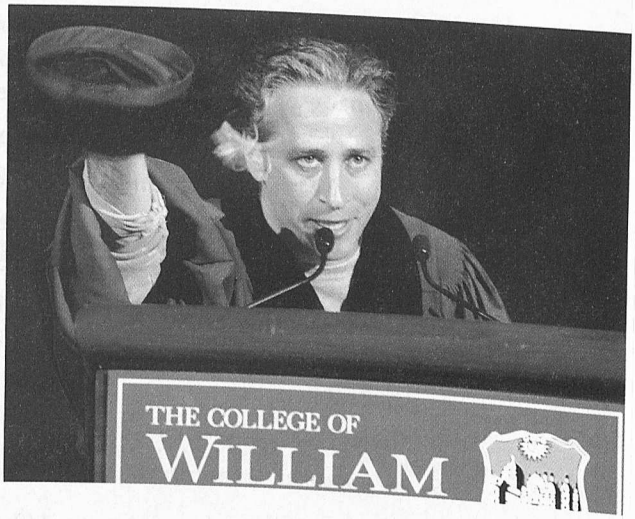
# 15

# Developing Your Ceremonial Speech

**CHAPTER OUTLINE**






**This chapter is intended to help you:**

- Identify the various purposes of ceremonial speaking
- Apply skills of invention and organization to ceremonial speaking situations
- Use appropriate supporting material in ceremonial speeches

For many of you, the first speech that you will give after leaving this class will be some sort of **ceremonial speech**, a speech that recognizes and helps to create a special moment in the life of a community. It could be making a toast at your best friend's wedding or presenting an award to one of your co-workers. It might involve inspiring your organization's members at a banquet, honoring the memory of a family member with a eulogy, or celebrating life in your community.

In spite of the diversity of these situations, each of them marks a unique moment in the lives of those who are involved. While their purpose is different from the informative and persuasive speeches that are central to addressing public issues, ceremonial speeches nonetheless serve an important public purpose. When done well, ceremonial speeches engage the principles, values, and goals that connect people to one another. In the words of rhetorical scholar

## CASE SCENARIO

### Treva's Speech on the Neuro Networking Club

Treva started an organization in her community called the Neuro Networking Club. Focused on young adults who are on the autism spectrum, the club is a way to offer social support for these young adults as well as to provide support and information to their families. Treva felt very comfortable speaking about the topic; she had given lots of speeches about autism and the joys and challenges of her son's Asperger syndrome. But she wasn't quite sure how she might adapt this information for the purposes of her ceremonial speech assignment.

James Jasinski, they "generate, sustain, or modify a community's existence" (Jasinski 211; Condit).

Thus, ceremonial speaking is an important type of speaking in the public sphere. No matter what the size of the community, people need occasions to reflect on their life together. They need to be reminded of what "the good life" means in their community and what it looks like to live that good life. This chapter will explore how different kinds of speeches respond to ceremonial situations and will give you practical guidance in developing ceremonial speeches of your own. ■

## Purposes of Ceremonial Speech

Like informative and persuasive speech, ceremonial speech is significantly influenced by the demands of the rhetorical situation. For example, the situation makes it fairly clear when a wedding toast, a eulogy, or a Memorial Day speech is the appropriate type of speech. But developing an effective ceremonial speech requires you to understand the more fundamental purpose that underlies each of these speech types. Once again, we can consider how a broad category of speeches can serve civic and political purposes as well as other purposes in your personal and professional life.

### Civic and Political Purposes of Ceremonial Speech

Ceremonial speeches have a long tradition of serving key civic and political purposes. Aristotle referred to these types of speeches as **epideictic rhetoric**, a type of public discourse that engages in praise or blame in ceremonial contexts. In Aristotle's time, civic rituals such as festivals and public funerals were occasions for this type of rhetoric, when speakers would make great efforts to celebrate the values of the community. For example, the funeral oration by the Athenian leader Pericles is considered a classic example of a speech that reinforces communal values.

Contemporary scholars have explained that the purposes of epideictic rhetoric can be united under the heading of *display* (Poulakos and Poulakos). How does ceremonial speech engage in display?

- *It puts the people, practices, and ideals of a community on display.* Ceremonial speech uncovers the aspects of life that are not seen and highlights what is overshadowed in day-to-day life.
- *It puts language itself on display.* Ceremonial speech especially invites speakers to use artistic language to heighten an audience's appreciation of the topic.
- *It puts speakers on display.* As Jasinski says, "Through the display of eloquence, an advocate positions himself of herself as someone to whom the community should listen."

Through display, ceremonial speech takes us out of our normal, everyday existence and illuminates those things that matter most to a community. Let's take a look at some of the ways in which this display serves civic and political purposes.

**Commemorating Leaders and Role Models** One purpose of ceremonial speaking is to recognize individuals who have accomplished great things or acted in ways that deserve praise. A speech that pursues this purpose is called a **commemorative speech**, or a speech of tribute. By commemorating a leader or role model, a speaker displays characteristics of that person that the audience should imitate.

Speeches that commemorate occur at award ceremonies, banquets, or other special events at which unique or excellent achievements are recognized. For example, an end-of-the-year banquet might feature a commemorative speech about a student government leader who has been an especially strong advocate for the interests of the student body. Or it might highlight a classmate who has overcome a physical disability to receive his or her college degree.

Recognizing leaders and role models is useful for identifying the *characteristics, actions, and values* that make your community flourish. Although these types of speeches focus on individuals, the person is being commemorated not just for who he or she is but for this person's commitments, traits, and efforts. What did she do that was so amazing? How did he persevere under such difficult circumstances? What actions show this person's commitment to excellence? Commemoration depends on how vivid and clear you can make this person's life to your audience.

