraordinary privilege of serving this country for a half a century. Today, I was a candidate for the highest office in the country I love so much, and tonight I remain her servant...tonight, more than any night, I hold in my heart nothing but love for this country and for all its citizens. (McCain, 2008).

McCain's praise of America and his mention of his public service was another emotional high point of his concession. As many people knew, McCain not only served in the military, but was a prisoner of war for five years in Vietnam. His personal sacrifice for America was great, which made his words even more powerful. McCain also indicated

that he would “remain her servant,” which showed that he was not bitter after the election loss, but that he still wished to serve his country.

McCain's attempt to pay tribute extended to the final lines of his speech. He concluded with a powerful statement: “Americans never quit. We never surrender. We never hide from history. We make history. Thank you, and God bless you, and God bless America.” McCain's closing statement paid tribute to traits he associated with the American public. He depicted America as strong, brave, and powerful. His repetitive use of the term “never” suggests that he felt Americans were constant and unwavering in their commitment to advancing their country. The phrase, “We never hide from history. We make history,” appears to refer back to McCain's critique of the country's history with racism. He indicated that Americans have acknowledged those mistakes and moved on to be a better country. Evidence of this progress was clear in the election campaign, with the election of Barack Obama, the strength of Hillary Clinton's presidential campaign, and the candidacy of Sarah Palin for the vice presidency. McCain's use of battle imagery and metaphors (e.g., “the power to wound,” “We never surrender”) strengthens this tribute and is in keeping with his own past as an old soldier. As a prisoner of war during the Vietnam War, McCain bravely refused to leave Vietnam before other prisoners of war who were due to go before him (Karaagac, 2000).

McCain's statements praising American democracy reaffirm him as a patriot who performs his duty unquestioningly, just as he did during his admirable service in the Vietnam War. By reaffirming America's greatness, McCain reaffirmed his own military experience and outstanding courage. He also reaffirmed his political service to the country, not only as a presidential candidate, but as a sitting Senator and as a citizen. By

defining what it means to be an American, McCain provided a call to action for his party and for all Americans. He urged them to be strong, fix the mistakes of the past, and believe in the promise of America.

4) **Affirming the candidate's campaign**

Ritter and Howell observed that losing candidates “reaffirm the importance of their campaign” (2001, p. 2317) not only to reassure their supporters that the effort was worthwhile, but also to convert “defeat into a trooping of the colors for the just cause and the future victory” (Corocan, 1995, p. 265). Chesebro and Hamsher (1974) wrote that a losing candidate must simultaneously “admit that a campaign has been lost,” exert that all energy devoted to the cause was productive, and retain commitment to the issues promoted by the campaign (p.40).

McCain first affirmed his campaign nearly halfway through his address, “We fought – we fought as hard as we could. And though we fell short, the failure is mine, not yours.” McCain affirmed his campaign, noting that his team had given a strong effort but ultimately did not prevail. McCain also held himself responsible for the loss. By projecting the loss of the election on himself (“the failure is mine, not yours”), McCain reaffirmed himself as a man who accepted responsibility for his actions, whether those ended in success or failure. Tactics such as taking responsibility for his campaign's loss made McCain a more credible speaker. His credibility may have been further enhanced by his use of battle imagery. For example, in this passage, McCain used the word “fought” twice to describe the events of the election. This wording may have been intentional. While campaigns often are depicted as battles by the media, the use of “fought” also references McCain's background as a veteran. As the soldier leading this

particular battle, he upheld his responsibility to his “troops” by recognizing their efforts and holding himself accountable for the campaign’s loss. McCain’s use of battle imagery elsewhere in the speech (i.e., via the use of words like “command,” “defend,” and “comrades”) reinforces not only his credibility as a campaigner, but also generates an impression that he is authentic and genuine.

McCain’s affirmation of his supporters also extended to his running mate. Several minutes after making the previous statement, McCain mentioned Governor Palin, describing her as

one of the best campaigners I have ever seen and an impressive new voice in our party for reform and the principles that have always been our greatest strength...with their [her family’s] tireless dedication to our cause, and the courage and grace they showed...We can all look forward with great interest to her future service to Alaska, the Republican Party, and our country. (McCain, 2008).

McCain spoke highly of Governor Palin, detailing her talents and political potential. This section was important for two reasons. First, McCain framed Palin as the future of the Republican Party, giving members of the party hope for the future. Second, by speaking of Palin as the future of the party, McCain lent credibility to himself for picking her to be his running mate, a political move questioned by many members of the Republican base and the opposition. By portraying the choice of Palin as a wise choice, McCain portrayed himself, the leader of the campaign, in a positive light. McCain also discussed the future roles of the candidates involved in the election. By doing so, he built his credibility as someone who not only recognized his electoral loss and opposition with grace, but he

was able to carefully reframe his status and that of his running mate as still relevant, post-election.

5) **Transformed roles for candidates**

Chesebro and Hamsher (1974) wrote that one of the attributes of a concession speech was the ability of the candidate to transform his or her role, meaning that the candidate could reframe himself or herself in a different light for the future. For example, a candidate might discuss his next endeavor in public service or the private sector. Or a politician might attempt to reframe herself in a more positive light, so that after the speech, the electorate would not just see a “loser”, but a candidate who happened to lose, but was still viable. A politician who transforms his or her role has the opportunity to make the loss of his or her election less negative.

Interestingly, McCain first referenced a transformed role when referring to President-elect Obama, not himself: “I had the honor of calling Senator Barack Obama – to congratulate him on being elected the next president of the country...Obama has achieved a great thing for himself...I applaud him for it.” By quickly referring to the new role of Senator Obama, McCain immediately addressed a key exigence underlying a concession address - - the need to “move on.” It signaled a shift in their respective positions, a shift that enabled both men and their various constituents to advance beyond the campaign. Additionally, it was important that McCain acknowledged that he had *already* greeted and congratulated President-elect Obama. It is a well-established tradition that the conceding presidential candidate talks to the winning candidate *before* giving a concession to the general public (Ritter & Howell, 2001). If McCain had neglected to mention the conversation with Obama, his audience might have been

concerned about the lack of etiquette. McCain also appeared gracious to his audience by first noting that he had congratulated President-elect Obama.

