



The Presidential Character

Predicting Performance in the White House

With a Revised and Updated Foreword by George C. Edwards III

Fifth Edition

James David Barber

The Presidential Character

A book entitled *The Presidential Character* is more timely and necessary than ever. This new issue of James David Barber's classic work appears almost 50 years after its first publication and yet reads like a roadmap to the 2020 presidential election. Its subtitle, "Predicting Performance in the White House," is an apt reflection on the election of 2016.

With a revised and updated foreword by George C. Edwards III that brings in the Trump Administration, this book argues that patterns in a person's character, world view, and political style can allow us to anticipate his or her performance as president. How would Barber have categorized Donald J. Trump, who appears to defy every presidential type and norm? This question suggests one of the most provocative and appealing reasons for students, scholars, and voters to re-read *The Presidential Character* at this particular juncture. What should we look for in a president? This text offers explanations and predictions of the performance of past presidents and presidential candidates with many cautionary tales looking forward.

FEATURES

- Presents a revised and updated foreword by presidential scholar George C. Edwards III, Distinguished Professor of Political Science at Texas A&M University, that includes the advent of the Trump Administration and highlights the book's classic and enduring contributions.
- Includes predictions of presidential performance from Nixon to Bush.
- Analyzes the media's role in providing information about the political candidates and in shaping public opinion of them.
- Draws on historical, biographical, and psychological research to help voters make judicious choices in determining the country's highest leaders.
- Encourages citizens to be actively involved scholars, critics, and participants in their government.

James David Barber was a Duke University political scientist and provocateur best known for exploring the psychology of Oval Office aspirants and occupants. He spent years as a consultant to "NBC Nightly News" and as a board member of the Poynter Institute, a center for the study of journalism and media ethics in St. Petersburg, Florida.

Praise for the Original Edition of *The Presidential Character*

"Given the imposing power of our Presidents today, there are few subjects of greater import; and Barber has written an important book on the subject."

Bruce Mazlish in *The New York Times*

"Comes closer to the truth about why presidents do what they do than any other author."

Hugh Sidney in *Life Magazine*

"The most original, most provocative, and most daring study of the presidency of the past decade . . . A major intellectual breakthrough."

James MacGregor Burns (late of Williams College and the
James MacGregor Burns Academy of Leadership of the School of Public
Policy at the University of Maryland)

The Presidential Character

Predicting Performance in the White House
With a Revised and Updated
Foreword by George C. Edwards III

Fifth Edition

JAMES DAVID BARBER

 **Routledge**
Taylor & Francis Group
NEW YORK AND LONDON

For Skiff

Fifth edition published 2020
by Routledge
52 Vanderbilt Avenue, New York, NY 10017

and by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 4RN

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

© 2020 Taylor & Francis

The right of James David Barber to be identified as author of this work has been asserted by him in accordance with sections 77 and 78 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

Trademark notice: Product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

First edition published by Prentice Hall, Inc. 1972
Fourth edition published by Routledge 2009

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Barber, James David, author. | Routledge (Firm)

Title: The presidential character : predicting performance in the White House /
James David Barber, with a revised and updated foreword by George C.
Edwards III.

Description: Fifth Edition. | New York : Routledge, 2020. | "First edition published by Prentice Hall, Inc. 1972. Fourth edition published by Routledge 2009"—T.p. verso. | Includes bibliographical references.

Identifiers: LCCN 2019029849 | ISBN 9780367366780 (Hardback) |

ISBN 9780367366773 (Paperback) | ISBN 9780429348075 (eBook)

Subjects: LCSH: Presidents—United States—Case studies. | Prediction (Psychology)

Classification: LCC JK511 .B37 2020 | DDC 352.230973—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2019029849>

ISBN: 978-0-367-36678-0 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-0-367-36677-3 (pbk)

ISBN: 978-0-429-34807-5 (ebk)

Typeset in Stone Serif
by Apex CoVantage, LLC

Foreword

George C. Edwards III

James David Barber's *The Presidential Character* first appeared in 1972, just as Richard M. Nixon was finishing his first term. Two years later, Nixon resigned from the presidency as a result of the Watergate scandal, for which he faced almost certain impeachment and removal from office. Rightly or wrongly, Barber's analysis of Nixon has been credited with predicting his ultimate downfall. Faced with the current presidency of Donald J. Trump and threats of impeachment, the perennial relevance of the core concern of Barber's book can scarcely be overstated.

Writers have long debated the "great man" interpretation of history. The two sides of this issue assumed their best-known forms in the nineteenth century. In *Heroes and Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History*, published in 1841, Thomas Carlyle argued that great men alone were responsible for the direction of history. To Carlyle, the environment of the hero was generally malleable and thus receptive to leadership. Viewing history from quite a different perspective, various schools of social determinists, including the Spencerians, Hegelians, and Marxists, saw history as an inexorable march in one direction, with change occurring only when the culture was ripe for it. They concluded that great men could not have acted differently from the way they did. Leo Tolstoy's portrayal of Napoleon in *War and Peace* is perhaps the most memorable depiction of this view.

We need not resolve this ancient debate, and there is evidence on both sides. Contemporary scholars, including myself, have concluded that important arenas of presidential leadership such as the public and Congress are constrained by institutional fundamentals, the nature of public opinion, and broader historical forces.¹

On the other hand, it is common to argue that it makes a difference who the president is. For instance, commentators often offer the example of the attempted assassination of President-elect Franklin D. Roosevelt on February 15, 1933, to make the point. If anarchist Giuseppe Zangara had succeeded in assassinating Roosevelt instead of

Chicago Mayor Anton Cermak, they argue, the history of the United States would have been different.

This example reflects that fact that although presidents may not be able to persuade others to do their bidding, they have substantial discretionary authority.² They are free to make a wide range of decisions that may determine war and peace, economic growth, the protection of civil liberties and the environment, access to health care, and many other crucial aspects of life in the United States. There is nothing more important to understand about the presidency than decision making. Decisions are what make presidents unique.

The presidency of Donald Trump reinforces the point dramatically. No president in modern times has adopted a decision-making style less reliant on information and more dependent on instinct. None has engaged in such coarse public discourse, had such an uneasy relationship with accuracy and the truth, and gone to such great lengths to delegitimize the opposition. By all appearances, the president's personal needs drive much of his public behavior and his approach to governing.

Although we have made great progress in increasing our understanding of the presidency, decision making—and the nature of the presidents who make decisions—is the area we understand the least. In 1992, I chaired a panel of distinguished scholars that reviewed the presidency of George H. W. Bush at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association. Dave Barber asked an incisive question from the floor: Aside from policy aspirations, what should we be looking for in a president? We did not offer insightful answers.

It is difficult to study presidential decisions. We typically lack access to the decision-making process, and decisions are inherently difficult to quantify. Nevertheless, if we do not ask the right questions, we are unlikely to arrive at the right answers. To his credit, Barber asked what is perhaps the key question about the chief executive.

WHAT SHOULD WE LOOK FOR IN A PRESIDENT?

In the nearly half century since James David Barber published the first edition of *Presidential Character*, it has been one of the most widely read, frequently discussed, and controversial books in political science. Barber's ambitious goal for his book was to develop some clear criteria for choosing presidents. Throughout his career, and in a variety of professional settings, one could observe him asking, "What should we look for in a president?"

Answering this question, he believed, required understanding the whole person, including his personality. Because the presidency is a position of public leadership, the president bears "intense moral,

sentimental, and quasi-religious pressures.” The president must not allow these pressures to distort his thinking. Sanity is needed in the presidency.

How do we determine who is sane, or less dramatically (and more to the point), best suited to carry the burdens of the presidency? Barber argues that we can identify patterns in a person’s character, worldview, and style that allow us to anticipate their performance as president. Our focus, then, must be on the individual rather than external influences on the president.

Because personality is so complex, Barber tries to identify those aspects of it that are most relevant to presidential performance. He suggests that character, style, and worldview are cognitive handles for assessing presidential personality.

CHARACTER

The core of Barber’s analysis, which gives the book its title, is the president’s character. Presidential character is “the way the President orients himself toward life.” Developed mainly during childhood, this orientation toward experience endures for a lifetime. But how do we determine a president’s character?

In just a few paragraphs, Barber lays out a typology based on two observable behavioral dimensions: activity and affect. Activity is the level of energy that a president devotes to the job, and affect is the level of satisfaction the president obtains from it. He divides each dimension into two categories (active-inactive and positive-negative), creating four possible combinations of character-oriented tendencies. Although he discusses much more than character in the biographies that compose the rest of the book, Barber declares early, “the core of the argument . . . is that Presidential character . . . comes in four varieties. The most important thing to know about a President or candidate is where he fits among these types . . . ”

The reason that character type is so critical, according to Barber, is that “the relation of activity to enjoyment in a President . . . tends to outline a cluster of characteristics, to set apart the adapted from the compulsive, compliant, and withdrawn types.” In other words, by measuring observable surface behavior, we can identify underlying psychological tendencies.

Some critics found these claims problematic. Barber asserts that his two dimensions tap what is essential and common to most theories of personality, yet he does not show he has grounded them in the literature on personality. Although he claims that his four basic character patterns are “long familiar in psychological research,” he provides no citations to support his assertion. Thus, critics called for

Barber to validate the premise that surface phenomena tap underlying personality characteristics and that the traits Barber attributed to each type go together and only with each other.

For Barber, self-esteem underlies character. The better people feel about themselves, the more likely they will be able to accept criticism, think rationally, and learn on the job. Thus, he maintains that the degree and quality of the president's emotional involvement in an issue are powerful influences on how he defines the issue itself, how much attention he pays to it, which facts and persons he sees as relevant to its resolution, and what principles and purposes he associates with the issues.

The most well-known aspect of Barber's analysis is his argument that active-negative presidents experience a common pattern of *rigidification* resulting from the relationship of a situation they face to their innermost feelings. In other words, these presidents, who are fundamentally insecure, persevere in disastrous policies when opponents threaten their self-esteem, especially their power and rectitude. Always in pursuit of inner phantoms, active-negative presidents respond to threats in ways that Barber finds inappropriate for the objective political situation.

Of the four character types, the active-positive is the one Barber believes is best suited for the presidency. Such a person has the energy needed to do the job and the personal security to deal with the inevitable interpersonal conflicts that result from competing perspectives, interests, policy goals, and ambitions. Thus, they do not need to defend their egos and can concentrate on achieving their policy goals. Although the personalities represented by the other character types may impede presidential performance, perhaps adversely affecting a president's vision, judgment, or actions, the personality of the active-positive presidents allows them to learn from their mistakes and open themselves to a wide range of views.

Because the four personality types are so different, it is essential to place presidents and potential presidents in the correct category of character. Obviously, you cannot predict behavior if you have misclassified a person. Barber acknowledges that no one fits exactly one of the four character types and that every president is a mixture of the four types. This complexity makes categorization difficult, but Barber resolves the issue by using the dominant tendency of a president. However, he does not resolve the question of identifying the personality characteristics of a mixed character type.

Not everyone agrees with Barber's categorization of individual presidents. Is Dwight Eisenhower a passive-negative type, as Barber claims, or active-positive, as scholar Fred Greenstein concludes?³ Some

also note that liberal Democrats Franklin D. Roosevelt, Harry S. Truman, John F. Kennedy, and Jimmy Carter do best in Barber's framework. On the other hand, presidents of whom Barber clearly disapproves such as Herbert Hoover (the failure to deal with the Depression), Lyndon Johnson (the escalation of the war in Vietnam), and Richard Nixon (just about everything), fall into the active-negative category.

How would Barber have categorized Donald J. Trump, who appears to many to be *sui generis* among presidents? This question suggests one of the most provocative and appealing reasons to evaluate the argument in *The Presidential Character*.

