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American Crusade: The Political Thought of Dwight Eisenhower

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AMERICAN CRUSADE:
THE POLITICAL THOUGHT OF DWIGHT EISENHOWER

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of Political Science

by
John William Kitch II
B.A., Baylor University, 2010
M.A., University of Oklahoma, 2012
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I would like to dedicate this dissertation to two people who have been on my mind and in my heart during the past few months. These two never met, but their lives have each served as an inspiration for me as I've completed this dissertation and, with it, my graduate school career.

Dustin Howes was a professor, a mentor, a dear friend, and will always remain an example of greatness of soul matched with humility. Dustin was a professional whose teaching and scholarship were marked by a passion for the truth, a compassion for those in his life, and a mind for unique insights, which were based on an exacting analysis of reality. His life was marked by grace, candor, and beauty. I will always be grateful for his thorough comments on my writing, his encouragement of my ideas, and his willingness to give his time to think with me. Even more importantly, I will always be thankful to Dustin for an unflinching example of how to live and how to die. I miss him deeply and remember him fondly.

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ABSTRACT

Dwight Eisenhower has long been thought of as a president who did not think about politics in a coherent way. This project finds, however, that Eisenhower was a coherent and systematic thinker about politics. The first chapter explores the sources of Eisenhower's political thought. In this chapter I establish that he had both the resources and inclination to reflect seriously on politics from early adulthood forward. Next, in Chapter 2, I outline his view of freedom in conjunction with how he thought about the state and society. Here, I find that he held that the state must be powerful enough to accomplish big tasks, such as the interstate highway system, but not so powerful that citizens could not hold it accountable. After establishing his thought on big political concepts, I turn to Eisenhower's thought on communism in Chapter 3. He imagined communism as a multifaceted threat that combined a spiritual challenge to America along with political and military challenges. Shifting back to America, Chapter 4 focuses on Eisenhower's perception of America as a unique political system. He was convinced that gradual progress was always likely to occur within America's existing institutions and he had confidence in the innate goodness of the national character, fueled by his belief in America's divine mandate to be an example of freedom to the world. I then turn, in Chapter 5, to exploring Eisenhower's unique brand of conservatism, which blends elements of traditional small government with progressivism. Although he did not fit neatly into either group, he exhibited both progressive and traditional conservative traits. Finally, I explore Eisenhower's view of the proper relationship between religion and American society in Chapter 6. He insisted that a broad religious commitment among America's citizens was the most important weapon for the country's Cold War arsenal. He also argued that the basis of citizenship in America was an

individual belief in a divine power. Overall, I find that understanding Eisenhower as a thinker allows the student of American politics to understand both his actions and the politics of his time in a new way.

INTRODUCTION

To explore Eisenhower's significance as a political thinker it is important to first establish a definition of political thought. My conception of political thought comes from distinguishing it from two concepts that are more frequently addressed in political theory and political science, respectively. The first thing that political thought differs from is political philosophy. I do not here use the term political philosophy in the way that political theorists most commonly use it today. That is to say that I am not arguing that a specific portion of political theory rises to the level philosophic inquiry, while most of the subfield fails to achieve this aim. Put more bluntly, I am not entering the debate between those theorists who study Strauss and those who do not about what truly matters in the study of political theory. Instead, I conceive of political philosophy as systematic reflection on human nature that is then applied to conceptual thinking about government. Political philosophy, in other words, is concerned about best regime types, in the broadest possible sense. Political philosophy, then, tends toward the abstract and the general, while viewing its task as a timeless one. According to this definition, Eisenhower was not a political philosopher. He was not, in fact, a philosopher of any kind.

Secondly, this dissertation is not merely an evaluation of Eisenhower's political opinion. I define political opinion as a personal judgment one makes about a given issue at a given time. Opinions, in this way, are non-systematic, as they do not require thought about more than one issue at a time. Opinions may be thoughtful or rash, reasonable or unfounded, but what unifies them in my conception is that they are related to a present issue only. One may have an opinion about whether a senator ought to be reelected or whether the United Nations should pass a specific resolution. The way that I will approach Eisenhower's thought will be different. I will analyze some of his opinions in order to better establish the content of his thought, but the aim of

the project is not to survey how he felt about particular political issues at specific times. Quantitative political science is frequently concerned with political opinion in a variety of settings. Public opinion, elite opinions, the opinions of members of congress, and the opinions of judges are all topics where extensive and helpful work has been done by political scientists in recent decades. Following this model, the field could stand to benefit from a rigorous study of the political opinions of presidents, grouped, for example, into governing ideologies or partisan affiliation. As intriguing as that project sounds, this project is something different.

My argument throughout the dissertation will be that Eisenhower was an important political thinker, whose thought influenced the course of national politics, his party's governing stance for years to come, and the American public consciousness on what to look for in a president. By political thinking I mean that Eisenhower thought consistently, intentionally, and coherently about American politics. He thought intensely both about the challenges he felt Americans needed to address domestically, and he thought carefully about America's place in the world. He thought frequently about the fundamental character of the American people, and he thought about the strengths and limits of the American systems of commerce and government. He did this thinking from before he entered politics through the end of his life, which was nearly a decade after he left the White House.

The Case of Presidents and Political Thought

The combination of presidents and political thought is something that has not been deeply studied in any academic discipline. Most of the major works on the presidency in political science, for example, attempt to understand the character of the institution by examining the actions of particular presidents. Books of this kind include Stephen Skowronek's *The Politics*

Presidents Make and *Presidential Leadership in Political Time*, Richard Neustadt's *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents* and Jeffrey Tulis' *The Rhetorical Presidency*. The other usual way presidents are approached is via the academic biography. These appear in history, such as Stephen Ambrose's *Eisenhower: Soldier and President* and in political science, as is the case with Fred Greenstein's *The Hidden-Hand Presidency*.

Only within the last decade has a book that takes the political thought of presidents seriously and systematically appeared. This is the aptly titled *Presidents and Political Thought*, written by political scientist David Siemers. In the opening chapter Siemers does an admirable job describing how he chose the six specific presidents he profiles. He is persuasive in arguing that, since he hoped to show a wide array of presidents some important figures had to be left out. John Quincy Adams is left out, though he had a deep education in political theory, because his primary teacher was his father, who is included for analysis. Lincoln is left out, Siemers argues, because, in spite of being what he calls "the office's most fascinating occupant," Lincoln never had an appetite for using the classical tools of political theory.¹

The important thing for this dissertation is that Siemers does not feel the need to justify why Eisenhower is left out of his analysis. Eisenhower is mentioned only once in the book and it is an instance where he is grouped together with a few other postwar presidents in order to make a comparison in service to a larger point about Woodrow Wilson. At the risk of sounding trite, there is an opening for the study of Eisenhower's political thought because the person who wrote the seemingly lone book on presidents and political thought did not even find it important to explain why Eisenhower did not merit close study. The implicit argument for why Eisenhower is

¹ David Siemers, *Presidents and Political Thought* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2009), 9.

not included can be found in the definition Siemers gives for presidents who displayed serious political thought. He puts it this way:

Most presidents have found most of their ideas outside of political theory. However, a sizable percentage of presidents have used tools housed in the political-theory toolbox. In these cases it was not political theory itself that caused anything. Each president was fully for his own actions.²

Siemers is arguing that the president who has been concerned with political thought has not been a traditional philosopher. Rather, the presidents he profiles have been men of political action who found it important to think about politics in a particular way in order to maximize the chance for political success. The combination, not the separation, of thought and action are hallmarks of political thought oriented presidents, in Siemers' telling. While I agree with this analysis, I find that Siemers makes a small misstep, which leads to him ignore Eisenhower as an important example of a political thinker in the White House.

Just before this definition Siemers provides a different definition. In arguing for the coherence of the choices he made about which presidents to include he noted that those who received significant attention in the work "define[d] their own theoretical inspiration from among those who have written systematic arguments about politics that attempt to be broadly applicable across time and place."³ The difference in establishing the threshold of presidential political thought as one who relied on the systematic writings of others from one who "relied on the tools" of political thought is an important one. Eisenhower was not someone quick to quote the seminal figures of political theory, but he did engage with the ideas that theorists such as Locke, Marx, Weber, and others put forth. He did not rely on systematic writings to form the basis of

² Siemers, *Presidents*, 15.

³ Siemers, *Presidents*, 15.

his thought, but he did “use the tools” these writers provide. He was intentional, specific, and motivated in his thinking about politics. He was a president whose actions, during his time in office cannot easily be separated from the underlying thought from which they flowed.

Though he does not include Eisenhower in his book, Siemers provides an important paradigm for thinking of presidents as serious political thinkers. For that reason, this dissertation will, in part, be extending Siemers’ work to a new case study.

Eisenhower’s Political Thought in Political Time

Stephen Skowronek is one of the most influential contributors to the study of the American presidency among political scientists in the past half century. One of his most noteworthy ideas is the concept of how the presidency relates to a concept he calls political time. In his work, *The Politics Presidents Make*, Skowronek argues that presidents are not entirely free actors, but are constrained by the institutional limits the presidency itself faces due to a given set of political realities, at a specific historical moment. He develops a four-part sequential structure that he believes describes the usual transition of presidencies in the United States.

The strongest situation a president can inherit is that of a reconstruction leader. These presidents are the most important figures in new political coalitions and usually enjoy a high level of support among voters, as well as in congress. They take advantage of their popularity to achieve important pieces of their agenda, because they are seen as correctives to the previous and now unpopular paradigm. These presidents are often remembered for being “great” presidents. Presidents Skowronek puts in this category include Washington, Franklin Roosevelt, and Reagan. Coming just after a reconstruction president is an articulation leader. This is someone who is elected on the basis of the ruling coalition’s popularity, but this president does not have

the personal popularity that the reconstruction president possessed. The two main reasons for this are that the articulation president faces challenges from within the party about leadership over its future and that there is no reverence attached to the articulation president, as there had been for the reconstruction president. These presidents usually end up being seen as moderately successful, though they have a difficult time winning reelection. Some notables in this group include Truman, Nixon, and George H.W. Bush.

Second to reconstruction, the best a president can hope for in political time is to be a preemption executive. These presidents do not fully unseat the governing coalition, but they are able to access a measure of growing public discontent with the ruling party's priorities. Thus, preemption presidents often enjoy a good deal of legislative success by brokering compromise deals and are generally charismatic personally, which contributes to their ability to attain success. Representative examples of preemption presidents include Clinton and Eisenhower. I will take up Skowronek's classification of Eisenhower and its importance for this dissertation below. The final of Skowronek's types is the disjunction president. This is someone who is elected largely because the opposition party has not yet become powerful enough to fundamentally unseat the ruling coalition, but at a time when the ruling coalition is quickly faltering. These presidents, in Skowronek's view, have no chance of success and are often remembered as the worst presidents in history. Figures in this group include Pierce and Carter.

This four-part scheme is the key to understanding how to place expectations for a current president and for correctly analyzing the link between presidents across time. The most important insight contained in this structure is that presidencies are not merely tests of the political acumen of the current office holder, but rather each president inherits a set of challenges and opportunities that flows directly from the relationship between the presidency and the

politics of the time. The downside of Skowronek's analysis is that he sometimes downplays the importance of personal decisions, styles, and thought. This is where he makes a misstep in understanding Eisenhower.

Though he includes Eisenhower as being a preemption president, he does not devote much attention to analyzing Eisenhower's time in office. He seems to believe, as do the majority of other scholars on the presidency, that Eisenhower was unremarkable as a chief executive and that, because of his lack of discernable thought or memorable personality studying him is likely to be a fruitless endeavor. If Skowronek had given Eisenhower a closer look, though, he would have found a way in which his theory could have been improved with some nuance.

Specifically, Eisenhower is something of both a preemption and a reconstruction president.

While it is true that he was elected by running against New Deal economic policies, it is also the case that his victory was thanks partly to his status as a nationally renowned and respected figure. Once in office he was able to use his popularity with voters and his calm public demeanor to influence attitudes about the scope and purposes of government. Another conservative figure would likely have had difficulty arguing publicly against Roosevelt's political legacy.

That Eisenhower played a more important role in the history of the presidency than has often been thought is important, but that revelation does not itself make the case that Eisenhower merits study as a political thinker. The two arguments-that he played an important role in the development of American politics and that his political thought was notable-do complement each other nicely, though. One of the ways that they are linked can be demonstrated by studying Eisenhower's role in postwar conservatism.

Eisenhower as Part of the Conservative Story

The most important scholar of American conservatism is historian George Nash. His book, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America*, is several decades old, yet is still thought to be the seminal chronicle of the development of conservative political thinking in the United States. Eisenhower is mentioned a few times throughout the work, but he is not a prominent character in Nash's story. The first mention of Eisenhower comes in a chapter titled "The Recovery of Tradition and Values." In this chapter, Nash argues that the 1950s saw a return to American traditionalism and public religiosity. Nash notes that Eisenhower began his first inaugural address with a prayer, something that was not common at the time, and that the president's decision to attend a church during his years in office was seen by Eisenhower and his advisors as an important public act.⁴ Later in the chapter, in a section analyzing the writings of Russell Kirk, Nash cites Kirk's description of the early 50s as "the early days of the apparently conservative administration of President Eisenhower."⁵ Similar to the way Skowronek treats Eisenhower, Nash seems to be implicitly arguing that Eisenhower's place in American conservatism was not important because of his own contributions to conservative thought, but rather because he found himself serving as president at an important time during the history of conservative development in America.

In his chapter on the Red Scare of the 1950s, Nash portrays Eisenhower's role in McCarthy's downfall as being passive. Specifically, he argues that McCarthy's popularity dropped only after he publicly attacked Eisenhower's commitment to fighting communism.

⁴ George Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America Since 1945* (Wilmington, DE: Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 2006), 87.

⁵ Nash, *Conservative Intellectual Movement*, 112.

Since Eisenhower was seen as a national, rather than a partisan, hero this discredited McCarthy in the eyes of many Americans who believed his accusations to be plausible before his attack on the president.⁶ Nash argues that as Eisenhower's presidency progressed movement conservatives went from suspicion to contempt for his credentials. In 1956, for example, William F. Buckley argued that Eisenhower was only a marginally better choice than Stevenson, but that he still represented nothing more than "measured socialism."⁷ During his second term, Buckley's critiques would go from stringent to hysterical. Eisenhower had committed a "sin against reality" by refusing to identify and respond to the Soviet aim of world domination.⁸

Nash lists a string of conservative critiques against Eisenhower in order to make a compelling point: That "the intellectual conservative movement" faced "estrangement from the immensely popular President Eisenhower,"⁹ which meant there was no point of significant access for movement conservatives to control high political offices throughout the 1950s. Nash notes this because he is establishing the conditions under which conservatism developed intellectually in the years after World War II. For the purposes of this dissertation, however, Nash's analysis leaves out the important fact that Eisenhower was a part of the intellectual development of both conservatism and American politics during his decade in office. He was not, it is true, an ideological conservative, but he was an influential conservative, regardless of whether figures like Buckley approved of him.

⁶ Nash, *Conservative Intellectual Movement*, 191.

⁷ Nash, *Conservative Intellectual Movement*, 395.

⁸ Nash, *Conservative Intellectual Movement*, 396.

⁹ Nash, *Conservative Intellectual Movement*, 398.

Eisenhower as a Political Thinker

In 1964, Eisenhower was invited to address the Republican National Convention. This was a contentious convention, as Barry Goldwater's supporters were fighting off efforts to replace him with a more centrist nominee. Eisenhower's speech gave a nod to this strife, but he did not spend time discussing it, nor did he take a side. Instead, he gave a broad speech that highlighted the culmination of his political thinking. It was an address he hoped would unify the party around what he believed were shared ideals of Republican orthodoxy. After beginning with some platitudes about the connection between Lincoln and the contemporary Republicans Eisenhower moved to providing a broad vision of what he felt fundamentally animated Republican philosophy. Republicans, he argued, "[had] ever sought to create an atmosphere of liberty and to sustain"¹⁰ individual liberty.

He went on to describe Republican politics, over the decades, like this: "We have maintained that in all those things that the citizen can do better for himself than can his government, the government ought not to interfere."¹¹ Conservatives may have debated whether Eisenhower's standard of when the government was needed to help a citizen was good enough, but his philosophical disposition was clear. He thought of himself as someone who had combatted the notion that the government can, as a routine matter, be counted on to solve complex societal problems. Later, he moved to a defense of his administration that rested on the notion that he had been a proud standard bearer of Republican values. For example, he argued

¹⁰ Dwight Eisenhower, Speech to the Republican National Convention, San Francisco, CA, July 15, 1964. *New York Times*. Last accessed February 18, 2017. Available at http://www.nytimes.com/1964/07/15/transcript-of-eisenhowers-speech-to-the-gop-convention.html?_r=0.

¹¹ Eisenhower, Speech to the Republican National Convention, July 15, 1964.

that his presidency had meant both that America had a military force capable of meeting the Soviet threat, yet also a leader ready to caution the people that a standing military would “spell always waste and inefficiency and extravagance.”¹² Rejecting the charge that Republicans were too aggressive in international affairs he noted that the past three wars had all come under the leadership of Democratic presidents. The conservative position on armed conflict, in Eisenhower’s telling, was to never seek it and to avoid having a military large enough to drain important economic resources anymore than present threats required.

Closing out his speech, which would be the last one on such a prominent national stage, Eisenhower used intimate language to describe his attachment to conservative thinking and the Republican Party. It is worth quoting this passage in full.

This, then, in sketchy outline, is my treasured picture of the Republican Party. It is the kind of party in which I, for one, and I would hope the vast majority of Americans, could serve with lasting pride. I count on it with confidence. My friends, for me the shadows lengthen, but my loyalty to the historic mission of my party, to its great record and its promise for the future is as strong and bright as ever, My confidence will never dim so long as all of us stand together for human dignity and for the sound and steady progress of this wonderful land; for so long as we stand as the strong, wise and sturdy leaders of freedom in the entire world.¹³

These are the words of a man who had spent most of life thinking intently about politics generally, about the politics of America, and about his own place in his country’s public life. It is true that the above quoted paragraph lacks the soul to move most readers. Eisenhower was not a Reagan or an Obama in his ability to command a room with his charisma. He was not a

¹² Eisenhower, Speech to the Republican National Convention, July 15, 1964.

¹³ Eisenhower, Speech to the Republican National Convention, July 15, 1964.

wordsmith with any poetic flair. However, if one matches these words from 1964 with other pieces of his thought throughout his life, a coherent picture of a unique political thinker emerges. This body of this dissertation seeks to demonstrate that point.

CHAPTER 1

SOURCES OF POLITICAL THOUGHT

In the six decades since he has left office Eisenhower scholarship has gone through several analytical paradigms. The prevalent view of Eisenhower during his time in the White House and in the first couple of decades after he left was one of an aloof figure, who did not have the political acumen to run the government. Later, though, with the publication of Fred Greenstein's *The Hidden Hand Presidency* (1982), historians and political scientists began to view Eisenhower as a calculating politician, who used his bi-partisan appeal and personal popularity to his political advantage. Eisenhower, this account holds, knew that as long as he appeared to be above the political fray in public he could use his popularity and his cunning instincts to win political battles out of the public's view. In order to understand the scholarly corpus on Eisenhower it is best to note the four major categories in which works most often appear. These are biographies, studies of his leadership style and abilities, examinations of his military service, and investigations of his presidency related to a specific topic issue, such as civil rights. There is one important area of scholarship missing, though. No political scientist or historian has yet produced a thorough study of Eisenhower's political thought. This dissertation seeks to do just that.

This dissertation is timely for three important reasons. The first is that the literature has successfully established that Eisenhower was an intentional political actor, but has not yet gone much deeper than that to try and discover if there was any philosophical or practical coherence to his actions. Secondly, by this point the trove of de-classified documents pertaining to his presidency, as well as the digitization of many primary sources related to his life makes such a study possible. Finally, the 1950s was a cultural and political bridge in the American experience.

The size of our permanent military, the status of civil rights, the state of transportation, America's role abroad, urbanization and suburbanization, and the stature and contours of religion and public life were all set to change dramatically either in or shortly after the decade in which Eisenhower served as president. To understand more about Eisenhower's political thought, then, is to understand more about America's political journey through the middle part of the twentieth century.

Introduction: What was Important in Shaping Eisenhower's Thought?

The most straightforward way to begin studying Eisenhower's political thought is to note that he was influenced by his own experiences, rather than by formal philosophical or political training. In order to conduct a comprehensive study of his political thought, then, it is important to first discuss some of the most important influences that shaped his views of life and politics when he stepped into the presidency. I present these things to give the reader important biographical information and to provide a baseline from which the deeper investigations of his political thought will naturally spring. These eight things are items that should be kept in mind by anyone hoping to understand Eisenhower as a political thinker. These are his childhood experiences, his military career, his perspective on military cooperation and alliances, the German enemy and the need for total victory, the liberation of Nazi death camps, his beginning thoughts on America, a concrete sense of good and evil, and his experience of and reflections on friendship.

Childhood Experiences

Eisenhower often portrayed himself publicly and privately¹⁴ as a Kansas farm boy who happened to find himself on the world stage. While his rural upbringing surely had some impact on him the religious background of his parents is more important to understanding Eisenhower as an adult. His paternal grandfather was a Mennonite pastor, his parents became members of the Jehovah's Witness and named him after Dwight L. Moody (a renowned evangelist and founder of the fundamentalist Moody Bible Institute in Chicago) and his family was committed to pacifism, especially his mother.¹⁵ The Eisenhower family lived, for most of Dwight's life, in rural Abilene, Kansas, and Dwight would recall that time and place fondly, though he scarcely returned to Abilene.¹⁶

It is not necessarily strange that he would not have found time to go back home, given the time, travel, and fame that were associated with his adult careers, but there was more than simple busyness that kept him away. Reading his grandson, David's, account of Eisenhower's post White House years in Gettysburg gives an insight into a restless soul who never quite felt at home anywhere. Not only did Eisenhower and his wife travel between Gettysburg, a home in Augusta, Georgia, and a community in Southern California after 1958, but Eisenhower had

¹⁴ The best evidence that Eisenhower's image of himself as a farm boy was more than a public persona comes in his letters to his childhood friend, Swede Hazlett. The two conducted a mostly continuous exchange of ideas and life updates between 1941 and 1958. Their correspondence is collected in, Dwight Eisenhower, *Ike's Letters to a Friend, 1941-1958*, ed. Robert Griffith (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 1984).

¹⁵ Gary Scott Smith, *Faith and the Presidency: From George Washington to George W. Bush* (Oxford University Press: 2006), 222.

¹⁶ Eisenhower often told Hazlett that professional duties were keeping him from visiting home and when he did return he did not stay for more than a day. He seems to have had no thought of retiring there, though he did ask that his presidential library be in Abilene.

complaints about each place. He was not misanthropic; he enjoyed the company of some whom he considered friends and relished being part of a social scene wherever he was currently located. And yet, he seemed to always hope for something more satisfying and elusive than what he had in each place. Abilene, then, functioned as a idealized homeland that served Eisenhower better as a memory than it did as a living place that was a part of his adult life. It is even fair to say that what Eisenhower hoped for when he envisioned America at its best was something like Abilene. A place where, as he remembered it, families were tight-knit, friends were loyal, there was the potential to live in communal harmony, and economic success was attainable.

Military Career

My project is an examination of Eisenhower's political thought, but it would be impossible to understand the man without reckoning with his military service. For someone who moved often, spent long stretches away from his family for much of his adult life, never settled in one place even in retirement, and often conducted his closest friendships through correspondence rather than face to face interactions, the army was the most stable force in his life. He grew up intellectually and morally in the army, he would always look back on his military career as the most satisfying portion of his life, and he approached presidential leadership in a manner that revealed he hoped to run the White House like a general's staff office as much as he could. Most fundamentally, though, his experiences in World War II would color his moral sensibilities and help shape his priorities once he was in office.

One way in which his military experience shaped his political thought is by influencing his conception of leadership. Once taking office he was consistently angered by what he saw as inefficiency and disloyalty in the executive branch. He could no longer issue simple orders and

expect that things would be done according to his wishes.¹⁷ This gave rise to anger and fear, not only because he was not used to this type of executive environment, but because he believed the inefficiency to be a threat to the operation of government. And that, he felt, was a threat to the prosperity of the American economy and a challenge to protecting American interests abroad. While he understood that the military is not free of bureaucratic delays, self-serving subordinates, or inefficiencies of time and money, once Eisenhower took office he began to nostalgically compare his current situation to what he remembered having in the Army. Increasingly, the military became a standard of organizational efficiency for him, and since the White House could not match his memory of the army he would never be fully satisfied with the working conditions of a president.

Early in his officer's career Eisenhower volunteered to be part of the army's first official tank training program.¹⁸ He would quickly become an enthusiast for the new weapon and would forge his lifelong friendship with George Patton (the most famous early tank supporter in the American military) on this basis. Both men published articles outlining their revolutionary vision of the tank in military journals and both were reprimanded by higher commanders for publicly challenging the accepted wisdom of the army's establishment on the matter.¹⁹ Within the first few paragraphs of the article Eisenhower criticized those who did not believe the tank to

¹⁷ Richard Neustadt, *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents* (New York: The Free Press, 1990), 10.

¹⁸ Jean Edward Smith, *Eisenhower in War and Peace* (New York: Random House, 2013), 40.

¹⁹ Thomas Morgan, "The Making of a General: Ike, the tank, and the interwar years," Army Historical Foundation. Last accessed Jan. 12, 2016. Available at, www.armyhistory.org/the-making-of-a-general-ike-the-tank-and-the-interwar-years.

be a promising weapon of the future as ignorant. Even in 1920 his style was direct and his thought pragmatic. He expressed his fundamental point this way:

The tank, as a self-propelling, centerpillar type of weapon, was a development of the late war. Many officers who served with fighting divisions never had an opportunity to take part in an action supported by these machines, and their knowledge of the power and deficiencies of the tank is based on hearsay. Others took part in such combats when the tanks were improperly used, poorly manned, or under such adverse conditions that they were practically helpless in trying to lend efficient aid to the Infantry. As the number of American-manned tanks that actually got to take part in the fighting with American divisions was very small, the number of officers of the Army who are openly advocates of this machine as a supporting weapon is correspondingly few.²⁰

At a time when tanks were mostly thought of as a powerful, but slow means of breaking through entrenched defenses that would go ahead of an infantry advance, Eisenhower imagined a more dynamic role for them that would include the combination of speed and firepower that would come to characterize the tank battles of World War II. Though he did not see combat as a part of the 301st Heavy Tank Battalion he was marked by his training experience with that unit. Alluding to commonly held notions about the tank Eisenhower later remarked about his unit: “We were different. The men dreamed of overwhelming assault on enemy lines, rolling effortlessly over wire entanglements and trenches, demolishing gun nests with their fire, and terrorizing the foe into quick and abject surrender.”²¹

It is important that this reflection came in Eisenhower’s final memoir, published just two years before his death. His experience with the tank unit had shaped not only his commanding decisions later, but his own sense of how to handle challenging situations. Specifically, his willingness to trust his own judgments and those of associates whom he respected, along with a

²⁰ Dwight Eisenhower, “A Tank Discussion,” *Infantry Journal*, vol. 27, 1920, 453.

²¹ Dwight Eisenhower, *At Ease: Stories I Tell to Friends* (New York: Eastern Acorn Press, 1967), 136.

craving for efficiency and a desire to find creative solutions to problems are all characteristics that would mark his later political thought and actions. The independence of his thought that was seen in his vision for tanks would appear later in his political thinking, for example during his decision to use federal troops during the Little Rock Crisis of 1957.

The tank, for Eisenhower, was the first major project of his career that required him to resolutely stand behind his vision in opposition to higher ranking and skeptical officers, as well as to inspire those whom he was charged with leading. A more mature Eisenhower would go on to cordially, but firmly disagree with Churchill and George Marshall on matters of strategy and eventually would go on to despise the domestic policies of Roosevelt and Truman. This confidence in his own political judgment stems not from a classical liberal education, or from a lifelong desire for high office, but rather from an assumed confidence that was first developed in the early days of his military career. It is important to connect his later thought with his early experiences, because doing so allows one to see the development of his conscience, consciousness, and practical judgment.

Later in Eisenhower's military career his innovative thinking would become even more apparent. In early 1942 George Marshall, army chief of staff, asked Eisenhower to propose a plan for winning the war in Europe. In May of the same year once he reviewed this plan and a separate Eisenhower recommendation that suggested a unified command of all American combat forces in the theater, Marshall appointed Eisenhower to the position that Eisenhower had proposed.²² The new unified command role that Eisenhower suggested was not obvious at the time and would require not only unprecedented levels of coordination between the services, but would entail the newly appointed commander to manage high ranking colleagues who had gone

²² Dwight Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe*, (New York: Doubleday, 1948), 50.

from peers to subordinates with a delicate balance of delegation of some things and a firm insistence on others. Eisenhower's suggestion, then, was not only a military novelty, but was something that would present difficult leadership challenges in the midst of the stresses of total war.

The single command of American troops was important, not only because it preconfigures the later unification of all Allied forces in Europe, but because Eisenhower himself felt that this idea was more important than his tactical contributions to the war's planning. "I remarked to General Marshall," Eisenhower would later remember, "that this was one paper he should read in detail before it went out, because it was likely to be an important document in the further waging of the war."²³ Additionally, he recommended that future commander of the U.S. occupation forces in Germany²⁴ and that Army Air General Joseph McNarney be appointed as Marshall's top aid because "[Eisenhower] knew that General McNarney firmly believed in the Air Force's ability to make the ground invasion of France possible."²⁵ Eisenhower would go on to consistently argue for the primary importance of air, ground, and sea coordination in the planning of D-Day, and in the press toward Berlin that followed. The unflinching nature of this conviction would become important later, as Churchill became convinced that a cross-channel invasion would not be tenable, and that a land invasion beginning in southern Italy and

²³ Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe*, 50.

²⁴ "General Joseph T. McNarney," *United States Air Force*. Last accessed Jan. 13, 2016. Available at <http://www.af.mil/AboutUs/Biographies/Display/tabid/225/Article/106132/general-joseph-t-mcnarney.aspx>.

²⁵ Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe*, 50.

advancing north to and through Germany was the most prudent strategy.²⁶ Later, Eisenhower would push back the planned launch date for D-Day from early May to early June, so that Allied air power could have more time to weaken German defenses.²⁷

Eisenhower was not the only advocate of a fully integrated force, but he was one of the first and became the new concept's most important supporter during the war. Eisenhower's boldness in planning the assault flowed from a deeply held belief about the nature of the present conflict and what was required to win it. The fact that this boldness was rewarded on a grand scale in Europe could only have strengthened Eisenhower's confidence regarding the wisdom of (often bold and independently formed) political judgments during his White House years. In short, the roots of Eisenhower's later political action can be seen in his actions as commander, and these actions flowed from deeply held, bold, and independent thought. So, while it is impossible to consider Eisenhower as a political thinker without reckoning with Eisenhower the officer, it is likewise true that a careful study of his time in the army will provide clues to his later political thought.

Though Eisenhower is mostly remembered as an officer for his role in WWII, he held a career long interest in America's transportation infrastructure. This interest was matched with active experience in 1919, when Eisenhower was assigned to be an officer on the Transcontinental Motor Convoy. This was an army commissioned journey that was designed to test the state of America's road network. The D.C. to California journey took over two months to complete and achieved its purpose of drawing public attention to the poor state of American

²⁶ Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe*, 195.

²⁷ Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe*, 230.

highways.²⁸ It would also serve as one of two most important influences on Eisenhower's later insistence upon a nationally integrated interstate highway system. "The old convoy had started me thinking about good two-lane highways," he would later quip, "but Germany had made me see the wisdom of broader ribbons across our land," he would remark about his experience with the German Autobahn.²⁹ Here again, the root of future thought that is deeper and more systematic is present in Eisenhower's early military career.

Cooperation and Alliances

The wartime experience of working in and eventually leading an alliance shaped not only how Eisenhower thought about international relations at the highest levels, but also came to drive what he expected from subordinate officers. Studying Eisenhower the president through now declassified memos, memoirs of administration members, Eisenhower's own diary and personal letters, and the reflections of family members show that politics was an intensely personal matter to him. Governing, even at the highest level, was a matter of mutual personal loyalties and of trust for specific individuals in specific roles. This conception of leadership was developed and honed during Eisenhower's years in Europe. He always felt personally responsible to Marshall, for example, and felt that he had granted others whom he trusted a personal gift. He trusted Marshall as a mentor, even when Eisenhower had been chosen over Marshall to command the D-Day operation. The letters exchanged between the two (though they were primarily a matter of

²⁸ Smith, *Eisenhower in War and Peace*, 53.

²⁹ Eisenhower, *At Ease*, 166-167.

professional communication) demonstrate a warmth that could be taken as real friendship.

Without this sort of personal bond, Eisenhower believed that the army would not only be less of a livable organization for its members, but that its fighting strength would tangibly suffer.

One of the most famous promotion in American military history happened on June 25, 1942, when Eisenhower was given the title of Supreme Commander of the Allied forces in the European theater. While it is true that this promotion, and his performance in this role, endowed Eisenhower with the profile and popularity he would use to be elected a decade later, it is also important to note how his experience in the role itself shaped his political disposition.

From the outset of the war Eisenhower was engaged in a role that was combat centered, but that required a diplomatic³⁰ sense and a willingness to navigate multiple national political structures. Immediately upon entering the theater, Eisenhower became concerned that the ultimate success of the Allied war effort was threatened by the lack of a coherent strategic command.³¹ Once taking command himself, Eisenhower was pleased with how his British staff cooperated and assisted his efforts, but did not appreciate the style or the strategic sense that the French delegation, led by an escapee from the Vichy government, General Giraud, displayed.³² This distinction provides the insight that Eisenhower was not merely happy to look back on the war effort as a success because of an ideal of cooperation, but rather that he developed and held concrete notions of what made for a good alliance partner and what was unhelpful to the joint goal. He would carry his own ideal of strategic cooperation into the presidency and would not only judge the actions of fellow heads of state, but would seek to pattern American commitments

³⁰ Joseph P. Hobbs, *Dear General: Eisenhower's Wartime Letters to Marshall* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1999), 143.

³¹ Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe*, 18.

³² Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe*, 103.

and actions according to what he felt best accomplished his goal of being a dutiful and intelligent alliance partner. Eisenhower always believed that America's interests coincided and did not compete with America's duties as an alliance partner.

Eisenhower's appreciation of the British as a near ideal ally followed largely from his personal fondness for Winston Churchill. This relationship developed as the two participated in the planning of D-Day, which, for a time, entailed twice weekly³³ meetings between the two that were held either at Churchill's country retreat or at his official office in London. As the Allied forces gained territory Eisenhower's headquarters moved closer to the theater of operations and the meetings with Churchill grew less frequent. Even so, the trust between the two allowed for compromises when strategic differences arose between the American and British delegations. A prominent example of this came just before the famed Cairo conference of 1943. Before travelling to Egypt to meet with his fellow heads of state Churchill stopped by Malta, site of Eisenhower's current headquarters to informally discuss long-term strategy for the European invasion. Churchill made it plain that he hoped to invade the continent by landing in southern Italy and then marching north by land, while Eisenhower prioritized a cross-strait invasion of France. In spite of this important divergence Churchill would not interfere with planning that relegated his hope for an attack on the "soft under belly" of the Axis to a secondary concern.³⁴

Eisenhower's vision of cooperation was one reserved not only for the strategic level, but for the individual as well. Without cohesion among units and between national militaries Eisenhower believed that the war effort would be doomed to failure. Put succinctly: "Morale is

³³ Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe*, 85.

