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Political Polarization in America, Through the Eyes of a President

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Political Polarization in America, Through the Eyes of a President

Abstract

This thesis examines the extent of political polarization in America from a historical perspective, with a focus on the years of Bill Clinton's presidency. With perspective from President Clinton himself, the author examines the Clinton years and the current state of polarization in relation to other times in American history.

Keywords

Political Science Thesis, Communication and Public Service Thesis, Social Sciences, Political Science, Henry Teune, Teune, Henry

Disciplines

Public Affairs, Public Policy and Public Administration

Comments**Thesis Advisers:**

Professor Henry Teune, Political Science

David Eisenhower, Communication and Public Service

*-Political Polarization-
in America,
Through the Eyes of a President*

-David Helfenbein-

**Communication and Public Service
&
Political Science**

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1

Preface: A Scholarly Journey

I consider myself a child of the Bill Clinton Presidency.

Born in 1986, I was six-years-old when William Jefferson Clinton first took office, ten at the time of his second inaugural, and fourteen when he left the White House. I have always been fascinated with Bill Clinton; as a baby boomer only two years older than my father and with his persistent interest in the youth of our nation, I have always thought of him as somewhat of a father figure for my generation. Over the course of the last two years, in preparation for writing papers on polarization and former President Clinton, I sat down with scholars, political analysts, advisers, and pollsters, politicians, journalists, close friends of former President Clinton, and the former President himself to learn more about polarization, former President Clinton's life and his presidency in the larger context of political polarization.

It was a privilege to speak with each and every one of these individuals. I am especially grateful to former President Bill Clinton for his time. Others to whom I would like to express my sincere gratitude to are: Richard Baker, Historian of the United States Senate; Charlie Cook, Editor and Publisher of "The Cook Political Report" and Political Analyst for the National Journal Group; John DiIulio Jr., Professor of Political Science at the University of Pennsylvania, former Assistant to President Bush and former Director of the White House Office of Faith-

Based and Community Initiatives; Jennifer Duffy, Editor for U.S. Senate and Governors and Political Analyst for “The Cook Political Report”; David Eisenhower, Director of the Institute for Public Service at the Annenberg School of Communication at the University of Pennsylvania and grandson of President Dwight D. Eisenhower; William Galston, Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institution and former Deputy Assistant to President Clinton for Domestic Policy; David Greene, White House Correspondent for NPR; Anna Greenberg, Vice President of Greenberg Quinlin Rosner Research; Albert Hunt, Washington Executive Editor for Bloomberg News; Governor Jon Huntsman Jr., Governor of Utah; Ann Lewis, Senior Advisor to Hillary Clinton’s presidential campaign, former White House Communications Director and former Counselor to President Bill Clinton; Paul David Leopoulos, childhood friend of former President Bill Clinton; Bruce Lindsey, CEO of the William J. Clinton Foundation and longtime advisor to President Bill Clinton; Thomas Mann, Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institution; Leon Panetta, Co-Founder of The Leon and Sylvia Institute for Public Policy and former Chief of Staff to President Bill Clinton; Jonathon Rauch, Guest Scholar at the Brookings Institution, senior writer for *National Journal* magazine, and correspondent for *The Atlantic Monthly*; Karl Rove, longtime advisor to President George W. Bush and former Deputy Chief of Staff; Skip Rutherford, Dean of, and William J. Clinton Professor at the University of Arkansas Clinton School of Public Service and longtime friend of former President Bill Clinton.; Margaret “Peggy” Scranton, Professor of Political Science at the University of Arkansas Little Rock; Stuart Rothenberg, Editor and Publisher of “The Rothenberg Political Report,” and Henry Teune, Professor of Political Science at the University of Pennsylvania.

I first became interested in political polarization while exploring the subject as an intern at the Brookings Institution, a think tank in Washington, D.C., and as a student in the University

of Pennsylvania's Washington Semester Program. Leading up to the 2006 midterm elections, I was closely following the nearly inevitable inter-party seat changes in Congress and became interested in the research of several Brookings' scholars on polarized division between Republicans and Democrats in America, the study of a phenomenon called political polarization. I was most interested in the causes and effects of polarized politics and the extent to which polarization in America today and compares to other periods of time in American history.

After studying polarization for only a few weeks, it became immediately apparent to me that the most important – albeit challenging – element of studying polarization is to clearly define what this term means. In reading books and conducting interviews, I soon realized that everyone has a somewhat different definition of polarization and differing opinions on how polarized we are today. Keeping this possible ambiguity in mind, I want to make it immediately clear as to what I will be referring to throughout this paper in using the term “political polarization:” Plain and simple, the term will refer to “acrimonious division of political parties, between the poles, or the extremities of the two major parties in the United States.”

Polarized politics in America has its risks, which include the following: it complicates the task of addressing certain long-range domestic problems; has the potential to damage the implementation of a consistent and resolute foreign policy and national security strategy; can do lasting damage to governmental institutions, for example, the Congress and Judicial Branches; and can potentially erode the public's trust in government (Galston and Nivola 35-38). Polarization also threatens the governmental system in two additional ways: by having the potential to create deadlock, a stalled system in which two sides are evenly matched against each other; or tyranny, when one side breaks from the union to impose its vision upon the other. In all, polarization needs to be studied, because in many ways, the future of the nation depends on

understanding it better and making certain that its consequences don't far outweigh any benefits it might offer (Eisenhower).

Despite discovering initial ambiguity in the term "political polarization," there is little ambiguity as to the extent of polarization existing today as compared to other times in our nation's past. Today, we, as a nation and as a people, are far less divided than we have been at other times in our nations past – most obviously, during the Civil War. Believing that we can entirely eradicate polarization in America is an unrealistic hope, and in some ways, polarization may actually be good for our nation. Thus, even attempting to reduce polarized politics in America could potentially cause more harm than good.

Political historian Richard Hofstadter wrote, "In our politics, each major party has become a compound, a hodgepodge, of various and conflicting interests; and the imperatives of party struggle, the quest for victory, and for offices, have forced the parties to undertake the business of conciliation and compromise among such interests." Yet, as journalist Ronald Brownstein writes in his recently published book The Second Civil War, "that definition is obsolete" (Brownstein 11). Brownstein declares: "Clearly the *country* has been more polarized than it is today. What's unusual now is that the *political system* is more polarized than the country. Rather than reducing the level of conflict, Washington increases it" (Brownstein 25).

It has been most interesting to study this subject in recent years. Days after the midterm elections of 2006, I wrote the following: "Many political pundits have described the November 2006 elections as a victory for centrists. The truth, however, is that while many centrist Democrats won, a fair number of the victories were at the expense of Republican moderates." I continued to explain that the election results demonstrated that the American electorate is not all that polarized, and that while the electorate in 2006 favored the Democrats (due mostly to

Republican corruption charges and dissatisfaction with the Iraq War, as exit polls had shown), the electorate still favored centrist candidates. The American voters favored both centrism and leaned toward Democrats in a Democratic year. As this study will reveal, the American public in actuality does share centrist positions on many issues.

What the current presidential race may also demonstrate is the American electorate's call for centrism. As I write this, all three remaining presidential candidates (Senators Clinton, Obama, and McCain) have stressed the importance of working together with members of the opposite party in order to achieve success in Washington and how their previous political work has demonstrated working with those across the aisle.

Henry Teune recently suggested to me that support for Senator Barack Obama's candidacy may be "generational." Political scientists, such as Everett Carl Ladd, Jr. and Warren E. Miller, have studied generational voting patterns in order to better understand political trends. For example, in "The Puzzle Transformed: Explaining Declining Turnout," Miller states:

[The] analysis in decline in aggregate voting turnout in the United States between the 1950s and 1980s attributes the decline to changes in the generational composition of the electorate. In particular the post-New Deal generation (first presidential vote in 1968 or later), which continues to grow in size, votes at a rate well below that of older generations" (Miller 1).

It is in fact possible that we are now seeing a new generational shift with strong support by young individuals supporting Senator Barack Obama (D-IL); significant appeal to his candidacy is seemingly also based upon the belief in his potential to unify this country beyond the partisan divides (Teune).

Senator Hillary Clinton (D-NY), a political figure known to be polarizing, has focused her candidacy on experience and in offering detailed programs to respond to national and

international challenges, stressing her ability in the Senate to repeatedly work with members of the opposing party (including those who voted to impeach her husband) in achieving legislative success. Senator John McCain (R-AZ) has based his candidacy to a significant degree on his character, not only as a wartime hero, but has also focused upon his “maverick” nature in the Senate and his ability to work toward bridging political divides (Eisenhower).

In a September 12, 1960 speech to the Greater Houston Ministerial Association, John F. Kennedy said the following in regard to his prospects to become the first Catholic president of the United States:

...if this election is decided on the basis that 40 million Americans lost their chance of being President on the day they were baptized, then it is the whole nation that will be the loser, in the eyes of Catholics and non-Catholics around the world, in the eyes of history, and in the eyes of our own people (Kennedy inaugural).

David Eisenhower cited this quote in relation to the current race. With both a woman and an African American close to winning the Democratic Party’s nomination, Eisenhower commented upon what his mentor, the late Karl Von Vorvys, would say about Clinton and Obama’s candidacies. Von Vorvys would say, he noted, that these two candidates have “ascriptive differences;” unlike Kennedy, they are unable to change the way they were born – their gender and their race (as opposed to their religion) –and these two innate qualities of gender and race are inherently polarizing (Eisenhower).

In studying former President Bill Clinton, it has become apparent to me that a significant degree of his passion in politics has been about bridging racial divide. As a young man in Little Rock, he had a choice to side with those who did not want to bring about a more equal nation and those who did and he chose to side with those who did.

From his youth to the present, Bill Clinton's political journey has been a continual fight for a better, more equal America (Eisenhower).

2

Introduction: **What is Political Polarization and Why Study it?**

Among the numerous advantages promised by a well constructed Union, none deserves to be more accurately developed than its tendency to break and control the violence of faction....

By a faction, I understand a number of citizens, whether amounting to a majority or a minority of the whole, who are united and actuated by some common impulse of passion, or of interest, adversed to the rights of other citizens, or to the permanent and aggregate interests of the community.

There are two methods of curing the mischiefs of faction: the one, by removing its causes; the other, by controlling its effects.

There are again two methods of removing the causes of faction: the one, by destroying the liberty which is essential to its existence; the other, by giving to every citizen the same opinions, the same passions, and the same interests.

It could never be more truly said than of the first remedy, that it was worse than the disease. Liberty is to faction what air is to fire, an aliment without which it instantly expires. But it could not be less folly to abolish liberty, which is essential to political life, because it nourishes faction, than it would be to wish the annihilation of air, which is essential to animal life, because it imparts to fire its destructive agency.

-James Madison, Federalist No. 10, 1787 (The Federalist Papers)

Robert Dahl of Yale University has written extensively on democratic theory. In How Democratic Is The American Constitution, he writes about James Madison’s discussion of the inevitability of parties in “every political society” and the dangers that these factions, or groups, can potentially pose to society. To combat their dangers, Dahl writes, Madison “offers five

proposals that might well serve us better in our own time than the anti-majoritarian biases displayed in Federalist No. 10” (Dahl 33-34). In a newspaper entitled *The Gazette*, Madison wrote the following five proposals (as they appear in Robert Dahl’s book):

Whatever dangers political parties may pose can be overcome ‘By establishing political equality among all,’ ‘By withholding *unnecessary* opportunities from a few, to increase the inequality of poverty by an immoderate, and especially unmerited, accumulation of riches,’ ‘By the silent operation of the laws, which, without violating the rights of property, reduce extreme wealth towards a state of mediocrity, and raise extreme indigence toward a state of comfort,’ ‘By abstaining from measures which operate differently on different interests, and particularly favor one interest, at the expense of another,’ and ‘By making one party a check on the other, so far as the existence of parties cannot be prevented, nor their view accommodated’ (Dahl and Madison qtd. in Dahl 34).

Madison’s serious concerns with political division in the United States demonstrate that uneasiness toward political acrimony has existed since the establishment of the nation. In fact, in 1797, Thomas Jefferson had complained that factional disputes were so heated that “‘Men who have been intimate all their lives, cross the streets to avoid meeting, and turn their heads another way, lest they should be obliged to touch their hats’” (Brownstein 17). Scholar Jeffrey K. Tulis says the following about presidents in our political system: “Presidents work in a political system composed of elements of tension and, at times, in contradiction to one another. Presidents are taught to act as they do by the theory of leadership built into the constitutional structure and reflected in its institutional principles and incentives” (Tulis 18). In many ways, leadership causes division (Eisenhower).

As previously stated, however, the term “political polarization” goes even beyond factional division, referring to “acrimonious division of political parties, between the poles, or the extremities of the two major parties in the United States.” Thus, polarization refers to extremes whereas factional divisions regard, more basically, the existence of organized groups

and the differences in opinions between them (As Madison wrote in Federalist No. 10, factions are: "...a number of citizens, whether amounting to a majority or a minority of the whole, who are united and actuated by some common impulse of passion, or of interest, adversed to the rights of other citizens, or to the permanent and aggregate interests of the community") (Madison).

Morris P. Fiorina, who wrote a book entitled Culture War? notes the following: "The 'culture war' refers to the displacement of the classic economic conflicts that animated twentieth-century politics in the advanced democracies by newly emergent moral and religious ones." The term "culture war" is attributable to sociologist James Davison Hunter, who "divided Americans into culturally 'orthodox' and the culturally 'progressive' and argued that increasing conflict was inevitable" (Fiorina 2-3). In defining polarization, two Brookings Institution scholars William Galston and Pietro Nivola, define polarization by what it is not. It does not mean "culture war," they say, as political divisions are not solely caused by cultural issues. (Galston and Nivola 3-4). Yet, they also make the point that in recent years cultural issues have been a major factor in the political divide (Nivola and Galston 3-4).

Fiorina writes that polarization is not a synonym for partisan parity, or a close division of political parties. After first noting this, Galston and Nivola continue by saying that

An election may be closely divided without being deeply polarized, as it was in 1960, or deeply polarized without being closely divided, as it was in 1936, or neither, as seems to have been the case in the famous 'Era of Good Feeling' between the war of 1812 and Andrew Jackson's arrival on the presidential stage. The conventional wisdom is that the electorate has been both deeply *and* closely divided during most of the national elections of the past decade. We argue that this proposition is valid to an extent. Its proponents often go on to claim, however, that the interaction between *deep* and *close* division is bound to create inertia. But as George W. Bush's first term demonstrated, a president elected with a minority of the popular vote and working with only a razor-thin margin in Congress could achieve legislative successes even amid polarized politics—at

least as long as the majority party was purposeful and unified (Galston and Nivola 3).

Political polarization should be examined at three separate, albeit interconnected levels in order to be better understood: among the American public (consisting of both voters and non-voters); the electorate (the voters, varying demographically from election year to election year), and political elites (the politicians, party activists such as the state or local chairs of the parties and media pundits).

A multi-layered examination of polarization supports the following: the American electorate and political elites appear to be more polarized than the American public and the political elites seem to be by and far the most polarized group of the three. Elite polarization raises the question: Are political elites polarizing the electorate and the masses, or are the electorate and public “asking for” more polarization from the elites? In other words, is the evident polarization top-down or bottom-up? Are the political elites reacting to a more polarized electorate or is the electorate reacting to a more polarized elite class?

Some scholars have found party activists and recent changes in the politics of parties (which have increased the influence of activists) to be the main causes for increased polarization in both the electorate and at the elite level (Layman, Carsey, and Horowitz 96):

The participatory nominating process enables individuals who have ideologically extreme positions on a range of issue to exert considerable influence on party politics. Confronted with activist bases that represent extreme views on multiple types of issues, party candidates, leaders, and office holders may have strategic incentives to stake out extreme positions on these multiple agendas (Layman et al. 2005). Activists, in their roles as grassroots-level opinion leaders, also help to make ordinary citizens aware of the parties’ diverging positions on multiple sets of issues (Layman, Carsey, and Horowitz 97-98).

...Although the increasing policy differences between the parties in government and those between the parties in the electorate have exerted causal influences on each other, we have argued that neither party elites nor the mass

electorate is likely to have started this process of growing polarization along multiple policy dimensions. A more likely culprit is the base of activists in the two parties. Policy-oriented activists have grown more prevalent in recent years and several factors have increased their influence in party politics. This has probably increased the incentives for party candidates and elected officials to take ideologically extreme positions on multiple policy agendas, which in turn has pushed the parties' coalitions toward more polarized positions on various issues (Layman, Carsey, and Horowitz 104).

While this is a probable theory, the debate over a top-down or bottom-up effect is still ongoing. There is academic research to support the notion that polarization stems from both the elite and electorate levels.

The American public is unified, not divided on many political issues – even those issues thought to be most politically divisive. Also, relatively speaking, America is less polarized today when compared to other periods of time in the nation's history, even though there still are aspects of polarization. There are many possible causes for the current state of polarization and even though several reforms could potentially be enacted to try and reduce polarized politics and its effects, it is also possible that polarization may not be a negative phenomenon. As Madison warned, reforms might actually prove to be more problematic than polarization in itself (Eisenhower).

Galston and Nivola note that fellow scholars and political observers generally agree on the following points: The U.S. Congress is more ideologically polarized than a generation ago; the rise of “safe” districts in the House of Representatives has resulted in the movement of Representatives to the ideological poles; the gap between activists in both parties has widened more in recent decades (although has always existed); and technological and regulatory changes in the past two decades have resulted in a more politicized mass media (Galston and Nivola 1-2).

