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# FDR and the Victor-In-Waiting Strategy: Posturing Oneself During a Campaign as the Candidate Who Has Already Won

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## ABSTRACT

In political races there are common rhetorical strategies for a successful campaign. It is argued here that a unique strategy would be for a candidate to successfully position herself or himself as a ‘Victor-In-Waiting,’ a VIW strategy, creating an impression of oneself as the candidate who has already won the contest and the opponent as having already lost. The candidate must present his or herself as more than a contender for the title. FDR’s first presidential campaign bid provides a set of circumstances that favored this approach. Corcoran’s (1998) dramaturgical rubric for acceptance and concession speeches presents three acts that are performed at the end of a political race: “*the loss of power, the transfer of political legitimacy, and the closure of public division.*” A rhetorical analysis of 12 speeches from FDR’s first presidential campaign applied Corcoran’s three acts to determine if FDR employed a VIW strategy against Hoover in the 1932 contest. It was found that FDR’s campaign rhetoric did employ a VIW strategy by successfully enacting the three dramatic acts of Corcoran’s rubric during the presidential race. This study presents a unique campaign strategy and opens a new lens for analysis of campaign speeches.

## KEYWORDS

Challenger, Incumbent, Posturing, Victor-In-Waiting (VIW) strategy, Acceptance Speech, Concession Speech, Dramaturgical, Political Legitimacy, FDR, Hoover

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## Introduction

Political races use common rhetorical strategies for a success. It is argued here that a unique strategy would be for a candidate to position herself or himself as a ‘Victor-In-Waiting’, a VIW strategy. This strategy would create an impression that the candidate has already won the contest, and is waiting for their conquered opponent to step down, even in the midst of the contest.

A VIW strategy would likely incorporate other strategies. But a successful VIW campaign can overcome many challenges of traditional strategies. The challenge, then, is for the candidate to present his or herself as more than a contender for the title, but as the clear and deserving victor early on. FDR’s first presidential campaign bid provides a set of circumstances that favored this approach.

## Research Question

The research question is...

RQ1: Do the campaign speeches of FDR’s first bid for presidency indicate a successful enactment of a VIW strategy?

It was found that FDR’s campaign rhetoric did employ a VIW strategy, posturing him as victor during the actual campaign by enacting the three dramatic acts of Corcoran’s (1998) rubric of concession and acceptance speeches.

Context for the analysis and artifacts begins by addressing basic strategies used by challengers and incumbents, explaining how these are applicable or not, then presenting an alternative rubric for analyzing a VIW strategy. The analysis of the artifacts is presented. The conclusion provides a summary of findings, limitations of the study, and suggestions for future study.

## Method for Analysis

To measure the components of a VIW strategy it is reasonable that the candidate would need to adopt the rhetoric of one who has already won a political race, such as, the dramaturgical expression of acceptance and concession speeches which enact the conclusion of a race and declaration of the winner. Corcoran’s (1998) analysis of the drama of a finished campaign, “*the loss of power, the transfer of political legitimacy, and the closure of public division,*” provides a rubric for examining FDR’s VIW campaign.

Twelve of FDR’s campaign speeches,<sup>1</sup> from his first bid for the office of President through his inaugural address, were studied through discourse analysis of artifacts to identify thematic elements and meanings congruent with Corcoran’s dramaturgical rubric.

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix for list of the campaign speeches used and links to transcripts and databases.

## Context

### *The 1932 Campaign*

In 1932 Hoover's presidential popularity rating was abysmal and so the Democratic nomination was a hotly contested race. The Great Depression had people ready for anyone besides Hoover (Winkler, 2006, p.62). FDR's charisma, plain talk, and infectious enthusiasm formed a powerful mix for the new medium of radio, which he had mastered (*Ibid.*, p.53). Hoover gave seven radio speeches in his campaign but ineffectively and too late (Trent and Friedenberg, 2000, p. 81). Ryan (1988) argues, FDR "was not the first president to speak over the radio, but he was the first one to realize its potential (Ryan, p.19)" and used it to full effect.

