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The Rhetoric of Lee Iacocca: the Man, the Myth, the Message (Michigan).

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THE RHETORIC OF LEE IACOCCA:
THE MAN, THE MYTH, THE MESSAGE

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
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in
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Theatre and Communication Disorders

by

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The writer dedicates this study to her son Jay for his sustaining love and loyalty.
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to analyze the rhetoric of Lee A. Iacocca as expressed in the thoughts and actions of the man; to explore rhetorical aspects of his popular myth-hero qualities; and to examine the rhetorical strategies Iacocca used in presenting his message. Criteria for the study were based on the rhetorical theories of Ernest Bormann, Lloyd Bitzer, and Kenneth Burke, with an emphasis on two of Aristotle's canons. In addition, the pattern for the myth-hero as presented by Joseph Campbell was a guide. These concepts blended into an interrelationship which helped illuminate the dimensions of Iacocca's rhetorical effectiveness.

The methodology of Ernest Bormann's fantasy themes as they applied to a larger rhetorical vision was used as a framework for Iacocca's odyssey.

Application of Joseph Campbell's pattern for the classical myth-hero figure was exemplified in Iacocca's success over formidable odds to become an industrial folk-hero.

Lloyd Bitzer's theory of the rhetorical situation was applied to Lee Iacocca's experiences in overcoming obstacles and crises through appropriate and persuasive responses. For Iacocca, exigences abounded: prevailing over prejudices suffered as the child of immigrants, enduring the public
humiliation of being fired as president of Ford Motor Company, and wresting a victory from the dramatic Chrysler turn-around as president of the near-bankrupt corporation. The audience addressed was not only Congress, from which Iacocca persuaded a $1.5 billion loan guarantee, but the American public who became emotionally engrossed in the struggle between the underdog individual and the impersonal government. Constraints broken and social realities altered were the revised interpretation of government financial intervention in a failing private enterprise, and a new approach to labor management problems.

To these rhetorical visions and situations, Iacocca brought dynamic examples of Kenneth Burke's identification and consubstantiality, in addition to Aristotelian ethos and pathos.

Lee Iacocca's rhetorical vision, a legacy from the Italian immigrant group, was strong enough to overcome the multiple crises of the rhetorical situation. As a child of immigrants, Lee Iacocca achieved the American Dream of success, and emerged as a significant spokesman for the re-affirmation of effective American values. The rhetoric of Lee Iacocca, reflected in the man, the myth, and his message lend contemporary credence to a revitalized realization of many traditional American beliefs.
CHAPTER I

Introduction

"He's the apotheosis of the regular guy," is the summation one informed observer gave of Lee Iacocca, who, as a child of immigrants, reached the presidency of Ford Motor Company, was publically humiliated by a firing, then rose from defeat to a new renaissance for Chrysler Corporation and for himself.


And his ad campaign on television, launched during the depths of the Chrysler crisis, was designed to build confidence in the product, and to add even more credibility to Iacocca's image.

His speaking engagements are so successful, he receives several thousand invitations a year.

As for the rhetoric of persuasion, Lee A. Iacocca is one of America's most articulate corporate spokesmen. His powerful plea for federal aid to rejuvenate a failing corporation represented a turning point in American capitalism.

From the crucible of an immigrant background, an inheritance not of money but of a vivid rhetorical vision,
and the sense of fearlessness in the face of defeat at one company, followed by the potential for total failure at another, Lee Iacocca wrested a stunning victory. With a talent for the mechanical, a firm grasp of the financial, and a flair and flamboyance for presenting a product and persuading the public to buy it, Iacocca's rhetoric has been heard, viewed, and read by millions.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study is to analyze the rhetorical activities and strategies of Lee Iacocca, the Man, through his own words and actions, and the statements of those who observed him; the Myth, as Iacocca enacted the qualities of classical myth, and as he became an industrial folk-hero through his own persuasive powers, augmented by the response of the public to his unusual television advertising campaign, and the overwhelming public reply to his autobiography; the Message, which shows the thematic concerns of his lifetime experience: the proud mention of his immigrant parents, the contribution of immigrants to the economic and social culture of the nation, his penchant for hard work and its reward, the need for a national industrial policy, and a frank expression of patriotism.

This study examines the strong rhetorical vision of living the American Dream of success in spite of the constraints of being disdained as an immigrant's child,
rising to the top and falling; the resolute vision of redemption for himself and for his corporation, his rhetorical powers in persuading Congress for a $1.5 billion dollar loan guarantee; and Iacocca's ability to touch the "common thread" of his experience and that of his audience through identification, in his many speech themes.

Plan

The remainder of this study is organized as follows:

Chapter II describes Iacocca, the Man, his background, education, and the rhetorical vision of the American Dream firmly established as a philosophy, instilled in him by his immigrant father.

Chapter III deals with Iacocca, the Myth, using classical myth described by Joseph Campbell as a paradigm for Iacocca's experiences. Additional factors which have contributed to the myth are the Chrysler television advertising campaign which starred Iacocca, as well as his best-selling autobiography.

Chapter IV examines Iacocca, the Message, in which the famed Congressional hearings about a $1.5 billion dollar loan guarantee to Chrysler are described. In terms of the hearings, Bitzer's rhetorical situation, including exigence, audience, and constraints is analyzed.

Chapter V assesses Iacocca, the Message, and looks at representative speeches and speech themes which reflect
Iacocca's experiences, and demonstrate the rhetorical theories of Bitzer, Bormann, and Burke as well as Aristotelian **ethos** and **pathos**.

Chapter VI contains a synthesis of the effectiveness of Lee Iacocca's rhetoric.

**Methodology**

This study interrelates three rhetorical theories, which are woven into the text in greater detail: Ernest Bormann's rhetorical vision and fantasy themes; Lloyd Bitzer's rhetorical situation; and Kenneth Burke's concept of consubstantiality and identification. Aristotelian proofs, especially **ethos** and **pathos** are of particular importance in explaining Iacocca's rhetorical effectiveness.

To understand the persuasive rhetoric and the motivation of Lee Iacocca, one must know his background and the ingrained, far-reaching impact the immigrant father had on the son. This background gave Iacocca the strong and sustaining rhetorical vision to attain and re-attain the American Dream of success. The relationship of his rhetorical vision and his experience in achieving that goal are reflected in the study of representative speeches with recurring themes of the immigrant, an awareness of opportunity in America, the value of hard work, the necessity for sacrifice, the need to take risks, the use of
common sense—all basic American values. The use of these fantasy themes, as defined by Ernest Bormann, chain out in face-to-face interacting groups, in speaker-audience transactions, in viewers of television broadcasts, in listeners to radio programs, and in all the diverse settings for public and intimate communication in a given society. Once such a rhetorical vision emerges it contains dramatis personae and typical plot lines that can be alluded to in all communication contexts and spark a response reminiscent of the original emotional chain.  

The usefulness of Bormann's theory can be developed further by noting that: 

If the critic can illuminate how people who participated in the rhetorical vision related to one another, how they arranged themselves into social hierarchies, how they acted to achieve the goals embedded in their dreams, and how they were aroused by the dramatic action and the dramatis personae within the manifest content of their rhetoric, his insights will make a useful contribution to understanding the movement and its adherents. 

The impact of the rhetorical situation on Iacocca's rhetorical vision is analyzed. The drama and crisis in much of Iacocca's experiences make Lloyd Bitzer's theory of the rhetorical situation particularly applicable. Bitzer defines the rhetorical situation as:

A complex of persons, events, objects, and relations presenting an actual or potential exigence which can be completely or partially removed if discourse, introduced into the situation, can so constrain human decision or action as to bring about the significant modification of the exigence.
Of the three constituents of any rhetorical situation, Bitzer stated that:

The first is the exigence; the second and third elements of the complex, namely the audience to be constrained in decision and action, and the constraints which influence the rhetor and can be brought to bear upon the audience.⁴

The most dramatic constraint Iacocca met was in Congress where he made his successful plea for federal aid with the concomitant opposition to government intervention in private enterprise. An analysis of his rhetorical presentation to Congress shows the constraints and the audiences with which he dealt effectively.

The influence of Lee Iacocca's rhetorical strategies in establishing consubstantiality and identification with the public demonstrate the validity of Kenneth Burke's theories. Consubstantiality, writes Burke, shows that "men have common sensations, concepts, images, ideas, attitudes" that make them have a feeling of oneness for each other.⁵ Identification is really persuasion, Burke states.⁶ Analyzing Iacocca's rhetoric in terms of Burke's concepts gives us an understanding of why Iacocca's communication has been successful.

Iacocca's intermingled use of Aristotelian ethos or credibility, and his pathos to move the emotions of his audience lends his persuasive powers a heightened dimension.
Significance of the Study

This study is designed to show the power of a rhetorical vision in one man's human experience, and how that vision enabled him, through consubstantiality and identification, to deal effectively with the exigence at Ford and Chrysler, and how his persuasive ability and emotional appeal overcame severe constraints and mastered complex audiences.

Essentially, this is a study of a rhetorical vision of a reaffirmation, a rededication to basic American values.

In the final analysis of his rhetorical strategies, Lee Iacocca: the Man, the Myth, and the Message cannot be separated; they are inextricably one.

Sources

Materials for the study include a number of Iacocca's speeches, in addition to his autobiography.

Because he is contemporary, newspapers and magazines provided an excellent source of information, many containing interviews with Lee Iacocca himself, and with colleagues and observers. Most frequently used were the New York Times, the Wall Street Journal, the Washington Post, and syndicated material in the State-Times, and Baton Rouge Morning Advocate. Time, Newsweek, U.S. News and World Report, Fortune, and BusinessWeek provided useful information.
The Congressional Record of the Chrysler hearings was of great value.

Some of the books used, in addition to Iacocca: An Autobiography, were Going For Broke by Michael Moritz and Barrett Seaman, New Deals: The Chrysler Revival by Robert B. Reich and John Donahue, The Iacocca Management Technique by Maynard Gordon, Iacocca by David Abodaher; also The Hero With A Thousand Faces by Joseph Campbell, and Stephen Ausband's Myth and Meaning, Myth and Order.

A videotape of Iacocca's 1985 address to Chrysler dealers in Detroit, a loan from A K. Durnin, was helpful.
Notes


2 Bormann, 401.


4 Bitzer, 6.


6 Burke, xiv.
CHAPTER II

The Rhetoric of Lee Iacocca: The Man

The legacy of young Lido Anthony Iacocca was a rhetorical vision from his immigrant father, a vision of fulfilling the American Dream, a vision imparted vividly enough to sustain Iacocca through a lifetime of great success and great failure. Through his ability to endure and prevail over what Bitzer calls the rhetorical situation, Iacocca, with a strong vision of himself and his purpose, could establish and articulate fantasy themes, values held in common with others. Through consubstantiality with others, and with persuasion, or identification, as Burke suggests, Iacocca was able to conquer varieties of opposition and win effective support.

The purpose of Chapter II is to explain how the critical theories of Bormann's rhetorical vision and Burke's identification and consubstantiality are woven into the experiences of Lee Iacocca.

While Bormann's "Fantasy and Rhetorical Vision" is discussed in further detail in following chapters, a relevant interpretation is applicable to this section. Basically, Bormann's definition of a rhetorical vision is that it is constructed from clusters of fantasy themes that
chain out into diverse settings, large and small groups, and to individuals in face-to-face interaction or through the "dream merchants of the media." In discussing the "manifest content of a fantasy" theme, Bormann writes that the theme could be a recollection of something from the past or a dream of what a group or individual might do in the future.1 Bormann developed his theory further by saying that the chaining of fantasy themes can be an expression of the "individual psychodynamics of the participants. A dramatic theme might relate to the repressed psychological problems of some or all of the members and thus pull them into participation."2 Referring to Robert Bales' work on interpersonal behavior, Bormann wrote that "Bales' most important discovery for the integration of communication and rhetorical theory" was the particular way a "zero-history group used fantasy chains to develop a common culture."3 Ideas that got

the members of the group to empathize, to improvise on the same theme, or to respond emotionally not only reflected the members' common preoccupations but served to make those commonalities public.4

The fantasy chain discovers the same common ground symbolically. .5

Values and attitudes of many kinds are tested and legitimized as common to the group by the process of fantasy chains.6

Bormann quotes Bales' observation that
The culture of the interaction group stimulates in each of its members a feeling that he has entered a new realm of reality. . . . The culture of a group is a fantasy established from the past, which is acted upon in the present. . . .

These fantasy themes can occur not only in groups but also in individual responses, where one may feel "exalted, fascinated . . . or powerfully impelled to action, but in any case, involved. . . . One is psychologically taken into a psychodramatic fantasy world . . . ."

A strong rhetorical vision, writes Bormann, helps people transcend the trials of the everyday world, and gives a deeper meaning to their existence. And, for centuries, human life was merely existence in southern Italy. So bitter was the ancient and modern economic history of this area, from Roman times to today, that the dramatic Italian proverb, "Christ stopped at Eboli," succinctly describes the deprivation of the typical village Eboli, near Naples, as a symbol of the end of the civilized world. Beyond Eboli, no man could endure the socio-economic repression.

In contemporary history, between the 1830's to the early part of the 1900's, a sense of hopelessness was particularly marked for farmers in southern Italy. After a complicated cast of ambitious political heroes and corresponding uprisings and revolutions, the promise of a better life for southern Italian farmers was ultimately denied. The critical issues of land reform and taxation
were lost in political skirmishes, as the northern sections of Italy dominated national events.

Before 1880, few Italians came to the United States, and these were mostly northern Italians; they were followed by the mass migration of the southern Italians to America from the 1880's to the early 1920's. The early migration of Italians to America was comprised chiefly of artists and political exiles "whose cultural attainments and political defiance of European overlords quickly won for them the empathy of New World republicans as well as important positions in the artistic and political life of the young nation." Slowly, reports of life in the New World drifted back to Italy, and to those who suffered severely from socio-economic repression, mainly the southern Italian, a whole new community vision of a better life was born.

The painful prelude to the slowly evolving rhetorical vision of a new beginning and the great migration of southern Italians was the fact that, in the late 1800's, more than 80 percent of the people of Italy depended on agriculture for their livelihood. In the 1890's, for example, agricultural workers could only hope to earn 16 to 30 cents a day. For many southern Italian farmers, their homes, frequently shared with domestic animals, were little more than hovels, with no plumbing, few windows, and little privacy. Their farming tools were ancient and inefficient. When Booker T. Washington toured Italy in 1911, just nine
years after Nicola Iacocca arrived in America, Washington "likened the crude wrought-iron hoes he saw there to the heavy tools that slaves used on the plantations before the Civil War." Washington also described citizens of southern Italian cities as "worse off than blacks in the slums of New Orleans, Atlanta, Philadelphia, and New York." During this period, the onslaughts on nature added to the despair of southern Italians with earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, floods, and diseases that broke down human resources and weakened the emotional bond Italians usually felt toward their villages.10

After centuries of economic suffering, small groups in the Italian agricultural community began to circulate reports about clusters of farmers who sold or mortgaged their house and animals to purchase one-way fares to America. Despite stories of some peasants who were exploited by cruel speculators, the messages which the peasants sent back from America were not "painful tidings and tales of suffering," but messages inspiring those who remained in hopeless misery to act.11 The rhetorical vision of a new life in America and a new beginning began by the chaining out of fantasy themes of hope, of opportunity and of remuneration for work. So powerful was the rhetoric of this social reality, that from 1900 to 1914, over three million Italian immigrants came to America. "The movement accelerated by chain migration, a process whereby Italians
in America acted as personal labor agents and informed their friends and relatives when and where jobs were available. While no spokesman for the rising new community and its vision became publically well-known, the rhetorical interaction between groups in America sending messages of hope to their counterparts in the homeland brought about the enormous migration of Italians whose raw labor contributed to the constant industrializing of America.

The sharing of fantasy themes by the new immigrants produced an almost religious fervor about life in the New World; it was, as Bormann writes, the "secular equivalent of a religious myth." As Bormann points out in the *Forces of Fantasy: Restoring the American Dream*:

> For many communities in the United States, the Fourth-of-July celebrations and the Fourth-of-July oration became the rituals celebrating the founding of the government. By dramatizing the Revolutionary War, the Declaration of Independence, and the Constitution, the Fourth-of-July orators provided an opportunity for the posterity of the community to share the fantasies and thus come to participate in the unifying vision. New immigrants from other countries were faced with the choice of continuing to be foreigners, of becoming hyphenated Americans, or of raising their consciousness to become real Americans. By sharing the drama of the founding and converting to the salient American vision, the immigrant could cut free from the Old World visions and become an adherent of the unifying drama of the founding of the new nation.
As Old World visions faded, the exciting rhetoric about a new community captured the imagination of these immigrants. They wanted to become part of a larger, brighter social reality: the New World.

Significantly, this year, 1986, marked the celebration of the Statue of Liberty, restored, as a renewed symbol of American values, especially, perhaps, to immigrants. Lee Iacocca, presiding over part of the 1986 Fourth of July gala, spoke of his own immigrant parents as symbols of many who came to America.

His father, Nicola Iacocca, was a poverty-stricken child of twelve when he first came to America. With no money, education, or social status of any kind, Nicola Iacocca, as millions of others who came to America, was driven by a vision of a better life. He wanted to be part of the American Dream with a chance to work, to earn sufficient money, to have the opportunity to advance, and to educate his children. With typical patriarchal Italian style, Nicola Iacocca communicated this vision, and lived his vision, in part, vicariously, through his son. To the new world, Nicola Iacocca brought his beliefs established from the past: his religious tradition, his belief in the value of the family, and his pragmatic philosophy, knowing that even in the American Dream there would be setbacks, losses, failures, but that these were not fatal. One could always redeem himself with a new beginning.
America represented "a new realm of reality." Old values were embellished with exciting expressions in the new world, and "acted upon in the present." Values and attitudes were "tested and legitimized," such as the rewards of hard work, the recognition of opportunity, and the spirit of enterprise. It was in this energetic, entrepreneur ambience that Lee Iacocca lived and learned well the values of his inherited rhetorical vision from the Italian community of immigrants, values that would sustain him through public humiliation and guide him to ultimate victory.

Many of the Italian immigrants, and Nicola Iacocca specifically, saw a significance in events beyond the mere externals. "They participated in a social reality resonant with high drama and rich symbolism." The values in this rhetorical vision required great energy and activity, "working, striving, acting in a hard-headed way, [and] involvement . . ." Survivors, whether individuals or groups, are principally concerned with basic values. Carving out a new life in a new country brought the immigrants close to earlier American values, especially the work ethic. They exhibited a particular talent for identifying with the common themes of human experience: work, worship, family, education, and a cautious approach to economics. Many of
Iacocca's later speech themes show the early basic values of his rhetorical vision.

Growing up in an atmosphere concerned, first with group survival such as a strong family unit, and struggling to survive as an individual coming from that unit helped to make young Lee Iacocca able to identify, to understand, and to persuade others.

Burke, in speaking of identification, suggests that persuaders identify with their audience by finding a common ground, by pointing out ways human beings may discover their ultimate oneness.

A is not identical with his colleague, B. But insofar as their interests are joined, A is identified with B. Or he may identify himself with B even when their interests are not joined . . .16

Because young Iacocca was a child of immigrants, he embraced many of the values his parents brought from Europe. But he was also obliged to reach out toward new dimensions of identification as well as reflect a consubstantiality with the way of life from which he came.

Burkes writes that a "way of life is an acting-together; and in acting together, men have common sensations, concepts, images, ideas, attitudes that make them consubstantial."17

The ability to persuade, to identify, and to communicate shared beliefs, values, and experiences has been
honied to a level of excellence by Iacocca, who understands, in practice what Burke described in theory. Burke points out that

As for the relation between "identification" and "persuasion": we might well keep it in mind that a speaker persuades an audience by the use of stylistic identifications; his act of persuasion may be for the purpose of causing the audience to identify itself with the speaker's interests; and the speaker draws on identification of interests to establish rapport between himself and his audience. So, there is no chance of our keeping apart the meanings of persuasion, identification ("consubstantiality") and communication . . .

Iacocca's persuasive powers began to develop in his early school years through his interest in leadership, in debate, and in the general desire to excel, to influence others.

In his career at Ford Motor Company, when he changed job orientation from engineering to sales, he was outstanding not only in selling, but in persuading others to follow him as he rose to the presidency. His ability to identify or persuade, and his consubstantiality in sensing the attitudes, images, and concepts of others undoubtedly contributed to his reputed marketing wizardry. Well-spoken or outspoken, Lee Iacocca has always proved himself to be persuasive.

Foreshadows

When I was ten, one of the country's first supermarkets opened in Allentown. After school and on weekends, my little pals and I would line
up at the door with our red wagons, like a row of taxicabs. . . . As the shoppers came out we would offer to take home their bags for a small tip.

As a teenager, I had a weekend job in a fruit market. . . . I used to get up before dawn to get to the wholesale market. . . . He paid me $2.00 a day, plus all the fruit and vegetables I could lug home after a sixteen-hour workday.

As the child of immigrant parents from Italy, Lido Anthony Iacocca was nurtured with a strong rhetorical vision, a vision of the hopes and promises that America represented to those who came seeking a new life, a new fortune. With an almost oversimplified concept of opportunity in the new land, Iacocca's parents gave their two children values that are still echoed in Iacocca's speeches today, fantasy themes that together formed the larger vision: themes of belief in hard work, rewarded; a pragmatic belief in common sense; a sense of patriotism; and a sense of adventure and risk-taking.

From his father Nicola, Lee Iacocca saw first-hand the results of being an imaginative entrepreneur, and grasped the rewards of learning how to promote a business. Although his father only finished the fourth grade, he had keen business acumen, "street smarts," energy, and imagination. Of his father, Iacocca wrote:

He was a restless and inventive man who was always trying new things.

He was in love with America, and he pursued the American dream with all his might.
For Nicola Iacocca, "America was the land of freedom—the freedom to become anything you wanted to be, if you wanted it bad enough and were willing to work for it." Iacocca adds in his Autobiography: "This was the single lesson my father gave to his family."  

The elder Iacocca arrived as an immigrant in 1902 at the age of twelve, "poor, alone and scared." Like several million other Italians, he had come from southern Italy to escape the cycle of poverty and despair.

Southern Italians had even greater incentives to leave than northern counterparts, for their conditions were more deplorable. "Christ stopped at Eboli" says the Italian proverb, implying that Christian civilization and the amenities of life never penetrated south of Eboli.  

Economic stagnation and political upheaval drove many desperate Italians to leave their native land, even though many never planned to stay in America. The Southern Italian proverb warns: He who leaves the old behind, knows what he loses, but not what he will find.  

