

TEACHER GUIDE

1944 DOC. #3: Dewey Response to “Fala Speech”

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Radio airtime cost lots of money and this is a major reason why the political action committees became so important to candidates in this period. Roosevelt and Dewey spent an unprecedented 2.5 million dollars to buy time on radio during the 1944 campaign. In the decades following this, media advertising budgets would spiral into the tens and hundreds of millions of dollars. Some felt that campaign spending was already out of control in 1944. Roosevelt’s Fala speech was aired on the radio, with no cost to FDR’s campaign, because a President’s speech was considered news.

Two days after Roosevelt’s speech, Dewey answered him during a campaign appearance in Oklahoma City. Dewey was angry with Roosevelt. He hired additional radio stations out of his own pocket to broadcast his remarks. In the speech Dewey acted like the prosecuting attorney he had once been, answering Roosevelt’s charges point by point and making new ones of his own. This call-and-response, where one candidate answers the other in speech after speech, has become a traditional part of U.S. presidential campaigning.

These excerpts are from the opening of Dewey’s speech and from another section near the end of his remarks. Together they make up slightly more than 10% of the total speech.

> **Project** the document and **have students read** the excerpts on the handout.

QUESTION	What are the main messages that Dewey is trying to convey? Give evidence from the text.
SUGGESTED ANSWER	Roosevelt went against his pledge and made the campaign negative while the Republicans are trying to maintain national unity and a positive campaign.
EVIDENCE	text: “the campaign on our side has greatly strengthened that [national] unity” while Roosevelt’s Fala speech was a descent into “mudslinging, ridicule, and wisecracks ”
SUGGESTED ANSWER	New Deal bureaucrats are corrupt and dangerous for the nation.
EVIDENCE	the “New Deal Depression” is overseen by “this motly crew” of “ill-assorted, power hungry conglomeration of city bosses, communists and career bureaucrats”
SUGGESTED ANSWER	Dewey has integrity and FDR is a liar.
EVIDENCE	text: “restore integrity to the White House, so that its spoken word can be trusted once again”

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PowerPoint Slide
Text on student handout

QUESTION What techniques does Dewey use to communicate his message? Give evidence from the speech.

SUGGESTED ANSWER He states his own good intentions.

EVIDENCE "I have been laying before our people the program..."; "I have been deeply conscious...most trying time in history...national unity...the conduct of the campaign on our side..."

SUGGESTED ANSWER He attacks Roosevelt's honesty.

EVIDENCE "gone was the high-sounding pledge"; with FDR out of the White House "its spoken word can be trusted once again"

SUGGESTED ANSWER He uses name-calling.

EVIDENCE text: "motley crew"; "ill-assorted, power hungry conglomeration of city bosses, Communists and career bureaucrats"

QUESTION What message does the photo of Dewey at the Indian Conference in Oklahoma City give about the candidate? State your evidence.

SUGGESTED ANSWER Dewey is calm and open to the views of others. He is concerned about the lives of Native American people.

EVIDENCE relaxed, listening posture; he is meeting with Native American leaders and their families

FURTHER QUESTIONS

What are the pros and cons of debating in the press, as Dewey and Roosevelt did, versus contending face to face in a radio or TV debate?

Do attacks on one's opponent do more harm or good for the attacking candidate? Why?

FDR's Fireside Chats were broadcast as news over the radio with no cost to Roosevelt. Dewey had to pay to get on the radio to rebut Roosevelt's Fala speech. Should candidates get free airtime on radio and television? Should this apply to 3rd party candidates as well?

Note: The 1934 Federal Communications Act requires broadcasters to "afford equal opportunity" to all candidates. If a radio or TV station runs an ad for one candidate, it must allow the opponent(s) to purchase "equal time." This does not apply to news coverage.

ADDITIONAL INFO

Dewey received negative publicity for his speech. One letter to the editor in North Carolina suggested that both Dewey's and Roosevelt's speeches reduced the campaign "to the level of a street brawl" (Troy 184). Dewey regretted his remarks after hearing the outpouring of negative response, calling it "the worst damned speech I ever made." He later said, "It was all wrong. I was attacking the dignity of the office I was seeking" (Troy 185). Despite his feelings about the speech Dewey continued to attack Roosevelt for his ties to party bosses, his failed economic and wartime policies, and for being in league with Communists.

CONNECTIONS

(see thematic listing)

Attack
Media Bias