While many scholars and analysts acknowledge that polarization is most prevalent at the elite level, Galston and Nivola also do not minimize the habit of polarization in the electorate (Eisenhower). For example, they write that there is more party-line voting, with fewer self-identified Democrats voting for Republicans and Republicans for Democrats than in the 1970s. Finally, “rank-and-file partisans are more divided in their political attitudes and policy preferences” and religion has also become more of a determining factor for party affiliation (Galston and Nivola 2). Time will tell whether or not this electorate polarization will continue in the 2008 presidential election.

Possibly the most important to ask here is, so what? Why should anyone care about political polarization? In studying the subject, William Galston and Pietro Nivola note that increased polarization can result in at least four risks: first, it complicates the task of addressing certain long-range domestic problems, most notably those which cannot be solved without making changes to the benefits already established in the modern welfare state. The two scholars write that the United States

...will not be able to sustain the impending demographically induced bulge in the cost of extant social insurance programs without either rethinking them, or alternatively, imposing draconian tax increases or sacrificing a multitude of basic public obligations...Bipartisan cooperation is essential to face these daunting tasks (Galston and Nivola 36).

Galston and Nivola also note that polarization can also damage the implementation of a steady and resolute foreign policy and national security strategy, writing that “...stability and perseverance in the pursuit of a foreign policy are as necessary in today’s treacherous world as during the showdown with fascism in the 1940s and with communism afterwards” and that “A

course of action buffeted by polarized politicians and tugged in contradictory directions, is no course whatsoever” (Galston and Nivola 35-37).

Polarization can also cause “lasting damage to vulnerable institutions, most notably the judiciary” and can erode public trust in government (Galston and Nivola 35-36). Galston and Nivola believe that if partisan contestation is unrestricted, it can weaken various parts of government such as executive agencies and the judiciary. For example, “The grueling and often acrimonious process of confirming presidential appointments has increased vacancy rates in several judicial courts” (Galston and Nivola 38). The judicial confirmation process also politicizes the courts and erodes the system of checks and balances as set forth in the Constitution, subordinating the courts to the Executive Branch (Galston and Nivola 38 and Eisenhower). Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV) said the following in regard to “the new interpretation of advice and consent” as seemingly held by much of the legislative opposition: “The president is not entitled to very much deference in staffing the third branch of government, the judiciary.” In regard to the erosion of public trust in government, Galston and Nivola write that “An abundance of nasty campaign advertising, negative news media slants, and outbursts by truculent politicians does not necessarily discourage people from voting, but a citizenry ingesting a steady diet of partisan vitriol may nonetheless grow disenchanting and cynical” (Galston and Nivola 40). As history reveals, however, political polarization has not kept people at home. In fact, polarized elections have galvanized *more* voters – “including more of the average sort, not just fanatics of the left and right” (Galston and Nivola 39 and Eisenhower).

On the contrary, party divergence may enhance the degree of policy representation in the American political process. Citizens can profit from these differences and are better able to distinguish between parties and candidates, casting policy-oriented ballots, electing those who

best represent their constituencies, increasing party discipline on campaign promises, and making it easier for voters to hold the majority accountable. Polarization also results in stronger political parties, stronger party identification, more recognition of policy differences, and better debate between alternatives (evidence suggests that polarization results in less parental party identification and increased recognition of policy differences) (Layman, Carsey, and Horowitz 101-103 and Eisenhower).

As Henry Teune notes, the polarization in America today is nothing like polarization we have seen in the past. True polarization, he states, only exists when one faction won't accept the results of an election rewarding a victory to an opposing faction, for example when the South wouldn't accept the victory of Lincoln. What we have today are simply "cleavages" (Teune). As previously described, when elections are highly polarized, voter turnout often increases, for example with the election of Mayor Frank Rizzo in Philadelphia, which marked the peak turnout of registered voters in Philadelphia in 1971 – drawing 76.7 percent of the city's voters (Teune and Brennan). In this election, race was a crucial factor, as many saw Rizzo as a divisive, prejudiced figure in politics (Teune).

Throughout the nation's history, race has proven to be the most potent and divisive faction of all. Resulting almost in the end of a unified nation during the Civil War, the nation met the issue head on once again in the 1960s, the Civil Rights era (Eisenhower). In this study of polarization, former President Clinton discusses how the Little Rock Central High School crisis, Martin Luther King, and the Civil Rights Movement affected him personally. Yet, now with the candidacy of Senator Barack Obama, America may be on the verge of writing a new chapter to what has repeatedly divided the nation – race.

In all, polarization should be studied because the future of the nation depends on understanding it better and making certain that its consequences don't far outweigh any benefits it might offer (Eisenhower).

3

Who Polarization Divides (and Who It Doesn't)

Polarization should be examined at three separate, albeit interconnected levels in order to better understood: among the American public (consisting of both voters and non-voters); the electorate (the voters, varying demographically from election year to election year); the political elites (the politicians, party activists such as the state or local chairs of the parties, and media pundits). Such a study reveals the following:

Polarization at the elite level is evident. There is much less debate over its prevalence in comparison to polarization both in the electorate and in the American public. One way to measure political polarization among party elites is by studying the difference between the median Democrat and Republican in Congress, based upon roll call voting. As scholars David Brady and Hahrie Han observe:

Coming out of the Civil War, parties were highly polarized in 1867, and the distance between them grew slightly and peaked around the turn of the century in response to the battle over industrialization in the 1890s. After the turn of the century, the ideological distance between the parties began to decline slightly until the mid-1930s, when it leveled off until approximately the late 1950s. It then began to rise slowly through the 1960s and started to grow sharply in the mid-1970s. In the present era, the distance between the median Democrat and the median Republican has been steadily increasing since the 1970s. The difference

between the parties today is less than the difference between parties in the 1890s, but greater than it was during the New Deal era (Brady and Han 130).

Other examples of polarization are prevalent among political elites. A *New York Times* article from November of 2003 described the House of Representatives as “fiercely polarized” after Members cast votes on what should have been a routine 15 minute vote on the Medicare Prescription Drug Bill; the vote was held at 3 AM and was extended by Speaker Dennis Hastert to two hours and fifty one minutes until the desired victory was attained (Mann and Ornstein 1). Yet, polarization did not begin with Republican leadership. Instead, signs of such tensions were apparent toward the end of Democratic control in 1995 (Mann and Ornstein 7). One-party control of both Houses and the presidency merely sharpened the partisanship as apparent in two ways: the parties had become more unified and ideologically polarized and the permanent campaign had become an integral element in American politics (Mann and Ornstein 211).

Political pundits on television also constitute the class of political elites who have become more polarized in recent years. Although *Crossfire* has recently been canceled (due partially to Jon Stewart’s harsh criticisms of it, describing it as “hurting America”), many other cable news shows consist of nothing more than political bantering. News stories exaggerate the intensity of politics in America: “acrimony and strident rhetoric make good copy, whereas footage of people getting along or reaching consensus doesn’t sell” (Nivola Policy Brief 4). Al Hunt, Bloomberg News’ Washington Executive Editor, agrees, adding how this is especially prevalent in the 24/7 news coverage on cable television. When asked about his former show, *The Capital Gang*, he stated that it was argumentative but also educational. Other shows, however, are nothing but “arguing” (Hunt). David Greene, a White House Correspondent for NPR,

describes journalists who “crusade to put topics in the headline” as contributing to increased polarization (Greene).

There is even scholarly evidence to prove that “incivility is extremely entertaining” (Mutz 243). Still, as Diana Mutz of the University of Pennsylvania notes, “When members of Congress represent some of the more extreme positions (as they do now), it follows then, as a result of journalists’ tendency to rely on official sources, that those more extreme viewpoints are also more likely to be covered by the press” (Mutz 239). The journalists are more polarized because of who and what they cover.

Both Rothenberg and Cook believe that polarized politics has spread beyond the Washington elites and acknowledge that polarized politics today exists among the elites outside of the beltway. While Jon Huntsman, Jr., the Governor of Utah, describes the legislators in his state as having a “can do” attitude and as less inclined to posture themselves than work on the issues, both Rothenberg and Cook believe that polarization has spread to state legislatures – bodies that are often not partisan (Rothenberg).

Fiorina and Matthew S. Levendusky describe a term they have created, “sorting,” as “the process by which a tighter fit is brought about between political ideology and party affiliation.” According to them, polarization is not a result of “sorting,” but is instead, predominantly an elite phenomenon, “one that has led to a worrisome ‘disconnect’ between ordinary voters and those who claim to represent them” (Wolfson 2). Polarization in the electorate, however, is most likely increasing in greater proportions than Fiorina and Levendusky claim it is (Galston and Nivola 10). Scholars Jeffrey Layman, Thomas Carsey, and Juliana Menasce Horowitz agree (Layman, Carsey, and Horowitz 89-90). Academic research demonstrates a wide range to the extent of electorate polarization.

Some research shows that there exists broad middle ground on numerous issues in the electorate. At a September 26, 2006 panel at the Brookings Institution, Karlyn H. Bowman, a Resident fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, stated that qualitative and quantitative data both show the electorate as “not really that polarized” (Dionne, Bowman, and Wolfe lecture, 9/26/06). Middle ground and bipartisan agreement can be found even on the most socially controversial issues such as abortion and gay rights. John DiIulio, the first Director of the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives notes that there is not any significant evidence of marked polarization in the mass electorate in the past ten years. The differences between registered Democrats and Republicans on issues and positions are not stark, although they have gotten slightly bigger over this time period (DiIulio).

In addition, contrary to media depictions, most states are not “red” or “blue.” As Governor Huntsman says, “the country is very much a purple country”; America should be “painted purple.” The political geography of the United States is not as simple as a nation divided between partisan states or regions. The voters of many “red states” elect Democratic Governors and, likewise, the voters of “blue states” send many Republicans to the state house. North Dakotans voted overwhelmingly for President Bush in 2004 (he received 63 percent of the vote) and yet, the state’s entire congressional delegation is Democratic (Nivola Policy Brief 2).

Other academic research suggests that an increasing political divide within the electorate is statistically significant. Increases in partisan differences, especially regarding abortion and homosexuality, are substantial:

...our own estimates of partisan differences on social welfare, cultural, and racial issues in the National Election Studies (NES) conducted in presidential election years from 1972 to 2004 point to marked (and statistically significant) increases in mass party polarization...Other scholars show similar increases...(Layman, Carsey, and Horowitz 89-90).

Other examples of increasing polarization at the electorate level include: more ideologically cohesive attributes of party identifiers, increased party loyalties, party affiliation as a much stronger voting behavior predictor in presidential elections, deep divisions on views regarding national security and foreign policy among party lines, “redder” and “bluer” states in presidential vote tallies (moving away from the national norm), and a decrease in the number of congressional districts that voted across party lines for presidential and congressional contests in the same year (Galston and Nivola 8-16).

While Stu Rothenberg of “The Rothenberg Political Report” notes that politics is peripheral to some and that polarization has affected those who are politically aware, he also believes that there is a significant amount of polarization in this country. This polarization has grown since the mid-1940s and has more recently reached an unhealthy point (Rothenberg). Charlie Cook, Editor of “The Cook Political Report,” also believes that the country is as polarized as he has ever seen. He recognizes one other major polarized time in recent history: the Watergate era. He describes how Republican or Southern conservatives defended President Nixon and draws a parallel between this polarized time and the polarized politics that occurred during President Clinton’s term. There were Pro-Nixon and Anti-Nixon partisans, just as there were Pro-Clinton and Anti-Clinton partisans during the impeachment hearings (Cook).

In his 1998 book, Boston College professor Alan Wolfe meticulously examined middle-class Americans’ attitudes on various issues thought to divide the country (Eisenhower). The book was entitled: One Nation After All: What Middle-Class Americans Really Think About: God, Country, Family, Racism, Welfare, Immigration, Homosexuality, Work, The Right, The Left, and Each Other. He concludes:

Although I cannot speak with certainty about all Americans, I am persuaded from the results of this study that there is little truth to the charge that middle-class Americans, divided by a culture war, have split into two hostile camps. Middle-class Americans, in their hearts of hearts, are desperate that we once again become one nation” (Wolfe 320-321).

In fact, “opinion surveys demonstrate that on nearly every major issue—from race and gender to sex and class, from prayer-in-the-schools to homosexuality to the environment to abortion—the American people occupy a midpoint between the partisan extremes” (Wolfson 2-3). The American public is unified, not divided on many political issues. As Wolfe writes about his own “ethnographic” studies, “...I have found little support for the notion that middle-class Americans are engaged in bitter cultural conflict with each other over the proper way to live. Middle-class people are not, in their cosmopolitan liberalism, out of touch with American and its core values.” He continues, “But nor are they so conservative that they have turned their backs on the problems of the poor and excluded” (Wolfe 278).

David Eisenhower discusses the significance of polarization as a relative term. Compared to other eras of American history, polarization today is minimal. He believes that we are in “a state of major party ‘parity’ which affords major political incentives to mobilize the party base and tends to penalize efforts to reach beyond it” (Eisenhower e-mail “Political Polarization”). For example, several interviewees mentioned Karl Rove’s victory strategy for President Bush focused on getting Republican Party base votes (Greenberg) and that Rove has been a master at mobilizing the fringes (Baker). Rove disagrees with this assessment, however, noting increases in Republican voter turnout as a reason for victory, similar to the Whigs in the 1840 election (Rove). The electoral realignment that took place in the 1830s and “sharp partisan conflict over economic issues after 1836...preeminently caused voter loyalties to stabilize. In addition, ‘a

lopsided surge of new voters to the Whigs' produced victory in 1840" (Formisano and Holt qtd. in Formisano 162).

Although Eisenhower feels that polarization may be minimal in comparison to other eras in our nation's history, he also realizes how difficult the issues the electorate has to deal with today are to negotiate. They are not "bread and butter" issues but instead are "valence" issues; thus, they are divisive. Even the very discussion of such issues contributes to the appearance of a politically polarized nation (Eisenhower).

At the same time, the "operational significance" of this attitudinal polarization is questionable. It is unlikely to result in riots in the street or civil war. By comparison, the 1960s was an era centered on race but one of less outward polarization and a time when race riots erupted in the streets; the nation "tinkered with something close to a civil war." Recent years and the present time might be echoes of the 1960s, as current elites who were born in this time (like Clinton) have come to power (Eisenhower).

America was once seemingly an irredeemably polarized nation. In the 1860s, a conflict regarding non-negotiable issues ensued, one that was nationally significant, bitterly divided along regional lines, and brought forth a Civil War. The current era is obviously not as polarized as that era was, or even as polarized as the years following War, a time of significant political parity. From approximately 1865 until 1904, Republicans were "waiving the bloody shirt." The Republicans would remind the electorate of those who were on the wrong side of the battle, questioning their loyalty and patriotism. In these years, Americans in industry accepted growth embedded by laissez-faire policies (Eisenhower).

There are parallels between the political battles today and those during the post-Civil War era. Today, we are refitting our economy for a globalized era. As a result, Republicans try to

keep reformers out of office by “waving the bloody shirt” (Eisenhower). Republicans have also used this scare tactic in relation to other issues. In 2006, while campaigning for Republican members of Congress, President Bush continually tried to paint the Democrats as weak on terror. At a fundraiser on October 2, Bush said: “If you listen closely to some of the leaders of the Democratic Party, it sounds like they think the best way to protect the American people is – wait until we’re attacked again” (Olbermann). At another fundraiser on September 28, Bush said, “Five years after September 11th, the worst attack on the American homeland in history, the Democrats offer nothing but criticism and obstruction and endless second-guessing. The party of FDR, the party of Harry Truman, has become the party of cut and run” (Kehnemui Liss). Like the post-Civil War years, President Bush attempted to remind the electorate who was on the wrong side of the battle, questioning the Democrats’ loyalty and patriotism. Democrats, who as a party found a place in the antiwar movement of the 1960s, remain there in opposition to the Iraq War today. In the end, President Bush’s scare tactic did not work, with the victories of a number of moderate Democrats to both Houses of Congress in 2006 (Eisenhower).

4

Explaining Today's Divide

There are many factors that contribute to polarized politics. These include: the media, religion, war, Democratic Party foreign policy shift, the 2000 election and the Electoral College, recognizing political opportunity through polarization, the modern emergence of social and cultural issues as political issues, political parity, gerrymandering, the rise of the permanent campaign, realignment of the electorate, primaries, new institutional norms, and the difference between unified and divided government (Nivola Policy Brief 3-7 and personal interviews).

I. The Media

The increased fractionalization of the mass media is a technical factor that is often mentioned as a cause of increased polarization (Eisenhower). Although Gregg Easterbrook claims that increased polarization is actually increased “opinionization,” there is little debate as to whether or not greater polarization exists among media elites today than in past years. The rise of cable and satellite television, for example, has clearly resulted in the rise of a greater number of overtly partisan television journalists than existed thirty years ago. Charlie Cook recalls the era in which there were three major television stations and there was not a big difference between the three. Newspapers were also homogenized. He recognizes that the media did “tilt

left,” but notes that everyone had the “same diet”; everyone watched the same news. We live in a different world today. Cook mentions how his sister, who lives in Kansas, watches Fox News, listens to Rush Limbaugh, and visits FreeRepublic.com, a conservative website, at least once a day. At a family event a few years ago, she was notably upset over the filibustering of Bush judicial nominations. He then asked her what she thought about the Clinton judicial nominees who didn’t get a hearing before the Judiciary Committee. She didn’t know what he was talking about. Why?: “...because Fox and Rush never told her.” This exact story, he notes, can be replicated on the liberal side as well (Cook).

