

Happy Presidents

An Analysis of How American Presidents have Communicated to the People Making Use of the Available Media Channels of Their Era – Franklin D. Roosevelt, Ronald Reagan, and Barack Obama as Successful Communicators

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Introduction

I [name] solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will faithfully execute the Office of President of the United States, and will to the best of my Ability, preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States.¹

Individualism is one of the core values in the American culture, in addition to freedom and equality, and in the contemporary United States the dominant political culture is individualistic. In an individualistic political culture the role of government is viewed as a mean of achieving marketplace efficiency and the government should primarily only interfere in areas promoting economic development. The appropriate participants in the role of politics are viewed to be professional politicians.² As a leader, the president of the US is both ceremonial head and prime decision-maker. The president is both an institution and a person, and has become very much a symbolic figure. The American public tends to vote for the person rather than the political issues. The media is personalizing the role of the president, and media strategies and communication skills are therefore very important for a president to achieve political success in the United States.

In 1933 Franklin D. Roosevelt said “the only thing we have to fear is fear itself”. Ronald Reagan promised “A New Morning in America”, and Barack Obama’s “yes we can” proved to have resonance in the American public. Restoring confidence in the people is important as well as it is important for a president to get his message to the people. But how does a president do this? Roosevelt, Reagan, and Obama had positive experience as communicators. John F. Kennedy is another president that comes to mind as a charismatic president and good communicator, but the focus will be on these three presidents, Roosevelt, Reagan and Obama, because they represent the media of their time and are generally viewed as charismatic presidents. Kennedy will be mentioned as a contrast to Richard Nixon in an example of television as a medium of communication in chapter 1. The president and the press are dependent on each other, and the developments of the media have had its effects on the image-making for presidents. Communication is related to the self-presentation of a president. The image-making is important as a mean of effective communication, and successful communication can ultimately lead to political success. The challenge with

¹ The Constitution of the United States, Article II, section 1 in Milton C. Cummings and David Wise, *Democracy Under Pressure, an Introduction to the American Political System*, (USA: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1971, 7th ed) 675.

² Fred M. Shelley et. al., *Political Geography of the United States*, (New York: The Guilford Press, 1996) 56, 60.

communication through the media is the contest between communication that clarifies and leads by argument versus the communication through affect and manipulation.

According to McCroskey (2001) the importance of rhetorical communication has been recognized for thousands of years. The first essay about how to speak effectively dates back to about 3000 B.C.³ The actual contribution of this essay to the theory of rhetorical communication is minimal, but it shows that an interest in rhetoric is about five thousand years old. During the Greek Period the “art of rhetoric” was further developed. Aristotle was one of the greatest theorists on rhetorical communication. According to Aristotle the means of persuasion are primarily *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*. *Ethos* refers to the nature of the source, *pathos* refers to the emotion of the audience, and *logos* is the nature of the message presented by the source to the audience.⁴ The first American rhetorical scholar served as president of the United States during the Colonial Period. John Quincy Adams may not have contributed much to the development of the rhetorical theory, but he was the first American rhetorician in the classical tradition. During the twentieth century James A. Winans was among the first Americans to make significant contribution to rhetorical theory. “Winans defined persuasion as gaining and maintaining fair, favourable, and undivided attention.”⁵ Other prominent American rhetorical scholars are Charles Henry Woolbert who viewed rhetoric as a behavioural science. Herbert A. Wichelns made a clear distinction between rhetorical criticism and literary criticism. The two scholars I. A. Richards and Kenneth A. Burke presented the “new rhetoric” which emphasizes producing understanding in the audience and the concept of identification in order to persuade.⁶ The term *rhetoric* is a highly complex and interesting subject in itself. Ever since Plato’s dialogue with the sophists portrayed in Aristotle’s *Gorgias*, rhetorical communication theory has created debate and continues to be a controversial issue today.⁷ Due to limitations this thesis will concentrate on communication through different media channels in modern time in the United States.

How is an image of a president made, and how does this image enhance the president’s capacity to communicate effectively and keep constituents focused on his agenda? Franklin D. Roosevelt, Ronald Reagan and Barack Obama are used as examples of successful communicators. The problem to be addressed is how three American presidents have

³ McCroskey, James C. *An Introduction to Rhetorical Communication* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2001), 4.

⁴ McCroskey, *An Introduction to Rhetorical Communication*, 7, 8.

⁵ McCroskey, *An Introduction to Rhetorical Communication*, 15.

⁶ McCroskey, *An Introduction to Rhetorical Communication*, 15.

⁷ McCroskey, *An Introduction to Rhetorical Communication*, 4-16.

successfully communicated to the public and the available media channels through which they communicated.

Method

The method used is divided into partly interpretation and analysis of historic research and literature, and partly into qualitative method with two in-depth interviews. The main sources used are books which can be found listed in the bibliography written on the subject of media and communication, as well as biographies and history of the three different presidents and their presidencies as observed by scholars. Since Obama is a sitting president at the moment, articles in newspapers such as *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* have also been relevant sources to cover some of what is happening during the writing of the thesis. Political speeches and clips on You Tube as well as the television show called *Inside the White House* from MSNBC have functioned as interesting sources as well. This information has been provided online. In addition to looking at what other people have written on the subject of media and communication and on the presidents, the opportunity to conduct two in-depth qualitative interviews was acted on and proved helpful in two of the chapters. In the chapter on Ronald Reagan, an interview with his former speechwriter, Clark S. Judge, gave interesting information about being a speechwriter, working inside the White House, and rhetorical strategies. This interview was done online through Skype as a videoconference. This way, despite being on the phone and in different countries, the interviewer and the interview subject were able to have a face-to-face conversation. The complete interview will be found as an appendix (A) while interesting aspects of it will be mentioned on various related points in chapter 3. The second interview in the thesis is related to the chapter on president Obama. Since Obama is the incumbent president, it was necessary to focus on him as a candidate, as it is too early to say as much about his presidency as with the other presidents. Therefore, an interview with a volunteer for the Obama campaign seemed appropriate. Erik Møller Solheim was a volunteer in the Obama campaign and provided interesting facts about the campaign strategy and how it was to work as a volunteer. This information co-relates to the overall strategy of Obama as a candidate and is therefore relevant to the thesis as a whole. This interview was done face-to-face and recorded. A summary of the interview will be found in chapter 4, and the interview guide used is put as an appendix (B). A complete transcript of the interviews can be given upon request. Both interview subjects were given the opportunity to remain anonymous and to read through the products before delivery. Both did not need to read through and both did not mind not being

anonymous. Talking to Mr. Judge and Mr. Solheim provided a good addition to the other sources as well as some “inside information” about two of the presidents, one concerning rhetoric and one concerning the campaign strategy. The interviews helped putting some of the theories from chapter 1 into perspective. Unfortunately, during the process of searching for sources, finding people who were interested in talking about this thesis proved difficult. Limited time made it hard to search for people in the United States to contact, and from the experience of this thesis people with expertise on the United States in Norway are also limited. Those media experts, and people with knowledge about social media who were contacted, denied the request. Also, because Roosevelt’s presidency goes further back in time, the thesis does not provide an interview to add to chapter 2. As an interesting note, as the thesis discuss the Internet as a new medium, the contact to the interview subjects was done online through e-mail and even facebook, and one of the interviews was done through Skype. When it comes to contact information and as a research devise, the Internet proved very helpful.

Structure

Chapter 1 examines the mass media and the presidency. This chapter functions as a good background of theories and information for the following chapters. The media plays an important role when it comes to the public’s impression of the president. The chapter looks at the development of the mass media in the United States and its effects on the presidency. Modern presidents are dependent on strategies to be presented as good as possible in the media, as well as strategies on how to use the media to their advantage. Despite strategies and help from media specialists, it seems image-making is not entirely in the hands of the politician. The power of self-presentation is a combination of circumstances, media strategies, the press, and the bloggers. Success is also dependent on a charismatic president. The press and the president are dependent on each other, and this relationship is given a closer look in this chapter. The focus will be both on how image-making is important for a president to be elected, but also how he continuously needs to contain his image in order to keep an effective communication to pass his policies while serving as a president in the White House, and the possibility to be re-elected. The functioning of the mass media impacts directly on the public perception of the presidency as well as establishing conditions that influence strategies to shape public opinion on the part of presidents and presidential candidates. The possibilities for image-making have changed over time in accordance with the technological changes. Both before and after the campaign presidents will seek to keep a good relationship with and

manage the media. Therefore the historic developments of newspapers, the radio, television, and the Internet are included in the first chapter.

Chapter 2 looks at Roosevelt's presidency, his relations with the press, how Roosevelt handled criticism from opponents, and the use of political language in speeches and on the radio. Franklin D. Roosevelt served as president of the United States for three full terms, from 1933 to 1945. The United States was in a bad economic shape by the time Roosevelt came to office in 1933 and in his First Inaugural Address the new president presented his plan to deal with the Depression – the New Deal. It was important for President Roosevelt to restore the confidence in the people. Franklin Roosevelt is perceived as an excellent communicator, often taking the role as a leader who sought to educate the public. Roosevelt made use of good press relations, and he knew when to reach the news in the newspapers at the best times. He used political rhetoric with successful metaphors, and he made excellent use of the new medium at the time – the radio. Through his radio chats, the president succeeded in creating a relationship with the public.

Chapter 3 looks at Ronald Reagan who represented “A New Morning” in America. To sum up Reagan's campaign in one word it would be optimism, and it proved successful. Historian Wilentz (2008) calls the period from 1974 to 2008 the Age of Reagan. Ronald Reagan became an important figure in American politics and his influence changed and reshaped the system. As a former Hollywood actor, Reagan had experience with performing in front of an audience and knew how to behave in front of a camera. Ronald Reagan was “born to be on TV” according to several critics. The chapter takes a look at Reagan's background, how he became president of the United States, and his success on television. The chapter will also look at some of Reagan's challenges as a sitting president for two full terms, and his reputation after he had served his time as a president. Although many critics seem to disagree with Reagan's politics, he still remains one of the most popular presidents in the United States.

Both the personal style and the media strategy proved successful for Barack Obama to be elected president. Chapter 4 will look at Obama's road to the presidency and his use of the media to achieve a massive support and a celebrity status. In addition to a winning charisma and political style, Obama has made use of his good organization skills, and he has also showed innovative use of the media channels, especially the Internet, to achieve political support. The first part of the chapter concentrates on Obama as a candidate, and the second part will look at Obama the president. The chapter looks at Obama as a communicator, Obama's political background, and the use of communication and organization techniques in

the presidential campaign. Obama is now faced with several challenges as he has entered the office of the presidency. The end of the chapter search to look at some deeper issues when it comes to individualism and social responsibility as Obama can be seen as a self-made man. When looking at Obama as a candidate, the interview with the Norwegian journalist who worked as a volunteer during the Obama campaign will be included. Obama's future as a president is very much in question. For Obama to achieve the stature of an FDR or a Reagan, his success as a campaigning candidate needs to continue inside the White House.

Chapter 5 is meant to function as a concluding chapter to the thesis. The thesis set out to look at how presidents have successfully communicated to the people. In particular, the thesis has tried to look at why Roosevelt, Reagan, and Obama are successful communicators through different media channels. It is interesting to see what the presidents have in common and the different media strategies that proved successful for the different presidents.

The biographical facts and background information that are included in each chapter about the presidents seemed necessary in order to get an impression of who the presidents are. To understand why a person is perceived as a good communicator it can be helpful to know the person's background, style, and political opinion. In American politics personal character is essential to succeed both for candidates and presidents. Even though a president tries to separate his private and public life, the perception of him as a public person becomes very important since the American public is likely to vote for the person rather than the political issues or the party. Being a good communicator is therefore extremely important to succeed in American politics. A good communicator who is able to connect to the public is likely to achieve political success. The connection to the public is often made by personalizing issues.

1.0 The Mass Media and the Presidency

The American voter, insisting upon his belief in a higher order, clings to his religion, which promises another, better life; and defends passionately the illusion that the men he chooses to lead him are of finer nature than he.

It has been traditional that the successful politician honor this illusion. To succeed today, he must embellish it. Particularly if he wants to be President.¹

-- Joe McGinnis

The media plays an important role when it comes to the public's impression of the president. This section will look at the development of the mass media in the United States and its effects on the presidency. Modern presidents are dependent on strategies to be presented as good as possible in the media, as well as strategies on how to use the media to their advantage. Despite strategies and help from media specialists, it seems image-making is not entirely in the hands of the politician. The power of self-presentation is a combination of circumstances, media strategies, the press, and the bloggers. Success is also dependent on the character of the presidency, for instance that the president is perceived as charismatic. The press and the president are dependent on each other, and this relationship will be given a closer look. How is an image of a president made, and how does this image enhance the president's capacity to communicate effectively and keep constituents focused on his agenda? The focus will be both on how image-making is important for a president to be elected, but also how he continuously needs to contain his image in order to keep an effective communication to pass his policies while serving as a president in the White House, and the possibility to be re-elected.

The functioning of the mass media impacts directly on the public perception of the presidency as well as establishing conditions that influence strategies to shape public opinion on the part of presidents and presidential candidates. The possibilities for image-making have changed over time in accordance with the technological changes. Both before and after the campaign presidents will seek to keep a good relationship with and manage the media: "With the major impact the mass media has in 'making or breaking' a candidate's image in the eyes of millions of voters, it is important to consider the role that mass media industries play in political campaigns."²

¹ Joe McGinnis, *The Selling of the President 1968* (London: Andre Deutsch Limited, 1970), 26.

² Martin Dupuis and Keith Boeckelman, *Barack Obama, the New Face of American Politics*, (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 2008), 57.

The difference between when the various media is being manipulative and affective versus when it is informative and analytical depends on the form of the medium and also the type of communication one wants to express. The concern of manipulation effects what is perceived as real and different medium can create different effects.

1.1 The Mass Media

The technological development of media has had great impact on the political process and political rhetoric as well as the need for image-making. Rhetoric can be defined as the skill of using language in speech or writing in a special way that influences people.³ Image-making refers to the impression that the president gives the public, or at least the impression he seeks to and wants to portrait.⁴

First, let us take a look at the changes that have taken place since the late 1700s. According to William Spragers one may divide the development into four periods. From 1789 to 1860 newspapers and a party oriented press were dominant in the media. From 1860s on the metropolitan newspapers, such as *the New York Times*, became a major force in politics. The new media technologies such as wire-service and the political development towards a two-party system made great impact as well. From 1900 the radio created a great change and radio commentators were affecting politics like the columnists in the newspapers. In 1950 television made the world smaller and more immediate.⁵ Arguably, one can add a fifth period to the media development with the Internet coming to public use in the 1990s,⁶ making the world even smaller and even more immediate than television. The technological changes have influenced the possibilities for image-making according to the era of the particular presidents.

As mentioned, the self-presentation of a president is fundamental to his success. Actually, when looking at public relations method, image-making first started with Andrew Jackson who became “a symbol of an age”. As John William Ward (1962) puts it; “(...) the symbolic Andrew Jackson is the creation of his time. Through the age’s leading figure were projected the age’s leading ideas.”⁷ Ward (1962) looks at national pride consisting of three main concepts, nature, providence, and will, as the symbols of the time. “(...) The massive emotions and psychological sanctions of all three of these ideas, nature, providence, and will,

³ Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) “rhetoric”.

⁴ Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) “image”.

⁵ Robert E. Denton, *The Primetime Presidency of Ronald Reagan: The Era of the Television Presidency* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1988), 19, 20.

⁶ *Det Store Norske Leksikon*, URL: <http://www.snl.no/Internett/historikk> (26.05.2009)

⁷ John William Ward, *Andrew Jackson: Symbol of an Age* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962), 208.

converged in the image of Andrew Jackson. The result was a symbolic figure.”⁸ Ward seems to be arguing that this “spirit of the age”, rather than the manipulations of the politician, made the image of Jackson. The press may have contributed to, or even created the image of Jackson, and it is important to recognize that image-making is not entirely in the hands of the politician.

Still, even though the image of a president is affected by historical and political circumstances as well as his presentation by the press, the politicians also create their own image, for instance through advertising. Innovative advertising techniques were being used in the early 1900s, but it was in the 1920s that the process went beyond previous levels. For example; “Posters and billboards commonly displayed the candidate in front of the American flag.”⁹ By the end of the 1920s both parties had upgraded their propaganda efforts and expanded their publicity divisions. In 1929 the Democratic Party set up the first permanent publicity bureau, mainly to keep up with the media attacks of its opponents, but the Republicans quickly followed up. Publicity material such as campaign buttons, posters, stickers, automobile license plate attachments and so on, were cheap to produce and are still popular today.¹⁰ Until WWII, newspapers were the main source for political news, accompanied by the radio which was used in a campaign in 1924 for the first time. “With the development of the new medium, a candidate’s ‘radio voice’ often would determine how well he fared in election.”¹¹ Because the air-time was expensive the politician had to be brief and to the point in his address. Speaking on the radio also had its hazards. For example, one could no longer claim to be misquoted. In the 1930s and 1940s formal speechmaking was dominant on the radio, but from 1936 dramatic messages were being used as well.¹² In this period of time, motion pictures were another medium that came into use. In addition to new inventions when it comes to medium, the development of transportation also had an impact on politics. In the 19th century the railroads had become the most common means of transportation for long distances, and it also became important for the politicians when campaigning. The candidates would travel from town to town and make a speech from the train at each stop. This is known as a “whistle-stop” tour. One example is Harry Truman who, in 1948, covered almost 32,000 miles and gave 350 speeches commonly referred to as Truman’s famous

⁸ Ward, *Andrew Jackson: Symbol of an Age*, 213.

⁹ Robert J. Dinkin, *Campaigning in America: A History of Election Practices*. (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1989), 128.

¹⁰ Dinkin, *Campaigning in America: A History of Election Practices*, 128, 130.

¹¹ Dinkin, *Campaigning in America: A History of Election Practices*, 132.

¹² Dinkin, *Campaigning in America: A History of Election Practices*, 132, 133.

“Whistle-stop” campaign.¹³ Improved transportation, like the railroad, and later the automobile, made it easier to come in contact with the voters.

The period from 1952 to 1988, Dinkin (1989) refers to as the Mass Media Age.¹⁴ This period was dominated by new complex analytical tools and detailed statistical information. The pollster became especially important, along with the advertising and public relations men, the management specialist, and the media specialist, as the decline of party identification led to a rise of consultants.¹⁵ McLuhan argues that the advisors and consultants became the new power in American politics. “By 1950, advertising agencies handled most presidential electoral campaigns. But by 1970, most campaigns were directed by independent, individual political media specialists who coordinated the activities of media, advertising, public relations, and publicity. These consultants understood both the new technology and the unique requirements of campaigning.”¹⁶ With television as the main new medium of this age one could broadcast speeches live, create spot commercials and trailers, and produce panel shows and joint debates. In fact, “by the mid-1960s most people received the majority of their political information from television.”¹⁷ Still, as the number of daily newspapers declined, the papers gave more in-depth coverage of political issues. As mentioned, there was a decline of party identification during this period. This, in connection to the changes in the primary process which led to an increased number of primaries, enlarged the role of the mass media, especially when it comes to campaigning. According to Arterton (1978) “(...) presidential media campaigns were forced to turn to the mass media because of the complexity of their task and their inability to mobilize or employ other resources.”¹⁸ The effects of the shift towards the voting public and away from the party leader can be discussed, but Barber looks at campaigning as a stress test.

On the face of it, campaigning for President is not much like being President. Presidents do not run around to shopping centers shaking hands. Presidents do not make the same speech ten times a day. Presidents need not spend half their energies raising contributions. Presidents are not forever calculating how to get on the television evening news. Presidents are not followed around, day after day, by some of the nation’s best reporters. Presidents wrack their brains, not their bodies.

¹³ Dinkin, *Campaigning in America: A History of Election Practices*, 136.

¹⁴ The “media” refers to the media-business as a whole, which in addition to press includes television, radio, and the Internet. The “mass media Age”-term which Dinkin uses here refers to the specific period of time in which the media experienced massive growth.

¹⁵ Dinkin, *Campaigning in America*, 159.

¹⁶ McLuhan in Denton, *The Primetime Presidency of Ronald Reagan: The Era of the Television Presidency*, 31.

¹⁷ Dinkin, *Campaigning in America: A History of Election Practices*, 167.

¹⁸ F. Christopher Arterton, “Campaign Organizations Confront the Media-Political Environment” in *Race for the Presidency: The Media and the Nominating Process*, edited by James David Barber, 3-24 (New Jersey: The American Assembly, Columbia University Drentice-Hall Inc., 1978), 9.

Nor, on the face of it, is New Hampshire much like America. Among many deviations, it is prettier, smaller, ruraler, whiter than your hypothetical average state. Its ethnic minority is French-Canadian. Its television comes from Boston, and its only important newspaper is run by an eccentric egoist who parks his .38 automatic next to his office telephone. New Hampshire is old, in a new nation, off in a geographical and cultural corner of the country.¹⁹

The way a candidate needs to go about getting elected president might not be realistic as to the reality of the job. Nevertheless, how a candidate appears to handle this “stress test” becomes an important part of his perceived image of the voter.

The mass media has several functions, it provides information, it can be persuasive, it should be entertaining and it creates cultural transmission. The mass media in the United States is commercial.²⁰ When it comes to the mass media and the political process, the media plays a major role as it is a main source providing information about politics. David Altheide and Robert Snow look at the media as having a logic of its own. “Media logic is the interactive process through which media present and transmit information.” And through the process the form and content are altered creating mediated communication. “What is projected affects what is seen. People, of course, see things differently.”²¹ There is a continuous debate about the effects of the media upon the political process, but that it does have an effect is unquestionable. The fact that the media can have an impact on American politics is really not a question any more, but *how much* of an impact is an ongoing discussion. William Adams provides four general perspectives on media effects. The feeling that family, friends, and other socioeconomic variables have a greater impact than the media is the “impotence” perspective. The “virility” perspective, on the other hand, views the media as very powerful and persuasive. The question whether newspapers or television play the bigger role, is referred to as the “print power” perspective versus the “video power” perspective. The two last mentioned perspectives indicate that the media *is* powerful and must therefore be seen in relation to the “virility” perspective.²² To take one step further, Roderick Hart et. al. look at how people view the presidential power and the mass media. Few people believe that the media only pass along what the president says without any interpretation – “no bias”. In contrast some take a “liberal bias” and believe that the media is controlled by liberals who are far from objective in their presentations, like the big networks CBN, USA,

¹⁹ James David Barber, “Characters in the Campaign: The Scientific Question” in *Race for the Presidency: The Media and the Nominating Process*, edited by James David Barber, 147-172 (New Jersey: The American Assembly, Columbia University Drentice-Hall Inc., 1978), 158.

²⁰ Denton, *The Primetime Presidency of Ronald Reagan: The Era of the Television Presidency*, 15.

²¹ Denton, *The Primetime Presidency of Ronald Reagan: The Era of the Television Presidency*, 17, 18.

²² Denton, *The Primetime Presidency of Ronald Reagan: The Era of the Television Presidency*, 21.

and PTL. The “conservative bias” means media support of corporate capitalism and other status quo positions. “Presidential bias” refers to the view that the presidents have almost immediate and unlimited access to the media and the national audience. People with “organizational bias” emphasize the power of the mass media organizations, allowing media to dictate what is covered and how material is presented. A “rhetorical bias” means that all mediated messages are formulated based upon recognized rules.²³

According to Robert Denton and Gary Woodward, the mass media influence American politics in three ways. First of all it helps setting the agenda. “Politicians most often find themselves in the role of responder rather than initiator of public issues.” The public rely on the media to take up and/or investigate issues. Secondly, as the media is presenting these issues it gives form and substance to world events. And, finally, the media personalizes the political issues reducing abstract or ideological principles by linking the issues to individuals. Television is in particular a personalistic medium.²⁴ It is important to recognize that there is a “flip side” of image-making by the politician and his supporters, because at the same time as the president can use the media to his advantage, the media can control the ways events are seen and can therefore be used against the president as well.

The content reflects the form of mediation. According to Denton (1988) the mass media has changed both participation and content to politics. “Thus, politics becomes an activity of style over substance, image over reality, melodrama over analysis, belief over knowing, awareness over understanding.”²⁵ In a McLuhan sense of the media, the form of mediation, electronic versus print, sets the term of communication.

It is impossible to talk about media impact on public opinion without mentioning the mass media in relation to democracy. “Free expression is a necessary concomitant to self-government, dependent on public information. The bulk of the electorate’s knowledge comes from the mass media. The American press helps the citizens by being a watchdog of government.”²⁶ On the other hand, one can also view the mass media as a threat to democracy, as Patterson (1980) puts it; “The problem is that the press is not a political institution and has no stake in organizing public opinion.”²⁷ When looking at the press in relation to presidential power, Winfield (1994) presents “(...) the classical conflict between

²³ Denton, *The Primetime Presidency of Ronald Reagan: The Era of the Television Presidency*, 25, 26.

²⁴ Denton, *The Primetime Presidency of Ronald Reagan: The Era of the Television Presidency*, 22, 23.

²⁵ Denton, *The Primetime Presidency of Ronald Reagan: The Era of the Television Presidency*, 24.

²⁶ Betty Houchin Winfield, *FDR and the News Media* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 231.

²⁷ Thomas E. Patterson, *The Mass Media Election: How Americans Chose Their President, American Political Parties and Elections*, copublished with the Eagleton Institute of Politics, Rutgers University (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1980), 173.

confidentiality and openness – confidentiality, which must be preserved to some extent if the government is to operate, versus the people’s right to know in order to make reasoned decisions in a democracy. The citizens have a right to obtain information relevant to those matters affecting their lives. At the same time, the president had to preserve the government.”²⁸ As mentioned, the president can both use the media to his advantage and be victim of the media’s presentation of events. This requires the media strategy of the president to be both effective and affective. The media strategy needs to be pre-aware of the possible steps to be taken and possible outcomes of media events and presidential communication.

1.1.1 Newspapers

In 2006 1,437 daily newspapers were published in the United States.²⁹ “With every major new entrant into the media landscape, many observers have predicted the imminent demise of the newspaper industry. First it was radio, then television, then direct mail, then audiotext and videotext, and now the Internet”.³⁰ Despite the technological developments within the media the newspapers have so far survived. Newspapers are often perceived as providing in-depth information and surveys show that people with higher education and older people are more likely to read a newspaper.³¹ Although newspapers have survived TV, radio, and the Internet, there has been a decline in readership and increased competition. But rather than to fight the competition proclaimed by the Internet for instance, newspapers have adjusted and created websites with blogs and continuously updated news. Web sites such as www.nytimes.com and www.washingtonpost.com have according to Stultz (2009) millions more readers than their printed versions. Even though newspapers have followed the Internet development, the problem is how to make their online newspapers profitable. For instance, advertising revenue is bigger in the printed papers than online.³² The advantages of the Internet are that the online news delivery is cheaper than the manual delivery of printed newspapers, and the Internet makes it possible to expand readership to new groups and new places.³³ When it comes to the content of the news and its form, some would argue that online news have become a genre of its own. The online news creates a more active reader. The content is layered which means

²⁸ Winfield, *FDR and the News Media*, 234.

²⁹ Thomas J. Stultz, “Newspapers” in *Media Selling – Television, Print, Internet, Radio*, Charles Warner, 410-430 (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009, 4th ed.), 410.

³⁰ Stultz in Warner, *Media Selling – Television, Print, Internet, Radio*, Charles Warner, 429.

³¹ Stultz in Warner, *Media Selling – Television, Print, Internet, Radio*, Charles Warner, 416.

³² Stultz in Warner, *Media Selling – Television, Print, Internet, Radio*, Charles Warner, 412.