³⁴ Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe*, 194.

the greatest single factor in a successful war.”³⁵ Throughout his time as European commander he worked in small ways to promote the family environment he hoped would permeate the experience for those serving under his command . He visited battle troops just before or after combat and saw himself as a father figure to those under his command.³⁶ He also proposed attaching permanent family names, in the British style, to American units in order to give troops a sense of belonging, stability, and boost morale.³⁷

Alliance building and maintenance would be something that Eisenhower would never leave behind in his public life. After the war ended he served as president of Columbia University, where he viewed his job as uniting disparate factions, in order to bring the university financial safety and intra-institutional harmony. During this same time he advised Pentagon officials about how to best handle the new budget regarding hungry bureaucracies associated with each branch of the armed forces and, most notably, he served as head of NATO from December 1950, until the launch of his presidential campaign in 1952. His experience in the White House, then, both as America’s chief soldier and diplomat in the early Cold War, and as the first Republican president in the New Deal era can only be understood if one accounts for the formative experience of alliance participation and leadership during and shortly after the war.

³⁵ Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe*, 210.

³⁶ Hobbs, *Dear General*, 163.

³⁷ Hobbs, *Dear General*, 156.

The German Enemy and the Necessity for Total Victory

Eisenhower is often remembered as the first great anti-Communist president. Many, in fact, have remembered this one issue as the full-extent of his political thought. He added the words “under God” to the pledge of allegiance, he refused to publicly rebuke Sen. McCarthy’s infamous behavior, and he approved large amounts of a conventional and nuclear military buildup throughout his time in office. While Eisenhower’s record on each of the above issues merits its own investigation, it is fair to characterize his foreign policy as one primarily devoted to the defeat of Communism. In order to understand the depth and contours of his anti-Communism, though, we must first understand how he viewed his German foes during World War II. One incident best displays his feelings. During the Tunisian campaign of 1943, some of Eisenhower’s staff officers suggested that he follow the traditional protocol of cordially visiting with the commander of a recently captured enemy force. Recalling this incident with disgust Eisenhower writes:

The custom had its origin in the fact that mercenary soldiers of old had no real enmity toward their opponents...A captured commander of the eighteenth century was likely to be, for weeks or months, the honored guest of his captor. The tradition that all professional soldiers are really comrades in arms has, in tattered form, persisted to this day. For me World War II was far too personal a thing to entertain such feelings. Daily as it progressed there grew within me the conviction that as never before in a war between many nations the forces that stood for human good and men’s rights were this time confronted by a completely evil conspiracy with which no compromise could be tolerated. Because only by the utter destruction of the Axis was a decent world possible, the war became for me a crusade in the traditional sense of that often misused word.³⁸

Though he writes in guarded and even cold language about the experience of the war in most places, here we see that it was a deeply emotional matter for him. More importantly for this project, he reveals thinking about the nature of good and evil manifested in the world that goes beyond a desire to defeat an enemy out of duty or love of one’s country. He does not

³⁸ Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe*, 157.

repudiate the traditional western practice of providing hospitality to a conquered general, instead he tacitly signals his approval of a practice that provides some sense of civility and humanity in the midst of the most inhumane of human activities. In the particular case of World War II, though, Eisenhower felt as if even formally greeting a particular German commander (one, it is important to note, who was a career military officer and had no direct role in the political regime of Germany, aside from continued military service) would signal a “compromise” with “evil.”³⁹ Much of Eisenhower’s later musing on Communism would mirror this type of statement, so it is important to note that it is clear that Eisenhower had already accepted the notion that some enemies were fundamentally dangerous, not just to his country’s interests, but to humanity itself.

The Liberation of Nazi Death Camps

Nothing in the war stirred his feeling as much as the discovery of Nazi concentration camps. In April of 1945 he personally inspected one such camp and interviewed survivors shortly after Allied forces had liberated it. Writing to Marshall on the day of his visit Eisenhower described the experience this way:

The visual evidence and verbal testimony of starvation, cruelty, and bestiality were so overpowering as to leave me a bit sick...I made the visit deliberately, in order to be in position to give first-hand evidence of these things, if ever, in the future, there develops a tendency to charge these allegations merely to propaganda.⁴⁰

³⁹ Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe*, 157.

⁴⁰ Dwight Eisenhower, Letter to George Marshall, Apr. 15, 1945. Eisenhower Presidential Library Archives. Last accessed February 18, 2017. Available at https://www.eisenhower.archives.gov/research/online_documents/holocaust/Report_of_Atrocities.pdf.

Eisenhower would go on to note in the same letter that George Patton refused to inspect the camp, after hearing initial reports about what he would find, for fear that it would make him “sick.”⁴¹ Eisenhower had an immediate sense that he had come upon one the most important stories of the war and he quickly decided that the horrors of the camps needed to be exposed to as much publicity as possible. Writing four days after his initial letter on the subject he telegraphed Marshall to request permission for a visit from a contingent of American newspaper editors and congressmen so “as to leave no doubt in their minds about the normal practices of the Germans in these camps.”⁴² He also hoped this large-scale publicity would “leave no room for cynical doubt” in the minds of even the most skeptical American and British citizens.⁴³ This immediate forethought regarding not only how what would come to be known as the Holocaust would be perceived in the short term, but how historians would remember it is striking coming from a general whose singular concern had been the achievement of Allied war aims. Though Eisenhower has not been treated as a serious political thinker, in this case he instantly shifts his attention away from war supervision and planning to the likely political ramifications of the narrative that will emerge regarding the conditions in the camps and the German culpability for these conditions.

⁴¹ Eisenhower, Letter to George Marshall, Apr. 15, 1945.

⁴² Dwight Eisenhower, Telegram to George Marshall, Apr. 19, 1945. Eisenhower Presidential Library Archives. Last accessed February 18, 2017. Available at https://www.eisenhower.archives.gov/research/online_documents/holocaust/1945_04_19_DDE_to_Marshall.pdf.

⁴³ Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe*, 408.

Linking Eisenhower's experience of the discovery of the concentration camps with his view that the Allies were fighting a war on behalf of moral goodness against a fully evil foe is not a simple task. One could argue, for instance, that Eisenhower's discussion of the German regime in his war memoir was likely influenced by the horror of having personally witnessed a Nazi death camp. This seems to be not only a plausible, but an almost certain truth. Importantly, however, when Eisenhower decided to cast off the long-held tradition of meeting with a recently captured opposing commander it was two years before Eisenhower had arrived at his first concentration camp. At this point he knew about the existence of the camps "only generally or through secondary sources" and had not imagined the scale of intentional brutality that the Germans carried out in the camps.⁴⁴

Upon personally confronting his first camp at Ohrdruf, in central Germany,⁴⁵ Eisenhower not only insisted upon immediate publication of the facts of the camps, but also began focusing on how to best take care of the newly liberated refugees who had survived Nazi control of the camps. His leadership in administering the feeding, housing, and resettling of camp survivors was, in time, harshly criticized by members of the American media as well as by the Harrison report, a presidentially ordered independent inquiry led by the dean of the University of Pennsylvania law school, Earl G. Harrison.⁴⁶ Upon receiving this report in August of 1945⁴⁷ Truman ordered Eisenhower to investigate the conditions of displaced persons under American control.

⁴⁴ Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe*, 409.

⁴⁵ "Ohrdruf," *Holocaust Encyclopedia*, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Last accessed Jan. 11, 2016. Available at www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10006131.

This incident is especially instructive for this project, because Eisenhower shifted the tone and content of his descriptions of this event over time, but he always maintained an awareness of the problem that demonstrated his own thinking. In his report to Truman in September of 1945 Eisenhower conceded that there were significant and systematic problems with the way refugees were being handled and promised to personally ensure an improvement in conditions.⁴⁸ Several days after his first letter to the president he wrote again for the purpose of documenting some of the reasons for poor conditions among the refugee population under the American army's purview. He noted a difficulty in locating paying jobs for many camp survivors, a general trepidation about the future, and the insistence by Baltic and Romanian Jews that being sent home would mean facing continued persecution. He noted that Army personnel were working to improve living conditions in refugee settlements, but disputed the Harrison report's claim that some refugees were being housed in former concentration camps.⁴⁹

In *Crusade in Europe*, written several years after the conclusion of the war Eisenhower was more defensive of the job the army did in providing a new life for the Holocaust survivors. Criticizing both the Harrison report and media coverage of conditions in the new refugee settlements Eisenhower wrote:

⁴⁶ "Harrison Report," United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives. Last accessed Jan. 11, 2016. Available at, www.ushmm.org/exhibition/displaced-persons/politic6.htm.

⁴⁷ "Harrison Report," United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives.

⁴⁸ Dwight Eisenhower, Letter to Harry Truman, Sept. 14, 1945. Last accessed February 18, 2017. Eisenhower Presidential Library Archives. Last accessed February 18, 2017. Available at https://www.eisenhower.archives.gov/research/online_documents/holocaust/1945_09_14_DDE_to_Truman.pdf.

⁴⁹ Dwight Eisenhower, Letter to Harry Truman, Sept. 18, 1945. Eisenhower Presidential Library Archives. Last accessed February 18, 2017. Available at https://www.eisenhower.archives.gov/research/online_documents/holocaust/1945_09_18_DDE_to_Truman.pdf.

Individuals with no responsibility in the matter, their humanitarian impulses outraged by conditions that were frequently beyond help, began carrying to America tales of indifference, negligence, and callousness on the part of the troops. Generally these stories were lies.⁵⁰

Eisenhower went on to claim that improving the material lives of the displaced persons remained a primary objective for him as long as he was in Europe. His claim that practical limitations worked to prevent a quicker progression of improvement was not an argument that the realities of war made it impossible for American troops to provide the freed prisoners with livable conditions, but merely that the units assigned to the task had not had sufficient time to complete it. Neither the humanitarian importance of creating suitable conditions for the displaced in the short-term or the political importance of resettling the refugees for European peace in the longer-term were ever in doubt for Eisenhower. He never retreated fully into a position which valued only combat objectives after the status of refugees became part of his command duty. He would conclude his reflections on this portion of the war by penning the following: "Of all the distressing memories that will forever live with American veterans...none will be sharper or more enduring than those of the [displaced persons] and of the horror camps established by the Nazis."⁵¹ The discovery and liberation of the camps, along with the task of aiding the survivors became Eisenhower's lasting and most vivid image of the war's larger significance. Combatively answering a question posed by a reporter at a June 1945 Pentagon press conference about whether it was appropriate or helpful to have publicized the full extent of the camps' atrocities Eisenhower quipped: "I think it did good. I think the people at home ought

⁵⁰ Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe*, 440.

⁵¹ Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe*, 441.

to know what they are fighting for and the kind of person they are fighting. Yes, it did good.”⁵²

The memory of the Holocaust’s aftermath would guide Eisenhower’s sense of concrete good and evil and the political responsibility to defend the former and combat the latter throughout his presidency. Understanding him as a political thinker requires understanding this formative experience.

America as a Unique Community

Perhaps the primary reason that Eisenhower has not been considered a serious political thinker up until now is because he is not a philosopher in training or style. He wrote no books and gave few speeches that demonstrated a particular philosophy of government or democracy that was deeply theoretical and systematic. He was not likely to ruminate on human nature, though there are notable exceptions to this.⁵³ He did, though, have a particular sense of America. He viewed America as a unique, dynamic, and fundamentally good political community whose flourishing was good for the world. Eisenhower’s anti-Communism, his economic positions, and his expression of religion were all bound together with his view of and love for America.

One place where Eisenhower’s sense of America’s fundamental goodness is present is in his wartime diaries, memos, and letters. In both public and private, and in both personal and professional contexts Eisenhower consistently extols the virtue not only of the American cause in the war, but of America’s enduring character. He does not believe the German people to be evil, though he feels that they have fallen into a particular kind of political evil from which they must

⁵² Dwight Eisenhower, Press Conference, Pentagon, Washington, D.C., June 18, 1945. Eisenhower Presidential Library Archives. Last accessed February 18, 2017. Available at https://www.eisenhower.archives.gov/research/online_documents/holocaust/Press_Conference_1945_06_18.pdf.

be cured. America, by its nature, would never fall into similar evil in Eisenhower's view. Since we know (and since Eisenhower knew) that Hitler was democratically elected it is easy to reason that Eisenhower felt that America's goodness and promise went beyond having a democratic system of government and sprung from something unique in America's history, composition, and present reality.

A Concrete Sense of Good and Evil

Eisenhower's thought is marked by a robust conception of good and evil. Not only did he believe that these things objectively existed, but he felt it to be his responsibility as an officer and as president to promote good while fighting evil. He reflected and influenced the spirit of the 1950s in this way. He did not think that struggles against evil in the world would be easy, or that the strategy to defeat political evil would always be evident, yet he did consistently find it easy to identify the forces of good and of evil themselves. World War II is a primary example of this. This way of viewing politics, though, carried on into his presidency and is evident after he retired from the White House. The American cause, fundamentally and at all times was an endeavor in the promotion of goodness across the world. The Soviets, their allies in Vietnam, and American youth who protested the Vietnam war were all parties to causing (in the first two cases) or tacitly encouraging (in the case of American protestors) objective evil in the world.

Friendship

Perhaps the most important part of Eisenhower's life that has never been considered politically relevant by scholars is friendship. Not only did he forge famous relationships with Winston Churchill and George Marshall, but he kept up friendships with childhood friends,

business associates, fellow soldiers, family members, and even political allies. Eisenhower showed warmth and tenderness in personal correspondence and diaries not only to his family, but toward such thorny figures as Richard Nixon and George Patton. For Eisenhower, one's career, capacity as a leader, and personal happiness all depended on maintaining a network of trusted allies. Eisenhower thought of these relationships as true friendships, but they were much more akin to strategic relationships. He sought to and succeeded in maintaining friendships with individuals that ranged in age, profession, intelligence, social status, and formality. He looked to his childhood friend Swede Hazlett, for example, to give him an unbiased view of world events and of Eisenhower's political actions, he mentored Nixon in leadership and campaigning, and he trusted Patton to do a professional job in the field, even when his own analysis of Patton's missteps caused him to consider sacking the general in favor of a calmer leader.

Friendship matters for understanding Eisenhower's political thought, not merely his life, because seeing how Eisenhower saw friendship (and particular friends) is an important window into seeing how Eisenhower viewed the world and his place in it. Eisenhower valued personal loyalty, established trust, and advice from associates as both general and president. These things could not be established except by long-term and real connections between Eisenhower and others around him. In order to better illustrate the role of friendship in Eisenhower's thought I will explore a few of his most important relationships.

George Marshall, Mentor

The most important mentor relationship Eisenhower had was also the one he cherished the most. Marshall and Eisenhower would become permanently connected during the war, but Eisenhower's admiration for the general existed before the two had formally met. According to

Eisenhower, “In 1940, the U.S. army mirrored attitudes of the American people, as is the case today and as it was a century ago.”⁵⁴ Eisenhower’s caveat, though, was that George Marshall had ensured that the War Department, at least, would be prepared for large-scale combat.⁵⁶ Eisenhower would always view Marshall as not only a faithful public servant, but as a man of high character and without an ego, who insisted on cooperation among those who he commanded. Marshall valued subordinates who would think and act within their spheres of responsibility, for he “hated buck passing.”⁵⁷ Correspondingly, Eisenhower notes that Marshall also hated the “man who tried to do everything himself.”⁵⁸ By the time Eisenhower wrote these descriptions of the man he so admired the two had worked closely together throughout the war and one senses in Eisenhower’s words the love a student has for a great teacher and the desire to emulate one whom he viewed as a supreme example of human virtue. Eisenhower, for the duration of his life, would lionize Marshall in public and in private. In spite of this warmth, the two were not deep friends in the sense that they viewed each other as equals and took active parts in each other’s personal lives, though.

⁵⁴ Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe*, 7.

⁵⁵ This deeper insight into how Eisenhower viewed the fundamental nature of the American military—namely, as a reflection of the population from which it sprung—would become important later in his career, as he reflected on what the military should be in the Cold War era.

⁵⁶ Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe*, 16.

⁵⁷ Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe*, 35.

⁵⁸ Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe*, 35.

David Eisenhower, Grandson

David Eisenhower was Dwight's only grandson and the son of John, Dwight's only surviving child.⁵⁹ David was a young child during Dwight's presidential years, but the two grew close in the last decade of Dwight's life. After leaving the White House in early 1961, Dwight and Mamie began to live a portion of the year at the family farm in Gettysburg, which by then also housed John's family.⁶⁰ David and Dwight's time together included experiences ranging from the commonly known experience of an elderly family member who cannot still drive safely, but drives anyway (after almost crashing a farm truck into a group of tourists that he felt were too close to the road Dwight angrily informed David, "When you get a license you must never impede access to a public thoroughfare."),⁶¹ to mundane, but warm discussions about baseball,⁶² to the touching. Most representative of this last category is a letter that Dwight sent to David, now away at college, upon his engagement to Julie Nixon. The often cold and distant former president wrote, in part: "A love, shared by two young and intelligent people, is one of heaven's greatest gifts to humanity...I'm not only proud that you are my grandson, but my friend as well—to whom I give my deepest affection."⁶³

⁵⁹ An older son, Doud "Icky" Eisenhower, died as a toddler of scarlet fever, an event that seemed to make Dwight's relationship with John more special and yet, more tense.

⁶⁰ The best record the public has about the friendship that formed between David, who was coming of age during in the 1960s, and Dwight, who hoped to spend his final years (there would turn out to be one more almost exactly eight-year-long bloc in his life) finally focusing on leisure and family life, is an intimate biography David Eisenhower wrote, entitled, *Going Home to Glory: A Memoir of Life with Dwight D. Eisenhower, 1961-1969* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2010).

⁶¹ Eisenhower, *Going Home to Glory*, 46.

⁶² Eisenhower, *Going Home to Glory*, 194.

⁶³ Eisenhower, *Going Home to Glory*, 226.

Throughout most of his life, and especially since he became famous during WWII, most who met Eisenhower found him to be cordial, but emotionally detached. Late in life, though, he seemed to be more disarmed around his grandson than he had been around anyone else, perhaps even more open than he was with Mamie. Though Eisenhower was surrounded with friends of all sorts—in this decade, he kept social appointments to go along with his homes in Gettysburg, Augusta, and California—during his retirement years he remained still a lonely man. As he prepared to write his memoir, David asked his grandmother “if she felt she had really known Ike.” She replied: “I’m not sure anyone did.”⁶⁴ Examples of Dwight trusting David enough to show real affection, then, help to illustrate not only that the general valued his finally attained quiet family life, but resonate a deeper point: that his life in public service had denied him normal family relationships and that he grieved this, even if he accepted it as a duty required cost.

Lyndon Johnson, In Search of a Friend

Perhaps the least well-known of Eisenhower’s friendships developed late in his life. After leaving the White House Eisenhower mostly refrained from publicly commenting on political affairs. When he did choose to re-enter that world he usually remained out of the national consciousness. (He spoke about the Vietnam protest movement, for example, during a June 1963 speech he gave at the dedication of a new building for his Gettysburg church, but did not have his speech published or widely covered.⁶⁵) Though he did not wish to maintain a large

⁶⁴ Eisenhower, *Going Home to Glory*, 65.

⁶⁵ Eisenhower, *Going Home to Glory*, 107.

public profile he did hope to stay active in politics by advising the current president, as well as Republican party leaders on a set of issues. Though Kennedy was not usually willing to accept much assistance from Eisenhower, Johnson kept Eisenhower regularly briefed on the Vietnam War effort by the end of 1965.⁶⁶ Initially, Eisenhower believed that Johnson was handling the war well, but by 1967 he had become critical of Johnson's leadership when he privately discussed the matter with friends.⁶⁷ In spite of this, though, he also found most critics of the war to be motivated by what he considered to be socially radical ideologies.⁶⁸ Eisenhower felt that Johnson, at least, understood how difficult it was to lead a war. From this mutual respect, the two formed a working relationship that blossomed into a genuine friendship. David Eisenhower describes it this way:

Johnson phoned Eisenhower often. Though most of their conversations focused on Johnson's detractors and trivial matters about political personalities, the link Johnson sought was spiritual and historical. He wanted the comfort of communicating with someone who could comprehend the unique pressures of the presidency.⁶⁹

Each man was lonely, in his own way, and each saw value in the other's counsel and company. The phone calls that were ostensibly about strategy are enough to demonstrate this, but there is deeper evidence of a real friendship between the two. Johnson would often visit the general when Eisenhower found himself at Walter Reed Medical Center for some type of care. After one such visit Johnson encountered Edward Elson, then the chaplain of the Senate, and, in

⁶⁶ Eisenhower, *Going Home to Glory*, 165.

⁶⁷ Eisenhower, *Going Home to Glory*, 202.

⁶⁸ Eisenhower, *Going Home to Glory*, 203.

⁶⁹ Eisenhower, *Going Home to Glory*, 204.

passing commented: “When I need comfort, this is where I come and this is the man I see.”⁷⁰

Johnson would come to mean something to Eisenhower, as well. In 1968, as Eisenhower’s health faded Johnson sent a parade of cards, flowers, briefings about presidential business, and offers to make the hospital’s living conditions more palatable for Eisenhower and his family.⁷¹ Eisenhower routinely replied to these acts of kindness with personal messages of thanks. In this way, the two men formed a steady correspondence. When Johnson did visit in the last months of Eisenhower’s life he would come alone and the two men would chat in private, without attendants or a security detail present. Remembering these warm, almost familial, visits firsthand David Eisenhower noted the “despair and unspeakable sadness”⁷² that Johnson visibly felt when talking with his friend, who he knew was dying, and noted that the president came and went quietly, in the same manner that would be expected of anyone who was paying what could have been a final visit to a beloved friend. Late in life, Eisenhower felt empathy for Johnson that led to something of a true, though short friendship. Each man seemed to find in the other not only a companion who understood the isolation of the presidency, but one who understood a deep personal loneliness throughout much of life.

George Patton and Swede Hazlett

With regard to understanding Eisenhower as a political thinker, his two most notable relationships are those with George Patton and Swede Hazlett. Because the content of each friendship (and the records we have of them) deals substantively with Eisenhower’s political

⁷⁰ Eisenhower, *Going Home to Glory*, 204.

⁷¹ Eisenhower, *Going Home to Glory*, 252.

⁷² Eisenhower, *Going Home to Glory*, 252.

thought they will not be addressed, except in brief, in this chapter. Later chapters will give each attention, as it relates to the broader trajectory of the project.

Patton, was not only Eisenhower's most exciting friendship for the casual observer, but one of the most important for the serious scholar. With Patton Eisenhower developed innovative tank doctrines and was responsible for disciplining the hot headed general on several occasions when George treated subordinates harshly, shared classified details with the press, or engaged in one of his high profile fits of anger. Eisenhower did not always enjoy commanding Patton, but he never lost a deep affection for his old friend. The way in which Eisenhower dealt with Patton in the chain of command and the manner in which he spoke of Patton to others demonstrates how important loyalty was as a governing principle of Eisenhower's vision of war and politics.

Swede Hazlett was a childhood friend who was Eisenhower's original inspiration in attending West Point. Suffering poor health, Hazlett's Naval career was a short one, but Eisenhower and Swede kept a consistent correspondence throughout most of Eisenhower's presidency (and until Swede's death in 1958) that ranged from the political to the personal with ease. These collected letters are as honest and informal of a record of Eisenhower's thought as we have today.

The fact that Eisenhower imagined himself, or at least presented himself, as having scores of close friends matters for understanding his political thought, because he conceived of politics as being fundamentally about grand group endeavors that sought to promote the common good. It is also important that he did not have especially close friends throughout much of his life, though. His social isolation is the context in which he both ascends to the presidency and acts within it.

Eisenhower as an American Thinker

It is difficult to say exactly when who was the first to observe a distinctive American way of thinking. In political theory the notion goes back at least to Tocqueville, but it can be plausibly traced back to the Puritans. The systematic study of a particular American philosophic stance did not come around until the early twentieth century, however, with the publication of an essay titled “Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking,” by Progressive William James. In first arguing that Americans systematically view the world with a philosophic lens that prizes practical results over intellectual purity, James founded an ongoing study of Pragmatism that both helped to group seemingly disparate American figures of the past and inspire influential American thinkers of the future. Eisenhower fits squarely in this tradition. In 1989 philosopher Cornel West published a seminal work titled *The American Evasion of Philosophy: A Genealogy of Pragmatism*. In the introduction to this book he describes his subject this way:

American pragmatism is a diverse and heterogeneous tradition. But its common denominator consists of a future-oriented instrumentalism that tries to deploy thought as a weapon to enable more effective action. Its basic impulse is a plebeian radicalism that fuels an antipatrician rebelliousness for the moral aim of enriching individuals and expanding democracy.⁷³

This is the precise mode that Eisenhower used to think about the world. He was thought of as someone who did not think much because his particular brand of thinking was outcome oriented, he did not care to display his thoughts in public, and because he had little regard for the type of politician that seemed more committed to intellectualism than the practical aspects of statesmanship. Eisenhower was not alone, though. His style was not that of an academic, but he

⁷³ Cornel West, *The American Evasion of Philosophy: A Genealogy of Pragmatism* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 5.

shared the same tradition of thought as thinkers such as John Stuart Mill, William James himself, and Reinhold Niebuhr. As the rest of this project delves into his writings, actions, and private reflections it will be clear that Eisenhower had in mind “the moral aim of enriching individuals and expanding democracy.”

To see Eisenhower as a crusader for liberty, in his own mind, is to truly see him. And yet, West provides a second part to his definition of American pragmatism that is arguably relevant to Eisenhower, also. West writes:

This rebelliousness, rooted in the anticolonial heritage of the country, is severely restricted by an ethnocentrism and a patriotism cognizant of the exclusion of peoples of color, certain immigrants, and women yet fearful of the subversive demands these excluded peoples might make and enact.⁷⁴

One of the primary controversies about Eisenhower’s presidency, both when he was in office and in debates about his legacy concerns his record on civil rights. A future chapter will address the issue at length, but for now it is worth mentioning that Eisenhower can be plausibly made into a civil rights hero or villain. Why would the same person who ordered D.C. and military schools desegregated and who spoke glowingly about the service of African-Americans under his command in war also seem disinterested in hosting black civil rights leaders from the south or in intervening in high profile cases, such as the murder of Emmett Till? How could the same person grumble about the Brown v. Board decision and militarize the national guard to enforce the decision on an unwilling southern state? The answer to these questions, I believe, helps to unlock Eisenhower’s holistic thought. He was irrational or incoherent in his thinking, but rather he was always adhering to a way of thinking that was focused on practical outcomes, rather than philosophical purity. Furthermore, he had both the desire to expand freedom to new

⁷⁴ West, *American Evasion*, 5.

parts of the country and the world and a deep suspicion about some movements that threatened stability or tradition. He was, in this way, a classic American. Though this study does not spend any more time evaluating Eisenhower's place in the annals of American pragmatism, it will be helpful to the reader to keep the connection in mind throughout.

From Eisenhower's Life to His Political Thought

The previous pages have provided a brief introduction to some of the key forces that shaped Eisenhower as a soldier and a president. The following chapters will more closely examine Eisenhower's political thought and will demonstrate that he was a coherent, forceful, and unique thinker. Without understanding these formative influences first, though, a search for the thinking Eisenhower produce results no different from the popular and scholarly consensus of the past half-century.

CHAPTER 2

FREEDOM, THE STATE, AND SOCIETY

In order to understand Eisenhower as a thinker it is vital to explore his musings on the most fundamental parts of government. Specifically, he gave thought and voice to specific conceptions of freedom, the state, and society that would guide all of his more specific thinking about topics such as foreign policy, American democracy, the place of religion in public life, and the menacing character of the Soviet Union. This chapter will explore these three basic categories of political thought in order to both establish Eisenhower as a political thinker and to illuminate a bridge between his life experiences and the more specific examples of his thought which will be addressed in later chapters.

Pre-Presidential Eisenhower on Freedom

While serving as president of Columbia University, Eisenhower delivered the inaugural Gabriel Silver Lecture. This annual lecture was endowed the year before in order to provide Columbia with the chance to host a renowned figure to address the topic of peace, broadly construed. Early in his remarks Eisenhower linked peace to freedom. One without the other, he argued, constitutes “an inhuman existence.”⁷⁵ In order for freedom to exist, though, Eisenhower insisted that justice must be an initial starting point. Justice, Eisenhower told the crowd, requires three components. The first condition to be met is that people “must be clothed and fed and sheltered.” Next, since humans are “thinking beings” they need to have the chance to pursue answers to the most fundamental questions about life. Finally, he contended, the human is a

⁷⁵ Dwight Eisenhower, 1950 Gabriel Silver Lecture, New York, NY, 1950. Dwight D. Eisenhower Memorial Archives. Last accessed May 2, 2016. Available at <http://www.eisenhowermemorial.org/speeches/19500323%20Gabriel%20Silver%20Lecture.html>

“spiritual being in within whom burns longings and aspirations that cannot be extinguished by all the goods of this world.”⁷⁶ Even before Eisenhower took office the emphasis on a holistic vision of justice that would include both bodily and spiritual elements was present in his thought. One cannot understand his thought on freedom without first understanding what he felt were its proper pre-conditions. Demonstrating the concrete nature of his thought regarding freedom he closed the lecture by calling for the university to establish a center dedicated to the study of world hunger, along with another institute, which would study “war” as “a social phenomenon.”⁷⁷

Freedom as Political Action

Eisenhower used the occasion of his first inaugural to announce the combination of physical and ethereal importance he placed on the concept of freedom. Early in the speech, in considering the uncertainty of international affairs at that time, he asks “Are we nearing the light—a day of freedom and peace for all mankind? Or, are the shadows of another night closing in upon us?”⁷⁸ He would spend much of the rest of the address answering his rhetorical question in a way that indicated that the pursuit of his conception of freedom would be his administration’s top priority. After listing the specific things he planned on doing toward this end he dramatically argued that the “hope” of freedom was “the supreme aspiration” of a well-

⁷⁶ Eisenhower, Silver Lecture, 1950.

⁷⁷ Eisenhower, Silver Lecture, 1950.

⁷⁸ Dwight Eisenhower, First Inaugural Address, Washington, D.C., Jan. 20, 1953. The American Presidency Project Archives. Last accessed February 18, 2017. Available at <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=9600>.

ordered polity and that such hope “must rule the way we live.”⁷⁹ He cautioned that anything short of total commitment to the achievement of lasting freedom would be fatal to the American political system. Speaking in the style of a progressive infused with the language of a Puritan preacher he confidently declared “history does not long entrust the care of freedom to the weak or the timid.”⁸⁰ He would use the word “freedom” ten times in this short address and he mentioned the word “free” twenty-one times more. This opening address of his presidency makes it clear that for Eisenhower, the only proper political path for the United States was one that prized the active promotion of his particular concept of freedom. Without understanding this, one risks misunderstanding Eisenhower’s politics entirely.

For Eisenhower this emphasis was not merely a top-down item that his administration would pursue, only because he desired it. He consistently argued that all humans had an innate desire for peace, and that specific conditions made this peace more or less likely. Most basically, he identified a fundamental tension between military necessity and human flourishing. Speaking of the Cold War arms race and the security rivalry between the United and the Soviets Eisenhower, issuing one of the most famous lines of his presidency, lamented: “This is not a way of life at all, in any true sense. Under the cloud of threatening war it is humanity hanging from a cross of Iron.”⁸¹ Alongside this, though, he argued that America could not fail to remain better equipped and prepared for war than the Soviets, so long as Soviet leadership insisted on an

⁷⁹ Eisenhower, First Inaugural, 1953.

⁸⁰ Eisenhower, First Inaugural, 1953.

⁸¹ Dwight Eisenhower, The Chance for Peace, address delivered to the American Society of Newspaper Editors, Washington D.C., Apr. 16, 1953. The American Presidency Project Archives. Last accessed February 18, 2017. Available at <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=9819>.

aggressive posture. He finds his hope for a different future (and his hope that the present tension can be resolved) by asserting that no disagreement between the Soviets and the Americans is intractable. Noting this tension in Eisenhower's thinking is helpful, as it illuminates his captiously optimistic realism. He does not believe that humans can prosper under permanently militarized conditions and, despite seeing no likely short term end to the Cold War, imagines a different politics for the future.

Though much of Eisenhower's rhetoric regarding freedom dealt with the American-Soviet conflict he frequently and intentionally broadened his vision. During his second inaugural address, for example, he noted:

From the deserts of North Africa to the islands of the South Pacific one third of all mankind has entered upon an historic struggle for a new freedom...Across all continents, nearly a billion people seek, sometimes almost in desperation, for the skills and knowledge and assistance by which they may satisfy from their own resources, the material wants common to all mankind.⁸²

People across the world, regardless of race or class, deeply desire political freedom and economic security. Of equal importance, according to Eisenhower, is that the post World War II world had become a place where peoples were galvanized to action, in order to pursue a better and more fulfilling life. Political conditions, systems of government, and economic realities vary across time and space, but for Eisenhower a basic hope for peace and prosperity was a fundamental component of being a human.

⁸² Dwight Eisenhower, Second Inaugural Address, Washington D.C., January 21, 1957. The American Presidency Project Archives. Last accessed February 18, 2017. Available at <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=10856>.

The “Basic Purposes of Government”

Most straightforwardly, Eisenhower believed that the state provided a “mediatory role” that helped to prevent a politics driven by popular whims or special interests.⁸³ Delivering his 1954 State of the Union address Eisenhower noted “three broad purposes” of government, including defense of “freedom,” promoting economic growth, and addressing the “human problems of the individual citizen.”⁸⁴ These three categories are typical of Eisenhower’s political thought; each one is stated ambiguously and yet, together they demonstrate that he was thinking about the fundamentals of politics, not just about policy issues of the day. This speech is the clearest articulation of Eisenhower’s vision of the role of government, as freedom, economic prosperity, and a desire to secure a combination of material and emotional goods for the individual would each go on to guide both Eisenhower’s reflections and actions throughout his political career. The duration of this chapter will explore Eisenhower’s thought related to freedom, the state, and society.

The State

Eisenhower did not leave lengthy thoughts or deliver a speech that explicitly outlined a systematic vision of the state, but he did comment on the issue indirectly. Writing to his friend in 1957 he opined that “laws are rarely effective unless they represent the will of the majority.”⁸⁵

⁸³ Robert Griffith, “Eisenhower and the Corporate Commonwealth,” *American Historical Review* 87, no. 1 (1982): 93.

⁸⁴ Dwight Eisenhower, State of the Union Address, Washington, D.C., January 7, 1954. The American Presidency Project Archives. Last accessed February 18, 2017. Available at <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=10096>.

⁸⁵ Eisenhower, Letter to Swede Hazlett, July 22, 1957, *Letters to a Friend*, 183-189.

Being a true believer in democratic governance, Eisenhower believed that the state should be a reflection of the people, insofar as a consensus could be reached. Because of this, it should strike a balance between too much power for the people to control and so little power that it could not meaningfully impact society.

Closing his 1955 state of the union address he argued that “a government can try, as ours tries, to sense the deepest aspirations of the people and to express them in political action at home and abroad.”⁸⁶ A government could and should attempt to help a people achieve better lives, but it could not provide ultimate happiness. “No government can” he continued, “inoculate its people against the fatal materialism that plagues our age.”⁸⁷ This juxtaposition demonstrates the two bounds of government Eisenhower hopes always prevail: The state should not be treated as a savior, but it should be considered an indispensable tool in the effort to achieve individual and communal prosperity. For Eisenhower, then, any circumstantial question of policy must always be guided not only by the Constitution, but by the test of whether the state is adequately expressing popular desires. A purely technocratic approach to ruling was not only anti-democratic, but was doomed to eventual failure, according to Eisenhower’s thinking.

