

A Comparative Analysis of the First Inaugural Addresses of Presidents Franklin D. Roosevelt
and Barack Obama

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A Brief Synopsis of Inaugurals

The election of each president of the United States brings about new ideas, new political discourse, and the potential for great change. Presidents are elected based on their ideas for change and on their vision for the future of our country. Throughout the election process, candidates make dozens of speeches, share countless press releases, and discuss new ideas and policies with thousands of people—but one speech stands as the pivotal and monumental starting point for the presidency: the presidential inaugural address. An inaugural address can be defined as a speech “happening as part of an official ceremony or celebration when someone (such as a newly elected official) begins an important job.” It is a time when, “the nation listens for a moment as one people to the words of the man they have chosen for the highest office in the land.”¹ These speeches are forever remembered throughout history and serve as the first official speech from the newly elected president.

A speech is a powerful tool. It can inform, demonstrate, persuade, or serve as entertainment. Any speech made places major emphasis on the language used to accomplish its goals, but political speeches, especially inaugurals, place an even higher importance than most. In her article discussing presidential inaugurals, Anna Romagnuolo further explains why language is necessary in the political realm of oration. She states, “Language is used to formulate policies (including language policies), create alliances, shape and disseminate values that define political associations, establish legal systems, and identify forms of government. Language, therefore, plays a pivotal role in politics. This is perhaps nowhere more true than with the American presidency.”² A president must emphasize all parts of their inaugural address including content, style, delivery, and arrangement.

¹ Arthur Schlesinger Jr. *The Inaugural Addresses of the Presidents of the United States*. New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1965. Print.

² Anna Romagnuolo. "Political Discourse In Translation: A Corpus-Based Perspective On Presidential

Romagnuolo goes on to determine two factors that determine an exceptional presidential inaugural: the rhetorical situation and the rhetorical form. The rhetorical situation is the ceremony and the rite of passage in which the new president-elect first formally addresses the nation. The rhetorical form, which has been argued to be usually epideictic, is aimed at accomplishing several different things. It must,

pacify the audience after an aggressive election, campaign; restate a belief system that unifies the country by drawing upon communal values, religious ideologies and historical experiences that are considered unique to the American people as a nation; acknowledge the responsibilities and limitations of executive power and the qualifications of the president for the office; outline the principals and goals that will inspire the new administration.²

It is a speech that must take into consideration the audience, mass media, and the future. It must represent the past while focusing on the future and the Nation's idea of it. This speech, that comes once every four years, has become a pivotal moment in American history each time it is given. An effective "inaugural address, worthy of its occasion, winds history into its every sentence. Echo and allusion, direct quotation, bind the day to the great words and deeds of all the days before it."³ Therefore, each president must take every aspect of their inaugural into consideration in order to achieve an inaugural address that will be well received by the immediate audience and historians alike.

Inaugurals." *Translation & Interpreting Studies: The Journal Of The American Translation & Interpreting Studies Association* 4.1 (2009): 1-30. *Communication & Mass Media Complete*. Web. 26 May 2014.

³ Rex Murphy. "Obama's Speech a Clichéd Dud." *The Globe and Mail* 24 Jan. 2009: A19. *LexisNexis® Academic*. Web. 6 June 2014. <<http://www.lexisnexis.com/hottopics/lnacademic>>

The First Inaugural of Franklin D. Roosevelt

One inaugural address that came during an important part of American history was President Franklin D. Roosevelt's First Inaugural in 1933 during the height of the Great Depression.

Franklin Delano Roosevelt, also known as FDR, was born on January 30th, 1882 in Hyde Park, New York. He received a superior education while attending the highly prestigious preparatory school, Groton School, in Massachusetts. In 1903, he graduated from Harvard with a BA in history while only attending the University for a total of three years. He went on to study law at Columbia University in New York. He successfully passed the bar exam there and left school early without fulfilling the degree requirements to practice law hands-on at a well-established law firm in New York City. After a short three years practicing law there, he was elected to the New York State Senate as a Democrat in 1910.

