



Analyzing Trump's 2025 Inaugural Address Using Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis Model

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ABSTRACT

Using Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework, this study looks at Donald Trump's 2025 inaugural speech to see how language enables power, ideology, and society. By applying Fairclough's three-dimensional model, the research analyzes the speech at the textual, discursive and sociocultural level. Rhetorical strategies of logos, ethos and pathos and Jakobson's language functions are evaluated to reveal Trump's linguistic and ideological techniques. The findings show that Trump uses his rhetorical appeals to present himself as a credible leader, to align with conservative values, and to evoke emotions of hope and urgency, along with credible leadership and conservative values. The sociocultural context of the speech further entailed that it was directly involved in the resolution of social issues and the creation of support for Trump as a unifying yet dividing figure. The interconnectedness of language, power and ideology in political discourse is therefore revealed in this analysis to contribute to the discussion on the strategic use of rhetoric in shaping public opinion.

Keywords: Fairclough Model, Critical Discourse Analysis, Political Rhetoric, Power, Ideology, Donald Trump's Inauguration Speech

1. Introduction:

Fairclough (2001) presented a detailed model of Critical Discourse Analysis that explains how language is used in the society in terms of politics and culture. CDA argues that language should be seen as a form of social practice that is determined by, and also helps to determine, the power relations prevalent in society. Thus, the model developed by Fairclough focuses on the language, power and ideology interface in order to show how discourse constitutes and is constituted by social norms.

CDA can therefore be applied to the study of political speeches to see the types of rhetorical strategies and ideological positions that politicians use in trying to influence the population. This paper applied CDA to the inaugural speech of Donald Trump when he was being inaugurated so as to see how language is strategically employed to establish authority, gather support and define what the nation and its policies should represent.

2. Research Questions:

How does Fairclough's CDA framework explain the rhetorical strategies used by Donald Trump in his inauguration speech?

What discursive structures and linguistic features are most prominent in Trump's rhetoric?

How does Trump's discourse construct power relations, and how does it reflect ideology and sociopolitical context?

3. Theoretical Foundation:

The theoretical framework of this study is grounded on Fairclough's three dimensional model including text analysis, discursive practice and sociocultural practice. Text analysis as outlined by Fairclough (1992) looks at the linguistic elements of discourse such as vocabulary and rhetorical devices to see how language contributes to the construction of meaning and the instantiation of ideologies. Discursive practice, outlined by Fairclough (1995) examines the processes by which texts are produced, distributed and interpreted within specific social and institutional contexts. Last, sociocultural practice situates discourse within broader societal structures, to look at the interconnectedness of power, ideology, and social change (Fairclough, 2001).

Power and ideology, intertextuality and rhetorical strategies are key concepts in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Fairclough (1989) postulates that language is a site of power where and how dominant ideologies are maintained or contested. Intertextuality, outlined by Fairclough (1992) is the encoding of texts as comprising of, and as deriving from, other discourses; a feature which is inevitably important for political speeches which Elicit historical and cultural references. Ethos, pathos and logos, strategic devices used by political rhetoric to establish credibility, move emotions and provide logical

arguments (Aristotle, trans. 1991). In addition, political rhetoric uses emotional appeals combined with simple language to create appeals to the audience (Wodak, 2015).

Thus, rhetorical appeals of logos, ethos, and pathos play a critical role in political discourse. Logos is the use of evidence and logical reasoning as seen in Trump's promises of economic reform (Aristotle, trans. 1991). Ethos is the credibility of the speaker and this is a notion that Trump often builds up by saying he is an outsider and also a business success (Charteris-Black, 2011). Pathos or emotional appeals are crucial in rhetoric because speakers often use vivid imagery and emotive language to mobilize American patriotism and hope, and sometimes, fear (Wodak, 2015).

In addition, Jakobson's (1960) language functions are relevant in explaining the purpose of political discourse. The referential function conveys information; the emotive function expresses the speaker's emotions. The conative function is goal directed, that is, it is intended to influence the audience, and the phatic function is a social function of language, used to establish contact with the listener. The metalinguistic function explains concepts and the poetic function emphasizes the aesthetic qualities of language.

