

The Three Faces of Ronald Reagan

by David L. Paletz and K. Kendall Guthrie

Differential coverage of politics, policy, and personality regarding the same two events in three different media—a local newspaper, an elite newspaper, and television news—reveals three different portraits of presidential concerns and actions.

During his first term, Ronald Reagan traversed the potholes of politics, his sometimes unpopular policies, administration scandals, and a recession to arrive, bedecked with popularity, at a landslide re-election triumph. In so doing, he defied the conventional wisdom of press, pundits, and scholars that a president's popularity inevitably, even inexorably, declines.

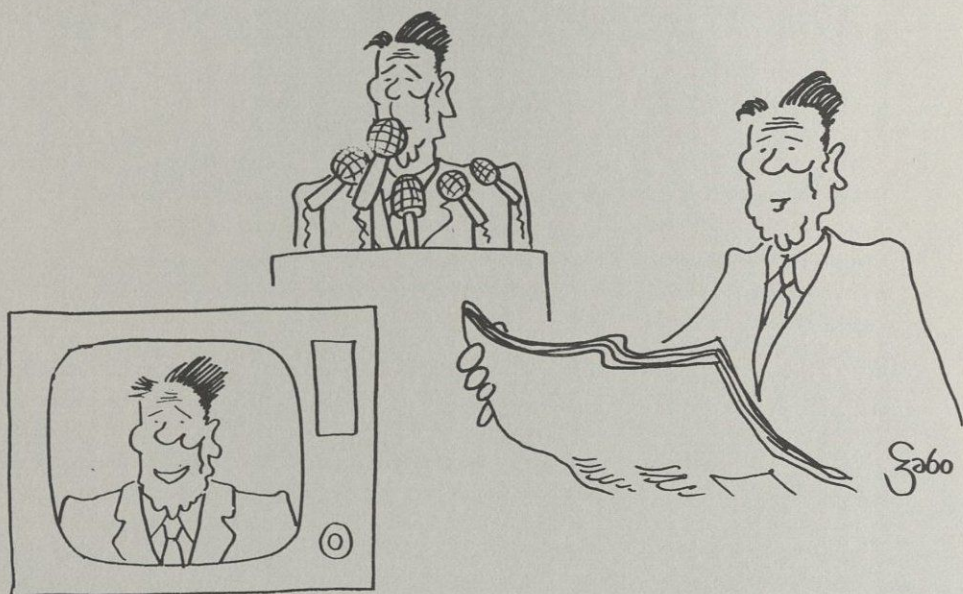
Unusual political circumstances partially account for Reagan's success. After a succession of failed presidents, the American public (including many journalists) wanted someone to demonstrate that the office was not unmanageable, that it could be a fount of action. Certainly, in his first term Reagan did not involve the country in military conflict, and he displayed skill in achieving the passage and implementation of much of his program. By 1984 people felt the flush of economic recovery and transferred their relief onto the incumbent.

Contributing mightily to Reagan's success, so it is claimed, was benign, often favorable, media coverage (4, 5, 6, 7). One critic even berated the White House press corps for acting "with unusual frequency during Reagan's first two years as a kind of *Pravda* of the Potomac, a conduit for White House utterances and official image mongering intended to sell Reaganomics" (13, p. 37; see also 15). Other journalists, angry with both the administration and their colleagues who apparently acquiesced in this media manipulation, wrote articles cataloguing some of Reagan's tactics and success. Most notable was *New York Times* White House correspondent Steven R. Weisman, who lamented that "Mr. Reagan has ignored some of the unstated ground rules under which reporters have traditionally covered the presidency. As a consequence, he has dramatically altered the kind of information the public receives about him and his administration" (33, p. 36).

But this chorus of complaint contradicts and defies the prevailing view of political communication researchers that, on balance, the media contribute to the decline and fall of presidents (10; 20, chap. 4). Moreover, one study con-

David L. Paletz is Professor of Political Science at Duke University. K. Kendall Guthrie is a doctoral candidate at the Annenberg School of Communications, University of Southern California. An earlier version of this article was presented at the Political Communication Division, International Communication Association Annual Meeting, Honolulu, Hawaii, May 1985. We would like to express our appreciation to the three reviewers of this journal whose insightful comments helped us see and correct some of the errors of our ways. Thanks also to James Pilkington and Jaclyn Freeman of the Vanderbilt Television News Archive.

Copyright © 1987 *Journal of Communication* 37(4), Autumn. 0021-9916/87/\$0.0+15



tends that, rather than bolstering Reagan, "the nation's reporters have written or said that Reagan is dumb, lazy, out of touch with reality, cheap, senile, ruining NATO, tearing up his own safety net, even violating his constitutional oath" (24, p. 54).¹

In an attempt to illuminate, if not resolve, the questions about President Reagan's media coverage, we analyzed reporting of two quite disparate events—one domestic, the other international—that we expected to engender different coverage. We hypothesized that different media outlets, because of their varying audiences, norms, and resources, would react differently to Ronald Reagan's public relations efforts. We therefore analyzed our two events in three outlets—network news, a national elite newspaper, and a local newspaper that relies on wire service reports for national news.