In 1905, FDR married his fifth cousin once removed, Anna Eleanor Roosevelt (who commonly went by Eleanor). Eleanor was the niece of President Theodore Roosevelt who stood in for her deceased father on their wedding day. Eleanor and FDR had six children together: Anna Eleanor (born in 1906), James II (born in 1907), Franklin (born in 1909), Elliott (born in 1910), Franklin D. Jr, (born in 1914) and John Aspinwall II (born in 1916). Unfortunately, the first-born Franklin did not survive infancy and passed away eight short months after his birth.

In 1912, FDR was reelected to the State Senate. He continually showed support for Woodrow Wilson's campaign for president which benefited him later on when, in 1913, Wilson appointed him as Assistant Secretary of the Navy, a position he held until 1920. Due to his wide array of experience and popularity, FDR was nominated by the Democratic Party for vice-president. Unfortunately, Republican Warren Harding was elected as the 29th President leaving FDR to put a hold on his political career.

In 1921, while vacationing with his family in Campobello Island, New Brunswick, Canada, FDR contracted poliomyelitis (infantile paralysis), which is more commonly known as polio. This left him permanently paralyzed from the waist down. Although this disease took a major toll on his body, FDR did his best not to let it take a toll on his career. When he decided to return to his political career, FDR made sure his polio did not affect anything. He taught himself to walk short distances with a cane and made public appearances standing up with support from family and his aides.

In 1929, FDR was elected as governor of New York by a narrow one-percent margin and later reelected for a second term by a fourteen percent margin. His successful elections as governor led FDR to further his political career and run for president. In 1932, he won the nomination for the Democratic Party candidate for presidency. His campaign pushed for government intervention in a time of economic depression. In November 1933, FDR defeated Herbert Hoover by seven million votes and became the 32nd president of the United States. All of his successes in the political realm that led to his election as President strengthened his ethos and made him a more persuasive orator and credible political leader.⁴

After his election as President, the process of writing the first inaugural address began. Many believed that Roosevelt developed the speech himself on February 27th in Hyde Park where he was born and that two days later, he added his now famous aphorism about fear after an inspired reading of Henry David Thoreau. In reality, one of FDR's closest aides, Raymond Moley, crafted a majority of the speech alongside FDR. Moley's personal assistant, Celeste Jedel, chronicled this process in her diary while working for Moley. She describes a part of this creation in her diary dated February 28, 1933.

⁴ "Biography of Franklin D. Roosevelt." *FDR Library*. Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum. n.d. Web. 19 May 2014.

‘When he [Roosevelt] had finished copying the first page, Raymond [Moley] walked over, took what he [Moley] had written and threw it in the fire—and did this again after the second page. After that F.R. threw away the pages as he wrote them.’ Moley, though, corrected Jedel’s account: ‘I threw the whole thing [Moley’s draft] in the fire at the end of copying.’⁵

Biographer Frank Feidel later tried to uncover the truth behind the creation of FDR’s First Inaugural. He concluded that, “Roosevelt wanted to think of the First Inaugural as entirely his own handiwork—that he could be as adroit when he put pen to paper as Woodrow [*sic*] Wilson or Winston Churchill.”⁶

The newly elected President Roosevelt delivered his first inaugural address on a cold and cloudy Saturday, March 4, 1933 at the East Portico of the U.S. Capitol in Washington D.C. The audience of 150,000 Americans was anxiously awaiting the speech to calm their fears because the country was currently in a deep financial depression known historically as the Great Depression. The Great Depression started when the stock market crashed on October 29, 1929, a day that has hence been known as “Black Tuesday.” On this day, the Dow Jones Industrial average fell about 23 percent causing the market to lose about \$9 billion in value. This crash was, “just one in a series of losses during a time of extreme market volatility that exposed those who had bought stocks “on margin” — with borrowed money.”⁶ As a result, unemployment increased dramatically, wages fell, and many were faced with foreclosures and repossessions after turning to credit cards to support themselves. Because people could no longer afford to

⁵ Davis W. Houck. *Rhetoric As Currency: Hoover, Roosevelt and the Great Depression*. College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2001. Print.

⁶ Nick Taylor. “The Great Depression: A Short History of the Great Depression.” *New York Times*. n.d. Web. 25 May 2014.

make purchases, businesses failed which, in turn, led to the loss of even more jobs which continually worsened the already failing economy.