Like other immigrant groups, the Americanization of Italians proved to be a three-generation process. The immigrant rarely becomes completely acclimated because of his ties to the old country. It is to those born of immigrant parents, as Lee Iacocca was, that the greatest burden is borne; "they are caught between two cultures, that of their parents and that in which they must live."
A very strong sense of family life was a concept to which Italian immigrants clung. Another prevalent idea, not held by Nicola Iacocca, was the rather dim view of education Italian immigrants had. This idea was reflected in the southern Italian proverb the immigrants brought to their new life in America: Do not make your children better than you are. Because most of the immigrants from southern Italy were peasants, they believed that the only way to economic security was through hard, physical work; this "backbreaking labor they contributed helped to build America." 25

Nicola Iacocca was, on the contrary, very ambitious for his son to be educated. The older Iacocca was also insistent that his children learn fiscal responsibility: "If you borrow anything, even twenty cents from a kid at school, be sure to write it down so you won't forget to pay it back." Iacocca mused in his autobiography that he often wondered how his father would have reacted, had he lived long enough, "to see me go into hock in 1981 to keep the Chrysler Corporation in business. This one was for a lot more than twenty cents: the total came to $1.2 billion." Iacocca added that this was one loan he'd remember without having to write it down. 26

Iacocca's father also taught him how to dramatize and market a product with flair:

My father is probably responsible for my instinct for marketing. He owned a couple of movie houses. . . . Old-timers in Allentown have told me my
father was such a great promoter that the kids who came down to the Saturday matinees used to get more excited about his special offers than about the movies. People still talk about the day he announced that the ten kids with the dirtiest faces would be admitted free.27

From his grammar school years, Iacocca saw the relationship between leadership, power, and communication. Even though he lost through a rigged, stuffed-ballot box election, Lee Iacocca's sixth grade determination to be captain of the student patrol was very strong. The special badge, the uniform, the prestige of being captain were all compelling incentives toward power. Besides losing the election and suffering "my first dramatic lesson that life wasn't always going to be fair," Iacocca recalled another important influence in his early schooling which has had a life-long influence:

The most important thing I learned in school was how to communicate. . . . Week in and week out, we had to write that damn paper. By the end of the year, we had learned how to express ourselves in writing.

. . . Miss Raber started us on extemporaneous speaking. I was good at it, and as a result I joined the debating team. . . . That's where I developed my speaking skills and learned how to think on my feet.

At first I was scared to death. I had butterflies in my stomach—and to this day I still get a little nervous before giving a speech. But the experience of being on the debating team was crucial. You can have brilliant ideas, but if you can't get them across, your brains won't get you anywhere.28
Iacocca remembered that in the seventh and eighth grades, he wanted to be president of his class, and was. In the ninth grade, he ran for student body president and won. The election, he said, went to his head and he neglected to stay in touch with his constituency:

I hadn't yet learned what I know now—that the ABILITY TO COMMUNICATE IS EVERYTHING.²⁵

By the time he was ready for college, Iacocca knew he had a fundamental education in reading, writing, and public speaking.

Other qualities which would serve him well later in his career were the ability to use time well, to concentrate, and to set priorities and stick to them.

I was also motivated by the pressure from my father that was typical among immigrant families, where any kid who was fortunate enough to attend college was expected to compensate for his parents' lack of education . . . so I had to be at the top of my class.³⁰

In addition to being in the top group in his engineering courses at Lehigh University, Iacocca was also interested in psychology and took four years of it.

I'm not being facetious when I say that these were probably the most valuable courses of my college career.³¹

The courses in psychology focused on the fundamentals of human behavior; for the final exam, the students were
introduced to a group of psychiatric patients they had not
seen before. The students' assignment was to make a
diagnostic analysis of each patient in a matter of minutes.

As a result of this training, I learned to figure
people out pretty quickly. . . . That's an
important skill to have, because the most
important thing a manager can do is to hire the
right new people.

. . . There's no qualitative analysis to check out
whether he's got some fire in his belly, or
whether he will have savvy—or street
smarts—when it comes to decision time. 32

The high school writing and debating skills plus the
engineering and psychology studies gave young Iacocca a
background he developed and used the rest of his life.
Years later, at both Ford and at Chrysler, Iacocca's
technical ability in designing, his practical psychological
instincts in understanding what the market wanted, and his
communication skills made him one of the most outstanding
executives in the automotive industry.

Even before he graduated from Lehigh University,
Iacocca wanted to work for Ford:

I drove a beat-up 1938 sixty-horsepower Ford,
which is how I got interested in the company.
More than once I'd be going up a hill when
suddenly the cluster gear in my transmission would
go.

'Those guys need me,' I used to joke to my
friends. 'Anybody who builds a car this bad can
use some help.' 33
Dearborn and Ford Motor Company

After receiving his master's in engineering on a scholarship to Princeton, Iacocca wanted, more than anything, to go to Dearborn and work for Ford. Swinging off the Red Arrow train which had brought him from Philadelphia to Detroit, with fifty dollars in his pocket, Iacocca asked:

"Which way to Dearborn?"
"Go west, young man—go west about ten miles!" 34

Iacocca rose rapidly as a young, eager engineer in the Ford Motor Company. Foresaking the technical aspects of engineering for sales and marketing, Iacocca found a niche for his persuasive powers. By 1970, he was appointed president of Ford.

All the emphasis on hard work, sacrifice, and risk-taking had as its ultimate focus the achievement of the American Dream. Lee Iacocca thought he had reached the pinnacle of power, money, and prestige.

But high drama was to mark the end of Lee Iacocca's rise to the presidency of Ford Motor Company. After 32 years with Ford, 1946 to 1978, Iacocca was fired by Henry Ford II. The automotive industry was puzzled as to why the innovator of the Mustang, which earned Ford Motor Company over a billion dollars in 1964, was so unceremoniously rejected.
In stark contrast to the president's suite he had enjoyed for eight years with its private bath, living quarters, and white-coated waiters, Iacocca was suddenly demoted to a cubicle in a warehouse with cracked linoleum floor and plastic coffee cups.

I began my life as the son of immigrants, and I worked my way up to the presidency of Ford Motor Company. When I finally got there, I was on top of the world. But then fate said to me: "Wait. We're not finished with you. Now you're going to find out what it feels like to get kicked off Mt. Everest!"  

**The Rise and Fall**

In tracing Iacocca's demise at Ford, *Time*'s automotive writer, shortly after the July 13, 1978, Ford firing, wrote that Iacocca, as a lively young Ford sales manager,  

would pep up a dull convention of 1,100 Ford salesmen by proving in a live demonstration that if he dropped an egg from a 10-ft. high ladder onto Ford's new crash-padded dashboard, the egg would not break. He was wrong. Until last week, that was one of the very few times that Iacocca came close to having egg on his face.

Tom Nicholson of *Newsweek*, in describing the famous firing, recalled an earlier omen foreshadowing Iacocca's fate at Ford:

At an informal luncheon several years ago, a reporter had a pointed question for Lee Iacocca, at that time Ford Motor Co.'s president, resident golden boy and unchallenged heir apparent to
chairman Henry Ford II. "After Henry leaves," the reporter wondered, "who will take over as head of the company?" With an almost impish grin, Iacocca replied: "Anyone the family wants." At Ford Motor, the "family" is in fact Henry Ford, and last week the hard-driving Iacocca learned to his dismay just what Henry wanted: Iacocca's head.

Executives at both Ford and at other auto companies observed that "Ford has long resented Iacocca's high visibility." The "sales and styling superstar" was on the cover of both Newsweek and Time, April 1964, when the Mustang was introduced. Reviewing Iacocca's adventures in the automotive industry, Time writer Kurt Andersen observed in 1985, that when Iacocca was on the way up, in Ford, he was "the hottest young man in Detroit," brilliant, an "ingenious automotive merchandising expert." Twenty-one years later, a metal sculpture of a Mustang hangs over Iacocca's desk at Chrysler. "I'm generally seen as the father of the Mustang," he says in his book's 17-page chapter devoted to the car, "although, as with any success, there were plenty of people willing to take the credit." Ford's design director at the time, Gene Bordinat, has been galled ever since by Iacocca's putative paternity. "The model was totally completed by the time Lee saw it," says Bordinat, now retired. "We conceived the car, and he pimped it after it was born.

"Mr. Upward Automobility," as an automotive writer called Iacocca, wrote:

After 32 years with Ford, the plain-spoken son of an Italian immigrant was a Horatio Alger-hero on wheels, a paradigm of upward automobility. Yet unlike others who have risen through the sober polyester-clad ranks of America's most important
industry, Iacocca is perpetually outspoken, fashionably dressed in European worsteds and as obviously at ease in a barroom throbbing with used-ford salesmen as in a hearing room full of Senators. If humans can be said to have automo­tive analogues, Iacocca suggests nothing so much as a Ford Mustang, that stylish-yet-democratic car whose creation is perhaps Iacocca's greatest triumph.40

The versatile persuasiveness of Iacocca's rhetoric had been evident for years. With equal aplomb, he could identify eloquently with a congressional committee or enjoy consubstantiality with used car salesmen in a bar.

As an accolade to the abruptly departed president of Ford, Ed Mulane, head of the Ford Dealer Alliance representing 1200 dealers, remarked: "Iacocca is the only guy with charisma. He was able to slot in the right product at the right time."41

In contrast, various Ford executives were irritated that Iacocca wrote in his autobiography that it was he who made the company hum. Indeed, they claim he left Ford in disarray. . . . Then there are his professions of humility. Says a Ford executive: "He suffers delusions of modesty."42

Despite rumors that Iacocca had the inside track on the chief executive job after Ford's retirement in 1982, some observers noted that Iacocca "made the mistake of encouraging subordinates to regard him as the dauphin. That did not sit well with Chairman Ford . . ."43
As a further dilution of Iacocca's power, Ford designed a troika, "A three-man office of the chief executive" composed of Ford himself, Iacocca and Vice Chairman Phillip Caldwell," 57, about 15 months before the firing.

Using coercive language, Ford threatened unilaterally the nine-member board of directors with the decision that Iacocca had to go or else he, Ford, would resign.

He then formally fired Iacocca---but didn't bother to tell the ousted president. . . . Iacocca actually got the first news of his dismissal when a trade-magazine publisher called him at his office. "There was supposed to be nothing to come out until Friday," a bitter Iacocca told Newsweek's James C. Jones in an interview after the dust had settled, "but somebody leaked the son of a bitch out here Wednesday night."

The historic exchange took place later when Iacocca was summoned to Ford's office the day after the board meeting "for the official word from the chairman."

What did they talk about precisely. "Precisely?" the still-shaken Iacocca said to Jones. "Well, as best as I can recall it, you get to a point and it becomes, "Well, it's just one of those things." Then I guess I held forth for quite a long time. You talk about your record, your credentials, where you are wrong, what you are doing right, that kind of thing. There was just nothing specific. We didn't have much of a discussion. . . . when Iacocca asked Ford what he'd done to deserve firing, the chairman shrugged: "I just don't like you."

Later, Iacocca, denying that remark of Ford's, said
"There was no rancor. It was cordial, he told Jones. "I really can't embellish it. There's nothing to embellish."\(^{46}\)

Iacocca returned to his office after the direct encounter with Ford, on a Thursday.

Later that day and the next he received dozens of supportive phone calls—many from Ford vice presidents as surprised and stunned as he. In fact, the first word many of them had of Iacocca's firing came from hallway scuttlebutt late Thursday afternoon. When the veeps left their office and got into their cars in the basement garage of the executive office building, they found confirmation on their front seats—a note signed by Henry Ford instructing them that henceforth they would all report to Phillip Caldwell.\(^{47}\)

In 1984, Iacocca wrote about the firing episode in his best-selling autobiography. His recollection of the rhetoric depicts a different drama from the remarks he made to the press in 1978. In his book, he wrote:

For Henry's benefit, I recited a list of my accomplishments on behalf of the Ford Motor Company. . . .

When I finished my speech, I said: "Look at me." Until this point he had not been able to look me in the eye. My voice was rising now as I realized that this would be our final conversation.

"Your timing stinks," I said. "We've just made a billion eight for the second year in a row. That's three and a half billion in the past two years. But mark my words, Henry. You may never see a billion eight again. And do you know why? Because you don't know how the f--- we made it in the first place!"\(^{48}\)
According to Iacocca, William Ford, Henry's brother, was there for the firing.

Near the end of the meeting, Bill made an honest effort to change his brother's mind. But it was too little, too late. As we left Henry's office, Bill had tears running down his face. "This shouldn't have happened," he kept saying. "He's ruthless."

Then he composed himself. "You were so cool in there," he said... You really laid him out. Nobody in his life ever took him on the way you just did. I'm surprised he held still for it."49

With Burkeian consubstantiality, Iacocca wrote in his memoir, "I instantly identified with every person I had ever fired." That Iacocca, too, could be "ruthless" and unreasonable in his autocratic-type management was substantiated by a close observer:

"In many ways," reckons a member of the Ford family, Iacocca and Henry Ford are alike." Iacocca, for instance, can be an unreasonably terrifying boss.50

In an interview six days before Iacocca was fired, Gail Sheehy asked Iacocca if "it is true that the Ford Motor Company leans on its executives to retire in their mid-fifties." Yes, replied Iacocca, to which Sheehy asked if many of them who were let go found new purposes, new careers. A few found new careers, but many of them died, replied Iacocca

and it's a shame. I personally did the axing of some of those guys. I didn't feel a thing at the
time. . . . It looks a lot different to me now. If a corporation brings its people along as effective managers, what better gain is there on that investment than to tap the experience and expertise those people have accumulated by the time they’re in their fifties? Otherwise, it’s a waste.51

Iacocca was fifty-three at the time of the interview with Gail Sheehy. As president of Ford, his personal hierarchy was rudely shattered when he himself was fired. Order in his life was suddenly shambles. Consubstantiality with those he had previously fired struck him, now that he experienced that identification.

Describing Iacocca as "the immigrant's son who worked, knifed, and charmed his way up to a prince's seat in Henry Ford's kingdom," Sheehy added that Lee Iacocca was

a man who talks like a prince, acts like a prince, has been made out by public relations to be a prince, even looks the part. . . . It all fit except for one thing. Lee Iacocca isn't a Medici; he's a commoner, and the company is controlled by a royal industrial family.52

In his life as a prince, "Iacocca had a huge constituency within the organization, high visibility outside as a charismatic leader," plus the fact that he "exudes the essence of daring and creative energy that is worth its weight in gold," according to Sheehy's description.53

But in the final analysis, Iacocca was an employed prince not a born prince.
When the chairman summoned Iacocca to his office, the brothers Ford stood for a while side by side listening to the hired prince talk about his record and tell how he "felt." And then, without explanation, they banished him from Fordland.54

When the president-prince suddenly became a fired, over-fifty underdog, a final touch of irony loomed:

Iacocca is such a dazzling package of talent that his availability for other top posts will only intensify anxiety for dozens of corporate presidents around the country---especially those over fifty-five.55

From Henry Ford's rejection, the unsupported firing, and the humiliation of being reduced to quarters in a warehouse came Iacocca's resolve to re-attain his rhetorical vision. Looking back on the dramatic end of his career with Ford, Iacocca wrote in 1984:

There are times in everyone's life when something constructive is born out of adversity. There are times when things seem so bad that you've got to grab your fate by the shoulders and shake it. I'm convinced it was that morning at the warehouse that pushed me to take on the presidency of Chrysler only a couple of weeks later.56

"He'll always be mad at Henry Ford," says Kathi Iacocca, 25, one of his two daughters. "He will take it to his grave. People who don't understand his anger don't know my father."57 The concept of "creative anger" became a theme in a number of Iacocca's speeches---anger used positively, as a spur, to set things right.
Distilling the drama of his demise, Iacocca reflected, with a touch of hubris,

I was fired for being a threat to the boss. Henry was infamous for dropping his number two men under unpleasant circumstances. To him, it was always the uprising of the peasants against their lord and master. Still, I had always clung to the idea that I was different, that somehow I was smarter or luckier than the rest. I didn't think it would ever happen to me.58

When Lynn Townsend, an ambitious young accountant, was named president of Chrysler in 1961 at forty-two, Townsend was described by a Chrysler vice-president as "the best man around who would accept the job."59

In contrast, Townsend's successor at Chrysler, John Riccardo, described Iacocca, when he hired the fired Ford "firepower," as the best executive in the auto industry.

Period.60

Summary
Rhetoric is a way of looking at—a way of interpreting—issues and meanings, writes Carroll Arnold.61 To that definition, Douglas Ehninger adds that rhetorical studies, because they are humanistic, focus on how and in what ways man uses and is used by symbols of persuasion, how man's symbol-using determines his personal and social decision-making, and what values guide his conduct.62
Early influences as the child of an immigrant entrepreneur left a dramatic mark on young Lee Iacocca. It was Nicola Iacocca's strong rhetorical vision of attaining the American Dream that sustained him and his youthful son. Lee Iacocca inherited this vision, shaped by fantasy themes of hard work, sacrifice, careful economics, and an imaginative use of opportunity. These were the values that guided his conduct and determined his personal and social decision-making.

These were also the values that enabled Iacocca to demonstrate what Kenneth Burke has called identification or persuasion, and consubstantiality. Burke's concept of dramatism in which he "treats language and thought primarily as modes of action "was exemplified in the dynamic decisions of Lee Iacocca. "Action involves character, which involves choice," writes Burke.63 "Language is a species of action, symbolic action---and its nature is such that it can be used as a tool,"64 a tool Lee Iacocca knew how to use with extraordinary precision. Iacocca's appreciation of the value of communicating effectively has made him an outstanding and colorful spokesman in the automotive industry, a business headed by faceless leaders from finance.

Lee Iacocca's experiences demonstrate the interrelatedness of Borman's rhetorical vision and Burke's identification. Iacocca took the fantasy themes of hard
work, sacrifice, and opportunity and shaped them into a strong rhetorical vision of the American ideal. Through that vision, he has been able to identify and articulate values common to all.
Notes

1 Bormann, 397.
2 Bormann, 397.
3 Bormann, 397.
4 Bormann, 397.
5 Bormann, 398.
6 Bormann, 398.
7 Bormann, 398.
8 Bormann, 398.
10 Iorizzo, 40-45.
11 Iorizzo, 48.
12 Iorizzo, 48.
15 Bormann, 404.
16 Burke, 20.
17 Burke, 21.
18 Burke, 46.

20 Iacocca, 4.

21 Iacocca, 3.


23 Coppa, 126.

24 Coppa, 137.

25 Coppa, 142.

26 Iacocca, 9.

27 Iacocca, 7.

28 Iacocca, 15-16.

29 Iacocca, 18.

30 Iacocca, 21.

31 Iacocca, 22.

32 Iacocca, 23.

33 Iacocca, 24.

34 Iacocca, 26.

35 Iacocca, xiii.


38 Nicholson, 65.
Kurt Andersen, "A Spunky Tycoon Turned Superstar," *Time* 1 April 1985: 34.


Andersen, 35.

Time 24 July 1978: 60.

Nicholson, 65.

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Iacocca, 128.

Iacocca, 128.

Andersen, 38.


Sheehy, 77-78.

Sheehy, 78.

Sheehy, 78.

Sheehy, 80.

Iacocca, xv.

Andersen, 34.

Iacocca, 60.


Gordon, 39-40.


Burke, 15.
CHAPTER III

The Rhetoric of Lee Iacocca: The Myth

Corporate heroes are not born, but they are frequently reborn, rising often from the crucible of disaster and dishonor to a refined if calculated new image.

Vernacular versions of the myth surrounding Lee Iacocca are woven around him like rhetorical garlands: "America's hottest new folk hero," "an industrial Indiana Jones" rescuing Chrysler from the Temple of Doom, the "Comeback Kid," a "corporate idol," "authentic business hero," and the "most celebrated underdog of all time." However egocentric, however tarnished and flawed, Lee Iacocca meets the measurements for a modern myth.

The purpose of Chapter III is to show the relationship between Iacocca's rhetorical strategies and the unmistakable myth-element he has struck in the mind of the American public. The first section explains how Joseph Campbell's paradigm for classical myth is exemplified in Iacocca's experiences; the second section deals with the contribution of the media to the myth; the third part reviews the influence of Iacocca's own rhetoric as a factor in his best-selling book *Iacocca: An Autobiography.*
Iacocca is a kind of Everyman to his audience. And because memory and imagination are always more powerful in the creation of myth than facts and statistics, Iacocca's public forgets that he is, and was, during a large part of his travails, a middle-aged millionaire.

Not the least of Iacocca's appeals has been his articulation of the unexpressed longings in his audience. He was able to be what millions of others only let themselves hope to be. Part of what separates a would-be hero from the average person is a fearlessness in the face of challenge, the willingness to lose as well as win. In a recent interview, Iacocca remarked that he thought the greatest fear people have is in making a mistake.

I'm talking failure. Too many people want a nice, secure life. But that's not really life. Every day is fraught with risks. Know what I think? One man's risk is another man's opportunity. You always gotta make your own breaks."

When quizzed about his motivation in terms of beating the odds, he replied: "To tell you the truth, I never approach a problem deciding what the odds are. That's self-defeating. It could make you think you're trying to do the impossible." Heroes reflect the rhetoric of risk.

To mythologize Lee Iacocca as "the apotheosis of the regular guy" is to explain in part how the myth about him reflects the beliefs and values of our culture. His larger-than-life consubstantiality is apparent in the craze
sometimes referred to as "Iacoccamania," sweeping the country.

It has become synonymous with such old-fashioned virtues as patriotism, integrity, beating the odds, and above all, hard work.\textsuperscript{2}

**Myth: The Classical Paradigm**

Joseph Campbell traces the basic steps of classical myth in the *Hero With A Thousand Faces*. First, the hero may appear to be of lowly lineage, though later he is often discovered to be a royal heir. Second, the call to adventure is accepted by the potential hero. Next, the would-be hero finds himself on the threshold of adventure, where he must undergo a supreme ordeal, enter into the unknown, encounter the Impossible Task, and, possibly, be slain by his opponent. Frequently, the rescuer of the hero has supernatural power. The nadir of the hero's adventures result in his own divinization, his apotheosis. From this point, we see the hero undergoing a kind of resurrection where he is illumined by the insight of his struggle. In the hero's return to the everyday world, he realizes that as he comes from the dreaded unknown which he has conquered that he re-emerges as more than he was; he is reborn. The hero has redeemed himself and his "kingdom." But there is often a steep price for this transcendence: a death, a dismemberment, a blinding. The redeemer has won—and paid.\textsuperscript{3}
Through Burkeian identification and consubstantiality, Iacocca has become that mysterious blend which is the essence of myth: the culmination of reality and fiction.

Joseph Cambell observes that the journey of Everyman shows a surprising consistency in the sacred writings of all the continents:

. . . the perilous journey was a labor not of attainment but of reattainment, not discovery but rediscovery. The godly power sought and dangerously won are revealed to have been within the heart of the hero all the time. He is "the king's son" who has come to know who he is and therewith has entered into the exercise of his proper power---"God's son," who has learned to know how much that title means. From this point of view the hero is symbolical of that divine creative and redemptive image which is hidden within us all, only waiting to be known and rendered into life.  

