

HYPER PROGRESSIVE AMBITION THEORY
THROUGH THE LENS OF PRESIDENTS JOHN F. KENNEDY AND
BARACK H. OBAMA: CANDIDACY, ELECTION, AND TRANSITION
TO THE PRESIDENCY

by
Paul Michael Hannahs McCoy

A thesis submitted to Johns Hopkins University in conformity with the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts in Government

Baltimore, Maryland
December, 2014

© 2014 Paul M. H. McCoy
All Rights Reserved

Abstract

Joseph Schlesinger in his seminal work *Ambition and Politics: Political Careers in the United States* defined the particular types of ambition that determined which politicians ran for what level of political office. In building out Schlesinger's typology to include the innovative concept of *hyper progressive ambition*, this paper seeks to answer Schlesinger's unasked question of just how progressively ambitious politicians would *achieve* their goals once elected to office. The campaigns, presidential transitions and early administrations of presidents John F. Kennedy and Barack H. Obama are examined to identify the characteristics of the hyper progressive candidate-turned-president and determine what safeguards such candidates should take to best position themselves for a successful administration.

The paper will describe the foundations of progressive ambition theory as termed by Arthur Schlesinger in his seminal work "Ambition and Politics: Political Careers in the United States", then identify the theory's failure to explain 'how' politicians run for higher office. It will explore selected data tests to demonstrate via quantitative data and examples from qualitative research how candidates-turned-leaders Kennedy and Obama actuated their hyper progressive ambitious abilities and stratagems. Synthesized from this paper's findings, hyper progressive politicians will 1. Know generally what they hope to accomplish in office, but 2. Will not have accrued the necessary experience and connections to actuate stated goals.

To profit from the lessons of this paper and thus from the past experience of the Kennedy and Obama transitions and early administrations, new hyper progressive candidates must first maintain existing decision making and risk management structures.

Secondly, they must be sure to both 1. Appoint advisers from a variety of different schools of thought e.g., not Clintonian economists only, and 2. They must avoid bringing predominately inexperienced hands into the advisory ranks (the hyper progressive president themselves is already lacking in government experience). By adhering to these transition guidelines, the next hyper progressive candidate-turned-president may hope to have installed satisfactory safeguards against the potential pitfalls of the hyper progressive candidate. By controlling for their inexperience, the hyper progressive president may effectively embark on the enterprises they so winningly proposed to the American people.

Readers:

Dr. Michael Siegel
Mr. Robert Guttman

Acknowledgements

To my mother Ann, who always believes in the music.

To my aunt Missy, who does not believe in quitting.

To my grandfather Ken, whose perspective I cherish.

To Aadil, who kept up constant encouragement.

To my stepfather Gerry, who loves knowledge.

And special thanks to Michael Baharaeen, Vincent Lui, and Benjamin Manekin for their editing assistance and invaluable insights.

Table of Contents

| | |
|--|-----|
| Abstract | ii |
| Acknowledgements | iv |
| Introduction | 1 |
| Chapter I: Quantitative Study of Hyper Progressive Ambition | 9 |
| Chapter II: Qualitative Study of Hyper Progressive Ambition | 36 |
| Chapter III: The Hyper Progressive Politician as an Ascendant Leader | 66 |
| Conclusion | 108 |
| Appendix | 119 |
| Curriculum Vitae | 120 |

Introduction

The paper will be organized as such: the first two chapters will explore the following first three points via the quantitative and qualitative lenses. The paper will describe the foundations of progressive ambition theory as termed by Arthur Schlesinger in his seminal work Ambition and Politics: Political Careers in the United States, then identify the theory's failure to explain 'how' politicians run for higher office. Second, this paper will explicate how the concept of *disruptive innovation* can be applied to this paper's expansion of Schlesinger's ambition theory. The paper will explain how certain politicians do manage to master and triumph over their respective political contests. Third, this paper will explore selected data tests to demonstrate via quantitative data and examples from qualitative research how candidates Kennedy and Obama actuated their hyper progressive ambitious abilities and stratagems.

In Chapter III, this paper will examine each president's capabilities as Chief Executive via the lens of a presidential transition to early administration crisis that tested the capabilities of each young Chief Executive and their transition team and advisers. Through examining these two young presidents using the *red flags* schema from Finkelstein, Whitehead, and Campbell's Think Again: Why Good Leaders Make Bad Decisions and How to Keep It From Happening to You, it will be determined whether Kennedy and Obama experienced similar decision making and risk management failures in their respective crisis.

In the Conclusion, practical ramifications of the existence of the successful hyper progressive candidate for president will be considered. The paper will explore what steps a potential future hyper progressive candidate-turned-President-elect

should take to guard against typical hyper progressive red flags (particularly misleading inexperience) that showed to be common stumbling blocks to Presidents Kennedy and Obama. Once the *red flags* are identified, the corresponding *safeguards* provided in Think Again will be explored. As well, the author will introduce counteractive procedures unearthed through this paper's research that best resist the encroaching and negative effects of the red flags common among hyper progressive candidates.

Hyper Progressive Theory's Origin:

Joseph Schlesinger in his seminal work *Ambition and Politics: Political Careers in the United States*¹ defined the particular types of ambition that determined which politicians ran for what level of political office. In exploring which politicians would exhibit progressive ambition in seeking higher office, Schlesinger split hairs to make the point that his analysis centered upon identifying which politicians would seek higher office, and not how they would go about doing so. In building out Schlesinger's typology to include the innovative concept of *hyper progressive ambition*, this paper seeks to answer Schlesinger's unasked question of just how progressively ambitious politicians would *achieve* their goals.

Schlesinger was focused principally on the political context of a politician, not necessarily any personal drive or skill that that individual happened to possess. His was a meta-theory, specifically designed to highlight the institutional determinants while obscuring the personal attributes. Schlesinger by his own admission did not address the 'how': how politicians manage to achieve their progressive ambition via

¹ Schlesinger, Joseph A. 1966. *Ambition and Politics*. American Politics Research Series. Chicago: Rand McNally.

higher office and Schlesinger intentionally focused on institutions and offices held at the detriment of teasing out any real nuance as to how individual political actors might demonstrate unique and impressive political gifts.

The paper will use the example of two senators, John F. Kennedy and Barack H. Obama, who overcame their minority statuses as a Roman Catholic and black man, respectively, to capture the highest elected office. It will be argued that it took a monumental effort by both politicians to overcome these historic barriers to achievement in the USA. The paper will address the fundamental lack of the 'how' in Schlesinger's ambition theory by positing that Kennedy and Obama both were hyperprogressive politicians who achieved success early by the standard timeline by using the tools at their disposal to their utmost application.

It is evident that all presidents are progressively ambitious inasmuch as they ascended to the highest political office in the country. However, as evident in the scatter plot displaying the age at which the presidents since Truman first ascended to the presidency (Appendix), some presidents ascend at a significantly younger age than others. This paper posits that Schlesinger's failure to factor in the unique talents of the individual politician resulted in the omission of a powerful point: not all politicians are cut from the same cloth. Rather, some politicians display a distinctive type of ambition not explored in Schlesinger's original typology, *hyper progressive ambition*.

The hallmarks of a politician that displays hyper progressive ambition in the modern (post-World War II) political era are: 1 they achieve the zenith of progressive ambition on a time table far ahead of than most. 2. They (their campaign) show unusual prudence in their allocation of their campaign resources. In conjunction with

point 1, they take advantage of *disruptive innovations* in elections to maximize their toolkit's efficaciousness. Hyper progressive politicians upgrade existing campaign methodology/best practices to take advantage of the emerging *disruptive innovation*² comprised of new methods/technologies in a way that maximizes efficacy of the organization and controls cost.

It should be noted that other candidates may display traits similar to HPP (hyper progressive politicians). For instance, a Republican representative that has served 6 terms might take advantage of a disruptive innovation (online fundraising) in defeating an incumbent Democratic Senator, thus resulting in their graduation to a U.S. Senate seat from the House of Representatives. However, as this hypothetical candidate was not a youthful politician (Senators Kennedy and Obama had not served in the U.S. Senate for even two completed terms at their election to the presidency) then they would not classify as an HPP per the definition provided in the previous paragraph.

Furthermore, while this thesis examines principally the experience of Democratic senators John F. Kennedy and Barack H. Obama, certainly Republican governors could also possess newness to politics and the sagacious appropriation of a disruptive innovation to achieve an early advancement to higher office. The first Republican president, Abraham Lincoln, was a former one-term representative and adroitly out-maneuvered his rivals at the 1860 Republican nominating convention; however, he is of a political era prior to the Post-World War II one, and thus is not within the scope of this paper's consideration.

²Christensen, Clayton M., Michael B. Horn, and Curtis W. Johnson. 2008. *Disrupting Class: How Disruptive Innovation Will Change the Way the World Learns*. Vol. 98 McGraw-Hill New York.

In contrast to Lincoln, Democratic governors-turned-presidents Carter and Clinton are promising candidates for hyper progressive stature. Research would be necessary to explore how they might have taken advantage of a disruptive innovation in campaigning for the presidency to qualify as true hyper progressive politicians.

Disruptive Innovation:

In their book Disrupting Class, authors Christensen, Horn, and Johnson explored the applications of the business concept of disruptive innovation to the field of education. The theory of disruptive innovation has relevant applicability in explaining how Kennedy and Obama maximized their opportunities to capture the White House. Both men adroitly identified strategic openings in vaulting ahead of their competition.

In business theory, a disruptive innovation is one that opens up the market of a product to *nonconsumers* who previously did not have access to the more high-end version of the product. In the case of Kennedy and the medium of television, consumers of news were those who had the time and owned subscriptions to newspapers. Television disrupted the market, opening up political discourse via a new medium to former non consumers. As Christensen explains, "Disruptive innovation...is a new plane of competition-where the very definition of what constitutes quality, and therefore what improvement means, is different from what quality and improvement meant...."³

Thus, this paper proposes that candidates Kennedy and Obama took advantage of the emergence of television and social media, respectively, to disrupt the existing

³Christensen, 47.

political order, consequently achieving the presidency on a time table far ahead of the average presidential norm. Senator Kennedy himself presciently wrote of the disruptive power of the TV medium in his article for TV Guide magazine in 1959, 'A Force That Has Changed the Political Scene'. In this germane article, Kennedy examined the younger candidates that were exceeding "with particular reliance on TV appeal"⁴. He declared, "Most of these men are comparatively young. Their youth may still be a handicap in the eyes of the older politicians-but it is definitely an asset in creating a television image people like and (most difficult of all) remember." Kennedy was here indirectly making a compelling argument for his presidential candidacy: the vehicle enabled these younger politicians to reach a wider audience, thus leapfrogging the old dependency upon patience and seniority to obtain political power.

I believe both Presidents JFK and BHO were hyper progressively ambitious politicians, actualizing sophisticated and original campaigning techniques (how they won) and possessing certain advantageous characteristics (why then ran), identifying them as such. I will first explore and explain why they displayed hyper progressive ambition - e.g. their penultimate office of senator prior to running for the presidency -as well as how they won - e.g. erudite campaign strategy and their minority status. Additionally, in modifying Schlesinger's distinction between the "how" and "whom" of achieving higher office, I will demonstrate that the "how" and "whom" of hyper progressive ambition are not mutually exclusive domains, but actually form a circuitous relationship in that both factors co-currently act upon each other.

All these factors (age, financing, priming, voting patterns)when combined

⁴ Kennedy, John F. 1959. "A Force that has Changed the Political Scene." *TV Guide Magazine*.

together reveal two politicians that possessed a level of craft superior to the average progressively ambitious politician. These men achieved the presidency much earlier than their post-World War II counterparts; they blew away the competition in the largesse of funds they brought to bear in the contest; they successfully primed their voters via polling and social media; and we know Senator Kennedy re-calibrated his Senate voting pattern to prepare for a White House run.

The convergence of all these traits within the examples of Presidents Kennedy and Obama exemplify how in the penumbra of these cases provided these two men outshone their peers in a variety of different competitive markers. They were far and away superior campaigners when pit against their contemporaries and were rewarded with the White House. A more comprehensive and general exploration might yield the inclusion of a generalized 'how' to Schlesinger's ambition theory: for the scope of my thesis, it is evident that Kennedy and Obama were in a class by themselves concerning how they actuated their progressive ambition.

In chapters I-II the existence and characteristics of the American hyper progressive politician were both established and studied through the lens of the American presidents John F. Kennedy and Barack H. Obama. In chapter III, the question posited is: how do such politicians execute their presidential transitions? What type and quality of decision making and risk management apparatus results? And finally, in the each president's respective first crisis, does the system produce a desirable outcome? This question's significance extends beyond the current Obama administration to potential administrations of a future hyper progressive politician that may triumph in the 2016 presidential contest.

Why is all of this significant?

In 2016, the United States will elect a new president; quite a few of the candidates currently mentioned also happen to be freshman senators as were Kennedy and Obama e.g. Rand Paul, Ted Cruz, and Elizabeth Warren. Hypothetically the American presidential contest may see an increase in the quantity of hyper progressive candidates entering into the contest and enjoying ultimate success. This trend may very well see itself fortified in the wake of President Obama's successful run in 2008.

If such a freshman senator were to emerge victorious in the presidential contest, having insights into how similar freshman senators such as JFK and BHO transitioned to the White House could prove quite useful providing pointers for how such victorious candidates should handle their own transition to the presidency. Prescriptive advice for hyper presidential candidates turned President-elect will be offered in this paper's concluding section.

I. Quantitative Study of Hyper Progressive Ambition

Introduction:

In today's modern rough and tumble politics, where the blogosphere and press are stampeding to locate the next big campaign announcement for 2016, I believe the prescient question is both the *who* and the *how*. The stunning success of Senator Obama in the presidential contest of 2008 echoed the similar shooting star effort of Senator Kennedy in 1960. In the addition of *hyper progressive ambition* theory to Schlesinger's typology, this paper seeks to expand the scope of his theory to encompass both the who and the how in describing the type of politician who displays the requisite characteristics, like Kennedy and Obama, to excel over their peers and capture the highest office in the land.

This paper will be mapped out as such: 1. It will describe the foundations of progressive ambition theory as termed by Arthur Schlesinger in his seminal work *Ambition and Politics: Political Careers in the United States*, then identify the theory's lack of explanation as to the 'how' of politicians running for higher office. 2. It will explicate how the concept of disruptive innovation can be applied to my adaptation of Schlesinger's ambition theory to explain how certain politicians do manage to affect to a high degree their political contests. 3., It will explore certain data tests to demonstrate using quantitative data how candidates Kennedy and Obama actuated their hyper progressive ambitious abilities and stratagems.

The data tests will 1. Demonstrate the order of magnitude by which Kennedy and Obama out-funded their opponents in their primary and general presidential elections, 2.

Elucidate the degree by which the two candidates took full advantage the *disruptive innovation* of television and social and new media, respectively, to craft honed campaign stratagems to achieve victory, 3. Reveal how the candidates crafted their Senate voting records to optimize their electoral chances, and 4. Reveal how the presidents' age at the time of their ascendancy to the presidency reveals how very 'ahead of the curve' these two men were in claiming the top prize of our country's elective offices.

Theory:

Joseph Schlesinger in his seminal work Ambition and Politics: Political Careers in the United States⁵ defined the particular types of ambition that determined which politicians ran for what level of political office. In exploring which politicians would exhibit progressive ambition in seeking higher office, Schlesinger split hairs to make the point that his analysis centered upon identifying which politicians would seek higher office, and not how they would go about doing so. In building out Schlesinger's typology to include the innovative concept of *hyper progressive ambition*, I seek to answer Schlesinger's unasked question of just how progressively ambitious politicians would achieve their goals. As Schlesinger intoned, "In ambition theory the emphasis in analyzing such data is not on how one advances in politics but on who will want to advance."⁶

Schlesinger believed that while it was political ambition that resulted in politicians running for higher office, a theory explaining who ran for higher office "...must rely upon findings such as those presented here about political opportunities."⁷In

⁵Schlesinger, Joseph A. 1966. "Ambition and Politics: Political Careers in the United States."

⁶Schlesinger, 15.

⁷Schlesinger, 5.

other words, Schlesinger was focused most of all on the political context of a politician, not necessarily any personal drive or skill that that individual happened to possess. His was a meta-theory, specifically designed to highlight the institutional determinants while obscuring the personal attributes.

Schlesinger committed two significant omissions in his work. 1. He by his own admission did not address the 'how': how politicians manage to achieve their progressive ambition via higher office and 2 He intentionally focused on institutions and offices held at the detriment of teasing out any real nuance as to how individual political actors might demonstrate unique and impressive political gifts.

For the paper's two examples, John F. Kennedy and Barack H. Obama, these two senators overcame their minority statuses as a Roman Catholic and black man, respectively, to capture the highest elected office. While perhaps historically disadvantageous, Schlesinger notes that such demographic limitations on one's ambition may be ephemeral within the scope of societal time: "Of course the success of John F. Kennedy in 1960 demonstrates that restrictions based on religion, race, and sex may be only temporary."⁸

However, this paper argues that it took a monumental effort by both politicians to overcome these historic barriers to achievement in the USA. Schlesinger is mum as to how these men might have overcome these historic tendencies, offering only that such barriers 'may be only temporary'. It is posited that the fundamental lack of the 'how' in Schlesinger's ambition theory by positing that Kennedy and Obama both were hyper progressive politicians, who achieved success early by the standard timeline by using the

⁸Schlesinger, 173.

tools at their disposal to their utmost application.

Obviously all presidents are progressively ambitious inasmuch as they ascended to the highest political office in the country. However, as evident in the selected scatter plot displaying the age at which presidents ascended (Appendix), some presidents ascend at a younger age than others. Schlesinger's theory offers no explanation as to how certain men achieved the presidency at an earlier time than the average. Schlesinger's failure to factor in the unique talents of the individual politician resulted in the omission of a powerful point: not all politicians are cut from the same cloth. Rather, some politicians display what I will term, borrowing and building upon Schlesinger's typology, *hyper progressive ambition*.

The hallmarks of a politician that displays hyper progressive ambition are:

1 They achieve the zenith of progressive ambition on a time table earlier than most.

A. They show unusual prudence in their allocation of their campaign resources.

B. In conjunction with A, they take advantage of *disruptive innovations* in elections to maximize their toolkit's efficaciousness¹. They upgrade existing campaign methodology/best practices to take advantage of the emergence *disruptive innovation*⁹ comprised of new methods/technologies in a way that maximizes efficacy of the organization and controls cost.

As you can see, from my own table and from Schlesinger's Figure IX-1 'Age and Achievement of Major Office in the United States'¹⁰, Kennedy and Obama, despite the handicap of being a minority, captured seats in the Senate and ultimately the presidency

⁹ Concept of Disruptive Innovation gleaned from: Christensen, Clayton M., Michael B. Horn, and Curtis W. Johnson. 2008. *Disrupting Class: How Disruptive Innovation Will Change the Way the World Learns*. Vol. 98 McGraw-Hill New York.

¹⁰Schlesinger, 175.

ahead of the mean (indeed, according to Schlesinger's graphic politicians tend to first achieve the a Senate seat even later than first-time presidents do). This might be yet another reason why historically a solid path to the presidency did not pass through the Senate, as by the time one on average reached the Senate they were already past the 'sweet spot' window identified by Schlesinger.

Disruptive Innovation:

In their book *Disrupting Class*, authors Christensen, Horn, and Johnson explored the applications of the business concept of disruptive innovation to the field of education. It was found that the theory of disruptive innovation possessed incredible crossover applicability to explaining how Kennedy and Obama maximized their opportunities to capture the White House. Both men adroitly identified strategic openings in how they could vault ahead of their competition.

In business theory, a disruptive innovation is one that opens up the market of a product to *nonconsumers* who earlier did not have access to the more high-end version of the product. In the case of Kennedy and television, consumers of news were those who had the time and owned subscriptions to newspapers. Television disrupted the market, opening up political discourse via a new medium to former nonconsumers. As Christensen explains, "Disruptive innovation...is a new plane of competition-where the very definition of what constitutes quality, and therefore what improvement means, is different from what quality and improvement meant..."¹¹

Thus, this paper proposes that candidates Kennedy and Obama took advantage of the emergence of television and social media, respectively, to disrupt the existing

¹¹Christensen, 47.

political order, consequently achieving the presidency on a time table far ahead of the average presidential norm. Senator Kennedy himself presciently wrote of the disruptive power of the TV medium in his article for *TV Guide* magazine in 1959, 'A Force That Has Changed the Political Scene'. In this germane article, Kennedy examined the younger candidates that were exceeding "...with particular reliance on TV appeal"¹². He declared, "Most of these men are comparatively young. Their youth may still be a handicap in the eyes of the older politicians-but it is definitely an asset in creating a television image people like and (most difficult of all) remember." Kennedy was here indirectly making a compelling argument for his presidential candidacy: the vehicle of TV enabled these younger politicians to reach a wider audience, thus leapfrogging the old dependency upon patience and seniority to obtain political power.

Thus, the disruptive power of television granted Kennedy entree into the arena of the top contenders for the presidency in 1960. Other politicians had already profited from its emergence, but Senator Kennedy had the imagination to appropriate the new technology to its fullest capacity. No better example exists than his thrashing of Vice President Nixon in their first presidential debate in 1960. However, it costs money to pay for all that television coverage.

I. Money, Honey

Identifying exactly how much money candidate Kennedy raised for his 1960 primary and general campaigns for the presidency is an exceedingly tricky business. As illuminated by an exceedingly helpful report put out by the Citizens' Research Foundation in 1962, in 1960 there was "...no federal requirement that pre-nomination

¹²Kennedy, John F. 1959. "A Force that has Changed the Political Scene." *TV Guide Magazine*.

expenses be disclosed...”¹³ However the authors made a good-faith effort to tabulate the total primary election expenditures for each of the major candidates; it is from this data that I intend to make a comparison of the total fundraising efforts of contenders Kennedy and Obama vis a vis their peers of 1960 and 2008.

