
The Evolution of the White House Staff

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THE SUCCESSES and failures of presidents have been increasingly attributed to the performances of their staffs. After the Iran-contra scandal broke, a special commission headed by former Senator John G. Tower examined the staffing system that yielded such ill-advised schemes as the exchange of missiles for hostages and the diversion of funds to the Nicaraguan contras. The commission faulted many on the White House staff, as well as the president, but the first political casualty was Chief of Staff Donald Regan, whose replacement was announced before he had a chance to resign. According to the Tower commission, Regan did not adequately inquire about the actions of others once news of irregularities began to appear in the press. These charges rang true to many Washingtonians. When he took over the staff early in the president's second term, Regan sharply cut the number of senior staff and installed a pyramidal White House organization with himself at the apex. As a result, President Reagan came to depend on his chief more than he had on any individual during his first term, and when his chief failed to perform, the president was left uninformed in the midst of a crisis.

The Iran-contra scandal has begged for explanation because it contrasted so starkly with the president's first-term successes. Students of the presidency, including Garry Trudeau, the cartoonist of "Doonesbury," had noted Reagan's lacadaisical work habits and heavy reliance on staff. But the president's remarkable legislative successes in forcing a Democratic House to accept sharp reductions in social programs, equally sharp hikes in defense spending, and a major tax cut had transformed this potential weakness into a strength. (One liberal Democratic congressman confided in 1982 that the president's example had persuaded him to delegate more

responsibility to his office staff.) Kudos were heaped on James Baker for organizing Reagan's legislative strategies and Michael Deaver for keeping his public image well burnished. Independent of the individual staff members, the triumvirate that governed the early Reagan White House—Baker, Deaver, and Edwin Meese—was widely complimented as an ideal form of organization.

If awareness of the importance of presidential staffing peaked under Reagan, it certainly did not begin with him. Carter's micro-management style overloaded the president and prevented him from developing priorities. Nixon's oversized staff of loyalists headed by H. R. Haldeman and John Ehrlichman was widely judged to have contributed to the misdeeds of Watergate. Every president's organization, in fact, has received a measure of credit or blame for the president's performance. But with the president's performance so dependent on the workings of his staff, and the staff's performance apparently dependent on its organization, what accounts for the structure of the modern White House Office?

The conventional scholarly answer is that the organization of the White House staff reflects the style and work habits of the incumbent president.¹ Staffing arrangements have been as individual and as variable as the men who occupied the office. Thus former General Dwight D. Eisenhower rejected Harry Truman's informal staff system and installed an orderly chain of command headed by a chief of staff. John Kennedy, self-assured and charismatic, replaced Ike's structure with an entourage of close advisers who, with himself as team leader, managed the White House informally. Similar personalized arrangements can be observed for each successor. The history of the modern White House Office can be recounted in terms of highly individualistic, four-to-eight-year bundles of organizational reformulations.

Not only does the conventional wisdom hold that presidents distinctively mold their staffs, it also strongly endorses this influence. Writing in the 1960s, one leading presidential scholar concluded that the president requires "the utmost flexibility in the choice, number, characteristics, and deployment of his staff."² This highly personalized view of staff structure appears to leave little to

1. James D. Barber, *The Presidential Character: Predicting Performance in the White House* (Prentice-Hall, 1972).

2. Aaron Wildavsky, "Salvation by Staff: Reform and the Presidential Office," in Wildavsky, ed., *The Presidency* (Little, Brown, 1969), p. 700.

be explained. But appearances are deceptive. Any number of organizational arrangements might satisfy a given president's needs. From all accounts, President Reagan found Donald Regan's strong-chief approach to White House management as congenial as the more open and less hierarchical staff administration of the first-term troika. And when Regan left, his successor, Howard Baker, set up a completely different operation, again without apparent discomfort to the president.

Also, critics have complained, the White House staff has become a separate entity, frequently working at cross purposes with the intent and needs of the president. Increasingly, presidential lapses in judgment and policy appear to reflect failed staff work. The White House Office is clearly far different from what it once was. No longer just the president's entourage of cronies and campaign staff, it appears to have been shaped by more significant and more stable forces than can be found in the comings and goings of presidents.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE MODERN WHITE HOUSE

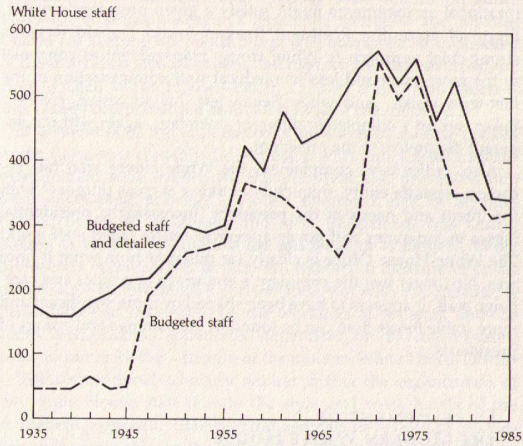
Unlike the other presidential agencies created in the Reorganization Act of 1939, or those introduced subsequently, the White House Office was not intended to participate in administration. Instead, its attentions were to be devoted exclusively to the incidental needs of the president, to be, as Roosevelt said, his legs. Consequently, it was no slight to the office or the presidency that the staff was initially kept small and free of statutory responsibilities. These men and women were expected to be factotums.

Shortly after entering office in 1933, Franklin Roosevelt assembled a dozen or so assistants to help plan his assault on the Great Depression. He had also inherited roughly fifty clerks and secretaries from the outgoing Hoover administration.³ As with his predecessors, many of these were on loan from various agencies, which presumably saw some advantage in having their people stationed close to the president. Precise figures on the total staff are unavailable, since the White House Office was not created until the Reor-

3. Transcript, William Hopkins oral history interview, pp. 2-4, Harry S. Truman Library.

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FIGURE 1. Growth of the White House Staff, 1935-85



SOURCE: Samuel Kernell and Samuel L. Popkin, eds., *Chief of Staff: Twenty-five Years of Managing the Presidency* (University of California Press, 1986), p. 201. Number of detailees for 1981 unavailable.

ganization Act allowed a modest professional staff of six newly created assistants to the president.

When James Rowe, the first of these assistants, returned from World War II, he called a friend in the Truman White House to ask how things had changed. He recalled later that they had "nine people doing what I used to do," and guessed that "nowadays they must have 300 or 400 doing what I used to do."⁴ Figure 1 supports Rowe's impression. Until the aftermath of Watergate reversed the trend, the president's staff grew about 5 percent a year.⁵

4. Katie Louchheim, ed., *The Making of the New Deal: The Insiders Speak* (Harvard University Press, 1983), p. 285.

5. The totals in figure 1 are estimates based on research undertaken in 1978 by the Office of Personnel Management at the request of Congress. Note that there are alternative ways of calculating staff size, depending on whether recently created agencies such as the Office of Policy Development are included. For more information on the difficulties of measuring the size of the staff, see John Hart, *The Presidential Branch* (Pergamon Press, 1987), pp. 97-100.

Although there seem to have been few constraints on growth, the aggregate numbers imply that presidents have avoided formal increases in staff. Until 1979 they were not required to report to Congress the number of aides loaned to the White House from the agencies, and they clearly preferred this inconspicuous, informal way of expanding. Gradually the number of detailees grew in relation to budgeted staff, until a new president would clean up the bookkeeping by including the positions in the White House Office budget.

Watergate and the subsequent criminal convictions of Richard Nixon's aides drew attention to the president's staff as no event had before or has since. An obvious way for Nixon's successors to dissociate themselves from the stigma of the imperial presidency was to trim personnel. In 1976 Jimmy Carter assured the American people that pruning the staff would be one of the first items of business in his new administration. The trend continued with Ronald Reagan, although some members of Congress charged that he misrepresented the number of detailees working in the White House.⁶ While such borrowing makes firm estimates elusive, the White House Office seems to have leveled off at about 400 people.

Although organizational manuals for each White House do not exist, the increase in size seems to have been paralleled by an increase in complexity. As the number and variety of tasks multiplied, duties were divided and eventually parceled among subunits. The formal designation of roles became more common and so did organization charts.

The development of specialization and chains of command has proceeded with seeming inevitability. Reviewing an early draft of his administrative reform plan, Roosevelt told its author, Louis Brownlow, that he did not want his assistants consigned to "little boxes." Nonetheless, he did make two formal assignments. Aggravated with the tardiness of legal advice from the Justice Department, he created the White House Special Counsel's Office. The counsel, Samuel I. Rosenman, however, spent more time writing speeches than advising on legal matters. Roosevelt also designated

6. Personnel detailed to the White House for less than six months are exempted from reporting to the department that pays them. The Reagan administration interpreted this rule as allowing persons to be detailed indefinitely as long as they change positions in the departments within a six-month period. Judith Havemann, "How White House Beefed Up Staff," *Washington Post*, July 22, 1987, p. A17.

the first press secretary, Stephen Early, although previous presidents had informally assigned aides to tend to Washington correspondents.

Even in hindsight, Roosevelt's staff arrangements resist classification. Thomas Corcoran and Harry Hopkins, arguably the most valued aides, were never members of the White House Office. And those who were rarely interacted: the president's personal and appointments secretaries were located in the west wing of the White House, and his new assistants across the street. "Not much of a presence," William Hopkins, veteran executive clerk of the White House Office, summed up this first official staff.⁷

Early in Truman's first term, when long-time personal friend Ed McKim tried to assert management control and began drafting an organization chart, the president promoted him to another job away from the White House. Other efforts to assign fellow staffers to organizational niches were no more successful.⁸ Reflecting his military experience, Dwight Eisenhower introduced fixed assignments and a chain of command for the White House staff. But he did so without formal titles, organization charts, or other appurtenances of bureaucracy.

Presidents Kennedy and Johnson restored more informal relations and more fluid assignments, but the staff's greater size and responsibilities meant that they could not return to Roosevelt's desultory management style. Periodically, Lyndon Johnson would become frustrated with his loose staff structure and, in the words of Bill Moyers, get in one of his "organizational moods."⁹ Over the years at least five senior aides were assigned, on arriving at the White House, the job of charting a formal staff structure. Since there was little formal division of labor among Johnson's staff, the attempt was doomed. Johnson would look at each effort, wad it up and throw it away, and instruct the now wary aide to try again. Eventually, the president would let the matter drop until some energetic recruit would rekindle his enthusiasm.¹⁰

7. Interview with William Hopkins, April 1, 1988, Silver Spring, Maryland. In searching through the Roosevelt archives, I turned up only one staff memo, to assistants telling them not to bother the president before 11:30. By the Nixon administration, such notes would become a standard way of coordinating staff activities.

8. George J. Schoeneman to Raymond R. Zimmerman, January 4, 1946, Truman Library.

9. Bill Moyers to Bob Kintner, May 5, 1966, Lyndon B. Johnson Library.

10. By the time Robert Kintner joined the staff in 1966 and was promptly given

No subsequent president has had to suffer Johnson's frustrations. All worked within the confines of formal organizational designations for each staff member. Richard Nixon's White House staff underwent two major reorganizations, and the finishing touches were being given to a third when Watergate struck. Organizational charts identified the implications of proposed changes.¹¹ Similarly, Presidents Ford and Carter employed charts and formal titles as a way of understanding and at times reorganizing the staff.

According to one account, when Edwin Meese, the head of Reagan's transition team, asked to see what the White House Office looked like, the Carter people produced an elaborate chart that located more than 400 budgeted staff among the twenty or so subunits of the White House Office. Meese accepted it matter of factly. Some changes were made, of course. James Baker had agreed to assume day-to-day management responsibilities as chief of staff, while Meese would take charge of policy planning in his position as counselor, and offices were shuffled accordingly. Some offices, such as Communications under David Gergen, became more important; others, including that of the national security adviser, less. But no major functions or organizational divisions were deleted or added by the new administration.

Both the number of formal subunits and levels of hierarchy have steadily increased, from one level and eleven subunits under Eisenhower to four levels and twenty-nine subunits under Reagan.¹² These increases in size and complexity have transformed a small group closely attentive and responsive to the president into a larger, more formal organization governed by rules and procedures, and have given it the appearance of a steadily institutional-

this assignment, the other aides had become jaded and perhaps in a few instances opposed to the prospect of organizing Johnson. As Kintner made his rounds researching the different duties of staff members, they would pointedly explain to him the futility of trying to organize the Johnson White House Office. See *ibid.* The tenor of comments to and about Kintner's efforts suggest that by that late date some aides may have feared reorganization would have removed them from direct access to the president.

