THE PRESS CONFERENCE SKILL OF DWIGHT EISENHOWER AND LYNDON JOHNSON AS A CONTRIBUTING FACTOR IN THE PROJECTION OF THEIR POPULAR IMAGES

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To my Mother and Father for never doubting my capabilities.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

There is no doubt that the mass media play a crucial role in the projection of a president's public image. From where else but the mass media do the people learn of their presidents? Not only through the printed word--the editorials and news stories--but also through radio fireside chats, televised press conferences and addresses to the nation. The media are important in bringing the president, his successes and failures to the nation. Elmer Cornwell, Jr., presidential scholar who has focused upon the role of the press in presidential politics, says of the media's role in a democracy:

> Theoretically, democracy is impossible without the free expression of citizens' views which the press makes possible. Less frequently emphasized is the use of the news media by government itself to inform the electorate and to win approval of its acts. The means of doing this must be organized in such a way as not to violate fundamental freedoms . . . . Presidents are peculiarly dependent upon the mass media for the exercise of their essential function of leadership. The growth of the 'opinion leadership' and 'policy leadership' aspects of the presidency has been paced by developments--both technical and organizational--in the media of communication.

The press conference is one of the most important vehicles for presidential politics. The press conference is the event during which a president may utilize all types of the media to explain his programs, to defend his actions, to solicit public support. It is the time during which he may establish rapport with the newsmen who deliver his messages to the public.

> The one clear overall conclusion is the continuing importance of the press conference as a channel of communication from President to public . . . all that Presidents have needed is some kind of forum, sufficiently formalized to maximize attention and regular enough to create a pattern of expectations, yet flexible and informal enough to supplement the relative rigidity of set speeches and messages to Congress. The press conference, in almost all of its various forms and permutations since its inception, has met these broad criteria fairly well.[2]

The press conference is not the only vehicle, of course, through which presidential information is given and dispersed. It is one of many different ways the president presents his programs, policies and personality to the public. But it is one of the most important, for the above reasons.

Moreover, it must not be assumed that the press conference benefits only the president. Presidential politics are important to the press, which attempts to know everything that is happening in the government of the people. The press conference helps newsmen fulfill their jobs. It is the time that together on an equal basis newsmen see the president, receive his information and quiz him on questions of interest to the nation, afterwards dissecting the material and evaluating it for their readers, listeners and viewers.

This thesis, however, focuses most heavily on the importance of the press conference to the president in conveying his public image. This is a necessary research topic because:

> The citizenry's capacity for information and argumentation is less than its capacity to absorb and respond to images projected by public figures, political and otherwise. A political leader's successfully projected appearance of competence, sincerity--his image in a word--can carry a far greater impact than his utterances. The skillful executive will, thus, do all that he can to create and project a favorable image for himself . . . .[3]

PURPOSES OF THE STUDY

This thesis proposes to compare the press conference skill of two presidents, Dwight Eisenhower and Lyndon Johnson, as a contributing factor in the formation of their public images. Questions to be answered include:

•What types of news conferences did each president hold; ie, formal or informal; informative or uninformative; televised or private; newsworthy or without importance?

.What techniques or abilities did he have to develop a skillful presentation in his meetings with the press?

•Did this skill come out in the press conferences as an asset or a liability with the press and the electorate, with whom he must communicate in a democratic society for support of his programs?

•What was his public image during his time in office?

•Did his personality have any bearing on the type of image he projected; ie, favorable or unfavorable?

DEFINITION OF A PRESIDENTIAL PRESS CONFERENCE

A presidential news conference shall be defined as any time the president gives information to the representatives of the news media, provided the proceedings are on public record. Press shall refer to all types of the media, not just the newspaper press.

Presidential news conferences have two common participants, the president and the press. A press conference may be televised for the public, but the public does not become a participant in it.

A formal presidential news conference is much the same each time: the president, through his press secretary, announces a

news conference, usually several hours in advance. The reporters meet in a designated room large enough to accomodate all the press and the cameras and lighting equipment of a televised production. The newsmen are seated, then rise when the president enters from a side door, often with his press secretary or other government official he has brought to brief the newsmen.

The president makes opening announcements, then tells the newsmen they can ask questions. Newsmen vie for the president's attention by simultaneously raising their hands and rising from their seats, usually before the last words of the previous answer have died out. The president indicates his questioners with a nod or by calling them by name.

The whole conference usually lasts about 30 minutes, at which time the senior wire service man, by tradition, says "Thank you, Mr. President." For years, Merriman Smith of United Press International was known to persons watching televised press conferences as the man who ended the conference. After the "Thank you, Mr. President", the reporters scramble for the door and the phone booths in the hallway. If the conference is televised live, the exit is somewhat more orderly.

The president may announce an informal conference a few minutes beforehand, by just asking a few reporters around the White House if they would like to come to his office for a press conference. Or, he may arrange an informal conference in advance with a few selected reporters, perhaps by having them in for dinner.

Whatever the informality of the conference, the decisions as to timing and convenience are the president's.

FURTHER DEFINITIONS

A president's press conference skill shall be defined as the summation of several factors: frequency of meetings, content of the conferences, techniques the president used, his ability, and his overall press relations.

Frequency is how often a president met with the press, and is important to the study because it shows the amount of presidential communication with the newsmen, and thus, the public.

Content refers to the topics covered more frequently and in what depth in the press conferences. Content gives an indication of favorite press and presidential subjects, what subjects the president best was able to answer, what subjects he avoided, and use of presidential announcements.

Techniques refer to the methods the president used in a press conference to project his public image. These include the physical manner and setting in which the president met the press, whether the reporters had to identify themselves, whether the president allowed direct quotation, whether the conferences were live or filmed coverage, whether the president used opening statements, backgrounding, whether his press conferences were formal or informal, where he met with the press, and his use of off-the-record and no comment.

Ability is defined as the president's competence and talent of performance in his press conferences. A president's ability refers to the following factors: passivity or activity during press conferences, knowledge of subjects, grammar, anger or refusal to answer questions he didn't like, the amount of personal charm he was able to project, and his general adeptness in fielding questions.

Presidential relations with reporters who covered the White House are important to this study because how the president fared with reporters determines the amount of news he could generate, the type of news, and also indicates somewhat the image he was able to present at large. His relations with reporters include the amount of time he spent with the newsmen, how sympathetic the press was to him, how personal quirks hurt or helped his relations, whether the press trusted him, whether the newsmen believed him, whether his relations were intimate, cordial or standoffish, and whether he had rapport with the reporters.

All of these factors add up to presidential skill in image-building through the press conference.

Presidential image shall be defined as the idea or conception of the president the public holds, expressed in terms of public popularity. This is indicated through public reaction in the national opinion polls as to how well a president handled his job, and through studies by newsmen and observers of presidential popularity.

APPROACH

To determine presidential skill in press conferences and the subsequent effect on image-making, it is necessary to look at the presidents and to compare their press conference abilities, techniques, content and other factors making press conference skill. The two presidents were studied because of their differences in personality, press conference approach and public popularity: Eisenhower was a former general of immense popularity who did not exhibit any particular skill during his presidential

conferences. Johnson was a politician who ran the presidency and his press conferences at the expense of his public image, who tried every conference format and still was not satisfied, and who saw his ratings drop considerably in the public polls during his Administration.

The author has relied heavily upon the studies of several presidential scholars, especially Cornwell, whose research in presidential leadership of public opinion has shown the press conference to be a vital factor in the shaping of presidential image. The words of other writers have contributed substantially to an understanding of presidential press conference techniques and resulting public opinion. Many of these writers are newsmen who have covered presidents regularly, and, by the nature of their closeness to the presidents, have been able to determine assets and liabilities in presidential leadership of press conferences.

This research has utilized the recorded transcripts of each president's press conferences. These indicate techniques and abilities of the president, and format and content of his press conferences, all which relate to presidential skill.

Interviews with Washington correspondents, both in person and through recorded transcripts at the Eisenhower Library in Abilene, Kansas, have been especially important.

Also researched were the personal papers of Eisenhower and correspondence between him and his staff and the public at large, both through selected files at the Eisenhower Library. To determine popularity, or image, the national opinion polls, particularly the Gallup Opinion Index, and studies of them, were

consulted. These are recognized by most scholars as indications of a president's public popularity.

FOOTNOTES

1. Elmer E. Cornwell, Jr., Presidential Leadership of Public Opinion (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1965), p. 9.

2. Ibid, pp. 206-7.

3. Elmer E. Cornwell, Jr., "Role of the Press in Presidential Politics", in Richard Lee, ed., Politics and the Press (Washington, D. C.: Acropolis Books, 1970), p. 19.

CHAPTER II

EVOLUTION OF THE PRESS CONFERENCE

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

The presidential news conference was a natural occurrence in the development of a democratic society such as the United States. As the country grew and the population increased, the news conference was developed so that the press, as carrier of information, could pass it on to the populace at large from the government leaders. In this way, the people became informed as to what their elected representatives were doing in government. Furthermore, the press conference became a method for the presidents to give information about their programs and policies.

Of course, without the growth of the press itself, there could have been no press conferences. In George Washington's time, in an isolated capital where there were few newspapermen, press conferences were not needed. In fact, there were no formal conferences for the first 124 years of the Republic, although newspapers were published in America from colonial days. However, the press was not ignored by government officials. The founding fathers did not set up an official information system, so the press became the informant, thereby receiving attention from those officials who wished to utilize it to their best advantage.

Before the 1890s, the press was the party organ type, but as technology developed methods of mass production, the "penny

press", or mass-circulation dailies, came on the scene. The mass press broke down the isolation in which much of the population always had dwelt. Public awareness of government developed and the press tried to meet this need for information.

Cornwell attributes much of the reason for press conference development to the fact that the president is news:

> What the President says has always been news, and increasingly so as the public appetite for dramatic copy has increased, and as competition among a number of channels disseminating news has grown.[1]

Cornwell indicates that the president benefited more than Congress from the public's new curiousity about government, accompanied by the possibilities for molding popular attitudes.[2] The president is the chief spokesman for the government, the one representative of all the people. He is bigger news than any other person in the capital. He is the symbol of the state, the leader of his party, the head of the government, and the personification of authority. He is well known to every reader, and so anything he thinks or says is news.

These factors, accompanied by several episodes in presidential history, helped to hurl the chief executive first and foremost into the reportorial limelight. The latter include, according to Cornwell, President Garfield's assassination, in which the papers covered his lingering death avidly for their readers; the illness and death of President Grant, during which time the press again was filled with detailed stories; and the wedding in the White House of President Cleveland.[3] Human interest stories therefore became an important source of copy, and presidents became among the most newsworthy humans.

PRESIDENTIAL USE OF THE PRESS CONFERENCE

In the beginning, the presidential news conference belonged solely to the president. The few reporters who attended remembered what they were there for, and the president was unconstrained because he did not have to weigh every word for its meaning.[4]

President Theodore Roosevelt was the first president to set aside an area in the White House for press use, although perhaps without realizing the far-reaching consequences of his decision. In 1895, a reporter for the Washington Star, William W. Price, had begun the practice of standing outside the White House gates, waiting for visitors to interview as they left the President's office. Other correspondents joined him, keeping up their vigil in even the worst of weather. One rainy day, Roosevelt saw the reporters at their post, and, either touched or inspired, ordered an anteroom set aside for them. This became the White House press room.[5]

Roosevelt, a dynamic personality with energetic force, transformed the White House into a source of news and action in government. He also set a model for future executive use of the mass media for opinion leadership. Cornwell says Roosevelt's overriding contribution was "a vivid realization of leadership via the newspapers, and hence, realization that access to this potential must be pursued actively and continuously."[6] He was the first to treat newsmen with a consideration calculated to have its rewards.

Although Roosevelt met with reporters he liked personally for informal conferences, he did not hold open news conferences. Often reporters met with him while he was being shaved.

The newsmen, perhaps because of Roosevelt's personality, let him get by with some things without question. He probably was the first president to use newspapermen deliberately for publication of "trial-balloon" statements for which he accepted no responsibility.[7] Oswald G. Villard says Roosevelt did more "to corrupt the Washington newspapermen than anyone" yet they "worshipped" him:

> However opposed politically one might be, it was impossible not to yield to his personal charm and the extraordinary stimulus which came from association with him. He flattered [the press corps] not a little by confiding freely in them and consulting them on matters of state . . . . Most of them . . . worshipped [him]. They created what remains a legendary Roosevelt . . . . They helped him mightily in the making of his vast reputation.[8]

Other presidents after Roosevelt carried on the press conferences, but each established his own format. New techniques were developed by presidents who felt a need to have control over the conferences, but these gradually became more liberalized until today few requirements are set.

Although Roosevelt developed the first informal press conferences, the news conference soon became more structured. It fell to Woodrow Wilson to establish the first formal conferences. Wilson held the first meeting eleven days after his inauguration in 1913. He welcomed the newspapermen, and asked them to serve as antennae between him and the public.[9] But, despite his original intentions, it was difficult for him to create an intimate atmosphere with the correspondents.

Wilson also was the father of the "official spokesman" device, by which newsmen could attribute what he said only to a "spokesman." They could not quote him directly except by permission.[10]

Under Calvin Coolidge, the press corps was forced to perfect the "White House spokesman", "an official spokesman for the President", and "a source close to the White House". These devices served Coolidge admirably, since they publicized information for which he disclaimed responsibility.[11] However, the practice of never speaking for publication had its drawbacks. The New York World pointed out that on a single day in April, 1925, the President had expressed his opinion on ten important subjects without once speaking for publication.[12]

Herbert Hoover abolished the spokesman device. He established three categories of news: news for which he could be quoted directly; background information which might be used to improve the content of dispatches, but on which he could not be quoted; and strictly confidential information, to be used in no way whatsoever. These categories generally are followed by presidents today.

Another device initiated by these presidents was the rule that written questions had to be submitted in advance of the press conference, and the president could ignore those he did not wish to discuss. Coolidge, Warren G. Harding and Hoover all followed this practice, which gave them control over what came out of the press conference, and whether the information would be favorable or not.