The hero-adventurer is a person of particular gifts, often honored by his society, or disdained. In the hero's search for the "golden ring," he may enact the "despised child who becomes the master of extraordinary powers" by prevailing over his oppressors, or he may return from his adventure with the means for regenerating his situation.

Lowly lineage The father and so-called "king" of the young hero-adventurer Lee, was an unknown Italian immigrant who had not finished the fourth grade, yet Nicola Iacocca possessed that all-important ingredient for any kind of adventure: the willingness to risk. Risk-taking was the
salient quality he imparted to his son Lido Anthony; it was a characteristic that would help Lee Iacocca reach for and attain several "golden rings."

Another important gift of the father to the son was a vision, a rhetorical vision of "all things are possible" in the Promised Land of America. Of his father, Iacocca said, "He was in love with America, and he pursued the American dream with all his might." Whatever this influential parent may have lacked in formal education, he more than made up for in intelligence, imagination, street savvy. Arriving in America as a frightened boy of twelve, Nicola worked through his fears, became an apprentice shoemaker, and later a successful businessman.

My father loved cars. In fact, he owned one of the first Model T's. He was one of the few people in Allentown who knew how to drive, and he was always tinkering with cars and thinking about how to improve them.

There was a rich closeness to the relationship: "I loved pleasing him, and he was always terrifically proud of my accomplishments," wrote Iacocca.

Later in life whenever I got a promotion, I'd call my father right away. ... At Ford, each time I brought out a new car, he wanted to be the first to drive it. In 1970, when I was named president of the Ford Motor Company, I don't know which of us was more excited.

No risk-taking entrepreneur would fail to be a good promoter, another quality Nicola imparted to his son.
Marketing, sales, public relations and all the persuasion those roles required were arts perfected by Lee Iacocca to supreme advantage, through his adventures and misadventures.

Excelling in school was a must for children of ambitious immigrant parents. And a strong religious life coupled with a pragmatic philosophy of taking the good with the bad pervaded the relationship of Lee Iacocca and his father.

Patriotism, and an unabashed salute to immigrants and their contribution, education, common sense, and a spunky resourcefulness were hallmarks from the home which Iacocca was to bring later to his speech themes, again and again.

As Campbell pointed out, when the child faces the world of "adult action, it passes, spiritually, into the sphere of the father— who becomes, for his son, the sign of the future task... the father is the initiating priest through whom the young being passes on into the larger world."9

The Call To Adventure

In the classical myth paradigm, an accident or a blunder may draw the hero "into a relationship with forces that are not rightly understood."10

"The blunder may amount to the opening of a destiny."11 What appears, then, to ordinary men as a mishap may be the very making of a hero, as Iacocca was to
learn by his dramatic firing as president of Ford by Henry Ford II.

And now, suddenly, I was out of a job. It was gut-wrenching.

Should I pack it all in and retire? I was fifty-four years old. I had already accomplished a great deal. I was financially secure. I could afford to play golf for the rest of my life.

But that just didn't feel right. I knew I had to pick up the pieces and carry on.

The private pain I could have endured. But the deliberate public humiliation was too much for me.

In times of great stress and adversity, it's always best to keep busy, to plow your anger and your energy into something positive.¹²

At this point, Iacocca revealed a great part of his motivation in accepting the Call to Adventure; there was an element of revenge which he later framed in speeches as "creative anger," admonishing his audiences to revitalize themselves and change those forces of destiny which were working against them.

But stumbling through the great unknown, the dark forest, has its price as every hero knows:

A year after I signed up, Chrysler came within a whisker of bankruptcy. There were many days at Chrysler when I wondered how I had got myself into this mess. Being fired at Ford was bad enough. But going down with the ship at Chrysler was more than I deserved.¹³

Remembering the turning point in accepting the Call to Adventure, Iacocca wrote that, strangely, it had nothing to
do with new cars and promotions and profits. When Henry Ford reduced his former president to an office in an old warehouse, to finish out his last months

This final humiliation was much worse than being fired.

I'm convinced it was that morning at the warehouse that pushed me to take on the presidency of Chrysler only a couple of weeks later.

Today I'm a hero . . . With determination, with luck, and with help from lots of good people, I was able to rise up from the ashes.¹⁴

**Supernatural Aid.** In classical myth, the rescuing agent is frequently endowed with supernatural powers. Contemporary expressions of this could be highly placed persons who recognize the talent of a young adventurer. Another expression of supernatural aid might be that the hero is given the ability to overcome fears. This aspect of the classical myth paradigm always comes to one who has accepted his proper call to adventure. Lee Iacocca, the "disdained child" character of the myth knew well what it was to be a real "disdained child." As the young son of immigrants, he was known as "Dago" and "Wop," acknowledged to be only one step above the lowest, the Jewish children. But inspired by his father to excel, father and son held a vision far beyond the petty parochial horizon of Allentown, Pennsylvania.

As the young, talented Iacocca made his way, for the first time, up the ladder of success, perhaps Charlie
Beacham of Ford was his finest mentor, teaching him how to be poised, how to make a polished presentation of himself, and above all, to expect everyone who worked for him to perform to potential. This last quality was assimilated by Iacocca and used throughout his remaining career at Ford, and through the extremely difficult years at Chrysler.

Another mentor who aided and recognized young Lee Iacocca was the then vice-president of Ford, Robert McNamara. The comparatively staid McNamara coaxed the exuberant young executive to write down his ideas. McNamara also recognized Iacocca's flair and flamboyance in sales and marketing, and rewarded Iacocca accordingly with generous promotions.

Ambitious Iacocca was clearly rocketing toward the top position of Ford Motor Company.

Having responded to his own call, and continuing to follow courageously as the consequences unfold, the hero finds all the forces of the unconscious at his side. Mother Nature herself supports the mighty task. And in so far as the hero's act coincides with that for which his society itself is ready, he seems to ride on the great rhythm of the historical process.¹⁵

That "rhythm of the historical process" was shattered by Henry Ford's firing of Iacocca as Iacocca was ostensibly next in line to lead the Ford Motor Company kingdom. But as Gail Sheehy pointed out in her interview with Iacocca a few days before his firing, about which he had a strong inkling,
Iacocca was merely a "hired prince," not the true heir apparent; he was banished.

And so Iacocca found himself crossing a critical threshold; at fifty-four, he was at the crossroads of relinquishing all that he had earned in power and prestige, or accepting a new call to adventure, and entering "the regions of the unknown (desert, jungle, deep sea, alien land) . . . suggesting threats of violence," as Campbell describes this phase.

In his depiction of classical myth, Campbell observes that it is

only by advancing beyond those bounds, provoking the destructive other aspect of the same power (the protective threshold guardian), that the individual passes, either alive or in death, into a new zone of experience.16

Campbell alludes to the pygmy myth in which the person who speaks from dreams, the dreamer, is the one highly respected and felt to possess supernatural talents and able to meet the supernatural spirits through extraordinary dream-power:

The adventure is always and everywhere a passage beyond the veil of the known into the unknown; the powers that watch at the boundary are dangerous; to deal with them is risky; yet for anyone with competence and courage the danger fades.17
Thus, we see the dreamer, the hero-adventurer with a strong vision of himself, equipped with competence and courage, driving back the edges of fear.

Campbell relates the tale of Prince Five-weapons and the ogre Sticky Hair who fails to intimidate the young warrior:

. . . he was unafraid, undaunted. As for the ogre, he thought: "This is some lion of a man, some man of noble birth, no mere man! For although he has been caught by an ogre like me, he appears neither to tremble nor to quake! In all the time I have harried this road, I have never seen a single man to match him! Why, pray is he not afraid? Why are you not terrified with the fear of death?"

To which the young warrior replied that he had a thunderbolt in his belly which the ogre could not digest because it would tear the ogre's insides to fragments. "In that case we'll both perish. That's why I'm not afraid!" Of course, Prince Five-weapons was referring to the Weapon of Knowledge within him.

One is reminded of Iacocca's rhetorical appeals, both emotional and statistical in the presentation of his case for Chrysler before the Congressional committee. Senator Proxmire and others praised him for his knowledge, his persuasiveness, his resoluteness.

Iacocca did not hesitate to use his great bargaining weapon: that if Chrysler Corporation failed, the government would pay millions in unemployment, suppliers and bankers
and dealers would be in grave jeopardy as well as the communities involved. Nor did he hesitate to counter all attacks on Chrysler to go into bankruptcy, which he knew would lead to quick and final failure.

The Threshold of Adventure. Also called "The Belly of the Whale" or the passage into the realm of night, the threshold of adventure represents the sphere of rebirth, symbolized in the universal womb-motif of the belly of the whale. "The hero, instead of conquering or conciliating the power of the threshold, is swallowed into the unknown, and would appear to have died."

The hero must go inward, to be born again. Campbell compares his disappearance to a worshiper in a temple, where the worshiper is reminded of "who and what he is, namely dust and ashes unless immortal."

The temple interior and the belly of the whale are equivalents. One reason temple entrances are flanked with gargoyles and devil-slayers is that these are the threshold guardians to drive off all those incapable of entering into the higher silences within. "They are the preliminary embodiments of the dangerous aspect of the presence, corresponding to the mythological ogres that bound the conventional world, or to the two rows of teeth of the whale."

The hero-adventurer at the moment he enters the temple undergoes a metamorphosis.
Allegorically, then, the passage into a temple and the hero-dive through the jaws of the whale are identical adventures, both denoting, in picture language, the life-centering, life-renewing act.

'No creature,' writes Ananda Coomaraswamy, 'can attain a higher grade of nature without ceasing to exist.'

In fact, the body of the hero may be harmed in some way. Classical myth versions are dismemberment, sailing through clashing rocks, being cut severely by reeds and cactus, or overwhelmed by boiling desert sands. It is at this point that the ego-slaying takes place, and the would-be hero becomes even more fearless.

Iacocca wrote in his autobiography that during the deeply stressful transition from failure to success, "I shook more; I drank more." Several times during the Congressional hearings, he suffered attacks of vertigo and was hospitalized briefly. But it was his wife Mary, for many years a diabetic, who, as the pressure became more and more severe at Chrysler, endured several diabetic comas plus heart attacks. Iacocca hints darkly that the extreme problems, both the Ford firing and the Chrysler crisis, contributed largely to her death.

**Trials and Victories of Initiation.** Having passed through the initial threshold, the hero continues in a dream landscape of tests and ordeals. In the myth-adventure, the hero is assigned The Impossible Task with a hopeless series of obstacles to overcome. In undertaking this perilous
journey, into the unknown, the hero undergoes what the mystics call "purification of the self," a cleansing, a humbling, with the total energy consecrated to transcending the goal. It is at this strategic point that the hero comes to understand what he must do to be saved.

The Road of Trials. As Brock Yates of Car and Driver wrote:

\[\ldots\] the story takes on a melodramatic quality: aggressive lad rises out of a warm, close-knit immigrant family in Altoona (sic), Pennsylvania, to father a wildly successful new model, the Mustang, and then leapfrog to the presidency of a great car company. He soon gains national prominence, but, like Icarus, he soars too close to the source of power and finds his wings fried off. From there it is downhill, as he assumes the leadership of a company with so bad an image that it is beginning to replace Buffalo's snowstorms and Los Angeles's smog as a national joke. After a death struggle with the Washington bureaucrats, and the bankers and their handmaiden, the Wall Street Journal \[\ldots\] the ending is well known: the New Chrysler Corporation is now a serious industrial entity, laughed at by no one. \[\ldots\] 24

In another tongue-in-cheek analysis of Iacocca's trials and tribulations, the New Republic reviews the books of Peter Ueberroth's Made in America and Iacocca's autobiography, citing "that amazing recent development, the emergence of the businessman as hero and patriotic icon."

\[\ldots\] this is the usual stance of the businessman/hero: he does not seek challenges, they seek him out. He is at first reluctant \[\ldots\] the challenge is beyond all human capability \[\ldots\] but he succumbs to entreaties \[\ldots\] he soon
he emerges as a hero following this leitmotiv. The reviewer chides the new type corporate saviors as having rhetorical skills; they are experts in salesmanship, marketing, public relations, and lobbying. They radiate a "rather austere kind of charisma. . . . more like the mystical ability to command that is the original meaning of 'charisma.'"  

Nevertheless, it was Iacocca's penchant for articulation of his problems, the corporation's plight, and the automobile industry in general that brought him to political and public attention.

An unknown window washer in Atlanta, when interviewed, gave a solid, sociological explanation for Iacocca's trial-by-fire appeal: "In America, people pull for underdogs and they just love a winner. Iacocca was both."

The Time writer compared Iacocca to the underdog pool player in a high-stakes game, announcing an impossible shot he's going to make involving angles and ricochets . . . and then does it.

A member of the Chrysler board, Joseph Califano said of Iacocca:

He's like the hero of Raiders of the Lost Ark; he's been down, on the edge, picked himself up, came to the top again.
Iacocca's bitter struggle to save Chrysler was almost a public spectacle: "the stakes were so high, and the auto company's decline and fall so conspicuous, that from 1979 to 1982 the cliffhanger drama of corporate survival unfolded in the press almost like a weekly serial."30

First the huge losses and painful layoffs, then full-court-press lobbying to win the federal loan guarantees that permitted the company to hang on. Still more layoffs, shutting plants, more billions of dollars lost.31

All through the trials and crises, Lee Iacocca "seemed absolutely resolute and tough. . . . Iacocca's own steadfastness and true grit were especially appealing to Americans." 32

He is viewed by some as a man whose appeal "seems to transcend party and class, a man America seems to see as a mirror view of itself."33

In his inimitable and self-descriptive rhetoric, he remarked about his autobiography:

I'm the image! Now I'm the image. They identify with a piece of the book they want to identify with (such as) life is full of adversity but don't let it knock your socks off, okay? Keep your feet on the ground, grit your teeth, move along and in this great country you'll have a second life.

It's adversity. They want to talk to someone who suffered a little. They don't look at me as a multimillionaire. They don't want to hear about that. They want to hear that you had a tough time and how you weathered the storm. . . . There's a common thread. People like grit and perseverance.34
There must be an unmistakable connection between the values inculcated by Lee Iacocca's immigrant father to the son, which gave Iacocca a particular and peculiar strength and vision in the face of almost certain defeat at Chrysler Corporation. The elder Iacocca saw America, as did almost all immigrants, as the Promised Land, the place to begin again.

If we define myths as tales which are believed to be true or at least are taken very seriously by a significant portion of a society and which are demonstrations of the order that a society perceives, then we can point to a whole collection of American tales which can justifiably be labeled myths of the New Beginning. We have only to look at the persistent popularity of any aspect of the 'frontier' to understand the significance of the New Beginning in American thinking.

Our folk heroes are rebels; they turn away from all that is traditional, comfortable, and everyday.35

The myth of the New Beginning which Iacocca's father practiced on a small scale in a small town in Pennsylvania was transferred, consciously or subconsciously, to Iacocca, although he was not put to the extreme test until he was a potential hero-adventurer, middle-aged and multimillionaire.

One of the basic, if oversimplified concepts about America is that it tends to regard itself as having sprung almost magically from the sweat and blood and imagination of a handful of freedom-loving, intelligent visionaries. The result of this unique inception is a reinforcement of the idea that intelligent,
reasonable, resourceful people can accomplish absolutely anything—human perversity and luck be damned.36

Myths and rituals are, according to Mircea Eliade and Joseph Campbell, part of our everyday lives and contribute to the way we see ourselves, and the way we order our world around us. And to Lee Iacocca's immigrant father, an inveterate risk taker and entrepreneur, a New Beginning was always the formula for excitement and success.

No mythic theme is more appealing than the theme of renewal, and that is why we find in almost every mythology the suggestion of the possibility of a new beginning.37

For Christians, the concept of personal renewal is of critical importance, from the ceremony of baptism, with the death-rebirth motif, to the "resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting."

Stephen Ausband proclaims that "The theme of renewal is, in a very real sense, the most sacred tenet of American mythology."38 He contends that, like all valid mythic elements, it is a part of our folk tradition, that it is so deeply entrenched in the way we view ourselves that we don't even recognize it as a belief. "America is the land of opportunity—which is only another way of saying it is the land of renewal." "For Americans," writes Ausband, "renewal is a way of life—one might almost say a sign of grace."39
**Atonement with the Father.** As Joseph Campbell pointed out, it was the father "who becomes, for his son, the sign of the future task . . . the father is the initiating priest through whom the young being passes on into the larger world."

"For the son who has grown really to know the father, the agonies of the ordeal are readily borne. . . ."\(^{40}\)

The relationship between the uneducated but inspired father and the talented, willing son brought Lee Iacocca through humiliation, failure, fiery trials to the apotheosis of his success. The son had enacted the power of the American Dream myth. "The hero himself is that which he had come to find."\(^{41}\)

**The Return**

The final work is that of the return. If the powers have blessed the hero, he now sets forth under their protection. . . . At the return threshold the transcendental powers must remain behind; the hero re-emerges from the kingdom of dread (return, resurrection). The boon that he brings restores the world.\(^ {42}\)

Mythology, contends, Campbell, is "psychology misread as biography, history, and cosmology."\(^ {43}\) The modern psychologist can translate mythology back to its true delineations

and thus rescue for the contemporary world a rich and eloquent document of the profoundest depths of human character. . . . We have only to read it, study its constant patterns, analyze its
variations, and therewith come to an understanding of the deep forces that have shaped man's destiny and must continue to determine both our private and public lives.

It has been Lee Iacocca's ability to reflect these archaic mythological themes that has, in part, made him a hero. From 1978 when he joined Chrysler to 1981, the company lost about $3.5 billion dollars, reputedly the worst bloodbath by any American company in history. In spite of the 1979 bailout at the point of bankruptcy, the corporation nearly failed several times since then. Iacocca found himself one Friday night in November 1981 with just $1 million left in the bank, a pittance for a company that was spending $5 million per working hour.

Wall Street's keenest auto analyst, Maryann Keller remarked that she "wouldn't doubt that people have bought Chrysler cars just because they wanted Lee Iacocca to make it." Iacocca's rhetoric about his self-concept was revealed in a New York Times interview with William Serrin, ironically entitled "The Importance of Being Iacocca."

The "slain ego" of the mythical hero is not a quality too many of his observers would attribute to Lee Iacocca. But Serrin touched on a particular slant concerning Iacocca which was not revealed in his autobiography: In a discussion about the proprieties of Detroit social and
professional ethics, Iacocca, defending his remarks about Henry Ford

spoke bluntly against the code of 'parochial Detroit.' He condemned the rule of the 'Grosse Point-Bloomfield Hills establishment' that 'you should never talk about peers, a former boss,' that 'you don't speak out against the king. He's powerful, he's got money.'

'They're not an immigrant said Mr Iacocca, who is not one either, but thinks of himself as one. 'They can talk that way.'

But the American public apparently sees Iacocca as far more than an immigrant. "Not since William Randolph Hearst has there been a tycoon who has occupied the national imagination as vividly as Iacocca." Advertising executive Sean Fitzpatrick of a competitor Chevrolet agency remarked of Iacocca: "In a period of time when there are no heroes, Lee Iacocca emerged as the champion of the most celebrated underdog of all time. Capturing the spirit of Faulkner's Nobel Prize address, he showed us that man—and Chrysler—will not merely endure, he will prevail."

The lionization of Lee Iacocca should not be surprising. In an industry filled with gray managers, he is funny, refreshing, and successful. He saved a company that had been left for dead—and saved it in the halls of Congress and on TV, where everybody could see him. Iacocca may not be as good as most people think he is, but he is very good at two things: selling (both ideas and cars)
and manipulating the federal government, getting it to do what he wants it to do.51

The Iacocca legend has prevailed for some time within the company: "he is adored by the 3,984 dealers, high-torque salespeople more temperamentally akin to Iacocca than many of his executive-suite colleagues." "Security guards are hired during dealer conventions to keep the dealers off him" said a Chrysler Public Affairs vice president. "Among Chrysler blue-collar employees, the admiration often seems more like a kind of fealty than mere employee loyalty.52

Perhaps the real secret of his heroic stature is his identification with the common man: Iacocca is the apotheosis of the regular guy.

... his bullish candor reminds people of a pal at the local tavern who calls 'em as he sees 'em. He is feisty and anti-Establishment, but his patriotism makes that posture seem safe and red-blooded. Partly, his popularity is a function of the times: two-fisted capitalism is in vogue. After a long period of feeling cranky and skeptical the country seems in the mood to have a hero or two. Moreover, his life embodies just the kind of happy ending that Americans like to celebrate: he had reverses, he fought back, he came out on top.53

In accord with his vision of himself, "Iacocca likes it best when he can make managing a car company seem like a martial task, urgent and vast and possible heroic."54
Iacocca's public affairs officer during the congressional hearings, Wendell Larsen, who orchestrated so much of the corporation strategy, remarked that

The nation has been looking for a leader who is sure of himself, who calls a spade a spade—even if it isn't. He oversimplifies issues, and people like that. 55

A Tarnished Hero

Some observers, however, view Lee Iacocca as a tarnished hero, a man whose ego might prevent him from joining the ranks of American business greats.

Professor Eugene Jennings of Michigan State University has spend thirty years "helping corporate chairmen substitute intelligent action for the traps of ego-centricity." Jennings has also studied and written about the history of leadership. He contends that Iacocca's fatal weakness is his "Caesar-like ego, a characteristic that allows for no humility."

'Caesar cannot be No. 2," Jennings says, asserting Iacocca represents an archetype—along with Douglas MacArthur, George Steinbrenner of the N.Y. Yankees and Occidental Petroleum Chairman Armand Hammer, among others—that finds it nearly impossible to adapt to legitimate authority. 56

Jennings observed that ego can be "both strength and weakness, allowing executives to attract believers to a cause, but also causing the executives to prove themselves over and over, thereby "spending a lifetime on a treadmill."
Two executives who have performed as well or better than Iacocca, according to Jennings, are David Roderick of U.S. Steel and Donald Lennox of International Harvester, neither of whom had the aid of "federal loan guarantees and an umbrella of trade embargoes." While Iacocca may be a folk hero to readers of his autobiography, Jennings said Iacocca was just another businessman among his corporate colleagues.

However valid the professor's point, he nevertheless remains in the minority. To a public hungry for heroes, Lee Iacocca has been crowned.

In addition to the classical myth paradigm, two other factors have contributed to the mythical aura of Lee Iacocca. One is the remarkable advertising campaign waged on television during the most difficult time of the Chrysler revival; the other is the striking success of Iacocca: An Autobiography.