Later, McCain recognized other transitions. Specifically, he spoke of the future leadership of Senator Biden as well: "My old friend, Senator Joe Biden, should have the honor of leading us" (McCain, 2008). McCain and Biden often mentioned during debates that they were old friends who disagreed on political issues. Perhaps this is why McCain chose to recognize Biden's transformed role in his concession as well. McCain also portrayed Palin as a future prospect of the Republican Party: "We can all look forward with great interest to her future service to Alaska, the Republican Party, and our country." Acknowledging Palin's transformed role was important for McCain, as his credibility as a public servant was impacted both positively and negatively by choosing Governor Palin to be his vice president. Because many viewed Palin as the future of the Republican Party, it was important that McCain graciously and positively honor her during his concession.

Soon after, McCain mentioned the first transformed role he himself would assume post-election: "I pledge to him [Obama] tonight to do all in my power to help him lead us through the many challenges we face." By noting that he would "help him [Obama] lead us," McCain was potentially referring to the fact that he wanted to continue being a leader both in the Republican Party and in the Senate. McCain may also have meant that Obama would need his help in uniting Americans and moving the country forward, elevating his status as a leader. The challenges McCain referenced likely included the two wars in the Middle East, the economic recession, the energy crisis, and other domestic issues.

The previous excerpt also reflects the same sentiment noted in his subsequent reference to his commitment to America: “Today, I was a candidate for the highest office in the country I love so much, and tonight, I remain her servant” (McCain, 2008). In this quotation, McCain declared himself America’s servant, a role he had played for many decades and would continue to enact as one of Arizona’s Senators. By re-framing himself as America’s servant, McCain signaled his desire to remain active, unlike presidential candidates such as Bob Dole and Al Gore who disappeared from the public eye immediately after conceding the presidential election. Both still remain in the private sector. McCain avoided this trend by remaining a member of the Senate and continuing to serve the country. McCain also made it a point in his concession to thank his campaign team and supporters.

6) **Thanking supporters**

Ritter and Howell (2001) observed that a common feature of concessions was an expression of appreciation extended by the losing candidate to his or her supporters. Thanking supporters allows those who helped most with the losing campaign to be honored by the candidate and recognized by the listening audience. It is important for candidates to acknowledge the ones who helped them get to where they are, regardless of electoral outcome. If not, they look ungrateful for all of the support they have been given throughout the campaign. McCain first thanked supporters nearly halfway through his speech:

I am so deeply grateful to all of you for the great honor of your support and for all you have done for me. I wish the outcome had been different, my friends...I cannot adequately express how deeply indebted I am to you. (McCain, 2008).

McCain also thanked his family: “I am especially grateful to my wife, Cindy, my children, my dear mother and all my family and to the many old and dear friends who have stood by my side.” He also expressed his appreciation to Palin and her family: “I am also, of course, very thankful to Governor Sarah Palin...her husband Todd, [and] their five beautiful children.” McCain then showed gratitude to his campaign staff: “Rick Davis and Steve Schmidt and Mark Salter⁴...to every last volunteer...thank you so much” and to his state, Arizona, for allowing him, “the privilege of serving this country for half a century” (McCain, 2008). McCain’s expressions of gratitude to his supporters, family, running mate, staff, and state were well-stated and likely conformed to audience expectations. He did not surprise anyone by who he chose to thank, and it appears he did not leave anyone important out. These expressions of thanks were neither bad nor exceptional, but if McCain had neglected to mention any of these individuals or groups, he might have suffered a loss of credibility and prestige. In short, the audience might have second-guessed his character. Most of all, McCain might have looked bitter, which would not have portrayed him in a positive light. Leaving out the “thank yous” would have made it more difficult for him to frame himself as a gracious, well-intentioned public servant. McCain had to also deliver his speech to seem more focused on the positive growth of America than his own personal success.

⁴ In a personal conversation with Meghan McCain, daughter of John McCain and full-time campaign volunteer, she recalled that Mark Salter had written her father’s concession speech.

7) The speaker's concession appears to be associated with an altruistic rather than an egotistic end on the part of the speaker

Chesebro and Hamsher (1974) observed that in concession addresses, speakers will often try to explain their cause as altruistic and for the greater good, as opposed to a more selfish effort on the behalf of the speaker. Following this advice was important for McCain because he still wished to have a political career after the election. Appearing to be altruistic not only fit with his ethos as a public servant, it helped him be a more viable candidate and politician for the future.

Throughout his speech, McCain focused more on conveying himself in an altruistic manner than in an egotist manner. For example, in one place he stated, "Obama has achieved a great thing for himself and for his country." In doing so, McCain demonstrated that he was able to move on from the loss of the election. McCain also appeared gracious by mentioning Obama's great success. McCain's appearing gracious to his audience lent to his image as an altruistic candidate and speaker.

Later, McCain indicated that he cared more about his country than about winning an election, another important indicator of his altruism. He did so in conjunction with a reference to the new roles that both he and Obama would play in the new order: "These are difficult times for our country, and I pledge to him tonight to do all in my power to help him lead us through the many challenges we face...by offering our next president our goodwill and earnest effort to find ways to come together, to find the necessary compromises, to bridge our differences" (McCain, 2008). In this statement, he re-dedicated himself to helping America progress, a truly altruistic position. Finally, McCain invoked his dedication to and reverence of America:

This campaign was and will remain the great honor of my life. And my heart is filled with nothing but gratitude for the experience and to the American people...I would not be an American worthy of the name, should I regret a fate that has allowed me the extraordinary privilege of serving this country...tonight, I remain her servant...I hold in my heart nothing but love for this country and for all its citizens (McCain, 2008)

As this quotation suggests, McCain considered himself a patriot who remained dedicated to public service, even in the wake of his loss to Obama. McCain very noticeably portrayed himself as uninterested in his own ends, but dedicated to America and her best interest, which included helping Obama. He mentioned his gratefulness and pride in being a candidate for president and in being an American. McCain also affirmed that he had been a servant of America and would continue to be, regardless of the election's outcome. By proudly stating his public service record for America and continued love for the country, the image that McCain attempted to paint in the eye of his rhetorical audience was that of an altruistic speaker. McCain also maintained his altruistic image by carefully handling identification of his opponent, Obama.