A new era opened up in 1933 with Franklin D. Roosevelt's first meeting with the press March 8. Roosevelt, like an earlier Roosevelt, made obvious efforts to please the press. One journalist described him as a man of many moods, "jovial, scornful, quippy, schoolmasterish or solemn."[13] The atmosphere at his press

conferences was informal, with 40 or 50 reporters gathered around his desk in the Oval Room of the White House. Many Washington reporters feel that the presidential news conference, as a means of obtaining useful information, reached a peak in the 1930s under Franklin Roosevelt.[14]

Roosevelt started the practice of giving reporters information off-the-record, which was much like Hoover's strictly confidential information. This has been continued today, so that a president may answer a reporter's question, but not allow it to be public, possibly because of security reasons. Another device, backgrounding, was developed so that a president could impart information in an explanatory way to the press, but not have it attributed to him. Deep backgrounding today is when the president may explain why he is doing something, but the information may not be released to the public at all. These methods provide the press with information for its own curiosity, but prevent information damaging to security or to the president from getting out.

Although Franklin Roosevelt began a practice of far-reaching consequences, the "fireside chat", it was not until Harry Truman's presidency that the press conference became truly formalized and institutionalized.[15] Both the tone and format of the press conference had changed considerably by 1953. Presidents were required to adopt new techniques to deal with the changes in news conference format.

For one thing, the rooms in which the press conference traditionally had been held were no longer large enough to accomodate the growing numbers of reporters. Instead of the Oval

Room or his office, Truman switched to the Indian Treaty Room on the fourth floor of the old State-War-Navy building, across from the White House.

Truman stood to address reporters, perhaps the first indication that a more formal atmosphere was pending. Truman was not as personal with reporters as Franklin Roosevelt, and his contacts never were as informal. Truman believed that the news media should perform the "informing function",[16] and so did not make the extensive public relations use of the conference that Roosevelt did.

Reporters began to rise and introduce themselves to ask questions. There could be few impromptu interjections. More and more reporters were present. The family atmosphere of the Roosevelt era was gone, until Lyndon Johnson.

The print media had dominated the mass communications until this time. News conferences had been held almost in private. Photographers were banned.[17] But, after Dwight Eisenhower became president, the news conference was opened to television filming for later broadcast, and still photos were permitted. Eisenhower also brought in a stenotypist to make an official transcript, and switched to direct quotation.[18]

Thus began the true formalization of the press conference. The president began to reach directly to the public. No longer could presidents have their words paraphrased to sound better, and no longer could reporters joust verbally with the president. Everything became public, and quite businesslike.

Because the press conference was formalized, Eisenhower and the reporters had to resort to a number of techniques. Initial

questions often had to be long enough to brief the President on a subject raised, and the range of questions widened, so the President was bound to become more generalizing and less controversial It was impossible for the President to go off-the-record or to provide semi-confidential background information, so to fill the resulting gap, Eisenhower instituted the "background dinner", and other sessions held for reporters by high Washington officials and members of the White House staff.[19]

Later presidents generally followed these same techniques. John Kennedy started the regular, live productions that are prominent today. He also instituted the practice of holding "television chats" with reporters.

Kennedy accepted the news conference frankly for what it was by 1961: a channel of direct communication with the public that in recent years had moved closer and closer in function to the fireside chat.[20]

Strangely enough, recent presidents have made moves to change the press conference to what it was during Roosevelt's time--a more informal affair that allowed a little intimacy with the press. Lyndon B. Johnson talked to reporters under many circumstances--swimming in the White House pool, jogging or walking his dog on the White House lawn, flying in Air Force One, lying in a hospital bed, walking at the Johnson ranch, and once sitting on top of a bale of hay.[21] His impulse was to revert to the practice he had followed as majority leader in the Senate: highly informal meetings with small groups of reporters.[22]

Richard Nixon has used television news conferences less than any other president in recent times. In the first 23 months of each administration, Nixon had 19 news conferences, which include formal and informal question and answer sessions, compared to 51 for Johnson, 46 for Kennedy and 56 for Eisenhower.[23]

At his December 10, 1970 conference, Nixon, expressing his distrust of the printed word, said, "I think the American public are entitled to see the President and to hear his views directly, and not to see him only through the press."[24] He held fewer news conferences during his first months than any of the three presidents before him.[25]

In summary, the press conference has developed through three stages since its inception. Under Teddy Roosevelt, the keynote was informality and intimacy of contact on a selective basis. Wilson and Franklin Roosevelt typified the coupling of a new equal access rule with a continued semi-private dialogue between president and reporters. Since 1952, the press conference has been mass, televised and fully public. How each president utilized the media available to him depended upon his own personality, since some presidents with few opportunities to develop their images used all techniques at hand, while other with many opportunities did not develop them fully.

DEVELOPMENT OF ELECTRONIC MEDIA

The advent of the electronic media--radio and television--brought more changes in techniques in the presidential press conferences. Many of the changes were permanent, since radio and television were revolutionary developments for the presidency as

well as for society as a whole. Until Coolidge, the channels available for a president to reach the public had remained the same since the days of Washington: the printed word or oral utterances to a live audience. Despite wide variations in the skill in which these could be used, as evidenced by the foregoing presidents, and despite the technological changes which overtook the printed medium, the president could not escape the boundaries thus imposed on him.

Although Franklin Roosevelt made the best use of radio, the innovation was not all his. Coolidge was aware of its potency as a projector of presidential image. Hoover used it, too, although probably more in deference to established expectations than as a means of promoting himself.[26] A pattern for presidential broadcasting already had been set by 1933.

Roosevelt's approach was significant by his clear understanding of radio's overall implications. He no longer had to rely solely on the press to take his messages to the people. Cutting, editing, paraphrasing, quoting out of context and other alleged newspaper practices were out. One source notes that the press, aware that its readers now knew exactly what the President had said, handled after-the-fact comment with new circumspection.[27]

The president now could appeal directly to the public, something which many presidents do in opening or closing remarks at press conferences. The president could give his side of a situation with Congress or other parties.

With the advent of television, the president's weapon of being able to go to the public was far more potent. The news conference became a channel of direct communication with the public.

Television has at times brought difficulties for all presidents using it. The president has needed to develop a "stage personality". He must be able to convince the public of his sincerity through his actions as well as his words. Television demands that he be an effective speaker and be able to radiate good human qualities. He must be able to use the skills of those around him effectively, such as those of the script writers, the production managers. They are helpful in selling him to the people. Cornwell says,

> The ultimate test is his ability to do all of this, while at the same time enhancing rather than blurring his individual image as the source of initiative and energizer of public policy. His individuality is a key asset which must not become submerged in a collegial effort by hucksters and ghosts.[29]

The advent of the electronic media, especially television, likewise changed the reporter's role from that of courier of the news to participant in making it. In the television era of press conferences, the reporters pitch the questions to the president, for him to bat the answers to the public. The fact that many reporters feel as though they are part of the show instead of newsmen is a frequent criticism of television press conferences. A description of a typical Kennedy conference is given by one source:

> The conferences themselves also became productions, far closer to a Hollywood epic than to the informal family gatherings of a scant two decades before. The new administration's first, on January 25, saw the use of two TV cameras on the platform, on either side of the microphones to pick up questions, a pulpit-like lectern for the Chief Executive, an attendance of 418 reporters . . . and an estimated television audience of some twenty-four million. The reporters grew to feel they were extras in the recurring drama . . . . So efficient had the transcript system become that the first five or six pages were ready for use by the time "Thank you, Mr. President", was uttered . . . . The point had almost been reached, in short, at which the only real excuse . . . was . . . the . . . audience.[30]

THE PRESIDENTIAL NEWS CONFERENCE TODAY

With the development of the electronic media, the presidency and the press conference as well, became more and more "institutionalized". Cornwell has described "institutionalization" as the process of formalization and routinization of press conferences.[3]

In part because of the work habits of the president, but also because of trends already noted that were external to the White House, both the tone and format of this means of communication had changed considerably by 1953. Aspects of this change included use of statements prepared on a staff basis, the formalization of the process whereby the president prepared to meet the press, the growth of subjects, and the lack of spontaneous interchange at the meetings.

This institutionalization did cause problems for presidents and newsmen, who found they couldn't establish rapport so easily with each other as in the past. Formalization caused the decline of opportunity for sharp supplementary questions, and initial questions had to be phrased so as to brief the president on a subject. Presidents had to become more general in the answers due to the large number of questions. And they had to prepare themselves adequately before the onslaught which required knowledge of all subjects. But the institutionalization had one major favorable point. It helped the president to reach the public, his main reason for holding press conferences in the first place.

For the reporters, this institutionalization helped them in gathering news but also made it available to all reporters at the same time.

How has institutionalization and the electronic media affected the president's ability to make news at a press conference? A study by Cornwell[32] of press conferences of Coolidge, Franklin Roosevelt, Truman, Eisenhower and Kennedy, and subsequent front page news in the New York Times showed frequency of press conferences has made little difference in news. The steadily broadening range of presidential responsibility has doubtless counteracted in some measure this decline in conference frequency. General public relations skill accounts for some of the president's ability to create news despite fewer press conferences.

EVALUATION OF THE NEWS CONFERENCE

The modern press conference offers desirable and undesirable characteristics to the public, the press and the president. For the president, the conference provides a method for him to expound his ideas, permitting direct appeals to the public by going over the heads of newsmen. It provides a way for him to keep subordinates and the opposition in line, by pronouncing his wishes publicly.

The press conference also benefits the reporters in that it allows them face to face contact with the official. It saves them time and frustration in trying to get news about the executive.

Nevertheless, criticisms abound, most of them from the press. Two-thirds of newsmen questioned in a poll gave the following criticisms of press conferences:[33] 1) the mass atmosphere of the conference, particularly the non-exclusive quality coupled with the small likelihood of being permitted time to ask questions; 2) too many reporters cannot attend the many press conferences;

3) conferences are propagandistic, and permit direct appeals to the citizen and bypass the reporter.

The size of the conferences is staggering. About 900 reporters now are accredited to cover the White House, according to one news magazine,[34] and other sources put the figure at over 1,000. However, the attendance at a large, formal conference is usually about 200.

Conferences have developed in such a way as to rule out any frank, semi-private discussion with the correspondents, who have increasingly found the president talking directly to the public and only incidentally to them.

Vermont Royster, former Washington correspondent and past president of the American Society of Newspaper Editors, has criticized the conference frequently. He says the modern press conference is "pretty dull, and nothing much comes of it anyway,"[35] emphasizing a criticism which is found throughout much of the literature on the press conference.

Much of the problem may lie with the working press. Officials and reporters alike have criticized newsmen for trying to ask difficult questions to trip up the president, or of being more interested in showing themselves off before the cameras than concentrating on what they are there for. Often questions on current national policy which are receiving extensive coverage in the news media are overlooked during press conferences.

An editor who has covered presidents since Coolidge said of Nixon's news conferences:

> Obviously, President Nixon is faced by a hostile corps of correspondents. The reporters seem more interested in needling the President . . . than they are in seeking out . . . information.[36]

Royster said in his column in the Wall Street Journal on December 15, 1970:

> The press and the President, for their own and the country's good, ought to manage better . . . . It's not the function of the reporting media to be servants of any government, nor of the political opposition either. Its function is to inform. The President's job is to inform them. Neither, right now, has found the best way to do that.[37]

He said the present press conference format is all wrong for that purpose, however useful it may be in other ways.[38]

Newsmen lately have attempted to fix the situation. In December, 1970, a group of 28 reporters gathered in a Washington hotel to discuss what one participant called "ways of making the presidential news conference more effective."[39]

Discussed at the meeting were such matters as how to persuade the President to hold more conferences, how to limit the number of questions, how to insure follow-up questions, and how to guide the line of questioning.

An official group also met with the director of communications in the administration and the President's press secretary. However, the news conference that followed was criticized in several sectors as a bad example of increasingly poorer news conferences.[40]

Because the conference has been stripped of its original function, developed into a presidential institution, and weighted down with the frills of a major production, it falls to the participants to see that it does not become a meaningless habit. The main job is the president's, since the conference is his to set and to describe. The president must choose between accepting increasing isolation from the reporters and devising new lines of

communication. Eisenhower, for instance, chose the former; Kennedy, the latter. Despite the large number of newsmen at Kennedy's conferences, Franklin Roosevelt, the originator of the informal atmosphere, would have felt quite at home in them.[41]

FOOTNOTES

1. Elmer E. Cornwell, Jr., Presidential Leadership of Public Opinion (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1965), pp. 206-7. (Hereinafter referred to as Cornwell).

2. Ibid, p. 12.

3. Ibid, p. 13.

4. Vermont Royster, "Presidential Press Conferences," The Quill, Vol. LVIII, No. 2 (February, 1971), p. 9.

5. Leo Rosten, The Washington Correspondents (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1957), p. 21. See also James Pollard, The Presidents and the Press (New York: MacMillan Co., 1947), p. 574, and, Delbert Clark, Washington Dateline (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Co., 1941), pp. 53-4.

6. Cornwell, p. 15.

7. Rosten, p. 22. See also Clark, p. 55.

8. Oswald Villard, "The Press and the President," Century, Vol. III, No. 2 (December, 1925), p. 198.

9. Rosten, p. 24.

10. Ibid, p. 24-5. See also Clark, p. 59.

11. Rosten, p. 32.

12. Ibid, p. 33.

13. Royster, p. 9.

14. "Nixon and the Press," U. S. News and World Report, Vol. LXIX, No. 26 (December 28, 1970), p. 14. (Hereinafter referred to as U. S. News).

15. Cornwell, p. 171.

16. U. S. News, p. 14.

17. Ibid.

18. Ibid.

19. Cornwell, pp. 180, 185.

20. Roscoe Drummond, "Mr. Kennedy's Calculated Risk," Saturday Review, Vol. XLIV, No. 6 (February 11, 1962), p. 82. See also Cornwell, p. 194.

21. U. S. News, p. 14

22. Cornwell, p. 200.

23. U. S., Public Papers of Presidents of the United States Washington, D. C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1953-70).

24. U. S. News, p. 14.

25. Ibid.

26. Cornwell, p. 254.

27. John F. Carter, Power and Persuasion (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1960), p. 30.

28. Drummond, p. 82.

29. Cornwell, p. 294.

30. U. S. News, p. 14.

31. Elmer E. Cornwell, Jr., "Presidential Press Conferences: A Study in Institutionalization," Midwest Journal of Political Science, Vol. IV, No. 4 (November, 1960), pp. 370-389 is the source of much of the information on institutionalization in this section. (Hereinafter this source shall be referred to as Cornwell, "Presidential Press Conferences,"

32. Cornwell, p. 203-6.

33. Nimmo, Dan D., Newsgathering in Washington: A Study in Political Communication (New York: Atherton Press, 1964), p. 159.

