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Kennedy's Inaugural Address

John F. Kennedy's Inaugural Address, delivered January 20, 1961, uses antithesis, anaphora, and appeals to shared civic identity to persuade a Cold War audience that sacrifice for democratic ideals is not only necessary but honorable. **[THESIS: states the text, historical context, strategies, and the argument all three strategies are building toward]**

Kennedy opens by drawing a contrast between the past and the present: "Let the word go forth from this time and place, to friend and foe alike, that the torch has been passed to a new generation of Americans." **[EVIDENCE: exact quoted passage from the source text]** The phrase "friend and foe alike" is antithesis, pairing opposites in a single phrase to suggest that the message transcends political division. **[DEVICE: names the specific strategy]** For an audience living under constant threat of nuclear conflict with the Soviet Union, the suggestion that Kennedy addresses enemies directly and confidently establishes his ethos as a leader unafraid of confrontation. **[EFFECT: explains why this device works for this audience specifically, not audiences in general]**

Kennedy reinforces this appeal to resolve through anaphora in his central pledge: "Let both sides explore... Let both sides, for the first time, formulate... Let both sides seek to invoke the wonders of science." **[EVIDENCE]** The repetition of "Let both sides" creates a rhythmic insistence that positions cooperation as an active choice rather than a concession. **[DEVICE]** The effect is motivational rather than defensive: Kennedy frames engagement not as weakness but as leadership, which is exactly what a domestic audience anxious about American strength abroad needed to hear. **[EFFECT]**

The address closes with its most direct appeal to civic duty: "Ask not what your country can do for you: ask what you can do for your country." *[EVIDENCE]* This antithesis reverses the expected relationship between citizen and government, making personal sacrifice sound not like a demand but like an invitation. *[DEVICE]* For a generation that had already lived through both the Depression and World War II, sacrifice framed as dignity rather than deprivation landed credibly because Kennedy's audience had already done it once, and he was naming it back to them. *[EFFECT]*

Kennedy's Inaugural Address succeeds because its rhetorical strategies are calibrated to their moment. The antithesis creates clarity in the face of Cold War ambiguity. The anaphora generates forward momentum when the country needed confidence more than caution. The appeal to shared sacrifice works because the audience already understood sacrifice as something Americans do. *[CONCLUSION: evaluates overall effectiveness rather than summarizing what the essay already said]*