8) The concession does not identify an explicit opponent or enemy

Chesebro and Hamsher's (1974) study of the concessions of Spiro Agnew and General Douglas MacArthur revealed that these speakers benefitted from vaguely discussing the reasons for their concessions from office. From this, the researchers posited that a concession speech is more likely to be well received if a specific enemy or opponent was *not* identified by the conceding party. McCain violated this criterion on multiple occasions. He repeatedly mentioned Obama, his opponent, by name. In fact, he

did so six times. The following passages illustrate: "I had the honor of calling Senator Barack Obama," "Obama has achieved a great thing," "Obama and I have had and argued our differences." If McCain had not specifically mentioned Obama and congratulated him, there may have been repercussions for McCain. Specifically, he would have seemed avoidant, bitter, and maybe even disrespectful to Obama. The only time that McCain referenced Obama without using his name occurred in the following passage: "I wish Godspeed to the man who was my former opponent and will be my president" (McCain, 2008). Here he went out of his way to recast Obama and welcome him as his president. In doing so, Obama was no longer his opponent. Perhaps more important, McCain addressed by his newly elected title: President. McCain even went farther by noting that Obama was "*my* President." This demonstrated not only McCain's acceptance of the election's outcome, but his allegiance to his "former opponent."

Examination of these substantive features of McCain's concession help lend understanding into his address. However, it is important to examine the style of the address as well.

Stylistic features

Foss (2008) observed that stylistic features in rhetorical genres centered on structural components such as sentence structure and word choice. She noted that stylistic characteristics constitute the form of rhetoric. McCain's address was similar to other concessions in terms of style. McCain utilized stylistic features in his concession in several ways. In particular his style enabled him to maintain high credibility, trustworthiness, and prestige prior to and during the concession speech. The concession speech also was intrinsically ordered by the classical dramatic frames of exposition,

rising action/conflict, climax, resolution, and denouement, and the speech itself functions as the culminating response to the extrinsic rhetorical environment (Chesebro & Hamsher, 1974).

1) Maintaining high credibility, trustworthiness, and prestige prior to and during the concession speech

McCain employed a rhetorical style that increased the effectiveness of the concession by promoting “high credibility, trustworthiness, and prestige prior to and during” his speech (Chesebro & Hamsher, 1974, p. 50). McCain achieved these attributes in his concession not only through the content of his speech, but through the manner in which he delivered his address. For example, McCain spoke in a manner that indicated his pride for his country without sounding overly somber about his loss in the election. Rather, his tone was humble and gracious. Such is the case with the following example: “This campaign was and will remain the great honor of my life, and my heart is filled with nothing but gratitude for the experience and to the American people” (McCain, 2008). McCain also adopted an informal tone in his speech, speaking to his audience in a manner that may be considered simple and conversational, such as referring to his audience members as friends: “My friends, we have come to the end of a long journey... I wish the outcome had been different, my friends.” McCain’s down-to-earth rhetorical style may have added to his trustworthiness as a political figure.

While appeals to ethos can be considered part of the substance of McCain’s speech, the words he chooses and the tone he uses to convey that substance relate to the style of his concession speech. McCain mostly portrayed himself as a public servant, highlighting his service to his country “for half a century” and thanking the people for

“giving me a fair hearing” during the campaign (McCain, 2008). His service to his country also was recalled through the various “battle metaphors” integrated into McCain’s address. While these might have been viewed as simply rhetorical flourishes had they been incorporated into the speech of another politician, coming from a man with McCain’s record of military service, they rang as authentic and genuine.

McCain did come under fire during the campaign from critics. In particular, his credibility as a career military man and politician was threatened by his debacle involving David Letterman (Orr, 2008), personal attacks on Obama (Escherish & Sher, 2008), and his questionable choice of Palin as his running mate (Winn, 2008). By being positive about his campaign and the future of the country, gracious and congratulatory toward Obama, (“Obama has achieved a great thing for himself and his country”), and expressing pride in his service, (“I would not be an American worthy of the name should I regret a fake that has allowed me the extraordinary privilege to service this country”), McCain not only recast himself from “loser” to a gracious and humble servant of America in a post-campaign setting, he re-established his ethos with his audience. McCain’s rhetorical audience interpreted him in the way he wished to be viewed. And because McCain’s audience was able to better connect with and believe him, he was able to re-frame himself in a more positive light and achieve a more successful outcome. This enabled him to continue his work as a major politician on the national stage. McCain also constructed his speech in a way that resembled the dramatic frames of exposition.

2) The concession speech is constructed by the classical dramatic frames of exposition, rising action/conflict, climax, resolution, and denouement, and the speech itself functions as the culminating response to the extrinsic rhetorical environment

Chesebro and Hamsher (1974) asserted that concession speeches have repetitive types of dramatic frames of exposition. These frames feature plot lines that occur in a specific order: exposition, rising/action conflict, climax, resolution, and denouement (i.e., the outcome of a very complicated series of events). McCain's speech, in some ways, represented itself as classical drama. By this I mean the speech referenced various parts of the classic drama, although those parts were not presented in the classic order. McCain began his speech alluding to the finality of his campaign: "My friends, we have come to the end of a long journey." McCain's statement represented denouement, the end of a complicated series of events. McCain then spoke of the resolution of the conflict when he referenced the result of the election, which he had lost. Later, McCain referenced the interaction that had occurred between himself and Obama, "Obama and I have had and argued our differences," which represented the action/conflict. McCain also referenced the resolution when he stated that he would continue working for the American people by supporting the new president and serving in the Senate. McCain again established denouement near the end of his address by calling Obama "my president." The climax in McCain's speech was near the end. As his voice became loud and passionate, McCain declared "Americans never quit. We never surrender. We never hide from history. We make history." Finally, McCain established exposition through the act of giving his concession, as it explained the reason for the concession to his audience.

