

THE PRESIDENT AND AMERICAN PUBLIC OPINION: FRANKLIN D.
ROOSEVELT IN THE CRISIS OF 1940-41

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The difficult task of leading public opinion is increased for the President by a tendency in the people to lag behind change. The American public mind often appears to be overcommitted to long-established conceptions of domestic and foreign affairs. This attitude may be due in part to the fact that the rank and file of the people are not in a position to know what is going on, what needs to be done, or what the results of a given policy may be. The strong President, consequently, feels it his duty to take whatever steps that are necessary to create, control and focus public opinion for the good of the nation as he interprets it. Just as a President cannot yield to every whim of the public, he can never ignore the public mood for fear of losing the support of the people. The struggle to lead or influence the opinions of the nation is great; the problem is multiplied during periods of intense controversy.

During the tense pre-war years 1940-41, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt was faced with perhaps the most traumatic years of his Presidential career. Roosevelt, like Wilson in 1916, was faced with a nation deeply committed to isolationism, and as the European hostilities increased, the President's role of opinion leader became a most difficult one. Roosevelt,

in attempting to prepare the United States both mentally and physically for what seemed to him an inevitability, the United States' entry into the war, was compelled to resort to a variety of techniques. As he employed these different techniques, he at times lagged behind public opinion; at other times he tagged along with the opinions of the people; however, at other times he actively attempted to mold public opinion. Only through the intelligent and skillful use of all these techniques could President Roosevelt significantly influence opinions of the nation.

The purpose of this introductory chapter is to present (1) the purpose of the study; (2) an historical background of the period of focus, 1940-41; and (3) a biographical sketch of the central figure of the study, Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

Purpose of the Study

This study advances the following thesis: Franklin Delano Roosevelt, through a skillful use of persuasive means, influenced American public opinion during the pre-World War II crisis years 1940-41. Certain aspects of this thesis warrant clarification. First, the general implication here is that President Roosevelt was successful in influencing public opinion in favor of preparedness in this country as well as assisting the Allies by furnishing all aid short of war. The persuasive means referred to are limited to four media of personal influence available to the President. They are the press, the electronic media--radio and television, the press conference,

and public speaking. The term "influence" implies that Roosevelt's use of these media significantly affected public opinion. The specific time period studied is from April, 1940, to September, 1941.

The purpose of this study is two-fold. First, four media--the press, radio and television, the press conference, and public speaking--will be analyzed to determine the potential effects which a President may bring to bear on public opinion through their use. Second, this theoretical construct will be applied to a case study of Franklin D. Roosevelt's leadership of public opinion during the pre-war years 1940-41. The influence of each, as well as their cumulative effects, will be sought.

Historical Background

In order to create for the reader the necessary background for the study to follow, (1) a series of events which occurred abroad between 1935 and 1940 will be discussed; (2) the actions and reactions of President Roosevelt will be examined; and (3) the development of public opinion will be traced from the days of strict isolationism in the early 1930's to the opinion climate existing at the beginning of 1940. Though the historical events noted are by no means comprehensive, they should serve to prepare the reader for the study which follows.

The foreshadowing of World War II began many years before the actual outbreak of hostilities on a global level. In the early 1930's Italy, led by Benito Mussolini, and Germany, led

by Adolph Hitler beginning in 1933, began their aggressive tactics. After each established himself as a dictator of oppression in his own country, he began his expansion tactics. Mussolini strengthened Italian control over Albania to block the exit to the Adriatic. After sufficiently building up both his army and navy, Mussolini in 1935 invaded Ethiopia. This act, along with that of Hitler's marching his untried legions into the demilitarized Rhineland at the height of the Ethiopian crisis in March, 1936, is significant, for it seems to represent the official collapse of the League of Nations as a peace-keeping organization. Since Ethiopia was a League member, the League contemplated drastic action in the form of an oil embargo against Italy. When the British refused the use of their fleet, the League backed down, using as an excuse that the United States, a non-member of the League, would not obey the embargo. Again the League proved helpless in intervening when Hitler marched into the Rhineland. Now faith seemed to be lost in the powerless organization; it rapidly faded in significance.

The events of 1935-36 had formally tested both Britain and the United States, and each had chosen to stand by and watch without taking any actions, even economic sanctions, against Italy or Germany. Their desire for inaction at these crucial times was to increase the feeling of freedom which Italy and Germany would possess as they banded into the Rome-Berlin Axis in October, 1936. Their organized aggression

could continue, they hoped, without interference from the democracies.

The United States' attitude of indifference to European events at this time may be attributed, according to Baldwin, to two major factors:

This attitude was partly owing to its [the United States'] preoccupation with the New Deal but even more to resurgence of isolationism brought on by a mistaken belief that Britain and France had let Stimson down in the Manchurian crisis, by the clear intention of the European debtors not to pay another sou on their obligations, and by a new wave of pacifism.¹

The latter, a new wave of pacifism, seems the most pertinent as it was a definite reaction to the aggressive acts of Italy and Germany. Because of these intense feelings, by 1935 popular pressure in the United States had swelled for legislation to prevent her involvement in case war did break out in Europe. The proposed legislation was embodied in the Neutrality Acts of 1935 and 1936. The 1935 Act directed the President, in case of war abroad, to embargo munitions and authorized him to warn Americans traveling on vessels belonging to the warring powers that they did so at their own risk. The next year, as events worsened abroad, Congress added the 1936 Act which prohibited loans to belligerents.

With the passage of the neutrality legislation, the message that the United States intended to convey was that Britain

¹Leland D. Baldwin, The Stream of American History (New York, 1952), II, 682-83.

and France need not count on her for any assistance should the European powers themselves become involved. The intensely pacifistic nature of the United States was characterized by her new interpretation of the rights of "neutrals," as reflected in the Neutrality Acts.² Though this legislation did not necessarily reflect the true feelings of the President, it did reveal the temper of the majority of the country. Commenting on Roosevelt's acquiescing to the Congress on the legislation he was called upon to administer, Baldwin states that ". . . at the time he [Roosevelt] really believed that the United States could stay out of a general conflict."³

Another significant pre-war event was the Spanish Civil War. For three years the fascist extremes, who received aid from Germany and Italy, continued to press the moderate center occupied by the Spanish Democratic Loyalists. In Milton's words, "Again fears, doubts, and conflicts of loyalties kept the democracies from helping the Spanish Republic."⁴ The inaction of the democracies, adds Baldwin, "seemed to be the

²Technically this legislation did not surrender any of the United States' rights under international law. However, it constituted an abandonment of the traditional American doctrine of freedom of the seas. It waved rights under international law for which she had gone to war in 1917. See Samuel Eliot Morison and Henry Steele Commager, The Growth of the American Republic (New York, 1960), II, 642-43.

³Baldwin, II, 683.

⁴George Fort Milton, The Use of Presidential Power, 1789-1943 (Boston, 1944), p. 285.

deciding factor in the downfall of the country under siege."⁵ The American State Department had gone along with and instituted what was in effect an embargo on arms to Spain. Though the embargo applied technically to both sides, only the Loyalists really suffered, for the fascists did not need the war materials.

Since the earlier Neutrality Acts had not foreseen the problem of civil war, Roosevelt asked for legislation to legalize his policy which he had employed. Congress readily gave this power but also reviewed and expanded the earlier neutrality legislation. It was now worded in stronger language and, in effect, directed the President in case of war to forbid Americans to travel on ships belonging to belligerent nations and to deny American ships the right to carry arms to belligerents or to mount guns against attack. The belligerents were permitted to purchase arms in the United States only if they paid cash and exported them on non-American ships. Burns' comment on this period of events seems significant:

Most of the people trusted Congress rather than the President to keep America out of war. . . . Any attempt by Roosevelt to override this feeling would have been disastrous. His real mission as a political leader was to modify and guide this opinion in a direction closer to American interests as he saw them.⁶

⁵Baldwin, II, 683.

⁶James MacGregor Burns, The Lion and the Fox (New York, 1956), p. 399.

The effects of the Neutrality Acts on the President's ability to maneuver diplomatically were most constraining. Congress had given public opinion a means of forcing the President to limit his actions. That Roosevelt was convinced war was approaching, a war which would inevitably involve the United States, was clearly indicated in his famous "Quarantine Speech" delivered in Chicago in October, 1937.⁷ However, his attempt to work for international peace by "quarantining the aggressors" through international actions, was interpreted as "interventionist" talk. He was swiftly slapped down by a storm of protest. He learned that the temper of the public at this time was still strongly pacifistic. McConnell sums up well Roosevelt's experience by noting that "he was clearly ahead of public opinion and he quickly realized that he was in danger of becoming isolated in the van. He retreated, but only sufficiently to renew contact with those he had to lead."⁸

The already tense situation abroad was further heightened by the emergence in 1937 of a third aggressor power. The Japanese had now reached a peak of readiness which motivated them to make the necessary move to take over all of China. In July

⁷Roosevelt warned the audience that if lawlessness and violence were allowed to rage unrestrained, "Let no one imagine that America will escape, that America may expect mercy, that this Western Hemisphere will not be attacked." Cited in Samuel Eliot Morison, The Oxford History of the American People (New York, 1965), p. 992.

⁸Grant McConnell, The Modern Presidency (New York, 1967), p. 83.

of 1937, Japanese troops moved into the north and up the Yangtse toward Shanghai. This undeclared war in China woke Britain to the point that she began to try to deal with the United States for a common policy in China. Roosevelt, knowing the intense feeling that existed toward foreign entanglements, was forced to turn Britain down. An application of the Neutrality Act of 1937 would have removed the access of munitions from both parties. Since China needed them worse than Japan, Roosevelt took advantage of the fact that neither had declared war, and he did not attempt to enforce the act.

The United States' pacifistic attitude was further evidenced late in 1937. On December 12, on the Yangtse River the United States gunboat Panay, flying two American flags, was evacuating American merchant vessels. Japanese aviators suddenly, with no warning, rained bombs on the Panay and three oil tankers. They all were either sunk or beached. Three people were killed and seventy-four wounded. The American public was willing to accept the affair as merely a case of mistaken identity. The Japanese government apologized and eventually paid an indemnity. A public opinion poll taken about a month following the sinking of the Panay, reflected that "70 per cent of those polled favored complete withdrawal from China of the United States Asiatic Fleet, marines, missionaries, medical missionaries and all."⁹

⁹Cited in Morison, p. 990.

Further evidence of the people's looking to Congress to keep them out of war was the proposal, immediately following the sinking of the Panay, of the Ludlow Amendment in Congress. It provided that war could be declared only as a result of a popular referendum, except in case of actual invasion. Its passage was prevented only by the Roosevelt administration's exerting all its power to prevent it. Roosevelt's now more cautious "soft pedaling" was easily understood.

With the arrival of 1938 the Axis powers were ready to continue their aggression. First, in March, German troops marched into Austria and annexed it to Germany. Then in September, Hitler moved to annex the Sudeten, the German element which inhabited the western border areas of Czechoslovakia. Britain and France, unprepared for war as they were, did not attempt to assist the Czechs.

By January, 1939, it was clear to Roosevelt that actions on the part of the United States would be necessary to make America's influence count. In a message to Congress in January, 1939, Roosevelt said, "There are many methods short of war, but stronger and more effective than mere words, of bringing home to aggressor governments the aggregate sentiments of our own people."¹⁰ A poll taken the following month by the American Institute on Public Opinion indicated that "sixty-nine per cent of the nation--more than two to one--

¹⁰Cited in Homer Carey Hockett and Arthur Meier Schlesinger, Land of the Free (New York, 1944), p. 665.

avored supporting Britain and France by every means 'short of war.'¹¹ Thus with the outbreak of these latest hostilities came a change in attitude in America. This was public pronouncement of America's emotional commitment to the cause of Britain and France.

At Munich the Sudeten Germans were surrendered to Germany. The Czech Army was no match for Hitler's. In spite of the appeals of Roosevelt for arbitration of the Sudeten question, by March of 1939 the remainder of the Czech region had fallen to Germany and, like Austria before it, was annexed by Hitler.

On April 14, 1939, after the fall of Czechoslovakia, Roosevelt sent Hitler and Mussolini a personal message in which he asked that they each promise not to attack any of a group of about twenty small countries in Europe during the next ten years. Hitler's reply was an insulting note followed by the bullying of some of the listed countries, soon to be "annexed" by Hitler. Mussolini at first refused to read the Roosevelt note, but he finally did so. His only response was a sneering insult to the United States, vocalized to some of his underlings.

The administration, with public opinion slowly shifting, proceeded with actions as well as words. American ships were sped to Europe to bring home nearly 100,000 American citizens who were stranded in the danger zone. Next Roosevelt called a special session of Congress in an attempt to repeal the arms

¹¹Ibid., p. 666.

embargo. It had been clear to many for some time now that the effect of the embargo had been to convince Germany that France and Britain, if at war, would be unable to receive any military supplies from the United States.

In the summer of 1939 Roosevelt again acted. The Japanese had now captured Shanghai. They then proceeded to harrass intolerably Americans and Europeans there. Roosevelt, on July 26, 1939, denounced the existing treaty of commerce with Japan. His action received almost unanimous approval at home, even from the isolationists.

In late August the United States and the other democracies were shocked when Russia and Germany signed a ten year non-aggression pact. They, too, were bargaining on the combined attack on Poland. Roosevelt again resorted to the writing of notes to the belligerents urging arbitration, but, again, his words were ignored. Though Roosevelt at this time definitely feared for the welfare of the United States, public opinion was not yet aroused. The general attitudes of the American people prior to the outbreak of European hostilities seem to be described aptly by Morison:

To threats of the war lords the average American was indifferent. He thought of Europe as decadent, given to secret diplomacy, class conflict, and evasion of debts. . . . Isolationism was not so much a reasoned principle as an instinctive belief in our safety behind ocean barriers. The world was indeed out of joint, but what obligation had we to set it right?¹²

¹²Morison, p. 991.

Within the next few weeks, ensuing events were to educate the American public quickly and dramatically.

On September 1, 1939, the war was brought even closer to the United States. After his usual tactics of fake frontier incidents, Hitler launched a full scale attack on western Poland. Hitler and Stalin had arranged for the latter to attack Poland from the east. During the month of September these two massive powers slowly squeezed the helpless Poles to surrender. She had received no aid from anyone. The country of twenty-one million people was divided between Germany and Russia, greatly assisting their cause. Meanwhile, on September 3, 1939, both Britain and France had declared war on Germany. The Second World War had begun.

The latest developments abroad, capped by Britain's and France's declaring war on Germany, had greatly affected public opinion in the United States. The new wave of feeling is captured well by Tugwell:

The first shock to complacency with nationwide impact was the attack on Poland. The Munich arrangements had rather served to confirm indifference than otherwise; even the invasion of Czechoslovakia had not caused any very deep revulsion. But the Polish invasion and the ruthless success of the sweeping blitzkrieg did cause a wide awakening. . . . From now on there would be much more disposition to listen when Franklin talked of national danger.¹³

With the change in public opinion Roosevelt now had more diplomatic freedom. During September, while Poland was slowly

¹³Rexford G. Tugwell, The Democratic Roosevelt (Garden City, 1957), p. 489.

falling, the President was organizing for hemispheric defense. Roosevelt's leadership brought about an inter-American conference composed of twenty-one republics which met at Panama City. Their mission was to form a "safety belt"--a neutral zone--stretching from 250 to 1250 miles out to sea and enclosing the two continents from the southern border of Canada to Cape Horn. The conference warned the Axis powers that within this neutral zone no hostile acts would be permitted. This act, unprecedented in international law, though it did not totally deter the aggressive acts of the Axis, did emphasize the fact that the republics involved at last had taken an organized stand against aggression.

Roosevelt was now attempting to take the reins of leadership for the free world. Commenting on Roosevelt's feelings during the fall of 1939, Perkins states, "He hoped the United States would be a mediator; he hoped we could limit the spread of the war. But he was fully conscious of the moral responsibilities of the people of the United States."¹⁴ Tugwell adds, "In spite of developing events, there is reason to believe that Franklin did cling to the hope of compromise. And even when in 1939 Poland was invaded, . . . he seems still to have felt that somehow the United States might keep out."¹⁵

¹⁴Frances Perkins, The Roosevelt I Knew (New York, 1946), p. 347.

¹⁵Tugwell, p. 484.

