Hillary Clinton's charge that Barack Obama "plagiarized" campaign lines prompts a "Meet the Press" panel discussion on the long history of politicians "borrowing" phrases from past speeches and campaigns.

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Decision 08, Speeches, Phrases, Campaign, Lines, Rhetoric, Borrow, Lift, Plagiarism, Repetition, Familiar, Speechwriting, Writing, Ideas, "I Have a Dream", "We Hold These Truths to Be Self-Evident", "All Men Are Created Equal", "Nothing to Fear but Fear Itself", "I See an America", Hillary Clinton, Barack Obama, Bill Clinton, John Edwards, Jimmy Carter, FDR, Franklin Roosevelt, Richard Nixon, 'I see an America', Robert Ingersoll, Civil War, Silly Season, Language, Power of Words

Transcript
Sound Familiar?
TIM RUSSERT, Washington Bureau Chief:
The Clinton campaign meant to--tried to make an issue of Barack Obama borrowing words and phrases from Deval Patrick, now the governor of Massachusetts, the national co-chair of Obama's campaign. Let's watch the similarity between Obama and Patrick.
(Videotape, February 15, 2008)
SEN. OBAMA: Don't tell me words don't matter. "I have a dream." Just words? "We hold these truths to be self evident that all men are created equal." Just words? "We have nothing to fear but fear itself." Just words?
(End videotape)
(Videotape, October 15, 2006)
MR. DEVAL PATRICK: "We hold these truths to be self evident that all men are created equal." Just words? Just words? "We have nothing to fear but fear itself." Just words?
MR. RUSSERT: Now the candidates were asked about that at the debate on Thursday. Here's now Senator Obama responded, then Senator Clinton.
(End videotape)
SEN. OBAMA: The notion that I had plagiarized from somebody who's one of my national co-chairs, who gave me the line and suggested that I use it, I think is silly. And, you know, but, but this is where we start getting into silly season in politics, and I think people start getting discouraged about it.
SEN. CLINTON: I think that if your candidacy is going to be about words, then they should be your own words. That's, I think, a very simple proposition. And, you know, you know, lifting whole passages from someone else's speeches is not change you can believe in, it's change you can Xerox. And I just don't think...
SEN. OBAMA: Come one. That's, that's not what happened, Hillary.
SEN. CLINTON: No, but Barack, it is because if, you know, if you look, if you look...
(End videotape)
MR. RUSSERT: And a reaction from the audience there, Doris.
MS. GOODWIN: Yeah, well, I think when you give a canned line like that, people don't like it. You know, and I think what's going on here is that it's inevitable when candidates sit next to each other at debates, work with one another as Obama and, and Mr. Patrick had, you're going to pick up patterns from one another, you know, especially during these debates. They've all picked up language from one another. They're like an old couple that begins to look like each other at the end of their lives, and they've, they've probably listened to their colleagues on the debating trail more than they have their wives or their spouses. So in some ways it's good for the party to have the best lines that everybody in that party comes up with, the best ideas and patterns. Eventually one person will be the nominee. Let them evolve into each other as, as the time goes by, mush them all together.
MR. RUSSERT: It's funny you should say pick up lines from spouses or pick up lines from competitors, because I listened to Senator Clinton's closing remarks, and they sounded hauntingly familiar to me. And sure enough, we went back and checked, and this is what we discovered. Here's Senator Clinton and her
husband, Bill Clinton, Senator Clinton and John Edwards. Let's watch.

(Videotape, February 21, 2008)

SEN. CLINTON: You know, the hits I've taken in life are nothing compared to what goes on every single day in the lives of people across our country.

(Videotape, February 18, 1992)

FMR. PRES. CLINTON: The hits that I took in this election are nothing compared to the hits that the people of this state and this country are taking every day of their lives.

(Videotape, February 21, 2008)

SEN. CLINTON: Whatever happens, we're going to be fine. You know, we have strong support from our families and our friends. I just hope that we'll be able to say the same thing about the American people, and that's what this election should be about.

(Videotape, December 13, 2007)

FMR. SEN. JOHN EDWARDS: What's not at stake are any of us. All of us are going to be just fine, no matter what happens in this election. But what's at stake is whether America is going to be fine.

MR. RUSSERT: David Brooks.

MR. BROOKS: You got to remember how the--how these people live. They are--first of all, they're insane people that want to run for president. Second of all, they've been talking--they're in--they've been talking constantly for two years and haven't really been listening. They have what I call loggeria dementia, which is talking so much you drive yourself insane. So they've just been grasping at everything, and they've had no time to read, no time to think. I mean, if Mitt Romney had to not borrow lines, his, his rallies would have been silent. So it would have been like Friends meetings or something like that. So I don't blame them. They just agglomerate everything they can use and hear and just shove it into their, into their speech.

MR. RUSSERT: But Chuck Todd, the Clinton campaign was out there waving the plagiarism flag when in fact it appears to be a very common tactic that all candidates use in terms of borrowing from husbands or from opponents or from friends.

MR. TODD: Well, it was about--it's about this character thing. Because if you really look at why Obama's beating Clinton, it's not on issues, it's on authenticity. He has sold himself as a more authentic person, a more authentic potential nominee. And I think the Clintons have felt any way they can undermine that authenticity, maybe he's a house of cards, maybe. You know, that--that's what they keep saying to themselves. There--they beat their head against the wall on this. They just don't understand how a guy who three years ago was in the Illinois state Senate is somehow beating them for their birthright, you know, this, this Democratic nomination. And so I think the hit on the quote/unquote "plagiarism charge" was trying to hit this authenticity. I mean, we've seen in our exit polls, he destroys her on that sort of honest, trustworthy, authenticity.