Based on this analysis, I would argue that McCain's concession met the criterion of a classical drama; however, he did not deliver the speech in the established order. He jumped around from speaking about the resolution (i.e., working with the president), later speaking about the differences between the two politicians (i.e., action/conflict) and denouement (i.e., calling Obama "my president"). Despite this, McCain's speech does not appear to suffer as a result. This realization suggests that all of the dramatic frames need not necessarily be in order for a rhetor to be successful in delivering an address. Doing so may make it appear too stiff and inauthentic. Thus, I posit that McCain meets the spirit of these stylistic requirements.

Organizing principle

Foss (2008) wrote that the organizing principle is "the root term or notion that serves as an umbrella label for the various characteristic features of the rhetoric" (p. 137). She further noted that the organizing principle combines the rhetorical situation, substantive characteristics, and stylistic characteristics of an artifact into a solid form, which "captures the essence of the strategies common to the sample collected" (p. 142). In regards to McCain's speech, the actual organizing principle is presidential concession. McCain's speech to the crowd at the Arizona Biltmore hotel and millions of others on television was more than just an ordinary concession, it was a presidential concession. People concede things on a daily basis: admitting faults, acknowledging they were beaten in competitive endeavors, perhaps even giving speeches noting their losses. What makes McCain's speech not just a concession, but a presidential concession is the purpose of the speech, the events surrounding the speech, the content, the expectations of the audience, the staging of the speech, and the timing of the speech – all were for the specific purpose

of conceding candidacy for the presidency. Only other presidential concessions could be this similar to McCain's concession. McCain's rhetorical situation involved delivering his concession to his rhetorical audience in order to address the exigencies unique to that context. The substantive features of his speech all centered on the expectations for a presidential concession. And finally, the stylistic features McCain employed were all employed for the purpose of a presidential concession. Therefore, the rhetorical situation, substantive features, and stylistic features of McCain's speech are best summarized by one principle: presidential concession.

Summary

McCain's speech demonstrates all of the features associated with the concession genre. He mobilized significant support during his concession by choosing the place, the time, and the company he would share the announcement of his concession with. McCain also controlled the delivery and the content of his speech. Next, McCain formally declared his defeat. Not only did he make it clear that he had lost, he graciously mentioned then-Senator Obama several times, pledging to promise to help him. Then McCain spent a large portion of his concession calling for unity behind President-elect Obama. McCain also paid tribute to the democracy he had served his entire adult life, as both a member of the Navy and a politician, for the fourth criteria.

Additionally, McCain made sure to highlight the things his campaign had accomplished. He touted the "impressive new voice" of Governor Palin, his running mate, who had been brought to a national stage through the McCain campaign (McCain, 2008). McCain also clearly acknowledged the new roles that he and President-elect Obama were going to play in the coming years. He pledged that he would work with the

president-elect to advance the country. McCain also acknowledged the changed roles of Gov. Palin, who became more famous during the campaign, and Senator Biden, who would be serving as Obama's Vice President and President of the Senate. Next, McCain made sure to thank his many supporters, his staff, and his family who had successfully stood by him as the Republican nominee. And McCain maintained an altruistic tone throughout his speech as he strongly conveyed his gratitude and desire to continue serving America.

In his speech, McCain did identify an explicit enemy (Obama) but only to congratulate and honor his opponent. If McCain had ignored Obama, it would have potentially hurt his good standing as a politician. McCain also maintained credibility and prestige throughout his entire speech, and his words were interpreted as altruistic. He strongly conveyed his gratitude and desire to serve America. Finally, McCain's speech resembled a classical drama in several ways, although he did not deliver his concession in the traditional order of a dramatic frame.

Having established that McCain met the frameworks of both Chesebro and Hamsher (1974) and Ritter and Howell (2001), the significance of his meeting those standards should be clear. The next chapter discusses the significance of McCain's concession and answers the research questions. I will review my findings with my readers and conclude this essay.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS

This analysis of John McCain's 2008 presidential concession address indicates that the speech participates in the genre of concession rhetoric. It also lends insight into how well McCain's concession demonstrates the qualities associated with the genre of concession speeches, indicates that the speech functions as a model concession, and finally suggests that scholarly conceptions of the genre may need to evolve. This study also contributes insight into the field of presidential rhetoric and political rhetoric. The following discussion summarizes the analysis in detail, and examines the strengths, contributions, and weaknesses of the study, as well as outlines possible directions for further research.

Summary of Analysis and Discussion of Findings

The first research question that guided this study was "How well does McCain's 2008 concession speech demonstrate the qualities associated with the genre of concession speeches?" To answer this question, we first looked at how many qualities of concessions (as defined by Ritter and Howell in 2001 and Chesebro and Hamsher in 1974) McCain addressed in his concession speech. According to this framework, McCain's speech demonstrates nearly all of the features associated with the concession genre. First, McCain mobilized several areas of conventional support, including

delivering the speech in a well-chosen, appropriate setting for him (i.e., the Arizona Biltmore Hotel), selecting appropriate individuals to accompany him on stage while he delivered his concession, and designating appropriate staging for the concession. McCain also controlled the delivery and the content of his speech. Second, McCain formally declared his defeat. Not only did he make it clear that he had lost the presidential election, but he graciously mentioned then-Senator Obama several times and pledged to help Obama when he assumed the role of President. Third, McCain spent a large portion of his concession not only calling upon supporters, but the rest of the nation to unify behind President-elect Obama. His speech clearly called for national unity. Fourth, McCain paid tribute to the American democracy he had served his entire adult life. He referenced the greatness of America and called on everyone to cherish their citizenship.

Fifth, McCain made sure to highlight and affirm the things his campaign had accomplished. He touted the “impressive new voice” of Governor Palin, his running mate, who had been brought to a national stage through the McCain campaign (McCain, 2008). Sixth, McCain clearly acknowledged the new roles that he and President-elect Obama were going to play in the coming years. McCain pledged that he would work with the president-elect to advance the country. McCain also acknowledged the changed roles of Governor Palin, who became more well-known during the campaign, and Senator Biden, who would serve as Obama’s Vice President and President of the Senate.