I would argue that as he spoke to these extraordinary issues during the campaign FDR presented himself so presidentially that by the time of his first inaugural it seemed as though he had long been president. The incumbent could use a VIW strategy unless they are so grossly out of favor with the public as to be perceived as arrogant and out of touch with reality. FDR's charisma, the economic context of the day, and careful choices of rhetoric allowed him to pull off a VIW strategy.

### *Comparing the VIW strategy to Common Strategies*

Common strategies an incumbent may use are to offer political favors, appoint friends to influential positions, massage economic and federal policies to favorable effect, manipulate domestic and foreign events, posture themselves as "above the political trenches", create pseudoevents<sup>2</sup> for media attention, and have the endorsement of their party (Trent and Friedenberg, 2000, p. 82). Challengers must paint the incumbent as responsible for current problems, attack the opponent's record, show how to correct the problems, exploit big issues while avoiding specifics, call for change, emphasize optimism, focus on traditional values, position themselves as in the philosophical center of their party, and delegate mudslinging to others (*Ibid.*, p. 94). Trent and Friedenberg (2000) assert that candidates can also merge styles or adopt the opposing candidate's strategies.

A candidate using a VIW strategy would employ some elements of the above strategies. In particular, incumbent tactics such as pseudoevents and posturing themselves as above the political trenches would be well suited to a VIW position. Challenger strategies, such as attacking the opponent's record and delegating mudslinging, emphasizing traditional values and central party positions, and emphasizing optimism for the future would also suit a VIW approach. However, other strategies may not coordinate with a VIW approach. Overuse of a call for change or merely taking the offensive on issues could overemphasize the reality that the race is not yet won, diminishing the VIW posture. Also, the challenger does not have the political leverage of the incumbent's office. Although an incumbent could use a VIW strategy, for the artifacts of this study the focus is on the challenger. The drama of concession and acceptance speeches helps elucidate this strategy and is explained below.

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<sup>2</sup> Pseudoevents, according to Trent and Friedenberg (2000, p. 82) "are occurrences that differ from 'real' events in that they are planned, planted, or incited for the primary purpose of being reported or reproduced."

### *Corcoran's (1998) Dramaturgical Rubric for Acceptance and Concession Speeches*

Corcoran (1998) outlines three essential dramatic expressions in concession and acceptance speeches: "*the loss of power, the transfer of political legitimacy, and the closure of public division.*" By co-opting these dramaturgical acts *during* the campaign FDR co-opted the position of the presidency from Hoover and the public viewed FDR as the VIW. In the first act the losing candidate concedes a victory to the winner and steps out of the way. The second act allows for peaceful transfer of authority, legitimizing the new president. In the third act the victor and the loser join hands,<sup>3</sup> unifying support for the country and cementing confidence in the new leader. If a candidate can enact an image of these three acts during the campaign, they may position his or herself as a VIW.

Corcoran (1998) contends that concession and acceptance speeches perform a necessary dramaturgical function in democratic societies. Consistent with Burkian perceptions (Burke, introduction), these speech acts complete the scenic battle between warriors fighting for power. A denouement is needed to bring the story to a satisfactory close because they "are dramatic expressions of essential democratic meanings (Corcoran, 1998)."

Corcoran's three indicators build from his study of presidential concession speeches in the U.S. and Australia. According to Corcoran (1998) these rhetorical expressions play "critical role[s] in the symbolic representation of power [and] have evolved into an established democratic practice that fosters and reinforces social perceptions of political legitimacy." He continues,

This rite of succession is not metaphor and dramaturgy, pure and simple. The concession speech, or rather, the rhetorical process of concession, is an institutionalised [sic] public enactment integral to democratic life and the legitimacy of authority. It has its own traditions, etiquette, and symbolism, but yielding and taking power is also a practical necessity. As one sees throughout the world, the 'transition of power' is often a matter of life and death on a grand scale. There it is a crude tragedy of murder and war.