34. U. S. News, p. 12.

35. Royster, p. 9.

36. Ibid, p. 12.

37. Vermont Royster in Wall Street Journal (December 15, 1970)

38. Ibid.

39. U. S. News, p. 12.

40. Ibid.

41. Cornwell, p. 200.

CHAPTER III

THEORIES OF NEWS CONFERENCES BY MODERN PRESIDENTS

DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER

Much of the military training in his background had to be put aside before Dwight Eisenhower could handle his press conferences to the satisfaction of the reporters and himself. The former general, who was used to giving orders and having them immediately obeyed, seemed to be wearing his five stars to his first few meetings with the press. During his first conference, held almost a month after he took office, Eisenhower stalked into the room and lectured 250 correspondents for fifteen minutes on inconsequential matters, among them that he did not have any hostility toward the press, and expected a good relationship to continue. Thus disposing of a rumor of ill feelings toward the press, he gave the correspondents fifteen minutes for eighteen questions before announcing that he had an appointment. He walked out, apparently not realizing protocol dictated he wait for the cry of "Thank you, Mr. President" from the senior wire service man before ending the conference.[1] One reporter after the first news conference expressed the thoughts of others when she said she felt she had been treated like "a G. I."[2]

Many of Eisenhower's initial attitudes about the press undoubtedly were a result of his old army days. During World War II, he was protected from any slip of the tongue by military censorship. If he didn't know the answer to a question, he could revert to the tactic of military secrecy. The commander was protected from himself, so to speak. After Eisenhower assumed

the presidency, things were different. He had to take on the press singlehandedly and he alone bore the responsibility for what he did and did not tell the reporters.

As a candidate, Eisenhower had not been wholly happy with reporters, either. He once remarked about the newsmen who traveled with him, "Some of those guys aren't reporters at all. They sound more like district attorneys."[3]

The Eisenhower Press Conference

Frequency

Eisenhower held a news conference about every two weeks, or 2.0 per month. This compared with Franklin Roosevelt, who had held conferences on the average of 6.9 per month, and Harry Truman, at 3.5 per month.[4] At times there were long stretches when the reporters did not see the President at all, such as during Eisenhower's heart attack recovery period. The President also cancelled press conferences during vacation periods in the summer. This occurred from more than two months in 1953 and 1954. Long gaps were less prominent during the second term. By years the Eisenhower press conferences were as follows:[5]

1953	23
1954	33
1955	19
1956	24
1957	25
1958	30
1959	31
1960	14
1961	1

The infrequency of the Eisenhower meetings, coupled with the fact that the President refused to hold alternating morning and afternoon meetings,[6] diminished Eisenhower's opportunity to estab-

lish rapport with the reporters. Furthermore, it was one of the main irritants to the press during his administration. An editorial entitled "The People Want to Know" appeared in the Beaumont (Tex.) Enterprise in June, 1953, noting " . . . elimination of last Tuesday's news session marks 11 times in the 22 weeks since he took office that he has failed to hold the scheduled weekly meeting . . . ."[7]

Although the five months during the heart attack convalescence from August, 1955 to January, 1956, and the two months, June and July, 1956 for the second operation were somewhat understandable, the times Eisenhower was incommunicado during vacations were less so. Thanks in part to Jim Hagerty, Eisenhower's press secretary, the President's press relations were saved from serious damage. Hagerty generally met the press every day, often more than once.

The dearth of Eisenhower press conferences was caused by several factors: the President's own personality--he felt he did not need to hold a news conference unless he had something to announce;[8] his major illnesses; and his trips abroad, which interrupted normal relations with the press, although some correspondents did travel with him.

Content

Four days before Eisenhower's first filmed news conference, Editor and Publisher[9] printed an analysis of the Eisenhower news conferences. The article accounted for fifty-five news conferences, attended on the average by 200 reporters, with more than 2,500 questions broken down into eleven categories. The greatest number

of questions referred to Senator Joseph McCarthy (notable because Eisenhower ignored most of them), followed by Indo-China, the Congressional elections, the Korean war, and the atomic energy A-pool. A large number were on national issues such as government security, the TVA and politics. Questions about civil rights issues, including segregation and school integration, were brought up frequently.[10]

The President was more knowledgeable in answering questions on foreign relations than he was on internal matters. This ability undoubtedly was a result of his military background. It is further explained by the fact that Eisenhower consistently refused to take part in what he called "partisan politics". He would not support his own party at times, even by campaigning. During an October, 1953 press conference, the President was asked by Robert Donovan, New York Herald-Tribune, if he would take part in the congressional campaign next year. Eisenhower replied,

> Well, now, of course, you know, Mr. Donovan, that I am deeply interested in what happens to the complexion of the Senate and of the House . . . but I do not intend to make of the Presidency an agency . . . in partisan elections.[11]

While certain topics would be brought up regularly, if Eisenhower deemed them not fitting the concern of the President, he would not answer them, or would do so unsatisfactority for the reporters. He refused to get down in what he considered the gutter with Senator McCarthy, and so attempted to ignore the whole McCarthy issue when it was raised by reporters. The same sort of theory held true for other controversial domestic issues.

The former Chief Executive also felt that the executive branch should not tell the legislative branch what to do. Sometimes,

this even went as far as refusing to endorse Administration measures in Congress. An example was the 1957 Civil Rights Bill, which had been introduced by the Administration, but had a vital part cut out by Congress. The President indicated no interest in retaining the deleted portions of the bill, which would have strengthened it. Because the President often felt it was not the Executive's position to comment on an issue or a bill, the press, and the public was less informed than it should be. One reporter in 1954 noted that a scrutiny of White House press conferences disclosed "A serious lack of efficiency and many a missed opportunity for more and more specific enlightenment of the public concerning the government of the United States."[12]

The exception to this rule was when Eisenhower decided an Administration measure needed more emphasis, such as fiscal responsibility. Cabell Phillips, writing in New York Times Magazine, August 16, 1959, said that "By actual count, he [Eisenhower] referred to it [fiscal responsibility] 22 times in his press conferences up to the end of July."[13]

Eisenhower generally was not an opinion leader, via the press conferences. His slackening use of the opening statement indicates this, as well as the fact that he let the reporters guide the meetings, rather than exercising presidential prerogative.

Techniques

The press conference was the reporters' only tool to reaching the President during the Eisenhower years. Reporters never saw Eisenhower in private, nor were they granted special interviews. Hagerty, in a letter to an editor early in 1953, explained,

> I regret very much that it will not be possible for me to grant you the weekly interview with the President which you request. Ever since his nomination, he has been forced to adopt a policy of not granting special interviews or writing individual articles for individual reporters or publications . . . it is simply impossible for him to give exclusive interviews with any one.[14]

Eisenhower's press conferences mostly were the same as his predecessor's in format. He held them in the same fourth floor conference room of the old State Department building, and utilized about 30 minutes to answer questions. He always arrived promptly, after the reporters were seated and waiting. He stood behind a desk to receive the questions, and a rule was that reporters had to identify themselves before posing a question. Eisenhower, like other presidents, picked his questioners. Yet, he rarely played favorites,[15] and was not criticized among reporters for being partial to those asking only easy questions. A reporter's ability to jump quickly to his feet with "Mr. President" accounted mostly for his being called upon. While accepting questions, Eisenhower shared the podium with no one, quite unlike Lyndon Johnson, who brought guests at times at answer questions. Furthermore, there was no exchange between Hagerty and the newspaper corps during the conference.

However, Eisenhower did make some drastic changes in the news conference, too. His contribution to the institutionalization of the news conference was considerable because he: 1) allowed for the first time direct quotes through a White House transcript service; 2) allowed radio networks to tape the conferences and use the material verbatim; 3) brought in television film cameras, and "still" cameras.[16] No other president had ventured to do anything like this, and especially the direct quotation and television

filming marked a change from which the presidential news conference could never return. All of this was subject to White House censorship, but controls were not exercised by Hagerty or his staff.[17]

The filming of press conferences for television use was met generally with praise, although some of the newspaper reporters grumbled that it would turn the news conference into a "circus". The broadcast media, of course, were elated. Frank Stanton, president of the Columbia Broadcasting System, Inc., noted it was

> a logical development of news coverage . . . such news coverage should go toward sustaining the high level of political interest and participation . . . which radio and TV helped to create during the past presidential campaign.[18]

The president of the National Association of Radio and TV Broadcasters said television film coverage of news conferences is "being applauded by broadcasters and television viewers throughout the nation . . . . "[19]

In addition to film for television and newsreel cameras, permission was given for the first time for "still" photographers to operate during the conferences. Hagerty suggested that all this was being done so the public could know of the President through his own words and actions and not just the printed word. He said editing of the sound movies was done by his office so the White House could remain in control of the spoken word of the President.[20]

About this time, at the beginning of 1953, the New York Times began to print the press conference proceedings in full, due to the allowance of direct quotation. Before that, questions had been verbatim and replies in indirect discourse.

Only one more step remained for the Eisenhower Administration to take in press conference coverage: the live, televised conference. However, Hagerty never saw this innovation as something of value for Eisenhower. "I'm afraid we would be forced to have some system of submitting written questions in advance," he once said, "and that just wouldn't be a free and open news conference."[21] Undoubtedly, he was worried that the President would make a slip which could not be retracted in time. At any rate, it was left to John Kennedy to hold the first live, televised conference, a credit to a man who was quite at ease in front of the public, and was admired by reporters for his adeptness in the news conference situation.

Eisenhower utilized few other techniques to mold his press conferences to sit his style. He used the opening statement, for instance, but only about half the time he held conferences, with a marked falling off in frequency as the Administration progressed. The opening statement was used to bring up subjects the President wished to discuss, but was afraid he wouldn't be asked, or to give his statement in advance of an anticipated difficult question. At times, reporters neglected to ask him about topics he wished to explain. Once he thanked a reporter for asking a certain question.[22] Another time, at the end of his press conference of June 18, 1958, after the "Thank you, Mr. President", Eisenhower said in frustration, "No one gives me an opportunity to talk about defense."[23]

Backgrounding, something which Franklin Roosevelt practiced with relish and other presidents followed, became impossible in a television era. Eisenhower resorted to the background dinner,

and other Administration officials held similar sessions for chosen reporters and columnists. During the Eisenhower Administration, backgrounding was at the departmental level, because the President did not see reporters except at news conferences.[24]

Although Eisenhower seemed well-adjusted in his meetings with the newsmen, his press conferences generally were formal, with little bantering back and forth as with Franklin Roosevelt or with Truman. He was courteous and tried to answer the reporters' questions, but somehow was a little far-removed from them. Roosevelt for instance, would call reporters by their first names; Eisenhower rarely, if he remembered a newsman's name at all.[25] Even his off-the-record dinners for selected members of the press corps were more of a business than social nature.

Eisenhower's attitude toward the press conference undoubtedly was a reflection of his attitude toward the presidency as a whole: he considered it his duty. Politics never had been his game, and he did not consider himself a politician, but a unifier. Richard Neustadt remarked: "He came to crown a reputation, not to make one. He wanted to be arbiter, not master. His love was not for power, but for duty--and for status."[26] One reporter believes Eisenhower did not consider the presidency the high point of his career, when he heard him say at a private dinner, "The peak, the climax of my career came on May 8, 1945 . . . . That's What I was trained for,"[27]demonstrating his feeling for his army career.

Eisenhower press conference ability

Eisenhower's press conference record generally is one of passivity, despite the fact that he innovated television coverage

and direct quotation, something which denotes at least interest in the conference. Although the President was briefed by Hagerty and other aides before each conference on possible questions and answers,[28] he often seemed at a loss for information in answer to a question. Possibly this was because more and more, presidents are being involved in a wide range of events, foreign and domestic, that require their attention. It is difficult to know about everything. Yet, Eisenhower left the impression that he was not always informed about what was going on around him, answering that some matter hadn't been brought to his desk, or telling a reporter he was giving the President new information.

An example is furnished by a question Alice Dunnigan, Associated Negro Press, asked the President September 30, 1953 at a news conference:

> Q. Recently a statement from the Department of Defense indicated that integration in schools on military posts may be delayed until 1955. I understand that Sen. Humphrey has brought this matter to your attention by letter, stating that such delays were unnecessary and in that . . .
>
> A. (interposing) Who brought it to me?
>
> Q. Sen. Humphrey of Minnesota.
>
> A. I haven't seen it.
>
> Q. You haven't seen it?
>
> A. I haven't seen the letter.
>
> Q. Do you have any comment on this issue?
>
> A. No I haven't. This is the first time that it has come up this fall.[29]

In light of what researchers have indicated of the Eisenhower Administration, this impression is palpable. The Eisenhower presidency is likened to a military system in which Eisenhower was the

ceremonial chief of state and subordinates ran the show. Often the decisions were made without the Chief Executive. "Eisenhower," wrote Richard Neustadt, "became typically the last man in his office to know tangible details and the last to come to grips with acts of choice."[30]

When the reporters, often specialists in a field, queried the President about a specific topic, he tried to answer them, but often gave an answer that might better have been left unsaid. This was due partly to the President's lack of knowledge on some subjects. It also was due to the President's habit of constructing sentences as he thought. Thus, the answers often were lost in grammatical confusion. His meaning "sometimes was so obscure in his unparsed sentences that reporters had to give up," one reporter remarked.[31] His language, though simple, often wandered and became the subject of a parody which was circulated among the press corps at that time, recasting Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address in Eisenhower language. It was amazingly typical in its take-off on the President's grammatical construction and characteristic of his attitude on the more controversial issues:

> I haven't checked these figures, but 87 years ago, I think it was, a number of individuals organized a governmental set-up here in this country. I believe it covered certain Eastern areas, with this idea they were following up based on a sort of national independence arrangement and the program that every individual is just as good as every other individual.[32]

However, Eisenhower's fondness for long, vague replies may have been a strength to his press conference technique. His replies were given in an informal manner such as Franklin Roosevelt would have used. The reporters understood him, despite his syntax and scrambled rhetoric.[33] Reporters have pointed out that John Kennedy,

a master at press conferences, often had the same wandering grammatical construction.[34]

The public did not seem to mind the Eisenhower English. When he appeared before them, they understood him through his general, down-to-earth terms on less than down-to-earth subjects. In addition, the President's sincerity in trying to explain something was a virtue in the eyes of the public.

It is to Eisenhower's credit that he did not make use of the "no comment" device until his September 30 conference, and then used it sparingly. Often he would reply to an inquiry that he would find out the answer and report it during the next conference. Sometimes he would say he would not answer a question, then, "But I will say . . . " and proceed to supply an answer. It was to his credit that he was the first president to allow direct quotation, while having the least reason to want to be quoted, because of his grammar.