Seventh, McCain made sure to thank his many supporters, his staff, and his family, all of whom had successfully helped him to become the Republican nominee. Eighth, McCain delivered his concession and wrote the content of his speech in a manner

that allowed him to be associated with an altruistic end. He was gracious, thankful, and even respectful and supportive of his opponent. Ninth, McCain maintained credibility and prestige throughout his entire speech, and his words were interpreted as altruistic. He strongly conveyed his gratitude and continued desire to serve America, and he successfully highlighted his half-century of service to the nation, strengthening his credibility. Finally, McCain's speech resembled a classical drama in several ways, even though he did not deliver his concession in the traditional order of the dramatic frames of exposition, rising action/conflict, climax, resolution, and denouement.

There was, however, one characteristic from the concession speech model that McCain did not demonstrate. Specifically, he mentioned Obama by name several times in his speech rather than avoid referencing him. Although Chesebro and Hamsher (1974) advise against doing so, I think that McCain was much better served by mentioning Obama in certain parts of his speech. Had McCain not specifically addressed Obama, I believe his concession would not have been viewed as so gracious. Additionally, many of those in McCain's rhetorical audience may have thought he was demeaning Obama and potentially being racist if he had not mentioned Obama by name. During the election campaign, McCain was criticized for not doing more to directly address the race-baiting and other race-related problems that occurred (Arovosis, 2008). To avoid addressing Obama by name in this instance might have been perceived by some as simply "more of the same." For those particularly concerned about the issue, the lack of respect paid to Obama by not mentioning him by name this might have been interpreted as an act of subtle racism.

McCain also demonstrated the qualities associated with concession speeches in a strong, successful manner. Specifically, McCain focused on several criteria of concessions that made his speech more successful given their connection to his past. With his focus on "Tribute to the American Democracy" and "Call for National Unity," McCain highlighted his own prestigious service to the nation by simultaneously paying respect to America throughout his speech and by encouraging the country to come together to move forward past the electoral process. McCain's background as a military man and life-long public servant helped the perception of his words seem believable and respected.

There were several other factors that added to McCain's rhetorical success. First, McCain reached across the party lines in his speech, acknowledging Obama as the new president and vowing to do whatever he could to support him. McCain had a history of teaming up with Democrats to pass certain pieces of legislation, such as the McCain-Feingold Act (Alexander, 2003; Drew, 2002). Because of McCain's bi-partisan efforts, he was well-known by many for reaching across the aisle. Therefore, his pledge to help Obama was credible and believable.

McCain also embraced the historical nature of the 2008 presidential election in his address. The election was a campaign of firsts. It featured Hillary Clinton, the first woman to nearly win the Democratic Party presidential nomination and the first wife of a former President to run for President; Sarah Palin, the first female Vice Presidential candidate from the Republican Party; and Barack Obama, the first person of color to be nominated by a major party to run for President and to be elected to that office. It was important that McCain noted the firsts of this campaign. McCain not only honored the

historical nature of the election by paying tribute to Obama and Palin, but he also rhetorically responded by delivering a speech which was unusual in and of itself.

Although McCain's speech matched the formula of concession speeches of the recent past, (i.e., Kerry, Edwards, Gore), his address was delivered in a more positive tone and was better received due to his gracious references to his opponent, Obama, his observance of the historical context of the election, and his own unique rhetorical style.

In addition to these features, McCain attempted to address the race issues reflected in the 2008 presidential campaign in his concession. As noted earlier, throughout the 2008 campaign, McCain was often criticized for not doing enough to address the rampant sexism that plagued candidates Hillary Clinton and his running mate Sarah Palin, and especially the racism that his opponent, Barack Obama had to endure (Aravosis, 2008). In his concession, McCain made several attempts to not only acknowledge the racism of the past and the present, but to show solidarity with his opponent and attempt to heal the potential wounds that may have developed because he did not more quickly address the racial problems evident in the election. First, McCain noted that the country had "come a long way from the old injustices...the memory of them still had the power to wound." However, McCain acknowledged that racism remained a problem for the country. McCain also used wording throughout the speech that not only addressed Obama as a peer and an equal, but as his leader. For example, he called Obama his "fellow American" and as "President." McCain also went further and implored the audience to support him as the "new president." McCain's efforts to address the racism of the "long and difficult" campaign are extremely important. Critics asserted that McCain should have done more to stop the racism that plagued his

opponent, Obama (e.g., Aravosis, 2008). To many observers, McCain did not forcefully stand against racism in the campaign; this was viewed as a major drawback among some who considered supporting him as a presidential candidate. In his concession, McCain went out of his way to not only be fair to Obama, but kind, gracious, and supportive to him as “the new President.” McCain’s efforts to start the healing process from the racial problems of the 2008 presidential election through his concession (by addressing the historical nature of the 2008 election regarding race and treating Obama as an equal) made his concession not only more gracious, but it showed that McCain is an honorable candidate.

McCain also achieved success in his concession through his efforts to frame himself from “loser” to “winner.” McCain worked to re-frame himself through several different means, most notably by highlighting his public service and the sacrifices he made for America, as well as through the staging he chose for his concession. These efforts made McCain’s concession not only more gracious and authentic, but rhetorically successful.

McCain’s efforts to “reframe” himself largely were grounded in his familial and personal history of service to the country. His rhetorical audience understood his well-known past as a son and grandson to Navy admirals who devoted their entire lives to military service. The campaign also had emphasized his past as a Navy pilot who spent five years as a prisoner of war in Hanoi during the Vietnam War. During his concession speech, McCain made several mentions of his storied public service in America, noting that he “would not be an American worthy of the name should I regret a fate that has allowed me the extraordinary privilege of serving this country for half a century.” He

also indicated that he would maintain his service after the election: “Tonight, I remain her servant.”

Not only was it appropriate for McCain to mention his service to America, but it also helped him achieve rhetorical success. His record of service was authentic rather than manufactured and/or embellished for the purposes of political campaigning. His audience was reminded of the many years he had spent working on their behalf, and they believed his words were genuine. McCain did not look like someone who wanted the American Presidency for selfish reasons. Rather, he appeared to be a man who just wanted to continue serving the country, as he had done his entire life, and would continue to do regardless of the election's outcome.