Barber does not fail to provide the appropriate caveats, noting that his categories are somewhat crude and that the impact of personality on performance is a matter of tendencies. He also disavows the reductionist view that character determines everything. Yet his core theory and its use in explanation and prediction of the most important aspects of presidential performance rests upon the special significance he places upon character.

PRESIDENTIAL STYLE

If character forms the inner core of personality, then style is its outer garb. It is a coping mechanism, a means by which people deal with their environment. In Barber's words, "style is how a . . . President goes about doing what the office requires him to do to speak, directly or through media, to large audiences; to deal face to face with other politicians, individually and in small, relatively private groups; and to read, write, and calculate by himself in order to manage the endless flow of details that stream onto his desk."

Presidents have habitual ways of performing these three political roles, and the balance among the roles varies among presidents. In addition to his basic patterns of style, each president has a unique mode of coping with and adapting to the demands of the office. According to Barber, presidents choose their style in early adulthood with their first independent political success. A confluence of needs, skills, and opportunities shows them what works and they stick to it.

WORLDVIEW

Each president also has a worldview the "primary, politically relevant beliefs, particularly his conceptions of social causality, human nature, and the central moral conflicts of the time." These views condition their perceptions, their thinking, and their judgment. As with

character and style, worldviews develop early, mainly in adolescence according to Barber. However, he argues, worldview only provides a general indication of the propensities of choice in a decision-making situation.

There is no explicit provision for dealing with worldviews in the character framework, and Barber handles them in an impressionistic and fragmentary way in the biographies of individual presidents. Nevertheless, his focus sensitizes us to the importance of the president's basic premises in decision making, which commentators frequently overlook in their analyses of presidential behavior. In addition, his descriptions are often provocative, which challenges us to refine our own perceptions of the presidents.

CLASSIFYING THE COMPONENTS

According to Barber, these three psychological components form a pattern of motives, habits, and beliefs that result in behaviors that are evident throughout life. Character is dominant and provides the main thrust and broad direction but does not determine in any fixed sense worldview and style. Moreover, these behaviors and the psychological foundation on which they rest do not change easily. Once developed, character, style, and worldviews tend to persist over time while issue positions may shift with the public mood and election potential. Consequently, personality factors may be a better predictor of how people will perform in office than what they say they will do if elected.

The best way to determine character, worldview, and style, according to Barber, is to see how they developed early in life. The problem is that the relevant historical information varies in quantity and quality. Often it is sketchy and unreliable. Yet it is essential to classify the three components accurately if we are to use the framework to explain presidential behavior.

EXPLAINING PRESIDENTIAL BEHAVIOR

The critical test for Barber's argument is explaining and predicting presidential behavior. Most of the book is a set of biographies in which he applies his concepts to modern presidents. These essays aim to explain presidential actions, but they also raise important questions for readers.

The president operates at the vortex of many competing forces, ranging from public opinion and the party divisions in Congress to the nation's foreign policy commitments and his own

ideological predispositions. Barber typically accords greater weight to personality than to other factors in explaining presidential behavior. Moreover, he usually gives greater weight to character than to style or worldview.

This reluctance to consider alternative explanations raises important questions. Was it rigidification or his political philosophy of individualism that discouraged Hoover from aggressively advocating welfare policies? Was LBJ defending his ego against harsh criticism or was he responding to his worldview, formed partly by domestic politics and opposition charges of the “loss” of China during the Truman presidency? At the very least, we need to consider such explanations.

Moreover, one could argue that neither Hoover nor Johnson had displayed rigidity in their long careers prior to facing these issues. And what are we to make of Hoover relaxing his views on the federal role in the economy in 1932 and LBJ reversing his escalation of the war in late 1968? Was Richard Nixon rigid regarding the Watergate cover-up, or was he amazingly flexible in his efforts to hide his violation of the law and maintain his office?

In addition, Barber does not consider the possibility of ego controls. Many people learn to control and regulate the expression of their personal needs and anxieties. For example, we are all familiar with people who learn to control their tempers. Such defenses help them to realistically appraise situations and deal with them more effectively. Is it not possible that the disciplined politicians who become president also have some resources of self-control?

The most memorable aspect of *The Presidential Character* is Barber’s claim that the interaction between character and a particular situation may produce tragedy for active-negative presidents because of their rigid response. Yet, how do we know when rigidification will occur? How do we know a trigger when we see it? Barber does not say.

In addition, we need to determine an appropriate test of the model. If tragedies do not appear, Barber asserts the environment was not ripe for producing rigidification. In the first edition of the book, Barber concludes that Richard Nixon was a special variant of the active-negative character type who had avoided tragedy. If even the nonoccurrence of a prediction does not invalidate the theory, what would it take to falsify it? Is the argument tautological?

If a predicted tragedy does occur, Barber can claim that the psychological explanation is valid. Perhaps it is. Alternatively, there may be another explanation . . .

CONCLUSION

The Presidential Character raises many important questions about presidential performance. Barber forces us to consider the occupants of the White House as individuals and the less visible influences on their behavior. He applies social science concepts to real world politics in an attempt to be helpful to citizens and scholars alike. Moreover, he does all this in an appealing and interesting fashion. It is not surprising that his book is still in print.

Barber also engages our analytical faculties as he offers an original approach to understanding politics and seeks to reach generalizations about presidential performance across presidents. To evaluate such an engaging and unique work calls for thinking carefully and critically about analysis of complex behavior in an equally complex environment. The encouragement of analytical rigor alone makes reading *The Presidential Character* a worthwhile endeavor.

Barber's work should encourage us to think about our current president and leaders who might become president. As Barber asks, "What should we look for in a president?" What criteria should we apply in evaluating candidates? Do character, worldview, and style help us? Can we determine the president's character? How does Barber's conception of character compare with how we assess character now? In addition, are there other criteria that are important to successful leadership, such as values, commitment, resolution, strength, and resiliency? And when does self-esteem verge into narcissism, and active energy dissolve into chaos? Barber has begun the conversation, but it is an enduring one in which each generation must engage.

NOTES

1. George C. Edwards III, *Predicting the Presidency: The Potential of Persuasive Leadership* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016); George C. Edwards III, *Overreach: Leadership in the Obama Presidency* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012); George C. Edwards III, *The Strategic President: Persuasion and Opportunity in Presidential Leadership* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009); Stephen Skowronek, *The Politics Presidents Make: Leadership from John Adams to George Bush* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).
2. See, for example, William G. Howell, *Politics without Persuasion* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003); Kenneth R. Mayer, *With the Stroke of a Pen: Executive Orders and Presidential Power* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).
3. Fred I. Greenstein, *The Hidden-Hand Presidency* (New York: Basic Books, 1982).

RECOMMENDED READINGS

Alexander L. and Juliette L. George, *Presidential Personality and Performance* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1998), chapters 2, 4, 5.

- Alexander L. George and Juliette L. George, *Woodrow Wilson and Colonel House* (Mineola, NY: Dover, 1964).
- George C. Edwards III, *Predicting the Presidency: The Potential of Persuasive Leadership* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016).
- George C. Edwards III, *The Strategic President: Persuasion and Opportunity in Presidential Leadership* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009).
- Stephen J. Farnsworth, *Presidential Communication and Character* (New York: Routledge, 2018).
- Fred I. Greenstein, *Personality and Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987).
- Erwin C. Hargrove, "Presidential Personality and Leadership Style," in *Researching the Presidency*, ed. George C. Edwards III, John H. Kessel, and Bert A. Rockman (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1993).
- William G. Howell, *Politics without Persuasion* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003).
- Richard E. Neustadt, *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents* (New York: Free Press, 1990).
- Robert Tucker, "The Georges' Wilson Reexamined: An Essay on Psychobiography," *American Political Science Review* 71 (June 1977): 606–18.
- Edwin A. Weinstein, James William Anderson, and Arthur S. Link, "A Reappraisal of Woodrow Wilson's Political Personality," *Political Science Quarterly* 93 (Winter 1978–79): 585–98.



Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

Contents

PREFACE, xxi

1 PRESIDENTIAL CHARACTER AND HOW TO FORESEE IT, 1

Personality Shapes Performance, 4
The Pattern of Character, World View, and Style, 5
The Power Situation and “Climate of Expectations,” 6
Predicting Presidents, 7
Four Types of Presidential Character, 8

2 THREE TRAGIC TALES, 12

Wilson Defeats the League, 13
Hoover Withholds Relief, 18
Johnson Escalates the War, 25
Rigidification, 34
Wilson’s Inner Struggle, 35
Hoover’s Inner Struggle, 39
Johnson’s Inner Struggle, 42
The Common Struggle, 46

3 THE ACTIVE-NEGATIVE PRESIDENTS, 48

Wilson's Style, 48
Wilson's World View, 52
Wilson's Character, 54
Hoover's Style, 57
Hoover's World View, 61
Hoover's Character, 64
Johnson's Style, 66
Johnson's World View, 74
Johnson's Character, 79
The Active-Negative Character, 80

4 THE ORIGINS OF PRESIDENTIAL COMPULSION, 84

Wilson Finds His Voice, 85
Hoover Discovers His Work, 101
Johnson Learns His People, 110
The Making of Active-Negative Presidents, 120

5 RICHARD NIXON: CONSTRUCTION AND DESTRUCTION, 123

The Nixon Construction, 123
Nixon's Move Onstage, 124
The Shaping of Richard's World, 129
The Start of a Style, 135
Interlude, 138
Nixon Victorious, 138
The Nixon Destruction, 143
The Nixon Tyranny, 144
Old Reliable Nixon, 146
Nixon's Old Style and World View, 149
The Power Disease, 150
Rigidification Road, 155
The Fear of Scandal, 157
Choice or Necessity?, 158
Steps in Nixon's Rigidification, 160
Vulnerabilities to the Confidence Game, 165
Voices from the Past, 167

6 THE PASSIVE-NEGATIVE PRESIDENTS, 169

Calvin Coolidge in the White House, 170

Coolidge Emerging, 172
 Eisenhower in the White House, 179
 Eisenhower Emerging, 185
 The Appeal of Duty, 192

7 THE PASSIVE-POSITIVE PRESIDENTS, 194

Taft and TR, 195
 Taft Finds Love and the Law, 204
 Harding and His Friends, 208
 Harding Develops Presidential Features, 217
 The Lure of Political Love, 222

8 REAGAN'S RISE AND RULE, 224

Winning Congress, 232
 Regan the "Conservative"?, 236
 Reagan's Rise: "Ideology" and Experience, 238
 Shifting Gears, 242
 Nancy and Her Friends, 244
 The Rich Reagans in Politics, 247
 "Supply-Siding" the Rich, 250
 The Reagan Rhetoric, 253
 The Fictionalization of Politics, 257
 Planned Distraction, 262
 The Threat Ahead, 264

9 FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT AND ACTIVE-POSITIVE AFFECTION, 266

Franklin's Growth to Joy in Work, 268
 The Roosevelt Presidency, 287
 The Thrust for Results, 298

10 HARRY S TRUMAN AND ACTIVE-POSITIVE COMBAT, 300

Truman Surprised by Grace, 301
 Truman Makes Up His Mind, 303
 Truman as President, 315
 What Truman Was Not, 339

11 JOHN F. KENNEDY AND ACTIVE-POSITIVE COMMITMENT, 341

Doubts About Kennedy, 341
Kennedy's Growing Pains, 343
Kennedy as President, 359
Kennedy's Commitment, 384

12 THE CRUCIAL FORD TRANSITION, 386

Ford Revs Up, 388
Jerry's World, 389
The Ford Style, 392
Ford Model Presidency, 395

BEYOND CHARACTER, 397

13 JIMMY CARTER: PREDICTED AND REVIEWED, 398

Jimmy Carter Predicted, 398
Archery: 1924, 400
Annapolis: 1943, 406
Plains: 1953, 409
Atlanta: 1962, 417
In and Out of the Slough of Despond: 1966, 423
The Road to Washington: 1976, 428
Jimmy Carter Reviewed, 433
Promises, Not Program, 435
Negotiating Washington, 436
Negotiating Peace, 441
Homework, 444
Rhetoric, 444
Carter's Presidential Character, 446
Character Test, 448
Test Results, 451
Power Situation, 453
Climate of Expectations, 453
Carter's World View, 454

14 GEORGE BUSH: THE WORLD VIEW DILEMMA, 456

Unfolding the Bush Mystery, 457
The Bush Beginnings, 460

Bush the Aristocrat, 465
 At Home: Love Them and Leave Them, 467
 Off to Texas, 468
 Off to Washington, 470
 The Pattern from His Boyhood, 473
 Off to War, 474
 The President's Surprise, 477
 Consent of the Governed?, 481
 He Himself, 482

15 ADDING IT UP, 484

Character and Culture, 484
 Politics and the Drive for Power, 485
 Politics and the Search for Affection, 486
 Politics and the Quest for Legitimacy, 488
 Creative Politics, 489
 Looking Forward, 490

NOTES, 493

INDEX, 511



Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

Preface

For better or for worse, who gets to be President of the United States makes a difference for our future. Our strength is democracy, government by consent of the governed, using reason to protect and advance progress for human beings. Our weakness is anarchy, government and politics shredded into fragments, thanks to dreamy public apathy and brainless emotion. History shows that political weakness can degenerate into tragedy: dictatorship, set up to cure confusion. But what if when that temptation looms, we wake up, take part, and find leadership, we can make life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness actually happen.

