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The Master of the Senate and the Presidential Hidden Hand: Eisenhower, Johnson, and Power Dynamics in the 1950s

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Abstract

In March of 2010, renowned architect Frank Gehry unveiled his design for a memorial to Dwight D. Eisenhower in Washington, D.C. Centered around an elaborate layout of stone blocks running along a city-block of Maryland Avenue is the featured aspect of Gehry's design: a narrative tapestry of scenes from Eisenhower's life. Over seven stories tall, the tapestry will impede the view of the building located directly behind it. That building is the Department of Education, named for Lyndon Johnson.¹ Decades after two of the greatest political titans of the twentieth century had passed away, their legacies were still in competition. In many ways, then, it is fitting that, as a great monument will be laid for Dwight Eisenhower in the nation's capitol, scholars have begun reassessing him as a leader and a president. One aspect of his presidency that has needed to be reevaluated is his fascinating relationship with Johnson. They came from different political parties and had different visions for America, yet there was a time when circumstances bound them in a meaningful, though unstable, political dynamic. For six years of his presidency, the moderate Republican Eisenhower had to work constructively with a Congress dominated by Democrats in order to get his agenda passed. As Majority Leader of the United States Senate during this period, Johnson saw an opportunity to raise the standing of the Democratic Party and his own ambitions for the presidency by aligning himself with, and occasionally undermining, President Eisenhower. Although neither man fully achieved his goals in this partnership, it nevertheless proved fruitful for both. Their interaction sheds light on them as individuals and leaders. Further, a closer inspection of many legislative triumphs previously credited to Johnson actually contained the artful influence of President Eisenhower, proving his political prowess applied to Johnson and the legislative process.

Keywords

Dwight D. Eisenhower, Lyndon Johnson, legacies, 1950s, power

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by Samuel J. Cooper-Wall

In March of 2010, renowned architect Frank Gehry unveiled his design for a memorial to Dwight D. Eisenhower in Washington, D.C. Centered around an elaborate layout of stone blocks running along a city-block of Maryland Avenue is the featured aspect of Gehry's design: a narrative tapestry of scenes from Eisenhower's life. Over seven stories tall, the tapestry will impede the view of the building located directly behind it. That building is the Department of Education, named for Lyndon Johnson.¹ Decades after two of the greatest political titans of the twentieth century had passed

¹ Philip Kennicott, "A New Wrinkle: Gehry's Eisenhower Memorial is Bold but not Curvy," *The Washington Post*, March 26, 2010, C1.

away, their legacies were still in competition. In many ways, then, it is fitting that, as a great monument will be laid for Dwight Eisenhower in the nation's capitol, scholars have begun reassessing him as a leader and a president. One aspect of his presidency that has needed to be reevaluated is his fascinating relationship with Johnson. They came from different political parties and had different visions for America, yet there was a time when circumstances bound them in a meaningful, though unstable, political dynamic. For six years of his presidency, the moderate Republican Eisenhower had to work constructively with a Congress dominated by Democrats in order to get his agenda passed. As Majority Leader of the United States Senate during this period, Johnson saw an opportunity to raise the standing of the

Democratic Party and his own ambitions for the presidency by aligning himself with, and occasionally undermining, President Eisenhower. Although neither man fully achieved his goals in this partnership, it nevertheless proved fruitful for both. Their interaction sheds light on them as individuals and leaders. Further, a closer inspection of many legislative triumphs previously credited to Johnson actually contained the artful influence of President Eisenhower, proving his political prowess applied to Johnson and the legislative process.

Paths to Power and Finding Common Ground

In many ways, the dynamic between these two men took shape at their very first meeting. Two weeks after Nazi Germany surrendered to the allies, Texas Congressman Lyndon B. Johnson received permission to take one of his small subcommittees

to Europe. Although his travel was under the guise of making an evaluation about how the U.S. Navy could help support a strong postwar defense effort, Johnson was most anxious to view conditions on the ground in Europe in order to enhance his credentials for taking part in postwar planning. Although Commanding General Dwight D. Eisenhower's staff complained about the timing of Johnson's visit, Eisenhower himself nevertheless charmed Johnson and his colleagues by briefing them about conditions in Europe. He also instructed his aides to allow Johnson's delegation to go wherever they desired and to ensure that they had "a very pleasant and wonderful visit."² Johnson benefitted politically from the visit, while Eisenhower dutifully and

² Robert Dallek, *Lone Star Rising: Lyndon Johnson and His Times, 1908-1960* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 269-270.

quietly satisfied any obligation he had to those public servants. Although neither man could have realized it at the time, this encounter foreshadowed a future relationship.

Seven years later Johnson and Eisenhower were reunited in the political realm. The election of 1952 saw Eisenhower win the presidency with the largest margin of victory since the landslides of Franklin D. Roosevelt. His popularity, dating to World War II, made him a political star. The Republicans also regained a two-seat majority in the Senate. One of the Democratic casualties that year was Majority Leader Ernest McFarland of Arizona. McFarland's defeat meant his assistant leader, Lyndon Johnson, who had only been in the Senate for four years, was now the highest ranking man in the Democratic caucus. Despite his inexperience, Johnson began

campaigning among his colleagues to be the new Minority Leader for the 1953 session of Congress. With the support of influential Georgia Senator Richard Russell, Johnson got the job; though, at that time, there was little competition for the leadership of Senate Democrats.³ The last two occupants of the position had been defeated for reelection while trying to defend the increasingly unpopular policies of President Harry S. Truman. However, Johnson sensed a new opportunity with a popular Republican now in the White House: if Democrats could align themselves with Eisenhower wherever possible, they stood to benefit from his massive appeal - an approach seemingly verified by the Democratic triumphs in the 1954 midterm elections,

³ On January 2, 1953, Democrats elected the forty-four year old Johnson to be the youngest party leader in the history of the Senate. *Ibid.*, 422-425.

which made Johnson Senate Majority Leader.⁴ As a result of this mindset, Johnson took pride in

⁴ Robert A. Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson: Master of the Senate* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002), 521. Interestingly, Eisenhower during this time was extending his political influence across the country, even to Lyndon Johnson's own reelection campaign. The Texas Republican Party, led by Jack Porter, Johnson's opponent in 1948, was seeking a candidate capable of using Eisenhower's coattails to overpower the Democratic leader, a strategy Eisenhower applauded and encouraged. See Dallek, *Lone Star Rising*, 439. The President, though, did not take an active role in the campaign, but behind-the-scenes he ordered executive agencies to "step up expenditures to stimulate industrial activity" in hopes that might make a difference by the time of the election. By October, though, polls showed the Republicans were vulnerable, so Eisenhower undertook a ten-thousand mile campaign tour. Along the way, Eisenhower declared that if the Democrats retook control of Congress, they would start "a Cold War of partisan politics." See Dallek, *Lone Star Rising*, 460. Johnson and House Democratic Leader Sam Rayburn took offense, sending the President a telegram calling his remarks an "unjust attack on the many Democrats who have done so much to cooperate with him and the Administration and to defend his program from attacks by members and leaders of his own party." They also declared that, as far as they were concerned, no partisan war would occur if the Democrats retook control of Congress and that they would continue to support an "enlightened foreign policy against the Republican reactionaries . . ." See Lyndon B. Johnson and Samuel Rayburn to Dwight D. Eisenhower, 9 October 1954, White House Central File, Alphabetical Series, Box 1599, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library. Regardless of whatever their motives were, Johnson and Rayburn did have a point. And this telegram was not the only example of Johnson trying to prove his intentions and abilities

supporting aspects of Eisenhower's agenda,
especially foreign policy.⁵ One example was

to the President; during a 1957 breakfast meeting with Eisenhower, Johnson presented him with papers which demonstrated that the current 85th Congressional session had spent far more time in session and passed more legislation compared to the Republican-controlled 83rd Congress. Eisenhower's secretary, Ann Whitman, noted in a memorandum on the matter that "The Senator is sensitive, apparently, in this respect." See Ann C. Whitman, Memorandum of Appointment, 26 August 1957, Ann Whitman File, Ann Whitman Diary Series, Box 9, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library.