The first event we tracked is President Reagan's push for a 25 percent cut in tax rates. By July 1981, Congress had passed the president's budget-cutting packages and had begun work on the kingpin of supply side economics, the tax cut. With Congress scheduled to vote at the end of the month, the president started to lobby wavering legislators. When passage of the bill still seemed

¹ A preliminary report from a larger study in progress analyzed "commentary or a network feature report more than two and a half minutes long" dealing with policy issues "on network evening news in the first two months" of 1983. Such stories, however, may be more critical than the hard news the president more easily dominates. Moreover, the data come from a period when a president's approval rating tends to be in decline, disregard television visuals, and do not cover the print media (24; see also 23).

uncertain, he unsheathed a nationally televised address to mobilize people into calling and writing to Congress.

Meanwhile, as Democrat leaders counter-lobbied, Reagan pressured legislators behind the scenes. The president won decisively on July 29. Democrats attempted postvote tactics to kill the bill but failed. The conference committee reconciled the differences and sent the tax cut plan for presidential signature on August 4, just as the Air Traffic Controllers began their strike.

During the key nine-day period (beginning on July 27, 1981, with the president's major promotional speech and ending August 4, 1981, when CBS News stopped its coverage of the issue), President Reagan appeared infrequently before the news media. He particularly avoided unscripted events and reporters' questions. When he did emerge in public it was to give speeches to friendly audiences or to television cameras that could not talk back. Thus, he addressed a trade lobbying group on July 27, presumably in part because the coverage would serve as a tantalizing preview to his televised address scheduled for that night. He then disappeared from media scrutiny while Congress bickered over the tax bill's details. The president's aides carefully parceled out a few quotes or activities to guide the press, but Reagan made no public comment until the tax bill passed and he could claim victory. He thus displayed himself as a cheerleader and victor, without publicly soiling his hands in the politics necessary to get the bill passed. Reagan then again vanished while Congress haggled over the politically touchy Social Security issue and the ramifications of the tax cut, deciding which programs to eliminate.

The second episode we examined is the president's June 1–10, 1984, European trip. During the winter and spring of 1984, Reagan presided as a serene statesman at the White House while his Democratic rivals criss-crossed the country wounding each other politically. As the long primary season ended, Reagan and his strategists launched his re-election campaign—not with traditional political stump speeches but with a presidential trip to Europe full of picturesque and symbolic vignettes designed for the press, especially nightly television news.²

Resplendent in academic robes, Reagan accepted a degree from the University College at Galway. At Ballyporeen, the president drank beer at a pub and prayed in the church where his Irish ancestors were baptized. Numerous scenes with world leaders displayed the president's statesmanship and international clout. And he exhibited and evoked emotional patriotism at the fortieth anniversary of the D-Day ceremonies.

As usual, the president was carefully shielded from interaction with the media. During the ten-day trip, which received constant press coverage, he directly answered reporters' questions only three times: getting into a helicop-

² The press office planned all reporters' travel and sleeping arrangements. The White House conducted seven pre-trip briefings; the Carter administration averaged only one or two per trip. Reporters were also provided with a thick briefing book which included maps of each stop, history, biographical information on all the leaders, and even currency conversion scales. In Europe, the president's staff held two daily briefings and smaller forums for elite reporters.

ter as he departed Washington; once in a shouted exchange just after he arrived in London; and then at a press conference on the last day of the trip at which he recounted his accomplishments.

Neither the tax cut nor the European trip was guaranteed in advance to be counted a Reagan success. To the president's advantage, the tax cut fell within the end of what has been called the "alliance phase" of press-presidential relations (10). During this period news organizations supposedly "communicate the White House line and channel the ideas and image of the president to their audience. White House officials cooperate with reporters' objectives of obtaining access to everyone in the new administration" (10, p. 274). However, passage of the proposal was in doubt, forcing the president to use many political ploys. Furthermore, the event contained conflict—between the Democrats and Republicans as well as about who would benefit from the cuts—which journalists tend to highlight. Since reporters were on their home turf in Washington, they had easy access to both sides. We therefore expected more favorable coverage because of the honeymoon but more analysis, conflict, and politics because reporters had access to the opposition.

The European trip presented a similar balance of assets and liabilities for Reagan. Past presidential trips have generally received positive and abundant coverage. Severed from their outside sources when covering a foreign trip, reporters are constrained to accept the official White House description of events. However, this particular trip fell into the "detached phase" of press relations, during which White House officials are supposedly "more concerned about preventing reporters from seeing their flaws than in getting them to prepare stories that will be favorable to their policies" (10, p. 274). Furthermore, reporters covering Reagan had voiced frustration at and opposition to what they felt were the administration's manipulative tactics toward the media (see 12, 13). Thus, reporters might be wary and ill disposed to serve as a conduit for the White House version of events. We therefore expected the coverage to have less political content, since it was a policy and public relations trip, but to be more strident, because of reporters' objections to staged events and to being manipulated.³

In devising our content analysis categories, we assumed that how President Reagan would be portrayed would depend upon the subjects that the media emphasized in their stories about him. The sentence was our basic unit of analysis. We coded a total of 5,422 sentences—792 in the *Durham Morning Herald*, 733 on the "CBS Evening News," and 3,897 in the *New York Times*. Each sentence was coded as follows: *policy* (allocation of goods or services; ideological statements; diplomatic goals or plans; standard operating procedures), *politics* (strategies to get policies passed into law; references to elections; deliberately vague sentences or those supporting or disfavoring an issue without explaining its substance, or giving political motives for supporting a policy), *patriotism* (references to national symbols, traditions, or values; sen-

³ We hope to undertake a similar examination of media coverage of President Reagan's failures.

tences aimed at stirring national pride or sentiment), the president's *personality* (descriptions or displays of his character or emotions; also nonsubstantive quips or jokes), and *miscellaneous/color* (indisputable facts; description of a thing or person's appearance; description of a person's physical action). We also classified each sentence as either *description* (detailing only "objective" events or facts) or *analysis* (going beyond facts to draw inferences or conclusions or to speculate on motives or implications or causation).