Discourse is a political tool that leaders use to express their visions, legitimize their power and seize public support. Such speeches as Van Dijk (1997) noted are strategic; they are aimed at convincing audiences while at the same time reflecting the reality of societies. This is particularly important for inaugural speeches, which are at the same time ceremonial and aspirational, stating policy objectives and promoting national unity (Charteris-Black, 2011; Hmouma, 2024).

The 2017 inauguration speech of Trump is a good example of a politician using his style of communication, which is straight forward, populist and nationalist (Kreis, 2017). Applying Fairclough's model to analyze Trump's 2025 speech helps to understand how these rhetorical features of the speech contribute to construction of power, how they can be used to address different audiences and how they can be used to solve some sociopolitical problems. Thus, this study hopes to examine how language is used to exercise power, represent ideology and mirror societal dynamics.

4. Trump's Speech Background

This is a historical comeback of intense and polarized American politics where the rivalry between Democrats and Republicans has become a competition of ideologies. Through the lens of Faircloughian Critical Discourse Analysis, this reflects not only his personal triumph, but also the broader sociopolitical dynamics at play. A deeply divided electorate is addressed by his rhetoric, populist appeals being influenced to reconnect with his base, while he positions himself as a unifying force against a perceived corrupt establishment. The speech is situated at a moment of national tension, where power dynamics and ideological clashes are dominant in the discourse, and the struggle for influence between the two dominant parties in the U.S. political landscape lasts until this day.

5. Methodology:

The analysis is based on Fairclough's three-dimensional model of CDA which has been expanded to include rhetorical appeals and language functions:

1. Textual Practice:

It involves employing a scrutinizing look at the linguistic and rhetorical features of the speech of Trump such as:

Rhetorical Appeals: This is employed to analyze how Trump used logos, ethos and pathos in his speech. The analysis will be made on the logical appeals (logos) through the factual claims and rational arguments he made, ethos through his personality and position as a leader and pathos through the use of vivid and emotional language.

Language Functions: Using Jakobson's (1960) framework, the study looks at how Trump uses language to accomplish different tasks, including referential (to convey information), emotive (to express emotion), and conative (to push the audience to do something).

2. Discursive Practice:

This level looks at the production, distribution, and reception of the speech within the political and media systems. It also looks at how the rhetorical appeals and language functions are used to get the message across to the audience, whether it is the supporters or the skeptics.

3. Sociocultural Practice:

The analysis then places the speech within the broader socio-political and ideological context. It will also examine how Trump's rhetoric is used to support political ideologies, explain socio-economic issues and stimulate nationalist sentiments. The interaction between rhetorical appeals and language functions and the society will also be a major focus.

6. Trump's Speech Analysis

6.1. Textual Analysis

- **Rhetorical Appeals**

It is clear that the language used by Trump in his address is formal and he employed **logos** throughout his speech, and he provides specific policies and results that he presents to the American public. For instance, he declares a national emergency at the southern border and reinstates the *Remain in Mexico* program on immigration, a key aspect of his political agenda. He also assured the energy independence and the revocation of the *Green New Deal* to assure the voters of his economic stability. Real life actions such as creating the *Department of Government Efficiency* or addressing inflation through domestic oil production are tangible actions that Trump has in mind to solve the nation's challenges as a leader. These appeals are generally meant to reinforce his image as a capable and actions-oriented president.

Ethos, or credibility appeals, is another key element in Trump's speech. He presents himself as a resilient figure when he gives the history of an assassination attempt and attributes his survival to divine intervention, which makes him a leader who was called for a higher purpose. He also uses his previous presidency to show that he has accomplished the job before, and the accomplishments he lists include economic growth and military strength. Additionally, he acknowledges the support of minority communities, including Black and Hispanic voters, as evidence of his broad appeal. He stated that *"To the Black and Hispanic communities, I want to thank you for the tremendous outpouring of love and trust that you have shown me with your vote."* These references also establish Trump as a trustworthy and an unbiased leader who is fit to lead the nation.

The language used in Trump's speech is filled with **pathos**, or emotional appeals, as he attempts to motivate his audience while conveying a sense of urgency. Hitting January 20th as *"Liberation Day"* and envisioning the beginning of a *"golden age"* is meant to inspire optimism. At the same time, he emphasized societal dangers, such as crime at the border and the decline of national pride, in order to frighten and mobilize. Trump also tapped into collective pride in American history, looking at the accomplishments of previous generations so that everyone can work towards the same goal. These emotional appeals allow Trump to not only motivate his audience, but also to direct them towards his vision for the country.