**The Media Myth**

Of Iacocca's aptitude for identification, "He tapped into America's frustrations," said Ron De Luca, advertising agency executive in charge of Chrysler advertising. "The country was starved for leadership and charisma," stated Leo Arthur Kelmenson, president of the ad agency. In describing Iacocca's rhetorical appeal, he added, "Lee talked directly to the American people."
After years as a top executive in the car industry, Lee Iacocca brought effective credibility to the television ads. "Iacocca isn't hustling cars. He's selling trust," said De Luca. His pugnacious delivery coupled with his credibility made the ad campaign unusually successful.

The first television commercials were in the winter of 1980. Iacocca came across as up-front, reasonable. 'I don't want you to buy a car on faith,' he told viewers, 'I want you to compare.' Then came the quintessential Iacocca tag line, the slightly belligerent ad that turned the promise of automotive quality into a dare. 'If you can find a better car,' he barked, 'buy it.'

The subtext, praising the old fashioned virtues of careful workmanship and pride, helped sell Iacocca to the public also.

The bluntness, the intense, almost-tough-guy facial expression combined with his you-gotta-believe-me style, took the public by surprise. He came across as unique, unlike the bland actors who ordinarily occupy TV selling roles.

From 1980 to 1985, Iacocca's 30-second spots had reached 97 percent of American households an average of 63 times apiece. This high visibility on television was just a part of Iacocca's mythical appeal; he was also tapping into the legend of the underdog, fighting for his life.
"We didn't invent Lee Iacocca," said the ad agency president in discussing the phenomenal success of the TV ad campaign. "We couldn't have. We just communicated the Lee Iacocca persona to the American public."^1

Iacocca's memoir became the best-selling nonfiction hardcover in publishing history (excluding the Bible, cookbooks, and dictionaries).^2 The feeling of consubstantiality his readers feel, "the common sensations, concepts, images, ideas, attitudes" as Burke writes are all at work between author and reader. The flesh and blood real-life drama of the classical myth paradigm, the humble beginning, the rise, the fall, the redemption, read like an adventure story to which millions could relate. "There must be something about it that makes it magic," remarked a Waldenbooks manager in Atlanta.^^3

The appeal of the book apparently cuts across all social stratas. The New York Times reported that during the week of December 17, 1984, average sales of the book were about 100,000 copies.^^4

In describing the appeal of the author and book, the biography buyer for B. Dalton book chain said "three-piece suits see him as the personification of In Search of Excellence. But the Iacocca book "is also selling wonderfully well to all those with grease under their fingernails, who look to 'Mr. I.' as the man who saved my job."^^5
Another book buyer, trying to pinpoint the appeal of Iacocca's autobiography, emphasized the author's divinization. Readers view Iacocca as a "man of the people. Mr. Iacocca was done dirty by his former employer, in his opinion, and set out to prove how wrong it was to send him away. Now he's back on top and readers like that 'justice triumphs' feeling."

A large number of book sellers reported that buyers were on waiting lists for weeks. "The books are flying out the door. Nothing in two years has sold like this---not since Erma Bombeck's Motherhood."

* * *

The first-person rhetoric of Lee Iacocca has struck a deep chord of universal myth. The paradox of "the regular guy" and the corporate savior are inextricably blended. As Walter Lippmann writes, "What a myth never contains is the critical power to separate its truths from its errors. . . . fact and fable, report and fantasy, are all on the same plane of credibility."

Summary: Myth

Lee Iacocca has become that mysterious blend which is the essence of myth: the melding of reality and fiction. Often humiliated as the "Wop" and "Dago" child of Italian immigrants, Iacocca, nevertheless, inherited a
special gift from his father: the conviction that the son
could live the American Dream and reach for it with the
spirit of risk-taking, of fearlessness in the face of
possible failure. Clearly, the call to adventure was met by
the spirit of adventure. Supernatural obstacles were met by
rhetorical pleas of supernatural aid, in the form of $1.5
billion dollars in a Congressional loan guarantee. And for
the road of trials, the Impossible Task was achieved by
sacrifice, discipline, hard work, and immense amounts of
persuasiveness.

That America sees Lee Iacocca's odyssey as a
mirror-view of itself can come as no surprise. He has
tapped into a universal myth-hero paradigm, and found a
"common thread," as he described it, a consubstantiality,
with his audience. In a less than perfect world, Iacocca
represents the excitement and hope of a second life, a
renewal, the New Beginning which Stephen Ausland depicted as
the American philosophy of pushing back the frontier. To
this exploration into the dangers and rewards of the
unknown, Iacocca symbolized to his audience the courage, the
daring, and the resolution that each must bring to the
challenge.

Part of Iacocca's appeal as a modern industrial folk
hero came from his freedom of fear of failure: his father
had taught him realistically that there were losses as well
as gains. Adversity was no stranger, but an "ogre" to be
overcome by intellect, imagination, and industriousness. **Risk taking** was essential for heroic endeavors. Another part of the hero-paradigm that admirers are apt to overlook is that there is a **price** for being the redeemer, a loss in one sense for a gain at another level. Iacocca suffered public humiliation by the Ford firing; he also suggested that the duress of the Ford and Chrysler crises brought about his wife's death.

An additional aspect of his appeal as a modern hero is the concept of the **individual** pitted against formidable social and economic forces, a factor which gave him consubstantiality with his public. During one of his severest moments at Chrysler, Iacocca plaintively asked, "Where are all the tigers?"

Chrysler's metamorphosis . . . was a stunning testament to the presence of tigers---both a reassurance and a warning regarding the power of the **individual** The company smashed the popular belief that, somewhere between the rise of the entrepreneur and the growth of managerial capitalism, the authority of the **individual** had faded.

The disdained child of the immigrant (and of the classical myth) became the acclaimed man, who, with a resolute vision of the American Dream of the New Beginning, achieved a remarkable rebirth for himself and for his corporation.
Notes

1 Marian Christy, "Iacocca's Family Means Most To Him," *Morning Advocate* (Baton Rouge, La.) 29 May 1986: 2C.
2 Christy, 2C.
4 Campbell, 39.
5 Campbell, 37-8.
6 Iacocca, 4.
7 Iacocca, 4.
8 Iacocca, 4.
9 Campbell, 136.
10 Campbell, 51.
11 Campbell, 51.
12 Iacocca, xiii-xv.
13 Iacocca, xv.
14 Iacocca, xiv-xv.
15 Campbell, 72.
16 Campbell, 82.
17 Campbell, 82.
18 Campbell, 87.
19 Campbell, 87.
20 Campbell, 90.
21 Campbell, 91.
22 Campbell, 92.
23 Campbell, 92.


33 Lois Romano, "Some See Iacocca As Eisenhower of the 80s," Sunday Advocate (Baton Rouge, La.) 8 Sept. 1985: 3E.

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Taylor, 57.

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Andersen, 30.


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Andersen, 32.

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Cuniff, 13-D.

Andersen, 32.

Andersen, 32.

Andersen, 32.

Andersen, 32.

Andersen, 32.

Andersen, 34.

Serrin, 22.
65 Serrin, 22.
66 Serrin, 22.
67 Serrin, 22.
70 Moritz, 347.
CHAPTER IV

The Impact of the Rhetorical Situation on Iacocca's Rhetorical Vision

Hoping to compensate for his sudden descent at Ford Motor Company by taking the Chrysler presidency, Lee Iacocca quickly saw that the re-attainment of his rhetorical vision might require groping at even lower levels than the finale at Ford. All expressions of humiliation, anger, and revenge were subsumed under the exigence of the rhetorical situation he faced. Lee Iacocca wrestled with a dying dragon: Chrysler Corporation was on the edge of bankruptcy.

The financial, productivity, and managerial predicament at Chrysler encompassed all the characteristics of Bitzer's theory of rhetorical situation.

The purpose of this chapter is to explain the nature of the rhetorical situation in which Lee Iacocca found himself upon assuming the presidency of Chrysler Corporation: The life-or-death exigence, the persuasive and fitting response he made to a specific and to a general audience, and how he demonstrated an ability to change the constraints of those audiences by effecting a new and workable approach between the government, private enterprise, and labor.
Lloyd Bitzer writes that when a critic asks, "What is a rhetorical situation?" he wants "to know the nature of those contexts in which speakers or writers create rhetorical discourse." Bitzer continues: "Rhetorical works belong to the class of things which obtain their character from the circumstances of the historic context in which they occur. . . . a work is rhetorical because it is a response to a situation of a certain kind."

In short, rhetoric is a mode of altering reality, not by the direct application of energy to objects, but by the creation of discourse which changes reality through the mediation of thought and action. The rhetor alters reality by bringing into existence a discourse of such a character that the audience, in thought and action, is so engaged that it becomes mediator of change. In this sense rhetoric is always persuasive.

As Bitzer points out, a particular kind of discourse evolves "because of some specific condition or situation which invites utterance." Bitzer quotes Bronislaw Malinowski who remarked that "language functions as a link in concerted human activity, as a piece of human behavior. It is a mode of action . . . ."

Bitzer's formal definition is:

Rhetorical situation may be defined as a complex of persons, events . . . presenting an actual or potential exigence which can be completely or partially removed if discourse, introduced into the situation can so constrain human decision or action as to bring about the significant modification of the exigence. . . . there are three constituents of any rhetorical situation: the first is the exigence; the second and third
are elements of the complex, namely the audience to be constrained in decision and action, and the constraints which influence the rhetor and can be brought to bear upon the audience.

"In any rhetorical situation," Bitzer writes "there will be at least one controlling exigence which functions as the organizing principle: it specifies the audience to be addressed and the change to be effected." The controlling exigence for Iacocca as head of Chrysler: struggling with imminent bankruptcy; the audience: a skeptical Congress, and a curious, sympathetic public; and the change to be effected: economic salvation for private enterprise granted by federal monies.

In the Chrysler Corporation crisis of 1978, the day Lee Iacocca was named Chrysler president was also the day the company announced it had just lost a record $158.5 million in the third quarter.

Iacocca realized that Chrysler was close to bankruptcy. It could borrow no more money from the private sector; federal backing for borrowing was imperative. Chrysler was obliged to ask for federal aid, for a loan guarantee to stave off bankruptcy, an imminent exigence.

A loan guarantee is not a gift, but a promise by the government to make good on the cash supplied by private banks and other sources to a company if the firm cannot repay the money. The borrower pays interest to both the United States Treasury and the banks.
In rhetorical discourse, the audience to be addressed "consists only of those persons who are capable of being influenced by discourse and of being mediators of change." In Chrysler's case, this audience was officially the Subcommittee on Economic Stabilization of the Committee on Banking, Finance and Urban Stabilization of the Committee on Banking, Finance and Urban Affairs in Congress. But there was another rhetorical audience; that was the American public who, through television and press, followed the dramatic hearings daily.

In November 1979, a few weeks after the hearings began, *Time* magazine's automotive writer remarked:

> Few issues in American public life raise more passion than federal aid for corporations. The Administration's proposed $1.5 billion Chrysler loan guarantee will add fuel to the old debate about whether public aid is proper for ailing private enterprises.6

The writer continued by pointing out that the rather distant relationship between private enterprise and the government, thought to be an American tradition, was closer to myth than reality.

When the nation was founded, the idea of mercantilism, which held that government should foster exports, was the prevailing economic philosophy. The second act passed by the first Congress in 1789 granted aid to builders and operators of ships. During the 19th century, Washington helped companies build canals and railroads. The Depression-inspired Reconstruction
Finance Corporation, before it was abolished in 1957, made loans totaling more than $13 billion to firms that banks would not finance.7

Granting the $1.5 billion loan guarantee to Chrysler would make the congressional committee "mediators of change." Acting the part of a "mediator of change" was of great concern to the congressional committee, not only in terms of their constituencies, but what the granting of this enormous sum meant in terms of political theory.

"Every rhetorical situation contains a set of constraints," writes Bitzer, "made up of persons, events . . . because they have the power to constrain decision and action needed to modify the exigence." Bitzer defines constraints as beliefs, attitudes, documents, traditions, images, interests, and motives.

One of the most difficult constraints about the Chrysler federal loan guarantee proposal was the extent to which it threatened the free enterprise system which cannot survive without the heat of competition and the constant fear of failure. Secretary of the Treasury Miller contended that the Chrysler crisis was a "unique situation," and that it would cost less to help the firm than to let it fail. The great fear was that other big companies, even those badly managed, might come running to Washington for a handout every time they were in serious financial trouble. Precedent posed a problem.
Even though the $1.5 billion loan guarantee was granted to Chrysler in December 1979, and signed by President Jimmy Carter in January 1980, by the following April the company was still having great difficulty in meeting federal requirements to use the money. In an effort to keep federal loan guarantees on an ad hoc basis, the government demanded from Chrysler that before they could use the $1.5 billion, the corporation must come up with a $2 billion aid package from the private sector. What that federal demand meant was that Chrysler's pledge of "$650 million from more than 175 banks and insurance companies, most of them already creditors of the ailing automaker," had to be combined with concessions from Chrysler employees, suppliers and the states and cities in which the company did business. One Wall Street auto analyst said that Chrysler needed "about $100 million a month in outside money in order to operate." In April 1980, a few months after the bailout was granted, many experts gave Chrysler six weeks to live before the fatal blow of bankruptcy. 8

This chapter examines how the exigence was resolved, and how certain constraints were overcome, chiefly by Iacocca's fitting response.

High drama was the label some observers put on the Congressional hearings for the government loan guarantee to Chrysler. Although the hearings were before the appropriate subcommittee and committee, the real rhetorical audience was
the public, involved and informed through newspaper articles, on television news and in press conferences where Iacocca gave peppery answers to routine reporter questions. Honing his marketing skills for the toughest test of his lifetime, Lee Iacocca instinctively knew how to take the threads of various fantasy themes and weave them into the whole fabric of a rhetorical vision of redemption—a vision the general public could relate to: a second chance—a new beginning—redemption for the underdog.

Through the credibility of his 32 successful years in the automotive business, Lee Iacocca was able to inspire belief in his ability to redeem a sinking company. Whether the group was a Congressional committee or the public, Iacocca's persuasive rhetoric tapped into the "dynamic process of group fantasizing. . . . Group fantasizing correlates with individual fantasizing and extrapolates to speaker-audience fantasizing and to the dream merchants of the mass media." 9

The "dream merchants of the mass media" were an important factor in recognizing the appeal of the "story" of Chrysler's redemption and dramatizing it.

Iacocca was able to find the commonality between his cause and the public, expressing the individual psychodynamics of the participants. A dramatic theme might relate to the repressed psychological problems of some or all of the members and thus pull them into participation. 10
As Bitzer points out, an exigence must have the potential of being changed by a fitting response; as Bormann writes:

Indeed, improvising in a spontaneous group dramatization is a powerful force for attitude change. Dramas also imply motives and by chaining into the fantasy the members gain motivations. Since some of the characters in the fantasies are good people doing laudable things, the group collectively identifies in symbolic terms proper codes of conduct and the characteristics which make people credible message sources.

Iacocca's appeal to Congress, and to the nation, to help save Chrysler was based on "composite dramas"—the tradition and history of the company, the validity of his new management, the need for competition in the industry, and most of all, the preservation of thousands of jobs—which chained out and were worked into the mass media and, in turn,

spread out across larger publics . . . to sustain the members' sense of community, to impel them strongly to action . . . and to provide them with a social reality filled with heroes, villains, emotions, and attitudes.

The hero roles were clear: Lee Iacocca and Chrysler Corporation; the villains: bankers and suppliers who would lend no more money, as well as Representative Richard Kelly and Senator William Proxmire who were adamantly opposed to the loan guarantee. And somewhere between villains and attitudes was the inexorable problem of government
intervention in private enterprise, a very difficult and strenuously contested issue.

All these "composite dramas which catch up large groups of people in a symbolic reality" constitute a "rhetorical vision." Bormann adds that these "fantasy dramas of a successful persuasive campaign chain out in public audiences to form a rhetorical vision," that strikes a common psychodynamic chord," that helps "create a common symbolic reality filled with heroes and villains."13

Iacocca's rhetorical technique consisted, in part, of the ability to articulate for Everyman the threat of failure, individual or corporate:

The relationship between a rhetorical vision and a specific fantasy theme within a message explains why so much 'persuasive' communication simply repeats what the audience already knows . . . many strikingly successful speakers have not created dissonances but have rather given voice to what the listener already knows or feels and accepts.14

Bormann explains the power of the coping function which a rhetorical vision provides to its participants:

Against the panorama of large events and seemingly unchangeable forces of society at large or of nature, the individual often feels lost and hopeless. One coping mechanism is to dream an individual fantasy which provides a sense of meaning and significance for the individual. . . .15

And it was to this "panorama of large events" and "forces of society" that Iacocca addressed himself, and gave a "sense of meaning and significance" to individual effort.
Lee Iacocca's persuasive powers were brought to the test before the Subcommittee on Economic Stabilization of the Committee on Banking, Finance, and Urban Affairs in the House of Representative, the Ninety-Sixth Congress. The principal hearings were held October 18, 19, 23, 24, 26, and 30 as well as November 1, 7, and 13, 1979. Although the bill was numbered 5805, it was entitled "Chrysler Corporation Loan Guarantee Act of 1979."

Iacocca described the rhetorical logistics of his Capitol Hill appearance:

The Senate and House Hearing rooms are designed to intimidate the witness. The committee members sit at a semicircular table a couple of feet above the floor, looking down. The witness is at a real psychological disadvantage, because he's always looking up at the questioner.

I was referred to as the witness, but that's a misnomer. In reality, I was the defendant. Hour after hour I had to sit in the box and go on trial before Congress and the press for all of Chrysler's so-called sins of management---both real and imagined.

In a series of charges ranging from failure to anticipate the small car market as Japan had, lack of insight regarding the overthrow of the government in Iran, to not being prepared for the fuel allocation system designed by the Department of Energy, various committee members began their fingerpointing at Chrysler. Iacocca
mused bitterly, "We were scolded... we were lectured.  
... We were excoriated... we had sinned. We had 
missed the market, and we deserved to be punished."17

And punished we were. During the congressional 
hearings, we were held up before the entire world as living examples of everything that was wrong with American industry. We were humiliated on the editorial pages for not having the decency to give up and die gracefully. We were the object of scorn by the nation's cartoonists, who couldn't wait to paint us into the grave. Our wives and kids were the butt of jokes in shopping malls and schools. It was a far higher price to pay than just closing the doors and walking away. It was personal. It was pointed. And it was painful.18

Bitzer's theory indicates that the "invited utterance participates naturally in the situation" and "is in many instances necessary to the completion of situational activity, and by means of its participation with situation obtains its meaning and its rhetorical character."19 Bitzer also speaks of "artistic rhetoric" which he describes as a "specific union" of persons, events, and relations and an exigence which amounts to an "imperative stimulus." The speaker is obliged to speak, "to respond appropriately to the situation" by supplying information, praising or blaming.20

Iacocca spoke persuasively in translating Aristotelian "inartistic proofs" of statistics into human values. An example of his "artistic rhetoric," given early in the hearing, shows how he made his appeal:
I speak for the hundreds of thousands of people whose livelihood depends on Chrysler remaining in business. It is that simple. Our one hundred forty thousand employees and their dependents, our forty-seven hundred dealers and their one hundred fifty thousand employees who sell and service our products, our nineteen thousand suppliers, and the two hundred fifty thousand people on their payrolls, and, of course, the families and dependents of all those constituents. The awesome total is well over two million Americans who would be severely impacted by the failure of this company.21

I am deeply aware of my grave responsibility to that huge population. I just hope I can represent them well here today in the process, and in the process express their grave concern for their own futures as I address your subcommittee.22

Iacocca resorted to clarification through definition of terms when he remarked:

But first let me clarify my purpose here. It is not, as was reported in most of the media, to ask for a handout. It is to request a helping hand. A handout, at least according to Webster, means anything you get for nothing, for free. We do not want anything for free. We are asking for the guarantee of a loan, every last dollar of which will be repaid.23

In dealing with a critical audience, the subcommittee, who would make or fail to make the desired response, Iacocca added, "So much for the semantics."

I will be quite frank with this subcommittee. I would rather not be here at all. I happen to be a strong advocate of the free enterprise system. I grew up in it and I slugged my way through it for over 33 years.24

Then, Iacocca coaxed from the subcommittee a common viewpoint:
I am sure you share my conviction that in the long run the answers to our problems are going to be found not in the Halls of Congress but in the marketplace.25

As he approached the possibility of asking for a government loan, he recalled: "What I had to say wasn't what people wanted to hear. It was so much easier to find a scapegoat."26

Later in the hearings, Iacocca resorted to a persuasive dramatization of statistics designed to show congressmen the consequences to their constituencies if the loan guarantee were not granted and Chrysler went bankrupt. Making shrewd use of "artistic rhetoric," he said:

In order to make our case, we had to force the congressmen to think of the loan guarantee in real human terms instead of ideology. We delivered to each representative a computer printout of all the suppliers and dealers in his district who did business with us. We outlined exactly what the consequences for that district would be if Chrysler went under. As I recall, there were only 2 districts out of the entire 535 that had no suppliers or Chrysler dealers. This list, which made our problems hit home, had a tremendous effect.27

Part of the challenge, then, of the Chrysler exigence, as presented by Iacocca to Congress, posed more problems than the granting of a "significant modification." The careers of many Congressmen were on the line in the form of jobs and dollars to their constituencies. And jobs and
dollars were symbols which voters expressed inexorably by their votes.

The Significant Modification

The "potential exigence" of bankruptcy at Chrysler Corporation could be rhetorically remedied "if discourse, introduced into the situation," could "constrain human decision or action as to bring about the significant modification" of the crisis. The "significant modification" Iacocca sought was a government-backed loan for $1.2 billion dollars. Besieged by multiple bankruptcies—not only monetary, but grim management confusion and faltering company morale—Lee Iacocca struggled with the controlling exigence of imminent failure as the organizing principle of Chrysler's exigence. But it was the "audience to be addressed and the change to be effected" that loomed as Iacocca's supreme challenge.

As activist musicians Arlo Guthrie and Pete Seeger wrote and sang in "I'm Changing My Name to Chrysler":

If you're a corporate titanic and your failure is gigantic
Down to congress there's a safety net for you.

"But," as Bitzer writes, "the rhetorical audience must be capable of serving as mediator of the change which the discourse functions to produce." And Congressmen had many qualms and questions. Charges and countercharges were
exchanged between the "corporate titanic" Iacocca and Congressmen not too willing to toss out a "safety net" of more than a billion for a failure so gigantic.

Besides exigence and audience, every rhetorical situation contains a set of constraints made up of persons, events, objects, and relations which are parts of the situation because they have the power to constrain decision and action needed to modify the exigence. ^2

Standard sources of constraint include beliefs, attitudes, documents, facts, traditions, images, interests, motives and the like; and when the orator enters the situation, his discourse not only harnesses constraints given by the situation but provides additional important constraints— for example his personal character, his logical proofs, and his style. 33

The "power of situation" constrained and shaped the "fitting response" Iacocca had to present.

