

Roosevelt's infamy speech: rhetoric to persuade a nation



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" Yesterday, December 7, 1941 - a date that will live in infamy - the United States of America was suddenly and deliberately attacked by naval and air forces of the Empire of Japan" (Eidenmuller, 2005, p. 1). This was the opening line of Franklin D. Roosevelt's Infamy Speech, which was given on December 8, 1941.

The speech was an appeal for a Declaration of War on the Empire of Japan. The speech was given just one day after the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, killing and injuring many Americans. This attack devastated America, and caused panic, fear and outrage for most Americans. Roosevelt's Speech lasted just over four minutes, but had an important impact that persists to this day.

This speech was one of the most famous and moving speeches in American history. This rhetorical criticism will exhibit that fact that Franklin Delano Roosevelt's Infamy speech was an effective speech due to the speaker's personal history and character, and his use of the elements of ethos and pathos. This neo-classical criticism of Roosevelt's speech will include: evaluating the rhetor, situation prior to the speech, the speech itself and the effect that the speech had. Rhetorical criticism is an approach to criticism that is least as old as Aristotle and the ancient Greek Empire.

Neo-classical rhetorical criticism comes from the first formal method of rhetorical criticism. Sonya K. Foss in her book, *Rhetorical Criticism: Exploration and Practice*, states that, neoclassical criticism focuses on, " discovering the effects of an artifact on an audience and whether the rhetor

selected the best strategies for achieving the intended effects" (Foss, 1989, p. 71).

Foss goes on to say when writing a neo-classical criticism, there are five main components that need to be covered and they are as follows: 1) An introduction, in which you discuss the research question, its contribution to rhetorical theory and its significance; (2) a description of your artifact and its context; (3) a description of your method of analysis; (4) a report of the findings of the analysis; (5) and a discussion of the contribution your analysis makes to rhetorical theory. (Foss, 1989, p. 16) The introduction should include information about the rhetor, and the occasion of the artifact prior to it happening. The description of the artifact should include; when the event happened, the time, and the audience of the artifact.

The method of analysis has five sections. The first is invention, which is often considered to be the most important. Invention is concerned with logos, ethos, and pathos. The second section is organization, which is the arrangement and structure of the artifact. The third is style, which is concerned with language, words, sentence structure and non-verbal communication.

The fourth section is memory or mastery of the subject. The next section is delivery, which is concerned with the physical delivery and how the rhetor presents the speech. The last section is analysis of the artifact or text.

Franklin Delano Roosevelt was born on January 30, 1882 in Hyde Park, New York.

Roosevelt attended Harvard University and Columbia Law School, earning two degrees. In 1905, when he was only 23, FDR married Anna Eleanor Roosevelt. In 1910, he won spot in the New York Senate, where he was appointed, Assistant Secretary, of the Navy by President Wilson. In 1920, Roosevelt was nominated for democratic candidate for the Vice-President.

He gained many friends and supporters during the years before his presidency. He won the election against Herbert Hoover in 1932, and promised to take action to help the American public. During his presidency, Roosevelt put into action, the " New Deal", which was a plan to improve the economy by creating jobs for Americans. The New deal helped to end the depression and established Roosevelt's credibility with the American public.

" Roosevelt fashioned a new deal, which fundamentally altered the relationship of the government to its people" (Goodwin, 2003 p. 1).

The American public never knew everything about Roosevelt. Prior to the delivery of the speech, The American audience did not know that he had polio and was confined to a wheelchair. Roosevelt was diagnosed with polio when he was a mere thirty-nine years old. The disease made him more or less paralyzed from the waist down. The American public was not aware of this at the time, because during that era the President's life was kept very private. Roosevelt spoke to the American public often and was regarded as someone who the American.

The context of the Roosevelt's Infamy Speech was not an everyday situation. Japan had just brutally attacked Pearl Harbor and America was filled with terror, disbelief, and confusion. Roosevelt delivered his speech to several

target audience segments. He was speaking to the House and Senate appealing for a declaration of war. He was also speaking to the military, which would be affected very personally by the war. Another segment he was speaking to was the American public.