Throughout the months of September and October the repeal of the neutrality legislation was hotly debated in Congress. After a vigorous fight the "cash and carry" provision was finally repealed on November 3. However, Congress refused to give Roosevelt additional diplomatic maneuvering room by repealing the entire set of acts. The remainder continued in force. The repeal seemed to make Roosevelt even more cautious and deliberative. He realized that the repeal did not carry an extensive commitment. It is significant that late in 1939 Roosevelt complained privately to Harry Hopkins that public opinion seemed to want to move faster than he.¹⁶

Roosevelt's techniques of leadership were, of course, his own. His general method of leadership is described by Hargrove:

But if he was a lion he was also a fox. He was a lion during periods of crisis and national affirmation when he could be the symbol and voice of popular demands for action. In periods of lull or conflict he could be a fox who acted within the limits of what he thought the traffic would bear.¹⁷

Roosevelt during this period seemed determined not to push or be pushed beyond what he deemed necessary to stay within the boundaries of public opinion.

The techniques of leadership used by the President during 1939 seem accurately stated by Burns:

¹⁶Elliot Roosevelt, editor, F. D. R.: His Personal Letters, II, 970, cited in Tugwell, p. 490.

¹⁷Erwin C. Hargrove, Presidential Leadership (New York, 1966), p. 61.

But he [Roosevelt] did not lead opinion toward a position of all aid short of war. He tagged along with opinion. Sometimes he even lagged behind the drift of opinion favoring more commitment by the United States to joint efforts against aggression.¹⁸

Indeed, it appears that Roosevelt had not, since the "Quarantine Speech," attempted actively to shape public opinion. Moreover, he had, in Burn's words, "let events do the principle job of educating the people."¹⁹ He utilized the events and the slowly changing opinions of the people to lead the people as he thought he best could within the restricted diplomatic grounds available to him.

During the winter of 1939-40, the period Senator Borah²⁰ referred to as the "phoney war," American public opinion began to crystallize into three fairly defined attitudes. Hockett and Schlesinger delineate among these attitudes:

The extreme isolationists, seeing no issue at stake either of national security or of ideology, wanted to "sit out" the contest. They scoffed at the possibility of Nazi design against the United States or the Western Hemisphere, branded their opponents as warmongers, and argued that in any event the invaders could best be repelled at the water's edge. . . . At the opposite extreme stood the interventionists who, judging the Axis dictatorship by both word and deed, saw the struggle as a world revolution of totalitarian despotism against the free way of life. They demanded immediate participation

¹⁸Burns, p. 400.

¹⁹Ibid... p. 399.

²⁰Senator William E. Borah (R) Idaho, was perhaps the most outspoken isolationist against the Roosevelt administration's tactics during this period. Borah, described by Baldwin (II, 536) as that "congenital aginster," had been a member of the group of "Irreconcilables" that was opposed to the League of Nations with or without reservations.

while Britain and France were still able to resist the Nazi juggernaut rather than wait until America, fighting alone, might herself fall a victim. . . . Midway between these groups was the dominant opinion of the country represented by the White House. With every wish to keep out of the fray, Roosevelt nevertheless believed in stretching neutrality to the utmost limits in order to back the democratic peoples. . . .²¹

With the coming of shattering events in 1940, these three distinct attitudes were to remain; however, many Americans were to reconsider and have a change of heart.

The following conclusions may be drawn from this historical background: (1) The United States' foreign policy now stood just short of "all aid short of war" to the Allies. (2) The existing climate of opinion was the result of several years' education by events abroad. (3) President Roosevelt, acting within the confines of public opinion, had cautiously led the United States to its present stand against the Axis powers. (4) The President still believed at this time that the current United States foreign policy might keep her out of war.

Biographical Sketch of Franklin Delano Roosevelt

This thesis would be incomplete without background information on Franklin Roosevelt, the speaker. Since this is primarily a rhetorical study, it should prove beneficial to the study as a whole to attempt to pin-point those aspects which made Roosevelt the effective political orator that he was. Since his eminence as a speaker is not likely to be questioned, the information presented here will be primarily expository.

²¹Hockett and Schlesinger, pp. 667-68.

Also, since two in-depth analyses of Franklin Roosevelt have been prepared previously,²² they will form the basis for the information presented here.

Several factors contributed to the persuasive powers of Franklin Roosevelt. This biographical sketch will treat four major factors which seem to have contributed most to Roosevelt's effectiveness: (1) training and experience, (2) manner of speech preparation, (3) appearance and personality, and (4) use of voice.

Training and Experience

Roosevelt's elementary school training was given him by his parents and private tutors. Sara Roosevelt observed that her son displayed at an early age considerable vocal fluency and talent as a conversationalist.²³

Roosevelt's first attempt at speaking competitively came during his schooling at Groton. Each boy was required to belong to either the Junior or Senior Debating Society. During the long term each society held monthly debates on subjects chosen by the students. Though he achieved no great distinction

²² Earnest Brandenburg and Waldo W. Braden, "Franklin Delano Roosevelt," A History and Criticism of American Public Address, III, edited by Marie Kathryn Hochmuth (New York, 1955), and Laura Crowell, L. Leroy Cowperthwaite and Earnest Brandenburg, "Franklin Delano Roosevelt, A Study in Leadership through Persuasion," American Public Address, edited by Loren Reid. (Columbia, 1961).

²³ See Sara Delano Roosevelt, My Boy Franklin, p. 35, cited in Brandenburg and Braden, III, 459.

Franklin participated enthusiastically²⁴ and did a creditable job.

Secondly, Franklin received at Groton an appreciation for the oral reading of literature. His letters home indicate that the experiences he had with oral reading made a significant impression on him.²⁵ The Reverend Dr. Endicott Peabody, the school rector, read daily to the students, usually from the Bible. Also professional actors and actresses periodically visited the school to read aloud to the students. As an adult Franklin himself enjoyed reading aloud. He once explained to Frances Perkins, "You know, I like to read aloud--I would almost rather read to somebody than to myself."²⁶ His Groton experiences must surely have helped shape this attitude.

Too, Groton helped to establish Roosevelt's ethical standards. Groton, an Episcopal preparatory school, required its students to attend religious services twice a day each weekday and three times on Sunday. During the four years at Groton, Roosevelt studied through the entire Bible twice. Eleanor Roosevelt attributes Franklin's extensive use of Biblical quotations in his speeches more to the Groton headmaster than to any other influence.²⁷

²⁴Elliot Roosevelt, editor, F. D. R.: His Personal Letters (New York, 1947), I, 156.

²⁵See Ibid., I, 40, 56, 247, 338, 340.

²⁶Perkins, p. 32.

²⁷Elliot Roosevelt, I, 247.

The Groton years also produced Roosevelt's first attempts at formal writing. Motivated by required theme writing in English, Roosevelt, in his third year, began writing short articles for The Grotonian, the monthly school publication.

Thus, at Groton, Roosevelt received training and inspiration in speaking and oral reading which would surely contribute to his future speaking skills.

After graduation from Groton in 1900, Franklin entered Harvard University. During his sophomore year he took a one-semester course entitled English 10hf, "Public Speaking." During the year 1902-03 he studied "Forms of Public Address" under George P. Baker, "the most famous teacher of speech in the country at that time."²⁸ The course included the study of models and the preparation of a variety of types of speeches.

Roosevelt's interest in hearing literature read aloud was furthered at Harvard. While there he became one of the many friends of the great Charles Townsend Copeland, teacher of English composition and literature. Roosevelt often spoke in later years of enthusiastically gathering with other students to hear this stimulating teacher read from the Bible and from eminent English and American authors. Crowell, Cowperthwaite and Brandenburg, in commenting on the effects of these years on Roosevelt, state, "Again Roosevelt was quickened by the power and glory of good literature read aloud and impressed

²⁸ Brandenburg and Braden, III, 461.

by the use of voice and presence to make words and thoughts take life."²⁹

As an undergraduate at Harvard, Roosevelt showed an active interest in journalism. On the staff of the university newspaper, the Crimson, he advanced from the rank of reporter to that of editor, managing editor, and finally to the presidency. Feeling very strongly that debate had something to offer to all, Roosevelt tried to communicate this feeling to the Harvard student body through the pages of the Crimson. He wrote, "The unique training which debating affords in thinking clearly and quickly and in speaking with precision and conviction gives it peculiar value. In no wise can these powers of thought and speech be more surely gained than in debating. . . ."³⁰

Also while at Harvard Roosevelt participated and led in a number of societies and organizations. This experience seemed to enhance his already well-developed conversational abilities as well as his platform speaking prowess. These years, perhaps more than those at Groton, were significant in Roosevelt's development as a speaker.

The remainder of Roosevelt's formal education consisted in the study of law at Columbia University. At Columbia Roosevelt showed little enthusiasm and was not an "outstanding student."³¹

²⁹Crowell, Cowperthwaite and Brandenburg, p. 214.

³⁰The Harvard Crimson, October 24, 1903, p. 2, cited in Brandenburg and Braden, III, 463.

³¹Brandenburg and Braden, III, 463.

Though he did not finish his law degree, he was admitted to the New York bar in 1907. For the next three years he was a member of the well established legal firm Carter Ledyard, and Milburn. Perhaps the only significance to surface from these years of the study and practice of law was that Roosevelt learned that "logical discipline must underlie the thinking of the persuasive speaker."³²

Crowell, Cowperthwaite and Brandenburg describe the quarter century of Roosevelt's public life beginning in 1910 as one of "apprenticeship and maturation."³³ During these years Roosevelt played a variety of roles--State Senator, assistant secretary of the Navy, invalid, Governor of New York, and, finally, candidate for the highest office in the land. Through these experiences Roosevelt, the speaker, grew in force and stature.

After a whirlwind campaign of four weeks and of ten to twenty speeches per day, Roosevelt was elected to the New York State Senate in 1910. As a Senator he rapidly won distinction as a skillful parliamentary debater.

Roosevelt's appointment in March, 1913, as assistant secretary of the Navy afforded him further opportunities for development as a skilled speaker and writer. As war for the United States neared, he conducted a relentless speaking and writing campaign in favor of a larger navy.

³²Crowell, Cowperthwaite and Brandenburg, p. 214.

³³Ibid., p. 215

After being nominated by acclamation in 1920 as his party's candidate for Vice-President, Roosevelt campaigned by train, automobile, and plane back and forth across the nation, making nearly a thousand speeches in forty-two states. Though he lost the fight for national office he gained valuable experience in campaign speaking.

Though stricken by infantile paralysis in August, 1921, Roosevelt, with the encouragement of his wife and personal friends, continued to keep abreast of politics, and by 1924 he was able to mount the speaker's rostrum of the Democratic National Convention and place in nomination the name of Alfred E. Smith. It was this classic nominating speech which reintroduced Franklin Roosevelt to the nation as a highly persuasive political speaker.

In the years from 1924 to 1928, Roosevelt continued to speak out on important political occasions. Again, in 1928, he was selected to renominate Smith at the party convention. Roosevelt again won another tremendous personal ovation and further recognition as a "powerful political orator."³⁴

Though forced into semi-retirement by his attack of paralysis, Roosevelt continued to develop as a political speaker through extensive reading, writing, and conversing. He read widely his favorite subject, naval history, as well as American literature. He also greatly increased his knowledge of

³⁴Ibid., p. 216.

geography. During the years Roosevelt had much time to follow his journalistic urge and write magazine articles. These revealed his maturing political philosophy. Since Roosevelt could not himself actively participate directly in government and politics, he was kept informed primarily by Mrs. Roosevelt, who had become active in New York political circles, and by Louis McHenry Howe, journalist and Roosevelt's devoted friend. The three, with Roosevelt the questioner, discussed the vital issues of the day. Roosevelt was introduced by Howe to many leaders in politics, industry, labor, and social work. In the sessions with these people Roosevelt was forced to rely more and more upon his ability as a conversationalist to gain an understanding of major problems.³⁵

In 1928, Roosevelt was elected governor of New York. During his first term in office, he made extensive use of the speaker's platform. In 1930, he was re-elected by the largest majority ever given a candidate for governor of New York. Throughout his administration as governor, he used the radio extensively to win the understanding and support of the people of his state.

On July 2, 1932, Roosevelt was handed his party's nomination for the Presidency. He at once launched upon a nationwide, stump speaking tour "rivaling the earlier exploits of

³⁵Eleanor Roosevelt, "This I Remember," McCall's LXXVI (June, 1949), 122-124.

William Jennings Bryan."³⁶ Roosevelt, in friendly, heart-warming fashion, asked the people to elect him their President. In the following election his party won the electoral votes of forty-two of the forty-eight states. "Thus recognized as a mature political orator of great persuasive power, Roosevelt assumed the role of a national leader," state Crowell, Cowperthwaite and Brandenburg.³⁷

The part played by each phase of Roosevelt's training and experience in his development as a polished political orator can be readily seen. The process, as with most outstanding speakers, was a cumulative one--a process consisting of many years of endlessly searching for the most effective means of appealing to his audience.

Manner of Speech Preparation

Roosevelt surrounded himself with highly energetic and capable people. To him and his advisors, speech preparation was always an item of much importance. For his major addresses he sought advice and assistance from many--receiving drafts and memoranda varying from short suggestions as to a sentence here and there to a long memorandum of factual information, and in some cases, complete addresses. Roosevelt generally took these various drafts and suggestions submitted to him

³⁶Crowell, Cowperthwaite and Brandenburg, p. 218.

³⁷Ibid.

and combined them with any material which he may have accumulated in the speech file which he kept. After careful study he usually dictated his own draft to his secretary. On some of his speeches he prepared as many as five or six drafts.³⁸ During the painstaking process of preparing the finished speech, Roosevelt went over each point, even each word, over and over again. He studied, reviewed and read aloud each draft as he made necessary changes. After the many hours which Roosevelt usually spent on each major address, he knew the speech almost by heart. Though he obtained ideas and supporting material from many persons, the final thought and form of expression were his own. He made the final decision.³⁹

Though Roosevelt's ethical and emotional appeals were stronger than his logical, the latter is still worthy of note. Roosevelt seldom gave the impression of attempting to prove an argument in the strict logical sense. Rather his method was to assume the correctness of his stand and then to give the impression of explaining or clarifying his arguments for his listeners. Brandenburg and Braden state that "he apparently thought that if the people understood a proposition they would accept it without logical demonstration."⁴⁰

Roosevelt tended to be inductive in logical procedure. He used often the example, the comparison, and the analogy,

³⁸ Samuel I. Rosenman, Working with Roosevelt (New York, 1952), p. 11.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Brandenburg and Braden, III, 482.

always avoiding abstractions and generalities. He wanted the people to see and feel what he had to say. The use of these concrete means of support not only clarified his arguments and strengthened his proofs but also enabled Roosevelt to hold the attention of the audience.

Roosevelt's character was also made a cause of persuasion in speeches, for he was keenly aware of the significance of the ethical judgments to be made by his listeners. Roosevelt often identified himself and his audience with "religious ideals, with respect for human rights, and with virtues of honesty and consistency."⁴¹ Roosevelt's "ethos" was further heightened by references to his trips which took him to the people to see first hand the problems facing them, for this concern impressed his listeners. The speaker's good will was revealed through his constant reiteration of his philosophy of social justice. The very nature of the Fireside Chats also enhanced his ethical appeal. In these "reports to the people," as Roosevelt referred to them, he conveyed the impression of one with nothing to conceal, one with great faith in the people's judgment. Indeed, the audience's acceptance of Roosevelt's ideal was affected by his ability to sell himself as a speaker. Brandenburg and Braden refer to it as "ethical persuasion."⁴²

Perhaps Roosevelt was even more skillful in stimulating the emotions of his listeners. Whether it was the use of timely

⁴¹Ibid., 485

⁴²Ibid., 494.

impressive facts, humorous satire, dialogue or rhetorical devices such as simile and metaphor, Roosevelt painted a vivid picture--one capable of moving the people toward acceptance of his ideas. He often appealed to basic human affections, expressing ideas that would produce favorable response from listeners who had a concern for the welfare of others. Too, he appealed to patriotism and duty and made frequent references to American tradition. As war neared in the late 1930's and early 1940's, Roosevelt appealed much to the basic instinct of self-preservation.⁴³ Though Roosevelt's logical and ethical appeals were strong, his emotional appeals made an even greater impact upon his audience.

