CHAPTER 5

Feeling Political Through Pictures: Portrayals of US Presidents, 1796–2020

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Anywhere in the world with a mobile data connection, from 20 January 2017: if one had a smartphone, one could hear George Washington admonish Donald Trump. If one scanned Washington's portrait on the one-dollar bill with the augmented reality app #GeorgeTalks, the picture delivered a one-minute speech, allegedly based on original quotations (Fig. 5.1). 'My dear Americans, dear World', it spoke, 'politics as I knew it has changed. Subjective perspectives outweigh pure reason. Eloquence is limited to 140 characters.' Equipped with a calm, deep voice and serene facial features, the portrait elaborated: 'I'm truly worried about the state of our democracy. … In last year's campaign, I witnessed the agitation of the community with ill-founded jealousy and false alarm—or should I say, fake news?'[1]

One of many jocular Trump-related apps to flood the digital market after the election, #GeorgeTalks emphasized the difference between the emotional styles of Washington and the incumbent. Trump's exuberant, often erratic, public performance and his impulsive reactions to political concerns formed the starkest contrast to the image of Washington passed down through visual and verbal sources as a disinterested leader with a disciplined personality.

[1] Avantgarde Gesellschaft für Kommunikation mbH, 'George Washington'.

U. Frevert et al., *Feeling Political*, Palgrave Studies in the History of Emotions, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-89858-8_5

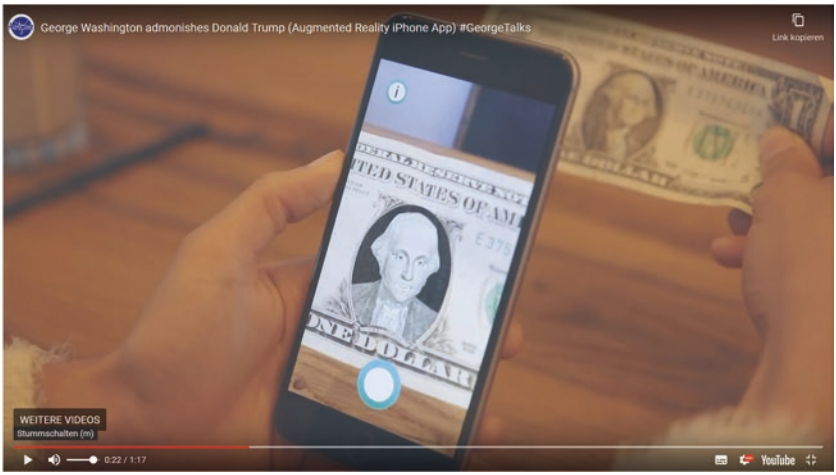


Fig. 5.1 App #GeorgeTalks. Still from Avantgarde Gesellschaft für Kommunikation mbH, 'George Washington Admonishes Donald Trump (Augmented Reality iPhone App) #GeorgeTalks', 19 January 2017, YouTube video, 0:22

Yet, the Washington of #GeorgeTalks also exemplifies a generic image of leadership and its emotional display that has been crafted over centuries. The formula for portraits of modern rulers, sovereigns, and politicians can be traced back to antique sculptures and busts of emperors, senators, and orators, which also informed depictions of military leaders, absolutist monarchs, and, with the emergence of republican and democratic systems, of statesmen more generally. Great commanders tended to be steady and composed, their collected manner and calm facial features reflecting a reasoned state of mind and an impartial approach to matters of importance. Trump, as media coverage of his tenure was quick to emphasize, seemed to be none of these things. 'Will you shut up, man? This is so unpresidential', Joe Biden snapped during the first 2020 presidential debate when Trump continuously interrupted him.[2]

What does 'presidential' mean, other than that which is related to the president? Do rules exist? And if so, who set them up and how are they enforced? Notwithstanding the fact that 'shut up' might itself be considered not quite appropriate in public political discourse, Biden's interjection referenced long-held (and gendered) ideas about what it means

[2] Martin and Burns, 'Cross Talk'. See also Leith, 'Trump's Rhetoric'.

to be 'statesman-like': how do you behave when you are the president and how does this influence your relationship with the wider public, including not only US citizens but also non-citizens and the international community?

This style (related to—but not to be confused with—leadership styles[3]) is not formally standardized, but subject to a variety of implicit norms for displaying and addressing emotions. Images are crucial in providing the emotional templates for it.[4] They link particular emotional expressions to leadership qualities and make presidents both relatable and admirable in the eyes of the populace as the first among equals. Whether official or unofficial, in paintings or on the internet, the iconographic display of emotions via facial expressions or gestures in presidential portrayals furnishes leaders with formulas for how to present themselves and gives the public an idea of what to expect from them.

However, portrayals not only depict emotions; they also direct them. As devices of political communication, they appeal to the emotions of potential voters and, after elections, the population more generally, ideally becoming catalysts for public support. The statement by John Quincy Adams that 'Democracy … is swallowed up in the present …. [I]t bears the head of no man upon a coin; its very essence is iconoclastic' is famous, but its core assumption has proven to be unworkable.[5] Democracies—and this is true not only for modern 'media-democracies'—rely heavily on the visualization of power.[6] Incidentally, Quincy, in office between 1825 and 1829, was the first US president of whom a photograph exists.

Portraits of US presidents, or any modern ruler for that matter, no longer act as real, present, or even legally accountable substitutes the way busts of Roman emperors or medieval effigies did, but they entertain a metonymic relation to their sitter that is close enough that viewers can respond to portraits with the original in mind. The recent Black Lives Matter protests, which included the toppling of statues of colonialization's profiteers, indicate that even today the representative function of portraits can go beyond reference and may verge on substitution. But while it seems intuitively right to assume that visual imagery has an impact on the emotions of individual citizens, it is challenging to delineate this influence.[7]

[3] Dobbins et al., 'Presidential Style'; Greenstein, *Presidential Difference*.

[4] On ruler portraits, see Jeandrée, 'Perfect Model'.

[5] Quincy Adams, *Memoirs*, 433.

[6] Alemann and Marschall, *Mediendemokratie*; Erben and Tauber, *Politikstile*; Münkler, 'Visibilität der Macht'; Münkler and Hacke, *Strategien der Visualisierung*.

[7] Boehm, 'Haushalt der Gefühle', 63.

Political science research on voter decision-making indicates that there is a correlation between 'person perception', leadership traits, and political choice. Voters affectively respond to candidates and their display of competence ('managerial, technical skills' and 'heroic, mythic leadership'), integrity (moral standards), behavioural stability (prudent vs reckless), and empathy (being 'compassionate and understanding' or 'out of touch and unfair').[8] Even in contemporary democracies, 'person perception', in which emotional style plays a major role, is largely negotiated through images. Portrayals in all media communicate in two directions: they devise emotional templates for leaders to model their behaviour on, and through this style they address the population. This communication is not unidirectional because the response to a particular template influences the configuration of the emotional style. Through responses, emotional and otherwise, portrayals become arbiters of political participation: they forge emotional connections not only to presidents, but to the state or nation as a whole.

Although portraits, especially election campaign pictures, are instrumental in that they aim at winning over voters, they are also symbolic of, for instance, state power, group membership, or the public's belief in the legitimacy of a particular political model.[9] It is this symbolic aspect of pictures that is of interest to historians. Portrayals of US presidents project notions of belonging, while also reinforcing the difference that is required from a head of state. Portraiture, understood to comprise any depiction of a historic human figure in any media, contributes to group formation and codifies conduct and morals, reconciling individual likeness with recognizable social types.[10] A portrait is a 'tool that makes possible the registering of an identity in relation to the social'.[11] Political portraiture can overlap with electoral portraits, propaganda, and socially engaged art or literature,

[8] Kinder, *Presidential Traits*, 6. See also the special section on 'Personality, Party Leaders, and Election Campaigns' in *Electoral Studies* 54 (2018), esp. Bittner and Peterson, 'Introduction'; Aaldering, 'Mediated Leader Effects'; Banducci et al., 'Intermedia Agenda Setting'; Ditonto, 'Face'.