Leadership is not sainthood. The President is no god. As Harry Truman reminded us, the President (so far a male) puts his pants on one leg at a time. Fortunately the President stands with is power inside a system with “checks and balances,” a system put together after centuries of learning how tragic it turns out to be when a society kneels down and sends its faith to a monarch. By long, hard experience, we finally learned that government— even democracy—is no church. Democracy is a system, a set of conditions, a down-to-earth skeleton put together to host and foster baseline virtues such as justice, freedom, equality, community, and participation, rather than topline virtues such as faith, hope, and charity. So who ought to be picked for the Presidency is a concern we ought to think about not in the context of moral perfection but in the context of basic political leadership in the reality of democracy.

Voting is not the only available mistake. Television dominates the news, so we are tempted to judge candidates by how they look rather than what they decide. Political knowledge declines, popping from argument to slogan, from commitment to gesture, from accuracy to impression. The Presidential contest can come on as a game, shown like T.V. sports, watching who’s ahead and who’s behind

rather than who they are. Who they will be is important to all of us. A ball game ends with the final score. The audience does not then put their power in the hands of the winning team. The campaign for President is different: it sets up a future, a game for the next four or eight years and beyond. We need to treat the campaign game not as a sporty moment but as a tough test based on standards of the Presidency itself.

And what does our President face? Exciting times, because democracies are trying to rise up and hang on all around the world, as humans of wildly different cultures come to recognize their need for the same form of government. And fortunately more and more people recognize that democracy is rights as well as process—requiring a guarantee that the *results* of democracy must never include the bashing of human rights. Think of yourself as becoming President of the United States—the first nation in this world founded on human rights, as the declaration of our revolution and the ultimate passage of our constitution makes clear. What an exciting challenge you would face.

But we also face dark times. Democracy can die. Here inside the United States we have been lazily floating over toward the edge of political disaster. Half of Americans do not bother to vote for a President. Congress fails to debate. Parties are falling apart. Law drifts toward uncertainty, decided too often by a split 5-4 vote in the Supreme Court. Decisions in foreign affairs, including war, slide over into the secret White House, where decisions are made without consent of the governed or even consent of the Congress. National economics is flooded with enormous debt, potential to drown free enterprise and fair taxes. Millions of citizens are poorly educated, worse than in a dozen other countries. Far more thousands get killed with guns in the United States than in countries like Japan and Germany, whose guns once set us to war. Drugs and AIDS and bankruptcy and Americans actually sleeping on the streets are increasing every day. And overseas, despite the excitement for democracy, television shows us starving children but cannot film the quiet and secret spread of nuclear weapons, building the possibility of Chicago as a Hiroshima.

No wonder, then, that we need a President whose character, style, and world view can contribute to a real fix for this country and this country's leadership for the world. To make that happen, we need voters who are into thinking, not just feeling, and talking, not just musing. My hope is that that can happen in political parties, Congress, and journalism—but also in colleges and universities, where advanced rationality can develop and even leadership can emerge.

This strange book includes predictions which were put forth before the public, and the retrospective writing about what I saw as

what actually happened afterward. No one shares blame for my mistakes, but over the years scores of scholars, journalists, editors, critics, encouragers, and institutions have helped me with the task, helpers I am very thankful for. As ever, I am specially grateful to the seven Yale graduate students who, at the start, raked through biographies with my instruments and told me what they thought: Richard S. Beth, Father Richard Costigan, S.J., Charles G. Daney, Elizabeth Kodama, Stephen Austin Merrill, Byron E. Shafer, and Robert James Straus. In the past, many readers have given me the benefit of their thoughts. I hope you write to me what you think, especially if you care about politics.

JAMES DAVID BARBER
Cullowhee Spring
Durham, N.C



Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

*The
Presidential
Character*



Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

Presidential Character and How to Foresee It



When we citizens vote for a Presidential candidate, we make, in effect, a prediction. We choose from among the contenders the one we think (or feel or guess) would be the best President. We operate in a situation of immense uncertainty. If we have already been voting for years, we can recall time and time again when we guessed wrong. We listen to the commentators, the politicians, and our friends, then add it all up in some rough way to produce our prediction and our vote. Earlier in the game, our anticipations have been taken into account, either directly in the polls and primaries or indirectly in the minds of politicians who want to nominate someone we will like. But we must choose in the midst of a cloud of confusion, a rain of phony advertising, a storm of sermons, a hail of complex issues, a fog of charisma and boredom, and a thunder of accusation and defense. In the face of this chaos, a great many citizens fall back on the past, vote their old allegiances, and let it go at that. Nevertheless, the citizens' vote says that on balance we expect Candidate X would outshine Candidate Y in the Presidency.

This book is meant to help citizens and those who advise them cut through the confusion and get at some clear criteria for choosing Presidents. To understand what actual Presidents do and what potential Presidents might do, the first need is to know the whole person—not as some abstract embodiment of civic virtue, some scorecard of issue stands, or some reflection of a faction, but as a human being like the rest of us, a person trying to cope with a difficult environ-

ment. To that task, the candidate brings an individual character, worldview, and political style. None of that is new at campaign time. If we can see the pattern set already for the candidate's political life, we can, I contend, estimate better the pattern this person brings forth to the stresses and chances of the Presidency.

The Presidency is a peculiar office. The Founding Fathers left it extraordinarily loose in definition, partly because they trusted George Washington to invent a tradition as he went along. It is an institution made a piece at a time by successive men (so far) in the White House. Jefferson reached out to Congress to put together the beginnings of political parties; Jackson's dramatic force extended electoral partisanship to its mass base; Lincoln vastly expanded the administrative reach of the office; Wilson and the Roosevelts showed its rhetorical possibilities—in fact every President's mind and demeanor has left its mark on a heritage still in lively development.

But the Presidency is much more than an institution. It is a focus of feelings. In general, popular feelings about politics are low-key, shallow, casual. For example, the vast majority of Americans knows virtually nothing of what Congress is doing and cares less. The Presidency is different. The Presidency is the focus for the most intense and persistent emotions in the American polity. The President is a symbolic leader, the one figure who draws together the people's hopes and fears for the political future. On top of all his routine duties, he has to carry that off—or fail.

Our emotional attachment to Presidents shows up when one dies in office. People were not just disappointed or worried when President Kennedy was killed; people wept at the loss of a man most had never even met. Kennedy was young and charismatic—but history shows that whenever a President dies in office, heroic Lincoln or debased Harding, McKinley or Garfield, the same wave of deep emotion sweeps across the country. On the other hand, the death of an ex-President brings forth no such intense emotional reaction.

The President is the first political figure children are aware of (later they add Congress, the Court, and others, as “helpers” of the President). With some exceptions among children in deprived circumstances, the President is seen as a “benevolent leader,” one who nurtures, sustains, and inspires the citizenry. Presidents regularly show up among “most admired” contemporaries and forebears, and the President is the “best known” (in the sense of sheer name recognition) person in the country. At inauguration time, even Presidents elected by close margins are supported by much larger majorities than the election returns show, for people rally round as he actually assumes office. There is a similar reaction when the people see their President threatened by crisis: if he takes action, there is a favorable spurt in the Gallup poll whether he succeeds or fails.

Obviously the President gets more attention in schoolbooks, press, and television than any other politician. He is one of very few who can make news by doing good things. *His* emotional state is a matter of continual public commentary, as is the manner in which his personal and official families conduct themselves. The media portray the President not as some neutral administrator or

corporate executive to be assessed by his production, but as a special being with mysterious dimensions.

We have no king. The sentiments English children—and adults—direct to the Queen have no place to go in our system but to the President. Whatever his talents—Coolidge-type or Roosevelt-type—the President is the only available object for such national-religious-monarchical sentiments as Americans possess.

The President helps people make sense of politics. Congress is a tangle of committees, the bureaucracy is a maze of agencies. The President is one man trying to do a job—a picture much more understandable to the mass of people who find themselves in the same boat. Furthermore, he is the top man. He ought to know what is going on and set it right. So when the economy goes sour, or war drags on, or domestic violence erupts, the President is available to take the blame. Then when things go right, it seems the President must have had a hand in it. Indeed, the flow of political life is marked off by Presidents: the “Eisenhower Era,” the “Kennedy Years.”

What all this means is that the President’s *main* responsibilities reach far beyond administering the Executive Branch or commanding the armed forces. The White House is first and foremost a place of public leadership. That inevitably brings to bear on the President intense moral, sentimental, and quasi-religious pressures which can, if he lets them, distort his own thinking and feeling. If there is such a thing as extraordinary sanity, it is needed nowhere so much as in the White House.

Who the President is at a given time can make a profound difference in the whole thrust and direction of national politics. Since we have only one President at a time, we can never prove this by comparison, but even the most superficial speculation confirms the commonsense view that the man himself weighs heavily among other historical factors. A Wilson re-elected in 1920, a Hoover in 1932, a John F. Kennedy in 1964 would, it seems very likely, have guided the body politic along rather different paths from those their actual successors chose. Or try to imagine a Theodore Roosevelt ensconced behind today’s “bully pulpit” of a Presidency, or Lyndon Johnson as President in the age of McKinley. Only someone mesmerized by the lures of historical inevitability can suppose that it would have made little or no difference to government policy had Alf Landon replaced FDR in 1936, had Dewey beaten Truman in 1948, or Adlai Stevenson reigned through the 1950s. Not only would these alternative Presidents have advocated different policies—they would have approached the office from very different psychological angles. It stretches credibility to think that Eugene McCarthy would have run the institution the way Lyndon Johnson did.

The burden of this book is that the crucial differences can be anticipated by an understanding of a potential President’s character, his world view, and his style.¹ This kind of prediction is not easy; well-informed observers often have guessed wrong as they watched a man step toward the White House. One thinks of Woodrow Wilson, the scholar who would bring reason to politics; of Herbert

Hoover, the Great Engineer who would organize chaos into progress; of Franklin D. Roosevelt, that champion of the balanced budget; of Harry Truman, whom the office would surely overwhelm; of Dwight D. Eisenhower, militant crusader; of John F. Kennedy, who would lead beyond moralisms to achievements; of Lyndon B. Johnson, the Southern conservative; and of Richard M. Nixon, conciliator. Spotting the errors is easy. Predicting with even approximate accuracy is going to require some sharp tools and close attention in their use. But the experiment is worth it because the question is critical and because it lends itself to correction by evidence.