**Inspiring Enthusiasm** A closely related purpose of ceremonial speech is inspiring enthusiasm. The **inspirational speech** attempts to stir an audience's passion and commitment toward some topic, goal, or purpose. As you might imagine, a speech of inspiration may involve commemorating a

person, but its purpose goes beyond celebrating an individual to celebrating a broader goal or purpose. This purpose also overlaps with the persuasive purpose of influencing attitudes; essentially, your task is to create a highly positive attitude toward the subject of your speech. But again, ceremonial speeches generally seek to shape a broader or more general attitude than that in a persuasive speech.

For example, a persuasive speech on freedom of expression might seek to strengthen an audience's attitude against a particular piece of legislation that threatens freedom of expression. And a commemorative speech might celebrate the efforts of someone who has defended freedom of speech. An inspirational speech, however, would seek to reinforce the importance of free expression in general and inspire listeners to continue to resist threats to free speech.

An inspirational speech is common at gatherings of political or civic organizations. In many ways, this type of speech builds the moral support and emotional energy that are needed to carry out long-term political and civic projects. If you are involved with a group that is fighting discrimination in your community, for example, it might not be enough to inform and persuade your members about the importance of a specific ordinance. To motivate people in your organization and to keep them engaged over the long run, you need to inspire enthusiasm.

**Renewing Civic Identity** As was mentioned at the beginning of this section, some ceremonial speeches are more narrowly defined by the demands of the occasion. In the United States, for example, events on Memorial Day, Independence Day, and Veterans Day are clear opportunities for renewing civic identities. These holidays, as well as moments such as presidential inaugurations and State of the Union addresses, are generally observed as a time to reflect on the values of the nation as well as the actions and sacrifices that other people have made on our behalf (Beasley; Vivian).

Renewal of civic identity occurs on local levels, too. Your hometown, for example, might have a festival that involves some formal events at which local leaders extol the virtues of living in your community. College campuses might have a Founder's Day or Charter Day, as do many campus organizations such as fraternities and sororities. Civic identity does not necessarily have to be limited to a specific place, either. Events ranging from Black Awareness Month to Universal Women's Week to Earth Day all offer a chance to unite people around identities that are meaningful to them.

Like commemorative and inspirational purposes, the purpose of renewing civic identity is crucial to the public sphere, as it strengthens the bonds of community. By reminding people of the identities that they share with others, speeches that renew civic identity can empower people to work together to fulfill common needs and goals.

## Other Purposes of Ceremonial Speech

You may be familiar with other ceremonial speech types that are more common in your personal and professional life. Like the purposes of the speeches described above, these purposes also are largely about establishing common ground and a sense of identification among speakers, audience members, and the subject of the speech.

**Introducing Speakers** The **speech of introduction** prepares an audience for a featured or keynote speaker. If a prolific scholar, an inspiring leader, or prominent alumnus is going to speak on your campus, you might be asked to introduce that person to the audience. Or you might need to introduce a keynote speaker at an organization meeting or professional convention. Your role is to act as a liaison between the speaker and your colleagues in the audience but in a more formal way.

Like the introduction you invent for your own speeches, a speech of introduction sets the stage for what comes next. However, when giving a speech of introduction, you should not draw attention to yourself with a bold attention-grabber or comments that enhance your own credibility. Instead, you need to put the speaker on display and keep yourself in the background. Generally, a speech of introduction will do the following things:

- *Identify the speaker's name and occupation.* Be sure to confirm the accuracy and pronunciation with the speaker before the speech.
- *Enhance the credibility of the speaker.* Highlight the speaker's experience and achievements that are relevant to the speech and your audience.
- *Note the significance and relevance of the speaker's topic.* Try to evoke the audience's interest in and excitement about the speech.
- *State the title of the speech.* This is all you need to do by way of offering a main idea or preview of the speech.
- *Ask the audience to join you in welcoming the speaker.* Showing appreciation helps to establish a positive mood right off the bat.

Displaying the speaker in a positive light is your ultimate goal with this type of ceremonial speech. Potentially embarrassing anecdotes and excessive praise can be awkward, as can an introduction that is too short or that drags on too long. Depending on the length of the featured speech, your introduction might run anywhere from two to five minutes. Err on the side of brevity.

**Presenting and Accepting Awards** Your familiarity with an award presentation speech and an award acceptance speech might come from the creative and often quirky speeches that are given during award ceremonies for television, film, and music performances. Like clockwork, the MTV Video Music Awards ceremonies generate odd award speeches and supposedly "spontaneous" events

that are usually more about self-promotion than about celebrating excellent performance. While entertaining, these instances reveal much about what *not* to do when you want to truly give credit for accomplishments.

The **award presentation speech** is essentially a tribute for a specific action or the quality of performance over a limited time frame—the top essay in your composition class, for example, or the most improved speaker during the season. As a result, award presentation speeches should focus on the performance that is being honored and leave out extraneous details that are not related to the award.

Also, consider explaining the award to your audience. Think about the criteria–application organizational pattern that you read about in chapter 14. Describing the criteria for the award can help the audience to better understand the awardee's accomplishments and direct you to talk about specific details. In addition, many awards on campus or in your community are named in honor of the award's sponsor. Recognizing that person adds meaning to the award and is a great way of keeping local history alive.