By FDR's inauguration day, "almost five thousand banks had failed, and twenty-two states had closed their banks. The spiraling effects of stock losses, foreclosures, and, ultimately, bank failures had at their epicenter the bankers and brokers."⁷ Americans looked to the newly elected president for hope and a way to get out of this deep financial hole they were stuck in, and FDR knew this. His first line addressed this concern by stating, "I am certain that my fellow Americans expect that on my induction into the Presidency I will address them with a candor and a decision which the present situation of our Nation impels." He informs the audience that he understands the current state of the nation and will be honest with them about it. He tells them that he will, "speak the truth, the whole truth, frankly and boldly" and that, "only a foolish optimist can deny the dark realities of the moment." This creates a sense of trust between FDR and the audience.

FDR's use of pronouns also creates trust with his audience. When discussing the people of the country as a whole, he uses the word "we" rather than "you." By doing so, he puts himself on the same level as his listeners to let them know that he too is a part of the economic recession and that they are not alone in this. FDR only uses the pronoun "I" when the sentence directly relates to him as the elected President. He also uses the pronoun "they" throughout his speech. "They" refers to the "money changers" who are the Wall Street bankers. He places the blame on the money changers as a scapegoat technique. "The efficacy of using the scapegoat technique ensued from his ability to channel Americans' anxieties and frustrations from themselves to the moneychangers."⁶ He places the blame on "them" by telling the American people that, "the

⁷ Halford Ryan. "President Franklin D. Roosevelt's First Inaugural Address, 1933." *The Inaugural Addresses of Twentieth-Century American Presidents*. Ed. Halford Ryan. Westport: Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc., 1993. 93-103. Print.

rulers of the exchange of mankind's goods have failed, through their own stubbornness and their own incompetence, [and] have admitted their failure, and abdicated. Practices of the unscrupulous money changers stand indicted in the court of public opinion, rejected by the hearts and minds of men.”⁸

The first ovation from the audience came after FDR stated, “Yes, the money changers have fled their high seats in the temple of our civilization. We may now restore that temple to the ancient truths [Applause].”¹⁰ He continued on to announce his new banking reforms: the New Deal. The New Deal would “work against a return of the evils of the old order” and it would be “a strict supervision of all banking and credits and investments; there must be an end to speculation with other people's money, and there must be provision for an adequate but sound currency.”¹⁰ The tactic of creating a New Deal strengthened both his ethos and logos because it informed the audience of his knowledge of the issue and that he had figured a way out of the crisis while simultaneously persuading the audience by reason.

Although openly acknowledging the current crisis the country faced, FDR focused on change and a brighter future. He acknowledges the need for change by saying, “This Nation asks for action, and action now.”⁸ He continues on to address one of the biggest concerns: unemployment. “Our greatest primary task is to put people to work. This is no unsolvable problem if we face it wisely and courageously.”¹⁰ His most famous line, “let me assert my firm belief that the only thing we have to fear is fear itself,”¹³ is a wave of reassurance to the audience. FDR is acknowledging that yes, people are scared and fearful about the current state of the union, but that their fear is the only thing that people should be fearful about. He is telling the country that there will be a brighter future now that he is the President, which increases his appeal by ethos and pathos greatly.

⁸ Franklin D. Roosevelt. “1 - Inaugural Address.” *The American Presidency Project*. 4 March 1933. Web. 7 June 2014.

Aside from the content matter of his speech, a notable feature about FDR's First Inaugural was his delivery style. Some have said that he is remembered for "talking to, not at, the American people."⁹ Although he was not the first president to address the Nation on the radio during his presidency (William Harding was the first in 1920), FDR was by far the best at utilizing the radio throughout his entire presidency, starting with his first inaugural. He saw just how beneficial and useful the radio could be to him and "he was the first one to realize its potential for persuading the mass audience by extending his voice into the living rooms of the nation."¹³ On the day of his inauguration ceremony, millions tuned in to their radios to listen to FDR give his much-anticipated speech.

Because FDR's inaugural address was broadcasted to not only the audience physically in front of him at the Capitol, but also to millions more over the radio, his language, style, and delivery of the speech became immensely more important than inaugurals before. It has been found though, that "Studies of Roosevelt's speaking during his twelve years as President tend to center more on issues and less on the rhetorical elements of speech preparation, style, persuasive techniques and delivery. These elements, particularly delivery, impelled FDR's rhetorical presidency."¹⁵ In the case of his First Inaugural, there tends to be much more emphasis on the economic recession and FDR's New Deal, nevertheless though, there is much research conducted on how his delivery style and language affected his listeners and their perception of the address.