³³ Marko Ala-Fossi, Piet Bakker, Hanna-Kaisa Ellonen, Lucy Küng, Stephen Lax, Charo Sadaba and Richard van der Wurff, “The Impact of the Internet on Business Models in the Media Industries – a Sector-by-sector Analysis” in *The Internet and the Mass Media*, Lucy Küng, Robert G. Picard and Ruth Towse, 149-165 (London: SAGE Publications LTD, 2008), 151.

that the news is presented at several levels of detail.³⁴ One can scroll down a web site and get the headlines, but one can also go into the specific news story and get the background information. “This news clusters reveal an emergent news genre differing from both print and broadcast: a theme-based group of news objects held together graphically, overlapping with other such groups, and undergoing progressive updating”.³⁵ Arguably, the online news have changed the way people conceive news by changing the role of the journalist, shifting some of the power from the journalist to the individual. According to Ala-Fossi et al (2008) the Internet threatens the traditional editorial role of newspapers; “The role of journalists as gatekeepers who select and report ‘the news’ is more difficult to maintain in an environment where customers in principle have access to similar sources as journalists, and users become important originators of content, too”.³⁶

In the 2008 campaign, newspapers, whether online or in paper, still proved to be an important influence on the public opinion. Several of the traditionally right-wing newspapers declared their support for the Democratic candidate Barack Obama. In total 234 American daily newspapers supported Obama, while 105 supported his opponent John McCain.³⁷ On average there is a tendency that American newspapers tend to lean to the political left. According to the magazine *Editor & Publisher*, these support announcements from the biggest newspapers can affect the voter. In 2000 and in 2004 the newspapers’ political support convinced about 4 percent of the voters. Still, the readers do take into account the political stance of the newspaper, but the important thing is that the reader trusts the newspaper. The newspapers that have established strong liability among their readers are most likely to influence the voters as well.³⁸ It might be a democratic problem if the voters are unable to look past the political partisanship of the media when choosing a candidate at elections. According to a report referred to by Gønli (2008), *The Washington Post* is viewed as most neutral, while *The New York Times* has a 90 percent chance of supporting the Democratic

³⁴ Diana M. Lewis, “Online News – a New Genre?” in *New Media Language*, Jean Aitchison and Diana M. Lewis (eds.), 95-103 (London: Routledge, 2003), 96, 97.

³⁵ Lewis in Aitchison and Lewis, *New Media Language*, 97.

³⁶ Ala-Fossi et. al. in *The Internet and the Mass Media*, Küng et. al., 150.

³⁷ The circulation of the papers that support Obama is more than 21 millions while the papers that support McCain sends out about 7 million additions. *Uventet støtte mer troverdig*, by Kristin Straumsheim Grønli from forskning.no, 03.11.2008, <http://www.forskning.no/artikler/2008/oktober/199595/> (12.08.2009)

³⁸ Grønli, *Uventet støtte mer troverdig*, <http://www.forskning.no/artikler/2008/oktober/199595/> (12.08.2009) Grønli refers to the magazine *Editor & Publisher*: “Tally of Newspaper Edorsements – Obama Maintains Big Lead at 234-105”.

candidate.³⁹ These numbers show the complexity of the question of liability of the different newspapers.

1.1.2 The Radio

As mentioned, the radio made it important for a politician to have a good “radio-voice”. After the radio became more accessible it became a part of the American home. By 1935, 78 million Americans were regular listeners to radio.⁴⁰ In the late 1930s the radio began to deliver news, despite an opposition from the newspaper publishers. This opposition from the newspapers has been referred to as the Press-Radio War of 1933-35.⁴¹ Franklin D. Roosevelt began using the radio to communicate to the public as a president, and radio commentators became the new newspaper columnists;

During the Depression of the 1930s, radio broadcasting brought hope to a dispirited populace. It brought entertainment of comedy, drama, and music, plus news and information. It brought inspiring words from the president of the United States that life would get better; we would get through this. In a nation too large for a national press – based on the available technology of the day – radio commentators provided national voices.⁴²

The big advantage with radio was that once you owned a radio set, it did not cost anything to listen, which made it possible to reach out to a number of people that otherwise could not afford or were likely to buy newspapers. For instance, for newly arrived immigrants, the radio became a tool for learning the language and understanding the American culture.⁴³ According to Talbot (2009), with the invention of television, the World War II became the last big story on the radio. But still, the radio has persisted. Instead, as Fang (2008) argues, the radio was reinvented and today there are more radio stations than ever before; in fact 99% of all homes in the United States have at least one radio,⁴⁴ and 95% of America’s cars have radios.⁴⁵ In 1954 the radio became a portable medium.⁴⁶ “Television owned the living room but radio owned the kitchen, the bedroom, the car, the backyard, and eventually the beach.”⁴⁷ The

³⁹ Grønli, *Uventet støtte mer troverdig*, <http://www.forskning.no/artikler/2008/oktober/199595/> (12.08.2009) Grønli refers to an unpublished research article from October 2008, by Brian Knight and Chung Fang Chiang, “Media Bias and Influence: Newspaper Endorsements”.

⁴⁰ Paul Talbot, “Radio” in *Media Selling – Television, Print, Internet, Radio*, Charles Warner, 472-496 (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009, 4th ed.), 474.

⁴¹ Irving Fang, *Alphabet to the Internet – Mediated Communication in Our Lives*, (St. Paul, Minnesota: Rada Press, 2008), 209.

⁴² Fang, *Alphabet to the Internet – Mediated Communication in Our Lives*, 209.

⁴³ Fang, *Alphabet to the Internet – Mediated Communication in Our Lives*, 209.

⁴⁴ Fang, *Alphabet to the Internet – Mediated Communication in Our Lives*, 225.

⁴⁵ Dupuis and Boeckelman, *Barack Obama, the New Face of American Politics*, 65, 66.

⁴⁶ Talbot in Warner, *Media Selling – Television, Print, Internet, Radio*, 474.

⁴⁷ Talbot in Warner, *Media Selling – Television, Print, Internet, Radio*, 474.

Internet has increased the possibilities for the radio. “The growing presence of broadband Internet access in the home and advances in audio coding systems mean that streaming or downloading audio across the Internet is straightforward.”⁴⁸ As an extension to the radio device itself being portable, the Internet has made it possible to podcast the programs that you wish to listen to and you can use your iPod or your mp3-player and listen whenever it suits you. Actually, more than 3000 stations are webcasting on the Internet.⁴⁹ The radio remains a local, personal, and flexible medium.

1.1.3 The Television Era

“The nature and structure of the media dictate the nature and structure of U.S. politics. And television is the supreme medium of impact and attention.”⁵⁰

McLuhan and Fiore argued that “the living room as become the voting booth” to express their view on the importance of television impact on the electorate.⁵¹ McGinnis claims that “The televised image can become as real to the housewife as her husband, and much more attractive. Hugh Downs is a better breakfast companion, Merv Griffin cozier to snuggle with on the couch.”⁵²

Several form changes occurred with the use of television in politics. The most significant change was the shift from face-to-face experiences to mediated communication. The presidential rhetoric became more ceremonial rather than deliberative, as the speeches would be sent on television and the photographic impression became more important. The presidential addresses are monologues rather than dialogues and the ideological discussions and debates were put aside for public presentations as pep rally, not to mention the fact that political advertising on TV has become very important, especially during the campaigns. When it comes to content, television does not have time to justify and explain and the content became less complex or ideological. “The primary concerns of presidential rhetoric are in projecting images rather than reasoning and icons of leadership rather than management. Clearly, how something is said is more important than what is said, and the act becomes primary to the message or actually becomes the message.”⁵³

⁴⁸ Ala-Fossi et. al. in Küng et. al., *The Internet and the Mass Media*, 159, 160.

⁴⁹ Dupuis and Boeckelman, *Barack Obama, the New Face in American Politics*, 65, 66.

⁵⁰ Theodore White in Denton, *The Primetime Presidency of Ronald Reagan: The Era of the Television Presidency*, 50.

⁵¹ McLuhan and Fiore in Denton, *The Primetime Presidency of Ronald Reagan: The Era of the Television Presidency*, 41.

⁵² McGinnis, *The Selling of the President 1968*, 28.

⁵³ Denton, *The Primetime Presidency of Ronald Reagan: The Era of the Television Presidency*, 6, 7 (quote p. 7).

With television the citizen has become the responder whose involvement has moved from action to reaction.⁵⁴ Television “makes every action public and by doing so trivializes both issues and candidates.”⁵⁵ At the same time, as a study by Roderick Hart has shown, because of the mass media the president is talking to the public more than ever before.⁵⁶ Television is defined as a “cool” medium by McLuhan. It is a must for any political candidate to have a cool, low-pressure style of presentation to succeed on TV because it allows the viewer to fill in the gaps with his own personal identification. As an example one can classify Richard Nixon as being “hot” in 1960 and “cool” in 1968.⁵⁷ Actually, Richard Nixon is a good example on how television as a medium were used deliberately to create an image of a president. According to Dinkin (1989), Nixon came across much better on radio than on television⁵⁸, but to keep up with the electronic development and win votes Nixon had to learn how to present himself on television. In his book *The Selling of the President 1968* Joe McGinnis looks at the difference between the individual and his image and how this difference can be exaggerated and exploited electronically. McGinnis uses Richard Nixon and the election of 1968 as the perfect example of the TV-politician. According to McGinnis, advertising agencies have tried openly to sell presidents since 1952.⁵⁹ The advertiser sees policies as products to be sold to the public. Richard Nixon, to many perceived as grumpy, cold, and aloof, came into what has been described as the nonchalant world of television. In the election of 1960, Nixon came out looking pale after recent illness in contrast to a tan and fresh looking Kennedy at a television debate. It is a matter of debate whether or not this one incident had much of an impact on the course of the campaign, but it has become famous as an example of unsuccessful communication:

It was just Nixon and John Kennedy and they sat down together in a television studio and a little red light began to glow and Richard Nixon was finished. Television would be blamed but for all the wrong reasons.

They would say it was makeup and lighting, but Nixon’s problem went deeper than that. His problem was himself. Not what he said but the man he was. The camera portrayed him clearly. America took its Richard Nixon straight and did not like the taste.⁶⁰

⁵⁴ Denton, *The Primetime Presidency of Ronald Reagan: The Era of the Television Presidency*, 7.

⁵⁵ Denton, *The Primetime Presidency of Ronald Reagan: The Era of the Television Presidency*, 7.

⁵⁶ Denton, *The Primetime Presidency of Ronald Reagan: The Era of the Television Presidency*, 9.

⁵⁷ Denton, *The Primetime Presidency of Ronald Reagan: The Era of the Television Presidency*, 45.

⁵⁸ Dinkin, *Campaigning in America: A History of Election Practices*, 167.

⁵⁹ McGinnis, *The Selling of the President 1968*, 27.

⁶⁰ McGinnis, *The Selling of the President 1968*, 32.

It would seem that Nixon did not have the personality to be on television. Nixon had problems appearing trustworthy on the screen. Still, though Nixon might have been offended by the use of television in politics, he decided to use it to become president in 1968. Nixon collected a team of professionals to make him a successful TV politician. One of them, Raymond K. Price, who was Nixon's best and most prominent speechwriters, looked at the challenge this way: "It's not the man we have to change, but rather the *received impression*. And this impression often depends more on the medium and its use than it does on the candidate himself."⁶¹ Everything, from the design used at a panel show to Nixon's tendency to perspire on his upper lip, was considered. The way he stood, his hand movements, eye contact, his tan and make-up, whether the family was present or not, the length of his answers, the impact of air conditioning, and so on could make a difference on the TV-screen. Television advertising could make Nixon appear strong. For instance, at the end of each segment the audience were to come up on stage and surround Nixon so that the last thing the viewer at home saw was a man in a big crowd of people looking very popular. In addition to ten scheduled panel shows, the Nixon team made several spot commercials. These commercials consisted of still pictures accompanied by words from Nixon's acceptance speech. Gene Jones was the man behind these spot commercials, and he possessed a great understanding of how pictures can be used as symbols. Ironically, though Jones was able to make America look like a wonderful place, he himself decided to move out of the country which he did not see as a good place to bring up children. Nixon won the election of 1968 with 302 electoral votes (43,3%) over Hubert Humphrey's 191 (42,7%) votes. Wallace also run for president and received 13,5% of the votes. Initially Robert Kennedy was the potential Democratic nomine, but because of his assassination, Humphrey became Nixon's opponent.⁶²

Though Nixon won the 1968 campaign, McGinnis emphasize the limitations of Nixon's candidacy. "The image campaign had done all it could within its limits. But the limits were the man. Richard Nixon."⁶³ The candidate can not appear too smooth either. But Nixon had learned a lot and began to hold televised press conferences without notes or a podium after he had become president. One of the problems was also that Nixon's personality created a split between the advertising consultants and the political people. Nevertheless, Nixon and his use of TV-campaigning was the first of his time.⁶⁴ As Denton (1988) claims, television is the best medium for promotion. When promoting a president, the presidency is seen as a

⁶¹ McGinnis, *The Selling of the President 1968*, 38.

⁶² Dinkin, *Campaigning in America: A History of Election Practices*, 188.

⁶³ McGinnis, *The Selling of the President 1968*, 127.

⁶⁴ McGinnis, *The Selling of the President 1968*, 161-168.

product and basic marketing strategies such as product positioning are being used. Like an advertiser needs to find out what the user wants from the product and then communicate the link between the product and the desired result, the potential president needs to be presented to the voter in a way that will result in support. “A coat would keep you warm and last a long time. Toothpaste would clean your teeth. Today, a coat communicates a certain style, status, or image and the right toothpaste can make you sexy.”⁶⁵ Another example of product positioning of the presidency is the huge support of Ronald Reagan – the man himself – from a public that might at the same time disagree with his policy positions. According to Denton (1988) there has been a professionalization of political communication. “The presidency is a product that undergoes constant evaluation, and when support sags, advertising and public relations activities are used to recapture support. Professional political communicators and pollsters, as permanent members of the White House staff, are responsible for presidents’ public images. In marketing terms, they are responsible for brand identification, product life extension, and product adoption.”⁶⁶

If one compares television with film, movies often portraits heroes, models or even “gods” presenting a “larger than life” attitude. Television on the other hand represents the stable and familiar. Because television accepts the ordinary, everyday and rejects the “special” and unusual, television may have a unique influence upon the nature of political discourse. In addition the medium is one of reaction and not thoughtful response or reflection. The individual or personality is the central structuring element of all televised political communication.⁶⁷ “The audience has the control. The true political power of the public no longer resides in the ballot or vote but in the controls of television.”⁶⁸

A lot of the political information on TV is presented in the news. The news on TV has a tendency to appear believable, exciting, and dramatic. During the 1960s there were several dramatic events, such as the Civil Rights riots, the Vietnam War, and Kennedy’s assassination, to be presented in the news. According to Denton (1988) the evening news programs were increased from 15 minutes to a half-hour format in 1963, making the news politically important.⁶⁹ “Since 1964, in fact, the networks’ evening news programs have been the major target of the candidates’ campaign activities.”⁷⁰

⁶⁵ Denton, *The Primetime Presidency of Ronald Reagan: The Era of the Television Presidency*, 88.

⁶⁶ Denton, *The Primetime Presidency of Ronald Reagan: The Era of the Television Presidency*, 90.

⁶⁷ Denton, *The Primetime Presidency of Ronald Reagan: The Era of the Television Presidency*, 49.

⁶⁸ Denton, *The Primetime Presidency of Ronald Reagan: The Era of the Television Presidency*, 50.

⁶⁹ Denton, *The Primetime Presidency of Ronald Reagan: The Era of the Television Presidency*, 51.

⁷⁰ Patterson, *The Mass Media Election: How Americans Chose Their President, American Political Parties and Elections*, 5.

Although television does not give face-to-face experience, the TV experience is often perceived as more real according to Tony Schwartz. The captured reality on TV can go beyond the personal experience. A media culture occurs as “(...) constant exposure to television results in the sharing of common “TV-stimuli” by everyone in society.”⁷¹ Joshua Meyrowitz shares this line of thought; “Physical presence is no longer prerequisite for first-hand experience of the world. The evolution of the media has decreased the significance of physical presence and has altered the significance of time and space for social interaction.”⁷² Dan Nimmo and James Combs argue that people do not learn politics from real experience; as “the political realities are mediated through mass and group communication creating a fantasy” world akin in its structure and devices to fiction: “(...) Television news is storytelling and employs the elements of the dramatic narrative, utilizing verbal and non-verbal symbols, sound, and visual imagery.”⁷³

Because of the increased impact of television and its need to personalize, the anchormen and reporters have also increased in importance and some have become media celebrities as well.⁷⁴ According to John Langer “(...) good television personalizes whenever it can, rarely using a concept or idea without attaching it to or transforming it through the ‘category of the individual’. Television presents, therefore, a world of personalities who organize our reality and articulate our social agendas.”⁷⁵

At the same time as television is a personalizing medium, it also simplifies things. “Television is a sales medium, best at presenting a dynamic message in the simplest form possible.”⁷⁶ This fact is a frustrating one for most political scholars because television then fails to properly inform and educate the public on political matters. The electronic media had made media knowledge a required skill for political leaders who has to become celebrities to succeed.⁷⁷ “Politicians, therefore, must simply study the art of self-promotion in order to become celebrity, fantasy figures.”⁷⁸ This creates benevolent leaders switching the focus on a choice of people and personalities rather than issues. How to speak and what to wear as well as which camera angle being used are of great importance. For example a close-up creates a personal experience while a high angle is a sign of weakness.⁷⁹ Overall the emphasis has

⁷¹ Schwartz in Denton, *The Primetime Presidency of Ronald Reagan: The Era of the Television Presidency*, 46.

⁷² In Denton, *The Primetime Presidency of Ronald Reagan: The Era of the Television Presidency*, 17.

⁷³ Denton, *The Primetime Presidency of Ronald Reagan: The Era of the Television Presidency*, 52.

⁷⁴ Denton, *The Primetime Presidency of Ronald Reagan: The Era of the Television Presidency*, 53.

⁷⁵ Denton, *The Primetime Presidency of Ronald Reagan: The Era of the Television Presidency*, 47.

⁷⁶ Denton, *The Primetime Presidency of Ronald Reagan: The Era of the Television Presidency*, 53.

⁷⁷ Denton, *The Primetime Presidency of Ronald Reagan: The Era of the Television Presidency*, 53, 54.

⁷⁸ Denton, *The Primetime Presidency of Ronald Reagan: The Era of the Television Presidency*, 55.

⁷⁹ Denton, *The Primetime Presidency of Ronald Reagan: The Era of the Television Presidency*, 56.

shifted from issues to personality. Denton's (1988) opinion is that television probably has made people politically lazy. When it comes to the nature of political participation, Denton (1988) is not optimistic about the role of television in electoral politics and writes; "At the very least, television has altered the nature of political participation in the United States and thus the "quality" of democratic government. Although television is highly invoking, it does not encourage critical involvement of information."⁸⁰ As the television provides limited information on political issues, it might be contributing to creating an elite. Only the people who are willing to find the information themselves will have proper insight on the political happenings. This leads back to the discussion on media's impact on democracy.

McGinnis says that nonchalant is the keyword for the TV-politician and describes how style has become substance on television. "Television seems particularly useful to the politician who can be charming but lacks ideas."⁸¹ This statement can be linked to Ronald Reagan and his TV-personality, which I will come back to later. But McGinnis also uses John F. Kennedy as an example of how the public accepted his actions on Cuba and his bluff in Berlin; "We forgave, followed, and accepted because we liked the way he looked. And he had a pretty wife."⁸²

According to Pew Research, television is still the number one medium when it comes to information about campaign news, although it is not as dominant as it once was.⁸³ One way of explaining the popularity of television is the fact that it is visual; "A very large percentage of what we learn, we learn through sight. The visual aspect of television is exciting and dramatic and, thus, a major reason that TV skyrocketed in popularity when it was first introduced."⁸⁴ TV ads are still the most costly because of its valuable airtime.⁸⁵ "In the current highly fragmented media world, broadcast television still has the broadest reach – 99 percent of American households – and the ability to have impact on the greatest number of people at any one time."⁸⁶

⁸⁰ Denton, *The Primetime Presidency of Ronald Reagan: The Era of the Television Presidency*, 57.

⁸¹ McGinnis, *The Selling of the President 1968*, 29.

⁸² McGinnis, *The Selling of the President 1968*, 30.

⁸³ *Social Networking and Online Videos Take Off – Internet's Broader Role in Campaign 2008*, The Pew Research Center, released January 11th, 2008 <http://people-press.org/report/384/internets-broader-role-in-campaign-2008> (26.05.2009) For more statistics on television visit www.tvb.org

⁸⁴ J. William Grimes and Ron Steiner, "Television" in Warner, *Media Selling – Television, Print, Internet, Radio*, 377.

⁸⁵ Dupuis and Boeckelman, *Barack Obama, the New Face of American Politics*, 57.

⁸⁶ Grimes and Steiner in Warner, *Media Selling – Television, Print, Internet, Radio*, 377, 378.

1.1.4 The Internet Age

If McLuhan argued that television made the living room become the voting booth, the Internet goes even further. “In a classic McLuhan-like sense, the Internet has been an extension of man (McLuhan, 1964)”.⁸⁷ The Internet provides man with new forms of immediate communication and extreme amounts of information. And at the same time, the Internet does not necessarily exclude other medias, but rather have made them a part of the Internet. Television, radio and newspapers are all available online. Although this is an ongoing process including several adjustments for the existing medias, the Internet has nevertheless proved not to be exclusive. “The Internet has established itself with remarkable, perhaps unprecedented, speed as an integral part of everyday life for many people all over the world, at work and in the home.”⁸⁸ By March 2009 there were more than 251 million Internet users in North America, representing the biggest percentage of the number of Internet users in the other world regions, with 74,4 percent of the North American total population. The world had a total of more than 1,5 billion Internet users, 23,8 percent of the estimated total world population.⁸⁹ According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 54,6 percent of all households in the US had access to the Internet in 2003.⁹⁰ There is no doubt that the Internet has had an expansive growth and represents an important additional medium. The possibilities that are represented through the Internet to reach out to millions of people worldwide in an immediate amount of time, makes it an important medium to be considered, also within politics.

There are several opinions on exactly when the so-called ‘Internet Age’ began, not to mention the phrasing itself. Some would rather refer to it as ‘the Internet Era’, ‘Information Society’, ‘Knowledge Economy’, or other various combinations of these terms. To make it simple, it will be referred to here as the Internet Age. Some historians would date this ‘age’ back to 1969, when computer scientists at universities and from government wanted to share data and distribute information over one network and linked large mainframe computers together in order to do this. “This groundbreaking work came from a desire to ensure the safety of government data during natural disasters or war and to allow university researchers

⁸⁷ Piet Bakker and Charo Sàdaba, “The Impact of the Internet on Users” in *The Internet and the Mass Media*, Lucy Küng, Robert G. Picard and Ruth Towse, 86-98 (London: SAGE Publications LTD, 2008), 86.

⁸⁸ Lucy Küng, Robert G. Picard and Ruth Towse, *The Internet and the Mass Media*, Introduction 1-17 (London: SAGE Publications LTD, 2008), 1.

⁸⁹ *World Internet Users and Population Stats*, www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm (13.08.2009). The exact number of Internet users in North America is 251 290 489 and the world total is 1, 296 270 108.

⁹⁰ Küng et. al. *The Internet and the Mass Media*, 6.

the ability to share information.”⁹¹ However, the developments that made Internet available for the general public can be dated to 1995. The e-mail, the Netscape Navigator, the Web and affordable home PCs were among such developments that contributed to “the world’s fastest growing communication medium.”⁹² Küng et. al. (2008) divide the Internet Age into two eras; the first era approximately from 1995-2001, with rapid expansion characterized with great enthusiasm and predictions of profound transformation. In the Second Internet Era, from 2001, the changes predicted at first were actually starting to take place and the established media industries began to adjust to the Internet, indicating more measured responses to the Internet development.⁹³ In 2000-2001 there was a break with the so-called “dot.com bubble”. Many companies had overrated the possibilities of the Internet and established themselves only as Internet based companies too quickly.⁹⁴

According to Küng et. al. (2008) *Internet* “(...) refers to a distribution system of information. Data transmitted through the Internet and other distribution systems including telephones, television, radio and computers can be either analogue or digital, depending on the architecture of the system.”⁹⁵ Internet has become an overall term for a number of technological developments, such as digitalization and the World Wide Web, but without going further into the technological differences, ‘Internet’ will be the term that includes such developments here. Henten and Tadayoni (2008) summarize that the Internet is not a fixed and finite thing – it has developed over time with different implications for the media, and it will keep developing and further impact the developments of other media.⁹⁶

Arguably, the Internet has not so much added new information to society, but rather made the existing information more available. The Internet has made more content accessible rather than so much adding new content.⁹⁷ For instance, web sites such as google.com and Yahoo! have dramatically changed the way people find information. Finding information online does require an ability to evaluate information though, and divide the serious web sites

⁹¹ Vincent Thompson and Paul Talbot, “The Internet” in *Media Selling – Television, Print, Internet, Radio*, Charles Warner, 432-469 (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009, 4th ed.), 432, 433.

⁹² Lucy Küng, Nikos Leandros, Robert G. Picard, Roland Schroeder and Richard van der Wurff, “The Impact of the Internet on Media Organization Strategies and Structures” in *The Internet and the Mass Media*, Lucy Küng, Robert G. Picard and Ruth Towse, 126-147 (London: SAGE Publications LTD, 2008), 126.

⁹³ Ibid: 130, 131.

⁹⁴ *History of the Internet – the Dotcom bubble*, <http://www.nethistory.info/History%20of%20the%20Internet/dotcom.html> (10.09.09)

⁹⁵ Küng et. al. *The Internet and the Mass Media*, 3.

⁹⁶ Anders Henten and Reza Tadayoni, “The Impact of the Internet on Media Technology, Platforms and Innovation” in *The Internet and the Mass Media*, Lucy Küng, Robert G. Picard and Ruth Towse, 49-63 (London: SAGE Publications LTD, 2008), 49.

⁹⁷ Richard van der Wurff, “The Impact of the Internet on Media Context” in *The Internet and the Mass Media*, Lucy Küng, Robert G. Picard and Ruth Towse, 65-83 (London: SAGE Publications LTD, 2008), 65.

from the ones providing incorrect information. To try to create a certain impression of how much information that exists online, van der Wurff (2008) refers to Lyman and Varian (2003) who projects that; “(...) an average Web page sizes 18.7 KB, while an average 300-page book would take up 1 MB of space. The 8 billion Web pages that make up the Web in 2005, therefore, present 150 terabytes of data, which is equivalent to 150 million books; 10 times as many books as are available in the library of Harvard University.”⁹⁸ In addition to this massive system of online information, the Internet has had great impact on businesses. In 1993 the World Wide Web made Internet open for businesses and not just to universities and researchers. The new ‘Internet economy’ is mainly based on advertising.⁹⁹ Despite the dot.com bubble, commerce on the Web have become successful in a number of areas, including shopping online, for instance on eBay, online banking, online gaming, reading news, watching movies or TV-series, or even join a matchmaking site. There are really no limits to the possibilities that the online-world presents. Although struggling with making it profitable, existing mediums have also adapted to the Internet. One can listen to radio, watch television, and read newspapers online.

When it comes to communication, the Internet has been especially effective in offering new opportunities challenging both time and space. The first e-mail was developed in 1972 and is still one of the most popular applications.¹⁰⁰ E-mail is not the only way to communicate and keep in touch through the Internet, though. Blogging, chats, instant messaging, and social networks are other possibilities. “Social networks such as MySpace.com and Facebook.com are the world’s new coffee houses, soda fountains, and pizza parlors where people can hang out together, catch up, and join discussions with a variety of interesting groups.”¹⁰¹ In addition to keep in touch with friends, these social network sites are arenas for advertising, music promotion and voicing political opinions. The Internet opens for an active audience, it is a personal and interactive medium. To understand, or at least try to understand, some of the outreach of social networks online, let us look at the most popular ones today. Of course, just as the development of the Internet itself has had a rapid expansion, the popularity of the Web sites and creation of new ones are constantly changing, but right now facebook and twitter seems be the most popular to have a personal profile on. Facebook has more than 250 million active users and 120 million of these check their facebook everyday – at least. Each of the

⁹⁸ van der Wurff in Küng et. al., *The Internet and the Mass Media*, 72, 73. For more data look at the survey “How Much Information?” by Peter Lyman and Hal R. Varian for UC Berkeley: <http://www2.sims.berkeley.edu/research/projects/how-much-info-2003/> (16.09.2009)

⁹⁹ Thompson and Talbot in Warner, *Media Selling – Television, Print, Internet, Radio*, 433-436.

