

## Day of Infamy

William Safire

New York Times Magazine; Dec 7, 1997; ProQuest Newsstand  
pg. 30

David Croland



VALENTINO  
FURS

SAKS FIFTH AVENUE

THE AMERICAN  
FUR AWARDS  
AMERICAN FUR FEDERATION  
\*\*\*\*\*

Alexandre

## WILLIAM SAFIRE ON LANGUAGE

### Day of Infamy

These are fighting words that will live forever in the annals of speechmaking.

THIS IS A GOOD DAY TO TAKE A close look at a famous speech. The day the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, President Franklin D. Roosevelt — who could have turned to his great speechwriters, Robert E. Sherwood and Samuel I. Rosenman, for his speech to Congress calling for a recognition that “a state of war has existed” — chose to write the message himself. He dictated this to Grace Tully, his secretary:

“Yesterday, December 7, 1941, a date which will live in world history,” went the first draft of his six-minute message, “the United States was simultaneously and deliberately attacked by naval and air forces of the Empire of Japan.”

F.D.R. was not satisfied with that. *Simultaneously* dealt with the naval and air forces operating as a unit, which was not his central point; besides, it was a six-syllable word. He changed *simultaneously* to the more dramatic *suddenly*, which went to the surprise nature of the combined attack.

What about “a date which will live in world history”? That seemed to credit the Japanese with an historic act and carried with it no condemnation. He reached for a word that expressed “shame, disgrace, evil reputation, obloquy, opprobrium.” His choice: *infamy*.

It was an unfamiliar word to most people; few recalled the passage in Ezekiel in the King James Version of the Bible, “Ye are taken up in the lips of talkers, and are an *infamy* of the people.” Because the adjective *infamous* is within the periphery of understanding of most English speakers, the noun *infamy* was a better choice than, say, *obloquy* or the more bookish *opprobrium*.

History has a way of editing phrases to make them more memorable. Just



as Churchill’s “blood, toil, tears and sweat” has been shortened in memory to “blood, sweat and tears,” F.D.R.’s “date which will live in infamy” has been cut to “F.D.R.’s *day of infamy* speech.” (*Day* is not as puissant as *date* in this case, as F.D.R. was marking the date with great specificity; however, I would have substituted *that* for *which*.)

Looking over the drafts supplied by the archivist Raymond Teichman at the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library in Hyde Park, I note that the President added and then crossed out “without warning” — why should an attacker give warning? — and handled the duplicity of Japanese negotiations with “was continuing the conversations,” which he shortened to “was still in conversation.”

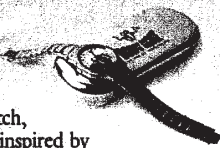
F.D.R., reading what he had dictated, evidently felt the message needed a lift. He wrote an insert: “No matter how long it may take us to overcome this premeditated invasion, the American people will in their righteous might win through to absolute victory.”

Every President can make use of good writing help. Lincoln used a suggestion of his Secretary of State, William Seward, in developing “the mystic chords of memory” peroration to his first Inaugural address. In the final draft of F.D.R.’s war message, the student of perorations in speechwriting can see the handwriting of Harry Hopkins, the President’s closest adviser. Under the

ILLUSTRATION BY TERRY ALLEN

# time machine.

Speedometer  
Watch clocks time  
like a vintage  
show car.



New Speedo Watch, from Body Heat, was inspired by the great Detroit iron of the '50s and '60s. Not only gives you the time, lower half also shifts into varying silver and grey hues as your moods change. Hands even alter color, blue to green, with your body temperature! Stainless back is dust, shock, and moisture resistant. Metal band adjusts for comfort. The compliments you'll receive are just one more plus. Each in its own metal case.

■ The Speedometer Watch from Body Heat™  
#0281MB \$49.95

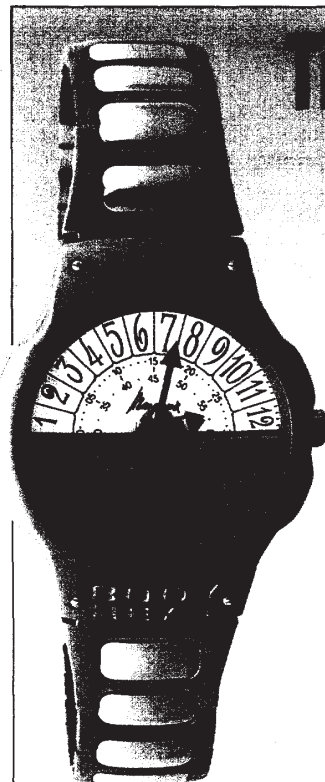
**The Edge Company**  
Tools, Gifts, & Action Gear

1-800-732-9976

P.O. Box 896-NV6997 Brattleboro, VT 05302  
Please add \$5.00 Federal Express delivery charge.