If you have the honor of receiving an award, a few key guidelines are necessary for the **award acceptance speech**, a speech that acknowledges an award and those who made it possible:

- *Express your gratitude for the award.* Humility is absolutely necessary for a successful acceptance speech.
- *Thank those who are bestowing the award.* It takes time and energy for organizations to give awards. Let them know that you appreciate it.
- *Thank those who aided your accomplishment.* The community angle on this speech is the reality that family, friends, and colleagues made your accomplishment possible. Mention them so that all of you can celebrate the moment.

**Celebrating Milestones** Different cultures, religions, and social groups have ceremonies that celebrate milestones that members of the group have reached. It could be a first communion, a bar or bat mitzvah, or a wedding. It could be a commencement ceremony at a school or college. It could be a work-related milestone, such as a promotion or a retirement party. Whether these ceremonies are formal or informal, they often include opportunities for speaking that recognizes the people who are reaching the milestone.

The most common speech in these situations is the **toast**, a brief speech that celebrates a milestone by amplifying feelings of goodwill. The specifics of the toast will depend on the particular milestone that is being celebrated. For example, a toast that celebrates a confirmation or other religious milestone will praise a person's religious development rather than other aspects of his or her identity. Also, toasts give speakers latitude to talk about the relationship between

## PUBLIC SPOTLIGHT

### Marisol Becerra

Marisol Becerra has been an active member of the Little Village community in Chicago since her early teens. Shocked by the pollution from coal-fired power plants in her community, Becerra worked with the Little Village Environmental Justice Organization (LVEJO) to map and inventory the toxins near these plants and to draw attention to related health problems, such as increased rates of asthma and premature births. She developed an interactive online map called OurMap of Environmental Justice that incorporates youth videos and displays toxic sites and gang territory.

For her work on these issues, Becerra has been honored with the Brower Youth Award from Earth Island Institute and has given inspirational speeches at the Clinton Global Initiative and PowerShift 2009. Her speech of acceptance at the Brower Youth Awards is a great example of a ceremonial speech that addresses a significant public issue. In it, she gave credit to her family, community members, and professors who mentored her; used statistics and testimony to raise awareness of the environmental injustice challenges in Little Village; and inspired her audience members to raise their voices for a safe and healthy environment.

Marisol Becerra has used ceremonial speaking to draw attention to the need for sustainable natural and social systems.

#### Social Media Spotlight

Marisol Becerra's speeches are able to circulate far beyond their initial performance, as the organizations that support her take advantage of websites and social media to connect activists on related issues.

- Marisol Becerra's Brower Youth Award acceptance speech: http://www.broweryouthawards.org/userdata_display.php?modin=50&uid=3678
- Marisol Becerra's PowerShift 2009 speech: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LITrHkVwtxA
- OurMap of Environmental Justice: http://www.elcilantro.org/?page_id=6
- LVEJO Facebook page: http://www.facebook.com/pages/Little-Village-Environmental-Justice-Organization-LVEJO/92669819450

the speaker and the person who has reached the milestone. A toast at a wedding, for example, often will involve a speaker sharing a brief expression of friendship for the couple or a short anecdote that encapsulates their relationship.

The social expectations for toasts are much like those of other ceremonial speeches. Be brief, focus on the subject rather than yourself, and avoid potentially embarrassing stories. Films with wedding scenes are filled with examples of toasts, most of which are either extremely effective or extremely inappropriate. Take a look at a few, and try to determine what distinguishes the successful ones from the bombs.

As a college student, you should also reflect on the possibility of giving a **commencement speech**, a speech that occurs during celebration of the

successful completion of an educational program. The interesting thing about the speech is that "commencement" means beginning, so the speech also marks a transition to a new phase of life. Consequently, a commencement speech both should celebrate accomplishment and inspire enthusiasm for what lies ahead. Because these speeches are so ritualized, speakers can easily fall into clichés and vague or sappy language. The rest of this chapter should give you some concrete ideas for making your commencement speech lively, instructive, and inspiring.

**Memorializing Loved Ones** A milestone that deserves its own section is the funeral, in which a **eulogy** serves the purpose of memorializing someone who has died. It can be a difficult speech to develop and deliver if you are close to the person you are memorializing, which is the case for most eulogies. The emotional intensity and grief can add to the normal challenges involved with public speaking.

But it can also be therapeutic for you. In many ways, a eulogy is a form of **auto-communication**, or communication in which the speaker is an important part of the audience. In other words, by thinking about what you would want to hear as a grieving audience member, you can develop a message that will be meaningful to the rest of your audience, too.