Story content in part depends on the sources reporters use. So we cross-referenced each sentence as follows: *Reagan quoted* (exact words; in television coverage, sentences when the president is shown speaking only), *Reagan paraphrased* (by the reporter; also included a reporter reading a direct Reagan quote) or *discussed* (by the reporter or someone else), and *Reagan supporter* (a statement supporting Reagan or his policies, within the context of the story, including actions as well as words; also general references to U.S. policy), *critic* (statement of opposition to Reagan or his policies within the context of the story), and *neutral/uninvolved or no source*.

In examining television news stories, we cross-referenced the sentences for each subject category with their concurrent television image. The connections were: reporter or commentator speaking and simultaneously shown on the screen; the reporter's voice heard over visuals of the president (what we call "dub over Reagan"); and the president speaking and simultaneously shown.

After a month, we recoded a randomly selected 10 percent of the stories (4 on television and 17 in print, involving 233 and 1,063 decisions, respectively). The intracoder reliability was 92 percent for television and 90 percent for print; intercoder reliability was 86 and 83 percent.

Overall, press coverage reflects a successful White House strategy of providing a "theme of the day" approach, with one event to enhance the president's purposes and popularity. According to *Time* White House correspondent Laurence Barrett, whose observation reflects inside access to the Reagan presidency, "how events had played and would play on the air and in print" dominated every strategy session (3, p. 442). When possible, aides construct "news events" to elicit specific headlines. On discovering that Reagan's original June 4, 1984, speech to the Irish parliament had "no lead," then-Assistant Secretary of State Richard Burt persuaded the president's chief foreign affairs advisers to include a "no force" proposal. In their pre-speech press briefings, aides billed it as the most important aspect of the president's talk. Working under deadline, reporters followed the administration's lead (19). Only later did they report that the "no force" proposal had been introduced several weeks earlier and had been revived as a public relations maneuver.

The *Durham Morning Herald's* lead story emphasized the peace initiatives. The Associated Press story began: "President Reagan, declaring 'America is prepared for peace,' announced Monday that he will consider a Soviet proposal to renounce the use of force in Europe if Moscow agrees to consider specific Western proposals to reduce the chance of war on the continent" (22, p. 1).

Dan Rather began the June 4 "CBS Evening News": "President Reagan told the Irish Parliament today that the United States, for the first time, is now will-

ing to consider a favorite Soviet arms proposal, a treaty that would ban the use of force in Europe." Although correspondent Bill Plante ended the segment by noting that "Mr. Reagan's speech was carefully planned to soften his image in Europe, where many believe he is dangerously trigger-happy," the story's overall thrust conveyed the president's desire for peace.

The *New York Times* led with Reagan's peace initiative on page 1: "President Reagan told the Irish Parliament today that he would be willing to discuss with the Soviet Union the possibility of a NATO renunciation of the use of force if Moscow would agree to a specific set of measures to limit the risk of military confrontation in Europe" (31, p. 1). The *Times* did print one story detailing Reagan's political motives and two stories discussing protestors—but on page 12.

So, by priming reporters, the president and his aides can frequently beguile the media into following his agenda and perspective, at least for that day. But already we see differences in the media's responses. As suggested by the *Herald* story, the AP wire service was essentially a conduit for the president's message, its coverage uncritical. "CBS Evening News" highlighted the president's message, but the reporter ascribed a political motive to it. And the *New York Times*, while treating the president's script as its main story, had enough staff following the trip to report his supposed motives and to provide coverage of dissenters, although relegating them to a less prominent page. Our content analysis suggests that this pattern of media variation holds for these three overlapping yet in many ways distinct faces of Ronald Reagan.

The wire reports about the president used in the *Durham Morning Herald* rarely went beyond what he said and did. At times, the coverage exhibited a celebrity syndrome, chronicling what Reagan wore and ate. Interpretation, ascription of motivation, or the infusion of politics into ceremonial appearances was infrequent. Thus the Ronald Reagan of the *Durham Morning Herald* appears as the dominant policy-maker and statesman in both the national and international spheres. This presidential focus, relative lack of politics (especially in the trip coverage), and scant amount of analysis unite to present the president favorably.

The most outstanding feature of the wire service coverage was the high amount of miscellaneous description and color material, almost twice the amount in other media (see Table 1). During the tax cut, the *Herald* devoted 31 percent of its coverage to this topic, compared to 8 percent for CBS and 15 percent for the *New York Times*. The description increased during the European trip, which abounded with scenic events. The *Herald* gave 56 percent of its space to description and miscellaneous material during this episode, compared to 33 percent for CBS and 23 percent for the *Times*. The *Herald* carried stories absent from other media, such as one primarily describing the new diet the president was using to try to overcome jet lag.

