

# Presidential Inaugural Addresses

The More things Change, the  
More they Stay the Same



# The Rhetorical Moment

- Janus moment
  - Past and future
- *Talk about* that
  - Celebrates comty
  - Names response to now
- Managing continuity and change
  - Continuity still respds to moment
  - Chg restores familiarity of comty



# Talk ties events together in web of

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- **description:** What happened? Why it happened?
- **evaluation:** What is good or bad about the moment? Do you accept or reject?
- **response:** How should cmty respond? What does it support? What does it oppose?

# Talk responds to events two ways

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## Acceptance:

- Motive embraces the event; approp
- Response coordinates per-form-ance
- DP: Little sense of disorder; order maps event

## Rejection:

- Motivates fighting r/t embracing event
- DP: Names *disorder* & coord *resistance*; seeks *restoration*
- Per-form-ance is for chg

# *Dialectic of Permanence and Change*

## **Acceptance**

- Celebrates **continuity** of values
- Assures that disorder req *only* **chgs** consistent w/ values (order)

## **Rejection**

- In naming disorder, celebrates order
- Thus, **affirms** ctrl values of comty
- **Chg** restores values

# Nations do this as well

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In a given moment

- Leaders lead by framing our situation to motivate action
- Celebrate the continuity
- Name the disorder to per-form chg

# Inaugural Addresses

Quadrennial *rituals* where national comty

- Celebrates its identity
- Affirms defining values
- Defines situation of its moment
- Coordinates response to its moment

Per-form-ing their role, Prsdts use IA to

- describe their ideal society (Order)
- point to probs and causes (Pollution & Guilt)
- suggest direction of society's movement (Remedy)
- describe government's role in society (Restore order)

# Dialectic of Permanence & Change

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Inaugurals are rituals managing this dialectic

- In times of crisis and change: identifying continuity
- In normal times: reassuring of change



# Inaugurals examined

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- **Thomas Jefferson** -- 1801. Described as second American revolution.
- **Benjamin Harrison** -- 1888. Era when US becomes industrial.
- **Woodrow Wilson** -- 1913. Coming to terms with the industrial age.
- **Franklin Roosevelt** -- 1933. Great Depression.
- **Ronald Reagan** -- 1981. Reversal of New Deal government.

# We look for

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- **values:** What do they praise about the situation? About their country? What do they value about the American experience?
- **causality:** Why do they see their situation occurring?
- **explanation:** What do they see as important in explaining their society?
- **response:** What do they believe is a proper reaction by government?

# Themes to watch for in Inaugurals

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- **<Progress>**: A lang of action
- **<frontier>**: A conceptualization of the Amer experience
- **tension between individual and community**: *The Amer struggle*
- **supremacy of Amer**: What makes Amer special? Exceptionalism

# Thomas Jefferson, 1801

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- The Election of 1800
- Ind freedom: Free from Inst
- Freedom in geographic frontier
- American Purity: Threat from Europe
- Prophylactic Government

# Benjamin Harrison, 1889

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- Weak Presidents & Robber Barrons
- America: Land of Businessmen
- New Frontier: geographic to business
- American Purity: Threat from Europe
- Individual freedom: needed for business?
- Government: Enforcer of Laws

# Pres lead in their moment

## If you are asking

- Which of these guys is *right* abt the revolution?
- They *make* history *up*!?
- Something besides *reality* at stake.

**Stuck in referential**

## Instead:

- Responding to cdtns (*reality*) of moment
- w/ resources of national character.
- Precedents in history give reassurance.
- Restoration hrt of task.

**Enacting env'ment:  
Def/ing moment**

# Woodrow Wilson, 1913

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- A progressive
- Rejective Frame: Restoration
- Restore to the frontier
- Europe: Source of markets
- Government: Referee for fairness

# Franklin Roosevelt, 1933

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- The Great Depression
- Military metaphor dominant
- Individual lives in human system
- Advance into frontier: by army
- Government: Leader of advance



# Ronald Reagan, 1981

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- The end of the New Deal
- World dominated by economy
- Freedom is: Individual in economy
- Economic institutions: Disappear
- Government: unleash individualism

# Over two centuries

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- American national motivation still in frontier
- Americans had to come to terms with institutions
- Freedom constant: language changes
- Motivation in govt changed
- Changes in our Americanism

# What about Obama?

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- **<Progress>**: A language of action
- **<frontier>**: A conceptualization of the American experience
- **tension between individual and community**: The American struggle
- **supremacy of Americans**: What makes Americans special

# Leadership

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- Conditions and demands change over time
- Leadership uses discourse to:
  - Coordinate response to those changes
  - Thru identifying the familiar (history/values)
  - To name the change in manageable ways
- Leadership uses discourse to inspire