One aspect of his delivery that has been discussed is how his smile evoked a positive feeling to his audience when he presented his speech.

If one aspect summarizes Roosevelt's delivery, it would be his famous Rooseveltian

⁹ Halford Ryan. "*Franklin D. Roosevelt's Rhetorical Presidency*." Westport: Greenwood Press Inc., 1988. Print.

smile. It was especially evident in his speaking throughout his first two terms in office. That smile communicated a feeling of warmth and sincerity, of calmness and control in his communication, and of plain fun in addressing his fellow Americans. Whether his grin was heartfelt or cultivated (one imagines it was a little of both), the important rhetorical effect was that his audiences could plainly perceive his goodwill toward them.¹⁰

A second aspect of his style to look at is how his handicap affected the way he was able to perform and deliver his speech. His “Rooseveltian smile” had to have been hard for him to maintain considering he was very constrained at the podium. Nonverbal communication is a very important aspect of oration, especially coming from the President. Although his movements were restricted, that does not mean FDR didn’t gesture at all. He “gestured actively with his head” and he has been said to have “broke with the style of gesturing used by his political contemporaries by adopting a more constrained style of gesturing.”¹⁴ He was able to adopt this way of gesturing by holding on to the podium with one arm and using the other arm to make gestures.

FDR ends his inaugural strongly, telling the Nation, “the people of the United States have not failed.” This was a mindful tactic that evoked a powerful sense of hope and reassurance that showed that Americans are not at fault for the great economic recession. He then ends by asking for a “blessing of God” to protect the Nation and guide the President. FDR’s final sentence asks of God, “May He protect each and every one of us. May He guide me in the days to come.”¹¹

Harry Hopkins, one of FDR’s most trusted advisors, best captured the true essence of FDR’s first inaugural address: “With that one speech, and in those few minutes, the appalling

¹⁰ Halford Ryan. “*Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Rhetorical Presidency.*” Westport: Greenwood Press Inc., 1988. Print.

¹¹ Franklin D. Roosevelt. “1 - Inaugural Address.” *The American Presidency Project.* 4 March 1933. Web. 7 June 2014.

anxiety and fears were lifted, and the people knew that they were going into a safe harbor under the leadership of a man who never knew the meaning of fear.”¹²

The First Inaugural of President Barack Obama

In the years following President Roosevelt's presidency, much changed in the United States: racial segregation has been outlawed, technology became a driving factor in the workforce, college-educated professionals replaced farmers and factory workers as the majority, and the first African-American man, Barack Obama, was elected as President of the United States. Seventy-five years prior, this would have never thought to have been possible by most, but now, it had become a reality and a signal of change for the course of America.

Barack Obama, husband of Michelle Obama and father of Malia (born in 1998) and Sasha (born in 2001), was born Barack Hussein Obama on August 4, 1961 in Honolulu, Hawaii. He is the son of Barack Obama Sr. and Ann Dunham. His father is of Luo ethnicity and was born and raised in Kenya. His father was able to earn a scholarship that allowed him to study in Hawaii, which is where he met Ann Dunham. Ann grew up in Wichita, Kansas, and moved to Honolulu after her parents bought a house there through the G.I. Bill. In 1964, Obama's parents divorced after four years of marriage when Obama Sr. moved to Massachusetts to pursue a Ph.D. at Harvard University. This divorce left Obama with his mother Ann, leaving him to have a mostly fatherless childhood. When his mother remarried, the family moved to Indonesia, but due to safety and education flaws, Obama was sent back to Hawaii to live with his maternal grandparents. Later, his mother and half-sister, from the marriage, returned to Hawaii to live with him.