The wire service's dispatches were filled with description. The *Herald's* front-page story on the opening day of the summit was typical: "After the reception in the parkside palace, built in the 16th century by Henry VIII, a

Table 1: Subjects of sentences in stories about tax cut and European trip

Tax cut	Herald		Times		CBS	
	(n = 438)		(n = 1555)		(n = 399)	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Personality	9	2	78	5	12	3
Politics	110	25 ^a	389	25	167	42
Policy	174	40	824	53 ^a	167	42
Patriotism	9	2	31	2	21	5
Misc., color	136	31 ^c	233	15	32	8
Avg. story length	19.89		43.2		19.95	
No. of stories	22		36		20	
European trip	(n = 354)		(n = 2342)		(n = 334)	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Personality	40	11	177	8	34	10
Politics	16	4 ^c	539	23	70	21
Policy	83	23	832	36 ^b	100	30
Patriotism	15	4	255	11	20	6
Misc., color	200	56 ^c	539	23	110	33
Avg. story length	15.4		38.4		19.65	
No. of stories	23		61		17	

^a Differences between *Times* and both CBS and *Herald* significant at .01 (z test).

^b Difference between *Times* and CBS significant at .05 and between *Times* and *Herald* at .01 (z test).

^c Differences between *Herald* and both CBS and *Times* significant at .01 (z test).

^d Difference between *Herald* and CBS significant at .01 (z test).

motorcade took the seven leaders down The Mall to 10 Downing St., the Prime Minister's official residence, where they posed for pictures in the ornate Yellow room, then sat down for a working dinner" (21, p. 1). Similar descriptive passages abound through the wire service coverage. Especially during the European trip, the *Herald* ran such AP stories, replete with descriptions of photogenic events.

The *Herald* also de-emphasized politics compared to the other media, especially during the European trip when the political issues were more subtle than during the tax cut vote. While the *Herald* and the *New York Times* both devoted 25 percent of their coverage to the political aspects of the tax cut, this is far less than CBS's 42 percent. The political content of the *Herald* plummeted to 4 percent during the European trip, substantially different from CBS's 21 percent and the *Times*'s 23 percent. While the other media mentioned how the Irish trip would appear to Americans during the election year, the wire service reports barely mentioned it.

The abundant description also meant less analysis than in the *Times* (see Table 2). The *Herald*'s analysis amounted to only 20 percent during the tax cut, which mirrored television's treatment but was 16 percent less than the *Times*'s. During the European trip, the analysis dropped to 8 percent of the total coverage, substantially lower than the *Times*'s 26 percent and CBS's 19

Table 2: Proportion of content description versus analysis in stories about tax cut and European trip

Tax cut	Description		Analysis		Total
	n	%	n	%	n
Herald	350	80	88	20	438
Times	995	64	560	36	1555 ^a
CBS	315	79	84	21	399
European trip					
Herald	326	92	28	8	354 ^a
Times	1733	74	609	26	2342 ^a
CBS	271	81	63	19	334

^a Difference from other media significant at .01 (z test).

percent. Overall, the wire reporters seemed content simply to describe what happened and not ask why.

The *Herald* also had a much more presidential focus than the *New York Times*, although it was similar to CBS in this regard (see Table 3). It devoted 29 percent of its space to Reagan paraphrased or discussed during the tax cut and 38 percent during the European trip. This emphasis may be in part due to its more limited space. The *Times* ran a total of 3,897 sentences in 97 stories during the two issues, compared to the *Herald's* 792 sentences in 45 stories. Such a limited newshole for national and international events leaves little space for coverage of actors other than the president.

The Ronald Reagan of the *New York Times* is a man primarily concerned with policy; political dealings are secondary. Nor is Reagan the only policy-maker. The policy-making process is often portrayed as complex and the president is not always intimately involved. Consequently, he shares the lime-light with critics, supporters, and uninvolved experts.

Our content analysis (see Table 1) shows that the *Times's* coverage centers substantially more on policy than either the *Herald's* or CBS's—13 percent and 11 percent more, respectively, during the tax cut episode. For example, before the tax cut bill passed, only the *Times* devoted two full stories to analyzing its provisions.

During the European trip, all three outlets covered less policy because the trip had less policy to cover. But the *Times* still led with 36 percent policy coverage. Typically, the *Times* carried three pieces previewing policy issues that would arise during the economic summit in London. The other media mentioned the issues only briefly.

Table 2 shows that, in line with its greater policy emphasis, the *New York Times* also ran more analysis about the tax cut (36 percent, about 15 percent more than the other media); during the European trip, it again ran 36 percent analysis (7 percent more than CBS and 18 percent more than the *Herald*). In fact, the *Times* frequently ran separate stories marked "analysis"; the other media did not.

Table 3: Average allocation of sources in stories about tax cut and European trip

Tax cut	Herald (n = 438)		Times (n = 1555)		CBS (n = 399)	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Reagan quoted	39	9	140	9	28	7
Reagan paraphrased or discussed	127	29	311	20 ^a	124	31
Critic	106	24	295	19	84	21
Supporter	105	24	342	25	76	19
Neutral/uninvolved or no source	61	14	467	30	87	22
European trip	(n = 354)		(n = 2342)		(n = 334)	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Reagan quoted	42	12	187	8	30	9
Reagan paraphrased or discussed	135	38	632	27 ^a	134	40
Critic	21	6	422	18	50	15
Supporter	50	14	515	22	33	10
Neutral/uninvolved or no source	106	30	586	25	87	26

^a Difference between *Times* and both CBS and *Herald* significant at .01 (z test).