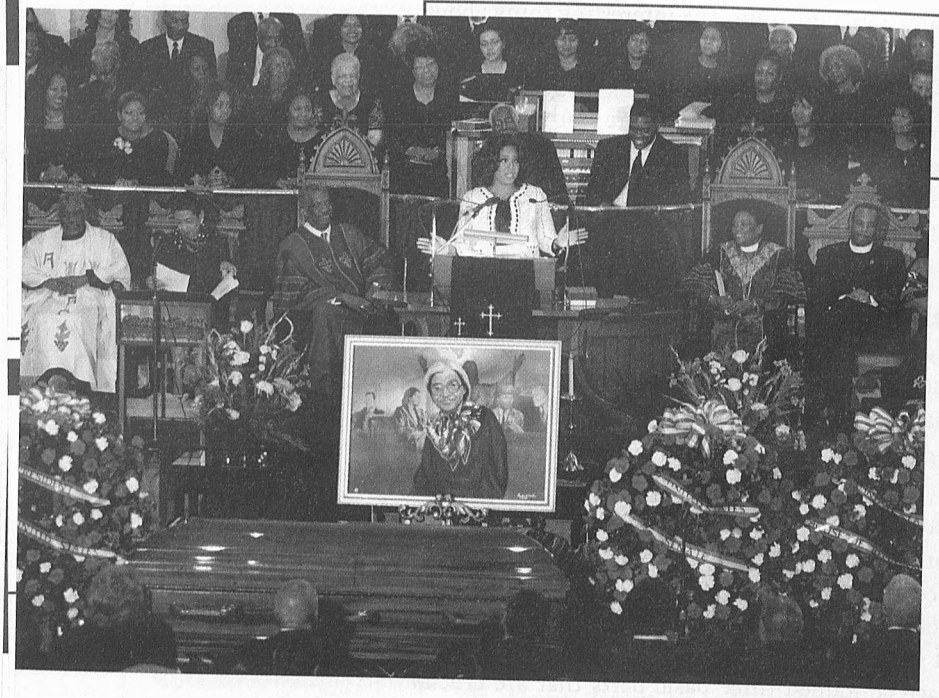
Traditionally, eulogies have contained three basic parts that are crucial for helping an audience to process their loss and move forward (Poulakos):

- *Praise of the deceased.* A good eulogy is as much a celebration as it is an expression of sorrow. Show the audience all of the positive things that came from the person's life: his or her character, actions, relationships, and accomplishments.
- *Lament of our loss.* Expressing grief is an important and necessary part of any eulogy. It can be cathartic for the audience members, and it shows that you recognize and share their feelings.
- *Consolation of the audience.* **Consolation** is the act of comforting the audience members and lessening their grief. Although words cannot eliminate grief, they can help an audience to see a world beyond their time of sorrow.

Often, the consolation of the audience will draw on those aspects of the person's life that were praised. The way to honor the memory of the person is to cherish the person's values and follow his or her model.

## Clarifying Your Purpose and Central Idea

Compared to an informative or persuasive speech on a public issue, a ceremonial speech usually has a fairly clear purpose. The descriptions above should give you a clear sense of what you are trying to accomplish. However, especially for some of the longer ceremonial speeches, such as a commemorative



PRAISE IN EULOGIES
Oprah Winfrey's eulogy of Rosa Parks praised Parks' courageous actions during the civil rights movement.

speech or a speech of inspiration, it may be useful to sharpen your purpose to keep your speech on track.

For example, a speech that intends to pay tribute to an individual can start meandering if the speaker does not have a clear sense of the characteristics, actions, or values that she wishes to praise:

*Purpose:* To pay tribute to Nathan Miller, student body president.

*Better purpose:* To pay tribute to Nathan Miller's devotion to the needs of disabled students on campus.

*Better purpose:* To pay tribute to Nathan Miller's commitment to equal treatment of all students.

The better purpose statements clarify which aspects of Nathan's experience and character will be on display. Likewise, a more focused purpose statement could help to focus a speech intended to inspire or renew civic identity:

*Purpose:* To inspire appreciation for veterans.

*Better purpose:* To inspire appreciation of other students who are veterans.

The success of a traditional commencement speech can hinge on whether a speaker has a coherent purpose. One of the most fascinating commencement speeches came from novelist David Foster Wallace, who spoke at Kenyon Col-

lege in 2005 ("David Foster Wallace"). His speech did not sound like a typical commencement speech, but it was driven by a fairly specific purpose: to inspire students to reflect on the idea that a liberal arts education teaches you how to think. Wallace used jokes, philosophy, and examples, in order to illustrate that idea and explore its meaning in everyday life. In contrast, many commencement speeches have a purpose that is little more than a few platitudes about the graduating class with some self-centered stories thrown in as filler. Having a more specific purpose than "celebrating the graduates" likely will make your commencement speech more memorable than the average speech.

Even short speeches can benefit from some careful thinking about your precise purpose. A speech of introduction, as we saw above, should dwell on the aspects of the speaker that are most relevant to the topic of his or her speech:

*Purpose:* To introduce David Orr to my audience.

*Better purpose:* To introduce David Orr as a knowledgeable and experienced speaker about "post-carbon" cities.

The same principle holds for award speeches. These are not times to say whatever you like about the award recipient or to elaborate on your personal opinion about a topic that is unrelated to your award. Focus instead on the reasons the ceremony is being held in the first place.

Finally, not all ceremonial speeches will have a central idea that is as clear and direct as those in informative and persuasive speeches. For example, it would probably sound a little stiff to start a toast by saying, "Today I want to show that Sharice and Alan are a great couple for three reasons." Likewise, an award acceptance speech makes several acknowledgements rather than establishing a core idea.

However, commemorative speeches, eulogies, milestone speeches, and inspirational speeches often will have an overarching theme that can be encapsulated in a sentence early in the speech:

*Eulogy central idea:* No matter how you knew Jennifer, her saucy humor made her loved by everyone.

*Commemorative central idea:* Barb's commitment to our entire association, not just a few certain groups, has established a model for leadership that we should all try to follow.

*Inspirational central idea:* With your hard work, we can restore conservative values as the bedrock principles guiding our legislature.

For these somewhat longer ceremonial speeches, the central idea is not so much a claim that needs to be established as a theme on which you can develop variations throughout your speech. Your entire speech, then, involves amplifying and magnifying that theme to develop a rich and satisfying depiction of your subject.