My argument comes in layers.

First, a President's personality is an important shaper of his Presidential behavior on nontrivial matters.

Second, Presidential personality is patterned. His character, world view, and style fit together in a dynamic package understandable in psychological terms.

Third, a President's personality interacts with the power situation he faces and the national "climate of expectations" dominant at the time he serves. The tuning, the resonance—or lack of it—between these external factors and his personality sets in motion the dynamic of his Presidency.

Fourth, the best way to predict a President's character, world view, and style is to see how they were put together in the first place. That happened in his early life, culminating in his first independent political success.

But the core of the argument (which organizes the structure of the book) is that Presidential character—the basic stance a man takes toward his Presidential experience—comes in four varieties. The most important thing to know about a President or candidate is where he fits among these types, defined according to (a) how active he is and (b) whether or not he gives the impression he enjoys his political life.

Let me spell out these concepts briefly before getting down to cases.

PERSONALITY SHAPES PERFORMANCE

I am not about to argue that once you know a President's personality you know everything. But, as the cases will demonstrate, the degree and quality of a President's emotional involvement in an issue are powerful influences on how he defines the issue itself, how much attention he pays to it, which facts and persons he sees as relevant to its resolution, and, finally, what principles and purposes he associates with the issue. Every story of Presidential decision-making is really two stories: an outer one in which a rational man calculates and an inner one in which an emotional man feels. The two are forever connected. Any real President is one whole man and his deeds reflect his wholeness.

As for personality, it is a matter of tendencies. It is not that one President "has" some basic characteristics that another President does not "have." That old

way of treating a trait as a possession, like a rock in a basket, ignores the universality of aggressiveness, compliancy, detachment, and other human drives. We all have all of them, but in different amounts and in different combinations.

THE PATTERN OF CHARACTER, WORLD VIEW, AND STYLE

The most visible part of the pattern is style. *Style is the President's habitual way of performing his three political roles: rhetoric, personal relations, and homework.* Not to be confused with "stylishness," charisma, or appearance, style is how the President goes about doing what the office requires him to do—to speak, directly or through media, to large audiences; to deal face to face with other politicians, individually and in small, relatively private groups; and to read, write, and calculate by himself in order to manage the endless flow of details that stream onto his desk. No President can escape doing at least some of each. But there are marked differences in stylistic emphasis from President to President. The *balance* among the three style elements varies; one President may put most of himself into rhetoric, another may stress close, informal dealing, while still another may devote his energies mainly to study and cogitation. Beyond the balance, we want to see each President's peculiar habits of style, his mode of coping with and adapting to these Presidential demands. For example, I think both Calvin Coolidge and John F. Kennedy were primarily rhetoricians, but they went about it in contrasting ways.

A President's *world view* consists of his *primary, politically relevant beliefs, particularly his conceptions of social causality, human nature, and the central moral conflicts of the time.* This is how he sees the world, and what his lasting opinions are about what he sees. Style is his way of acting; world view is his way of seeing. Like the rest of us, a President develops over a lifetime certain conceptions of reality—how things work in politics, what people are like, what the main purposes are. These assumptions or conceptions help him make sense of his world, give some semblance of order to the chaos of existence. Perhaps most important, a man's world view affects what he pays attention to, and a great deal of politics is about paying attention. The name of the game for many politicians is not so much "Do this, do that" as it is "Look here!"

"Character" comes from the Greek word for engraving; in one sense it is what life has marked into a man's being. As used here, *character is the way the President orients himself toward life*—not for the moment, but enduringly. Character is the person's stance as he confronts experience. And at the core of character, a man confronts himself. The President's fundamental self-esteem is his prime personal resource; to defend and advance that, he will sacrifice much else he values. Down there in the privacy of his heart, does he find himself superb, or ordinary, or debased, or in some intermediate range? No President has been utterly paralyzed by self-doubt and none has been utterly free of midnight self-mockery. In between, the real Presidents move out on life from

positions of relative strength or weakness. Equally important are the criteria by which they judge themselves. A President who rates himself by the standard of achievement, for instance, may be little affected by losses of affection.

Character, world view, and style are abstractions from the reality of the whole individual. In every case they form an integrated pattern: the man develops a combination which makes psychological sense for him, a dynamic arrangement of motives, beliefs, and habits in the services of his need for self-esteem.

THE POWER SITUATION AND "CLIMATE OF EXPECTATIONS"

Presidential character resonates with the political situation the President faces. It adapts him as he tries to adapt it. The support he has from the public and interest groups, the party balance in Congress, the thrust of Supreme Court opinion, together set the basic power situation he must deal with. An activist President may run smack into a brick wall of resistance, then pull back and wait for a better moment. On the other hand, a President who sees himself as a quiet caretaker may not try to exploit even the most favorable power situation. So it is the relationship between President and the political configuration that makes the system tick.

Even before public opinion polls, the President's real or supposed popularity is a large factor in his performance. Besides the power mix in Washington, the President has to deal with a national climate of expectations, the predominant needs thrust up to him by the people. There are at least three recurrent themes around which these needs are focused.

People look to the President for *reassurance*, a feeling that things will be all right, that the President will take care of his people. The psychological request is for a surcease of anxiety. Obviously, modern life in America involves considerable doses of fear, tension, anxiety, worry; from time to time, the public mood calls for a rest, a time of peace, a breathing space, a "return to normalcy."

Another theme is the demand for a *sense of progress and action*. The President ought to do something to direct the nation's course—or at least be in there pitching for the people. The President is looked to as a take-charge man, a doer, a turner of the wheels, a producer of progress—even if that means some sacrifice of serenity.

A third type of climate of expectations is the public need for a sense of *legitimacy* from, and in, the Presidency. The President should be a master politician who is above politics. He should have a right to his place and a rightful way of acting in it. The respectability—even religiosity—of the office has to be protected by a man who presents himself as defender of the faith. There is more to this than dignity, more than propriety. The President is expected to personify our betterness in an inspiring way, to express in what he does and is (not just in what he says) a moral idealism which, in much of the public mind, is the very opposite of "politics."

Over time, the climate of expectations shifts and changes. Wars, depres-

sions, and other national events contribute to that change, but there also is a rough cycle, from an emphasis on action (which begins to look too “political”) to an emphasis on legitimacy (the moral uplift of which creates its own strains) to an emphasis on reassurance and rest (which comes to seem like drift) and back to action again. One need not be astrological about it. The point is that the climate of expectations at any given time is the political air the President has to breathe. Relating to this climate is a large part of his task.

PREDICTING PRESIDENTS

The best way to predict a President’s character, world view, and style is to see how he constructed them in the first place. Especially in the early stages, life is experimental; consciously or not, a person tries out various ways of defining and maintaining and raising self-esteem. He looks to his environment for clues as to who he is and how well he is doing. These lessons of life slowly sink in: certain self-images and evaluations, certain ways of looking at the world, certain styles of action get confirmed by his experience and he gradually adopts them as his own. If we can see that process of development, we can understand the product. The features to note are those bearing on Presidential performance.

Experimental development continues all the way to death; we will not blind ourselves to midlife changes, particularly in the full-scale prediction cases. But it is often much easier to see the basic patterns in early life histories. Later on a whole host of distractions—especially the image-making all politicians learn to practice—clouds the picture.

In general, character has its *main* development in childhood, world view in adolescence, style in early adulthood. The stance toward life I call character grows out of the child’s experiments in relating to parents, brothers and sisters, and peers at play and in school, as well as to his own body and the objects around it. Slowly the child defines an orientation toward experience; once established, that tends to last despite much subsequent contradiction. By adolescence, the child has been hearing and seeing how people make their worlds meaningful, and now he is moved to relate himself—his own meanings—to those around him. His focus of attention shifts toward the future; he senses that decisions about his fate are coming and he looks into the premises for those decisions. Thoughts about the way the world works and how one might work in it, about what people are like and how one might be like them or not, and about the values people share and how one might share in them too—these are typical concerns for the post-child, pre-adult mind of the adolescent.

These themes come together strongly in early adulthood, when the person moves from contemplation to responsible action and adopts a style. In most biographical accounts, this period stands out in stark clarity—the time of emergence, the time the young man found himself. I call it his first independent political success. It was then he moved beyond the detailed guidance of his family; then his self-esteem was dramatically boosted; then he came forth as a

person to be reckoned with by other people. The *way* he did that is profoundly important to him. Typically he grasps that style and hangs onto it. Much later, coming into the Presidency, something in him remembers this earlier victory and re-emphasizes the style that made it happen.

Character provides the main thrust and broad direction—but it does not *determine*, in any fixed sense, world view and style. The story of development does not end with the end of childhood. Thereafter, the culture one grows in and the ways that culture is translated by parents and peers shapes the meanings one makes of his character. The current world view gets learned and that learning helps channel character forces. Thus it will not necessarily be true that compulsive characters have reactionary beliefs, or that compliant characters believe in compromise. This is also true of style: historical accidents play a large part in furnishing special opportunities for action—and in blocking off alternatives. For example, however much anger a young man may feel, that anger will not be expressed in rhetoric unless and until his life situation provides a platform and an audience. Style thus has a stature and independence of its own. Those who would reduce all explanation to character neglect these highly significant later channelings. For beyond the root is the branch, above the foundation the superstructure, and starts do not prescribe finishes.

FOUR TYPES OF PRESIDENTIAL CHARACTER

The five concepts—character, world view, style, power situation, and climate of expectations—run through the accounts of Presidents in the chapters to follow, which cluster the Presidents since Theodore Roosevelt into four types. This is the fundamental scheme of the study. It offers a way to move past the complexities to the main contrasts and comparisons.

The first baseline in defining Presidential types is *activity-passivity*. How much energy does the man invest in his Presidency? Lyndon Johnson went at his day like a human cyclone, coming to rest long after the sun went down. Calvin Coolidge often slept eleven hours a night and still needed a nap in the middle of the day. In between, the Presidents array themselves on the high or low side of the activity line.

The second baseline is *positive-negative affect* toward one's activity—that is, how he feels about what he does. Relatively speaking, does he seem to experience his political life as happy or sad, enjoyable or discouraging, positive or negative in its main effect? The feeling I am after here is not grim satisfaction in a job well done, not some philosophical conclusion. The idea is this: is he someone who, on the surfaces we can see, gives forth the feeling that he has *fun* in political life? Franklin Roosevelt's Secretary of War, Henry L. Stimson, wrote that the Roosevelts "not only understood the *use* of power, they knew the *enjoyment* of power, too. . . . Whether a man is burdened by power or enjoys power; whether he is trapped by responsibility or made free by it; whether he is moved by other people and outer forces or moves them—that is the essence of leadership."

The positive-negative baseline, then, is a general symptom of the fit between the man and his experience, a kind of register of *felt* satisfaction.

Why might we expect these two simple dimensions to outline the main character types? Because they stand for two central features of anyone's orientation toward life. In nearly every study of personality, some form of the active-passive contrast is critical; the general tendency to act or be acted upon is evident in such concepts as dominance-submission, extraversion-introversion, aggression-timidity, attack-defense, fight-flight, engagement-withdrawal, approach-avoidance. In everyday life we sense quickly the general energy output of the people we deal with. Similarly, we catch on fairly quickly to the affect dimension—whether the person seems to be optimistic or pessimistic, hopeful or skeptical, happy or sad. The two baselines are clear and they are also independent of one another: all of us know people who are very active but seem discouraged, others who are quite passive but seem happy, and so forth. The activity baseline refers to what one does, the affect baseline to how one feels about what he does.