The *Times* portrayed the complexities of the policy process and the president's sometimes peripheral involvement in several ways. For instance, while all media quoted Reagan approximately the same percent of the time during the two events, the *Times* paraphrased or discussed Reagan only 20 percent of the time during the tax cut compared to 29 and 31 percent in the *Herald* and CBS (see Table 3). The figures for coverage of the European trip were 27 percent for the *Times*, 38 percent for the *Herald*, and 40 percent for CBS.

The *Times* also devoted more space than the *Herald* and CBS to policy-makers other than the president and to uninvolved or neutral experts. For example, it gave almost equal coverage to critics and supporters during the tax cut issue. Because of its extensive reporting of the parlaying on Capitol Hill and the views of neutral or uninvolved participants, the paper depicted Reagan as a foreground figure in a crowded landscape.

During the European Economic Summit, the *Times* portrayed the president as merely one of the world leaders. For instance, he was given no credit for the joint declaration that came out of the summit, in contrast to coverage in the *Herald* and CBS. The lead story on June 9 did not mention Reagan until paragraph nine, just before the jump. Indeed, the *Times* frequently gave policy-making credit to aides, whereas CBS and the *Herald* tied it to the president.

Along with its policy emphasis, the *Times* did provide variegated reporting of Reagan. June 5 coverage of the European trip was typical, with stories previewing the policy issues expected to arise at the summit, describing the president's lunch with the queen and a dispute involving his secret service agents, and

humorously describing the trip bureaucracy. Moreover, *Times* reporters occasionally inserted language that undermined, or at least modified, the extent to which the stories served the president. Wrote one, "presidential aides have not even tried to conceal their delight over the resonance that today's visit is expected to have with millions of Irish-American voters at home." He described the day's events as "a carnival of nostalgia with heavy political overtones" and noted that Reagan sipped stout "as cameras whirled" (30, p. 8).

Indeed, in contrast to the *Herald*, which generally ignored the political dimensions of the trip and gave dissenters from the president's policies short shrift, the *Times* sometimes highlighted both. The same day that Reagan was reported in one *Times* story as finding "contentment" in the village of his ancestors, a front-page story was devoted to the Irish Prime Minister's denunciation of the president's Central American policy (1). And the paper's June 10, post-summit story lead was: "The London economic summit conference marked the culmination of a 10-day European trip that the White House strategists count as one of their most successful efforts to project Mr. Reagan's strength as a leader" (32, p. 1). It is no coincidence that Steven Weisman, the reporter responsible for most of the newspaper's coverage of the trip and for the critical interpolations in its stories, would later that year, in the *Times Sunday Magazine*, describe and attack the Reagan administration's techniques of press manipulation (33).

Nonetheless, the *Times* did not ignore the visual images flowing across the Atlantic. The White House publicity machine provided a plethora of photographs on the European trip, which the *Times* and *Herald* ran almost daily. These photographs nearly always showed the president as happy, reinforcing his public image of self-confidence and geniality. Moreover, print reporters often described the pictures, thus reinforcing their effects. Weisman's Ballyporeen story began: "An elated President Reagan walked the narrow street and prayed in the old stone church of his Irish forebears today and declared that the experience 'has given my soul a new contentment'" (30, p. 8).

At first blush, the "CBS Evening News" coverage seems to fit between that of the *Herald* and the *Times*. For example, CBS provided more policy coverage than the *Herald* but less than the *Times* (Table 1). Sometimes, as with its focus on the president as policy-maker, its coverage is close to the *Herald*; but its percentage of analytical reporting of Reagan's European trip is closer to the *Times* (Table 3).

But the CBS coverage stands out, as is clear from Table 1, in the high percentage of sentences we classified as "politics" in the tax cut episode and the substantial percentage, almost as much as the *Times*'s, in the network's reporting of the European trip. The Reagan seen on CBS may be a preeminent leader and policy-maker, but he is one whose motives are frequently political.

This finding confirms a difference between CBS and UPI coverage of the 1980 presidential campaign identified by Robinson and Sheehan: that CBS was "more political" (25, p. 209). But they also described the network's coverage as "more critical" (25, p. 209). This gave us pause. Watching our videotapes we

perceived the same intentions by some of the CBS reporters to infuse criticism or at least skepticism into their stories. Why, we wondered, did their efforts often seem unsuccessful?

The explanation, we believe, can be found in the relations between words and visuals in the CBS News stories. On the one hand, the CBS personnel involved in reporting, editing, and producing the evening news obviously seek to show the president in stories about or related to him. On the other hand, the president and his advisors limit his televisable public appearances (we call this "controlled exposure"). They also try to ensure that, when he does appear, he looks and acts in ways most advantageous to his political and policy interests.

Unlike the wire services, and for reasons considered by Robinson and Sheehan (25, pp. 217–239), CBS News is unwilling to serve as a mere conduit for the president's self-interest and self-serving appearance, yet it uses, if not relies on, visuals engineered by the White House. This subtle irony makes its coverage so intriguing.