[9] Edelman, *Symbolic Uses*, 2: 'Political forms thus come to symbolize what large masses of men need to believe about the state to reassure themselves.' See 3 on election campaigns as 'a ritual act' rather than 'participation in policy formation': 'elections draw attention to common social ties and to the importance and apparent reasonableness of accepting the public policies that are adopted.' Cf. Cohen, *Symbolic Construction*.

[10] See Pointon, *Hanging*; West, *Portraiture*, 21–41.

[11] Pointon, *Search for Identity*, 11.

but it always has the individual at its centre and as its purpose. 'Image' needs to be understood in its double meaning as both a picture and the reputation of an individual, both of which can make them (in)adequate candidates for office.

In presidential portraiture, the intersection between institutions as official infrastructures and informal systems of norms becomes particularly potent. As representations of a political representative, portraits visually equate the politician's body with the body politic.[12] While displayed by an individual, the political emotions at play are supra-individual: they are institutionally formed and transmit an institution's purpose.

Recent scholarship has seen a prolific interdisciplinary engagement with the force that images can muster in the political realm, ranging from visual history to political iconography to the agentic 'image act'.[13] According to some art historians, pictures should be understood as visual repositories and catalysts of emotions, while studies in experimental and empirical aesthetics enquire into the relationship between the formal properties of art (e.g. colour, lines, and composition) and emotions.[14] Straddling the line between studies in visual culture and art on the one hand and history on the other, this chapter draws mostly on political iconography and the social function of art and visual culture to explore how pictures employ the iconography of emotions to emotionally connect with the population. It thus investigates the mediality of emotions, which includes both the presentation within the pictures and the use of portrayals. George Washington's official portrait epitomized the new ideal of civil leadership, but without its widespread dissemination through innumerable copies, ranging from print to teapots, it may have remained a decorous elite project.[15] With the rise of cheap printing, photography, and television in the centuries to come, other forms of portrayal were added to the mix. The circulation of informal pictures and snapshots enabled top-down

[12] Cf. Kantorowicz, *King's Two Bodies*, 7–23; Rogin, 'King's Two Bodies'; Stein, 'President's Two Bodies', 34.

[13] For visual history, see Haskell, *History*; Burke, *Eyewitnessing*; Paul, *Visual History*. For political iconography, see Diers, *Schlagbilder*; Fleckner, Warnke, and Ziegler, *Handbuch*; Krass, 'Politische Ikonographie'; Ginzburg, *Fear*; see also Freedberg, *Power of Images*. For agentic 'image act', see Bredekamp, *Bildakt*, 56–64.

[14] Pawlak, Zieke, and Augart, 'Vorwort', 8–10; Franke, 'Spielarten', 172–75; Werner, 'Visualität', 152–53; Winner, *How Art Works*, 29–100.

[15] On 'trivial ruler portraits', see Warnke, 'Triviale Herrscherbildnisse'.

communication to be broadened to include the electorate, who could now communicate with each other and with the administration.

History has the benefit of hindsight: the three portrayals of presidents that will be discussed in depth—Washington, Franklin D. Roosevelt, and Barack Obama—have proven very successful as tools of emotional communication. Moreover, they allow historians to integrate emotion history with media analysis, as each exemplifies how a particular medium—painting and other pictorial depictions, photography, the internet—shapes the way images are framed. Each of the presidents was also a 'first': the first president, the first visibly disabled president, the first black president. Investigating these instances of emerging types will demonstrate that emotional templates become successful when adapted to fit the individual.

Portraying Composure: George Washington

While George Washington was portrayed multiple times throughout his life, his image as president was shaped by three portraits in particular, all painted by Gilbert Stuart: the *Athenaeum* and the *Vaughan Portraits* of 1795, an unfinished half-length, depicting Washington's head in front of a brown background, and a bust respectively, and the *Lansdowne Portrait* of 1796 (Fig. 5.2).[16] The latter, which employs the same formula for the head as the *Athenaeum Portrait*, is the first American presidential portrait and has become iconic, endlessly copied and engraved and an integral part of the White House decor. Both the president's body and the picture's composition communicate ideas about the emotional styles of the ideal leader, which were to shape pictorial traditions of presidential demeanour throughout to the present.

The *Lansdowne Portrait* shows Washington wearing a black suit, black stockings, black shoes, and a grey powdered wig and standing amid symbols of American republicanism. His determined expression and outstretched hand imply that he is about to give a speech, which echoes the interpretation that the picture depicts the address Washington gave to the Fourth Congress (March 1795–March 1797) in the Congress Hall in Philadelphia in 1795. This speech defended the US' neutrality during the French Revolutionary Wars in 1793, which had led to the (still in force)

[16] On the portrait, see Evans, *Genius*, 67–71; Barratt and Miles, *Gilbert Stuart*, 166–75; Howard and Hoffman, 'Thousand Words'; Wick, *George Washington*, 34–73; Depkat, 'Erfindung'.

Fig. 5.2 Gilbert Stuart, *George Washington* (*The Lansdowne Portrait*), 1796, oil on canvas, 247.6 × 158.7 cm. (© National Portrait Gallery, Washington, Smithsonian Institution; acquired as a gift to the nation through the generosity of the Donal W. Reynolds Foundation)

Neutrality Act of 1794 and the 'Jay Treaty' of 1795 (Treaty of Amity Commerce and Navigation, between His Britannic Majesty and the United States of America), which facilitated trade with Great Britain. At the time, Washington and his allies were eager to present their choice to remain neutral as a disinterested decision that was best for the country. Meanwhile, his political enemies agreed that he was in fact not disinterested but uninterested: he did not care about the suffering of the French or about the general threat that monarchy posed to a republic.

The *Lansdowne Portrait* epitomizes this struggle between political factions during the early American Republic and equates political disinterestedness with emotional tranquillity.[17] The picture subscribes to a long tradition, dating back to Roman Antiquity, of displaying leaders of state as determined but tranquil and emotionally moderate, a sign of both their capability to lead and to remain cool-headed in the face of danger.

[17] Pahl, 'Proclamations of Neutrality'.

Washington's portrayal as a calm leader has mostly to do with his face—'the best likeness of the Chief in his latter days'—and posture, although the body was modelled on someone else's.[18] With the clenched mouth (a nod to his false teeth, but also a device to connote determination), the face is based on the *Athenaeum Portrait*, which in turn took inspiration from early modern physiognomic patterns such as Charles Le Brun's *L'expression des passions* of 1667, a typology of emotional expressions.[19] Washington's face is a code for 'boldness', a face often used for soldiers and statesmen (Fig. 5.3).[20] His oratorial posture with the outstretched hand, sword at his side, feet firmly placed on the ground, embodies his commitment to the office.

Referencing ancient virtues, the various attributes depicted in the portrait are conducive to a narrative of American republicanism. The columns signal constancy, the legs of the table and chair display the fasces, symbols of Roman leadership. The American flag on the back of the chair and the rainbow, a symbol of peace, indicate that the president has a tranquil American state behind him.[21] The most important symbol, the flag, is also the smallest, rejecting too much overt symbolism and subscribing instead to sober signification. The books on the table are the *Journal of Congress*—the minutes of Congress, begun in 1789—and the *Federalist Papers*, a collection of essays promoting the ratification of the Constitution of the US written by Alexander Hamilton, John Jay, and James Madison between 1787 and 1788. The paper awaiting signature may be the Jay Treaty. It was ratified on 24 June 1795, and on 8 December of the same year, Washington addressed the Fourth Congress. This speech, arguing that 'our favored country … has enjoyed tranquility'[22] while the Europeans were involved in bloody wars, arguably inspired the painting. If the Jay

[18] George Washington Parke Custis to Thomas Carberry, Esq., 7 April 1839, in Lamb, *Magazine*, 583–84, here 583. Cf. Barratt and Miles, *Gilbert Stuart*, 168.