⁵ In 1965, Johnson recounted his intentions towards Eisenhower to the newly elected House of Representatives Republican leader, Gerald Ford. Johnson said he told Eisenhower, "Mr. President, when I agree with you, I'll come tell you. I'll disagree with you with dignity and decency, and I won't talk about your dog or your boy. But I'll try to offer an alternative . . ." Later in his conversation with Ford, Johnson claimed to have never had a quarrelsome word with Eisenhower for six years. While Johnson romanticized his relationship with Eisenhower, this attitude reflected Johnson's desire for a partnership. See Michael Beschloss, *Reaching for Glory: Lyndon Johnson's Secret White House Tapes* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001), 165. In his conversations with Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, there is strong evidence of Johnson's desire to cooperate. The two met on occasion and extended great courtesy to each other as they exchanged ideas, prompting Dulles to write the President after one such chat, "I had a very gratifying talk with Lyndon Johnson. He came to see me just prior to leaving for Europe this afternoon. It was not only marked by great personal warmth but a sincere desire to help find a way to get bipartisan backing for our foreign policies." Dulles went on to reiterate Johnson's assurance that if the administration would cooperate

Johnson's quick approval of a measure granting Eisenhower full authority to use the U.S. Armed Forces in 1955 to defend Taiwanese islands around Formosa from Chinese air attacks.⁶ Later, following the 1956 election, foreign policy returned as a forefront issue during the Suez Crisis, as Britain and France launched an assault on the Egyptian military on the Sinai Peninsula and the Suez Canal. On November 9, 1956, Eisenhower arranged to have Congressional leaders briefed about conditions on the Sinai, in hopes this would help get approval for proposals which increased the chief executive's authority to handle the American response to the

and counsel with himself and Democratic Senate Whip Mike Mansfield, he was confident Eisenhower's policies would be supported by most of the Democratic caucus. See John Foster Dulles to Dwight D. Eisenhower, 13 November 1956, Ann Whitman File, Dulles-Herter Series, Box 8, DDEL.

⁶ This 1955 measure would later serve as Johnson's inspiration for the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution in 1964. See Tom Wicker, *Dwight D. Eisenhower* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2002), 79.

crisis. Eisenhower's plan worked perfectly, as Johnson found the briefing "very fruitful and helpful" and promised he would not play politics with foreign policy. By meeting face-to-face with Democrats, Eisenhower assured Johnson and other Senators that he was firmly in control of the situation.⁷ Johnson also supported Eisenhower's "open skies" proposal, calling the plan for the superpowers to be able to fly over each other's nations to observe nuclear armament facilities an "imaginative stroke." Johnson further recommended an "open curtain" policy, which encouraged the free movement of people and ideas between the communist and democratic areas of the world

⁷ Cole C. Kingseed, *Eisenhower and the Suez Crisis of 1956* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995), 137.

without being subjected to suspicion.⁸ Soon after, as Johnson lay in a hospital recovering from his first heart attack, Eisenhower thanked him for this support, writing, “Thank you ever so much. I am greatly pleased by what you had to say. I do hope you are rapidly improving.”⁹ This gracious and respectful tone found in their early correspondence was symbolic of their meaningful efforts to cooperate on critical foreign policy issues in the first years of the Eisenhower Administration.

Johnson’s alignment with the President was necessitated by the latter’s obvious popularity, still strong even a decade after World War II ended. As

⁸ Lyndon B. Johnson, *The Vantage Point: Perspectives of the Presidency 1963-1969* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971), 470.

⁹ Galambos and Van Ee, Dwight D. Eisenhower to Lyndon B. Johnson, *The Presidential Papers of Dwight D. Eisenhower*, <http://www.eisenhowermemorial.org/presidential-papers/first-term/documents/1531.cfm>.

long as Eisenhower was doing well in the polls, Johnson was likely to support him. As Eisenhower's reelection approached in 1956, Johnson's support for the President was remarkably nonpartisan in nature. In fact, Johnson was careful to avoid criticizing the President, because, as Doris Kearns wrote, "Johnson felt that to attack Eisenhower would be 'like telling children that their father was a bad man . . .'"¹⁰ Johnson took specific action to appease the President, including allocating an additional five million dollars for the Overseas Information Program after Eisenhower placed a call to him on the matter in May of 1956.¹¹ With such action, Johnson's standing with Eisenhower grew.

¹⁰ Doris Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), 155.

¹¹ According to South Dakota Senator Karl Mundt, Johnson had intended to support a cut of the OIP budget prior to Eisenhower's request to the contrary. Karl Mundt to Dwight D. Eisenhower, White House Central Files, Alphabetical File, Box 1599, DDEL.

As the campaign of 1956 neared, Eisenhower even believed the Democrats might nominate Johnson to run against him. In his memoirs, Eisenhower observed that Johnson would have “. . . had better vote-getting power” than the actual nominee, Adlai Stevenson.¹² For his part, Johnson viewed the President’s reelection as inevitable. Sid Richardson reported to Eisenhower on November 8th that Johnson had told him that “The President is going to carry Texas . . . and I am going to continue to work with him.”¹³ Eisenhower not only carried Texas, but won in a landslide greater than that of his first campaign. However, the close cooperation between the two politicians had already reached its

¹² Eisenhower, Dwight D. *Waging Peace: The White House Years 1956-1961* (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1965), 11.

¹³ Galambos and Van Ee, Sid Richardson to Dwight D. Eisenhower, *The Presidential Papers of Dwight D. Eisenhower: The Middle Way*, Vol. 17 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 2376.

apex. Johnson's biographer Robert Dallek explained that in Eisenhower's second term, "Johnson was reluctant to abandon the bipartisanship that he believed had served the country and congressional Democrats during Ike's first term. But pressure from liberals, a defense of congressional prerogatives, and genuine differences over Middle East policy pushed him into a conflict with Ike," and the result was Johnson's allegiance to Eisenhower waning over the rest of the decade.¹⁴ For the Democratic leader, this strategy appeared quite wise, but what he had failed to anticipate, and what some scholars have failed to grasp, was how Eisenhower in turn used Johnson to his own political advantage.

Eisenhower's Approach to Johnson and Congress

¹⁴ Dallek, *Lone Star Rising*, 511.