The press today is also overtly focused upon the election process and the winner of elections (Lewis). Horse race coverage is both prevalent and constant in both local and national political races. Such a focus generally stresses the partisan divide.

Stu Rothenberg mentions that the decentralization of media has resulted in an increase in press designed specifically for niche audiences: Democrats watch Keith Olbermann and visit websites such as Daily Kos and MyDD while Republicans watch Fox News and listen to Rush Limbaugh. Evidence suggests that partisan audiences do in fact select media that lean in the direction of their personal views (Mutz 226). News reporting has become “journalism of affirmation,” in which viewers watch news they agree with (Hoyt lecture, 3/27/08). Pietro Nivola questions the cause-and-effect relationship of all of this, writing that the “partitioning of audiences might suggest that increasingly the media are becoming hostages to partisan markets, rather than the other way around” (Nivola Policy Brief 4). It is unclear as to if the media breeds extremism or if it reinforces initial beliefs. In fact, there is proof for both scenarios (Dionne, Easterbrook, Rauch, Mutz lecture, 11/28/06).

Markus Prior's forthcoming book describes the widened gap between those who are politically informed and those without interest in the political process. The basic premise is that those who are uninterested in politics have more choices to avoid it, due to an increasingly fractionalized media (full of more choices for non-political entertainment). Cable and satellite subscribers, for example, have many other choices of programs to watch in place of politically related media. This results in a group of citizens who are less likely to vote and a "steady diet...for political junkies." According to Prior's thesis, "Without involuntary exposure to political media...more moderate voters will drop out of the electoral process, and the voting public will be increasingly extreme in its composition" (Mutz 232-235). The junkies are further energized to be politically active.

As previously noted, the Internet provides a means for Americans to increase politically partisan knowledge. The Internet has encouraged "ideological soul mates to seek each other out, organize, pool resources, and proselytize" (Nivola Policy Brief 4-5). Blogs have been developed for those on both sides of the aisle.

II. Religion

John DiIulio, the first Director of the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, said, "Ten years ago, I couldn't get anyone to pay attention to me talking about religion. Now people think it's the alpha and omega variable. It's not." This does not mean that religion does not matter in politics and in elections. It does matter – but it matters a lot more in measuring voting behavior in national elections (DiIulio).

The religion gap has doubled since the mid-1990s. President Bush could not have been re-elected in 2004 by those people who didn't go to church, and at the same time, John Kerry

would have lost with a wider margin if he hadn't received any substantial votes from churchgoers (DiIulio): "In 2004, exit polls found that Americans who attend services more than once a week voted for George W. Bush over John Kerry, 64 to 35 percent. By contrast, those who said they never go to religious services backed Kerry, 62 to 36 percent..." Yet, "Taken together, these two groups account for only about three voters in ten — the 16 percent of Americans who attend religious services more than once a week and the 15 percent who never do" (Dionne 183). While there may be divisions in the electorate based upon religious differences, these divisions do not account for the majority of the electorate.

E.J. Dionne, Jr. and John DiIulio, Jr. note that there is both a relationship between religion and voting and between religious individuals and Bush voters, but are cautious in stating the overall importance of religion in election outcomes. Religion is not the only factor in determining election outcomes, as is sometimes misconstrued.

For example, the religion gap takes a back seat to the race gap (DiIulio). As Dionne writes, "Where white voters backed Bush 58 to 41 percent, black voters supported Kerry, 88 to 11 percent. The gap between black and white supporters of Bush was 47 percentage points, a far larger difference than the divide between the most religious and the most secular voters" (Dionne 184). White southerners turned to the Republican Party before the rise of the religious right, primarily due to racial issues (as is evidenced by the 1964, 1968, and 1972 presidential elections) (Dionne 187). Class is another factor that matters a great deal in elections. Additionally, as Dionne adds, "...in 2004, as we have seen, there was an issue that mattered more to the electoral outcome than any of the issues related to faith: the war on terror" (Dionne 184). Exit polls in the 2006 midterms suggested that corruption and the War in Iraq were the two main reasons for

voting behavior. The main point here is: religion does matter in politics and elections, but it is not all that matters.

III. Foreign Policy and War

David Eisenhower believes that the Iraq War is symbolic: it bears on the validity of the Vietnam War. A major difference, however, is that there is no draft in the current war. In addition, the critics of this war are mostly those who disagree with the execution versus the premise of it (Eisenhower).

The Iraq War is more politically polarizing than any previously polled war. There is a wide gap between the number of Democrats and Republicans who support it (Cohen, Salvanto, and Sides lecture, 10/16/06). There was more unanimity across party lines for and against both the Vietnam and Korean Wars (Wilson 104). The current war has clearly been an “instrument for accelerating polarization” (Baker). Political elites, the electorate, and the American public all appear to be divided over the war.

The polarization over Iraq is one example of a larger polarization that has appeared in recent decades regarding foreign policy. Stu Rothenberg describes the 1950s and 1960s as an era in which the differences between the two parties were narrow. Politics always used to end “at the water’s edge.” Democrats and Republicans could disagree on healthcare, but prior to the Vietnam War, they were on the same page in regard to foreign policy. Vietnam changed this (Rothenberg). The Democrats moved leftward: “The party’s standard-bearer in 1972, it should be recalled, proposed slashing the U.S. defense budget by one-third” (Galston and Nivola 20). As is apparent by the Iraq War, a similar divide between parties in regard to war exists today.

IV. The 2000 Election, the Electoral College, and Recognizing Political Opportunity through Polarization

The closeness of the Bush election in 2000 is a contributing factor to the current state of polarized politics (Rothenberg and Cook). This election radicalized the Democrats (some of whom thought the election was “stolen”), just as the Republicans were radicalized under Clinton – the “Boomer” President (Rothenberg). During the Clinton years, Americans thought that the country was polarized. There was a “narrow sliver” of people in the middle who effectively made change. The 2000 election has led to even greater polarization (Cook).

The 2000 election was the fourth time in U.S. history that a president who had won the Electoral College but had lost a plurality of the popular vote was elected. President Bush’s governing strategy, however, was “uncompromising,” instead of “triangulating,” which was inconsistent with his ambiguous mandate to lead. It is possible that his leadership style would have been regarded as less divisive had he won a clear majority in addition to the Electoral College (Nivola Policy Brief 6).

Also, President George W. Bush has recognized “political opportunity” through polarization (Greene). His 2004 election strategy, for example, reached out to base voters (Baker, Greene, and Greenberg interviews). This strategy is retrospective: President Bush realized that if he lost the conservative base, like his father, “bad things can happen” (Greene). Anna Greenberg suggests that this presents a dilemma for governing. Governing is a more difficult task when you are elected by “base strategy” (Greenberg). However, President Bush has also used polarizing tactics toward his advantage in governing, for example, in cutting taxes:

Inheriting a sharply polarized political environment, the new president chose to make the intense partisanship work to his advantage rather than try to diminish it. This entailed demanding unity from his fellow Republicans on Capitol Hill based on shared political stakes; encouraging House leaders to produce the strongest possible

version of his legislative proposals; circumventing Senate Democratic leaders by seeking a handful of Democratic defectors on an issue-by-issue basis; and then dominating the conference committee process to write legislative language that delivered most of what he sought (Mann and Ornstein 124).

Overall, President Bush's campaigning and governing strategies have incorporated attempts to use polarization toward his political advantage. Members of Congress' willingness to be "loyal foot soldiers" has also aided in this effort, as is evidenced by the passage of the 2003 Medicare Prescription Drug Bill.

V. The Modern Emergence of Social and Cultural Issues as Political Issues

Social and cultural issues have come to the forefront of the political dialogue and debate in recent decades. In the 1950s, for example, Civil Rights was an issue that cut across party lines and galvanized a dealignment of national political conditions (Eisenhower). It was a bipartisan issue: there was a good deal of agreement between parties. By the time that the 1980s rolled around, abortion was at the forefront but abortion is very much drawn along party lines. In the 1990s, gay marriage became a significant issue, also divisive along party lines. Cultural issues that were previously ignored in the 1940s and 1950s came about in recent decades (Rothenberg). These cultural issues are, as David Eisenhower previously noted, not "bread and butter" issues. They are in principle very divisive along party lines.

VI. Political Parity and Gerrymandering

Parity has contributed to the current state of polarization (Hunt). Election results are incredibly close. The Senate, as it currently stands, only requires a one seat change for the other party to take control. In 2001, Senator Jeffords single-handedly changed majority-minority status

in the Senate by switching parties. In a time of such political parity, with leadership potential well within reach, the battle for this advantage is all the more fierce:

America's political parties are colliding because they are competing for power almost in a dead heat. Unusually small margins now make the difference between winning or losing the presidency, the House, or the Senate. With so much riding on marginal changes in political support, it is not surprising to see both sides battling to gain an edge by whatever means are deemed effective.

So, for instance, if the GOP sees that redrawing district lines in Texas can add a few seats to its majority in the House, the opportunity is seized without hesitation. When the Democratic opposition gets a chance to trip up a Republican president's judicial nominees, it frequently doesn't seem to hesitate either. The perpetually quarrelsome atmosphere sows ever more resentment and distrust (Nivola Policy Brief 4).

In our current state of political parity, scoring political points is most important (Duffy). This profit in scoring points is enhanced by gerrymandering (Eisenhower).

Congressional redistricting is not “the sole or even a primary cause of polarization. But that does not mean it is irrelevant” (Mann 265-266). The gerrymandering of districts creates partisan advantages by increasing the number of safe districts and decreasing the number of competitive ones. In addition, while redistricting may play no role in the Senate, many Senators who have moved from the House to the Senate have brought their contentious attitudes with them (Mann and Ornstein 12).

Gerrymandering may actually be more of an effect of polarization than a cause in itself, with parties working to squeeze out party advantages. This doesn't mean, however, that redistricting reforms wouldn't reduce political polarization (Taylor Jr., Mann, Baden, Hirsch, and Edsall lecture, 10/30/06).

VII. Realignment of the Electorate and Primary Elections

Many scholars and analysts repeatedly point out that inter-party coalitions used to be much more prevalent in politics. Charlie Cook discusses how there used to be Southern Democrats who voted like Republicans. Now, these individuals have either died or changed parties. Southern conservative, low income, working Democrats have become Republicans. Similarly, conservative social and cultural values are driving upscale whites in the North to leave the Republican Party and to join the Democratic Party (Cook). As a result of the electorate realignment, the Republican Party – which is now anchored in the South and West – has become more orthodox (Nivola Policy Brief 4).

Meanwhile, primaries encourage extremism. John McCain has repeatedly tried to position himself to better appeal to conservative voters, and for good reason. Typically, those who turnout to vote in primaries are the most conservative Republicans and the most liberal Democrats. The electorates in presidential primaries tend to be small, under 18 percent, and unrepresentative of the public at large (Nivola Policy Brief 5).

Upon first glance, this year's primaries involving Senators Clinton, Obama, and McCain seem to suggest that the electorate is choosing more moderate candidates. However, as Pietro Nivola notes, John McCain was aided greatly by a split of the conservative base vote between Governors Mike Huckabee and Mitt Romney and the GOP primaries tended to be winner-take-all. On the Democratic side, Barack Obama, who is currently ahead in the delegate count, has a more liberal voting record than Hillary Clinton (Nivola e-mail).

VIII. New Institutional Norms, the Permanent Campaign, and Unified versus Divided Government

Incivility can be linked to institutional factors (Eisenhower). Although examples of incivility in the American legislative bodies are not new (in the words of Senate Historian Richard Baker, “there have been periods of enormous frustration”), incivility and collegiality that has existed in the past is no longer the same. Today’s rivalries do not match the infamous rivalry of 1856, in which Senator Charles Sumner, a Republican abolitionist, was caned by Democratic Representative Preston Brooks, but they still do run deep (Mann and Ornstein 29). Since the late 1970s, the growing ideological polarization between the parties has resulted in more aggressive and partisan leadership (Mann and Ornstein 179). The impeachment of President Clinton, for example, was a “weapon in the partisan wars”:

...Activists in the party base would be courted, not ordinary citizens. James Madison would be turned on his head: rather than the mob whose passions had to be cooled by their more deliberate leaders, the public struggled to contain the sectarian obsessions of their representatives in Washington.

Impeachment represented a further escalation of political differences (Mann And Ornstein 122).

The “permanent campaign” has also contributed to increased polarization. This term was first widely publicized by Sidney Blumenthal, who described it as “a combination of image making and strategic calculation that turns governing into a perpetual campaign and ‘remakes government into an instrument designed to sustain an elected official’s popularity’” (Hecklo 1-2). The permanent campaign has also come to mean a greater reliance on constant fundraising (Hunt). The development of the jet plane has made it possible for politicians to travel the country on campaign trips in short periods of time. Their families stay in their home districts and states and thus, members have even greater incentive to travel back home immediately after Congress

recesses for the long (usual four day) weekend. As a result, politicians spend less time in Washington, DC, which diminishes collegiality among members of Congress, most notably between members of opposite parties (Dionne Jr., Mann, Ornstein, and Weber, lecture, 10/31/06).

Regarding the composition of governmental bodies, according to a study by David Mayhew, there is no significant difference in producing legislation between single- and split-party control (Jones 242). It can be argued, however, that unified government permits partisans to move their political agendas further to the left or the right than otherwise possible. The Republican victory in 1994, for example, enabled Clinton to govern more toward the center. (Nivola Policy Brief 6-7). Similarly, President Bush will likely have to compromise more now under divided government than he did under unified government. Arguably, his first post-election speech demonstrated more willingness to compromise and to work with Democrats than those made in the past.

James Madison said, “There are...two methods of removing the causes of faction: the one, by destroying the liberty which is essential to its existence; the other, by giving to every citizen the same opinions, the same passions, and the same interests” (Federalist No. 10). Before studying whether or not reforms can and should be made to try and curb polarization, we will examine polarization through the eyes of a president.

5

Polarization and the President from Hope

After conducting interviews with several individuals who have known President Clinton, it became all the more apparent that he has been a politically polarizing figure since his earlier days in politics as Governor of Arkansas. Bill Clinton was different than other politicians: he was smarter and more tactful, he was incredibly passionate about many issues, and most importantly, he knew how to win. This drove Republicans, both in Arkansas and nationally, mad. On the national level, Republicans had a reason to fear Clinton: he was a legitimate threat to their party's control over 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue. By 1992, it seemed as if the Republicans had grown accustomed to living in the White House: no Democrat had won it since 1980, and after the 1984 and 1988 elections, it didn't seem like Democrats were in too good shape to win it back. Clinton's unique qualities, combined with his ability to outmaneuver and beat the Republicans in what was, after all, a Republican era, were both likely significant factors in the development of Clinton as a politically polarizing figure. In 1993, William Jefferson Clinton, who faced tough odds, became the leader of the most powerful nation in the world. This man, who from the days of his childhood was deeply affected by poverty and damaged race relations,

developed his incredible intelligence and unparalleled political skills to become a reform-minded President in formerly conservative Reagan era (Clinton, Eisenhower, and Rutherford interviews).

While studying the former President, I traveled to Arkansas to research at the Clinton Library. On my second day there, I met with Bill Clinton's childhood friend, Paul David Leopoulos. Leopoulos met William Jefferson Clinton for the first time in the third grade in Hot Springs, Arkansas – where Bill Clinton moved after living in Hope, his birthplace. The two lived a block and a half away from one another.

Paul David Leopoulos met me in the lobby of the newly built Clinton School, a former train station with two waiting rooms, one for whites and one for blacks. He walked in wearing all denim, apologizing for his outfit after just finishing work on his farm. Paul David Leopoulos was a religious man and a deeply honest individual who held nothing back. After the interview, I distinctly recall him telling me that he was not a rich man. It was at that moment that everything came together for me: for the first time, I saw where Bill Clinton came from. I saw a poor boy that was born into a family with a deceased father, and soon after, an alcoholic stepfather. It occurred to me that Clinton surmounted some incredible challenges. Through my readings and discussions with others, it also occurred to me that any deficits in Clinton's life were accounted for by his mother's unrelenting love and unparalleled character.

Leopoulos describes Clinton as a “superman” and “supernatural.” He believes that Clinton has a number of qualities not often found together: superb intellect, passion for others, and great communication skills. He recalls an example from Clinton's youth when the former President demonstrated great care for another individual. He told me that a young Bill Clinton was in the supermarket on Thanksgiving Day and started talking to another child who told him that he didn't have a place to go for dinner. Clinton invited this boy over to his house for a home-

cooked meal; the boy came (Leopoulos). From all of my conversations with Arkansans who have been friends with Clinton for years, I became easily convinced that Clinton has cared deeply for others since he was a little boy.

Clinton's childhood friend also has some fond memories of Bill Clinton's mother, Virginia. He told me that she would frequently come home and "step onto a soapbox" about something. The two children would listen closely to what she had to say; Leopoulos believes that Clinton learned about important worldly matters directly from his mother, long before most children his age did, and thus began to develop opinions about serious matters and subjects at a very young age (Leopoulos).