Specifically, Eisenhower articulated two rules for government involvement in any issue. First, “the federal government should perform an essential task only when it cannot otherwise be adequately performed”⁸⁸ and, second “in performing that task our government must not impair

⁸⁶ Eisenhower, State of the Union Address, 1955.

⁸⁷ Eisenhower, State of the Union Address, 1955. The American Presidency Project Archives. Last accessed February 18, 2017. Available at <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=10416>.

⁸⁸ Eisenhower, State of the Union Address, 1955.

the self-respect, freedom, and incentive of the individual.”⁸⁹ Here the nuance in Eisenhower’s thought begins to show. The government must always be an engine of the people, but must never fully prioritize the collective so much that individuals are stifled in economic incentive and in life choices more generally. The state should not be worshipped or hated. It is something that can be used for great evil (the Soviets and Nazis his prime examples), and due to its power it is always a potential threat to personal happiness, domestic freedom, and international peace. However, the state can be a powerful (and is an indispensable) tool for those who want to advance and preserve freedom.

Executive Power and the Rule of Law

Though Eisenhower believed that too much government interference in economic policy was among the greatest possible domestic threats to American prosperity he insisted on the need for a strong presidency. Up until now this has not been viewed as an important or revealing characteristic of Eisenhower’s thought. Of course a former general and sitting president would be in favor of wide-ranging executive power, the implicit argument goes. It is important to note though, the inherent tension between Eisenhower’s desire to weaken government power in many areas, while simultaneously expanding the role of executive power. Eisenhower’s reasoning is specific and fits into his larger conception of politics.

The most illustrative experience of Eisenhower’s presidency regarding how he viewed executive power is an incident that has been popularly dubbed the Little Rock Crisis. Following the city school board’s plan for racial integration Little Rock’s Central High School was set to admit nine African American students in the fall of 1957 as the students prepared to enter the

⁸⁹ Eisenhower, State of the Union Address, 1955.

school for the first time. Large crowds of white protestors assembled on the premises and demanded that the black students be denied entrance. Insisting that he was acting in the interest of public order and to ensure the safety of the students Governor Orval Faubus ordered the Arkansas National Guard to prevent the students from entering the school. Faubus, himself a proponent of continued segregation argued that allowing the students to attend the school under conditions of unrest would not only present short term problems for the city and the school, but would hamper the process of eventual full integration.

Disturbed that the governor had defied a federal district court's order to implement the school board's integration plan Eisenhower met with Faubus on September 14, 1957. At this meeting Eisenhower suggested to the governor that it would be wise to give the national guard new orders to protect the black students as they attended the school. While Eisenhower's public statement after the meeting struck a conciliatory tone his diary entry that night provided a more honest perspective and confrontational posture. He wrote:

I pointed out at that time [Faubus] was due to appear the following Friday, the 20th, before the Court to determine whether an injunction was to be issued. In any event, I urged him to take this action promptly whereupon the Justice Department would go to the Court and ask that the Governor not be brought into Court. I further said that I did not believe it was beneficial to anybody to have a trial of strength between the President and a Governor because in any area where the Federal government had assumed jurisdiction and this was upheld by the Supreme Court, there could be only one outcome-that is, the State would lose, and I did not want to see any governor humiliated.⁹⁰

In this entry we see that Eisenhower felt no pain in exercising the presidency's informal power by directly threatening to exercise the office's formal powers. Writing to his childhood friend in just several months prior to the crisis Eisenhower described his conception of executive power this way: "We cannot possibly imagine a successful form of government in which every

⁹⁰ Dwight Eisenhower, Letter from Oct. 8, 1957, *The Eisenhower Diaries*, ed. Robert Ferrell (New York: W.W. Norton, 1981), 347-348.

individual citizen would have the right to interpret the constitution according to his own convictions...Chaos would develop.” Eisenhower believed that it was a primary duty of the executive to enforce court orders in any places where such orders were being defied. Without an executive that was both strong enough and insistent upon using force to ensure that court orders were obeyed, democracy would devolve into mere “chaos.”⁹¹

When it became clear that Faubus would not only not follow Eisenhower’s advice to change the National Guard’s mission, but would instead continue his policy of using the Guard to prevent the school’s integration Eisenhower acted quickly and forcefully. Nine days after the meeting with Faubus the White House released a statement describing the daily Little Rock protest of integration as “unlawful”, because it was designed to hinder the implementation of a federal court order and, so was a violation of the Constitution. Therefore, the statement went on to announce that according to US Code Title 10, Ch. 15, sections 232-234 the president had the authority to use military force to quell an insurrection or domestic disturbance, in the case that “normal judicial proceedings” were unable to operate.⁹²

The next day Eisenhower handwrote a note ordering federal troops to Little Rock to ensure that the black students would be able to enroll. His notes from the crisis reveal that he wanted to order federal troops to the scene, rather than immediately and only nationalizing the Arkansas national guard, because he wanted both to ensure that the order would be immediately obeyed with no possibility of delay or obstruction due to local loyalties, and he wanted the

⁹¹ Eisenhower, Letter to Swede Hazlett, July 22, 1957, *Letters to a Friend*, 183-189.

⁹² Dwight Eisenhower, White House Statement, On the Obstruction of Justice in Arkansas, Sept. 23, 1957. Eisenhower Presidential Library Archives. Last accessed February 18, 2017. Available at https://eisenhower.archives.gov/research/online_documents/civil_rights_little_rock/Press_Release_Proclamation.pdf.

governor and protestors to realize how quickly the federal government could respond with a significant show of force. He flew back to Washington from the naval base in Rhode Island, where he had been staying at and working from for several weeks. Speaking from the Oval Office before a national television and radio audience he sought to connect his action to other moments and figures in American history:

By speaking from the house of Lincoln, of Jackson, and of Wilson my words...convey both the sadness I feel in the action I was compelled today to take and the firmness with which I intend to pursue this course until the orders of the federal court at Little Rock can be executed without unlawful interference.⁹³

The references to Lincoln and Jackson are clear. Lincoln, of course, is the ultimate symbol of federal power triumphing over state dissent and Jackson famously threatened an armed response to South Carolina, should John Calhoun and his allies attempt to carry out a nullification threat. The reason for the inclusion of Wilson, though not as immediately obvious is intentional. Wilson, being a Democrat with southern roots, began his political career as a proponent of a robust notion of states rights. This stance did not last, though. Wilson would go on to write glowingly of a “national spirit” that bound all Americans together.⁹⁴

He went on to refer to protest leaders as “demagogic extremists” and argue that local leaders has willfully failed to disperse the “mob.” This decision, then, had been an “inescapable responsibility” of the presidency, since no one else had the constitutional or actual power to

⁹³ Dwight Eisenhower, speech, White House, Washington D.C., Sept. 24, 1957. Eisenhower Presidential Library Archives. Last accessed February 18, 2017. Available at https://eisenhower.archives.gov/research/online_documents/civil_rights_little_rock/1957_09_24_Press_Release.pdf.

⁹⁴ William C. Spragens, *Popular Images of American Presidents* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing, 1988), 61.

enforce the court's decision.⁹⁵ Hoping to make clear that his action was driven by a commitment to a particular view of executive power and not motivated by a substantive stance on civil rights he noted that his opinion of the decision in question was irrelevant and that Little Rock was not representative of the whole white south. Indeed, he noted, that "many communities in our Southern States have instituted...plans for gradual progress in the enrollment...of school children of all races."⁹⁶ This, he argued, "demonstrated to the world that we are a nation in which laws, not men, are supreme."⁹⁷ As for Little Rock, he continued: "I regret to say that this truth-the cornerstone of our liberties-was not observed in this instance."⁹⁸ Since "agitators" had "frustrated" the court's ruling he had little choice, if he were to uphold the duties of his office and the fundamentals of American democracy, but to use military force to ensure that the Little Rock school was integrated, and that other potentially recalcitrant southerners took note that resisting integration would not end well.

The Danger of a State Sustained Economy

Shortly after Harry Truman's election in 1948 leaders of both parties began privately recruiting Eisenhower for a potential 1952 presidential run. Until this time, Eisenhower had never been publicly affiliated with either party, and, in fact, had spent significant effort hoping to ensure that he would not be perceived as a partisan sympathizer.⁹⁹ Many took this lifelong

⁹⁵ Dwight Eisenhower, speech, White House, Washington D.C., Sept. 24, 1957.

⁹⁶ Dwight Eisenhower, speech, White House, Washington D.C., Sept. 24, 1957.

⁹⁷ Dwight Eisenhower, speech, White House, Washington D.C., Sept. 24, 1957.

⁹⁸ Dwight Eisenhower, speech, White House, Washington D.C., Sept. 24, 1957.

⁹⁹ Eisenhower, *Eisenhower Diaries*, Jan. 1, 1950, 167-170.

political silence as a signal that Eisenhower cared little and thought little about the domestic issues of the day. This led partisan operatives to believe that his personal popularity could be attached to any platform and ensure electoral success for either party. While it is true that Eisenhower despised being considered a politically involved man, up until this point in his life, the historical record shows that he did, in fact, have developed beliefs about both the philosophy of government and about the actual operation of America's government. Specifically, he was worried about what he perceived to be a dangerous trend toward state control of the economy. A caustic diary entry from January of 1949 merits inclusion here:

The trend toward governmental centralization continues, alarmingly. In the name of "social security" we are placing more and more responsibility upon the central government, and this means that an ever-growing bureaucracy is taking an ever-greater power over our daily lives. Already the agents of this bureaucracy cover the land-to justify their existence and render those reports that that seem to show a "profit" on their operations they nag, irritate, and hound every businessman in the United States. This morning's paper says that the American Museum of Natural History is nearing bankruptcy...Undoubtedly, the final answer will be "federal aid." This is indicative of what is happening to us everywhere. The "tax and tax, spend and spend, cut and cut" formula is working wonderfully for the shortsighted persons who cannot (or do not desire to) see beyond the next election date.¹⁰⁰

This private reflection differs drastically from the public image Eisenhower was portraying around the same time. The staunchest public criticism he had offered of the New Deal by this point was mild and came cloaked in personal praise for Roosevelt. "With some of Mr. Roosevelt's political acts I could never possibly agree," Eisenhower noted, "but I knew him solely in his capacity as a leader of a nation at war-and in that capacity he seemed to me to fulfill all that could possibly be expected of him."¹⁰¹ Taken together these two musings show that

¹⁰⁰ Eisenhower, *Eisenhower Diaries*, Jan. 14, 1949, 153-154.

¹⁰¹ Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe*, 410.

Eisenhower's reservations about the Democratic domestic agenda were both long-held and deeply rooted. That he would criticize Roosevelt at all in his first book is noteworthy, because doing so departed from the book's usual diplomatic tone and focus on strategy and Eisenhower's personal achievement. The appearance of the critique, though it is tame and short, points toward deeply held convictions that Roosevelt's philosophy of government ran counter to Eisenhower's vision for the state.

Serving by this point as president of Columbia University, Eisenhower became acquainted with the Republican leaders in New York. Governor Thomas Dewey paid a personal and secret visit to the general to convince him that he alone was suited to win the presidency for the Republicans in 1952. Dewey was so convinced of Eisenhower's conservative credentials that he offered to resign his position, so that Eisenhower could win a stepping-stone gubernatorial race in 1950.¹⁰² In November of 1949 Eisenhower was visited by national party leaders, who hoped to convince him that one more Democratic victory would send America incontrovertibly toward socialism. Eisenhower records himself as being moved by the argument, but remaining unconvinced that he was suited to be the Republican candidate. He closed this day's reflections by insisting that he would never "willingly go into politics."¹⁰³ His economic worries did not stop, though. Later that month he again noted his worries about excessive economic centralization.¹⁰⁴ In 1954 he delivered a message to Congress for the sake of providing a yearly economic report. In this message, he described an active role for government involvement in the

¹⁰² Eisenhower, *Eisenhower Diaries*, July 7, 1949, 161-162.

¹⁰³ Eisenhower, *Eisenhower Diaries*, Nov. 2, 1949, 164.

¹⁰⁴ Eisenhower, *Eisenhower Diaries*, Nov. 25, 1949, 166.

economy, but a role that would center on setting conditions such that the market could work, rather than on sustaining the economy with government spending. Eisenhower contends:

It is Government's responsibility in a free society to create an environment in which individual enterprise can work constructively to serve the ends of economic progress; to encourage thrift; and to extend and strengthen economic ties with the rest of the world.¹⁰⁵

He would go on to argue that a foundational task of the federal government in ensuring that the market would be conducive to economic success was preventing monopolies from forming and breaking them up when they were discovered. He viewed this role not as something opposite of what he felt Roosevelt and Truman had done before him. They had, in Eisenhower's mind used the government as an economic monopoly itself. This was, for Eisenhower, something that was not only unfair and un-American, but unsustainable in the long-term.

In 1956, he wrote about a controversy concerning whether the federal government should have a role in regulating natural gas prices. He argued that though natural gas is fairly categorized as a "public utility" and though the Supreme Court had recently granted Congress the authority to regulate the commodity's prices, he was so bothered at the suggestion of federal involvement in that market that he urged Congress to pass legislation that would formalize a federal unwillingness to intervene. "The producer of any such well," he argued "should be enabled to charge whatever he can get by competitive bidding in his particular state."¹⁰⁶ Though he recognized a legitimate public interest in the price of natural gas he did not feel that the situation was dire enough to justify federal intervention in the economy.

¹⁰⁵ Dwight Eisenhower, Annual Message Transmitting the Economic Report to the Congress, Washington, D.C., Jan. 28, 1954. The American Presidency Project Archives. Last accessed February 18, 2017. Available at <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=9997>.

¹⁰⁶ Eisenhower, *Eisenhower Diaries*, Feb. 11, 1956, 314-318.

The fear of a government driven economy would never leave his thoughts. During his 1956 State of the Union speech, for example, he identified “fiscal integrity” as a fundamental objective and defined it as working toward a balanced budget and reducing taxes, but only in conjunction with a reduction in expenditures.¹⁰⁷ Without a significant spending cut reducing taxes would not address the fundamental problem of government interference in the economy. In private, too, Eisenhower continued to fear an economy that was entangled with the state. In a diary entry from March of 1958 he described his administration’s approach to economic management:

We are basically conservative. We believe, for example, that frantic efforts now to put the federal government into a large-scale building program will have the most unfortunate financial consequences in the years immediately ahead. We believe in a private enterprise rather than a “government” campaign to provide the main strength of recovery forces.¹⁰⁸

Here is an example of Eisenhower’s theoretical and concrete fears merging in his thoughts: Not only was he philosophically opposed to a government driven economic program, but he believed that his administration was faced with the challenge of defeating influential opponents who wanted his government to be the primary agent in his country’s economic recovery. This entry is important not only because it connects the philosophical with the practical, but because it demonstrates the resolve of Eisenhower’s commitment to this principle. Late in his second term, in private, he still wrote at length (the above quotation is from an uncharacteristically long entry) about what he thought was the tempting, yet irrefutably foolish principle that a government could repair or sustain an economy. “Private enterprise” was not

¹⁰⁷ Eisenhower, State of the Union Address, 1956. The American Presidency Project Archives. Last accessed February 18, 2017. Available at <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=10704>.

¹⁰⁸ Eisenhower, *Eisenhower Diaries*, Mar. 17, 1958, 351-354.

only an important component of a free society, but was the best hope for ensuring statist economic planners were not able to dupe the voters into a doomed philosophy of economic intervention.

The Taft-Hartley Act

The Taft-Hartley Act of 1947 was a Republican-sponsored bill that passed new restrictions on several forms of union conduct. For example, once the law took effect, unions could no longer mandate membership for current employees, were required to bargain with management in good faith, and were prevented from threatening a strike designed to pressure a third-party business to pressure a business with which a union had an ongoing conflict.¹⁰⁹ Seen by conservatives as necessary regulation designed to prevent union leadership from taking advantage of both employees and employers, the act was met with strong opposition by Harry Truman, who viewed it as an attempt to limit the political tools unions could use to secure favorable conditions for their members.

The Democratic Party made the repeal of the act a primary part of its 1948 and 1952 platforms and, as such, a live issue. Eisenhower initially appointed union leader Martin Durkin as Secretary of Labor. Unions and Durkin himself believed that Eisenhower would be open revising the act in ways that would render it more acceptable to union leadership. To this end, Durkin suggested nineteen amendments to the act in a message sent to congress. He noted that Eisenhower was supportive of these proposed changes.¹¹⁰ There seemed to be cause for

¹⁰⁹ “1947 Taft-Hartley Substantive Provisions,” *National Labor Relations Board*. Last accessed Nov. 7, 2016. Available at www.nrlb.gov.

¹¹⁰ “1947 Taft-Hartley Substantive Provisions,” *National Labor Relations Board*.

optimism among union activists, because the appointment of Durkin seemed to signal that Eisenhower was willing to allow business-labor relations to be a point of compromise, in order to build political capital amongst some democrats. The nomination of Durkin enraged Robert Taft, longtime senator, stalwart conservative, and Eisenhower's chief rival for the Republican nomination. Speaking just after the announcement of Durkin's appointment Taft complained "that a man would be appointed who has always been a partisan of Truman Democrats, who fought Gen. Eisenhower's election, and advocated the repeal of the Taft-Hartley law."¹¹¹

By the time Durkin submitted his nineteen amendments to Congress, though, things had changed for Eisenhower. Robert Taft had recently died, yet Eisenhower had grown uncomfortable with the idea of revising legislation that so many in his party strongly supported. Commerce Secretary Sinclair Weeks helped to convince Eisenhower to reverse course and to leave the Taft-Hartley Act as it was in its present form. This reversal humiliated and infuriated Durkin, who resigned over the incident and criticized Eisenhower for having changed his mind without notifying Durkin that he no longer supported the previously agreed upon plan.¹¹²

The reversal on the Taft-Hartley Act is indicative of Eisenhower's larger economic outlook. He feared unchecked capitalism and he felt that business and labor leaders should seek compromises that would provide each group with some of their objectives. He worried that too much wealth being concentrated in a few hands would have a corrupting influence on American society, as it would erode the national creed of equality of opportunity. In spite of these feelings, though, Eisenhower consistently came down on the side of wanting less economic intervention in

¹¹¹ "Taft-Ike Breakup Seen," *The Stanford Daily* (December 3, 1952), 122, no. 46.

¹¹² "Martin P. Durkin (1953)," Miller Center, University of Virginia. Last accessed Nov. 7, 2016. Available at <https://millercenter.org/president/eisenhower/essays/durkin-1953-secretary-of-labor>.

government, aside from large capital projects like the Highway System. The Taft-Hartley Act was, according to most conservatives of the day, nothing more than a law that would help ensure a fair negotiating environment for both sides of a dispute. Not wanting to intervene decisively on the side of labor in this example is representative of Eisenhower's overall convictions regarding how much involvement the government should have in what he considered to be the regular features of how the economy operates.

When Eisenhower first secured his party's nomination in 1952 the Taft-Hartley Act was one of the most important issues on which he was at odds with both Republican leadership and a Republican sentiment. In 1948 the party platform makes no mention of the act, while the Democratic platform calls for the law's repeal.¹¹³ In 1952, the Republican platform triumphantly calls for keeping the act in place and lists eight benefits it provides to "the working man" and seven benefits it ensures to unions.¹¹⁴ Meanwhile, the Democrats again called for the act to be repealed in their platform.¹¹⁵ In 1956, however, the Republicans had shifted their position to look more like Eisenhower. To start with, the platform awkwardly reads:

Our great president has counseled us further: "In all those things which deal with people, be liberal, be human. In all those things which deal with people's money, or their economy, or their form of government, be conservative."¹¹⁶

¹¹³ 1948 Democratic Party Platform, July 12, 1948. Last accessed March 3, 2017. Available at The American Presidency Project, www.presidency.ucsb.edu.

¹¹⁴ 1952 Republican Party Platform, July 7, 1952. Last accessed March 3, 2017. Available at the American Presidency Project, www.presidency.ucsb.edu.

¹¹⁵ 1952 Democratic Party Platform, July 21, 1952. Last accessed March 3, 2017. Available at the American Presidency Project, www.presidency.ucsb.edu.

¹¹⁶ 1956 Republican Party Platform. Last accessed March 3, 2017. Available at American Presidency Project, www.presidency.ucsb.edu.

While there is no explicit explanation in the platform itself for what, exactly, this “counsel” from Eisenhower will mean for the party going forward there are a few hints in the policy positions later expressed in the document. The Taft-Hartley Act is one of these. Four years after issuing an ode to the Taft-Hartley Act that reads like the political version of Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s Love Sonnet 43 (the poem which famously begins “How do I love thee? Let me count the ways”), the Republicans committed themselves to “revise and improve the Taft-Hartley Act so as to protect more effectively the rights of labor unions, management, the individual worker, and the public.”¹¹⁷ Rather than being an issue that pitted management on the side of freedom against unions on the side of socialism, as the party had previously seen the issues which concern the law, the platform now pitched the dispute as one where individual liberty was at stake in the welfare of workers to unionize effectively. “The protection of the right of workers to organize into unions and to bargain collectively is the firm and permanent policy of the Eisenhower administration.”¹¹⁸ Though this paragraph does go on to blame the obstructionism of Democrats for the fact that the act had not yet been amended it is important that the Republican position shifted to desire an amended deal. This is the clear influence of Eisenhower and it is evidence of his political thought in action within his own party.

Freedom: What is it?

Freedom is, perhaps, the most frequently mentioned topic in Eisenhower’s speeches, letters, and memoirs. He used the word liberally and usually seemed content to imply that its meaning was self-evident. Importantly for this project, though, Eisenhower had a specific

¹¹⁷ 1956 Republican Party Platform.

¹¹⁸ 1956 Republican Party Platform.

conception in mind when he discussed freedom. He believed that freedom consisted in balancing individual agency with an inescapable duty to the whole.¹¹⁹ He imagined a political order that would never be fully controlled by either elites or the masses, nor one that would be dominated by any partisan agenda for an interminable period of time.¹²⁰ In order to understand Eisenhower's most sweeping notions it is often helpful to pay attention to the details of what appear to be political, not philosophically oriented speeches. An instructive example can be seen in his 1957 State of the Union Address, wherein he discussed labor-business relations:

Freedom has been defined as the opportunity for self-discipline. This definition has a special application to the areas of wage and price policy in a free economy. Should we persistently fail to discipline ourselves, eventually there will be increasing pressure on government to redress the failure. By that process freedom will step by step disappear. No subject on the domestic scene should more attract the concern of the friends of American working men and women and of free business enterprise than the forces that threaten a steady depreciation of the value of our money.¹²¹

Here, Eisenhower seamlessly relates a current practical dispute to a lasting principle. Though his passive language here leaves his prose less clear than would be ideal for scholarly purposes, he communicates his perspective straightforwardly. Freedom is living in a self-disciplined manner which will enable one to achieve prosperity. In order to achieve the self-discipline that freedom requires, a citizen (in this case a member of the working class or a business executive) must demonstrate a disinterested public mindedness, for the sake of both the community and one's own long-term interests. Earlier in this same speech Eisenhower cited an

¹¹⁹ Griffith, "Eisenhower and the Corporate Commonwealth," 91.

¹²⁰ Griffith, "Eisenhower and the Corporate Commonwealth," 91.

¹²¹ Dwight Eisenhower, State of the Union Address, Washington D.C., Jan. 10, 1957. The American Presidency Project Archives. Last accessed February 18, 2017. Available at <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=11029>.

“enlightened self-interest” as one of America’s enduring hallmarks. Freedom, for Eisenhower, must include more than pursuing one’s own needs, yet without an honest pursuit of some degree of self-interest freedom will be meaningless.

Another example of Eisenhower’s conception of freedom come in chapter 11 of Eisenhower’s second term memoir, *Waging Peace*, which is titled “Principally Politics” and begins with the following quote, attributed to Daniel Webster: “Liberty exists in proportion to wholesome restraint.”¹²² For Eisenhower this restraint applied not only to individual lives, but to the government apparatus as well. Specifically, he tied a congressional penchant for continually increasing spending to a decline in the moral character and quality of life of the whole of the American people. Blaming the Democrats for the particulars, but complaining about the general attitude of Congress he wrote: “I was getting alarmed by the sprit of recklessness that sought constant increases in spending, and by the apparent inability of [the Republicans] to stem it.”¹²³ He would go on to cite economist Arthur Burns who argued that the “creeping inflation” the United States had experienced since 1933 was a fundamental threat to the sustainability of a free market and to any chance for continued prosperity in the long-term. Eisenhower was especially convinced by Burns’ chief arguments that inflation was worth fighting, because if it was occurring at all there existed no failsafe way to ensure that it did not occur too suddenly and because even a small amount of inflation badly damaged the poor and middle classes.¹²⁴

¹²² Dwight Eisenhower, *Waging Peace: The White House Years, A Personal Account 1956-1961* (New York: Doubleday, 1960), 374.

¹²³ Eisenhower, *Waging Peace*, 378.

¹²⁴ Eisenhower, *Waging Peace*, 378.

Freedom through responsibility is a theme to which Eisenhower often returned. In closing his farewell address he connected freedom and responsibility with a broad understanding of human well-being. In a characteristically soaring manner he confidently announced his highest hopes for the world.

We pray that peoples of all faiths, all races, all nations, may have their great human needs satisfied; that those now denied opportunity shall come to enjoy it to the full; that all who yearn for freedom may experience its spiritual blessings; that those who have freedom will understand, also, its heavy responsibilities; that all who are insensitive to the needs of others will learn charity; that the scourges of poverty, disease, and ignorance will be made to disappear from the earth, and that, in the goodness of time, all peoples will come to live together in a peace guaranteed by the binding force of mutual respect and love.¹²⁵

Freedom itself did not ensure this long list of human goods in Eisenhower's thinking, but rather without robust political, economic, and social freedom the fundamental and universal goods of health, peace, and happiness would not be attainable. Freedom, then, not only has a specific content, but a particular purpose for Eisenhower. It is a powerful instrument of human flourishing, not an abstract concept that is to be celebrated for its own essence. When properly understood the pursuit of freedom would be natural for a people and would naturally lead to their collective and individual good

The Economics of Society

Important to Eisenhower's understanding of both freedom and the state is an understanding of how the two connect to provide a conception of a good society. The best succinct statement on this topic comes from scholar Robert Griffith, who writes that Eisenhower hoped "to resolve what he saw as the contradictions of modern capitalism and to create a

¹²⁵ Dwight Eisenhower, Farewell Address, Washington D.C., Jan. 17, 1961. The American Presidency Project Archives. Last accessed February 18, 2017. Available at <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=12086>.

harmonious corporate society without class conflict, unbridled acquisitiveness, and contentious party politics.”¹²⁶ For Eisenhower, a space in which a common public life could be pursued was not only a necessary part of democratic governance, but an essential ingredient in human happiness. It is in considering society, as distinct from but related to the state that Eisenhower expressed one of his chief political fears: unchecked business interests. Modern capitalism had the potential to increase human welfare, but also carried with it the possibility of causing great suffering. Griffith quotes Eisenhower as lamenting the “concentrated wealth” that had served as “a menace to the self-respect, opportunities and livelihood of...ordinary citizens.”¹²⁷ This ill, in Eisenhower’s words, “compelled drastic action for the preservation of the laborer’s dignity-for the welfare of himself and his family.”¹²⁸ Here, we can see roots of thought that would later manifest in Eisenhower’s partial, but substantial support for the baseline of the New Deal. This is noteworthy, because Eisenhower has often been categorized (and, at times categorized himself) as a president on a mission to destroy the economic legacy of the Roosevelt and Truman administrations. Understanding Eisenhower’s hopes for the society helps to understand why his later New Deal stance was nuanced.

Political Society

Eisenhower not only imagined a particular type of society; he had specific ideas about how that society would be threatened. His musings on these obstacles to common flourishing and how to best confront them constitute his most basic ideas about what makes for a good

¹²⁶ Griffith, “Eisenhower and the Corporate Commonwealth,” 88.

¹²⁷ Griffith, “Eisenhower and the Corporate Commonwealth,” 89.

¹²⁸ Griffith, “Eisenhower and the Corporate Commonwealth,” 89.

political society. The greatest possible systematic internal threat to a common good, in Eisenhower's mind, was interest group driven politics.¹²⁹ Demonstrating bold political thought Eisenhower proposed a solution to the rancor of democracy that directly contradicts James Madison, one of America's most original and prodigious democratic thinkers. In Federalist Paper 51 Madison argues that the best way to ensure that no interest group dominates politics, to the detriment of the whole, is to construct a system where "ambition checks ambition."¹³⁰ Explaining his position that no one person or group can be trusted with definitive power Madison famously wrote "If men were angels, no government would be necessary. If angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal controls on government would be necessary."¹³¹ Like Madison, Eisenhower believed that political competition could not be avoided in a democracy, but unlike Madison Eisenhower located the solution in "the leadership of public-spirited and professionally skilled managers...who could exercise the disinterested judgment necessary to avoid calamities."¹³² Eisenhower felt that society must find a leader whom it could trust to wield significant power, rather than trusting in an institutional framework which would not enable any leader to have too much power. What Madison imagined as a fundamental threat Eisenhower felt a necessity of good governance.

¹²⁹ Griffith, "Eisenhower and the Corporate Commonwealth," 92.

¹³⁰ Publius, *The Federalist Papers*, No. 51. The Avalon Project. Available at http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/fed51.asp.

¹³¹ Publius, *The Federalist Papers*, No. 51.

¹³² Griffith, "Eisenhower and the Corporate Commonwealth," 93.

Eisenhower has often been perceived as a self-reliant politician rather than a philosopher president. His military experience, his folksy style, and his carefully guarded public statements combined to give citizens and scholars alike the impression that confidence and a vague conservatism marked his political life and that any serious thought was left to other realms. Even the oft cited and well-known Eisenhower scholar Robert Griffith argued that “Eisenhower was not, of course, a profound or original thinker.”¹³³ This conclusion, though popularly and understandably reached, is incorrect. Eisenhower’s thoughts regarding how to best deal with democratic conflict are important, because they illustrate that his confidence in himself and his conclusions work with, rather than stand in for, serious political thought. Eisenhower’s political vision called for leaders who could manage crises, exercise a non-partisan public mindedness, and build a consensus among disparate factions. Between September of 1949 and January of 1950 Eisenhower recorded a series of reflections in his diary responding to Republican leaders urging him to run in 1952.¹³⁴ In each of these entries Eisenhower notes that he does not feel a duty to run for office. His civic contributions will be more valuable elsewhere and he has a disdain for the thought of being affiliated with a particular party.

A diary entry from November of 1959 reveals that he was first approached about seeking a future Republican nomination in 1943.¹³⁵ Though he recalls dismissing this suggestion he was again approached about the matter in 1945. The primary reason Eisenhower gives here (years later and in private) for not running relate more to the experience of the war than to a sense of duty. Successfully defeating the Germans in less than a year from the time of D-Day until the

¹³³ Griffith, “Eisenhower and the Corporate Commonwealth,” 88.

¹³⁴ Eisenhower, *Eisenhower Diaries*, Sept. 27, 1949-Jan. 1, 1950, 162-170.

¹³⁵ Eisenhower, *Eisenhower Diaries*, Nov. 28, 1959, 369-376.

final surrender was, in Eisenhower's words, "the climax of my own personal career."¹³⁶ "Anything that could happen to me thereafter," he continued, "would, in my opinion, be anticlimactic."¹³⁷ Quickly, though, Eisenhower turns from recalling his suspected boredom at the thought of occupying the White House to remembering his short time as the governor of American occupied Germany. This was a task to which he was naturally well-suited, but one which caused him great discomfort, in his memory, because the job was being done by a soldier. He remembered his position this way: "I kept pounding away on this matter because of my feeling that after wars are over...the executive head of all organizations governing civilians should be, under the Western tradition, a civilian."¹³⁸ Even in his memories he could not fully separate his feeling that the political world was mundane and not a good match for his talents with his self-image as one uniquely disposed and positioned to provide the type of political leadership he believed post-war America was lacking at the highest level.

By the time Eisenhower launched his campaign in 1952, though, he had come to view himself as the exact type of leader he felt America needed. On February 11th of 1952 Eisenhower declared: "Our times are tumultuous-people are returning to instinct, emotion, and sentiment. Responsibility is becoming again something real."¹³⁹ Shortly before his inauguration he privately noted his distaste for what he viewed as usual and toxic partisan politics.

¹³⁶ Eisenhower, *Eisenhower Diaries*, Nov. 28, 1959.

¹³⁷ Eisenhower, *Eisenhower Diaries*, Nov. 28, 1959.

¹³⁸ Eisenhower, *Eisenhower Diaries*, Nov. 28, 1959.

¹³⁹ Eisenhower, *Eisenhower Diaries*, Feb. 11, 1952, 214.

The real fact is that no one should be appointed to political office if he is a seeker after it. We can afford to have only those people in high political offices who cannot afford to take them. Patronage is almost a wicked word-by itself it could well-nigh defeat democracy.¹⁴⁰

Here Eisenhower expresses a characteristic fear both of a system that is dominated by party competition and a fear that too much power in the hands of public sentiment (in this case, in the form of a recently victorious president appointing only partisan allies to important posts) could ruin “democracy” itself.¹⁴¹ Eisenhower posits himself and his stature as a virtuous and disinterested leader as the antidote that American democracy needs. It is, certainly, fair to question both his motivations and his self-awareness. It is difficult to read his diary entries and the letters he wrote to friends during the late 40s and early 50s and find his years long refusal to consider a presidential run as sincere. It is also a notable stroke of egoism to imagine one’s self as the only citizen who has both the credentials and temperament to lead a nation out of a moral and political crisis.¹⁴² More importantly, though, it is possible to trace consistent and distinctive political thought on Eisenhower’s part. Understanding Eisenhower’s thought on the state, freedom, and society helps to provide a basis from which to understand his political decisions regarding specific issues and his guiding motivations as president.

¹⁴⁰ Eisenhower, *Eisenhower Diaries*, Jan. 5, 1953, 218.

¹⁴¹ This worry that democracies must be protected from becoming mere instruments of public whim is seen both in the American founders and in John Stuart Mill’s *On Liberty*.

¹⁴² Arguing that Eisenhower imagined early 1950s America in crisis is an easy task once one takes into account his views on the economic, political, and moral state of both the country and the Soviet Union at the time.

Eisenhower Situated in the Politics of his Time

The next chapter will explore Eisenhower's particular brand of conservatism in a more thorough manner, but it is important here to establish some of the political landscape of the 1950s, in order to see where Eisenhower fit within it. Though he had been a university president himself, Eisenhower opposed the growing trends within the academy which prized pure academic freedom for faculty members to express unpopular political opinions freely, along with the conception of a system that would not inculcate values within the student populations, but would instead allow individuals students to make up their own minds on even the most fundamental of questions. William Buckley notes in his famous book *God and Man at Yale* that in an address at Cornell, noted historian Edward Kirkland attacked Eisenhower for insisting, in Eisenhower's inaugural speech at Columbia, that universities should instill "The American Way of Life" in their students. Kirkland was also upset that Eisenhower had recently announced his support for loyalty oaths being required at some public universities, which were designed to prevent communist sympathizers from being in roles that could influence young Americans.¹⁴³

Historian and Republican strategist Geoffrey Kabaservice notes that Eisenhower's moderate Republicanism can only be fully understood as an outgrowth of the earlier progressive Republicans.¹⁴⁴ Eisenhower's moderation was not pure Progressivism, though. Instead, he picked up their willingness to accept technological and social changes of the time, their internationalist bent, and their enthusiasm for the idea that good government meant good management. Distinguishing himself, though, he was not eager to launch reforms and his

¹⁴³ William Buckley, *God and Man at Yale* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1951), 141.