One of Iacocca's most persuasive points at the Congressional hearings was the fact that if Chrysler went under, not only would America have to import more small cars because of the energy crisis at that time, but that America would also be exporting jobs. Wasn't one of the chief ingredients of free enterprise, the quality of competition? Then, "competition was something the loan guarantees stood to provide a lot more of." 34

"While the battle was being fought in and out of Congress, I was busy doing everything I could to raise money... I felt like a rug merchant who needed to raise some cash in a hurry. And my spirits were low because
wherever I turned, there was nobody saying: 'Give it a go, you can make it.'"35

During what turned out to be "a national debate" over the future of Chrysler, Iacocca wrote that New York Times columnist Tom Wicker suggested that Chrysler should scrap making cars and build mass transit vehicles; that, of course, would cost far more than the proposed loan guarantee. But it was the Wall Street Journal, Iacocca pointed out, that really carried on a vendetta against Chrysler. In an editorial heading, the slug read: "Laetrile for Chrysler." In the middle of the Congressional furor, "after we had borrowed only part of what we were entitled to under law, the Journal ran an editorial suggesting that Chrysler be 'put out of its misery.' It was their now-famous "Let Them Die With Dignity' editorial. . . ."36

As a sales and marketing expert, Iacocca showed a sharp awareness of the power of words.

A big part of the problem was the language being used to describe our situation. 'Bailout' is a colorful metaphor. It conjures up images of a leaky boat foundering in rough seas. It implies that the crew was inadequate. At least 'bailout' is a better phrase than 'handout,' which was also being tossed around.37

In an effort to allay the myth that Chrysler was a monolithic corporation that didn't merit help, Iacocca's strategy was to explain that Chrysler was "really an amalgam of little guys. We're an assembly company. We have eleven
thousand suppliers and four thousand dealers. Almost all of these people are small-businessmen, not fat cats."\textsuperscript{38}

And then, in a direct quotation from the hearings, Iacocca added, "We needed a helping hand---not a handout."\textsuperscript{39}

One of the most difficult constraints Lee Iacocca had to deal with in the Congressional hearings was opposition to the principle of government aid to a large corporation. The possibility caused a furor in political and business circles. Governmental intervention in the free enterprise system was viewed with dismay, although federal loans had been extended many times previously.

Representative Stewart McKinney of Connecticut cited governmental precedents.

The Federal Government has been involved in a number of specialized efforts in past years, with favorable results. The most frequently cited are the Lockheed loan guarantee and the New York City loan programs. During the Depression, the Reconstruction Finance Corporation guaranteed more than $40 billion in loans to private companies without losing a loan, and returned a fat profit to the U.S. Treasury. In fact, there are a large number of Federal guarantee programs in existence. . . . 160 such programs with more than $200 billion of guaranteed or insured loans outstanding.\textsuperscript{40}

The personal question that still gives me difficulty is should we give assistance to Chrysler or any other corporation.\textsuperscript{41}

But it was Representative Richard Kelly of Florida who brought the most caustic challenge to the rhetorical
situation of government aid. Citing a history of bad management in Chrysler Corporation, Kelly contended that the business had made itself non-competitive through poor decision-making. Quoting a number of statistics as proof, Kelly reasoned that Chrysler did not read the market accurately and continued to make large cars instead of fuel efficient cars. Kelly referred to the Council for a Competitive Economy and the National Association of Manufacturers who opposed aid for Chrysler. The most basic reason: "the Federal government's willingness to underwrite Chrysler's failure spells doom for the private enterprise economic system."42

The congressman quoted economist Milton Friedman: "The private enterprise economic system is not only a profit system, but a 'profit and loss system.'"43 Kelly complained that "we redirect capital away from the successful 'growth' sectors and into sectors which need to be propped up." This "prevents the natural marketing forces from channeling demand to stronger enterprises, which would serve to strengthen the overall economy."44

Alluding to the pollution regulations the government imposed on car manufacture, and the main point that then president John Riccardo of Chrysler cited as Chrysler's chief problem, Kelly remarked: "I favor removing, to the extent practicable, the regulations of which Chrysler complains. But, that is no reason to finance failure. All
of the other auto manufacturers are subject to the same regulations.\textsuperscript{45}

Closing charges by Kelly at the first subcommittee hearing emphasized that

The argument which has been stressed in support of the bail-out is that if government fails to aid Chrysler the effect on employment and on the GNP would be disastrous. I caution my colleagues on the subcommittee to be wary of projections which fail to accurately reflect redistribution of the Chrysler market and the redistribution of labor along with it and through other market demands. If this government does nothing, Chrysler will still be with us tomorrow. But, it will be leaner, smarter and a much more effective competitor in the free-market economy. By giving into demands for aid, we deny capital to firms which could use it more efficiently, we jeopardize jobs in healthier segments of the economy and we run the risk that political judgments will replace market judgments in our economy.\textsuperscript{46}

So vital an issue was the prospect of a corporate bailout, the chairman of the subcommittee remarked, that not only was the entire subcommittee present, but the full committee was in attendance, an unusual occurrence in Congress.

When he stepped before the entire committee and the television lights in response to "Mr. Iacocca, will you please proceed, sir," Lee Iacocca faced the most challenging crisis of his career. His cup overflowed with a complicated exigence, multiple audiences, and precedent-bound constraints.
The Plan For Survival

An important part of Iacocca's fitting response to the Congressional subcommittee included his plan for survival as a reply to the Chrysler exigence. Making a basic rhetorical appeal, he asked for belief in the company because of the fact that internal management problems were being remedied, that excessive, marginal assets had been jettisoned, that a new, highly competitive line of models was underway, chiefly fuel efficient models.

With greater detail, he supported his argument on behalf of Chrysler by citing the great tradition of the corporation and its contributions to the country; he mentioned the precedent-breaking idea of concessions from labor during the crisis; he pleaded with the committee not to abandon Chrysler to bankruptcy, a sure and quick means of corporation death. Iacocca appealed to the self-interest of his listeners, asking if they would purchase a car from a bankrupt company. His final argument was an extensive use of statistics as evidence to show that the government loan guarantee would cost the government far less than the social services required for the thousands who would be unemployed.

Some members of the subcommittee and the Treasury pressured Iacocca to declare bankruptcy instead of asking for the federal loan guarantee. Iacocca brought his most persuasive powers to bear on this extremely important point in his plan for Chrysler survival. He asserted that if
Chrysler declared bankruptcy, public confidence in buying Chrysler products would be completely destroyed. Pointing out the ripple effect of a Chrysler bankruptcy, Iacocca used Data Resources, Inc. figures which showed a short-term loss of 500,000 to 600,000 jobs, but a long-term loss of 200,000 to 300,000 jobs nationwide. In Detroit, the unemployment figure was estimated at 170,000; in St. Louis, at 22,900 jobs. Iacocca dramatized this evidence by asserting that

The effects on unemployment insurance benefits would be, they estimate, $1 billion in the first year alone. . . . the effect on pension guarantees would probably be close to another $1 billion. Data Resources estimates the total cost of the Nation's taxpayers of over $10 billion in the first year alone if Chrysler fails.

Appealing to those who saw the government loan as setting a dangerous precedent, Iacocca pointed out through statistics the history of numerous instances of federal aid. He framed the key question of government intervention in the private sector by saying

But we should not argue precedent. We should argue what is the cause, what is the need, and how does the future stack up?

Keenly aware of the immediacy of the exigence, Iacocca used expressions such as "quickly" and "as soon as possible" in pressing for government aid to come in time. Ironically, although he had just pleaded for the committee to disregard
precedence, at least in terms of government loans, it was the very concept of precedence on which he ended his plea:

Mr. Chairman, Chrysler Corporation is a good company. It is worth saving. I am dedicated, as is my new management team, to turning it around. It has a strong future. I am proud to be associated with it and I think it is deserving of some assistance from the Congress of the United States.50

The Constraints of Disbelief

Congressman Richard Kelly of Florida, indicating a disdain and contempt for Iacocca's plea for federal aid, showed a certain rudeness of manner and language:

I think that you are trying to put a con on us. . . . I think you have made your presentation in the open market, and the people out there, acting on a voluntary basis, spending their money and knowing what they are doing—not people of the quality you see sitting up here, but the kings of industry that really know how to make the thing hum—they have told you to get lost.

And they told you to get lost because, in the same conditions in which they survived, you could not make it. So now you are coming here, and you are expecting this bunch of "dummies" here on this subcommittee to fall for this baloney about human suffering.51

Citing that auto workers under the United Auto Workers contract made about twice the amount other production workers in America made, Kelly continued:

I would like to . . . take a shot at spreading around a little of that "suffering," and I think if your people were interested in saving their
company and this country, then they would do what they have to do to compete.

This is all just pure bunk. . . . the United States, its Government, and its people, have got to come to understand that they have got to do what they have to do to compete or they are not going to survive.52

"Explaining" to Iacocca that the "real world doesn't work" any other way, Kelly asked:

How come it is that the people out there in the real world don't believe a word you said so that they will loan you their money voluntarily? . . . 53

Pressing harder on the union wage issue, Kelly asked Iacocca if he had proposed that union workers take a 25 percent cut "so they wouldn't be getting paid 100 percent more than the rest of the production people in the United States," or did Iacocca "Mickey-Mouse around" about maintaining current wage levels? Kelly repeated his challenge to Iacocca's credibility: Why should the government believe you and the people give you their money if private enterprise doesn't believe you enough to give you money?54

Another constraint loomed. Congressman Ron Paul of Texas pointed out that the very fact that the U.S. government was in the loan guarantee business contributed greatly to national inflation. "It has been these guarantees, and credit increases that we need to subsidize these loans that cause inflation and cause the distortion in the economy and the dislocation."55 Congressmen Paul,
in addition to expressing the constraints of government's contribution to inflation, cast further doubt on the politics of the government and the free enterprise system:

I think this is part of the American tragedy, that the head of a corporation is coming in the name of free enterprise and participating in this fraud---this fraud that we must perpetuate the problems and the mistakes that we have made in the past.

Your one excuse is, that you can do something if you get this help and assistance. . . . In the next breath, you define quite clearly the devastating effect of regulations and how much it costs you, and say this is out of your realm. Well, I would beg to differ. It is an economic problem and a political problem. It is a political problem for you to get a bailout. It is a political problem to change the excessive cost of regulations.56

In reply to these constraints about government loans, deregulation, political and economic problems, Iacocca, in what appeared to be a rather impassioned plea, ended this part of the subcommittee hearing with a sense of urgency:

We are the microcosm of all the things that are wrong.

Energy is impacting on us. Regulation is impacting on us. Runaway inflation on commodities is impacting on us. Imports are impacting on us. We are a big city company with a lot of black employment. This is impacting on us. I don't know where to turn. I ran it all out for this subcommittee. I have done the best I can. I am committed to it. I am going to turn it around one way or the other. I need your assistance now, and I need a vote of confidence. What else can I tell you?57
In a sentence that summed up the extreme sense of exigence Lee Iacocca believed described the immediacy of Chrysler's desperation, he said: "The string has run out on us." 58

Bankruptcy or bailout? This was a constant constraint that kept reappearing at the hearings. The subcommittee, balking at an outright loan, discussed once more the possibility of bankruptcy as a solution to Chrysler's problems. In reply to probes on this topic, Iacocca said: "There is just no tomorrow. It doesn't matter what the bankruptcy referee does. They call it reorganization, Chapter XI. That is a euphemism up on Wall Street or in the law offices. The guy out there who is plunking out $8,000 for the average car today, he says it is bankruptcy."

Adding that that was a "marketing view," Iacocca later remarked: "I don't think this is an option at all. . . . There is no way for a consumer-oriented company to sell an $8,000 car while it is going through bankruptcy proceedings." 59 Iacocca's final effort on the subject included his response to Representative Norman D'Amours of the subcommittee: "Congressman, I am not a lawyer; I am a marketing man. And I would bet my life on the fact that if we go to bankruptcy . . . we will go into liquidation immediately. That is my humble opinion. And I am not a lawyer." 60
Switching the issue from government regulations and
government loans to the victims of those regulations, Kelly
asked Iacocca about an earlier remark that Iacocca had made
concerning the one dollar a year salary he would receive
from Chrysler. Chiding Iacocca's credibility stance and
quipping that "that is pretty close to being motherhood."
Kelly pressed for further details about stock options,
stock, contracts and other dimensions of Iacocca's financial
arrangement with Chrysler. The thrust of Kelly's
implication was that Iacocca had made himself look more
virtuous than perhaps he was. Iacocca replied:

... if you are saying am I trying to be a
martyr, no. I am trying to set an example for the
very people you are talking about. I can talk
with some fervor in front of the union guy who
said, what did you give up, Iacocca, lately? And
I say, what the hell did you give up? He is
making $30,000; I am making a buck.

That is why I did it. It wasn't symbolism. I
want everybody to share equally.

As everyone knew, Iacocca was a millionaire before he
was fired at Ford. A few lines later in this dialogue with
Kelly, Iacocca said that his salary and other stock
arrangements were a deferral until the company made a
profit; then he would "get it all back."

Lee Iacocca was forced to rely on his famous
credibility as a successful executive when Congressman
Norman Shumway of the subcommittee said that he saw nothing
in the present Chrysler situation that suggested the
corporation was on the way to profitability. "I do not see
the kind of answers that would really convince me that this
is the case," asserted Shumway. To this charge, Iacocca
cited his convincing credentials:

Congressman, I couldn't convince you. You will
have to take my word for it. I put together a new
team at Chrysler. They are the best automobile
men in the United States, in my opinion. We have
got a track record. We have been through all
that. We know how to build small cars. We have been at it for 30 years and we're saying we can do
it. That is all we can say to you. You go on
track records, you go on experience. We offer
ours up to you. That is all I can say.

To another subcommittee member who suggested that the
loan guarantee represented too much of a risk for the
government, Iacocca replied:

It is a risk, Congressman, you will have to
assess. There is one answer to all that: We
liquidate and throw 600,000 people out and let the
chips fall where they may. There is no way to
answer as a businessman the risks you are bringing
up. I am as worried as you are. But our doomsday
scenario, if you add 15 percent interest rates
going to 20 percent, and you have oil lines. . . .
the next line will be you are standing in line in
the snow rather than in the spring of the year,
which will make it terrible.64

To his allusion to the great unemployment a Chrysler
failure would cause, Iacocca added that he could not
possibly plan against every risk: "The sky is falling.
. . . we have got to get our whole act together."65

. . . guarantee us a loan, and we have a better
than 50-50 chance. In this high risk business of
ours, that is terrific odds that we will be black in 1981 and make it.66

Congressman D'Amours quizzed Iacocca about his 50-50 statistics: "Those 50-50 odds don't come from Jimmy the Greek. They come from somebody's hip pocket, right?"

Iacocca handed the responsibility back to him by replying that if the Chrysler bailout risks were too high, then the government could look forward to paying out at least $10 billion in unemployment insurance.67

Lee Iacocca's assignment at this juncture of the Congressional hearings was to persuade the government and the public that the Chrysler bailout package was a "vision" far beyond the simple idea of sustaining a failing corporation.

It was do-or-die, the free-enterprise predilections of the pillars of American government, industry, and labor be damned. Chrysler, driven by one of the most flamboyantly aggressive executives in American industry, would go after the last thing such a freewheeler ever would want or need---68

---and that, of course, was a $1.2 billion loan guarantee, in spite of tremendous opposition. Using his flamboyance and his aggression, Iacocca presented his vision dramatically.

A rhetorical vision is constructed from fantasy themes that chain out in face to face interacting groups, in speaker-audience transactions, in viewers of television broadcasts, in listeners to radio programs, and in all the diverse settings
Bormann continues by explaining that "dramatizations which catch on . . . are worked into public speeches and into the mass media." The expressions of these themes "spread out across larger publics, serve to sustain the members' sense of community, to impel them strongly to action (which raises the question of motivation), and to provide them with a social reality..."70

As if he were describing Iacocca himself, Bormann writes:

When a person appropriates a rhetorical vision, he gains with the supporting dramas constraining forces which impel him to adopt a lifestyle and to take certain action.71

And the halls of Congress were filled with "constraining forces," not the least of which, at the moment, was the upcoming union negotiation.

**Altering A Reality**

One of the most significant realities altered by the Chrysler hearings was a new vision of the relationship between management and labor.

Douglas Fraser, then president to the United Auto Workers, testified before the subcommittee; Iacocca believed that Fraser "constituted a lobby effort of his own... He knew what would happen to his people if Chrysler failed.
And he knew we weren't crying wolf." Fraser testified brilliantly," recalled Iacocca. "He talked vividly about the cost in human lives and suffering. . . . Fraser was a tireless and effective lobbyist. . . ." Like Iacocca, Fraser used what Bitzer calls "artistic rhetoric" as the labor leader presented statistics in terms of human values.

In Fraser's actual appeal, his credibility was assumed; his pathos was powerful. As part of his opening statement, he said, "I can't believe that Congress can turn its back on the Chrysler workers and their families, or on the people who work in the parts supplier industry and their families." Reiterating what Iacocca had said about 200,000 jobs disappearing permanently, and 600,000 jobs that would disappear in the short run, Fraser also mentioned the 40,000 Chrysler retirees whose entire benefit program would be lost if Chrysler folded, "benefits worth 23 million a year," Fraser pointed out. Adding the health provisions to that, Fraser said that the "total cost to retirees of a Chrysler failure would be $390 million in lost benefits." And those people, I suppose, would then go and look for Government social services. . . . if the Chrysler Corp. did not survive, the Government would have this awesome burden of paying off $1 billion in pension reinsurance. When you think of the costs of unemployment compensation and food stamps and social services and the loss of income tax coming into the Federal
Treasury, it is not a question of whether or not Congress can afford to come to the aid of the Chrysler Corp., but whether or not it can afford not to.  

Now I am not here as an apologist for the Chrysler Corp. They have made many mistakes over the years. They have made mistakes in product planning. I don't believe that they have put enough revenue, when they had the revenue, into new plants and equipment.  

Pointing out that to meet the Federal regulations of fuel efficiency, Chrysler, as well as the other auto companies, was obliged to lighten the weight of a new fuel efficient car by 700 to 1,000 pounds. "And when you do that, you have to redesign the car. You have to reengineer the car. And that does not cost large amounts of money; it costs massive amounts of money. Not in the millions or hundreds of millions. You are talking billions of dollars."  

Continuing, Fraser posed one of the key questions:  

I think there is a compelling case for Federal help for the Chrysler Corp. The philosophical question has been raised—Do loan guarantees violate the principle of a free enterprise system? 

I am not willing to sacrifice 125,000 Chrysler workers and their families on the altar of the free enterprise system.  

Congressman Kelly, in constant opposition, ridiculed Fraser and suggested that Fraser's presentation was a "con job." Alluding to a statement from Fraser's prepared statement and verbal remarks, Kelly cited the human "suffering," "frustration," "family pressure," and "despair"
which Fraser described if Chrysler should fail. Then, challenged Kelly, Fraser introduced the racial issue, since a high percent of assembly line workers were black. Calling all of this "nonsense," Kelly asserted: "This is a con job. This is not the way you approach people wanting to borrow money that are going to give it to you on a voluntary basis. You are trying to rip off the people in this country."

"And what this Congress is getting ready to do, if they help you, is buy votes." Kelly repeated his earlier complaint that the auto workers were the most highly paid production workers in America, and that he could see no reason why they should be. To this, Fraser answered

Now, in terms of the UAW wrecking the economy, Congressman, we don't have any apologies to make for the rates of pay that we negotiate nor the fringe benefits. We are able to do this because historically---obviously, we now have an exception to the rule in Chrysler---but historically we have been dealing with a wealthy industry.

Fraser then cited figures showing that productivity in the auto industry increased each year, "So we are able to do what we do in the auto industry because the auto workers are extremely productive." Fraser, justifying the union wages, added that "we realize that in order to share in the larger economic pie, you first have to bake that economic pie. We are willing always to bake that larger economic pie so that we can have a larger slice."
Congressman S. William Green of New York posed again one of the central questions that haunted the subcommittee and the Banking committee: If the government props up Chrysler with aid, will Ford, in a year or two, want help also? Or GM? "Isn't that a real worry if we start going down this path with Chrysler?" Green asked. Fraser, showing flexibility and negotiating skill, replied, "I think, Congressman, one of the things I have learned as I have gone along in life, you should never be rigid or doctrinaire in these things. You really have to look at each case on a case-to-case basis." 86

Representative James Blanchard ended this part of the second day of the hearings, which featured Douglas Fraser, by saying that he had not heard anyone else tear down the corporation "other than a statement yesterday to Mr. Iacocca by Judge Kelly that Chrysler was a loser and that Mr. Iacocca was a loser." 87

Political constraints posed another hurdle in the UAW endorsement of the Chrysler loan guarantee and in President Carter's approval of the plan. Up to this point, the fall of 1979 when the hearings were held, the UAW had refused to endorse Carter for renomination in 1980. Fraser, as was well known, advocated the nomination of Senator Kennedy. Carter sent word indirectly that if Fraser wanted those jobs held for his union members at Chrysler, then the UAW
president knew who to endorse for the nomination in 1980.88

More political rhetoric was added when Treasury Secretary William Miller, a strong Carter advocate, made a number of strategic allusions during various meetings for Carter's support.89

Miller insisted that Chrysler had not made enough sacrifices; Miller also wanted Chrysler either to merge with another auto company, even though the corporation had no offers for obvious reasons, or Miller hoped Chrysler would be acquired by an oil company.