[19] On Le Brun, see Kirchner, *Expression*; Montagu, *Expression*; Schmidt, 'Showing Emotions'.

[20] See Depkat, 'Erfindung', 738–39.

[21] On the symbolism, see *ibid*., 738–39.

[22] *Journal of the House of Representatives*, 367. According to a newspaper article of May 1797, 'the figure is standing and addressing the Hall of Assembly. The point of time is that when he recommended inviolable union between America and Great Britain'; quoted in Barratt and Miles, *Gilbert Stuart*, 170–71.

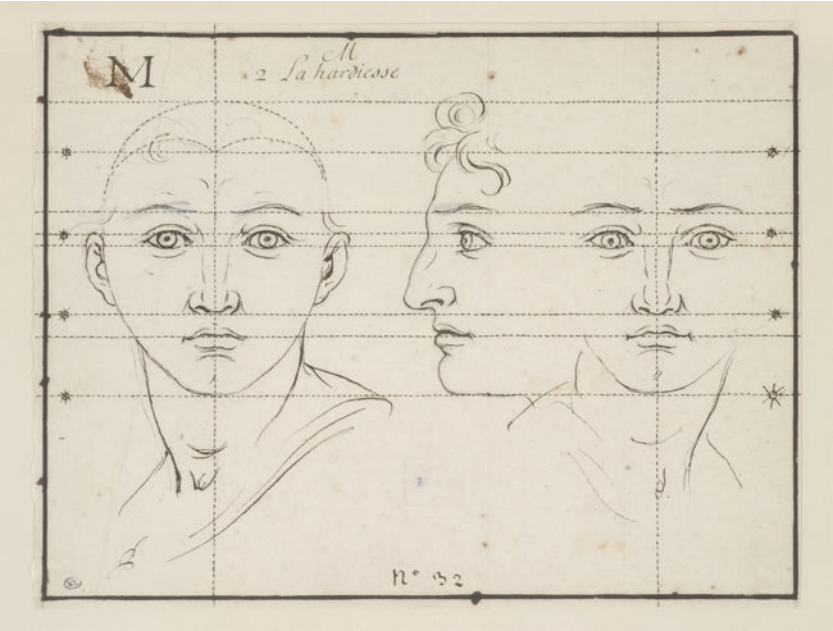


Fig. 5.3 Charles Le Brun, *Boldness (la hardiesse)*, 1660s, ink on paper, 19.6 × 25.4 cm. (© bpk/Musée du Louvre, Dist. RMN—Grand Palais)

Treaty is indeed shown in the portrait, then its inclusion visually reinforces the outcome of the politics of neutrality and, by extension, tranquillity.[23]

The Proclamation of Neutrality, issued on 22 April 1793, divided the government: Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson and Secretary of the Treasury Alexander Hamilton, the former opposing, the second embracing neutrality, were particularly hostile towards one another, and in 1793, Jefferson resigned. He came out of retirement to fight the Jay Treaty, and he predicted—quite correctly—that there would be an outpouring of emotion over this issue. The Jay Treaty was indeed so unpopular that effigies of John Jay were burnt in several cities, apparently at the instigation of the Jeffersonians.[24] While Washington and his allies urged restraint, his

[23] Barratt and Miles, *Gilbert Stuart*, 172, describe it as 'an example of the use of portraits to celebrate political alliances'.

[24] Estes, 'Shaping', esp. 399–401.

enemies organized protests and wrote furious letters to local councils. The political fronts were divided along emotional lines, the calm defence tactics of the government colliding with the passionate outcry of the opposition—which would, eventually, result in the formation of the first political parties in the US: the Republicans and the Federalists. The *Lansdowne Portrait*, whose production coincided with the formation of these parties, catalysed sentiments of group identity.

Portraits are major tools of social formation because they make recognition supra-individual. Viewers should not only recognize the sitter, but also recognize (or not) themselves in them.[25] The portrait addressed proponents of Washington's contemporary politics, but its formative power transcends this particular moment. While it was in no way the only depiction of Washington, the portrait was the first to show him in civilian clothes rather than in his military uniform, indicating a shift in his affiliation. Washington had become famous as a general, but through his more neutral attire, Stuart transformed what was known as the formula for the European royal portrait into a Republican ruler portrait or 'the state portrait'.[26] This was a president of the people but also not quite of the people: the sword, a sign of aristocracy and the military, was no longer in use; in his civilian frock, Washington became relatable to his electorate. But from Washington's face to his clothes, from the attributes to the format, Stuart's portrait also epitomized rulership and the composed, yet resolute style of the statesman.

Copied several times by Stuart and other artists, the *Lansdowne Portrait* and countless other portraits of Washington, often based on Stuart's iconography but also those showing him in military uniform, were widely disseminated. Engraved or printed, as pictures proper or on paraphernalia, the portraits became tools of early participation by fostering a feeling for the political realm people were inhabiting. Washington himself had miniatures painted and given to friends and allies. After his death in 1799, mourning rings with his portrait—originally a European monarchic tradition, meant to forge an emotional bond between autocratic heads of states and their subjects—were all the fashion, indicating the wearer's loyalty to the Republic (Fig. 5.4).[27] The portraits potentially reached and addressed all citizens, but through their subject and iconography, they nonetheless

[25] See Pointon, *Hanging*, esp. 53–78, 159–75.
[26] DeLorme, 'Gilbert Stuart', 353.
[27] Ruby, 'Love Affairs'.

Fig. 5.4 Mourning ring for George Washington, ca. 1800. (Courtesy of Bridgeman Art Library)

aligned the emotional framework with a particular group in society: wealthy white men of a certain age.

In the early years of the Republic, the electorate was nominally rather diverse. Since the constitution only specified who was eligible for public office, voting rights were accorded on the state level and were thus non-uniform. Most states had in fact allowed Catholics and Jews to vote since the Revolution. In some places, property-owning women, free black males, adult male payers of the poll tax, and white adult males who had served in the militia had suffrage.[28] But with a multitude of restrictions in place to prevent unwanted groups from casting their ballot, participating in an election was easiest for those who most closely resembled Washington.[29] His individual likeness was extrapolated to encompass collective likeness and depicted the gendered and racialized model for the Constitution's originally gender- and race-less 'the people'.

Since 1797, a copy of the *Lansdowne Portrait*, alongside a portrait of Washington's wife Martha, has been displayed in the White House's East Room, its public chamber. As the portrait has been included in each

[28] Kousser, 'Voting Rights', 195–98.
[29] Free, *Suffrage Reconstructed*, 11–17.

redecoration, it gestures at the tradition of both the White House's history and of the appropriate attitude towards the office. But while its official use shapes official styles, it was through its derivatives that it became a tool of early political participation. Disseminated all across the States, Washington's picture served as the standard model of an American citizen: white, male, civil, bold, and determined. When the *Athenaeum Portrait* of 1796 was chosen to grace the one-dollar bill in 1876, the portrait literally became a valuable device of economic participation and exchange. Its use as a model for Mount Rushmore's Washington in 1941 saw a particular type of president set in stone. The three others, Thomas Jefferson, Theodore Roosevelt, and Abraham Lincoln, sport equivalent facial expressions. Different periods, but one towering head. Yet this monument, 'an accomplishment born, planned, and created in the minds and by the hands of Americans for Americans', overrode the claims of a particular group.[30] Before its ownership was vested to the government after the discovery of gold in 1877, the site belonged to the Lakota people, a Sioux tribe, who have, as of now, not relinquished their claim to the land. A 2012 report, undertaken at the instigation of the Obama administration, suggested returning the land because '[t]oday, the Black Hills are national forest and park lands, although they still hold a central place in the history, culture, and worldviews of surrounding tribes and at the same time serve as a constant visible reminder of their loss'.[31] Without the indigenous people who 'gave up' their land, the report emphasized, there would be no US.[32] And yet, it is highly questionable whether the monument connects with them or represents an American identity to which they wish to belong.