Roosevelt's style was also a factor leading to his effectiveness. His theory was to be "clear enough for the layman to understand."⁴⁴ He felt keenly the need to keep his nationwide audience informed and this necessitated talking in a language that the people could understand. Clarity and simplicity characterized his every thought. Roosevelt's appeal to the people was further accented by his use of the common idiom--often by homely and trite phrases such as "rule of thumb" and "clear as crystal." Too, he liked to use colloquial and

⁴³Earnest Brandenburg, in "Franklin Delano Roosevelt's International Speeches, 1939-1941," Speech Monographs, XVI (August, 1949), 21-40, an analysis and criticism of nineteen of Roosevelt's international speeches delivered from 1939 to 1941, concludes that Roosevelt repeatedly appealed to the emotion of fear.

⁴⁴Eleanor Roosevelt, "This I Remember," p. 122.

expressions, as well as occasional slang, particularly in his Fireside Chats. Through the use of these techniques he gave his speeches the common touch that made him more human to millions of his fellow Americans. Of course the stylistic trademarks are more prevalent in his popular efforts and extemporaneous remarks than they are in his more formal addresses to Congress.

Furthermore, Roosevelt worked to give his speeches an oral quality. He was concerned not so much with how the speech appeared in print but rather with how it might sound when read aloud. He often read his speeches aloud to get the feel of the effect each word might produce. Roosevelt used numerous rhetorical devices such as personal pronouns, repetition, and parallel phrasing to add to the oral quality. He also freely used epigrams, striking phrases, and witticisms. He was constantly on the lookout for some given phrase which might appeal to his listeners. Many catchy phrases, among them "good neighbor policy" and "the new deal," were first used by Roosevelt. Many of these phrases became popular terminology in the conversation of his fellow countrymen.

Appearance and Personality

Other important factors in the effectiveness of Franklin Roosevelt were his appearance and personality. His broad, friendly smile and his highly expressive countenance were important assets to Roosevelt, as a speaker. His mobile face

"changed expression with the quickness and sureness of a finished actor's. It was amused, solemn, sarcastic, interested, indignant. It was always strong and confident and it was never dull."⁴⁵

The effects of Roosevelt's appearance and personality were seen in his public appearances, which tended to be highly successful. He inspired confidence, admiration, and good will among his listeners. Each felt that Roosevelt was talking directly to him. With his conversational manner he stirred the emotions of his listeners and conveyed the impression of informality, spontaneity, and friendliness. His speeches bore the stamp of deep sincerity, a quality not missed by the audience.⁴⁶

Another of Roosevelt's more notable personality traits was that he always gave the air of being happy. He laughed a great deal. Campaign audiences, regardless of their size were drawn to Roosevelt's warm friendly attitude. His feeling of good will was conveyed to his listeners.

On the radio Roosevelt was highly successful in projecting his personality to his radio listeners. He had that unusual gift of making listeners feel, even though they were hundreds of miles away, that he was talking with them instead of at them.

⁴⁵"Americans Loved the Roosevelts," Life, XXI (November 25, 1946), 110.

⁴⁶New York Journal, November 9, 1932, cited in Brandenburg and Braden, III, 517.

"His voice carried a feeling of intimacy with his audience as well as his subject."⁴⁷ Thus the effectiveness which Roosevelt achieved in delivery was due in part to his personality and appearance.

Use of Voice

Roosevelt's voice alone tended to inspire confidence. His voice was described as "fresh," "brilliant," "rich," and "melodious."⁴⁸ The radio director of the University of Chicago characterized his voice as "like honey syrup oozing through the steel filter that jackets the microphone."⁴⁹ Brandenburg and Braden conclude, "Perhaps no other aspect of Roosevelt's speaking evoked such unanimity of opinion as the superior quality of his speaking voice."⁵⁰ During most of his speaking, his voice was clear, resonant, and, as one observer said, "vibrant with enthusiasm."⁵¹ Roosevelt had extremely good control of his tenor voice; he never allowed it to become monotonous.⁵² There were skillful variations, although never extreme, in pitch, rate, and volume which helped to communicate specific ideas

⁴⁷"When Roosevelt Goes on the Air," New York Times, June 18, 1933, cited in Brandenburg and Braden, III, 520.

⁴⁸ Brandenburg and Braden, III, 520.

⁴⁹Sherman H Dryer, "Air Power," Collier's, CVI (September 14, 1940), 18, cited in Brandenburg and Braden, III, 520.

⁵⁰ Brandenburg and Braden, III, 520.

⁵¹New York Times, September 6, 1936, Sec. 9, p. 10. cited in Brandenburg and Braden, III, 521.

⁵² Brandenburg and Braden, III, 524.

and emotions. One of Roosevelt's important assets as a speaker was unquestionably his superior vocal control.

No previous American President had placed so much faith in and importance on the spoken word. It was through the spoken word that Roosevelt taught Americans to know him. Always he informed the people and enlisted their support on the policies and actions of their government by talking to them. Americans believed they knew Roosevelt intimately and well for they had heard him in ball parks, in convention halls, from the rear of railway trains, on sound tracks in the movies and chiefly on the radio. Roosevelt's was indeed leadership through persuasion. Morison and Commager remark:

Nature gave him a personality that won crowds and enchanted individuals, an impressive physical presence an infectious grin, and a reassuring voice, and the radio and the airplane made it easy for him to exploit these gifts.⁵³

The dominant factors contributing to Franklin Roosevelt's effectiveness as a speaker, thus, were his (1) training and experience, (2) thorough speech preparation, (3) appearance and personality, and (4) use of his voice.

⁵³Morison and Commager, II, 585.

CHAPTER II

THE PERSONAL PRESIDENTIAL LEADERSHIP OF PUBLIC OPINION

The process of opinion formation on any given issue is usually a slow one. Generally, there are many influencing factors at work attempting to exert as great an effect as possible. The home, school, church, social and civic organizations, pressure groups and the different levels of government are the primary influencing factors which are constantly doing their part to affect the opinions of the people on the issues of the day. At the head of our federal government is the President of the United States, the public-opinion leader for the nation. The aim of this chapter is to answer three questions: (1) What is the nature of public opinion? (2) What is the relationship between the President and public opinion? and (3) What dominant personal means may the President employ to influence public opinion?

This chapter will establish a theoretical construct which is applicable to the study of any President's ability to lead opinion. The personal influence will be limited to what appear to be the dominant means that a President may personally employ to influence public opinion. They are the press--the newspaper and the leading weekly, bi-weekly, and monthly periodicals which play an important role in opinion formation;

the electronic media--radio and television; the press conference; and platform speaking, which will be referred to as public speaking.

The Nature of Public Opinion

A study involving something as many faceted as is public opinion certainly warrants some general understanding. This section will define public opinion, discuss the unique nature of public opinion, and delineate the different channels through which public opinion is expressed.

James Bryce defines public opinion as "any view, or set of views, when held by an apparent majority of citizens."¹ Many authorities agree with Bryce that a substantial majority of the people must hold a certain point of view or attitude before public opinion can be said to exist. Other authorities, however, disagree with the necessity of "majority acceptance." Harwood L. Childs maintains that "public opinion is any collection of individual opinions, regardless of the degree of agreement or uniformity." He continues: "The degree of uniformity is a matter to be investigated, not something to be arbitrarily set up as a condition for the existence of public opinion."²

¹Harold Zink, Government and Politics in the United States (New York, 1945), p. 246.

²Harwood Lawrence Childs, An Introduction to Public Opinion (New York, 1940), p. 24.

More recently Zink identifies with Childs' school of thought. He points out that there exist hundreds of collections of individual opinions and that it is only by examining and analyzing these that an adequate understanding of the state of the public mind can be reached. Each of the "collections" or groups of opinions is likely to be subdivided into smaller aggregations. These must be studied before the public opinion of the group can be understood. The points of view of

the farmer, the laborer, the merchant, the professional man, the unemployed person, the radiator agitator, the public servant, the housewife, the student, the inhabitant of the underworld, and many others will be taken into account.³

In the politics of the twentieth century the organized opinions of reasonably large groups, though not a majority, are always important. These groups need not be composed of a majority of the people or a majority of the voters, for past history has shown that comparatively small groups which are strongly supporting a certain viewpoint may have a significant influence on political matters. There are pressure groups constantly at work on most issues. Whether large or small, they represent the opinions of a group which may or may not represent the feelings of enough people to have legislation or policy carried out as they desire. The President, or anyone else, seeking to influence public opinion, then, must be aware of the many "collections" or groups of opinions,

³Zink, p. 238.

for only by examining and weighing them separately and collectively can the opinion leader arrive at his final decision on any particular issue.

The nature of public opinion presents a great challenge to any who may attempt to appeal to it. Laski refers to "that queer, shifting, labyrinthine amalgam we call public opinion."⁴ "Public opinion," in Young's words, "is often an invisible, intangible, even elusive, but a real collective attitude or compound of such attitudes, flowing from such daily contacts and experiences of the people."⁵

Sorenson lends additional insight into the nature of public opinion with his commentary:

Public opinion is often erratic, inconsistent, arbitrary, and unreasonable--with a "compulsion to make mistakes," as Walter Lippman put it. It is frequently hampered by myths and misinformation, by stereotypes and shibboleths and by an innate resistance to innovation. It is usually slow to form, promiscuous and perfidious in its affection and always difficult to distinguish. For it rarely speaks in one loud, clear, united voice. . . . not only is there human virtue and wisdom in public opinion, but there is also human weakness and error.⁶

Thus the many faceted nature of public opinion presents a challenge to anyone who attempts to influence it. In a world

⁴Harold J. Laski, The American Presidency, An Interpretation (New York, 1940), p. 264.

⁵William H. Young, "The National Government," Introduction to American Government, edited by Fredric Ogg, Austin Ray and P. Orman (New York, 1956), p. 149.

⁶Theodore C. Sorenson, Decision Making in the White House (New York, 1963), p. 45.

of change, with many voices beckoning to it, public opinion is constantly subject to change.

The opinions of the people are expressed through several different means. The most powerful of these means is the ballot box. Though it offers a somewhat infrequent opportunity of giving the public a chance to express their desires, its great strength is felt by public officials and political parties when the voters express their approval or disapproval of them.

A much more frequent expression of public opinion is offered by opinion polls, for they can be operated more or less continuously. Since the administration of Franklin Roosevelt, this method of expression of opinions has been one watched closely by all opinion leaders.⁷ Cater feels that as indicators of public opinion "they are crude indices rarely revealing which publics want what and how intensely they want it. They do," he adds, "provide a valuable clue."⁸ Concerning the opinion poll's reflecting the true feelings of the people, Zink says that they are more reliable when dealing with elections than they are when dealing with political and social questions.⁹

⁷For an analysis of the important part played by the public opinion poll in the pre-election campaign of 1968, see "The Polls and the Pols and the Public," Newsweek, LXXII (July 8, 1968), 23-27.

⁸Douglass Cater, Power in Washington. A Critical Look at Today's Struggle to Govern in the Nation's Capitol (New York, 1964), p. 105.

⁹Zink, p. 240.

The opinion poll, like each of the other channels, gives the people a frequent means of expression of their opinions on varied issues.

Another channel through which public opinion is expressed is direct communication with public officials--either written by letter or telegram, or oral by phone or a visit to the official. This form may be utilized by an individual or a pressure group. It is, of course, difficult to assess the representative character of the expressions submitted. They may or may not represent a majority viewpoint.

In addition, the opinions of the people find expression through the mass communications media. Select individuals accept the challenge of using radio and television to express the feelings of groups, both large and small. Likewise, writers of all persuasions, representing many viewpoints, express their feelings through the newspaper, periodicals and other printed propaganda pieces. Through the use of these varied means of expression, the opinions of the people are vividly made known to those in authority.

The following conclusions concerning public opinion are now apparent: (1) The organized opinion of reasonably large groups, though not a majority, is always important. (2) The unique nature of public opinion presents a challenge to anyone who appeals to it. (3) Public opinion is expressed through a number of channels.

The Presidency and Public Opinion

Since the heart of this study is the Presidential leadership of public opinion, it should prove helpful to look first at the relationship between the Presidency and public opinion. Five areas will be examined and discussed: (1) the President as the "spokesman" for the nation; (2) the Presidential responsibility to lead or influence public opinion; (3) the effect that skillful leadership of public opinion may have on Presidential power to govern; (4) the Presidential dependency on the public for the power of governance; and (5) public opinion as the most effective check on the power of the President.

For he is also the political leader of the nation, or has it in his choice to be. The nation as a whole has chosen him, and is conscious that it has no other political spokesman. His is the only national voice in affairs.¹⁰

So spoke Woodrow Wilson in writing on the Presidency. Johnson and Walker offer reasons why the President is the spokesman for the nation.¹¹ The members of the Supreme Court are restricted in speaking out on the issues of the day, since these may soon come before their court. Similarly, the Congress is divided and tied to their local concerns. Since each party within each house is constantly contradicting each other, this presents

¹⁰Woodrow Wilson, "The President of the United States," Readings in American Government, edited by Finla Goff Crawford (New York, 1927), p. 123.

¹¹Donald Bruce Johnson and Jack L. Walker, editors, The Dynamics of the American Presidency (New York, 1964), p. 272.

a confusing picture to the people. Thus no national spokesman stands out. The President, on the other hand, since he is the only nationally elected officer, can claim to speak as the leader of his political party, the executive branch, and, symbolically, for the whole nation all at once.

Others have commented on the President's unique role of spokesman for the nation. Orth and Cushman refer to the President as the only "'All-American' officer in political affairs," adding that "the President to most Americans personifies the government."¹² Rossiter sees the President as the American people's "one authentic trumpet. . .the voice of the people, the leading formulator and expounder of public opinion in the United States."¹³ Cornwell refers to the leadership of public opinion as "one of the facets of the Presidential role."¹⁴

Because of his role as "Voice of the People," the President's responsibilities are greatly increased. Since the President is the focal point of the political attention of the nation, his remarks will be listened to very carefully. This idea was emphasized by Livingston and Thompson when they said, "From his [the President's] words the people derive hope, despair, frustration, anger, and above all, a sense of

¹²Samuel Peter Orth and Robert Eugene Cushman, American National Government (New York, 1931), pp. 302-03.

¹³Clinton Rossiter, The American Presidency (New York, 1960), p. 34.

¹⁴Elmer E. Cornwell, Jr., Presidential Leadership of Public Opinion (Bloomington, 1965), p. 7.

national purpose."¹⁵ Milton's words add further emphasis: "To a much greater degree than we realize, ours is a government of public opinion, and we look to our chosen leader to sense our doubts, fears, hopes and aspirations and be the nation's spokesman."¹⁶ Sorenson, writing on the responsibility of the President in dealing with public opinion, feels that the President cannot just respond to public opinion--he has a responsibility to lead it as well--"to shape it, to inform it, to woo it, and win it."¹⁷ In more restrained language Cornwell states that the President can and does, and probably should, shape popular attitudes, rather than just responding to them passively. He concludes: "The Republic would actually be in grave danger if the President remained passive and inarticulate."¹⁸ Both Sorenson and Cornwell point up the need for a single voice to shape the powerless, passive opinions of the people. There appears to be no one better qualified or more obligated to influence the opinions of the people than the President of all the people.

The successful President will recognize that he is dependent on the public for much of the necessary power of governance. The Chief Executive "finds in the populace the

¹⁵John C. Livingston and Robert G. Thompson, The Consent of the Governed (New York, 1963), p. 304.

¹⁶Milton, p. 4.

¹⁷Sorenson, p. 46.

¹⁸Cornwell. p. 7.

very essence of his power to influence the process of governance."¹⁹ Since the President's role in relation to policy-making is horatory rather than determinative, since he has neither the legal-constitutional nor the party-political base to command action, or even attention to the legislative process, he must, in Cornwell's words, "persuade, bargain, exhort, and on occasion, bribe. Above all he must win and channel public support."²⁰ The leverage the President has acquired in the law-making process has been indirect, based on the arts of persuasion. "Each President realizes that he must ever be speaking to as well as for the nation, for once he is elected, he finds that he is only one bidder among many courting the favorable attention of the public."²¹ Sorenson concurs that if a President is to be successful, he must utilize his abilities as a speaker and leader to rally public support.²² This dependency on public opinion is something with which the President must reckon.

Though the President is dependent on the public for the necessary power to govern, the skillful leadership of public opinion may grant him much additional power. Wilson, in speaking on the President as national spokesman, states:

If he rightly interpret the national thought and boldly insist upon it, he is irresistible; and the country never feels the zest of action so much as when its President is of such insight and calibre. . . . A President

¹⁹Ibid., p. 3.