By enacting these dramatic elements I argue that FDR essentially jumped ahead to the end of the race to dominate the election by posturing himself as the legitimate president. This created the ethos of a VIW that Hoover could not overcome.

### **Analysis**

The following analysis of FDR's campaign rhetoric supports this strategic method using Corcoran's (1998) three essential components. After a more detailed look at these three acts they will be applied to FDR's campaign speeches from 1932.

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<sup>3</sup> When the losing candidate does not graciously concede victory the public scorns them as a sore loser, reinforcing the perception of the loser's failed contest, alienating them from the public, while strengthening the victor's win as legitimate (Corcoran, 1998).

FDR's enactment of dramatic elements similar to those identified by Corcoran created a romantic mode of emplotment (White, 1973)<sup>4</sup> making FDR the conquering hero, already victorious over Hoover, and ready for the real war against the evils of the economy and fear itself. FDR shifted public attention away from the race itself and made defeating the Depression the real campaign. This effectively stole away any legitimate claim Hoover had to the office.

### *Analysis of the Artifacts*

Twelve of FDR's campaign speeches<sup>5</sup> were analyzed, from a speech prior to the campaign through to his inaugural address. These are viewed through the lens of Corcoran's (1998) three acts.

#### *Act I: Loss of Power*

FDR's rhetoric supports the first principle of the essential enactment of Corcoran's (1998) concession/victory drama: *the loss of power*. In concession and acceptance rhetoric the first act shows one party as having failed. It is certainly common to claim judiciously that your opponent has failed. FDR did so unabashedly by attacking Hoover's character and detachment from the people. After outlining the failures of Hoover's administration in his Nomination address, FDR bluntly says, "And there we are today," right where Hoover put them.

FDR alludes to Hoover's camp as criminals when he talks of exposing them publicly because "publicity is the enemy of crookedness." In Columbus, FDR attached the labels of "false," "misleading," and "erroneous" to his opponent. Later in Pittsburg he called Hoover's policy practices "economic heresies." During his Atlanta speech, to emphasize his support of the American farmer, FDR lambasted Hoover for suggesting "that the farmers of the United States are willing and anxious to have foreclosed the mortgages upon their homes in which their fathers and mothers lived and died and in which their children were born," a thought "inconceivable" to FDR and abhorrent to Americans.

Several times FDR demeaned Hoover's intellect calling his group "shallow thinkers (Forgotten Man)" in contrast to what "thoughtful men do (Atlanta)," and in a thinly veiled a reference to Hoover and his followers as people with "childish minds....[and not] advanced beyond kindergarten (*Ibid.*)."<sup>6</sup> In Boston, FDR called Hoover's dignity for the office of President into question by claiming Hoover tried to "create the impression that there was no campaign going on at all [and] sought to create the impression that all was well with the United States, that there was no depression....And then, dignity died." If Hoover was attempting to discount the election it may be argued he was also attempting a VIW strategy, though ineffectively. Later that day FDR indicted Hoover, claiming, "Washington stands convicted (Berlin)." This epithet is intensified in the inaugural address when he states, "the unscrupulous money changers stand indicted in the court of public opinion."

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<sup>4</sup> White coined the term "emplotment" to mean that every collection of historical events is in some way a narrative with a plot, whether it be romance, satire, comedy, or tragedy. Romance, in this use, refers to "a drama of self-identification symbolized by the hero's transcendence of the world of experience, his victory over it, and his final liberation from it....the triumph of good over evil, or virtue over vice..." (pp. 8-9).

<sup>5</sup> [See Appendix for list of the campaign speeches used and links to transcripts and databases.](#)

Hoover's lack of interest in campaigning fed the image of a defeated president. Even Hoover, prior to the Republican primaries, confessed to the *New York Times* publisher, Adolph Ochs "that he 'did not give a damn about being reelected' and would gladly be relieved of the problems placed upon him and 'get out of the hell' in which he was living (Ritchie, 2007, p. 95)."