Portraying Perseverance: Franklin D. Roosevelt

Mount Rushmore was completed during the presidency of another man who would become iconic, 'the force of nature known as Franklin Delano Roosevelt' as one twenty-first-century author put it.[33] The admiration for FDR, while strong among parts of the population during his lifetime, has steadily grown since his death into hero worship. Authors have called this 'FDR's shadow' or 'Roosevelt's high bar'.[34] Roosevelt's presidency was, in

[30] Gutzon Borglum quoted after Boime, 'Patriarchy', 142.
[31] Anaya, 'Report', 11.
[32] *Ibid*., 6.
[33] Greenstein, *Presidential Difference*, 12.
[34] Miller, *Greatness*, 105.

any case, a watershed, although during his time, some felt that he was dividing the nation. On the eve of his re-election in 1936, he gave a speech in Madison Square Garden, challenging 'the old enemies of peace—business and financial monopoly, speculation, reckless banking, class antagonism, sectionalism, war profiteering. … They are unanimous in their hate for me—and I welcome their hatred.'[35]

Roosevelt's campaign image had always relied on casting him as a figure undaunted in the face of adversary. This image was bolstered by his handling of his (suspected) polio infection, which had left him paraplegic in 1921. It was supported by an acquiescent media that had fallen in love with the elegant and eloquent FDR. 'Day after day', a 1936 article on 'The Roosevelt Myth' recounted, 'we informed the gullible public that Franklin Delano Roosevelt was by far the smartest politician who had ever occupied the White House'. An overwhelming victory, swift execution of policies, command of Congress, and his incredible popularity swayed the correspondents in Washington. Roosevelt, the author wistfully remembered, appeared as the epitome of leadership, sagacious, diplomatic, wary, judicious, and visionary: 'here was a politician to make Machiavelli, Mark Hanna, Talleyrand, and Boies Penrose hang their heads in utter shame.'[36]

In his second term in office, journalists saw the 'myth' come tumbling down. FDR proved to be impolitic, unreliable, disingenuous, and equipped with neither a clear plan nor vision. A press conference on 31 May 1935, in which Roosevelt discussed the Supreme Court's decision to declare the National Recovery Administration (NRA), an essential part of the New Deal, unconstitutional, observers thought especially disillusioning: 'he exhibited anger, disappointment, and chagrin in a petulant tirade against the Supreme Court lasting one hour and twenty minutes by the clock. … No President has ever made so intemperate an utterance at a press conference.' FDR and his administration, the author fumed, had been taken by surprise that a major instrument of the New Deal was outlawed: 'Neither the *Führer* nor his Brain Trust had prepared a plan of retreat.' Within four years, the article asserted, Roosevelt had gone from being a calm, patient, clear-sighted head of state to an unreckonable, thin-skinned, ill-prepared showman.[37]

[35] Roosevelt, 'Address at Madison Square Garden'.
[36] Brown, 'Roosevelt Myth', 390.
[37] *Ibid*., 391.

Roosevelt's relationship with the media is almost as legendary as his presidency.[38] FDR was a mass-media president, appearing in newspapers, on the radio, and in newsreels. A member of the upper class, Roosevelt had had his portrait painted several times since childhood, but although some portrait paintings and drawings were used for the campaign and appeared in newspapers, the primary media for addressing American citizens in the 1920s and 1930s were photography and film.[39] FDR's image was shaped by his intricate relationship with the press, described by a contemporary in 1937 as an 'emotional allegiance'.[40] Playing on the heartstrings of the news corps was paramount for Roosevelt's public appeal. It was through the media that emotions were filtered and evoked and that people participated in his politics, from the New Deal to the Second World War.

Presidents need to exhibit their personalized version of disinterested discipline, peppered with passion to avoid appearing indifferent. When Roosevelt decided to run for president in 1931, he projected an image expected of leaders of state via a shrewd image campaign. Framing his disability as an enemy he fought and eventually kept in check, he appealed to potential voters' admiration for his tenaciousness and turned the implicit requirement for leaders to be able-bodied on its head. While popular and academic scholarship has long reiterated the belief that there existed a gentleman's agreement between the media and Roosevelt to not thematize his illness in exchange for political insights, it is now established that the paralysis of his legs was not only widely known, but 'a central component of his persona'.[41]

After his condition improved, Roosevelt's illness did not prevent him from being politically active. He was governor of New York before winning the Democratic nomination for the presidential race. Roosevelt did not want to be photographed in a wheelchair, but he was depicted leaning on his cane and being supported by others or with his braces on, without which he was unable to stand or walk. Once sitting at his desk, he joked, he was forced to work because he could not get up on his own. While they had originally reported on the pitilessness of making a 'crippled' man run

[38] Steele, *Propaganda*; Winfield, *FDR*; Keller, 'Roosevelts Bildpropaganda'; Culbert, 'Franklin D. Roosevelt'. Cf. Casey, *Cautious Crusade*.

[39] Meschutt, 'Portraits', 9, 6.

[40] Rosten, 'Washington Correspondents', 42.

[41] Pressman, 'Ambivalent Accomplices', 327–28. See 350–52 for instances where enemies used Roosevelt's disability disparagingly and it backfired.

for office, newspapers took their cue from FDR who worked tirelessly to present himself as a recovering man.[42] They capitalized on the stoic endurance FDR displayed although 'this handsome six-foot man's fine body was twisted with infantile paralysis from the waist down'. Nevertheless, as a 1931 article explained, FDR was not going to be subdued: 'Never once did he relinquish his hold on the future. Not once … did he falter in his fight to beat the blow from the dark.'[43] In another article, engineered by the Roosevelts together with the author (a Republican family friend), the magazine *Liberty* proclaimed in July 1931: 'It is an amazing possibility that the next President of the United States may be a cripple.' A picture showing the presidential hopeful sitting at his desk, his braces in full view, accompanied the text (Fig. 5.5).[44] In 1932, with the Great Depression in full swing and the election around the corner, *Time* magazine stated admiringly: 'Never have his crippled legs deterred him from going where he would.'[45]

Sally Stein has argued that the pictorial strategies of images of Roosevelt were pivotal to his success. Roosevelt headed the country in times of deep crisis. But while it might have been expected that the public would prefer an able-bodied leader who exemplified the vigour the country embodied and needed, Roosevelt fared well precisely because the public latched onto the disabled president as an emblem of perseverance in a 'collaborative process of dealing with the president's lack of conventional signs of mastery'.[46] Roosevelt's famous inaugural speech of 1933 subtly but unmistakably entwined his individual body with the body politic, the politician with the country:

> This is preeminently the time to speak the truth, the whole truth, frankly and boldly. Nor need we shrink from honestly facing conditions in our country today. … [L]et 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.[47]

[42] For this shift, see *ibid.*, 329–30.

[43] 'Life Story'.

[44] Looker, 'Physically Fit', 6. On the machinations leading to the article, see Kiewe, 'Body as Proof', 92–94; Pressman, 'Ambivalent Accomplices', 333.

[45] 'Campaign', 13.

[46] Stein, 'President's Two Bodies', 34.

[47] Roosevelt, 'Inaugural Address', 1. See Stein, 'President's Two Bodies', 37.

Fig. 5.5 Franklin D. Roosevelt, 1930. (Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library & Museum)

Franklin Roosevelt thus established as his enemy not a political opponent but paralysis and fear. In contrast stood his confidence and strength, manifest both in his words and in the calm, solemn voice he used to speak. Roosevelt transformed the template for presidential style by incorporating both his unique situation and the general expectations levied on a president, bolstering his leadership qualities by forging a connection to the public that was pre-eminently emotional. 'If I read the temper of our people correctly,' he said, 'we now realize … that if we are to go forward, we must move as a trained and loyal army … I assume unhesitatingly the leadership of this great army of our people.'[48]

All in power and all who were part of the elite, Roosevelt claimed, gained, and lost their legitimacy with the emotional support of the people. Wall Street bankers, responsible for the crash of 1929, 'stand indicted in

[48] Roosevelt, 'Inaugural Address', 6–7.

the court of public opinion, rejected by the hearts and minds of men'.[49] With his speech, the press asserted, FDR managed to win the people over. After 'the strong, knotty hand of the man drops affectionately from the … aged Dutch Bible', he addressed a crowd looking on in awed silence. Then, they wrote: 'The tensions breaks … Stirred and swayed by the magic of that powerful voice, the crowds burst into ringing cheers, echoing to the ends of the earth.'[50] Strong hands compensated for legs that could not walk. The newspaper weaved together a story whose narrative features reflected this breathtaking moment.