¹⁰⁰ Henten and Tadayoni in Warner, *The Internet and the Mass Media*, 50.

¹⁰¹ Thompson and Talbot in Warner, *Media Selling – Television, Print, Internet, Radio*, 444.

users has an average of 120 friends. Facebook was founded in 2004 as a social utility for people to communicate with their friends, family, and coworkers. It has also become a place for creating groups, events, and expressing opinions. Facebook was established by Mark Zuckerberg with the intention of being a social platform at Harvard University. It quickly extended to other universities, colleges, and high schools, and is now an international web site in several languages. The privacy policy of this page has been debated, and the amount of private information one decides to put ‘out there’ is up to each person. For instance, if you are in a process of getting a job you might want to un-tag the party pictures before your potential boss checks out your facebook profile. It is important to remember that once submitted information into a digital media this information will always exist. Facebook has now put further restriction on their privacy policy.¹⁰² Twitter is more a platform for stating one’s opinions and actions, rather than posting photos and personal information. “What are you doing?” is the question to answer on Twitter. The answer must be no more than 140 characters long and can be posted online through cell phone, instant messaging or the Web. Twitter started in 2006 by Jack Dorsey as a project founded by Obvious, a creative environment in San Francisco, and with immediate success Twitter Incorporated was founded in 2007.¹⁰³ According to an article in *The New York Times*, it is not mainly teenagers that use twitter, as one might think. While the original thought was that Twitter would keep people connected, it has developed into a place for people to be marketing products, posting ideas, political opinions, and follow news. Professionals, journalists, celebrities, and politicians have become users of twitter to a larger extent than teenagers and young people who are already connected to their friends through other social platforms online.¹⁰⁴ If it is possible to make such a division, one might say that Twitter is creating the ‘elite’ of social networking online. While people might be encouraged to close their facebook profile for work-related reasons, journalists for instance might be encouraged to join twitter because of their profession in order to be updated on the latest happenings, conversations, and news.

Another way to keep updated is to go on YouTube. It is not a social platform like facebook and twitter, but it is a web site that provides online videos. It may be music videos, news, humor, or political speeches. YouTube was founded in 2005 and is available for

¹⁰² *Facebook*, www.facebook.com/press/info.php? (13.08.2009)

¹⁰³ *Twitter*, www.twitter.com/about#about (13.08.2009)

¹⁰⁴ *Who’s Driving Twitter’s Popularity? Not Teens*, by Claire Cain Miller for the New York Times, August 26th, 2009, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/08/26/technology/internet/26twitter.html> (26.08.2009)

everyone online.¹⁰⁵ For instance, President Obama posts his Weekly Address to the Nation on YouTube, as a part of the Obama administration's media strategy.

When it comes to the effect of the Internet on politics, there is no doubt that it has become an important tool for the politicians. Take for instance the huge number of people one can reach in an immediate amount of time online. The Pew Research Center has made a survey on the Internet and the 2008 Presidential Campaign. The survey states that the Internet has lived up to its potential as a major source for news about the presidential campaign. 24 percent of Americans say they regularly learn something about the campaign from the Internet, which is almost twice as much as the campaign in 2004. Among the people that get political information online, young people dominate as 42 percent of ages 18-29 regularly learned about the campaign from the Internet. There is clearly an age gap when it comes to receiving political information from the different media, especially the Internet. Still, although people might get campaign information online, they do not always seek the information intentionally, but rather 'come across' campaign news while they are online doing something else. MSNBC is the online news outlet that most people get campaign information from, followed by CNN and Yahoo News, and also a numerous of other online news outlets. Among the young people social networks such as MySpace and Facebook have been sources of campaign information, and also information about the candidates.¹⁰⁶ For politically engaged people, reporters, and researchers outside the borders of the United States, the online news are usually more updated than television. The Internet is crucial for people abroad especially on Election Night. According to Leira (2008), the 2008 Presidential Campaign has extended the use of Internet. For instance, when it comes to the campaign web sites that used to be a place mainly to find information about the election, but that now in addition are more candidate focused. In the 2008 campaign these sites functioned as a place for the candidates to post their commercials, these commercials were then picked up by other web sites and TV-channels and in that way the commercial became distributed beyond the candidate's website. Political websites also functioned as mobilizing through another new thing, blogging. These websites provide online news only about politics e.g. realclearpolitics.com¹⁰⁷ Extremely detailed and updated information about the election were available online in the 2008 campaign through these sites of political news. Compared to the last presidential election in

¹⁰⁵ *YouTube*, www.youtube.com/t/about (18.08.2009)

¹⁰⁶ *Social Networking and Online Videos Take Off – Internet's Broader Role in Campaign 2008*, The Pew Research Center, released January 11th, 2008 <http://people-press.org/report/384/internets-broader-role-in-campaign-2008> (26.05.2009)

¹⁰⁷ *Valget på Nett*, by Halvard Leira from forskning.no 01.11.2008 <http://www.forskning.no/artikler/2008/oktober/199677/> (12.08.2009)

2004 there is a huge difference with the amount of information and lay out.¹⁰⁸ “The World Wide Web was and is used for informing voters, mobilizing supporters, raising money, and communicating messages. With the Internet, candidates could promote their issues and define their image.”¹⁰⁹ The Internet is therefore a necessary part of the media strategy of the current president, an additional arena to use for image-making.

On Twitter one can express opinions and make statements, on Facebook one can get the latest gossip, and on YouTube one can watch videos and listen to music. Politically speaking, one can get the latest political news and statements on Twitter, be Obama’s friend on facebook and watch his Weekly Address on YouTube.

1.2 The Character of the Presidency

“Presidents are responsible to the public and thus must maintain good relations. Relations with the public are important to the president because they directly affect his political survival, ability to perform his job well, and establishment of a positive historical image.”¹¹⁰ The popularity of the president is important all along, first to gain support to get the job, then to maintain this support to do a good job, and to keep a good reputation when the job is done. As the media is personalizing issues, it is also personalizing the president. “No detail in the life of a modern president (...) escapes the eyes of the media, which provide such information to a public apparently hungry for more.”¹¹¹ Every little thing, no matter how trivial or private a matter, about the president is newsworthy. The latest [May 2009] example must be the Obama’s new dog – a Portuguese water dog called “Bo”. A ten minute long sequence of it showing the president and his family run with the dog in the garden of the White House shown on the Norwegian evening news in between the financial crisis and the troubles in North Korea. Now everyone will want to buy that type of dog, and to create an even bigger symbolic touch, the dog was a gift from Sen. Edward M. Kennedy.¹¹² Even outside the borders of the United States, information about the American president is an important part of the media. This is understandable when it comes to foreign policy, but I doubt that little Bo will have a great impact on global politics. I do not even know if the Norwegian Prime

¹⁰⁸ Halvard Leira, talk at NUPI September 1 2009, 12.30pm. To see the difference between coverage from 2004 to 2008, go to: http://www.realclearpolitics.com/bush_vs_kerry.html to view 2004 edition of polling data, and go to: http://www.realclearpolitics.com/epolls/2008/president/us/general_election_mccain_vs_obama-225.html for the 2008 polling data. (24.10.2009)

¹⁰⁹ Dupuis and Boeckelman, *Barack Obama, the New Face of American Politics*, 71.

¹¹⁰ Denton, *The Primetime Presidency of Ronald Reagan: The Era of the Television Presidency*, 24.

¹¹¹ Milton C. Cummings jr. and David Wise, *Democracy Under Pressure – An Introduction to the American Political System*, (USA: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1993, 7th edition) 364.

¹¹² *Dagsrevyen* 15.04.2009; <http://www1.nrk.no/nett-tv/index5/16747> (26.05.2009)

Minister has a dog; I believe he has a son and a daughter, but I could not even say that for sure. I do know the family relations of the Norwegian Royal family though, but this leads to a discussion whether the President of the United States has become more and more to function as a national symbol rather than a political leader. The president of the United States is clearly a symbol, but can he be both? The United States is a representative democracy with majority rule, consisting of a constitutional government, federalism, and values such as equality and individual rights. The American presidency is both an institution and a person, because the framers of the constitution did not want a king; “The framers wanted a more authoritative and decisive national government, yet they were keenly aware that the American people were not about to accept too much centralized power vested in a single person”.¹¹³ The American political system is built on the principle of checks and balances, separating the powers between the three branches of government; the Executive branch, the Judicial branch, and the Legislative branch, limiting the president’s power by making him head of one of the three branches elected for four years at the time. The president in the US inhabits a number of roles; chief of state, chief executive, chief legislator, chief diplomat, commander in chief, chief of party and popular leader.¹¹⁴ Although the King in Norway has come to be a symbolic person only, his powers are formally written in the constitution. It is unthinkable that the King in this country would execute any of his constitutional powers, but in order to avoid any chance of such powers to one person, the founders chose a president as head of state dependent on the other branches of government. George E. Reedy explains the roles of the president being similar to a monarch at times in *The Twilight of the Presidency*:

The life of the White House is the life of the court. It is a structure designed for one purpose and one purpose only – to serve the material needs and the desires of a single man. It is felt that this man is grappling with problems of such tremendous consequence that every effort must be made to relieve him of the irritations that vex the average citizen. His mind, it is held, must be absolutely free of petty annoyances so that he can concentrate his faculties upon ‘great issues’ of the day.

To achieve this end, every conceivable facility is made available, from the very latest and most luxurious jet aircraft to a masseur constantly in attendance to soothe raw presidential nerves. Even more important, however, he is treated with all of the reverence due a monarch. No one interrupts presidential contemplation for anything less than a major catastrophe somewhere on the globe. No one speaks to him unless spoken to first. No one ever invites him to ‘go soak your head’ when his demands become petulant and unreasonable.¹¹⁵

¹¹³ Cummings and Wise, *Democracy Under Pressure – An Introduction to the American Political System*, 364.

¹¹⁴ Cummings and Wise, *Democracy Under Pressure – An Introduction to the American Political System*, 364-368.

¹¹⁵ George E. Reedy, *The Twilight of the Presidency*, in Cummings and Wise, *Democracy Under Pressure – An Introduction to the American Political System*, 359.

Some would argue that these two functions – ceremonial head and prime decision-maker – are best separated in a democratic society. The problem is that the public probably votes for the person rather than the policies. Still, the presidency of the United States requires a strongly personal leadership style. The president must convince the public that they can trust him to make the right decisions in order to get their support.

The president and the press are dependent on each other. All along, of course, the president is dependent on the press to present him in a positive view in the media. Still, looking beyond the development of the media with for instance an increased number of medium, the different presidents have had different approaches to the media. Dwight Eisenhower is known as isolated from the press presenting a rather indifferent relationship to the press. While others, such as Franklin Roosevelt, Harry Truman and John Kennedy developed a respectful-manipulative attitude toward the press. They were able to be respected by the press and use that respect to their advantage. Not to mention Ronald Reagan and his use of the televised media. Johnson and Nixon can be placed as a suspicious-vindictive perspective, while Ford and Carter having a respectful-deferential attitude.¹¹⁶ In the following chapters, Franklin D. Roosevelt and Ronald Reagan will be used as examples of successful communication as they used the medium available at their time very well. The president's attitude towards the press of course affects the amount of news coverage he will get. As Rodger Streitmatter has found, a president whose personality appeals to the press receives 50 percent more personal news coverage than quiet, more reserved presidents.¹¹⁷

According to Neustadt the power of the presidency is the power to persuade. The president has to persuade to get support from a number of people, such as legislators, bureaucrats, sub-national officials, and of course the public. In addition, Neustadt emphasizes that the power to persuade also means that presidential power relies on the power to bargain.¹¹⁸ James MacGregor Burns adds command as a third kind of presidential influence.¹¹⁹ In any case, presidential leadership entails influence through communication. As Colin Seymour-Ure puts it: “Yet whether one prefers to view the exercise of presidential power as command, bargaining, or persuasion, it is an unavoidably *communicative*

¹¹⁶ Denton, *The Primetime Presidency of Ronald Reagan: The Era of the Television Presidency*, 27.

¹¹⁷ Denton, *The Primetime Presidency of Ronald Reagan: The Era of the Television Presidency*, 29.

¹¹⁸ Craig Allen Smith and Kathy B. Smith (eds.), *The President and the Public: Rhetoric and National Leadership*, in “The Credibility of Institutions, Policies and Leadership”, Volume 7, series editor: Kenneth W. Thomson (Lanham: University Press of America, 1985), xi, xii.

¹¹⁹ Smith and Smith, *The President and the Public*, xiii.

process.”¹²⁰ When considering power as communication it might be a danger that the emphasize lies on process over substance, according to Smith & Smith (1985).¹²¹

The Coordinated Management of Meaning (CMM)¹²² can be used as the theoretical framework when studying presidential communication. The CMM consists of six levels including content, speech act, situation, relationships, individual life-scripts, and cultural patterns. The CMM suggests that several factors influence successful communication. The semantics, such as grammar and vocabulary, as well as how the words are presented in relation to, for instance rising inflection, eye contact and smiles, are important gestures for the president when speaking. The president’s own personal values and who he approaches from situation to situation as well as the core set of American values overall impact the way of communication.¹²³ This coincides with Ryan (1995) who goes back to the Greeks when looking at presidential oratory. “The Greek rhetorical tradition, refined by the Romans, passed on by the trivium of grammar, rhetoric, and dialectic in medieval and renaissance universities, and studied in the liberal arts curriculum in the twentieth century, is inextricably linked, as it was in Athens and is now in the United States, to the practice of free speech in an open and democratic society.”¹²⁴ In the old phrasing, Ryan (1995) mentions four important rhetorical factors. The *disposition* means how the speech is arranged for persuasive effect. It is for example important with a good introduction to catch attention. Secondly comes the *elocution*, the canon for style, word choice and diction, comparable to level one – content – of the CMM. Memorizing speeches for maximum effect – *memoria* and the *actio* – the delivery, are the two final factors.¹²⁵ In a way both *disposition*, *memoria*, and *actio* are all included in level two – speech act – in the CMM-approach. Looking back in history the Greek philosophers disagreed on which of the rhetorical factors that were the most important ones; “Aristotle believed that persuasion was produced by three means: logical appeals, emotional appeals, and ethical appeals, by which Aristotle meant a speaker’s good will, good sense, and good moral character. He also thought a speaker’s style of language should be clear and

¹²⁰ Smith and Smith, *The President and the Public*, xiv.

¹²¹ Smith and Smith, *The President and the Public*, xiv.

¹²² “The CMM approach suggests that (1) human beings inevitably create or construe meaning, (2) that we attempt to coordinate and manage our meanings with those of others for purposes of understanding, that (3) we accomplish this coordinated management through reference of rules, that (4) these rules are learned, adapted, created, and discovered through communication, and that (5) there is a hierarchy of rules encompassing content, speech act, episodic, relational, life script, and cultural pattern levels.” Smith and Smith, *The President and the Public*, xx.

¹²³ Smith and Smith, *The President and the Public*, xv-xx.

¹²⁴ Halford Ryan (ed.), *U.S. Presidents as Orators: A Bio-critical Sourcebook* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1995), ix.

¹²⁵ Ryan, *Presidents as Orators*, xi.

appropriate.”¹²⁶ In contrast, “other ancient Greek theorists and practitioners (...) held that delivery played an important role in making the speaker persuasive.”¹²⁷

As mentioned, the president needs to succeed in persuasion with several types of people, relations, and situations. One particularly important stance to communicate his leadership is through the Inaugural Address. In fact, according to Smith and Smith (1985), presidents use the inaugural address to establish the major themes of their administrations.¹²⁸ The inaugural addresses involve different traditional patterns on domestic issues in contrast to international issues, but there are some ‘musts’ that needs to be included. First of all, it is important for the new president to unify the country after a divisive campaign. Then the president needs to show the themes rhetorical vision which will orient his administration. In addition, the president must speak to prosperity so that the listeners will understand his place in history.¹²⁹ In other words, the president must take into consideration both the past, present, and future, which is important to maintain his popularity. Of the presidents that will be looked at one can sum up the following themes; Franklin D. Roosevelt represented ‘hope’, Ronald Reagan was a man of ‘optimism’, and Barack Obama promises ‘change’. The inaugural address is mainly an address to the public, but the president also needs to establish a good relationship with Congress to gain support for his proposals. Other examples of communicating leadership are according to Smith and Smith (1985) when the president is forced to deal with a crisis, answering critics, and in the presidents’ farewells.

Theodore Lowi actually says that the United States has a “plebiscitary president”, meaning a ruler who governs on the basis of popular adoration.¹³⁰ Denton (1988) continues this line of thought by claiming that Americans make their political decisions based on superficial information and role behaviour, that having a charismatic leader is more important than a programmatic president. “Public opinion is more important than political persuasion. Image projection is more important than policy argumentation.”¹³¹ Still, achieving public support is also a kind of persuasion. “The media encourage us to look at the president in informal contexts and allow the president to demonstrate concern for citizens. This two-way mirror contributes little to the demands of leadership, governing, or program development. We get an artificial person. We see our presidents more but know them less.”¹³²

¹²⁶ Ryan, *Presidents as Orators*, xv.

¹²⁷ Ryan, *Presidents as Orators*, xv.

¹²⁸ Smith and Smith, *The President and the Public*, 3.

¹²⁹ Smith and Smith, *The President and the Public*, 3.

¹³⁰ Denton, *The Primetime Presidency of Ronald Reagan: The Era of the Television Presidency*, 86.

¹³¹ Denton, *The Primetime Presidency of Ronald Reagan: The Era of the Television Presidency*, 87.

¹³² Denton, *The Primetime Presidency of Ronald Reagan: The Era of the Television Presidency*, 87.

Summary

The media has influenced American politics, and goes on doing so with continuously new inventions and ways of communicating. It has been argued that one of the consequences of the media development has been a growing emphasis on style rather than substance, especially with the invention of television. The president has been forced to keep up with this development and today it is necessary for a president to have the communication skills that are required to succeed on TV and online. At the same time the president still needs to be a good public speaker. To succeed, rhetoric and news strategies are the basis behind every modern president. Being able to be perceived as someone the voter can trust is important. Even though one may argue that a lack of substance has been a consequence of the technological developments of the mass media, one may also argue that these new inventions have given room for more communication and more information. Television, radio and newspapers are all still functioning as important channels for communication, and the Internet provides an addition to these channels creating broader choices of how one wants to reach out to people. Used in the right way the extended communication possibilities could function positively for the president, at the same time as his opponents have the same new opportunities for organizing critique. With the immediate factor of today's media, if something goes wrong for the president, the whole world knows it right away.

When it comes to image-making for a president there seems to be a contest between what is manipulated and what is real when communicated through the various media. There exists a contest between communication that clarifies and leads by argument and communication through affect and manipulation. Television functions as an example of a medium which can be viewed as being manipulative and affective, while the Internet tends to become more informative and analytical. Television requires short and catchy segments and therefore often chooses style over substance, while the Internet can provide massive information on different issues. Newspapers also seem to be a medium which is informative, providing in-depth information, but at the same time headlines can be misleading, and if one does not take the time to read through the article or click on the extended version online, it can be manipulative as well. The radio is able to reach people during their daily routines and as some radio hosts prove, it can be manipulative and affective, such as controversial radio hosts Rush Limbaugh exemplifies.



CBS

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15

2.0 Franklin Delano Roosevelt

So, first of all, let me assert my firm belief that the only thing we have to fear is fear itself -- nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance. In every dark hour of our national life, a leadership of frankness and of vigor has met with that understanding and support of the people themselves which is essential to victory. And I am convinced that you will again give that support to leadership in these critical days.¹

Franklin Delano Roosevelt served as president of the United States for three full terms, from 1933 to 1945. Elected for a fourth election, he died in office a few months after being sworn into office for an unprecedented fourth time. The United States was in a bad economic shape by the time Roosevelt came to office in 1933 and in his First Inaugural Address the new president presented his plan to deal with the Depression – the New Deal. Franklin Roosevelt was a good communicator, often taking the role as a leader who sought to educate the public. Roosevelt made use of good press relations, and he knew when to reach the news in the newspapers at the best times. He used political rhetoric with successful metaphors, and he made excellent use of the new medium at the time – the radio. Through his radio chats, the president succeeded in creating a relationship with the public. Among the American presidents, Roosevelt is perceived as one of the great and ranks number three, after Lincoln and Washington.²

The early 1930s was not an easy time to be president of the United States, a country with extremely high unemployment rates, closed banks, and a lack of any federal safety-net or welfare system. FDR's first hundred days in office have become famous and a common measurement of later presidents and their achievements when they enter the office. During this first period, FDR introduced the New Deal as the recovery plan to deal with the Great Depression, and in 1935 he also introduced a Social Security reform. Later he had to deal with the Second World War, which the United States entered after the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941. FDR was engaged in the development of the United Nations which he hoped would act as a place to solve international disagreements in the future. In April 1945, just as the war was coming to an end, Roosevelt died of a cerebral haemorrhage. Serving the country as a president in three full terms, dealing with the Great Depression and World War II, Roosevelt has become one of the most popular and respected presidents in the United States of all

¹ Franklin D. Roosevelt, *First Inaugural Address*, Washington, March 4, 1933, <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/fdrfirstinaugural.html> (14.10.09)

² Ole Moen, *USAs Presidenter – Fra George Washington til George W. Bush*, (Oslo: Forlaget Historie og Kultur, 2008), 418.

times.³ This chapter looks at Roosevelt's presidency, his relations with the press, and the use of political language in speeches and on the radio. As well as the opposition he faced and the character of the man himself.

2.1 The Road to a Twelve Years Presidency

Franklin D. Roosevelt was born in New York in 1882. FDR went to Harvard and Columbia Law School and in 1905 he married Eleanor Roosevelt. Inspired by his fifth cousin and earlier president of the United States, Theodore Roosevelt, Franklin D. Roosevelt became engaged in politics.⁴ Despite his wealthy background, Roosevelt took a liberal, progressive and social stance in politics. Some say because of Mrs. Roosevelt who showed him her social work in the slums of New York's East Side.⁵ In 1920 he ran as the Democratic nominee for Vice President. In 1921 FDR got poliomyelitis, but despite fighting with the disease he became governor of New York in 1928.⁶ As governor Roosevelt became known for progressive political programs, and it was during this time he first started giving his fireside chats that were later successfully continued from inside the White House.

Roosevelt decided to run for president for the 1932 election and chose John Nance Garner as his running mate. Their opponents were the sitting president Herbert Hoover and Vice President Curtis. With the escalated situation of the bad state of the economy, Hoover had trouble getting support and his main strategy seemed to be attacking Roosevelt. Roosevelt, on the other hand, had engaged a group of political experts and intellectuals known as the "Brain Trust" as strong supporters. This type of group support was something new in national politics. In addition, Roosevelt was able to get support from several prominent Republican Senators who were disappointed with Hoover's lack of accomplishments. With the campaign slogan "A New Deal" and the campaign song "Happy Days Are Here Again", Roosevelt won 472 electoral votes against Hoover's 59.⁷ The victory was a triumph for FDR in more counties than any previous presidential candidate. Another reason for the success was that Roosevelt and the Democrats were able to blame Hoover and make him responsible for the bad state of the country at the time.

In the election of 1936 FDR and the Democrats had built up a strong political coalition and won the election with about 61% of the votes against Republican candidate Alfred M.

³ *The White House*, URL: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/about/presidents/franklindroosevelt/> (15.04.2009).

⁴ *The White House*, URL: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/about/presidents/franklindroosevelt/> (15.04.2009).

⁵ Moen, *USAs Presidenter – Fra George Washington til George W. Bush*, 404-407

⁶ *The White House*, URL: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/about/presidents/franklindroosevelt/> (15.04.2009).

⁷ Moen, *USAs Presidenter – Fra George Washington til George W. Bush*, 404-407.

Landon. Because of WWII, Roosevelt decided to break against the two-term tradition and won the election of 1940 against Wendell L. Wilkie.⁸ Wilkie focused on the break from the two terms rule, but in a time of crisis the argument did not reach the voters.⁹ In the third election, Roosevelt had Henry A. Wallace as his Vice President. When running for president a fourth time in 1944, it was clear to most people that because of Roosevelt's increased illness he might not be able to serve the full term. The position of the Vice President therefore became increasingly important. Wallace was perceived as very liberal and being friendly with the Soviet Union, these controversial characteristics were not acceptable to many people. Roosevelt chose Harry S. Truman as his running mate in this fourth election instead, and according to Moen (2008) changing the Vice President was an important step in order to win the election. Truman first said no, but accepted when the president told him that the Democratic Party would be split if he said no.¹⁰ Roosevelt and Truman won the election against Thomas E. Dewey and his running mate John W. Bricker, 432 electoral votes against 99 to the Republicans.¹¹ As predicted, Roosevelt was not able to serve long, and died in April 1945. Vice President Truman took over the office.¹²

2.2 Facing Opposition

Roosevelt's skill of coalition building was crucial for his pursuit of the presidency in 1932. The Democratic Party was split and Roosevelt was perceived as a bridge candidate. Among the Democrats were the conservative, southern, prohibitionist wing against those who took a more liberal stance in economic matters and who opposed prohibition. This second wing was largely populated by Catholic working class voters in the northern states. Roosevelt managed to get support from voters of both groups, in addition to reaching out to progressive Republicans who were tired of Hoover and "big business".

As president, Roosevelt was faced with several forms of opposition. After the first few months in office it became increasingly difficult to hold together the coalition of business, laborers and farmers. The economy had not yet had any significant recovery and various oppositional political movements were strengthened throughout the nation. For instance, business men founded the American Liberty League as a vehicle for mobilizing anti-New Deal sentiments, led by the chairman of General Motors. The opposition from business men

⁸ Betty Houchin Winfield, *FDR and the News Media*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 17.

⁹ Moen, *USAs Presidenter – Fra George Washington til George W. Bush*, 404-407.

¹⁰ Moen, *USAs Presidenter – Fra George Washington til George W. Bush*, 404-407.

¹¹ Moen, *USAs Presidenter – Fra George Washington til George W. Bush*, 404-407.

¹² Dinkin, *Campaigning in America*, 149-155.

was largely formed because of Roosevelt's departure from the gold standard and his initiative to regulate the stock exchange and the airwaves.¹³ Of the many new programs that were put forward in the New Deal were for instance the National Recovery Administration (NRA) and the Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA), both of which did not give immediate results. The slow rebound in the economy also led to opposition among progressives who felt that the reform was too slow and that Roosevelt gave too much compromise with big business. The Socialist Party led by Norman Thomas witnessed resurgence, also challenged by the Communist Party. The Communist Party organized the unemployed in the early 1930s as well as promoting full equality for African Americans. During 1934 there was a wave of labor conflict with several violent strikes.

In addition to oppositional businessmen, progressives, and laborers, there are examples of single controversial figures who led opposition towards Roosevelt as well. One such figure was Father Charles Coughlin who in the late 1920s began delivering his sermons on the radio. Father Coughlin became an example of an oppositional character who was both a media personality and a political commentator. Although he initially supported Roosevelt he became increasingly critical to the New Deal. Father Coughlin gathered strong support among the lower middle-class Catholic immigrants. The broad appeal was largely due to the radio audience. Not only the president used the radio to his advantage, but also his opposition creating competition in the use of the new media device. The most important political leader that emerged was Huey P. Long who was Senator in Louisiana, and who also initially supported Roosevelt. Long criticized Roosevelt both publicly and privately for not being a strong enough reformer. "Share Our Wealth" became the slogan for Long's organization as he became a national figure against Roosevelt. Long was assassinated in 1935, and the possibility that he might run for president was no longer an issue for the Roosevelt administration.¹⁴

Despite the various oppositions, Roosevelt moved forward. In 1935 a series of measures were passed often referred to as the Second New Deal, for instance the Social Security Act and the Wagner Act. One criticism of Roosevelt's presidency is that the focus was so much on economic issues that little attention was given race, concerning the rights for blacks, Hispanics, and Asians. Some critics also say that Roosevelt let the large corporations

¹³ Roosevelt created the Securities and Exchange Commission, and the Federal Communications Commission (Maier et. al.).