The President was not always amiable and even-dispositioned. He could have a sharp answer for a reporter who probed too deep or too hard. In fact, his temper was well-known to the Washington correspondents. A number of examples are found in his press conferences, some of them rather famous, such as the time he was asked if, to balance the budget, he would be willing to do without the pair of helicopters that had been proposed for getting him out to the golf course a little faster. To that, the President coldly replied, "Well, I don't think much of that question . . . ."[35] and turned away to someone else.

"The stormiest White House conference" or recent years, according to James Reston, took place November 11, 1953, when Raymond

P. Brandt of the St. Louis Post-Dispatch touched off a stream of questions from reporters about Administration policies. Brandt asked whether the President knew in advance of Attorney General Brownell's recent speech in Chicago regarding Harry Dexter White and whether he was consulted as to plans "to bring the White story out." Brandt also asked whether the President thought the Congress should subpoena a Supreme Court justice (Clark). He asked further whether the Administration's "action in virtually putting a label of traitor on a former President is likely to damage our foreign relations." Eisenhower would not answer the questions, and when others tried related queries, he flatly said that he was "going to answer this last question right now on this subject for this morning at least."[36]

The conference got wide attention in the press, and was made the subject of a special article in the Nieman Reports in which full text of the unofficial transcript was printed. One foreign correspondent remarked that no European premier or foreign minister "would dream of according the press the privilege accorded to it by President Eisenhower."[37]

During his televised press conferences, Eisenhower portrayed a grandfatherly, assuring leader to the people at large. He was able to project sincerity, although he was not as good at mustering the inspirational appeal of Roosevelt. However, the people rallied behind their President, upon viewing the onslaught of reporters against one man at the televised press conferences. Files in the Eisenhower Library reflect the feelings of many persons who told the President to conduct conferences "in the way you wish", and to keep the correspondents in their place. Several said Eisenhower

should not hold press conferences if he did not feel like it,[38] perhaps indicating that part of the public does not realize the press conference is largely for the people.

Relations with Reporters

Shortly after Eisenhower took office, it was rumored that the President was thinking of not holding press conferences at all. The President-elect had said he felt he didn't need to hold a conference at least until he had something to say. However, he had a press secretary adept and shrewd enough to realize that the press conference not only satisfied the press' quest for information, it also kept public attention focused on the chief executive, his policies and actions. Following Eisenhower's first three conferences Murray Snyder, assistant press secretary, said reception to these had "been excellent, and we also find that there has been a considerable improvement in the Administration's relations with the press since we have been in office. The President is pleased . . . ."[39]

Eisenhower had one of the longest honeymoon periods of any president in his relations with the newsmen. For the most part, reporters treated him kindly and with respect, and did not demand too much of him. This had a lot to do with his acceptance by the public--the ex-war hero, the non-partisan President, the man of peace. Eisenhower came to the presidency with a high prestige that stayed that way throughout his terms. His fatherly image and dignity gave the nation a sense of solidarity, and his era lacked the criticism that had been popular under Truman. One historian wrote:

> Dwight D. Eisenhower's great strength as President was as a unifier of the nation, an accomodator rather than a provoker of controversy, a man of decency and dignity, a man who blurred issues, a tranquilizer rather than a stimulant. He was a man

> who, when he saw a cloud on the horizon, looked for the silver lining, a man who, after a generation of depression, war, contention and divisions in the nation, was an optimistic and attractive mediator.[40]

Cornwell remarks that Eisenhower's large public following protected him from any criticism by the mass media. The reporters, aware of this popularity, were disinclined to court disfavor among their readers and Republican editors by saying harsh things about the war hero.[41] It was not until a few years into the Eisenhower presidency that newsmen began to be critical of Eisenhower. Robert L. Riggs, chief of the Washington bureau of the Louisville Courier-Journal in April, 1954, said "there was a lengthy period when it appeared that they (editors) had adopted permanently the slogan: Let's not be beastly to Eisenhower."

> Our questions are beginning to sound like brief lectures--and not too brief at that. They have long apologetic introductory sentences. They convey regret at bringing up unpleasant subjects . . . .[42]

Riggs said it is vitally important to the country's welfare and to the health of the newspaper business that "the editors have finally recovered from their school-girl infatuation and are able once more to cast intellectually mature and skeptical glances at Washington."[43]

Eisenhower kept his relations with the newsmen cordial and cooperative, but never intimate. He did not see reporters socially, as did Lyndon Johnson, but instead was more inclined to socialize with publishers.[44] Although most of the reporters respected him, he kept them at a distance. This probably saved him from some of the personal criticism Johnson faced as President. Reporters never complained that Eisenhower was "using" them to his advantage.

The Editor and Publisher staff noted that the President, at the end of his presidential career, "had departed from our midst neither liked nor disliked--but pretty much unknown."[45] The reference was to the President's cordial, but distant, relations with newsmen.

Despite this distance, reporters must have seen Eisenhower as trying to be fair with them. He was willing as no other president before him to risk direct quotation of his remarks and to try to give the newsmen fair answers, despite the slips which occurred. One reporter explained respectfully, "He took on all questions,"[46] a feat which most presidents will not attempt.

At the end of his Administration, Eisenhower was asked by a reporter if he thought the press had been fair to him in its questioning. The President replied, "Well, when you come right down to it, I don't see that a reporter could do much to a President, do you?"[47]

Press Secretary

Whatever success Eisenhower did have with the press can be accounted for largely because of his press secretary, Hagerty. Hagerty reportedly was the reason the President decided to go ahead with the conferences in the first place, and the reason for his later televised conferences.

The press secretary, a bespectacled Irishman with a winning smile, had lifted the press secretaryship to its highest level of efficiency. It was he who kept the press briefed during the long periods of the President's illnesses; it was he who daily met the newsmen to give them the information they needed to appease their

editors; it was he who briefed the President and worked with him to polish every press-President performance. James Marlow, Associated Press news analyst, in a column shortly before Eisenhower left office, paid Hagerty this tribute:

> Hagerty . . . was to a large extent the President's eyes and ears in the world of general news. He was more than that. He not only was a buffer between the President and the press to a degree unmatched in this century, he was also times without number Eisenhower's mouthpiece.[48]

Summary of Eisenhower Press Conference Skill

In summarizing, Eisenhower brought to the presidency and press conference no previous political skills, but a military background. He met with the press rather infrequently, on the average of twice a month. Moreover, there were long stretches during which time he did not meet with the press at all. He seemed to consider the press conference a duty only, and might not have held any conferences at all if his press secretary had not urged him to do so.

Eisenhower was not an active opinion leader in his press conferences, taking little opportunity to express presidential opinion on domestic issues which were raging in the country. This lack of leadership is evidenced by the fact that he used opening statements only about one-half the time, and by the fact that he would not talk about some subjects he did not feel fitting to the president's attention. He was most adept at answering questions on foreign matters.

During his press conferences, Eisenhower stood behind a desk to address the reporters. He shared the podium with no one. Reporters had to identify themselves before asking questions. Yet, the President rarely played favorites, and while he did not call reporters by name, he did not ignore them, either. He gave little

extra background information because he held only formal, on-the-record press conferences that allowed for little give and take between President and press. Eisenhower was not accessible to the newsmen, seeing them only in press conferences and once in a great while at a background dinner.

Eisenhower did enhance the press conference favorably by instituting the direct quotation and bringing in live and "still" cameras for photographing the events. His personal image over television was favorable although he did not particularly work at presenting himself favorably.

Eisenhower had a passive quality at press conferences. He let the reporters guide the meetings. He often was at a loss for answers, and left the impression that he was the last to know what was going on in his own presidency. His grammar and syntax were sometimes poor, and he gave long, vague replies. This perhaps was not a disadvantage, because most newsmen understood him quite well, and he reflected a sincere image of trying to answer almost all questions put before him in the best way he could; he used no comment sparingly. For these reasons, the public identified him as a personable president.

Eisenhower displayed a quick temper at times, but his relations with newsmen generally were cordial and most of the reporters liked him. He was not intimate with reporters, but this did not seem a hinderance in his relations with them, for they never accused him of trying to get something from them. He enjoyed a long honeymoon period with them, in fact his whole presidency.

JOHN F. KENNEDY

Although this discussion focuses on the press conference styles of Lyndon Johnson and Dwight Eisenhower, a discussion of the President between them is much in order. It will lend insight for comparison into the problems that Johnson faced following a President so full of charm and so adept at handling his press conferences.

Most veteran Washington newsmen agree that in his press conference technique Kennedy never has had an equal. He was scintillating and brilliant, and gave relaxed and professional performances. The Kennedy intellect and charm could only help his press conference ability. The newsmen enjoyed his conferences, and it seemed that the President enjoyed himself, too.

The Kennedy Administration attempted to be more personal than the Eisenhower Administration. The reporters had direct access to presidential advisers and to the President. In its nearly three years in office, the Kennedy Administration in its relations with the news media and their personnel generally enjoyed a degree of warmth, accessibility and cordiality unmatched by any previous administration.[49]

Innovations affecting White House relations with the press included: live telecasts and broadcasts of news conferences; exclusive interviews; unusual intimacy with certain reporters; luncheons with groups of newsmen to discuss matters of public concern; a shift in the scheduling of news conferences mostly to afternoons so that no morning session was held between March 21 and the final one on November 14, 1963.[50]

Of course, no administration is without criticism. During Kennedy's presidency, reporters complained of "managed" news and suppression and distortion, especially during the Cuban crisis, and of favoritism of certain reporters. The President and the press often clashed on the press' responsibilities, and Kennedy would lecture the press on its role during times of crisis.

But the Kennedy news conference stands out to most newsmen as the best example of presidential press conferences, at least since Roosevelt. The Kennedy conferences were "relaxed", one reporter said, and he believed that the press conference under Kennedy "helped to make Kennedy" a good public image.[51]

As in the Eisenhower Administration, the frequency of news conferences held by Kennedy was variable. In 1961, he held 19; in 1962, 27 and in 1963, 17, including one at Bonn, Germany and one with business editors. The total Kennedy conferences were 63 in 34 months, or slightly fewer than Eisenhower had in a similar span.[52] Kennedy also was away from Washington more than Eisenhower --215 days as against 195 for the former President in an equivalent period.[53]

It is significant that Lyndon Johnson did not follow the large, formal news conference format of Kennedy during his first few months in office. The news conference had become highly institutionalized at the end of the Kennedy Administration, and the next President attempted to cope with that through emphasis on more informal, intimate affairs where reporters and the president could establish rapport.

The Johnson Press Conference

Frequency

Johnson held news conferences on the average of 2.1 per month. Although the number of Johnson conferences does not compare favorably with other presidents, such as Franklin Roosevelt or Truman, it must be realized that Johnson met quite frequently with reporters in backgrounding sessions, off-the-record dinners, or for individual interviews. Actually, no president ever made himself more accessible to the press than Lyndon Johnson. He always was ready to meet with newsmen in small groups or privately, outside the news conferences. He was quite sensitive about this, too, wanting the reporters to realize and appreciate his accessibility. Once, during a press conference in 1965, he was questioned about the format of press conferences to come. At the very next conference, he spent a considerable amount of time giving the newsmen statistics on the number of press conferences he had held to date, whether they were with adequate advance notice, off-the-record, or televised. He also informed them of a number of other times in which he had made himself available, including lengthy walks, airplane flights, and even a barbecue at the Johnson ranch. At the same conference, he reminded newsmen that it was his prerogative to choose the time, place and method of meeting:

> First of all, I regard my own responsibility in this field as making available to all of you all the information that I can, consistent with the national interest . . . . How and where I do that is a decision that I reserve for myself . . . .
>
> Second, I consider it the responsibility of the press to report those facts to the American public as fully as possible and in the best perspective possible. The press, of course, has the right and has the duty to comment on the facts . . . .

> Therefore, I plan to see the press at many different times in many different ways if you are willing. I will, however, try to follow the standing practice of holding at least one press conference a month of the nature which you describe as ample advance notice, coverage by all media, full dress--even white ties if you choose.[58]

During this press conference, Johnson very simply explained his feelings about the presidential press conference.

By years, the Johnson press conferences were as follows:[59]

1963-64	35
1965	17
1966	41
1967	22
1968-69	20

Content

Both foreign and domestic questions came up frequently in Johnson press conferences, but because of the Vietnam war, Johnson increasingly was confronted with Vietnam-related issues, among them, the war, troops, prisoners of war, Cambodia, Laos, South Vietnamese leadership and Congressional murmurings. Generally, he answered these questions, but rarely to the satisfaction of reporters, who found themselves being less and less sure of his answers. Often he was evasive, or would give a standard answer that the Administration's course in Vietnam is in the best interests of the nation,[60] or, especially after Vietnam became a real issue, "I don't have any information that you do not have."[61]

Other frequent news conference topics logically included politics, congressional bills, civil rights, the opinion polls and the Dominican Republic. Political questions included congressional elections, and also Johnson's own plans of whether or not he would seek the nomination of his party. This question especially was prevalent during the period before the 1964 election, and

Johnson was naturally evasive in most of his answers. Like Eisenhower was with McCarthy, Johnson rarely would take the opportunity to swipe at a member of the opposition, including George Wallace.

The President used his press conference time quite regularly to announce appointments. He usually did this during opening statements, giving reporters a chance to follow-up with questions. He was not without surprises. Veteran newsman Hugh Sidey recounts an incident when after three months of searching for a new under secretary of state, Johnson made a surprise announcement at one of his office news conferences. "In an 'oh, by the way' manner in answer to a question . . . he said he had decided that Attorney General Nicholas de B. Katzenbach was to be the man."[62] What topped it all off, Sidey said, is that he denied he had planned the announcement to be so casual, although reporters had been told beforehand by aides to ask the question.

Johnson frequently invited aides and other top Administration officials to news conferences to give reporters the benefit of their knowledge. While this gave the Administration policies more publicity, it also helped reporters who might have had to go to other sources if the President didn't have the full details.

Finally, the content of Johnson's news conferences reflects a thorough knowledge of what was happening in the press. The President frequently would refer to a newspaper story or editorial he had seen, or comment on an erroneous account that he wanted to set straight. This is in contrast to Eisenhower, who reportedly skimmed the newspapers, if he read them at all. Also unlike Eisenhower, Johnson often would call reporters by name. All this

reflected the interest Johnson had in press relations and his orientation towards news.

Techniques

The varied settings of the Johnson press conferences were the most striking techniques the President used to enhance his meetings with the press. When Johnson took over the presidency on the death of Kennedy, he resorted to his old practice as Senate majority leader: highly informal meetings with small groups of reporters. These intimate press conferences were practiced throughout his presidency, although he made use, too, of the larger formal meetings and televised conferences of the Kennedy era.