The compilers of *Financing the 1960 Election* were able to determine that candidate Kennedy and his family contributed \$150,000 towards his primary campaign (based upon the records of the Democratic National Committee).¹⁴ The authors noted, "The Kennedy family assiduously avoided any financial arrangements that would embarrass the Senator, and this limited excessive spending."¹⁵ However, we can imagine that the famed Kennedy fortune of Kennedy's father, Joe Kennedy, would have been brought to bear in this seminal contest, even if clandestinely. We also know that in 1960 there was no federal limit on the amount candidate Kennedy could himself spend on his campaign, and he did not have to report whatever he did spend.¹⁶

Kennedy, weighing in at total predicted expenditures of \$912,500, possessed 49.1% of the total \$1.86 million spent among the top five Democratic primary contenders. By whatever means Kennedy used to acquire this surfeit of funding, he clearly put it to good use, winning the pivotal Wisconsin and West Virginia primaries to eviscerate the Catholic question and pave his way to winning the Democratic Convention on the 1st ballot.

The authors of *Financing the 1960 Election* theorize that the large pocketbook

¹³Alexander, Herbert E. 1962. *Financing the 1960 Election*. Citizens' Research Foundation. Study no.5. Princeton, N.J.: Citizens' Research Foundation: 16.

¹⁴Ibid. 16.

¹⁵Ibid. 17.

¹⁶Ibid. 17.

may have liberated Kennedy's campaign strategy: "A wealthy candidate...may have a psychological advantage in attitudes toward incurring debts. The Kennedy political approach has been marked by notable risk-taking, and the lack of money would hardly be a deterrent if spending seemed necessary to achieve victory."¹⁷ In other words, since Kennedy knew he was playing with half of the total Democratic primary money in play, he and his campaign team likely felt that they could afford to take calculated risks in the primary e.g. compete in the West Virginia primary to combat the concern that Kennedy could not win over Protestant voters for the general election.

It is relevant whether candidate Obama had a similar proportion of his party's total primary race money in his coffers. The numbers for the 2008 primaries will appear abnormally large compared to 1960 in part due to inflation; therefore, it is spurious to simply compare the quantity of dollars spent between 1960 and 2008 and much wiser to compare the total proportion of Obama to his Democratic contenders in 2008.

If we take Obama's primary expenditure amount of: \$414 million and divide that by the sum of all Democratic contenders: $414/731=56.63\%$. That is in the ballpark of the percentage advantage that candidate Kennedy enjoyed over his opponents in the 1960 Democratic primary (49.1%). Thus, both hyper progressively ambitious politicians Kennedy and Obama out-funded their Democratic rivals in their respective primaries by a health margin.

As well, if we directly compare Kennedy to Nixon's primary fundraising totals: $\$912500/500000=1.825$. Kennedy raised 1.825 times as much funds as Nixon to play with in his primary. In 2008, Obama to McCain's primary fundraising ratio was:

¹⁷Ibid. 27.

$\$414/221=1.873$. Obama raised 1.873 times as much funds as McCain did in the 2008 primary. Thus, Kennedy and Obama had an uncannily similar proportional advantage over their opponents in their respective primary fundraising efforts. It should be noted that in 1960 Vice President Nixon was the heir apparent to President Eisenhower and faced no serious primary opposition for the Republican nomination, whereas in 2008 Senator McCain engaged in a significant tussle with other Republicans to secure the nomination.

It is unfortunately not possible to compare the fundraising efforts of Kennedy and Obama concerning their general campaigns as the Citizens' Research Foundation could not offer satisfactory numbers on how much the Kennedy and Nixon general campaigns raised (as earlier noted, the primary campaign totals themselves were rough estimates). 1960 was in the pre-FEC (Federal Election Commission) era, as explained to me by an FEC official, "Please note that the FEC "opened its doors" in 1975 and has campaign finance data only from 1972 - present. Presidential Funding started with the 1976 election".¹⁸ Thus, it is not possible to include 1960 general election data for analysis; therefore, this paper will not include 2008 general election data as a comparison point.

II. What They Did With All That Coin

Candidate Kennedy Priming

Both Barack Obama and John Kennedy sedulously followed the polling numbers to calibrate their campaign messaging. They naturally sought to optimize the percentage of voters that received their targeted messaging so that they could capture the largest

¹⁸Julie Kinzer, Public Affairs Specialist Public Records Office Federal Election Commission. 2014. 1960 JFK Fundraising Data Request. Vol. Email Correspondence Between Myself and the FEC.

number of votes. Of course, all politicians and their campaigns seek to do the exact same thing. However, this section will demonstrate that Kennedy and Obama not only did this but executed with a precision and purpose to achieve dynamic results.

As only under six years have elapsed since the 2008 election, quantitative analysis for how campaign and speech messaging was influenced by Obama's campaign efforts is sadly lacking. For Obama, we must rely mainly on the qualitative analysis of his actions. However, for President Kennedy, the study *Issues, Candidate Image, and Priming: The Use of Private Polls in Kennedy's 1960 Presidential Campaign* by Lawrence R. Jacobs and Robert Y. Shapiro, offers scholars an excellent resource for assessing how candidate Kennedy calibrated his campaign messaging to sync with the findings of his private pollster, Louis Harris.¹⁹

Looking at Table 1 on page 532 of Jacobs and Shapiro, we can begin to see a trend emerge: Senator Kennedy adjusted the issues on which he took policy stances in a given week. We see that over time the issues cited in Harris' polls are more likely to be brought up as policy concerns by the candidate when compared to issues not polled for. Looking at the last line of Table 1, we see that on average across all weeks of the 1960 general campaign Kennedy took policy stances on 56% of those issues cited in polls as compared to 27% of issues which were not so-cited. This clearly shows a relationship between the public and the candidate: the deeper question is from which direction the influence is being exerted.

As Jacobs and Shapiro elucidated, "Our quantitative analysis confirms that

¹⁹Jacobs, Lawrence R. and Robert Y. Shapiro. 1994. "Issues, Candidate Image, and Priming: The use of Private Polls in Kennedy's 1960 Presidential Campaign." *American Political Science Review* 88 (03): 527-40.

Kennedy's positions responded to public opinion: the issues that were raised in Louis Harris's polls were persistently mentioned by Kennedy in his subsequent public statements. What is significant is not just that Kennedy cited issues identified by the public but that the frequency and strength of his stance was congruent or consistent with the public's preferred *direction* for policy."²⁰ Thus, candidate Kennedy was shown to be clearly responsive to the priming instigated by those polled! In return, Kennedy *intentionally primed* the electorate by parroting the policy concerns of those polled. It appears that an echo chamber effect took hold; Harris' polls informed Kennedy as to what issues were significant to the public; Kennedy then, 56 to 27 percent, emphasized those policy concerns in his public statements. It becomes difficult if not impossible to untangle where the loop started or began. More research would be necessary to access the public's top issues prior to Harris' polling to ascertain the public's true concerns pre-echo chamber effect.

Whether Kennedy or the electorate were the chicken or the egg, what is clear is that candidate Kennedy intentionally took advantage of the *disruptive innovation* of modern polling to ascertain the favored policy issues of the electorate. Thus, Kennedy displayed a *hyper progressive ambitious* trait. Next, we will explore Kennedy's legislative record leading up to his presidential campaign and how his legislative record in the Senate could prove an exemplar of a hyper progressively ambitious politician working his craft.

Candidate Obama and the New (Read: Social) Media

Unlike in JFK's time, when Barack Obama ran for president national polling was

²⁰Ibid. 532.

standard procedure by CNN, the Pew Research Center, and National Election Exit Polls, to name a few sources.²¹ However, while Kennedy had taken advantage of the *disruptive innovation* potentialities of polling, Obama, to a degree far dwarfing his rivals, took advantage of the disruptive power of social media (in particular, with Facebook and YouTube).

In his chapter 'No Laughing Matter: The Role of New Media in the 2008 Election', Girish J. Gulati unpacked in quantitative terms just how great the Obama campaign dominated social media in promulgating its campaign message of hope and change. Examining Table 1: 'YouTube Activity in the 2008 Presidential Campaign, January 3, 2008', we can appreciate in numerological terms the sheer force of the Obama campaign's domination of this new media.²² The other candidates were simply buried.

While Obama 'only' had 35.6% of the total subscriber population relative to the Democratic candidate field, his total video views comprised 70.3% of total views through January 3, 2008.²³ From this information, it is hypothesized that Obama's candidacy had extreme crossover appeal; people were viewing Obama's YouTube channel who were not subscribers but simply interested in learning more about his candidacy. In this way, it seems apparent that Obama's campaign executed a multi-pronged media saturation strategy to get the Senator's name recognition to sky rocket. Or, in other words, his campaign was *priming* the voters via his own YouTube channel with tailor-made messaging, much like candidate Kennedy had done with his polling practices.

²¹Sabato, Larry. 2010. *The Year of Obama: How Barack Obama Won the White House* Longman: 175.

²²Ibid. 196.

²³Ibid. 196.

In analyzing Table 1²⁴, what first popped out to the author was Ron Paul's impressive YouTube subscriber showing. This paper ascribes Paul's prodigious following to the enthusiasm that Paul's libertarian supporters brought to his campaign as he infused a third party-sensibility that galvanized Libertarians from outside the Republic party. However, if one were to simply glance at these numbers you could be forgiven for wondering why Paul himself did not sweep the Republican nomination going by subscribers alone. This is where it is important to revisit the funding amounts raised in 2008 to see that McCain out-fundraised Paul 221 to 35 million. Having a large online following (and perhaps predominately polarized Libertarians) did not overcome McCain's formidable war chest.

Gulati provided pivotal further quantitative data demonstrating the Obama campaign's mastery of the new media with Table 2: 'Facebook Support in the 2008 Presidential Campaign January 4, 2008-November 4, 2008'.²⁵ Here, we can witness how swiftly Obama's Facebook supporter count ballooned over the course of the general campaign against Senator John McCain. At the time of the election, Obama had 2,397,253 supporters vs. McCain's 622,860; that is 3.85 times the number of supporters as the Republican candidate for president.

Of course, we also know that Obama's supporters for president were overwhelmingly younger than McCain's supporters. According to the National Exit Poll, 66% of those polled aged 18-29 voted for Barack Obama, compared to 32% for McCain.²⁶ Thus, the fact that Obama blew away McCain in the total number of

²⁴Ibid. 196.

²⁵Ibid. 197.

²⁶Ibid. 65.

Facebook supporters may be more a sign of the age demographic that used Facebook in 2008 than of the overall effectiveness of Obama's campaign in wooing voters generally.

Another gem mined by the National Election Poll is whether the Obama and McCain campaigns contacted the voter. 26% of all polled said they had been contacted by the Obama campaign compared to 18% for McCain. This is not an insignificant difference of 8 percentage points considering that when voters confirmed they had been contacted by Obama's campaign, 64% of them voted for Obama, as compared to 60% for McCain.²⁷ Depending on which kind of voter (committed to one candidate or the other, or still undecided) was contacted would be helpful information to determine the significance of the sway being contacted by a campaign would hold.

It remains a chicken and egg question as to whether funding or savvy strategy pushed these Kennedy and Obama to victory. However, what is crystal clear is that Kennedy (polling) and Obama (YouTube, Facebook) took full advantage of these disruptive innovations to reach, analyze, and understand more voters than their opponents. All the contenders in 1960 and 2008 were progressively ambitious; only Kennedy and Obama were able to combine such a significant amount of funding with brilliant strategic appropriation of new technologies to achieve victory over their peers.

III. Voting Record

Kennedy Voting

Charles H. Gray, from the University of Canterbury, New Zealand in 1965 executed a highly useful quantitative study exploring the voting record of then-Senator Kennedy and his primary opponent for the Democratic nomination in 1960, Senator

²⁷Ibid. 71.

Johnson (Senator Goldwater, Republican candidate for president in 1964, is also included in his study).²⁸ Analyzing the roll call votes of these three senators, Gray attempted to determine whether the candidates for president altered their voting pattern between the 85th and 86th Congresses.

The time window of these two Congresses overlapped with the 1960 presidential election. The 85th Congress occurred from January 1957-January 1959; the 86th, January 1959-January 1961. Thus, taking a snapshot of the roll call vote of senators Kennedy and Johnson between these two Congresses offers a useful opportunity to analyze whether or not the two candidates for president modulated their voting pattern to best prepare themselves for a presidential run.

Gray analyzed five distinct policy areas for his study; this paper will focus on two of his five for the purposes of my quantitative analysis: civil rights (Figure 3) and foreign military aid (Figure 4). Both these policy areas were major ‘hot button’ issues of the time and both were areas that where the American public expected the President to take a significant policy stance. Gray expands upon the significance of civil rights thus, “Positions of the parties and of the three senators changed more radically on this scale than on any other between the two Congresses. In the campaign year of 1960 the Northern Democrats took over as the champion of civil rights while most Republicans moved into the position just above the Southern Democrats.”²⁹

For candidate Kennedy, his party’s shifting towards a more liberal position on civil rights is most significant. It means that, if Kennedy hoped to capture the

²⁸Gray, Charles H. 1965. "A Scale Analysis of the Voting Records of Senators Kennedy, Johnson and Goldwater, 1957–1960." *American Political Science Review* 59 (03): 615-621.

²⁹Ibid. 618.

Democratic nomination, it behooved the candidate to be as close to the party norm as was prudent and tenable. Thus, we should predict, as Gray imported, that Kennedy, a Northern Democrat, would correspondingly shift his voting record on civil rights accordingly, and so he did.³⁰

Gray explained, “The most dramatic shift was made by Kennedy, who with twelve other senators voted pro-civil rights on every roll call...Johnson, on the other hand, moved up the scale to the lukewarm position from which Kennedy and Goldwater had departed in opposite directions.”³¹ Thus, in this case, both Kennedy and Johnson displayed classical progressive ambition: Kennedy wisely adjusted his policy stance on civil rights to match with twelve of his colleagues so that he could maintain his outward perception as a Northern Democrat. Johnson moved as far to the middle as he could to stay competitive for the national campaign while not ostracizing himself from his Southern Democratic allies.

This sense of Kennedy acting in a progressively ambitious manner, but not achieving any sort of genius in his voting record, is affirmed when we study his foreign military aid roll calls between the Congresses. In this example, he and Johnson's movement matched exactly. Both Senators Kennedy and Johnson adjusted their roll call votes to become more pro-aid as they approached their presidential runs.³² Perhaps it may have appeared more ‘presidential’ to be pro-foreign aid, as presidents historically have exercised more foreign than domestic power in the Oval Office.

Gray surmised his study by expounding, “The scaling and ranking data presented

³⁰Ibid. 618.

³¹Ibid. 618-19.

³²Ibid. 619.

above indicate pretty clearly that the lure of the presidency exerts a magnetism, as the time for nominations approaches, capable of altering the public stands that senators, *qua* senators, have previously taken on issues with an ideological content.”³³ Here, Gray hints at the presence of a priming power possessed by the office of the presidency itself that exerts an influence upon the senators who seek the presidency. The ‘magnetism’ compels ambitious senators to adjust their policy stances to best-position themselves for a successful presidential run. Joseph Schlesinger would also in the same year as Gray’s work was published (1965) expand upon this magnetism to explain how who which politicians will want to advance, though not necessarily how they will advance.

Obama Voting

Unfortunately, we were unable to locate a similar analysis performed on Senator Obama's voting record. In spite of this lack of similar research, it was decided to review Senator Obama's voting record from 2005 (his first year in the Senate) through 2008 (his last full year serving in that chamber), e.g. the 109th and 110th Congresses. This voting window mirrors the duration of time of Gray's examination of Kennedy's voting record in the 85th and 86th Congresses. The search was narrowed to key legislation via Project Vote Smart's Key Votes listing, which identified key senatorial votes based upon criteria e.g. how much media attention a vote had garnered and how contentious the vote was.

Senator Obama announced his presidential campaign on February 10th, 2007, approximately two years into his first senatorial term. Using this date as a benchmark, we will first examine relevant key votes prior to and then after this date. In November 2005, Obama voted 'yea' for an amendment to the Medical Assistance and Prescription

³³Ibid. 621.

Drug Amendment, foreshadowing his increased interest in health care reform. As well, in May 2006 the Senator voted 'yea' for S. 2611, the Immigration Reform Bill.³⁴ This vote certainly would have aided him with courting the Latino vote prior to his 2008 presidential campaign launch. It is quite possible that Senator Obama sought to both 1. Emphasize his policy expertise in health care reform, a popular public issue at the time and 2. Court Latino voters in preparation for his 2008 presidential run.

In March 2007, Senator Obama was fresh off his announcement of his candidacy for President; there may not have been a better time for him to have voted 'yea' to the United States Policy in Iraq Resolution of 2007. Irrespective of politics, beefing up his foreign policy credentials and therefore appearing more 'presidential' are tried and true presidential efforts. In October of 2007, the future president voted for the DREAM Act, another pro-Latino vote. Perhaps most notably, Obama in December 2007 was a co-sponsor for the Iraq Withdrawal Amendment (S. Amdt 3875). As he was already hitting Clinton hard at the time on her support for the Iraq War, co-sponsoring this bill would have served to further enhance his foreign policy credentials while directly assaulting Clinton on an unpopular war at home.

In July 2008, Obama voted 'yea' for the HR 6331 Medicare Bill. At this point he knew he had clinched the Democratic nomination and was likely looking to strengthen his campaign narrative of being pro-affordable health care coverage for all Americans. Thus, from this quick purview of Senator Obama's voting record, we can see a candidate that intentionally and selectively co-sponsored and voted for issues that would help voters perceive the candidate as pro-Latino, pro-health care reform, and anti-Iraq War even

³⁴"Barack Obama II's Voting Records." Project Vote Smart., accessed 4/22, 2014, <https://votesmart.org/candidate/key-votes/9490/barack-obama-ii/?p=1#.U1atgPldXj1>.

before the first debate commenced. Senator Obama was not yet a Senator at the time of the tendentious Iraq War Resolution of 2002 (a vote that he later bludgeoned Senator Clinton with during the Democratic primaries). A necessary contribution to this field of study would entail ranking as did Gray the gradations of change in voting behavior from one Congress to the next for Senators Obama and Clinton.

Senators Made President: Rare Birds

One of the most compelling reasons to place Kennedy and Obama in an exalted status among the ambitious is simply that, as sitting senators they managed to be directly elected to the presidency. As the United States Senate explains, “Three senators, Warren G. Harding, John F. Kennedy, and Barack Obama moved directly from the U.S. Senate to the White House.”³⁵ Only sixteen senators, sitting or former, have gone on to serve as president, or 16/44=36% of all presidents.³⁶ It is compelling that only in the 20th and early 21st centuries have senators ever been directly elected to the White House, and then so sparingly.

Barry C. Burden, in his scholarly article *United States Senators as Presidential Candidates* (Spring 2002), sought to quantify the number of senators who ran for president compared with their peers, predominately governors, vice presidents, and sitting presidents. Looking at Burden’s work, it becomes apparent that achieving the presidency through the Senate is not typically done and only recently has appeared as a viable option.

Examining Burden's Table 2, we see that between the presidential elections of

³⁵"Senators Who Became President." [www.senate.gov](http://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/common/briefing/senators_became_president.htm). United States Senate, accessed 3/29, 2014, http://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/common/briefing/senators_became_president.htm.

³⁶ Ibid.

1960-1996, the majority of contenders were either current or former senators (44.6%).³⁷ Governors were the next most numerous type of candidate, at 23%. Sitting senators came in at 33.8% of the total. Clearly, in the post-war presidential contest era senators make up the largest bloc of candidates for the highest office.

Things get interesting when you look at who actually wins the presidency. 60% of the winning contenders from 1960-1996 had no previous senatorial experience. 30% of the winners were former senators, while only 10% of those winners were senators (knowing the data, that 10% is comprised by the presence of John Kennedy!).³⁸ Thus, among the 10 presidential elections held from 1960-1996, 6 of the winners had never been a senator, 3 were former senators, and only one, Kennedy, was a sitting senator. Clearly, the statistically best path to the White House is not directly through the United States Senate.

In the next chapter this paper will engage deeply with the more qualitative-based sections of Burden. Pressing questions that arise here include: it will be hypothesized that after seeing JFK make a successful run for the presidency from his seat in the Senate, other senators throughout the latter half of the 1900s decided that they too could make a similar run. This thus resulted in a greater number of sitting senators who attempted to become president, as they were inspired by Kennedy's successful effort. What ultimately amounted to JFK admiration (in the qualitative chapter, we will explore how then-candidate Obama appropriated the imagery of JFK's Camelot to achieve his own historic run to the White House) happened to coincide with a seismic change in the power

³⁷Burden, Barry C. 2002."United States Senators as Presidential Candidates." *Political Science Quarterly* 117 (1): 95.

³⁸ Ibid.

distribution within the Senate.³⁹ This change in the influence of less senior senators occurred in tandem with the disruptive innovation of television for JFK and later the internet and accompanying blogosphere for Obama.

Eve Lubalin and Robert L. Peabody, like Burden, explored the prior office-holding experience of presidential contenders, nominees, and victors in their chapter *The Making of Presidential Candidates* from the compilation *The Future of the American Presidency* (1975).⁴⁰ They were like Burden interested in the seemingly modern phenomenon of more and more senators throwing their hats in the ring for the presidential contest. Their first few tables explore the previous roles of presidential contenders prior to the race, but are harder to utilize because they do not isolate the data points between those who ran, were nominated, and actually won the presidential contests. In this way, Burden's data tables are much more useful for my search for hyper progressive ambition.

However, they compiled one data chart that is quite unique and demonstrative of Sinclair's conceptualization of a technological innovation acting upon the *why* of senators entering a nominating contest. Table 2 on p. 54 provides an illustration of the positive trend in the number of subcommittees in the United States Senate from 1950-1970. From 1950-1970, the number of subcommittees ballooned from 60 to 144.⁴¹ That is a net gain of 84 subcommittees; thus, 84 more opportunities for freshman senators to obtain leadership roles within the Senate. Thus, the authors quantifiably offered a clear example of why today's senators would have a better chance than in the past at capturing

³⁹Sinclair, Barbara. 1989. *The Transformation of the US Senate* Johns Hopkins University Press Baltimore: 5-6.