¹⁴⁴ Geoffrey Kabaservice, *Rule and Ruin* (Oxford University Press, 2012), 21.

internationalism lacked “Wilsonian Moralism.”¹⁴⁵ This last point is confusing on its surface, because Eisenhower did not hesitate to use moral language and he frequently pitched the Cold War in the terms of good and evil. Unlike Wilson, though, Eisenhower felt that American power should be used to influence foreign domestic governments for the sake of democracy. He had no vision of a world governed by moral and self-determining peoples. In fact, he had little problem installing decidedly un-democratic leaders in foreign countries, for the sake of American interests. In contrast to Wilson’s vision Eisenhower hoped that American power would help to contain threats in the world to democracy, which in turn would make the world a better place, even for those who did not live in democratic regimes.

Though Eisenhower won two presidential elections and enjoyed wide public popularity, he would never achieve complete acceptance from the more conservative wing of his party. His refusal to attempt a dismantling of the New Deal, his comfort with large scale government action, and the fact that he was not committed fully to conservative ideology over a pragmatic consideration of politics infuriated thought leaders of true conservatism. William Buckley, for instance, writing during the 1956 presidential election argued that Eisenhower was not a true Republican, but was merely a “measured socialist” who could not be trusted with the fundamental task of fighting the growing state apparatus that Roosevelt’s Democrats had built.¹⁴⁶ Another critique from the ideological right was that Eisenhower was merely a liberal who was friendlier to big business than his predecessors had been. Still, this argument went, Eisenhower did not care for traditionalism and had no use for those who offered a counter liberal philosophy

¹⁴⁵ Kabaservice, *Rule and Ruin*, 21.

¹⁴⁶ Nash, *Conservative Intellectual Movement*, 236.

of politics.¹⁴⁷ Noted historian of conservatism George Nash contrasts the wide dissatisfaction with Eisenhower on the right with the former general's popularity nation wide. This, argues Nash, is evidence that Eisenhower was considered by everyone to be a centrist in his time.

¹⁴⁷ Nash, *Conservative Intellectual Movement*, 237.

CHAPTER 3

THE THREAT OF COMMUNISM

Communism is one of the most important themes for understanding Eisenhower's overall political thinking. It was a topic he addressed frequently throughout his presidency, both in public and private. It was, he felt, the most important issue in the history of the world. He conceived of communism as a five part threat. The rest of this chapter examines each of these five dimensions, beginning with the most fundamental and philosophical, then moving to the practical consequences of his thinking on the topic.

Existential

Most fundamentally Eisenhower believed that the threat of communism was a total one. The long-term fate of democracy was at stake, as was the potential for human flourishing around the world. In short, if communism was not stopped from expanding until the Soviet leadership was content, the entire world would be doomed to interminable misery of every kind, in Eisenhower's view. In thinking about the conflict holistically Eisenhower felt that the Soviet threat was, at its core, an existential one. In early 1956 Eisenhower asked a group of current and retired high ranking military officers to study a possible nuclear conflict with the Soviets and to attempt to project American losses. A diary entry from January 23rd of that year, merits quotation at length:

The report was in two parts, each based on a particular assumption as to a condition under which war might develop. The first anticipated no warning until our DEW¹⁴⁸ line was reached. The second anticipated a month of strategic warning...Under the first case the United States experienced practically total economic collapse, which could not be

¹⁴⁸ DEW stands for "distance early warning" and refers to a system of nuclear detectors in Canada and Alaska.

restored to any kind of operative conditions under six months to a year. Members of the federal government were wiped out and a new government had to be improvised by the states. Casualties were enormous. It was calculated that something on the order of 65 percent of the population would require some kind of medical care and, in most instances, no opportunity whatsoever to get it... While these things were going on, the damage inflicted by us against the Soviets was roughly three times greater. The picture of total destruction of the areas of lethal fallout, of serious fallout, and of at least some damage from fallout was appalling... For ourselves, it would be clear that there would be no shipping in and out of our country except some small or improvised vessels for many months. It would literally be a business of digging ourselves out of ashes, starting again.”¹⁴⁹

This reflection demonstrates that for all of his talk about America holding moral, political, and military advantages over the Soviets Eisenhower also understood the Cold War as something unique in the history of political rivalry. He had a sobriety about the inevitable physical and social destruction the world would experience should the conflict ever escalate to a nuclear war. Under these conditions, winning a war, in any traditional sense, would not be possible. The Soviets would likely suffer more damage than the United States, but both would be reduced to an economy, a government, and a society that no longer functioned.

Eisenhower’s greatest fear, then, was not that the Soviets would “win” an armed conflict, but that one would take place at all. This would seem to run counter to the type of language Eisenhower deployed when writing about America’s pre-war stance in the late 1930s. In his war memoir he criticized both the American government and population for refusing to accept the need for eventual American intervention in Europe. His calculus of America’s enemy had not changed, as he viewed both the Germans and the Soviets as much more formidable and much more evil than a usual foe, but his assessment for what a war would bring was much different in the 50s than it was in the 30s. It was appealing to imagine simply militarily defeating the Soviet Union, but it was not possible to seriously contemplate such an outcome, even in a best-case

¹⁴⁹ Eisenhower, *Eisenhower Diaries*, Jan. 23, 1956, 311-312.

scenario, without accepting that any war would mean the gravest military and civilian losses in American history.

A crisis would test this attitude just a few months after the Soviet launch of Sputnik jarred American citizens and policymakers alike Eisenhower delivered his sixth State of the Union address. Shortly after the perfunctory introductory remarks Eisenhower shifted his tone and starkly asserted that there were but two topics that merited the nation's current attention. The first was "to ensure our safety through strength"¹⁵⁰ and the second was to create peace. In bridging these two points he bluntly argued that:

We could make no more tragic mistake than merely to concentrate on military strength. For if we did only this, the future would hold nothing for the world but an Age of Terror. And so our second task is to do the constructive work of building a genuine peace. We must never become so preoccupied with our desire for military strength that we neglect those areas of economic development, trade, diplomacy, education, ideas, and principles where the foundations of real peace must be laid.¹⁵¹

Once again, Eisenhower found it his duty to remind the American people that the greatest threat of communism was not military destruction, but of an internal and holistic degradation of the American way of life to the point that such a thing would no longer meaningfully exist. It is especially noteworthy to find such commentary in this speech, because the mood of the country at the time was one of trepidation regarding the military situation. The Soviet satellite had inaugurated a new era of the conflict and, it was widely thought, of military technology more generally. And yet, though Eisenhower addressed questions of physical security in his address

¹⁵⁰ Dwight Eisenhower, State of the Union Address, Jan. 9, 1958. The American Presidency Project Archives. Last accessed February 18, 2017. Available at <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=11162>.

¹⁵¹ Eisenhower, State of the Union Address, Jan. 9, 1958.

he could not make it onto the second page of an eleven-page text without warning of the possibility of a permanent “Age of Terror” if Americans gave in to the temptation to put a desire for physical security above all else.

Famously, in his Farewell Address of January 1961, Eisenhower described communism as a “hostile ideology global in scope, atheistic in character, ruthless in purpose, and insidious in method.”¹⁵² In the same speech he went on to note that “until the latest of our world conflicts, the United States had no armaments industry. But now...we have been compelled to create a permanent armaments industry of vast proportions.”¹⁵³ At this juncture it may have seemed to his listeners that he had finally reconciled himself to an indefinitely large, expensive, and mobilized military. In one sense, he had. He no longer explicitly discussed slashing the military’s budget and he could no longer imagine a near-term future without a corporate arms industry in the United States. Importantly, though, he had not been converted from the skepticism of the start of his presidency about the American handling of the Cold War. He went on to lament the current conditions:

This conjunction of an immense military establishment and a large arms industry is new in the American experience. The total influence-economic, political, even spiritual-is felt in every city, every State house, every office of the Federal Government. We recognize the imperative need for this development. Yet we must not fail to comprehend its grave implications. Our toil, resources and livelihood are all involved; so is the very structure of our society.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵² Eisenhower, Farewell Address, Jan. 17, 1961.

¹⁵³ Eisenhower, Farewell Address, Jan. 17, 1961.

¹⁵⁴ Eisenhower, Farewell Address, Jan. 17, 1961.

Eisenhower accepts the “imperative need” for the size of the current military and the close relationship between the government and arms companies, but only for a limited time. This is a set of conditions, he hopes, will be temporary and will not return to American life once the imminent threat of global war passes. Examining the full context of Eisenhower’s thought makes it clear that he believed that America would win the Cold War, in the sense that it would outlast the Soviets as a world power. In cautioning Americans against becoming too comfortable with a large arms industry and a permanently large standing military, then, Eisenhower is counseling his country to worry about its future, even while it protects itself in the present. The connection comes most deeply from the toll the “total influence” of the new arrangement takes on American society. The cost, for Eisenhower, is a temporary, yet holistic degradation of the character of American life. The elevation of security had damaged America’s “economic, political, even spiritual” quality of life. This adverse impact of necessary defense efforts impacted citizens at every level of government and society. Eisenhower hoped that a sober awareness about the side effects of America’s military administered medicine would provide the people with the urgency that would be required to combat cultural weakening they faced.

Specifically, realizing that the current military situation was both historically un-American and philosophically opposed to the core tenets of the American project—for Eisenhower these fundamental distinctions included individual freedom, a balance between material success and non-material happiness, and the chance for individuals to live in harmony with each other and with God—would allow the American people to shift back to a less militant posture as quickly as possible and would help citizens to be on the lookout for ways that the military industrial complex may be negatively impacting their lives in ways that were not immediately obvious.

Taken together, Eisenhower's thought on communism is both coherent and careful. He has a specific paradigm through which he views not only communism, but the Soviet state and the Cold War itself. That Eisenhower does not ever specifically and fully outline the exact parameters of his thought on the subject is a consequence of his pragmatic style and penchant for focusing intently on a particular matter before him. A careful analysis of his thought, though, reveals that he viewed both individual crises and the general context of the entire Cold War through a lens that held communism to be an insidious, aggressive, and formidable challenge to America in every facet of existence. To meet this challenge, he thought, American citizens and policy makers needed to understand their enemy and needed to approach specific incidents with the mind of a technician, not merely the passion of a crusader.

Though Truman is usually described as the first notable anti-communist president, Eisenhower was, himself, an avid opponent of global communism. For Eisenhower this was not merely a political rivalry with the Soviet Union, but rather his opposition to communism was grounded in his ideological commitments. In fact, that many observers now view his own perception of his presidency as merely an exercise in defeating global communism. Though much of this dissertation is dedicated to disputing the notion that Eisenhower was little but a cold warrior while he occupied the White House this chapter will examine his views on communism. To understand his thought in this realm it is important to note that that Eisenhower's thought flowed from experience and not from a liberal education or an intentional desire to engage in philosophy. For Eisenhower, the Soviet state, its leadership, and its geopolitical maneuvers were inseparable from broad or theoretical communism. Because of this he often conflates communism and the Soviet state. The duration of this chapter will examine five dimensions of

communism that Eisenhower perceived as a threat to America and to human freedom. These overlapping, but importantly distinct dimensions of threat are: spiritual, ideological, economic, political, and existential.

Spiritual

Eisenhower often mused on the spiritual dynamic of a conflict. He excoriated the Germans in World War II for representing a system that attacked humankind not only with arms and propaganda, but also with a unique malaise of the soul. The Soviets, for Eisenhower, were even worse than the Nazis had been in terms of the scope of a spiritual risk to freedom and free peoples. After an initial tour of European capitals as NATO's chief Eisenhower traveled back to America to give informal reports both to Congress and to the American public. As he prepared his remarks he hoped to emphasize not only the material strength of Allied armies, but also "the spiritual vigor of the European peoples, who for years had labored...to repair the devastation of war, and having fought the creeping paralysis of Communism now found in the North Atlantic Treaty new hope."¹⁵⁵ This was important for Eisenhower because in his thinking spiritual strength tangibly contributed to military might. The Europeans, being freedom loving and right-minded peoples, possessed an unending resolve to defeat the Soviets, not merely because the Soviets were a geopolitical foe, but because global communism embodied an evil that could not be allowed to long persist if human prosperity were to survive.

One can argue that Eisenhower never adequately demonstrates a link between spiritual strength and material power, and it is beyond dispute that Eisenhower's rhetoric about the spiritual dimensions of the Cold War are often tinged with an idealism that can be surprising

¹⁵⁵ Eisenhower, *At Ease*, 368.

coming from a former general. Importantly, though, seeking to understand Eisenhower's assessment of the communist threat without understanding his conception of the Cold War as, in part, a spiritual conflict will prevent a scholar from fully appreciating his thinking on the central foreign policy issue of his presidency. The spiritual component of the conflict, for Eisenhower, was concerned with individual and collective attitudes about the relationship between the human and the divine, but it did not stop there. Eisenhower did not conceive of existence as having separate spheres for spiritual and practical matters, but rather he imagined a world where the spiritual was intimately entwined with all other categories of the human experience and, as such, could not be neglected in analyzing a political problem.

For Eisenhower, the spiritual threat of Communism required not only a willingness to fight for the western creeds of liberal democracy in the case of an actual war and a faith in an objective divine goodness but also necessitated a self-awareness about the costs of the Cold War. Historian Walter McDougall notes that "Eisenhower said over and over that the only way the United States could lose the Cold War was by militarizing its society, bankrupting its treasury, and exhausting Americans' will to resist."¹⁵⁶ At a news conference in 1953 Eisenhower elaborated his thoughts about the matter:

We must not destroy what we are attempting to defend. So, just as earnestly as I believe we must fight communism to the utmost, I believe that we must also fight any truly unjust, un-American way of uprooting them, because in the long run I think we will destroy ourselves if we use that kind of defense... That, I say, must be the true path for every real American: to oppose these ideologies, these doctrines that we believe will destroy our form of government, and at the same time, do it under methods where we don't destroy it. I can't define it any better than that.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁶ Walter McDougall, *Promised Land, Crusader State: The American Encounter with the World Since 1776* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1997), 170.

¹⁵⁷ Dwight Eisenhower, Press Conference, Washington D.C., Nov. 11, 1953. The American Presidency Project Archives. Last accessed February 18, 2017. Available at <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=9760>.

To Eisenhower, the Cold War presented the real threat that the democratic west could fear so much for its physical security that it would be willing to do anything to counter Soviet power. It was conceivable, in Eisenhower's thinking, to win the Cold War by defeating the Soviets economically and politically so as to avoid a nuclear conflict. If this victory was not achieved in a certain way, though, it would matter little for the nation's long-term prosperity. A drive for victory at all costs, even if it came in the cause of justified self-defense against an evil enemy could not be tolerated, if the good things about American democracy were to persist. And if America lost what was uniquely good about its character and political system, it would have lost the only thing it was defending. The Cold War, then, was about defending a way of life, not just defending literal life.

Ideological

Speaking at Dartmouth's graduation ceremony in June of 1953, just five months after taking office Eisenhower indirectly launched an attack on Joseph McCarthy, the noted communist hunter. After learning that the senator was encouraging the burning of non-approved books in Voice of America office libraries around the world Eisenhower quipped to the crowd of graduates: "Don't join the book burners...Don't be afraid to go in your library and read every book...How will we defeat communism unless we know what it is?"¹⁵⁸ Eisenhower often worried that a disdain for communism could too easily become a hatred that was blinded and therefore self-destructive. It was not only permissible, but indispensable for Americans to understand the nature of Communism's assessment of the human, politics, and the future.

¹⁵⁸ Smith, *Eisenhower in War and Peace*, 588-589.

Ignoring the claims of Soviet propagandists and communist sympathizers would leave American wholly unequipped to wage the ideological portion of the Cold War. Without addressing this dimension, Eisenhower believed, the long-term defeat of the Soviets would not be possible. Treating communism as nothing more than a military or economic threat did not merely underestimate the enemy, but misunderstood the fundamental nature of the conflict. Rather than worrying about exposing citizens to the ideas of communism, Eisenhower believed that political leaders should be sure to educate Americans about communism, so that its weaknesses would become evident.

Writing in the final chapter of *Waging Peace*, the memoir of his second term Eisenhower argued that the Soviet system could be understood in the following way: “Communism, no matter how it may be described or disguised, requires dictatorship as a condition its existence...This eliminates freedom of choice between their own and other ideologies.”¹⁵⁹ He conceived of the Cold War, in its most fundamental guise, as being a proxy for “the conflict between liberty and slavery,” which he noted was “as old as history as new as the latest tick of the clock.” This struggle between liberal democracy and Communism, between the Americans and the Soviets, was a signal of “the instinctive rebellion of men, descended from tribes that knew no law, except survival of the fittest.”¹⁶⁰ The Soviets were an ideological threat, because their system was a concretized version of man’s original sin. What the communist system provided, in Eisenhower’s mind, was a seductive temptation that asked unwitting peoples to remake the world according to their own desires. Communism, then, was a threat that needed to be met not only by force, but also by a superior articulation of better ideas.

¹⁵⁹ Eisenhower, *Waging Peace*, 625.

¹⁶⁰ Eisenhower, *Waging Peace*, 624.

After describing the political threat of communism in his 1959 State of the Union Address, Eisenhower went on to argue that one of the greatest weapons in the Soviet's ideological arsenal was an abuse of language. He argued:

We live, moreover, in a sea of semantic disorder...Police states are called people's democracies. Armed conquest of free people is called 'liberation.' Such slippery slogans make more difficult the problem of communicating true faith, facts, and beliefs.¹⁶¹

In Eisenhower's thinking the official Soviet use of distorted language was the sign of an evil and formidable ideological opponent. It would not do to merely shrug off Soviet use of language as incorrect, or manifestly and hilariously false. Instead, this dimension of the Cold War required an intentional and large-scale response. This response had two important components. "We must use language to enlighten the mind, not as the instrument of the studied innuendo and distorter of truth," Eisenhower argued. "And we must live by what we say," he continued.¹⁶² It was not enough to fight the Soviets materially and economically, nor was it enough to point out the hypocrisy in the Soviet creed and in official statements and namings. Rather, the task America and its allies needed to undertake, according to Eisenhower's recommendation, was one of both propagating a language that exalted democratic freedoms and denounced the ills of communism, while also living up to these stated ideals of justice and individual freedom. Either approach, if pursued alone, would be incomplete and would be susceptible to defeat by communist lies. In thinking this way, Eisenhower shows himself to imagine the ideological as a concrete part of politics, not merely a rhetorical or philosophical

¹⁶¹ Dwight Eisenhower, State of the Union Address, Jan. 9, 1959. The American Presidency Project Archives. Last accessed February 18, 2017. Available at <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=11685>.

¹⁶² Eisenhower, State of the Union Address, Jan. 9, 1959.

dimension that policymakers need not worry about. Understanding the particular ideological challenge of global communism, in Eisenhower's mind, was a necessary precursor to defeating the total Soviet threat.

Economic

The economic arena was the most obvious practical dimension of the Cold War for Eisenhower. This position was based on an observation of the political realities of the time. A military conflict may never come and, if it should, both sides would have likely already lost, as Eisenhower saw it. The war of ideas among non-aligned peoples was important as well, but that realm lacked the daily urgency that economic competition provided to both American and Soviet policy makers. For Eisenhower's part, he argued that increased developmental aid to foreign countries should be an American priority, because such aid would create larger and freer markets, would add to the world's population of consumers engaging in trade with America and American allies, and would build goodwill toward America. To this end, Eisenhower proposed the "Eisenhower Doctrine,"¹⁶³ which allowed countries under threat of Communist harassment to ask for direct aid from the United States. The aid provided would be a combination of military and economic assistance, depending on the nature of the threat. Critics of the economic assistance portion of the plan worried that, in the long-term, the plan may help to launch currently underdeveloped states into competitor status with the United States. Eisenhower conceded that this could be a long-term result, but countered that fear by arguing that such aid "has as its principal purpose the strengthening of freedom and the gradual exhaustion of

¹⁶³ U.S. Dept. of State, Office of the Historian, "The Eisenhower Doctrine: 1957." Last accessed March 7, 2016. Available at <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1953-1960/eisenhower-doctrine>.

Communism in the world.”¹⁶⁴ Put another way, Eisenhower believed that one of the chief ways to build goodwill and trust toward the American led Cold War alliance was to outbid formal and informal offers of Soviet aid to non-aligned states. The threat of a future economic rival should not deter Americans from meeting the more immediate threat of expanding Soviet influence.

In his first State of the Union address Eisenhower emphasized the need to integrate military planning with economic considerations. He argued for “the inescapable need for economic health and strength if we are to maintain adequate military power and exert influential leadership for peace in the world.”¹⁶⁵ The trick, for Eisenhower, was that he abhorred notions of centralized economic planning. How, then, could the American government unite its military and economic plans, while retaining full control of the one and little control of the other? Eisenhower hoped to solve this puzzle with the six following objectives: a balanced budget, reducing military spending, ensuring payment on government debt, fighting inflation, reducing taxes, and encouraging an increase in private enterprise.¹⁶⁶

Though the last point is so vague as to be of little help for the scholar’s purposes, the first five present the beginnings of a concrete and comprehensive fiscal policy. Here, we are provided with a glimpse of Eisenhower’s greatest hope for American economic life. He envisions a state that spends as little as is reasonable (though, not, as little as is possible), an economy that does not become reliant on government spending for economic growth, and a society that is driven by individual freedom which results, in part, in economic improvement.

¹⁶⁴ Eisenhower, Letter to Swede Hazlett, July 22, 1957, *Letters to a Friend*, 185.

¹⁶⁵ Dwight Eisenhower, State of the Union Address, Feb. 2, 1953. The American Presidency Project Archives. Last accessed February 18, 2017. Available at <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=9829>.

¹⁶⁶ Eisenhower, State of the Union Address, Feb. 2, 1953.

Though he does not mention communism in this section he does help us to understand what he most fears in the Cold War. When he notes, at other times, that the greatest threat the Soviets pose is the temptation for America to destroy itself by ruining its own character in pursuit of endless security he is expressing a fear that the five substantive economic points he lists in early 1953 will disappear from American life and with them, American freedom, peace, and contentedness will disappear as well.

Political

Most scholars have not analyzed Eisenhower's thinking about communism more deeply than only considering his version of the political threat. It is important to end here, rather than to begin here, because it is only by understanding Eisenhower's deeper thinking on the issue that his take on the political situation comes truly into focus. For Eisenhower the political threat included, but was not limited to the military threat the Soviets presented. Eisenhower viewed the Soviets as a looming political threat as early as the months just before America entered World War II.

In his final memoir, he recalled that "from 1941 onward, I had, because of personal experience, become increasingly sure that the Soviets would not look upon the United States as anything other than a potential enemy."¹⁶⁷ During the war, Eisenhower worked with other high-ranking officers to caution the Roosevelt administration against trusting the Soviets to act in good faith. "We did not openly refer to the Soviets as a potential enemy in those days," Eisenhower noted, because our political leaders were trying to develop working political

¹⁶⁷ Eisenhower, *At Ease*, 239.

agreements with them. But there was no doubt what we meant when we kept warning.”¹⁶⁸ What was meant, specifically, was that the United States would not be able to avoid a political conflict with the Soviets, regardless of the perception of goodwill being built during the common war effort in Europe. Shortly after the war, some advisors in the Truman administration began counseling the president to escalate America’s military posture in order to counter Soviet ambitions in Europe and to prepare for what they viewed as an inevitable war. Conversely, Eisenhower cautioned that not only was a Soviet war not yet inevitable, but also that conflict could not be treated primarily as a potential military matter. Instead, a balance of both military and economic strength, along with a calmness that allowed for the real possibility that war would not be necessary was the best way forward in Eisenhower’s mind.¹⁶⁹

Between the World War II’s immediate aftermath and the start of his presidency Eisenhower was asked to lead NATO. After serving as Columbia University’s from 1948 until 1951. Soon after accepting NATO command and arriving in Europe Eisenhower surveyed the military situation facing the Atlantic alliance and concluded that the “outlook was bleak for those of us who only five years before had fought a war to eradicate tyranny from the earth.”¹⁷⁰ He continued: “It now seemed that, at any moment, the arrogance of Communist power might be converted into offensive action against the West.”¹⁷¹ In response, Eisenhower believed that his first job, upon assuming NATO’s leadership, was to travel to the capitals of other alliance

¹⁶⁸ Eisenhower, *At Ease*, 319.

¹⁶⁹ Chester Pach and Elmo Richardson, *The Presidency of Dwight D. Eisenhower* (Lawrence, Kansas: Kansas University Press, 1991), 12-13.

¹⁷⁰ Eisenhower, *At Ease*, 364.

¹⁷¹ Eisenhower, *At Ease*, 364.

member states in order to personally convince their leaders of the urgent need for total commitment to a joint military strategy which had the sole purpose of defending against Soviet aggression and comprehensively defeating Soviet aims across the world. The strategy Eisenhower imagined, then, included an irreplaceable role for the military, but it was not a merely military approach. Put differently, Eisenhower believed that tending to physical defense and preparing for a possible full blown conflict was necessary, but he hoped to instill a bigger vision in his colleagues. He encouraged a strategy that imagined the military as but one tool in a large array of political dimensions of the conflict.

Later, when Eisenhower was sworn into the presidency he was immediately faced with a question about how he would broadly pursue foreign policy. Specifically, he had to make the concrete decision as to whether to retain NSC 68's¹⁷² analysis of the Cold War that Truman had relied upon in formulating his foreign policy. This paradigm held that the Soviets were bent on total world domination and that stopping this pernicious plot would require a full military and economic mobilization by the United States. In spite of this large-scale mobilization containment, not direct confrontation was to be the mode of combatting the Soviet Union Truman chose. Eisenhower quickly judged this analysis to be fundamentally flawed. In comparison, Eisenhower wanted a leaner and more agile military joined with better diplomacy. He aimed for a combination of striking secret deals with the Soviets at times, while opting for direct and public confrontation at other times. Though the Soviets were a substantial threat, he argued, the threat presented by the Cold War was not one of pure and unstoppable escalation. If American leaders embarked on Truman's plan for full mobilization in the short-term not only would the American

¹⁷² National Security Council Document 68 was presented to Truman in 1950 and argued for a rapid military to be largely completed by 1954. This buildup would be designed to counter perceived Soviet escalation.

people misunderstand the state of the conflict, but defense spending would balloon to a level that would damage the overall health of the economy. Even more troubling, for Eisenhower, was that this “permanent state of mobilization” would threaten the fundamentals of American political life.¹⁷³ Where Truman and his advisors saw in the Cold War a geopolitical threat which verged on overwhelming American capabilities for self-defense, Eisenhower saw a different kind of challenge: The possibility that the American people could, in an outbreak of hysteria, destroy themselves without any bullets being fired.

Rejecting NSC 68 was an important first step in Eisenhower’s foreign policy, but more was required. It was now up to Eisenhower and his administration to imagine a new suitable framework from which to view the Cold War. The new approach would come to be called the “New Look” and would include a significant reduction in military spending (The president’s request for military funding dropped by \$5 billion dollars from 1954 to 1955, when the New Look was adopted.), a reapportionment of funds (The army and navy would receive lower percentages of the total military budget, while the air force would receive a larger share.), and a new deterrence strategy to combat Soviet power. Rather than building up an overwhelming conventional force, Eisenhower hoped that a nuclear arsenal that would be sufficient for retaliatory purposes would be enough to dissuade the Soviets from starting a war.¹⁷⁴

The most important foreign policy issue during the early days of Eisenhower’s presidency was the state of the Korean War. Though worried about the spread of communism in Asia, Eisenhower felt that Truman had carelessly led the country into an imprudent war. Eisenhower used this position to campaign as a sort of anti-war president, whose judgment he

¹⁷³ Pach and Richardson, *Presidency of Dwight Eisenhower*, 76.

¹⁷⁴ Pach and Richardson, *Presidency of Dwight Eisenhower*, 81.

hoped would appeal to doves and hawks alike. Speaking in Detroit late in the campaign Eisenhower argued that the Korean conflict “was never inevitable, it was never inescapable.” The way things had unfolded had proven to be “a damning measure” of Truman’s abilities as a world leader.¹⁷⁵ Eisenhower then shifted his focus in the address from the ill-advised nature of American involvement in the war to an indictment that the ultimate cause of the war was that Truman failed “to turn back Communist ambition before it savagely attacked us. The Korean war—more than perhaps any other war in our history—simply and swiftly followed the collapse of our political defenses.”¹⁷⁶ In Eisenhower’s thinking fighting communism meant taking a holistic approach, which used military force as but one tool in a vast arsenal that would be required in order for lasting peace to be achieved.

Truman’s failure, in Eisenhower’s argument, was not that he did not sufficiently want to oppose communism, but that he did not understand the depth of the commitment that would be required to defeat it. The suggestion Eisenhower hoped voters would pick up is that he could be trusted to bring the necessary intellectual and moral resources to the Cold War that provided the west’s only hope for eventual safety from expansionary communism. The Korean War transitioned the Cold War into a real war and Eisenhower worried that if this became the normal condition of the American-Soviet rivalry, his long-term hope of ending communism through non military means would be doomed. Additionally, Eisenhower saw Korea as a preview of needless destruction that would come from conventional wars fought between democratic and communist

¹⁷⁵ Dwight Eisenhower, Campaign Speech delivered in Detroit, MI, Oct. 24, 1952. Eisenhower Presidential Library Archives. Last accessed February 18, 2017. Available at https://eisenhower.archives.gov/research/online_documents/korean_war/I_Shall_Go_To_Korea_1952_10_24.pdf.

¹⁷⁶ Eisenhower, Campaign Speech delivered in Detroit, MI, Oct. 24, 1952.

powers. While most policy makers at the time were primarily concerned about the possibility of a nuclear conflict, Eisenhower seemed to be equally worried about the prospect of an endless series of small and conventional wars fought as proxy conflicts, in place of a full blown nuclear war. Ending the Korean War was important for Eisenhower not only because he felt that the United States could not gain much from its continuation, but also because he hoped to turn the Cold War cold again.

Another illustrative set of examples of the New Look Policy is the two Taiwan Straits Crises. After the Korean War ended in 1953, Eisenhower ordered an end to the naval blockade that had been in place between China and Taiwan. He hoped that this would decrease tensions between Mao's China and Nationalist Taiwan. Both parties, though, became more aggressive in their military posturing once the American naval presence was removed. This led to a calculated response from Eisenhower, which sought to both avoid full scale armed conflict in the short-term, without leaving America's commitment to fight communism in the long-term in doubt. Specifically, in early 1955 Congress passed a resolution which Eisenhower signed that promised that the United States would defend Taiwan from an invasion from the mainland. Conversely, the United States would not assist Taiwan in a conflict in which it was the party that began the fighting.¹⁷⁷ This effectively ended the First Taiwan Crisis, as both sides backed off bellicose rhetoric and Mao stopped bombing islands occupied by Taiwan and claimed by China.

In 1958 the crisis began after Kai Shek reinforced the islands of Matsu and Quemoy. In response, Mao ordered the shelling of these islands and many in the region, including important members of Taiwan's political class, as well as American military officers, believed that a full

¹⁷⁷ "Taiwan Crisis," The Cold War Museum. Last accessed March 3, 2017. Available at www.coldwar.org/articles/50s/taiwan_crisis.asp.

invasion of Taiwan's home island would soon follow. Kai Shek sought permission from Eisenhower to retaliate against mainland China, while an American general in the region, along with the Joint Chiefs, counseled Eisenhower to be prepared to deploy tactical nuclear weapons¹⁷⁸, should China become more aggressive. Eisenhower, ever worried about the cost of an all-out war with another nuclear power, flatly refused to allow for any Taiwanese response to the bombardment. Instead, he began secret negotiations with Mao's officials in Warsaw, hoping for a diplomatic solution. Eisenhower hoped that the crisis would be settled by an agreement that would require Taiwan to demilitarize the particular islands that had been originally reinforced in exchange for a cessation of Chinese bombing and a promise that no invasion of Formosa would take place. Eisenhower biographer Jim Newton eloquently describes what happened:

Negotiations began in Warsaw on September 15, and after early posturing, China suspended its bombing on October 6. Taiwan reluctantly agreed-as if it had much choice-to scale back its military presence on the islands, though not to abandon them. China responded with a move that captured the lunatic order of the period. It resumed shelling on October 25, but only on odd-numbered days. Terror devolved into farce; the threat of devastation was transformed, Ike noted, into a "Gilbert and Sullivan war." The prospect of World War receded.¹⁷⁹

Looking back on this crisis now it is easy to imagine Eisenhower's moves as nothing more than the obvious choices of a reasonable leader. At the time, though, it was not at all clear that the New Look would produce better results than the more aggressive containment of Truman's presidency. During September of 1958 and at the height of the crisis Khrushchev sent

¹⁷⁸ These are small nuclear weapons that are designed to be used within specific battles against ground troops. Though using a weapon of this type would not necessarily constitute a full-nuclear war it carried the possibility of quick escalation, given that even a small nuclear weapon could be perceived by the other side as signaling a full nuclear conflict.

¹⁷⁹ Jim Newton, *Eisenhower: The White House Years* (New York: Anchor, 2011), 274-275.

a menacing telegraph to the White House and, by ignoring it, many in the American military establishment felt that the president was capitulating to the communist bullying. Navy Chief Arleigh Burke argued that the position that no political aim was worth risking a third world war was one of misguided naiveté and that such an attitude was the primary reason that the Soviets, as he saw it, had been winning the Cold War since its inception.¹⁸⁰

Diverging from military advisors and from a strong feeling that nuclear war with the Soviet sphere was inevitable demonstrates Eisenhower's independent thought in real time. He was not the only American to believe that staving off a nuclear war, even a limited one, was required at nearly any cost, but he was uniquely positioned to put his conviction into policy. His crisis management was guided most fundamentally by a conception of how he perceived the overall arch of the Cold War, which was, for Eisenhower, neither an interminable and abstract struggle between democracy and communism or a merely particular rivalry between two states without a deeper moral context. It was, rather, a concrete conflict wherein each side not only represented, but actually instantiated objective good and objective evil. The latter part of this formulation meant winning had to be America's highest foreign policy priority, yet it also meant that victory achieved at the cost of America's enduring hallmarks of goodness (as Eisenhower saw them) would, itself, be a defeat. The correctness of the conflict, though, meant that prudence was required, even if confronting Communism's evil would have to be delayed or reimagined in a way that did not include traditional military conflict.

¹⁸⁰ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1958-1960, Volume XIX, China, Document 62* (Washington: Government Printing Office).

Eisenhower's conception of the Soviet political challenge can be seen outside of crisis management as well. Two weeks before taking office Eisenhower recorded a lengthy diary entry that detailed both the excitement and trepidation he experienced as he reflected on the prospect of working with Winston Churchill in an official capacity again. In this note Eisenhower worried that Churchill did not understand how formidable of a political foe the Soviets had become. He put it this way:

Nationalism is on the march and world communism is taking advantage of that spirit of nationalism to cause dissension in the free world...Actually what is going on is that the communists are hoping to take advantage of the confusion resulting from destruction of existing relationships and in the difficulties and uncertainties of disrupted trade, security, and understandings—to further their aims of world revolution and the Kremlin's domination of all people.¹⁸¹

The Soviets were skillfully exploiting the global trend toward national self-determination, something that Eisenhower praised elsewhere, and if the Americans and British did not find a way to meet this challenge the Soviets would soon exercise a daunting amount of influence across the world. So Eisenhower's thinking went. The problem was not only a general one, but manifested itself in several specific and critically situated locations. Among the states Eisenhower worried could fall into the Soviet sphere none may have been more important than Mexico. Writing to a friend in July of 1954 Eisenhower noted that Mexico had influential Marxist elements in its domestic political climate. A former president, Lazaro Cardenas, was not only a communist sympathizer, but was broadly popular. Noting that he would not support tariffs on Mexican goods for fear that such a move would cause the Mexicans to embrace communism he wrote:

¹⁸¹ Eisenhower, *Eisenhower Diaries*, 223.