Through scholarships, Obama was able to attend the highly acclaimed Punahou School, which is a private college preparatory school. He attended this school from fifth grade until his high school graduation in 1979. Being one of only three black students, Obama felt tremendous pressure in regards to racism and his identity. Though he faced many struggles, he was still able to excel in sports and academics and graduated with honors. After high school, he moved to Los

Angeles to study at Occidental College. It was at this school that Obama made his first public speech, which was a speech in response to apartheid in South Africa. In 1981 he transferred to Columbia University in New York City where he majored in political science with a focus on international relations. He graduated two years later with a Bachelor of Arts degree. After his graduation, he accepted an offer to work as the Director of Developing Communities Project in Chicago, Illinois, where he made a big impact by creating organizations and scholarships for the surrounding areas. After several jobs and travels to Kenya to visit family, Obama decided to enroll at Harvard Law School in 1988. Laurence Tribe, a constitutional scholar whom Obama served as a research assistant for a Harvard, describes Obama at the time by saying, “he was certainly the most all-around impressive student I had seen in decades.”¹² Within his first year of attendance at Harvard, he was chosen to be an editor of the *Harvard Law Review*, a law review that is published monthly by a group of students at the Harvard Law School. He went on later to become the president of the journal, which gained media attention due to the fact that he was the first black president of the *Harvard Law Review*. While attending Harvard, Obama worked at two different law firms as an associate during his summers. It was at one of these firms, the Chicago law firm of Sidley Austin, where he met Michelle Robinson, his future wife and future first lady of the United States.

After his graduation from Harvard in 1991, Obama taught constitutional law at the University of Chicago Law School for twelve years. While teaching in Chicago, Obama also worked as a civil rights lawyer at the Miner, Barnhill, and Gallhand firm. During Bill Clinton’s campaign for presidency in 1992, he organized a voter registration campaign in Illinois called Project Vote that ended up being a huge success; the campaign surpassed expectations and

¹² Glen Johnson. “Harvard Experiences Sculpt Obama Appeal.” *The Washington Post*. 26 Jan. 2007. Web. 4 June 2014.

brought in 150,000 of 400,000 unregistered African Americans. The success of this campaign brought Obama into the media which later helped his campaign for State Senate.

In 1996, Obama ran as a Democrat for the Illinois State Senate and won, succeeding Alice Palmer for the 13th District. He was reelected to Illinois State Senate in 1998 and once again in 2002. He went on to win a seat in the U.S. Senate in 2004. When it came time for the 2008 Democratic nominee for president, Obama became the official Democratic candidate over former U.S. First Lady Hillary Clinton. After a vigorous campaign against Republican candidate John McCain, Obama won the election and became the 44th President of the United States of America on November 4, 2008. This day marked an incredible moment in history that many people would have thought to be impossible just 40 years prior.¹³

Two months later, on January 20th, 2009, it came time for the Presidential Inauguration, something that Americans, both Republican and Democrat, had been anxiously awaiting. This inauguration marked a significant day in America's history, a day when a black man would be sworn in as the President of the United States. The speech that Obama was about to share would be a speech that signaled a change in the course of our history and, therefore, many Americans had high expectations of it.

Barack Obama's First Inaugural was primarily written by his speechwriter Jon Favreau. At just 27 years old, Favreau had already become one of the youngest chief speechwriters in the White House, an unattainable job to most. He was recommended to Obama by Robert Gibbs after he had worked on John Kerry's campaign and has since been called Obama's "mind reader" by the President himself. The process of writing the first inaugural was a joint effort. Obama began the process by sharing his vision for what the speech would entail while Favreau feverishly took notes on his computer. Favreau, along with a team of other speechwriters, then

¹³ Barack Obama. *Dreams From My Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance*. New York: Random House Large Print, 1995. Print.

spent weeks researching past inaugurals, presidents, and U.S. history before he came up with the first draft of the inaugural. The first draft was rewritten several times, then reread and further edited by Favreau and Obama, before the final version, which would be read in front of millions of Americans, would be completed.¹⁴