²⁰Ibid., pp. 5-6.

²¹Cater, pp. 104-05.

²²Sorenson, p. 51.

whom it trusts can not only lead it, but form it to his own views.²³

Orth adds that

when a vigorous minded President makes a determined effort to win popular support for some measure or policy, he usually finds it possible to create a public sentiment for it which party leaders in and out of Congress dare not ignore, for it has usually happened that in cases of conflict over questions of legislative policy between the President and Congress the nation has been inclined to support the President.²⁴

Rossiter lists some requirements for the President if he is to skillfully lead public opinion. He, too, sums up well the power the President has at his disposal if he speaks carefully and skillfully:

The President who senses the popular mood and spots new tides even before they start to run, who practices shrewd economy in his appearances as spokesman for the nation, who is conscious of his unique power to compel discussion on his own terms, and who talks the language of Christian morality and the American tradition, can shout down any other voice or chorus of voices in the land.²⁵

Not only does public opinion serve to extend the powers of the President, but also it serves as the most effective check upon the powers of the President. "With public sentiment on its side," Lincoln said with exaggeration, "everything succeeds; with public sentiment against it, nothing succeeds."²⁶ More recently Franklin Roosevelt has written, "I cannot go any faster than the people will let me."²⁷ The

²³Wilson, p. 123.

²⁴Orth and Cushman, pp. 302-03.

²⁵Rossiter, p. 33.

²⁶Cited in Sorenson, p. 48.

²⁷Ibid.

President draws immense authority from the support of the American people, but only if he uses it in ways that are fair, familiar, and traditional. "He can lead public opinion, but only so far as it is willing to go. There are times when the public will not rouse to any appeal."²⁸ If the President chances to roam too far outside the accepted limits of Presidential behavior, he exposes himself to that "one disaster from which few have recovered, the loss of genuine popular support."²⁹

The public has many ways of expressing its dissatisfaction with Presidential leadership of public opinion, and in turn, of limiting the power of the President. There are, first, the obvious outlets of public opinion such as the press, the electronic media, opinion polls, letters to the White House, visitors, pressure groups and elections. The real force of public opinion as a limiting factor on the Presidency is felt through other restraints. Rossiter states:

Public opinion works most effectively on a President when it encourages Congress to override a veto, persuades an investigating committee to put a White House intimate on the grill, stiffens the resolve of a band of Senators to talk until Christmas, convinces an ousted commissioner that his ouster is worth fighting in the courts, and puts backbone in a Supreme Court asked to nullify a Presidential order. The various institutions and centers of power that limit the President are powerless and useless without public opinion--with it they are well armed.³⁰

The limiting effect which public opinion may have on Presidential power is a factor which the perceptive President will

²⁸Rossiter, p. 68.

²⁹Ibid., p. 70.

³⁰Ibid.

recognize, accept, and attempt to reconcile to his effective leadership of that opinion.

From this discussion of the Presidency and public opinion five conclusions are evident: (1) The President is the voice of the people, the spokesman for the nation. (2) The President has the responsibility to lead and, perhaps, shape public opinion. (3) The President's skillful leadership of public opinion may greatly increase his power to govern. (4) The President must recognize that he is dependent on the public for the necessary power to govern. (5) The opinions of the people serve as the most effective check upon the powers of the President.

Media Used by the President to Personally Influence Public Opinion

Although the President may affect public opinion in a number of ways, this study is concerned primarily with the following four: the press, the electronic media, the press conference, and platform (public) speaking. Three areas of each medium will be explored: (1) background and development; (2) general effects on the opinion-making process; and (3) the Presidential use of the medium to affect or influence public opinion.

The Press

The history of the press in this country dates back to the birth of the nation; however, its influence on public opinion did not become prominent until the anti-slavery

agitation preceeding the Civil War. Up to that time the political orator had been the chief means of molding or influencing public opinion. During the last half of the neneteenth century, the press became the outstanding instrument in developing public opinion. Only at election time did the press have to share this dominant role with the orator.

During the first two decades of the twentieth century the press continued easily as the front-runner in the influencing of the thoughts and attitudes of the people. The press, however, was destined to lose much of its influence in the next two decades. The press for some time had tended to be partisan in nature. Two major factors contributed toward this partisan reporting of the news. First, the newspaper tended to be controlled by wealthy men or organizations. It simply felt that it could not afford to antagonize its big advertisers. Second, recognizing that the people in general tended to be rather partisan in nature, the newspaper was readily willing to cater to this desire.

In many instances the partisan-type reporting of the news resulted in outright slanting and coloration of the news. By the mid-1930's there was a demand for something more reliable, something to present the truth behind the bold headlines of the newspaper. The introduction of weekly, bi-weekly, and monthly periodicals was the answer, at least in part, to this problem. Though each of them was partisan to some extent from its inception, each generally gave, and continues to give,

facts to back up its editorial opinions. In their reporting of the news, each attempts to increase its reading public and, in turn, "develop an even stronger and more efficient public opinion."³¹

The decline of the influence of the press in the opinion-making process was, then, due greatly to the mistrust of the public. In a study made by Francis E. Leupp, it was found that reader-mistrust was the number one cause for the decline of the press.³² However, another major factor was the advent and use of the radio to report the news. The effects and influence of the radio will be covered later in this chapter.

At the time of its inception the press merely reported what happened. There was no attempt to persuade or influence the opinions of its readers. As the press developed, it began not only to mirror the feelings and attitudes of its readers, but also it began to attempt conscientiously to influence the thoughts and opinions of its readers. It became in most instances an advocate. There is, perhaps, some question today as to whether the press should do more than just report what the public is doing or thinking. Most, Bogardus concludes, are advocates. This attempt to express an editorial viewpoint, he feels, is justified if the newspapers function "above the board. They must present both sides of any controversy,

³¹Cited in Emory S. Bogardus, The Making of Public Opinion (New York, 1951), pp. 58-59.

³²Ibid., p. 56.

however, if they are to fairly influence public opinion."³³

Despite any decline in the effect of the press, Bogardus further states:

The newspaper, periodicals, books all play important roles in opinion-making. They achieve this result by presenting facts and propaganda forcibly, and by making appeals to the human emotions, by spreading personal opinions favorable or unfavorable regarding a public cause.³⁴

There are numerous reasons why the press continues to be a major force in opinion formation. Ogle lists four of them. First, people in general tend to accept at face value what they read in print, for they have been conditioned to accept as correct and factual those things appearing in print. Second, the newspaper account may be the reader's first encounter with these ideas or opinions in print. Consequently he is more likely to unquestioningly accept these opinions, for he may have no others on the particular subject. Third, the press is adaptable to the individual reader in that he is free to read at his own pace and as thoroughly as he desires. This is probably the only medium of communication in which this occurs. Fourth, the newspaper may make use of repetition as often as is necessary for the reader to comprehend. Ogle contends that repetition educates the public.³⁵ He concludes that of the various media used to disseminate information and impressions which help people formulate opinions, "the oldest, from the

³³Bogardus, p. 49.

³⁴Ibid., p. 61.

³⁵Marbury Bladen Ogle, Public Opinion and Political Dynamics (Boston, 1950), p. 283.

point of view of time, and perhaps still the most important, is the press--the newspaper and the mass circulation periodicals."³⁶

The effects of the press on public opinion as expressed by Childs seem to characterize the consensus:

In spite of the increasing influence of television in politics, the newspaper still remains the primary source of information regarding candidates and office holders, legislation and politics, and what is going on in government. For breadth of treatment, for variety of viewpoint, for interpretation and background, it really has no equal. . . . There are undoubtedly many instances when the deliberate attempts of newspapers to influence elections, editorially and otherwise, have borne fruit. Their influence on public policy would also seem to be considerable since many policy makers look to their favorite papers for clues to the popular will.³⁷

The applicability of the press to the Presidential leadership of public opinion, then, is rather obvious. If the President is the spokesman for the people, the national leader of public opinion, and if the press is the primary means of influencing public opinion, then it would seem that the President would endeavor to utilize the press to the utmost. This, of course, is the case. Corwin and Koenig note:

As builder of public sentiment the President utilizes an assortment of media and techniques. The day to day means is the press, and for this reason how the President fares with reporters bears vitally on the success of his leadership.³⁸

³⁶Ibid., p. 282.

³⁷Harwood L. Childs, Public Opinion: Nature, Formation, and Role (Princeton, 1965), p. 182..

³⁸Edward S. Corwin and Louis W. Koenig, The Presidency Today (New York, 1956), p. 70.

Sorenson, too, in discussing the Presidential leadership of public opinion, comments on the importance of the use of the press.

The President must be well aware of the American press and other media, for their selection and descriptions of particular events far more than their editorials, help to create or promote national issues. This, in turn, helps to shape the minds of the Congress and the public, as well as to influence the President's agenda and timing.³⁹

The following conclusions may be drawn from this discussion:

(1) The press still remains the most influential means available to influence public opinion. (2) The skillful President will carefully utilize the press to its maximum potential. (3) The press is the day to day means--the one most used by the President--to influence public opinion.

The Electronic Media

With the development of television there came the use of the expression "electronic media" to represent both radio and television. Since these two media share more than a title, they are grouped under a single heading for discussion here. The unique qualities of each will be discussed separately, and then their cumulative influence will be presented.

Radio.--Though radio as a form of entertainment became quite popular in the 1920's, it was not until the early 1930's

³⁹Sorenson, pp. 54-55. Sorenson may be implying the need of the President's "courting" the press, for this may be one factor in his receiving "a good press" which every President desires. This subject will be more thoroughly examined later in this chapter when the Presidential use of the press conference is discussed.

that it was effectively utilized by the politician. As early as 1932, however, studies such as Edward S. Robinson's indicate that radio even then had a marked effect on the formation of political attitudes.⁴⁰ Franklin D. Roosevelt was the first major politician to utilize this novel mass medium to reach the millions of listeners.

It appeared at first that this new medium would challenge the press as the major disseminator of news and other information. Though radio did assume some of the popularity of the press, it was soon discovered that the two mass media actually complemented each other. Together, many more people could be reached. The newspaper industry, recognizing the potential power of opinion dissemination available in radio, began to buy into the radio industry; and by the early 1940's about one-third of the radio stations in the United States were either owned or controlled by newspapers or newspaper chains.⁴¹

Though limited to its appeal to the auditory sense, the radio from its inception has had tremendous appeal to many. Perhaps the appeal has been greater to the less educated and lower income groups, for the effort of reading is precluded.

⁴⁰Robinson studied the influence of radio on political attitudes in 1932 and indicated that the medium, even at that relatively early date, had marked effect in the formation of political attitudes. Edward S. Robinson, "Are Radio Fans Influenced?," The Survey, LXVIII (November 1, 1932), 546, cited in Ogle, p. 297.

⁴¹Ogle, p. 296.

Not only the less literate have found great satisfaction in radio listening, but also those without time to read, those with poor eye-sight, as well as those who are too lazy to read. All have found in radio a ready means of receiving the latest news, as well as the opinions and ideas of others.

Since radio is limited to the use of the voice, the importance of the tone of voice and the persuasive quality is greatly emphasized. The radio speaker must appeal at one or he is in danger of being tuned out, mentally if not literally. One's voice may be made to work for him, however. With the proper voice and something important to say, the radio speaker is capable of moving the listeners to his viewpoint.

Much of the appeal of radio is due in part to its instantaneous nature of "making people alert on the spot where they are, in their homes, in their autos, in trains, in the air, on the seas. In consequence, the effects on public opinion are multifarious."⁴² Though it is listened to primarily for its entertainment value, news programs are listened to as a part of the format. For many years radio has enjoyed a place along side the press and motion picture as an important factor in the formation of public opinion.

Radio, as the forerunner of the electronic media, has now for almost four decades functioned effectively as a means

⁴²Bogardus, p. 78.

of presenting news programs as well as offering to those in government a means of ready access into the homes of countless millions. Perhaps people listened with more interest in the 1930's because of the novelty of hearing their President or Senator speak to them. They have continued, however, to listen throughout the years because of the perennial appeal mentioned above.

Television.--The second of the electronic media, television, did not become a widespread means of entertainment or of news dissemination until the late 1940's and the early 1950's. Like radio before it, television readily adapted itself to the opinion formation process. Television seemed to have all the advantages and appeal of radio, plus giving the listener "face to face" contact with the speaker--whether he was a news announcer or the President of the United States. Now the speaker's voice was not quite so important a commodity, though a pleasing voice was still desired.

What then is the effect of these electronic media on the formation of public opinion? Childs is probably accurate in his appraisal of the difficulty of measuring the effects of the media. He states, "As with newspapers, it is almost impossible to isolate these media, separate them from other influences, and measure their effects individually or together."⁴³ Childs adds, however, that:

⁴³Childs, Public Opinion: Nature, p. 218.

They [radio and television] have focused attention and awakened interest in national and international affairs to a degree never before attained. . . . Never before have government officials been able to project themselves, their viewpoints, and their activities so effectively and directly to the people.⁴⁴

Several writers on the Presidency have commented on the effects of the electronic media on the President's capability of influencing public opinion. The unanimous feeling seems to be mirrored by Cater:

With the advent of the television and radio, the President's power to shape and lead public opinion has been vastly increased because he is now provided with a direct unmediated access to the individual citizen. Increasingly it is the President, by the careful use of these communications advantages, who sets the tone of debate about any national issue, no matter how trivial.⁴⁵

The vastness of the audience the President commands and its effects are seen in Rossiter's words.

The coming of radio, and now of television, has added immeasurably to the range of the President's voice, offering the President the opportunity of speaking to almost every home, in almost every land. No one, not even Ed Sullivan, can gain access to so many homes.⁴⁶

It can be seen, then, that the electronic media as a complement to the press greatly enhances the leadership power of the President. Together these three form the vast "mass communications" at work in twentieth-century America. Cornwell notes: "Presidents have found in the mass circulation daily

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 221.

⁴⁵Douglass Cater, "The Presidency and the Press," The Dynamics of the American Presidency, edited by Donald Bruce Johnson and Jack L. Walker (New York, 1964), p. 272.

⁴⁶Rossiter, p. 33.

newspapers, radio broadcasting, and recently, television, unprecedented channels for executive leadership of opinion in the making of national policy."⁴⁷ Truly unlimited potential is available to the President in his opinion leadership role through the skillful use of these media.

The following conclusions may be drawn from the discussion of the electronic media: (1) They serve as a complement to the press in presenting news and opinions to the mass audience. (2) They have given the President direct and instantaneous access to the homes of millions of Americans. (3) Unlimited potential for influencing opinion is available to the President through the use of the electronic media.

The Press Conference

A third means which may be employed by the President to exert personal influence is the press conference. The press conference, like the electronic media, had its inception in the twentieth century. The first to use the press conference was Theodore Roosevelt, who allowed a reporter to interview him while he shaved. The first President to hold scheduled press conferences was Woodrow Wilson. The press conference was utilized by Presidents Harding, Coolidge, and Hoover, for it had become an institution. The first President, however, to prove just how influential the press conference could be in the opinion-making process was Franklin D. Roosevelt. Under

⁴⁷Cornwell, p. 4.

Roosevelt the conference reached its peak. In Drummond's words:

It was Franklin D. Roosevelt who really opened up the White House press conference. He opened it up in every direction. He abolished all the inhibiting restrictions. Questions did not have to be submitted in advance; they could be asked orally and spontaneously and they reporters could quickly follow up points which Mr. Roosevelt had himself made. . . . President Roosevelt used the press conference resourcefully and creatively.⁴⁸

The effects of the press conference were further broadened by the admission of radio microphones and reporters. With the radio reporters and commentators now admitted to the conference and the conference carried on the radio, the President was able to exert even more influence on public opinion. Another useful and significant dimension had been added to opinion leadership.