- **Language Functions (Jakobson's Framework)**

From the speech, it can be seen that there are several language functions that were used by Trump and each of them has its own purpose. For instance, the **referential** function is exhibited through Trump's explanation of his policies such as executive orders taken to enhance free speech and strengthen the country's military as he stated that clearly in his address *"I will also sign an executive order to immediately stop all government censorship and bring back free speech to America"*. These factual statements are intended to show that his administration is ready to take positive actions. The **emotive** function, however, is most obvious from his language, which is often emotional, for instance, calling it the *"the golden age of America"* and complaining about the rate of society. This allows him to relate with the audience on a personal level by expressing his emotions.

The **conative** function is also visible in Trump's ability to address the audience directly. For example, *"I will fight for you, and I will win for you"* and *"Together, we will end the chronic disease epidemic"* call for people to join forces and trust him to lead. The **phatic** function allows the speaker to engage the audience through phrases that contain little information but serve a purpose, such as *"Thank you very much,"* or the occasional pause for applause, which makes the conversation between Trump and his audience more personal.

The **metalinguistic** function in Trump's speech is the part where he explains or describes something in terms of its relationship to other languages or cultures, for instance, when he states that there are only two genders *"As of today, it will henceforth be the official policy of the United States government that there are only two genders, male and female"*. This does it in order to place his administration on the right side of conservatives and to address a specific issue that concerns his supporters. Lastly, the **poetic** function is also visible in the fact that he often uses slogans and repetition, such as *"Drill, baby, drill"* and *"Make America great again."* These are not only easy to remember but also lead to the understanding of the main ideas in his speech.

6.2. Discursive Practice

- **Production**

The speech is in the language of populism of Trump, the language is simple, the imagery is patriotic and the speech always gets through to the audience. His language is away from elitism and instead runs concurrent with the sentiments of ordinary Americans, in that he presents himself as their representative. This is in line with the general political persona of an outsider struggling to dismantle the power axis. The production of the speech is to inspire loyalty while at the same time supporting his narrative of national renewal and the fight against corruption.

- **Distribution**

Trump presented his speech in a ceremonial setting and was heard by a wide audience both nationally and internationally through extensive coverage by the media. Given that it is an inaugural address, the speech was able to combine policy announcements with aspirational rhetoric in order to ensure that its message is at once actionable and symbolic. This dual purpose is most effectively accomplished for the audience of loyal supporters and skeptical observers alike.

- **Interpretation**

Trump's Speech could be interpreted in two ways based on ideological perspectives. It can be seen as a positive and realistic call to action for the renewal of the nation by his supporters. It may be seen as too divisive, or even nationalistic, by his critics. This is because Trump is a polarizing figure and a master of the media, and he has positioned himself as both savior and disruptor.

6.3. Sociocultural Practice

- **Power Dynamics**

The speech suggests that Trump is a savior, who is restoring power to the people, and at the same time, is demolishing a corrupt establishment. This position strongly establishes a clear us versus them dynamic, which drives his base to rise up against what they believe are elites, and does so while maintaining his populist image. So, through the emphasis on the reclamation of sovereignty, justice, and economic prosperity, Trump presents his administration as the remedy to years of bad mismanagement and exploitation.

- **Ideology**

Trump's rhetoric was mainly nationalist, meritocratic and traditional. By supporting policies that normal citizens should support as they relate to American sovereignty and the traditional family unit, he wants to attract those people who are tired of progressive ideologies. His rejection of issues such as the *Green New Deal*, and his position on gender issues shows that his administration is against things, he believes, are contrary to American tradition.

- **Sociopolitical Context**

The speech is a reflection of and response to societal tensions such as economic instability, cultural divides and the disappointment with governmental institutions. Trump offers his administration as a unifying power that can resolve these conflicts and lead the nation to a new era of greatness. Thus, he attempts to unite the nation even while trying to keep his base of supporters extremely loyal.