Sometimes the White House image prevails. Indeed, when the president is shown speaking, policy and, to a lesser extent, patriotic sentences dominate; politics is banished⁴ (see Table 4). Thus, the 8 out of 20 stories dealing with the tax cut on the "CBS Evening News" in which Reagan appeared centered on policy issues favorable to the president, such as cutting government waste or the merits of lowering taxes; politics, pressuring people to vote for those policies, was peripheral.

Television reporters respond in two ways. One is to insert quotes from the president's earlier speeches and statements into their stories in ways appropriate to the reporter's theme and therefore sometimes different from the president's intentions. But because Reagan restricted his on-camera tax cut pronouncements, reporters did not seem to have much useful, let alone damaging, material with which to work. For example, on July 31, CBS News correspondent Phil Jones tried to connect Reagan with an analysis of the budget cuts by using footage from the president's July 27 televised address. But the clip shows the president, looking straight into the camera with a determined face, saying "Republicans and Democrats in the Congress came together and passed the most sweeping cutbacks in the history of the federal budget." Although Jones goes on to discuss which programs will be reduced or eliminated, Reagan seems unconnected to the series of quickly flashed stills and figures because he never talks about specific eliminations.

A second response by television reporters is to infuse into presidential stories the politics the president tends publicly to eschew. When the president is not pictured, tax cut stories have an almost two-to-one politics-to-policy ratio, the

⁴ As a career movie actor and TV pitchman, President Reagan knows how to manipulate video to his advantage. According to Hart (14), compared to all presidents since Truman, Reagan's speeches during the first year were the highest on activity—which includes words evoking aggressiveness, accomplishment, and communicativeness—and lowest on realism—which includes words evoking present concern, human interest, concreteness, familiarity, and temporal and spatial awareness.

Table 4: Connections between words and pictures on CBS

	Reporter (n = 140)		Dub over Reagan (n = 25)		Reagan (n = 26)	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Tax cut	52	37	8	32	16	63 ^a
Policy	67	48	12	48	3	10 ^a
Politics	1	1	1	4	7	27
Patriotism	20	15	4	16	0	0
Misc., color						
	(n = 106)		(n = 84)		(n = 34)	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
European trip	31	29	30	36	15	45
Policy	33	31	22	26	2	5 ^a
Politics	9	9	12	14	8	23
Patriotism	33	31	20	24	9	27
Misc., color						

Another person was either shown speaking or dubbed over in 208 sentences about the tax cut and 110 sentences about the European trip. Reagan was not pictured in 12 stories about the tax cut.

^a Difference between Reagan and dub over significant at .05 and between Reagan and reporter talking at .01 (z test).

^b Differences between Reagan speaking and both dub over and reporter talking significant at .01 (z test).

reverse of the ratio when he is shown. Attesting to the prevalence of this television reportorial approach, CBS coverage of the tax cut episode contained almost twice the percentage of politics of either the *Herald* or *Times*. The focus was on the president's "woo 'em with a White House meeting, charm 'em with a phone call strategy" (July 28, 1981) and other vote-corralling tactics.⁵

On the surface, the *New York Times* and "CBS Evening News" coverage of the president's trip were similar (see Table 1). There was no significant difference in the percentage of space they allocated to personality and patriotism. The difference in policy coverage was small—6 percent.

CBS did devote substantially more attention to color and pageantry. But this similarity is hard to reconcile with our previous analysis and with the plaint of ABC White House correspondent Sam Donaldson on Ballyporeen:

It may have been a smash with the audience, but it was the most sterile, controlled event I've ever seen. There was absolutely no spontaneity; nothing happened that wasn't in Deaver's script or the security man's bible. We've become

⁵ It might be thought that this political emphasis is an artifact of the section of the tax battle we analyzed—the period just before the vote. However, in reviewing CBS coverage of the proposal for the six months prior to our episode, we found only 7 stories concerned primarily with its policy substance. The other 26 stories focused on who supported the plan and how much Reagan would compromise in order to ensure its passage.

the equivalent of Hollywood directors, scriptwriters, and cameramen. We even distribute the pictures for them (quoted in 19, p. 43).

Donaldson is partly right. When the president appeared on the screen in CBS news stories it was to discuss broad policy themes and patriotism, recount plans to "renew American prosperity," and express his desire to talk peace with Russian leaders. He also described the scenery around him, quipped cleverly, and demonstrated a likeable personality. Politics was virtually non-existent.

Yet when we analyze the television coverage closely, we uncover some intriguing data. The president was shown and heard simultaneously for just ten percent of CBS coverage of the European trip, a mere three percent more than the tax cut. He was, however, shown (but not heard) far more often during the trip; but with the voice of a network correspondent dubbed over his visuals 26 percent of the time, compared to 6 percent for the tax cut episode. In other words, reporters were unwilling to give the president's words, as contrasted to pictures of him, untrammelled access to the television audience. They insisted on orally framing European trip events for viewers.

Certainly the frame that television reporters applied was often consistent with the pictures of the president: reporters simply narrated the activities shown—they may have lacked time or inclination to do otherwise, considered it journalistically improper to intervene, etc. Thus the percentages of "miscellaneous, color" content are similar for the European trip irrespective of who appears on the screen and who speaks, the president or the reporter.

On occasion, however, television reporters transcended or contradicted the pictures, usually to insert into their stories the politics the president omitted. Even though the European trip lacked obvious political angles, the subject was politics 26 percent of the time when reporters were speaking over the president, 31 percent when other pictures provided the backdrop, and only 3 percent when the president was shown and heard.

