

Old Made New

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There are professors of classical rhetoric, but not many PR practitioners I know who consciously use classical rhetoric. It's a forgotten craft, or at least a craft I have forgotten, if I ever knew it well. And there is good reason. Look into any manual of classical rhetoric or at any web site (<http://humanities.byu.edu/rhetoric/silva.htm>) and you will find a mind-boggling list of terms in Greek and Latin that seem to have little to do with modern communications. Yes, you will recognize the canons of rhetoric (some of them anyway) and persuasive appeals, but when was the last time you consciously used onedismus or mesozeugma or acrostic? When was the last time you consciously ornamented prose, as so much rhetoric seems to be about?

But teaching of speaking and speech, begun before Socrates and continued as a curriculum to the 20th Century, has much to offer. Consigning studies in rhetoric to long-ago classes in high school and college is a disservice to ourselves and clients. We forget at our peril.

That is why I have tried an experiment in this essay. The test was to write a speech using elements of classical rhetoric and then to show each step of the way what was done. If I succeed, the speech should read well, but buried within its body should be rhetorical mechanics.

Here then is a ceremonial speech, called an encomium. Read it through, then I will parse it to show how old rhetoric should be made new.

I am here to praise forgotten men of California who did great deeds. I am celebrating because as a Greek historian said, "Great deeds are usually wrought at great risks." Great deeds and great risks should not be lost to history: We should remember those who have gone before us and risked much to build the society Californians expect. And who were those men? Civil servants, bureaucrats who built the modern California between 1940 and 1970.

I speak because I know one such California civil servant who did great deeds but is confined in advanced age and surviving barely. I heard him all my life tell of things that others like him did. His memory, fading and gapped, is better than that of California's citizens who assume its public works appeared magically.

As a writer and speaker, I consider it a duty to represent those who have faded from view. I am a small voice next to their accomplishments but better a small voice than no voice at all.

These men were the last of California's great builders. They were the last of a breed of American males about whom the poet Sam Walter Foss wrote,

*Bring me men to match my mountains,
Bring me men to match my plains,
Men with empires in their purpose
And new eras in their brains.*

These men don't exist today in California because they can't.

California, a swollen state of 38 million, burdened by debt, hamstrung by law, can no longer achieve the great public works of the past. There isn't space: There isn't will. Times have changed, and it isn't the time to think of moving mountains.

It wasn't always this way.

California was rural until the 1930s. The Spanish settled the coast in the late 1700s, molded missions and granted vast rancheros, but few they were. Thousands of miners in 1849 invaded the Sierras to rip mountains and silt creeks in pursuit of gold, but they moved on. The mountains settled to a sleep of small towns and lumber mills. Railroad titans with thousands of Chinese and Irish blasted the Sierras and bonded the United States with a band of iron, but the population of the State had not leapt forward. In the 1930s California had vast farms and great ranches, one major City – San Francisco – and one aspiring megalopolis – Los Angeles.

By the 1960s, all had changed. A migration to California that began during World War II was in full flood. Millions saw their golden future in the state, and millions came. A state of 7 million in 1940 (by comparison to New York's 13.4 million) leapt to 15.7 million by 1960 and 20 million by 1970. And, it continued to grow.

People needed roads. People needed water. People needed power. People needed protection from floods and fire. California state bureaucrats, little known then and forgotten now, scrambled to give them the public works they needed. They labored as the population soared in Southern California, once a desert but now the home of millions seeking a warm climate and easy lifestyle. The bureaucrats built highways. The bureaucrats built dams and hydro generating plants. The bureaucrats stretched a ribbon of water 400 miles from Oroville in Northern California to Los Angeles in the south to slake the thirsty. The bureaucrats

provided the infrastructure for factories, for jobs and for housing.

But serving California's new citizens created a dilemma that has not been resolved. Dam builders in the minds of conservationists were damn builders. The Central valley covered in Spring flowers of naturalist John Muir became flatlands of asphalt and concrete. The rolling hills of the coastal mountains sprouted high voltage power lines hooked to lattice towers. The golden beauty of California became fools gold as subdivisions crawled across orchards, canyons and hillsides and altered the grace of native soil. Wild rivers turned mellow with barriers bottling and hemming them in to protect householders. Canyons disappeared below lakes. Sierra mountain passes became four-lane freeways. California today is a shadow of an earth on which Indians roamed and harvested acorns.

Conservationists condemn those who committed what they call destruction. They want public works stopped and dams torn down. They want wild rivers set free and salmon runs to return. They call for solar power and windmills. They want fewer roads and more trails. They blame bureaucrats for destroying the California dream.

But were bureaucrats to blame for this? Could they have kept California in native condition? Could they have barred development and kept millions out?