7. Conclusion

In his 2025 inaugural speech, Trump's use of rhetorical appeals and language functions displays a calculated effort to inspire loyalty, mobilize support, and reinforce ideological values. He supports himself as a capable leader with practical solutions through logical arguments; he portrays himself as a resilient figure with a divine mission through credibility appeals; and he energizes his audience with hope, pride, and urgency through emotional appeals. The impact of the speech is further increased by the strategic use of language functions, both emotionally resonating, practically informing, and ideologically unifying. In this pivotal moment of American history, Trump is positioned as a transformative leader.

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9. Appendix:

Here is a transcript of Trumps' 2025 Inaugural Speech.

"Thank you. Thank you very much, everybody. Thank you very, very much. Vice President Vance. Speaker Johnson. Senator Thune. Chief Justice Roberts. Justices of the United States Supreme Court. President Clinton, President Bush, President Obama, President Biden, Vice President Harris, and my fellow citizens, the golden age of America begins right now.

From this day forward, our country will flourish and be respected again all over the world. We will be the envy of every nation, and we will not allow ourselves to be taken advantage of any longer. During every single day of the Trump administration, I will very simply put America first.

Our sovereignty will be reclaimed. Our safety will be restored. The scales of justice will be rebalanced. The vicious, violent and unfair weaponization of the Justice Department and our government will end. And our top priority will be to create a nation that is proud, prosperous and free. America will soon be greater, stronger and far more exceptional than ever before.

I return to the presidency confident and optimistic that we are at the start of a thrilling new era of national success. A tide of change is sweeping the country, sunlight is pouring over the entire world, and America has the chance to seize this opportunity like never before. But first, we must be honest about the challenges we face. While they are plentiful, they will be annihilated by this great momentum that the world is now witnessing in the United States of America.

As we gather today our government confronts a crisis of trust. For many years, a radical and corrupt establishment has extracted power and wealth from our citizens, while the pillars of our society lay broken and seemingly in complete disrepair. We now have a government that cannot manage even a simple crisis at home, while at the same time stumbling into a continuing catalog of catastrophic events abroad. It fails to protect our magnificent law-abiding American citizens, but provides sanctuary and protection for dangerous criminals, many from prisons and mental institutions that have illegally entered our country from all over the world.

We have a government that has given unlimited funding to the defense of foreign borders but refuses to defend American borders, or, more importantly, its own people. Our country can no longer give basic services in times of emergency, as recently shown by the wonderful people of North Carolina. Been treated so badly. And other states who are still suffering from a hurricane that took place many months ago.

Or more recently, Los Angeles, where we are watching fires still tragically burn. From weeks ago, without even a token of defense, they're raging through the houses and communities, even affecting some of the wealthiest and most powerful individuals in our country, some of whom are sitting here right now. They don't have a home any longer. That's interesting.

But we can't let this happen. Everyone is unable to do anything about it. That's going to change. We have a public health system that does not deliver in times of disaster, yet more money is spent on it than any country anywhere in the world. And we have an education system that teaches our children to be ashamed of themselves in many cases, to hate our country despite the love that we try so desperately to provide to them. All of this will change starting today, and it will change very quickly.

My recent election is a mandate to completely and totally reverse a horrible betrayal and all of these many betrayals that have taken place, and to give the people back their faith, their wealth, their democracy, and indeed, their freedom. From this moment on, America's decline is over.

Our liberties and our nation's glorious destiny will no longer be denied. And we will immediately restore the integrity, competency and loyalty of America's government.

Over the past eight years I have been tested and challenged more than any president in our 250-year history. And I have learned a lot along the way. The journey to reclaim our Republic has not been an easy one, that I can tell you. Those who wish to stop our cause have tried to take my freedom, and indeed, to take my life.

Just a few months ago, in that beautiful Pennsylvania field, an assassin's bullet ripped through my ear. But I felt then, and believe even more so now, that my life was saved for a reason. I was saved by God to make America great again.

Thank you. Thank you very much.

That is why each day, under our administration of American patriots, we will be working to meet every crisis with dignity and power and strength. We will move with purpose and speed to bring back hope, prosperity, safety and peace for citizens of every race, religion, color and creed. For American citizens, Jan. 20, 2025, is Liberation Day.

It is my hope that our recent presidential election will be remembered as the greatest and most consequential election in the history of our country. As our victory showed, the entire nation is rapidly unifying behind our agenda, with dramatic increases in support from virtually every element of our society: young and old, men and women, African Americans, Hispanic Americans, Asian Americans, urban, suburban, rural, and very importantly, we had a powerful win in all seven swing states, and the popular vote we won by millions of people.