## THE ETHICAL DIMENSION

### Using Ceremonial Speech to Engage Differences

At the beginning of this chapter, you learned that effective ceremonial speaking should engage the audience's principles, goals, and values. But *how* should it engage? Is it preferable to reinforce the meanings that audiences give to goals and values, or can ceremonial speech engage differences and offer meanings that raise disagreement?

Chris Hedges's commencement speech at Rockford College in 2003 offers a provocative case for examining this ethical dimension of ceremonial speaking. Hedges, a war correspondent and author of the book *War Is a Force That Gives Us Meaning,* delivered a speech that was largely about war and comradeship. Coming shortly after the U.S. invasion of Iraq, his speech drew national attention after a few members of the audience booed and tried to get onto the stage and the sound system was cut off twice during the speech. The public sphere buzzed with discussion about the appropriateness of Hedges's speech as well as the behavior of audience members who disagreed with his message.

Rhetorical scholar Lois Agnew analyzed the tumult over Hedges's speech and explains that the speaker and the audience share the blame. On one hand, Hedges's speech appears to violate the usual norms of commencement speaking. He did not acknowledge the accomplishments of the graduates, and he did little to develop identification with his audience. On the other hand, critical responses to the speech generally refused to see the moment as "an educational moment that appropriately culminates the students' academic experiences" (160).

For Agnew, the case shows the challenge of making ceremonial speech something more than just empty platitudes. Agnew frames her conclusion for a new vision of epideictic rhetoric in relation to the ethical principle of reciprocity that has been discussed throughout this book: "Audiences and speakers who enter into epideictic moments with a genuine commitment to learn from each other, even as they respectfully acknowledge their differences, will be uniquely prepared to respond to a world in which difference is often seen as a divisive force" (161).

#### WHAT DO YOU THINK?

1. Read the text of the speech at **http://www.commondreams.org/headlines03/0520-13.htm**, or watch the video (the first of four clips) at **http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SAWMgYyAtHU.** If you were in the audience, how would you have responded to the speech?
2. What adaptations to the immediate audience or occasion might have softened the response to the speech?
3. Who do you think was Hedges's primary audience for the speech? How might this have influenced his rhetorical strategies?

## Inventing Your Ceremonial Speech

The topical system that you have been using for informative and persuasive speeches also can be applied in ceremonial situations. After all, your audience and the topic of your speech remain the central constraints for rhetorical invention regardless of the type of speech you are giving. The topic of language analysis, however, needs to be adapted for ceremonial situations.

### Using Audience Research

Demographic factors can be surprisingly useful for ceremonial speaking. If you need to make an impromptu toast or are struggling with the challenge of

developing a eulogy in a short time, a simple demographic analysis can help you to make some basic choices and steer clear of important hazards.

For example, a successful impromptu wedding toast can benefit greatly from examining age, religion, race, and class. A toast that might be fine when you are out with friends of the couple the night before the wedding might not be acceptable at a wedding reception with older family members and children. Similarly, be wary of making assumptions about shared experiences when making a toast to an audience of mixed religious backgrounds or an audience that is racially or economically diverse.

Likewise, a eulogy often brings together people of diverse backgrounds who might have known the deceased person at different ages or stages in life. If you are familiar with the range of people who are likely to attend a memorial, you can consider adapting your speech to address events and memories that will resonate with different groups.

In other ceremonial situations, demographics can give you hints about whether your audience has deficient or abundant knowledge about the topic of your speech. Age is again an important factor. A younger audience might not know much about a particular award or milestone, requiring you to go into greater depth and make your speech somewhat more informative. If you are trying to inspire a young audience about civil rights, they might need to know more about the history of civil rights struggles than an older audience would.

Consider how race and ethnicity can influence your invention. On the topic of civil rights, an audience that is dominated by one ethnic group might need to know more about the struggles of other groups. Conversely, a speech that is attempting to renew civic identity might focus specifically on celebrating the contributions that one ethnic or racial group has made to the community.

Overall, audience research is critical for determining your audience's disposition and knowledge base about the topic of your speech. As with every other type of speech, these factors should shape how you approach your topic. Just because the focus of ceremonial speaking often is a person does not mean that you can ignore the other people—the audience—who are ultimately the ones you are trying to reach with your speech.

## Using Topic Research

Nevertheless, the subject of your speech is typically much richer than you might know. A bit of research can often yield an interesting anecdote or new perspective that changes a ceremonial speech from a boring ritual to a moment of real audience engagement. Come back to the common topics discussed in chapter 8 to brainstorm possibilities for your speech.

**Existence** Paying tribute to collective groups such as organizations or communities requires you to make them come alive for your audience. Use concrete and active language to show where the spirit of your community exists

or how your organization plays an important role on campus. Likewise, you can do a better job of inspiring enthusiasm for an abstract idea or value by showing where it already exists or specific obstacles to its achievement.

**Definition** You could develop an entire speech around the definition of a key term or idea. A commemorative speech might show how a lawyer or victim's advocate exhibits a commitment to "justice," or a eulogy could show that the definition of a "patriot" fits a the person you are memorializing. Definitional strategies also can come into play for award presentations, when you might explain the denotative meaning of the award criteria or some of the connotative meanings that are embodied by the award recipient.

**Comparison** When used carefully, comparison can be an excellent strategy for developing the accomplishments of a person. Comparing the achievements of your subject to other respected people will magnify the importance of your subject. Think, for example, of how an award-winning athlete will be compared to others stars or hall of fame players.

However, be sure that your comparison does not overshadow the primary subject of your speech. In a milestone speech, it would be embarrassing to spend more time talking about past presidents of your organization than about the president whose efforts are being celebrated. Also, avoid contrasting your subject to "average" people, many of whom may be your audience members. Your purpose, after all, is to celebrate and inspire audience members, not make them feel bad.