¹⁴ Long's assassinator was the son-in-law of a judge whom Long was trying to remove from office (Maier et. al.).

keep too much power.¹⁵ The oppositional movements represented both impatience with the New Deal and oppositional views on the cooperation between business and government. “The moderate liberalism of Roosevelt and his allies stood in contrast not only to the conservatism of Republicans and business Democrats but also to political beliefs that were more severely critical of capitalism itself.”¹⁶ Overall the political opinion in the United States had moved leftward between 1929 and the mid- 1930s.

Roosevelt was well aware his opposition and the disorders that were happening in the society. His experience as a politician helped him stay in office and respond to opposition. “Roosevelt was nothing if not a masterful politician, with extraordinary antennae for shifting political winds.”¹⁷ In 1935, when the demand for action was strong, Roosevelt took this demand as an opportunity to promote legislation in which lay close to his heart, such as social security. In addition to answering the nation’s mood with the renewed action, Roosevelt’s change of getting the new set of measures passed were more likely because the Congress had become more liberal after the last election the previous November.¹⁸

Roosevelt was perceived as a strong leader, giving him the necessary respect to deal with the opposition. Goodwin (1995) makes the connection that Roosevelt’s leadership abilities were closely related to the character of the man himself. Roosevelt was self-confident and even perceived as arrogant, although the struggle with polio made him less so and more focused. The confidence remained and the ability to transmit his internal strength to others was important as a leader especially during the times in which Roosevelt became president. White House aide, Harry Hopkins, described Roosevelt as someone who always would give you the feeling that everything would be alright.¹⁹ Although, Roosevelt sometimes did make the people he disagreed with feel that he agreed with them. In addition, Roosevelt had a willingness to always try new things, a characteristic which could prove helpful when dealing with opposition. For instance, when it comes to administrative organization, Roosevelt created multiple new emergency agencies in order to overcome the opposition to the New Deal programs in the old-line bureaucracies. “He deliberately confused spheres of authority and reinforced the confusion by appointing people of clashing attitudes and temperaments to the competing positions. (...) But so long as his administrative system produced energy,

¹⁵ History on opposition is taken from Pauline Maier et al, *Inventing America – A History of the United States*, 2nd ed., (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006), 709-733.

¹⁶ Pauline Maier et. al. *Inventing America – A History of the United States*. (New York, W. W. Norton, 2003) 717.

¹⁷ Maier et. al. *Inventing America – A History of the United States*, 717.

¹⁸ Maier et. al. *Inventing America – A History of the United States*, 717.

¹⁹ Doris Kearns Goodwin, “Franklin D. Roosevelt – 1933-1945”, IN Robert A. Wilson (ed.). *Character Above All – Ten Presidents from FDR to George Bush*. 13-37. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), 13-15.

ideas, and momentum in the country at large, where he rightly believed it really mattered, he was willing to let it be confused at the top.”²⁰ This strategy of innovative organization kept the power in Roosevelt’s hands. Roosevelt’s openness towards trying new things also led to mistakes, but he handled the admitting of mistakes in a calm way and simply moved on. According to Goodwin (1995) the downturns did not seem to diminish Roosevelt’s confidence nor damage his image among the people. One example of a promise made that Roosevelt had to go back and say that he could not keep, was made during the 1932 campaign when he promised to balance the budget and lower government expenditures. Once in office, Roosevelt explained to the public that it was not possible to do this at the time because of the depression. The public accepted his explanation until the campaign in 1936. When Roosevelt again was attacked for not keeping his promise he first responded with humor, and then came up with the response where he admitted that presidents make mistakes and said: “Better the occasional faults of a government that lives in a spirit of charity than the constant omissions of a government frozen in the ice of its own indifference”.²¹ With strong argumentation, Roosevelt was able to answer the attack, convince the public, and keep his support.

With the wartime economy, Roosevelt was able to create new partnerships between business and government in the production of war equipment. “Though the way a president communicates his own strengths to the entire nation remains partly a mystery, there is no doubt that Roosevelt created the national climate that made this unmatched productivity possible.”²² The characteristics of self-confidence, the openness to innovation, the ability to appear calm, and the role as an educator – all made Roosevelt a strong leader who could deal with opposition.

2.3 Roosevelt and Political Communication

Not only is FDR’s first hundred days and the New Deal well known, but Roosevelt’s successful communication and press relations are continually referred to. When entering the office in 1933 FDR was not without press experience. “Franklin D. Roosevelt’s initial political experience paralleled the American press’s increasing emphasis on social concerns and economic change.”²³ Louis McHenry Howe was the man who helped FDR to maintain successful publicity. For instance, Howe was able to delay the knowledge of the seriousness

²⁰ Goodwin in Wilson, *Character Above All – Ten Presidents from FDR to George Bush.*, 18.

²¹ At the 1936 Democratic Convention, Goodwin IN Wilson *Character Above All – Ten Presidents from FDR to George Bush*, 19, 20.

²² Goodwin in Wilson, *Character Above All – Ten Presidents from FDR to George Bush*, 17.

²³ Winfield, *FDR and the News Media*, 12.

of FDR's disease for a long time when he was governor. "Throughout it all, Howe's main news strategy was to control the news content for the most supportive image of Roosevelt, without setting the pose so much that it could not immediately be dropped."²⁴ The thought being that if you say a thing often enough, there is a good chance that it becomes a fact. FDR nevertheless always had to deal with the fact that he was in a wheelchair and at the same time keep his popularity as president. Over and over again Roosevelt had to prove his physical health. One way of dealing with his disease, was that FDR managed to be humorous about his physical condition in public.²⁵ The physical condition was especially being questioned during the first campaign, as people were wondering if he could face the presidential pressure. To convince the public, FDR had a specialist examine him and make an official statement that he was fit for his job. Howe of course made sure to circulate the statement.²⁶ Roosevelt's opponent, Herbert Hoover made a statement during the campaign that had an underlying sense which indicated that a handicapped person could not execute the president's assignments in a satisfying way. Choosing Roosevelt as president would therefore be a risk. In answer to this accusation, Roosevelt went on a tour giving 60 speeches, including 27 longer political lectures. In comparison, Hoover made 10 similar appearances. Roosevelt proved Hoover wrong and showed the public that he was fit to become president.²⁷

In addition to the use of humor, public statements and the campaign trip to persuade the public that he was fit to be president, Roosevelt was in fact a good communicator. "When Roosevelt focused attention on the state's problems, the audience forgot his legs. His speeches, expressing his enthusiasm, brought him positive headlines. His energetic stumping throughout the state served to convince journalists and audiences alike that he was in magnificent health."²⁸ Because of a good relationship with the press, FDR was able to avoid photographs of him in the wheelchair, or for instance when he was getting out of the car. This was respected even in a time when photography became more and more important to the media. Actually, because the press avoided to photograph Roosevelt in a way that could make him seem helpless or crippled, most people assumed that he could walk on his own power. According to Goodwin (1995), Roosevelt was able to transfer pity into admiration by the manipulation of other people's reaction to his disability.²⁹ When Roosevelt was victim of an assassination attempt, the public confidence grew even stronger. "The American people

²⁴ Winfield, *FDR and the News Media*, 13.

²⁵ Winfield, *FDR and the News Media*, 13.

²⁶ Winfield, *FDR and the News Media*, 20.

²⁷ Moen, *USAs Presidenter – Fra George Washington til George W. Bush*, 405.

²⁸ Winfield, *FDR and the News Media*, 16.

²⁹ Goodwin in Wilson, *Character Above All – Ten Presidents from FDR to George Bush*, 25.

needed a dramatic, innovative, and strong leader. America, too, was suffering from a handicap, a crippling economic disease that was bringing it to a standstill.”³⁰ According to Winfield (1994), Roosevelt successfully became the symbol of courage and hope for the country.

Roosevelt delivered his acceptance speech in person for the first time ever by flying in to Chicago. Both the personal appearance was powerful, as well as the fact that flying to Chicago when commercial air transport still was in its early years showed how the president made use of the developments of transport in national politics.³¹ From his first Inaugural Address came the famous words; “the only thing we have to fear is fear itself” making FDR seem as a leader with confidence.

Ryan (2003) argues that Roosevelt was able to invent a policy rhetorically. The presidential rhetoric usually focuses on persuading the public and the Congress of a policy, but according to Ryan (2003) when it comes to FDR and his speechwriters this sometimes also happened to be the opposite case.³² Ryan (2003) search to examine to what degree a speechwriter create policy when inventing a speech. Either way, Roosevelt as already stated was a good communicator, and one of the strong rhetoric effects were the use of metaphors. One example of a successful metaphor was the “progressive government” in 1932, when Roosevelt gave a campaign address before the San Francisco Commonwealth Club. “Progressive government” functioned on several levels; it evoked progressivism as a reform philosophy, it implied FDR’s new, action-oriented government which in contrast to Hoover’s perceived inactivity and because of the Depression signaled advancing of the country, and it portrayed Roosevelt as a professor lecturing the audience on the implications of US history to 1932.³³ The “progressive government” metaphor did, according to Ryan (2003), illustrate a successful relationship between language and policy. Of course, another famous and successful use of language was the “fear”-sentence in Roosevelt’s First Inaugural Address. The Address also includes a lot of militaristic words, and overall framed the president’s New Deal as the response to the Depression.³⁴ A third successful metaphor was the “Lend-Lease” term used in 1940. With the ongoing World War, the British needed ships to replace those

³⁰ Winfield, *FDR and the News Media*, 23.

³¹ Winfield, *FDR and the News Media*, 21.

³² Halford Ryan, “Franklin Delano Roosevelt: Rhetorical Politics and Political Rhetorics” in Ritter, Kurt and Martin J. Medhurst (ed.), *Presidential Speechwriting – From the New Deal to the Reagan Revolution and Beyond*, (College Station, USA: Texas A&M University Press, 2003) 21, 22.

³³ Ryan in Ritter and Medhurst, *Presidential Speechwriting – From the New Deal to the Reagan Revolution and Beyond*, 31.

³⁴ Ryan in Ritter and Medhurst, *Presidential Speechwriting – From the New Deal to the Reagan Revolution and Beyond*, 32-34.

sunk by the Germans. Roosevelt used the term 'lend-lease' and used it as a metaphor of neighborly lending in order to convince Congress and the American public of the help that would be given England. The metaphor also personalized the relationship between the United States and England in the time of war.³⁵

There are also examples of failed use of metaphors, for instance the Court-Packing Scheme was a failure. With the so called "Court-Packing Plan", Roosevelt proposed that he could appoint one additional judge for every judge over seventy within the maximum of fifteen members in total. FDR wanted to nominate more judges to get more of the New Deal proposals passed.³⁶ This was a case that FDR kept bringing up in his Fireside chats, which was not very wise according to communication strategies. According to Ryan (2003) this political failure can be directly linked to Roosevelt's rhetoric. Roosevelt used "tired old men" which presented a negative image of the sitting judges, who answered that age per se was not an issue. After receiving critic for his speech, Roosevelt apologized and rephrased at Victory Dinner, but then he went back to his original metaphor in his Fireside Chat, making the proposal even more unpopular.³⁷ Ryan (2003) concludes that Roosevelt had success when he took the role of educating the public, while his rhetoric and hence policies were unsuccessful when his speeches lacked good arguments.

(...) when Roosevelt marshaled metaphors that brought-before-the-eyes action-oriented images that the American people perceived to be genuine and needed, he persuaded. He offered a New Deal to assuage the Depression. He did deploy military metaphors to array the plebeians against the patricians. He did grill millionaires in order to redistribute income.³⁸

Being able to earn the people's trust was important for a successful communication strategy, and the metaphors could function as useful images to get the public on board his political agenda.

Roosevelt reinstated the press conferences as another tool in communicating to the press and the public. FDR promised to meet twice a week "off the record" with the press, but he included four rules concerning the information:

(...) all news stories based on news announcements from the White House were to be without quotations; direct quotations could be used only when given out in writing by the press secretary Steve Early; background information would be given reporters on their own authority

³⁵ Ryan in Ritter and Medhurst, *Presidential Speechwriting – From the New Deal to the Reagan Revolution and Beyond*, 34, 35.

³⁶ Moen, *USAs Presidenter: fra George Washington til George W. Bush*, 409.

³⁷ Ryan in Ritter and Medhurst, *Presidential Speechwriting – From the New Deal to the Reagan Revolution and Beyond*, 24, 25, 27.

³⁸ Ryan in Ritter and Medhurst, *Presidential Speechwriting – From the New Deal to the Reagan Revolution and Beyond*, 35.

and responsibility, not to be attributed to the White House; and the off-the-record information was to be confidential, given only those reporters present.³⁹

In addition to these rules, FDR made sure to find a suitable timetable, meaning that he met with the press on times to meet the spot-news requirement for a first-page story for both the morning and afternoon editions. Newspapers were one of the most important medium at the time. Also, FDR and his press secretary would plant questions to be able to talk about preferred issues. According to Winfield (1994), despite these rules and tactics, FDR's press conferences were a success and he was able to maintain a good relationship with the press. The result was that FDR could maintain a regular, expected flow of news from the White House. "The president's press meetings became the greatest regular show in Washington."⁴⁰ Like when dealing with his illness, FDR used humor in his press conferences as well, for instance by starting off with "No news, except...".⁴¹ This informal style and FDR's personality were part of the success in combination with the rules and underlying news management strategies.

Correspondents recounted it was easy to talk to Franklin D. Roosevelt because 'it was a personal relationship'. In fact, Roosevelt's access system may have been part of the secret to his excellent press relations. The journalists were so dependent on the White House for news that FDR's personal relations could influence the news stories, especially with the new journalistic demands for interpretation.⁴²

One thing FDR did react to though, was the new "interpretive journalism" style that emerged in the 1930s and 1940s. According to Winfield (1994), FDR as an old reporter himself, was hostile to the journalistic change. "This new reporting style challenged the old-style objective of sticking to a factual account of what had been said or done. 'Why' and 'how' became especially important because readers wanted background information and context about the new government agencies and the flurry of New Deal activity."⁴³

Winfield (1994) questions whether Roosevelt's excellent relations with the Washington correspondents would be the same had it not been for the fact that many of the publishers and editors were Roosevelt's allies and domestic adversaries.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, Roosevelt filled the expectations of an executive leader with action and control in times of crisis, domestically the Great Depression and World War II internationally. "From 1933 to

³⁹ Winfield, *FDR and the News Media*, 28, 29.

⁴⁰ Winfield, *FDR and the News Media*, 33.

⁴¹ Winfield, *FDR and the News Media*, 33.

⁴² Winfield, *FDR and the News Media*, 53.

⁴³ Winfield, *FDR and the News Media*, 53.

⁴⁴ Winfield, *FDR and the News Media*, 232.

1941, Franklin D. Roosevelt maintained an open government, one of the most open presidencies since Teddy Roosevelt's. (...) Yet by 1941 confidentiality became wartime covertness for protecting military and diplomatic plans."⁴⁵ Winfield (1994) stresses this conflict between confidentiality and openness, and emphasizes that control of information is a source of tremendous political power, one that Roosevelt managed well.⁴⁶ Franklin D. Roosevelt left a legacy for subsequent presidents with his presidential press relations: "As a benchmark, Roosevelt showed the importance of a dynamic personality. His easygoing manner, his charm, and his optimistic nature were an integral part of his overall news management abilities."⁴⁷ Winfield (1994) indicates that with these skills, Roosevelt might even have created unreasonable expectations for less personable presidents. Either way, Roosevelt set a certain standard when it comes to presidential communication and succeeding presidents have compared their communication tactics and leadership abilities to that of Franklin D. Roosevelt.⁴⁸ FDR knew how to use the mass media to his advantage as president of the United States. "Foremost a greater communicator, FDR knew when to speak and when not to. He knew how to use his charm and withdraw it."⁴⁹

An example of a speech where Roosevelt used humor successfully is the so-called 'Fala Speech':

These Republican leaders have not been content with attacks on me, or my wife, or on my sons. No, not content with that, they now include my little dog, Fala. Well, of course, I don't resent attacks, and my family doesn't resent attacks, but Fala does resent them. You know, Fala is Scotch, and being a Scottie, as soon as he learned that the Republican fiction writers in Congress and out had concocted a story that I had left him behind on the Aleutian Islands and had sent a destroyer back to find him - at a cost to the taxpayers of two or three, or eight or twenty million dollars - his Scotch soul was furious. He has not been the same dog since. I am accustomed to hearing malicious falsehoods about myself - such as that old, worm-eaten chestnut that I have represented myself as indispensable. But I think I have a right to resent, to object to libelous statements about my dog.⁵⁰

This statement was made when Roosevelt was campaigning against Dewey in the last election. Roosevelt was accused for sending the marine out to Aleutene to pick up the lapdog Fala, who had been left behind by mistake. With this speech, Roosevelt won the debate.⁵¹ Roosevelt chose to answer the negative attack from the Republicans using humor and making

⁴⁵ Winfield, *FDR and the News Media*, 234.

⁴⁶ Winfield, *FDR and the News Media*, 234.

⁴⁷ Winfield, *FDR and the News Media*, 236.

⁴⁸ Winfield, *FDR and the News media*, 234, 236.

⁴⁹ Winfield, *FDR and the News Media*, 239.

⁵⁰ Franklin D. Roosevelt, Campaign Dinner Address, Washington DC, September 23, 1944, <http://www.hpol.org/fdr/fala/> (14.10.09).

⁵¹ Moen, *USAs Presidenter – Fra George Washington til George W. Bush*, 407.

the opponents look ridiculous instead, a communication strategy which proved successful in this particular case.

By and large, FDR “demonstrated that mass media can be a major political weapon for leadership.”⁵² Roosevelt kept pace with the technological developments and “(...) reaffirmed the subsequent continual presidential search for the most direct method of sending information to the American public.”⁵³

2.4 Fireside Chats

Franklin D. Roosevelt used the media well, and one medium in particular was the radio. As the radio in itself developed it allowed FDR to reach people outside the New York broadcasts. FDR used the radio as governor, when campaigning, and as president. The famous “fireside chat” started in 1929. Through this chat FDR spoke to the people in a familiar and intimate manner. “He projected his personality as a friend of the people with speeches that were logical, simple, and authoritative.”⁵⁴ The approach was fascinating and the radio, according to Winfield (1994), became New York’s classroom, where Roosevelt could present his proposals and receive public support.⁵⁵

The first fireside chat Roosevelt gave as president was regarding the banking crisis, and it can function as an example of his way of educating the public, keeping public support and calming the public down. This fireside chat was delivered on March 12, 1933, at a point when nearly all the banks in the United States had been temporarily closed.

I want to talk for a few minutes with the people of the United States about banking – with the comparatively few who understand the mechanics of banking but more particularly with the overwhelming majority who use banks for the making of deposits and the drawing of checks. I want to tell you what has been done in the last few days, why it was done, and what the next steps are going to be. I recognize that the many proclamations from State Capitols and from Washington, the legislation, the Treasury regulations, etc., couched for the most part in banking and in legal terms should be explained for the benefit of the average citizen. I owe this in particular because of the fortitude and good temper with which everybody has accepted the inconvenience and hardships of the banking holiday. I know that when you understand what we in Washington have been about I shall continue to have your cooperation as fully as I have had your sympathy and help during the past week.

(...)

It is possible that when the banks resume a very few people who have not recovered from their fear may again begin withdrawals. Let me make it clear that the banks will take care of all needs – and it is my belief that hoarding during the past week has become an exceeding unfashionable pastime. It needs no prophet to tell you that when the people find that they can

⁵² Winfield, *FDR and the News Media*, 236.

⁵³ Winfield, *FDR and the News Media*, 238.

⁵⁴ Winfield, *FDR and the News Media*, 17.

⁵⁵ Winfield, *FDR and the News Media*, 18.

get their money -- that they can get it when they want it for all legitimate purposes -- the phantom of fear will soon be laid. People will again be glad to have their money where it will be safely taken care of and where they can use it conveniently at any time. I can assure you that it is safer to keep your money in a reopened bank than under the mattress.

The success of our whole great national program depends, of course, upon the cooperation of the public -- on its intelligent support and use of a reliable system.

(...)

After all there is an element in the readjustment of our financial system more important than currency, more important than gold, and that is the confidence in people. Confidence and courage are the essentials of success in carrying out our plan. You people must have faith; you must not be stampeded by rumors or guesses. Let us unite in banishing fear. We have provided the machinery to restore our financial system; it is up to you to support and make it work.

It is your problem no less than it is mine. Together we cannot fail.⁵⁶

During a time of depression, Roosevelt was able to communicate seriousness through this fireside chat. Behind each of his statements are grounded arguments. Roosevelt created confidence from the people by reassuring them that closing the banks and then reopen was the best thing to do at the time. After the first paragraph, Roosevelt gave a detailed explanation of the government's plan, almost a day-to-day plan, helping the public understand and making his listeners feel they had a part in what was going on. The detailed explanations of the government's doings indicate a need to educate the public, but Roosevelt was able to do this while maintaining an attitude of respect.

One gets the feeling that he knows what he is doing. Roosevelt referred to the public throughout his chat emphasizing their importance. In addition, Roosevelt used direct speech using the personal pronouns "I" and "you" which made the listener feel that he was talking directly to him or her. Also, this form of narrative helped personalizing the issue and that way Roosevelt was able to make a connection to the public. The well-known reference to 'fear' in Roosevelt's First Inaugural Address was brought up again, this time Roosevelt promised that 'the phantom of fear will soon be laid'. Roosevelt showed that he took the public serious by acknowledging that the bank problem is both his and their problem. The radio chat feels like a very personal, in debt address from the president and is therefore effective communication. Besides talking to the public, the president also talked on behalf of the banks that were to be reopened, that needed to win back the trust of the people. By talking on the radio at that time the president reached a lot Americans, and with the direct speech and personalization of issues, people could sit at home in their living rooms and feel that the president was addressing *them*.

⁵⁶ Franklin D. Roosevelt, Fireside Chat 1, *On the Banking Crisis*, March 12, 1933, <http://millercenter.org/scripps/archive/speeches/detail/3298> (14.10.09)

According to Goodwin (1995), Roosevelt had a magnificent sense of timing, which was an important part of the strategy behind the fireside chats. Roosevelt made sure that he did not give too many talks on the radio, because if he talked too frequently on the radio the chats would lose its effectiveness.⁵⁷ During the twelve-year presidency, Roosevelt only gave 30 fireside chats.⁵⁸

In addition to radio, FDR used a talking motion picture in the 1930 campaign, a very new and impressive medium at the time. The movie was a campaign documentary of FDR's inspection tours called "The Roosevelt Record", and it was shown at 200 theatres and distributed for small meetings by five Movietone sound tracks.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Goodwin in Wilson, *Character Above All – Ten Presidents from FDR to George Bush*, 32.

⁵⁸ Miller Center, <http://millercenter.org/scripps/archive/speeches> (26.10.09).

⁵⁹ Winfield, *FDR and the News Media*, 18.

Summary

Franklin D. Roosevelt served as president of the United States in twelve years. Throughout these years Roosevelt proved to be a successful communicator who kept good relations with the press and held effective fireside chats on the radio. Despite the illness and the fact that Roosevelt was dependent on a wheelchair, he was able to serve his time in office as well as anyone else. This way Roosevelt is an example of the American ideology that if you just work hard enough you can achieve what you want. The self-presentation of the president also helped Roosevelt appear as a strong leader when it comes to the issue of his illness, as the press cooperated not to focus on his disability to walk. The strategies of image-making were especially important for a president with a handicap. It seems that the press relations during Roosevelt's presidency indicate that the press was less oppositional than what we experience today. The press respected the wish not to present Roosevelt with photos of him in wheelchair or other situations which portrayed his disability, as well as the press followed the rules set up during the press conferences. It is fascinating that most of the country preferred to believe that the president could walk and was lead to believe this was true. Roosevelt used his press relations to control the regular flow of news from the White House, which is something that might be taken for granted today.

Roosevelt's progressive politics created a democratic era in American political history. Despite opposition, that was especially strong because of the time of depression, Roosevelt managed to get re-elected three times with great majority. His confidence helped him be perceived as a strong leader, which was something the public felt was needed during a depression and in war-time. At the same time as Roosevelt appeared strong and with confidence, he held an informal style during his press conferences and related to the public on a personal level through his fireside chats. The combination made him seem a likable man and helped him keep support throughout his twelve years as president of the United States.



3.0 A New Morning – Ronald Reagan

'They say we offer simple answers to complex problems,' Reagan proclaimed in the speech that first brought him attention as a politician. 'Well, perhaps there is a simply answer – not an easy answer – but simple: if you and I have the courage to tell our elected officials that we want our national policy based on what we know in our heart is morally right.' Compared with the various Democratic appeals – the updated, moderate southern progressivism of Jimmy Carter; the retooled New Deal liberalism personified by Walther Mondale; the cool rationalism of Michael Dukakis – this seemed a forward-looking message with conviction as well as confidence.¹

Ronald Reagan represented “A New Morning” in America. To sum up Reagan’s campaign in one word it would be optimism, and it proved successful. Historian Wilentz (2008) calls the period from 1974 to 2008 the Age of Reagan. Ronald Reagan became an important figure in American politics, and his influence changed and reshaped the system. As a former Hollywood actor, Reagan had experience with performing in front of an audience and knew how to behave in front of a camera. Ronald Reagan was “born to be on TV” according to several critics; “(...) a message must conform in terms of content and structure in order to maximize impact and effectiveness. Reagan’s cool, laid-back style is perfect for television.”²

The following takes a look at Reagan’s background, how he became president of the United States, and his success on television. The chapter will also look at some of Reagan’s challenges as a sitting president for two full terms, and his reputation after he had served his time as a president. Although many critics seem to disagree with Reagan’s politics, he still remains one of the most popular presidents in the United States. In relation to this chapter an interview with Clark S. Judge was performed. Mr. Judge is a former speechwriter for Ronald Reagan and could provide some interesting facts on political speeches and the environment inside the Reagan White House. This interview is referred to as a source throughout the chapter, and a complete summary of the interview as well as the interview guide can be found in the appendix (A).

3.1 The Reagan Era

Ronald Reagan served as president of the United States from 1981 to 1989³, but his legacy extended beyond his eight years as president. Preceding his years as a politician, Reagan was an actor. Before he came to Hollywood, Reagan worked as a radio sports announcer in Iowa.

¹ Sean Wilentz, *The Age of Reagan – A History, 1974-2008*, (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2008), 6-7.

² Robert E. Denton, *The Primetime Presidency of Ronald Reagan: The Era of Television Presidency*, (New York: Praegers Publishers, 1988), 64.

³ Robert J. Dinkin, *Campaigning in America: A History of Election Practices*, (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1989), 194-196.

Because of a restricted budget to cover travel expenses, Reagan learned to report baseball and soccer matches on the basis of wire reports, which was quite common at the time. His lively imagination and way with words made him known for the exciting descriptions of the games. In 1937, Reagan signed a contract with Warner Brothers and has played in 52 movies.⁴ During World War II, Reagan produced propaganda movies. He had too bad sight to fight in the war himself, but he had no problem acting like it on film. Reagan married the actress, Jane Wyman and they had two children together. Wyman won an Oscar while Reagan was mostly considered a B-film actor. The couple also experienced political disagreement, and in 1948 their marriage came to an end. In 1952, Reagan remarried to Nancy Davis and they had two children as well. Reagan became a member of the Republican Party in 1962 and he chose a conservative political stance.⁵ As a first lady, Mrs. Reagan was criticized for being high maintenance because she used almost one million dollars on redecorating the White House at a time when Reagan was making cuts in social programs for the poor. Mrs. Reagan however leaned towards more liberal policies on certain issues later on. After the assassination attempt on Reagan in 1981, Mrs. Reagan became active in restrictions on the sales of handguns and later she fought for stem cell research in relation to the Alzheimer disease, which Reagan came to suffer from. In his diaries Reagan expresses his love and need of his wife Nancy. For example, Reagan wrote on June 16th, 1981: “It’s lonely. Nancy is in N.Y. for the Royal Ballet. I don’t like it here by myself.”⁶

When Reagan first ran for office, Gerald Ford was the sitting president. Reagan’s ideas were to cut the federal spending by \$90 billion, cut the personal income taxes to an average of 23 percent, and at the same time balancing the budget, seemed too wild at the time and helped the credibility of Ford’s campaign instead. While Reagan won some impressive primary victories, Ford was re-nominated and ultimately defeated in the general election by the team of Jimmy Carter and Walter Mondale.⁷ But according to historian Sean Wilentz (2008) “Carter’s best day as president may have been his first”.⁸ While the Carter administration floundered, the Republicans kept gaining support and on July 16th 1980 they nominated Ronald Reagan and George H. W. Bush as their presidential ticket. Traditionally chances are high for a sitting president to get re-elected and sit out his two terms, but with the nomination

⁴ According to another source he has played in 53 movies. *The White House*, www.whitehouse.gov/about/presidents/ronaldreagan (15.04.2009).