As of now we do not take too seriously any direct threat from Mexico. She is a weak country. But let her once form a partnership with Moscow and it takes no great imagination at all to see what would happen.¹⁸²

Eisenhower felt that American policy makers could not afford to think about any issue of foreign relations, be it trade, defense, or diplomacy, without accounting for the Soviet response. No sector of the world was unimportant in the political war with communism and no issue could be presumed to be unrelated to the broad context of the conflict. One particular incident which demonstrates Eisenhower's thinking on this front came in 1958, when Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev notified the world that the Soviet Union would soon end its occupation of East Germany and would recognize the East German state as an independent entity. The primary implication of this move, for the Cold War, was that this would mean that the western Allies would no longer have permission to occupy and defend West Berlin. Though Eisenhower admitted that the legal basis for continuing American presence was tenuous, he refused to withdraw American troops from the city.

The soundest basis for our remaining in Berlin, I felt, was our solemn obligation expressed to the two million Germans of West Berlin and to the entire world to stand by a city that had freely chosen to stay with the West and the cause of freedom. If our word to them would be broken, then no one in the world could have confidence in any pledge we made.¹⁸³

The impetus for staying, then, was twofold. The first was to protect the physical safety of West Berliners at a time when their existence as a democratic enclave with a prosperous economy was threatened. The more strategic reason for Eisenhower's firm stance in favor of a direct confrontation over the future of West Berlin is that he did not want to signal weakness to the Soviets or to American allies. The obvious symbolic importance of West Berlin, along with

¹⁸² Eisenhower, Letter to Swede Hazlett, July 20, 1954, *Letters to a Friend*, 128-133.

¹⁸³ Eisenhower, *Waging Peace*, 337-338.

the way that this particular crisis was playing out on the international stage meant that here, unlike in the Taiwan Straits, Eisenhower would not back down rhetorically or militarily. Though the standoff did not come to an outright war, Eisenhower was willing to accept such an outcome if the only alternative was surrendering West Berlin at the whim of the Soviet controlled East German government. Comparing the Taiwan Straits Crisis with the Soviet demand that the Americans abandon West Berlin reveals two distinct responses from Eisenhower. Importantly, this demonstrates that when it came to the military and political dimensions of the Cold War conflict Eisenhower possessed a pragmatic nature, rather than the orientation of a true hawk or a true dove.

Eisenhower and Peace

One of the most notable curiosities of the Eisenhower presidency was that he was elected largely because of the fame he won as one of the most important commanders in the largest war in the history of the world, yet he spent much more time talking about peace than he did musing on war. For Eisenhower, peace was not only a far away abstract goal, but something that either would or would not be achieved, depending on whether particular political objectives were met. I discuss his “Chance for Peace” speech elsewhere, but it is worth noting again here. This was the first public speech Eisenhower gave as president and it was broadcast on both television and radio. After speaking in specific terms about the virtues of America and the moral defects of the Soviet system he concluded in sweeping language that was representative of how he thought about peace. American policy under his administration would be aimed at “the lifting, from the backs and from the hearts of men, of their burden of arms and fears, so that they may find before

them a golden age of freedom and of peace.”¹⁸⁴ This “golden age of freedom and peace” was, for Eisenhower, a realistic and concrete possibility, but it required that the United States take specific actions to curb the spread of Soviet influence around the world.

His ruminations on peace were not limited to airy hopes for a better future that lacked specific content of thought. He often argued that money spent on the military was, though sometimes necessary, always a “sterile” use of funds, because that money would do more positive good for society if it were spent on schools, infrastructure, or another project that would enable both collective and individual prosperity. The military would never make America great and, in fact, was a threat to the things that were best about the American way of life. That it was a necessary tool meant that the sacrifices required of maintaining it were important, but the sacrifices were more than the potential loss of life or a mere economic hit: the greatest threat was a deeper potential menace that the American people would come to accept a perpetually large, expensive, and mobilized military as their new way of life. If this was a condition that lasted for too long, Eisenhower feared, his long-term vision of a peaceful America at the head of a peaceful and prosperous world would not be realized.

That Eisenhower was so concerned with peace may seem strange, at first glance, but it was part of a coherent way of thinking about the world for him. As importantly, it was a way of thinking that matched up with his life experiences. Though he bristled at his mother’s pacifism, he did grow up in a small religious community that was deeply committed to peace as a way of life. This influence can be seen in Eisenhower’s thinking and speaking peace, even though he does not readily acknowledge his religious upbringing as a source of his thought. Furthermore,

¹⁸⁴ Dwight Eisenhower, *The Chance for Peace*, April 16, 1953.

when he talked about war he often talked about it in the context of being legitimate only for the sake of establishing a peace as quickly and as fully as possible. He carried this line of thinking with him throughout his public life.

One of the last prominent public speeches he made came at the Republican National Convention in 1964. Peace, he argued, was a foundational Republican virtue and was a point on which the two parties substantively differed in their values and track record. Mentioning a recent poll that indicated that voters more trusted the Democrats to keep the country safe than the Republicans Eisenhower offered this rebuttal: “World War I, World War II, and the Korean War were started during Democratic administrations...it is hard to believe that an informed and impartial public should conclude Republicans are less able to keep peace than the Democrats.”¹⁸⁵ It is noteworthy that Eisenhower served two terms as president without entering or escalating a war. He was able to help effect a ceasefire in Korea and he declined to become involved in Vietnam. This was, in Eisenhower’s thinking, one of his important and conservative accomplishments.

The connection between Eisenhower’s emphasis on peace and his thinking about communism is one of the most important links between any two topics in all of his political thinking. The reasoning for being obsessive about communism was not only to win a conflict in the short-term, but to get on with the even more important business of, as he titled his second book, “Waging Peace.” This is what he viewed as his legacy and this is what he felt all patriotic and wise leaders should keep at the forefront of their minds always, even as they dealt with the contingencies of communism’s multi-faceted threat.

¹⁸⁵ Eisenhower, Speech to the Republican National Convention, San Francisco, CA, July 15, 1964.

CHAPTER 4

THE UNIQUENESS AND BASIC GOODNESS OF AMERICA

Eisenhower has been thought of by some thinkers¹⁸⁶ as a conservative ideologue, by some in his own party as a moderate who was not a conservative at all, by still more as a politician without substantive values on controversial political issues of his day. There is something valuable in each of these assessments, though each misunderstands Eisenhower's disposition and shortchanges his thought. Rather than fitting into one of these three categories Eisenhower was, instead of an ideologue, a pragmatic thinker committed to a particular kind of conservatism. Specifically, Eisenhower was fully committed to the idea of America's fundamental and unchanging goodness. A quick reading of many of his speeches will reveal language about America's greatness and goodness that does not seem to differentiate much from the way in which most presidents speak about America. Fred Greenstein described Eisenhower's political attitude about America as an "impatiently intense idealism"¹⁸⁷ that often manifested itself in anger toward American political and business leaders who, in Eisenhower's view, were too selfish to think of the common good. Eisenhower could not stand those who he felt did not both share and contribute to his vision of America as uniquely good and uniquely great. That America was both good and great was taken as a given in his mind and it is from this starting point that the fullness of his political thought flowed.

A closer examination of his writings, diaries, letters, and speeches shows that Eisenhower was politically and intellectually committed to the notion that there existed a fundamental

¹⁸⁶ Reinhold Niebuhr, Walter Lippmann, and William Lee Miller are among public intellectuals of Eisenhower's time who thought of him as a right-wing ideologue.

¹⁸⁷ Fred Greenstein, *The Hidden Hand Presidency*, (New York: Basic Books, 1983), 54.

essence to America and that this essence was good, essentially unalterable, and important for contemporary American politics and society. Put another way, Eisenhower's words and actions can only be understood if one first understands his conception of America and understands that this set of ideas was more important to him than any specific policy positions. The duration of this chapter will explore six dimensions of America according to Eisenhower. These include America's religious foundation, America as a land of continual progress toward a more just society, America as the antidote to fascism and communism, America as a land without social status, the combination of power and justice, and America as a just leader in international affairs. Finally, the chapter will conclude with a discussion about how Eisenhower, in light of how he viewed America, viewed himself as the ideal public servant for the American people.

America's Religious Foundation

In Eisenhower's thinking America had an explicitly religious founding and that fact mattered, perhaps more than any other, when it came to properly understanding the fabric of American communal life. Speaking shortly after his election in 1952 Eisenhower succinctly stated his view of America's relationship to religion in this way: "Our form of government has no sense unless it is founded in a deeply felt religious faith, and I don't care what it is."¹⁸⁸ In this quote both Eisenhower's blunt style and his peculiar sense of America's uniqueness are on

¹⁸⁸ Dwight Eisenhower, Address at the Freedoms Foundation, Waldorf-Astoria, New York City, Dec. 22, 1952, cited in Patrick Henry, "'And I Don't Care What It Is': The Tradition-History of a Civil Religion Proof-Text," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* (March 1981) 49, no. 1: 35.

display. He was not the type of culture warrior of the Christian Right that would arise in force in later decades, but he did believe America's religious heritage to be inescapably important for American politics in the present.

It is worth pondering Eisenhower's words here, both because they are often quoted and because they seem to make little sense. How could it be the case that someone would find a country's particular religious heritage vital to its political success, yet simultaneously conclude that the specifics of that religion are immaterial to judging its impact on the same country? The most likely scenario, when Eisenhower's thought is taken as a coherent whole, is that Eisenhower actually did care about the specifics of America's religion. It just so happened that American public religion at the time of his presidency coincided with Eisenhower's own view of what American religion could and should be composed of, if the country were to draw strength from it.

Eisenhower's "I don't care what it is" comment, in context, should be taken to mean that he is equally happy with any mix of Protestantism, Catholicism, and Judaism making up the dominant religious consensus. The particular and exclusive theological claims of each needed not be litigated in such a way as to exclude the others in order for America to function successfully, in Eisenhower's mind. Each of the three shared enough of a basic worldview and anthropological stance to get along with each other for the sake of the common good in the American system. At that time in America each of the three was composed mostly of traditionalist elements when it came to moral teachings and each was staunchly opposed to Soviet communism, for example. These shared fundamentals were the really important things for Eisenhower.

Writing to a friend in the summer of 1947 Eisenhower described his feeling about America's religious foundation:

I believe fanatically in the American form of democracy-a system that recognizes and protects the rights of the individual and that ascribes to the individual a dignity accruing to him because of his creation in the image of a supreme being and which rests upon the conviction that only through a system of free enterprise can this type of democracy be preserved.¹⁸⁹

This is an example of Eisenhower expressing his view that America's religious heritage remained important for current politics, but it is also a representative statement about his conception of America's distinctiveness. Democracy is not limited to America, of course, but the particular American instantiation of it was the best kind, in Eisenhower's view. Going further, he believed not only that America happened to be exemplary of the best kind of democracy, but that there were specific things about the country's history and common character that made it the best model. This theme, that America is a model for human prosperity and that the reasons for this are related to unique national traits is one of the most common in Eisenhower's writings, both public and private.

Speaking at his first inauguration he began to publicly describe how America's religious foundation should guide American policy. In a characteristically airy tone he argued:

We who are free must proclaim anew our faith. This faith is the abiding creed of our fathers. It is our faith in the deathless dignity of man, governed by eternal moral and natural laws. This faith defines our full view of life. It establishes, beyond debate, those gifts of the Creator that are man's inalienable rights, and that make all men equal in His sight... This faith rules our whole way of life.¹⁹⁰

It is noteworthy that Eisenhower capitalized references to god in the written text of his speech. In doing so, he is expressing his belief in a concretized divine being, not merely talking

¹⁸⁹ Eisenhower, Letter to Swede Hazlett, July 19, 1947, *Letters to a Friend*, 40-42.

¹⁹⁰ Eisenhower, First Inaugural Address, Jan. 20, 1953.

about a metaphorical source of human rights. Speaking for the first time as the new president he explicitly argued that America's religious origins were so important that they encompassed the nation's "full view of life." He notes that equality, which derives from a divine being, is "beyond debate" in the most fundamental of American creeds and calls this conception a "faith" that "rules" the entirety of America's social structure. Religion is the blood of America's body politic in Eisenhower's view. It is something indispensable to America, not only for philosophical, but for practical reasons as well. An America that is not in harmony with its own particular religious origins is, for Eisenhower, an impossible conception.¹⁹¹

The uniqueness of Eisenhower on this front can be better understood by comparing him to the other presidents who served in his era. Franklin Roosevelt, though a lifelong Anglican Church member seldom invoked the divine in his public speeches and was not apt to find much of a political use in religion.¹⁹² Like Roosevelt, Truman was a lifelong church member, a Baptist in his case, yet he frequently resorted to appeals rife with religious language as he made attempts at public persuasion.¹⁹³ What is even more striking is what these two had in common and how it contrasted with Eisenhower: both Roosevelt and Truman attended church services less frequently as they aged and their public duties increased. Conversely, Eisenhower spent most of his adult life not attending church, not claiming a specific denomination, and paying religion little

¹⁹¹ Late in his life, after his presidency, Eisenhower would come to worry that Americans were straying too far from the nation's religious heritage. For most of his life, though, he seems to reject this as a possibility. America not only needed to be faithful to its religious roots, but it would doubtlessly do so.

¹⁹² "God in the White House: From Washington to Obama—the presidents' religious beliefs and their impact on politics," God in America Project, Public Broadcasting Service. Last accessed Feb. 24, 2017. Available at www.pbs.org/godinamerica/god-in-the-white-house.

¹⁹³ "God in the White House," God in America Project.

attention in even his private letters and diary entries. Famously, just before he took office that changed. He joined a prominent Washington Presbyterian church, which he attended regularly. He also formed a friendship with that church's head pastor. Upon retiring to Gettysburg he joined a local Presbyterian congregation and again attended frequently and befriended the church's pastor. The man who had been a Jehovah's Witness as a child and, as best as we can tell, a Christian leaning deist for most of his adult life became a committed Presbyterian, spending his final years much in the same way later president Carter would more famously spend his post White House years: living in a small town, mostly away from the spotlight, and actively participating in a small church.

Strikingly, Eisenhower's use of religious language in public came at almost the exact time he decided he would attend church while in office. Beginning his first inaugural address with a prayer was a decision that surprised many at the time, but was representative of how he would consistently use his platform to invoke divine blessing on America for the duration of his presidency. A fierce debate among some scholars exists about whether this late faith was genuine for Eisenhower or whether, instead, it was the result of a calculation he made to achieve political success. While I have no answer for this question it is worth noting here, because it points to the level of frequency and intensity with which Eisenhower deployed religious language as president. He did not merely allow some casual mentions of the word "god" to appear in his speeches, echoing other presidents of his time, but instead made themes of the divine a constant refrain in his public appeals. This zeal of a convert style was new to the presidency when Eisenhower deployed it and it points to specific underpinnings of his political thought.

Continual Progress Toward a More Just Society

One of the distinctive features of Eisenhower's thought regarding America's uniqueness is that he saw a consistent progress in the country's social life being worked out in history. For example, in corresponding with Billy Graham while in office Eisenhower argued that churches and clergy members could help to promote increasing racial equality by pressuring federal courts, via an informal moral authority that could lead to a shift in attitudes on race among churchgoers. Eisenhower would be often criticized during his presidency by civil rights activists who believed he did not do enough to promote systematic change. Conversely, conservatives who opposed a change in the fundamental racial status saw in Eisenhower a racial equality crusader who had little care for the cultural norms of the time or the autonomy of local entities to manage racial affairs.

Though the next chapter will more fully explore Eisenhower on civil rights it is important to note here that the most important reason for this mixed image of his presidency related to racial issues springs from his mixed record of actions. This record resulted from Eisenhower's conviction that progress was being steadily, though slowly, achieved rather than from a confused sense of a long-term vision. The vision was holistic and coherent in that it included both a preferred end result and a desired method to help achieve this result. Eisenhower envisioned a future time when racial equality would permeate American society, but he was not willing to use his formal or informal powers as president to attempt to move too quickly on issues related to race. He was convinced that acting too quickly would prove pragmatically disastrous and the slow pace of change did not bother him, because he believed that positive changes were coming as quickly as possible.

One instance of Eisenhower expressing America's tendency toward social progress comes in a phrase at the end of his farewell address that reads, at first, like little more than a fluffy conclusion to a speech he wanted Americans to remember. Looking at it through the lens of his overall thought reveals that, in fact, he was articulating a clear conviction in America's intrinsic capacity for bringing about positive change to the world. Speaking about a post Cold War future, one in which the American form of government had triumphed peacefully but totally over the Soviet system he put it this way:

To all peoples of the world, I once more give expression to America's prayerful and continuing aspiration: We pray that peoples of all faiths, all races, all nations, may have their great human needs satisfied; that those now denied opportunity shall come to enjoy it to the full; that all who yearn for freedom may experience its spiritual blessings; that those who have freedom will understand, also, its heavy responsibilities; that all who are insensitive to the needs of others will learn charity; that the scourges of poverty, disease, and ignorance will be made to disappear from the earth, and that, in the goodness of time, all peoples will come to live together in a peace guaranteed by the binding force of mutual respect and love.¹⁹⁴

Though this paragraph sounds like the expression of a general Christian faith, rather than a description of America the two were often intertwined in Eisenhower's thinking. This particular passage came not only at the end of his Farewell Address, a traditional occasion for presidents to provide a combination of personal reflection and philosophical thought about America, but he described the paragraph as "America's prayerful and continuing aspiration." It is fitting that he felt no need to make a clear distinction between America's communal qualities and a broad Christianity. This type of religious faith, politically embodied, was the fundamental feature of America, to Eisenhower's thinking.

If the world could come to more resemble America, Eisenhower is arguing, it could make tangible progress toward improvements in the economic, political, and social fortunes of

¹⁹⁴ Eisenhower, Farewell Address, Jan. 17, 1961.

people everywhere. Eisenhower has no worries that specific people groups or certain civic traditions will have trouble incorporating American democracy. On the contrary, he believes that the only lasting hope for global prosperity specific, yet attainable. He seems to also be hinting here that America's greatest challenges are how it deals with external threats, not how well it adheres to the tenets of its own creed. The most important goal for the United States, under this reading of things, is to be sure to remain both an exemplar and an active force for the betterment of humanity. There is a messianic component to Eisenhower's thinking regarding that is as inescapable as his pragmatic instincts, which have more often been the topic of scholarly reflection on him.

America as an Antidote to Fascism and Communism

One way that Eisenhower conceived of America's uniqueness was to imagine it as the cure for totalitarian systems of government present in his day. Specifically, he saw America as an antidote to both fascism and communism, the two great enemies of his military and political career. Eisenhower believed that America was not only contextually in the right in World War II and the Cold War, but he also held that America's rightness in these conflicts stemmed from an underlying national virtue. American democracy, he believed, had specific characteristics that made it morally superior to and immune from becoming a totalitarian system.

One example of this was related to America's military history. At the beginning of World War Two America had never retained a large standing army during peace time. This was not a continuous, intentional decision by American policy makers over nearly two centuries as much as it was the result of America's roots in the traditional citizen-soldier model of the English-speaking world. Though the English had a standing army for several centuries by the

time of the Cold War, they went centuries existing as a cohesive political unit without a permanent force. Still, though, Eisenhower was pleased that the United States did not have a professional military culture throughout its history. During the Cold War, when military budgets soared and each branch of the armed forces grew into larger and more routinized bureaucracies Eisenhower lamented that this was not a state of affairs that could be sustainable if American democracy was to flourish in the future. The traditional model of a small American military that would be enlarged in the case of a crisis was, though rare among western powers, superior to a permanent and permanently large standing army because the latter system put the country in service to the military instead of the military being a tool for the country.

Though, on the whole, he was pleased with America's history of having a small army during peacetime he did have some concerns about how that tradition impacted the United States strategically in a world where American interests were becoming increasingly global. That the United States had not kept a fully mobilized military during peacetime was more than a historical point of interest, in Eisenhower's mind. He felt so strongly that Americans were not accustomed to the sacrifice demanded by large-scale war that he took it as a primary mission to create both a sense of investment and of confidence in American soldiers that the war in Europe could be won decisively. Reminiscing about the importance of the success of the Tunisian campaign, which came early during America's involvement in the war, he wrote that "the morale of the [2nd] corps had improved markedly since March 1 and it had a right to prove its own effectiveness as well as the quality of American arms."¹⁹⁵ Before the Tunisian victory Eisenhower noted that American soldiers seemed particularly bothered by European notions that American fighting forces were

¹⁹⁵ Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe*, 152.

not to be feared by enemies or relied upon by allies. After Tunisia, in Eisenhower's mind, American troops were cured not only of their combat inexperience, but of their cultural unfamiliarity with large-scale fighting.

Though Eisenhower treated this cultural unfamiliarity with war as both a strategic and tactical weakness at the outset of the war, he believed that the reason for this naiveté was America's unique goodness. Specifically, America had not spent its existence merely undertaking exercises of political rivalry and colonial conquest, but had, instead, built a society that had served as a model for what Eisenhower saw as the budding democratic spirit that was manifested in newly invigorated nationalist movements across the world. The American public had "an abhorrence of war"¹⁹⁶ that was historically ingrained and that, though temporarily strategically problematic in Eisenhower's view in the late 1930s, was a manifestation of the American national desire to live in harmony with the rest of the world.

The American military, then, was an important tool for American policymakers, but it could never helpfully become a central focus of national energy for a sustained period of time. Writing once more to his friend Swede Hazlett in 1956 Eisenhower bemoaned what he viewed as the military bureaucracy's obsession with ever growing budgets and an endless enlargement of personnel and weapons. "Let us not forget," he wrote "that the Armed Services are to defend a 'way of life,' not merely land, property, or lives."¹⁹⁷ He would go on in the same letter to speak about the need for "balance" when thinking about America's security challenges in the full context of economic, political, and moral communal life.

¹⁹⁶ Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe*, 7.

¹⁹⁷ Eisenhower, Letter to Swede Hazlett, Aug. 20, 1956, *Letters to a Friend*, 169.

The answers that American political and military leaders produced to questions about this balance, along with what the public focused its attention toward mattered in Eisenhower's mind, not only for the specific policy questions of the day, but the way in which how the balance between security and moral and economic prosperity, as Eisenhower envisioned it, was worked out reflected the underlying character of a country. "Possibly nations have some of the characteristics of the individual," Eisenhower wrote, "and we know many individuals who stand poverty with good grace grow insufferable and degenerate in character the moment they experience good fortune."¹⁹⁸ Eisenhower was clear about this metaphor in the same paragraph when he noted that "Some people doubt that it is possible for a free government to live too long...It looks as if we are having a chance to prove or disprove the charge."¹⁹⁹ American existence into the future was in the balance based on how the country handled its military-civilian relationship going forward.

In one instance of original thought Eisenhower noted that during the war he had come to hope for a program that would require each American male, upon reaching a certain age, to serve in the military in some capacity for 18 months, even during peacetime. Rather than leading to a culture that embraced a permanent and large standing army this proposal would, Eisenhower hoped, provide a much greater portion of the public with an intimate knowledge of military life, while also ensuring that the professional and permanent part of the force could remain small, as they would always be able to rely on young men who were serving their mandatory obligation for most tasks a peacetime military would need to accomplish.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁸ Eisenhower, Letter to Swede Hazlett, Jun. 24, 1957, *Letters to a Friend*, 181.

¹⁹⁹ Eisenhower, Letter to Swede Hazlett, Jun. 24, 1957, 181.

²⁰⁰ Eisenhower, Letter to Swede Hazlett, Sept. 12, 1950, *Letters to a Friend*, 80.

Though Eisenhower does not say much about this program and though he does not make a formal proposal to implement such a thing, even this quick reference to his thinking on the matter demonstrates that he had long been thinking about the enduring relationship of a practical political system and the enduring character of a polity. Eisenhower wanted a population that was competent and comfortable with military affairs, but one that did not rely on the military for financial or psychological security outside of instances of genuine crisis.

In the last chapter I discussed Eisenhower's sense that the Cold War presented much more than a physical threat to the United States. Here, it is plain why this matters for Eisenhower. If America is to thrive long into the future it must act in particular ways in the present. And that particular right way, according to Eisenhower, could be discovered by Americans understanding their own heritage and by exercising fidelity to the fundamental characteristics of the nation. It is fair, on this point, to charge Eisenhower with being so vague in his thinking that it is difficult to discern much in the way of practical guidance for American leaders or voters. Important for understanding Eisenhower's thinking, however, is realizing that he held a long, steady, and coherent conviction that America possessed fundamentally good and unique characteristics and that when the American people were faced with a tension about how to proceed the first and most important counsel Eisenhower would give would be an exhortation to look to what he viewed as a few basic and undisputed foundational ideals of American democracy.

America: A Land without Social Status

When speaking or writing about his childhood Eisenhower was quick to emphasize his roots as the son of farmers and to note that he was proud to have grown up in a small town. To hear Eisenhower describe what he viewed as an idyllic childhood in Abilene is to glimpse a vision of how he viewed America at its most characteristically good. For example, in a letter to Swede Hazlett, written in the fall of 1947, Eisenhower described a recent visit to his hometown this way: “I saw no significant physical change in the town-that is one corner of the country that seems to drift along in the even tenor of its ways, and its people are the happier for it.”²⁰¹

As Eisenhower penned this note he was officially the secretary of the army, but he was in a transitional phase of his career. He had already served as the American governor of occupied Germany, and he had not yet taken on either of his most prominent pre-presidential non army positions, that of serving as president of Columbia University and NATO’s first full-time commander. On this visit to Abilene, then, Eisenhower had more time to linger than he had had during his military career or than he would have later. The especially (for him) reflective tone of his letter suggests the extra thought he gave his hometown on this visit. Abilene was a place that both stood in contrast to most of contemporary America, yet was emblematic of the nation, as well. Eisenhower never displayed any interest in living in Abilene once after he left for West Point, and his visits were not as frequent as they could have been. Abilene was not a physical home once he reached adulthood for Eisenhower, yet it always remained a home for his imagination, and it was this function that helped Eisenhower to conceive of a particular America.

²⁰¹ Eisenhower, Letter to Swede Hazlett, Oct. 29, 1947, *Letters to a Friend*, 44.

The Combination of Power and Justice

Writing to a friend in August of 1956 Eisenhower described America's enduring hallmarks this way: "American strength is a combination of its economic, moral, and military force."²⁰² The full context of this quote was that Eisenhower had become exasperated at arguing with the Joint Chiefs of Staff about military expenditures and "coordination among the Services."²⁰³ He was angered that the Joint Chiefs could not see past their particular professional interests to the larger picture of holistic American strength.

One story from *Mandate for Change*, Eisenhower's first term memoir is illustrative of how he viewed the interaction between the American economy and the virtues of the American citizenry. He described a meeting with a businessman who had apparently asked Eisenhower to extend a particular tax that, though viewed unfavorably by the business community was judged by this particular man to be necessary in the short-term. Going on to argue that this incident represented something good and broad in American businesspeople he mused as follows:

He is a representative of the class that the so-called liberal is always calling 'thief,' 'robber,' 'economic tory,' and all of the other names that imply venality and utter selfishness. Of course, all of us are selfish. The instinct of self-preservation leads us into short-sightedness...often at the expense of our fellows. But the very least that we should attempt to do, it seems to me, is to think of our long term good...There is no future prosperity for any except as the whole shall prosper...END OF TIRADE!

In addition to the amusing capitalized sign-off Eisenhower is exhibiting one of his core convictions. Specifically, he is arguing that the incident with the businessman, though a seemingly unimportant one, is representative of a care for the common good that Americans usually possess. This unified cooperative spirit, on the most important questions, was one of the

²⁰² Eisenhower, Letter to Swede Hazlett, Aug. 20, 1956, *Letters to a Friend*, 168.

²⁰³ Eisenhower, Letter to Swede Hazlett, Aug. 20, 1956, *Letters to a Friend*, 168.

people's best attributes and was characteristic of them across social, economic, and generational lines. For Eisenhower, Americans were broadly committed to the success of the American project, which resulted in a faithfulness to the good things about America's character.

Economic prosperity, political power, and American democracy were tied together in Eisenhower's thinking. Speaking on Labor Day in 1953 he proclaimed that "the workers of America are witnesses, before the world, of the strength, the pride, and the prosperity that alone can be won by free labor." He went on to argue that free American workers "mock the false insinuation that economic well-being can be purchased only at the cost of political freedom." Instead, he noted, "free American labor has won for itself the enjoyment of a standard of living unmatched in history." He bragged that Americans had produced not only enough food for themselves, but enough to send to the "thousands suffering the peculiar torments of the proletarian paradise of Eastern Germany."²⁰⁴ A free political system was the foundation of a free economy and a free economy gave America not only the moral, but the political advantage over the Soviets and their satellites. America's success was inextricably tied to America's national goodness.

American Justice and Leadership in International Affairs

It is important to note that Eisenhower did not hold the position that the United States always acted in accord with its underlying high character. He held that human beings would always be subject to selfishness and mistakes and, because of this, the business of government would always be fraught with imperfect information, often questionable motives, and acts of

²⁰⁴ Dwight Eisenhower, Statement by the President: Labor Day, Washington D.C., Sept. 7, 1953. The American Presidency Project Archives. Last accessed February 18, 2017. Available at <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=9691>.

injustice. Even these aberrations, in Eisenhower's thinking, though, helped to demonstrate that the overriding character of the nation was good. For example, Eisenhower proudly recalled a speech he delivered in the first months of his presidency to the Organization of American States (OAS) wherein he admitted "all peoples, our nations-every one of them, the United States included-have at times been guilty of selfish and thoughtless actions."²⁰⁵ He would go on to note that in spite of this America remained committed to an "understanding and trust"²⁰⁶ throughout the Americas. While these comments themselves are important, it is more noteworthy that he included them in larger section of his book that covered America's leadership in the Cold War. This was a leadership, he thought, that was both benevolent and befitting of the American people's desire for both greatness and peace. The tone of his comments to the Latin American leaders, while seemingly intended as friendly,²⁰⁷ come across as patronizing. The reason for this is that Eisenhower took as a given that the United States was usually a good neighbor and most often acted out of more than mere self-interest. Both World War II and the Cold War served as concrete evidence that the United States was a powerful agent for good on the world stage. That the two dominant political conflicts of Eisenhower's adult life would be so easily translatable into a clear narrative of good and evil helped to make his starting belief in America's goodness a firm and lasting conviction.

²⁰⁵ Dwight Eisenhower, *Mandate for Change, 1953-1956* (New York: Doubleday, 1963), 149.

²⁰⁶ Eisenhower, *Mandate for Change*, 149.

²⁰⁷ He would use the word "friendship" to describe the relationship between the United States and Latin American states later in this chapter.

Eisenhower's enduring view that America had long played the role of international peacemaker and that it should continue to do so in the future is evidenced strongly by several incidents that seem too small for most Eisenhower scholars to remember. A chief example is the Jordan Valley Unified Water Plan, more often referred to as the Johnston Plan. This 1953 plan sought to permanently set the way that the Jordan River's resources would be split between Syria, Lebanon, Israel, and Jordan in a way that would satisfy all parties enough to prevent armed conflict over the water supply.²⁰⁸ Importantly, Eisenhower specifically dispatched diplomat Eric Johnston to help negotiate the plan when it seemed clear that no peaceful solution would be quickly forthcoming from the Middle Eastern states themselves.

After an initial round of negotiating in person with both Arab and Israeli leaders Johnston returned to the White House to give Eisenhower a personal briefing on the progress of the talks. According to newspaper reporting at the time Johnston noted that though the plan was designed, on its face, to fairly divide water rights, the proposal's deeper goal was to bring lasting peace in the region between Arabs and their newly arrived Jewish neighbors. Specifically, Johnston and Eisenhower believed that if water rights were agreed upon new areas of Jordanian land would be fit for settlement and this, they hoped, would provide a home for many of the Palestinian refugees and prevent ongoing conflict between the Israeli state and the Palestinians

²⁰⁸ David Phillips et al. "The Jordan River Basin: 1. Clarification of the Allocations in the Johnston Plan," *Water International* (2007) 32, no. 1: 16-38.

living in and around Israel.²⁰⁹ Eisenhower's vision for Johnston's mission, then, was to use American leadership to create permanent peace in a region that had already become violent in the half-decade since Israel's 1948 founding.

This incident is noteworthy, because it is one of the first times that an American president sought to use American power and prestige as a way of mediating peace in a distant region of the world. The commonly accepted beginning of formal American enduring dominance on the international stage is the founding of the United Nations, but this incident is of a different kind. The U.N. is an institutional body that was set up to be a long-term and regular actor in world politics. What Eisenhower did, in deploying Johnston, was to send a special envoy for a specific mission at a particular time.

That this mission was to the Middle East was also important. Unlike in Southeast Asia, Latin America, or Iran the Levant was not full of governments whose loyalty could conceivably be won or bought by either the Americans or the Soviets. Israel was a new liberal democracy, while Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon all had large populations of religiously serious Muslims and the latter two states also contained significant numbers of Christians. An alliance with the Soviets would have been unlikely or impossible on ideological grounds alone. Eisenhower, then, was acting out of a conception of American power and American goodness that saw the United States as a moral, as well as a political authority in the world.

In 1956, Eisenhower launched a program that was emblematic of his belief that the United States would be best served by being an international leader in the promotion of human rights. Speaking at a conference launching the "People to People Program," which would allow

²⁰⁹ "Eric Johnston Reports to Eisenhower on Middle East Mission," *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, Nov. 18, 1953. Available at <http://www.jta.org/1953/11/18/archive/eric-johnston-reports-to-eisenhower-on-middle-east-mission>.

Americans to travel abroad to learn about the culture of another place, while serving as messengers of America's democratic ideals to the host country, Eisenhower articulated the soaring hopes he had for the venture. "The purpose of this meeting," he announced, "[was] the most worthwhile purpose there is in the world today: to help build the road to peace, to help build the road to an enduring peace."²¹⁰ American initiative in the realm of cross-national understanding was important politically, not only culturally, in Eisenhower's view. He posed two "problems" in the form of questions that he hoped the new program would address. "How do we dispel ignorance?," he asked, followed by wondering "How do we present our own case?"²¹¹ The reason that these issues presented important challenge to be met, he felt, was because the Soviets were committed to engaging in ideological warfare against the democratic world.

He noted, "The Communist way, of course, is to subject everything to the control of the state and to start out with a very great propaganda program all laid out in its details."²¹² American efforts at public outreach to the third world were qualitatively "different."²¹³ The United States relied on "the forces of initiative, independent action, and independent thinking of 168 million people." This system was available to any nation that would take it up as their own, Eisenhower believed. And, the more that did adopt the American systems of enterprise and government, the safer the world would be from the threat of large-scale war. In addition to more

²¹⁰ Dwight Eisenhower, Speech at The People to People Conference, Washington, D.C., Sept. 11, 1956. The American Presidency Project Archives. Last accessed February 18, 2017. Available at <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=10599>.

²¹¹ Eisenhower, People to People Conference, Sept. 11, 1956.

²¹² Eisenhower, People to People Conference, Sept. 11, 1956.