In order to more fully understand this dynamic, historiographical conclusions must be analyzed and reevaluated. Chief among them is the perception of President Eisenhower as “. . . an aging hero who reigned more than he ruled and lacked the energy, motivation, and political know-how to have a significant impact on events.”¹⁵ Originally the view of cynical liberals in the 1950s, it had made its way into early historical analysis of Eisenhower and public perception about the President. Modern scholars, such as Fred Greenstein, have discovered that Eisenhower was a far more devious and clever strategist than his critics had assumed. In fact, he employed a shrewd “hidden-hand” methodology which concealed a great deal of his leadership

¹⁵ Fred Greenstein, *The Hidden-Hand Presidency: Eisenhower as Leader* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1982), 5.

initiatives while enabling him room to maneuver within the political system.¹⁶ Akin to many aspects of his presidency, Eisenhower's interactions with Congress typically invoked a philosophy derived from this hidden-hand style of leadership. It was a multi-faceted approach that, interestingly enough, had a similar concept as that of an extensive study written by Democratic attorney James Rowe for

¹⁶ Ibid., 5-6. Yet, while the "hidden-hand" strategy proved effective for Eisenhower, it also allowed for others to portray him as a weak leader. Lyndon Johnson, on the contrary, exercised his power overtly and commandingly. Known as the "master of the Senate," Johnson's leadership strategies have become part of Senate lore. He knew how to count and gather votes, and was capable of intimidating, threatening, bribing, cajoling, amusing, or flattering in order to wrangle support. His biographer Robert Caro wrote, "He used the powers he found and the powers he created with a raw, elemental brutality." Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson*, xxi. Eisenhower, though, saw through the Senate Democratic leader. Eisenhower's friend William E. Robinson remembered the President, while watching the 1960 Democratic Convention, saying of Johnson, "He is a small man. He hasn't got the depth of mind nor the breadth of vision to carry great responsibility. Any floor leader of a Senate majority party looks good, no matter how incompetent he may be. Johnson is superficial and opportunistic." Greenstein, *The Hidden-Hand Presidency*, 28.

Harry Truman after the Republican Party won both houses of Congress in the 1946 midterm elections.

Rowe's report ended up in Eisenhower's White House files after Truman left office, though there is no evidence that Eisenhower himself ever read it.

That said, many of Rowe's recommendations were also part of Eisenhower's strategy and it serves as a valuable lens for further examining the tactics of President Eisenhower.

Rowe laid out historical precedents for his conclusions concerning the success of Presidential dealings with Congress. He noted that Presidents such as Grover Cleveland and William Howard Taft tended not to vocally berate Congressional opposition, since this kind of behavior often harmed the President and his reputation more than his

targets.¹⁷ Eisenhower avoided such confrontations by limiting his criticism of Congress in public. Rarely did an intense disagreement between Eisenhower and Johnson become news or public knowledge. Eisenhower's kindness and diplomacy shown in many interactions with Johnson certainly signaled a legitimate feeling that the President preferred Johnson as a friend, not an enemy.¹⁸ This

¹⁷ James Rowe, "Cooperation or Conflict: The President's relationships with an opposition Congress", White House Central Files, Permanent File, Box 2, DDEL, 3.

¹⁸ The formal correspondence between the two was almost always kind, if not warm, in nature. This is especially true for the summer of 1955, when both Johnson and then Eisenhower were stricken with heart attacks. After hearing of Eisenhower's health troubles, Johnson wrote to the President expressing a strong desire to continue to cooperate with him. The President's Chief of Staff, Sherman Adams, replied to Johnson, writing that the letter was "... very pleasing to [Eisenhower]. He asks me to say that he echoes your desire that there be fullest cooperation between the leaders of the Congress and the administration on every matter important to the welfare and safety of our country." See Sherman Adams to Lyndon B. Johnson, 12 October 1955, White House Central Files, the President's Personal File, Box 973, DDEL. Wilton Persons, Eisenhower's Congressional liaison aide, latter recalled that their respective heart problems brought Eisenhower and Johnson closer together, "They belonged to

attitude was very much unlike Herbert Hoover, for example, who became so “publicly argumentative” with Congress that it approved little of his agenda. To ease or prevent tension, Rowe viewed personal meetings with opposition leaders as significant gestures toward cooperation. Indeed, scheduling records indicate that Eisenhower occasionally breakfasted with the Senate Democratic leader and regularly invited Johnson and House Speaker Sam Rayburn to private evening meetings at the White House. Rowe also recommended that the President should “act and speak at all times in terms of public welfare and not as partisan.”¹⁹ The Congress would be more likely to support the President whenever he has popular support on his side. According to Rowe,

the same cub, so to speak.” See Wilton B. Persons Oral History, OH #334, DDEL.

¹⁹ Rowe, “Cooperation or Conflict,” 25.

“The history of every administration shows that in the final analysis a President has but one weapon: public opinion.”²⁰ Eisenhower was accustomed to this practice as well, partially because he knew his intentions far better than those of many Congressmen. As Eisenhower once confided to friend Edward “Swede” Hazlett, “In the general case each [member of Congress] thinks of himself as intensely patriotic; but it does not take the average member long to conclude that his first duty to his country is to get himself re-elected.”²¹ Eisenhower accused Johnson and others of such pettiness, but was fortunate that he himself had a degree of popularity which left little doubt to his reelection. Although he was never able to bring

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.

²¹ Dwight D. Eisenhower to Edward E. Hazlett, 22 July 1957, Ann Whitman File, DDE Diary Series, Box 5, DDEL.

Republican majorities back into either house following their loss of power in the 1954 midterms, Eisenhower proved capable of working with Johnson and the Democratic Congress.

Another significant method Eisenhower employed specifically on Johnson was the use of intermediaries. Some were congressional allies, who kept tabs on the Senate Democratic leader. This was one assignment in which Republican leader William Knowland, who did not often hold the confidence of the President, was particularly useful. With his desk on the Senate floor right across the center aisle from Johnson, Knowland was ideally situated to be able to gather some information to pass along to Eisenhower, including a possible rift between Johnson and his mentor,

Sam Rayburn, in 1957.²² Two specific men, though, managed the job best. In the early days of the presidency, the primary go-between was Sid Richardson. The Texas millionaire made his fortune in oil, and he and Eisenhower had been friends for over twenty years. He also was a financial contributor to both the President and Johnson, making him the ideal person to discreetly handle Johnson on Eisenhower's behalf. Eisenhower, with counsel from Treasury Secretary George Humphrey, used Richardson to encourage Johnson to support the administration's policy wherever possible. In one instance Eisenhower had a hand in plans to suggest Richardson threaten support for a primary election challenge to Johnson from Texas Governor Allen Shivers in 1954 unless the

²² Ann C. Whitman Diary, 29 August 1957, Ann Whitman File, Ann Whitman Diary Series, Box 9, DDEL.