⁵ Reagan is said to have shifted from liberal to conservative because of disputes over the issue of Communism in the film industry. *The White House*, www.whitehouse.gov/about/presidents/ronaldreagan (15.04.2009).

⁶ Douglas Brinkley, *The Reagan Diaries*, (New York, Harper Collins Publishers, 2007), 25.

⁷ Wilentz, *The Age of Reagan – A History 1974-2008*, 65-68.

⁸ Wilentz, *The Age of Reagan – A History 1974-2008*, 74.

of Reagan, Carter's chances diminished. The last time a candidate won over a sitting president was Franklin D. Roosevelt's victory over Herbert Hoover in 1932. Ronald Reagan increased his chances with the nomination of the Republican Party and the backing of the new right's machine behind him. Still, there was no clear victory until the very end of the campaign.⁹ Reagan ended up winning the election of 1980 with 489 electoral votes against Jimmy Carter's 49 electoral votes.¹⁰ This was the third largest margin to that point in American history, preceded by Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1936 and Richard Nixon in 1972.¹¹

During the campaign, Reagan blamed economic failure and bad handling of foreign affairs (on-going hostage situation at the time) on the Carter administration, Carter tried to make Reagan look like an extremist with radical economic ideas (for instance the tax cuts). "Whereas Carter spoke philosophically of ambiguities and limits, Reagan spoke with splendid simplicity about an unbounded American politics".¹² On a TV-debate Reagan elegantly managed to prove otherwise of his image as a fiery extremist with simply saying his famous words, "there you go again", when Carter brought up the issue of nuclear arms and related that to a conversation he had had with his daughter making the issue seem trivial enough that he should take advice from a teenager. In a calm and trustworthy manner Reagan looked straight into the camera and said as his final statement: "Are you better off than you were four years ago? Is it easier for you to go and buy things in the stores than it was four years ago? ... Is America respected around the world as it was".¹³ With only one week left Reagan took over the election. In popular votes Reagan got 51 percent, Carter 41 percent, and a third candidate Anderson got 7 percent. Despite the large margin in electoral votes, the popular vote showed that the Reagan administration still had to work on convincing the nation of their political ideas.¹⁴ Reagan was re-elected in 1984 and won 525 electoral votes against Democrat Walter Mondale who won 13 electoral votes.¹⁵ With 59 percent of the popular vote Reagan was the first president since Dwight D. Eisenhower to serve a second full term. Since James Monroe only Franklin D. Roosevelt (1936) had won a larger proportion of the electoral vote with the 1984 election.¹⁶ With the increased popularity Reagan showed success in convincing the public. The Age of Reagan continued.

⁹ Wilentz, *The Age of Reagan – A History 1974-2008*, 120.

¹⁰ Dinkin, *Campaigning in America: A History of Election Practices*, 194-196.

¹¹ Wilentz, *The Age of Reagan – A History 1974-2008*, 124.

¹² Wilentz, *The Age of Reagan – A History 1974-2008*, 125.

¹³ Wilentz, *The Age of Reagan – A History 1974-2008*, 124.

¹⁴ Wilentz, *The Age of Reagan – A History 1974-2008*, 124.

¹⁵ Dinkin, *Campaigning in America: A History of Election Practices*, 194-196.

¹⁶ Wilentz, *The Age of Reagan – A History 1974-2008*, 174.

In politics Reagan was a supporter of tax cuts to the ones with high incomes so that they would be encouraged to make investments which would increase activity and ultimately result in increasing tax income. This economic line of thought came to be known as “Reaganomics” in American politics. The effectiveness of “Reaganomics” is still controversial among scholars and economists, but what is clear is that financial speculation and deficits were problems of the day. In the recession of 1982 the unemployment rate was doubled, the number of bankruptcies was the biggest since the 1930s, and the budget deficit came well over \$100 billion dollars for the first time ever.¹⁷ Reagan was forced to publicly acknowledge the fact that the economy was in recession, a fact that the economists already knew.¹⁸ By the time Reagan left the White House, the budget deficit had reached \$2.7 billion. The tax cuts resulted in that the middle class paid most while the payoffs landed among the more wealthy people. This “bubble of speculations” ended in a crash of the stock market on October 19th 1987, which was the biggest one day drop at the New York Stock Exchange since 1929.¹⁹ Wilentz (2008) describes the recession as both a consequence of the Carter presidency and a product of Reagan’s policies. The public nevertheless seemed to keep a “wait-and-see” attitude towards Reagan’s politics²⁰, both domestically and on issues abroad.

On foreign policy Reagan’s chief advisors were Alexander Haig (Secretary of State), Casper Weinberger (Secretary of Defense), and William Casey (Director of the CIA), who according to Wilentz (2008) all were “(...) hard-line hawks who shared his [Reagan’s] desire to establish unquestionable U.S. military superiority, no matter what it cost”.²¹ Reagan experienced both success and disaster abroad. One controversy was the Iran-Contra affair. In 1986 a group of American government officials led by Robert McFarlane and Oliver North went undercover to Iran to have secret meetings with high-level Iranian officials, but without results. The team went back to Washington where the undercover operation continued. Their presence in Iran had however leaked and five months later the meetings were revealed by radical university students in Tehran, and soon the world knew that the United States had been dealing secretly with Iran. This was the beginning of the scandal that came to be long-lasting and more complicated. The Iran-Contra case persisted with suspicious methods of funding the operation and continued diplomatic talks with the Nicaragua government. The

¹⁷ *The White House*, Ronald Reagan, www.whitehouse.gov/about/presidents/ronaldreagan (15.04.2009)

¹⁸ Wilentz, *The Age of Reagan – A History 1974-2008*, 147.

¹⁹ Reagan’s political era is also known as the “Reagan Revolution”. The White House presents a more positive view of this era: “At the end of his administration, the Nations was enjoying its longest recorded period of peacetime prosperity without recession or depression.” www.whitehouse.gov/about/presidents/ronaldreagan (15.04.2009)

²⁰ Wilentz, *The Age of Reagan – A History 1974-2008*, 147.

²¹ Wilentz, *The Age of Reagan – A History 1974-2008*, 153.

team asked foreign governments for aid to the contras which might illegally contravene the will of Congress. Huge funds were deposited into Swiss bank accounts. Reagan argued that the donations were lawful so long as the United States demanded nothing in return – ‘no quid pro quo’, although this was later debated, in particular because there would be a tactic quid pro quo in such dealings. The president knew of the ambiguities of the contras and deliberately ordered that Congress be kept in the dark.²² The Iran-Contra Affairs created circumstances for terrorism, hijacking and a hostage taking. The situation reached an especially controversy when it became clear that the US was trading arms to Iran for hostages. This realization occurred after the hostages were released. Reagan did not admit it, but the president had authorized arms sales in hope of freeing hostages.

To defend himself against the press and potential public criticism, Reagan stuck to his story of being confused and misled long enough and bought valuable time and contained the political damage. When the Iran-Contra affairs came out in the open and consequences were about to be decided, it is said that McFarlane tried to commit suicide. The CIA director, Mr. Casey, died of natural causes. Reagan himself had a prostate surgery. These health related issues might have created some public sympathy for the president and his advisors. In fact, “Precedents, timing, and the political calendar all worked in Reagan’s favor.”²³ With less than two years left of Reagan’s second term it seemed the Democrats wanted to avoid another impeachment of a Republican president, bearing Nixon and the Watergate scandal fresh in mind. Speculators say that Democrats were afraid such action would backfire if they were able to win the next presidency, fearing Republicans then would search for every reason to impeach a future Democratic president. The majority report concerning the Iran-Contra affairs claimed that Reagan had failed in his duty because of allowing lawbreaking among his subordinates and thereby failed to “take care that laws be faithfully executed” as stated in the Constitution. Under different circumstances a case like this could lead to impeachment of the president, but evidence that Reagan had known was never found. The minority report represented the opposite view of course, but the leading participants were convicted. It is interesting to note that as the hearings were televised, how the accused came across on TV also played its part.²⁴

There is no doubt that, although Reagan avoided impeachment, the Iran-Contra case damaged his image. As Wilentz (2008) puts it; “By emphasizing matters of style instead of

²² Wilentz, *The Age of Reagan – A History 1974-2008*, 215-216.

²³ Wilentz, *The Age of Reagan – A History 1974-2008*, 229.

²⁴ Wilentz, *The Age of Reagan – A History 1974-2008*, 209-245.

Reagan's deliberate and emphatic political decisions, it also turned a dubious caricature, popular among some of Reagan's liberal detractors – the president as a doddering old man of mercy of his manipulative advisers – into a rationale for not judging him too harshly.”²⁵ After this case, Reagan changed his inner circle in trying to revise his damaged presidency, “(...) replacing sharp-edged ideologues with temperate pragmatists.”²⁶ More bad news followed for Reagan; Mrs. Reagan was diagnosed with breast cancer, but had a successful surgery, and in domestic politics the stock market broke down. But, just as one thought that Reagan had lost his magic touch, the dialogue with the Soviet Union represented a bright spot. On December 8th 1987, Reagan met with Mikhail Gorbachev and they signed a treaty to eliminate all intermediate- and short-range missiles from the U.S. and Soviet arsenals.²⁷ Reagan has ever since been honored for ending the race between the United States and the Soviet Union in nuclear weapons, and thereby making the Cold War come to an end. After his meeting with Gorbachev, Reagan's popularity ratings went straight up and more than 60 percent thought he was doing a good job.²⁸

Despite the negative results of Reagan's politics, the press seemed to be taking into consideration both his age and his success with the Soviet Union, and still presented him in a positive image. In 1994 it was known that Reagan suffered from Alzheimer disease. Ronald Reagan is still viewed as the father of conservatism and has gotten the credit for ending the Cold War. When labeling 1974 to 2008 as the “Age of Reagan”, Wilentz (2008) acknowledges the importance of the conservative movement as a whole in shaping the era but he argues that “Without Reagan the conservative movement would never have been as successful as it was. In his political persona, as well as his policies, Reagan embodied a new fusion of deeply conservative politics with some of the rhetoric and even a bit of the spirit of Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal and of John F. Kennedy's New Frontier.”²⁹ His critics are impressed with his style and rhetoric, but are negative towards his politics and lack of substance. Seeing fiction from reality seemed hard for Reagan and maybe the American people found it easier to see the fiction as well.³⁰

²⁵ Wilentz, *The Age of Reagan – A History 1974-2008*, 231.

²⁶ Wilentz, *The Age of Reagan – A History 1974-2008*, 243.

²⁷ Wilentz, *The Age of Reagan – A History 1974-2008*, 243.

²⁸ The information about the Iran-Contra Affairs is taken from Wilentz, *The Age of Reagan – A History 1974-2008*, pp. 209-244.

²⁹ Wilentz, *The Age of Reagan – A History 1974-2008*, 1.

³⁰ The bibliographical facts and other interesting points of information are taken from Moen, *USA's Presidenter*, 522-537.

3.2 The Great Communicator

As a politician, Reagan is known for being able to express trust and optimism, and although as any other president his approval ratings had its ups and downs, overall Reagan was a very popular president, and he is still viewed that way by many today. Though his politics lacked depth, as some would say, his way of presenting it made him a very well-liked man. Among the presidents in American politics, Reagan has been called the Great Communicator. Reagan was able to communicate optimism in an easy and natural way. “President Feelgood” is for instance known for his humorous comments after the assassination attempt when he expressed to his wife at the hospital: “I forgot to duck, dear”.³¹ The attempt was executed by a mentally disturbed young boy who fired six shots at Reagan and punctured his lung. Reagan was back at work after ten days, though his physical health was weakened much longer, the White House managed to hide this from the public. Reagan’s way of dealing with the attack, with his humor and supposed quick recovery, increased his popularity even more.

According to Muir (2003) all presidential administrations choose focus. “More than any other modern president, Ronald Reagan sought to exploit the moral possibilities of the rhetorical presidency.”³² The symbol of optimism was much needed after a turbulent 1960s and 1970s.³³ Reagan’s promise of a new morning was well received in the American public.

Ronald Reagan had six full-time speechwriters who all “shared the love of language”.³⁴ A lot of work was dedicated behind each speech with drafting, editing, circulation, and revision, both by the Speechwriting Department and by the president himself, who always had the last word. The speechwriters tried to anticipate the President’s line of thought beforehand and wrote accordingly. Reagan’s distinctive style made it easier for the speechwriters, even as writers were replaced. Reagan always simplified his final speeches and is known for writing for “the ear rather than the eye”. The most important thing being that the speech sounded good rather than its qualities as a written piece of work.³⁵ Even though there was a close cooperation between the speechwriters and the president, the contact was mostly in writing. “Most people are surprised to learn that after writing speeches in the Reagan White

³¹ Ole Moen, *USAs Presidenter, fra George Washington til George Bush* (Oslo: Forlaget Historie og Kultur AS, 2008), 530.

³² William K Muir Jr., “Ronald Reagan’s Bully Pulpit: Creating a Rhetoric of Values”, in *Presidential Speechwriting. From the New Deal to the Reagan Revolution and Beyond*, 194-210, edited by Kurt Ritter and Martin J. Medhurst (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2003), 194.

³³ Muir IN Ritter and Medhurst, *Presidential Speechwriting. From the New Deal to the Reagan Revolution and Beyond*, 195.

³⁴ The speechwriters were: Bentley Elliott (chief), Tony Dolan, William E. Buckley Jr., Donna Rohrabacher, Peggy Noonan, Allan A. Myer, Peter Robinson. Muir IN Ritter and Medhurst, *Presidential Speechwriting. From the New Deal to the Reagan Revolution and Beyond*, 197.

³⁵ Denton, *The Primetime Presidency of Ronald Reagan: The Era of Television Presidency*, 66.

House for five years, Peggy Noonan had actually met Ronald Reagan only three times.”³⁶ Judge explained that the fact that the speechwriters rarely met the president was not a problem with Reagan because Reagan was a developed politician by the time he got to the White House and his political purpose was therefore stated clear. The challenge for the speechwriters was not so much knowing the president’s purpose, but rather taking the temperature around government. The administration was reforming the government and there was a lot of resonance to what the president was doing at the time. This resonance needed to be taken into consideration when developing a speech.³⁷

Muir (2003) finds it striking that there was minimal influence of the media in the Reagan speechwriting process as “(...) the speechwriters tended to focus on the immediate audience for an address, rather than primarily writing for news media consumption.”³⁸ One example of a well-known speech which proved powerful was *Remarks at the Brandenburg Gate* delivered in West Berlin, June 12th 1987. The part of the speech that was most important was this:

There is no sign the Soviets can make that would be unmistakable, that would advance dramatically the cause of freedom and peace.
General Secretary Gorbachev, if you seek peace, if you seek prosperity for the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, if you seek liberalization: Come here to this gate.
Mr. Gorbachev, open this gate.
Mr. Gorbachev -- Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!³⁹

Reagan’s advisors and speechwriters were not sure about this approach in the speech, and according to Clark S. Judge, this speech was sent back and forth several times, and each time it came back from the president he had ‘flagged’ the line “tear down this wall”. But Reagan proved right and the speech was a success. From the speechwriter’s desk to the President’s podium there is a lot of work in between. One needs to check the opinions of the people, measure the audience. When the background work is completed, the speech is put together and written up before it goes to staffing, which includes inputs from the President. A draft is then sent back to the speechwriter. The speechwriting process is therefore a process which includes a lot of mediation, processing, and negotiation. Writing the president’s speech is not just poetry. The speech needs to fit the political purpose of the whole government, the people,

³⁶ Martin J. Medhurst, “Afterword. Enduring Issues in Presidential Speechwriting” in *Presidential Speechwriting. From the New Deal to the Reagan Revolution and Beyond*, 217-220, edited by Kurt Ritter and Martin J. Medhurst (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2003), 219.

³⁷ Interview with Clark S. Judge, Monday October 12th 2009. Interview Guide and summary is found in Appendix A.

³⁸ Muir in Ritter and Medhurst, *Presidential Speechwriting. From the New Deal to the Reagan Revolution and Beyond*, 200.

³⁹ Ronald Reagan, *Remarks at the Brandenburg Gate*, West Berlin, June 12th 1987, American Rhetoric, <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/ronaldreaganbrandenburggate.htm> (13.10.2009).

and sometimes people abroad as well.⁴⁰ “Reagan’s greatest speeches were ceremonial in nature, philosophical in purpose, and addressed to the common sense of the American people.”⁴¹ When it comes to the role of the speechwriter, Judge emphasize that the important thing is for the speechwriter to know the president’s purpose. It is important to know his history and how he thinks about policy. Judge makes the distinction between the president as a private persona and the public persona, and emphasize that the speechwriter needs to have a sense of the president as a public persona. To some extent the president is creating a character, and Mr. Reagan was particularly adaptable on this point. It is necessary for the president to show qualities that are familiar to the public, so that the public can absorb the issues. It is therefore important for the speechwriter to have a sense of the president’s political purposes, what he sees as being appropriate and inappropriate. In addition the speechwriter should agree with the president politically because the job as a speechwriter demands passion and devotion.⁴²

Another characteristic of Reagan’s speeches was the stories, including humorous letters from the public, that were often included. These stories or letters made the president communicate his compassion and helped him relate to the public. According to Judge, including the stories first of all was a part of showing the humanity of the man. In political communication the struggle is how to take large and abstract concepts and making an understanding of how it relates to people. To be able to reach out one needs to make a connection to the public. The stories were a way of making people relate to what Reagan was saying about politics.⁴³

Ronald Reagan managed the president’s job as a moral leader well. Surveys show that the American people viewed life more positive after Reagan’s presidency. Still, of the four million spoken words during his presidency, Reagan’s most famous speeches announced no new policies – according to Muir.⁴⁴ Denton (1988) does not agree with labeling Ronald Reagan as the great communicator. “It is simply impossible to find a Reagan speech that will be studied as a piece of literature or as an exemplary example of human persuasion.”⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Clark S. Judge, lecture at BI, Oslo, September 16th, 2009.

⁴¹ Muir in Ritter and Medhurst, *Presidential Speechwriting. From the New Deal to the Reagan Revolution and Beyond*, 200-210.

⁴² Interview with Clark S. Judge, Monday October 12th 2009. Interview Guide and summary is found in Appendix A.

⁴³ Interview with Clark S. Judge, Monday October 12th 2009. Interview Guide and summary is found in Appendix A.

⁴⁴ Muir in Ritter and Medhurst, *Presidential Speechwriting. From the New Deal to the Reagan Revolution and Beyond*, 211-216.

⁴⁵ Denton, *The Primetime Presidency of Ronald Reagan: The Era of the Television Presidency*, 2.

Another critic, Isaac Asimov, feels that Reagan made it more important for a president to be popular, than to be effective.⁴⁶ At the same time, Reagan did create optimism in the American society. “Reagan, a professed conservative, received majorities in virtually every voter block or group in the population. For the first time since the days of Lyndon Johnson, more Americans were satisfied than unsatisfied.”⁴⁷

The idea that during the Reagan presidency it became more important for a president to be popular in contrast to presenting in-depth analysis of policies, has to be looked at in relation to the media world at the time. Television had become important to use in elections, and Reagan had that ability to use it to his advantage. Denton (1988) argues that Ronald Reagan “the great communicator” is really Ronald Reagan the “great television communicator.”⁴⁸ So why is Ronald Reagan labeled a great communicator? Was he so good on TV that he did not have to add substance to the political issues that he spoke of? Or is this just the perfect example of how the media functions as discussed earlier, focusing on style rather than substance.

“In the 1960s, television became the instrument of winning elections. Reagan made it the instrument of governing. The medium became the message.”⁴⁹ McLuhan’s theory fits well with Ronald Reagan and television. “To this end, Ronald Reagan is king. Ronald Reagan is the first to personalize McLuhan’s notion of ‘the medium is the message’.”⁵⁰ Reagan became the message through television. Denton (1988) really emphasizes the actor in Ronald Reagan, and the fact that he did not do that well on film, but rather on TV as a result of television itself being a “cool” medium. “Reagan truly reinforces the myth that any citizen can become president of the United States. But he does so because he is a *television* actor. Although truly radical, Ronald Reagan appears passive and ‘cool’.”⁵¹

According to Denton (1988), Reagan’s use of the media, and particularly television, did affect his popularity a great deal. In fact, Denton (1988) argues that instead of calling Reagan the great communicator, it would be more appropriate to say ‘the great television communicator’: “(...) after nearly 30 years of the television medium we now have a mature and complete television president in the form of Ronald Reagan.”⁵² “Ronald Reagan has become the model for the primetime president. He succeeded where other contemporary

⁴⁶ In Denton, *The Primetime Presidency of Ronald Reagan: The Era of the Television Presidency*, 1.

⁴⁷ Denton, *The Primetime Presidency of Ronald Reagan: The Era of the Television Presidency*, 1.

⁴⁸ Denton, *The Primetime Presidency of Ronald Reagan: The Era of the Television Presidency*, 76.

⁴⁹ Denton, *The Primetime Presidency of Ronald Reagan: The Era of the Television Presidency*, 11.

⁵⁰ Denton, *The Primetime Presidency of Ronald Reagan: The Era of the Television Presidency*, 59.

⁵¹ Denton, *The Primetime Presidency of Ronald Reagan: The Era of the Television Presidency*, 72.

⁵² Denton, *The Primetime Presidency of Ronald Reagan: The Era of the Television Presidency*, 4, 5.

presidents such as Johnson, Nixon, Ford, and Carter failed.”⁵³ In chapter one the way Richard Nixon worked hard to succeed on television is looked at. As contrasted to Nixon, being on television looked natural and simple to Reagan. When watching MSNBC’s *Inside the White House* episode on Reagan, one gets the impression of how calm and nice Reagan seems, with jellybeans on every table in the White House.⁵⁴ Of course, when the episode was made Reagan knew he was ‘on’, but it seemed nevertheless obvious that Reagan was well respected among his advisors and colleagues inside the White House.

Denton (1988) looks at three explanations as to why Ronald Reagan is called the great communicator. The cultural explanation is that Reagan was able to reestablish the “heroic presidency” reinforcing the traditional American myths and values, such as individualism. “With Reagan, Americans saw the president of an idealized past who defined the citizens in textbook terms of “patriotism, motherhood, and apple pie”.⁵⁵ Secondly, Reagan used symbolic politics. Image control was of great importance for Reagan and his staff. For instance Reagan made sure to hold parties, dinners, and receptions in the White House which represented class. Denton (1988) explains that Americans tend to like to elect the common man, but once elected one wants him to behave classy as a sign of leadership. Finally, Reagan’s media personality was of great importance. Through the media Reagan was provided with access to the general public and by using the media right, Reagan was guaranteed to get a favorable perception.⁵⁶ It is said that Reagan could have every emotion. Reagan had the ability to get a message across to the people. Reagan’s background as an actor helped him look natural in front of a camera. In addition, as an actor it is not just about making the movie, it is also about selling the movie. Actors selling movies are much like politicians or presidents who are campaigning, for instance by making sure to be photographed at the right places. Both require a great deal of stamina and personal discipline, and Reagan inhabited them both. In this sense Reagan’s experience on film and television helped his abilities to serve as a president, while his camera familiarity helped when communicating to the people.⁵⁷

In contrast to Roosevelt, when it comes to press conferences, Reagan held fewer than earlier presidents as he appeared more on TV instead, but when he did he changed the place for the press conference to a more “majestic setting” and made the reporters raise their hands

⁵³ Denton, *The Primetime Presidency of Ronald Reagan: The Era of the Television Presidency*, 10.

⁵⁴ Inside the Reagan White House, msnbc, 1981, <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/30892505/> (04.10.09)

⁵⁵ Denton, *The Primetime Presidency of Ronald Reagan: The Era of the Television Presidency*, 10.

⁵⁶ Denton, *The Primetime Presidency of Ronald Reagan: The Era of the Television Presidency*, 10, 11.

⁵⁷ Interview with Clark S. Judge, Monday October 12th 2009. Interview Guide and summary is found in Appendix A.

like schoolchildren.⁵⁸ One example of how the settings could be used is what Wilentz (2008) calls the Inaugural Day extravaganza. The first time Reagan was to be sworn in the location of the ceremony was switched from the East to the West Front of the Capitol. This was done in order to emphasize the stylistic as well as the symbolic dimensions of the change which Reagan's politics represented. The West Front was a more telegenic site that also happened to look out toward Reagan's real America. Reagan's second Inaugural had a symbolic ceremony as well, but in a quite different way. Because of cold weather, the ceremony was moved inside the Capitol which limited the televised splendor of 1981. The politics were also different than then what was presented at the first Inaugural, as things had changed during Reagan's first 4 years as a president. For instance, he had achieved a reform of the tax code, but the budget was not yet balanced.⁵⁹

One typical example of Reagan's rhetoric is the spot commercial called "It's morning again in America" used in his campaign of 1984. The ad shows pictures of people going to work, moving into new houses, and getting married with nice music playing in the background and a calm voice talking about less inflation. It promises better employment and possibilities for buying new homes. It is an image of the typical American dream with family values such as marriage, a good job and a nice house in the suburbs. The sentence is: "It's morning again in America, and under the leadership of President Reagan our country is prouder and stronger and better. Why would we ever want to return to where we were less than four short years ago?"⁶⁰

Roderick Hart describes three typical characteristics of Reagan's rhetoric. First of all, "Reagan's rhetoric provides a sense of momentum – an emotional, take-charge, can-do spirit of optimism that deals with broad statements of philosophy rather than of policy." Secondly, like the Reagan rhetoric avoids policy, it also avoids unpleasant facts and complex issues by identifying a clear "sense of place"; "describing who we are, what's on our minds, and what we should do, and does so in short, crisp sentences with little embellishment." Finally, Reagan's rhetoric builds on tradition. For instance through the way Reagan's public addresses looked similar to national celebration, including national symbols and ceremonial settings.⁶¹ Some of these characteristics make Reagan's message fit television as a medium. By avoiding complex issues it fits television's focus on style rather than substance. The emphasis on

⁵⁸ Denton, *The Primetime Presidency of Ronald Reagan: The Era of the Television Presidency*, 30, 31.

⁵⁹ Wilentz, *The Age of Reagan – A History, 1974-2008*, 127, 176.

⁶⁰ *It's Morning Again in America*, YouTube, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EU-IBF8nwSY> (28.05.2009).

⁶¹ Denton, *The Primetime Presidency of Ronald Reagan: The Era of the Television Presidency*, 65, 66.

national symbols and ceremonial settings of the public addresses relates to television as a visual medium.

During his eight years as a president of the United States, Reagan kept a diary which he wrote in every single day, only interrupted by the time he was in the hospital. A collection of these notes have been published in the book *The Reagan Diaries* edited by Douglas Brinkley. This could provide a better insight in the personality of Reagan. Though it mostly only provides facts of the day, the events and the people he met, without much personal comments about it. Still, it does provide some hints as to what kind of president Reagan was. Since the talk with Mr. Gorbachev which led to the end of the weapon race between the US and the Soviet Union has been mentioned earlier in the chapter, the day described in Reagan's diaries might be interesting to include:

Tuesday, December 8

This is the big day. Staff meeting was small talk and actually so was NSC because at 10 A.M. a full ceremony in the S. Lawn for Gorbachev's arrival. He & Raisa arrived in a limo made in Russia that's bigger than anything we have. After the usual routine he & I went to the Oval O. All out talk must be through interpreters. A good rousing meeting – we got into a debate about human rights. He thinks we have fewer of those than they do. After a while we brought in additional members of our teams. It was a good meeting & it's plain he really wants more reduction of nuclear weapons. I think we'll make progress on the START Treaty.

After lunch Nancy & I met he & Raisa and went up to the East Room for the signing of the INF Treaty. It was TV'd live and really was an historic moment.