²¹³ Eisenhower, People to People Conference, Sept. 11, 1956.

security, increasing percentages of the world's population could reasonably expect material prosperity in their lifetimes. All of this, without exception, was good for America. Yet again this is a case where Eisenhower is insistent that what is good for America is good for the entire world and vice versa. Without American leadership, unfortunately, such increased prosperity and happiness would not be possible. No other western nation had either the ability or ideological purity to meet the Soviet challenge in this arena. The choice for Americans was stark: either take an active and missionary role in helping the world to see the universal value of capitalistic democracy or risk the failure of the system at the hands of Soviet influence which, unchecked, would lead to inevitable armed conflict that would be too costly for anyone to bear. This is yet another example of Eisenhower conflating American Christianity with what he viewed as America's political mission. For Eisenhower, the lines between pure and civic religion did not need to be sharply drawn, at least not as related to matters of public policy. Religion could inform citizens about what large goals were worth pursuing and the practical working out of those goals, would serve the health of American religion, while it accomplished tasks for the American political system.

Eisenhower as Eisenhower's Ideal Public Servant

Perhaps the most basic Eisenhower conviction regarding America's distinctiveness was that he believed that the public, in most cases, possessed a wisdom that helped to avoid a political environment dominated by partisanship. This moderation, as he saw it, meant that American voters were motivated by a sense of the common good and that they expected their politicians to be independent minded figures who eschewed partisan interest when it conflicted with the public good. Additionally, Eisenhower believed that there really could be a specific

common good that provided for the chance to create policy to benefit a wide segment of society and that the content of this common good could be known in most cases. Because he wanted to be seen as the ideal type of public servant he expected the American people to demand that he publicly describe himself as neither a conservative or a liberal, but rather as someone who took a position on particular issues based on what would benefit “America as a whole.”²¹⁴ Selfish partisans existed on both the left and the right and they both had to be resisted, according to his public pronouncements. Instead, politics should be conducted through a “middle way,” whereby political leaders were partisans of America only.²¹⁵

Rhetoric about serving the full country’s interests and Eisenhower’s claims that he was essentially free of partisan motivation was not a rare or ill-considered tactic. One noteworthy examples of Eisenhower’s view of himself is also one of the most instructive. Just before he began the 1952 campaign a personal friend gifted him a copy of a letter George Washington had written to an acquaintance just before his own presidency. Eisenhower somberly noted that he “was struck by the solemn concern expressed by Washington as he proceeded ‘to embark again on the tempestuous and uncertain ocean of public life.’”²¹⁶ After quoting Washington’s hopes and fears at length Eisenhower concluded his reflections on his initial campaign: “It was with much the same feeling expressed by General Washington, but also with the expectation of new experiences and new opportunities for service, that my wife and I now turned toward the future that loomed before us.”²¹⁷

²¹⁴ Eisenhower, *Mandate for Change*, 8.

²¹⁵ Eisenhower, *Mandate for Change*, 11.

²¹⁶ Eisenhower, *Mandate for Change*, 25.

²¹⁷ Eisenhower, *Mandate for Change*, 25.

Eisenhower would never explicitly admit in public or to himself that he viewed himself as a Washington figure, but it was no accident that he chose the premier American symbol of non-partisan public spiritedness as his inspiration at the outset of his presidency. For Eisenhower, as for many Americans, Washington embodied the highest example of service to the country and was a figure to be emulated. Even more importantly, though, Eisenhower's casting of himself as a successor to Washington in more than the merely presidential sense was directly related to his view of the American people. The American citizenry, in Eisenhower's view, demanded, produced, and was loyal to figures who existed above the partisan fray that engulfed lesser nations and lesser men. For Eisenhower America was different, it was better, and it required a unique type of leadership. The best example of a political community in the history of the world, as Eisenhower saw America, deserved a leader that was up to the moral task, not merely the pragmatic duties that would come to the president.

In conclusion, Eisenhower conceived of America as a political community that, through a specific historical experience and through a commitment to both moral goodness and national greatness by its citizenry had ascended, in his lifetime, to become a benevolent world power. That America's moral capabilities to lead the world honorably had existed since its founding in Eisenhower's mind was important, but the nation did not reach its full potential until that moral goodness was joined with a combination of political, economic, and military power large enough to exert notable influence on the world stage. A new superpower shepherd of peace needed not only competent leadership, but leaders who also believed passionately in America's mission of global stewardship abroad and in its role as a moral exemplar in domestic affairs.

Eisenhower, in thinking about himself, saw just the figure who could lead the country in a way that would both harness its material power and lead it further down the road of moral goodness. Eisenhower saw himself, then, as a figure who had the combination of formal power, naturally endowed gifts, and a sufficiently strong character to help America achieve new heights of greatness. Far from being a president who did not think coherently about or often about politics, Eisenhower was committed to a holistic vision of American history and politics. This vision would guide his political and ethical sensibilities and would give him fodder for his presidential agenda. It is fair to note that Eisenhower was not a systematic thinker and it is reasonable to critique much of his thought related to America as being simple, naive, or too full of self-praise. Nevertheless, his conception of America, America's place in the world, and his place in leading America in the world was the result of years of both experience and thought. In this way, though not a philosopher, Eisenhower was a persistent political thinker.

CHAPTER 5

EISENHOWER'S CONSERVATISM AS GRADUALISM

Eisenhower is an important historical figure in both the Republican Party and in postwar American conservatism. Rarely, though, is he thought of as an important intellectual figure for these entities. This chapter seeks to demonstrate that Eisenhower was both a thoughtful and committed conservative, though one of a particular kind. In order to illustrate the argument the remaining pages will address Eisenhower's non-partisan posture, his conception of the "corporate commonwealth," his record on civil rights, his thoughts on the military industrial complex, and his positions on a range of economic issues.

Writing during Eisenhower's presidency British philosopher Michael Oakeshott defined conservatism not as "a creed or a doctrine, but a disposition."²¹⁸ We have not evidence and no reason to speculate that Eisenhower took note of Oakeshott's work. This, though, makes the fact that Eisenhower fits Oakeshott's description of a conservative so well especially important. Oakeshott did not have Eisenhower in mind as he wrote and Eisenhower was not attempting to live an image put forth by an academic. Instead, Eisenhower is an example of Oakeshott's thesis of conservatism only because Eisenhower was a conservative. Some of the most important features of conservatism, according to Oakeshott, are "a propensity to use and to enjoy what is available rather than to wish for or to look for something else; to delight in in what is present rather than what was or what may be."²¹⁹ In terms of spending government money,

²¹⁸ Michael Oakeshott, "On Being Conservative," in *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays* (Carmel, Indiana: Liberty Fund Press, 1991 [orig. 1956]), 168.

²¹⁹ Oakeshott, "On Being Conservative," 168.

conceptualizing his vision for America's highest possible ideal for communal life, and in his attitude about politics Eisenhower was a conservative according to this definition.

Eisenhower's Non-Partisan Posture

Prior to accepting the Republican nomination for president in 1952, Eisenhower had been courted by some Democrats to run as their party's candidate in 1948.²²⁰ Though he declined the summons, this incident would later serve as a chief reason that citizens and analysts alike believed that Eisenhower lacked partisan convictions. His relative quiet on political matters did extend beyond his formal army career and into his time as Columbia's president, head of NATO, and informal advisor to the Washington security community. In addition to his lack of political talk he also envisioned himself as someone who both above partisan battles. Recalling how he viewed himself shortly before he entered the political realm he wrote in one of his memoirs the following:

My feeling about such issues had long convinced me that it would be impossible for me ever to adopt a political philosophy so narrow as to merit the label "liberal," or "conservative," or anything of the sort. I came to believe, as I do to this day, that an individual can only examine and decide for himself each issue in a framework of philosophic conviction dedicated to responsible progress—always in the light of what he believes is good for America as a whole—and let the pundits hang the labels as they may.²²¹

Eisenhower enjoyed and cultivated the sense in others that he was not a man of partisan conviction and he embraced that same idea in his own self-reflection. Taking Eisenhower at his word about whether he was a partisan would always leave one concluding that he was not only

²²⁰ Alonzo Hamby, "1948 Democratic Convention: The South Secedes Again," *Smithsonian Magazine*, August 2008. Last accessed June 7, 2016. Available at <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/1948-democratic-convention-878284/>.

²²¹ Eisenhower, *Mandate for Change*, 8-9.

disinterested in ideologically driven politics, but that he himself had no ideological beliefs to draw from. A closer examination, though, demonstrates otherwise. If, instead of looking to Eisenhower's words about whether he was a partisan we turn to the broader corpus of his speeches, public writings, and private reflections a different picture emerges. It is true that Eisenhower was neither a lifelong politician nor a movement conservative. It was on this very point that some in the party objected to his nomination. This wing supported Senator Robert Taft, the son of his more famous father who had previously served as Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. Robert Taft's Republican and conservative credentials were unquestionable and lifelong. In this context, Eisenhower appeared to be an outsider not only to the party, but to the foundational ideals of conservatism. Once the historical context of Eisenhower's rise to power is understood, though, it is possible to see that he spent decades holding and developing a certain kind of conservative disposition. Specifically, he was committed to conservatism as gradualism. The best articulation of this that he gave came, ironically, in the above-mentioned quote where he insists that he is not a partisan. Rather than this insistence the phrase "responsible progress" is the key to understanding his particular kind of conservatism.

Though I will argue that Eisenhower's statements denying a true partisan allegiance should not be taken as credible on their face, there is something to be learned about him in them. For example, one window into both his basic political orientation and the style with which he thought about the world came at a 1949 speech delivered to the American Bar Association's annual convention. In this talk, Eisenhower outlined what he called "the middle way."²²² He imagined politics as being a similar exercise to military conflict. In both, he thought, "cowards" hid behind "slogans" but run away from an active engagement with the task at hand. This

²²² Eisenhower, *Mandate for Change*, 11.

passage merits quoting at length, because in this paragraph Eisenhower shows that he has little respect for hyper partisans, yet that he is a conservative himself. This is also an example of how he often used clichéd military metaphors to express a level of political thought that was deeper than the tone betrayed. He said:

The frightened, the defeated, the coward, and the knave run to the flanks, straggling out of the battle under the cover of slogans, false formulas, and appeals to passion—a welcome sight to an alert enemy. When the center weakens piecemeal, disintegration and annihilation are only steps away, in a battle of arms or of political philosophies. The clear-sighted and the courageous, fortunately, keep fighting in the middle of the war. They are determined that we shall not lose our freedoms, either to the unbearable selfishness of vested interest, or through the blindness of those who, protesting devotion to the public welfare, falsely declare that only government can bring us happiness, security, and opportunity.²²³

In this speech Eisenhower both posits himself as a non-partisan and asserts the most fundamental conservative dictum of the day: That the gravest threat to American freedom, domestically, lay with those who advocated for too much government involvement in society and in the lives of individuals. This drift toward statism, as Eisenhower and other prominent conservatives saw it, had to be reversed at both the popular and policy levels if America were to prosper long-term.

Despite this reserve, though, Eisenhower had long held to a fundamentally conservative political outlook. Writing in 1949, for example, Eisenhower lamented the negative impact he felt increased taxes were having on donations to Columbia, where he was then president. He began his diary reflection on the matter by noting that “the trend toward governmental centralization continues, alarmingly.”²²⁴ By this point, the American government’s bureaucracy had already grown so pervasive as to “cover the land” and to infringe on matters of small

²²³ Eisenhower, *Mandate for Change*, 11.

²²⁴ Eisenhower, *Eisenhower Diaries*, Jan. 14, 1949, 153.

business, the flow of the free market, and the autonomy of citizens. The harm done to private universities that relied on donations for their survival came from the fact that the wealthiest philanthropists were paying such high sums in taxes that they no longer had the disposable income to spend on charitable causes, in Eisenhower's analysis. Worse than the strained fundraising situation in Eisenhower's mind was that many academic officials hoped to make up the shortfall by courting monetary aid from the federal government itself.

Though he conceded that some small and specifically directed aid would be helpful to private colleges, he feared that large streams of income coming from the government would centralize the administration of higher education and would prevent universities from being excellent. To those who were advocating for a large expansion of aid programs Eisenhower had stinging words: "The proposition is immoral, and its adoption, in this general sense, will lead to statism and, therefore, slavery."²²⁵ For Eisenhower this was not an isolated issue, nor a passing concern. Instead, he viewed this debate as emblematic of the larger disagreements in American society about how prominent of an economic role the government should play in areas that had previously been left to state and local governments or private individuals or organizations. In the specific case of universities Eisenhower noted that "the best way to establish dictatorship is to get control of the educational processes in any country."²²⁶ Eisenhower was further frustrated, because he felt that he was one of a rare few in the academic world who understood the issue clearly. He lamented that "there seems to be little awareness of what is happening to us." The

²²⁵ Eisenhower, *Eisenhower Diaries*, Jan. 14, 1949, 153.

²²⁶ Eisenhower, *Eisenhower Diaries*, Jan. 14, 1949, 154.

majority of Columbia's leaders, in Eisenhower's view, were shortsighted and did not worry at all about the long-term risks of relying too heavily on a financial structure that had the potential to strip the university of its status as an independent entity.

Though Eisenhower remained the president of Columbia until he took office as president of the United States he unofficially, but substantially turned away from his duties in that position to become the supreme commander of NATO in 1950. In this role he was both politically quiet and focused nearly exclusively on foreign relations. For that reason, it is best to jump to the beginning of his presidency to continue to analyze his conservatism. One concrete example of Eisenhower's conservatism in action was his appointment of Albert Cole to head the Department of Housing and Home Finance.²²⁷ Under Cole's leadership, the federal government took a more distant stance toward discrimination in housing compared to the Truman administration.²²⁸ A recent review of Eisenhower's housing department conducted by political scientists Lamb and Nye found that Eisenhower did not specifically direct Cole to be less aggressive in looking for housing discrimination than Truman's department had been. Instead, Eisenhower kept a hands-off approach to Cole's work, because he knew that Cole represented his boss's disposition against federal intervention in local and state matters.²²⁹ Eisenhower's conservatism was evident here both because he was not enthusiastic about forcing federal policy on localities in what had traditionally been a state matter and because he did not have an appetite for a grand program that sought to revolutionize the way that housing was administered across the country. There is

²²⁷ This is the department now most commonly known as "HUD."

²²⁸ Charles Lamb and Adam Nye, "Do Presidents Control Bureaucracy? The Federal Housing Administration during the Truman-Eisenhower Era," *Political Science Quarterly*, (Fall 2012) 127, no. 3: 445-467.

²²⁹ Lamb and Nye, "Do Presidents Control Bureaucracy?" 460-461.

another way that Eisenhower's conservatism was on display in the appointment and management of Cole. By not giving Cole a specific agenda to carry out, but instead allowing him to manage his department as he saw fit Eisenhower was taking a hands-off approach of delegation.

Eisenhower's "Corporate Commonwealth"

Though he was weary of sweeping government involvement in the economy, he was not an unrestrained capitalist. As Eisenhower scholar Robert Griffith put it, he wanted "to resolve what he saw as the contradictions of modern capitalism and to create a harmonious corporate society, without class conflict, unbridled acquisitiveness, and contentious party politics."²³⁰ Part of government's job in encouraging this "corporate commonwealth"²³¹ was to "prevent or correct abuses springing from the unregulated practice of a private economy."²³²

The most illustrative example of the corporate commonwealth vision is also Eisenhower's most remembered legacy. Eisenhower came into office planning to modernize America's infrastructure specifically by creating an interstate highway system through a cooperative effort between federal, state, and local governments. In order to determine how best to proceed Eisenhower appointed friend Gen. Lucius Clay to head a study group, in August of 1954. Specifically, the committee was charged with recommending a funding scheme that would be efficient, would satisfy governors, and would enable a smooth transition to large-scale

²³⁰ Griffith, "Eisenhower and the Corporate Commonwealth," 88.

²³¹ Griffith, "Eisenhower and the Corporate Commonwealth," 88.

²³² Griffith, "Eisenhower and the Corporate Commonwealth," 92.

public works, if the ongoing recession worsened.²³³ Clay did succeed in appointing figures from a range of backgrounds to his committee, including bankers, teamsters, engineers, and car company executives. As a result, the committee's findings, many of which were adopted into the Interstate Highway Act of 1956, proved valuable at modernizing the country's transportation grid. Critics, though, would note that the lack of voices concerned about environmental impact, existing community disruption, the long-term use of farm lands, or the design of cities would lead to construction that, in many locales, harmed social and economic systems which were beneficial to the already present citizens.²³⁴

Though the criticisms that have been levied against the Clay Committee regarding a lack of foresight that went beyond the economics of the matter are largely fair, the important thing to note regarding this chapter was that Eisenhower believed that a transformational project was possible in America, but only if there was willful cooperation between various levels of government, and between private citizens and their elected officials. Here, Eisenhower's optimism about America's capability to effectively join resources in a great time of need, and his expectation that the country's citizens and leaders will be able to find a substantive common ground when the national interest is at stake is on display. He believes that a great task can be accomplished and that it will make a noticeable difference in the lives of all Americans, in this case it will be a catalyst for economic prosperity that will reach across class, geographic region, and partisan affiliation. Eisenhower is not a progressive, though, as he does not believe that the arms of government should be used alone to improve conditions, even when the proposed

²³³ Richard Weingroff, "General Lucius D. Clay – The President's Man," *Highway History*, U.S. Dept. of Transportation, Fed. Highway Administration. Last accessed June 27, 2016. Available at <https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/infrastructure/clay.cfm>.

²³⁴ Griffith, "Eisenhower and the Corporate Commonwealth," 106.

solution is large and costly. Rather, Eisenhower envisions a venture project of this nature being, at heart, an intentional action of the people's collective will. The federal government is one engine which they must use in order to accomplish such a large task, but many other entities must be involved if the project is to be viable.

Civil Rights: Champion or Enemy?

When commentators analyze Eisenhower's civil rights record they often look only at a few of the highest profile cases on the issue of his presidency. While this chapter will explore some of the most important of these cases later, it is first important to establish that Eisenhower's thought and action on the matter began long before he took office. For example, he issued an order in March of 1944 demanding the equal treatment of soldiers, regardless of race, by all officers under his command, he helped to persuade George Marshall that black troops should be allowed in combat roles, and in 1946 he suggested to his brother, Milton (the new president of Kansas State University), that he should require all students to take a citizenship class which would have the "elimination of racial intolerance" as one of its chief goals.²³⁵ Shortly after taking office he acted to integrate schools on military bases and created a committee designed to end racial discrimination by federal contractors.²³⁶ It is also noteworthy that of his five Supreme Court appointees, none were southerners and that he was reportedly angry with southern congressional members who added late amendments to the 1957 Civil Rights Act, which were thought to weaken some of the law's new protections.²³⁷

²³⁵ David Goldfield, "Border Men," *Journal of Southern History* (Feb. 2014) 80, no. 1: 7-38.

²³⁶ Goldfield, "Border Men."

²³⁷ Goldfield, "Border Men."

The first landmark civil rights issue of Eisenhower's presidency was the *Brown v. Board* decision, which required the eventual racial integration of public schools. In the lead up to the case's arguments interest groups and political leaders on each side of the separate but equal question lobbied the president to officially weigh in on the case on their behalf. Before making the final decision to allow Attorney General Herbert Brownell to, following his own conviction, file an amicus brief arguing that the decades old system of legal segregation be struck down, Eisenhower heard arguments from both sides and made known his own preference to avoid giving the appearance of executive meddling in the Supreme Court's affairs.

For example, in an exchange with South Carolina governor James Byrnes, Eisenhower refrained from taking a clear position on the case before the court, but noted that he believed that "separate but equal" was likely doomed in the long term, because it was a confusing legal standard with no clear government body having the authority to regularly determine what did and did not meet the equal part of the doctrine.²³⁸ Though Eisenhower's biographers are at odds about whether he privately supported the court's 1954 decision, examining his actual actions surrounding the case present a more complicated picture than someone who merely was excited or disappointed by the particulars of the decision. For example, in March of 1953 (just two months into his presidency) Eisenhower ordered all schools on military bases to be racially integrated by the following academic year.²³⁹ He sent simple replies to the governors of Texas

²³⁸ Dwight Eisenhower, Letter to Gov. James Byrnes, Dec. 1, 1953. Eisenhower Presidential Library Archives. Last accessed February 18, 2017. Available at https://www.eisenhower.archives.gov/research/online_documents/civil_rights_brown_v_boe/1953_12_1_DDE_to_Byrnes.pdf.

²³⁹ Dwight Eisenhower, Memorandum to Concerning Segregation in Schools on Army Posts, Mar. 25, 1953. The American Presidency Project Archives. Last accessed February 18, 2017. Available at <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=9803>.

and Louisiana, assuring them that he would forward their letters to Brownell for consideration, after each had written to him requesting his assistance in defending the status quo. Writing to Swede in the fall of 1953 Eisenhower again refrained from making his wishes for the Court decision known, but did predict that could would “be very moderate and accord a maximum of initiative to local courts.”²⁴⁰

Though Eisenhower portrayed himself as ambivalent about the Court’s decision in 1954 he would later become more resolute in his views. The most famous policy decision he made related to Brown was, of course, using the military in the Little Rock Crisis of 1957. Around the same time, however, he privately vented that the Court’s decision was imprudent and was based on a faulty understanding of human nature. Again writing to Swede in May of 1957 (just a few months before the Little Rock Crisis took place) Eisenhower argued that expecting full scale integration so quickly was foolish. “Law are rarely effective unless they represent the will of the majority,” he began. “When emotions are deeply stirred logic and reason must operate gradually,” he continued. Because *Plessy v. Ferguson* had been decided almost sixty years before Brown, Eisenhower emphasized that most southern whites believed segregation to be not only moral, but unassailably legal. Given that reality, he felt, only a gradual process of integration had a chance to succeed and to proceed without substantial unrest.²⁴¹ Here is a core example of Eisenhower’s conservative gradualism. He is neither the arch traditionalist that refuses to accept change on moral, legal, or traditional grounds nor the progressive who is actively seeking ways to bring about societal improvement quickly and on a grand scale. Rather,

²⁴⁰ Eisenhower, Letter to Swede Hazlett, Oct. 23, 1954, *Letters to a Friend*, 134-135.

²⁴¹ Eisenhower, Letter to Swede Hazlett, July 22, 1957, *Letters to a Friend*, 183-189.

he hopes for the eventual improvement of social conditions, but believes that pursuing a goal so large requires time, patience, and an acceptance that the ideal is rarely practical in matters of cultural overhaul.

A second important civil rights episode that illustrated Eisenhower's core approach to the issue was the murder of Emmett Till in Mississippi in 1955. Till was from Chicago and was visiting relatives in the south when he was abducted, tortured, and killed for having been thought to have been flirting with a white female resident of the town. This lynching galvanized the civil rights movement, since it happened to such a young boy and because Till's mother, Mamie decided to hold an open-casket funeral so that the extent of the violence done to Emmett would be publicly visible. A few days after Till's death the editor of the *Chicago Defender*, a nationally known African-American newspaper telegraphed the White House to ask if any formal action would be taken related to the murder.²⁴² The next day J. William Barba, an assistant to the president, replied that Eisenhower had delegated the matter of federal response to the Justice Department and that, so far, they had not found "any facts which provide a basis for Federal jurisdiction or action."²⁴³

It is important to note the administration's first response to a call for presidential action, because it reveals Eisenhower's basic disposition on high profile incidents involving civil rights. Specifically, he sought to avoid federal involvement in the enforcement of laws, unless there

²⁴² *Chicago Defender* Telegram to Dwight Eisenhower, Sept. 1, 1955. Eisenhower Presidential Library Archives. Last accessed February 18, 2017. Available at https://www.eisenhower.archives.gov/research/online_documents/civil_rights_emmett_till_case/1955_09_01_Chicago_Defender_to_DDE.pdf.

²⁴³ J. William Barba Telegram in Reply to *Chicago Defender*, Sept. 2, 1955. Eisenhower Presidential Library Archives. Last accessed February 18, 2017. Available at https://www.eisenhower.archives.gov/research/online_documents/civil_rights_emmett_till_case/1955_09_02_Barba_to_Chicago_Defender.pdf.

were extraordinary circumstances that would prevent state or local authorities from properly handling the matter themselves. On the same day Barba wrote back to the *Defender* Mamie Till, Emmett's mother, sent a message to Eisenhower "pleading that [Eisenhower] personally see that justice is meted out to all persons involved in the beastly lynching of [Emmett}." ²⁴⁴ She closed the letter by noting that she would wait for a personal reply from the president. Eisenhower held firm that, as far as he could tell, there remained not legal justification or practical usefulness to potential federal involvement in any aspect of the case.

The public controversy over the case, though, did not subside quickly. 10,000 mourners attended Till's funeral in Chicago. Later, when the all white jury in Mississippi acquitted the two suspects there were protests of 20,000 in Chicago and 10,000 in Harlem. ²⁴⁵ Later in the fall Frederic Morrow (a special assistant to Eisenhower and the first African-American to hold an executive position in White House history) began receiving messages from members of the black community urging him to urge the president to act. One message in particular stood out. William Beverly, publisher of the *Pittsburgh Courier* and future ambassador to Liberia under both Nixon and Carter, wrote to Morrow to advise him that even if Eisenhower did not wish to act formally, an official statement condemning Till's murder would go a long way in quelling some of the anger at inaction within the black community. In November Morrow wrote a classified memo to Eisenhower and argued for some type of official action. After noting that his experience as a former NAACP field director made him especially able to spot racial tension he

²⁴⁴ Mamie Bradley, Telegram to Dwight Eisenhower, Sept. 2, 1955. Eisenhower Presidential Library Archives. Last accessed February 18, 2017. Available at https://www.eisenhower.archives.gov/research/online_documents/civil_rights_emmett_till_case/1955_09_02_Bradley_to_DDE.pdf.

²⁴⁵ Allan Jalon, "1955 Killing Sparked Civil Rights Revolution: Emmett Till: South's Legend and Legacy," *Los Angeles Times*, Oct. 7, 1985.

reported that in his official travels throughout the country black citizens everywhere were angry and saddened that the administration had not yet taken even a small action in the case. He warned that if the president did not act he risked allowing racial tension to explode into needless violence. He put it this way: “The warning signs in the South are all too clear: the harassed Negro is sullen, bitter, and talking strongly of retaliation whenever future situations dictate.”²⁴⁶ He described a frightful social situation in Mississippi that teetered on the edge of a full-blown race war. The white citizens councils were engaging in “economic terrorism” and had created a climate of “fear and terrorism that holds the entire area in a vise.”²⁴⁷

Meanwhile, he argued that black Mississippians were themselves beginning to organize in ways that were designed to meet violence with violence. Inaction on this case meant allowing a large portion of the country to succumb to fruitless bloodshed, Morrow argued. Additionally, Morrow aimed at Eisenhower’s particular conservatism by noting that though it seemed prudent to refrain from acting in this case, it was actually the more dangerous course. The world, not only black Americans, were watching and Morrow feared that Eisenhower’s caution was creating a multi-pronged crisis. One example of international attention the case received came a month before Morrow’s memo. A group called the Norwegian Students Association sent a telegram addressed to Mamie Till expressing condolences after the American embassy would not aid the delivery of the message.²⁴⁸

²⁴⁶ E. Frederick Morrow, Memorandum to Dwight Eisenhower, Nov. 22, 1955. Eisenhower Presidential Library Archives. Last accessed February 18, 2017. Available at https://www.eisenhower.archives.gov/research/online_documents/civil_rights_emmett_till_case/1955_11_22_MDR_re_Till.pdf.

²⁴⁷ Morrow, Memo to Dwight Eisenhower, Nov. 22, 1955.

²⁴⁸ Norwegian Students Association, Telegram to Mamie Till, Oct. 15, 1955. Eisenhower Presidential Library Archives. Last accessed February 18, 2017. Available at

A couple of months after Morrow's recommendation cabinet secretary Maxwell Rabb asked White House Staff Secretary Andrew Goodpaster to advise Eisenhower that, at the least, a form letter should be composed and sent to each of the over 3,000 citizens who had written directly to the White House asking for federal action. To not respond at all, Rabb worried, would be to "miss the boat" regarding public opinion.²⁴⁹ This is an important illustration of Eisenhower's starting place on Civil Rights, because this is the rare case where we have a record of public pressure combining with the counsel of some of his most trusted advisors to advise a course of action that Eisenhower was not comfortable taking.

That Eisenhower was firm in his conviction that the Till murder gave the federal government no cause for intervention and that he was sure that gradual progress on civil rights was real and enough can be seen in the State of the Union Address he delivered in 1956, a few months after the murder. In this speech he did not mention Till, did not allude to the case itself, and refrained from mentioning tension in Mississippi or the broader south. Instead, he argued, "Unprecedented advances in civil rights have been made" and, he announced, "we are proud of the progress our people have made in the field of civil rights."²⁵⁰ He would go on to note that America's international stature had increased because of recent extensions in domestic civil rights. For Eisenhower, it was more important that broad progress was being made, as he saw it, in access to housing, jobs, and the integration of schools on military bases. To dwell (or even

https://www.eisenhower.archives.gov/research/online_documents/civil_rights_emmett_till_case/1955_10_15_Resolution.pdf.

²⁴⁹ Maxwell Rabb, Memorandum to Andrew Goodpaster, Jan. 6, 1956. Eisenhower Presidential Library Archives. Last accessed February 18, 2017. Available at https://www.eisenhower.archives.gov/research/online_documents/civil_rights_emmett_till_case/1956_01_06_Memo.pdf.

²⁵⁰ Dwight Eisenhower, State of the Union Address, Jan. 5, 1956.

publicly mention) Emmett Till's murder, Eisenhower feared, would be to risk an improper influence over a state matter and would involve the presidency in a controversy that would benefit neither the office nor the people.

The other high profile civil rights incident of the Eisenhower presidency was the Little Rock Crisis of 1957. Since I have already explored that episode in a previous chapter relating to Eisenhower's view of executive power I will not rehash it here. It is important to note, though, that Eisenhower did act decisively in a way that pleased many black citizens and civil rights advocates and angered many southern whites. In addition to deploying military forces to Central High School, Eisenhower signed the Civil Rights Act of 1957 into law just days after the Arkansas crisis had subsided. This bill was the first piece of federal legislation on Civil Rights since reconstruction and provided for the protection of voting rights, dedicated a portion of the Justice Department's resources exclusively to civil rights, and made it a federal crime to violate another citizen's civil rights.²⁵¹

In addition to the high profile case of the Till murder and the Little Rock Crisis Eisenhower was consistent in his gradualist perspective on civil rights in small exchanges. For instance, Jackie Robinson wrote to Eisenhower in May of 1958 requesting that the president stop asking African-Americans to be patient in hoping for civil rights progress. After applauding the president for the action he took in Little Rock he asks for a bolder public statement about the need for faster civil rights progress. He wrote:

²⁵¹ "Civil Rights Act of 1957," *Civil Rights Digital Library*. Last accessed June 21, 2016. Available at www.crdl.edu.

As the chief executive of our nation, I respectfully suggest that you unwittingly crush the spirit of freedom in Negroes by constantly urging forbearance and give hope to those pro-segregation leaders like Gov. Faubus who would take from us even those freedoms which we now enjoy. Your own experience with Gov. Faubus is proof enough that forbearance and not eventual integration is the goal the pro-segregation leaders seek.²⁵²

By this point, Robinson's major league debut was over a decade behind him and he was a nationally known and respected civil rights figure, in addition to being an athletic hero to many. The ambivalence toward Eisenhower's civil rights record that he displays in this letter is an attitude that was common among civil rights champions of the time. Characteristic of how he handled high level correspondence while in office, Eisenhower replied with a short and cordial, yet ultimately dismissive letter. He contended that he urged patience as a means to progress, rather than a substitute for it. He also commended Robinson for being one of the most important leaders in guiding America toward eventual full social and political equality. He insisted that progress had been made and that Americans, especially African-Americans, ought to be proud of the achievements in civil rights over the past few years. Unfortunately for Robinson, Eisenhower's letter did not explicitly denounce the morality of segregation, but rather treated it as a policy problem to be carefully and slowly dealt with over a period of years.

Important to understanding Eisenhower's political thought is understanding that he should not be classified as either a hero or opponent of civil rights. He did not support racial discrimination culturally or legally, but he was never prepared to launch a moral or total crusade against it. In Eisenhower's thinking there were even greater evils than segregation and the chance of political instability at home while facing communism abroad was chief on the list.

²⁵² Jackie Robinson, Letter to Dwight Eisenhower, May 26, 1958. Eisenhower Presidential Library Archives. Last accessed February 18, 2017. Available at <https://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/jackie-robinson/letter-1958.html>.

The Threat of the Military Industrial Complex

Though Eisenhower cherished his military career and appeared to always remain prouder of his role in WWII than of any accomplishment he achieved while president, he viewed the military as a necessary evil, not something to be intrinsically celebrated. He put it this way: “The one thing that disturbs me is the readiness of people to discuss war as a means of advancing peace.”²⁵³ During his first campaign he noted in a speech that military forces were “nonproductive, sterile organizations whose purposes are, at the best, largely negative.”²⁵⁴ He was convinced of the unalterable need for a strong military for America, and he never waived that serving in the military was an honorable and selfless thing. He was careful to not lose sight, though, of the notion that, ultimately, the military’s actions resulted in a loss of wealth, life, and happiness.

Perhaps Eisenhower’s most memorable phrase came in his Farewell Address. Just a few days before he would leave the office, Eisenhower used his final chance to address the American people as president by cautioning against the trajectory of civil-military relations. Using blunter language than he previously had on the subject when making public remarks he argued: “In the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military industrial complex.”²⁵⁵ For Eisenhower, the problem of an increasing reliance on military might alone was a fundamental threat to the traditional American system of freedom. Eisenhower showed the nuance of his position and

²⁵³ Dwight Eisenhower, Letter to John Sheldon Doud, quoted in Griffith, “Eisenhower and the Corporate Commonwealth,” 95.

²⁵⁴ Griffith, “Eisenhower and the Corporate Commonwealth,” 95.

²⁵⁵ Eisenhower, Farewell Address, Jan. 17, 1961.

incrementally prepared his audience for his conclusion about the dangers of the military industrial complex by first praising America's commitment to building a world class set of armed forces.

After noting the necessity of a strong military, though, he quickly pivoted to the substance of his present concern. He reminded Americans that a permanent "arms industry" had never existed in America until after WWII. Furthermore, he was disturbed that the United States government had come to have a higher annual arms budget "than the net income of all United States corporations."²⁵⁶ He went on to define the impact of this new and colossal arms industry as multi-faceted. The consequences were "economic, political, even spiritual" and extended far beyond the bureaucratic corridors of Washington. This problem was absolute, it impacted the lives of regular Americans, and its threat to become all-encompassing for American society was grave in Eisenhower's thinking. Though he viewed America as intrinsically good and the American people as collectively virtuous he did think that such things were an absolute protection against the threat of the military industrial complex. "The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist,"²⁵⁷ he noted. Eisenhower cautioned that Americans of the present and future would do well to vigilantly look for instances where the combination of industry, arms, government funding, and a social prioritizing of defense over all else would become pernicious.

This is one of the strangest facets of Eisenhower's thought. He was committed, not only in word, but through policy to the notion that America would possess the most powerful conventional army and nuclear arsenal in the world. Simultaneously, he consistently viewed a

²⁵⁶ Eisenhower, Farewell Address, Jan. 17, 1961.

²⁵⁷ Eisenhower, Farewell Address, Jan. 17, 1961.

large, permanent standing army as a threat to America's basic way of life. Existing perpetually with a huge army, prioritizing new military technology over all else, and looking to win all conflicts primarily through physical force were all better suited to Soviet ideology than to American sensibilities. The United States and conservatism, in Eisenhower's thinking were fundamentally about both domestic and international peace. An entrenched relationship between big business and a large military could not, over time, avoid being a threat to this commitment to peace.