Both are crude clues to character. They are leads into four basic character patterns long familiar in psychological research. In summary form, these are the main configurations:

Active-Positive

There is a congruence, a consistency, between being very active and the enjoyment of it, indicating relatively high self-esteem and relative success in relating to the environment. The man shows an orientation toward productiveness as a value, and an ability to use his styles flexibly, adaptively, suiting the dance to the music. He sees himself as developing over time toward relatively well defined personal goals—growing toward his image of himself as he might yet be. There is an emphasis on rational mastery, and on using the brain to move the feet. This may get him into trouble; he may fail to take account of the irrational in politics. Not everyone he deals with sees things his way and he may find it hard to understand why.

Active-Negative

The contradiction here is between relatively intense effort and relatively low emotional reward for that effort. The activity has a compulsive quality, as if the man were trying to make up for something or to escape from anxiety into hard work. He seems ambitious, striving upward and seeking power. His stance toward the environment is aggressive and he has a persistent problem in managing his aggressive feelings. His self-image is vague and discontinuous. Life is a hard struggle to achieve and hold power, hampered by the condemnations of a perfectionistic conscience. Active-negative types pour energy into the political system, but it is an energy distorted from within.

Passive-Positive

This is the receptive, compliant, other-directed character whose life is a search for affection as a reward for being agreeable and cooperative rather than personally assertive. The contradiction is between low self-esteem (on grounds of being unlovable, unattractive) and a superficial optimism. A hopeful attitude helps dispel doubt and elicits encouragement from others. Passive-positive types help soften the harsh edges of politics. But their dependence and the fragility of their hopes and enjoyments make disappointment in politics likely.

Passive-Negative

The factors are consistent—but how are we to account for the man's *political* role-taking? Why is someone who does little in politics and enjoys it less there at all? The answer lies in the passive-negative's character-rooted orientation toward doing dutiful service; this compensates for low self-esteem based on a sense of uselessness. Passive-negative types are in politics because they think they ought to be. They may be well adapted to certain nonpolitical roles, but they lack the experience and flexibility to perform effectively as political leaders. Their tendency is to withdraw, to escape from the conflict and uncertainty of politics by emphasizing vague principles (especially prohibitions) and procedural arrangements. They become guardians of the right and proper way, above the sordid politicking of lesser men.

Active-positive Presidents want to achieve results. Active-negatives aim to get and keep power. Passive-positives are after love. Passive-negatives emphasize their civic virtue. The relation of activity to enjoyment in a President thus tends to outline a cluster of characteristics, to set apart the well adapted from the compulsive, compliant, and withdrawn types.

The first four Presidents of the United States, conveniently, ran through this gamut of character types. (Remember, we are talking about tendencies and broad directions; no individual man exactly fits a category.) George Washington—clearly the most important President in the pantheon—established the fundamental legitimacy of an American government at a time when this was a matter in considerable question. Washington's dignity, judiciousness, his aloof air of reserve and dedication to duty, fit the passive-negative or withdrawing type best. Washington did not seek innovation, he sought stability. He longed to retire to Mount Vernon, but fortunately was persuaded to stay on through a second term, in which, by rising above the political conflict between Hamilton and Jefferson and inspiring confidence in his own integrity, he gave the nation time to develop the organized means for peaceful change.

John Adams followed, a dour New England Puritan, much given to work and worry, an impatient and irascible man—an active-negative President, a compulsive type. Adams was far more partisan than Washington; the survival of the system through his Presidency demonstrated that the nation could tolerate, for a time, domination by one of its nascent political parties. As President, an angry

Adams brought the United States to the brink of war with France, and presided over the new nation's first experiment in political repression: the Alien and Sedition Acts, forbidding, among other things, unlawful combinations "with intent to oppose any measure or measures of the government of the United States," or "any false, scandalous, and malicious writing or writings against the United States, or the President of the United States, with intent to defame . . . or to bring them or either of them, into contempt or disrepute."

Then came Jefferson. He too, had his troubles and failures—in the design of national defense, for example. As for his Presidential character (only one element in success or failure), Jefferson was clearly active-positive. A child of the Enlightenment, he applied his reason to organizing connections with Congress aimed at strengthening the more popular forces. A man of catholic interests and delightful humor, Jefferson combined a clear and open vision of what the country could be with a profound political sense, expressed in his famous phrase, "Every difference of opinion is not a difference of principle."

The fourth President was James Madison, "Little Jemmy," the constitutional philosopher thrown into the White House at a time of great international turmoil. Madison comes closest to the passive-positive, or compliant, type; he suffered from irresolution, tried to compromise his way out, and gave in too readily to the "war-hawks" urging combat with Britain. The nation drifted into war, and Madison wound up ineptly commanding his collection of amateur generals in the streets of Washington. General Jackson's victory at New Orleans saved the Madison administration's historical reputation, but he left the Presidency with the United States close to bankruptcy and secession.

These four Presidents—like all Presidents—were persons trying to cope with the roles they had won by using the equipment they had built over a lifetime. The President is not some shapeless organism in a flood of novelties, but a man with a memory in a system with a history. Like all of us, he draws on his past to shape his future. The pathetic hope that the White House will turn a Caligula into a Marcus Aurelius is as naive as the fear that ultimate power inevitably corrupts. The problem is to understand—and to state understandably—what in the personal past foreshadows the Presidential future.

Three Tragic Tales



Lord Acton's aphorism, "Power tends to corrupt; absolute power corrupts absolutely," has been no more true for Presidents than John Adam's view that "the first want of man is his dinner, and the second his girl." Power may corrupt—or ennoble or frighten or inspire or distract a man. The result depends on his propensity for, his vulnerability to, particular kinds of corruption or cleansing—in short, on his character. In the Presidency, power seems to have left George Washington with his pre-Presidential dignity intact, to have lifted Chester Arthur and Harry Truman somewhat above what they were before, to have revealed strengths Lincoln was not thought to have possessed—and to have ruined some good men for other political roles.

Political power is like nuclear energy: available to create deserts or make them bloom. The mere having of it never yet determined its use. The mere getting of it has not stamped into the powerful some uniform shape.

In our peculiar democracy, as Richard Neustadt clarified so effectively, political power is the power to *persuade*. Only very rarely can a President issue definitive commands and expect to see them executed. He is always about the business of persuading people to do what he wants them to do in their own interests. The contradiction of power is that the President, like most actors in the political system, is dependent on his dependents, subject to his subjects, forever in the position of supplicant for renewal of his license to rule. A President can so dissipate his real powers that he has nothing left but the shell of office. The most

powerful man in the world is also the man most vulnerable to the complex mix of consent on which his power rests.

This chapter is about three Presidents who seem to have forgotten that power means persuasion. Different as they were in other ways, Woodrow Wilson, Herbert Hoover, and Lyndon B. Johnson came to share in their Presidencies a common pattern: a process of rigidification, and a movement from political dexterity to narrow insistence on a failing course of action despite abundant evidence of the failure. Each of these three helped arrange his own defeat, and in the course of doing that, left the nation worse off than it might have been. Not by accident, these three are the prime twentieth-century examples of the active-negative type. Their political tragedies developed, I will argue, out of inner dramas in which themes of power and themes of conscience struggled for pre-eminence. I think it would have been possible to foresee this development even before these men took office. But first, is it plain that Wilson, Hoover, and Johnson displayed, as Presidents, a pattern of progressive—and politically significant—attachment to a “solution” each could neither sustain nor abandon?

WILSON DEFEATS THE LEAGUE

In many respects Woodrow Wilson was one of the nation’s most successful Presidents; certainly he was not the machinelike psychotic some have made him out to be. In a scathing review of the worst Wilson book, a biography in which Sigmund Freud and William C. Bullitt (both intense Wilson-haters) are said to have collaborated, Arthur Link comments: “For a mentally unbalanced person, Wilson had a remarkable career. Somehow he managed to make distinguished contributions to the four separate fields of scholarship, higher education, domestic politics, and diplomacy.”¹ The idea of Wilson as a leader totally in the grip of mental disease is obviously false. Far from being paralyzed by his inner conflicts, Wilson was able to draw on extraordinary strengths to produce a political legacy that places him firmly among the “great” Presidents. Not much is to be gained, then, from attempts to assess either the depth of his “psychosis” or the height of his “greatness.” We are dealing with neither a patient nor a god but with a man who, trying hard to do the right thing, killed a dream he shared with millions throughout the world. But the story will have to carry its own weight.

The history of Wilson and the League extends far back into Wilson’s own history and far out into the world he had to deal with. Perhaps the clearest place to grasp the essentials is the President’s return from the Paris Peace Conference in July 1919 with the Covenant of the League of Nations, which required ratification by two-thirds of the Senate, or 64 votes. The situation he faced was as follows:

Republicans controlled the Senate by a majority of two. In the House, the Republicans had a majority of 39. In 1918, Democrat Wilson had taken the unusual step, over the protests of his key advisors and his wife, of asking the people to vote for Democrats for Congress; a

Republican victory, he had said, "would certainly be interpreted on the other side of the water as a repudiation of my leadership." Only five months earlier the wartime President had declared politics "adjourned" for the duration. The election had been a massive defeat for Wilson, resulting in the Republican majorities.

The chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Wilson's arch-enemy Henry Cabot Lodge, was responsible for initial consideration of the Treaty. Lodge had stacked the Committee with opponents of the League. Ten of the eighteen members were determined to kill it.

Senator Lodge was also majority leader of the Republican party in the Senate.

Forty-nine Senators had declared themselves, shortly before Wilson's return from Paris, in favor of "reservations" (basically, amendments) to the League Treaty.

Nevertheless, there was strong support both within the Senate and in the country at large for some form of the League. In a preliminary poll by the "League to Enforce Peace," 64 Senators were prepared to vote for ratification, 20 were doubtful, and 12 opposed. And even Senator Lodge confessed that "the vocal masses of the community"—most clergy, professors, editors and so forth—were "friendly to the League."

In other words, the President faced an implacable enemy in Lodge, a very difficult proposition in the Foreign Relations Committee, a near stand-off in the Senate as a whole, and a generally favorable climate of opinion in the "vocal" public. Rarely had there been a situation which called more clearly for the most adroit political leadership by the President of favorably inclined Senators and the most intense efforts at developing the compromises necessary to bring around the waverers. Long before, Wilson himself had advised Presidents in such circumstances to

be less stiff and offish, [to] himself act in the true spirit of the Constitution and establish intimate relations of confidence with the Senate on his own initiative, not carrying his plans to completion and then laying them in final form before the Senate to be accepted or rejected, but keeping himself in confidential communication with the leaders of the Senate while his plans are in course . . . in order that there may be veritable counsel and a real accommodation of views instead of a final challenge and contest.²

Like others of his character, Wilson found this lesson of life easier to expound than to live by.

Before leaving Paris, the President had sent a message to the American people, a message which began, "The treaty of peace has been signed. If it is ratified and acted upon in full and sincere execution of its terms it will furnish the charter for a new order of affairs in the world." He rested only one day after arriving in the United States, then appeared before the Senate to speak on the treaty. But before leaving the White House for the Senate chamber, he held a press conference; to a reporter who inquired whether the Treaty would pass the Senate with "reservations," Wilson snapped: "I do not think hypothetical questions are concerned. The Senate is going to ratify the treaty." However, his speech that day first developed a conciliatory theme:

My services and all the information I possess will be at your disposal and at the disposal of your Committee on Foreign Relations at any time, either informally or in session, as you may prefer; and I hope that you will not hesitate to make use of them. . . .³

But his tone changed as his rhetoric rose. The League was “a practical necessity,” “an indispensable instrumentality.” “Statesmen might see difficulties,” he said,

but the people could see none and could brook no denial. . . . The League of Nations was . . . the only hope for mankind . . . the main object of the peace . . . the only thing that could complete it or make it worthwhile . . . the hope of the world. . . . Shall we or any other free people hesitate to accept this great duty? Dare we reject it and break the heart of the world? There can be no question of our ceasing to be a world power. The only question is whether we can refuse the moral leadership that is offered us, whether we shall accept or reject the confidence of the world.