⁴⁰Dunn, Charles W. 1975. *The Future of the American Presidency* General Learning Press: 26-65.

⁴¹Ibid. 54.

the US presidency: they simply have a greater opportunity to exercise a leadership role within the Senate. As Lubalin and Peabody elucidated, “By enhancing such opportunities to lead public opinion on new issues through the use of nationally broadcast hearings, nightly news coverage, and guest appearances, presidentially ambitious senators, especially those of the majority party, have exploited the potential for national leadership now inherent in Senate incumbency.”⁴²

IV. The Post-War Presidents’ Age

One of the simplest ways to analyze the degree to which Presidents Kennedy and Obama displayed hyper progressive ambition would be to compare the ages at which these two men ascended to the presidency to the other presidents of the Post-World War II era. The distinction is made between winning a presidential contest and ascending to the presidency to account for the cases of Presidents Truman, Johnson, and Ford, in which they first became president due not to victory in an election but through the Vice Presidential office they held, as the sitting president left the office due to death or resignation.

Schlesinger himself illustrated the % of politicians who attain a certain office at a certain age in Figure IX-1 'Age and Achievement of Major Office in the United States'⁴³. Concerning the time of presidential ascendance, Schlesinger analyzes, “By far the greatest proportion of the men elected President through 1960 are in their early fifties...”⁴⁴ Kennedy and Obama attained the presidency at the much earlier ages of 43 and 47, respectively. Thus, these two politicians achieved the highest office in the land at

⁴²Ibid. 56.

⁴³Schlesinger, 175.

⁴⁴Schlesinger, 175.

an age well ahead of the curve circa the 1960s.

The data was run starting from President Truman through the present sitting president, President Obama (conveniently one of the politicians analyzed for signs of hyper progressive ambition) as Truman was the first post-World War II president to serve. To use data from pre-World War II presidents would be anachronistic, as the nature of presidential selection-making at the time would not line up with the changes in how campaigns are run and won in the modern era. It was desirable to ensure not comparing apples to oranges, e.g. George Washington to Barack Obama to control for changes in life expectancy and the political process generally. Therefore this analysis will cover the time period of 1945 through 2008 (when Obama first ran for and achieved the presidency).

For the resulting graph, see the Appendix. First, the most compelling trend to note is that of the negative slope of the line of best fit. The slope of the basic algebraic form $y=mx+b$ is slope $m=-.416$. Here, a one unit change in x is related to a shift from one presidential ascendance age to another e.g. from Truman's age at becoming president moving to Eisenhower's age when he assumed the presidency. Thus, the trend is that a change from one presidency to the next is associated with about a 4/10 of a year decrease in the age of the next president. From this, we can surmise that the Post-World War II trend is that presidents are becoming incrementally younger.

Of course, the sample size taken in this graph (12 presidents) is not large enough to adequately determine statistical significance. However, this visual does offer a powerful demonstration of just how 'below the curve' Kennedy and Obama were relative to their presidential peers of the post-World War II era. The next closest men in

youthfulness are Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton, two Democratic governors.

It is also fascinating to note that it appears that all the presidents below the line were Democrats while all save Truman above the line were Republicans. This might suggest that those politicians that wish to achieve big early might be better served to be in the Democratic Party in the current political climate. Certainly in the post-War era to today the Democratic Party has been more associated with minority interests than the Republican Party; that Kennedy and Obama were both minority candidates merely adds greater credence to this vein of thought.

Regardless, clearly presidents Kennedy and Obama save Clinton were the youngest post-War presidents to achieve the presidency. On strictly a question of who grabbed the brass ring earliest in their careers, these two men stand out. Coupled with the following analyses, it stands a significant point of reference for why these two men stood in a class of ambition ahead of even their presidential peers.

Conclusion:

All these factors (age, financing, priming, voting patterns) when combined together reveal two politicians that possessed a level of craft superior to the average progressively ambitious politician. These men achieved the presidency much earlier than their post-World War II counterparts; they blew away the competition in the amounts of funds they brought to bear in the contest; they successfully primed their voters via polling and social media; and we know Senator Kennedy re-calibrated his Senate voting pattern to prepare for a White House Run.

The convergence of all these traits within the examples of Presidents Kennedy and Obama exemplify how in the penumbra of these cases provided these two men

outshone their peers in a variety of different competitive markers. They were far and away superior campaigners when pit against their contemporaries and were rewarded with the White House. A more comprehensive and general exploration might yield the inclusion of a generalized 'how' to Schlesinger's ambition theory: for the scope of this thesis, it is evident that Kennedy and Obama were in a class by themselves concerning how they actuated their progressive ambition.

Work Cited

- Biographical Directory of Presidential and Vice Presidential Candidates* 2010. Guide to U.S. Elections. 6th ed. Vol. 1. Washington, D.C., United States: CQ Press.
- "*Senators Who Became President.*" www.senate.gov. United States Senate, accessed 3/29, 2014, http://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/common/briefing/senators_became_president.htm.
- Alexander, Herbert E. 1962. *Financing the 1960 Election*. Citizens' Research Foundation. Study no.5. Princeton, N.J.: Citizens' Research Foundation.
- "Barack Obama II's Voting Records." Project Vote Smart., accessed 4/22, 2014, <https://votesmart.org/candidate/key-votes/9490/barack-obama-ii/?p=1#.U1atgPlDXj1>.
- Burden, Barry C. 2002. "United States Senators as Presidential Candidates." *Political Science Quarterly* 117 (1): 81-102.
- Campbell, Angus, University of Michigan, and Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research. 1970. *Survey Research Center 1960 American National Election Study : Sept.-Dec. 1960*. ICPSR Study.Rev ICPR ed. Vol. 7216. Ann Arbor, Mich.: Inter-University Consortium for Political Research.
- Christensen, Clayton M., Michael B. Horn, and Curtis W. Johnson. 2008. *Disrupting Class: How Disruptive Innovation Will Change the Way the World Learns*. Vol. 98 McGraw-Hill New York.
- . 2008. *Disrupting Class: How Disruptive Innovation Will Change the Way the World Learns*. Vol. 98 McGraw-Hill New York.
- Diller, Daniel C. 2002. *Carter, Jimmy: Presidential Biography*. Guide to the Presidency. 3d ed. Vol. 2. Washington, D.C., United States: CQ Press.
- . 2002. *Clinton, Bill: Presidential Biography*. Guide to the Presidency. 3d ed. Vol. 2. Washington, D.C., United States: CQ Press.
- . 2002. *Eisenhower, Dwight D.: Presidential Biography*. Guide to the Presidency. 3d ed. Vol. 2. Washington, D.C., United States: CQ Press.
- . 2002. *Ford, Gerald R.: Presidential Biography*. Guide to the Presidency. 3d ed. Vol. 2. Washington, D.C., United States: CQ Press.

- . 2002. *Johnson, Lyndon B.: Presidential Biography*. Guide to the Presidency. 3d ed. Vol. 2. Washington, D.C., United States: CQ Press.
- . 2002. *Kennedy, John F.: Presidential Biography*. Guide to the Presidency. 3d ed. Vol. 2. Washington, D.C., United States: CQ Press.
- . 2002. *Nixon, Richard: Presidential Biography*. Guide to the Presidency. 3d ed. Vol. 2. Washington, D.C., United States: CQ Press.
- . 2002. *Reagan, Ronald: Presidential Biography*. Guide to the Presidency. 3d ed. Vol. 2. Washington, D.C., United States: CQ Press.
- . 2002. *Truman, Harry S.: Presidential Biography*. Guide to the Presidency. 3d ed. Vol. 2. Washington, D.C., United States: CQ Press.
- Dunn, Charles W. 1975. *The Future of the American Presidency* General Learning Press.
- Gray, Charles H. 1965. "A Scale Analysis of the Voting Records of Senators Kennedy, Johnson and Goldwater, 1957–1960." *American Political Science Review* 59 (03): 615-621.
- Jacobs, Lawrence R. and Robert Y. Shapiro. 1994. "Issues, Candidate Image, and Priming: The use of Private Polls in Kennedy's 1960 Presidential Campaign." *American Political Science Review* 88 (03): 527-540.
- Julie Kinzer, Public Affairs Specialist Public Records Office Federal Election Commission. 2014. **1960 JFK Fundraising Data Request** . Vol. Email Correspondence Between Myself and the FEC.
- Sabato, Larry. 2010. *The Year of Obama: How Barack Obama Won the White House* Longman.
- Schlesinger, Joseph A. 1966. *Ambition and Politics*. American Politics Research Series. Chicago: Rand McNally.
- Sinclair, Barbara. 1989. *The Transformation of the US Senate* Johns Hopkins University Press Baltimore.
- Wanless, Emily. 2010. "Running for President: Progressive Ambition and the United States Senator." *Conference Papers -- Southern Political Science Association*: 1.

II. Qualitative Study of Hyper Progressive Ambition

In the previous chapter, we explored through quantitative analysis how both JFK and BHO (Barack Hussein Obama) displayed traits of a new category of politicians, the hyper progressively ambitious politician. The theoretical foundations of this class of politician are rooted in the political theory of Joseph Schlesinger's seminal work, Ambition and Politics. Schlesinger's original treatise purposefully limited itself to investigating which politicians display ambition. It was realized that Schlesinger's concept of progressive ambition (that of a politician seeking to advance to a higher office than the one they currently hold) could be expanded out to both 1. Explain how progressively ambitious politicians achieve higher office and 2. Encompass a more advanced class of political animal, that of the *hyper progressively ambitious* politician.

In the 20th century through the early 21st century, only two minority-status United States senators managed to be directly elected to the Presidency: John F. Kennedy and Barack H. Obama. These men were minority candidates who successfully navigated myriad electoral pitfalls to become the first Catholic and African American to attain the country's highest office.⁴⁵ JFK and BHO were examples of an archetypical candidate type, that of the young gun intellect riding into Washington to reinvigorate the Republic. The press helped build and reinforce this narrative. Exactly what type of candidate were these two future presidents, and has the literature fully expressed the complexities of such a candidate?

It is believe both Presidents JFK and BHO were hyper progressively ambitious

⁴⁵Smith, Robert C. 2013. *John F. Kennedy, Barack Obama, and the Politics of Ethnic Incorporation and Avoidance*. SUNY Series in African American Studies. Albany: State University of New York Press: 1.

politicians, actualizing sophisticated and original campaigning techniques (how they won) and possessing certain advantageous characteristics (why they ran), identifying them as such. We will first explore and explain why they displayed hyper progressive ambition - e.g. their penultimate office of senator prior to running for the presidency -as well as how they won - e.g. erudite campaign strategy and their minority status. Additionally, in modifying Schlesinger's distinction between the “how” and “whom” of achieving higher office, we will demonstrate that the "how" and “whom” of hyper progressive ambition are not mutually exclusive domains, but actually form a circuitous relationship in that both factors co-currently act upon each other.

It is important to note that it is not believed that JFK and BHO are necessarily the only hyper progressively ambitious politicians. For instance, Governors Clinton and Carter (both future presidents) shared the same penchant as JFK and BHO for achieving the presidency well ahead of the age curve (see Chapter I: Appendix). However, this paper is principally an investigation of Kennedy and Obama as their many biographical similarities and similar outcomes make them perfect candidates for such a cross-comparison, a comparison across an approximately 50 year span (1960-2008).

While the previous chapter utilized mainly quantitative data to make the case that Kennedy and Obama were hyper progressive politicians based upon the prodigiousness of their campaign accomplishments - e.g. amount of funds raised and media attention garnered - in this chapter we hope to principally demonstrate the *similitude* between the two candidates and their campaigns. We will bolster these quantitative findings by affirming their shared identity as hyper progressively ambitious politicians from Chapter I with the more qualitative-based data in this chapter to affirm the marked similarity in

political style between these two men. Thus, in demonstrating through the qualitative examples of this chapter the striking political similarities of these two candidates, when combined with the numerical similitudes from Chapter I, thus affirms the existence of a rarified breed of political candidate: that of the hyper progressively ambitious politician, for which JFK and Barack Obama are superb examples.

I. What Factors Primed JFK and BHO to Possess and Demonstrate Hyper Progressive Ambition

A. The History of Senators Running for President

In order to comprehend why Senators Kennedy and Obama displayed the presidential ambition they did, it is important to first explore what it has historically meant for a senator to run for the presidency. In actuality, senators have had an abysmal record in being directly elected to the nation's highest office. In the quantitative chapter of this thesis, it was explored how senators are typically too old and have too many legislative liabilities to win a presidential contest. This makes the successes of Kennedy and Obama all the more impressive, while also putting their ultimate political successes in context. In this section, we will first explore the historical handicaps senators have faced in running for national office, and then segue to the following sections discussing how these two senators overcame such obstacles - e.g. minority status, youth, branding/image appeal.

Kirk Victor's article, "Breaking Out is Hard to Do," emphasizes that it would appear the more tenured a senator is, the less likely they will be successful in running for the White House. "The two senators in the 20th century who succeeded as presidential candidates were not at the core of power", noted Baker of Rutgers. *"They were very*

marginal figures, Harding and Kennedy."⁴⁶ It should be noted that Victor penned this article in 2004, four years before then-Senator Obama's fruitful 2008 campaign.

However, Kirk is on to something distinctive: while the public tends to think of senators as prime prospects for a presidential run, their historical record in achieving the presidency has proved abysmal.

Interestingly enough, the only three senators (Warren Harding, Kennedy, and Obama, according to the Senate's website⁴⁷) who have ever been elected directly to the presidency were all early on in their Senatorial careers (Harding and Obama were both freshmen, whereas Kennedy was merely early into his second term). Clymer, in his article, "Sit Down and Legislate for a While," of November 2006, chastised young senators for scheming for the presidency upon arrival in the Senate. He believes that by properly attending to one's senatorial duties, one will construct a formidable resume that will serve one in good stead if and when a senator decides they will run for the presidency.⁴⁸

However, I believe that Clymer's conclusion was incorrect: if one wishes to be a president, don't be a senator; and if one is a senator, run for president at the first possible opportunity. For the longer one serves, the less likely it is he or she will ever become president. This is due to the fact that accumulating a copious voting record can easily be interpreted by political opponents as flip-flopping. Kennedy and Obama knew this, and presumably entered presidential campaign mode the moment they arrived in the upper chamber. Both men would have sought to avoid contentious, ambition-threatening votes

⁴⁶Victor, Kirk. 2004. "Breaking Out is Hard to do." *National Journal* 36 (14): 1020: 7.

⁴⁷"[Http://www.Senate.gov/artandhistory/history/common/briefing/senators_became_president.Htm](http://www.Senate.gov/artandhistory/history/common/briefing/senators_became_president.Htm).", accessed November/12, 2013.

⁴⁸Clymer, Adam. 2006. "Sit Down and Legislate for a while." *New York Times* 156 (53763): A27-A27.

and cast coalition-building, broad-appeal votes in the chamber. As then-Senator and Majority Leader LBJ complained, "Jack Kennedy was out there kissing babies, while I was getting the laws passed."⁴⁹

Marc Ambinder wrote a piece in the *Atlantic Monthly* spinning the tale of the relationship between Senators Clinton and Obama as both geared up to run for president, "Teacher and Apprentice." Most interesting here is Ambinder's focus on a 'process-oriented' campaign model that Obama ultimately honed so well: "it {the model} is concerned less with specific policies and positions than with broad themes related to politics itself...such as its larger purpose."⁵⁰ This builds on both Sorensen's and Victor's emphasis on the very genius of a young senator's presidential aspirations: they lack a copious voting record to be bludgeoned with, and the savvy ones know to be sure not to offer too-specific policy proposals that can leave themselves a prime target for a focused assault on their candidacy. This, coupled with a unifying message to offset their minority status, results in a candidate that is seemingly unassailable and irresistibly attractive to the American people.

Kenneth T. Walsh provided a counter-argument to the pro-'process-oriented' campaigning that Kennedy and Obama efficaciously implemented in their campaigns. Writing solely on the Obama campaign in March of 2008 (when it appeared that Senator Clinton was making a strong counter-surge against Obama), Walsh believed that Obama was having new difficulties finishing Clinton off because he had not yet offered the American people a *more descriptive* policy plan. Walsh chastised Obama thus, "The best

⁴⁹Victor, 6.

⁵⁰Ambinder, Marc. 2007. "Teacher and Apprentice." *Atlantic Monthly* (10727825) 300 (5): 56: 5-6.

use of charisma, historians say, is to harness it in the service of specific goals."⁵¹This paper believes that in the final analysis of what pushed Kennedy and Obama definitively over the finish line was their incorporation of minority status-neutralizing speeches. If you inspire the American public, grab their heartstrings, all you have left to do is convince them that you are one of them (i.e. neutralize your minority status). Once this is accomplished, you are a most formidable presidential opponent.

B. Exploring Variables Shared by JFK and BHO that Set Them Apart

At universities across the country there appears to have been of late a general interest in studying progressive ambition within the United States Senate and House of Representatives. As both candidates Kennedy and Obama displayed progressive ambition in pursuing the White House, dovetailing occurs in two articles researched. Progressive ambition is an ambition in which an individual desires a higher office; in the case of a U.S. senator, there are only two higher elected offices: that of the U.S. Presidency and Vice Presidency. Therefore, unpacking articles that have explored progressive ambition through a quantitative lens can provide a methodical approach to studying potential similitudes between the two candidates.

In an article entitled "Moving on Up: Political Ambition and the Timing of Decisions to Run for Higher Office," Emily O. Wanless of the University of Georgia investigated which characteristics made politicians more likely to "emerge "or enter into a campaign. In Chapter 4 of her paper, entitled "U.S. Senators Running for U.S. President," she explored this fundamental question: "Which influential factors increase or

⁵¹Walsh, Kenneth T. 2008. "Every Prince Charming has His Limits." *U.S. News & World Report* 144 (8): 24: 2.

decrease the rate in which senators emerge as presidential candidates?"⁵² This query is essentially seeking to identify those variables that lead to some senators seeking the presidency (i.e. manifesting their progressive ambition), while others choose not to pursue it. For purposes of this critical review, we sought to pinpoint which variables Wanless isolated those variables that both Senators Kennedy and Obama possessed at the time of their deciding to emerge for president. Among the factors Wanless controlled for in her regressions, the two candidates shared the following: 1. they both sat on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee when they declared their presidential campaigns, 2. both were what Wanless categorized as “nontraditional” candidates (i.e. either a woman or a racial/ethnic minority), and 3. both ran for president when no incumbent was present in the race (in 1960, President Eisenhower had already served two terms and was thus ineligible to run; the same was true of President George W. Bush in 2008).

Considering the first similarity, it seems to make intrinsic sense that a presidential hopeful would seek a seat on the Foreign Affairs Committee: presidents, in their role as Head of State, are expected to be masters of foreign policy, and being a member of the Senate's Committee on said subject certainly acts to burnish one's foreign policy credentials. Not surprisingly, Wanless found serving on the Committee had a positive (+) coefficient associated with it (meaning, if a senator was serving on the Committee, they were more likely than those who were not to enter into a presidential race).⁵³ Likely, Kennedy and Obama both sought a seat on Foreign Relations looking ahead to a future presidential run.

⁵²Wanless, Emily Orchard. 2011. *Moving on Up: Political Ambition and the Timing of Decisions to Run for Higher Office*: 83.

⁵³Ibid. 107.

For the nontraditional trait studied by Wanless, the regression again showed a *positive* correlation between being a nontraditional candidate and emerging as a presidential contender. Wanless postulates that this occurs as those individuals who are nontraditional and have managed to become senators must have an unusually potent form of progressive ambition. Wanless adds, "Being a minority may increase your viability in certain segments of the population, facilitating the assemblage of a multi-ethnic coalition."⁵⁴ This is a novel take on what is conventionally considered a mighty handicap.

The other quantitative-based article I wanton explore is Sarah A. Treul's "Ambition and Party Loyalty in the U.S. Senate." Treul explored the relationship between a senator's degree of party loyalty and the corresponding likelihood that the senator will choose to exercise progressive ambition and run for president. Treul formulates her "rational choice model" for determining the likelihood of a senator deciding to run for president: "*...it is likely that senators are more prone to make a bid for the presidency when the costs of running are low, the candidate has no potential liabilities, and the candidate is risk acceptant.*"⁵⁵

Considering each of the three premises of Treul's choice model, it would appear that both candidates Kennedy and Obama fit her formula. Concerning the costs of running, Kennedy had family money to run his race; Obama himself had sedulously cultivated Hollywood donors and possessed the foresight to recruit advisers who constructed a savvy internet donation machine. As well, both men were prepared to absorb the costs of running a national campaign. As for liabilities, neither senator was chairman of a committee - neither had served in the Senate long enough to earn such a

⁵⁴Ibid. 105.

⁵⁵Treul, 6.

distinction -and thus were not concerned with potentially jeopardizing their service as a chairman. Senator Tom Daschle, in 2004 the Majority Leader of the Senate, considered a run for the presidency in 2004 but decided against it because he found that his personal desire to run for president was severely conflicting with his duties and responsibilities as a Senate leader.⁵⁶ Thus, another advantage of youth in the Senate; the cost to run is lower as a chairmanship is not on the line.

Treul's concept of risk acceptance is tied to the question of liability. If there is little liability (as was the case for Kennedy and Obama), then there is inherently less risk to run. Wanless' argument was rooted more in this concept of risk acceptance, as she was studying whether a senator chose to run (emerge) or not. Both Kennedy and Obama could accept the risks, because at worst, they would be able to return to their positions in the Senate with a greater national profile than before (and potentially a cabinet position or vice presidential slot in the offing as a reward for their efforts). In 1956, JFK did actively campaign for the vice presidential nomination at the convention and was narrowly defeated.