MS. NORRIS: I, I think, if I may say, it's also an invitation for him to step into the ring. Because they think if he takes a defensive position--if she strikes at him and he--if he, he strikes back, that she has an advantage there because she is better positioned to sort of be in that sort of warrior pose. That's something that he's not always comfortable. You started talking about this in an historical context. Eleanor Roosevelt
said, "You cannot make me feel inferior without my consent."

MS. GOODWIN: Absolutely.

MS. NORRIS: If they're trying to embarrass him, one of the tacks he seems to have taken is, "You will not embarrass me without my consent. You may try to pull me here, but I'm going to stay right here."

MR. RUSSERT: You know, in history--on Super Tuesday, Hillary Clinton gave a speech: "I see an America where our economy works for everyone." Jimmy Carter, 32 years ago, "I see an America with a job for every man, woman and child." Bill Safire wrote about this in 1987, former speechwriter for Richard Nixon. He said, "I always admired Franklin Roosevelt's use of the repeated 'I see' construction. Working with writers Samuel Rosenman and Robert Sherwood in 1940, F.D.R. collaborated on a speech that used 'I see' to frame an inspiring vision: 'I see an America where factory workers are not discarded after they reach their prime. ... I see an America whose rivers and valleys and lakes ... are protected as the rightful heritage of all the people. ... I see an America devoted to our freedom.' Working as a speechwriter for Richard Nixon," "I thought: Why not lift it?" Sure enough, Nixon gave a speech saying, 'I see a day when Americans,' just like Carter, just like Clinton. So then, Safire acknowledges this: "After that speech, I felt a little pang of guilt..." "I called Sam Rosenman to fess up to using the 'I see' construction he and Bobby Sherwood had written for Roosevelt." And this is what Rosenman said, "'Check Robert Ingersoll'" "10 years after the Civil War."" "I tracked down the speech. ...There was the source of F.D.R.'s 'I see' in an Ingersoll speech in' '76. "'I see our country filled with happy homes. ... I see a world where thrones have crumbled. ... I see a world where labor reaps its full reward.'" This is Ingersoll who nominated Samuel Blaine for president in 1876. Rutherford B. Hayes won the nomination. Doris Kearns Goodwin, I see that politicians have a way of borrowing from one another.

MS. GOODWIN: Well, look, just as these politicians on the campaign trail are borrowing and absorbing patterns and evolving, so too speechwriters. They look at the best speeches in history. It's inevitable that those patterns are going to get in their heads. And you know, we can't make too much of this. This is the spoken word. It's different from the written word, and it becomes part of what's in there. As you said, there's not that much in their heads anymore that's coming in that's new. So all that's in there is what was there before.

MR. RUSSERT: Barack Obama has been criticized about rhetoric over substance. David Brooks, ask not what MEET THE PRESS can do for you, but what you can do for MEET THE PRESS. This is what you wrote in your column about Barack Obama having some fun with his status. "Up until now The Chosen One's [Obama's] speeches had seemed to them less like stretches of words and more like soul sensations that transcended time and space. But those in the grips of Obama Comedown Syndrome began to wonder if His stuff actually made sense. For example, His Hopeness tells rallies that we are the change we have been waiting for, but if we are the change that we have been waiting for then why have we been waiting since we've been here all along?"

MR. BROOKS: I was describing what I think is happening, and it's happened to me to some extent. You go to the rallies, you, you faint, you feel, you weep at your phone because you're watching the--his videos. And then you actually begin to think about them a little more, and you, you experience a little bit of a letdown, and you start to think. And I'm, I'm amazing that Hillary Clinton has not launched these attacks a
little better. How is this 47-year-old guy—he'll be 47 if he's elected president—going to change all these 70-something polarized committee chairmen on the Hill? He's—there's been a lot of bipartisan things that have happened the last couple of years: the gang of 14 on judges, immigration, the FISA got—bill got 68 senators. He's been involved in none of them. So it's fair to ask, and she should do a little of this asking, "How exactly are you going to bring this unity about?" And you know, it's fair to ask these questions. It should be said that people who come down from the heights of Obama-mania still do seem to like him. They know it's going to be tough, they're realistic about it, but they think, "Hey, I share something with that guy, some sense of hope."

MS. GOODWIN: But, you know...

MR. BROOKS: And that can't be erased. That's still there.

MS. GOODWIN: ...what history argues, and I think this is what he's arguing, is that the only time we've seen progressive change in this country is when the country is mobilized to push the people in Congress to action. That's what happened in the Progressive Movement in the turn of the century, it's what happened in the New Deal, it's what happened in the '60s. And I think that's what he's arguing. That "I can't just get it down by myself; I need to have that movement out there that will push us in Washington, me and them included." And that's what I think is the strength of that message that he's trying to espouse

MR. RUSSERT: You have five seconds, historian. Have you ever seen a race like this?

MS. GOODWIN: I love it. It's the best. No, you know, and it's exciting because people are involved with—we've been worrying for years about the fact that nobody's paying attention anymore, that it's a—you know, it's not a participant sport, that the declining polls are going down. People are going to the voting booths; people are excited. How can you not love it?