“Accept or reject”—that was the way Wilson posed the question. The Senate was challenged on moral grounds. Putting aside his notes, the President concluded with an image which made clear his view that only one course was available to the Senate:

The stage is set, the destiny disclosed. It has come about by no plan of our conceiving, but by the hand of God who led us into this way. We cannot turn back. We can only go forward, with lifted eyes and freshened spirit, to follow the vision. It was of this that we dreamed at our birth. America shall in truth show the way. The light streams upon the path ahead, and nowhere else.⁴

Wilson’s friend William Gibbs McAdoo saw the effect of this speech as “casting pearls before swine, so far as the Senatorial cabal is concerned.” Another Senator called it “soap bubbles of oratory and soufflé of phrases,” and Senator Warren G. Harding, characteristically, found the speech “utterly lacking in ringing Americanism.”

Henry Cabot Lodge began his Committee’s deliberations on the treaty by reading aloud its entire text, 268 pages. It took him two weeks; often he read to a clerk alone, as the Committee members drifted away. Lodge’s strategy is evident from his correspondence at the time: he hoped to wreck the League, to prevent the Democrats from entering the 1920 election as the party of peace, not by a frontal assault on the treaty but by offering a barrage of “reservations” he thought Wilson would not accept. These covered a variety of restrictions aimed at gaining support from groups skeptical of the League—insuring control of immigration, reaffirming the Monroe Doctrine and the right to withdraw from the League, and, most important, retaining Congressional control over the commitment of American forces. These were questions of substance, but Lodge’s letters and statements leave no doubt that he saw them as instruments to defeat the League and that he would keep inventing reservations until the League fell.

Lodge shared this purpose with the Senate “irreconcilables,” about fif-

teen in number. But many other Senators were undecided, somewhat confused, ready to consider possibilities and alternatives. In response, Wilson adopted a peculiar position: he would entertain the possibility of "interpretations" passed simultaneously but separately from the treaty, but would not agree to "reservations" attached to the treaty itself. This issue of the *form* by which the Senate could express its understanding of the treaty's meaning loomed large in Wilson's mind; he stuck to the stance that no word of the treaty could be changed without resubmitting it to the European powers, and to the view that "reservations"—but not "interpretations"—should be rejected because they would change the treaty.

Lodge sought much information from Wilson, but Wilson, despite his generous offer in the Senate speech, refused many of these requests. Lodge pointed to the President's behavior as proof of Wilson's disrespect for the Senate.

A week after presenting the treaty, Wilson called in a group of wavering Senators for a conference at the White House. "He refused to risk a controversy by discussing the merits of the reservations that they proposed." Instead he lectured them for hours on the necessity for approving the treaty as it stood. The press covered this and other conferences thoroughly, the big question being whether any Senators would shift in Wilson's direction. None did. "Almost to a man, these Senators warned Wilson that unless he accepted binding reservations, the treaty would not be ratified."

"I am pondering very carefully," Wilson wrote, "the method of action best calculated to bring about the right results in these difficult days." On July 21, Republican ex-President William Howard Taft, who had long been an effective advocate of the League and a supporter of Wilson's effort, suggested five "interpretations" and one "reservation," explaining later that while he himself would be ready to vote for the League as is, it was necessary "to recognize the exigencies, personal, partisan, and political" and to give leadership to the "mild reservationists" in the Senate who held the key to success. Wilson's Senate leader Gilbert Hitchcock rejected Taft's try as Republican propaganda and said it changed nothing.

On July 30, four Republican moderates told Wilson the treaty could be ratified quickly with reservations, and Senator Frank Kellogg said 37 Republicans would support it with moderate reservations. Wilson did not follow up on this.

On July 31, Wilson told a friend, "I have been talking to some more senators about the treaty," and added, "They are endeavoring to humiliate me."

On August 1, to a Republican Senator who told him the treaty could pass only with "the Lodge reservations," Wilson responded, "The *Lodge* reservations! Never! Never—I'll never consent to adopt any policy with which that impossible name is so prominently identified."

On August 12, Lodge delivered a Senate speech which Wilson's sympathetic biographer Walworth calls "one of the great orations of American history," invoking George Washington, American idealism, free will, and the Constitution. When Wilson heard of it he declared that "if I said what I thought

about those fellows in Congress, it would take a piece of asbestos two inches thick to hold it."

On August 15, Senator Hitchcock emerged from a conference with the President to say it was necessary "to remove absolutely any probability of the dotting of an 'i' or the crossing of a 't.'"

On August 19, President Wilson met publicly with the Foreign Relations Committee. He said nothing stood in the way of ratification except certain doubts about the meaning of various provisions and added, "I must frankly say that I am unable to understand why such doubts should be entertained." He reiterated his stand on reservations versus interpretations.

According to McAdoo, Wilson had a political reason for his adamance: he would not be averse to "mild" reservations, but was convinced "that the opponents of the treaty had not advanced them in good faith and the moment there was any indication on his part of a willingness to accept them, partisan opponents would immediately propose other and more objectionable reservations which it would be impossible to consider. They were, he said, determined to prevent ratification at whatever cost; therefore, it was impossible for him to discuss compromise."

"Subsequent events proved clearly," McAdoo continued, "the correctness of his judgment. Lodge and the opponents of the treaty were determined to defeat it, regardless of consequences."

What this line of argument totally ignores is the presence of a large and potentially decisive body of Senatorial opinion held by those Senators ready to vote for the League with a few minor modifications. Indeed, Senator Lodge was out to kill the League by fair means or foul, as his subsequent behavior and correspondence revealed. Wilson could not hope to compromise with Lodge. But the "mild reservationists" were another story. Wilson gave Hitchcock a draft of four "interpretations" which were virtually identical with the four "reservations" being sponsored by the mild reservationists. But he would never drop the distinction. To partisan opposition by the Republicans he added institutional opposition: the Senate was not to "advise and consent" on this treaty except in the most passive way. For many members this was probably a critical point, though one hard to state publicly. If there was to be a dramatic new move for peace after the World War, they wanted to have a hand in it. Wilson slapped them back continually, offering only to "explain," in the style of a schoolmaster.

Wilson often argued that the Allies would not accept reservations, but the biographies do not show that he tried to find out if they would. Later it became clear that the French and British wanted America in, and were not much concerned with what French premier Georges Clemenceau called "a few harmless compromises."

On September 3, 1919, President Wilson left the tangle of Washington politics to launch a nationwide speaking tour for the League of Nations, delivering 40 addresses in 22 days before he collapsed with a stroke in Colorado. Others tried to carry on the work of compromise, but eventually, on March 19, 1920, the

Senate voted to reject the treaty, with Lodge's reservations, by a margin of seven votes. Wilson refused to the end even to free his Senate supporters to vote their own consciences, which would have resulted in the entry of the United States into the League of Nations.

Much later, on Armistice Day, 1923,

a throng of well-wishers gathered in front of his "S" Street house. Wilson appeared on the balcony and, overcome by emotion, made a brief speech. "I am not one of those that have the least anxiety about the triumph of the principles I have stood for," he concluded. "I have seen fools resist Providence before and I have seen their destruction, as will come upon these again—utter destruction and contempt. That we shall prevail is as sure as that God reigns." (The main headline in the New York Times the day Wilson's remarks appeared read, across three columns, HITLER FORCES RALLYING NEAR MUNICH.)⁵

HOOVER WITHHOLDS RELIEF

Herbert Hoover did not create the Great Depression. Nor was he an ogre who liked to see people suffer, or a witless tool of the big corporations, or even a typical Republican politician in his day. Like Wilson and Lyndon Johnson and most other human beings, Hoover set out to do the right thing, and much more than most, he devoted his whole heart and soul to the struggle. In the Presidency he failed, not because of any wicked moral flaw but because he could not meet one of the extraordinary demands the Presidency places on a man—the demand for confidence.

Long after his Presidency, Hoover got a letter from a schoolgirl asking him "what, in your opinion, constitutes a great leader." Hoover replied, "Certainly these qualifications include integrity, education, administrative experience, specialized information on foreign and domestic affairs, devotion to the American heritage and the American way of life." He made no mention of inspiration, of any *public* quality, nor of the communication of ideas, hopes, or fears. Yet Hoover as President had done his best to make words into weapons against disaster.

Well before the disaster, Hoover saw his own vision in the sky. Accepting the Republican nomination in 1928, he had said that

We in America today are nearer to the final triumph over poverty than ever before in the history of any land. The poorhouse is vanishing from among us. We have not yet reached the goal, but, given a chance to go forward with the policies of the last eight years, we shall soon with the help of God be in sight of the day when poverty will be banished from this nation.⁶

On Inauguration Day he had "no fears for the future of our country. It is bright with hope."

Then, the week before Halloween, 1929, came the sharp tumble that would become the Crash. There had been a few warning signs in the economy of

bricks and potatoes and coin over the counter, but the paper economy of Wall Street wafted upward. General Electric more than tripled its price in a year and a half, reaching 396 in September 1929. Then, starting on October 23, the bottom fell out of the stock market. The next day—"Black Thursday"—the loss of values amounted to nearly as much as the United States had spent on winning the World War. By mid November, the stocks listed on the New York exchange had fallen over 40 per cent in value.

But it was just paper, just the mysterious machinations of the money-changers, many thought. The President reinforced this whistle-in-the-dark attitude the day after the big slide: "The fundamental business of the country, that is, the production and distribution of commodities, is on a sound and prosperous basis." "All of which," he concluded, "indicates a healthy condition."

In November, speaking confidentially, Hoover told a conference of business leaders to "think beyond emergency relief and plan ahead to maintain social order and industrial peace while bringing about orderly liquidation and prevention of panic during a period of readjustment to new ideas of living more in accordance with the heritage of America's founders." He told this select group that a depression was at hand, a severe depression. But the word "depression" did not often escape him in public. On December 3, he said that "a very large degree of industrial unemployment and suffering which would otherwise have occurred has been prevented." "The maximum point of depression," he said soon thereafter, "was about the first of the year." Later, in January 1930, the President announced that the unemployment trend had been reversed, and on March 7 he noted that "employment had been slowly increasing" since December and that "all the evidences indicate that the worst effects of the crash upon unemployment will have been passed during the next sixty days." But unemployment kept rising. Sixty days passed. In May, Hoover found his program had "succeeded to a remarkable degree," the slump "greatly diminished."

"I am convinced," he said, "we have now passed the worst and with continued unity of effort we shall rapidly recover." Later in May he said business would be back to normal by the fall. In June he told a visiting delegation, "The depression is over." Summer 1930 came and went. In October, a year after the crash, Hoover gave Americans this message:

No one can occupy the high office of President and be other than completely confident of the future of the United States. . . . Perhaps as to no other place does the cheerful courage and power of a confident people reflect as to his office. . . . There are a few folks in business and several folks in the political world who resent the notion that things will ever get better and who wish to enjoy our temporary misery. To recount to these persons the progress of cooperation between the people and the government in amelioration of this situation . . . only inspires the unkind retort that we should fix our gaze solely upon the unhappy features of the decline. . . . This is no time to talk of any surrender, . . . the spirit of this people will never brook defeat.⁷

Meanwhile, out in the countryside, folks were finding life harder and harder to enjoy. From Black Thursday on, unemployment increased steadily,

doubling in the year following March 1930. Wage rates began to decline significantly in the last quarter of 1930; during that year only 125 firms reported wage increases, while 900 reported cuts. In 1931, 3,586 concerns cut wages.