Paul David Leopoulos also noted that Clinton is a forward-looking individual, especially regarding his personal work. During the March 17th interview, the former President told me that he liked John Kennedy, for, among other reasons, his interest in America having a positive role in the world. He was touched by all of the people in Latin America who had his pictures on the walls of their homes after Kennedy started the Alliance for Progress. After studying the era in which he grew up, I can easily imagine a young Clinton actively listening to President Kennedy's inaugural address on January 20, 1961, in which Kennedy summoned a young generation to national and international service. In his inaugural, Kennedy said: "To our sister republics south of our border, we offer a special pledge — to convert our good words into good deeds — in a new alliance for progress — to assist free men and free governments in casting off the chains of poverty" (Kennedy inaugural). Leopoulos told me that recently he and Clinton were discussing an article about all the work that the former President is doing in Africa to help save children with AIDS. Clinton looked at Leopoulos and said, "It's not the kids we've saved; it's the kids we haven't saved" (Leopoulos).

The debate over racial justice and the dual system of public facilities such as schools had a great impact on many Arkansans in the years of Clinton's youth. In September 1957, Little Rock's Central High School was a battleground in the struggle for civil rights. After a decision in *Brown v. Topeka Board of Education* was issued, declaring segregated schools unconstitutional, nine black students – who afterwards became known as “The Little Rock Nine” – attempted to enter an all-white school while members of the Arkansas National Guard blocked their entrance. After three weeks of negotiations between President Dwight D. Eisenhower and Governor Orval E. Faubus of Arkansas, Eisenhower called in the United States Army's 101st Airborne Division to escort the students into the school. The controversy itself led to the closing of the Little Rock Public High Schools the following year (Little Rock Central High School Pamphlet).

During my interview, I asked President Clinton how his youth shaped his political beliefs and career. His answer, plain and simple, was “enormously.” He said:

President Clinton: I was formed by the direct impact of the Little Rock Central High School crisis, and by Martin Luther King, and the whole Civil Rights Movement, and also by the influence of my family. You know, my grandparents were just poor, relatively uneducated, white Southerners, and unlike most relatively uneducated white Southerners, they were very strongly supportive of equal rights for African-Americans. And they had a big impact on me, and I just, I'd always felt that way, and it was the defining issue of my childhood. Even more than the Vietnam War was...I was older when that happened, you know, in college.

Plain and simple, a young Bill Clinton was shaped enormously by both his family and the defining racial moments of his childhood (Clinton interview). His political career which followed was to a large degree dedicated to a quest for racial justice (Eisenhower).

When I traveled to Arkansas, I asked several of President Clinton's longtime friends why they thought he has been viewed by many as a politically polarizing figure. The answers were

incredibly similar and not very different from what Clinton said himself. The most common answer was: because Bill Clinton is so smart and is able to outmaneuver the opposition (Leopoulos, Panetta, and Rutherford interviews). Clinton didn't mention his intelligence, but did acknowledge that his ability to defeat Republicans has likely contributed to the view that he is polarizing.

Skip Rutherford, a close friend of President Clinton's since his late twenties, notes that as governor, Clinton aroused politically polarizing feelings. He believes that it stemmed from three primary causes: from jealousy, because Clinton was so incredibly intelligent; from his own ambition, acknowledging that ambition makes some people uneasy; and from his outspoken commitment to civil rights, equal rights, and human rights. Clinton, who is not only smart and ambitious, was outspoken on many issues as Governor, constantly challenging the status quo – for example, by threatening the white power structure with his stance on Civil Rights – and was wholly unapologetic for his controversial stances. Clinton could also successfully co-opt the opposition (Rutherford). Leon Panetta, President Clinton's Chief of Staff from 1994-1997, agreed with Rutherford's analysis of others being jealous of Clinton, noting that he was the type of student who always came out on top. Panetta said that in addition to Clinton's intellect, capability, and broad visions, he is still a “political animal” and he is “tough” (Panetta).

Since his earliest days in politics, Clinton has always been a strong supporter of equal rights for all races and nationalities. Taking such a passionate stance on an issue that had divided America since its inception surely contributed to Clinton's polarizing effect. During the March 17th interview, I asked the former President how much he thought that the 1990s were an echo of the 1960s, the civil rights era. He answered as follows:

President Clinton: *The Republican Party stopped being the progressive party of America after Theodore Roosevelt left office. They were never the progressive party, although Richard Nixon and Dwight Eisenhower were practically socialists compared to the people that run it now. They were much less conservative than these people are, but the, they, and a lot of those people were reacting to the '60s, they became Republicans because of the Civil Rights Movement. And basically, that's the culture in which I grew up, so I understand it, and one of the things that their politics have always valued is an enemy. They always have to have an enemy. They need an enemy to sort of polarize people, divide them, keep them torn up, and upset, and that's again, it's most effective when they're in opposition. When they get in, and have to govern, most people don't like that very much, but it's when they feel insecure or uncertain, then that sort of appeal works better.*

Peggy Scranton, a Professor at the University of Arkansas who has studied President Clinton in great detail, agrees that Clinton has been a lightning rod for political polarization since his days as Governor. She believes that one of the factors which contributed to Clinton's polarization *in Arkansas* was his return to the state from studying on the East Coast. She said: "to some people in Arkansas, it seemed like a smart East Coaster was coming in and telling us how to do this [and that], when we [were] doing just fine anyway." (Scranton) A background of an elite East Coast education was not looked highly upon in Arkansas politics (Eisenhower). In fact, "Arkansans and southerners in general in this era were especially sensitive about Easterners descending on their states to tell them how to manage their affairs and southern race relations." Thus, Clinton "faced a tall order in convincing Arkansans that he had not taken on the ways of the Yankee [N]ortheasterners, and yet he was able to do so" (Eisenhower e-mail "East Coast Studies"). (Clinton attended Georgetown University and worked for Senator Fulbright in Washington, DC. A few years later, he attended Yale Law School, before returning to Arkansas and serving in public office.)

Scranton also added that Clinton was polarizing in relation to "culture wars." As previously noted, James Davison Hunter's Culture Wars found a chasm between "orthodox" and

“progressive” factions and that each “can only talk past the other” (Galston and Nivola 4). In recent decades, social and cultural issues have come to the forefront of the political dialogue and Clinton has taken stances on such issues, for example, abortion – which is clearly drawn along party lines (Clinton is pro-choice). As Professor David Eisenhower noted, these cultural issues are not “bread and butter issues”; instead, they are incredibly divisive along party lines.

Likely also contributing to Clinton’s representation as a polarizing politician was his stance against the Vietnam War; he represented the group of young adults who had challenged the status quo. As a young politician who had a definite agenda, who supported Civil Rights, and who was against the Vietnam War, from the very beginning, he took firm positions on incredibly divisive issues (Scranton). Clinton did not try to conceal his views on the Vietnam War, as many other youth activists from his era were opposed to it as well. Despite his polarizing stances, Clinton seemed to fare well in the public at large, especially in regard to his “empathy and effectiveness” (Eisenhower). For example, Bruce Lindsey, another longtime and very close friend and advisor of Clinton’s, noted that even throughout the impeachment process the American people continued to give Clinton high marks (Lindsey). Lindsey is correct: a CNN/USA Today/Gallup Poll released on December 20, 1998 revealed that “in the wake of the House of Representatives' approval of two articles of impeachment, Bill Clinton's approval rating...jumped 10 points to 73 percent” (CNN). Lindsey said that the President realized that the division over impeachment was greater among political elites than in the population at large (Lindsey).

Bill Clinton was also polarizing because he was a new breed of Democrat – a repackaged, winning Democrat, committed to a vision of a socially progressive, diverse America (Eisenhower).

6

Bill Clinton: A New Democrat

Bill Clinton was a New Democrat, a new breed of Democrat. DLC Founder and CEO Al From acknowledged in a 2005 speech at Hofstra University that the first New Democrat rhetoric was uttered by Senator Edward Muskie in the mid-1970s in which he recognized that in order to preserve progressive governance, liberalism had to be reformed. The first organized efforts to reform the party occurred in the early 1980s. With President Reagan in the White House, a Republican Senate, and Republican landslide in the House, it appeared that the Democrats had to reform or else they were doomed (Eisenhower).

After studying 20th Century Democratic presidents, such as Roosevelt, Kennedy, and Johnson, it has become all the more apparent to me that a New Democrat is a synthesis of past party successes combined with a certain “toughness” that didn’t exist in the party in the 1980s. New Democrat principles focus upon responsibility, opportunity, and community, all of which are alluded to in President Clinton’s second inaugural address.

Responsibility is an echo of President Kennedy’s successes; recall his inaugural address: “Ask not what your country can do for you -- ask what you can do for your country” (Kennedy

inaugural). In From's 2005 speech, he said that Democrats had forgotten what John Kennedy had taught: that opportunity and responsibility must go hand in hand (From).

Opportunity is an echo of President Roosevelt's successes; in his second inaugural, he said: "Government is competent when all who compose it work as trustees for the whole people." Al From notes that just as Roosevelt and the New Dealers modernized the Democratic Party for the Industrial Era, Clinton modernized the party for today (From). From continues,

In the same Democratic tradition of innovation, the New Dealers brought America back from economic depression and the New Democrats led an economic resurgence in the 1990s. By tempering the excesses of capitalism, Roosevelt saved capitalism. By modernizing progressive governance, Clinton saved progressive governance (From).

Clinton, like Roosevelt, believed that the Democratic Party should provide the American people with the opportunity for success.

Finally, community is an echo of President Johnson's successes; in his Great Society speech, Johnson says that the "Great Society" "demands an end to poverty and racial injustice" and describes the "Great Society" as "a place where the city of man serves not only the needs of the body and the demands of commerce but the desire for beauty and the hunger for community" (Johnson Great Society).

A New Democrat was a synthesis of past successes of the Democratic Party, most notably FDR, JFK, and LBJ. It also reconnected the party with its past, with its "first principles and grandest traditions," while also expanding upon them (From). In his speech, Al From said:

By choosing to emphasize growth over redistribution, Clinton reconnected the Democratic Party with Andrew Jackson's credo of opportunity for all, special privileges for none. By choosing reciprocity over entitlement, he reconnected his party with John Kennedy's ethic of mutual responsibility. By choosing tough-minded internationalism over isolationism, he reconnected Democrats to the

progressive internationalism of Wilson, Roosevelt, Truman and Kennedy. And, by choosing empowering government over bureaucracy, he reconnected his party with Roosevelt's tradition of innovation and reform (From).

A New Democrat was also a “durable Democrat” – one who could win in the Reagan Era. A New Democrat was therefore also bound to arouse Republican scrutiny, especially Clinton, who seemed to be the most durable New Democrat of them all: a Democrat who could win and did win (twice) the race for the highest office in the land. (Eisenhower and From). In his speech, From specifically mentions Bill Schneider’s views on how Clinton fit the mold for what the Democrats needed: a “tough liberal,” similar to Roosevelt, Truman, Kennedy, and Johnson, of which they hadn’t seen in many years, especially after the Democrats seemingly began to be known as the party that was incapable of winning the White House (From). Clinton mentioned to me that the Republicans tried to defeat him by treating him as other, past Democrats who had run for office, but that they were unsuccessful because he was a new type:

President Clinton: If you look at this, if you look at the Democrats who ran and lost, Jimmy Carter for re-election, Mondale was never in the race so it's no difference, Dukakis, if they'd won, they would have all been polarizing figures, because the strategy the Republicans sought was to go after them personally. There was something wrong with their values, or their strength, or their this, or their that, and they tried to turn them literally into two-dimensional cartoons. That's what they tried to do to me, and I think that, frankly, I became polarizing to them, because I beat them. You know, and they literally, a lot of them, I heard many conversations, where people that talked to them, said -- the various active Republicans in Washington, they really didn't think they'd ever have another Democratic President. They thought they'd found a formula to put us in a cookie cutter, and they couldn't put me in the cookie cutter. I mean, I was just as anti-crime as they were, I felt just as strongly that people who on welfare that could work should work as they did, I believed in a strong national defense, and I was more fiscally responsible than they were.

From said that Clinton’s New Democrat philosophy was “the modernization of liberalism.” It involved progressive policies which created opportunity for all, not just the

entitled few. It incorporated values like work, family, responsibility, and community and offered solutions to governing other than strictly bureaucracy (From). Clinton believes that his polarization has not been based upon issue stances, but on his ability to outmaneuver the opposition. He does acknowledge, however, that his stances on certain issues contributed to his polarization as well:

President Clinton: But, I did things that drove them crazy too. They didn't like the fact that I was pro-choice, that I thought that we should cut taxes on the working poor, and that wealthy Americans should pay their fair share, should pay over more, that made them mad. They didn't want to break the monopoly of the health insurance companies on healthcare coverage, even if we had people who didn't have coverage, and the costs were bankrupting the economy. I think a lot of them thought I was a liberal in moderate's clothing and they didn't like the fact that I was for gay rights. I think that drove a lot of them to see me as a polarizing figure. But my style wasn't polarizing.

President Clinton also discussed his ability to combat Republican attacks:

President Clinton: ...they got mad when I answered their attacks. They acted like I was a negative politician because, when they attacked me, I answered back and kept them from defeating me. But I didn't start any of those fights. They came after me, even in the primary. You know, so, I basically think I wouldn't have been viewed as polarizing if I'd lost. I just think that they had a game plan, and they carried it out, and you know, if you go back and look, they did their best to deny me the so-called Presidential Holiday. You know, no free time, attacking from the beginning, deny his legitimacy.

This quote by Clinton alludes to a modern transformation in presidential politics: the inclusion of private morality in connection to public morality. The Republicans continuously attempted to destroy Clinton based upon private moral issues – attempting to tie them to his presidency. Note the quotation by Clinton below:

President Clinton: [The Republicans] thought that Presidential coverage was about scandal, and that's what they wanted, and even with that, they couldn't get the job done. And it just drove them nuts I think. But to me, you know, I just

couldn't imagine why we were wasting all of this energy on all of this stuff. I just thought it was such a colossally stupid thing to do when the country had all these challenges, and when we could have legitimate debates over things that mattered that we really disagreed about and work out compromises. And so in the second term, we basically operated on two tracks. They continued to bash me in public...But underneath that, when we got down to the hard-nosed budget negotiations, we did business. And we did some things they wanted, we did some things I wanted, we operated the country the way it should operate, and we made enormous progress in a whole range of areas in my second term. So it was almost like living in a parallel universe my second term. The politics and the rhetoric, and the press was one thing, and what was actually happening for America was another, and when we'd get something done, or when there was some big step forward, then it would break through, and the public would see yes, we were still on track. It was fascinating.

David Eisenhower notes that the inclusion of private morality in public context was first apparent in a speech delivered by Ronald Reagan on behalf of Barry Goldwater in 1964 entitled “The Speech,” or otherwise known as “Rendezvous with Destiny” (Eisenhower). Reagan says of Goldwater:

During the hectic split-second timing of a campaign, this is a man who took time out to sit beside an old friend who was dying of cancer. His campaign managers were understandably impatient, but he said, ‘There aren’t many left who care what happens to her. I’d like her to know I care.’ This is a man who said to his 19-year-old son, ‘There is no foundation like the rock of honesty and fairness, and when you begin to build your life upon that rock, with the cement of faith in G-d that you have, then you have a real start.’ (Reagan Rendezvous with Destiny).

President Reagan’s focus was on Goldwater’s *private morality*.

The basic premise of Reaganism is evident in Reagan’s “A Time for Choosing Speech,” made in the same year. Reagan said, “The Founding Fathers knew a government can't control the economy without controlling people. And they knew when a government sets out to do that, it must use force and coercion to achieve its purpose.” Reagan continues by saying, “So we have come to a time for choosing” (Halsall).

Reaganism was based upon limited government, private enterprise, and the private sector. The distinction between Reagan's descriptions of Goldwater – of private morality – juxtaposes the Kennedy-Johnson Era's emphasis on the morality of the public good through public policies – public morality. Republicans elect "*moral leaders*," who understand the limits of government and protect us from too large a government, to better our lives. Democrats enact "*moral laws*" for the betterment of the American people. The basic premise of Reaganism is that it is not government and policy which result in a better society. Instead, character development and private acts of charity do (Eisenhower). The paradigm results in the following: Republicans, who define themselves by their own example-setting private morality, are therefore better positioned to attack the Democrats for any lack of private morality, and to turn them into (as Clinton himself said) "two-dimensional cartoons" (Clinton interview). In turn, the Democrats, who enact moral laws, are better positioned to criticize the Republicans for working against the common good and only for a select group or groups of Americans. Republicans' constant attacks on Clinton for the most part concerned his private morality, and fair or unfair, contributed to the polarization of this man. Whether or not the attacks are truthful, they serve as means for members of the two parties to characterize themselves and their opposition.

Reaganism, which extolled acts of private morality, was a set of beliefs which called into question Kennedy's popularization of certain issues, such as civil rights and poverty. In this regard, Reaganism is a set of attitudes and beliefs based upon an idea that American social activism during the in the 1960s was wrong. Reaganism dismisses the Kennedy-Johnson years as successful. Clintonism – partially a continuation of the Kennedy-Johnson years – is thus the antithesis of Reaganism, and attempts to validate the progress of the Kennedy-Johnson years as a

success (Eisenhower). During the March 17th meeting with President Clinton, he and I spoke specifically about the 1960s:

President Clinton: ...I think that for a lot of conservatives, who were not necessarily mean-spirited, but voted with the Republicans, saw the '60s as more negative than positive. They just saw it as a period, they weren't necessarily racist, they just saw a lot of social breakdown, they saw the riots in the cities, and they saw the protests, and they saw the breakdown of the family, you know, they saw those things, and they attributed it to erroneous government policies in stuff regarding society, and so the conservative rhetoric had a lot more appeal to them. And I think that, so, I don't mean to say that everybody that voted with the Republicans was, you know, they weren't all like their political leaders. But we've seen in Washington, but until they had to leave, DeLay was the heart and soul of their Congressional strategy. But there were a lot of really good people who followed them, who were just old-fashioned straight-laced people who didn't get anything directly from the government; at least they didn't perceive that they did, anyway, and they wanted to live in a more orderly country. And I think there was a sort of backlash from the '60s.