11. For example, see John Dean, "Methods for Reorganizing the Executive Branch," January 2, 1973, Richard M. Nixon collection, National Archives.

12. Eisenhower figures are from "Staff Work for the President and the Executive Branch," Legislative Background Collection, Johnson Library, n.d. For Reagan's White House structure, see Samuel Kernell and Samuel L. Popkin, eds., *Chief of Staff: Twenty-five Years of Managing the Presidency* (University of California Press, 1986), p. 202.

izing organization rather than one remade in each new president's image. The continuity in the organization of Carter's and Reagan's staff further undermines the idea that staff organization merely reflects each president's style.

The decisions of presidents and senior aides provide more direct evidence. In many instances, they appear to have been engaged in a rear-guard action to prevent bureaucratization rather than an expansionist venture. During the transition in 1968, President Nixon's chief, H. R. Haldeman, summoned the new White House aides and read to them Brownlow's principles for assistants, emphasizing the passage instructing aides to cultivate a "passion for anonymity."¹³ At some moment in each of their terms, presidents from Johnson to Carter inveighed against large staffs and occasionally ordered cutbacks.¹⁴ One of the ironies of Watergate is that by late 1972 President Nixon had decided that his staff had "grown like Topsy" and directed a disbelieving aide to come up with a plan to cut it by half early in the second term.¹⁵ If neither presidents nor their aides have wanted larger, more complex staffs, why has the White House developed the way it has?

TOWARD AN EXPLANATION OF WHITE HOUSE DEVELOPMENT

One answer is that while the upper reaches of the staff system may have been distinctively shaped by each president, its overall size and complexity have been dictated by the growth of the national government, particularly the president's increased responsibilities since World War II.¹⁶ Or as Donald Rumsfeld, Gerald Ford's chief of staff, commented, "You have all these threads, and the White House staff's function is to see that those threads get through the needle's eye in a reasonably coherent way."¹⁷ In this

13. See William Safire, *Before the Fall: An Inside View of the Pre-Watergate White House* (Doubleday, 1975), p. 116.

14. *A Discussion with Gerald R. Ford: The American Presidency* (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1977); and Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith: Memoirs of a President* (Bantam, 1982).

15. Richard P. Nathan, *The Plot That Failed: Nixon and the Administrative Presidency* (John Wiley, 1975), p. 53.

16. Hart, *Presidential Branch*, p. 114.

17. Kernell and Popkin, eds., *Chief of Staff*, p. 112.

regard the president's staff is unexceptional; the senior civil service and congressional staffs may have grown and professionalized even faster.¹⁸ According to this argument, work load drives development more than presidential proclivities do.

A variant of this argument claims that the growth of responsibilities has induced a profound transformation. "Whatever his particular policy objectives, whatever his personality and style, the modern president is driven by . . . formidable expectations to seek control over the structures and processes of government . . . [to create] an institutional system responsive to his needs as a political leader."¹⁹ This desire for responsiveness has prompted presidents to centralize decisionmaking in the White House and to politicize the bureaucracy.²⁰ The size and complexity of the modern office are the products of this centralization.

Clearly, this explanation elucidates one motivating force of presidential behavior. To gain the cooperation he felt he deserved from others, every president has tried to extend his control into the jurisdictions of others. But insufficient responsiveness has less to do with the increasing volume of demands than with the structure of American politics. Suspicious of the conservative sympathies of the old line departments, Franklin Roosevelt located many of the New Deal agencies under his direct supervision. Each subsequent president has followed his lead because, although some may have been more disposed to assert unilateral authority than others, the search for greater responsiveness inheres in the predicament of the office, in the clash of expectations of presidential leadership with a system of separated powers. The search is neither more nor less than the pursuit of power in a system all presidents come to feel has dealt them too little.²¹ When Truman remarked of Eisenhower,

18. Congressional staffs increased from 3,556 in 1957 to 11,432 in 1981; the number of committee staffers rose from 715 in 1955 to 2,865 in 1981. Norman J. Ornstein and others, *Vital Statistics on Congress, 1984-1985* (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1984), pp. 121, 124.

19. Terry M. Moe, "The Politicized Presidency," in John E. Chubb and Paul E. Peterson, eds., *The New Direction in American Politics* (Brookings, 1985), p. 239.

20. Hugh Hecl, *A Government of Strangers: Executive Politics in Washington* (Brookings, 1977), pp. 71-75; and Margaret J. Wyzomirski, "The De-Institutionalization of Presidential Staff Agencies," *Public Administration Review*, vol. 42 (September-October 1982), pp. 448-58.

21. Thirty-five years ago, Robert A. Dahl and Charles E. Lindblom made precisely this point: "If presidential politicians could be given 'sufficient' power over the bureaucracies, the bureaucracies would be responsive to presidential politicians—

"He'll sit here and he'll say, 'Do this! Do that!' And nothing will happen," he was talking as much about the office as about his successor.²² Since every president, most of the time, has wished for greater responsiveness, its ever-present pursuit cannot alone explain the modern evolution of the office.

The argument does, however, identify vital features of presidential leadership. Presidents are constantly probing the boundaries of their control, and where they meet little resistance, new authority can be established. Each successive decision becomes marginally less costly as accommodation becomes unnecessary and the president's options less confined by other Washingtonians' prerogatives. The growing size and complexity of the White House Office offers indirect evidence of the steady successes of postwar presidents in poaching in the domains of others.

The interests of presidents and their fellow Washingtonians have been diverging for a long time, and in ways that could not always be reconciled through negotiation and reciprocity. The president, unlike other politicians, has the nation as his constituency. He may at times find a tactical advantage in cultivating support among particular segments of the population, but such concerns are clearly secondary. By contrast, members of Congress represent local constituencies. However interested a congressman or senator may be in a national policy, his or her job requires servicing the district or state first. Similarly, when party leaders were still consequential political figures, they considered their responsibilities to be little more than collecting the claims of state party organizations and presenting them to the White House for action. In both instances, insatiable particularism frequently conflicted with the president's notion of the national interest. It still does.

The conventional view is that these differing perspectives provided the basis of reciprocity, and generally they did. Presidents swapped specific jobs and projects for support for their programs so routinely that expectations sometimes became institutionalized in such informal rules as senatorial courtesy. But in many

a neat tautology." (Emphasis added.) *Politics, Economics, and Welfare: Planning and Politico-Economic Systems Resolved into Basic Social Processes* (Harper and Row, 1953), p. 351.

22. Quoted in Richard E. Neustadt, *Presidential Power: The Politics of Leadership from FDR to Carter* (John Wiley, 1980), p. 9.

instances, such exchanges compromised the president's goals. Evidence in the historical record shows that on these occasions, presidents sought to skirt traditional rules. Even Franklin Roosevelt—considered a paragon of the bargaining president—at times chose strategies that undermined the political order founded on reciprocity. He did so when he allowed the Internal Revenue Service to expose corruption among Democratic machines and send the leaders to prison. He did so when he directed Harry Hopkins to create a federal administration for delivering relief programs instead of turning them over to expectant Democratic organizations skilled in the efficient distribution of patronage. And he did so when he resisted the patronage claims of senators who wanted their nominees rather than New Deal professionals to run federal relief and public works programs in their states.²³ These actions reaped political ill will, but they preserved the president's national policy objectives. Well before presidents became habituated to centralization, their preoccupation with the needs of the national constituency sometimes led them to resist arrangements among community members predicated on the axiom that a collective good was the simple sum of highly divisible parts.

Presidents' concern with providing collective goods may explain their preoccupation with other politicians' insufficient responsiveness and their efforts to extend presidential authority. To explain their success, however, one must investigate the weakening of the forces that once contained them and kept political relations in a state of mutual dependency. The evolution of the White House staff is as much a result of the transformation of American politics beyond the Oval Office as of the efforts of presidents searching for responsiveness.

Today's Washington is not the one that greeted President

23. Perhaps the most famous and well-documented instance of exposing a Democratic machine under FDR is the dismantling of Tom Pendergast's Kansas City organization. See Lyle W. Dorsett, *The Pendergast Machine* (Oxford University Press, 1968). Roosevelt did not rebuke all machine claims for control of federal relief programs. Hopkins turned over most of the Chicago operations of the WPA to Ed Kelly's organization. Lyle Dorsett describes this exceptional arrangement and more typical patterns in *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the City Bosses* (Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1977). An example of conflict between senatorial claims of patronage and the president's program can be found in Senator Ellender's insistent appeals for appointments for federal administrative posts in Louisiana. See James Rowe, "Memorandum for the President," May 19, 1939, Rowe papers, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library.

Roosevelt in 1933. Gone are the national party committees that represented state and local party organizations whose interests had to be attended to by elected politicians. The national apparatus was especially important to the president because it ran his campaign and, after the victory, served as a clearinghouse for the distribution of federal patronage. Gone too is the power of the national party chairman. Although the chairman was always subordinate to the president, that did not keep James Farley from openly courting Democratic delegates for the 1940 nomination or deter him and his successor Ed Flynn from openly feuding with the White House staff.²⁴ National party chairmen could be disregarded only at the risk of alienating state party organizations.

The stature of congressional leaders has also diminished. When Roosevelt took office, they spoke with such authority that they could cut a deal with the president and return to their committees in the full expectation of being able to implement it. Had the president created an in-house congressional liaison office, as was occasionally recommended, he would have been tacitly challenging the position of the Big Four legislative leaders with whom he lunched each week to plan legislative strategy. Such a tactic would have inevitably redounded to his disadvantage, which, of course, is why Roosevelt spurned such advice. But today the president can no longer rely on the floor leaders, and the congressional liaison office is a necessity.

The limiting power of the press has also changed.²⁵ In 1933 a comparatively small, homogeneous band of Washington newspaper correspondents controlled the president's access to the citizenry, and to court their favor he obligingly conducted "family gatherings" with them twice a week. For Roosevelt to have avoided the press conference would have been tantamount to surrendering the national stage to his adversaries. He did contemplate more frequent fireside radio chats, but until the war he resisted

24. The relationship between president and national party apparatus since Roosevelt is discussed by Lester G. Seligman, "The Presidential Office and the President as Party Leader (with a Postscript on the Kennedy-Nixon Era)," in Jeff Fishel, ed., *Parties and Elections in an Anti-Party Age: American Politics and the Crisis of Confidence* (Indiana University Press, 1978), pp. 295-302.

25. For a fuller account of this transformation, see Samuel Kernell, *Going Public: New Strategies of Presidential Leadership* (CQ Press, 1986), pp. 51-81.

having more than an average of two a year because he did not want to dilute their effect. Such dedicated presidential courtship of White House correspondents became more desultory, however, as television deprived them of their near monopoly. Before long, broadcast journalists had reduced them to second-class citizenship, and recent presidents have decided that the fewer press conferences the better.

All these evolving political relations are rooted in forces well beyond the control of politicians. Ultimately, the arrival of broadcast technology, especially television, ended the grip of print journalists on political communication from Washington and thereby weakened their leverage at the White House. This does not mean that presidents, the political system's most resourceful participants, merely acquiesced to the new limits and opportunities presented by political evolution; when it served their purposes, they became agents of change. President Kennedy, concerned that the press would turn against him sooner or later, confided to a friend that he adopted televised press conferences to communicate directly to the American people.²⁶

To summarize, the modern White House staff is the cumulative product of presidents' strategic adaptations to an evolving political community. Presidents seeking responsiveness probe for new power. Other participants in the political process, because of their own deteriorating power, have found themselves at times unable to resist. The cumulative result of presidential encroachment has been the steady centralization of policymaking within the White House. Internally, it has taken the form of increased work, which in turn has stimulated the growth of staff and the subdivision of work into more specialized tasks. This sequence by which presidential strategy has begotten staff structure can be confirmed in the history of the White House Office as an organization. One finds it in the character of new staff work and the timing of its introduction, in its subsequent routinization as resistance from outsiders weakens, and ultimately, in the efforts required of modern presidents and their senior staff aides to harness their staff's disparate activities to achieve coherent leadership.