Democratic leader got on board with certain Eisenhower policies.²³

After Richardson's death in 1959, Eisenhower's second Treasury Secretary, Robert Anderson, another Texan, stepped in to the role. When reflecting on this experience in a letter to Johnson several months after Eisenhower's death, Anderson recalled that this liaison was established ". . . on the basis of preserving completely the [Democratic] party integrity and the absolute right of dissent, but so that we did not confront either the Administration or the Congressional leadership with surprise suggestions which might not be in our national interest either politically or economically." Anderson also remembered that the information

²³ Shivers and Johnson had one of the greatest rivalries in Texas politics, mainly due to Shiver's bucking of the Democrats in 1952 to support Eisenhower. Greenstein, *The Hidden-Hand Presidency*, 59-60.

discussed by the President or Johnson with him would be kept confidential from the cabinet, though he did reserve the right to report anything Johnson told him to Eisenhower. Lastly, Anderson nostalgically noted the “free exchange” of ideas between them, and how their relationship was much stronger than future presidents with Congressional leaders, including John Kennedy’s relationship with Everett Dirksen, Johnson’s with Dirksen (in the 1960s), or Nixon’s with Congressional Democrats in the early 1970s. Although Anderson may have idealized the Eisenhower-Johnson relationship as he wrote to his fellow Texan so many years after the fact, he was certainly in a position to see the cordiality and respect the two showed for each other.²⁴

²⁴ Robert B. Anderson to Lyndon B. Johnson, 19

The use of intermediaries was a creative tactic on Eisenhower's part, but probably even more effective were his more personal meetings with Johnson, an approach highlighted in the Rowe Report. Even when the Democrats were the minority party in Congress, Eisenhower invited Johnson and Rayburn to the White House to talk policy and politics over drinks and light refreshments. The three were comfortable talking with each other in this setting and were able to bond over the fact that they were all born Texans (though Eisenhower was raised in Kansas).²⁵ Most importantly, these meetings surely allowed

March 1970, Anderson Papers, Box 344, DDEL. Anderson also would periodically write summaries for Eisenhower about Johnson's political stances on certain issues for the President's use, even against other Democrats such as Richard Russell. Robert B. Anderson to Dwight D. Eisenhower, 30 December 1958, Ann Whitman File, Administration Series, Box 2, DDEL.

²⁵ Irwin Unger and Debi Unger, *LBJ: A Life* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1999), 168.

Eisenhower to get a better sense of Johnson's persona and character, and thus allowing him to more easily take the pulse of his so-called "loyal opposition" in Congress.²⁶

Overall, these tactics proved essential for Eisenhower over the six year period in which the President and the powerful Majority Leader worked to guide the legislative process. Johnson was obsessed with public approval and press attention. Eisenhower understood Johnson's motives in this regard, and privately referred to the Democratic

²⁶ Johnson, on the other hand, fell victim to somewhat underestimating Eisenhower. According to assistant George Reedy, Johnson went so far as to think White House Press Secretary James Hagerty was "... responsible for the esteem in which the nation held Eisenhower." See George Reedy, *Lyndon B. Johnson: A Memoir* (New York: Andrews and McMeel, Inc., 1982), 67. Perhaps Johnson even had a sense of his own self-superiority existed, if so it was enhanced by his devoted staff. Foremost among them was Reedy, who said in his memoir on Johnson that the Senate Majority Leader was the most influential leader of the early 1950s, more so than even Eisenhower. *Ibid.*, xiii.

leader as a “phony.”²⁷ Eisenhower also displayed no inclination to trust Johnson, as the Majority Leader clearly wanted Eisenhower’s job and would employ devious political strategies to get it. Yet, no matter the degree to which Eisenhower detested Johnson’s “superficial and opportunistic” qualities, the President was aware of his own popularity and how this could be used as leverage over the Senate leader.²⁸ It was also clear to Eisenhower that he would need the help of Democrats to pass his agenda, which was not conservative enough to suit the Taft wing of the Republican Party. To achieve Democratic support, Eisenhower treated Johnson with great respect, even placing him on five-person

²⁷ Wicker, Dwight D. Eisenhower, 134.

²⁸ Eisenhower quoted by Arthur Krock. W.J. Rorabaugh, *The Real Making of the President: Kennedy, Nixon, and the 1960 Election* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2009), 30.

committee which would be tasked with determining his (Eisenhower's) own fitness to continue in office should his health severely deteriorate or if an ailment, such as a stroke, limited his mental capacities.²⁹

Eisenhower's tactics, right down to his efforts to accommodate Johnson's ego, as well as his incredible patience which the Democratic leader, showed how effective the President was at managing and even manipulating what could have been a bitter adversary into a respectful opponent and a partial ally. And while his tactics were inventive if not brilliant, comparatively few scholars have assessed Eisenhower's subtle role in

²⁹ Eisenhower established this committee after experiencing his first health scares in office, including a heart attack in 1955 and a stroke in 1957. Ann C. Whitman Diary, 3 January 1958, Ann Whitman File, Ann Whitman Diary Series, Box 9, DDEL.

the crucial legislative issues of the day. As a result, the stereotype of Eisenhower as a passive president persists. To better understand Eisenhower and Johnson's relationship and comparative powers, a more complete picture is required. Several significant case studies, ranging throughout the Presidency, serve to enhance Eisenhower's true role in this dynamic. Taken together, they represent each man's strengths and power.

Early Cooperation and the Emergence of Eisenhower's Leadership Abilities

“We are in the minority,” Johnson told the Senate Democratic Conference after assuming the party leadership in early 1953, adding “I have never agreed with the statement that it is ‘the business of the opposition to oppose.’ I do not believe the American people have sent us here merely to

obstruct.”³⁰ Knowing full well that it was not in his own best interest to make an enemy in Eisenhower, Johnson supported the President where practicable. Johnson moved quickly to extend the olive branch to Eisenhower by accepting the nominees for the Presidential cabinet, declaring “I am anxious to cooperate with the President in carrying out his mandate. Unless there is a violation of some important principle, I believe the President should have around him the men he has selected.”³¹ One of the most contentious nominees needed Johnson’s help the most. Eisenhower had selected Charles “Chip” Bohlen to be Ambassador to the Soviet Union in April 1953. Bohlen was a career diplomat

³⁰ Lyndon B. Johnson to the Senate Democratic Conference, 2 January 1953, White House Central Files, Alphabetical File, Box 1599, DDEL.

³¹ Lyndon B. Johnson in Senate speech urging the confirmation of Charles E. Wilson to be Secretary of Defense, 26 January 1953, White House Central Files, Alphabetical File, Box 1599, DDEL.

with experience in dealing with the Soviets, but anticommunist maverick Senator Joseph R. McCarthy vehemently opposed Bohlen's confirmation because the latter had taken part in the Yalta Conference, which had yielded sections of Germany and the city of Berlin to Soviet influence. In addition, McCarthy implied that Bohlen was as a homosexual and demanded access to Bohlen's FBI file.³² Eisenhower denied McCarthy access to the file but allowed it to be reviewed by Senate Majority Leader Robert Taft, who found in it nothing worthy of disqualifying Bohlen. On the Senate floor Johnson defended Bohlen, and accused McCarthy and his supporters of questioning the integrity of President Eisenhower. With support from Johnson and the Democrats, Bohlen was

³² Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson*, 526.

confirmed in a 74 to 13 vote. As a result, Johnson knew he and the Democrats benefitted from this issue while the Republicans seemed divided. Not for the last time, Johnson got good press and Eisenhower got what he wanted out of the Senate.³³