Of course, Treul did not pen her article explicitly considering the JFK/BHO question, but her regressions are rare examples of quantitative research done to study the concrete variables that determine why senators run for and achieve the presidency. Further quantitative research is required to identify variables which contribute to senators successfully running for the presidency. Of course, we can study the striking common factors of Harding, Kennedy, and Obama, but without a robust quantitative analysis of these variables and their effects in elections, we have only qualitative analysis from

⁵⁶Victor, 7.

which to build conclusions. A regression built upon independent variables selected as electoral characteristics of the senatorial candidates (e.g. whether the senator is a minority/nontraditional candidate, how many terms they have served in the senate, whether they have sat on the Foreign Relations Committee) and the dependent variable of how far candidates with the prescribed traits progressed in their respective campaigns for presidents, would be invaluable to actually defining using quantitative analysis what traits best enable senators to run successfully for higher office.

The most insightful quantitative analysis would be expanded to encompass *time*, adding independent variables to determine *how far* into the presidential campaign (e.g. declaring candidacy, running in the primaries, winning the primaries, being selected as a running mate on the ticket, and winning the general election)a senator progresses. In this way, one could determine the *degree of significance* each individual independent variable held for a candidate's ultimate electoral prospects (e.g. does being a minority candidate bestow a senator with a greater chance of success than having served on the Foreign Relations Committee?) through both analyzing the coefficient (slope/rate of change) of each independent variable and then also putting the independent variables *into the context* of their respective correlation with what stage of the campaign an owner of that trait typically progresses to.

II. How JFK and BHO Actuated Their Hyper Progressive Ambition

In the previous section we explored the context in which senators Kennedy and Obama began their efforts to achieve the presidency. In this section, we shall take Schlesinger's ambition theory from the “whom” to the “how”: how the Kennedy and

Obama campaigns crafted their strategies to negate their weaknesses and bolster their strengths; how their perceived disadvantages were morphed into narrative-warping political weapons to achieve electoral victory. In the process, we hope to demonstrate that Schlesinger's original distinction between the “how” and the “why” was not accurate, and that, in politics, the “how” and the “why” cannot be separated but are actually one in the same - one acting upon the other. For example, then-Senator Obama may not have been politically activated were it not for his racial minority status; as well, he may not have been able to win the presidency without that very status.

It will be demonstrated how candidates Kennedy and Obama maximized the traits life had dealt them (their “who” markers) and turned them into the powerful branding/identity markers that helped propel them to electoral victory. We hope to show that in ambition and politics, the chicken and the egg cannot be separated, that identity is destiny, and that Kennedy and Obama could not have scored the stunning political upsets they did without the distinctive minority identities they possessed by birth. As well, their youthful status as young senators ultimately served them quite well in the presidential election campaigns of '60 and '08.

A. Minorities as Leader: Kennedy's Religion and Obama's Race

i. Mitigating Strategies for Minority ‘Disadvantages’

Both senators Obama and Kennedy were minority candidates in a national campaign (an African American and a Catholic, respectively). Robert Smith, in his work, John F. Kennedy, Barack Obama, and the Politics of Ethnic Incorporation and Avoidance, explored the unique “ethnic incorporation and avoidance” the two men had to perform. Smith sagely highlights, “Obama's election represents only the second time in

history that an "ethnic" American—a nonwhite Anglo-Saxon Protestant—has been elected president."⁵⁷ The other one, of course, was JFK. Smith interprets the two candidates' campaigns as attempts to seemingly gloss over their "otherness" by emphasizing their more unifying features.

Stuckey, Curry, and Barnes (to be referred to as 'Stuckey') collaborated out of Georgia State University to create an insightful exploration of the elections of Kennedy and Obama. They explored how each candidate brought their respective minority groups into the national political mainstream. Stuckey declared succinctly that minority candidates must minimize and marginalize their minority status to voters. She then goes on to explain the different rhetorical strategies the candidates employed to accomplish this goal.

Stuckey opined that the "central problem for a minority candidate" is the "need to articulate national appeals, to represent the entire nation."⁵⁸ Stuckey pounds this theme home: a minority candidate for president must minimize, minimize, and minimize the significance of their minority status in their campaigns. Minority candidates must do this so that they can make a plausible argument that they will adequately represent not just their minority group but the majority.⁵⁹

Smith builds his case by elucidating what he viewed as the primary stratagem of Kennedy's campaign: "Kennedy's 1960 campaign was to a great extent based on marketing a narrative of a handsome, charismatic, youthful, gallant, cool celebrity with a

⁵⁷ Smith, Robert C., 1.

⁵⁸ Stuckey, Mary E., Kristina E. Curry, and Andrew D. Barnes. 2010. "Bringing Candidacies in from the Cold: Mainstreaming Minority Candidates, 1960 and 2008." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 40 (3): 414-430: 426.

⁵⁹ Ibid. 416.

thrilling rhetoric of change, a new generation leadership committed to "getting the country moving again." Charisma and change were also the "master narratives" of Obama's campaign."⁶⁰Smith suggests that, in order to negate the potentially negative effects of running as a minority, such a candidate (e.g. Kennedy and Obama) has sought to couch to their campaign rhetoric in terms of hope (a generally positive emotion) and change (which is undeniably what a first-time minority candidate seeking the presidency will bring to the nation). Smith's point reinforces the electoral significance of the variables Wanless explored in her study of senators emerging into a presidential race (Wanless found the 'nontraditional' variable to have a positive correlation when they emerge meaning that being a minority candidate in 2008 meant you were more likely to run than the mean candidate).

Smith also pinpointed the similarities in Kennedy's and Obama's campaign strategy of focusing on "feel-good" rhetoric: both campaigns took great pains to not become encumbered by minute five-point plans on what they would do if elected president.⁶¹Both senators offered paucity of detail as to their future administrations' policy proposals once in office. Rather, they built their campaigns on the experience of electing a young, telegenic, unencumbered senator to the highest office in the land. This proved, against the aged and experienced senators (e.g. Humphrey and Johnson for Kennedy; Clinton and McCain for Obama), a smashingly successful recipe for electoral victory. Both Kennedy and Obama gave seminal speeches that were designed to "mainstream" their candidacies, grappling with their minority status while simultaneously elevating the issue to that of what was best for the United States in the long term.

⁶⁰Ibid. 104.

⁶¹Ibid. 104.

Kennedy's moment came on *Sept. 12, 1960*: "...the candidate gave a major speech to the Greater Houston Ministerial Association, a group of Protestant ministers, on the issue of his religion."⁶²In this speech, Kennedy called for America to stay faithful to its historical roots of religious liberty, declaring "I believe in an America that is officially neither Catholic, Protestant, nor Jewish."⁶³

Similarly, Obama's moment of truth came on March 18, 2008, with his "A More Perfect Union" Speech, given at the National Constitution Center in Philadelphia. In responding to concerns that he was too radical for American race relations, based upon the opinions of his pastor, Rev. Wright, "Like Kennedy, Obama makes the issue one of ideals versus practice-if voters truly adhere to the fundamental ideals of America, their best choice is to practice those ideals by voting for and mainstreaming the minority candidate."⁶⁴

Stuckey clearly believes that being a minority candidate is a major handicap in a presidential campaign; however, she identifies certain factors that "open the door" to a minority candidate making a triumphant run: "Such a context includes economic factors, the lack of an incumbent, the presence of new technology, and the ability to plausibly argue for the presence of a crisis. All these render the status quo less desirable, and make broadening the mainstream rhetorically and politically possible."⁶⁵

Reiterating Victor's earlier point, Stuckey also notes that the longer a senator serves, the more ossified their candidate identity becomes for a presidential contest; ergo, the less well-known a minority candidate is, the better they may be able to fashion their

⁶²Transcript: JFK's Speech on His Religion. 2007. John F. Kennedy.

⁶³Stuckey, 423.

⁶⁴Ibid. 423.

⁶⁵Ibid. 416.

image to capture cross-demographic appeal. As Stuckey explained, "Interestingly, the less well-known a candidate is, the easier it may be to accomplish this mainstreaming...Beginning with a blank slate, his {Obama's} inventional possibilities were correspondingly greater."⁶⁶ From a branding perspective, if one is Catholic or black, the less associated you are with that 'brand', the more potential you have to rebrand yourself to the majority electorate (the Protestants and Caucasian American, respectively). Of course, a minority may have a very devoted following from members of his own minority group, in which case, it is imperative to both portray oneself as a mainstream candidate while maintaining the loyalty of your minority base.⁶⁷

Moyer's Not Just Civil Religion builds on this vein of thought by investigating the underlying rhetorical inventions the presidents following World War II have utilized in framing their religious convictions within the existing American theological framework. Kennedy may have paved the way for candidate Obama in the way he successfully privatized, and thus effectively compartmentalized, his Catholicism. As Moyer wrote, "Kennedy's privatization of his Catholicism was a rhetorical invention that had yet to be seen in U.S. political discourse."⁶⁸ In this way, Kennedy reoriented the public's perception of his Catholicism from an "other" to merely a piece of the greater American quilt.

Moyer and Stuckey both focused on the ways the candidates minimized the significance of their minority status. For Obama, this meant disowning the more traditional, separatist views of Reverend Wright. "Obama...violated the aspirations of black liberation by refiguring its vision from its ethnic particularity to a universal, or

⁶⁶Ibid. 419.

⁶⁷Ibid. 419.

⁶⁸Moyer, Jason Ray. 2012. "Not just Civil Religion: Theology in the Cases of Woodrow Wilson, John Kennedy, and Barack Obama."U of Iowa: 86.

inclusive vision of hope."⁶⁹Obama, like Kennedy, surmised that the best strategy for achieving the presidency was to run as a candidate for all Americans, not as a candidate that would represent solely his niche interest group.

ii. Luck: Happy Advantages JFK and Obama Happened to Have

Thus, both candidates effectively neutralized their minority status by reframing their campaigns as steps in the natural progression of American democracy towards “a more perfect union.” This alleviated concerns that their empowerment would lead to de-stability. Kennedy and Obama, according to Stuckey, were so successful in mainstreaming their candidacies because they had the advantages of 1. an economic downturn, 2. No incumbent present in the election, and 3. The presence of new technology, or *disruptive innovation* (see Chapter I of the thesis), that revolutionized the electoral process.

a. The Economy

Stuckey, in his work Bringing Candidacies in from the Cold: Mainstreaming Minority Candidates, 1960 and 2008, introduces a new variable: the economic climate at the time of the election. For example, unemployment was higher in 1960 than in 1956, and in 2008 there existed a crisis mode brought on by the Great Recession.⁷⁰ Thus, both JFK and BHO benefited from a weakened economy as it eroded voters' confidence in the status quo, thus opening them up psychologically to a minority, or “new,” type of leader. This voter mentality dovetails nicely with a “hope and change” message, as voters are already disappointed with the status quo leadership that oversaw these economic downturns.

⁶⁹Ibid. 142.

⁷⁰Ibid. 417.

b. Absence of an Incumbent

The absence of an incumbent speaks to the scenario in which candidates for the presidency do not find themselves racing against an incumbent for the Oval Office. Both Kennedy and Obama found themselves running in the general election against a man who had never held the presidency himself (then-Vice President Richard Nixon and Senator John McCain, respectively). If running as a minority candidate is an electoral handicap, then at least not having to run against an incumbent was a significant advantage that both Kennedy and Obama enjoyed. Stuckey states that the lack of an incumbent's presence opens the door to a "non-mainstream" candidate making a push.⁷¹

c. Disruptive Innovation of 1960: Television; 2008: The Internet

Kennedy took advantage of television to stunning effect in his first presidential debate against then-Vice President Nixon, whereas "...Obama's campaign made superb use of the Internet...as well as from the astute use of standard media tactics."⁷² Stuckey's final point of crisis presence is tied to the economic point: she notes that Kennedy played up the looming Cold War crisis and Obama campaigned on the Iraq and Afghan wars, as examples again of how the status quo (read: majority) leadership of the country had repeatedly failed to manage (yet another reason why a record of service on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee would be a great sell).⁷³

d.

Youth/ Sex Appeal

Two documentaries are considered the most accurate and penetrating windows

⁷¹Ibid. 417.

⁷²Ibid. 417.

⁷³Ibid. 417.

into the Kennedy and Obama presidential campaigns: *Primary* and *By the People*, respectively. *Primary* followed the Kennedy and Humphrey campaigns as they wound through the Wisconsin primaries of 1960. Viewing this video cassette was particularly relevant as the author was not alive to witness the charisma that was the Kennedy campaign of 1960. Humphrey, the seasoned legislator, appears as old and stodgy, juxtaposed against the virile and pulchritudinous Kennedy. Humphrey was very unambiguous in listing his agricultural points, whereas Kennedy was wonderfully vague, alluding to the approaching dangers of communism. Perhaps the most striking juxtaposition of *Primary* was the image of Humphrey wandering around a Wisconsin town awkwardly handing out business cards whilst Kennedy was mobbed by teenagers demanding a signed photograph.

By the People's most poignant moment involves an Obama volunteer who proudly declares that Obama is the first candidate he has felt impassioned enough to campaign for since Bobby Kennedy in 1968. Obama is a rock star in the film, his chief strategists noting fondly that, whereas most presidential campaigns must spend time and money introducing their candidates to the American people, the Obama campaign started with an already famous candidate.⁷⁴ The Obama volunteer who noted the striking similarities between Obama and the JFK/RFK duo was not alone, for he was consuming a manufactured image that the Obama machine had assiduously fashioned and distributed.

B. Obama's Play: Appropriation of Kennedy's Camelot

Senator Ted Kennedy of Massachusetts determined that Barack Hussein Obama would make the best heir to his brother's legacy. He and niece Caroline Kennedy

⁷⁴*By the People*. Directed by Amy Rice, Alicia Sam's, Edward Norton, et al. S.I.: Pivotal Pictures :Culver City, CA, 2010; 2009.

anointed Obama at American University, echoing a famous foreign policy speech of JFK's. Senator Kennedy quoted his slain brother by saying the time had come "for a new generation of leadership."⁷⁵ Obama, while prudently accepting the endorsements, was also determined not to simply be typecast as JFK 2.0. As David Axelrod, Obama's master strategist, put it, "But every candidate has to stand on his own, or her own. So the thing we are careful not to imply is that there is some sort of transference, and that somehow if the Kennedys lay hands on Obama then he then wears the mantle. That would be presumptuous and wrong."⁷⁶ Obama did not want to be typecast by the Clinton or McCain campaigns as an empty suit with no substance but that which the Kennedy aura transferred unto him; he knew he already had a credibility gap when it came to real experience and substance.

As well, Obama's entire campaign was predicated on hope and change, very future-oriented platforms on which to construct a push for the presidency. Had Obama merely rested on the laurels of the Kennedy coronation, he would have been basing his brand principally on the Camelot of the 1960s. As candidates Kennedy and Obama knew, one of the keys to their victories was their brands' forward-looking orientation, thus sidestepping the requisite requirements for experience and time served. However, as Roger Black explains in his article "Obama or Kennedy?" Obama was able to appropriate JFK's imagery because the endorsements he received from Caroline and Ted Kennedy shielded him from overt criticism that he was using the Kennedy image.⁷⁷

Ruth Conniff further discussed the candidates' efforts to mainstream their attempts

⁷⁵Smith, Chris. 2008. "The Honorary Kennedy." *New York* 41 (21): 20: 1.

⁷⁶Ibid. 2.

⁷⁷"Obama or Kennedy?" 2008. *Creative Review* 28 (8): 64.

to appeal to the majority of Americans by providing more substance about how this process actually plays out. "As a Rorschach, Obama reflects Americans' best feelings about themselves—a sight better than what we have now."⁷⁸ As Kennedy and Obama sought to appeal to the largest possible audience, they sagaciously spoke in platitudes that encouraged voters to fill in the gaps to fit their own desired interpretations of each man. Echoing Stuckey's exploration of the significance of the selection of our national leaders, 'A JFK For Our Times' notes that "A country defines itself by its leadership, and electing a minority figure as chief executive is a significant milestone."⁷⁹

While both Kennedy and Obama were minority candidates, both men endured minute probing concerning their religion. For example, Kennedy was grilled on how his Catholicism would color his decisions in the Oval Office, whereas Obama was incorrectly presumed to be a Muslim by nearly 1/5 of all Americans, according to a PEW poll taken in 2010.⁸⁰ This idea of an "other" candidate is an interesting phenomenon. They were ultimately successful in their bids for the presidency by effectively redefining what it meant to be an American in a position of power in the United States of America. This sense of potential and possibility may be why American voters flock to candidates like them. The minority candidate may be the average American's best chance to queer the power structure, to support the contender who, like them, is not supposed to win the big prize, but with the support of the people, truly can.

i. Frame: The Fetishization of the American Presidency

The aforementioned sources dealing with the question of Obama's position as an

⁷⁸Conniff, Ruth. 2007. "Obama's Kennedy Bid." *Progressive* 71 (6): 14: 3.

⁷⁹"A JFK for our Times." 2008. *Maclean's* 121 (45): 2: 1.

⁸⁰Falsani, Cathleen. 2011. "Kennedy and Obama: The Faith Question." *Sojourners Magazine* 40 (1): 14: 2.

heir to the "Kennedy Mystique" were articles predominately composed in the period of 2007-08, in the midst of Obama's compelling presidential run. Of particular note is the impressive representation British scholars made to the collections. One particularly fascinating British account of the Kennedy-Obama duality on the Freudian level was made by Gregory Frame of the University of Warwick, United Kingdom. Frame theorized that the U.S. craves a father figure and has placed this subconscious onus onto its presidents. As JFK was cut down before his time, his image is frozen in place as an ideal president/father figure, as it has never been besmirched by the same degree of judgment most presidents ultimately face. Frame theorizes that candidate Obama appropriated this Kennedy Mystique to make himself appear presidential and to wear the Kennedy mantle.⁸¹

Frame claims that the brand of the Obama campaign was ripped right out of the JFK playbook: "In semiotic terms, the similarities between the two men are inescapable: like Kennedy, Obama is youthful, attractive, with a young family, and he appears similarly concerned with exuding sartorial elegance in his public appearances...the Obama presidency is clearly indebted to the Kennedy legacy: elegant, stylish, disguising an enormous intellect beneath the veneer of relaxed sophistication."⁸²Frame is implying that Obama saw in Kennedy a tested and effective presidential model, one that, due to his similarities to JFK (Harvard-educated, young senator, etc.) would fit himself efficaciously.

I sense in Frame's work the implication that in co-opting Kennedy's style, Obama may also have been seeking to deemphasize his "blackness." Again, building on Moyer

⁸¹Frame, 165.

⁸²Ibid. 165.

and Holmes' theory that minority candidates must mainstream their candidacies, it would make sense that Obama would seek to appear as "white" as possible to dissemble his blackness, and thus his "otherness." I believe this trope requires thorough qualitative research to incorporate race, queer, and postmodern theory in order to be adequately explored.

Frame warns that both men came to signify not candidates for president but actual fetishes for the American father figure. As Frame wrote, "The fetishization of his {Kennedy's} image...describes as 'The Kennedy Obsession'...in relation to our own fixation with the representations of the Obamas."⁸³ Many noted in 2007-08 a similarly fervent "Obama Obsession" sweeping the public. Both men appeared to become fetish props, with people ultimately voting for them not because of their policy stances (which both candidates kept deliberately murky), but for their symbolic significance (attractive young statesmen that came to represent Freudian father-absence of the highest and most potent order). As Robert Smith warned in his aforementioned *Politics of Ethnic Incorporation and Avoidance*, "Yet we know that in both Kennedy's and Obama's cases that much of the success of their narratives rested on manufactured images, rhetoric, political posturing, and an all-too-frequent fawning press corps...Thomas Reeves concluded by warning, '...the American people must resist the temptation to be won over by a handsome face, expensive campaign efforts, and thrilling rhetoric.' In 2008 as in 1960 this resistance proved too big an ask."⁸⁴ The ultimate marketing campaign resulted in Americans possibly electing an advertisement as opposed to an actual man to the presidency.

⁸³Ibid. 165.

⁸⁴Smith, Robert C., 104.

Thus, both Kennedy and Obama were candidate soul mates of a sort, and it seems certain that Obama actively cultivated this perception. Frame argues that Obama and his campaign advisors were well aware of the public's fascination with him in relation to Kennedy, explaining, "It is arguable that, through the similar implementation of a star image, Obama presented himself as the man who would ultimately fulfill the promise of Kennedy's curtailed presidency, becoming the son to Kennedy's father...To paraphrase Obama's own campaign rhetoric, was he the one we had been waiting for?"⁸⁵ Of course, Frame was not the only person who gazed upon the Obama campaign and saw in his ethos the echoes of Camelot.

ii. Sorensen: Personality and Purpose Trumps Seniority/Experience

Ted Sorensen, JFK's senatorial advisor and eventual presidential advisor, gushes in his article "Heir Time" on the like-compartments of JFK and BHO. Sorensen believed that in 2008 Obama was the candidate the country needed to unify it and revive American liberalism, the role he believes Kennedy successfully played in 1960. He noted that both candidates were lampooned for their thin resumes, quoting his old boss on the campaign trail, "Experience is like tail-lights on a boat which illuminate where we have been when we should be focusing on where we should be going."⁸⁶ Both Kennedy and Obama spun a like narrative: the fresh and brilliant young face riding into Washington on a white horse to reinvigorate the Republic and lead it to a bright new destiny (Kennedy's "Camelot" imagery).

Sorensen notes that both were Harvard-educated and rose to prominence through

⁸⁵Frame, 168.

⁸⁶Sorensen, 2.

their all-star performances at the previous Democratic National Conventions (Kennedy in his bid for the vice presidential slot in 1956; Obama as a keynote speaker at the 2004 Convention).⁸⁷ He also, as Frame and Smith had opined, noted that both Kennedy and Obama drafted nondescript presidential plans, "Kennedy's speeches in 1960 and even earlier, like Obama's in early 2007, were not notable for their five-point legislative plans. Rather, they focused on several common themes: hope, a determination to succeed despite the odds, dissatisfaction with the status quo, and confidence in the judgment of the American people...neither talked down to the American people."⁸⁸ Here, Sorensen makes the distinctive point that the electoral success these two men enjoyed was born from their respect of the American people. They did not proselytize complex policy points (a la Victor's prediction that tenured senators fail as presidential candidates because they cannot help but speak 'senatorese' to voters).