26. Blaire Atherton French, *The Presidential Press Conference* (University Press of America, 1982), p. 13.

A HISTORY OF WHITE HOUSE ORGANIZATION

The modern White House staff is a two-tiered organization. The lower tier consists of such line units responsible for conducting the president's external relations as the press secretary, the congressional liaison staff, the secretary to the cabinet, and the speechwriters. The upper tier comprises staff who are primarily responsible for planning and internal maintenance of the organization. While such a distinction is not applicable to the early staffs, it is essential for understanding the evolution of the modern White House. Even President Truman, who was his own office manager, had aides such as John Steelman, Clark Clifford, and Charles Murphy to help supervise the activities of others. More recently, formal offices such as the chief of staff have been created for this purpose. Whether or not such offices are present, however, a half dozen or so senior aides who work directly with the president will assume some management control.

These two domains of activity place their members in different settings. As the number and variety of routine external tasks increase, layers of specialized subunits proliferate to handle them. On-the-job training and selective recruitment results in a cadre of experts. How well an aide works the Hill, monitors public opinion, analyzes diplomatic messages, or performs other specialized tasks determines his worth to the organization and relationship to the president. Only as the president requires a particular expertise will an aide be asked to write a memo or be summoned to the Oval Office. The rest of the aide's time, which is most of the time, will be spent on routine relations.

Those charged with planning and coordinating the affairs of the line staff, by contrast, remain generalists, working closely with the president on a wide range of issues. They confront the world outside the White House the same way the president does, not as matters requiring routine relations but as exigencies that demand presidential action. Because their job is to help the president do his job, they must be responsive to his personal style and work habits.

And yet the imperatives of size and complexity are no different for the president's senior staff than for the managers of any other organization. Beneath the surface idiosyncrasy of personalities, predictable organizational trends toward rationalization prevail here as well. Presidents, ill disposed to work within formal struc-

tures, may resist such bureaucratization, but they do so at the risk of leaving line staff insufficiently supervised, resulting in such pathologies as presidential overload, aides' interpreting for themselves what actions are in the best interest of the president, and fights among subunits for influence over policy. A history of presidential staffing must take into account the development of each tier of White House organization.

The Development of White House Line Staff

Were the White House Office an ordinary organization, it would have a manual listing dozens of tasks from coordinating foreign policy to answering the president's mail. Most of these routines have evolved from incidental activities that proved so valuable they began to require special resources. Others were once prerogatives shared with, if not wholly controlled by, other politicians. Underlying each loss of prerogative is a story of political transformation. Why did a particular authority or responsibility become the president's and how did it affect the organization of the staff?

To answer, I have chosen to examine the way the White House staff has made political appointments and managed public relations. These activities epitomize recent trends in presidential leadership over time. Through his early successes President Reagan, more than any of his predecessors, demonstrated that by assiduously recruiting loyalists the president can take control of the bureaucracy and by rallying public support he can gain leverage with fellow politicians. But neither Reagan's personnel strategy nor his communications strategy was altogether novel. Each adapted practices that can be traced back decades. In this respect they parallel histories of other staff routines. Similar stories could be told for the development of congressional liaison activities, White House responsibility for making domestic and national security policy, interest group staff work, and many others.

The Appointment Process

The Constitution gives the chief executive the power to appoint government workers, except as the power is limited by Congress. In the nineteenth century, dispensing patronage jobs helped the president cement relations with his party in Congress and the

states. The steady expansion of the civil service during the twentieth century has removed most lower-grade positions from presidential control, but the numbers of political executives in Washington have grown dramatically, and presidential appointments have gained in importance what they have lost in overall extent. Today most of the appointments are for the several thousand or so political executive positions responsible for running the federal bureaucracy, the regulatory agencies, and the federal judiciary.²⁷

Although Roosevelt distributed five or six times as many patronage positions as Ronald Reagan, no one on his staff in his first term had any special responsibility for screening and recommending appointments. Many people, of course, volunteered advice. Harry Hopkins, the czar of relief programs, helped deal with patronage matters, and Felix Frankfurter and Thomas Corcoran identified personnel for critical administrative positions.²⁸ But not until 1939, when James Rowe became the first assistant to the president, did Roosevelt assign an aide to be routinely responsible for presidential appointments. And Rowe's involvement was neither comprehensive nor exclusive.

Part of the reason is that many of Roosevelt's appointments were his in name only. The departments usually consulted directly with Democrats in Congress to award the least important positions. Professional positions, such as commissioners of the regulatory agencies, district attorneys, and state administrators of federal programs, required complex negotiations among the department with the position, the Democratic National Committee, senators from the state affected, and, frequently, interest groups. The president made the final decision, but these others created the short list and, for certain positions, exercised a veto. Roosevelt's mandate to Rowe was as much to adjudicate the frequent disputes as to advance the president's interest. When the principals agreed, the White House staff simply reported the result to the president for endorsement.

Rowe's contribution was to preserve for the president a more than pro forma role in appointments. He and other aides resisted the efforts of the Democratic National Committee to make the

27. Hecló, *A Government of Strangers*, pp. 58-67.

28. Dorsett, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the City Bosses*; and Steven P. Erie, *Rainbow's End: Irish-Americans and the Dilemmas of Urban Machine Politics, 1840-1985* (University of California Press, 1988), pp. 128-30.

short list rather than merely to give political clearance to the president's tentative choices. They also forwarded irreconcilable appointment fights to the president and occasionally alerted him to agency choices of persons known to be unsympathetic to him. Frequently Rowe's efforts made him unpopular with politicians jealous of their long-held prerogatives.²⁹ Since many of them wielded enough clout to get into the Oval Office more easily than the White House assistants, they could often undo his efforts.

Neither Rowe nor Marvin McIntyre, a White House aide who joined him in clearing appointments in 1941, nor any other staffer routinely became involved in appointments of upper-level administrative executives (principally assistant and under secretaries) in the departments. This remained the preserve of the cabinet secretaries in private consultation with the president. Roosevelt valued Rowe's counsel and often acted on his advice, but the president's calculated disorderliness precluded all but the most desultory efforts at White House coordination of personnel recruitment. And although Roosevelt wanted to make the most of the political capital to be earned through smart appointments, any effort to give the president greater control over appointments would have been strenuously opposed within his party in Congress and around the country.

Harry Truman practiced more orderly administration than Roosevelt, which finally implemented the White House staff's original mandate to manage the flow of people and messages to and from the president. Truman's administrative style shows clearly in his designating assistant Donald Dawson an informal clearinghouse for political appointments. According to Dawson, even cabinet secretaries submitted the names of candidates for senior department appointments to him for political vetting before introducing them to Truman.³⁰ And while Appointments Secretary Matthew Connelly occasionally represented the patronage interest of the Democratic machines, presidential patronage and administrative appointments generally passed across Dawson's desk.

This arrangement appears to have worked well and certainly

29. DNC chairman Ed Flynn opposed Rowe's appointment as assistant attorney general in charge of patronage and legislative affairs for the Department of Justice. Rowe to Franklin D. Roosevelt, October 20, 1941, and Rowe to Flynn, October 25, 1941, Roosevelt Library.

30. Interview with Donald Dawson, March 30, 1988, Washington, D.C.

avoided the rivalry and rancor that had plagued Roosevelt's appointments. There are several reasons for this. The expansion of the civil service reduced the number of patronage appointments the White House could make. Politicians also appear to have been less persistent in pursuing appointments. DNC chairmen Robert Hannegan, Howard McGrath, and Bob Boyle did not press the party's interest over that of congressmen or the agencies as aggressively as did James Farley and Ed Flynn. And perhaps the party's naturally subordinate role to Congress and a rapidly professionalizing social service bureaucracy had preempted many of the patronage games popular in the 1930s.

At least as important, however, was the president's commitment to Dawson. Truman consistently turned direct appeals over to him, and the members of Congress, the national party, and even department secretaries came to appreciate that Dawson's recommendation carried great weight with the president. Significantly, Dawson and not the DNC kept the book that logged the patronage appointments granted to Democratic representatives and senators.³¹

Thus if Roosevelt frequently nurtured contention among competing claimants so that he could control the final decision and extract political advantage, Truman surrendered many of the potential political gains in favor of a more orderly process. While the president continued to make important appointments and could be acutely attentive to their political ramifications, the lesser but more voluminous choices were resolved through Dawson's recommendations.

This arrangement made the White House Office the forum where the patronage barons of the Democratic party played appointment politics. But valuable as Dawson's skills as an arbiter were, he did not attempt to promote the president's programs through political appointments. Procedures remained relatively primitive, mostly because the administration had no overarching selection policy, nor could it.³² The arena may have shifted to the White House, but the appointments game remained largely in the hands of Democratic politicians in Congress and the party organizations.

31. *Ibid.*

32. G. Calvin Mackenzie, *The Politics of Presidential Appointments* (Free Press, 1981) p. 14.

Dawson wished otherwise, and he organized a task force that produced a book-length report, "The Best Brains," which proposed that the president create a data bank of talented potential appointees. The project was abandoned, however, when, under Truman's instruction, Dawson realized that the White House "had to be practical about presidential appointees. Use them for political advantage, use them to get the best people of your own party persuasion . . . and build up the party. And get people that were loyal—that was the first qualification; ability was second."³³

Dwight Eisenhower's administration also maintained the status quo, even though the campaign had promised to end cronyism and streamline government. After twenty years in the wilderness, the Republican party now controlled federal patronage, and Congress and the state organizations wanted to cleanse the bureaucracy of Democrats and reward those who had been steadfast. Although Eisenhower at first appeared insensitive to these pent-up demands, after consulting with Senator Robert Taft and others he agreed to follow tradition.

Others on Eisenhower's staff had a more sophisticated appreciation of the political advantages that controlling appointments conferred. During the transition, Herbert Brownell, former chairman of the Republican National Committee and subsequently Eisenhower's attorney general, made strategic appointments to incorporate the Dewey wing of the party into the administration. Once the term began, Charles F. Willis, Jr., assistant to Chief of Staff Sherman Adams, handled both political executive and patronage appointments. Although Willis and his staff occupied a lofty position in the White House Office, they did little more than quench the Republican congressmen's thirst for patronage. Systematic recruitment of loyalists was tried, but Operation People's Mandate, as the effort was called, aroused such controversy when it began tampering with the independence of civil service positions that the enterprise was quickly abandoned.³⁴ By the end of the administration, staff clearance of appointments had settled into an established, perfunctory routine.

Inclined neither to seize control of appointments nor to exploit Republican politicians' claims to the president's advantage, the

33. Dawson interview.

34. Laurin L. Henry, *Presidential Transitions* (Brookings, 1960), pp. 676-80.

Eisenhower White House did little more than formalize further the traditional process. Requests were submitted and proposed appointments were cleared by means of orderly, well-delineated guidelines.³⁵ Eisenhower appears rarely to have become involved in appointments.

The vision of Dawson's "Best Brains" entered presidential practice in John Kennedy's administration. For such a consequential innovation, staff responsibility for identifying candidates occurred casually, even inadvertently. It was not born of dissatisfaction with the service the president was receiving from his political executives, although Kennedy was no different from any other president in complaining about the unresponsiveness in the departments. Nor is there any evidence that the White House was trying to wrest control of appointments from party or Congress. Instead, the president was cultivating the goodwill of congressional Democrats and working harmoniously with the national party apparatus. In fact, the reform appears to have arisen more as an afterthought.

Six months into Kennedy's term, the White House senior staff realized that filling vacancies would be a continuing activity. Because no one was much interested in clearing appointments, Ralph Dungan, who had informally taken on the responsibility, recruited Harvard professor Dan Fenn to set up an office for selection. "We started with nothing really," Fenn recalled, "no charter, no discussions with [Kenneth] O'Donnell or Dungan or with the President about what this thing was supposed to do or how it was supposed to function. . . . They just wanted some recruiting done."³⁶ Given a free hand, and unsophisticated in Washington ways, Fenn developed a plan for the staff to identify candidates who had the technical expertise rather than political assets. Instead of state parties and congressional staffs, the hunting grounds became universities, think tanks, and the career federal service. The staff's function was clearly important: one study found that more than half of Kennedy's appointees were initially contacted by someone in the White

35. For example, whereas Truman's staff informally solicited the FBI to provide security clearances, Eisenhower's staff made such clearances standard procedure. Mackenzie, *Politics of Presidential Appointments*, pp. 14-21.

36. National Academy of Public Administration, "Recruiting Presidential Appointees: A Conference of Former Presidential Personnel Assistants" (Washington, D.C.: NAPA, 1985), p. 3.