In the nation's nineteen largest cities, unemployment increased 149 percent over the nine months ending January 1931. In October 1931, more than 100,000 Americans applied for jobs in the Soviet Union in response to an ad for 6,000 skilled workers. Lacking other accommodations, several hundred women were counted sleeping in Chicago's Grant and Lincoln Parks in September 1931. Chicago's school teachers received no pay for eight of the thirteen months from April 1931 to May 1932. Hunger riots were instigated in early 1931 in Oklahoma City, Minneapolis, St. Paul, and New York. In the summer of 1931, Great Britain went off the gold standard, and seventeen other nations followed suit. That spring, all the mills and factories in Lawrence, Massachusetts, were closed and silent.

By 1932, about one out of four Americans was without adequate income, somewhere between 600,000 and 1,000,000 were wandering across the country looking for work, city after city had totally exhausted relief funds, and thousands upon thousands had had their savings wiped out in bank closures. Homeless men slept in garbage incinerators, families lived on dandelion soup or existed on occasional handouts, and malnutrition spread. In short, a very great many Americans, through no fault of their own, lost their jobs, their homes, their savings, and their dignity; turning in desperation to their government for help, they found relief funds exhausted and no jobs to be had.

A miner in Appalachia told a reporter, "I don't say they can keep the hard times from coming. But they can make us understand the whys and wherefores, can't they? That's all I ask, and everybody in the mine is asking the same thing. You go back to New York and tell 'em the miners want to understand what's going on."

The President's optimistic statements began thinning out after 1930, but many people remembered (erroneously) that he was the one who said prosperity was just around the corner. His complicated explanations had been so often coupled with unfulfilled promises that people doubted both. Hoover sent a telegram to a comedy team saying the country needed some jokes to wash away the Depression and would they think of some. He told Christopher Morley a poem might do it—"something simple enough for a child to spout in school on Fridays." And he said to Rudy Vallee, "If you can sing a song that would make people forget their troubles and the Depression, I'll give you a medal."

The jokes came back at him: Mr. Bones says, "The stock market went up." Mr. Interlocutor asks, "Oh, is Hoover dead?" "Hoover asks Andrew Mellon for a nickel to call a friend. Mellon gives him a dime so he can call all his friends." His very name became a hateful prefix: "not only 'Hoovervilles,' but 'Hoover blankets' (newspapers wrapped around for warmth), 'Hoover wagons' (broken down automobiles hauled by mules), 'Hoover flags' (empty pockets turned inside out), 'Hoover hogs' (jackrabbits)."

Not long after his Presidency began, the Democrats opened up a propa-

ganda shop in Washington to criticize his every move. Quickie books were produced accusing him of all sorts of evil in the past and present. The barrage continued past 1930 when, in the Congressional elections, Democrats won over 50 House seats to gain a majority and the Senate Republicans hung on by a bare 48 to 47. The party balances were deceptive, though, because the lone independent Senator (George Norris of Nebraska) and a sizable number of progressive Republicans opposed Hoover's policies.

Hoover's policies for meeting the Depression were complex and he worked extremely hard in long conferences with innumerable groups to knit them together. His approach was clear in the stance he took and maintained toward relief. By the summer of 1930, social workers could chart with considerable accuracy the decline and fall of households—from the sacrifice of extras to the desperate search for enough to eat. Detroit had a carefully worked out plan for registering the unemployed, developing part-time work, and rotating jobs. But in just seven weeks Detroit went through this process: 86,000 unemployed registered, 11,000 of them were put to work at a cost of \$2 million—and the number of unemployed rose to 90,000. In the summer of 1930, a severe drought hit the Southwest; the Secretary of Agriculture called it the worst in our history and recommended a relief fund of \$25 million. Congress preferred a bill authorizing \$60 million, to which the President responded "prosperity cannot be restored by raids on the public treasury" or by "playing politics with human misery." Millions of farmers went bankrupt. Senator William Borah thundered, as Christmas 1930 approached, "For God's sake, get something done to feed the people who are hungry." The President pressed forward a plan to provide loans for farmers for seed, fertilizer, and cattle feed—but not direct relief, not cash to the hungry, not the dreaded "dole." Committees were formed. Congress finally compromised on \$45 million. On into the spring of 1931 the President and his Congressional allies fought off proposals to "put a man on a basis of equality with a mule" by providing food for the hungry farmers to eat as well as to feed their animals. The relief funds were quickly exhausted as farmers borrowed (against who knows what security) some \$47 million, or an average of only \$150 apiece for some 385,000 borrowers.

The President's philosophy with respect to relief began to emerge in the farm crisis of 1930–31. He turned to the Red Cross and appealed for contributions of \$10 million for farm relief. In November 1930 the Red Cross had less than \$5 million of uncommitted general funds. By the end of 1930 it had given out some relief to 50,000 families—on the average, ten dollars per family. Instead of approving the \$15 million Congress wanted to appropriate for food loans, the President backed the Red Cross drive to raise what was necessary by voluntary contributions. Over the radio he said, "It is unthinkable that any of our people should suffer from hunger or want. . . . It is to the heart of the nation that I am appealing tonight." Support for the drive did not raise the issue of "whether people shall go hungry or cold. It is a question as to whether the American people will maintain the spirit of charity and mutual self-help." But he added, "if the time should ever come that the voluntary agencies of the country

are unable to find resources with which to prevent hunger and suffering, I will ask the aid of every resource of the Federal Government." The drive netted some \$5 million. According to one careful historian of the period:

The fight over adding a few millions for food to the drought relief measure cost the President an incalculable loss of prestige. A relief expert with worldwide fame, Hoover could have played a leading role with full popular support. . . . But Hoover had to make the decision and he feared "wholesale raids on the public treasury." He seemed to forget the long history of federal appropriations to supplement private contributions in disaster relief. He feared that approval of even \$15 million for food for drought sufferers would open the way for appropriations to feed victims of the depression. . . . It was easy for relief advocates to picture the President as being indifferent to human suffering, however unfair such a charge might be. Hoover clung with wonderful stubbornness to the idea that local resources should be able to take care of hunger and misery regardless of their causes.⁸

Not just in agriculture but in the Depression generally, the President clung to his confidence in the nation's "sense of voluntary organization and community service." In the fall of 1930, he appointed an Emergency Committee for Employment, its work to be guided by the principle that unemployment was strictly a local responsibility.

The Committee's chairman drafted a message for the President to submit to Congress calling for public works, slum clearance, low-cost housing, and rural electrification. The Committee also favored Senator Robert Wagner's initiative for public works planning and a national employment service. The President rejected both. In the spring the chairman resigned.

For all Hoover's intense action in "coordinating" national relief efforts, he thought of disbursements from Washington as a last resort and of direct payments to the poor as beyond the pale. In his message to Congress of December 1930, he made his principles clear:

Economic depression can not be cured by legislative action or executive pronouncement. Economic wounds must be healed by the action of the cells of the economic body—the producers and consumers themselves. Recovery can be expedited and its effects mitigated by cooperative action. That cooperation requires that every individual should sustain faith and courage; that each should maintain his self-reliance . . . that the vast majority whose income is unimpaired should not hoard out of fear but should seek to assist his neighbors who may be less fortunate; that each industry should assist its own employees; that each community and each State should assume its full responsibilities for organization of employment and relief of distress with that sturdiness and independence which built a great nation.⁹

Wounded by the accusation that he would feed cattle while men starved, Hoover insisted that a breakdown of the principles of self-help and local responsibility would "have struck at the roots of self-government"; if the day ever came when federal help was the only alternative to starvation, he would be for it, but "I have faith in the American people that such a day shall not come."

The critic Edmund Wilson, responding to the view that hardship strengthens character, commented, "It is a reassuring thought, in the cold weather, that the emaciated men in the bread lines, the men and women beggars in the streets, and the children dependent on them, are all having their fibre hardened."

In that same fall of 1930, Pennsylvania, with one-twelfth of the country's population, had one-sixth of its unemployment. Governor-elect Gifford Pinchot protested that the time for "gentle bedside language" had passed. The states had already discarded Hoover's principled distinction between the dole and indirect relief. "Industry and business are not giving men the chance to work. Nor are they feeding the unemployed. We must feed them if they are to live." And then he said what was so rarely brought forth in these debates: opposition to federal relief came from "fear lest the taxation to provide that relief be levied on concentrated wealth—fear lest the policy of years, the policy of shielding the big fortunes at the expense of the little ones, should at long last be tossed into the discard." At the same time that Congressmen and Governors were pleading for a few more millions in federal relief, Hoover's Reconstruction Finance Corporation, operating in secret to prevent distorting money markets, was disbursing millions of dollars a day in loans to business. Shortly after the RFC director resigned, that body lent banks he headed \$80 million. A Congressman noted that "President Hoover has given an outright dole to the railroads. He would give a dole to the building and loan associations. He would come to the aid of banks with frozen assets. He would help foreign countries, but to starving American women and children he wouldn't give a red cent." On the income side of the ledger, taxes on the rich were a sometime thing. Colonel Robert R. McCormick, editor and publisher of the *Chicago Tribune*, paid \$1,515 in taxes on a supposed personal property total of only \$25,250, while calling on his readers to pay their full taxes. Louis Florsheim of the shoe company paid income taxes of \$90, S. J. T. Straus \$18. Federal income taxes for Mr. J. P. Morgan, who encouraged workers to contribute to relief ("we must all do our bit"), amounted to zero for the years 1930, 1931, and 1932.

Despite the rising tide of criticism, the President stood firm. "No governmental action, no economic doctrine, no economic plan or project can replace that God-imposed responsibility of the individual man and woman to their neighbors," he said on the radio; and to Congress he said, "I am opposed to any direct or indirect government dole. Our people are providing against distress in true American fashion." Isolated in the White House, existing on three hours of sleep a night, the President said of Congressmen pleading for all sorts of fiat money, public works, doles and the like, "As long as I sit at this desk they won't get by."

After numerous vetoes of relief bills and with the election looming before him, Hoover signed a bill in the summer of 1932. This bill provided that financially exhausted states could borrow from an RFC fund of \$300 million for specified purposes. In terms of the public confidence, however, the damage had been done. "If any one attitude lost the election in 1932," writes Harris Gaylord

Warren, "it was Hoover's refusal to use federal resources in direct relief." Whatever he felt in private, Hoover *seemed* uncaring—and adamantly so. "To these ideas Hoover clung with an obstinacy worthy of a better cause. . . . No matter how often he denied it, people were starving in the midst of plenty."¹⁰

The "Bonus Expeditionary Force" descended on Washington in the summer of 1932 to demand immediate payment of bonuses due veterans in 1945. Some 20,000 strong, the veterans had made it to Washington from all over the country, riding the rails and living on handouts, under the rule of "no panhandling, no drinking, no radicalism." They set up camp and, under the command of Walter W. ("Hot") Waters, maintained a semblance of military order. On June 15, a somewhat nervous House of Representatives passed a bill to grant the bonus; on June 17, the Senate defeated it, and the ex-soldiers gathered outside the Capitol and sang "America." Some went home, but 15,000 stayed on in the sweltering heat hoping that Congress and the President would help them. Hoover said nothing. By mid July the veterans had been encamped in Washington for two months, during which time the President received the heavy-weight wrestling champion, delegates of sorority members, and essay contest winners, but no one from the Bonus Army. He did get a bill passed lending money to those willing to go home—the loan to be subtracted from the bonus due them in 1945. On the last day of Congress, the veterans' leader gathered his men on the Capitol steps, saying "We're going to stay here until I see Hoover," who was expected for his traditional adjournment visit. The President stayed in the White House. In April he had said that he was "absolutely opposed" to passage of the bonus bill, which would "irretrievably undermine" the government's credit, and in May he announced that "The Government cannot be dictated to by organized minorities." On July 28, 1932, General Douglas MacArthur and his troops drove the bonus marchers out of Washington, burning their shacks and tents, and killing with tear gas a baby born earlier in the summer at the camp. The B.E.F. News suggested an epitaph for the child: "Here lies Bernard Myers, aged three months, gassed to death by order of President Hoover." The President was satisfied with MacArthur's work: "A challenge to the authority of the United States Government has been met, swiftly and firmly. . . ." "What a pitiful spectacle," said the *Washington News*, "is that of the great American Government, mightiest in the world, chasing unarmed men, women and children with Army tanks. . . . If the Army must be called out to make war on unarmed citizens, this is no longer America." When a delegation of writers called at the White House to protest the attack, the President was too busy to see them. As they left they heard children's voices singing "Happy Birthday to You"—a group of schoolchildren were presenting Mr. Hoover a birthday cake.