While mobilizing the emotional potential of his disability proved to be very successful, the nature of the images changed once FDR was in office. He refrained from being shown with braces. The Secret Service saw to it that photographers, under the threat of losing their equipment or access to the White House, did not take photos disadvantageous to the president.[51] He was shown seated behind his desk, writing or speaking into microphones, or in his car. With his illness almost disappearing from media coverage, pictures of FDR approached established forms of leadership portraits. Officially, this had to do with the fact that the disability was no longer news, but Stein has argued that this shift also reflected the willingness of the American public to believe in a miracle cure. If Roosevelt could get up and walk again, then the country, shaken by poverty, hunger, and crime, could do the same.[52] Indeed, the parallel was noted at the time. Roosevelt, the author of a 1941 *LIFE* article wrote, 'never recovered his former agility, but he did throw off the infection'. Likewise, the New Deal was meant 'to check the social infection that raged in the body politic. … It may not be all that is desirable, but at least the country walks again.'[53]

When standing, Roosevelt, his stance wide, followed the pattern set by Washington, embodying the bold, calm, and determined ruler archetype favoured by Republican governments (Fig. 5.6). When sitting at his desk (Fig. 5.7), he subscribed to a formula of leadership that had emerged in the nineteenth century. Jacques-Louis David's famous 1812 hand-in-waistcoat portrait of Napoleon (National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.) shows the emperor rise from his desk at four o'clock in the

[49] *Ibid*., 2.
[50] Lowitz and Lowitz, 'Biggest Job', 2.
[51] Pressman, 'Ambivalent Accomplices', 337–39.
[52] Stein, 'President's Two Bodies', 36. Cf. Pressman, 'Ambivalent Accomplices', 328.
[53] Johnson, 'Devil or Demigod?', 78.

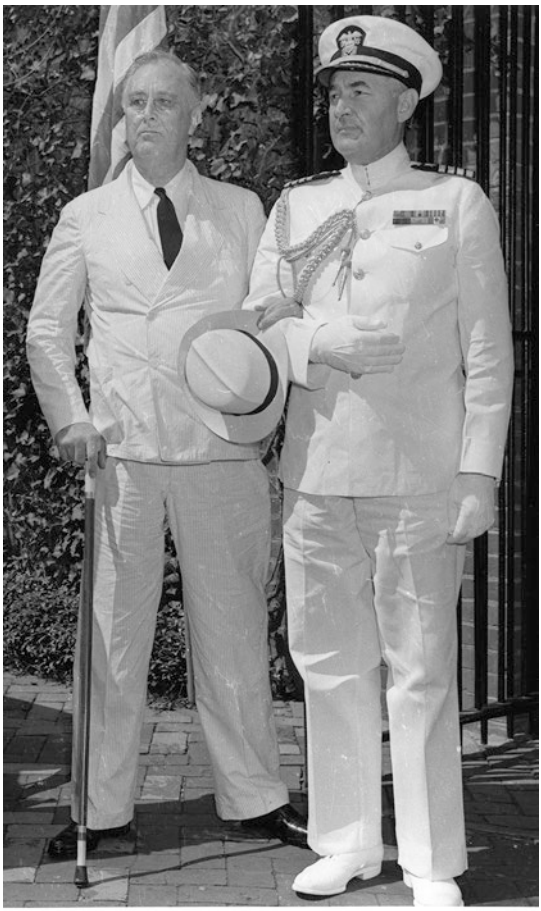


Fig. 5.6 Franklin D. Roosevelt and Captain John McCrea, August 1942. (Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library & Museum)

morning. Modern leadership meant tireless dedication, punishing working hours, and doing paperwork at desks rather than commanding armies in fields. Borrowed from portraits of scholars, the sitting-at-desk formula, employed by leaders of all state forms, ranging from Otto von Bismarck to Joseph Stalin and Adolf Hitler, indicated that the requirements for leadership had changed.[54] It had become an intellectual, rather than a physical,

[54] On the 'desk portrait' of the sovereign, see Schoch, *Herrscherbild*, 107–10.

Fig. 5.7 President Roosevelt working with his stamp collection in the White House, 5 May 1936. (Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library & Museum)

job: 'a sitting job' as Roosevelt himself said.[55] Echoing Washington's exchange of his military uniform for a civilian attire, it shows that government had become what it is still called: an administration.

The portrait formulas employed unanimously by both authoritarian and democratic heads of state indicate little distinction between leader and *Führer*. The 'Roosevelt Myth' text denigrated the president as authoritarian to underscore the short-temperedness not only of his character but also of his politics, occasionally seen to be 'as contemptuous of Constitutional barriers as Abraham Lincoln' as *LIFE* put it in 1941.[56] The author of the feature had just published *Roosevelt: Dictator or Democrat?* and the 'essential conclusions of his book', published in the magazine,

[55] 'Life Story', 10.
[56] Johnson, 'Devil or Demigod?', 76.

were captioned 'Devil or Demigod?'.[57] The article described how this dichotomy was actually the result of several exaggerated 'build-up' and 'smear' campaigns in the media. It was accompanied by images ostentatiously illustrating this antagonism (Fig. 5.8). The picture on the left shows Roosevelt from below, sporting an arrogant expression, the corners of his mouth drawn down, nose tip drawn up. His eyes, which are just slits, look into the distance. On the right, he is shown frontally, a benign smile playing around his half-open mouth and eyes. His shoulders seem slightly slouched, lending him the approachable appearance for which he was known: 'the Roosevelt smile', a disarming mixture of humour and optimism, was proverbial in the 1930s already.[58] Scholars have argued that it was with FDR that the now indispensable professional smile, communicating unflagging optimism, entered political campaigning.[59]