FDR took advantage of Hoover's growing desperation. In Sioux City, Iowa FDR rebukes the sudden announcement by Hoover that he was working on "a plan to consolidate and simplify the Federal bureaucracy," something he had promised but had not done. In Pittsburgh, the administration was held accountable for shifting the blame for the Depression to foreign causes,

The "foreign cause" alibi is just like ascribing measles on our little boy to the spots on his chest, instead of to the contagious germ that he has picked up somewhere."

Notice the two derogatory metaphors for Hoover, he is a crook searching for an alibi, and he is an infectious germ. So, Hoover is desperate, felonious, and a disease to eradicate.

These claims which were so widely felt and easy to support, strengthened FDR's characterization of Hoover as loser, but alone do not indicate a VIW strategy. Yet, this does reinforce it and gave FDR the edge needed to enact a VIW image. What is missing from this act (as described by Corcoran, 1998) was an actual concession speech from Hoover. No candidate would ever do so in the midst of an election. But this does not negate the use of the analysis here. Actually, it served to fit with what Corcoran (1998) describes as the image of a scorned loser, beaten but refusing to go down graciously. In effect it only worsened Hoover's image in the eyes of the public and strengthened FDR's. Hoover's "lackluster" campaign (Reid and Klumpp, 2005, p.747) knowing he was doomed to lose (Renshaw, 2004, p.76) does suggest a concession of sorts.

For purposes here, beyond character assassination, FDR worked to create an image of Hoover as already vanquished by separating the man from the president's office and title. In the "Forgotten Man" speech FDR goes further to distance Hoover from the American citizen as well,

It is said that Napoleon lost the battle of Waterloo because he forgot his infantry—he staked too much upon the more spectacular but less substantial cavalry. The present administration in Washington provides a close parallel. It has forgotten or does not want to remember the infantry of our economic army.

FDR widened this separation by disconnecting the label of "president" from Hoover. FDR would speak of "the president," or "Mr. Hoover", rarely calling him "President Hoover". The alienation of man from position was profoundly accomplished during FDR's party acceptance speech whereupon he openly declared, "and note well that in this campaign I shall not use the word 'Republican Party,' but I shall use, day in and day out, the words, 'Republican leadership,'" creating a clear opportunity for the party to save face by distancing itself from its administration and rallying around their new leader. Likewise, this also works in the third act of healing public division after the battle is won.

FDR's rhetoric forced Hoover into a concessionary image. Hoover shifts from desperation, to admitting failure, to extortion. Note the following examples. According to FDR's speech in Atlanta, Hoover finally admitted his failure (a sort of concession speech *a priori*) but his apologia failed. FDR proclaimed there was "an awakening in the White House", the Democratic strategy had "forced the president, for political expediency, in the closing days of a campaign, to confess this abject failure [the farm foreclosures] of his experiments." Again, in Boston, "several moods have come over the utterances of the Republican leader," stated FDR, "first, they were plaintively apologetic. Then the next move was indignation at the Congress of the United States. Finally, they have in desperation resorted to the breeding of panic and fear." He further accused Hoover of threatening America claiming, "in the event of change, the present administration will be unable to hold in check the economic forces that threaten us in the period between Election Day and inauguration day (Boston speech)."

Hoover fully enacted in the most negative way a type of concession. Corcoran (1998) points out that regarding the concession speech: "The performance will be praised if it is 'gracious'. If the speech is abject to the brink of emotional breakdown, it will be received with not much irony. If it is delayed or betrays any hint of resistance to total surrender, the leader will be scorned." This is the persona that FDR projected onto Hoover, moving him into the role of sore loser. This image was furthered by Hoover's poor and limited relations with the press, his constant visage of a soured man, and the disrespectful way he treated FDR as an opponent, leaving FDR "at first humiliated and then angered.... determined to campaign at full throttle and leave nothing back (Ritchie, 2007, p. 125)."

