

Day of Infamy: Speech Analysis

Yesterday, December 7, 1941 - a date which will live in infamy - the United States of America was suddenly and deliberately attacked by naval and air forces of the Empire of Japan.

The United States was at peace with that nation and, at the solicitation of Japan, was still in conversation with its Government and its Emperor looking toward the maintenance of peace in the Pacific. Indeed, one hour after Japanese air squadrons had commenced bombing in Oahu, the Japanese Ambassador to the United States and his colleague delivered to the Secretary of State a formal reply to a recent American message. While this reply stated that it seemed useless to continue the existing diplomatic negotiations, it contained no threat or hint of war or armed attack.

It 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. During the intervening time the Japanese Government has deliberately sought to deceive the United States by false statements and expressions of hope for continued peace.

The attack yesterday on the Hawaiian Islands has caused severe damage to American naval and military forces. Very many American lives have been lost. In addition American ships have been reported torpedoed on the high seas between San Francisco and Honolulu.

Yesterday the Japanese Government also launched an attack against Malaya. Last night Japanese forces attacked Hong Kong. Last night Japanese forces attacked Guam. Last night Japanese forces attacked the Philippine Islands. Last night the Japanese attacked Wake Island. This morning the Japanese attacked Midway Island.

Japan has, therefore, undertaken a surprise offensive extending throughout the Pacific area. The facts of yesterday speak for themselves. The people of the United States have already formed their opinions and well understand the implications to the very life and safety of our nation.

As Commander-in-Chief of the Army and Navy, I have directed that all measures be taken for our defense.

Always will we remember the character of the onslaught against us. No matter how long it may take us to overcome this premeditated invasion, the American people in their righteous might will win through to absolute victory.

I believe I interpret the will of the Congress and of the people when I assert that we will not only defend ourselves to the uttermost but will make very certain that this form of treachery shall never endanger us again. Hostilities exist. There is no blinking at the fact that our people, our territory and our interests are in grave danger.

With confidence in our armed forces - with the unbounded determination of our people - we will gain the inevitable triumph - so help us God.

I ask that the Congress declare that since the unprovoked and dastardly attack by Japan on Sunday, December seventh, 1941, a state of war has existed between the United States and the Japanese Empire.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Questions

1. At one point it was suggested that FDR say, "a day which will live in world history," but as you can see he chose infamy. Do you think the right choice was made? Why or why not? Explain the different feelings and emotions evoked, or implied, by each phrase.

2. Summarize the relationship between the US and Japan in the second paragraph.

3. How did FDR explain to the public that the attack was pre-determined?

4. Why did FDR list the other locations attacked by Japan? What if Americans listening had never heard of Wake or Midway before, how would they have responded to that part of the speech?

5. Discuss what the implications were that FDR alluded to when he said [Americans] "well understand the implications to the very life and safety of our nation."

6. What kind of victory does FDR predict Americans will have and why?

7. Why does FDR emphasize the existence of hostilities? How will this presence of "grave danger" change American lives forever?

8. What does FDR hope to get across to the public when he says it was an "unprovoked and dastardly attack?"

9. In terms of presidential speeches, this one is quite short. How do you think that benefited, or took away from, the message FDR needed to give Americans?

10. This speech is based in fact. You don't read FDR's opinion or feel any sort of emotional manipulation in his message. Why do you think FDR chose this particular delivery method? Was it effective, why or why not?

11. Americans would have listened to this speech on the radio rather than watching FDR deliver it on TV. How differently would an American have received this at the time on the radio versus today if you watch a similar speech on TV?

12. How might Britain, France, Russia, Germany, Italy, and Japan each have reacted to this speech?

13. If this speech were being delivered in the present day and a news reporter was issuing social media “shares” of the speech, which 3 direct quotes would be most "shared" on social media to the American people and why?

What would be 3 interpretive/summary statements the reporter would write him or herself and then “share” to the American people and why?

Write one response FDR would have had to EACH type of share, and one response an average American would have had to EACH type of share (4 responses total).