Back to the Cabinet Room for another session – with a full house – 34 people in the room. Not nearly as good a meeting as this morning's.

Tonite the State Dinner – Van Cliburn entertaining.

Everything turned out fine – a very enjoyable evening. Then came word that the Market on Wall Street zoomed up 56 points right after we signed the treaty.⁶²

⁶² Brinkley (ed.), *The Reagan Diaries*, 555.

Summary

Reagan presented a new morning in America with optimism. He had a natural style on television and made it look easy to approach the audience. Reagan served as president in two full terms and presented new politics within economics. Abroad Reagan had the Iran-Contra controversy, which shows that the president's foreign policies had a direct affect on his approval ratings at home. Still, with a strategy of not knowing what was going on, he kept his position as a president. The great success in foreign policy was the agreement with Gorbachev to stop the race of nuclear weapons between the United States and the Soviet Union. Reagan's critics say that his policies failed and that he could not see fiction from reality. His supporters would say the opposite. The interesting thing about Reagan's popularity is that many people who strongly disagree with his politics still love the man himself. And when many in American politics tend to vote for the person rather than the party, this can be seen as a great advantage. Reagan understood rhetoric and took the text seriously. He knew how to get his message across to the people. According to one of his former speechwriters, Mr. Judge, it is important for the speechwriter to know the president's purpose. A presidential speech needs to fit the government and the people. Reagan's delivery skills were of great importance. The speeches are a compressed art form, and during the time of Reagan's presidency the need for snappy quotes was important.

Even though one might criticize Reagan for lack of political depth, to a certain degree it seems necessary for a president to communicate with style and big words in order to relate to the public and get the abstract political ideas across. When it comes to the critique that Reagan's speeches lacked in-depth information about policy issues, this correlates to the fact that television is a medium which focuses on style rather than substance. Reagan's image was damaged by the deficit that he left behind and his Iran-Contra case, but still he is viewed as one of the most popular presidents in the United States. Regardless of his political outcome, Reagan did become a symbol of the conservatism also after his time as a president. "(...) conservatives in the age of Reagan learned how to seize and keep control of the terms of public debate – skills that liberal Democrats had once mastered but lost amid their political complacency in the 1970s and disarray in the 1980s."⁶³

⁶³ Wilentz, *The Age of Reagan – A History, 1974-2008*, 8.



4.0 Yes We Can – Barack Obama

“Barack Obama, with his good looks, charm, and oratory skills, wowed both the voters and the media. Obama strategically conserved his resources for a media blitz in the last weeks of the campaign.”¹ Both the personal style and the media strategy proved successful for Barack Obama to be elected president. This chapter will look at Obama’s road to the presidency and his use of the media to achieve a massive support and a celebrity status. In addition to a winning charisma and political style, Obama has made use of his good organization skills, and he has also showed innovative use of the media channels, especially the Internet, to achieve political support. Since Obama is the current president much of the discussion will therefore be on Obama as a candidate. It is difficult to predict what his image will be after his presidency is completed. The chapter will nevertheless also look at what political challenges the President is faced with and how the media strategies from campaigning are being developed in the White House. This chapter also includes an interview with a Norwegian journalist who worked as a volunteer during the Obama campaign. The interview primarily focuses on Obama as a candidate, but it also concerns some of the challenges as president and is therefore placed in the middle of the chapter.

4.1 Obama – the Candidate

This part of the chapter concentrates on Obama’s road to the presidency, and Obama’s communication abilities. First Obama’s political background and facts and perspectives on his rise as a politician will be given a look. In addition, Obama gained a celebrity status as a candidate as well as being faced with challenges such as the racial issue. Obama can be seen as an example of a self-made man and the last part of this section will focus on Obama’s political stance in relation to the core values embedded in American politics.

4.1.1 Barack Obama

Barack Obama was born in 1961. He grew up partly in Hawaii and partly in Indonesia. Obama’s father was from Kenya and his mother from Kansas. His parents divorced and his mother later married a man from Indonesia, and Obama lived there parts of his childhood, but came back to the United States to attend high school in Waikiki. Barack Obama continued to Occidental College in Los Angeles where he transferred to finish his degree at Columbia University in New York, majoring in political science. Obama went to work as a community

¹ Martin Dupuis and Keith Boeckelman, *Barack Obama, the New Face of American Politics* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 2008), 57.

organizer in Chicago in 1985, an experience that proved very useful later in his political career. In 1988, Obama continued his education and went to Harvard Law School, where he became president of the *Harvard Law Review* as the first African-American in this position. Obama served as Senator of Illinois before running for president in 2008. Barack Obama is married to Michelle and they have two daughters, Malia and Sasha.²

In his biography *Dreams From My Father*, Barack Obama describes his time as a community organizer. This urge for organizing from the bottom-up seems to be especially important to Obama. In his campaign as a presidential candidate he was able to organize great grass root support. As president, Obama was determined to use this organization to marshal support for the policies he wants to establish. This organization is now called “Organizing for America” (OFA) and has its own website. A further description of OFA will be laid out later.

After Law School, Obama worked as a Civil Rights lawyer while being politically active until he decided to run for the U.S. Senate. In an attempt to explain Obama’s success, Dupuis and Boeckelman (2008) point out that he was the quintessential underdog; “the skinny guy from the South Side with a funny name”.³ Illinois is mostly a democratic state, but Obama was able to get support from people who normally did not care much about politics, because of his “personal magnetism”⁴. In addition, Obama came up with clever “(...) one-liners attacking the Bush administration, such as ‘The problem with No Child Left Behind is Bush left all the money behind’, or ‘The president says the economy is in a jobless recovery, but there is no recovery without jobs’”.⁵ In the first phase of the primary race, Obama had to build name recognition. As two of his opponents, Dan Hynes and Blair Hull, saw each other as the main rivals, Obama could concentrate on building his own support. By the end of the race Obama was leading, while Hull had an unfortunate divorce story which the media would not let go of. The result was a victory with nearly 53 percent of the votes to Barack Obama, leaving Hynes with 24 percent and Hull with 11 percent.⁶ One is tempted to discuss whether Hull’s divorce scandal was the reason for Obama’s victory. It might have been so and it might not, but there is no doubt that the media proved to have a powerful influence on the campaign and the popularity of the candidates by making the divorce a big story. With his victory, the phrase “Yes we can” had become a part of Obama’s politics, and still is.

² *The White House*, http://www.whitehouse.gov/administration/president_obama/ (12.08.2009)

³ Dupuis and Boeckelman, *Barack Obama, the New Face of American Politics*, 11.

⁴ Dupuis and Boeckelman, *Barack Obama, the New Face of American Politics*, 18.

⁵ Dupuis and Boeckelman, *Barack Obama, the New Face of American Politics*, 19.

⁶ Dupuis and Boeckelman, *Barack Obama, the New Face of American Politics*, 19-22.

Like in the Democratic primary campaign for U.S. Senate, Obama's opponent in the general election campaign for U. S. Senate, Jack Ryan, got his somewhat unfortunate divorce papers revealed in the media. In addition, Ryan represented a clear political contrast to Obama when it comes to economic approach and support for President Bush's policies in Iraq. To make things even harder for himself, Ryan added controversy by hiring an assistant who was to follow Obama around and film everything he did. After Ryan proved unfit as a candidate, the Republicans used a long time to find a new candidate, a time in which Obama kept campaigning as if he had an opponent and his popularity grew.⁷ The Republicans came up with Alan Keyes – an outspoken social conservative as Obama's opponent. "Keyes's campaign focused largely on issues related to his religious and moral beliefs, particularly abortion. By contrast, Obama tended to emphasize bread-and-butter concerns, such as the economy and health care."⁸ Dupuis and Boeckelman (2008) summarize the race with Keyes looking like an angry preacher against Obama's rock star charisma. Obama won with 70 percent against Keyes with his 27 percent, which is the largest gap ever in an Illinois U.S. Senate race.⁹ Barack Obama became Senator of Illinois, but he kept a low key the first year in Washington. "Despite his high-profile campaign and celebrity acclaim, Barack Obama arrived in Washington ranked ninety-ninth out of one hundred senators. All eyes were upon him – some expecting brilliance and innovation, other waiting for a blunder to mar his enviable image."¹⁰ Senator Obama was assigned to three committees; Environment and Public Works, Veterans Affairs, and Foreign Relations.¹¹ In his book, *The Audacity of Hope*, Obama describes the victory and the job as a Senator himself and touch upon the coincidences that proved fortunate for his road to victory:

For the duration of the campaign I did my best to say what I thought, keep it clean, and focus on substance. When I won the Democratic primary and then the general election, both by sizable margins, it was tempting to believe that I had proven my point.

There was just one problem: My campaign had gone so well that it looked like a fluke. Political observers would note that in a field of seven Democratic primary candidates, not one of us ran a negative TV ad. The wealthiest candidate of all – a former trader worth at least \$300 million – spent \$28 million, mostly on a barrage of positive ads, only to flame out in the final weeks due to an unflattering divorce file that the press got unsealed. My Republican opponent, a handsome and wealthy former Goldman Sachs partner turned inner-city teacher, started attacking my record almost from the start, but before his campaign could get off the ground, he was felled by a divorce scandal of his own. For better part of a month, I traveled Illinois without drawing fire, before being selected to deliver the keynote address at the Democratic National Convention – seventeen minutes of unfiltered, uninterrupted airtime on national television. And

⁷ Dupuis and Boeckelman, *Barack Obama, the New Face of American Politics*, 25-30.

⁸ Dupuis and Boeckelman, *Barack Obama, the New Face of American Politics*, 32.

⁹ Dupuis and Boeckelman, *Barack Obama, the New Face of American Politics*, 39.

¹⁰ Dupuis and Boeckelman, *Barack Obama, the New Face of American Politics*, 89.

¹¹ Dupuis and Boeckelman, *Barack Obama, the New Face of American Politics*, 40.

finally the Illinois Republic Party inexplicably chose as my opponent a former presidential candidate Alan Keyes, a man who had never lived in Illinois and who proved so fierce and unyielding in his position that even conservative Republicans were scared of him.

Later, some reporters would declare me the luckiest politician in the entire fifty states. Privately, some of my staff bristled at this assessment, feeling that it discounted our hard work and the appeal of our message. Still, there was no point in denying my almost spooky good fortune. I was an outlier, a freak; to political insiders, my victory proved nothing.

No wonder then that upon my arrival in Washington that January, I felt like the rookie who shows up after the game, his uniform spotless, eager to play, even as his mudsplattered teammates tend to their wounds.¹²

Obama acknowledges that the developments of his opponents and his opportunity to deliver the Keynote Address were important elements that helped him win. Obama may have kept a low key at the beginning of his time as a Senator, but after a while he was eager for more. February 10th, 2007, Senator Obama announced that he was running for President at a rally in Illinois. John McCain became the republican presidential candidate in March 2008, while Barack Obama and Hilary Clinton fought a close race to win the Democratic candidacy. In early June 2008 it was clear that Obama would be the Democratic candidate for president and in August he announced Senator Joe Biden as his running mate. Alaska Governor, Sarah Palin was chosen as John McCain's candidate for Vice President. On November 4th, 2008, Barack Obama was elected the 44th President of the United States with 364 electoral votes to John McCain's 163. The Democrats picked up 19 seats in the house and expanded their majority to 255 to 174. Senate Democrats won 6 seats which gave them a 57 to 40 majority.¹³ Today [October 2009], the Democrats have 58 seats in the Congress, while Republicans have 40 seats, in addition there is one seat for an Independent and one seat for an Independent Democrat, resulting in the total of 100 seats.¹⁴ In the House of Representatives there are now 257 Democrats and 178 Republicans.¹⁵

¹² Barack Obama, *The Audacity of Hope, Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream* (New York: Vintage Books, 2006), 23, 24.

¹³ *Timeline: 2008 Primary and General Election*, John Hopkins University, <http://advanced.jhu.edu/academic/government/new-president/timeline-2008-primary-and-general-election/> (25.08.2009).

¹⁴ U.S. Senate, *Party Division in the Senate, 1789- present*, http://www.senate.gov/pagelayout/history/one_item_and_teasers/partydiv.htm (12.10.2009). Note: Senator Arlen Specter was re-elected in 2004 as a Republican, and became a Democrat on April 30, 2009. Senator Joseph Lieberman of Connecticut was re-elected in 2006 as an independent candidate, and became an Independent Democrat. Senator Bernard Sanders of Vermont was elected in 2006 as an Independent.

¹⁵ House of the Clerk – U.S. House of Representatives, *Party Divisions the House of Representatives (1789 to present)*, http://clerk.house.gov/art_history/house_history/partyDiv.html (12.10.2009).

4.1.2 The Rock Star Politician

Obama is characterized as a man with great charisma and communication skills. He has been called a “rock-star” politician after his success in the U.S. Senate election of 2004: “By the end of 2004, he had not only won his U.S. Senate election by the largest margin in Illinois history, but had become a “rock-star” politician who had captured the imagination of voters and the media nationwide”.¹⁶

During the run for U.S. Senate, Obama’s style, rhetoric and media approach began to show. Barack Obama delivered the Keynote Address to the Democratic National Convention on July 28th. This speech is viewed as the most significant event in the campaign and made Obama an overnight sensation.¹⁷ Before the Democratic National Convention, Obama had already been labeled a “rock star” after appearing on Sunday morning talk shows. The campaign money that was raised included support from celebrities such as Barbara Streisand and Michael Jordan¹⁸, but at the same time Barack Obama was himself becoming a celebrity. The Obama Fever was increasing and created heightened expectations of a candidate who might become America’s first African-American president.¹⁹ The talk show host, Oprah Winfrey, also expressed her support to Obama, and encouraged him to run for president already in 2006, as Obama was promoting his book *The Audacity of Hope*. This encouragement was also voiced by the *New York Times* columnist David Brooks.²⁰ Some would see Obama as a somewhat different future president as “(...) columnist Maureen Dowd suggests that Obama could (...) be the “first woman president.” “His approach seems downright feminine compared to the Bushies. He languidly poses in fashion magazines, shares feelings with Oprah, and dishes with the ladies on *The View*. After six years of chest-puffing, Obama seems very soothing.”²¹ With a strong celebrity status building up, it was important for Obama to keep an image of a serious candidate and keep focusing on the substance of issues, and of course, use this celebrity status to his advantage. In addition to getting officially stated support from celebrities, Obama experienced other media coverage as well. “Obama’s face was on the cover of *Time* and *Newsweek* before he was even sworn into office. He was mentioned on television sit-coms like *Will and Grace*.”²²

¹⁶ Dupuis and Boeckelman, *Barack Obama, the New Face of American Politics*, 1.

¹⁷ Dupuis and Boeckelman, *Barack Obama, the New Face of American Politics*, 30.

¹⁸ Dupuis and Boeckelman, *Barack Obama, the New Face of American Politics*, 30.

¹⁹ Dupuis and Boeckelman, *Barack Obama, the New Face of American Politics*, 31.

²⁰ Dupuis and Boeckelman, *Barack Obama, the New Face of American Politics*, 119.

²¹ Dupuis and Boeckelman, *Barack Obama, the New Face of American Politics*, 121.

²² Dupuis and Boeckelman, *Barack Obama, the New Face of American Politics*, 71.

Barack Obama inhabits a special ability to use rhetoric and speak in public, something he knew himself already as a college student. He writes in his biography *Dreams From My Father* about a rally where he and his fellow students dramatized the situation for activists in South Africa. Barack Obama was supposed to be talking when two white students would come onstage dressed in paramilitary uniforms and drag him away.

I stopped. The crowd was quiet now, watching me. Somebody started to clap. "Go on with it, Barack," somebody else shouted. "Tell it like it is." Then the others started in, clapping, cheering, and I knew I had them, that the connection had been made. I took hold of the mike, ready to plunge on, when I felt someone's hands grabbing me from behind. It was just as we'd planned it, Andy and Jonathan looking grim-faced behind their dark glasses. They started yanking me off the stage, and I was supposed to act like I was trying to break free, except a part of me wasn't acting, I really wanted to stay up there, to hear my voice bouncing off the crowd and returning back to me in applause. I had so much left to say.

But my part was over.²³

With his winning personality and style, Obama has used language consciously to get support by adapting his speeches to the different audiences and settings. For instance, by using the word "y'all" in southern Illinois, "(...) while using "precise, polished" language in speaking to upper class suburbanites and inserting black slang into speeches before African American audiences."²⁴ According to Dupuis and Boeckelman (2008), Obama was perceived as honest by telling people what they did not necessarily *want* to hear, not making exaggerated promises. At the same time one might say that the change in language suggests manipulation rather than communication, though it might be expected given the fragmented nature of the American electorate. Such alterations are harder to get through as a President trying to govern. In addition, the body language was significant during his speeches, such as eye contact with the audience. Also, Obama is supposed to be indicating inclusion with his hand gestures by opening his hands with fingers slightly open when speaking.²⁵

Despite the apparent success in creating an image for himself, Obama has also faced some challenges. Racial issues were impossible to avoid for Barack Obama. In the campaign he needed to have a biracial approach. At the same time as he could become the first African-American president, support from black communities could not be taken for granted. There is a fine line between achieving support from black and white voters and Obama had to find a balance. "Black candidates have usually taken one of two campaign strategies: reach out to a coalition of black and liberal voters or downplay race and attempt to attract those in the

²³ Obama, Barack, *Dreams From My Father*, 106, 107.

²⁴ Dupuis and Boeckelman, *Barack Obama, the New Face of American Politics*, 35.

²⁵ Dupuis and Boeckelman, *Barack Obama, the New Face of American Politics*, 36.

middle of the road politically.”²⁶ Most successful black candidates have a “crossover appeal”, including Obama. Barack Obama had in particular two things that worked to his advantage; his last name and Illinois. According to Dupuis and Boeckelman (2008) many white Americans have a more positive perception of new black immigrants than they have of native blacks, and because “Obama” is not a traditional American black name, he avoided some of the problems other African American candidates face. In addition, Illinois has historically elected more black statewide officials than any other state in the United States. To mobilize the black community, Obama, among other things, held speeches in churches in a style similar to that of Martin Luther King jr. “The call-and-response speech technique resonated with these listeners and seemed natural for Obama.”²⁷

Other than the racial issue, Obama made little controversy during the campaign. There were, of course, the descriptions of his youth in the biography *Dreams From My Father*, which includes alcohol and partying, but not really a scandal. Still, this part of the story has been left out on the audio tape of the book.²⁸ As a politician Barack Obama did face problems when it comes to his relations to reverend Jeremiah Wright Jr. Wright belongs to the Trinity United Church of Christ and has been Obama’s pastor for the last 20 years. Barack Obama writes in his biography that he joined the church when he worked as a community organizer in the South side in Chicago. The reverend has come up with several controversial statements making it difficult for Obama. For instance he damned America by saying “God damn America” instead of “God bless America” and indicated that the US itself was to blame for 9/11. Wright’s “inflammatory rhetoric”²⁹ made it necessary for him to leave the African American Religious Leadership Committee who supported Obama’s campaign, because Wright’s statements made it hard for Obama who had to explain his connection to the reverend and the controversy from Wright.³⁰

When it comes to fundraising the Internet has been especially important to Obama’s campaigning. With an easy click on the campaign website people could make contributions online. Obama has proved to be a successful fundraiser with “an astute media strategy”³¹ with the help from his campaign media advisor, David Axelrod. The combination of celebrity status, charisma, and mass appeal helped his ability to raise money. For the presidential

²⁶ Dupuis and Boeckelman, *Barack Obama, the New Face of American Politics*, 74.

²⁷ Dupuis and Boeckelman, *Barack Obama, the New Face of American Politics*, 81.

²⁸ According to the documentary *Historien om Barack Obama* shown on the channel NRK2, Aug 22nd 2009.

²⁹ ABC News, *Obama’s Pastor: God Damn America, U.S. to Blame for 9/11*, by Brian Ross and Rehab El-Buri, March 13th, 2008, <http://abcnews.go.com/Blotter/DemocraticDebate/Story?id=4443788&page=2> (25.08.09).

³⁰ *The Huffington Post*, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2008/03/14/Jeremiah-wright-obamas-pa_2_n_91664.html (25.08.09).

³¹ Dupuis and Boeckelman, *Barack Obama, the New Face of American Politics*, 41.

campaign Obama was able to raise \$25.7 million which is quite impressive, not only because of the huge amount, but also taken into consideration that Obama was far less known and experienced than his opponent when he entered the race. Obama raised a little less than Hilary Clinton, but as Dupuis and Boeckelman (2008) put it, she “(...) has been on the national political scene since the early 1990s, eight times as long as Obama.”³² For the 2008 presidential race, the fundraising started two years before the election, which is the earliest ever.³³

4.1.3 The Self-made Man

Obama’s popularity and fame can be explained by his charisma and personal style, but also by the fact that he is a perfect example of what Americans love most of all; the American Dream. Working his way up, all the way to the presidency. Dupuis and Boeckelman (2008) explain Obama’s fame;

“Obama has captured America’s imagination because his story reflects many of the most positive beliefs that permeate American culture: that plucky underdogs can triumph, that the American dream of success is open to immigrants and their children if they work hard, that racism is fading. He also appeals to Americans searching for common ground in an era of political division and hyper-partisanship and gives them hope that wealth, nepotism, and negative campaigning are not the only tickets to success in contemporary politics.”³⁴

Almost ironically, Obama himself is a product of the dream he is defending and trying to make inclusive for every American at the same time. The fact that Obama is an example of the self-made man may serve as a rhetorical strength, but the overlap the individualistic notion of the American Dream with the inclusiveness and urge for increased equality might be rhetorically difficult at the same time.

The politics of Barack Obama is grounded in some of the basic themes and values in the United States of America. In his famous Keynote Address at the National Democratic Convention in 2004, Barack Obama said:

“(...) there is not a liberal America and a conservative America: There is the United States of America. There is not a Black America and a White America and Latino America and Asian America: There’s the United States of America.
The pundits, the pundits like to slice-and-dice our country into Red States and Blue States; Red States for Republicans, Blue States for Democrats. But I’ve got news for them, too. We worship an “awesome God” in the Blue States, and we don’t like federal agents poking around in our libraries in the Red States. We coach Little League in the Blue States and yes, we’ve got

³² Dupuis and Boeckelman, *Barack Obama, the New Face of American Politics*, 55.

³³ Dupuis and Boeckelman, *Barack Obama, the New Face of American Politics*, 55.

³⁴ Dupuis and Boeckelman, *Barack Obama, the New Face of American Politics*, 1.

some gay friends in the Red States. There are patriots who opposed the war in Iraq and there are patriots who supported the war in Iraq. We are one people, all of us pledging allegiance to the stars and stripes, all of us defending the United States of America.”³⁵

This statement is one of the issues that are at the core of Obama’s political message. Obama represents a wish to unite the country, as to change and renew in America. Fighting social injustices on a number of issues, such as race, education, and especially health care, are at the heart of Barack Obama’s political goals. Still, as Obama might be viewed as a liberal politician, he himself prefers to be labeled as “progressive”. In fact, Obama wants to be seen as what he calls a “thoughtful progressive” which means “(...) combining a belief in government action to solve problems with a commitment to fiscal responsibility”.³⁶

“Liberalism” in the United States became a label of strong government control after Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal. The “L-word” has become something that politicians try to avoid. Not having a strong label to use in the American political language has been a disadvantage for the Democratic Party. This seems like a contradiction since in fact the US is still referred to as a “Liberal Democracy”. Liberal and leftist used to be opposing terms, but since they are used similarly in the US, it is hard to have a fixed ideology for Democratic politicians and especially a Democratic president. Although Obama’s call for action and a pragmatic approach that both government and market are necessary forces in a successful democratic society, which is an ideology that in the correct semantic meaning of the word would be “Liberalism”. Either way, this rhetorical dilemma of the Democratic Party is the reason why Obama labels himself as “progressive” such as most other Democratic top politicians do.³⁷ Barack Obama discusses this rhetorical dilemma himself in his book *The Audacity of Hope*. Obama writes that after Ronald Reagan the ideological lines between Democrat and Republican, liberal and conservative, were sharpened and that simplicity became the virtue of politics. Obama calls the Democrats confused, but the urge for a clear ideology does not necessarily acquire an either/or thinking on every issue;

Ultimately, though, I believe any attempt by Democrats to pursue a more sharply partisan and ideological strategy misapprehends the moment we’re in. I am convinced that whenever we exaggerate or demonize, oversimplify or overstate our case, we lose. Whenever we dumb down the political debate, we lose. For it’s precisely the pursuit of ideological purity, the rigid orthodoxy and the sheer predictability of our current political debate, that keeps us from finding new ways to meet the challenges in “either/or” thinking: the notion that we can have only big

³⁵ Barack Obama, *2004 National Democratic Convention Keynote Address*, American Rhetoric, <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/convention2004/barackobama2004dnc.htm> (02.09.2009).

³⁶ Dupuis and Boeckelman, *Barack Obama, the New Face of American Politics*, 34.

³⁷ Erik Åsgård, guest lecture from Uppsala University, *Liberalism and the election of 2008*, at the University of Oslo, Blindern, 18.03.09.

government or no government; the assumption that we must either tolerate forty-six million without health insurance or embrace “socialized medicine”.³⁸

As mentioned, Barack Obama can be seen as a self-made man, as someone who became successful on his own. There are political differences when it comes to significance of self-making to American politics. Republicans tend to emphasize individual initiative and a limited government. As Ronald Reagan said, “(...) what I want to see above all is that this country remains a country where someone can always get rich.”³⁹ There is no doubt that individualism is the core value in the notion of the American dream, but Obama tries to persuade people that in individualism there is also a commitment to the values of community and equality underlying this notion; “Obama’s vision of the American Dream transcends individualism and economic success, implying that each of us has an obligation to keep the dream alive for everyone.”⁴⁰ In addition to his communitarian values and liberal policy approach, Obama wants to improve the quality of political debate and avoid negative campaigning.

4.2 Inside the Obama Campaign – from a Norwegian Perspective

Erik Møller Solheim had originally planned to go to the United States to cover the 2008 presidential election as a journalist. But, when getting closer to the trip he felt it would be wrong to try to cover the election as a neutral journalist when he found himself truly cheering for Barack Obama. Instead he decided to volunteer in the Obama campaign and write a book about it. The book is called *En Stemme for Obama – en nordmanns forsøk på å få 300 millioner amerikanere til å forstå sitt eget beste*. Together with a photographer called Richard Eriksen, Solheim volunteered and went to the United States to work for Obama.

The following is a summary of an interview with Mr. Solheim. The interview took place at Colletts Café in Oslo on September 23rd 2009 from 1.30pm to 3.00pm. The interview was recorded and Mr. Solheim agreed to have his name displayed in the thesis. This is Solheim’s story.

The Volunteer Experience

Although Barack Obama writes about collecting support, about going door-to-door in his book *The Audacity of Hope*, this was not a clear inspiration to Mr. Solheim. Solheim

³⁸ Obama, Barack, *The Audacity of Hope*, 48, 49.

³⁹ Ronald Reagan on the American Dream at a press conference in 1983 IN Dupuis and Boeckelman, *Barack Obama, the New Face of American Politics*, 103.

⁴⁰ Dupuis and Boeckelman, *Barack Obama, the New Face of American Politics*, 103.

deliberately read Obama's books later because he did not want to know too much in advance, but rather learn along the way and have his future readers to go through this process with him. When it comes to the communication method of going door-to-door, Solheim generally had good experiences. When he first entered the volunteer-office on 300 West Adams Street in Chicago, he had only imagined he would help out around the office with copying and similar back-office work. But he was put to do phone calls. Solheim explains that the Obama campaign was against using so-called "robo-calls", which means that everything is done automatically and a recorded voice is what the receiver hears when picking up the phone. Only at the very end, the campaign made use of such "robo-calls". Later an opportunity to go door-to-door came along. Solheim experienced that the Americans generally seemed happy to be contacted this way. Talking to people helped make the volunteer-work meaningful. When asked if he got any training in this type of work, Solheim explained that the Obama campaign was built on telling *your* story. Some received training on successful story-telling, but with about 8 million volunteers, it was impossible to provide such training to everyone. Instead one was given a handbook on how to do campaigning. As mentioned, the core of the reaching out to people was telling your story. Obama has told his story and successfully made his own story an American story, connecting it to the common values shared by the American people. When knocking on doors making a connection, finding a common ground became the ice-breaker. The recipe is simple, first ask a question then tell your story explaining why you work as a volunteer and why you support Obama. Solheim, despite being scared of the dogs he met in some of the neighborhoods, feels that the door-to-door method does work. Being a Norwegian did not create problems, but rather increased the ability to connect with certain groups of people. For instance, the fact that Solheim was volunteering without being able to vote made it easier to connect with people who still clearly remembers how it is not having the right to vote.