Two examples of the words-pictures gap must suffice. One ends with Reagan and his wife Nancy shaking hands with several rosy-cheeked Irish children as they walk into an old stone building. The reporter dubs over the image this comment:

The president's visit to Ireland is inescapably political. On one level, it's an effort to project a warm and sentimental image of Ronald Reagan seeking the roots he shares in common with 40 million other Americans. It's also a platform from which he can proclaim over and over that he wants peace, try to put the Soviets on the defensive and convince both the U.S. and its European allies that the nuclear arsenal is in safe hands (June 2, 1984).

CBS reporter Leslie Stahl's June 5 story exhibited an even wider word-picture gap. The visual story consisted of vignettes of the president as statesman: Reagan with the guards at Buckingham Palace, dining with Margaret Thatcher,

in line with various world leaders, saluting the flag as patriotic music plays. Stahl comments:

When it comes to political oneupmanship, Ronald Reagan is a master. Upstage the winner of the California primary—piece of cake: have lunch at Buckingham Palace with the Queen of England; meet with Britain's Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, and pay tribute to the thousands who died on the beaches at Normandy. White House officials say this trip was not scheduled for political reasons, not designed to cast a shadow on the Democrats' final stretch, but as long as the president had to come for an economic summit, why not?

Research on the relationship between news' visuals and words indicates that people recall news items significantly better when the pictures and audio-verbal content reinforce each other (11, 16, 17). But pictures clashing with the text may confuse viewers and impede retention. We would suggest, then, that scenes in which the president is shown and heard would have most effect on public perception, followed by those in which the visuals are reinforced by the reporter's observations. Least memorable, it might be thought, and most confusing, would be news segments in which the correspondent's comments contradict the visuals showing the president. Research suggests, however, the primacy of the visual over the audio channel:

The individual, when receiving information, makes critical use of its non-verbal elements in deciding how to interpret its actual verbal significance. When the verbal and non-verbal content of TV material come into conflict with each other. . .the lasting effects on the viewer are likely to be those of the non-verbal elements exclusively (2, p. 78).

As a result, the pictorial messages portraying Reagan as a patriot and policy-maker may well be more strongly ingrained in the viewers' minds than the political and critical aspects of the story that reporters convey with their words (8). Viewers will likely associate reporters and anchors with the political issues and Reagan with policy, patriotism, and good will.

Reagan's facial expressions also aid his image (28). When researchers imbedded different facial expressions into mock newscasts, they found that supporters who saw a happy/reassurance face reacted with strong positive emotions and few negative emotions toward Reagan; opponents felt almost neutral. In contrast, the anger/threat facial display tended to polarize viewers: supporters reported moderate positive feelings and few negative ones, whereas opponents reported strong negative feelings and few positive ones. Furthermore, supporters questioned a day later were less likely than neutral viewers or opponents to remember the president as angry.

Although picking facial expressions out of continuously moving newscasts proved tricky, we analyzed the trip newscasts showing the president. Out of 68 pictures, 9 could not be accurately classified. However, an overwhelming 55 of the remaining 59 fell under "happiness/reassurance." Thus, intuitively or consciously, Reagan knows that this expression has the best effect on his audi-

ence—boosting his supporters and neutralizing his opponents. (Of course, we do not mean to suggest that the president is not naturally cheerful, or at least buoyant.)

The *New York Times*, AP, and “CBS Evening News” differ in their economic resources, their conceptions of their audiences’ characteristics, interests, and needs, and their reporting norms, with two important effects. First, to some extent, they each focus on different aspects of the president and his conduct of the office. Second, and perhaps more significant, they differ in their vulnerability and resistance to the public relations techniques of the presidency, particularly as practiced by the Reagan White House (see 18, 26, 27). We believe that similar differences between media should be found in coverage of other high officials during other time periods. We will briefly describe the three faces we uncovered.

Facing severe deadline pressure and the need to provide a diversity of clients with acceptable service, AP reporters are essentially presidency body watchers. Relying extensively on the public record and publicly observed behavior, they speedily describe and transmit the president’s official activities (9, 29). This often entails serving as conduit for his themes, ideas, and perspectives—for reality as the president defines it. Interpretation, ascriptions of motivation, and infusions of politics into ceremonial presidential appearances are infrequent.

Such coverage finds a comfortable and comforting home in the *Durham Morning Herald*. With its emphasis on local news, its limited space for national and international events, the paper does not publish a diversity of stories about the presidency. The ones printed derive from and often feature Reagan at the expense of other policy-makers; his opponents are relatively little noted. As a result, he appears as the dominant policy-maker and statesman in both the national and international spheres. This presidential focus, lack of politics, and absence of analysis combine to present Reagan most favorably.

The *New York Times* covers President Reagan diligently. As a result it often serves as a conduit for his vision and version of events. But the *Times* also devotes attention to policy issues and to the policy process. Policy-making and execution are often complex, and the president is not always intimately involved in the details. Consequently, other participants, including critics and dissenters, receive coverage. The Reagan portrayed by the *Times* is thus an important but not hegemonic national and international policy-maker who occasionally dabbles in politics.