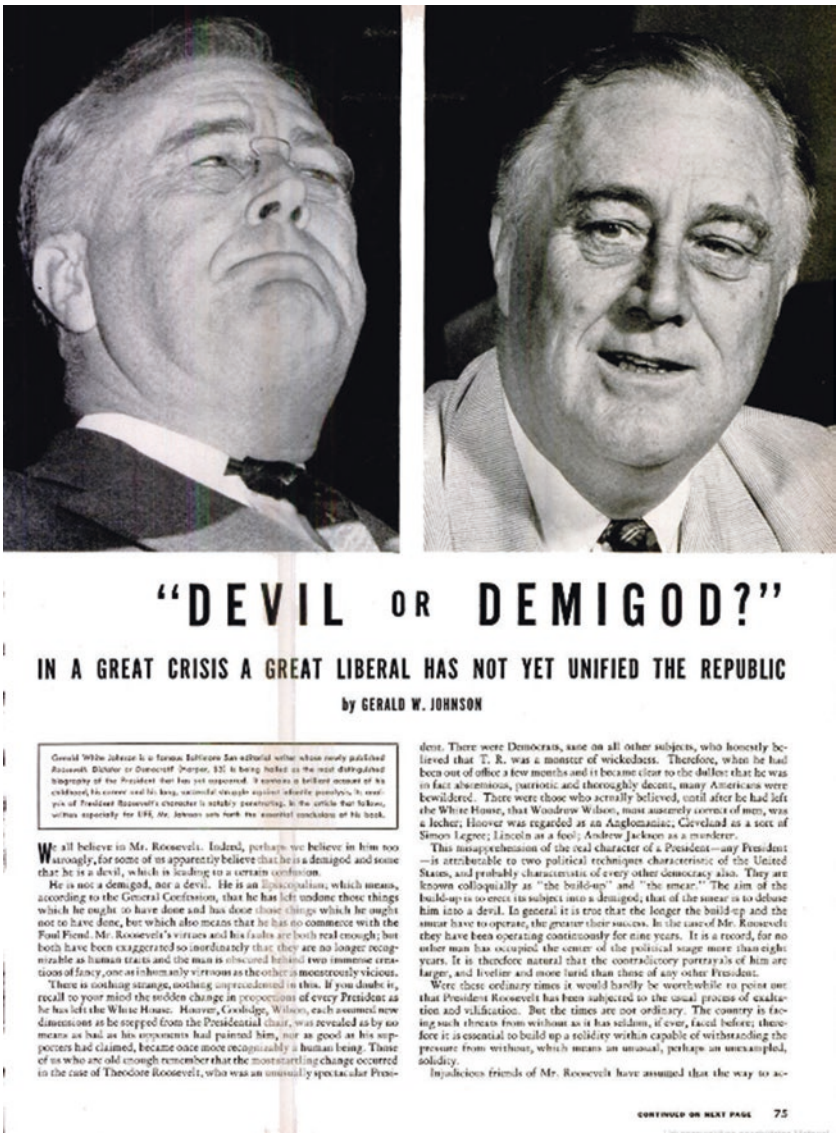
The *LIFE* article was full of comparisons. Roosevelt was set against his predecessors Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, Andrew Jackson, and Woodrow Wilson. The caption accompanying two photos, one of his cousin and former president Theodore Roosevelt and one of FDR, leaning on his crutches, read that just as TR overcame asthma, FDR 'triumphed over paralysis'. Placing Roosevelt in a long tradition of ambivalent but ultimately successful figures was not incidental. The article expressed faith in Roosevelt's ability to meet the challenges of contemporary leadership:

> In Adolf Hitler we are facing a popular leader of astounding capacity. … To cope with such a man we need a leader capable of inspiring the masses of our own people with a faith comparable to the faith of the masses of the Germans in their man; but God forbid that we should produce one who leads in the same direction![60]

Hitler's 'antithesis' had to be a champion of freedom. And, as the pictures preceding the article made clear, he also had to be a smiling, informal, affable president, not a tense and standoffish one if he wanted to convince Americans to make the ultimate sacrifice for freedom: going to war.

Until today, Roosevelt remains the only visibly disabled American president in US history. Yet, it was his disability that was used to project an image very much in line with the Washingtonian stylistic tradition of

[57] *Ibid*., 75; Johnson, *Roosevelt*.
[58] Rosten, 'Washington Correspondents', 38.
[59] Keller, 'Roosevelts Bildpropaganda', 148.
[60] Johnson, 'Devil or Demigod?', 78.



"DEVIL OR DEMIGOD?"

IN A GREAT CRISIS A GREAT LIBERAL HAS NOT YET UNIFIED THE REPUBLIC

by GERALD W. JOHNSON

Gerald White Johnson is a famous Baltimore Sun editorial writer whose newly published *Roosevelt: Dictator or Democrat?* (Harper, $2) is being hailed as the most distinguished biography of the President that has yet appeared. It contains a brilliant account of his childhood, his career and his long, successful struggle against infantile paralysis. In analysis of President Roosevelt's character is notably penetrating. In the article that follows, written especially for LIFE, Mr. Johnson sets forth the essential conclusions of his book.

We all believe in Mr. Roosevelt. Indeed, perhaps we believe in him too strongly, for some of us apparently believe that he is a demigod and some that he is a devil, which is leading to a certain confusion.

He is not a demigod, nor a devil. He is an Episcopalian, which means, according to the General Confession, that he has left undone those things which he ought to have done and has done those things which he ought not to have done, but which also means that he has no commerce with the Foul Fiend. Mr. Roosevelt's virtues and his faults are both real enough; but both have been exaggerated so inordinately that they are no longer recognizable as human traits and the man is obscured behind two immense creations of fancy, one as inhumanly virtuous as the other is monstrously vicious.

There is nothing strange, nothing unprecedented in this. If you doubt it, recall to your mind the sudden change in proportions of every President as he has left the White House. Hoover, Coolidge, Wilson, each assumed new dimensions as he stepped from the Presidential chair, was revealed as by no means as bad as his opponents had painted him, nor as good as his supporters had claimed, became once more recognizably a human being. Those of us who are old enough remember that the most startling change occurred in the case of Theodore Roosevelt, who was an unusually spectacular President. There were Democrats, alone on all other subjects, who honestly believed that T. R. was a monster of wickedness. Therefore, when he had been out of office a few months and it became clear to the dullest that he was in fact abnormous, patriotic and thoroughly decent, many Americans were bewildered. There were those who actually believed, until after he had left the White House, that Woodrow Wilson, most austerely correct of men, was a lecher; Hoover was regarded as an Anglomaniac; Cleveland as a sort of Simon Legree; Lincoln as a fool; Andrew Jackson as a murderer.

This misapprehension of the real character of a President—*any* President—is attributable to two political techniques characteristic of the United States, and probably characteristic of every other democracy also. They are known colloquially as "the build-up" and "the smear." The aim of the build-up is to erect its subject into a demigod; that of the smear is to debase him into a devil. In general it is true that the longer the build-up and the smear have to operate, the greater their success. In the case of Mr. Roosevelt they have been operating continuously for nine years. It is a record, for no other man has occupied the center of the political stage more than eight years. It is therefore natural that the contradictory portrayals of him are larger, and livelier and more lurid than those of any other President.

Were these ordinary times it would hardly be worthwhile to point out that President Roosevelt has been subjected to the usual process of exaltation and vilification. But the times are not ordinary. The country is facing such threats from without as it has seldom, if ever, faced before; therefore it is essential to build up a solidity within capable of withstanding the pressure from without, which means an unusual, perhaps an unexampled, solidity.

Injudicious friends of Mr. Roosevelt have assumed that the way to ac-

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE 75

Fig. 5.8 First page of Gerald W. Johnson, '"Devil or Demigod?": In a Great Crisis a Great Liberal Has Not Yet Unified the Republic', *Life*, 24 November 1941, 75–82

statespersons: undaunted, decisive, resolute. This was the template he capitalized on and the one that proved the most enduring. Later presidents, especially the chronically ill John F. Kennedy, did not act on the notion that less-than-perfect bodies could help craft an appealing public image, indicating that templates have a long-lasting influence and are variable, influenced—but not wholly determined—by the trends of the time. At the same time, however, Roosevelt's colloquial manner, so different from his punctilious and unappealing predecessor Herbert Hoover, made him a favourite with journalists, something that was (and remains) a precondition for becoming a favourite with the public in the first place: 'The reportorial affection and admiration for the president is unprecedented', a contemporary analysis noted. Even 'callous', 'hard-boiled', 'disillusioned' newsmen enthused about this likeable fellow whose cigarette holder hung 'at a jaunty angle'.[61] But after two years, the author Leo Rosten stated, the press' 'emotional allegiance' had turned into 'critical sentiment'. The 'debonair poise' and the 'unflagging optimism' had soured, the smile had become a grimace, 'turned on and off with calculated purpose'.[62] This, however, Rosten wrote lucidly, had less to do with Roosevelt himself faltering, but because reporters, who liked to think themselves cynical, resented that they had been charmed into shedding their journalistic objectivity.[63]

A visually omnipresent president, Roosevelt died of an aneurysm on 12 April 1945 at his retreat in Warm Springs, Georgia, during a portrait session. FDR's portrait was left unfinished, documenting the forever-interrupted painting process and, intriguingly, paralleling Washington's famously unfinished *Athenaeum Portrait*. News of FDR's death, although unsurprising to his employees, his party, and journalists, 'spread like wildfire'. People around the retreat cried, quivered, choked.[64] Ohio's *Logan Daily News* printed 'The Last Photo of Franklin Delano Roosevelt' on its front page, alongside a fervent plea for unity: 'The nation must rally from the shock. … The people of the United States must now—if ever—BE united.'[65] The quote is paradigmatic: Roosevelt's emotional appeal to the electorate cannot be divested from his emotional mobilization of the press.