Clinton then places himself into this construct:

President Clinton: And then there were people like me that think there was a lot more good than bad in the '60s. It was the period of the Civil Rights Movement, the rise of the women's movement, the nascent environmental movement, which really took off in the '70s, young people were very active in politics. I just think that there was a lot more good than bad. And the peace movement also did more good than bad. Yes, there were excesses, but it was a turbulent time. The excesses were in reaction to things that our government was doing that were excessive, and problems in our society that were profound, and it's difficult to make those changes without the kind of emotional strains on a society that we saw. And, in my memoir...at the end, I basically say, that when I served, I thought that people who looked back at the '60s and saw more good than bad tended to be Democrats, people who saw more bad than good tended to be Republicans. But for me, I don't think any of my policies, or the way that I governed was in reaction to the '60s. It had lots more to do with my personal experience of growing up in Arkansas, trying to solve problems, and serving as the governor of a small state, where I had to constantly try to unite diverse groups of people and conflicting interests, and get people to sit down together and talk through their differences, and work to an acceptable conclusion. So, I never saw myself as some sort of a reincarnation of a '60s figure. That was a cartoon that was put on me by my adversaries to try to undermine my ability to win elections and be effective once I got to be President. And, I didn't take any particular offense at it. It's the

way they thought, and it's the way they did their politics, and it worked so well for them that in Presidential election after Presidential election after Presidential election that I got what they were doing, but I think they got increasingly more frustrated when it didn't work. If anything, I think they were dominated by their sort of '60s construct, and because I'd grown up in the South with people who were extremely skilled at keeping people torn up...I've said all the time: I knew it when I saw it, and I was able to react to it in a positive way.

Bill Clinton, who as a young boy was impacted by the events at Little Rock Central High and Kennedy, Johnson, and King, and who emerged as the strongest Democratic leader in the late 1980s, stood at a high point in 1997. Although it was a maxim for both him and the Democratic Party, Clinton realized that there was a significant amount of work remaining to be done; he also seemed to realize that the Republican Party still had strength despite its weakened status. The President knew that his second term only marked the beginning of an American journey, but he wanted to build what he saw as the best possible bridge for us all to cross into the twenty-first century.

Clinton's second inaugural is paramount because in many ways it represented the zenith of his rise as a "New Democrat," despite a Republican takeover in 1994 and a governmental stalemate and consequential shutdown of government. The 1997 inaugural was a plateau for a Democrat after a painstaking defeat of Republicans (Eisenhower). The inaugural was also a chance for Clinton to interpret his presidency in the larger context of American history. The speech linked Roosevelt's, Kennedy's, and Johnson's visions of America with Clinton's through the lens of the New Democrat principles: responsibility, opportunity, and community. In the speech, Clinton also expanded upon his vision of community to include the visions of a non-president, Martin Luther King, who dreamt "the American Dream." He said that King is "like a prophet of old." In doing so, he awarded MLK a higher status than any of the presidents. King is

not equal to the presidents he mentions in his speech; King speaks with the will of G-d (Clinton second inaugural and Eisenhower).

Clinton defines race as America's constant challenge and measures progress by the treatment of all citizens "as equals before the law and in the heart." This is in stark contrast to how Reagan Republicans would view progress; to them, progress is measured by the expansion of individual political and economic liberty, which is America's constant challenge. In his second inaugural, Clinton attempts to prove that government is not powerless in promoting racial justice. In other words, as Kennedy and Johnson set out to prove thirty years earlier, public morality *is* a feasible goal. (Clinton second inaugural and Eisenhower).

President Clinton delivered his second inaugural Address on January 20, 1997, the day that marked the beginning of his second term in office. The speech itself is a collage of echoes to several other speeches, including: President Franklin Roosevelt's second inaugural (January 20, 1937); President John F. Kennedy's inaugural address (January 20, 1961); Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech (August 28, 1963); President Lyndon B. Johnson's "Great Society" speech (May 22, 1964); President Lyndon B. Johnson's "We Shall Overcome" speech (March 15, 1965); and Martin Luther King's "I See the Promised Land" speech (April 3, 1968, given a day before he was killed). There are also responses in his inaugural to past speeches made by two Republican Presidents: Ronald Reagan's first inaugural (January 20, 1981); and George Herbert Walker Bush's first inaugural (January 20, 1989).

President Clinton's visions can largely be traced back to those of Franklin D. Roosevelt, Martin Luther King, John F. Kennedy, and Lyndon B. Johnson – all of which sharply contrast visions of conservatism. Clinton draws upon earlier ideas for a purpose: to remind Americans

that in the grand debate between private and public morality, between Reaganism and a new synthesis of Democratic principles, the Democratic vision prevails.

7

A President's Reflections & a Moment in Time: January 20, 1997

Leon Panetta said that when President Clinton worked on speeches in the White House, especially important ones like the second inaugural, he generally sat down first with speechwriters and aides and prepared an outline and wrote out possible themes. He would talk through the outline and listen to discussion of it. Out of this discussion, Clinton would get a better sense of the themes he wanted to stress in a particular speech, and then speechwriters would write a draft. Next, the President would make a large number of revisions to the draft, writing new paragraphs and moving sections around. The speechwriters would usually then write a second draft, followed by another discussion meeting. President Clinton would constantly revise his speeches; he got better with the revision process with practice (Panetta). From personal experience, Bill Clinton is often revising his speeches up until only a few minutes before the speech is given.

Michael Waldman was Director of Speechwriting for President Clinton from 1995 until 1999. In his book, POTUS Speaks: Finding the Words That Defined the Clinton Presidency, he discusses the process that Clinton went through in writing his second inaugural. He writes, “At its best, working with Clinton as he prepared a speech was like watching Michael Jordan

practices his free throws. It was a priceless opportunity to see a genius disassemble his game, practicing each part...At its worst...well, at its worst it was like writing a second inaugural address.” Waldman writes that in contrast to the first inaugural, Clinton was less certain of what he wanted to say or how to say it. He notes that even though the President won re-election, his mandate was “tenuous.” He writes that the large goals from his first term still remained, and could only be achieved by working with congressional Republicans (who had just won the House majority two years earlier). Clinton’s goal for his second inaugural was “to focus, to have clear goals, continued energy” (Waldman 150).

Waldman writes that the President was thinking about how to frame his own presidency and was deeply influenced by a book he was reading entitled The Politics Presidents Make by Stephen Skowronek. President Clinton realized that “the best-remembered presidents are those who take bold stands to upend the existing order, who push back against their predecessors.” Clinton said: “All kind of presidents had significant accomplishments who never get any credit in history because they couldn’t control the story line.” Waldman notes that even those who had *acted* cautiously made bold claims. Now, facing a Republican Congress, Waldman writes that Clinton’s tone in his second inaugural had to be “necessarily muted”: “the speech would have to be a call for common ground” (Waldman 151). During the March 17th interview, President Clinton discussed this “call for common ground”:

President Clinton: *[The American people] wanted a more unified country. They wanted a government that was working for them, and what I was trying to do in the inaugural was to say, ‘I’m going to try and give you that sort of government, and I’m going to try and give you that sort of country, and I’m going to do my best to be a unifying figure, no matter what they do or say, and I hope they’ll vote, they’ll come with me.’ And then I tried to outline, at least in general terms, the areas in which I wanted them to be most active.*

I asked Clinton specifically about his views of the Republican Congress at the time of his inaugural. He answered first by admitting a mistake:

President Clinton: Well let me just say this – I do think that I made one mistake. When I listened too much to the – the Democrats had been in the majority so long in that Congress, that I didn't reach out to [the Republicans] as much as I should have right after the election, because I had the Democratic leaders come down and meet with me, and all of my advisors said that's what I had to do, because otherwise they would be offended – and I made a mistake in that.

He continued by discussing his relationship with the Republicans:

President Clinton: I went to see the Republicans when I went to Washington, but once I got there, it was unbelievable. I mean, they told me they would never, none of them would vote for the budget, there was no point in even talking about it. They were telling me that – the Republicans did. And so, you know they, and Newt Gingrich had basically been very effective, became Speaker basically, by dislodging the more moderate Bob Michael, by opposing Bush's new 5% gas tax in the budget deal in 1990. So, I don't think I did a really good job in the beginning, but I don't think it would have mattered. For example, Bob Dole, the only time Bob Dole ever told me anything he didn't do was on healthcare. I offered to write a healthcare bill with Senator Dole, and submit a bipartisan bill. And, uh, he said, 'No, go on, put one in, and then we'll work one out together.' And then he got a memo from William Kristol that said, 'if you let Bill Clinton pass something on healthcare, the Democrats will be in the majority for 40 years, and you'll never get elected President.' So, they made up their mind they were going to beat everything. And the, and they got, you know the health insurance companies spent all of the money lobbying, and the Harry and Louise ads and all that other stuff, and they just, and the mistake I made on healthcare was not just telling the American people that we had to wait 'till after the next election, and they'd have to decide, because the senators had a filibuster, and as long as they had more than 40 votes, they could always beat me, and there would be nothing I could do about it. Which is factually true. But this idea that it was some big government monstrosity hatched up in secret is simply, it's not, it's factually inaccurate. The bill actually took 3000 more pages out of the federal laws than it put in. And it's astonishingly similar to what was just done in Massachusetts, what's being proposed in California, and not altogether unlike the plan that Senator Edwards has just proposed.

The former President concluded by returning to the discussion of his ability to break the Republicans' mold that ensured Democratic failure:

President Clinton: So, it's just that, the whole thing was, it's almost impossible to describe now, because my presidency is a part of history, but the Republicans thought it was like an alien event, they couldn't imagine that a Democrat could win the White House, because they thought that they had been so successful in convincing people that we were, you know, weak on national defense, never met a tax we didn't like, couldn't run anything, the government was responsible for all the problems of America. And all you had to do was put them in there to say they had the right base, and they would say the right things, and it was fine. They really believed they had a formula that would always work, and I think the main things is, while I was liberal on some things, like civil rights, and human rights for gays, and women's rights, I wasn't on other things, and it made it hard for them to turn me into a cartoon. And, you know, I think that was just eating at them the whole time, and then, even when they got the press to believe there was something to Whitewater, after I had already been exonerated by a Republican United States Attorney...

Leon Panetta mentioned that President Clinton had a difficult transition after the 1994 election; the political side of Clinton felt that 1994 was a disaster for Democrats and he had personal responsibility for it only two years into his first term (Panetta). Presidential Scholars David Eisenhower and Peggy Scranton believe that the second inaugural was clearly a response to Gingrich's "Contract with America," just after the shutdown of government (Eisenhower and Scranton). Eisenhower noted that this speech enabled Clinton to prove his own victory in an election after a significant defeat in 1994; in the end of it all, Clinton was the victor (Eisenhower). In the March 17th interview, Clinton specifically mentioned that the second inaugural marked a turn of events for him – the defeat of the Gingrich Revolution:

President Clinton: ...the second inaugural was a call to, we had by then defeated the Gingrich revolution. It was obvious that they weren't going to abolish the Department of Education and have drastic cuts in health and environmental protection in order to finance even larger tax cuts for wealthy people. They were going to lose that. And that's what the election in '96 was about in essence. You

know, they over-read their mandate in '94. And, so what they were trying to do didn't work, and so what I was trying to do was to give a rationale that I hoped would enable the country to come together and encourage the Republicans to work with me more. And while they continued to be extremely hostile in their personal comments, and in avidly support whatever Ken Starr wanted to do, they actually, every year, we made significant progress in the legislative arena. They wouldn't pass some of the things I wanted to pass. They never passed another minimum wage increase, we only passed one they wouldn't pass – an employment non-discrimination act against gays, they, you know, they, we had to do piecemeal healthcare reform. But, we got the balanced budget bill, we got the children's health insurance bill, which was the biggest expansion of healthcare since Medicaid. Five million kids got insurance...we had the biggest expansion of college aid since the GI Bill at the end of the World War II. And we passed a lot of important international legislation. We passed the Millennium Debt Relief initiative, which was the biggest thing that had been done for poor countries in a long, long time. And I continued to be able to do a lot of things by executive order on the environment, not legislatively, but by executive order.

President Clinton's term in office was a "tug-of-war," a constant struggle. Yet at the same time, the two parties did find some common ground and significant accomplishments were made. Although Clinton was often frustrated by the unwillingness of the Republican Congress to cooperate with him, he does not admit perfection on his end as well. The struggle between Democrats and Republicans is one aspect reflected among the various themes in the second inaugural.

One recurring theme throughout President Clinton's second inaugural is the biblical idea of a land of new promise. In the Book of Deuteronomy, it is written:

Now Moses went up from the plains of Moab to Mount Nebo, to the top of Pisgah, which is opposite Jericho. And the LORD showed him all the land, Gilead as far as Dan, and all of Naphtali and the land of Ephraim and Manasseh, and all of the land of Judah as far as the Western Sea, and the Negev and the plain in the valley of Jericho, the city of palm trees, as far as Zoar. Then the LORD said to him, 'This is the land which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,' saying 'I will give it to your descendents I have let you see with your eyes but you shall not go over there' (Deuteronomy 34:1-4).

Clinton speechwriter Michael Waldman wrote the following about the “land of promise” segment in Clinton’s second inaugural:

Taylor Branch arrived, his face flushed from the cold. He had been thinking while driving in from his home in Baltimore, he said. The speech needed a unifying image. What about New Freedom? After all, Clinton’s program sought to find a new meaning of freedom in the information age. No go: that had been Woodrow Wilson’s slogan. Still, he thought, the speech did not do enough to point toward the destination, did not summon a picture of the future. The bridge was nice, but what was on the other side? Martin Luther King, and the Pilgrims, echoing Moses, had seen the Promised Land. That would be a bit much. It couldn’t be the Promised Land, but what about a land of New Promise? A new, lofty opening to the speech was written in (Waldman 153).

To Clinton, this land represents a new America, an America for the twenty-first century. Clinton touches upon the New Democrat Principles of community, opportunity, and responsibility throughout his entire speech, but more specifically, when he also references his idea of a land of new promise. For example, President Clinton says: “This is the heart of our task. With a new vision of government, a new sense of responsibility, a new spirit of community, we will sustain America’s journey. The promise we sought in a new land we will find again in a land of new promise.” It is no coincidence that Clinton discusses New Democrat principles in relation to this new land, being that Clinton’s visions of a better land centered upon these principles.

In his second inaugural, Clinton explicitly describes the land of new promise. In this land, education will be “every citizen’s most prized possession,” “the knowledge and power of the Information Age” will reach every child, and “the plans [parents and children] make at their kitchen table will be those of a better home, a better job, the certain chance to go to college.” In this land, the “streets will echo again with the laughter of...children, because no one will try to shoot them or sell them drugs anymore,” “everyone who can work will work,” the lower class will integrate into the middle class, there will be new medicinal miracles that will reach those

currently in need in addition to the children and hardworking families who have been “too long denied.” This new land will stand “mighty for peace and freedom” and will maintain “a strong defense against terror and destruction.” Children will be “free from the threat of nuclear, chemical, or biological weapons” and “ports and airports farms and factories will thrive with trade and innovation and ideas.” It will be a leader of democracies, a “nation that meets its obligations” by balancing the budget and never losing its values. It will “have secure retirement and health care...the world’s most productive economy” and at the same time, will protect the environment. Finally, in this new land, politics will be reformed “so that the voice of the people will always speak louder than the din of narrow interests.”

President Lyndon B. Johnson’s concept of the “Great Society,” described in his “Great Society” speech on May 22, 1964 given at the University of Michigan, was similar to Clinton’s land of promise. Just like with Clinton’s land of promise, Johnson’s “Great Society” demanded “an end to poverty and racial injustice.” It was described as a place where “every child can find knowledge to enrich his mind and to enlarge his talents.” Clinton’s land of promise is a place where “education will be every citizen’s most prized possession.” Johnson’s “Great Society” is a “a place where the city of man serves not only the needs of the body and demands of commerce but the desire for beauty and the hunger for community”; it is a “place where man can renew contact with nature.” Clinton’s land of promise is “A nation that fortifies the world’s most productive economy even as it protects the great natural bounty of our water, air, and majestic land.” Johnson said that most of all the Great Society is “just the beginning” and is “not a safe harbor”; it is not “a resting place, a final objective, a finished work. It is a challenge constantly renewed, beckoning us toward a destiny where the meaning of our lives matches the marvelous products of our labor.” Clinton reminded the American people: “...let us never forget: The

greatest progress we have made, and the greatest progress we have yet to make, is in the human heart” (Clinton second inaugural and Johnson Great Society).

In his inaugural, Kennedy spoke of his goals of working toward betterment in the same manner, as continual work. For example, he said: “All this will not be finished in the first 100 days. Nor will it be finished in the first 1,000 days, nor in the life of this Administration, nor even perhaps in our lifetime on this planet. But let us begin” (Kennedy inaugural). For Kennedy, Johnson, and Clinton, progress – the march to a promised land – is an ongoing process.