A Common Enemy: Right-Wing Senators

At the beginning of the 1953 session of Congress, conservative Ohio Senator John Bricker offered an amendment limiting the President's power to conduct foreign affairs by granting authority to Congress to approve international compacts and treaties and by restricting the President from making any treaty which violated the Constitution. Eisenhower did not feel that such an amendment was truly necessary, but saw nothing wrong with its premise, which was “. . . a reaffirmation of the supremacy of our Constitution

³³ Dallek, *Lone Star Rising*, 434.

and the right of Congress, under the Constitution, to annul by subsequent act of its own any provision of any treaty.”³⁴ However, the President made clear he thought the language of the Bricker Amendment tied the president’s hands and “. . . would be notice to our friends as well as our enemies abroad that our country intends to withdraw from its leadership in world affairs . . . It would impair our hopes and plans for peace and for the successful achievement of the important international matters now under discussion.”³⁵ Bricker’s proposal appeared to be subtly criticizing the United Nations by declaring that it would not permit international organizations from controlling or adjudicating the rights of

³⁴ Dwight D. Eisenhower to John J. McCloy, 13 January 1954, Ann Whitman File, DDE Diary Series, Box 5, DDEL.

³⁵ Dwight D. Eisenhower to William F. Knowland, 25 January 1954, Ann Whitman File, DDE Diary Series, Box 5, DDEL.

American citizens.³⁶ Eisenhower and Attorney General Herbert Brownell tried to convince Bricker to delay the Senate's consideration of his proposal, but Bricker introduced it anyway, and signed on sixty-three other senators as cosponsors. In turn, Eisenhower worked with Republican leader William Knowland to introduce what was called the Knowland Substitute for the Bricker Amendment. Essentially, though, this was Eisenhower's counterproposal, simply reaffirming the Senate's ability to ratify all foreign treaties.³⁷

However, Lyndon Johnson soon managed to develop a more popular alternative to Bricker.

³⁶ The amendment also threatened to limit the scope and use of executive agreements, a gesture meant specifically to limit Presidential authority in foreign affairs while increasing legislative influence. Duane Tananbaum, *The Bricker Amendment Controversy: A Test of Eisenhower's Political Leadership* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 223.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 222.

Johnson considered the Bricker Amendment an insult to former Democratic Presidents Roosevelt and Truman, not to mention an impediment if he himself ever became president. Yet, he was also under a great deal of pressure because most southern Democrats supported Bricker, as did Sid Richardson.³⁸ Johnson, in this case, showed his political cunning by meeting with Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, and asking Dulles to convince Eisenhower to publicly denounce Bricker's Amendment.³⁹ Most importantly, though, Johnson

³⁸ Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson*, 528-529.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 530. Johnson's encouragement was hardly needed. Once Bricker began publicly attacking the administration after the Knowland Substitute was proposed, "Eisenhower resolved to wage an all-out campaign to defeat the amendment . . . [and] vowed that he would 'fight up and down [the] country' and 'call names;' he would denounce the amendment as a 'stupid, blind violation of the Constitution by stupid, blind isolationists.'" The President even had his aides draft a speech against Bricker which he could have delivered on television, but later thought better of it in case a last-minute compromise could be worked out. See Tananbaum, *The Bricker Amendment Controversy*, 138.

convinced Democratic Senator Walter George to propose a more moderate alternative to Bricker's measure. George's motion dictated that international treaties could not become law if they violated the Constitution, and all United Nations Charters and Executive agreements (but not formal treaties) required approval by Congress. Johnson, though, wanted the George Resolution to fail as well, but by a closer and more respectable margin. Johnson hoped the George Resolution would draw some conservatives from Bricker and, if George failed, he hoped the issue might be laid to rest.⁴⁰ Eisenhower himself might have accepted the George Amendment, but again felt such an amendment was not necessary. He also feared its passage might make it appear that the Democrats

⁴⁰ Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson*, 533.

had once again saved his administration. Yet, as historian Daune Tananbaum noted, this was hardly the reality; in fact Eisenhower “. . . played an active role in the deliberations within the administration and the efforts to work out a compromise with Senator George and the Democrats and the Republican leaders.”⁴¹ On February 26, 1954, both amendments were up for a vote. Bricker’s only garnered forty-two votes to fifty in opposition. George received sixty votes, but thirty-one opposed him, which kept the amendment from meeting the required support from the two-thirds of the Senate.⁴² Johnson had apparently executed the voting exactly

⁴¹ Tananbaum, *The Bricker Amendment Controversy*, 154. Eisenhower’s staff also called each Republican senator shortly before the floor vote on Bricker’s Amendment to remind them of the President’s opposition to it. *Ibid.*, 174.

⁴² The thirty-first vote in opposition was cast by a Democrat loyal to Johnson, who was rushed to the floor in dramatic fashion at the last moment to decide the fate of the George Resolution. Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson*, 536-537.

to his desire and received the credit he sought from the press. What the press missed was how Republican dissent from the George Resolution effectively showcased Eisenhower's influence, as thirteen moderate "Eisenhower Republicans" voted against George, because, as Tananbaum noted, "of the administration's objections."⁴³ Scholars have looked to the Bricker debate to prove Johnson's prowess as Majority Leader, and, for that matter, his ability to calculate votes and hold Democratic support exactly where he wanted it should give him notable credit for diffusing Bricker. As the "master of the Senate," Johnson deserves no less. Still, Eisenhower worked his own influence behind the scenes (and in public, wherever necessary), and

⁴³ Tananbaum, *The Bricker Amendment Controversy*, 183.

played a critical role in working towards the goal, which, on this occasion, he and Johnson shared.

The debate over the Bricker Amendment was only a momentary interruption in the saga of Senator Joseph R. McCarthy. As McCarthy's committee began hearings with the U.S. Army in early 1954, Johnson kept silent. He feared a Democratic assault against McCarthy would unite the Republicans and make the notorious Wisconsin senator a partisan issue. As Johnson put it, ". . . why put on the brave act, beat one's chest, and net twenty-five votes against Joe, and in turn get smeared and unite the Republicans behind Joe."⁴⁴ Although Democrats and Johnson approved McCarthy's censure, it was Eisenhower's efforts to subtly undermine McCarthy that had greater

⁴⁴ Dallek, *Lone Star Rising*, 442.

influence in slowly, but surely, securing
McCarthy's downfall.⁴⁵ United Nations
Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge later wrote that in
a meeting on January 21, 1954, Eisenhower laid out
a clever strategy based on televising the upcoming
Army-McCarthy hearings. Figuring the hearings
would not go well for McCarthy, Eisenhower then
arranged for Vermont Senator Ralph Flanders to
call for McCarthy's censure. This move ultimately
triggered an investigative committee which
recommended censure to the entire Senate body.
Eisenhower's plan moved cautiously, but its result
indicated that Eisenhower was just as crafty as the
wily Johnson.⁴⁶ Johnson, though, worked
effectively as well, wherever he thought he could

⁴⁵ Greenstein, *The Hidden-Hand Presidency*, 215-
216.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 227.

help to undermine McCarthy. Especially when, prior to his censure, McCarthy introduced a resolution limiting presidential ability to negotiate within the “Big Four” powers (Great Britain, France, the Soviet Union, and the United States). Johnson countered McCarthy’s attention-getting ploy by quickly bringing it to a vote on the floor, where it was struck down. Eisenhower privately celebrated the result, saying “McCarthyism” had been reduced to “McCarthywasm.”⁴⁷ Thus, while Johnson and Eisenhower did not necessarily work jointly, they again had a common goal in seeing McCarthy’s influence ended, and aided each other by both working towards it.