Harry Truman, who succeeded Franklin Roosevelt, was the first to experiment with the new medium of communication--television. Though both Truman and Eisenhower utilized the televised press conference, it was John Kennedy who first realized the potential of the medium. A close parallel may be seen between Roosevelt's and Kennedy's effective use of the media. There were several factors contributing to their effective use of the media. First, each had had an ample opportunity to observe those before him use the media. They each had a keen understanding of his medium. Not only did

⁴⁸Roscoe Drummond, "The Presidential Press Conference," The President, edited by David E. Haight and Larry D. Johnston (Chicago, 1965), pp. 276, 279.

they each recognize the potential value of the press conference, but they also had the personality--the proper temperament and wit--necessary to gain the most from the conference. Each made a special attempt and was successful at making friends, particularly with the newsmen, for he realized the importance of the personal effect he would have on those who would write the stories or report the news to be projected to a mass audience.⁴⁹ Each, too, had the ability to project himself well over his medium. During both the Roosevelt and the Kennedy administrations, the press conference became a production which appealed greatly to the millions listening. Men of lesser skill in adapting to the press conference routine and the use of the electronic media have proven less successful in their use of these means of influence, and probably, in turn, less successful in influencing the opinions of the people.

What are the potential effects of the press conference when skillfully used? In speaking of the general potential of the conference, Cater observes:

. . . for the President of the United States his weekly press conference, which continues to be his primary and most systematic effort to communicate with the

⁴⁹These newsmen--reporters and commentators--are referred to by Clarence Schettler, Public Opinion in American Society (New York, 1960), p. 119, as informal opinion leaders of public opinion. Since they are the middle men between the President and the public, they play a significant role in opinion formation. This "two-step flow" of communication and its effects on public opinion formation were first discussed in a pioneer study: Elihu Katz and Paul F. Lazarsfeld, Personal Influence: The Part Played by People in the Flow of Mass Communication (Glencoe, 1955).

people on a variety of major and lesser matters, offers a tremendous challenge. It provides a major measure of his leadership. . . .⁵⁰

Rossiter describes the press conference as

the most influential channel of public opinion to and from the President that has been opened up in recent years. . . . The President could not ask for a tool of leadership more perfectly designed to his ends, for a pulpit more artfully constructed from which to preach his sermons to us and to the world, for a listening device more finely tuned to hear the opinions and fears and complaints of the American people than the press conference.⁵¹

More specifically, Cater sees numerous advantages offered the President by the press conference.

[The press conference is] . . . a device for keeping public attention focused on himself as the single most important man in the United States. By having the flood lights thus fixed, the President can give his words and gestures subtle gradations of meaning and avoid the stark black and white they would acquire if, each time he wished to make an announcement, all the paraphernalia of publicity had to be hauled out afresh. In the press conference the President can converse with the public rather than preach to it.⁵²

Other advantages of the press conference are listed by Drummond:

The President can hold the headlines for several days or longer when he uses the press conference for important statements. The President can seize the initiative to shape public discussion on matters of his choice at the particular moment. He can either take the play away from his critics or center attention where he wishes. . . . He can command public attention without the painful process of preparing formal speeches and can deepen popular interest in his action program. The question-and-answer

⁵⁰Cater, "The President and the Press," p. 277.

⁵¹Rossiter, pp. 114, 117.

⁵²Cater, "The President and the Press," p. 277.

format is easy to read, easy to listen to and easy to grasp.⁵³

Pollard adds another advantage of the press conference. He observes, "It multiplies the possibilities of the White House as a sounding board for making, shaping, and altering public opinion."⁵⁴

The far reaching effects of the press conference are summed up well by Drummond:

The White House Press Conference is valuable to the President as an instrument of influence and leadership. When resourcefully used by the President, he can inform the country vividly and cumulatively, develop a public opinion which can be brought to bear on Congress and develop a public understanding and support for actions which a President can take only when he has assured himself of such support.⁵⁵

These conclusions, then, may be drawn: (1) The press conference offers to the President who possesses the necessary ability and skill a powerful means of influencing public opinion. (2) Through the use of all the mass media in this particular setting, the press conference offers the President advantages which he would not otherwise enjoy. (3) With the press conference, the President can exert more influence on the reporting of the news, and, therefore, exert more influence on public opinion.

⁵³Drummond, p. 278.

⁵⁴James E. Pollard, "The White House News Conference as a Channel of Communication," Public Opinion Quarterly, XV (Winter, 1951-52), 677.

⁵⁵Drummond, p. 278.

Platform Speaking

The fourth and last of the personal means of influencing public opinion available to the President to be considered is platform speaking. From the time of Greek democracies to the New England town meeting, the public speaker was the acknowledged leader of public opinion. In the history of the United States Webster, Clay, Calhoun, Phillips, Lincoln, Douglas, and all the other outstanding speakers of the nineteenth century were leaders of American public opinion. Their ability to speak was their primary "stock in trade" in affecting public opinion. As mentioned earlier, as the press began to influence the opinions of the people the last half of the nineteenth century, the platform speaker now shared the role of opinion leadership.

Recent studies of public opinion and the many influencing factors on it give full treatment to the mass media which seek to influence public opinion, but they devote little attention to the effects the platform speaker may exert on public opinion. McKean, in responding to the omission of public speaking in studies of public opinion, listed four functions served by platform speaking.⁵⁶ The four advantages listed by McKean seem as appropriate today as when listed some three decades ago. First, he stressed that the public speaker commands

⁵⁶Dayton D. McKean, "Public Speaking and Public Opinion," The Quarterly Journal of Speech, XVII (November, 1931), 521-22.

continuous attention from his audience--an attention which a newspaper or magazine may not receive. Even with radio or television speaking, the listener may be reading the newspaper, playing bridge, engaged in conversation with family or friends, playing with the children, or doing any number of other potentially distracting things. Secondly, the writer stressed that if the speaker has something of significance to say, he will receive the attention of the press and other media. The third advantage presented by McKean was that with public speaking the intensity of attention given the speaker is greater. When discussing something of a complicated matter on which an opinion need be formed, the speaker can take the necessary time to describe and explain it fully. The same people, perhaps would not be willing to expend the energy necessary to gain an understanding of the subject from a newspaper or magazine. The fourth advantage listed is the speaker's ability to employ ethical persuasion--that is, the persuasion of his presence, his reputation, and his personality. This last advantage, of course, the radio and television speaker may employ.

In a more recent study of public opinion, Hennessy comments on the worth of platform speaking to the politician who desires to influence public opinion:

. . . the democratic politician desires large, enthusiastic crowds for three reasons. First, he needs the support and votes of the individuals in the crowd. Second, he hopes for a band-wagon effect. He wants to rouse the individuals in the crowd to persuade other voters as well as give their own votes, and he wants to make his cause

to seem popular to those who are in the crowd. Third, he needs the crowd for what we have called feedback. . . .⁵⁷

Gosnell, after a study of the ten election attempts of Franklin D. Roosevelt, concludes that campaign speaking does have an effect on voters' opinions. He determines that in at least two of Mr. Roosevelt's bids for office, campaign speaking was essential. Gosnell's findings show that campaign speaking is probably more significant and necessary in close elections.⁵⁸

That public speaking is believed by the President and others to have potential power to sway persons' opinions can be seen by almost any day's newspaper. The President, in this decade as in the past, still continues to use his public appearances to influence the listeners' attitudes. Since he is the President, he can discriminately choose most of his speaking engagements. Obviously their possibilities in the over-all political picture are studied. Since the process of opinion formation is usually a long, drawn out one, the President may utilize many speaking engagements to influence the public on a single issue. Public speaking, though it is but one of the personal means used by the President, is carefully incorporated into the overall process of opinion formation.

No President, of course, expects to move mountains with any one given speech, though some speeches more than others

⁵⁷ Bernard C. Hennessy, Public Opinion (Belmont, 1965), pp. 34-35.

⁵⁸ Harold F. Gosnell, "Does Campaigning Make a Difference?," Public Opinion Quarterly, XIV (Fall, 1950), 413-18.

are designed to carry great punch on a particular issue. The cumulative effect striven for by the President's use of public speaking is expressed by McConnell:

So also with his speeches; they seldom can be expected to sway many by their sheer logic or eloquence, yet they leave a residue of impressions. Is the President devious? Is he a man of character? are questions in the minds of most of his hearers, no matter what the subject matter of his speeches? No one speech or one interview or ceremonial act will have a decisive effect on presidential power or the course of events, but collectively all of them affect the outcome of large affairs.⁵⁹

The following conclusions may be drawn concerning the use of public speaking to influence public opinion: (1) Though no longer the dominant influence on public opinion, public speaking still continues to provide the President with a personal direct means of addressing members of his vast constituency. (2) Only with this means can the President directly see and feel the reactions of his listeners. (3) With this means, too, he can probably more fully project his presence and personality to the people. (4) Whether used in a political campaign, before a particular group or organization, or on a speaking tour "taking the message to the people," public speaking adds an additional influence on public opinion which may cumulatively greatly increase the President's persuasive powers.

The following conclusions may be drawn from the discussion of these four means of personal influence: (1) The press is still the dominant means available to influence public opinion. (2) The electronic media, which complement the press, vastly

⁵⁹McConnell, p. 73.

increase the President's power to influence public opinion, for the media give the President a direct unmediated access to the individual citizen. (3) The press conference greatly increases the President's power, for with it the President can maintain more control on the reporting and interpretation of the news. (4) Public speaking still offers the President the most direct means of reaching and influencing the public. (5) Together these means offer the resourceful President unlimited opportunity to influence the opinions of the nation.

CHAPTER III

FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT'S LEADERSHIP OF PUBLIC OPINION 1940-41

During the years from 1936 to 1939 President Roosevelt cautiously attempted to lead public opinion. As noted earlier, he usually endeavored to discover and then implement the desires of the people rather than to attempt actively to shape opinion. Events had not yet necessitated aggressive leadership. The events of 1940-41, however, certainly did demand a President who would assert himself in the leadership--the influencing--of public opinion. The purpose of this chapter is to present three specific situations in which Roosevelt utilized the personal means of influence discussed in Chapter II to influence public opinion: (1) the Charlottesville Speech of June 10, 1940, (2) the press conference of December 17, 1940, and its effects as seen in the national press the following days, and (3) the Fireside Chat of September 11, 1941. These actions will be studied to show how each medium was used skillfully by Franklin Roosevelt to influence public opinion in favor of aid to the Allies.

The Charlottesville Speech

Background

The coming of spring, 1940, brought Senator Borah's "phoney war" to a dramatic end. In April Hitler began his momentous

drive against the Allies. The German Army employed all the latest means of warfare--paratroops, tanks, bombing planes, and motorized infantry. The Allies, who were unprepared for Hitler's onslaught, were no match for the German Army. Denmark and Norway both fell in April, and in May the Netherlands, Luxembourg, and Belgium each surrendered to Hitler. Northern France was invaded and the entire country was on the verge of surrender as May ended. The French government was moved to Vichy. Though it was then capable of little independent action, it managed to keep control of its fleet..

The great threat to the Allies did not spare the major Allied power, Great Britain. In May the British lost 30,000 men and nearly all their armored equipment in their withdrawal from Dunkirk. The whole of Britain was next on Hitler's schedule. At this time Churchill replaced Chamberlain as Prime Minister. On May 15, Churchill cabled Roosevelt for help--he needed aid of any type available. Although he wanted destroyers, in effect, he was asking the United States to proclaim a state of non-belligerency.

The reactions of the majority of the populace to the events abroad during April and May were fear and anger. As both France and Great Britain weakened, many more realized for the first time how close war might be. The people were shocked and angered by the impact of Hitler's blitzkriegs. Public support was rapidly developing in favor of aiding the Allies.

Roosevelt, though not sure the United States would accept "all aid short of war" to the Allies, felt the time had come when he must insist, without reservation, on arming the United States. On May 16, 1940, the President acted. In a speech to Congress he outlined his preparedness program. The general reaction to the program was "shock," for according to Tugwell, "Americans still refused to face the situation." The Congress, though, Tugwell adds, "closed its eyes, held its breath, and authorized all he asked."¹

In order to inform the people and enlist support for his preparedness program, Roosevelt delivered a Fireside Chat to the nation on May 26, 1940. In this address he outlined the sequence of events which had occurred the past two months. He then pointed to the significance to the United States of these events. Again and again he appealed to the basic want of survival, as he illustrated how small the Atlantic Ocean was and what the consequences might be if the United States did not properly prepare herself. The people were now more afraid than before. This, of course, was Roosevelt's objective, for he realized the people must be sufficiently aroused before action could be taken.

The month of May brought increased support to the President. During this critical month the President's popularity

¹Tugwell, p. 523.

had risen in the polls by 10 per cent.² With this rise in popularity also came a strengthening of the powers of the President which was necessary if he were to begin aiding the Allies. This aid, he felt, must be begun at once. Without Congressional approval, Roosevelt began at once by administrative order to send aid to the Allies. Though the materials sent were mostly of World War I vintage, they were welcomed by the slowly sinking Allied Powers:

On June 4, Churchill delivered his memorable speech to the House of Commons in which he said:

. . . we shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing-grounds, we shall fight in the fields, and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender, and even if, which I do not for a moment believe, this island or a large part of it were subjugated and starving, then our Empire beyond the seas, armed and guarded by the British fleet, would carry on the struggle, until, in God's good time, the New World with all its power and might, steps forth to the rescue and the liberation of the Old.³

The Prime Minister had offered a great challenge to the President and the people of the United States. Six days later, Churchill received his formal reply.

²This, Cantril believes, indicates a strong desire to let the leader assume the responsibility of decision. He concludes "At critical times, people in a democracy are willing to assign more rather than less responsibility to their acknowledged leaders." Hadley Cantril, "America Faces the War: A Study in Public Opinion," Public Opinion Quarterly, IV (Fall, 1940), 406.

³Winston S. Churchill, Their Finest Hour, p. 118, cited in Basil Rauch, Roosevelt from Munich to Pearl Harbor (New York, 1950), p. 212.

The Speech

President Roosevelt was invited to deliver the commencement address to the graduating class of 1940 at the University of Virginia. His son was one of the five hundred graduates. When inquiring newsmen asked Presidential Press Secretary Steve Early what the subject of the speech would be, he stated that it would deal with ". . . democracy, since democracy today seems to be the issue over which a good part of the world is chosing." He then added that ". . . events of the day might cause revision of the rough draft of the speech."⁴

Roosevelt chose this speaking occasion to deliver a major foreign policy address. The President wished to reply to Churchill's speech of June 4 in such a manner as to encourage Britain and the other Allies as he pledged the support of the United States. This time the President felt he must pledge more than moral support--he must pledge an even greater amount of supplies and munitions than had already been sent.

Early on the day he was to deliver the commencement address, the President received word that Mussolini had joined with the Axis powers in their drive to subjugate the democratic world. This marked the diplomatic failure of Roosevelt to keep Mussolini out of the war. The President, in Greer's words, "had used every means to keep Mussolini out of the

⁴"Martial Words and Actions," The United States News, VIII (June 21, 1940), 24.

war. He used every approach--reason, cajolery, warning, and promises--but as France tottered, Mussolini decided for war."⁵ Rauch similarly states that "Mussolini had not dared to strike until his prey was beaten down by a stronger beast. Roosevelt had striven to the end to spare France the degraded final blow from Italy."⁶ Roosevelt's reaction, according to Greer, was that he "could not contain his bitterness and contempt."⁷ This feeling was conveyed in the address that June 10.

When Press secretary Early told the newsmen that "events of the day might cause revision" in the prior written draft of the President's speech, he could not have foreseen the event which was to make this particular speech a memorable one.⁸ During the train ride from Washington to Charlottesville, the President continued working on the speech--"carefully weighing each word."⁹ Mussolini's actions and their effects became an important part of the speech.

Because of rain the commencement exercise at Charlottesville had to be held in the crowded and hot campus gymnasium. The President, after formally addressing President Newcomb and "my friends" of the University of Virginia, then made an effort to adapt not only to this immediate audience, but also to his vast radio audience when he said:

⁵Thomas H. Greer, What Roosevelt Thought (East Lansing, 1958), pp. 184-85.

⁶Rauch, p. 213.

⁷Greer, p. 185.

⁸"Martial Words and Actions," p. 24.

⁹Ibid.

. . . I also take this very apt occasion to speak to many other classes that have graduated through all the years, classes that are still in the period of study, not alone in the schools of learning of the Nation, but classes that have come up through the great schools of experience. . . .¹⁰

The President slowly developed the speech by, first referring to "this younger reneration," who, as past generations, were wondering what was to become of the country they had known. He then briefly discussed the threat to democracy apparent in the world, adding that "the whole of our sympathies lie with those nations that are giving their life blood in combat against these forces."¹¹ Belare relates that "they the audience broke into the wildest applause, cheering and rebel yells."¹²

The President then moved closer to his central theme when he said, "The people and the Government of the United States have seen with the utmost regret and with grave disquiet the decision of the Italian Government to engage in the hostilities now raging in Europe."¹³ Roosevelt then carefully related to the audience his efforts of the past few weeks to keep Italy out of the war. "One minute he was hesitant, the next he was emotionally excited, putting into his words all the emphasis

¹⁰Samuel I. Rosenman, editor, War--and Aid to Democracies, Vol. IX of The Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt, 13 vols. (New York, 1941), p. 259.