To the Black and Hispanic communities, I want to thank you for the tremendous outpouring of love and trust that you have shown me with your vote. We set records and I will not forget it. I've heard your voices in the campaign and I look forward to working with you in the years to come. Today is Martin Luther King Day and his honor, this will be a great honor. But in his honor we will strive together to make his dream a reality. We will make his dream come true.

National unity is now returning to America, and confidence and pride is soaring like never before. In everything we do, my administration will be inspired by a strong pursuit of excellence and unrelenting success. We will not forget our country, we will not forget our constitution, and we will not forget our God. Can't do that.

Today I will sign a series of historic executive orders. With these actions we will begin the complete restoration of America and the revolution of common sense. It's all about common sense.

First, I will declare a national emergency at our southern border. All illegal entry will immediately be halted and we will begin the process of returning millions and millions of criminal aliens back to the places from which they came. We will reinstate my Remain in Mexico policy. I will end the practice of catch and release. And I will send troops to the southern border to repel the disastrous invasion of our country.

Under the orders I signed today, we will also be designating the cartels as foreign terrorist organizations. And by invoking the Alien Enemies Act of 1798, I will direct our government to use the full and immense power of federal and state law enforcement to eliminate the presence of all foreign gang criminal networks, bringing devastating crime to U.S. soil, including our cities and inner cities.

As commander in chief I have no higher responsibility than to defend our country from threats and invasions, and that is exactly what I am going to do. We will do it at a level that nobody has ever seen before. Next I will direct all members of my cabinet to marshal the vast powers at their disposal to defeat what was record inflation and rapidly bring down costs and prices. The inflation crisis was caused by massive overspending and escalating energy prices. That is why today I will also declare a national energy emergency. We will drill, baby, drill.

America will be a manufacturing nation once again, and we have something that no other manufacturing nation will ever have: the largest amount of oil and gas of any country on Earth, and we are going to use it. We're going to use it.

We will bring prices down, fill our strategic reserves up again, right to the top, and export American energy all over the world.

We will be a rich nation again, and it is that liquid gold under our feet that will help to do it. With my actions today, we will end the Green New Deal and we will revoke the electric vehicle mandate, saving our auto industry and keeping my sacred pledge to our great American autoworkers.

In other words, you'll be able to buy the car of your choice. We will build automobiles in America again at a rate that nobody could have dreamt possible just a few years ago. And thank you to the autoworkers of our nation for your inspiring vote of confidence. We did tremendously with their vote.

I will immediately begin the overhaul of our trade system to protect American workers and families. Instead of taxing our citizens to enrich other countries, we will tariff and tax foreign countries to enrich our citizens. For this purpose, we are establishing the External Revenue Service, to collect all tariffs, duties and revenues. It will be massive amounts of money pouring into our treasury, coming from foreign sources.

The American dream will soon be back and thriving like never before. To restore competence and effectiveness to our federal government, my administration will establish the brand-new Department of Government Efficiency.

After years and years of illegal and unconstitutional federal efforts to restrict free expression, I will also sign an executive order to immediately stop all government censorship and bring back free speech to America.

Never again will the immense power of the state be weaponized to persecute political opponents, something I know something about. We will not allow that to happen. It will not happen again. Under my leadership, we will restore fair, equal and impartial justice under the constitutional rule of law. And we are going to bring law and order back to our cities.

This week, I will also end the government policy of trying to socially engineer race and gender into every aspect of public and private life. We will forge a society that is colorblind and merit-based. As of today, it will henceforth be the official policy of the United States government that there are only two genders, male and female.

This week, I will reinstate any service members who were unjustly expelled from our military for objecting to the Covid vaccine mandate, with full back pay. And I will sign an order to stop our warriors from being subjected to radical political theories and social experiments while on duty. It's going to end immediately. Our armed forces will be free to focus on their sole mission: defeating America's enemies.

Like in 2017, we will again build the strongest military the world has ever seen. We will measure our success not only by the battles we win, but also by the wars that we end, and perhaps most importantly, the wars we never get into.