By casting Hoover in the role of the failed leader, distanced from his title and his own party, and a pathetic sore loser, FDR cemented the general opinion that he had already won. He effectively characterized Hoover as having already conceded victory or as in denial of his loss. The next act needed was the transferring of political legitimacy.

### *Act II: Transfer of Legitimate Power*

The second act in the drama is the *transfer of legitimate power* to allow for peaceful transfer of authority and legitimize the new president. FDR's enormous charisma and oratory skill were the dominant factors here. Keirsey and Choiniere (2005) state,

the energetic and gregarious Operator Franklin Delano Roosevelt loved freedom, activity, excitement, and impact. He was exhilarated by them, almost transported. To be able to take action, preferably dramatic action, to rise to a difficult challenge, to impose his prowess on events: these were what made life worth living....He was a fine, charismatic speech maker who could excite his audiences in the same way as did his fifth cousin, the ebullient Artisan and spellbinding orator, Teddy Roosevelt.

A peaceful transfer of power is only possible when the loser willingly concedes defeat. FDR was able to paint Hoover as a sore loser while bolstering his own impression of congenial strength and legitimate victory. FDR combined his vibrant personality and skillful rhetoric to create a commanding presence and presidential tone.

Though no one questions FDR's charisma, viewpoints vary considerably regarding his governing skills. Oliver Wendell Holmes described FDR as possessing a "second-class intellect. But a first-class temperament (Janeway, 2004, p.4)!" Renshaw (2004) and others see inconsistencies in FDR's proposals. His plans were often vague and contradictory. Eccles (1951, p. 95) claims Hoover and FDR's policy rhetoric often seemed to get switched around. FDR's ability to overcome this allowed him to perform a charismatic role that dramatically created the constituted reality of the legitimate leader: a leader of action, of principle, in charge, fit for the role, with no real threat to his position.

Besides the New Deal and save-the-farmer rhetoric,<sup>6</sup> a key theme for FDR's campaign was he was a man of action. This rhetoric of action enabled him to give the impression that he already had legitimate authority. FDR spoke like an acting president. Consider a few examples:

"These unhappy times call for the building of plans (Forgotten Man)"  
 "I have started...breaking the absurd traditions (Nomination Address)"  
 "I have already proposed its [the government's agriculture department] reorganization (Atlanta)." "  
 "We must act. We must act quickly....And finally, in our progress towards a resumption of work we require two safeguards (Inaugural address)." <sup>7</sup>

Note in each of these the present-tense tone, as though such progress had already begun.

FDR's charisma is even more powerful when considering his physical handicap. While seeking re-election for governorship in New York doctors reported that FDR's "chest expansion was bigger than that of Jack Dempsey (Renshaw, 2004, p.67)." FDR responded, "Dempsey is an 'ex'; I'm not (*Ibid.*)."<sup>8</sup> Much of his strategy was to direct focus away from his weakened legs by avoiding photos in his wheelchair and using heavy braces when standing. During the campaign he called attacks on his physical fitness a "perfectly silly piece of propaganda (Neal, 2004, p. 170)." By managing the press and by the sheer physical rigor of his campaign FDR maintained a powerful stance in the eyes of the public. Even James, his son later remarked, "It amazes me how many people of that period were not even aware of father's handicap (Houck, 1997, p.20)." Houck (1997) argues that even the media bought into it (p.22).

In a speech made less than a year before his official entry into the contest he was already speaking as one in command and perhaps giving some hints as to his approach to the nation's dilemma when he spoke on the welfare of the nation's crippled. FDR proposed a specific set of steps needed to help "crippled" people become productive again. He commented, "People who

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<sup>6</sup> From the outset of the campaign FDR consistently stood on one clear plank in his platform, that of the importance of restoring farmers, "I cannot escape the conclusion that one of the essential parts of a national program of restoration must be to restore purchasing power to the farming half of the country. Without this the wheels of railroads and of factories will not turn (Forgotten Man)." FDR claimed that the agrarian economy had to be restored so there would be people who could purchase products from workers in the city factories.