**Causality** Remember that causal strategies involve both effect-to-cause and cause-to-effect thinking. For example, when you accept an award, your recognition of the people who have supported you is essentially a movement from effect (award-winning achievement) to cause (the support of others). Conversely, speeches that pay tribute or inspire might narrate how certain actions, initiatives, or commitments have caused positive results. In either direction, though, ceremonial speeches tend to dwell on the causes or actions that bring about positive effects

**Correlation** Correlation also can show how a person's presence is associated with positive things. Eulogies use this when they show how a person "lights up a room" or brings joy to people's lives. A milestone speech might use correlation when it is difficult to demonstrate causation. For example, you might celebrate someone's involvement with the committee that organizes your campus blood drive, since it may be a challenge to specify individual actions.

**Time and Place** Ceremonial speeches often show how an individual has made a long-term commitment to a cause or activity. Or they may focus on specific moments in time that highlight unusual or extraordinary efforts.

specific moments in time that highlight unusual or extraordinary efforts. Place also offers a way to think about the diversity of instances in which an individual or group had made an impact on the world. And of course, renewing civic identity often will incorporate celebration of a specific locale. You might include references to the natural world or recognizable landmarks to unite people through a shared sense of place.

## Using Effective Language

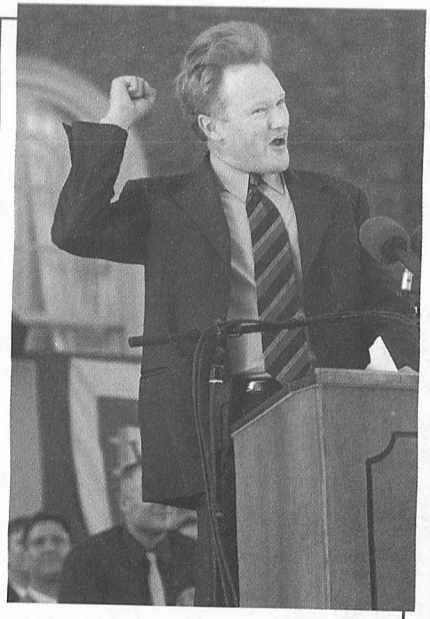
The purpose of many ceremonial speeches is not only to celebrate but also to inspire and motivate, so choices of language and style are central to the development of an effective speech. Think about the strategies for effective language that you learned about in chapter 7. It is not enough to merely talk about the subject of your speech; instead, the goal is to *depict* or *paint a picture* of the subject that captures the audience's attention and moves the audience to appreciate, celebrate, or identify with that subject. Consequently, for ceremonial speeches, think about how different types of language can help you to extend or elaborate your ideas.

A metaphor can provide a great unifying theme for your speech. For example, Dr. Beryl Brubaker developed her commencement speech at Eastern Mennonite University around the metaphor of "bridge builders," highlighting examples of people who enabled reconciliation and peaceful relationships among individuals and groups in conflict (Groff). Commencement and other inspirational speeches often rely on metaphors for depicting future challenges and obstacles: climbing a mountain, walking a path, swimming against the current, or taking a test. Well-chosen metaphors give listeners a vivid image as well as a connection to something that resonates with their everyday experience.

Alliteration is another common way of elaborating a series of ideas. In a baccalaureate address, the Rev. Dr. Kirk Byron Jones used alliteration to link pieces of advice to his overarching theme that graduates need to "pause" in their lives.

> Here are "four Ps" for you to remember should you so dare:
>
> 1. *Permission.* If you don't value your rest, no one else will. . . .
> 2. *Planning.* Schedule daily and weekly times of rest and leisure, and be open to the unscheduled graces of free time to simply be. . . .
> 3. *Practice.* Don't just plan your rest and leisure, but live it. . . .
> 4. *Personhood.* Know that having regular periods of rest and relaxation helps you to remember that you are infinitely more than what you do. . . . (Jones).

Similarly, anaphora encourages thinking about how you might expand on an idea to develop a set of related or parallel instances. For example, in his



LANGUAGE IN CEREMONIAL SPEECHES

Ceremonial speeches do not need ornate language; concrete details and vivid language like that in Conan O'Brien's Harvard Class Day speech are the keys to a memorable speech.

Harvard Class Day speech in 2000, comedian Conan O'Brien used anaphora and metaphor together to emphasize his larger message about the importance of risk-taking and resilience. In a series of sentences, he repeated the notion of leaving a cocoon and shared how he left a string of comfortable and successful jobs at Saturday Night Live and The Simpsons. This repetition underscored the necessity of taking chances and not resting on one's past successes.

These techniques can make for memorable ways of developing main points or elaborating on a central idea. More broadly, though, do your best to use concrete, familiar, and active language that sustains audience attention throughout your speech. Read aloud these words from Paul Hawken to hear how carefully chosen language can evoke powerful images and feelings:

> There is invisible writing on the back of the diploma you will receive, and in case you didn't bring lemon juice to decode it, I can tell you what it says: You are Brilliant, and the Earth is Hiring. The earth couldn't afford to send recruiters or limos to your school. It sent you rain, sunsets, ripe cherries, night blooming jasmine, and that unbelievably cute person you are dating. Take the hint. And here's the deal: Forget that this task of planet-saving is not possible in the time required. Don't be put off by people who know what is not possible. Do what needs to be done, and check to see if it was impossible only after you are done.