The idea of a land of new promise is biblical in nature. The journey to this land – of which all Americas will embark upon together – serves as a metaphor for progress itself. In the opening paragraph of his second inaugural, President Clinton said: “We must keep our old democracy forever young. Guided by the ancient vision of a Promised Land, let us set our sights upon a land of new promise” (Clinton second inaugural).

It is no coincidence that Clinton invoked the bible in his speech. President Clinton has been deeply religious since his boyhood. His childhood friend, Paul David Leopoulos recalls a young Clinton walking to church every Sunday alone (Leopoulos). When asked about his fluency in Scripture in the rhetoric of his speeches, and whether or not this came naturally to him, he answered:

President Clinton: Yeah, I mean, I grew up in the Baptist Church. I was a regular churchgoer, but I also, uh, had a minister for many years who had a profound influence on me who stopped giving traditional hellfire and brimstone sermons, and instead, literally talked -- every sermon was a dissection of Scripture. We'd go back to the oldest available text, usually in Greek, and tell you what it meant, and we'd -- I got very interested in it.

Clinton also told me that he spent a lot of time during his presidency reading scripture (Clinton interview).

The idea of “a land of new promise” was not a new metaphor in political rhetoric when Clinton uttered the words in 1997. Instead, the metaphor has been repeated throughout many other speeches, including a significant number of prominent 20th Century ones, for example, in President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s second inaugural address and Martin Luther King’s “I See The Promised Land” speech.

In his second inaugural, Roosevelt said: “Shall we pause now and turn our back on the road that lies ahead? Shall we call this the Promised Land? Or, shall we continue on our way?...Let us ask again: Have we reached the goal of our vision of that fourth day of March 1933? Have we found our happy valley?” (Roosevelt). A day before Martin Luther King was killed in 1968, King said the following:

Well, I don't know what will happen now. We've got some difficult days ahead. But it doesn't matter with me now. Because I've been to the mountaintop. And I don't mind. Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will. And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people will get to the Promised Land. And I'm happy, tonight. I'm not worried about anything. I'm not fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord (King I See The Promised Land).

When one reaches a mountaintop, they must eventually come down. From the summit, the destination is in sight; one can see the valley of promise that he or she is trying to reach (Eisenhower).

President Clinton thought very highly of both President John Kennedy and Martin Luther King. In fact, he thinks that King was the greatest American of his lifetime. Although he liked John Kennedy, Clinton had a deep attachment to his brother, Robert Kennedy (Clinton

interview). In my March 17th interview, I asked President Clinton how John Kennedy and Martin Luther King inspired him, and he said the following:

President Clinton: ...I had always been impressed with Kennedy, because I had met him, you know, in '63 and I thought he was a doer. You know, I just, yes, I liked the fact that he was young and attractive and all that, but I liked the fact also that he had been brave in war, he had seen the world, he was interested in America having a positive role in the world. I love that all those people in Latin America, after he started the Alliance for Progress, had his pictures up in their houses and stuff. And I like the fact that he didn't back off when the Southerners tried to stop him from integrating the colleges and universities. You know, his Justice Department enforced the Civil Rights laws. I liked that. It meant something to me. So, I liked him because I thought -- I was much more into his substance than his style. I thought he had a good mind and a good team and that he was trying to do good things for America.

Even though I only asked him about John Kennedy, Clinton digressed and spoke about John Kennedy's brother Robert as well. He said:

President Clinton: I also have to tell you that I was a devoted supporter of Robert Kennedy's campaign in '68. I think if he -- he was really the first New Democrat. He was the first guy that tried to get working class rights that we already started losing to the so-called Reagan Democrats. We'd already started losing to people like George Wallace, people that hated school busing, and all that sort of stuff. Kennedy explicitly reached out to them and tried to touch them and bring them in, without renouncing his support for civil rights, and for poor people. He tried to build a broad base, of middle-class and poor people in America. And, he also was for Welfare reform. He thought people on welfare who could work should do it, and he was for economic incentives in the inner cities and poor rural areas to give people the means to support themselves. Same sorts of things I did when I was President. So, in the specifics of his programs, Robert Kennedy was really important in my life, and important to me, and I was devastated when he was killed. I thought, you know, he was very important.

Clinton described Martin Luther King as the greatest American of his lifetime, and once again digressed (I had only asked him about King), and told me that he thought Gandhi was the greatest person on earth in his lifetime:

President Clinton: ...*Martin Luther King – I thought was the greatest American of my lifetime. I think the speech he gave at the Lincoln Memorial was the most important political speech of my lifetime, and I think the vision he had – the thing I liked about King was that he instinctively was not just, you know, he was instinctively what I would call a synthesizing thinker. He was always trying to put things together. The relationship of racism to poverty, to injustice, to our misguided policy in Vietnam. He was always trying to put people together, to build alliances, to find ways of...reconciling ways. So...and I liked that – and he was heavily influenced by Gandhi, which, who I think is probably the greatest person in, on earth in my lifetime. He was killed when I was very, very young. But I spent my whole life trying to put things together and trying to overcome people who were trying to tear them apart. That’s the way I saw it anyway. I still believe that, so, King had an effect on me in that sense that was greater than any of the others, because of what he represented.*

Another theme in President Clinton’s inaugural with potentially biblical undertones is Clinton’s embodiment of Joshua (Eisenhower). As written in the Book of Joshua:

Not it came about after the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, that the LORD spoke to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses’ servant, saying ‘Moses My servant is dead; now therefore arise, *cross this Jordan, you and all people, to the land which I am giving to them*, to the sons of Israel. Every place on which the sole of your foot treads, I have given it to you, just as I spoke to Moses’ (Joshua 1: 1-3).

The “bridge to the twenty-first century” was a theme of the Clinton campaign (Lindsey). Michael Waldman recalls that in writing a speech announcing a literacy program during the campaign, Bruce Lindsey asked him specifically if the speech had a lot of bridges in it. When Waldman said yes, Lindsey said, ““Then you’ll be fine”” (Waldman 136). Although the original phrase was “a bridge to the future,” Waldman rewrote this during the campaign and called it “a bridge to the Year 2000.” Soon after, Clinton rewrote the phrase as “a bridge to the twenty-first century” (Waldman 125-138).

Toward the end of the second inaugural, Clinton says: “Yes, let us build our bridge. A bridge wide enough and strong enough for every American to cross over to a blessed land of new

promise.” If the bridge to the Twenty-First Century represents a connection between the old land and the land of new promise, then Clinton is Joshua, who will lead the way in crossing the River Jordan into the land of Israel (Eisenhower).

There are clear “echoes” of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt in Clinton’s second inaugural (Eisenhower). In his 2005 speech at Hofstra University, Al From said that Bill Clinton saved progressive governance by modernizing progressive governance (From). Like President Clinton, Roosevelt referred specifically to his own idea of the proper role of government in his second inaugural. The two had a similar vision of the role of government; government should stand up for the common Americans and provide them with the tools for the betterment of their lives. Roosevelt saw “one-third of a nation ill-housed, ill-clad, ill-nourished” (Roosevelt second inaugural). Clinton wanted to build an America that was “ever moving forward toward realizing the full potential of its citizens” (Clinton second inaugural). In his second inaugural, Roosevelt said the following regarding his idea of the proper role of government:

Four years of new experience have not belied our historic instinct. They hold out the clear hope that government within communities, government within the separate States, and government of the United States can do the things the times require, without yielding its democracy. Our tasks in the last four years did not force democracy to take a holiday.

Nearly all of us recognize that as intricacies of human relationships increase, so power to govern them must also increase – power to stop evil; power to do good.

...By using the new materials of social justice we have undertaken to erect on the old foundations a more enduring structure for the better use of future generations.

In that purpose we have been helped by achievements of mind and spirit. Old truths have been relearned; untruths have been unlearned. We have always known that heedless self-interest was bad morals; we know now that it is bad economics. Out of the collapse of a prosperity whose builders boasted their practicality has come the conviction that in the long run economic morality pays. We are beginning to wipe out the line that divides the practical from the ideal; and in doing we are fashioning an instrument of unimagined power for the establishment of a morally better world (Roosevelt).

Recall the previous discussion of public morality in connection with the Kennedy-Johnson years. Thirty years later, Franklin Roosevelt was establishing the modern-day Democratic platform in support of public morality – in support of, as he says himself, “a morally better world.” Exactly sixty years after Roosevelt uttered the words above, Clinton echoed them. He said:

As times change, so government must change. We need a new government for a new century – humble enough not to try to solve all our problems for us, but strong enough to give us the tools to solve our problems for ourselves; a government that is smaller, lives within its means, and does more with less. Yet where it can stand up for our values and interest in the world, and where it can give Americans the power to make a real difference in their everyday lives, government should do more, not less. The preeminent mission of our new government is to give all Americans an opportunity – not a guarantee, but a real opportunity – to build better lives (Clinton second inaugural).

In my March 17th interview with President Clinton, I asked him how Franklin Roosevelt inspired him. He said:

President Clinton:...Roosevelt was sort of a -- almost a mythic figure to working people and rural people in the South. Keep in mind Arkansas had at the end of World War II a per capita income that was only 56% of the national average. Second poorest state in the country after Mississippi, and more than one in four of our people were out of work during the Depression, and people were hungry, I mean literally hungry. So, when Roosevelt visited Arkansas during the Depression, people didn't, he had to drive across dirt roads, and they, people didn't have enough money to paint their all their houses. They distributed whitewash, and people painted the fronts of all their houses out of respect for Roosevelt, so when he drove by, he'd see good houses. I mean, he represented to me, in the received memories I got of Roosevelt, primarily from my grandfather, and from my mother's brother -- my grandmother's brother. And those, that whole group, somebody, a government that cared about people, and that did things. Roosevelt was always to me about doing, you know that the job... Yes, you were supposed to speak and inspire people, and lift their spirits, but you were supposed to be able to do that because you actually did things. And Roosevelt to me was always the great experimenter, the great doer, the activist. You know, if

this doesn't work, try something else, and keep going. I always loved that about him. It was thrilling to me. Everything I ever read about him or knew about him from that day to this day was mostly about that.

President Clinton valued Roosevelt's vision of government because it was based upon caring for and helping the American people, and at the same time, made continuous attempts to achieve the best possible outcomes.

There are also "echoes" President Lyndon Baines Johnson in Clinton's second inaugural (Eisenhower). Similar to the echoes of President Roosevelt's role of government in President Clinton's second inaugural, there are echoes of calls to repair the racial divide in the speech as well. These passages echo President Lyndon B. Johnson's "We Shall Overcome" speech, delivered on March 15, 1965 in the Capitol. Clinton's statements build upon and transform Johnson's mention of civil rights. In my interview, Clinton mentioned that although he liked Kennedy, when Kennedy started running for President, he supported Johnson because he was a Southerner, and that *"even though it was weak, he had at least made possible the passage of the '57 Civil Rights Act..."* (Clinton interview).

President Lyndon Johnson delivered his "We Shall Overcome Speech" to a Joint Session of Congress, urging his former colleagues to support a law designed to eliminate illegal barriers to the right to vote. Johnson specifically spoke about overcoming bigotry and injustice, saying: "[The American Negroes'] cause must be our cause too. Because it is not just Negroes, but really it is all of us, who must overcome the crippling legacy of bigotry and injustice. And we shall overcome" (Johnson We Shall Overcome). Similarly, in his second inaugural, President Clinton said:

The divide of race has been America's constant curse...Prejudice and contempt...are no different...

These obsessions cripple both those who hate and, of course, those who are hated, robbing both of what they might become. We cannot, we will not, succumb to the dark impulses that lurk in the far regions of the soul everywhere. We shall overcome them” (Clinton second inaugural).

Michael Waldman wrote in his memoir that President Clinton had written this section about “the nation’s oldest, most divisive dilemma” almost entirely by hand (Waldman 155).

President Clinton offers answers to claims made by two former Republican Presidents, Bush and Reagan, in his speech as well. Both Presidents Reagan and Bush were involved in leading America’s recovery from the Vietnam War and lifting the threat of inflation. Both presidents seemingly believed that the Vietnam War was a significant setback in an “otherwise unblemished American story” (Eisenhower).

Ronald Reagan was elected in 1980 as the “conservative champion of pre-Vietnam values” (Eisenhower). In Ronald Reagan’s first inaugural, he said “...government is not the solution to our problem; government is the problem” (Reagan first inaugural). Clinton answered this claim in his second inaugural by stating:

And once again, we have resolved for our time a great debate over the role of government. Today we can declare: Government is not the problem, and government is not the solution. We – the American people – are the solution. Our founders understood that well and gave us a democracy strong enough to endure for centuries flexible enough to face our common challenges and advance our common dreams in each new day (Clinton second inaugural).

Clinton continued by stating how he viewed the proper role of government: a government that should stand up for the common Americans and provide them with the tools for better lives – echoing Roosevelt’s vision (Waldman 154 and Clinton second inaugural).

President George H.W. Bush looked to restore the pre-Vietnam bipartisanship in his inaugural address (Eisenhower). In his second inaugural, President Clinton recast Bush's claim regarding the primary cause of party divisiveness. For Clinton, party divisiveness is not primarily caused by the Vietnam divide, as Bush suggested it is. Instead, race divides the Democratic and Republican Parties. In his inaugural, President H.W. Bush stated:

For Congress, too, has changed in our time. There has grown a certain divisiveness. We have seen the hard looks and heard the statements in which not each other's ideas are challenged, but each other's motives. And our great parties have too often been far apart and untrusting of each other. It has been this way since Vietnam. That war cleaves us still. But, friends, that war began in earnest a quarter of a century ago; and surely the statute of limitations has been reached. This is a fact: The final lesson of Vietnam is that no great nation can long afford to be sundered by a memory. A new breeze is blowing, and the old bipartisanship must be made new again (Bush).

Clinton responded:

The divide of race has been America's constant curse. And each new wave of immigrants gives new targets to old prejudices. Prejudice and contempt, cloaked in the pretense of religious or political conviction are no different. These forces have nearly destroyed our nation in the past. They plague us still. They fuel the fanaticism of terror. And they torment the lives of millions in fractured nations all around the world (Clinton second inaugural).

When Clinton said "cloaked in the pretense of religious of political conviction," he was seemingly referring to divisive racial ideals of some members of the religious right.

In his inaugural, Bush said the following about his desired relationship with the Democrats:

To my friends—and yes, I do mean friends—in the loyal opposition—and yes, I mean loyal: I put out my hand. I am putting out my hand to you, Mr. Speaker. I am putting out my hand to you, Mr. Majority Leader. For this is the thing: This is the age of the offered hand. We can't turn back clocks, and I don't

want to. But when our fathers were young, Mr. Speaker, our differences ended at the water's edge. And we don't wish to turn back time, but when our mothers were young, Mr. Majority Leader, the Congress and the Executive were capable of working together to produce a budget on which this nation could live. Let us negotiate soon and hard. But in the end, let us produce. The American people await action. They didn't send us here to bicker. They ask us to rise above the merely partisan. 'In crucial things, unity'—and this, my friends, is crucial (Bush).

Clinton discussed his desired relationship with the Republicans in his second inaugural by invoking imagery of Martin Luther King, echoing King's "I Have a Dream Speech." In this speech, King said: "I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: 'We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal'" (King I Have a Dream). In his second inaugural address, Clinton said:

Thirty-four years ago, the man whose life we celebrate today spoke to us down there, at the other end of this Mall, in words that moved the conscience of a nation. Like a prophet of old, he told of his dream that one day America would rise up and treat all its citizens as equals before the law and in the heart. Martin Luther King's dream was the American Dream. His quest is our quest: the ceaseless striving to live out our true creed. Our history has been built on such dreams and labors. And by our dreams and labors we will redeem the promise of America in the 21st century.

To that effort I pledge all my strength and every power of my office. I ask the members of Congress here to join in that pledge. The American people returned to office a President of one party and a Congress of another. Surely, they did not do this to advance the politics of petty bickering and extreme partisanship they plainly deplore. No, they call on us instead to be repairers of the breach, and to move on with America's mission (Clinton second inaugural).

As previously addressed, the 1960s were not about the polarization of Vietnam to Clinton. Instead, the 1960s represented an era of changing race relations to him. Thus, today's partisan politics did not result from the Vietnam War as Bush said it did. To Clinton, political partisanship is a direct result of racial tensions and governmental advancement of racial progress.

8

Conclusion: Repairing the Divide?

Can anything be done to manage the negative consequences of polarization? The answer to this question: maybe, but reforms are not necessarily recommended.

There are several reforms which could be enacted to try and curb political polarization in America. Yet, as Jon Huntsman notes: “there is no such thing as solving the ideological divide.” The division might be repaired for a few years, but then the polarization will be back again. While a temporary fix might exist, there is no permanent one. A moderate approach will always be replaced by a more ideological approach (Huntsman). The pendulum appears to swing back and forth (Cook). Dramatic, horrendous events can temporarily eradicate the polarization. For example, politics in America was unified briefly after September 11th (Rothenberg). Recall the bipartisan coalition of politicians singing “God Bless America” on the steps of the Capitol after the attack on America. In Charlie Cook’s words: “If 9/11 wasn’t enough [to repair polarization], God forbid, what the hell will it take?” (Cook).