Playing Politics: Cracks in the Partnership

During the second term, their dynamic shifted significantly. The two shared fewer goals as

⁴⁷ Dallek, *Lone Star Rising*, 480.

Johnson was no longer satisfied helping the President's agenda, but instead wanted to advance one of his own - an agenda which benefitted him the most. Johnson's change of heart, however, allowed Eisenhower to prove his true leadership ability in Congress, through issues like civil rights in 1957. Based on proposals made by Attorney General Herbert Brownell in 1956, proposals which never made it to the Senate floor, the Civil Rights Act of 1957 would be the most critical piece of legislation debated by the Congress that year. This came about, according to Brownell, thanks to Illinois Senator Paul Douglas, who managed to "extract" a promise from Johnson which assured civil rights would be considered early in the 1957 session.⁴⁸ Then Vice President Richard Nixon,

⁴⁸ Herbert Brownell with John P. Burke, *Advising*

Republican Leader William Knowland, and Brownell arranged for Knowland to bring the act to the Senate floor directly, where Nixon, as the presiding officer, authorized the bill for consideration by the full Senate, thus allowing the act to avoid first being sent to the Senate Judiciary Committee, where Chairman James Eastland, a vehement supporter of segregation, would certainly have killed it. By employing an obscure Senate rule, these members of Eisenhower's team managed to advance the measure. Kept uninformed of this maneuver, Johnson and other southerners in the Senate denounced the scheme as unfair.⁴⁹ The provisions of Brownell and Eisenhower's Act established a Civil Rights Commission, created a

Ike: The Memoirs of Attorney General Herbert Brownell (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1993), 220.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 220-221.

Civil Rights Division at the Justice Department, authorized the Attorney General to bring charges against voting rights discrimination, and guaranteed no jury trials for civil rights violators (as all-white juries typically acquitted those charged with civil rights violations). Johnson allowed debate to begin on the bill, but remained neutral on it.⁵⁰ Johnson wanted a mild civil rights act that would pacify his caucus of Democrats which was becoming increasingly fractured between liberals and conservatives.⁵¹ Johnson argued that the bill would not be passed if the clause giving the Attorney General authority in regards to voting rights remained in the legislation. This codicil infuriated

⁵⁰ David A. Nichols, *A Matter of Justice: Eisenhower and the Beginning of the Civil Rights Revolution* (New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2007), 145.

⁵¹ Johnson's longtime mentor, Richard Russell, lambasted civil rights during the floor debate, weakening the resolve of some moderate Republicans for the bill. *Ibid.*, 156.

the President, who already saw the bill as a compromise solution. Nevertheless, Eisenhower agreed to withdraw his support for that clause.⁵² As Brownell insisted, Eisenhower had to be practical.⁵³ However, historian David Nichols questioned whether Eisenhower knew some of these provisions would fail and used them as bargaining tools against Johnson and the southern Democrats.⁵⁴

Johnson, however, weakened the Civil Rights Act further by proposing an amendment which would have guaranteed jury trials to those accused of committing civil rights violations. Johnson took this action to ease the fears of southerners about the Act. Angered, Eisenhower

⁵² Ibid., 159.

⁵³ Talking with Eisenhower in retirement, Brownell said the former president reiterated that the act simply would have been lost if that section of the legislation had not been conceded. Brownell, *Advising Ike*, 225.

⁵⁴ Nichols, *A Matter of Justice*, 239.

considered scrapping the entire Act.⁵⁵ Instead, Eisenhower and newly sworn-in Attorney General William Rogers used their influence on Capitol Hill to reach a compromise with Johnson and the Democrats on the Act's final language, which dictated that the specifics of a case would determine whether defendants would have a jury trial.⁵⁶ The compromise provided that as long as a defendant faced no more than a three-hundred dollar fine and a jail sentence of forty-five days (reduced from ninety), no jury would be gathered.⁵⁷ Despite a twenty-four hour filibuster by Senator Strom Thurmond, the first Civil Rights Act was passed by Congress and signed by the President in late

⁵⁵ Ibid., 162.

⁵⁶ Brownell, *Advising Ike*, 222.

⁵⁷ This compromise swayed five senators, including North Carolina's Sam Ervin into voting for the act. Eisenhower, *Waging Peace*, 161.

August. Johnson took credit for the bill, while all of the efforts of Eisenhower and his subordinates were less obvious by comparison.⁵⁸ Johnson had walked a tight-rope between a crusader for civil rights who would soon be seeking the presidency and a pragmatic senator trying not to lose the support of his southern delegation. Regardless of who received credit for the bill, clearly Johnson was not the ally he used to be for Eisenhower.

The remainder of 1957 only worsened their relationship. Back in May, Johnson and the Senate had cut funding for the United States Information Agency (USIA), a critical aspect of the President's propaganda efforts. Eisenhower wrote Johnson, "I am very disappointed that in this instance you found it desirable to reduce rather than to increase the

⁵⁸ Nichols, *A Matter of Justice*, 168.

pressure of our effort [with the USIA] . . . it is still difficult for me to understand why this vital weapon in our arsenal would be blunted at this critical juncture in world affairs.”⁵⁹ Johnson also opposed Eisenhower’s decision to send the 101st Airborne Division to Little Rock High School for the enforcement of school desegregation. Johnson remarked, “There should be no troops from either side patrolling our school campuses.”⁶⁰ Later, as the 1957 session drew to a close, Congress appropriated only \$2.7 billion of the \$3.8 billion in funding Eisenhower had requested for mutual security programs. Looking back, Eisenhower sourly concluded, “The 1957 session marked the low point in effective cooperation between the administration

⁵⁹ Galambos and Van Ee, Dwight D. Eisenhower to Lyndon B. Johnson, *The Presidential Papers of Dwight D. Eisenhower*, Vol, 18, 174.

⁶⁰ Eisenhower, *Waging Peace*, 171.

and the Congress.”⁶¹ The situation looked no better in 1958.

Space Race Initiatives

As much as the Senate suited him, Johnson’s life’s desire was to be president, and Eisenhower’s closed-door methods sometimes allowed an uncooperative Johnson to act the part. A notable example followed the Soviet Union’s October 1, 1957 launch of Sputnik, the first satellite to orbit the earth. As described by Johnson’s aide George Reedy, Sputnik stunned the American public and fueled fears that the United States was now falling behind in the technological battle of the Cold War. Eisenhower, according to Reedy, dismissed Sputnik as an expensive “toy.”⁶² Eisenhower did tell the press, “As far as the satellite is concerned, that does

⁶¹ Ibid., 146-147.