Speaking directly about the most basic danger of this confluence he sharply commanded "we must never let the weight of this combination endanger our liberties or democratic processes."²⁵⁸ In terms of traditional American liberty, Eisenhower instructed that "we should take nothing for granted."²⁵⁹ The only hope for "security and liberty" to "prosper together" was for "an alert and knowledgeable citizenry" to "compel the proper meshing of the huge industrial and military machinery of defense with our peaceful methods and goals."²⁶⁰ He did not fear a corruption of the collective American character that would result in the American public being motivated by conquest or selfish goals. Rather, he feared that the citizens of his country would drift, unknowingly, to adopt a permanent policy of perpetually increasing armament, and, that this, in turn, would result in a national community whose deepest priorities had been abandoned and whose citizens suffered for it.

Though the Farewell Address is Eisenhower's most famous exploration of the military industrial complex his root ideas on the subject had been developing for years by the time he

²⁵⁸ Eisenhower, Farewell Address, Jan. 17, 1961.

²⁵⁹ Eisenhower, Farewell Address, Jan. 17, 1961.

²⁶⁰ Eisenhower, Farewell Address, Jan. 17, 1961.

spoke in 1961. For example, writing to a friend in September of 1950 Eisenhower contended that “We, in America, have never liked to face up to the problem arising out of the conflicting considerations of national security on the one hand and economic and financial solvency on the other.”²⁶¹ In order to address the problem, from a policy perspective, Eisenhower suggested that the American military be relatively small in peacetime, but that it develop a “striking force” that would be both reasonably inexpensive to maintain and would provide American leaders with the ability to command a quick response to a military crisis. If the crisis were large enough, the thinking went, larger forces could be mobilized and, if needed, drafted to join the fight.

This option, in Eisenhower’s thinking, captured the possibility of allowing Americans both to be prepared in the new, Cold War dominated international landscape, while permitting them to continue to spend most of their energy and resources on peaceful pursuits which were likely to bring in more money and more happiness. Speaking about the issue in philosophical terms Eisenhower argued that “It has always been obvious that a democracy, even one as rich as ours, could not maintain in peace the force in being that could promptly and successfully meet any trouble that might arise in any portion of the globe.”²⁶² He continued to note the possibility of several crises happening at the same time and in different parts of the world.

The deeper issue, though, was that Eisenhower did not believe it would be possible for American democracy to maintain the things that made it unique and good if the citizens and government became too focused on security alone. That the solution had to come from a determined effort by the citizenry to remain free of the military-industrial complex was clear in his thinking. No bureaucratic solution, nor a reliance on the prudence of the leaders of the armed

²⁶¹ Eisenhower, Letter to Swede Hazlett, Sept. 12, 1950, *Letters to a Friend*, 78-81.

²⁶² Eisenhower, Letter to Swede Hazlett, Sept. 12, 1950, *Letters to a Friend*, 78-81.

forces would be successful in staving off the threat in the long-term. In 1949 he put it this way: “Since a democracy must always retain a waiting, strategically defensive, attitude it is mandatory that some middle line be determined between desirable strength and unbearable cost.”²⁶³ Now that the branches of the military had been enlarged and professionalized each one would have an unending appetite for appropriations, Eisenhower feared. Perhaps most troubling was that it would be easy not only for the military to make loud demands for more resources, but that such demands would likely appear reasonable to a citizen who was not balancing the usefulness of a new weapon or program with the holistic impact it would have on American life. The democratic citizen’s job, then, was to serve as both a supporter of a needed military apparatus and a watchdog against the military establishment’s desire for economic and political control over the society.

Eisenhower’s views about the military industrial complex make up an important part of his conservatism, because they help to illustrate the type of society he envisioned for America. Eisenhower believed in America’s basic goodness and felt that the country had a knack for working out domestic problems that threatened individual liberty and communal prosperity. If only Americans would realize the fundamental good in their system and in their political community they would not be quick to make drastic changes to the type of life they had lived together unless those changes were required for continued economic success. It is on this last point where Eisenhower’s conservatism coherently distinguishes between a large and new government undertaking, such as the interstate highway system, and a different large and costly government program, in this case the military industrial complex. The former, for Eisenhower, helped Americans to better live out their happy and healthy lives together, while the latter was a

²⁶³ Eisenhower, Letter to Swede Hazlett, April 27, 1949, *Letters to a Friend*, 53-55.

financial, philosophical, and political burden to lasting American success. The basis of difference in Eisenhower's conservatism, then, was not the size of the project a government was undertaking, but the goal and side effects a particular program would have on holistic American life. The military industrial complex, to put it simplistically, threatened America more than it helped America. This, in turn, meant that it was a dangerous revolution in the way that American society operated, rather than a necessary means of self-preservation, as many other Americans at the time argued.

Leveling the Playing Field: Public Housing Assistance and Healthcare for the Sick and Elderly

Years before he entered the political world the New Deal's expansion of government services, authority, and costs alarmed Eisenhower. As noted earlier, he would cite stopping the trend of increasing government involvement in the economy as the chief reason that he decided to seek the presidency. While he was a critic of the scope that of the federal government's recent spending he did not seek to entirely roll-back the baseline of the New Deal. He made it a point to ensure that safety net programs, such as social security and payments to the poor and sick would continue. Because of this, many have characterized Eisenhower as a soft New Deal president. William F. Buckley famously described Eisenhower's animating political principle as "measured socialism."²⁶⁴

The full story of Eisenhower's thought on this front goes further than being a mere non enthusiastic, but still essential New Deal disciple. A representative example comes in his 1954 State of the Union Address, in which he discussed his vision for the future of medicine in

²⁶⁴ Nash, *Conservative Intellectual Movement*, 395.

America by proclaiming: “I am flatly opposed to the socialization of medicine.”²⁶⁵ That he did not stop there likely angered conservatives of a purer ideology, but what followed, taken together with such a stark opening statement illustrated Eisenhower’s own conservatism. He continued:

the great need for hospital and medical services can best be met by the initiative of private plans. But it is unfortunately a fact that medical costs are rising and already impose severe hardships on many families. The Federal Government can do many helpful thing and still carefully avoid the socialization of medicine.²⁶⁶

In a manner that was typical to his public speaking he set out what he believed to be two dangerous extremes. Though he does not seem to have read Aristotle, he often deployed a style of someone trying to convince the world of the Aristotelian premise that virtue can be found in the space between two vices. In this instance the two ills were the reality of rising medical costs that American families could not afford in the first place and the specter of a health care system fully controlled by the government in the future. The choice was not between these two, he insisted, but instead a third option that consisted of a few government interventions designed to help the market better provide for the needs of citizens was not only possible but necessary.

Matching his concern for health care was his infrequently discussed, but important role in changes to the federal government’s role in the housing market. Here again is an issue where Eisenhower is a conservative, but not an ideological one. Upon signing the bill for the Housing Act of 1954 he issued a short statement that described the advantages he felt the new law would provide for individual citizens and the society, alike. He began with the wide view: It would

²⁶⁵ Dwight Eisenhower, State of the Union Address, Washington, D.C., Jan. 7, 1954.

²⁶⁶ Eisenhower, State of the Union Address, Jan. 7, 1954. The American Presidency Project Archives. Last accessed February 18, 2017. Available at <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=10096>.

improve living conditions for millions of citizens, make neighborhoods that had fallen into disrepair more attractive and safe, and help the market be better suited to do these things itself in the future.

He then moved on to discussing the specifics. He tied the law's provision to "insure larger home mortgage loans, carrying smaller down payments and longer terms"²⁶⁷ to what was becoming seen as the idealized "American Dream." "Millions of our families will be able, for the first time, to buy new or used homes. Families will be helped to enlarge or modernize their present homes."²⁶⁸ Keeping in mind the poorest Americans, he noted that the law would provide the opportunity for those dislocated from their homes because of needed "slum clearance" the chance to move into better living conditions. Then, he concluded his analysis by noting that the law would also allow private credit lenders to receive government assistance that would allow them to increase their business in the short-term, but that would allow them to become disassociated with federal funding later. This package was quintessential Eisenhower. He advocated for a high level of federal intervention, but only in a way that he felt would be limited, mostly temporary, and would achieve a good for individual citizens that would not come to pass without such an intervention. The difference between this type of philosophy and those conservatives who viewed the powerful state as the ultimate envenom of freedom is clear. It is also important to distinguish Eisenhower from the Democrats who were committed to the New

²⁶⁷ Dwight Eisenhower, Statement by the President Upon Signing the Housing Act of 1954, Washington, D.C., Aug. 2, 1954. The American Presidency Project Archives. Last accessed February 18, 2017. Available at <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=9962>.

²⁶⁸ Eisenhower, Housing Act, Aug. 2, 1954.

Deal. Eisenhower retains his disdain not only for particular programs he finds to be examples of government overreach, but especially for the philosophy which says that the government ought to permanently be in the business of finding new problems to solve in a proactive fashion.

Business-Labor Relations

One of the less discussed yet important categories of thought and action for understanding Eisenhower's conservatism is his role in business and labor relations. In 1947, the Taft-Hartley Act, which was designed to limit the legal maneuvering of labor unions in cases where a strike could be deemed a threat to national security, was passed by the newly elected Republican congress, was vetoed by Truman, and finally became law following a congressional override. This act had angered labor advocates since the time of its passing and during the campaign Eisenhower had promised a concession to labor in the way of slight adjustments to the act. In his first year in office, just as he was seeking to put together a reform bill to send to Congress, Sen. Robert Taft, conservative stalwart and cosponsor of the original bill died. Consequently, the conservative wing of congressional republicans repudiated Eisenhower's attempt at even small modifications to the act in the early days of his administration.²⁶⁹

Importantly, Eisenhower did abandon the larger question of business-labor relations after this initial defeat. In fact, he turned away from his attempt at a concession to unions and quickly moved toward working to ensure a government approach that clearly favored business over labor when it came to setting ground rules for disputes. The most important action he took on this front was to appoint members of the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) who were, in the

²⁶⁹ Stephen Weatherford, "The Eisenhower Transition: The Economics and Politics of Economic Policy," 63-94, in *The Eisenhower Presidency: Lessons for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Andrew J. Polsky (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2015), 203.

words of political economist Stephen Weatherford, “ardent conservatives.”²⁷⁰ This strategy, Weatherford argues, was “assertively partisan.”²⁷¹ Eisenhower’s conservatism, though initially questionable to some longstanding business and party leaders on this issue, would prove to be genuine and durable in its distrust of the federal government as an explicit protector of a growing array of workers rights.

Though he did not wish to use the government as a vehicle to ensure positive protections for workers as a group he did seek to use the government as an agent of shifting economic focus. Raymond Saulnier, the chairperson of Eisenhower’s Council of Economic Advisors put it this way:

The intention of these initiatives was to shift the relationship between public and private efforts in a way that would strengthen the underpinnings of the market-based and market-directed entrepreneurial economy, as well as enhance personal freedom.²⁷²

As was typical of Eisenhower, he felt that the government did have a role to play, but that role was to explicitly create paths for private individuals to do the important work of society. He was not a Jeffersonian when it came to government’s involvement in the economy. He felt that without some federal involvement for the purposes of providing a minimal social safety net, setting regulations designed to encourage growth, and fighting inflation the economy would not be likely to succeed in the long-term in the contemporary and complex environment. During his

²⁷⁰ Weatherford, “Eisenhower Transition,” 203.

²⁷¹ Weatherford, “Eisenhower Transition,” 203.

²⁷² Raymond Saulnier, “Eisenhower’s Economic Strategy: Promoting Growth and Personal Freedom by Creating Conditions Favorable to the Operation of a Market-Based Economy,” *Forum for Social Economics*, (Fall 2004-Spring 2005) 34:1-8.

tenure in office he fought against price controls, attempted to curb opportunities for government to compete with private business, and encouraged private investment in new energy technologies, most notably in the hydroelectric and nuclear sectors.²⁷³

Spending and Inflation

One of Eisenhower's most traditional conservative positions was that he viewed inflation as the ultimate economic ill. In 1960, for example, his economic advisors suggested a stimulus package both for the sake of the economy itself and for Republican election fortunes later that year. In spite of this pressure, Eisenhower refused to consider such a move, because he feared that whatever good a stimulus would do in the short-term that it would lead to inflation in the long run.²⁷⁴ Looked at more broadly, Eisenhower's economic policy preferences for most of his presidency "reflected consistent, but flexible fiscal conservatism."²⁷⁵

In order to understand the nuance of his position on federal spending it is helpful to refer to a press conference he gave shortly after his first inauguration. Here he argued that "the objective of a tax reduction is an absolutely essential one" if the American system of economics, which he held to be based on "private incentive and initiative and the production that comes from it" were to survive lower taxes, over the long-term were non-negotiable.²⁷⁶ In the immediate,

²⁷³ Griffith, "Eisenhower and the Corporate Commonwealth," 100.

²⁷⁴ Ann Mari May, "President Eisenhower, Economic Policy, and the 1960 Presidential Election," *Journal of Economic History*, (June 1990) 50, no 2: 417-427.

²⁷⁵ May, "President Eisenhower," 424.

²⁷⁶ Dwight Eisenhower, Press Conference, Washington D.C., Feb. 17, 1953. The American Presidency Project Archives. Last accessed February 18, 2017. Available at <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=9623>.

though, Eisenhower concluded that cutting taxes not only could not be a priority, but that he could not counsel it at all. The problem was that the federal budget was out of balance and more tax cuts would only exacerbate the issue. Eisenhower feared that this would trigger a never-ending cycle of destruction. He reasoned that tax cuts before the budget was balanced would lead to perpetual inflation. He expressed it this way: “Therefore, there is no end to the inflation; there is finally no end to taxation; and the eventual result would, of course, be catastrophe.”²⁷⁷ In these remarks Eisenhower makes clear that his ultimate aim is to limit and then reduce inflation, not to ensure that the immediate tax burden on individuals is lessened.

Looking back at Eisenhower on this front, one may judge that he was a strange Republican president, in that he was willing to openly insist that tax cuts would be harmful in the short-term. It is worth remembering, however, that it was not until decades later when tax cuts as ideology became a principle of Republican orthodoxy. In insisting on the balancing of the budget and the attack on inflation Eisenhower was as much of a traditional conservative of his day as could be imagined. During the question and answer portion of the press conference Eisenhower went even further, saying “I shall never agree to the elimination of any tax where reduction in revenue goes along with it. In other words, it would have to be a substitute of some kind in that same area.”²⁷⁸ Eisenhower viewed those who wanted quick tax cuts with the same disregard he held for those who wanted new federal spending. Each position would exacerbate the current problem of an out of balance budget and inevitably lead to long-term economic damage, in his thinking. Therefore, the “conservative” thing to do was to pay off the government’s current commitments while seeking to reduce them in the future.

²⁷⁷ Eisenhower, Press Conference, Feb. 17, 1953.

²⁷⁸ Eisenhower, Press Conference, Feb. 17, 1953.

Though Eisenhower held the traditional conservative viewpoint on spending and inflation the way that he thought about it in context of his overall take on American domestic policy fits well into his theme of conservatism as gradualism. The refusal to support quick tax cuts in the service of a longer-term policy goal points to Eisenhower's thinking that conservatism can only be meaningful as a patient commitment to the nation's long-term health. The desire for quick fixes in the policy realm was something he had accused the Democrats of during the campaign and, though he was deploying traditional campaign tactics, he also seems to have actually believed that American liberalism was intrinsically a philosophy that was committed to the ill of intellectual hubris, which sought complicated and government driven solutions to many problems in the short-term. Eisenhower's conservatism, as he saw it, counteracted this tendency not only by offering differing policy solutions, but by providing a temperament that was more eager to think about politics as a long-term affair.

CHAPTER 6

PUBLIC AND PATRIOTIC THEOLOGY

Eisenhower's religion, both its personal and political importance is a subject of much debate among scholars. The usual battle is over whether Eisenhower himself was a true believer or merely a religious instrumentalist. I argue that it is impossible to finally discern Eisenhower's conviction, but that we need not do so in order to understand the political significance of Eisenhower's use of religion. I find that he used religious appeals tailored to be received equally well by Christians and Jews as a fundamental part of his rhetorical strategy. More deeply, understanding how Eisenhower thought about American religion sheds light into how he thought about politics.

Religion in Eisenhower's America: The Legal Background

The 1940s saw a spate of turning points in the legal status of religious liberty, through a series of landmark Supreme Court decisions. Between 1940 and Eisenhower's election in 1952 nine important decisions would be handed down on issues of free exercise, the tax status of religious activities, and the place of religion in public schools. Quickly surveying these cases provides an important glimpse into the country's legal trends regarding religion at the time Eisenhower was ascending from mid ranking officer to president.

Cantwell v. Connecticut (1940)

Here, door-to-door Jehovah's Witness evangelists were arrested for causing a breach of the peace and for violating the state's licensing rules by soliciting donations for religious pamphlets in a Catholic neighborhood in New Haven. The high court ruled in favor of the

Jehovah's Witnesses, by denying that the state had constitutional authority to require a prior license for the conduct of religious activity. To do so, they argued, would amount to an informal but substantial prior restraint on free exercise.

Minersville School District v. Gobitis (1940)

In another case involving Jehovah Witnesses, two high school students were expelled from their local public school after refusing to salute the American flag during a required daily pledge ceremony. The students contended that saluting the flag violated their free exercise by compelling them to ignore their religious duty not to worship an entity other than god. The court ruled for the school, arguing that the state had a legitimate interest in inculcating national unity and furthermore concluded that such a decision was out of the court's proper purview. The lone dissenter was Harlan Stone, who would soon become chief justice and begin to see votes go his way in religious liberty cases.

Jones v. Opelika (1942)

This case involved a conglomeration of several instances where states had punished Jehovah's Witnesses for refusing to pay licensing fees before selling religious books. Grouping the ordinances together, the court upheld their constitutionality by finding that in instances where religious materials are being sold "using ordinary commercial methods" sellers could be required to obtain the same licenses that other sellers needed to secure before conducting business.

Murdock v. Pennsylvania (1943)

Just a year later the court reversed the *Opelika* decision and argued that “in substance” ordinances requiring a licensing fee for the sell of religious books was a tax on religion. They rejected the previous standard of “ordinary commercial methods” and found that just because a religious person was using a commercial avenue to evangelize did not mean that they were engaged in a mere business venture. They retained the right to attempt to persuade others of the rightness of their religious beliefs and, should they be subjected to licensing fees to do so, the religious liberty of rich denominations or individuals would be safe, but the right to free exercise would be endangered for those who depended on the sale of their materials for the livelihood.

West Virginia State Board of Education v. Barnette (1943)

In a manner similar to the *Murdock* decision the court reversed a previous stance in this case. Here, the state had expelled some Jehovah’s Witness children for refusing to take part in a required flag salute. In addition to this expulsion the school district reported that the students were unlawfully truant and the state threatened to prosecute their parents for not sending the kids to school. This time, siding with the protesting Jehovah’s Witnesses, the court ruled that the state did not have the authority to mandate a flag salute because doing so was mandating a belief and specific support of the current political situation. By this point, it had become clear that the court had shifted to be disposed to accept the claims of religious minorities who felt that their free exercise was being violated.

Everson v. Board of Education of Ewing Township (1947)

Ewing, a New Jersey town just outside of Trenton, had a program where families that sent their children to private schools could receive grants to cover the cost of transportation to and from school each day. The town's reasoning was that there was a public interest in ensuring all students would be able to attend the school of their family's choice. A non-religious resident felt that this use of tax money was material support to religion, as the private schools in the area were almost entirely Catholic institutions. The court ruled that the program could continue because it did not amount to government support for a specific religious organization. Instead, the town had decided merely to extend a general benefit from only public school students to all students. Because the town had not made any provisions for which private school students would qualify for the grant it was ruled to be a religiously blind program. The court noted that this decision did not mean that other localities were bound to offer similar grants to students attending private schools, but that there was no ground for a federal court to overturn a local decision of this sort.

Illinois ex rel McCollum v. Board of Ed. of School Dist. No. 71, Champaign County (1948)

A school board in Illinois instituted a program where religious education would be provided Jews, Catholics, and Protestants who wished to participate. Parents signed their children up for one of the three classes and, for one hour a week, a local clergy member would use dedicated classroom space to provide religious instruction. The school argued that the program was voluntary, did not use taxpayer dollars, and did not disadvantage non-participating students because they simply went to a study hall during the hour. The court ruled the program to be unconstitutional, because it entailed the "close cooperation" between the school and

religious authorities. It also, in effect, provided tax supported encouragement to religion by using school classrooms for religious education. Most fundamentally, the court ruled that the program was a violation of the establishment clause, because the school's active participation facilitated the spread of a particular faith. In a nearly unanimous decision the court struck the program down.

Zorach v. Clauson (1952)

The last religious liberty case before Eisenhower's presidency was a school release program for religious instruction that mirrored the Illinois program in its intent. Like the case in Champaign County a public school in New York wanted to provide its students with the option of using one hour a week during school time to attend religious education. The school felt that this program was sufficiently different from the Illinois example, because instruction was not held on school property. Instead, students would leave the school to go to a neighborhood religious organization's building where they would be taught. The school checked with the instruction entities to be sure that a student was not using the program as an excuse to leave school early. Teachers were not allowed to speak with students about their participation in the program and school administrators were only allowed to verify attendance. The court ruled that these differences were sufficient to protect the program's constitutionality. Because no public facilities or money were being used and because the rules of the program made it clear that there was no reward or penalty for participation in the program it could be allowed.

Together, these cases help to illustrate the religious environment Eisenhower would see as he stepped into his presidency. It was a time where public sentiment often differed from legal opinion, in that the latter allowed for more expression of religious minorities whose members or

tenets were considered by many citizens to be obnoxious, yet it was also a period where the courts and the public agreed that a Judeo-Christian baseline for America's sense of itself was both present and welcomed.

Religion in Eisenhower's America: The Sociological Background

Eisenhower took office at a time when America was experiencing one of the strangest religious transformation of the 20th century. Specifically, the country's population was becoming simultaneously more religious and more secular. While noting that the trends of increased religiosity were significant and durable prominent sociologist Will Herberg argued that a specific kind of secularism was becoming more prominent in American life during the 1950s.

He wrote:

The secularism that pervades the American consciousness is essentially of this kind: it is thinking and living in terms of a framework of reality and value remote from the religious beliefs simultaneously possessed.²⁷⁹

Put another way, Eisenhower would become president during a time of increasing, yet increasingly casual religion in America. Understanding this environment is important for putting Eisenhower's own thought on religion in its peculiar context. Herberg argues that a close examination of America's religious history makes it clear how the situation in the 1950s came to be and came to be seen as normal to most Americans. He notes that new immigrant waves were expected to adopt most features of American culture, yet were allowed (and even expected) to retain their particular religions.²⁸⁰ New "immigrant" churches helped to establish the identities of American Jews, Italian-Americans, German-Americans, and others. Without nationalized

²⁷⁹ Will Herberg, *Protestant-Catholic-Jew* (New York: Doubleday, 1955), 2.

²⁸⁰ Herberg, *Protestant-Catholic-Jew*, 11.

centers of worship new immigrants would have had trouble retaining any vestige of their home culture and so, throughout successive generations these immigrant communities kept their faith communities at the center of their common life.

Along the way, though, the children and grandchildren of each nationality's original American immigrants began to develop what Herberg dubbed "the American Way of Life."²⁸¹ This "spiritual structure of ideas and ideals...synthesizes all that commends itself to the American as the right, the good."²⁸² The relationship between the religion of Americans and the American Way of Life has been mutually influential, according to Herberg. They way that the two have informed each other has encouraged religious pluralism and, at times, a spreading of religious fervor. Herberg argues that, for example, Americans have always known and valued a diversity of religious expressions and so a society with believers of multiple faiths is considered the admirable status quo. Inherent in this structure, though, he argues, is an increasing secularism fueled by a weak deism. The foundation of the American creed, in Herberg's analysis is a "faith in faith,"²⁸³ something first observed about Americans by Tocqueville in the 1830s. That is to say that exclusive theological claims are not as important to the average American as a commitment to the idea of faith itself. In fact, specific theological claims could threaten the American Way of Life's emphasis on religious plurality.

And so, "religion in America has tended toward a marked disparagement of forms, whether theological or liturgical,"²⁸⁴ Herberg argues. And indeed, he found that "the anti-

²⁸¹ Herberg, *Protestant-Catholic-Jew*, 75.

²⁸² Herberg, *Protestant-Catholic-Jew*, 26.

²⁸³ Herberg, *Protestant-Catholic-Jew*, 89.

²⁸⁴ Herberg, *Protestant-Catholic-Jew*, 83.

theological, anti-liturgical bias is still pervasive.”²⁸⁵ By the time Eisenhower took office Herberg observed that America was full of religious people, (he notes that 95% of those surveyed considered themselves religiously Protestant, Catholic, or Jewish)²⁸⁶ yet these were believers who often refused to place serious importance on the distinctive theological claims made by their respective faiths.

Instead, the country’s sacred grounding was the bond of Americanism. The dominant feature of American religion was activism, not theology.²⁸⁷ During Eisenhower’s administration this activism was easily channeled into a staunch anti-communism. The worries about the Soviet threat (both political and spiritual) joined with a belief that “ethical behavior and a good life, rather than adherence to a specific creed, will earn a share in the heavenly kingdom.”²⁸⁸ Eisenhower’s America was a place where, in the minds of most Americans, fellow citizens’ patriotism could be judged by whether they accepted one of the monotheistic faiths, and the quality of their faith could be judged by whether it accommodated the American Way of Life. Though Herberg popularized the phrase “Protestant-Catholic-Jew” to describe the American religious consensus, he was describing a phenomenon, rather than inventing a concept.

²⁸⁵ Herberg, *Protestant-Catholic-Jew*, 83.

²⁸⁶ Herberg, *Protestant-Catholic-Jew*, 46.

²⁸⁷ Herberg, *Protestant-Catholic-Jew*, 83.

²⁸⁸ Oscar Handling, *The Uprooted*, (New York: Little, Brown, and Co., 1951), quoted in Herberg, *Protestant-Catholic-Jew*, 83.

Eisenhower's Thought on Religion in America

In 1956 Eisenhower began his State of the Union Address with a sweeping gesture toward the divine. He proclaimed:

The opening of this new year must arouse in us all grateful thanks to a kind Providence whose protection has been ever present and whose bounty has been manifold and abundant. The State of the Union today demonstrates what can be accomplished under God by a free people; by their vision, their understanding of national problems, their initiative, their self-reliance, their capacity for work—and by their willingness to sacrifice whenever sacrifice is needed.²⁸⁹

Here, Eisenhower blends the notion that America has divine blessing to thank for its national well-being with the idea that America's prosperity is largely due to the hard work of its citizens. This notion was not new to Eisenhower, but was rather an example of him channeling one of the oldest modes of American thinking about the intersection between national goodness and national success. In his 1952 work *The Irony of American History*, theologian Reinhold Niebuhr noted American political theology originally had two camps, which he calls the "Jeffersonian" and "Puritan" perspectives. For the Jeffersonians, "the favorable economic circumstances of the New Continent were the explicit purpose of providential decree." Meanwhile, the Puritans shifted from their early conviction that material blessings were not a sign of a people's goodness or wickedness to a subtle, yet real belief that the overwhelming prosperity of America was due, in large part, to the godliness of its citizens.²⁹⁰ Like the Puritans, Eisenhower was not apt to insist on the explicit result of prosperity flowing from the actions of a godly people. Instead, just as the Later Puritans did, according to Niebuhr, he was eager to

²⁸⁹ Eisenhower, State of the Union Address, Jan. 5, 1956.

²⁹⁰ Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Irony of American History* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1952), 47-50.

caution Americans that they had a high calling and to remind them that living up to this godly mission was of ultimate importance, on both an individual and societal level.

The duration of this chapter explores Eisenhower's thought as it relates to religion in America's public sphere by analyzing Eisenhower's sense of the country's founding religious principle, his understanding of both the individual and social importance of belief in a good and powerful deity, and his conviction that America's fundamental character is shaped by intentional divine influence. Taken together, it is best to conceive of Eisenhower's understanding of religion in America as communal and in service to both the individual and the society. This understanding is best described as being a belief in and hope for public and patriotic theology.

Eisenhower's Early Religion

Eisenhower was raised by Jehovah's Witness parents who used the family's house to hold weekly worship meetings for the local chapter of the sect.²⁹¹ The religious fervor of his parents, particularly his mother who had become a certified preacher in the denomination, meant that the family's social life revolved around the Jehovah's Witness community. Over time, though, Eisenhower's father, David became disillusioned with the Jehovah's Witness teachings and withdrew to become a Christian whose general commitment to the faith and dedication to reading the Bible remained, but who no longer claimed a serious denominational affiliation.²⁹²

²⁹¹ Jerry Bergman, "Steeped in Religion: President Eisenhower and the Influence of the Jehovah's Witnesses," *Kansas History* (Autumn 1998) 21, no. 3, 152.

²⁹² Bergman, "Steeped in Religion," 155-156.

Eisenhower's Religion in the White House

In order to understand Eisenhower's views on the role of religion in American politics, it is important to first note some key features of his background. As noted in the introduction, Eisenhower grew up in a home with devout Jehovah's Witness parents. Though he never seems to have rejected the faith of his parents in an explicit way, he never joined their ardent commitment to making the faith of a particular denomination the center of his life. In fact, he spent most of his adult life having no regular denominational affiliation or routine for church attendance. Shortly before taking office, though, he was encouraged by influential religious leaders, including his new confidant Billy Graham, to choose a Washington church to join and attend regularly.

He chose National Presbyterian Church, which had claimed several past presidents as members and was also the spiritual home of current senators and supreme court justices. Shortly after his first inauguration, Eisenhower was baptized by the church's pastor, Edward Elson.²⁹³ Though Eisenhower's life as a consistent and public worshipper was new, his view that America was fundamentally a Christian nation was not. His presidency provided him the chance to communicate his long-held views in a more powerful way, but it did not seem to alter the essential nature of his religious convictions. These remained solid, though vague and he seems to have relied on them for personal strength more than for doctrinal or explicit political guidance. He was private on this front throughout much of his most of his adult life. It is nearly impossible to find discussions of specific theological content in his personal letters or diaries.

²⁹³ "Leading the Leaders: Edward L.R. Elson '28," *Asbury University*, May 30, 2014. Last accessed March 3, 2017. Available at www.asbury.edu/news.

Christian Deism as America's Founding Principle

In a recorded message for the America Legion's "Back-to-God" campaign Eisenhower boldly argued, "without God, there could be no American form of government, nor an American way of life. Thus the Founding Fathers saw it, and thus, with God's help, it will continue to be."²⁹⁴ Characteristically, Eisenhower argues that a monotheist understanding of the divine is vital to the health of America's polity, but does not venture into the specifics of what this particular faith should look like when it comes to concrete theological premises.

This choice was one of conviction and strategy. That he rarely proclaimed the goodness of Christianity's specific tenets was no accident. Though he described himself in 1952 as a "convinced, nearly fanatic Protestant,"²⁹⁵ he also proclaimed to the Freedoms Foundation in the same year that "our form of government has no sense unless it is founded in a deeply felt religious faith, and I don't care what it is."²⁹⁶ He would only have had Judeo-Christian monotheism in mind, but at the time 95% of Americans self-identified as religiously Jewish or Christian.²⁹⁷ In their landmark book *Civil Religion and the Presidency* Richard Pierard and Robert Linder argue that Eisenhower's thought on civil religion coalesced around four pillars. These were, first, viewing god as a source of both individual and national strength, second thinking of American government as resting on a spiritual foundation, seeing faith as a public

²⁹⁴ Dwight Eisenhower, Speech for the American Legion's Back to God Campaign, Feb. 20, 1955. The American Presidency Project Archives. Last accessed February 18, 2017. Available at <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=10414>.

²⁹⁵ Richard Pierard and Robert Linder, *Civil Religion and the Presidency* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), 199.

²⁹⁶ Eisenhower, Address at the Freedoms Foundation, Waldorf-Astoria Hotel, New York City, Dec. 22, 1952.

²⁹⁷ Herberg, *Protestant-Catholic-Jew*, 83.

virtue, and remembering that religion is an important tool in the fight against Soviet style communism. “We are not merely religious,” he said to the Second Assembly of the World Council of Churches in 1954. Rather, “we are inclined, more today than ever to see the value of religion as a practical force in our affairs.”²⁹⁸

Religion was not merely a spiritual good, nor was its value intrinsic. Rather, its benefit was best seen in light of what it could help the nation accomplish. Institutionalized religion and individual faith were two of the most powerful tools in an American leader’s arsenal against enemies like the Nazis and the Soviets. The reason is that in these struggles, Eisenhower was confident that America was representing a position of universal good. That is to say that he believed it to be self-evident that both Hitler and Stalin and his successors were in conflict with humanity itself and, as such, with god. Standing up to this type of enemy meant standing up for god’s design for a globe filled with happy individuals and communities which were free to exist in peace with one another.

Eisenhower’s vision of American public religion, then, was not a particular form of sectarian Protestantism. Rather, he believed that the country was founded on and guided by a less specific notion of the divine. Specifically, at the communal level, he hoped for the nurturing of an already existing Christian deism. This can best be understood as a belief in god, along generally Christian and Jewish lines that emphasized a commonality between Americans of different sects and of differing levels of devoutness.

The particular substance of this commonality, for Eisenhower, was a commitment to a unified public good. Specifically, he emphasized that the divine was the primary source of

²⁹⁸ Dwight Eisenhower, Address to the Second Assembly of the World Council of Churches, Evanston, IL, Aug. 19, 1954. The American Presidency Project Archives. Last accessed February 18, 2017. Available at <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=9991>.

individual and national strength, that American government relied on a spiritual foundation, that faith was a public virtue, and that religion was useful in the ideological struggle against America's internal enemies.²⁹⁹ An example of support for this Christian deism came at the first national prayer breakfast (at the time known as the presidential prayer breakfast), held in 1953 where Eisenhower spoke and noted the importance of the event. He put it this way: "Today I think prayer is just simply necessity, because by prayer I believe we mean an effort to get in touch with the Infinite".³⁰⁰ Being in touch with the infinite would keep Americans grounded and focused on pursuit of the common good. Importantly, the administration was not friendly with all faith groups. Specifically, Eisenhower shared a mutual disdain with the leadership of the American Council of Christian Churches, a leading fundamentalist Protestant group.³⁰¹ The reason for this helps to illuminate his general outlook on America's Christian deist roots. Fundamentalists insist on specific, sectarian, and non-negotiable theological content. Eisenhower's religion was too general to be holy to the Council, and their beliefs were too specific and alienating to be useful in the service of America's common religious bond to Eisenhower.

This example of tension notwithstanding, when speaking about religion Eisenhower was speaking for a large number of Americans in the 1950s. Speaking about this "rough consensus" Sarah Barringer Gordon writes that it:

²⁹⁹ Pierard and Linder, *Civil Religion*, 199.

³⁰⁰ Dwight Eisenhower, Speech to Presidential Prayer Breakfast, Washington D.C., Mayflower Hotel, Feb. 5, 1953. The American Presidency Project Archives. Last accessed February 18, 2017. Available at <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=9851>.