Sorensen concludes by noting the repeated failure of tenured senators to recognize the potent appeal this "simplified" campaign talk can have on the American voting public. I would extrapolate from Sorensen's and others' observations that the very genius of JFK and BHO was that their inexperience strengthened their appeal to the voting public while simultaneously duping their more experienced and powerful senatorial adversaries. As Sorensen succinctly waxes, "Most of Kennedy's opponents, like Obama's, were fellow senators...who initially dismissed him as neither a powerhouse on the Senate floor nor a member of their inner circle. That mattered not to the voters; nor does it today."⁸⁹ Because these impotent senators do not have power in the Senate, their

⁸⁷Sorensen, 2.

⁸⁸Sorensen, 2.

⁸⁹Sorensen, 3.

adversaries make the grievous miscalculation of fatally underestimating them. Ironically, Kennedy and Obama's lack of real power in the Senate proved a most opaque cloak with which to camouflage themselves for the presidential contests.

III. Devil's Advocate

A. Context 1960 vs. 2008

The similarities between JFK and BHO's opponents for president have been explored in the critical review: in summary, seasoned and tenured senators against the audacious young senators. However, no research, qualitative or quantitative-based, has sought to root out the differences between the opponents JFK faced in 1960 and those against BHO in 2008. Were the primary challengers of Senators Humphrey and Johnson analogous to the resistance of Senators Clinton and Edwards that Obama faced? We would argue that Senator Clinton was a much more established threat than was Humphrey in the 1960 primary season.

Furthermore, the nominating process at the Democratic Conventions of 1960 and 2008 were worlds apart. In 1960, a candidate could conceivably not even run in the Democratic primaries and still maneuver to become the party candidate at the convention (as LBJ had schemed to accomplish). This was near the exact opposite in the 2008 primaries, where once Obama achieved the number of delegates necessary to clinch the nomination at the convention, incredible pressure built on Clinton to withdraw from the campaign to allow the presumptive nominee to move swiftly to the general campaign. JFK and BHO were operating under different nominating rules when they achieved their electoral victories, and to not recognize and account for these significant differences is to not grasp the realities of what occurred in each election (not to mention the differences in

facing Vice President Nixon of 1960 vs. Senator McCain in 2008). However, the similarities between the two candidates are strikingly fantastic (e.g. Stuckey's points). Thus, the perspective of focusing on the similarities does bear out.

B. The young wunderkind as a candidate type

With the 2016 presidential election already becoming a focal point for political conversation, self-declared presidential hopeful senators Ted Cruz and Rand Paul could potentially take stock from how JFK and BHO ran their presidential campaigns. The campaign techniques and styles they used may prove transferable to other electoral paradigms for young senators (i.e. serving on the Foreign Relations Committee and/or not serving in a senate leadership position). Furthermore, no research has been done on the relative effects or 'bumps' each quality gives to a senator in a presidential campaign (or, more simply, does serving on the Foreign Relations Committee confer a greater or lesser benefit than, say, being a minority candidate?).

i. What Significance, if any, did their status as youthful senators have on their abilities to run a successful presidential campaign?

Both Obama and Kennedy were young senators who outfoxed and defeated more seasoned senior senators in presidential combat. While qualitatively this was extensively remarked upon and analyzed, no significant quantitative analysis existed to explain this phenomenon. Quantitative questions such as: how would the dependent variable: success in a presidential campaign measured against the independent variables (e.g. age of the senator, number of years served in the Senate, leadership positions held within the Senate, etc.). Any serious investigation into the similarities between Kennedy and Obama and why they were able to capture the White House must start with a quantitative

study of how their Senatorial attributes augmented their campaign capabilities.

ii. The role of technology in the campaign successes of the two men

The efficacious results of the use of modern technology by both the Kennedy and Obama campaigns has been lauded in qualitative analyses as one of the principal reasons both candidates were able to emerge victorious in their respective elections. However, as with the last question, no real quantitative analysis of this phenomenon has been attempted. The dependent variable -efficacy of the technological tool -could be studied via the independent variables - for example, age of the technology, cost of implementing the technology, rate of saturation of the technology within the political system, number of people the technology can/does communicate with, number of opponent candidates who also are utilizing the said technology, etc.. While we have talked of the power of the televised candidate debate in giving Kennedy a boost against Nixon in 1960, the stunning success of micro donations that the internet brought to the Obama campaign of 2008, and the targeted advertising of the Obama campaign of 2012, no real quantitative study of these sundry technological advantages or developments seemingly exists.

IV. Conclusion

Presidents John Fitzgerald Kennedy and Barack Hussein Obama both overcame their minority status to capture the United States Presidency. Through their multiple shared inborn and developed political skills/traits, this paper sought to demonstrate just how similar these two politicians were to each other and how different they were from all other typical politicians. In this way, we hope to have brought home the ‘uniqueness’ factor of hyper progressive ambition theory: few politicians fit into the category because to be so hyper ambitious, one requires at least one strikingly rare characteristic - for JFK

and Obama, their minority status -to catapult them ahead of their peers in the presidential contest. Thus, both JFK and Obama were both intensely unique and successful politicians, thus cementing their status as hyper progressive politicians, the political nature of which is outlined in Chapter II.

Chapters I and II outlined the characteristics of candidates Kennedy and Obama and how these characteristics set them apart from the average progressively ambitious politician. Progressing, chapter III will examine how a hyper progressive politician performs *once* in higher office. It will be highlighted that, while their dazzling campaign skills did secure them electoral victory, their very swift ascent through the rungs of political office does result in a politician who, while an adroit campaigner, is not prepared to effectively handle a presidential transition and subsequent early crisis.

As a little divertissimo, David L. Holmes interestingly asserts that Barack Obama actually received a greater quantity (three years to JFK's one) of formal Roman Catholic schooling.⁹⁰ Often, being a "nontraditional" candidate does not signify a monolithic political perspective, as is often maintained by the American media and general populace. Moyer suggests that minority candidates may actually by virtue of their "other" status make ideal leaders, as he expounds, "... when holding two competing perspectives simultaneously a development is produced, a kind of synthesis, that should not be treated as relativistic but as a "perspective of perspectives".⁹¹ This "perspective of perspectives" may gird the candidate with a holistic viewpoint that can most accurately absorb and synthesize the myriad issues that confront the modern American Republic.

⁹⁰Holmes, David L. 2012. *The Faiths of the Postwar Presidents: From Truman to Obama*. George H. Shriver Lecture Series in Religion in American History. Vol. 5. Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press: 50.

⁹¹Moyer, 92.

Works Cited

- "[Http://www.Senate.gov/artandhistory/history/common/briefing/senators_became_president.Htm](http://www.Senate.gov/artandhistory/history/common/briefing/senators_became_president.Htm).", accessed November/12, 2013.
- "A JFK for our Times." 2008.*Maclean's* 121 (45): 2.
- "Obama Or Kennedy?" 2008.*Creative Review* 28 (8): 64.
- Transcript: JFK's Speech on His Religion. 2007. John F. Kennedy.
- Ambinder, Marc. 2007. "Teacher and Apprentice." *Atlantic Monthly* (10727825) 300 (5): 56.
- Clymer, Adam. 2006. "Sit Down and Legislate for a while." *New York Times* 156 (53763): A27-A27.
- Conniff, Ruth. 2007. "Obama's Kennedy Bid." *Progressive* 71 (6): 14.
- Primary*. Directed by Robert Drew, Joseph Julian, inc Time-Life Broadcast, Docurama and New Video Group. New York, NY: Docurama, 2003; 1960.
- Falsani, Cathleen. 2011. "Kennedy and Obama: The Faith Question." *Sojourners Magazine* 40 (1): 14.
- Frame, Gregory. 2012. "Seeing Obama, Projecting Kennedy: The Presence of JFK in Images of Barack Obama." *Comparative American Studies* 10 (2): 163.
- Holmes, David L. 2012. *The Faiths of the Postwar Presidents : From Truman to Obama*. George H. Shriver Lecture Series in Religion in American History. Vol. 5. Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press.
- Howell, William G. 2011. "Presidential Power in War." *Annual Review of Political Science* 14: 89-105.
- Kristol, William. 2007. "In 2008 it's Ronald Reagan Vs. Bobby Kennedy." *Time* 169 (15): 26.
- Matthews, Chris. 2011. "Five Things JFK could Teach Obama." *Time* 178 (18): 42.
- Moyer, Jason Ray. 2012. "Not just Civil Religion: Theology in the Cases of Woodrow Wilson, John Kennedy, and Barack Obama." U of Iowa.

By the People. Directed by Amy Rice, Alicia Sams, Edward Norton, et al. S.I.: Pivotal Pictures :Culver City, CA, 2010; 2009.

Sherwell, Philip. January 2007. "Barack Obama 'the New Jack Kennedy'." *The Telegraph*.

Smith, Chris. 2008. "The Honorary Kennedy." *New York* 41 (21): 20.

Smith, Robert C. 2013. *John F. Kennedy, Barack Obama, and the Politics of Ethnic Incorporation and Avoidance*. SUNY Series in African American Studies. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Sorensen, Theodore. 2007. "Heir Time." *New Republic* 237 (2): 16.

Stuckey, Mary E., Kristina E. Curry, and Andrew D. Barnes. 2010. "Bringing Candidacies in from the Cold: Mainstreaming Minority Candidates, 1960 and 2008." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 40 (3): 414-430.

Thomas, Evan. 2008. "Welcome to the Family." *Newsweek* 151 (6): 37.

Treul, Sarah A. 2009. "Ambition and Party Loyalty in the U.S. Senate." *American Politics Research* 37 (3): 449.

Victor, Kirk. 2004. "Breaking Out is Hard to do." *National Journal* 36 (14): 1020.

Walsh, Kenneth T. 2008. "Every Prince Charming has His Limits." *U.S. News & World Report* 144 (8): 24.

Wanless, Emily Orchard. 2011. *Moving on Up: Political Ambition and the Timing of Decisions to Run for Higher Office*.

Chapter III: The Hyper Progressive Politician as an Ascendant Leader

I. Introduction

In the previous two chapters the existence and characteristics of the American hyper progressive politician were both established and studied by examining of the American presidents John F. Kennedy and Barack H. Obama. The question now is: how do such politicians execute their presidential transitions? Do such politicians establish similar and predictable decision making processes? More specifically, using the *red flags* framework of the decision making work Think Again, we can discover what errors hyper progressive politicians in the United States' highest office typically commit. Does their decision making process incorporate a robust risk management structure to control for the myriad risks and rewards that any new president must contend with? And finally, in each president's first crisis, does the system produce a desirable outcome? This question's significance extends beyond the current Obama administration to potential administrations of a future hyper progressive politician that may triumph in the 2016 presidential contest.

It has been surmised from the earlier chapters that Presidents JFK and BHO (John F. Kennedy and Barack H. Obama) were *hyper progressively* ambitious politicians, actualizing sophisticated and original campaigning techniques (how they won) and possessing certain advantageous characteristics (why then ran), identifying them as such. In the earlier chapters it was explored why they displayed hyper progressive ambition - e.g. their penultimate office of senator prior to running for the presidency -as well as how they won - e.g. erudite campaign strategy and their minority status. Additionally, in

modifying Schlesinger's distinction between the “how” and “whom” of achieving higher office, it was demonstrated that the "how" and “whom” of hyper progressive ambition are not mutually exclusive domains, but actually form a circuitous relationship in that both factors co-currently act upon each other.

Thus, in the first two chapters the striking similarities in the candidacies down to the sartorial style of each man was noted and examined; in this chapter, it will be probed how the two transitioned to the highest office in the land. It is hypothesized that two preeminent variables pull my examples towards and away from having similar administrative preparation results. On the one hand, both men had a paucity of legislative experience compared to their most significant competitors for the presidency, to give one example of the sundry similitudes; on the other, one transitioned to his administration in the period of 1960-61, the other 2008-09. In that time, the Presidential Transition Act of 1963 was passed, critically altering the resources with which presidents-elect may prepare for their administrations.

Thus, to properly examine the efficacy of both mens' transition process, and to attempt to control for the time period in which both men happened to serve, each early administration will be examined via the vehicle of an early crisis in the respective administration. For President Kennedy, the Bay of Pigs; for President Obama, the passage of ARRA (The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009). In both these cases, the presidents made critical decisions that reflected upon the processes they had put in place beforehand to best prepare them to make such a calls.

It is important for me to note that it is not this paper’s assumption that JFK and BHO are exclusively the only hyper progressively ambitious politicians. For instance,

Governors Clinton and Carter (both future presidents) shared the same penchant ask JFK and BHO for achieving the presidency well ahead of the age curve (see Chapter I: Appendix). However, this thesis investigates Kennedy and Obama because their many biographical similarities and similar outcomes make them perfect candidates for such a cross-comparison, a comparison that spans across an approximately 50 year span (1960-2008).

An organization's decision making structure is the process by which an organization weighs the predictable risks and rewards of a particular decision/ action. Just having a formalized decision making structure does not make the procedure either 'good' or 'bad'; rather, a decision making structure may be rated by examining the degree of risk management implemented in the process.

Risk management is simply the reasoned balance of potential risks and rewards when making a decision. For instance, an organization that focused chiefly on short-term profit gain (rewards) to the detriment of ignoring warnings from its CRO (chief risk officer) concerning investment risks, would not have an effective risk management procedure in place and consequently could be considered to not have a balanced e.g. 'good' decision making structure as well. Basically, incorporating risk management into the decision making process requires the reasoned consideration of the dangers and benefits that may come from a decision.

Woven into this exploration will be the grading of how well (if at all) each president built into their decision making process risk management to protect against potentially egregious decision making errors such as groupthink or bad information. How well each president-elect and their respective teams inoculated their administrations

against such failures will reflect how well a hyper progressive politician can transition from a candidate to an efficient and effective leader.

During the 1960 presidential primary campaign season, Senator Johnson noted that Senator Kennedy was off from the Senate politicking via kissing babies while he, the responsible public servant and Majority Leader, was wiling away precious campaign time stewarding legislation through the Congress. This anecdote that is, per Dr. Ginsburg of Johns Hopkins University, illustrative of a characteristic indicative of the hyper progressive politicians: they make great campaigners, but potentially not as slick leaders. Dr. Ginsburg posited two severely diverging paths for such a candidate that does reach the zenith of their political ambition: 1. what do I do now? The candidate-turned leader fails to produce the ability to lead effectively, or 2. Rise to the occasion. The candidate backs up a scintillating campaign performance with an equally efficacious showing in higher office.⁹²

While it is beyond the scope of this paper to determine which of these freshman senators might be classifiable as a hyper progressive politician, if one were to emerge as such and ultimately capture the presidency, knowledge of how past hyper progressive politicians-turned-presidents had managed their transitions would prove invaluable in formulating a risk management strategy that sought to mitigate the potentiality for costly errors as was experienced by President Kennedy during the Bay of Pigs crisis.

Finally, based upon the findings from the above points, this chapter will have set the groundwork for envisioning what kind of a presidency might emerge from the electoral success of a hyper progressive politician in 2016. Currently, a slew of freshman

⁹²Ginsberg, Dr. Benjamin. *Thoughts on Paul McCoy's Master's Thesis*.

senators e.g. Rubio, Paul, Cruz, and Warren, have been noted by political operatives as potential candidates for the presidency in 2016. In the Conclusion, the nature of a future hyper progressive presidential transition will be considered.

A. Historical Background

Before the analysis of the actions of presidents Kennedy and Obama, relevant historical background information will be provided to help put their decisions in context.

i. Kennedy and the Bay of Pigs

Candidate Kennedy's degree of knowledge of the Eisenhower administration's covert plan to remove Fidel Castro from power was in the hands of President Eisenhower, who chose to not reveal the existence of the plan until after Kennedy's election to the presidency. As elucidated by Rebecca Friedman in Crisis Management, "As a presidential candidate, Kennedy received three briefings from intelligence officials in 1960...Although the CIA had no clear policy for briefing presidential candidates, briefings often omitted highly sensitive covert actions, signal intelligence, and human intelligence programs until after the election."⁹³

President-elect Kennedy learned of the existence of the CIA plan to overthrow the existing Cuban government on November 18, 1960. President Eisenhower, in his final briefing with the President-elect, pressed Kennedy to continue the regime change operation that his administration had initiated.⁹⁴ From the beginning of the Kennedy administration, the CIA curtailed the access that Kennedy's advisers had to relevant information. "The CIA controlled information so tightly that Kennedy's advisers were

⁹³Friedman, Rebecca R. 2011. "Crisis Management at the Dead Center: The 1960-1961 Presidential Transition and the Bay of Pigs Fiasco." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 41 (2): 313.

⁹⁴Friedman, 313.

not allowed to keep briefing materials; the president did not think to push back when Bissell's team collected them at the end of every meeting."⁹⁵

According to Friedman, "January 28, 1961: Kennedy receives his first full briefing as president on the CIA's Cuban operation and authorizes continuation and acceleration of planning."⁹⁶ At this point, Kennedy had taken ownership of the plan to remove Castro from power. As Friedman spells out, "...There were three basic preconditions that Kennedy had set-and on which the CIA, State Department, and Department of Defense had all agreed-for the invasion. There had to be first, plausible deniability of American involvement; second, support for a popular uprising against Castro; and third, a guerrilla option for the brigade if the operation went awry. On March 16, with the plan in nearly final form, it should have been clear that Operation Zapata did not meet these prerequisites."⁹⁷

The Bay of Pigs operation was launched on April 16, 1961. As considered by Friedman, "In practice, the operation did not benefit from a guerilla option, popular support, or plausible deniability."⁹⁸ While the CIA appealed for more air support, President Kennedy would not acquiesce to the request; "Within four days, 89 members of the Brigade were killed and 1,197 taken prisoner."⁹⁹

ii. Obama and the Financial Crisis

President Obama provided a revealing interview for Rolling Stone magazine in 2010 explaining why he chose the advisers he did to guide his formulation of a stimulus:

⁹⁵Friedman, 318.

⁹⁶Friedman, 309.

⁹⁷Friedman, 326.

⁹⁸Friedman, 328.

⁹⁹Friedman, 308.

“...’there is no doubt that I brought in a bunch of folks who understand the financial markets, the same way, by the way, that FDR brought in a lot of folks who understood the financial markets after the crash, including Joe Kennedy, because my number-one job at that point was making sure that we did not have a full-fledged financial meltdown.”¹⁰⁰ President Obama saw his appointed advisers truly as the experts best-prepared to stave off a meltdown of the American economy.

According to Suskind in Confidence Men, President Obama had two basic pools from which to pull for his economic team: Team A, the more progressive economists who had been a major part of his campaign, and Team B, many who had worked in the Clinton administration and who were more moderate to their approach in fixing the existing system. Obama ultimately went with Team B and a more cautious, moderate approach to building the stimulus, in effect performing a switch-out of his campaign’s economic team for a new, presidential one:

“On Monday, November 24, Obama unveiled his newly minted economic team. The headline names were Summers, Geithner, and Romer. It was a markedly different group, compositionally and ideologically, from the A-Team Obama had showcased throughout his campaign. Summers would take the NEC chair, Geithner the top job at Treasury, and Romer the head role at CEA. As for the members of Team A, they would find themselves exiled to the hastily crafted President’s Economic Recovery Advisory Board.”¹⁰¹

II. Judging the Transitions

A. Presidential Goals in Crisis

The Strategic Triangle model taught by C. Roland Christensen of the Harvard

¹⁰⁰Suskind, Ron and James Lurie. 2011. *Confidence Men: Wall Street, Washington, and the Education of a President* Harper New York: 9.

¹⁰¹Suskind, 151.

Business School¹⁰² is a template by which one can analyze the way three interlocking factors interact to result in a goal being successfully achieved. The three interlocking variables are: the goal, that which the individual or organization hopes to accomplish; the internal resources are those tools that the decision maker has at their disposal; the external actors are those forces that act independently of the primary goal seeker and may either help, hinder, or be a neutral actor in the effort to achieve the goal.

It is critical to identify the goals that Presidents Kennedy and Obama established heading into their premier crisis of their young administrations. By understanding the nature of the goals and their relation to one another inside and out of each individual crisis, it can be determined how a hyper progressive politician frames their problem solving dilemma. Furthermore, the respective goals of Kennedy and Obama may be potentially considered as *inappropriate attachments* per the red flags template of Think Again.

Finally, this paper will expand upon the concept of a decision maker having a single primary goal to include the scenario of a decision maker having two separate and potentially non-complimentary goals in action *at the same time*. In the examples chosen to explore the nature of the hyper progressive politician in higher office, both Presidents were attempting to actuate two distinct policy goals simultaneously. This paper argues that the reason one president was successful in actuating their primary goal (Obama) and the other was not (Kennedy) was not due to their executive skills per se but rather due to the fact that in Kennedy's case his goals were in conflict with one another while for Obama one goal did not directly hinder the success of the other.

¹⁰²Christensen, C. Roland. "A Useful Model Taught by C. Roland Christensen at the Harvard Business School."

i. President Kennedy and the Bay of Pigs: His Goals

President Kennedy's primary goal was the overthrow of Fidel Castro from power over Cuba. The internal resources at his disposal were the CIA; (Joint Chiefs of Staff) CJS/Pentagon; and finally, his hand-picked advisers within the administration. The external actors were President Fidel Castro as well as the international and domestic press.

In a meeting with the CIA on March 11, 1961, President Kennedy emphasized his desire to find a method to overthrow Castro that "...could be accomplished with the least amount of political risk."¹⁰³ For the President had another intertwined goal: *plausible deniability* of U.S. involvement in any operation to overthrow President Castro. The resources for Kennedy were the same as his primary goal, and the external actors were as well Castro and the world press. In the end, it was the press that exposed the U.S. government's efforts to enact regime change in Cuba; as well, Kennedy's advisers failed to alert the president to this information leak.