The informal meetings began somewhat abruptly shortly after Johnson took office. On December 7, 1963, he told Pierre Salinger, his first press secretary, to invite the reporters in for a chat. It was Saturday and only a few surprised reporters were around.[63]

Johnson held many such unannounced-in-advance sessions, much to the ire of the reporters who might miss the show if they did not stay around on weekends. Johnson continued them despite the fact that this was one of the wedges he drove between himself and the press corps, which was irritated because it never knew what to expect.

Shortly after the first one of these informal sessions, the President was asked if this was the type of press conference he intended to hold, or whether this was just an interim meeting. His answer should have forewarned all:

> I would say that we are going to maintain an adequate flow of information to the press at all times in the best manner we can. We will do what comes naturally. Maybe it will be a meeting of this kind today, maybe a televised meeting tomorrow,

> with maybe a coffee session the next day. We don't want to be too rigid. We always want to be flexible. One thing, though, that we are determined to do is to let you know as much about what goes on in your house and your government as we possibly can, consistent only with the interests of our country and self-preservation of our country.[64]

The President did not stick solely to the informal conference in his office. He tried all angles with the reporters, in a number of places, walking with them on the White House lawn, sitting on a bale of hay at the Johnson ranch, in Air Force One, at dinners and barbecues. He seemed to like the variety, to change the scenery occasionally.

Christian said Johnson preferred the informality of office news conferences (other informal types, also) to the rigidity of television appearances and "never entertained the thought of changing the habit."[65] Although the President did not regard television as his medium, he held reasonably frequent press conferences over television and addressed the nation often in formal broadcasts. Johnson noted once during a press conference that he had been criticized for using television so frequently, which amounted to 58 times in 1965 in reporting to the people.[66] This was twice as often as Kennedy.[67] Nevertheless, his technique apparently was successful in getting his image to the people: an August 1, 1965 Gallup Poll found that 66 per cent of a national sample had seen or heard at least one presidential press conference during the previous six months.[68]

Though still experimenting with locale, Johnson adopted most of the Kennedy precedents. These included the opening statement and backgrounding.

Johnson used the opening statement more than half the time, at both formal and informal conferences, and more than his prede-

cessor. He propagandized his ideas and his programs by reading statements of his views at the opening of televised press conferences, before television viewers had grown tired or confused and had turned the dial to something else. Jack Bell said this was one way Johnson used the institution of the press conference to project to the people the image he wanted them to have of him.[69]

Johnson often exercised control over his press conferences by using the same techniques for countering reporters as did other presidents: calling on reporters he wanted to have question him, refusing to answer them or turning them aside if they were too persistent. An example is furnished by the questioning about a Senate investigation of Bobby Baker, secretary to the majority in the Senate. Johnson made a brief statement about gifts the two exchanged, then shut reporters off with a "that is all I have to say about it and all I know about it."[70]

As for the televised press conference, Johnson made no innovations in the time of day it was held. Richard Nixon has initiated the nighttime televised conference, but Johnson stuck to a late morning or mid-afternoon schedule.

Johnson's primary contribution to television exploitation, as pointed out, was the televised announcement, sometimes impromptu such as the time he raced with a police escort to the television station to announce a strike settlement, and sometimes planned in advance.[71] Facilities were installed in the White House for such spur-of-the-moment appearances.

Summarizing, Johnson's techniques for the most part were not any different from those of Kennedy and Eisenhower, although more flexible. The institutionalization of the press conference had

been completed by the time he was President, with the final touch, the live television performance, being added during the Kennedy presidency. There were no further steps forward, so Johnson took them backward, through the use of the informal, intimate meeting. Although these meetings caused him problems with the press he was trying to please because they often were unannounced and few newsmen could attend, they were very much in the simple, informal style of Johnson. He worked best with individuals, or in small groups. He liked the intimate atmosphere, something which stemmed from his Southwestern, ranch-style life as opposed to the more formal, intellectual atmosphere of Kennedy, who, it seemed, enjoyed the mass, televised appearances. However critical the reporters were of the informal conferences, they were a logical step for a President who wished to retain some of the intimacy of the Franklin Roosevelt era, some of the give-and-take that only can be found in more informal meetings.

Johnson's Press Conference Ability

Lyndon Johnson ranks as moderately successful in his press conference performance. He generally was adept at answering questions, although at times his answers were not very satisfactory. His grammar was good. But he was lacking in that essential element that made the conferences of his predecessor so much better: charm. He could never reach the public or the press in the manner that most of his predecessors could, through means of personality.

> . . . anyone who has ever sat with Mr. Johnson in that handsome oval office off the Rose Garden knows what an incredibly good teacher and persuasive advocate he can be. The pity is that Lyndon Johnson couldn't transfer these skills to TV or some other open forum.[72]

Of course, the Johnson personality alone could not account for his problems with the press and the public; it was not simply a matter of lack of charm. Additional factors will be discussed later in this study.

All this does not mean Johnson was not adept at presenting his point. Much has been written about "the Johnson treatment", a term used to describe Johnson's methods of obtaining what he wanted, dating from his Senate days. This method of cajolery possibly was effective, considering the amount of legislation credited to the Senator.

> The Treatment could last ten minutes or four hours. It came, enveloping its target, at the LBJ ranch swimming pool, in one of LBJ's offices, in the Senate cloakroom, on the floor of the Senate itself--wherever Johnson might find a fellow Senator within his reach. Its tone could be supplication, accusation, cajolery, exuberance, scorn, tears, complaint, the hint of threat. It was all of these together. It ran the gamut of human emotions. Its velocity was breathtaking, and it was all in one direction. Interjections from the target were rare. Johnson anticipated them before they could be spoken. He moved in close, his face a scant millimeter from his target, his eyes widening and narrowing, his eyebrows rising and falling. From his pockets poured clippings, memos and statistics. Mimicry, humor, and the genius of analogy made The Treatment an almost hypnotic experience and rendered the target stunned and helpless.[73]

The "treatment" was used after Johnson became President, and somewhat in news conferences to the disgust of some reporters. Rowland Evans and Robert Novak report that when the "treatment" dominated news conferences, a sour note entered the President's relations with the press:

> Reporters en masse didn't like being on the receiving end of The Treatment. Johnson's failure to understand that annoyed the press, which in turn made Johnson increasingly wary and suspicious. Unable to tame the press as he tamed so many Senators, he foolishly took offense at routine questions, and was quick to find a double meaning in the most innocent point raised by a reporter.[74]

Johnson found one other obstacle in his press conference mastery, the televised news conference. While Kennedy enjoyed the theatrical atmosphere, Johnson in his first recorded sessions for television was uneasy and wary. He had trouble taking up too much time with unimportant subjects during his opening statements. He improved with time, of course. When the President went on television in the early spring of 1964 for an hour's conversation with three newsmen, he was edgy at first; as the program progressed, his natural eloquence came through. Walter Lippman said of the interview that the President

> has no reason to worry about himself as a performer on TV . . . . In his interview . . . he was never at a loss for words or facts, or for grammar and syntax . . . and . . . aware not only of the meaning of the questions put to him but of how his answers would be taken by the great audience.[76]

Another newsmen noted that Johnson's performance was as polished as Kennedy's had been under similar circumstances.

> He was patient, philosophical, full of praise for his staff and for Congress, unruffled by hard questions and as nonpartisan as the Twenty-third Psalm. He might not be a "great" President, but he would be "a people's President", whose administration would be "compassionate". All in all, it was a solid exhibition for the President who was pre-empting the middle of the political road.[79]

Johnson was a powerful President, in that he knew what to do with the skills embodied in his office, but he never was quite able to sell his philosophies to the press or the public. There was nothing weak about his leadership, said a press secretary, but there was something woefully amiss in his handling of the powers of persuasion and communication so desperately needed by national leaders:

> At least some of this was due to his inability--our inability --to communicate successfully to the news media and through the news media . . . . Perhaps God saves the Republic from dictators by giving all of its leaders an Achilles heel. A combination of the Johnson drive and ability and the Kennedy charm and youthful appeal would have been devastating.[78]

Relations with Reporters

No president in the history of the nation has ever devoted so much time to reporters. Johnson was generous with the press. Besides his press conferences, he included them in social activities and on a personal basis. He occasionally walked into the press lobby between appointments just to say hello and tell one of his many stories. But his "lover's quarrel" with the news media, as he called it, became more of an all-out war by the end of his term in office.

It was not always that way. Johnson succeeded to the presidency with a sympathetic press. He was the man to carry the country through the terrible grief of a President's death, and the press understood the problems he faced as he tried to draw the country together.

But the honeymoon period waned fast. Newsmen could not forget Johnson's Senate days when he had a reputation as a whiner, a needler, a man who would call a reporter in to praise a story or to bawl him out.

Johnson felt that the never really had a chance with the press. In some cases, this was true. The drawling Texan had replaced a President much respected by the Eastern liberal press, a man educated in the right places, who had an ability to get things across. Some reporters never forgave Johnson for being from Texas, for having gone to a little teachers' college.[79] The new President

bothered their vanities by letting his hair down just as he had done in earlier days. Many reporters felt Johnson's personal habits were not befitting the office of president. Kennedy never would have shown the scar of a gall bladder operation or tugged at the ears of a pet beagle. Johnson's vocabulary became famous ("I've got earphones in Moscow and Manila, earphones in Rangoon and earphones in Hanoi, and all I hear on them is, 'F---- you, Lyndon Johnson.'")[80] For these personal reasons, many reporters just did not like the man, believing him to be an embarrassment to the office he held.[81]

Other things affected his press relations to a greater extent. Some of them were minor, but became major the more they were practiced. For instance, Johnson refused to announce his press conferences, although he surely must have known the newsmen did not like it when they were not informed one was coming. It put them in a bad spot with their editors when they missed a conference. For another, just as in his Senate days, Johnson was thin-skinned. He became furious when newsmen criticized him in the press, and he said so. John Cauley, Washington bureau chief for the Kansas City Star, recounted the time Johnson called Jack Bell from his office about a book Bell had written on the President. "There must be something bad in it, you haven't sent me a copy," Johnson told Bell. Something was said on the other end, and Johnson said, "You newspapermen are just like the Ku Klux Klan--a closed society."[82] Unfortunately, the men who were in the position to say the most about the President, the columnists, often were the ones with whom he had the worst rapport.

Johnson at times left newsmen in the dark about his plans. He handled his own press relations, and so his press secretary could not inform the press because he himself was not informed. The President also cut off the ready access the reporters formerly had enjoyed to other White House staff for backgrounding. Christian admitted, "We tried without success to keep certain staffers away from the press. At times, the White House was like a sieve."[83] News leaks infuriated the President, because he wanted to control the Administration's news.

Many newsmen disliked Johnson because they thought he was using them for his own purposes. One researcher said that Johnson seriously misunderstood the relationship of a politician, even if he is the President, to the reporters who cover him. He gave as an example the time when Johnson told a group of reporters shortly after he became President, "You fellows play ball with me, and I'll make you big men."[84]

Johnson was "direct and unabashed in his efforts to woo reporters."[85] Evans and Novak, in their critical review of the Johnson presidency, said " . . . the President was convinced that only through manipulation of the press could he and his Administration be assured of fair treatment."[86] They hinted that press secretary Pierre Salinger's resignation to run for the United States Senate from California might have been precipiated by conflicts in press-presidency ideas between the two men:

> Salinger's departure increased Johnson's freedom to attempt to manipulate the press corps as though it were a commodity for sale, with personal favors in return for favorable stories . . . . Johnson's success as majority leader in cultivating a number of submissive correspondents led him to the erroneous conclusion that his press relations could be solved by the art of seduction.[87]

The newsmen did not trust Johnson. He constantly was telling them one thing, then doing another. He would throw out a little tidbit and then get mad when they wanted more. One of many examples is furnished when, at Christmas, 1964, the President told the reporters it would be impossible to keep the federal budget under $100 billion. All the papers headlined this. Shortly, when the President's newly-organized budget was announced as under $100 billion, Johnson looked like a financial wizard and the press had helped to enhance this wonder. On later occasions, the President seemed deliberately to mislead reporters and the public in order to indulge his passion for secrecy and timing. In July, 1965, a reporter asked if the President had given any thought to whom he might name for a vacancy on the Supreme Court. None at all, said the President. The following day he announced Abe Fortas.[88]

At first, these antics were separate incidents. Johnson's relations were not in too much danger because of his honeymoon period, followed by the Republican nomination of Barry Goldwater, and Johnson's subsequent landslide victory at the polls. Johnson took the so-called mandate, and tried to keep it. Little by little, personal quirks and international problems chipped away at it.

Of considerable influence was the Vietnam war, and the credibility gap which became more prominent as newsmen and the public began to feel they were not getting the facts from the President.[89] Johnson denied obvious changes in policy; he seemed to be trying to delay the war's impact on the American people by creating a false impression of what really was going on. Reporters must have asked hundreds of questions about Vietnam; the answers they received were never very satisfactory. In one press conference in July,

1965,[90] the President presented his reasons for being in Vietnam, and then at a later conference,[91] when asked why it was wrong to bomb the capital in North Vietnam and who ordered this theory into the government's policy, Johnson had no comment. He said he had to use his judgment, but this did not explain anything to the reporters.

Christian believes that the use "of American military power in the Dominican Republic opened a wedge for criticism, and Vietnam made it a veritable canyon."[92] He is joined in this thought by journalists who believe that when Johnson sent Marines into the Dominican Republic, and aroused the wrath of the liberals, he opened a wound in the Johnson consensus. The President insisted upon absolute concensus, and overplayed his hand, just when Vietnam was blooming.

Credibility became the single biggest problem in Johnson's four years of leadership. It tainted in some way almost everything he did. Louis Harris found in his sampling early in 1967 that the people's personal confidence in the President was about twenty points below their ratings of him on the conduct of the office of the presidency and his management of the war.[93] The feelings of newsmen in this respect did not differ from those of the public, for they saw him in action every day.

Johnson ended his presidency feeling he had failed in the area of press relations. He told a reporter near the end of his Administration:

> Our most tragic error has been our inability to establish a rapport and a confidence with the press and television--with the communications media. I don't think the press has understood me.[94]

The tragedy, one reporter noted, is that Johnson never understood why he was not understood.[95] Much of it had to do with

the tactics he brought from the Hill to the White House. Much of it was his inability to master the skills of mass communications, inspiration and education, try as he might. Much of it was his use of any means, even deviousness, to reach the end. Much of it was his political lifestyle, evident in his dealings with the newsmen who covered him and grew to mistrust him--not all of them, of course, but many of them.