House Office, compared with fewer than a quarter for Kennedy's predecessors.³⁷

Why this expansion of the president's authority did not generate howls of protest from Congress and the Democratic party is not altogether clear. Fenn's low profile and his standard reassurance to outsiders that his was not a "job shop" may have initially allayed suspicions. He also began work after the transition appointments had been made and the Democratic faithful had recaptured most of the plums in the executive agencies. Then too, the demand for positions may have been at a low ebb during the early 1960s: few field offices remained exempt from civil service, and these jobs had traditionally been more valued for sustaining the local party than those located in Washington. Dungan and Fenn also limited White House involvement to the most important executive appointments, and because these were fewer than they would be after the creation of the Senior Executive Service in the late 1970s, Kennedy's staff may have received fewer candidates than their counterparts in subsequent administrations. These reasons aside, this innovation would never have been tolerated had patronage not lost its value as the currency of support.

Clearly, Fenn's operation set important precedents. Limited in scope and staff and lacking grand aspirations, however, its innovations were more procedural than substantive. The full transformation of personnel selection from an appurtenance of party politics to a centralized management device was left for subsequent presidents to discover.

After his election in 1964, Lyndon Johnson faced a recruitment task comparable to that of a new president. Many holdovers from the Kennedy administration were anxious to leave, and others were deemed less necessary to the president now that he had been elected in his own right. Johnson also knew that he would soon need special recruits to implement the Great Society programs. Rather than return to arrangements that placed a premium on political accommodation, he expanded Kennedy's personnel operation. He enlisted John Macy, the head of the Civil Service Commission, to oversee White House recruitment and directed him to canvass universities and the career government service for the ex-

37. Dean E. Mann and Jameson W. Doig, *The Assistant Secretaries: Problems and Processes of Appointment* (Brookings, 1965).

perts he needed. "Do not worry about politics," he instructed Macy; others in the White House would concern themselves with those matters. Thus began the most comprehensive presidential talent search to date. Within a year or so, Macy had accumulated more than 30,000 names of potential appointees for about 600 offices.³⁸

Johnson invested more than his predecessors in establishing personnel recruitment as a White House routine. He insisted that nominations for all but the highest positions pass through Macy's office.³⁹ He also insulated Macy from political pressure by having him run the operation from his office at the Civil Service Commission. The system seemed to work, although from time to time assistants who had to clear Macy's recommendations with party politicians would carp about his political naiveté or what they viewed as his meddling in politically sensitive matters. Macy recalled White House staffers in less than nostalgic terms: "Each one of those power-seekers really feels he's in charge of getting the people in his particular program area."⁴⁰ The creation of a formal White House unit for presidential appointments would await the Nixon administration. Johnson prepared the way, however, by recruiting a professional, insulating him from intrusion by others on the staff, and elevating his work to central importance in staffing the administration.

Richard Nixon began without a personnel strategy, and in an early cabinet meeting, becoming caught up in his own rhetoric, he ceded to his secretaries the prerogative to fill their departmental positions. Ability, not loyalty to the administration, he advised them, should be the primary criterion in hiring. But by the time the meeting was over he confided to an aide, "I have just made a big mistake."⁴¹

In the absence of a plan that would quickly correct this error, the White House staff was relegated to processing a deluge of nominees from Congress and the bureaucracy. Peter Flanigan and his

38. Transcript, John W. Macy oral history interview, tape 3, pp. 8-14, Johnson Library.

39. Richard L. Schott and Dagmar S. Hamilton, *People, Positions, and Power: The Political Appointments of Lyndon Johnson* (University of Chicago Press, 1983), pp. 22-26.

40. NAPA, "Recruiting Presidential Appointees," p. 42.

41. Rowland Evans, Jr., and Robert D. Novak, *Nixon in the White House: The Frustration of Power* (Random House, 1971), p. 66.

assistant, Harry Fleming, went through the motions of assembling a talent bank, but under these arrangements, it had little purpose. Clearance rather than recruitment became the order of the day.

Within six months, the president and his senior aides had become frustrated with the White House's limited role. They frequently found themselves having to spend time to prevent some appointments, such as those opposed by an important constituency that appealed directly to the White House. In the fall of 1970 Chief of Staff H. R. Haldeman invited Frederic Malek, who as undersecretary at Health, Education, and Welfare had helped purge administrators unsympathetic to the president's social policies, to propose alternative arrangements. After several months Malek presented a highly critical report, charging that "Presidential directives have not been carried out, and counter-productive efforts have taken place within a number of Departments."⁴² He proposed creating a multidivisional White House personnel office that would have exclusive jurisdiction over appointments. Nixon liked his ideas, and by year's end Malek had moved into the White House.

Within his new office Malek established subunits responsible for recruiting and for drafting procedures to evaluate management. The recruiting unit was divided into one group charged with identifying and clearing the best political appointments and a second that searched for talent loyal to the president. Frequently these groups conducted searches for the same slot and forwarded their recommendations to the president.⁴³ Malek also brought in private management consultants, one of whom, Pendleton James, would later head Reagan's personnel operation. Within a short time about thirty staff members had created an office that "was more specialized, more centralized, and more professional than any of its predecessors."⁴⁴

For all it sought, the Personnel Office initially stayed clear of two politically sensitive activities: appointments to supergrade and

42. "Management of Non-Career Personnel: Recommendations for Improvement" (December 18, 1970), pp. 30-31, cited in Mackenzie, *Politics of Presidential Appointments*, p. 53.

43. Malek added that generally the substantive nominee got the appointment, but frequently when a strong political appointment was identified, he would be checked out and approved by those recruiters concerned exclusively with professional standards. NAPA, "Recruiting Presidential Appointees," pp. 9-10.

44. Mackenzie, *Politics of Presidential Appointments*, pp. 49-50.

similarly exempted positions and a purge of current appointees selected under the earlier system. Both were first orders of business to be taken up in the second term. Within days of Nixon's reelection, the office sent out evaluation forms for all presidential appointees, putting them on notice that they might be asked to resign. This was the first phase of a strategy to take control of the departments through recruitment, retention, and promotion. These unprecedented efforts took staff; by the end of 1972 the personnel staff reached fifty-two and would grow yet larger. The second phase was to be a year-long effort to centralize recruitment of lower-level executives and establish control over agencies by placing Nixon loyalists in their personnel offices and at other pressure points. The third phase, to begin in 1974, was to consolidate control and to place people who had been politically helpful.⁴⁵

Execution fell far short of White House expectations, however, because the president's goals were contrary to those of the bureaucracy, the congressional committees that oversaw it, and clientele groups that had been achieving representation in the agencies. Overly aggressive staff generated bad publicity when they ran afoul of civil service regulations or appeared callous about careers. Then the distractions of Watergate ended any designs for running the bureaucracy from the White House. Still, presidential appointments that had once been determined through negotiating among fragmented institutions had now become a resource that a president could use unilaterally to expand his control over the operations of government.

In the aftermath of Watergate, Presidents Ford and Carter assumed less aggressive postures, but, significantly, neither wholly abandoned Nixon's innovations. Ford pared the personnel staff to thirty-five people and renamed the office. Outside recruiters were replaced by those with government experience who would presumably be more politically sensitive. The administration also invited representatives from the agencies to join White House staff in interviewing potential appointees. But if the Ford White House lowered its sights, it did not surrender the president's prerogative to recruit loyalists. This was left to Jimmy Carter.

Despite auspicious signs—the staff had started to inventory talent before the election—the Carter administration never ade-

45. Memo, Jerry Jones to H. R. Haldeman, March 7, 1973, Nixon collection, National Archives.

quately outlined a White House role in presidential appointments. An early jurisdictional battle among the senior staff sidetracked advanced planning for a comprehensive talent search. The White House was also unprepared for the volume of requests from the Democrats in Congress, who had been denied access to federal appointments for eight years. Neither problem would have been too serious had President Carter been committed to a centralized personnel strategy. But he was not. Indeed, within weeks after the inauguration, Washington insiders realized that the president did not much care who occupied the agency posts. One tell-tale sign was that when the White House staff and a cabinet secretary disagreed over a particular appointment, the secretary usually prevailed. Each loss, of course, only emboldened the cabinet secretaries and reduced the staff's importance.

The result was reminiscent of Nixon's inadvertent early abandonment of the presidential prerogative.⁴⁶ Like Nixon, by midterm Carter had become disillusioned with the results. In 1978 Arnie Miller joined the president's staff to ensure a stronger presidential hand in appointments. Miller compiled a data bank of potential appointees, hired one of Malek's assistants, and borrowed elements of Nixon's controversial personnel policies.⁴⁷

Ronald Reagan's transition team behaved as though it had learned from the mistakes of the Nixon and Carter administrations. Although Reagan gave lip service to the tradition of cabinet government, he abandoned any pretense of returning to it well before the inauguration. The transition staff decided at the outset that appointments would be a jealously guarded prerogative of the White House Office, and that meant for the first time appointments at every rank, from the cabinet secretary down to the 2,500 schedule C and other noncareer administrative positions. Even the

46. So too was Stuart Eizenstat's remark, "That's the whole ball game." James P. Pfiffner, *The Strategic Presidency: Hitting the Ground Running* (Chicago: Dorsey Press, 1988), p. 83. Personnel director Arnie Miller concurs that Carter's early approach was a failure. "He tried to decentralize personnel. He tried to cut back on the size of the Presidential Personnel Office staff. He bumbled it. Midway through his presidency, he suddenly realized that he had given away the store." Miller then reflected, "The expectations are still there on a President." NAPA, "Recruiting Presidential Appointees," p. 30.

47. But gaining control over the process proved difficult. "Even in our own office," Miller recalled, "someone else was calling with a Schedule C recommendation who had no business making that recommendation. It jeopardized our own credibility." NAPA, "Recruiting Presidential Appointees," p. 10.

selection of federal appeals court judges, traditionally the responsibility of the Justice Department, was moved into the White House. According to Pendleton James, Reagan's first personnel director,

the Cabinet officers and major agency heads were advised prior to their accepting the position . . . that there would be an organization in the White House that would make its voice heard on the appointments and, if you had somebody that you wanted in an office, it would have to go through the White House Presidential Personnel Office because everything in the appointment process went into the Oval Office through the Presidential Personnel Office. We clearly established control at the beginning.⁴⁸

Not surprisingly, given the new mandate, the size of the personnel office more than doubled. But as important as these resources were, they would have counted for little had President Reagan not consistently displayed a keen interest in his staff's progress toward filling key department positions. By appointing James to the highest staff rank, assistant to the president, and moving the personnel office into the west wing of the White House, the president strengthened his personnel director's hand in dealing with the departments.

James generally followed Malek's lead and later credited him with making the breakthrough in organizing recruitment. While hiring loyalist managers was the most important responsibility, political approval was required. But, in a new twist, political clearance now was achieved within the White House. The Congressional Liaison Office, the domestic policy adviser, the national security adviser, and the Political Affairs Office, as well as each of the governing troika of James Baker, Michael Deaver, and Edwin Meese, were given an opportunity to approve candidates. These offices certainly checked with politicians whose opinions needed to be taken into account, but the White House staff now firmly controlled the process.

President Reagan's innovation did not require a dramatic departure from past personnel practices. He could enlist the White House staff because Truman had made political clearance a task of his staff and because Kennedy's staff had focused on recruitment

48. *Ibid.*, p. 11.

instead of clearance. Johnson too had contributed by employing Macy's office to identify nominees who would not be beholden to other politicians. And Nixon allocated a sizable staff and created the White House Personnel Office to supervise selection. Reagan's innovations were but the culminating increments of an evolution long under way.

The Growth of Communications

Because cultivating popular support for the president's programs is fundamental to democratic leadership, every president's staff has at some point been put to work making phone calls to friendly journalists, doing advance work for presidential travel, writing speeches, monitoring public opinion polls, or performing the myriad other activities designed to bolster the president's image with the American public. Historically, in-house public relations arose as the president turned his attention to winning reelection. Only in the past two decades, however, have presidents employed professionals in the White House to pursue public relations campaigns to promote their policies in Washington.

For many years some public relations work was performed by the presidential press secretary. Early in the twentieth century, the president discovered that if he wanted to speak to the American public, he would have to do so through correspondents based in Washington.⁴⁹ To help attend to their needs, Franklin Roosevelt designated Stephen Early as the first press secretary. Since then the press secretary's office has expanded at a faster pace than the overall staff. One obvious reason has been the emergence of radio and television. Cozy, unrecorded press conferences with give and take between the president and the reporters and casual background briefings by the press secretary were the daily bread of print journalists. They did not, however, nourish broadcast journalists, who worked to a different deadline and needed live feeds or film. These different needs and the new opportunities provided presidents by television led to the creation of a second White House media office in the late 1960s.