He was trying to reassure them and give them faith that things would be okay, especially the people who would have loved ones affected by it. He also wanted to gain public support for his declaration of war. Roosevelt was also addressing the rest of the world, specifically Great Britain. He wanted to get across the message that they were all in serious danger. The U.

S. was not alone as a victim of Japan's attacks. The occasion of his speech was a major historical event because it was the first attack on U. S. soil, so he knew it would become an important speech.

The audience knew very little about the topic, prior to the delivery of Roosevelt's speech. Information traveled pretty slowly back in those times. During the time of Roosevelt, the audience found out news from the newspaper and the radio. The American public listened to Roosevelt's addresses on the radio on Sunday evenings and they trusted and respected him. They were not extremely well informed of world relations except through information they obtained through the government.

The target audience identifies with the House and the Senate. Also American citizens identified with each other and there was a sense of patriotism, loyalty and justice. The overall response of the audience to the speech was positive. The audience responded to the speech with uproarious applause and cheering.

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The audience probably felt emotionally comforted and moved to action and patriotism. After the speech, there was a common opinion that war was the only option, and there was support for Roosevelt's Declaration of War. Now that an overview of the target audience is established, the next step is the neo-classical criticism itself. Invention is the first step involved in neo-classical criticism.

Neo-classical criticism involves three factors: logos, pathos, and ethos. Logos can be defined as "logical and rational elements of the rhetoric and the effects these elements have on the audience" (Foss, 1989, p. 5). Logos uses logical argumentation with evidence and reasoning.

Roosevelt's proposal for war was something that would obviously require logic and reasoning to gain support. The first part of his speech that used logos, concerned the deception and sneakiness of the Japanese government. Roosevelt stated in his speech, "The United States was at peace with that nation, at the solicitation of Japan, was still in conversation with its Government and its Emperor looking towards the maintenance of peace in the Pacific" (Eidenmuller, 2005, p. 1).

With this statement, he was showing evidence that the Japanese were negotiating peace with us. He was using evidence and reasoning to show that the Japanese had betrayed the U. S. Roosevelt talks about how the Japanese government was negotiating peace with us, to intentionally deceive us so we would be unprepared and un-expecting of their attacks.

The second argument of logic was his argument that the attacks on Pearl Harbor were pre-mediated and planned. In his speech, Roosevelt says, "It <https://assignbuster.com/roosevelts-infamy-speech-rhetoric-to-persuade-a-nation/>

will be recorded that the distance of Hawaii from Japan makes it obvious that the attack was deliberately planned many days or even weeks ago” (Eidenmuller, 2005, p. 1). With this statement he is providing reasoning, that the Japanese were planning the attack, the whole time they were deceiving us with their false peace negotiations. He is trying to show the deceitful and deliberate nature of the attacks in order to gain support for his declaration of war. Negative emotion towards the Japanese was prevalent.

This leads to the next factor utilized by Roosevelt in his Infamy speech, pathos. Pathos refers to the type of emotions that are generated by the event and how these emotions focus the audience into acting favorably (Foss, 1989, p. 6). According to Stephen E. Lucas, in *The Art of Public Speaking* “ By engaging the emotions of the listener, the speaker has a better chance of convincing listeners to change their attitudes or take some form of action” (Lucas, 2004, p. 449) The tone Roosevelt is conveying in his speech is empathy, values, and concern.

Roosevelt says, towards the end of the speech, “ With confidence in our armed forces-with the unbounded determination of our people - we will gain the inevitable triumph- so help us God” (Eidenmuller, 2005, p. 3). He was trying to foster a great sense of patriotism and to move the audience to action. With this line he was trying to give the audience a sense of optimism and hope through his faith in the U. S. army.

With the simple line, “ I regret to tell you that very many American lives have been lost” (Eidenmuller, 2005, p. 2). Roosevelt once again utilized pathos. Many Americans died in the attacks, which mean many friends and family

members of the audience died. Therefore, emotions about these losses were very strong. The next factor is ethos, which is the credibility effect or appeal of the speaker's character on the audience (Foss, 1989, p.

5). Ethos deals with how the audience perceives the rhetor in terms of character and competence. The audience perceived Roosevelt to have good character when going into the speech. He was a very loved and trusted public figure.

He was the President, a well respected person. Any negative aspects of his life were not known by the audience because his life was kept private.