Also call for our beautiful 80 page full-color catalog - FREE!

We ship FedEx



Calling all Catholics for . . . after all the money is made, games played, battles won or lost, and as the sun goes down on your day, as you pause to take stock, you, once debonair, perhaps still are, beautiful and immortal, frolicking through life but, naturally, not forever, even you, finally, forced to concede how quickly time passes, tricky long-range questions popping up: where are the answers, where's the clarity . . . we're here to say you won't get all the answers in the **National Catholic Reporter**, but you'll find some questions that ebb and flow in this quirky, cranky but often benign old world . . . there's news in this justice-driven, renewal-oriented newsweekly, affectionately called **NCR**, spiced with hints of meaning, relevance and soothing ritual. Hell—there's even glimpses of heaven, plus humor where God is more than a slang word, where prophets of a sort strut their stuff . . . folks in 95 countries subscribe 'cause they think we have a clue or can cue Catholics on where to look, not least inwards . . . do call us at **1-800-333-7373** for a sample, or check us out at **www.natcath.com/**

National Catholic Reporter

**NCR**

THE INDEPENDENT CATHOLIC NEWSWEEKLY

word *Deity*, he suggested an insertion, reminding the President that a reference to God was called for.

To lift the spirit of a stunned nation, Hopkins, not noted for his writing skill, wrote in the line that subtly evoked Lincoln's wartime "with firmness in the right," and combined it with an adaptation of the final few words of the Presidential oath: "With confidence in our armed forces — with faith in our people — we will gain the inevitable triumph — so help us God." (Hopkins had added another phrase — "with assurance in the righteousness of our cause" — but that must have seemed excessive to him, and he crossed it out of his insertion.) F.D.R. then escalated "faith in our people" to "with the unbounded determination of our people."

Sherwood, the dramatist who had won a Pulitzer Prize for "Abe Lincoln in Illinois," might have been understandably grumpy at being shut out of such an historic speech. He did not hear the echo of Lincoln's triple-*with* construction in his second Inaugural ("With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right") in Hopkins's insertion. Sherwood later called Hopkins's insertion "the most platitudinous line in the speech," but he was mistaken.

F.D.R. scrapped his own insertion about winning through to victory and, making emendations, chose Hopkins's line instead. All this is why, as Americans remember Pearl Harbor, speechwriters remember the Pearl Harbor speech.

#### FAREWELL TO SINO

At a White House briefing, Samuel R. Berger, the national security adviser, was asked about a state-

ment by China's President, Jiang Zemin, and replied, "It's not a new formulation in the theology of Chinology."

He was interrupted by raucous laughter from Sino-philists in the press corps, one of whom shouted the correction, "*Sinology*."

Meekly, the national security adviser began to accept the correction, but then — suddenly — a wave of hawkishness overtook him. "*Sinology* — no, *Chinology*! I'm inventing a new term."

It's about time. For centuries, the combining form *Sino* — from the Greek *Sinai*, akin to the Sanskrit *cina*, meaning "Chinese" — has been used in lieu of *Chinese*. Why? *Sino-Soviet* had a smooth, sibilant sound, but now that we're back to Russia, what's so sacrosanct about *Sino-Russian relations*? Why not *Chinese-Russian relations*?

This may upset the Foreign Policy Establishment, the legion of U.S. *Sinologists*, *China-watchers* and *Beijingologists* everywhere, but I'm getting on the Berger bandwagon to dump *Sino*, which only confuses people. If the national security adviser uses it, and I use it, and you use it, the dictionaries will have to record it — and then the word will be in. The New York Times stylebook urges reporters to avoid *Sino-* in adjectival references to China, preferring *Chinese-American*, but sticks with *Sinologist*. C'mon, fellas — time to go all the way.

Now, about the name of the newly assertive coiner. His name is Samuel R. (for Richard) Berger. He likes to be called Sandy, which is fine for a nickname, especially when a line is being drawn in the sand, but I do not believe in substituting warm, cuddly nicknames for real names in standard newspaper writing.

*Chinologist*. Play it, Sam. ■