⁶² George E. Reedy, *The Twilight of the Presidency: From Johnson to Reagan* (New York: NAL Books, 1987), 64.

not raise my apprehensions [about the Soviet Union], not one iota. I can see nothing at this moment, at this stage of development, that is significant . . . as far as security is concerned.”⁶³

However, Eisenhower’s words were surely spoken with a desire to calm the fears of the public, and not out of ignorance, as Reedy implied. Nevertheless, using his seat of the Senate Armed Services Subcommittee on Preparedness as his platform, Johnson brought in scientists to testify about the importance of understanding and traveling in outer space. Johnson then introduced the National Aeronautic and Space Act before the Senate during the 1958 session. This piece of legislation established the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), a national civilian space

⁶³ David Halberstam, *The Fifties* (New York: The Random House Publishing Group, 1993), 625.

agency. To cap off his efforts, Johnson delivered a nationally televised speech about the need for exploration in space, in a performance which some called his first “State of the Union” address.

Overall, Reedy wrote, “The picture was that of a president ignoring what many people regarded as the greatest crisis in centuries while the Senate Democratic leader was working night and day to mobilize the nation to meet the challenge.” This situation further enhanced the argument that the real power in Washington lay with Lyndon Johnson, as some Americans began to ask if this was the man who was really running the country.⁶⁴ However,

Reedy conveniently excluded from his narrative an

⁶⁴ Reedy, *The Twilight of the Presidency*, 63-67. An article in *LIFE* Magazine trumpeted such a perspective, writing that, “‘Lyndon Johnson has the ball’ . . . as the 85th Congress convened for its second session [in January 1958], Eisenhower’s political power had waned.” See the uncredited article, “Watchful, Challenging Moves from a Powerful Democrat,” *LIFE* Magazine, 20 September 1958, 19.

executive message from Eisenhower to Congress a full two months before the Space Act passed. It was this message which formally proposed the creation of NASA.⁶⁵ In fact, any hesitation from the White House towards the Space Act was not derived from opposition to NASA itself, but rather due to objections concerning the creation of a seven-member policy board for the federal space agency. Eisenhower and his advisors felt the board was in conflict “with the concept of a single head [of NASA] directly responsible to the President,” and was likely to divide responsibilities, and make it “difficult to hold anyone accountable for results.”⁶⁶

Clearly Eisenhower was not unconcerned with

⁶⁵ Roger E. Bilstein and William R. Lucas, eds., *Stages to Saturn: A Technological History of the Apollo/Saturn Launch Vehicles* (Washington, D.C: The NASA History Office, 1996), 32-33.

⁶⁶ Quotations from Staff Memo, “Main Problems in the Senate Bill Establishing a Federal Space Agency, July 1958, Ann Whitman File, DDE Diary Series, Box 35, DDEL.

satellites and space exploration and even had his own recommendations on the matter.⁶⁷ To resolve the issue, Eisenhower arranged a private meeting with Johnson and convinced the Majority Leader to replace the policy board with an advisory group, which gave greater authority over NASA to the President.⁶⁸ With these facts in mind, and though Johnson was the crucial force in establishing the space agency, Reedy's assessment of Eisenhower as

⁶⁷ Despite the claims of his critics, Eisenhower appeared to have a knack for understanding the issues involved in the space race. Shortly after Sputniks' launch, Eisenhower called officials from the National Science Foundation and the National Academy of Science to the White House and discussed the satellite with them. On another occasion, Secretary Ann Whitman reported encountering "The President in [The Oval] office much too early - 7:37 - and immediately started dictating about outer space and formulae for mass and such . . ." See Ann C. Whitman Diary, 8-9 October 1957, Ann Whitman File, Ann Whitman Diary Series, Box 9, DDEL.

⁶⁸ Eisenhower reported to Persons that Johnson "accepted this concept and agreed to work for its inclusion in the bill." See Wilton B. Persons, "Memorandum for the Record," 7 July 1958, Ann Whitman File, DDE Diary Series, Box 35, DDEL.

an unconcerned and out-of-touch president, an impression some historians embraced, is proven inaccurate.

A Most Shameful Day and the End of Cooperation

Eisenhower, however, was not destined to always emerge victorious when he and Johnson were not aligned. By 1959, Johnson's and Eisenhower's interactions had become much more limited. On June 25 Eisenhower had sent Johnson a strongly worded letter urging him, in the name of protecting the nation's classified information, to withhold a resolution permitting Congress to investigate national security agencies up to their highest levels of authority. What is most striking about the letter, though, is that Eisenhower no longer addresses it "Dear Lyndon" (as was customary with earlier correspondence), but a more

formal “Dear Senator Johnson,” suggesting that their partnership was now more distant.⁶⁹ George Reedy, for one, noticed Eisenhower was applying the veto power much more frequently.⁷⁰ Conditions reached a boiling point when Eisenhower nominated former Atomic Energy Commission member Lewis Strauss to be Secretary of Commerce. Strauss, though, had already clashed with Congressional Democrats while serving on the commission.⁷¹ Although Johnson was publicly undecided about Strauss until the day of the

⁶⁹ Galambos and Van Ee, Dwight D. Eisenhower and Lyndon B. Johnson, *The Presidential Papers of Dwight D. Eisenhower*, Vol. 20, 1538-1539.

⁷⁰ Reedy, *The Twilight of the Presidency*, 68.

⁷¹ Strauss, who had been a recess appointment from 1958, faced contentious committee hearings before the floor vote. The Senate’s hesitancy to advance the nomination led Eisenhower to write Strauss in April, “I am concerned lest the delay in your confirmation bother you unduly. And I most certainly am dismayed that some of our so-called “statesmen” could behave in such a childish fashion”. Dwight D. Eisenhower to Lewis Strauss, 11 April 1959, Ann Whitman File, Administration Series, Box 35, DDEL.

confirmation vote in June, he had worked covertly to gain the support of Republicans William Langer and Margaret Chase Smith to oppose Strauss.⁷²

Always the master of surprises, Johnson brought the confirmation to a vote rather unexpectedly on June 18th, when three Republican Senators were out of town and one could not return in time (Eisenhower dispatched two Air Force planes to pick-up the other two).⁷³ Johnson's scheme had made all the difference as Strauss was voted down by a 49-46 margin. No better example illustrates Johnson's greatest advantage over Eisenhower: the power he

⁷² Republicans had not anticipated Chase Smith's vote to be "no," but she was frustrated with the White House over pork barrel spending and owed Johnson numerous favors. When she announced her decision, Arizona Senator Barry Goldwater was said to have pounded his desk and shouted "Goddam." See Dallek, *Lone Star Rising*, 558.