California's bureaucrats like government workers the world over did not make decisions to build. They implemented decisions to build. The California legislature – Senate and Assembly – the voice of citizens, elected by citizens, made the decisions. Elected politicians give budgets and take them away. Votes in Sacramento's capitol building authorized dollars for dams and steel for bridges. California's bureaucrats did what they were told to do, and they did it well. California today is the state its citizens made. If the state of the state is wrong, then millions wronged it. Californians voted for their representatives. Their representatives voted for public works. Bureaucrats acted.

For those who decry the California they see now, let them not turn on lights in their homes. Let them not use their computers. Let them not drive to work or a store. Let them not turn on a tap to drink water, wash laundry or flush a toilet. Let them protect themselves against fire and flood. Let them regress to the pre-industrial society of native Indians and see if they can live in a modern world. To deny the infrastructure bureaucrats built is to

deny oneself. We live in a modern civilization that whether we like it or not, uses the land and its resources to support its citizens.

California's bureaucrats were given a mission to perform great deeds. These forgotten men understood this and provided the public works needed to support the state that California is today. They should not be condemned for having done so but celebrated for what they gave. There are no statues erected for them, no monuments, no ceremonies remembering the many who worked as civil servants. They came. They labored. They left. Most are dead, and bronze markers in cemeteries where families linger and sometimes tell the tale of what their fathers did.

I am not here to call for memorials. Nor am I here to invoke shame for failing to regard the feats these forgotten men produced. I am here to celebrate what they achieved. California now, for better and worse, would not be California without them. The forgotten men did not ask for thanks. They did their jobs, went home, raised families and eventually retired. They were not perfect men. There were geniuses and fools among them. There were upright individuals and thieves. But together, they built. And to paraphrase the epitaph of the great London architect, Christopher Wren, "if you seek their monuments, look around."

This 10-minute speech uses epideictic oratory designed for ceremonies and often used for funeral orations. Ceremonial speeches are as frequent today as in ancient Greece. A large part of politicians' and CEOs' jobs is to preside at ceremonies where their presence and words are verification of the importance of the event.

The speech follows five canons of rhetoric – invention, arrangement, style, memory and delivery. Invention means deciding what one is going to speak about – a principle driving all speeches and writing. Have something to say before attempting to say it. Unfortunately, then and now, too many speeches are empty calories – whipped cream or worse – without a core of truth or audience interest.

Arrangement focuses on how one orders a speech, or any writing for that matter. Style focuses on expression of ideas in a manner that makes them easy to understand and forceful. Memory concerns itself with some issues that are no longer a problem, such as committing the speech to memory, but it also deals with quoting from sources and with previsualization of an audience and locale where one delivers the speech. Delivery refers to how the speech is presented. It focuses on mechanics, the same machinery modern communicators teach across a range of media from public speaking to television appearances and media interviews.

The speech follows a traditional rhetorical path of introduction, statement of facts or narration, division, proof, refutation and conclusion. The introduction focuses on ethos, or the establishment of the speaker's credentials. This hearkens to Cicero who said speakers should be knowledgeable and credible to get an audience to listen. Even today, a master of ceremonies introduces a speaker with a bio and credentials. An audience wants to know to whom they are listening and why. Following the introduction is the narration, or statement of facts, that lays out the case for celebrating forgotten civil servants or for condemning them. It is a recitative of issues to be discussed and is the first part of the old saw about teaching, "Tell them what you are going to tell them. Tell them. Tell them what you told them." Division outlines what is to follow after the narration. In this case, three questions ask whether bureaucrats are to blame for decline of the California dream. Refutation provides proof for the speaker's point of view. In this speech, the proof is that citizens through state representatives voted for public works projects. The conclusion summarizes the case and ends with an emotional appeal for support.

Within these boundaries, there are other rhetorical niceties as well, including rational and emotional appeals, elements of style, clarity of argument, rapid delivery, sincerity and forceful presentation. There were a number of ornamentations too tucked into the text for mnemonics as well as for sound and persuasiveness.

Let's look at the speech again in detail.

I am here to praise forgotten men of California who did great deeds. I am celebrating because as a Greek historian said, "Great deeds are usually wrought at great risks." Great deeds and great risks should not be lost to history: We should remember those who have gone before us and risked much to build the society Californians expect. And who were those men? Civil servants, bureaucrats who built the modern California between 1940 and 1970.

**Introduction ,
statement of
theme and
ethos.**

**Quotes
(memory)**

I speak also because I know one such California civil servant who did great deeds but is confined in advanced age and surviving barely. I heard him all my life tell of things that others like him did. His memory, fading and gapped, is better than that of California's citizens who assume its public works appeared magically.

**Ethos:
Speaker's
qualifications**

As a writer and speaker, I consider it a duty to represent those who have faded from view. I am a small voice next to their accomplishments but better a small voice than no voice at all. These men were the last of California's great builders. They were the last of a breed of American males about whom the poet Sam Walter Foss wrote,

Quote.

*Bring me men to match my mountains,
Bring me men to match my plains,
Men with empires in their purpose
And new eras in their brains.*

These men don't exist today in California because they can't.

