Critique of the Outside Speaker

In a time of confusion, one speech gave Americans peace of mind with its delivery, content and speaker. This notorious speech in American history was given by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt titled the Pearl Harbor Address to the Nation. This speech was given the day after the attack on Pearl Harbor, December 8, 1941. This speech is most recognized for its opening line “…a date that will live in infamy”, where it is sometimes referred to as the “Infamy Speech”. Roosevelt executed this speech with such passion and inspiration to a concerned nation at the time. The Infamy Speech will forever be remembered in history as the official start to World War II.

President Roosevelt gave this speech to inform the American public of his decision to declare war on the Japanese empire. Most Americans fear the thought of war, but through Roosevelt’s delivery he showed anger for the attacks, compassion for those who perished and confidence that America will succeed. Roosevelt states “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.” By using language such as “I” and “we” the speech becomes more personable, where the audience is able to relate to it. Perhaps the aspect of the speech that give it such notoriety is the opening line, “Yesterday, Dec. 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.” Roosevelt
simply chose the right “dynamite” word, infamy, which grabbed listeners attention. A dynamite word, when used responsibly, grasps the listener’s attention and keeps them focused (Gregory, p.257, 2010). By using the right words and capturing the audience’s attention, Roosevelt was able to effectively inform the audience of his decision to declare war on Japan.

Roosevelt uses repetition, pauses and credibility to further impact the audience. Roosevelt uses genuine passion when he said “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.” Roosevelt used repetition of “last night” to emphasize the severity of these attacks not only on American soil, but across the globe. When he spoke these words he also took a pause. These dramatic pauses and repetition of key words showed the audience that Roosevelt was serious as well as further emphasized his words. During this time, America had turned to President Roosevelt for guidance and clarity as to dealing with these attacks. Franklin Roosevelt already had initial credibility through ethos simply because he was an elected president. But for those who may have doubted him he stated “As commander in chief of the Army and Navy, I have directed that all measures be taken for our defense.” This statement establishes credibility giving the audience confirmation that he is well informed with his decision and will lead this country in the right direction. Therefore, by using repetition, pauses and credibility the audience is able to understand the severity of these attacks as well as the key points to reassure that it will be handled correctly.

The organizational pattern of this speech enabled the audience to clearly understand the issue at hand and the solution to fix it. The organizational pattern executed in this speech is that of the problem-solution pattern. The problem-solution pattern is “an arrangement of information that explores a problem and then offers a solution” (Gregory, p.206, 2010). President Roosevelt
states the problem “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.” Then he simply offers a solution in the closing statement “I ask that the Congress declare that since the unprovoked and dastardly attack by Japan on Sunday, Dec. 7, a state of war has existed between the United States and the Japanese empire.” This type of speech is organized simply because it is informing the audience of a problem and offering a solution as to how it will be solved. I believe that the organizational pattern used in this speech matches with the type of speech that was given. The main goal of this speech was to inform. Roosevelt informed the audience of the problem at hand, being the attack on Pearl Harbor, and the solution which was to declare war on Japan.

This speech is one of the most memorable speeches in American history because it is a great example of leadership communication. As a leader, and someone in the public eye, you must remain calm in a time of crisis such as Roosevelt did. This speech impressed me because President Roosevelt kept his content brief, clear and to the point. Roosevelt was aware of the nation’s feelings during this time, and he tailored his speech to fit the audience. This quote emphasizes Roosevelt’s understanding of his audience by stating “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”. During his speech he never imposed his opinions; instead he stated facts and positivity for the outcome. I enjoyed listening to this speech. Roosevelt used vocabulary that all listeners could understand and relate to. The content of this speech is what makes it so notorious. In doing so, he captured the audience attention and offered them reassurance and hope in our nations time of need.
In a time of confusion, one speech gave Americans peace of mind with its delivery, content and speaker. President Roosevelt delivered this speech with great passion, remorse and strength. He took dramatic pauses, used repetition and kept a steady pitch in his voice. In this speech, Roosevelt stated facts and offered solutions while projecting hope and positivity. Furthermore, President Roosevelt exudes excellent leadership communication in our nation’s time of crisis. He does this through his vocabulary and delivery during his speech. President Roosevelt produced a remarkable speech that achieved a goal, supported the thesis and mastered an organizational pattern. The content of the Pearl Harbor Address to the Nation is what makes this speech a milestone in American History.