## Organizing Your Ceremonial Speech

The basic strategies that you learned earlier in the semester can be adapted easily to ceremonial speaking. As with informative and persuasive speaking, some of the topics for invention lead directly to specific organizational patterns. Especially prominent in ceremonial speaking are chronological, causal, and topical order.

### Chronological Order

Chronological order makes sense for those ceremonial speeches that attempt to capture the life or career of a person being commemorated or memorialized. Eulogies, for example, often touch on the significant moments in one's life, such as significant work or volunteer accomplishments, marriage, and the birth of children. Speeches of introduction and award presentations also will often use a chronological order to build a list of achievements that culminates with one's current work.

Speeches that attempt to renew civic identity may review historical events in chronological order, too. For example, Deborah Parker's Memorial Day Speech in 1997 used chronological order—moving from World War II to Vietnam to Somalia—to show how the U.S. military has long been a melting pot of Americans from diverse backgrounds. Similarly, President Bill Clinton used chronological order at the beginning of his first inaugural address to develop the theme of American renewal:

> Though our challenges are fearsome, so are our strengths. Americans have ever been a restless, questing, hopeful people. And we must bring to our task today the vision and will of those who came before us. From our Revolution to the Civil War, to the Great Depression, to the civil rights movement, our people have always mustered the determination to construct from these crises the pillars of our history. Thomas Jefferson believed that to preserve the very foundations of our Nation, we would need dramatic change from time to time. Well, my fellow Americans, this is our time. Let us embrace it.

Chronological order also can work well for speeches of inspiration. Like the motivational sequence order for persuasive speeches, a chronological speech intended to inspire can be effective if it narrates a history that inspires an audience to support some value or idea in the future.

## Causal Order

Causal order makes sense when you are trying to highlight the actions and accomplishments of your subject. This type of speech might place those actions as the causal factor that led to praiseworthy outcomes. For example, a speech celebrating World War II veterans might focus on specific battles or decisions that were especially important in bringing about the Allies' victory. Or in an inspirational speech, you might use cause-and-effect order if you provide a series of examples that show how commitment to a principle caused people to act in heroic or admirable ways.

## Topical Order

Topical order is a standard organizational strategy for assembling a list of virtues or qualities of a person whom you want to praise. Consequently, this strategy comes in handy for commemorative and inspirational speeches as well as eulogies. Speeches that attempt to renew civic identity may also be organized a series of values or ideals that citizens should strive to live by as members of a community.

An interesting speech that blends chronology with topical order is Blaine McCormick's "Benjamin Franklin and the Real 'National Treasure.'" In it,

McCormick develops a set of "financial and entrepreneurial virtues" that emerge from a narrative about the early part of Benjamin Franklin's life. The speech weaves these virtues into the narrative, stopping at times to offer an internal summary:

> His early experiments with vegetarian diets led to a lifetime of curiosity and—given the other patterns that have emerged—it's no wonder he ended up being one of the top scientists of his age. So industry and self-education are two of the early virtues that we want to highlight as we seek to find the real national treasure.

Here, McCormick identifies two of the key topics that he has developed before moving on with his narrative. This is a creative way of developing a series of topics that blends different organizational patterns together.

Again, the diversity of situations that call for ceremonial speech means that there is no easy guide for the most appropriate organizational strategy for your speech. But recalling the basic patterns that you have learned throughout this book can give you some creative options for developing a unique and memorable ceremonial speech.

## Supporting Your Ceremonial Speech

Regardless of the topic of your ceremonial speech, supporting material is absolutely necessary if you want your speech to be more than a series of clichés and platitudes. You audience members will want details about the person who is being commemorated. They will be fascinated by new stories that are part of their civic identity. They will want to be reminded of the distinctive characteristics and events that shaped the life of the person you are eulogizing.

Most ceremonial speeches, then, have a significant component of informative speaking at their core. But as much as your audience members want to learn more about the topic of your speech, you ultimately want them to be moved by your speech. You want to stir their emotions, enhance their appreciation, and potentially encourage them to imitate the subject of your speech. For example, if you wish to pay tribute to your college football team, you cannot simply describe the team and its accomplishments. You must use vivid depictions and concrete examples that convey the meaning of the actions, and you must make their meaning available to those listeners who are not football fans.

All of this points to the importance of selecting supporting material for your ceremonial speech. As you return to the types of supporting material that we have learned about so far, think about how these materials can best serve the various purposes of ceremonial speaking.

### Narratives

As you have seen, narratives are at the heart of much ceremonial speaking. Whether it is a lengthy tribute or a short toast, a narrative can help a speaker to achieve the purposes of most types of ceremonial speaking.

The keys to selecting a good narrative for a ceremonial speech come down to its vividness and ability to encapsulate a core idea. First, vivid narratives make a ceremonial speech truly a speech of display. They evoke images that an audience will not soon forget. Elie Wiesel's Nobel Prize acceptance speech uses narrative, not to provide detailed description of specific events of the Holocaust, but to create an image of his personal experience and to set a mood:

> I remember: it happened yesterday or eternities ago. A young Jewish boy discovering the kingdom of night. I remember his bewilderment, I remember his anguish. It all happened so fast. The ghetto. The deportation. The sealed cattle car. The fiery altar upon which the history of our people and the future of mankind were meant to be sacrificed.
>
> I remember: he asked his father: "Can this be true?" This is the 20th century, not the Middle Ages. Who would allow such crimes to be committed? How could the world remain silent?"
>
> And now the boy is turning to me. "Tell me," he asks. "What have you done with your life?" And I tell him that I have tried. That I have tried to keep memory alive, that I have tried to fight those who would forget. Because if we forget, we are guilty, we are accomplices" (Wiesel).