Before then there were occasional glimpses of the future. Harry Truman wanted to appoint a radio executive as his press secretary

49. This is described more fully in Kernell, *Going Public*, pp. 55-68. Also see Leo Rosten, *The Washington Correspondents* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1937); and James E. Pollard, *The Presidents and the Press* (Macmillan, 1947).

after Early's departure, but the uproar from correspondents quickly changed his mind. Eisenhower's press secretary James Hagerty had once waxed enthusiastically of having a weekly television show for President Eisenhower, but slowly the idea fell by the wayside.⁵⁰ His understandable preoccupation with the White House press corps, however, did not prevent him from keeping close tabs on Howard Pyle, who had been brought into the administration to help with publicity.⁵¹ Clearly, direct nationwide public relations remained subordinate to press relations within Washington. Bill Moyers, who served as Johnson's press secretary from 1965 until 1967, wrote numerous proposals outlining how the administration could use public relations to counter an increasingly hostile press treatment of the president's Vietnam policies. His ideas included many of those that would be implemented in the next administration.⁵²

Suffering from a credibility gap, Johnson is known to have wanted the help of some "public relations genius." When long-time journalist and NBC executive Robert Kintner joined the White House staff, many thought this would be his job. He advised the president on how to handle columnists, periodically urged him to change his media strategy, and made some modest revisions in the flow of public relations activities out of the White House.⁵³ But despite propitious circumstances, splitting public relations from press relations was apparently never seriously contemplated. Perhaps Kintner was no match for Moyers. Or perhaps, as Joseph Laitin, a former Johnson aide, has suggested, the president trusted none of his aides sufficiently to enshrine one as public relations czar.⁵⁴

After experimenting briefly with the arrangements of his predecessors, President Nixon decided that the press secretary was so busy responding to the Washington press corps that he could not

50. James C. Hagerty, *The Diary of James C. Hagerty: Eisenhower in Mid-Course, 1954-1955*, ed. Robert H. Ferrell (Indiana University Press, 1983).

51. Michael B. Grossman and Martha J. Kumar, *Portraying the President: The White House and the News Media* (John Hopkins University Press, 1981), p. 97.

52. Bill Moyers to President Johnson, June 6, 1966, Johnson Library.

53. Instances are reported by Larry Berman in "Johnson and the White House Staff," in Robert A. Divine, ed., *The Johnson Years, Volume One: Foreign Policy, The Great Society, and the White House* (University Press of Kansas, 1981), pp. 187-213. Also see Robert Kintner to Bill Moyers, April 8, 1966, Johnson Library.

54. Grossman and Kumar, *Portraying the President*, p. 97.

help the president attract more sympathetic coverage in the rest of the country. Nixon needed an adviser who commanded a broader view of his publicity needs and someone who had ties with the non-Washington press. So in 1969 he hired Herbert Klein, director of the American Society of Newspaper Editors, to head a new Office of Communications.

Early in his tenure, Klein proposed several ways his office could make a special contribution. It could "develop the means of depicting pictorially the programs of the Administration as seen on television." Radio, he noted, was an "almost untouched area . . . which has a growing audience particularly in news." He also believed the office could arrange more briefing sessions for broadcast journalists, as well as newspaper editors in "key areas across the country" and could "work with each of the departments of government in coordinating and augmenting their public relations efforts."⁵⁵ Subsequent administrations have weighted these activities differently and have added others, but Klein had clearly identified what would become the primary missions of the office.

Although a long-time friend of Nixon, Klein was an outsider to the senior aides. Known for his close ties to the newspaper industry, he was never fully accepted into Nixon's inner circle. And perhaps worse, he had an insufficiently low regard for the press. He actually set up the office to help journalists and increase the quality of information about the administration disseminated to the news media around the country.⁵⁶ He refused to send out stories he considered propaganda, and when the administration's press relations deteriorated, he refused to break off his contacts.

Suspicious of Klein's loyalties, Haldeman appointed his own aide, Jeb Stuart Magruder, as assistant communications director. Thus began a rivalry so antagonistic that it continued after the men left office. While Klein sought to coordinate news releases from the agencies, Magruder orchestrated their public statements to boost the administration. While Klein tried to cooperate with the press, Magruder devised plans to discredit NBC's David Brinkley. Only when Charles Colson attempted to take over the Communications Office as a post from which he could bash the press did the two

55. Herbert G. Klein, Memorandum for the President, October 9, 1969, Nixon collection, National Archives.

56. For instance, he helped journalists file requests under the Freedom of Information Act. Herbert G. Klein, *Making it Perfectly Clear* (Doubleday, 1980), p. 186.

cooperate.⁵⁷ But in the end, the hardliners won out. Klein "became a virtual figurehead. Magruder—dutifully taking his cues from Haldeman—was the de facto director." In 1973 Klein left and was replaced by fellow staff member Ken Clawson, "a hardliner himself, who took his cues from Colson."⁵⁸

This internal combat and its subsequent association with Watergate rocked the office to its foundation. Yet in one guise or another, every subsequent president has found it necessary to designate someone to perform the kinds of services described in Klein's memo. President Ford dismissed Clawson and subordinated the office to the Press Secretary's Office under Ron Nessen. Gerald Warren, assistant press secretary in the Nixon White House, was selected to head the unit, and to avoid the politically charged title of communications director, he was given the convoluted one of deputy press secretary for information liaison. For the next two years the office limited itself to low-profile activities such as feeding stories to the non-Washington press and arranging interviews between correspondents and administration officials.

In 1976 Ford's chief of staff, Richard Cheney, rejuvenated the Communications Office to put the White House on a campaign footing. Speechwriter David Gergen was appointed head of an informal communications group to coordinate the statements of the various White House units and presidential agencies and to promote favorable images of the president. The separate Office of Communications was restored and incorporated speechwriting, research, and a television office. Cheney, like Haldeman before him, used the office to control the flow of information from the White House.⁵⁹

The Carter administration rechristened the Office of Communications the Media Liaison Office and subordinated it once again to the press secretary's office. But in 1978, with his public and congressional support in disarray, Carter recruited his former campaign adviser, Gerald Rafshoon, to solve his communication problems. Media Liaison remained under the press secretary, but a new

57. Klein, *Making it Perfectly Clear*; and Jeb Stuart Magruder, *An American Life: One Man's Road to Watergate* (Atheneum, 1974).

58. John A. Maltese, "The Office of Communications: Its Functional Evolution (1969-1974)" (Master's thesis, Johns Hopkins University, 1985).

59. John A. Maltese, "The White House Office of Communication: Channeling Information in the Executive Branch," paper prepared for the 1988 Midwestern Political Science Association meeting, p. 34.

Communications Office was quickly assembled from existing units to oversee speechwriting and media advance work. As a long-standing confidant of the president, Rafshoon wielded the authority necessary to make coordination work. Working closely with Press Secretary Jody Powell, he succeeded more than any of his predecessors in orchestrating the administration's public relations.⁶⁰

With the arrival of Ronald Reagan, the "Great Communicator," the office's position became secure. James Baker's staff director, David Gergen, was appointed assistant to the president for communications, thus allowing the heads of speechwriting, the press office, and communications to report directly to the same person. Reflecting its importance to Reagan, the Communications Office was subdivided into a White House television office for arranging the president's television appearances, a speaker's bureau for scheduling appearances of administration officials, and a research and writing section for preparing fact sheets and briefing the president for press conferences.⁶¹ In a repetition of the emerging pattern, control of communications gradually gravitated to the senior staff. In early 1984, with the election approaching, Gergen resigned and troika member Mike Deaver assumed full operational control of the White House's public relations.

The importance of public relations was confirmed in that each of the four chiefs of staff who served Reagan picked his own director of communications. One of Donald Regan's first acts was to appoint Patrick Buchanan. Where Gergen and his boss Baker had viewed the office's duties as coordinating public activities and generating goodwill within the news industry, Buchanan made it a focal point and ultimately a lightning rod for the administration. "Let Reagan be Reagan," was to be the leitmotif of this second, more conservative Reagan regime, and Buchanan sounded the theme as loudly as anyone. The directorship was being transformed from an administrative to a policymaking position. Within a brief time, he emerged as the administration's spokesman for the conservative movement. Eventually, Buchanan's ambitions outgrew the office, and in the spring of 1987 he resigned, saying that he could better promote conservative causes from outside the

60. Grossman and Kumar, *Portraying the President*, pp. 98-99.

61. Dom Bonafede, "The Selling of the Executive Branch—Public Information or Promotion?" *National Journal*, vol. 13 (June 27, 1981), pp. 1133-57.

White House, and began taking soundings of his support for the Republican nomination for the presidency.⁶²

Reagan's third chief, Howard Baker, immediately chose former Senate aide Thomas Griscom as the new communications director.⁶³ Together they took on the task of conciliating Congress and others about the involvement of Reagan and his staff in the Iran-contra scandal. Griscom returned the position to its managerial function. Still, the directorship retained its importance. When, in Reagan's words, "rhetoric is policy," the aide who controls the flow of presidential messages to the country shapes the course of policy discussion.

Both Johnson's reluctance to entrust public relations to an aide and the subsequent politicization of the communications director's role illustrate how vital this activity has become to modern presidential leadership. Its policy implications are too important for it to be consigned to the lower reaches of the line staff, and yet it is a job that requires a great deal of routine work performed with a high level of competence. The communications director should both understand the techniques of public relations and appreciate the needs and practices of those in the media whose favor the president seeks to curry. Moreover, the communications director must frequently coordinate the activities of other administration officials in the White House and in the executive departments. They will naturally be inclined to view him as overstepping his authority. To succeed, then, the director needs the level of support from the president that is normally associated with being a member of the upper-tier senior staff. Thus the communications director occupies an ambivalent status in the White House Office. He needs to be firmly footed on both tiers of the organization and as a consequence sometimes finds himself on shaky ground on one or the other.

While the rising importance of public relations politicized the role of the director within the staff, it guaranteed that the routines

62. On the disagreement between Reagan and Buchanan, see "Reagan's Speechwriter Says He Was Dismissed in Dispute," *New York Times*, June 10, 1986, p. A20. Buchanan's resignation is reported in James R. Dickenson, "White House Communications Aide Buchanan Resigns," *Washington Post*, February 4, 1987, p. A8.

63. The rising status of the communications director is indicated by Griscom's willingness to accept the post when the position he wanted, deputy chief of staff, had been offered to someone else. Steven V. Roberts, "President Names Tennessee as Director of Communications," *New York Times*, April 2, 1987, p. B10.

of communications would continue to flourish. In 1969, Klein had begun modestly with four aides and an ill-defined mandate to cultivate the non-Washington press. By 1988, the office contained a sizable staff supervising five other units, two of which did not even exist in the highly rationalized Nixon White House Office.⁶⁴

Commonalities of Line Staff Development

In the Reagan administration, personnel and public relations became fully developed operations and were widely predicted to become models for his successors. Each began years earlier as incidental activities of a few aides and subsequently showed the same development tendencies. As centralized personnel selection and communications became more important to their leadership, presidents recruited people with backgrounds in these fields. In neither cases did the first expert brought into the White House—Truman's Dawson in personnel and Johnson's Kintner in communications—occupy a fully specialized role. The first two aides to be given fixed responsibilities were John Macy in personnel and Herbert Klein in communications. Under President Nixon, both these line activities were for the first time formally designated as separate organizational subunits of the White House Office. Since then, they have steadily expanded in size and function to the extent that the senior aides who preside over the personnel and communications offices are commonly referred to as czars.

A superficial reading of these histories might suggest that the emergence of routines has less to do with the leadership strategies of presidents than with the steady expansion of function and accretion of structure that typify growth within organizations. The incremental development of staff structure should not conceal its true cause: the strategic behavior of presidents. A principle of political physics is at work. The more aggressively a president probes the frontier of his control, the greater the resistance he encounters. Those politicians whose prerogatives are threatened may themselves react aggressively and seek to pare back the president's authority. Minor departures from current baselines that are consis-

64. They are the Office of Media Relations and the Office of Public Affairs. The other three offices under the Communications umbrella are speechwriting, scheduling, and advance planning. Maltese, "White House Office of Communications," app.

tent with precedents may, by contrast, accomplish the same purposes without triggering resistance.