To ask these questions is also to ask what approach is best for America to adopt to address racial tensions that have been present throughout history; could we actually reach a

colorblind society and if so, how? The election of an extraordinary political leader might be able to repair the nation's divides. An independent presidential candidate or a person that actively reaches across the aisle, or one with the ability to build unity between different races, as Clinton worked hard at for example, might be able to effectively bridge gaps. (At the very least, this person could potentially aid in achieving a less polarized society) (Rothenberg and Eisenhower).

Institutional changes in Congress might aid in decreasing polarization. Overall, possible changes could include: adjustments to the legislative calendar (such as two full weeks on and two full weeks off) so that legislators, including those in opposing parties, can interact with each other more frequently and more directly (including on weekends) and can spend more time deliberating on the floor (Mann and Ornstein 232-233); Congressional rules changes to increase deliberation and restore regular order (Mann and Ornstein 233); gerrymandering reform (such as the establishment of independent commissions to determine districts); instant runoff voting, a system in which voters rank the candidates and there are runoffs until a candidate receives a majority (candidates can focus on voters outside of their base); open primaries (with the hope that more moderates would sway primary results, expanding the primary electorate beyond the most liberal and conservative voters); either making voter registration less complex (with the hope of increasing participation) or establishing compulsory voting (more voters might mean a greater number of moderate voters, even though there would be more partisan voters as well) (Nivola and Galston lecture, 11/15/06); adjustment to the presidential primary schedule by front-loading larger states with more diverse electorates (with the hope of attracting a wider range of voters); a reduction in the frequency of U.S. elections (the stakes in each election cycle might be higher); and reforming the Electoral College (before we experience another 2000 election again, to increase turnout and heighten the importance of "non-battleground states") (Nivola Policy

Brief 8). Regarding the media, nothing can be done – unless, of course, we amend the Constitution and change the First Amendment (Easterbrook 257).

Another question to ask, is, should anything be done to try and repair polarization?

Polarization does have its risks. As previously stated,

...Increased polarization of the political parties carries at least four risks. First, it complicates the task of addressing certain long-range domestic policy problems, particularly the big ones that cannot be solved without altering the established distribution of the benefits in the modern welfare states. Second, it can mar the implementation of a stray, resolute foreign policy and national security strategy. Third, partisan excesses can do lasting damage to vulnerable institutions, most notably the judiciary [as a result of, for example, the grueling and often acrimonious confirmation process]. Finally, there is the distinct possibility that partisan antagonisms, and especially the slash-and-burn tactics that polarized parties routinely adopt, erode public trust in government (Galston and Nivola 35-38).

Polarization also threatens the governmental system by having the potential to create deadlock, a stalled system in which two sides are evenly matched against each other; or tyranny, when one side breaks from the union to impose its vision upon the other (Eisenhower).

Also as previously mentioned, polarization is not necessarily bad for America. Party divergence may enhance the degree of policy representation in the American political process and as a result of polarization, citizens are better able to distinguish between parties and candidates, casting policy-oriented ballots, electing those who best represent their constituencies, increasing party discipline on campaign promises, and making it easier for voters to hold the majority accountable. Additionally, polarization results in stronger political parties, stronger party identification, and more recognition of policy differences (Layman, Carsey, and Horowitz 101-103).

It is also possible that polarization is here by “popular demand.” First, the volume of policy items on which the parties have reached consensus over the years is often underestimated, despite a politically polarized environment. Mainstream voters have not stayed home in recent elections, but instead, have turned out in greater numbers. Parity also means that moderates in Congress retain considerable leverage (Galston and Nivola 41-42).

In addition, there are notable perils in enacting reforms. At the turn of the 19th century, Progressives – who didn’t like parties – sought reforms such as non-partisan ballots to diminish the parties’ role in politics. (These ballots are still used in some municipal elections across the country today.) This resulted in lower voter participation and increased voter confusion. The activists turned out; the situation worsened (Nivola and Galston lecture, 11/15/06).

Adam Wolfson summarizes Nivola’s comments on polarization at a conference at a Brookings-Hoover Institution conference:

If we are polarized over issues that truly matter, and if polarization leads to genuine reflection as well as an honest reckoning and real policy solutions, then it could truly be said that polarization has virtues. But, as Nivola observed, the great danger in today’s polarization is that it often concerns not the substantial but the trivial, that it is not always over the central concerns of the nation but distracting sectarian issues, and that it is making national unity difficult in a time of great international peril: All of which is to fiddle while Rome burns (Wolfson 9).

While the risks may be high in attempting to repair our politically polarized state, it might just be worth taking those risks.

In the late eighteenth century, a conversation about “we the people” began. At this time, Americans first set out to achieve the best nation possible. Throughout history, we have both unified and divided time and time again.

At the very beginning of this nation, the Founding Fathers locked themselves in a room and many disagreed with each other, but in the end, one sole document (that has lasted to this very day) was signed by many. As President Abraham Lincoln said in 1861:

...We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battlefield and patriot grave to every living heart and hearthstone all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union, when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature (Lincoln first inaugural).

We are not a perfect union. We never have been a perfect union and we likely never will be one. We can only strive to be a more perfect union.

9

***Afterward: The Interview Transcript,* President Bill Clinton**

Interview Recorded on March 17, 2007

David Helfenbein: ...The paper that I wrote last semester was on political polarization. And now I'm doing a paper on you, specifically your second inaugural, and eventually tying that into political polarization, because I can make that my thesis. But this paper specifically is a 30-pager on your second inaugural and on your life in general, because I learned a lot about your life in Arkansas, and I think that was interesting.

So, my first question for you is, in your second inaugural, you mentioned a new land of promise filled with new democratic principles, which were opportunity, responsibility and community. Which tangible goals did you hope to achieve by laying out this framework, and more specifically, which tangible goals did you hope to accomplish at the beginning of your second term, when you gave your inaugural?

President Bill Clinton: Well, first of all, let's set the stage here. I'd won the election in '96 I think for two reasons. One is, the people had begun to perceive that we were making progress in a whole range of areas. The economy was doing better and people felt it. We'd passed welfare reform. We proved that you can basically have a government and society that involved people of all racial and religious groups and it was the most diverse administration in history. And it had performed well, and there was a sense that things were working in America again. So, what I wanted to do, and, at that point we'd made major progress towards peace in Northern Ireland, the Balkans, Middle East, Haiti. So there was a sense that the world was kind of moving in the right direction. And what I wanted to do was to build on that, try to deal with a whole range of unfinished business in America and in the world. So I was trying to set, that's why I ran on the theme of, I talked about building bridges to the 21st Century. I wanted to, I thought that a lot of what I had to do in my first four years, was correcting policy errors of the past, reversing them, especially things like economic and social policy, with things like, you know, the standard medical leave law, the, which had been vetoed in the previous administration, doubling the earned income tax credit, raising the minimum wage, all those things we did, and I wanted to, I wanted to in my second term, I tried to tackle the 20 year old problem of flat median wages, and

increasing inequality, which had been, well, in most wealthy countries, but it really had been quite pronounced in America, and parenthetically, we were successful, in my second term. It's the only time since 1973, that four-year period, when median wages, as opposed to average wages, which includes the wealthy, median's the one in the middle. They went up, and income inequality went down, and actually, the percentage increase in income of the bottom 20 percent was greater than the top 20 percent, in my second term. So we had, I wanted to try to make sure that we implemented the welfare reform law in a way that really helped poor people and poor families, and uh, I wanted to do much more in education, to try to make college as nearly universal as possible. Access to at least two years of college, put it in the reach of every American who wanted to go, because of all of the young people need to go. If you just look at the Census figures, and the most recent Census I had was 1990 from 80 to 90. It was clear that both the high school dropouts and high school graduates had quite a decline in real wages, as a group, and they didn't start to rise until people had at least two years of college. So, I had a whole range of issues that I was trying to address, to try to deal with what I thought were the structural challenges that we would face in the 21st Century. I also wanted to try to maintain support for more expansive trade, by adding labor and environment conditions, not an anti-trade policy, but a trade-plus policy. I still believe that's the right policy for America. I think one of the reasons that there's so much opposition to trade in our country is that half of the people have felt no benefits from the global economy in America, and there's a lot of opposition in other countries because over half of these people in many other countries don't feel the benefits of it, even though the countries with well-organized economies benefit enormously. China has put more people out of poverty in less time than any ever before, and in the last 20 years, world free trade has lifted more people out of poverty than in any 20 year period in history. The problem is that the population is growing fastest in the poorest countries, and economic growth alone is not enough to keep up with that growth in those places, and meanwhile, if you have open borders with no trade enforcement, no labor or environmental standards, no serious efforts to try to help people who are dislocated or whose wages are depressed by international competition here at home, then you lose support in the wealthy countries, even as you are losing the support of the poor countries. That's basically where we are now. We need to have a time out and go back. That's why I tried to do that in my second term, but I had virtually no support in Congress for it. Just like I tried to emphasize climate change in my second term, and there was no support in Congress for that. But what I was trying to do, both on the things we got done, and the things that I just advocated, if you look at, you'd have to, it might be interesting for you to look at the major subjects of the State of the Union Addresses that followed on that Inaugural, from '97 through 2000, because they were all basically extensions of the themes in the Second Inaugural, each focusing on what the major issues that I wanted the Congress to deal with and the country to deal with in that year, but that, the whole idea was the Second Inaugural was a call to, we had by then defeated the Gingrich Revolution. It was obvious that they weren't going to abolish the Department of Education and have drastic cuts in health and environmental protection in order to finance even larger tax cuts for wealthy people. They were going to lose that. And that's what the election in '96 was about in essence. You know, they over-read their mandate in '94. And, so what they were trying to do didn't work, and so what I was trying to do was to give a rationale that I hoped would enable the country to come together and encourage the Republicans to work with me more. And while they continued to be extremely hostile in their personal comments, and in avidly support whatever Ken Starr wanted to do, they actually, every year, we made significant progress in the legislative arena. They wouldn't pass some of the things I wanted to

pass. They never passed another minimum wage increase, we only passed one they wouldn't pass — an employment non-discrimination act against gays, they, you know, they, we had to do piecemeal healthcare reform. But, we got the balanced budget bill, we got the children's health insurance bill, which was the biggest expansion of healthcare since Medicaid. Five million kids got insurance, we got enormous, uh, I've got a booklet here, I'll give you too. We've got, I've got a little book of all of the accomplishments of the administration, so you can see which ones happened in which years. It might be worthwhile. I'll give you a copy of it before you leave. But, we had the biggest expansion of college aid since the GI Bill at the end of the World War II. And we passed a lot of important international legislation. We passed the Millennium Debt Relief initiative, which was the biggest thing that had been done for poor countries in a long, long time. And I continued to be able to do a lot of things by executive order on the environment, not legislatively, but by executive order. And, so while their rhetoric, the partisan rhetoric on their part never cooled down, even after they got beaten in the impeachment and they lost the midterm elections of '98, which parenthetically, was a truly historic hour. I don't know if you know this, but when the Republicans lost the Congress this time, President Bush said this was normal by historic circumstances, and for the sixth year of a Presidency, it was. I mean, I think over time, the President's party has averaged losing like 30 seats in the house, and 4 seats in the Senate. It was actually better this time because this is the most protected Congress as a result of redistricting in history, so if we'd had the '94 redistricting, we would've won 40 seats or more. But still, that's true. In '98, when they were trying to impeach me, they outspent us 100 million dollars, and all of the commentary said that they were going to win 25 to 30 seats in the House and 4 to 6 seats in the Senate, because they, we had more Senators up than they did. They won no seats in the Senate, and we won five of the seats in the House, because we ran a totally positive campaign and we had an agenda. That had not happened since 1822, when we were essentially a one-party country. So the public supported what I was trying to do, all the way through. They wanted a more unified country. They wanted a government that was working for them, and what I was trying to do in the inaugural was to say, "I'm going to try and give you that sort of government, and I'm going to try and give you that sort of country, and I'm going to do my best to be a unifying figure, no matter what they do or say, and I hope they'll vote, they'll come with me." And then I tried to outline, at least in general terms, the areas in which I wanted them to be most active.

David Helfenbein: So you think that the 1990s were an echo of the 1960s? How much do you think the 90s were an echo of the Civil Rights Era?

President Bill Clinton: Oh, well, I think the Republican Party, starting under President Reagan basically, was taken over by, he was a perfect leader for them because he was a likable man, I liked him very much, and he was from California, and he was a smooth, you know. But the guts of it were conservative white Southerners. White Southern Protestants, and their allies. You know, Gingrich from Georgia, Arney from Texas, DeLay from Texas, and they, and their supporters, and they basically, when I was a boy, were in the Democratic Party, going back to the Civil War because the Republican Party was the party of Lincoln. The Republican Party stopped being the progressive party of America after Theodore Roosevelt left office. They were never the progressive party, although Richard Nixon and Dwight Eisenhower were practically socialists compared to the people that run it now. They were much less conservative than these people are, but the, they, and a lot of those people were reacting to the '60s, they became

Republicans because of the Civil Rights Movement. And basically, that's the culture in which I grew up, so I understand it, and one of the things that their politics have always valued is an enemy. They always have to have an enemy. They need an enemy to sort of polarize people, divide them, keep them torn up, and upset, and that's again, it's most effective when they're in opposition. When they get in, and have to govern, most people don't like that very much, but it's when they feel insecure or uncertain, then that sort of appeal works better. That's why I think it worked for them in 2002 and 2004, in spite of the fact that the American people didn't necessarily agree with them on the specifics and the details. 2006 was the first election we've had that's really a post 9/11 election, where the voters were kind of free to think about, "what do I want positively for my country? What do I believe in? What direction do I want to go? What's going on that I don't like?" You know, they can suspend their fears and feel free to make choices, and I think that's what I was trying to get at in '96. And there was a huge amount of, if you look at, when I left office, the DLC published a survey that said that faith in government had increased dramatically in the 8 years when I served, because we saw it, among other things, as a job. You know, I thought I was supposed to get up and go to work every day, and get something done for the American people, and I was not particularly interested in, you know, demonizing them or keeping people torn up and upset all the time. And I think that, you know, it was very, it worked, it was effective.

David Helfenbein: You talk about your youth. How did your youth shape your political beliefs and career, especially in regards to civil rights?

President Bill Clinton: Enormously. I was formed by the direct impact of the Little Rock Central High School crisis, and by Martin Luther King, and the whole Civil Rights Movement, and also by the influence of my family. You know, my grandparents were just poor, relatively uneducated, white Southerners, and unlike most relatively uneducated white Southerners, they were very strongly supportive of equal rights for African-Americans. And they had a big impact on me, and I just, I'd always felt that way, and it was the defining issue of my childhood. Even more than the Vietnam War was. I was older when that happened, you know, in college. But I think that it was, I think that for a lot of conservatives, who were not necessarily mean-spirited, but voted with the Republicans, saw the '60s as more negative than positive. They just saw it as a period, they weren't necessarily racist, they just saw a lot of social breakdown, they saw the riots in the cities, and they saw the protests, and they saw the breakdown of the family, you know, they saw those things, and they attributed it to erroneous government policies in stuff regarding society, and so the conservative rhetoric had a lot more appeal to them. And I think that, so, I don't mean to say that everybody that voted with the Republicans was, you know, they weren't all like their political leaders. But we've seen in Washington, but until they had to leave, DeLay was the heart and soul of their Congressional strategy. But there were a lot of really good people who followed them, who were just old-fashioned straight-laced people who didn't get anything directly from the government; at least they didn't perceive that they did, anyway, and they wanted to live in a more orderly country. And I think there was a sort of backlash from the '60s. And then there were people like me that think there was a lot more good than bad in the '60s. It was the period of the Civil Rights Movement, the rise of the women's movement, the nascent environmental movement, which really took off in the '70s, young people were very active in politics. I just think that there was a lot more good than bad. And the peace movement also did more good than bad. Yes, there were excesses, but it was a turbulent time. The excesses were in

reaction to things that our government was doing that were excessive, and problems in our society that were profound, and it's difficult to make those changes without the kind of emotional strains on a society that we saw. And, in my memoir, you ought to read it, at the end, I basically say, that when I served, I thought that people who looked back at the '60s and saw more good than bad tended to be Democrats, people who saw more bad than good tended to be Republicans. But for me, I don't think any of my policies, or the way that I governed was in reaction to the '60s. It had lots more to do with my personal experience of growing up in Arkansas, trying to solve problems, and serving as the governor of a small state, where I had to constantly try to unite diverse groups of people and conflicting interests, and get people to sit down together and talk through their differences, and work to an acceptable conclusion. So, I never saw myself as some sort of a reincarnation of a '60s figure. That was a cartoon that was put on me, by my adversaries to try to undermine my ability to win elections and be effective once I got to be President. And, I didn't take any particular offense at it. It's the way they thought, and it's the way they did their politics, and it worked so well for them that in Presidential election after Presidential election after Presidential election that I got what they were doing, but I think they got increasingly more frustrated when it didn't work. If anything, I think they were dominated by their sort of '60s construct, and because I'd grown up in the South with people who were extremely skilled at keeping people torn up... I've said all the time: I knew it when I saw it, and I was able to react to it in a positive way.

David Helfenbein: Why do you think that you have been a polarizing figure in politics? I've heard you answer this, sort of, on the news in some stories.