Although the exact number of people in attendance at the inauguration is not known, it has been estimated to be around 1.8 million people.¹⁵ The high turnout of this event was due in part to many different reasons, including the desire of many to hear the President speak of change and a hopeful future for the country. Even before his election, while he had a seat in Senate in 2006, Obama was seen as a “face of reform and change.”¹⁶ This trait carried over into his campaign and election and can be seen in his speech. He represents this need for change in a powerful way. For example, “Today I say to you that the challenges we face are real. They are serious and they are many. They will not be met easily or in a short span of time. But know this, America—they will be met.” These lines alone evoke a powerful feeling of hope in the listener. Obama represents the changes in a realistic way by saying that it won’t be easy or quick, but that with time, it will happen. He continues on to list specific issues and modifications that will take place and reassures the audience by saying America is capable: “All this we can do. All this we will do.” A statement like this sounds so concrete and was read with such confidence, that it once again builds hope in the citizens. Changes in government are mentioned as well. “The question we ask today is not whether our government is too big or too small, but whether it works... Where the answer is *yes*, we intend to move forward. Where the answer is *no*, programs will end.” This reaffirms his intentions as President to implement change in the government systems,

¹⁴ Ed Pilkington. “Obama Inauguration: Words of History ... crafted by 27-year-old in Starbucks.” *The Guardian*. 19 Jan. 2009. Web. 4 June 2013.

¹⁵ Caitlin Stark. “By the Numbers: Presidential Inaugurations.” *CNN Politics*. CNN. 21 Jan. 2013. Web. 4 June 2013.

¹⁶ Kathy Kiely. “Democrats see Obama as ‘Face of Reform and Change.’” *USA Today*. 3 May 2006. Web. 3 June 2013.

something that many Americans felt was necessary. He acknowledges the need to adapt with the world as it is changing: “For the world has changed, and we must change with it.” These examples further recognize Obama as a face of change, something that was apparent during his campaign, and therefore, needed to be carried out in his inaugural.

Much was happening in the U.S. in 2009, adding to the significance of what Obama had to say and further developing the idea that immediate alterations were necessary. America was not only at war with two countries, Afghanistan and Iraq, but it was also in a deep recession. This recession was due in part to the fact that many Americans were buying houses and then taking out loans out from those houses, which they did not have the means to pay back. According to an article in *Forbes*, written just five days before Obama’s inaugural, “The United States economy is only halfway through a recession that started in December 2007 and will be the longest and most severe in the post-war period. U.S. gross domestic product will continue to contract throughout all of 2009 for a cumulative output loss of 5%.”¹⁷ It was also called the “most severe financial crisis since the Great Depression.” The recession of 2009 was an economic decline similar to the U.S. great recession during the time of Franklin Delano FDR in the 1930’s.

It is quite apparent that Obama and Favreau drew many references and ideas from FDR’s First Inaugural due to the fact that the economic situation of the U.S. was similar to that 76 years prior during FDR’s first term as President. One similarity was in the presentation of the country’s current crises. Obama acknowledged all of the current problems without delving into great detail, a strategy homogeneous to FDR’s. Both Obama and FDR also looked to a brighter future, promising change and a prosperous country. The blame in both inaugurals fell on the wealthy rather than the working poor. Obama praises the “doers and makers” and criticizes the rich

¹⁷ Nouriel Roubini. “A Global Breakdown of the Recession in 2009.” *Forbes*. Forbes. 15 Jan. 2009. Web. 4 June 2013.

whereas FDR denounces the actions of the unmoral money changers. Because of the similar failing economies, both presidents reference the need for change and the need for it to happen immediately. Obama states, “Starting today, we must pick ourselves up, dust ourselves off, and begin again the work of remaking America,”¹⁸ as a way to encourage immediate change. A similar line can be found in FDR’s speech, “There are many ways in which it can be helped, but it can never be helped merely by talking about it. We must act and act quickly.”¹⁹ Obama’s fourth stanza, one in which he lists current problems the U.S. is facing, is alike that of FDR’s second stanza. Obama mentions,

Our economy is badly weakened...Homes have been lost; jobs shed, businesses shattered. Our health care is too costly, our schools fail too many; and each day brings further evidence that the ways we use energy strengthen our adversaries and threaten our planet.²³

This list of issues is remarkably similar to the one FDR lists:

Values have shrunken to fantastic levels; taxes have risen; our ability to pay has fallen; government of all kinds is faced by serious curtailment of income; the means of exchange are frozen in the currents of trade; the withered leaves of industrial enterprise lie on every side; farmers find no markets for their produce; the savings of many years in thousands of families are gone. More important, a host of unemployed citizens face the grim problem of existence, and an equally great number toil with little return.²⁴

¹⁸ Barack Obama. “Inaugural Address.” *The American Presidency Project*. 4 March 1933. Web. 7 June 2014.