However, for President Kennedy the fundamental issue was that Kennedy's goals were *in conflict* with each other. In order to successfully remove Castro from power, Kennedy would have likely have had to call upon U.S. air power to aid the Cuban rebels during their landing at the Bay of Pigs. As Friedman explains, "CIA appeals for more air support...were denied by President Kennedy...President Kennedy's decision to cancel the second air strike against Castro's air force was likely the mistake that doomed the invasion."¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³Friedman, 321.

¹⁰⁴Friedman, 308.

To maintain deniability, Kennedy held back on committing further military support, thus sabotaging his primary goal. As well, his advisers' failure to read the New York Times and foreign newspapers meant that Kennedy wasn't even aware that plausible deniability had also already been lost; papers in Nicaragua and the New York Times had already printed stories linking the Eisenhower administration to plans to overthrow Castro's Cuba.¹⁰⁵ While the green Kennedy White House was not aware of media reports of American involvement with the rebels, it is quite probable that Castro would have been.

ii. President Obama and ARRA: His Goals

President Obama's primary goal was to facilitate, following the bailouts of fall 2008, the fast and effective recovery of the U.S. economy. His internal resources were his hand-picked economic team, led by Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner and Director of the National Economic Council (NEC) Lawrence Summers. The external actors were the U.S. Congress, in particular Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi, the Progressive Democrats, and the opposition Republicans.

President Obama's secondary goal was for *inspiration* in the stimulus bill: during his transition team's first meeting with Obama as President-elect, Obama cried, "There needs to be more inspiration here!"¹⁰⁶ Indeed, on the campaign trail for president "...Obama also pledged to upgrade our infrastructure...He was especially keen on new-economy infrastructure like broadband and high-speed rail...Obama also promised better

¹⁰⁵Friedman, 327.

¹⁰⁶Suskind, 154.

public works, not just more public works.”¹⁰⁷The President wanted to channel the Rooseveltian spirit of 'men and shovels'¹⁰⁸, or government investment in national infrastructure, for instance smart energy, “...structural transformation and the seeding of innovative new industries.”¹⁰⁹His internal resources were his economic team, and the external actors were again the U.S. Congress.

While many ultimately considered the stimulus a success in staving off another depression, thus achieving the president’s primary goal, his secondary goal was not implemented per the President's original specifications; for instance, his desire to see smart grids directly incorporated into the stimulus bill was vetoed by his own advisers, as it was believed that implementing such a program would require implementation by district to district, which was considered unfeasible.¹¹⁰However, President Obama clearly prioritized in the case of his two goals; his primary aim was the salvation of the U.S. economy.

The president, aided along by Chief of Staff Rahm Emanuel, envisioned a stimulus that would be a kind of down payment on president’s long-term goals for American economic transformation and revival. Brooking official Bruce Katz captured the thinking of the president and Emanuel, “Administrations go fast. You don't have that much time to change things...The narrative coming from the top was: 'Let's make sure we take advantage of this disruptive moment.’”¹¹¹

In contrast, Larry Summers, one of his chief economic advisers and a former

¹⁰⁷Grunwald, Michael. 2012. *The New New Deal: The Hidden Story of Change in the Obama Era* Simon and Schuster:

¹⁰⁸Dr. Thomas Stanton, conversation, 10/21/2014.

¹⁰⁹Skocpol: 10.

¹¹⁰Suskind, 154-55.

¹¹¹Grunwald, 161.

Clinton Secretary of the Treasury, was focused more so on stimulus that was "...timely, targeted and temporary stimulus."¹¹² In other words, long-term economic stimulus, while visionary and critical to long-term development, was not in the strategy for Summers.

The emphasis on the economy over economic innovation or an innovative overhaul drove the president's selection of demonstrably Clintonian and moderate economists to his top administration posts. However, As Skocpol explained in her article 'Accomplished and Embattled':

*Timothy Geithner and Lawrence Summers would lead his White House economic advisory team. In a financially induced crisis, Obama believed they were uniquely qualified to figure out where reforms were needed-and, perhaps persuade bankers to help the larger economy moving forward. But building this kind of economic team-especially given the well-known proclivity of Summers taking control of the process of generating policy alternatives-also meant that Obama was not going to hear day to day from other kinds of economic experts who thought of jobs first, or who saw U.S. economic recovery over the longer term as requiring commitments to structural transformation and seeding innovative new industries.*¹¹³

Thus, Obama's second goal, of infusing the stimulus with infrastructure improvements was squelched by his economic advisers, the same experts who had been principally appointed to tackle the primary goal, the avoidance of an economic depression. However, in President Obama's case, one of his two goals could fail without bringing down the other.

It must be noted that, per triangle model, a goal must be achievable for it to be legitimate. Director Summers, nominally an internal resource for the president to utilize

¹¹²Grunwald, 123.

¹¹³Skocpol, 10.

to actualize his goals, stymied Obama and Congressional Democrats in his opposition to the stimulus moneys being devoted to a large degree to infrastructure as he believed that the president's own goal was not achievable. As explained by Grabell in Money Well Spent,

*The transition team clashed with congressional Democrats over several proposals. While giving a presentation on the stimulus at a caucus meeting on January 9, Larry Summers expressed his concerns that a heavy investment in infrastructure would take too long to get out the door. Representative Jim Oberstar was in the back of the room and grabbed a microphone. Summers just didn't get it, Oberstar said. Transit agencies wouldn't need to go through the time-consuming process of awarding new contracts. They already had billions of dollars in pending options for new buses and railcars. They just needed money to exercise them.*¹¹⁴

Summers came at the stimulus with a ruthlessly practical Keynesian mindset. Per Michael Grunwald in his work The New New Deal, "A stimulus package, he [Summers] argued, should be *timely, targeted, and temporary*."¹¹⁵ Focused on these guideposts, Summers apparently did not understand the intricacies of Congressional budgeting as the Congressional Democrats did. Here again, the inexperience of both Summers and Obama came to the fore; all that was needed for infrastructure investments to be made was the money to be committed to the appropriate agencies: infrastructure investments were 'shovel-ready'. While money would be pumped into infrastructure improvements by the ultimate ARRA law, Obama's entrustment of the steering of the stimulus to Summers and Geithner resulted in a bill that did not truly encapsulate the original goals as set by the president.

¹¹⁴Grabell.

¹¹⁵Grunwald, 60.

iii. Compare and Contrast

Thus, Obama's chosen advisers were able to facilitate the achieving of his first goal, but not the second. In contrast, Kennedy's advisers could not help him in achieving either goal: as will be discussed further in the Red Flags section of this paper, his advisers failed to both understand the language of the CIA and Pentagon nor did they come to know that the press had already published stories noting the American plans to overthrow Castro. Thus, Kennedy's advisers failed twice over to properly assist him in achieving his desired goals.

For instance, concerning President Obama and his goal to have an 'inspirational' e.g. greater infrastructure investment and allocation of 'seed money' alternative energy sources¹¹⁶. In other words, while President Obama did wish to have a greater emphasis on infrastructure and renewable energies. Obama's greatest failure may not have been his selection of more conservative economic advisers, but rather his failure to balance his team with more progressive economists and financial experts to aid in his desire and campaign pledges to revitalize the U.S. economy via infrastructure renewal and smart energy investment.

B. Red Flags

In order to consider how Presidents Kennedy and Obama responded to their respective crisis, it is necessary to use a common framework for evaluating the ultimate result. It is particularly important to establish a consistent methodology for judging the risk management and decision making abilities of the two young presidents as Kennedy's

¹¹⁶Skocpol, Theda and Lawrence R. Jacobs. 2012. "Accomplished and Embattled: Understanding Obama's Presidency." *Political Science Quarterly (Academy of Political Science)* 127 (1): 10.

crisis concerned foreign affairs whereas Obama's was in the realm of financial policy. Thus, a common framework with which to review the preparatory procedures for the Kennedy and Obama decision making process is required to rigorously juxtapose the two experiences and draw sound conclusions. The framework to review these two transition processes will be drawn from Think Again by Finkelstein, Whitehead, and Campbell. In this work the authors specified certain variables that determine the success or failure of decisions.

In Think Again, the authors identified four red flags that can serve as pitfalls to sound decision making. They are:

1. Misleading Prejudgments
2. Inappropriate Self-Interest
3. Misleading Experiences
4. Inappropriate Attachments¹¹⁷

Prejudgments are those assumptions one bring to any decision; self-interest might be a familial or business connection one has to a problem's outcome; misleading experiences are the famous 'general fighting the last war' phenomenon; and attachments might be one's infatuation with a program design we ourselves originated.

Further, in the course of research it was found necessary to expand upon the framework of red flag #3, *misleading experiences*, to include the presence of *inexperience* in either the president or their transition team and staff. In my research of the Bay of Pigs Crisis and the financial crisis President Obama engaged, very often the presidents and their staffs were forced to make critical decisions without the benefit of any relevant experience. In these cases, I will make the distinction between misleading

¹¹⁷Finkelstein, Sydney, Jo Whitehead, and Andrew Campbell. 2013. *Think again: Why Good Leaders make Bad Decisions and how to Keep it from Happening to You* Harvard Business Press: 173.

experience and misleading *inexperience*.

In response to all these potential pitfalls for sound decision making, the authors identified four safeguards that assist a decision maker in controlling for the potential red flags. They are:

1. Experience and Data
2. Governance
3. Decision Group and Process
4. Monitoring

Experience and data are just that: key pieces of information that assist the decision maker in realizing that certain assumptions they have made may in fact be factually wrong.

Governance has to do with how the CEO regulates the information sharing among his subordinates. Decision group and process concerns the parameters by which the group of advisers deliberates and establishes the ideas/plans that will be funneled up to the decision maker. Monitoring involves the feedback process where the ramifications of decisions are analyzed to identify necessary adjustments to the current procedure.

For the purposes of this chapter, emphasis will be placed on identifying which, if any, *red flags* were present in the decision making process of Kennedy and Obama during their respective crisis event. Focusing on identifying the red flags present does not mean that neither administration successfully installed safeguards. Rather, by examining the greatest weaknesses present in the Kennedy and Obama transitions, traits common to hyper progressive candidates generally may be identified. Thus, potential pitfalls can be marked and 'treated' for future administrations. While it is certainly valuable to recognize what hyper progressive politicians do well, for preventative measures it is more useful to define what errors are commonly committed.

Following the analysis of the respective red flags present in both administrations, the two young administrations will be juxtaposed to determine if there were similarities between the quantity of each type of red flag present in each crisis event. In this way, the author will determine whether 1. The two young administrations encountered committed similar in kind and amount of red flags errors and 2. If there is a similarity present in the results, whether this finding might portend for a standard transition experience for future hyper progressive candidates moving forward, particularly in regard to the 2016 presidential contest.

It is also important to specify the time period that we speak of when we discuss the presidential transition. Per Rebecca Friedman in her article Crisis Management at the Dead Center, "As Neustadt writes in *Presidential Power*, 'A President's transition can be defined in two ways, narrowly by the time span between election and augural, broadly by the time until he and his principal associates become familiar with the work they have to do, including what to ask of one another and what to expect in response'".¹¹⁸ Friedman chooses to define the term broadly, as will this paper, to encapsulate not only the time in which the incoming administration is transition to running the executive branch but to also encapsulate the new administration process of learning how to practice the art of administrating the Republic.

For the purposes of this paper, the 'transition period' will be from the day after Election Day in November to the time of their first major crisis. This will effectively encapsulate the time in which President-elect Kennedy came to form his opinions on the planned Bay of Pigs operation through when the operation was launched in April 1961;

¹¹⁸Friedman, 309.

for President-elect Obama, when he and his transition team formulated their baseline approach to the brewing financial meltdown through the signing into law of the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act in February 2009.

The methodology of Finkelstein provide a rigorous framework within which we can judge how effectively these two politicians handled an early administrative crisis of the first order. It is also intended that by using the same guidelines, we may mitigate the bias of examining in the case of Kennedy a foreign policy crisis and for Obama a financial one. By considering the overlying structure of these two presidents' decision making and risk management processes, we can expect to extract a robust and accurate assessment of not only how they managed these crises but to what degree each young administration adapted to and resolved their respective crisis moment.

One final point: in the case of President Kennedy, the scope of his decision making fell principally to 1. Who he put into positions of power in his transition team and early administration and 2. How he interacted with and handled the government agencies in charge of implementing the military operation in Cuba (CIA, CJS). Conversely, while President Obama had faced a similar task in formulating his transition team and appointing certain individuals to his administration's economic team, an added wrinkle to the passage of ARRA was how his administration interacted with the Congress. Thus, it is acknowledged that the comparison is imperfect; however, Kennedy's handling of the government agencies and Obama's handling of the Congress are both excellent gauges of their risk management abilities at the outset of their respective administrations.

Finally, it is important to establish that for both crisis examples to be studied in-depth, it is not the intention of this paper to provide a comprehensive historical

background and foundation of the context in which the events occurred generally. Where clarification/ further detail is necessary for the reader to appreciate why the president made decisions as he did, detail will be necessarily provided; however, it is not the author's intent to provide a full history of the Bag of Pigs crisis, per se. Rather, this paper intends to highlight the processes and people in place in the administration at the time that led to the corresponding decision making and risk management choices that were made.

i. President Kennedy: The Bay of Pigs

The Bay of Pigs crisis ultimately played out as a horror story for the President and his administration. As explained by Finkelstein, "It was a disaster. The plan had been leaked. The Bay of Pigs was miles from rebel strongholds on the island, and Castro's forces quickly closed in...the lack of U.S. military support allowed the Cuban army to overcome the invaders...It was a military catastrophe and a political setback...it was clear that even if the plan had not been leaked, the chances of success were minimal. The decision to invade was flawed."¹¹⁹ This synopsis is in sync with the other prominent sources that this paper's research turned up.

The story of why President Kennedy failed to have effective decision making and risk management apparatus in place early in his administration is the story of the failure of his administration to account for and control for the red flags that were present at the time of the decision. In a major way, the lack of experience and information scuttled an effective engagement with the government organizations that the President's advisors had to coordinate with.

¹¹⁹Finkelstein, 158.

As Kurt Campbell and James Steinberg elucidated in their work Difficult Transitions, “the Kennedy administration was forced to make critical decisions before it had really settled into office...excessive deference to military and CIA experts, along with a lack of knowledge about the national security bureaucracy, in general, contributed to insufficient scrutiny by Kennedy and his senior team of advisers.”¹²⁰ President Kennedy was not ready to be Commander in Chief in January 1961 in part because his administration was not ready to provide him the critical support services he needed to do his job.

In the case President Kennedy's handling of the Bay of Pigs crisis, one of the major flaws often noted in his handling of the crisis was how he perceived the meaning of reports from the CIA and Joint Chiefs of Staff. However, the issues that would dog the young president were born even before his first engagement with these agencies. As Friedman describes, "The roots of many challenges that Kennedy later faced with the Bay of Pigs invasion can be traced to the miscommunications and information asymmetries that occurred between election and inauguration days."¹²¹

Thus, according to Friedman President Kennedy's Bay of Pigs handling suffered principally from a communications failure at its core: communication between advisers and the president, a failure of the president to comprehend the bureaucratic lingo of the agencies his intelligence reports were originating from, a failure to adequately challenge the assumptions made by his advisers and the government agencies that developed the

¹²⁰Campbell, Kurt M. and James Steinberg. 2008. *Difficult Transitions: Foreign Policy Troubles at the Outset of Presidential Power*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press: 26.

¹²¹Friedman, 313.

logistics for the attack. Now, these critical communication errors will be evaluated with the lens of the red flags to ascertain how the Kennedy transition team did struggle.

a. Misleading Prejudgments

In the work Difficult Transitions, Kurt Campbell and James Steinberg examine the perils that can potentially derail a new administration. In the case of President Kennedy, they made the prescient point that during the campaign for the presidency, “Whether the United States faced the prospect of a Soviet numerical advantage in strategic nuclear missiles, for example, became a campaign issue...It turned out that the “missile gap” was a myth. Although some argue that Kennedy’s use of this issue was simply a political play, there is strong evidence that it was based on a genuine, though inaccurate, assessment of the facts.”¹²²

Candidate Kennedy had determined in the course of the 1960 presidential campaign that not only was the missile gap narrative good for his electoral chances; he also came to internalize this assumption entering into the presidency. Thus, when during the Bay of Pigs crisis he had to determine the severity of the threat of the continued existence of a Communist Cuba, his presumption of Soviet missile superiority colored his decision making towards the Soviet satellite, Castro's Cuba.

As well, President Kennedy at his inaugural declared forcefully that the United States would “...pay any price, and bear any burden, to defend liberty.”¹²³ This statement reveals a mindset that was primed to commit to heavy costs to enact what the President

¹²²Campbell, Kurt M. and James Steinberg. 2008. *Difficult Transitions: Foreign Policy Troubles at the Outset of Presidential Power*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press: 46.

¹²³Campbell, 50.

perceived as necessary change in the global theater. When coupled with his assumption that there truly was a missile gap with the Soviet Union, the President had made a dangerous prejudgment that a Communist Cuba combined with an armed-to-the-teeth USSR would have to be dealt with forcefully and promptly upon his assumption of the presidency.

Another damaging prejudgment that the President entered into office with was his firm belief that the NSC was a decision making apparatus that would not suit his management tastes. The NSC under President Eisenhower had provided the President with an institutional apparatus that "ensure[d] that policy makers dot the most pressing 'i's' and cross the most important 't's'."¹²⁴ However, Kennedy believed that the NSC was simply too bureaucratic and would hamper his ability to make decisions more informally with his personal advisers.

Therefore, as Frederick Thayer explained in his article "Presidential Policy Processes and "New Administration", "Convinced that the machinery had diluted presidential control and determined to make the White House the dominant force in foreign policy, Kennedy also wanted to increase the responsibility of the State Department for foreign affairs. ...the statutory NSC remained but was not used."¹²⁵ Thus, President Kennedy had entered office with the NSC framed in his mind as a 'bad' organization that needed to be sidelined from his decision making process.

However, as Friedman points out, "The machinery of foreign policy making is too

¹²⁴Friedman, 329.

¹²⁵ Thayer, Frederick C. 1971. "Presidential Policy Processes and "New Administration": A Search for Revised Paradigms." *Public Administration Review* 31 (5): 555.

complex for any incoming president and staff to manage in an informal way...to abolish formal structures during the transition is a mistake."¹²⁶ While Kennedy did not want the ossified procedure of the NSC, to remove it before his staff had even begun serving resulted in a decision making apparatus to transmit critical information to the president.

b. Inappropriate Self-Interest

In the case of self-interest, President Kennedy's tantamount interest was that he and his Administration maintain plausible deniability as to any U.S. involvement in the operation. As Friedman explained, "He [Kennedy] believed that public exposure of American involvement in the exiles' invasion of Cuba would have negative political consequences that would counteract his broad goals."¹²⁷ Thus, while Kennedy sought a military solution to forcibly remove Fidel Castro from power of Communist Cuba, his determination that such an act must not be discovered to have an American connection greatly hampered his decision making quality.

Indeed, on March 11 1961 the CIA presented to President Kennedy the Trinidad Plan for aiding the rebels to overthrow Castro in Cuba. The President approved the plan with modifications. As Friedman explains, this was a major risk management and decision making failure. The President himself had identified that the "best possible plan...had not yet been presented."¹²⁸ Kennedy in part moved forward in spite of knowing that Trinidad Plan was not sufficient due to the fact that he had inherited the plan from President Eisenhower, the institutional inertia of the CIA, the newness of his staff and thus their inability to sufficiently challenge the plan on behalf of the President, and "the

¹²⁶Friedman, 329.

¹²⁷Friedman, 322.

¹²⁸Friedman, 323.

information asymmetry between the White House and the CIA."¹²⁹

The President was also concerned about his public perception if his Administration failed to 'deal with' Cuba in some manner. As explained by Finkelstein, "...there was an element of self-interest in his decision to go ahead with the plan. While he had personal misgivings about the whole enterprise, Kennedy was under domestic political pressure to do something about Cuba and was accused by opponents of being weak."¹³⁰ Ironically, while seeking for the United States to not appear directly involved in any military action against Cuba, he certainly felt pressure to project the hawkish demeanor he had established to great effect for the presidential campaign.

c. Misleading Experiences

In the case of the new President Kennedy, the chief executive suffered from misleading *inexperience* going into the Bay of Pigs decision. As a candidate for president, Kennedy received only three briefings from intelligence officials in 1960. As explained by Friedman, "Although the CIA had no clear policy for briefing presidential candidates, briefers often omitted highly sensitive covert actions, signal intelligence, and human intelligence programs until after the election."¹³¹ This paucity of background briefings contributed to Kennedy's development of the misleading prejudice that the Soviet missile gap required a firmer American hand in Latin America.

Candidate Kennedy was also out-maneuvered tactically by Vice President Nixon for the final televised debate the two candidates. Nixon believed that the Senator had been briefed on administration intelligence concerning the covert Eisenhower program; in

¹²⁹Friedman, 323.

¹³⁰Finkelstein, 158.

¹³¹Friedman, 313.

an attempt to tie Kennedy, the Vice President in the debate came out against American support for the Cuban resistance fighters. As Friedman explains, “Consequently, Kennedy was forced to defend U.S. government support for anti-Castro Cubans on a national stage, despite the contradiction...with his repeatedly expressed personal views and advisors’ recommendations.”¹³²

Had Kennedy had the same information the President Eisenhower was working with, he may have come to a more nuanced policy conclusion than to support the government in the final Kennedy-Nixon presidential debate. However, boxed in by Nixon, Kennedy went ahead and responded to Nixon’s military right. The misleading inexperience of never having received more in-depth policy briefings from the Eisenhower administration meant that Kennedy could not adequately judge whether or not supporting President Eisenhower on regime change in Cuba was actually an intelligent policy decision for a future Kennedy administration.

d. Inappropriate Attachments

President Kennedy very much wanted to have a management structure that was not ossified to the point of immobility. However, he went too far in that direction, resulting in communication breakdown between his personal advisers and departments leads and an overall lack of structure within his administration. As Thayer explains, “Informality within the White House (at least in the Kennedy Years) gave presidential assistants an access {to the President} not easily available to Cabinet officers. As this increased tensions, Kennedy sought to 'minimize conflict' and 'restore unity' by using

¹³²Friedman, 312.