Summary of Johnson Press Conference Skill

Lyndon Johnson held press conferences on the average of 2.1 per month, a poor showing. Despite this, he was more accessible to the press than any other president. He often would meet with the newsmen privately or in groups.

He utilized the news conference to its fullest, using it to announce appointments and other important events, and gave opening remarks more than half the time. He asked aides and other Administration officials to participate to give information to newsmen.

His most striking technique was his variation of the setting of the press conference. He liked informal, intimate meetings with the press, but these caused him problems because he would not announce them in advance. He also used the formal, televised conference, although he presented a poor image over television and did not enjoy these performances. He frequently held background dinners and met reporters for interviews. He did play favorites somewhat, both in and out of the press conferences.

Johnson was adept at answering all questions, but often gave answers that were unsatisfactory to the press. He had good grammar but lacked charm and his style never was very warm, although he tried to do well. His famous "treatment" at times offended the

reporters, for they felt he was using them and trying to get something from them.

Although Johnson was generous with his time, he had problems in his press conferences and with the press in general. He had a political background which too many persons remembered as manipulative from his Senate days, and his personal quirks irritated newsmen. Johnson was infuriated by news leaks and criticism in the news media and let the press know it. He was unabashed in effort to win the press, and turned on and off the charm at will. The newsmen realized this, and did not trust him. All these personal habits and failings became evident in his press conferences.

These problems were compounded by the fact that in his conferences Johnson began telling half-truths and manipulating the information to an extent that hurt his credibility. The credibility gap in the Johnson Administration is infamous. Compounded by international troubles in Vietnam and the Dominican Republic, this added up to an ill feeling between the newsmen and the President.

EVALUATION

A number of noticeable differences come to light at the end of this comparison of the press conference skills of Lyndon Johnson and Dwight Eisenhower.

The only similarity is in the frequency of their meetings with the press. Both met the newsmen on the average of about twice a month, not very frequently. Eisenhower had the poorer record; for long periods he seemed to ignore the press entirely. Johnson was much more accessible because he would meet with reporters for interviews.

Johnson utilized the press conference to its fullest extent. He liked to meet with the newsmen and could not stay away from his "affair" with the news media. Eisenhower did not even want to hold meetings at first, and felt he did not need to hold conferences except when he had something specific to say.

Johnson would vary his press conference formats. He liked informal, intimate meetings with the newsmen, and while he did not feel that the televised press conference was his best method, he used it. He held all kinds of meetings imaginable with the newsmen, from those in his office to those at the Johnson ranch. Eisenhower, on the other hand, never varied his format. He used the same formal, rigid meeting each time. His conferences always were announced in advance, but Johnson's informal meetings were not, so that they could remain informal. This angered the newsmen who missed them.

In the press conference, Johnson would answer most questions, going off-the-record occasionally. But he did not give satisfactory answers to questions he wanted to avoid, often reiterating information he had given in previous conferences. This

especially was true of questions on the most vital subject, Vietnam. Eisenhower would not answer questions he felt demeaning to the office he held, but he used no comment sparingly, and generally tried to give some sort of answer to most questions. Both presidents gave less than satisfactory answers instead of giving no answer at all.

Eisenhower had poor grammar at times, and his answers often were vague and drawn out. He often did not know about a subject the reporters brought up. However, his sincerity compensated for this disadvantage. He projected an image of trying to be fair in answering all questions, whether or not he knew the facts, and the public and press reacted favorably to his attempts. Johnson, in comparison, while always in command of his own presidency and press conferences, gave the indication of trying to manipulate the press with his answers by withholding information or not answering truthfully. He lacked sincerity and personal charm and warmth.

Eisenhower had a better image in televised press conferences than did Johnson. He was able to project sincerity and warmth, while Johnson seemed ill at ease in front of the camera.

As for techniques, Johnson used the opening statement to explain his policies more than did Eisenhower, and, also unlike Eisenhower, he used the press conference to announce appointments. This had newsworthy appeal. Johnson called on newsmen by name; reporters had to identify themselves to Eisenhower. Because Johnson's press meetings often were informal and without television, he could give background information to the newsmen. Eisenhower had to resort to background dinners. The reporters came to rely on Eisenhower's press secretary for additional information, whereas reporters under Johnson could nearly always go directly to him.

Both presidents stood to address the newsmen, except during Johnson's informal sessions when he was seated. In addition, Johnson invited aides and Administration officials to brief newsmen at presidential conferences.

Personal qualities had a lot to do with successful projection of the image of each president. Johnson had a political background, and followed a president popular with the press. Eisenhower was not hindered by a political image, and he had fewer personal foibles to interfere with his popularity. Johnson demonstrated a lot of energy during his press conferences, which at times was misplaced, such as the time he showed newsmen his operation scar or when he picked up his dogs by the ears. He worked hard to woo the reporters, turning on and off as they fell in and out of favor with him. The newsmen resented this. Eisenhower never had these problems, mainly because he saw the press less than Johnson and also because he did not pull the stunts Johnson did.

Although Eisenhower would flare up during a press conference, he soon would cool down and the matter would be forgotten. Johnson, on the other hand, would become cold and abrupt. Out of the conference, he would seek out a reporter for a critical story he had written and let him know he did not like it. He was very thin-skinned, more so than Eisenhower who seemed to take criticism as part of being President. However, Eisenhower did not suffer from the critical remarks that Johnson did during his presidency. He was protected by a favorable public image.

Of most importance in understanding their differences was the fact that Eisenhower was credible and Johnson was not. The newsmen and the public began to believe that they could not trust

the former Senator, that he did not tell them the truth about Vietnam, that he was slipping them partial and calculated information for his own benefit. Eisenhower always was forthright with the newsmen, however vague his answers were, and was not discovered trying to conceal information. People trusted him, including newsmen. While he was not intimate with reporters, he did not play favorites and so did not get into the trouble Johnson did with newsmen's fears of being manipulated. Despite all his accessibility to the press, Johnson suffered for it. He might have been better off if he had stayed away from the correspondents more than he did.

FOOTNOTES

1. Jack Bell, The Splendid Misery (Garden City: Doubleday Co., 1960), p. 290. See also James Pollard, "Eisenhower and the Press: The First Two Years," Journalism Quarterly, Vol. XXXII, No. 3 (Summer, 1955), p. 287. (Hereinafter referred to as Pollard, "The First Two Years.")

2. As quoted in Bell, p. 290.

3. Elmer E. Cornwell, Jr., Presidential Leadership of Public Opinion (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1965), p. 177. (Hereinafter referred to as Cornwell).

4. Ibid, p. 178.

5. James Pollard, "Eisenhower and the Press: The Final Phase," Journalism Quarterly, Vol. XXXVIII, No. 2 (Spring, 1961), p. 181. (Hereinafter referred to as Pollard, "The Final Phase").

6. Cornwell, p. 178.

7. "The People Want to Know," Beaumont Enterprise (June 25, 1953).

8. Oral History Project, transcript of a tape-recorded interview by John Luter of Edward Folliard, September 7, 1967, p. 7, Eisenhower Library.

9. S. Richard Brooks, "2,500 Questions," Editor and Publisher, Vol. LXXXVIII, No. 3 (January 15, 1955), pp. 8-9.

10. Eisenhower Papers, Official File 101-L, "Press Conferences," transcripts of press conferences, September 30, 1953-January, 1961, Eisenhower Library. (Hereinafter "Official File" shall be referred to as O.F.).

11. O.F. 101-L, transcript of press conference, October 21, 1953.

12. Raymond Moley, Columbus Dispatch (June 27, 1954).

13. Cabell Phillips, New York Times Magazine (August 16, 1959).

14. Eisenhower Papers, General File 6-M, "Press Conferences, 1952-53," letter from Jim Hagerty to Robert Guibord, February 4, 1953, Eisenhower Library. (Hereinafter "General File" shall be referred to as G.F.).

15. John Cauley, Washington bureau chief, Kansas City Star, private interview November 3, 1971, in Kansas City, Missouri.

16. Oral History Project, transcript of a tape-recorded interview by John Luter of Raymond Scherer, January 20, 1968, pp. 8-9, Eisenhower Library.

17. Pollard, "The First Two Years," p. 288.

18. G.F. 6-M-1, "Radio and Television Broadcasts of Press Conferences, 1952-53," telegram from Frank Stanton to Dwight Eisenhower, January 21, 1953.

19. G.F. 6-M-1, "Radio and Television Broadcasts of Press Conferences, 1955," telegram from Harold Fellows to Dwight Eisenhower, January 20, 1955.

20. Pollard, "The First Two Years," p. 299.

21. Sidney Shalett, "We Bring You Now the President," Saturday Evening Post, Vol. CCXXVII, No. 47 (May 21, 1955), p. 146.

22. U. S., President, press conference transcript, Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States, 1959 (May 13, 1959), p. 384.

23. U. S., President, press conference transcript, Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States, 1958 (June 18, 1958), p. 488.

24. Cornwell, pp. 186-7.

25. Cauley interview.

26. Richard Neustadt, Presidential Power (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1960), p. 165.

27. Folliard transcript, p. 24.

28. O.F. 101-L has numerous examples of questions the President's staff prepared for him in advance of press conferences, as well as requests by the President for answers to be given him for possible questions.

29. O.F. 101-L, transcript of a press conference, September 30, 1953.

30. Neustadt, p. 159.

31. Bell, p. 295.

32. Doris Fleeson, "The Gettysburg Address as It would have been Written by President Eisenhower," Chicago Daily News (June 14, 1957).

33. Cauley interview.

34. Oral History Project, transcript of a tape-recorded interview by John Luter of Roscoe Drummond, June 21, 1967, p. 22, Eisenhower Library.

35. U. S., President, press conference transcript, Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States, 1957 (March 27, 1957), p. 215.

36. Information in this section from "The Famous Press Conference," Nieman Reports, Vol. VIII, No. 1 (January, 1954), pp. 41-3.

37. Harold Callender, New York Times (November 15, 1963).

38. G.F. 6-M, 1952-53, letters from citizens to Dwight Eisenhower.

39. G.F. 6-M, 1952-53, letter from Murray Snyder to Edward Warren, March 9, 1953.

40. Walter Johnson, 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1960), p. 317.

41. Cornwell, p. 178.

42. O.F. 101-L, speech by Robert L. Riggs, April 29, 1954, at Columbia, Missouri.

43. Ibid.

44. Cauley interview.

45. "Presidential Thanks," Editor and Publisher, Vol. XCIV, No. 3 (January 21, 1961), p. 6.

46. Cauley interview.

47. Pollard, "The Final Phase," p. 184.

48. James Marlow, Columbus Dispatch (January 12, 1961).

49. James Pollard, "The Kennedy Administration and the Press," Journalism Quarterly, Vol. XLI, No. 1 (Winter, 1964), p. 14. (Hereinafter referred to as Pollard, "The Kennedy Administration"

50. Ibid, p. 4.

51. Cauley interview.

52. Statistics quoted by Pollard, "The Kennedy Administration," based on a letter by Pierre Salinger to Pollard, p. 10.

53. Pollard, "The Kennedy Administration," p. 10.

54. George Christian, The President Steps Down (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1970), p. 187.

55. Ibid.

56. Ibid, p. 206.

57. Elmer E. Cornwell, Jr., "The Johnson Press Relations Style," Journalism Quarterly, Vol. XLIII, No. 1 (Spring, 1966), p. 6. (Hereinafter referred to as Cornwell, "The Johnson Style").

58. U. S., President, press conference transcript, Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States, 1965, Vol. I (March 20, 1965), p. 303.

59. U. S., President, press conference transcripts, Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States, 1963-1969, all volumes.

60. See, for example, U. S., President, press conference transcript, Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States, 1965, Vol. I (April 1, 1965), p. 367.

61. U. S., President, press conference transcript, Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States, 1966, Vol. I (March 22, 1966), p. 347.

62. Hugh Sidey, A Very Personal Presidency (New York: Atheneum, 1968), pp. 188-9.

63. Cauley interview.

64. U. S., President, press conference transcript, Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States, 1963-64, Vol. I (December 18, 1963), p. 69.

65. Christian, p. 199.

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73. Rowland Evans and Robert Novak, Lyndon B. Johnson: The Exercise of Power (New York: The New American Library, Inc., 1966), p. 10 See also Bell, The Johnson Treatment, for discussion of this.

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CHAPTER IV

IMAGE OF PRESIDENTS BY THEIR PUBLICS

Dwight Eisenhower and Lyndon Johnson were as different from each other in their public images as they were in their press conferences. Eisenhower never suffered from a poor public image and generally was well-liked by the people as well as the press throughout his presidency. Johnson, on the other hand, suffered from a decline in popularity greater than that experienced by most presidents in the waning years of their presidencies.

Likewise, contrasts may be drawn in the press conference styles of these two presidents. The popular Eisenhower, surprisingly, never tried too hard at his press conferences. He often lacked skill at answering questions and in expressing himself. Johnson, suffering in public image, seemed to sink deeper into the quagmire as he tried harder at holding good press conferences. He attempted informal conferences with more intimacy, but this did not seem to help either his press relations or his public relations.

In order to study public opinion of these presidents, the Gallup Opinion Polls, Roper Polls and other regional and national polls, and studies of them, were examined most frequently to give an indication of the presidential popular images. Although the opinion poll is not an indicator without faults, it is, according to Richard Neustadt, "widely taken to approximate reality" in Washington and reports about its behavior "are very widely read."[1] Presi-

dents have referred to it consistently in their dealings with the public; in fact, Johnson used to carry favorable clippings in his pocket to whip out at will. Its use within limits as an indicator of the presidential standing with the public is defensible.

With regularity over the last two and one-half decades, the Gallup Poll has posed to its cross-section samples of public the question, "Do you approve or disapprove of the way (the incumbent) is handling his job as President?" The responses form the index known as Presidential Popularity.

The variation in the opinion poll ratings has been considerable. Harry Truman, while the most popular president of recent years for a few weeks in 1945 when more than eighty-five per cent of the public was pleased with his job, was also the least popular, when during 1951 to March 1953, less than thirty per cent of the public liked what he was doing.[2] Johnson most nearly approached these extremes, with Eisenhower never higher than seventy-nine per cent and never lower than forty-nine per cent, and Kennedy usually high, but in noticeable decline at the time of his death.[3]

John Mueller, in his study "Presidential Popularity from Truman to Johnson," notes four independent variables which determine presidential popularity. They are: 1) a "coalition of minorities" variable that suggests the overall trend in a president's popularity will be downward; 2) a "rally 'round the flag" variable which anticipates that international crises and similar phenomena will give a president a short-term boost in popularity; 3) an "economic slump" variable associating recessions with decreased popularity; and 4) a "war" variable predicting a decrease in popularity under the conditions of the Korean and Vietnam wars.