McCain also contributed to his “reframing” by choosing specific types of staging to help depict his as a winner. His concession was delivered on a stage at the Arizona Biltmore Hotel. An enormous American flag waved behind him before, during, and after his concession. Giant pillars decorated in a blue star theme framed the stage and appeared quite patriotic. Upbeat patriotic music played in the background before and after McCain's concession. The music was similar to that heard in war movies.

McCain's choice of staging was an important tactic to encourage the audience to accept him as a “winner.” He deliberately chose elements of the setting (e.g., stage, pillars, music, and colors) that were not only bright, bold, and positive, but that conveyed the notion of “presidential.” If McCain had won the election, the same setting would have been around him, and it too would have been perceived as presidential. McCain's choice of staging, combined with his mentions of self sacrifice and service to America, helped him reframe himself from “loser” to “winner” and achieve transcendence.

Although McCain lost the election, many critics were impressed with his campaign effort, his concession, and his service to America. His audience was able to examine McCain's record of heroic public service and not view him as a loser, but as someone who gave what he had to his country and would continue to do so. McCain's efforts to reframe himself were successful, and his rhetorical audience viewed him better after the speech than before the speech.

McCain not only met the criteria of a concession set forth by Ritter and Howell (2001) and Chesebro and Hamsher (1974), but he did so while playing to his rhetorical and political strengths. The one criterion McCain did not embrace ("Identifying a specific opponent or enemy") was crucial for him to disregard. McCain was well known for his bipartisanship and willingness to "reach across the aisle." If he had not mentioned Obama, he likely would have been viewed more negatively by his rhetorical audience. Thus, he demonstrated the qualities of the genre of concession speeches quite well, and to great critical success.

The second research question posed by this study was "Does McCain's 2008 concession speech function as a model concession speech?" In other words, this question asks whether McCain's speech rose above simply meeting the standards associated with concession addresses. Through my analysis, I have found that McCain did deliver a model concession speech. Not only did McCain meet the criteria for concessions previously established by Chesebro and Hamsher (1974) and Ritter and Howell (2001), he did so in a way that made his speech "special" and memorable. McCain emphasized the parts of the criteria that corresponded well with his public persona (i.e., "Tribute to American Democracy," "Call for National Unity"). And, despite how hard-fought the

campaign was, he adopted and maintained a positive, humble, and genuine tone throughout the speech that was perceived as believable and genuine by the majority of people who listened and watched (Weber, 2008).

Further, the great acclaim that McCain's presidential concession received from both his supporters, Obama supporters, and the media also indicate that it was a model concession speech. Critics nearly universally respected and spoke highly of McCain's concession. "It was as gracious as it was honorable..." wrote Mettycat, a blogger for *Vet Voice* (Mettycat, 2008). John Watkis noted that McCain's concession address was "his best speech" (Watkis, 2008). *NBC News*' Brian Williams and *Fox News*' Brit Hume both mentioned on air that they felt McCain's concession was gracious. AOL News' *Politics Daily* writer Christopher Weber observed that "it was a perfect speech, delivered with humility and grace" (Weber, 2008). From this perspective, McCain's address could be considered a "model" concession speech.

Given that McCain's concession not only fulfills the role of a model concession but moves beyond the set criterion, the third research question must be answered: "If McCain's 2008 concession speech does function as a model concession, in what way does it suggest a need for the genre to evolve?" First, McCain's concession suggests that even though the criteria for concession speeches outlined by Chesebro and Hamsher (1974) and Ritter and Howell (2001) are characteristics of most concession speeches, that does *not* mean that they always will be useful or relevant in every situation. Rather, concession addresses need to attend more broadly to unique moments in a campaign or the larger cultural milieu.

For example, in his concession address, McCain did not avoid mentioning his opponent. Chesebro and Hamsher's (1974) analysis of the speeches of General Douglas MacArthur and Vice President Spiro Agnew suggested that opponents *should not* be recognized. However, the rhetorical situation from which McCain's address emerged was very different from MacArthur's and Agnew's in this regard. McCain had a specific opponent (Obama) while MacArthur and Agnew faced adversaries that were harder to identify and constraints that made not identifying an enemy more beneficial to their unique situations. In the example of MacArthur's concession, the general was removed from command by President Truman because of a disagreement between the two regarding MacArthur's command of the Korean War. Blaming President Truman outright for his dismissal would have made MacArthur seem negative and potentially lessen his overwhelming public approval rating (Chesebro & Hamsher, 1974). Therefore, MacArthur wisely referred to his opposition in only a vague manner. However, McCain's scenario was different, as his opposition was obvious to all participating in the election. If he had intentionally ignored Obama, it possibly would have been viewed as negative and he would have been viewed as less gracious by his rhetorical audience. Therefore, this criterion, postulated by Chesebro and Hamsher (1974), was clearly better left ignored by McCain.

Similarly, while McCain's speech did contain elements of the classical dramatic frames of exposition, rising action/conflict, climax, resolution, and denouement, these were not included in their prescribed order. Like McCain, future rhetors may feel that their speeches are stronger without abiding in the order, and they may choose to ignore it based on other constraints related to their occasion and time. The previous examples

drawn from McCain's concession indicate that the concession genre must not only provide guidelines for what would stand as a concession, it must also allow rhetors to be flexible and violate those attributes if their particular rhetorical situation calls for doing so. What may work for one rhetor's concession may not work for another's.

Nowhere is McCain's attempt to address the unique features of his rhetorical situation more apparent than in his comments regarding the issue of race, a contentious issue throughout the campaign. Earlier in the campaign, McCain had been accused of not standing against racism when Obama was verbally attacked by McCain supporters (Aravosis, 2008). McCain also was criticized (Aravosis, 2008) for not doing more to silence the criticisms of Obama's religion and questions about his nationality. Perhaps in response to this, McCain attempted to create a sense of identification between himself and Obama by discussing their commonalities. He noted that he and Obama "both love" America, that he and Obama both believe that "America offers opportunities to all," that America has come a long way from the racism of the past, and that he and Obama were "fellow Americans," despite their political differences. McCain also mentioned the faith that he and Obama shared when discussing the loss of Obama's grandmother. These references to their "common ground" were extremely important. By speaking of his opponent as someone who was similar to him, McCain was able to suggest that he was not racist - - that he shared common ground with and respected Obama. And, given his calls for national unity, he was able to lay the groundwork needed to encourage his audience to respect Obama as well.