¹⁹ Franklin D. Roosevelt. “1 - Inaugural Address.” *The American Presidency Project*. 4 March 1933. Web. 7 June 2014.

It is easy to see by these comparisons the relationship between FDR's First Inaugural and Obama's because of the similar events that were taking place at the time both President's gave their First Inaugural Addresses.

Many people expected Obama's speech to be focused on the topic of the first black man as President, but this is not what they received. Instead, Obama gave a speech with very few references to racism at all, so few in fact that there's really only one distinguishable reference. The one significant and personal remark he makes regarding racism is towards the end of his inaugural: "... and why a man whose father less than sixty years ago might not have been served at a local restaurant can now stand before you to take a most sacred oath." It was a simple sentence that served as a simple reminder of where he came from and where he was standing that day, and where America is standing today. Many felt Obama needed to mention Martin Luther King Jr. and racism in some way, but others felt that the significance of his election was more than could be recognized, let alone be stated in a short speech. There was an exigency at this time that made it more important for Obama to talk about the war and the current economic crisis rather than the fact that he was the first African American to be president.

Another difficult subject Obama had to address was the war in Afghanistan that had started in 2001, eight years prior to his election. The war had affected and would continue to affect millions of Americans. Similarly to the topic of the first black president, the war in Afghanistan was such an important matter to address that it had to be brought up, but couldn't be the entire focus of the Inaugural Address. To reference it, Obama became the first president to use the word "Muslim" in his address. He uses the word twice, once to acknowledge the diversity of the United States by saying that "We are a nation of Christians and Muslims, Jews and Hindus and nonbelievers. We are shaped by every language and culture, drawn from every

end of this Earth.”²⁰ The second time he uses the word is when he makes a direct statement to the Muslim World and seeks to “extend a hand” to them:

To the Muslim world, we seek a new way forward based on mutual interest and mutual respect. To those leaders around the globe who seek to sow conflict or blame their society's ills on the West, know that your people will judge you on what you can build, not what you destroy. To those who cling to power through corruption and deceit and the silencing of dissent, know that you are on the wrong side of history, but that we will extend a hand if you are willing to unclench your fist.²²

This reference to the “Muslim World” extends the inaugural past the boundaries of the United States and into the rest of the world, making it not only an inaugural to the United States but a global address.

Obama and Favreau chose to use a style and language that was “the language of the people.” This included imagery of many scenarios that the typical American could envision and/or relate to. These images evoked pathos in the audience. For instance,

It is the kindness to take in a stranger when the levees break, the selflessness of workers who would rather cut their hours than see a friend lose their job which sees us through our darkest hours. It is the firefighter’s courage to storm a stairway filled with smoke, but also a parent’s willingness to nurture a child, that finally decides our fate.

In those two sentences alone are references to Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, the growing unemployment rate, 9/11, and parents raising a child—all things that many Americans at the time could personally identify with. He evokes emotional appeals also by referencing our ancestors and the struggles they endured for us to have this life. Phrases like, “For us, they toiled in

²⁰ Barack Obama. “Inaugural Address.” *The American Presidency Project*. 4 March 1933. Web. 7 June 2014.

sweatshops and settled the West; endured the lash of the whip and plowed the earth,” and, “these men and women struggled and sacrificed and worked till their hands were raw so that we might live a better life,” account the struggles our families endured to give us the freedom and life we have today.²¹

Other than common struggles and powerful historical references, Obama connects with the audience by his use of “we.” “We” appears sixty times in the speech compared to “I,” which is used only twice, and in the first stanza, and “me,” which is not said once. The use of “we” lessens the gap between the President and the audience by including him as a citizen of America. It puts him on the same level, facing the same everyday struggles as ordinary citizens, in the eyes of the listeners. This was a similar tactic that John F. Kennedy used in his speeches.