In the Presidential campaign of 1932, Hoover's original plan was to give only a few speeches, but by August he was determined to stump the nation. When Henry Stimson suggested that Hoover not use the recovery programs for partisan purposes, Hoover "broke out into a rather impassioned speech in which he said that . . . he was going to use all the machinery to win the election, for he felt that victory was necessary to the country."

A reporter for the *Saturday Evening Post* tried to help “humanize” Hoover for the public, but came away from his interview saying that “I had never seen so much romance buried in the course of a single afternoon.” In the campaign Hoover made 200 speeches, mainly defenses of his programs and attacks on the uncertainties of Roosevelt. He began at Des Moines, in his home state, Iowa. In preparation he wrote a draft speech 71 typed pages long and nursed it through 15 redrafts, then sent the printed proofs out to a dozen people for suggestions. The speech ended this way: “We held the Gibraltar of world stability. The world today has a chance. It is growing in strength. Let that man who complains that things could not be worse thank God for this victory.” The audience, carefully selected for their loyal Republicanism, responded warmly. Through the campaign such indoor crowds cheered him, but in the streets he met the hatred from which the White House shielded him. In Detroit a mob crying “Hang Hoover!” was held back by armed mounted police. Driving to the stadium where he would speak, “Through block after block they flashed past tens of thousands of men and women utterly silent and grim save for those who could be glimpsed shaking their fists and shouting unheard words and phrases.” On Halloween night he made his way into Madison Square Garden through a crowd of thousands shouting “We want bread.”

In 1928 Hoover had carried forty states. On November 8, 1932, he carried six. Forty-five percent of factory workers were unemployed.

JOHNSON ESCALATES THE WAR

The ghost of Woodrow Wilson drifts through the careers of the Presidents I call active-negative. Hoover wrote a book about Wilson’s ordeal; Nixon had Wilson’s desk moved into the White House for his use. And Lyndon Johnson’s crucial decision on the war in Vietnam was made in a conversation with another Henry Cabot Lodge. Johnson—who, Eric Goldman thinks, “re-enacted the presbyter-professor Woodrow Wilson”—had a style radically different from Wilson’s,¹¹ yet there is a curious similarity to their histories. Each started out strong and wound up defeated. Each fastened on a particular line of policy and stubbornly pursued it to the end. It is probably not too much to say that each played a crucial role in the disillusionment of a political generation.

In November 1963, immediately after the eulogy for President Kennedy in the Great Rotunda of the Capitol, Johnson, with tears still on his face, met with Lodge. Lodge, then ambassador to Vietnam, reviewed the situation there and said of the hard decisions coming, “Unfortunately, Mr. President, you will have to make them.” Johnson replied with feeling, “I am not going to lose Vietnam. I am not going to be the President who saw Southeast Asia go the way China went.” Later that day he told his advisors to “increase the pressure and press on.” There in the emotional backwash of the assassination began Lyndon Johnson’s intense personal commitment to a line of policy that would lead him, his nation, and Indochina to disaster.

To those who attribute the Vietnam disaster to “the system,” to some institutional inevitability in the American government, there is a hard question in the Johnson history. What was it in the system that made John Kennedy determined to withdraw from Vietnam after what he hoped would be his reelection in 1964? What in the same basic system led Johnson, in contrast, to increase the number of men in Vietnam by some 2,500 percent, to more than 535,000, and to pour in American money at the rate of some \$30 billion per year? The men and money were the President’s to command; Johnson commanded and the men and money moved. If any “system” was moving inexorably down the track toward tragedy in Vietnam, it was Johnson’s own system—his character—not some structure of government or set of abstractions.

The President, after his retirement, enumerated programs he had launched for young people and then said, “But the statistics are meaningless unless young people feel a basic trust and understanding of the process of their government. Sadly, we’ve been unable to build that trust.”

Lyndon Johnson’s escalation of the war in Vietnam was a complex checker game in which the meaning of each little move is hard to unravel. It is easy to get lost in the maze of verbiage, hard to stand back and see clearly what was happening at any given time. But in the end, the result was a series of tremendous losses—of life, health, national spirit, and of confidence in the Presidency. Through it all, Johnson’s credibility crumbled as he hewed stubbornly to an increasingly unrealistic line of policy. Three lines of development first ran parallel, and then diverged: Johnson and the public; Johnson as Commander-in-Chief; Johnson and the peace feelers.

With the public, Johnson repeatedly stressed his peaceable ways, his opposition to hawkish opponents, and his desire to turn his hand to the building of America. In the 1960 campaign, he had disdained Richard Nixon: “One of my friends that drinks Pepsi-Cola—a former Vice-President—went out to Vietnam and said we ought to have a little more war. Well, we won’t.”

As 1964 moved toward election day, “Peaceable” Lyndon thumped more and more on the contrast between himself and his opponent, Senator Barry Goldwater:

August 16, 1964: Some others are eager to enlarge the conflict. They call upon us to supply American boys to do the job that Asian boys should do. They ask us to take reckless actions, which might risk the lives of millions and engulf much of Asia.

August 29: I have had advice to load our planes with bombs and to drop them on certain areas that I think would enlarge the war and result in committing a good many American boys to fighting a war that I think ought to be fought by the boys of Asia to help protect their own land. And for that reason, I haven’t chosen to enlarge the war.

September 25: There are those that say you ought to go north and drop bombs, to try to wipe out the supply lines, and they think that would escalate the war. We don’t want our American boys to do the fighting for Asian boys. We don’t want to get involved in a nation with seven hundred million people and get tied down in a land war in Asia.

September 28: We are not going north and we are not going south; we are going to continue to try to get them to save their own freedom with their own men, with our leadership and our officer direction, and such equipment as we can furnish them.

October 21: We are not going to send American boys nine or ten thousand miles away from home to do what Asian boys ought to be doing for themselves.¹²

On October 27 Johnson stated categorically, in a speech at Pittsburgh, "There can be and will be, as long as I am President, peace for all Americans."¹³

And the week before the voting, Johnson said in Los Angeles that "The only real issue in this campaign, the only one you ought to get concerned about, is who can best keep the peace. . . . I tell you, as your Commander-in-Chief of the mightiest nation in all the world, we can keep the peace, in the words of the prophet Isaiah, by reasoning together, by responsibility, by negotiation." He won the election by a landslide. He continued, through his term of office, to present himself as the determined seeker after peace. On April 7, 1965, at Johns Hopkins University, the President pulled out all the stops again:

We will never be second in the search for . . . a peaceful settlement in Vietnam. There may be many ways to this kind of peace; in discussion or negotiations with the governments concerned; in large groups or in small ones; in the reaffirmation of old agreements or their strengthening with new ones. We have stated this position over and over to friend and foe alike. And we remain ready with this purpose for unconditional discussions.¹⁴

He offered one billion dollars for development of Southeast Asia after the fighting stopped. Many times Johnson had left the impression with the public that he set no conditions whatever for negotiations, that he would meet with the Pope and Ho Chi Minh at the North Pole if necessary to make peace. "I will go anywhere anytime to talk peace with anyone." Returning from Konrad Adenauer's funeral in April 1967, he pounded at this theme: "Maybe someday, somehow, sometime, somewhere, someone will want to sit at a table and talk instead of kill, discuss instead of fight, reason instead of murder; and when they do, I will be the first to come to that table, wherever it is." In his fifth State of the Union address on January 17, 1968, the President said, "Our goal is peace, and peace at the earliest possible moment." And so on. The message to the public was a continual barrage of hope and promise, an apparently heartfelt desire for nothing so much as an end of the killing.

Meanwhile, in his role as Commander-in-Chief, Johnson made war with a vengeance. After the Kennedy funeral he had given his pledge not to lose Vietnam; increasingly he saw escalation as the only way to fulfill that pledge. In the spring and summer of 1964, he set in motion the detailed studies of how to heat up the war, as revealed in the leaked "Pentagon Papers" of 1971. Even before that, in February, "an elaborate program of covert military operations against the state of North Vietnam" was started, including U-2 flights over Laos, commando raids, and naval bombardment of the North Vietnamese coast. The

Pentagon drew up a plan calling for full-scale bombing of North Vietnam and the possible use of ground combat forces to protect the air bases. A resolution was drawn up for possible Congressional approval of "wider U.S. actions in Southeast Asia."

The President told Charles Roberts of *Newsweek* that he had actually decided in October 1964 to undertake bombing of North Vietnam after the election. That is a matter of memory; Johnson remembered it differently in 1971. "Decision" is the key word here—did the President "decide" then? Or had his key advisors reached a "consensus" on escalation beyond what the President had "decided"? Or were the extensive proposals for escalation simply "contingency plans" available, supposedly, along with other "options"? The detailed answers were not entirely clear in the 1971 releases of "The Pentagon Papers." But, aside from the details, several larger features of the situation were beyond serious question:

The President in his campaign treated the public to a very strong impression that he was not going to escalate the war. Meanwhile his topmost advisors had been working for half a year to develop plans for exactly that. It is not believable that the President was ignorant of these plans, however distracted by campaigning he may have been.

The United States, under Johnson's leadership, did not stumble accidentally into a "quagmire" in Vietnam by reacting to discrete events on a one-at-a-time basis. The Tonkin Resolution, for example (see below), was ready and waiting in the President's pocket for a suitable incident. However hesitant the President may have been to actually implement each "next step," the precise steps were planned out in advance by top advisors fully aware of what they were doing.

Throughout the deliberations in progress while Johnson was campaigning, the policy-makers had near the fronts of their minds the problem of persuading the public that nothing much was happening, that escalation was simply an extension of past policy. By April 1965 when Johnson ordered a troop increase of 18–20,000 men, additional Marine forces, and a "more active" mission for the Marines in Vietnam, he also ordered that "premature publicity" be avoided by taking all possible precautions. The actions themselves should be taken as rapidly as practicable, but in ways that should minimize any appearance of sudden changes in policy. . . . The President's desire is that these movements and changes should be understood as being gradual and wholly consistent with existing policy." The very day the President made these decisions, he told a press conference that he knew of "no far-reaching strategy that is being suggested or promulgated." Thus the lying to the public was not a matter of the President's reacting in response to criticism, but a carefully thought through part of administration planning.

Johnson's public escalation of the war began in circumstances which seem nearly comic in retrospect. In the first days of August 1964, an American destroyer escorting South Vietnamese ships on a raid against a North Vietnamese island installation (a practice not widely known by the public or by Congress) was approached by three North Vietnamese torpedo boats. The American skipper later said he fired the first shot, then sank two of the PT boats.