¹¹Ibid., p. 262.

¹²Felix Belare, Jr., New York Times, June 11, 1940, Sec. 1, p. 1.

¹³Rosenman, War--and Aid, p. 262.

at his command," relates The United States News.¹⁴ After condemning Italy for entering the war on the side of Germany, he shocked the commencement audience and the nation when he said:

On this tenth day of June, 1940, the hand that held the dagger has struck it into the back of its neighbor.

On this tenth day of June, 1940, in this University founded by the first great American teacher of democracy, we send forth our prayers and our hopes to those beyond the seas who are maintaining with magnificent valor their battle for freedom.¹⁵

Belare concludes: "There could be no missing the depth of his feeling, since he put into the words all the emphasis at his command."¹⁶

The President then set forth his policy which he hoped the nation would accept:

In our American unity, we will pursue two obvious and simultaneous courses; we will extend to the opponents of force the material resources of this nation; and, at the same time, we will harness and speed up the use of those resources in order that we ourselves in the Americas may have equipment and training equal to the task of any emergency and every defense.¹⁷

For the first time the President was promising material resources to the Allies. "The United States had taken sides. Ended was the myth of United States neutrality," states Time.¹⁸ An era had ended and another had been inaugurated. Rauch concludes, "This put an end to the status of the United States

¹⁴"Martial Words and Actions," p. 24.

¹⁵Rosenman, War--and Aid, pp. 263-264.

¹⁶Belare, New York Times, June 11, 1940, Sec. 1, p. 6.

¹⁷Rosenman, War--and Aid, p. 264.

¹⁸"Tenth of June," Time, XXXV (June 17, 1940), 13.

as a neutral under former rules of international law and made it a non-belligerent supporting the nations fighting in defense of their independence. . . ."19

The President then concluded by presenting a challenge to his audience: "I call for effort, courage, sacrifice, devotion. Granting the love of freedom, all of these are possible."²⁰ In these closing minutes of the address academic decorum was forgotten as the audience responded with spontaneous applause. Belare describes the reaction of the audience: "As the President neared the end of his speech the cheering became general and members of the faculty stamped their feet and applauded."²¹

The reactions of the nation were further recorded in the press the following days. Time described the address as

a fighting speech, more powerful and determined than any he had delivered since the war began. It was a speech of decision, with none of the ambiguities that had marked his words on neutrality. It was eloquent. . . . It was specific in its aid to the Allies. . . . nothing remained now but to get on with the job. . . . The President spoke for the nation.²²

The New York Times, the day following the address, stated:

"Editorial comment on President Roosevelt's address in general, pledged that the people of the country were ready to back him fully to assist the Allies." The Pittsburg Post Gazette

¹⁹Rauch, p. 219.

²⁰Rosenman, War--and Aid, p. 264.

²¹Belare, New York Times, June 11, 1940, Sec. 1, p. 6.

²²"Tenth of June," p. 13.

commented, "The overwhelming majority in this country supports the President's position fully."²³ The Minneapolis Morning Tribune wrote, "If Mr. Roosevelt spoke too bluntly, he will no doubt be disillusioned by Congress. But we suspect that his address did little more than give official utterance to what the nation thinks and feels."²⁴ From abroad the London Telegraph observed:

The affirmation that America must both protect its own security and the principles of life which it values and assert its power in international affairs clearly does not go too far from public opinion there. Ample evidence is on hand that the spirit of the American people has grown warm in support of the Allied cause.²⁵

The United States News, likewise, wrote, "President Roosevelt's speech. . . is rated by the commenting press as a complete departure from diplomatic tradition, but representative of the sentiment of the American people."²⁶ The Nation concludes, "These are strong words, but the reception of the President's speech should end any question whether the American people support his determination to give all possible aid to the Allies."²⁷ And, finally, Newsweek summed up Roosevelt's success in influencing public opinion in favor of aiding the Allies: "As in the past, the week's acts as a whole were bent toward

²³Cited in New York Times, June 12, 1940, Sec. 1, p. 7.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶"President's Pledge to the Allies: Reaction of the Nation's Press," The United States News, VIII (June 21, 1940), 29.

²⁷"The Shape of Things," The Nation, CL (June 15, 1940), 721.

the same end. The way devised to give the hard pressed Allies surplus planes and guns was a test of American reaction--and a test that went over."²⁸

The press, then, reported widespread support, among both the journalists and the readers. However, what did the polls reveal about the feelings of the people regarding increased aid to the Allies? First, in a poll taken by Cantril, it was found that at the end of May, 73 per cent favored increased aid to the Allies. By about mid-June, 79 per cent favored the same proposal.²⁹ Second, a poll conducted by the American Institute of Public Opinion revealed that on May 23, 65 per cent favored doing everything possible to help England and France except go to war. By June 11, this group had increased to 73 per cent, an increase of 8 per cent.³⁰ Though it is true, of course, that other events may have occurred during this polling period, the dominant event was probably President Roosevelt's Charlottesville speech. His aggressive leadership at this crucial time for the Allies seems to have been effective in influencing public opinion.

The following conclusions may be drawn from this study of Presidential leadership: (1) President Roosevelt skillfully utilized a platform address, supported by the available mass

²⁸"Italy's Plunge Stirs President to Boost Our Aid to the Allies," Newsweek, XV (June 17, 1940), 33.

²⁹Cantril, "America Faces the War," pp. 391-92.

³⁰Hadley Cantril, Public Opinion 1935-46 (Princeton, 1951), p. 971.

media in his attempt to mobilize or influence public opinion.

(2) The indicators of public opinion--the press and the polls--agreed that Roosevelt was successful in his attempt to influence public opinion favor of increased aid to the Allies.

The Press Conference of December 17, 1940

Background

During the month of June, 1940, Germany continued her air war against Britain. The valiant British continued to defend their country as well as could be expected under the circumstances. The United States continued as a non-belligerent to send munitions and supplies to the Allies. Roosevelt, committed himself entirely to the British cause. The actions to aid the Allies in June, 1940, are described by Rauch:

He "scraped the bottom of the barrel" in American arsenals to find arms for the British Home Guards, who were organizing against invasion. They soon received half a million guns, a hundred and thirty million rounds of ammunition, nine hundred French 75s with a million shells, TNT, and other munitions.³¹

In late June the subject of Selective Service--the first peacetime conscription--was broached with the Congress. This would, if necessary, place the nation in a position to back up their aid-to-the-Allies program. The program rallied "both popular and Congressional support to a surprising degree," according to Rauch.³² Perhaps the most momentous occurrence of the month

³¹Rauch, p. 223.

³²Ibid., p. 225.

of June, however, was Roosevelt's nomination for a third term. Though he had not campaigned or publicly asked for the nomination, he did expect to be nominated by his party. Hopkins and Byrnes presented to the convention "a unanimous draft" for Roosevelt. The draft, however, did not pass, due to support still pledged to Farley and Garner. Farley, to restore party unity, nominated Roosevelt by acclamation and the motion carried.

During the remainder of the summer, the President continued the development of hemispheric defense he had begun before the fall of Poland. In mid-July twenty-one republics, including the United States, met at Havana to discuss means of sealing off the Western Hemisphere from attack. In August the United States united with Canada in setting up a Permanent Joint Board to plan defenses for the northern half of North America. In September the Congress authorized loans totaling \$1,500,000,000 to Latin America for acquisition of strategic supplies and the expansion of defense industries.

In late August Hitler intensified his air war over Britain. Churchill alerted Roosevelt that he was greatly in need of destroyers. Then came what Hockett and Schlesinger refer to as the "daring stroke."³³ Roosevelt, without Congressional authorization or knowledge, by administrative order agreed to give fifty old model destroyers to Britain in exchange for ninety-nine year leases on eight naval and air bases strewn

³³Hockett and Schlesinger, p. 670.

all the way from Newfoundland to British Guiana. Roosevelt also received a pledge from Churchill that Britain would not sink or surrender her navy should Germany overcome her. Hockett and Schlesinger report:

The President then on September 3, 1940, gleefully told the legislature of these outposts of security, the most important additions to the national defense since the Louisiana Purchase. The public accorded wholehearted approval.³⁴

During September England braced for an expected German invasion which never materialized. Instead Hitler turned his blitz on Soviet Russia. The British Navy and Air Force continued to successfully defend Britain against the powerful assaults of the Luftwaffe, the German Air Force.

Because of the tenseness of the international situation, Roosevelt announced that he would deliver only five major campaign speeches prior to the November election. Wendell Wilkie, the Republican nominee, struck mostly at the third term and "the effects of the New Deal issues," since Roosevelt and he had agreed that their conflict over the current policy of support to the Allies might weaken their position. Both parties, however, now favored keeping America out of the war, aiding Britain short of armed intervention, and measures for rendering the Western Hemisphere impregnable against attack. It appeared, since they primarily agreed on foreign policy, that their agreement not to discuss that policy meant little.

³⁴Ibid.

Each week the Gallup Poll took the "pulse" of the nation. Polls in September and early October showed Wilkie gaining on Roosevelt, but still trailing substantially.

During the closing weeks of the campaign the war inevitably became the dominant issue. Sherwood observes that ". . . Wilkie started to shout charges that American boys were already on the transports--that we should be involved in a foreign war within five months if Roosevelt won. . . ." ³⁵ Sherwood adds that Wilkie also began "to scare the American people with warnings that votes for Roosevelt meant wooden crosses for their sons and brothers and sweethearts." ³⁶ Sherwood describes effects of Wilkie's campaign speeches: "Fear of war was something new and unreasoning and tending toward a sense of panic." ³⁷ Wilkie's strategy of terror seemed to be reaping success. ³⁸ Roosevelt was forced on the defensive, for the opinion polls in late October showed Wilkie continuing to gain new support. In the end Roosevelt was urged by politicians from within his own party to reassure mothers and fathers that their sons would not be sent to fight on foreign

³⁵Robert E. Sherwood, Roosevelt and Hopkins (New York, 1948), p. 187.

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Ibid., p. 188.

³⁸The following is an example of a radio "spot" used by the Republican Party on election eve: "Mothers of America: When your boy is dying on some battlefield in Europe--or maybe in Martinique--and he's crying out 'Mother, Mother!--don't blame Franklin D. Roosevelt because he sent your boy to war--blame yourself because you sent Franklin D. Roosevelt back to the White House," cited in Sherwood, p. 198.

soil. This pledge he made before a large partisan crowd in Boston as the campaign neared its end.

When the final public opinion polls were examined as election day neared, the Gallup Poll showed Wilkie now close to Roosevelt. The "trend" seemed still to be moving in Wilkie's favor. The final Roper Poll showed Roosevelt getting 55.2 per cent and Wilkie receiving 44.8 per cent of the votes. This was one-half of one per cent from the final results.³⁹ When the final count was in, Roosevelt had received 449 electoral votes to Wilkie's 82. This was an endorsement, it seemed, of Roosevelt's policies by at least a majority of the people.

As war in Europe continued in November, 1940, the United States continued to react. By a short time after the election, Congress had voted the remainder of what now totaled \$18,000,000,000 for rearmament. There were funds sufficient for a two-ocean navy, but the bulk was to be spent mobilizing an army of 1,200,000 and expanding the air force to 35,000 planes. Too, the manufacturing of war supplies was to be greatly expanded. Roosevelt, continuing to further commit the United States to the effort of the Allies, announced that henceforth Britain would be allotted half the nation's production of military supplies. The President had been "fortified by the popular endorsement given him in the November election," report Hockett and Schlesinger.⁴⁰

³⁹Cited in Sherwood, p. 198.

⁴⁰Hockett and Schlesinger, p. 671.

As 1940 drew to a close, Great Britain was on the verge of bankruptcy in terms of dollar credits. Her balances, which had amounted to \$4,500,000,000 before the war, were gone. It was obvious that even though Roosevelt had pledged 50 per cent of the United States' war production to the Allies, they could not, under the "cash and carry" law, obtain these necessary supplies without money. In the endless discussions of this problem Roosevelt began to say, reports Sherwood, "We must find some way to lease or even lend these goods to the British."⁴¹ With the stepped-up bombing of city after city in Britain in late November, Britain's situation became more critical. Without supplies from the United States, she could not continue to resist the saturation bombing.

On the morning of December 9, 1940, while enjoying a respite cruise aboard the Tuscaloosa, Roosevelt received a 4,000 word letter from Churchill. This lengthy document presented the British plight in detail. After stating Britain's present financial position in a few words, he asked for more destroyers, either by a process of gift or loan. Sherwood notes: "He [Churchill] concluded this memorable document with an expression of confidence that the American nation would support Britain's cause and meet her urgent needs. . . ." Sherwood adds, "This message had a profound effect on Roosevelt."⁴²

⁴¹Sherwood, p. 221.

⁴²Ibid., pp. 223-24.

In early December the American people were further alarmed by rumors that Britain was nearing the end of her financial resources. Moreover, it was rumored that the United States' supplies would soon be exhausted. Brandenburg notes, "Although the citizens of the United States were still extremely anxious that their country not enter the war, they gradually adopted the attitude that helping England was more important than staying out of the conflict."⁴³ The state of the public mind in early December is vividly revealed by Time:

The people wanted facts--no matter how hard, cold, and disillusioning. In every way they knew how, Americans asked last week--How grave the peril? How great the sacrifice? How heavy the burden? How huge the task? . . . the cloudy nationwide feeling built up into one need; as threatening and insistent as an August thunderhead: leadership. All talk, all possible hope of leadership came down to one man: Franklin Roosevelt. . . . The U. S. promised Franklin Roosevelt the moon and sixpence, if only--⁴⁴

These conclusions may be drawn from this background information: (1) Roosevelt led the United States in a preparedness program at home as well as all aid short of war for the Allies. (2) Roosevelt's unprecedented election to a third term brought him additional power to further influence coming

⁴³ Brandenburg, "Franklin D. Roosevelt's International Speeches," pp. 24-25. In answer to a December Gallup Poll which asked, "Which of these two things do you think is the more important for the United States to try to do--to keep out of the war ourselves, or to try to help England win, even at the risk of getting into the war?" 60 per cent thought helping England more important. It had been split 50-50 in November. See "Gallup and Fortune Polls," Public Opinion Quarterly, IV (Winter, 1941), 680.

⁴⁴"What of the Night?," Time, XXXVI (December 23, 1940), 9.

events. (3) The people in mid-December were demanding leadership--the President was the one person to whom they could look.

The Press Conference

When President Roosevelt returned to the White House from his Caribbean cruise, there was speculation that some new form of financial aid to Britain was under consideration by the administration.⁴⁵ This speculation, along with the President's absence from Washington for two weeks, brought approximately 200 newsmen to the President's scheduled press conference on December 17, 1940. "As he faced the large and impatient group of reporters. . . , the President was at his fittest," Langer and Gleason observe.⁴⁶ The purpose of this press conference was to release a "trial balloon"--to sketch for the American press and people the manner in which the United States would attempt to meet Britain's financial crisis. Its acceptance depended, to a great degree, on the President's ability to communicate it to his audience.

The President began the press conference with his usual statement, "I don't think there is any particular news."⁴⁷

⁴⁵The lead story of the New York Times on December 16, 1940, the day before the President's announcement of Lend Lease, was "Britain Requests Our Financial Aid." The story discussed several indications that an administration movement was under-way to offer the Allies financial aid.

⁴⁶William L. Langer and S. Everett Gleason, The Undeclared War, 1940-41 (New York, 1953), pp. 238-39.

⁴⁷Rosenman, War--and Aid, p. 604.