In a related vein, this analysis of McCain's concession speech also suggests that the genre of concession addresses might recognize how important honoring one's

opponent can be for a conceding rhetor. McCain honored Obama beyond the expected niceties. He discussed "congratulating" and "applauding" Obama for his election victory. McCain also discussed his admiration for Obama's ability to get those who would not normally vote in the 2008 election. Additionally, McCain stated his sympathy for the recent loss of Obama's grandmother, who passed away several days before the election. McCain also noted that Obama was no longer "my former opponent" but instead would be McCain's "president." By honoring his opponent in this way, McCain conveyed his respect for Obama and the office of the President. This positioned him to be able to work effectively with Obama in the future. It also sent an important signal to the American public who questioned Obama's experience and legitimacy. If McCain can honor and respect the new President, so should they. Future concession speeches, particularly those given after contentious races, might enhance their ability to unify the electorate by adopting such a tactic.

McCain's concession speech also suggests yet another significant criterion of rhetor success not discussed by Chesebro and Hamsher (1974) and Ritter and Howell (2001) - - the authenticity of the conceding candidate's voice. As previously noted, McCain's concession speech was deemed "gracious" by many critics (e.g., Gibbs, 2005; Mettycat, 2005; and Watkis, 2005). However, this "graciousness" emerged only after a contentious race during which he was charged with not doing enough to address the racism and sexism apparent in the campaign (Aravosis, 2008). As *NBC News* anchor Brian Williams noted, "Even some Republican stalwarts will tell you that the John McCain they've known for many years wasn't always the McCain they saw making some campaign decisions and appearances" (McCain concession speech and Obama victory

speech on election night, 2009). This caused many to question whether McCain was being genuine. However, in his concession, critics noted that they felt McCain made a return to the “vintage 2000 John McCain...only said what he felt needed to be said...wasn't worrying about the reaction of the party's base” (Gandleman, 2008). Because McCain directly addressed controversial issues (i.e., race and gender) in his concession, he appeared authentic – the “vintage 2000 John McCain.” These observations suggest that “genuineness” is an important component of successful concession speeches and should be integrated into the genre's features.

McCain's speech also may have changed the expectations for the genre of concession rhetoric. Because McCain's speech was so well received by critics and citizens, he may have set the bar for concession speeches higher than before. McCain not only met the vast majority of previous criteria for concession speeches defined by Chesebro and Hamsher (1974) and Ritter and Howell (2001), but he also relied on his rhetorical strengths such as use of battle metaphors, a kind and genuine voice when dealing with his opponent, and recognizing the historical context of the election. In the future, constituents may expect their candidates to concede in the same manner that John McCain conceded in -- with class, dignity, and graciousness. Other politicians also may look to his speech as an example of how to give a concession address. Perhaps McCain's concession example will encourage all future presidential concessions to become more gracious, unifying pieces of rhetoric.

It may also be possible that McCain's speech has raised the importance of the concession genre. Specifically, it is apparent that this speech was crucial to McCain as

he worked to reframe himself for the future. He not only maintained his position as a Senator and a Republican after the election, but was considered by some to be the de facto leader of his party (Martin & Raju, 2009). McCain's ability to positively reframe himself, from loser to "leader," was enabled through his concession. This reframing from "loser" to "winner" may prompt future critics to examine how the next conceding presidential candidate uses his or her concession to re-frame him or herself.

Contributions of this Study

This study contributes to the academy in several ways. It adds to the knowledge base of political and concession rhetoric, provides what may be the first academic analysis of McCain's concession, and adds to our understanding of John McCain as one of the most prominent political figures of the past thirty years.

First, this study adds to the knowledge of political rhetoric, more specifically concession rhetoric with regards to presidential elections. The study of political rhetoric is an important and growing field. Within this frame of reference, the study of concession rhetoric is just beginning to emerge. Besides the work of Chesebro and Hamsher (1974), there were very few analyses of concession rhetoric until 1994 when Corcoran wrote about presidential concessions from 1952-1994. With Corcoran's influence, several other pieces about concession rhetoric have emerged, including Ritter and Howell's (2001) work and Willyard and Ritter's (2005) research. In this study, the combined frameworks of Ritter and Howell (2001) and Chesebro and Hamsher (1994) provided more insight into the nuances and characteristics of concession addresses. Because of this analysis of McCain's presidential concession, others will be able to build on its findings and even further define what makes a strong concession.

Additionally, this scholarly review of McCain's concession is perhaps the first of its kind. As such, it not only contributes to the genre of concession rhetoric, but it also is a basis from which to begin understanding how McCain dealt with some very particular constraints when addressing the exigencies that he faced not only in his concession speech but perhaps throughout the campaign. As noted before, the 2008 presidential campaign was an unusual one, both in terms of the challenges that McCain overcame and the individuals who were nominated to run on the major party tickets.

McCain's come-from-behind victory in the primaries and eventual Republican nomination was a remarkable political accomplishment. McCain's campaign transformed from national underdog to the winner of the party's nomination. He went from an early campaign moment in which he was laying off his staffers to defying the odds by becoming the Republican Party nominee for president. McCain's unexpected rally was incredible; even he noted this in his concession. Viewed from this perspective, McCain's concession was the culmination of one of the greatest political rallies in recent memory, and examining his campaign is vital to understanding how McCain came from behind in the Republican primary, achieved success, and showed political leadership.

McCain's concession speech also provides us with insight into how candidates might address historical circumstances in their concession speeches. As noted earlier, race was a major factor in the 2008 presidential election. This study has addressed those issues, by not only detailing how concerns about Obama's race were addressed during the election, but by analyzing how McCain highlighted those issues in his concession speech. McCain prominently featured the historical nature of Barack Obama's win. He noted how historical and significant the election was for the African-American community, and

he observed the growth of America that enabled the country to embrace Obama as a candidate, "This is an historic election, and I recognize the special significance it has for African-Americans and for the special pride that must be theirs tonight." McCain also observed how America had "come a long way" from the bigotry of the past, with Obama's election serving as evidence. The way that McCain artfully addressed these circumstances provides insight into the larger body of his campaign discourse. He made mention of America's troubled past with racism in a fair critique, but moved on to congratulate Obama and the country for moving past the "cruel and frightful bigotry" of the nation's history.