Narrative also works powerfully when it can capture a key idea. Ceremonial speeches often use narratives and parables to frame ideas in a novel way. For example, Booker T. Washington's Atlanta Exposition Address of 1895 used a short narrative to define his perspective on race relations and advancement among blacks in the South.

> A ship lost at sea for many days suddenly sighted a friendly vessel. From the mast of the unfortunate vessel was seen a signal, "Water, water; we die of thirst!" The answer from the friendly vessel at once came back, "Cast down your bucket where you are." And a third and fourth signal for water was answered, "Cast down your bucket where you are." The captain of the distressed vessel, at last heeding the injunction, cast down his bucket, and it came up full of fresh, sparkling water from the mouth of the Amazon River. To those of my race who depend on bettering their condition in a foreign land or who underestimate the importance of cultivating friendly relations with the southern white man, who is their next-door neighbor, I would say; "Cast down your bucket where you are"—cast it down in making friends in every manly way of the people of all races by whom we are surrounded.

Washington's perspective was not uncontroversial; critics such as W.E.B. Du-Bois found it insufficient for pursuing civil rights. Yet in this speech, his narrative was an effective way to address his ideas with a mixed-race audience.

The story said more about diversity and its importance than could have been said in an extended discussion of the topic. When chosen and told carefully, narratives can make your point with eloquence.

## Examples

Examples are a staple of all types of speeches, and ceremonial speeches are no exception. The primary importance of examples is for making ideas concrete and tangible to your audience, much in the way that narratives make action vivid for your audience. In his eulogy of President Kennedy, Lyndon Johnson mentioned several examples of Kennedy's goals as a way to give people tangible ways for Kennedy's legacy to live on:

> The dream of conquering the vastness of space, the dream of partnership across the Atlantic—and across the Pacific as well—the dream of a Peace Corps in less developed nations, the dream of education for all of our children, the dream of jobs for all who seek them and need them, the dream of care for our elderly, the dream of an all-out attack on mental illness, and above all, the dream of equal rights for all Americans, whatever their race or color. These and other American dreams have been vitalized by his drive and by his dedication. And now the ideas and the ideals which he so nobly represented must and will be translated into effective action (Johnson).

Notice how these examples provide specific details about what could otherwise be a broad or vague idea. Instead of saying, "Kennedy was a man with a lot of dreams about what America could be like," Johnson gave life to those dreams, helping different parts of the audience to connect with different aspects of the Kennedy legacy.

## Testimony

Testimony can be powerful in certain kinds of ceremonial speech and somewhat awkward in others. To understand this, think about how testimony functions in informative and persuasive speaking. Primarily, it lends credibility to the speaker by drawing on other people's experience or expertise about the topic.

Thus, testimony is likely to work well in those situations in which communal recognition of outstanding achievement is the overarching goal. Award presentation speeches, for example, might draw on quotations from other people in the field who have praised the recipient's work. Other speeches that pay tribute to a person or an organization can benefit from testimony, too. If the point is to praise your subject, then the praising words of other people can be appropriate.

In contrast, the testimony of others may be more difficult or awkward to use if your speech mostly emphasizes your personal connection to the subject. Toasts and some eulogies might fit into this category. For example, it would seem odd if you began a toast by sharing a personal experience that has led you to admire the person you are toasting but then launched into a discussion of how other people are filled with admiration too.

Likewise, a eulogy that is primarily about your personal relationship with the deceased probably does not need the testimony of others to convey the spirit of that relationship. Such testimony might be relevant if your eulogy focuses on the respect and high regard that the person had. The choice of whether to include testimony, then, should be shaped by whether you intend to take a personal or a more public perspective in your speech.

### Statistics

Like testimony, statistics vary in their usefulness as supporting material for ceremonial speeches. In general, statistics are seen as a rather dry form of supporting material; they often lack the emotional appeal of a narrative or a concrete example. But when used strategically, they certainly can magnify the importance of your subject and his or her accomplishments. A speech of introduction might mention the number of books a speaker has written on the subject, or an award presentation speech might offer a statistic that was used to determine who would receive the award.

Inspirational speeches can use statistics strategically to show accomplishment. If an organization tells its members that last year's walkathon had 100 participants, that number can inspire them to work on getting more participants this year. Or if you show that donations to a charity improved the lives of 500 families in your community, that can let people know that their efforts are having a real impact. These kinds of statistics can be crucial in inspiring people to see their individual action as meaningful, contributing to a much bigger collective action.

## CASE CONCLUSION

### Treva's Speech on the Neuro Networking Club

Treva decided that her speech should attempt to inspire enthusiasm about the club. In doing so, she would also be raising awareness about autism and encouraging people to come to the club's annual Spring Hullabaloo. Her main hope was to increase the buzz on campus about the group in the hopes that more people would hear about and participate in the club.

From audience research, it was clear that her classmates knew little about autism in general, so Treva knew that they would need some information before she talked about the specifics of this club. She chose to develop her speech around the common topics of existence (both the existence of autism and the existence of the club) and comparison (to show that autism is far more common than many other prominent health issues). Statistics and testimony would be important pieces of supporting material for developing the latter point. In addition, Treva recognized that to inspire enthusiasm, she needed to include narratives that conveyed the fun and lively spirit of the club. Relying on both her personal experience and the testimony of other people in the group, she was able to paint an inspiring picture of the group.