President Bill Clinton: Well I think, I really believe it's more, um, I think that, in the beginning, it was because, well, let me back up and say...If you look at this, if you look at the Democrats who ran and lost, Jimmy Carter for re-election, Mondale was never in the race so it's no difference, Dukakis, if they'd won, they would have all been polarizing figures, because the strategy the Republicans sought was to go after them personally. There was something wrong with their values, or their strength, or their this, or their that, and they tried to turn them literally into two-dimensional cartoons. That's what they tried to do to me, and I think that, frankly, I became polarizing to them, because I beat them. You know, and they literally, a lot of them, I heard many conversations, where people that talked to them, said -- the various active Republicans in Washington, they really didn't think they'd ever have another Democratic President. They thought they'd found a formula to put us in a cookie cutter, and they couldn't put me in the cookie cutter. I mean, I was just as anti-crime as they were, I felt just as strongly that people who on Welfare that could work should work as they did, I believed in a strong national defense, and I was more fiscally responsible than they were. But, I did things that drove them crazy too. They didn't like the fact that I was pro-choice, that I thought that we should cut taxes on the working poor, and that wealthy Americans should pay their fair share, should pay over more, that made them mad. They didn't want to break the monopoly of the health insurance companies on healthcare coverage, even if we had people who didn't have coverage, and the costs were bankrupting the economy. I think a lot of them thought I was a liberal in moderate's clothing and they didn't like the fact that I was for gay rights. I think that drove a lot of them to see me as a polarizing figure. But my style wasn't polarizing. I didn't, you know, they got mad when I answered their attacks. They acted like I was a negative politician because, when they attacked me, I answered back and kept them from defeating me. But I didn't start any of those

fighters. They came after me, even in the primary. You know, so, I basically think I wouldn't have been viewed as polarizing if I'd lost. I just think that they had a game plan, and they carried it out, and you know, if you go back and look, they did their best to deny me the so-called Presidential Holiday. You know, no free time, attacking from the beginning, deny his legitimacy. And they promoted this canard that I would not have won had Perot not been in the race, which is factually untrue. The post election polls show that the vote would have been divided 10 points for Bush and 9 points for me, and I would have still won by five points, which is a lot in a Presidential election.

David Helfenbein: You talk a lot about reaching out to the other party. You said that before and explicitly in your speech. What was your view on the Republican Congress at the time of that speech?

President Bill Clinton: Well let me just say this -- I do think that I made one mistake. When I listened too much to the- the Democrats had been in the majority so long in that Congress, that I didn't reach out to them as much as I should have right after the election, because I had the Democratic leaders come down and meet with me, and all of my advisors said that's what I had to do, because otherwise they would be offended -- and I made a mistake in that. I went to see the Republicans when I went to Washington, but once I got there, it was unbelievable. I mean, they told me they would never, none of them would vote for the budget, there was no point in even talking about it. They were telling me that -- the Republicans did. And so, you know they, and Newt Gingrich had basically been very effective, became Speaker basically, by dislodging the more moderate Bob Michael, by opposing Bush's new 5% gas tax in the budget deal in 1990. So, I don't think I did a really good job in the beginning, but I don't think it would have mattered. For example, Bob Dole, the only time Bob Dole ever told me anything he didn't do was on healthcare. I offered to write a healthcare bill with Senator Dole, and submit a bipartisan bill. And, uh, he said, "No, go on, put one in, and then we'll work one out together." And then he got a memo from William Kristol that said, "if you let Bill Clinton pass something on healthcare, the Democrats will be in the majority for 40 years, and you'll never get elected President." So, they made up their mind they were going to beat everything. And the, and they got, you know the health insurance companies spent all of the money lobbying, and the Harry and Louise ads and all that other stuff, and they just, and the mistake I made on healthcare was not just telling the American people that we had to wait till after the next election, and they'd have to decide, because the senators had a filibuster, and as long as they had more than 40 votes, they could always beat me, and there would be nothing I could do about it. Which is factually true. But this idea that it was some big government monstrosity hatched up in secret is simply, it's not, it's factually inaccurate. The bill actually took 3000 more pages out of the federal laws than it put in. And it's astonishingly similar to what was just done in Massachusetts, what's being proposed in California, and not altogether unlike the plan that Senator Edwards has just proposed. So, it's just that, the whole thing was, it's almost impossible to describe now, because my presidency is a part of history, but the Republicans thought it was like an alien event, they couldn't imagine that a Democrat could win the White House, because they thought that they had been so successful in convincing people that we were, you know, weak on national defense, never met a tax we didn't like, couldn't run anything, the government was responsible for all the problems of America. And all you had to do was put them in there to say they had the right base, and they would say the right things, and it was fine. They really believed they had a formula that would always work,

and I think the main thing is, while I was liberal on some things, like civil rights, and human rights for gays, and women's rights, I wasn't on other things, and it made it hard for them to turn me into a cartoon. And, you know, I think that was just eating at them the whole time, and then, even when they got the press to believe there was something to Whitewater, after I had already been exonerated by a Republican United States Attorney. A lot of people have forgotten this, but before there was ever a Whitewater special counsel, the Republican US attorney in Arkansas said that Hillary and I didn't do anything wrong. We had nothing to do with it. And he was pressured, just like the Justice Department pressured these 7 US attorneys. He was pressured by the first Bush Justice Department to name Hillary and me as persons of interest in the investigation, before the '92 election. Exactly what they're doing now. Hardly any criticism from the press. They thought that Presidential coverage was about scandal, and that's what they wanted, and even with that, they couldn't get the job done. And it just drove them nuts I think. But to me, you know, I just couldn't imagine why we were wasting all of this energy on all of this stuff. I just thought it was such a colossally stupid thing to do when the country had all these challenges, and when we could have legitimate debates over things that mattered that we really disagreed about and work out compromises. And so in the second term, we basically operated on two tracks. They continued to bash me in public. They all voted against, for example, they all voted against stopping the genocide in Kosovo. This, for example, they were just, anytime they could think of a posture that was anti, most of them did it. But underneath that, when we got down to the hard-nosed budget negotiations, we did business. And we did some things they wanted, we did some things I wanted, we operated the country the way it should operate, and we made enormous progress in a whole range of areas in my second term. So it was almost like living in a parallel universe my second term. The politics and the rhetoric, and the press was one thing, and what was actually happening for America was another, and when we'd get something done, or when there was some big step forward, then it would break through, and the public would see yes, we were still on track. It was fascinating.

David Helfenbein: I have four more questions. Number one, how did these three men inspire you: Franklin Roosevelt, John Kennedy, which all of us kind of know, and Martin Luther King?

President Bill Clinton: Well, Roosevelt, was sort of a, when I was born, Truman was President, and he was from Missouri next door, and we all, everybody loved him, so I was raised admiring him. But Roosevelt was sort of a -- almost a mythic figure to working people and rural people in the South. Keep in mind Arkansas had at the end of World War II a per capita income that was only 56% of the national average. Second poorest state in the country after Mississippi, and more than one in four of our people were out of work during the Depression, and people were hungry, I mean literally hungry. So, when Roosevelt visited Arkansas during the Depression, people didn't, he had to drive across dirt roads, and they, people didn't have enough money to paint their all their houses. They distributed whitewash, and people painted the fronts of all their houses out of respect for Roosevelt, so when he drove by, he'd see good houses. I mean, he represented to me, in the received memories I got of Roosevelt, primarily from my grandfather, and from my mother's brother -- my grandmother's brother. And those, that whole group, somebody, a government that cared about people, and that did things. Roosevelt was always to me about doing, you know that the job... Yes, you were supposed to speak and inspire people, and lift their spirits, but you were supposed to be able to do that because you actually did things. And Roosevelt to me was always the great experimenter, the great doer, the activist. You know,

if this doesn't work, try something else, and keep going. I always loved that about him. It was thrilling to me. Everything I ever read about him or knew about him from that day to this day was mostly about that. Kennedy I liked because he -- actually, when Kennedy started running for President, I supported Johnson, because he was a Southerner, and because, even though it was weak, he had at least made possible the passage of the '57 Civil Rights Act, as a Democratic majority leader to Eisenhower, and so I always- I liked Johnson, but when it was obvious he wasn't going to win, I had always been impressed with Kennedy, because I had met him, you know, in '63 and I thought he was a doer. You know, I just, yes, I liked the fact that he was young and attractive and all that, but I liked the fact also that he had been brave in war, he had seen the world, he was interested in America having a positive role in the world. I love that all those people in Latin America, after he started the Alliance for Progress, had his pictures up in their houses and stuff. And I like the fact that he didn't back off when the Southerners tried to stop him from integrating the colleges and universities. You know, his Justice Department enforced the Civil Rights laws. I liked that. It meant something to me. So, I liked him because I thought -- I was much more into his substance than his style. I thought he had a good mind and a good team and that he was trying to do good things for America. I also have to tell you that I was a devoted supporter of Robert Kennedy's campaign in '68. I think if he -- he was really the first new Democrat. He was the first guy that tried to get working class rights that we already started losing to the so-called Reagan Democrats. We'd already started losing to people like George Wallace, people that hated school busing, and all that sort of stuff. Kennedy explicitly reached out to them and tried to touch them and bring them in, without renouncing his support for civil rights, and for poor people. He tried to build a broad base, of middle-class and poor people in America. And, he also was for Welfare reform. He thought people on Welfare who could work should do it, and he was for economic incentives in the inner cities and poor rural areas to give people the means to support themselves. Same sorts of things I did when I was President. So, in the specifics of his programs, Robert Kennedy was really important in my life, and important to me, and I was devastated when he was killed. I thought, you know, he was very important. And Martin Luther King, I thought was the greatest American of my lifetime. I think the speech he gave at the Lincoln Memorial was the most important political speech of my lifetime, and I think the vision he had- the thing I liked about King was that he instinctively was not just, you know, he was instinctively what I would call a synthesizing thinker. He was always trying to put things together. The relationship of racism to poverty, to injustice, to our misguided policy in Vietnam. He was always trying to put people together, to build alliances, to find ways of...reconciling ways. So...and I liked that, and he was heavily influenced by Gandhi, which, who I think is probably the greatest person in, on Earth in my lifetime. He was killed when I was very, very young. But I spent my whole life trying to put things together and trying to overcome people who were trying to tear them apart. That's the way I saw it anyway. I still believe that, so, King had an effect on me in that sense that was greater than any of the others, because of what he represented.

David Helfenbein: What did the Bridge to the 21st Century represent, and did we actually build and cross that bridge as you had imagined we would?

President Bill Clinton: Well, as I said, I saw my first term as basically getting America in order again, getting America to work again. You know, putting the American people back in charge of their government, putting the American people back in the center of public decisions. That's the

way I saw it. So I wanted my second term to try to use the prosperity that we had to deal with some of the longer-term challenges that we faced -- with the economy, with education, with the environment, with foreign policy, and to do as much as I possibly could on healthcare. I also had a plan that would've totally solved the Social Security problem. Did we succeed? Yes and no. We did a lot on education, probably 85% of what I tried to get done, some of which was undone after I left office. We did an enormous amount on the environment, but not on climate change...just a little there because we had no support in the Congress and it required Congressional action. We did a lot on Civil Rights and human rights, but not as much as I wanted because I couldn't pass any legislation. We did, in foreign policy, we were by and large successful, although Arafat turned down my last peace deal in the Middle East, in the dumbest move, diplomatic move, certainly in my lifetime. Certainly, the most colossal blunder that any world leader ever made. That's what I believe. I think that, you know, an enormous amount of what has happened in the last several years can be tied directly to that. I still believe that the terrorists would have been active, and I don't, I think Al-Qaeda would have tried to hit us, but half the steam behind terrorism in the world would have gone out if we had made that peace and then begun building a cooperative future. Most of my foreign policy objectives, however, we were quite successful in pursuing. I think, I didn't get Bin Laden, and I regret that, but I would say we, the things that were left undone were energy and healthcare. We were moving towards economic justice, and I left them a plan, which they rejected, which would've totally solved Social Security. Basically, I wanted to pay the debt down, and take the public debt down to zero, and then we wouldn't have had the interest payments on the debt, and then I wanted to take the money that we would have spent paying interest on the debt and put it in a Social Security trust fund until there was enough to solidify it, and then they could give tax cuts, or spend it, or do whatever they wanted, you know, finance Medicaid, Medicare, whatever. We also took Medicare, which was supposed to go broke in 1999, and I took office in '93, and we took it up to 2027. I think it's actually a little less now, it's been eroded, but we did that. So, we didn't get the big -- I negotiated the Kyoto Treaty, but, and I would have felt satisfied if it had been ratified, but the Senate voted against it before I could even present it to them. And the public -- the mood just wasn't right. The economy was booming and (indecipherable). And people didn't know enough about climate change, and I couldn't generate enough interest in it, because of the way, because oil was cheap, and people didn't feel insecure about importing it the way they do now. So sometimes, you just have to lay these things out, and you know, when Theodore Roosevelt was President, he talked about a lot of the things that were actually not done until Franklin Roosevelt became President. So, he had to wait more than 20 years, he was long dead then, but it took more than 20 years for a lot of that stuff to happen. And that's the way it is in the long stream of American history. Part of what -- The President is supposed to deliver are concrete results, but you're also supposed to tell people the truth about what you think the long-term challenges are, and hope that you can keep moving the country in the right direction to achieve them.

David Helfenbein: Last two questions. You demonstrate a remarkable fluency in Scripture in the rhetoric of your speeches. Did that come naturally to you? Does that come naturally to you?

President Bill Clinton: Yeah. I mean, I grew up in the Baptist Church. I was a regular churchgoer, but I also, uh, had a minister for many years who had a profound influence on me who stopped giving traditional hellfire and brimstone sermons, and instead, literally talked --

every sermon was a dissection of Scripture. We'd go back to the oldest available text, usually in Greek, and tell you what it meant, and we'd -- I got very interested in it. And the whole time I was President, I continued to spend quite a bit of time reading Scripture. So it was natural to me, it wasn't anything that was -- you know, you can't fake that. People can tell if it's just a device that somebody else wrote in a speech for you. It's just part of my heritage. And it was a way of communicating with people that they could understand.

David Helfenbein: And my last question, on polarization in general. Do you believe that America is polarized? Do you think it was polarized during your term?

President Bill Clinton: Um, I think we, I think we can be polarized by politicians, but if you look at all of the surveys, roughly 70% of us want less polarization, and I think that, what I think is going on is that there are first of all, there are legitimate differences between the parties and among the American people over a lot of issues. And, when those issues, when you fight out an election, there's always going to be a lot of intensity, and that'll happen. But I think that what- I think that the rise of the far right in America, and it's dominance of American politics has measurably contributed to the polarization, because polarization for them is a strategy, you know, diminishing the integrity, the character, the strength, the values, of particular politicians, and the Democratic Party in general has been a critical part of their strategy. Newt Gingrich put out a little book of words and phrases that should be used to describe Democrats: "liberal", "sick", "pathetic", "weak." I mean, it works. It's a part of their strategy. And I think if you look at what the Bush administration did, questioning the patriotism year in and year out of anybody that disagreed with anything they wanted to do after 9/11, and politicizing that event, it didn't surprise me at all. It's a part of their strategy. There will always be un- but I think , and I think there's some really tough issues, for example, I think that abortion's the toughest issue in American public life, because most Americans feel ambivalent about it. Most Americans don't feel like we should criminalize the conduct of women and their doctors in the early stages of pregnancy. And most Americans wish there were far fewer abortions, and see them all as tragedies, unless the baby will certainly die, or something. So you have, when people feel ambivalent about an issue like that, or most Americans feel somewhat ambivalent about affirmative action. They want minorities to have, and women to have, a fair chance. But, if they think that if there's a quota system, when the economy is shrinking, not expanding, that some people are going to be left out who are treated unfairly, because they happen to be in the categorical majority, even though they personally are right. So, whenever you have an issue where people feel ambivalent, and there are lots of complicated issues in the world. Take the Patriot Act for example. After 9/11, most everybody was willing to take some new, more stringent measures to make America more secure. And the question was: "Will this measure fundamentally change the character of our country or compromise the future of our children?" So you have to ask yourself that. So you have to ask yourself that. So, some of this is in, uh we're in, anytime you go into a new era, where there's not a settled consensus, and you have a lot of things that people feel ambivalent about, they're vulnerable to polarization. When people feel insecure, they're highly vulnerable to polarization, and we had a few years where we felt insecure. But the majority of the public in both parties, and independents don't want, and yet, the Republicans have found that they can make somebody else polarizing by attacking them. That's why people say that Hillary is the most polarizing figure. She hasn't done anything to be polarizing; they have attacked her, and she has responded and not been consumed by it. But

that's the sort of thing that happens. There's no easy answer to this. We've always had contentious politics, but the times plus the rise of the right made that happen. I expect that this election season will be less polarizing, because I think, if you look at it, it appears to me anyway, that all the Republican candidates that are at least now, they're trying to be less polarizing. It's like they've got the message of the last election. So, I think maybe, this run we've had since the late 70s of the ultra-conservative, white, Southern Protestants driving the Republican Party to the right, and driving the polarizing strategy, and being benefited from it. See it's not fair for the American people to complain about something that worked. They kept on doing this because it worked for them. And I think the American press is not blameless in this either, because they have so much to cover, they kind of like the cartoons. It's easy if an issue's a cartoon, or a candidate's a cartoon, and they can attack someone personally in the press, or comment, you know, the columnists can. It's a lot easier than dissecting their position on healthcare or energy policy. You read, you ought to read, read the columns. Not- except for Tom Friedman, E.J. Dionne, and a few others, an inordinate percentage of the people who write columns about politicians are writing some something that in the end comes down to enabling them to make a personal judgment about them, which is more likely to be wrong than right. And I don't like that.

David Helfenbein: I cannot thank you enough...

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