This study also adds to the understanding of John McCain as one of the most prominent American political figures of the late 20th and early 21st century. McCain's family history is important, as his father and grandfather were both four star admirals in the Navy. McCain's status as a former prisoner-of-war is not just an unfortunate circumstance for the American hero, but a moving story of strength and bravery. By extension, McCain's position as prominent Senator and former presidential candidate make him the most politically successful prisoners-of-war in recent memory. With the analysis of McCain's most prominent speech, we better understand the legendary political figure and his contributions to the larger genre of political rhetoric.

The critical success of McCain's speech makes this analysis academically relevant and needed. Unlike the scathing presidential concessions given in recent years given by candidates such as Gore, Kerry, and Edwards, and the often-bitter tone of the 2008 presidential election, McCain's concession was nearly universally viewed as gracious and classy. Schwieter (2008) wrote that McCain "took the high road" and

avoided mudslinging toward his opposition. *Time's* Joe Klein and *Newsweek's* Nancy Gibbs both acknowledged that McCain's concession speech was "gracious." Because this speech was so critically acclaimed, it should be examined in a rhetorical context, provided by this study.

Limitations of the Study

There were several limitations of this study that made analysis of McCain's concession more difficult to accomplish. First, there is very little research to build on in the field of concession rhetoric. With the exception of the previously mentioned studies (Chesebro & Hamsher, 1974; Corcoran, 1994; Ritter & Howell, 2001; Willyard & Ritter, 2005), it is difficult to find other academic works focusing on concession rhetoric. Because of this, I had a limited range of articles to be inspired by, draw ideas from, and build upon. Concession rhetoric should be greatly expanded by the academic community to build a larger body of literature and more nuanced analyses of concession addresses. I hope to contribute to the growing body of concession analyses.

Second, I completed this study as a single text analysis of only McCain's 2008 presidential concession. Each of the studies I have drawn inspiration from (Chesebro & Hamsher, 1974; Corcoran, 1994; Ritter & Howell, 2001; Willyard & Ritter, 2005) has used a comparison-contrast format between multiple texts. I did not use this format. Therefore, it is possible that I may have missed some nuances in McCain's speech because I have not compared it with other similar concession addresses.

Third, through this analysis it was discovered that there are limitations of the concession genre that had not been previously discussed. As rhetors are thrust into unique circumstances in which to deliver their addresses, they must be allowed flexibility

in completing the criteria set forth by Chesebro and Hamsher (1974) and Ritter and Howell (2001). What may work for one rhetor (i.e., MacArthur) may not work for another (i.e., McCain).

Finally, my findings did not suggest the need to delete criteria or add new criteria to the already existing criteria by Chesebro and Hamsher (1974) and Ritter and Howell (2001). Although concessions may have potentially changed somewhat since the two structures were created, my study did not reveal any need to significantly alter those criteria. However, had I compared McCain's speech with others through time, I might have been able to create a larger "big picture" understanding of the genre's evolution and therefore contributed more to scholar's understanding of the genre. This potential study would have better informed future rhetors and rhetorical critics about appropriate content in concession speeches. Instead, I suggest that scholars should view the criteria set forth by Chesebro and Hamsher (1974) and Ritter and Howell (2001) as flexible guidelines to start with, not absolute requirements of a concession.

Directions for Further Research

There are many possible directions for further research, not all of which are listed here. First, John McCain is a compelling rhetor with a famous family history and a rich past as a public servant. He has been one of the most significant Republican politicians of the past thirty years, authoring numerous bills and making countless television appearances on behalf of the Republican Party. Scholars in political rhetoric would be wise to investigate other pieces of McCain's rhetoric throughout the years. Perhaps we would learn more about him as a rhetor and gain a greater understanding of political leadership and the act of re-framing oneself after a loss through a concession speech.

Additionally, concession speeches are clearly an underdeveloped area of political rhetoric. They are recurring rhetorical forms in American politics, and as long as we have democracy, we will have politicians delivering concessions after losses. For our understandings of the concession genre to grow, we need more rhetorical scholars who will analyze concessions and add new literature to the field. Doing so also will enable our models to evolve. Chesebro and Hamsher (1974) and Ritter and Howell (2001) developed models to better understand concessions. These were extremely useful when assessing McCain's 2008 concession. But one day, these models may be less relevant than they are now as political and rhetorical norms will change and evolve. Future scholars must determine what constitutes strong and successful concession speeches through time, and develop those ideas into an evolving model.

Furthermore, concessions are designed to reframe a loser in a more favorable light. Therefore, future concessions should be examined closely to see if they accomplish this goal. McCain's concession is a great example of a politician using such a speech to reframe himself positively and build off of the success of his address, and it is likely that others may embrace the rhetorical techniques he employed. We need to keep examining concession speeches, including those from the past and the ones in the future, as they come. This developing genre shows great promise for understanding this brand of political rhetoric, but growth must continue to happen so we can more fully understand the political and rhetorical impact of a concession speech.

Conclusion

John McCain's 2008 presidential concession was not a speech delivered by the greatest rhetor of the day. It was a speech delivered by a man with passion and humility,

and who had a high regard for the greatest office in the land. Even though he had just lost the most important election of his career, the concession was great because McCain made it great. Instead of conceding in what many would consider “the usual” way, his words were personal and believable. McCain promised to help the new president succeed and he pledged to continue serving the nation, all at a time when he could have bowed out of political life completely and no one would have blamed him. After viewing McCain’s concession, I agree with the sentiment of AOL News’ *Politics Daily* writer Christopher Weber, “Never [before have I] seen a candidate more gracious in defeat...[It] was a perfect speech, delivered with humility and grace” (Weber, 2008). McCain’s speech was excellent because he built on the expectations of concessions from the past while expressing genuine sentiments about the event and his life. Future politicians would be well served if they followed McCain’s example. McCain’s concession will stand as one of the strongest concession addresses and potentially even one of the greatest political speeches of the 21st century in America.

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