[61] Rosten, 'Washington Correspondents', 39, 38. The cigarette holder was fondly remembered by former Washington journalist Daniel Schorr in 1997. See Clausen, 'President', 24.

[62] Rosten, 'Washington Correspondents', 42, 45.

[63] *Ibid*., 50.

[64] 'President Roosevelt Dies'.

[65] 'Nation Mourns'.

Portraying Hope: Barack Obama

After the November 2008 presidential election, *Time* showed the president-elect Barack Obama on its cover, sporting the familiar look of far-sighted determination. A week later, on 24 November 2008, the front page depicted an image of him photoshopped into a famous picture of Franklin D. Roosevelt sitting in a car. Comparisons between presidents had, for better and worse, become a tradition of their own. The media later denounced the popular Obama-FDR analogy as a fallacy, but the picture shows how easy it was to insert Obama into the presidential tradition.[66] Circumstances such as the financial crisis seemed similar, and so did his style. Tall, slender, eloquent, and flashing a winning smile, Obama appeared to be presidential demeanour incarnate: smart, capable, composed, yet approachable. But the pictures also implied that, like every president before him, Obama had to reconcile the tension between continuity and change, the double-edged sword of both political culture and portraiture: what makes one different from all the others, yet somehow similar to them?

Obama's presidency was ushered in by a now-iconic stencilled poster portrait with the tagline 'HOPE'. It was created independently by street artist Shepard Fairey, but approved by the 2008 presidential campaign (Fig. 5.9).[67] Referencing the portrait of John F. Kennedy—a sick president who pretended to be abundantly healthy—and the head of Abraham Lincoln, the *Hope* poster showed a determined leader looking off-canvas into a brighter future.[68] Considered a game-changer in the history of politically engaged art, the poster was credited with unprecedented mobilizing power, although or maybe because it presents its groundbreaking subject using very conventional means. Reminiscent of Soviet agitprop art, Andy Warhol and Robert Rauschenberg's pop appropriation art, and American patriotic images, its 'look of the hand silkscreen print in an era that is dominated by digital reproduction' had a nostalgic feel to it.[69] A method of everyday printing, popularized by Warhol as a way to call attention to the commodification of images, the silkscreen, together with the John F. Kennedy allusion, harkened back to the aesthetics of the 1960s, a time that has become associated with economic prosperity and the civil

[66] Miller, 'Obama and FDR'.
[67] Fairey and Gross, *Art for Obama*.
[68] See Fisher et al., 'Hope Poster Case', 270.
[69] Cartwright and Mandiberg, 'Obama and Shepard Fairey', 173.

Fig. 5.9 Shepard Fairey, *Obama Hope*, colour screen print poster, 2008. (National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution; gift of Chisholm Larsson Gallery, New York City. Illustration courtesy of Shepard Fairey/Obeygiant.com)

rights movement. These retro-aesthetics reflected Obama's straddling of the line between the novelty of being the first non-white presidential candidate and the sense of tradition and convention. It also reconciled individuality, of person and picture, with the internet's visual culture and its potentially endless reproduction of images. According to Fairey, this oscillation was deliberate. He aimed to 'portray Obama as both an exciting progressive and a mainstream patriot with a vision. … I hoped such an image would make him feel immediately established, familiar, American,

and presidential.'[70] The vague notion of 'presidential' seemed to imply that certain qualities can make someone particularly fit for office—physically, mentally, behaviourally—yet they must still essentially be like everyone else.

Fitting Fairey's declared aim to create a visual endorsement for Obama, the *Hope* poster's alleged role in mobilizing emotional support became the subject of a major copyright dispute in 2012.[71] Fairey was sued for using an Associated Press photo for the poster without requesting permission, but art historian Marita Sturken, appointed as expert by the defence team, posited that the photo had become a work of art through its borrowing and remixing of other visual traditions: in brief, through the postmodern habit of 'always pointing to previous styles of imaging'.[72] Quoting Robert Hariman and John Louis Lucaites' assessment that iconic images 'activate strong emotional identification or response', Sturken argued that the newness of the poster—not the original picture—derived from its emotional potency: 'it has been transformative of American political culture. … [Its] influence is the most profound argument that can be made for the poster's distinction from the original photograph. … The poster did create hope.'[73]

This claim has been echoed by political analysts pointing to the 'Obama effect', which included the unprecedented mobilization of black voters in both 2008 and 2012, whose turnout was 60.8 per cent and 62 per cent compared to 59.6 per cent and 57.6 per cent, respectively, among white voters.[74] It is, however, difficult to measure the impact of pictures, even iconic ones, and to identify the motivational force of an image: did the poster create hope?

What can be said, though statements about collective mentality and emotional responses are difficult to make, is that the poster broached the issue of feelings. Obama personifying the 'anticipatory emotion' of hope was a strategy intended to address the variegated emotionality of a diversified electorate, persuading them to come together behind a singular figure and a singular feeling.[75] At the same time, the poster and the Obama

[70] Fisher et al., 'Hope Poster Case', 269.

[71] *Ibid.*, 271.

[72] *Ibid.*, 280; see also 277–87, esp. 284.

[73] Hariman and Lucaites, *No Caption Needed*, 17; Fisher et al., 'Hope Poster Case', 286–87; see also 277–87, esp. 284.

[74] Kinder and Chudy, 'After Obama', 9–10. See Goldman and Mutz, *Obama Effect*.

[75] Miceli and Castelfranchi, *Expectancy*, 159–70.

campaign more broadly allowed people to 'participate on one's own terms' in politics.[76] The poster was downloadable for free on Fairey's homepage and could be disseminated and used as desired. In the digital world, the sharing of images and the sharing of feelings are mutually operative, the image both warranting and inducing emotions that then resonate with recipients. The 'like' button is illustrative of emotion codified, as are memes: derivative units of visual information that epitomize a brief message.[77] Memes supportive of Obama cast him as smart and likeable yet playful, and framed interactions with his vice-president Joe Biden as an affectionate relationship (Fig. 5.10).[78] Affirmation became couched in romantic tropes, bolstering the notion that his presidency fostered fellow feeling. 'This gives the internet one last chance to talk about our bromance', Obama joked when awarding the Medal of Freedom to a deeply moved Biden in January 2017, inviting a large community to partake in their dual relationship.[79]

Pictures need not be processed in detail to create a 'feel' for a period or a person. By producing a reference-laden work, Fairey tapped into the large store of the US cultural imagination, conjuring up a wide, if vague, network of visual cues into which Obama fitted neatly. The 'rhetoric of "bipartisanship"', it has been argued, 'is central to his image'.[80] This ambition to address all groups regardless of political leanings, race, religion, class, or gender is reflected in the *Hope* poster's amalgamation of easily recognizable, but relatively uncontroversial aesthetic traditions. In fact, the aesthetics were specifically harmless and integrative precisely because it was feared that the candidate was not.

Since the twentieth century, the make-up of the electorate has fundamentally changed. In 2008, 24 per cent were non-whites, a figure that increased to 27 per cent in 2012.[81] The poster addressed this, as well as the fact that this candidate was different from his forerunners, by blatantly not discussing it. Fairey thought it 'a good strategy to de-racialize the image by using red, white, and blue', a shift in the colour-coding pattern that swapped race for all-encompassing all-American citizenship.[82] Pictures of

[76] Cheney and Olsen, 'Media Politics', 51.
[77] Shifman, *Memes*, 19.
[78] Fieldstadt, 'Hilarious Obama Memes'.
[79] BBC News, 'Bromance', 0:07–0:13.
[80] Rowe, 'Visualizing', 208.
[81] Krogstad, '2016 Electorate'.
[82] Fisher et al., 'Hope Poster Case', 269.