'bilateral' relationships with his advisers, thus reducing overall interaction still further."¹³³

Ironically, due to the President's determination to maintain an informal communication network for his administration, he ended up depending much too much on the CIA and the Pentagon without rigorously questioning their motives nor understanding the terminology used by many of foreign policy organizations he and his staff were coordinating with. As Richard Neustadt explained, even when Kennedy attempted to check on the work produced by the CIA, "He was dubious enough about the plans he received from the CIA to ask for advice from the Joint Chiefs of Staff. But he evidently was too ignorant to understand that when the military is asked to comment on an operation that is someone else's responsibility it will be loath to open its mind-or its mouth."¹³⁴ Thus, the check that the president sought to deploy was not suited to the task of reviewing the CIA's work.

Furthermore, the response he and his advisers received from the CJS (Joint Chiefs of Staff) was in the lingo of the organization, a lingo that the Kennedy Administration did not speak and interpreted at their peril. As Neustadt narrates, "The Joint Chiefs told him that they thought the CIA plan had a 'fair' chance of success. What the colonel who wrote those words meant by them was 'fair' as next to 'poor'. What Mr. Kennedy took them to mean was 'fair' as next to 'pretty good'."¹³⁵

Thus, Kennedy's attachment to his mind's perceived meaning of 'fair' resulted in

¹³³Thayer, 555.

¹³⁴Clinton, W. David and Daniel George Lang. 1993. *What Makes a Successful Transition?* Papers on Presidential Transitions and Foreign Policy. Vol. 9. Lanham: University Press of America ;Charlottesville, Va: 132.

¹³⁵Clinton, 132.

the president making an incorrect calculation as to the likelihood of success of the Bay of Pigs operation. His advisers failed him as well in not clarifying for him the actual meaning of 'fair' in military parlance. The result was an informational breakdown born of attachment assumption of meaning.

ii. President Obama: The Financial Crisis

Put so succinctly by Suskind, "It [ARRA] was something of a hodgepodge, a hastily built plan that reflected the competing and unresolved ideas coursing through the barely formed administration."¹³⁶ However, it was not merely unresolved ideas, but ideas committed to too swiftly, without allowing for greater debate within the transition team in Chicago on that snowy night. Yes, the President did call for 'innovation' in that first meeting; however, he did not engineer, as did Kennedy later with the Cuban Missile Crisis, a deliberative process to compel his advisers to thoroughly vet all the options actually available to them to solve the economic meltdown.

Grunwald revealed that Obama's detractors were impressed by his efforts in securing election: "He [Obama] ran for president with no executive experience beyond editing the Harvard Law Review, but even his detractors had to admit his own improbable campaign was a well-run operation-disciplined, cohesive, eyes-on-the-prize."¹³⁷ Furthermore, the president knew what he wanted to do once he entered into the presidential office, per Grunwald: "In private moments during his campaign, Obama liked to quote the last line of *The Candidate*, when the political newcomer played by Robert Redford, dazed after his improbable victory, wondered: "What do I do now?"

¹³⁶Suskind, 162.

¹³⁷Grunwald, 89.

Obama's point was that he didn't intend to be that guy."¹³⁸ The larger question that emerges in Obama's transition is: what red flags hindered him from actuating his goals?

Now this paper will explore the process in which President Obama and his transition team handled the looming financial crisis of fall 2008. President-elect Obama had a unique and very tricky assignment transitioning to the presidency as pressing questions of how to respond to the financial crisis were present even before he assumed the office, much like where the Eisenhower Administration had laid the groundwork for the Cuban Invasion even before President Kennedy had assumed office.

In this way, while both scenarios were different in subject (foreign policy versus financial/economic), they both originated under the previous administration's watch and thus were inherited by both men immediately upon assumption of their office. Due to this distinction, both men were highly reliant upon their transition teams from the get-go to engage their respective crises. In President Kennedy's case, his main inter-governmental interactions were with the CIA, JCS, and the Pentagon; for President Obama, the Congressional leadership. However, while they both had to build an efficacious response to different institutional stimuli, the common means of evaluation via Think Again's red flags will bridge these temporal and coincidental gaps sufficiently for analysis.

a. Misleading Prejudgments

President Obama entering into the crisis had already determined that he would not nationalize the banks to resolve the financial meltdown. This prejudgment can also be tied to debatable misinformation vis a vis the political disposition of the economic team

¹³⁸Grunwald, 89.

that Obama had selected for his push to resist the financial meltdown. These former Clintonian economists shared with President Clinton the 'Third Way' Democratic thinking that believed in the market to bring prosperity to people.

For instance, in their work Accomplished and Embattled: Understanding Obama's Presidency, Skocpol and Lawrence R. Jacobs revealed the a startling predisposition of the young President's economic team: "“From the start, the new President, a cautious lawyer by training, heard key options taken off the table not just by Republicans and conservative Democrats in Congress and the Beltway media, but by his own economic advisers, who were leery of disrupting existing business practices and hesitant to embrace policies outside conventional boundaries.”¹³⁹

Present here are some glaringly obvious prejudgments: the President's top advisers would not be entertaining solutions that might alter the existing financial framework and they were not looking to explore any ameliorating action that would extend beyond established policy prescriptions for an economic crisis. These prejudgments held by the President's chief economic advisers set the stage for a transition team that had already committed to a predominant course of action (stimulus response) before even delving too deeply into the issue at hand.

As well, the Obama transition team had already decided early in its first meeting in Chicago in December 16th, 2008 that a major stimulus package was the proper response to the worsening financial meltdown. As described by Ron Suskind in his work Confidence Men, “The effectiveness of stimulus spending was still considered the realm of unproven economics, but its detractors, in failing to take the ‘multiplier effect’ into

¹³⁹Skocpol, Theda and Lawrence R. Jacobs. 2012. "Accomplished and Embattled: Understanding Obama's Presidency." *Political Science Quarterly (Academy of Political Science)* 127 (1): 8.

account, appeared to underestimate its value... Inside Team Obama there was almost no discussion of whether to undertake a stimulus, just of how large it ought to be.”¹⁴⁰

Compounding the issue, even when the President and his team during the drafting of ARRA determined that some of the stimulus should come from tax breaks for Americans, they handled the implementation of this program in a completely ineffectual manner on both the policy and political sides. This political fumble will be explored in the *misleading experience/ inexperience section* of the red flags review.

b. Inappropriate Self-Interest

As Money Well Spent author Michael Grabell lays out, the understaffed Obama Administration did not want to risk putting out a bill that was ill-prepared to absorb the onslaught of Congressional nitpicking and probing. So instead, to protect the mystique of the Obama Administration, it simply chose to not create a White House stimulus bill. As Grabell elucidated one senator’s reaction, “Senator Mel Martinez was struck by the lack of involvement from the transition team in crafting the bill...For weeks there remained question of whether Obama would put forth his own proposal. But short staffed and stretched thin, the transition team had little capacity to create a major piece of legislation. Obama’s advisers also rationalized that the bill would get more support if members of Congress wrote it themselves.”¹⁴¹ This was a gross case of inappropriate self-interest: unable or unwilling to produce a bill by itself to help guide the Congress in negotiations, instead the White House offered Congress policy pointers and briefings; no critical ‘blueprint’ bill to offer effective and firm direction.

In seeking to avoid puncturing the bubble of the sagacious Camelot-inspired

¹⁴⁰Suskind, 153-54.

¹⁴¹Grabell, 66-67.

White House, President Obama failed to offer to his Democratic allies in Congress the framework with which he hoped to see the stimulus bill enacted. Had he offered to his Democratic allies such a document, they might have been able to warn him of the potentially egregious error he would ultimately make of handing the Republicans a significant tax break without even forcing them to bargain for it. This segues nicely to the next section of the misleading experience and woeful presence of inexperience that permeated the Obama financial crisis.

c. Misleading Experiences/ Presence of Inexperience

Similar to the misleading attachments section, Obama had just campaigned through the brutal American campaign season on hope and change. While this tact may have helped him secure the White House, the repetitive trope of ‘hope and change’ would certainly not necessarily help him and his transition team lock down an efficacious response to the worsening financial crisis.

In the realm of inexperience lies the atrocious handling of the inclusion of tax cuts in ARRA. As Michael Grabbell recounted in his history of the financial crisis Money Well Spent, the jejune Obama Administration determined that it would both 1. Install tax cuts without even forcing the Republicans to bargain for them, and 2. Spread them thin over 2 years, thus significantly reducing the perceivable impact of the cuts on the minds of American consumers. As Grabbell writes, “While that might have worked if the tax cuts were substantial, congressional Democrats argued that \$10 a week wouldn’t be enough to counteract the prevailing fear of losing a job, a home, and years of retirement savings. The criticism was ultimately proved right. Even the people who did spend the extra money didn’t notice it. Obama lost not just political credit but also the boost in

consumer sentiment a large check might have provided."¹⁴²

President Obama had campaigned as a reformer politician who would re-energize bipartisan feeling in the fractionalized capital. However, in his eagerness to display bipartisan feeling, he unwittingly handed his Republican opponents an opening. As explained by Grunwald, "Republican leaders didn't view Obama's concessions as signs they could work with him. They viewed his concessions as signs they could beat him..."¹⁴³ Furthermore, the administration did not heed the advice of Congressional Democrats who correctly perceived that stretching out the tax cuts would not result in consumers registering their presence nor would they subsequently credit the Democratic administration with their existence.

As well, Chief of Staff Emanuel perceived the president's failure to control the narrative as a critical tactical error. "Rahm thought the real communications error was putting too many eggs in the bipartisanship basket, and some of his colleagues agreed. The president let Republicans control the narrative, because he didn't want to get into a partisan brawl, but when the partisan brawl happened anyway, Republican obstructionism only seemed to prove that he had failed to change Washington."¹⁴⁴ The President could not wish away the partisan nature of Washington, D.C.

As Grabell explains, "Obama received no goodwill for the tax cuts, as Republicans lambasted the plan as a spending bill that would result in increased taxes later. By offering the tax cuts at the outset instead of having Republicans demand them,

¹⁴²Grabell, Michael. 2012. *Money Well Spent?: The Truth Behind the Trillion Dollar Stimulus, the Biggest Economic Recovery Plan in History* Public Affairs: 65-66.

¹⁴³Grunwald, 185.

¹⁴⁴Grunwald, 245.

Obama gave up a critical bargaining chip that might have made the stimulus seem a more bipartisan effort."¹⁴⁵It was a rookie political error that cost the Administration leverage in handling the Republican side of the Congress.

d. Misleading Attachments

President Obama had built his campaign upon the ideals of hope and change. Going into the inferno of delineating how his administration would respond to the financial meltdown, Obama remained committed to these campaign ideals, in effect determined to be a consensus builder in office. As Ron Suskind explained in his work Confidence Men, describing the scene in his economic transition team's first meeting on the financial crisis "...Obama was surprisingly aloof in the conversation...the president-elect now seemed disconnected and less than in control of the process. As the economic team hashed out the minutiae of a plan and tried to settle on a number, Obama's contributions were rare. 'There needs to be more inspiration here!' he said at one point."¹⁴⁶

Thus, the President-elect, when confronted with a problem as numerically complex as the financial meltdown, fell back to the trope of 'original thinking' in order to assuage his strain at dealing with such a combustible situation. Obama was feeling the heat from having an inappropriate attachment to the rhetorical invention of his successful presidential campaign, that of the transformational president who rode into Washington to save the Union. As elation turned to reality, the President was certainly feeling the

¹⁴⁵Grabell, 66.

¹⁴⁶Suskind, Ron and James Lurie. 2011. *Confidence Men: Wall Street, Washington, and the Education of a President* Harper New York: 154.

pressure already to deliver on the promise he had so stunningly sold to the nation.

Further, President Obama harbored an attachment to his chief economic advisers, Geithner and Summers, born not necessarily of necessity but of shared disposition. Per Grunwald, "...Obama felt comfortable with technocratic elites like Summers and Geithner. He was one of them. He also felt comfortable with their brand of market-oriented centrism. It was another thing they had in common."¹⁴⁷ Thus, while Obama desired a more progressive bent concerning infrastructure improvements, his gravitation towards advisers more attuned to his 'technocratic' mindset resulted in advisers who did not see eye to eye with him on stimulus infrastructure projects.

Indeed, as the Progressives of the Obama campaign team were frozen out of top administration positions, the joke spread among Obama's supporters that while Obama won the White House, Hillary Clinton's staff received the plum jobs.¹⁴⁸ However, with the selection of Clinton-era supporters with stimulus goals diverging from the president's, Obama found his message undercut and even appropriated by Republicans in their efforts to undermine the stimulus. As Grunwald elucidates, "They {Republicans} quoted Summers about poorly designed stimulus, Orszag about the slow pace of public works, Romer about the power of tax cuts."¹⁴⁹ All three, Summers, Orszag, and Romer, were top Obama economic advisers who did not stay 'on message' for the president's stimulus. Due to his attachment to them all, he paid a heavy political cost.

As Suskind reveals on that first transition team meeting to explore the financial crisis, "The team was sympathetic to Obama's position, which demanded that he

¹⁴⁷Grunwald, 100.

¹⁴⁸Grunwald, 101.

¹⁴⁹Grunwald, 199.

somehow deliver on the high rhetoric of his campaign, but it was taken aback all the same by how out of place the comment seemed in the middle of a discussion of quantifiable outcomes.”¹⁵⁰Obama allowed his attachment to ‘the big picture’ to cloud his judgment as to how the crisis should be dealt with: with hard numbers and a concrete action plan.

III. Conclusion

A. What This Says About Hyper Progressive Candidates Turned President?

One clear takeaway from President Kennedy’s experience from the Bay of Pigs is that elite presidential campaigns do not automatically translate into sleek transition teams. President Kennedy did not have a decision making structure in place from day 1 to adequately weigh the scales for the Bay of Pigs decision and he certainly did not have a risk management structure in place to identify the inherently destructive duality of having two diverging goals (the removal of Castro coupled with plausible deniability of U.S. involvement).

In both the cases of the young Presidents were railroaded by more experienced actors; President Kennedy deferred to the point of acquiescence concerning the CIA; for President Obama, Secretary Geithner and Director Larry Summers steered the ship firmly away from the industry-seeding enterprise the president had originally envisioned. Indeed, when Obama was later given the opportunity to meet with the Progressive economists, he displayed great curiosity and interest in their work.¹⁵¹ Like Kennedy, Obama had learned from the first great crisis of his administration the mistake of relying upon one perspective.

¹⁵⁰Suskind, 154.

¹⁵¹Suskind, 276.

Thus, a common characteristic of a hyper progressive young gun who captures the presidency is the ironic tendency to defer to their policy superiors at the outset of their administration when they are faced with their premier severe crisis. It was by marketing themselves as capable and 'ready to lead from day one' that these relatively young politicians were able to convince voters to choose them over their more experienced political rivals in the campaigns leading to the Oval Office. However, once they assume the Presidency and are met with their first true crisis, both men reacted in a similar vein: half-hearted and unfocused efforts to seek balance in their Administration's response while ultimately electing to commit to the establishment policy prescription.

Why did both President Kennedy and Obama do this? Going further from the paper's introduction, it would appear that young gun politicians who have poured so much into winning high stakes elections may have not fully honed the management chops necessary to respond to a true crisis from the get-go. Such thoughts first gripped President-elect Obama's economic transition team in their first meeting following his election¹⁵². While Kennedy and Obama succeeded in constructing an impressive political brand and fashioned around them a team for achieving presidential contest victories; the requisite skill set, while formidable, apparently does not instantly translate into the same skill set necessitated in being president during a crisis.

Of course, a counterargument to hyper progressive presidents struggling with their first crisis would be that all new presidents will suffer a steep learning curve. Certainly any individual and their transition team, regardless of whether they were a 'young gun' hyper progressive going into their first term at the White House, would be

¹⁵²Suskind, 155.

green around the edges when it came the use of their presidential prerogative. What is so striking about Kennedy and Obama was that they were in contrast so *decisive* on the campaign trail. When juxtaposed with their handling of their first great crisis, it would seem that somewhere from the heat of the campaign onto their first crisis, their impressive élan deserted them.

Or perhaps it is more a question of their similar professional preparations for the job. As then-both Senators Johnson and Clinton would attest, then-Senators Kennedy and Obama were legislative pipsqueaks, offering up paltry bits of legislation while they served for short stints in the United States Senate. Indeed, neither man held a managerial or leadership role while serving in the Senate (outside of managing their own senatorial office, of course). It would seem that this in part would explain why Presidents Kennedy and Obama, while full of confidence and eager to win the White House, upon encountering their first true test of leadership, would, having never been battle-hardened as governors or Senate leaders would have been tested, would seek the succor and apparent ‘safety’ of expert opinion in the CIA or establishment economic advisers.

B. Similar Errors, Different Results

The question of the quality of the end result cannot be ignored. Per Friedman, President Kennedy's Bay of Pigs catastrophe has no peer among foreign policy failures during a presidential transition since 1961.¹⁵³ For President Obama's work in passing and signing ARRA into law, the record is much more favorable. Many economists consider the Stimulus as instrumental in preventing the US economy from falling into another depression.

¹⁵³Friedman, 329.

While President Obama floundered in his intervention efforts during his transition team's first economic meeting to inject more innovation into the stimulus' rollout, Obama did select the steady hands who understood the existing financial system to frame the White House's Stimulus proposal to the Congress. In contrast, President Kennedy shattered the existing NSC decision making structure soon after taking office, and instead relied on untested and unprepared advisers to guide him in evaluating the invasion plans constructed by the CIA, as well as the evaluations of those plans performed by the Pentagon.

Thus, while both men brought their share of red flags into both equations, principally that of misleading inexperience, President Obama was fortunate in that he installed capable and experienced hands in positions of significant power so that they could efficaciously frame the resulting legislative proposals to the Congress, thus setting the tone for the bill's crafting in the legislature. In juxtaposition, in the Kennedy Administration no foreign policy steady hand was designated by the President to frame a cohesive approach to the entire process of implementation and execution.

Their actions in the critical area of developing a robust decision making apparatus differed. President Obama did not disassemble the existing economic decision making system, whereas President Kennedy did extricate the NSC from day to day operations. Where President Obama did install tried hands at key positions in his financial Administration, President Kennedy relied on government neophytes for counsel. Thus, while both young senators-turned-president were hampered by inexperience, it was Kennedy's choosing to dismantle the existing risk management structure at the genesis of his Presidency that greatly hampered his Administration's efforts to efficaciously manage

the Bay of Pigs crisis.

From the perspective of Christensen's goals model, Obama was more successful in the end as his two goals were not in conflict. Obama could avoid a depression yet fail to seed innovative industry. For Kennedy, however, attempting to maintain plausible deniability sabotaged his efforts to remove Castro from power, and doomed the rebels to capture and death. That Kennedy and his advisers failed to grasp 1. That the two goals were in conflict and 2. That plausible deniability had already failed as the press was already aware of U.S. efforts to remove Castro explains why Obama and Kennedy experienced such drastic divergence in success level.

C. The Hyper Progressive President in Action

Both young gun hyper progressive politicians began the presidency with a paucity of executive experience. Both had served in legislatures rather than governor's mansions prior to ascending to the presidency. As well, in the United States Senate neither man took on a major leadership role (in part due to the fact that seniority often dictates who is in a position of leadership in that body). Thus, ironically what had served them so excellently in the presidential campaign (a thin resume with a limited voting record) translated into a politician turned Chief Executive who had never had to make the big calls.

Works Cited

- "A Tale of Two Stimulus Payments: 2001 Versus 2008." 2014. *American Economic Review* 104 (5): 116.
- Alter, Jonathan. 2010. *The Promise: President Obama, Year One* Simon and Schuster.
- Arnold, Peri E. 1998. *Making the Managerial Presidency : Comprehensive Reorganization Planning, 1905-1996*. Studies in Government and Public Policy.2 , rev ed. Lawrence, Kan.: University Press of Kansas.
- Baker, Kevin. 2009. "Barack Hoover Obama." *Harper's Magazine* 319 (1910): 29.
- Blinder, Alan S. 2013. "After the Music Stopped." .
- Burke, John P. 2001. "Lessons from Past Presidential Transitions: Organization, Management, and Decision Making." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 31 (1): 5-24.
- Callahan, Richard F., Dr Sandra O. Archibald, Kay A. Sterner, and H. Brinton Milward. 2007. "Key Actions that Contribute to Successful Program Implementation: Lessons from the Recovery Act." .
- Campbell, Kurt M. and James Steinberg. 2008. *Difficult Transitions : Foreign Policy Troubles at the Outset of Presidential Power*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press.
- Christensen, C. Roland. "A Useful Model Taught by C. Roland Christensen at the Harvard Business School."
- Clinton, W. David and Daniel George Lang. 1993. *What Makes a Successful Transition?*. Papers on Presidential Transitions and Foreign Policy. Vol. 9. Lanham: University Press of America ;Charlottesville, Va.
- Davis, John. 2011. *The Barack Obama Presidency: A Two Year Assessment* Palgrave Macmillan.
- Ewers, Justin. 2009. "Waiting for the Payoff." *U.S. News & World Report* 146 (5): 50.
- Finkelstein, Sydney, Jo Whitehead, and Andrew Campbell. 2013. *Think again: Why Good Leaders make Bad Decisions and how to Keep it from Happening to You* Harvard Business Press.
- Foer, Franklin and Noam Scheiber. 2009. "Nudge-Ocracy." *New Republic* 240 (7): 22.