Another way he increased his character was by the use of simplistic language in his speech. He also used words such as, our and us.

He did this to show that he was an American just like everyone listening to his speech. His character was very high. Prior to the Pearl Harbor incident, 71% approved of Franklin Delano Roosevelt as President, 29% disapproved, and 9% had not opinion (Gallup, 1972, p. 262). This shows his character was very high. Roosevelt says, " Yesterday, December 7, 1941 - a date that will live in infamy - the United States of America was suddenly and deliberately attacked by naval and air forces of the Empire of Japan" (Eidenmuller, 2005, p.

1) He demonstrates competence here by his knowledge of the subject. He reveals that he was aware of the affairs that were taking place and the nature of the attack. He was very knowledgeable and certain of his claims throughout his speech. The organizational style of Franklin Delano

Roosevelt's speech was problem-solution order. Problem-solution order is <https://assignbuster.com/roosevelts-infamy-speech-rhetoric-to-persuade-a-nation/>

speech organization in which the first main point deals with the existence of a problem and the second main point presents a solution to the problem (Lucas, 2004, p.

410). It is clear that Roosevelt was using this order in his speech. He states the problem when he says, " the United States of America was suddenly and deliberately attacked by naval and air forces of the Empire of Japan" (Eidenmuller, 2005, p. 1). This was his first main point and apparent problem that Roosevelt was presenting in his speech. In the very last sentence of his speech he gives a concise solution, when he states, " I ask that the Congress declare that since the unprovoked and dastardly attack by Japan on Sunday, December seventh, a state of war has existed between the United States and the Japanese Empire" (Eidenmuller, 2005, p.

3). The style and delivery is another factor in rhetorical criticism. Although, Roosevelt was a well-educated man, he delivered the speech in a style that anyone could understand, from the well-educated to the very poorly educated. He delivered the speech in a simplistic, yet conversational style.

This established a personal and comforting delivery. He also spoke loudly with assertion, confidence, and certainty. This made the audience view him as a strong leader. There was one instance I noticed where he used more dramatic, metaphoric language; when he says, " Hostilities exist. There is no blinking at the fact that our people, our territory, and our interests are in grave danger" (Eidenmuller, 2005, p. 3).

Another element of his style was his vocal pauses. He used vocal pauses for emphasis, when he says, " Yesterday the Japanese Government also
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launched an attack against Malaya. Last night Japanese forces attacked Hong Kong. Last night Japanese forces attacked Guam" (Eidenmuller, 2005, p. 2).

These pauses between each country add a dramatic effect and foreshadow a sense of impending doom. He spoke clearly and paused so the audience could take in what he said. He varied his volume, pitch, emphasis, and rate, which are very important in effective public speaking. He spoke from a manuscript, which he only had one day to prepare.

He did not have quite enough time to fully memorize it, but he spoke confidently nevertheless. The effect of Franklin Delano Roosevelt's speech was very powerful and clear. After the speech, Congress voted to declare war on Japan and enter WW2. The U. S.

then dropped two nuclear bombs in Japan, one on Nagasaki and one on Hiroshima, to damage the Japanese army and quite possibly as revenge for Pearl Harbor. Also, after the speech, public opinion was swayed in favor of the war. Roosevelt's speech mobilized America to action and patriotism. The public stood behind him in his actions against Japan. Before the speech, the public was in terror, disbelief and confusion.

After the speech, Americans were soothed, comforted, and informed. Also on December 17, 1941, in a Gallup Poll, 68% of Americans said that defeating Germany in the war was more important than keeping American out of war (Gallup, 1972, p. 262). This shows the huge support that his speech gained for his endeavors. In conclusion, Franklin Delano Roosevelt's speech was incredibly powerful and moving speech.

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Roosevelt achieved his goals of comforting the American public, mobilizing Americans to support him, and convincing congress to declare war on Japan.. This criticism reveals an understanding of the meanings behind Roosevelt's speech. Criticizing this speech also exhibits Roosevelt's skill as an effective public speaker.

The speech came at an extremely critical period in history and was very powerful. It also was instrumental in the outcome after Pearl Harbor. Franklin Delano Roosevelt's " A Day that Will Live in Infamy" speech is a speech that will forever live in history.