Another notable feature of the speech is in the way it was delivered. It was spoken with a natural eloquence and nonchalance, an oratory style that is perceived as effortless to the audience. This style of delivery adds to his ethos as well. It has been said that his oratory style is one that, “reflects black church preaching.”²² His speaking style can be described as using three techniques. The first technique is transcendence. Obama has the ability to create vivid images in listeners’ minds while he is speaking, a skill that allows the audience to visualize exactly what he is describing. The second technique is anaphora. Anaphora is the use of repetition for rhetorical effect. This method is used to emphasize a main point or idea. Examples of anaphora appear constantly throughout the speech: “For us, they packed...For us, they toiled...For us, they fought and died...” and “This is the price... This is source... This is the meaning...” These repeated phrases draw attention to his point as well as make it more memorable. The third method is the use of hand gestures and pace/tone of voice. Combined, these attributes can change the

²¹ Barack Obama. “Inaugural Address.” *The American Presidency Project*. 4 March 1933. Web. 7 June 2014.

²² Salatheia Bryant-Honors. “Obama’s Oratory Style Reflects Black Church Preaching.” *Spirited Chat*. Chron. 17 Jan. 2011. Web. 1 June 2013.

audience's outlook by making them truly believe in what is being said. Obama speeds up and slows down his pace, increases and decreases his volume, and makes good use of pauses which adds to the effect and depth of his speech.

Every elected president has stood at a podium to address his fellow Americans on his inauguration day, but Obama has been said to be one of the first to take it farther, to “not only speak to Americans, in Washington and beyond, but to use his inaugural address, deliberately, to speak directly to the rest of the world. Consciously casting himself as a global leader of a globalized society.”²³

²³ Anne Applebaum. “Remaking America; We Are Ready to Lead the World Once More, President Obama Tells His Adoring Nation; Anne Applebaum; Witnesses a Day of Tears and Joy as Obama Reaches Out Across the Globe.” *The Daily Telegraph* 21 Jan. 2009: 1. *LexisNexis® Academic*. Web. 6 June 2014. < <http://www.lexisnexis.com/hottopics/lnacademic/>>

Conclusion

By closely examining both FDR and Obama's first inaugurals and analyzing their applications of the five canons (the use of invention, memory, style, arrangement, and delivery), we can see the similarities between both presidents' First Inaugural Addresses. Both FDR and Obama entered their presidency at a time when the United States was in a deep economic recession. This state of recession made both of their inaugural addresses ever more important and anticipated. Both Presidents had to address their audiences and provide a light of hope in a time where there was very little. Obama directly referenced FDR's presidential timing by acknowledging the Great Depression in his line, "Starting today, we must pick ourselves up, dust ourselves off, and begin again the work of remaking America."²⁴ This reference of picking ourselves up and dusting ourselves off was "a paraphrase of the great songwriter Dorothy Fields, who wrote that lyric for 'Swing Time' (1936), arguably the best of the escapist musicals Hollywood churned out to lift the nation's spirits in hard times," famously during the Great Depression."²⁵ The line provides a direct link between the similar times of both FDR and Obama.

It is very apparent that both Obama and Favreau were aware of this similarity between the two times and that they could draw references from FDR's inaugural to strengthen Obama's First Inaugural by referencing past struggles the country has faced. Although there were indeed many similarities between the two inaugurals, Obama had an even greater issue to confront and address on his inauguration day: the fact that he was the first African-American to serve as the President of the United States. As pointed out earlier though, it was too great of a subject for him

²⁴ Barack Obama. "Inaugural Address." *The American Presidency Project*. 4 March 1933. Web. 7 June 2014.

²⁵ Anne Applebaum. "Remaking America; We Are Ready to Lead the World Once More, President Obama Tells His Adoring Nation; Anne Applebaum; Witnesses a Day of Tears and Joy as Obama Reaches Out Across the Globe." *The Daily Telegraph* 21 Jan. 2009: 1. *LexisNexis® Academic*. Web. 6 June 2014. < <http://www.lexisnexis.com/hottopics/lnacademic/>>

to abruptly point out. He did make reference to the matter when he mentioned his father, a reference that provided insight without overdoing the situation.

Both FDR and Obama's first inaugurals provided Americans with a sense of hope and a brighter future during a time when many doubted the faith of their own country. The two speeches provide an insight into the history and state of the country at the time they were given. A president is elected as a chosen representative of the country to represent the people and serve as an ambassador of change and progress for the American people. FDR and Obama both gave stirring inaugural addresses that provided a sense of hope during a time when the country needed it most.

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