After paving the way with this expected statement, Time relates, "he held forth in monologue for 45 minutes."⁴⁸ Drummond adds, "Throughout the long, extemporaneous discussion. . . , Mr. Roosevelt spoke without a note on his desk but apparently with great care and deliberation. . . ."⁴⁹ Roosevelt set the stage for remarks to follow by again appealing to the basic want of security--or survival. He stated:

In the present world situation of course there is absolutely no doubt in the mind of a very overwhelming number of Americans that the best immediate defense of the United States is the success of Great Britain in defending itself. . . .⁵⁰

This was Mr. Roosevelt's theme. Before allowing questions the President began to elaborate. The President, note Langer and Gleason, "in bantering language made light of the 'nonsense' he had been hearing about the traditional methods of financing war."⁵¹ Roosevelt then attempted to establish himself as, in Sherwood's words, "a middle-of-the-roader,"⁵² by dismissing as banal the thinking of two groups--those advocating outright loans to the British government and those who would make gifts of the aid to Britain. He then said that there

⁴⁸"An Hour of Urgency," Time, XXXVI (December 30, 1940), 7.

⁴⁹Roscoe Drummond, "Loans of Guns to Britain Is Proposed by President," Christian Science Monitor, December 18, 1940, Sec. 1. p. 8.

⁵⁰Rosenman, War--and Aid, p. 604.

⁵¹Langer and Gleason, p. 239.

⁵²Sherwood, p. 225.

were other methods of assisting Britain. Cautiously, he explained that the United States, since she had the money to produce additional munitions, could either lease or sell these surplus goods to the Allies. He stressed again that the best defense of Great Britain was the best defense for the United States. What he wanted to do, the President said, was "eliminate the dollar sign. . . get rid of the silly, foolish old dollar sign."⁵³

Roosevelt continued in his folksy, friendly vein by offering an analogy "to illustrate his meaning and cushion the shock."⁵⁴ The President's illustration was of the simple, homely type for which he was known.

Suppose my neighbor's home catches fire, and I have a length of garden hose four or five hundred feet away. If he can take my garden hose and connect it with his hydrant, I may help him put out the fire. Now, what do I do? I don't say to him before that operation, "Neighbor, my garden hose cost me \$15; you have to pay me \$15 for it." What is the transaction that goes on? I don't want \$15--I want my garden hose back after the fire is over. . . . But suppose it gets smashed up--holes in it--during the fire; we don't have to have too much formality about it. . . . He says, "All right, I will replace it." Now, if I get a nice garden hose back, I am in pretty good shape.

In other words, if you lend certain munitions and get the munitions back at the end of the war, if they are intact--haven't been hurt--you are all right. . . .⁵⁵

The President then quickly added that he could not go into details, that there was no use to ask any legal questions about

⁵³Rosenman, War--and Aid, p. 607.

⁵⁴Langer and Gleason, p. 239.

⁵⁵Rosenman, War--and Aid, pp. 607-08.

how it would be done. He stressed that the United States would enter into some kind of arrangement for the British use of American munitions and equipment. This would, he noted, be the best thing for Britain and for the defense of America. With this said, Roosevelt had launched the so-called "trial balloon." The questions to follow would give him some indication of the possibilities of his proposal, but the real test would be the response of the reporters as reflected in the press.

As earlier noted, Roosevelt recognized the potential power of the press conference and attempted to exploit it to its fullest advantage. Langer and Gleason describe the President's handling of this particular press conference: "His skillful blending of humor and solemnity, of candor and evasion, together with the high import of the news he dispensed made the occasion memorable."⁵⁶ The effects of Roosevelt's press conference on events to come are noted by Sherwood:

I believe it may accurately be said that with that neighborly analogy [of the garden hose] Roosevelt won the fight for Lend Lease. There were to be two months of some of the bitterest debates in American history, but through it all the American people as a whole maintained the conviction that there couldn't be anything very radical or very dangerous in the President's proposal to lend our "garden hose" to the British who were fighting so heroically against such fearful odds.⁵⁷

The significant effects of the President's press conference were also noted by others. Langer and Gleason point out that

⁵⁶Langer and Gleason, p. 239.

⁵⁷Sherwood, p. 225.

the significance of the President's press conference of December 17, 1940, can scarcely be exaggerated. . . . The occasion was regarded, alike by those who sympathized with the President's policy and those who opposed it, as fulfilling the expectation with which his return to the capitol had been anticipated. The issue of aid to Britain had finally been presented to the people with some adumbration of its real implications.⁵⁸

And, finally, Rauch adds:

The portentous conception of Lend Lease was presented by Roosevelt to a press conference immediately after his cruise in words so homely and convincing that the American public understood and in great majority quickly approved. . . . After the election the American public had debated earnestly how the Administration's commitment to aid Britain should be carried out. The Roosevelt solution of "lending the neighbor the garden hose" resolved the issue and satisfied all but last ditch isolationists.⁵⁹

These conclusions may be drawn from Roosevelt's use of this press conference to influence public opinion: (1) The President skillfully adapted to the reporters present--and indeed the nation--by employing the friendly, folksy manner of speaking for which he was known. (2) The general response of the reporters and the nation pointed to the effectiveness of the press conference.

Roosevelt employed the press conference skillfully in communicating with the reporters. How successful was he, however, from the standpoint of news coverage and editorial endorsement, in projecting his ideas to the mass newspaper audience of the nation? Roosevelt, as a leader of public opinion, recognized that the press was the chief source of public information. Boorstin notes, "Though newspaper owners

⁵⁸Langer and Gleason, p. 240.

⁵⁹Rauch, pp. 295-96.

opposed him in editorials which few read, Roosevelt himself, with the collaboration of a friendly corps of Washington correspondents was using front page headlines to make news read by all."⁶⁰ Greer also observes that

he [Roosevelt] regarded himself as an expert in this field the newspaper, and his press conferences often turned into seminars as he lectured reporters on the nature and techniques of their business. . . . He had a fine sense for news. . . .⁶¹

Heywood Broun called Roosevelt "the best newspaperman who has ever been President of the United States."⁶²

An analysis of the newspapers following the December 17 press conference reveals that in each case examined, Roosevelt received the lead story. The Dallas Morning News' lead story on December 18 was headlined "President Outlines Sweeping Plan To Aid British By Lending Equipment To Be Repaid After War."⁶³ The Christian Science Monitor's lead story on December 18 was headlined "Loans Of Guns To Britain Is Proposed By President."⁶⁴ Likewise, the New York Times devoted headlines to the President's action of the previous day. The headline read, "Roosevelt

⁶⁰Daniel J. Boorstin, The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America (New York, 1961), p. 20. To make headline news, Roosevelt used not only actual events, but also what Boorstin terms "pseudo-events." These pseudo-events are contrived, and designed to keep the focus on a person or event. For a thorough discussion of the use of pseudo-events and their influence, see Boorstin's book.

⁶¹Greer, p. 149.

⁶²Cited in Boorstin, p. 20.

⁶³The Dallas Morning News, December 18, 1940, Sec. 1, p. 1.

⁶⁴Christian Science Monitor, December 18, 1940, sec. 1, p. 1.

Would Lend Arms To Britain."⁶⁵ In these articles there appeared little commentary.⁶⁶ Rather, a factual presentation of the President's proposal was given. Roosevelt received the editorial support of both the Christian Science Monitor and The Dallas Morning News. There appeared no editorial either for or against the proposal in the New York Times.

The Christian Science Monitor commented:

This plan shows imagination, that ability to adapt means to the situation. . . . It cuts through banks of foggy thinking, recognizing that the vital thing is speed in getting weapons to the place where they will be most effective. . . . Its simplicity should sell it to the American people.⁶⁷

The Dallas Morning News editorialist was brief and to the point when he stated:

Prompt action should be taken by the Federal Government to give England this assistance. . . . the aid should be extended for the very practical reason that England's downfall will cost this country untold billions, if not warfare and loss of life. . . .⁶⁸

Again on December 19, 1940, The Dallas Morning News editorialized "Strong appeal is attached to President Roosevelt's

⁶⁵New York Times, December 18, 1940, Sec. 1, p. 1.

⁶⁶Drummond did note that "there ran the evident conviction that security of the United States is intimately related to the security of Britain, that, indeed, the President and the administration is committed to securing a British victory with everything in their power." Christian Science Monitor, December 18, 1940, Sec. 1, p. 1.

⁶⁷Christian Science Monitor, December 18, 1940, Sec. 1, p. 24.

⁶⁸The Dallas Morning News, December 18, 1940, Sec. 3, p. 4.

new plan for extending and increasing aid to Great Britain.

. . . Its merit comes from the increasingly popular conviction that Great Britain is our own first line of defense. . . ." ⁶⁹

Roosevelt's press conference proposal also received wide coverage by the weekly news magazines. Newsweek, for example, titled its cover story in the December 30, 1940, issue, "Roosevelt 'Garden Hose' Plan Heightens Aid-Britain Drive." The writer said:

Americans who had been clamoring for a sign on foreign policy from their President got not one but several when Mr. Roosevelt returned to the White House last week. . . . Behind the President's every move last week, there lay a keen awareness of the drift of public opinion. . . . ⁷⁰

The general response to the President's new plan to aid Britain seems to have been expressed aptly in an editorial from The New Republic, December 30, 1940.

President Roosevelt's plan to lend arms to Britain has not, contrary to the fear of many, aroused much opposition from isolationists. On the whole, its object seems to be approved. This is an example showing how ready the country is to respond to bold and intelligent leadership. ⁷¹

Consequently, this example of Franklin Roosevelt's use of the press conference to influence public opinion demonstrates that, at least in this particular case, he was successful in

⁶⁹The Dallas Morning News, December 19, 1940, Sec. 3, p. 8.

⁷⁰"Roosevelt 'Garden Hose' Plan Heightens Aid-Britain Drive," Newsweek, XVI (December 30, 1940), 7-8.

⁷¹"Lending Arms," The New Republic, CIII (December 30, 1940), 884.

gaining headline coverage for his momentous news conference. In addition, the press, both newspapers and magazines, reflected the wide spread approval of the President's proposal.

The Fireside Chat of September 11, 1941

Background

President Roosevelt, in a Fireside Chat, went before the nation on December 29, 1940, to formally present his Lend Lease program to aid the Allies. It was described as a speech "on the state of emergency." The effects of this speech are recorded by Tugwell:

Into the muddy turbulence of contention the words of the President who knew his own mind fell like a precipitant. There were many who felt that he had said what they had been groping for words to express. There was a notable calming even though the debate over Lend-Lease was just beginning.⁷²

This speech was to be remembered as the "Arsenal of Democracy" speech. Roosevelt had successfully presented his plan to the people and now it was up to the Congress to act.

After more than two months of bitter debate, in March, 1941, the Lend Lease Act was passed "by decisive majorities over the stern opposition of isolationists in and out of Congress."⁷³ The Act authorized the President to "sell, transfer title, exchange, lease, lend or otherwise dispose of materials to any country whose defense the President deems vital to the defense

⁷²Tugwell, p. 571.

⁷³Hockett and Schlesinger, p. 672.

of the United States."⁷⁴ Congress made an initial appropriation of \$7,000,000,000 to furnish needed ships, planes, tanks, ordnance, manufacturing facilities and industrial and agricultural products. Over the radio Roosevelt told the people that "immediate, all-out aid would be provided for Britain, Greece, China, and for all governments in exile whose homelands are temporarily occupied by the aggressors."⁷⁵

The months from April to September, 1941, proved to be just as momentous as the prior months. During the winter and spring Hitler continued to rain devastation on the Allies' cities with his air force; the German submarines also played havoc with British shipping. In April the United States took Greenland under her protection and announced that the American Navy would patrol the sea lanes in defense zones. In May the United States transferred fifty oil tankers to Britain. This same month, after the American freighter Robin Moor was sunk by a German submarine, President Roosevelt declared an "unlimited emergency." This was accomplished, Tugwell notes, to "allow the President more freedom in sending aid to Britain."⁷⁶

The month of June brought what Tugwell refers to as the "turning point" in the war.⁷⁷ Hitler turned his aggressive attentions from Britain to Soviet Russia. The non-aggression pact they had signed had obviously meant little. Hitler

⁷⁴Cited in Hockett and Schlesinger, p. 673.

⁷⁵Ibid.

⁷⁶Tugwell, p. 571.

⁷⁷Ibid.

decided that the Russian might was a sham. Too, Russia had a vast amount of oil and wheat resources. Out of necessity the United States and Britain determined that Russia should join the Allied cause and, in turn, receive Lend Lease aid.

When, during the summer, Lend Lease shipments began to encounter more difficulty in the Atlantic, Iceland was occupied by the United States forces. This new step gave additional protection to the many convoys from Greenland to Iceland; however, it was recognized as another step toward war. The decision was felt necessary, for the German submarines were torpedoing and sinking any Allies ship possible with no provision for the safety of those aboard.

As events worsened "Roosevelt, like Wilson a generation earlier," as Morison and Commager note, "moved to clarify American public opinion by obtaining a statement of war aims from the Allies."⁷⁸ On August 14, Roosevelt and Churchill met at Argentia Bay, Newfoundland, and there they created the "Atlantic Charter." This was a document "containing certain common principles on which they based their hopes for a better world."⁷⁹ The charter statements were, in reality, the principles under which the United States was willing to fight if war came. It was still an undeclared war, though the United States, it seemed was slowly moving toward a belligerent state. Not only was Lend Lease actively in effect,

⁷⁸Morison and Commager, II, 660.

⁷⁹Ibid.

but also the United States had accepted the responsibility of patrolling the sea lanes to protect increased Lend Lease shipments. "The distinction between this and 'war' was maintained by Roosevelt with the utmost care," Tugwell observes.⁸⁰

Throughout these months of constant decision making, on the precipice of war, public opinion polls reflected that the President continued to have the support of the majority of the people. When the American Institute of Public Opinion asked the question "Do you think President Roosevelt has gone too far in his policies of helping Britain or not far enough?" 55 per cent answered "about right" and 23 per cent felt the President had gone too far. However, 22 per cent felt he had not gone far enough in aiding the Allies.⁸¹ As the Nazis increased their sinkings of Allied ships in late summer, the question of the United States Navy's being used to convoy ships carrying war materials to Britain was debated. A September 2, 1941, poll taken by the American Institute of Public Opinion revealed that 52 per cent favored using the American Navy in the convoy role; 39 per cent were opposed and 9 per cent had no opinion.⁸² With the continued support of the people, President Roosevelt could feel more secure in his leadership role.

⁸⁰Tugwell, p. 578.

⁸¹"Gallup and Fortune Polls," Public Opinion Quarterly, IV (Winter, 1941), 680.

⁸²Ibid.

After the sinking of another American ship in the Atlantic on August 17, and the expectation that Germany was to continue her ruthless submarine warfare, "President Roosevelt, by September, was preparing the country for naval war in the Atlantic. . . ." ⁸³ This seemed the only way of keeping supply lines open to Europe. The unsuccessful Nazi attempt on September 4, to sink the Greer, a United States destroyer, was the act "that goaded the President to take a step he had delayed a long time. . .," observes Newsweek. ⁸⁴ The days immediately following the Greer attack, there was much speculation as to what measures, if any, the President would take. Stronger measures were anticipated. ⁸⁵

From this eight months of background, these conclusions arise: (1) The President, reacting to events abroad and in the Atlantic, led the American people from the role of non-belligerence to that of active defense. (2) The American (polls) people by more than a majority supported the President's actions.

⁸³Greer, p. 186.

⁸⁴"Navy's Mammoth Snake Hunt Puts War in U. S. Front Yard," Newsweek, XVIII (September 22, 1941), 13.

⁸⁵The lead story in the New York Times, September 11, 1941, Sec. 1, p. 1, the day the President was to deliver his Fireside Chat to the nation, was devoted to this speculation. It read, in part, "The Chief Executive is expected generally to announce steps taking the United States closer to active belligerency in his speech to the world. . . ."

The Fireside Chat

Franklin Roosevelt was the first President to use what is traditionally known as the "Fireside Chat." This was his forte. For almost nine years the nation had listened as Roosevelt brought his "reports to the people"--and they had responded. These radio speeches were delivered on the average of two or three times a year, depending, of course, on the course of events. Since they appeared so seldom, they were made more attractive to the listener. Though the President had delivered radio addresses on numerous occasions in 1941, the Fireside Chat scheduled for September 11 was the first delivered since December 29, 1940.

An estimated 60,000,000 Americans hovered around their radios on the night of September 11 to hear their President tell them what he was going to do about Hitler.⁸⁶ The address was broadcast over all major chains.⁸⁷ Time notes that ". . . the President spoke in a low, grave tone, without histrionics, with little dramatic emphasis. But his words were hammer blows."⁸⁸ Roosevelt began by carefully reviewing with the listening audience the Greer incident of September 4. The destroyer, he said, was

⁸⁶This estimate appeared in Newsweek, XVIII (September 22, 1941), 15.