The comparative advantage of incrementalist strategies can be found in the history of staff development. When presidents have sought new institutional resources requiring statutory authority, they have frequently been rebuffed.⁶⁵ Chilly congressional receptions met proposals by various task forces and commissions to strengthen presidential staff. But until recent times, by contrast, the ancient practice of detailing went almost unnoticed.

One finds incrementalism as well in advances in presidential public relations. President-elect Kennedy announced that he would conduct live televised news conferences and thereby gained a means for speaking directly to the American public. While seeming to preserve the special access of Washington correspondents to the president, he transformed the press conference.⁶⁶ When presidents have sought to increase dramatically their access to prime-time television, they have occasionally been challenged by network executives.⁶⁷ Similarly, when the national networks denied airtime to President Reagan in 1987, chief of staff Howard Baker argued vigorously that the denial violated previous understandings about the president's access to television.⁶⁸

Instances of building on precedents to increase the president's control over personnel recruitment are also plentiful. When Nix-

65. A Democratic Congress refused to go along with the Brownlow commission's recommendations that the Civil Service Commission be installed in the new Executive Office of the President. For the congressional politics of the enactment of the Brownlow proposals, see Peri E. Arnold, *Making the Managerial Presidency: Comprehensive Reorganization Planning, 1905-1980* (Princeton University Press, 1986), pp. 107-15. A decade later, President Truman had designs on converting the Office of War Mobilization and Reconversion to a national planning agency, but when he was advised that the new Republican Congress would never agree, he quietly moved its director John Steelman and much of his staff into the White House. Herman Miles Somers, *Presidential Agency, OWMR: The Office of War Mobilization and Reconversion* (Harvard University Press, 1950), pp. 95-101.

66. Kernell, *Going Public*, pp. 104-05.

67. When this happened to the Nixon White House, it responded by arguing that its requests were not out of line with the time the networks had given its predecessors. *Ibid.*, pp. 102-04.

68. The networks responded that the president had not submitted a formal request but had simply announced he would be speaking on *contra aid* "if cameras wanted to attend." James Gerstenzang and Josh Getlin, "Reagan Offers New *Contra Aid* Compromise," *Los Angeles Times*, February 3, 1988; and Eleanor Randolph, "Reagan's Preemptive Strikeout," *Washington Post*, February 3, 1988, p. C1.

on's staff codified recruitment procedures in a White House manual for political executives early in the president's second term, every technique, including those for circumventing civil service rules, cited as precedent the practices of past presidents. Yet never before had these practices been formed into a code of conduct sanctioned by the White House. The difference between Nixon's operation and what had preceded it was the difference between "organized and unorganized crime."⁶⁹

Expanding the base and enlisting precedents are venerable strategies to allow the president to reach some new point without disrupting current sensibilities or arousing opposition. But they do so by encouraging presidential self-restraint. The result is what I have described in the case studies: the gradual, nearly continuous expansion of staff responsibilities and institutional resources—strategically inspired and environmentally conditioned.

Incrementalism may have provided the tactics of change, but to understand the motivation and direction, one must delve elsewhere. Presidents have chosen to centralize functions in the White House because the resources (potential benefits) and leverage (potential costs) of those politicians whose compliance the president traditionally needed have eroded. For example, when Dawson proposed the concept of a talent bank to Truman, the benefits of patronage and the costs of violating other politicians' expectations made it an impractical idea. Truman felt he could not afford to upset politicians whose support was needed.⁷⁰

Lyndon Johnson decided differently, but he appears to have arrived at his choice employing much the same calculus: balancing the loyalty of executives with few political assets versus the resourcefulness but independence of those with strong political connections. Johnson emphasized to Macy that he wanted loyalty most, and that career civil servants and university professors, rather than local politicians or congressional staffs, were to be the source, because whatever advantage to be had from appointing Washington politicians would be outweighed by the costs of their divided loyalties.⁷¹ So Johnson, the protégé of Franklin Roosevelt

69. Hecla, *Government of Strangers*, p. 74.

70. Dawson interview.

71. And in many instances civil servants and academics had the technical competence he wanted for his Great Society programs. Interview with John Macy, July 27, 1983, Washington, D.C.

and as politically acute, made a decision his mentor would have shunned.⁷²

What about politics had altered the strategy for making appointments? First, appointments had declined as the currency of politics. The continued extension of the civil service had greatly depleted the availability of lower-level patronage positions. And although the emergence of a large bureaucracy administering federal social policies had generated many more executive positions in Washington, these offices were less valuable to congressmen trying to shore up local campaign organizations and demanded a level of technical or managerial competence that was exceptional for the political appointments of an earlier era.

Second, the traditional claimants had either disappeared or their needs had changed in ways that made patronage less important. The state and national party apparatus had so atrophied that it played little part in identifying or clearing appointments. With great effort James Rowe fended off assertions of rights by DNC chairmen James Farley and Ed Flynn to preserve an independent role for President Roosevelt. But now presidents occasionally explore ways to invigorate the formal party apparatus in an effort to rekindle a party feeling on which they might then draw.

Members of Congress no longer need patronage the way they once did. In an age of television advertising, professional phone banks, and targeted mail, campaigns are less labor intensive. Money suffices. And staffs have grown to such an extent that congressmen have been able to outfit a permanent campaign organization under the guise of district offices.

These and other changes, gradual as they have been, have given presidents the latitude to select political executives according to their technical expertise and loyalty. The evolution of the White House staff's role in recruitment reflects this transformation of the political landscape.

The same holds true for White House communications. More

72. Symbolic of the political transformation were the efforts of James Rowe to educate John Macy in the kinds of men and women who would serve the president well. Good Democrats, particularly Washington lawyers with strong associations throughout the party, were being overlooked in favor of bureaucrats. How, Rowe questioned at one point, would they help Johnson pull the party together for the 1968 election? Exasperated, Rowe finally turned to his friend Johnson who told him to "lay off Macy." His talent search was going precisely the way he wanted. Macy interview.

than any other president, Ronald Reagan sought to mobilize public support for himself and his policies in Washington; and his success was unparalleled. But his record was the culmination of a long process; every president since Hoover has incorporated ever greater doses of public relations into his leadership strategy. However measured—political travel outside of Washington, speeches to particular constituencies, appearances at photogenic gatherings—presidents have increasingly resorted to public relations to improve their chances of success in Washington.⁷³

The growth of these public activities was made possible by technological advances. Instead of arduous treks across America by rail, such as President Wilson's ill-fated attempt to generate popular support for joining the League of Nations, air travel allows the president to deliver an address to an important constituency in Los Angeles and return to Washington the same day. Presidents are more inclined to take their case to the people because it is much easier to do so. Again, before radio, presidents could appeal to the country only through highly mediated news reporting and movie newsreels. Not until Franklin Roosevelt delivered his famous fire-side chats was any president able fully to convert his status as a national representative into a compelling resource for pressuring Congress and the bureaucracy. The omnipresence of television has made "going public" a vital ingredient in modern presidential leadership.

Technological advances are, however, only half the story. For the increased use of technology to be worthwhile, those whom the president seeks to influence must be vulnerable to appeals for public support. If leadership could be maintained only through bargaining and compromise, a public appeal would be harmful. A public relations campaign introduces an element of pressure when negotiators are supposed to be searching for mutual accommodation. It commits the president to a position, making it awkward for him to come away from the bargaining table with less than he wanted. Finally, by appealing to the public to call, write and send Mailgrams, the president undermines other politicians' claims to represent the interests of their constituencies. Consider the bemusement of a congressional leader who returns to the Hill after a strategy lunch at the White House, only to hear the president on

73. On each dimension, a steady growth rate has been under way since Hoover. See Kernell, *Going Public*, pp. 83-110, especially pp. 86, 94, 97.

the radio exhorting the American public to pressure their representatives to accept his legislative program. When Roosevelt actually did something like that in attempting to push his plans for expanding the Supreme Court, he suffered the worst legislative defeat of his thirteen years in the White House.

Washington is a more individualistic community today than in Roosevelt's time.⁷⁴ The growth of the modern welfare state has created larger, more diverse constituencies that are highly attuned to and represented in Washington decisionmaking. Modern communications has made ordinary citizens more familiar with the actions of their representatives, and has made the representatives more sensitive to the opinions of their voters. Consequently, the media has become a far more prominent force in Washington politics, especially as political parties have lost their importance in guiding voters and aggregating disparate constituency interests.

These long-term trends have created Washington politicians who are less willing to subordinate individual prerogatives to the collective needs of their institutions. They are more short-sighted, less willing to defer immediate benefits for long-term investments in coalition building. One result is that would-be leaders have greater difficulty attracting followers. Presidents find fewer politicians who will serve as potential coalition partners. In the absence of leaders, presidents have to engage many more trading partners, unsure as they do so that these politicians can or will deliver their end of the bargain. Weakening party ties have further eroded the affinities that traditionally made bargaining easier and occasionally unnecessary. Increasingly presidents have found comparative economy in giving up bargaining and working instead on politicians' preferences en masse. Public relations then substitutes for negotiation with political leaders.

The Emergence of White House Managers

The White House is the president's workplace. Some presidents work well with many assistants; others prefer to work intimately with only two or three. Some prefer formal and highly structured

74. For a good impression of the changing political relations in Washington, compare Douglass Cater, *Power in Washington: A Critical Look at Today's Struggle to Govern the Nation's Capital* (Random House, 1964); and Hedrick Smith, *The Power Game: How Washington Works* (Random House, 1988).

staffs; others like to mix up assignments and have no fixed schedule for staff meetings. These work habits largely determine the organization and responsibilities of the senior staff, the White House managers.

Yet the special demands on coordination made by the growing size and complexity of the White House staff suggest that the president's choices in these matters will not be totally free.⁷⁵ What are the implications for the senior staff of the presidential strategy of centralization and the structure it begets? Coping with a large, complex organization involves more than fine tuning for maximum efficiency. In the absence of coordination, not only will some tasks fail to be performed while others will be unnecessarily duplicated, but also the organization will be rife with personal disputes and battles over jurisdiction.

Organizations need policing. The more complex the organization, the greater the problem posed by the cover of anonymity. And staffs with high turnover, such as the president's, will have the most serious problems, since its members have little stake in the integrity of procedures but may have a great stake in policy decisions. Hence they find themselves exploiting or even sacrificing procedural integrity to advocate certain policies. This divergence of interests is one reason the White House Office has become so notorious for the leaks and infighting that frustrate the best efforts of every president.

Much of the work senior managers do is to relieve the president from coordination qua policing. President Ford's first chief of staff, Donald Rumsfeld, commented that the chief of staff was always "heaving his body" between White House groups to make sure that the process worked.⁷⁶ Similarly, Michael Deaver, one of Ronald Reagan's first-term senior managers, described his role as the "protector" of the president. "Everybody who runs a department within the White House has a constituency," he explained. "And they . . . want to get those people off their backs, so they dump them on us in the scheduling office in hopes that the president will take care of it."⁷⁷

75. Herbert A. Simon, *Administrative Behavior: A Study of Decision-making Processes in Administrative Organizations*, 2d ed. (Macmillan, 1957), pp. 26-28.

76. Kernell and Popkin, eds., *Chief of Staff*, pp. 172-73.

77. Colin Campbell, personal interview with Mike Deaver, May 3, 1983, Washington, D.C.

Such stratagems have a purpose. It is not writer's block that makes the speechwriters chronically tardy in turning in drafts for review. They simply do not want the text changed. Lower-level employees leak embarrassing information about their colleagues to gain an advantage as the moment of decision approaches. They push decisions onto the president to avoid blame if things go badly and to show their influence if they go well. Size and complexity imply more than the need for managers to make sure the organizational parts mesh. They must also contain the competition for influence and channel it in constructive ways.⁷⁸ As the White House becomes more complex, so too do these management problems. Presidents who manage their own offices will increasingly risk being overwhelmed with police work.

In the early days, senior aides were a president's trusted advisers, and chief executives could mold staffs to their liking without creating a crisis. The experience of Roosevelt, Truman, and Eisenhower suggested that the White House staff could and should be organized however the president wanted. Yet even during these presidencies, elements of organizational imperative were emerging, so that now the question of how to organize the staff has become a paramount concern of those who study and advise presidents.