The "coalition of minorities" variable indicates that a president's popularity will go downward as he is forced to act on a variety of issues and gradually alienate enough minorities to be defeated. An example is Kennedy's efforts to force back a steel price rise in 1962, which, while supported by most Americans, tended to alienate businessmen. Other reasons for overall decline in popularity would be disillusionment and fair weather support.[4]

Mueller says a president's popularity traditionally declines at an even rate, for all four years of each term.

The "rally 'round the flag" variable brings into the analysis the phenomenon that certain intense international events generate a "rally 'round the flag" effect which tends to give a boost to the president's popularity rating. As Tom Wicker said, "simply being president through a great crisis or a big event . . . draws Americans together in his support."[5] This rally point must be international, specific, sharply focused and dramatic.

These upsurges will create small bumps upward in the otherwise normal decline of popularity of a president.

The "economic slump" variable indicates that an economy in slump harms a president's popularity, but an economy which is improving does not seem to help his rating.

Lastly, a president will experience an additional loss of popularity if a war is on.

All of these variables are important to a study of image-making through press conferences, because it is frequently through press conferences that a president will explain policies that may alienate minorities; that he may announce a crisis and ask for public support; that he may explain economic policies which will make him

popular or unpopular. The effectiveness of a president's programs may depend upon his explanation of purpose through the conference.

DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER

Few men attained the presidency with as high prestige as Dwight Eisenhower. The new Chief Executive bore a dignity, an outward warmth and a solidarity that the people wanted. They depended upon him to clean up that "mess in Washington", to reduce taxes. They looked forward to a time of general good will.

Eisenhower came out of World War II as the most popular military leader, at least according to a Roper Poll in November 1945.[6] Likewise, shortly before the national conventions in 1948, Eisenhower was the favored candidate of Democrats and Republicans alike.[7] It is so unusual that a man so clearly the choice of the electorate was so reluctant to run.

Elmo Roper, in his study of the popularity of various presidents, said Eisenhower was admired for four major qualities:[8] his experience and ability in foreign affairs; his understanding of military matters; his genius for shaping a diversity of opinions and factions into a team; his persuasive personality. The Eisenhower personality cast its spell over the electorate, but this seemed to exist quite apart from the immediate reactions to the General as a speech-making candidate. His speeches often were platitudinous, his manner earnest to the point of grimness. Although he did not seem at home campaigning, it somehow did not affect the public, Roper said.

A parallel may be drawn with his press conferences. As in his speeches, in the press conference setting Eisenhower was not exactly

at home. His image was favorable, but not superior. He wandered through sentences, was without knowledge on some subjects. He had no particular skill, although his presentation was sincere. Despite this, the people continued to like him as a fatherly, sincere person who was good for the country.

Eisenhower was more than the people's choice; he was the people's possession, according to John Fenton, managing editor of the Gallup Poll, in his study of presidential popularity.[9] Throughout his eight years in office Eisenhower saw little diminution of popularity. Although his popularity was never higher than seventy-nine per cent, it never dropped lower than forty-nine per cent, either.[10]

Eisenhower began his first term with a popularity in the Gallup Poll of sixty-eight per cent, only two points below his first-term average.[11] This popularity rose with the moves toward an eventual settlement of the cease-fire in Korea. Although the President experienced a slight downturn in popularity in 1953, his speech before the United Nations in December brought it back up. This Atoms for Peace speech, in which Eisenhower called for international cooperation of the peaceful uses of atomic energy, was the first example of his ability to recover lost ground in a single move. The President's press secretary attributed the President's January legislative program and the United Nations speech as giving his popularity "a terrific upward jump."[12] Neither of these important events occurred during a press conference; however, explanations of them did.

The President had two problems during the first half of his first term which affected his popularity: he would take no firm

position on either the army-McCarthy hearings or the war in Indo-China.[13] Although questioned most often during press conferences on the former, and many times on the latter, his answers were vague and not newsworthy. In May his standing with voters was fifty-four per cent.[14] Undoubtedly any firm statements through the press conferences about these events would have helped the President's rating.

The fighting in Korea ended in July and the next survey in September indicated the President's popularity had shot up to a new high of seventy-five per cent.[15]

Although the 1954 congressional elections for the Republicans were disastrous, Fenton argues that this is not because the voters did not like their President.[16] Eisenhower's personality did not help his party but the people still liked him. Many voters thought it was a good idea to have the president of one party and the congress controlled by another.[17] Eisenhower's popularity did respond to the bi-partisan congressional fight, and hit a fifty-seven per cent first term low in November, 1954. By way of contrast, Truman's popularity at the time of the Republican congressional victory in 1946 was thirty-two per cent.[18]

Perhaps significant is the fact that Eisenhower would not take political stands during his press conferences. As pointed out earlier in this study, he believed the president should not campaign for his party, even to the extent of foregoing questions at press conferences. Any word by the President, any campaigning, might have helped his party and his own popularity.

The year 1955 was a time of relaxation and flowering of hopes for a peaceful world--an era of coexistence--and the President's

popularity hit its highest peak. On his return from a Big Four meeting in Europe, the Gallup Opinion Polls recorded an all-time high of seventy-nine per cent.[19] Another Gallup Poll in August of that year gave these top reasons for the President's popularity: 1) his military record; 2) ability in handling the job; 3) keeping the country out of war.[20]

While Eisenhower was restricted to a Denver hospital and through his convalescence at Gettysburg, following his "moderate coronary occlusion" in September, 1955, the American people's admiration held firm. Even with his presidential duties limited while at Gettysburg, and his long period of no contact with the press and no press conferences, seventy-five per cent of the public approved of the way he was handling his job.[21] The seeming unimportance of press conferences in maintaining presidential popularity perhaps can be explained because of the specific situation. Undoubtedly the public felt sympathetic for the ailing President; a President such as Eisenhower who enjoyed unusual popularity when he was well could be expected to retain at least as much popularity, if not more, from his public when he was immobilized from a heart attack.

The election of 1956 posed no problems for the American public. It seemed to be a question of the man, Eisenhower, and the party, the Democrats. The public made up its mind early, according to opinions given polltakers. After the election, Eisenhower began his second term with an electorate which clearly approved of him, seventy-nine per cent by the Gallup Poll in January, 1957.[22] The people were satisfied to have some form of peace, a fairly solid prosperity and a leader they liked.

Neustadt offers this suggestion about the source of a chief executive's strength with the electorate: "An image of the office, not an image of the man, is the dynamic factor in a president's prestige. Impressions of the person will form early and last long, but the values men assign to what they can see alter rather quickly."[23]

When Eisenhower started his second term in 1957, many politicians thought he would suffer from a "lame duck" presidency, in that he could not run again. However, the President did not seem much bothered by this problem, as his popularity stayed pretty high throughout these years, though declining generally.

In 1957, Eisenhower's popularity slipped to 57 per cent, equalling the low point of his first term. Several things might have caused this decline: his budget, and a new round in the fight between the Eisenhower Republicans and Taft Republicans. Throughout the winter and spring, polls consistently found the weight of public opinion siding with the critics who favored a budget cut.[24] Likewise, Eisenhower's decision to fight for foreign aid did not sit well with a public which decided for a cut in the mutual security program.[25] Because of the budget fight, Eisenhower lost a number of conservative Republicans. Meanwhile, the Democratic trend which started earlier spread far and wide. Racial crisis and the space race with Russia helped to bring down the President's popularity, too.

The Republican rift, coupled with the 1958 recession, lost the Republicans the elections in 1958, making the Democratic majority bigger than any since 1936. Eisenhower's popularity continued to increase at a time when his party's fortunes fell to a low ebb.

By 1959 he had regained most of the popularity lost during the first half of his second term. Fenton says international events, such as Eisenhower's invitation to Khruschev to visit the U. S., and his good will tour of Asia, Africa and Europe, helped his image.[26] But other factors must be taken into account. Eisenhower, not being able to run for another term, assumed an elder statesman role that changed the image of the presidency, and things were running smoothly between the Democratic Congress and the Republican White House. This undoubtedly was because of the "weak" president role which Eisenhower assumed during most of his presidency by refusing to push Administration measures through Congress, or by refusing to tell Congress what to do through statements to the press. He pretty much let the Congress run itself. Because of all this, the President's international moves could only bring to the public's mind the image of a man who had so adeptly led the country during World War II.[27]

As noted, Eisenhower's popularity breaks the traditional declining trend which comes naturally as presidential terms progress, according to the Mueller study. Reasons for this may be explained. The President had personal appeal; he was extremely likeable. Also during his first term he was able to make one sensational achievement: he ended the unpopular Korean war. Eisenhower's amateur status surprisingly also was to his benefit; the public may have been more willing to grant him an extended "honeymoon". He was benefited by the fact that he was not an active President, either in administration or legislation. This is a somewhat dubious honor, but one which does not arouse the wrath of minorities and makes those who are active wait in limbo for some-

thing to happen. Finally, Eisenhower's first term and most of his second coincided with a period of national goodness.

This analysis strongly suggests that presidential style as well as the ideological and political nature of his administration and the times can make a sizeable difference in the popularity ratings. With Eisenhower, of course, this style was reflected most correctly through his press conferences. He was passive in his news conferences, just as in his leadership of the Administration and Congress; his presence was one of good feeling, just as was the era during which he was President; his techniques were not political, that is, not of manipulation, just as his whole presidential image was not that of a politician.

Other factors besides the press conference have been discussed herein as affecting Eisenhower's public image; however, the impact of the news conference upon the successful explanation of presidential actions, policies and national and international events cannot be discounted. Although a presidential news conference may not have a direct impact upon the image the public receives of a presidential event, it very frequently will have an important indirect one.

> I think [my grandchildren] will be proud of two things. What I did for the Negro and seeing it through in Vietnam for all of Asia. The Negro cost me 15 points in the polls and Vietnam cost me 20.
>
> Lyndon B. Johnson[28]

Lyndon Johnson suffered a lack of public prestige which went steadily downhill practically from the day he took office.

Johnson came to the presidency with a handicap: John Kennedy, a vibrant, young leader, left an image hard to follow. At first, Johnson's popularity ratings in the Gallup Polls were over seventy per cent, even hitting eighty, but after his own election in 1964, they went into the sixties and by September 1966 had hit the forties.

Johnson had additional problems which, in one way or another, had an impact on his public relations. Most striking, and most widely accepted as a cause of his poor public image, was the Vietnam war. It is widely held that the unpopular, indecisive wars in Korea and Vietnam severely hurt two presidents: Truman and Johnson.[29] Johnson himself felt that Vietnam hurt him image, as indicated by his quote at the top of this page.

Popularity levels were in steady decline in the polls as the wars progressed with record lows occurring during the presidents' last years when the wars seemed quite hopeless. Undoubtedly, the Vietnam war contributed to Johnson's decision not to run again.[30] And Vietnam became a major campaign issue, perhaps leading to the election of a Republican president in 1968.

Kenneth Waltz, in his study of electoral votes and foreign policy crisis, says that when an international crisis hits the

nation, the people rally behind the president. This also is Mueller's conclusion, as discussed in the section on Eisenhower. Waltz says:

> . . . there is not time for dissension to develop. The public poses few problems for the President who acts deftly, or even clumsily, in a short and sharp encounter. If the crisis is prolonged and the blood of Americans is shed in carrying out the government's policy, should not one expect a different reaction?[31]

As a war wears on, public support dwindles. A parallel case to Vietnam may be drawn with Truman and the Korean war. Waltz points out, "It is clear that the decision to resist in Korea was widely approved and the execution of that decision over the next three years was not."[32]

Realizing the problem Truman had with Korea, Johnson must have known the domestic political risks he was running. However, "to have changed policies because of electoral fears for the future would not have been honorable."[33]

The study by Mueller, nevertheless, shows that while the Korean war had a large and independent negative impact on Truman's popularity, the Vietnam war had no independent impact on Johnson's popularity. The decline of popularity simply was in keeping with the traditional trend.[34]

This does not mean that the war had no impact at all. Whatever impact the war had was tapped by other variables in the Mueller equation, especially the coalition of minorities variable, which is specifically designed to account for general overall decline. The Vietnam war simply did not have an additional impact.

How could this be? Neustadt says, in his observations of Truman and the Korean war, that Truman "seems to have run afoul of the twin notions that a wartime Chief Executive ought to be 'above

politics' and that he ought to help the generals 'win'."[35] Johnson, in his press conferences and statements, gave the idea that the war was simply an extension of the past presidents' policies and actions. Opposition at first largely came from radical groups, or groups unassociated with either party. Johnson kept away from the battle, saying that he wanted to keep the war "above politics". Vietnam never really became Johnson's war.

Mueller says that while Truman dismissed General Douglas MacArthur, himself a popular figure, Johnson had public statements from General William Westmoreland, a man highly respected by the conservatives, that the President was giving him substantial support.

Vietnam affected Johnson in other ways, which may have contributed to his falling popularity. It drained away the money needed by the fledgling domestic programs of the Great Society. Perhaps even more damaging, it robbed Johnson's programs of the care that they needed to keep them going.[36]

Of what effect were the Johnson presidential press conferences to the Vietnam question? Through them, Johnson was able to project his image of keeping the war above politics and of attributing it to other presidents. These were things Johnson continually stressed to the press while at times giving very little additional information about Vietnam. His press conferences helped him convey this message.

Other things might as well have accounted for Johnson's public image problems, including the racial crisis which was enough to keep many persons unhappy with the situation in the country. Americans were confronting each other after years of

tension, and no one could be appeased by the moves the Administration was making. Johnson himself believed that civil rights cost him fifteen points in the polls, although he continually stressed the theme of equality in his press conferences. His concept as indicated in the phrasing of his statement at the beginning of this section was based more on his feeling of personal contribution to the Negro, than of any civil rights demonstrations and violence which occurred during his Administration.

Evans and Novak say the Dominican Crisis was actually the problem that changed the Johnson presidency indelibly. When the President sent in Marines, he invoked furious criticism from the liberals, with whom there became a split, just as Vietnam was becoming an issue.[37] Notable is the fact that the President held no news conferences in the month following the Dominican crisis to help him explain his actions.