My proudest legacy will be that of a peacemaker and unifier. That's what I want to be, a peacemaker and a unifier. I'm pleased to say that as of yesterday, one day before I assumed office, the hostages in the Middle East are coming back home to their families. Thank you.

America will reclaim its rightful place as the greatest, most powerful, most respected nation on Earth, inspiring the awe and admiration of the entire world. A short time from now, we are going to be changing the name of the Gulf of Mexico to the Gulf of America. And we will restore the name of a great president, William McKinley, to Mount McKinley, where it should be and where it belongs.

President McKinley made our country very rich, through tariffs and through talent. He was a natural businessman and gave Teddy Roosevelt the money for many of the great things he did, including the Panama Canal, which has foolishly been given to the country of Panama after the United States. The United States — I mean, think of this — spent more money than ever spent on a project before and lost 38,000 lives in the building of the Panama Canal. We have been treated very badly from this foolish gift that should have never been made. And Panama's promise to us has been broken. The purpose of our deal and the spirit of our treaty has been totally violated.

American ships are being severely overcharged and not treated fairly in any way, shape, or form. And that includes the United States Navy. And above all, China is operating the Panama Canal, and we didn't give it to China, we gave it to Panama. And we're taking it back.

Above all, my message to Americans today is that it is time for us to once again act with courage, vigor and the vitality of history's greatest civilization. So as we liberate our nation, we will lead it to new heights of victory and success. We will not be deterred. Together we will end the chronic disease epidemic and keep our children safe, healthy and disease-free.

The United States will once again consider itself a growing nation, one that increases our wealth, expands our territory, builds our cities, raises our expectations and carries our flag into new and beautiful horizons. And we will pursue our manifest destiny into the stars, launching American astronauts to plant the stars and stripes on the planet Mars.

Ambition is the lifeblood of a great nation. And right now, our nation is more ambitious than any other. There's no nation like our nation. Americans are explorers, builders, innovators, entrepreneurs and pioneers. The spirit of the frontier is written into our hearts. The call of the next great adventure resounds from within our souls. Our American ancestors turned a small group of colonies on the edge of a vast continent into a mighty republic of the most extraordinary citizens on Earth. No one comes close.

Americans pushed thousands of miles through a rugged land of untamed wilderness. They crossed deserts, scaled mountains, braved untold dangers, won the Wild West, ended slavery, rescued millions from tyranny, lifted billions from poverty, harnessed electricity, split the atom, launched mankind into the heavens and put the universe of human knowledge into the palm of the human hand. If we work together, there is nothing we cannot do and no dream we cannot achieve.

Many people thought it was impossible for me to stage such a historic political comeback. But as you see today, here I am. The American people have spoken.

I stand before you now as proof that you should never believe that something is impossible to do. In America, the impossible is what we do best.

From New York to Los Angeles, from Philadelphia to Phoenix, from Chicago to Miami, from Houston to right here in Washington, D.C., our country was forged and built by the generations of patriots who gave everything they had for our rights and for our freedom. They were farmers and soldiers, cowboys and factory workers, steel workers and coal miners, police officers and pioneers who pushed onward, marched forward and let no obstacle defeat their spirit or their pride.

Together they laid down the railroads, raised up the skyscrapers, built great highways, won two world wars, defeated fascism and communism, and triumphed over every single challenge that they faced. After all we have been through together, we stand on the verge of the four greatest years in American history. With your help, we will restore American promise and we will rebuild the nation that we love, and we love it so much.

We are one people, one family and one glorious nation under God. So to every parent who dreams for their child, and every child who dreams for their future, I am with you, I will fight for you and I will win for you. We are going to win like never before. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

In recent years our nation has suffered greatly. But we are going to bring it back and make it great again, greater than ever before. We will be a nation like no other, full of compassion, courage and exceptionalism. Our power will stop all wars and bring a new spirit of unity to a world that has been angry, violent and totally unpredictable.

America will be respected again and admired again, including by people of religion, faith and good will. We will be prosperous, we will be proud, we will be strong and we will win like never before. We will not be conquered, we will not be intimidated, we will not be broken and we will not fail. From this day on, the United States of America will be a free, sovereign and independent nation.

We will stand bravely, we will live proudly, we will dream boldly, and nothing will stand in our way because we are Americans. The future's ours. And our golden age has just begun. Thank you, God bless America, thank you all."