Solheim got the impression that the campaign showed great communication from the top down to volunteers on the streets. The Obama campaign was one of the richest campaigns ever, but "on the ground" looked chaotic. Everything was provisional and temporary, and there were extreme limitations on unnecessary resources. Still, Solheim claims that there was a great cohesion between the top and the bottom. The fact that they had only what they needed created increased motivation. When entering a volunteer-office that looked awful, it made you want to get to work, it made you feel that you were needed. There was no 'extras'. The limited resources made you feel like you were a part of something similar of a

revolutionary movement. The grassroots organization coincides with Obama's own story and helps build liability. Here is a quote from the Handbook for Volunteers on storytelling:

As a Field Organizer, you will be in direct contact with voters and volunteers who look to you for leadership. A critical part of taking leadership is being able to articulate for others who you are, where you come from and what challenges have shaped the life choices that led you to this campaign. If you are asking others to follow you they need to know why you're worth following. Simply saying "follow me" is not enough. They'll know if they want to follow you if they see in you someone who has faced challenges before, someone who can act in the face of uncertainty, and someone who will make choices based in principles and values. As a leader you must tell people who you are and why you're there.

As an Organizer, you will tell your story on a daily basis: at volunteer trainings, at house meetings, at organizational meetings, in one-on-ones, at the doors, etc. Telling your story is a skill. It requires critical reflection on your life, your values, and how those values were shaped. It requires connecting that story to Barack Obama and moving people into action.

Stories are not developed in a quiet corner. They're developed in relationship with others—you tell your story, pay attention to the way others react, and continually make choices about which parts of your story help to motivate and encourage others to act.

As Organizers in Ohio, we tell our story to motivate ourselves, our volunteers, and the public to experience the values that call us to act, the urgency of our cause and why we need to act now.⁴¹

Reaching the Top

Being able to hear Obama speak live on three occasions, Mr. Solheim was asked about his impressions of Obama's communication skills and reference to being a "rock-star" politician. Solheim emphasize the difference between a speech that is thoroughly prepared and scripted, and a more unedited speech. The first time Solheim saw Obama speak was in Minneapolis. This was an unedited speech, compared to other big televised speeches. In some ways Obama seemed like a stand-up comedian, kept talking on this and that, some of it was interesting other things were not. But what was impressive was the narrative. How he built up the speech through several "tops". Obama started building up to a point, and then slowly calmed it down again, then he built up to a slightly bigger top – calming it down again, until he reached the highest and final top, and by this time the whole crowd was standing. There was a certain musicality to it that kept escalating. This technique represents a great narrative understanding, Solheim says, and the type of escalation can be compared to the campaign as a whole itself. The campaign witnessed small victories all along, and then at the end the biggest victory of all. It is all about reaching the highest top at Election Day.

⁴¹ On e-mail from Erik Møller Solheim, 30.09.2009. *Orientation Materials for Deputy Field Organizers and Out-of-State Volunteers.*

The Time as a President – keeping his support

Although Obama has proved to be a great communicator, Solheim does not think that rhetoric is everything. Solheim believes that the successful rhetoric of Barack Obama will continue to be present during his presidency, but Solheim says that he feels irritated when people claim that it is only rhetoric that matters, or at least he feels it is an easy point to make. It is almost like saying that because a person is pretty, that person can not possibly be any smart. The rhetorical techniques are not at all unimportant, but when President Obama goes to Egypt and gets standing applause from Muslims, it is beyond that. On the other hand, the Open Door Policy that Obama stands for is of great importance. For instance when it comes to the measures being taken on the issue of climate, this is politics in complete contrast to Bush. At this point, when it comes to dialog and a more open government, a lot of the rhetoric gets a concrete value. Solheim wants to point out that coming from a campaign-setting and a victory represents a climax. One builds up extreme expectations to one candidate, and one is doomed to experience a downturn. Solheim admits he has felt disappointment over his candidate himself. Why did not Obama just enter the White House and do everything right away, why could he not be harder towards the Republicans. Why can he not just say that the ‘you lie’ comment during the joint session in Congress is related to racism. Obama could not do all this all at once, because he is an extreme clever pragmatic, and despite his victory as a president there is still 47 percent of the population who did not want him to become president. Obama needs to keep his support and hopefully also convince some of his opponents of his political agenda.

Obama can easily be accused for either too much talk and too little action, or visa-versa. The celebrity-status and his charisma can help his support. For instance, the recent speech to Congress about the Health Care Reform immediately had an effect on the popularity polls, Solheim thinks the popularity increased with about 10 per cent right after the speech. One problem for Obama now is that the Republicans are good at keeping Town Hall Meetings, where they create opposition to Obama’s policies. While Obama quietly delivered his suggestion of a Health Care Reform to the Congress only to wait for a reply. Obama’s tactic now seems to be not to get too much involved, while the Town Halls are increasing negative opinions towards Obama and the reform. For now, Solheim believes that the Health Care issue will result in a classical compromise in the middle. Solheim refers to David Gergen and his theory that if a president wants to get things done it is during the first two years of the presidency he has a chance, which is when he still has popular support. The following two years is the preparation for re-election. While if you do get re-elected, the next four years is

really just a time when you are on your way out. This might be limited description of the presidential periods, but it does explain why Obama is trying to do so much at the moment. At home he is working on health care, abroad he brings up climate change, talks to China and stops the building of a rocket shield. [September 2009]

The 2008 Campaign and Communication Resources

When it comes to the use of Internet during the Obama campaign, Solheim thinks that facebook is the most overrated website, while YouTube had the greatest impact, at least in the beginning. Because Barack Obama is good at giving speeches and in order to gain name-recognition, YouTube proved very useful. Despite websites, Solheim thinks that mail has been the most effective way of communication throughout the campaign. “Everyone” has an e-mail address, at least that was Solheim’s experience working as a volunteer when registering new supporters for the campaign. Both David Plouffe, the campaign manager, and Obama himself, were good on email. Plouffe did for instance send out video-clips of himself explaining how they would win the next state, making the volunteer feel they got some knowledge and inside information about the thoughts on the ongoing election process. It was inspiring, Solheim says. When it comes to text-messaging, Solheim only had an American phone number by the end of his period in the US, but noticed the use of sms mostly at the Election Day. Another important tool was the Obama website, because it also has local sites for states and cities. A lot of arrangements and happenings occurred locally. For instance, when Solheim found himself to be in Chicago, he clicked himself into these community websites and found out what he wanted to attend that was in the neighborhood. It could for instance be someone who arranged for fellow supporters to come to this person’s house to watch one of the TV-debates. Very much of the happenings were such individual initiatives, in addition to the official Obama happenings. E-mail was an important tool not only to get inspired, but also to be notified when things where happening.

Organizing for America

Yes, Solheim is still a member of Organizing for America and does receive an email from time to time. Through OFA the local engagement keeps working even after the election. For instance so-called House Parties where volunteers invite people into their private home to discuss politics. Also the political discussions can be on local politics, like what is needed in their neighborhood and so on. A report of meetings like this is sent to the local volunteer office. In addition to keeping the political discussion going, it is important to keep the support overall. American politicians are very concerned with public opinion polls. Right now it is

therefore important for OFA to try and influence the public opinion to the advantage of President Obama. For instance a group of people can work together and send emails to one Senator on a particular issue. When a Senator receives thousands of angry mails for instance indicating that these people will not vote for him if he votes against Obama's Health Care Reform, it might have an effect. A Senator is like the President also dependent on votes and support to keep his position. The fact that OFA consists of employees and is up and running as a huge organization is extremely important for the 2012 election. If the supporters are able to keep this up, it will be a huge advantage. The organization that Obama built before being elected as a president will already be there when or if he runs for re-election.

Events leading up to the election

When it comes to the financial crisis that appeared right at the end of the presidential race, Solheim does not think it is right to say that Obama won the election because of this, but it is safe to say that the economic crisis did make the victory more realistic. If things had happened differently it would have been a much closer race. Solheim adds that although one might get the impression from Norwegian media that the crisis is over now, in the United States it is very much still going on. This is important to keep in mind when looking at the Health Care issue for instance. Any indication for government spending will meet skepticism especially at a time like this.

What does it take?

It is hard to say exactly what it takes to be president of the United States, but Solheim emphasizes personality and the ability to represent trust. Personality and liability are correlated. It is important for the voter to have something to relate to. At the same time there are examples of how one single appearance in the media can ruin everything, even if one has the necessary qualities. Solheim uses Howard Dean as an example. In fact, Dean ran a campaign with extensive use of the Internet and the Media, which was a forerunner to Obama's media use. But, during a speech Mr. Dean appeared far from trustworthy referred to as "the dean scream", and that was it.

America regained

After working as a volunteer and the election of Obama as president of the United States, Solheim has gained a restored belief in democracy. The disillusion from American politics are shadowed by the joy and the thrill of the victory of Obama. Solheim is reminded of this feeling when he for instance sees an old clip of President Bush jr. and is relieved that Mr.

Bush no-longer runs the country. Solheim feels that he has learned a lot about American politics. He understands the limits of what Obama will be able to do, at the same time as he feels proud for being part of choosing him as President. Maybe he has become a little bit American himself, at least the experience has given him a more pragmatic approach to politics finding himself feeling irritated over naïve politicians on the far left back home. Another thing that Solheim is left with from the experience is the increased international engagement. As a volunteer he met other non-Americans who also had left to work for a candidate they themselves could not vote for. There seems to be an increased feeling that what is going on in the United States affects people worldwide.

4.2.1 Interview Results

The interview with a volunteer has given some interesting information which is related to the overall communication strategy of the Obama campaign. To sustain liability, the Obama campaign was against using so-called “robo-calls”, although they were used in the very last phase of the campaign. The organization of the campaign reflects a good cohesion between the top and the bottom. The Obama campaign was one of the richest campaigns ever, but it nevertheless appeared chaotic on the ground. The provisional and temporary impression led to increased motivation among the volunteers. A strict policy on no unnecessary resources signaled the priorities of the campaign. Part of Obama’s narrative technique is building up a speech through several “tops”, which proved powerful on the immediate audience. When it comes to the use of the Internet, Solheim points out YouTube and e-mail as the most important channels of communication for the campaign. The OFA continues to support the President to a large degree through local initiatives and volunteerism. The volunteer experience shows that the 2008 Campaign created international engagement as several other volunteers also were not US citizens, but decided to work in a campaign despite the fact that they did not have the right to vote. This might be seen as an indication that the other parts of the world are likely to gain a more positive view of the United States with Obama elected president.

4.3 Obama – the President

Barack Obama was elected the 44th president of the United States, November 4th, 2008. Not only is Obama the first African-American to be elected president, but the election also symbolized a political shift after eight years under the Republican President George W. Bush. Obama won the presidential race with great popularity. This part of the chapter looks at the

challenges presented to the president once in office and the communication strategies used in facing these challenges.

4.3.1 Political Challenges

The first challenge for President Obama when he entered the office in January 2009 was to pass the stimulus bill to deal with the ongoing financial crisis in the United States. On the economy Obama's politics open up for government action on some problems that are too big to be solved by the market forces. When getting the stimulus bill passed, Obama faced Republican opposition which weakened the final legislation. At the moment [September 2009] Obama's health care reform is facing problems. The editorial in *The New York Times* in April predicted that health care would be a tough fight for the president; "Far too many Americans still have no health insurance; those who do pay too much and the quality of care is too low. (...) Mr. Obama must keep reminding Americans that reforms are essential for their personal health and the nation's economic health."⁴² This reminding has been evident in several of the President's Weekly Addresses to the Nation. On July 17th, 2009, Obama stated that the Health Care Reform could not wait and he made clear some of the acclaims that are not correct about the reform. First he argued that it will not increase deficit, because the large subsidies that goes to insurance companies would be withdrawn making up for the costs of the reform, as well as the fact that a reform would prove beneficial over the long run. Obama made clear that everyone can still choose their own doctor and they can keep their current insurance plan if they want to. This reform does not mean a government run health care, but stronger regulations to keep the insurance companies honest. In the Weekly Address on August 22nd, 2009, there seemed to be a need to repeat these arguments and Obama also added that illegal immigrants will not be covered with the new reform, neither will it affect the current ban on using tax dollars for abortion.⁴³ The Organization for America website states the overall goal of the reform: "A moral imperative by any measure, a better system is also essential to rebuilding our economy – we want to make health insurance work for people and businesses, not just insurance and drug companies."⁴⁴ Barack Obama now has to convince Congress. The president held a joint session to Congress to put forward the Health

⁴² Editorial: *One Hundred*, the New York Times, April 29th 2009 http://www.nytimes.com/2009/04/29/opinion/29wed1.html?_r=1&pagewanted=print (29.04.09).

⁴³ Weekly Address to the Nation *Health Care Reform Cannot Wait*, 17.07.2009 [http://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/Weekly-Address-Health-Care-Reform-Cannot-Wait/\(02.09.09\)](http://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/Weekly-Address-Health-Care-Reform-Cannot-Wait/(02.09.09)) and Weekly Address to the Nation *President Obama Debunks "Phony Claims" About Health Reform; Emphasizes Consumer Protections*, 22.08.09, [http://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/09/08/21/Weekly-Address-The-Moral-Case-for-Health-Insurance-Reform/\(02.09.09\)](http://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/09/08/21/Weekly-Address-The-Moral-Case-for-Health-Insurance-Reform/(02.09.09)).

⁴⁴ *Organizing for America*, www.barackobama.com/issues/healthcare/ (02.09.09).

Care Reform, but at this moment [October 2009] nothing is decided yet. Time will show how much of the reform Obama is able to get through, and how much of it will turn out as great compromises. Still, some of the goals have already been achieved, for instance the Child Act. At the moment the efforts to pass the Health Care Reform have drawn Obama down on the popularity scale, but as the *New York Times* writes, the problems caused by the reforms is just as much a matter of the Democratic Party as it is the President; “In reality, the health care wrestling match is less a test of Mr. Obama’s political genius than it is a test of the Democratic Party’s ability to govern.”⁴⁵ Whether the reform is depending on the Democratic Party, the President, the Congress or the people to become a reality, the President is the one who will be blamed either way. Therefore communication and the ability to control the agenda are at issue. The Health Care Plan has become Obama’s main call for change on the domestic agenda, and it is also the Democratic Party’s signature case, but such a big change will provoke media coverage for better or worse.

On foreign policy one of the first steps of President Obama was to order a closure of the prison at Guantanamo Bay and to take a look at the detention methods as well as prohibit the use of torture. Because of claims about mistreatment of the prisoners and various documentation and photo materials as evidence, this issue has created some controversy in the media. The War in Iraq is another important issue on foreign policy, which also was an important part of the presidential campaign in 2008. Barack Obama has announced a plan to responsibly end the War in Iraq. In addition he has announced new strategies to deal with the problems in Pakistan and Afghanistan. The President has also indicated that the US will be taking new steps towards Russia, China, and Cuba, emphasizing keeping a dialogue with these countries on international issues such as nuclear threats. The important goal for Obama is to show the American people that his foreign policy approach can be true to both their values and their safety without one excluding the other. It also looks like the United States will become more active in addressing the global climate change internationally. Because of the economic crisis, the strong issues in foreign policies, and the reform in health care, issues such as education, civil rights and immigration lay somewhat in the shadows, but the president might indicate some changes on these issues later on in his presidency.⁴⁶ Overall the new administration indicate change on a number of issues compared to the policies of the Bush administration, but in order to make it happen Obama is dependent to keep his strong

⁴⁵ New York Times *Don’t Blame Obama* by Ross Douthat August 24th 2009
http://www.nytimes.com/2009/08/24/opinion/24douthat-1.html?_r=1 (25.08.09).

⁴⁶ *The White House*, www.whitehouse.gov/issues (03.09.09).

support among his voters and continue to convince the American people, the media, and the Congress of his politics. “This victory alone is not the change we seek – it is only the chance for us to make that change” said Obama on election night 2008.⁴⁷ Some would also say that the Obama administration has taken on too much too early. The latest development now is that Barack Obama won the Nobel Peace Prize, this will affect his popularity. Most people were surprised that a sitting president who has just entered the office received the prize. Obama is now faced with pressure to continue his work abroad and will face an even harder time dealing with the war in Afghanistan.

4.3.2 Media Strategies in Office

He has got a facebook-profile, he is on Twitter, and he delivers his Weekly Address to the Nation on YouTube. Barack Obama is reaching the public without having to rely on the mainstream news media. While President Obama is open for political change and proclaims an open Government, he has also been open to making use of what the newest technologies can offer in media communication. In addition to YouTube, the President’s Weekly Address is posted on the White House Web Site (www.whitehouse.gov). As an example of to what extent the video may reach the public, the first Weekly Address where Obama discussed the \$825 billion economic stimulus plan, posted Saturday 24.01.2009, had more than 600,000 hits on YouTube by late Sunday afternoon.⁴⁸ The Weekly Address to the Nation used to be a speech that would be recorded and then aired on the radio Saturday mornings. Posting the weekly address online is part of the new media strategy of the White House. The strategy’s main idea is to use new channels built around social networking to communicate with and motivate voters in addition to or as a supplement of traditional ways of communicating.⁴⁹ Underlying this new media strategy is Barack Obama’s aim to have an open government. “Our commitment to openness means more than simply informing the American people about how decisions are made. It means recognizing that government does not have all the answers, and that public officials need to draw on what citizens know.”⁵⁰ On the White House Web Site one can find a ‘Media Center’ where one can watch live speeches of the President as well as slide shows, press briefings, among other things. In addition there are links to numerous

⁴⁷ *Organizing for America*, http://www.barackobama.com/learn/about_ofa.php (18.08.2009).

⁴⁸ *Melding Obama’s Web to a YouTube Presidency*, by Jim Rutenberg and Adam Nagourney for the New York Times, January 26th, 2009, http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/26/us/politics/26grassroots.html?_r=1&sq=Obama%20on%20Youtube (28.01.09) To watch the Address go to <http://www.whitehouse.gov/president-obama-delivers-your-weekly-address/>

⁴⁹ Rutenberg and Nagourney, *Melding Obama’s Web to a YouTube Presidency*, http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/26/us/politics/26grassroots.html?_r=1&sq=Obama%20on%20Youtube (28.01.09).

⁵⁰ *The White House*, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/ope/> (18.08.2009).

platforms and blogs on specific areas or topics. For instance data.gov which provides access to federal datasets.⁵¹ The Open Government Initiative tries to provide information to the public and opens up for public feedback through blogging, suggestion boxes and e-mails. This is part of how Obama is using Internet as a new media channel. In fact, Obama's use of the Internet to reach contributors and voters has been characterized as groundbreaking.⁵² From 2003, Obama had a detailed website focusing on his political career and experience and displayed a number of photos "(...) showing the smiling, young-looking Ivy-League graduate in a number of settings with his family and political supporters."⁵³ The site was first obamaforillinois.com and then it changed into obama2010.com, until it became obamaforamerica.com – his presidential campaign website. The continuous update of the websites show the technological savvy of the Obama campaign and clearly helped Obama gain name recognition.⁵⁴

As mention, the Internet was especially important when it comes to fundraising during the campaign, but the Internet has also helped Obama keep his support alive after being elected president. Obama's organizational skills have proved very equivalent and, as mentioned, Obama wanted to keep his grass root organization after becoming president. Obama's campaign organization proved especially successful and has even been associated with being similar to a social movement.⁵⁵ After Obama won the presidency, speculations occurred as to what to do with this huge campaign organization of his. According to Peter Overby the organization was important because of its database with 13 million e-mail addresses and because of its "net roots" style network "(...) that turned out voters for Obama in the primaries and helped him carry traditionally Republican states in November [2008]".⁵⁶ There were several ways of how to translate the campaign organization into the presidency. One alternative was to turn over the list of Obama-supporters to the national party committee, like other former presidents have done. But the loyalty of the supporters may not cohere with the Democratic Party. Secondly, Obama could take his list of supporters to the White House and use the support to get bills passed in Congress, but that would probably make it government property. Thirdly, Obama could just keep his campaign committee going, or create a new action committee – none of which have ever been done before. Finally, another

⁵¹ *The White House*, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/open/innovations/Data/> (18.08.2009).

⁵² Dupuis and Boeckelman, *Barack Obama, the New Face of American Politics*, 117.

⁵³ Dupuis and Boeckelman, *Barack Obama, the New Face of American Politics*, 70.

⁵⁴ Dupuis and Boeckelman, *Barack Obama, the New Face of American Politics*, 70.

⁵⁵ *The Fate of Obama's Net Roots Network*. Peter Overby, NPR (National Public Radio)

<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=97722217> (on e-mail from Mark Luccarelli 07.02.09)

⁵⁶ Overby, *The Fate of Obama's Net Roots Network*. <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=97722217>

alternative would be a tax-exempt entity, using the database to promote Obama's issues. This has never been done before either, and the tax code might be limited.⁵⁷ A lot of the organization was indeed based on the various blogs online and the challenge was "(...) transforming the YouTubing – Facebooking – texting – Twittering grass-roots organization that put Mr. Obama in the White House into an instrument of government".⁵⁸ The solution became "Organizing for America" (OFA) which will be housed in the Democratic National Committee. Among the supporters themselves there was a huge interest to have the Obama organization live on. Though it is emphasized by Obama's aides that the organization wants to build public opinion and not direct lobbying or pressuring of the members of Congress.⁵⁹ The OFA Web Site states that:

"Organizing for America, the successor organization to Obama for America, is building on the movement that elected President Obama by empowering communities across the country to bring about our agenda for change. (...) Now it's time for our movement to rise again, stand with President Obama, and make that promise a reality."⁶⁰

In addition to encourage public engagement, President Obama is using the Internet to keep his support after being elected President. This correlates to president and communication looked at in chapter 1; the popularity of the president is important all along, first to gain support to get the job, then to maintain this support to do a good job, and to keep a good reputation when the job is done. It is important for the president to keep good relations with the public because he is responsible to the public and because he is dependent on public opinion to succeed in his job. So, this is one way of keeping that support while in office, and at the same time increasing the chances of getting re-elected. Barack Obama went to election with a promise of change, his motto being "Change we can believe in". On the election night Obama stated that by being elected a change has already occurred, but he also emphasizes that it is after the polls have closed that the work really begins. In Organizing for America Obama encourage citizens to help create that change and get the work done.

Updated websites, online recruiting and contributions, are the main way of how Obama has used new technology to reach out to his supporters. Obama raised millions of dollars online and has used among other things YouTube videos to reach voters directly. E-mail is a given when campaigning nowadays, but Obama has also made use of text-messages.

⁵⁷ Overby, *The Fate of Obama's Net Roots Network*. <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=97722217>

⁵⁸ Rutenberg and Nagourney, *Melding Obama's Web to a YouTube Presidency*, http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/26/us/politics/26grassroots.html?_r=1&sq=Obama%20on%20Youtube (28.01.09).

⁵⁹ Rutenberg and Nagourney, *Melding Obama's Web to a YouTube Presidency*, http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/26/us/politics/26grassroots.html?_r=1&sq=Obama%20on%20Youtube (28.01.09).

⁶⁰ *Organizing for America*, http://www.barackobama.com/learn/about_ofa.php (18.08.2009).

For instance, Obama pronounced that Joe Biden would run as Vice President via text messaging instead of a traditional press conference and the media in general.⁶¹ Erik Møller Solheim who worked as a volunteer during Obama's campaign, also describes how he continuously throughout the day of the election received e-mails and text messages backing-up his work and support, sometimes with an encouragement to make a donation of, for instance \$5 dollars as well, all signed with *Barack*.⁶²

⁶¹*Politics Going Global – 'Net-Roots'-Style?*. Peter Overby, NPR (National Public Radio) <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=97722217> (on e-mail from Mark Luccarelli 07.02.09).

⁶²Erik Møller Solheim. *En Stemme for Obama* (Norge: Gyldendal, 2009).

Summary

As a presidential candidate, Barack Obama proved to be a successful communicator towards his voters and towards the media, though one might rely on the other. Obama's rhetorical qualities as a speaker, running television advertisement close up to the election as part of his media strategy, and the advanced use of the Internet are elements that made Obama present a positive image of himself and win the election. The underlying enthusiasm for community organizing also helped the building of a large grass-root support succeed. Other circumstances such as coincidences during his run for the Senate, for instance the negative portraits of his opponents and being chosen to speak at the National Democratic Convention have also helped Obama's career. As well as the political landscape in the United States at the time, with eight years under President George W. Bush who began to be unpopular and gave the Democrats a country that was ready for change. Still, despite these circumstances, with the election of 2008, the media role has been expanding with the use of new technologies to reach out to the voters. The challenges Obama met as a candidate was keeping his celebrity status to his advantage and dealing with the racial issue. During these four years as a president, Barack Obama now needs to continue his success as a communicator towards the media, his supporters, but also towards the Congress and his administration to make that change he has promised. The interview revealed an interesting note on the president's narrative technique as an important rhetorical strategy. This has the greatest effect when experienced face-to-face, but as Obama's speeches are watched on TV or online, it is probable that the narrative technique has an effect through these other mediums as well. It also provided an insight to how the Obama campaign worked "on the ground" and the important underlying strategy of telling a story as the way to reach out to people and getting support. The fact that Organizing for America is continuing to be active is an interesting way for a president to keep the support while in office. When it comes to the challenge of the Health Care Plan, the issue can be looked at as a test for the idea that successful communication can succeed politically.

5.0 Happy Presidents

The thesis set out to look at how presidents have successfully communicated to the people. In particular, the thesis has explained why Roosevelt, Reagan, and Obama are successful communicators through various media channels in the context of different political climates. Technological development has increased the number of media channels and the media plays an important role when it comes to the public's impression of the president. The image of a president is not entirely in the hands of the politician. A successful communicator has presented himself in a successful way. This thesis suggests that the successful image-making and communication is dependent on a number of things. The historical circumstances and unexpected turn of events are important factors that impact the president, first as a candidate and also later when serving in office. One example of this is Obama as a candidate. His opponents had their unfortunate divorce scandals revealed in the media, and Obama was also asked to deliver the Keynote Address to the Democratic National Convention in 2004. These events helped Obama look like a better suited candidate, and the speech gave him an opportunity to show his great abilities as a speaker, not to mention the valuable airtime creating name recognition. The image of the opponent might serve as an advantage for the image-making of the other candidate. Barack Obama was also labeled a "rock star" politician and achieved a celebrity status. It is important to acknowledge that there is a manipulative aspect to successful communication. The use of media and the politics of the age are important aspects when considering a candidate or a president's communication, but personal appeal and charisma also have an impact.

5.1 Communication and the Politics of the Age

It is said that the image of Andrew Jackson became a symbolic figure. Was it "the spirit of the age" or the manipulations of the politician that helped shape this image? Arguably, it is a combination of the historical time period and the strategies of image-making and communication that have shaped the legacies of all three presidents that have been discussed in this thesis.

According to Sean Wilentz (2008), the period from 1933 to the late 1960s can be classified as a period of liberal reform that began with the rise of the New Deal and ended with the fall of Lyndon B. Johnson's Great Society. This is a period when Franklin D. Roosevelt became a symbolic figure. The period from 1974 to 2008 can, although briefly interrupted in the late 1970s and temporarily reserved in the 1990s, be classified as an era of

conservatism. This period can also be called the Age of Reagan.¹ With the election of 2008 there has been a shift to a Democratic president who believes in progressive politics. It is too early to say whether President Obama will be seen as a symbolic figure of this future period, but some have already been tempted to give that prediction. All three presidents have changed the path of the politics in the periods when they were elected.

The politics and issues behind the candidates are also of importance. Roosevelt presented progressive politics, Reagan presented conservatism and tax reform, and Obama is bringing back the progressive policy making. Each candidate believed and believes strongly in their political ideas and it was important to express their beliefs to the public in a trustworthy manner.