<sup>7</sup> FDR's Inaugural is appropriate to include in this collection. For, to use a VIW strategy during a campaign only to revert back to convention during the inaugural would delegitimize the image created during the race. For the VIW candidate, the Inaugural must, therefore, reinforce the impression of a victor who is jumping into the fray and taking immediate control. In contrast to FDR's deliberative, judicial style at his first Inaugural see Kinnier et al., 2004, for an example of identifiers typical of epideictic Inaugurals.

are crippled take a long time to be put back on their feet—sometimes years; as we all know....Remember that most of the cripples can in some shape, manner or form be brought back to useful life (Assistance for the Crippled).” The description could easily be taken as an allegory of the Depression. FDR embodied for the crippled nation the spirit to overcome.

One of FDR’s boldest moves to enact his image as already in charge was breaking with “foolish traditions” (Nomination address). Flying to the Democratic convention in Chicago was a dramatic coup. The conqueror flew in on his mechanized Pegasus, quashing dissent in his own political party, clearly prepared to lead the country, and giving the impression that this was actually the beginning of the New Deal and Hoover just needed to vacate the White House.

Two of FDR’s most famous quotes show the tremendous power he had to constitute this image as legitimately in charge by defining leadership in his Oglethorpe speech, and conquering fear at the Inaugural:

“True leadership is the setting forth of the objectives and the rallying of public opinion in support of these objectives....The country needs and, unless I mistake its temper, the country demands bold, persistent experimentation. It is common sense to take a method and try it: If it fails, admit it frankly and try another. But above all, try something (Oglethorpe).”

“So, first of all, let me assert my firm belief that the only thing we have to fear is fear itself—nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance. In every dark hour of our national life, a leadership of frankness and of vigor has met with that understanding and support of the people themselves which is essential to victory. And I am convinced that you will again give that support to leadership in these critical days (Inaugural).”

In both instances FDR speaks presidentially, as an authentic director of the state. Note that the victory he speaks of in the latter is not the election, but victory over the national crisis; victory over fear. This was not an inaugural, but a State of the Union address. Rather than an acceptance speech, this was a presidential speech. By immediately invoking the presidential authority of “broad executive power to wage a war against the emergency, as great a power as the power that would be given to me if we were in fact invaded by a foreign foe,” FDR made clear how much power he thought he had. Daughton (1993) notes that FDR later said, “I sought principally in the foregoing Inaugural Address to banish, so far as possible, the fear of the present and of the future which held American people and the American spirit in its grasp (Daughton, p.427).” Even FDR’s theme song, adopted at the Democratic Convention, “Happy Days Are Here Again,” embodies the feel of the day. Note the title is in present tense, not future tense; happier days *are* here again, not *will be* here.

FDR’s strong rhetorical charisma, his ability to position himself as the leader taking action, his skill at minimizing his paralysis and creating a vigorous persona, and turning the Inaugural into a state of the union address all served to thoroughly establish the perception of a legitimate campaign winner already in charge. Lastly, he needed to close the issue of the divided scene.

### *Act III: Closure of Public Division*

The third act of the concession/victory dramaturgy is *closure of public division*. The battle and contestants are glorified. The victor works to recreate a sense of unity among all parties, directing them towards a better future. The act is a vital component in the play. Corcoran writes that electoral victory needs a climactic ritual, “a final revelation of the vanquished leader’s failure and crushed hopes. The leader’s mortified ambition is pressed to center stage (Corcoran, 1998).” This immense pressure to surrender and join the new bandwagon creates a very difficult situation for the loser, but the third act is important for bringing closure to the scene, even for the vanquished. Corcoran states,

Finally the losers especially have to find reconciliation: some special meaning in the efforts and emotions and aspirations that ended in defeat. Loss must somehow be consecrated by acceptance, rededication to a cause, and a renewed struggle.