⁷³ Strauss recounted this episode in his autobiography, in which he also praised the fourteen Democrats who crossed party lines to vote for his confirmation. See Lewis L. Strauss, *Men and Decisions* (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1962), 399.

held over the Senate. Regardless of how the President tried to influence or sway him, Johnson had his own methods of persuading or controlling his fellow senators. In the end, it was fairly often the case that Johnson made the final call on issues like the Strauss nomination. Eisenhower, on the other hand, was simply enraged by the final vote, declaring “this is the most shameful day in Senate history [since the attempt to impeach Andrew Johnson in the 1868].”⁷⁴ Privately, he consoled Strauss by writing him, “I believe that all those members of the Senate who voted against your confirmation will eventually come to reflect with deep regret upon the day they decided to refuse confirmation to one whose reputation for courage, integrity, and good judgment makes him one of our

⁷⁴ Dallek, *Long Star Rising*, 558-559.

distinguished Americans.”⁷⁵ Johnson was deeply offended by Eisenhower’s criticism, and barely spoke with the President until he received a call from Eisenhower “apologizing for any misunderstanding.”⁷⁶ Still, the damage was done and the Strauss nomination appeared to join the Bohlen nomination in 1953 as bookends for the Eisenhower-Johnson dynamic, as essentially one opened and the other closed the relationship. As Johnson planned to seek his party’s nomination in 1960, any remaining camaraderie between the two faded. Johnson, as the next presidential election neared, distanced himself from Eisenhower, and the President was growing exhausted with Johnson’s political games.

⁷⁵ Dwight D. Eisenhower to Lewis L. Struass, 27 June 1959, Ann Whitman File, Administration Series, Box 35, DDEL.

⁷⁶ Dallek, *Lone Star Rising*, 560.

In March of 1960 the two managed to cooperate for one last significant compromise, a second Civil Rights Act. Eisenhower's version of the act would have been an indirect endorsement of the 1954 Supreme Court decision *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*.⁷⁷ Johnson, though, garnered enough support to pull education grants from the act. However, Eisenhower refused to concede a clause which allowed federal authorities to inspect voter registration lists and assess penalties if cases of clear discrimination arose. After eighteen southern senators filibustered for one-hundred and twenty-five hours, the longest in Senate history, Johnson broke the filibuster and the Senate passed the Civil Rights Act. Once more, Johnson received much of the publicity and credit

⁷⁷ Nichols, *A Matter of Justice*, 240.

while Eisenhower was the silent force behind the legislation.⁷⁸ Following the final vote, Republican Congressional Leaders complained to Eisenhower during one of their many meetings with the President that they were upset by Johnson's coverage in the media. Exasperated as well, Eisenhower admitted, "I don't know what to do - but I get annoyed about [the credit going to Johnson] . . . Except for this political game, I wouldn't care who gets credit for something that's good to have."⁷⁹ Few statements better summarize this position, which Eisenhower held consistently throughout his tenure. Months later the approach of the 1960 election brought these ill feelings between

⁷⁸ Ibid., 254-256.

⁷⁹ Eisenhower quoted by L. Arthur Minnich in a Republican Legislative Leaders Meeting, 26 April 1960, White House Office, Office of the Staff Secretary, Legislative Meetings Series, Box 6, DDEL.

the two to a fever-pitch. At one of his stag dinners in late July, Eisenhower was asked by members of the press to name several Democrats whom he respected and who might be nominated to succeed him as president. Eisenhower listed Senators John Stennis of Mississippi, Spessard Holland of Florida, and Frank Lausche of Ohio. Reporters were quick to note the absence of Johnson from the President's "recommendations," though based their increased hostilities during Eisenhower's second term, this should not have been surprising. The President even refused the suggestion of his aide Bryce Harlow to mention Johnson's name after the fact. Ann Whitman noted, "The President brushed the [suggestion] off, saying that Johnson had made some comments much worse about him . . ." The result was an awkward meeting between

Eisenhower, Johnson, Rayburn, and Harlow on August 3rd. Meant to be another simple private chat to discuss Congressional matters, the gathering was marked by Johnson giving the President the silent treatment. In the aftermath of these events, Robert Anderson went to meet with Johnson while Eisenhower's own Congressional liaison fractured as Harlow accused Wilton Persons and Press Secretary James Hagerty of "poisoning the President's mind" against Johnson and firmly declared that Johnson would make the best president out of any Democrat."⁸⁰

Ultimately, the point was moot as Johnson had been nominated by the Democrats for the Vice Presidency several weeks earlier, but was significant in that these events acknowledged that

⁸⁰ Ann C. Whitman Diary, 3 August 1960, Ann Whitman File, Ann Whitman Diary Series, Box 11, DDEL.

the relationship between the President and the Senate Majority Leader had ended. Congress was soon in recess for the election season, which saw Eisenhower make a multi-state campaign tour on behalf of Nixon's Presidential campaign. Once more, Eisenhower and Johnson were on completely opposed sides, this time in one of the most contentious presidential elections of the twentieth century. No other reason so effectively demonstrated why their partnership could not endure, for they ultimately had party allegiances that, at their core, made them political adversaries.

The Common Experience of the Presidency

Following Senator John Kennedy's triumph over Nixon in the election, Eisenhower sent telegrams to the candidates on both parties' national tickets. The shortest, just a one sentence message of

congratulations, was sent to Vice President-elect Johnson.⁸¹ Whatever remained of their relationship seemingly mattered little, as both Johnson and Eisenhower would soon face new positions, especially as the latter would shortly be leaving public service for retirement.

Neither Eisenhower nor Johnson received all of what they wanted out of their relationship. Eisenhower did not get all of his administration's agenda passed, and Johnson was obviously not elected president in 1960. Yet, a firm portion of the Eisenhower Administration's agenda was enacted and Johnson would become president in time.

⁸¹ Johnson responded with a telegram of a warmer tone, "I appreciate deeply your warm message of congratulations. I just want you to know that I am confident you will continue your career in the same spirit of service to your country which you have always exhibited in the past." Lyndon B. Johnson to Dwight D. Eisenhower, 10 November 1960, Ann Whitman File, Administration Series, Box 22, DDEL.

Ultimately, Johnson was far easier for Eisenhower to work with than many Democrats and even certain Republicans such as Bricker, McCarthy, and Knowland. Additionally, Eisenhower's sometimes covert leadership allowed Johnson to get the press and praise he craved. Together, they managed to share power in a political chess game for Eisenhower's entire tenure (six years of which found the Senate controlled by Johnson and the Democrats) with only minimal public spats. Their relationship, interestingly, would greatly improve in the 1960s as Eisenhower became a valuable supporter of President Johnson as armed conflict in the country of Vietnam intensified with the dramatic escalation of U.S. forces. Their partnership during the 1950s, even at its best moments, had never been close. It was, some argued, the common

experience of the being President which aided their reconciliation.

History still judges their respective legacies. Their philosophies were different and their methods were nearly polar opposites, but together they helped the government function in meaningful ways throughout the 1950s. This story is also a small part of a larger narrative about Eisenhower and his leadership. For someone who entered the presidency with no legislative experience, Eisenhower was quick to grasp the challenges and opportunities it presented him as president, including the savvy Democratic leader whom Eisenhower had to flatter, appease, pressure, and take-to-task in order to achieve the amount of success with Congress he wanted. The fact that Eisenhower learned to deal with Johnson, regardless

of whether the Majority Leader was being helpful, stubborn, or manipulative, said something about the President's ability to grasp the inner-workings of partisan politics. Ultimately, Johnson was a fairly open book to Eisenhower; he knew what the Texan wanted and how devious he was in his efforts at political domination and self-promotion. One must imagine the disadvantage lay with Senator Johnson, who appeared unable to fully comprehend the motives of the private, calculated, and cautious Eisenhower, which was a tribute to the President's methodology for governing: a popular confidence with a quiet but powerful presence of authority.