Fraser countered that loan guarantees were the only real option the government commanded. Miller insisted that the government should not be in a hurry to provide aid. . . . 'We had a hell of an argument,' Fraser recalled. Miller was saying to me, 'You see that pear in the center of the table? You know, sometimes you shouldn't eat fruit unless it's ripe.' I said, 'On the other hand, if you let it lay there long enough, pretty soon it'll get rotten, it'll be all full of maggots. That's where we are now.' Miller was putting the pressure on us.90

Despite the arguments in metaphor, another tradition was broken. Fraser's nomination for a seat on Chrysler's board of directors was promised for May 1980. To this unusual and unprecedented appointment, Fraser remarked to reporters at Chrysler headquarters:

I sincerely believe the voice of the worker will be heard in the highest echelons of the Chrysler Corporation and the concerns of workers will be expressed there. This represents a tremendous
step forward in labor-management relations in the United States. We think it gives workers an effective voice in their own destiny.91

These actions make clear that the UAW has met its responsibilities in the broad effort to save Chrysler workers' jobs and restore the company to stability. The burden now rests on the Congress to act promptly to assist Chrysler, as well as on the banks, supplier companies, and others with a stake in this matter.92

House majority leader Jim Wright labeled the renegotiation "one of the most unselfish, public-spirited, forward-looking acts in the history of the American labor movement. If Chrysler's own workers are willing to make such concession, surely the Congress cannot do less."93

In what would prove to be a preview of how streamlined Chrysler management was to become under Lee Iacocca, Fraser, in a bulletin to persuade workers to take a pay cut, wrote:

For the first time in 42 years, we were faced with the stark reality that we would not be able to obtain the full auto pattern for Chrysler workers immediately. Instead, our principal goal had to be the preservation of Chrysler workers' jobs. Without the jobs, the best benefits in the world are meaningless. The corporation is in desperate straits. It is going to lose more than $1 billion in 1979—more than any other company has ever lost in the history of North America. It has been forced to sell off most of its overseas operations and some of its domestic operations. It has had to close plants. It has been severely downgraded by the credit rating services, to the point where it can no longer obtain credit. It has been forced to open its books to the U.S. government and its executives have been grilled by congressional committees. There is no way your bargaining committee would allow any deviation from the pattern if we were not convinced that Chrysler was 'on the brink' and that concessions
are necessary to save the jobs of Chrysler workers.\footnote{94}

In bringing to a close Fraser's testimony in the hearing, Representative Blanchard of Michigan, who had drafted the loan guarantee bill, asked Fraser what the union president thought about the credibility of Chrysler's new leadership: "I realize you are not a Chrysler executive and you are not party to the decisions that they make, but do you have confidence in the new leadership there? Specifically, do you have confidence in Mr. Iacocca?"

Fraser replied that he knew Iacocca slightly from Iacocca's years at Ford, had met him a few times, and had had many telephone conversations with him, and that "my frank assessment is that I wish he had got there about 5 years ago. I think if there is hope for survival---and I think there is at Chrysler---that that hope rests in his leadership. I can visualize, as this company recovers and prospers, we are going to have many, many battles. He is a pretty tough battler." Fraser added, "I have confidence in his ability, his drive, and his seeming dedication to the proposition that Chrysler is going to recover."\footnote{95}

A Vision of Power

During the October Congressional hearings, Fortune magazine, in their October 22, 1979 issue, published a criticism of "Chrysler's Pie-in-the-Sky Plan for Survival."
For Lee A. Iacocca, Chrysler's new c.e.o. and Detroit's premier marketing wizard, convincing businessmen . . . and the rest of a skeptical nation that ailing Chrysler deserves federal aid is the toughest sell of his career.96

Fortune contended that Iacocca was determined, despite overwhelming obstacles, to "reap the glory that was denied him once when Henry Ford refused to name him as his successor."97 The driving force in this personal and corporate drama was Iacocca's vision of power: this "vision gave to every social and political action a sense of importance."98 Iacocca's ability to "dramatize a theme" and "hit a common psychodynamic chord" as Bormann describes fantasy and rhetorical vision, was performed with considerable flair. As an individual and as a corporate head, he was able to move the imagination of his various receivers. As a marketing genius, Iacocca was able to fire the imagination of small and large groups:

The group grows excited, involved, more dramas chain out to create a common symbolic reality. . . . When they need to develop a message for specific context they often find themselves shaping the drama that excited them in their original discussions into suitable form for a different public. . . . thus the rhetorical vision is propagated to a larger public until a rhetorical movement emerges.99

Describing Iacocca as "firmly in the driver's seat as chairman, after John Riccardo abruptly retired in September 1979," Fortune said, "Iacocca has no intention of
relinquishing Chrysler's membership in the Big Three Club of Detroit, even if it means begging at Uncle Sam's door."

Some of the questions *Fortune* posed were questions that were also raised at the congressional hearings:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Question</th>
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<td>Is the government somehow responsible for the company's flirtation with bankruptcy, as Chrysler contends?</td>
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<td>If the government spurns the company's pleas, will Chrysler really be forced to liquidate?</td>
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<td>If, on the other hand, Chrysler gets the money, will it be able to execute the stunning turnaround that its recovery plan presumes?</td>
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"Iacocca, haggling like a used-car salesman," wrote Peter Bohr in *Fortune* would, even though possibly denied the full amount he asked the government for, remain unchanging in his strategy for Chrysler's recovery. Citing the fact that Chrysler had sold between $400 and $500 million in assets, plus trimming its operating expenses some $600 million, "the plan makes clear that the company will stick fast to Iacocca's vision of remaining a full-line rival to G.M. and Ford." Seeing a vision clearly through a glass darkly, clouded with price tags of millions and billions must have required extraordinary stamina and conviction. For example, *Fortune* mentioned that "the company expects to lose a colossal $1 billion this year [1979], and a still staggering $500 million next year, before earning $400 million in 1981."
The critical rhetoric of *Fortune* pointed out an ironic note: that "the regulatory blues, long a favorite refrain of the auto industry, certainly sound haunting, but the situation is not quite as bad as Iacocca would have one believe." The fuel economy rules were cited by Iacocca as only one of the causes of Chrysler's demise. But, added, writer Peter Bohr, "He seems to ignore the fact that fuel economy has become perhaps the most marketable feature a new car can offer. Had the fuel-economy standards not gone into effect last year, the auto companies, especially Chrysler, might have been even less prepared..." Fuel economy, exacting emissions and safety standards were really "expenditures as mandates of the marketplace rather than the government," according to *Fortune*.

According to one analyst, "Chrysler's main problem has been its product, both the type of product and quality of it." Year after year, the analyst pointed out, Chrysler would copy G.M.'s successful styles, but two or three years too late. Insufficient research and development was slighted also. Underspending on capital reinvestment needs in the corporation became one of Iacocca's major speech themes a few years later.

Bohr described the "final argument" of Chrysler in its plea for "federal welfare," as he called it. "Chrysler raises a chilling specter---the complete shutdown of the company."
Fortune believed that Iacocca was advancing a worst-case scenario, that Chrysler's argument was "self-serving and overdrawn: the dire consequences envisioned fit Shakespearean tragedy better than reality."  

Fortune's writer Peter Bohr suggested that if Iacocca could not find sufficient cash on his own that Chrysler could reorganize under the newly revised federal bankruptcy code, an idea Iacocca said was absolutely unfeasible. The corporation was certain to fail if they declared bankruptcy, Iacocca had testified earlier.

In a final criticism, Fortune advised that

Fundamentally, then, Iacocca's apocalyptic talk of liquidation is essentially a bargaining tactic rather than realistic assessment of the options open to the company. His fear of reorganization may be that it would force Chrysler to hive off some of its parts, leaving it a fragment of its former self. That would shatter his dream of reigning over an enterprise capable of competing across the board with G.M. and Ford.

Credibility Campaign

Sustaining public confidence in the purchase of a Chrysler product posed a dramatic challenge, even to the reputed marketing genius of Lee Iacocca. During the Congressional hearings, which became, in a way, public hearings, the conflict between bailout and bankruptcy for Chrysler Corporation held serious sales problems. Vowing
Repeatedly, that bankruptcy was not a viable solution, Iacocca summoned all his marketing magic.

Having taken over the chairmanship of Chrysler in November 1979, after his 1978 firing by Henry Ford, Iacocca recruited a number of former executives from Ford Motor Company, as well as enticing some automotive experts out of retirement. Also recruited was Ford Motor Company's advertising agency, Kenyon and Eckhardt, with whom Iacocca had worked for many years when he was at Ford.

While the hearings were going on, our sales dropped off dramatically. Nobody wanted to buy a car from a company that was about to go belly up. The percentage of consumers who were willing merely to consider a Chrysler product plunged overnight from 30 percent to 13 percent.109

The hearings took place in October and November of 1979; the advertising agency switch was in March of that year. Time magazine wrote that Iacocca repeatedly denied that he has been pirating former colleagues from Ford. "In fact, he makes his denials with all the sincere innocence of Captain Kidd. Last week, smiling broadly, he announced that the Kenyon & Eckhardt ad agency was quitting Ford after 34 years to take on the $120 million Chrysler account. It was the largest account switch in U.S. history."110 As the New York Times wrote, Iacocca will be "putting all his advertising eggs in the basket of a longtime friend, Leo-Arthur Kelmenson, president of the agency."111

Under an unusual arrangement, the ad agency people worked
inside Chrysler on marketing and planning committees. Part of this program was an effort to improve a high priority item on the Chrysler agenda, improved dealer relations. In speaking of the dealer-advertising effort, Kelmenson remarked in the New York Times interview: "Knowing Iacocca and his incredible strength with the dealers—he has this great capacity to talk in terms and in the vernacular that the dealers understand—I would think that that would be No.1 in order or priorities." When the Times writer asked Kelmenson why Kenyon & Eckhardt took the Chrysler account—wasn't an assured $75 million from Ford better than a dubious $120 million account from Chrysler—Kelmenson replied:

Once in a lifetime you reach for the rings. We really believe in what we're doing. I believe not only will that company be saved, but it will be a major contributor to the American economy. . . . I think we're doing something. Somebody else can be safe and secure. That's not why I'm in this business. Neither are the people who work here.

Iacocca'a campaign, as he analyzes it in his Autobiography was based on two factors: one, to reassure the public about Chrysler's future, that they had no intention of going out of business, and second, that Chrysler was meeting the market needs of American consumers.

It was a credibility campaign, par excellence.

Instead of conventional type advertising, Kenyon and Eckhardt used a series of editorials explaining the
corporation's viewpoint about loan guarantees as well as presenting long-range company plans. "Instead of promoting our products, we were promoting the company and our future ... it was time to advertise our cause instead of our cars." 114

The double-page editorial ads were designed to anticipate what the man on the street was thinking about Chrysler, his doubts, his questions.

An example of one ad was its bold headline reflecting consumer's questions: "Would Americans be better off without Chrysler?"

Other ads posed questions such as

- Doesn't Chrysler have more problems than anyone can solve?
- Is Chrysler management strong enough to turn the company around?
- Did Chrysler wait too long to downsize?
- Does Chrysler have a future?

Each ad carried Lee A. Iacocca's signature to indicate a new reign. As Iacocca analyzed the credibility approach, he wrote that he hoped the consumer would think of the chief executive of the company as saying, "I'm here, I'm real, and I'm responsible for this company. And to show that I mean it, I'm signing on the dotted line." 115

The new ad campaign, designed to build public confidence in the company and its future, took on a special aura of credibility with the head of Chrysler Corporation as its most articulate spokesman. What made the campaign even
more unusual was its launching, in the heat of the Congressional hearings over bailout or bankruptcy, proclaiming Chrysler's cause instead of its cars.

Constraints Of Disagreement

Battling for its corporate life produced more sophisticated rhetorical strategies; in addition to the unique advertising campaign on television plus the printed editorial-type ads, Chrysler turned to a professional public relations source.

A young Louisiana lawyer and lobbyist, considered one of the best in his profession in Washington D.C., was chosen by Wendell Larsen, Chrysler's vice-president of public affairs: Tommy Boggs, son of Hale and Lindy Boggs, a partner in the law firm of Patton, Boggs & Blow, was considered one of Washington's most talented lobbyists. His access and influence were "probably unmatched among professional representatives."

Lawyer-lobbyist Boggs knew how to deal with the political machinations of Washington. President Carter, in a cabinet shake-up, replaced Secretary of the Treasury William Blumenthal who was sympathetic to Chrysler's plight, with George Miller. Secretary Miller was, for a long period of time, against tax and loan aid to Chrysler. Wendell Larsen of Chrysler's public affairs and master-mind of the
Washington campaign described his final plea to Miller for an advance tax refund for Chrysler:

Miller just blew us right out of the water. He said, "No, forget it, no way, absolutely not, get it out of your head." He was pretty firm. He said, "If you're going to get anything, it's going to be loan guarantees, and even then you'll only get seven hundred and fifty million dollars, and it's going to be tough to pass, and even if it passes, it's going to be so awful you'll wish you'd never brought the whole thing up, and I hate you guys and wish you'd go away." He was vicious.117

But lobbyist Tommy Boggs interpreted Miller's final killing of the tax option as "a subtle change: In saying to us, 'Forget this solution,' the government was coming along with the idea that there should be some solution."118

At the same meeting in which he axed the tax approach, Miller "tentatively endorsed the goal of some kind of action to keep Chrysler in business." This was no small success."119 At last, Chrysler had established a new audience, however tenuous, and "had installed itself on the public agenda."120

However, on a private agenda at a summer meeting in 1979, Treasury Secretary Miller criticized Iacocca for what Miller viewed as extravagant expenditures in styling, considering the company was on the verge of bankruptcy. Philip Loomis, a senior Treasury analyst, recalled that
was determined not to let this foolish extension into the luxury car market proceed. After letting the secretary go on for a while without saying anything, Iacocca suddenly jerked his glasses from his face and rapped them loudly against the table. He then made it clear——without being abusive but with clearly evident emotion——that it was his understanding it was the job of Chrysler's president to run the car company and the job of the secretary of the Treasury to run the government's side; if the secretary didn't mind, he would decide which car programs were warranted. Miller gritted his teeth and went back to the question of loan guarantees. 121

The puzzling task of forming a response to the public by Chrysler Corporation loomed throughout most of 1979. Immense amounts of rhetoric poured forth as to the causes, extent, import of the crisis. Not only did Chrysler commission its own analysis in an effort to persuade Congress for aid, but other government agencies drew up reports. Many of these were designed by consulting firms, with no coordination between researchers about objectives or measurements, different studies and different starting points, different causes of the problems. These studies probably didn't change anyone's mind who held strong views on the subject, but "they did shape public understanding of what was at stake. . . . Statistics cobbled up at consulting firms in Boston and New York would be cited, denounced, compared, and angrily flung one against the other in the media and on the floors of the House and the Senate." 122

Professional persuasion was highly apparent as lobbyist Tommy Boggs "employed a dozen lawyers working full time to
'sell the company on a one-to-one basis' to every legislator." In an interview with Boggs, writer Robert Reich wrote that Boggs believed Chrysler Chairman Riccardo, who had hired Iacocca, was a liability; Boggs also believed that Chrysler's trouble was rooted in an excess of marginal overseas investment and a weak product line. Riccardo solved both those problems, but it hadn't sunk in yet by the time he had to take it to Washington. And he was somewhat of an anathema on the Hill because he's been up there for a year and a half preaching about how the stupid regulations were killing his company. He had irritated a lot of members. He had a credibility problem on the Hill. But it remained for Wendell Larsen, former vice-president of public affairs for Chrysler, to set in motion Burke's theory of dramatism and his concept of order. Since order is closely related to hierarchy, a "dramatistic analysis of order incorporates the principles of "sacrifice," "victimage," and "scapegoatism." As Kenneth Burke contends "the sacrificial principle is intrinsic in the nature of order." And the idea of victimage as reflected in the idea of scapegoat is typical of the "human congregation." As Burke writes: 1. If order, then guilt; if guilt, then need for redemption; but any such 'payment' is victimage. 2. If action, then drama; if drama, then conflict; if conflict, then victimage.
Chrysler's vice-president of public affairs recalled:

Congress wanted to hang somebody. They wanted an expression of guilt; they wanted contrition and punishment. So eventually, to get the loan guarantees, we did something that was very dramatic and very cynical: We helped John Riccardo see that the company would better served if he resigned. Don Riegle came down from Detroit . . . sat down across the desk from him, looking him in the eye, and told him that it would be tough to get anything through Congress with him still in charge. He told him face-to-face, and that took guts; the two have been friends ever since.

So that Sunday, I went to Riccardo's house, and we worked it out. I'd written my master's thesis in English literature on scapegoat symbolism in Faulkner; that came in handy. I told John that Congress and the country weren't going to act until we'd staged a morality play, and I told him how he'd been cast: John Riccardo takes on himself all the sins of commission and omission, we drive him into the woods, and the company is pure again. At the end of the day we drafted his resignation statement. The script was for Riccardo to fall on his sword—a ritual ending, for Congress's benefit, to the dumb management that he had got Chrysler in such trouble. The next morning we issued the statement, and Riccardo was gone. A few days later when Iacocca testified again before Congress, we'd changed the story. Instead of going through the reasons we were in trouble, he basically said, 'We're guilty, we're sorry, the bad guys are all gone now, and we'll never do it again. Now please just give us the money.'

All the symbolism of Burke's dramatism had been enacted—-all but redemption. But that was in offing.

Not the least of the constraints of disagreement was the avowed conservative viewpoint of Senator Proxmire. In keeping with his economic image, the Chairman of the Senate Banking Committee was unalterably opposed to the Chrysler
bailout. The New York Times on October 21, 1979, published an excerpt from his book The Fleecing of America. With crisp dispatch, Proxmire pointed to the salient issues:

Who's to blame when a corporation gets in trouble?
What are the alternatives to a Chrysler bailout?
What are the stakes for the millions of taxpayers a Senator is supposed to be representing? 127

Citing that the factor of failure, "or rather the possibility of failure, is a linchpin of the free-enterprise system," Proxmire wrote that if you can't come up with the right management and the capital, "you're out." That prospect, he continued, has managed to keep the Government out of the "save-everybody business to date," but he mentioned the Lockheed governmental loan of $250 million as a very dangerous precedent, a precedent he was against.

Chrysler has argued, Proxmire remarked, that the company has only two options: bailout or bankruptcy, and that bankruptcy was a certain disaster. Iacocca had earlier underlined this point in demonstrating that public confidence in the product was the key to Chrysler's forthcoming success. But Proxmire saw the economics from a different vantage point. He dealt primarily with the fact that under the new bankruptcy laws the organization would still produce, still keep going. What he overlooked, according to Iacocca's argument, was that the public would not buy a car from a corporation undergoing bankruptcy; public faith would be destroyed, the corporation's
credibility for future servicing and trade-in value was too questionable.

Proxmire did not acknowledge the huge employment figures pedaled in the studies submitted by Chrysler Corporation, nor did he mention what the government would have to underwrite in social services needed by Chrysler unemployed, if the corporation went out of business.

Contending that Chrysler's bankruptcy would not severely affect the auto industry, Proxmire continued with his argument that even if Chrysler disappeared from the market, competition from G.M., Ford, and Japan would solve car buyer's problems and needs sufficiently. He cited this important point:

As to Chrysler's complaints about the fuel-efficiency requirement, the company tries to argue it both ways. On the one hand, Chrysler says it has been fairly damaged by the cost of meeting the ruling. On the other hand, the company says that its development of the fuel-efficient Omni and Horizon make it more competitive with the other companies. Yet it seems unlikely that Chrysler would have developed these high mileage cars in the absence of those painful Government requirements.128

"My conclusion:" added Proxmire, "A decision by the Congress to bail out Chrysler would be a disaster for American business, for the American economy and for the American taxpayer. It would be a signal to line up at the trough."129 A bailout for Chrysler would simply "open the floodgates; the United States would have put into effect
a sure-fire system for insuring incompetence and unwanted products and services, achieved at colossal new cost to the Federal Government."130

Proxmire, in his final review of the situation, lamented the careful orchestration which Chrysler presented in its plea for a loan guarantee. "Chrysler can't lose. The fix is in. Just about all the power, all the clout, all the money, all the influence is on one side."131 The Senate Banking Committee chairman elaborated that "The President of the United States is for Chrysler, and so is the entire executive branch, including Treasury, Commerce, Budget, Labor, Defense, the works." He added, "The banks are for Chrysler." The six states where Chrysler had factories with thousands of workers, plus the states' 12 Senators comprised a political force.

Then there are the lobbyists Chrysler has hired, the best money can buy—and that is very, very good. Thomas Boggs of the law firm Patton, Boggs and Blow is working with the Democrats, and William Timmons, another prominent Washington lobbyist and former Nixon and Ford White House aide, is working with the Republicans. According to a Wall Street Journal article last September, 'Chrysler's current efforts . . . dwarf what it has done before.' . . . Mr. Boggs says, 'at least a dozen of the 60 or so attorneys in his law firm [were] working full time to sell the company on a one-to-one basis to every member of Congress.'132

Bitterly, Proxmire added, "Such lobbyists know how to appeal to liberals and conservatives. They are winners and
they're going to win this one big because they have everything going for them."

The last line of Proxmire's article, entered in the Congressional Record for the October 30, 1979 hearing was: "The Chrysler bailout can't lose. But the American taxpayer can---and will."134.

After the October 30 Congressional hearing at which time Proxmire blasted the Chrysler appeal for a loan guarantee, the Wall Street Journal, December 3, 1979, published a reply by Iacocca in the "Manager's Journal" column entitled "Chrysler Deserves Federal Help."

The Chrysler chairman began by saying that Proxmire based his whole argument on the usually sound principle "that the marketplace should be the final judge of success or failure, and if the government started routinely bailing out failing firms, there would be a breakdown of market discipline."135 "On paper," Iacocca wrote, "this is a terrific principle, a free enterprise standard." He continued:

But what happens when the real life cause of a company's trouble is not market discipline? What happens when one company, because of the industry it's in, because of its size, because of its relative position, is driven into the ground by the unequal effects of government regulation?

It wasn't management mistakes---(although there were some), or superior competition in the marketplace (there was some of that, too), that brought the company to its knees. It was the relentless hammer of more and more government regulation.136
Iacocca acknowledged that government regulations should not be abolished, that "regulations may be the most effective way to finance social objectives, when it becomes clear that car buyers, on their own, are unwilling to pay for socially desirable features" such as clean air, better fuel economy.

Tackling the bankruptcy issue once more, Iacocca viewed Proxmire's suggestion as an unsuitable alternative to the loan Chrysler sought.