Franklin D. Roosevelt represented hope. This message of hope was highly appreciated by a public suffering from a depression. Although Roosevelt also had many opponents, he handled the criticism strategically and his success was partly due to his message of hope. Roosevelt kept good relations with the press and connected to the public through his fireside chats. One might consider these fireside chats as a way of continued campaigning, a way of keeping the public support once in office. Roosevelt was a leader who educated the public and answered his opponent in a sharp tone. This image made him seem fit as a president who the public could trust to make the right decisions, especially in times of crisis. The way he communicated to the public proved successful.

Ronald Reagan symbolized optimism. Reagan promised a “New Morning” in America, and with his charismatic style and TV-skills he succeeded in getting the message through to the people. One might compare Reagan’s political communication to the medium itself. As television is a visual medium that tends to mediate style over substance, some would say that Reagan himself was a man who had great style but failed to talk in-depth about the political issues he proclaimed. Either way, Reagan clearly succeeded in his communication, because even among people who strongly disagreed with his politics, they were attracted to Reagan’s integrity and leadership qualities. Reagan changed politics with what would seem as controversial proposals at the time, for instance drastic tax cuts: he connected to the public by including stories in his speeches, and he is said to be the first successful TV-politician. The father of conservatism communicated to the public with success.

Barack Obama promised change. It is not yet possible to say if his message will prove successful during his presidency, but it did work for him as a candidate. The United States

¹ Wilentz, *The Age of Reagan – A History 1974-2008*, 1.

seemed ready for a change of pace after a Republican president served two full terms. The spirit of our age seems to move away from Republican politics towards Democratic progressiveness. This shift is also related to the way the United States is viewed around the world. The politics inside the US tries to follow the overall decline of America's role in the world, as no longer being the one and only great powerful nation. Obama's approach on foreign policy encouraging dialogue before warfare seems to be in accordance to the spirit of our time. Appealing to the people who wanted a change proved successful to win the presidency. With rhetorical skills and ability to speak in public like Reagan, Obama engaged the public. Obama avoided negative campaigning and built his support as a grassroots organization, posted videos on YouTube, and had an especially successful fundraising strategy. Obama communicated his image as a community organizer and a progressive politician with success as a candidate, now it remains for him to deliver as president.

5.2 New Media Communications

The functioning of the mass media impacts directly on the public perception of the presidency as well as establishing conditions that influence strategies to shape public opinion on the part of presidents and presidential candidates. The technological changes have increased the number of media channels and led to new possibilities when it comes to political communication and image-making. The mass media can provide information, it can be entertaining, it can help setting the political agenda, and it can be persuasive. The development of mass communication proceeded from local newspapers to metropolitan newspapers, and then to radio, television and the Internet. At the beginning of these historical developments, there was a decline of a party-oriented press and the rise of objective fact-oriented journalism that coincided with the normalization of the two party-system in the United States. The early newspapers represented partisanship, while today's newspaper journalists are expected to take a neutral role when reporting political issues. Still, as the 2008 Campaign showed, some of the newspapers chose side in the election. On average the tendency in recent years is that American newspapers tend to lean to the political left. As discussed in chapter one, the newspaper's political support can affect the voters. Especially because newspapers are viewed as a trustworthy medium and generally focus on substance and in-depth information compared to other media, television in particular.

When it comes to television, the underlying partisanship seems to be evident in some of the big news channels. Although Fox News denies bias, it is perceived as a conservative channel with a tendency to portray Republican politics more positively than Democratic ones.

CNN News present themselves as neutral as well, still when looking at the headlines of www.foxnews.com and www.cnn.com it seems that FOX were negative towards Obama, while CNN was more positive. This becomes speculative, but it is an interesting factor when it comes to the presentation of a candidate or a president in the various news channels online and on television.

The technological development of the media has also led to a rise of consultants and media advisors. The complexity of today's media world makes the candidate or the president depend on experts who help him or her with the image-making. It is worth mentioning that there is an ongoing debate about the amount of power these consultants have come to inhabit in the political sphere. In the United States the consultants have been a part of image-making and politics for quite a while, because the decline of party identification in the US over the past 30 years has greatly strengthened the long-standing tendency to emphasize the person rather than the political issues. These days the debate is being discussed in Norwegian media. The multiple-party system has delayed the need for media consultants as the political issues of the party has been emphasized, but now the need for media advisors seems to be increasing in additional countries than the United States, independent of the political system and number of parties. It is no longer enough for a politician to speak his mind, explain his policies and stand for his own opinions, he needs to think about how he says it, who he is talking to, while anticipating potential criticism. The media strategy, therefore, needs to be both effective and affective.

The form of mediation sets the term of communication. With the radio the candidate or the president's "radio voice" became important. The politician was given the opportunity to create a relationship with the voter in a new way. With direct speech and a personal approach the radio voice can reach a huge number of people as they are in their own familiar environments at home, in the car or at the office. With the development of the Internet, the radio is also available online and the podcast opportunity makes the radio channels less dependent on reaching the audience on specific times of the day, though for the most part, the radio remains a local, personal, and flexible medium. Although the president himself no longer uses the radio as Roosevelt did, the radio hosts are very much active in trying to influence public opinion or create political opposition.

Television is visual. The development of television created the TV-politician. Not only the voice, but the looks became important. The focus changed from issues to personality, from substance to style. The anchormen and reporters took over the roles of the newspaper editors. It is all about appearance, and appearance can be manipulated.

Radio and television made news and political information more immediate, but the Internet has increased the availability of immediate communication. All the other media channels, newspapers, radio, television, are all available online with a simple “click.” The responder is given a more active role and blogging has become an additional way of voicing political opinion. For the politician his actions are victim of immediate publicity, but the way he can create an image is also given more opportunity online. A candidate can create his own website, or his own online profile, and control the information put out. This opportunity is also presented to the opponents, and creating oppositional groups. Manipulating political information is made possible online. Nonetheless, the opportunity to post online information works both ways.

Arguably the development of the media channels has been a development that went from reporting political issues with substance to the importance of style over substance. Today, what we see is a tendency to increase the substance, but it is still a matter of both. The newspapers are perceived as providing substance and in-depth information. With the online newspapers the possibilities for providing even more substance with background information on issues have increased. Because of the immediate reporting of news today, the public quickly knows what has happened, the facts of the matter; therefore it is more interesting to provide more reporting on how and why and different background information. Television also needs to answer this demand and might shift to a more substance based reporting as well. When it comes to political speeches, the fact that the receiver is more likely to hear or see the whole speech now, the form of the speech is no longer as dependent on presenting that one catchy quote.

In addition to the different media channels that have developed, the pollster is increasingly important. Because of advanced technology the statistical information is massive. Especially when it comes to campaigning the latest polling results are of importance. The statistics can provide information on the voting patterns in a specific area for instance, and is therefore a huge advantage for the candidate. Also the polls can at all times provide the popularity rate of the candidate or the president.

The increased number of media channels available and the immediate communication creates a higher demand of the politician who needs to manage the different medium. At the same time it has created increased opportunities for the politician to create his image and to get his political message across. For instance, a candidate can post a video on YouTube, and in a limited amount of time that video is picked up and turned into world wide advertising. The development of the media has led to both immediate and increased communication.

5.3 Communication or Manipulation?

It is interesting to see what the presidents presented have in common and the different media strategies that proved successful for the different presidents. One thing the three presidents have in common is that they were/are all “happy presidents”. According to Lou Cannon who writes in the 100days-blog of *the New York Times*, the ability to keep a sense of normalcy may serve as an advantage for a sitting president. Cannon makes a connection between FDR, Reagan and Obama as all being presidents who did/do not let the job dictate their daily routine. Most presidents get grey hair during the first term in the job. The job is obviously a heavy weight on any person. A way of dealing with the extreme amount of responsibility that is resting on the president’s shoulders is that the president can choose to keep in touch with his life before being elected. These daily routines makes the president enjoy his job, hence makes him better at his job. In the case of Roosevelt, he took breaks to work on his stamp collection, he maintained his interest in architecture, and apparently made the cocktail hour a time to avoid serious talk. Reagan enjoyed horseback riding and made his trips to Camp David and to his ranch in California priorities. Reagan was also known for ending staff meetings with a bright anecdote quite often. President Obama remains true to his own timetable and eats breakfast and dinner with his family every day if possible. Instead of the bright anecdote, Obama invites his staff out to play basketball from time to time. Reagan filled the White House with jellybeans; the Obamas have apples in every room. What do these trivial details say about the presidents? The jellybeans are hard to explain, but the apples are a part of the focus on eating healthy which is in particular an issue that is being portrayed by the current first lady. These hints about the president’s personality are important attributes to the image-making, and it is a way of connecting with the ordinary citizen. The extra curricular activities can easily become a target for media criticism as important political issues are going on and the priorities seem inappropriate for a president. On the other hand, it seems that since the president of the United States is able to get the public to relate to him as a person by showing something of his private life, the basketball game might also be part of a media strategy necessary for the president in order to stay popular. An apparently happy president is no guarantee for a successful presidency, but trying to keep in touch with the public by letting them in on some of the private life may serve as an important attribute. As Cannon also points out, the American people are a future looking people: “As F.D.R. and Reagan knew, most Americans are optimists who believe in better days ahead for themselves and their country.

‘Yes we can’ has resonance.”² A happy president who seemingly enjoys his job looks comfortable and secure as a leader.

The point is that communication is critically important for the president. From looking at communication theories in chapter one, and the different challenges for the three president, one understands that it is more to it than happiness. Still, personality is an interesting aspect that should not be underestimated. The American people vote for the person rather than the party; personalizing issues and the presidency is therefore important to connect with the public. With media strategies and the interpretive nature of the press itself, how does the voter know what is being manipulated and what is real? Which interests does the president inhabit for appearances and which are put forward to project a positive image?

The challenge for the politician is getting the message across to the public. It is matter of communicating the abstract political ideas into something that the public can relate to. For instance, Reagan used anecdotes or stories, which helped simplify the issues. The way of self-presentation as a “happy president” can be viewed as a more manipulative way of communication. Sometimes strategies of simplification and relating to the public are enough, but sometimes the candidate or the president uses manipulation to create an image.

Building a strong alliance and having supporters are crucial to become president, and the art of keeping this support that one has built up as a candidate after being elected is also part of the success. In Obama’s case the organizational way his support was achieved was also a part of his image. The way the president’s supporters were part of a large grassroots organization correlates to Obama himself, having worked as a community organizer and made his supporters motivated to work for him. The campaign strategy fits with Obama’s image as a self-made man.

5.4 Some Similarities and Differences

Humor is an important part of the communication strategies to all three presidents. There are also other similarities and differences. Obama is trying to keep his supporters when he is in office by keeping his campaign organization, Organizing for America (OFA). Roosevelt in a sense did the same thing with his fireside chats. They can be seen as continued campaigning after being elected. OFA is even more a way of continued campaigning for Obama now that he is president. Through the organization the supporters gather on local and national issues that are important for them. They lobby in a grassroots organizational way. In addition, by

² Lou Cannon, *Get Out of the (White) House*, February 12, 2009, <http://100days.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/02/12/get-out-of-the-white-house/> (13.02.2009).

building his organization on his background as a community organizer and a volunteer himself, Obama made the image of being a self-made man stronger. The self-made man is an image that in itself is appealing to all Americans. Roosevelt's fireside chat had a personal approach that made the listeners feel the president was addressing them. To compare this approach to Obama's, one might say that the sitting president is communicating directly to the public online, through twitter, facebook, email, and the weekly address on YouTube. Still, one also knows that it is not the president himself who posts these online messages, but rather some of his media advisors. Posting the Weekly Address online, on the other hand, have made it more available, and it is in addition visual compared to the radio address. Both Roosevelt and Obama are presidents who kept and keep an open government. Roosevelt took over the presidency during the Great Depression, while Obama came to office in the midst of what is now being called the Great Recession. Though the severity of these economic crisis differ, the fact that the president who takes over the office in such times needs to restore the confidence of the people is the same. Roosevelt succeeded with a message of courage and hope. Obama needs to continue a successful communication to the public in order to seem trustworthy and deliver the change he has promised.

The Health Care Reform that Obama is trying to get passed is similar to what Roosevelt wanted to accomplish with his New Deal. It might have helped Roosevelt to get more radical changes passed because the party legislative machinery functioned better than it does today, putting more pressure on the president. Despite the different political strategies, the similarity between the Roosevelt and the Obama presidencies is that they were able to give the public what it wanted and needed to hear at times of crisis. Both Roosevelt and Obama went to Harvard and Columbia; Roosevelt achieved average grades, while Obama has kept his a secret. This is a minor difference, but a more serious difference when it comes to communication is that Roosevelt seemed very confident in his answers to his opponents, sometimes even sharp. Obama on the other hand, seems so far reluctant to answer back to the same degree. This might damage his image over time, as he has made big promises of change and is therefore committed to achieving challenging political goals. Others would say that Obama has taken on too much too soon, and in that sense he has not served the expectations of the voters.

Storytelling is something Reagan and Obama have in common. President Obama's campaign strategy of telling his story to make a connection to the public in order to achieve support is comparable with Reagan's strategy of using stories in his speeches. Reagan's stories were someone else's and usually humoristic in nature, but nevertheless the goal

remains the same – connecting to the public. Also, as Obama has been referred to as an example of a self-made man, this reference can to some extent fit Ronald Reagan as well. Reagan's parents struggled to get by and his father was an alcoholic. Reagan set out to achieve the American dream, not through fancy schools, but through acting. He became a Hollywood actor, and he achieved maybe the ultimate dream by becoming the president of the United States. Roosevelt, on the other hand, is the American dream in reverse as someone who came from a wealthy family and struggled with creating his image as a progressive politician.

Both Roosevelt and Reagan experienced assassination attempts, and the strategy of appearing stronger than they really were is valid for both the previous presidents. When Reagan had an apparent quick recovery he gained popularity both through sympathy and by looking courageous. Roosevelt kept the impression that he could walk and was not forced to the wheelchair as much as he could. It almost seems as if the public wanted to believe this fairy tale themselves. That the public needs to create an image of their leader of their own, and a leader is strong and decisive.

5.5 Concluding Remarks

All presidents are different and the different times define their presidencies as well, but Roosevelt, Reagan and Obama have in common that they were and are great communicators. One important arena for the presidents to create an image for themselves is through the media channels. Roosevelt and Reagan made use of the new technologies presented through radio and television. Radio made it possible to transfer voices and the politician could speak to a huge number of people at the same time, at home in their living room. For a candidate or a president, this was a great opportunity to reach out to the voters and a possibility to make a personal approach. Roosevelt succeeded with his fireside chats. Television added a visual picture to that voice. As soon as the medium is visual, appearances become more important. Reagan had the ability to look good on TV and managed to use television to his advantage as a politician. Internet is not a new medium in the same sense as radio and television, because it does not represent something as big as voice or visual picture. Internet rather presents all the already available mediums in one place and makes it even more available. Communication is now immediate. Obama inhabits the skills that make him look good on TV and sound good when he gives speeches, and he has succeeded in doing these things online. As the media has developed the information is increasing as well as the means of communication; Roosevelt wanted to reach the morning and afternoon editions of the newspapers, Reagan wanted to be

on the evening news, Obama is free to communicate independently from these previous media schedules. If the president posts something online it can reach a tremendous number of people anywhere right away. When the president is able to use this extended communication opportunities it can be a huge advantage.

All of these factors; circumstances and unexpected events, the image of the opponent, media strategy and advisors, charisma and personal appeal, successful rhetoric, strong support, appealing policies – all helps shape the public opinion and are therefore part of a successful candidate and a successful president. One of the big challenges for the president or the candidate is to appear trustworthy while the challenge for the voter is how to know what is manipulated and what is real because what the voters see is a mediated version of the person they are set out to judge. The media is therefore crucial in the process of electing a president and the candidate or president has both to be able to command it for direct communication with his public and at the same time keep good relations with the press in order to achieve a favorable impression in public.

Interview with Clark S. Judge – former speechwriter for Ronald Reagan

Time: Monday, October 12th 2009

Start: 4.00 pm (local time) 10.00 am (US Eastern Time)

End: 4.30 pm (local time) 10.30 am (US Eastern Time)

Place: Via Skype Online Phone Connection

Interview Subject: Clark S. Judge

The interview was done in English and was recorded. A complete transcript can be given upon request. The interview guide used as well as a summary of the interview is given here as an appendix.

Interview Guide:

1. I noticed that you imitated Reagan during your lecture in Oslo. How important is it for the speechwriter to be ‘inside the President’s mind’? How well do you need to know the president’s personality, characteristics etc.
2. What about the politics, does the speechwriter have to agree politically with the president? (you mentioned this, but...)
3. I have read that the speechwriters rarely met the President themselves, most of the communication was done in writing... How did you know what to write when you did not talk to or know the president?
4. In what ways did the fact that Reagan was a former actor, and as you said “he could have every emotion”, make the speechwriter’s job easier? (increased flexibility...?)
5. In more general terms, not just concerning speeches, how much of an advantage did Reagan’s experience on film and television have on his abilities to communicate as president?
6. No doubt, the words are important and the written text needs to be compelling, but how important is the delivery? Reagan did have great communication skills – how much of the credit would you give the delivery vs the speech in text itself?
7. In one of your articles you claim that in public communication the most important thing is ‘to be the message’, to mean what you say. What kind of messages can best be communicated in speeches? (*Say What They Want to Hear – And, if Possible, Mean It – Wall Street Journal*)

8. Reagan is known for using stories in his speeches, for instance letters he received from the public, what kind of effect does this ‘personal touch’ give a speech? Why was it important to include these stories in Reagan’s speeches?
9. Others have emphasized that communication in politics have followed the path of advertising – a means of manipulation. What’s your response to that perspective? Suggest that speeches are more about communicating affect than content. Another related idea is that the means of communication alters the message fundamentally, i.e. that the medium is the message. See what his reaction is.
10. The fact that new technologies have increased the channels of communication to the voters, how has this affected the speechwriting? Speeches have persisted – why? (Changes in form – able to watch it afterwards on YouTube etc.) Would putting speeches directly on the Web (as Obama has now done) change the content or delivery of the speech?
11. Some claim that if a president wants to get his agenda done he needs to do it during the first two years of his presidency because that’s when he still has the popular support – do you agree? How does this claim suit Reagan’s presidency?

Interview summary:

Clark S. Judge worked as a volunteer for Reagan’s campaign in New York in 1980, work that included licking stamps and going door-to-door. Since Mr Judge was a writer he was asked to write things for the campaign, and eventually Judge ended up applying for the job as speechwriter for Vice President Bush (sr.) and practically “fell into the job”. Later Mr Judge became a speechwriter for President Reagan as well. Judge emphasizes that there is a long way before a speech is completed, from the speechwriter’s desk to the President’s podium with sometimes a lot of back-and-forth. The following is an interview with Mr Judge via Skype video phone call on October 12th 2009, from 4.pm to 4.30pm (local time). Mr Judge was in his office in Washington (10.am to 10.30am US Eastern Time).

Knowing the President’s Purpose

During a lecture in Oslo³, Mr Judge imitated Reagan, but when asked if a speechwriter needs to be ‘inside the president’s mind’, Judge answered that the important thing is for the speechwriter to know the president’s purpose. It is important to know his history and how he

³ Clark S. Judge, lecture at BI, Oslo, September 16th, 2009.

thinks about policy. Judge makes the distinction between the president as a private persona and the public persona, and emphasize that the speechwriter needs to have a sense of the president as a public persona. To some extent the president is creating a character, and Mr Reagan was particularly adaptable on this point. It is necessary for the president to show qualities that are familiar to the public, so that the public can absorb the issues. It is therefore important for the speechwriter to have a sense of the president's political purposes, what he sees as being appropriate and inappropriate. This is part of how you think about your job as a speechwriter. Also, not only does Mr Judge think that a speechwriter needs to know the president's political purpose, but Judge also says that a speechwriter absolutely should agree with the president politically. If you do not agree with the president you should not get the job because this job is a job that demands passion and devotion.

Reagan in the White House

Although the speechwriters not necessarily met with the president much since the communication was mostly done in writing, this was not much of a problem with Reagan according to Mr Judge. First of all because Reagan was a very developed politician by the time he got to the White House. Reagan's political purpose was stated clear. The challenge for the speechwriter was not so much knowing Reagan's purpose, but taking the temperature around the government. The administration was reforming the government and there was a lot of residence to what the president was doing at the time.

'He could have every emotion'

The fact that Reagan used to be an actor before he entered the presidency did not necessarily make the speechwriter's job easier, but Judge thinks it made the job of his speechwriters more gratifying. Although the acting was very helpful for Reagan when performing a speech, independently from being an actor, Reagan was a man who took his text serious. He focused on putting it across to the audience. If a text where to be politics what he said was going to be what he would expect. Reagan had a great sense of the nuances in language. The things that at the time looked simple, and it sure looked absolutely natural for Reagan to speak in front of an audience or a camera, but it isn't easy. Judge does not think that anyone after Reagan has managed to do this as apparently simple as he did. The actor background had more to do with

learning how to perform in front of a camera. Also, as an actor it is not just about making the movie, it is also about selling the movie. Actors selling movies are much like politicians or presidents who are campaigning, for instance by making sure to be photographed at the right places. Both require a great deal of stamina and personal discipline. Judge learned from Reagan how much stamina and personal discipline was part of being a president. These are requirements also when serving as a president, and Reagan inhabited them both. In this sense Reagan's experience on film and television helped his abilities to serve as a president, while his camera familiarity helped when communicating to the people.

Delivery versus the Speech

Naturally, as a former speechwriter Judge was tempted to give the speech as a text itself the credit for a successful communication, but Judge rather said that the most important thing with Reagan was the fact that he took the text seriously. The speechwriter needs to make the speech work, but Reagan had the ability to change the meaning of a text by the way he delivered it. The delivery is therefore a tremendous part of the success as a speech. Reagan was able to bring life to the text.

Speeches as a Way of Communicating a Message

When asked what kind of messages that are best communicated in speeches, Judge says theoretically all messages, but if you compare a speech to a book the difference is that you have much less time to say what you need to say. Comparing a book to a film for instance, movies are much shorter and therefore demands a different kind of delivery. Essentially any kind of performance is a compressed art form. Although, on television one exception is the miniseries. If you take for example all seasons of *The Sopranos* you get something like a 40 to 50 hour long sequence, but each episode is a very compressed art form. This is true with speeches as well, it needs to be compressed and it puts limits to what you can do.

In one of his articles, Judge claims that in public communication the most important thing is 'to be the message', to mean what you say.⁴ On the other hand, others have emphasized that communication in politics have followed the path of advertising – a means of manipulation. Judge says that one usually talks about TV-advertising in this respect and he

⁴ Clark, *Say What They Want to Hear – And, if Possible, Mean It*, Wall Street Journal.

acknowledges that advertising has its uses. In the American culture ads have a certain purpose of being a form of compressed debate. One important aspect to keep in mind though, is that television has changed as a medium, from a short medium to a long medium. The information on TV is not necessarily as compressed as it used to be. Although Judge values the purpose and uses of advertising, but Judge disagree to the claim that advertising is all there is to a campaign.

The Humanity of the Man

Reagan is known for using stories in his speeches, for instance letters he received from the public. Judge feels that including the stories in speeches first of all was part of showing the humanity of the man. In political communication the struggle is how to take large and abstract concepts and making an understanding of how it relates to people. To be able to reach out one needs to make a connection to the public. The stories were a way of making people relate to what Reagan was saying about politics.

New Technologies

New technologies have increased the channels of communication to the voters, for instance speeches are now put directly on the Web. These changes have affected the speech in a way that it has made the soundbite less important, it is no longer the same demand for a ‘snappy quote’ and the pressure to break through in the press has decreased. The technological developments have meant that both writers and our political speakers are more inclined to assume that the audience will hear or view large portions of the speech. When Judge was in the White House he felt they were very conscious of the quote that everybody hung on.

Getting the President’s Agenda Through

Judge does not agree that it is necessary for a president to do as much as possible during the first two years of his presidency when he still has popular support. The current administration [Obama administration] has made a big mistake with doing too much too early which has diminished the public support. Judge thinks that the current president [Obama] is going beyond his mandate. Mr Reagan on the other hand, although the Reagan administration was transforming the government, his last tax bill came in the second year of his second term, that is six years in. Every two years the house of the representatives and a third of the senate is re-

APPENDIX A

elected, if the president does good in these elections he tends to get a boost. It is when he starts to loose these midterm elections that can be critical to getting his policies through. If the current president would wait until the congressional election and did a good election there, he would be in a very strong position which would increase his possibilities for instance with the Health Care Reform. Right now, because the president has gone beyond his borders of what the people would think he could do, he gets enormous pushback, even within his own parities. The public opinion and the support from congress is especially important because in the presidential system each issue is voted on individually.

Interview guide – Erik Møller Solheim

Time: Wednesday, September 23rd 2009

Start: 1.30 pm

End: 3.00 pm

Place: Colletts Café

Interview Subject: Erik Møller Solheim

The interview was done in Norwegian and was recorded. A complete transcript or a translation of the questionnaire can be given upon request.

- 1) Når du meldte deg som frivillig, var du inspirert av Obama som selv skriver i boka *The Audacity of Hope* om det å gå og banke på dører – og hvilke erfaringer har det å arbeide som frivillig gitt deg?
 - Oppfølging:
Metoden (banke på dører) – tror du det er en god måte å kommunisere politikk med folk på? Eller er det en effektiv reklame – hva tror du? Har det noe for seg?
- 2) Barack Obama er gjentatte ganger referert til som en ”rock-star politician”. Du har sett han tale ”live”, hva var det som imponerte deg spesielt?
- 3) Hvordan tror du Obama klarer seg utover i presidentperioden, kommer retorikken og den gode kommunikasjonsevnen til å vedvare – og er det nok?
- 4) Obama har oppnådd kjendisstatus, hvilke fordeler og ulemper kan en slik status gi presidenten, tror du?
 - Oppfølging:
Kan kjendisstatusen påvirke/ødelegge for å kommunisere idene til folk som er skeptiske til han? For eksempel: mange som demonstrerer mot helsereformen, folk ser ikke ut til å ha forstått temaene/poengene/ideene, hvorfor klarer ikke Obama å nå disse menneskene?
- 5) Hva tror du om helsereformen? Er amerikanerne fortsatt ikke klare? Vil det ødelegge for demokratisk gjenvalg i kongressen 2010?
- 6) 2008 kampanjen har tatt i bruk internett på en bredere måte enn tidligere, spesielt har Obama visst å bruke det apparatet som finnes på nettet med facebook, twitter og muligheter for donasjoner. Hvor viktig rolle tror du internett spilte i valgkampen? Og hvordan merket du som frivillig kampanjens teknologiske virkemidler? (e-post, sms)
- 7) Er du fortsatt aktiv og medlem av Organizing for America? På hvilke måter kan alle de frivillige som jobbet under valgkampen fortsette å støtte Obama når han sitter som president?
 - Oppfølging:
Hvordan bruker man nettverket i forhold til helsereformen nå for eksempel?
- 8) I hvilken grad tror du finanskrisen spilte en rolle når det gjelder støtten og seieren til Obama?
 - Oppfølging:
Har dette temaet/denne saken forsvunnet pga. måten Obama håndterte krisen på?

APPENDIX B

- 9) Mange faktorer spiller inn når en president skal velges; media, journalister, pengestøtte, valgkamporganisering, personlig karisma osv. Hva tror du må til for å vinne? Hvilke evner er nødvendige å inneha hos en presidentkandidat?
- 10) Du forklarer i boka *En Stemme for Obama* hvorfor du som nordmann har en interesse av USA og hvem som styrer landet ved å skille mellom "Amerika" og "USA"; nå etter valget og din kandidat har vært president i drøye 8mnd, hvilken forestilling har du om landet?
- 11) I sammenheng med dette kommer du også inn på habilitetsproblemet du evt. ville møtt dersom du skulle reist over for å dekke kampanjen som journalist og ikke som frivillig, fordi du heiet på Obama, kan du forklare litt nærmere hvordan du differensierer journalist-rollen fra frivillig og/eller forfatter-rollen?
- 12) Er det noe annet du ønsker å legge til?

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