³⁰¹ Smith, *Faith and the Presidency*, 242.

did not entail a fully fledged commitment to respect for religious difference. Instead, it represented the conviction that respect for the three great religious traditions of American history and contemporary life – which included Protestants, Catholics, and Jews—was essential to successfully resisting and combating totalitarian incursions. Provided that no one religion was signaled out for special approval, went the argument, the deployment of religion by government (and the dependence of government on religion for validity) was fully consistent with democratic freedoms.³⁰²

Barringer Gordon's analysis is helpful here in that it contextualizes Eisenhower's statements and actions on religion. He was not simply a president who relied on religious tropes in his language by default, but rather an active member of a society where a growing sense of the interconnectedness between church and state was fashionable. Going further, I argue that Eisenhower was not merely representative of the American culture of this era, but was at the vanguard of this sentiment. Without a president such as Eisenhower, who was eager to infuse public discourse with explicit religious language that included light versions of basic Protestant, Jewish, and Catholic theology, American society may not have so readily embraced a strengthening connection between church and state. Eisenhower as a political thinker here, then, helped to shape the country's default political attitudes of the 1950s. Later, when dissenters from this arrangement would go on to win court rulings that would limit the political efficacy of the consensus (the prohibition of official school prayer decreed in *Engel v. Vitale* in 1962, for instance), the baseline would change over time, yet for a time Eisenhower's basic outlook was America's basic social and legal outlook.

³⁰² Sarah Barringer Gordon, *The Spirit of the Law* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 53-54.

The Social Importance of a Shared Belief in the Divine

The role of religion in promoting the common good was not only conceptual for Eisenhower, it was of concrete relevance to the important issues of his time. One arena for this was in foreign policy. For example, speaking to the National Conference of Christians and Jews he argued that the country's "spiritual strength" served as "matchless armor" in a global fight "against the forces of godless tyranny and oppression."³⁰³ He also titled his WWII memoir, *Crusade in Europe*, a decision that he noted was intentional, because he viewed that conflict as a holy war. It is worth noting that, as a child raised in a Jehovah's Witness community, he would have been taught that war was not justifiable, unless the enemy was an enemy of god.³⁰⁴ The common good that derived from a religious citizenry was not limited to World War II the Cold War, though, in Eisenhower's thinking.

He quipped, for example, "faith is the mightiest force that man has at his command. It impels human beings to greatness in thought and word and deed."³⁰⁵ Domestic politics needed virtuous citizens and religion was the only way for America to achieve that goal, according to Eisenhower. This last formulation is important, because it belies the way in which Eisenhower used his faith to speak of America's communal religion. The phrase "thought, word, and deed" is an exact copy of a communal confession and absolution refrain from the Anglican Book of Common Prayer. It appears, in part, as "We have sinned against You in thought, word, and

³⁰³ Dwight Eisenhower, Speech to the National Conference on Christians and Jews, July 9, 1953. The American Presidency Project Archives. Last accessed February 18, 2017. Available at <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=9637>.

³⁰⁴ Bergman, "Steeped in Religion," 160.

³⁰⁵ Dwight Eisenhower, Speech to the Second Assembly of the World Council of Churches, Evanston, Illinois, Aug. 19, 1954.

deed....” This prayer is often used by other denominations, including Lutherans and Presbyterians, so it is likely that Eisenhower would have become accustomed to it in the year and a half between his inauguration and joining National Presbyterian Church and the time at which he delivered this speech. If humans sinned in “thought, word, and deed” in spite of their religion, their faith also gave them the inspiration to do good things, indeed to ascend to “greatness,” in Eisenhower’s mind. He was providing a liturgy to Herberg’s American Way of Life. Religion was important because it was fundamentally useful for a prosperous citizenry.

America’s Character Shaped by the Divine

In addition to believing that religion served both a personal and public good, Eisenhower was convinced that America’s most important foundation was religious in nature. In a 1958 commencement speech at the Naval Academy he described America’s common heritage as follows:

Basic to our democratic civilization are the principles and convictions that have bound us together as a nation. Among these are personal liberty, human rights, and the dignity of man. All these have their roots in a deeply held religious faith—in a belief in God.³⁰⁶

That he chose to make this point at a military academy graduation was likely not an accident. He felt that this was an important articulation of the most basic commonality of all Americans. For Eisenhower, the military, particularly at a time when the country faced a formidable enemy, was a vital connection between the citizenry’s godly desires and the power of the government to carry out the people’s just hopes.

³⁰⁶ Dwight Eisenhower, Speech at the U.S. Naval Academy Commencement, Annapolis, MD, June 4, 1958. The American Presidency Project Archives. Last accessed February 18, 2017. Available at <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=11080>.

“Before all else, we seek, upon our common labor as a nation, the blessings of Almighty God. And the hopes in our hearts fashion the deepest prayers of our whole people.”³⁰⁷ With these words Eisenhower moved passed introductory acknowledgements to begin the substance of his second inaugural. He would quickly go on to anthropomorphize the nation as a religious believer even more specifically. “May we pursue the right-without self-righteousness...May we grow in strength-without pride in self. May we, in all our dealings with all peoples of the earth, ever speak truth and serve justice.”³⁰⁸ America, in Eisenhower’s view, was both called and destined to become a source of political power, justly administered, through the deployment of a collective spiritual character that aligned the country’s citizens and institutions with a divine mandate to promote peace globally.

Perhaps the clearest formulation of Eisenhower’s thinking on this point came at his speech celebrating the building of the Interchurch Center in New York in 1958. He noted that the building would come to represent “a prime support our faith—‘The Truth’ that sets men free.”³⁰⁹ Though the building was to house a Christian (specifically, Protestant) enterprise, Eisenhower spoke in general terms about religious liberty and the mutually supportive relationship between religious liberty and political liberty. He would go on to argue that “if we are to live true to the faith that inspired our Founding Fathers, we must think of our self-respect as a nation, and we must not forget to exercise self-discipline”³¹⁰.

³⁰⁷ Eisenhower, Second Inaugural, Jan. 21, 1957.

³⁰⁸ Eisenhower, Second Inaugural, Jan. 21, 1957.

³⁰⁹ Dwight Eisenhower, Speech at the Cornerstone Laying Ceremony for the Interchurch Center, New York, NY, Oct. 12, 1958. The American Presidency Project Archives. Last accessed February 18, 2017. Available at <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=11257>.

³¹⁰ Eisenhower, Speech at the Cornerstone Laying, Oct. 12, 1958.

Earlier in the day white supremacists had bombed a Synagogue in Atlanta, providing Eisenhower a disturbing counterexample of the opposite of the American civic creed's virtue of toleration, as he saw it. "If we are believers in the tradition by which we have lived, that freedom of worship is inherent in human liberty, then we will not countenance the desecration of any edifice that symbolizes one of the great faiths."³¹¹ Of course, any decent person would be outraged by the bombing of a Synagogue, but Eisenhower was arguing that the bombing itself was more than a particularly grisly crime. It was, rather, an attack on the fabric of the American system itself. Anyone who would bomb a Synagogue not only hated Jews, but was a direct enemy of America and America's most important heritage. If the connection was not obvious enough, Eisenhower he resorted to invoking the ultimate American: George Washington. He rhetorically asked those gathered: "Can you imagine the outrage that would have been expressed by our first President today, had he read in the news dispatches of the bombing of a Synagogue?" He went on to note, again, that freedom of religion was not only a historic feature of America's make-up, but one of its most politically valuable, as well.

Our first President spoke gratefully of religious liberty, but he spoke also of the moral requirements which religion places on the shoulders of each citizen, singly and together. Washington believed that national morality could not be maintained without a firm foundation of religious principle.³¹²

Near the conclusion of his remarks he argued that the most important words of the presidential oath are "so help me God,"³¹³ because the highest office of a religious democracy

³¹¹ Eisenhower, Speech at the Cornerstone Laying, Oct. 12, 1958.

³¹² Eisenhower, Speech at the Cornerstone Laying, Oct. 12, 1958.

³¹³ Eisenhower, Speech at the Cornerstone Laying, Oct. 12, 1958.

could not be satisfactorily carried out except by divine aid. This is especially noteworthy, since these are the only words of the oath he took, and that presidents have chosen to take, that is not required by the Constitution.

“Clearly,” he argued, “civil and religious liberties are mutually reinforcing.”³¹⁴ He ended his speech by arguing that religious congregations have always been the best source of justice and constitutional security in American society. When speaking about the threat the Soviets presented to freedom around the world he often argued that without America free religion could not be expected to survive in the long-term. Here, he turned that maxim around and argued that without churches and other religious bodies, America would not long thrive and could not exist in the way he felt it had been designed to function.

Even though there had been problems, the plan to defeat global communism, largely through spiritual strength was working in Eisenhower’s view. Speaking in 1956 to the International Council for Christian Leadership, he explained at length his vision of America’s relationship to its common religion and how this related to foreign affairs. Noting that he was especially happy that the group was holding a week of events headlined by the prayer breakfast at which he spoke he delivered these impromptu words:

This is terrifically important today. There has been too much of the world that believes the United States to be completely materialistic, boastful, proud, and arrogant...It is such meetings as this, continued, repeated, and brought home to them, that help to dispel this very great and dangerous delusion. It is still a nation that is founded on the religious faith, with great concern for the sentiments of compassion and mercy...That is what we want others to think about when they think of the United States. People have talked about the spirit of Geneva. The thing that the spirit of Geneva did accomplish and at least so far has not been destroyed—one part of it that is valuable—is that people there, in watching that conference, gained a belief that the United State was truly trying to follow in the footsteps of the Prince of Peace, and to establish a just peace for the world...I had

³¹⁴ Eisenhower, Speech at the Cornerstone Laying, Oct. 12, 1958.

no intention of making a speech. As a matter of fact, I was promised I didn't have to—and I don't know how I got started. But thank you very much.³¹⁵

For Eisenhower, America was so clearly acting out of a god-centered devotion to the world's common good that others could see it, if they only paid attention. These public prayer meetings that were hosted as joint efforts across sectarian lines were not only evidence of America's divine goodness, according to Eisenhower, but were some of the most important supports of it.

Eisenhower's Own Faith: True Believer or Instrumentalist Christian?

The status of Eisenhower's own faith has been a topic often debated by researchers. For example, in an interview with National Public Radio's "God in America" series Randall Balmer argued that Eisenhower was likely not a personally religious man. "I'm not sure Eisenhower really believed it...I think there's nothing really in Eisenhower's life that suggests a deep faith or piety."³¹⁶ Gary Smith, meanwhile, argues that Eisenhower is "considered one of the most religious presidents in American history."³¹⁷ To support this claim Smith notes that some of the president's closest friends and advisors during and after his presidential years were Billy Graham, Pastor Edward Elson, and Kansas Senator Frank Carlson, all of whom were well-known devoutly Christian figures.³¹⁸

³¹⁵ Dwight Eisenhower, "Remarks at Annual Breakfast of the International Council for Christian Leadership, Feb. 2, 1956." The American Presidency Project Archives. Last accessed February 18, 2017. Available at <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=10682>.

³¹⁶ Randall Balmer, *God in America*, National Public Radio, May 10, 2010. Last accessed March 3, 2017. Available at <http://www.pbs.org/godinamerica/interviews/randall-balmer.html>.

³¹⁷ Smith, *Faith and the Presidency*, 221.

³¹⁸ Smith, *Faith and the Presidency*, 222.

Historian Sarah Barringer Gordon argues that Eisenhower was both genuinely religious and that the trajectory of his official worship reflected America in the 1950s. Eisenhower was genuine in his faith, she argues, but it became important for him to choose a church with which to officially affiliate as he took office not only because he was the president, but because in the 1950s institutions of all kinds were growing in importance in American life. This meant that denominational affiliation was becoming an important part of many Americans' public and self-identity. In other words, Eisenhower was not merely joining a church because he thought it would be politically useful, but because he himself would have been likely more open than ever to the advice of Billy Graham and others that he should have a specific denominational membership because that is the way that Americans were increasingly defining their religious lives.

Eisenhower also became interested in attending religious services for the social, as well as the spiritual content of the sermons. For example, in 1954 he heard a sermon in support of adding the words "under God" to the pledge at New York Avenue Presbyterian Church and thereafter became that cause's most important advocate.³¹⁹ While his personal faith may well have always existed, it was coming to take on a more specific and more politically relevant status in his life, as he was entering the White House.

Though we cannot know for certain how devout Eisenhower was in beliefs, or even what the beliefs he did hold might have been, we can see that the way he thought about religion shaped the way he thought about politics. For Eisenhower, theology was personal in the sense that he kept much of his own views of the divine to himself, yet it was also political in that he

³¹⁹ Smith, *Faith and the Presidency*, 222.

used the way he viewed the proper role of religion in public life as an anchor for envisioning American politics, both domestically and abroad. The dispute about whether he was a sincere Christian or an instrumentalist is an intriguing one, but it misses the point when it comes to understanding Eisenhower's political thought or the religious climate of the 1950s.

Eisenhower's Self-Image as Spiritual Leader of the Body Politic

One of the most striking features of Eisenhower Presidential Library's chapel is a banner stitched with the words "The President's Prayer." Below this inscription is a prayer that Eisenhower wrote himself and delivered at his first inaugural. He both had the idea to deliver a prayer and he wrote the specific prayer himself. In part, the prayer read as follows:

May cooperation be permitted and the mutual aim of those who, under the concepts of our Constitution, hold to differing political faiths; so that all may work for the good of our beloved country and Thy glory. Amen.³²⁰

It is consistent with Eisenhower's typical conception of the role of America's religion in America's politics that he would join the nation's good with a divine will. This moment added something else, though. Specifically, Eisenhower was embracing the role as a spiritual leader of the people. Taking this job seriously was not a one-time event. He would also join Washington's National Presbyterian Church at the encouragement of one of his most important spiritual advisors, Billy Graham. Though Eisenhower had always claimed to be a religious person he had never joined or regularly attended a church during his adult life until he moved into the White House. Within two weeks of being sworn in he had joined the church and had

³²⁰ Eisenhower, First Inaugural, Jan. 20, 1953.

become the first sitting president to be baptized. The choice of National Presbyterian Church was no accident, either. The congregation had long been home to highly visible government officials, including Supreme Court justices and notable members of Congress.

Pierard and Linder argue that Eisenhower's sense of his own role in American public religion had three important cornerstones. These were: a conception of the individual as a fundamentally spiritual being, an assumption that American democracy rests on a spiritual foundation, and a crusading activism on behalf of promoting spiritual good within the polity.³²¹

An example of Eisenhower acting in the role of spiritual leader of a spiritual people engaged in a spiritual struggle comes from an address he gave to the World Christian Endeavor Convention in July of 1954. "Only a great moral crusade," he proclaimed, which was made of citizens who hoped "to express in some faint and feeble way their conceptions of what the Almighty would have us do—that is the force that will win through to victory."³²² The awkward syntax here aside, Eisenhower is articulating his view that the Cold War is an essentially spiritual struggle and, as such, one of the chief jobs of the president is to rally the people to muster both the resolve and humility before the divine will to successfully defeat their enemy. Though his public speeches provide an important window into his self-image as a spiritual leader, he did not limit himself to speech alone. He had a sense that ritual in the exercise of public religion

³²¹ Pierard and Linder, *Civil Religion*, 195.

³²² Dwight Eisenhower, Speech to the World Christian Endeavor Conference, Washington D.C., July 25, 1954. The American Presidency Project Archives. Last accessed February 18, 2017. Available at <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=9953>.

mattered. This sense was best exemplified in the fact that he and his closest advisors, at Eisenhower's own insistence, took communion before the beginning of a new session of congress.³²³

Eisenhower was not the only one who viewed himself as a spiritual leader. Pierard and Linder argue that he "occupied a central position in the flowering of public religiosity in the 1950s."³²⁴ In 1955, for example, the RNC released a statement calling Eisenhower "not only the political leader, but the spiritual leader of our times."³²⁵ In part, this messaging seemed designed for the sake of future elections, both Eisenhower's own re-election bid and for the sake of Republican congressional races. The RNC wanted voters to view Eisenhower as their spiritual leader, because a religious people in the midst of a possible nuclear conflict and just a decade removed from World War II would not likely vote their spiritual leader out of office. In part though, this imaging of Eisenhower was genuine on the part of the president himself and his political admirers. The chaplain of the senate and a Methodist clergy member, Frederick Brown Harris said of Eisenhower's self-written and delivered first inaugural prayer: "his supplication turned the inaugural platform into a high and holy altar."³²⁶ For many Americans in the early 1950s, the closer America was to Eisenhower's "Supreme Being" the better off things would be both internationally and at home.

³²³ Smith, *Faith and the Presidency*, 226.

³²⁴ Pierard and Linder, *Civil Religion*, 204.

³²⁵ Pierard and Linder, *Civil Religion*, 204.

³²⁶ Smith, *Faith and the Presidency*, 227.

Eisenhower's approach to the intersection of religion and American politics did not go without criticism, however. Many skeptics argued that his moral certainty damaged his ability to fruitfully negotiate with Soviet leadership,³²⁷ while famed public intellectual William Lee Miller dedicated a volume of essays titled "Piety along the Potomac: Notes on Politics and Morals in the '50s" largely to criticizing Eisenhower's intellectual and political marriage of church and state. Niebuhr, as well, feared that Eisenhower's style of blending religion and politics would lead Americans to a moral arrogance that would prevent them from seeing injustices within their own society and committed by their government abroad. The title of the book *The Irony of American History*, refers to Niebuhr's argument that the best moral resource of the American public was its refusal to believe its story of goodness to an ultimate degree. The sort of emboldening of the will based on the assurance of rightness of cause that Eisenhower hoped religion would play for Americans was precisely the sort of religious influence Niebuhr worried would gild fallible state policy with the infallible tint of perceived divine sanction.

Eisenhower as Emblematic of American Religion in the 1950s

Earlier in this chapter I have argued that it is impossible for the scholar to know how serious Eisenhower's faith was to him, and it is even more difficult to ascertain exactly what theological tenets would have been included in his faith. Part of the reason for this was that Eisenhower was a difficult person to know. As discussed in an earlier chapter, he had few trusted friends, his closest family members found him to be a larger than life figure and complicated personality, and even his wife expressed an uncertainty about how well she had understood him during his life. Though Eisenhower became much more eager to talk about

³²⁷ Smith, *Faith and the Presidency*, 248.

religion during his presidential years, he nonetheless retained the enigmatic qualities about the subject that he did about most issues in his life. His newfound religious enthusiasm was a public symbol in that he wanted Americans to know that he would be a regular church attendee during his presidency, but the content of his own reflections were private, hidden even from his closest associates.

In this way, Eisenhower was the embodiment of the 1950s American religious scene. He lived up to and stood as a powerful symbol of the situation described by Herberg, in that he insisted on the civic necessity of holding to a faith, he was enthusiastic about efforts at Jewish-Christian cooperation, and he despised religious entities that he saw as putting their specific theology ahead of the project for a united America. It is not only fitting that it is difficult to discern his own personal theological beliefs, but it is important to understanding why Eisenhower is a key to understanding the religious moment of his time.

Eisenhower's Presbyterianism was not the faith of the Scottish Reformers or of the Puritans. The reason for this is not that he rejected Calvinism (though we have no evidence that he accepted it, either), but that he expressed his own faith in such a way as to reveal that its primary function was to serve the American people by inspiring Eisenhower to serve and by providing him with a moral vision of good and evil in the world. And yet, traces of a typical Presbyterian outlook are present in Eisenhower. Though there is no record of him musing on "The Elect" he discussed the geopolitical situation as if Americans were an earthly Elect who bore a responsibility to the rest of the world to both shine as an example of what freedom could mean for a people and to work on behalf of those who were themselves unable to experience political freedom. This combination of a sense that some are endowed with an overwhelming gift of god's grace, while others must toil without it combined with the earthly focused activism

Herberg cited as being fundamental to the American creed. The result, in Eisenhower's case, was a president who had a high level of self-assurance about his moral convictions and who insisted that his country had a specific calling to fight political ills across the world. To shy away from this, in Eisenhower's thinking, would not be an expression of humility, but rather of a hubris that refused to accept the task of sacrificing on behalf of humanity.

Thinking of Eisenhower in this way reveals an insight into how he viewed the political world. He believed that the politics of the 20th century was a struggle between good and evil. German fascism was followed by Soviet communism as existential threats to the possibility of a free and peaceful world. Thus, America was not only justified in opposing these regimes, but was acting a divine protector for the rest of the world. Even the Soviet people themselves, Eisenhower thought, depended on the goodwill of the American people to fight the Soviet government. The enemy, he argued, was the Soviet state and its ideological grounding. The people under its control were captives to be set free by political success and humanitarian concern. The specifics of how all of this would play out were less important to Eisenhower's immediate political reflections than the conceptual frame of being committed to the struggle on the grounds that it was a special mission for America given by a divine plan for the world's eventual peace.

Understanding Eisenhower's thought on religion is important not only because it provides a window into how Eisenhower thought about politics, but it helps to illumine the way that religion and politics interacted in America in the early post war years. Eisenhower was a product of his time in the way he thought of religion, but he was also a powerful shaper of religious and political thought as well. Had he not been so determined to infuse American politics with the language and symbolism of a light Christian monotheism it is not clear that such

a consensus as Herberg wrote about would have had a nationally public face. In later years, when social protests would sweep America to combat what was seen as a consensus that was too traditional, it was Eisenhower's vision for American religion that was being responded to and assailed. Whether one finds his particular vision appealing or not, understanding its development and the influence it had on the country provides an irreplaceable insight into American politics of the era.

CONCLUSION

Though Eisenhower was president during a decade that is remembered by some as the idyllic height of American life, he was not a traditionalist. Indeed, he sometimes advocated vigorously on behalf of civil rights, was an innovator in how he organized the presidential bureaucracy, and had little personal concern that America's racial and social situation was dramatically changing. In addition to these things, though, he was a consistent advocate of a fiscal policy that prioritized the fight against inflation, he sought to decrease government involvement in labor-business relations, and he was worried that the New Deal's ongoing expansion would end American freedom. Gradualism, then, is the best word for Eisenhower's conservatism. He held to basic conservative principles and believed that they could be implemented into public policy, but thought that the only way to do so was through careful and gradual progress.

Eisenhower in 1964

In the Introduction, I discussed Eisenhower's 1964 speech to the Republican National Convention. This speech is worth revisiting now, as it provides a window into understanding the culmination of Eisenhower's thought regarding the Republican Party and his own conservatism. He began his description of Republican mythos by invoking Lincoln. "Our party, let us never forget," he noted, "was born out of protest against a supreme indignity to mankind—slavery."³²⁸ This commitment to human dignity had remained at the forefront of Republican efforts in the ensuing century, Eisenhower argued. He described the beginnings of the party to its present this way:

³²⁸ Eisenhower, Speech to Republican National Convention, San Francisco, CA, July 15, 1964.

This Republican Party, then, was conceived to battle injustice; it was born committed against degradation of people. So it is more than mere coincidence that we Republicans have as an article of political faith, faith in the individual. Nor is it coincidence that our party so born has never ceased to champion the rights and privileges of every citizen, regardless of race or station.³²⁹

On one level, Eisenhower seems to be giving a tacit endorsement of soon to be nominee Barry Goldwater, in noting that the Party's emphasis on personal liberty was motivated by a concern for the well being of all citizens equally. More broadly, though, he is making the case that there is a coherent core of American conservatism and that choosing to elect Republicans will be better for the country, because it is Republicans who better understand the way human beings work and what they need for a good life. Doubling down on the race issue he noted that the Party had always been the friend of black Americans.

From the time that Lincoln signed the land grant act in 1862 to recent weeks when Republicans in Congress, to their great credit, voted far more overwhelmingly than did our opponents to pass the Civil Rights Bill. During that period of more than a century our party's programs have reflected concern for the individual, whoever he may be, wherever he may be whatever he may be.³³⁰

The presentation of Republican commitments as motivated only by a concern for the well being of individual citizens was classic Eisenhower. As he would go on in the speech to criticize the "centralizing process"³³¹ that he argued the Democrats had been engaged in during their years in power (since the White House years of Franklin Roosevelt) he collapsed his own views and the story of the Republican Party's history into one. He likely saw this speech as a second farewell address, this time to his own party and he seems to have tried to use the opportunity to cement what he hoped would be his ideological legacy on the party.

³²⁹ Eisenhower, Speech to Republican National Convention, July 15, 1964.

³³⁰ Eisenhower, Speech to Republican National Convention, July 15, 1964.

³³¹ Eisenhower, Speech to Republican National Convention, July 15, 1964.

Eisenhower and Goldwater

Much has been made of how committed Eisenhower was to Nixon's election in 1960 and Nixon himself was hurt by what he saw as a lacking effort on Eisenhower's party to enthusiastically endorse him. While the dynamic between the two, particularly as the 1960 campaign went on, was strange and, often, strained Eisenhower felt that Nixon would be a decent president, whose basic governing philosophy was sound. The more complicated and interesting case regarding Eisenhower's judgment of potential successors came in 1964.

Put most simply, Eisenhower was no admirer of Barry Goldwater. In the aforementioned 1964 convention speech, though Eisenhower made did not criticize Goldwater, he did laud those Republicans who had just voted for the Civil Rights Act. Goldwater, famously, voted against the act and was accused by many of being an outright racist. Furthermore, Eisenhower did give Goldwater even a small endorsement from the podium. He simply spoke about broad conceptions of Republican philosophy and was content to push Goldwater's campaign aside in a moment Eisenhower likely realized would be remembered as one of his most important post-presidential speeches.

This may have been strange behavior for a former president who has been invited and agreed to speak at his party's convention, however by the time of the Convention Eisenhower had already undertaken behind the scenes activities, hoping to prevent Goldwater from becoming the nominee. In 1963 Eisenhower informally oversaw the formation of the Republican Critical Issues Council (CIC), which consisted of moderate Republicans and other Eisenhower associates. The council was chaired by Eisenhower's brother, Milton, who was serving as the president of Johns Hopkins University at the time. Remembering the activities of the CIC, former speechwriter for Milton Eisenhower, Ron Wolk, noted that the council published papers

criticizing Goldwater's record on civil rights and called on the convention to pass a resolution denouncing the Ku Klux Klan and the conservative conspiracy theory based John Birch Society.³³² None of the CIC proposals were accepted and Milton Eisenhower failed in a convention effort to nominate a moderate Republican, William Scranton, to be the party's presidential nominee.

Later in the campaign season, Eisenhower came to a tentative peace about Goldwater's candidacy: he did not grow fonder of Goldwater, but he reluctantly agreed to help him, to a limited degree, during the campaign. The most visible and most fascinating of these efforts was a commercial that Eisenhower allowed to be shot by Goldwater's campaign at the Eisenhower farm in Gettysburg. The short ad includes an awkward exchange between Goldwater and Eisenhower, sitting at a picnic table across from each other. Goldwater begins:

We keep getting back to the subject of war and peace, and in this campaign that Congressman Bill Miller and I are engaged in—for the Presidency and the Vice Presidency—because we constantly stress the need for a strong America, our opponents are referring to us as warmongers, and I'd like to know what your opinion of that would be. You've known me a long time and you've known Congressman Miller a long time.³³³

Neither of the two men appears comfortable in the other's presence. Goldwater seems nervous and Eisenhower seems annoyed and, possibly, pained to be participating in the endeavor. Nevertheless, Eisenhower responds to Goldwater's rhetorical question:

³³² Ron Wolk, "2016: A Reminder of the Goldwater-Eisenhower Convention," *The Morning Call*, April 5, 2016. Last accessed March 3, 2017. Available at <http://www.mcall.com/opinion/yourview/mc-trump-eisenhower-yv-0506-20160405-story.html>.

³³³ "Ike at Gettysburg," Republican National Committee, 194, From Museum of the Moving Image, *The Living Room Candidate: Presidential Campaign Commercials, 1952-2012*. Last accessed March 3, 2017. Available at www.livingroomcandidate.org/commercials/1964/ike-at-gettysburg.

Well, Barry, in my mind, this is actual tommyrot. Now, you've known about war; you've been through one. I'm older than you; I've been in more. But I'll tell you, no man that knows anything about war is going to be reckless about this.³³⁴

The commercial then concludes with the narrator signing off with the often-lampooned Goldwater slogan, "Vote for Barry Goldwater. In your heart you know he's right."³³⁵ Even Eisenhower's formal cooperation with Goldwater's campaign amounted to as grand of an example of "damning with faint praise" as could be imagined in politics. Eisenhower can bring himself to say that "anyone" who has war experience will not be "reckless" regarding "these things," presumably referring to the likelihood that Goldwater would start an ill-advised conflict with the Soviets. Even in delivering this thin compliment, though, Eisenhower cannot help himself but to throw in a reminder that Goldwater is not his equal in judgment. The line about being "older than you" and having been in more wars than Goldwater comes across as Eisenhower reminding viewers that he does not have full faith in a potential president Goldwater's decision making capabilities.

The tension between Eisenhower and Goldwater should not be seen as a merely personal one, though the two had distinctly opposed styles and Eisenhower did not have much regard for Goldwater as a potential statesman. Instead, Eisenhower's deepest concerns about Goldwater were directly related to Eisenhower's political thought. Eisenhower did not believe that Goldwater's libertarian vision of government was in line with traditional conservatism, or with what he saw as the historic commitments to the Republican Party. This tension, between an ascendant and acerbic libertarian wing and a more reserved and moderate portion of the Republican Party would continue for decades.

³³⁴ "Ike at Gettysburg," Republican National Committee.

³³⁵ "Ike at Gettysburg," Republican National Committee.

Eisenhower and Reagan

As much as Eisenhower disliked Goldwater, he held an admiration for Reagan beginning with Reagan's emergence as a rising Republican star during Goldwater's campaign. As Reagan prepared to run in 1968 he and Eisenhower developed a mentor-protégé relationship through correspondence and over the course of four in person meetings, at Eisenhower's residences in Gettysburg and California.³³⁶ In 1965, through a mutual friend, Reagan solicited Eisenhower's advice on how he would suggest launching a national campaign. Eisenhower composed a letter, counseling Reagan to market himself as a true Republican, to remind primary voters of his loyalty in the Goldwater-Johnson race, and to attempt to win the support as many non-Republicans as he could muster. In short, Eisenhower suggested a strategy that was similar to the one he had used during his initial campaign.

Though this relationship seems to have been deeper and more important politically than most historians have previously thought (there is a recent book on the topic: Gene Kopelson's *Reagan's 1968 Dress Rehearsal: Ike, RFK, and Reagan's Emergence as a World Statesman*, published in 2016), Reagan's eventual presidency provides both points of continuity and divergence from Eisenhower that would remain important, even after Reagan left the White House.

Specifically, both Eisenhower and Reagan crafted a public image that was meant to appeal to a wider audience than their own party's core constituency, both sought to cut taxes, yet were not afraid of costly federal programs that they deemed necessary, and both talked often about peace, though they served during the Cold War. Their differences are important, too.

³³⁶ Fred Barnes, "Unearthing the Eisenhower-Reagan Connection," *The Weekly Standard*, Oct. 10, 2016. Last accessed March 3, 2017. Available at <http://www.weeklystandard.com/unearthing-the-eisenhower-reagan-connection/article/2004653>.

Reagan specific tax cut plan, his exuberant embrace of unparalleled free trade, his seemingly high level of comfort with the large conventional military buildup that the United States had come to by the time he took office all separated him from Eisenhower.

Perhaps most importantly, though, is the difference in their respective legacies within the Republican Party and conservative movement. Eisenhower thought of as not much more than a calm vessel for safe mediocrity during in the early years after he left office has had a rebound in interest and admiration from scholars and politicians, alike. This increase in esteem has been palpable, but it has not risen to deification that Republicans have frequently bestowed upon Reagan, since he left office.

The first Republican primary debate of the 2016 cycle was held at the Reagan library, in front of a full-sized replica of Air Force One. Failed candidates from Rubio (whose campaign ran an ad proclaiming that “the Children of the Reagan Revolution are ready to assume the mantle of leadership”)³³⁷ to a verbal sparring match between Ted Cruz and John McCain in January 2016 about which one of them had been an earlier and bigger Reagan supporter.³³⁸ Candidates with little experience often liken themselves to Reagan’s original outsider status, while candidates with political experience claim to be qualified to inherit the America that eight years of a Reagan presidency began to form. During the strange days of the 2016 election cycle the Clinton campaign even ran an ad arguing that Reagan would have supported a qualified Democrat, like Clinton over Trump.

³³⁷ Bradford Richardson, “Rubio casts himself as a child of Reagan Revolution in new ad,” *The Hill*, Feb. 25, 2016. Last accessed March 3, 2017. Available at <http://thehill.com/blogs/ballot-box/presidential-races/270700-rubio-casts-himself-as-child-of-the-reagan-revolution-in>.

³³⁸ Jake Tapper, “McCain on Cruz Claim: ‘It’s an outright lie,’” *CNN*, Jan. 31, 2016. Last accessed March 3, 2017. Available at <http://www.cnn.com/2016/01/30/politics/ted-cruz-ronald-reagan-john-mccain-1980/>.

The systematic way in which Republicans have obsessed over Reagan and his legacy while contesting who among them is heir to his throne is demonstrable, through a catalog of a series of mostly small, unrelated, and mundane events. In some cases, though, the reverence for Reagan among Republicans can be observed in its most powerful emotional form.

As a high school student in Texas, I attended the 2004 state Republican Convention in San Antonio as a volunteer page, having been appointed by my local state senator. At the convention I spent the first two days watching county level caucus meetings, watching Rick Perry, John Cornyn, and other party figures give standard and standardly boring convention speeches. And then, on the final day of the convention, just a few moments before the final, all delegate session, someone announced that everyone should be seated for an important announcement. The crowd then learned that Reagan had passed away in the few minutes before people had come back into the main hall. This hall, which comfortably held the 10,000 delegates (a larger convention, the organizers often noted, than the upcoming national convention in New York would be) quickly transformed into the type of scene that unfolds when a family member has just been pronounced dead in an emergency room. There was crying, shrieking, praying, hugging, and a clear sense of disconsolation. It was touching and it was frightening; it was the first visceral encounter I had with politics. It played an important role in my fascination with politics, which eventually led me to graduate studies in the field.

Reagan is, for many Republicans, a demi-god. He is a demi-god often shaped in the image of the particular person attempting to claim his legacy at a given moment, but his shadow has never faded in Republican politics. Conversely, Eisenhower, even after coming back into fashion as a sort of sweet but quiet uncle, has never had the depth of impact on his party that Reagan accomplished. Because of this, some of the most original and most important

contributions of Eisenhower to Republican thought have become neglected: An active concern about the military becoming too large, an obsessive dedication to world peace, a refusal to intervene militarily in far away places for vague reasons, and a conviction that limited government does not have to be crippled government are all unpopular positions within the party today. Eisenhower may yet experience a rebound of his policy ideas within his party, but that day has not arrived.

Eisenhower and Trump

The primary reason is that Eisenhower, not Reagan, Goldwater, or some other; even more obscure figure is the best corollary to Trump's rise to the White House. Both Eisenhower and Trump were nationally famous party outsiders, who regular party members regarded as untrustworthy renegades throughout the nomination process. Once nominated both faced more politically experienced Democrats who ran campaigns based largely on ridicule.

In both cases, those who work in politics professionally consistently underestimated them: campaign operatives, party leadership, and the media. Both rode popular waves to clear electoral victories, yet those who had not voted for them met both with deep suspicion. Open questions about the qualifications of each to be president, to form a cabinet, and to handle crises abounded in the early days of the administration. Both were willing to make some bargains with their party's base, yet not afraid to bring some non-conservative and non-traditionalist elements into their party's leadership. Both seemed to despise what they saw as a Democratic Party that had become corrupt and unaccountable and both marked their campaigns, with appeals of personality.

Of course, the differences are large and significant. I have no doubt that Eisenhower would be disgusted with being compared to Trump, but he may well have been even more disgusted with Trump's political enemies. It is not clear yet, what Trump's presidential or political legacies will be, but looking back to Eisenhower's early days in office is a good place to start, if one is searching for relevant historical comparisons.

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