FDR successfully accomplished this third act of reconciliation and coalescence through his calls for both political and public unity, through his call to rally as if for war, by foregoing an epideictic celebratory style at the Inaugural in favor of a more deliberative and judicial style, and by extending some laudatory remarks to his opponent while co-opting part of Hoover’s own plans for recovery.

FDR’s image as a vigorous and stalwart defender of the whole people is clear in his Nomination address, “Let us now and here highly resolve to resume the country’s uninterrupted march along the path of real progress, of real justice, of real equality for all of our citizens, great and small.”

FDR’s campaign speeches are littered with references to unity, interdependence, and unified goals. In the Forgotten Man speech he claims, “I do not want to limit myself to politics....The present condition of our national affairs is too serious to be viewed through partisan eyes for partisan purposes.” In his Nomination address he directs the listener to the universal nature of the issue, “Never in history have the interests of all people been so united in a single economic problem....Danger to one is danger to all.”

On several occasions he specifically downplays party divisions. He uplifts Republicans and calls them and everyone else to join him in the New Deal. For example, in his Nomination address,

This is no time for fear, for reaction or for timidity. Here and now I invite those nominal Republicans who find their conscience cannot be squared with the groping and failure of their party leaders to join hands with us; here and now, in equal measure, I warn those nominal Democrats who squint at the future with their faces turned toward the past, and who feel no responsibility to the demands of the new time, that they are out of step with their Party.

His record in New York had already proven he was one who brings bi-partisan cooperation to government (Winkler, p.48). To the Commonwealth Club in San Francisco he reiterates, “I want to speak not of politics but of government. I want to speak not of parties, but of universal principals.”

By mixing war metaphors like “It is high time to admit with courage that we are in the midst of an emergency at least equal to that of war. Let us mobilize to meet it (Forgotten Man),” with a more positive and altruistic mission like “Let us now and here highly resolve to resume the country’s uninterrupted march along the path of real progress, of real justice, of real equality for all of our citizens, great and small (Nomination address),” FDR pulled off a scenic transformation akin to Kennedy’s success in combining the war and peace metaphors to promote the Peace Corps (Dorsey, 1996).

As explained above, even in FDR’s Inaugural address, where he is clearly and legitimately victor, his forgoing of an epideictic style of victory speech and favoring a deliberative speech works in Act III as well as it did in Act II by giving a common rallying point for the nation.

Also, as argued earlier, FDR worked to separate Hoover from his own party to allow Republicans to save face and join the New Deal initiatives. By identifying Hoover as a sore loser, FDR was able to bypass Hoover’s refusal to concede and further move this part of the drama into the third act of the concession/acceptance play. It is not until after the election that communiqués between Hoover and FDR finally reveal a slight abdication to the new leader ([Hoover-Roosevelt Exchanges, Pepperdine University](#)).

FDR was careful to offer a few ennobling comments about his counterpart and his administration: of Hoover, “my distinguished opponent (Pittsburg);” of Hoover’s agriculture department, “it has done many admirable things (Atlanta);” once more regarding Hoover, “I reiterate my respect for his person and his office (Boston).”

At Indianapolis he spoke of my arguments, misquoting them. But at Indianapolis he went further. He abandoned argument for personalities.

In the presence of a situation like this, I am tempted to reply in kind. But I shall not yield to the temptation to which the President yielded. On the contrary, I reiterate my respect for his person and for his office. But I shall not be deterred even by the President of the United States from the discussion of grave national issues and from submitting to the voters the truth about their national affairs, however unpleasant that truth may be.

Of course, FDR quickly tears them back down. Here, FDR at once lifts a toast to a worthy opponent and puts him quickly back in his place as the sore loser. The battle is presented as having a clear victor, and there are more important things to consider.