Those who offer glib assurance about the desirability of bankruptcy proceedings ignore one basic fact. Chrysler's problem is not one of paying off creditors. It is the need to raise massive amount of new capital to meet federal law. We cannot raise that capital while going through bankruptcy.137

Liquidation of Chrysler "is absolutely not acceptable," wrote Iacocca. Again citing the huge amounts of money it would cost the government in social services for hundreds of thousands of unemployed workers, plus his strong point that because of regulations, Chrysler was forced to compress into five years, 15 to 20 years of engineering research, Lee Iacocca brought his final point to the fore:

The issue we have raised by going to the government is not free enterprise. We are not asking for a handout. We are asking government to guarantee loans that we intend to pay back in full. We really don't think a loan guarantee to Chrysler is in any sense a reward for failure, nor would it lead to a breakdown in market discipline.
Rather, the central and critical issue at stake in Chrysler's survival is people and jobs. If government wants . . . to prevent increased welfare dependence and government spending, if it wants to offset an $8 billion imbalance of automotive trade with Japan, let it approve Chrysler's legitimate and amply precedented request for temporary assistance.138

Once again, Iacocca's ability to persuade through his translation of abstracts into human terms was clear. His final retort to Proxmire's sarcastic allusion to Chrysler's lobbying "clout" was to reply that the real "clout" lay in over 600,000 American workers who have a "direct interest in our success, combined with the responsible action of a Congress that places the national interest above high-sounding but misapplied doctrine."139

Summing up his collision with Proxmire, Iacocca wrote in his Autobiography that Proxmire, although his "chief nemesis" as chairman of the Senate Banking Committee, "was tough, but he was always straightforward and fair." Proxmire told Chrysler Corporation from the beginning that he was totally opposed to loan guarantees, but "he was scrupulous in letting us make our case." Proxmire promised only to vote against us---not to do any lobbying."140

Iacocca mentioned that at the end of his lengthy testimony and interrogation by Proxmire, "Senator Proxmire paid me a high compliment. 'As you know, I am opposed to your request. But I have rarely heard a more eloquent, intelligent, well-informed witness than you have been today."
You did a brilliant job and we thank you. We are in your debt.' I thought: 'No, no, you've got it backwards. We're trying to get in your debt!'\textsuperscript{141}

A number of critics in Congress were displeased with what was viewed as Iacocca's "hucksterism," but the Tuesday before Christmas 1979, the Chrysler loan guarantee bill passed by House 271 to 136; in the Senate, by 53 to 44.\textsuperscript{142}

At a Chrysler press conference following the vote, many observers acknowledged that Iacocca "had charmed the reluctant dragon as no one before in American history."\textsuperscript{143}

**Summary**

**The Impact of the Rhetorical Situation On Iacocca's Rhetorical Vision**

It was in the crucible of crisis that all the fantasy themes which shaped Iacocca's rhetorical vision were tested, re-evaluated, re-defined, and proved. Fantasy themes of hard work, family values, love of country and appreciation of unlimited opportunity, education, using adversity positively—all of these were questioned in creating a fitting response to a critical, uneasy audience, namely Congress, and the American public who viewed the Chrysler drama daily as it unfolded in the media.

The initial attainment of the rhetorical vision---Iacocca's rapid ascension to the top of Ford Motor
Company—was supported, in part, by the loving inspiration of his imaginative father, generous mentors in the Ford corporation, the loyalty of his wife, and the sheer exuberance of youth on the way to a goal.

After Iacocca was toppled at Ford, with public humiliation, all the values, all the fantasy themes of the larger rhetorical vision of success in America, lay in disarray. The exigence threatening the rhetorical vision brought these fantasy themes into sharp focus, weighed them again, and found basic American concepts such as hard work, the value of an education, the use of "creative anger," the idea of unlimited opportunity—still valid. Iacocca's re-affirmation of these values, of these fantasy themes, helped form his fitting response to a private and public audience.

Doubtless, the key reality which was altered was, for the moment, a working answer to the question: To what extent does a federal loan guarantee violate the principle of free enterprise? Through the persuasive rhetoric of Lee Iacocca, Douglas Fraser of the United Auto Workers, and many unnamed participants, a new relationship between government, private enterprise, and labor evolved. And while the innovation of a labor leader appointed to the corporate board of directors received accolades, the historic use of the many for the advancement of the few took place, as Chrysler union workers suffered substantial wage cuts and
fewer worker benefits to help save the corporation. To be sure, they continued working in the face of a serious recession, but the workers did not reap the millions in benefits allotted to those at the top of the pyramid.

The rhetorical situation brought a re-affirmation, a rebirth of Iacocca's rhetorical vision. As in life, it is death and the idea of death that give keenness and value to life; the threat of corporate death, successfully overcome, gave a new meaning and depth to Lee Iacocca's rhetorical vision: that the American Dream really has no frontiers, either of failure or success, and that an individual can go as far as his heart and mind will take him.
Notes

1 Bitzer, 1.
2 Bitzer, 3.
3 Bitzer, 4.
4 Bitzer, 4.
5 Bitzer, 7.
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CHAPTER V

The Rhetoric of Lee Iacocca:
The Message: Speech Themes

Lee Iacocca is a man with a very strong rhetorical vision about himself, about his work, and about his country. The most frequently heard themes in Iacocca's speeches are the patriotic theme, in which he mentions his own child-of-immigrants background, plus the contribution of immigrants to the greatness of America; patriotism and opportunity; work, education and family values; and economic basics which include reducing the national debt, improving our foreign trade deficit, and setting goals for a workable industrial policy.

This study uses representative speeches which demonstrate Iacocca's speech themes: the Commencement Exercises for the University of Michigan, June 4, 1983; an address to the National Press Club, Washington, D.C., July 13, 1983; a speech delivered at the Poor Richard Club in Philadelphia, January 17, 1985; a speech at the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People Fund Dinner, April 28, 1985; an address to the Lehigh Chamber of Commerce in Allentown, Pennsylvania on May 24, 1985; and a
speech at the "Year of Liberty" Gala Concert in Washington, D.C., October 28, 1985.

Lee Iacocca's Rhetorical Vision

Concomitant with Burke's identification and consubstantiality and Aristotle's ethos or credibility, is the application of Bormann's "Fantasy and Rhetorical Vision" to the experiences of Iacocca.

Bormann writes that a "rhetorical vision" is composed of

the composite dramas which catch up large groups of people in a symbolic reality. . . . Just as fantasy themes chain out in the group to create a unique group culture, so do the fantasy dramas of a successful persuasive campaign chain out in public audiences to form a rhetorical vision.¹

A rhetorical vision is constructed from fantasy themes that chain out in face-to-face interacting groups, in speaker-audience transactions, in viewers of television broadcasts, in listeners to radio programs, and in all the diverse settings for public and intimate communication in a society.²

Bormann's contention is that these dramatizations "sustain members' sense of community," and "provide them with a social reality filled with heroes, villains, emotions, and attitudes."³ The ability of a speaker to dramatize an idea, to hit "a common psychodynamic chord," may "create a common symbolic reality filled with heroes and villains."⁴ Identification, consubstantiality, and credibility are effective means a speaker can use to strike that "common psychodynamic
chord" and establish a sustaining rhetorical vision, because, writes Bormann

The relationship between a rhetorical vision and a specific fantasy theme within a message explains why so much "persuasive" communication simply repeats what the audience already knows. . . . many strikingly successful speakers have not created dissonances but have rather given voice to what the listener already knows or feels or accepts.\(^5\)

In suggesting how the critic trying to make a fantasy theme analysis might proceed, Bormann suggests that the critic "look for patterns of characterizations . . . of dramatic situations and actions. . . . The critic must then creatively reconstruct the rhetorical vision from the fantasy chains. . . ."\(^6\) Bormann then proposes a series of applicable questions, some of which are:

- What acts are performed by the ultimate legitimatizer?
- What meanings are inherent in the dramas?
- What emotional evocations dominate the dramas?
- What motives are embedded in the vision?
- How artistic the use of language?
- How rich the total panorama of the vision?\(^7\)

In speaking of the rhetorical vision of a movement or an organization, Bormann writes that in a "very important way meanings are in messages," that when members of a group chain out a fantasy theme, they come from their meeting with each other "with new meanings, that may not have existed before. . . . members have appropriated them by sharing in their creation through public dramatization."\(^8\) The
emotions associated with meanings are, also, partly in the message as well as in the people participating in a fantasy chain.

The rhetorical vision provides its participants with an emotional evocation. Thus, the critical analysis of emotional appeals is illuminated by the process of fantasy theme analysis.9

According to Bormann's theory, "motives are in the messages," and that a rhetorical vision is the catalyst for the drive to action. Bormann writes: "People who generate, legitimatize and participate in a public fantasy are 'powerfully impelled to action' by that process.10

Of an individual playing a lead role in the dramatic action, Bormann notes:

When an actor assumes a role in a drama he gains with the part constraining forces which impel him to do and to say certain things. When a person appropriates a rhetorical vision he gains with the supporting dramas constraining forces which impel him to adopt a life style and to take certain action.11

Lee Iacocca, through his speeches, has indicated clearly an energetic belief in his rhetorical vision. Supporting dramas, as Bormann describes them, might well be a variation of Bitzer's rhetorical situation. Certainly, Iacocca's odyssey has been filled with drama, composite dramas, to which he has responded with such personal persuasiveness that he has, indeed, struck a "common psychodynamic chord" among Americans.
Fantasy Themes and the Rhetorical Vision

Fantasy themes that shaped a rhetorical vision for Lee Iacocca later became speech themes, themes of the immigrant in America, of patriotism, of work, education and family values, and economic. But perhaps the most pervasive of all the fantasy themes, running like a consistent pattern through the fabric of his experience, is the theme of the immigrant in America.

The Theme of the Immigrant in America. Shaping the rhetorical vision of living the American Dream, was the fantasy theme of the immigrant and the limitless possibilities to be found in the new land. Lee Iacocca's parents were immigrants from Italy. His father, a risk-taking, imaginative entrepreneur, made and lost several modest fortunes, and endowed his son with the dream of achieving success. Driven in part by the sting of bigotry, as the child of immigrants, young Iacocca was compelled to excel. Nicola Iacocca managed a good education for his son Lee; whatever he could not endow the boy with materially, he made up for in embuing him with a sustaining vision of rising to the top in business.

The fantasy theme of the immigrant plays an emotion-arousing part in the speech themes of Iacocca; it is closely connected with another theme, hard work, and, also
with the concept of *patriotism*, which Iacocca mentions repeatedly in his speeches.

Representative of his expression of the immigrant theme are selections from his address in 1985 to the Lehigh Chamber of Commerce in Allentown, Pennsylvania, where Iacocca grew up. Iacocca spoke of the birth of the industrial middle class which arose in America, because of steel mills and auto factories and other industries. He mentioned that "for the first time anywhere, in the history of mankind, a man in a factory could earn enough to buy his own home, and a car, and to save enough to send his kids to college." That didn't happen in Europe, which is why so many of them "stuffed everything they could into an old suitcase and came here."

Seventeen million of them came through Ellis Island alone. . . . They gave up everything to chase a *dream* across the ocean. And do you know what? For most of them that dream came true. Of course they broke their backs to make it come true. They sacrificed, and they worked hard, and they built an industrial America that was the wonder of the world.

. . . it was hard work that became reality.

In his speech at the "Year of Liberty" Gala Concert delivered in Washington in 1985, Iacocca developed the same emotional theme, using more formal, more poetic language than in the Chamber of Commerce address. In describing the liberty the immigrants found in America, he said
it wasn't the liberty of streets paved with gold. It was the liberty of the shovel, the freedom of the pushcart, and the dignity of the plow . . . It was the freedom to work hard, and to keep what that hard work built.  

In giving his listeners a picture of what the immigrants contributed to America's progress, he mentioned that

They were ambitious in a time when ambition was not a dirty word.
They were hardworking in a time when hard work was not something to be avoided.
They were builders.
They built a country.

They did it with pain, and sweat and tears. 

He concluded his speech on an emotive note about the importance of the immigrants' contribution:

America isn't great because of its natural resources. It's great because those people dug into the ground, often under terrible conditions, and took the resources out. America isn't great because of miles of open prairies. It's great because people broke their backs to bust the sod and grow food. America isn't great because of a few industrial geniuses. It's great because of the thousands of others who fired the furnaces and forged the metal. And America isn't great because of a piece of paper called a Constitution. It's great because people fought, and bled, and sometimes died to fulfill its promise of a just and humane society.

The fantasy theme of the immigrant in America, with its abundant opportunity, was an early and lifelong part of Lee Iacocca's larger rhetorical vision. Of this "gift" from his father, Iacocca wrote:
. . . America was the land of freedom—the freedom to become anything you wanted to be, if you wanted it bad enough and were willing to work for it. This was the single lesson my father gave to his family. I hope I have done as well with my own.  

The Theme of Patriotism. Lee Iacocca has always brought a particular blend of ethos and pathos to the fantasy theme of patriotism in his speeches. In many speeches, this topic is used to make an emotional conclusion; often Iacocca will ask for an intensifying spirit of patriotism from his audience, indicating a desire to stir them, to awaken them to the values and possibilities of America.

In addition to the first-hand experience growing up in the home of immigrant parents, Iacocca also wants to enliven a love of country in his listeners. Often, he does this with humor, language, and example. His speech delivered to the Poor Richard Club in Philadelphia in 1985 is an example.

While the greater part of this speech deals with Iacocca's version of economics, the speech is representative in its patriotic flavor.

Of all the people in history, Ben Franklin is the man I'd most like to meet. I'd like to have a drink with him. (I'd have a scotch, and he'd have his glass of port.)

He'd probably start by saying "Iacocca, that's a hell of a name. I never heard a name like that before." And I'd tell him all about the big waves of immigrants that came over. (I'd probably talk a lot about that because since I got involved
Lauding Franklin's intellectual versatility, Iacocca mentioned that Franklin wouldn't be at all surprised that America had sent a man to the moon; nor would many other modern accomplishments amaze Franklin, Iacocca said.

He was always looking ahead. He understood what people can do when they pull together. He knew about human potential. He had vision.

I suspect that if Franklin had just one question for me after all this time, it would be "are you still free?"

After condemning the national trade deficit, the budget deficit, and the national energy policy, or the lack of it, Iacocca remarked

You know, I really don't know if I'd like to have that drink with Benjamin Franklin, after all. I don't know what I'd say when he asked me that big question---"Are you still free?"

Citing the legacy of independence left us by Franklin and his colleagues, Iacocca also mentioned that "they left us a tremendous challenge---to preserve that independence."

One of the emotional themes which Iacocca almost always mentions in conjunction with patriotism is the idea of the sacrifices made on behalf of today's Americans.

As you know, I've been involved with the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island restoration. . . . Since my parents were among the 17 million people who
came through Ellis Island, I thought I understood what that experience was all about.

But in the past two and one half years, I've come to appreciate more than ever just what those two symbols in New York Harbor stand for.

... if you reduce all those experiences into just two words, they would be "hope" and "sacrifice."

The Statue, of course, was the symbol of hope to all those immigrants who passed by it. And Ellis Island was the symbol of sacrifice. It was the reality they met when the adventure was over.

... they picked up the challenge that Ben Franklin and the others left. They broke their backs to build something strong and lasting for themselves and their families.

In his speech at the "Year of Liberty" Gala Concert in Washington, D.C. in 1985, Iacocca struck a note of consubstantiality, when he mentioned donations for the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island project.

You know, the last couple of years lots of school kids have been sending me their nickels and dimes for the Lady. Some even send me their lunch money, or a few bucks from selling cupcakes or washing cars. And a man once dropped into my office and gave me a million dollars to help shine her up. (As he said—"just a simple tribute to my immigrant mother.")

In his Lehigh Chamber of Commerce speech he provided a humorous slant on his patriotic project.

... I just got a check for the Statue in the mail a couple of days ago from a lady who is 86 years old. It was for $10,000. And she's not the kind of person to throw her money away because she asked me to send her a free copy of my book. She said she never bought a book in her life—-that
she always gets them from the library. But she said the waiting list was over two months long.

Well, she's got her priorities straight. She'll write you a letter and give you ten grand for Miss Liberty, but she's not going to waste 15 or 20 bucks to read about some Italian kid's ups and downs in the car business. All I can say is God bless her.24

And to his Allentown audience, he offered the same arrangement; if anyone wanted to donate $10,000 to the cause, "I'll send you a free book, too. No waiting at the library---I'll even sign it."25 Detroit's most famous salesman always asks for action in his speeches.

The Themes of Work, Education, and Family Values.
Representative of these fantasy themes as they form a larger rhetorical vision was Iacocca's Allentown speech in 1985. In many of his speeches, especially the graduation addresses, these themes are expanded.

In reminiscing about his childhood in Allentown, Iacocca remarked to his hometown audience:

The important things you take away from your childhood are values that you rely on for the rest of your life. And I picked up all of mine right here---values, like hard work, and responsibility, and sacrifice, and helping each other out when the going got tough.26

Alluding to his early years of education in Allentown, he said he hoped the schools were "still teaching kids the basics, like how to read and write, and how to think and how
to communicate And I hope the community still gives those kids the same values it gave me.

I think about those basic values a lot these days, because I look at the world around me, and I see some things that are really out of whack with the values I learned while I was growing up.27

Iacocca added that "College and graduate school were easy because I left Allentown High School with all the basic tools."

Concluding the speech, Iacocca said that "after 39 years you begin to ask yourself what you can put back. I guess you start to feel the debt you owe."

But by then most of the people you really owe are gone. You could never pay them enough anyway---your parents, your teachers, all the people who gave you your values, and who sometimes kicked you in the rear end to be sure you understood them.

In a final allusion to what the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island symbolize---the future---Iacocca ended by saying that "By remembering some of the simple values that made this country great, we can keep it great."28

And for all the values that his parents, his teachers, and Allentown in general gave him as he grew up, Iacocca concluded on this emotional note: "... nobody ever had a better start than I got here in Allentown. So whenever I come back, there's more than just nostalgia and friendship---there's a real sense of gratitude."29
Iacocca demonstrated unmistakable consubstantiality with his audience, dramatized by his believability and his emotional appeal.

The Theme of Economic Basics. One of Iacocca's most popular appeals to the public is his analysis and proposed solutions to economic problems in America, however oversimplified his presentation may be. As Iacocca sees it, the central economic issues, which he discusses in almost all his speeches, are (1) the need to remedy the national debt; (2) the necessity of balancing our trade deficit, and (3) the importance of a re-industrialization policy.

"Obscene federal deficits" is Iacocca's label for the national debt. He relates this often abstract concept to the daily financial realities of his audience. As a child growing up during the Depression in Allentown, he understood well, and so did his Allentown audience, that "all of us were scared to death of being in debt." "One of the values I remember from here is that you pay your bills on time. And you don't live beyond your means. Pretty basic, pretty simple stuff."30

In Iacocca's speech to the NAACP Freedom Fund Dinner, he described America as "the world's greatest industrial giant slowly strangling . . . under a dungheap of public debt." In an effort to bring trillions and billions into practical focus for his audience, Iacocca, using comparison, mentioned that during the first term of Reagan's
administration, the deficit was more than the total deficit of our first 206 years as a nation. Adding that the interest of the deficit is almost 150 billion dollars a year, he said

And that doesn't buy a single thing. It doesn't pave a single road . . . It doesn't educate a single kid . . . it doesn't hire a single policeman . . . or fuel a single space shot. It doesn't feed or house a single poor family.

To the graduates of the University of Michigan in 1983, Iacocca related the severely depressed job market of that year to "a national economy that's gasping under the load of huge budget deficits," adding that the students had endured an economic picture which included double-digit unemployment, gas lines, factories operating at half-speed, rocketing inflation, and a deep recession. A blighted national economy meant that those graduates were facing the bleakest job market since World War II. Iacocca assured the young people that this really wasn't an economic test as much as it was a test of the human spirit.

Iacocca touched upon themes of hard work and sacrifice in the face of hardship, ideas with which the graduates, their parents, and the speaker were deeply familiar. From someone who had also suffered, the advice was authentic.

The trade deficit is one of Iacocca's most recurring themes; it is an issue which has grown more threatening and
dangerous to the auto industry, as well as other industries, since Iacocca first began to talk about it.

His chief rhetorical strategy in dealing with this theme is to interpret the statistics in terms of jobs and in terms of future generations. Jobs and children are both topics his audiences can identify with emotionally.

To the University of Michigan audience, whose graduates in 1983 would suffer from half as many job opportunities as previous graduating classes, Iacocca advocated fair trade to replace free trade; then the labor and production market would be much healthier. He cited a number of statistics, but the most emotional set of figures with which every listener in Ann Arbor could identify was that in 1983 "Japan's unemployment rate was 2.8 while America's was 10.5." 35

Japanese car imports drive away with a larger share of the American market every year; to this dilemma, Iacocca offered a four-point plan, complaining bitterly in his Michigan address that Japan imported 20,000 American cars while they shipped 2 million cars to America from Japan; that the Japanese industry enjoyed government protection of subsidies and import quotas; that cheaper labor gave the Japanese a higher profit in Japan, but a lower selling price in America. 36

Two years later, in his NAACP speech, he cited that the U.S. "had a $3 billion deficit with Japan in 1980, and a $37
billion deficit last year (1984). Or a swing of $40 billion dollars."

But the real measure of that trade deficit isn't money or numbers—it's jobs... jobs... jobs! 37

The second part of the trade deficit theme is what this problem is contributing to future generations. Iacocca's speech title to the Poor Richard Club in Philadelphia suggests clearly his condemnation of the problem: "We're Taxing Our Own Kids: Are We Becoming A Colony Again?"

Defining a colony as "a settlement which ships raw goods to a mother country, which then ships back finished products, Iacocca, in his address to the NAACP in Detroit, launched into a bitter attack:

Earlier this year I was in Philadelphia for a big birthday party they have every year for Ben Franklin. I gave a speech, and I pointed out that America's largest exports to Japan were corn, soybeans and coal—all foodstuffs and raw materials. And Japan's top exports to us were cars, trucks and video recorders—all high-value manufactured goods.

I told them we're becoming a colony again. Just like we were in Ben Franklin's time. Except we've adopted a new "mother country" this time around. It's not England, it's Japan! 38

To this contention, Iacocca brought short but vital statistics with which his listeners could identify:

In 1980, 1.2 million Americans had jobs because of our trade surplus. In 1984, 3.7 million
of them were on the street because of our trade deficit.  

Iacocca has the ability to take a complicated economic situation, simplify it in a speech for his audience, then dramatize it in personal terms. An example from his Poor Richard speech is this excerpt with which every listener could identify:

Simply put, every nation devises policies to keep its trade in balance or to gain a surplus. That's because trade means jobs. If you buy more than you sell, you export jobs. Our own Department of Labor estimates that each billion dollars of the trade deficit equals 30,000 jobs. So with a deficit of $120 billion, we're talking about 3.6 million American jobs.

Articulating for his listeners their vague but real fears about abstract but real economic issues, Iacocca remarked at the NAACP speech:

Let me tell you what really terrifies me. It's the thought of carrying the current budget deficit and the current trade deficit into a recession! And one's coming, sooner or later.

What do you do then? You can't raise taxes in a recession. You can't cut social programs in a recession.

With this feared recession, not only jobs disappear, but educational opportunities for our children, Iacocca said. "... there goes Cleveland, and Gary, and Detroit. There goes the industrial middle class. There goes the economic base for the public school systems. There go the
opportunities we all want to pass on to our kids." In a very strong emotional appeal in both the Poor Richard speech and the address to the NAACP, Iacocca closed with the theme that "our kids will be the first generation of Americans that will have to settle for less than their parents had," thanks to a mismanaged economy.

The third factor in the economic arena which Iacocca has dealt with for a number of years is the need for an industrial policy in the United States. America cannot enjoy economic health, Iacocca contends, unless it has a vision of wholeness about the relationship of government to industry to people. Since economic health means jobs, audiences identify easily and wholeheartedly with this theme.