Fig. 5.10 Elisha Fieldstadt, 'Hilarious Obama Memes', *CBS News*, 21 December 2016

presidents, it has been shown, generate a feeling of belonging when citizens, or at least the desired portion of them, are able to recognize themselves in their leader. In the case of a black presidential hopeful, the fact that blackness (unlike whiteness) is not connoted 'as a human norm' needed navigating.[83] While 'de-racialization' appears indeed to impact the success of politicians, Fairey's aim did not translate into public response, despite the temporary claim (and hope) that America had become post-racial in the twenty-first century.[84] Ranging from individual to coordinated attacks, such as the 'birther movement' (prominently fronted by Trump), which asserted that Obama was not born on US soil and was thus ineligible to run for president, Obama faced continuous racist aggressions.

[83] Dyer, *White*, 1.
[84] Andersen and Junn, 'Deracializing Obama'; Tesler and Sears, *Obama's Race*.

From his candidacy to the end of his tenure, his race—alternately classified as black, biracial, or mixed race—was the overarching concern of the media, the public, and, very quickly, of scholarship.[85]

Unlike with his predecessors, Obama's emotional style was not only meant to prove that he was presidential material; in addition, social and media discourse made the campaign to be about a repudiation of the emotional stereotypes about black men, ranging from simple-minded irresponsibility to brutish anger. Scholars investigating the 'Obama effect' have therefore hypothesized that 'the power of the incredible number of images of Obama and his family that firmly refuted stereotypes associating blacks with violence, crime, laziness, and fatherless families' was highly conducive to a 'positive shift in racial attitudes'. Exposure to mass-media coverage substituted for '*face-to-face* intergroup contact', known to reduce prejudice.[86] In Obama's case, symbolic politics could not be thought as separate from the phenomenon that individuals from marginalized groups are likely to be seen as generally representative of the group as a whole. Obama's campaign needed to, paradoxically, make him somewhat atypical of a stereotype group while also deflecting the notion that he was representing a racial group in particular to invite voters to consider him a suitable representative of the country, and thus all races, per se.[87]

The fusing of heritage with habitus points to the underlying implications of the template incepted by Washington: while its flexibility makes it an adaptable enough scaffold for virtually every person, its historical moment of origin engendered expectations that have become built-in. Whiteness is one of them, being of Christian faith is another. Roosevelt shrewdly angled the template to his purpose, proving its point by presenting himself as striving against particularly adverse conditions and then implying victory by changing how he was visually represented. Obama, in contrast, was perceived as incorporating difference: his race was no 'adversary', but sufficiently distinguished him from the standard statesperson-like style to require attenuating so that he could click with a diverse population.

[85] Literature on this topic include: King, *Obama and Race*; Kinder and Dale-Riddle, *End of Race*; Gillespie, *Race*.

[86] Goldman and Mutz, *Obama Effect*, 61–62. See 'President Barack Obama Visual Iconography of Obama', which is part of the Cornell Library's Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections.

[87] I am grateful to Stephanie Lämmert for her helpful comments on this aspect.

Fairey's insistence on making Obama seem mainstream indicates how images of Obama epitomize the fierce contest between tradition and innovation entwined with his presidency. The newness of the first black president was interwoven with new media, where, through the personalized use of the pictures by the population, a feeling of community was not only evoked, but able to materialize.

Conclusion

In May 2020, it transpired that President Trump would not unveil the official portrait of Obama that had been painted for the White House, breaking with a custom in place since Jimmy Carter. A photo of the Bushs presenting the Clintons with their portraits (Fig. 5.11) captured how much these portraits resemble the demeanour and emotional display of the political elite. Bill Clinton opted for the same tie as the one he wears in his portrait. Hillary Clinton's smile is duplicated. George W. Bush imitates Washington's pose. The artistic regime of portraits evidently not only portrays but also trains, forcefully projecting ideas of how a president should behave—which is, apparently, so appealing that media coverage jumps on such occasions where the templating becomes visible.

The templates put forward by media portrayals, both pre- and post-election, associate presidential behaviour with emotional discipline, a view that has been challenged by the election of Trump. While it could be assumed that different kinds of rulers have different emotional configurations, the comparison of Roosevelt to Hitler, still sometimes considered valid, suggests that the boundaries between democratic and non-democratic iconographies are not as clear as one might wish.[88] Democracies, like all state forms, must find a way to communicate with the many and their emotions, but unlike most other state forms, they must communicate with a particular view to participation. 'A government', Alexis de Tocqueville wrote in his *Democracy in America* of 1835, 'retains its sway over a great number of citizens, far less by the voluntary and rational consent of the multitude, than by that instinctive, and to a certain extent involuntary agreement, which results from similarity of feelings and resemblances of opinion.'[89]

[88] Loiperdinger, *Führerbilder*. See Jacobs, 'Gibt es'.

[89] Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 382. See also Burstein, *Sentimental Democracy*, 4–21; Knott, *Sensibility*, 1–22.

Fig. 5.11 Former US President Bill Clinton and Senator Hillary Clinton stand by their official White House portraits during the unveiling event hosted by President George W. Bush and First Lady Laura Bush, 14 June 2004. (Photo by Tim Sloan/AFP via Getty Images)

Media portrayals are particularly effective when they create a feel of electoral togetherness. The 'effigy of a candidate', Roland Barthes wrote, 'establishes a personal link between him and voters'. The candidate not only offers an electoral programme for voters to judge, but 'a physical climate, a set of daily choices, expressed in a morphology, a way of dressing, a posture'. Politics thereby becomes '"a manner of being", a social-moral status'. Electoral photographs offer 'to the voter his own likeness, but clarified, exalted, superbly elevated into a type'. [90] Presidential portrayals, whether official ones or their derivatives, partake in the political discourse by intertwining artistic templates with character templates and communicating the institution of the presidency to the populace. The personal likeness turns, as Barthes indicates, into a supra-individual likeness, the term's stem, 'to like', indicating that recognition oscillates between identification and appreciation. 'Americans', a study put it in 1983, 'vote

[90] Barthes, 'Photography', 91.

in overwhelming number for the presidential candidate they like most'.[91] The twenty-first-century expression of this can be seen in the various ways of 'liking' posts on the internet.

While it is impossible to define to which extent portraits, by both crystallizing and catalysing emotions, make meaningful interventions in what this book deems the democratic political sphere (i.e. an ongoing and open discussion about how people want to live together), the visual can be a means of balancing the requirements of vastly different groups. The emotional registers of politics are conveyed through visual imagery, which in turn emotionally resonate with people.

Unveiling ceremonies for presidential portraits are, according to the organizing institution, The White House Historical Association, 'often bi-partisan events with warm greetings and collegial speeches exchanged by the president and their predecessor'.[92] They are meant to symbolize that despite political differences, there is a general agreement across party lines on the legitimacy of democratic institutions themselves. While Donald Trump's decision not to attend the unveiling was just one of many instances in which he deliberately violated established, if unwritten, rules of behaviour, it must be noted that this equally successful way of connecting emotionally with parts of the population only works because there is a standard to diverge from in the first place.

George Washington's portraits set the tone for a visual genealogy of presidential depictions. US presidents still begin their tenure by choosing a portrait of their preferred predecessor to adorn the Oval Office to visually stress that they are about to take their place among a long line of predecessors. The tension between the supra-individual formations of emotions and their individualized adaption, inherent to institutional templating, relates to the essence of portraiture. Portraits must negotiate between what makes the sitter resemble other people and what makes them stand out. They invoke emotional repertoires to appeal to the electorate's emotions and express the likeness between the president and the people but also the exceptionality of the former. Be it Washington donning civilian clothing, Roosevelt bouncing back from hardship, or Obama becoming de-racialized through American colours—presidents need to evoke a united public sentiment by connecting emotionally with those they govern.

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[91] Kinder, *Presidential Traits*, 2.
[92] White House Historical Association, 'Official White House Portraits'.

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