**Narration –
statement of
facts.**

*California, a swollen state of 38 million, burdened by debt,
hamstrung by law, can no longer achieve the great public works
of the past. There isn't space: There isn't will. Times have
changed, and it isn't the time to think of moving mountains.*

It wasn't always this way.

**Pun: Spanish
gave land
grants**

*California was rural until the 1930s. The Spanish settled the coast
in the late 1700s, molded missions and granted vast rancheros,
but few they were. Thousands of miners in 1849 invaded the
Sierras to rip mountains and silt creeks in pursuit of gold, but they
moved on. The mountains settled to a sleep of small towns and
lumber mills. Railroad titans with thousands of Chinese and Irish
blasted the Sierras and bonded the United States with a band of
iron, but the population of the State had not leapt forward. In the
1930s California had vast farms and great ranches, one major
City – San Francisco – and one aspiring megalopolis – Los
Angeles.*

**Anastrophe –
violation of
syntactical
arrangement
for emphasis.**

**Onomatopoeia:
word sounds
imitating
action**

*By the 1960s, all had changed. A migration to California that
began during World War II was in full flood. Millions saw their
golden future in the state, and millions came. A state of 7 million
in 1940 (by comparison to New York's 13.4 million) leapt to 15.7
million by 1960 and 20 million by 1970. And, it continued to grow.*

*People needed roads. People needed water. People needed
power. People needed protection from floods and fire. California
state bureaucrats, little known then and forgotten now, scrambled
to give them the public works they needed. They labored as the
population soared in Southern California, once a desert but now
the home of millions seeking a warm climate and easy lifestyle.
The bureaucrats built highways. The bureaucrats built dams and
hydro generating plants. The bureaucrats stretched a ribbon of
water 400 miles from Oroville in Northern California to Los
Angeles in the south to slake the thirsty. The bureaucrats
provided the infrastructure for factories, for jobs and for housing.*

**Anaphora:
Repetition of
words at the
beginning of a
phrase for
emphasis**

But serving California's new citizens created a dilemma that has

~~not been resolved. Dam builders in the minds of conservationists were damn builders. The Central valley covered in Spring flowers of naturalist John Muir became flatlands of asphalt and concrete. The rolling hills of the coastal mountains sprouted high voltage power lines hooked to lattice towers. The golden beauty of California became fools gold as subdivisions crawled across orchards, canyons and hillsides and altered the grace of native soil. Wild rivers turned mellow with barriers bottling and hemming them in to protect householders. Canyons disappeared below lakes. Sierra passes became four-lane freeways. California today is a shadow of an earth on which Indians roamed and harvested acorns.~~

Dilemma in the form of antanaclasis – repetition of a word that has a different meaning in the second usage

Parallel construction with the paragraph before

Conservationists condemn those who committed what they call destruction. They want public works stopped and dams torn down. They want wild rivers set free and salmon runs to return. They call for solar power and windmills. They want fewer roads and more trails. They blame bureaucrats for destroying the California dream.

But were bureaucrats to blame for this? Could they have kept California in native condition? Could they have barred development and kept millions out?

Division

California's bureaucrats like government workers the world over did not make decisions to build. They implemented decisions to build. The California legislature – Senate and Assembly – the voice of citizens, elected by citizens, made the decisions. Elected politicians give budgets and take them away. Votes in Sacramento's capitol building authorized dollars for dams and steel for bridges. California's bureaucrats did what they were told to do, and they did it well. California today is the state its citizens made. If the state of the state is wrong, then millions wronged it. Californians voted for their representatives. Their representatives voted for public works. Bureaucrats acted.

Refutation and logos, appeals to reason

For those who decry the California they see now, let them not turn on lights in their homes. Let them not use their computers. Let them not drive to work or a store. Let them not turn on a tap to drink water, wash laundry or flush a toilet. Let them protect themselves against fire and flood. Let them regress to the pre-industrial society of native Indians and see if they can live in a modern world. To deny the infrastructure bureaucrats built is to deny oneself. We live in a modern civilization that whether we like it or not, uses the land and its resources to support its citizens.

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**Conclusion
and pathos,
appeals to
emotion**

I am not here to call for memorials. Nor am I here to invoke shame for failing to regard the feats these forgotten men produced. I am here to celebrate what they achieved. California now, for better and worse, would not be California without them. The forgotten men did not ask for thanks. They did their jobs, went home, raised families and eventually retired. They were not perfect men. There were geniuses and fools among them. There were upright individuals and thieves. But together, they built. And to paraphrase the epitaph of the great London architect, Christopher Wren, "if you seek their monuments, look around."

Quote

There you have it. I hope the experiment was a success. If it was, maybe it is time to get out those musty books on rhetoric sitting in boxes you packed when you left college and to review them again.

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James L. Horton, the founder of online-pr.com, has been in public relations for more than 25 years.