One can discern the consequences of size and complexity for senior aides in the ways presidents have used their assistants. To illustrate the trend, I shall inspect three presidents' approaches to their senior staffs. Presidents Truman and Reagan represent endpoints of both the chronology and a continuum of staff responsibility. President Johnson is a transitional figure, a self-manager struggling at times with a gangly staff structure.

Harry Truman: Hands-on Management

Truman began his tenure in the Oval Office more dependent on his staff than Roosevelt had ever been. A fair reading of the record indicates he got off to a poor start, having trouble recruiting the right talent and creating the kind of White House organization he needed.⁷⁹ These problems soon reflected on the man, and observ-

⁷⁸ Lou Cannon provides a typical example in "Writing Reagan's Final Scenes," *Washington Post*, July 27, 1987, p. A1.

⁷⁹ "Joint Oral History Interview: The Truman White House," February 20, 1980, Truman Library.

ers found him failing to measure up to the job.⁸⁰ Much to his displeasure, Truman was soon besieged by offers of help in straightening out the disarray of his White House.⁸¹ By late 1946, however, he had achieved the type of organization he would employ for the remainder of his presidency. The turnaround was dramatic. Looking back, William Hopkins, who served in every White House from Roosevelt through Nixon—most of the time as its executive clerk—found more favor with Truman's approach than with any of the others.

President Truman was more orderly than his predecessor, more informal than his successor, and more egalitarian than either. He diligently ran his own staff, largely through a regular morning meeting in which ten to fifteen aides would report and be given assignments. A few, such as Donald Dawson, had more or less fixed duties. At one time or another, all were pressed into service as troubleshooters.

Among these regular attendees, two were more senior than the others. John Steelman, who retained nearly a dozen of his staff from the dismantled Office of War Mobilization and Reconversion, was principally charged with conducting the president's day-to-day business. He also was the administration's chief labor negotiator during a time when labor unrest was a major issue facing the country. Clark Clifford, who served as special counsel, presided over a group of speechwriters and idea men. Reflecting the informal partitioning of staff, lower-level aides who worked for either of these men were unfamiliar with the daily duties of their counterparts who worked for the others.⁸²

⁸⁰ See, for example, Walter Lippmann's syndicated column, "Today and Tomorrow," January 5, 1946. Lippmann stressed that the presidency "is not just a man with some secretaries and clerks. It is the central department of Government where all other departments meet, and have to be guided, corrected, superintended, and made a team. . . . [Truman] did not see that he needed . . . to make the White House itself an efficient department."

⁸¹ See various entries in the Harold Smith Papers, particularly those for May 4 and August 10, 1945, and February 8 and 28, 1946. See also Truman's penciled remarks on his appointments schedule of March 23, 1946: DNC Chairman and Postmaster General Robert Hannegan "is most anxious to control my staff—nothing doing. I wouldn't let my wife or mother do that . . . my personal staff are responsible to me." Truman Library.

⁸² One indicator of incipient partitioning of work is that no one clearly remembered what others did. "I don't know what Steelman did with all his staff" and "Connolly ran patronage and political travel and we stayed out of it" characterize recollections in oral history interviews.

Politics reinforced the division of labor. As union leaders came to recognize the comparative advantage of working with the White House rather than through their traditional representative, the secretary of labor, Steelman became organized labor's unofficial contact with the president. Occasionally, this brought him into disagreement with Clifford, who, concerned with burnishing the president's leadership image, would counsel Truman to take a tough line with striking unions while Steelman was urging conciliation. The two differed on other issues as well, with Clifford generally taking the more liberal position. After the disastrous 1946 midterm elections, Clifford joined a small, informal weekly discussion group of administration liberals to ponder ideas that might save the president in the next election. Through him, many of this group's proposals reached Truman. He adopted some, including the creation of a permanent Fair Employment Practices Commission, the recognition of Israel, and the decision in the summer of 1948 to call the Republican Congress back into a special session to create issues for the fall's campaign.⁸³ President Truman tolerated competition among his staff with the proviso that his aides not publicly criticize one another. By running the staff personally, he could take advantage of its independent thinking while containing some of its internal tensions.

Truman succeeded because his staff remained small. Most of the growth in routines and complexity during his tenure occurred among other presidential agencies. The new Council of Economic Advisers and National Security Council had not yet assumed major responsibilities, but the rejuvenated Bureau of the Budget under James Webb took over preparation of Truman's legislative program and helped write his State of the Union addresses. This reduced the pressure for diversification and growth within the White House staff and gave the president the flexibility of choosing his advice from among the departments and presidential agencies.

Lyndon Johnson: The Struggle With Hands-on Management

The daily White House activities under LBJ were more presidentially centered than they had been for any president since Franklin

83. One of the best accounts of Clifford's role is Patrick Anderson's *The President's Men: White House Assistants of Franklin D. Roosevelt, Harry S. Truman, Dwight D. Eisenhower, John F. Kennedy, and Lyndon B. Johnson* (Doubleday, 1960), pp. 113-32. After his departure from the White House staff, Clifford's position was filled by Charles Murphy.

Roosevelt. As one aide observed, "Johnson didn't compartmentalize his mind, and therefore he didn't subdivide the work in the office that way."⁸⁴ The randomness of presidential needs was reflected in staff assignments, and there was no John Steelman, much less Eisenhower's Sherman Adams, to impose order. Indicative of this, Jack Valenti, who served as the staff's de facto ring leader, had, among other duties, editing drafts of speeches, maintaining close relations with Senate Minority Leader Everett Dirksen, keeping tabs on the bureaucracy, and "telling important people things they did not want to hear."⁸⁵ Bill Moyers described the staff structure as "like the spokes of a wheel radiating out from a hub. Each person has a special relationship to the President and does what the President needs done."⁸⁶

Johnson may have been temperamentally disposed to emulate Roosevelt by keeping staff relations fluid. But with three times the White House personnel, there were simply more people who required guidance and more specialized units that required coordination, including adjudication of internal policy and jurisdictional disputes. Moyers's spokes to the Oval Office were neither the same thickness or length. Nor, according to scholars of the Johnson presidency, were they "unsegmented hierarchically," and "kingpins" emerged to serve as "centers of integration."⁸⁷ When Joseph Califano joined the staff in 1965 and took over the task forces, for example, he coordinated the activities of domestic policy staff and fashioned dozens of task force reports into a coherent legislative program.

Still, frequent instances of confusion, contradictory assignments, and abrasive relations among aides spilled into the press,⁸⁸

84. Jake Jacobsen oral history interview, May 27, 1969, tape 3, p. 16, Johnson Library.

85. Eric F. Goldman, *The Tragedy of Lyndon Johnson* (Knopf, 1969), p. 117.

86. Moyers continued, "You can define very briefly what each man does, but it is impossible to catch the full scope of his duties." Memo, Moyers to Kintner, May 5, 1966, Johnson Library.

87. Emmette S. Redford and Richard T. McCulley, *White House Operations: The Johnson Presidency* (University of Texas Press, 1986), pp. 52-53.

88. Press attention to disputes among the White House staff was a regular irritant to President Johnson. He could be heard complaining "you never hear of Harold Ickes and Harry Hopkins fist-fighting in the Rose Garden in [Roosevelt's] administration." Berman, "Johnson and the White House Staff," p. 101. Such incidents inspired a seasoned veteran of staff competition, George E. Reedy, to write *The Twilight of the Presidency* (New American Library, 1970).

and numerous staff memos over the years advised Johnson of the external liabilities created by the absence of coherent management. Johnson's own periodic search for someone who could draw up an organization chart reflected his yearnings for a solution to the management problems. But the president was ambivalent, as Robert Kintner's unhappy experiences indicated. Of the senior staff, Kintner alone was recruited principally to help coordinate staff activities. One of his innovations that at least survived throughout his fourteen-month tenure was a weekly staff meeting in which senior and second-tier aides heard reports from their colleagues on what the rest of the White House was doing. Initially, Johnson supported these meetings and attended at least one, expressing his satisfaction with it to Kintner. But as membership grew to nearly thirty aides and press leaks became a serious problem, the president became suspicious of the gatherings. As Johnson's enthusiasm waned, so did that of his senior advisers. Attendance fell off; only the second-tier staff, who had few other avenues of acquiring information, remained enthusiastic.

Despite his frustration, then, Johnson was ultimately unwilling to turn management responsibility over to his senior staff. And without his backing, efforts at systematic coordination became no more than false starts. Perhaps only someone with Johnson's "herculean readiness to take on any task at any time" could at this late date of staff development attempt to cope largely on his own.⁸⁹ In fact, all of his successors have delegated management duties to senior aides and eventually appointed someone to be chief of staff. Still, Johnson's attempt underscores that the incumbent president retains the prerogative to try to do it himself.

Ronald Reagan: The Staff Takes Over

The organizational history of the Reagan White House must center on its four chiefs of staff. More than for any other president, Reagan's assistants established the management philosophy of the White House Office. That they differed dramatically in their concepts of organization illustrates the ways the backgrounds and personal preferences of senior aides can be as important as those of the president in organizing the staff; it certainly cautions us from facilely taking the measure of the president by studying his work-

89. Goldman, *Tragedy of Lyndon Johnson*, p. 102.

place. And yet in the welter of administrative styles, Reagan's approach to the office is evident. The president's general lack of interest in details and, collaterally, his insistence on delegating routine planning and administration characterized his leadership with each chief. The latitude he gave senior advisers is what allowed their styles to come to the fore. Donald Regan reported that when he took over the White House Office, the president's only advice was to be sure he received all points of view on an issue before making a decision.⁹⁰

Under Reagan, the individuality of the White House organization usually attributed directly to presidential style became a reflection of the styles of his senior staff: James Baker, the skilled strategist who sought to moderate the conservative arguments the president had always found so persuasive; Donald Regan, the corporate chief executive officer from Merrill Lynch, who considered the staff implementers rather than creators of policies; Howard Baker, the Senate minority leader, who had spent his career helping assemble governing coalitions among people with disparate political viewpoints; and Kenneth Duberstein, the manager whose quiet diplomacy and attention to detail had served him well in the White House and given him a good reputation on Capitol Hill. The style of each is evident in the teams he assembled and in the top-level organization he created. But amid the diversity of management styles, is there any evidence of continuity in the architecture of the upper strata of the staff system that reflects the constraining influence of institutional forces?

The answer must be yes. The size and complexity of the modern White House Office dictates that whoever manages the staff, even if it is the president, must solve the puzzle of coordination. This is where the variety of Reagan's advisory systems becomes instructive. The architecture of the White House Office is not fixed by its broad foundation of line offices in the organization. Reagan's first-term troika of James Baker, Edwin Meese, and Michael Deaver (later expanded when William Clark became national security adviser) and the second-term, strong-chief system under Donald Re-

90. Donald T. Regan, *For the Record: From Wall Street to Washington* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1988). For an overview of Reagan's staffing arrangements, see Bert A. Rockman, "The Style and Organization of the Reagan Presidency," in Charles O. Jones, ed., *The Reagan Legacy: Promise and Performance* (Chatham, N.J.: Chatham House, 1988), pp. 3-29.

gan represent distinctive approaches to solving this puzzle. The troika has generally been judged a success, the latter a disaster.

The collective management of the first term involved teams. A coterie of senior aides under Meese planned the president's domestic policies. The aides of Chief of Staff Baker ran operations. Deaver's small group oversaw scheduling and public relations; and Clark (later Robert McFarlane), ran the National Security Council's staff. Most line units within the White House Office were fairly separate from each other and directly responsible to one of these management teams. And these lower-tier offices kept abreast of the others' activities through regularly scheduled meetings. This horizontal character of the staff organization was extended into the upper reaches of the bureaucracy by the creation of cabinet councils and subcabinet working groups. The relative absence of hierarchy is evidenced by the large number of people holding titles of assistant or deputy assistant to the president.

Whatever its advantages in assuring Reagan a variety of opinions—and compared with what followed, these were considerable—the presence of four hubs posed some distinct problems. The organization could be cumbersome and could fuel conflict, especially when the four disagreed strongly on policy recommendations or when the agenda became congested. Hammered-out consensus rather than deference and reciprocity was the normal resolution. Such practices can be taxing, however, which was why David Gergen demurred from recommending the system to future presidents. Michael Deaver attributed much of its viability to the special esprit generated after the assassination attempt early in the term as personnel were learning to work together.⁹¹ Having the line staff bunched around multiple hubs also risked having too many people involved in planning the president's program. The nearly exclusive access of Baker, Clark, Deaver, and Meese, however, prevented Reagan from being overrun with importunities. Beyond this, the senior staff devised the Legislative Strategy Group, an ad hoc committee whose membership would be limited to a half dozen and changed according to whom the senior men thought needed to be involved in a decision.