- Friedman, Rebecca R. 2011. "Crisis Management at the Dead Center: The 1960-1961 Presidential Transition and the Bay of Pigs Fiasco." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 41 (2): 307.
- Ginsberg, Dr Benjamin. *Thoughts on Paul McCoy's Master's Thesis*.
- Grabell, Michael. 2012. *Money Well Spent?: The Truth Behind the Trillion Dollar Stimulus, the Biggest Economic Recovery Plan in History* Public Affairs.
- Grunwald, Michael. 2012. *The New New Deal: The Hidden Story of Change in the Obama Era* Simon and Schuster.
- Hall, Jeremy L. and Edward T. Jennings. 2011. "The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA)." *Public Performance & Management Review* 35 (1): 202.
- Heilemann, John. 2009. "Inside Obama's Economic Brain Trust." *New York* 42 (10): 18.
- Henry, Laurin L. 1960. *Presidential Transitions*. Washington: Brookings Institution.
- Hirsh, Michael, Mark Hosenball, and Suzanne Smalley. 2008. "OK, You Two, what would You do to Solve this Mess?" *Newsweek (Atlantic Edition)* 152 (17): 42.
- Horowitz, Irving Louis. 2010. "Legalism as an Executive Ideology: Foundations of Barack Obama's Leadership Style." *Perspectives on Political Science* 39 (3): 160.
- Johnson, Clay. 2009. "The 2008-2009 Presidential Transition: Preparing Federal Agencies." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 39 (4): 819.
- Johnson, Clay. 2008. "Recommendations for an Effective 2008 Transition." *Public Administration Review* 68 (4): 624-626.
- Johnston, Van R. 2013. "The Struggle for Optimal Financial Regulation and Governance." *Public Performance & Management Review* 37 (2): 222.
- Kettl, Donald F. 2014. "The Reluctant Executive." *Government Executive* 46 (3): 16.
- Kreiser, Christine M. 2013. "JFK Trials, Triumph and Tragedy." *American History* 48 (5): 40.
- Kumar, Martha Joynt. 2009. "The 2008-2009 Presidential Transition through the Voices of its Participants." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 39 (4): 823.

- Kumar, Martha Joynt. 2008. "Getting Ready for Day One: Taking Advantage of the Opportunities and Minimizing the Hazards of a Presidential Transition." *Public Administration Review* 68 (4): 603-617.
- Pfiffner, James P. 1996. *The Strategic Presidency : Hitting the Ground Running*. Studies in Government and Public Policy.2 , rev ed. Lawrence, Kan.: University Press of Kansas.
- Rockman, Bert A., Andrew Rudalevige, and Colin Campbell. 2012. *The Obama Presidency : Appraisals and Prospects*. Los Angeles: SAGE/CQ Press.
- Skocpol, Theda and Lawrence R. Jacobs. 2012. "Accomplished and Embattled: Understanding Obama's Presidency." *Political Science Quarterly (Academy of Political Science)* 127 (1): 1.
- Suskind, Ron and James Lurie. 2011. *Confidence Men: Wall Street, Washington, and the Education of a President* Harper New York.
- Tellis, Paul G. 2010. *American Recovery and Reinvestment Act : History, Overview, Impact*. Laws and Legislation. New York: Nova Science Publishers.
- Tetlock, Philip E. 1981. "Pre-to Postelection Shifts in Presidential Rhetoric: Impression Management Or Cognitive Adjustment." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 41 (2): 207.
- Thayer, Frederick C. 1971. "Presidential Policy Processes and "New Administration": A Search for Revised Paradigms." *Public Administration Review* 31 (5): 552.
- Vaughn, Justin S. 2014. "The Contemporary Presidency Reconsidering Presidential Policy Czars." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 44 (3): 522.
- Zeller, Shawn. 2014. "Hands-Off Presidency Bottoms Out." *CQ Weekly* 72 (24): 1094.

Conclusion

Based upon the findings from previous chapters it will be posited what kind of a presidency might emerge from the electoral success of a hyper progressive politician in 2016. Currently, a slew of freshman senators e.g. Rubio, Paul, Cruz, and Warren, have been noted by political operatives as potential candidates for the presidency in 2016. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to determine which of these freshman senators might be classifiable as a hyper progressive politician, if one were to emerge as such and ultimately capture the presidency, knowledge of how past hyper progressive politicians-turned-presidents had managed their transitions would prove invaluable in formulating a risk management strategy that sought to mitigate the potentiality for costly errors as was experienced by President Kennedy during the Bay of Pigs crisis.

The worst red flag condition identified in Chapter III was that of misleading inexperience. Neither Kennedy nor Obama entered the Oval Office with a surfeit of managerial experience; indeed, Obama himself acknowledged when transitioning from a State Senator of Illinois to U.S. Senator from Illinois that he needed help in setting up his Senate offices. As Obama explained to Pete Rouse, Senator Daschle's former chief of staff, "...I don't know how to build a large staff and negotiate the potential pitfalls of being a relatively high-profile newcomer to the Senate."¹⁵⁴ As Obama had precious little time between becoming a Senator and then beginning his run for the presidency, most of his managerial experience would have to be built on the presidential campaign trail.

For President Kennedy, his naiveté in believing he could just extricate the NSC as an established risk management apparatus from the existing presidential framework and

¹⁵⁴Suskind, Ron and James Lurie. 2011. *Confidence Men: Wall Street, Washington, and the Education of a President* Harper New York: 50.

still maintain an effective procedure for decision making while containing risk was shocking. Kennedy's presumption that such an extreme organizational re-shifting without a corresponding safeguard being installed reveals a man who had never managed risk in a truly significant manner.

This returns to the crux of why hyper progressive candidates are inherently prepared to win the presidency but in danger of disappointment upon assuming the role; in seeking to escape their current political office rapidly to progress to the next higher office (a la Kennedy and Obama bolting the Senate for the Presidency), they neglect to cultivate the requisite leadership, risk management, and decision making skills that the office of the Presidency demands to be successful from Day 1.

Due to this common lack of experience established in Chapter III, Presidents Kennedy and Obama were particularly susceptible to falling prey to assumptions and misinformation or misinterpretation of presented information. As well, neither young president knew when he needed to 'push back' against information offered up as gospel by the government agency they were interacting with (Kennedy) or their economic policy team (Obama). Both Kennedy and Obama knew exactly what they wanted to actuate in office; the issue arose in them not knowing *how* to make that change occur once they entered into office.

Again, it needs to be reiterated that in the two examples explored in Chapter III, Kennedy and Obama's respective crises are popularly considered to have had drastically different levels of success. For Kennedy, the Bay of Pigs is considered near-universally as a foreign policy fiasco of the highest order. For Obama and the selling and passage of ARRA, the stimulus dollars the Act pumped into the U.S. economy is widely considered

to have averted another depression, irrespective of debates as to whether the stimulus too large or too small in dollar amount. However, what is significant in this analysis is not whether the end result of the president's decision was positive or negative, but rather to examine the quality of risk management and informed decision making made by the president to arrive at the decisions they arrived at.

Safeguards

As Presidents Kennedy and Obama both displayed significant misleading inexperience in their handling of their respective crises, it behooves this paper to explore what corresponding safeguards may have helped mitigate the inexperience of both men. *Kennedy*: Having removed governance (NSC), Kennedy left himself and his decision making structure at risk because he removed that risk management apparatus. Governance was thus a vital safeguard lacking presence in the early Kennedy White House. Later, after having gained the hard-won safeguard of experience, Kennedy amped up the 'debate and challenge' safeguard via ExComm.

The following are the safeguards identified by the author after considering what preparations may have assisted President Kennedy in avoiding the pitfalls that he committed during the Bay of Pigs crisis (as discussed in Chapter III):

Kennedy Safeguards to Counteract (Via the Safeguard Database):¹⁵⁵

1. *Experience, Data, and Analysis*

A. "Expose decision maker to new experiences"

- i. Ex. Share information about Pentagon/ CIA lingo on a regular basis
- ii. "Increase the flow of real-time information": e.g., do not have the president dependent upon one government agency ex. The CIA for relevant information.

B. *Do Analysis of key assumptions*

- i. "Do extra modules of analysis of key areas of uncertainty, particularly where experience about these uncertainties is limited"
 - a. In the case of Kennedy, his ignorance of CIA and military lingo resulted in him making decisions based upon incorrect assumptions.
- ii. "Pressure test the proposed solution-e.g., add 25% to the downside case": the Kennedy team was so focused on maintaining deniability for the Administration that it failed to accurately note the tremendous downside of failure.

2. *Group Debate and Challenge*

A. "Add new members who have different viewpoints"

- i. "Increase the communication to and from the decision group to increase the diversity of viewpoints and consequent challenge."
 - a. The Secretary of State Rusk wanted to inform the president of his reservations but feared it was not his place to become involved in a military/ Defense Department operation.
- ii. "Add the implementer to the decision group"

¹⁵⁵Finkelstein, Sydney, Jo Whitehead, and Andrew Campbell. 2013. *Think again: Why Good Leaders make Bad Decisions and how to Keep it from Happening to You* Harvard Business Press: Appendix II.

- b. President Kennedy would become more directly involved with Ex. Comm. During the Cuban Missile Crisis.

3. *Governance*

A. "Review and modify the overall decision process"

- i. "Advise on, or ask for a report on, the decision group and process used"

- a. More pertinent information to Kennedy would have made much more sense.

Obama: President-elect Obama was involved in the first economics debate to map out an approach to the crisis, but did not manage it well. He lacked the experience to navigate the discussion towards his desired outcome (innovation, creativity) in handling the debate. As well, with Summers already established as a heavy in his administration's brain trust, Obama had installed an individual very set in his ways; would be hard to overcome the Clintonian thinking of that time. Of course, Summers also brought with him invaluable experience.

Obama Safeguards to Counteract (Via the Safeguard Database):¹⁵⁶

I. Experience, Data, and Analysis

A. "Do Analysis of Key Assumptions"

- i. "Focus analysis on specific elements of the classical decision process-e.g., create alternative frames for the problem, lay out the link between the frame and criteria, identify potential options, discuss the key assumptions, create detailed implementation"

- a. This is where Obama, in his effort to move beyond 'just' a traditional stimulus bill, was not able to lead. There was not a procedure in place before his first financial crisis meeting as President-elect to steer the proceedings towards

¹⁵⁶Finkelstein, Sydney, Jo Whitehead, and Andrew Campbell. 2013. *Think again: Why Good Leaders make Bad Decisions and how to Keep it from Happening to You* Harvard Business Press: Appendix II.

framing the issue and attempting to corral assumptions as to how to best resolve the crisis.

II. *Group Debate and Challenge*

A. "Add new members who have different viewpoints"

i. "Add people with different personal interests and/or emotional tags-e.g., skeptical generalists..."

a. This is where Obama went too far one way. Believing that experts who understood the system were the only ones who could fix it, he went too far in that direction, locking out many of the progressive economists and financiers who had expected a seat at the table for the construction of the stimulus. Having assured their presence at the table would have offered the President a mouthpiece for his sentiments for greater imagination and innovation.

B. "Design the decision process to encourage conflict between people with different viewpoints"

i. "Have a session to identify new frames, options, criteria"

a. Obama did do this...in April 2009, after the stimulus bill was already signed into law.¹⁵⁷ Had he included the exiled progressive wing of the Democratic Party more from design, these insights would have been harvested then.

III. *Governance*

A. "Add an individual with different emotional connections-e.g., different prejudgments, no attachments to the status quo"

i. Again with the exiled progressive economics wing: Obama selected Clinton men to staff his top finance and economics jobs in his administration. There was a failure to attain balance in perspective.

B. "Strengthen the governance process to add challenge"

i. "Increase the time spent debating aspects of the decision-e.g., business background, framing, options, criteria"

¹⁵⁷Suskind, 275-76.

a. Again, this approach would have opened the door to greater reflection as to how to add the 'inspiration' bit that Obama desired.

Similitudes:

Both presidents could have benefited from the presence of safeguards from the experience, group debate and challenge, and governance categories. There was variation within each of these categories however. These variations can be explained due to the varying nature of their respective crises.

Concerning Experience, both men would have profited from doing an analysis of their key assumptions. However, whereas President Kennedy needed to become more proficient in the operational semantics of his military, President Obama needed to “...create alternative frames for the problem...” e.g., there should have been a discussion structure that would have encouraged opposing viewpoints in his economic meetings, not silenced a president calling for inspiration.

This difference in emphasis in exploring their key assumptions existed because Obama was proficient in economic lingo and desired a helping hand to guide him to an inspirational, consensus-built solution, whereas Kennedy was struggling simply to comprehend the terminology being employed by the military. President Obama did not require the clarification of facts inasmuch as he needed an advocate for alternative paths for potential exploration.

Concerning Group Debate and Challenge, both men should have added new people who had perspectives differing from those already in their administration. For Kennedy, this was a question more of needing more experienced hands on deck to help

him probe and resist military advice and assumption; for Obama, his understanding of the financial crisis was fundamentally stymied by the absence of the progressive economic wing in the White House.

For President Kennedy, the necessity was in expanding the depth of experience. As well, Kennedy would later insert himself more forcefully into the decision making process during the resolution of the Cuban Missile Crisis. This sort of strident presidential leadership and authority would have been very salutary earlier in his administration.

For President Obama, greater emphasis would have been better-placed in stirring conflict among his advisers. While there was healthy, vociferous debate concerning the size of the proposed stimulus, the size range was never expanded to include what the progressives considered necessary to fill the economic hole in the economy.

In Governance, Kennedy's greatest weakness was the lack of a risk management and decision making structure set in place. The dismantling of the NSC had taken care of that. For Obama, it came back to the lack of the progressive presence in his administration in top positions of power. When the President did have Paul Krugman and others to the White House in April of 2009, months after ARRA had been signed into law, his thoughts on zero interest spurring borrowing, ensnared the president in "rapt fascination".¹⁵⁸

Discovered Leadership Strengths and Weaknesses of the Hyper Progressive Politician

Hyper progressive politicians bring a blend of compelling strengths to higher

¹⁵⁸Suskind, 276.

office. Their message is powerful, inspiring, and inclusive. Their goals for their respective administration, while often vague, are also often lofty and *ambitious* (fitting). The public that elected them to higher office is often rewarded for their votes with inspiring rhetoric and intentions that reinforce their desire to be inspired and included by the hyper progressive candidate.

Of course, there are two sides to this inspirational coin: this vagueness and inclusiveness message can result in a leader adrift; in their establishment of policy priorities some of their voluminous constituency inevitably feel betrayed by the leader's failure to take on their *issue* of choice.

As well, hyper progressive politicians, as they progressed through subsequent offices without having the time to cultivating the legislative and executive skill sets needed to be an effective leader, are often simply unprepared to take on the duties of the office they have been elected to. Thus, ironically they lack the very skill set required to actuate the lofty goals they have promised to the electorate that put them in their position of power in the first place.

What Type of Experience, Then, Should Voters Look for in their Candidates?

Concerning legislative/ senatorial experience: voters tend not to take to long-serving U.S. senators because at some point these time-tested senators have surely voted for something that the voters find reprehensible. Ironically, the legislative experience that these senators have accrued would be very useful to a president. Of course, as legislators and not executives, senators may still be lacking in managerial authority.

The author believes that both experienced senators and governors are excellent candidates for the White House; however, as governors have served as executives of a

U.S. state, they are more directly positioned to have the relevant managerial and executive experience to succeed in the Oval Office from day one. However, the institutional knowledge of a long-serving senator is invaluable to a president that would seek to shepherd tendentious legislation through the U.S. Congress.

The Future Looks Bright for Hyper Progressive Politicians

Disruptive innovations present greater opportunities for HPP candidates, who excel at taking advantage of such changes. Coincidentally, the Post-World War II American political era has been one of rapidly advancing communications technology breakthroughs. As technology as a communication tool has rapidly expanded and evolved, HPP have experienced a correlated surge in their electoral chances as they have a higher frequency of disruptive innovations to take decisive advantage of. Thus, we as an electorate should expect to see a greater frequency of successful HPP candidates entering into the political arena.

Preparing for Future Hyper Progressive Candidates-turned-President

In 2016, a new president may also be a young, super-ambitious senator. If a new hyper progressive candidate is confirmed into the office of the presidency, it is relevant to wonder what kind of leader they may turn out to be in office. Synthesizing from this paper's findings, this new president will 1. Know generally what they hope to accomplish in office, but 2. Will not have accrued the necessary experience and connections to get it done.

However, they will have been stellar campaigners, having inspired the American people to elect them to the highest office in the land. They will have, as Presidents Kennedy and Obama before them, have garnered the support of the electorate. However,

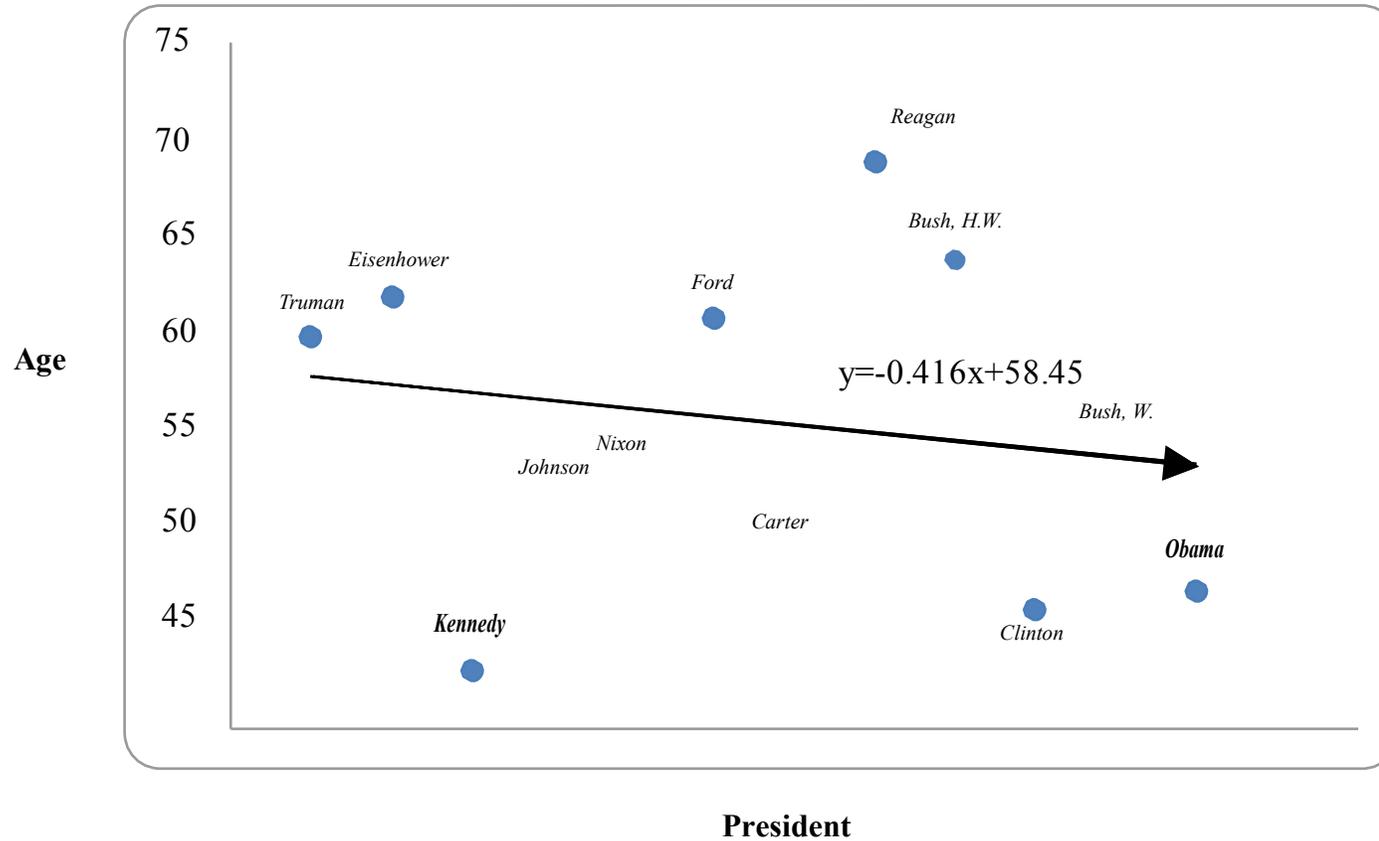
great rhetoric and ideas do not translate alone into great presidencies. To profit from the lessons of this paper and thus from the past experience of the Kennedy and Obama transitions and early administrations, new hyper progressive candidates must first maintain existing decision making and risk management structures. While every new president wishes to put their own personal imprimatur upon the office, all new presidents are inherently inexperienced in the role of president early-on, none more so than a hyper progressive candidate, who achieved the office at a younger age and thus likely has not had the experience to master certain leadership skills.

Secondly, whatever crisis may emerge early in a president's term of office, they must be sure to both 1. Appoint advisers from a variety of different schools of thought e.g., not Clintonian economists only, and 2. They must avoid bringing predominately inexperienced hands into the advisory ranks (the hyper progressive president themselves is already lacking in government experience). By adhering to these transition guidelines, the next hyper progressive candidate-turned-president may hope to have installed satisfactory safeguards against the potential pitfalls of the hyper progressive candidate. By controlling for their inexperience, the hyper progressive president may effectively embark on the enterprises they so winningly proposed to the American people.

Appendix: Data Visualization

Source: McCoy, Paul M. H. "Presidential Age of Ascendance, Presidents Truman-Obama".

Presidential Age of Ascendance, Presidents Truman-Obama



Curriculum Vitae

Paul Michael Hannahs McCoy was born on February 17, 1988 in Fort Belvoir, Virginia. He currently resides in Baltimore, Maryland.

Mr. McCoy received a Bachelor of Arts degree, magna cum laude from Gettysburg College in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania in May 2010. He double majored in religious studies and music (violoncello). He was principal 'cellist of the Gettysburg College Orchestra, and sang in the College's college and concert choirs as a baritone. His undergraduate thesis in religious studies synthesized the art, music, and theology of French composer Olivier Messiaen.

Upon graduation, Mr. McCoy spent two years working in customer relations and health IT including a year as a government contractor for the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS). In 2012 he began employment with Econ One Research, Inc., an economic consulting company with an office focused on international arbitration located in downtown Washington, D.C.

Mr. McCoy had the distinct privilege to serve as a senatorial intern in health policy for U.S. Senator for Maryland Barbara Mikulski in the Spring of 2014 on Capitol Hill.

This thesis marks the completion of a Master of Arts in Government from Johns Hopkins University.