The Johnson credibility gap caused many of the President's problems with public image. The Americans simply did not trust their President. One editor said people began to feel that Johnson was not dealing with the whole truth as he knew it.[38] Too often his methods seemed devious, his sincerity dubious, his pronouncements calculated for effect. The harder he tried to correct these impressions, the worse the situation got. His image as a political person, coupled with his dominant personality, only strengthened doubts in the public's mind, seasoned by the age-old belief that purely political people are to be mistrusted. His news conferences helped promote this image to its fullest: on television, Johnson looked insincere. His statements to newsmen were discovered half-true or calculated for effect. He would not answer questions

on controversial issues such as Vietnam to the satisfaction of the public desiring all the facts. All of this added up negatively for the Johnson image.

One presidential source believes that Johnson was plagued with an additional problem most presidents do not have to face. He was President when one historical epoch was drawing to a close and the next one barely beginning. The political ways and assumptions in which he was schooled "proved effective but not ultimately persuasive in dealing with the nation's problems."[39] Thus, the Great Society was setting up bigger federal bureaucracies when many social critics were calling for more decentralization. The Vietnam war was based on assumptions of an international "Communist conspiracy" that seemed less valid as time went on, even though Johnson continually stressed these things to the public through his meetings with the press.

Only a brief glance at the Gallup Polls for the Johnson period indicates the story of the toll all these things took on his popularity.[40] In December of 1963, seventy-nine per cent of the people approved of the way he was doing his job, and only three per cent disapproved. His "mandate" was considerable. During 1965, it stayed generally in the sixty percentages, but by 1966, was in the fifties, with a slight upward trend in July. By October of 1966, it had hit the then low point of forty-four and rose slightly in early 1967, only to drop again in August and September to the thirties. This was the lowest the index ever got, except for twice in March, 1968 and in August, 1968. Following Johnson's surprise announcement over television in March of 1968 that he would not seek the presidency again, his popularity shot up to 49 per cent in

April, and stayed generally in the forties until the last poll was taken in October, when it was forty-two per cent.

An example of the impact an individual press conference may have on popularity is shown through the Johnson press conference in early June, 1966. Following his announcement that the U. S. was intensifying the bombing of North Vietnam, his popularity rating went down to the forty percentile. Likewise, when the crisis in the Dominican Republic broke in the spring of 1965, the President did not hold any news conferences to explain details and policies on the sending in of troops, and his popularity dipped.

Howard K. Smith, veteran newscaster, said one consistent and serious fault in Johnson's handling of foreign policy affairs was his inarticulation of purpose. He did not state his purposes well, if at all. At critical times he abdicated to his critics, and false conceptions of Johnson and his presidency were fastened onto the public mind.[41] It is certainly true that Johnson was often not able to explain his purposes through his press conferences, at least to the satisfaction of persons becoming used to mistrusting their President. His inability to convince the public of his logic on Vietnam is one example.

However, Smith believes that a longer perspective will place Johnson very high on the scale of presidents. Current judgments are confused by the fact that what is conspicuous and immediate may change. And, he says, the American public has an ingrained distrust of power that was more operative in Johnson's case because he, more than almost any predecessor, knew how to use power and did so with evident effect.[42]

While it is not accidental that "strong" presidents most adroitly use the power of their office to enhance their presidencies, their techniques of doing so are most important to their presidential images. Perhaps this was Lyndon Johnson's most serious problem. Unlike Dwight Eisenhower, who presented a safe, fatherly image, Johnson represented the political animal, powerful and to be watched. All of his public relations techniques, even his press conferences, exemplified this. The picture he presented via the press was that of deviousness and of lack of credibility. He represented power-play politics, and his public image suffered because of it.

FOOTNOTES

1. Richard Neustadt, Presidential Power (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1960).

2. John Mueller, "Presidential Popularity from Truman to Johnson," American Political Science Review, Vol. LXIV, No. 1 (March, 1970), p. 19.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid, p. 20. All further information in this section concerning these theories is based on the Mueller study.

5. Tom Wicker, "In the Nation: Peace, It's Wonderful," New York Times (July 4, 1967), p. 18.

6. Elmo Roper, You and Your Leaders (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1957), p. 246.

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid.

9. John Fenton, In Your Opinion (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1960), p. 114.

10. Gallup Opinion Index (Princeton, N. J.: Gallup International, January, 1953 to January, 1960).

11. Gallup Opinion Index, January, 1952 to January, 1957.

12. Eisenhower Papers, Official File 139-E, "Public Opinion," letter from Jim Hagerty to Thomas E. Dewey, January 30, 1954, Eisenhower Library. (Hereinafter "Official File" shall be referred to as O.F.).

13. Roper, p. 266.

14. Gallup Opinion Index, May, 1954.

15. Gallup Opinion Index, September, 1954.

16. Fenton, p. 119.

17. Ibid.

18. Ibid, p. 120.

19. Ibid, p. 121. See also Roper, p. 270.

20. Gallup Opinion Index, August 4, 1955.

21. Fenton, p. 122.

22. Gallup Opinion Index, January, 1957.

23. Neustadt, p. 95.

24. Fenton, p. 181.

25. Ibid, p. 182.

26. Ibid, p. 192.

27. Ibid, p. 193.

28. Quoted, David Wise, "The Twilight of a President," New York Times Magazine (November 3, 1968), p. 131.

29. Kenneth Waltz, "Electoral Punishment and Foreign Policy Crisis," in James Rosenau, Ed., Domestic Sources of Foreign Policy (New York: Free Press, 1967), pp. 273, 288. See also Neustadt, pp. 97-99 and Mueller, p. 23.

30. Mueller, p. 23.

31. Waltz, p. 273.

32. Ibid, p. 274.

33. Ibid, p. 288.

34. Mueller, p. 20.

35. Neustadt, p. 97.

36. "The Johnson Years," Newsweek, Vol. LXXIII, No. 3 (January 20, 1969), p. 21. (Hereinafter referred to as Newsweek).

37. Rowland Evans and Robert Novak, Lyndon B. Johnson: The Exercise of Power (New York: The New American Library, Inc., 1966) pp. 510-529.

38. W. W. Baker, Editor, Kansas City Star, private interview November 3, 1971, Kansas City, Missouri.

39. Newsweek, p. 24.

40. Information in this section taken from Gallup Opinion Index, December, 1963 to October, 1968.

41. Howard K. Smith, "Prologue: A Strong Thread of Moral Purpose," in James MacGregor Burns, Ed., To Heal and To Build: The Programs of President Lyndon B. Johnson (New York: MacGraw-Hill Book Co., 1968), pp. 1-15.

42. Ibid.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The news media are the major vehicles for projecting a president's image to the public at large. Through the mass media --the live telecasts, the oral broadcasts, the printed explanations--the people in this democratic society learn about the man they elected to office, his policies and programs, his leadership ability and his personal traits. Through editorials and news stories, fireside chats over radio and televised press conferences and addresses to the nation, a president's image is projected to the people.

The presidential press conference is one of the most important methods by which the presidential image is projected. Because the president stands alone and above all other public figures in audience interest and importance, the news media are vitally interested in him. All types of the news media assemble for a press conference, as representatives of the people, to carry the president's words to the electorate. The potential for information and image-building from this one event is tremendous. Therefore, the power of the press conference to a president who knows how to use it is very great. Of course, the press conference is not the only method by which the president reaches the public. But it is one of the most important because of the opportunities it gives him through all types of the media to solicit public support

of his programs, to defend his actions and to explain his policies.

Because the presidential press conference is such an important vehicle for the president's public personality, it may either enhance or limit it, depending upon the skill of the president using it, and upon his personality.

The two presidents researched herein were completely opposite, both in their utilization of the press conference for projecting their public images and in their public popularity.

Dwight Eisenhower was a passive president, who left most of his presidential duties to subordinates, and often was the last man to know what was going on in his own Administration. He did not exercise the presidential prerogative of strong executive leadership of the country because he did not feel it was for the president to instruct the other branches of government or to take strong stands on certain domestic issues.

A look at his press conferences reveals more of this inaction. Eisenhower met the reporters only in formal, off-the-record conferences that allowed for little give and take or spontaneity between press and president. This was almost his only contact with reporters. Inside the meetings, he let the press guide the conferences. He often was at a loss for answers to their queries, although he tried to furnish some sort of information even if incomplete. His grammar and syntax were sometimes poor, and he gave long, vague replies.

Eisenhower did institute direct quotation and live television coverage of press conferences, but probably only on the urging of his press secretary. His personal image over television

was favorable although he did not work at presenting himself favorably. He simply did not consider the press conference as important to enhancing his public image. More than likely, he saw press conferences as a presidential duty. He never attempted to exploit them to their fullest potential.

Eisenhower enjoyed one of the most unusual popularities of any president, despite this relative inaction. As shown by this research, the Eisenhower image never suffered to any extent during the entire time he was in office. He was the people's president; they felt he belonged to them.

The press conference presentation of Eisenhower was most important in helping him realize this popularity. Although he was not particularly skillful, the people identified with a man like that. After all, they were not skillful at government leadership, either. The overall image of Eisenhower was one of an apolitical man who did not try to wheel and deal, who attempted to level with the reporters and the people, and who was sincere and could be trusted. Eisenhower always tried to answer the questions; he always tried to be fair; he always attempted to be honest, even if he did not know the answer completely. This, coupled with his own personal warmth, fatherly image and general appeal, helped him in his popular image more than any attempts at manipulation of the press conference could have.

Lyndon Johnson had exactly the opposite reaction, both in the press conference techniques and public image. He utilized the press conference to its fullest, using it to make major announcements or appointments and other events. He was an innovator in press conference format; he experimented with a number of

different locales and degrees of intimacy with the press. He utilized other measures for getting the press to him, such as personal interviews and dinners that Eisenhower rarely had.

In the press conferences, he was adept at answering all questions, but often gave answers that were unsatisfactory because they were repeats of other unsatisfactory answers or they did not seem to tell the whole story. Johnson could express himself well, but lacked charm and personal warmth. He sometimes offended the reporters, who felt he used them to enhance his image.

Johnson directed all press relations, just as he directed his presidency, trying to get the maximum from them. He saw the press conference as a tool to the advantage of a president, but he could not make it work well for him because he lacked something which Eisenhower had: personal appeal. His image reflected the problems he had with the public; upon entering office he had high popularity ratings in the polls, but these went steadily downward during his presidency.

The press conferences of Johnson were effective in projecting his unlikeable image, although he tried to correct it. This image was one of a political president, whose answers were calculated for effect, whose statements were sugar-coated for the best impact. The press and the people began to mistrust him, partially because of the tremendous power he wielded so effectively and partially because of his planned, manipulative techniques. His personal quirks became magnified in every little action, significant or not. The "credibility gap" of the Johnson Administration was the reflection of a people not sure of the facts they were getting or of the intentions of the president giving those facts.

It is unfortunate for Johnson that electorates do not respond to reasoned arguments and skillful descriptions of executive measures, because he was adept at this. However, as exemplified by Eisenhower, the public accepts the image of sincerity and trust over that of power and skill. This does not mean that press conference skill can be discounted by a president concerned with public image. A president who does not attempt any leadership of the media tools available to him will find the public rejecting his policies at the election polls and his personality in the opinion polls.

But for these two men, any deliberate skills attempted in their press conferences were mediated by individual factors of personality and reputation. Both communicated a definite image through their press conferences, but for one personality helped that image; for the other, it hindered it.

All the research done indicates the press conference has an important place in the American system as a tool in presidential image projection. If the president knows how to utilize it to its best potential, he will find it enhances, not limits, his popularity. However, as shown by these two presidents, his public popularity also depends upon the personality that he projects. For personal charm and reputation will intercede and mediate the skill he is projecting to the people.

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THE PRESS CONFERENCE SKILL OF DWIGHT EISENHOWER AND LYNDON JOHNSON AS A CONTRIBUTING FACTOR IN THE PROJECTION OF THEIR POPULAR IMAGES

by

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ABSTRACT

The news media are major vehicles in projecting a president's image to the public at large. The news conference is one of the most important methods by which the president, through the media, reaches that public. Because the presidential press conference is such an important vehicle for the president's public personality, it may either enhance or limit it, depending upon the skill of the president using it.

This thesis comparatively studies the news conference skill of two presidents, Dwight Eisenhower and Lyndon Johnson, as a contributing factor in the formation of their public images.

The procedure used was the comparison of the press conference abilities, techniques, content and frequency for Eisenhower and Johnson, and their press relations. These factors comprise presidential press conference skill. The author relied upon the studies of presidential scholars and the observations of newsmen, through interviews and through their writings, about presidential abilities at press conferences. This study also utilized the recorded transcripts of each president's press conferences, and the personal papers of Eisenhower. To determine popularity or image, the national opinion polls, particularly the Gallup Opinion Index, and studies of them, were consulted.

This research indicates the techniques and abilities which contributed to presidential press conference skill, and how this skill contributed to each president's image-making.

Eisenhower, the people's president, was passive in his press conferences. He was not an opinion leader, taking little opportunity to inform the public of his Administration's policies. He often was without information on a subject, indicating at times that he was the last man in his Administration to know what was being decided. While trying to answer all questions put before him, his grammar and syntax left much to be desired. Eisenhower did not consider the news conference an important tool in promoting his presidency, and did not work hard at meeting the press. Nevertheless, his press conference skills helped his image: he was sincere and honest in his answers, he tried to be fair and display no favoritism to reporters; his image was that of a kindly, fatherly person who attempted to level with the press and with the people. Eisenhower's public image was good throughout his Administration.

Johnson, on the other hand, had exactly the opposite reaction, both in presidential press conference techniques and image. He experimented with a variety of press conference formats, always trying to better his image. He saw the press conference as a tool to be used to the advantage of a president, and made every attempt to utilize it as such. He directed all press relations, utilized all techniques, such as opening statements, backgrounding and new locale to improve his skill. Johnson was a powerful President, and this power was evident in his press conferences.

Yet, he suffered from an unfavorable public image, largely because the press and public grew to mistrust this power in the hands of this man. The newsmen believed Johnson tried to manipulate them to his own purposes. They found half-truths and statements calculated for effect in his press conferences. Moreover,

unlike Eisenhower who enjoyed the end of a war and an era of good feeling, Johnson involved the country deeply in the continuance of war, and was beset by other problems of race, crime and poverty.

With both Johnson and Eisenhower, press conference skill contributed significantly to their public image projection. However, skill was mediated by factors of personality in the projection of this image for both of these presidents.