In his National Press Club address in 1983, Iacocca said that, indeed, America did have an industrial policy, but that it was a hodgepodge of outdated, and often contradictory concepts. "Somebody has to coordinate monetary, fiscal, tax, trade, energy and regulatory policy---or they all go off in different directions." Industry must reinvest its capital for research and development, Iacocca told his commencement audience at the University of Michigan as well as the Press Club listeners. Not only do better products result, making competition better, but, of course, more jobs are created and maintained. But many industries are simply engaging in huge
buysouts which do not create more jobs or better products. Competition is a vital part of an effective industrial policy, and that includes staying competitive in world markets.

For his larger vision of economic health for America, Iacocca advocated tax credits, guaranteed loans, and "wages and prices that are indexed to productivity and real GNP growth, not inflation." To his listeners, he suggested that all the people involved could work out their plans for accomplishing these industrial goals. And Chrysler, of course, was the example of how it worked, "a great example of how government, labor and management can work together to save and create something of real value," a testimony of his concept.

**Sacrifice and Credibility**

The occasion for the Washington Press Club speech in 1982 was really to announce the loan guarantee payback by Chrysler, seven years ahead of time. Iacocca offered this gesture as dramatic proof that the bailout was successful. His personal credibility as a leader in the automotive industry was re-established.

But along the way, Lee Iacocca had ironically damaged his image. Iacocca's persuasiveness in convincing the American public that Chrysler Corporation was in sound financial condition and on the upswing, conversely, caused
uneasiness and outright rebellion in other quarters of the public, namely with union workers.

"Equality of sacrifice" was a speech theme Iacocca used again and again in describing how Chrysler Corporation came back from the brink of bankruptcy; for more than two years, from 1980 to 1982, union workers received lower pay, fewer benefits, and fewer days off than their counterparts at GM and Ford. Iacocca's appearances on the Chrysler TV ad campaign assured not only the public but the union, also, that the financial strength of the corporation was growing. Union members had heard about the restored salaries and other benefits for Chrysler executives; the workers felt they deserved a reward, too, for their years of sacrifice.

With Doug Fraser on the board of directors, union leaders knew the firm's recovery was tenuous, but with "Chrysler's ballooning cash reserves and the chairman's calculated public crowing," it was difficult to convince the rank and file union membership of how precarious finances still were at Chrysler. When the 1982 union contract came up for renegotiation, the glowing picture of Chrysler Corporation which Iacocca had conveyed to the public collided with what he was willing to offer the workers as reward for "equality of sacrifice." Robert Reich of Harvard interviewed Doug Fraser about the difficult situation:

"Lee Iacocca is talking to the dealers and bankers and everybody," Fraser recalled, "and he's painting this glowing picture. And I told him, I
says, 'Lee, you're getting the negotiations in trouble. You're speaking with forked tongue here. I understand what you're saying and why you're saying it, but you better explain to our committee. I'm not going to try to relay it for you. You've got to do it directly.' And he did. He came over and got up on that podium there. Our whole committee was there, and he just said, 'You know, things are not nearly as good as you've been hearing.'" 45

The 1982 union contract was rejected by nearly 70 percent of the rank and file; one highly placed union executive attributed the loss to "Iacocca's boosterism."

And here's Iacocca bragging all over the country that Chrysler's got a billion dollars. Now they needed that billion dollars for development and engineering . . . but the workers didn't give a damn about that. They see a man running all over the place talking about how healthy his company is, they figure that company can afford a little increase for them after so long without it. His mouth got us in trouble on that ratification vote. 46

The theme of sacrifice went sour; Iacocca's credibility took an ironic twist; Doug Fraser voluntarily suspended his membership on the Chrysler board; and the union went on strike.

The Union turned the tables on the theme of sacrifice again in 1983; a six day strike "reduced Chrysler's fourth-quarter earnings by about $90 million. But the real cost of the strike could not be measured in dollars and cents. It left a legacy of bitterness. It distanced the company still further from the brief era of cooperation and
common cause that had prevailed during the worst of the crisis."

Another bitter view of the sacrifice theme, from the workers' standpoint, was the glamorous long-term deal the board of directors offered Lee Iacocca in 1983 to remain with the corporation. Because "He is so intimately linked to the future success of the company," remarked one board member, the directors, "making it hugely lucrative for him to stay," offered him "a four-year package of stock and stock options worth $5.6 million."

Doug Fraser represented the one dissenting vote on the board:

"I really got agitated," he recalled. "I said, 'You know, the amount of money you're talking about is not important to Lee Iacocca, but the workers are going to view this as a retroactive recovery. You're making a goddamn mistake.' It was scandalous. It has not so much to do with compensation, but it has everything to do with ego. In Lee's case he was going to show the Ford Motor Company that he was going to earn more. It's crazy. It's goddamn insensitivity."

The theme of sacrifice was not rewarded by "retroactive recovery." It was the triumph of cash over credibility.

Summary

How did Lee Iacocca develop fantasy themes in his speeches---themes of immigrants in America, work, values, sacrifice, basic economics---into an effective rhetorical vision of living the American Dream? Part of the answer lay
in his casual language, his spontaneous delivery, and his
talent in analyzing his audience in terms of ethical and
emotional appeals; closely tied to all these techniques was
his ability to identify with his audience, and to feel a
consubstantiality with them.

Iacocca's style was the simple, no-nonsense language of
a survivor with unvarnished, unembellished words and
sentences. The vocabulary was ordinary, the sentence
structure uncomplicated, and the content essentially
persuasive, directive, with blame always followed by praise.

Some examples of his style were the effective use of
colloquial phrases: "they zapped 200 million Americans
where it hurt, in the wallet. . . . the hosing we're getting
in the field of international trade. . . . a dandy model to
follow. . . . a hell of a trade deficit. . . . I want you to
get damn mad about the current state of affairs."

The style of the speeches was ordinary; extraordinary
was the speaker because, in Iacocca's case, "the man is the
style."

Wry proof of Iacocca's powerful delivery to which he
devoted enormous energy, according to Time's Kurt
Andersen, was the fact that Bob Hope swore he would never
again follow Iacocca on the podium, after an Al Smith
Memorial Dinner in New York. A tough act to follow, Hope
lamented.
From 1980 to 1985, the American public saw the president of Chrysler Corporation deliver his straight-from-the-shoulder commercials. Viewers heard a strong, resonant voice, well pitched at a normal rate and volume; Iacocca spoke distinctly and intensely in a simple style about a product for which he had become almost a metaphor.

How does he deliver a speech? With his "regular guy" approach, Iacocca knows how to relate to his audience and his audience can relate to him. The man is the message, in this case. Some observers have said that he begins slowly, reading from his manuscript, shifting from extemporaneous to an ad-lib, impromptu style. As for gestures,

eager to give his measured words emphasis, he starts his right hand stirring the air in tight counterclockwise loops. And before long, like one of his new turbocharged cars, he revs up and zooms off, quoting himself, zigzagging between 60s idiom and mild profanity, tossing away irreverent asides like empty beer cans. Hyperbole comes naturally.

"A slight lisp comes and goes, and provides an affecting touch of vulnerability. He works the audience, improvising." 51

But his enthusiastic "razzmatazz does not charm or convince all listeners." For example, author and sociologist David Riesman found Iacocca's "showmanship distasteful," accusing him of "excessive bravado." No
friend of Iacocca's, the Wall Street Journal recently called him "Motor City's most famous motor mouth."\textsuperscript{52}

Despite his detractors, his showmanship has had a particular appeal. Of Iacocca's customary and jaunty departure from manuscript to off-the-cuff improvisations, his friend Doug Fraser, former United Auto Workers president quipped, "I'm a hip shooter, I'll admit it. But Lee, Lee is a hip shooter deluxe."\textsuperscript{53}

Pragmatic might be the word to describe the logical appeal Iacocca used to develop some of his speech themes. As far back as the Congressional hearings in 1979, through his unusual TV ad campaign, and in speeches, Iacocca almost always translated statistics into human values; the "inartistic" became a flesh-and-blood idea. For example, in discussing the trade deficit due to Japanese car imports, Iacocca demonstrated that a certain number of dollar-valued imports equalled a certain number of jobs, and jobs were what people wanted to hear about.

To his credibility, Iacocca brought generous expressions of identification. For example, in his commencement address to the University of Michigan in 1983, many in the audience represented ethnic groups as part of the vast Michigan auto industry complex. Iacocca's mere presence as the successful son of an immigrant assured them of ultimate possibilities, in spite of hardships and setbacks. Specifically, Iacocca lauded the students,
families, and faculty for what they had suffered to reach this occasion. As Iacocca stood before his audience, they could associate him with an extremely difficult task, well done. When he spoke of having faith in the economy, in the future, in themselves, he was undoubtedly inspiring as well as believable. His audience knew he knew what he was talking about. His was the authority derived from personal experience.

Closely allied with Iacocca's credibility was his emotional appeal. For example, in the Michigan graduation speech, he wanted to move the young graduates to action, to have the determination to succeed. "I want you to get damn mad about the current state of affairs. I want you to get so mad that you use your new degree and your common sense to kick America off dead-center." His emotional appeals are particularly effective in patriotic speech themes, where the emotional and the ethical are strongly interrelated, brushed like a fine overlay on all the Aristotelian canons of his speech.
Notes

1 Bormann, 398.
2 Bormann, 398.
3 Bormann, 398.
4 Bormann, 399.
5 Bormann, 399.
6 Bormann, 401.
7 Bormann, 401-2.
8 Bormann, 405-6.
9 Bormann, 406.
10 Bormann, 406.
11 Bormann, 406.
14 Lehigh Chamber of Commerce Address, May 24, 1985.
18 Iacocca, Autobiography, 3.
20 Poor Richard Club Address, January 17, 1985.
21 Poor Richard Club Address, January 17, 1985.
22 Poor Richard Club Address, January 17, 1985.
24 Lehigh Chamber of Commerce Address, May 24, 1985.
26 Lehigh Chamber of Commerce Address, May 24, 1985.
27 Lehigh Chamber of Commerce Address, May 24, 1985.
29 Lehigh Chamber of Commerce Address, May 24, 1985.
30 Lehigh Chamber of Commerce Address, May 24, 1985.
31 Address to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Detroit, Michigan, April 28, 1985.
32 NAACP Address, April 28, 1985.
33 Commencement Address, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan, June 4, 1983.
35 University of Michigan Commencement Address, June 4, 1983.
36 University of Michigan Commencement Address, June 4, 1983.
37 NAACP Address, April 28, 1985.
38 NAACP Address, April 28, 1985.
39 NAACP Address, April 28, 1985.
40 Poor Richard Club Address, January 17, 1985.
41 NAACP Address, April 28, 1985.
42 NAACP Address, April 28, 1985.

Kurt Andersen, "A Spunky Tycoon Turned Superstar,"

Time 1 April 1985: 33.
CHAPTER VI

The Effectiveness of Lee Iacocca's Rhetoric

Summary

The rhetoric of Lee Iacocca reflects the language of the ordinary man, dramatized by an extraordinary man with a straight-talking, pragmatic style, who is able to reach out and touch the "psychodynamic chords" of the American listener and observer. Ironically, it has been the son of immigrants who has reminded Americans of the basic values that have made the nation what it is. Iacocca's ability to attain and re-attain the strong rhetorical vision of achieving the American Dream has been matched by his determination, not merely enduring but prevailing over the rhetorical situation, winning through it with identification and consubstantiality.

A sustaining rhetorical vision has unquestionably been the framework upon which Lee Iacocca has mounted his success as corporate savior and industrial folk-hero. His father, arriving in America as a frightened twelve-year-old child, fought through his fears and worked hard to win and lose several small fortunes. But most of all, Nicola Iacocca imbued his son, in true Italian patriarchal style, with the desire to achieve all the promise of a new life in a new
From the Italian immigrant group sprang fantasy themes that comprised the larger rhetorical vision. The vision was lived through enormous amounts of hard work, and the discipline and sacrifice that accompanies industriousness: a willingness to risk, to fail as well as succeed, and to understand that failure is not fatal. In the New World, there were always new beginnings, new ways to approach problems, but always undergirded with old and traditional values. With the fantasy theme of work, went the concept of unlimited opportunity: "The young Iacocca was programmed for excellence. He says, 'My dad taught us we could be anything we wanted to be,'" a familiar admonition of immigrant parent to promising child. To the New World, Iacocca's immigrant parents brought their religious and family traditions, the foundation and strength of life's pleasures and problems, as they understood it. Logically tied to these themes, were ideas of basic economics concerning the rewards of hard work, a demand for productive excellence, and a respect for debt and its payment. The crowning theme of this vision was a profound patriotism, a clear-eyed, almost naive appreciation of the chance to create a fulfilling life. Coming from the socio-economic deprivations of southern Italy during the early 1900s, Iacocca's father understood thoroughly the opportunities in America, "the golden door," as depicted in Emma Lazarus' poem at the foot of the Statue of Liberty.
The rhetorical situation added high drama to Iacocca's odyssey. By the time he was forty-six, he had attained the presidency of Ford Motor Company, only to be publically humiliated by Henry Ford II's firing. This exigence, fueled by anger and revenge, channeled Iacocca toward another automotive corporation. He assumed the presidency of Chrysler Corporation thinking it was in a temporary decline, but suddenly learned that the company was perilously close to total failure: bankruptcy. Mustering all his persuasive powers and rhetorical strategies, Lee Iacocca broke the constraints of precedent and transcended enormous opposition to the key question of government intervention in private enterprise. Through planning, lobbying, persuading, plus raising $1.2 billion dollars in private funds on the side, Iacocca, with help, gained a $1.5 billion dollar loan guarantee from Congress for Chrysler Corporation. But his troubles had only begun. Even after the loan guarantee, Chrysler was on the edge of bankruptcy several times, the company losing a record breaking $3.5 billion from 1978 to 1982, the biggest financial blood-bath in American corporate history. In 1982, the company broke even, and has been on the upswing since. Besides the huge federal loan guarantee, another social reality which was altered by Iacocca's rhetorical response to the Chrysler exigence was a new approach to labor problems. Union workers accepted less pay and benefits for several years to keep working and to
return the corporation to health. Accordingly, Iacocca chose the president of the United Auto Workers, Douglas Fraser, to be on the Chrysler board of directors, an innovation in labor management relationships.

But it was the collision of the rhetorical situation with the rhetorical vision that produced a strengthened, re-affirmed vision in Iacocca. At Chrysler Corporation, Iacocca experienced aspects of the classical hero paradigm: the call to destiny, the labyrinth of trials, supernatural aid, and finally, an apotheosis with the father figure. In Iacocca's case, this apotheosis was not only attained by success as president of Ford, but was fulfilled by the re-attainment of the American ideal, as he led Chrysler from near-death to renewal. Renewal, corporate and individual, was represented in the redemption of a company and in the re-birth of dynamic Lee Iacocca. The strength of Iacocca's rhetorical vision transcended the vicissitudes of rhetorical situation.

To all of these situations, Iacocca brought an intuitive talent for persuasion, or identification with his audience and helped his observers to see him as a symbol of all that it was possible to overcome and achieve.

The Greek word root for pathos means suffering. Iacocca represented a living, realistic version of that quality which gave him a particular consubstantiality. And to emotional appeals he brought hard-earned amounts of
Aristotelian credibility. As he spoke before assembly line workers, hopeful graduating classes, or beleagured businessmen, the exemplification of his rhetorical vision represented an unmistakable authenticity.

Iacocca demonstrated through his experiences, the interrelatedness of Bormann's rhetorical vision, Bitzer's rhetorical situation, Burke's identification and consubstantiality, and Aristotelian ethos and pathos.

Conclusion

In addition to the previous explanation of the rhetorical theories which help demonstrate why Lee Iacocca has been, and is, an effective communicator as well as a description of the sources of his rhetorical strategies, the critic needs to ask what contribution to modern rhetoric has Iacocca made? A concluding re-examination of the framework of this study, the Man, the Myth, and the Message follows.

The Man: For dreamers, for the disenfranchised, for doers, for entrepreneurs—Lee Iacocca is the symbol. "Mr. America," Life magazine titled him. "He's the guy you expect to see sitting next to you at the neighborhood bar, calling 'em as he sees 'em. So it should come as no surprise that the most homely, plain-talking Joe to catch the public eye since Harry Truman is being courted for the presidency." Iacocca is a man who apparently enjoys communicating.
Invitations to make personal appearances flow to his office at the rate of 750 a month; he writes a monthly newspaper column, "Straight Talk"; he raises funds for the Statue of Liberty-Ellis Island project; he works for the Juvenile Diabetes Foundation. And he is the second highest paid chief executive officer in the United States, as head of Chrysler Corporation. When asked by a family member to cut down on his public engagements, Iacocca quips, "I can't---I'm the star."^4

In spite of his imperfections or because of them, the American public has identified with Iacocca. He has actually done what so many of them can only hope to do. He is a symbol to observers of potentialities fulfilled; Lee Iacocca is the all-American success story.

The Myth: In part, Lee Iacocca represents the American myth, which according to Stephen Ausland, is the concept of a new beginning. As the child of immigrant parents who were keenly aware of all the possibilities which lay within "the golden door" of America, Lee Iacocca enacted, vicariously for his father, at least, the attainment of success in the New World, the presidency of Ford. Perhaps one might suggest that the first attainment of success, at Ford, was "the apotheosis with the father," as Joseph Campbell outlined in his classical myth paradigm. The re-attainment, the agony at Chrysler Corporation before Iacocca reshaped
failure into success, was Iacocca's own, his re-birth, so to speak.

To his hard-earned credibility, Iacocca brought generous amounts of emotional appeal as he suffered through Congressional hearings persuading reluctant lawmakers to make an unheard of $1.5 billion dollar loan guarantee, in spite of opposition to government intervention in free enterprise. The hearings went far beyond the confines of the Congressional committee rooms, as Iacocca's rhetoric was heard at press conferences and on television news. The episode became a public cliff-hanger with which much of the public could identify, contributing to his mythical stature.

It is easy to forget, however, that heroes must pay a price for their vision. The riches, the honors are all many see as the outcome. In Iacocca's case, the pressure of near-bankruptcy and the continual loss of millions even after the federal aid caused his own temporary illnesses, and he hinted quite clearly, the implied fatal influence of the Ford and Chrysler crises in bringing about the death of his wife. Proof that he felt her loss before he was able to save Chrysler is the fact that his autobiography is dedicated to her.

A hero, like a champion, has something special that marks him and enables him to rise above the ordinary and finally emerge victorious, though at a price. As Gail Sheehy so aptly described Iacocca's rise: "He worked,
knifed, and charmed his way to the top. . . . Lee Iacocca is a dazzling package."^5

There is an apparent exciting quality about his character and personality that is expressed in his work and in his speeches. Even after 40 years in the automotive industry, for example,

he still glories in the hurly-burly of his factory floors, in the sheer quantities of capital (2.8 billion) and steel (1.3 million tons) and humans (110,000 employees) that he must commit to producing 2 million vehicles a year. Iacocca likes it best when he can make managing a car company seem like a martial task, urgent and vast and possibly heroic.®

In describing Iacocca's climb to the top at Ford as "swift and scrappy," friends add that he had a reputation for being "a very difficult man to please, very demanding and obstinate." To this, Chrysler's present design vice-president adds, "He demands the same elements from management that he does in our cars, strength and a distinctive image."^7

Other de-mythologizing remarks which tend to give Iacocca ordinary human dimensions are the fact that "He settles for nothing less than dominance," plus the analysis of those who have crossed him. They describe him variously as "intimidating, unmerciful, arrogant, ruthless, opportunistic. . . . The corporate image Iacocca projects, unlike his public persona, is that of a cold and uncompromising autocrat."^8
Iacocca's daughter Kathi, when asked to describe her father in a word or phrase, replied, "Very ambitious." 9

The Message: "America Loves Listening to Lee," said Time magazine in its feature-cover article of April 1, 1985. But why? This blunt, plain-spoken, outspoken man offers no stentorian graces or particular rhetorical eloquence. What does he offer, then?

Lee Iacocca has become a symbol of the American success story in Horatio Alger proportions. He has achieved what so many of his followers can only dream or hope of accomplishing, which lends him a mythical-hero stature. What does he say that makes people want to listen to him, to read him?

His record-breaking autobiography sales indicate a hunger for heroes the public has always sought. Like all autobiographies, it presents only the author's point of view, but despite his many detractors, Lee Iacocca's life story reads like an adventure novel. However imperfect, he is a man with a strong vision of himself and the value of his life and his achievements, well-able to prevail through crises.

His book reflects the same values he speaks about. In his ordinary-guy style of delivery, which belies his extraordinary flair, drive, and single-mindedness toward success, he speaks about values important to Americans: jobs, economic stability, the values of family, education;
the rewards of hard work, risk-taking, and the unlimited opportunity in America. It is significant that the son of immigrants should remind us of basic American values.

"I could make a million dollars with Lee Iacocca," said one speakers' bureau official. "He could make $15,000 to $20,000 a night and be booked through six months." For those addicted to quantitative measurements of effectiveness was the fact that in 1982, the first year Chrysler showed a profit, Iacocca received 2,500 speaking invitations, and accepted, without fee, only 30. In 1984, he accepted 46 of more than 3,000 invitations to speak. In January and February of 1985, he was approached by 1,270 groups, during those two months, to speak. And there is evidence that he likes to communicate with the crowds who come to hear him. In April 1985, Xerox sponsored a lecture series in Rochester, a series which had drawn crowds of only a few hundred. On a rainy night

More than 3,000 came out to see Iacocca. After the crackerjack 45-minute lecture, they gave him a standing ovation. Later that night, stretched out on the plane back to Detroit, he was still impressed by all those fans who had paid to hear him speak. "Five and eight dollars a head," he mused, "and they didn't even get a drink."

Those statistics show, in part, that Iacocca's speaking effectiveness is enjoying a kind of continuum.

Another aspect of rhetorical merit was the immediate response to his 45-minute commencement address at the
University of Michigan when 14,000 members of the audience also gave him an enthusiastic standing ovation.

"He's a very dynamic, almost flamboyant speaker," reported John Peterson, an official of the National Press Club where Iacocca had spoken in 1983. "He comes in dressed in an Italian silk suit and he's like a television personality. Obviously, he's a pretty shrewd businessman, but he has a certain charisma that attracts people."¹²

Invested in the proof of Iacocca's rhetorical effectiveness are the most important factors, the ones which cannot be measured. There can be no analysis of the indefinable magic of personality and dynamism with which so many Americans can identify. Fortunately, no computer can capture the levels of rejection and rebirth for which Iacocca stands, from the personal to the professional to the corporate. His was, and is, the rhetoric of a renewal, a re-affirmation of national values, of redemption in the distinctive American tradition.
Notes


3 Spitz, 35.

4 Spitz, 38.

5 Sheehy, 78.

6 Kurt Andersen, "A Spunky Tycoon Turned Superstar," Time 1 April 1985: 35.

7 Spitz, 40.

8 Spitz, 40.

9 Spitz, 40.


11 Andersen, 39.

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Candidate: Jayne Margaret Megginson

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Date of Examination:

October 27, 1986