⁸⁷Through rebroadcasts the speech was translated in fourteen languages to the world.

⁸⁸"You Shall Go No Further," Time, XXXVIII (September 22, 1941), 11.

carrying American mail to Iceland. She was flying the American flag. Her identity as an American ship was unmistakable.

She was then attacked by a submarine. Germany admits that it was a German submarine. . . . I tell you the blunt fact that the German submarine fired first upon this American destroyer without warning. . . .⁸⁹

This was piracy--piracy legally and morally.⁸⁹

The President then stressed that the attack on the Greer was only the latest attack on American ships. He referred to the sinking of the Robin Moor on May 21, the Sessa on August 17, the Steel Seafarer on September 7, and the Montana on September 11. This series of acts, Roosevelt concluded, must be considered as a part of a world pattern by the Nazis.

Roosevelt then stated the real issue involved when he said, "It is the Nazi design to abolish the freedom of the seas, and to acquire absolute control and domination of these seas for themselves."⁹⁰ With the control of the seas in their hands, the President noted, "the way can obviously become clear for their next step--dominion of the United States--dominion of the Western Hemisphere by force of arms."⁹¹ On this key issue Roosevelt continued:

Generation after generation, America has battled for the general policy of the freedom of the seas. . . . It means that no Nation has the right to make the broad oceans of the world at great distances from the actual theater of land warfare unsafe for the commerce of others. . . .

Our policy has applied from the earliest days of the Republic--and still applies. . . .

⁸⁹Samuel I. Rosenman, editor, The Call to Battle Stations, Vol. X of The Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt, 13 vols. (New York, 1950), pp. 384-85.

⁹⁰Ibid., p. 386.

⁹¹Ibid.

Unrestricted submarine warfare in 1941 constitutes a defiance--an act of aggression--against that historic policy.⁹²

Roosevelt's determination to act was shown in the emotional statement:

There has now come a time when you and I must see the cold, inexorable necessity of saying to these inhuman, unrestrained seekers of world conquest and permanent world domination by the sword: "You seek to throw our children and our children's children into your form of terrorism and slavery. You have now attacked our own safety. You shall go no further." . . .

No matter what it takes, no matter what it costs, we will keep open the line of legitimate commerce in these defensive waters. . . .

The time for active defense is now.⁹³

The solution offered by the President was that

. . . in the waters which we deem necessary for our defense, American naval vessels and American planes will no longer wait until Axis submarines lurking under the water, or Axis raiders of the surface of the sea, strike their deadly blow first. . . let this warning be clear. From now on, if German or Italian vessels of war enter the waters. . . they do so at their own peril.⁹⁴

The decision had thus been made. There was no turning back, for the United States was now committed fully to a plan of active defense. Again a new step toward war had been taken. The United States would not, however, at this time declare all out war against Germany.

The general response to his Fireside Chat must have been gratifying to the President. Time notes, "The U. S. press gave almost unanimous praise for the speech and agreement with

⁹²Ibid., p. 388.

⁹³Ibid., pp. 389-90.

⁹⁴Ibid., p. 391.

its objective."⁹⁵ Brandenburg, too, observes that "the American people and the nation's press heartily endorsed the President's speech."⁹⁶ The New York Times editorializes:

President Roosevelt spoke last night the words which we believe this nation was waiting to hear. . . . We believe that the course which the President has chosen to follow. . . will have the support of a great majority of the people of the United States.⁹⁷

The Dallas Morning News editorialist comments: "Clear-thinking Americans endowed with the courage that made this country free and great will echo the ringing defiance of the Nazi-Fascist piracy."⁹⁸ Newsweek notes that "at home the news was received with what appeared to be a mixture of elation and resignation."⁹⁹ These reactions seem to characterize the response of the nation to the President's speech.

Following the President's speech, opinion polls revealed that he had gained additional support. While on September 2, 52 per cent favored naval escort, on October 2, 62 per cent favored the new policy of "shooting on sight" introduced on September 11. By October 17, 76 per cent said they approved

⁹⁵"You Shall Go No Further," p. 11.

⁹⁶Brandenburg, "Franklin D. Roosevelt's International Speeches," p. 33.

⁹⁷New York Times, September 12, 1941, Sec. 1, p. 20.

⁹⁸Cited in New York Times, September 12, 1941, Sec. 1, p. 20.

⁹⁹"Navy's Snake Hunt," p. 13.

of the President's foreign policy.¹⁰⁰ Indeed, these polls seem to reflect the support pledged by the press immediately following the historic address of the President on September 11.

From this final example of Presidential leadership of public opinion it may be concluded that (1) the radio was the means used by the President to influence public opinion in favor of continued aid to the Allies, even if it meant war; (2) the press and the public opinion polls reflected widespread praise and approval for the President's actions; (3) The President's popularity increased during the time immediately following the radio speech.

These conclusions may be drawn from the leadership of public opinion by Franklin Roosevelt in 1940-41: (1) The President led the nation from a period of reluctant non-belligerence in June, 1940, to a period of active defense in September, 1941. (2) During this period in which a preparedness program at home and aid to the Allies increased, the President enjoyed the approval of the majority of the people. (3) The President, in October, 1941, was more popular than he had been at any time during these two years. (4) Roosevelt skillfully used an assortment of media to influence public opinion--the press, the press conference, the radio and the occasional speech.

¹⁰⁰"Gallup and Fortune Polls," Public Opinion Quarterly, VI (Spring, 1942), 163.

CHAPTER IV

SUMMARY AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The purpose of this study was two-fold. First, in Chapter II. following a background introduction of public opinion and its relationship to the Presidency, four media of communication were analyzed to determine their potential effects on public opinion when used by the President. The second purpose of the study was to present a case study of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's leadership of public opinion during the pre-war years, 1940-41. An attempt was made to determine how Roosevelt skillfully utilized the four media--the press, the electronic media, the press conference, and public (platform) speaking to influence public opinion, not only in favor of preparedness at home, but especially in favor of aid to the Allies.

Summary

Public opinion as used in this study refers to any collection of individual opinions; it may or may not constitute a majority. Since public opinion tends to be intangible, elusive, and quickly changed, it demands keen perception and sensitivity of any who attempt to influence it. With many voices constantly beckoning to it, public opinion is subject to change at all times.

Public opinion is expressed through a number of channels. The most powerful means is the ballot box. A much more frequent expression of public opinion is offered by opinion polls, for they can be operated more or less continuously. Additional means through which public opinion is expressed are direct communication with public officials and the mass communication media--the press, radio and television.

The President of the United States, since he is the only nationally elected officer, is the recognized spokesman for the nation. The role of opinion leadership for the nation greatly increases the responsibilities of the President. Since he is the President, he is looked to expectantly by the people, particularly in an hour of urgency. The President must do more than just respond to public opinion; he must educate and influence it. Though the President is dependent on public opinion for the necessary power to govern, the skillful President who is capable of rallying or influencing public opinion will be granted much additional power to further influence people and events. But if public opinion is capable of increasing the powers of the President, it also serves as the most effective check upon the powers of the President. The public may forcefully voice its dissatisfaction with Presidential leadership through any of the various channels--the ballot box, public opinion polls, direct communication with the White House, and the mass media.

This study was concerned with the way in which a President can influence public opinion through the use of the press, electronic media, the press conference, and public speaking. The press is generally recognized as one of the dominant media used to influence public opinion. People in general tend to accept at face value what they read in newspapers and magazines. The President, though he utilizes an assortment of media of communication, uses the press as his day to day means of influencing the opinions of the people. How well the President fares with the reporters bears vitally on the success of his leadership. If he receives a "good" press, his opportunities of influence are greatly increased.

The electronic media--radio and television--complement the press in its influence on public opinion. These media have a special appeal, particularly to those without time to read, those with poor eyesight, and those who do not enjoy reading. Since almost every home has at least one radio and one television set, the President has the potential of reaching approximately 200,000,000 Americans on any given speaking occasion. The President can, through the use of radio and television, gain access to more homes than anyone else--entertainers included. With the opportunity of reaching more people, of course, come additional possibilities of influencing the opinions of the people.

Another means of personal influence which the President may use to affect public opinion is the press conference. The

press conference gives the President an opportunity to make friends with the press. He must recognize the necessity of cultivating the friendship of the reporters, for they are the middle-men between the President and the public. The press conference, if skillfully used, offers several advantages to the President. It is a device through which he can help to shape the newsman's story by the manner in which he presents his ideas. Too, it is a means of focusing attention on the President. He can hold the headlines for several days when he uses the press conference for important statements. Another important advantage is that the President may determine to a great extent the temper of the populace by the questions asked by the reporters. The press conference is a sounding board for influencing public opinion.

A fourth means of personal influence which the President may employ is public (platform) speaking. This medium offers advantages which the other media cannot. The platform speaker commands continuous attention. A person reading a magazine article or watching a televised Presidential speech is subject to any number of distractions, while the observer in a "live" audience is not. If the speaker is capable of arousing a few, then their effects may be felt by the others present. The band wagon effect may occur. Finally, the physical presence of the audience gives the speaker an opportunity to gauge the effects his words have on the audience. The President who carefully chooses his audiences can, through the use of public

speaking, greatly influence the opinions of many people--both the prominent and the average citizen.

It is evident, then, that the President has available to him through the press, the electronic media, the press conference, and platform speaking four complementary means of influence. Their influence is limited only by the ability of the President to utilize them to his advantage.

When Poland fell to the Nazis in September, 1939, the impact of the war abroad was greatly felt in the United States. This event, more than all the prior acts of Nazi and Fascist aggression of the past three years, shook Americans from their complacency. The war was brought even closer to the United States, however, in April, 1940, when Hitler began his momentous drive against the Allies. The German Army, equipped with the latest weapons of warfare, overran Denmark and Norway in April, and in May the Netherlands, Luxembourg and Belgium each surrendered to Hitler. Northern France was invaded, forcing the French government to move to Vichy. The monstrous German war machine did not spare the greatest of the Allies, Great Britain. While withdrawing from Dunkirk, the British lost 30,000 men and nearly all their armored equipment. On May 15, Prime Minister Churchill cabled Roosevelt for help. At the top of his list of requests were destroyers. Churchill was, in effect, asking the United States to proclaim a state of non-belligerency. Though public opinion in favor of aiding the Allies was increasing steadily, President Roosevelt did not think the nation

was mentally prepared yet to accept the non-belligerent role. He did, however, propose a preparedness program to the Congress and the nation in May, 1940. The polls reflected that Roosevelt's popularity had increased 10 per cent during the month of May.

By early June it was apparent to the President that the United States must significantly increase her aid to the Allies. Roosevelt chose an occasional speech, the commencement address to the University of Virginia, to present a major foreign policy speech in which he pledged the support of the United States to the Allied cause. The President's resolve to become a non-belligerent was strengthened by Mussolini's surprise assault on the weakened France. When the President proclaimed to the audience that the sympathies of the United States were with all the Allies, the audience broke into wild applause. The United States, the President stated, would extend to the Allies the material resources of the nation. The United States had now officially taken sides. As Roosevelt neared the end of his speech, the cheering became general; members of the faculty stamped their feet and applauded. The President had successfully moved his audience to accept this new commitment to the Allied cause. The indicators of public opinion, the press and the opinion polls, reflected the success of the President. The majority of the people were ready to back him fully in this new policy.

An abundance of munitions and equipment were immediately sent to the Allies during the summer of 1940. Roosevelt also continued organizing for the defense of the Western Hemisphere. Meanwhile, the air war over Great Britain was intensified. The year 1940 also saw national precedent broken and President Roosevelt nominated for a third term. In the November election the President received an easy majority of the popular vote. With this endorsement of the majority of the people, Roosevelt felt more freedom to act in favor of additional aid to the Allies.

As 1940 drew to a close, Great Britain was on the verge of bankruptcy. Since she needed war supplies and munitions even more now than in the past, Roosevelt began searching for some way to lease or lend these goods to the British. While the President was away from the White House on a vacation cruise, rumor began to spread in the United States that not only were British finances gone, but also United States supplies were running low. The nation was now, more than ever before during the war, looking to the President for leadership. The people were not sure what had to be done, but they trusted the President to act. Public opinion polls in December revealed that even if it meant United States involvement in the war, 60 per cent of the nation favored extended aid to the Allies.

The anticipation of the people and the speculation that some new form of financial aid to Britain was under consideration brought more than 200 excited newsmen to the President's

press conference of December 17, 1940. The President did, in fact, have a new program to propose. After announcing that there was really no news, he began a forty-five minute extemporaneous explanation of his solution to Britain's financial crisis. Roosevelt realized that his ability to sell his program to this audience of newsmen might mean the possibility of national acceptance by the people. This time he must have the support of the people, for his program would require Congressional action. This day the President was at his best as he appealingly employed humor and solemnity. His proposal to lend or lease weapons and equipment he likened to someone's lending his garden hose to a neighbor whose house was on fire. He explained that the man lending the hose did not want to be paid for the hose, he just wanted his hose back after the fire had been put out. The newsmen were apparently impressed by Roosevelt's friendly, folksy presentation, for the general response of the reporters and the nation as reflected in the press was widespread acceptance. Roosevelt had skillfully employed the press conference; it was exploited to its fullest advantage. The timing of his news and the high importance of it easily achieved headline news in the nation's press. Most newspapers devoted their lead stories to this momentous event. The President had focused attention both on himself and on his foreign policy. Since acceptance of the program was dependent on its exposure to the people, Roosevelt knew he must have saturation news coverage.

The United States moved progressively closer to war during 1941. When German submarines began playing havoc with American and British shipping during the spring, the United States took Greenland under her protection and announced that the American Navy would patrol the sea lanes in defense zones. In May, after the Robin Moor, an American freighter, was sunk by a German submarine, President Roosevelt declared an unlimited emergency in the United States. During the summer Lend Lease shipments began to encounter even more difficulty in the Atlantic. In order for the many convoys to have sufficient protection, Iceland was occupied by the United States. This was recognized by most as another step closer to war. Nazi submarines were now sinking any Allied ship possible with no provision for the safety of those aboard. In August Roosevelt moved to clarify American public opinion by obtaining a statement of war aims from the Allies. As the summer neared its end, the United States had accepted even more responsibility for the patrolling of the sea lanes. Roosevelt carefully maintained the distinction between this and "war." Throughout these months of decision making, on the precipice of war, public opinion polls reflected that the President continued to have the support of the majority of the people.

When it became evident that Germany was determined to step up her ruthless submarine warfare, Roosevelt began to consider naval warfare to protect United States and Allied interests. The Nazi attempt at sinking the United States

destroyer, the Greer, was the act which moved the President to action. Roosevelt chose the evening of September 11, 1941, in a Fireside Chat to the nation to explain his decision to enter a period of active defense. The issue, he contended, was the freedom of the seas. He pointed out to his 60,000,000 radio listeners that generation after generation of Americans had battled for the general policy of the freedom of the seas. The only solution to the problem, the President concluded, was to begin immediately protecting United States shipping. From this time on, the United States Navy would shoot on sight. The President had presented to the nation a moving statement of the new policy of active defense. Response to the radio speech was almost unanimous praise and endorsement of its objective from the nation's press. Public opinion polls reflected a substantial increase in the public approval of the President's policies. In October, 1941, Roosevelt's policies enjoyed the approval of 76 percent of those polled. Thus, Franklin Roosevelt successfully utilized the radio as a means of influencing public acceptance of his new policy.

During the pre-war years 1940-41, as the United States increasingly sent aid to the Allies, Roosevelt enjoyed the majority acceptance of his policies. Through the four personal means--the press, the electronic media, the press conference, and public speaking--Roosevelt significantly affected public opinion in favor not only of preparedness at home, but also of increased aid to the Allies.

Suggestions for Future Research

This study of the opinion leadership of a President in a pre-war crisis was chosen to illustrate the successful use of these chosen media to influence public opinion. From an examination of prior research, it appears to be the first study of its type. Since other war crises have occurred in this century, it should prove profitable in future study to examine the techniques used by those Presidents to influence public opinion.

While Franklin Roosevelt was skillful in his use of these personal media, it might be found that other Presidents, in contrast, have been less skillful and less successful.

The parallel between the skillful use of radio by Roosevelt and television by John Kennedy was drawn earlier in this study. Additional research in this area, too, should prove beneficial.

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