In a clever stunt in Boston, FDR acted the role of legitimate national unifier by co-opting a five-point plan of Hoover’s “which the President’s Commission under the leadership of the Secretary of Commerce urged should be done. There is a lot of it which is still good,” FDR said and vowed to put into action what Hoover did not. This move discredited the inactive Hoover,

showed action and planning by FDR, helped raise the status and strength of his New Deal, showed he had the power to take what was Hoover's and make it work, and displayed a willingness to work across party lines to do whatever needed to be done while giving some credit to vanquished Hoover.

FDR's campaign rhetoric, therefore, completes the concession/acceptance drama as it performs the third act of closure during the campaign. He opened the door for unity, rallied the public to a unifying cause, spoke like an acting president, and both honored his opponent while co-opting his plans. As such, he completed the three acts, soundly establishing himself as the VIW.

## Conclusions

It is true that FDR carried out a campaign in traditional ways. But his rhetoric also played on the political stage in such a way that he was able to act presidentially throughout the contest. Indeed, as noted in Ritchie's (2007) work on the 1932 campaign, FDR's tactic was to try different, and at times conflicting and often vague messages, avoiding specifics on how he would win the war on the economy (pp. 123, 133). The format and effect of such a strategy can be explained by applying a rubric from the rhetorical drama that would normally play out at the end of a contest. Corcoran's (1998) three essential expressions enacted in the dramaturgy of the concession and acceptance speeches provide such a rubric: "*the loss of power, the transfer of political legitimacy, and the closure of public division.*" By performing these three acts FDR successfully constituted himself as the "VIW."

This study opens a new lens for analysis of campaign speeches, the VIW strategy. This strategy would backfire if the opponent could effectively do the same. However, FDR's charisma, the economic context of the day, and careful rhetorical choices made him successful.

The limitations of this study are the need for counter analysis of Hoover's campaign rhetoric in light of this VIW strategy. President Hoover's own attempts to deny a real contest may offer an example of an incumbent's failed attempts at a VIW strategy. FDR's three subsequent campaigns for presidency need to be analyzed for comparison. Comparisons also need to be made to similar attempts to employ this strategy in other presidential campaigns, and to analyze variables such as context and individual style or personality, as well as differences and similarities between scenes. A study of recent campaigns, if they employed a VIW strategy, could give insight into whether this approach is effective in today's political climate. The 2012 U.S. presidential contest in the midst of economic crisis played out differently for the incumbent, Barack Obama. Furthermore, the conditions favoring such a strategic approach need to be explored along with alternative rubrics for analysis besides Corcoran's (1998) criteria.

It is still fair to say that FDR's campaign speeches fit the mold of one who is acting as the victor even while in the midst of the contest. Based on Corcoran's (1998) criteria FDR did indeed successfully employ a VIW strategy in his first presidential campaign.

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## Appendix

List of FDR's 1932 campaign speeches used for this analysis.

[“Radio Address on a Program of Assistance for the Crippled”](#) – February 18, 1931

[“The Forgotten Man”](#) – Radio Address, Albany, New York, April 7, 1932

[“Address at Oglethorpe University”](#) – May 22, 1932

[“Roosevelt’s Nomination Address”](#) – Chicago, Illinois, July 2, 1932

[Columbus, Ohio Address](#) – August 20, 1932

[“Commonwealth Club Address”](#) – San Francisco, California, September 23, 1932

[Sioux City, Iowa Address](#) – September 29, 1932

[Pittsburg, Pennsylvania Address](#) – October 19, 1932

[Campaign Speech in Atlanta, Georgia](#) – October 24, 1932

[“Address on Long-Range Planning”](#) – Boston, Massachusetts, October 31, 1932

[Berlin, Massachusetts Address](#) – October 31, 1932

[“First Inaugural Address”](#) – March 4, 1933

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