From his vantage in the Treasury Department, Secretary Donald Regan saw much in the first-term performance of the president's

91. Colin Campbell, interviews with David Gergen, January 11, 1983, Washington, D.C., and Michael Deaver, May 3, 1983, Washington, D.C.

staff that grated on his sensibilities. The staff spoke with too many voices; leaks were so common as to be unexceptional; some of the staff, particularly Deaver, were too absorbed with preserving the president's public image and were too easily distracted by current opinion in Washington. Most distasteful of all to Regan, many aides enjoyed friendly relations with Washingtonians normally numbered among the president's adversaries, including liberal Democrats and White House correspondents. "Reagan was continuously being pressured to compromise in ways that preserved the influence and the policies of the defeated opposition," Regan complains in his memoirs.⁹² All this he set out to change. The White House would be the president's command post.

Because most of the first-term senior staff had departed and the president had given him a free hand, Regan set out to redesign the administrative system along a strict hierarchy with himself as a strong chief of staff. He pared the top-heavy organization, reducing the number of assistants to the president from eighteen to eleven.⁹³ He consolidated or gutted offices, especially those that mostly cultivated relations with outside groups: the staff of the Public Liaison Office, for example, was halved.⁹⁴ He scaled back the Personnel Office, moved it out of the west wing of the White House, and demoted its new director. Regan consolidated most responsibilities of the triumvirate in his office. The resulting centralization was profound. The Domestic Council was brought under the direct supervision of the chief of staff's office, and the number of cabinet councils that had mostly been staffed by the Domestic Council was reduced from seven to two.

The one office upgraded was Communications; it was now to enjoy a more prominent place in the constellation of line offices. As part of Regan's strategy for the administration to speak with a single voice, Patrick Buchanan, the new communications director, was given control over the speechwriters and Public Liaison Office.

By the end of summer, many of the first-term lieutenants had either made peace with their reduced status or had departed. Regan's pyramid was in place. Internal communication was to flow

92. Regan, *For the Record*, p. 245.

93. Dick Kirschten, "It's Crowded at Top of Regan's Command . . . Causing a Case of West Wing Job Jitters," *National Journal*, vol. 17 (February 23, 1985), pp. 434-35.

94. Jane Mayer and Doyle McManus, *Landslide: The Unmaking of the President, 1984-1988* (Houghton Mifflin, 1988), p. 40.

mostly down the organization in an orderly fashion and with minimum leakage. Messages for external consumption were to go up the ladder to designated senior aides for dissemination to the press.

At least, that was the plan. But Regan's reorganization mostly managed to create friction, ill will, and open infighting. From his post at the much-reduced Political Affairs Office, Ed Rollins warred with Buchanan over the latter's desire to have the president campaign vigorously for aid to the Nicaraguan rebels; by October Rollins was gone. Frustrated with being unable to get through to the president, Max Friedersdorf, head of congressional liaison, left the next month. Eventually, Buchanan left after Regan vetoed his nominee for new head of the speechwriters' group. Aside from Nancy Reagan's east wing office, the only unit that escaped Regan's control was McFarlane's National Security Council. Worn down by continuous bickering with Regan, difficulty in getting access to the president, and rumors and innuendos planted in gossip columns, McFarlane too resigned in late November.

So Donald Regan's orderly system in which the heads of the lower-tier offices took orders from the senior staff failed. Perhaps someone with more political sensitivity and more active backing from the president could have better succeeded. The tale is, however, a caution for White House managers who would trust in hierarchy to coordinate the staff. Under threat, the second-tier units emerged as "rival baronies" warring with one another and the chief's office. And leaks to the press became "part of the job" as all quarters of the administration sought to "aggrandize their own roles."⁹⁵

The first two staff organizations under Reagan's presidency thus represent very different approaches to management. While the cabinet councils and the operation of the domestic and national security offices were part of the White House staff's effort to administer the executive branch, much of their work and the rest of the apparatus described here concerned management of the staff system. The brilliant successes of the first term and the debilitating failure of staff work that led to the Iran-contra scandal in the second suggest that the recondite issues of internal staff management have important implications for presidential leadership.

95. Mayer and McManus, *Landslide*, p. 186.

The varieties of top-level organization, indeed the variety of styles among recent chiefs of staff, indicate that the way the president and his senior advisers approach the job is a matter of choice. Yet undeniably, the development of a large, specialized line staff within the White House places a heavy burden of administration on the president. Aside from the purely organizational matter of integrating the activities of compartmentalized units, there is the centrifugal pull from the clienteles of line staff, which must be checked by the president or those who work closely with him. These organizational and internal political dynamics create strong pressure for the president to centralize management of his staff. From Roosevelt through Johnson, only Eisenhower resorted to a system based on a chief of staff. After Johnson, only Carter failed to do so, and he changed his mind later in his term. The role of senior staff as White House managers is now well established.

GOVERNABILITY AND THE MODERN WHITE HOUSE

A partial list of the responsibilities of the modern White House Office includes managing the executive branch, tending to the political needs of Washington politicians, planning the president's program, and generating support for him in Congress and across the nation. Such services are now routinely performed by a staff that was originally mandated to do little more than coordinate the flow of people and messages to and from the White House. Expanded work has produced a bureaucracy comprising hundreds of specialists. Presidential aides who deal on an equal footing with other government leaders hold positions created fifty years earlier for half a dozen self-effacing, circumambient White House assistants. Discussions of the nation's governability now invariably turn to the emergence of these aides who have great power and little legitimacy.

Critics complain that the White House staff meddles in affairs best left to others, and the performances of recent aides offer them outstanding justification. Failing to obtain cooperation from the FBI in investigating Daniel Ellsberg, Egil Krogh, a second-tier staffer in the Nixon White House, organized the "White House plumbers" to break into the office of Ellsberg's doctor in hope of discovering incriminating evidence. A decade later, Oliver North,

from his NSC office, diverted funds from the sale of missiles to Iran to aid the contras in Nicaragua. Both men had seen their president frustrated in trying to accomplish his goals through legitimate channels. Zealous loyalty inspired each to undertake illegal actions that ultimately undermined the president they were so eager to serve. Such responsiveness presidents do not need.

Critics also charge that large staffs insulate presidents, preventing them from acquiring political information essential for building a governing coalition in a fragmented governmental system.⁹⁶ The vantage of White House aides is, or soon becomes, too parochial for its exclusive counsel to be sufficient. Only by understanding other politicians who view policy choices from different perspectives can a president assess the likely responses of those whose cooperation he ultimately needs. Despite protests from his secretaries of state and defense, President Reagan remained convinced that politicians and the American public would view his dealings with the ayatollah as something other than trading arms for hostages. Had he brought key senators into his confidence, he probably would not have continued to harbor such a naive view. Moreover, less self-reliance at the outset would have subsequently allowed him to avoid bearing the full brunt of responsibility for failed policies.

If somehow the growth and activities of the White House staff had been arrested at a more modest level, these critics charge, presidents and the nation would be a lot better off. For them, the staff is the problem, and pruning it is the solution. "Rigorous efforts should be made to keep this staff small," was the first guideline offered Reagan's transition team by the National Academy of Public Administration in 1980.⁹⁷ Presumably, if there were fewer Egil Kroghs or Oliver Norths in the White House, there would be fewer opportunities for staff to run wild.

Yet causality runs primarily in the other direction. The modern White House Office is the cumulative result of the ways presidents have engaged an evolving political community. Had the web of

96. "Suffocation" is the way Richard E. Neustadt, writing long before the White House staff reached its current size, characterized the ill effects of large staffs; see "Presidency and Legislation: Planning the President's Program," *American Political Science Review*, vol. 49 (December 1955), pp. 1020-21.

97. National Academy of Public Administration, *A Presidency for the 1980s* (Washington, D.C.: NAPA, 1980), p. 17.

mutual dependency that obliged presidents to work closely with fellow Washingtonians not weakened, the size of their staffs would have remained inconsequential to leadership, and therefore would not have grown so. As presidents grew self-reliant and they centralized their leadership, however, they began to outfit themselves with the necessary resources. Consequently, each president, liberal Democrat and conservative Republican alike, has broadened the mandate of his staff as he sought to take on certain activities that his predecessors had relied on others to do. To assume that the governability of the modern presidency simply required reducing the staff and returning it to its original size and importance would be to ignore the pervasive environmental forces that have transformed presidential leadership. To try to remove surgically the problems that attend large organization would only succeed in leaving the president an invalid, as self-reliant as ever, yet incapacitated.

Half a century ago, Louis Brownlow proclaimed, "The President needs help." The president still does, but now it is ironically in figuring out how best to use Brownlow's unintended progeny, the White House staff. Instead of trying to wish it away, the presence of a large, complex staff must be accepted as a given and its problems addressed forthrightly. The president's aides must be recognized for what they are—his agents, routinely representing his interest in their dealings with Capitol Hill and the permanent government. Their value derives from taking those actions the president would if he were undertaking the task himself. The White House staff offers the president economy, but it is not a free ride. The president must give the staff clear direction and vigilantly oversee its performance. Presidents who did so, such as Truman and Johnson, rarely had problems resulting from overly aggressive aides. In the absence of presidential guidance, aides can compromise the presidency and the country. Oliver North, who was identified early as someone who needed to be kept on a "very short leash" but was not, devised and executed his own version of America's foreign policy and very nearly brought down the president.⁹⁸ One of the major challenges to the president in staffing and organizing his office is to keep his agents on course, neither shirking their duty nor arrogating to themselves presidential decisions.

98. Mayer and McManus, *Landslide*, p. 81.

The other principal problem of modern presidential staffing is that layers of organization overly filter the president's contact with the outside community, preventing him from receiving advice from other political leaders. Much of the criticism of this problem should be directed toward the strategy of centralization that has removed presidents from the daily transactions of other politicians.

The president will be no more captive to staff than he allows. Yet the concern with suffocation by staff is a legitimate one. Beyond his daily reciting a mantra to remind himself of this, a president can do much to mold the White House staff into a creative force rather than allow it to become a retinue of sycophants.

The raw material for such shaping can be found in the pluralistic character of the modern White House staff. Its division of labor and recruitment of experts with varying backgrounds will create differing opinions about the president's priorities and interests. Moreover, outside pressures for representation on the White House staff are great. Presidents tacitly acknowledge this when they appoint aides from competing wings of their political party. And special groups and constituencies are diligent in trying to infiltrate the staff with one of their number and in cultivating contacts with presidential assistants.

None of these dynamics is peculiar to the modern White House. Each was present in the organization and politics of Truman's staff. But as decisions have steadily shifted to the White House, the forces promoting pluralism have intensified, making staffs more difficult to manage. Uncontrolled, the president's staff becomes a cacophony of voices, leaving outsiders wondering if anyone is in charge at the White House. And yet the political diversity of the modern White House offers an invaluable source of second opinions and new ideas.

The challenge facing modern presidents is to create staff structures that supervise without stultifying. Platitudes are easy; practice promises to be more difficult, for the task involves nothing less than balancing order and creativity. Procedures designed to keep the president's agents well tethered are apt to be enlisted by senior aides to suppress dissent from below. Also, the competition of political interests rarely conforms to the requirements of orderly administration. Protracted disputes among staff members may lead one faction to decide it can do better by disrupting established procedures it sees favoring its adversary. Senior aides bent on

order and maintaining the integrity of their administrative apparatus may be quick to enlist hierarchical controls. But these methods easily become oversubscribed. Suppressing dissent only guarantees that competition will be vented in a more virulent form through leaks and personal attacks in the press. The hammered-out consensus of Reagan's first-term staff may have been taxing on its participants, but it unquestionably served him better than the pyramidal management system that replaced it.

Future presidents must better appreciate that the modern White House Office has evolved into more than their personal entourage of legislative or campaign aides. They may be present as the inner circle, but the legacy of centralization is a larger, more inclusive staff whose routine activities are increasingly important to, and to a degree responsive to, the outside political community. And while the president can fairly insist on and expect staff loyalty, he must recognize that as his agents, this staff will daily make choices that affect his welfare. The moral of recent presidential failures—Watergate, the Iran-contra scandal, and the many pratfalls—reinforces the implication of the evolution of presidential staff. Managing the White House has become an essential feature of presidential leadership.