Limited in time but not geographic space, “CBS Evening News” shows Reagan almost whenever he makes himself available. Other policy participants in executive branch decision making are relegated to relative obscurity. In the process, CBS visually transmits, however begrudgingly, the symbolic vignettes with which the president beguiles the public. But its reporters often verbally express skepticism about his intentions and interpret his behavior and actions politically. The “CBS Evening News” Reagan is the powerful and important figure in national and international arenas, a man more statesmanlike and policy-

mindful than his counterparts, but one whose motives, CBS reporters tell us, are inescapably political.

There is another Reagan face that neither the *Herald*, nor CBS, nor even the *Times* fully reveals. It can be glimpsed in the pages of Barrett's exhaustive account of the first two years of the Reagan administration (3). It is fascinating: a president who like most people combines convictions and ignorance, determination and indecision, tough words with prudence. It is this apparent inability of the mass media to capture President Reagan beyond the clichés, in all his complexity and contradictions, that must be our abiding concern.

References

1. Apple, R. W., Jr. "Ireland's Premier Chides President." *New York Times*, June 4, 1984, p. 1.
2. Baggaley, Jon and Steve Duck. *Dynamics of Television*. Farnborough, Hants, England: Saxon House, 1976.
3. Barrett, Laurence I. *Gambling with History: Ronald Reagan in the White House*. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1983.
4. Bonafede, Dom. "That's Mike Deaver at the Hub of Reagan's Presidential World." *National Journal* 12, August 15, 1981, pp. 1461-1465.
5. Bonafede, Dom. "The Washington Press—Competing for Power With the Federal Government." *National Journal* 14, April 17, 1982, pp. 664-674.
6. Bonafede, Dom. "The Washington Press—An Interpreter or a Participant in Policy Making?" *National Journal* 14, April 24, 1982, pp. 716-721.
7. Bonafede, Dom. "The Washington Press—It Magnifies the President's Flaws and Blemishes." *National Journal* 14, May 1, 1982, pp. 767-771.
8. Booth, Alan. "The Recall of News Items." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 34, 1970-1971, pp. 604-610.
9. Fishman, Mark. *Manufacturing the News*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1980.
10. Grossman, Michael B. and Martha Joynt Kumar. *Portraying the President: The White House and the News Media*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981.
11. Gunter, Barrie. "Remembering Television News: Effects of Picture Content." *Journal of General Psychology* 102, January 1982, pp. 22-24.
12. Hamburger, Tom. "How the White House Cons the Press." *Washington Monthly* 12, January 1982, p. 22.
13. Hanson, C. T. "Gunsmoke and Sleeping Dogs: The Prez's Press at Midterm." *Columbia Journalism Review* 6, May/June 1983, p. 27.
14. Hart, Roderick P. *Verbal Style and the Presidency: A Computer-Based Analysis*. Orlando, Fla.: Academic Press, 1984.
15. Hoffman, David. "At Home: The Candidate, Packaged and Protected." *Washington Journalism Review* 6, September 1984, pp. 37-41.
16. Katz, Elihu, Hanna Adoni, and Pnina Parness. "Remembering the News: What Pictures Add to Recall." *Journalism Quarterly* 54, Spring 1977, pp. 231-239.
17. Lichty, Lawrence W. "Video versus Print." *Wilson Quarterly* 6, 1982 (special issue), pp. 49-57.
18. Locander, Robert. "Modern Presidential In-Office Communications: The National, Direct, Local, and Latent Strategies." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 13, Spring 1983, pp. 242-254.

19. Matusow, Barbara. "Abroad: The White House Writes the Lead." *Washington Journalism Review* 6, September 1984, p. 43.
20. Paletz, David L. and Robert M. Entman. *Media Power Politics*. New York: Free Press, 1981.
21. "Reagan Asks Persian Gulf Joint Action." *Durham Morning Herald*, June 8, 1984, p. 1.
22. "Reagan Says He'll Consider Kremlin Offer." *Durham Morning Herald*, June 5, 1984, p. 1.
23. Robinson, Michael J. and Maura Clancy. "Teflon Politics." *Public Opinion* 7, April/May 1984, pp. 14-18.
24. Robinson, Michael J., Maura Clancy, and Lisa Grand. "With Friends Like These. . . ." *Public Opinion* 6, June/July 1983, pp. 2-3, 52-54.
25. Robinson, Michael J. and Margaret A. Sheehan. *Over the Wire and on T.V.* New York: Russell Sage, 1983.
26. Rubin, Richard L. *Press, Party, and Presidency*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1981.
27. Seymour-Ure, Colin. *The American Presidency: Power and Communication*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982.
28. Sullivan, Dennis G. et al. "The Effect of President Reagan's Facial Displays on Observers' Attitudes, Impressions, and Feelings about Him." Paper presented at the 1984 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Washington, D.C., August 30-September 2, 1984.
29. Tiffen, Rodney. *The News from Southeast Asia: The Sociology of Newsmaking*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1978.
30. Weisman, Steven R. "Reagan Finds 'Contentment' in Ancestral Village." *New York Times*, June 4, 1984, p. 8.
31. Weisman, Steven R. "President Asserts He Would Discuss Non-Use of Force." *New York Times*, June 5, 1984, p. 1.
32. Weisman, Steven R. "The Harvest for Reagan: Aides See Europe Trip as Significant Success." *New York Times*, June 10, 1984, p. 1.
33. Weisman, Steven R. "The President and the Press: The Art of Controlled Access." *New York Times Magazine*, October 14, 1984, pp. 36ff.